



# The Telegraph

calcutta, india



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## Around the world in 480 acres

SUSHOVAN SIRCAR

### NEW TOWN'S ECO PARK DANCES WITH DIVERSITY



TANDEM BIKING



BAMBOO GARDEN

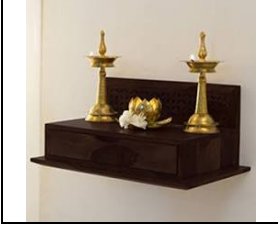
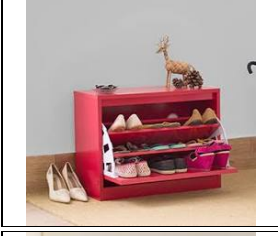
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**CIMA**  
CENTRE OF INTERNATIONAL MODERN ART



SHIKARA ON THE LAKE



GRAPEVINES

Pictures by Bishwarup Dutta

Darjeeling tea bushes, rustling Chinese bamboo groves, Dal Lake-style *shikara* rides, tandem bikes and the grapevine is right for once about a patch of French vineyard in Calcutta's backyard.

The world has shrunk into a 480-acre green oasis called Eco Park amid an emerging vertical concrete jungle, New Town.

"This is not an amusement park but a space for recreation that endeavours to acquaint people with the diverse beauty of nature. We have made several unique floral experiments in the park," said Debashis Sen, chairman of New Town development authority Hidco and principal secretary at the urban development department.

It has 47 zones that include a tea garden, an orchard and a bamboo grove. A peeping Salvador Dali and a pensive Vincent van Gogh welcome visitors from a painted wall next to the entrance. Golf carts are available for those with creaky joints or unwilling to work the pins.

The park is chief minister Mamata Banerjee's baby — born on July 19, 2011. She spotted the lake while driving home from the airport on that day and couldn't resist the temptation of walking up to the serene water and greenery. "Every now and then she stops by," says a Hidco official.

Infrastructure company IL&FS and architect Pradeep Sachdeva engineered a success story when the Eco Park gates were opened for the public in December 2012. Exactly a year later, the second phase of development was completed.

**Metro** took a stroll through the city's newest must-go address.

#### **Darjeeling chai**

The tea garden occupies 3 acres in the heart of the park. Experts say it is possible to grow tea bushes in Calcutta sans the flavour and aroma of Darjeeling. "There are three keys to it... proper drainage of water, acidic soil and shade for the bushes," says Aurobinda Mitra, the garden consultant and former director of the Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswa Vidyalaya, Kalyani.

#### **French toast**

A mini vineyard luxuriates in an orchard where fragile grapevines twining up a scaffold. Sommeliers seasoned to sniff the contrast between cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir might respond to the effort with an indignant pooh but growing grapes in tropical Calcutta is in itself an endeavour worth clinking glasses. "We hope the vines bear fruit soon," wishes curator Partha Sarathi Ghosh.

#### **Dal moments**

The 112-acre lake, with a 7-acre islet, is one-and-a-half times bigger than the 73-acre Rabindra Sarobar and thrice the size of Kankurgachhi's Subhas Sarobar which measures a mere 41 acres. The entertainment options include regular paddleboats, Rishikesh-style kayaks and Dal Lake-like *shikaras* and zorbing.

Morph from boatman to biker on the tiled trailway by picking one of the 14 tandem bikes — acquired from Chennai at Rs 10,000 apiece. "This has been my favourite part of the tour. It allows me to travel around this huge place with ease in the company of my friends," says Amitabh Das who took a tandem tour with friend Nisha Roy.

**Original Chinese**

Thin black bamboo, dwarf bamboo, golden bamboo... giant panda food is growing at Eco Park. This is authentic Chinese, unlike the counterfeit doodahs sold in the bazaars. "The park lets you fill your lungs with fresh air. This is my second visit and this time I have brought my family along," said Nidhi Chhibbar of Southern Avenue, who was there with mom Sheetal and sisters Radhika and Sidhika.

**Winged Bengal**

The fluttering flight of a swarm of 143 butterflies from seven species inside a dome-shaped enclosure showcases Bengal's ecological tapestry. The butterfly house also breeds a variety of the winged beauties. "We conserve, study and breed them. All these butterflies are found in the state," says Arjan Basu Roy, secretary of Nature Mates-Nature Club, an NGO that maintains the house.

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