

## Galaxy Bangladesh at forefront of revolutionary changes in travel trade

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Dhaka : Galaxy Bangla-desh, established in 1972, has been a pioneering name in the country's travel trade. Since the country's independence, the sector has undergone revolutionary changes and Taufiq Uddin Ahmed, Chairman of Galaxy Bangladesh, has always been at the forefront of it.

The group commenced its journey with a travel agency named Galaxy Travel in 1972. Back then, the country only had 5-6 travel agencies in the capital as opposed to around 3000 currently, mentioned Taufiq Uddin Ahmed, Chairman of Galaxy Bangladesh, talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital recently.

"We started with an office in the capital's Dilkusha area, comprising only a table and three chairs," said Taufiq.

Talking about how he got into the travel business, he said, "I had always been fascinated by aeroplanes. Since travel agency is related to airlines, I decided to open one."

Also, at that time, apart from Biman Bangladesh Airlines, British Airways and Thai Airways were the only two foreign airlines that used to operate flights from Dhaka to London and Bangkok respectively, informed the travel trade veteran.

Meaning, the business volume was less back then. However, since there was no commission kick back practice, the profit was no less, stressed Taufiq.

Furthermore, in the beginning of Galaxy's journey, there was only one travel segment-business/corporate segment.

"There was no labour segment before 1985. Leisure travel was also rare," mentioned Taufiq. "Only business/corporate travellers used to fly from Dhaka to Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, London and onward to the USA," shared the Chairman.

Being a veteran, Taufiq has witnessed the massive changes, the industry has undergone over the years first hand.

He mentioned, earlier, there were no visa issues. Also, agents had to take approval from the Bangladesh Bank before issuing an air ticket. However, the latter is not required anymore.

After becoming a successful travel agency, Galaxy Group spread its wing to other avenues of the trade.

It started becoming General Sales Agent in Bangladesh for foreign airlines, one after another, over the years.

The first international airline that Galaxy Group became the GSA of was the USA's United Airlines. Afterwards, Galaxy became the GSA of Qatar Airways which is currently one of the leading airlines worldwide and in the Bangladesh market too.

"Initially, Qatar Airways only had one flight on Dhaka-Doha route. Currently, the airline operates four daily flights from Dhaka to Doha and onward to the Middle East, Africa, USA and Europe," said Taufiq.

Galaxy currently represents another legacy carrier in Bangladesh-Thai Airways. The airline operates two flights a day to and from Dhaka.

Galaxy has recently added another leading airline of the world-Saudia to its GSA network, which operates 4-5 daily flights to/from Dhaka.

The airline plans to increase its frequencies further to and from Dhaka in the coming winter season.

Besides, Galaxy also represents two other Middle Eastern carriers-Oman Airways and Jazeera Airways-in Bangladesh.

Galaxy's legacy does not end there. The group is also a partner of the renowned international visa center-VFS Global-in Bangladesh, through which visas for Thailand, the UK, Australia and Europe, are applied to the respective Embassies by travellers.

"Labour and business travel has been fueling the continuous growth of the country's travel trade industry," claimed the Chairman, adding, "Lion share of the labour movement is to the Middle East while business travellers usually fly to Europe, the USA, Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong quite often."

Replying to a question the veteran rejoiced, no technology like zoom, cellphone, fax etc could stop business/corporate travellers from flying. Leisure travel is not behind, noted the Chairman, claiming, plenty of travellers are now flying to India, Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, Maldives etc for leisure purposes.

Also, medical travel has boomed over the years. Thousands of people travel to India, Thailand, Singapore, Dubai and London too for health checkups and other medical purposes, claimed Taufiq.

He mentioned, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka currently issues over 5000 visas a day, making Bangladesh one of the top inbound travel markets to India.

These show how significantly outbound tourism practice has been rising among Bangladeshis. However, comparatively, inbound tourism is largely falling behind.

To bring more tourists, the government must invest in promotion and marketing, stressed the Chairman.

Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Chattogram, Kuakata, Sundarbans and North Bengal, among others, are promising tourist destinations of the country.

However, international tourists are not aware of these beautiful places, sighed Taufiq. National Tourism Organisations-Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and Bangladesh Tourism Board- should communicate with the embassies and travel agencies abroad, suggested Taufiq.

He also urged the government to run advertisements featuring Bangladesh, an ideal tourist destination with plenty to offer, across TV channels abroad as well as social media platforms.

The USA, the UK, and Singapore, among others, could be target markets for Bangladesh to bring in tourists, claimed the Chairman of Galaxy.

On the other hand, apart from promotion and marketing, investments have to be made by the government in infrastructure works too across the tourist destinations of the country. The infrastructure in Bangladesh's tourist destinations lacks planning, further stressed Taufiq.

It may be mentioned here that Taufiq Uddin Ahmed, over the years, had also played key roles in trade bodies of the country and helped facilitate the growth of the travel trade industry. He had been the elected president of the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh for three consecutive terms.