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#EVENTS

Celebrating Harvest and Heritage: How Poush Utshab Brought Rural Crafts and Traditions to Dhaka

On a winter morning in Dhaka, Gulshan Lake Park felt different. The usual city rush softened into the sound of folk songs, the rhythm of dance, the elegance of fashion shows, and the quiet conversations between artisans and visitors. On 13 December, Poush Utshab was unfolded; an event that brought together rural traditions, craft culture and childhood memories, right in the middle of the capital.

Organised by the Gulshan Society and the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh

(FDCB), the day-long festival sought to revive the spirit of poush, a month deeply rooted in Bangladesh's rural life. The mela offered cultural performances, traditional food, handloom fashion, and a wide range of folk crafts from different regions of the country.

Mutual Trust Bank supported the event, with Radhuni, Berger, and Bata as partners.

Shaibal Saha, general secretary of FDCB, explained the idea behind the event in simple terms. "After harvesting new rice, villages celebrate with pitha and festivals. But in the city's mechanical lifestyle, we are slowly forgetting that joy. Through this

Poush Utshab, we wanted to recreate that festive rural environment so city people can experience it again."

The event opened with cultural performances that reflected Bangladesh's intangible heritage. Folk dance, Lalon songs, folk music, and Rabindra Sangeet followed one another. Alongside the performances was a fashion show spread across two segments, showcasing our own textile traditions. Eighteen designers presented outfits made with handloom fabrics, bringing rural weaving practices into a contemporary setting. The focus remained on material, craftsmanship and story, rather than just a show.

FDCB President and renowned designer, Maheen Khan, said the planning behind the event had been long-term. "Poush is a festive time across Bengal. In villages, there are rituals, ceremonies, and fairs during this season. We wanted the event to feel complete, which is why we combined crafts, food, fashion and cultural performances. The event stood as a celebration of life"

A cultural activist herself, Khan said the mela highlighted core designs and intangible heritage that are often ignored.

"The festival reflects the spirit of the harvest season through pitha-puli, nabanna utshab, and folk practices that are slowly fading from urban life. Bangladesh is an agro-based country, but there is a growing gap between rural life and urban living. This festival was arranged so people can share the joy of Nabanna, through food, art, music and stories," she shared.

If the performances created the mood, the artisans gave the mela its soul. Each stall told a story of skill, struggle, and survival.

Ashutosh Sutradhar, a wooden toy artisan from Sonargaon, Narayanganj, stood beside rows of brightly coloured handmade toys. "My grandfather started this work in the 1960s. At that time, 20 to 30 families were involved in this. But, now, only two families are left," he said.

Sutradhar uses koroi, gamari and burflower wood in making the toys. A recipient of eight national awards, he trained himself further in Japan and Nepal.

"Plastic toys reduced demand, but festivals like this still create huge interest," he shared.

Music and rhythm also played a central role in shaping the atmosphere of the Poush Utshab. One of the highlights was dholcholon, a boshonto special dhol performance. The group was founded by Babu Chan, from Kamalganj, Moulvibazar.

"Today, my son and my student are performing," Babu Chan smiled. "We usually perform at religious festivals, corporate events, and seasonal celebrations. I hope this practice continues through generations."

No poush celebration is complete without pitha. The mela featured dudh chitoi, nakshi pitha and other winter delicacies, offering visitors a taste of seasonal rural life. For many, it was deeply nostalgic.

A stall visitor, Ashrafunnesa, who came from Gulshan, said the mela reminded her of childhood. "When we were young, we used to make things with clay and paper just for fun. Seeing all this after so many years feels very special," she said.

Srabanti Datta, general secretary of Gulshan Society, said this was their first attempt at organising a Poush Mela.

"We organise many events, but this one is special. We started small, but the response has been very positive. We designed the event in such a way that it feels warm and comfortable, not commercial," Datta shared.

As the evening lights reflected on the lake, the event stood as more than a festival. It became a meeting point between rural and urban Bangladesh, a reminder that beneath the city's concrete layers lies a culture, rich with craft, memory and life, still waiting to be celebrated.

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi

#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

How Alavee Hossain is redefining wellness and spas in Dhaka

Living in one of the busiest capitals in the world, Dhaka's urban dwellers do not know a moment of tranquillity and quiet. One visionary entrepreneur, however, is here to change this. Alavee Hossain, with her astute understanding of contemporary wellness needs, has gradually become the catalyst behind the rise of self-care sanctuaries that offer pockets of peace amidst the city's unending hustle.

A lifelong passion

"Growing up. I saw my mother run a beauty salon called Oishee Herbal Parlour in Malibagh, Chowdhuripara," shares Alavee Hossain. "So, I was familiar with how traditional beauty salons worked."

A henna artist at the age of 12, Hossain was encouraged to pursue her talents and gain independence from a young age.

"It is hard to believe that I am a computer engineer by profession," she mentions. A Pittsburgh University degree, a Wall Street career, and a 7-year move to Thailand later, Hossain decided to come back to Bangladesh and do something for her motherland. And as she knew the ins and outs of the beauty industry already, that's where she chose to wet her feet.

From her experience of high-end spas in Thailand, Hossain could see a stark difference in the beauty industry culture in this part of the world. A critical gap that piqued her attention was that parlours here invariably came with two problems: too much noise and too many lights!

"In a spa, you are supposed to look for quiet and relaxation, to unwind," she mentions, zeroing in on the key difference between conventional salons and true wellness centres.

