

Travel to St Martin's banned for nine months, local tourism stakeholders in torment

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Dhaka: Travel to the popular coral-rich island St Martin's, located in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, is banned for nine months since February 1, 2025, according to a move from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Local business stakeholders who mostly rely on earnings from tourism are currently in agony over the new government regulation.

The suspension of travel to St Martin's Island will be effective till November 2025.

Usually, the island's tourist season runs from October 1 to March 31, however, this year, travel to St Martin's has been suspended before the season ends over new regulations.

Tourist vessels were allowed to operate to St Martin's until January 31, 2025, informed Cox's Bazar Additional District Magistrate Imran Hossain.

The move has raised concerns among local tourism stakeholders, as it plays a vital role in the island's economy.

Reports cited MA Abdur Rahim Jihadi, President of St Martin's Hotel-Motel-Resort Owners' Association, saying, "No such crisis has ever occurred on the island before."

He stressed, the island and its people will face several challenges since tourists have stopped coming due to the ban.

Hundreds of locals in the island are involved in tourism trade. They had requested the government to reconsider the move, at least allowing tourists to visit the island till February 28, so that the locals could mitigate the financial losses to some extent, according to the President of St Martin's Hotel-Motel-Resort Owners' Association.

Tourism businesses on the island, which usually operate from October to March, are currently facing severe financial woes, due to the shortened season.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has restricted tourist visits to just three months—November, December, and January—in 2025.

Reports also cited Taiub Ullah, Owner, St Martin Mermaid Resort, saying, "It is impossible for the people of St Martin's to survive the remaining ten months of the year with just two months of income."

Tourism would have naturally declined in March due to Ramadan, hence, the stakeholders had urged to keep the tourist flow open till February at least, reports further added.

Earlier, tourist travel to Saint Martin's resumed on December 1, 2024, from the BIWTA jetty at Nuniachhara in Cox's Bazar, with six vessels on the Cox's Bazar-Saint Martin's route.

Previously, tourist vessels operated from October to March, with services suspended during the monsoon due to rough seas.

However, new restrictions now have imposed limits on overnight stays too—banning them in November and capping them at 2,000 tourists per night in December and January.

Earlier, tourist vessels also operated from Teknaf, however, sediment accumulation in the Naf River and border tensions with Myanmar have suspended vessel operations on that route.

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