

Political unrest, travel alerts hinder foreign tourist arrivals

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Date: 01 January, 2025



Dhaka : The initial forecast of inbound tourist arrivals in Bangladesh last year was quite promising, with expectations of welcoming several hundreds of foreign visitors, as per the confirmations based on the bookings received prior. Till mid-2024, inbound tour operators of the country were satisfied with the tourist arrival flow.

However, due to the mass unrest beginning July 2024 that toppled the former government, many tourists cancelled their trips to Bangladesh, right before the main travel season (July-June) could even begin.

For instance, The Bengal Tours Ltd, a renowned inbound tour operator, was able to bring 314 foreign tourists from July 2023 to June 2024 before the unrest began.

The political unrest, followed by the travel alerts imposed by several

governments against visiting Bangladesh, led to a 10 per cent drop in foreign tourist arrivals in 2024 compared to 2023's 341 tourists, said Masud Hossain, Managing Director of The Bengal Tours Ltd.

It may be mentioned here, Bengal Tours' clients comprise mostly Japanese travelers (80pc). During the mass unrest that began in July, Japan had imposed a travel alert against visiting Bangladesh, which severely impacted the flow of tourists for the year 2024.

Masud Hossain mentioned, his clients enjoy visiting archeological sites, undergoing Dhaka city tours, experiencing rural lifestyles, witnessing heritage, folk and culture, among other promising tourism products of Bangladesh.

However, the drop in visitors amounts to a much larger number, taking the entire industry's performance into consideration. For instance, Taufiq Rahman, CEO of Journey Plus, another prominent inbound tour operator of the country, said, he witnessed a sharp 50 per cent slump in visitors last year compared to 2023.



Masud Hossain (left) and Taufiq Rahman (right)

Journey Plus operates river cruises and city tours as well as heritage visits to archeological and cultural sites of Bangladesh for tourists from the UK, Europe and Asia.

In 2024, Taufiq mentioned, Journey Plus only brought 250 foreign tourists to Bangladesh, compared to 575 tourists in 2023.

He also cited the political unrest, followed by the travel alerts by governments against visiting Bangladesh, as the reasons behind the plunge in foreign tourist arrivals last year.

Tour operators stress on the importance of lifting these travel alerts against visiting Bangladesh, if the number of tourist arrivals are to be increased. On a positive note, countries have started easing their travel

advisories against visiting Bangladesh-Japan being the latest in the list.

The moves are leading to a rise in tour bookings for 2025, according to the tour operators.

As per Masud Hossain's forecast based on the queries or booking received so far, Bengal Tours expect around 500 leisure travelers in 2025-estimating a growth of 40 per cent.

However, Taufiq Rahman from Journey Plus reiterates that these bookings for 2025 are tentative. "It all depends on the political stability and initiatives the Bangladesh government takes," he said.

Another issue that is hindering the flow of foreign tourists, according to Taufiq Rahman, is the complication with travel insurance. For instance, the UK requires its travelers to acquire travel insurance from the destination country they visit. It is called Public Liability Insurance (PLI).

However, since the number of inbound tourists is not significant, country's insurance providers are reluctant to offer PLI. The government of Bangladesh should consider solving this problem, if the inbound tourism sector is to be developed, urged Taufiq Rahman.