

Kolkata : An Introduction

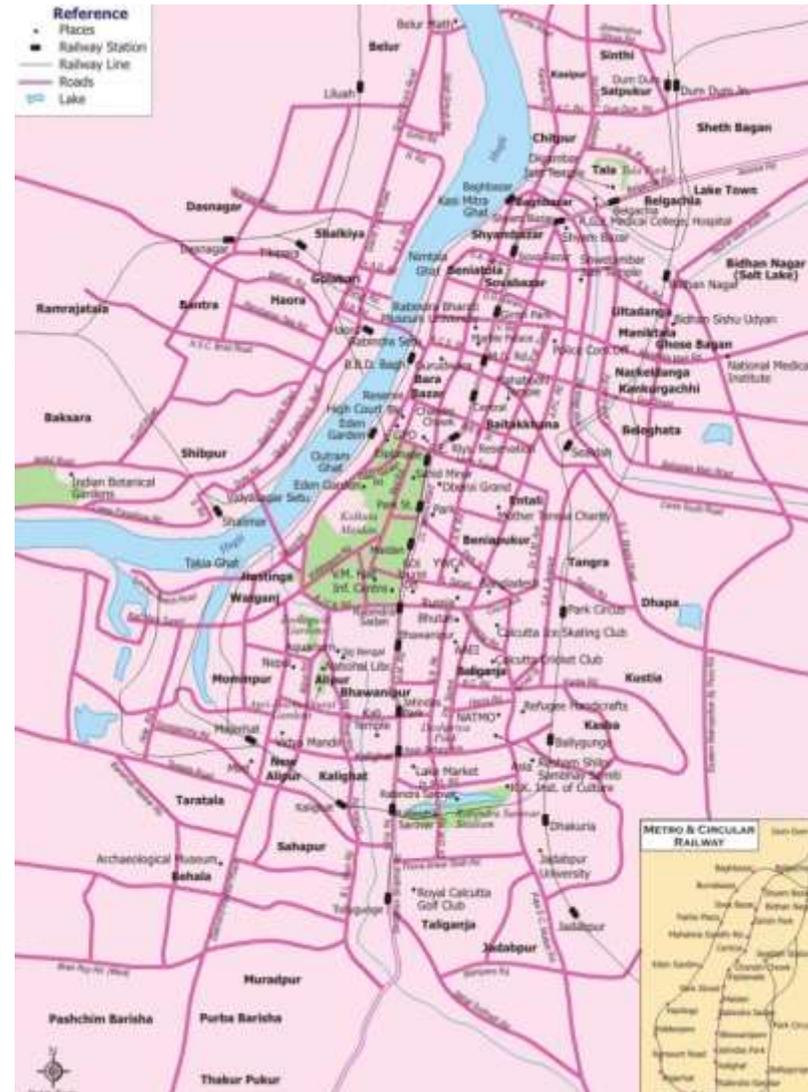
Name and origin : The rent-roll of Akbar and the work of a Bengali poet, Bipradas Pipilai, of the late 15th century, both make mention of the city's early name as *Kolikata*, from which Kolkata/ Calcutta are said to have derived. There is much discussion about the origin of the city's name. The most accepted view is that it comes from the Hindu goddess Kali and the original name was *CaliKshetra*, "the place of Kali".

Other theories include:

- The name comes from the location of the original settlement beside a *khal* ("canal" in Bengali)
- The place was known for the manufacture of shell-lime, the name deriving from *kali* ("lime") and *kata* ("burnt shell")
- The name is derived from the Bengali *kilkila* ("flat area"), which is mentioned in the old literature.
- The name came into being when Job Charnock, the architect of modern Kolkata, asked a farmer the name of the area around Hooghly River. The farmer misunderstood due to language problems and thought that he was referring as to when he harvested his paddy. He proudly replied "Kal Kaata" meaning "I cut it yesterday." Job Charnock thought that the name of the place is Calcutta.

Growth & Development : The area where the city is now located was originally inhabited by the people of three villages: *Kalikata*, *Sutanuti* and *Gobindapur*.

The Calcutta High Court ruled in 2003 that Job Charnock, the Englishman generally believed to be the founder of Calcutta, is not the founder of the city and that hence Kolkata has no birthday. According to the Court, the city has its genesis in the Maurya and Gupta period and it was an established trading post long before the Slave Dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, the Portuguese, the French or the British established a modern township there.



The British East India Company chose the place for a trade settlement. In 1698, the East India Company bought three villages (Sutanuti, Kalikata and Gobindapur) from a local landlord family of Sabarna Roy Choudhury. The next year, the company began developing the city as a Presidency City. In 1727, on the order of King George I, a civil court was set up in the city. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation was formed and the city had its first mayor.

