Is the Tourism-Sun Rising or Setting in the Tourism Industry of Bangladesh? An Investigation from the Perspective of Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model

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Abstract

The use of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model by the tourism sector is nothing new on a worldwide scale. From coastal to alpine destinations, this idea is still applied to many topics of tourism studies today. But there was little hint at TALC's implementation in Bangladesh, although the model's importance. The nation has recently suggested moving up the development ladder from "Developing Country" to "Least Developed Country" (LDC). A significant portion of this growth came from the tourist industry, which accounted for 4.4% of the country's GDP (WTTC, 2020). But TALC has not yet been investigated by Bangladesh's tourist sector. To assess where Bangladesh's tourist sector is now, this research used Butler's TALC model. For determining the stages, secondary data were examined in Microsoft Excel 2016. Afterward, ten in-depth interviews with academics and tourism practitioners were conducted to validate the variables of the stages of the TALC checklist. The study found that the tourism industry of Bangladesh is passing the development stage. The validity of the development phase was demonstrated by the factors of the development stage such as an identifiable tourist market, a decline opportunity in host community participation and control of development, the provision of modern amenities by external entities, and the expansion of artificial facilities. This research proposed strategies to graduate from the development stage of TALC such as intensive promotion through embassies and consulates, easy Visa accessibility, proper safety-security, capacity building of the stakeholders especially host community, promoting responsible tourism, Public Private Partnership (PPP), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and coordination & cooperation among regulatory agencies. This study may serve as a theoretical and practical guide for designing new tourism policies for uplifting the tourism industry in TALC's later phases. This study concludes with a discussion of its limitations and directions for future research.

Keywords: TALC model; Bangladesh; Secondary data; In-Depth interviews and Development stage

Introduction

The life cycle pertains to the several phases or stages that an object undergoes throughout its lifespan. There are different stages of life for each object, and each stage has its traits or qualities. The objects' existence begins with their introduction and ends with their decline. If we consider any product, it is first launched on the market and then reaches growth, maturity, and lastly decline stages. As previously stated, every object has passed different stages of its life cycle, and tourism destinations are no exception. A tourism destination does not initially become widely known. Tourists became interested in the location, and it gradually gained widespread popularity. Multiple development projects are implemented in the vicinity of the attraction to better serve tourists. The development activities and improved tourist services aid places in attracting the greatest number of visitors. But eventually, the destination loses its tourist appeal, forcing it to decline unless more inventive activities are undertaken to rejuvenate it. The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) was established by [1] and is one of the most popular ideas used to explain concepts of how a destination develops and changes over time [2]. The stages of TALC contain particular and unique qualities of a tourist destination that assist Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in adopting alternative tactics based on the stage's posed

character and circumstances [3] According to Ly [3] TALC focuses on defining a destination, investigating the reasons that caused the destination to change, and analyzing the transformation of a tourist site as well as tourist markets. Therefore, policymakers and the govt. embraced the TALC as the paradigm of an approach that facilitates simple planning for many types of tourist destinations [4]. The model serves as an accepted framework utilized by academics and LDCs (least-developed countries) to facilitate a comprehensive comprehension of the progression and advancement of a certain destination [5]. Bangladesh, classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC), has just been recommended for graduation to the status of a developing country. The aesthetic appeal of the nation's landscape and cultural heritage distinguished her as a prominent figure in beauty pageantry [6] and "Beautiful Bangladesh" [7]. Among the many tourist attractions in Bangladesh are those centered around archeology, beaches, adventures, ecotourism, agritourism, culinary arts, and ethnic heritage. The beauty of diverse tourism products and the warmth of the locals attract domestic and international travelers. 0.391 million international tourists visited the country in 2019, generating $0.391 million in revenue (World Bank, 2020). Meanwhile, leisure spending accounted for 88% of total expenditures [8]. The statistics should be adequate, but Bangladesh has enormous potential that might draw more tourists. A country's

ability to attract more tourists may be enhanced by a tourism strategy and action plans that are effective and well-designed. Recently, Bangladesh assembled a team of national and international tourism professionals to develop a comprehensive national tourism master plan. The determination of Bangladesh's current tourism stage could aid in the formulation of an effective strategy based on the plan. Unfortunately, Bangladesh has not yet literally explored the stage. As a framework that divides a location into six distinct stages, the Butlers' TALC model may be applied to ascertain Bangladesh's current standing as a tourism destination [9]. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the Tourist Area Life Cycle of Bangladesh, with the potential to provide a fundamental basis for the formulation of the country's tourism action plan.

Research Questions

The title of this study presents the main research question symbolically. Bangladesh is a beautiful country that has each type of tourism product. The country has products of beach tourism i.e. world's longest sea beach Cox's Bazar, Sea-Princess Kuakata Sea beach, archeological tourism i.e. UNESCO declared world heritage sites Paharpur Buddhist Vihara, Sixty Dom Mosque, eco-tourism i.e. world largest mangrove forest Sundarban, Ratargul Swamp Forest, adventure tourism i.e. surfing, hill climbing in Sajek Valley, Chittagong hill tracks and agri-tourism in all over Bangladesh. After the liberation of Bangladesh, the father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman realized the prospects of tourism in Bangladesh, and he established Bangladesh Parjatan (tourism) Corporation (BPC) in 1972 and took several relevant initiatives (i.e. exploring the archeological sites) for promoting Bangladesh home and abroad as a popular tourism destination. Now, it is 2024 which means that the tourism industry of Bangladesh has passed 52 years. So, it is highly rational to ask about the life cycle history of the tourism industry of Bangladesh. This study is conducted from this motivation and tries to answer a broad research question- In which stage of TALC, the tourism industry of Bangladesh is staying? The study also searched for the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes and indicators of the phase of TALC in which Bangladesh is residing?
2. Are the indicators of the specific phase performing in Bangladesh?
3. What Bangladesh should do to graduate from the specific stage?

Research Objectives

To fill out the gap and answer the research questions, this study draws a broad objective and three specific objectives. Determining the Life Cycle of the Tourism industry in Bangladesh is the overall objective of this study. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the key characteristics and indicators of the TALC phase in which Bangladesh is presently positioned.
2. To evaluate the indicators of the Bangladesh TALC phase.
3. To suggest some approaches for reaching the next TALC stage.

