CHAPTER SIX

Suggestions for Reforms and Improvements of the Tourism Industry in Bangladesh

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This chapter proposes some suggestions for reforms and improvements of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. These will also provide guidelines to help formulate effective marketing strategies and attain better marketing performance of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. The following are the proposed suggestions in this regard:

6.1. Better Understanding of Marketing Principles and Techniques

A business firm or an industry cannot expect optimum success in the marketing activities until its personnel have perfect understanding of the marketing mix, concepts, principles and techniques and their uses. Especially, they should gain knowledge to develop balanced and workable marketing mix strategies for the firms concerned. Therefore, in developing right marketing strategies and attaining optimum marketing performance of the tourism industry in Bangladesh, the concerned executives of the BPC, the private tour operators, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, hotels and other tourism firms have to have better understanding of marketing principles and techniques and apply those properly. Only with such understanding, people can identify the needs and wants of the visiting and potential tourists and apply right marketing strategies to satisfy these needs. It can also help motivate the tourists to visit Bangladesh, increase their length of stay and visit more places and thus attain better marketing performance of the industry.

6.2. Development of the Infrastructure

An improved infrastructure is the key to the development of tourism activities in a destination country. The Government should initiate some ambitious projects to develop the highways, railways and airways to connect Dhaka with Kuakata and the Sundarbans and facilitate comfortable movements of the tourists. The Government’s projects should also include steps to improve and establish mooring and departure point facilities (Jetty) on the river sides and construct bridges with a view to achieve the same objectives. The airlines and other ground level transport
sectors should maintain a time schedule and punctuality in their services. ZIA should be developed in such a way that it can act as a regional hub for the airlines’ movements and connect the tourists’ journey from Dhaka to other neighbouring countries like India, Burma, Bhutan, Tibet, etc easily and conveniently. This should also provide an opportunity to the foreign tourists to include Bangladesh as a stopover destination in their South Asian itineraries. Besides, the government should also provide efficient tele-communication systems, uninterrupted electricity supply and enough accommodation facilities in the destination areas. All these would help develop the acceptability of the tourism arrangements in Bangladesh to the present and potential visitors. A seaport may also be established in between or near Kuakata sea beach and the Sundarbans. This would help increase the tourists’ movements there and improve the economic, social and cultural mobility of the adjacent areas.

6.3. Increasing the Offers and Widening the Extent of Services

Bangladesh tourism industry should increase the number of offers and widen the extent of its services. BPC or the concerned ministry should establish some artificial spots with lakes, boating arrangements, angling facilities, swimming pools, gardens and shopping centres in some suitable places of the country. They should also take initiatives to develop certain physical features at Kuakata and the Sundarbans areas to meet the recreational needs of the tourists. These may include golf course grounds, amusement parks, museums and accommodations. If these things and facilities are made available to the tourists, Bangladesh can then attract more foreign tourists from some particular market segments.

6.4. Improving and Controlling the Quality of Products and Services

The tourism industry in Bangladesh must offer attractive, unique and competitive products and services for the foreign tourists. It should offer services of
such quality as would meet the needs and expectations of the visiting foreign tourists. Therefore, all the firms engaged at different levels of the industry should emphasize to offer quality services that fit to the expectations of the market and also introduce new ones to ensure market acceptability. For this, the service providers should continually examine their services to ensure whether the quality of the services is in accordance with the needs and expectations of the market. Improvement of existing products/services and development of new ones in this process would help meet the needs and expectations of the visiting tourists. The respondent tourists were asked to suggest ‘which products/services and how those products/services should be improved and new ones be introduced/developed?’ Most of them emphasized the creation of new attractions, making of plenty of things available to see and/or do, making of quality and hygienic food available, arrangement of entertainment facilities and improvement of accessibility to the destinations. Some of them also emphasized the development of tourism components based on nature, the traditions, the rivers and the villages.

The Government of Bangladesh should also come forward to control the quality of the tourism products and services. As the national tourism organization as well as the attractions in Bangladesh is under the ownership and maintenance of the government, it is only the government who is responsible for effectively controlling the quality of tourism services in Bangladesh.

