

Impact of Tourism on the Economic Growth of Bangladesh: Challenges and Ways Forward

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Abstract: *This study investigates the tourism industry's impact on Bangladesh's economic growth. It analyzes Bangladesh's tourism revenues from 2009 to 2021, sourced from the Bangladesh Economic Review and World Tourism Outlook. Data includes tourism revenues and their contribution to GNP. The analysis employs thematic methods to examine the relationship between tourism and economic growth. This study identifies the current state of tourism and its significant contributions to the national economy. The study reveals that the tourism sector is a catalyst for economic growth, creating employment opportunities, promoting cultural exchange, and boosting local businesses. However, the sector faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing initiatives, safety and security concerns, and airline related issues. To address these challenges and to accelerate economic growth thereby, the government of Bangladesh should implement context-specific strategies. This research proposes strategic interventions and policy recommendations, including initiating tourism based long-term vision, exploring more captivating tourist spots, upgrading tourism websites, creating employment opportunities, promoting evidence-based tourism education, enhancing BPC sponsorship, investing more in the tourism infrastructure development, and promoting festival-based tourism. All these strategies will help Bangladesh overcome the challenges impeding the positive impact of tourism on economic growth.*

Keywords: Tourism, Economy Growth, Gross National Product (GNP), Challenges, Ways Forward

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Tourism has played remarkable role in the economic growth of many countries, including Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the tourism industry has been significantly contributing to the economic growth of the country as it brings in the foreign currency by providing the tourists with varieties of sights, beautiful landscapes, friendly local communities, and mild temperatures, as well as ensuring their security and safety (Roy & Roy, 2015).

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In recent years, Bangladesh's tourism sector has seen notable advancement and growth. The tourism industry has generated 3.02% of the country's GDP as well as 8.07% of total employment in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2022). Bangladesh possesses ample natural attractions, diverse cultural offerings, and numerous historical monuments, indicating promising prospects for the growth of its tourism sector (Afrin & Hassan, 2021). The diverse cultural events as well as natural attractions, such as the Sundarbans mangrove forest and Cox's Bazar, the world's longest natural sea beach, make Bangladesh well known around the world. Furthermore, the country offers a plethora of other appealing destination. The tourism sector in Bangladesh has experienced substantial growth, leading to a rise in the number of visitors from domestic and international origins (Khondker & Ahsan, 2015). Hence, the inclusion of notable tourist destinations and resources is crucial to ensuring the expansion of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. These destinations and resources offer a unique opportunity to showcase the untapped potential of the country to international visitors (Hasan & Jobaid, 2014). Effective tourism management solutions can lead to positive environmental outcomes, preservation of cultural resources, and promotion of cultural assimilation (Hassan et al., 2013). Historically, political instability and violence have presented significant challenges to the tourist industry (Alauddin et al., 2021). However, these present circumstances show a greater potential to overcome the challenges prevalent within the tourism sector of Bangladesh, which impedes in attaining efficient economic growth. Considering this, this study aims to investigate the contribution of tourism to Bangladesh's economy and its effect on the expansion of the country's economy. The research aims to analyze the challenges impeding the economic growth of Bangladesh by expanding its tourism industry and recommends workable, actionable strategies to overcome the challenges identified.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between tourism and economic growth, as evidenced by its positive impact on GDP, the generation of new employment opportunities, and the distribution of wealth. Dritsakis (2004) has compiled evidence indicating tourism is a significant factor in Greece's long-term economic success. To shed light on the many channels via which the tourism sector boosts GDP, Song et al. (2012) conducted a thorough literature review on the subject matter of tourism economies. Chen & Chiou-Wei (2009) analyzed the correlation between the flourishing tourist industry and the inconsistent expansion of Taiwanese and Korean economies. Hall & Page (2014) investigated the geographical factors that have an impact on tourism and vacations. The findings of their study illuminated the variety of policy and regulatory frameworks used in this field that have impacts on tourism expansion. Kobra et al. (2018) explored the pros and cons of using advertisements to entice foreign investment in the Bangladeshi hospitality industry. More than 120 government and private sector professionals were interviewed to explore their perceptions of the tourism business. Inadequate funding is a significant obstacle, and poor communication, collaboration and coordination among the different entities involved are often cited as causes of conflict in the tourism industry. Bhuiyan & Darda (2018) have studied the benefits of Halal tourism in the economic context of Bangladesh. Since Bangladesh is home to the fourth-largest Muslim population in the world's, Bangladesh has preponderance of mosques, and shrines as well as other religious institutions serving the Muslim population. Sayeda (2017) examined socio-economic, socio-cultural, as well as environmental implications of mass tourism in Bangladesh context, focusing on the Cox's Bazar as well as its

