

TOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Cox's Bazar is one of Bangladesh's leading coastal areas, mainly because of its scenic beauty. Tourism in this area led to the development of facilities such as hotels, restaurants, airport, gift shops etc. and supports local communities in form of employment opportunity. Recently, this area is showing signs of negative environmental impacts such as excessive crowds, poor waste management, security issues, and unplanned construction of hotels to support excessive local tourist demand. This implies that Cox's Bazar has socio-economic and environmental impacts mainly caused from domestic tourism; certain areas that require immediate attention are discussed in this paper based on the concept of sustainability.

Key words: Cox's Bazar, enclave tourism, sustainable tourism

JEL classification: Q26

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation aided to set new trends in the field of tourism; tourists are increasingly interested to travel remote and exotic destinations of the world. In response to this growing need many destinations in Asia reconstructed their tourism sector to attract this segment of tourists. Bangladesh could not capitalize on its low costs 'sun and sand' tourism appeal to international tourist. Yet its 'sun and sand' product named Cox's Bazar surely attracted mass volume of local tourist over last three decades, which led to concern over protection of natural resources in the area.

TOURISM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

A country usually tends to promote tourism of its resources to improve economic developments and reduce inequalities in income distribution by sourcing employment opportunities in a particular area (Mbaiwa, 2005, Nistoreanu et al., 2011). Bornhorst (2010) suggests two primary role of sustainable tourism in a destination. Firstly, it should enhance the social and economic wellbeing of the local citizens. Secondly, to be considered as a tourism destination the destination requires to offer a range of activities, the visitors are willing to pay to enjoy their experience; this activities in return will enhance resident's wellbeing and allow the destination to operate in a sustainable manner. If the above is satisfied then it could generally be regarded to benefit economic, environmental, social and cultural aspect of a nation. The aim of sustainable tourism development is to maximise local economic benefit with an overall improved ways of life for the locals at the same time protect environment for future generations; ensure long-term economic linkage

between destination and other industries and provide utmost satisfaction to the visitors (Bramwell and Lane, 1993, Năstase et al., 2011). The negative impacts of areas like Cox's Bazar are assessed in this paper; based on the concept of sustainability, which considers three main principles of social equity, economic efficiency and ecological sustainability.

BANGLADESH AND ITS TOURISM INDUSTRY

Bangladesh, one of the least developed countries in the world, lies in the north eastern part of south Asia, sharing borders on the west and north side with India and on the south-east with Myanmar and on the south with the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh is recognised for its poor living conditions, its continuous political instability, corruption and a zone that attracts natural calamities. Peace and a considerable economic growth have still not been achieved in this region. Bangladesh has a population of over 140 million people 40% of them living under poverty line. Ever since its independence in 1971 the economic growth rate has risen to 6.7% in 2011 making Bangladesh one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita GDP of 735 US\$ (The World Bank, 2012). Bangladesh economy is entirely based on agriculture and garment industry, which attracted foreign investors due to cheap labour and low conversion cost. Tourism was almost non-existent at the country's independence in 1971. After about 40 years, this industry has a direct contribution of 2.2% in 2011 to the country's GDP (WTTC/Travel and Tourism Economic Impact, 2012).

However, attractions available in Bangladesh are not for every segment. The most visited tourist area in Bangladesh is Cox's Bazar, the longest sea beach in the world. The sea beach is 120 km long with crescent shaped low hills in one side and Bay of Bengal on the other side. This tourist area falls in Chittagong, at the northern part of Bangladesh that covers an area of 685

sq. km with 27 mahallas or subdivisions and 9 wards and houses a population of 52,000 people. Chittagong is the second largest city of Bangladesh and a busy international seaport. Apart from the world's longest sea beach, this little town offers tall cliffs, Buddhist temples and local tribal festivities with mouth-watering seafood.

In the proposed research, Cox's Bazar was chosen as a case study to analyse its tourism products and evaluate its success among local visitors till date. The first objective of the research is:

1. Analyse tourism products of Cox's Bazar and satisfaction of the local tourists.

The second area of interest is to identify activities that are not in line with the concept of sustainable tourism; from the study of visitors experience an attempt to find signs that suggest negative impact on Cox's Bazar due to mass domestic tourism. This led to the second objective of the research:

2. Evaluate negative impact of tourism in Cox's Bazar from visitor's perspective.

The information contained in this paper was collected from both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data collection involved the administration of structured online questionnaire sent to more than hundred Bangladeshi respondents who have visited Cox's Bazar in the past; 58 completed questionnaires were later used for analysis of their visitation experience. Secondary data sources used includes few government reports available online and other relevant literature on Cox's Bazar tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Travel motivation and Bangladesh brand image

