

Dutch city near you

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Chinsurah, a town located about 50 kilometres from Kolkata, might look similar to any other urban conglomeration in the state. What may, however, elude the uninitiated human eye is its rich Dutch heritage. And hence Chinsurah can be best described as a conglomeration between modernity and history.

The Dutch arrived here way back in 1628 and continued to rule the land for more than one and a half century. The local buildings and language depicts the conglomeration of two cultures. It is even said that 'Calcutta' derived its name from the Dutch word—*Golghata*, meaning land of skulls.

In the early 16th century, the bank of the river Hooghly was a coveted place for business and trade which lured European traders. The Dutch found Chinsura a small and sleepy town suitable for carrying out trade and business.

The Dutch presence in the area saw cultural assimilation in various forms till 1864—the Europeans participated in local religious festivals and even married local girls. The Shandeshwari temple has a pair of brass drums and a silver statue of

Shiva which was gifted by the Dutch.

Chinsurah started to emerge as an epitome of Holland. Fort Gustavus, built by the Dutch, now houses the Chinsurah court and is perhaps the longest court building in the world.

St. John's Armenian Church built in 1695 is the second oldest church in Bengal. The church was constructed by the Armenians who came to Chinsurah in 1625 and lived peacefully with the Dutch.

The Armenian custom of celebrating Christmas on January 6 has also become the custom here.

The clock tower of Chinsurah is another piece of architecture. The tower stands as the landmark.

Ghari more in the middle of the town and the London-made clock was set up in 1911 in honour of King Edward-VII and still in use since then. A small and simple old Dutch church lies near the clock.

The grave of a Dutch woman, Susana Anna Maria who died in 1809, looks like a temple and is a marvel of Indo-Dutch architecture. Susana was a rich Dutch lady who married a Briton. The monument, located near the station, is also known as Dutch mandir. The structure has a big dome with four open gates on all sides.

The famous Mohosin College once popularly



St. John's Armenian Church built in 1695 at Chinsurah. Pix: Somen Sengupta



Dutch Mandir is actually the grave of a Dutch woman. Pix: SS

known as Presidency College of Hoogly was once the palace of a French soldier Perron. Perron participated in the Maratha war and lived here as recluse after the defeat of the Marathas.

England got the town from the Dutch in 1864 in exchange for Sumatra. However, the palaces that stand beside the river have their own tales to tell. Dilapidated though they are, one can discern the smell of nostalgia wafting in the air. The needs of rapid urbanisation have not left Chinsurah untouched. The new is coming up with the old.

CHINSURAH
dutchland