



Travel & Tourism



Bangladeshis are Going Places

by Asiuzzaman

A Report on the Rise of Domestic Tourism in the Country

THE number of foreign tourist arrivals increased in the past two years, says Bangladesh parjatan corporation and private tour operators. But during this period, domestic tourism has also earned tremendous popularity.

Last year some one lakh 35 thousand tourists arrived in Bangladesh. The number was one lakh 26 thousand in 1993, according to official statistics maintained by the BPC and special branch of police. There was a slump in the arrival of foreign tourists in the middle. Any foreigner arriving in the Zia International Airport are counted as 'tourist'. In fact the number of destination tourists is still very poor. The parjatan officials have no estimate of destination tourists.

Both BPC and tour operators association of Bangladesh (TOAB) sources said that domestic tourism has also increased over the past several years.

"As more people showed their interest to see the country, more tour operators came forward with interesting package of tour programmes," Hasn Mansur, president of TOAB said.

Mansur, who runs Guide Tours Ltd., said despite various constraints, the sector is now booming.

He said a number of members of TOAB started full-fledged operation and are doing good business. Toab currently has 15 members.

He said Bangladeshis are now accustomed to living amid our instable political situation, and most of them still prefer to travel amid these circumstances.

Tourism was declared an industry in 1991 and a new national tourism policy was adopted in 1992 to boost the sector. Tourism is considered the biggest and fastest growing industry in the world.

According to the world tourism organisation, the sector attained growth at a rate of nearly 4 per cent. If estimated, more than 500 million tourists arrival worldwide. Bangladesh however, failed to keep pace with this fast growth and lagged behind even its neighbour India, Nepal and Bhutan.

An executive of the BPC said that its 800-bed accommodation in hotels and motels across the country are booked



Bangladeshi tourists near Zafong, Sylhet -AKM Mohsin

at the end of March. Even some of Parjatan's picnic sports are booked already. All these indicate the increase of domestic tourism. However, there are no statistics that on the percentage of domestic tourism in the sector. The BPC executive said that tourism months add some other positive campaigns helped the promotion of domestic tourism. The increase in literacy rate is also necessary for the growth of this sector. He pointed out a brighter side of the satellite dish antenna, saying that people became aware of traveling and visiting places through satellite TV programmes.

Both BPC and TOAB sources complained that the government support to develop the sector is inadequate. "The gov-

ernment should create a congenial atmosphere to develop the sector," one TOAB official said.

Since 1984-5 the government investment in BPC is about Tk 15 crore, and afterwards the BPC invested Tk 33 crore from its own resources to fund different projects. The BPC official said some of the projects remained unimplemented because of unavailability of funds.

The tourism sector can earn 100 to 200 crore US dollar each year if proper investment is made. The BPC currently earned a profit of Tk 60 crore a year, he added. Both private and government-owned tour operators underscored the need for an increased role of the government to develop

the sector.

Most popular tourist spots in the Country and How to get there.

Sundarbans: The Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest and part of the world's largest delta formed by the great Ganges and Brahmaputra. No land is too far away from water. The jungle itself boasts tall forests of Sundari trees. Gewa trees, red deer, the Royal Bengal tiger, an abundance of colorful birds, 50 species of reptiles and other sights undreamed of by city-dwellers. No one comes back from the Sundarbans disappointed.

The best way to see the Sundarbans is in a launch, which costs Tk. 6000/day. It is

cheapest, therefore, to get together a group of people. You may take Biman's flight to Jessore (Tk. 655 one way). Luxury coaches also go to Khulna in 8 hours with a one hour ride to the launch site. Bus fare is Taka 120 - 150. The most enjoyable route from Dhaka to Khulna is the rocket steamer which takes 24 hours for a fare of Tk. 915 (1st class), Tk. 550 (middle class) and Tk. 120 economy class. It is not necessary to stay overnight in Khulna, although Hotel Royal International offers a single room for about Tk. 100 and Park hotel for Tk. 48. It is advisable to go through a tour operator since they know which are the best parts to see. Cost per individual in a sizeable group can be as low as

Tk. 2000, all inclusive.

