

Nature, hill, heritage should be prioritised for country's tourism prosperity

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Dhaka : Bangladesh boasts an abundance of nature, hill and heritage tourism products that are unparalleled in comparison with what other countries in the region have to offer. Therefore, these particular tourism products that the country proudly features should be considered the unique selling points for its promotion among foreign travellers, rather than the popular beach destination Cox's Bazar that the government only focuses on apparently, said industry insiders.

According to industry stakeholders, Southeast Asia holds plenty of globally popular beach destinations, which Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar cannot stand out from. However, on the other hand, the country prides itself with plenty of exemplary and scenic nature, hill, culture and heritage tourism destinations and products. These, if promoted and developed to international standards by the government, will be more effective in putting Bangladesh in the global tourism map and will

attract more international travellers.

Sylhet, epitome of nature tourism

Speaking of these products, the first destination of the country that comes to mind is Sylhet. The division, full of tourism potential and opportunities, features many of the best nature, hill, heritage and culture tourism products and destinations that the country has to offer.

The geographic location of Sylhet makes it an ideal place to bring in plenty of foreign travellers as well as locals. Located in the northeast region of Bangladesh, Sylhet is bordered by Meghalaya State of India to the north, Tripura and Mizoram States of India to the south, Assam of India to the east and parts of Dhaka, Chattogram and Mymensingh divisions of Bangladesh to the west.

Sylhet welcomes several thousands of travellers every year, however, mostly locals, thanks to its tantalising landscape graced by lush green tea gardens, pristine swamp forests and rolling hills. The scenic destination is blessed with blue rivers, steeped in rich history and boasts an array of historical sites as well as esteemed shrines.

In addition to the sacred shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (R) and Hazrat Shah Paran (R), the Sylhet division, encompassing four districts- Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Sunamganj and Sylhet-also welcomes visitors to the ancestral home of Shree Chaitanya Dev.



Among the beautiful tourist attractions of Sylhet stand the lush and expansive tea gardens on the city's outskirts. While entering the city, travellers will be greeted by the sight of women plucking tea leaves in scenic Lakkatura, Malnichhara and Tarapur tea gardens.

Then there is Jaflong, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Sylhet. At the base of Khashia-Jainta Hills of India's Meghalaya State, Jaflong features a mesmerising landscape where fountain streams from Khasia Jainta Hill flow into the rivers Piyain and Dauki, leaving colourful pebbles behind on the riverbeds. The location also offers travellers a picturesque view of mountains touching the sky. The area also features Khasia tribal villages and betel nut leaf gardens that make it an exciting destination for travellers to visit.

While visiting Jaflong, travellers can also explore nearby attractions such as Sada Pathar in Bholaganj, the enticing fountain in Sreepur, the emerald-green water stream of River Lalakhal, the scenic Tamabil Green Park, and Panthumai that offers an overwhelming blend of hills, rocks and rivers.

However, a trip to Sylhet will be incomplete without hopping on a boat to explore the only freshwater swamp forest in South Asia-Ratargul. During monsoon, what mesmerises travellers is the beauty of captivating waves of clear water across the huge Hakaluki Haor, the largest haor (wetland) in the country.



Scenic Ratargul (above) and mesmerising Bisnakandi (below) of Sylhet

Sylhet's Moulvibazar is another destination that stands out to travellers. The district houses a staggering 153 out of the total 167 tea gardens in the country, making it the ultimate destination to enjoy waves of greenery across the small hills. It also features Lawachhara National Park, Bangladesh Tea Research Institute compound, Madhabkunda and Humhum waterfalls, among others-filled with biodiversity and natural beauty.

It may be mentioned here, the division boasts luxury hotels and resorts all around including Palace Luxury Resort, Grand Sultan Hotel, Dusai Hotel and many others.

Lack of hygiene, sanitary facilities at sites

However, industry stakeholders believe that the potential of Sylhet's tourism sector largely remains untapped. Due to the lack of government attention, the vast opportunities of Sylhet's tourism are underutilised.

The reasons behind foreign tourists not getting attracted to visit Sylhet or domestic tourists turning their backs on Sylhet after one visit are poor road connectivity to/from the popular destinations and lack of infrastructure/facilities at the sites. A pressing issue faced by tourists at the sites of Sylhet is the severe shortage of hygiene or sanitary facilities, like restroom/changing room. Quality food options around the sites are also limited.

Talking to The Bangladesh Monitor, Syed Yameenul Huq, Executive Assistant Manager and In-charge of Sales and Marketing, Grand Sylhet

Hotel and Resort, urged the government to provide the travel industry of Sylhet with infrastructure and connectivity support.

Hassan-Ul Abedin, General Manager, Hotel Star Pacific, another hotel in Sylhet, talking to The Bangladesh Monitor, also said the same thing, while urging the government to take initiatives to ensure safety and security of the tourists at night. This will create the scope for having a vibrant nightlife in Sylhet which it currently lacks, he added. If the government facilitates, the private sector can come forward and introduce more establishments, as even locals now seem enthusiastic to enjoy fun activities, he further claimed.