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Assessing the Conditions of the Factors of Ecotourism in Kuakata: Defining the Challenges to Overcome

Abstract

This study intended to find the condition of different aspects related to ecotourism in Kuakata to give better insight on how to improve the present situation of tourism in Kuakata and how to promote and develop ecotourism to bolster and secure the future of this place. For this research, descriptive analysis was performed for the data collected through 56 questionnaires using SPSS 26.0 and MS Excel and it was found that regular environmental condition, regular security system and impact of ecotourism on the locality in Kuakata is good, but the economic condition of local people, local transport facilities, hotel quality, water quality, sea-beach management, forest management, present ecotourism status, government and NGO's roles in the development of ecotourism are pretty average and electricity condition is bad. Environmental hazards deter tourism quietly and plastic, noise, and odor pollution in highly present in Kuakata. Diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, and dengue are very frequent diseases in this locality. The findings of this study could give proper insight towards ecotourism in Kuakata and might help further development in this regard.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, biodiversity, environment, tourist, development.*

JEL Classification: Z32, Z30, Z31

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1. Introduction

Ecotourism or nature tourism is an extremely significant niche product for the larger travel industry with the prospects to be a powerful instrument in sustainable growth (Wood, 2002) and can become functional by educating, training and motivating local communities to consider environmental tourism as a substitute and supplemental income-giving activity which greatly facilitates environmental sustainability (Pakdeepinit, 2007). Natural tourism is generally one of the world's most rapidly growing tourism sectors (Buckley 2000; Kuo 2002; Ryan et al. 2000; Wight 2001). It can be defined as 'tourism mainly related to the direct enjoyment of relatively untouched phenomena of nature' (Valentine 1992). As far tourism is concerned, Kuakata is a very significant in Bangladesh. It is a town in south-eastern Bangladesh known for its panoramic sea beach. Kuakata sea beach is recorded as the second largest sea beach in Bangladesh. Locally Kuakata sea beach is known as 'Sagar Kannya' or Daughter of the Sea. It has a rare scenic beauty spot on the southernmost tip of Bangladesh. Kuakata is a place enriched with many potentials and natural resources, but there are many things to be discovered yet (Rashid & Taskin, 2018). Tourism has increasingly become a very significant and dynamic sector both among developed and developing nations (Gartner & Lime, 2000). Ecotourism business development in Kuakata is highly significant to find these undiscovered beauties and potentials. Bangladesh has a great chance to be a demanding place as an ecotourism destination and its potential for ecotourism development is also very high. Ecotourism can be based on scenic beauty, attractive sites, traditional cultures, and ethnicity (The Daily Star, 2013). Kuakata can be a real potential place for this ecotourism business.

Existing tourist facilities related to beach recreation and basic requirement are not sufficient in Kuakata. Proper planned actions and policies are not available here for beach development facilitating all types of tourists. All types of beach facilities should be available considering national and international tourists in Kuakata. (Rahman et al., 2015). With keeping all these issues in mind, this study has made an effort to find some of the key aspects regarding tourism and ecotourism conditions in Kuakata. This finding contributes highly to the betterment of the tourism system in Kuakata. This work helps to understand the current situation in Kuakata and identify the challenges and limitations of tourism marketing and promotional activities in this area. This study has covered some areas of tourism-related terms and found quantitative information regarding these by asking questions to the locals that none of the previous studies have done before. By analysing all parameters, this work helps to increase the potential of Kuakata as a high demanding ecotourism place. It also contributes to the ecotourism business in Bangladesh. Ecotourism business can contribute a lot to the economy of Bangladesh. It can play a vital role to brighten the image and recognition of a country worldwide. So, this research has great importance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecotourism

