

## St Martin's Island welcomes tourists as season reopens with over 1,100 arrivals

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Tourism officially resumed on St Martin's Island on December 1 after months of restrictions, with three cruise ships transporting 1,174 travelers from Cox's Bazar on the opening day.

The vessels departed the Nuniachhara BIWTA jetty between 7:00 am and 8:00 am following strict screening by the district administration, Department of Environment and Tourist Police to ensure compliance with the government's 12-point conservation guideline.

According to Hossainul Islam Bahadur, General Secretary of the Sea Cruise Owners Association of Bangladesh, six ships were authorized to sail this season, but only half operated on the first day. Although the government has capped daily arrivals at 2,000 tourists, turnout remained lower due to ongoing school exams and other factors. Two vessels — Karnaphuli and Baro Auliya — each carrying roughly 950

passengers, operated at full capacity, while others stayed docked due to insufficient demand.

Bahadur added that ships already have full bookings from December 5 to 26, and the remaining approved vessels will gradually join operations. December 1's ships are expected to reach the island around midday.

Local business owners say accommodations and facilities have been prepared to welcome visitors. Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan said that overnight stays are again permitted, but only during December and January. All tourists must purchase tickets and travel passes online, with QR codes scanned at checkpoints to maintain the daily visitor limit.

The Department of Environment said monitoring will be tightened at both departure and arrival points to ensure ship operators and tourists follow environmental rules. A circular issued on October 22 laid out strict guidelines banning unapproved vessels, tickets without QR codes, beach lighting at night, loud music, parties, and entry into ecologically sensitive areas such as keya forests. Harmful activities involving turtles, corals, birds or other marine life are prohibited. Visitors are also encouraged to avoid single-use plastics.

Tourism to the island had been suspended since February 1, but travel is now allowed from November to January under regulated conditions.

Meanwhile, authorities fined cruise operator Keari Sinbad BDT 50,000 for issuing tickets without the required QR-coded travel pass. The company said passengers arrived at the jetty last minute with return tickets but no onward passes, and that system issues in the early morning prevented them from generating QR codes.

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