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A Feast *for* PUJA

PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED
FOOD & PLATING: RBR



Drums, lights, and the return of joy



Every autumn, something shifts in the air across Bangladesh. The evenings cool a little, the markets grow busier, and the sound of the dhak begins drifting through neighbourhoods long before the first pandal goes up. Durga Puja is arriving, and for a few days, the country's worries seem to step quietly aside.

Inflation has made many household budgets stretch far thinner than they once did, and news from around the world rarely offers much comfort. Yet when the festivities finally begin, familiar anxieties give way to something older and warmer. Families who have spent months counting every taka find themselves buying new clothes for the children, sharing sweets with neighbours and lingering over conversations that have nothing to do with bills or headlines.

In the pages ahead, we take you on a journey through the season's spirit. Discover the historic Hindu temples across Bangladesh worth a visit this festive period, and find recipes for the dishes that fill family kitchens during the celebrations. Flip through the pages and let the festivities begin.

-- LS Desk
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed/ Collected





#TRAVEL

7 temples that hold centuries of stories

As Durga Puja approaches this autumn, temples across Bangladesh prepare to come alive with worship, colour, music and gatherings of devotees. But beyond the festive atmosphere, many of these temples carry stories that stretch back centuries, preserved through distinctive architecture, enduring traditions and generations of worshippers.

From elaborate terracotta walls to hilltop shrines and temples that have survived war and upheaval, each offers a different glimpse into the country's religious and cultural heritage. This Puja season, here are seven temples worth visiting for the stories they hold as much as the sights they offer.

KANTAJEW TEMPLE, DINAJPUR

Including Kantajew Temple in a list of Bangladesh's must-visit temples almost feels inevitable. Built in the 18th century under the patronage of Maharaja Prannath, the temple is best known for its extraordinary terracotta work, with its walls carrying scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Krishna's life, alongside glimpses of life in Bengal.

Originally built in the Navaratna style, its nine spires were destroyed by the 1897 earthquake, but the elaborate terracotta panels survived. The temple also comes alive during the annual Rash Mela around Rash Purnima, when the month-long fair draws devotees and visitors to the area. Even without the festivities, however, Kantajew is the kind of place where simply walking around the walls can keep you looking for another detail.

DHAKESHWARI NATIONAL TEMPLE, DHAKA

Dhakeshwari National Temple has a long history, with its name, meaning "Goddess of Dhaka", closely tied to the city's identity. The temple is traditionally associated with King Ballal Sen of the Sena dynasty and is believed to date back to the 12th century, although its present structure has changed considerably through repeated renovations. The complex includes four small Shiva temples beside its historic pond.

This temple hosts the city's largest Sharadiya celebrations, with Mahalaya marked by Chandipath recitations and the Chokkhu Daan ritual that "opens" the goddess's eyes. On Dashami morning, the iconic procession winds from the temple to Wiseghat for immersion, while devotees fill the grounds.

PUTHIA TEMPLE COMPLEX, RAJSHAHI

Puthia feels more like an entire temple landscape than a single architectural masterpiece. The historic complex in Rajshahi is home to a remarkable collection of temples, ponds, and remainders of the Puthia Raj family's estate. The complex includes the Govinda Temple, the lakeside Bhubaneshwar Shiva Temple and curved Dolmancha used for Rath Jatra.

Built mainly between the 18th and 19th centuries, the temples showcase different forms of Bengal's religious architecture, with terracotta and traditional silhouettes appearing across several structures. The large Shiv Sagar pond adds another layer to the setting. Rather than rushing from one shrine to another, Puthia is best experienced as a place to wander, look around, and take in how closely its temples and old landscape fit together.

CHANDRANATH TEMPLE, SITAKUNDA

Reaching Chandranath Temple is part of the experience. Perched on 350-metre Chandranath Hill in Sitakunda, the temple is one of Bangladesh's best-known pilgrimage sites, and is regarded as one of the 51 Shakti Peethas where part of Goddess Sati's body fell.

Thousands of devotees make the climb each year during the Shiva Chaturdashi festival, turning the usually quiet hill into a lively pilgrimage route. While Mahashivratri brings the largest crowds, Sharadiya Puja also draws devotees who combine Navaratri worship with the hill's panoramic views. For visitors who enjoy places where the journey is almost as memorable as the destination, Chandranath is difficult to overlook.

BHABANIPUR SHAKTIPEETH, BOGURA

Set beside the Karatoya River in rural Bogura, **Bhabanipur** temple complex is regarded as one of the Shakti Peethas, where devotees worship Goddess Bhavani, also known as Aparna. Bhabanipur has grown into a larger sacred complex with several shrines, Shiva temples and a pond known as Shankha Pukur.

Daily Devi puja, recitations of the Devi Mahatmyam and seasonal festivals keep the complex alive. During Sharadiya Puja, pilgrims from across Bangladesh and neighbouring India gather for special rituals. Its quieter setting makes Bhabanipur particularly interesting for anyone curious about Bangladesh's older traditions of goddess worship and living pilgrimage culture.

RAMNA KALI TEMPLE, DHAKA

Ramna Kali Temple carries a history that goes far beyond its role as a place of worship. Located beside Suhrawardy Udyan, the temple is believed to have originated as an ashram several centuries ago before the main temple was built and expanded under Rani Bilashmoni Devi. Its most devastating chapter came in 1971, when the temple and the adjoining Ma Anandamoyee Ashram were destroyed during the Liberation War.

The site was later rebuilt, with the reconstructed temple inaugurated in 2021. Today, the temple hosts major Kali Puja and Sharadiya Durga Puja celebrations, with pushpanjali, arati and Sindur Khela drawing thousands on Dashami. Today, Ramna Kali stands as more than an old temple in the heart of Dhaka, bringing together religious heritage and national history.

JESHORESHWARI KALI TEMPLE, SATKHIRA

In the village of Ishwaripur in Satkhira, Jeshoreshwari Kali Temple is one of Bangladesh's most significant pilgrimage sites. The temple is believed to have been established centuries ago and has undergone several changes over time. Its surviving Natmandir, with its rows of pillars, is one of the most recognisable parts of the site.

While Kali Puja is the main annual draw, Sharadiya Navaratri and Durga Puja are also observed with village-wide festivities. For visitors willing to travel beyond the usual tourist circuit, Jeshoreshwari offers a quieter encounter with one of Bengal's oldest traditions of Goddess worship.

