

Tourism Development in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on Sylhet

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Abstract: The significance of tourism has many dimensions including economic, social, cultural, political, etc. Tourism in Bangladesh is a slowly developing foreign currency earner. Tourism development is a blooming issue in Bangladesh. This research has been conducted based on explanatory and descriptive design. The explanatory research has been used because a questionnaire is being used to capture tourist's expectations and requirements. This study has led to the application of 4P's and current state of tourism in Sylhet. This study elucidates the application of 4 P with the expectations of prospective tourists to make Sylhet as a sustainable tourism destination.

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I. Introduction

Tourism industry plays a vital role both at global and individual levels. Many countries depend on tourism as a main source of foreign income. Tourism is a type of service to which marketing mix can be applied to. The marketing mix consists of so called four 4p's: Product, Price, Promotion and Place. Out of the four components "Promotion" is the most visible factor. The selection and use of appropriate tools is crucial during the whole promotional process.

The main objective of this study is to study Sylhet as a brand of destination. We have focused on Sylhet as a brand and how it can be promoted through the right mix of marketing. To elaborate, how pricing of transportation, stay at hotel, consumer's or potential consumer's demographic features and promotional activities are related with each other and how it is related with the decision making process of the consumer or potential consumer, we have tried to figure this out. We have also identified the problems and limitations of promotional activities. Finally we have provided suggestions and recommendations for the hospitality and tourism industry sectors.

II. Literature Review

Almighty has blessed Bangladesh with bounty of nature. Based on natural bounty Bangladesh is endowed with various tourist attractions. Bangladesh, as a vacation destination, has many facets. It is endowed with almost all the natural potentials that attract tourists (Shahid, 2004). Tourism is one of the most important and fastest growing industries in the world. Bangladesh also gives priority in this sector where around one in 30 of the working populations are involved in an activity that supports tourism. The Government of Bangladesh formulated a National Tourism Policy in February 1992 to attract foreign private investments in this sector (Government of Bangladesh, 2005). Tourism involves travelling for pleasure and education. It is also a business of attracting tourists and providing accommodation and entertainment. In many countries, tourism is an industry for earning revenue and foreign exchange (Hossain, 2007). Unfortunately, foreign private investments in this sector are not in satisfying level where domestic and government investment is also unsatisfactory. Each and every destination possesses different geographical features and different historical backgrounds so that one competitive model applied in one destination may not be applicable to another destination nor may not give appropriate results (Kozak, 2002). There are a lot of problems exist behind this situation which have been come up from different studies. These problems are image problem, misconception about tourism by the policy makers, lack of in-depth knowledge, high cost of accommodation and shortage of international standard accommodation facilities, lack of far-sightedness and sincerity on the part of the government, non-allocation of fund for the tourism in national budget, lack of proper marketing strategy and initiative, complicated visa and immigration formalities, lack of proper infrastructure and superstructure to facilitate tourism activities in the country, lack of motivation etc. These problems are common for all areas in Bangladesh. In the case of tourism in Sylhet, the reality may different from the country case.

McCarthy (1964) refined Borden's idea and defined the marketing mix as a combination of four factors, known today as the 4 'Ps' of marketing – product, price, place, and promotion. With destinations all these factors can be related and thus people's expectations can be identified.

Destination attributes are combinations of multidimensional factors that can create the overall attractiveness of that destination. But, one should not expect that tourist visiting one place is like those going to another place. They might have a several reasons for choosing one destination over another. Not all attributes could be important or determinant for tourists (Crouch, 2011). Sylhet region is growing faster in tourism industry in Bangladesh. It is located in the north-eastern part of Bangladesh, is well known for its tea gardens, lush tropical forests, different tribal communities, natural water falls, crystal clear water lakes bordered by ever green hills, haors, shrine of Hazrat Shahjala (R.) and Hazarat Shahparan (R.), and the region however is currently known for its business boom-being one of the richest regions in Bangladesh. This region is in an apex position in the country for remittance flow from the Europe, America and Middle East. Nestled in the picturesque Surma Valley amidst scenic tea plantations and lush green tropical forests, greater Sylhet is a prime attraction for all tourists visiting Bangladesh. Sylhet thus became a region of saints, shrines and daring but virile people. Its rich potentialities became easily attractive and the 18th century Englishmen made their fortune in tea plantation. About 80 km. from Sylhet town connected by roads and rail. Srimangal, which is known as the tea capital of Bangladesh, is the actual tea center of the area. In nature, greater Sylhet is adorned with mighty rivers like Surma, Kushiara, Khwuai, Monu, and Piang; hills and mountains of Moulvibazar, Jajlong, and Volagonj; waterfalls like Madhabkunda, Porikunda and Hamham; distinguished Lawacherra national park (largest rain forest of Asia with more than 500 rare species like gibbons, owls, leopard, python); spacious tea estates and gardens of Srimongal, Hobigonj, and Sylhet (Shawon, 2013). Besides, a good number of indigenous tribes (e.g. Monipuri, Khasi) live in different hilly areas of Sylhet who have different lifestyles, colorful occupations, long history and enriched culture as well. Historically Sylhet holds glorious heritage of Hazrat Shahjalal (R), Shahporan (R), and their companions who have enlightened this region with the light of Islam about 800 years ago. Their shrines are, with the increasing trend (Islam, 2010). The conventional focus on the tourist requires this promising industry where it should be a matter of great opportunity to develop this sector. Tourism sector in Sylhet region would be the best sector for the investors to make better profit as well as to flourish tourism business in this region. The economic and societal significance of tourism in Sylhet region emphasize the need to develop a more rigorous understanding of the evolving tourism industry as well as to know how it influences processes of local economic development. For this reason, this study is very important to examine the problems of the tourism sector and then to sort out its potentiality as a guideline for the development of tourism in Sylhet region.

