



SEVEN CONTINENTS 100 COUNTRIES

A Bangladeshi couple's tale of collecting memories through travel

Sarmin Shahariath and Rezaul Bahar, married since 2005, are avid travellers. So far they have travelled 100 countries across seven continents.

PHOTO:
REJAUL BAHAR

REZAUL BAHAR

WE HAVE BEEN TO PLACES.

It's a bold statement considering the vastness of the planet we live in. But since 2008, when we made our first trip as a couple to the Bahamas, Sarmin and I have travelled to 100 countries on 7 continents.

Looking back, we never thought one day people we know would call us a "globetrotting couple".

But here we are. Last November, we visited Indonesia, our 100th country together.

WHAT IGNITED THE PASSION?

After travelling to a few new places, we quickly realised what we wanted: Gathering moments through travel. If the earth is the only heaven we will ever see and the brief time we have on it, why not attempt to explore it before our eyes close forever?

As we all know, travelling isn't all about going to a new place. For me,

2005 when we got married. Some might say travelling around the world takes lots of time and involves loads of money. Yes, it does. But what matters most is passion.

Coming from middle-class traditional families in Bangladesh, we both have our own stories of struggle. The stories give us strength; the memories help us to accept life as it is.

During Sarmin's days at Jahangirnagar University, a cup of tea with friends sometimes felt like a luxury as she had to save every penny possible from what she got from her family.

Now, she is a business consultant with a reputed firm here in the United States. She has worked for some of the Fortune 500 companies.



Connecticut, I am working for one of the five US military academies.

INDEED, HARD WORK PAYS OFF!

We started our conjugal life in the US in a tiny rental apartment with an enormous burden of student loans. I had an entry-level job. On top of that, Sarmin started her higher education. Every penny we spent was for basic needs. With a basic cable TV service, we could only watch Travel Channel, Discovery, National Geographic and a few others. We didn't have the money, but watching shows of Samantha Brown, Anthony Bourdain on the Travel Channel, and seeing the world through Discovery or National Geographic sowed the seed of travelling in us.

PASSION FOR LIFE, NOT MONEY, IS THE KEY.

A few years later, the financial burden eased up as we both started earning. But the life lessons we gathered were precious.

We learnt how to appreciate life as it is and accept and enjoy the present. We realised that searching for happiness or worrying about the future and ignoring the present creates no memories.

And without the memories what a human can treasure?

So, we consciously decided to invest our hard-earned money where we thought would be most beneficial to us: exploring the world and collecting memories together.

BUT WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS IMPORTANT.

Travelling while working full-time is not easy. Travel takes time and money, tests us physically, and pushes us to leave our comfort zone.

About ten years ago, both of us decided to exit the career-centric rat race. Increasing income and hence responsibilities simply didn't appeal to us.

But that doesn't mean we ignored our primary responsibilities.

Planning is really important.

We have found a way to utilise the 25 to 30 annual leave we get. We generally target weeks that have holidays. Taking a 4-day leave adding to a holiday with two weekends on both ends of a work week gives us 9 days off from work. This allows us to plan a trip to one or two countries. This is how we have been managing to go out 7-8 times a year, covering on average 8-10 countries every year.

SPECIAL CELEBRATION IN BALI

Indonesia was set as our 100th country almost a year ago when one of my childhood friends proposed a get-together of friends to celebrate the milestone. After a few hick-ups like kids' exams, visa troubles, and passport issues, 25 of our childhood friends from three continents gathered in Bali on November 21. The four-day-long reunion with the people we love gave us precious memories worth saving for a lifetime.

TRAVEL GAVE US A LOT.

I have seen the most

beautiful sunrise in my village, Londa, located in the southernmost part of Bangladesh. In Morocco, our tour guide couldn't help crying when we said goodbye. In Uzbekistan, an eagle feather from an eagle master formed a bond among strangers beyond explanation. We must have made some connections with a few people around the globe.

The most amazing place we have ever been is Antarctica. With its alien landscape, Antarctica is the closest "out of this world experience" we had. So remote, so isolated, so vast, yet so pristine and so pure! We would love to visit this place again.

We would also love to visit Alaska, a heaven on earth, as many times as possible. If you want to feel nothingness, the Gobi Desert in Mongolia might be the place for you. For us, Egypt can take you back thousands of years in time. The landscape of Chile's Patagonia left us awestruck, while Jordan's Wadi Rum reminded us of Mars. And to feel "isolation", we would recommend a visit to Iceland.

For us, Asia is the best continent. It is so diverse when it comes to culture, nature, history and wildlife. However, travelling can pose some unwanted challenges too. A severe toothache forced me to visit a dentist first just after landing in Perth, Australia. We had a narrow escape when our aircraft lost an engine after taking off from Belgrade, Serbia. In Spain's Madrid, a "magician" took all our money and credit cards. We even somehow enjoyed our forced stay at a hotel in Cyprus during the Covid-19 pandemic.

But that's the beauty of it.

THE WORLD IS OUT THERE, AND YOU HAVE TO SEE IT FOR YOURSELF.



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it's a way of getting an idea of what we truly are. It is a gateway through which one can interact with different people and cultures opening up the possibility of new perspectives on life. Every aspect of life can be experienced through it -- nature, politics, religion, history, science, our differences and similarities in culture and social norms etc.

NOTHING COMES EASY.

Sarmin and I were born and raised in Bangladesh. Our paths became one in

After completing my studies at Buet, I moved to the US for higher studies. Doing odd jobs in New York City wasn't enough to support my studies and expenses, so I had to take the yellow cab license. I can still recall driving for two shifts, 18 hours straight wrecking my body for some much-needed extra money. Somehow, it was not enough too!

Now, as a LEED professional and licensed engineer in the state of