6.5. Reorganizing the Package Tours and Cruise Programmes

Package tours and cruise programmes should be reorganized to include new sights and/or places. Emphasis should be given on developing some shorter (two to six hours long) and daylong city tours and cruise programmes for both the short-stay and the stopover visitors. All the tour programmes should include a balanced number of days and offers that may meet the needs of both the regular and the stopover visitors. These tour programmes should be supported by drinks (both hot
and soft), foods (packed or set-up) and toilet facilities. Experienced guides should also accompany by the tours to explain the significance of the respective sights/destinations. At least two to three cruise vessels should be made available at each of the Buriganga River, Cox’s Bazar and Kuakata sea-beach and the Sundarbans destinations. These destinations are the heaven-places for the river and sea-cruise and excursion programmes that can attract a large number of foreign visitors.

6.6. Establishing More Economy Hotels in the Destination Areas

BPC as well as the private entrepreneurs should establish more economy hotels with restaurant facilities in the destination areas. Emphasis should be given to establish medium quality hotels at some important areas (e.g., Cox’s Bazar, Sylhet, Kuakata and the Sundarbans) having tourism significance to cater for the needs and expectations of the tourists. For this, GOB should formulate policies and take measures to motivate them in this regard.

6.7. Arrangement of Cultural Programmes

More hall rooms should be established in some cities (like Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal), tourist spots and other public places where regular cultural programmes, dramas, musical shows, dance parties, etc will be arranged. Live arts like dances and musics of both the traditional Bengali artists and the tribes should be arranged at the important destinations of the country.

6.8. Conservation of the Tourism Components for Future

Necessary actions should be taken to protect the historical relics, cultural and archaeological sights, ancient buildings, monuments and the sights of natural importance from physical deterioration. At the same time, the cultural values of the country should also be conserved as the tourism assets for the future generations.
6.9. Establishment of Efficient Channel of Collection Network

The tourism industry in Bangladesh should establish an efficient channel of collection network. For this, efficient services from the channel members and country-wide reservation for travel tickets, hotel rooms, package tours, cruise programmes, etc are necessary for comfortable tours of the tourists and optimum performance of the industry.

6.10. Building and Maintaining Relationships among the Providers

The service providers of the tourism industry in Bangladesh should extend their horizons well beyond the traditional channels of collection and pay importance on building and maintaining relationships with the other providers of tourism services. For this, the big channel members and service providing firms should establish their branches or liaison offices in the important source countries and at all the destination areas in Bangladesh to ensure cooperation with other channel members and the service providers. To ensure better relationships, the service providers at different levels of the industry should also have some specific knowledge of the other sectors. These may include the types of tours offered by tour operators, availability and tariffs of accommodations, types of foods required for different market segments, timing and fares of different types of transports and availability of accompanying guides skilled in specific foreign languages. For this, they need to be supported by adequate information materials to help provide their services more efficiently and satisfy their customers properly. Moreover, all the firms of this industry should also introduce computer reservation and information facilities throughout their distribution networks.

6.11. Creation of Easy Accessibility to the Destinations

The tourism industry in Bangladesh should make the attractions, facilities and services accessible to the tourists. Because, tourists are not supposed to spend their money for a hazardous tour and get depressed of it. Therefore, an easy accessibility
to the attractions at the destinations should be created through developing convenient, comfortable and quick transports.

6.12. Opening a Separate Marketing Department in the BPC Office

In the short run, BPC should immediately open a separate marketing department with professionally skilled marketing personnel to plan and implement the marketing activities systematically and efficiently. This marketing department will formulate effective marketing policies and strategies, review them over time and implement them properly. In the long run, the marketing activities of the corporation should be passed over to the private sector organizations when a large number of private sector service providers will come up. At the same time, BPC’s accommodations, restaurants, tax-free shops, tourist plants and other installations should also be privatized and handed over to the genuine and professional service providers. These will relieve the BPC from its present work loads of dual responsibilities of developing tourism in Bangladesh and marketing of tourism services to both the national and the international tourists. All these will help make the marketing activities more successful and bring about better performance of the industry.

