

XXCE

METRO
 on Sunday


Next weekend you can be at ...

Ghutiari Sharif

A shrine dedicated to an ascetic, who is believed to have brought rains to a drought-hit village with his spiritual power, puts Ghutiari Sharif on the map of tourists.

A tiny suburb in the hinterland of South 24-Parganas, Ghutiari Sharif boasts a *mazaar* or *dargah* of Pir Ghazi Mubarak Ali Sahab, who was known to have kept wild tigers as pets.

A two-minute walk from the Ghutiari Sharif railway station will

take you to the *mazaar* of Ghazi Sahab.

Legend has it that back in the 17th century this village, then part of the Sunderbans, was hit by a severe drought for several months. It is said that Ghazi Sahab performed intense meditation to bring rainfall to the area. Residents were saved but this strenuous act of meditation cost this holy man his life. The miracle, along with the tragic death of the "holy" man, is remembered to this day.

Since then, starting from the death anniversary of Ghazi Sahab (August 3), a month-long fair is held every year at this *dargah*. Around 4 to 5 lakh people visit the shrine to pay homage during this period.

Interestingly, the *mazaar* is not only a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. People of all religions come here to pay homage to Ghazi Sahab.

The top of the shrine has a white crazy china mosaic dome with four towers adorned with Islamic floral

motifs.

Since the entry to the *mazaar* is through narrow lanes lined with shops, people interested in having a closer look at the dome can climb up on the terrace of the adjoining prayer hall.

We visited the place a few days before the festival and found some men spreading out colourful sheets of cloth (*chaddar*) with religious text printed on them. Devotees place these *chaddars* on the grave of Ghazi Sahab inside the shrine.

In the backyard of the shrine, people tie knots with pieces of colourful cloth to make their wishes come true. Some place cooked food and light incense sticks in front of the *dargah*.

A few steps from the shrine is a pond, around which the faithful pray to have their wishes (*mannat*) granted. They dip their palms into the water and pray silently.

Both Muslims and Hindus pray together at the *dargah*. The common belief is that if you pray sincerely here, Ghazi Sahab will fulfil your wishes.

In the afternoon, you can head for Canning, two stations beyond Ghutiari Sharif, the gateway to the Sunderbans. From there, you can take a bus to Gosaba, hire a motor boat to visit the *sangam* (confluence) of the rivers Matla and the Bidyadhari. Sunset on the watery horizon can make for a picturesque end to your day.

(Metro on Sunday thanks reader AMITABHA GUPTA for this contribution.

Pictures by author)

If you have a weekend destination to share, write in to: The Telegraph (Metro), 6, Prafulla Sarkar Street, Calcutta - 700 001
 E-mail: ttmetro@abpmail.com



Going

Ghutiari Sharif is a one-hour journey by local train on the Canning line from Sealdah (south).

Staying

There are many roadside eateries if you want a quick bite. It is not easy to find accommodation in the area. It takes half a day to visit the *dargah* and come back. It is advisable to be careful about your belongings as pickpockets are reported in the area. It is advisable to start early and come back before sundown.