

Opportunities and Challenges of Eco-tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Ecotourism ensures the viability of economy, sensitivity of ecology and appropriateness of culture. It is a sustainable form of natural environment based tourism that combines environment and economy and seeks to minimize harmful impacts, focuses on local culture, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth as well as learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. Bangladesh enjoys a most favorite position, being easily accessible from many popular destinations in South Asia. This is a great advantage and particularly true of the Chittagong Hill Tracts that provides a truly pristine and exciting destination for travelers. We have not only the longest unbroken sandy sea beach– Coxes Bazar and the largest single tract of mangrove forest–Sundarban but also many other Islands, Haors, Baors etc. Bangladesh is the home of Royal Bengal Tigers, Leopards, Asiatic elephants, monkeys, langurs, gibbons, Otters, Pythons, and Paradise Flycatcher etc. However, due to lack of proper care and policy it has not seen a huge tourist's crowd and environmentally viable as expected. The practice of eco-tourism can improve both of our economic trends and environmental management if proper home grown development philosophy can be formed and implemented. Considering this aspect, proper marketing strategies can play a key role. This study analyses the present status and promotional strategy of eco-tourism potential in Bangladesh and puts forward some recommendations for turning the country into an environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, Marketing Strategy, Environmental Management, Economic Development

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Introduction

Bangladesh is a country with rich traditions, natural beauty, beaches, forests, lakes, hills, wild lives, archaeological attractions, monuments, handicrafts, sanctuaries, cultural heritage, tribal culture and architecture, incredible greenery, mighty rivers and attractive river cruises, sunny beaches, colorful tribal life and attractive cultural functions that offer great tourist attractions (Haque, Hossain and Nazmin, 2006). After the independence of Bangladesh, the government of the newborn state realized the importance of tourism in its economic and social life. Therefore, the government decided to reorganize the tourism sector (Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, 2004) by combining both the tourism department and the private corporation into one organization, bringing it under government responsibility for better coordination, promotion, development and marketing (Hossain, 2006). Bangladesh Economic Review (2010) states that Bangladesh has basically three sectors of generating revenue: industry, agriculture and service. Tourism is a part of service sector which contributes to the GDP of Bangladesh. Though the contribution of tourism in GDP is only 7% in 2004-05, it has increased to 9.44% by the year 2009-10. It decreases in 2014 which is 4.1% of total GDP and in 2015; tourism contributes 4.7% of the total GDP. Effective promotional strategies are very essential for the improvement of tourism industry in any country. Proper marketing provides full and responsible information, increases respect for the natural, social and cultural environments of destination areas and enhances customer satisfaction. Due to lack of nourishment, available research, fund and proper marketing strategy, Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation could not yet develop the promotional strategies. As a result, tourism industry could not get room to grow correctly in Bangladesh. But there are lots of opportunities if Bangladesh attempts to focus our land as an eco-tourist destination to the tourists through effective promotional policies and take some steps to improve some infrastructural facilities, the country would be able to combine economy and environment. If eco-tourism is not economically viable, the facilities and services required by most eco-tourist will not be provided and potential economic benefits of eco-tourism for both industry and local residents will not be achieved. If the environment and its treasures are not maintained, the resources base eco-tourism is destroyed. If the eco-tourism is not culturally acceptable and local people do not get benefit from its existence, they will be hostile towards eco-tourism. In order to make these aspects more effective towards sustainable eco-tourism development, the current situation calls for 'sustainable infrastructure' and implementation of effective marketing strategies through integration of environmental concerns into all the socio-economic development practices of the country. The main objective of this study is to explore opportunities and challenges of eco-tourism marketing in Bangladesh.

Methodology of the Study

It is an exploratory type of study. Data has collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data has collected by studying and reviewing the different journals and articles, textbooks, news papers and websites. Primary source includes Formal survey through questionnaire, Informal conversation with experts who understand the pros and cons of the industry. The target people were officials of Parjaton Corporation and the tourists from home and abroad. Sampling technique was judgmental sampling and Sample sizes are 20 respondents from the officials and 40 respondents from the tourists.

Eco-tourism: Meaning and Importance

Ecotourism has been developed following the environmental movement which appeared at the beginning of the seventies. The growing interest of people for environment and trips oriented towards fresh air, in addition to the growing dissatisfaction towards mass tourism, highlighted to the tourism industry a need for ecotourism. Besides, the understanding and the agreement with the principles of nature preservation and durability for a growing portion of the population took part in the evolution of the term "**ecotourism**". It focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. The concept of ecotourism is one of ambiguity and dispute. Ecotourism has to be both ecologically and socially conscious. Its goal is to minimize the impact that tourism has on an area through cooperation and management and in some case it even encourages travelers to have a positive impact on their new surroundings. Ecotourism implies,

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people”(Blangy and Wood, 1993)

Eco-tourism is very important regarding the global climate change as well as environment and development conflict. It is an essential understanding to the tourism oriented or third world countries as it actively contributes to the natural and cultural heritage protection includes local and native populations in its planning, development. It contributes to their well-being; offers to visitors an interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage; lends itself better to individual travelling and travelling organized for small groups. Eco-tourism ensures a destination, generally natural environment which is not polluted; minimizes the negative impacts of tourism; Contributes to conservation efforts; Cooperates with local people to manage natural areas; supports the local economy and the specificity of the place. Bangladesh is a land equipped with hills, valleys, forests, beaches, lakes and rivers. She can be an eco-tourist hub if all aspects of eco-tourism development aspects are properly addressed.

