

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY AS DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH: A REVIEW OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Bangladesh, a nation rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, possesses significant untapped potential in its tourism and hospitality sectors. Despite this, the contribution of these industries to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has historically been modest compared to global averages. Recognizing tourism as a catalyst for economic growth, there is a growing imperative to understand and enhance its role in the country's development trajectory. The purpose of this research is to assess how much the tourism and hospitality management sectors contribute to Bangladesh's economy and what new ways there are to develop these sectors and to determine the current obstacles that impede them from reaching their full potential. This research aims to identify ways in which the strategic development of both the tourism and hospitality management sectors can create jobs, generate foreign exchange earnings, and stimulate the development of other related industries. This paper presents a narrative literature review along with a bibliometric analysis of modern scholarly works on tourism in Bangladesh. It combines peer-reviewed literature and government reports with national and international tourism statistics to evaluate the direct economic impacts of tourism on the hospitality industry covering GDP contribution and job creation, among other factors and the indirect impacts, such as foreign direct investment. It also includes a qualitative assessment of tourism-related policies, legislative frameworks, and developmental programs. Bangladesh's tourism and hospitality produce 3% of the total National GDP and seek to grow to 6-7%, contributing greatly to employment opportunities from all sectors, including accommodations, restaurants/cafes, passenger travel (transportation), and handicrafts, as well as attracting foreign investments and promoting cultural exchange. The literature reviewed points to a positive association between overall economic development and the growth of these sectors; however, there are some challenges associated with limited infrastructure and poor marketing. Bangladesh's economic development relies on strategic investments and effective management of the tourism and hospitality industry. Competitively priced, high-quality products in Bangladesh can enhance the country's overall gross domestic product (GDP), provide

many new jobs, and improve the country's status as an economic player on the world stage. Continued focus on responsible tourism practices and increased investment in infrastructure will be needed to realize this potential.

Keywords: Tourism Management, Hospitality Industry, Bangladesh Economy, Sustainable Economy

1. Introduction

Bangladesh, a country of South Asia, with its rich cultural heritage, varied beauties, and famous hospitality, has a big but unexploited field of tourism and hospitality. From the largest natural sea beach in the world at Cox's Bazar to the calm mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, which is also a World Heritage Site of UNESCO, many attractions would help the country to develop its economy. However, the share of these two important sectors to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still low, contrary to the very high potential inside the country and to global standards. This difference shows a big need to really know and make better the role of tourism and hospitality in Bangladesh's bigger economic growth plan. The realization of tourism as a powerful means of economic growth, employment creation, and earning foreign exchange has led to the urgency of understanding the best ways to harness these sectors. A well-established tourism and hospitality sector does not just create income but provides income to other sectors such as transport, handicrafts, food service, and local trade. It also encourages cultural exchange, promotes world goodwill, and raises the status of a country in the world.

The paper makes an in-depth appraisal of the present landscape of tourism and hospitality management in Bangladesh. The major objectives are to: (1) assess the current contributions of these sectors to the economic development of the country; (2) identify major opportunities for sustainable growth; and (3) identify key challenges that are preventing the sectors from achieving their full potential. Through addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a clear path through which strategic interventions and proper management can lead to the creation of substantial employment, enhancement of critical foreign exchange earnings, and invigoration of a wide range of related industries to hasten the overall economic development of Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global and Regional Context of Tourism's Economic Impact

Bangladesh, a South Asian country known for its rich cultural heritage, varied natural beauty, and renowned hospitality, has a large but underdeveloped tourism and hospitality sector. Its attractions range from the world's longest natural sea beach at Cox's Bazar to the tranquil mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Together, these and other destinations could contribute significantly to the country's economic development. Yet tourism and hospitality still account for a small share of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), despite Bangladesh's considerable potential and the standards seen globally. The gap points to a clear need to understand these sectors more fully and improve their place within the country's broader economic growth

strategy. Tourism's net effect on Bangladesh's economy has been positive, although it has not remained steady. Just before the pandemic, in 2019, tourism contributed \$12.71 billion to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equal to 4.39% of the national economy. The sector also supported around 2.48 million jobs, or 3.90% of total employment (WTTC,2024). Those figures point to tourism's growing place in the national economy, but they also indicate how far Bangladesh still has to go to match similar destinations. At present, tourism is estimated to account for around 3% of national GDP. The government's ambitions are considerably higher: it is aiming for a contribution of 6-7%. This large gap does not only indicate an underperformance but also gives a clear signal for the potential growth within the sector.