III. Background

Sylhet is one of the managerial divisions of Bangladesh situated in the north-eastern piece of the nation. Sylhet division is flanked by Meghalaya (Indian State) toward the north, Tripura (Indian state) toward the south, Assam (Indian state) toward the east, Chittagong and Dhaka divisions toward the west. Some time ago Sri-Hatta is an old exchanging Central purpose of the locale. Amid the Sultany period, the locale was named "Jalalabad". In the 14th century Yamany Saint Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) vanquished Sylhet and began crusade on Islam. Sylhet locale was built up on 3 January 1782. It is the authoritative seat of Sylhet Division. The city is situated on the correct bank of the Surma River in northeastern Bengal. It has a subtropical atmosphere and rich good country landscape. Sylhet is one of Bangladesh's most critical profound and social focuses. It is a standout amongst the most vital division of Bangladesh, after Dhaka and Chittagong on the grounds that because of its significance to the nation's economy, and also its status as a visitor goal.

The district has exceptional tourism possibilities. There is a tremendous territory of green cover of tea plants on little hillocks. Jajlong falls, Madhabkunda falls, the sanctum of Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) and so on are the other most alluring visitor puts in the locale. The city's dargahs, or entombment destinations of Muslim holy people, draw a few thousand aficionados every year. The 04 districts of Sylhet division are Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Sunamganj and Habiganj.

The main tourism attractions of Sylhet are:

1. Jajlong: Jajlong is the considerable alluring normal traveler puts in Sylhet in Bangladesh. It is around 60 Km far from the Sylhet city. It is a most appealing spot with close by the tea and orange garden. Jajlong is found other than the Mari River and close by the Khasia slope. Stream Mari is begun from the Himalaya of India. It carries the stone with its tide from the Himalaya. Visitors can gather these vivid stones from Jajlong. They can see the hanging Duke Bridge in India and high slopes from here.

2. Srimangal: One must visit to Srimangal on the off chance that he/she needs to see the normal magnificence. It has the most delightful climate and called as a tea capital in Bangladesh. The masterminded slanted slopes with tea garden are truly astonishing. Here sightseers can discover the Khasia and Monipuri tribal town close-by the tea plant. Sreemangal is an Upazila of Maulvibazar region. It is where one ought to travel.

3. Madhabkunda waterfall: Madhabkunda waterfall is the greatest waterfall in the nation arranged in the Maulvibazar region. The waterfall originates from the pinnacles of the high mountains. To see the gem waters of the waterfall, voyagers visit here the entire year. It is just 5 km far from the Kanthaltali of Borolekha Upazila. With the advancement of the correspondence framework, visitors can visit Madhabkunda waterfall both by street and rail.

4. Lawachara National Park: Lawachara National Park is a piece of the West Bhanugacha hold backwoods. It was built up in 1996. The aggregate zone comprises of 2740 hectares. Woods of the Lawachara National Park is of 1250 hectares. Vacationers can discover here the Khasia and Tripura tribal town. The woodland wetlands, little streams and bumpy sandstone zones are truly astonishing. Travelers can likewise visit Lawachara National Park from Shreemangal and Kamalgonj effortlessly. It is just 8 kilometers from the town of Srimangal.

5. Ratargul Swamp Forest: It is just perceived bog backwoods of Bangladesh and is situated in Sylhet. There is Goyain River in north and an expansive haor in South of Sylhet region. The Ratargul Swamp Forest is in the center area. This marsh backwoods is arranged at fringe range of Fatehpur Union of Sylhet region. This is around 26 kilometers far from the Sylhet City. Plants in this timberland are submerged for the most part four to seven months of the year. The clean new water can give the visitors an astounding feeling when they ride over the pontoon through the woodland.

