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## Islamic Tourism: In the Perspective of Bangladesh

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# Islamic Tourism: In the Perspective of Bangladesh

Syeda Tamanna Fahim<sup>α</sup> & Evana Nusrat Dooty<sup>σ</sup>

**Abstract-** Islamic tourism is a new tourism destination in the world today. Through this tourism, religious duty was performed as well as knowledge achieved for wider dimension. By this way muslim can ensure satisfaction of Almighty Allah. The study reveals that there are huge opportunities to develop Islamic tourism in Bangladesh as it has a lot of natural beauties, Islamic heritage, cultural and archeological heritage, historic heritage, which might be potential tourism destinations. Various organizations including Organization of Islamic Conference can play vital role in this regard. The study also identifies problems in developing Islamic tourism in Bangladesh. And herewith we have provided some measures to develop this new trend of tourism to accelerate economic growth in our country.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is considered a comprehensive way of life as its teachings cover, directly or indirectly, every possible affairs of human life. The Quran in many different ways issued special attention to tourism and in its attitude toward tourism considered one of the great blessings of Allah. According to the holy text of the Quran, Muslims should travel in order to fully appreciate the beauty of Allah's world and also visit their friends and relatives. They have a responsibility to provide hospitality to visitors who, under Islamic law, enjoy the citizens' rights. Tourism is traditionally closely linked to religion which has acted as a powerful motive for traveling. Religious buildings, rituals, festivals and religious events are important tourist attractions for those are the followers of the particular systems of belief represented (Henderson, 2003).

Tourism is one of the promising sectors of Bangladesh. Tourism industry effects positively on the Bangladesh economy for increasing foreign exchange earnings, and employment opportunities. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in 2012 was BDT193.0bn (2.1% of GDP). It is forecast to rise by 6.8% pa to BDT819.4bn by 2023 (4.7% of GDP). Travel & Tourism generated 1,281,500 jobs directly in 2012 (1.8% of total employment). By 2023, Travel & Tourism will account for 1,785,000 jobs directly, an increase of 2.9%

pa over the next ten years. (World Travel and Tourism Council-2013)

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) have emphasized for developing the tourism activities in the member countries. The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), expressed support for tourism in accordance with the Shariah. The bank has allocated fund for tourism development in Muslim countries in this connection. As Bangladesh is second largest muslim country of the world it has a strong potential to develop Islamic tourism. This study is designed to explore the concept of Islamic tourism. And also to find out prospects for developing islamic tourism in Bangladesh in order to get the satisfaction of Allah and attract more tourists.

## II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In Islam, traveling is considered as worship (*'Ibadah*). Because it is enjoined in order to perform one of the pillars of Islam, namely '*Hajj*' during certain months, and '*Umrah*' to the House of Allah is prescribed throughout the year. Secondly, in the Islamic worldview, travel is also connected to knowledge and learning. The greatest journeys were undertaken at the beginning of Islam with the aim of seeking and spreading knowledge. For example one of the *Taabi'een* said concerning the verse in which Allah says:

"(The believers whose lives Allah has purchased are) those who turn to Allah in repentance (from polytheism and hypocrisy), who worship (Him), who praise (Him), who fast (or go out in Allah's Cause), who bow down (in prayer), who prostrate themselves (in prayer), who enjoin (on people) Al Ma'roof and forbid (people) from Al Munkar, and who observe the limits set by Allah. And give glad tidings to the believers" [Al-Tawbah 9:112].

Thirdly, the aim of travel in Islam is to learn lessons and receive reminders. The command to travel about in the land appears in several places in the Qur'an. Allah says:

"Say (O Muhammad): Travel in the land and see what was the end of those who rejected truth" [Al-An'aam 6:11]. Allah also says:

"Say to them (O Muhammad): "Travel in the land and see how has been the end of the Mujrimoon (criminals, those who denied Allah's Messengers and disobeyed Allah)" [Al-Naml 27:69].

