

An analysis of constraints and defies of running tourism businesses in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Tourism is a flourishing industry. It has become an important source of income for many countries. Tourism is imperative for the growth and development of a developing country like Bangladesh because it is one of the most potential commercial sector of the country. Tourism industry can provide adequate job opportunities for the vast number of unemployed people. This industry has been contributing to expand the economic condition of the country, yet it is not getting enough attention for appropriate development on a large scale. Inadequate and inappropriate managerial capabilities are the main cause behind this scenario. This report focuses on the causes of management problems regarding the existing tourism businesses. It also endeavours to provide some corrective measures for overcoming the problems.

Keywords: tourism businesses, types of tourism, problems of handling tourism businesses, recommendations, tourism sites

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a land of lush green natural beauty. Its attractions include rivers, coasts and beaches, archaeological sites, religious places, hills, forests, waterfalls, tea gardens and so on. The Sundarban in the southern parts of the country, Historic Mosque in Bagerhat city, Ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur are the three world heritage sites in Bangladesh. To explore the beauty of nature, a large number of domestic and foreign tourists visit the country and its tourist attraction sites. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported in 2013 that the travel and tourism industry in Bangladesh directly generated 1,281,500 jobs in 2012 or 1.8 percent of the country's total employment, which ranked Bangladesh 157 out of 178 countries worldwide. Direct and indirect employment in the industry totalled 2,714,500 jobs, or 3.7 percent of the country's total employment. The WTTC predicted that by 2023, travel and tourism will directly generate 1,785,000 jobs and support an overall total of 3,891,000 jobs, or 4.2 percent of the country's total employment. This would represent an annual growth rate in direct jobs of 2.9 percent. Domestic spending generated 97.7 percent of direct travel and tourism gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012. Bangladesh's world ranking in 2012 for travel and tourism's direct contribution to GDP, as a percentage of GDP, was 142 out of 176. However, Bangladesh has failed to introduce itself as a renowned tourist destination due to some limitations.

The specific research objectives of this study are

- To identify the present scenario of tourism businesses in Bangladesh
- To investigate different problems of managing tourism businesses in Bangladesh

- To identify the causes of the problems of managing tourism businesses in Bangladesh
- To identify potential strategies for overcoming the problems relating to managing tourism businesses in Bangladesh.

2. Methodology of the Study

In order to comply with the objectives, data was taken from both the primary sources and secondary sources. The primary data was taken from field study and visiting tour operators offices. The secondary data was collected from different reports, published articles, websites, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Daily newspapers.

3. Literature Review

The government of Bangladesh had named 2016 as the Year of Tourism. As per The Worldfolio Bangladesh government had invested \$26 million in 2016 to promote tourism worldwide. The tourism development plan aims to develop present and potential tourist sites under a PPP (public-private partnership) initiative. One of the most important sites earmarked for development for foreign visitors is Cox's Bazaar. Stretching an incredible 120 KM along the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal, it is the world's longest unbroken beach documented yet and home to Bangladesh's budding surf scene. Ecotourism sites also fall under the plan, sites such as Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site where visitors can catch a glimpse of the Royal Bengal Tiger, and St. Martin's Island, the only coral island in Bangladesh [1]. There is also a focus on

health and religious tourism. Bangladesh is home to several important Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu archaeological sites, like the Mahasthangarh in Bogra; the single largest Buddhist monastery, and the temple city of Puthia in Rajshahi. Other proposals put forward in the plan are the establishment of tourist trains on routes such as Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet, Dhaka-Khulna and Dhaka-Rajshahi; and five modern tourist marine vessels to attract foreign visitors ^[2]. The hotel industry will be integral to the success of the tourism mega plan. Testament to Bangladesh's burgeoning tourism industry is the presence of the world's biggest hotel chains, which will be ready to cater for the large increase in both business and leisure travellers in the coming years. Up to now investment has been naturally cantered in Dhaka, but luxury hotels have begun to pop up outside the capital. On March 1st the Radisson opened the first five-star facility in the port city of Chittagong, which is where Cox's Bazaar is located. The 22-storey Radisson Blu Chittagong Bay View has 241 suites and is the chain's second hotel in Bangladesh. The government aims to leverage the significant presence of luxury hotels to kick start MICE (meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions) tourism. "We have excellent MICE facilities in terms of hotels and conference and convention centres," said Tourism Minister Menon. The successful hosting of the ICC Cricket World Cup in 2014 demonstrated Bangladesh's ability to put on large scale events, something it hopes to do much more of in the future. But indeed all of these ambitious plans to attract more foreign visitors rest on the aviation industry; and improving regional and international air connectivity is another priority for the government and the national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which plans to increase flight frequencies on financially viable routes and expand its network to all key commercial and capital cities in the region ^[3]. The company is also working closely with Bangladesh's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the U.S. Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) in order to acquire the FAA's 'Category 1' rating that carriers must have to operate direct flights to the U.S. Therefore, a proper master plan for developing tourism businesses is present in Bangladesh. If we can execute the plan efficiently, we must be able to overcome the present problems of managing tourism businesses in Bangladesh and establish a worthy industry or the survivals of the tourism businessmen ^[4]. In this study data from several sources are taken for consideration to analyse the causes behind the problems of managing tourism businesses and recommendations have been provided based on the gathered information.