6.13. Setting Reasonable Prices for the Tourism Components

The tourism industry, like any other industry, should set reasonable prices for different components to be supplied to the tourists. Reasonable prices help attract especially the market segments from the students, the retired persons, the ethnic groups and the pleasure travellers. Reasonable prices also establish congenial relationships between the tourists and the marketers. For this, the service providers should estimate the costs of their services to be provided, determine the effects of price levels on tourists inflow, know the competitive price offers of the neighbouring countries, decide on the discounting needs where supply remains underutilized and ascertain the profitability of their firms. By analyzing those
aspects, the firms should set reasonable prices for their services. The prices thus set by the service providers are most likely to ensure better performance of their firms and good value for the money to be spent by the tourists.

6.14. Performing the Marketing Activities at Minimum Possible Costs

Though Bangladesh is not an expensive tourist destination, the marketers should yet emphasize to perform their activities at minimum possible costs. Marketers can keep their costs minimum by avoiding wastage, saving unnecessary efforts and performing large scale operations. For example, the use of ‘on line’ computer system for the reservation of air and train tickets, booking of hotel rooms and confirmation of package tours or cruise programmes of the tour operators can save both efforts and costs which again help set lower prices. However, attention should be given to the profitability of pricing instead of merely attracting increased number of tourists.

6.15. Price Sensitivity of the Market should be Considered

The marketing managers or the concerned commercial managers of the firms involved in marketing tourism products and services in Bangladesh should first determine accurately the extent of price sensitivity of different market segments. They should then proceed on to decide the prices to be charged. For example, business tourists are less price sensitive and, hence, relatively higher price their visits to Bangladesh. On the other hand, low price but economy class, quantity discount, seasonal price reduction and other promotional pricing may be appropriate strategies to attract the price sensitive segments including ethnic groups, teenagers, college students and retired persons in visiting Bangladesh. Such promotional pricing, especially in the off-seasons, may be appealing to attract the customers. Therefore, price discounts and other sales promotion benefits should also be offered.
6.16. Prices should be Competitive with the Neighbouring Countries

While pricing the products or services, the tourism firms in Bangladesh should closely observe and follow the rates prevailing in the neighbouring destination countries to make their prices competitive. Because, price awareness among the tourist-customers is growing and price competition among the marketers is increasing day by day.

6.17. Price Control and Maintenance by the Government

The GOB and the BPC should control those elements which directly or indirectly influence the prices of the tourism products and services. They should manipulate those elements through regulatory, fiscal, monetary and motivational measures. For example, the government can keep the landing, navigation and refuelling charges for the airlines at minimum, sanction credits to tourism firms at low interest rates and reduce their tax burdens. These measures will influence capital costs, keep the government’s charges low, decrease operational costs and encourage greater use or larger consumption of the tourism products and services. The Government can also introduce 'price maintenance or set prices' for certain categories of hotels to make their rents/tariffs reasonable and competitive.

6.18. Emphasis on Short-run Cash Flow and Profitability

Tourist market is volatile in nature. Therefore, the marketers of every units of the industry should emphasize short run cash flow and profitability for better performance. That is, a room selling at a discount rate is better than keeping it vacant. Therefore, the key marketing personnel of the tourism firms in Bangladesh should make prompt but wise decisions in such respects.

6.19. Use of Meters by Autorickshaws and Taxis

Ground level transports, especially, autorickshaws and taxis do not use any meter to compute exact fare. The Government should take measures to make it
mandatory in using meter by the autorickshaws and taxis for the estimation of accurate fare. This will help prevent cheating the foreign tourists by the drivers of autorickshaws and taxis.

6.20. Designing the Promotion Plans Aiming at Benefits Sought by the Tourists

For the successful operation of the promotion campaigns, the tourism industry in Bangladesh should identify the target market and the benefits sought by them. Understanding of what benefits are sought by the different market segments becomes necessary for developing its successful promotion plans. The industry should also consider its priority and objectives while deciding on utilizing one or more appropriate element(s) of the promotion mix.

