



INVESTIGATE THE CHALLENGES IN TOURISM BUSINESS: A STUDY BASED ON SYLHET DIVISION IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

At present, tourism is the world's largest industry. As Bangladesh is a gift of natural beauty & has lots of natural resources, historical places, water front, theme parks, museums, cultural centers, and many famous tourists' spots, it has lots of opportunities to earn significant amount of revenue from this sector. But Tourists' friendly Bangladesh tourism industry is facing multiple questions and challenges in both national and international level. This is the high time to recognize and rectify the issues and challenges in order to fabricate the industry as an internationally reputed one. The study is exploratory in nature. Working with only 40 respondents, this study provides an overview of the issue in interest. The study also focuses on the challenges of 21st century faced by tourism industry. This study can be considered as an input for further development of the sector.

Key words: Challenges, commodities, security, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Increased leisure time and changes in lifestyle and consumption have given improved importance to tourism, leisure and recreation in both the developed and the developing world, and tourism has become one of the fast-growing industries in the world economy. This international, interdisciplinary series brings together innovative, contemporary research and practice in tourism, leisure and recreation studies. Statistics for domestic tourism are not so easily available. Goodwin (2000) stated that, however it is certain that domestic tourism is also growing rapidly in many Asian and Latin American countries. In many cities where the traditional economic activities have declined, city authorities have invested in tourism as a means of boosting the image of their city, revitalizing and physically regenerating it, and creating new jobs. Bangladesh is a developing country in Asia holding a high potentiality for tourism. Halim (1990) & Huq (1991) stated that, like other parts of the world, in Bangladesh too, tourism industry can play a significant role in the national economy if developed properly. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) plays an important role for the development of tourism. For a long time, Bangladesh

has been an attractive site for tourists. But at present its position is not significant in terms of international tourism market. According to Huq (1991), the vital ones are poor accessibility and communication, mismanagement in tourist destination, lack or absence of security measures in tourist destination, lack of quality accommodation and lack of recreation and amusement. This thesis aims to identify and interpret the challenges of tourism sector in Sylhet Division, Bangladesh.

Tourism is the fastest growing service-industry in the world today and prospects of it are very bright. Tourism creates employment. World Tourism Organization (WTO) stated that, the tourism industry accounts for 11% of total global employment. It is said that every twelve tourists create a new job. There are some countries that have traditionally lived off tourism such as Switzerland in Europe. Other countries in Asia, Latin America and elsewhere have joined this elite group of countries over the years known for their tourism, proving its immense potential worldwide.

Bangladesh tourism industry, especially Sylhet has great potentials both as a foreign exchange earner

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and provider of job-opportunities with resultant multiplier effect on the country's economy as a whole. The role of tourism in generating economic benefits has long been recognized in many developing countries. Many developing countries, faced with the problems of declining terms of trade for agricultural products, high levels of protection against manufactures, and natural tourism industry, have turned to urban tourism as a possible alternative source of growth. These countries have devoted their resources to the construction of airports, local transport infrastructure and hotels that are aimed at the development of tourism sector. Everything seems to suggest developing countries look upon tourism consumption as manna from heaven that can provide a solution to all their foreign exchange difficulties. But the situation in Bangladesh is much more problematic than any other countries in the South East Asia.

Bangladesh is located conveniently on the east-west air-corridor making it a gateway to the Far East. It is endowed with resources and the potential for tourism industry. Sylhet is the hilly district in the north east of Bangladesh. A region in mainly a plain country Sylhet lies between Khasia and Jaintia hills in the north Tripura hills on the south forest around abounds with innumerable bird's species. The orange grove of Chhatak with humming bees adds to the fairy land an aura of the region. The Sylhet valley is formed by a beautiful, winding pair of rivers named the Surma and Kushiara both of which are fed by hill streams from the north and south. The valley has good number of Haors and vast stretches of green land. These Haors provide a sanctuary to millions of migratory birds who fly from Siberia across Himalayas. Sylhet is the foremost tea granary of the country. The teas gardens are like green carpet spread over slopes of the hills are a feast of the eyes of the travelers. This study firstly explorative and secondly descriptive in nature. The key objective of this study is to explore present state tourism in Sylhet Division. The specific objectives of the study are:

- i) To give a vivid description of Sylhet tourism industry and its present situation.
- ii) To analyze the issues related with tourism business in Sylhet.
- iii) To identify the obstacles and forthcoming challenges in tourism sector of Sylhet.
- iv) To recommend possible ways for the improvement of the sector.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As an investigative process research takes place at different levels of scientific sophistication. However, the process of research across different branches of knowledge varies greatly. Research aims at solving problems, identifying a potential market for urban tourism and tourist's attitude. This research was a

conclusive research. Here participant observations, focus group analysis, interview and survey techniques are followed to collect data. We have collected data from 40 tourist people, and randomly they are selected of the different tourism spot of Sylhet. Fieldwork was the useful tools for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.

For data analysis of survey researcher has used the formula of Z test and based on the result researcher has accepted the null hypothesis. Data processing procedure is given in appendix-B.

Sylhet division at a glance: Sylhet district was established on 3 January 1782. Until 1878, Sylhet was under the jurisdiction of Dhaka division. In the same year, Sylhet was included in the newly created Assam Province. Up to 1947 (excepting the Banga Bhang period of 1905-1911) it remained a part of Assam. In 1947, as a result of a referendum, it was attached to the East Pakistan and was included in the Chittagong Division. The greater Sylhet was divided into four new districts viz Sylhet, Sunamgonj, Habiganj and Maulvi Bazar in 1983-84. On 1 August 1995 Sylhet was declared as the 6th division of the country consisting of the four districts of the greater Sylhet. Sylhet district consists of 11 upazilas, 2 municipalities, 37 wards, 233 mahallas, 98 union parishads, 1693 mouzas and 3249 villages. The upazilas are balaganj, beanibazar, bishwanath, companiganj, fenchuganj, golabganj, gowainghat, jaintiapur, kanaighat, sylhet sadar and zakiganj.

Sylhet as a tourist city: Nestled in the picturesque Surma Valley amidst scenic tea plantations and lush green tropical forests, greater Sylhet is a prime attraction for all tourists visiting Bangladesh. Laying between the Khasia and the Jaintia hills on the north, and the Tripura hills on the south, Sylhet breaks the monotony of the flatness of this land by a multitude of terraced tea gardens, rolling countryside and the exotic flora and fauna. Here the thick tropical forests abound with many species of wildlife, spread their aroma around the typical hearth and homes of the Manipuri Tribal maidens famous for their dance.

The Sylhet valley is formed by a beautiful, winding pair of rivers named the Surma and the Kushiara both of which are fed by innumerable hill streams from the north and the south. The valley has good number of Haors, which are big natural depressions. During winter these Haors are vast stretches of green land, but in the rainy season they turn into turbulent seas. These Haors provide a sanctuary to the millions of migratory birds who fly from Siberia across the Himalayas to avoid the severe cold there. Sylhet has also a very interesting and rich Sylhet, before the conquest by the Muslims; it was ruled by local chieftains. In 1303, the great Saint Hazrat Shah Jalal came to Sylhet from Delhi with a band of 360 disciples to preach Islam and defeated the then Raja Gour Gobinda.

For miles and miles around, the visitor can see the teagardens spread like a green carpet over the plain land or on the sloping hills. A visit to the tea plantation in Sylhet is a memorable experience. Sylhet, the tea granary of Bangladesh, not only has over 150 tea gardens but also proudly possesses three largest tea gardens in the world in both area and production.

