

## Sri Lanka eyes Bangladesh for MICE tourism

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 01 February, 2023



Dhaka : Sri Lanka, renowned for leisure and business tourism due to its top-notch destinations and tailor-made facilities, underwent great hurdles in the last few years such as the Covid-19 pandemic, an economic crisis and a political uprising. However, once the situation improved, Sri Lanka ended 2022 with 750,000 tourist arrivals and USD 2 billion in tourism earnings, showing the great strength of its third biggest forex earning sector to keep the country's economy afloat. Now, the country is looking at Bangladesh, one of its most promising source markets, to become a key participant in the new tourism products the island nation is launching, especially Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE).

Speaking to The Bangladesh Monitor, Sudharshan Seneviratne, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka to Bangladesh, said, Bangladesh has emerged as a key target market in South Asia with its palpable

presence. Bangladesh has proven its self-determination, economic development and resilience within a very limited time while broadening their horizon, especially in trade, investment and tourism, added the High Commissioner.

Thisum Jayasuriya, Chairman of Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB), the government body responsible for the country's MICE tourism, while speaking to The Bangladesh Monitor during a familiarisation trip of a Bangladeshi delegation team to Sri Lanka, said, they are discussing with Bangladesh's tourism representatives, airlines, sports agencies, professional conference organisers, and MICE buyers to position Sri Lanka among them as a preferred destination for meetings, incentives, conferences, weddings and events.

For this purpose, they have been organising roadshows and B2B sessions with Bangladeshi counterparts in Bangladesh as well as familiarisation trips for Bangladeshi delegations in Sri Lanka, mentioned the Chairman of SLCB.

"Besides India, Bangladesh is one of Sri Lanka's biggest neighbours and closest countries. This makes Bangladesh one of the most potential key markets to drive MICE tourism in the country, apart from leisure tourism, and lift it out of the economic crisis it is facing currently," also mentioned the SLCB Chairman.



*Sudharshan Seneviratne (left) and Thisum Jayasuriya (right)*

"We are in discussions with many corporates and associations of Bangladesh to get MICE tourism in Sri Lanka. Following the inquiries that we are receiving for events, 2024-2025 is looking good so far, claimed Jayasuriya.

Jayasuriya noted Sri Lanka would be a tremendous MICE destination for Bangladeshis due to the diversity the country offers which is rare to find in the region.

"Travellers can reach Colombo from the airport in 25 minutes. They can go to the golf course from Colombo in an hour. Travellers can have their conferences in Colombo and dinner receptions in a beautiful beach

destination just an hour away," said Jayasuriya.

The country now has enough fuel for essential services like buses, trains and medical vehicles, and steps have been taken to give special importance to tourists for their pleasant stay and travel, said Sri Lanka Convention Bureau Chair Thisum Jayasuriya.

"As businesses are growing, Bangladesh will show interest in coming and doing business here. MICE will be the segment that would be rocking Colombo. Also, as an incentive, we will see the tourist zones reaping the benefits as well," expressed Samrat Dutta, Area Director of Taj in Sri Lanka and Maldives to The Bangladesh Monitor.

"Bangladesh is a very favourable market for us. We are looking forward to business coming from that end. At Taj, we are not only capable but also we have a competitive advantage in looking after people from that region," further said the Area Director.

Taj Samudra is a very favoured wedding destination. Bangladeshis who want to have beautiful destination weddings can choose Taj Samudra without any hesitation for their dream wedding event. Taj Samudra has lovely venues, both indoor and outdoor, at the hotel to make the guests' wedding dreams come true, mentioned Samrat Dutta.

"We are also getting a lot of queries in terms of business events and incentives. Most of them started from January 2023," noted Dutta.

The state-owned carrier of Sri Lanka, SriLankan Airlines, is now offering direct flights on Dhaka-Colombo-Dhaka route at a starting fare of USD 388 all inclusive.

Sharuka Wickrama Adittiya, Manager, Bangladesh, SriLankan Airlines, speaking to The Bangladesh Monitor, said, Dhaka is a vital market for SriLankan Airlines, one of the top revenue generating routes in the airline's network.

Hence, the carrier is offering attractive tour packages for passengers from Dhaka, mentioned the Manager. "We have tour packages to Colombo and Maldives for Dhaka customers," he added.

Also, the leisure arm of the national carrier SriLankan Holidays has appointed franchisees in the Bangladesh market so that they can offer these attractive tour packages to customers in Dhaka on their behalf,

mentioned the Manager.

The flag carrier of Sri Lanka currently operates daily flights to and from Dhaka with wide-body A330-300 and A330-200 aircraft.

It can be mentioned here that visa on arrival facility for international tourists in Sri Lanka is available currently for Bangladeshis. Issuance of on arrival electronic travel authorisation (ETA) for tourists at the port of entry to Sri Lanka is effective, making travel to Sri Lanka from Bangladesh quick and hassle-free.

"Sri Lanka has MICE facilities that were the first to be developed in the South Asian region. BMICH, for instance, is the first purpose built venue for MICE. We are a compact destination for MICE. We have great facilities and attractions for the incentive market and meeting market. We have all the branded hotels in Sri Lanka," Paddy Paul, Managing Director, Golden Isle Travels, one of the DMCs in Sri Lanka that participated in a B2B session held in Colombo with a Bangladeshi delegation recently.

One of the Bangladeshi MICE delegates at the B2B session in Colombo, Md Moinul Islam, Manager, Outbound Tour, Discovery Tours and Logistic, said, "Sri Lanka is definitely a MICE tourism friendly country. They offer attractive rates for MICE events. They are now working towards catering to the Bangladesh MICE visitors to increase the volume of business by adding special experiential features. Even the hotel rates are very reasonable."

Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan MICE agents are currently cooperating with joint initiatives to offer attractive packages with hopes to increase MICE arrivals between the two countries.

According to the statement released by the country's Tourism Minister Harin Fernando recently, Sri Lanka hopes to double tourist arrivals to 1.5 million in 2023 and bring in USD 5 billion in vital foreign exchange.