4. Tourism Businesses in Bangladesh

At present people are getting interested in tourism businesses. The business opportunities are increasing significantly. There are so many tour operators here who are facilitating tourism businesses. A large number of people are availing the facilities provided by them. This business is providing marvelous job opportunities to the people of Bangladesh. Students are having graduations, post graduations and other degrees in Tourism. That is why tourism business has become a need for the graduate

students of the Tourism department. In addition to the revenue, tourism can bring a real sense of pride and identity to the communities. It allows them to look at their history, community identity and so on. This helps the local residents to maintain their tradition and culture.

Types of tourism

The Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation has classified tourism into six broad categories ^[5] These are as follows:

i) Business tourism

Due to the expansion of RMG sector, a large numbers of potential buyers and their delegates regularly visit Bangladesh for their business purposes. As a result the number of business tourists in Bangladesh is increasing gradually each year.

ii) Site Tourism

In Bangladesh the majority of the international tourists usually come for passing leisure time. They are attracted to the natural beauty of Bangladesh. Additionally the local people also visit different tourist destination during their vacations.

iii) Office Tourism

This type of tourism is much similar to business tourism. This focuses on the delegates of multinational companies those have offices in Bangladesh. The delegates need to visit Bangladesh on a regular basis to provide assistance to their offices.

iv) Education Tourism

Many of the local universities and other educational institutions are arranging international conferences and seminars where delegates come from all around the world. This foreign delegates fall under the category of education tourism and are increasing significantly each year.

v) Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is widespread in countries where the medical institutions and experts are proficient and their services are affordable to the patients ^[14]. Currently the medical tourism is not well established in Bangladesh. But still many foreign tourists come to Bangladesh to avail different medical facilities at lower cost.

vi) Religious Tourism

Bangladesh organizes Bishwa Ijtema which is the largest congregation of Muslims after the Holy Pilgrimage of Makkah ^[12]. Every year a large number of foreign Muslim tourists from all over the world come to participate on it. However, tourists also come to visit Bangladesh to explore different religious events of various ethnic groups.

vii) Other Tourism

Other types of tourism includes Walking tour, Wildlife tourism, Water tourism, Bicycle touring, Boat sharing, Cultural tourism, Dark tourism, Rural tourism, River cruise, Nautical tourism, Halal tourism, Sports tourism, Slum tourism and so on. People also come for short visits

to meet relatives, participating sports and international awareness program etc.

5. Tourism Sites for Developing Businesses

More than seven hundred spots of tourist interest are situated in Bangladesh. These include nature-driven beauty like green valleys, forests, sea beaches, archaeological and historical sites, iconic religious places, cultural events and human made wonders [6].

The Buddhist relics are very significant among the various archaeological sites and monuments, which are Paharpur (8th century AD)- the single largest Buddhist Monastery in south of the Himalayas and a UNESCO-designated world heritage site, Mahasthangarh (3rd century BC)-the country’s oldest archaeological site, Mainamati- the seat of lost dynasties (Buddhist) etc., Mainamati is an isolated low dimpled of hills near Comilla district, dotted with more than 50 ancient Buddhist settlements.