surrounding areas. The planners put in a lot of time and effort to ensure wonderful time for the people from all walks of life on these tours since that's what mass tourism is all about: bringing in as many people as possible. Amin et al. (2017) investigated the difficulties rural tourism faces and made forecasts about its likely traits in the coming years. Sultana (2016) investigated how tourism affected different parts of the Bangladeshi economy, with a focus on how it aided the growth of the tourist sector. Moreover, numerous studies have examined how travelling abroad has impacted the development of various nations. Tourism, GDP growth, and Turkey's overall GDP have all been the subject of several academic studies of the country's economy. de Esteban et al. (2015) and Gokovali (2010) have made significantly contributed to studies on economic growth by highlighting the contributions of this sector. Significant correlations between tourist and economic indicators have been found. Both Ohlan (2017) and de Esteban et al., (2015) found that the expansion of the financial industry and the income from tourism within the country were strongly correlated with the country's GDP growth. Tourism income, the value of the rupee relative to the dollar, capital investment, and GDP growth were all found to be positively correlated in a study conducted by Stauvermann & Kumar (2017). However, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies on the tourism sector's impact on the national economy of Bangladesh, associated challenges as well as the ways forward to overcome those challenges. This study addresses this knowledge gap by investigating these subject matters and integrating them into a coherent manner.

