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Curls naturally!

PHOTO: ADNAN RAHMAN
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LOCATION: INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL DHAKA

#REVIEW

Inside National Botanical Garden's new barefoot trail

The connection between people and the earth never truly fades. It's a quiet pull we often forget in Dhaka: a city built of brick and concrete. There is no smell of soil here, only paved roads and a lifestyle shaped around shoes. Yet, those who remember dewy village paths or the softness of mud under their feet know how even a moment of touching real earth can bring a gentle, surprising peace to the heart.

In a city where daily life runs on footwear, the National Botanical Garden, located at Mirpur, has something unusual to offer. It's an invitation to walk barefoot! Known for its flower gardens, greenery, ponds, and peaceful walking routes, the botanical garden now provides a new sensory experience designed to help visitors reconnect with nature through the simple touch of the earth beneath their feet.

The newly opened barefoot trail is simple, yet thoughtfully designed. At the entrance, two signboards welcome visitors with information on the benefits of barefoot walking and a clear set of safety guidelines. The trail is constructed in step-like segments, with each section offering a different surface underfoot: cool sand, wooden logs, pebbles, soft soil, shallow water, and finally, an ankle-deep layer of cool mud. The path is bordered by bamboo fencing.

The moment I stepped in, the cool sand greeted my feet with comforting relief. Walking over the wooden logs introduced an uneven, grounding rhythm. The pebbled walkway followed, each step awakening different pressure points and sharpening my senses, while the patch of soil felt like a familiar village road after rain. The muddy pathway, soft and cool, brought a quiet, unexpected joy. By the time I completed the loop, a calmness had settled over me, and the restlessness I had carried slowly melted away.

Visitors joined the initiative with excitement, while others wandered in out of curiosity.

"I came here to experience it with my family," said Mahbub Morshed, a businessman visiting the trail for the first time. "However, we need to be more aware that some people were still coming in with shoes, which really shouldn't happen. Other than that, it's a wonderful experience."

Shirin, a homemaker who regularly comes to the botanical garden for yoga with her group, decided to visit the new trail after hearing about it.

"It's really effective in serving its purpose," she shared. "Children growing up in the city rarely get to visit villages, but our connection with the soil is inseparable. Even though the trail is a long walk from the main gate, I really appreciate the unique experience it provides."

Speaking of effectiveness, barefoot walking is known to stimulate nerve endings, improve circulation, and reduce stress. The signboards along the trail explain that it can also help regulate blood pressure, activate natural acupressure points, and even support better eyesight!

Beyond these physical benefits, the trail encourages a slower, more mindful pace for Dhaka residents, something they often struggle to find in their busy daily lives.

Abdul Latif, a retired banker who lives in Eastern Housing near the Botanical Garden, shared his thoughts.

"In one word, it's therapy," he said. "For the elderly community or those with health concerns, it's rare to find a place like this in the city, although people of all ages can benefit from it. Visitors do come from different parts of Dhaka, but I believe every neighbourhood should have trails like this."

For new visitors, the instructions are simple: walk slowly, take small steps, and pause if you feel discomfort. Check your feet afterwards and wash off at the water point near the gate. Those with diabetes or foot injuries should consult a doctor before trying.

To reach the barefoot trail, purchase a ticket at the main gate, priced at Tk 30. From there, walk to the area known as Jatrabari, where you will find a beautiful wooden gate titled 'Barefoot Trail.'

In a city that rarely slows down, this 50-metre trail is more than just a walk; it's a quiet reminder that the earth beneath our feet has the power to heal, to restore, and to calm the mind. It offers visitors of all ages a chance to reconnect, not just with nature, but with themselves as well.

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi

#16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Women and the hidden cost of DOMESTIC ABUSE

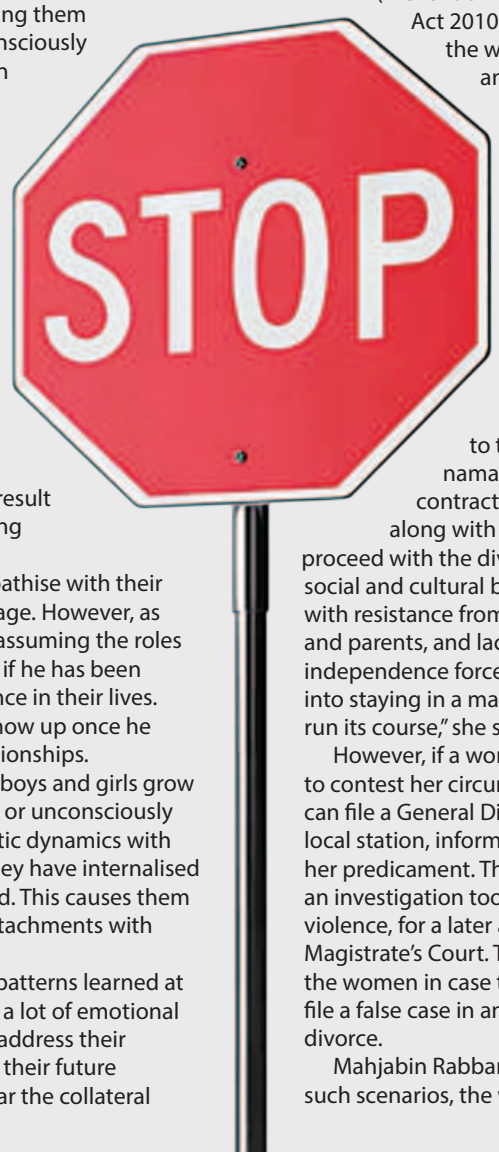
Drawing on insights from psychologists, religious scholars, and legal experts, this article puts the spotlight on girl children growing up in abusive homes. From the gaps in our enforcement systems to the cultural and religious narratives that keep women tethered to harmful marriages, the piece reveals how societal silence endangers the next generation and why breaking the cycle begins with protecting mothers and their children.

