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River Tourism in Bangladesh: Present Status and Future Prospects

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Abstract

River tourism is quite different from the conventional tourism concept which is based on rivers. Bangladesh has great potential to flourish in this sector. Bangladesh is already famed as a riverine country. A good number of tourists are interested in river tourism in Bangladesh. Though there is huge potential for Bangladesh to become a prominent destination for river tourism but still it is untapped due to various challenges. This study analyzed the existing river tourism sector of Bangladesh to explore the potentialities and challenges of this sector. The study revealed that there are some challenges to gaining success in the development of river tourism. Lack of skilled manpower, safety and security issues, lack of tourism infrastructure, and inadequate funding are some remarkable challenges. Based on the findings, the paper suggested several recommendations for the development of river tourism in Bangladesh.

Index terms— river tourism, major challenges, economic development, tourism growth.

1 I. Introduction

Rivers are major spatial elements in the landscape of Bangladesh. Historically Bangladesh is known as the "Land of Rivers". The rivers of Bangladesh are one of the greatest forms of self-identification for the country and the most important geographical feature of Bangladesh. The rivers of Bangladesh also played an important role in the history, growth, and development of the country. The livelihood of countless rural Bangladeshis depends on the rivers. The country has 700 rivers including tributaries and a total length of almost 24,140 km. They consist of rivers, hilly streams, winding seasonal creeks, and canals together constituting about 7% of the country's total surface areas and they link most parts of the country by an intricate network of waterways (Banglapedia).

River tourism is one of the most popular forms of tourism worldwide. It offers an opportunity to travel inland waterways and rivers. It provides a unique experience to explore a country differently. River tourism is very flexible, comfortable, and pleasant to travelers and serves the tourism purpose mostly in an enjoyable way. Foreign tourists are interested in exploring the local people's livelihood, their unique culture and traditional way of life, nature, picturesque pristine countryside, and the serene beauty of the rivers, hilly rivers, and wetlands like haor (wetland ecosystem). The serenity and touch Author: Lecturer, Department of Maritime Tourism and Hospitality Management. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University, Bangladesh. e-mail: nora.mthm@bsmrmu.edu.bd of a river may vary for tourists. Some found it in a dramatic and romantic way, permeating a sense of pleasantness to the beholders. Tourists are also interested in exploring the people's life of Char (River Bar). Their struggling and survival ways are really different from others. Foreign tourists also love to visit inland and coastal islands like Hatia, Bhola, Swandeeep, and so on. Tourists are also interested to travel in paddle steamers because of its antique appeal, heritage, and convenience.

Each river in the country is full of opportunities for the tourism sector and waiting to be utilized. River tourism also can work as the savior from demise of rivers. River tourism is the best way to see the real beauty of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, Bangladesh is still far behind from developing river tourism for improper tourism infrastructure.

2 II. Literaturer Review

The tourism sector is playing an important role in the economic development of developing countries. In Bangladesh tourism is one of the most profitable sectors (Elena et al., 2012). River tourism is a unique sub-sector of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. River tourism is closely related to the natural environment and living being on the bank of river livelihoods which are deeply rooted in rivers and water. The history of river tourism started with Herodotus. In ancient times he described his journey to Egypt in 450 BC when the Nile overflows on Egypt. People used boats to move and sail right by the pyramids for going Naucratis to Memphis ??Carson, 1994, p. 22).

In primeval times people in this South Asia region only use waterways because the river was the main route then. Moving one place to another for personal reasons and carrying goods for business purposes people were using rivers as only of way movement. At present, still, the people of Bangladesh are giving importance to our river ways for both passenger and commodities transportation. River tourism has become popular and taken a particular place besides ocean and overland traveling. Hulme and Youngs (2002) stated that writing and traveling have been intimately connected. Writers open an imagination field for us and give us the enjoyment of traveling through their writing. Such peaceful traveling like River tourism gives this kind of scope to armchair travelers.

