



The Importance of Cultural Heritage Sites in Bangladesh from Tourism

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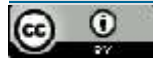
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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is very rich in cultural heritage sites that have a huge impact on the tourism sector, highlighting their potential to attract tourists and drive economic growth. Employing a mixed-methods research design, this analysis integrates quantitative data on visitor numbers and economic contributions with qualitative insights from interviews with tourism professionals and local community members. The results reveal that iconic sites such as Sonargaon, Moinamoti, and Nagaon Bouddobihar not only draw significant tourist attention but also play a critical role in the cultural and economic landscape of Bangladesh. The preservation of these sites is linked to increased tourist engagement and spending, underscoring the need for effective conservation strategies. The research underscores the importance of enhancing infrastructural and informational resources to improve tourist experiences and sustain the benefits of heritage tourism. This paper provides valuable implications for stakeholders in the development of tourism policies and offers a foundation for future research in heritage tourism dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has made the world more interconnected, facilitating easier and often more affordable travel. Increased global interactions have spurred interest in cultural exchange and the exploration of new destinations, thus broadening the tourism market. Innovations in technology have revolutionized travel as well. Online booking platforms, virtual tours, and mobile applications have made it easier for travelers to plan and book trips. Enhanced transportation technologies have also reduced travel time and cost, making remote destinations more accessible. Cultural heritage sites make up the most vital part of tourism. While people are travelling to be able to know history, they usually visit these places.

In recent years in Bangladesh, the tourism sector has witnessed significant growth, driven by strategic initiatives, promotional campaigns, and investments in tourism infrastructure. This growth underscores the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to successful tourism development.

To study the impact of cultural heritage sites on tourism in Bangladesh, a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods is recommended. Qualitative methods, such as interviews with tourism stakeholders, focus groups with visitors, and observational studies at heritage sites, provide rich, contextual insights into visitor experiences, perceptions, and cultural values. Quantitative methods, including surveys, statistical analysis of visitor numbers, and economic impact assessments, offer numerical data on visitor demographics, spending patterns, and tourism trends. Several research approaches can be employed to explore the relationship between cultural heritage sites and tourism development: Comparing the tourism impact of different cultural heritage sites within Bangladesh or with international sites can highlight best practices and areas for improvement. Involving local communities, government agencies, and tourism organizations in the research process fosters collaboration and ensures diverse perspectives are considered.

Conducting longitudinal studies over time can track changes in visitor behavior, site management strategies, and tourism policies, providing valuable insights into trends and impacts. Analyzing specific cultural heritage sites as case studies allows for in-depth examination of their tourism potential, challenges faced, and successful strategies implemented.

Analyzing qualitative data such as interviews, focus group discussions, and archival documents to identify themes, patterns, and emerging issues related to tourism at cultural heritage sites. Employing statistical methods to analyze quantitative data, such as regression analysis to assess the relationship between visitor demographics and spending patterns, or economic impact modeling to estimate the contribution of heritage tourism to the economy. Using GIS tools to map visitor flows, site accessibility, and infrastructure development around cultural heritage sites, aiding in spatial analysis and decision-making for tourism planning and management.

Bangladesh, as a developing country in the tourism sector, is actively engaged in enhancing its appeal as a premier tourist destination. Under the

leadership of Prime Minister Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the government has adopted numerous policies aimed at bolstering tourism, focusing particularly on the preservation of its rich cultural heritage. These initiatives include legislative reforms to simplify visa processes, improve tourism infrastructure, and promote international collaborations. Central to these efforts is the commitment to the conservation of cultural heritage sites, which are pivotal in attracting tourists and fostering a deeper understanding of Bangladesh's historical and cultural landscape. The government's acceptance of the "Bangladeshi Tourism Development Concept for 2019-2025" signifies a significant step towards enhancing tourism infrastructure, preserving cultural heritage, and catalyzing economic growth in the sector.

According to a report of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation on "implementing measures the management, preservation, and protection of cultural heritage objects", as of now, a total of 450 physical cultural heritage objects have been placed under state protection across the Republic. In conclusion, this thesis aims to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in Bangladesh by addressing key challenges faced by cultural heritage sites. Through research, analysis, and actionable recommendations, the goal is to enhance cultural heritage management practices, promote responsible tourism, and ensure the long-term preservation and economic vitality of Bangladesh's invaluable cultural assets.