6.21. Advertising in Some Specific Printed Media

At the present state of the infrastructure, tourism arrangements and resource capability, TV advertisements in the international channels to promote Bangladesh’s tourism are not viable though may be successful. If Bangladesh tourism industry wants to attract more foreign tourists, it may at best advertise in some specific travel guides, magazines and specialized professional journals that the potential tourists, overseas tour operators, travel agents and travel writers read. These advertisements should target at specific market segments and channel members in some source countries rather than for the discriminate coverage. Themes and appeals in those advertisements should be focused on some basic elements. These may include natural beauty, sea beaches, sea and river cruises, village tourism, colourful tribal lives, etc. Mangrove forests, wild lives, parks and gardens, man-made lakes, historical places, cultural heritages, monuments, sanctuaries and low cost opportunities should also be emphasized there.

As Bangladesh has resource constraints and can spend a limited amount for direct-to-consumer advertising it should emphasize push communication strategy. Here, tourism firms will promote their services to the tour operators (both of home and abroad) and the tour operators will promote those services to the travel agents (again, both of home and abroad) and the travel agents in turn will promote those to the potential tourists.

6.23. Production and Distribution of the Printed Promotion Materials

Tourist customers cannot see or touch the tourism products/services of the destination country physically. Therefore, they want to understand the nature and level of quality of the intangible tourism components through evaluating the tangibles available in the glossy brochures, souvenirs, magazines, guides, hand books, posters, folders, photographic materials, view cards and other collateral materials. The tourism marketers in Bangladesh, therefore, should produce attractive and comprehensive printed promotion materials to present, transpose and explain the nature, benefits and features of the tourism arrangements in the country. All these should be published in English and other market-based languages. These promotion materials should convey a general appeal to all market segments and try to improve the general image and highlight the comparative benefits of Bangladesh as a tourist destination. These materials must be reached adequately to the right distribution points, i.e., to the tour operators and travel agents in the source countries, Biman’s overseas offices and Bangladesh diplomatic mission offices. Measures should be taken to ensure that these organizations/offices distribute those printed materials properly among the prospective foreign tourists. At the arrival lounge of ZIA, BPC should establish an information counter/centre which will provide oral information and distribute these printed materials to the visitors as well as stop-over passengers.
6.24. Opening Branches and Information Counters in the Source Countries

BPC should establish its own branch offices in some major tourist generating countries. At the same time, BPC should initially take lease of or hire some spaces in Biman’s overseas offices to open up information counters with single desk and storage facilities (for promotion materials). Since the overseas offices of Biman in many countries are well located, it should not attempt to use Bangladesh mission offices which are often in places where the travel agencies are not located. These offices and information counters will perform the responsibility of distributing information materials, motivating the prospective tourists and keeping liaison with the channel members and other tourism organizations. These offices will also provide necessary materials and information to the journalists, professional travel writers, academicians etc and motivate them to write informative articles featuring Bangladesh’s tourism in newspapers, travel magazines and professional journals of their countries.

6.25. Implementing Motivational Programmes

BPC and other service providers should take necessary measures to motivate the executives of Bangladesh mission offices abroad, Biman’s overseas offices, foreign tour operators and travel agents in the source countries to stimulate the prospective tourists through WOM communication. BPC, Biman, TOs, TAs and other service providers should launch programmes so that visitors themselves get motivated to influence their friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbours, etc about the attractiveness of Bangladesh’s tourism, quality of services and friendliness of the people. For this, BPC as well as the government should implement motivational programmes to stimulate the executives of the above firms/offices and overseas channel members and make them acted as a personal source of information for the potential tourists. Of course, the effectiveness of WOM communication depends upon the ability and willingness of the spokespersons and endorsers. Necessary motivational measures should also be taken to get coverage on Bangladesh’s
tourism in the international media. For this, more public relation efforts should also be made to ensure media attention in highlighting tourism destinations and activities in Bangladesh.

6.26. Allowing More Discounts and Offering Other Incentives

More off-season discounts in the form of group tour discounts, student concessions, SAARC tour rebates, etc should be allowed to attract more tourists. All the sectors should also offer some other incentives like free/extra services, gifts, raffle-draws (in the cruise ships), dance parties, TV facilities (in the hotel rooms, cruise vessels and bus/micro-bus), etc. BPC, with the help of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, should arrange more free orientation trips to Bangladesh for the travel writers, tour operators and travel agents of the important source countries.