3 R

The great river Amazon was first traveled by European travelers. They followed Amazon from the Andes between 1541 and 1542 and showed interest in other travel and discovers more from Amazon. River tourism is also highlighted in the writing of Travel Guide of the River from Chongqing to Wuhan by Shaw (2007). In 2000 a study of tourism was done in the Yunnan Great Rivers, National Park in China. The Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze Rivers have a variety of tourism activities like logging, fish hunting, water-based agriculture, etc. that attract tourists from all over the world, as observed by Cater (2000) A river constitutes a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure, and links with the environment and the natural world. Tourists, researchers, and investors are mostly interested in ocean cruising (Dowling, 2006) although some scholars are shown interest in the study of river tourism, and have demonstrated that river tourism can be a good source of outdoor recreation as well as it will attract eco-tourists (McKean et al., 2005) People are very much fond of river cruising for enjoying colorful natural beauties and different ways of living on the bank of the river. Moreover, it offers a more relaxing and slower travel experience than other forms of tourism. River tourism allows travelers for creating a personal adventure. River tourism has become a major tourist attraction, giving a boost to the tourism industry. River ship provides a traveler with an intimate atmosphere with close interaction with our culture as the river was the sole means of transport in the past.

4 III. Methodology of the Study

This research is carried out by using the qualitative research approach. Qualitative methods have become increasingly appropriate to researchers of tourism as they being to explore personal feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, particularly of host communities, and the impact of tourism on them (Walle, 1997:534).

This study was based on the synthesis of primary data and secondary data. Primary data had been collected from the interviews of different stakeholders, field observation, and questionnaire analysis. Secondary data had been collected from published research articles, journal articles, conference papers, seminar proceedings, dissertations, books, reports, newspaper, articles, magazines, brochures, government websites, and open-access materials. As the data on river tourism is inadequate, so to collect more data an intensive literature review related to river tourism and resources, their management issues, and constraints in the Bangladesh context was conducted through an online search.

5 IV. Objective of the Study a) Primary objectives

The primary objective of this study is to identify the potentiality of river tourism in Bangladesh.

6 b) Secondary objectives

? To identify the scope of river tourism in Bangladesh.

? To identify the benefits and economic contribution of river tourism in Bangladesh. ? To identify the barrier and challenges in the development of river tourism in Bangladesh. ? To find out some recommendations that will help the growth of river tourism in Bangladesh.

V. Prospects of River Tourism in Bangladesh

Generally, the use of the river for travel and recreational activities is known as river tourism. River tourism is an alternative type of tourism that includes trips to natural areas and walks on the bank of the river and muddy roads, swimming, and sports activities, for example, fishing, rafting, canoeing, river kayaking, etc. Rivers are very important for the economy of Bangladesh historically. Once upon a time, people depend on the river for their livelihood. People are used to fishing, boating, and many more as a means of income source. Our agricultural sector depends on the mercy of river water for irrigation.

102 The Water Development Board, Bangladesh (WDB, 2019) has published documents with the names of 406
103 rivers. This number varies from source to source as some rivers have already vanished with time and some have
104 taken different names at different places. There are 57 international rivers in Bangladesh of which 53 flow from
105 India and 3 from Myanmar. Bangladesh has predominantly four major river systems (1) the Brahmaputra-
106 Jamuna, (2) the Ganges-Padma, (3) the Surma-Meghna, and (4) the Chittagong Region river system. However,
107 the Brahmaputra is the 22nd longest (2,850 km) and the Ganges is the 30th longest (2,510 km) river in the world
108 (Banglapedia 2004).