Literature Review

The concept of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) may seem relatively novel in the context of Bangladesh, but it has been extensively employed since the 1980s. The TALC study is further augmented by an extensive body of literary work [4]. The concept was initially developed by R.W. Butler in 1980 [35] and subsequently revisited by the same author [5]. This idea has since been used for ecotourism [10], CBT [11], natural-based destinations (Bao & Zhang, 2006), and historical destinations [1] as well as within the confines of a particular nation [4] Butler [1] posits that the Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC) consists of seven distinct stages, each characterized by unique attributes. The stages have been thoroughly examined by researchers in the field of tourism [12-15,5,4,11,16] who conducted a study proposing a micro foundation of the TALC hypothesis. The authors proposed the hypothesis based on the available maximum utility for the tourists. The study found that during the exploration, involvement, and development phases, visitors get the most benefit from their trips to the destination. In contrast, the phases of consolidation and stagnation are marked by the social impacts linked to the attractiveness of any destination. This research proved the positive role of specific policies and tourist arrival in destinations over the stages of TALC. It is mentioned that policies focusing on tourism promotion, generate significant changes in tourist arrival data and tourism development. Another study by Gore et al. [16] examined the consistency of the TALC stages with the stages of a beach destination in Goa, India. The researchers analyzed the tourist arrival data to fix the stages. The study found the dissimilarities in TALC stages for domestic and international tourists. But the TALC provides an accurate picture for both types of tourists. The study found that India passed the consolidation stage during 1989-193. The tourism industry boosted up in this stage. Many chain hotel, airlines, and travel agencies started their business in India during the consolidation stage. Later the country reached the rejuvenation stage in 1994-2008. The expansion of technology helped the country reach this stage. The authors also marked that the infrastructure development policy of the Indian government such as the construction Konkan Rail line attracted the most domestic tourists in Goa. Moreover, establishing international airports, permitting charter flights, policy to issue e-visa and on-arrival visa, the Gambling Act, and different large festivals also attracted domestic and international tourists. The research mentioned that such initiatives attracted day and weekend visitors. The study identified this stage as the consolidation stage. Later, the local people also participated in this flow by registering their houses with hotel aggregators like OYO and Airbnb. The diversified tourism products focus on adventure, sports, water, nature, agriculture, and hinterland were also introduced which transformed Goa to the development stage again in 2015-2018. Manalu and Manik [13] mapped the stages of TALC of four ecotourism destinations in Indonesia. The study articulated that Tao Silalahi and Sampuran Efrata Waterfall are currently in the stagnation stage, while the Soda Water Natural Pool is currently in the exploration stage and

Aek Nauli Forest is currently in the involvement stage. Based on the study, it can be said that the state of ecotourism objects in the Lake Toba region is still in a state of critical need for development. The lack of cleanliness of tourist facilities, the quality of the washrooms, and public transportation networks that are not consistently available are some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration. The authors suggested that to achieve the goal of increasing the number of travelers who visit ecotourism destinations, it is very necessary to make improvements. The authors also mentioned that the position concerning the tourism life cycle will serve as the foundation for the formulation of ecotourism development strategies in this region. The study of Javed and Tučková [12] used the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model to examine the relationship between the government and the competitiveness of the tourism industry of three countries (India, Pakistan, and China). To examine the understudied aspect of the tourism industry about the present problem under investigation, the case study utilized time-series data. The results of the analysis indicated that, following the TALC model, China is approaching the stage of consolidation, India is situated between the stages of involvement and development, and Pakistan is situated between the stages of exploration and involvement. These three countries were selected from the Asia Pacific region. The research recommended a strategic approach by the government and other pertinent authorities to sustain tourism expansion since neighboring nations are enhancing their capabilities. The government also needs to play a big role in planning tourism and improving tourist destinations to reach these goals in the next few years. Kubickova and Li [17] also conducted a homogeneous case study to examine the relationship between government and tourist competitiveness in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras using the TALC model. The case study utilized time-series analysis. The study showed that the impact of government on tourist competitiveness is influenced by both the degree of freedom granted and the stage of destination development. The result demonstrated that Costa Rica has demonstrated the strongest tourism competitiveness among the three countries and is positioned at one of the upper tiers of the TALC model. Guatemala has had an increase in tourism competitiveness, but it has decreased in recent years. In 2012, tourism's contribution to GDP was barely 8.4%. Honduras exhibits a pattern comparable to that of Guatemala. Honduras contributed approximately double the percentage to GDP compared to Guatemala, exactly 15.3%. The study contended that tourism competitiveness is impacted by both governmental policies and the country's stage of tourism development. Each country is at different stages of development and competitiveness, which are influenced by government decision-making. Odum [5] applied the TALC model to evaluate ecotourism destinations in southeastern Nigeria and examined the implications for the development and planning of the tourism industry. The subsequent are the results uncovered by this study: As a result of the sociopolitical environment that influences tourism in Nigeria, immediate resorts were established near lakes; other characteristics of southern Nigerian tourist destinations include limited development and stagnation, uncertain

destination growth, and stage overlap. Due to the government's "sloppy attitude" toward tourism, the exploration and development phases are currently underway at the region's most popular tourist destinations. Conversely, the placement of these attractions affords individuals an opportunity to participate in initiatives that promote sustainability.

Petrevska and Collins-Kreiner [4] investigated the applicability and soundness of the TALC model to the advancement of tourism in Macedonia. Overall, by 2001, the government's participation in the development and execution of policies at each TALC stage had undergone a substantial transformation due to the investigation. Specifically, the proactive role was modified, and the tourism industry was marginalized. The involvement stage (2004-2005) witnessed a significant surge in tourism awareness among both residents and tourism actors, which played a pivotal role in shaping the tourism market. Additionally, the political and economic climate of the area substantially improved, which enabled the tourism facility to grow and develop. The growth stage (2005-2013) was distinguished by a continuous increase in visitor numbers, assisted by effective advertising and increased promotion. Kruczek et al. [9] also adopted the TALC model to analyze the tourism development phases of Antarctica based on International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) data. The study determined tourist volume and identified problems related to the environment. The research mentioned that the development cycle of the Antarctic tourism region can be analyzed using the TALC concepts. The era from 1958 to the early 1990s can be classified as the exploration phase, starting from the first disembarkation of tourists. The earliest travelers were charmed by the area's distinctive features, which determined its appeal as a tourist destination. Tourist arrivals increased from several thousand to ten thousand per season during the 1990s. During this phase of involvement, the preliminary legal and organizational framework of Antarctic tourism was established. Tourist arrivals have increased steadily throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century; they are currently four times greater than they were in the year 2000. The prevailing stage of maturation is according to the Butler cycle. One such approach would be to have a consolidation phase before the peak season when the number of visitors is at its highest. This progress aligns with the Butler TALC model, transitioning towards the consolidation and stagnation phases, and is expected to achieve critical tourist capacity in the upcoming decades.

