



Problems and Prospects of Tourism Industry in Bangladesh: A Study on Cumilla District

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the most growing industries all around the world. Bangladesh is a new tourist destination on the map of the world. Bangladesh has enormous potential to develop tourism because of its attractive natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. The tourism industry of Bangladesh has several positive impacts on the overall economy of this country. Tourism can add value to the Bangladeshi economy if a proper marketing plan and strategy can be built and implemented for this purpose. The main objective of the study was to find out the major problems and prospects of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. The study area was Cumilla District. The study has tried to highlight the special attractive tourist spots of Bangladesh, especially in Cumilla. Tourists of Cumilla District were the population of the study. For the study, a convenient sample of tourists from various tourist spots in the Cumilla District had taken. The study depended on both primary and secondary data; primary data were collected with a structured questionnaire and analyzed. From the analysis, it was found that the majority of the respondents are satisfied with cultural & religious heritage, transportation quality & cost efficiency. But they are dissatisfied with Information gaps, the absence of tour operators, poor service of hotel & poor security. Most of them suggest developing infrastructure such as accommodation, transportation, ensuring security,

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taking more promotional activities, reducing the cost of touring, etc. To enhance the existing image sincere steps of the concerned authorities can really be helpful; some guidelines have been mentioned in the recommendation part.

Keywords: Tourism; tourism industry; Bangladesh; Cumilla district.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is travel for recreation, religious, leisure, family, or business purposes, usually for a limited duration. Tourism can be domestic or international. Bangladesh is a very nice place to visit. The country is blessed with natural beauty which attracts the tourist. It has attractive beaches, beautiful heritage & historical relics. Many hotels, restaurants, amusement parks, & transportation facilities have been set up in the country for the proper use of these natural beauties. Besides many new tourist places are being discovered at different times & these potentials can be utilized for the development of the tourism sector. Cumilla district is one of the largest districts in Bangladesh. Many historical and archaeological sites are situated in this district. This district has played a significant role in Bangladesh Tourism & it has huge potentiality in the tourism sector. Many archaeological sites have left to be recovered & also accommodation facilities, transportation, security system and etc. need to be developed. The government and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation should take some initiatives for the proper conservation of these historical and archaeological sites for the next generation.

Tourism is one of the most important sectors which generate revenue for our country. But because of many reasons like lack of proper planning, lack of transportation and lack of accommodation facilities Bangladesh tourism is not doing well like other countries. The aim of this paper reveals the prospects and problems of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. For preparing the paper many previously published articles, newspapers, reports, and journals have been observed. Data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. So, it is to be hoped that this paper will be a helpful document for the tourism industry.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study has been conducted with the following objectives:-

- ❖ To find out the major problems and prospects of the tourism industry in Bangladesh.

- ❖ To analyse the tourism industry in Cumilla District.
- ❖ To provide some suggestions to overcome the barriers to develop the tourism sector.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism means going out and visiting places for a religious purpose, gathering knowledge and having pleasure, fun, or for economic benefit. Sultana [1] stated that Tourism is a growing industry in Bangladesh. It generated 1, 25,000 international tourists in 2014 and international tourism generated US\$ 1.5 trillion in export earnings and international tourist arrivals grew by 4.3% in 2014 to 1.133 billion. According to WTTC direct employment support by travel and tourism is forecast to rise by 2.9 percent per annum to 1,785,000 jobs or 1.9 percent of total employment in 2023. Haque & Islam [2] stated that dynamic tourism prospects of Sylhet region are flourishing the economy, earn a lot of foreign currency, increase household income, create employment, develop essential infrastructures, reduce the economic gap, create a better image, reduce regional disparity, create goodwill, and build regional cooperation etc. Parveen [3] stated that the tourism industry in Bangladesh remains neglected for a long time and its share is very disappointing compared to other SAARC countries. She further added that for rapid improvement and development of infrastructure necessary initiatives should be taken to attract both tourists (domestic and foreign) and foreign investors to invest in this industry. Islam [4] concluded that that the promotional activities of the tourism industry in Bangladesh are seriously hindered because of a lack of financial support together with an insufficient marketing budget, low-quality promotional literature, improper distribution of sales literature, a bad image of Bangladesh tourism, and improper and inappropriate marketing strategies for the potential promotion of Bangladesh.

