**Tourism in Bangladesh: Present Status and Future Prospects**

**Introduction**

Tourism is a leisure activity which involves a discretional 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 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.

**Objectives of Seminar**

By this seminar we want to highlight the present situation and future prospects of tourism industries of Bangladesh. The main objective of this paper is to make an overview of the potential of tourism development in Bangladesh. We try to identify the sector’s present problems and analyze the future prospects of tourism in the country’s economic development. The paper 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 and articles.

**Importance of tourism**

Tourism is an essential industry that plays a crucial role in the economic, social, and cultural development of many countries. Here are some of the key reasons why tourism is important:

1. **Economic Development:** Tourism is a significant contributor to the global economy, generating employment and revenue for businesses and governments. It creates job opportunities in various sectors such as hospitality, transportation, entertainment, and retail.
2. **Foreign Exchange Earnings:** Tourism provides an important source of foreign exchange earnings for countries, helping to improve their balance of payments.
3. **Infrastructure Development:** Tourism development often leads to the development of infrastructure such as airports, roads, and hotels, which can benefit both tourists and locals.
4. **Cultural Exchange:** Tourism can facilitate cultural exchange by allowing people from different cultures to interact and learn from each other.
5. **Environmental Preservation:** Tourism can create incentives for environmental preservation by promoting sustainable tourism practices and conservation efforts.
6. **Community Development:** Tourism can provide opportunities for local communities to benefit from tourism development through job creation, income generation, and other economic opportunities.
7. **Improved Quality of Life:** Tourism can lead to the development of social and cultural amenities, such as parks, museums, and recreational facilities, which can improve the quality of life for both tourists and locals.

In summary, tourism is a significant industry with far-reaching economic, social, and cultural impacts. It can create jobs, generate revenue, facilitate cultural exchange, and promote environmental conservation, among other benefits. Therefore, it is essential for countries to invest in tourism development and promotion to unlock the full potential of this industry.

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**Types of Tourism**

Tourism can be classified into several types based on the purpose, nature, and duration of the trip. Here are some of the most common types of tourism:

1. **Leisure Tourism:** This type of tourism is for recreational purposes and involves activities like sightseeing, relaxation, and entertainment.
2. **Business Tourism:** This type of tourism is for business-related purposes and involves attending conferences, meetings, and other business events.
3. **Adventure Tourism:** This type of tourism involves activities that are physically challenging, such as trekking, mountaineering, and rafting.
4. **Cultural Tourism:** This type of tourism involves visiting places to learn about the culture, history, and lifestyle of the local people.
5. **Health Tourism:** This type of tourism involves traveling to destinations for medical treatment, wellness, and spa services.
6. **Educational Tourism:** This type of tourism involves traveling to learn about a specific topic or subject, such as attending workshops, seminars, or language courses.
7. **Ecotourism:** This type of tourism focuses on nature conservation and involves visiting destinations that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.
8. **Sports Tourism:** This type of tourism involves traveling to attend or participate in sports events, such as the Olympics, World Cup, or local sporting events.
9. **Religious Tourism:** This type of tourism involves visiting religious places, such as shrines, temples, or churches, for spiritual purposes.
10. **Culinary Tourism:** This type of tourism involves traveling to explore local and regional cuisines, food festivals, and culinary traditions.

These are just a few examples of the types of tourism that exist. The tourism industry is constantly evolving, and new types of tourism are emerging as people's interests and preferences change.

**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.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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, Moheskhali, Inani Beach at Cox’s Bazar | Gour Gobinda Fort |
| Central Shahid Minar: The Symbol of Bengal | Khagrachari | Shahi Eidgah 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 SeaBeach), Saint Martin | Hakaluki haor at Moulovibazar |
| Bangabandhu Memorial Museum | The Shrine of Shah Amanat | Lalakhal |
| Bahadur Shah Park | Chimbuk, Bandarban | Bholagonj Sadapathor |
| National Memorial of Dhaka | Sailopropat, Meghla and Nilghiri at Bandarban | Bisanakandi |
| The Lalbagh Fort | Boga Lake, Ruma, Bijoy, Sorno Mondir, Kaokaradong at Bandarban | Ratargul Swamp Forest |

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.



**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 997, 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 |

**Present status of tourism in Bangladesh**

The importance of tourism sector has increased overtime. In 2009-2010, 838 was allocated for tourism sector from national budget. This has been increased to 1818 in 2011-2012. However, lately there is a decreasing trend in tourism expenditure. In 2013-2014, tourism expenditure in national budget has been falling to 683. This decreasing trend may be due to the current political crisis, which has discouraged tourism in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, government-controlled tourism organization - Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) is doing well in terms of profit. In 2008-2009 it lost about 194 lakh taka. However, since then it is making profit. In 2009-2010, the profit was 23.41 lakh taka which has consistently increased to 612.33 lakh taka in 2012-2013. This profit has accompanied by both increasing total income and total expenditure. This total income and total expenditure in 2008- 2009 were 3598.6 and 3792.35 lakh taka respectively. These figures have risen to 7168.33 lakh taka and 6556 lakh taka respectively in 2012-2013. The number of tourists that came to Bangladesh during 2008 to 2012 are shown in Figure 2: The inbound tourism severely falls to 267,107 in 2009 from the previous year 467,332. This may be due to the global financial crisis. The number of tourists, however, show increasing trend after 2009. The inbound tourism has recovered to 303,386 in 2010 and has increased to 588,193 in 2012.