2.2 Tourism and Economic Growth Theories

Academics have developed theoretical models to explain how tourism relates to economic growth. Among the best known is the Tourism-Led Economic Growth (TLEG) hypothesis, which, like several other models, argues that tourism can act as a major catalyst for the economy. There are several reasons for this. Tourism brings in foreign exchange and can reduce payment imbalances; it generates direct and indirect employment across service sectors; and it creates demand for substantial investment in infrastructure. Spending on transportation and communication systems can also produce positive externalities for other sectors, not just tourism, while eventually improving living conditions. The Growth-Led Tourism (GLT) hypothesis proposes a positive link between a country's overall economic growth and the development of its tourism sector. As national incomes rise and infrastructure improves, travel becomes more accessible and attractive to a broader population. A third perspective, bidirectional causality, holds that tourism and economic development influence each other. Tourism can stimulate economic growth, creating favorable conditions for the tourist trade to expand further. Recent empirical studies in Bangladesh have provided additional evidence of this complex relationship. Sadekin (2025) found that international tourism receipts, tourism expenditure, and foreign direct investment (FDI) exerted positive long-term effects on economic growth.

2.3 Previous Studies on Tourism in Bangladesh: Contributions, Challenges, and Opportunities

The lack of a cohesive national brand and efficient international marketing greatly hinders Bangladesh's ability to compete in the global tourism market. According to Hassan and Kokkranikal's (2018) analysis of Bangladesh's national tourism policy formulation process, the nation must have well-informed, evidence-based policies, strong political support, and active participation from the private and voluntary sectors to become a successful, sustainable tourism destination.

Amin (2018) also emphasized that tourism in the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, must be developed sustainably. He called for a multi-level approach with stakeholders so that tourism can bring socio-economic benefits to local communities without damaging the environment. The study proposed an action plan for long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the Sundarbans as a tourism destination based on UNWTO indicators for sustainable tourism development.

But often systemic barriers thwart that potential. One issue is repeated and again in academic research and policy analysis: bad roads and limited air connectivity remain the main barriers to the country's development. Poor infrastructure negatively affects tourists' experiences and satisfaction, making Bangladesh less attractive as a travel destination (Mohiuddin, 2023). The study revealed that the poor transport infrastructure reduces the accessibility and connectivity of the tourist sites, leading to fewer visits and shorter visits. The lack of adequate accommodation and hospitality facilities also limits the quality and range of services available to tourists and further weakens Bangladesh's appeal.

The lack of effective international marketing and a single national brand greatly hampers Bangladesh's competitiveness in the international tourism market. In their analysis of the process of national tourism policy formulation in Bangladesh, Hassan and Kokkranikal (2018) stress that if Bangladesh is to become a successful and sustainable tourism destination, it needs well-informed, evidence-based policies, strong political backing and active involvement of the private and voluntary sectors.

The National Tourism Policy 2010 was designed to create employment and contribute to economic growth while maintaining environmental sustainability. However, several critics have questioned the effectiveness of this approach. Hassan, Kennell and Chaperon (2020) interviewed 13 influential stakeholders and found that the implementation of tourism policy in Bangladesh is hindered by hierarchical governance structures. This is especially apparent in decisions concerning priority areas, the choice of policy instruments and the ways in which the private sector is encouraged to contribute to national tourism development. The initiative has been hampered for a long period by a lack of funding, poor inter-agency cooperation and low public awareness.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified all of these problems. Bangladesh's tourism and hospitality sector lost \$3.1 billion, while approximately 400,000 workers were displaced (Amin & Taghizadeh-Hesary, WTTC, 2024). Revenue and employment fell sharply, and the effects were profound. Recovering and revitalizing the sector now requires urgent, innovative measures, including digital innovations and the promotion of green tourism initiatives.

