

Shopping for ceramics

Ceramics and Bangladesh have long had had an association with each other. The first ceramic plant to open in this side of the country was back in 1958 in Bogra. Owned by Tajma Ceramic Industry this was

Discovery of large deposits of white clay in Mymensingh, Netrokona and Sylhet helped fuel the growth of this industry. Today, ceramics are widely available throughout the country.

With so many options, it is hard to choose what to buy and for what occasion. But if you have a good eye for it, Bangladesh is a treasure trove of the most quaint, quirky and exciting pieces of ceramics.

For our hunt for the best ceramics, this week, the Lifestyle team decided to pay New Market of Dhaka a visit. The instructions given beforehand were clear enough; be on the look out for what-ever seems unique and out of the box.

Of course, appearances were not the only thing that mattered - price played a big role too and in an area where fixed prices are laughed off, bargaining is a must for getting really good products.

The journey began from the opposite of Dhaka College, on the footpaths before Doza Market. The footpaths are the best place to pick up bargains. Low overhead costs means the shopkeepers are more willing to mark up less and thus offer much more competitive prices.

Joynal Miya, who has had his ceramic shop in the footpath for over 25 years had much insight to offer. "Bangladesh exports a lot of its ceramics to Italy, Japan, USA. "Sometimes, these export quality product make it to shops like ours and if you are really lucky and have a good eye you can get these products for very cheap," he said.

Joynal previously used to sell plastic products but moved on to ceramics as it was much more lucrative.

After picking up a few knick-knacks in the footpaths, we went towards the main area of New Market, entering from next to the post office right after crossing the kitchen market. The entrance is full of small shops selling plastic and ceramics both. Crossing that, you enter the main market.

This place is a hustle and bustle of activity anytime the market is open. Close your eyes and imagine an object and chances are you will find it available in New Market. Mizanur Rahman, a trader in the market for over 33 years explained the pro-tips when buying ceramic products.

"Opt for locally manufactured products. They are of much better quality than Chinese products and much more durable," he said. "There is not much scope for bargaining but you can knock off at least 40-60 percent of quoted price if you negotiate well enough and buy in bulk," he said.

Speaking to Md Sohag, proprietor of Janani Enterprise also extolled the virtues of local ceramics.

"They are oven-proof and more durable and you will notice that most customers like to buy local products. The Chinese ones use more Pyrex and hence are less durable," he said.

Another tip handed out was to look for shops with the shop owners present as they are more likely to negotiate and make a sell at a lower price since employees have to abide by strict instructions.



Moving on ward, in a corner we found Khaleque Variety Store. This is the store to meet all your baking requirements. Everything to do with making cake and decorating your cake is available here. A comparatively posh store, Khaleque Variety Store offers unique tools at very competitive prices. At the end of the day, we were stocked with cups, plates and large ceramic trays, along with salt and pepper shakers and much more. Most of the products selected were hand picked from quite a number of stores and the end result was an exquisite and very price

competitive collection. That is the beauty of New Market, because those who persevere are always rewarded in the end. If New Market is not to your taste, the Gulshan DCC Market offers even more bargains while one can go right to the source in Mirpur to get even more products at a significantly reduced cost.

Indeed, Bangladesh and Dhaka itself is an amazing location just waiting to serve your ceramic product needs along with a lot others. You just have to know where to look and look hard. This week was a lesson in just that very idea.

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