

## **Assessment of Destination-specific factors of Bangladesh: A review of Saint Martin Island as an emerging Tourist Destination**

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***Abstract:** The study is conducted on Saint Martin Island, one of the most visited tourist attractions of Bangladesh. It views Saint Martin Island as an emerging tourist destination and evaluates the requirements of the tourists that can turn it into an emerged full-fledged tourist's place of visit. Bangladesh has plenty of opportunities to earn foreign exchange and create jobs through promoting the tourism sector. The study is conducted on 200 tourists through interview with a designed self-administered questionnaire by applying suitable sampling method. Data were analyzed using factor analysis. The research applies both investigative and empirical research methods. Multiple regression model has been used to test the influence of various factors on the travelers' tour purpose to Saint Martin. Moreover, ten factors related to various aspects of tourism were taken as indigenous variables. The indigenous variables taken for this study are: natural beauty, service quality, awareness about the destination, adventure, convenient lodging, security, easy and comfortable transportation, safe and quality food and shopping facility and relaxation opportunity. The travel motive has been taken as exogenous variable of the model. The outcomes of regression analysis reflect that natural beauty, service quality, adventure and relaxation opportunities are statistically significant. Therefore, these factors indicate the traveler's intention to travel to Saint Martin over other destinations. The main attributes, features and types of tourists' motivations are analyzed in this study.*

***Keywords:** tourism destination, Saint Martin's island, decision making factors, tourist's travel motivations, tour intentions*

### **Introduction:**

Tourism is an industry that is growing not only in developed countries, but also in developing and underdeveloped countries (Tasci, et al., 2004). Bangladesh has recently enlisted its name in the list of developing countries, which has tremendous tourism potentialities. The country is known as the land of rivers. Being a deltaic nation at the

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mouth of the Bay of Bengal, it has huge coastal areas and islands, accompanying a large number of people to earn their livelihood. Bangladesh does not own hundreds of big mountains. It neither has destinations that provide tourist experiences in a scorching desert nor white snowy alps for skiing or jumping. Being situated in the most southern corner of Asia, Bangladesh has very few assets to meet the hunger of its beauty starving people.

Being situated in the northeast part of the Bay of Bengal, St. Martin's island is one of the smallest islands of the world. It covers about 9 km area. It plays a minor role in forming the southernmost part of Bangladesh. The island is 7.315 km long and from 975m to 1,890m wide. Apart from this island, there are many small islets that ranges from 100 to 500 square meters. The island is locally known as “Narical Gingira” because of large amount of coconut trees available in the island. There is a beautiful coral reef adjoining the island that contributes in extending the island, known as the Chera Dwip. A contemporary study under the National Conservation Strategy of Bangladesh has discovered that the surface of Saint Martin Island is the external surface of an underwater hill and not essentially a coral island. The hill coexists as a part of the Teknaf range which stretches from Cox's Bazar to Teknaf. The substantial amount of coral sediment collection on the island each year has given the apparent appearance of this coral island. Basically, Saint Martin is formed of sand stones with natural minerals.

Bangladesh is blessed with thousands of natural and man-made resources e.g., sea beaches, hilly areas, many historical places, mangrove forest, etc. It has an enormous opportunity to develop its tourism industry competing with today's global tourism situation (Islam, 2006). To attract both foreign and domestic tourists, the infrastructures require consistent development. The adjacent countries like Sri Lanka, India, Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal bring significant number of tourists each year and generate large portion of money. In a study, it has been found that the services offered by a tourist destination and the level of satisfaction of tourists are of utmost importance. In future, the experience of the tourists can be improved if the destination can satisfactorily meet up the tourist's visiting purpose, resulting to the enhancement of destination competitiveness. (Baloglu, et al., 2003).

The longest unbroken sandy sea beach of the world Cox's Bazar; the coral island with clear blue water, Saint Martin's Island; the largest mangrove forest of the world, the Sundarbans; attractive hills and mountains in Chittagong and Bandarban, are situated in Bangladesh. Yet, it fails to draw enough number of foreign tourists. According to Moudud, H. J. (2010), the main reasons of this failure to bring foreign tourists in Bangladesh are inadequate infrastructural expansion at the tourist destinations, absence of appropriate sanitation and hygiene facilities for the travellers, shortage of capable and competent tourist guides and service providers, insufficient promotional programs, etc. Because of these issues, the response from the foreign tourists is low.

As the targeted tourists are not properly focused, the tourism industry of our country is not booming in its anticipated speed. The study focuses on different preferences and features that affect the intention of tourists to select Saint Martin's Island as a tourist destination..

