

Rural Tourism-Prospects in Rustic Bengal

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Abstract

Rural tourism, a “could be variant of Ecotourism”, is a relatively new branch of activity that has been becoming increasingly popular in the developing countries in the recent time. Despite Bangladesh being the heartland of an array of distinctive endowments, rural tourism is still in its budding stage. The current study probes to explore the problems and prospects of the growth of rural tourism in Bangladesh that could play an important role in sustainable development of rural societies. Rural tourism not only connects the visitor from the frenetic present with the traditional assets of communities but also bring socio-economic and environmental benefits to the area concerned. But this promising sector requires sound planning procedures with emphasis on the development of infrastructure, strengthening security measures, promoting tourist attractions, encouraging private sector participations and ensuring sustainability. Thus an effective framework to upgrade rural tourism can be developed which can turn out to be a befitting vehicle for rural or overall development of the whole nation.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Since independence Bangladesh government has been focusing on different key areas of the economy like agriculture, industry, infrastructure, etc. But unfortunately the alternative source of income generation like tourism failed to draw proper attention of the government. In last two decades due to flourishing readymade garment sector large portion of rural inhabitants have moved towards cities for work. This informal migration has been accelerated by the pull factor originated from highly seasonal character of agriculture resulting in an imbalance in the development between rural and urban areas, a fact that necessitates additional sources of income generation for the rural areas. In this regard, rural tourism could play an important role. However, the potential of rural tourism as a major force in rural socio-economic development is yet to be realized to the fullest extent. Though National Tourism Policy was adopted in 1992 surprisingly tourism in the rural landscape has not been considered there. The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is definitely useful for a country like Bangladesh, where three fourth of the population lives in villages. According to UNWTO, in 1959 top 15 tourist destinations absorbed 98% of all international tourist arrivals; in 1970 the proportion stood at 75% and this fell to 57% in 2007, reflecting the emergence of interest in new and diversified tourist destinations around the world. Bangladesh endowed with green country-side, rich and diversified customs and traditions, colourful festivals, folk arts and handicrafts as well as historical heritage can definitely take advantage of the situation. But recent facts and figures depict Bangladesh's failure to portray herself as an attractive tourist destination. It has been ranked 129th out of 136 countries and stands at the bottom in South Asia compared with its neighbours according to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011. Despite some attempts made to promote all general attractions like archeological sites, historical places, natural beaches, rural tourism has been overlooked by the concerned authorities. Although the idea of rural tourism might be a bit of puzzle to most to the Bangladeshis, still the rustic charms hold greater appeal for foreigners. In this regard, the positive experience of other developed and developing countries should work as a lesson to outline rural tourism as a product of good location and good planning. The situation demands careful study and strategic planning taking into consideration a number of sensitive issues that may have considerable significance on the socio-cultural aspects of rural communities and environmental aspects of the locality concerned.

2. Definition

The definition of rural tourism has been the subject of many debates in the literature without arriving at any firm consensus (Bramwell 1994). In the recent past, rural tourism was restricted to traditional farm-based or agri-based tourism (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). However, with the changing pace of time and environment the concept has captured a wide range of potential activities include touring, water-based activities, land-based activities, conservation activities, cultural and educational activities, health and fitness activities and gastronomic activities (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). The key component of rural tourism is the close association with the physical environment in rural settings (Stabler, 1997). It offers opportunities for tourists to experience traditions and lifestyles of local people, events, culture, cuisine and crafts which are not available in cities and larger towns and definitely to get associated with the image of rurality. Thus nostalgia of the origins, the need for recuperation of

the lost link with nature and the basics of life in an increasingly complex, highly organized, anonymous, congested, stressful urban and inhumane surrounding constitutes the principal attention of rural area (Kastenholz et al, 1999). As against conventional tourism, rural tourism is distinct for being a tourism activity away from the mainstream world where natural environment is predominant and the locality is sparsely populated; where a complete blend of seasonality and local events can be observed and where tourism activity is based on the preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. Hence a rural tourist destination could be defined as a wider area dominated by the natural and/or farmed/ forested environments where specific natural, economic and socio-cultural features, such as tradition, local cooperation, trust and reciprocity are harmoniously embedded and as such create a unique tourist product that is predominantly small scaled, nature friendly, “ethno-cultured”, in other words ‘sustainable’ (Gopal et al,2008). Thus rural tourism can revitalize the classical concepts of tourism through adopting traditional beliefs and values to modern life and introduce a new dimension in the sustainable development of tourism as it causes little or no harmful impact while benefiting the local community economically and socially by the means of showcasing the rural life. It can also benefit the local community by facilitating entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, and conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, and preservation of the environment and heritage.

