

UNVEILING THE CHARISMATIC AURA: POSITIONING THE SUNDARBANS AS THE PREMIER TOURIST DESTINATION IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has significant tourism potential, which can contribute to economic growth. For years, Bangladesh tourism sites were neglected due to a lack of marketing, trained personnel, concerned organizations, and adequate funding. The government and concerned groups must prioritize developing the tourist sector in Bangladesh to alleviate poverty, enrich the economy, and improve people's livelihoods. The Sundarbans are noted for their royal Bengal tigers and magnificent spotted deer. Royal Bengal tigers can only be found in the Sundarbans. The author gathered important development ideas and comments from tourism specialists and travelers for the empirical section. This project will increase readers' familiarity with the Sundarbans tourism sector. The readers would be encouraged by the progress of the Sundarbans. Reading about this initiative will increase tourists' interest in the Sundarbans by educating them about the area's natural beauty and wildlife. This study will inform decision-makers about the significance of developing Bangladesh's tourist spot.

Key words: The Sundarbans, tourism potential, peregrination to the Sundarbans

Introduction

The Sundarbans is the largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world and it looks quintessential from the inner sides. The Sundarbans is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, most of which situated in Bangladesh and the remaining in India. Sundarbans' South, East and West are three protected forests in Bangladesh. This region is densely covered by mangrove forests, and is one of the largest reserves for the Bengal tigers. We know that Sundarbans is our national asset; if we save Sundarbans, our country will be saved as well as human being. Generally destination branding is an assurance of quality. These are some of the words that come to minds when people think about beautiful Bangladesh. It is the high time to change our country's image by branding Sundarbans, welcoming foreign tourists. In this research we have tried our level best to identify the way how we can introduce Sundarbans as a branded tourist spot. We have identified the drivers of destination branding as well as we have made comparison between the drivers and the Sundarbans. Drivers of brand loyalty on tourists' choice of destination is momentous no room for doubt in it. There are some keynotes on the site including attraction of the destination, accommodation, safety & security, uniqueness of the destination, transportation accessibility, amenities & Ancillary services, Wildlife of Sundarbans Famous spots (Dublar char-island, Hiron point, Karamjol); flora & fauna ,Transportation facilities & accessibility . Finally we have proposed a model for branding Sundarbans, providing some recommendations. A short detail is illustrated for attracting tourists for visiting the Sundarbans:

- **Location:** On the Bay of Bengal and largest mangrove formation is one of the world's largest river deltas.
- **Tropical climate:** Cool and dry during the tourist season.
- **Waterways:** Large and small water ways provide opportunities for cruising and jungle boating.
- **Forests:** Un-spoiled mangroves forest ecology.

- **Wildlife's:** The largest single population of the Royal Bengal Tiger and exceptional populations of spotted Deer and wild boar; adequate bird watching, migratory species and raptors in particular.
- **Beaches:** An unspoiled, wild, unpolluted and totally undeveloped beach throughout along the Bay of Bengal and around some is lands.
- **History/archaeology:** Rare sites set in the forest.
- **Sociology:** Fishermen in particular, other fishermen, other traditional collectors of forest produce.
- **Cuisine:** Many different species of edible fish, prawns & crabs.

Materials and Methods

This study has been prepared based on experience gathered through learning and getting information about the Sundarbans and the tourism industry. For generating this article, the information is collected from websites of the tourism sector and Sundarbans websites. In order to make the article more meaningful and presentable, two sources of data and information have been used widely. They are as such-primary data and (data of the books on Sundarbans) and secondary data sources such as newspapers, magazine, internet etc. Qualitative approaches have been adopted for data analysis and interpretation, taking the processed data as the basis. Therefore, the article relies primarily on an analytical judgment and critical reasoning.

Destination Profile: Sundarbans- An Exuberance of Mother Eyes. The name Sundarbans can be literally translated as "beautiful forest" in the Bengali language (Shundor, "beautiful" and bon, "forest").The name may have been derived from the Sundari trees that are found in Sundarbans in large numbers. A total 245 genera and 334 plant species were recorded by David Prain in 1903. Area: The forest covers 10,000 km². Of which about 6,000 are in Bangladesh. It became inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1997. The Sundarbans is estimated to be about 4,110 km², of which about 1,700km² is occupied by water bodies in the forms of river, canals and creeks of width varying from a few meters to several kilometers. Forest limits: North-Bagerhat, Khulna and Sathkhira districts: South-Bay of Bengal; East- Baleshwar (or Haringhata) river, Perojpur, Barisal district, and West-Raimangal and Hariabhanga rivers which partially form Bangladesh boundary with West Bengal in India.

The principal policy objectives and perceived benefits of the sites are as follows:

- Launching the attractive tourism products
- Developing strong base of domestic or local based tourism products including sumptuous hilsa fish
- Conserving and protect the environment from dirty getting.
- Enhancing the national and international image of the quintessential picturesque.

