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Tourism in Kuakata, Bangladesh: Understanding Current Status and Future Prospects

Abstract

Kuakata is the second largest sea beach, situated in the southern part of Bangladesh from where both sunrise and sunset can be enjoyed. Even it is a place of rare and unique beauty that has the potential to become one of the major tourist attractions of Bangladesh. The purpose of this research is to analyze the current assessment of tourism in Kuakata, including the available facilities, expectations and demands of the tourists and their concerns. For this research, questionnaire with a sample of 35 people was conducted and the results are analyzed with MS Excel. The findings show that the lacking in marketing and promotional approaches are the main cause of the current challenging situation in the tourism industry in Kuakata. The current study investigated the destination satisfaction of Kuakata province, so, this provides further contribution to tourism and hospitality management literature and industry practitioners as well.

Keywords: *Tourism challenges, Tourism development, Kuakata, Tourism attraction.*

JEL Classifications: H12; H11; H10

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has significant impacts not only on itself but also in other sectors such as hospitality, service and manufacturing industry and the economic progression of a nation as a whole. Tourism has increasingly become a very significant and dynamic sector both among developed and developing nations (Gartner & Lime, 2000). Tourism development is essential

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for economic growth of the nation like Singapore, U.A.E, Malaysia and Thailand. Any country of the world can earn foreign currency through tourism industry especially using marketing of their historical places, natural beauty places (Madden et al. 2017). Similarly, Kuakata, Bangladesh is known for its panoramic sea beach. It is located in south-eastern part of Bangladesh and is the important for tourist destination. Kuakata beach is a sandy expanse 18 kilometers (11 mi) long and 3 kilometers (1.9 mi) wide. From the beach, one can have an unobstructed view of both sunrise and sunset over the Bay of Bengal (Kuakata). Although it is full of potential and many natural beauties, its beauty is yet to be discovered properly. To take this tourism destination to international level, infrastructure development, proper management and marketing is essential. Tourism marketing is an integral effort to make a positive relation between the tourists and the tourism organization's interests in favor of tourists' ultimate satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction basically depends on three basic components, namely: transport, locale and accommodation (Marahatta & Kshetri, 2012). At present, tourists are more concerned about security, safety, environmental issues, and quality of services, available information and expenses rather than visiting a place without proper prior information. Distance is not a big obstacle to visit a place any more, while available information and branding of the destination is more important. Tourism & transportation are closely related as a function of making long term economic growth and development.

Despite having lots of potentialities, the tourism industry of this country is growing very slowly. Forty years have passed of Bangladesh's tourism industry, but still its tourism is in a budding position compared to its neighboring countries. At present Bangladesh is not known as a tourist destination in the international market. The number of tourist's arrival in Bangladesh is very low and the speed of tourism growth is not very promising. In 2010, only 300,000 tourists came to Bangladesh. Among them, more than 70% came for business and official purposes (Hossain, 2013), total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was BDT 840.2bn (USD10.6bn), 4.3% of GDP in 2016, and is forecasted to rise by 7.2% in 2017, and to rise by 7.1% pa to BDT 1,783.0bn (USD22.6bn), 4.7% of GDP in 2027 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). Though, tourism as an industry got recognition in Bangladesh in 1999, it never got so much attention by the government to become a vibrant sector. Bangladesh is lagging behind in promoting its own tourist's attractions through advertisement and electronic media while its neighboring countries focus largely on that. As Bangladesh is not too well known as a tourist destination in the international market, its first job is to work on renovating its tourism sector to introduce it as a tourism brand in the international market. Because branding in tourism not only attract tourists but also attract international investors to invest money.

With keeping these issues in mind, this paper has made an attempt to analyze the problems faced in the tourism sector in Kuakata and perceive necessary measures to be executed to grow Kuakata into a global tourist destination. Moreover, importance of tourism destination marketing and using different marketing tools for promoting tourist attractions, technique of selling different tourism product was discussed here thoroughly in theoretical part, which might give a strong base with practical knowledge and information.

The main aim of this paper is to find out and analyze the overall present scenario of tourism in the Kuakata sea beach of Bangladesh, and find out what measures could be implemented to improve its current condition and develop Kuakata as an international tourism destination. In this paper attempts to address the following specific objectives:

- Understanding current situation and future trends of tourism industry in Kuakata;
- Investigation of the marketing and promotional activities undertaken by the various tours operators of Bangladesh and the contribution of these activities in development of this area;
- Identification of challenges and limitations of tourism marketing and promotional activities undertaken by various tour operators of Bangladesh;

- Studying to find ways and means to attract both domestic and international tourists and investors to participate in this sector, leading to increased GDP and economic growth;
- Recommendations of necessary policies and managerial implications to the tour operating organizations of Bangladesh as per the findings of the present research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourism Scenario of Bangladesh

Tourism Business is one of the fastest growing businesses in Bangladesh. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), by the year of 2025 tourism sector will contribute nearly 4.4% (BDT 1,252.8 billion) of the total GDP of Bangladesh. The tourist places like Ratargul (Sylhet), Saint-Martin Island, Kuakata beach are some of the important tourist areas that should be developed by doing a master plan for attracting both foreign and domestic tourists in all the year round (Afroz & Mahmud, 2017). Specialized institution for tourism education can work in this regard to foster the tourism sector of Bangladesh for the rapid expansion of this sector. Improvements in the overall environmental quality of the beach, as well as better roads and transport facilities, are more likely to increase the recreational benefits to visitors and also their visitation rate (Hossain & Islam, 2016).

2.2 Quality and Cost of Tourism in Kuakata, Bangladesh

In this study revealed that product, promotion, people, process and physical evidence have significant effect on tourists' satisfaction but service distribution system (place) and cost of visiting (price) is not satisfactory element to the tourists. Besides, accommodation facilities, transport system, communication (road) could not meet tourists' expectation (Sarker & Begum, 2015). Government of Bangladesh can take realistic initiatives to develop service distribution system and long term plan to develop Kuakata as a dream destination. The tourist satisfaction level on tourism can affect the future tours in that place (Hossain et al., 2015). If the customers are not satisfied with the service provided and tourist products and facilities available there, they will not revisit the place themselves and disseminate negative review to others who might think of going to visit those places.

2.3 Resources of Tourism in Kuakata, Bangladesh

There is not sufficient and required structural, social, political and economic development in the tourism sector in Kuakata event though there is no lacking in the natural resources of the area. No planned action and policy were available here for beach development facilitating and influencing all types of tourist (Rahman et al., 2015). The infrastructural problem in Bangladesh tourism industry can be overcome by giving proper training and creating efficient and skilled manpower to be work in the industry. Another major issue that needs to be focused on is doing proper publicity of the tourist destinations and allocating efficient budget to develop the natural and infrastructural facilities (Tuli, 2014) .

3. Methodology

This paper is an empirical research. The primary objective of this research is to find out the overall interest of domestic and foreign tourists towards visiting Kuakata sea beach. The secondary purpose of this work is to find out the current situation of Kuakata, its strength and weaknesses and to offer some suggestions to attract more tourists to Kuakata sea beach.

Two types of data used to complete this research. A set of questionnaire was used as the primary data collection technique with a sample size of 35. The respondents were people in the age group of 15-35 years, who are likely to be existing or potential tourists. This paper

was based mostly on secondary data. The secondary data was collected from a number of previously published journals on related topics and several reference books and articles.

3.1 Problem Statement and Identification

Elaborating the problem tree, we can see the main problems as; there isn't much marketing and promotional activities going on about tourism in Kuakata. Many foreign tourists don't even know about Kuakata as a tourist destination and only a few of the local tourists have ever even been to Kuakata. As people don't know much about the place and the facilities it provides, the number of tourist visiting Kuakata every year is very little. In this perspective, a problem tree is drawn to see the causes-effects of the problem at a glance in Figure 1 for Kuakata tourism.

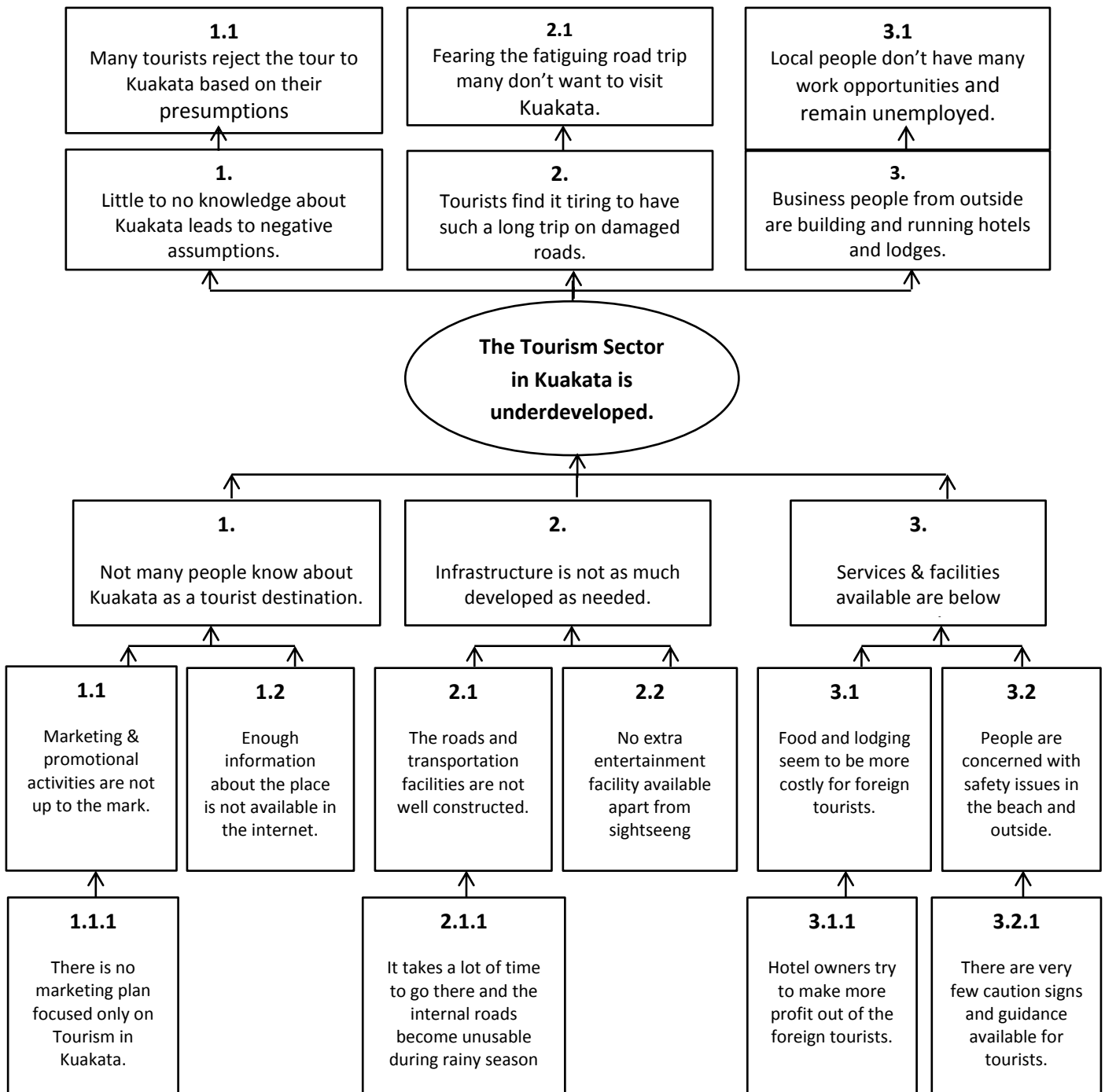


Figure 1. Causes-Effects Diagram of Problem Tree for Kuakata Tourism.

3.2 Sampling, Data Collection and Questionnaire Development

The data of this research was collected from interviewees who are in different demographic units. Some of them visited Kuakata many times, some for the first time and some of them haven't visited even once. So their outlooks on a tour to Kuakata may differ on different levels. The person who went to Kuakata more than once and stayed there during a longer time had experienced something more than others who have visited once. Thus, the information is given by all those people might be quite inconclusive due to their unconscious and unaware motive. To get the most valid research data, information should be collected by spending a long time in the research area and examining a large group of people, but it was not possible due to resource constraints.

The empirical part of this research was done based on questionnaire analysis. The results would have been more accurate if the research could be carried out by going to research field personally and interviewing different groups of people like tourists, transportation and accommodation provider, local people and the tourism authority, but it was not possible due to major limitations. Thus, the survey was conducted through online communication. The questionnaire form was prepared on Google Docs and forwarded to the respondents for their valuable feedbacks. The survey period was from November 2017 to December 2017.

3.3 Data Analysis

For this paper, content analysis and summarizing were used as basic data analysis technique as there were not much quantifiable data. Content analysis is a procedure for the categorization of verbal or behavioral data, for purposes of classification, summarization and tabulation (Mayring, 2002b). The content can be analyzed on two levels:

- i. *Basic level or the manifest level*: a descriptive account of the data i.e. this is what was said, but no comments or theories as to why or how.
- ii. *Higher level or latent level of analysis*: a more interpretive analysis that is concerned with the response as well as what may have been inferred or implied.

4. Results

This section presents the descriptive statistics that are collected from the 35 respondents using questionnaires. The survey also included their demographic characteristics, as well as their opinion and satisfaction level on their recreational visits to the Kuakata Sea Beach. In this section various factors are analyzed to determine their importance in overall customer satisfaction level. This portion is the findings of both primary and secondary data analysis. The demographic profile of the respondents (Table 1) shows that 54.3% of the respondents are male and the rest is female. Most of the respondents have visited Kuakata in the age 15-25 years that is 93.33%. Observing this, we can say that students are more likely to visit tourist spots than jobholders or businessmen. The following paragraphs present the details of frequencies.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the sample respondents.

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/Percentage
Age	15	35	21.14
Sex: Male			54.3%
Female			45.7%
Number of Recreational site Visit (Past Year)	0	4	1.71
Visited Kuakata			57.1%
Number of Visits to Kuakata: Once			72.2%

Twice			22.2%
More than twice			5.6%
Accommodation While Visiting:			
Resort			23.5%
Hotel			64.7%
Villa			11.8%
Eco Lodge			0%
Campsite/ Tourist spot			5.9%
Other			5.9%
Important Factor While Choosing Destination:			
Price of the holiday			54.3%
Climate / Weather			45.7%
Amount of tourist attractions			22.9%
Having a lively nightlife			14.3%
Quality of beach and swimming water			17.1%
Accessibility of location			20%
Availability during school holidays			8.6%

Proper marketing of this tourist spots – There are only some advertisements in TV to promote tourism of Bangladesh in general by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. Information about Kuakata is available on the internet, but those are very basic. Before going to Kuakata everyone has known only about the beauty of the beach and did not have any ideas about the other attractions which were surrounding Kuakata. From the survey result is shown that most of the respondents (71.4%) have known about Kuakata from friends or family. Yet, most of the people could not reach to know about it from Marketing or Promotional Channels. Thus, attraction of more tourists and potential investors, development of proper marketing channels and activities are crucial for tourism in Kuakata.

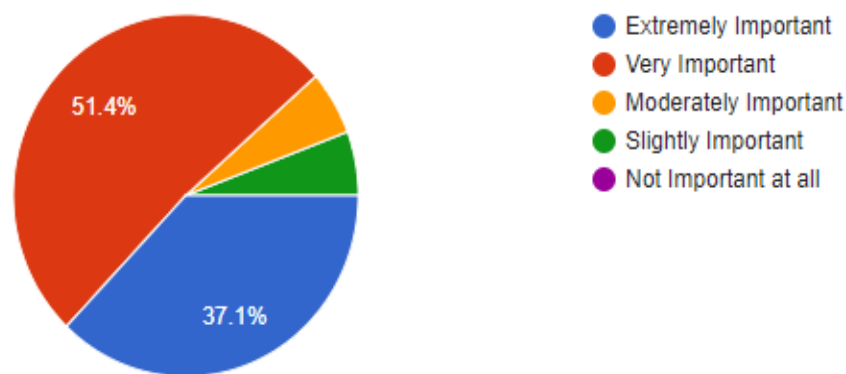


Figure 2: Opinion on Importance of Tourism Marketing and Promotional Activities.

Figure 2 depicts that the most of the respondents believe that proper marketing of the tourist destination is very much important in attracting tourists.

Quality of information available about Kuakata – As shown in figure 3, we can see that the information available for potential tourists to gain insights from are not yet too much satisfactory. Nowadays tourists tend to gather full information about the tourist destination before visiting the place, so not having enough information available on the internet can put negative impression on their mind.

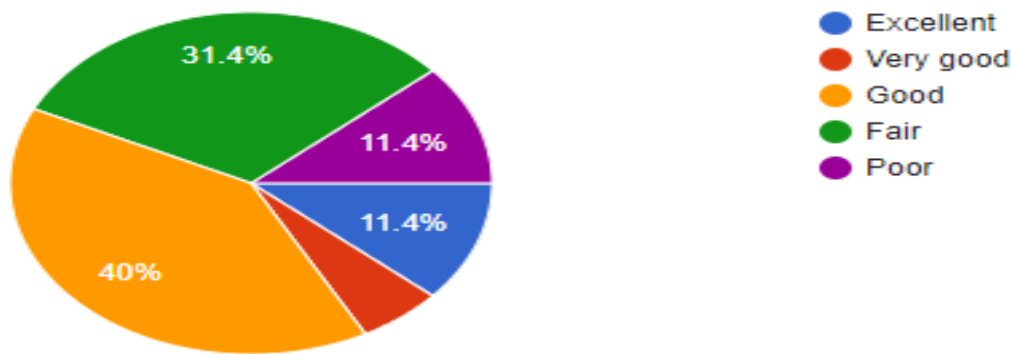


Figure 3: Visitors' opinion on the quality of information available about tourism in Kuakata.