Motivation is considered to be one of the fundamental components of tourism studies, as motivation initiates certain important activities like why tourists travel, where to travel and overall satisfaction of the travel (Devasa, 2010). 'Push' and 'pull' are two important factors in tourism studies as together they are considered to attract international travel flow where push factors represents demand side motivators and pull factors represents supply side attractions that influences motivation to travel (Dann, 1977 cited in Pike, 2004). Crompton (1979, cited in Hsu, 2009) highlighted seven socio-psychological push motivations in a desire to travel to a particular destination (escape, self-exploration, relaxation, prestige, progression, kinship-enhancement and social interaction) and two pull motivations (uniqueness and education). Devasa (2010) states that cultural and natural features of a destination are important pull factors that segregate itself from other similar product. Hsu (2009) suggests destination image as one of the vital components of pull force, since the visual image of a place have great influence on decision making process of a tourist. The next section discusses the

importance of positive destination image and Bangladesh country image as a tourist destination to the world.

In spite of possessing a wealth of natural resources Bangladesh tourism suffers a negative image due to its political, environmental, economic and social reasons (Zahra, 2012). Bonn et al (2005) states, image influences destination selection process as a favourable image stands greater chance to be selected by consumers. Hall and O'Sullivan (1996, cited in Seddighi, 2001) supports three elements which aids in long term survival of a destination; they are 1) word-of-mouth reporting, 2) image making of media and 3) policies and interest of destination government. Images are formed with or without actual visitation which can be vague or clear but in any case indicates positive or negative feeling about the place (Gunn, 1988). Generally, the formation of destination image in consumer mind could be influenced by three sources of information, firstly, personal experience, which includes personal likes and dislikes, secondly, extrinsic elements, which are socially conditioned- the experience of others and lastly the supply side communication network (Hsu, 2009). Studies on destination image in the past suggests that image of a country can be formed from an individual's general knowledge or feelings, external influence from friends and relatives, advertisements and their own past experience (Beerli and Martin, 2004). This implies that the image formation depends on the degree of familiarity obtained from all social and cultural sources. Positive destination image are related to positive purchase decision (Woodside, 1989) and negative image deters interest of potential visitors (Selby and Morgan, 1996). A previous image study of Bangladesh as a tourist destination revealed a negative image held by most European respondents due to a consistent circulation of negative information between the destination and tourists' home country. To improve the standard of available facilities at present and enhance the prospect of tourism in Bangladesh, the concept of 'enclave tourism' was deemed appropriate for destinations in Bangladesh (Zahra, 2012).

Enclave tourism

The concept of 'enclave tourism' suggests development of all inclusive closed-off resorts in a destination with all required facilities for tourists (Lengyel, 1980). This geographically isolation of tourism activities in any area allows better control on standard of product and services; as this form of tourism is designed by tourism managers to create and control culture and physical environment to cater the needs and desires of the tourists (Freitag, 1994). This kind of tourism activity is tourists centric and appears to exclude host community due to the fact that some host community is hostile towards tourism activity in their area. Ceballos-Lascurain (1996, cited in Mbaiwa, 2005) argues that enclave tourism do not consider needs and expectation of surrounding host community

and are characterized by foreign ownership with design to attract foreign affluent tourists, hence do little benefit to local community with trickle-down effect from tourism activities. All-inclusive resorts do not allow tourist to comprehend real image of a destination, rather a distorted image is formed through walls of his familiar environmental bubble (Cohen, 1972). Enclave tourism proved successful for countries like Maldives and Mauritius, where the brand image became stronger with passage of time with a product of international standard yet sharing common issues that reflect problems of many developing countries like social, political and environment turbulences (Zahra, 2012). For some destination, enclave tourism proved unsuccessful even after inflow of tourist exceeded expectation yet the growth in tourism yield adds little to the region; due to foreign ownership of tourism business and poor forward and backward linkages i.e. Botswana Delta (Mbaiwa, 2005). When tourism fails to enhance the livelihood of local people then it is less likely that the residents of the area would co-operate any tourism activities in the area (Hartle, 1990). Like many other tourism approaches, enclave tourism has both advantages and disadvantages; hence it is needful to assess its applicability on a country like Bangladesh. The next section discusses the history of tourism in Cox's Bazar to enable better understanding of the destination and its residents.