Bangladesh is full of attractive places. Ecotourism is a concept that can be defined in many ways. Tourism which is inspired by the natural history of an area is known as ecotourism. The tourists visit relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation, and sensitivity. It is a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labor or financial means aimed at benefits for the management of the site and the economic well-being of the local people (Ziffer, 1989). There are a lot of measures and kinds of ecotourism (Donohoe & Needham 2006; Orams 2001), but they concern journeys into a natural area to a wider extent; involves natives to the area; provides economic gains for the conservation of local environment and species diversity by reducing impact of the visitors. It is tourism and recreation that is both nature-based and sustainable (Lindberg & McKercher, 1997) and a refinement of the connection between tourism and conservation and

also expansion of it (Stronza et al. 2019). Ecotourism provides the tourists with an educational experience while also ensuring the location's economic, social, and sustainable development (Weaver and Lawton 2007). In ecotourism, there continues to be a significant and predominant element of cultural relativism. Therefore, what considers as ecotourism in some regions or countries does not necessarily hold true in others (Fennell, 2001).

2.2 Constraint Factors of Marketing of Ecotourism in Kuakata

There are lots of natural resources in Kuakata. There are scenic resources, such as Faltra Forest, Jhau Forest, Gangamati, Lebur Char, Lal-kakrar Char (Red Crab lands of Sand-Deposition), Kuakata National Park, etc. There are also material resources, such as prawns, fishes, crabs, dry fishes, minerals, etc. There are also some potential facilitative resources, such as Ramnabad Channel, ample space for ship breaking and making industry, adequate spaces for in-shore afforestation, and international quality stadium (Rahman et al., 2015). Some of the cultural resources are- Central Shima Buddhist Temple, Rakhain handicraft, Misripara Buddhist Temple, etc.

There are many constraint factors of marketing ecotourism in Kuakata. First of all, there is a lack of appropriate marketing of these tourist spots. There are only a few advertisements on TV, radio, and other print media to promote tourism in Bangladesh in general by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. Although there is information available about Kuakata on the internet, those are very basic. It is known to everyone about the beauty of the beach but did not have ideas about the other attractions which were adjacent to Kuakata. This happens because most people do not have knowledge about it from Marketing or Promotional Channels. Thus, the development of appropriate marketing channels and activities is crucial to attracting more tourists and investors, for tourism in Kuakata. Also, the quality of information is not sufficient for Kuakata. At present tourists try to collect full information about the tourist spots before visiting the place. Therefore, a negative impression can be made on their mind if there is not enough information available on the internet.

In Australia, the Northern Territory Tourism Industry has earned great success over the last few years by heavily promoting its natural and cultural resources, assisted by promotional vehicles such as *Crocodile Dundee* and the packaging of Ayers Rock (now Uluru). Kakadu National Park has become an important foundation in the marketing, promotion and development of the Northern Territory's Tourism Industry. (Moore & Carter, 1993). To meet the demand of the ecotourism visitors, ecolodges of Caribbean and Latin America are providing different products related to ecotourism marketed by internet (Lai and Shafer, 2005). Canada is trying to develop internet-based marketing for ecotourism (Donohoe and Needham 2008) and Thailand is promoting ecotourism marketing based on internet too, but not so developed for the tourists and doesn't help much on ecotourism aspects as not enough information is provided (Sangpikul, 2008).

Situation in Kuakata in regards to ecotourism marketing, however, doesn't seem very satisfactory as no visible marketing campaign promoting ecotourism in Kuakata is done. Resources like as Fatrar Forest, Jhau Forest, Gangamati, Lebur Char, Lal-kakrar Char (Red Crab lands of Sand-Deposition), Kuakata National Park, Central Shima Buddhist Temple, Rakhain handicraft, and material resources like as prawns, fishes, crabs, dry fishes, minerals, etc are most significant places and sources of ecotourism in Kuakata, but no marketing revolves around these important sources.

There are also problems regarding transportation to Kuakata. The distance to Kuakata from Dhaka is about 300 km. Despite the distance not so long, it took a longer time than expected for the visitors to reach Kuakata. Because they need to use five ferries to get across. The ferry services are not good at all. It cannot carry many conveyances at a time, which creates large lines of vehicles on the shore. So, the expected time sometimes goes to double.