2.4 Role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Tourism Development

Foreign direct investment is considered as a catalyst of economic development of a country and Bangladesh is not an exception. In tourism, it provides much needed capital for major infrastructure projects, as well as advanced technologies and management practices. It can also link the local market with the global supply chain. Therefore, foreign investment is particularly significant in the development of quality accommodation and entertainment facilities that will contribute to the attractiveness of the destination for international tourists.

Chizema (2025) examined how inward foreign direct investment (FDI) affected economic growth in South and Southeast Asia between 2006 and 2022. The results show that both FDI and gross capital formation make significant contributions to growth, although their effects depend on institutional quality, human capital, and trade facilitation. To strengthen absorptive capacity, the study recommends targeted investment in education, better institutional quality, and measures that facilitate trade.

In Bangladesh, Sadekin (2025) found that the interaction between foreign direct investment and international tourism receipts has a significant positive effect on long-term economic growth. This makes attracting foreign investment to the hospitality sector a central part of the national economic strategy. Yet bureaucratic inefficiencies still need to be addressed to maintain policy stability and provide investors with a more transparent environment.

2.5 Hospitality Management Education and Standards in Bangladesh

Human resource quality is the most important factor in achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage in Bangladesh's tourism sector. Hospitality management education in the country is still relatively new, and it continues to face problems involving curriculum relevance, access to practical training, and faculty qualifications. Founded in 1974, the National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute (NHTTI) has become a leading provider of foundational vocational education for industry. The Bangladesh Tourism Board has set out a National Tourism Human Capital Development Strategy (2021-2030) in response to the shortage of skilled workers in the sector, which employs more than 5 million people across formal and informal tourism-related jobs (Bangladesh Tourism Board, 2023). The more urgent task, however, is to modernize and standardize hospitality education so that its programs align with international service-quality benchmarks.

Research on hotel service quality in Bangladesh shows that customer satisfaction is closely tied to the condition of physical facilities, interior design, and food and beverage services. Alauddin et al. (2020) assessed perceived service-quality dimensions in Bangladesh's hotel industry using the SERVQUAL model. Their survey included 300 respondents from Cox's Bazar and Saint Martin's Island. The results pointed to clear gap between what customers expected and how they perceived the service, particularly in terms of reliability and empathy. Similarly, Bhowmik et al. (2024) measured guest insight regarding the service quality of star-ranking hotels in Bangladesh and found that while key areas such as service quality, food quality, location, and modern facilities receive high satisfaction scores, overall service and interaction could improve. Employees' behaviour shows a favourable view, particularly in complaint resolution, but green environment practices have growth opportunities, especially in promoting energy-saving initiatives. Improving the competitiveness of Bangladesh's hospitality sector will require major investment in human capital, including higher education, stronger partnerships between industry and academia, and continuing professional development.

3. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative methodology that brings together a narrative literature review and bibliometric analysis of secondary data. Its purpose is to develop an in-depth understanding of how tourism and hospitality management affect economic development in Bangladesh, while also mapping the existing academic research on the issue. The key steps undertaken in this study are as follows:

Bibliometric Data Collection: Peer-reviewed articles on tourism in Bangladesh, published between 2010 and 2024, were identified through searches of scholarly databases, primarily Scopus and Google Scholar. Data Extraction and Synthesis:

Quantitative information on tourism's contribution to GDP, employment, and foreign direct investment (FDI) was drawn from reports by international organizations, including the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as well as government sources such as the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Thematic and Bibliometric Analysis: The collected literature was examined thematically to determine its main areas of focus, particularly economic contributions, infrastructure challenges, and policy governance. Bibliometric analysis will then trace publication trends and show which research themes have remained prominent, providing a view of how tourism scholarship related to Bangladesh has developed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Bibliometric Analysis of Tourism Research in Bangladesh

To comprehend the academic footing promoting tourism development in Bangladesh, a bibliometric analysis was conducted on recent publication trends. As shown in Figure 1, academic interest in the tourism sector of Bangladesh has increased tremendously within the last decade. Pre-2015 research output was very low, but recently, there has been a surge in the volume of publications, indicating that a large number of scholars are now aware of the economic importance of the sector (Labib et al., 2022).

