

MUSING**By the beach**

I'm on the longest beach in the world right now. It has been a while since I last came here, almost eight years I think. I remember being ecstatic about coming here the last time. This time around, however, I was looking forward to a quiet time because I'm an adult now. But who was I kidding- the sea beach is one of the few things in the world that brings out the child in all of us.

We are staying at the Sayeman Beach Resort, which is gorgeous by the way. You step outside the hotel compound and you're on the beach, literally. I don't think I have been to one during the winter before. Even at 2 pm, the sand and the breeze alike were cool.

With my jeans folded up to turn them into three-quarters, I run to the shore. Just watching the huge entity in front of me made me feel alive in a way I don't fully understand. I could feel a smile spread across my face, ear to ear, and I don't know why. As the sea roars, all other sounds around you become inaudible. It's like I'm in a dream- but not the kind you have when asleep at night; the kind when your mind is awake but drifting.

As I watch the waves crash against the shore, I lose myself in deep thoughts. One can only snap back to reality when the cool water rushes over one's feet. As the water goes back into the sea, I can feel the sand from below my toes slide. I try to hold the wet sand by sort of clenching my toes, but that only makes them slip by faster. I'm only left with froth between my toes and a pleasant tingling feeling. In my otherwise thoughtless mind, all I can think of is the sea and how vast it is.

A heightened sense of liberty is unanimous across all the sea beaches in the world. It is just so difficult to care when you're by the sea. Sunglasses to protect my eyes and coconut water to keep me hydrated is all I need right now.

I turn around and walk towards an empty beach chair. I don't remember seeing this many children playing in the sand the last time I was here. Or maybe I didn't notice. The wind in my hair emptied me of all my worries, reservations and cynicism. Even the greatest cynic can't help but think of and want the conventional, and widely believed to be ideal, life.

The jewellery vendors approach all ladies and you are bound to take a look even if you aren't interested in buying something initially because everything is so beautiful and there is so much variety. The same things in Dhaka would cost almost three times the price. My browsing for souvenirs for my girlfriends is interrupted by the smell of shutki in the air. Only in Bangladesh, huh?

So far it is pretty perfect. Settling in my beach chair, I lean back and look into the horizon- where the sea and the sky become one. This is where premonitions can't even reach me, let alone haunt me.

By Maaesha Nuzhat Nazmul

LS SUGGESTS**Escape into yourself**

Admit it; at a point in your life when you were tired and battered down with the daily stress of modern existence, you thought of escaping to a brilliant place with sunshine and the lull of crashing waves or maybe to a getaway with mountains and high trails. Whatever that may be, we all have our happy place where we want to go to at the end of a stressful work week.

While sightseeing or hiking holidays do get the stress off your shoulders, their effects only last in stories and pretty pictures. After you come back to work somewhat tired and grumpy faced from the adventures, you store the memories of the trip far back in your mind to get ready for the hit of reality.

This is where a meditation retreat differs from the common holiday.

When you go on a week-long meditation excursion, you do not come back with only pictures. In fact, you may not have any pictures at all since use of technology is advised to be kept at a minimum during such retreats. However, you bring back a higher sense of self and a peace of mind attainable only by being brave enough to sit and listen quietly to the chaos of one's thoughts.

Those who already do yoga have found a piece of this serenity from daily meditation. You sit in the morning to acquire the strength to deal with the disorganised world and you sit at night to forget the gruelling ardours of the day. Yet, there persists the sense of haste to get back to reality which keeps you from getting the full benefits of meditation.

A retreat will ensure that there are no such distractions so that you can concentrate on acquiring a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle.

Yoga is advised to be done in any clothing you deem comfortable and on any seating arrangement suitable for you, but sitting in an asana all day long might not be your cup of tea just yet. Do not fret, for meditation retreats these days are filled with other activities such as, herbal treatments, exploring the local culture, cooking, hiking, mountain-biking, and even snorkelling. So, when a visit to your own mind seems enough for the day, you can get up from the downward dog and right into the ocean. Meditation can be incor-

porated into any part of your life which means you might just find that enlightenment while looking at a school of fish get past you.