There are also concerns about food and accommodation facilities, safety & security in the outside area. Hotel rooms demand and rent depend on times of the year. Demand varies from peak seasons to off-seasons. In peak seasons, the demands and rents are comparatively higher, while in off-seasons, those become lower. Services vary from cheap to expensive hotels. Expensive hotels offer comparatively better services. In the case of safety and security in the outside area, there should have sufficient lifesaving matters, in addition to some symbols indicating where to go and which spots are risky. Information should be available in English (Hossain, 2015). Some steps need to be taken to increase entertainment facilities and tourist attractions. In Kuakata, tourists were often busy visiting many adjacent places. But at night time, there was not much to do. There are no big marketplace or entertainment places to sit and hang out. Here the environment, water, and locality are still neat and clean. The water has not become polluted yet, because still, it is not very crowded. But in the rainy season, the roads get overflowed and become unusable, because the road here is still quite undeveloped (Rashid & Taskin, 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

In this survey, data were collected through 56 questionnaires to meet up the study objectives. As Kuakata belongs to the Latachapli union, all the data were collected from the Latachapli union. Thus, the Latachapli union became the study area of this study. Face-to-face interviews from different households of the Latachapli union were taken according to the pre-determined questionnaire. This survey was conducted in December 2020. All of the participants, who were all local tourists, were willing to take part in the survey. The research team took their consent before interviewing them. Due to the pandemic situation foreigners weren't in Kuakata to visit and so, no foreigners were involved in this study and this was a limitation of the study. Social distancing and health hygiene were maintained according to the instructions of WHO (World Health Organization).

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire contained some socio-demographic questions, such as the respondent's age, gender, occupation, and educational status. The rest of the questions were about ecotourism and overall facilities related to tourism in Kuakata. Several questions were single answer questions (e.g., in which months the number of tourists increases in Kuakata, how is the quality of food in Kuakata, etc.) and the answers are presented in table 1 with their respective frequencies and percentages. Some questions had multiple options to choose as answers (e.g., spots of Kuakata tourists mostly visit, types of pollution seen in Kuakata) and their answer frequency with percentage is also presented in table 1. 13 questions were 5-point Likert type where respondents were asked the questions and they answered them through a 5-point scale as very good, good, average, bad, and very bad, expressing their opinion on the statements of the questions. Responds were given by scaling the points, quantifying them as 1 = very good, 2 = good, 3 = average, 4 = bad and 5 = very bad. Table 2 contains these questions' responses, with percentages of respondents answering a certain question stating its' statement as very good or good, average, and bad or very bad. Mean and standard deviation of the Likert type questions are also presented to check how was the overall response of the participants were for a statement, with mean converging towards 1 meaning overall response converging towards 'very good' and mean converging towards 5 meaning overall response converging towards 'very bad'. Mean around or near to 3 represents the response to be 'average'. Mode for the same questions is also tabulated to find what is the most chosen answer for a statement of a question from the points very good, good, average, bad, and very bad.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

To handle and analyze the data, Microsoft Excel 2019 and IBM SPSS version 25 were used. Excel was used to clean, edit and sort the data. Then the dataset was imported to SPSS to analyze further. Frequencies and percentages of the quantitative data were computed and some statistical analyses such as mean, standard deviation, and mode were calculated for the 5-point Likert type questions.

4. Results

The demographic information of the respondents was recorded in this survey to have an overview of the respondents of the study. Out of the 56 respondents, 38 (67.9%) were male and 18 (32.1%) were female. The mean age of the respondents was 38.23 years (standard deviation 11.532) with the maximum age being 65 years and minimum being 20 years. Most of the respondents attended primary school only (48.2%) whereas the secondary and higher secondary level of education had been received by 19.6% and 25% of them respectively. None of the respondents were graduates and 4 of them (7.1%) were not educated at all. Respondents were from all walks of life as suggested by their professions. 14 of the respondents were shopkeepers, 12 were housewives, 8 were street food sellers, 5 were farmers, 4 were tourist guides and tour operators, and the rests were of various professions.