109 River tourism may become one of the main unique selling points in the tourism industry of Bangladesh. The
110 volume of river tourism in Bangladesh is at its initial state compared with the vastness of the river networks.
111 Nowadays, many private companies are mainly engaged in river tourism which facilitates organized various river
112 cruising packages. Though Bangladesh has numerous rivers but all the rivers are not suitable for river tourism
113 because of not having a proper depth from the surface, heavy river wave, muddy canals, improper infrastructure,
114 and so on. Bangladesh has a huge tourist market segment for river tourism. This segmentation is done through
115 a distinct field survey. Around 50 people of different ages were taking part in this survey. It is notified that
116 adventure lover tourists, Community-based tourism lover tourists, and nature lover tourists are interested in river
117 tourism. Adventure lover tourists are mostly coming from young age people. Moreover, tourists from different
118 countries are also interested to take part in river tourism in Bangladesh. They want to explore the scenic natural
119 beauty of Bangladesh through river tourism. Overall river tourism can support eco-tourism that is environment
120 friendly.

121 **7 a) Unique Characteristics of River Tourism in Bangladesh**

122 Historically, people in Bangladesh traveled by boat because the river was the main route for both passenger
123 transportation and carrying goods. Rivers are also major spatial elements of the landscape and constitute a
124 significant tourism resource. River tourism in Bangladesh contains some unique characteristics.

125 **8 Source: Developed by Author, 2022 b) Scopes of River 126 Tourism in Bangladesh**

127 The rivers of Bangladesh have several scopes that lead to sustainable river tourism. A good number of direct and
128 indirect facilities are provided by the rivers of Bangladesh that create scopes for river tourism. Direct facilities
129 include:

130 ? Riverside areas which are full of natural attraction.

131 ? Transport including different types of river vehicles, especially for river cruising. ? Providing recreational
132 activities (water sports, swimming, fishing, boat race, and so on). ? Direct food supply (fish, drinking water,
133 water-based agriculture for other food sources).

134 The rapid growth of the population in Bangladesh increases the use of river water for human and industrial
135 purposes. Rivers provide some indirect facilities including jetty of water transport, Disposal of human waste,
136 Support industrial activities and waste disposal, Source of hydroelectricity, and so on.

137 **9 c) Major River Tourism activities in Bangladesh**

138 River offers an extensive variety of opportunities for recreational and tourist activities. River tourism offers great
139 water adventures experience as well as it provides the most scenic views, diverse wildlife, and flora along the
140 route. River tourism is combined with exciting waterbased activities. Major river tourism activities are water
141 rafting, river cruise, fishing, river exploration, boating, kayaking, and leisure activities.

142 Though Bangladesh is the biggest river delta in the world but lacks the necessary river cruising product, river
143 tourism in Bangladesh is still underdeveloped. There are very few river cruising products are available now. River
144 cruises on the Sundarban for a 3 to 4 days night stay is very popular among tourists. Source: Cruise transport
145 in river circuits, (Helal, 2020)

146 **10 Figure: Different Trips in River Ways**

147 There are also some other river cruising products available. These are the 'Dhaka Dinner Cruise' offering on the
148 river Shitalakhawa, Padma River Cruise, Jamuna River Cruise, Chittagong Boat Cruise offerings on the river
149 Kornofuli, etc.

150 **11 VI. Benefits of River Tourism Development in Bangladesh**

151 The tourism industry offers many jobs for unemployed people. President and CEO of WTTC stated that "Travel
152 & Tourism, which already supports one in every 10 jobs on the planet, is a dynamic engine of employment
153 opportunity" (2018). The development of River tourism also can create extensive employment opportunities
154 for local people. River cruise ships, restaurants, retailers, travel agents, leisure industries, airlines, and other
155 transportation services can create a huge number of new job opportunities. It also helps to alleviate poverty.

156 The data of Chart 01 shows that 6% of tourists strongly disagree that River Tourism creates a large number
157 of job opportunities and income sources for local residents of River based areas.14% of tourists disagree with

158 this statement. 10% of tourists neither agree nor disagree. 10% of tourists believe that rivers can create jobs for
159 unemployed people. 60% of tourists strongly agree with this statement. So we can see most of the participants
160 agree with this statement.