TALC also acted as a ground study in some research [11,15]. For analyzing sustainable tourism development potentialities in Tunisia during (2020-2025) Widz and Brzezińska-Wójcik [15] analyzed tourism development phases in Tunisia. It has been determined that Tunisia remained in the exploration phase until the 1960s before consistent tourism investments were established. From several thousand to 94,000 in 1960, there were few visitors to the exploratory form during this period. The economic and social repercussions of tourism on local communities are negligible at this stage of regional development. 1960–1985 was the period of involvement identified by the research. With a roughly 20-fold

increase from 1965, the number of tourists visiting Tunisia surged to 1.8 million in 1985. An extensive 10-year tourist development plan was also executed during this time to establish 35,000 hotel beds in the country. The initial tourism zones were developed in proximity to coastal towns during that period. The National Tourism Organization was founded to enhance and advertise tourism while guaranteeing top-notch tourism services. A statutory body was also established to supervise and oversee the construction of national hotels. Therefore, 15,000 jobs were generated in the tourism sector. The notable finding of this study is identifying the development stage. Tourism had significant growth after 1985, marking the beginning of a development phase in Tunisia. During this period, the quantity of hotel accommodation rose to more than 93,000 in 1985, leading to the creation of 40,000 jobs in the tourism industry. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of hotel beds and jobs both doubled, with 197,500 hotel beds and 79,000 jobs in total. The expansion of hotel infrastructure and economic shifts, particularly in 1987, led to a rise in the volume of tourists. By 1990, the number of visitors exceeded 3 million and grew substantially to almost 5 million tourists by 2000. An evident surge in visitor activity was seen in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. This led to a rise in tourism revenue and the enhancement of infrastructure. Between 2011 and 2015, Tunisia experienced two significant decreases in visitor numbers which period is marked as a decline phase in Tunisia Setiawan and Wiweka [11] also completed an unground study on TALC phases to develop a national strategic tourism plan for a tourism village. According to the research findings, Dieng Kulon Kulon tourism village exhibits a favorable propensity to emerge as a national strategic tourist area of Indonesia. The existence of resources that have the potential to stimulate curiosity regarding cultural heritage and historical sites. According to the tourism area life-cycle theory, Dieng Kulon Tourist Village is presently undergoing the development phase. According to the data, more than fifty percent of the visitors spent the entire day in the village. In addition to bolstering the hospitality industry, local tourism augmented the earnings of photographers, travel agencies, guides, and car park operators. However, external travel operators, particularly large tourism agencies, marginalize local communities, which is an additional negative effect. Thus, it is evident that the Dieng Kulon tourism village is presently resided in the development stage. A steady proportion of visitors maintain their accommodations for a minimum duration of three days. Promotional campaigns are also carried out across several electronic and social media platforms to maximize their audience reach Corporations.

Different Stages of TALC

Tourists are mostly drawn to cultural, historical, and ecological destinations during the exploration phase of TALC. There aren't many visitors, they're just passing through, and the tourist infrastructure isn't yet in place, but locals are still quite involved [18]. Phase two sees an uptick in tourists and their level of engagement with host communities [19]. Therefore, both visitors and locals count on the state and municipal governments to provide reliable transportation and other amenities. Advertising for the destination is also kept to a minimum [20]. According to Butler [1], this is known as the Involvement phase in TALC. In the third stage, Development, targeted advertising strategies are created to entice certain types of tourists to the destination. There is a shift of power away from host communities and toward private companies that cater to tourists with high-end services [4]. Artificial facilities enhance a destination's cultural and natural settings and alter the destination's physical aspect considerably when they add modern infrastructure and lodgings [17]. The fourth stage of TALC, known as "Consolidation," is defined by an increasing number of visitors (albeit at a slower rate of growth), a local economy that is dependent on tourism, a diverse advertising and marketing policy [18], and the presence of franchise and chain-based services in the tourist destination [11]. This is the point where host communities start to get irritated because of all the tourists and not enough services [22]. As a result, there are some limitations placed on them in the tourist zone. Staggering follows the TALC phase, this phase is defined by a peak number of visitors that meets or exceeds the destination's capacity, a reputation for the destination that is both stable and subject to change, an abundance of man-made facilities, improvements to the destination's cultural and natural attractions, frequent ownership changes, and a high level of reliance on tourists' intentions to return. The TALC decline stage is unexpected. However, the destination's appeal and competitiveness begin to wane at this point. Consequently, the location is hardly frequented by non-vacationers. During this stage, the amenities are made available to the local people at reduced prices for usage or purchase. The buildings and systems that were once utilized for tourism are now used for something else entirely [15]. Consequently, it makes tourists think twice about visiting the destination. Thus, it stops being a popular and attractive tourist destination. The final phase of TALC is Rejuvenation, which entails revitalizing a declining destination. The revitalization could be executed through the development of untapped natural resources or the addition of high-demand artificial facilities [5,11]. The newly offered amenities draw in travelers, reigniting the popularity of vacation travel. The facilities would prioritize the contemporary preferences and tastes of the tourists. To enhance the appeal and energy of the destination, it is essential for both governmental and non-governmental entities to work together, even though the revitalized destination may not have significant competition on a wide scale [23].
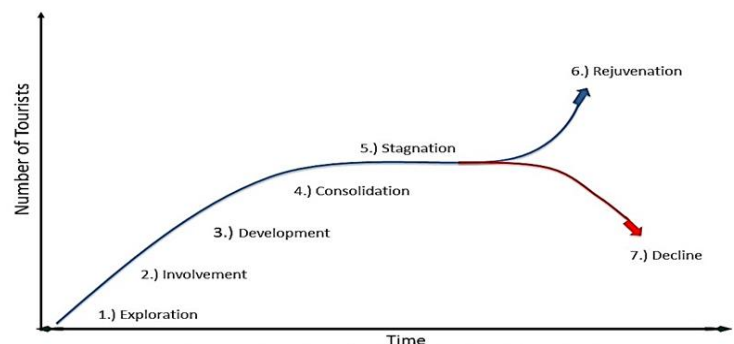

Figure 1: *Tourism Area Life Cycle Model; Source: Butler (1980).*

As a tourist destination, it is not clear in which of the mentioned stages Bangladesh resides or what characteristics it possesses. References missing aim to learn more about the Tourism Area Life Cycle in Bangladesh and may serve as a basis for developing the country's road map. Therefore, this study will help determine the stage of TALC and minimize the gaps.