Respondents were asked several questions related to Kuakata and its overall tourism scenario to find out the impact of tourism on the biodiversity of Kuakata where some of the questions were of multiple responses. Table 1 contains all of the frequencies and percentages of respondent's responses to a particular question.

In the time interval from November to March, tourists from all over the country and foreign come to visit Kuakata and it is the time that this place faces a huge surge of tourists visiting, as all the respondents informed. The most visited place in Kuakata is Kuakata sea beach as all the respondents stated. Misripara Rakhain Polli and Buddhist Temple, Jhauban, Lal Kakrar Char, and Lebur Ban are also some most visited places, but Fatrar Char is not visited by tourists as the locals stated. It was found that students visit Kuakata the most and a very few numbers of teachers, businessmen, and government service holders visit this place. For visiting and touring purposes, motorbikes and auto-rickshaws were mainly used. As far as the food was concerned, 78.6 percent of the respondents thought that the food quality was average in Kuakata and 21.4 percent stated that foods were hygienic, but none reported foods to be unhygienic or not up to the mark. Most people maintained that natural gas was mainly used all over Kuakata for cooking along with wood and coal. Biogas was used very little, but solar energy was not yet used. Deep tube wells and shallow tube well were the sources of drinking water in this touring place. All the locals who participated in this study asserted diarrhea to be the most common disease to visit Kuakata now and then. Cholera, typhoid, and dengue fever were also some very common diseases here, asserted by 58.9, 57.1, and 69.6 percent of the locals, respectively.

Several tornadoes and other environmental hazards had visited Kuakata in recent times of which the most detrimental to tourism had been Aila, as per 55.4% respondents, followed by Sidr (42.9%), but Fani had not been very much hampering for tourism here. 82.1% of the people of responded to this survey thought that recent environmental hazards had pretty much hampered tourism with 16.1% thinking that might haven't hampered. All of the wastages here were managed as landfilled. 75% of the local people found that the biodiversity of Kuakata had not been hampered so much and other 25% found no hampering at all although all of them thought that plastic pollution was there the major pollution type and 64.3% of respondents found noise pollution was also causing problems, as well as 39.3%, found odor pollution problematic.

Table 1: Frequencies of variables.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender of the respondents		
Male	38	67.9
Female	18	32.1
Educational status of local people in Kuakata		
Primary	27	48.2
Secondary	11	19.6
Higher Secondary	14	25.0
Graduated	0	0.0
Not Educated	4	7.1
In which months the number of tourists increases in Kuakata		
November-March	56	100.0
April-October	0	0.0
November-January	0	0.0
In which months the number of foreign tourists increases in Kuakata		
November-March	56	100.0
April-October	0	0.0
November-January	0	0.0
Quality of foods in Kuakata		
Hygienic	12	21.4
Average	44	78.6
Unhygienic	0	0.0
Not up to the Mark	0	0.0
Type of water is used for drinking in Kuakata		
Deep Tube Well	29	51.8
Shallow Tube Well	0	0.0
Both Deep and Shallow Water	27	48.2
How much of the biodiversity of Kuakata hampered due to tourism		
Very much	0	0.0
Not So much	42	75.0
Not Hampered	14	25.0
Recently which environmental hazard was most hampering for tourism in Kuakata		
Fani	1	1.8
Sidr	24	42.9
Aila	31	55.4
How the tourism hampered for the recent environmental hazard		
Very Much	1	1.8
Quietly	46	82.1
Not Hampered	9	16.1
Which spot of Kuakata tourists mostly visit		
Kuakata Sea beach	56	100.0
Misripara Rakhain Polli and Buddhist Temple	48	85.7
Jhauban	48	85.7
Lal Kakrar Char	46	82.1
Fatrar Char	0	0.0
Lebur Ban	49	87.5

