

AROUND THE WORLD

A Day in the Life of a Bangladeshi Student

SARAH ANJUM BARI

"Opening your eyes at 6 am every day is like going down Alice's wonderful little hole. You have to pinch yourself every single time," says Samiul Bari, a student of Economics at York University in Toronto, Canada. Picking up a dark roast from Timmie's on his way to an 8 am class, Samiul battles through minus umpteen degrees weather that seems to bring the Game of Thrones set to life. "Think back to every theory you've heard about Canada's weather and believe me when I say that it's every bit as bad and then some. We're all just stumbling around campus looking for something to eat," he confirms.

About 9000 miles away in the land-down- under, Syed Ali Ashhab wakes up in bright, sunny Sydney and kicks the day off with a run around campus. After a quick shower and a big breakfast, Ali makes the two-minute commute to his first class of the day at Western Sydney University. "At times the struggle is real when you realise that every single task has to be completed by yourself," shares Ali. "I have learned to live independently the hard way after making uncountable number of mistakes."

Another Bangladeshi student in Malaysia gets up early to clean her room and make her own breakfast. "A lot of the things that I never did back at home are part of daily life. I've started going on morning runs and exercising daily," she says. Remembering to switch all the electrical appliances off, Zubaida Bashir leaves for class at Monash University where she is pursuing a Master's degree in International Business.

Meanwhile in Mannheim, Germany, Shahensha E Alam's day starts with biking to morning class or catch a train to work. Stopping for a pretzel on the way, he says, "Germans love their bread!"

But long before any of these people, Raihana Noorjahan has woken up to the sounds of honking cars and loud birds at 5 am. She has left the house in a hurry to beat the people traffic on sidewalks and make it through the 16 seconds allowed by subway doors.

"It's like living in a hyper version of Dhaka – a

hub for people from all around the country," says Raihana. "Different languages, different accents, but at the end we all have something in common. Everyone in New York City is always. In. A. Rush." ***

Being able to experience a new city – not only its academics but also its way of life – is a dream for many students in our country: the throb of activity that keeps New York buzzing, the magic that snowfall brings to Toronto and the kaleidoscope of colour and energy that is Sydney. Braver souls crave the adventure of a place where they know neither the language nor the culture. The prospect of studying abroad is the ultimate adventure.

Sydney resident Ali talks about the various lounge areas, libraries and cafeterias on college campuses that accommodate students looking to relax or spend time with friends in between classes. Culinary treats like Max Brenner dessert bar, Mexican restaurant Guzman Y Gomez and an abundance of scenic locations make Sydney, according to Ali, a place with countless opportunities for people looking to explore and find new hobbies.

As a person with a passion for sports, Ali spends his Wednesdays playing indoor cricket at facilities like Five Dock Sports Centre with friends from the Bengali community. He also works as a cricket coach, teaching children beginner-level drills to help foster interest in a sport that he loves and has a considerable following in Australia.

After hours spent in the classroom, workplace, the gym, and in the company of friends, Ali ends his days with some YouTube-surfing to unwind before it all starts again the next day. It is then that he muses over the life he has built for himself miles away from home.

"It isn't easy to balance everything as there will be plenty of situations where you feel demotivated," says Ali. "That is where mental strength and the desire to find success as an international student comes in. The thought that it was my decision to come here and achieve big things is what drives me through the day." ***



"Sprechen Sie Englisch? I don't remember asking any other question so many times in the past two years," recalls Shahensha E Alam. Enrolled in the MSC in Economics programme at Mannheim University, Shahensha has come to appreciate the true weight of being an international student in a non-English speaking country – especially one that knows how to make him work hard.

"At Mannheim University they throw you into the swimming pool; whether you can swim or not is your headache," jokes Shahensha. "If you've ever heard of German efficiency, it is applicable in daily life here." ***

Shahensha has come to love traditional German

meals such as Spätzle, Bratwurst and Schupfnudeln, while also frequenting student haunts such as Cafe Sammo for his favourite coffee during the city and an Irish sports bar called Murphy's Law. It all depends on the weather, which apparently colours everyone's daily plans in the city.

