

JAMAICA, NY: A slice of Bangladesh away from it

Every day during the month of Ramadan, the Bangladeshi restaurants sell iftar fare. On Chand Raat, the Hillside Avenue buzzes with people. Bangladeshis come from other parts of New York and neighbouring states to partake in the Chand Raat merriment.

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which means that even at a doctor's office, you can communicate in Bangla," she said.

There was a time when Bangladeshi Americans in New York City were known as a diaspora of taxi drivers and shopkeepers. Times have changed. Today, you will find thousands of accomplished engineers, physicians, entrepreneurs, and academics of Bangladeshi descent in the city. The children of fathers who once worked or still work as taxi drivers or shopkeepers excel in school and find a strong footing in mainstream America.

Mozammel Khan, who is an assistant manager at a 7-Eleven store in Manhattan, lived in multiple communities in and out of New York before settling in Jamaica. According to Khan, accessible public transportation, public schools and parks for children, banks, higher education institutions like

St. John's University and York College, and last but not least, 'deshi' and Halal grocery stores and restaurants make Jamaica an enticing place to live.

"I have lived in Jamaica for most part of my life in America. For Bangladeshi Americans, there are countless perks of living here, including Bangladeshi restaurants like Sagar,

Premium Sweets, Panshi, etc. Masjid Al-Mamoor, more commonly known as Jamaica Muslim Center, a mosque established by Bangladeshi Americans, is another added attraction of the place."

Khan, whose son recently entered Rochester Institute of Technology

study Computer Science, thinks that Jamaica is an affordable neighbourhood to live, much less crowded than the similar 'deshi' neighbourhood of Jackson Heights, and not a bad place to raise children.

"Jamaica is an affordable place to live for people with family. Living costs are much lower than most parts of New York City, which makes it an attractive neighbourhood for new immigrants," he said.

"I can't afford to live in Manhattan. However, the train system allows for easy transit to Manhattan as well as Long Island, making my daily commute to work hassle-free," he continued.

The residents of Jamaica complain of occasional street robbery, which is, however, not uncommon in big metropolises, and overall cleanliness of the neighbourhood being subpar. However, the joy, which comes from living around your 'own' folks, relishing 'deshi' cuisine whenever you want, and enjoying Eid, Ekushey February, Pahela Baishakh, and Bijoy Dibosh observations and celebrations, remains unmatched by typical American neighbourhoods.

Every day during the month of Ramadan, the Bangladeshi restaurants sell iftar fare. On Chand Raat, the Hillside Avenue buzzes with people. Bangladeshis come from other parts of New York and neighbouring states to partake in the Chand Raat merriment. Bangladeshis living out-of-state visit their friends and family in NYC during Eid times, because Eid genuinely feels like Eid in 'deshi' neighbourhoods like Jamaica and Jackson Heights.

On Chand Raat, Jamaica's Hillside Avenue comes alive with live music, young girls set up mehendi booths on the pavement, and men and women are spotted doing their last-minute Eid shopping.

All New York City public schools are closed on Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha. It may be noted that the New York City public school system is the largest in the United States, with over 1.1 million students taught in more than 1,800



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schools. The Bangladeshi-owned shops and restaurants are also closed on Eid days.

I have celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr with my extended family in Queens on a number of occasions; with schools and shops closed, Jamaica feels like an Eid day in Dhaka. On the streets, you see men, women, and children in traditional Bangladeshi outfits, chatting and laughing. They visit their friends, family and neighbours, prepare sumptuous meals at home, and exchange gifts and clothes, just like it is done in Bangladesh.

Ever wondered where America's largest Eid jamaat is held? The Jamaica Muslim Center organises the largest Eid congregational prayer in the US. Before the pandemic, as many as 15,000 men, women, and children congregated to offer their Eid prayers in the playground of Thomas A. Edison High School in Jamaica, Queens!

Nayla Aziz, an online business owner in her 30s, lives with her husband in Minnesota. Before moving to Minnesota, she used to reside in Jamaica with her parents and brother. Nayla says that she always misses the hustle of New York City, the resilience of New Yorkers, and the Bengali vibes and vibrancy that places like

Jamaica offer.

"Because my parents still live in Jamaica, I visit them a few times a year. On my trips to Jamaica, I bring back kachchi biriyani, sweets, etc. from Bangladeshi restaurants for my family in Minnesota," she said. "We can find Indian and Pakistani-style biriyani here, but not Bangladeshi-style kachchi biriyani or beef tehari!"

"In addition to proximity to literally anything, from 'deshi' grocery stores to beauty parlours, Jamaica gives you a different kind of happiness," she continued. "The happiness comes from being around people who share your home country."

Bottom line

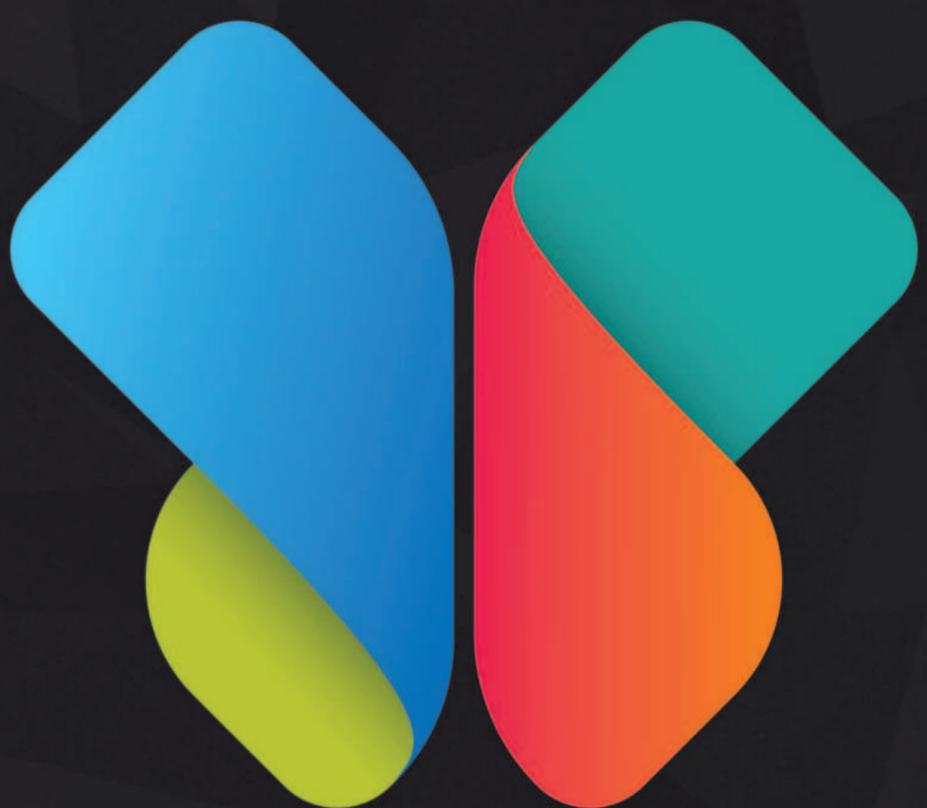
It is for places like Jamaica and Jackson Heights that the diaspora of Bangladeshi immigrants gets to immerse in the sights, sounds, and aroma of traditional cuisine of their birthplace. It is because we pride on our roots and rich cultural heritage that only a few of us, if any, would ever miss a chance to explore Jamaica and the like, when we visit the "Big Apple."

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Photo: Litu Anam**



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