What type of people generally visits Kuakata		
Businessman	3	5.5
Lawyer	0	0.0
Teacher	2	3.6
Student	55	98.2
Government Service Officer	2	3.6
What type of local vehicle mostly used for tourists for travelling different places in Kuakata		
Motor Bike	56	100.0
Van	2	3.6
Auto Rickshaw	51	91.1
Rickshaw	0	0.0
Bus	1	1.8
Car	0	0.0
What type of fuel is used for cooking in Kuakata		
Natural Gas	56	100.0
Wood	46	82.1
Solar Energy	0	0.0
Biogas	5	8.9
Coal	46	82.1
What type of pollution is seen in Kuakata		
Plastic Pollution	56	100.0
Noise Pollution	36	64.3
Odor Pollution	22	39.3
How the waste management process exists in Kuakata		
Landfill	56	100.0
Anaerobic Digestion	0	0.0
Composting	0	0.0
Incineration	0	0.0
What type of diseases generally visits in Kuakata		
Diarrhea	56	100.0
Cholera	33	58.9
Typhoid	32	57.1
Dengue Fever	39	69.6

Respondents were asked to give their views on some statements about tourism conditions, facilities, and environmental impact of tourism and ecotourism of Kuakata. Responds were given as a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = very good, 2 = good, 3 = average, 4 = bad and 5 = very bad. Very good and good were put together and, very bad and bad were put together for percentages of respondents who responded on the particular statement as very good and good, very bad and bad, or average. A smaller value for the mean for a statement from table 2 means the condition, described by the statement, was very good or bad, whereas the value of mean near to 5 meant very bad or bad. The mode gives the most amount of respondent's choice of response for a statement.

From the table 2, it can be seen that local people of Kuakata stated that regular environmental condition, regular security system and impact of ecotourism on the locality in Kuakata was good. But it was also evident that the economic condition of locals, transport facilities, hotel quality, water quality, sea-beach management, forest management, present ecotourism status, government and NGO's roles in the development of ecotourism in Kuakata were average. However, the electricity condition in Kuakata was bad as 75% of people responded.

Table 2: Responses on statements about tourism in Kuakata.

Statement	Very good/ Good (%)	Average (%)	Very bad/ Bad (%)	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode
Regular environmental condition of Kuakata	91.1	8.9	0.0	1.88	0.541	Good
Economic condition of local people in Kuakata	5.4	92.8	1.8	2.96	0.267	Average
Regular transport facilities of Kuakata	25	60.7	14.3	2.82	0.834	Average
Quality of hotels in Kuakata	19.6	80.4	0.0	2.8	0.401	Average
Water quality of Kuakata	30.4	69.6	0.0	2.66	0.549	Average
Regular security system of Kuakata	66.1	33.9	0.0	2.14	0.724	Good
Regular electricity generation system of Kuakata	25.0	0.0	75.0	4.07	0.806	Bad
Condition of the sea beach management in Kuakata	26.8	73.2	0.0	2.71	0.494	Average
Condition of Forest management in Kuakata	7.1	48.3	44.6	3.38	0.62	Average
Present status of ecotourism in Kuakata	7.1	92.9	0.0	2.93	0.26	Average
Governments' role for the development of ecotourism in Kuakata	14.3	85.7	0.0	2.86	0.353	Average
NGOs' role for the development of ecotourism in Kuakata	8.9	91.1	0.0	2.91	0.288	Average
Impact of ecotourism in Kuakata	87.5	12.5	0.0	1.73	0.674	Good

5. Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

Although Kuakata is a prime tourist attraction in Bangladesh, tourism here has not been flourished much and the level of expectancy of economic and infrastructural development in this area due to tourism is not yet achieved, because of the neglecting the potential of tourism in Kuakata and mismanaging the system (Rahman et al., 2015). Questions were asked to the local people who observed the situation on their own so that they could answer rightly, with an intention to check some of the tourism and ecotourism-related aspects that relate highly to the betterment of the tourism system. There are several studies regarding tourism in Kuakata, but this study covered some areas of tourism-related terms and found quantitative information regarding these by asking questions to the locals that none of the previous studies have done before.

