We had started from Dhaka the night before and reached Teknaf by bus at around nine in the morning to catch the ship that ferried us to the island. As far as stamina was concerned it was really in short supply. The two small children that accompanied their parents were sagging in spirit as they needed refueling of the stomach. For me sleep was of foremost concern. After the meal all three families were given separate rooms and I with my wife had the chance to dose off for a couple of hours. Before that I had the chance to catch a glimpse of the area. The view of the ocean from the veranda that stretched along the whole length of the hotel, had not inspired me and my wife to rush and savour the beauty. To be honest except for the sea the views at all directions from the balcony at first seemed ordinary. The rest of the gang was too zealous to have wasted time sleeping, although except for one family with a child the rest had been in the island several times before.



While the rest of the group went to see kite making in progress at a resort called Sheemana Periyè, which is nearby, my wife and I dozed off after lunch. When we woke up, the sun was tilted to the west and we hurriedly came out of the hotel equipped as we were with the camera. It was only when we climbed up the dune right in front of the resort and found ourselves on the beach that it dawned on us how pretty the beach of this side of the island was. As we started walking to the north we realised that the view became even prettier. On our right was the ocean and on the left thick keya bushes bordered the whole length of the shore as far as eye could see. The setting sun was a sight of otherworldly beauty. The wide horizontality of the view that glowed in the deep reddish light of the twilight, the continuous pummeling of the waves, made one feel small and lost. If this had no rejuvenating effect on the mind what else was there in the world that would do the magic.

After the sun disappeared we ambled along the beach to look for the kite makers at Sheemana Periyè. A couple of kites in the sky were our guide. It was not until we reached Sheemana Periyè that we realised the resort was the only place designed to match with the pristine beauty of the beach and its surroundings. It consisted of a number of cottages and a few shades made of dried leaves used as dining spaces and a wooden platform from which the sea is visible.

The following day was earmarked for the kite festival. However, as morning broke everyone realised that the wind had subsided so much that most of the kites that were designed mostly by artists to suit their own imagination using a special kind of cloth would not fly. We had to wait till the afternoon when wind started to blow wildly. Ironically the gusty wind was unsuitable for flying even the heaviest kites of the bulk that had been made over the last seven days. But that did not deter the kite makers, who took to the beach with gusto. The result was the loss of many a kite. Some were broken, some nosedived into the ocean. Though all of them were revived many were made redundant as the bamboo-stick structures gave in and could not be replaced.

The loss of kites to the gusty wind did not mar the festive mood. Children of the nearby village came in flocks. The traditional paper kites were distributed among them. If there were only a few kites flying in the sky, there were no shortage of high spirit among the kite makers and their cohort on the ground. Only the people who were to engage in kite making had come to the island seven days prior to the day of the festival; the rest came the day we arrived. All had fun in mind when they arrived, and fun they had by taking pictures, singing songs and dining under the shades.

Our soujourn would not be complete without a dip in the ocean; my wife declared this the day we arrived. She was an eager party to the flocks who needed to soak themselves thoroughly in the ocean on a daily basis. I remained resolutely off the water on two consecutive days, but could not resist the attraction of the sea the day before we were to leave the island.

Once in St. Martin, who in their right mind would want to miss a visit to the Chhera-deep? For my wife and I, we contacted a man who arranged for a trawler that took us to Chhera-deep in the morning of the day of our departure. If one is a coral-buff one must not miss this opportunity to visit this treasure trove made of multi-coloured dead coral reef.

On the day of our departure, at two thirty at noon we reached the ferry ghat and found that the ship that was suppose to take us back to Teknaf was not there. We had acquired advance tickets, but the ship was nowhere near our sight. Instead, two unknown ships were moored at the end of the wooden pier. My heart sank, but the group leader came to our rescue. As the ships were to leave the dock at three, he decided to get on board one of them. We bought tickets at a concession price as our leader Manik bhai was one of the owners of a resort.

Four days on the island was a treat to the eye as well as the mind. I felt a certain pang of regret as I resisted my wife's insistence to bring back a few chunks of coral reef the villagers were selling. They looked enticing white, immaculate like carefully crafted marble sculptures. But the environmentalist in me kept me from buying them as souvenirs. We had seen exquisite scenery and experienced life amidst nature, things that will stay etched in our memory for the rest of our lives. And to top it all, the photographs we have taken would always be there not as documents but as cues to our real life experiences.