Sometimes rare plant or animal species work as the main motive behind rural tourism; sometimes traditional food, handicraft or historical places become the prime attraction. The way it is organised and the particular shape it takes vary from country to country. In Indonesia, rural tourism is centered around the plantation areas of Sumatra and Java. Tourists visit farms to directly observe activities like rice planting or rubber tapping. Japan and Korea offer tourism in the form of farm-stay. Malaysian government has funded agrotourism quite heavily. The ministry of tourism of Government of India with the help of state tourism departments has identified 31 villages across the country as tourist spots and has taken serious attempts to promote rural tourism. In Europe, well developed rural tourism can be observed in Austria and France. In Austria rural tourism businesses receive financial support from government. While in France camping and caravans are the main form of accommodation in rural areas and make the journey towards the nature more adventurous and colourful. However, the new age of rural tourism is quite young, it started in 1989-90 when local governments recognized the rural tourism as a possibility for economic developments and achievements. In spite of Bangladesh’s huge potential in the scenario of rural tourism, the concept of rural tourism is still overlooked.

3. Objectives of the study

- To collect information on rural tourism and to highlight different types of rural tourism in Bangladesh.
- To identify the impact of rural tourism in the overall development context of Bangladesh.
- To identify the challenges faced by rural tourism industry of Bangladesh.
- To prescribe necessary suggestions for the improvements of rural tourism sector in Bangladesh.

4. Methodology

In this article qualitative analysis has been conducted based on secondary data to understand the concept of rural tourism and the various aspects that are involved in the successful development of rural tourism in Bangladesh. The data have been collected mainly from the publications of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Published reports, books, journal, daily newspaper and websites etc.

5. Literature Review

In spite of being a country of thousands of villages the concept of rural tourism is still overlooked in Bangladesh. Although in the Industrial Policy of 1999, it was identified as a ‘Thurst Sector’, very few papers have focussed on this issue in Bangladesh while quite a good number of study has dealt with the similar issue from the perspective of India, a neighbouring country with similar rustic scenario and characteristics. Among the papers concerning the overall tourism sector of Bangladesh Islam and Carlsen (2012),Tuhin and Majumder (2011) are notable. Islam and Carlsen (2012) deals entirely with rural tourism and it tries to investigate the nexus between tourism micro-enterprises and the alleviation of poverty in rural Bangladesh. The study comes up with a very disappointing finding; lack of knowledge and reluctance to switch from traditional occupation among local poor people work as an impediment to get involved with tourism.Tuhin and Majumder (2011) identifies the role of tourism industry in the economic development of the country and highlights the major tourism products of Bangladesh with a SWOT analysis of the tourism sector. The study suggests that public and private level investment is required for the development of tourism sector of Bangladesh and regional cooperation can bring benefits as well. Halder (2007), Gopal, et al. (2008), Sarkar (2009) are some of the work on rural tourism from Indian perspective. Halder (2007) attempts to probe the impact of marketing of rural tourism in India and focuses on the potential of rural tourism in shaping the society. In this regard, emphasis has been put on identifying

