



**1** Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal in India. It has a population of around 15 million people, and rush hour starts early in the morning. All day there are traffic jams with cars, public buses, taxis, motorcycles, and pedicabs,<sup>1</sup> and drivers honk their horns<sup>2</sup> from morning to night. You can also catch the train or get on the subway, but those are busy, too. For pedestrians, Kolkata can be dangerous—crossing the road is especially difficult. Fortunately, the old parts of the city have smaller streets that are better for pedestrians. Cars can't drive down them, so they are much quieter and a lot safer.

In these old streets, you'll see men pulling rickshaws. Rickshaws are a traditional type of transportation in the city, and local people still like using them. In the morning, the drivers pick up children and take them to school. And if you miss your bus to work, a hand-pulled rickshaw is much cheaper than taking a taxi. Later on in the day, housewives often prefer to go by rickshaw to the local markets. The drivers drop the women off with their shopping outside their houses; no other type of public transportation can do that! So rickshaws are popular with many local people. When the traffic is very bad, you can go anywhere by rickshaw. Kolkata is one of the last cities in the world with hand-pulled rickshaws, so the drivers also make money from tourists. Visitors to the city often want to get a photograph of themselves sitting on a rickshaw because it's a famous symbol of Kolkata. However, not everyone thinks the famous rickshaws are a good idea. Some local politicians don't like this old type of transportation because they think it's wrong for one human to pull another. Instead, they want more rickshaw drivers to use pedicabs or modern electric rickshaws, which are clean and fast. The problem is that Kolkata has around 2,000 traditional rickshaw drivers. They are often men from villages in the countryside, and they don't have any other job. The new electric rickshaws are very expensive, so these drivers can't afford them. For these men, it's probably the end of the road for the traditional rickshaw and their way of life.

<sup>1</sup> pedicab (n) /ˈpedɪkæb/ a type of taxi with no engine. The driver pedals.

<sup>2</sup> honk your horn (exp) /hɒŋk jɔː hɔːn/ make a loud noise in a car to tell people you are there

**2** Read the article. Which paragraph (1–3) talks about:

- a why people like rickshaws in Kolkata? \_\_\_\_
- b modern transportation in Kolkata? \_\_\_\_
- c the end of the old rickshaws in Kolkata? \_\_\_\_

**3** Work in pairs. Read the article again and answer these questions.

- 1 What is the population of Kolkata?
- 2 What are streets like in Kolkata?
- 3 Where is it safer for pedestrians to walk? Why?
- 4 Why do local housewives and tourists like taking rickshaws?
- 5 Some politicians want a new type of rickshaw. How is it different?
- 6 How many people pull the old rickshaws in Kolkata?
- 7 Why don't these drivers use the new rickshaws?