

Exploring Kolkata - Past, Present and Fascinating Trivia

Hey Aspirants! Welcome back to our captivating 'Know Your City' series. This time, we invite you to join us on an exploration of the remarkable city of Kolkata. Nestled in the eastern part of India, Kolkata is a metropolis bursting with history, culture, and an undeniable zest for life.

Known as the "Cultural Capital of India," Kolkata embodies a perfect blend of tradition and modernity. It is a city where ancient architecture coexists harmoniously with contemporary skyscrapers, and where the arts flourish in every corner.

Steeped in history, Kolkata's story is a fascinating one. It was the capital of British India until 1911, and remnants of its colonial past can still be seen in its architecture and institutions. But Kolkata is not just about its colonial history; it's a city that has played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, and it continues to be a hub of intellectual and artistic endeavors.

The city's vibrant culture is a testament to its diverse population, with a rich literary heritage, a love for music and dance, and a passion for sports, especially cricket. Kolkata is also renowned for its delectable cuisine, with mouthwatering dishes like rasgulla, sandesh, and roshogolla that will tantalize your taste buds.

Before looking at the different aspects, one must know the City symbols of the particular city. The city symbols of Kolkata are:

Kolkata	
State	West Bengal
Official Language	Bengali
City Animal	Fishing Cat
City Bird	White-breasted Kingfisher
City Tree	Banyan Tree
City Flower	Night-flowering Jasmine
Chief Minister	Mamata Banerjee
Chief Secretary of West Bengal	Shri H.K. Dwivedi

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[Image Source: Lonely Planet]

So now, let's move on to the first aspect of the blog i.e. **History of Kolkata.**

History of Kolkata

Kolkata, a city steeped in history and culture, traces its origins back to ancient and early medieval times, much like its counterpart Delhi. The story of Kolkata is a captivating narrative of resilience, transformation, and an enduring spirit that has left an indelible mark on the Indian subcontinent.

Ancient and Early Medieval Period:

The city's history can be likened to a tapestry woven with threads of dynasties and empires. Kolkata's ancient avatar, dating back to around 400 BCE, was known as "Gobindapur." This settlement was nestled along the banks of the Hooghly River and existed during the reign of the Mauryan Empire, with influences from the Gupta and Pala dynasties. It was a hub of trade and commerce, attracting merchants from far-flung lands.

Medieval Period:

Fast forward to the medieval period, and you find Kolkata in the midst of transformation. It became a prominent river port under the Sultanate of Bengal and thrived during the Mughal era. The town grew steadily, serving as an important trading post for the East India Company.

Colonial Period:

However, Kolkata's destiny changed dramatically with the arrival of the British in the 17th century. In 1690, Job Charnock, an agent of the English East India Company, established a trading post in Sutanuti, which later merged with Gobindapur and Kalikata to form the nucleus of modern-day Kolkata. The British East India Company recognized the strategic significance of the location, and Kolkata emerged as a key trading and administrative center.

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The city flourished during the British colonial rule, becoming the capital of British India in 1772. Kolkata was a hotbed of political and cultural movements during this period, giving birth to the Bengal Renaissance, which saw luminaries like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Swami Vivekananda shaping the city's intellectual landscape.



[Image Source: India Today]

Independence and Beyond:

Kolkata played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, witnessing iconic moments such as the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. In 1947, when India gained independence, Kolkata became the capital of West Bengal.

The city's history is marked by moments of triumph and tragedy, from the grandeur of colonial architecture to the somber memories of the Bengal Famine. Kolkata has always demonstrated resilience and the spirit of its people.

Here is a timeline of some key events in Kolkata's history:

- **Late 17th Century:** Job Charnock, an agent of the English East India Company, establishes a trading post in Sutanuti, laying the foundation for modern Kolkata.
- **1690:** Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata merge to form the nucleus of Kolkata.
- **18th Century:** Kolkata becomes an important trading and administrative center under British rule.
- **1772:** Kolkata is officially designated as the capital of British India.
- **19th Century:** The city witnesses the Bengal Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual movement led by luminaries like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore.
- **1885:** The Indian National Congress is founded in Kolkata.
- **1942:** The Quit India Movement, a major milestone in India's struggle for independence, is launched in Kolkata.
- **1947:** India gains independence, and Kolkata becomes the capital of West Bengal.
- **1950s:** The city's population swells due to the influx of refugees following the partition of India.
- **1970s-80s:** Kolkata experiences periods of political turmoil and economic decline.
- **21st Century:** Kolkata undergoes urban revitalization and infrastructure development, restoring its status as a cultural and commercial hub.