She gauged the needs of her target audience with amazing clarity. Alavee Hossain realised that consumers sought not just beauty, but genuine tranquillity and holistic care. And with that, came Kensho and Yugen — one, a beauty salon and Japanese village-style spa in Gulshan, and the other, a medicated health and wellness massage centre in Dhanmondi and Lakeshore Hotel.

Leading with transparency and quality

One of the non-negotiables of Alavee Hossain's business philosophy and ethical leadership is her staunch commitment to transparency and quality in the products she uses and the services she offers.

"I have lived a good chunk of my life abroad," Hossain confides. "Salons in most of those countries would show me a range of products I wanted for my skin and hair. I chose, and they delivered."

This is not what she saw here in Dhaka, however. One of her customer surveys revealed the lack of clear information about products and treatments, which often bred scepticism.

Driven by her research, Hossain positioned her business ventures in a more customer-centric fashion, prioritising client education and ensuring customers are both informed and empowered in their choices.

As a trained wellness professional herself, Hossain understands the importance of building trust. Her vision for high-quality spas warrants an environment where clients feel comfortable expressing their needs, thereby elevating their experiences and establishing a new benchmark for the industry.

Innovating the future of wellness

Alavee Hossain's entrepreneurial drive is not just restricted to high-end salons and spas. It extends to embracing groundbreaking innovations as well, and especially integrating advanced technologies and holistic practices that go beyond superficial beauty.

Hossain aims to delve into "medicated spas," an emerging trend focused on tangible health benefits rather than skin-deep aesthetics. She plans to introduce techniques that enhance blood circulation, support muscular health, manage pain, and promote relaxation.

From Weyergans' DermioCare, utilising electrically charged negative ions for skin rejuvenation, to their VacuStyler, employing intermittent vacuum and pressure therapy for improved circulation and tissue health, Hossain is bringing cutting-edge, never-before-seen amenities to Dhaka's consumer base.

A vision for empowering retreats

A venture that is close to Hossain's heart is the concept of wellness retreats. "Dhaka's people live under tremendous stress. Retreats that offer immersive experiences such as sound baths, Pilates, and yoga allow individuals to disconnect and recharge."

Alavee Hossain has invested in Ahara Woods, a tranquil sanctuary just a thirty-minute drive from Dhaka. This venture will offer transformative activities like art healing, breath work, and more, establishing it as a true detox zone for stress-afflicted individuals.

While investing in high-quality spa and wellness sessions may come with a higher price tag, Hossain's success is testimony to the fact that discerning clients are increasingly recognising the abject need for such experiences.

Trailblazers like her have managed to carve out a new path for wellness lovers in the country, and it is destined to see newer heights in the face of increasing demand.

"I have learned this throughout my life that hard work shapes you long before success finds you. The success I now enjoy reminds me of what my late father would always tell me: 'Work hard, keep your focus straight, manifest the best, and trust that something good is always on its way,'" Hossain says.

And she adds, "I am doing just that, and looking out for good things."

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Nafis Ahamed Khan

#HEALTH & FITNESS

The woman behind Bangladesh's holistic cancer care initiatives

Mahzabin Ferdous, known for her contribution to Bangladesh's corporate branding, communications, and PR landscape, is among those who lost not one, but six family members to cancer. Raised in a close-knit family, surrounded by the warmth of her grandparents, aunts, and uncles, Mahzabin developed a deep sense of community from an early age. She recalls her childhood as what many would call a picture-perfect joint family. That warm picture, however, was slowly overshadowed by cancer, where Mahzabin endured losing loved ones, including her parents.

"I saw cancer taking away both my grandfathers and my aunts, and I was in my early 20s when I saw cancer slowly taking over my mother's health," Mahzabin recalls.

She adds, "Although I went ahead to pursue a career in marketing and PR, at the back of my mind, I knew that I would work on cancer in some form or another. Having seen it so closely and how it affected the people I love, I felt I couldn't do much back then, and that left a dent."

Early in her career, Mahzabin had decided that she would work for about 10 years before creating something of her own that reflected her values. And after building a career with renowned names such as Samsung and IPDC, she knew it was time to begin her own path towards not just entrepreneurship but to giving back to the community.

> The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that by 2050, the number of new cancer cases across the world will reach 35 million. In Bangladesh alone, cancer is responsible for 11.9 per cent of all deaths annually. As per Bangladesh Medical University's Department of Public Health and Informatics (DPHI), almost 53 new cases are reported per 100,000 people every year. This means every year, nearly 90,000 people and their families in Bangladesh are affected by a disease that could turn terminal when not treated early and snatch away a loved one.

Today, she stands as a cofounder of boutique communications and content creators' platform CThreeSixty, and The Marvel Be You, while actively representing Bangladesh Cancer Aid Trust (BANCAT) — an organization dedicated to supporting and caring for cancer patients and their families throughout their journey.

Coming across BANCAT was a calling that Mahzabin knew she wanted to pursue ever since losing her mother.

Care as a tool to heal

Guided by the belief that "Care is Cure," BANCAT is a holistic care platform for cancer fighters across Bangladesh, especially designed for patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who often remain unaware of how to navigate a daunting disease.

To date, BANCAT has supported over 2,000 cancer patients, or warriors — as BANCAT calls them, through accommodation, financial assistance, and emotional well-being. Their support branches through several impactful initiatives: Alok Nibash — is Bangladesh's first cancer care home; Alok Katha — handmade katha, or traditional quilts, embroidered by family members of the warriors attending them; Alokon — a platform providing mental wellness counselling to warriors and their families, which is also open for every individual from all walks of life navigating the trauma of a terminal illness.

However, the ambition to support the warriors of this terminal illness does not end here. Keeping the value of holistic care at its core, BANCAT is now on its way to developing what could be Bangladesh's, and possibly the world's first-ever Cancer Care Village.

Having witnessed the devastation of cancer firsthand and seeing its impact every day on people, Mahzabin and her team are determined to ensure that the Care Village is designed to be a multi-functional care and wellness centre. It aims to integrate not only medical services but also residential facilities, recreational areas, and mental health support, bringing all of BANCAT's initiatives under one umbrella.

While Alok Nibash today accommodates nearly 90 cancer patients travelling to Dhaka from as far as Nilphamari for the treatment, the future Care Village aims to extend its residential support to almost 250 patients at a time.

"The vision is simple", Mahzabin says. "To stand for sustainability while being the ultimate care hub for not only cancer but any terminal disease. We are still in the awareness-building stage through various collaborations. We see too many heartbreaking incidents where families disown a patient simply because they don't know how to navigate such a situation. The issue is not the disease itself but detecting and treating it early, while knowing how to care for it."

To tackle this at a mass level, the long-term goal also includes building a chain of smaller care hubs at the Thana and Upazila levels, ensuring care-related facilities and guidance are available to those who feel lost or are afraid when a disease is initially detected.

By Sanjida Tanny
Photo: Courtesy

#FASHION & BEAUTY

Why vests are stealing the spotlight in men's wedding wear

Once considered optional, the vest has now become the main character of men's wedding wear. It's the one piece that can instantly turn a simple outfit into a statement piece, without any heavy commitment to a sherwani! Think of it as the style shortcut for men who want to look wedding-ready without appearing as though they are trying too hard.

What's exciting this season is how experimental men's vests have become. Gone are the days when black was the only "safe" choice. Sure, black still has its place — sleek, elegant, forever dependable — but wedding fashion has officially expanded its colour palette.

Deep bottle green, royal blue, charcoal grey, rust, ivory, champagne gold, maroon, and even muted pastels are making strong appearances. For events like gaye holud or mehendi, brighter shades of purple, rani pink or orange with playful prints are stealing the show. Receptions, on the other hand, are witnessing the rise of bold solids with rich textures.

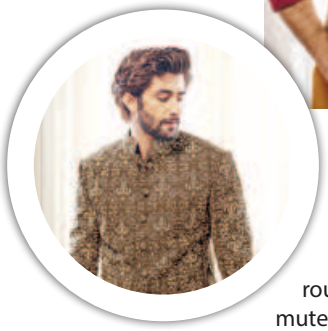
The prints, you say? Oh! The prints.

From geometric patterns to floral motifs that feel celebratory, vests are giving men the confidence to step outside their neutral comfort zones. Paired with a plain kurta, they create just the right balance between festive and polished.

This is where the groom's best friend shines: coordinated, stylish, and clearly aware that wedding photos last longer than Instagram stories.

For those who prefer subtler drama, minimalist thread work is having a moment. Fine embroidery, tone-on-tone detailing, and understated textures add depth without screaming for attention. These are perfect for close cousins or brothers who want to look refined and distinguished from the crowd but not overpower the groom.

On the other end of the spectrum, full-on karchupi vests are unapologetically bold and are ideal for the groom himself or that one cousin who will dance to every song. Rich embellishments, intricate craftsmanship, and statement detailing make these vests wedding royalty material.



For the groom, the vest offers an extra opportunity to coordinate with the bride in ways that feel thoughtful rather than overly matchy.

Some grooms are choosing to twin subtly, echoing the bride's outfit through colour accents, embroidery tones, or fabric textures, creating a visually harmonious look without stealing her spotlight.

Others are going the contrast route, opting for deeper or more muted shades that allow the bride's ensemble to shine even brighter.

A soft ivory vest against a richly coloured bridal lehenga, or a deep emerald or maroon that complements gold jewellery, can elevate the couple's overall aesthetic beautifully.

This kind of colour coordination adds depth to wedding photos and creates a sense of cohesion that feels intentional, elegant, and undeniably striking, because when the bride and groom look good together, everyone notices.

Sleeves, too, are no longer an afterthought. Sleeveless vests remain the classic choice. But sleeved vests are gaining popularity for winter weddings and evening events, offering a slightly more formal, layered look. They add warmth, yes, but more importantly, they add presence. Perfect for groomsmen who want to stand out without stepping on the groom's toes (fashion politics is real).

And let's talk fit, because no amount of embroidery can save a poorly fitted vest!

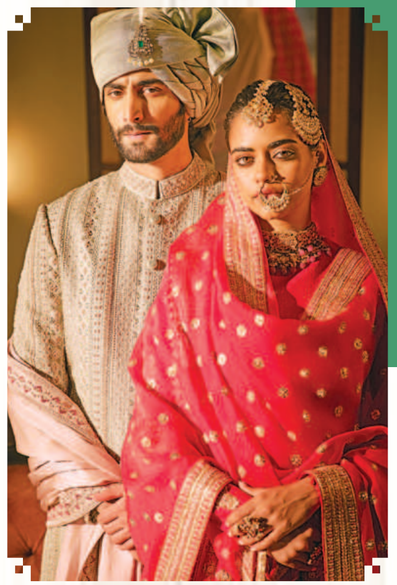
A well-tailored vest sharpens the silhouette, elevates posture, and makes even the most relaxed panjabi look intentional. Too tight and you will spend the night adjusting buttons; too loose and you will look like you borrowed it five minutes before leaving.

What's refreshing this season is how men are finally having fun with wedding fashion. The groom's brother can afford to be bold, the best friend can experiment, the cousins can coordinate, and the groom can choose a vest that quietly says, "Yes, this is my wedding."

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo Courtesy: House of Ahmed
Wardrobe: House of Ahmed

#FASHION & BEAUTY

Why red will always be the ultimate BRIDAL *colour*



Close your eyes and think of yourself as a bride. A vision appears in your mind, resplendent and radiant in no other hue but red. A colour so steeped in meaning and significance, of love, passion, and energy that it is only fitting brides choose to say, "I do".

Deeply rooted in tradition where goddesses adorned in red would protect mortals, empowered by its vitality and strength, it is not just a colour in South Asian cultures but symbolises good fortune, fertility, and prosperity.

Warding off evil, this fiery hue is believed to bring harmony, joy, good fortune and happiness to a woman's life and this is why its association with marital bliss is so strong.

With strong ties directly to the matters of the heart, this blessed hue reflects the undying fire of love and passion between a couple, intended to stay aflame until death.

Standing on the opposite end of the spectrum to white, which represents a state of mourning and grief, red is a harbinger of new beginnings, good fortune, fertility and love. What's more, its vibrant nature makes a bride stand out in a crowd, elevating her status as she steps into her new life and role!

So many sublime reasons for a bride to wear red on her big day, and it's just the beginning!

Across South Asia, this auspicious hue is favoured because of its flattering nature; there's a red for every skin tone. When choosing red for your big day, it is imperative to find the perfect one for your complexion, and if you do not know which shade of red is perfect for you, trial and error is key.

The rule of thumb is, deep, orangey reds and vermillion are great for wheatish, warm skin tones. It brings out the warmth in one's complexion. In a similar family, there's also deep coral and persimmon red, which is a fabulous option for wedding outfits.

Fair-skinned ladies with cool undertones look best in blueish reds like bright cherry. This plays out the blue veins in their colouring, making it pop. Raspberry red is also another great choice.

Olive-skinned ladies should gravitate towards orange-toned reds such as brick and crimson that bring out the greenish tones in their colouring. Strawberry red is perfect for women with medium to light skin.

Dusky women can take on richer, deeper shades of reds such as oxblood and merlot. Bordeaux and deep auburn are two other shades brides can consider at the end of the spectrum.

When it comes to wedding sarees, Benarasi katan still reigns supreme. Girls adorn themselves in their mother's sindoor-red wedding katan and dream of becoming a bride one day, and this reverie lives in their hearts lifelong. Timeless, deeply meaningful and precious red katan is always the right choice.

Choosing the right red katan for you is crucial. Pay close attention to the material and work, as well as the colour. They look great in every shade of red, so pick the best one for you.

New-age brides dreaming of something different are also spoilt for choice. An all-red lehenga is a fantastic statement and looks really chic and sophisticated. Skip the gold, go with just diamonds or rubies and voila!

Traditional red lehengas look great too. One could go for a contrasting border or dupatta, teamed with traditional jewels. Red saree gowns also look lovely and are perfect for brides wanting to wear red for the reception, because why not? The modern bride can do whatever she wants and wear red whenever she wants. It's her big day after all!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo Courtesy: House of Ahmed
Wardrobe: House of Ahmed

#FOOD & RECIPES

Timeless Christmas baking recipes every home baker will love

There is something quietly reassuring about baking. This recipe collection brings together four timeless bakes, each offering its own gentle indulgence. From the bright, zesty lift of a lemon tea cake to the deep warmth of coffee and walnuts, from soft butter cupcakes crowned with cream frosting to delicate cream-filled sandwiches, these recipes are perfect for festive tables or moments when only something homemade will do. Simple to prepare yet deeply satisfying, they celebrate the enduring joy of classic baking.

Merry Christmas!

LEMON TEA CAKE WITH GLACE ICING
Ingredients
4 eggs
275g castor sugar
Zest of 3 lemons, plus lemon juice
275g flour, sifter
1 tsp baking powder
130ml cream
65g butter, melted
200g icing sugar

Method
Heat the oven to 180°C. Grease the pan. Whisk eggs and sugar until foamy. Add lemon zest and whisk in flour and baking powder. Whisk in cream and gently fold in the batter. Pour the mixture into a cake pan and bake in the oven for 50-60 minutes or until the tops of the cakes are golden brown and springy to the touch. Remove from oven and cool. To make icing, mix the icing sugar with enough lemon juice to form a thick paste.

Spread over the top of the cooled cake and leave to set.