By Mir Elham Bin Ahmed
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed; Location: Dhakeshwari Temple, Dhaka



#PROFILE

Why Esha Rushdi prefers raw vulnerability over curated perfection



In a digital world dominated by filters and polished highlights, creator Esha Rushdi offers a refreshing mirror. Discover how her commitment to unvarnished honesty is redefining what it means to build genuine connections online.

Her journey into the public eye did not follow a traditional script. Long before the term "content creator" became a household job description, Rushdi was already documenting her life. She was the person sharing cooking experiments and capturing unscripted, funny moments with her son. With a background in communication, she naturally gravitated toward editing and visual storytelling, driven by an innate desire to forge genuine bonds with an audience.

That natural affinity for human connection traces back to her childhood. She was always the person others gravitated toward, someone who could make strangers feel comfortable enough to open up within minutes.

"Making people feel good about themselves and about life is a gift I was born with," she says, smiling.

It was this quiet, instinctive charm that laid the groundwork for everything she would build later on.

FROM A FASHION HOUSE TO A BEAUTY VENTURE

Esha Rushdi's path to entrepreneurship was equally organic, shaped by life's shifting chapters. Having navigated roles as a student, a housewife, and a stay-at-home mother, she did not step into business until after her son was born. Rushdi started working with a local fashion house before eventually taking a leap of faith to build her own beauty venture, The Powder Room.

When she first started, success meant building a business people could trust. But as her platform grew, so did her vision.

"Now, with a growing platform, I can reach more people and create a bigger impact," Rushdi emphasises.

"For me, success is no longer just about what I build; it is about how many people







I can connect with along the way," she adds. This evolution from a traditional entrepreneur to a community builder highlights a deep shift in her priorities. This explains how she is curating a space for shared experiences.

That same hunger for deeper connection eventually birthed her podcast, The Other Side, by Esha Rushdi. Growing up watching legendary interviewers like Oprah Winfrey and later drawing inspiration from modern long-form shows like The Diary of a CEO, she wanted to create a space that moved beyond surface-level chatter. She wanted unvarnished, vulnerable stories.

"I wanted to create a space where guests could feel comfortable being honest and sharing the parts of their stories we don't usually get to hear," she shares.

The emotional resonance of the podcast has far exceeded anything she originally expected.

FINDING BALANCE IN THE CHAOS

Juggling entrepreneurship, a growing podcast, content creation, and family life is a constant tightrope walk. Yet, Rushdi refuses to subscribe to the toxic productivity culture that defines modern entrepreneurship. She does not keep a rigid routine. Instead, she takes each day as it comes, focusing on what matters most and making ample time for her family.

When creative fatigue hits, she does not believe in forcing ideas. She steps away from work for a few days, rests, and resets through travel or a simple change of scenery.

On chaotic days, she reminds herself why she started. "I do all of this because I am passionate about it, and I should enjoy it too," she declares.

She chooses to take things one step at a time, keeping a healthy balance and protecting her mental peace.

LOOKING TOWARD LIVE HORIZONS

Looking ahead, Rushdi is excited about the future of her brand and community. The love and respect she received from her audience mean everything to her, even if it is just someone watching for three seconds. She hopes to pass that inspiration on by giving people a space to feel heard.

Her next big dream involves taking those deep conversations beyond the digital screen. She envisions a large live talk show where people can gather in person, share their stories, and feel part of something tangible and meaningful.

Esha Rushdi proves that true influence is built on empathy, turning ordinary spaces into arenas of genuine human understanding.

By Tagabun Taharim Titun
Photo: Courtesy



#TRENDS

How a guitar school from Bandarban touched hearts

Recently, a Facebook video of children from Bandarban playing guitars and singing songs went viral on Facebook. I personally discovered them performing the "Bus Shohokari" song by the musical band Bagdhara. The children of Bandarban strumming the guitar strings in harmony captivated me instantly.

Bawm Ram Tiam Amlai, the founder of Basic Guitar Learning School, mentions, "One cannot progress much in guitar without basics, so my aim was to teach basics of guitar to the children." That is how the name came into place.

Amlai adds, "I have seen kids playing digital games from a very early age. Instead of getting into bad habits like online gambling, drugs, video games, I want them to be involved in playing guitar." Hence started the journey of Basic Guitar Learning School.

The beginnings were small: 4 or 5 students came to a small room in the 2nd floor of a house in New Gulshan, Bandarban. Now, almost 50 students are playing guitar at Marma Artists Group Training Room in Bandarban town.

What started as a journey in 2018 has now won the hearts of millions online and reached many popular bands. The first song cover that gained widespread popularity over the internet was "Asha" by the rock band Warfaze. "Later, during our performance day at Manik Mia Avenue, we met the band members in person and sang the same song in front of them in the green room," mentions Amlai.

In these 8 years, Amlai did not stop his lessons even when the pandemic struck. Over WhatsApp calls with his students, he kept delivering guitar lessons.

Amlai mentions, "There are students who are even 10 years old learning guitar. Some of the students come from five to ten kilometres away."

He did not think his videos would gain so much popularity; he just started posting to keep memories. In this regard, Amlai adds, "I wanted to keep these videos saved in my page so that the children can come and look back at these when they get older."

Till now, Basic Guitar Learning School has performed in four programs in Dhaka and



had two performances in Bandarban. Last year, on occasion of Chaitra Sankranti, 12 of his students performed the song "Heal the World" along with the band Warfaze in tribute to Michael Jackson at BICC. This year, they were invited to sing the National



Anthem in a program at the National Parliament Complex.

He recalls one special moment from the performance at National Parliament Complex, "The school students who came as audience were taking autographs and clicking pictures with the children of Basic Guitar Learning School. We did not know any of them, even they did not know me, but they knew the children who performed in those Facebook videos."

Basic Guitar Learning School also performed at the opening ceremony of Poh Chu Gro that took place this September in Bandarban, organized by Green Milieu and British Council Bangladesh.

The children can currently perform songs in five different languages: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, English, and Bengali. He believes that while preserving our own culture, we should also respect different cultures. Amlai mentions, "By performing songs from different languages and different cultures, we can make people from that culture feel happy and respected."

He was inspired to playing guitar when he saw his seniors performing at school functions. And now, Amlai's students are inspired by him. Some of his students even post videos of them playing guitar on their social media.

Amlai extends his gratitude to Chathui Pru Sir, who had encouraged him to play the guitar. He highlights in this regard, "If it was not for Chathui Pru Sir, I would not have been where I am today."

With encouragement from him, Amlai joined the Chimbuk band, one of the earliest bands in Bandarban. Amlai dreams that in the future, some of his students would also be a part of that band.