The world’s longest unbroken beach (120 km) of Cox’s Bazar is situated on a clean stretch comprising of miles of sands. With its water sports and towering cliffs, this place has been aptly described as the tourist capital of Bangladesh. Top of the list on any tourist’s wildlife itinerary is a visit to the Sundarbans (world’s single largest mangrove forest- a UNESCO world heritage site) the home of majestic Royal Bengal Tiger, in its natural habitat. Spread over 6000sq. km this riverine delta is criss-crossed by a network of rivers and creeks. It’s dense tropical forest play home to a wide variety of flora and fauna and is every game lover’s and anglers ideal heaven. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh boasts of having some outstanding ancient monuments. Some of the more popular tourists destinations are Lalbagh Fort, built in 1678 AD. Sonargaon, the seat of Deva dynasty upto the 13th century, Ahsan Manjil, Husseni Dalan (a Shiite monument), the Sat Gambuz mosque (seven doomed mosque built in 1680 AD) and the Dhakeshwari Temple. Sonargaon—the ancient capital of this land—is not very far from the present capital. It beholds old palaces. A folklore museum situated in the area showcases the finest handicraft products made in this country.

The Hill districts in the south eastern region of the country commands an exotic view of natural beauty. Accessible by road from the port city of Chittagong, it is a tranquil heaven for nature lovers. Green hills and sprawling valleys are often dotted with waterfalls and small lakes. The unique lifestyle of the ethnic people adds value to the romance of this paradise. With no sound and air pollution, these hilly districts can be the finest destinations for those wanting to get away from the time chasing modern urbanistic life and embrace a domain of tranquillity.

Up in the north eastern part of Bangladesh in the region of Sylhet, the sprawling tea gardens offer a panoramic view. It is like a green carpet rolled out for kilometres. For centuries, these tea gardens have been producing tea. The plucking of tea leaves by thousands of women in the waist-level thick tea bushes itself is a spectacular view. In the midst of the tea garden valleys, natural waterfalls make it more scenic. The Madhabkunda water fall is the most prominent one with tens of thousands of tourists

visiting it every year. In the north central part between Sylhet and Mymensingh districts, huge water bodies dominate the landscapes which offer another opportunity for nature adventurers. Known locally as haor, these water bodies turn to safe havens for millions of cold escaping migratory birds coming from as far as Siberia. Tanguar haor situated in the district of Sunamganj is known to be the biggest single water body in Asia.

Bangladesh is often called a land of mosques. It is obvious that with an over eighty percent of the 140 million people being Muslims, there will be innumerable mosques. However, many of the mosques are ancient and reflect the taste and savoury of the early Muslim preachers and rulers. The 60-domed mosque complex in Bagerhat (a world heritage site) is unique with its architectural design. The Atia mosque in Tangail near Dhaka is still vibrant with its archaic designs. The Star mosques in the capital Dhaka show the craze for beautification of holy places. The huge and magnificent national mosque—Baitul Mukarram—in the heart of Dhaka is an imposing architectural beauty.

Contribution of tourism in Bangladesh economy

According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report (2016), the total contribution of travel and tourism was 4.8% of the GDP in 2015 and was expected to rise 7.95% from 4.75% in 2014 [7]. It is forecasted to rise by 6.9% per annum to 4.75% of GDP by 2016. Total contribution include direct, indirect and induced contribution.

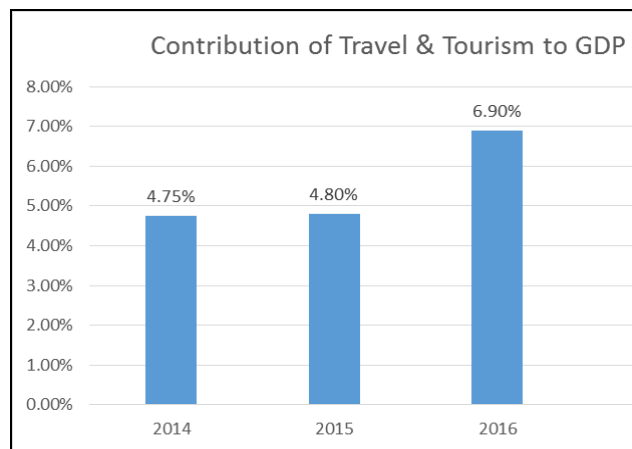


Fig 1: Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP

Travel and Tourism generated 1,756,500 jobs directly in 2014 and this was forecasted to grow by 4.5% in 2015 [15]. This includes employment by hotels, airlines, travel agents and other passenger transportation services. It will increase by 3.1% per annum on average over the next ten years. The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to employment was 2.8% of total employment in 2014. By 2024, travel and tourism are forecasted to support 4.2% of total employment.

