

## Not enough business until corona situation develops, regardless of demand

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : As outbound travel is halted following the coronavirus pandemic, there has been an overflow in domestic tourism, specially to resorts. Hence, the luxury resort The Palace in Sylhet achieved 25 per cent revenue growth monthly even amid the pandemic. However, it is not enough to sustain and recover from the losses incurred during the lockdowns imposed to curb the virus spread.

Mohammad Tanvir Hassan, Head of Sales and Marketing, The Palace, said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital recently.

From September to December 2020, The Palace witnessed a boom in business with repeated individual guests, families, and couples. Uniquely, the Palace with 150-acre land is the largest resort in the country, offering the highest amount of openness anyone can imagine. This makes the resort the best place for guests to enjoy a luxurious staycation while ensuring proper social distancing and isolation from others which are key concerns amid the pandemic, said Hassan.

For a more sophisticated, private and relaxing stay, the villas are a popular choice. With timely room service, the guests can remain completely isolated at the villas, noted Hassan.

Moreover, The Palace itself is a destination, claimed the Sales Head. In this huge resort, there are several activities, enough for guests to pass their days with utmost

enjoyment. The resort has a huge lake where guests can indulge in fun activities like boating and fishing activities. It also has a movie theatre, swimming pool, steam, sauna, jacuzzi, and water zone which is immensely popular for kids.

There are also indoor sports activities like VR and table tennis for sporty people. Even outdoor activities include basketball, trekking and cycling. Not to mention, there is a beautiful tea estate just 10 minutes away from The Palace. Visitors wishing to embrace the ambience of tea coming to Sylhet can always have a quick visit to the estate, making their stay at the resort fulfilling.

Furthermore, the food pricing across the five restaurants at the luxurious resort is quite competitive. So even if there is no restaurant by the surrounding area, it never seems to be a problem. From buffet breakfast and lunch to a-la-carte dinner, across cuisines like pan Asian, continental, fast food and others, guests love to indulge in the delicious food items served by the resort's top-notch restaurants, mentioned Hassan.

This is why domestic travellers resorted to The Palace in the absence of outbound tourism as The Palace is an international standard resort - one of a kind in the country, added the sales head.

To make the guests' stay more convenient, The Palace is currently offering two packages - a full board package popular among most of the guests as it includes meals and a bread and breakfast package - a favourite among site-seeing lovers.

Not to mention, The Palace is only 1.5 hours away from Dhaka as most of the guests arrive with their personal vehicles while air travellers can reach the luxury resort in two hours from Sylhet Airport.

With such great connectivity and facilities, The 'niche' Palace has always been at the top of the guests' preferred domestic destinations to unwind.

However, this inconsistent growth or overflow in occupancy by this segment was not part of their regular business. Domestic tourism got lucky to witness this growth as people turned to staycations at domestic destinations, thanks to the closure of outbound travel from Bangladesh.

Even though, it did turn out to be a lifesaver to help the resort stay afloat amid the pandemic, it was not enough to recover the losses incurred during the lockdowns. It did not even cover 20 per cent of the pre-pandemic revenues, said Hassan.

"If we could have performed like this for six months to one year, we could have recovered," sighed Hassan, adding, the lockdown that followed in 2021, again set the resort back in terms of revenues.

The Palace's guest mix consists of 50 per cent leisure travellers - families and individual guests, five per cent individual corporate guests and the rest - their most revenue generating segment - corporate groups that come for residential conference.

Now, amid the pandemic, The Palace unfortunately could not welcome the latter segment, the most significant in sales volume.

"Most of our repeated guests are corporate groups from different pharmaceuticals, local big companies' dealers and banks. Usually, they hold several events and team building programmes at The Palace during the winter season. However, following the pandemic, these activities of such groups were completely halted while work from home and zoom meetings took over," expressed Hassan.

After the lifting of the last lockdown in August, The Palace is currently eyeing the coming winter season for a boost in business. However, quick vaccination rollout across the country is key in this regard, said the Sales Head Tanvir Hassan, adding, starting September, they are already getting a good response in bookings. Several long pending events are awaiting to take place.

"If we can grab the market till December and continue the business for six months, we would be able to recover," hoped Hassan.

He further added, "For now, we are aiming for survival and sustainability. Once the market becomes mature and stable, we will worry about revenues then."