

Post-Covid-19 Tourism: Recovery Policy for Bangladesh

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***Abstract:** Covid-19 has changed the world tremendously and this change will persist for years. Its impact on world tourism is strongly felt. However, it has been predicted that five sectors including domestic tourism will boom in the post-Covid-19 period, making the economy vibrant. Recently, the UN Secretary General has mentioned that tourism will be the best weapon to combat economic crisis in the post-Covid world. Various researches and statistics have revealed that in the post-Covid period, possibly up to December 2022, people will go for outings covering a distance from 161 to 482 kilometers. As holiday making will be people's first choice, domestic tourism will gain a momentum. UNWTO has already indicated that domestic tourism traffic will begin soon. The tourism of Bangladesh is most likely to flourish in the post-Covid period. There are multifarious reasons for this. Bangladesh is called the Unique Delta of 7 Tourist Attractions (7TA) which includes river, sea, mountain, forest, history-heritage-culture, seasonal variation and hospitality. Bangladesh figures best in 7TA. Tourism industry provides employment opportunities for a huge number of people. One hundred eighty million people of Bangladesh, where 60 percent is youth, may massively enjoy its benefits. The tourism potential can really be "a penalty shoot" for the country. The present research investigates the tourism scenario of Covid-19 Bangladesh, presenting a three dimensional analysis (academic, professional and observer), with seven steps and relevant policy activities.*

Keywords: Covid-19, Unique Delta of 7TA, Domestic Tourism, Penalty Shoot, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Covid -19 has brought momentous changes to the world which will, understandably, last long. This has a palpable impact on world tourism. However, an imperative factor is that, in the post-covid-19 world there are five particular sectors that will vividly flourish and directly influence the socio-economic state of the world. One of the five sectors is domestic tourism and Bangladesh is one of those countries where this has high prospect. In a recent speech the United Nations' Secretary General has avowed (America, 2020) that tourism is likely to be the sturdiest tool to mend the post-Covid-19 world. Regarding the prospect of tourism, Bangladesh is considered the Unique Delta of 7TA (Seven

Tourist Attractions) (Kobra, Bhuiyan & Zayed, 2018). These seven attractions are: rivers, sea, hills, forests, heritage & culture, the variations of the seasonal change and hospitality. In other words, if a country has one of the seven attractions, it is labelled GOOD for tourism; if a country has two, it is considered BETTER; and if any country has three, it is titled the BEST for tourism. In this respect Bangladesh is positioned as the BEST, which is rationally a great boon.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

In the world today, tourism is acknowledged to be the largest industry. Numerous studies, researches and surveys prove that it directly impacts 109 other industries. For instance, a tourist needs transportation, accommodation, food & medication, and most obviously shopping. So, it involves ranges of other services starting from the everyday necessities including transports he uses or buys at every place he stays. Thus, taking the nuances in consideration it ensures the demands of daily essentials and thereby many people earn their living by being employed in those service industries.

Since there are ample opportunities for Bangladesh to attract tourists in the post-Covid-19 world, there is no alternative to some basic considerations in the field of tourism in Bangladesh. If a set of planning are implemented properly, it will not only benefit the domestic tourism but also contribute to attracting international tourists. It is worth mentioning that according to the latest report on the competitive tourism done by the (Forum, 2019), Bangladesh has positioned itself five steps further securing the 120th place in comparison to the previous year. In fact, in 2018 Bangladesh was on 125th position among 140 countries.

Post-Covid recovery policy for Bangladesh is based on two major inquiries: 1. What are the visual attractions in Bangladesh? 2. Why, despite ample possibilities, Bangladesh has not achieved its tourism goal even after 50 years of her liberation?