Roy, et al., [5] pointed out that the satisfaction of tourists greatly depends on natural beauty, transportation and accommodation facilities, safety and security, and costs. Mondal & Haque [6] found that the country has immense

opportunities to create jobs for youths, promote local culture, encourage local entrepreneurship, and above all increase economic benefits through developing sustainable tourism, which can also contribute to achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Roy & Roy [7] suggested that up-date the present tourism policies in Bangladesh compare to the world tourism market, tourism spot and related organization should run by the private sector & tourism related discipline like hotel and tourism management should be started at the all-university in Bangladesh. Islam & Al-Amin [8] stated that tourism stakeholders emphasized the need for the successful collaboration of different tourism stakeholders for the development and promotion of tourism & also found that there is a lack of optimum govt. supports in the promotional activities of the tourism sector. Hussain [9] mentioned that the Mainamoti site is unique in its kind as it the symbol of ancient Buddhist cultural and religious heritage. It has significance to the tourists as it is the symbol of the ancient civilizations of the 7th century. More than nine sites are still unexcavated. Proper site identification, excavation and decoration are essential to bloom this site as a tourism site.

4. METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data have been considered for research analysis-

4.1 Primary Data Source

Primary data for the project was collected by visiting, observing tourist spots, by asking a question to local people, university students, and authorities of tourist spots, domestic and foreign tourists in Cumilla.

4.2 Secondary Data Source

Data have been collected from different newspapers, articles, journals, websites, Wikipedia etc.

4.3 Designing Questionnaire

The survey was conducted using a manual questionnaire. Questions were generally structured as multiple-choice questions.

4.4 Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling has been chosen to meet the research objectives.

4.5 Sample Size

To conduct this survey, a predesigned questionnaire had been provided to 60 respondents. Among them, 50 responded to the questionnaire and return while 10 copies are not. Among this sample, 40 were domestic tourists and 10 were international visitors. These foreign visitors mostly from India, Nepal, UK, and Germany. Due to COVID-19, Bangladesh government imposed travel restrictions, that's why, visitors are not travelling through the country to visit the tourist spots. This is one of the negative impact in developing tourism and local economy.

5. TOURISM INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's tourist attractions include historical monuments, resorts, beaches, picnic spots, forests and tribal people, wildlife of various species. Various tourist attractions exist in all divisions of Bangladesh. Some of these are given below:

5.1 Chittagong Division

In the south-eastern part of Bangladesh there are sea beach Cox's Bazar, St. Martin's Island, Patenga beach, and hilly areas like Nilachol, Nilgiri, Sajek valley, etc.

5.2 Sylhet Division

In the north-eastern part, there are Bichnakandi, Jaflong, Ratargul Swamp Forest & also a green carpet of tea plants on small hillocks, etc.

5.3 Dhaka Division

Many attractive tourist spots are located in this division including Lalbagh Fort, Ahsan Manzil, Shaheed Minar & Jatiyo Smriti Soudha, etc.

5.4 Barisal Division

This division is famous for its attractive Kuakata Beach.

5.5 Khulna Division

In the south-western part, there are the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world & Shat Gombuj Masjid in Bagerhat is a notable site.

5.6 Rajshahi Division

In the northern part there are archaeological sites, including the temple city Puthia in Rajshahi, Mahasthangarh in Bogra.

5.7 Rangpur Division

Many historic tourist spots are situated in this division like Tajhat Palace, Kantajew Temple, etc.

5.8 Mymensingh Division

There are various tourist attractions in this division including Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Sangrahashala, Bijoypur China Matir Pahar, etc.

Tourism is a sector with great potential. The recovery of our many economic problems lies within tourism. If we start implementing the initiative plans, we might become one of the top countries in the tourism sector.

