

2-12-2024

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Recommended Citation

Kawsar, Md. Javed; Evans, Michael; and Khan, Rashed (2024) "Pilgrimage and Tourism Marketing Concepts, Prospects, and Challenges in two Developing Countries: Bangladesh and Ghana," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol12/iss2/10>

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Pilgrimage and Tourism Marketing Concepts, Prospects, and Challenges in two Developing Countries: Bangladesh and Ghana

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This contextual paper analyses the significance of pilgrimage and tourism marketing concepts, prospects, and challenges in two developing countries, Ghana in the West of Africa, and Bangladesh in the South of Asia. The focus of this study is to assess the present marketing and promotion of tourism in the two countries which are different in population size, economy, and tourism contribution towards each country's GDP.

Within the context of nature-based tourism initiatives in Bangladesh, it is imperative to measure future prospects of tourism marketing ventures related to pilgrimage. The development of marketing for tourism can be helpful for delivering stability to the volatile industry of a developing country. Subsequently, active marketing and advertising of tourism activities will allow Bangladesh to retain and increase their visitors. Moreover, religious tourism can explore new ways to foster tourists in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the growth in tourism marketing targeting international tourists to Ghana, appears to be less focused than marketing and promotion activities for domestic tourism. Effective marketing and promotion of domestic tourism attractions such as water sports, festivals, national parks and wildlife reserves could attract more visitors and increased employment and income stream for the proprietors of such attractions / venues. Furthermore, within this context, religious tourism is considered as a niche market with many new prospects for the future in Ghana.

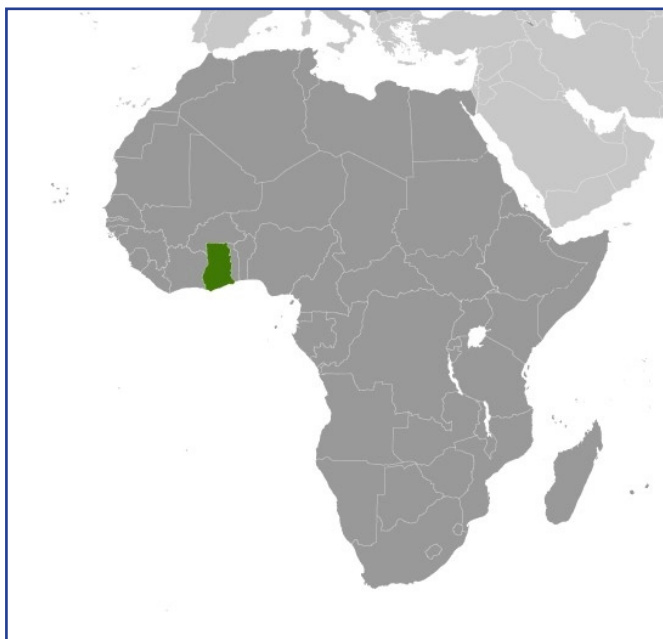
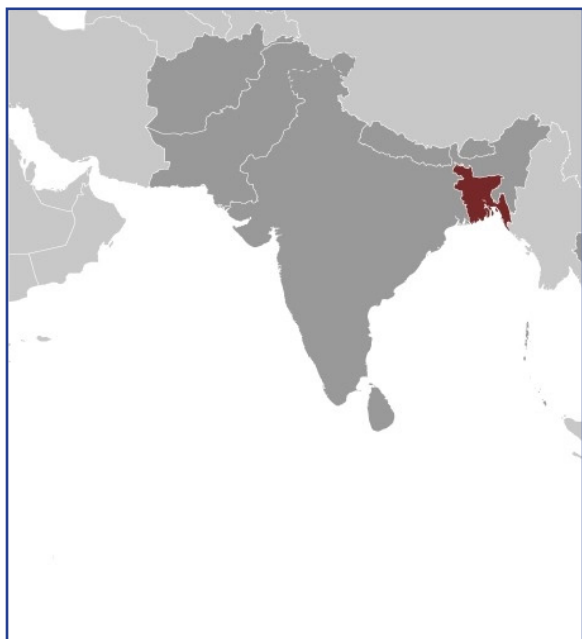
The study also aims to assess the challenges of the rise of new tourist sites within Bangladesh and Ghana's neighbouring countries, disintermediation in the distribution system, inadequate ICT infrastructure, changes in consumer behaviour, and fragmentation of the tourism industry, which are all contributing factors to the marketing difficulties that tourism practitioners in developing countries or emerging economies face. A management and marketing plan that is well coordinated is required to address these issues. The concept of smart destinations has emerged as a result of the development of new ICT concepts, including digital marketing, social media marketing, e-tourism, and virtual tourism. These will all be considered in this paper.

