



Basic Bengali (Bangla) for Travelers

This is a brief introduction to Bengali, also called Bangla, one of the official languages of the Indian state of West Bengal. This introduction contains basic instruction about pronunciation and important words and phrases. When volunteering and traveling in the northeastern states of India, the ability to communicate in Bengali will greatly enhance your experience. Even if you do not plan on studying the language in-depth, we strongly suggest learning and using basic greetings and phrases. The locals will greatly appreciate your efforts and will be all the more welcoming to you during your stay. If you would like to complete a beginning course in Bengali, there are a number of self-study books and tapes. Lonely Planet's *Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook* (2005) and Jack Dabbs's *A Short Bengali-English, English-Bengali Dictionary* (1962) are two helpful books.

Pronunciation

Bengali is written in the Brahmi script, which is also used to write many other Indian languages, such as Garo and Manipuri. There are 43 characters – 32 for consonants and 11 for vowels. The Brahmi script is not used in this guide; however, a list of the Brahmi characters can be found at the end of this document. Bengali has 11 vowels, though many of the vowels have several sounds.

a	'u' as in run	i	'i' as in bit
â	'a' as in tap	o	'o' as in shot
aa	'a' as in father	oh	'o' as in both
ai	'ai' as in aisle	oy	'oy' as in boy
ay	'ai' as in mail	u	'u' as in put
e	'e' as in red	ui	'ui' as in quick
ee	'ee' as in bee		

Generally, Bengali consonants are pronounced the same as in English.

b	as in bat	n	as in neat
ch	as in chew	ng	as in finger
d	as in dog	p	as in pin
f	as in fun	r	as in rabbit
g	as in get	s	as in sit
h	as in how	t	as in stop
j	as in jaw	v	as in vow
k	as in kennel	w	as in women
l	as in last	y	as in yolk
m	as in mill	z	as in zap

There are two special types of consonants: aspirated consonants and retroflex consonants. Aspirated consonants are pronounced much more forcefully and with a puff of air. Aspirated consonants are indicated by a single quotation mark (').

b'	'b' as in bus	j'	'j' in jump
ch'	'ch' + 'h' as in punch hard	k'	'k' in kill
d'	'd' in duck	p'	'p' in pit
g'	'g' in go	t'	't' in time

Retroflex consonants are pronounced by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth while pronouncing the consonants. Only five consonants can be pronounced this way (ḍ, ḍ', ṭ, ṭ', and ṣ). In this guide, retroflex consonants will be indicated by an underline (ḍ, ḍ' ṭ, ṭ', ṣ). In Bengali, usually the first syllable is stressed. In this guide, the stressed syllable will be in italics.

Greetings

Welcome	<i>sha-go-tom</i>
Hello	<i>no-mohsh-kar</i> (Hindu)/ <i>as-sa-lam wa-lai-kum</i> (Muslim)
Hi	<i>hai</i>
Goodbye	<i>no-mohsh-kar</i> (Hindu)/ <i>al-laa ha-fez</i> (Muslim)
Bye	<i>bai</i>
See you later.	<i>po-re dâ-k'a ho-be</i>
Nice to meet you.	<i>aap-nar sha-t'e poh-ri-chi-toh hoh-e k'u-shi hoh-e'ch'i</i>
How are you?	<i>kâ-mohn aa-ch'en?</i>
I'm fine, and you?	<i>b'a-loh aap-ni</i>

Introductions

My name is...	<i>aa-mar naam...</i>
What is your name?	<i>aap-nar naam ki?</i>
I am from America.	<i>aa-mi â-me-ri-ka t'e-ke esh-chi</i>
Where are you from?	<i>aap-ni koh-tai t'e-ke e-she-chen?</i>
I am a student.	<i>aa-mi ch'at-roh</i>
I work in...	<i>aa-mi ...-e kaaj koh-ri</i>

Etiquette

Thank you	<i>d'oh-noh-baad</i>
Please	<i>pleez</i>
Sorry	<i>so-ri</i>
Excuse me (to get attention)	<i>shu-nun</i>
Excuse me (to get past)	<i>ek-tu de-k'i</i>
Is there anything I can do to help?	<i>aap-nar u-poh-ka-re aa-mi ki ki-ch'u kohr-te paa-ri?</i>

Relationships/Titles

I/me	<i>aa-mi</i>
You (formal)	<i>aap-ni</i>
You (informal)	<i>tu-mi</i>
Us	<i>aam-ra</i>
Him/Her	<i>u-ni</i> (formal)/ <i>oh</i> (informal)
Them	<i>u-na-ra</i> (formal)/ <i>oh-ra</i> (informal)
Friend	<i>bohn-d'u</i>
Family	<i>poh-ri-bar</i>
Daughter	<i>me-e</i>
Son	<i>ch'e-le</i>
Brother	<i>b'ai</i>
Sister	<i>bohn</i>
Father	<i>ba-ba</i>
Mother	<i>maa</i>
Husband	<i>shaa-mi</i>
Wife	<i>stree</i>
Doctor	<i>dak-tar</i>