Sylhet: Sylhet, Srimongol, and Zafong can be covered in one trip. Known as the land of two leaves and a bud, Sylhet boasts terraced tea gardens, rolling countryside, colorful tribesmen, brilliant orange-groves and pineapple plantations, tropical jungles, and exotic birds. The Monipuri tribal dance must also be seen. Srimongol offers the Bhanugach rainforest, tea plantations, a tea factory, rare orchids, primates and birds. Srimongol is only 5 to 6 hours away from Dhaka by coach and the road is fairly good. Stay at the Guest House of BD Tea Research Inst.

Chittagong, Rangamati & Cox's Bazar: Home of the Kaptai Lake colorful tribal villages, large hill forests, Foyle Lake and the still pristine beaches of Cox's Bazar, this part of the country is most popular for Dhakaite tourists. Luxury coaches to Chittagong, Green line (832465) and Sandia (415581) operated daily between Dhaka, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar and costs anywhere between Tk. 100 - 400.

Rangpur & Dinajpur: The Kantaji Hindu temple in Dinajpur is a world heritage site and a most beautiful temple. Visit also the Ramsagar Lake. In Paharpur, visit the Buddhist monastery which depicts life a thousand years ago on terracotta tiles. Take the train to Bogra. Stay overnight to Paharpur, Rangpur and Dinajpur. BG491 also flies directly to Saidpur.

Private Tour Operators

01. A Intraco (Bangladesh) Ltd
02. Discover Tourism Ltd
03. Golden Wings
04. Royal Bengal Tourism Dreamland
05. Sundarban Tourism Company Ltd
06. Sundarban Tourism Complex Ltd
07. Sunfine Travels International
08. Sylhet Tourism Guide
09. S S Tours Ltd
10. Tepantar Parivraman
11. The Guide Tours Ltd
12. Tour Palnner
13. Travel House Ltd
14. Travel Guide & Tours
15. Unique Tours and Travels

KHASHRU Choudhury hunted birds from a young age. When he was a second year student at B.U.E.T., he started going to the Sundarbans to hunt and train with the poachers. Many years later, Khasru bhai conformed from a hunter to a wildlife conservationist, but his relationship with the wildlife of Sundarban - from the Sundari trees to the Royal Bengal tiger - has continued through the past twenty years.

The way to understand the Sundarbans, says Khasru bhai, is to consider its basic ecological structure. The Sundarbans cover 8000 sq. km. of deltaic swamp of the Ganges Delta. It was created by silt deposits from the salty Ganges waters, leading to deltaic land with continuous flow of water on top and through the soil. The sodium-filled water led to the mangrove vegetation which feeds and breeds the crustaceans.

The trees of the jungle, to protect themselves against excess water intake, grow wax on their surface. When these trees shed their leaves on the water (all land in the Sundarbans is very close to water), the waxy leaves don't decompose easily. They grow fungus on the surface, which the fish - mullets, fly eaters, catfish, and pankaj-eat. Sharks and crocodiles feed on the smaller fish.

Now the land connection: the crustaceans rub on the aerial roots of the trees to lay their eggs. The fiddler crabs, which populate the jungle quite densely, feed on these, and deer, wild pigs, and tigers eat the crabs.

Asked what are the brightest sights in the jungle, Khasru bhai says, "there is a classical monotony about the jungle." The most beautiful spots are Katka, Madarachira, and Tin Kana Island (Three Point Island) - a triangular piece of land surrounded by the poshori river and crowded with deer and Gewa trees.

You may see from 300 to 400 deer at a time in the southern part of the jungle, whereas sightings in the North are usually 3 or 4, 30 or 40. There are two species, the spotted deer and the barking deer which have plain red coats, small horns, and two

Wildlife Conservationist Describes the Sundarbans

by Gemini Wahhaj

canine teeth in front and bark like a dog.