Key Words: religious tourism, pilgrimage, marketing, digital marketing, challenges, opportunities, Bangladesh, Ghana

Introduction

Tourism is a dynamic and rapidly evolving industry that has the potential to contribute significantly to a country's economic growth and development. Bangladesh, a land of natural beauty, rich culture, and warm hospitality, has been emerging as a promising destination for travellers seeking unique experiences. Bangladesh has been steadily

growing in recent years, as the country's natural beauty, cultural heritage and historical significance continues to attract both domestic and international travellers. While often overshadowed by its more renowned neighbours in South Asia, the country has been making significant strides in tourism sector. Despite these inherent advantages, the tourism industry in Bangladesh faces a myriad of challenges that have hindered its growth

Figure 1: Bangladesh Location Map (left) & Ghana Location Map (right)

(left) <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bangladesh/locator-map/>

(right) <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ghana/locator-map/>

and potential. The first part of this article explores the present prospects and the problems of the pilgrimage and religious tourism sectors in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is blessed with diverse natural landscapes, from the profuse green hills of Sylhet to the serene beaches of Cox's Bazar, which boasts the world's longest natural sea beach. The Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to Bengal tigers and a unique mangrove ecosystem. These natural wonders offer immense potential for eco-tourism and cultural tourism (Bhuiyan & Bhuiyan, 2023). Domestic tourism has been a lifeline for the tourism industry, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when international travels were restricted. Many Bangladeshis used this opportunity to explore their own country and support local businesses (Sufian & Hoque, 2023). This trend has encouraged the growth of community-based tourism and sustainable tourism practices, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are spread to remote areas (Roy & Roy, 2015).

The second part of this article explores the scenario of pilgrimage and religious tourism along with facets of conventional tourism. Based on literature research, Ghana's economy is being driven by international tourism, which has the potential to significantly improve

the country's balance of payments. Ghana has a wealth of cultural and natural attractions that draw tourists, including the UNESCO-listed colonial castles used during the slave trade in Ghana and other national, local heritage sites and parks and fauna reserves. Effective marketing and promotion of domestic tourism attractions such as water sports, festivals, national parks, and wildlife reserves using digital marketing tools could attract more visitors especially the youth, to contribute to increased employment and income stream for local proprietors of such attractions and venues.

The Ghana Ministry of Tourism's National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) for 2013-2027 provides a comprehensive analysis of the status of Ghana's tourism industry in terms of both foreign and domestic tourists, to maximise the industry's potential (Ministry of Tourism, 2012; Deichmann & Frempong, 2016). Therefore, it is vital that the industry is thoroughly investigated and well promoted and marketed. Besides the focus of attracting international tourists to Ghana, it is proposed that domestic tourism marketing campaigns should be ramped up to encourage Ghanaians to visit attractions at their doorstep for both leisure and educational purposes (Nofal *et al.*, 2020).

A country's national receipts and balance of payment from inbound tourism and domestic tourism, contributes significantly as a source of income in a country. Domestic tourism contributes significantly to the promotion of local, regional, and national economic growth by providing key sources of income stream within a country which, therefore, contributes to the improvement of local and regional economic structures. Income from domestic tourism helps drive the development of tourism products providers and enhance employment which could stimulate domestic demand (Wu, Zhu, & Xu, 2000).

Methodology

This is conceptual research. This study applied a systematic literature review to collect secondary data (Pandey & Pandey, 2021) considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria to select the most appropriate and relevant data for this research and to remain focused (Mukherjee, 2019). The inclusion of articles which are published in the English language from 2018 to 2023 maintained the relevancy of the research to the present day, with a focus on information about religious tourism in Bangladesh and Ghana.

All articles were concerned specifically with data related to the following key words 'religious tourism,' 'religion,' 'pilgrimage', 'religious tourism marketing', 'religious tourism in Ghana', 'religious tourism in Bangladesh', 'religious tourism in developing countries', 'challenges of tourism marketing in Bangladesh', 'prospects of tourism marketing in Bangladesh', 'challenges of tourism marketing in Ghana', 'prospects of tourism marketing in Ghana'.

The identified keywords were used to search existing journal articles that are listed on Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>), the most renowned search engine for academic journal articles. The overall interpretation of data was carried out with the support of content analysis techniques to gain new insights for this research study. Based on the data, challenges and prospects of tourism marketing in the selected countries were discussed along with the identification of different marketing strategies followed by making some recommendations of suitable strategies for the developing countries.

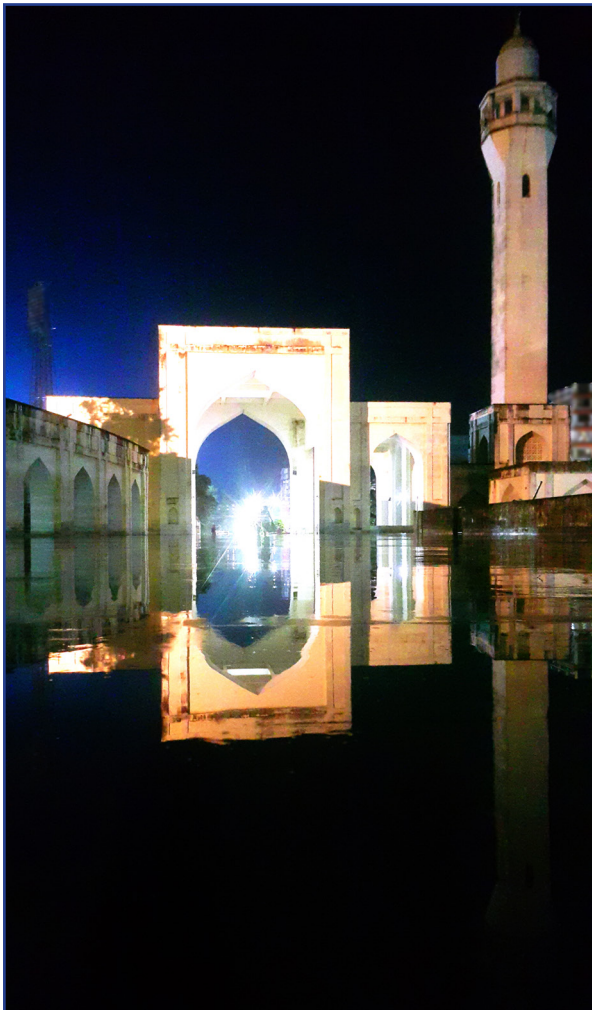
Religious (Islamic) Heritage and Tourism in Bangladesh

