

An Overview of Present Status and Future Prospects of the Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh is bestowed with beautiful coasts and beaches, archeological sites, historical and religious places, hills and islands, forests and jungles and attractive countryside with innumerable water bodies and green fields of agriculture. These rich natural and cultural attractions are valuable ingredients for tourism development in Bangladesh. Every year, a large number of tourists visit these attractive places, which has a significant contribution in the national economy. However, tourism industry in Bangladesh is faced with many problems, such as lack of good transportation and communication system, lack of well planned accommodation, food, entertainment and other services to satisfy diverse categories of tourists. The issue of safety and security of the tourists of both domestic and foreign origins is also very important for the development of tourism in Bangladesh. Though a policy has been adopted in the recent time for ensuring sustainable development of this sector, the strategies adopted under the policy are not yet being seriously taken up for implementation. Besides, the country requires a strong physical planning strategy to develop its urban and rural areas, and national transportation and communication system to establish connectivity to the tourism spots. There should be a strong marketing policy as well for the promotion of tourism in the country. Thus if necessary policies, strategies and actions are taken by the national government, tourism may become a potential economic sector.

Introduction

Tourism is a leisure activity which involves a discretionary use of time and money and recreation is often the main purpose for participation in tourism (Ghosh, 2001). Tourism is emerged from the movement of people to and their stay in various destinations. There are two basic elements in tourism, such as the journey to the destination and the stay. In short, tourism means the business of providing information, transportation, accommodation and other services to travelers (Ghosh, 2001). Tourism may be broadly

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divided into domestic tourism and international tourism. In domestic tourism, people move within their own country whereas in international tourism, the barriers exist in travelling destinations beyond national boundaries ((Zulfikar, 1998). In tourism, tourist acts as the key player in this system. The term tourist is defined as who goes on holiday to visit places away from his home. Foreign tourist is a person who visits a place and stays at least 24 hours on a foreign passport for the purposes of leisure, business, meeting and so on. On the other hand, domestic tourist is a person who travels within the country to a place other than his place of residence and stays at hotel or rented place and uses the sightseeing facilities for duration of not less than 24 hours or one night and not more than 6 months (Zulfikar, 1998).

Traveler is the person who goes from one place to another for satisfying his own needs and wants (Zulfikar, 1998). The interest of traveling varies in different ages of people due to health, energy and as well as their socio-economic background. The younger people are more interested to travel than the elderly ones. People like to travel for different purposes i.e. recreation, business, religious, cultural, sports and as well as to attend workshops, seminars and conferences. As a result, the tourism industry has to satisfy the needs of all categories of tourists depending on the nature of market segmentation.

Traveling helps to breakdown the monotony of life and reinvigorates one's energy to start afresh with work. Although there is an enormous opportunity to flourish tourism in Bangladesh, it is only recently that the potential of the sector has been recognized. There are many places of attractions for tourists in the country, which can be developed with good communication facilities for visitors. But often it is seen that these places are suffering from various problems, such as poor communication and transportation system, lack of good quality accommodation facilities, lack of safety and security, and above all lack of tourism attractions and services. It is very important to preserve the natural quality of places and develop necessary attractions with required infrastructure for travelers of diverse origins and background.

Bangladesh has an attractive natural environment and many historical-cultural places, which can be potentially utilized for the development of tourism. The country is bestowed with beautiful coasts and beaches, archeological sites, historical and religious places, hills and islands, forests and jungles and attractive countryside with innumerable water bodies and green fields of agriculture. These rich natural and cultural attractions are valuable ingredients to promote tourism in the country.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this paper is to make an overview of the potential of tourism development in Bangladesh. It tries to identify the sector's present problems and analyze the future prospects of tourism in the country's economic development. The research is mainly based on conceptual ideas, secondary information and empirical field observation. The secondary information is collected through a survey of literature and relevant Internet based websites.