Most of the locals stated that food quality is average in Kuakata. For tourists to be more attracted, food quality must be enriched, another research also suggested the same (Raihana & Rashid, 2018). With the development of the tourism management system, it should be kept in concern that biodiversity and the environmental balance of the locality are preserved. Locals think that the biodiversity of Kuakata is quietly hampered by tourism. That is why proper steps in that regard must be taken. Coal and wood are very much used in this locality as cooking fuel which might cause substantial damage to the surrounding environment and pollute the vicinity. It also came into notice that local people found plastic pollution highly present along with noise and odor pollution, which are also substantially present in the tourist spot. As far as ecotourism is concerned to be developed in Kuakata, environmental preservation must be promoted, and that's the reason these pollutions must be kept in check. It is also evident from the collected data that diseases like dengue, cholera, typhoid and diarrhea are pretty frequent here, which requires proper attention and care to prevent these diseases to enhance ecotourism.

Although the people from the locality stated that regular environmental condition, regular security and overall impact of ecotourism is good in Kuakata, there are still several aspects there to pay heed to for the cause to develop tourism there. Most of the local people maintained that economic condition of locals, transport facilities, hotel quality, water quality, sea-beach management, forest management, present ecotourism status, government and NGO's roles in the development of ecotourism in Kuakata are average and the electricity condition is bad. Local authorities and local tourism management should work on developing the transport facility in Kuakata for tourists to travel from one spot to another easily. The quality of hotels must also be improved and the availability of sweet and drinkable water must be ensured. The spots tourists visit must be kept clean, well maintained, unpolluted and ecofriendly by locals, tourists, and respective authorities. Electricity is very irregular in Kuakata and so, local people, as well as tourists, suffer. To overcome all these shortcomings, local government or authorities and local tourism management together with related NGOs must work on and take necessary steps to develop the tourism condition in Kuakata to attract more and more tourists to this very beautiful and picturesque place.

Bangladesh is a country with many naturally beautiful places and has some historically and culturally significant places. These places can boost tourism in this country if promoted and managed properly. Kuakata is such a place for Bangladesh with its' eye-catching sea beach, second-longest of the country, and provides a rare chance to enjoy both sunrise and sunset from the same place, it also has some other interesting places to visit, such as Misripara Rakhain Polli and Buddhist Temple, Jhauban, Lal Kakrar Char and Lebur Ban. With all the beauties Kuakata holds, it can multiply its current tourist numbers rapidly and become a hotspot for tourism, only if the proper concern is paid towards its tourism potential. Several points have been found in this study where some prosperity must be done to improve ecotourism in this place. Infrastructural development is a concern, as well as environmental balance to keep, is a must.

Ecotourism promotes proper facilities of a tourist attraction and economic profit along with its natural conservation and sustaining the local biodiversity. A place like Kuakata, which is blessed with overwhelming natural beauty and biodiversity, proper implementation of ecotourism can help to make this place one of the most attractive places to more foreign and domestic tourists to visit every year and hence, economic solvency for the local people can be achieved and Bangladesh can earn more foreign currency through tourism. The government must put their necessary concern in this case and should focus on developing the current condition of tourism in this certain place. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation must take proper actions on redefining the pros and cons of ecotourism in Kuakata to bring prosperity to this sector and the local people. They should emphasize the environmental aspects of tourism besides its economic benefit. They should try to educate local people about the environmental condition and delicacy as well as conservation of biodiversity of this place. Tourists must be aware of the nature conservation and sustainability of tourist spots and should be guided and instructed properly. Combining everybody's eager effort to develop and promote ecotourism in Kuakata can make it a place not only local tourists but also foreigners would surely put in their bucket list to visit.

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