essential elements for development of rural tourism like environment, demography, culture, economic and political background of that particular place. The study comes up with the conclusion that encouraging the private enterprises and understanding the need of the target customers is essential for promoting tourism in rural areas. Jones (1990) has also put emphasis on the marketing aspect of tourism. While embarking into discussion on various tourism marketing strategies used in Jackson County, Iowa, he identifies a five-step approach to marketing, comprised of elements such as developing a slogan, establishing an image, cooperating regionally, exploring opportunities for historic preservation, and marketing quality of life factors. Gopal, et al.(2008) put emphasis on local suitability and acceptability besides the matching of tourist demand and local product supply while development of tourism in rural areas. Mainly the study deals with Agri Tourism, a especial branch of rural tourism. Sarkar (2009) explores the possibilities of growth of rural tourism in West-Bengal of India in sustainable development of rural societies and suggests to establish an effective framework to develop rural tourism in a responsible manner. Outside this sub-continent against a back-drop of South-East Asia Rattanasuwongchai (1998) discusses rural tourism in Thailand context and its positive as well as negative impacts on the rural communities. The study accentuates the importance of sound planning procedures including a realistic assessment of carrying capacity, development of infrastructure, zoning, the involvement of local people, and education of both local people and tourists. However, it is generally assumed that rural tourism is beneficial for the development of any region because of the positive impact it has on employment generation and increase in income. Weaver (1986), while looking at the rural economic development of the tourism industry, identifies the following benefits that tourism can bring to a non-metro community: enhanced employment opportunities, increased income potential for local residents, diversification of the local economic base, additional tax revenues, heightened community visibility, and added cultural opportunities for residents. In case of Eastern Europe the situation is quite similar. Pakurar and Olah (2008) depicts rural tourism as a way of development possibilities in the Northern Great Plain region of Hungary. This might raise the life-quality of the particular region concerned and decrease the disparity between urban and rural regions. Besides the effectiveness of rural tourism in case of rise in income and employment generation it is distinct for its environment-friendly nature. In a study by Sillignakis, it is mentioned that purest form of rural tourism should be functionally rural and traditional in character. An interesting point comes out of this study; not all areas or communities are suitable for development. But this is definitely an effective tool for the development of agricultural based communities like ours provided that the development plan requires caution. In this regard we also have to think of the marketing approaches.

6. Rural Tourism and Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a country of 86038 villages (Source: Census 1991) could offer its rural landscape, wildlife, community and cultural life, natural heritage and others to attract visitors from both within the country and abroad. Endowed with vast natural assets and heritages, Bangladesh has huge potential in this field. All the opportunities to get away from the hectic urban life, to relax and revitalise in the tranquility of nature are present in rural Bangla. Many countries have already been utilizing the rural entity as an alternate source of livelihood and employment. Bangladesh is yet in its nascent stage; but surely it has a lot to offer. Especially the blending of lush green countryside and serpentine rivers flowing across the country can offer different types of rural tourism, including: nature-based tourism, heritage tourism, agritourism, cultural tourism, riverine tourism, etc. Following types of Rural Tourism can easily be promoted in Bangladesh:

6.1 Nature-based Tourism

This type of rural tourism activity (sometimes called recreation-based tourism) refers to the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenic beauty, including the very especial wildlife assets. It may be either passive or active. In passive case, the tourists tend to strictly observe the nature; while in case of activity based natural tourism, which is increasingly becoming popular in recent years, tourists participate in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities. Bangladesh has a good potential in this field because of its rustic greenery, associated with diverse flora-fauna and good number of recreational facilities. Wide range of activities like swimming, water rafting, fishing, boating, hunting, horse riding, trekking, safaris etc could be offered to the tourists. Especially, trekking the mountains of hilly rural areas of Rangamati, Khagrachhari or Bandarban, wild-life safari into the jungles of Sundarban and Chittagong division with properly trained tourist guide might add a new dimension in the development of tourism sector of Bangladesh. Besides all the recreation and adventure based activities, nature-based tourism in Bangladesh is ideal for its all the natural resources like hills, valleys, forests, beaches, lakes and rivers.

6.2 Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that, as its primary purpose, focuses on visiting/experiencing of places and activities associated with the important events of the glorious or notorious past. As Bangladesh was a part of ancient, classical, medieval and colonial India, it is considerably rich in archaeological and historical assets. The

