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Retro FESTIVE

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#FYI

Is kaali jeera the health superfood you've been missing?

Kaali jeera, also known as black cumin or black seed, has been appreciated for its health benefits. Though used as a spice, it has been traditionally regarded as a natural aid for maintaining good health.

However, it must be acknowledged that even though kaali jeera comes with a lot of health benefits, it is not a complete substitute for any medical treatment.

One of the main health benefits of kaali jeera is its ability to support the body's defence mechanism. It contains natural plant compounds that help the body fight inflammation, and protect cells from damage. This makes it valuable for people who wish to brace overall immunity through diet.

The use of kaali jeera is also known to aid with digestion. It can reduce bloating, gas, and mild stomach discomfort when used regularly in food. Older generations in South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, often added it to their daily meals, believing that it would keep their stomach light and active.

Another important use of this ingredient is in maintaining heart health. Taking in small but regular amounts help maintain stable blood pressure and support acceptable cholesterol levels. The effects are linked to the natural oils in it, which helps with better blood circulation, reducing the chances of cardiovascular diseases.

In short, kaali jeera offers multiple health benefits when used regularly and in moderation. Its support for digestion, immunity and heart health makes it more than just a spice. Reintroducing it into daily meals, as earlier generations once did, can be a simple step towards better long-term wellbeing.

By Sana Nawab
Photo: Collected

#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

CELEBRATING CELEBRATIONS: Anika Azam's Event Planning Journey

Anika Azam's event management journey began in 2009, though her father had noted her creativity a good decade before that. "He would see me happily planning events for friends and family and would often tease me about becoming an event planner."

To Anika, that idea was ludicrous. "Wedding planner? Whatever would people need that for — I would tell him, and laugh." Ceremonies tended to be smaller, cosier functions, typically organised by families themselves, and it was unthinkable that people would hand over the planning of such a personal affair to external planners. "He was a visionary, however," she agrees. "Around 2009-2010, social dynamics really did begin to change: more people entered formal employment, schedules grew busier, urban traffic increased, and families increasingly relied on professionals to manage celebrations."

BABY STEPS

It was around this time that Anika had just finished her graduation, suffered a brief stint with a 9-5 job and knew that it was simply not for her. "The pull toward events was simply stronger," she confesses.

Anika's first real assignment came when her best friend's sister was getting married; Anika had long been the go-to person for daalas and holud dances among cousins and university friends, and stepping into the role of a planner felt organic.

"Kri Events initially focused almost exclusively on weddings," shares Anika. "We sketched our own designs and also drew inspiration from international trends, experimenting all the way." Learning on the job, Anika's young team brought verve and fresh ideas to a developing field.

After five or six years of concentrating solely on weddings, Anika expanded Kri Events to offer birthday party, baby shower, and anniversary planning services. "Now, in its 17th year, Kri Events handles bridal showers, corporate functions, high-tea gatherings, club events, and a wide range of private celebrations." shares a proud Anika. She also takes pride in sharing that much of the company's business comes from repeat clients and referrals. "It's proof of our consistently good quality service in a competitive market."

A TALE OF FAVOURITES

Several projects stand out in Kri Events' portfolio. One early landmark was a wedding for 7,500 guests at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Centre, an ambitious undertaking that made Kri Events the talk of the town, and demonstrated the team's ability to manage large-scale logistics. "It was only our second project too; can you believe it?" gushes a proud Anika.

A more recent South Indian themed gaye holud, featured a bride in traditional white attire, food served on banana leaves, and a simple décor with folded banana leaves and diyas. Another prominent event from the previous season was a safari-themed party that included a highly realistic python mock-up; guests reportedly believed it was real, reflecting the team's attention to detail and theatrical flair.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

"Watching other event planners blatantly use our designs for their work has been a challenge," shares Anika. "We started managing events much before most of the newcomers in the market, and at first, it used to feel really bad, because we would put in hours into sketching our designs, only to have it copied by someone else."