Speaking of his aims, Amlai notes, "I would be more than happy if even one or two students can come up as a rising star." Every year, as an end of year ritual, Amlai records his students' yearly accomplishments and performances. He dreams to build a studio one day where students can play guitar, perform other artistic activities, and engage in meaningful conversations.

By Labiba Tasnim
Photo: Courtesy







#FOOD & RECIPES

Bring the unforgettable flavours of Durga Puja to your dinner table

Durga Puja is as much a celebration of rich, unforgettable flavours as it is of tradition and togetherness. Whether you are hosting a festive gathering for friends or preparing a cosy meal for your family, serving the right balance of classic Bengali comfort foods and festive centrepieces makes all the difference. From crispy Luchi with sweet Suji to flavourful Bhuna Khichuri, tender Mutton Curry, and delicate Patishapta, these 15 authentic, easy-to-follow recipes bring the magic and warmth of traditional festive dining straight to your home kitchen.

Star LIFE Style

VEGETABLE BATTER FRY

Ingredients

2/3 cup maida (refined flour)
1/3 cup corn flour, 1 tsp rice flour
½ tsp turmeric powder
1/3 tsp cooking soda
Salt and sugar, to taste, 1 cup oil
Sliced potato, brinjal and pumpkin or any other combination of vegetables

Method

Wash the sliced vegetables and add salt and sugar to them and keep aside. In a bowl, add maida, corn flour, rice flour, turmeric powder, cooking soda and salt and mix well. Add water to make a batter thick enough to coat the vegetables and set aside. Heat oil in a wok. Drain the vegetables of the salt and sugar water. Dip in batter and deep fry.

LABRA (MIXED VEGETABLES)

Ingredients

½ tsp turmeric powder
1/3 tsp chili powder
½ tsp cumin powder (jeera)
1/3 tsp coriander powder
¼ tsp asafoetida (Hing), optional
¾ tsp panch phoron
4 green chilies, split
½ tsp wheat flour(atta)
1 tsp ghee, 2 tbsp oil
6 daaler bori (optional)
Vegetables such as potato, pumpkin, brinjal, radish, cauliflower, cabbage, bean and whatever else you have available in the refrigerator

Method

Heat oil in wok. If you add daaler bori, fry first and keep aside. Temper oil with two slit green chilies and paanch phoron. Add the cut vegetables and the turmeric, chilli, cumin, asafoetida and coriander powder and salt and sugar. Fry till the raw flavour is gone and a fried smell prevails. Then add water and cook till it is completely absorbed and the vegetables are cooked. When done, add the bori, remaining green chillies, ghee and wheat flour and mix. Cover to allow standing time and serve.

CREAM PANEER (COTTAGE CHEESE)

Ingredients

250g paneer, cut into small cubes
1 cup fresh milk or powder milk
3-4 tsp fresh cream or coffee mate (you can also use milk powder)
1 black cardamom, 4 green cardamom
3 cloves, 1 bay leaf
1 medium sized potato, boiled and cubed
1 green capsicum, cubed
1 tbsp ghee
2 tbsp oil
½ tsp ginger paste
4 green chilies, slightly slit
Salt to taste



Method

Heat oil in wok. Fry the paneer and keep aside. Fry capsicum and keep aside. Add ghee to the oil and temper with the whole spices. Add the ginger paste. Then put the boiled potato cubes and fry them. Add milk, coffee mate and then cover it and let it cook. Add the paneer cubes and green chilies and cook on low flame so that the flavour of milk infuses into the paneer. Add the capsicum, and then allow a 1-minute standing time and remove from flame.

CAULIFLOWER AND POTATO CURRY

Ingredients

1 small cauliflower, cut into small flowerets
2 medium potatoes, cut into wedges
1 green capsicum, cut into half-inch squares (optional)
1½ tsp turmeric powder
¾ tsp chilli powder
1 tsp cumin powder
1 bay leaf
3 tbsp oil
1 tsp ghee
½ tsp garam masala powder
1 tsp wheat flour(atta)
2 green chillies, split

Method

Heat oil in a pan. If you use capsicum, fry it in some oil until it softens and keep aside. Add the cauliflower to the oil. Add salt and sugar as per taste and fry until all the water is absorbed and the raw smell is gone. Add ½ tsp of turmeric powder and fry till a nice aroma pervades, then remove from oil.

In the same oil, add 1 bay leaf and the potatoes and fry. Make sure to season it with some salt. Add the remaining turmeric powder, chilli powder and cumin powder with 2 tbsp of water and cook until all the water evaporates and the oil starts to float on top. Then add ½ cup of water and cover to allow the potatoes to boil. When the potatoes become soft, add the cauliflower, but do not cover the lid, or else the trapped vapour will make the cauliflowers soggy. The curry needs to have a thick consistency so don't be afraid to add more water and wheat flour if needed at this stage.

Finally, add the capsicum, ghee, garam masala powder, green chillies and salt and sugar as per taste before serving.

VEGETARIAN EGG

Ingredients

For the egg
500ml full cream milk made into paneer
Saffron, for food colouring
4 medium potatoes, boiled and mashed
1 tsp ginger paste
Salt, to taste
3 tbsp cornflour, mixed with ½ cup of water
4 tbsp of oil

For gravy —
½ tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp chilli powder
½ tsp cumin powder
½ tsp ginger paste
1 medium tomato, chopped
1tsp white Vinegar
Salt, to taste
½ tsp garam masala
1tsp ghee
1 bay leaf

Method

Mash the paneer and add a pinch of salt and the saffron colour. If needed, add a little bit more of the saffron colour to resemble the colour of an egg yolk and mould into balls.

Add the ginger paste and salt to mashed potatoes and make oval shaped balls surrounding the paneer balls. Dip into the cornflour batter and then deep fry them.

For gravy —
Add 1 bay leaf to the leftover oil from frying the vegetarian eggs. Then one by one, add powdered chilli, cumin, ginger paste, chopped tomatoes and salt. Pour ½ cup of water and fry till it evaporates.

Add the vinegar and 1 cup of water to make the curry. Then place the vegetarian eggs into the curry, garam masala powder, ghee and serve.

DHOKAR DALNA

Ingredients

For dhoka
1 cup gram lentil, washed and immersed in water
sugar to the paste to make a thick batter. In a pan, heat oil, add the batter and keep stirring till the water is absorbed. Spread on a greased plate and allow to cool. Cut into rectangular pieces.