161 The development of river tourism can ensure the contribution to the GDP of Bangladesh. River tourism
162 activities are connected with different products and services (e.g. foods, entertainment equipment, recreational
163 equipment, accommodation, transport, etc) which can directly contribute to GDP. Private investment and
164 government funding in this sector can contribute indirectly to GDP. The data of Chart 02 shows that 6% of
165 tourists strongly disagree that river tourism can ensure the economic contribution to the GDP of Bangladesh.
166 4% of tourists disagree with this statement. 10% of tourists neither agree nor disagree. 60% of tourists believe
167 that river tourism can ensure the economic contribution to the GDP of Bangladesh. 20% of tourists strongly
168 agree with this statement. So we can see most of the participants agree with this statement.

169 12 Strongly

170 Sustainable river tourism can ensure and promote peace by fostering understanding between local people and
171 tourists. It also promotes and preserves the local cultural and historical traditions.

172 The data of Chart 03 shows that 4% of tourists strongly disagree, that River tourism development can
173 create collaboration between local communities and tourists from different areas that makes socio-economic
174 development. 16% of tourists disagree with this statement. 32% of tourists neither agree nor disagree. 30% of
175 tourists agree and 18% of tourists strongly agree with this statement. So we can see almost 50% of the participants
176 agree with this statement.

177 River tourism development can ensure infrastructural development of riverside areas that can reduce the
178 negative impact of natural disasters. Natural disasters can cause land erosion of riverside areas. People lost their
179 homes and being shelter less. It also slows down the pace of economic growth.

180 The data of Chart 04 shows that 12% of tourists strongly disagree, that River tourism development can ensure
181 infrastructural development of riverside areas that can reduce the negative impact of natural disaster. 5% of
182 tourists disagree with this statement. 22% of tourists neither agree nor disagree. 26% of tourists agree and 34%
183 of tourists strongly agree with this statement. So we can see most of the participants agree with this statement.

184 River tourism development can raise awareness among local residents about the importance of river and river-
185 side tourism spots. Overall all these things can work as a contributor to protecting the environment, river
186 preservation, and diminution of river pollution. The data of Chart 05 shows that 20% of tourists strongly
187 disagree, that River tourism development can promote the importance of river preservation and diminution of
188 river pollution. 10% of tourists disagree with this statement. 4% of tourists neither agree nor disagree. 32%
189 of tourists agree and 30% of tourists strongly agree with this statement. So we can see almost 62% of the
190 participants agree with this statement.

191 13 VII. Major Barriers in Developing River

192 Tourism in Bangladesh

193 River tourism activities are addressing the opportunities of tourism which can directly contribute to our GDP.
194 There are some challenges that hinder to activate the river tourism in Bangladesh that's given below:

195 Illegal river sand mining is very common in our country. For unplanned sand mining in river destroys both
196 side of river area. It also negatively impacted on agricultural land besides the river. Every year people are losing
197 land to river erosion caused by illegal dredging.

198 Insufficient budgetary allocation slows down the development of river tourism development. So sufficient
199 budgetary allocation needs for proper river tourism infrastructure development, marketing and promotional
200 activities, training for operating river tourism activities tools, and so on.

201 14 Source: Developed by Author, 2022

202 The absence of community precipitation (people who live beside the riverine areas) in river tourism decelerates
203 the development of river tourism as they are not aware of it. There is a huge opportunity to make the community
204 involved and develop river tourism as well as develop the entire community of riverside.

205 River pollution is posed a serious challenge to river-based tourism in Bangladesh. The main reason behind
206 river pollution is the unawareness of river health and sustainability of the river ecosystem, throwing dirty garbage
207 in the river while traveling, oil spills from tourist's vessels, leak of chemicals from industrial containers, etc.

208 Underdeveloped insufficient infrastructure and super infrastructure (jetties, vessels, well-designed and equipped
209 ships) for river tourism make it difficult to flourish this tourism sector.

