



Thoughts on the Protection of Tourists' Rights

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THOUGHTS ON THE PROTECTION OF TOURISTS' RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT: *Due to the rise of tourists' mobility across the globe, tourists' satisfaction and ensuring service quality should be considered a sincere concern for destination management organizations. Promoting and upholding tourists' rights can be a useful managerial way for the tourism industry to flourish in retaining and improving tourists' satisfaction and enhancing their service consumption experience. The paper aims to create awareness to promote Bangladesh's tourism industry to protect tourists' rights, increase tourists' well-being through quality tourism experience. This study can help the industry understand a potential concept to guide tourism destination strategy development in Bangladesh. Thus, as a potential tourism destination, Bangladesh can enhance and promote physical and mental health for national and international tourists. Status of current scenario of tourists' rights in Bangladesh has also been discussed in this paper.*

Keywords: *Tourists' rights, Bangladesh, tourism destination, Cox's Bazar, Dhaka*

Since tourism bears the identity of a nation's culture and heritage, it can easily create a Bangladesh brand image. Except for the only desert, Bangladesh is equipped with all-natural characteristics and rare resources which remain pristine and green even in this age of deforestation and global warming. Already, Bangladesh has been able to draw thousands of foreign tourists' attention for its unbroken/uninterrupted longest sea-beach Cox's Bazar, coral island Saint Martin's and world heritage sites—Paharpur and the Sundarbans. Its daughter of nature, Rangamati, low hill stations—Bandarban and green Sylhet—also witness significant tourists' arrival yearly. Yet, there is no denying that we have still lacked to receive and entertain self-motivated Western and Eastern experienced tourists.

We have to admit that Bangladesh lacks national infrastructure and superstructure to satisfy international tourists. For example, high-class airports, water, and train lines are yet to be developed in Bangladesh. However, we need not go for big plans for attracting tourists and catering to their demands. Instead, Bangladesh may think of improving *behaviour/attitude of hosts towards guests*. For example, tourist rights in Bangladesh are not officially protected. Observation shows that a good number of tourists leave/travel Bangladesh with dissatisfaction. They are not shown proper courtesies and are treated with no extra care. It is genuinely baffling about whom to blame for this. There is established no concerned authority with assigning law and its enactment to protect tourists' rights. If we become a bit careful to take care of the tourists, our commitment to lifting Bangladesh's image will befittingly be demonstrated.

Simultaneously, some national measures and empowering a relevant authority to protect tourist rights will help attract many tourists for generating revenue. In Cox's Bazar, tourists' capital

of Bangladesh, local hosts' behaviour even to domestic tourists is frequently frustrating. The dominance of such people is strong even across the beach. They are aggressive, instead of smiling and welcoming to the tourists. In many ways, they harass the tourists, such as gender discrimination, physical assaults are some examples. There are no price lists for different beach activities, ensuring equal rights to experience tourism without complaints. Due to the lack of fixed price list, there increase brokers and touts without a license or government approval. Thus they demand irrational prices from tourists and prices vary based on travellers' body language and bargaining capacities with mental pressure. For instance, a low-earning new couple or group tourists may be fascinated to have photographs having the sunset as the background. The unreasonable price demanded by mobile beach photographers is beyond their buying capacities. If they venture for availing themselves of the facility for such photographs, they may not be able to come back home with the rest of the money in their budget. As tourists, the couple becomes deprived of a memorable honeymoon experience and loses the rights of pleasure only because of unprofessional and irrational pricing. The above is just an example. There are many tourists' complaints about beach markets, local transportations, hotels and restaurants in pricing, compelling and misbehaviour with females and students.

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is not also free from such complaints and deceptions. Most of the tourists use Dhaka as a transit. They are either foreigners or expatriates. Their centre-point happens to be Dhaka mainly because they land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. They get Dhaka as the lounge where they make their itinerary to visit other tourist attractions across Bangladesh. They sojourn, shop and eat in Dhaka. The increasing number of local shops' complaints is least encouraging for systematic tourism development and establishing the destination image. Foreign tourists can easily be identified by language and bodily characteristics. The so-called taxi drivers, salespeople, non-branded hotel and restaurant staff always target to poach their currencies. The foreign tourists tend to feel worried to exit in such unfavourable circumstances. Taxi drivers or salespeople hike the price of seeing foreign tourists. The non-branded hotel and restaurant staff insist on unusual tips. Such things mar the prospects for the development of hospitality and tourism in Bangladesh.

Negligence to tourists by guides or custodians of museums, historical sites and monuments is also a violation of tourist rights. Their whimsical and unprofessional analysis and not paying proper attention to tourists' interest, taking much time/reluctance to find out keys to open the door/or showing the way and asking tips for allowing tourist entrance seem unethical. Thus it contributes to establishing an image crisis of Bangladesh destination.

This scenario, however, is very common to the tourism industry in many underdeveloped countries. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has raised its voice favouring tourists' rights since it believes in "Tourism enriches". Now most countries' tourism boards and councils are becoming more alert about protecting tourists' rights. Among the SAARC countries, the Maldives has already initiated the scheme for protecting tourists' rights. In the Midland city of Hong Kong, the price hiking for tourists has remarkably been observed before Covid-19. The authorities there have taken sweeping actions against all mismanagement that may infringe on tourist rights.

Bangladesh is also taking new steps in restoring its image in many respects. It has a good number of plans for tourism development. Measures for protecting tourists' rights will encourage

a large number of tourists to visit Bangladesh. Tourism is less expensive here than the case with other SAARC countries. Bhutan, to cite here an example, is very expensive for Western tourists. But it gets thousands of Western tourists yearly. This is because it protects tourists' rights through its hospitable and friendly culture and behaviour. Admittedly, foreign tourists are not citizens for a destination, and logically they would not be entitled to many facilities that a local citizen can easily enjoy. But the picture is different in some African countries, such as Ghana, Ethiopia. They respect tourists like their own citizens. They have national tourist codes of conduct. They value tourists' rights in earnest. However, the following measures may be effective to protect tourists' rights in Bangladesh:

- Agreeable definitions of foreign tourists and domestic tourists by the authority concerned should be formed.
- The authority concerned may help foster norms for tourists' proper behaviour by all those involved in the industry.
- Tourists' satisfaction, along with professional services, will have to be made available at tourist locations.
- Enactment of tourists' rights protection laws through a national council should be gazetted.
- The district commissioners should be assigned to monitor the behaviour with tourists at the local level.
- Inspection teams approved by the proper authority may often meet the tourists to ensure their satisfaction. If they find any anomaly, they should go for legal action against the shop or person or transport service-provider.
- Tourists' rights protection should start at the airport.
- Websites for tourist facilities, shopping and entertainment, must ensure the list of prices, rents, and be updated.
- Tourists' markets should be strictly monitored by local law enforcement and administrative agencies.
- Public awareness should be created through media, brochures and posters.
- Training, workshops and seminars on tourism and tourist rights for stakeholders should be regularly organised by public and private bodies and training institutes.

Pleasure does not last long when the mind becomes disturbed. Tourism gives tourists the promise of happiness and mental relief from a chaotic life. Pleasure and mental satisfaction are essential for tourists. The host country should ensure good service without creating any anxiety for tourists about being deceived in the course of irrational price, misguiding, misbehaviour, and underestimating as strangers that violate tourists' rights. There is no alternative to protecting tourists' rights for sustainable tourism development and upholding Bangladesh's positive image.

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