Research Methods

Nature of the Study

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to enhance the research's accuracy and accomplish its objectives. In order to determine the TALC of Bangladesh and its particular stage, the quantitative method was used; to validate the stages checklist, the qualitative method was employed. The methods that are followed for conducting this study are discussed below.

Types and Sources of Data

This research utilized both sources of data (primary and secondary). The National Tourism Organization (NTO)-Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), the World Bank, and the Bangladesh Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (BAAPA) were consulted for secondary data. Widz and Brzezińska-Wójcik [15]; Setiawan and Wiweka [11]; Kruczek et al. [9] Petrevska and Collins-Kreiner [4] identified the TALC phases in extracting and analyzing the secondary data. The data include annual totals for international and domestic tourist arrivals and receipts. The most reliable and appropriate source for determining the TALC phases is the recorded data about tourist arrivals [9,4] as the model analyzes the data based on the number of tourists and time. Gore et al. [16] also analyzed the TALC phases using the data of international and domestic tourists. In this study, the primary data was also gathered via ten (10) in-depth interviews. The purpose of the interview is to collect accurate information from the four Assistant Directors (AD), two Deputy Directors (DD), and four academicians and tourism researchers of the Bangladesh Tourism Board (NTO). The respondents were chosen based on purpose because they were well-known and knowledgeable about Bangladesh's tourism landscape and development. Based on the interview checklist for a particular stage of the TALC, a semi-structured questionnaire was formulated. The respondents only provided feedback on this particular stage. A combination of secondary data and in-depth interviews for TALC analysis ensures the authenticity of the data and research [11]. This study considered the years 2010 to 2019 for international tourist arrival data as the secondary data. The starting year 2010 is significant because the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh started to prioritize the tourism industry considering its contribution to the economy. This year government formulated the National Tourism Policy 2010 and also established the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) as the National Tourism Organization (NTO). This study considered the year 2010 as the renovation year of the tourism industry in Bangladesh and collected data from this year. The ending year for collecting data is 2019. In the year 2019, the world tourism industry fell into a great recession because of the COVID-19 pandemic [6]. Governments imposed restrictions on traveling. The restrictions prevailed in most of the months of 2020 and 2021. As a result, tourists' arrival rate was decreasing dramatically around the world including in Bangladesh. So, the years are not normal for the tourism industry. Therefore, the study considered the international tourist arrival data till 2019. The study also collected domestic tourist arrival data from BAAPA and the time range 2015-2019 is considered for collecting the data. Bangladesh Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (BAAPA) is the largest entertainment industry association in Bangladesh, representing the diverse and inclusive attractions industry. The association worked to mitigate the COVID-19 effects on the attraction industry, industry advocating and lobbying to positively impact laws, and relevant webinars that help guide the attraction industry's strategic decision-making. BAAPA, which was established in 2005, represents over 20 divisions of Bangladesh's largest industrial attraction companies (BAAPA, 2022). The organization started to collect domestic tourist arrival data from its members in 2015 as per the direction of the Bangladesh Tourism Board (Interview 01). BAAPA provided the data time range 2015-2019.

Sample of the Study

Purposive sampling has been used in this study to identify respondents for collecting primary data. The primary objective of employing qualitative research methodology is to deliberately choose participants or locations that will most effectively facilitate the researcher's comprehension of the research issue [24]. A group of tourism practitioners and academics possessing relevant knowledge and experience was selected for this study. The sample size for this investigation is ten, as mentioned earlier. Appropriate sample size is utilized in this investigation. Qualitative research requires that the sample size not be excessively large, as this could impede the researchers' ability to extract data [25]. Once more, it is crucial to ensure that the sample size does not become impracticable to acquire exact data [26], theory saturation, or informational redundancy [27] occurs. Lincoln and Guba [28] suggested that information should be gathered until it becomes redundant. Collecting and analyzing information follow a cyclical pattern, which persists until additional data is uncovered [29]. This study conducted interviews with ten sample respondents who have a direct affiliation with the tourism industry, employing the methodology described.

Data Analysis Procedure

Microsoft Excel 2016 was used to perform an analysis of the secondary data to identify the TALC stages. After that, the TALC characteristics checklist was used to validate the stage. The checklists used in this study are based on those of Butler [1] and Odum [5] [22], Boyd [36], Odum [5], Petrevska and Collins-Kreiner [4], and Russo [30] were among the TALC publications that served as guidelines for the checklist. Focusing on the checklist that Bangladesh is upholding, the in-depth interview is undertaken. In addition, the interview is evaluated using thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke [31] and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane [32]. The method facilitates the generation or

combination of similar responses or opinions in Microsoft Excel and Word documents [34,6] classifying and reorganizing the unstructured data yields in themes and subthemes [33]. All interview data were analyzed because they contained all the themes and subthemes essential to this study.

Findings of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify the specific phase of Bangladesh in the TALC. The analysis of this study reveals that Bangladesh has already passed the first two phases-exploration and involvement in the Tourism Area Life Cycle and now is residing in the development stage. It is also found that the number of tourists, as well as receipts from tourists, is increasing day by day. The study also analyzed the checklist of the development stage which is adapted from Odum [5] and Butler [35] the analyses reveal that the attributes and indicators of the development stage are acting in Bangladesh. The details of the findings are discussed below.
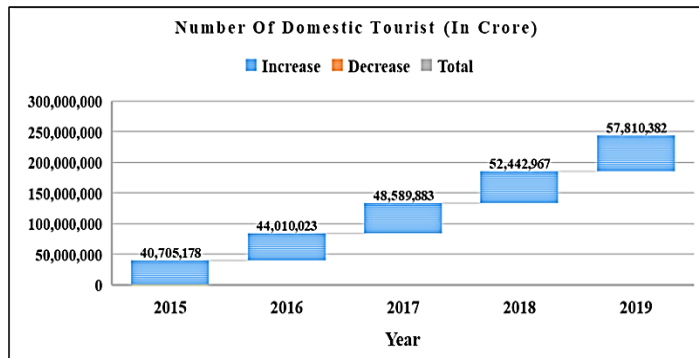

Figure 2: Number of Domestic Tourists in Bangladesh; Source: BAAPA, 2022.