Halal tourism is one the fastest growing tourism sectors (Ainin *et al.*, 2020; Moshin *et al.*, 2020). Thereby, the global tourism industry is continuously adopting various halal tourism services to accommodate the growing demand for halal tourism (Akter & Hasan, 2023). Considering the increase in Islamic tourism, Bangladesh has a great opportunity to attract these travellers. Islamic tourism in Bangladesh is a unique blend of spirituality, history, and culture, offering travellers a chance to explore the country's Islamic heritage in a meaningful way. For centuries, Bangladesh has been home to many religious sites, mostly famous for its extravagant mosques located in several different cities. For instance, Star Mosque, Baitul Mukarram Mosque, Saat Gumbaz Mosque, ChhotaSona Mosque, Mosque of Baba Adam, the Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal, the Shrine of Sultana Bayazid Bostami, Shrine of Shah Amant etc.. These are places where followers visit to get spiritual purity. However, Bangladesh is a country that generates one of the lowest numbers of tourists and earning from tourism (Uchinlayen & Suchana, 2018). Thus, despite the country's potential, Bangladesh has not effectively marketed itself as a tourist destination, either domestically or internationally. The lack of promotion and branding efforts has resulted in limited awareness among potential tourists.

Bangladesh's current endeavour is to promote Islamic religious travels as a distinct category within their tourism sector (Luz, 2020). The Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, often referred to as the National Mosque of Bangladesh (Figure 2) is one of the largest mosques in the country. It is a symbol of religious unity and a centre for congregational prayers, drawing thousands of worshippers daily. This site has major potential for promotion, but the arrival of more visitors would need to be managed in a professional manner. Perhaps e-ticketing or self service ticketing should be considered.

E-Ticketing and self-service has become a favoured method of travelling for tourists, especially when travelling to heritage sites. However, tourists' behaviour and attitude towards the adoption of e-ticketing in developing countries needs more attention. The majority of tourist sites in Bangladesh do not have an e-ticketing

Figure 2: Main Entrance and Minaret Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Bangladesh



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baitul_Mukarram#/media/File:Baitul_Mukarram_National_Mosque_main_entrance_&_Minaret.jpg

system, which could add to visitor discomfort queues or unexpected prices (Islam, 2010). However, e-ticketing system can raise questions of privacy concerns for visitors, especially in a developing country such as Bangladesh. On the contrary, the development of more e-tickets and self-services can assist in modernising the country and increase its capabilities to attract and influence more tourists.

Studies show that more than 61% of Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region, with 133 million in Bangladesh alone (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Thus, there is a huge opportunity for religious tourism in Bangladesh, with appropriate planning and marketing the country could majorly benefit from religious tourism.

Marketing Islamic tourism involves promoting destinations, experiences and services that cater to Muslim travellers while adhering to Islamic principles and values. This niche market has been growing steadily as an increased number of Muslim travellers seek destinations that accommodate their religious and cultural needs. Halal tourism is predicted to increase by 73% from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.76 billion in 2050 (Global Halal Tourism Organisation, 2021; Suban *et al.*, 2021).

Bangladesh should use this opportunity to create an effective target market in order to increase their tourism numbers (Horaira & Devi, 2021). With the correct marketing of religious tourism, the country can attract both domestic and international tourists, generating a positive flow of visitors each year. Two examples of Muslim gatherings are demonstrated below where pious Muslims from different parts of the country as well from abroad join together for spiritual purity.

The Hazrat Shahjalal Mazar located in Sylhet, one of the most popular sites for halal tourism in Bangladesh. It is the grave of one of the famous saints in the region (Yogsutra.com). This Mazar welcomes thousands of visitors every day. Majumder *et al.* (2018) show that this Mazar is not only a spiritual space but also a commercial place with various business activities on a daily basis. In addition to the mosque, the complex includes an Islamic cultural centre, which often hosts events, lectures, and programs related to the Islamic culture, heritage and spirituality. While this place provides sufficient accommodation for its visitors, safety of tourists is always a serious issue (Yogsutra.com). Tourists are often the main target for small gangs, petty thefts, racism and many more problems, especially in areas that are densely populated, such as Sylhet. Bangladesh has a high crime rate, especially on public transport. This is a major setback for the country as visitors may not feel safe to visit (Abir & Khan, 2022). Petty crimes tend to be more focused on women such as street harassment, name calling and theft. Safety of tourists is a primary issue with Bangladesh's tourism industry and requires extensive advancement to ensure visitor satisfaction and safety.

Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim populated country and has become the host of what is estimated

Figure 3: Huge Ijtema Tent on the Banks of the River Turag near Dhaka for the Occasion of Bishwa Ijtema

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishwa_Ijtema#/media/File:Congregation_of_Muslim,_Tongi,_Bangladesh.jpg

to be the second largest annual Muslim gathering, called the 'Biswa Ijtema' (Figure 3). This event holds a bright prospect for a halal tourism (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2018). Biswa Ijtema, also known as the World Muslim Congregation, is an enormous annual Islamic gathering, which takes place in Tongi, near Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. This religious event attracts millions of Muslims from Bangladesh and around the globe, making it a significant and culturally rich occasion in the Islamic calendar.

