

Maritime Tourism and the Blue Economy: Bangladesh Perspective

Jan Rumi

Dean of the Consular Corps of Hawaii and Frank Haas

Former Dean, University of Hawaii, USA



"With a growing emphasis on Bangladesh's 'Blue Economy' and a wealth of maritime attractions and resources, the time is right for the development of Maritime and Coastal Tourism as a significant contributor to Bangladesh's economic vitality and growth."

Bangladesh has been enjoying strong economic growth throughout the last decade, but the future will be even brighter with the development of a 'Blue Economy' built around its maritime resources. Maritime and Coastal Tourism can be a part of that bright future since tourism an industry that has strong growth potential, generates substantial employment and is a clean alternative to other economic sectors.

Tourism is the world's leading industry and it continues to grow in size and importance and eighty per cent of tourism is coastal tourism.

Compared to some of its South Asian neighbours, Bangladesh tourism is relatively small, but favourable conditions in Bangladesh and the region provide indications that it can become a major contributor to economic growth. Neighbours like the Maldives, with a \$US2.7 billion tourism industry and Sri Lanka, with USD 3.9 billion in tourism receipts, point to the potential for Bangladesh, which currently generates only USD 227 million in tourism receipts.

The conditions for growth are in place for both the development of domestic and international tourism for Bangladesh. The economy has been growing rapidly both in

Bangladesh and in the South Asian region domestic and regional economies, there is a growing middle class with the means to travel for recreation and leisure. Structurally, conditions favour the development of tourism since air routes are expanding within the region and more and more of the population lives in urban regions with access to air service. Finally, the growing availability of long-haul aircraft and low-cost air carriers can open up Bangladesh tourism to distant markets.

Proof of tourism's potential for Bangladesh is also found in the current growth rates for global tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation estimates that the global tourism industry grew by 6.8 per cent in 2017 and has projected continued growth at a 3.3 per cent annual rate through 2030. The picture is even more positive for South Asia, which posted an average annual growth rate of more than 10 per cent since 2005 and now brings \$US39.5 billion annually into the region.

Bangladesh has much to offer for prospective visitors. The country has one of the world's longest sandy beaches at Cox's Bazar, the Sundarbans Mangrove Forest (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), St. Martin's Island, cultural and religious sites and the potential to create water-based recreational activities on its extensive Bay of Bengal coastline.

The government of Bangladesh has already developed policies that recognise tourism's potential to attract foreign exchange, preserve and maintain cultural and natural resources, alleviate poverty and create a favourable national image for the country. What is needed now is a plan to put these policies into action and coordinate the industry, government and non-governmental agencies that can contribute to tourism's successful development. The policies and assets are in place, ready to be developed.

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As a developing coastal and Maritime Tourism destination, Bangladesh would benefit by focusing on three fundamental precepts to realise its potential. First, it needs to preserve and protect its coastal and aquatic assets, primarily the Bay of Bengal, its beaches and tributaries. The Bay of Bengal has an extended coastline with a variety of beaches and aquatic resources that can be the basis for coastal tourism. The development of these assets, however, requires that the conditions in the bay remain safe and attractive for recreation. Since the bay touches several nations within the region, the critical steps to maintain its health will require the continuation of multi-national efforts.

Secondly, as a relatively underdeveloped maritime destination, Bangladesh has the opportunity to strategically develop its Maritime Tourism by tapping into best practices of other more highly developed destinations. In one sense, tourism in

Bangladesh is underdeveloped; however, another way to look at this is to consider tourism to be a 'blank page' ready for a comprehensive development plan. Master-planning will ensure that development in Bangladesh is strategic and coordinated.

Finally, to create a comprehensive development plan, Bangladesh should coordinate developments through regional and international partnerships. Other countries and regions with highly developed tourism industries can provide Bangladesh with a blueprint for development and allow the country to take advantage of learning from other successful tourism destinations.

Partnerships will be a key to the strategic development of Maritime Tourism in Bangladesh and should cover a range of potential partners including tourism-based companies both within the region and internationally. Knowledge-based partners such as universities and other training institutions along with the government to government relationships and partnerships will be key to tourism development. Bangladesh can benefit from the expertise and lessons learned in other successful Maritime Tourism destinations.

As the authors of this article are from the State of Hawaii, USA, a dream Maritime Tourism destination, it is suggested that a partnership such as establishing a Sister-State relationship with the State of Hawaii could be a game changer for the development of Maritime Tourism of Bangladesh.

For Bangladesh's sustainable Maritime Tourism development, trends are very favourable and the outlook is positive. With appropriate planning and partnerships, Bangladesh will be able to attract domestic, regional and international tourists. It is time to implement a comprehensive plan to develop our tourism industry in order to become a sustainable tourist destination by outperforming the regional competitors.

Most Underwater Volcanic Eruptions Go Unnoticed

Up to 80 per cent of volcanic eruptions goes unnoticed by land-dwellers. That's because they're erupting underwater. An estimated one million volcanoes some extinct and some very active-spew molten hot lava. Despite the heat, creatures can still be found near their superheated vents. Researchers believe these areas harbour several undiscovered species that are invulnerable to the harsh conditions, including water temperatures up to 750 degrees Fahrenheit.