To make the curry —
Heat oil in a pan and fry the dhokas and then keep aside. In the remaining pan, add the whole spices. Add the powdered turmeric, cumin, asafoetida and chilli and ginger paste, tomato puree, vinegar, salt, and sugar (as per taste) and some warm water. Cook until there is a layer of oil floating on the top and the raw smell of the spices are gone. Then incorporate the fried dhokas into the sauce and add sufficient water (for the dhokas to boil) as they tend to absorb a lot of the water in general. Add ghee, garam masala and split green chillies and mix well. Remove from flame and serve.

FRIED HILSA (ILISH BHAJA)

Ingredients

6 pieces Hilsa fish
1 tsp onion paste
½ tsp garlic paste
½ tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp vinegar, Cornflour
Salt, to taste

Method

Marinate the fish with all the ingredients. In a separate bowl, combine water and cornflour to make a thin batter. Heat oil in a pan, there should be enough oil to shallow fry the Hilsa. Dip the pieces of fish in the batter and then the oil and fry till golden brown.

TOMATO CHUTNEY

Ingredients

8 tomatoes, cut into thick slices



1-inch ginger
½ tsp turmeric powder
3 green chillies (or as per taste)
Salt and sugar, for taste
1 tbsp of oil
For the curry —
1 tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp chilli powder
½ tsp jeera powder
½ tsp ginger paste
1 tbsp tomato puree
1 bay leaf
2 cinnamon sticks
3 green cardamoms
2 cloves
¼ tsp of asafoetida powder
1 tsp vinegar
1 cup oil
1 tsp ghee
green chillies, as per taste

Method

To make dhoka —
Blend the gram lentil with ginger and green chillies and a little bit of water to make a paste. Add the turmeric powder, salt, and

4 tbsp sugar
½ tsp salt
2 seeds of tamarind or 6 dried plums (shuknaboroi)
Water, to soften
1 tbsp oil
1 tsp of mustard seeds
1 dried red chilli
1 tbsp oil
3 mango bars (store bought), cut into squared, or raisins (optional)

Method

For the syrup —
In a pan, boil the tomatoes with salt and add 1/3 cup of water till the tomatoes soften. Add the tamarind or dried plums and sugar. You may also add the mango bar pieces and raisins. Remove from flame and set aside.

In a separate pan, heat oil for tempering. Add the red chillies and fry. Add the mustard seeds and after they start cracking, pour only the oil directly into the syrup. Without adding any extra oil, heat the temper until the oil is absorbed and mix into the syrup. Serve in desired bowl.

MUTTON CURRY

Ingredients

500g mutton, washed and drained
2 tbsp yoghurt
3 desi onions, finely sliced for 'beresta'
1/3 tsp nutmeg powder
1 tsp ginger paste
½ tsp garlic paste
1 tsp onion paste
1 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp coriander powder
2 tsp almond and raisin paste
2 potatoes, peeled and cut into halves and washed (optional)
1 bay leaf
2-inch pieces of cinnamon stick
1 black cardamom
4 cloves
4 tbsp butter oil
3 green chillies
Salt, to taste

Method

Marinate mutton with yoghurt, salt and nutmeg for about 30 minutes. Heat the butter oil and fry the onion slices with a little bit of salt till the onions become golden brown, and place in a bowl draining the oil as much as you can from it. In the same pan, without adding any extra oil, fry the potatoes with a pinch of salt and keep aside as well.

In a separate pan, temper oil with the whole spices and add the ginger, garlic, and onion paste.

Add powdered chilli and coriander, salt and ¾ cups of water and cook until the water completely evaporates and the raw smell of masalas disappear. Add the marinated mutton and half of the fried onions and cover. Cook on medium flame. The mutton will cook in its own juices.

Add the fried potatoes, green chillies and ½ cup of water and cover for 5-10 minutes to allow the mutton and potatoes to absorb the flavours in the curry. Add the remaining fried onions as garnishing and serve.

BHUNA KHICHURI

Ingredients

1 cup pulao rice
1 cup dry roasted mung daal
1½ tsp freshly grated coconut
1 bay leaf
1 black cardamom
4 green cardamoms
2 cinnamon sticks, roughly 1½ inches thick
6 peppercorns
1 tbsp ginger paste
1 tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp chilli powder
½ tsp coriander powder
½ tsp cumin powder
4 tbsp ghee
6 green chillies
½ tsp garam masala powder
Hot water

Method

Wash and soak the pulao and mung daal before starting. Drain water from rice and daal. Heat ghee in a pot and temper with the whole spices. Add the coconut and fry until golden brown. Add the rice, 2-3 split green chillies and ginger paste, salt and fry till a rich aroma pervades. Add sugar and stir well so that it coats the rice.

Add the daal and further fry so that the daal absorbs the ghee and spices. Add all the other dry masalas (except for the garam masala powder) and fry well till the raw smell of the masalas is gone. Add 5 cups of water, and cover and cook on high flame.

When almost done, add the garam masala powder, the remaining green chillies and ghee (optional)

Over a low flame, let the khichuri cook for 5 more minutes before serving.

LUCHI

Ingredients

1½ cup maida flour
1/3 tsp salt
1 tbsp ghee or oil
3 cups oil, for deep frying



Method

Add the salt and ghee to the flour and mix it in well. Then start mixing in the water, little at a time to make a stiff dough. The end result should be a dough with a rubber like texture. Cover and allow to rest for 15 to 30 minutes.

Then make small round balls from the dough. For this amount of flour, you should get 10-12 balls. Heat oil in a pan. Roll out the balls into flat disc-like shapes with a diameter of 4-4" and deep fry the oil.

SUJI (WITH LUCHI)

Ingredients

1 cup semolina (suji)
1 cup sugar
3 tbsp ghee
1 tbsp raisins
6 green cardamoms, crushed
Warm water

Method

Heat ghee in a pan and temper it with the crushed cardamoms. Add the semolina and lightly fry it till it turns golden brown and then mix in the sugar, raisins, and enough water to cook the semolina. When the water is absorbed and semolina is cooked, remove from the flame and serve.

Note: This semolina is fried lightly and more ghee and sugar are added to get a runny texture so that it complements the luchi. When adding the sugar, you can start of by adding ¾ of a cup of sugar and check before adding more to adjust how sweet you want it to.

Recipe Compilation: LS Desk
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Food and Plating: RBR

#CAREER

The rise of the passion economy

Turning hobbies into modern careers

The line between pastime and profession is blurring as more creative minds find ways to monetise their interests. Explore the shifting mindset toward alternative careers and entrepreneurship.

Hobbies are the things we do after work, between classes or whenever we get a little time for ourselves. But the moment someone suggests turning one into a career, the questions begin. Is there enough money in it? Is it stable? What happens if it does not work out?