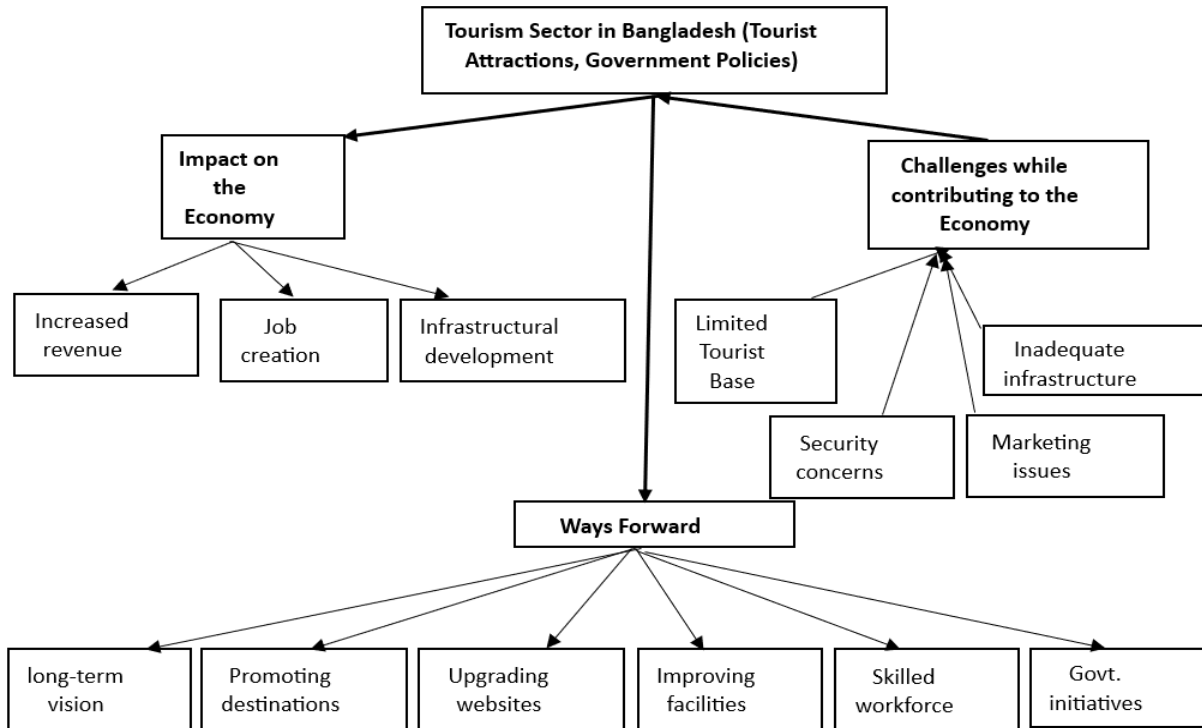
3. Research Methods

The study employed the qualitative research methodology to comprehensively understand the impact of tourist revenues influence the national economic growth (Largan & Morris, 2019). The constructivist/interpretivist approach is followed, considering social constructions, value interpretations, and stakeholder viewpoints that recognize the numerous aspects that affect tourism's economic effect. Bangladesh's unique economic and social conditions have contextualized the approach of this study, highlighting the contributing of tourism industry to significant economic development of Bangladesh in recent years. The researchers employ critical reflexivity is employed throughout the investigation to reduce biases and improve rigor (Smith, 2008). The study uses a systematic selection of secondary data sources, including official government documents, statistics, and publications from respected institutions like the Bangladesh Tourism Board, World Tourism Organization, and World Bank, to ensure data integrity and relevance. Data were collected from 2009 to 2021, allowing for an examination of travel patterns before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were carefully checked for source trustworthiness and organized and validated before analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data topics were identified and interpreted using thematic analysis, which includes familiarization, coding, theme development, review themes, defining and naming themes, and report generation (Saldaña, 2021). Techniques to enhance validity and reliability include audit trails, and triangulation of sources cited (Figure 1). The audit trail provides a thorough journal of the study process, making findings transparent and traceable while the triangulation verifies conclusions by comparing and cross-referencing data from several sources, reducing single-source biases (Perry, 2004). Since no humans are involved, informed consent standards do not apply to primary data gathering. However, this study strictly follows secondary data ethics. The study maintains data integrity and properly credits credible sources (Smith, 2008). The limitations of this study include the dependence on secondary data sources only, which may not offer statistical generalizations, and the researcher's background and experiences influencing results interpretation. Carefully obtained

data was checked for source reliability. To ensure correctness and dependability, data was organized and validated before analysis (Thome, 1998).

3.1 Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework



Source: Authors' Compilation.

4. Results and Discussion

Bangladesh's tourism sector is a significant part of the country's economy, generating jobs and driving economic growth. However, despite increased tourist revenue since 2009, the sector's contribution to the economy has decreased and the number of tourists has fluctuated (Rakib & Hassan, 2020). It faces challenges like security concerns, a limited tourist base, and inadequate infrastructure. To tackle these issues, Bangladesh should develop a long-term tourism vision, promote lesser-known tourist destinations, upgrade government tourism websites, improve tourist facilities, encourage tourism and hospitality management education, invest in infrastructure development, and promote festival-based tourism (Alauddin et al., 2021).

4.1 The Contribution of Tourism Sector to Bangladesh's Economy

Bangladesh possesses numerous tourist attractions, including seashores, seaports, mangrove forests, waterfalls, river ports, tea gardens, mountains, roadside panoramas, eco parks, safari parks, and historical sites. Since, in recent years, the government has shaped policies and regulations about tourism agencies, the private sector has also emerged within the tourism sector of Bangladesh (Hossain & Wadood, 2020). To govern Bangladesh's tourism business and make it an attractive destination, the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) was founded in 1972. It guides

government and commercial tourist companies, helps international tourists get visas and immigration status, as well as reducing the red tape for preserving the rights and interests of tourists (Alauddin et al., 2021; Sultana, 2016). Hossain and Wadood (2020) found that Bangladesh's economy benefits BDT 500 million from the tourism sector. The Bangladesh government earned \$1,157 billion from tourism between 2009 and 2018. Bangladesh's tourism sector has contributed considerably to its GNP through tourist revenue. Tourism brought approximately 77 million US dollars in 2009 which contributed to the 0.075% of Bangladesh's GNP. In 2021, it has contributed 0.066% to GNP, with 273,00 million dollars. Thus, revenue has increased 3.54 times in this region through the contribution percentage has slightly reduced (Table 1). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) claimed that the Bangladesh's tourism sector generates 2.23 million official and informal jobs annually between 2011 and 2017 (Hossain & Wadood, 2020). The sector's GDP contribution is increased by residents' unrecognized informal jobs as rickshaw driving, sidewalk sales, trash cleanup, amateur child singing, camera operation and so on (Rakib & Hassan, 2020).