Bangladesh offers shariah compliant hotels, food and beverages to the visitors, while highlighting their tourism destination as 'Muslim friendly' (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2018). During the time of the Biswa Ijtema, Bangladesh is a truly international destination. Muslim tourists from South Asia, Southeast Asia, the middle east, and beyond come to attend. This is known as a peaceful and

apolitical event which serves as a platform for Muslims to strengthen their faith, engage in religious discussions, and seek spiritual purification. Many attendees set up temporary camps in and around the venue to stay close to the religious activities. These camps also provide a communal atmosphere for Muslims to bond, pray and share the experiences (Sarker, 2021).

Tourists, government, residents and companies are the key stakeholders in preserving the traditional culture of Bangladesh while attracting more travellers. Nonetheless, tourists require decent accommodation, food and entertainment, which can be a great opportunity for Bangladesh to market for these specific tourists, ensuring their safety and satisfaction (Sarker, 2021). However, this annual yearly gathering promotes water pollution along the Tongi Khal. Studies show that researchers have found very high levels of ammonia and almost zero dissolved

oxygen during the low flow season, which is further aggravated by the Biswa Ijtema gathering, posing health risks for low income settlements (Hoque *et al.*, 2021).

Buddhist Holy Sites for Pilgrimage and Tourism in Bangladesh

Historically, Bangladesh is a land of glorious cultural heritage with inter-religious harmony and co-existence being inherent characteristics. Buddhism entered ancient Bengal more than 2,000 years ago and continued as the region's predominant religious faith until about the 11th Century AD. Ruling dynasties patronised Buddhism successively for nearly seven hundred years in ancient Bengal and the adjoining kingdoms in eastern India. As a result, Buddhism has a deep influence on Bengali life, culture and civilization (MOFA, 2023).

The prominent Chinese pilgrim-traveller FaHien, who toured ancient Bengal and other parts of India for 16 years in the seventh century (629-645 AD), noted that Buddhism was flourishing in the northern and central

parts of present-day Bangladesh. His travel diary recorded about 30 monasteries in this part of ancient Bengal. Travel records such as this from Chinese pilgrims helps provide clues for archaeologists to uncover the lost Buddhist heritage sites. A number of important Buddhist archaeological sites have already been uncovered in different parts of Bangladesh and the country is believed to be a rich repository of South Asian Buddhist heritage. In order to draw the world's attention to the rich Buddhist heritage in Bangladesh, the Government organised an international event in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization in October 2015.

The following are the most notable Buddhist archaeological sites which have been uncovered so far in Bangladesh (as listed by Dipananda (2022))

Paharpur Buddhist Monastery (Sompura Mahavihara)

The most prominent Buddhist monument in Bangladesh is the colossal monastery at Paharpur known as Sompur Mahavihara in the northern district of Naogaon (Figure

Figure 4: Paharpur Buddhist Monastery (Sompura Mahavihara)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somapura_Mahavihara#/media/File:Paharpur_Buddhist_Bihar.jpg

4). This is the second-largest single monastery in the south of the Himalayas. The Monastery was built by the second king of Pala dynasty Dharmapala in the 8th century AD. According to Tibetan sources, Sompur Mahavihara in Paharpur was one of the five greatest Buddhist monasteries in ancient times. The world-famous Buddhist scholar Atish Dipanka Srijnan (11th Century) stayed at the Mahavihara for many years. Sompur Mahavihara has been designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985. The excavated findings have been preserved at the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi.

Mainamati Shalban Vihara

This site is called the Seat of the Lost Dynasties, which lies in a range of low hills in Comilla district beside the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. The whole range of hillocks runs for about 18km and is studded with more than 50 sites hosting the Buddhist civilization of the 7th-12th century AD. At Mainamati, the principal monument is Shalban Vihara. Shalban Vihar was built by the King of Buddhist Deva Family Bhabadev in the 8th century and it survived for 400 years.

Tri-Ratna Stupa

Another important Buddhist temple, named Tri-Ratna Stupa, is found about 5 km away from Shalban Vihara. This Stupa is the symbol of Tri-gem of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhamma & Sangha. Ruins of numerous other Buddhist viharas and temples such as Charpatra Mura, Boiragir Mura, Kotila Mura, Ananda Vihar, Voge King's Mura, the Vihar of Rupban Kanya, Aduna-Paduna Mura, and Pacca Mura, Kotebari have been found in the vicinity of Shalban Vihara.

Mahasthangarh

Mohasthangarh, situated about 13 km north of Bogra town, is an ancient, fortified city acclaimed to be one of the oldest urban-style settlements in all of Bengal. The oldest layer dates back to the 3rd century BC. Ancient Pundranagar, the capital of Emperor Chandragupta, the founder of the Moyura dynasty, was located here. The city continued flourishing during a few successive Hindu and Buddhist dynasties. Beyond the citadel, other ancient ruins found within a radius of about 8 km testify to the existence of extensive suburbs.

The Buddhists were at this site until at least the 11th century. Their most glorious period was the 8th to the 11th centuries when the Buddhist Pala emperors ruled the area. Most of the uncovered remains of the site including brickwork belong to this Buddhist era. The rich archaeological museum of Mohasthangarh has a rare collection of antiquities, gold ornaments, coins, and terracotta objects with many other relics recovered from the site.