Fundamental inborn traits of the Sundarbans: Statistics says that the Sundarbans is a World Heritage Site. It constitutes 51% of the total reserved forest estate of Bangladesh, and contributes about 41% of total forest revenue and accounts for about 45% of all timber and fuel wood output of the country. About 3.5 million people depend directly or indirectly for their livelihood on the Sundarbans resources. If we can brand the Sundarbans successfully then it will contribute about 60% of total forest revenue and accounts for about 55% of all timber and fuel wood output of the country. The Sundarbans, the largest mangrove ecosystem existing in the world today and also legally declared as "Ecologically Critical Area", serves as coastal protection from cyclones and tidal surges. The Sundarbans Impact Zone (SIZ) has an approximate (2009) population of 8.5 million which constitutes about 6.0 percent of the total Bangladesh population and has an area of about 15,352 sq. km which represents 10.4 percent of the country's area. The Sundarbans provides livelihoods for a vast majority of the population living in and around the SIZ, who suffer from chronic poverty and lack access to decent work or social security schemes. Frequent natural disasters disrupt their livelihoods and income sources, and the status quota is further maintained by entrenched systems of social exclusion, discrimination and abuse, such as bonded labor, wage-exploitation, corruption and discrimination based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability and age. Moreover, non- traditional and unsustainable economic practices generating profit for local business and political elites put the fragile

ecosystem of the Sundarbans at risk of degradation and over-exploitation, thus endangering the primary source of income available to local communities.

Results and Discussion

Model for branding the Sundarbans: For branding Sundarbans we can use the following 'BUILD' model.

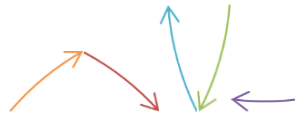


Figure: BUILD model

B = directly reflecting, and overtly driving, the essence of the destination **BRAND**.

U = working to **UNITE** the people of the destination, and its visitors, closer together in pride, in interaction, and in better quality of life.

I = ensuring **INFRASTRUCTURE** supports delivery of both hard (transport systems, energy, stadiums, telecommunications, safety & security, accommodation, etc.) and soft (service culture, skills development, Brand delivery, policy, marketing & promotion, partnerships etc.) areas of the experience.

L = investing in the **LEGACY** of the Tourism sector – creating today what will become the building blocks of tomorrow.

D = dramatically enhancing the destination's ability to **DELIVER** the tourism Brand promise to travelers.

Proposal model of the process of creation of destination brand

- **Marketing investigation, analysis and strategic recommendations:** The process starts by developing a strategy for the destination (Sundarbans) brand. This involves market analysis, creating a vision and setting clear goals for the branding Sundarbans.
- **Destination brand development:** The next step in the process is the development of the brand identity and positioning. The positioning can be made on tangible, intangible, functional and symbolic attributes. For the sake of adding an emotional attachment to the brand it must be: credible, deliverable, differentiating, conveying powerful ideas, engaging stakeholders, and attract tourists.
- **Destination brand launch and communication:** In this stage the brand is communicated and promoted through marketing campaigns and tactics to the target group.
- **Implementation:** Brand implementation refers to the physical representation and consistent application of brand identity across visual and verbal media. In visual terms, this can include signage, uniforms, liveries, interior design and branded merchandise. Brand implementation encompasses facets of architecture, product design, industrial design, quantity surveying, engineering, procurement, project management and retail design.
- **Monitoring and review:** This stage emphasizes the importance of closing the gap between communication, conceived ideal, and desired identity by conducting marketing research. This is often the stage where many branding strategies fail, and the strategy should include this step as important.

SWOT analysis of the Sundarbans as a destination: A SWOT analysis (alternatively SWOT matrix) is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a project or in a business venture. A SWOT analysis for the Sundarbans is presented below:

The abbreviation SWOT stands for the sites

	INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
+	STRENGTH	OPPORTUNITY
-	WEAKNESS	THREAT

Problem to be solved: The threats to the mangrove eco-system are arising partly due to biotic pressure from the surrounding environment and, partly due to human induced or natural changes in the upper catchments. These can be outlined as below:

- Reduced flow of sweet water into Sundarbans mangrove system.
- Extension of non-forestry land use in to mangrove forest.
- Straying of tiger into villages along the western boundary of Sundarbans.
- Demand for small timber and fuel wood for local consumption.
- Poaching of tiger, spotted deer, wild boar, marine turtles, horse’s hoecrab etc.
- Uncontrolled collection of prawn seedlings.
- Uncontrolled fishing in the water of reserve forests.
- Continuous trampling of river/creek banks by fishermen and prawn seed collectors.
- Chemical pollution through marine paints and hydrocarbons.
- Long International Border along the Eastern boundary of Indian Sundarbans.

Concluding remarks

Ecotourism is a win-win solution for destinations like the Sundarbans where the conservation efforts for the environment are also associated with the livelihood opportunities of the local people. Sensitization about the environment as well as environmental education is best achieved through ecotourism. For ecotourism to be effective in its true sense there is a need to develop a proper ecotourism package which should be different from the existing mass tourism packages. At present a small percentage of the local people are engaged in tourism related activities. Focus should be on more involvement and participation of the local people in ecotourism. This will help in maintaining a social balance in terms of income generation of the local people. We know that the Sundarbans is our national asset; if we save the Sundarbans then our country will be saved as well as human being. Just we have to fight a good fight and finish the race. We have to keep the faith. So keep branding our beloved the Sundarbans.

Recommendation for policy implications: There are some recommendations for the development of beloved Sundarbans which must be ensured are following: i) to save the environment of the Sundarbans and the wildlife; ii) to establish a policy for promoting the Sundarbans; iii) to establish environment friendly water vehicle route in the forest; iv) to establish the sign and light of signal in the forest, v) to set the limit that each of the ship, vi) to ensure the availability of drinking water, vii) to provide medical facilities for the tourist’s ships, viii) to ensure the availability of the tourist guide, and ix) to engage local people for saving the forest.

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