Tourism in Cox's Bazar

This section elaborates understanding tourism in Cox's Bazar using Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycles (TALC) model. Butler's TALC model was deemed appropriate to study Cox's Bazar tourism as tourism in Cox's Bazar has a much longer history which made it pass through various phases of life cycles; which would aid in analyse success of each phase. The first stage of TALC model is 'exploration' phase, where a small group of tourists identifies 'exoticism' of a place for its various attributes and attracts attention of local people. The second phase is called 'involvement' where the local people creates facilities and promotes the new place and tourist numbers grow over time. The third phase is 'development' where the area experiences much more promotional activities, in this phase often natural and cultural attributes are substituted with artificial ones. The next phase is 'consolidation' where the rate of tourists visit may start to decline even when the number of tourists shows increasing trend. 'Stagnation' is the phase where the area attracts its highest number of tourists beyond which it fails to attract any further growth of tourist number. From this stage onward, the area might experience a number of different possible outcomes depending on the initiative taken by the destination. The area might enter into a rejuvenation phase if new attributes are introduced within the area or else face decline for its inability to compete with other similar product offered by the rivals (Garay, 2011). The use of TALC model support understanding tourism in Cox's Bazar in last two

centuries and evaluates importance of sustainable tourism in the area in order to protect resources for more centuries to come.

The exploration for Cox's Bazar started in the mid-16th century, Cox's Bazar was under the rule of Arakan Kings (taken over from Mughals), who were drawn to the scenic beauty of the land and decided to camp there. This small area overlooking Bay of Bengal was initially ruled by Mughals, the land was then overtaken by Tipras and Arakanese, followed by Portuguese and the British. Cox's Bazar is also known as 'Panowa', meaning 'yellow flower'. Its former name was 'Palonki', which was changed to 'Cox's Bazar' to commemorate the role of Captain Cox in the development process of the area. In 1773, Captain Hiram Cox was appointed as a superintendent by the British East India Company in Palonki, to resolve century old conflicts between the locals of Palonki (Rakhains) and Arakan refugees. Captain Cox died in 1799, before he could completely resolve conflicts between the two groups but his effort to rehabilitate and bring peace was acknowledged by the locals, by establishing a market and named the market after him as Cox's Bazar, which means Cox's market. (The travel guide world 66, 2010). After the independence from British reign in 1947, Cox's Bazar remained part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The first chairman of Cox's Bazar of East Pakistan Fazlul Karim, established Tamarisk forest along the beach to attract tourism and prevent destruction caused by tidal waves. After the liberation war in 1971, Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan and reorganised the tourism sector, which was then called National Tourism Organisation with the main objectives to develop, promote and market tourism (Islam, 2009). In 1973, National Tourism Organisation was renamed as Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation with greater responsibilities to develop tourism infrastructure along with promotion of Bangladesh as a tourist's destination. After the independence war, Cox's Bazar received more attention and development but yet tourism success in terms of foreign tourists was insignificant due to political and social instability in the whole nation. This area has facilities to accommodate about 65,000 tourists, when more than 100,000 local tourists visit the place in the peak season (bdnews24.com, 2010). The increased demand for accommodation, food and transport during the peak season (December-March) led many local businesses to take advantage of the situation and charge higher price for low quality product and services. On the basis of the finding of primary research, this paper recommends reduction of mass tourism by local people and initiates high cost low volume tourism. The following section discusses the research methodology used for the primary data collection and analyse the findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

For the proposed study, online questionnaires methodology was employed. This methodology served both objective one and two of the research; i.e. analyse tourism products of Cox's Bazar and evaluate local tourist's satisfaction. A structured questionnaire link was electronically sent to respondents who have visited Cox's Bazar in the past. This method helped the researcher to obtain primary data without travelling to Bangladesh and data gathered was recorded by the online survey tool called 'kwiksurvey', which is free, quick and easy to use.

The literature review section has an elaborate discussion of Butler's TALC model, which suggests the various stages a destination goes through, depending on the number of tourists it attracts over time. Cox's Bazar could be identified to be at the 'development' phase of the TALC model, where the area experiences more visitors and greater promotional activities to attract more visitors; that with the passage of time may attract a number of undesirable social impacts which include crime, overcrowding, concern over price rise, resident's hostility etc. As per TALC model, when an area like Cox's Bazar attracts more and more tourists over time without appropriate controls in place, the destination passes through each phases until it reaches declining stage because of the degradation of its resources (Anguiló, 2005).

The following section discusses the key findings of the survey to analyse domestic visitor's opinion of Cox's Bazar and assess negative impact caused from tourism in this area:

Frequency of visit: 74% people visited Cox's Bazar more than two times, which suggests destination loyalty or a lack of alternate recreation option within the country.

