

Industry stakeholders present roadmap for country's tourism recovery

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Dhaka: Tourism industry stakeholders urged the government to prepare a comprehensive crisis management plan to revive the country's travel trade sector, which is currently reeling from the effects of the recent student-led mass uprising against the former government.

For this purpose, the stakeholders presented a roadmap for the country's tourism industry recovery during a seminar held at Sheraton Dhaka on October 6.

At the seminar, industry experts suggested a number of measures: launching e-visa system, ensuring travellers' safety, undertaking public relations efforts, attending international fairs, appointing tourism officials in Bangladeshi missions abroad, and increasing Biman's role in promotional activities.

The seminar titled “Roadmap for Tourism Recovery: Present Bangladesh Context” was organised by the travel trade publication The Bangladesh Monitor.

Peter A Semone, Chairman of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), attended the programme as the chief guest and Syed Ghulam Qadir, General Secretary of World Tourism Network Bangladesh Chapter, presented the keynote paper, while Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, moderated the session.

Addressing the seminar, Peter A Semone assured full cooperation from PATA, given that the Bangladesh government seeks the association’s support in tourism recovery. He further stressed the necessity to establish visa free entry for top tourist generating source markets of Bangladesh.

PATA Bangladesh Chapter President Shahid Hamid also spoke on the occasion. According to him, building the country’s image as an ideal destination to visit is key to increase the number of tourist arrivals.

Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh President Md Rafeuzzaman urged the government to reduce the VAT imposed on tour operators’ services, allowing them to offer attractive packages to visitors.

Bengal Tours Managing Director Masud Hossain reiterated the need to recognise tour operators as they bring valuable foreign currency to the country. This, in turn, will facilitate them to go all-out in promoting Bangladesh globally as an attractive destination to visit.

Journey Plus CEO Taufiq Rahman stressed that utilising NRB communities all over the world to promote Bangladesh as an ideal destination to visit can be a huge gamechanger. He sought PATA’s support in helping Bangladesh’s tourism industry recover, referring to the key role the association played during Sri Lanka tourism recovery.

Representing the hospitality sector, Unique Hotel and Resorts CEO Md Shakawath Hossain highlighted the necessity to revoke advance income tax imposed on products the country’s hotels serve to guests. Such policy improvements will allow the country’s star hotels to offer their products and services to foreign visitors at attractive rates, said Shakawath.

In the keynote address, Syed Ghulam Qadir noted, the country's hotel occupancy currently stands at a poor number—30-35 per cent—while many international bookings remain cancelled.

Despite immense potential, Bangladesh's tourism industry remains primarily driven by domestic travellers, expressed Qadir. According to government data, Bangladesh welcomed 555,000 foreign visitors in 2023, when the tourism sector contributed 3.2 per cent to the country's GDP.

The seminar was also attended by other key figures from the country's tourism, airline and hospitality sectors as well as media representatives.

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