Bhasu Vihara

This site, locally known as Narapatir Dhap, is situated about 6 km northwest of Mahasthangarh. Initial excavations unearthed two large Buddhist monasteries and a medium-sized Buddhist shrine. At this site, around 800 artefacts (ornamental bricks, semi-precious stone, terracotta beads, iron nails, oil lamps, etc.), a number of bronze statues and terracotta plaques have been found.

Additional sites

There are a number of magnificent modern-era Buddhist temples in Bangladesh. The Golden hilltop Temple in Bandarban district is probably the most charming Buddhist temple in the whole country. Gigantic Buddha status in Dhaka, Chittagong and other parts of Bangladesh are other special attractions for pilgrims and tourists. There are also a number of historical Buddhist sites, learning centres and pilgrimage spots in Bangladesh. Some of the sites are regarded as holy places for Buddhists and some of them have been declared as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. Bangladesh is also the birthplace of Buddhist scholar Atish Dipankar.

The living heritage of Lord Buddha is as still popular in Bangladesh as it was in the past (Nyaupane & Budruk, 2009). Since independence the government has carried out many excavations. In this way many Buddhists archaeological sites have been discovered. But still, some remained undiscovered. These various historical or holy places could be rare resources for Buddhist pilgrims and tourists from home and abroad. In Buddhism, visiting places where Lord Buddha was born, got enlightened, and died are regarded as holy tasks. There are about 500 million Buddhists in the world and every year the volume of Buddhist pilgrimage tourists is increasing. Over 350,000 foreign tourists visit the places where Lord Buddha lived, meditated, and delivered sermons for

mankind (Alwis, 2007). These tourists come from Japan, India, Myanmar, Tibet, China, Thailand, and many of these might be encouraged to come to Bangladesh to visit these scared sites.

Bangladesh and West Bengal now plan, separately, to develop a Buddhist circuit based on the sites in both regions. The Association for Conservation and Tourism (ACT), a voluntary organisation in West Bengal, stated that demand had been increasing for years. Raj Bas Basu, head of ACT, said that there were many historic Buddhist places spread across Bangladesh. Several years ago, ACT took part in an initiative to mark West Bengal and Bangladesh on tourist maps to highlight their geographic importance. Businessman Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury from Bangladesh stated:

When the tourists of both Bengali regions will visit each other's country, friendship and cultural exchange will increase. Not just the tourist area, but also the economic development of the entire region will flourish. In the next few years this tourism circuit will become very popular.'

Chowdhury said the biggest obstacle to this objective was the visa situation, as there were no provisions for visas into either region of old Bengal. Tourism companies and traders need to be allowed to offer visas specifically to the areas, or otherwise issue convenient e-visas. (BBC Bangla; Dipananda, 2018)

Although there are few Buddhists in Bangladesh and West Bengal today, this should not stop rapport building between Buddhist and Muslim nations. In recent years, Pakistan has made numerous moves to reach out to Buddhist-influenced nations such as China, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Bangladesh has also tried to draw closer ties to Thailand. Both Bangladesh and West Bengal have remarkably close ties thanks to their inheritance of South Asian Buddhist heritage. Sadly, this heritage has largely been forgotten, and it is high time that these Buddhist sites were given the attention and care they deserve.

Hindu Holy Sites for Pilgrimage and Tourism in Bangladesh

Hinduism is the second largest religion in Bangladesh. There are many religious places of Hindus in the

country which can be visited for prayer and to carry out religious rituals. Various religious festivals are devoted to goddesses. Rash Mela is one such religious event that can attract tourists easily. In Bangladesh, there are many temples around the country where Hindus and tourists can go to attend religious activities as well as see the places. Some of these include Dhakeshwari National Temple (Dhaka), Adinath Temple (Moheshkhali Island near Cox's Bazar), Bhabanipur temple (Bogra), Chandranath Temple (Sitakunda), KalBhairab Temple (Medda), The Puthia Temple (Rajshahi), Kantajee Temple (Dinajpur), Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (Dhaka city) and Gurudwara Nanak Shahi (Dhaka city, beside University of Dhaka). Among them Dhakeshwari National Temple (Figure 5), Adinath Temple, and Kantajee Temple are very famous as tourist spots in Bangladesh. Every year many tourist visits these places. In addition, believers of Hinduism come to see the festivals, to learn the culture, and observe the belief (Suchana, 2018).

The historic holy site of Langalbandh is a well-known pilgrimage destination in Bangladesh for Sanatan (Hindu) believers. Every year, approximately 1-1.5 million Hindu devotees visit this place from all across Bangladesh, as well as India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, to take a sacred bath in the Old Brahmaputra River and participate in other religious festivities. In order to make

Figure 5: Shiva Temples at Dhakeshwari National Temple



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhakeshwari_Temple#/media/File:Shiva_temples_Dhakeshwari_Mandir_2_by_Ragib_Hasan.jpg

Figure 6: Pancha Ratna Govinda Temple

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puthia_Temple_Complex#/media/File:Puthia_Mandirs10.JPG

this holy occasion more convenient and secure, there is a sustainable strategy for developing religious tourism in Langalbandh through the creation of new infrastructure (Hossain, 2010).