Overview of the Contribution of Tourism Industry

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism plays an important role for the development of tourism in Bangladesh. Historically, Bangladesh has been an attractive destination for various categories of tourists. But at present, its position is not significant in terms of international tourism market (Islam, 2009). Tourism is one of the fastest growing and single largest industries in the world. The contribution of tourism industry in the global as well as individual perspective is really amazing. Many countries of the world at present depend mainly on tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earning. According to the World Tourist Organization (WTO), while 448.5 million tourists moved throughout the world during the year 1991 (Davidson, 1994), about 593 million tourist arrivals were recorded during 1996 registering a 4.6% increase over 1995 (Bhattacharya, 1997) and 32.22 % growth in five year.

WTO also recorded a total number of 763 million international tourist traffic in 2004, which is 10.58% higher than previous year and earned US\$ 623 billion, which shows an increase of 18.89% over 2003. Tourism continues to surge as a world economic force, contributing nearly \$5.5 trillion to the world's economy in 2004 (WTO, 2005). The increasing trend of tourist arrivals and earnings is continuing. In 2005, the world tourist arrivals rose to 808 million and it is expected that the volume of tourists will reach 1,561.1 million in 2020. This continued growth in tourism business throughout the world is encouraging and nations are becoming concerned to attract more tourists to their own destinations. Today most of the countries in the world are trying to promote tourism sector as a major source of income and thus important means for national economic development.

The tourism industry is frequently referenced in Bangladesh as a highly important stakeholder with the potential to provide extensive benefits to the Protected Reserved Forests (Hossain and Nazmin, 2006). Economic benefit for tourism is seen as a way to reduce the level of dependence of local communities on natural resources, such as the park. In Bangladesh, there is hardly any in-depth research available on the impacts of tourism on ecosystem and communities. There is also no effective national tourism plan to guide the entrepreneurs and investors. Besides, there is serious lack of management in this sector at national, regional and local levels. Bangladesh thus requires adopting a strong policy, if it wants to utilize the potentials of tourism in national economic development and societal progress.

Major Tourism Attractions in Bangladesh

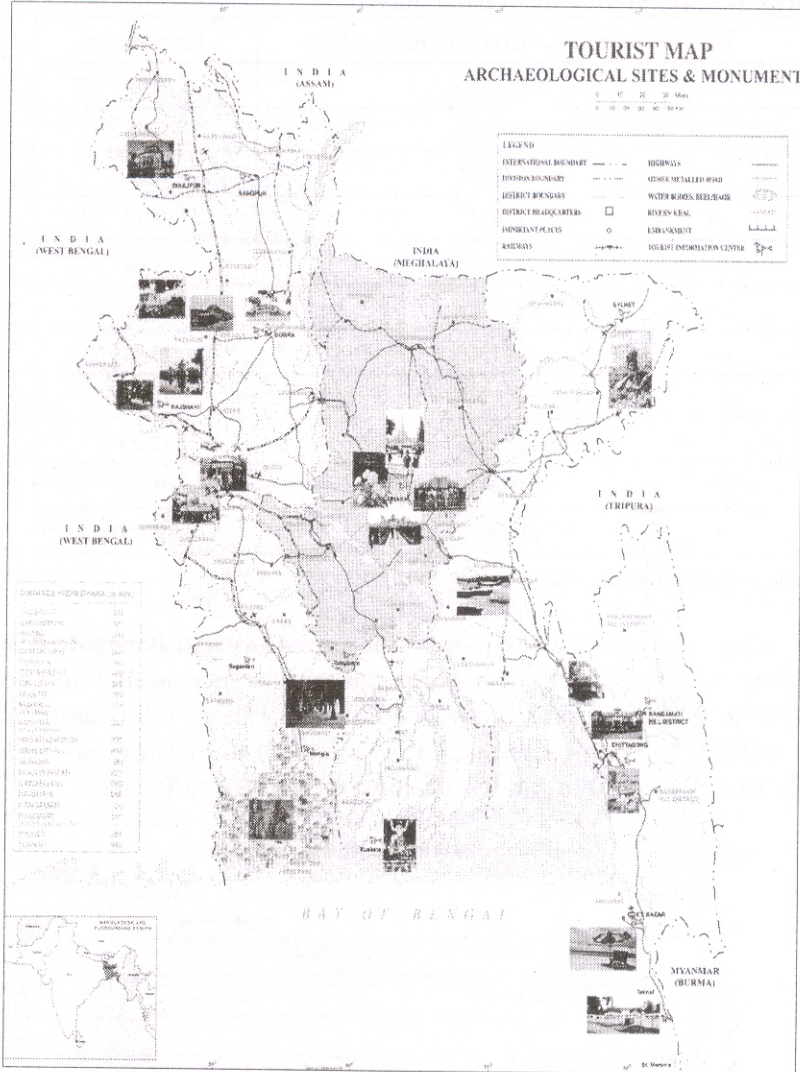
Although there are opportunities of developing tourism attractions and facilities across the country, at present only a handful tourism spots are available for visits by tourists. These limited facilities are concentrated in some places, like Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions. In Chittagong Division, the site seeing facilities are mainly located at Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban districts. Mainamati at Comilla is an important archaeological site and Lalbagh Fort in Dhaka is a great historic site. In Sylhet Division, the major tourist attractions are located mainly at Jaflong, Madhabkunda, Tea gardens and the Shrines of Harzat Shah Jalal and Shah Poran. Some renowned attractions in Rajshahi Division are Kantaji's Temple, Swapnapuri, Ramsagor and Rajbari at Dinajpur, Paharpur at Noagaon, and Mahasthangarh at Bogra. In Khulna Division, some attractions are Shatgombuj Mosque at Bagerhat and Sundarban, the largest mangrove forest in the world, is located in the southern part of Khulna Division along the Bay of Bengal. This mangrove forest has been declared as a World Heritage site (www.mocat.gov.bd). There is no denying the fact that Bangladesh has not made enough