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Today, Kolkata stands as a vibrant metropolis, blending its rich history with modern progress and continuing to contribute significantly to India's cultural and economic landscape.



[Image Source: The Wire]

This timeline showcases Kolkata's rich and diverse history in a simple way. Let's move on to the next aspect of this blog i.e **Geographical aspect**.

Geographical Aspects of Kolkata

Kolkata, located at approximately 22.57°N 88.36°E in eastern India, spans an area of about 185 square kilometers (71.4 square miles). This vibrant metropolis, often referred to as the "City of Joy," is the capital of West Bengal. With its rich cultural heritage, Kolkata is known for its artistic, literary, and intellectual contributions.

It boasts a unique blend of historical architecture, bustling markets, and lush greenery, making it a captivating destination for residents and visitors alike. Kolkata's dynamic spirit is encapsulated within this compact urban expanse, making it a center of commerce, culture, and innovation in the eastern part of India.

Geographical Features:

Here are some key geographical features of Kolkata:

Elevation: Kolkata is located at a relatively low elevation, with its average elevation being just about 9 meters (30 feet) above sea level. This low-lying terrain has made the city susceptible to flooding, especially during the monsoon season.

River: The city is situated along the banks of the Hooghly River, a distributary of the Ganges River. The Hooghly River not only influences the geography of Kolkata but also plays a significant role in the city's commerce and culture.

Coastal Location: Kolkata is located near the Bay of Bengal, giving it a coastal climate and access to a major seaport. This proximity to the sea has historically contributed to the city's economic significance.

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Urban Area: The Kolkata Metropolitan Area spans a considerable urban expanse, with numerous neighborhoods, commercial districts, and residential areas.

Green Spaces: Kolkata is known for its lush greenery and numerous parks and gardens, providing a respite from the urban hustle and bustle. The Maidan, a vast urban park, is a prominent green space in the heart of the city.

Wetlands: The outskirts of Kolkata are dotted with wetlands and water bodies, which are vital for maintaining ecological balance and supporting biodiversity.

Sundarbans Delta: To the south of Kolkata lies the Sundarbans Delta, the largest mangrove forest in the world. This unique ecosystem is home to the Bengal tiger and a variety of wildlife.

Demographic Snapshot:

Kolkata's demographics reflect its status as one of India's major metropolitan areas:

Population: Kolkata is one of the most populous cities in India, with a diverse population that includes people from various cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds.

Urban Density: The city is densely populated, with numerous residential neighborhoods and commercial centers. It has a bustling and vibrant atmosphere.

Cultural Diversity: Kolkata is known for its rich cultural heritage, and its residents represent a mix of Bengali and non-Bengali communities.

Socioeconomic Diversity: The city exhibits socioeconomic disparities, with affluent areas alongside pockets of lower-income neighborhoods.

Physiographic Aspects:

Kolkata's physiographic conditions influence its climate, environment, and overall living conditions:

Climate: Kolkata experiences a tropical wet-and-dry climate. It has hot and humid summers, a monsoon season with heavy rainfall, and mild winters.

Rainfall: The city receives a significant amount of rainfall during the monsoon months, which is essential for agriculture and maintaining water levels in the Hooghly River.

Air Quality: Like many other urban centers in India, Kolkata faces challenges related to air quality, especially during the winter months when smog and air pollution become prominent issues.