Islam, S., 2009 stated that the Saint Martin's island is undergoing environmental damages which are irreversible to some extent. Saint Martin is viewed, toured and attracted by thousands of tourists every year but the little island is insecure and dying unprotected and uncared.

### **An overview of Saint Martin as a Tourist Destination**

Saint Martin's island is considered as the most visited destination, eco-tourist's attraction and the only coral island of Bangladesh. It is also known as the marine paradise of Bangladesh. The Saint Martin's island is situated in the entryway to Bangladesh. It not only owns beautiful scenery but also have crystal clear blue water from the Bay of Bengal surrounding the island. Accommodation in the destination is very limited. The hotels are very close to the seashore and adoring sound of sea can easily be enjoyed from the hotels' lobby. Moreover, for homestay facilities, the fisherman of the localities and the local people have arranged some tourists' accommodation facilities in their home. In total, there are 34 registered tourist guides and almost 15-16 people work in each organization, on an average. Therefore, it can be said that almost 480-500 people of Saint Martin's Island are directly related with tourism activities. Apart from this, a large number of people is involved in providing indirect tourism facilities, such as constructing hotels, motels, resorts, rent-a-car business, junk business, selling umbrella benches in the sea-beach, called kitkot, etc. Many students are working as part-time tour operators. Many people are involved in catching fishes, drying them and selling those to the different parts of the country. So, approximately 800-1,000 people of Saint Martin's island are directly and indirectly serving the tourism sector. Again, each of them has to maintain a family of 4-6 persons which ultimately results in feeding almost 4,800 people of the country. Tourism is now the main source of income of Saint Martin's island. It is playing a major role, not only in developing the standard of living of the local people but also providing ample benefits to the people engaged with this sector, like travel agents, tour operators and other stakeholders.

### **Literature Review and theoretical framework:**

A tourist destination is described as an area where the travellers or tourists travel outside their usual place of residence for more than one day but less than a year. But this definition has been transforming since 1970s based on the nature, motive and travel purposes. In a research, Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reily and Luk (2008) found that through tourism, people represent themselves to other nations and this subsequently forms perceptions about the other countries of the world. The technique to deal with the

increasing number of tourist's attractions of the global market competition is modifying and improving (Ekinici and Hosany, 2006). The most quoted description of a destination perception is given by Crompton (1979). Gallarza and Saura (2002) acknowledged that an image of a destination is the combination of beliefs, knowledges and impressions that a person owns about that place. A ground-breaking work of Echtner and Richie (1993) revealed that destination images are correlated with various tangible and intangible attributes or functional and psychological features. These attributes can further be defined as the tangible features of a place that can be directly observed or measured. Whereas, the intangibles attributes cannot be easily seen and measured. A tourism destination is also evaluated as either positive or negative based on the quality of services it provides, including accommodations, food, transportations, etc.

Recently, tourism is seen as a very multifaceted series of activities related to economic productivity (Pretes, 1995). To build sustainable competitive advantage, the importance of recognizing the customer value is becoming the most significant key (Woofruff, 1997).

In terms of marketing, two factors in the travel and tourism industry have always been crucial: service quality and customer satisfaction. These are sometimes used as indicators of profitability and the successful achievement of organizational objectives. The task of the event management agencies is to deliver equal level of service to all the visitors of a destination. Travelers expect the service components to fully meet their expectations (Yourtseven, 2000). Regardless of the nature of the tool used to manage tourism, the authentic cultures and potential of a destination and community must be maintained in order to preserve the regional identity of a tourist destination (Tasci, et al. 2004). In the international tourism market, there are many sub-functions of the entire travel and tourism industry. These sub-functions start from transportation to the food and lodging, security and other sectors. Some of the major actors of tourist attractions also includes the beauty of the destination, recreational facilities, historical aspects, etc. In order to satisfy the customers, all of these functions are needed to be provided under a single basket (Neal, 2003). To provide the highest level of satisfaction to the customers, it is a prerequisite to know what the customers want and what are their needs and demands. Therefore, the tour agencies adopt many strategies to make their service qualities better to attract more tourists.

The researches have concentrated on the importance of tourism from various viewpoints, e.g, economic, cultural, social, political, etc. Azam et al. (2005) has studied on the factors that influence the tourists to pick Bangladesh as the tourist destination. The research has revealed that Bangladesh has various positive factors, such as quality of service, natural beauty, hospitality of the people, etc. Again, some factors discourage them to pick Bangladesh, for instance, lack of security and safety, unavailability of hygienic food, lack of shopping facilities, etc.

