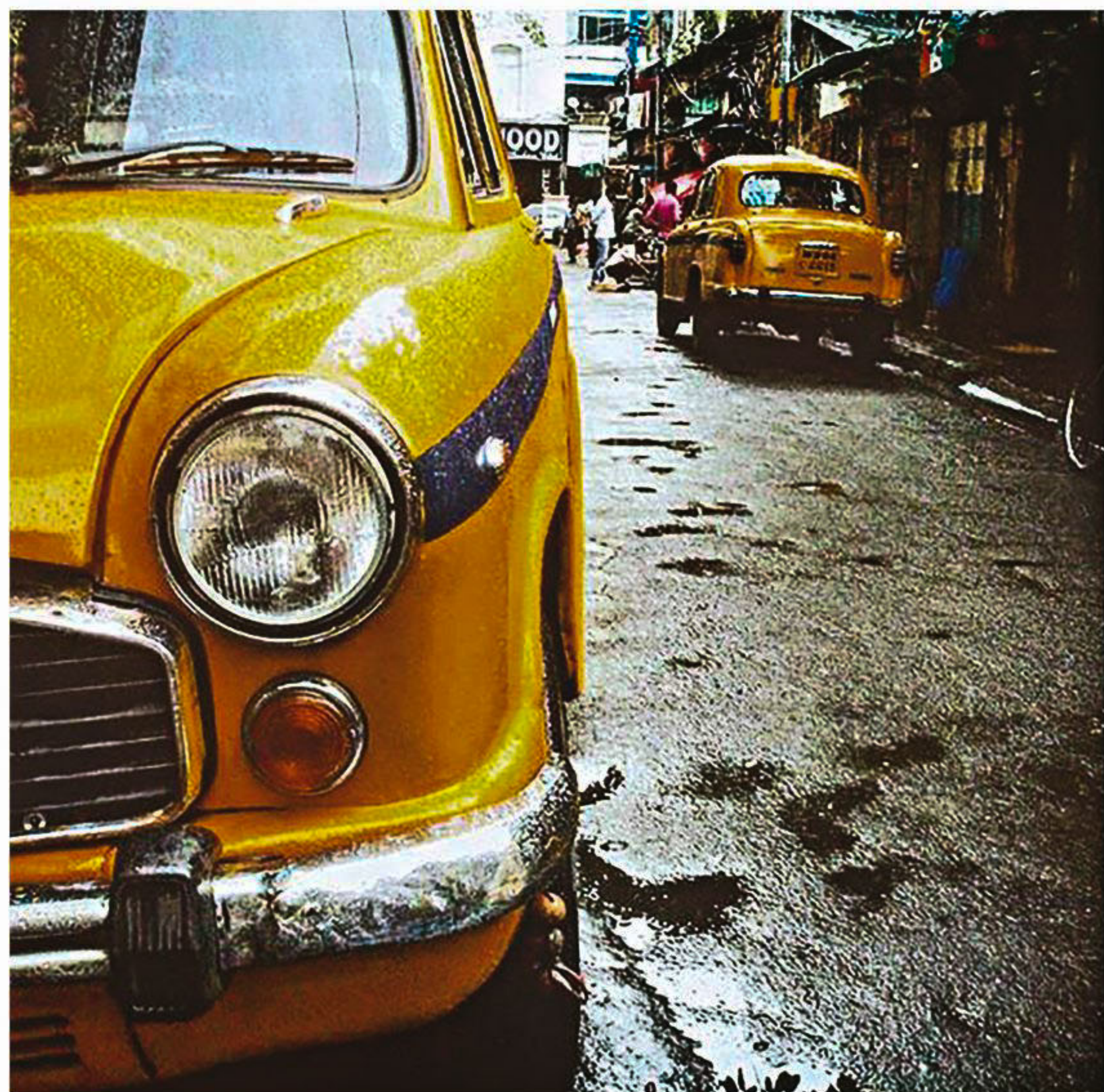


Phuket is synonymous with relaxing. You can be floating on the rooftop infinity pool of your hotel, looking at the people parasailing down at the beach, while heavy clouds come down on you from the mountains. Because that's what I did. Later, Tungsten bulbs lit up the beach town; I wandered around and found a pop-up restaurant right by Thanon Bangla.

Fluent only in "Sawasdee!"—the only bit of Thai I knew—I ordered Pad thai and shrimp tempura. There were many such restaurants all lined up by the road, managed by married couples; the men cooked while the women took care of the finances. As soon as the steaming noodles and shrimp landed in front of me, the sky opened its gates. The spices danced on my taste buds and the complimentary coconut smoothie sent me into a meditative state, not to be disturbed by obscure Thai yells to get under a shelter.

