

The Sources and Availability of Information for Tourists: A Study on Tourism Sector of Bangladesh

Nazia Nabi* and Shituma Zaman**

Tourism has considered as the world's largest and rapid growing industry of modern business world. It has a vital influence on economic development of a country. 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. Tourism can add value in the Bangladeshi economy if the industry can be handled properly. However, this industry fails to reach its destination due to lack of awareness, lack of facilities and adequate marketing practices. This study aims to identify the sources and availability of information for tourists and the possible reasons why they visit Bangladesh which can help to construct and implement proper marketing plan and strategy for this industry. The study shows that tourists uses travel agent and various newspaper and magazines to know about Bangladesh before visit. And, most of the tourists agree that they get valuable information about Bangladeshi tourism sector more easily.

Field of Research: Marketing

1. Introduction

Tourism is a technical and multidimensional industry which encompasses many disciplines like information and publication, package tours, travel agency, hotel operation and catering services etc. In south Asian countries, tourism is a catalyst of change in household economies, leading to new opportunities for employment, new sources of cash income, and new information about technologies (Barkin 1996, Eadington & Smith 1992, Levy & Lerch 1991, Liu 2003). Bangladesh is one of the few countries in South Asia that definitely is not on the tourists hunting list like Nepal, India, Maldives or Sri Lanka; but it has a delicate and distinctive attraction of its own to offer. The traditional emphasis of the tourist trade has always been on the material facilities offered by a country rather than on its actual charms. This may be a reason why Bangladesh has seldom been highlighted in the world's tourist maps.

As Bangladesh has the hidden opportunity to take place in the world's tourism industry, this paper has taken a diminutive attempt to discern some of the factors such as the sources of information which are available in Bangladesh and tourists' attraction or motivation to visit this country. Focusing on the collected information, this paper has taken an attempt to suggest the ways that can improve this sector in Bangladesh.

*Nazia Nabi, Assistant Professor, School of Business, University of Information Technology and Sciences, GA-37/1 Progoti Sarani, Baridhara J-Block, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. e-mail: nazia.nabi.nn@gmail.com

**Shituma Zaman, Lecturer, School of Business, University of Information Technology and Sciences, GA-37/1 Progoti Sarani, Baridhara J-Block, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. e-mail:shituma@dhaka.net.

1.1 Problem Statement

This paper provides a brief review of some of the relevant approaches that have been used for the measurement of customers or tourists. The problem statements for this research are:

- a. To find out the sources of information that tourists use to gather knowledge about Bangladesh.
- b. To understand the availability of information related with tourism sectors.
- c. To identify the reasons of tourists to visit Bangladesh.

The problem statement is generated from the consideration that tourism can significantly contribute to sustainable development and particularly to alleviation of poverty and the protection and conservation of the natural, cultural and social environment. Tourism is an important matter for generating income, creating opportunity for employment and earning foreign currency. Practically, Bangladesh has a lot to attract tourists, by which the economy can be improved, but is still poor to play in this industry. So, to improve this sector, it is necessary to know the perception of the existing tourists.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study have been conducted to determine the rationales that should build awareness among the service providers of tourism sectors and the tourists about the prospects of tourism as a medium for marketing potentials in Bangladesh. The objectives of this study are:

- To find out the sources and availability of information that tourists use to know about the Bangladesh.
- To identify the reasons why tourists come to Bangladesh and with whom.
- To provide suggestions for improving tourism sector in Bangladesh

1.3 Research Question

The research questions for this study are:

- a. What are the sources that tourists use to collect information about Bangladesh?
- b. Is there proper information about Bangladesh available for the tourists?
- c. What are the factors that attract tourists to come to Bangladesh?

1.4 Structure of the Paper

The paper is divided into seven parts. Part one, 'Introduction', introduces to the present situation of the tourism industry and the background of the problem; followed by problem statement, objective of the study and the research questions used for this research. Part two, 'Literature review', has been executed in five phases; it discusses, firstly, about tourism; secondly, tourism of Bangladesh in brief; thirdly, classification of tourists; fourthly, the role of tourism in Bangladesh economy and lastly, the sources of information and tourists' motivation. Part three, 'Methodology', explains the research design. Part four,

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'Data Analysis and Findings', discusses the results of the study. As the result of the study is theoretical, the presenting of results in the findings part is considered easier to understand. Part five, 'Conclusion', concludes the research result. In addition, the research result is concluded with the limitation of the research. Part six, 'References', provide the lists of full bibliographical details and their journal titles. Lastly, part seven, 'Appendix' includes the foreign exchange earnings of Bangladesh from tourism & other travels.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Define Tourism

Tourism is an activity done by an individual or a group of individuals, which leads to a motion from a place to another. From a country to another for performing a specific task; or it is a visit to a place or several places in the purpose of entertaining which leads to an awareness of other civilizations and cultures, also increasing the knowledge of countries, cultures, and history. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited".

The term tourism could be viewed from different angles like economic, managerial, marketing, social, environmental and so on (Rashidul 1988). Tourism can be classified into several distinct categories. They would include holiday travel, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business travel, health treatment, shopping, conference, incentive travel, official mission, education, sport and others travel (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board 2004). According to International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism, "tourism is the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and study of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent resident and are not connected with any earning activity". Hossain (2005) identified foreign tourists' attitude toward service product arrangement, channel of distribution, price of tourism product and services and promotional arrangement and showed various marketing constraints that affect the attitude of the foreign tourists. He recommends that Bangladesh tourism industry should arrange its marketing mix elements in a way that attain positive attitudes of the foreign tourists and ensure growth of the country. Tourism industry in Bangladesh has not got a solid footing to "taken off" despite all the efforts and measures from government and other private agencies (Shahabuddin 1986).

2.2 Tourism of Bangladesh in Brief

Bangladesh is a low profile, small country in South Asia. This country, though very small in area, has a rich collection of tourism product to offer the world. It has a unique cultural heritage with numerous historical and archaeological sites. Bangladesh has the longest natural unbroken sea beach in the world with five world heritage sites (Hossain 2006, Islam 2009). Among the five world heritage sites, the most famous are the eighty-one domed Shat Gombuj Mosque in Bagherhat, made by great Muslim saint Khan Jahan Ali in the 15th century, and world's largest mangrove forest, Sunderbans, which is the home of the world famous Royal Bengal tiger. Tourism sector of Bangladesh is one of the least developed

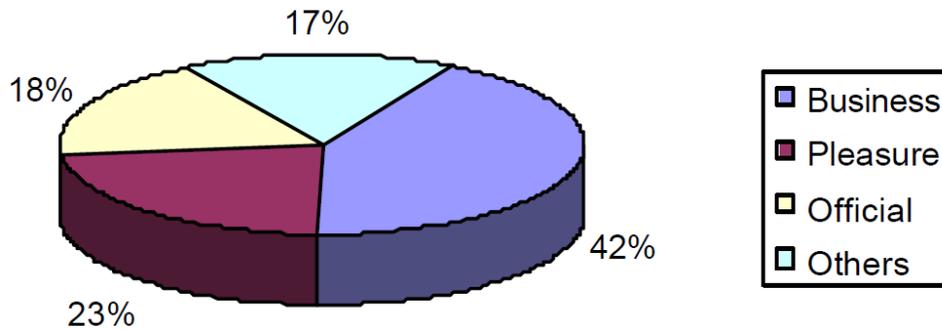
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sectors, yet tourists arrival expanded from 113,242 in 1991 to 468,951 tourists in 2008 (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation 2009); the growth indicates light of further scope by maximizing use of existing resources (Islam 2009).

2.3 Classification of Tourists

According to a sample survey conducted by governmental agency, the tourists' arrivals are classified in the following categories:

Figure 2: Classifications of Tourists



[Source:

www.bangladeshtourism.gov.bd]

2.4 The Role of Tourism in Bangladesh Economy

Bangladesh is bestowed with the beauties of nature. The fascinating natural beauty has provoked many travelers from far and nears through ages to undertake a journey to this land. Bangladesh offers the rare beauty spot of sunrise and sunset in fascinating Kuakata, the rare beauty of the Sundarbans-abode of the Royal Bengal Tiger, the longest smooth sandy beach in Cox's Bazar, the oldest archeological site in Mahasthangarh and many other delightful beauties of cultural and historical heritage.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the national tourism organization of the country, was established in 1973 with the intention of developing the tourist facilities and promoting tourism products; and created a favorable image of the country.

The tourism sector can play an important role as a driving force of economic development by contributing in three high priority goals of developing countries like Bangladesh:

2.4.1 The Generation of Income

Tourism expenditures and the export related goods and services generate income to the economy of Bangladesh and can simulate the investment necessary to finance growth in other economic sectors. Government may earn revenue by imposing tax on the popular products demanded by the tourists.

2.4.2 Employment

Tourism offers the job opportunity for different classes of people and thereby contributes to the alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh. Tourism generates jobs directly, through hotels, restaurants, taxis, souvenir sales; and indirectly, through the supply of goods and services needed by tourism-related business. In addition, tourism can include the local government to make infrastructural improvements and also make an important contribution to a country's balance of payments.

2.4.3 Foreign Exchange Earnings

Although the number of tourist arrivals has shown an increasing trend over the years, Bangladesh has not been able to reap the full benefits in the tourism sector up to the desired level according to its potentiality. In the year of 2004-2005, approximately 271,270 tourists visited Bangladesh and it earned 3,967 million taka whereas in 2005-2006, 300,000 tourists visited Bangladesh contributing more than 4,000 million taka to the domestic economy.