Despite not being in the league of major German cities, Mannheim is a happening place – attracting visitors from neighbouring towns, and the constant influx of exchange students. Snippets of conversation in German, Mandarin, Spanish, Turkish and English can all be heard simultaneously within five feet's distance in trams or

buses; the diversity has enriched Shahensha's experience.

The best part is the student-friendliness. Everything from banking and insurance to transport costs are subsidised for students, making it more economical than other European cities. Europe's interconnectedness, coupled with Germany's central location, has allowed Shahensha to travel to fascinating places like Venice, Vienna and Geneva – "each better than the last!" He stresses on learning the language as the ultimate tool for not only getting by in a foreign land but also truly enjoying the experience. "Europeans really appreciate the effort you put into

learning their language," says Shahensha.

"However, anyone interested in moving to Germany for higher studies should be certain that they wish to study," he advises.

This begs the question – once again – of what makes the struggle worth it?

Moving to Germany, answers Shahensha, has exposed him to a world of knowledge that he would've been unaware of had he continued to live back at home. He has seen the reasons behind hindrance in personal growth – such as political conditions, education gap, lack of facilities and even family traditions. It has helped him figure out why he hadn't been growing, and how much more he can grow now.

"Plus, you learn how to cook," he adds. ***

"Winter is coming" is very real for students in Canada, especially those from a warm country like Bangladesh. However, not even the weather can dampen the cheery spirits of warm-hearted Canadians, according to Samiul Bari.

Be it at the all-you-can-eat sushi bars, the local Hakka joint or Shwarma Maxx selling Toronto's hottest shwarmas, the behaviour of people is as nice as the delectable food. On days when he feels homesick, Samiul takes the Toronto Transport Commission (TTC) – the main student transportation – for a \$3.25 ride over to Danforth for home-cooked style meals at Ghorra and Premium Sweets (we're everywhere, aren't we?). On weekends, TTC takes him to the majestic Niagara Falls where he "washes [his] worries away."

"Toronto for me has been about learning," shares Samiul. "I've received more reality checks in a semester than I have my whole life. From using other people's kitchen utensils to making the last subway on time, it's all about the experience. Looking up at the CN tower and wanting your goals to reach such heights is a shared sentiment. It's been electric. It's been real." ***

Next door to Canada, Raihana is in the middle of a transition from being a student to working as a research analyst in New York. Her daily job at an energy company consists of researching new ways

to decrease zebra fish in the water plant system and then testing the leads out in a lab.

"People think students in NYC have the best time. News Flash: They really don't," clarifies Raihana. "Almost 90 percent of students work right before/after/in-between classes to pay for college."

Adhering to every NYC cliché portrayed by Hollywood, Raihana describes Central Park as her favourite spot in the city. It is also the most popular student hub because of its vast area comprising amusement parks, sculptures, trails, etc. On days when Genetics or Organic Chemistry class made her want to pull her hair out before graduation, Central Park saved her. She found her favourite spot on a hill with a mid-century patio where, surrounded by hills overlooking the Manhattan skyline, she would calm her mind over a book and a bottle of water.

"My favourite thing about NYC is its diversity, which keeps the city alive. There are always people on the streets. And the best part is how all the buzz, lights, noise make it feel like Bangladesh," Raihana says. ***

Living closer to home has its perks, realises Malaysia resident Zubaida. Amid weekdays taken up by classes stretching from 7 am-10 pm, Zubaida enjoys cheat days with her Bangladeshi friends on Fridays. They put on shalwar kameez and kurta, visit Asian restaurants and splurge on traditional meals that they save up for throughout the week. Saturdays and Sundays include driving to the city centre for shopping, paintball, bowling, laser tag and other adventures.

However, Zubaida is still learning to cope with classes. She explains, "Sleep is suddenly much less important, and I can feel my muscles getting stronger from all the housework. Moreover, most good food places in Malaysia close down by 10 pm, making it really difficult to find decent dinner after night classes. Sometimes I have dinner at the 7/11 next to my apartment or the nearby mamak (street shops)."

"Coming to Malaysia for higher studies is one of the best decisions I've made. Hopefully things will stay that way," she concludes.