DAY TWO

Take a walking tour in downtown Kuala Lumpur. There's a quality every traveller should possess: spontaneity. I had only planned on looking at souvenirs at Central Market. As luck would have it, the smiling woman at the information desk handed me a "Kuala Lumpur Must Visit Attractions" booklet. It contained a list of the places with a map on the back; one had to find a designated person at each location



The yellow Ambassador taxi is a symbol of Kolkata

PHOTOS: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD



Stupas of Borobudur temple in Yogyakarta

and get the book stamped. Spontaneity? Heck, this was my version of the Amazing Race.

The Sri Mahamariamman Temple, Sin Sze Si Ya Temple, and Jamek Mosque were easiest to find. So were the St Mary's Cathedral, Sultan Abdul Samad Building beside Merdeka Square, and museums close by. However, the bustling Petaling Street drove me insane as I traversed its entire length more than a few times in search of Fung Wong Biscuit, a century-old bakery. When I did find it, the owner, perplexed with this animated man, cared enough to stamp his booklet. Mission accomplished.

NIGHT TWO

Spend an evening shopping and eating around Park Street in Kolkata. If there's something India offers us Bangladeshis, it's the experience of being ourselves but also feeling out of place at the same time. And it's more prominent in Kolkata where you see and hear Bangla everywhere. Like most troubles during travelling, this alienating feeling too could be solved with retail therapy.

In the city which lets me be a babu moshai, Park Street is where I felt at home. Walking through Sudder Street and then past the Indian Museum, the next left turn lured me into "the Street that Never Sleeps". This cosmopolitan avenue has everything to offer—hotels, shopping, bookstores (a personal agenda), coffee, historical architecture because it's been here since the late 18th century, nightlife, Kusum Rolls (another personal agenda)—everything. It's an amusement park for the senses but mostly for the pockets. I spent a good half hour scouring through covers at the Oxford Bookstore, ordered myself a double egg double chicken kati roll at Kusum's, and simply walked the road from end to end when I realised I needed coffee, and Café Coffee Day obliged. One travels through time at Park Street, stopping to



The classic panoramic view of Shanghai

either hail a yellow taxi or to take in the blinding lights and timelessness of it all.

DAY THREE

Visit Borobudur temple in Yogyakarta; leave for the airport in the evening. The final day of a trip brings with it many issues. Do we have to check-out at 12? How much does the luggage weigh? Did I forget to buy that cold cream Nanu wanted? It's even more serious when one, for no apparent reason, saves the most important item on the itinerary for last.

After promising the concierge I'd be back before check-out time, I took a Grab bike to Jombor bus station. As if the locals knew why I was there, I was promptly directed to get on the Cemara Tunggal bus that would drop me at the temple's entrance. The single largest Buddhist structure on the planet, the scale of Borobudur and intricacy of its architecture had me mesmerised the moment it appeared on my peripheral vision. I walked clockwise around the temple as instructed, one platform after another, stopping to look at the stories carved on the stones—the life story of Buddha and his journey towards Nirvana. I had fun enacting Temple Run on its terraces. The horizon came into view as I climbed to the topmost platform, where a total of 72 Buddha statues sat inside individual perforated stupas. In the distance, I could see the volcanoes Merapi and Merbabu under the clear sky, and recalled what my Grab driver had told me earlier that morning.

"Sir, try to see the Merapi and Merbabu from the top. If you do, consider yourself a lucky man," he had said.

I checked my watch and realised that check-out time was behind me, and my return flight was hours away. But I had never felt luckier.

Kazi Akib Bin Asad is Sub-editor of SHOUT, The Daily Star. Follow his travels on [instagram.com/akibasad](https://www.instagram.com/akibasad)

Underground art scene in Berlin, Germany

Sushmita S Preetha

"Berlin is all kinds of cool, if you know where and how to look. And the Alternative Berlin Walking Tour did just that. It showed me Berlin—the gritty, rebellious, diverse, creative, political ever-changing Berlin—on its walls, garbage bins, tunnels, bridges, sidewalks. Led by an artist in his early 40s, we explored the city's pulsating underground art and culture scene. Sure, the free tour only gives you a glimpse of the artist squats, urban farms, graffiti and street art throughout the city, but it's enough to whet your appetite to go discover more on your own."

Scan the QR code to see this location on Google Maps:

