

Evaluating Female Tourist's Perception about Security and Safety While Visiting Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Purpose: Safe and secure environment decides the success or failure of a tourist destination. Due to some socio-cultural phenomena, women are more vulnerable regarding security and safety issues. Cox's Bazar, a popular tourist destination in Bangladesh, has recently faced a negative reputation for being an unsafe place because of some unexpected incidents and its widespread media attention. This paper intends to evaluate the perception of female travelers, who visited Cox's Bazar in January and February 2022, while staying there, and how they perceived security and safety in Cox's Bazar. **Methodology:** 312 women tourists from Cox's Bazar have been surveyed through a self-administrated two-part questionnaire. The sample size was determined by using a non-probability random sampling technique following the quantitative data analysis method. **Findings:** The findings shows that participants had reasonably positive perceptions of security and safety, although they felt unsafe going out at night. The main concern reported was snatch thief and pick-pocketing cases. **Practical implications:** Deploying more police and enhancing the provision of closed-circuit television (CCTV) was found to be an important instrument that may increase security and safety perception. **Originality:** Very few genders centric research on tourism crime has been done lately. Recent media attention about women tourists' safety and security raised a concern to identify specific loopholes regarding security to ensure safe travel for a female in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Keywords: Cox's Bazar; Tourism; Perception; Women safety; Crime; Security

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1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar is considered as one of the most popular tourist destinations (Hassan & Shahnewaz, 2014). Each year millions of tourists visit this place because of its touristic attractions. 120 km long unbroken sea beach, unique culture of the tribal communities, different variety of cuisines attract tourists from all over the world. As an emerging economy of the world the government of Bangladesh is thinking about diversified economy, to serve this purpose tourism industry arguably possesses considerable potentials. However, unprecedented external situation such as – pandemic, natural calamities, terrorism, crimes etc. often take this industry in a vulnerable situation. By taking correct measure the casualty can be reduced to some extent. Especially concern of security and safety are important facets for the development of a tourism destination. According to, UNWTO (1996), "Safety and security are vital to providing quality in tourism. More than any other economic activity, the success or failure of a tourism destination depends on being able to provide safe and secure environment for visitors". Bangladesh often gets negative media attention due to some heinous crime and as a fragile industry tourism sector suffers most. To illustrate the vulnerability the recent rape incident on 22 December 2021 can be mentioned. After that incident vacancy rate to most of the accommodation provider dropped down to half during the peak tourist season (The Daily Star, Jan 4, 2022).

In context of Bangladesh safety for women tourists is a major concern. Until now Bangladesh is not 100% safe for solo female travelers or females in general. However, to target this huge consumer base tourism sectors are taking measure to ensure the safety of women traveler. In this article the researcher tried to know the perception of women tourists while visiting the most renowned tourist spot of Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar. After investigating 312 female tourists regarding their safety security concern at Cox's Bazar it can be said that there need to be take more government and private sector collaboration to ensure safety of women traveler. In this article the researcher found some specific security loopholes which need further attention to ensure tourists safety.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism Crime Relationship

In hospitality industry (Paraskevas and Brookes, 2018a) and tourism destinations (Mehmood et al., 2016) crime has many adverse influences. It is easier to apply criminology theories to understand the relationship between tourism and crime but in literature this has rarely been discussed (e.g., Prideaux 1996). However, tourism related criminal activities and tourist's victimization is mostly explained through three theoretical approaches - hot spot

theory, routine activity theory and economic theory of crime. To understand the true mechanism that affects the victimization of a tourist these three approaches can be considered. It will be easier to build the strategies to ensure security and safety for the tourists based on these approaches.

The Hot Spot Theory (Crotts 1996) states that specific area may associate with higher degree of criminal activities. By analyzing criminal focuses and environmental criminology, this theory has been explained. To support the theory Crotts (1996), gave an empirical evidence of Dade County which is a popular tourist place in Florida. In the year 1993, 16% among all tourists, who visited the State of Florida, stayed in Dade County. Interestingly, 37% of all criminal violence against tourists reported in there. Based on this evidence Crotts (1996, p. 8) state that, specific types of suitable settings and similar cluster of areas are chosen by the criminal group to target a tourist for attacks.