The spotted deer live in the grassy jungles of the North, travelling in groups of 15 or 20. The leader is a male who usually sits under cover of a tree or other protective shelter. There are two female sentinels. Female and children wander around more freely. At the sign of danger, a deer will first beat its hoof on the ground, says Khasru bhai. Then its hair rises, it cries out, and only if it can sense the direction of danger does it start to run.

"It's not a good system," says Khasru bhai. "The deer has a good sense of smell, but no sense of perception. It will react even if it senses a wild pig or just some unusual smell." Khasru bhai remembers that in 1974, right after the famines, there was no salt to tan deer skin, so these sold for one taka each.

Hunters and animal conservationists park outside the forest on boats, sometimes carrying their boat over the shoulder from the main water to swampy grounds. Here they stay for two or three days at a



The Royal Bengal Tiger -Parjatan

time, venturing into the forest during the day and returning by night. "We take rice and dal with us whenever we go," says Khasru bhai. "And we cook the fish we find there - prawn, Koi, Vетки." Most deer live in open spaces, while the wild pigs which stay in the dense jungles overgrown by Phoenix and Tiger Fern.

"Have you ever seen any tigers?" I asked.

"I've seen tigers?" Khasru bhai laughed. "I've chased tigers."

There is no official census of the number of tigers in the Sundarbans. In 1970, WWF estimated the count at 300, and over the years this number has been arbitrarily increased to the current 450.

To find a tiger, you must follow its tracks. Khasru bhai explains the way to read a track.

"You must be able to tell if its male or female, how old it is, and what its intentions are mystical animals - a wild yak, a crow, and a pack of silver wolves - all manifestations of local shamanistic gods and goddesses dwelling on the upper slopes of the mountain.

After circling the peak three times by the standard route, the pilgrim can follow a higher and more difficult trail called the Khandrosanglam. Finally, after completing 13 rounds of the outer kora, the ambitious pilgrims can travel the nangkor, an inner circuit that reveals the hidden door to Kailas' innermost mysteries. The circuit may take three days.

The broad meadows beneath Kailas' western face are dotted with grazing yaks. Higher up, nomadic families have set up tents.

To mark this critical passage, pilgrims leave an article of clothing at a sacred site just below the pass, signifying the leaving behind of all past impediments and attachments. Crossing the Doima-La, one begins a new life. "Going around Kailas even once," says a pilgrim, "purifies the obstructions of a lifetime."

der from the main water to swampy grounds. Here they stay for two or three days at a

addressing issues specific to their own community in Humla. The gods come in person, and the pilgrims have to prove their existence by performing feats that no human being can endure. Upon their return to their village the shahans are forced to drink boiling water and rub their tongues along iron tridents brought burning hot from the fire.

The summit of Kailas glows above the waters like a pale fire. For the shamans, this dome of luminous ice is a place from which other dimensions can be more easily reached. For Tibetan Buddhists, Kailas is the seat of the Tantric deity Chakrasanvra, entwined with his consort in a halo of fire. For Hindus, it is the dwelling place of Siva and Parvati.

The traditional kora or circumambulatory route around Kailas was revealed to a Buddhist yogi 500 years ago by

in roaming. Males and females leave different pug marks, a healthy adult tiger (7-8 years old) will leave a deeper impression than an old (13-14) tiger.

A tiger does not go into open clearings unless it is a beautiful winter's day or time for its mating cry. Usually it selects an island and circles this all night - from 4pm to 9pm - then it rests a little and starts prowling again at midnight. In the morning it selects another place to rest.

The tigers in the southern parts are well-fed and have much game. They are not man-eaters. As the tiger's game density increases, its territorial boundary decreases.

If the pug mark is clear, says Khasru bhai, all is right and the tiger is making its daily rounds. If not, it may be out on a hunt, especially if it is dawn or dusk. "A tiger never chases long."

There is one tiger in Chandpa that Khasru bhai had chased several times in his hunting days. It is still living, with a score of 52 preys killed.

