

Tour operators, airlines eye Eid vacationers

M ABDUR RAHIM

With holidaymakers preparing for Eid vacation, tour operators and airlines are rolling out promotional packages.

Tour operators say they take Eid packages as an opportunity to promote local tourist destinations and develop the domestic hospitality industry.

People increasingly tend to take Eid vacation as an opportunity for holidaying. As Eid and winter coincide this year, people take the coming vacation as the best chance of holidaying.

The tour operators are getting huge bookings and they hope tourists will buzz around Cox's Bazar, the Sundarbans, Saint Martin's and other local destinations this year.

The country's leading tour operator The Guide Tours Ltd offers special package - a tour to the Sundarbans and a whale-sighting visit to the Bay of Bengal during Eid vacation.

Guide Tours will hire an ocean-going vessel for the November 19-22 whale-sighting tour, the first of its kind in the country. The tourists on board will move 125-km south into the Bay of Bengal to see whales.

Mominul Islam, director of The Guide Tours Ltd, said the place is 1133 metres deep and like a canyon in the seabed where whale can be sighted. The tour will cost Tk 12,000 a person. "Local tourism industry is growing and we want to explore new destinations," he said.

Guide Tours has also arranged three tour programmes to the Sundarbans. Tours are scheduled for November 12-15, November 14-17 and November 16-19. A tour will cost Tk 4,500 a person.

Bengal Tours offers tour to the Sundarbans from November 13-16. Tourists will be taken to Khulna and returned to Dhaka by air. A tourist has to pay Tk 14,000.

Saint Martin's Tourism Ltd offers tours to Cox's Bazar, Saint Martin's island and the Sundarbans during Eid at an average cost of Tk 5,000 a person.

The firm also offers tours to Bhutan, and parts of India such as Meghalaya, Sikkim, Sillong, Darjeeling, Tripura, Ajmeer Sharif, Kolkata, Himachal Pradesh and Bombay. The visit by roads will cost between Tk 6,000 and Tk 17,000 a person.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) is receiving good bookings against its Eid offers. About 40 percent of total offers has already been booked. Starting from November 17, Dhaka-Cox's Bazar-Saint Martin's package will cost Tk 7,000, Dhaka-Sundarbans-Dhaka package Tk 5,000 and Dhaka-Cox's Bazar Tk 4,000 a person.

GMG Holidays, a sister concern of GMG Airlines, has introduced a special family package for travellers intending to visit Kolkata for Eid shopping.

Starting from \$538 for a family of three, the package offers return air ticket on Chittagong-Kolkata-Chittagong route by GMG Airlines along with two nights stay at a five-star hotel in Kolkata. The offer is valid until November 30.

Emirates offers 'Magical Dubai' and 'Discover Malaysia' at special rates. The Dubai tour with three-night accommodation will cost \$615 and three-night Malaysia tour \$328 per person. Sources said other tour operators and airlines may also offer special packages as Eid nears.

"In Bangladesh, both inward and outward tourism is growing and promotional packages by tour operators and airlines play a major role for the growth of tourism," said Kazi Wahid ul Alam, local PR consultant of Emirates and Qatar Airways and editor of travel magazine The Bangladesh Monitor.

travellers across Thailand, he said.

Malaysia Airlines offers a number of package tours at special discount rates. The airline offers tour from Dhaka to Kuala Lumpur at \$300, to Langkawi and Kuala Lumpur at \$455, to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur at \$471, to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur at \$530, to Bali and Kuala Lumpur at \$492, to Hongkong and Kuala Lumpur at \$640 and to Singapore, Bali and Kuala Lumpur at \$655.

Starting from \$538 for a family of three, the package offers return air ticket on Chittagong-Kolkata-Chittagong route by GMG Airlines along with two nights stay at a five-star hotel in Kolkata. The offer is valid until November 30.

Emirates offers 'Magical Dubai' and 'Discover Malaysia' at special rates. The Dubai tour with three-night accommodation will cost \$615 and three-night Malaysia tour \$328 per person. Sources said other tour operators and airlines may also offer special packages as Eid nears.

"In Bangladesh, both inward and outward tourism is growing and promotional packages by tour operators and airlines play a major role for the growth of tourism," said Kazi Wahid ul Alam, local PR consultant of Emirates and Qatar Airways and editor of travel magazine The Bangladesh Monitor.

C'nawabganj
edible oil
traders
go on strike

UNB, Chapainawabganj

Edible oil traders and grocers went on indefinite strike here from yesterday to put an end to "harassment" by BDR while transporting oil.

The traders alleged the paramilitary BDR men halt oil-carrying transports on the pretext of curbing smuggling.

Abdul Wahid, president of the district Chamber of Commerce, also echoed the sentiment of the striking traders.

The border guards on Wednesday seized 25 barrels of palm oil and deposited it with local customs, angering the traders. The oil in a boat was being brought to Rahapur Bazar from the district headquarters.