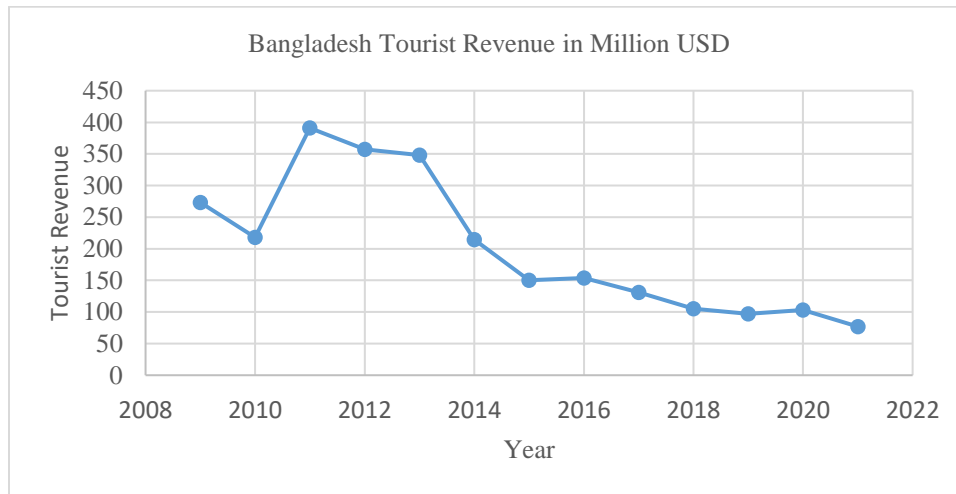
4.2 Role of Tourism Sector in Accelerating the Economic Growth in Bangladesh.

Table 1: Impact of Tourism on the Economic Growth of Bangladesh

Year	Number of tourists	Tourist Revenue in Million USD	% of GNP
2021	135,000	273.00 m \$	0.066 %
2020	182,000	217.90 m \$	0.058 %
2019	323,000	391.00 m \$	0.11 %
2018	267,000	357.00 m \$	0.11 %
2017	237,000	348.00 m \$	0.12 %
2016	182,000	214.30 m \$	0.081 %
2015	126,000	150.30 m \$	0.077 %
2014	134,000	154.00 m \$	0.089 %
2013	104,000	131.00 m \$	0.087 %
2012	160,000	105.00 m \$	0.079 %
2011	157,000	97.00 m \$	0.075 %
2010	139,000	103.00 m \$	0.089 %
2009	267,000	77.00 m \$	0.075 %

