

## TOURISM PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES AT SYLHET REGION IN BANGLADESH: A CRITICAL CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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### Abstract

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Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries along with the leading source of foreign exchange earnings and employment for many emerging countries. Bangladesh has an attractive natural environment and many historical-cultural places, which can be potentially utilized for the development of tourism. The aim of the paper is to explore the tourism prospects and challenges at sylhet region in Bangladesh. The paper is based on secondary data. The data and information have been collected and examined mainly from different published articles and reports, research papers, Bangladesh Tourism Board, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, World Tourism Organization and different websites. The importance of tourism in Bangladesh along with its benefits in socioeconomic development. The improvements from tourism are multidimensional. The results exhibited that dynamic tourism prospects of this region are flourish the economy, earn a lot of foreign currency, increase household income, create employment, develop essential infrastructures, reduce the economic gap, create better image, reduce regional disparity, create goodwill, and build regional cooperation etc. The study also displayed that major challenges of this area are lack of infrastructure facilities, modern and sufficient recreation facilities, security and safety, proper training and HR, proper planning, marketing and information, product development, tourism awareness, and political instability etc. The study is constrained in inside of Sylhet and the result is attained based on the past studies. The study is wholly prepared based on literature at Sylhet in Bangladesh.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the core features that predicted to drive the economy of a country. Pantouvakis (2013) designated that tourism is one industry that endures grows and develops around the world which has a main influence on the world economy. Tourism industry is important as it plays a vital role in the economy of developing and developed countries. The meaning of tourism progressed along the last decades and it is nowadays commonly



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recognized that it encompasses a dynamic element, a static element and economic significances (Vanhove, 2005). Tourism industry has become very significant and is measured as one of the biggest companies in the world. Loyalty is a significant matter for the sustainability of trade of the firms. Relationships with the tourists should be made well in order to achieve their satisfaction and loyalty. The review is to check several between destination image, service quality, superficial value, satisfaction and loyalty (Ohm and Supinit, 2012). Khan and Hossain (2018) studied that tourism and hospitality industries should be commended for its use of ICT and adoption of modern machineries like social networks for engaging with consumers. The application of ICT has been cunningly accomplished and applied with very least cost, needing little methodical resource from the staff. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) recognized that marketing in tourism may be seen as the subsystem in the system of marketing services and by services, its' mean all those activities, as the final product does not have a physical is invisible and intangible for the tourist. The tourism product is a multifaceted product because it comprises of goods and services in different doings. The study is determined that image is an impression of firms that have been entrenched in the minds of tourists comprehended from their advertising and public relations of the firm, from word of mouth and through the tourist experience when consuming goods and services that the firm offers (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001).

The paper has originated that image of the hotel is one of the two most important aspects for the guests of a hotel in considering the intention to repurchase and applaud it to others. So, image has a chief role in persuading marketing activities of firm (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). The paper is advanced first review pre-existing literature on tourism, sports tourism, mega-event tourism, sustainable tourism and past academic study on the effects from tourism. Importantly, the significances exposed that stakeholders would like to see more inward investment from the private area to exploit on the advancement and infrastructure developments that have taken place in the tourism area and also demonstrated that economic, environmental and social aspects are influenced on tourism industry development (Khan, et al., 2018). Ferdoush and Faisal (2014) presented that the importance of tourism is observed from many viewpoints like economic, social, cultural, political, etc. Now in our gross domestic product, the role of tourism is below 1%. If it could be brought to 5% then it would create about 5 lacs direct and indirect employment, which would move the economic index in the upper direction in all areas. Tourism is one of the lucrative areas in Bangladesh (Elena et al., 2012).



