

## Govt should waive taxes to bring down room rates

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : A five-star hotel in Cox's Bazar charges BDT 8,000-10,000 for a deluxe room. However, if you go to Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur, you will find a room with equivalent standard at half of the cost. Behind this disparity lies the reason that our country's hotels have to pay almost 37 per cent in taxes to the government, while other countries' authorities do not charge their respective hotels so much in taxes. Mohiuddin Khan Khokon, Director of Sales and Marketing, Hotel The Cox Today, said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital recently.

"Therefore, if the government waives the taxes for us, we will be able to bring down the room rates for the guests. This will make such premium hospitality services more affordable to the guests. In turn, the hotels will also receive more number of guests round the year," Khokon expressed.

Nevertheless, the five-star property, with 276 rooms in the main tourism hub of the country Cox's Bazar, witnessed full occupancy from September to December last year after reopening following the year-long shut-down imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

To its misfortune, as soon as the hotel started recovering from the pandemic losses, it faced another hurdle - the Omicron variant - in January. Yet, once it reopened after the halt brought by the Omicron variant in February, Hotel The Cox Today again received full occupancy in February and March, mentioned Khokon.

However, in April, during the month of Ramadan, the hotel has comparatively less bookings, shared Khokon. Hence, the hotel is offering a special Ramadan promotional package for guests as some guests do visit even during Ramadan.

Under the hotel's Ramadan Package, guests can avail 02 nights and 03 days accommodation, airport pick and drop, complimentary breakfast/iftar, sehri/dinner as per bed, wake-up call during sehri (on request), 50 per cent discount on gym, 10 per cent on Edge restaurant, 20 per cent discount on laundry service, 20 per cent discount on Man's parlor, daily newspaper and wifi internet - all at a starting price of BDT 13,000. This package is valid till 25th Ramadan.

Khokon mentioned, earlier, when Cox's Bazar was closed off to tourists for over a year because of the first and second phase of coronavirus, they did not sit idle, rather undertook various renovation works like repainting the hotel and changing the furniture to give it a brand new look.

In February and March this year, Hotel The Cox Today hosted large events for corporates which were on hold during the pandemic. Moreover, the hotel is already receiving bookings for many large events post Eid in May.

Guests of such events usually amount to 600 persons, who occupy lion-share of the hotel at a time. Hence, from each event, the hotel receives great amount of business, by offering accommodation and food, claimed Khokon.

Hotel The Cox Today has plenty of facilities to host such grand events, mentioned Khokon. The hotel has five halls with a capacity of 900, 400, 200, 60-70, and 25-30 people respectively.

Thus, Hotel The Cox Today can easily host a conference of 1000 people conveniently, claimed Khokon.

Apart from these facilities, the hotel has a huge and splendid signature restaurant at the lobby, a coffee shop, bar, Thai spa, salon, gym, and swimming pool, among others.

Khokon claimed, the country's tourism and hospitality industry depends on the private sector as it occupies 85-90 per cent of the industry. Hence, he urged the government to help the private sector with connectivity and security.

Also, Cox's Bazar has plenty of potential, yet it is under-utilised, sighed Khokon, mentioning, how lively beaches of other countries are during the night while ours remain empty as there is nothing to do but worry about safety.

To change this situation, Khokon urged the government to allocate hotels with the respective portions of the beach in front so that they can bring many facilities and activities on the beach at night like music, lights, stages, coffee shops, dance performances by indigenous people, among others.

Asked about the group's expansion plans, Khokon said, the parent group of the hotel Sweet Dream Management Ltd is in efforts to open six new outlets across the country under the brand D'more.

They have already opened D'more Bandarban in December, noted Khokon while expressing their plan to launch the others by 2023 in Kuakata, Srimangal, Rangamati, and Chattogram, among others.