efforts to preserve and develop its tourism sites of historical, cultural and environmental interests. Some important tourism attractions are listed in Table 1 and geographical distribution of some archaeological sites and monuments is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Tourist attractions in Bangladesh

Attractions in Dhaka	Attractions in Chittagong	Attractions in Sylhet
Sonargaon: Cultural Capital of Bangladesh	Port City of Chittagong	Jaintiapur Town (The Capital of an Ancient Kingdom)
Bangladesh Institute of Arts and Crafts	Himchari, Mohekhali, Inani Beach at Cox's Bazar	Gour Gobinda Fort
Central Shahid Minar : The Symbol of Bengal	Khagrachari	Shahi Edgah of Sylhet
The Dhaka Zoo	Chandraghona (Biggest Paper Mills in Asia)	Temple of Sri Chaitanya Dev
The Suhrawardy Uddyan	Kaptai Lake, Buddish Temple at Rangamati	Tea Gardens of Srimongal
National Art Gallery of Bangladesh	Sitakunda	The Border Post of Tamabil-Jaflong
Chota Katra	Patenga and Fouzdarhat Beaches	Madhabkunda
Bara Katra	Mercantile Marine Academy at Juldia	Hairpur Gas Field
Mausoleum of National Leaders	Foy's Lake	The Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal
Ahsan Manzil Museum	Shrine of Shah Amanat	The Shrine of Hazrat Shah Poran
National Museum	Tomb of Sultan Bayazid Bostami	Lawachara, Madhabpur Lake, Bangladesh Tea Board at Srimongal
Science Museum	Cox's Bazar (The Longest Sea-Beach), Saint Martin	Tangore haor, at Sunamgonj
Mukti Juddha Museum	Court Building Museum	Hakaluki haor at Moulovibazar
Bangabandhu Memorial Museum	The Shrine of Shah Amanat	--
Bahadur Shah Park	Chimbuk, Bandarban	--
National Memorial of Dhaka	Sailopropat, Meghla and Nilghiri at Bandarban	--
The Lalbagh Fort	Boga Lake, Ruma, Bijoy, Sorno Mondir, Kaokaradong at Bandarban	--

Figure 1 shows the distribution of tourism attractions in different areas across Bangladesh. Beside this, there are many other places of attractions, which are not yet explored or considered for tourism development. It explains the fact that tourism facilities can be developed in most parts of the country. A rigorous policy is, however, required for uniform development of tourism opportunities based on potentials in different parts of the country.