Fourthly, May be the greatest aim of travel in Islam is to call people to Allah and to convey to mankind

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the light that was revealed to our Prophet (sm). This is the mission of the Messengers and Prophets and their companions after them (may Allah be pleased with them). The companions of our Prophet Muhammad (sm) spread throughout the world, teaching the people goodness and calling them to the message of truth. We hope that the concept of travel today will try to achieve the same great aims. Finally, travel in Islam also includes travelling to ponder the wonders of Allah's creation and to enjoy the beauty of this great universe, so that it will make the human soul develop strong faith in the oneness of Allah and will help one to fulfill the obligations of life. Relaxation is essential to enable one to strive hard after that. Allah says:

"Say: Travel in the land and see how (Allah) originated the creation, and then Allah will bring forth the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. resurrection after death). Verily, Allah is Able to do all things" [Al-'Ankaboot 29:20].

Not only for spiritual gain, but traveling is also important for physical gain. Offering religious and historic places to international tourists may earn more revenue to the Muslim country. Moreover, The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) have emphasized for developing the tourism activities in the member countries. Greater travel by Muslims within the Islamic world could lead to better understanding, stimulate collaboration and serve the common good. Our study aims to formulate suggestions in favor of Islamic tourism for developing tourism sector of Bangladesh.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore tourism from Islamic perspective ;
2. To provide some recommendations to develop Islamic tourism in Bangladesh.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study. Data was accumulated from relevant books, articles, newspapers, action plans of the Government and also from all related authority like Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, World Tourism and Traveling Council 2013, Bangladesh Economic Review. All data obtained from secondary sources are analyzed and finally a conclusion along with some recommendations is drawn.

### V. DISCUSSION

#### a) Tourism

Tourism is a complex phenomenon and it is a challenging task to offer a succinct definition of this concept (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006, 12). Tourism is a tool that can be said by which people in leisure time job stress and patterns of everyday life at home status and experience new places, to gain the psychological benefits (Homayoun, 26:2005). According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), "Tourism comprises the

activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited." (Medlik, 2003).

Tourism is a complicated concept that covers a wide range of social, behavioral, economic, political, cultural, and environmental considerations. The concept of tourism consists of a set of activities, services, and benefits which all give tourists particular experiences (Medic and Middleton, 1973). Buhalis believes that a tourism destination has five essential elements: attractions, access, facilities, activities, and tourism-related side services (Buhalis, 2000, 98). Tourism is a leisure activity which involves a discretionary use of time and money and recreation is often the main purpose for participation in tourism (Ghosh, 2001).

#### b) Exploring Islamic Tourism

##### i. Definition

Tourism is traditionally closely linked to religion which has acted as a powerful motive for traveling. Religious buildings, rituals, festivals and religious events are important tourist attractions for those are the followers of the particular systems of belief represented (Henderson, 2003). Islamic tourism is a new tourism destination in the world today. There are 54 Muslim countries in the world. Most of the countries situated in an important nerve point of the world. Due to the geographical and economic importance of Muslim countries, the scope of Islamic tourism increases day by day.

All product development and marketing efforts designed for and directed at Muslims. Motivations are not always or entirely religious. Participants could be pursuing similar leisure experiences to non-Muslims, albeit within parameters set by Islam, and destinations are not necessarily locations where Shariah or full Islamic law is enacted. (Henderson 2010)

Islamic Tourism is defined as any activity, event, experience or indulgence, undertaken in a state of travel that is Islamically compliant, with the purpose to interface within an Islamic framework, with one or all of the following; history, arts, culture, heritage, way of life, economy, health, education and any other human interests (ITC, Malaysia)

In Islamic tourism, the visitors have traveled in a place for the satisfaction of Allah and their recreation. Tourism is a part of life and not contradictory with the fundamental theme of Islam.