Purpose of visit: 83% people visit Cox's Bazar for recreation purpose.

Cox's Bazar, a fun element: More than 65% respondents agreed with the statement, Cox's Bazar offers a lot of fun. Majority of the visitors visit the area for the beach experience.

Hotels in Cox's Bazar: More than 80% respondents are satisfied with the accommodation facilities available in Cox's Bazar in spite of the fact that they do not reflect international standard (Shamsuddoha, 2011).

Restaurants in Cox's Bazar: More than 75% visitors find restaurants in Cox's Bazar satisfactory. The restaurants however meet local expectation of required standard; they do not qualify as restaurants of international quality.

Beach area: 82% respondents found the sea beach overcrowded and more than 50% considered it dirty.

Safety/ security in Cox's Bazar: 48% people thought Cox's Bazar is a safe place to visit, with 26% undecided and another 26% considered the area unsafe.

Transportation: 80% domestic visitors found transportation to and from Cox's Bazar satisfactory. Cox's Bazar is well connected with Chittagong by road and air, and Chittagong is accessible via air, rail and road transportation from every part of the country. The present transport facilities satisfy domestic tourists yet it lack required quality to satisfy international standard.

Extension of available facilities: Most people would like to see availability of more beach activities like para riding, surfing, speed boat ride, diving, food festivals (mainly local and sea food), cultural shows etc. This suggests that demand for more beach activities are there. It is important to create new attractions or finding natural resources that have not yet been exploited in order to improve position in the destination cycle (Anguilo, 2005). New attractions in nearby beach areas in Chittagong will provide more employment and earnings and reduce load on Cox's Bazar sea beach.

Facilities within Cox's Bazar are a concern for most visitors. Excessive crowd, high rates are top of the list, also of concern is lack of activities and safety issues. Availability of quality accommodation and internet was recommended by some respondents. In general, most visitors consider the area lacks governance of skilled personnel. Shamsuddoha (2008) highlighted that Bangladesh lacks international standard tourism education to train and develop tourism related organisations, which suggests inefficient state owned tourism enterprises.

The National Tourism Policy of Bangladesh declared in 1992 have the objectives to preserve, protect, develop and maintain tourism resources, so that it helps to alleviate poverty by providing employment opportunities; which suggests the National Tourism Policy adopted the strategy of sustainable tourism. Bangladesh has developed the most basic infrastructure required to reach its tourism destinations via road, rail and air with other supporting facilities like hotel, restaurants, travel agencies etc. Yet these facilities do not reflect international standard due to lack of long term planning, government officials lack managerial skill, hospitality training providers are unable to provide training to match international standard etc. Mbaiwa (2005) advocates strong linkages of tourism with the rest of the domestic economy to reap optimum benefit of this industry. An attempt to assess tourism in Cox's Bazar and its contribution to economic development in its region was undertaken in this section particularly to highlight backward and forward linkage between tourism and other sectors.

Employment opportunities: Various tourists' facilities like hotels, transport, restaurants, wholesale and retail industries were established to support tourism in Cox's Bazar. Most local staff (public or private) holds poor quality and low paying jobs; as they lack quality education and training to enhance the standard. The capital city Dhaka has renowned privately owned

tourism related organisations like Radisson, Westin, Sheraton, foreign airlines; these organisations employ expatriate staff, who occupy senior and management positions; with a wide disparity in wages and other benefits between local staff and expatriate staff. This suggests foreign ownership do not provide well paid job to locals in Bangladesh.

Development of infrastructure: Cox's Bazar has developed better road network with the main city Chittagong that could be an important indicator of a socio-economic development to the region. This implies that this area has the ease of transportation facilities required to support international tourist demand.

Development of Chittagong airport: Besides being a busy seaport, Chittagong also developed an international airport. This development of air transport in this region also benefited locals since social services are quicker. Cox's Bazar have its own airport for domestic flights called Shah Amanat Ali airport, this further suggests most required basic infrastructure was created to develop tourism and attract international visitors by the government.

Local business development: Due to presence of tourists in this region, a number of wholesale and retail traders in Cox's Bazar and Chittagong provide a variety of product and services to local and foreign tourists. This includes all types of food in the hotels and restaurants, handicrafts, other entertainments etc. This requires higher involvement of both locals and government in the decision making process that benefit and strengthens local economy.