In the eyes of the international market, the attractiveness of a tourist place depends on a number of factors, for example, the existence of tourism bodies, beautiful landscape and physical environment, inspiring tourist experience and support from the local people (Pike, 2008). Pike also added that some supplementary steps are required to maintain a balance in the international market, including risk and inseparability, intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and sustainability (Pike, 2008).

Transportation has always been playing a predominant role in the development of tourism industry. To reach the desired destinations the tourists will choose any mode of transportation but the most widely used transport to visit Saint Martin is ship that starts the journey from Teknaf point.

Accommodation and lodging plays a pivotal role in providing suitable and comfortable travel experience to the travelers (Middleton and Clarke, 1999).

Once the physical facilities have been made, the staff and workers are needed to be employed, trained, organized and motivated so that they can meet the needs of the guests. These procedures usually begin before the guests arrive or even before their reservations. The guests also expect the level of service depending on the size and the nature of the property (Cook et. al 2007).

One of the recent motivations of the travel industry is food and beverage. Food has a vital role in the travel sector and the quality of service related to food is very significant. The desired food items on the menu depends largely on the culture and demographic characteristics of a destination (MacDonald, 1997).

The final choice of tourism destination largely depends on the level of security at the place of visit. The primary requirement of a tourist destination is to provide safe and secured environment to the visitors. This was seen after the catastrophic event of 11th September 2001 (Besculides et al, 2002).

Entertainment is the next requirement of a destination. Entertainment begins from the historic attractions of a nation and also includes other forms, for instance, nightclubs, parks, etc. These entertainment facilities also work as a significant economic contributor of a country (MacDonald, S. 1997).

Attractions are the scenic beauty and natural places of a destination. These can be either natural or manmade; and are appealing to both the tourists and to the local community. Besides these attractions, tourists also please themselves by enjoying other entertainment opportunities. The attractions may be permanent or temporary. We can say that the events, for example, fair, fashion festivals, big events, etc. are temporary; and the activities at the destination, like sightseeing, trekking, skiing are permanent (Cook et.al, 2007).

An attribute that is very important to some tourists are the shopping opportunities at the destinations. It is also considered as the part of tour experience or the prime motive of travel. We see various types of shops selling Burmese accessories and clothes, pickles, seashells, jewelries, etc. near Cox's Bazar sea-beach. But such facilities are quite less in the market areas of Saint Martin's island.

Based on the above-mentioned literature reviews, ten variables can be identified to influences relationships between the traveler's motivation and destination specific factors of Saint Martin's Island. These are:

1. Service quality of Saint Martin's Island
2. Natural beauty of the Saint Martin's Island
3. Traveler's awareness about the island
4. Accommodation and convenience of lodging facility of the island
5. Adventure opportunities available at the island
6. Safety and security at the destination
7. Comfortable and convenient transportation used to reach the island
8. Quality of food available at the island
9. Shopping facility available in the island
10. Relaxation opportunities supplied by the relevant authorities of the island

**Objectives of the Research:**

1. To evaluate existing factors that contribute tourist's motivation to visit the Saint Martin's Island.
2. To identify the marketing strategies that needs more focus to bring tourists to the destination.
3. To find the factors that will contribute in future development of tourism sector of Saint Martin.

**Methodology:**

This study is conducted using both primary and secondary data. The data was collected from different tourists in Bangladesh through a self-administered survey tool. The first section of the questionnaire contains closed questions that helped to collect tourists' demographic characteristics and travel behavior. Demographic characteristics included the age, gender, income, marital status, occupation, length of stay, composition of groups and choice of accommodation of respondents. These questions showed trip length and

duration, kind of travel partner, the motive for traveling in the Saint Martin's Island and the way respondents wished to travel. These demographic characteristics ultimately contribute tourist's motivation to travel. The second segment of questionnaire was set in Likert scale and it was related to destination preferences. Questions in Likert scale regarding the destination preferences were allocated into 10 categories: natural beauty, service quality, awareness about the destination, adventure, convenient lodging, security, easy and comfortable transportation, safe and quality food and shopping facility and relaxation opportunity.

The study was conducted in total of 200 respondents from January to March, 2016 both at the tourist destination and online.

Data collected through the survey was processed by using the IBM SPSS software. In order to test the reliability of the Likert scale questions, Cronbach's Alpha test was applied.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The aim of the research was to examine the effect of various factors that directly or indirectly affect the tour intention of the visitors of the Saint Martin's Island. The study examines different features that reflect people's visiting intention. These 10 features were selected from previous literature and through conducting field survey.

Among the tourists who visited the St. Martin's island, 100 respondents were males (50%) and 100 (50%) respondents were females. They were asked different questions relating to their visit at the destination. In the demographic part age, gender, occupation, income, and overall tourist behaviors were covered. The majority of the tourists belong to the age group of below 25 years (63.5%) and they prefer to tour with friends (47.5) rather than family or other traveller groups. Most of the duration of their stay at the destination from 3 to 5 days (60.5%).

