

BANGLADESH: POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY TAKES HEAVY TOLL ON TOURISM



Tourism industry insiders have said that the growing political-uncertainty in Bangladesh has taken a major toll on both the country's hospitality and the travel trade as the business is now down by 50 percent against last year during the peak-time. Most of the in-bound tour operators have experienced either cancellation of the previous bookings or the size of groups coming in have shrunk in size. The domestic tourists are now very cautious about moving out and about or are reluctant to come to the capital or to leave the capital.

The hospitality and tourism sector has long been facing the sharp edge of the knife of the political-turmoil since eruption of the movement-at-Shahbagh. **The last and final hit came out when several countries issued a 'red-alert' for their citizens and residents, branding Bangladesh country, as a risky destination for visitors.**

Bengal-Tours Ltd. executive director, Masud-Hossain said that his company usually handles about 4,500 foreign-tourists annually, and it peaks during the November to February period. But since the start of the year the number has come down to up to 2,000 as most groups have cancelled their visit due to the political uncertainty. Masud Hossain said that: "Our company handled about 3,000 foreign tourists during November to February period of last year of which there will not be more than 1,500-tourists this year. More than 80-groups of 3 to 10 people have already cancelled their bookings on security and safety grounds." There are almost no leisure foreign tourists coming to Bangladesh now. Most of the visitors are mainly NGO-people or business people.

Bengal-Tours received about 3,566 foreign tourists in the 2010-2011 period registering 31 percent growth against the 2005-2006 period, 4,075 tourists in 2011-2012 with a 50 percent growth and 3,490 tourists in 2012-2013, showing a 29 percent growth. The revenue-growth was 67 percent in the 2010-2011 period, 74 percent in the 2011-2012 and 63 percent in the 2012-2013 period against the base-year of 2005-2006.

Echoing Mr. Masud, Ajiyer Fair-Trade Tourism CEO, Shahid Hussain-Shamim said that 5 groups comprised of 128-people from UK, Japan and Germany have already cancelled their bookings since February of this year and another group comprising of 13 tourists from Japan has also cancelled their booking, in fear of the political uncertainty in September.

Mr. Shamin said that: "This year the inquiries and the bookings were good. But **we have lost our credibility to the foreign tourists.** Now they've been suffering from a lack of confidence in the information we give them, although we've a good reputation and we provide real and true information." Mr. Shamim fears that the business will fall by 30 percent in terms of the revenue and 50 percent in terms of the number of visitors.

A high ranking executive of a 5 star hotel in the city said that political uncertainty always has adverse effect on their business as they usually depend on airline crews and business-visitors. The deadline of 25th October which was set by the opposition has now forced many visitors to cancel their bookings. "Although October to March is our peak period, we're not that busy. Our hotel's occupancy-rate was supposed to be 90-percent but it has now come down to 65 percent," he said. He also added that they have to take various expense-control, wastage, spoilage, energy saving,

cost-cutting measures so as to adjust with the bad-business situation.

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