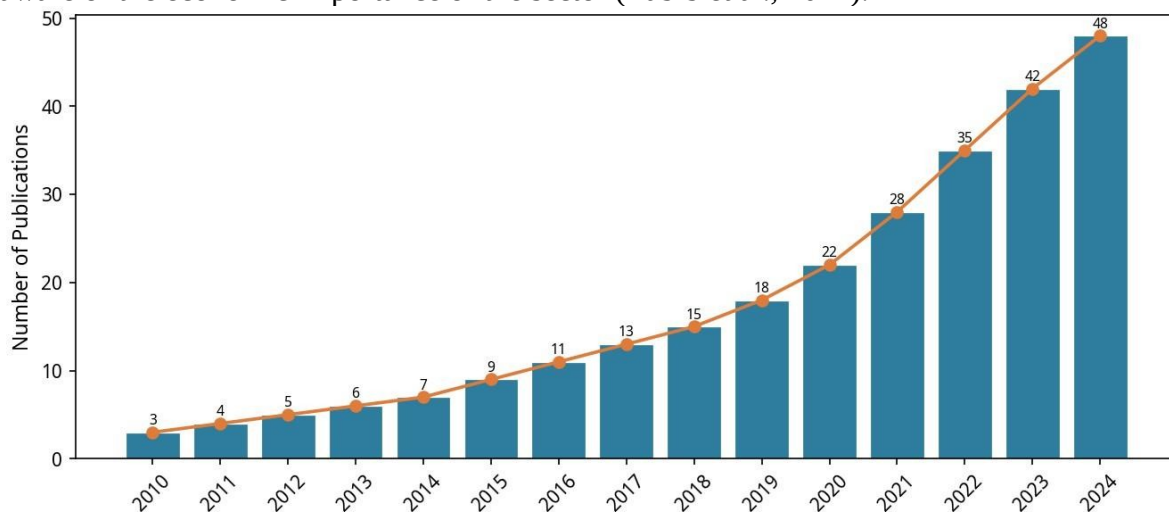


Figure 1. Annual Publication Trend: Tourism Research on Bangladesh (2010–2024)

The thematic analysis of these publications shows that within academic discourse, 'Ecotourism & Sundarbans' and the 'Hospitality Sector' form primary themes (Figure 2). However, a clear trend is noted in the increasing interest in exploring 'Sustainable Tourism' and the implications of tourism on economic growth. This emerging trend in scholarship is reflective of the practical challenges facing the country, as it provides an indication of the necessity to balance economic exploitation with environmental resource imperatives.

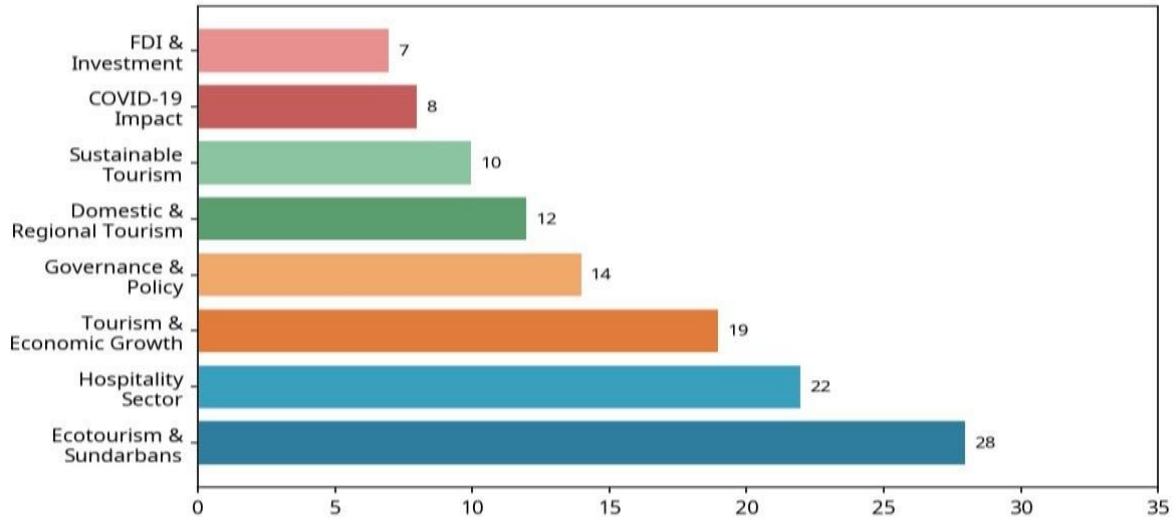


Figure 2. Research Theme Distribution in Bangladesh Tourism Literature (Bibliometric Analysis, 2010–2024)

4.2 Economic Contribution of Tourism and Hospitality in Bangladesh

The tourism and hospitality sectors of Bangladesh will show a steady though small increase in their contribution to the economy of the country. Table 1 shows the long-term economic impact of the sector from 2015 to 2025. The data will show an increase in the contribution of GDP and generation of employment till 2020. A huge downfall of 56.7% in the year 2020 will further prove how much the sector depends on global factors and is hence vulnerable to something like the COVID-19 pandemic. But the years following that will show an upward trajectory of recovery where the total contribution will reach \$11.10 billion which will be 3.2% of the GDP by the year 2025.

Table 1. Tourism and Hospitality Contribution to Bangladesh's Economy (2015–2025)

Year	Travel & Tourism Contribution (% of GDP)	Travel & Tourism Contribution (USD bn)	Employment (000s)	Year-over-Year Growth (%)
2015	4.4	8.80	2,180	—
2016	4.5	9.30	2,250	5.7
2017	4.6	10.50	2,340	12.9
2018	4.4	11.82	2,414	12.6
2019	4.39	12.71	2,483	7.5
2020	2.6	5.50	1,740	-56.7
2021	3.0	7.20	2,140	30.9
2022	3.0	8.10	2,180	12.5
2023	3.0	9.50	2,500	17.3
2024	3.1	10.20	2,500	7.4
2025	3.2	11.10	2,600	8.8

Sources: WTTC (2019, 2022, 2024); Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2020); Sadekin (2025); Hafsa (2020)

Note: The 2025 figures are projections and estimates based on WTTC and national models, not historical actuals.

Figure 3 shows the changes in GDP percentage relative to the absolute USD value, making it clear when the pandemic hit and how recovery has been since then.

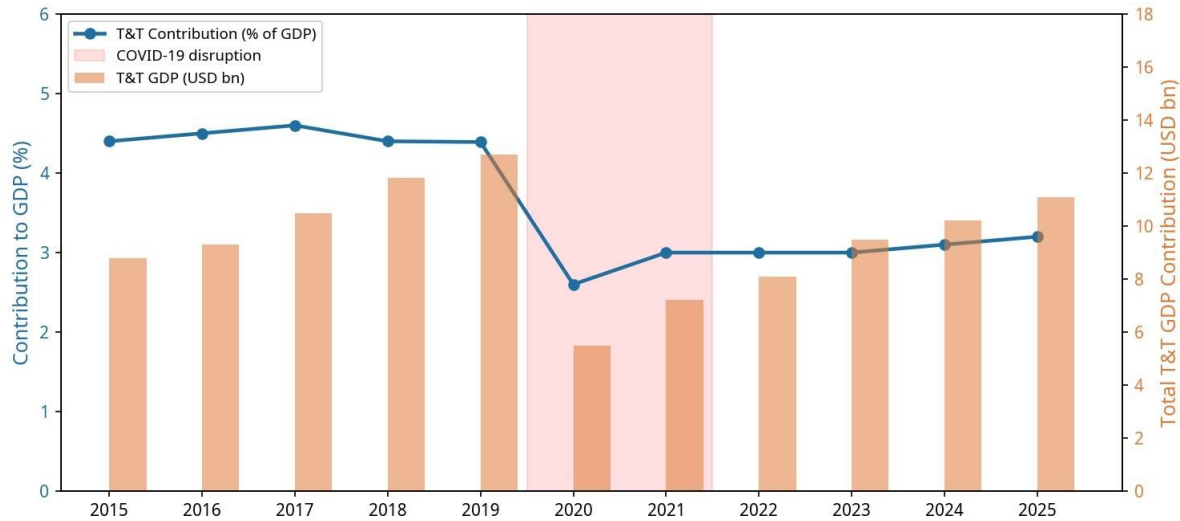


Figure 3. Tourism and Hospitality Contribution to Bangladesh's GDP (2015–2025)

4.3 SWOT Analysis of Tourism in Bangladesh

To provide a comprehensive overview of the industry's current strategic position, this section presents a SWOT analysis grounded in the reviewed academic literature.

Literature-Supported SWOT Analysis of the Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

- **Strengths:** The country is home to major natural attractions, from the Sundarbans to Cox's Bazar, as well as a varied cultural and historical heritage. Amin (2018) identifies the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as a place where exceptional biodiversity gives Bangladesh a strong standing in the global ecotourism sector. Nobl (2021) also records the considerable economic value of the Sundarban mangrove ecosystem. Bangladesh's natural beaches draw large numbers of domestic visitors, Alauddin et al. (2020) note, while competitive labor costs and a welcoming local population add to the country's appeal for tourists (Islam & Chowdhury, 2020).
- **Weaknesses:** Problems arise due to inadequate transportation infrastructure and poor connectivity to major sites, along with the acute shortage of skilled hospitality professionals. Mohiuddin (2023) demonstrates that poor transport infrastructure reduces the accessibility and connectivity of tourist sites, leading to fewer and

shorter visits, and Rahman, Hossain, and Islam (2018) identify the same infrastructural constraints, together with a shortage of quality accommodation beyond Dhaka, as the most persistent limits on the industry. In addition, there is no cohesive international branding strategy, which makes the country's visibility in the market difficult (Hassan & Kokkranikal, 2018; Sultana & Akter, 2019).

- **Opportunities:** There is room for growth in sustainable ecotourism and community-based tourism projects, a point emphasized in the agenda for sustainable development of the Sundarbans (Amin, 2018) and in the analysis of tourism, sustainability, and the post-COVID-19 economy in Bangladesh (Amin & Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2023). The draw of foreign direct investment (FDI) could help the creation of top-notch facilities; Sadekin (2025) shows that FDI interacting with international tourism receipts has a significant positive effect on long-term economic growth in Bangladesh, and Chizema (2025) reaches a similar conclusion for South and Southeast Asia more broadly. Better regional links within South Asia offer more paths for expansion.

- **Threats:** Environmental degradation, along with the severe effects of climate change on the country's coastal and mangrove regions, presents a major challenge, as documented in the economic valuation of the Sundarban mangroves (Nobi, 2021) and in the study of socio-economic and environmental impacts in Cox's Bazar (Ferdos, 2026). Alauddin et al. (2021) show that political instability has a measurable negative impact on the tourism industry in Bangladesh, and regional competition remains intense, particularly from markets such as India and Sri Lanka (Amin & Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2023; Sultana & Akter, 2019).

4.4 Challenges Hindering Full Potential

Inadequate infrastructure and connectivity

Many studies identify poor roads, weak rail connections, limited domestic air service, and a lack of quality accommodation particularly beyond Dhaka as major obstacles to tourism growth (Mohiuddin, 2023; Rahman et al., 2018). Together, these problems make destinations such as Cox's Bazar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts harder to reach and diminish visitors' overall satisfaction. Stakeholder surveys conducted during the pandemic likewise confirm that infrastructure remains one of the most pressing challenges for the sector (Quader, 2024). For example, The Daily Star reports that Bangladesh's tourism competitiveness is significantly weakened by inadequate infrastructure, outdated communications, and insufficient decent accommodation and recreational facilities (The Daily Star, 2019a; see also Mohiuddin, 2023; Rahaman et al., 2018; Quader, 2024).

Weak Destination Branding and International Marketing

Several scholars argue that Bangladesh has limited international visibility because it lacks a strong destination brand and has not maintained consistent promotional efforts abroad, especially in comparison with regional competitors (Sultana & Akter, 2019).

Recent analyses suggest that without sustained branding, digital advertising, and social media campaigns, the country continues to receive far less representation on the global tourism map, and Hassan and Kokkranikal (2018) similarly note the absence of a cohesive national branding strategy in the policy process.

This marketing deficiency is closely tied to Bangladesh's unfavorable standing in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index. It ranks lowest in South Asia, indicating limited overall competitiveness (Sultana & Akter, 2019; Saha et al., 2024).

Governance, Regulation, and Investment Issues

Stakeholders and researchers repeatedly point to complex procedures, overlapping mandates, and poor coordination among government agencies as major obstacles to tourism development. Hassan, Kennell and Chaperon (2020) find that the implementation of tourism policy in Bangladesh is hindered by hierarchical governance structures and weak inter-agency coordination. One report, for instance, notes that a cruise ship needed approval from at least 17 separate ministries and departments before it could dock in Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2022b), a clear example of how bureaucratic red tape can discourage tourism investment and international arrivals. Studies also point to the absence of a national tourism master plan and the fragmented way policies are implemented. Together, these problems hinder long-term planning and reduce private sector engagement (Hasan, Kenneii & Chaperon, 2020; Islam & Chowdhury, 2020).

Low Budget Allocation and Limited Public Support

Empirical research by Sultana and Akter (2019) and Ferdos (2026) shows that tourism receives less than 1% of the national budget, limiting infrastructure development, marketing efforts, and destination management. Although the sector has considerable potential to contribute to GDP and employment, scholars argue that sustained underinvestment prevents it from fully realizing those economic benefits.

Limited financial incentives and steep operating expenses, among them high import duties on materials used by hotels and resorts, make it harder for the hospitality industry to improve quality.

Human Resources and Service Quality

Existing research repeatedly identifies the shortage of skilled, professionally trained personnel in hospitality, tour guiding, and destination management as a major constraint. Alauddin et al. (2020) and Bhowmik et al. (2024) both document gaps between the service quality that visitors expect and the quality delivered in Bangladesh's hotels, and many operators lack adequate formal preparation in areas including customer service, foreign languages, and sustainable tourism practices, so that the resulting service quality falls below international standards.

Because vocational training institutions are scarce and ties between industry and academia remain inadequate, organizations struggle to provide the standard of service international tourists expect. As a result, fewer visitors return, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations decline.

Service Gaps at Destinations

Research by Alauddin et al. (2020) and Bhowmik et al. (2024) shows that tourists often encounter expensive but poor-quality accommodation, inadequate hygiene, few healthy food choices, and limited organized activities especially at night in beach destinations such as Cox's Bazar, and Ferdos (2026) reports similar service and environmental shortfalls in that same destination. These shortcomings diminish the visitor experience and make Bangladesh less competitive than neighboring countries, which offer better value for money and a wider variety of attractions and services.

5. Policy Recommendations

Strategic policy recommendations are proposed based on the synthesized literature and economic data to accelerate the development of Bangladesh's tourism sector:

5.1 Promote Comprehensive Infrastructure Development

The government must support its commitments with funded, actionable projects. A pressing priority is a multimodal transport network connecting major hubs by road, rail, and air, including routes from Dhaka to Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, and the Sundarbans. Tax holidays and subsidized land leases could help attract private developers and foreign investors to less-developed tourist areas. With that backing, high-quality accommodation facilities meeting environmental standards could be developed (Alam, 2026).

Bangladesh could adapt infrastructure ideas that have proven effective in nearby countries. India's "Swadesh Darshan" and "PRASHAD" initiatives provide useful examples (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, n.d.). They focus on integrated tourist circuits and pilgrimage sites, supported by modern amenities such as e-vehicle transport and accessibility features for inclusive use. Bangladesh might apply a similar model through a "Bay of Bengal Coastal Circuit" or "Sundarbans Eco-Circuit," connecting several regions and offering visitors consistent, high-quality facilities.

5.2 Implement Aggressive, Data-Driven International Marketing

The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and the Bangladesh Tourism Board need to develop a shared international branding campaign and keep it current. Rather than depending on broad slogans, they could use digital marketing, social media influencers, and appearances at major global tourism fairs to reach specific groups, for instance, eco-tourists in Europe and cultural tourists in Asia. Another immediate priority is a professionally managed national tourism website offered in multiple languages (Saha et al., 2024).