2.5 The Sources of Information and Tourists' Motivation

In a competitive market such as tourism, consumer awareness, selection, and the choice of tourism and hospitality products depend heavily on the information supplied to and used by the tourist (Fodness & Murray 1997; McIntosh & Goeldner 1990; Moutinho 1987). From the guests' point of view, information is the harbinger and initial indicator of the later, actual tourist service. It follows that the quality and quantity of the information available is an actual strategic success factor (Laesser 1998). The most important criteria of influence include such factors as potential travelers' own intuition/desires, their own experience/satisfaction or dissatisfaction, information made available by the providers, information given by friends and relatives (recommendation by word of mouth), the marketing influences of guidebooks, press articles, TV programs, TV/radio commercials, advertisements, among others (Fodness & Murray 1999; Laesser 1998; Snepenger et al. 1990).

In tourism, most producers will often have no practical choice but to deal with certain segments, mainly because of the location and nature of their business (Middleton 1994). Possible segments include purpose of travel, buyer needs, user characteristics, demographic, economic or geographic characteristics, psychographic characteristics, price, etc. (Middleton 1994; Bieger 1998). Due to the continuous loss of power of socio-demographic segmentation (Schewe 1998; Bieger 1998), information sources structures – based on consumer behavior - have frequently been used as a segmentation variable in tourism literature (Fodness & Murray 1997, 1999; Mansfeld 1992; Um & Crompton 1990). Information-seeking is often coupled with a cultural (and therefore regionally different) background, which results in different patterns of behavior (Dawar 1993). Among those vacation groups, the presence of family and friends at the destination, prior visits to the destination, the degree of novelty associated with the destination (Snepenger et al. 1990).

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Information sources have been included in many research works as important factors for the analysis of tourist behavior. For instance, first, most of the tourist behavior models incorporated the search of external information as an important component (Bettman 1979; Engel, Kollat et al. 1978; Gursoy & McCleary 2004; Howard & Sheth 1969; Mathieson & Wall 1982; Schmoll 1977; Um & Crompton 1990; Woodside & Lysonski 1989). Second, some studies have examined the influence of information sources on tourists' preferences and intentions (Mayo 1973; Milman & Pizam 1995). Third, other studies have centered on the relationship between information sources, destination selection and travel decisions (Baloglu 2000; Bieger & Laesser 2004; Capella & Greco 1987; Chen & Gursoy 2000; Eagles 2000; Gursoy & McCleary 2004; Woodside et al. 2000; Woodside & Dubelaar 2002).

Promotion is recognized by many as a critical element in tourism marketing. Among the array of promotional methods available, the travel brochure is one of the most important and widely utilized (Holloway & Plant 1988). One of the most influential factors in the purchase of a tourist product (destination) is information about tourist goods and services. Moreover, tourists differ in the information sources they use before making a decision (Moutinho 1987). Institutions, travel agents and tourist businesses make great efforts and spend a lot of money to make tourist information circulate. Despite the high investment made on communication and promotion, there is a general lack of knowledge as to which information source tourists use to make their choice (Kim et al. 2005; Weilbacher 2003).

Sources of information about a destination have a great influence on the process of tourist decision-making, and the behavior of tourists determines how the search for information is done and how information will be used (Andereck & Caldwell 1993; Capella & Greco 1987; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling & Worrall 1990; Snepenger & Snepenger 1993). Formal sources of information, like brochures, and informal sources, for example relatives and friends, have an influence on image formation in a tourist destination (Beerli & Martin 2004). Tourists tend to prefer impersonal information sources (brochures, Internet, guides, etc.) (Molina & Esteban 2006). Nevertheless, personal experience probably appears to be the most important information source. Tourists use external information sources as a first step when planning their holiday travel (Goossens 1994).

So, it is essential for entrepreneurs and tourism promoters to know exactly what kind of information should be included in tourist brochures and guides. At the same time, it is also important to analyze the effect of information on tourist behavior and image. So, this study has taken an attempt to identify the sources of information for tourists and the reasons why the tourists select a particular country, for this study, Bangladesh which were studied by past researches with a very little scope.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Research Design

The required information for this study has been collected by interviewing tourists from various tourists' spots, hotels, clubs etc. and analyzing journals, leaflets and publications on tourism. The data has been collected from various private and government organizations related to tourism industry of Bangladesh with convenient sampling and availability of

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information of the organizations, among them, were hotels, motels, clubs, Parjatan Corporation office, authorized personnel of scenic places, renowned show rooms etc. Both foreign and domestic tourists and local community people who live around different tourist spots. Besides, the officials of different government and private organization related to tourism industry were interviewed for this study.