Source: www.mocat.gov.bd/images/b_map_large.jpg, 2010

Fig. 1: Major tourism spots of Bangladesh

Tourist Arrivals in Bangladesh

Beside a large number of domestic tourists, foreign tourists also comprise a good percentage in the composition of total tourists every year. In 1997, the total no. of foreign

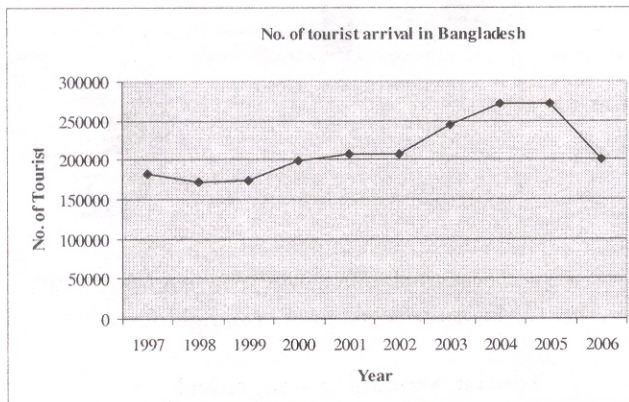
tourist was 1, 82,420 which is increased in the upcoming years. The number of tourists in 2003 was 2, 44,509 which is 2.92% higher than the previous year. In 2004 and 2005, about 12.75% tourist visited Bangladesh. The number of tourist arrivals in Bangladesh has decreased in 2006 which was 9.41% of the total tourists. The year-wise number of tourists arrived in Bangladesh from 1997 to 2006 are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Arrival of foreign tourists in Bangladesh

Year	No. of tourist arrival in Bangladesh	Percentage
1997	182420	8.57
1998	171961	8.08
1999	172781	8.12
2000	199211	9.36
2001	207199	9.74
2002	207246	9.74
2003	244509	11.49
2004	271270	12.75
2005	271270	12.75
2006	200311	9.41
Total	2128178	100.00

Source: www.mocat.gov.bd/tourism_statistics.php, 2010

Table 2 and Figure 2 show that the number of tourists visited Bangladesh significantly varies for different years. The number of foreign tourists increased almost continuously up to the year of 2005. The percentage of tourist arrivals in the country is decreased particularly in 2006. The current status of the volume of tourists can not be ascertained, however, due to lack of reliable data for the most recent years after 2006.



Source: www.mocat.gov.bd/tourism_statistics.php, 2010

Fig. 2: Variation of tourist arrivals in Bangladesh in different years

Annual Profit Earning from Tourism Sector

Tourism is one of the most profitable sectors in Bangladesh. In fiscal year 2000-2001, total income earning from tourism sector was Tk.3388.26 lakh and total expenditure was Tk.3187.14 lakh. The annual income, expenditure and profit of this sector for different years can be observed in Table 3.

Table 3: Annual profit earning from tourism sector

Year	Total Income	Total Expenditure	Taka in lakh (Profit/Loss)
1990-1991	5079.7	4852.92	226.78
1991-1992	4254.31	3970.49	283.82
1992-1993	4673.83	4289.36	384.47
1993-1994	4385.17	4005.01	380.16
1994-1995	4859.37	4378.21	481.16
1995-1996	2455.51	2218.84	236.67
1996-1997	3768.76	3538.49	230.27
1997-1998	4541.87	4304.26	237.61
1998-1999	3776.49	3592.59	183.9
1999-2000	3829	3528.97	300.03
2000-2001	3388.26	3187.14	201.12
Total	45012.27	41866.28	3145.99

Source: www.mocat.gov.bd/tourism_statistics.php, 2010

The information in Table 3 shows that in relative terms, the sector had experienced a decline in earning profit during the period of 1990-91 and 2000-01. The situation in recent years can not be observed due to lack of data. Considering the overall situation, it can be said that the country has not paid enough attention to utilize the economic potential of tourism. World-wide, tourism is now a major economic sector and Bangladesh has a huge scope to tap this opportunity for economic gains.