Bangladesh could draw from Thailand's "Value Over Volume" strategy, particularly its "5 MUST DO" initiative: Must Try, Must Taste, Must Seek, Must Buy, and Must See (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, 2023). Its emphasis is on distinctive cultural and experiential offerings. Rather than depending only on mass tourism, Bangladesh could curate a selection of high-quality experiences and position itself as a premium destination for authentic cultural and eco-tourism.

5.3 Revolutionize Human Resource Development

To narrow the substantial skills gap, the government needs to make major changes to hospitality education. Research shows that curricula built around competencies and measurable outcomes can greatly strengthen graduates' readiness for tourism-sector employment. This would require institutions such as the National Hospitality Training and Tourism Institute to bring their programs into line with international standards and the Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum established under the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012, 2018). This framework has helped improve labor mobility and bring skill sets across member states into closer alignment. Research also points to clear benefits from structured partnerships between industry and academia for employability, which suggests that training programs should form formal relationships with hotels and tour operators. When curricula are designed jointly, students can gain practical experience through internships and work-integrated learning, connecting classroom teaching with current operational needs. Studies of tourism skills development and rural training point to another concern: extending vocational training centers into rural tourism areas can increase local participation in the visitor economy while reducing entry barriers for marginalized groups. That, in turn, supports a more inclusive form of tourism-led economic growth.

Bangladesh should look to Thailand's Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model, which took shape in the 1990s around the idea of "tourism by the local people for the local people" (UNDP Thailand, n.d.). Giving communities a meaningful way in tourism development, while ensuring that they receive most of their benefits, can improve livelihoods without sacrificing cultural heritage. Thailand's homestay programs and training for local entrepreneurs also offer useful models as Bangladesh develops rural and ecotourism sites.

5.4 Strengthen Policy Implementation and Inter-Agency Coordination

The weak implementation of the National Tourism Policy of 2010 points to a need for stronger governance, an issue repeatedly identified in earlier studies of tourism management and policy implementation. A centralized, high-level inter-ministerial task force could improve coordination between the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. Studies show that when responsibilities are divided and ministries fail to coordinate adequately, tourism governance becomes less effective and implementation suffers. This body should also secure financing, monitor compliance with environmental regulations, and coordinate approvals so tourism projects can move forward without needless bureaucratic delays. Previous studies suggest that tourism governance works best when agencies have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and share data regularly. They also need to develop strategies together, ones that strengthen resilience, improve investment quality, and keep policy consistent.

Bangladesh could learn from Nepal's progress in institutionalizing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for tourism infrastructure, a direction also consistent with wider OECD guidance on effective tourism growth and quality investment (OECD, 2015, 2018). Nepal, for example, combined international funding with PPP arrangements to

move forward with the Greater Lumbini Area Development Project. The project brought several heritage sites into a unified Buddhist circuit, strengthened local value chains, and supported women-led enterprises. Similar coordination among agencies, along with comparable PPP structures, may help Bangladesh manage tourism projects in the Sundarbans and Cox's Bazar more effectively while supporting environmental sustainability and creating economic benefits for local communities.

Bangladesh could look to Nepal's "Community Homestay Network," founded in 2012 and now spanning 36 communities (Destination Stewardship Center, 2024). Under its 80/20 business model, host families receive 80% of the revenue. The arrangement supports women, eases the strain that over tourism places on well-known destinations, and gives young people an incentive to return to rural areas. For Bangladesh, similar community led efforts offer a practical model for expanding inclusive rural tourism.

6. Conclusion

Bangladesh's tourism and hospitality sector stand at the crossroads. At present, it contributes about 3% of the Gross Domestic Product of the country. However, the long-term data and bibliometric analysis show that there is much room for growth, which is currently going untapped. The country is blessed with natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and demographic advantages that can position it as a very competitive destination within South Asia. However, to realize this potential, there must be a paradigm shift from passive management to active and strategic management.

Bangladesh can turn tourism into a leading force of economic growth by first addressing the structural shortfalls in transportation, undertake aggressive international marketing, and make substantial investments in the training of hospitality workers. In addition to the above steps, the government can adopt sustainable tourism models, which would ensure that economic development does not come at the expense of the country's fragile environmental resources and that local communities receive fair economic benefits. A thriving tourism sector would also enhance Bangladesh's global image as a prosperous, friendly, and resilient country.

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