



Alla scoperta del
BANGLADESH

LA TERRA DELLA IUTA



The philosophy of **ALTROMERCATO EXPERIENCE**

La vicinanza e la prossimità sono due concetti estremamente cari ad Altromercato. In questo senso lavoriamo ogni giorno per creare un mondo più equo e più vicino, accorciando le filiere produttive.

Con Altromercato tExperience, il concetto di vicinanza diventa sempre più concreto, perché i turisti italiani avranno la possibilità di vivere in prima persona e toccare con mano il mondo del commercio equo e solidale. Con questi programmi di viaggio, vogliamo promuovere la conoscenza diretta delle organizzazioni con cui Altromercato collabora, offrendo esperienze uniche, momenti di scoperta, di crescita e di scambio culturale.

**“CAMINANTE, NO HAY CAMINO,
SE HACE CAMINO
AL ANDAR.”**

Antonio Machado



Matale farmers group, Podie, Sri Lanka (foto Beatrice De Blasi)

COUNTRY: BANGLADESH
Area of the visit: Mujibnagar town
Organization: BaSE - Bhabarpara Group (BH)
Link: <http://www.altromercato.it/flex/FixedPages/Common/prod.php/L/IT/pro/pro-9810090>

1. THE ORGANIZATION



BaSE craftwomen

BaSE stands for Bangladesh Shilpo Ekota, which means United Artisans of Bangladesh. It was founded by Giovanni Abbiati, an Italian missionary who in the 70s was touched by the poverty of the villages and the lifestyle of underprivileged rural women. He wanted to avoid economic dependency and noticed the skills of women in jute work. He decided to give them the opportunity to uphold their traditional skills and sell their products to the market.

BaSE was officially founded in 1992 to coordinate the handicraft activity of several producer groups present in the area gravitating on Khulna (South West of Bangladesh). BaSE is a member of WFTO and works according to fair trade principles. It now involves about 10.000 producers (99% are women), organised in 17 producer groups.

The organization provides them not only with the possibility of having an additional revenue from the handicraft production, but also with social programs such as: education on human rights, legal issues, children health, breeding. In addition BaSE has created a revolving loan fund to help the craftswomen when they have to face extraordinary financial events. Fair work, microcredit and most of all dignity and cultural empowerment are the greatest achievements of BaSE.

BH Group Background:

Bhabarpara (now known as Mujibnagar) is an historical place; near this village in 1971 Bangladesh Independent Revolutionary Government was formed during the Independence War against Pakistan. The economy of that area is completely based on agriculture. Sending the children to school, going to see the doctor when somebody is ill, waiting a few years before marrying a daughter of thirteen were still privileges of rich families. In this context BaSE provides working opportunity for women. The centre is specialized on Jute items. **At present 140 women are involved in hand crafted jute products such as Carpets/Floor Mats, Tablemats, Hammocks, Sika.** The producers work under three separate centres of Bhabarpara, Karpasdanga & Pakuria village.

Through these 3 centres producers collect the work order and produce the required items at home, beside their family household works. Through this technical work marginalized women are able to contribute economically to their families and society. As well as learn administration, quality control, saving and packing. The work gives them the opportunity to upgrade their life style, build houses, sanitary latrines, send the children to school, health support etc. The group is a self help group, managed and run by an own management committee. The producers elect their group leader and committee every two years. The group develop own samples and, according to buyer/partners requirements, are produced and marketed through BaSE.

2. THE PRODUCTS

GARMENTS IN SILK AND COTTON, HOME DECOR (CURTAINS, JUTE CARPETS), HOUSE EQUIPMENTS (BEDCOVERS, TABLECLOTHS, APRONS, TOWELS), DATE-PALM LEAF ITEMS (BASKETS, TRAYS, POTS).

Jute, the eco-friendly fibre, is a traditional production for Bangladesh. Once it was the most important material in the world for packaging of wares (in particular for agriculture commodities), Nowadays, it is less and less used because of the raise of plastic as the major packaging material. BaSE uses jute to produce its house equipments and house decors. Garments are created with cotton fabric. Other unique home decor objects are created with local fibres like palm leave with no impact on the environment.

3. THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Bangladesh is currently the second largest producer of jute fibre. The Jat Area, popular for highest quality of jute fibre, is located in Bangladesh. To extract fine fibres from jute plant, a small stalk is harvested for checking. Usually, this small stalk is brought before 2 weeks of harvesting time. If the fibre can easily be removed from the Jute core, the plants are ready for harvesting. After harvesting, the jute stalks are tied



Craftwoman with a jute string



into bundles and submerged in soft running water. The stalk stays submerged in water for 20 days. In most cases, the fibre extraction process in water is done by the farmers while standing under water. When the jute stalk is well retted, the stalk is grabbed in bundles and hit with a long wooden hammer to make the fibre lose touch from the jute core. Then, the fibre is washed with water and squeezed for dehydration. The extracted fibres are further washed with fresh water and allowed to dry on bamboo poles. Finally, they are tied into small bundles to be sold into the primary market. BaSE Producers buy the jute directly from farmers and make jute weaving and strings to produce beautiful bags, baskets and mats.

4. THE TOUR

1. The program

Morning:

- ✓ **10.00 am** • Arrival to BH group centre. Welcoming tea and snacks.
- ✓ **10.30 am** • Producers welcome the guests with song and flowers.
- ✓ **10.40 am** • Meeting with producers and briefing on the organization, its history, its objectives, the social projects working thanks to the proceeds of Fair Trade, the jute as a material, the partnership with Altromercato.
- ✓ **11.20 am** • Observation of the artisans making jute table mats.
- ✓ **11.35 am** • Training on how to make a jute mat 10x10x10cm at the centre.

Afternoon:

- ✓ **01.00 pm** • Lunch break in the BH group premises.
- ✓ **02.00 pm** • Visit to the producers' houses in the village to see the producers' families lifestyle and how they manage to work at home.
- ✓ **03.30 pm** • End of the visit.

2. The workshops and practical activities

The centre is situated inside the local church. Women can work at the centre but some of them usually collect some work to do it at home.

Visitors will be involved in the production of a little jute tablemat after a training session with the artisans.

3. The joint meal

The organization will offer to the visitors local foods for lunch in the BH production site where the producers will join the guests for lunch. The menu of the lunch will include: rice, lentils, BaSE craftwomen fruits and bottled water.

4. Interaction with the community of artisans

During the visit to the production site visitors and artisans will be in contact in particular during the scheduled practical activities. In order to facilitate the interaction lunch will be shared with the artisans. Furthermore, the visit will finish with a brief tour of the houses of the artisans.

5. guide

The guide's role will be assumed by Ms. Asfiya Eila, the *BaSE Producer Group Coordinator*. She knows very well the producers groups and the production processes. She graduated in Finance and she can speak fluently in English.

6. Sanitary facilities

Toilets and fresh water will be available at the BH group premises.

7. Transportation and accessibility

The sites of the visit are easily reachable by car, buses or big coaches.

IT IS NOT ADVISABLE TO DO IT DURING THE MONSOON SEASON (JULY – OCTOBER) when it is not always possible to travel on the road.

8. Suggested/Requested outfit

As the host communities are Christian it is best to wear at least half-sleeves t-shirts or shirts and below the knee dresses, skirts or trousers.

9. Period of rains

The monsoon period is between July and October. During these months there will be a very rainy weather so that it is best to avoid the visits.

10. Gift

As a souvenir of the tour, the tourists will keep with them the items they will create thanks to the help of the artisans.

11. The area of the visit and touristic destinations nearby the site

Mujibnagar (on site).

In the city there's an important Educational Institution and the Memorial Monument remembering Bangladesh Government initially installed in Mujibnagar during the Independence War against Pakistan (1971).

Meherpur (23 Km – 30 mins).

Close to the India-Bangladesh border. The town is famous for local sweets. If they came in summer season can able to taste fresh Mangos from trees. The Mujibnagar famous for the Mango trees.



The visit takes place in Mujibnagar, a town in the Meherpur District of Bangladesh. Coordinates: 23° 38' 0" N, 88° 36' 0" E



12. Price

The prices will be fixed until 30 September 2016.

N. OF PEOPLE	PRICE FOR PERSON
2	13
3	12
4	12
5	11
6	11
7	11
8	11
9	11
10	11
11	11
12	11
13	10
14	10
15	10
16	10
17	10
18	10
19	10
20	10

The day before guests can come to Mujibnagar. Close to the BH Group premises, there are a Church guesthouse and another guesthouse in a civil building:

- Church guest house can accommodate only 2 people and guests can donate whatever they want as contribution.
- The other guesthouse can accommodate maximum 10 people and per night cost is Euro 8