



Bangladesh from a foreign student's POINT OF VIEW

Going abroad to study can be an experience of a lifetime. Being introduced to new cultures, getting involved with new people, tasting new food and with a host of other novel experiences that follow, we not only enhance our educational qualifications, but also create bonds for a lifetime and memories to cherish forever.

While it is a common phenomenon for us Bangladeshis to pick a country outside for higher education, there also exists a group of students who choose to come to Bangladesh to study. While it is not very common to see foreign faces at universities, there is a niche group of international students.

How do they like the experience of studying in our country? A medley of good and bad, Bangladesh is the country they choose to make a temporary home away from home.

A land of opportunities

Being a fast-paced and developing country, Bangladesh is a land of opportunities where people thrive and dreams come true. The vivacious and energetic youth of the country have taken the definition of extracurricular activities while studying to newer heights.

This sentiment is echoed by several international students, including Regita Gurung, a communications strategist in Bhutan who completed her undergraduate studies in Bangladesh.

"During my time in Bangladesh, I received the opportunity to be involved in many forms of work, including part-time and freelance. This enabled me to learn and grow both as a person and professional while pursuing my education," she remarked.

Another student, Ruchi Dave, who is currently studying public health in Asian University for Women (AUW) stated, "There is an abundance of opportunities along with the required platforms for people in Bangladesh to start something of their own, such as a new business or getting involved in social activities like volunteering and youth activism. I am making the most of my

time here!"

These endless opportunities do not come without competition, which is why Bangladeshi students tend to be more competitive in nature. But even in this competitive landscape, students achieve and win together. As Bijay Mehta, an MBBS student said, "Although we compete, it's healthy competition. My peers feel delighted when I do well in exams and vice versa."

Exploring Bangladesh

Being in a new country provides the scope to explore new places and go on adventures, and this is something foreign students seem to enjoy the most. Among the many fond memories created, glimpses of the country's scenic beauty are etched in their memories forever.

"Coming from a landlocked country, my journey to St Martin's Island was nothing short of magical. The blur of blue where the sky meets the sea is one of the most glorious sights I have ever witnessed!" exclaimed Puja Khanal, a student from Nepal.

"I have a bucket list of places to visit from which I have already ticked off Sylhet, Rangamati, Cox's Bazar, and Bandarban. Yet, there is so much left to explore. After all, it is a country that has it all — from greenery to beaches to hills," she added.

This is not only limited to exploring the various hotspots of Bangladesh, but students find joy and adventure in the little things as well — such as exploring street food, hawkers' markets, and rickshaw rides through narrow alleys.

A melting pot of cultures

We may be a small country but we are rich in culture and diversity, and foreign students are a testament to this. From the various things that comprise culture, our diverse food is what they fall in love with.

"I definitely miss the food from home, but our food isn't as colourful and flavourful as here," said Hina Azam from the UAE who has been studying in Bangladesh for three years. However, the Puja beg to differ, as they believe the momos we prepare are completely different from the authentic ones!

Apart from food, our colourful festivals are a representation of the vibrancy and joy among the people of our country — celebrations international students love to be part of.

"Weddings in Bangladesh are second to none. They are so grand and extravagant and I fully enjoy being part of all the ceremonies," a foreign student studying in Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) shared.

While on one hand people appreciate the grand celebrations, on the other, they are left in awe of how harmoniously we follow our own religions.

"One thing that struck me in Bangladesh was hearing the sound of various religious practices at the same place, such as the peaceful Adhaan from mosques and tintinnabulation of bells from temples," said Halima Rahami, a student from Afghanistan.

Getting along with people

Despite all the joy and new experiences, staying away from home comes tied with missing family members and old friends. Luckily, new bonds of friendship help fill this void, especially when living in a dorm. International students find new family among locals for being with them through thick and thin, whether it is to accompany them in eerie roads or ensuring they have sufficient money.

"Coming to Bangladesh from Dubai felt like moving from one home to another. The people here are so hospitable, welcoming, and kind, that I never felt alone in a foreign

land," expressed Syeda Asghari, who is an undergraduate student at North South University (NSU).

Another foreign student from AUW (Asian University for Women) shared her experience, mentioning, "From celebrating together to suffering together, I have felt the essence of true sisterhood and unity during my time at AUW. The friendly nature of people here is surely a microcosm of the entire country."

Alongside, living in Bangladesh exposes its residents to people of all social classes, something many countries lack.

"In Bangladesh, I have to interact with all sorts of people, be it a shopkeeper for bargaining or a rickshaw puller for travelling. This has enabled me to learn a lot about other peoples' way of living," expressed Fahad Zaman, a student who came from the Middle East.

Getting the grit

Moving to a new country such as Bangladesh does not come without challenges, also add to it the stress of getting used to new educational methods and adjusting with the people, weather, and systems. Commute is a major problem we all face and slowly acclimatise to. However, for foreign students, the road system often comes as a shock.

Apart from that, the absurd amount of pollution is another setback as most complain about the air being "too heavy." Safety in some places and after certain hours, especially for girls, is another major concern. Another difficulty that has to be overcome is the utter chaos in our country, ranging from noisy neighbourhoods to mismanagement of systems.

Despite all this, certain factors make this journey enjoyable. Finding respite in our scenic beauty, developing bonds for life, celebrating our festivals and food draped in colours, and learning to adjust and live on their own are what make it a journey to cherish forever.

By Fariha Amber
Photo: Regita Gurung