As per *routine activity theory* (Holcomb and Pizam 2006), there are three specific elements which ignite the tendency of criminal occurrence. Based on the classic concept of human ecology, routine activities of everyday life is on the core of this theory. Often tourists become a suitable target. Among the three elements first one is the motivated offenders, who involved themselves in criminal activities due to their personal circumstances. For example in some poorer countries poverty sometimes drags a person to criminal offence. Those offenders see tourists as a potential target as they carry many valuable items with them. Second element is the suitable target to make a victim. In this case also tourists are potential candidates as most of the time they are in an unfamiliar environment carrying cash and other valuables with them. For this reason criminals easily target them. The last element is the absence of protectors. If a tourist travel alone or the country in which he/she is travelling doesn't provide enough safety the risk of criminal offences against that tourist increases (Holcomb and Pizam 2006). Here the emphasis is given over the dependency between crime structure and everyday activities where the criminal activity is considered as routine activity with other routine behavior (Cohen and Felson 1979).

The final approach to understand the relationship between tourism and crime is the *economic theory of crime*. The foundation of this theory was built by Nobel laureate, Gary Becker. He stated that, if a person gets more benefit from a criminal activity than other investment of time or money, he will engage in more crime (Becker 1968). According to this theory, crime has been viewed as a rational decision of a criminal. A criminal will consider his potential gain and analyze potential losses (they may get arrested or get some sort of punishment or associated social stigma) before committing criminal activity. In a tourism destination earnings from the tourism sector can stimulate the economy of that particular area. Because of this boosts in economy the number of potential victims are also increased. So as per this theory we can say that by creating employment opportunities and wages for local people has some connection with the increase of criminal activity in a particular area (Montolio and Planells-Strusse 2013). However, ensuring proper safety security can control this situation to some extent.

2.2 Perception of tourists' about security and safety

While visiting a tourist destination, tourists are always concerned about the safety security of that destination. If they are not satisfied about this concern they develop a negative impression about that destination. Increasing crime rate is a very alarming situation for any tourism destination. Tourist flow of that area may gradually decline due to this negative phenomenon. Following consequences may occur after that.

- Higher percentage of criminal activity may discourage a potential tourist to select particular destination for visit.
- Because of this safety concerns tourists lose their interest to take part in different activities away from their staying facilities.
- In this adverse condition tourists are unwilling to pay return visit or recommending the destination to their acquaintances.

Increased crime rate creates a negative image about a tourism destination on the mind of a tourist. Negative media coverage or word – of - mouth stimulates to create these negative images. Therefore this impact drastically reduces tourist perception about the security and safety of that particular destination (Donaldson and Ferreira 2009; Cavlek 2002; Sönmez and Graefe 1998). For the development of a tourism destination this is a very concerning phenomenon as tourism destination greatly depends on its positive image (Donaldson and Ferreira 2009). For this reason, ensuring safe and secured environment for tourists is directly connected to the prosperity of a destination (Cavlek 2002). Obviously the concern of security and safety play a pivotal role in tourist's decision-making procedure (Ferreira and Harmse 2000; Mawby 2000). News about political instability, terrorist attack or violence crime makes a tourist think about their personal safety while visiting a particular tourist destination (Pizam, 1999). Usually, a safe destination or destination with lower crime rate is likely to be chosen by the tourists (Sönmez and Graefe 1998). As per the research findings of Pizam and Mansfeld (1996), tourists are likely to delay, reschedule or cancel their trip to a certain destination when they feel threaten. No tourist compromises their personal safety or put themselves in jeopardy while choosing a vacation destination (Cavlek 2002).

Mawby (2000) found risk as a perceived thing rather than real. In his research on risk fear paradox, in the context of travel and tourism he conclude that actual risk of tourists falling victim to a crime may be out of proportion than their fear of crime (Mawby, 2000). In most cases media creates this confusion among tourists by magnifying actual scenario of a crime of a tourist destination. Mawby (2000) further emphasize to educate the tourist to prevent them from the dangers of crime. Therefore deferred demand can result in perceived risk. In that case prospective tourist will not pay a visit because of the problem in supply side and in that case crime is an excuse (Ferreira and Harmse 2000).

The index of visitor satisfaction is a good indicator to evaluate tourist's intention to visit the destination again. Tourists with positive satisfaction are likely to re-visit the destination again, on the other hand dissatisfied tourists will never consider the place for visiting again in future (Campo-Martínez et al. 2010). Usually tourists' expectations are affected by many factors including word-of-mouth communication, previous experience and marketing campaign circulated of a particular destination. If tourists recommend the place to other it implies that they are satisfied with the arrangement of the destination. This positive image is essential to pull potential tourist demand. By analyzing the relationships between tourist satisfaction and destination image and the tourists' willingness to recommend the destination to others Bigné et al. (2001) concluded that positive image of a destination influence tourists to recommend or re-visit the destination.

2.3. Women Traveler's perception about Safety and Security

Gender plays a very crucial role in the perception of security concern of tourists. If we compare both male and female tourists, female tourists were more cautious about criminal activity than male (George, 2003). In most cases female tourists feel insecure to travel alone (Walker and Page, 2007). They may experience frequent cheating activities by service personnel (Harris, 2012) and they have more concerns about vulnerability (Boakye, 2008). However, there are some studies which found different observations that are gender does not affect perceptions of crime risks (George, 2003) and terrorism risks (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998). Overall a person's socio demographic characteristics affect tourists' perceptions of crime.

Women chose to travel for different purposes such as - business, relaxation, spending holiday and entertainment. While traveling to a destination, most of the women concerned about are their personal security and vulnerable conditions. There are some other safety issues which could happen to a woman traveler when visiting a tourist destination like – accidents, sickness, and violent crime (i.e., snatch theft, assault, rape etc.). In terms of health safety or religious and cultural beliefs there's a huge difference is noticeable between male and female. Most of the time a female, faces greater difficulties and unwanted attention whether she travel alone or in a group. A female traveler should assess the risk before begin her journey either alone or in a group. Women travelers usually avoid the areas which have major safety issues. They tend to be more alert and cautious about it while visiting a destination (Amir, Ismail and See, 2015).

3. Methodology

The survey was conducted involving sample of 312 women visitors at Cox's Bazar. It was taken during the month of January to February 2022, as this period is considered as peak tourist season in Bangladesh. Tourists from Cox's Bazar were surveyed at various popular tourists' spot around the destination. These include Inani beach, Himchari Mountain, Buddhist temple at Ramu, Kolatoli beach, Sugandha beach and Marine Drive Road. To provide reasonable representation of the target population local attractions were chosen. Moreover, the surveys were conducted in different time of the day so that the research can present cross-section of visitors.

A self-administrated two-part questionnaire was used as the survey instrument. First portion of the survey investigate the socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level), length of their stay at the destination and whether they traveled alone or in a group had been investigated. In the second part, participants were asked different question related to safety and security to understand their perceptions regarding this issue and their intention for future visits to Cox's Bazar. Data were collected from airport, police station and hotels in Cox's Bazar area. Non-probability sampling technique had been used to determine the sample from the population. In this technique the participants in the population have no prior probability to be chosen as sample. As method convenience sampling technique has been applied which means researcher collect the information from members of the population who were conveniently available.

To understand the behavior of the consumers' perception different questions were asked based on different characteristics, including whether they would like to recommend Cox's Bazar to their acquaintances and whether they others that Cox's Bazar is a secure place to visit. Five-point Likert scales were used to investigate the perception of the respondents. Each respondent rates their overall observation regarding the security on various issues like – daytime experiences while roaming around the city, nighttime experiences while walking on the streets, experiences while using any sort of transport, experiences while staying at hotel/accommodation unit or crossing the roads. Their perception about security was measured on a 1–5 scale where 1=very secured and 5=very unsecured. Similarly, the participants were asked to rate their likelihood about different security and

safety initiatives taken by the concerned authority (pedestrian walkway design, closed-circuit television (CCTV) provision, signboard or direction board regarding safety measure, amount of lighting, safety information provided for the tourists and the number of security forces). Their likelihood was measured on a 1–5 scale where 1=very satisfied and 5=very dissatisfied. Lastly, a question about the possible threat group was asked to the respondents. The participants gave their opinion by providing scale ranging from 1–5 scale where 1=very secured and 5=very unsecured to examine whether beggars, illegal traders, refugees, homeless people or prostitutes could be threats to them. At the last portion of the questionnaire, participants were asked, had they faced any crime or felt that their life was in danger, during their stay in Cox’s Bazar.

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The table below demonstrates information about the travel behavior of the participants. This is vital information as the security and safety perception may change time to time in different phases of travel. For example, tourists who have acquaintances at the destination may feel safer since these local people or someone that familiar with the destination will accompany them during their stay at the destination. It will create a comforting atmosphere in case of any adverse situation.

Table 1. Travel patterns of the respondents

Purpose of visiting Cox’s Bazar		
Holiday	218	70%
Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)	88	28%
Business	6	2%
No. of party		
Single	2	1%
pair	38	12%
A group of three people	48	15%
A group of greater than four people	224	72%
No. of visit		
First time visit	169	54%
twice or more visit	143	46%
Length of stay		
1 to 10 days	296	95%
More than 10 days	16	5%

Among the 312 female respondents, over half of visitors (54%) were visiting Cox’s Bazar for the first time, the remainder (46%) had been visited this destination at least once before. The findings suggests that majority of them visited Cox’s Bazar for leisure and recreation purpose (70%) and only (2%) of them are business traveler. So, it can be summarized Cox’s Bazar attract more leisure tourists than business tourists. Besides 28% of the visitors came there to visit their friends and relatives (Table 1). It is noted that 99% women participants had at least one partner during their visit. This thing shows that most of the female travelers felt insecure and unsafe to travel alone. Barker and Page (2002) and, Donaldson and Ferrerira (2008) also have similar findings in their study that female travelers prefer to travel with companions. Almost half of the participants were first time in Cox’s Bazar and most of the participants stayed for several nights. Familiarity is an important factor regarding the security perception of a destination for this reason first- time visitors are more anxious than those who previously visited the destination.

Following table demonstrate the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the respondents

Age		
18-24 years	85	27%
25-34 years	170	55%
35-44 years	40	13%
45-64 years	17	5%
Above 65 years	0	0%
Education level		
Secondary	29	9%
Higher secondary	59	19%
Bachelor’s	158	51%
Master's	62	20%
Doctorate	2	1%

Majority proportion of participants falls into the age range of 25-34. 18-24 years old people possess second large proportion of the age group. Only 17 participants or 5 percent were from senior generation (Table 2). From these statistics we can assume that younger generation travel more rather than the older generation in the perspective of Bangladesh. In total 82% of the participants came from 18-35 years old age groups. As per educational qualification all participants had finished their bachelor's or Master's degree of education. According to Demos (1992) highly educated tourists likely to report more concerns about security and safety than the lower educated people. For instance, these groups of people are well informed about the destination before visiting it. Also, they tend to be very meticulous about every aspect of the destinations. Especially the destination security and safety issue is very important for them, and this may reflect their perception and intention.

4.2. Security and Safety assessment

Table 3- Perception of the women travelers about the general conditions and environment of Cox's Bazar area.

General Conditions and Environment	Very Secure	Secure	Not Sure	Unsecure	Very Unsecure	Total
Touring city in daytime	26%	38%	29%	5%	2%	100%
Walking streets after dark	5%	16%	28%	36%	15%	100%
Using transport	7%	34%	37%	17%	5%	100%
Crossing roads in the area	6%	24%	42%	21%	6%	100%
Staying in accommodation	33%	35%	23%	8%	1%	100%
Overall feeling on environment in the area	9%	41%	41%	9%	0%	100%

199(64%) participants felt secure touring Cox's Bazar at day (Table 3). However, when they were asked, "How safe do you feel walking the Cox's Bazar area after dark?" 113 (36%) women tourists felt unsecure and 47 (15%) of the participants felt very unsecure to walk around the city after dark. This finding is similar with the research done by George who found that 36.2% of visitors did not feel secure to stay outside after dark in Cape Town, South Africa (George, 2003). Findings in this study also reveals that 88 (28%) participants were unsure if they felt secured or not in Cox's Bazar after dark. In comparison with George's (2003) finding it is also similar. In that case 37.9% of visitors who were uncertain whether they felt secure or not. It can be concluded that tourists are not comfortable to walk the streets of Cox's Bazar at night.