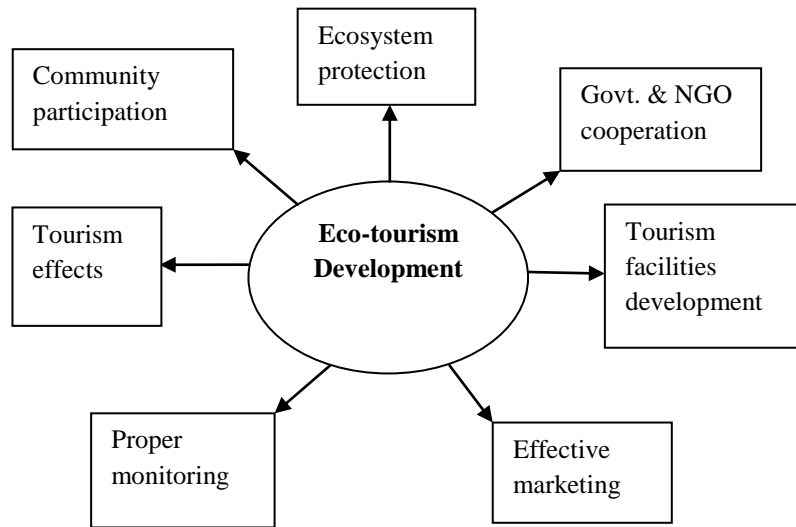


Figure 1: Eco-tourism Development Aspects (Source: Reza, 2016)

Through making an allowance for eco-tourism development aspects, Bangladesh can promote sustainable use of natural resources, explore economic value of ecosystem services, create incentives for conservation in local communities, reduce threats to biodiversity and generate direct and indirect income local stakeholders.

Economics, Marketing and Management of Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism helps in the process of generating foreign exchange, creation of employment and encouragement of local economy especially nature tourism which occurs in rural areas. It can lead to localized economic development in these often neglected areas. This industry has a great importance not only as a generator of income but also for creating employment opportunities. According to the World Tourism Organization, a total number of 763.25 million international tourist traffics were recorded during 2004 and received US\$ 622.68 billion from this sector and making the tourism as one of the largest industries in the world. World vision (2001) anticipates that, an average annual tourism growth rate of 4.1% till 2020 where nature base tourism would increase employment rates, improve socio-economic condition and foreign exchange earnings. So, in order to address the economic aspect of ecotourism, proper marketing and management is essential. In ecotourism, proper marketing communications occur in three ways such as external, internal and word-of-mouth. External uses formal communication channels to promote the tourism product to the traveler, boasting of its benefit and making promises. Internal communication occurs when the tourism service provider makes contact with the tourist and delivers the promised benefits. Word-of mouth communication occurs informally when visitors or employees discuss their experiences of the tourism products to others. For proper marketing of

eco-tourism, some issues are essential such as, local demand, environmental sensitivity, international demand, investment climate, community interests and support.

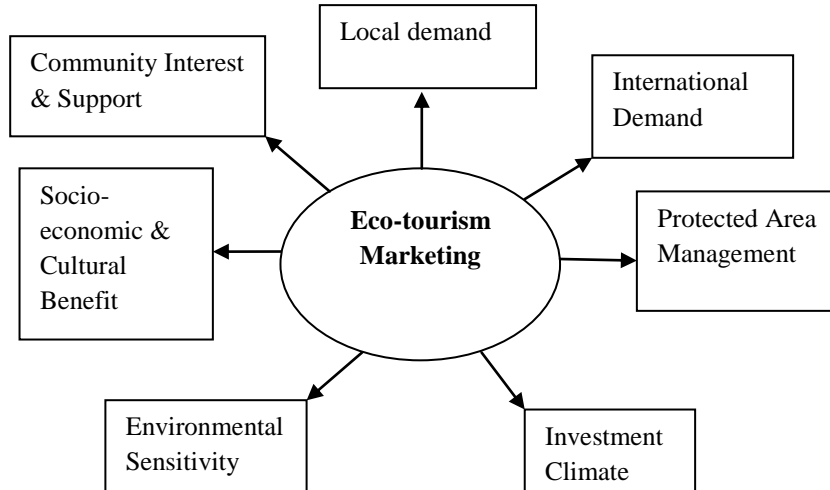


Figure 2: Eco-tourism Marketing Issues (Source: Reza, 2016)

Basically, eco-tourism implies a traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as existing cultural manifestations found in any areas (Boo, 1990). Eco-tourist needs to explore the value of natural land, local food, recreation facilities, status of biodiversity, conserved inhabitants and endangered species. As a result, management of natural parks, protected areas, game reserves are essential. Primarily global thoughts are close to climate change and sustainable development now. We know, sustainable tourism refers to meet the needs and rights of present tourists and host communities and regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Home grown development aspects and effective policies can be important part for sustainable tourism. For proper management of eco-tourism in any country, three aspects are necessary. Economic- private & public partnership, employment opportunities, purchasing decision; socially- cultural appropriateness, benefit for future generations, role of media, local government & NGO's; environmentally- environmental safety standard, global warming, climate change and environmental awareness. On the other hand, hospitality management is very decisive as it combines easy access of hotels, motels, restaurants, timely transportation, maintains local, regional and national security, as well as cultural and natural enrichment.