**Table 2**: Income, expenditure and profit of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation for 2008-2013 (source: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2014)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Fiscal year | Total income (Lakh tk.) | Total expenditure (Lakh tk.) | Profit before tax (Lakh tk.) |
| 2008-2009 | 3598.60 | 3792.35 | -193.75 |
| 2009-2010 | 4535.88 | 4512.47 | 23.41 |
| 2010-2011 | 5966.71 | 5819.21 | 107.50 |
| 2011-2012 | 7127.82 | 6836.62 | 291.20 |
| 2012-2013 | 7168.33 | 6556.00 | 612.33 |

**Contribution of tourism in the Bangladesh economy**

According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report (2014), The total contribution of travel and tourism was 4.4% of GDP in 2013 and is expected to grow 7.9% to 4.5% of GDP in 2014. It is forecasted to rise by 6.5% per annum to 4.7% of GDP by 2024. Notable that, total contribution consists of direct, indirect and induced contribution.

**Bangladesh: Total Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP**

**Figure 2: Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP**

Travel and Tourism generated 1,328,500 jobs directly in 2013 and this is forecasted to grow by 4.0% in 2014. This includes employment by hotels, airlines, travel agents and other passenger transportation services. It will increase by 2.7% per annum on average over the next ten years. The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to employment was 2.8% of total employment in 2013. This is forecasted to rise to 3.9% of total employment in 2014. By 2024, travel and tourism are forecasted to support 4.2% of total employment.

**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 | 3776.4 | 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 cannot 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 preserve tourism opportunities for future generations.

**Problems of Tourism Sector in Bangladesh**

The tourism industry in Bangladesh faces several challenges that hinder its growth and development. Here are some of the main problems of the tourism sector in Bangladesh:

1. **Limited Infrastructure:** One of the significant challenges of the tourism sector in Bangladesh is limited infrastructure. There is a lack of adequate transportation facilities, accommodation, and entertainment facilities, particularly in remote areas. As a result, tourists often face difficulties in traveling and finding suitable accommodation.
2. **Security Concerns:** Security concerns are another significant problem for the tourism sector in Bangladesh. The country has a history of political instability, terrorism, and crime, which can discourage tourists from visiting. Ensuring safety and security is essential to attract and retain tourists.
3. **Unstructured and Fragmented Industry:** The tourism industry in Bangladesh is relatively unstructured and fragmented, with many small and medium-sized businesses operating independently. The lack of coordination and integration among stakeholders in the industry can lead to a suboptimal tourist experience and reduced competitiveness.
4. **Lack of Marketing and Promotion:** Bangladesh's tourism industry suffers from inadequate marketing and promotion both domestically and internationally. Limited marketing and promotion activities result in low awareness of the country's tourism potential, and hence a lower number of tourists.
5. **Environmental Concerns:** The tourism industry can have a significant impact on the environment. While tourism can be an excellent source of revenue and employment, it can also have negative effects on the environment if not managed sustainably. Bangladesh is no exception, and there is a need to balance tourism development with environmental conservation.

To address these problems and develop the tourism industry in Bangladesh, there is a need for significant investment in infrastructure, improved security measures, increased collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, increased marketing and promotional activities, and sustainable tourism practices. By addressing these challenges, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of its tourism industry, bringing significant economic and social benefits to the country.

**Prospect of Tourism Sector in Bangladesh**

Tourism is an emerging sector in Bangladesh with significant potential for growth. Although the country has faced many challenges in terms of infrastructure, security, and political instability, the government has taken various initiatives to promote tourism and improve the country's image as a tourist destination.

Here are some key factors that suggest a promising prospect of tourism in Bangladesh:

1. **Natural beauty**: Bangladesh is a land of natural beauty, with the world's longest natural sea beach, the Sundarbans mangrove forest, numerous rivers, waterfalls, and hills. These attractions have great potential for attracting tourists.
2. **Cultural heritage**: Bangladesh has a rich cultural heritage with historical sites such as the Paharpur Buddhist Monastery, Lalbagh Fort, and the Mosque City of Bagerhat. These sites can attract both domestic and foreign tourists interested in exploring the country's history and culture.
3. **Ecotourism**: Bangladesh is home to various wildlife sanctuaries, including the Sundarbans, which is the largest mangrove forest in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Ecotourism can be a lucrative segment of tourism in Bangladesh
4. **Affordable destination**: Bangladesh is a relatively affordable destination compared to other popular tourist destinations in the region, such as Thailand or Malaysia. This makes it an attractive destination for budget-conscious travelers
5. **Government initiatives**: The government has launched several initiatives to promote tourism in the country, such as developing tourism infrastructure, providing incentives for investors, and improving security measures for tourists.

However, there are still some challenges to overcome in the tourism sector in Bangladesh, such as improving the quality of infrastructure and services, enhancing security measures, and improving the overall image of the country as a tourist destination. Despite these challenges, the prospect of tourism in Bangladesh looks promising and has the potential to contribute significantly to the country's economy.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, tourism in Bangladesh is a promising industry that has significant potential for growth. The country is rich in natural, cultural, and historical attractions, which can appeal to both domestic and international tourists. The present status of tourism in Bangladesh is primarily focused on domestic tourism, but the government has recognized the importance of promoting tourism as a significant source of revenue and employment. Despite some challenges such as limited infrastructure, security concerns, and an unstructured tourism industry, the government is taking initiatives to promote tourism and attract foreign investment.

Looking forward, the future prospects of tourism in Bangladesh are encouraging. There is potential for developing infrastructure, promoting ecotourism, and improving the overall image of the country as a tourist destination. A thriving tourism industry can bring significant economic and social benefits, such as job creation, revenue generation, and cultural exchange. To ensure sustainable growth, it is essential to prioritize environmental and cultural preservation, enhance security measures, and improve the overall tourist experience.

In conclusion, with the right investment, planning, and execution, tourism in Bangladesh has a bright future ahead, and it can play a significant role in the country's economic development and global integration.

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