210 In river tourism, tourists have to stay in boats or ships. It creates some safety and security issues like natural
211 disasters, robbery, tidal surges, thieves, pickpockets, and mobile networks not found in the middle of the river,
212 etc. Many tourist spots across the country are yet to gain popularity among tourists both from home and abroad
213 due to a lack of proper promotional and marketing activities. To attract tourists from home and abroad, we need
214 to give importance to promotional activities.

215 15 Strongly

216 In every year thousands of hectares of river-side land erosion happened in rainy season. This is one of the biggest
217 challenges to grow this specific tourism subsector.

218 Sufficient skilled man power needed for developing and operating river tourism. Otherwise insufficient skilled
219 man power may cause this sector collapsed before booming.

220 16 VIII. Recommendations for Sustainable

221 Development of River Tourism river area for tourism. Proper security needs to be ensured and a one-stop
222 information system can be introduced for tourist's safety. 9. Proper marketing approaches should be taken to
223 reach the maximum number of tourists for river tourism. 10. Specialized academic and training centers are
224 needed to create skilled manpower for the river tourism sector. Special rescue teams and lifeguards should be
225 prepared to avoid any kind of accidents. 11. Laws should be imposed to rescue river areas which are abused.
226 Special campaigning, seminar, and conference can be arranged for raising awareness to protect rivers and riverside
227 areas.

228 17 IX. Conclusion

229 As a riverine country, river tourism has tremendous potential in Bangladesh. River tourism in Bangladesh is
230 expanding gradually. Local and foreign tourists are very much interested to take part in river tourism. By
231 improving the existing river tourism spots and activities, also developing new ones, the country can attract
232 a significant number of local and international tourists. Also, this sector has great potential to reduce the
233 unemployment rate by generating new job opportunities. Though there are lots of challenges in developing river
234 tourism which includes fewer river tourism scopes and activities, safety issues, lack of infrastructure, lack of
235 efficient human resources, lack of environmental awareness, insufficient promotional work, etc. The development
236 of the river tourism sector depends on how efficiently and effectively these challenges can be overcome. Several
237 strategies are discussed to mitigate these challenges in this report. Proper planning and implementation should
238 be ensured for the development of river tourism. In this way, this particular tourism sector may bring economic
prosperity to the national economy.



Figure 1: F

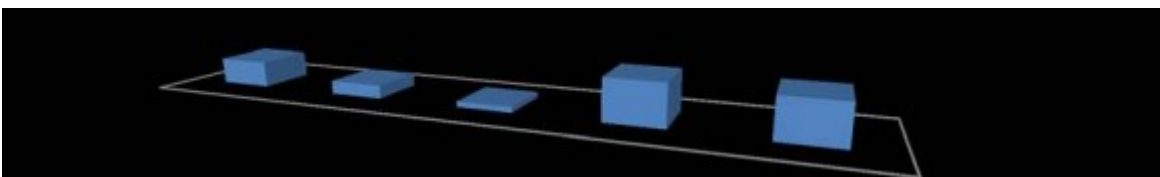


Figure 2:

239

River Tourism in Bangladesh: Present Status and Future Prospects
 Disagree 20% Chart Global Journal of Management and Business Research
 Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree 10% 4% 32% 30%
 Volume XXII Issue III Version I Year 2022 () F

Figure 3: 05: River tourism development can promote the importance of river preservation and diminution of river pollution

1. Ensuring local community involvement in the process of river tourism development makes tourism sustainable and everlasting.
2. Need to promote local heritage, festivals, and culture of river areas for attracting local and foreign tourists.
3. Public awareness should be increased among both local people and tourists to control environmental pollution.
4. Infrastructural

and ~~infrastructural~~ infrastructural

development needs to be carried out to the river tourism spots.

5. Foreign tour operators can be used as another way to promote river tourism in Bangladesh across the world. It will help to reach more foreign tourists. Moreover, this can boost our tourism sector rapidly.
6. The development of sustainable river tourism is a long-term phenomenon. Development planning for the short-term will help to gain long-term achievement.
- 7.

Figure 4:

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