

Travels and Travails

FARAH GHUZNAVI

While transport innovations and the massive expansion in media technology have ensured that our world is indeed getting smaller, international travel is not without its downsides. For one thing, those very same technologies have contributed to teaching local con artists global techniques, and opened up a quite different horizon of possibilities for them. There are endless scams designed to trap the unwary traveller, ranging from the elaborately constructed to the devilishly simple. As the widespread adulteration of foodstuffs (and just about everything else!) shows, we in Bangladesh have displayed no lack of ingenuity what might be termed *kubuddhi* - when it comes to various criminal schemes, although the tourism business has not yet been targeted by the major players specialising in such "creative thinking".

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But if our lack of status as a global tourist destination is currently holding back Bangladeshi crooks from applying their talents to the travel industry, no such difficulties are being experienced across the border. Naïve arrivals to the golden destination of Agra for example, are sometimes greeted by touts who advise them that they must reconfirm their hotel bookings before going to the hotel. These scam-runners generously "assist" the visitors to make the necessary call by taking them to a pre-arranged phone booth where they are fictitiously patched through to the hotel, and informed that their booking has been cancelled. They are then advised that they will instead be accommodated at a "sister hotel" at a slightly higher price. The tout will take them to the new location, thereby earning a profitable commission for his part in the scheme, while the hapless traveller gets fleeced.