Traditionally, Islamic Tourism is associated with religious activities such as hajj and umrah. As the years passed, it developed to a much larger dimension as people go beyond exploring other Islamic destinations. This new dimension has led to the need for all the other components in tourism such as the food industry, the airlines or transportation industry and many others, to

make adjustments so as to fulfill the needs of this unique segment.

ii. *Features of Islamic tourism*

"Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things." (Al-'Ankaboot 29:20)

In the human world which is characterized by ethnic-cultural diversity: to demonstrate unity in cultural diversity. A Quranic verse on ethnic-cultural diversity reads:

"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors; verily in that are signs for those who know." (Ar-Rum 30:22)

Another verse reads:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (Al-Hujurat 49:13)

Islamic *Sharee'ah* has brought a number of rulings that regulate travel and tourism, so that it will achieve the aims mentioned above and will not overstep the mark or become a source of evil and harm in society.

These rulings include the following:

- a. It is haraam to travel for the purpose of venerating a specific place, except the three mosques. It was narrated from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "No journey should be undertaken to visit any mosque but three: al-Masjid al-Haraam, the Mosque of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Mosque of al-Aqsa." Narrated by al-Bukhari (1132) and Muslim (1397). It is even more haraam to travel to visit places that are regarded as holy in other religions, such as those who go to visit the Vatican or Buddhist idols and so on.
- b. The evidence also indicates that it is haraam for the Muslim to travel in kafir lands in general, because of the evils that will affect the Muslim's religious commitment and attitude as the result of mixing with those nations who pay no attention to religion and morals, especially when there is no need for him to travel for medical treatment or business and so on, rather it is just for leisure and for fun. Allah has made the Muslim lands spacious, praise be to Allah, and He has placed therein wonders of creation so that there is no need to visit the kafirs in their lands.
- c. There can be no doubt that *sharee'ah* forbids tourism in places of corruption, where alcohol is drunk and immoral actions take place and sins are

committed. The Muslim is enjoined to keep away from sin so he should not commit sin or sit with those who are committing sin.

iii. *Islamic tourism as business activity*

In Islamic literature, a general term for "religiously acceptable" is Halal and it usually refers to consumption and utilization of material things for Muslims (Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi, 2011). The way to utilize and consume all the blessings is mubah and termed halal in Islam (Gulen, 2011). In other words, consumption and utilization of things that are not forbidden by the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammed (PBH)) are halal in Islam (Gulen, 2011). The opposite of the term is haram and it denotes unacceptable consumption and utilization of things. A muslim is therefore expected to benefit from halal things and abstain from the haram.

iv. *Islamic tourism is an alternative to conventional tourism*

- a. Avoidance of religiously prohibited (*haraam*) products and services in the tourist packages; in other words, observance of the *halal* requirement such as in the hospitality and entertainment products and services
- b. Offering non-tangible, qualitative ingredients or contents in the tourist package, especially as defined in spiritual-moral terms
- c. Offering opportunities for vastly improved cultural literacy, for learning other perspectives on the inner meaning of tourism, especially the understanding of pleasure, vacation and recreation as the primary objectives of tourism
- d. Islamic tourism is not just about visiting holy places, mosques, shrines and tombs, and other popular religious sites that are limited to the history of Islam
- e. Objects of sight-seeing or touristic sights such as the pre-Islamic historical sites and the natural wonders targeted by conventional eco-tourism may be included and indeed projected as part of Islamic tourism provided that the Islamic perspectives on eco-tourism and the pre-Islamic historical sites are always made clear to the tour operators and the potential tourists.

c) *Bangladesh possess a strong potential for islamic tourism*

i. *Natural beauties*

Bangladesh is country of natural beauty. It is a country filled with hills, valleys, forests, beaches, lakes and rivers. The Sundarbans (large and small rivers, forest ecology, wild life, beaches, culture, plants, mammals (Royal Bengal Tiger, spotted Deer), Otter squirrel, Monkeys, Barking deer, wild boar, Dolphin, reptiles, fish, birds etc. Hiron points, Katka, kochikhali, Dubla Island, Mandarbari, and Putency Island etc). Miles of golden sands, towering cliffs, surfing waves, rare conch shells,