WALNUT COFFEE CUPCAKES
Ingredients
For the cupcakes —
170g butter, softened
170g castor sugar
A pinch of salt
3 medium eggs
170g self-rising flour, sifted
85g walnuts, finely chopped, plus walnut halves for garnish
For the icing —
3 tsp instant coffee
125g butter, softened
85g icing sugar

Method
Heat the oven to 170°C/mark 3. Arrange 20 fairy-cake cases on 2 fairy-cake or slightly larger muffin trays. Beat the butter, sugar, and salt until pale and fluffy, then gradually beat in two eggs. Fold in one tablespoon of flour, then beat in the third egg. Tip in the rest of the flour and the chopped walnuts and lightly fold into the butter mixture. Using a spoon, divide the mixture between the paper cases. Bake for 15 minutes or until the mixture is firm and springy to the touch. Leave to cool on a cake rack. Meanwhile, for the icing, dissolve the instant coffee in 1½ teaspoons of boiling water. Leave until cold. Beat the softened butter and icing sugar until fluffy, then beat in the coffee. Once the cakes are completely cold, spread the icing over the top of each one and decorate with a walnut half.

BUTTER CAKES WITH CREAM FROSTING
Ingredients
1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
1½ cups sugar
3 eggs
2 tsp vanilla
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
2/3 cup milk
1 recipe cream frosting (below)

Method
Preheat oven to 350°F. Line twenty-four 2½ inch muffin cups with paper bake cups. In a large mixing bowl, beat butter with an

electric mixer on medium-high for about 1 minute. Add sugar. Beat until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla. Whisk together flour, baking powder, soda and salt. Add flour mixture in two additions, alternating with milk and beating on low after each addition until combined. Fill lined cups about 2/3 full. Bake 15 to 18 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out clean. Cool in pans on a wire rack for 5 minutes. Remove cupcakes from pan; cool completely on a wire rack. Fill and/or frost as directed. After frosting, refrigerate for 2 to 24 hours.

Cream frosting —
In a large mixing bowl, beat ½ cup (1 stick) of softened butter with a mixer for 30 seconds. Gradually beat in one cup of powdered sugar. Beat in 1 tsp vanilla and 1 tbsp milk. Use at once or refrigerate up to 3 days. Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes before using.

CREAM SANDWICHES
Ingredients
For the cookies —
1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
10 tbsp (1¼ sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
1½ cups sugar
1 large egg
2 tsp vanilla essence
For the filling —
7½ ounces best-quality white chocolate, coarsely chopped
1/3 cup heavy cream

Method
Preheat oven to 350°F.
Make cookies — Whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt. Put butter and sugar in the bowl. Mix on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add egg, vanilla. Mix until smooth. Reduce speed to low; gradually mix in flour mixture. Using a 1-inch ice-cream scoop, drop dough onto baking sheets lined with parchment paper, spaced 2 inches apart. Bake until golden and just set, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool on parchment on wire racks. Melt white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Remove from heat; whisk in cream in a slow, steady stream. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Assemble cookies —
Spread 1 tablespoon filling onto the bottom of one cookie; sandwich with another. Repeat. Cookies can be refrigerated between layers of parchment in airtight containers at room temperature for up to 2 days.

#FOOD & RECIPES

Eating on a budget in Badda? Here are 4 spots under Tk 150

Dhaka is a city of hustlers, where people from all classes venture out into the world each day with the hope of making it big. These big dreams come with long hours and lots of eating on the go. Thankfully, it does not always have to be expensive; budget-friendly food carts are available just about anywhere. If you are in Badda and looking for a bite that packs a punch without the high prices, we have got you covered! We have put together a list of 4 inexpensive food and drink spots that will have you coming back again and again.

CHILLHOUSE

A small food stall located opposite the back entrance of BRAC University, you are bound to see it right away. Their service is quick and the options innumerable. You can find everything from tried-and-tested fried items to carbohydrate-heavy options like chowmein and fried rice, with prices noted prominently on the window display. Drinks are also available, but not the most bang for your buck here.

Food prices start from Tk 10, with the most expensive item on the menu being well under Tk 100. The chicken sandwich and shawarma are regular crowd favourites here. For Tk 70, you can get a good portion of your daily protein intake, wrapped in either grilled white bread or fluffy pita bread.

And, the dip options are simply unparalleled. Even if you are a sauce snob who thinks ketchup is the average joe of the dip universe, you may just be impressed by the tamarind chutney and shorisha sauce (not to be confused with yellow mustard). While the chutney offsets the peppery meat with its sweet tang, the shorisha sauce brings a pleasant pizzazz to your meal with its kashundi-like flavour notes.

CAFEISTA

If you are dining at Chillhouse, you might be looking for something refreshing to sip on after your meal. Or, you may just be in desperate need of a caffeine kick for your midday slump. Well, look no further! Cafeista is right next door to Chillhouse, and it serves up a delicious range of hot and cold caffeinated and chocolate-based beverages at half the price of a regular cafe. And, the best part? They do not skimp on quality with freshly ground coffee being sourced directly from North End Roasters.

For a small student-owned business that operates in tiny quarters, I was surprised to find they made no compromises on their coffee equipment either. Top-notch coffee machines from DeLonghi are used for all drinks. In a quick chat with the barista, he revealed that they do a deep cleaning of all machines every week.

Within Tk 50 to 170, you can find anything from strong espresso to creamier, flavoured drinks to satisfy your sweet tooth. I opted for the black coffee and Cadbury hot chocolate, spending Tk 70 and Tk 80 respectively.

First impressions — The temperature is just right. Not too piping hot, it allows you to dig right in and let the caffeine (or sugar) flow through you. The black coffee is well-balanced, with no burnt bitterness, while the hot chocolate is more suitable as an occasional treat.