PHOTO: BEPZA
AZM Azizur Rahman, general manager (Investment Promotion) of Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza), and Yasufumi Matsuo, executive director of Op-Seed Device Company (BD) Co. Ltd, exchange documents after signing an agreement in Dhaka on Tuesday to establish a fully Japanese-owned electronic company in Chittagong EPZ with an investment of \$8.2 million.

American
Airlines to lay
off 1,100

AFP, Texas

World number one American Airlines has announced plans to lay off as many as 1,100 pilots, mechanics and other ground staff in coming months, with more cuts in the future as it struggles to pare costs amid falling revenue.

"Unless things change significantly, we know we are in a difficult winter," Jeff Brundage, American's senior vice president of human resources, said in a letter to employees Friday, outlining the first wave of cuts.

India's central bank to hold rates steady

REUTERS, Bombay

India's central bank is expected to keep interest rates steady next week despite spiraling inflation, to protect economic growth, but could prepare the way for the first rate rise in four years.

Analysts said the Reserve Bank of India would be more concerned in a policy review on Tuesday about a slowdown in growth in Asia's fourth-biggest economy after a poor monsoon.

Inflation, based on the closely

Ericsson returns to quarterly profit

AFP, Stockholm

Swedish telecommunications equipment maker Ericsson reported a return to net profit in the third quarter, lifted by healthy growth in its international markets.

Ericsson, the world leader for mobile networks, posted a net profit of 4.8 billion kronor (527.9 million euros, 667.1 million dollars), against a net loss of 3.9 million kronor a year earlier.

Sales increased by 14 percent in the same period to 31.8 billion euros.

PROMOTION OF REGIONAL TRADE

Saarc leaders to sign 4 deals in Dhaka summit

UNB, Dhaka

The upcoming Saarc summit in Dhaka would focus on key economic issues as the South Asian leaders are expected to sign four agreements to promote trade and business among the seven nations in the regional bloc.

The accords, which would be incorporated in Dhaka Declaration capping the proceedings of the conference, are Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs, Promotion and Protection of Investment, establishment of Saarc Arbitration Council and Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation.

According to the Bangladeshi officials, last Saarc summit in Islamabad infused momentum in the cooperation through a thaw in the Indo-Pak bilateral relations that had worked as precursor to an impulse for moving ahead in several important directions.

"We will maintain the momentum generated at the Islamabad summit," they said, adding that the Saarc leaders in Islamabad had signed three important agreements on Safta, Saarc Social Charter and Additional Protocol on Combating Terrorism. They also endorsed independent council of poverty alleviation.

It was for the first time that the

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), at its Islamabad summit, got down to deal with hardcore economic areas of cooperation with a regional orientation and focus.

"The task of Dhaka summit is to materialise of these commitments and give shape and substance through concrete measures and implementation," a seasoned Bangladeshi diplomat told UNB. Preferring anonymity he said, "This is a complicated and difficult task, but it is the beginning of a process in which Saarc will have a true way and momentum."

According to the tentative schedule, the January 9-11 summit would be preceded by a series of meetings of Saarc senior officials, foreign secretaries and foreign ministers doing the spadework for the meet.

The meeting of the programming committee comprising senior officials of the member states will be held on January 3-4, the standing committee comprising foreign secretaries will meet on January 5-6 while the council of ministers consisting of foreign ministers of Saarc countries will hold a two-day meeting January 7-8.

The inaugural session of the three-day summit will be held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Centre on January 9 and the concluding session at ICC on January 11.

US threatens to restrict sock imports from China

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration threatened Friday to restrict imports of hundreds of millions of dollars of socks from China, despite retail group charges that the move was politically motivated.

The decision, coming just a few weeks before the US presidential election, follows Democratic party criticism that the Bush administration has not been aggressive enough in helping the rapidly dwindling US clothing and textile industries cope with increased competition from China.

Industry groups are filing additional petitions asking the administration to restrict billions of dollars of other clothing and textile shipped by their chief rival.

Jim Jochum, assistant secretary of Commerce for import administration, said the Commerce Department would impose emergency restrictions on cotton, wool and man-made fiber socks from China early next year unless the two sides can negotiate an agreement that makes that unnecessary.

"It's clear to us that imports from

China have surged dramatically," Jochum said. "In fact, from 2001 through the last 12-month period that we have information for ... imports have increased 4,200 percent."

In dollar value, sock imports from China have increased from \$8.8 million to \$170 million, he said.

The proposed new quotas would restrict the growth in China's cotton and man-fiber sock exports to the United States to 7.5 percent above the previous year's level. The quota on wool socks would limit year-on-year growth to 6.0 percent.

As a result of a 1994 world trade deal, the United States has been gradually lifting quotas that have protected US textile and apparel producers from foreign competition for decades. All remaining quotas will be lifted on Jan 1, 2005.

The quota removals have opened the door for a dramatic increase in imports from China, which has ramped up its textile and apparel production in response to the phase-out.

12x6