Contemporary picture of tourism sector in Bangladesh

The people who have visited Bangladesh are pleased and satisfied with the country's magnificent natural beauty, eye-catching attractions, rich cultural heritage, cheap services and facilities, and friendly simple people. Despite the facts, Bangladesh has not taken appropriate measures to counter its negative image abroad as a country that faces poverty, floods and cyclones. According to World Economic Forum (2013), the position of Bangladesh is 123rd out of 140 countries. According to world travel & tourism competitiveness report (2013), Bangladesh got 129th out of 136 countries. Among the South Asian countries, the status of Bangladesh is very well compared with India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. It is expected that the Parjaton Corporation along with other private tour operators will prefer the issue of correcting the image by undertaking promotional measures in order to develop tourism in Bangladesh. The government should also extend cooperation in this regard by playing the foremost role in building the positive image so that the industry can play its proper responsibility to the economy of the country.

Tourist Arrivals in Bangladesh

The following table shows the tourist arrivals in Bangladesh in different years:

Month	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
January	20,213	16,733	39,345	29,632	24,670	20,370	19,170	16,733	10,045	27,202
February	15,848	17,308	30,788	27,286	26,012	22,021	22,022	15,308	15,288	25,181
March	19,853	17,579	30,079	27,114	25,262	25,999	21,202	16,579	14,079	24,014
April	16,234	23,956	25,128	28,786	25,173	21,455	20,211	14,956	13,128	25,281
May	18,535	20,853	36,929	25,704	19,959	15,213	17,100	14,853	16,220	22,104
June	17,496	24,483	39,158	26,244	24,020	19,623	15,201	17,483	15,158	20,200
July	19,773	32,223	42,457	25,780	25,991	21,423	16,233	27,223	14,411	21,283
August	15,292	20,614	36,017	20,239	23,938	17,762	20,102	20,614	16,017	17,130
September	13,166	18,509	26,723	19,749	20,860	18,336	14,206	18,509	17,321	16,742
October	15,568	27,073	43,213	18,963	22,785	20,112	18,312	19,073	21,203	18,903
November	18,399	30,308	39,996	21,336	25,208	23,322	21,312	14,308	21,196	19,336
December	17,285	39,471	77,499	25,274	20,392	22,122	19,202	19,471	29,409	21,274
Total	207,662	289,110	467,332	297,107	271,270	247,788	224,273	215,113	203,475	258,650

Table 1: Foreign Visitors Arrival by Months (2006-2015)

(Source: Bangladesh Tourism Board Website; tourismboard.gov.bd/publications/statistics/)

The table depicts that the number of tourist arrivals in Bangladesh has increased to 258,650 in 2015 from 207,662 in 2006 which shows a positive signal. In general, the statistics shows a very good and positive trend. But the fact is that the overall scenario is not good. This rate can be considered very accelerative for those countries that have already matured in the market. But for the initial level of market entry, the above growth rate is not a positive one. Expected tourists' arrival is about 600,000 for the year 2020, subject to remaining the present trend unchanged.

Tourism and Travels in Bangladesh: Foreign Exchange Earnings, GDP and Employment

The marketing performance of any tourism organization can be evaluated based on the earnings by the organization. The following table shows the earnings and growth rate of the same of Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation, the only government owned tourism organization in Bangladesh: (Million Taka)

Month	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Jan	273.80	297.50	259.00	457.00	450.42	653.71	561.13	749.28	649.24	495.98
Feb	218.10	260.60	327.00	393.70	502.73	554.11	624.04	585.06	579.46	496.98
Mar	196.10	336.20	355.90	425.90	468.50	538.94	471.90	527.79	518.90	565.97
Apr	219.00	312.50	241.10	309.40	335.56	411.62	387.22	459.35	473.85	427.37
May	240.50	282.70	226.30	305.00	347.95	452.02	449.95	423.06	538.21	342.11
Jun	221.70	313.00	288.00	279.70	301.23	394.96	366.17	509.52	417.71	473.03
Jul	207.10	267.50	302.30	303.60	296.98	398.14	346.63	461.98	453.03	320.97
Aug	170.50	251.50	232.00	285.90	354.61	424.16	363.72	417.30	439.32	431.37
Sep	193.40	245.90	217.30	293.10	334.14	362.29	342.54	464.46	350.65	368.06
Oct	187.00	205.00	265.10	247.90	332.67	327.95	359.68	415.67	361.99	525.26
Nov	234.80	277.70	224.20	250.42	324.45	444.50	440.25	519.39	461.28	477.14
Dec	291.80	262.50	371.80	415.94	444.65	568.25	551.96	591.66	518.60	638.46
Total	2653.80	3312.60	3310.00	3967.56	4493.89	5530.65	5265.19	6124.52	5762.24	5562.70
% Change	1.02	24.82	-0.08	19.87	13.27	23.07	-4.80	16.32	-5.92	-3.46

Table 2: Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism & Other Travels (2001-2010)

(Source: Bangladesh Tourism Board Website; tourismboard.gov.bd/publications/statistics/)