Langalbandh is home to a number of ancient temples and hermitages as well as numerous bathing ghats built to make bathing easier for the pilgrims. Currently, the site has 13 ghats and 10 temples dedicated to various Gods. The majority of the ghats are on the river's west bank since they were erected with the Sun god, who rises in the east, in mind.

Kodla math (cenotaph) in Ayodhya village in Bagerhat with its ridged rekha deul is one of the oldest terracotta temples located in a tiny hamlet deep inside Bagerhat district, while the destroyed temple in Madhabpasha in Barishal is another terracotta temple in ruins (Chatterjee, 2022).

The stunning Govinda temple in Puthia (Figure 6) with its ornate carvings and Pancharatna charchala towers is located within the Puthia Raj Bari complex in Rajshahi. The Puthia estate (Figure 7) was one of the largest zamindari estates in British India and dates back to Akbar's time. The building is closed to the public sometime so tourists cannot visit. The Bhubaneswar Shiva temple in Puthia is the largest Shiva temple in Bangladesh. Built in 1823 by Rani Bhubonmoyee Devi, the widow of Raja Jagat Narayan Roy, it overlooks Shiv Sagar Lake. This ornate temple is an imposing and excellent example of the five-spire style (Pancharatna) of temple architecture (Chatterjee, 2022). The Chota Ahnik temple in Puthia is rumoured to be built during the reign of legendary queen Bhabani. Built in the Dochala style with its curved cornices, it was meant for the Rani's private worship. The larger Govinda temple

Figure 7: Panoramic View of Puthia Temple Complex

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puthia_Temple_Complex#/media/File:Puthia_Mandirs10.JPG

can be seen in the background. The Dolmancha temple in Puthia is an imposingly terraced Dolmancha. It is one of the finest examples of its kind in both Bengals. It is also one of the largest temples in Bangladesh. According to McCutchion, ‘The Dolmancha was most commonly built in the 18th century... they’re spread over the whole of Bengal, wherever Krishna was worshipped’ (Telegraph India, 2022)

The Aatchala Shiv mandir in Chanchra, Jessore is a beautifully preserved temple that was built in 1696 by local zamindar Manohar Ray. It is a functioning temple with Shiv pujas being held every month on full moon nights after the Bangladesh’s Department of Archaeology allowed it in 2017 (Chatterjee, 2022).

All of these sites are generally unknown to people in Bangladesh, let alone tourists from other countries. Still, some Hindu tourists from India and other countries come to visit as they found information about these temples in ancient books and documents. But these sites have a lot of issues which is why tourists either struggle to access them or they return with bad experiences. For example, due to years of neglect, the three-kilometre-long sacred site of Langalbandh’s infrastructure is now in poor condition. Every year, numerous mishaps occur during the celebration. Another example is, the lack of access to Charchala temple in Madhabpasha in Barishal as it has been taken over by a giant banyan tree. The side entrances are blocked by a building and a sweet shop on either side. A bit different is the story of Jora Shiv Mandir at Murali in Jessore which has been defaced by paint. This is upsetting to witness by Hindu tourists. Another big issue is that some Hindu tourists have misconceptions they are not safe to visit Bangladesh because of terror activities.

Overall, one of the most pressing issues facing tourism in Bangladesh is the inadequate transportation infrastructure. Poorly maintained roads, limited connectivity to tourist destinations, and outdated airports have made it challenging for travellers to access many parts of the country (Abir & Khan, 2022). This lack of infrastructure not only deters tourists but also limits the economic benefits that could be derived from a more developed tourism sector. Moreover, safety and security are paramount concerns for any tourist (Rahman

et al., 2010). Bangladesh has faced periodic political instability, which has also discouraged potential visitors. Additionally, the country is prone to natural disasters, including cyclones and floods as well as earthquakes, making an unstable environment for both domestic and international tourists. Ensuring the safety of tourists and having effective emergency response mechanisms in place is crucial for building trust and attracting travellers.

Additionally, Bangladesh tourism has been impacted by various concerning crises and conflicts in recent years. Sustainability has been a dominant topic of discussion that has driven many countries in recent times - in both businesses (including tourism) and towards a more sustainable way of life for people. However, the plight of the Rohingya people (a stateless ethnic minority who fled to Bangladesh as refugees, to avoid genocide) causes problems in Bangladesh. They are associated with drugs, human trafficking, littering and many more issues which have become significant challenges for the tourism sustainability of Bangladesh (Bhuiyan, 2023). Thus, while UN Tourism claim that sustainable tourism has the potential to stimulate tourist movements and assist in reviving the tourism industry, Bangladesh is at a considerable disadvantage. Despite the potential for sustainable religious tourism and pilgrimage, the country requires vast improvements to their tourism infrastructure and product.

Domestic Tourism and Pilgrimage in Ghana

Domestic tourism is important in the promotion of cultural understanding, interrelatedness, and goodwill within Ghana. Domestic tourism promotion among Ghanaians will inspire them to visit attractions within the country and in increase the understanding of their national identity and heritage through visitation of national heritage sites, and cultural events. Furthermore, domestic tourism in Ghana could contribute to the feeling of a united sense of national pride in Ghana’s inimitable legacy of natural resources, thereby reducing conflicts between tribes and other neighbours (Mena, 2004). The promotion of domestic tourism can help to alleviate the seasonality of income from inbound tourism by encouraging domestic tourism during the traditionally slow ‘off peak’ periods of international tourism arrivals (Bakari, 2021). Domestic tourism contributes to rising tourism investment, lowering unemployment rates,

Figure 8: Atwea Mountain Prayers Camp, Ghana

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atwea_Mountain_Prayers_Camp.jpg

and developing natural regions fit for family and friend recreation (Mustafa, 2012).