Gradually, however, Anika got over her frustration, reframing imitation as validation and continued to innovate. Anika

believes in protecting original ideas but recognises that it can be difficult to enforce design patents, especially considering the varying budgets of clients who look for similar designs at cheaper rates. "And you cannot discount creative freedom either," she agrees. Anika herself does not condone exact duplication in any of her designs, even if close inspirations are possible.

THE 'CUSTOMER IS KING' APPROACH

Anika's customers are those that prioritise quality without running after extravagance. For such clients, she maintains a set of non-negotiables, which she believes have played a part in taking her to the top of her game. Her two hard and fast values include quality work and maintaining respectful client relations. "The team's attitude matters as much as its output," she feels. "Every time my team meets a client, my ask is simple: behave courteously, and try, as far as possible, to have a can-do approach."

In line with this approach, Anika prides herself of having attained the reputation of 'The Last-Minute Queen.' "I once pulled off a grand, multi-hall event in 24 hours!" she laughs.

THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF EVENT MANAGEMENT

From changing names of events to changing styles and designs, cultural influence is inevitable at the time of social media and global culture. Anika remains flexible and sees these trends as opportunities for creativity and reinterpretation of tradition. "New designs, even if adapted from a different culture, allow me to expand my creative horizon," shares the open-minded designer.

Though Anika refrains from labelling the company with a single signature, her clients and peers often recognise a distinctive touch in Kri Events' productions. "Is this your work? They ask. I have no idea how they recognise it — I must have some unique imprint that even I am not aware of," she adds cheerfully.

Anika believes in strategic growth. "I see that there is no shortage of sprawling halls for large events. How many people can afford to have such lavish events, though?" Backward integration, in the form of purchasing space for parties and smaller events reflect a desire to bridge market gaps that she sees in this area.

Anika Azam, through her unique business acumen, cheerful outlook and a never-say-die attitude continues to pursue bigger, better, and more meaningful celebrations while preserving the same trust in quality. Her continued focus on client care, and dynamic creativity has allowed Kri Events to thrive in an industry that rewards unconventionality, authenticity and reliability.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Courtesy

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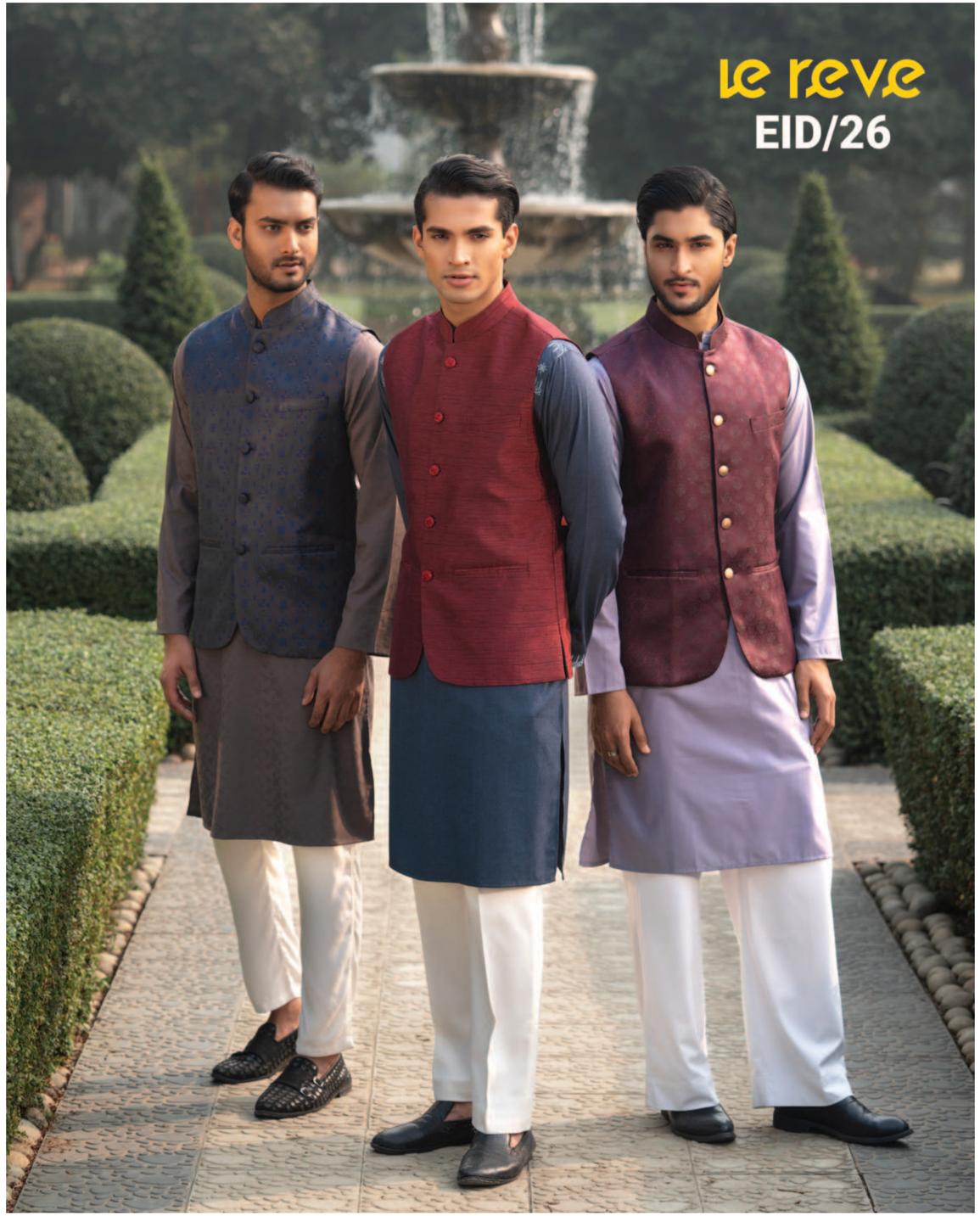
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#FASHION & BEAUTY

Want Instant Glam?

TRY THE 60S HAIRSTYLES

They say hair is the crowning glory; it makes or breaks a look. How true! The foundation of a great look begins, or sometimes ends with hair, or more accurately, the hairstyle! It is a universal fact that in order to elevate a look to its maximum potential, the right hairdo is key. One may have the best outfit, makeup, or accessories, but if her hair isn't on par, it all fails to make any impact.

Which is why staying on trend is paramount for the truly fashionable, for whom looking good is a lifestyle, not just a choice!

Fashion is cyclical in nature. What was in vogue once upon a time, sometimes decades ago, could become relevant in a moment's notice. That's what is so remarkable about beautiful things, as noted bard Lord Byron once said, 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Bouffants are very stylish right now as they were in the sixties. To be honest we're in love with anything retro, and what's more fun and fabulous than retro hairstyles?

Beehive hairstyles have always held a special place in every woman's heart. Giving us that extra lift and oomph, this is a style that always has our back!

Originating in the sixties, it can be updated to look and feel relevant and interesting. They always look chic and polished and flatters most face shapes. What's most remarkable is that bouffant looks great with both ethnic and western outfits equally and that's a win-win for us all! It also has many different renditions in that it can be dressed up or down as one chooses.

Going to a wedding? Go all out with a bouffant, decked up with flowers that will complement your lehenga beautifully. Going to your friend's birthday party? Go for a half up half down combo of bouffant at the front and hair left loose at the back that will look fabulous with your evening dress.

Have a meeting in the morning and lunch date with your colleagues? Go for a mini bouffant with a ponytail that will look absolutely amazing with your office blazer.

There is a bouffant for every occasion; you just need to find out the right one for you – it may also be Eid, this year. What say?

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
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Styling and Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Models: Ayasha Ahasan Linda
Makeover: Enamul Hoque Masum

#SOCIAL WELFARE

INSIDE MOSABBIR ALOK NIBASH'S CARE FOR CANCER PATIENTS

When Momena Begum first came to Dhaka from Gopalganj, she did not arrive at a hospital. She arrived at uncertainty.

Her son, Yamin, was eleven when he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. Treatment meant moving to a city that did not belong to them. They rented a space in a slum in Dakshinkhan because it was the only place they could afford.

"What else could I do?" she says quietly. "His father passed away nine years ago."

The logistics of cancer became heavier than the diagnosis itself. Rent. Food. Transport. Daily hospital visits. And the quiet exhaustion of having nowhere stable to return to at night.

Everything changed when another patient — someone she had shared a hospital ward with — told her about a place called Mosabbir Alok Nibash.

"Since coming here, I really like this place," Momena says. "The food, the staying arrangements, and the environment with everyone make me feel good. For the last three and a half years, I have been coming and going from here."

For families like hers, Mosabbir Alok Nibash is not charity. It is continuity.

A response to a question most people never ask

Cancer care in Bangladesh is concentrated in Dhaka. Patients travel from districts like Moulvibazar, Mymensingh, or Gopalganj, often with no relatives or housing options.

Rebeka Akter, patient coordinator at Mosabbir Alok Nibash, sees this reality every day.

"Patients coming from outside Dhaka usually don't have a place to stay or eat," she explains. "Here, they can stay free of charge. We provide accommodation, food, and transport for both the patient and their attendant."

She often visits government hospitals herself, searching for those sleeping on floors or verandas.

"They tell doctors, 'How will we get treatment? We have no place to stay, no food arrangements.' That's how they find us."

For Salma, who came from Moulvibazar for her child's treatment, hospital floors had become home. "It was very difficult," she says simply. "I had to stay on the floor." At Mosabbir Alok Nibash, she now has a bed, meals, and transport to the hospital. "It feels good. Very good. Whatever is provided, I am grateful," she shares.

Gratitude, here, often begins with something as basic as stability.

The system behind the shelter

Mosabbir Alok Nibash was founded by cancer survivor and entrepreneur Najmus Ahmed Albab, after he witnessed how patients without financial support were forced to live in slums during treatment.

Saad M Ahmed, Facility Manager overseeing operations, describes the scale of what happens inside.

"My daily responsibility is ensuring nutritious food," he says. "We deliver 600 meals every day. That is 18,000 meals every month." Meals are designed according to the nutritionists and doctors. "We follow strict diet charts. Sugary foods are forbidden. If a child needs specific nutrition, we try to provide it."

But food is only one part of the system.

The facility houses patients and attendants, provides transportation, and maintains strict hygiene protocols to protect patients with compromised immune systems. "When patients return from hospitals, they must refresh themselves before entering," Saad explains. "Government hospitals are often very dirty, and infections spread easily. We separate blood cancer patients because they are more sensitive."

The numbers reflect the demand.

"Between both units, including patients and attendants, we have capacity for around 180 to 190 people," he says. "Sometimes we exceed that because patients want to stay here. Mosabbir Alok Nibash has become a trustworthy place for them."

Care that extends beyond infrastructure

For many patients, Mosabbir Alok Nibash replaces not just housing, but isolation.

Shumi Akter, a cancer patient from Mymensingh, arrived seeking treatment for her child. Then she received her own diagnosis. Now both mother and child live at the facility together.

Stories like hers are not unusual.

Saad recalls moments that define his work. "One child asked me for a pomegranate," he says. "They call me 'Mama.' Pomegranate costs TK 400 per kilo. They cannot afford it. When someone donates, I arrange the fruit and give them quietly."

These gestures exist outside formal healthcare. They exist inside care.

The larger vision

Mosabbir Alok Nibash continues to expand. Plans are underway to build a 250-bed cancer care unit.