Most of them are students (40%) although businessman, private, and public employees are also found. The income of the tourists who visit this area is between 31,000 and 50,000 taka (42.5%), which is really good. The decision for the tour is usually taken within 6 months or less (40%), but some prefer to decide immediately. The tourists mainly gather information from friends and relatives (60%).

Most tourists are unmarried (40%), but there are also newly married couples (32.5%). But couples with children (27.5%) are less willing to go to the island of Saint Martin. They like to stay in a medium-sized accommodation (45%) instead of a first-class, low-class or family home. Many young tourists also plan and visit this coral island by making instant decisions.

The reliability statistics of the variables are presented in the calculations. The internal reliabilities of scales for most of the factors are found acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). It has been found from the descriptive statistics opinion that the mean of natural beauty, service quality, destination awareness, safety and security, adventure facilities, accommodations, transportations, quality food and relaxation opportunities are above 3.00. The mean of the other factors like, safety and security and shopping facilities are below 3.00. This implies that the natural beauty, service quality, destination awareness, adventure facilities and relaxation opportunities are statistically significant in explaining the intention to visit Saint Martin. The result of the study shows that people's opinion on shopping and security system are not significant reasons to visit Saint Martin.

Ten factors or attributes that are related to different facets of tourism such as natural beauty, service quality, awareness about the destination, adventure, convenient lodging, security, easy and comfortable transportation, safe and quality food and shopping facility and relaxation opportunity were used as indigenous variables. On the other hand, the intention to travel was used as exogenous variable.

From the Table 4 (Appendix), natural beauty, service quality, awareness about the destination, convenient lodging, easy and comfortable transportation, safe and quality food and relaxation opportunity has positive correlation with the tour intention of the travelers. On the other hand, shopping opportunities, security system and adventure facilities are quite negatively correlated with tour intention. Thus, if the shopping standard are enhanced then there is a chance of the visitors to revisit the destination.

Security is also one of the strongest factors in determining the tour intention of tourists. The security issue is very important as tourists go to tour for pleasure and amusement purposes. The amusement opportunities are not viable if the destination is not secured. Bangladesh government has patrolled tourist polices in various tourist destinations in the country, including Cox's Bazar and Saint Martin.

The quality of service is an important issue that influence the tourist intention.

Natural beauty is also a vital factor affecting the tour intention of the travelers. The natural beauty is significant because tourists visit Saint Martin to enjoy the sandy island surrounded by blue water, coconut trees and to view the astonishing sunset.

We can see that the shopping facility that exists in the destination is inversely affecting the tour intention of the visitors of Saint Martin. Buying various souvenir products and locally made handcrafts and gift items with indigenous products is one of the core attractions of the tourists.



### **Conclusions and Implications**

The study has shown the outcomes which are important for future development of tourism sector of Saint Martin's Island. The study highlighted the need to move from the development of tourism to the management of destinations. Once a tourism destination has been developed, its objectives must be achieved. Relationship is required between the relevant agencies in order to manage the entire destination.

Goeldner et al. (2000) has mentioned that emerging tourist destination (such as Saint Martin) can be developed by remembering six simple steps:

1. Encourage sustainable development
2. Generate products for specific market segments
3. Gain and maintain competitiveness
4. Increase visitor experience
5. Preserve local resources
6. Promote residents' quality of life

Tourism has been declared as one of the most potential industries of this country by the government of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, diverse types of tourism elements and destinations are found, like Sylhet, Zaflong, Cox's Bazar, Mohesh Khali, Inani beach, Kuakata beach are significant tourist's areas. These destinations should be adequately developed for attracting both foreign and domestic tourists.

Abdullah, Chowdhury and Hossain (2010) stated that political instability, blocking and ban, terrorism, lack of security, etc. are the main barriers to the development of such an essential industry in the country. Bangladesh has many other influences that make tourists visit the country, such as technology, culture, finance, human resources, etc.