Table 1 represents that the overall analysis indicates that Bangladesh has huge opportunities to make the tourism industry profitable. But first, we need to develop our infrastructures & give more focus on our domestic tourists.

6. TOURIST SPOTS IN CUMILA DISTRICT

Comilla District, officially is known as Cumilla District. The present Comilla is a district under the Chittagong Division. The Cumilla region was once under ancient Samatata & was joined with Tripura State. Cumilla district consists of 17 Upazilas. This is located almost in the middle portion of Bangladesh. This district has several archaeological spots including Mainamoti. Meghna & Gomti are the two main rivers for this district. Here are the lists of top places Cumilla.

❖ Archaeological Heritage/Museum/ Historic Royal Places

- Shalban Bihar
- Maynamati Museum
- Palace of king Bhoj
- Palace Moynamoti Rani
- Pashchimgaon Nawab Bari
- Hatiabhang Fort
- Rani Kuthir

❖ Mazar/Graveyard/Mosque/ Temples

- Maynamati war cemetery

- Noor Manikchar Jami Masjid
- Utkhara Mazar
- Chondimura Temple
- Jagannath Temple

❖ Mura

- Rupban Mura
- Kutila Mura
- Itakhola Mura
- Charpatra Mura

❖ Amusement Parks

- Blue Water Park
- Magic Paradise Park
- Dinosaur Park

❖ Nature Attractions

- Lalmai Hills
- Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
- Dharmasagar sagor par
- Gomti's banks

6.1 Government Income

Tourist places of Kotbari also play a great role in the govt. income. Shalbon Bihar & Mainamoti museum is fully under the govt. and from FY 2012-13 increasing income of these places rapidly year by year.

Table 2 shows that highest income achieved in FY 2016-2017 BD TK. 12215114 and the lowest was in 2012-2013 BD TK. 4275401. Due to world recession, it has negatively impacted in 2012 in Bangladesh, although the world recession was happened in 2010. Because of this reason, significant number of visitors did not arrive in Bangladesh.

6.2 SWOT Analysis of Tourism in Cumilla District

i. Strength

- Several archaeological sites.
- Cost-effective transportation facility.
- There is a Second World War cemetery, Mainamati War Cemetery.

ii. Weakness

- Many attractive locations remain unexplored.
- Inadequate accommodation facility.

- Lack of Information on websites & social media.
- Absence of enough tour operators.

iii. Opportunity

- Located along the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway.
- Comilla Airport. (The Airport is not currently in operation.)
- The popularity of Khadi Textile & Rosh Malai of Matri Bhandar.

iv. Threat

- Poor coordination among tourists, local community and policymakers.
- Fear of local communities for loss of land.
- Non-sustainable behavior of tourists.
- Illegally cutting the soil in Lalmai Hills.

Some observations have been made based on field-survey, discussion with the owner of local shops to make the study stronger with their information. Like In the dry season (November to March) the tourists gather mostly & the huge number of tourists sometimes makes a negative effect on this area by polluting the environment & creating sound pollution. (Source: Authors' own observation & discussion with local people & visitors)

7. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data has been analyzed with the help of Microsoft Excel.

Table 3 shows that since the respondents are from Cumilla city & the sites aren't too far away so they can be visited very easily.

Table 4 shows that 30% of respondents knew about Cumilla's historic sites by social media like Facebook, 28% by Google & 20% by YouTube. Due to social media, it is very easy to get ideas about different tourist places nowadays. Especially through various events on social media tourists get a lot of information.

Table 5 exhibits that 18% of respondents select Mainamoti Shalbon Bihar, 14% select Dhormo Sagor Park & 13% select Mainamoti Museum, which they have already visited. Every year many tourists from different parts of the country & also from abroad come to see the historical archeological monument Mainamoti Shalbon Bihar.

Table 6 indicates that 54% of respondents are satisfied, 22% of respondents are dissatisfied & 16% of respondents are highly satisfied with the place they had visited. The potentiality of the Cumilla region is satisfactory since the majority of the visitors are satisfied with the tourist places.