Soil and Vegetation:



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The soil and vegetation of Kolkata, situated in the eastern part of India, are influenced by its tropical climate and the presence of the Hooghly River. Here are some key characteristics:

Soil:

1. **Alluvial Soil:** The region predominantly has alluvial soil, which is rich in minerals and organic matter due to periodic flooding and sediment deposition by the Hooghly River.
2. **Silty Soil:** Silty soil is common in areas closer to the riverbank, making it fertile and suitable for agriculture.
3. **Clayey Soil:** Some parts of Kolkata have clayey soil, which retains moisture but can be less fertile.

Vegetation:

1. **Mangrove Forests:** The Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located in the delta of the Hooghly River and is home to the famous Royal Bengal Tiger. It's characterized by mangrove forests and unique aquatic vegetation.
2. **Wetlands:** Kolkata and its surroundings have numerous wetlands, including the East Kolkata Wetlands, which are vital for maintaining the city's ecological balance. These areas support various aquatic plants and bird species.
3. **Urban Greenery:** Kolkata takes pride in its urban green spaces, like the iconic Maidan, which is a vast open field with numerous trees. The city's gardens, parks, and tree-lined avenues contribute to its green cover.
4. **Urban Farming:** In some areas, especially within the city limits, urban farming is practiced, with residents growing vegetables and herbs in small plots.
5. **Botanical Gardens:** The Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden, located in nearby Howrah, is home to diverse plant species, including rare and exotic ones.
6. **Urban Trees:** Trees like banyan, peepal, neem, and coconut palms are common in the city and provide shade and aesthetic beauty.

Kolkata's soil and vegetation contribute to its unique urban and natural environment, offering a mix of greenery, biodiversity, and a connection to its historical and ecological heritage.

In summary, Kolkata's geography is characterized by its coastal location, the presence of the Hooghly River, and a mix of urban development and green spaces. These geographical features contribute to the city's unique identity and play a crucial role in its cultural, environmental, and economic aspects.

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[Image Source: Wikipedia]

Now let's move on to the **political aspects of Kolkata**.

Political Aspects of Kolkata

Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, holds significant political importance within the state and the country. The city, formerly known as Calcutta, has a rich history intertwined with politics and has played a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape of West Bengal and India. Here are key political facts and details about Kolkata:

- 1. State Capital:** Kolkata serves as the capital of West Bengal, one of India's largest states. As the capital city, it is the hub of political activities, housing the state government's key institutions.
- 2. Legislative Assembly:** Kolkata is represented in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly by multiple constituencies, each electing a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to represent the city's interests. The legislative assembly is responsible for making and implementing state laws.
- 3. Municipal Corporation:** The civic administration of Kolkata falls under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). KMC is responsible for local governance, urban planning, and municipal services within the city. The Mayor of Kolkata, elected by the corporation's representatives, plays a crucial role in city governance.
- 4. Chief Minister:** The Chief Minister of West Bengal holds significant authority in Kolkata. The Chief Minister, along with the state cabinet, manages the state's affairs, including Kolkata's governance. Prominent Chief Ministers who have led West Bengal from Kolkata include Mamata Banerjee and Jyoti Basu.
- 5. Governor:** The Governor of West Bengal, appointed by the President of India, represents the central government in the state. While the role is largely ceremonial, the Governor's office has historical significance in the city.
- 6. State Politics:** Kolkata is a major hub for state-level political activities. It has been the epicenter of various political movements, rallies, and protests organized by different political parties over the years.

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7. Major Political Parties: Kolkata hosts branches and offices of major political parties, including the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Indian National Congress (INC), among others. These parties are active in city politics and vie for power in state elections.

8. Civic Engagement: Kolkata's citizens are known for their active participation in politics. They regularly participate in elections, protests, and social movements, contributing to the city's vibrant political discourse.

9. Historical Significance: Kolkata has a rich history of political and social movements. It was a prominent center for intellectuals, activists, and freedom fighters during the British colonial era. The city played a crucial role in the Indian independence movement.

10. Cultural Influence: Kolkata's cultural vibrancy often intersects with its politics. Cultural events, festivals, and gatherings frequently become platforms for political expression and discourse. The city's cultural icons, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose, had deep political influences.

11. Civic Issues: Kolkata, like many metropolitan areas, grapples with various civic issues, including urban planning, infrastructure development, and environmental concerns. These issues often take center stage in local politics and influence voters' decisions.