So we can presume that tourists to Cox's Bazar remained at their accommodation facilities at night or they may use of private transport provided for them by their hotel to get them to and from entertainment venues or they enjoy the private beach adjacent to some five star hotel as those places are well guarded. Fifty-two participants (17%) felt reasonably unsafe and 14(5%) felt very unsecure while using public transport in Cox's Bazar. A further 116 (37%) were not sure whether they felt safe or not while using public transport. Participants had expressed number of objections regarding using transport among them – sexual harassment, hijacking, overpriced rent have mentioned frequently. Most of the women didn't recommend traveling alone in any transport which also demonstrates their concern about safety. The media coverage of the recent rape incident at Cox's Bazar on December 13, 2021, may create these negative perceptions regarding public transport in the city. There are different types of transports in Cox's Bazar, including auto rickshaws, buses and private cars. Most of the crimes were conducted in the former two transports so these are considered unsecure for tourists. Locals and tourism stakeholders usually advised the tourists not to use these forms of public transport especially at night.

In total 213 (68%) female respondents, are satisfied with the safety measurement taken by the accommodation facilities in Cox's Bazar. Though 23% of the participants were not sure about their opinion but very few (9%) considered staying hotel was unsafe for them. In the whole travelling, most women travelers felt hotel was the safest place in Cox's Bazar. Most of the hotels and resort in that area have every kind of security measures including – tourist verification, electronic smart card lock system, CCTV coverage, security guard etc. Through the respondent's observation it can be concluded that accommodations in Cox's Bazar are doing satisfactory work in term of safety security measurement.

4.3. Evaluating the perception of female tourists about the safety measures taken by concerned authority.

Table 4- Perception of the women tourists about the security measures taken by the concerned authority in Cox’s Bazar area.

Security Measures taken by the concerned authority	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Sure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Total
Pedestrian walkway design	13%	32%	33%	17%	4%	100%
Closed-circuit television(CCTV) provision	16%	29%	30%	18%	7%	100%
Signboard or direction board regarding safety measures	25%	33%	24%	15%	3%	100%
Amount of lighting	17%	28%	28%	21%	6%	100%
Safety information	14%	25%	34%	19%	8%	100%
Number of police and security forces	11%	22%	31%	25%	11%	100%

Many participants showed their dissatisfaction about the number of police forces deployed in the area and the amount of lighting. Bangladesh Government has taken initiatives to deploy special tourist police in different tourist spots of Cox’s Bazar. According to Moslem Uddin, deputy inspector general (Chattogram) of Tourist Police, after a recent unexpected case the number has been increased to 208 and 250 more will be recruited soon (The Daily Star, Jan 4, 2022). Increased number of security forces may provide both positive and negative impressions on tourists. Too many police patrolling may create doubt on the mind of a tourist about the safety of that area or they may feel more secured. By using advance technology to monitor the tourist zone remotely and informing the tourists about risky areas through signboard can play a crucial role to ensure security.