Though the foreign exchange earnings through mobilizing domestic resources by the host country's tourism industry can play an important role in the economy, the earning of Parjaton Corporation is very insignificant in terms of the overall earnings of the said industry in the world and even in the Asian region. The earnings from tourism in Bangladesh was Tk. 267.7 million in 1990-91 which increased to Tk. 5562.70 million in 2010. There is also a very positive sign that in most of the year from 2000 to 2010 has a positive growth rate. From the above table we have seen, Bangladesh does not have a good position in world tourism, but the trend of growth rate in the earnings is encouraging. By observing GDP it is important to calculate hotels fares, airlines fares, airport services, travel agents as well as leisure and recreation services. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was BDT193.0 billion (2.1% of total GDP) in 2012, and which was 7.7% in 2013, and to rise by 6.4%, from 2013-2023, to BDT384.7 billion in 2023. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP are shown in the following figure-

Years	Direct contribution to GDP (Billion taka)
2010	148.1
1011	167.6
1012	193.0
1013	223.0
2023 (forecasted)	683.2

The rapid development of tourism sector in Bangladesh has led to significant employment creation. Direct contribution to employment means the number of direct jobs within the Travel & Tourism industry. In 2012 Travel & Tourism directly supported 1,281,500 jobs. It is assumption that by 2023, tourism would create 1,785,000 jobs. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to employment are shown in the following Table-

Years	Direct contribution to Employment (000)
2010	1240.5
1011	1252.9
1012	1281.6
1013	1338.3
2023 (forecasted)	1785.8

Opportunities of Eco-tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

The terms ‘ the third world’ , ‘underdeveloped countries’, ‘developing countries’, ‘ poor countries’, ‘ the south’ and less-developed countries are discussed mostly nowadays. Bangladesh is a lower middle income country (dreaming for middle income country within 2021) in South Asia with an area of 147,570 sq. km. and a population of 160 million. It is bordered on the west, north and east by India, on the south-east by Myanmar and Bay of Bengal to the south. The territorial waters of Bangladesh extend 12 nautical miles and economic zone of the country is 200 nautical miles. Bangladesh has already adopted ‘National Tourism Policy-2010’. The main objective of this policy is to develop eco-tourism, a wing of sustainable tourism through conservation and preservation of cultural values of the local community and their participation and sharing benefits. Through this policy, a platform has been already created to improve the inflow of national and international currencies at local level of Bangladesh. We know eco-tourism considers community gain and cultural appropriateness. So it can provide benefit for economically underprivileged, indigenous, marginal and religious minority peoples of Bangladesh. Besides, local people can explore their thoughts by the eco-tourists such as, ‘simple living, high thinking’, ‘zest for living, room to grow’, etc. However, Bangladesh possesses a great potential for ecotourism development. The country entirely itself is an ecotourism destination. There are plenty of ecotourism attractions lying hither and thither of this land. The offshore islands, haors and wetlands, mangrove forests, rivers and culture can be our ecotourism products.

Sea Beaches: Cox's Bazar (62 miles), the longest sea beach of the world, is the tourist capital of Bangladesh. The shark-free beach is good for bathing, sun-bathing and swimming. The breathtaking beauty of the setting sun behind the waves of the sea is captivating. Visiting the fascinating spot like Himchhari, Teknaf, Inani Beach, Buddhist Temple at Ramu and islands such as Sonadia, St. Martin and Moheskhali can form memorable experiences of one's lifetime. Kuakata, locally known as Sagar Kannya, is a panoramic sea beach on the southernmost tip of Bangladesh. Kuakata(30 km long), is one of the rarest places which has the unique beauty of offering the full view of rising and setting of crimson sun in the water of the Bay of Bengal in a calm environment.

Forests: The Sundarbans is the largest mangrove forest in the world. Two-third of the Sundarbans is in Bangladesh. Sundarbans South, East and West are three protected forests in Bangladesh. Sundarbans meaning beautiful forest is the natural habitat of the world famous Royal Bengal Tiger, spotted deer, crocodiles, jungle fowl, wild boar, lizards, monkeys and an innumerable variety of beautiful birds. Wildlife photography is an important part of eco-tourism, includes photography of the wildlife, boating inside the forest, nature study, meeting fishermen, wood-cutters and honey-collectors, peace and tranquility in the wilderness. National Botanical Garden was established in 1961 and is located to the eastern side of National Zoological Garden in Mirpur with a total area of 84 hectare of land. The garden has a collection of about 100 species of local and foreign plants. About 100 varieties of roses, in the bamboo grove 100 varieties of bamboo, varieties of sandal wood are some notable attractions of the garden along with about 60 species of different rare and exotic plants. Botanical Garden and Eco-park is a reserved forest block with unique natural beauty established in 1998 at the foothill of Chandranath Hill at Sitakunda, Chittagong with a total area of 808 hectare. It is a promising site for developing habitat of wild flora and fauna, blooming eco-tourism and developing research and education for scientists of home and abroad.