THE CYCLE BEGINS IN CHILDHOOD

"When children grow up around domestic abuse, their systems adapt to the chaos, making violence feel like a normal part of life," says Tarana Anis, Senior Child Psychologist at Evercare Hospital, Dhaka. Many even blame themselves for parental conflict. As they grow older, they step in– trying to fix their parents' relationship or becoming their mother's protector, often going to great lengths to keep her safe.

Toddlers, pre-teens, and teenagers in such environments often develop depression, anxiety, mood or personality disorders, along with sleep issues that affect their studies and peer relationships. Some also exhibit behaviours like panic attacks, bed-wetting, stammering, lying or aggression, while others retreat into isolation through excessive social media or gaming.

Tarana Anis explains that girls often learn to equate love with suffocation, control and abuse. Mirroring what their mothers endured. This confusion around relationships can erode their self-esteem and self-image, leaving them consciously or unconsciously drawn to similar men as their fathers. Hence, some girls demonstrate fixer tendencies when their marriage is at stake, while others become the oppressor who abuses their husbands. In some extreme cases, one woman may even become the victim and the abuser as a result of maladaptive coping strategies.

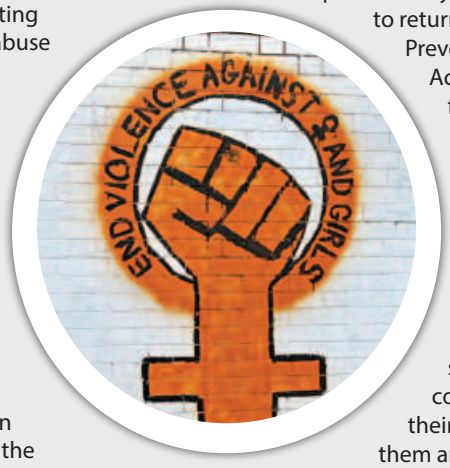


Boys initially empathise with their mothers at an early age. However, as adults, they end up assuming the roles of their fathers even if he has been a dominating presence in their lives. This will gradually show up once he navigates adult relationships.

Ultimately, when boys and girls grow up, they consciously or unconsciously seek out those chaotic dynamics with partners, because they have internalised that trauma is a bond. This causes them to develop messy attachments with people.

In order to undo patterns learned at home, they must do a lot of emotional work. If they do not address their childhood baggage, their future relationships will bear the collateral damage. Therapy for children alone is not enough — the parent trapped in the cycle must also seek individual or couples counselling to restore safety at home.

Anis observes that in domestic violence cases, families and society often focus on protecting themselves, treating abuse as a private matter that doesn't warrant intervention. "We need proactive bystanders, not silent spectators, when children and women are suffering," she says.



A LEGAL BATTLE: THE LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM

According to Mahjabin Rabbani, Advocate of the Supreme Court, women can seek legal intervention against an abusive spouse under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. This law covers the well-being, safety, and security of boy and girl children along with their mothers.

If a woman is being abused by her husband, she's allowed to end it as per the Muslim marriage laws. "She needs to take her kabin-nama, i.e., the marriage contract, to a Kazi office, along with two witnesses, to proceed with the divorce. However, social and cultural barriers, along with resistance from husbands and parents, and lack of financial independence force these women into staying in a marriage that has run its course," she says.

However, if a woman still wants to contest her circumstances, she can file a General Diary (GD) at the local station, informing them of her predicament. This GD acts as an investigation tool for domestic violence, for a later appeal to the Magistrate's Court. This will safeguard the women in case their husbands file a false case in an effort to stop the divorce.

Mahjabin Rabbani informs, "In such scenarios, the wife can submit a written statement on the dissolution of her marriage, mentioning children's custody and the personal belongings she's taking."

In circumstances where she's being pressured by her birth parents to return to her in-laws, the Prevention and Protection Act can also order family members to refrain from harassing her, even if she's living in the same space as them."

If they continue to violate the court-appointed suggestions, the complainant can draw their attention and have them arrested as ordered by the court.

Where child custody is concerned, mothers can appeal for a lawsuit to the family court. For this, you need to appeal under the Family Court Ordinance, 1985, which covers guardianship and custody for children.

"The law says that fathers are legal guardians of children, while the mother is the custodian. Mothers may get custody if their sons are seven years old and if their daughters are adolescents or unmarried. The court will assess which parent can ensure their child's welfare," says Rabbani.

However, if the child is still a minor, they may remain in the mother's custody. The father will be granted visitation rights during this time. Based on the children's lifestyle, the court will ask the father to provide a certain amount of child support every month. He is also to pay the financial security as outlined in the couple's marriage contract (kabin-nama)

Mahjabin Rabbani acknowledges that women in divorce and custody battles often struggle with trust issues after being failed by their families and society. Lawyers sometimes worsen the situation by pushing clients to file false dowry and child support cases.