6.27. Removal of Misperceptions and Enhancement of the Image

For a service industry like tourism, enhancing the perceived image of the destination country is essential to attract a large number of foreign tourists there. A positive image can help influence the foreign tourists to visit the country and increase their length of stay during their visits. Bangladesh, as a tourist destination, does not currently enjoy a good image. Rather, the potential foreign tourists currently hold misperceptions about Bangladesh as a tourist destination (as noted in Chapter Five). Of course, while the tourists come to visit Bangladesh, they are found to get fair impression of the country and thus their perceived image is changed. Therefore, necessary marketing techniques should be adopted to remove the perceived negative image of and misperceptions about Bangladesh before the arrival of the tourists here. A positive image can be created and misperceptions can be removed through promotional measures and public relations. As more advertisements through international TV channels to create greater tourism awareness and improve image of Bangladesh are not possible due to the resource constraints, it can be advised to print and distribute suitable glossy information
materials at this stage. Presentation of the audio-visual films already prepared by the BPC among the potential markets will be of considerable importance in removing misperceptions about and enhancing the image of Bangladesh. It also requires cooperative efforts of the concerned ministry, the BPC, the tour operators and the travel agents of both home and abroad to publicize and propagate our tourism arrangements. Moreover, the local authorities should also try to create positive perceptions about and a strong image of their own regional destinations.

6.28. Professional Efficiency of the Service Providers

The people engaged in different firms of the tourism industry play a vital role to satisfy the visitors and, hence, they should be professionally efficient. Especially, the telephone operators of the information counters, the guides of the tour operators, the employees of the travel agents, the receptionists of the inquiry counters, the taxi drivers, the hotel boys, the waiters of the restaurants, the accompanying guides, etc always come into contact with the tourist customers. Therefore, they should be professionally efficient to present their services in a way that the tourists get a good impression as well as satisfaction of the same. Tourists want the maximum value of their money and the highest level of pleasure/satisfaction. Only these people can ensure rightly the maximum value of money to be spent by the tourists and the highest level of pleasure within the available time frame. Sufficient training is required to ensure the delivery of friendly and polite customer-contacts as well as to make the tourist guests happy and satisfied. Therefore, BPC should launch intensive training programmes which will develop the professional ability of the service providers and sales staff as well as equip them to ensure their understanding and ability of the service-process. Intensive training courses in foreign languages, especially, in English should also be conducted to develop communication skills of the above mentioned employees and executives. It should be remembered that an efficient provider can even create greater dissatisfaction among the guests due to his/her insincerity and negligence.
6.29. Priority of the Tourism Sector in the National Development Plans

Having divergent significance of tourism, the industry may reasonably claim the foremost importance in the national annual budgets, development projects and five years' plans. The point to remember here is that if such a prospective sector like tourism continues to be ignored, then nobody should blame the industry for failing to make any substantial achievement. Therefore, GOB should give enough financial supports to the BPC with a view to develop more new projects, renovate the old ones, carry out promotion activities and improve the image of the country.

6.30. Encouraging More Private Investment in the Tourism Sector

Private sector investment in the tourism industry of Bangladesh should be encouraged through formulating liberal government policies, granting loans on easy terms, allowing tax holidays and providing physical facilities. The participation of an adequate number of private sector investors from home and abroad can ensure a smooth development of this industry. The joint efforts of both the government and the private sectors will help capture an optimum share of the global tourist market.

In line, the tourism industry in Bangladesh should undertake an integrated effort for maximum satisfaction of the tourists and better performance of the industry. As the industry consists of multi-dimensional activities and services, the services of a single dedicated sector or organization or a special group of efficient providers cannot ensure the total satisfaction of the tourists and complete success of the industry. Therefore, coordinated efforts among the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, the BPC, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the tour operators, the travel agents, hotels, the other providers, the local authority and the host population are needed to ensure effective marketing practices, maximum satisfaction of the visitors and better performance of the industry.