Ashraf Shiddike Rizve

In Bangladesh, where career choices are often tied to financial security and conventional professions, choosing a less familiar path can take some courage. Yet, some people decide to take that chance. Their hobbies become businesses, their interests become professions, and something they once did simply because they enjoyed it starts paying the bills.

Their journeys are rarely straightforward. For some, the transition takes years. For others, it begins with a small business opportunity. And for some, the first sign that a hobby could become a career is simply getting paid for doing it.

KNOWING WHEN TO TAKE THE LEAP

For Ashraf Shiddike Rizve, founder of Aquarium Park Dhaka, it was a process that stretched across decades. What began as keeping fish gradually grew into an interest in aquatic life, aquascaping and nature.

Around 2011, he and other hobbyists started Bangladesh Aquarists, a Facebook community for people interested in fishkeeping. As the community grew, so did the demand for products and services, eventually leading to Nature Aquatics and, years later, Aquarium Park Dhaka.

"Eventually, however, I realised that this was something I genuinely wanted to build my life around," Rizve said.

His story shows that taking the leap does not always mean making one dramatic decision. Sometimes, it happens through a series of smaller ones.

For comic book artist Fahim Anzoom Rumman, who has worked with Dhaka Comics and Prothom Alo, there was no fixed point either. His work with The Daily Star magazine Rising Stars helped push him towards digital art, but the real turning point came when his work started earning him money.

"The turning point, I think, would be when I first started earning. This was around 12 years ago," Rumman said.

And for Raihan Ahmad, founder of BanglaNumis Auction, the transition came from an opportunity hidden inside his existing hobby. As a banknote collector, he would sometimes buy multiple copies of an item, keeping the best one and selling the extras at a small profit.

Over time, he realised that his knowledge and network could support something larger. That eventually became BanglaNumis Auction, a platform for collectable banknotes, coins and other numismatic items.

WHEN THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU DON'T QUITE GET IT

Taking an unconventional career path can be difficult even before the first business problem appears.

Rizve felt that pressure partly because of his education. After studying pharmacy, choosing to build a career around fish and nature naturally raised questions. His family eventually understood that this was not a



sudden decision. His father, who kept birds, had actually encouraged his son's interest in fishkeeping.

Rumman's experience was similar. His parental support was limited at first, but changed after his work for Rising Stars began generating an income.

"When I started writing for Rising Stars and earning, they realised that it was something serious," he said.

Ahmad, meanwhile, did not face the same family pressure. His family and friends supported his decision, although there was some uncertainty because numismatics remains a specialised field.

Sometimes, the challenge is not convincing people that you enjoy something. It is convincing them that something you enjoy can become a viable profession.

THE HOBBY STOPS BEING JUST A HOBBY

Once money, customers, employees and deadlines enter the picture, the freedom of simply doing something for fun can disappear.

Rizve acknowledges that shift. There are days when his work feels more like a business than a passion, particularly when he has to think about investment, operations and customers.

For Rumman, the challenges changed as his career developed. He spent years building the skills required to work professionally and later joined another venture where he could not express his creativity in the way he wanted.

His experience has taught him that the obstacles do not necessarily become easier; they simply change.

"At every stage, my obstacles changed dynamically and if you want be successful you need to adapt to the unpredictable obstacles," Rumman said.

For Ahmad, one of the greatest difficulties has been dealing with customs procedures when importing collectable items from international auctions and dealers. Delays, classification issues and shipping problems can make international trading difficult.

Rizve has faced a different set of problems. Building an aquarium business meant helping customers understand proper fishkeeping, filtration and water quality. As Aquarium Park Dhaka grew, the challenges expanded to large aquarium systems, landscaping, visitor management and maintenance.



Raihan Ahmad

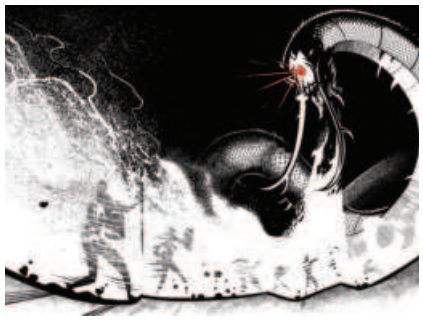
SO, DO THEY REGRET IT?

A hobby can look very different once it becomes the source of your income. That does not necessarily mean the decision was a mistake.

Neither Rizve nor Ahmad regrets making the change.



Fahim Anzoom Rumman



Rizve acknowledges that he would have approached some business and financial decisions differently. But the wider choice remains one he stands by.

For him, there is something satisfying about seeing a childhood interest become an experience shared by other people.

Ahmad has no regrets about turning collecting into his profession, particularly because he gets to work in a field he genuinely enjoys.

Rumman's regret is not about choosing art. Instead, he wishes his work could reach more people through translation.

"I'd like all my works to be translated into multiple languages," he said, pointing out that something that works in English may not necessarily work in Bangla.

What you should know before you turn your hobby into your job

Their advice is similar in one important way: enjoying something is not enough to make it a business.

Rizve advises people to understand their market and customers before making a major investment. He also stresses learning first and building a community around the hobby.

"Don't confuse passion



with a business model," he said.

Ahmad also puts knowledge before business. He advises aspiring hobby-based entrepreneurs to develop expertise, understand their market, start small and build a reputation based on trust rather than chasing quick profits.

For Rumman, networking and collaboration matter. He advises artists to build trust within their community, reach out to other artists and understand their audience. In Bangladesh, he says, social media can be useful for making those connections.

All three point to the same uncomfortable truth: there is no guarantee that passion will pay.

Turning a hobby into a profession requires learning the business side, adapting when circumstances change and accepting that something once done purely for enjoyment may eventually come with pressure.

But perhaps that is the real leap of faith.

For Rizve, it took more than three decades. For Ahmad, a collection became a business. For Rumman, earning from his art showed him that it could be more than a hobby.

None of their journeys followed the same route. There is no fixed timeline for turning something you love into a living. Sometimes, you simply have to start and see where it takes you.

By Mehdi Islam Mahi
Photo: Courtesy

#PRESS RELEASES

Aarong launches “Sharodiyo Getaway” campaign this Puja, for My Aarong rewards member



As Bangladesh gets ready to celebrate Durga Puja, Aarong has launched “Sharodiyo Getaway”, a festive campaign under the My Aarong Rewards programme. Running until 21 October 2026, the campaign gives customers the chance to win rewards and exclusive offers across travel, hospitality, dining, entertainment and home appliances.