"Many women seeking legal aid cannot proceed because their lawyers create false cases and they lack the resources to resolve them," she says. On top of this, the opposition can delay proceedings by skipping court dates, pushing hearings months ahead, and further hindering women from moving forward with their divorce.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11

#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

READING THE ROOM: Rukhsara Osman on DJing and self-belief

The path to becoming a DJ in Bangladesh's underground scene is not always easy, especially for women. For Rukhsara Osman, known as "VampBetch" in the music scene, her pull toward music was instinctual and driven by immersion. She had never planned to become a DJ but loved being surrounded by electronic music. It began during a quiet phase of her life, while she was pregnant and resting from her business as a chef for her bespoke catering company, Romalicious.

"When I was pregnant, I would sneak a practice in here and there with my husband's music and DJ console," she recalls. At that time, DJing was not an ambition; it was slowly turning into something she would like to keep learning. "I was surrounded by amazing DJs like Psytaraa and Izhaqo, who are my core influences. In fact, Izhaqo was the first person to give me stage time at one of his shows."

No glitz, just grit

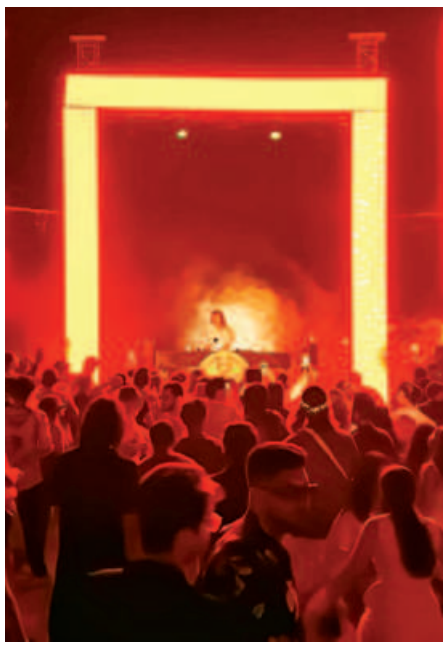
VampB's first time performing was when she was eight months pregnant at her close friend's birthday party. "I was surrounded by seasoned DJs and was somewhat nervous, yet I think I did a great job. Everyone loved it," she exclaimed.

She went on to perform at a show called 'Abar Nach' in Cox's Bazar. "From that moment on that beautiful stage, I knew there was no turning back," says VampB.

VampB makes it clear — she wants to share her love for music and the art of DJing. In the two and a half years she has been in this industry, she has done notable shows, from morning coffee shows like Breakfast Club to intense underground shows like her recent performance at Spectrum, and she has even appeared on the YouTube channel named "Beware of Falling Avocados."

Playing the crowd, not playing to it

Her performances reflect a clear emotional intelligence, not just musical. "I watch the crowd, slowly their inhibitions start to fade — moving and grooving to the music. It's exhilarating to watch them enjoy themselves," she says.



For a DJ, VampB notes that awareness of the crowd depends on every show.

"It's like a wave and a counter-wave. You give something, and it comes back to you. You establish a deeper understanding by looking at people's eye and their dance moves. Even if they walk away. Your next move is being processed."

Having played both morning and night shows, each offering different dynamics. "Morning sets can be much softer; people are much more accepting of groovier music that slowly builds energy. On the other hand, people on evening sets are ready for the music to take them over, through energetic and dark sounds."

For the girls who want in

As a woman in an unconventional profession in Bangladesh, VampB does not sugar-coat her experience. "In my first year as a DJ, I didn't face many problems, but then, the completion really started, and things started to take a different turn. It's not easy to be a player in the male-dominated scene."

When asked how people perceive her professional choice, she responds, "Realistically, I have the support of my family and friends. People will always have comments about what I do, but it does not faze me. I know I'm doing something off the beaten path, but I love what I do. I love the stage, the music, the audience who shows up for me… There isn't anything better."

Her advice for young women wanting to enter the scene was blunt but affirming: "Making the right friends in the music scene is key. You have to be aware of the perception you are creating about yourself. I highly advise that one doesn't go under any group or company that would dictate where or how you play. The first couple of years are about self-exploration, gaining experience (however little the show might be) and understanding, really, figuring out the kind of music you want to put out there as a DJ."

She parts with a solid thought, "Confidence in the performing industry is everything. You could be a model, a musician, an influencer, a dancer or anything else for that matter. The secret is to have faith in what you do. Be determined and confident; all the negativity that will come towards you will not affect you all that much."

Rukhsara Osman's commitment to thoughtful curation and emotional connection stands out. She reminds us that DJing is not just about dropping the next track, it's about reading the room, knowing when to hold back and curating space for others to feel free.

LS Desk
Photo: Courtesy

Driven by its promise of quality at affordable prices, SaRa Lifestyle has firmly established itself as a leader in Bangladesh's winter fashion scene.

SARA LIFESTYLE reinvents affordable winter fashion

The brand has become a trusted benchmark for consumers, especially when it comes to jackets. With the arrival of winter, excitement builds, and when winter clothing comes into conversation, the name that naturally surfaces is SaRa.