Table 7 demonstrates that 32% select cultural, religious heritage & 19% respondents select transportation quality behind their satisfaction. Marks of rich ancient civilization have been found in Lalmai, Mainamati hills. There are plenty of archeological sites in these hill areas are the main attraction of both domestic & foreign tourists.

Table 8 represents that 30.8% of respondents' select the absence of tour operators, 23% select poor service of hotel & poor security behind their dissatisfaction. Although Cumilla is famous for its archeological sites, only a lack of tour operators, guides, high-quality hotels & restaurants every year many tourists leaves the city without seeing all the tourist spots.

Table 9 shows that 42% of respondents suggest infrastructure development, 24% suggest taking more promotional activity & 14% suggest ensuring tourists' security & reducing the cost of touring. Even though Cumilla is much better than other districts if the authority wants to attract more foreign tourists several actions must be taken immediately like developing infrastructure, enhancing advertising & ensuring security, etc.

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After analyzing the data, the study has come to some important points:

- ❖ The Cumilla region has different attractive places to visit as the tourists are very keen to get a test of visiting. It's found that different places were easily coverable to visit at a time.
- ❖ Most of the respondents told that they use Facebook, Google & YouTube to get information about the different tourist places.
- ❖ From the observation, it is understood that several traveling places are not yet popular with the tourist & obviously tourist visiting places is found limited in a range of a few only.

- ❖ Most of the respondents are satisfied with the tourist place they have already visited in the Cumilla district.
- ❖ The majority of the respondents are satisfied with cultural & religious heritage, transportation quality & cost efficiency.
- ❖ Most of the respondents said Information gaps & the absence of tour operators, poor service of hotel & poor security are the reasons behind their dissatisfaction.
- ❖ Most of them suggest developing infrastructure, ensuring tourist security, taking more promotional activities & reducing the cost of touring.

Table 1. Tourist arrivals rise in five years

Year	Arrival of foreign tourists in BD (in millions)
2014	0.16
2015	0.14
2016	0.20
2017	0.26
2018	0.27
2019 (Jan-July)	0.20

Source: The Financial Express, 2020 and BPC, 2020

Table 2. Govt. Income of the tourism area

Fiscal Year (FY)	Income (BDT)
2009-10	4989975
2010-11	5517697
2011-12	5018240
2012-13	4275401
2013-14	6141885
2014-15	6614206
2015-16	9437234
2016-17	12215114
2017-18	10545991

Source: Annual data of Archaeology department, Kotbari, 2020

Table 3. Respondents answer on “Have you ever visited tourist spots in Cumilla district”

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	50	100
No	0	0
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 4. Respondents answer on “The media by which they knew about the historic sites of Cumilla”

Media	Frequency	Percent
TV	3	6
Newspaper	2	4
Facebook	15	30
Google	14	28
YouTube	10	20
From family or friends	6	12
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 5. Respondents answer on “The places in where tourists visited in Cumilla district.”

Name of the place	Frequency	Percent
Mainamoti Shalbon Bihar	12	18
Mainamoti Museum	9	13
Mainamoti War Cemetery	3	4
Chondi Mura Temple	4	6
Jagannath Temple	4	6
Rupban Mura	3	4
Kutila Mura	1	2
Itakhola Mura	1	2
Palace of Moynamoti Rani	4	6
Charpatra Mura	1	2
BARD	7	10
Magic Paradise Park	2	3
River Gomti	2	3
Dhormo Sagor Park	10	14
Rani Kuthir	2	3
Nawab Faizunnesar Bari	3	4
Total	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2020 *** Total respondent was 50 but 13 respondents had chosen two or more options.