Problems of Bangladesh tourism industry

- i) The major reason which prevent foreign visitors from traveling to Bangladesh are political instability and unrest Compared to other South Asian Countries, vacationing international tourists arrival are much less in number in Bangladesh than.
- ii) Bangladesh possesses tourists' attractions like historical, scenic, climatic, (religious festivals, trade fairs and so on. In terms of accessibility) i.e. accommodation local transport, security, catering, Medicare, Bangladesh lags far behind than many other neighboring countries.
- iii) Lack of sincerity and political will to promote Bangladesh as a common tourism destination.
- iv) Different studies reveal that most of the tourists have a negative image of Dhaka. They as a famine and flood stricken country with dirty and poor inhabitants, overcrowded and lawless city streets, unsanitary conditions, portray Bangladesh.
- v) Insufficient planning and provision for infrastructure components are two classic errors that hinder the development of tourism in Bangladesh.
- vi) It is observed that majority of tourists visiting Bangladesh are busy in tourist places and monuments or relaxing in beaches. It is a matter of great regret that after sunset they have nothing entertaining to do.
- vii) There is no casino, Bingo, Public transport, theatre and late night show.
- viii) For a designation to attract increasing tourism flow it requires the provision of security and safety to taunts, it is unfortunate that Bangladesh has failed to provide these to them, which is one of the major problems Bangladesh industry in facing.
- ix) Lack of government policy is also a problem for tourism industry. This indicates that our tourism sector is in scarcity of proper guideline.
- x) Corruption is another major problem regarding tourism industry of Bangladesh. For which foreigner often fell into problem

in their smooth and continue journey in Bangladesh.

- xi) Shortage of tourism training infrastructure, qualified trainers, and lack of proper strategies and policies for human resource development hinders the growth of tourism in Bangladesh.
- xii) Finally absence of effective coordination and lack of investment is major obstacle in this sector.

Problems specifically related to Sylhet as a tourists destination

The shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal: In the shrine, women can enter only in the basement and not into the 'Majar' (grave) of Hazrat Shahjalal for religious reason. Being a religious area of Islam its almost rare that a person from any other religion except who knows about the wish fulfilling virtue of this place. Congestion of buildings in the front side of the 'majar' also shows the improper planning. Touch of disregard from the part of government is also visible. Moreover few years ago there was an incident of bomb blast.

Temple of Sri Chaitanyadev: It's an important place for people of 'Sanatan' religion and every year a fair is held in its premises. By using this criteria government could earn a lot from India by allowing entrance of the Indians to Bangladesh. But previous government didn't take any action to this regard. Government condition of negligence in reforming and developing of this area is also a miserable thing to say.

Jaflong: Jaflong is one of the attractions of the tourism industry of Sylhet of which glamour is being diminished day by day. Though there have been some development in the transport system, there are also many low quality buses which are in operation.

The problems in Jaflong are:

- i) Stone and sand collection from the river 'Mari' in an excessive amount;
- ii) Crowd of workers of the stone and sand collection;
- iii) Some miserable incident of firing by the BSF;
- iv) Natural pollution- air, water, and noise pollution etc;
- v) Inadequate management to control the illegal works is also a weak point;
- vi) Lack of security is a great concern. Each and every year we get news of tourists and visitors drowning and dying in quicksand. The authority is well informed of these miserable incidents, but they are not taking any step to prevent tourists from going to such areas.

Jointapur Rajbari: Though it sounds like a great thing to be visited, but in reality it is actually a worn-

out one storied unattractive building. Bushes and dirt around the building have made the place almost intolerable. This place is now being used as a school. A tourist who wishes to go to a 'Rajbari' is surely to be stunned at the sight of 'Jointapur Rajbari'. It's the result of absence of any proper and organized central authority to look after this kind of precious asset of Bangladesh.

Srimongol: One of the most important, beautiful and tourist attracting spot in Sylhet, is Srimongol. A tourist who goes to Srimongol must be interested to stay inside a tea garden. But a matter of pity there is no government owned tea garden in Srimongol, where government could establish a tourist resort. The importance of government owned organization is, private tea companies don't have the headache to improve the tourism situation.

Madhabkundo Waterfall: Security of the tourists is the main problem here. It becomes a death valley in the rainy season. Inadequate security cannot prohibit the excited young people to ride at the top of the fall which is very slippery. As a result, every year this area experiences two or three death cases. Moreover this place has become quite crowd and congested due to the flying businesses of local people. Although madhabkundo is one of the most visited tourists destination of Sylhet, there are no separate transportation like bus for going to madhabkundo. Most visitors and tourists still have to reserve transport for reaching their.