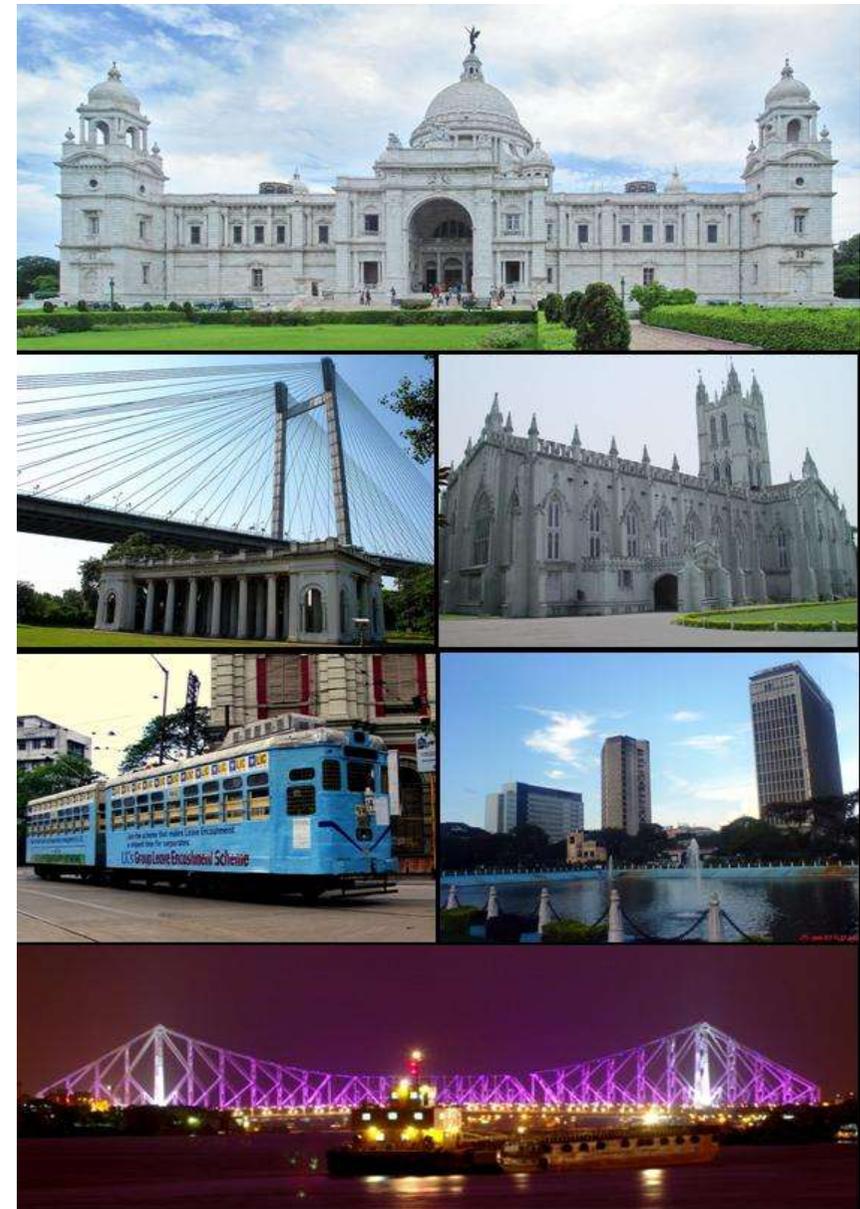
The three villages, in particular *Kalikata*, where Calcutta is located, came into the possession of the British East India Company in 1690 but its beginnings as a major city from the construction of Fort William by the British in 1698.

Kolkata the “City of Palace”, remained the capital of British India from 1858 to 1912. From 1912 to India's Independence in 1947, it was the capital of all of Bengal and after independence, Calcutta remained the capital of the state of West Bengal.

Kolkata is regarded as India’s cultural capital. Among many other proud distinctions the city has produced to be noble Laureates Ronald Ross, Rabindranath Tagore, C V Raman, Gunter Grass, Mother Teresa and Amartya Sen

Located at the tip of the sprawling Ganges delta which flows into the Bay of Bengal, the city hugs the eastern bank of the massive Hooghly tributary. The Howrah bridge which connects the mega-city to an industrial township on the opposite bank is a signature land mark.

The city abandoned its British imposed name of Calcutta in December 2000 and restored its traditional identity – Kolkata.



Climate : Kolkata is remarkably temperate all year round. The best time to visit is between October and February when the weather is the most pleasant. Cotton clothes are best for the humid Kolkata weather. Light woollens suffice for the city's brief and mild winter.

Access : Kolkata is well connected by rail and air to all the major Indian cities and towns. Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport is 17km northeast of the city centre.

The city has two major railway stations – one at Howrah and the other at Sealdah another railway station named Kolkata has also become operational.

Local Transport :

Kolkata has an excellent public transport system. The efficient Metro line connects most parts of the city. All areas are well connected by State bus, "Mini bus" and Private bus services. Parts of the city have tram services which are unique in the country. Private taxis, Shuttle autos are popular modes of transport, so are cycle rickshaws and hand drawn rickshaws for short distance.



Hand Drawn Rickshaws



Kolkata Tram System



Kolkata Metro Train at a Station