6. Problems of Handling Tourism Businesses

Despite of having adequate tourism business opportunities, the tour operators are still having problems of handling tourism businesses in Bangladesh. Some of the main reasons are as follows.

Seasonal tourism

The tourism of Bangladesh is mostly based on winter season. The maximum portion of the revenue comes from the businesses occurred in the winter season. In other seasons the tour operators hardly have businesses. That is why they have to face financial problems to bear the fixed expenses. To face this problems sometimes they need to restructure their employee lists and many employees are terminated during the off peak seasons. Thus the tour operators cannot maintain a healthy workforce in long run.

Inefficient human resources

In Bangladesh there is lack of awareness regarding the tourism industry. That is why skilled people are unwilling to join tourism industry. Sometimes the salary packages are not that much attractive to pool people from better background.

Lack of logistic support: To run the tourism businesses there is a significant need for having the logistic support. A tour operator sometimes cannot have full logistic support and thus they need to outsource it. This leads them to incur more expenses. It is very much difficult to outsource the logistics during the peak seasons. Thus this is a great threat for the tour operators.

Unavoidable circumstances

In Bangladesh there are some unavoidable circumstances which affect the tourism businesses a lot. For example traffic jam. Traffic jam is a great threat for the tourism industry. Time management is very important to operate a successful tour. In most of the situation the traffic jam is a threat to it. Nowadays it is becoming intolerable. The foreign tourists get disturbed because of huge traffic jam and they do not recommend others to visit Bangladesh. Therefore this has become an important problem to the tour operators for organizing successful tours and they are losing future customers due to that.

Lack of appropriate rules and regulations

In Bangladesh the rules and regulations for the tourists are not fairly established. Most of the policies are outdated and sometimes not applicable to many new situations. That is why mismanagement occurs in organizing tours.

Insufficient infrastructures and superstructures

Proper infrastructures and superstructures are important for developing a sustainable tourism industry. In Bangladesh tourism related infrastructures and superstructures must be developed. Specially the transportation sector needs to be improved ^[17].

Tourism friendly community

Being one of the most sensitive and emotionally fragile industry, Tourism often suffers from local community involvement with the industry with the diverse pool of tourists ^[8]. Bangladesh is still far from making a tourism friendly local community due to lack of awareness and social structure. Sometimes the local communities in the tourist destinations are not aware of the tourism. That is

why the tour operators faces problems in organizing the tours.

7. Findings and Analysis of the Study

At modern era tourism business has become one of the most lucrative businesses of the world. In Bangladesh the opportunities for developing tourism business are available. It provides ample job opportunities to the young generations. It also contributes in the socio-economic development of the country. This industry is facing a lot of problems due to a number of reasons. Some of them are mentioned below.

- One of the most important drawbacks of development of the tourism industry of Bangladesh is less-prioritisation of tourism by all previous governments. The tourism industry are not given priority that much. That is why the industry is not developed yet.
- Lack of budgetary allocation leads an unestablished tourism industry ^[19]. A sustainable tourism industry needs a sufficient budget *ET all* ocation.
- There is a scarcity of the branding of tourism industry in Bangladesh. Nowadays branding is very important to develop any industry ^[10]. Branding is not only important for developing a sustainable tourism industry but also to attract foreign investment.
- Apart from the budgetary allocation, there is a need for proper planning programmes to develop a sustainable tourism industry. Inappropriate planning is one of the most important issue for the tour operators to operate their businesses effectively.
- Due to the recent contamination of culture of Bangladesh, it often represent the nation as a poor host of tourism industry. But the true fact is the culture of Bangladeshi people is one of the most hospitable and friendly in the entire world.
- Unavoidable political instability is an important factor for declining tourism businesses. In past few years we have seen that tour operators faced a great loss in their business due to instable political condition. A lot of tours were cancelled due to that.
- The tourist destinations lack appropriate recreational facilities. We just focus on the nature. But now the time has come to add value to the natural resources by adding some simple recreational facilities.
- The fraudulent in the tourist zone is a threat for the tourists. Specially the foreign tourists loss their motivation to visit Bangladesh and they do not recommend it to others for that.
- Different crimes occurs in tourist zones. So that people do not want to explore the areas because of safety and security. Tourist zones have to be crime free and safe in order to have a sustainable tourism industry.
- The formalities for the tourists to visit Bangladesh should be less lengthy. The visa processing should be easier and simpler ^[9]. The lengthy visa processing system discourage foreign tourists to pay a visit to Bangladesh.