Lawachorra Rain Forest: Lawachorra rain forest is a large area and to visitors it's a great place to stay two or three day as it is impossible to wander the full area in a day. But there is no place to stay there. Again if anybody wish to build a accommodation its sure that he is going to build a two or three storied hi-fi building in a jungle (how funny!). How it is mismanaged can be understood from the instance that the only 'African Oak Tree' (which was said to be 'Chloroform tree' as misconception) in Bangladesh has been cut down recently.

Sripur: When a tourist goes to a place that requires entry fee he can surely want to get something special. But Sripur fails to serve as a 'special' place. There could be huts inside this place to stay on and invite peoples to stay there and enjoy camping. But there is no such type of initiative to better the condition. Its condition is getting worse day by day. Sometimes tourists do picnic there and leave the garbage's there on the spot which makes the spot even dirtier. There is no initiative by the authority to improve the area and increase its attraction.

Challenges of 21st century to be resolved

The world is undergoing a lot of changes-both positive and negative. Like climatic change due to global warming, high growth of population, rising prices of commodities and fuel, etc. Bangladesh as a developing nation is greatly affected by them. From

the perspective of the tourism industry, these momentous changes present a major challenge and may have long-term industrial consequences. In fact tourism risk has never been higher and tourism officials must change the way they do risk management.

Rising Prices: The prices of food, accommodation, and fuel have increased at fast rate considering to the past. These price rises are the result of a number of factors: irregular rainfall, the high cost of fuel resulting in higher transportation costs, political disturbances, earthquakes and floods etc. The impact of tourism being caught in the crossfire is already manifesting itself. Restaurants have had to raise prices or lower their service. Transportation companies have been (and will continue to be) hard hit. The airline industry is especially vulnerable. All these factors make tourism a more expensive one. Especially in Sylhet price of necessities are quite higher, which actually hinders tourism.

Environment: The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI 1999) pointed out:

'Tourism in natural areas, euphemistically called 'eco-tourism,' can be a major source of degradation of local ecological, economic and social systems. The intrusion of large numbers of foreigners with high-consumption and high-waste habits into natural areas, or into towns with inadequate waste management infrastructure, can produce changes to those natural areas at a rate that is far greater than imposed by local residents. These tourism-related changes are particularly deleterious when local residents rely on those natural areas for their sustenance. Resulting economic losses can encourage socially deleterious economic activities such as prostitution, crime, and migrant and child labor'.

Some of the different kinds of impacts that tourism development and operational activities can have include:

- i) Threats to ecosystems and biodiversity – e.g. loss of wildlife and rare species, habitat loss and degradation,
- ii) Disruption of coasts – e.g. shoreline erosion and pollution, impact to coral reefs and fish spawning grounds,
- iii) Deforestation – loss of forests for fuel wood and timber by the tourist industry also impact on soil and water quality, bio-diversity, integrity, reducing the collection of forest products by local communities,
- iv) Water overuse – as a result of tourism / recreational activities e.g. golf courses, swimming pools, and tourist consumption in hotels,
- v) Urban problems - Congestion and overcrowding, increased vehicle traffic and

resultant environmental impacts, including air and noise pollution, and health impacts,

- vi) Exacerbate climate change – from fossil fuel energy consumption for travel, hotel and recreational requirements,
- vii) Unsustainable and inequitable resource use - Energy and water over consumption, excessive production of wastes, litter and garbage are all common impacts.

Climate Catastrophe: Climate is an essential resource for tourism, and especially for beach, nature and winter sport tourism, and the phenomenon of global warming already gravely affects the industry and an increasing number of destinations. The UNWTO declared climate change a priority issue shows the growing awareness among industry leaders and policymakers that the impacts of global warming pose a serious threat to tourism - one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates show that in 2002 travel, tourism and related activities will contribute 11% to the world's GDP, rising to 12% by 2010. The industry is currently estimated to generate 1 in every 12.8 jobs or 7.8% of the total workforce. This percentage is expected to rise to 8.6% by 2012. Tourism is also the world's largest employer, accounting for more than 255 million jobs, or 10.7% of the global labor force (WTTC 2002).