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Bangladesh is located accessibly on the east-west air-corridor making it an entry to the Far East. It is awarded with resources and the potential for tourism business. Sylhet is the hilly district in the north east of Bangladesh. A region in mostly 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 Bangladesh.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Haque and Islam (2015) conducted a study is to explore the problems and prospects to flourish the tourism sector in the region. Quantitative method has been used in the paper to discover the exploration problems based on survey method. The tourists are found very enthusiastic to get test of visiting different places and the study consequences some good suggestions for enlightening tourism areas. Nevertheless, in order to make Bangladesh a tourism friendly country, a restoration of tourism policy, which should be in tune with the new countrywide economic, social, environmental policies and trends and the government should monitor all actors and aspects related to tourism sector in Bangladesh.

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries as well as the main source of foreign exchange earnings and employment for many emerging countries. It is a vacation activity which includes a discretional use of time and money. Regeneration is often the key aim for involvement in tourism (Ghosh, 2001).

According to Rahman et al. (2010) Bangladesh has an attractive natural environment and many historical-cultural places, which can be potentially utilized for the development of tourism. The country is conferred 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.

Armin et al. (2014) conducted a research with goals to project the tourist arrivals in Bangladesh to realize the growth rate of earnings from the tourism sector in Bangladesh and to compare the inbound and outbound voyages by drive of visit. In Bangladesh, unique and attractive tourism market has been developed over the years to extent the business. The study exposed that average number of tourist advents and earnings from the tourism industry has



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been growing for last ten years. Nevertheless, the growth rate is not satisfactory comparing with the potential. By the study, it is seen that most of the foreigner comes in Bangladesh for the purpose of travelling. The study supposed the tourism businesses as a new vocationalsim. The study offers some commendations for the development of tourism industry in Bangladesh the context of new vocationalism.

According to Shahid (2004) the scenarios of tourists sports capturing, tourist absorbing, buying air ticket, travelling, site seeing, food & beverage delivering etc. have been changed and so new vocationalism essentially needed all over the world. Tourists should have the proper knowledge and skills to handle all the subjects efficiently by these changes. Bangladesh, as a vacation destination, has many aspects. It is gifted with practically all the natural potentials that attract tourists.

Redwan (2014) highlighted the significance of tourism in Bangladesh along with its benefits in socioeconomic growth. The improvements from tourism are multidimensional such as GDP contribution, employment generation, foreign currency earnings, infrastructure development, and creation of investment opportunities, poverty alleviation, government earnings and cultural improvement.

Ali (2004) showed that through enlightening the efficiency and effectiveness of services of tourism region, arranging better facilities, cost cutting method, technological improvements and infrastructural development, both domestic and foreign tourists can be stimulated to tour with different alternative reasons.

According to Muhammad and Rehana (2010) researched that tourism sector can play positive contribution towards enhancing Gross Domestic Product of a country. The tourism sector in Bangladesh has been progressively growing from mid Nineties to till now. The study has been undertaken to note effective and efficient utilization of strategic management of tourism sector to raise Gross domestic product through which macroeconomic sustainability over the time period of the country can be improved. The study is recommended that through enlightening the efficiency and effectiveness of services of tourism sector, arrange facilities, cost cutting techniques, technological growth and infrastructural development, both local and foreign tourists can be stimulated to tour with different alternative causes. Tourism area may be grown up under holistic approach which in turn will increase Gross Domestic Products as macro-economic variables of the country will be upgraded and sustainable development can be achieved. The study is maintained that through developing public and private sector partnership, Bangladesh Government, related other autonomous organizations and likewise foreign direct investment to build strategic leadership, articulating suitable approaches and



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realizing of these approaches will generate new chances and strengthening capacity building and lessening the weakness in addition to eliminating threats can be feasible.

According to Tuhin and Majumder (2015) tourism has measured as the global biggest and fast growing business of modern business world. It has a vital effect on economic development of a nation. Bangladesh is a new tourist destination on the map of the world. Bangladesh has massive potential to develop tourism due to its attractive natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Tourism can add value in the Bangladeshi economy if appropriate marketing idea and approach can be made and realized for the purpose. Nevertheless, the business flops to influence its destination due to suitable marketing applies. The study goals to illustrate the current scenario of tourism industry in Bangladesh, classifies the restraints, and recommends helpful processes consequently. The study also recommends that government should formulate a 'tourism policy' instantly for the development of this industry. Both public and private level investment is vital in the tourism area and regional cooperation can bring benefits for Bangladesh.

