



#INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL VLOGGERS

Several foreign travel vloggers have visited our country, entertaining Bangladeshis and the rest of the world with their videos on our food, culture, sights and sounds, and people. Their vlogs never fail to create a buzz on YouTube and social media. In the spirit of World Tourism Day tomorrow, we decided to speak to three such vloggers — Mark Wiens, Doug Barnard, and Brent Timm — to find out their experiences and thoughts on tourism in Bangladesh.



Star **LIFE** Style

THE BANGLADESH EXPERIENCE

3 global travel vloggers reveal their stories

They have bragworthy numbers of subscribers and followers; they have those staggering numbers of likes and views — now, for their insights...

TRAVELLING THROUGH BANGLADESH: MEMORIES AND HIGHLIGHTS

First of all, if you watch their videos, you would become pleasantly surprised by the extent of their journeys. From rural escapades to bustling areas, our three vloggers covered quite a lot of Bangladesh.

To illustrate, when Doug Barnard came to our country, he attended two weddings, took the steamer to Barishal, and celebrated Valentine's Day and the spring festival at Dhaka University, among other things.

One of his favourites was a trip to Bandarban. "When people think of Bangladesh, they picture crowds and a very busy and hectic place. Many foreigners don't know about the serenity that exists here," he expressed.

Meanwhile, Brent Timm went to a premiere of Barbie, visited a garment factory, haggled in local markets, hiked through Lawachara National Park, and much more.

He also spent an Eid in our country, which is a memory he cherishes. Another is watching a cricket match in Sylhet. "I had never seen a cricket match live before. The excitement was just insane. It was crazy — the experience, the energy!" he exclaimed.

On the other hand, Mark Wiens is a food vlogger travelling around the world. In Bangladesh, his taste buds were surely hard at work — with street food, the bhortas, kachchi biriyani, mezbani beef, and so on.

If he had to pick just one as his favourite, he informed that it would be hilsa curry with mustard oil (perhaps referring to shorshe ilish).

THE BUMPS ALONG THE WAY: ANY CHALLENGES OR FEEDBACK?

"You could always say the traffic!" Mark laughed out loud.

An eerily similar answer came from Brent; it was even that same laughter!

Also, stating that change and progress take time, he shared, "I really wanted to go to the Sundarbans and Sajek. It seemed very difficult to get information to go to those places and to find easy transportation."

He admitted that even as a seasoned

traveller, he had to struggle.

Doug too pointed out about the lack of tourism infrastructure.

PUTTING BANGLADESH ON THE TOURISM MAP

"I think Bangladesh has a big tourism potential," Doug continued. "For now, it may mostly appeal to those who want real, authentic, unfiltered, travel experience; which, in my experience, is the best kind of travel."

"There's a ton of potential to promote ecotourism. Before I went there, I really didn't know much about Bandarban and Sundarban and all these places. If you look at Bangladesh on a map, it's a fairly small country. I was amazed by the diversity of the different areas."

Meanwhile, Mark, the gastronomic

Bangladeshi food is not as well-represented as some other cuisines. So it's harder to learn about Bangladeshi cuisine when you're not in Bangladesh

globetrotter (who lives in Thailand) had tried out a couple of Bangladeshi restaurants in Bangkok. He loved the food there, but visiting our country elevated the whole impression.

"The food was spectacular," he opined. "But, I think still in comparison to some other cuisines, Bangladeshi food is not as well-represented as some other cuisines. So it's harder to learn about Bangladeshi cuisine when you're not in Bangladesh."

Putting our food "very high" on the culinary map, he elaborated, "It should be one of the world's great cuisines. It is very unique: the use of mustard oil in many dishes is so evident, and also, the bhortas are amazing."

And as for Brent, he said that the "real Bangladesh" lies in the tea gardens, paddy fields, and all the beautiful places and people. For him, it is not just about Dhaka, the traffic and the like, which, many might get the impression if they

did a quick image search on the internet, based off some of the first few results.

FOREIGN VLOGGERS AND THE LOCALS

The final point, which would be grossly unfair to miss out, is the experience of these vloggers with the people.

You must have seen at least one or two of these travel videos. An underlying theme is that the vlogger simply walks down the road, gets greeted by countless people, sometimes asking for selfies or to have a quick chat.

Seeing these videos, one may claim that, generally speaking, Bangladeshi locals are excited and indeed really curious around foreigners, that also with a camera.

All the three vloggers we spoke to were very passionate and positive about it.

"I was very surprised by the kindness of the local people. I was greeted with a tremendous amount of love and compassion. So many people would offer to help me," Brent reflected.

But wasn't it overwhelming at some point? Well, possibly; but the vloggers seem to take it in good spirit.

"I like travelling to places that are more interactive," Doug answered. "For me, travelling is not just about sightseeing: I travel to meet people. I really try to dive deep into culture, and Bangladesh is perfect for that."

And hence, with great food, great people, and diversity of places, Bangladesh had been an amazing experience for them all.

The concluding remark of Mark Wiens — when asked about his favourite memory from our country — would summarise the people experience and to a great extent the Bangladesh experience at large.

Guided by a local friend, when he went to a home at a village, he was astonished to see the huge number of delicacies served: "Yes, I was there to film. But even if we didn't have the cameras, they would have treated us the same way. It wasn't a show for the cameras. It was the gracious hospitality that made them do this."

By M H Haider

Photo: Mark Wiens; Doug Barnard; Brent Timm

Special thanks to Mark Wiens, Doug Barnard, and Brent Timm for sharing their valuable insights. Check out their videos on YouTube/follow them on social media as they travel across the world.