Launched in May 2018 by Snowtex Group, the lifestyle brand has rapidly earned immense customer confidence. The cornerstone of SaRa's success lies in its three core principles: sustainable quality, wearing comfort, and budget-friendly pricing.

A new and diverse winter collection

As winter sets in, SaRa has once again unveiled a fresh collection of seasonal staples. The range is meticulously curated to meet diverse customer needs, featuring everything from lightweight layering pieces for mild weather to heavy-duty jackets suited for colder conditions. The clothing is crafted from a wide range of high-quality fabrics, including Tencel, cotton, denim, blended materials, and synthetics. Most appealingly, despite the variety and superior quality, prices remain accessible to the mass market, with items available within a range of Tk 500 to 4,000.

Highlights of the new collection include —

For Men: Stylish Jackets, Shackets, Hoodie Jackets, Tencel Shirts, Full Sleeve T-shirts, Denim Shirts and Jackets, Casual Shirts, Formal Suits, Denim Pants, Joggers, and various designs of Shawls.

For Women: Modern Kurtis, Fusion Jackets, Hoodie Jackets, Denim Kurtis, Denim Jackets, Comfortable Ponchos, Denim Tops, Full Sleeve T-shirts, Hoodies, and elegantly designed Shawls.

For Kids: Boys can choose from Jackets, Denim Shirts, Sweatsets, Denim Jackets, and Joggers. The girls' selection features

Jackets, Denim Tops, and Kurtis.

This comprehensive collection confirms that SaRa is the ultimate one-stop solution for meeting the winter fashion needs of the entire family.

Trust built on customer experience

In the winter fashion market, particularly for jackets, SaRa is widely regarded as the go-to brand. This trust has been built on the perfect blend of durable products, maximum comfort, and exceptional value for money. SaRa believes this confidence stems directly from positive customer experiences, which continuously drives the brand toward improvement and innovation.

Since opening its first store in Mirpur-6, Dhaka, in May 2018, SaRa Lifestyle has rapidly expanded its footprint with a growing network of outlets across the country.

In Dhaka, the brand now operates in Bashundhara City, Mohammadpur, Uttara, Baridhara (J Block), Banasree, Wari, and Basabo.

Beyond the capital, SaRa has established outlets in Rangpur (Jahaj Company More), Rajshahi (Rani Bazar), Bogura (Joleshoritola), Sylhet (Kumarpara), Feni (Shaheed Shahidullah Kaysar Road), Barishal (Bibir Pukur Par), and Narayanganj (TSN Plaza), reflecting its expanding reach and increasing popularity nationwide.

A new SaRa outlet is set to open soon at Shib Bari More in Khulna City.

SaRa Lifestyle is also accessible across multiple platforms, offering home delivery within Dhaka and nationwide courier service. Customers can shop directly through the official website or browse and order via the brand's Facebook and Instagram pages — all offering equally convenient delivery options across Bangladesh. Just log onto: https://saralifestyle.com. Check them out on social media — https://www.facebook.com/saralifestyle.bd; https://www.instagram.com/saralifestyle.bd

CGM Explained
HELLO NATURAL CURLS!

Curly hair has long been shrouded in misconceptions. From being labelled as unmanageable and unattractive, to the belief that it requires costly maintenance. These stereotypes have often deterred individuals from celebrating their authentic hair texture. Until now.

Kazria Kayes, once far too used to straightening out her locks, discovered CGM, tried it, mastered it, and nothing was ever the same for the curly-haired beauties of Bangladesh again. She went on to create the Facebook support group, Curly Girl Bangladesh by Kazria K and the Curl Station on Instagram, where she guides women interested in managing and maintaining curls on the easiest ways to do so.

"People make the mistake of believing that CGM — Curly Girl Method — is a costly and time-consuming process," shared Kazria. "After eight years of continuing it, I can safely say it's neither, also it's applicable to boys and men."

The CGM requires you to get familiar with your hair type. Hair can go from wavy to curly to coily, with types ranging from 2A to 4C. While some experts argue that Type C curls usually get the most mileage out of this method, don't let that discourage you, because so many with types 2A to 4A have done their curls proud.

Kazria mentions that the CGM involves forgoing anything that can damage curls, such as drying agents and chemicals (read sulphate, silicone, mineral oils or alcohol) as curls are naturally drier than straight hair, and replacing these with moisturising, nourishing, and gentle ingredients. This would also mean a hard pass at heating tools such as straighteners and curling irons, and even traditional towel drying.

Now, here's where we debunk the myth of CGM being a tiring process. True, the products that curly hair demands are different, but the procedure is no more or less cumbersome than managing straight hair. In fact, washing hair, according to Kazria, needs to be once a week, with this method. "On my hair wash day, I use a sulphate-free shampoo, deep condition it with a silicone-free conditioner, and wrap my hair with a clean, old, stretchy t-shirt to soak up excess water. If one is not intending to style their hair and go out, this is enough!"

When it comes to styling, however, there are a few steps one needs to follow. Once hair is damp and no longer sopping wet, work a curling cream and gel into it. The cream allows curls to form, and the gel makes sure they do not lose their definition when you go out and expose your hair to wind, sunlight, and pollution.

Kazria also recommends co-washing hair, instead of shampooing every day, especially for scalps that tend to get greasy quickly. "Co-washing is simply using one pump of shampoo into a conditioner and using that as a cleanser." It cleans hair and gets rid of the grease without drying it out.