"It has to include primary diagnostic and healthcare, cancer screening, supportive care, terminal care, accommodation and its related services," he says. "Because patients from rural areas struggle the most." The current model has already served over a thousand patients. Each one arrives carrying not just illness, but displacement.

Cancer narratives often focus on treatment — chemotherapy, radiation and surgery. Mosabbir Alok Nibash focuses on everything around treatment.

Momena Begum understands this difference more than anyone. "If we go to a relative's house, even for one day, they make a face," she says. "But here, we feel free," she plainly says.

Mosabbir Alok Nibash may not be able to cure cancer completely, but it removes one of the quietest and most devastating burdens patients carry; having nowhere to live while fighting to stay alive.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Silvia Mahjabin

Essentials:
For Zakat or Sadaqa support during Ramadan
Visit https://www.facebook.com/BANCATcares for more information.

Cancer Warriors

Cancer Warriors

Rebeka Akter, Patient Coordinator Mosabbir Alok Nibash

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Healthier Iftar Habits

One of the most anticipated moments of Ramadan in many homes is iftar and its preparation. After a long day of fasting and prayers, naturally, everyone wishes to break their fast with their desired foods.

However, to keep ourselves healthy this Ramadan, it's essential for our iftar menus to focus on what the body needs for its recovery instead of what solely tastes good on the palette. Don't worry, this is not another list of things you already know; this one might surprise you.

HYDRATION

Almost every fasting individual has been told about how crucial drinking water during iftar is, and of course that remains true, but there are some other options that can assist with the role of hydration during iftar besides just drinking water.

Cucumbers are one of the most hydrating foods, with their composition being over 90 per cent water. They are available in our local markets almost all year round, and should be a great addition to everyone's iftar menus this Ramadan.

It might come as a surprise to some, but lettuce is also an extremely hydrating vegetable, with its water content being nearly the same as that of cucumbers. It might be difficult to incorporate cucumbers everywhere, but lettuces are much more diverse, and can be added to a variety of items, from salads to wraps and much more.

VINGS

As the first meal of the day after breaking the fast, iftar many people tend to crave something sweet.

While such cravings are commonly met by jilapi and other sugary sweets, that is not what the body is truly asking for. The body requires items that won't lead to a sugar spike followed by crash. Foods like oranges, dates and chia seeds can assist here.

Dates have been the oldest occupant of iftar menus across the world, and for good reason. Though small in size, dates should not be ignored as they have a very high sugar and fibre content. Since the sugar is natural, it allows healthy absorption in the body and the fibres aid digestion after a long day of fasting.

Oranges are also a great source of natural sugar. They may not have been very common during iftar, especially for Ramadans in summer, but this year, that is about to change, and what good news that is. Not only do oranges have high water and Vitamin C content, but they're also high in fibre, making them easy to digest.

While not sweet on their own, chia seeds can be incorporated with other sweet items in many ways to make those items healthier. They are an excellent source of fibre and hydration for iftar, as they also absorb large amounts of water and aid digestion. They can be added to a variety of different desserts with yoghurt, peanut butter, and literally any other ingredient, or used as a "topping" too.

GUT HEALTH

While we have all surely heard of the good old warning of avoiding fried food and store-bought items, rarely do we ever pay heed to it.

It is understandable that sacrificing certain fried foods is difficult for many during iftar, but switching to some different cooking techniques and appliances can make these items healthier, especially for our gut after a long fast.

Instead of frying in oil or deep frying, using an air fryer can be a healthier alternative as no oil is involved. Air frying is also much quicker and doesn't require constant monitoring. Alternate cooking methods like baking, steaming, or grilling the same foods that we would oil fry can make them healthier for iftar too.

Oats are often despised by many, but they can be used in diverse ways. Popular foods like haleem (lentil soup) and khichuri can be made healthier if cooked with oats instead of their usual ingredients. The difference in taste is hardly noticeable, but the health benefits are immense. Oats also have a very high fibre content and absorb sufficient water to keep the body hydrated. They prevent bloating and the "crash-out" caused by consuming other complex carbs like rice or bread.

