



INBOUND TOURISM

The economic boost Bangladesh keeps ignoring

Frequently referred to as the "land of rivers", Bangladesh is interwoven by over 700 rivers and produces breathtaking views, as well as an ecology that sustains a thriving biodiversity. If you leave the natural beauty aside though, then there is the abundance of historical sites, a cultural legacy and all that translates to

country might have the opportunity to make its tourist industry a significant economic pillar.

WHY IS INBOUND TOURISM SO IMPORTANT?

Inbound tourism acts as a critical catalyst for economic growth across the world. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) claims that the global tourism industry was able to accomplish a staggering USD 9.9 trillion, which is equivalent to 9.1 per cent of the global GDP, in the year of 2023. This portrays how the travelling and the tourism industry can stimulate local economies, create new jobs, and improve the standard of living.

Bangladesh has a lot of opportunities, but for some reason, this is not fully utilised. In 2022, more than 529,000 foreign travellers entered Bangladesh, which is a sign of gradual improvement following the COVID-19 pandemic. This number, however, pales in comparison to countries like India that hosted over 17 million international tourists in 2019.

Tourism makes up around 3.4 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP, according to Bangladesh Tourism Corporation, which is far less than the average 10 per cent that the rest of the world enjoys, and heavily suggests

untapped development opportunity.

Numerous aspects of the economy are directly impacted by inbound tourism. Jobs in a variety of industries, like retail, food services, transportation, and hospitality, are facilitated by tourism.

Bangladesh may experience substantial employment with a growing tourist industry, especially in its rural or underdeveloped areas. Inbound tourists also contribute significant foreign currency to the economy, bolstering national reserves and promoting trade. Beyond this, tourism also enhances Bangladesh's reputation outside by showcasing the country's beauty, history, and legacy, and promoting international ties.

SUCCESS STORIES ACROSS THE BORDER

You do not have to look far to understand the contribution that inbound tourism makes to a nation.

Thailand, for example, which was previously ranked as a low-income country, became a star in the tourism industry by marketing its world-class beaches, heritage, and local experiences. It earned around 11 per cent of its GDP from tourism in 2019, which welcomed 39.8 million tourists. Thailand's success is in its ability to provide a range of experiences at various price points, while promoting itself as a safe and unique travel destination.

"Bangladesh has similar potential," states Shehrina Wahid, Director Public Relations at Amari Dhaka Hotel, a renowned five-star hotel in the capital.

"We have been ineffective at promoting our beautiful country. If we could do proper promotions, especially with spots like Cox's Bazar, Saint Martin's Island, the Sundarbans, and all other lesser known but equally beautiful sites, we have the potential to become global attractions. We think these places are quite well-known, but that's mostly locally, and many foreigners remain unaware of them, and this needs to change," she adds.

NECESSARY BUILDING BLOCKS

Any tourism sector relies heavily on dependable and effective infrastructure. For Bangladesh, this means spending money on utilities, lodging, and transportation. Our road and rail connections to popular tourist destinations are also lacking. Although, recent projects like the railway line that connects Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, and the Padma Bridge, are encouraging initiatives. Travel for foreign tourists can be made easier by growing these networks and enhancing airport amenities, especially at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

While major centres such as Dhaka and Chattogram have luxury hotels, tourist

destinations that are further out of these developed zones frequently lack quality lodging. It's possible to accommodate a range of travellers' tastes by promoting investments in eco-resorts, budget accommodations, and even homestays.

"Five-star hotels like Amari Dhaka can organise any kind of tour for our foreign guests to visit any tourist destination within Dhaka, so that they can actually enjoy their stay," says Shehrina Wahid. "These guests come here for work on month-long, sometimes yearly contracts, and they soon exhaust their destination options. They frequently express interest in venturing outside the capital. Improving infrastructure, and more importantly, safety at out-of-city destinations would allow us to perhaps, partner with agencies and offer more comprehensive tourism experiences."

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unrealised tourism potential. But even with all its charm, Bangladesh does not draw nearly as many foreign visitors as its neighbours in South Asia.

Increasing inbound tourism just might unlock a catalyst for global awareness, cultural interchange, and storming economic progress. With careful planning and teamwork, the



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