Heritage sites act as magnets for tourists, drawing visitors from around the world and boosting the tourism industry of the host country. Tourism to heritage sites generates significant revenue through accommodation, dining, transportation, guided tours, souvenir sales, and related services, contributing to local economies.

The tourism sector creates employment opportunities, directly and indirectly, in areas such as hospitality, tour guiding, transportation, handicrafts, and preservation efforts. This facilitates cultural exchange and understanding between visitors and local communities, fostering mutual respect and appreciation for diverse cultures.

According to the Tourism Board of the Republic of Bangladesh on Tourism Development, Dhaka recorded over 0.3 million tourist arrivals in 2019, showcasing a consistent upward trend in visitor numbers. The tourism sector in Dhaka & Narayanganj contributed approximately \$5 million to the local economy in 2019, encompassing revenues from accommodations, dining, tours, and souvenir sales. Tourism to Dhaka and Narayanganj has led to the creation of thousands of jobs in various sectors, including hospitality, tour guiding, transportation, and artisanal crafts, providing livelihood opportunities for residents. The revenue generated from tourism has been instrumental in funding conservation and restoration projects in Dhaka, ensuring the upkeep and preservation of its historic landmarks and cultural heritage.

Visitors to Dhaka engage in cultural exchanges with local communities, experiencing Bangla traditions, cuisine, music, and crafts firsthand, leading to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the region's cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of tourism as a driver of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental progress is widely acknowledged across global economies, regardless of their developmental stages. Tourism's resilience amid economic fluctuations underscores its enduring value, with benefits extending beyond financial gains to encompass broader societal and environmental dimensions (Hooper, 2016). Over the past four decades, heritage has evolved from merely representing historical artifacts and cultural identity to playing a pivotal role in tourism development. The symbiotic relationship between heritage and tourism, while beneficial, also introduces complexities that necessitate nuanced management strategies (Hooper, 2016).

Dr. Butler is a leading authority in tourism studies, notably exploring the symbiotic relationship between tourism and cultural heritage. His seminal works, including "Heritage Tourism" and "Tourism and Cultural Change," intricately dissect the economic, social, and cultural impacts of heritage tourism. Through rigorous analysis, Dr. Butler illuminates the transformative potential of cultural heritage sites in shaping tourism landscapes worldwide. Heritage tourism encompasses both tangible and intangible cultural, historical, and natural assets, including architectural marvels, cultural festivities, culinary traditions, and linguistic heritage (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). This expanded definition of heritage acknowledges the diverse facets of human experience, from everyday life narratives to traditional occupations and cultural practices. Heritage tourism has emerged as the fastest-growing segment within the tourism industry, attracting a significant influx of visitors to cultural and historical sites worldwide. This sector is recognized for its potential in driving economic growth and alleviating poverty on a global scale (UNWTO, 2005).

Preserving and sustaining tangible and intangible heritage not only enriches communities but also contributes to the formation of individual and collective identities. However, managing heritage can also give rise to social complexities as it intersects with local communities' interests and aspirations (Silverman & Ruggles, 2007). The management of heritage sites is a multifaceted endeavor that intersects with issues of identity, cultural preservation, and community engagement. Effective heritage management entails aligning location-based values with sustainable practices, often under the stewardship of professional managers (Howard, 2003). The concept of heritage, rooted in notions of inheritance and legacy, underscores its intrinsic value to both individuals and communities (Howard, 2003). A stalwart in tourism management, Professor Dann's contributions pivot around effective strategies for managing and promoting cultural heritage sites as tourist destinations. His research illuminates the intricate web of factors influencing heritage site management, from stakeholder engagement to visitor experience enhancement, underscoring the pivotal role of strategic management in unlocking heritage tourism's potential.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, defines cultural heritage as comprising both tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible cultural heritage encompasses movable items like

sculptures, manuscripts, and coins, along with immovable assets such as archaeological sites and monuments, including underwater ruins and shipwrecks (UNESCO, 2017). This tangible heritage is characterized by its visible and easily recognizable physical properties, making it a vital means of communication and information transmission beyond direct interpersonal interactions, as noted by Foote (Salvatore, 2018). Referring specifically to monuments, UNESCO's Declaration Concerning Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003) underscores the cultural identity significance of heritage, emphasizing the adverse impact of its destruction on human dignity and rights (Silverman & Ruggles, 2007).