12. Minority Influence: Kolkata's diversity is reflected in its politics, with significant minority populations having a say in the city's political landscape and representation.

13. Legislative Representation: Kolkata sends multiple Members of Parliament (MPs) to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's Parliament, representing the city's interests at the national level.

14. Recent Political Developments: Kolkata has witnessed significant political shifts, including the dominance of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) in recent state elections. Mamata Banerjee, the leader of AITC, has emerged as a prominent political figure.



[Image Source: Telegraph India]



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Kolkata's political scene is dynamic and reflects the complex and diverse nature of Indian politics. The city's history, cultural heritage, and active citizenry continue to shape its political landscape, making it a crucial center for political activities in the region and a key player in West Bengal's politics.

Culture of Kolkata

Kolkata's culture is a captivating blend of history, traditions, and diverse influences that have shaped the city into a vibrant and unique metropolis. Here's a glimpse into the cultural tapestry of Kolkata:

- **Language and Linguistic Diversity:** Kolkata is a linguistic melting pot where Bengali, also known as Bangla, is the dominant language. However, English, Hindi, and Urdu are also widely spoken, reflecting the city's cosmopolitan nature.
- **Literary Heritage:** The city has a rich literary legacy, boasting renowned authors like Rabindranath Tagore, who penned the national anthem of India. Kolkata's vibrant intellectual scene continues to thrive, with numerous literary festivals and a deep appreciation for literature.
- **Art and Creativity:** Kolkata has a strong artistic tradition, particularly in fields like painting, sculpture, and theater. The city's art galleries, including the famed Academy of Fine Arts, showcase the works of talented artists.
- **Religious Diversity:** Kolkata is a harmonious mosaic of religions, with Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and other faiths coexisting peacefully. Diverse religious festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm, adding to the city's cultural richness.
- **People and Warmth:** Kolkata is known for its warm and friendly people, often referred to as "Kolkata's warmth." The residents, fondly known as Kolkatans or Bengalis, are known for their hospitality and strong sense of community.
- **Cuisine:** Kolkata's culinary scene is a treat for food enthusiasts. The city is famous for its street food, including mouthwatering treats like rasgulla, sandesh, puchka (pani puri), and the iconic Kolkata biryani. The unique Bengali cuisine, characterized by the use of mustard oil and spices, is a gastronomic delight.
- **Festivals:** Kolkata truly comes alive during festivals like Durga Puja, which is celebrated with grand processions, beautifully crafted idols, and cultural performances. The city's festive spirit is infectious, and the celebration of cultural events is a way of life.
- **Arts and Crafts:** Kolkata is known for its traditional arts and crafts, including intricate embroidery, handwoven sarees, and exquisite terracotta works. The city's artisans continue to preserve and showcase their craftsmanship.
- **Music and Dance:** The city reverberates with classical music, including Rabindra Sangeet, a genre of songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore. Traditional dance forms like Kathak and Bharatanatyam coexist with contemporary dance styles.
- **Cultural Icons:** Kolkata boasts cultural landmarks like the Victoria Memorial, Indian Museum, and Howrah Bridge, which reflect its historical and architectural significance.
- **Academic and Intellectual Hub:** Home to prestigious educational institutions like Jadavpur University and Presidency University, Kolkata has a strong intellectual tradition, nurturing scholars and thinkers.

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In summary, Kolkata's culture is a vibrant tapestry of languages, arts, cuisine, and traditions, making it a city that celebrates its rich heritage while embracing the modern world. It's a place where history and creativity merge to create a captivating and dynamic cityscape.



[Image Source: Travel Triangle]

Now let's talk about the **environment in Kolkata.**

Environment in Kolkata

Kolkata's environment is a captivating blend of urban life and natural beauty, creating a unique ecological landscape:

Urban Greenery: The city is adorned with lush greenery, with numerous parks and gardens providing a respite from the urban hustle and bustle. Places like the iconic Maidan, Central Park, and Eco Park offer serene escapes within the city.