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### Appendix

**Table – 1 : The demographic profile of the respondents who have visited Saint Martin' Island**

| <b>Descriptions:</b>          | <b>N</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Descriptions:</b>            | <b>N</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender Classification:</b> |          |                   | <b>Length of stay:</b>          |          |                   |
| Male:                         | 100      | 50%               | Less than 2 days                | 35       | 17.5%             |
| Female:                       | 100      | 50%               | 3 - 5 days                      | 121      | 60.5%             |
| Total:                        | 200      | 100%              | 6 – 10 days                     | 24       | 12%               |
|                               |          |                   | More than 10 days               | 20       | 10%               |
|                               |          |                   | Total:                          | 200      | 100%              |
| <b>Age classification:</b>    |          |                   | <b>Information source:</b>      |          |                   |
| Below 25                      | 127      | 63.5%             | Friends and relatives           | 120      | 60%               |
| 26 – 40                       | 45       | 22.5%             | Internet                        | 40       | 20%               |
| 41 – 55                       | 20       | 10%               | BPC                             | 12       | 6%                |
| 56 – 70                       | 4        | 2%                | Newspaper                       | 8        | 4%                |
| Above 70                      | 4        | 2%                | Others                          | 20       | 10                |
| Total                         | 200      | 100%              | Total:                          | 200      | 100%              |
|                               |          |                   | <b>Composition of Group:</b>    |          |                   |
| <b>Income classification:</b> |          |                   | Alone                           | 20       |                   |
| Below 10,000                  | 40       | 20%               | Family                          | 65       | 10%               |
| 10,001 – 30,000               | 63       | 31.5%             | Friends                         | 95       | 32.5%             |
| 30,001 – 50,000               | 85       | 42.5%             | Travel groups                   | 14       | 47.5%             |
| 50,001 – 70,000               | 06       | 3%                | Others                          | 06       | 7%                |
| Above 70,000                  | 06       | 3%                | Total:                          | 200      | 3%                |
| Total                         | 200      | 100%              |                                 |          | 100%              |
|                               |          |                   | <b>Choice of accommodation:</b> |          |                   |
| <b>Occupation:</b>            |          |                   | Standard class hotel            | 50       | 25%               |
| Unemployed                    | 22       | 11%               | Medium class hotel              | 90       | 45%               |
| Student                       | 66       | 33%               | Economy hotel                   | 50       | 25%               |
| Business                      | 46       | 23%               | Relative's home stay            | 10       | 5%                |
| Government job                | 24       | 12%               | Total:                          | 200      | 100%              |
| Private job                   | 16       | 8%                |                                 |          |                   |
| Others                        | 26       | 13%               |                                 |          |                   |
| Total                         | 200      | 100%              |                                 |          |                   |
|                               |          |                   | <b>Advanced plan to visit:</b>  |          |                   |
| <b>Marital Status:</b>        |          |                   | Suddenly                        | 25       | 12.5%             |
| Single                        | 80       | 40%               | 6 months prior or less          | 75       | 37.5%             |
| Newly wedded                  | 65       | 32.5%             | 7 months to 1 year              | 80       | 40%               |
| Married with children         | 55       | 27.5%             | 1 year or more                  | 35       | 17.5%             |
| Total                         | 200      | 100%              | Total                           | 10       | 5%                |
|                               |          |                   |                                 | 200      | 100%              |

**Table - 2 : Descriptive Statistics**

|                              | N   | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|----------|
| Beauty of the Destination    | 200 | 4.00  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.2800 | 1.10349        | 1.218    |
| Service Quality              | 200 | 3.00  | 1.00    | 4.00    | 3.3600 | .79597         | .634     |
| Awareness of the destination | 200 | 4.00  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.9550 | .91496         | .837     |
| Adventure facilities         | 200 | 4.00  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.5200 | 1.06549        | 1.135    |
| Lodging and accommodations   | 200 | 3.00  | 1.00    | 4.00    | 3.3600 | .79597         | .634     |
| Security and Safety          | 200 | 3.00  | 1.00    | 4.00    | 2.3550 | .79507         | .632     |
| Transport availability       | 200 | 3.00  | 1.00    | 4.00    | 3.1450 | .79822         | .637     |
| Hygienic food                | 200 | 3.00  | 1.00    | 4.00    | 3.3200 | .88403         | .782     |
| Relaxation                   | 200 | 4.00  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.0600 | 1.22634        | 1.504    |
| Shopping                     | 200 | 4.00  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 2.1000 | 1.17341        | 1.377    |
| Valid N (list wise)          | 200 |       |         |         |        |                |          |

**Table – 3 : Reliability Statistics**

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .721             | .723   | 10         |

**N.B.** Reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered “acceptable” of the internal consistency of data

**Table - 4 : Item-Total Statistics**

|            | Corrected Item-Total Correlation |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| Beauty     | .035                             |
| Service    | .262                             |
| Awareness  | .043                             |
| Adventure  | -.021                            |
| Lodging    | .262                             |
| Security   | -.053                            |
| Transport  | .006                             |
| Food       | .018                             |
| Shopping   | -.020                            |
| Relaxation | .246                             |