Customers who make a purchase of Tk 3,000 or more at any Aarong outlet or on aarong.com will receive a scratch card with every qualifying purchase. In-store shoppers can collect their scratch card at the payment counter, while online shoppers will receive it with their qualifying order. The rewards come courtesy of nine partners. NOVOAIR is offering free round-trip air tickets to any destination, Rangs eMart is offering free home appliances or discounts of up to 20 per cent, and Ramada by Wyndham Cox’s Bazar Kolatoli Beach is offering a free staycation or 55 per cent off accommodation. Pizza Hut is offering a complimentary meal or a free pizza, Mana Bay a buy-one-get-one offer, and WOWZA a free entry pass and buy-one-get-one offer. Terracotta Tales is offering a voucher worth Tk 5,000, Six Seasons Hotel 15 per cent off its à la carte menu, and The Slow Garden a free night’s staycation.

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Tackling Vitamin D Deficiency in Bangladesh



Bangladesh is blessed with abundant sunshine. Yet vitamin D deficiency is an important nutritional concern. Vitamin D is essential for calcium absorption, bone mineralisation, muscle function and skeletal health. Severe deficiency can cause rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults.

A review of studies conducted in Bangladesh between 2002 and 2022 found a substantial burden of vitamin D deficiency, particularly among women, pregnant women and older adults.

WHY DEFICIENCY IN A COUNTRY FULL OF SUNSHINE?

The answer lies in the difference between sunlight availability and meaningful sunlight exposure. Urbanisation and modern lifestyles have reduced outdoor activity. Many people spend most of their day indoors. Women who spend



limited time outdoors may be particularly vulnerable.

Sociocultural clothing styles that cover most of the skin reduce the area available for vitamin D production. Sunscreen, cosmetics and skin pigmentation also play a role. People with darker skin generally require greater ultraviolet-B exposure to produce the same amount of vitamin D as people with lighter skin. Older adults have a reduced capacity to synthesise vitamin D through the skin, while obesity and limited physical activity may also contribute.

WHAT DOES VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY DO?

The strongest evidence relates to bone and muscle health. In children, severe deficiency can impair bone mineralisation and cause nutritional rickets. In adults, prolonged severe deficiency can result in osteomalacia, bone pain and muscle weakness. Adequate vitamin D should therefore be viewed as one component of broader bone health, alongside calcium, protein and physical activity.

Low vitamin D levels have also been associated with obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disorders and infections. However, an association does not necessarily mean supplementation prevents or treats these diseases. Vitamin D is an essential nutrient, not a universal cure.

WHO NEEDS PARTICULAR ATTENTION?

Some people deserve closer nutritional and clinical attention, including:

- Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Infants, children and adolescents with limited outdoor exposure or inadequate dietary intake
- Older adults
- People who spend very little time outdoors
- Individuals with obesity
- People with disorders or medications affecting vitamin D metabolism

Assessment should be based on individual risk rather than indiscriminate testing.

FOOD FIRST—BUT FOOD ALONE MAY NOT ALWAYS BE ENOUGH

Naturally occurring dietary sources of vitamin D are relatively limited. Fatty sea fish such as hilsa and rupchanda are good sources. Egg yolk, liver and meat provide smaller amounts, while fortified foods can contribute where available. Improving access to appropriately fortified foods could be an important public-health strategy.

SENSIBLE SUNLIGHT HAS A ROLE

Regular outdoor activity can contribute to vitamin D production and offers additional health benefits. However, there is no universal amount of sun exposure that guarantees adequate vitamin D. Production depends on skin pigmentation, age, season, time of day, clothing, exposed skin area and air pollution.

There is a thumb rule that the best time to get natural vitamin D from sunlight in Bangladesh is between 10am and 3pm, when UVB rays are strongest. Exposing at least 20 per cent of the body for 15 to 30 minutes is generally enough, although needs vary by skin tone.

Therefore, “more sun” is not necessarily the answer. Sensible exposure should be balanced with protection from excessive ultraviolet radiation and skin damage.

SHOULD EVERYONE TAKE VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTS?

Not necessarily. Supplementation can be useful when deficiency is diagnosed or an individual has a recognised indication. Taking large doses without medical or nutritional guidance is not harmless.

Vitamin D is fat-soluble, and excessive intake can lead to toxicity and hypercalcaemia, with potentially serious complications.

The 2024 Endocrine Society clinical practice guideline does not recommend routine vitamin D testing or supplementation above the recommended dietary intake for generally healthy adults under 75 without specific indications. Certain groups may benefit from supplementation according to age and clinical circumstances.

WHAT BANGLADESH NEEDS

Vitamin D deficiency is not simply a problem to be solved by prescribing tablets. A sustainable solution requires sunlight, a healthy diet, physical activity, appropriate fortification, targeted supplementation and evidence-based clinical care.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Bangladesh may have abundant sunshine, but sunshine alone does not guarantee adequate vitamin D. The better approach is to spend sensible time outdoors, eat a balanced diet, remain physically active, identify those at risk and use supplements when clinically appropriate.

By Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin
Chief Clinical Dietitian and HOD, Dietetics and Nutrition Department, Continental Hospital PLC



How ancient spices built empires and defined human history



THE FEARLESS OLIVE
REEMA ISLAM

Modern pantries treat spices as ordinary, but history tells a far wilder story. Centuries ago, rare aromatics were so valuable that kingdoms waged wars and guarded trade routes with fierce secrecy.

"No man should die if he can afford cinnamon," remarked a writer in the 14th century, capturing a truth that once governed global commerce, politics and power. Long before oil and gold became the currencies of empires, spices transformed economies, drew ships across unknown oceans and inspired voyages that altered the course of history.

In medieval Europe, dockworkers in London were sometimes paid in cloves, while Roman soldiers received allowances in salt, giving rise to the expression "a man worth his salt." Such was the value of spices that kingdoms guarded the origins of these precious commodities with extraordinary secrecy. The quest for pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg helped create vast trading networks, fuelled maritime exploration and ultimately contributed to the European search for new sea routes — a journey that led to the discovery of the Americas.

Today, a pinch of spice is an everyday pleasure, but there was a time when wars were fought, fortunes made and empires built in pursuit of these fragrant treasures.

The story of spices on the Indian subcontinent stretches back thousands of years. An ordinary meal in the cities of the Indus Valley Civilization may have included salt, asafoetida (hing), pepper or chillies, accompanied by vegetables and staple grains. By the time of the Mauryan Empire, culinary choices had become even more diverse. Kautilya, the renowned strategist and author of the Arthashastra, wrote about the cultivation and trade of several varieties of salt, including sea salt, black salt, rock salt and mineral salts, underlining the importance of flavouring agents in both diet and statecraft.