area's early history featured a succession of Indian empires, internal squabbling, and a tussle between Hinduism and Buddhism for dominance. Different archeological sites spread throughout the country bear the testimony of those old days. Mahasthangarh the ancient capital of Pundra Kingdom (situated outside the Bogra town on the bank of Karatoa river), dated 700 BCE is the oldest archaeological site of Bangladesh. The Somapura Mahavihara, a great creation of Dharmapala of Pala dynasty, the first independent Buddhist dynasty, situated in a village called Paharpur of Naogaon district is the greatest Buddhist Vihara of the Indian Subcontinent. Mainamati (located at Comilla) with more than 50 ancient Buddhist settlements dated from 8th to 12th century A.D are also very important Buddhist archaeological sites of the region. During the Mughal period several Hindu states were established like that of Maharaja Pratapaditya of Jessore. These kingdoms helped to introduce new culture and sculpture into Bengali art-forms which lead to creation of many more archeological sites. Kantojiu Temple, a late-medieval Hindu temple at Kantanagar of Dinajpur, Saptaratna Mandir of Comilla dated around 16th century, Handial Mandir built between 1300 to 1400 CE at Pabna, temple of King Kangsa Narayan of Rajshahi's Tahirpur, where the Hindu community's Durga Puja was first observed in the Indian subcontinent are some of the temples built under the philanthropy of Hindu Zamindars and Rajas of the then Bengal. After the arrival of Islam during late middle ages Sultanate period was set in the Bengal. Sixty Dome Mosque of Bagerhat of 15th Century is the most prominent archaeological site of that era. Built by Ulugh Khan Jahan, this is known to be the most impressive Muslim monuments in the whole of the Indian subcontinent. World War II cemetery, Gandhi Asram, Mujibnagar memorial are some of the places of great historical interest located away from the cities. However, active local involvement is very necessary for successful heritage tourism endeavours.

6.3 Agritourism

Agritourism refers to, "the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation" (Lobo, 2001). It comprises of taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including overnight farm or ranch stays and other farm visits; and visiting agriculture-related festivals, and other such attractions. Bangladesh being an agribased country has enormous opportunity in this field of tourism. In fiscal year 2011-12 agricultural sector contributes 14.90 percent of total GDP at constant prices (Source-BBS), whereas 47.30 percent of the total labour force aged 15 and above are employed under agricultural sector according to the Labour force survey of 2010. The statistics clearly shows a very low productivity of agricultural sector. In this regard Agritourism can act as a catalyst to raise the contribution of the concerned sector in the national economy which can be developed by providing opportunities to stay or visit the farms and participate in collecting or harvesting agricultural products. Especially overnight farm stay can turn out to be very attractive for the foreigners. Many pre-harvest and post-harvest rites are held in rural Bangladesh which could be a good attraction for the tourists. Pre-harvest rites include Megharani, hudmadeya and ben biya (wedding of frogs) for rains and ksetbandhan, kaktaruya and gasvi for protecting the crops. Post-harvest ceremonies include laksmirchhad, navanna and magan. In navanna people celebrates the new harvest with pitha, chira, muri and other foods of Bengali culture. All these festivals make the country an ideal destination for agritourism. However, agritourism needs some of the key factors, such as, social skills of farm-based entrepreneurs, farm aesthetics, and proximity of farms to urban centers to flourish. If neat and clean accommodation facilities along with hygienic food can be provided while staying in a farmhouse the foreigner could taste the pastoral flavour of real rural Bengal.

6.4 Cultural Tourism

Bangladesh is the country of "thirteen festivals in twelve months". Influenced by three great religions - Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in successive order, it has been a melting pot of three different streams of culture: folk, modern and classical, and is particularly rich in folk culture which has its roots in the rituals and rhythms of rural life. Folk song accompanied with folk dance and performing art like Jatra (folk drama) could be showcased to the foreigners in a proper way. Some of the folk games like, boat-race, kite flying, pigeon flying, cockfight and bullfight are so distinct and unique in their own way and could be of worth attract the tourists.

Village fairs are the integral part of the Bengali culture. About two hundred fairs are organized throughout Bangladesh throughout the year. Dubla Rash Mela (at the Bengali month of Agrahayan), Fair of Adinath temple, Golakandail fair (at the starting of the month Magh), Gulpukur fair (on the last day of Bengali month Bhadra), Shibchaturdashi fair (on 14th Falgun), Langalbandh fair (on the month of Chaitra), Kothin Chibor Dan fair, fair of Ghoshbila, fair of Ashwin Shangkranti (on the month of Ashwin), Baul mela (on the occasion of Lalon Shah's birthday) are some of the festivals of Bengal which take place in different places across the countryside throughout the year. The tribal people living in other parts of the country also hold on to their traditions and customs that date back hundreds of years. Their diverse cultures, festivals and traditions contribute profusely to make Bangladesh a culturally rich country and to make her a popular tourist spot if necessary facilities are provided for the tourists.