colorful pagodas, Buddhist temples and tribes, delightful sea-food--this is Cox's Bazar, the tourist capital of Bangladesh. Other special attractions of Cox's bazar are Inani beach (about 30 km from Cox's bazar full of coral stones), the island of Maheskhali (famous for its Buddhist and Hindu temples and a dry fish industry), Teknaf (the southern-most point of Bangladesh), Ramu, Sonadia, Himchhari, St. Martin Island (only Coral Island) etc. The three Hilly Districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban are inhabited by a number of tribes, with their distinctive cultures, rituals and traditions. Chimbuk, Ruma, Rain-Khyoung valleys, keocradang and Tazinsdang are highly attractive products in the hill tracts. Sylhet, most tea granary of the country, is another attractive tourism site of the country. Kuakata beach, where both sun rise and sunset is seen, is another tourist landmark of the country. So, Bangladesh has rich and varied flora and fauna-a biological phenomenon, which simply describe as unique in the Bangladesh.

#### ii. *Islamic heritages*

As second largest Muslim country of the world Bangladesh possess a strong Islamic heritage. About 0.5 million people visit Bangladesh every year in the purpose of World Ejtema. The main Islamic heritage sites are- Star Mosque; Baitul Mukarram Mosque; Shait-Gumbad Mosque, Bagerhat; Chhota Sona Mosque; Mosque of Baba Adam; The Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal; Shrine of Sultan Bayazid Bostami; Shrine of Shah Amanat; Huseni Dalan Mosque. These places may be attractive destinations for Islamic tourism.

#### iii. *Archeological heritages*

Bangladesh is a country considerably rich in archaeological wealth, especially of the medieval period both during the Muslim and pre-Muslim rules. The major archeological sites are Shait-Gumbad Mosque, Bagherhat; Sonargaon; Lalbag Fort; Paharpur; Mahasthangor; Mainamati; Kantanagar Temple, Dinajpur.

#### iv. *Historic heritages*

Historical monuments of Bangladesh represent Hindu, Muslim, British periods and independent scattered all over the country. Major historical attractions are-Lalbagh Fort; Sonargaon; world war 2 symmetry Gandhi Asram; National Memorium, Mujibnagar Memorial, Central Sha-hid Minar, Martyred Intellectual Memorial, Old High Court Building, etc.

#### v. *Cultural heritages*

Bangladesh has a strong cultural heritage. The mentionable places with cultural heritage of Bangladesh are-Natore - Dighapatiya Rajbari (Uttara Ganabhaban) Shilaidaha Kuthibari, Kushtia: Sagordari, Jessore: Trishal: Shahjadpur Kuthibari: National Museum, Ahsan Manzil Museum, Dhaka.

#### vi. *Recreational tourism products*

Bangladesh has world's largest unbroken sea beach, thousand of rivers and rivulets, numerous lakes

and cannels which provide recreation facility like speed boat, paddle boat, normal boat, swimming, squash etc to the tourist such as angling, boating, swimming, fishing etc.

#### d) *Barriers in implementing islamic tourism in bangladesh*

##### i. *Lack of awareness among mass people about islamic tourism*

There is lacking of proper Islamic knowledge among the people of our country. For this reason Islamic tourism is still a new concept to our people.

##### ii. *Unavailability of proper infrastructural facilities*

Though tourism is a promising sector of Bangladesh, infrastructural facilities are not properly available in our country. And as Islamic tourism is not introduced yet, there are no infrastructural facilities to support Islamic tourism in our country.

##### iii. *Islamic recreational events*

Many Muslim countries like Iran, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran gain success in Islamic tourism by implementing Islamic recreational events. But in our country such kind of events are not introduced, still.

##### iv. *Inadequate conservation of islamic heritages*

Bangladesh is enriched with abandon Islamic heritages that can encourage Muslim tourists to come to Bangladesh. But many of these sites are going to be dented as proper initiatives are not taken to conserve these.

##### v. *Limited educational and research scope on tourism*

Tourism is a researchable matter. There are huge research have been conducting all over the world on this topic. Researchers engaged to find out how tourism may be a tool for sustainable economic development. But in Bangladesh there is a little scope to research on tourism.