Policy Gap in Tourism Development

Bangladesh has not made any concerted effort in the past in exploiting its tourism potential. In the recent period, however, there have been some awareness development campaigns by both public and private sectors on the potential of tourism in the country. The government has enacted an ordinance in May 2010, which empowers it to declare an area as a tourism site and control development in designated tourism spots (GoB, 2010). This may help the relevant authorities in the identification of potential tourism areas in the country. By promoting appropriate development for tourism and controlling unwanted development within tourism sites, the government may initially create tourism friendly environment in all the potential tourism areas of the country. An early

identification and declaration of tourism sites may set the momentum for tourism development in the country. Both investors and consumers would then be gradually motivated toward utilization of the potential benefits of the sector. With further enactment of laws and rules of business, development and management of the tourism sector in the country can be made possible. It must be reminded that tourism development policy should be guided by sustainable development philosophy in order to preserve tourism opportunities for future generations.

Problems of Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

Infrastructure facilities are not adequate for the tourism sector in Bangladesh. Infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities are not satisfactory at different tourism spots in Bangladesh. Some accommodations are highly expensive and are not affordable by average domestic and international tourists and some are in poor condition. Transportation linkage to different tourism spots by road, rail, air and water is not efficient. A master plan of national transportation network is seemingly not in place supporting the national tourism policy and existing tourism attractions of the country.

The success of tourism sector can not be imagined without an effective policy of advertisement, marketing and public relations. Bangladesh lacks in skilled manpower and technical expertise to formulate policy guidelines for advertisement, marketing and as well as for building public relations. Innovative ideas are necessary to advertise the tourism spots to people within and outside the country. Webpage of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation is not well developed with adequate information, such as photographs of renowned places, accommodation facilities, modes of transport, distance from the capital city, etc.

Unplanned development beside the tourism spots affects the physical environment of the spots. It destroys the natural scenic beauty of the sites. For example, at Cox's bazaar sea beach and Saint Martin Islands, development of many unplanned commercial establishments, such as hotel, motel and shopping centers disturbs the tourists and as well as spoils the environment. Absence of Master Plan with detailed Land Use Plan for each urban or rural community is a common problem in the country. Tourism development requires a huge infrastructure development that can not be ensured without physical plans.

Finally, political vision is a prerequisite for the development of tourism in the country. Unfortunately, the lack of political will is commonly observed in such efforts. There is also lack of effective coordination among various organizations, which are directly or indirectly involved in tourism sector. As a result, the current policy is not adequate for flourishing this sector in the country successfully. Corruption is a common problem in public sector organizations and agencies involved in the development of various sector. Tourism is such a sector that involves multi-sectoral activities, and as a result, corrupt practices in the system will only deter the progress of this sector.

Prospect of Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

Tourism sector has the potential to make a huge contribution in the economy of Bangladesh. By ensuring proper development of this sector, it is possible to earn a large amount of foreign currency which will contribute to the growth of national economy. The sector provides an ample employment opportunity for the people who are directly or indirectly involved in this sector. It is a service providing sector. The unemployment problem of the country can be reduced partly by developing necessary infrastructure of this sector. It will help increase household income at community level and as well as the revenue of the government. It will also help reduce the economic gap between the rich and poor people of the country.

Tourism may also strengthen the political unity of the country. The people who come from developed countries are different in life style, background and income level from a developing country, like Bangladesh. The people in Bangladesh may get opportunities to compare their life style with the people of developed countries. They may exchange their idea and knowledge. Domestic and foreign tourists like to visit historical places, archeological sites, national monuments and as well as ancient battlefields, which in the long run may help strengthen the political unity of the country.

It may be possible to introduce Bangladesh to the rest of the world through tourism sector. It may also be helpful to create better image to foreign nations through proper management of tourism activities. If the sector can be managed properly and may attract people from different regions of the country and international sources to visit the attractions in Bangladesh, it will create goodwill for the country. Tourism can also play an important role in social and cultural development through cultural exchange and contact between people of different race and nationalities. This sector has also educational significance. The people of the country can learn many things by sharing knowledge with tourists who come from different national and international sources. It also creates opportunities of networking for investment and business development purposes.