Source: Authors' Estimation

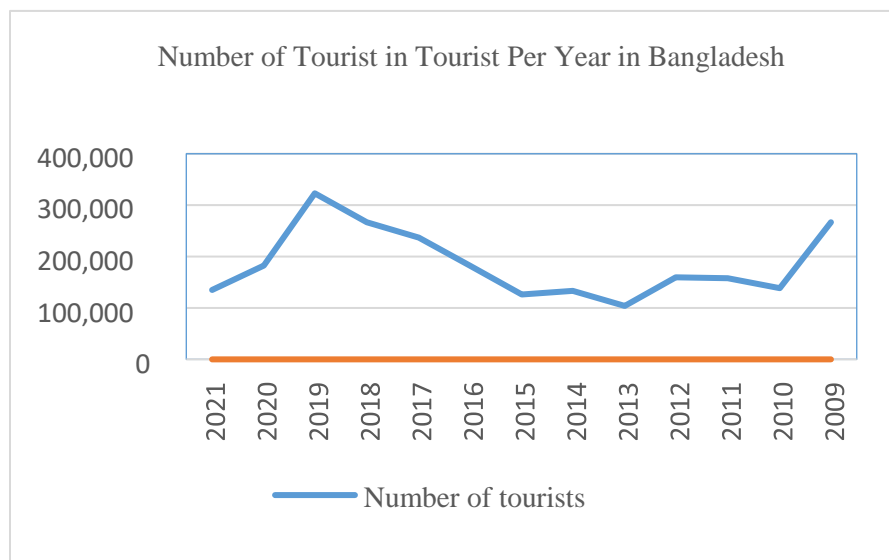
Figure 2: Bangladesh Tourist Revenue



Source: Authors' Estimation

The tourism industry in Bangladesh also boosts infrastructure, local communities, hospitality, and manufacturing. (Islam et al., 2021). The Bangladesh tourism sector has grown significantly in the recent decade, with the creation of several new tourist destinations, natural springs, and beaches. To enhance infrastructure and make Bangladesh more tourist-friendly, the Bangladesh Roads and Highways Department developed 10,000 km of new roads, naval channels, rail lines, and private aviation facilities. Nearly 1700 hotels, motels, and resorts have been built nationwide (Alauddin et al., 2021). The number of visitors has fluctuated and been dropping for years. Bangladesh must consider that tourist numbers have dropped from 267,000 in 2009 to 135,000 in 2021 (Figure 2). This scenario indicates there exist several challenges, affecting visitors' enthusiasm for visiting Bangladesh as a result. (Islam et al., 2021).

Figure 3: Number of Tourist in Tourist per Year in Bangladesh



Source: Authors' Estimation

4.3 Challenges of Tourism in Accelerating Economic Growth

4.3.1 Inadequate Security Measurement

In international tourism, the security of the tourists is a crucial concern. The State Department of US advised against visiting Dhaka and South-Eastern Bangladesh because of the prevalence of crime, kidnapping, and terrorism, though Bangladesh has improved its ranking on the 'World Economic Forum's Safety & Security Index, 2019', progressing from the 123rd position to the 105th place by significantly emphasizing on its security measures for ensuring the tourists' well-being (Roy & Chowdhury, 2021).

4.3.2 Lack of Tourists from Western Countries

Bangladesh's tourism population is predominantly Indian, with the majority coming from Asian countries. However, Bangladesh attracts barely 7% of tourists compared to 20%–71% for other Asian countries. This indicates that despite its potential, the country's tourist sector has a major shortfall (Murshed, 2018; Ahmad, 2021).

4.3.3 Limitations of the Domestic Airlines System

Biman Bangladesh Airlines heavily advertises its country to tourists, with most of its foreign flights aimed at London, the airline's only non-Asia destination. This results in higher travel costs for visitors from other countries, placing Bangladesh in the 111th position in the aviation industry, ranking it worst among Asian nations (Rahman & Saima, 2021).

4.3.4 Extra Cost for Tourists

Bangladesh's travel costs are significantly higher than those in other countries, especially those with highly established tourist sectors. Despite rising expenses, the available opportunities are limited and less relevant, making it a significant challenge compared to other popular travel destinations offering more amenities at more reasonable prices (Bhuiyan et al., 2022).

4.3.5 Lack of Adequate Marketing

The Bangladesh Tourism Board, established in 2010, aims to promote Bangladesh's tourism business globally. Despite its involvement in various events, such as exhibits and the Cricket World Cup opening ceremony in 2011, there has been no significant promotion marketing strategies to boost the tourism industry in Bangladesh (Nekmahmud et al., 2020).

4.3.6 Lack of Adequate Tourism Infrastructure

Bangladesh ranks 109th globally in tourist infrastructure, with economic development behind only Nepal. The country's transportation infrastructure is underdeveloped, with road and highway networks covering only 7.5% of the total land area. The number of cars exceeds road infrastructure, leading to a lopsided traffic ratio. Traffic gridlock worsens, and traffic collisions are a significant issue. In 2019, around 4,580 people lost their lives in motor vehicle collisions, a higher number

than previous years. Bangladesh's tourist services are subpar compared to other countries', ranking 133 out of 140 nations (Rahman, 2021).

4.4 The Way Forward: Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

This paper suggests the following specific measures to improve the tourism industry in Bangladesh by addressing the previously identified challenges.