Hills, Rivers, Lakes and Island: Rangamati is a wonderful repository of scenic splendors with flora and fauna of varied descriptions. The township is located on the western bank of the Kaptai Lake. Rangamati is a favorite holiday resort because of its beautiful landscape, scenic beauty, lake, colorful tribes, its flora and fauna, tribal museum, hanging bridge, homespun textile products, ivory jewellery and the tribal men and women who fashion them. Bandarban is regarded as one of the most attractive travel destinations in Bangladesh. Its resources can attract tourists from all over the country or even from abroad. Nilgiri is a famous tourist place here. Notably Bandarban is the house of the three highest peaks of Bangladesh. Khagrachari is also known as Phalang Htaung or the Mong Circle. Khagrachari is a valley. It has three rivers namely Chengi, Kasalong and Maini. Most of the land of Khagrachari is hilly areas. Its resources can attract tourists from all over the country or even from abroad. The Sylhet Division is covered with terraced tea estates, patches of tropical rainforest, pineapple plantations and orange groves. This division has the best climate in the country – temperate and cool air in the winter and moderately warm in the summer. This place is also of religious importance to the pious Muslims

of Bangladesh since the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shahporan (RA) are situated there. St. Martin's Island is the only coral island in Bangladesh. It is about 8 km west of the northwest coast of Myanmar at the mouth of the Naf River. The local name of the island is "Narical Gingira". Bangladesh may consider all aspects for development of ecotourism at St. Martin's island. It is endowed with vast marine and land resources having great biodiversity significance. This island is a good example of co-occurrence of corals, algae, seaweeds, grasses and mangroves.

Govt. of Bangladesh has already launched an act of protected areas of tourism and special tourism zone where tourism authority would emphasize of using solar energy at remote areas. National Board of Revenue (NBR) decided to provide customs duty waiver on importing heavy machineries and instruments to erect eco-tourism oriented infrastructure. Bangladesh Tourism Board started 'Tourism Awareness Program' from 2013, now this formula is working at Chittagong hill tracts area. Ministry of civil aviation and Tourism has started to provide journalism fellowship on tourism from 2016. It is a great opportunity for journalists to pick up local eco-tourist zones.

Challenges of Eco-tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

There are a lot of challenges of eco-tourism marketing in Bangladesh. In our country, the poor people have least knowledge and understanding regarding country's eco-tourism development where local people at some destinations are completely unaware of eco-tourism. In hilly districts, tribal people set fire to the jungles for jhoom cultivation causing damage to the forest and species. Evergreen forests are highly degraded, shal forests are now converting exotic short rotation plantation, and mangrove forests are losing her beauty due to shrimp farming and high population pressure. Many of the plants and animals species are extinct already from the protected areas of Bangladesh due to land encroachment in forests, commercial cultivation, and violation of forest and environmental laws etc. St. Martins Island is not free from danger due to the habitat destruction, changes of landscape, salinity intrusion, expansion of settlements and over-exploitation of fisheries resources. Besides some common challenges, the authority facing to explore eco-tourism in Bangladesh, which are given below:

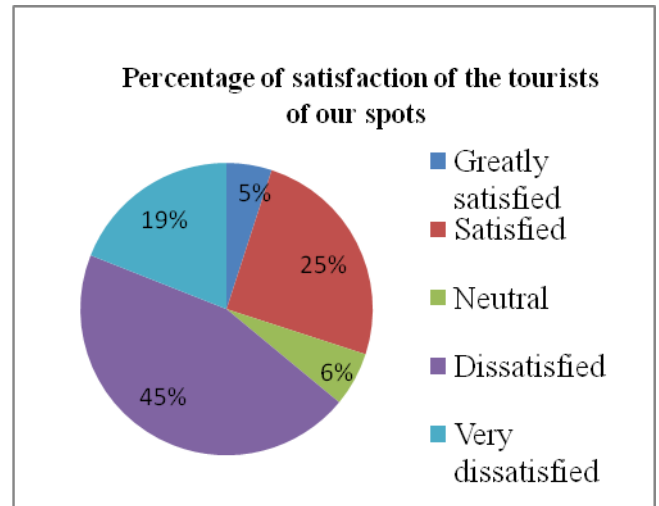
1. All the 5-star, 3-star, 2-star hotels are located in Dhaka, Cox's Bazaar and Sylhet and its number and accommodation capacity are insufficient.
2. Hijacking, snatching, murder etc. have become an ordinary event in our life.
3. Political corruption as well as political, social and cultural stability
4. Uncontrolled ground level transportations
5. Sanitation problems
6. Lack of pure drinking water and hygienic foods
7. Poor local infrastructure, uncontrolled urbanization and low institutional capacity
8. Lack of technical knowhow and weak promotional activity
9. Lack of consistent tourism strategies and policies

10. Lack of pollution free environment.
11. Biodiversity loss and degradation
12. Human resources weakness (According to international labor organization, 40% young people are inactive in Bangladesh)
13. Absence of training institute related to eco-tourism
14. Lack of market information
15. Increasing cultural deterioration and disrespect for human rights
16. Conflict between tribal and other people

Findings of the Survey Conducted on Tourists: The variability of insights found from this study provides huge scope for policy and learning interventions to promote and strengthen eco-tourism in Bangladesh. The objectives of tourism industry must match with the findings delineated in the whole report. To have insights about the industry a survey was conducted on 40 persons of varying age, social class, income level. This survey has supported to understand the present condition of our tourism industry. Followings are some of the findings of my survey:

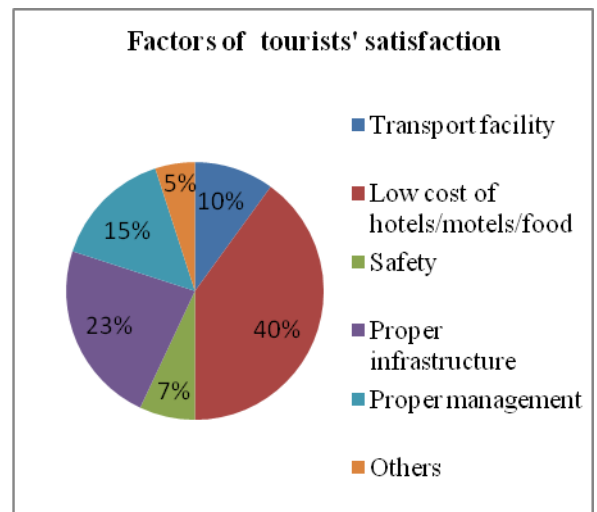
1. Percentage of Satisfaction of the Tourists of

Our Spots: According to the survey on satisfaction of the tourists of our spots it was found that most of them were dissatisfied about it. Only 5% was greatly satisfied and 25% was moderately satisfied with the environment and facilities of the tourist’s spots.