"It's very famous," says Khasru bhai. "It walks with a slight limp, where some hunter shot it once."

Khasru bhai rattles off hundreds of birds' names, describing each beauty and its strange ways - the blue cheeeked clossis, racket-tailed drongo which is dark with a two-winged tail and a few hairs and imitates other creature's cries, etc. He describes the biggest crocodile reserve in the country, and the biggest pythons he has ever seen. He described seeing on certain mornings red blankets of barking deer. Some parts of the jungle are dense with sharp aerial roots and swampy vegetation - unsuitable for tourist penetration - while others boast tall Sundari trees. And once in Laudub, which is now a forest camp, he encountered the notorious dacotts who travel on boats.

"Call me if you're ever going there," he says, promising to describe tourist must-sees another day.

Editor's note: The best way to see the Sundarbans is in a huge group. Get together a group and get in touch with a tour operator. Khasru bhai works closely with Guide Tours Ltd. (836338, 400511).

Pilgrimage in Highland

Mt. Kailas lies in western Tibet, but both Hindus and Buddhists believe it is the earthly form of Mt. Meru, the axis of the world and the holiest of all places of pilgrimage. The Shamans, who predate both the Hindus and Buddhists and believe that human beings serve as vehicles for gods, say that the mountain rises from the center of the earth into the sky, like a magical ladder.

Mt. Kailas is thus a popular place of pilgrimage, but the roads to this holy mountain are not easy. The Bon Shamans, who now live mostly in north-western Nepal, an area called Humla, must make the journey three times in their lives. "Once when the gods first enter us, later to strengthen that bond, and then towards the end of our lives when the gods will soon have to find other bodies to carry out their work," explains a shaman. The village then sends them with porters and attendants and food for the journey, but still it's not easy. "Each time these passes seem higher and the road more difficult," says the shaman.

The journey begins with

Travel Briefs

Sonargaon chooses employee of the Year: Sonargaon Hotel awarded its Employee of the Year Award for 1993 to Khandakar Lutfor Rahman, Front Office Cashier. He won a Dhaka-Singapore-Bangkok-Dhaka ticket. -Sonargaon Tatler

Air Cargo in Asia-Pacific Region to Grow: The International Air Transport Association predicts that international air cargo in the Asia-Pacific region will grow by 10 to 10.5 per cent a year in the next three years, while cargo growth in Europe is expected to grow by 5.5 per cent a year. -Monitor

Saudia Promotes Domestic Tourism: Saudia is trying to develop the kingdom's local tourism industry. The Airline actively participated in the first National Tourism Exhibition held in Riyadh last year. It also provides in-kingdom tours under the Saudia World Holidays banner. Saudia wants to develop the necessary infrastructure within the Kingdom to support a growing domestic tourism need. The airline is in constant dialogue with all the elements of the domestic tourism industry - hotels, convention facilities, car hire operators, agents, etc. - with the aim of coordinating efforts to a common goal. -Monitor

Airbus predicts new jet orders by 2011: European consortium Airbus Industries expects the world passenger jet market to grow by over 13,400 new planes by 2011, worth some one trillion US dollars. The company is aiming for 20 per cent market share within 10 years. It estimates its current market share at between 35 and 40 per cent, but hopes to overtake the current leader in the market US manufacturer Boeing company of Seattle. Rivalry between the two companies has intensified since the recession of the 1990 Gulf War. McDonnell-Douglas is the third market of jets of over 100 seats, with a share of less than 10 per cent. -Monitor

Indian private airline to buy aircraft: Real Aviation Ltd., a private Indian Airline, said it has signed a \$40 million deal with Dornier Luftfahrt GmbH of Germany to buy three Dornier aircraft. The company is owned by Daimler Benz of Germany. -Monitor

Lufthansa cuts pre-flight formalities: Lufthansa is a leader in sophisticated inflight service for the business traveller. The airline is now turning its attention to reducing preflight hassle as well as frequent travellers. Lufthansa is trying to introduce a smart card in Germany to eliminate the need for tickets and check-in lines.