In recent Global Ecotourism Conference 2007 (GEC07) it was agreed that "Climate change has increasingly become a major threat affecting the very resources on which ecotourism depends – natural areas and local and Indigenous communities around the world....Stronger leadership and strategies are needed in order to substantially decrease ecotourism's carbon footprint generated from multiple sources including facility operations and transport-related greenhouse gas emissions."

Travel and tourism leaders are now feverishly working at the climate change front. Because

- i) Firstly, the economic costs of climate change for the industry will rise inexorably if it takes a business-as-usual attitude.
- ii) Secondly, tourism relies more than other industries on a good image, but its reputation as a beneficial and environmentally acceptable activity has rapidly faded during recent debates on the causes of global warming.

Bangladesh is a place of global calamity. Each and every year the country is facing flood, khora, and other natural disasters. Sylhet is situated in a prone earthquake area. This makes the district more risky and challenging from tourism perspective. Long term planning and sustainable development is a must by the authority.

Human Resource Challenges: Availability of skilled manpower is a major challenge faced by the travel and tourism industry, one of the largest

employment generators in the country. To sustain growth in the travel and tourism industry, trained manpower/ workforce is required at every level — managerial, supervisory, skilled or semi-skilled. Challenges faced at each level are different. Study found that most tourists' organization in Sylhet is operated by locals. They do not have much training on tourism and hospitality. Moreover there remain linguistic problem of the local community who fail to interact in proper bangoli and English languages. . Such a high proportion of untrained manpower would adversely affect quality of services offered to the tourists. There are very few training and education institute in Sylhet and tourism sector could not attract well-trained personnel to pursue this as a career.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

The tourism industry can no longer ignore the issue of total tourism security, what is often called "tourism surety." Security has been a major problem as well for growth of tourism for a number of years. Terrorist attacks or political unrest in different parts of the country have adversely affected sentiments of foreign tourists. Terror attack in Sylhet, chondipul where one man was died due to the fire in the bus has raised concerns of security. These kinds of political tension have a negative impact in tourists mind. Moreover death in jaflong, madhabkundo, etc area, stealing of mobile and other important accessories in parks, sexual abuse etc also must be taken as a major threat. The authority must give proper attention to mitigate these problems.

Steps under Consideration of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation being renamed as the Bangladesh Tourism Board will play the leading role of promoting and marketing Bangladesh Tourism domestically and internationally. BTB will also be engaged in formulating tourism plans and policies for the development of tourism, along with attracting foreign investment in the tourism sector. The formation of the BTB is yet another positive step for the Bangladesh tourism industry in 2011, after launching the campaign, "Bangladesh Tourism Year 2011" earlier this year.

Firstly, the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation would like to concentrate on expanding tourist destinations. They want to identify towns and cities that could be transformed into new places of interest, and then want to upgrade these destinations and promote them.

Secondly, Communication systems is other issue that they hope to rectify, as communication between tourist hotspots is not up to standard and the infrastructure at present is also not as strong as it should be. Part of the communication and infrastructure shortfalls is the fact that some roads are either in terrible condition or non-existent, hampering travel and transportation

Thirdly, Accommodation also needs to be looked at. The government has recognized these problems and is giving the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation their full support in trying to solve the problems and develop the tourism industry.

Fourthly, The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation wants to introduce multidimensional tourism to Bangladesh, offering tourists a host of different attractions that combine natural wonder with religion, tradition and history.

Fifthly, they want to appoint professionals in the tourism field, such as tour operators, hospitality specialists and developers, to breathe new life into the industry. The privatization of hotels, swimming pools, bars and motels has already begun.

Sixthly, the deployment of tourist police is also being looked at to step up security.