Recommendations

Management Strategies for Improvement of Tourism Sector

Some management strategies for sustainable development of tourism sector based on its problems and prospects are given below:

- The government has to play a key role for preparation of policy guideline for planning and development, advertising, regulation and marketing of tourism sector, because it provides ample employment opportunities to the citizen and earns foreign currency for the country. It will also help government to solve unemployment problem and as well as act as source of revenue collection.
- The government should be monitoring the activities of travel agencies which are involved in tour operation. Every travel agency should be enlisted with Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB). Proper initiatives should be taken so that none of the travel agencies can operate their functions without affiliation of TOAB.

- National Tourism Organization should be strengthened with provision of adequate fund, skilled manpower and as well as technical expertise to run the organization smoothly. In this regard, National Tourism Policy, 2009 should be implemented as quickly as possible and necessary support should be given to attract private sector, such as tax holiday, loan and concessionary rates in taxes and duties and in special cases, allotment of land.
- Strategic Master Plan for tourism, which was prepared by UNDP/WTO in 1990 and later updated by WTO should be implemented for sustainable tourism development. Tourism development has many positive and negative impacts on society, economy, culture and as well as on environment. Sustainable development should be achieved by balancing the needs of tourists at present and in future.
- Necessary initiatives should be taken to increase cooperation between public and private sectors to provide services for the travelers. In the long term, it will be beneficial not only for people who travel, but also for people in the communities they visit, and for their respective natural, social and cultural environments.
- Bangladesh tourism faces many problems including areas of marketing, management, infrastructure, policy, safety, regulation and image. All problems are not unique and similar to the reality of worldwide tourism destinations. Solutions should be found out considering every aspect carefully and valuable suggestions should be provided based on experience, opinion of experts and relevant knowledge of others.

Overcoming the Physical Planning Gaps in Tourism Development

Bangladesh has just started realizing that the country has an immense potential in tourism development in the future. The recent policy adopted through a gazette notification in May, 2010 shows government's desire for exploiting the tourism potential of the country. The policy has, however, not been backed by detailed strategies, rules and actions. Such a sector heavily relies on the physical planning, and coordination and integration of diverse activities performed by various organizations and agencies.

Tourism plan has to address complex issues that need to be accommodated in various plans at regional and local levels involving politicians, administrators, professionals, community leaders and investors. Gunn (1988) argues that there is a need to understand the complex relationship between tourism and recreation, preservation and conservation. Professionals involved in the preparation of national, regional and local tourism plans and in the design of site plans for diverse categories of tourism attractions should pay due attention so that concern for sustainable development is not jeopardized by their actions. The positive impact of tourism can be great in this respect to maintain a good balance between tourism and environment. The policy makers and physical planners involved in tourism planning must not forget this concern of sustainability in development.

Bangladesh has not progressed much in terms of preparing and implementing physical plans of its cities and towns and other areas of economic and resource potentials.

However, current efforts in preparing Master Plan of cities and municipalities in the country may help development of tourism plans for resourceful areas of the country. What is imperative is that these physical plans take care of the resource foundations and market expansion potential for possible tourism development in each individual case of urban and rural settings. In each case, a tourism functional system has to be developed relying on resource bases and internal and external factors of tourism development. Communities of each tourism spot must be integrated in the tourism development plan. In this respect, a national physical plan of tourism development has to be framed to guide regional and local tourism development sectors through Master Plan of individual cases.

Conclusion

Since tourism is a profitable sector, in the long run, sustainable tourism development in the country may be possible through adopting appropriate policies and strategies, knowledge sharing and cooperation. To expand tourism, new destinations based on regional settings should be identified and preserved for developing attractive tourism sites both for domestic and foreign tourists. Such places should be kept free from any illegal encroachment, chaos and pollution. The success of tourism development depends, however, on the cooperation of various players involved in the sector from public and private sectors. Finally, as tourism development involves multi-dimensional activities, visionary leadership at national, regional and local levels is of utmost necessity. It is hoped that Bangladesh will quickly move forward to exploit the potentials of tourism in favor of its national development

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