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Travel and tourism competitiveness: Strategies for BD

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Bangladesh has an invigorating mix of mind-blowing scenic beauty, fascinating history, vibrant cultural heritages, archaeological remains, the largest sandy sea beach, unique mangrove, wildlife, flora, fauna and especially the warmth of the people that can attract tourists. Although Bangladesh has some unique associations to provide better life experiences to tourists, the country has not positioned itself well as a perfect tourist destination in the mind of tourists all over the world till now. In The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Ranking, 2015, Bangladesh has ranked 127th by obtaining 2.9 points among 141 countries of the world. In Southeast and Southern Asia region it has ranked 22nd. Why is our position in Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index poor, although we have unique and competitive brand associations in the tourism sector compared to other countries, especially our neighbours India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal and others? There are some issues like improper business environment, lack of safety and security, shortage of health and hygienic products and being outdated in ICT readiness that have been obstructing the sector from achieving its goal. The competitiveness index is determined on the basis of some pillars. In this article we have tried to analyse those pillars' current situation in the context of Bangladesh compared to the countries in Southeast and Southern Asia region on the basis of the report of Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index Ranking-2015. To improve the competitiveness in global market and occupy a good position in the tourists' mind the author has tried to set some strategies.



Natural environment, natural resources and natural beauty are the core elements of tourism.

Business environment is the first pillar which can facilitate the growth of travel and tourism industry positively. Business environment consists of some factors like institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability and health and primary education. Demand conditions, factor conditions (land, labour, capital, and resources), related and supporting industries, structure and rivalry affect the business environment. Business environment in our country is not suitable because of inadequate infrastructure, corruption, inefficient government bureaucracy, policy instability, burdensome import procedure and inadequately skilled manpower. According to the report of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index-2015, Bangladesh has achieved 4.06 points for the business environment, whereas Singapore has achieved 6.13 and the standard deviation is 0.72. In air transport, ground and port, and tourist services infrastructure Bangladesh has scored 1.87, 3.29 and 2.32 respectively whereas standard deviations are 1.09, 1.03 and 1.06. Bangladesh can create a proper business environment by ensuring adequate infrastructure, developing air and transport system and tourist support services like hotels, restaurants and transportation. The burdensome import procedure should be minimised by reducing tariff in the category of tourist support products. An intensive training programme should be implemented for creating skilled manpower. Corruption in business procedures must be eliminated to create a favourable business environment.

Secondly the safety and security issue is another pivotal pillar for creating a competitive advantage in tourism industry. In 21st century safety and security issues have become one of the most indispensable conditions for travel and tourism. Security and safety in tourism industry refer to the safety of a tourist's personal life, his property and free movement during his stay and departure from the destination. A global study conducted on visitors by CNN in 2013 has showed that 67 per cent visitors were worried about safety and security rather than its cost and reputation. Unfortunately it was a great threat for Bangladesh tourism industry, when several countries announced Bangladesh a risky tourist destination and issued Red Alert for their citizens and residents over visit to Bangladesh in 2015. Bangladesh has lost its credibility to foreign tourists over the safety and security issues. In 2014 and 2015 various political unrests, strikes, attacks on foreigners occurred that might have affected the tourism industry badly in Bangladesh. In safety and security category Bangladesh has achieved 4.43 whereas Singapore has achieved the highest value of 6.40 and the standard deviation is 0.98. Bangladesh needs to be alert and has a good preparation in the face of more uncertain events in future. The supreme precedence should be set to the safety and security of tourists. Public awareness, community involvement and participation should be enhanced rather than only organizing tourist police. Sense of community ownership should be established. In tourism planning local people should be involved and they have to be informed properly about the value of tourism resources and development. If local people can properly understand the benefits from tourist activities, they will look after the tourists and the tourist attractions. Finally local people should be involved in their own areas to ensure the safety and security of tourists.

Thirdly, in the travel and tourism competitiveness index the health and hygiene factor acts as an important dimension. Simply hygiene refers to conditions and practices that help maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases. Tourists consider health and hygiene factors before making choice of destination. Quality of health care services, medical facilities, treatment of different diseases, and availability of hygienic foods, sustainability of environment, environmental degradation and pollution affect the decision of tourists. Bangladesh has achieved 4.29 in health

and hygiene dimension whereas Singapore has achieved the highest value of 5.44 and the standard deviation is 0.44. The tourism authority should take some initiatives to manage the environmental degradation by establishing recycling plants for non-biodegradable garbage at all tourist spots. Health care services and medical facilities should be developed at important tourist spots.

Fourthly natural and cultural resources of a country have a significant impact on tourists' decision to visit a destination. It should be recognised that the nature is a central element of the tourist experience. Natural environment, natural resources and natural beauty are the core element of tourism. Bangladesh has marvelous scenic beauty in every corner of the country that can be used as a strategic tool for branding. Protection of natural resources, wildlife, plants, flora, fauna and use of renewable resources are a precondition for sustainable ecotourism.

It is needed to give priority to socio-cultural issues and historical (mosques and monasteries), archaeological (castles, caves, bridges and museums) and folkloric values of the community. Protection of local and conventional culture (wood and stone architecture), social security and peace has to be ensured. Respects to local culture, customs, beliefs, norms and privacy can eliminate the conflict in tourism. Gastronomy of any locality has to be sustained. Only rules and regulations, laws are not enough to protect natural resources and cultural values. They can be protected by increasing community involvement, awareness and participation. In natural resources and cultural resources dimensions Bangladesh has accomplished 2.30 and 1.56 respectively. In natural resources dimension Thailand has obtained the highest score of 4.47 whereas the standard deviation is 0.77. On the other hand, in the cultural resources pillar India obtained the highest score of 5.09 where the standard deviation is 1.09.

Finally technology and innovation play a good role in choosing a tourist destination. Recently Bangladesh has done well in promoting the use of ICT. In Bangladesh the latest technologies are somewhat available but it's not satisfactory. In the pillar of technology and innovation Bangladesh has achieved 2.70 whereas Singapore has achieved the highest value of 5.98 and the standard deviation is 1.04. To attract tourists from abroad we have to ensure a fast information system on the internet, electronic banking system and electronic visa. Access of all citizens to ICT should be achieved by bringing in new technology through FDI. Implementation of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and an intelligent guidance system will help develop sustainable development of ecotourism. A virtual social network should be used in Bangladesh for rapid expansion of travel and tourism.

By ensuring a favourable business environment, safety and security, offering hygienic products, protecting natural and cultural resources and finally adopting innovative technology Bangladesh can create a good position and brighten its image in the travel and tourism industry.

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