

# SWOT Analysis of the Bangladeshi Tourism Sector

## STRENGTHS

What is the current level of patronage, and how does this compare with past trends?

Tourists in Bangladesh are inbound tourists, Bangladeshi middle and high class or expats. There is a lack of knowledge about demand in the Bangladeshi tourism business, particular regarding the Bangladeshi middle and high class and the expatriated community. Inbound tourism registration exist for the period 1996–2005. Average number of inbound tourists in the period was 203.015 tourists. The lowest number of inbound tourists was 165.887 tourists recorded in 1996, the highest was 271.270 tourists in 2004.

What products are accentually and potentially available?

Due to historical isolation Bangladeshi culture and history is distinct from many countries. Bangladesh offers a variety of natural and cultural tourist destinations, some on the UNESCO Heritage List. The national transport, whether it is by air, land or water, is cheap although the existing slow transportation by road, rail and water can be an adventure with the right positive attitude.



A variety of tourist accommodation facilities are offered in rural and urban Bangladesh. Most investment has been done in the business related tourism and the metropolitan cities. Bangladesh is concerned with safeguarding a heritage damaged by increased salinity and climate change. Nevertheless sustainable commercial use of these resources is often low, which affects the standard for preservation, development and level of international appeal.

Bangladesh is a fairly new and rarely visited inbound tourist destination, which can attract an adventure searching tourist market. The world image of Bangladesh can be inspired by several new sustainable tourist attractions to increase the understanding of the country's history and developing challenges. The interest in the effects of global warming can affect the inbound travel market in Bangladesh, as the country is one of the 10 countries most vulnerable to a rise in sea level.

The tourism potential in Bangladesh can be developed through implementation of multilateral and inter-regional projects or co-operation with foreign travel companies.

Who are the customers, and how are they segmented?

Bangladesh attracts inbound tourists from many countries; several pull-factors are expected and the tourist activity is spread throughout the year. South Asia and Europe are the largest inbound regions and India, UK and USA are the largest inbound countries. Local travel market is part of the growing urban population, which lives similarly to their Western counterparts. 12 million passport holders and a decrease in annual working days since 2005 are estimated to have a positive effect on the local travel market.

Expatriated Bangladeshis represent a word of mouth access to several potential national target markets. Moving back to their native country some of them also represent a valuable skilled workforce in the tourism sector. The urban expatriated community in Bangladesh represents a variety of nationalities. The average years of stay are between 2-5 years.

What are the activities and behavior of the costumers?

In terms of existing tourist products, both inbound and home market, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Chittagong and Khulna Division are the main tourist divisions. Sundarbans, Cox' Bazar and Chittagong Hill Tracks are some of the most popular tourist destinations.

To what extent are costumers satisfied with the available products?

Several travel experienced expats argue that the best experiences in Bangladesh are to be found outside Dhaka.

What are the available financial and human resources?

The tourism industry has low construction, running and salary expenses. Labor force is reliable and abundant. English is commonly used by the tourism industry. The national aviation industry are expanding, as the Bangladeshi aviation industry followed the globally growth rate in 2007.

## **WEAKNESSES**

What products are available?

Several factors, e.g. amount of garbage and the condition of several attractions, indicate that the existing tourism business is not sustainable. The accessibility to tourist destinations and accommodations is negatively affected by non-availability of adequate infrastructure, including domestic and international transportation. Existing beach life, Bangladeshi style, includes mud flats destinations loathed during high season. This can not be sold as a typical western mass tourism destination.

The existing low inbound tourism demand indicates that fundamental product and promotion improvement is required. Tourism products should relate to the fact that Bangladesh is a modern Muslim society and a densely populated developing country, which has been historically isolated. Sustainable tourism product is one such solution. Tourists, especially inbound tourists, need a guide or high level of knowledge to travel safely and responsibly (culture and nature awareness) in Bangladesh.



To what extent are costumers satisfied with the available products?

Several tourist products do not live up to a western concept of quality and service. Travelling time and safety are relevant obstacles to the local expat target market. Social insecurity: Local people do not have experience with tourists, so visitors sometime feel uneasy in some places. Several expats, who have no experience with urban Bangladesh, base their perception of rural Bangladesh on their impressions of the capital city.

What are the available financial and human resources?

The Bangladeshi level of investments in travel & tourism is not exceptional, compared with regional and worldwide annual investment. The tourism industry is vulnerable due to a short high season and a large local market share. There is a lack of educated staff. The tourism industry is still quite young in Bangladesh, and its development has been predominantly left to the local market forces. The tourism development is largely uncontrolled as no marketing or developing policy exists, in spite of the fact that the Bangladeshi government and private tourist sector are represented by several organisations (Parjatan and TOAB).

There is a lack of knowledge about the demand, supply and competitors in the Bangladeshi tourism business. There is a low level of co-operation and innovation in the tourism sector. Tourism industry lacks marketing professionalism, which is severely crippling the industry's inbound tourism growth. In the home market every company is generally on their own when they want to promote the destination. It is expensive and ineffective for local operators to reach the worldwide market at the current time. The inbound tourism marketing is primarily preformed by few foreign tour operators. This fact indicates that the Bangladeshi tour operators are losing income to their foreign competitors.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Bangladesh is a democratic Muslim state more interested in national development challenges than in the

conflicts between the 'Western' and 'Muslim' world. The country embraces liberal democracy, has a generally homogeneous society and one dominant religion. The interim government provides travellers with a form of relative stability while fighting corruption and bureaucratic procedures.

Despite some unfathomable hindrances national economy is improving and the country is showing positive development. The seasonal weather is relatively stable; especially the cold season is comfortable for travelling. The population speaks Bangla and English – the latter by the well educated urban people. Strong linguistic, cultural and historical connections exist to England, Pakistan and India.



The number of tourists in Bangladesh is estimated to increase due to generally growing local, regional and world tourism travel activities. Responsible tourism is a growing world market niche.

Inbound travel pattern to nearby tourist countries correspond to the best travel season in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has a strategic stopover position in the region to the largest inbound tourist destination in the region, India, as well as two prominent world ecotourism destination, Nepal and Bhutan.

## **THREATS**

Infrastructural development is required; especially the state of the roads and rails is a significant obstacle for the tourism sector. Technological development is also required.

The climatic changes through out the year (and in the future) have considerable implications for travelling in Bangladesh since the country occasionally experiences harsh storms, floods and earthquakes. The country also has a worldwide image of poor land with numerous natural catastrophes and corruption.

The national tourism sector is negatively affected by the lack of social and political commitment. The preservation of natural and historical attractions is just one of the challenges that the Bangladeshi society has to face.

(Excerpt from "Introduction to the tourism industry in Bangladesh" by Majbritt Thomson)

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