

Holidaymakers' rush boosts ticket sales

SAJADUR RAHMAN

Many Bangladeshis no longer spend their holidays with family and friends at home. Now, they travel overseas for leisure, entertainment or shopping.

Eid-ul-Azha this year is no exception. Travellers are queuing up to buy tickets to their favourite destinations. But many are being forced to reschedule their travel plans as air tickets are not readily available.

Most flights to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal and Bhutan are booked out, according to ticket sellers and tour operators.

"It is tough to get tickets to Thailand and Malaysia during the Eid holidays. Our holiday packages are sold, and still there is huge demand," said Zahirul Alam Bhuiyan, chief executive of Discovery Tours and Logistics that manages more than 200 outbound travellers under Eid packages.

Alam said people no longer decide at the last minute to travel overseas; instead, they plan ahead.

"Now, it is impossible without making plans in advance. There are no air tickets available."

Tour operators said the destinations of choice for Bangladeshis are in Southeast Asia, followed by Europe and the US. But most holidaymakers are going to Thailand, Malaysia, Nepal, Bhutan and Singapore.

A three-day/four-night package for Thailand now costs Tk 35,000 a person, up from around Tk 30,000 earlier, according to Discovery Tours. The package includes breakfast, lunch, dinner and sightseeing.

Lexus Holidays, another tour operator, is also overbooked this holiday season.

The operator normally sends 10-12 persons a day under its different packages,

but the number goes up to 100 during the Eid holidays.

Lexus offered a five-day/six-night trip to Thailand at Tk 39,500 a person, up more than 10 percent in off-peak seasons.

"We are at full capacity. There is no air ticket for Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore or Nepal," said Masum Ali, an executive of Lexus Holidays.

Officials of Asian Holidays and Galaxy Tours also said the same on the pressures they are facing from the travellers.

Ishtiaq Ahmed, a partner of CAMAIR Travels, said tickets to Thailand, Nepal, Singapore and Malaysia are sold out despite higher prices during this Eid holiday.

"You cannot get a return ticket for Bangkok at Tk 35,000-Tk 36,000 now, up from around Tk 30,000 at other times," said Ahmed.

Moreover, the upscale travellers also choose cruise trips in Singapore and other countries, said Alam of Discovery Tours.

"We are taking a group of travellers to Russia during these Eid holidays," he added.

The exact number of Bangladeshis going out of the country as tourists is hard to come by.

About 18 lakh people fly out of the country a year, said Syed Quadir, vice president of Galaxy Holidays, a top tour operator.

They include tourists, migrant workers, foreigners, students, businessmen and medical tourists. Tourists account for about 20 percent of them and their number is increasing by the year, he said.

There are about 350 tour operators in Bangladesh. Of them, about 60 organise outbound tours, according an official of state-run Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

BY THE NUMBERS

18 lakh

people fly out annually

20% of them

are tourists

60 operators

run outbound tours

GP launches 3G services in parts of Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Grameenphone yesterday launched 3G services for its customers in Bashundhara and Baridhara areas on a commercial basis.

The mobile operator is initially offering three packages in two speed tiers, while more packages will come in the near future, according to a statement.

Within the next few weeks, other areas of Dhaka and Chittagong along with Sylhet, Gazipur and Narayanganj will be covered with 3G network, it said.

There are three packages under the 512-kbps tier, starting with 2GB standard monthly plan at Tk 400. There is a Smart Plan for smartphone users comprising unlimited data (Fair Usage policy after 1.5GB), voice minutes, SMS and MMS at Tk 800, and for the heavy users' unlimited monthly plan (Fair Usage policy after 8GB) at Tk 950.

In the 1 mbps tier, there are three pack-

ages, starting with 2GB standard monthly plan at Tk 700. There is a Smart Plan for smartphone users comprising unlimited data (Fair Usage policy after 1.5GB), voice minutes, SMS and MMS at Tk 1,100, and for the heavy users' unlimited monthly plan (Fair Usage policy after 8GB) at Tk 1,250.

A video call to other 3G-enabled GP number will cost Tk 1.20/minute with a 10-second pulse. All charges are excluding value added tax.

The operator also arranged a bicycle rally in the Bashundhara residential area to mark the occasion. A boy's scout band also marched around the area. Customers and visitors at the GP headquarters were invited to make video calls to the celebrities.

Rajeeb Bhattacharjee, head of marketing of the company, inaugurated the customer experience session.

The launch of the 3G services follows the recent acquisition of 10 MHz spectrum in the 2,100 MHz-band.

AFC Agro gets nod for IPO

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission yesterday gave the green light to AFC Agro Biotech to raise Tk 12 crore from public.

The bio-pharmaceutical and biochemical manufacturer plans to float 1.2 crore ordinary shares of Tk 10 each.

Imperial Capital and Sigma Capital Management will manage the initial public offering, the proceeds of which would be used to purchase machinery.

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Time to tell the success stories of RMG

Analysts and entrepreneurs join discussion to restore the image of the sector

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment makers should build a strong communication strategy, brand the sector and tell their success stories more effectively to restore the image dented by the recent factory disasters.

Analysts and garment entrepreneurs shared the view at a discussion organised by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital yesterday.

Apart from suggesting ways to

improve labour standards, the speakers called for a bigger role of the media to showcase the achievements and potential of the sector.

It will be hard to restore the shattered image of the sector; serious work and honest intention will be required, Gerben De Jong, ambassador of the Netherlands, told the discussion organised on the eve of an apparel and textile exposition that begins in the capital tomorrow.

"One keyword is radical transparency. Cooperate with all stakeholders during the inspection for fire and build-

ing safety and do not fear the publication of the inspection data," Jong said.

A sector that is serious about compliance has nothing to hide, he added.

Jong also suggested building a positive labour relationship with trade unions to win their support.

"It's a common interest for the Bangladeshi trade unions and the employees to save the RMG employment. So reach out to them," he said, adding that the image of the factories could be protected much if workers speak in favour of the owners.

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On this occasion, a premium publication - 'SMEs OF BANGLADESH' which has been published by The Bangladesh Rating Agency Limited (BDRAL), a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet South Asia Middle East Limited was launched. Notably, SME Foundation is the Strategic & Knowledge Partner of this publication. 'SMEs OF BANGLADESH' was sponsored by AB Bank Limited, Eastern Bank Limited and Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited.

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