Table 6. Respondents answer on “Level of satisfaction about the place tourist had visited”

Types of responses	Frequency	Percent
Highly satisfied	8	16
Satisfied	27	54
Neutral	2	4
Dissatisfied	11	22
Very dissatisfied	2	4
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 7. Respondents answer on “Causes of satisfaction”

Causes	Frequency	Percent
Cost Efficiency	6	16
Transportation Quality	7	19
Security	4	11
Cultural & Religious Heritage	12	32
High Quality of Food	5	14
Good Service of Hotel	3	8
Total	37	100

Source: Field survey, 2020 *** Only 37 respondents answered this question

Table 8. Respondents answer on “Causes of dissatisfaction”

Causes of dissatisfaction	Frequency	Percent
High cost of touring	2	15
Bad transportation	0	0
Poor security	3	23
Absence of tour operators	4	31
Poor quality of food	1	8
Poor service of hotel	3	23
Total	13	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

(Only 13 respondents answered this question).

Table 9. Suggestion for improvement of tourism in Cumilla district by respondents

Suggestion	Frequency	Percent
Developing infrastructure (accommodation, restaurants & transportation)	21	42
Ensuring tourists' security (tourist police, regular monitoring)	7	14
Taking more promotional activity	12	24
Reducing cost of touring	7	14
Promote Community based sustainable tourism	3	6
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

To make Bangladesh as a tourism-friendly nation following recommendations should be implemented by the government as well as national and local tourism authority:

- ❖ The government should invest more to develop archaeological sites and given the order to take proper steps to start excavating the sites which are still unexcavated.
- ❖ Websites of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation & every regional tourism office should be well-designed and tourist-friendly and contain all the necessary information. Authorities should make a plan for creating events, announcements, and writing blogs so that can be shared across social media.
- ❖ Establishing more informative signboards on roads for tourists. Tourist guide book should be available everywhere in Bangladesh. Tourism authorities should consider the effective use of ICT for advertising.
- ❖ Since most tourists are satisfied with the tourist places so the authorities should promote these places by introducing various channels on YouTube & by opening various events on Facebook.
- ❖ The concerned authority has to be more careful regarding the protection of archaeological sites & natural resources. Besides the authority should take action to reopen Comilla airport & to introduce railway facilities with Rajshahi and Khulna division.
- ❖ Ensuring the availability of tourism-related support services such as tour operators, world-class service and guides, establishing well-decorated hotels and motels with all modern facilities to meet the needs of visitors.;
- ❖ Authority should be higher concerned on tourist security, taking more promotional activities, reducing the cost of touring by providing discounts and promoting community-based sustainable tourism. If the

local community becomes aware about the protection of the environment and heritage of the destination, it will be easier to achieve sustainable tourism development of any destination. According to UNWTO (2020), tourism sector deals with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) to minimise the current crisis by highlighting the enduring values of tourism.

10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The empirical data showed that as a tourist attraction, the potentiality of the Cumilla region is satisfactory as the majority of the visitors agreed with this view. However, small or big, any weak point for any place is harmful to sustainability for a longer period of time. So, it is a matter of concern & worries about some negative factors of Cumilla tourism like the absence of tour operators, poor service of hotel & poor security, etc. The analyses show that the tourists are suggested for developing infrastructure, ensuring tourist security, taking more promotional activities & reducing the cost of touring. Several actions must be taken with very urgencies like a realistic plan and policy for encouraging tourism, allocation of money for the development of this sector, and a special force for a particular period of time for ensuring security and safety of visitors. However, investments in tourism and the development of infrastructure have to be ensured immediately as these will led to the expansion of tourism. This research tries to identify the relative factors that satisfy tourist interest. A large number of our people now prefer to visit other countries rather than Bangladesh. So, we all should be cautious to capture them.

11. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research is included only 50 respondents, but in future research the amount of sample could be increased to extend the area of further research. This research is based on Cumilla

area, but in future two or more other divisional areas in Bangladesh will be included for further research.

12. LIMITATION OF THIS RESEARCH

The study was limited by the fact that it takes a stratified random sample in data collection. This sample doesn't actually represent the overall population & there have no chance to ignore the sampling error. For the in-depth analytical purpose, adequate time is required. But limited time was a major hindrance to prepare such an in-depth study. Another vital constraint of the study was insufficiency of information. It is hard to get insight because authorities are not willing to provide sufficient information.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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