HOW TO EAT

While the things we eat control our health during Ramadan, the method and order of consuming the different items on the iftar table also has a big impact on health.

It is important to begin with dates and water instead of juices or any other solid food. The dates allow a stable blood sugar rise while the water provides cells with hydration so that they can effectively work to digest the rest of the foods coming after.

It's also very important to eat slowly, as the digestive system has been idle for a long time. Having some items first and leaving the rest to eat after finishing the Maghrib prayer is also a good option, to allow the body time to adjust and prevent drowsiness post iftar.

If we decide on healthy iftar habits right from the start, we will have a much easier, and healthier time this Ramadan.

By Raidah Hasan
Photo: Courtesy

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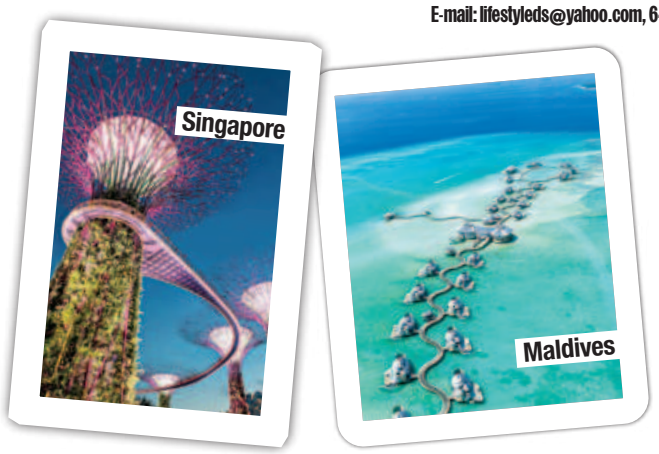
#TRAVEL

5 FOREIGN DESTINATIONS
Perfect for Short Vacations



Not every vacation needs a two-week leave or once-in-a-lifetime budget. Sometimes, all you need is a long weekend, a valid passport, and a destination that offers maximum experience in minimum time.

For Bangladeshi travellers juggling work, studies, and city exhaustion, short international vacations are becoming the smartest way to travel. From Dhaka, several international destinations are surprisingly ideal for three to five-day escapes, offering culture, nature, food, and rest without exhaustion. From misty mountains to neon cities and turquoise waters, these destinations offer thoroughgoing experience with nominal time away.

Here are some destinations that promise exactly that.

Maldives: Doing Nothing, Beautifully

A four-day short Maldives gateway is all about presence. Go straight from Velana International Airport to one of the idyllic islands like Dhigurah, Kandooma, or Maafushi, and let the ocean set your peace.

Once you arrive, powder-white beaches and crystalline lagoons become your backdrop; perfect for sunbathing, swimming, and snorkelling over vibrant coral reefs teeming with tropical fish and in South Ari Atoll.

On a typical Day 2, speedboat excursions take you to multiple snorkel spots, while another day might be perfect for jet-skiing, paddleboarding or simply watching the sunset with a gentle breeze on your face.

Island picnics, as well as local craft exploration options are also there. Spend at least one morning exploring Male's cultural corners, from the historic Male Friday Mosque to small museums that speak to local heritage.

By day 4, a last swim or beach walk feels like a reset, leaving you refreshed before your return. Whether you choose quiet island life or lively water sports, the Maldives delivers a deeply restorative short escape.

Singapore:Small City, Big Payoff

Singapore may be compact, but it packs a variety of experiences ideal for a three-day getaway.

Start in the heart of the city on Day 1 by exploring Marina Bay and its iconic skyline, wander through Gardens by the Bay and marvel at the Supertree Grove and Cloud Forest, before catching the light and water show by night. After that, head to Lau Pa Sat or a hawker centre for local delights like chicken rice and satay, where flavours reflect the city's multicultural heritage.

Day 2 dives into neighbourhood culture, start with Chinatown's heritage streets, then visit Haji Lane for indie boutiques and cafes, and finish with panoramic views from Marina Bay Sands SkyPark.