The smart card will supply boarding passes by automatic teller machines at airports which direct debit bank accounts. The smart card is designed for domestic travellers with carry-on luggage only. The concept is not expected to bypass travel agents as fares will have to be prebooked. -Holiday Aviator

BA Opens Club Center in Asia: Showing growing commitment to the region, British Airways opened an executive Club Membership Center in Singapore. Previously, the airline's London office handled membership matters. But with matters being controlled in London, customer opinion in the Far East remained unknown. The Singapore facility will give the airline an opportunity to create rapport with frequent fliers from Asia.

The Executive Club, oldest of all British Airways subbrands, has a current worldwide membership of over one million members, with only 11,000 members. The average member value is anywhere from 3000 to 6000 pounds sterling per year, depending upon the tier of membership - Blue, Silver, or Gold. This is quite significant considering the limitations of using British Airways inter-regionally. Singapore telecommunication network the airline's decision to open the center.

Members are entitled to a wide range of services from priority waitlisted flights to access to over 100 Executive Club Lounges for Silver and Gold cardholders. -Holiday Aviator

Air France Hosts Fashion Competition: Since 1982, Air France has organised an international competition for fashion designers in Paris. The contest is open to fashion schools all over the world, and is geared to discover new talents and encourage careers in fashion designing. -Air France

Thailand plans second national carrier: Thailand will set up a second national carrier as a subsidiary to Thai Airways International, as reported by the Thai daily, The Nation. Thai will have the controlling stake or 50 per cent equity. The new airline will start services on domestic and international routes where Thai already has rights but has not started operation. Thai will supply the new airline personnel, aircraft, and operating equipment.

Dhaka-based agency offers Nepal tour: The Travel and Tour is offering a Nepal tour package for Taka 15,000 per person. The price includes a roundtrip air ticket, stay at a five star hotel in Kathmandu for three nights and four days, sightseeing tours and transportation to major shopping districts. However, passengers must pay an additional foreign travel tax. Children between 2 and 12 years can accompany their parents at 67 per cent of the adult price.

Sonargaon appoints new PR Manager: Sonargaon Pan Pacific Hotel has made Roseta Haque Mahmood its new public relations manager. Ms. Mahmood has been working at a social marketing company and communications officer since 1991. She has an MBA from the Institute of Business Administration at Dhaka University and a bachelor in economics from the Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada. -Sonargaon Tatler

Air France talking about US alliance: French national carrier Air France has discussed the possibility of an alliance with American Airlines and other American companies. The weekly Le Nouvel Observateur announced that Air France is ready to sign the deal with American Airlines. Another French daily Les Echos said that United Airlines, also another American company, which is already linked with Lufthansa, recently approached Air France about an alliance. Air France and Continental had finalised an agreement last year, but it was frozen by Air France Chairman Christian Blanc.

Build Hong Kong Airport, Boost Local Economy: By spending more money to build Hong Kong's new airport, the country hopes to improve its economy by 0.9 per cent in 1996, 1.3 per cent in 1996 and 1.0 per cent in 1997, as reported by Hang Seng Bank.

The government will provide 71.2 per cent of the 158 billion Hong Kong-dollar Airport Core Program (ACP). The ACP has nine other projects besides the airport, including the building of a rail-link and expressways. The Provisional Airport, Mass Transit Railway Corp (MTRC) will fund 14.9 per cent of the project, while 13.9 per cent will be given by the private sector.

Lufthansa To Invest \$10m in Indian Tourism: Lufthansa airline will invest ten million US dollars to promote the travel industry in India in an effort to capitalise on India's growing tourism sector. Lufthansa sees a good opportunity for itself in India's local tourist market. Lufthansa's chairman Juergen Weber believes that Lufthansa can reach an agreement with Air India to increase the number of foreign tourists - that is Germans and other Europeans - in the country. Lufthansa would benefit by increasing the number and frequency of flights to India. Germany, along with some 40 other countries, has asked India for additional landing rights to bring in more flights.