Figure 2 represents the number of visitors in Bangladesh. It is observed that the number of visitors is consistently increasing every year. In 2015, the number of visitors was four crores seven lac more (40,705,178) whereas the number increased to five crores and seventy-eight lacs more (57,810,382) in 2019 which is 1.7 million more than in 2015. Specifically, the total of seventy lacs visitors increased in five years (2015-2019). The trends indicate that the tourism industry of Bangladesh is growing as people are more eager to tour. The other researchers also found that the industry is boosting up with a vast number of domestic tourists [37-39].
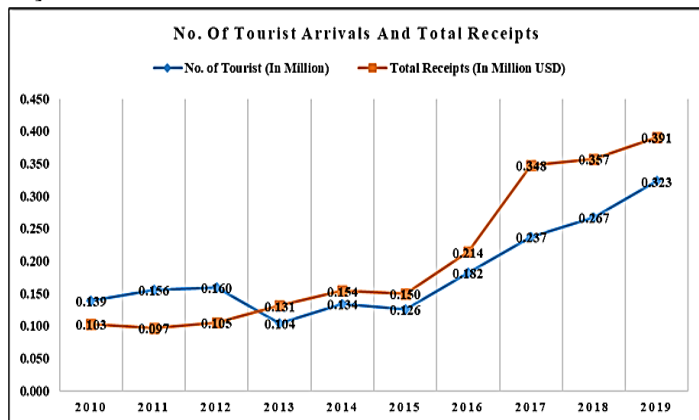

Figure 3: Number of International Tourist Arrivals in Bangladesh and Total Receipts; Source: World Bank and BTB, 2022.

The line chart (figure 3) represents the data of international tourist arrivals to Bangladesh and the total receipts from them. It is seen that both the number of tourists and earnings from them increased from 2010 to 2019. However, there was a downward (from 0.160 million to 0.104 million) in tourist arrival in 2013. This year Bangladesh faced political insatiability [40]. Researchers [41-43] found that political instability harms tourist behavior and decision-making. After 2013, the tourist arrival rate increased dramatically and consistently. In 2010, 0.139 million international tourists visited Bangladesh and the total receipt was 0.103 million USD. On the other hand, in 2019 total number of tourists was 0.323 million which is 45% more than in 2010 and the number of receipts from the tourists was 0.391 million USD which is 26% more than in 2010. So, the data proves that day by day Bangladesh became a popular tourist destination for international tourists.
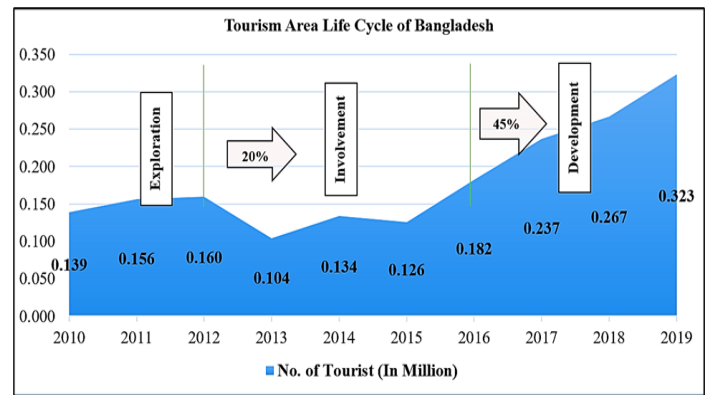

Figure 4: Tourism Area Life Cycle of Bangladesh (Source: World Bank and BTB, 2022).

Figure 3 clearly shows the different stages of TALC that Bangladesh has crossed and in which stage it is retaining. So, it is seen that the country residing in the development stage till 2019. The stages are determined through the calculation of tourists' growth in a specific year. It is seen in the figure that the number of tourists is small, and the growth rate is not high from 2010 to 2012 which is the basic characteristic of the exploration stage. It is discussed in the literature [10,17,5,44,11] that a small number of tourists explore the destination and there are limited tourist facilities in the exploration stage. In Bangladesh, the government started to prioritize the tourism sector in 2010, and facilities for tourists increased from 2010 to 2012 [23]. But the following year 2013 faced a tourist crisis as it decreased because of the political instability. However, there was an increased rate after this year and Figure 2 reflects the rate. It was found that the tourists' arrival rate increased by 20% from 2012 to 2016 which means more tourists were involved in the period. This data proves that Bangladesh stayed in the involvement stage from 2012 to 2016. If we analyze other indicators of the involvement stage like the intervention of government & private organizations, promoting the destination through advertisements & tourism fairs, and emerging tourist seasons, the scenario of the involvement stage would be clear. Now, October to February has emerged as the tourist season in Bangladesh [45] and Cox's Bazar Sea Beach emerged as a popular tourist destination [46, 47]. Bangladesh took midterm strategies

and initiatives from 2012 to 2016 like upgradation initiatives of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and Cox's Bazar Airport, integration of local government institutions in the tourism industry, identification of tourist destinations scattered in different parts of Bangladesh, the establishment of new tourists' destinations and modernization and expansion of existing tourist spots (Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, 2022). The government also took the initiative to create and manage the development of the tourism industry through public-private partnerships. Promotion and expansion of the domestic tourism industry through the creation of product documentaries and participation in tourism fairs organized at home and abroad are also arranged. Moreover, the year 2016 was declared the "Tourism Year" by the government (Independent, 2016). These initiatives helped Bangladesh to get more tourists as tourists gradually increased in the consecutive years after 2016.

Table 1: Checklist for the Development Stage of TALC Bangladesh Based on the Participants' Opinion.