4.4.1 Initiating and Implementing Tourism-centric Vision

Bangladesh Government need to initiate a long-term tourism vision over the upcoming five-ten years to boost tourism-related income and its contribution to the country's GDP. Historically, tourism has contributed 8-10% to GDP, but today it contributes only 4% (Islam et al., 2023). The plan can also involve building tourist attractions, highways, naval bases, and airports (Figure 3).

4.4.2 Exploring More Captivating Tourist Spots

A number of captivating tourist destinations in Bangladesh that are relatively unknown to both domestic and international visitors (Islam et al., 2020). The BPC should be creating and disseminating diverse media formats, including books, booklets, handouts, stickers, images, and videos, to acquaint both local and international tourists with the site.

4.4.3 The Government Tourism Websites Upgradation

BPC website focuses on tourism growth, but is not updated frequently (Alauddin et al., 2021). The Corporation should hire skilled professionals in the industry and provide an exhaustive directory of tourist destinations.

4.4.4 Ensuring Tourist Facilities

Tourists from other countries should have access to various amenities during their stay, including one-stop visa facilities, tourist guides, safety measures at popular destinations, special rates for currency exchanges, currency exchange facilities at tourist spots, and tourist cards offering discounts and additional amenities (Ananya, 2021).

4.4.5 Promoting Tourism and Hospitality Management Education

Bangladesh is highly regarded for tourism and hospitality management education, and the BPC can grant special privileges to tourism-related agencies to encourage young people seeking education and employment in these fields, which will create a systematically structured tourism sector (Rahman & Hassan, 2020).

4.4.6 BPC Sponsorship for Domestic Tourism

Facilitating the study tours for students by coordinating with high schools, colleges, BPC, and private tour associations, focusing on education on 'tourism and hospitality' will beget the domestic tourism development in the medium and long term (Kuri et al., 2021).

4.4.7 Tourism based Infrastructural Development

Poor Road infrastructure, particularly in rural regions with waterfalls and historical monuments, hinders Bangladesh's tourist economy. The ruling authority should build roads and communication infrastructures (Mohiuddin, 2023).

4.4.8 Strong 'Handicrafts Market' establishment

Bangladesh's diverse handicrafts collection, involving people from diverse religious, caste, tribal, and rural backgrounds, presents significant opportunities for growth in the country's tourist destinations (Islam et al., 2021).

4.4.9 Promoting Festival centered Tourism

Bangladesh, a country with diverse ethnic groups, celebrates various festivals and celebrations throughout the year. On April 14 annually, 'The Bangla New Year' Festival, or "Noboborsho", is celebrated, and if promoted and supported, it has a promising future for festival-based tourism (Kabir & Avi, 2023).

Moreover, Bangladesh's tourist sector, leveraging the "Beautiful Bangladesh" tagline, requires significant investment from the government and private sector to fully realize its potential, requiring a thoughtful policy framework to be implemented.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the impact of the tourism sector in Bangladesh on its economic development and the associated challenges as well as the ways forward to overcome these challenges. The study finds that from 2009 to 2021, Bangladesh has accommodated around 5,238,000 tourist arrivals, which has contributed to the country's GNP, though in a very unremarkable way as it is only around 0.1% which is also decreasing in recent years. Though the Bangladesh tourism sector endeavors to provide innovation, technology transfer, infrastructure development, interpersonal relationship building, employment generation, and positive country image repair, it still strives with numerous challenges like decline in Western tourists, security measures inadequacy, and the domestic airline-system limitations, additional tourist costs, insufficient marketing, and inadequate tourism infrastructure, decreasing number of tourists visiting Bangladesh and lowering the tourism sector's contribution to Gross National Product (GNP) of Bangladesh thereby. To accelerate economic growth, the Bangladesh government should take actionable strategies, including initiating tourism based long-term vision, exploring more captivating tourist spots, upgrading tourism websites, creating employment opportunities, promoting evidence-based tourism education, and enhancing BPC sponsorship, investing more in tourism infrastructural development, and promoting festival-based tourism. These strategies will help Bangladesh overcome the challenges impeding the positive impact of tourism on the economic growth.

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