

#PERSPECTIVE

A foodie's Chattogram adventure

Chattogram does not exactly come up as the go-to vacation destination in my mind — that spot is reserved for Cox's Bazar. But I wanted to go someplace that celebrates my kind of food — Chattogram — the land of kala bhuna and mezban. So, I decided to make a trip out of it, and for once, have peace with travel buddies.

After checking in, I went for a quick stroll. Weirdly, and sadly perhaps, the area was surrounded by familiar food shops I know from Dhaka, so nothing 'authentic' right from the start. That, and people in Chattogram evidently don't have to wake up at 9 AM on a Saturday.

Defeated, I went back to the hotel and their breakfast buffet, bracing for disappointment.

There were less than nine items perhaps, so my mind was already hitting the 'meh' button, but the moment the paratha and spicy aloo dum hit my tongue, I was in paradise.

Now, I should mention that while I was on vacation, my other companions weren't. They were there to work, and they would be covering loads of things about Chattogram, including the food scene, so I decided to tag along with them.

By late afternoon, we were going to try this apparently famous old 'posh dining'. Sadly, the staff, it seems, forgot what customers and orders were, and decided that hanging out in the kitchen is more fun. So, we left.



think of that aloo bharta. In fact, I nearly ordered a big box of it to go, but everyone stopped me, citing it would go bad before we reached the hotel.

Day three started with a no-arguments visit to the hotel's breakfast buffet. The rest of the day was also quite uneventful, foodwise at least. Until of course, I went to this shop called Flavors.

From their cookies to their sweets, and most importantly, their crisps, sold in plastic containers, are simply divine. Why? Well, if you are old and get heartburn after eating crisps, like me, these are perfect. No issues, and it tastes lovely, just the right amount of spice, salt, and crunch. No judgement, but I bought nearly eight boxes of crisps to take to Dhaka.

Then, I visited an old friend: Gani Bakery. I bought two kilos of milk toffees and two kilos of biscuits, which ranged from good to great. The toffees were incredible, so amazing that I felt insanely jealous of the people who lived near and right across it.

If you have been keeping count, that's nearly five kilos of food in big-ish containers. I had to stop by Biponi Bitan to get a new backpack to carry them. While there, I also got to try falooda at the renowned New Liberty Drink House. While the falooda was great, it wasn't the main attraction for me. Rather it was the interior and the staff, or rather their uniforms. If you ever read Archie Comics (the old ones), you know Pop Tate's, and this feels exactly like that.

We wrapped the day at DFC (Dorothy Fried Chicken). This was apparently run by a Korean lady for the longest time and still uses her original recipe for the spicy Korean fried chicken.

We ordered some, and it was quite lovely. If I am being honest, Dhaka has better fried chicken, but considering how long this place has been running, and how recent the good Dhaka fried chicken is, you have to consider them nothing short of pioneers.

And so, my trip came to an end. My treacherous colleagues, quite selfishly, left for Dhaka a day earlier than me, and it left me time to ponder on my thoughts. I came here to experience Chattogram's Kala bhuna — which I was eating in my hotel room, having ordered it from the hotel restaurant — and mezban, but instead, I am

leaving with five kilos of biscuits and crisps, and pining for the aloo bharta from Bhabir Hotel. Not what I had in mind, but hey, I am not complaining!

By Intisab Shahriyar
Photo: Intisab Shahriyar



With the light fading, we decided to delay lunch and head to Patenga Beach instead. Since I love sea sides, the disappointment of the restaurant washed over quickly. However, when we got there, I was left disappointed once more — the once pretty beach and all its vast expanse were developed over, and the beach access, in that area at least, had been reduced to steps as you see in a village pond.

The displeasure was curbed somewhat by a very busy jhalmuri seller, who whipped up one heck of a Bombai chilli chanachur mix, and later, a mouth-watering (and eye-watering) naga fuckha. Try it if you ever

visit Patenga. Eating chanachur facing a sea breeze just isn't talked about enough.

We wrapped up the day by going back to GEC Mor because I insisted on having kala bhuna. Someone recommended Zamzam's restaurant, so we went there. While my colleagues ordered fish, I ordered the kala bhuna, daal, rice, and aloo bharta. Here's some sacrilege; I have had better kala bhuna in Dhaka, frankly. And so, day one was a bust, food-wise at least, except for the breakfast.

Day two started with a 'debate.' While I wanted the hotel breakfast, my colleagues wanted to try another place while on our

way to Guliakhali Sea Beach. As I was the oldest of the bunch, I couldn't really huff and puff, so I just went with it. But guess what? The eatery did not open at 8 AM on a Sunday. So, we had some mediocre breakfast at some random hotel down the road. All the while, I was making mental voodoo dolls for these nearly Gen-Z co-workers of mine.

In any case, breakfast over, we headed to Guliakhali Sea Beach, and it was a very memorable experience, but the meh breakfast and the empty stomach were intruding on this otherwise spectacular sight. We decided to go for lunch, and our chauffeur once again recommended a hotel, making my very young colleagues very excited.

The roadside eatery, as it turned out, hilariously called Bhabir Hotel, was packed to the brim with people. After some minutes, we managed to sneak into a table. There were no menus, no options. It was bhaat, daal, beef chuijhaal, tomato bharta, and aloo bharta, or get lost!

Now, I was quite perplexed. How is it that I am in Chattogram, and not being served mezban or kala bhuna at THEIR eateries? Food was served and we all dug in. Beef chuijhaal was ok, tomato bharta was nice, but the aloo bharta? That was transcendental. I have to be honest; it's been two months since this trip, and I still