Attributes of the Development Stage (Themes and Subthemes)	Participants									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Well-defined tourist market, propelled by heavy advertising in tourist-generating areas.										
Recognized as a short-haul tourism destination	*	*	*		*		*			
Indian tourist market		*						*		*
Domestic tourist market including the young tourist group	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
Large-scale advertising and promotion on social media (Facebook, YouTube)	*			*			*			*
Local involvement and control of development will decline rapidly.										
International experts for preparing tourism master plan		*		*	*					
3rd Terminal of Hazrat Sahjalal International Airport	*		*		*				*	
Four special tourist zone		*	*		*	*				
Presence of international travel agencies like TripAdvisor, Booking.com	*		*					*		
Collaboration with international organizations	*			*		*	*	*		
Local provided facilities will disappear due to the presence of elaborate and more up-to-date facilities provided by external organizations, especially for visitor's accommodation										
Initiatives for establishing 15 hotels		*							*	*
Establishment of motels			*		*		*			
Procuring tourist couch and ship	*		*	*						
Construction of "Parjatan Bhaban" (tourism building)		*			*	*		*		*
Improvement of auxiliary and supportive services	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
Natural and cultural attractions will be developed sophisticatedly with man-made imported facilities.										
Development and establishment of airports	*	*	*							
Development of beach areas		*			*	*				
Renovation of new beaches	*		*	*			*		*	
Establishment of tourism centers		*				*				
Changes in the physical appearance of the area will be noticeable and may not be welcomed by all natives										
Infrastructural development	*				*			*		*
Construction of Chittagong Cox's Bazar rail line		*		*	*		*			
Protest against the establishment of a new airport			*					*	*	*
The ethnic community protested to establish 5-star hotels and tourist spots at the Cimbuk hill track		*						*	*	*

(*) Indicates responses of the Marked Participants; Sources of the Checklist [35,5]

Discussion of the Study

This study identified that the tourism industry of Bangladesh is booming as both domestic and international tourists are increasing day by day. The research also found that Bangladesh is staying in the development stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). The determined stage (development stage) of Bangladesh TALC is validated through the in-depth interview of the respondents. The opinion of the respondents is discussed in the following section based on the checklist [1,5] and in-depth interviews of the development stage.

Attributes 1: Well-Defined Tourist Market, Propelled by Heavy Advertising in Tourist-Generating Areas

The first attributes of the development stage of Bangladesh TALC are supported by several indicators like short-haul tourism destination, number of domestic tourists especially young tourist groups, and social media-based advertising and promotion. The international tourist arrival data (table 03) shows that Bangladesh has now become a short-haul tourism destination. Short-haul tourism, also called short-distance tourism means traveling to a country that requires less time (30 minutes to 3 hours) to travel from the country of origin [79]. Short-haul tourism occurs in neighboring countries. In 2019, 88% of tourists came from neighboring countries (India, Nepal, and China) to Bangladesh. Surprisingly 78% came from India. So, it may be said that Bangladesh become a short-haul popular tourism market for Indian tourists which fulfills the criteria of a "well-defined tourism market" in the development stage. It is also evident that the domestic tourist market of Bangladesh is also well-defined. In the last several years, the per capita income of Bangladesh has consistently increased (The Daily Star, 2019). With the increase in income, people of Bangladesh are now more like to travel as there is a positive relationship between income and tourism [80,81]. When people have the money, they will travel for mental peace [82]. If people of Bangladesh get 2-3 days' vacation, they go travel with family and friends. Most tourist destinations become overcrowded during seasonal vacations (Daily Bangladesh, 2021). A respondent said that:

> *We received complaints from the tourism suppliers about the over-tourism. It is a pleasant pain as there are huge domestic tourists on different vacations, and we can't meet their demands. (Participant 04)*

Among the domestic tourists, the young tourist group holds a major portion in Bangladesh. Young generations are adventurous, and they like to visit different tourist destinations with friends (Lojo, 2020). Their travel behavior is reflected in the following statement of a tourism academician.

> *At Present, the young generation doesn't think about whether they have money or not, they are crazy about travel. They save money and go to travel when they get 2-3 days' leave from the university. (Participant 10)*

Different airlines, tour operators, and travel agencies run their promotional activities targeting Indian tourists, domestic tourists, and young tourist groups. The promotional activities are mostly social media based as most tourists like to search and share travel information as well as excitement through social media [23]. Bangladesh Tourism Board (NTO) and different tour operators regularly attended different tourism fairs held in neighboring countries, especially in India to attract tourists from the neighboring countries. These activities are the indicators of the development stage.

Attributes 2: Local Involvement and Control of Development Will Decline Rapidly

In the second attribute of the development stage of TALC, the involvement and control of the local stakeholders are decreased. Recently Bangladesh has taken the initiative to prepare a National Tourism Master Plan. To prepare, the planned government formed a group of international experts (The Business Standard, 2022) which is mentioned in the following statements.

> *We would like to prepare the National Tourism Master Plan which will be inclusive for all. The master plan will act as a guideline for future tourism development. We nominated international experts considering their expertise in the relevant fields. (Participant 02)*

> *The hospitality sector, which is the associated sector of tourism is dominated by foreign employees. Most of the top positions of star-ranking hotels are owned by them. We are not only losing our reserve for these but also our students are deprived of getting the job. (Participant 08)*

Not only the foreign experts, but the presence, and activities of international travel agencies like TripAdvisor, and Booking.com are also noticeable in Bangladesh. It decreases the business involvement as well as the control of Bangladeshi travel agencies and tour operators. Bangladesh Government has also taken initiatives to establish three exclusive tourist zones at Cox's Bazar Sea beach area for foreign tourists (UNB, 2019). The entry of the local citizens will be highly restricted in this tourist zone.

In the development stage of TALC, the national tourism organization implements different programs collaborating with different international organizations. The NTO of Bangladesh is now connected with the United Nations World Tourism Organizations (UNWTO), the Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC). The NTO participated in different events and activities of international tourism organizations.

> *During the pandemic, we submitted three projects to COMCEC, and one of the projects was awarded. We also participate in different capacity-building events of UNWTO and SESRIC. (Participant 5)*

In 2019, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) declared Bangladesh the "OIC city of tourism for 2019" (SESRIC, 2019). The inauguration program was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the tourism ministers of OIC member countries were present at the event. It indicates that Bangladesh is increasing collaboration with international organizations.