2. Objectives of the Study

A number of studies and statistics specify that in the post-covid-19 world people would, understandably, prefer trips within the range of 161-482 kms whether it is a mere holiday, vacation or honeymoon (at least till December 2022). Thus, there is a visibly potential market for domestic tourism. Therefore, the present study claims that in facing the post-Covid -19 economy, domestic tourism surely can be a “penalty shoot” for Bangladesh. However, to avail the “penalty shoot” opportunity Bangladesh has to adopt some policies, specifically, by the Ministry of Tourism.

3. Methodology

The article is descriptive in nature and based on pure secondary data. Data has been collected from several secondary sources like journals, periodicals, newspapers and scholarly articles. All the tourist spots of Bangladesh are covered (Sadat, Kader & Zayed, 2020). Though Bangladesh is good in primary and secondary economy, tertiary economy is far behind compared to even Nepal or Bhutan. It is identified that post-Covid-19 tourism will be dominated mainly by domestic tourists. Bangladesh is good in domestic tourism. In bound tourism is rare in Bangladesh. The paper tries to draw a methodological sketch by pointing Covid-19 as a key to start new normal recovery policy both for domestic and international tourism. In this paper we tried to look into “Elephant theory and window dressing method” recovery policy. The practicing factors and plans of these policies (which are implemented by govt. and non-govt. organizations and associations) are:-

- a. Divisional tourism bubble plan.
- b. Institutions related to tourism and their roles and responsibilities.
- c. Packages, offers and incentives.
- d. Creative multidimensional campaign, all in one.

4. Observations

As per the statistics of Bangladesh Tourist Police (Police, 2019), there were 1,57,00,000 domestic tourists in 2019. Different research reports reveal that per person cost of those domestic tourists were 5-12 thousand BDT. At the same period of time, a number of Bangladeshi people travelled overseas. For instance, the number of Bangladeshi tourists visiting India was closely 2.9 million whereas 600,000 people visited Thailand. In addition, almost 300,000 Bangladeshi visited Malaysia; 200,000 travelled to Singapore; and approximately 500,000 people went to the Middle East countries like United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia; quite a lot headed to Europe, America and Australia as tourists. To sum up, about 46,000,000 Bangladeshi tourists visit the world every year (Akhundova, Zayed & Ibrahim, 2021).

Furthermore, it is a fact that every year 120,000 Bangladeshi origin expatriates visit Sylhet from the United Kingdom. They are wealthy British citizens now. Besides, assembling 2 million people of Bangladeshi origin, who live all over the world for different purposes, come to attend family weddings or visit their old parents every year. Unfortunately, many of these visitors, who could be potential domestic tourists, go to neighboring countries (like India, Nepal, Bhutan, & Thailand) due to a number of reasons like lack of proper information of Bangladeshi tourism. These tourists spend considerable amount of money over air fare, accommodation, food and shopping.

The present study argues that, in at least 24 post-covid-19 months the target Bangladeshi tourists are most likely not to visit abroad for merely tout purpose. On the other hand, due to the boredom and monotony of the locked-down phenomenon, these potential tourists will be obviously attracted to domestic tourism. This anticipation can be well grounded one considers what UNWTO, a tourism -centric concern of the UN, has stated: that the Domestic Tourism Traffic is in the process of emergence in no time. To state the latest datum in this regard the finding of an Oxford Economics research can be referred to where it is stated that because of Covid-19 the world tourism must wait till 2024 to achieve its 2019 status. Therefore, there is hardly any disagreement over the fact that domestic tour has hardly any alternative now (Organization, 2020).

5. Bangladesh in Terms of Tourist Destination

The number of magnetic tourist attraction spots in Bangladesh is nearly 1700 among which 503 are of historical importance and heritage spots with a great legacy of attractive tourist interest. Besides, there are about 135 museums all over the country which can also play a vital role in attracting tourists. Most notably the 19 long sandy beaches of the country are very lucrative to the tourists. Along with the water-centric tourist charms, we have more than 137 'haors' with surpassing scenic beauty with additional attractions of about 49 hills and mountains with their grandeur. Ratargul is a rare swamp forest, one of the very few in the world, which is called the Sundarbans of Sylhet, is another natural beauty spot for tourist attraction in Bangladesh. In addition, Bangladesh is decked with 65 villages with their unique local dialects, sports, music, even specialized deserts which offer the tourists an erratic cultural diversity.

