

Tourism year: Time to get real

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Lets contemplate a scenario. You notice hype building around "the largest pot of kacchi biryani" being cooked in your city. You come across countless posters that highlight the word "largest". Once you get to taste the *kacchi*, you discover that the rice is overcooked (almost resembling porridge) and there's a serious dearth of potato (SACRILEGE!) and meat. No, I don't want you to put into words how you'd be feeling at that moment, but that is exactly how I feel every time I see Cox's Bazar being marketed as "the longest uninterrupted natural beach in the world." If the biryani is not up to the mark or diplomatically put, "does not meet your expectations", does it matter if it was cooked in the largest pot in the city, or country, or even the world? Likely not.

The point is, if you've travelled abroad and have been to beaches that draw millions of tourists from around the world, you know Cox's Bazar does not have what it takes. Whatever natural splendour it had is being chipped away by unplanned "development", and with the kind of "beach life" that's



PHOTO: DARSHAN CHAKMA

The point is, if you've travelled abroad and have been to beaches that draw millions of tourists from around the world,

being offered, this conservative, small town with 5-star hotels cannot compete with Goa or Pattaya. Neither should it aspire to.

With 2016 being declared "Tourism Year" by the Government of Bangladesh, it's high time we do an honest assessment of our tourist destinations-move away from overselling

what's, bluntly put, underwhelming and shift focus towards what's uniquely interesting and/or attractive.

Under-exposed

The first time I managed to find Puthia, I was embarrassed. Mostly because I had no idea something of this stature exists in Bangladesh. Growing up most of us didn't read about it. Our text-

books mentioned the few obvious "archaeological treasures" like Sonargaon, Paharpur, Mahasthangarh or Mainamati.

FYI, Puthia is about 23 kms east of Rajshahi. You obviously have to ask around for directions. I was at a loss trying to figure out why this city of temples that has all the potential to

become a tourist hotspot is left uncared for.

We can't have nice things

As tragic as the aforementioned case is, unregulated tourism presents a new set of problems. Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari)

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