

Attending global travel fairs crucial for country's tourism recovery

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Dhaka : Effective marketing efforts to brand Bangladesh's tourism in the global arena are highly essential in this post-pandemic time to drive recovery. However, this crucial measure is at hindrance currently as the government decided not to take part in any international tourism fair for the time being.

"Our absence in the int'l tourism fairs will put our country out of the tourism map," said Abu Taher Md Jaber, CEO of Bangladesh Tourism Board.

"Even if we cannot go, we must have our country's pavilion at the fairs which can be coordinated by the Bangla-deshi missions abroad and attended by private tourism stakeholders," he urged.

"We have appealed to the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry formally for allowing it," claimed the BTB CEO.

Private sector stakeholders further stressed the importance of attending such international tourism fairs to highlight the country's potential to the world and bolster the sector's post-pandemic recovery.

In times of crisis, marketing efforts must be further strengthened, said tour operator Taufiq Rahman, CEO of Journey Plus, who is also the Secretary General of Pacific Asia Travel Association Bangladesh Chapter.

"Marketing channels must not be closed. Otherwise, our country will fall behind in

tourism in these post-pandemic times when we should promote further," said Taufiq Rahman.

"PATA Bangladesh Chapter has appealed to the Bangladesh Tourism Board for allowing us to visit the international tourism fairs like the upcoming WTM and ITB. Attending such fairs will have a far-reaching impact," he added.

Another tour operator Masud Hossain, Managing Director of The Bengal Tours Ltd also stressed how crucial promotional and country branding activities are currently for the growth of tourism.

"Tourism can be the greatest driver of our country's revival from the coronavirus crisis. However, highest priority to the sector is required from the government level for this purpose," said Masud Hossain.

Masud Hossain sighed, he is attending JATA Tourism Expo in Japan this year at his own cost without no support from the government.

It may be mentioned here, according to data from Bangladesh Tourism Board, earnings from inbound visitors were BDT 2,279 core 27 lac in 2021 (12 months), compared to BDT 1,196 crore 2 lac in 2020 (10 months).

Meaning, Bangladesh's tourism sector witnessed 59 per cent year-on-year growth in foreign currency earnings in 2021.

BTB CEO Abu Taher mentioned the cost of attending such fairs is far less than the foreign currency earnings in tourism. BTB has shown the Ministry all the numbers and figures to reconsider the ban on attending international tourism fairs this year, claimed the NTO's CEO.

Prior to the pandemic, till 2019, Bangladesh has been attending international tourism fairs like WTM, JATA, and ITB every year.

Furthermore, the figures show tourism is on its way to recovery finally following the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic which put a halt to it for years.

However, shutting marketing channels and promotional works would put the recovery efforts in vain, expressed industry insiders.

Taufiq Rahman mentioned, in November 2022, a group of 29 tourists including 27 British and two Australians will come to visit Bangladesh for five days through his company.

Masud Hossain further noted, from November 2022 till March 2023, 600-700 tourists from Japan and Europe will be coming to visit Bangladesh through his company.

Also, a lion-share of the tourists arriving in the country for FIT purposes is from India.

The government is waiting for natural tourism growth whereas the country should be eyeing targeted growth currently to quickly recover the tourism sector from the pandemic impacts, said Taufiq Rahman.

"In this regard, cooperation among the concerned departments and ministries should be further strengthened. The only reason we are falling behind in tourism is because the government opts for a bottom-up approach instead of a top-down approach," claimed Taufiq Rahman.

Masud Hossain suggested, "The government should sit with the stakeholders to prepare the recovery plan in a more effective way. Special packages should be offered to tourists to drive recovery. Bangladeshi Embassies abroad should promote our tourism potential in the respective countries. The national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines can offer an attractive promotional fare."

"What is of high importance currently is the proper positioning of Bangladesh in tourists' minds," said Masud, adding, "People are thinking Bangladesh is on its way to

suffer from a miserable state like Sri Lanka. But that is not true. Hence, effective promotional activities to change the country's image are crucial."