The protection of cultural heritage has been integral to the founding mission of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), an organization established post-World War II that unites museums and professionals in the field (Campens, 2020). Over seven decades, ICOM has focused on combating illicit cultural goods trafficking and safeguarding heritage during emergencies, leveraging technological advancements, robust policies, and ethical frameworks to fulfill its international heritage protection mandate, particularly in conflict-ridden scenarios (Murphy, 2016).

Bangladesh, a country rich in history and culture, boasts an impressive array of cultural heritage sites that reflect its storied past. Its history and culture are appreciated worldwide. Bangladesh became a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1998. In 2022, the World Society promotes international cooperation between state and public organizations, researchers, experts, scholars, the media sphere, and interested people in the field of preservation, study, and popularization of the cultural legacy of Uzbekistan in the context of the world cultural heritage.

"Legacy is a connection between our generations, between our society. This is exactly what needs to be passed on to other generations, it is something that needs to be shared with the world. This is a universal legacy that we see at the root of our history, and we must, therefore, make every effort to preserve that heritage. This will be important not only for Uzbekistan but for the entire world." Audrey Azoulay, director of General UNESCO

Bangladesh lies along the ancient Emperor, the historic trade route that connected the East and West India and Myanmar. This strategic location made it a melting pot of cultures, traditions, and religions, influencing the development of the region's unique architecture, art, and learning. Major heritage sites: Sonargaon, known as a crossroad of culture and trade, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on the Indian subcontinent. Major landmarks include the Ahsan Monjil and Lalbagh Kella. Sonargaon is over one millennium old and was a major center for Islamic rule and business. The historic center of Sonargaon is a UNESCO World Heritage site, famous for its well-preserved mosque, office, pond, madrasas, and bazaars.

Cumilla, an ancient city, thrives within historically intact old palace walls, with stunning examples of old architecture. It is renowned for its striking red-colored bricks and the Moti-Ark fortress.

Several of Bangladesh's cultural heritage sites have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This status not only recognizes their universal value but also contributes to their preservation and promotion.

Table. 1 Cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh

Site	Location	Area (acre)	Year
Historic Center of Lalbagh Kella	Dhaka City 40/10'N 63/40'E	216 (530)	1993
Historic Center of Ahsan Monjil	Dhaka City 38/50' N 66/50'E	240 (590)	2000
Fort of Sonargaon	Narayangonj City 41/20'N 61/0'E	37.5 (93)	1990
Cumilla - Moinamoti	Cumilla City 39/50'N 66/15'E	1.123 (2.770)	1890

Cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh are crucial to the country's tourism industry, attracting millions of visitors each year. These sites, such as the ancient city of Samarkand and the architectural complexes of Sonargaon, are central attractions that significantly contribute to the national economy. However, despite their appeal and potential for attracting tourists, these sites face numerous challenges that could undermine their ability to draw and satisfy visitors. The deterioration of heritage sites due to insufficient maintenance reduces their aesthetic and historical appeal, potentially leading to a decrease in visitor numbers. As the visual and historical integrity of these sites is essential for sustaining tourist interest and ensuring repeat visits. Excessive visitor numbers strain resources at popular sites like Lalbagh Kella, leading to a decrease in the quality of visitor experience, potential damage to the site itself, and a significant threat to the residents' quality of life. An advocate for sustainable tourism practices highlights the need for effective visitor management like toolkit which is used in Art Cites because it assists not only site managers to control tourism flows in heritages sites but also maintain the site's appeal and longevity.

Many heritage sites that are lesser-known lack the visibility and resources to attract tourists, missing out on the chance to contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, there is a growing concern that not all renovation works at cultural heritage sites are conducted with the necessary care or adherence to conservation standards, risking irreversible damage to these invaluable assets.

Apart from these, poor infrastructure around heritage sites also restricts access, making it difficult for tourists to visit and enjoy these locations. Qualities of roads, transportation, and accommodations are all important to facilitate

access and improve the overall tourist experience. The continued neglect of these issues poses risks not only to the preservation of heritage sites but also to their ability to attract and satisfy tourists, ultimately affecting the tourism sector and economic growth.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper methodology employed in investigating the importance of cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh for tourism, utilizing a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods integrate qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, providing a comprehensive analysis of complex phenomena. Historically, qualitative research has been utilized to explore in-depth experiences, meanings, and perceptions, while quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 The first survey was held to know what the most attractive places for people are. Where do tourists go during their visit? It was conveyed orally, and approximately 24 people participated in this questionnaire. It showed that the majority of the tourists come to Bangladesh to experience our religious or heritage sites, making for 63%, museum and theater came next with 14%. Landmarks, bazars and parks are the least visited places with 11%, 7%,5% respectively.