In the present point of the study, it must be mentioned that UNWTO has acknowledged the International Tourism Day 2020 as the year of Tourism & Rural Development. Moreover, The Sundarbans, Sixty-tomb mosque, Paharpur Buddha monastery, Mahasthangarh, are already included in the list of World Heritage Sites declared by the UNESCO. The thousand years old Panam City of Sonargaon is an unmistakable emblem of timeless elegance. It will not be exaggeration to call it the Babylon of Bangladesh. To add more, one can refer to Pohela Boishakh, celebration of Bengali New Year's Day, which is labelled as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. The celebration of International Mother Language Day having been approved by the UN is observed by the entire world, which makes Bangladesh unique. Apart from these, Bangladesh offers closely 75 yearly festivals and events which can allure the tourists with their local color and flavor.

It is an inordinate regret that except for Cox's Bazar, Kuakata and Potenga, nearly 16 of our beaches are literally unexplored by the majority of tourists. An interesting fact is that the Kiamabeach of Australia is very popular with the tourists since the waves do not

move in their regular pace with roar but come like a frivolous dancing maid who comes to kiss the shore and disappears. People enjoy this with fish & Chips. However, people hardly know the astounding fact that the Kattali Beach of Chittagong, Bangladesh, has the same aesthetic appeal as the Kiama. To add further, Parki/ Satkhira's Mandarbaria, Katka of Khulna, Karamjal, or Laldia of Borguna beaches are each full of startling attractions.

Apart from the aesthetic bounties of the sea beaches, the scenic beauty of Bangladeshi hills and mountains are also mesmerizing. Tourists can find significant similarities between the Sajek Valley of Bangladesh and Spanish Bilbao. In the same way the picturesque view of the Powel Park of Kaptai, Bangladesh can be compared to the tantalizing Zurich park of Switzerland. It will not be undeserving to call the fascinating Sunamganj the Kashmir of Bangladesh. Likewise, the floating markets of Pirojpur's Swarupkathi Aatghorkuriana offer no less charms than those of Thailand or Kerala. The visual appeal of Nilachalmountain or Chittagong's Bhatiari is not unlikely to remind the tourists of the Blue Mountains of Sydney. A historical evidence (Forum, 2019), claims that some historians are of the opinion that the 8590 sq.km big haorzone of Bangladesh emerged from the sea in the 6th century and till today is known to be the largest waterbody of non-salty water. However, some of its extension part is stretched towards Assam. Apart from this, there are number of exclusive Islands in Bangladesh, to name some, Saint Martin's Ireland, Swarna-deep, Nijhoom-deep, shah Poreer -deep, Hatia-deep, Monpura-deep, Kutubdiaa-deep, Bholar-deep or the Queen Ireland, Moheshkhali, the most beautiful island surrounded by hills, whose beauty can only be compared to Maldives. And last but not the least, Shonadia island is going to be the Dubai of Bangladesh in near future.

6. Tourism in Bangladesh: The Challenges

It is a matter of profound concern that in spite of having a treasure of resources that can create a considerable market in world tourism, Bangladesh could not achieve its goal in terms of tourism even after 50 years of independence. It does not mean Bangladesh has no progress in tourism sector. The main reason can be a lack of efficient leadership. A remarkable point is that the ministry of tourism is different from any other sector since it is not a lace for traditional bureaucracy. Moreover, to make tourism successful at least 11-12 ministries have to have cooperation and collaboration. So far in the last 33 years a total of 28 secretaries took the office of tourism. On an average, each got little more than a year for performing duties. In other words, due to lack of good governance the tourism industry did not meet the progress goal.