Just like maintaining straight hair can involve the use of high-end products as well as things from one's kitchen, the same is true for the management of curly hair.

Kazria mentioned that using reetha powder or lentil water as shampoo, using herbal packs for deep conditioning, etc., are all good practices for the CGM, as long as no harmful chemicals touch the hair.

"Aloe gel blended with boiled sago makes for a natural, and really effective deep conditioning mask for the hair," she shared.

Another really effective gel that Kazria swears by for styling curls is flaxseed. They release a slimy substance when boiled. Strain it, store it in a box and pop it in the deep freezer, as it can spoil fast. Thaw as required before each hair wash. "It works better than any factory-made gel. I promise!" says Kazria.

"The transition period may be tough," admits Kazria. "You cannot straighten out your hair or use heated styling items. You have to be careful not to use chemical products on the hair. There may be some hair fall too."

She feels that it is easy to get discouraged in the wake of such things, but this is just your hair's way of ridding itself of chemically induced damage and being reintroduced to a more natural form of growth. Once this rite of passage is crossed, there is nothing between you and a gorgeous, curly mane just begging to be complimented!

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Baizid Haque Joarder, Nazia Tariq, Roudro Nurayez Ahsan, Dhrubo Numayer Ahsan, Kazriya Kayes
Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Location: Intercontinental Hotel Dhaka

RAMEN *for* winter nights

There's a chill in the air after ten at night, indicating winter is near. And for some of us, this is the perfect excuse to curl up in our sweet spot and have the most hearty and warm meal one can have. Thanks to the Japanese media and entertainment industry for decades, a bowl of ramen has been almost always the solution for people like me.

Which is why making my own ramen from the pantry is less of a chore and more of a journey to flavour town.

This is how you make a ramen with everyday ingredients.

Ramen
(1–2 servings)
Ingredients

2 packs plain ramen noodles
2 cups bone broth (chicken or beef)
Thinly sliced chicken or beef cold cuts (strips or shredded)
1 tsp soy sauce
1 tsp sesame oil (optional, but makes a difference)
1 clove garlic, smashed
1 spring onion, chopped
1 soft-boiled egg
Sesame seeds
Nori (dried seaweeds)
3 shitake mushrooms, whole or thinly sliced
Chilli flakes or crushed dried red chillies (according to your preference)
Spinach or bok choy, a handful (optional)

Method

In a pot, pour in the bone broth with the mushrooms. Add garlic, soy sauce, and a splash of sesame oil. Bring it to a gentle simmer. Do not boil the broth, just warm it through. Toss in the chicken or beef cold cuts. They will soften and release flavours, giving extra layers of taste.Add noodles directly into the simmering broth. Let it cook for 2–3 minutes until soft but not mushy.Throw in spinach or bok choy for the last 30 seconds if you want it to look somewhat healthy.Pour everything into a bowl. Top with spring onion, chilli flakes, and a boiled egg sliced in half.

Flavour boosters (optional but excellent) —
A small spoon of butter
A squeeze of lemon
A few drops of fish sauce
A drizzle of chilli oil
Corn kernels (makes it feel like proper ramen)

Quick variations —
Creamy style (appetising and simple)
Add 2 tbsp of milk or 1 tbsp of cream to the broth before adding noodles

Spicy Dhaka-style
Add:
½ tsp crushed red chilli
½ tsp black pepper
A dash of vinegar

Beef version
Use beef bone broth and beef cold cuts
Add a small dash of Worcestershire sauce for a deeper flavour

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Collected

#TRAVEL

BANGKOK, PHUKET, CHIANG MAI

The ultimate kid-friendly Thai destinations

My travelogue has had a recent makeover. The itinerary now insists on including clean bathrooms, feeding areas, and a prospective diaper change station. Even though these recent life developments had me apprehensive to venture back out into the world, I slowly started to identify and appreciate how family-friendly most cities in the world had become when I was not paying attention.

It was a bit like that car spotting phenomenon. You know the one where, when you notice a particular brand and model of a car, they start to appear everywhere. Similarly, once I braved back out into the world, I started to realise how much the world had to offer to travelling parents with children. It's still a work-in-progress, but at least it was much better than what my fears had me convinced.

As the first international travel location, my personal preference was to start with a place that was already familiar. I could not look past Thailand.

On a global scale, when you do the math for budget, accommodation, food and shopping and build a travel itinerary, I think anyone in any stage in life would find it hard pressed to find a better alternative to Thailand. When you add children to the mix, it becomes even more appealing.

Firstly, let's tackle where to go in Thailand. Bangkok or one of the islands, or both?

I would recommend Bangkok as the first stop to ease into the holiday season with modern facilities and an endless supply of 7-Elevens for any need at any hour of the day. A couple of days to get your bearings before you shoot off to your island holiday.

Although any number of island combinations could work as your first holiday, my recommendation includes two options. One for families with really young children and zero energy to plan or think. Another option for families on the path to recovery is some off the off-the-beaten-track adventures. Let's go!

BKK + Phuket

Let's face it, Bangkok has a reputation. If a certain portrayal in the Hangover movie is to be believed, what would have been its entertaining and exciting prospect pre-children would now terrorise the same adults and make them want to stay away. In my opinion, though, the movie underestimates Bangkok's diversity and capability to segregate trouble and keep it tied to specific locations only.