INDIAN PANI FUCHKA

Finding a pani fuchka cart in Maddha Badda is rather like spotting a unicorn in the wild. While fuchka and bhelpuri stands are a dime a dozen in every neighbourhood, pani fuchkas are not as accessible, with the nearest ones being in Uttar Badda.

Indian Pani Fuchka is one of the few stands that you can find here, all six days of the week, from 10 AM to 10 PM. If you are near BRAC University's back gate, just keep walking straight ahead until you spot the solitary fuchka cart with metal haris (pots).

At Tk 30, you will get six hard fuchka shells and free rein to drown them in as much topping as you want from the five options: sour tamarind, sweet tamarind, yoghurt, olive, and Naga spice. I doled out just enough to get maximum flavour without losing the crunch factor.

My personal favourites were the olive and Naga spice. The olive topping tasted a lot like the juice of actual sun-dried pickles, evoking the nostalgia of slow summer days. As for the naga, be warned! Only three to four drops bring the fire faster than one would expect. If you are a spice lover, you will enjoy this thoroughly, but do not blame me if you get an upset stomach!

CAFE JHOTPOT

Like the other spots in this list, Cafe Jhotpot is located in the same network of alleys. If you walk straight on from the fuchka cart and turn to your left, you will have arrived at Cafe Jhotpot.

Initially, I did not consider this spot seriously, figuring it to be yet another chanasta place. But, it made the list for three reasons: the crowd, the seating spaces, and one unique item!

As a rule of thumb, I try to go where the crowd goes. If customers are willing to wait outside on the alleys even when all seats are taken, clearly, the food must be worth it.

I ordered the three-piece masala singara, which came peppered with a nice quantity of in-house spice powder and a pora ruti. A regional delicacy from Kushtia, this torched loaf of sweet, caramelly milk bread is hard to find in the city except in places like Mohammadpur.

Right in the heart of Badda, you can sink into the pillowy bliss of a well-torched pora ruti at just Tk 30. Usually enjoyed with malai cha, I ordered it sans the tea to see if it could stand on its own. I am happy to report that it did. The caramel was not saccharine sweet, and the milk powder was the icing on top of the figurative cake! The only downside? The cafe does not live up to the promise of its name, with slow service nearing a 15-minute wait time.

By Sunehra Afreen
Photo: Sunehra Afreen

#TRAVELOGUE

A different Singapore: Art, history, and everyday life

The city is synonymous with glitz and luxury, often drawing the uber-rich. But beyond the glam, lie tiny enclaves, spinning yarns of friendship, collaboration, and coexistence with warmth and vibrant colours. They are as appealing as the greenery is soothing.

I was not visiting Singapore for celebrated landmarks. My interest lay elsewhere.

Over the years, I have become more of a relaxed flaneur than a landmark-hopper, wandering, eager to stumble upon the unexpected, sample local cuisine and talk with the locals, and explore fascinating neighbourhoods steeped in culture and history.

The identities of all these places collectively bubble up to create a complete kaleidoscope for a proud nation. The predictable homogeneity is a suffocating turn-off for me. The element of surprise keeps the traveller in me engaged and excited.

This disposition led me to two radiant microcosms hidden beneath Singapore's usual gleaming self. If I were an artist, they could easily be my muses.

Arab Street packs an array of businesses and eateries that exude an aroma evocative of the Muslim culture. Today, there is more influence from the Malay Archipelago than from the Arab countries. A thriving commercial hub where merchants of all kinds have set up their shops.

It owes its name to the settlement of Arab traders in the 19th century. Sir Stamford Raffles designated this area for the community. It quickly evolved into a thriving commercial hotspot, shared by other ethnicities. Located in Kampong Glam or Kampong Gelam, as it is also called, it's just a stone's throw from the nearby Bugis metro station.

My first stop was a small shop, owned by an affable Indonesian woman. Her warm greetings, laced with an ear-to-ear grin, were inviting and welcoming, eager to tell a story as it related to her. A hot Nasi Goreng and a brief teaser later, I began a jaunt down the street, excited and curious.

The first eyecatchers were the colourful facades of the shophouses. Many of them were silk, carpet, lamp, spice, and fragrance shops. The pastel signature not only added colours to the delightful two-story Peranakan shophouses that stood in refreshing contrast to the ubiquitous gleaming tall buildings, but also to the variegated soul of Singapore. Peranakan refers to a mixed-heritage community, dating back to when the Chinese immigrants married local Malay women.

The pastel colours reminded me of Cinque Terre, Italy. If those were the flowers on the lap of the lush green mountains, these were the flowers of green Singapore.

From the streets below, the open windows looked like inviting portals to the glorious past. I craved a Harry Potter broomstick to instantly fly me up and back through time. But my acrophobia quickly intervened and restricted me to a stroll.

The real charm lay about halfway down the street. The tall granite arch with Omani carvings stood as the gateway to an Arab Street offshoot: Muscat Street, named after the capital of Oman, a shining symbol of cooperation and friendship between Singapore and Oman through maritime trade. One of them at each end proudly stands as a testament to this rapprochement.

Perhaps, this is the essence of it all — the camaraderie and the spirit. The first soundbite, an introductory orchestra, along with the stunning visuals, was the soothing call to prayer wafting through the air, an apt reminder of the Muslim culture and tradition dominating this part of the city, and the acceptance of it.

Redeveloped by a joint venture, the street boasts large murals on the side of the buildings. Colours splash the large mural-like raconteurs that tell fascinating stories in pictures, tying the city's rich past to the proud present.