Since the youth account for 50% of Ghana's population, they are the anticipated target market for tourism expansion, they hold the key to the long-term success and sustainability of Ghana's tourist industry (Preko *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, with the advent of digital marketing in the tourism industry, Domestic Youth Tourism in Ghana should be promoted and marketed. This tourism segment could be classified as computer natives as they are the ones who use the internet more than the older generation. Teaching tourism education in schools would have the potential to push school children towards loving travelling when they grow up thus promoting domestic tourism in Ghana (Meng & Uysal, 2008).

Religious Pilgrimage in Ghana.

Besides the known domestic tourism attractions in Ghana, religious tourism is gaining prominence in the country. One of the predominant Christianity pilgrimage tourism sites in Ghana is the *Pentecostal and Prayer Mountains* landscapes. Pilgrimage to these mountain landscapes is perceived by Christians to provide them with an experience of power and deeper meaning and high-spiritedness to their lives. (Bernbaum, 2006; Anttonen, 2009; Okyere, 2019). In this ideology, mountains or high places that point above the earth are seen as sacred sites as they are perceived to be closer to heaven. Therefore, mountains are considered to be sacred places of exposure,

where people can discover spiritual insight for themselves (Brockman 2010).

Pentecostal churches around the world are the advocates and promoter of pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains in the Ghanaian Christianity communities (Figure 8). The Pentecostals in Ghana were at the forefront in development and invigoration of pilgrimage to two sacred sites: Abusua Prayer Mountain (APM) and; Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp (NMOPC) for prayer practices (Okyere, 2019).

Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp's sacred prominence is its power to attract religious pilgrims from different religious backgrounds. The attraction is attributed to the mountain's serenity for reflection and meditation for believers from diverse religious denominations, thus, Christians, Muslims and African Traditional Religious followers. Pilgrims are not only from Ghana but from various West African countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Okyere, 2019).

Another religious pilgrimage mountain site is in Koforidua, Eastern, Ghana where the Roman Catholic Church hang a cross in front of the mountain in affirmation of God's presence at the site. This site is also used by different religious groups for non-denominational prayer rituals.

In view of the importance of tourism in Ghana, investment, and development policy must include all stakeholders in Ghana's Tourism sector including the central governmental agencies, to develop a long-term strategy to support the development of domestic tourism in the country. Development of infrastructure and provision of tourist resources for providers of amenities, attractions, and accessibility to the various attractions in the country are vital (Bakhtiyarovitch *et al.*, 2020; Nurov *et al.*, 2021).

Domestic tourism in Ghana faces challenges at different levels in various destinations. These challenges could be either policy or marketing associated issues at destination management level or could be either socio-cultural or socio-economic aspects within the destination (Bakari, 2021). The challenges faced in the development, promotion and growth of sustainable domestic tourism include bureaucracy, lack of investment, lack of

policy and planning, low technological development, no effective plan for tourism development, lack of high-quality infrastructure, ineffective distribution of tourism resources and lack of public and private sector partnerships. Furthermore, the population are not aware or do not have enough information about various attractions in Ghana. Moreover, unequal development of regions or areas within a destination can pose a challenge to domestic tourism and this is the case in Ghana (Morupisi & Mokgalo, 2017).

Additionally, Ghana's regard for tourism in general can inhibit domestic tourism development because more tourism marketing and promotion has been focused on inbound international tourism. Negative perceptions of domestic destinations or ineffective marketing can deter residents from investigating their own country. Consequently, good marketing planning and promotion is required to develop a prospective sustainable domestic tourism product that will sustain domestic tourism in Ghana.

The aforementioned sociocultural, and socioeconomic factors within Ghana pose obstacles to domestic tourism development. It has been noted that disposable income is a major determinant and 'push' for tourism participation therefore, indicating that affluence significantly influences tourism participation (Morupisi & Mokgalo, 2017). Mbaiwa *et al.* (2007), conclude that prices for tourism services may be prohibitive to the domestic tourists and this can be due to an emphasis on international tourism where the inbound tourists are from affluent countries and can afford the prices of tourism services and products at the destination.

Similarly, a lack of financial resources, inadequate transportation infrastructure, including roads, and public transportation, can inhibit domestic tourism. If destinations are difficult to reach, travellers may decide against visiting. Furthermore, prohibitive transportation costs, and the absence of organised excursions have been identified as obstacles for domestic tourism participation (Butler & Richardson, 2013). However, some of the obstacles are non-economic in nature. Butler and Richardson's (2013) study in South Africa concluded that the majority of young people believe that national parks and museums are not exciting for them and that most national heritage attractions are for international tourists.

It is worthy of note that one of the major characteristics of tourism is seasonality therefore, numerous tourism destinations are extremely seasonal, with peak tourist periods concentrated at specific times of year. This seasonality can result in congestion during peak periods and a lack of tourism-related revenue during off-peak times (Corluka, 2019).