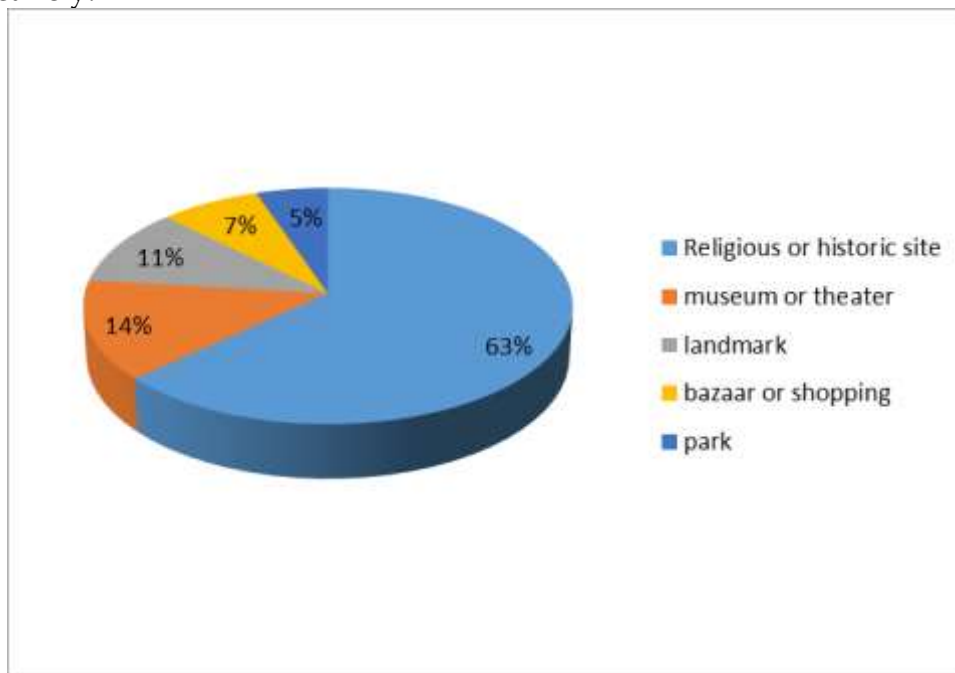


Figure 1. Source: Author owns Creation

Table-01: online and offline interviews were conducted. Respondents who came from different countries and residents: 10 women and 10 men between the ages of 20 and 45 took part in the study. A few of them continued to pursue various educational stages. Most of them were already working toward careers in

different fields. This survey was held to clarify what kind of people come and create opportunities according to their interests.

Table. 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Country	Educational qualification	Occupation
Terra	23	female	USA	Bachelor's degree	Exchange program teacher in UWED
Sunnat	23	male	Dhaka	Post-graduated	student
Nicola	35	female	Italy	PhD	historian
Michele	50	female	Italy	PhD	historian
Tim	55	male	USA	college	traveler
Alim	27	male	Narayangonj	Bachelor's degree	engineer
Camille	40	female	France	Master's degree	biologist
Alain	43	female	France	Master's degree	biologist
Bertha	53	female	Germany	DSC	historian

Table-02: An online survey was conducted with the help of Snap XMP. During the survey, respondents were asked their names, opinions about place, quality of infrastructure, and payment methods. In order not to waste people's time, I used Yes/No questions. Do you like or not?

Table. 2 Opinion Infrastructure and Payment

Names	Overall opinions about place.	Infrastructure	Payment methods
Kamal	Yes	No	Yes
William	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jameson	Yes	No	No
Bakhodir	Yes	No	Yes
Parker	Yes	Yes	No
James	No	Yes	Yes
Mohmmad	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sarah	Yes	No	No
Sojib	Yes	Yes	No
Karim	Yes	No	Yes

Figure 2: The Next poll was conducted to know people's frequency of travel to these sites. 30 people took part in the survey. The majority of respondents were first-timers from different countries who were into history.

Especially residents who come frequently, which means domestic tourism is developing year by year. When we asked them where they know about our country, they said that most famous travelers' blogs appeal them to visit here or their interests to history of Sonargaon.