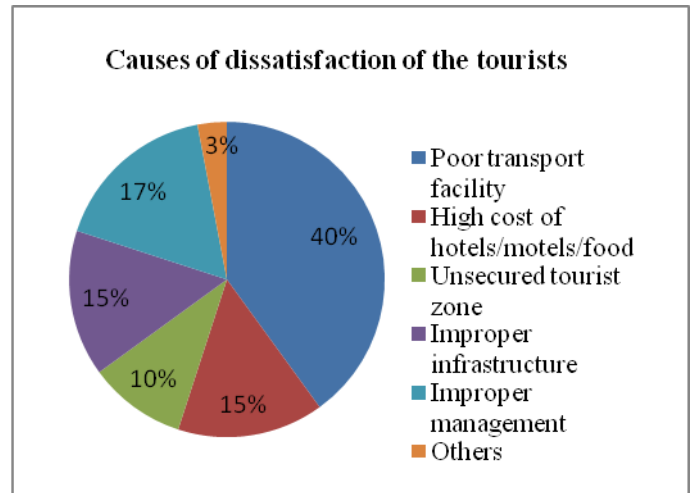
2. Factors of Tourists’ Satisfaction:

In response to the question that “if they are satisfied, then what factors did they find playing as the most effective role to make their trip a memorable one”, the respondents name few important factors influencing their satisfaction. 40% of the respondents mention low cost of hotel and food as important factor. Proper infrastructure proper management, transport facility and safety are some of the other important drivers of satisfaction.

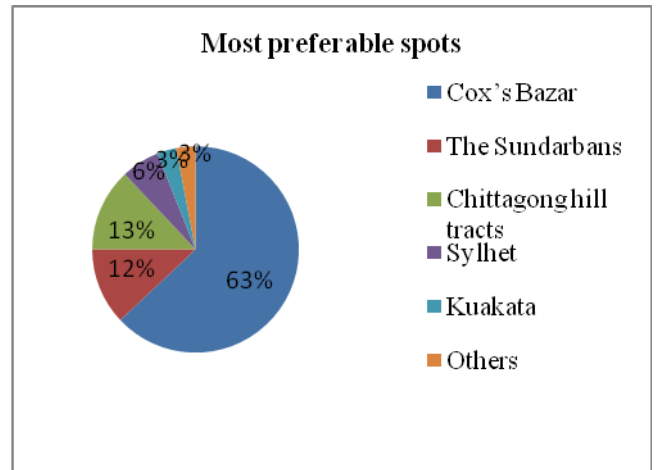


3. Causes of Dissatisfaction of the Tourists:

In response to the question that “if they are not satisfied, then what factors did they find playing as the most negative role to make their trip a bad experience”, the respondents name a number of important factors causing their dissatisfaction. 40% of the respondents mentioned poor transport facility as the main cause. Some other causes are high cost of hotel, improper management, improper infrastructure etc.

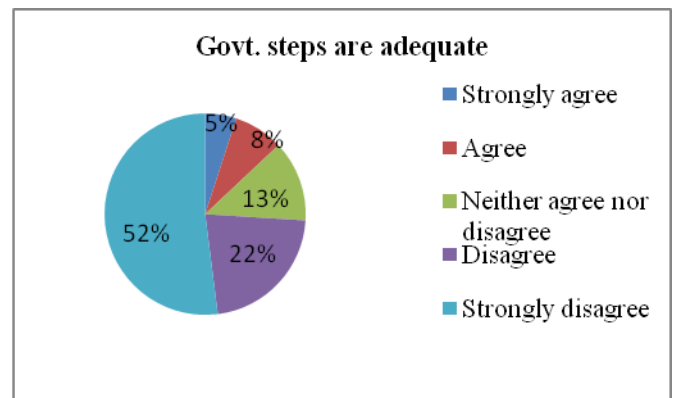


4. Most Preferable Spots: The respondents were asked to list their most preferable spots. 63% of them name Cox’s Bazar as their most preferable spots. Other preferable spots are the Sundarbans, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, Kuakata etc.

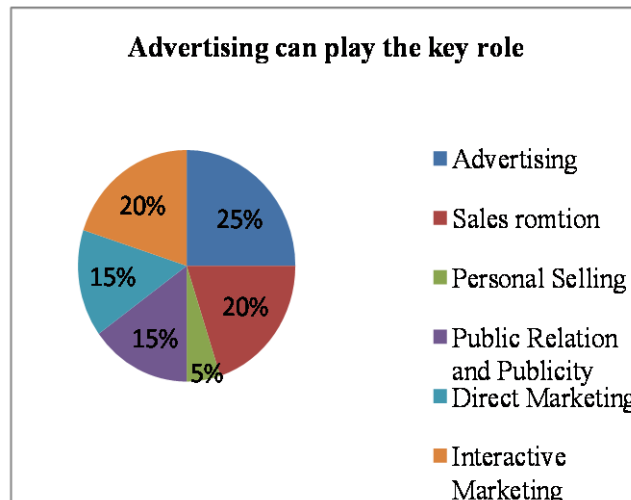


5. Government Steps Are Adequate:

The respondents were asked whether government steps for the development of tourism in Bangladesh are sufficient or not. 52% of the respondents think that the government steps were not adequate. Only a small portion of the respondents was satisfied with the initiatives of the government.