6.5 Riverine Tourism

River tourism accounts for a significant proportion of the world's tourism consumption, with activities such as Nile cruises and rafting holidays making it an economically important area of tourism. But in Bangladesh there has been a scant recognition in the role of rivers in tourism industry although it being a broad deltaic plain with about 800 rivers flowing through it constitute a waterway of total length around 24,140 km. These rivers can provide opportunity of cruising. About 400 haor-baor and jheels are embedded in the north-eastern part of the country. In this case Bangladesh might follow our neighbouring country India; where house-boat is used as an effective tool for promoting tourism in Kerala or Kashmir. The hilly region of the country is crossed by swiftly flowing rivers like Karnaphuli, Sangu, where river rafting or some other type of adventurous ride could be introduced. On the other hand, tourists are especially interested in visiting inland and coastal islands like Hatia, Swandeeep and Bhola, but tourist friendly services are hardly available there. Thus rivers of Bangladesh might turn out to be a major tourism product providing spectacular settings, recreational opportunities, waterfront landscapes in many centres of tourism interest.

7. The impact of rural tourism

Rural tourism has many potential benefits like foreign exchange, employment, higher government revenues and the transformation of agriculture into a modern service industry. But at the same time it can also cause harm to many indigenous societies.

7.1 The economic impact

Rural tourism can be an important source of job opportunity particularly for the economically underdeveloped people of rural communities. Local residents with few skills can readily work as food servers, retail clerks, and hospitality workers. Furthermore, rural tourism can also offer business opportunities to local inhabitants. Thus it can play an important role in poverty alleviation. Weaver (1986) notes that tourism results in enhanced employment opportunities, increased income potential for local residents, diversification of the local economic base, and additional tax revenues for rural areas.

Reports suggest that over the years the number of tourist arrivals in Bangladesh has shown an increasing trend. But Bangladesh has not been able to reap the full benefits of it up to the desired level. In the year 2009, approximately 2,67,000 tourists visited Bangladesh (Source- World Bank) and it earned 5762.24 million taka (Source-Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation) whereas in 2010, 3,03,000 tourists visited Bangladesh contributing 5562.70 million taka to the domestic economy.

According to another report published by the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2011, the travel and tourism sector accounted for Tk 18,250 crore or 2.2 percent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product. The amount is expected to rise by 6.1 percent to Tk 35,370 crore by 2022, according to the London-based institute. The sector created 13.29 lakh jobs directly in 2011 or 1.9 percent of the country's total employment. According to the report, it will generate 18.4 lakh jobs by 2022. (Akter, 2012). In this regard Rural Tourism can play a very significant role in Bangladesh.

However, it should be kept in mind that although rural tourism is economically beneficial for Bangladesh, it is a two-edged sword which may damage many indigenous communities. The rural people have to depend on the urban entrepreneur, so the benefit may not reach them. Most of the facilities such as resorts, hotels and tour companies belong mainly to urban investors who take away most of the profit. On the other hand, jobs in rural areas are frequently low-paying, part-time and seasonal and often offer limited benefits. Moreover, local people sometimes are compelled to sell the local handicraft and farm produce products at lower price due to lack of competition.

7.2 The environmental impact

Tourism revenues can be used for environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal. These help will result in retaining existing population and businesses and attracting new enterprises and families. Moreover, rural people will learn how to develop healthy environment and to preserve the natural habitats.

On the other hand, tourism risks degrading natural resources in rural areas and it can have a profound impact on the environment. Some tourism activities may cause environmental pollution from unhygienic disposal of human waste, discharge of sewerage effluent into water sources, and littering. Moreover, rural tourism will disturb natural ecology and over population will spoil the scenic beauty.

7.3 The socio-cultural impact

The income from tourism is much higher than what rural people can earn from agriculture. For that tourism has been accepted willingly in many rural areas in spite of its negative effects. Through rural tourism, education and health of the rural community will improve and rural people will be introduced to the modern culture. They will come out of their traditional values and beliefs. They will develop a cultural understanding through fairs and festivals. Moreover, rural tourism encourages conformity to an idle image of community which can result in growth of personal ties and community solidarity. Most significantly it will reduce migration of rural people to

urban areas.

The negative side of rural tourism is it may disrupt rural culture by the invasion of foreign visitors with different values which may result in causing a decline in participation in rural traditional and cultural practices. It may also help causing erosion in traditional values and culture.