Attributes 3: Local Provided Facilities Will Disappear Due to the Presence of Elaborate and More Up-To-Date Facilities Provided by External Organizations, Especially for Visitor Accommodation

These attributes of the development stage focus on the tourist support services, especially on the accommodation. The respondent opined that the present government is more concerned about providing different types of services to tourists. Table 02 also

highlights different types of development activities that have been initiated by the Bangladesh government in the last five years. The government improved auxiliary and supportive services like tour guiding, the extension of tourist policing service, developed road, transport, hygiene, and sanitation systems in different tourist destinations, and established a tourist information center for tourists. Moreover, international hotel chains have planned to open their chain in Bangladesh as there have huge demand for luxurious accommodation not only in the capital city but also all over the country. Fifteen more five-star hotels will be established in the next three years (The Daily Sun, 2017). In 2019, the government constructed a new motel in the Chapainawabganj district which is a significant and popular tourist area for archeological tourism and land port. In 2018, the government also adopted a plan for building a tourism center in the adjacent area of Sheikh Hasina Bridge of Chapainawabganj District, Hatia, and Nijhum Island of Noakhali District, Adorsho Nagar of Netrokona District, and district headquarters of Pancagarh District. This year the government also adopted a plan for creating tourism facilities in the Durgasagor area of the Barishal district. Six tourist coaches are collected for operating tours in the attractive tourist areas inside the country. All these facilities are provided to satisfy and meet the growing demand of the tourists.

> *Domestic tourists to our country have increased remarkably in the last few years. We are trying to provide them with better services by establishing different tourist facilities including accommodation services. Moreover, we are exploring and establishing new tourism centers in different districts around the country which are getting attention as new tourist destinations. (Participant 04)*

The government also completed a feasibility study to explore potential areas where tourism could be developed. All these initiatives of Bangladesh fulfill the criteria of the third attribute of the development stage of TALC.

Attributes 4: Natural and Cultural Attractions Will Be Developed Sophisticatedly with Man-Made Imported Facilities

This attribute highlights the indicators of artificial development. The natural and cultural attractions are renovated with artificial facilities like road infrastructure, tourist support services, ride facilities, beautification, etc. [5] All facilities are man-made. At this point, the Bangladesh government took the initiative to develop Cox's Bazar International Airport which is the most popular and longest sea beach area in Bangladesh. A direct railway has already been constructed and started operations on November 11, 2023. Construction of the third terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, and strengthening of the existing runway of Osmani International Airport, Sylhet, Shah Amanat International Airport, and Chittagong are going on. The government also took the initiative to develop different beaches in Bangladesh. The "Parki" which is a popular beach area of Bangladesh got a project for creating tourism facilities. In 2020, the government tourism organizations of Bangladesh owned their

building named "Parjatan Bhaban (Tourism Building)". It has already been mentioned in the third attribute that the government is working on developing different types of tourist facilities in new tourist destinations in Bangladesh.

Attributes 5: Changes in the Physical Appearance of the Area Will Be Noticeable and May Not Be Welcomed by All Natives

According to the last attributes of the development stage, the physical appearance of the tourism area is noticeably changed because of the development initiatives of the government. However, the changes may make the host community unhappy. They may protest different types of development initiatives. This study found the indicators which support the attribute as Bangladesh is staying in the development stage of the TALC and the attributes are the same in the country. At present, the roads and highways of Bangladesh are more developed than in the past. Even the connecting roads of different district-level tourist destinations also got the touch of development. However, the development activities were not accepted by the local people. In 2016, the government of Bangladesh decided to establish a new airport at Arial Fen (Bill) of Munshigonj district. However, the government faced remarkable protests. Moreover, a five-star hotel was planned to be constructed under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative at the Cimbuk hill track of Bandarban district (Tourism International, 2020) which is a popular tourist destination in Bangladesh. But ethnic community who lived on the hill protested to establish the hotel (The Daily Star, 2021).

> *Our government tried to establish a hotel so that the tourists could enjoy the beauty of the hill and nearby area. However, the local community didn't support the initiative. Moreover, we face protests from environmentalists for protecting the beach area. (Participant 7).*

Strategies to Way Forward from the Development Stage

The study identified the specific stage (development stage) of TALC in Bangladesh. The stage is also validated through the in-depth interview based on the checklist of the stage. It is found that Bangladesh has huge potential for tourism development. So proper strategies may utilize the potentiality and make Bangladesh an attractive tourist destination for domestic and international tourists. The present study proposes the following strategies for the way forward from the development stage and make Bangladesh the model tourism destination among the developing countries. Promoting tourism in foreign countries to attract international tourists is one of the primary responsibilities of foreign embassies [48]. Sri Lanka has already received the benefits of the innovative role of tourism promotion in foreign countries [49] Primarily it is needed to focus on targeted inbound tourism market through the foreign embassies and consulates [50] They can also render efforts for building regional coordination with neighboring countries to promote the extended tour and cross border tourism. Researchers also acknowledged the role of foreign embassies and consulates in tourism promotion and attracting foreign tourists [51-53]. Thus, this study urged the collaborative initiatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, and

