

## Tourism masterplan ready to bring 5.58m int'l tourists annually by 2041

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Dhaka : The long-awaited tourism masterplan, to develop the country's promising sector, is finally ready by Bangladesh Tourism Board, aimed at increasing international tourist arrivals to 5.58 million annually by 2041. The masterplan also targets to create 21.94 million job opportunities meanwhile. Under the masterplan, several development projects and initiatives will be undertaken, starting 2023.

Abu Taher Md Jaber, CEO of Bangladesh Tourism Board said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital recently.

In the interview, he added, as part of the masterplan, e-Visa for tourists who are eligible for Visa on Arrival will be launched soon as the initiative has already been approved and implementation works are currently underway.

As of now, inbound tourist number has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, claimed the CEO, mentioning that, in 2019, a total of 3 lac tourists came to Bangladesh throughout the year while, in 2022, the number exceeded that level in the first five months alone.

### Five projects under masterplan

Under the masterplan, implementation works of five tourism development projects in Tanguar Haor of Sunamganj, Nijhum Dwip of Noakhali, Sompur Mahavihara of Paharpur, Sharankhola of Sundarbans and Mawa by the Padma Bridge, will commence soon.

Once the currently running feasibility study for these projects is complete by September 2023, implementation works will begin, further announced the CEO.

Explaining the potentials of these destinations, the head of the NTO informed, Mawa by the Padma Bridge is being considered for MICE and river tourism purposes.

"We are looking to develop MICE infrastructure at Mawa to facilitate exhibitions and meetings. Meanwhile, tourists can enjoy river cruise on Padma," expressed Abu Taher Md Jaber.

### Cox's Bazar

Speaking about the organisation's plans to develop the most popular destination of the country-Cox's Bazar-to international standard, the CEO shared, they have identified 11 clusters there.



Abu Taher Md Jaber, CEO, Bangladesh Tourism Board

"To utilise the entire sea beach, the longest unbroken one in the world, for tourism purposes, activity and entertainment zones will be established all across, instead of at only a few points like now," claimed Abu Taher.

The purpose behind all these activities and projects, as part of the masterplan, is to develop these destinations to international standard in an effort to attract more tourists from the neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and India, expressed the CEO.

"These projects will include investments from both the public and

private sectors. BTB is now motivating the private sector to invest in projects like hotels, motels, resorts, or amusement parks," said Abu Taher, adding, "The government, on the other hand, will establish infrastructure and connectivity to facilitate."



Tourism at scenic Nijhum Dwip to boost following masterplan

## Masterplan priorities

It may be mentioned here that the masterplan will be working as a roadmap to ensure continuous growth of the country's tourism sector till 2041. It is a long-term project with several detailed plans that will take place across the entire country to develop Bangladesh as a whole and place it among the top tourist destinations in the world.

Hence, such large number of big-scale projects and initiatives, under the masterplan, must be carried out in phases, informed the CEO of BTB.

In the initial implementation phase of the masterplan, BTB is prioritising to market the country's tourism products that are already ready. For instance, the CEO mentioned, BTB is in efforts to promote occasions and activities that feature our culture and heritage like Mongol Shobhajatra or Pahela Baishakh to foreign tourists.

Community and village tourism are among the current priorities too, he added.

## Preparing new policies

Policy support is also crucial for tourism development to take place across the country, stressed the CEO. Hence, BTB is also preparing several policies, under the masterplan, that are key to drive inbound tourism.

For instance, Abu Taher Md Jaber mentioned they are working to prepare homestay policy which is quite popular among travellers nowadays. It will be integral to grow community or village based tourism, he claimed.

Another policy BTB is preparing currently is for wayside amenities on the highways. This is also important for those wishing to travel by road across the country, the CEO further stressed.

DMO, training centres

Also, to better facilitate tourism, BTB is establishing a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) by 2023 in each of the five aforementioned promising areas.

At the same time, efforts are underway to establish training centres in Cox's Bazar and Kuakata-the two most promising tourism destinations of the country-in an attempt to increase the hospitality and service standard for international tourists, claimed the head of the NTO.

Further suggestions

Furthermore, initiatives to better serve each traveller demography are also being taken for the comfort of all inbound international tourists, highlighted the CEO.

For instance, Indians travelling to Bangladesh have a difficult time to find vegetarian food. Hence, BTB is discussing with several restaurants in Dhaka, Cox's Bazar and Chattogram to open vegetarian corners at their F&B outlets, mentioned Abu Taher.

To further facilitate growth in the inbound tourist segment, Abu Taher urged the concerned authorities to consider launching visa free entry to visa holders of Japan, Canada, the US, the UK and Schengen.

Another opportunity the concerned authorities can explore is the idea of introducing a transit visa or stopover visa once the Third Terminal is operational, stressed the CEO of BTB.

Also, since Bangladesh is a riverine country, it boasts plenty of river tourism potential. Hence, facilitating their immigration at the river ports should help increase the number of river cruise travellers, said Abu Taher.

Interestingly, an ocean cruise idea is being considered on Sri Lanka-India-Bangladesh route, also mentioned the CEO, based on the discussions he had with his counterparts in those respective countries.

However, to successfully implement the masterplan, more manpower is essential, stressed the CEO. Therefore, the NTO has applied to recruit more manpower in a range of capacities so that, together, they can successfully complete all the projects and initiatives in due time,

concluded Abu Taher Md Jaber.