There is also the information technology challenge faced by the tourism industry in Ghana - to promote and market tourism products in the country especially when it comes to domestic tourism. While technology can improve domestic tourism, it can also present challenges to traditional tourism providers. Established businesses can be disrupted by online booking platforms and peer-to-peer sharing services. Some of the identified challenges, include lack of a digital spatial database of tourism facilities and destinations, inadequate information on the Internet, difficulty updating current graphical tourist guides and maps (expensive, time-consuming, and labour-intensive) and insufficient motivation for efficient marketing (Eshun *et al.*, 2015)

Significance of Domestic Tourism Marketing

Domestic tourism marketing involves the cooperation and involvement of all tourism stakeholders and practitioners within the tourism industry to deliver good quality services and tourism products that may provide tourist satisfaction. Effective and efficient domestic tourism marketing strategies should be embedded in the overall marketing plan (Meng & Uysal, 2008; Preko *et al.*, 2019; Stone & Nyaupane, 2020; Amoako *et al.*, 2022).

Domestic tourism promotion and marketing should be based on the identification of consumers and anticipation of their demand for tourism products and services and providing the necessary services to meet the tourists' requirements. The services and products on offer should be effectively communicated to the consumer through traditional marketing, utilising television (TV) and print advertisement or digital marketing tools such as social marketing platforms to stimulate tourism within the country. TV remains among the most widely viewed media by consumers and at the moment TV cannot be completely replaced by new media forms; both complement each other in the emerging tourism

marketing practices (Wayne, 2018; Rabab'ah *et al.*, 2020).

Through marketing and promotion planning, market segmentation, and marketing research, a tourism marketing mix can be developed to accomplish the organisation's strategic marketing goals (Mkwizu, (2023).

With the advent of digital marketing and information and communication technologies, Kaur (2017) opines that successful Smart digital marketing campaigns should include quality websites as a prerequisite in the development, promotion, and marketing domestic tourism online. Tourism services and products and online destinations for tourists could be accessed by locals as well as international tourists which could, therefore, provide employment and revenue to the country and destinations.

Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, Tiktok etc. allow stakeholders to communicate directly with their target audience. Social media platforms help tourism services and products establish credibility, improve customer service, and gain insight into tourists' activities at a destination (Al-Badi *et al.*, 2017; Deb *et al.*, 2022). Search Engine Optimisation is essential to intelligent digital marketing. The online classification of tourism products on search engines establishes their online popularity and contributes to an increase in website visits and enhances the attractiveness of a destination (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2015; Mkwizu, 2019; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021)

Sending personalised emails to customers increases the chances of getting quick response along with showing that a travel agency cares. Engaging content across various online platforms leads to increased engagement rates. Blogging is an excellent way to engage with audiences and move beyond just selling products. The majority of online users today access the internet on their mobile phones, and this should reflect in every aspect of online marketing considerations and marketing materials should be mobile friendly. The digital marketing tools or channels are most used in tourism marketing, reflecting the relationship between Smart or Digital Technology and the Tourism Industry (Briez *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Governments, tourism boards, local communities of industry stakeholders and the private sector should collaborate to develop strategies for promoting domestic tourism, enhancing infrastructure and mitigating negative impacts to address the various challenges outlined in the case studies presented above. By strategically addressing these challenges, religious tourism can flourish and contribute to economic development while preserving the destination's cultural and natural heritage (as opined by Bakhtiyarovich *et al.* (2020) and Nurov *et al.* (2021).

To mitigate difficulties in tourism, it is necessary to address a variety of factors that can impede the development and viability of the tourism industry. These challenges can range from economic and infrastructure issues to environmental and cultural concerns. Infrastructure development that improves transport systems to make it easier for tourists to access various destinations could be one of the tourism marketing strategies that would help mitigate these obstacles. Additionally, to invest in accommodation and hospitality facilities and encourage the development of budget-friendly accommodation options to accommodate a broader spectrum of tourists, Travel agencies and online booking platforms will need collaborate in the provision of tourism packages as part of a promotion and marketing initiative to develop effective campaigns showcasing the distinct attractions and experiences offered by various religious tourism destinations (Papadimitriou *et al.*, (2015).

It is important to encourage the participation and benefit-sharing of local communities in tourism activities to preserve and respect local cultures. For instance, local artisans and businesses could be encouraged to produce distinctive and suitable souvenirs and products that appeal to visitors. Training and educating tourism industry employees is important both to provide quality services and guarantee positive experiences for tourists, while implementing customer feedback systems to continuously enhance services and promptly address any problems.

In both countries, those in charge of education, should consider introducing schoolchildren to tourism education, emphasising tourism services and products, so that they

may develop an interest in tourism as adults. Additionally, the local populace should be educated on the benefits of tourism, such as job creation and economic expansion, to create support for the industry (Meng & Uysal, 2008; Stone & Nyaupane, 2020).

Providers of religious tourism services should initiate the application of digital marketing tools by first conducting market research to identify the expectations of the target visitors based on their preferences, interests, and demographics. This will aid in market comprehension and the effective customisation of marketing and promotional messages. To promote tourism, national and regional governments must invest in digital marketing initiatives. In addition, the government should provide local and regional tourism industry practitioners with education and training in digital marketing as well as the necessary resources to enhance their skills and capabilities.

Providers of tourism should investing in marketing campaigns and digital advertising initiatives. As most travellers possess mobile phones, providers of tourism services and products should create mobile applications that provide users with access to travel information, including augmented reality guides and local language support (Al-Badi *et al.*, 2017; Kaur, 2017; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021; Deb *et al.*, 2022).

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