6. Keane Bridge: Keane Bridge is the top traveler puts in Sylhet city. It is arranged over the Surma River. It is additionally called as an entryway of Sylhet city. It was made by iron and inherent 1936. English Governor of Assam, Sir Michael Keane named this extension after his own particular Keane Bridge.

7. Lalakhal: Lalakhal is a small village just below the Jainta hills in Sylhet which is an immense tourist spot in Bangladesh. It is one of the most beautiful places in Bangladesh. Lalakhal has the emerald green color water the same during all season. Soil mixed with the water and filthy bottom made the water look like this. By and large tourists hire boat from Sarighat. Local engine boats will take you to the location in just 1 hour 15 minutes. One can take a trip by car too. Zero point is a corner where tourists can also travel which is not at all far from Lalakhal. It will almost cost 1000-1500 taka by local boats to reach the place. From river queen restaurant tourists can hire boat for half an hour costing 500 taka almost.

8. HumHum Waterfall: It is the most celebrated waterfall in Bangladesh. It is arranged at Kamalgonj Upozila of Moulvibazar locale in Sylhet. It is truly a stunning vacationer put in Sylhet division. The waterfall turns out to be more appealing with its encompassing sights. It is an incredible fascination for the visitor.

IV. Methodology

Our study aims to see the relationship between various factors such as pricing of hotel, transportation cost and consumers demographic features. Our research was carried out using both primary and secondary data. Existing literature available about the topic was not sufficient to carry out this research and thus our study works with primary data collected through questionnaires and surveys which came out with the participation of general people. We conducted the survey through Google form and people answered our given questions. Our sample size was One hundred. From the results given to us by Google we got different charts which showed different percentages of information related to the demographic characteristics. Our method can be called as general percentage method. We tried to keep our work neat and clean and therefore we interviewed diverse people from different backgrounds. It helped us not to get biased results. Moreover, it reduced the chances of repetition. The results showing different percentages of information through the pie charts have been placed in the appendix part of our article.

The main objective of this study is to attract more people to come and visit Sylhet. So we conducted the survey to know how much people are willing to spend and how they consider other factors in order to visit the beautiful places mentioned above.

V. Exploratory Findings and Discussion

The result of our study showed that, our short trip did put an impact on local business people, as well as hotel operators, though we have not stayed in a local hotel out there but still it influenced other hotels around there to grab more people. Because we have been there by our BRACU bus it really took the attention of other people, there were placard and posters in front of the bus which contained our university name and also the venue that where we were supposed to go and visit, so as a result those venues took the attention of other people through our visit so it clearly increased people's interest in the destination.

In addition to further increase the attractiveness of those areas or spots, authorities are also coming up with thinking and ideas like, different cultural shows, food festivals (the one which was even happening at that time while we were there in Sylhet like something called " Pitha utshob"), then seminars etc and everything is organized by the authorities just to promote those areas to worldwide, just to let people know about all these beautiful places and just to welcome people to visit them.

Basically we have not done our survey based on any organization; moreover we have done our survey in terms of demographic. Like, we created a questionnaire and asked people one to one way and this is the way that we did our survey .And this is how our study revealed. Our survey mainly included such questions like, “Have you ever been to Sylhet?” and here we got 60% of people, they have been there. And more questions like “How was your experience when you visited Sylhet” and here 70% of people replied that places were good but they were not fully satisfied in terms of having all sorts of facilities and all. Then we asked that “ which place do you like the most to visit within Sylhet “and here it was very difficult because almost everyone liked all those places but we have marked that almost 80% people they preferred “ Jaflong” the best place in Sylhet to them though many of them also mentioned “ Srimongol”.

We asked many more questions regarding this to different people and that’s how we have done our survey and finally we ended up with a result. People were even asked by us that, “what about your thoughts regarding the role of promotional activities in the development of tourism and hospitality industry ? “ here we got 78.62% of people think and strongly agreed on that , promotional activities can really play a vital role in the development of any tourism.

VI. Conclusion and recommendation

Tourism is the only smokeless money generating business sector. So this sector needs to be taken care of by the government. We have many Tourism destination points in Bangladesh and Sylhet is one of the best of them. By our study we came to the conclusion that our respondents were mostly middle-upper middle class people. Their decision of a tour is not that much affected by the cost of the whole tour. They simply want a refreshing vacation in a good environment. People want good experiences. Travel agencies should come forward and make packages keeping in mind that middle class people are very much interested to go on a tour to Sylhet. They should give lucrative promotional offers. On top of that the government should promote Sylhet as a destination in radio as well as on television. The government should make more hotels for the public so that they can go for a tour in less cost and thus be motivated to go for tour. There are many historical places in Sylhet about which people usually do not have any knowledge. Few people know of them. The government should come up and promote these historical places in Sylhet to make Sylhet more attractive for travelling.

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