8. Challenges

Despite the fact that Bangladesh is an ideal home for Rural Tourism, there are many challenges that have been impeding it's flourishing here. To promote and facilitate rural tourism in Bangladesh following challenges are to be addressed and considered by the government and other concerned authorities:

8.1 Underdeveloped infrastructure

Mere natural beauty along with few other attractions has never been enough to attract large number of tourists anywhere (Rousseau, 2001). Bangladesh is a country of village landscape, wildlife, community life, and natural heritage that may catch the attention of foreigners. But the country suffers from underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of enough facilities that are the prerequisites for the development of rural tourism in Bangladesh. The overall conditions of highways, railways, waterways and domestic airways are depressing. Moreover, most of the villages in the country lack all-weather roads and electricity. Sometimes it seems to be a very difficult job to just get to some of these villages. Besides, lack of smooth and easy transport networks are also major problems of rural tourism in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is criss-crossed by innumerable rivers and its reflection of local ways of life, could become a major attraction for foreigners. But, there are no arrangements for regular water transport allowing for safe travel through the waterways.

Another factor that hinders the development of rural tourism in Bangladesh is its poor tele-communication and internet facilities. Tourists need to communicate with their relatives and friends while they are in the remote village areas, but its tele-communication and internet service is very painful. Moreover, foreign tourists suffer significantly from load shading, low voltage and power cuts in villages and return to their countries with unpleasant experiences of Bangladesh tourism.

8.2 Lack of skilled manpower

The human element, more than the excellence of the attraction, plays a decisive role in promoting the popularity of tourism sector. There is an acute shortage of skilled and professional manpower in tourism industry in Bangladesh which, no doubt, impedes its progress here. Besides, the trained people in hospitality management are not interested to go to rural area to work. Hence, the rural people who will be appointed are required to be trained for discharging their duties. They should have enough knowledge about the village landscape and should be able to generate interest in the mind of tourist to visit the site. It should be remembered that the success of rural tourism largely depends on the quality of service provided to the tourist. So, to develop the manpower, the Government and the tourism industry need to make best use of local youths by training them to explore the huge untapped opportunities.

8.3 Poor international image

Bangladesh, as a tourist destination, does not currently enjoy a good image. At present, foreign tourists hold misconceptions about Bangladesh. They view Bangladesh as a country of poverty, beggars, religious and social dogmatism, political unrest, corruption, densely populated by poor people, and regularly affected by natural calamities. If a country is besieged with regular disturbance and if hunger, disaster, illiteracy, etc. are its constant companion foreigners will be least interested to visit that country and spend their leisure there (Shamim, 2000). "The government hardly did anything to improve the image of the country; rather they used the negative aspects of the country for foreign aids. Therefore, the negative sides stole the spotlight permanently" (Shaker, 2002). For this, foreign tourists do not consider Bangladesh as a tourist destination, and to dispel the negative image of the country, no optimistic measure has yet been taken either by the government or by the industry.

In this regard government should take appropriate action to enhance the image of the country. Our embassies and diplomatic missions can play an important role here. Media can also play a very effective role. Short documentaries can be made and broadcast in the international channels. The example of India and Malaysia could be a good lesson in this regard. India has been regularly posting advertisement in all the major TV channels in the world, Malaysia has been doing so. Bangladesh can follow their footprints to promote tourism.

8.4 Lack of Education

Most of the rural people do not have basic education. Lack of literacy is a major problem in developing the tourism sector in the rural area of Bangladesh. In 2008, rural literacy rate in Bangladesh was 51.49% (Source-BBS). Moreover, according to the Census report 2001, 59.77% of the rural population completes primary education, 10.28% of the rural population completes S.S.C and H.S.C. Only 1.30% of the rural population is graduate and above. Because of this poor literacy rate, they do not understand the meaning of rural tourism and can not communicate with the potential tourist.

8.5 Resource constraints

Despite its being recognized as a thrust sector, in 1999 Industrial Policy it has not yet got the required fund allocation on priority basis in both the public and the private sector (Hasan, 2001). Insufficient financial support hinders essential developments like human resource management, enforcement of rules and regulations, building of physical infrastructures, and land use management. For that, government should provide enough financial support to encourage rural tourism. We should understand that rural tourism will eventually create employment in rural areas and it will prevent the migration of people from rural to urban areas.