Survey method has been used to collect information from the tourists. The research is both qualitative and quantitative. Although we have followed non -probability sampling, the members from various groups like age, occupation, income have been included whenever possible.

The survey has been conducted on 30 respondents, among them, 15 were foreign tourists and rests 15 were domestic tourists and local community people of different tourist spots. As the study has been conducted at the period when tourists were unavailable (not the peak season), and there were time limitation, so, the study has been conducted with the small sample size. Both face-to-face interview and formal questionnaire were used to collect primary information from these 30 respondents.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 The Sources of Information

One of the reasons for conducting this study was to know the sources tourists usually exercise to collect information about tourism of Bangladesh. According to table 1, which has been made on the importance of various sources, shows that most of the tourists, that is 16%, collect information from magazine/newspaper as well as the travel agent. Subsequently, family, friends and relatives (12%) as well as tourist leaflet/travel guide/brochure (12%); word-of-mouth (8%), webpage advertisements (8%), tourist information centre (8%) and various tourism related TV programs (8%) were found as most important sources for the tourists of Bangladesh. The least used source is hotel/accommodation as only 4% respondents said that the hotels of Bangladesh lack the necessary information about the tourist spots.

Unlike the other developed countries, Bangladesh provides less information through hotel and brochures which are the most efficient way to attract and the repurchase of the tourist spot.

Table 1: Sources of Information

Sources	Percentage of tourists
Word-of-mouth	8%
Webpage	8%
Advertisement	8%
Family, friends, relatives	12%
Tourist information centre	8%
Hotel/accommodation	4%
Magazine/newspaper	16%
Tourist leaflet/travel guide/brochure	12%
Travel agent	16%
TV	8%
Others	0%

4.2 Availability of Sufficient Information

Among 30 respondents, 40% respondents agree that there is sufficient information available for tourists of Bangladesh. Again, shown in table 2, 33.3% disagree and 13.3% strongly disagree with the availability of information. So, there is still lack of sufficient information about tourism industry in Bangladesh.

Table 2: Availability of Information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
Disagree	10	33.3	33.3	46.7
Neutral	4	13.3	13.3	60.0
Agree	12	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

4.3 Tourists' Motivation to Visit Bangladesh

Tourists visit Bangladesh for various reasons such as visiting historical sites, recreation, tour, passing through or coming for business purpose. According to table 3, majority of tourists (28%) visit Bangladesh for various tourist spots like the world's largest mangrove forest, Sunderbans. 24% tourists have a general interest in nature and wildlife. Consequently, hospitality, easy access to/from Bangladesh (17%), recreation/tours (17%) and tourism through business purpose are the main reasons for visiting Bangladesh by tourists.

Table 3: Attractions for Tourists

Reasons for selecting Bangladesh	Percentage
Tourist spots	28%
Wildlife	24%
Hospitality	17%
Recreation/tours	17%
Business purpose	14%

By discussing with the tourists, it has been identified that tourist spots are the main attraction for the tourists, but the insecurity is one of the main reasons for their unwillingness to re-visit Bangladesh even though there is easy access to/from the country and attractive tourist and historical spots.

5. Conclusion

For overall sustainable development of Bangladesh, tourism comprises as one of the key development components. Potential tourists must be made aware of the interesting and historical place, scenic beauties, adventurism, health reports, rich, and ramified culture etc (Rashidul 1988). There are a number of tourist facilities in Bangladesh but, in some cases, information on this sector is not available to the tourists. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the national tourism organization of Bangladesh which was established in 1973 with the intention of developing the tourist facilities and promoting tourism products should change its marketing strategy with an aim to building up a good image of Bangladesh (Hasan 1992).

Although the factors influencing tourism sectors have been analyzed for many countries, the factors like the sources and availability of information in Bangladeshi tourism sector are still being ignored. According to tourists, the government should take care of providing sufficient information regarding the tourist spot. Although the information is available, it is still not sufficient to develop this industry. So, committed efforts are needed from both the public and private sectors for full development and utilization of the potentials of the Tourism Industry.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

In determining the sample size for tourists visiting Bangladesh, the population frame was not available. The main constraint behind this limitation was the lack of possibility to collect tourists' lists because of strict confidential of government organizations and the season. So the study was conducted with non-probabilistic sampling. Besides, due to shortage of time, few numbers of people were surveyed. Tourists' non-cooperation, unwillingness to answer and providing biased answer were other drawbacks for this study. Time constraint has been another limitation for which the study was taken on Dhaka, Chittagong and Dinajpur only that could not provide sufficient information for the industry.

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Appendix

Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism & Other Travels

(2001-2010)

(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

Source: Bangladesh Bank

|All Figurs are Provisional 2010 N.B: Foreign Exchange Earnings