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MOTIJHEEL HOLIDAY MARKET

A shopper’s paradise on a budget in the heart of Dhaka

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Holiday markets, weekend farmer’s markets, night markets, thrift markets – these are the places that always seem to trigger my spending compulsion. Even though I have enrolled myself in a self-imposed rehabilitation programme from emotional spending sprees and retail therapy in general, my brain insists

College. To my surprise, I had been completely unaware of this lively, penny-pinching shopping option in the heart of Dhaka. It opens only on Fridays from 10:00am and continues long after sunset and Esha prayers, transforming the entire area into a buzzing, sprawling fair. After only strolling through half the market, I found myself at the far end, already immersed in the festive rhythm.

sudden sight of glass jars and bottles, stacked precariously on makeshift racks of wooden stools and cane baskets. The variety was astonishing: jars in every possible shape, size, and design, ranging from simple, utilitarian containers to ornate, vintage-inspired pieces. Some were brand new, others recycled, and many were nothing more than old liquor bottles, gleaming in the hazy light.

I noticed that homemakers were showing great interest in these glass treasures, not just for their versatile uses but also because more households are consciously shunning plastic in their kitchens. These jars could store everything – powdered spice mixes, dry condiments, nuts and pulses, seasonal pickles, even sauces. I could not resist buying a round glass jar perfectly suited for my steamed chicken jug soup. At only Tk 20 for the smallest jars, with slightly larger ones costing an extra Tk 10 or so, the bargains were irresistible.

The highlight of my haul, however, was a vintage-designed amber glass bottle with a small hand grip on its neck. It could hold nearly three litres of liquid, and had once belonged in the shelves of a chemist or pharmacist. Meticulously cleaned, it bore no trace of its earlier life and was priced at just Tk 250. To me, it seemed destined to be transformed into a decorative vase. I could already picture it against a sunlit wall, casting a warm amber hue, holding a couple of white lilies.

Another delightful find was the assortment of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese rice wine bottles, porcelain and glass alike, in dark tones and pastel shades. Their decorative textures, vintage-inspired detailing, and unusual lids made them striking pieces of design. I haggled hard for a pale pink bottle with a diamond pattern, but at Tk

500 it seemed indulgent for someone supposedly in “retail rehab”. With some reluctance, I walked away, though not without glancing back at it more than once. Instead, I invested in something equally exciting: 50 yards of crochet lace in intricate, delicate patterns. At only Tk 10 per yard, it was a staggering bargain, considering the same would fetch Tk 60 to Tk 80 per yard in regular malls. Of course, in ordinary circumstances, I would never dream of buying such an excessive length. I have no concrete plan for it yet, but I imagine it will eventually find its way into party favour bags or be distributed among friends who love lace as much as I do.

There was, however, one catch. These laces were not displayed neatly but bundled into large plastic bags, laid haphazardly on the street, and needed hand-washing before use. They were leftovers from wholesale markets, rough around the edges but still treasures for those willing to sort through them.

As I tore myself away from the lace vendor, I stumbled upon Manik, a sturdy vendor selling soft, creamy cotton balls. It was the first time I had encountered a street seller offering local Shimul Tula sourced from Narayanganj. Their natural nude shade was stunning, and I was taken back by the sheer softness.

“I take lease of cotton plants from villagers and process the cotton myself,” Manik explained cheerfully as we engaged in light-hearted bargaining. The encounter lent a personal warmth to the transaction, linking the material directly to the land and its cultivators.

Moving along, I found more wonders. Amidst stacks of clothes, rubber shoes and slip-ons were curtains, kitchen utensils, and melamine crockery. Entire stalls were dedicated to plants and gardening tools, while others showcased

sturdy metal racks. To my delight, one vendor specialised in Macramé – wall hangings, plant holders, and decorative accessories. The intricate knotting technique, an age-old craft, has been enjoying a resurgence, and here it was available at bargain prices.

As I took in the sheer variety, I reflected on the art of thrift shopping. It is not about grabbing everything in sight; it requires a trained eye to discern unique finds from heaps of ordinary stock.

The Motijheel market demanded patience, but it also rewarded curiosity. Every corner seemed to hold something unexpected – a treasure, a curiosity, or simply a useful household item at a fraction of the mall price.

It dawned on me that if such a tiny fraction of the market had so much to offer, then the remaining stretch must be brimming with countless undiscovered gems.

The sheer expanse of this vibrant Friday market reminded me of Bangkok’s famed Chatuchak Market, albeit in a distinctly Dhaka setting.

By the time I made my way out, my hands were full, my wallet lighter, but my heart strangely content. Despite my claims of retail restraint, I had succumbed once again to the thrill of discovering bargains. Yet there was no regret, only the quiet satisfaction of finding beauty and value in the most unexpected of places.

The Motijheel holiday market may not have cured me of my spending impulses, but it gave me a morning filled with small joys, cheerful banter, and a renewed appreciation of the city’s hidden marketplaces. For those who, like me, revel in the art of thrift, it is a must-visit.

So, will you be joining me next weekend?



that anything below Tk 500 does not qualify as “serious” shopping. In my mind, therefore, I stand on the high moral ground, convincing myself that the Motijheel holiday market would not possibly draw me into another spree. Last Friday, I drove down to Motijheel, where the market stretches across the length of the street and pavements outside Motijheel Ideal School and

It was here that I bargained for a kilo of local Shimul tula – red silk cotton – to crochet lace with, and that first purchase gave me a sense of what treasures the market had in store. The day was overcast and humid, yet the atmosphere was joyous, the sort of Friday morning one rarely associates with pleasure until something delightful interrupts routine. For me, it was the