Buddhist traditions, however, favoured simplicity. Salt, mustard seeds, pepper, and amloki formed part of a restrained cuisine, while foods such as garlic and onion were often avoided. Even humble ingredients carried profound meaning. One of Buddhism's best-known stories recounts how the Buddha asked a grieving mother to bring him mustard seeds from a household untouched by death. When she found no such home, she realised that suffering was universal and that she was not alone in her loss.

Among all spices, few have commanded as much fascination as black pepper. Known as "Black Gold", pepper travelled from the Malabar Coast of Kerala to distant markets in Greece as early as the fourth century BCE. Its immense value attracted merchants, adventurers, and empires, from the Romans to the Portuguese. When Vasco da Gama arrived in India at the end of the 15th century in search of spices, he discovered that he was far from the first claimant to this lucrative trade.

Legend has it that when the Portuguese attempted to carry pepper plants back to Europe, their hosts in Kerala offered a gentle reminder: "You may grow the plant in your country, but how will you give it our rain?" The rich pre- and post-monsoon climate of Kerala — often called "God's Own Country" — gives its pepper a distinctive intensity that proved difficult to replicate elsewhere.

Competition for spices reshaped the world map. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, who found more efficient sea routes around the Cape of Good Hope, and eventually by the British, whose arrival in South Asia was deeply tied to the spice trade. Ironically, British cuisine was once far more heavily seasoned than it is today. As spices became cheaper and more widely available, sections of the aristocracy adopted simpler, blander food as a way of distinguishing themselves from the broader population.

The Mughals brought yet another layer to the subcontinent's culinary heritage. Arriving from Central Asia, Emperor Babur reportedly found Indian food lacking in fragrance. By the reign of Akbar, Mughal kitchens had introduced new aromas and refinements, including the use of rose water to perfume dishes. The Mughals also popularised elaborate desserts and the custom of ending meals with paan, shaping dining traditions that continue across South Asia today.

From the healing qualities associated with turmeric to the astonishing prices once commanded by nutmeg, spices have long been far more than mere ingredients. They are stories of trade, migration, conquest, faith and culture — tiny seeds and powders that connected distant worlds and continue, even now, to awaken our senses.

Photo: Collected

MIND THE GAP

NOSHIN NAWAL
Barrister Noshin Nawal is an activist, feminist and a columnist with a knack for sharp, satirical takes on social and societal issues. She can be reached at nawalnoshin1@gmail.com.



Passport, ticket, husband?

Apparently, paying taxes and signing legal contracts does not qualify you to board an airplane alone. While packing for Bangkok, I learned that true adulthood requires an invisible husband's stamp of approval.

Runi was packing for Bangkok when Aunty Farzana discovered a serious problem with her travel arrangements. She looked at Runi and asked, "Who are you going with?" Runi replied, "Me." Aunty Farzana lowered her teacup and clarified, "No, I mean which person?" With a quizzical look at her aunt, Runi answered, "I am a person, Aunty." This was technically correct but culturally ambitious.

Aunty Farzana was surprised to learn that Runi was travelling alone. She asked why she would do such a thing, and Runi considered explaining that aeroplanes did not require passengers to arrive in pairs. However, she had an early flight and wanted to conserve her strength. Instead, she listened as Aunty Farzana leaned forward and warned her that immigration was very strict nowadays. They might ask where her husband was.



Runi looked down at her passport. It contained her name, nationality, date of birth and photograph. Curiously, there was no section marked HUSBAND: CURRENT LOCATION. She told Aunty Farzana that immigration officers could ask about her travel, but she could not understand why they would need to know where her husband was. Aunty Farzana simply replied that it was "for safety."

Of course. Safety was an extraordinary concept in Bangladesh. A woman could spend two hours navigating broken pavements, buses grazing her elbow and motorcycles approaching from directions previously unknown to geometry. Nobody asked where her husband was. But put her inside an international airport, surrounded by CCTV, security officers and several branches of Premium Sweets, and suddenly, civilisation required male supervision.

Aunty Farzana had recently read about women reportedly being questioned at Dhaka airport about whether they were married, whether their families knew they were travelling and why they were travelling without guardians. She approved of it, insisting that "they are protecting girls." Runi pointed out that these were adult women. Aunty Farzana responded, "Exactly. Young girls."

Runi then asked how old a woman had to be before she became an adult. Aunty Farzana thought about it for a moment before saying, "Depends." When Runi asked what it depended on, Aunty Farzana gave the answer as though it were perfectly obvious: "Whether she is married."

There it was: the unofficial constitutional amendment nobody remembered passing.

At 34, Runi could earn a salary, pay income tax, sign contracts, vote, take out a loan, and be prosecuted for crimes entirely on her own. But apparently, at immigration, she might still need to explain whether somebody at home knew where she was going.

Runi imagined the equivalent conversation with her cousin Rabbi. An immigration officer might ask him, "Sir, are you married?" If he replied, "No," the officer could then ask whether his mother knew he was going to Thailand and who had given him permission. Rabbi would probably assume it was a prank and look around for cameras. Nobody would call it protection. They would call it ridiculous.

That was the clever thing about restrictions placed on women. They rarely introduced themselves as restrictions. They arrived dressed as concern: Be careful. We're only asking. It's for your safety. Does your family know?

By midnight, Runi had packed her passport, ticket, hotel confirmation, travel insurance, and enough skincare to survive a minor corona crisis. Just before she finished, Aunty Farzana appeared at the bedroom door and advised her to take her marriage certificate, just in case.