Most of this city actually offers a safe passage to most on a quick stopover, as also indicated by female solo travellers, marking it as one of the safer cities that can be enjoyed on your own. I place tremendous value on female and marginalised lenses on travel, especially when it comes to safety. With that in mind, let's scope out the general must-sees!

Wherever you start in Bangkok, and I do hope you can find a suitable accommodation as close to the Nana MRT as possible, as most attractions pan out from that area. I would start my day by purchasing an MRT ticket, get off at Asok and make my way to Terminal 21, a more spread-out shopping mall.

The various exits also offer additional walking time while staying within air-conditioned zones, an important requirement on your first day, to acclimatise. The food options inside the mall are also varied and include some of the best hygienic dessert options. If you are like me and cannot walk inside a mall without some kind of bubble, boba or sago drink in hand, then look no further and head straight to YenlyYours in Terminal 21. This is an absolute mango heaven! Besides its smoothies and floats, the dessert options include mango sticky rice, of course, but also the lesser-promoted "treasures" such as mango mochi, mango cheese tart, and mango crepe.

Once you have checked mango off your list, move on to Pier 21 for a pad Thai with prawn wrapped in egg.

If you are a pram-pushing daredevil, by all means tick off the mandatory locations such as Khao San Road, the Floating Market and Arab Street; all the more power to you! However, if you would like to play it safe on your first trip while continuing to partake in the best of the city, I would suggest an alternate route to old BKK.

Rattanakosin is the historic heart of Bangkok. Most people associate it with all the Wats or temples it has to offer, but for me, this is where the real hidden charm of Bangkok lies, like the old parts of most cities, I suppose, being the source of origin. Have you really seen Dhaka until you have visited Old Dhaka? The bank of the Chao Phraya is magical, and the cafes and restaurants lining this part of the city are unforgettable. Each restaurant has a history and old photographs you can peruse while you eat.

A full day spent in this part of Bangkok, traversing between the many Wats, ferried across in one of the canal boats and ending the day, watching the sunset from the Eagle Nest rooftop, can easily make one forget about the chaos of the city centre.

Once you and your baby have recovered from the flight, it's time for island hopping!

Phuket

I chose Phuket because, whilst there are plenty of other secluded islands that can offer an experience a thousand times better than here, it is the sheer convenience of Phuket that I find unmatchable. Here, you don't have to forego the natural beauty to satisfy comfort.

Nearly all resorts are built to attract families with children. You can choose any number of resorts along that coastline, whether it be Centara, Marriott, or Holiday Inn, suiting your budget; you are guaranteed a world within a world. With a variety of children's activities offered through the kids' clubs, several splash pools and most restaurants catering to children, some offering freshly prepared meals specific to toddlers, whilst tired mummies are whisked away for the perfect foot massage or backrub next to the ocean, this is the family holiday we all deserve.

Whilst I have been busy blowing Phuket's horn, the memory of another island begs to be mentioned. This is Koh Lanta, where I had once disappeared to during a challenging work assignment and had left after a couple of days feeling like a new person. This island feels like being cradled into nature's arms like no other, ushering in peace, tranquillity and safety. Please look it up if that's the need of the hour. Otherwise, the newly reenergised army of parents, look this way with your slightly older kids, for an adventure away to Chiang Mai!

Chiang Mai

Head to the Elephant Parade with your kiddy entourage and learn the story about the father and son duo, who brought this place into existence when they fell in love with a certain baby elephant called Mosha during their holiday in Thailand.

Have you heard of cocoon farms, no? Then your next stop should be to the Thai Silk Village for a hands-on workshop on silk weaving.

A visit to Chiang Mai is not complete without at least a day spent at Baan Kang Wat, a tucked away art village, yes, guilty as charged — also in the Old Town streets of Chiang Mai.

Every inch of this place is Instagram-worthy and one of the best family day outs you can have. While the kiddos can enjoy a painting workshop, you can take your tired feet across for a cup of joe and a slice of cake at Graph. If you happen to peek inside one of the art studios, coffee in hand, some of the artists might let you watch as they work.

If you are anything like me, an out-and-out urban parent, Chiang Mai also offers a wonderful opportunity at glamping! You have heard me right, this is the newest stage in your camping journey, for those who are taken by the idea without being equipped with the logistics (and let's face it, the guts!) that camping demands.

Once you have had your fair share of café hopping, night markets and kayaking adventures, you might want to end your trip by taking a stroll to the Thapae Gate of the Old City Walls to take to the shores of the Ping River to watch thousands of people release their krathongs or paper-based lanterns into the water. Alternatively, arrange for a day-trip to Nong Bua Pra Chao Luang lotus lake to watch thousands do the same, but in this case, releasing the lanterns into the sky, and totally for free!

By Naaz Fahmida
Photo: Collected

#FOOD & RECIPES

In a city as crowded and chaotic as Dhaka, quiet moments feel rare. It's no surprise that people are always seeking a place where they can breathe fresh air, enjoy nature, and spend quality time with their families. And if you add a plate of warm bhaat, fresh bhortas, daal, and fried fish to that scene, life suddenly feels a little easier. Only four kilometres away from Mirpur 1 Circle, Mirpur Beribadh offers that escape. It's near enough for a quick ride, yet far enough to make you feel like you have left all the noise behind.

