

Spain urges more tourism exchange with Bangladesh for mutual benefit

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Dhaka: Spain is the second most visited country in the world by tourists, after either the USA or France, making its tourism sector one of the country's biggest industries by contributing 11 per cent to the nation's GDP. However, there is much room to increase the tourist or business traveller arrivals to the country from Bangladesh as the Spanish Embassy in Dhaka facilitates hassle free visa processing in 15 days.

Ambassador of Spain in Bangladesh Francisco Benítez said this during a press meet at his official residence in the capital on November 30.

Prior to the pandemic, Spain welcomed around 80 million visitors a year. As of now, already the European country recovered 80 per cent of its pre-pandemic tourism numbers, he added.

Picasso Year 2023

Benitez also announced that Spain has officially kicked off The Picasso Year 2023 which marks the 50th death anniversary of the world-renowned painter.



Arrangements for Picasso Year 2023

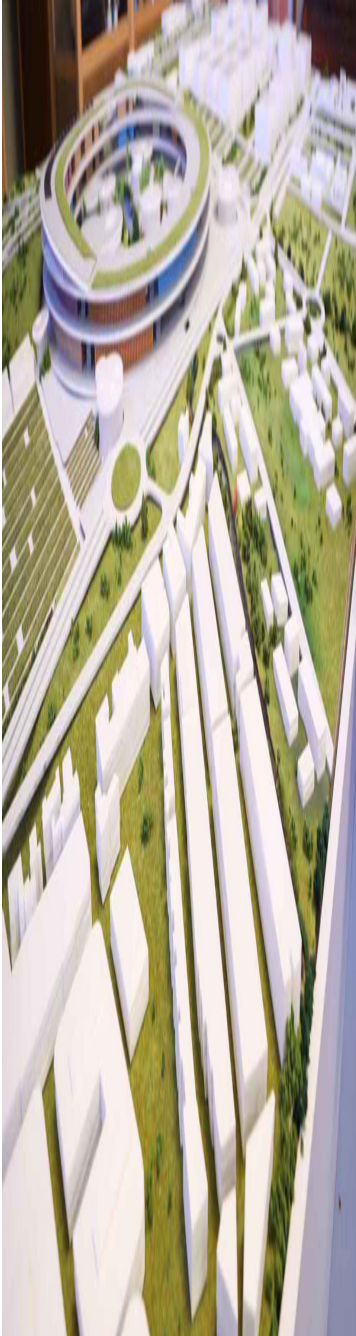
Various exhibitions will be held throughout the year 2023 in Spain that Bangladeshis would love to visit and enjoy, said the ambassador.

The locations in Spain inspired Picasso to compose some of his most relevant artworks of the 20th century, and the country aims to promote the Spanish culture through the artist's legacy and reinforce the position of Spain as a leading cultural tourism destination, he claimed.

Potential host for BIE specialised expo

Benitez further mentioned the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE)

visited the Spanish city of Malaga to discuss preparations for a potential bid to organise a Specialised Expo in 2027.



Model for the potential BIE specialised expo

The theme considered would be focused around the challenges of modern cities, ensuring that sustainability matches with quality of life, in line with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The area earmarked for the Expo project covers an 80-hectare zone in the Buenavista area of Campanillas, located in the east of Malaga.

“To win the bid, Spain wishes for Bangladesh’s vote and if won, it would be a great opportunity for Bangladesh to attend the expo in Spain as the country needs effective marketing and branding efforts in the global stage to increase inbound tourist arrivals,” noted Benitez.

Tourism exchange

Not only that but also Spain has offered Bangladesh to develop its tourism industry, infrastructure and connectivity as the European country has immense success and expertise in these respective areas, mentioned the Spanish envoy.

"Bangladesh's tourism has many untapped potentials which can bring a new avenue for Spanish and Bangladesh companies for investment. River tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, agro tourism, factory visit tourism, and urban tourism are very promising initiatives that Bangladesh can easily focus on for the sustainable tourism the country eyes," he added.

For this purpose, Spain can contribute and help develop Bangladesh's tourism industry, said the Spanish envoy, mentioning, "We are already in talks with the government to help develop the country's railways", which can be a key driver to increase the domestic and inbound tourism in Bangladesh as better rail and road connectivity is crucial for the development of tourism to the areas that have no airports but great tourism potentials.

Already many Spanish companies are working in Bangladesh in transport projects such as underground metro rail and alleviated highway that are very important for the development of the country, mentioned Benitez.

"Sports tourism and exchange is also another area that we are eyeing to work on between Bangladesh and Spain. As you know, Spain is one of the leading countries in sports, sports infrastructure and sports tourism, having the biggest football clubs, and most visited football stadiums. We are in discussion with the government for further collaboration in sports exchange as we speak," added the envoy.

Air traffic management is another area Spain masters, said Benitez, adding the Spanish company Indra manages 45 per cent of the world's air traffic including one of the busiest airports in the world London's Heathrow.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh will also benefit from Spain's next generation air traffic technology and systems, noted the Spanish Ambassador.

Metropolitan forest

Furthermore, in such harsh times of climate change, Madrid has launched a drive to connect a series of existing woodlands, creating a 75km-long green belt around the city called a Metropolitan Forest.



Representative image of the Metropolitan Forest

Once complete, the forest would cover 35,000ha. It would help the city improve its air quality, counter climate change and create a wealth of recreational opportunities for residents, mentioned Benitez.

“Bangladesh could also use benefit from such initiatives and Spain is willingly to help,” said the envoy.

Tourism export

Francisco Benítez said, Spain, as a single country, is currently the fourth largest customer of Bangladesh, primarily for readymade garments (RMG).

Bangladesh exported goods worth USD 2.3 billion to Spain in 2020, which increased to USD 3.16 billion in 2021, registering 35 per cent growth in

exports, according to the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.

"However, our yearly exports to Bangladesh are still quite low, barely reaching EUR 200 million. Hence, there is a great potential for an increase in our commercial exchanges," he said.

In this context, Spain's tourism exports to Bangladesh can be a game changer benefiting both of the countries as it is probably the only export which does not have as much tariff as other exports," claimed Benitez.

The recent opening of a commercial office at the Spanish embassy in Dhaka, the existence of a Spain-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce in Dhaka and support from the media would play vital role in diversifying the commercial relations between Spain and Bangladesh, concluded the Spanish Ambassador to Bangladesh.

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