Teacher	<i>shik-k'ok</i>
Man	<i>pu-rush lohk</i>
Sahib (for unknown men)	<i>sha-heb</i>
Mr./Sir	<i>mis-tar/sar</i>
Woman	<i>moh-hi-la</i>
Begum (for unknown woman)	<i>be-gohm</i>
Ms./Miss	<i>miz/mis</i>
Mrs./Madam	<i>mi-ses/mâ-dam</i>

Food and Drinks

I am hungry.	<i>aa-mar k'i-da pe-e-ch'e</i>
I am thirsty.	<i>aa-mar tesh-ta pe-e-ch'e</i>
I would like...	<i>aa-mi ... chai</i>
Food	<i>k'a-bar</i>
Bread	<i>ru-ti</i>
Meat	<i>mang-shoh</i>
Fish	<i>maach</i>
Vegetables	<i>shohb-ji</i>
Fruit	<i>p'ol</i>
Chicken	<i>mur-gi</i>
Rice	<i>b'aat</i>
Lentils	<i>daal</i>
Drinks	<i>pa-ni-o</i>
Coffee	<i>ko-fi</i>
Tea	<i>cha</i>
Water	<i>pa-ni</i>
Milk	<i>dud'</i>
Beer	<i>bi-ar</i>
The meal was delicious.	<i>k'ub mo-ja ch'i-loh</i>

Important Locations

Where is the...? ...	<i>koh-t'ai?</i>	Hospital	<i>hash-pa-tal</i>
Market	<i>ba-jar</i>	Home	<i>ba-ri</i>
Temple	<i>mon-dir</i>	Bathroom	<i>goh-sohl k'a-na</i>
Mosque	<i>mos-jid</i>	Toilet	<i>toy-let</i>
Church	<i>charch</i>	Shower	<i>sha-war</i>
Shop	<i>doh-kan</i>	Kitchen	<i>ran-na ghor</i>
School	<i>skul</i>	Garden	<i>ba-gan</i>

Cost

How much?	<i>ko-toh?</i>	Price	<i>dam</i>
How many?	<i>koy-ta?</i>	Expensive	<i>daam</i>
Money	<i>ta-ka-poy-sha</i>	Cheap	<i>sho-sta</i>

Time of Day

Morning	<i>sho-kaal</i>	Evening	<i>bee-kaal</i>
Afternoon	<i>du-pur</i>	Night	<i>raat</i>

Useful Words and Phrases

Yes	hâng
No	naa
Maybe	hok
Now	â-k'ohn
What is that?	oh-ta-ke ki boh-le?
I would like to go...	aa-mar ... je-te ich-ch'a hohch-ch'e
I would like to buy...	âk-ta ... kin-te chai
I am tired.	aa-mi tai-ard
I am lost.	aa-mi ha-ri-ye gâ-ch'i
I am ill.	aa-mi o-shush-t'oh
I am happy.	aa-mar k'u-shi laag-ch'e
I don't understand.	na aa-mi buj'-te paar-ch'i na
Please say it again.	aa-bar boh-ten pleez
Please speak more slowly.	aa-roh d'i-re boh-len pleez
Do you speak English?	aap-ni ki ing-re-ji bohl-te paa-ren?
Help!	ba-cha-o!
Who?	ke?
Where?	koh-t'ai?
Why?	kâ-noh?
What?	ki?
When?	ko-k'ohn?
How?	ki-she?

Miscellaneous

Peace	shaan-ti	Beautiful	shun-dohr
Love	b'a-loh-ba-sha	Slowly	d'i-re
Work	kaj	Bad	k'a-rap
Enough	jo-t'esh-toh	Good	b'a-loh

Numbers

The Bengali counting system has no discernable patterns. However, below are a few helpful numbers.

1	âk	11	â-gaa-roh	30	ti-rish
2	dui	12	baa-roh	40	chohl-lish
3	teen	13	tâ-roh	50	pon-chaash
4	chaar	14	chohd-doh	60	shaat
5	paach	15	poh-ne-roh	70	shoht-tur
6	ch'oy	16	shoh-loh	80	aa-shi
7	shaat	17	sho-te-roh	90	nohb-bo-hi
8	aat	18	aat'-aa-roh	100	âk shoh
9	noy	19	u-nish	1,000	âk haa-jaar
10	dosh	20	beesh	100,000	âk laak'