Bangladesh Tourism Board (National Tourism Organization) so that foreign embassies and consulates of Bangladesh in different countries take initiatives to promote tourism and attract foreign tourists to visit Bangladesh. But Visa should be easily accessible to foreign tourists. Now, getting a tourist Visa for Bangladesh international tourists faces various complexities such as lengthy visa processing, unprofessionalism, and partial Visa rejection for group tours [54-56]. Such problems also need to be solved immediately with the initiatives of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On-arrival Visa for tourists from source countries & short-haul destinations and introducing E-visa would be an instant solution in this regard. Safety-security is another great concern for tourists [57,58] Hariyanto [59] claimed that lack of safety-security and unexpected security incidents damage the destination image, revisit intention, and demotivate new tourists to make tour plans. So, this study recommends establishing secure destinations for tourists with the help of Bangladesh tourist police and initiating continuous patrolling in sensitive areas, access control, community tourist policing, security volunteers, safety signage, First Aid services, security locks, and lockers. Media also play a key role in shaping tourists' risk perception [60] and travel decisions [61,62]. The widespread media coverage not only leads to a decline in tourist arrivals, but also perpetuates a negative perception in the minds of tourists, which persists for an extended period due to repeated exposure to the incident [63-65] But media also benefits and promoting tourism industry travel documentaries, featured news, and vlogs [66] So, media can play both positive and negative role for attracting tourists and tourism development. Thus, it is recommended that the media adopt appropriate broadcasting strategies that will not have any adverse effects on the tourism industry. This study also recommends giving special attention to providing consistent tourist facilities for tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Tourist facilities and amenities ensure tourist satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth communication, destination referrals, revisit intention, and destination loyalty [67,68] Tourist satisfaction can also be ensured through continuous monitoring of tourism activities, performance rating of destinations and tourism service agencies, and satisfaction rating of the tourists. Monitoring pricing in tourist destinations regarding accommodation, food, tourist activities, and other auxiliary services can also ensure affordable prices, justice, and satisfaction of the tourists [69,70]. Prompt initiatives can also be taken to observe Big Data (bulk review of the tourists on social media and other social networking sites) about any destinations. Establishing an online reporting system, a tourist help desk, and introducing a toll-free hotline number for handling tourist complaints and emergencies would be an effective solution. Now, Bangladesh does not have any toll-free national emergency helpline or hotline number for tourists. However, it is an effective way to handle tourist complaints as well as emergencies and ensure tourist confidence with satisfaction [72]. Thus, this research highly recommends introducing a toll-free simple three or four-digit hotline for the tourist. Proper maintenance and preservation of tourist attractions across the country are also needed. Raising awareness among the host community on the benefits and impact of maintenance and preservation of tourism resources would generate better outcomes. Thus, national tourism organizations may engage the host community and other tourism stakeholders in inclusive tourism development initiatives and arrange capacity-building programs for them. Campaigns should also be run among the tourists to promote responsible tourism concepts so that the tourists respect nature as well as the emotions and culture of the host community. Moreover, the NTO needs to prepare a rational tourism plan focusing on physical & social settings and the Annual Performance Agreement (APA) would be an effective measure to execute the plan. The execution of the plan should be consistent with the destination features [73,74] and needs enough allocation of budget [75,76]. Synergistic outcomes may be generated if the plan is executed through collaborative activities with international tourism organizations like UMWTO, PATA, SESRIC, and COMCEC. Such collaboration not only provides expertise but also sources external funds. As a member state, Bangladesh has the right to claim such benefits from international organizations. In addition, the plan may be executed under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and inviting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The government is now establishing three exclusive tourist zones (Sonadia, Naf, Sabrang) in Cox's Bazar district [77]. In addition, some other tourist zones may be established, and govt. can invite FDI in these zones which will create employment opportunities and increase tourism GDP. Local and young entrepreneurs can also invest but they need soft loans and tax/VAT rebate facilities for hotels, motels, restaurants, and other tourist services. Banks and other financial institutions may come forward in this regard. Last but not least, Govt. support is highly needed for tourism development [78]. Three regulatory agencies (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Bangladesh Tourism Board, and Bangladesh Tourist Police) on behalf of the govt. are now working for the tourism development of Bangladesh as the regulatory agency. Moreover, the Department of Archeology and the Department of Forest and Environment serves a major part of tourists as many destinations are controlled by these regulatory agencies. Thus, coordination and cooperation among all mentioned agencies are highly needed, which is the prime recommendation of this study.

Implications of the Study

Theoretical Implications

The TALC has received the attention of researchers since the 1980s. However, the concept is new in Bangladesh. Thus, this study appears as the first model to analyze the life cycle of Bangladesh as a tourist destination. Moreover, most of the literature emphasized specific tourism products for applying the TALC concept. Very few studies are conducted for analyzing the TALC of a specific country like Bangladesh where the economy, as well as the tourism industry, is boosted. Therefore, this study has significant implications for the body of tourism literature and knowledge as it is a new study in Bangladesh that emphasizes the specific country as a tourism destination. Furthermore, the qualitative part of the study which identified some attributes of the

development stage of Bangladesh could be based on the further quantitative study. The students as well as the new researchers could gain knowledge from this study about systemic qualitative study.

Practical Implications

The study determined where Bangladesh is standing in the TALC. When anyone knows their standing point, they may adopt strategies to graduate from their current position. This study acts as a guideline for the Bangladesh government and national tourism organization to adopt proper strategies for making it more competitive and attractive. The study mentioned that Bangladesh is preparing a national tourism master plan. So, the study findings and proposed strategies could act as a guideline for preparing the master plan. The findings of the study could also be helpful to destination management organizations for analyzing the life cycle of the destination and taking necessary actions according to the result. At present data and information, a powerful tool for making decisions. However, it is evident from this study that there is a lack of preserving and utilizing the tourist arrival data. This study could guide the destination managers in utilizing the tourist arrival data. Above all, the findings of the study could be worthwhile to the managers of each type of tourism attraction or product, practitioners, policymakers, and government tourism organizations for destination management and branding of Bangladesh as well as least developed countries.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to determine the tourism area life cycle of Bangladesh. It was also expected that the study would identify the specific stage of the TALC that Bangladesh is retaining as well as the attributes/indicators of the stage. The study found that the tourism industry of Bangladesh is retaining in the development stage of the TALC. The result of this study also showed that the indicators/attributes which are identified through the in-depth interview support the checklist of the development stage of the TALC which was developed and modified by [35] and Odum [5]. The findings of this study highlighted that the tourism sun (industry) of Bangladesh is rising and collaborative efforts, as well as appropriate strategies, may make the sun (industry) sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders. Thus, this research proposed some strategies to move from the development stage to the consolidation stage. The indicators of the consolidation stage are- the growing influx of tourists, a local economy heavily reliant on tourism, a varied marketing and advertising strategy, and franchise & chain-based tourism services [11]. It is expected that the proposed strategies such as intensive promotion through embassies and consulates, hassles Visa accessibility, proper safety-security, capacity building of the stakeholders especially host community, promoting responsible tourism, PPP, FDI, and coordination & cooperation among regulatory agencies would make pathways to graduate from the development stage to consolidation stage and so on. This study has some scope for further research. Researchers argued that the tourist arrival data is the best method for determining the TALC. However, the present study only considered the international tourist arrival data and data of the visitors, not the tourists for determining the TALC. Further study could be conducted considering the data on both domestic and international tourists. In addition, this study is conducted considering Bangladesh as a tourist destination. There is a scope to apply the model to specific types of tourism like archeological tourism, ethnic tourism, agri-tourism, adventure tourism, and heritage tourism in Bangladesh. Moreover, the TALC model was developed in the context of western/developed countries. But this study applied the model in the context of Bangladesh which is a least developed country. Thus, all the attributes of the model may not be suitable for developing countries like Bangladesh. However, an advanced study could be conducted to develop a new Tourism Area Life Cycle Model (TALC) from the perspective of developing and least-developed countries.

Declaration

Funding

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