Hossain (2001) highlighted on the adopting marketing strategies of the BPC to meet the needs of the tourists, fulfill purposes of the BPC, and contribute to the national economy of Bangladesh. The study has suggested that in formulating and adopting marketing strategies, BPC should inspect carefully those aspects which affect prospective tourists' choices in connection with selecting destination and adopting tourism products like attractions, facilities and accessibility.

Zahir et al., (2011) suggested for erecting good quality accommodations combination with good restaurants and commercially vital cities to serve both the national and the intraregional tourists. The research is also recommended the deluxe and graded hotels to offer modified services amalgamation with reception, living, foods, and recreation for the high spending tourist segments.

According to Ali and Mobasher (2008) explored that for Bangladesh- spots and cost of services have positive effect on the tourism sector. The study is recommended that tourism should be acted as a significant element of economic development of the state for which working together may be applied between tourism marketing plan and its implementation procedure. Integrated marketing communications channel should be used to develop tourism area of the Bangladesh.



## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the paper is to explore the tourism prospects and challenges at Sylhet region in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To forecast and highlight the prospects of tourism sector in the country.
- b) To know the major challenges to the tourism development.
- c) To explore the critical conceptual review of tourism prospects and challenges of the Sylhet region.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODS OF THE STUDY

The paper is based on secondary data. The data and information have been collected and examined mainly from different published articles and reports, research paper, Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, World Tourism Organization and different websites.

### 5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## **5.1 Tourism Destination**

The paper mostly highlights on the prospects and constraints of tourism sector in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has developed cultural heritage. Bangladesh is very much attractive and potential tourism sector that can earn foreign currency around the world. The study has based on secondary information that has gathered from different articles published in journals, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, and different websites. The paper realizes the prospects and potentiality of tourism development in the country. Besides, the paper identifies numerous restraints to the development of tourism and prescribes some essential recommendations for policy preparation and managerial effect of the development of the tourism sector in Bangladesh (Latif, at al., 2017). Bangladesh is a country of natural beauty where the tourism as an industry has enormous prospect to boost up the economy. Tourism has direct influence on cultural, social, educational, and economic areas of any nation and moreover on their worldwide associations. It has been dramatically persuading some businesses such as transportation, accommodation, food, shopping mall, entertainment and hospitality etc. All these businesses can increase the economic growth procedure by creating jobs, branding infrastructures and commercial skills, enlightening balance of payments, and increasing foreign exchange earnings.



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According to Debashish et al (2017) the main aspects that can effect on satisfaction level of tourists with specific reference to tourism industry in Bangladesh. Satisfied tourists will revisit the tourism destination and they will provide positive word-of-mouth. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize which aspects around the tour destinations have effect on overall satisfaction of tourists. Primary data is collected from 428 tourists of different tourism destination in Sylhet region using structured questionnaire. It is revealed in the paper that the tourists' satisfaction depends on natural beauty, transportation and accommodation facilities, safety and security, and costs. The paper is displayed that tourist satisfaction depends on a difficult procedure where the role of every actor is essential and those actors should be coordinated with each other. Also, the paper allows recognizing the current strengths and weaknesses of tourism services in Sylhet which may replicate the overall situation of Bangladesh.