7. Tourism to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Bangladesh is on the track to be a middle- income country. At the same time, out of the 16 SDGs that Bangladesh needs to accomplish, 4 are directly related to tourism. 13 more indirectly connected. So, tomorrow's failure in tourism will mean catastrophe to achieve the SDGs. Thus, there is no alternative for Bangladesh in the coming times except for concentration on the field of tourism, run on the path of triumph and take the initiatives to attain them. The tourism situation after Covid-19 is sure to be contributory to reach that goals.

A question that may arise in the mind of any reader is whether the many possibilities of success that is knocking at the door of Bangladesh in the aftermath of Covid-19 will be successfully utilized or not. Theory- data -information and situation analysis project that in the next three years, the desired and surprising success in tourism in Bangladesh will come unmistakably only if its roadmaps are drawn now.

8. "Ownship" Bureaucratic Leadership

History articulates "Ownship" bureaucratic leadership is a recognized tool for success in the arena of tourism. France, the uppermost efficacious country in the world today, was just like any other country of Europe. Emperor Napoleon III dreamed that he would represent France to the people of the world in an attractive way centering Paris. To that end, the then French bureaucrat Jazz Barrow assigned Osman. The visionary and creative leadership of a bureaucrat had established France as the number one tourist destination in the world today. Note that in 2019, 90 million or more international tourists visited France.

In addition, the recent example of Malaysia is also noteworthy. The country, which is evidently less diverse than Bangladesh, has become the world's top Muslim tourism destination in the GMTI or Gesnabal Muslim Tourism Index surpassing Turkey and Egypt. The first visionary behind Malaysia's tourism triumph was the country's father of the nation, TunkuAbdur Rahman, and later the fourth and seventh Prime ministers, Dr. Tun Mahathir Mohammad. In the nineties, DaimZainuddin and the country's enterprising bureaucracy led the way in materializing the visions. Here it must not be forgotten that the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also had his first dream of tourism in Sonar Bangla and Bangladesh Tourism Corporation was formed as a part of that dream. To add more, the present Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, has taken various realistic steps and initiatives to promote Bangladesh's tourism to the world. Most significantly, Bangladesh has all the natural treasures needed to reach the top in the sector of tourism. Therefore, all we need is a 'Jazz Baro Osman' of Bangladesh to implement plans. Effective leadership with a vision is now the need of time.

9. Recovery Policy for Bangladesh

9.1 Elephant theory and window dressing method

The total number of divisions of tourism in Bangladesh including destination and service aviation is 13-15. Considering all of these, this 'elephant theory' of tourism can be applied here. If instantaneous steps are taken in the 'window dressing' method considering the following enterprises to score a goal in the penalty shootout for tourism of Bangladesh in the post-Covid 19 world (Sufian, 2020). Not only will Bangladesh have boundless benefits or speedy success but tourism will become the prime and most operative tool to deal with the economic damage posed by Covid 19.

9.1.1 Divisional tourism bubble plan

In the last two years, the number of domestic tourists has augmented at a momentous rate as compared to the previous two years. In the case of Covid 19, this trend will be even quicker. So, the divisional tourism "bubble" is a viable and sustainable way for the tourism traffic management that is internationally recognized and prevalent in the current context. As a result of divisional tourism "bubble", over-tourism will not be the same and tourism will be promoted across the country. At the same time, collection and promotion of "safe, clean and secure / safety stamp" logos / stickers should be popularized as soon as possible. Global destinations have already started "safe travel" stickers more than a month ago in accordance with international rules.

9.1.2 Institutions related to tourism and their roles and responsibilities

The Ministry of Global Tourism cannot function alone. About 20 ministries across the country are directly involved in tourism development, promotion and success. In the case of Bangladesh, it is obligatory to add some departments of 2-3 more ministries such as Export Promotion Bureau, BIDA etc. to coordinate the responsibilities and duties of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism as the leading ministry in the field of tourism in Bangladesh (Board, 2010).