The first giant mural delineated the typical daily life of a Muslim merchant family, selling merchandise, apparently from their shophouse, while their young son playfully hurled a paper aeroplane through an open window upstairs. That aeroplane instantly made me wonder if he was sending us a plane-load of messages to share his anecdotes.

Standing next to it was a depiction of a publishing house, "Pustaka", once run by one Haji Muhammad Said, then a prominent figure in the Malay printing Industry. Did those books hint at these murals featuring their lives one day?

Right below was the picture of two tombstone makers practising their craft. Then, to the right of it was a metal fabrication shop and Jamal the jeweller, hard at work. The illustrations in these murals of ordinary lives were so vivid, and the portrayal of common people so natural, that everything felt very real and palpable, and I instantly imagined myself in that world with them, trying to understand their struggles and aspirations, and their way of life that slowly shaped this area.

Today's ambitions of the new are certainly mirrored in these murals that lay out the aspirations of the old, binding all with a common thread. The spirit of the old not only lives on among the new, but the character of the old also propels the new forward.

All these murals come together in a smaller Kampong Gelam mural that embroiders the individual pieces into one elegant tale, one of cooperation. Another important mural was an interesting juxtaposition of two time periods of Kampong Gelam, between the 1920s-30s, and 2023, showing the evolution of the area. A small river of the 1920s-30s has disappeared on one side, and a new bridge and tall buildings have taken their places on the other.

The salient feature of the area, Sultan Mosque, or Masjid Sultan, was a small house then with a sloped clay tiled roof, a clear contrast to the huge ornate two-story white grand mosque with impressive golden domes and minarets attracting thousands of worshippers today. Non-praying visitors are allowed in up to a certain point. The welcome mat extended to non-Muslims is another gesture of harmony. Inside the prayer hall, huge chandeliers and fans dotting the ceiling appeared to illuminate and disseminate the message of peaceful coexistence.

This is not the only confluence of cultures in Singapore. On the East Coast, there's a charming Katong District that prides itself on street art. It is home to pastel-coloured terraced houses patterned after the Peranakan heritage. The main level of terraced houses is elevated to protect against the water because of proximity to the sea.

The back alleys wear lovely street art makeovers. The rows of two-story charming houses with intricate carvings on doors and windows, bathed in pastel hues, are a treat to the eye. I chanced upon some lovely murals while checking out a famous local confectionery, Chin Mee Chin. The kopitiam boasts its signature Kaya Toast, served in the rich backdrop of Peranakan floral motifs and street art.

Artists poured their hearts out in buckets in sprightly colours here to project their sense of pride. East Coast Road, with adorable street-side pots of shrubs and quaint shops, makes a walk soothing. The murals, approved by the authorities, are a tribute to the proud coastal identity. Life here takes a stroll, and pauses frequently to savour it all over a Kaya Toast and coffee.

I wanted a tête-à-tête with a local on Muscat Street to put a face to it all. Teh Tarik, a special pulled tea in hand, I struck up a candid conversation with Nikki, a friendly young woman, in front of the famous Tarik café, a popular haunt for the locals and tourists alike. Seated next to her mother-in-law, Hariya, she was a Singaporean native, married to a Yemeni man. Her son Ibrahim flashed me a toothless smile as a friendly gesture. Her husband, a glowing embodiment of the spirit around, worked nearby. She spoke highly of quality halal food, hip restaurants, and the trendy shops set up by the Malays and the Chinese.

My Padi Quencher was a refreshing green drink with coconut flesh and wheatgrass. This was a fusion of disparate elements, just as the city is of different cultures, all contributing to her richness. With every sip, I felt I was now taking in the whole essence of a multi-faceted stage, adorned with fascinating bonds expressed in street art, and enriched by the spirited protagonists. The murals and floral motifs are emphatic artistic expressions that nicely complement garden-wrapped Singapore. Her walls are leaves of an open book where artists spontaneously narrate stories and project identity.

By Arif Shahjahan
Photo: Arif Shahjahan

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Postpartum yoga

A healing journey for body and mind

Motherhood begins with immense joy, but soon, physical and mental exhaustion step in. The body feels unfamiliar, and the mind rides an emotional roller coaster. In the middle of sleepless nights and feeding schedules, self-care quietly fades away. The "baby blues" often step in, leaving many mothers feeling fragile and overwhelmed. Yet, recovery is not a luxury but a necessity. And that's where post-pregnancy yoga steps in. It serves as a gentle bridge between healing the body and calming the mind.

From hormonal fluctuations to weakened core and pelvic muscles, after childbirth, a woman's body undergoes dramatic changes. Back pain, fatigue, anxiety, and mood swings are common complaints. In today's fast-paced world, many mothers feel pressured to "get back in shape" quickly, but healing takes time, and the body deserves patience.

Yoga offers far more than physical exercise, as it is a complete system of self-recovery. Gentle asanas strengthen the pelvic floor, back, and abdominal muscles. Breathing practices calm the mind and uplift mood, while relaxation improves sleep and restores energy.

Many new mothers regain calm and confidence within weeks of consistent practice. Even ten mindful minutes a day can bring grounding amid the beautiful chaos of motherhood.

Every woman's recovery timeline is different. For those who had a normal delivery, gentle yoga may begin after one month. After a Caesarean birth, yoga is suggested after 4 months, with medical clearance. Begin with breath-work and restorative poses before slowly moving to core-strengthening practices.