On Day 3, enjoy Sentosa Island's beaches and attractions like Universal Studios or the SEA Aquarium, or opt for a relaxed morning at Tiong Bahru with its art-filled streets and bakeries.

Singapore's efficient transport makes all this possible without rushing, so even a short trip feels remarkably complete.

Northern Vietnam: From the Old Quarter to Open Waters

A three-day trip to Northern Vietnam is perfect for travellers seeking variety without rushing. Start in Hanoi, where Day 1 unfolds in Old Quarter, narrow streets, colonial buildings, lakeside cafes, and food stalls serving pho and egg coffee. Key stops like Hoan Kiem Lake and the Temple of Literature offer a quick but meaningful introduction to Vietnam's cultural heart.

On Day 2, head to Ninh Binh, often called "Ha Long Bay on land." Just two hours from Hanoi, its limestone karsts, river caves, and ancient temples feel cinematic. A boat ride through Tam Coc or Trang An delivers quiet magic.

Nepal

Nepal: Mountains, Monasteries, and Mindful Slowness

A short trip to Nepal is a soulful blend of spiritual heritage, serene lakes, and Himalayan panoramas. Start in Kathmandu Valley, arriving at Tribhuvan International Airport and heading straight into the bustle of Durbar Square, where ancient palaces and temple courtyards tell stories dating back centuries.

Wander through Swayambhunath and Boudhanath, where fluttering prayer flags and Buddhist chants set a deeply meditative tone, and pause at Pashupatinath to glimpse a sacred Hindu ritual.

From Kathmandu, a scenic drive or short flight takes you to Pokhara, the gateway to the Annapurna Range and a haven for nature lovers. Here, mornings begin with boat rides on Phewa Lake, mist-softened views of snow-capped peaks lingering on the horizon, and visits to limestone caves like Mahendra Cave that mix geology with myth. For adventure and calm alike, Pokhara offers paragliding, lakeside cafes, and sunrise viewpoints that make the Himalayas feel alive.

Whether exploring heritage sites or reflecting by mountain lakes, Nepal delivers richness in every direction, perfect for a five-day escape.

Day 3 is reserved for Ha Long Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Whether on a day cruise or short overnight journey, emeralds waters and towering cliffs make a powerful finale.

Together, these destinations balance city life, countryside calm, and natural wonder, ideal for a short but deeply immersive escape.

Turkey: Istanbul and Cappadocia - Yes, It's Possible

Some travellers may assume that seeing Turkey's magic in five days is impossible; that a country this rich in history and landscape demands weeks. But with smart planning, five days can offer a memorable slice of Turkey's heart: the urban marvel of Istanbul and the surreal vistas of Cappadocia.

Start in Istanbul with its iconic sights on Day 1 and 2, Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace, and the bustling Grand Bazaar immerse you in centuries of Ottoman and Byzantine legacy.

A Bosphorus cruise adds a scenic rhythm to the city experience, while spice stalls and cafe culture reveal daily life in the city that bridges two continents. Mid-trip, fly to Cappadocia where otherworldly landscapes await.

The Goreme Open-Air Museum, fairy chimneys of Love Valley, and underground cities showcase both nature's artistry and ancient ingenuity. A sunrise hot-air balloon ride here becomes the highlight of many travels, painting the sky over rock formations like a dream.

With domestic flights and compact touring, five days in Turkey doesn't just cover highlights, it creates unforgettable moments.

Travel That Respects Your Time

Short vacations are no longer about ticking destinations off a list. They are about emotional return on time invested.

These five places succeed because they offer completeness, each gives travellers a sense of arrival, experience, and closure within days. For Bangladeshi travellers navigating demanding lives, these destinations prove that you don't need long vacations to feel renewed. Sometimes, a few well-chosen days away are enough to come back lighter, clearer, and ready again.

By Farhana Faiza
Photo: Collected