4.4. Female tourists’ perception about re-visiting or recommending Cox’s bazar to others

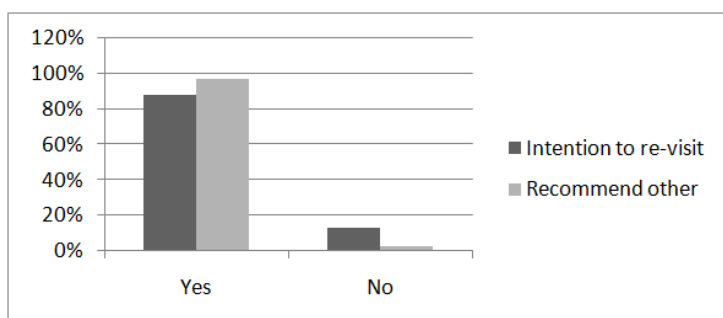
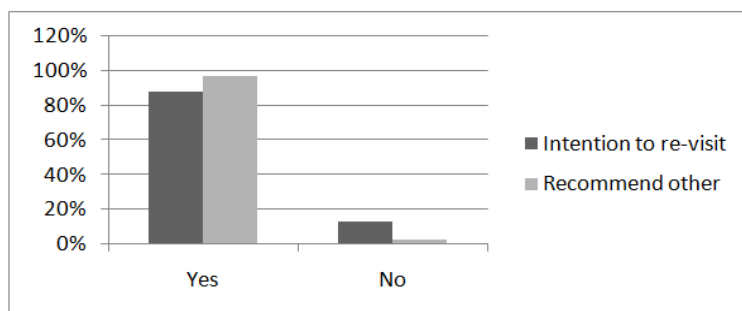
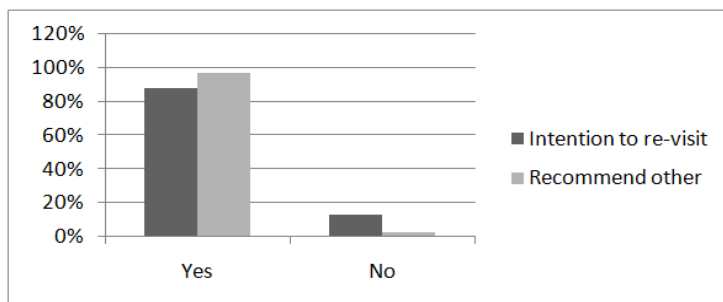


Figure1- Participants intention to Re-visit Cox’s Bazar or recommend to others

If a tourist intends to re-visit a place and recommend it to others, it shows a positive perception about the destination. To know this phenomenon the researcher asked each respondent, whether she recommend Cox's Bazar to her friends and colleagues and whether she re-visit Cox's Bazar. Majority of the participants positively answered these two questions. Overall perception about security might be a reason to re-visit this place. This finding also indicates that there is a positive relationship between re-visiting preference and recommending the destination to others.

5. Conclusion

Very few genders centric research on tourism-crime has been done lately. This study finds that although female travelers are positive about their safety concern while visiting Cox's Bazar, but most of them were anxious about the safety security at night. Several findings of this research are also consistently similar with other empirical studies. For example, many researchers suggest that tourists generally avoid a destination with high crime rate or frequent criminal activities. Besides tourists who have already been victim of any sort of criminal activity usually feel more fearful when they visit a place. And in most places tourists feel less safe about roaming the destination at night. However, the key finding which is totally aligned with the finding of this study is that tourists' especially female travelers are fearful about roaming a destination at night.

Research suggests that, by nature females are more vulnerable to crime than males. That is why a female tourist has every reason to concern about her safety while visiting a place. Tourism industry alone cannot ensure a safe environment for female travelers. A collaborative effort from the government's law enforcement agencies and tourism sector is necessary for a safe travel of women. Number of specific measures need to be taken to ensure women's safe trip to Cox's Bazar. *At first*, information about safety security measures needs to be given on arrival of a tourist to the destination. For instance, as many participants showed their concern about safety in transportation, hotel authority can provide them information about public transportation system or can arrange designated transportation system for them. *Secondly*, deploying more tourist polices in remote places and at night will reduce the crime rate, by this way tourists can easily seek instant help if any incident occur. Besides all sensitive areas need to be monitored under CCTV provision. Previous crime record can help to identify the sensitive areas. *Thirdly*, government should take initiative to altering negative media attention about the safety security concern of a tourist. In case of any bad occurrence immediate action from the government law enforcement agencies can help to regain the trusts of tourists. Finally, local community right needs to be protected while ensuring safety of a traveler. A harmony among law and order, local government, community people and tourism industry stakeholders can ensure a safe environment for a woman tourist. If all this body works together both local people and tourists can stay safe and secured.

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