##### vi. *No international promotional activities of Islamic heritages*

Most of the tourism dominated countries adopt modern and suitable marketing strategy for developing their tourism industry. They also focus their tourism places to the tourists with market oriented ways. Due to improper marketing strategy, Islamic tourism could not focus highly among the tourists.

##### vii. *Less preference on eco-tourism*

Though Bangladesh is a country with great potential for developing eco-tourism, ample steps are not taken to develop eco-tourism in the country. But implementing eco tourism may be one step forward to Islamic tourism as Islam shows a great concern about environment.

#### e) *Recommendations*

To make the Muslim-friendly environment, our suggestions are as follows:

i. *Build up proper infrastructural facilities encouraging to islamic tourism*

It should be ensured in tourism sites proper infrastructural facilities that promote Islamic tourism. Islamic resorts and hotels, as well as Islamic destinations will shape the tourism activities; alcohol-free accommodations in which gender-segregation and the dress code will be strictly respected and controlled; available prayer-rooms on site; and "Islamic" transportation facilities (Hamarnah & Steiner, 2004).

ii. *Arrange Islamic tourism events*

Bangladesh can arrange gender segregated sports and wellness facilities and "Islamic" entertainment programs in tourism places. Elements of this concept are already implemented by Saudi Arabia and Iran in their tourism industry.

iii. *Involvement of mass media in Islamic tourism efforts*

Media can play a crucial role to develop Islamic tourism in a country. It would be helpful for Bangladesh to promote Islamic tourism through establishing satellite channel, newspaper and other media. And by positive involvement of exiting media should be ensured.

iv. *Appropriate marketing strategy*

Bangladesh is the second largest Muslim country of the world. It should establish proper marketing strategy to attract more Muslim tourists. Bangladesh must have to develop positive image as a Muslim country to focus the Islamic tourism.

v. *Co-ordination among muslim countries*

There should be a coordinated effort among Muslim countries of the world to develop Islamic tourism. Bangladesh can arrange joint tourism packages with other Muslim countries to attract huge tourists. It can be helpful for Bangladesh to implement Islamic tourism properly as well as to ensure economic growth of the country.

vi. *Take proper ecotourism initiatives*

Bangladesh is blessed with two of the world's splendid and enchanting ecotourism spots of diverse nature- the Sundarbans and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Wahidul, 2002). The Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest and could be the goldmine for ecotourism in Bangladesh. Cox's bazar, the three Hilly Districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban ; Sylhet, Kuakata beach these are mentionable eco tourism spot in Bangladesh. If proper steps taken to implement eco tourism in these tourism sites, it should be compliant to Islamic tourism.

vii. *Create awareness among mass people*

Bangladesh should take proper steps to create awareness about Islamic tourism among her people. The concerned authority can arrange different programs to circulate the spirit of Islamic tourism around the country.

viii. *Proper role of OIC*

OIC is the highest platform for the Muslim countries. Bangladesh can create and maintain an international linkage with OIC to increase their tourism activities.

ix. *Implement public private partnership*

It would be helpful for Bangladesh to take advantage of public private partnership to implement Islamic tourism.

x. *Increase scope of tourism education and research*

In Bangladesh, the public educational institute is not offering tourism education. Though some private Institution is offering, the scope is very limited. So, government should take initiative to expand tourism education and also allocate proper fund for research activities in this ground.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Tourism is one of the emerging industries in Bangladesh. It is a purposeful activity in Islam that aims to achieve physical, social and spiritual goals. The physical goal leads to a healthy and stress-free life, which subsequently lets Muslims to serve Allah better. Islam encourages visiting Muslim brothers, as this helps strengthen among Muslim community. The spiritual goal reinforces one's submission to Allah through the beauty and bounty of Allah's creation (Hashim *et al.*). So, the teaching of Islam influences to enhance the tourism activities in Muslim countries. Bangladesh has huge opportunities to develop Islamic tourism for economic sustainability as well as fulfill the religious spirit. Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey have successfully adopted the Islamic tourism and were able to attract more tourist effectively.

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