6. Advertising can play the key role: The respondents were asked which promotional tools can be used to promote tourism in Bangladesh. 25% of them think that advertising can play very important role. 20% of them think Sales promotion should be used; another 20% think Interactive marketing can be effective. 15% emphasize Public relation and publicity, another 15% emphasize Direct Marketing. Only 5% respondents mentioned personal selling to be used as a promotional tool to promote tourism.



Eco-tourism Marketing in Bangladesh: Integrated, Niche Strategy and Geographical Information Systems

Various tools of Marketing Communication can be used to promote the tourism sector of Bangladesh.

Advertising: Advertising is a non-personal form of mass communication and offers a high degree of control for those responsible for the design and delivery of the advertising message. Different tourist attraction of the country can be advertised in TV, Radio, newspaper, Journals or magazines using persuasive message to attract the potential visitors. Both the home country media and foreign media can be used to deliver the message. For example: Some persuasive and attractive advertisements like “Beautiful Bangladesh” can be prepared and presented in broadcast media.

Sales Promotion: According to Philip Kotler, sales promotion is the short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service. According to the authors, samples, cash refunds, price packs, premiums, advertising specialties, patronage rewards, point-of-purchase displays and demonstrations, and contests, sweepstakes and games can be used for consumer promotion tools and many of the tools used for consumer promotions- contests, premiums, displays – can be used as trade promotions or alternatively, the manufacturer may offer a straight discount off the list price on each case purchased during a stated period of time, also called a price-off, off-invoice or off-list whereas in business promotion includes many of the same tools used for consumer or trade promotions but mainly conventions and trade shows and sales contests are used for business promotions. Incentives can be given to attract the visitors in the off-season. For example- tour package, discount services, price reduction or some facilities can be offered to the visitors. Some lucrative offers can be offered on different occasions. Tour fair

can also be arranged. Again, special offers can be given on special days like Valentine's Day, or any other days when there exists an opportunity to attract visitors.

Personal Selling: Personal selling is traditionally perceived as a communication tool which involves face-to-face activities undertaken by individuals, often representing an organization, in order to inform, persuade or remind an individual or group to take appropriate action, as required by the sponsor's representative. According to the author, a sales person engages in communication in a one-to-one basis where instantaneous feedback is possible and the costs associated with interpersonal communication are normally very large. The respective authority can send their delegates to different countries where they will personally deliver messages about the tourist's attraction and facilities of our country in different seminars and meetings. 'Team selling' form of personal selling can be used where groups of people will present information on our tourists spot to a number of potential visitors who can influence even more visitors to visit our tourists spots.

Public Relations: Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization's leadership, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest. Third-party like magazines, newspapers, news programs etc. disseminate the messages on behalf of a particular company or organization. The increasing use of public relations and in particular publicity is a reflection of the high credibility attached to this form of communication and there is no charge for the media space or time but there are costs incurred in the production of the material. Press relations, product publicity, corporate communications, lobbying and counseling etc. are the different tools which can be used for public relation effectively. Newsworthy information on the tourist spots can be created and placed in the local news media and also in the foreign news media to attract attention of the potential visitors. Bangladesh can establish one tourism promotion office and help desk in each of the countries where a large number of visitors are supposed to be found. Again, a Tourism booth can open in each of the High Commissioner Offices of Bangladesh in various countries.

Direct Marketing: Direct Marketing is defined as any activity which creates and profitably exploits a direct relationship between the company and its prospect. Direct marketing is a term used to refer to all media activities that generate a series of communications and responses with an existing or potential customer. Telephone, mail, fax, e-mail, the Internet etc can be used to communicate directly with specific consumers and to create and sustain a personal and intermediary-free dialogue with them. The database from the travel agencies and hotels can be used to obtain the lists of their frequent clients. This information can be used to communicate and inform about various tour facilities and offers to the potential client bases. For example, it may take the form of direct-mail marketing, catalog marketing, telephone marketing or direct-response television marketing.

Interactive Marketing: Interactive marketing relies on customers expressing their preferences so that marketers can produce more relevant marketing messages. Unlike the outbound marketing of the past, interactive marketing creates a two way dialogue between a business and its customers. Any time a customer is invited to provide feedback, express their personal preferences, or offer up demographic information, they are providing information that marketers can use to guide their advertising efforts. Interactive marketing can take many forms, but search engine marketing is one of the most common. When customers type a query into a search engine, they are shown advertising based on their search terms. Bangladesh should develop an interactive website or improve its current website so that potential visitors can contact directly with our responsible authorities. Again, there should be efficient personnel who will respond to their queries accordingly. Bangladesh's tourism sector must start taking all the preparations from this moment if it wants to grab the huge development potentiality it possesses. Although we should largely target the foreign visitors, at the same time it must not also ignore the increasing prospect of the domestic market of this sector. As mentioned earlier, it is not enough that the country possesses a potential for becoming a covetable tourist destination.