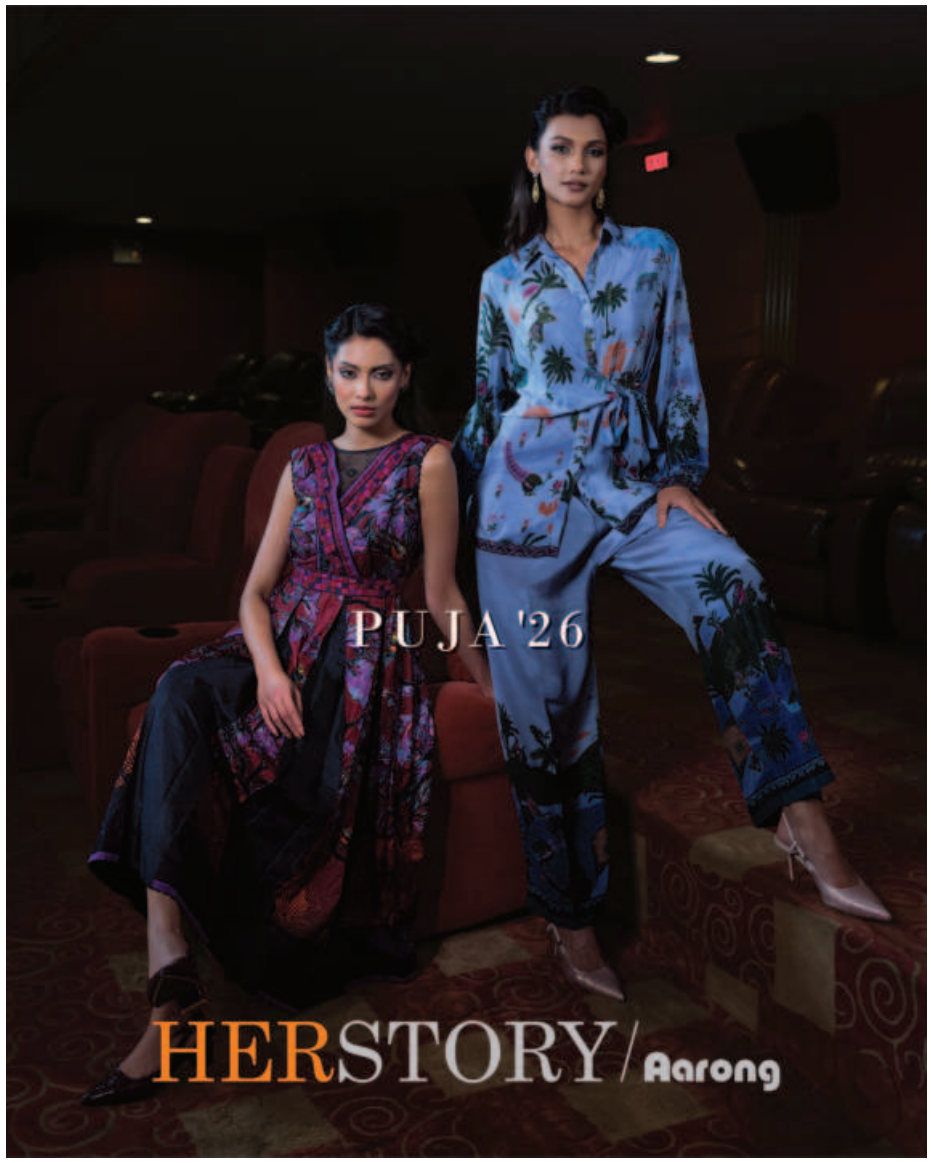
Runi stared at her aunt and replied, "Aunty, I'm going on holiday, not applying for a residency."

The next morning, Runi reached the airport. She had her passport, ticket, visa, hotel confirmation and travel insurance. When she was asked about the purpose of her travel, she simply answered, "Tourism."

For a brief moment, Runi wondered whether she should also declare that her husband was alive, informed, and broadly supportive. Instead, she handed over her passport.

Because perhaps the question was never whether Bangladeshi women were capable of travelling alone. Perhaps the real question was why, after all these years, their independence still seemed to require a permission slip.

Photo: Representational Image: AI generated





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#FOOD & RECIPES

Can Dhaka's pet café industry find its nine lives?

Furry Cafe

Walk into a café in Dhaka today and you might not just be handed a menu — you might also get a rule board telling you how to greet a cat. That is the reality of the city's newest experiment: the pet café.

There are only two keeping the concept alive in Dhaka — A T M Ragib Raihan, owner of Furrycafe in Tejgaon, and Zeeshan Sadeque, owner of Robbie Bobbie Café, along with his co-owner Mayisha Alamgir in Bashundhara R/A.

The pet café concept remains small, but it raises a bigger question: can Dhaka's pet café industry survive in a market where several ventures have already closed down?

For animal lovers, the idea sounds appealing. Instead of scrolling through our phones over a favourite drink, there is a cat at our table.



Robbie Bobbie Cafe

But behind that adorable experience lies a complicated and costly industry.

According to Raihan and Alamgir, their motivations came from their love for cats and their desire to support animal welfare and foster homes.

A pet café here is not just a café with cats added to the decor. Alamgir mentioned that the café itself helps create a support system for stray and rescued cats. The business and welfare initiative therefore become intertwined.

Dhaka's pet culture has changed noticeably over the years. More people are keeping pets, rescuing animals from the streets, and speaking up about animal rights, with rescue stories and adoption opportunities frequently appearing on social media. Perhaps it was only a matter of time before that affection moved beyond people's homes and into cafés.

The customers are not limited to pet owners. Animal lovers who cannot keep pets at home can still experience that connection, while families can introduce their children to animals in a controlled environment.

Raihan mentioned that children who are initially afraid of animals can gradually overcome that fear after spending time with the cats.

A pet café can also become someone's first comfortable interaction with an animal. A child who gets anxious around cats might leave having learned that an animal does not need to be chased, picked up, or touched to be loved.

Running a pet café comes with a responsibility that a regular café does not have: the animals cannot be treated like furniture.



Furry Cafe



Robbie Bobbie Cafe

Both Raihan and Alamgir emphasised the importance of keeping food and cats separate. The cafés use partitioned areas so that cats do not come into direct contact with food preparation and serving spaces.

At Furrycafe, Raihan said, "There is a rule board in front of the cat area door for the visitors, and the area is monitored." The message is simple: do not force an interaction because you paid to enter.

If a cat wants to sleep under a chair, it should be allowed to do so. A cat that approaches you may be welcomed, while one that retreats should be left undisturbed.

But the biggest challenge is not regulation; it is sustainability.

A lot of pet cafés have come and gone in Dhaka before. According to Raihan and Alamgir, several cafés eventually shut down, making survival one of the biggest challenges for those still operating.



Robbie Bobbie Cafe

Unlike conventional cafés, the expenses do not stop at rent, ingredients, and staff salaries. There are additional costs such as vaccinations, healthcare, specialised food, regular deep cleaning, and constant monitoring.

This makes us question whether there is enough demand in Dhaka to sustain more pet cafés, or whether the concept will remain a niche experience.

The answer depends on whether we stop seeing these spaces simply as a trend. Bangladesh's growing pet culture indicates there is an audience, and with continued support, the cafés can sustain themselves and help more cats.

The city is already learning to make space for animals in people's homes, online communities, and everyday conversations. The next step is making space for them in our cafés too — patiently, responsibly, and with more support.

By Faria Nowshin Tazin
Photo: Courtesy
Location: Robbie Bobbie Cafe, Furry Cafe