An escape at Mirpur Beribadh: Where nature and bhaat-bhorta bring people together

Just beside Tamanna World Family Park, located at Mirpur Beribadh, a row of temporary bhaat-bhorta hotels stands quietly. Among them, you will easily notice the one that started it all: Rofik Miyar Bhorta O Bhaater Hotel, or as the locals call it, Rofik Kakar Bhorta-Bhaater Hotel.

As you arrive at the shop, the first things you notice are the open sky, the cool breeze from the nearby river's quiet flow, and the calm environment where families gather for slow noons and lunches. The shop looks simple enough — a tin-shed kitchen, a counter where "Rofik kaka" sits, and a wide yard in front where plastic chairs and tables are arranged for customers, surrounded by trees.

"This place holds 23 years of history and effort. We opened this shop so that every customer would be reminded of home-cooked food," shared Md Rofik Miya.

"When we first started here, Mirpur Beribadh was completely empty," added Md Ajom, the youngest son of Rofik, recalling the early days. "There was no connection to the city, and transportation was terrible."

Back then, the area was mostly surrounded by the river. Their only customers were the boatmen who worked

nearby. The shop originally sold chotpoti and fuchka, but they soon realised that the boatmen wanted food that reminded them of home, food that felt comforting.

"So, we turned it into a bhat-bhorta hotel, starting with only bhaat-alu bhorta-daal," Ajom said, smiling. "All the recipes were my mother's."

What began as a small food stop for boatmen gradually became a popular destination for families and foodies. Today, people from all over Dhaka come here not just to eat, but to experience the simple comfort of homemade food.

One regular visitor, Waliullah, a businessman, shared, "I come here often. The bhortas are the reason I keep coming back."

The shop offers a Tk 100 bhorta package, which includes ten varieties, each served in double portions. For fish lovers, there are fried fish options too.

Milon, an employee who has been working here for 13 years, stood in front of a large pan of hot oil, flipping fish with steady hands. "The best-selling fish is tilapia," he said. "People often refuse tilapia elsewhere,

but here it's the most popular."

They also serve hilsa, koral, prawns, and pomfrets with prices ranging based on size. The tilapia we tried, priced at Tk 200, was fresh, crispy, brown, and perfectly cooked; soft inside, crunchy outside, just the way most foodies would enjoy it.

The bhortas tasted fresh and comforting. Although each had its own mild difference in spice level, all of them carried the potential that makes you want to eat just a little more. The spices were simple yet flavourful. Nothing fancy, just honest food.

As the noon passed, more families arrived. Children and parents chatted while waiting for their food. It's easy to see why the shop has become a beloved spot. It doesn't try to impress with decorations or style; it simply offers warmth, nature, and a meal that feels like home.

Mirpur Beribadh may not be far from the busy part of Dhaka, but it definitely feels like a small break from the city. With its quiet surroundings and the timeless charm of bhat-bhorta, it has become a place where families come not just to eat, but to reconnect.

The shop opens at 1 PM and closes before maghrib adhan, offering only lunch items for visitors.

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi

Women and the hidden cost of domestic abuse

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

What further adds fuel to this fire is the many false dowry cases filed by fellow women to end their marriages. However, this only makes matters more complex for actual abuse victims, who have to jump through many legal hoops to prove their honesty. In such situations, the real victims get dismissed in police stations, making it difficult to bring justice to the survivor.

Mahjabin Rabbani highlights that there are few child-protection mechanisms in our country. The One Stop Crisis Centre is a good initiative under the police reform. It provides first aid and legal support, and if expanded, it could have connected victims to law enforcement.

"Our government is yet to create an establishment that provides holistic solutions covering not just legal aid shelter but also psycho-social support. If we had these provisions, they could not only secure children, especially girls facing parental abuse, but also hold said parents accountable for their behaviours."

An enforcement system in dire straits

Faruq Hasan, a development worker and policy analyst, says the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 is strong on paper, but those enforcing it fail to address the root causes of violence against women. Additionally, the lack of clarity in our police stations pushes women towards informal mediation, which excuses the abuse and ultimately hinders them from getting legal protection.

When a woman in Bangladesh tries to file a complaint for domestic violence, police often refuse and tell her to return later, usually after 'resolving' the issue with the very husband or in-laws who abused her.

The social stigma surrounding this process deters a lot of women from seeking justice, as returning to court frequently feels like multiple assaults. In the absence of family-friendly shelters, many women return to the same abusive home. Ultimately, keeping quiet becomes the norm as the abuser is often the bread-winner, so women retraumatise themselves by staying back.

Hasan says our country's enforcement mechanism can improve if urban and peri-urban areas ensure that at least five per cent of police officials are trained women officers. This would allow a woman victim to be received by someone who understands her situation and can explain her rights. He adds that police should be legally required to register domestic-violence complaints immediately. In case they do not, officers and stations must be penalised, giving victims grounds to sue the establishment.

Children cannot be an afterthought in these laws. Courts must become family-friendly, and child welfare centres must be established to act as surrogate homes in case the legal proceedings drag on for months or years. Here, children can continue their education and still maintain ties with relatives. Additionally, these centres should also provide victims with a basic livelihood so they can rebuild stability without returning to abusive husbands.

It is also the school authorities' responsibility to act as surrogate guardians for children. "Aside from subject matters, teachers need basic training in recognising childhood trauma," Hasan explains.