Niche Marketing is related to the market segmentation ‘an emphasis on a particular need or geographic, demographic or product segment’ (Teplensky et al, 1993). Kotler (2013) states that niche markets are usually constructed by dividing a segment into sub-segments and the key issue in niche marketing is specialization. We can apply niche marketing strategy by the demographic and psychographic segmentation. Demographic segmentation means

1. Ethnic identity and nationality: countries – USA, UK, East Asia, South Asia, African etc.
2. Age: young, old and children around the world
3. Family: Bangladeshi in USA, UK, Australia etc.
4. Sex: men and women
5. Religion: Islamic, Christian, Buddhists, Hindu etc

Psychographic segmentation depends on hobbies, opinions, values, lifestyles, attitudes and personalities. Regarding eco-tourism, niche market for forests, hills and islands can be in such a ways:

1. Hills and islands includes sundarbans (the home of the majestic royal Bengal tigers)
2. Rangamati- the lake district
3. Kaptai- the lake town
4. Bandarban- the roof of Bangladesh
5. Khagrachari- the hilltop town
6. Tribal community- the indigenous cultural assimilation

Besides, applications of geographical information systems (GIS) are very important for marketing eco-tourism. By the use of these systems, concerned authority can easily sell eco-tourism products, show graphic location, assimilation of plants and animals, explain geo-demographic characteristics and put in plain words about cultural variety and the socio-economic condition of indigenous peoples.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Bangladesh can be an eco-tourist hub if govt. and local people work together. It is important to mention that, host community should need to work together than the socio-cultural conflict. Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are given for the managerial implication to improve the promotion of this industry:

Image of the Country: Bangladesh is suffering from the image problem because of some international media. These media highlight Bangladesh negatively which results to create misconception among the potential tourists. As a result, many foreigners do not choose Bangladesh as an eco-tourist destination because of either they don't have enough idea about the country and its tourism attractions and facilities or what they have is negative. To some extent, it may be partially true but is not the fact as a whole. Once someone visits the country his/her perceived image is changed. So, Bangladesh tourism should emphasize first on its promotional measures to correct this negative image.

Information Technology in Promotional Activity: The international tourism system is dependent on information technology for its future growth, competitiveness and long-term survival. In promoting the tourism industry of any country, the Internet can play the leading role to facilitate information exchange internationally. In addition to that World Wide Web is the most popular application on the Internet which can be used effectively for the many purpose of tourism marketing including direct sales, advertisement, customer support, etc. Bangladesh tourism authority must consider the effective use of this technology for the promotional activity of this industry. It is worth mentioning here that though Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation has its own web page; it should be well designed containing all the necessary information such as wildlife photography books, wildlife videos, and environmental awareness issues.

Promotion of Specific Regions: If the industry wants to attract more foreign tourists, it needs to publish some creative advertisement in some specific travel guides, magazines, and specialized professional journals that the potential tourists, overseas tour operators, travel agents, and travel writers read. It is very important of information and education center for both national and international tourists for exploration eco-tourism.

Allocation of More Promotional Funds: Bangladesh don't have that level of capability to compete with the world's top tourist generating countries, but it has the capability to compete with the member countries of SAARC or at least some other small countries of SAARC except India. To compete with these countries, needs to conduct more promotional measures. But what the amount is allocating presently for this purpose is not sufficient. Though the country has not enough financial capabilities, but it can easily increase it promotional budget up to 4 or 5 percent

of its total earnings from this sector. In addition to that the authority should have a plan for the effective use of the promotional budget because it will again help to increase the earnings by attracting more tourists. Double taxation can be avoided in case of foreign investors on the basis of bilateral agreements.

Promotion of Bangladesh through Foreign Tour Operators: Foreign tour operators can play an important role in motivating the potential tourists to a specific tourist destination. BPC and the private tour operators of Bangladesh can maintain the contact and liaison with the foreign tour operators and to influence them to send more tourists to Bangladesh. Even foreign tour operators can be used to distribute the brochure, souvenirs, and tourists' maps of Bangladesh tourism. For this purpose they need to have some incentives. Bangladesh can sell package tours through foreign tour operators where they receive a handsome amount of discount. Besides the govt. of Bangladesh provide easy license, low interest loan, training and guidelines to local the tour operators.

More Discounted Offer for a Group Tour and Long Stay: Bangladesh can attract more tourists by offering more discounts on group tours and long stay visits. For example, discount on air tickets, hotel rents, discounted price of local transport arranged by the tour operators etc. National airlines have a major role in this regards. Since the position of the national airlines of Bangladesh is not so good, the country can make the mutual arrangement on some selected international airlines. In addition to that the tourism authority should offer more off-season discounts, students discount, SAARC tour rebate etc to motivate the potential tourists to visit Bangladesh.

Direction for Further Research: This research was conducted to find out the use, importance and ways of promotional activities in tourism of Bangladesh. It is tough to conduct the research on a vast area like eco-tourism with the time frame allocated for the study. There remains further scope to conduct the study as the replication of the present study. For example, to have in-depth picture of the tourists' opinion they can be interviewed. A comparative study can be done among the cost of visiting the destinations of different regions from the same place of origin as the cost for travelling is an important element in choosing the destination place. Again, the promotional strategies used by the successful destinations can be compared to prescribe the more suitable strategy for Bangladesh.

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