8. Recommendations

- Ensuring Clean and Safe Environment: No one wants to visit a place that is not clean or unhealthy. Tourism

cannot survive without a clean and safe environment. In these situations, communities that do not provide pleasant surroundings and a clean environment have a very hard time attracting business.

- Having friendly people and good service: Tourism requires friendly people and good service. No matter what the attraction may be, a tourism centre that lacks good customer service and friendly people will fail. In the same way, communities that offer poor service not only do not attract newcomers, but, in the end, have a difficult time holding on to their local population, young people and businesses ^[11].
- Good restaurants, hotels and recreational facilities: Tourism requires good restaurants, hotels and recreational facilities. These are the same factors that are essential to any community seeking economic development.
- Tourism campaigns on Special Attractions: Sometimes rare plants or animal species are the main attraction, sometimes traditional food, handicraft or historic buildings ^[20]. A European example of well-developed rural tourism is France. Camping and caravans are the most popular forms of accommodation in rural areas, many of them on farms. Many farmers have developed camping sites on their farms.
- Tourism focusing on emerging and minority communities: Tourism is an important economic development tool for emerging and minority communities around the world. Since tourism is based on the appreciation of other cultures, tourism industries have been especially open to giving disadvantaged groups around the world opportunities that have often been denied to them by other economic sectors.
- Employment Generation: Tourism requires a great deal of construction work and provides large numbers of entry-level jobs. Tourists may infuse additional money into the local economy through shopping. In nations where manufacturing is not developed, the tourism industry can be an essential method for reinvigorating local economies.
- Infrastructure Development: Improving the infrastructure, human resources, proper policy and concerns of government can easily hold the industry back into the right track and thus Tourism can become the engine of poverty alleviation and economic growth.
- Focus on innovations: Focus should be made on innovations like eco-tourism. The number of eco-tourists in the world has been increasing by more than ten percent a year ^[21]. Initially, Bangladesh may set its target to attract one million eco-tourists a year. To achieve that target, it will have to chalk out a down-to-earth tourism marketing strategy and go for aggressive marketing in countries, which produce most of the outbound tourists.
- Tourism Fairs: Nowadays different organizations often organize tourism fairs in Bangladesh, in which mainly outbound tour packages are sold. Sending tourists from Bangladesh to other countries cannot be treated as the development of tourism in our country.

These fairs are sellers' fairs in character from the perspective of Bangladesh because the foreign exhibitors or their counterparts in Bangladesh sell outbound tour packages, and only a few offer domestic tour packages.

- Policy-making: The tourism policy of a country provides the most explicit indication of the governmental approach to sustainable tourism development and the role that all stakeholders in the tourism industry need to play ^[18]. As part of tourism policy, organizations can be set up which are able to set objectives, formulate plans and implement programs.
- Planning: Planning has both policy and operational elements which form part of the process by which the government decides on objectives, sets out the means for achieving the objectives and sets priorities. ^[13] Policy planning involves the long-term outline of general goals, objectives and directions for sustainable tourism development. Operational planning covers the strategies and procedures to be implemented in order to carry out the policy. Integrated planning also requires reliable and timely information in order to highlight clearly the links between national economic development and the tourism sector.
- Private sector participation: In most Asian and Pacific countries and areas, the private sector is recognized as a major stakeholder since it is largely responsible for providing tourism services. So Bangladesh has to encourage private sector for this potential sector ^[16]. One of the most important issues has been how to attract greater private sector participation, including development of partnership between the public and private sectors.

9. Conclusion

Tourism plays a vital role in the economic development of a country. It contributes to the fulfilment of significant societal growth and expansion. The tourism industry focuses on concepts such as infrastructural development, expansion and the development of new Businesses. Bangladesh is a country of good prospects for tourism. A master plan and integrated tourism planning can indicate that the tourism sector is a major part of the national economy and that the planning process will be ongoing and action-oriented in ways that facilitate implementation. The nature of the people of Bangladesh is a huge advantage for us. Bangladeshi people are worldwide renowned for their hospitality. A sustainable tourism industry is badly needed for managing the tourism businesses effectively. Like other developing countries Bangladesh should prepare plans particularly at the central level to guide tourism development, as they have recognized the tourism sector as an important source of foreign currency earning and employment generation.

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