According to Subrata et al. (2018) the modern progress and the predicted high growth in tourism area of Bangladesh give a comprehension that it has great possibilities to improve into a world class tourist zone and needs inspection. The goal of the paper is to inspect the aspects that influence tourists' satisfaction in Bangladesh. A questionnaire survey design is applied in order to regulate the persuasive aspects that have considerable influence on tourists' satisfaction. Defendants from all over Bangladesh participated in the survey. The results designate that the acknowledged aspects affect tourists' satisfaction. From among the aspects, information considerably influence on tourists satisfaction. The results recommend to

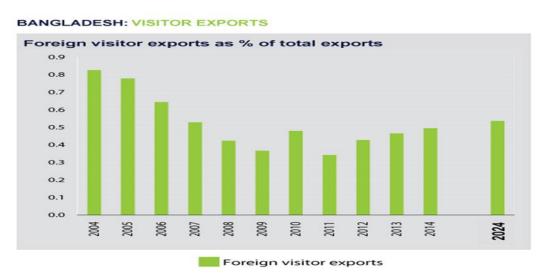


put prominence on information, lodging, safety and security features for improving the level of tourists' satisfaction. The study gives heightened information for tourism specialists, and tour operator regarding the tourists' perception in Bangladesh.

## 5.2 Prospects of Tourism Sector

## 5.2.1 Prospects of Tourism industry in Bangladesh

Tourism sector can help to flourish the economy of Bangladesh. By ensuring proper improvement of this area, it is potential to earn a lot of foreign currency which will donate to the growth of the national economy of the country. The area also offers ample employment opportunity for the people who are directly or indirectly involved in this sector, since it is a service providing sector. The joblessness problem of the country can be reduced partly to develop necessary infrastructures of this sector. It will help to increase household income and as well as the revenue collection of the government will rise consistently (Latif, 2016).

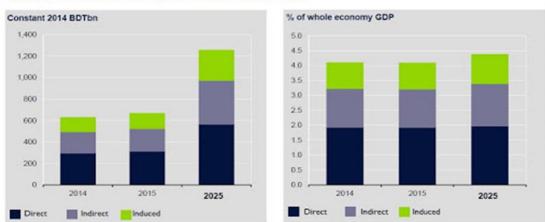


Source: Bangladesh Tourism Board

Therefore, it will also help to decrease the economic gap between the rich and the poor people of the nation. Tourism can also be strengthened by the political unity of the state. Local tourists as well as foreign tourists like to visit historical places, archeological sites, national monuments and ancient fields that aid to strengthen the political unity of the country in the long run (Latif, 2015).



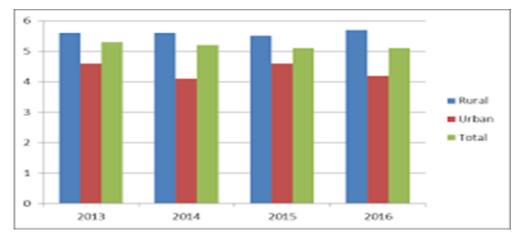
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Furthermore, extensive local tourism will help to form regional cooperation among the people by giving the chances to contact, share and exchange their views and sub-cultures with each other. It will also help to improve more cohesiveness and empathy that will decrease local disparity in terms of psychological and economic point of view within different divisions and districts and increase the unity among them and inspire them more to work for the nationwide interest (Latif, 2014).



Source: Bangladesh Tourism Board

The people who come from industrialized countries, their life style, income level, background etc. are totally different from branding countries like Bangladesh (Zahir, 2011; Ferdouse, 2014). The people of the country can simply compare their life style with the people of industrialized nations. So, they can exchange these knowledge and views with each other. It is as well potential to assert Bangladesh to other parts of the world by tourism sector. It may also helpful to create better image to foreign country through proper management of tourism activities. If the sector can be managed properly and attracted tourists from different region within and outside the country, it will create goodwill for the country.