Control of resources: Tourism control power lies with locals and Bangladesh government, which is deemed as a positive progress for implementing sustainable tourism strategies in the region. Mbaiwa (2005) states dominance of the industry by foreign investors and non-local investment can lead to reduced control over local resources. The loss of local control on resources could be considered as one of the most negative long-term effects of tourism as the locals suffers a sense of loss of place and develop negative attitude towards tourists. The tendency of foreign investor is to maximise profit in the shortest possible period; even at the cost of degradation of local environment, culture and social aspect due to their profit maximising strategies (Mbaiwa, 2005). Therefore, it is very important for Bangladesh government and locals to dominate major controlling power to prevent any step not in line with the concept of sustainable tourism development.

RECOMMENDATION

Access to accurate data for more studies: Tourism activities aid in diversification of local economy which has a multiplier effect on it; as such destinations worldwide are continuously upgrading their tourism products and expanding activities by exploring new destinations and activities. It is very

important to evaluate performance of tourism activities to adopt appropriate management strategies to help researchers and tourism policy makers with performance indicators for further strategic decisions (Pestana, 2011). Accurate tourist's inflow and outflow record is required to improve performance and allow general people to access these resources to help conduct more studies in future.

Diversify current tourism product: More private investment like Fantasy Kingdom, theme park etc. are required in Bangladesh to allow people more entertainment options, job opportunities and source of income. Cox's Bazar needs to restructure its market, by specializing and segmenting it with renovation plan of urban infrastructure and accommodation facilities in the form of enclave tourism, yet limit construction according to carrying capacity of the area. Enclave tourism will limit tourists and local interactions to the minimum, hence reduce negative impacts caused from such tourist local encounter. This arrangement will allow marketers to improve brand image by offering a product of international standard and maintain the long term sustainability of the tourism industry and subsequently derive economic benefits, only if ownership of resources lies with local people. If foreign investors dominate ownership than earnings from tourism will not stay in the country, there would be no significant backward and forward linkage from the generated income; as tourists will not be able to interact with locals due to enclave tourism and hence there will not be any trading with the local residents to support local economy.

Cox's Bazar in all inclusive resort for foreign affluent tourists: In the case of Cox's Bazar, issues of sustainability were not given much consideration, i.e. tourism in Cox's Bazar does not suggest social equity, economic efficiency and ecological sustainability. A recommendation of enclave tourism was proposed in this study to enhance its brand image from a backward, poverty stricken, victim of natural, social and political turbulences to an image that reflect the country's unique natural beauty along with its food and culture. The negative image formed over last three decades is far too prominent to eradicate in a short time with the current product unless major changes are introduced. Enclave tourism might obstruct social equity, which is fairness and equal access to the resources by all the user groups, yet this will aid in restructuring a product of international standard and strengthen formation of positive destination image. Therefore, to make tourism in Cox's Bazar sustainable in the form of enclave tourism, it should restrict foreign ownership in order to encourage participation of the local communities in the planning, design and execution of tourism activities in the area. This will result in greater economic efficiency and ecological sustainability. Local ownership of tourism facilities in the area will enable greater backward and forward linkage with the rest of the regions domestic economy and give rise to a sense of

responsibility to protect resources for the future generation.

Offer product to appropriate segment only: Bangladesh has qualities to trigger 'push' motivation like escape, self-exploration, relaxation, kinship enhancement and social interaction with its product. In terms of 'pull' motivation, Bangladesh has uniqueness in its product that has influence of its culture mixed with it that could be educative to certain segments. Marketers need to acknowledge motivation of each segment and offer product according to their need and determine appropriate visitors attraction promotional campaigns. Satisfaction from each visit is very important as satisfaction results in repeat visitation thus leading to increased loyalty towards a destination and positive word of mouth communication (Devasa, 2010). This study on Cox's Bazar reveals concern of local visitors of excessive crowd, security concern and unplanned waste management which indicates dissatisfaction with the tourism product. A lot of improvement is required to make Bangladesh tourism brand a product of international standard. The starting point needs to be redefining its brand image by carefully upgrading its facilities to match international standard. Bangladesh needs to appear in the mass media

with positive information to help change global attitude towards it.

CONCLUSION

For Cox's Bazar to grow tourism in a sustainable manner, firm control measures must be in place. The management and planning phases should incorporate effective strategies to address issues that are sensitive to social and environmental aspects like involving locals in decision making, provide training, protecting environment etc. There should be more communication between different levels of administrative structures, local governments and stakeholders to take active part in the sustainable tourism governance strategy. The results of this study suggests that local visitors have moderate to high satisfaction level with the present sand and sea product, continuous improvement and international benchmarking will eventually succeed in attracting foreign visitors in Cox's Bazar. So long as the local community benefits from the activities and environment do not face further degradation, then tourism in Cox's Bazar will see positive growth.

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