8.6 Lack of safety and security

Safety and security of the tourists are major concerns to develop any kind of tourism in Bangladesh. Foreign tourists consider our country as a nation with deteriorating social and political turmoil, government instability and insecurity of life. Frequent hartals and political agenda make traveling uncertain all the time. Moreover, when tourists come in Bangladesh to enjoy its natural beauty, they are afraid of cheating and harassment at the airport, hijacking on the spots, and the disturbance of the beggars. All these events impede tourists' interest and enthusiasm to explore the rural area of Bangladesh.

8.7 Lack of communication skills

Due to lack of proper education, most of the people living in the rural areas lack proper communication skills. They are not in a position to communicate with the foreign tourists. This works as an impediment in promoting tourism in the rural areas

8.8 Lack of local involvement/participation

Local participation is inevitable to flourish rural tourism in Bangladesh. But in practice most of the rural people do not have much understanding of tourism. They are seldom involved in decision making, planning and implementing policies. Moreover, they are misguided by outside investors who hope to take most of the economic benefits from rural areas. Therefore, local people become confused about what kind of tourism they want to establish in their own area.

9. Suggestions for improvements

It is indispensable to take care of every sector of the developing country like Bangladesh. Rural tourism is of no exception from it. The vital point of tourism expansion in rural communities is not "whether" but "how" to develop. The concerned authority should take required steps to identify the problems and isolate the shortcomings first and chalk out necessary measures to harness the potential of this sector.

- To make foreigners stay interesting and worth spending of his money in rural areas we need not only all-weather roads but we also have to ensure sanitation and high standards of hygiene, electricity, telephone, and wayside amenities etc.
- To safeguard rural resources, careful planning and development of authentic attractions are imperative.
- Sufficient training has to be ensured to the employees and executives in order to offer quality standards of services.
- To develop communication skills of the employees and executives intensive training courses in foreign languages, especially, in English should be conducted.
- To make the rural destinations easily accessible and to facilitate quick and comfortable movements of the tourists, improved transport networks and well-organized domestic transport should be built.
- To provide an everlasting experience to the tourist and to bring substantial increase in the incomes of the locals and conserving the local culture and natural heritage at the same time home stay programmes in rural tourism sites should be developed.
- Proper actions should be taken to conserve the historical relics, cultural and archaeological sites, ancient buildings, monuments and the sights of natural importance from physical deterioration.
- Security measures should be strengthened to ensure safe and risk-free movements of the tourists.
- Tourist fairs can be arranged in home and abroad focusing on the unspoiled natural beauty and reserves of the rural landscape of Bangladesh.
- As the womenfolk are one of the stakeholders in any developmental activity, rural tourism must involve active participation of women in matters of decision making.
- Live arts like dances and music of both the traditional Bengali artists and the tribes should be arranged at the important destinations of the country.
- Rural way of life, tranquility, pastoral idle, local foods, rural arts and crafts should be presented to tourists as regional and cultural symbols.
- Necessary promotional actions and public relation activities should be strengthened to remove the perceived negative image of and misconceptions about Bangladesh before the arrival of the tourists in Bangladesh.

- To attract relatively more foreign tourists, some creative advertisements can be published in some specific travel guides, magazines and specialized professional journals that the potential tourists read.
- Government should encourage private sector investment in the rural tourism arena through formulating liberal government policies, granting loans on easy terms, allowing tax holidays and providing physical facilities.
- Government should invite foreign investors to invest in this virgin field of tourism in Bangladesh.
- To ensure sustainability in rural tourism sector, private enterprise should be active in “green marketing” and creating a type of tourism which conforms both tourists’ expectations and industry standards.
- There is no alternative but to enforce the laws properly to promote rural tourism and protect nature at the same time.

10. Conclusion

Forty years have elapsed since the start of Bangladesh’s tourism industry, yet we still see it in a budding position in comparison to our neighboring countries, such as India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal who attract substantial number of tourists every year and thus generates huge amount of foreign currencies. Despite having all the potential to flourish, rural tourism in this country has been growing at a very slow pace. Bangladesh is a country with a dominant rural population and agri-based economy. For this, rural tourism development can be of great importance here. Bangladesh with a pervasive rurality has a unique range of sights and sounds that the world is not yet introduced to. The simplicity of rural living, the timelessness of rural landscape is something unheard of elsewhere in the world. If a proper marketing plan is done for rural tourism, it could bring lots of benefit to our country and can be an important mechanism for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, development of rural areas and progression of women and other disadvantaged groups in the country.

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