Some world famous meditation retreats are in India as it is deemed to be the centre of eastern spiritualism. Ananda in the Himalayas enjoys a great mix of influential clientele while the Lotus Yoga Retreat in Goa is famous for the classes taught by Simon Low, a forerunner among the teachers of yoga in the UK.

For those who seek to be fully immersed in yoga, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram, Kerala is the place to go. The place holds two-week yoga holidays with silent



meditation, teachings in yoga and participation in Karma yoga.

The adventure seekers can go to The Yoga Farm in Costa Rica or Adventure Yoga Retreats in Portugal for surfing and hiking. You can also fancy going to Egypt under the guidance of Sara Campbell, four-time free diving world record holder and Kundalini yoga teacher, for a mix of yoga and meditation with snorkelling sessions and a two-day safari into the Sinai desert.

If you are low on time and want to go on a weekend yoga escape within the country, you

might have to improvise a little. The only meditation excursion currently available in the country is provided by the Quantum Foundation which goes on regular meditation safaris in Lama, Bandarban.

You can join them for a lesson in yoga and self-awakening, although do your research beforehand as Quantum do have their detractors. You can also take resort in the newly founded and already appraised Nazimgarh Garden Resort and Grand Sultan Tea Resort and turn them into your own meditation retreats with great hillside vistas.

Either way, go on a meditation holiday and rediscover your ties with nature.

Will you achieve Zen? Difficult to say. What we can hope is that maybe after coming back from a rejuvenating retreat, you will be able to hold your peace even at the 9 'o clock traffic on a Sunday. Anyone who has to go out in this city knows how much of a blessing that is.

By Afsin Ahmed
Photo: Collected

PERSPECTIVE**Eating out - not the only source of entertainment anymore**

Eat, eat, eat- how much more can you eat? While Bangladesh has welcomed new cuisines with open arms (and mouths) and the current food scene is like never before, even the biggest foodie needs a break from all this food.

It is a common complaint among young people that in Dhaka city there's nothing more to do other than eating out. However, you can catch a whiff of change emerging from around the corner. More options for recreational activities are now up for you to explore.

For instance, Dhaka Comicon has been recently gaining momentum. This age old celebration is responsible for bringing all superhero lovers under one roof all over the world, and now we get to be a part of it too. Ever since it started in 2012, it has been growing strong. This is now one of the most sought-after events of the year.

Workshops are now held in order to help young entrepreneurs and job-seekers network together. Not only professional workshops, but you can also attend workshops by Lokogatha to learn and engage in art and

crafts.

Winter is a season of festivities for us Bengalis and has been so for as far as my memory goes. Most of us are booked away, completely swamped with weddings for these couple of months every year. This year it is a little different, though. Dhaka Folk Fest that took place in November was the first international folk music festival in the country. This was a musical platform where our culture was displayed for a global audience. Around 60,000 people among the audience had their minds blown and hopefully this was the first of many such splendid experiences.

The Shakrain Festival, also known as Kite festival, is celebrated at the end of the Bangla month Poush, which is half way through January. This day is known as Poush Sangkranti. Shakrain is the oldest tradition of Old Dhaka. Growing up, some such traditions were not something we were fully aware of but thanks to the digital age we live in now, social media has brought us closer to our very own festivals, and thus, now people from all

over the city gather in the old town to be a part of this dynamic event that includes flying kites, fire breathing and fireworks.

Speaking of internet bringing us closer, check out the new start up 'JeteChao?' Through JeteChao, you can be kept in the know about the latest events that are taking place in Dhaka every day. The recently launched website provides a list of events and also gives you details and directions on how to get there.

As millennials, we are open to a world different than the one the generations before us lived in. People on the other side of the world spend a lot of time in parks, theatres, and museums and have a greater opportunity to acquire knowledge and ensure cultural enrichment than we do. However, this is a start, and that too, a good one. So let us embrace this change and utilise our free time doing things that don't just involve food.

By Maaesha Nuzhat Nazmul