Finally, the Government provides incentives to attract private sector partners. The incentives include tax-holiday, loans, concession rates for taxes and duties and in specific cases, allotment of land etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the City residents have a positive image on Sylhet. But still they feel that Sylhet as a tourist city is losing its attraction day by day. They are facing problem on the sector including -transportation, accommodation, security and safety, night life etc. Especially in case of security they are showing higher concern. In my survey most of the respondents give the following regards about the issues and challenges of tourism in Sylhet. These are given below-

- i) A high percentage of respondents view Sylhet as one of the most pleasurable tourist's destination of the country.
- ii) Sylhet provides personal safety and security, but this is not sufficient as the incidents on the tourist spot are increasing day by day.
- iii) Prices for tourism services are high in Sylhet, especially the fair of hotel and motels. But the fair of parks are quite reasonable.
- iv) Increasing tourism business in Sylhet are creating more employment opportunities in Sylhet and also better shopping, dining, and recreation opportunities.
- v) A high percentage of respondents think that tourism lead to increase the price of necessary commodities near the tourist attraction area and also excessive traffic congestion and pollution in the city.
- vi) Tourism results in increasing the real estate price near the tourist attraction area.
- vii) Most of the Sylheti community feel proud of their local art and culture.
- viii) Most visitor feel that Sylhet can be a major foreign remittance earning site of the country if properly developed as a large number of people from Sylhet lives abroad.
- ix) Tourism leads to increase crime in the city and greater demand for tourist police.
- x) Most resident feel that increasing price of fuel and transportation fair can have a large negative impact on their life and tourism in the whole country.
- xi) Political and social instability, lack of security and the changing climate are imposing a great challenge on tourism business of Sylhet.
- xii) Government initiative in this sector is insufficient.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

From the data analysis and comment of the respondents, the following recommendations are mentioned for sustainable tourism development in Sylhet.

- i) Safety and security is a major concern as mentioned. To encourage all tourists whether inbound, outbound or foreign, government and other associative bodies should take step to ensure personal safety of the tourists. The concern of safety and security should be especially applicable to jaflong and madhabkundo. In jaflong the area of quicksand should be marked as "Danger zone".
- ii) Government should take necessary step for the beautification of the sites that are not yet in the light or ignored.
- iii) Investment in this sector should be increased and more private ownership should be encouraged.
- iv) More infrastructure and roads and highways should be developed.
- v) Hotel fare and price of commodities near the site should be minimized to a comfortable level.
- vi) Tourism and hospitality management courses could be open by Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.
- vii) In developing a new tourism spot anybody should give close attention to scenic beauty and adventure. Also it can be said that people want newness. To constantly attract tourists management should be aware of peoples changing mind and they should be dynamic about the style of the area, various events etc.
- viii) Well transportation system may be developed all around the city where sightseeing bus could be made available to give a clear view of this beautiful nature to the tourists.
- ix) In the tourist zones, an extremely good communication system like internet, digital phone, fax, etc. should made available for the tourists.
- x) "Young entrepreneurs" especially female entrepreneurs of Sylhet may be encouraged to operate various types of goods and services reflecting rich cultural heritage including art-

- craft of the country for selling to the foreign tourists.
- xi) Tribal people of the country for example Manipuri tribe in Sylhet may be encouraged by the policy makers and/or non government organizations to undertake entrepreneurial activities associated with tourism.
 - xii) Proper planning and management is needed to control the price of the necessities to a tolerable limit of the tourists in theme parks, zoo, and other sites.
 - xiii) Steps should be taken to mitigate pollution of the environment arising due to tourism and traffic should be more seriously managed by the authorities during tourist season, holidays etc.
 - xiv) Tourist and community police should be deployed to the parks, attractive sites to oversee the situation.

CONCLUSION

One sample z test was conducted on the responses given by respondents. High significance value (typically above 0.05) indicates that there is no significant difference between the test value and observed mean. Researcher has formulated a hypothesis prior to data collection based on which researcher has taken his decision. A hypothesis is a statement about the nature of anything, a proposition that is empirically testable. The null hypothesis of researcher's survey is "socio-economic challenges of tourism are very high in Sylhet". Normally the opposite is treated as alternative hypothesis. Based on survey researcher has accepted the null hypothesis (appendix). That is the tourism sectors of Sylhet are facing high level of challenges which must be given proper consideration for sustainable tourism development.

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