Gentle Postnatal Poses for Every Mother --

SETU BANDHASANA (BRIDGE POSE)
This gentle backbend strengthens the lower back, glutes, and pelvic floor while opening the chest and shoulders.

How to do it: Lie on your back with knees bent and feet hip-width apart, press through your feet to lift the hips, hold for a few breaths, and then slowly lower down.

BHUJANGASANA (COBRA POSE)
The cobra pose tones the spine, opens the chest, and improves posture, often strained by breastfeeding and baby care.

How to do it: Lie face down, place palms beside the chest, inhale to lift the chest off the floor while keeping the elbows slightly bent, hold briefly, and exhale to release.

PHALAKASANA (PLANK POSE)
Plank pose strengthens the core, shoulders, and arms while improving posture and endurance during postpartum recovery.

How to do it: Begin on hands and knees, extend your legs back into a straight line from head to heels, engage your core, hold for 30–60 seconds, then release. Keep your knees down at the beginning.

NAVASANA (BOAT POSE)
It's a beneficial posture for postpartum recovery as it helps engage and strengthen the core muscles. Focus on gentle tightening of the belly rather than pushing too hard. If you have had a Caesarean or are healing from abdominal separation, check with your doctor before trying the full pose.

How to do it: Sit with knees bent and feet flat, lean back slightly, lift your feet off the floor, and balance on your sitting bones. Hold for a few breaths, then relax. Start slowly with bent knees or hand support. Always consult your doctor before attempting the full pose.

KEGEL EXERCISE: THE INVISIBLE STRENGTH BUILDER
Kegel exercises are a simple yet powerful way to restore pelvic strength after childbirth. They help improve bladder control, posture, and even enhance overall confidence.

How to do it: Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Gently tighten the muscles you'd use to stop urination mid-way, hold for five seconds, then relax. Repeat about twenty times a day. A few minutes of this invisible workout can make a remarkable difference — strengthening from within and supporting a mother's recovery journey with grace.

Postpartum yoga is not about achieving the perfect pose or pre-pregnancy shape; it's about finding balance, breath, and grace in your new rhythm of life.

By Farhana Abir
The writer is the founder of Yoga Bliss. She is a PhD Scholar and an antenatal yoga expert and pelvic floor rehab therapist. Contact her at yogabliss.bd@gmail.com

DISCLAIMER

Always consult your doctor before starting yoga after childbirth. Practice under the guidance of a qualified yoga expert.

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#DECOR

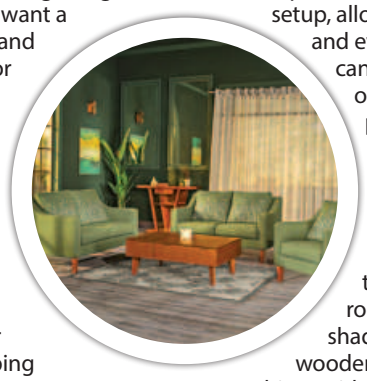
A newlywed couple's guide to perfecting their living room

Before buying any new furniture when moving into your new home, understand your collective needs as a couple first. Next, consider the size and layout of the living room. Then, determine whether you need a casual setup or an elegant one. Assess these factors and plan to buy the furniture for the living room accordingly.

To put together a seating area, also known as the conversation area, get a set of sofas based on your specific needs. Choose veteran sofas if you prioritise both comfort and elegance. If you have more people over often, you should augment your seating arrangement. Ottomans can be a smart choice, as they can be used for multiple purposes. You can rest your feet on them when it's just the two of you. Also, they can accommodate extra seats for guests in large numbers.

Alternatively, you can get a divan sofa, a long and cushioned seat typically placed against a wall, which can also serve multiple purposes, providing extra seating where you can even lounge and sit back.

Get a centre tea table for your seating area where you can serve beverages and snacks to your guests. Consider getting a table with a glass top if you want a piece that is easier to clean and does not sustain scratches or dents.



A tea table with lower compartments will come in handy for storing newspapers and magazines for visitors to indulge in light reading as you keep them waiting for refreshments.

Nowadays, many interior designers recommend keeping a focal wall, otherwise known as a feature wall, in your living room. A decently maintained focal wall can enhance the aesthetics of your living room even with a sparsely furnished setup. The TV often goes on the focal wall because it naturally becomes the centrepiece of the room.

Keeping in mind other activities the new couple can romanticise, add a karaoke setup, allowing the couple to sing and even dance to music. You can define the seating area or karaoke zone tactfully by placing an area rug that highlights the space.

If you have a dedicated focal wall in a darker shade, opt for a wooden, oak-coloured TV cabinet to brighten up your living room. For a wall of lighter shade, get a dark-coloured wooden TV centre. Choose a TV cabinet with bolstered compartments to keep essential documents, and utilise the space better.

Get a file rack or open bookshelf which the newlywed can decorate with things they are fond of. This piece of the living room can be a place where the couple keeps essences of their being, such as souvenirs, or a photo frame of themselves on a vacation.

Finally, as a new couple just starting their married life together, getting this new living room set can be a big investment for you, but it is still worth it. You do not necessarily have to pay the whole amount in one go and drain your bank account. Simply, look for a furniture brand that offers Equated Monthly Instalments (EMI), allowing you to pay for your purchases in equal monthly payments and spread the cost over a predetermined period. This option can help you pay off the furniture bills in affordable portions, keeping you away from unnecessary stress.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Hatil