Hooghly River: The majestic Hooghly River flows through Kolkata, not only adding to the city's scenic charm but also serving as a vital waterway. The iconic Howrah Bridge spans across this river, symbolizing the city's connection with its water bodies.

Wetlands: Kolkata is blessed with several wetlands and marshy areas, contributing to the region's ecological diversity. The East Kolkata Wetlands, designated as a Ramsar site, play a crucial role in waste recycling and water purification.

Botanical Gardens: The Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden, one of the oldest in India, showcases an incredible variety of plants and trees, including the giant banyan tree that holds a Guinness World Record.

Zoological Parks: Alipore Zoological Gardens, also known as Kolkata Zoo, is home to a wide range of animal species, making it a popular destination for nature enthusiasts.

Biodiversity: Kolkata's urban landscape supports a variety of flora and fauna. The city's numerous trees, flowering plants, and bird species contribute to its biodiversity.

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Challenges: Like many urban centers, Kolkata faces environmental challenges such as air pollution, waste management, and encroachment on natural habitats. However, efforts are being made to address these issues and protect the city's natural treasures.

Conservation Efforts: Kolkata has shown a commitment to preserving its environment through initiatives like tree planting drives, awareness campaigns, and conservation projects. These efforts reflect the city's dedication to maintaining its ecological balance.



[Image Source: The New York Times]

Economy of Kolkata

Kolkata, the vibrant metropolis of eastern India, stands as a financial and commercial powerhouse. As of 2023, its economic prowess is estimated at a staggering \$150.1 billion (PPP metro GDP), making it India's third most productive metropolitan area.

Kolkata's economic landscape is diverse, with a strong emphasis on the tertiary sector, which contributes over 70% to the city's gross SDP. The city's workforce is one of the largest in India, accounting for over 32% of its population. Unemployment rates in Kolkata are relatively low, hovering around 5%.

The key drivers of Kolkata's economy include:



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- **Information technology (IT):** Kolkata is a major IT hub, home to a number of global and Indian IT companies.
- **Telecommunications:** Kolkata is a major center for telecommunications, with a strong presence of public and private sector telecom operators.
- **Hotels and tourism:** Kolkata is a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from all over India and the world. The city's hotel industry is thriving, with a wide range of accommodation options available for all budgets.
- **Banking and financial services:** Kolkata is a major financial center, home to the headquarters of the Reserve Bank of India and a number of commercial banks.
- **Media and entertainment:** Kolkata is a thriving center for media and entertainment, with a number of film studios, television channels, and newspapers headquartered in the city.
- **Retail:** Kolkata has a thriving retail sector, with a mix of traditional and modern shopping malls and markets.
- **Manufacturing:** Kolkata is a major manufacturing hub, with a strong presence of industries such as steel, heavy engineering, mining, minerals, cement, pharmaceuticals, food processing, agriculture, electronics, textiles, and jute.

Kolkata is also a major center for education and research, with a number of prestigious universities and colleges located in the city. The city's skilled workforce is a major draw for foreign investors.



[Image Source: Wikipedia]

Overall, Kolkata's economy is strong and diversified, with a number of key growth drivers. The city is well-positioned to continue its economic growth in the coming years.

In conclusion, Kolkata, often referred to as the "City of Joy," stands as a captivating tapestry of history, culture, and commerce in eastern India. With a storied past that has witnessed the ebb and flow of empires, Kolkata has emerged as a city that seamlessly bridges tradition and modernity. Its rich cultural heritage, exemplified by luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, continues to inspire and shape the artistic landscape of India.

Kolkata's diverse populace, marked by linguistic and religious harmony, lends it a unique character that is both welcoming and harmonious. The city's economic landscape, driven by a thriving service sector and a burgeoning retail industry, showcases its resilience and potential for growth.



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As Kolkata moves forward, it carries with it the echoes of its colonial history, the vibrancy of its festivals, the aroma of its street food, and the promise of a brighter, more prosperous future. Kolkata remains a city that beckons explorers and enthusiasts alike, inviting them to delve into its myriad facets and discover the warmth and vitality that define this remarkable metropolis.



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