9.1.3 Packages, offers and incentives

For example, helicopter tourism, we are talking about more than 4 million financially capable tourists, it will be quite effective for them. For example, someone with family will hesitate to go to Sajek because of the road communication system. Helicopters can be easily used for this. The small unused aircrafts (10-12sitters) of the Air Force can be used commercially in this case. Due to the pollution of Buriganga river in various ways, Turag river can make a significant contribution to Dhaka-centric maritime tourism. Similarly, VUSA (Visit United States of America with one single price for anywhere, EURO pass / SAVER PASS on train or ship) for travel to 29 countries in Shenzhen

Europe, for example VBD (Visit Bangladesh), VBD MULTI PASS CONCEPT can be used. Tourists will definitely take advantage of such laid-back prospects. At the same time, the government and non-government organizations will have the occasion to work together for the welfare of VBD / VBD MULTI PASS in the form of VUSA / EURO PASS, so that they can discover a new Bangladesh (Sufian, 2014). The accomplishment of this project will have 3 substantial results.

1. Tourists can travel all over Bangladesh in a safe and uninterrupted 5-9 day trip in shortest possible time, the lowest possible cost and in the easiest way, .
2. Their perception of the country will change; they will enjoy a safe and beautiful Bangladesh, and the reimbursements will benefit to the entire economy, including agriculture, industry and services.
3. Children will also be on this family trip so that they will have a clear idea about the country and thus, their level of patriotism will be awakened. Bangladesh will reap the benefits in the long run too. Bangladesh Tourism Corporation can take the lead in this work as it has several infrastructural facilities. If Bangladesh Tourism Corporation starts, it is sure to create a huge stimulation in the private sector.

9.1.4 Creative multidimensional campaign, All in One

7TA include creative multidimensional promotion of Destinations, Rivers, Haors, Seas, Mountains, Forests, History-Tradition-Culture, Seasonal Variety, Culinary, Shopping, Leisure, spots of Spiritual interest, Museums, Zamindar Bari, Archaeological Signs, etc. Not just a mere campaign like the national "Ruh-aafza", it will be a three-dimensional campaign like Coca-Cola where there will be spicy allurements of a long-awaited sense of gratification. Bangladesh will score only after the penalty shoot in the next tour of post-Covid 19 realities (Sufian, 2020).

10. Outcomes

Despite the fact that many people have lost their jobs due to various adversities and economic catastrophes in the world, employment is going to be created in the tourism sector every two and a half seconds. Interestingly enough, the arrival of a tourist directly employs 11 people. 33 more people gets involved indirectly. In other words, the arrival of 1 lakh tourists is associated with 11 lakh employment. If there are 1 million regular domestic or international tourists in a place, there would be permanent jobs for 11 million people. In a country of 160 million people, this could happen more extensively. Because 80 percent of this population is young. Recently the world-famous Forbes magazine published a report on the top 10 countries in terms of job creation in the field of tourism, where Bangladesh ranks first behind India and Pakistan (Madden, 2020). In addition, the employment will continue to increase through proper implementation of the mentioned policies. Right now, Bangladesh will be unique in domestic tourism and later in international tourism (Zayed et al., 2021).

11. Conclusion

According to statistics the ratio of domestic tourism vis-à-vis international tourism is 7:1 whereas the former sector earns ten times. The fact that many things can be done virtually but tourism has to be done actually endorses the claims made in the present study. In this circumstance, in the post-Covid 19 new normal, a considerable number of domestic tourists are anticipated to vitally contribute to Bangladesh's economy. Therefore, the direct and indirect jobs and employments that depend on tourism will be reactivated opening up new possibilities of recruitment and finally leading the country to overcome the damage done by Covid19. However, all these anticipated means of success vitally depend on the flawless implementation of Elephant theory & Window Dressing Method Tourism Policy (Sufian, 2020).

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