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## 5.2.2 Prospects specifically related to the Sylhet region

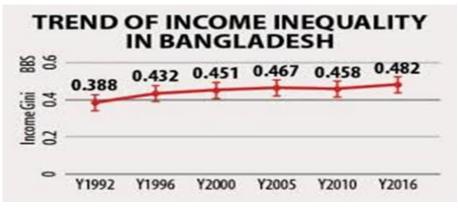
- a) Help to flourish the economy of Bangladesh.
- b) Earn a lot of foreign currency.
- c) Help to increase household income.
- d) Reduce the unemployment problem of the country.
- e) Develop necessary infrastructures of this sector.
- f) Help to reduce the economic gap between the rich and the poor people of the country.
- g) Create better image to foreign country through proper management of tourism activities.
- h) Reduce regional disparity in terms of psychological and economic point of view within different divisions.
- i) Create goodwill for the country.
- j) Help to build regional cooperation among the people.

## **5.3 Challenges of Tourism Sector**

## 5.3.1 Problems of Bangladesh tourism industry

The main reason which prevent foreign tourists 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.

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 (Bangladesh Tourism Board).



Source: Bangladesh Tourism Board



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Lack of sincerity and political will to promote Bangladesh as a common tourism destination. Different studies disclose that most of the tourists have a negative image in Bangladesh. They as a famine and flood stricken country with dirty and poor inhabitants, overcrowded and lawless city streets, unsanitary conditions, portray Bangladesh (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation).

Insufficient planning and provision for infrastructure components are two classic errors that hinder the development of tourism in Bangladesh. It is supposed that common 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 (Bangladesh Tourism Board).

There is no casino, Bingo, Public transport, theatre and late night show. 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 (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation).

Lack of government policy is also a problem for tourism industry. This indicates that our tourism sector is in scarcity of proper guideline. 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.

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. Lastly absence of effective coordination and lack of investment is major obstacle in this sector (Bangladesh Tourism Board).

### 5.3.2 Challenges specifically related to the Sylhet region

- a) Lack of infrastructure facilities.
- b) Lack of modern and sufficient recreation facilities.
- c) Lack of security and safety.
- d) Political instability.
- e) Involvement of nonprofessional peoples.
- f) Lack of proper training and human resources related to tourism.
- g) Visa problems.
- h) Lack of proper planning from government.
- i) Lack of marketing and updated information.
- j) immature long term vision both government and private sectors

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- k) Negative brand image of Bangladesh as a tourist destination country.
- 1) Lack of product development in tourism potential areas.
- m) Inefficient promotional activity makes the tourism sector, especially tourism sector of Bangladesh, is one of the laggard industry.
- n) Insufficient infrastructure makes the problem a bit larger.
- o) Lack of tourism awareness among the domestic people.
- p) Lack of properly trained manpower in this sector.
- q) Absence of association of the coordinated agencies.
- r) Environmental pollution and unplanned development, particularly in resorts.
- s) Shortage of budgetary allocation also widening the problem. The government should allocate a special fund for the development of the tourism sector.
- t) Security and safety for the foreign tourists is one of the prime concern for not branding the tourism sector of Bangladesh rapidly, etc.

## 6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND DIRECTION FOR THE FURTHER STUDY

Now, 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 chances to earn important amount of revenue from this area. But Tourists friendly Bangladesh tourism industry is facing multiple questions and challenges in both national and international level. This is the high time to identify and remedy the issues and challenges in order to fabricate the industry as an internationally reputed one (Hossain et. al., 2013). Bangladesh is a country of enriched heritage and culture from thousands of years ago. The economy of Bangladesh has much potentiality to earn foreign currency creating more attraction and disseminating the information regarding the tourist places to other parts of the world. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, and different websites. The paper discoveries that the main tourist attractions, number of foreign tourists arrivals in Bangladesh in several years, the annual income and profit earning from tourism area in the nation have shown the chances and potentiality of tourism development in the nation. However, the paper identifies numerous restraints to the growth of tourism and recommends some necessary recommendations for policy formulation and managerial implication of the development of the tourism sector in Bangladesh. So, the value of the tourism area development has a positive effect on the growth and economic development of Bangladesh in future (Arif, et al., 2011).



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