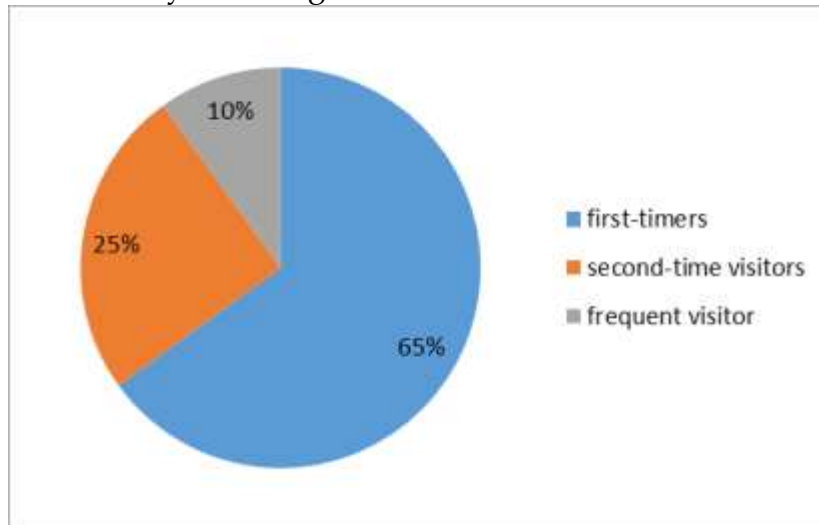


Figure. 2 The Next poll was conducted to know people's frequency of travel to these sites.

Figure 3: Next, we asked people to poll about the quality of sites by Google forms. 56 different-aged respondents of different ages participated and filled out the questionnaire. 30% of respondents said the quality of the sites is perfectly preserved, 35% said it is good. A few of them mentioned some drawbacks in conservation of these places.

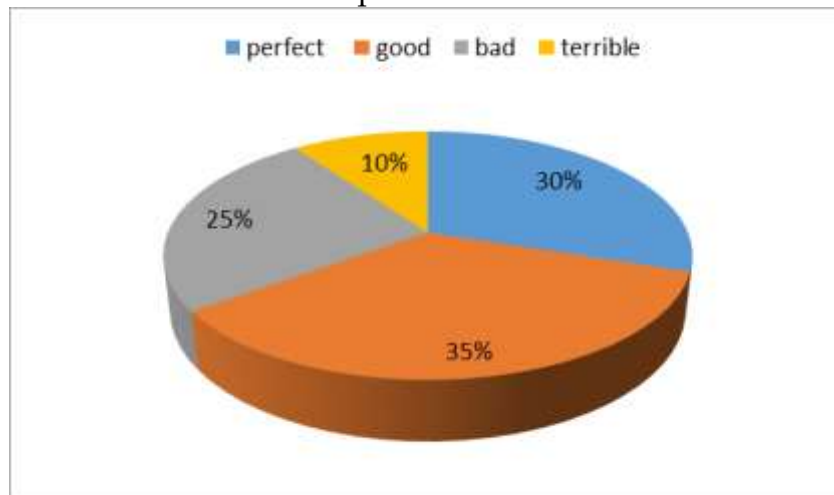


Figure. 3 poll about the quality of sites by Google forms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The value of cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh transcends their visual and historical allure. As demonstrated by the survey, these sites are invaluable economic assets that invigorate local economies and advocate for sustainable tourism practices. On a cultural level, they are repositories of tradition and history, providing enriching experiences for visitors and a source of

identity for local communities. To optimize these benefits, ongoing conservation efforts and judicious tourism management are imperative. Looking ahead, Bangladesh faces the challenge of balancing development with preservation to safeguard the legacy of its cultural heritage sites for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. Building upon the insights gained from this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance the importance of cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh for tourism: developing comprehensive conservation plans for heritage sites, integrating sustainable practices, risk management strategies, and adaptive reuse initiatives to ensure long-term preservation. Foster meaningful partnerships with local communities, indigenous groups, and cultural stakeholders to promote inclusive tourism planning, community-based tourism enterprises, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research on the importance of cultural heritage sites in Bangladesh should explore a broader range of destinations and include diverse stakeholders, such as local communities, government bodies, and private investors. Comparative studies between different heritage sites could provide deeper insights into how management strategies, conservation practices, and marketing approaches influence tourist engagement and site sustainability. Moreover, future investigations could integrate quantitative data—such as tourist arrivals, revenue generation, and preservation costs—with qualitative analyses of visitor experiences and cultural impacts. Another promising direction would be to assess the role of digital technologies, such as virtual tourism and augmented reality, in promoting and preserving cultural heritage. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, future studies can contribute to developing more sustainable and inclusive heritage tourism policies in Bangladesh.

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