Transportation to Kuakata – From a previous study it was observed that, although the distance to Kuakata from Dhaka is about 300 km it took a longer time than expected for the visitors to reach Kuakata due to five ferries on river which were needed in order to get across. The ferry services are very poor and cannot carry many vehicles at a time, which creates enormous lines of vehicles on the shore. Sometimes it takes twice the time expected.

Food and accommodation facilities – Easy accessibility of reasonable hotel and lodges and having good quality meal is very much important factor for the tourists. Some of the respondents thought that it is quite ok while others thought that there are lots of things to improve.

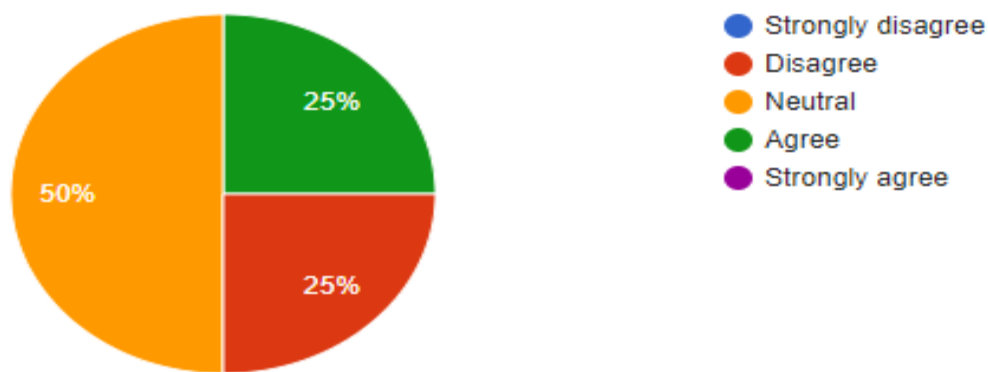


Figure 4: Opinion on Satisfaction Level on the Quality of Food & Accommodation.

The demand for the hotel rooms and rent depend on times of year. In peak seasons, hotel rooms are not always available and rent goes up. While, in off seasons, accommodation are comparatively cheaper and in most of the cases the rent is negotiable. Cheap hotels are not so neat and clean but expensive hotels provides very cozy environment to the tourists.

Safety & security at the outside area – It can be further observed that the satisfactory level varies largely from visitors to visitors. There was not enough information about the beach, its depth, where to go and where not to go. Some information was available but those were only in Bengali, information should be in English and there should have some symbols as well. There are not enough lifesaving matters if needed. (Hossain , 2013).

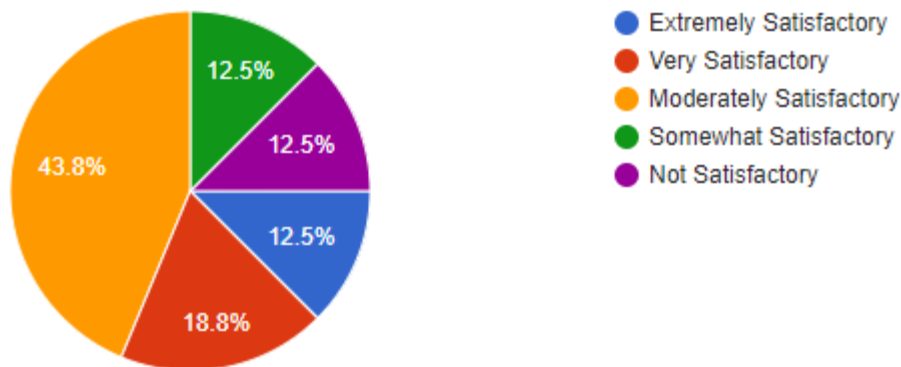


Figure 5: Satisfaction on Safety and Security at the Outside Area.