This would help them spot when something is bothering children at home. Moreover, teachers should have the communication skills that enable children to confide in them about their household issues. If something serious is actually happening at home, the educators can at least alert the right authorities.

Hasan notices that our family systems are not very woman-friendly. While individual men can admit their faults, those in patriarchal structures function like a clan. This is present in our parliament and legislation, where there's a dearth of women representatives. When men do back women, it's usually those who reinforce their misogynistic interests. Thus, reminding us that the face of patriarchy is not always men.

"Men will tamper with the laws in a way which does not hold them accountable. Hence, mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law must break the cycle of abuse and offer support to the victims," he concludes.

Women's status in Islam: facts over fiction

More often than not, our patriarchal culture, coupled with misinterpretations of religious scriptures, propagates that women must wear suffering as a badge of honour. Even if it comes at the cost of her and her children's safety.

Syed Gulam Kibria, CEO, Al Azhar International Grammar School, is an Islamic scholar and a graduate of Islamic Theology from Al Azhar University, Cairo. He believes that many South Asian cultures, including Bangladesh, have inherited patriarchal traditions that often contradict the Quran's teachings. Over centuries, male-dominated social systems replaced Quranic values with cultural norms, often falsely justifying it as 'tradition' or 'honour'. Thus, restricting women's rights and justifying spousal dominance in the name of protection. Ultimately, overshadowing the Prophet Mohammad's (SWT) model of mercy and mutual respect with cultural control.

If read honestly, the Quran restored women's inheritance and consent rights, prohibited forced marriages, protected women's dignity and reputation and made mutual respect the foundation of marriage. "Therefore, any system, cultural or legal, that degrades women, silences their voice, or normalises abuse is not Islamic, even if it exists in a Muslim-majority society.

Children raised in abusive homes suffer lasting trauma. Islamic law prioritises their safety and moral upbringing. The scholar recommends women in abusive marriages to seek safety first, as Islam does not ask them to stand in harm's way. They must consult trusted family members, imams, or women's rights advocates, as many Islamic scholars now support women's shelters and safe separations.

Azhari says to request 'khula' or legal divorce if reconciliation is impossible. More importantly, protect their children as our Prophet Mohammad (SWT) said, raising children with justice is an act of faith. Islam does not ask women to submit to relationships that are detrimental to their well-being.

Azhari says that religious leaders can emphasise that protecting women and children is part of taqwa, which translates to being conscious of God. Also, helping victims is an act of sadaqah (charity) and being a silent spectator to oppression is a sin.

He also urges scholars, leaders and families to teach that true manhood is mercy. That's when cultural excuses for violence lose legitimacy. They must educate communities that abuse contradicts faith. It is also essential to support victims through justice, counselling, and protection and challenge cultural customs that equate male dominance with piety.

By Rubab Nayeem Khan
Photo: Collected

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#DECOR

How to build a productive yet cozy office in Bangladesh

Setting up an office space can be challenging. Being considerate of every single detail and need of the stakeholders can make the process more demanding than it appears. You can start by deciding the kind of corporate culture and dynamic you want to foster in your firm, because the way you design your office directly shapes it.

Do you want to create a casual setup where employees feel right at home? Or, do you prefer a more formal-looking setup where clients visiting the place feel like your office is highly functional and productive?

It is important to set a clear theme that reflects your corporate culture beforehand. The décor of the office should represent your company's brand image the moment someone enters, whether a client or candidate looking to work here.

With that in mind, choose a wall colour that goes well with the colour shade of your company logo. The reception deserves special attention as it can also serve as the waiting room for the visitors. Consider this the first impression they will have about your firm. Choose visitor chairs, paired with a centre table to tie the seating area together. This way, the visitors will instantly form a positive opinion about your firm while they are waiting.

In the workstation or bullpen area, where employees spend most of their time working, minimalist and modern pieces go a long way. Choose spacious desks with drawers or compartments for files. Many offices now prefer ergonomic swivel chairs, which are famous for supporting the back and helping with the sedentary nature of desk jobs.

If you have a smaller space, you could utilise it by getting a single workstation table that is divided into four sections and thus can function as cubicles. For storage facilities, a multipurpose shelf, side rack, or file cabinet can help keep the area organised without overwhelming the room.

Often, the focal point of the office, the director's or the CEO's office, should maintain a consistent décor that sets an authoritative tone. Go for a director's table paired with a leather swivel chair. For visitors, two additional chairs are enough to keep the room functional without crowding.

Every office needs a dedicated meeting room, commonly referred to as the conference room. For a classy look, opt for a round-edged Ontario table. If you prefer a table with a sharp edge, choose a Huckleberry table for the meeting room. Make sure the chairs complement the design.

With mental health becoming a priority in many workplaces, a common room goes a long way. This is where employees can unplug, reset, take a break and engage in friendly banter with their colleagues. Fixed chairs, paired with a tea table, a setup that encourages a brief escape from work, can rejuvenate employees for creativity at work.

Whether you are getting furnishings for your office from scratch or simply upgrading it, getting new furniture may seem like a big investment. However, it does not have to strain your budget. Simply, look for furniture brands that offer Equated Monthly Instalments (EMI), allowing you to spread the cost and pay the amount in manageable portions over a predetermined period of time. This way, your business can get the right start without putting too much pressure on your cash flow.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Hatil