Availability of entertainment facilities – According to the secondary data analysis, most of the entertainment facilities in Kuakata are Nature based. Watching the sunrise and sunset, walking on the sea beach, or enjoying the natural beauty nesting to the beach and forest by hiring motorbike, or going to middle of the sea by small boat, visiting the Sundarban forest were common to everyone. In Kuakata, tourists were always busy visiting many places nearby. But there was not much to do at night time, as there is no big market place or places to just sit and hang out in.

Maintenance of tourist attraction – Maintenance of the tourist area leaves a large impact on tourist satisfaction level. If the areas the tourists visit are not clean and well maintained, they will not feel satisfied with their visit. The current situation of Kuakata in this factor is quite satisfactory. The environment, water and locality are still neat and clean. As it is not too crowded with tourists, the water hasn't become polluted yet. But the internal roads in the area are still not quite developed, so in the rainy season they get swamped and become unusable.

5. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

The Kuakata Sea Beach is a potential recreational site in Bangladesh for holidays and leisure times. In this paper addressed the necessary information which is related to the overall situation of Kuakata. The aim of this paper is to find out the tourism prospect and development possibilities of Kuakata sea beach by analyzing the current situation of that region. In this paper shown that just improving the infrastructure and adopting necessary marketing and promotional activities can be a major changing factor in the prospect of tourism industry in Kuakata. If the beach is developed to its full potential, it may also contribute to the livelihoods and socio-economic development of local communities. The country can also earn foreign currency as more and more visitors, including foreign tourists, are expected to visit to the site. Furthermore, both contacts and contracts can be initiated with national and international travel agencies so that more domestic and foreign travellers can be attracted towards this beautiful tourist destination that Bangladesh has to offer. In addition, private sector can encourage by the government to work together for the sake of the development of tourism industry in Bangladesh.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the current situation of tourism sector in Kuakata sea beach, understand its potentialities and customer demands, people's expectations and experience towards the visit, marketing and promotional prospects and progresses of Kuakata to both local and international tourists and so on. There are some recommendations in followings, which might help to attain the goal of the study and develop the tourism in Kuakata. Government and appropriate authority should focus more on highlighting Kuakata as a tourist's destination to both local and foreign tourist market. Different marketing

techniques and channels can be used to do that, such as making promotional video clips and advertisements and spread it through TV, newspapers, internet, YouTube and other forms of electronic media marketing. Kuakata still doesn't have its own website with all of its information. The information about Kuakata is in the Website of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, but it lacks detailed and updated information. Some information is available in some other websites and blog which are not reliable and not updated properly due to lack of expertise and skills. The government should give more attention in increasing local tourists flow because, getting it popular to the local tourists can serve as another promotional media and capture the attention of tourists from neighbor countries. For that purpose, more investment and proper planning are necessary. There is not proper monitoring system to control and improve hotel business, security issues and transportations which might be taken seriously. Transportation, accommodation, promotional, safety and security, entertainment and internet facilities related factors should be considered for tourist satisfaction. The environment in Kuakata sea beach is still neat and clean, but it is advancing towards the way of pollution. Proper initiatives can be taken to maintain its hygiene and local people can be encouraged not to damage the beauty of the beach area. Roads can be constructed along the beach so that visitors can visit other attractive sites near the beach in other vehicles along with rented motorbikes. Proper transportation parking places can also be developed for the tourists with vehicles of their own, to ensure the maintenance of clean environment on the beach as well as the free movement of the visitors. No easy transportation to Kuakata is available for tourists who want to visit there from distant places. The easiest mode of travel can be boat and bus. The government can launch quality boat to that area. Bus services are still not so good. Special routes can be developed to visit the tourist destinations to attract more tourists with comfortable travel service. Kuakata is bestowed with natural beauty. Tourists remain busy during day time to travel different places. But when it is night they get bored to stay at hotels or to walk around. They need some refreshment and entertainment at night. Some entertainment facilities for night time can be available. At the beach, there is not enough information about the beach and tour guides who can speak in English and other languages. So, there can have more signs and information in English and other languages. Finally, there can be proper initiatives and planning to develop tourism of Kuakata. Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation of the Government of Bangladesh can give special attention to developing Kuakata Beach as an international standard beach. Local participation in managing this special and unique recreational beach can be encouraged, as tourism generates additional income to the local people and contributes to boosting up the local to National economy.

Although this research was carefully prepared, there were some unavoidable limitations. Firstly, the sample of the study is limited to the tourists living in Dhaka and adjacent areas and secondly, the research was conducted only on a small size of sample which may have led to a biased result.

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