

The Impact of Rural Tourism on the Economic Growth of Rural Residents in Bangladesh: A Study on Melandaha Upazila in Jamalpur District

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Abstract

The development of rural tourism can contribute to both socio-economic development and environmental benefits for the people within rural areas. It plays a vital role in society, fostering business growth, generating employment, and ensuring a better livelihood for rural inhabitants. Bangladesh is a land of natural beauty. Melandaha Upazila in Jamalpur District is a hidden treasure of natural beauties, enriched with colorful rural life, archaeological and historical sites, and cultural attraction. With proper care, this location could emerge as a prominent rural tourism destination in Bangladesh. This paper focuses on recognizing how rural tourism can be the best alternative of earning for rural people to minimize the dependency on seasonal work (e.g., agriculture, fishing, boating), create alternative sources of income, and ensure economic development as well as solvency through participation in rural tourism businesses. This study was undertaken to explore a secondary income source for rural people who depend on an agricultural-based economy. To test this assumption, a survey questionnaire was administered to identify whether the commencement of rural tourism can stimulate the economic growth of rural residents or not. This study identifies the major attractions and prospects of the rural tourism in this destination. Finally, this study also presents a SWOT analysis and suggests necessary recommendations for commencing

rural tourism in Melandaha Upazilla.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Alternative sources of income, Socio-economic growth, Sustainable development, involvement of rural residents, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Tourism in rural areas holds the greatest potential for enhancing the rural economy by ensuring the involvement of the local community in its development. Bangladesh possesses a significant chance to develop rural tourism as a promising sub-sector within the larger tourism industry. However, this sector is still in its infancy phase, navigating the initial stages of growth. Rural tourism takes place in countryside areas and provides experiences related to nature-based tourism activities, agricultural work, rural culture and unique lifestyle, rural cuisine, sightseeing, and more. The distinctive characteristics of rural tourism spots include a relatively sparse population, an agricultural foundation, lush greenery and forestry, as well as an exceptional and appealing socio-cultural lifestyle

Bangladesh is enriched with natural beauties and the simple attractive lifestyle of the rural community. This creates an amazing potential for rural tourism development. Most of the people in rural areas of Bangladesh depend on agriculture-based occupations. Rural tourism has immense potential to offer new segments of working opportunities in rural areas. Nations abound with historical landmarks and natural beauty spots, providing opportunities to generate foreign currency through tourism (Madden et al., 2017). By effectively harnessing this potential, Bangladesh can cultivate numerous tourism destinations within local regions, thereby making a distinctive contribution to the national economy.

Given the substantial number of individuals engaged in seasonal agricultural labor, tourism presents an additional avenue for income generation among this demographic. In rural regions, the lifestyle, culinary practices, fishing methods, and various livelihood activities differ significantly from urban living. Urban dwellers are increasingly developing a strong connection to rural communities, with rural tourism offering city residents the opportunity to experience village life and immerse themselves in rural culture for a few days.

Rural tourism has the potential to significantly enhance livelihoods, generate employment opportunities for rural residents, and indirectly stimulate the establishment of local marketplaces for rural products. This can lead to social advancement, improved living standards, and expanded educational, social, and economic prospects for rural communities.

2. Literature Review

Rural tourism is a tactics to ensure sustainable economic development at rural level by preserving culture and traditions, conserving natural resources, and increasing income. Bangladesh is a developing country with limited financial resources, but it may raise its GDP by putting more emphasis on the tourist sector (Muhammad Shamssuduha, 2005).

Rural tourism plays a pivotal role in fostering an inbound tourism-friendly environment by stimulating domestic tourism. This, in turn, paves the way for an expansion into international tourism by creating a solid foundation through increased domestic interest (McIntosh et al., 2005).

In Bangladesh, tourism is a vital industry that has become one of the fastest growing service sector. Tourism sector has a countless positive impact on different aspects of development in Bangladesh, such as social, cultural, educational, economic, and political. In addition, tourism plays a significant role in enhancing Bangladesh's soft power by facilitating cultural interactions between Bangladesh citizens and foreigners from different countries. Rural tourism can help to generate additional incomes to rural community people and diversify the local economy (Tuffin, 2005).

Since rural tourism is predominantly managed by the local inhabitants of these specific rural regions, they hold the authority to make key decisions, enabling them to directly benefit from profits and contribute to community development (Khanal & Babar, 2007). It also gives more importance on improving the outcomes for host communities from side to side tourism development. Rural tourism places significant emphasis on the involvement of local communities within rural areas and is closely associated with rural development, distinguishing itself from other forms of tourism. Well-running rural tourism can ensure economic development, social development, and environmental development of any rural area.

In rural tourism, community people participate as host and welcome tourists as guest. This helps to reduce the negativity of socio-cultural impact on rural people and handed the responsibility of tourism activities to community people (Ying & Zhou, 2007). Rural tourism can be the best practice for the empowerment of local people, creating awareness about basic needs of life, and improving their expertise in different fields.

3. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify the impact of rural tourism on the economic growth of rural residents in Bangladesh.

Other secondary objectives are:

- To determine whether rural tourism is indispensable to the long-standing, sustainable economic and environmental development of rural area.

- To identify the importance of rural tourism as means of alternate income source of rural people.

4. Methodology

Primary and secondary data were both used in this study.

Published research articles, journal articles, conference papers, books, reports, magazines, brochures, government websites, and other open-access materials were read for the purpose of collecting secondary data.

Depth interviews and individual questionnaire surveys were used for collecting primary data. Five tourism experts were interviewed separately regarding the significance of rural tourism in Bangladesh perspective. They suggested several positive impacts of developing rural tourism which declare that rural tourism can be a safeguard for the economic development of rural people.

The questionnaire survey categorized respondents into four groups: villagers and stakeholders from the study area, visitors with an interest in rural tourism, and consultants within the tourism sector. Demographic data of each respondent extracted from the upper part of the questionnaire and the lower part of the questionnaire were designed with topic-related questions. To collect necessary data, the questionnaire is prepared by using the most effective and popular Likert scale. Regression analysis is used to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Correlation analysis is also used to check the correlation among variables and the subsequent hypothesis is tested quantitatively.

Questions and Hypothesis

Question

Is there any relationship that exists between the development of rural tourism and economic development of rural communities?

Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship that exists between the development of rural tourism and economic development of rural communities.

H1: There is a significant relationship that exists between the development of rural tourism and economic development of rural communities.

Increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y) is selected as dependent variable for data analysis and corresponding independent variable (Xi) are given below:

X1=Job creation

X2=Financial support for the conservation of ecosystems

X3=Improving standard of living

X4=High price of local products

X5=Support other cottage industries

X6=Increasing the rate of primarily educated people

X7=Greater profit sharing and local market creation

X8=Alleviate poverty

The dependent variable, 'increasing income of rural people through rural tourism,' essentially measures the quality of life and elevated living standards attained by rural individuals through their engagement in rural tourism activities.

5. Study Area: Melandaha Upazila (Jamalpur District), Bangladesh

Melandaha upazila is enriched with archeological, historical, and cultural attractions. The area of this upazila is 239.65sq.km. Melandaha was formed as Thana on 21st May 1925 and turned into upazila on 15th April 1983. Almost 2, 92,347 people live here, and the average literacy rate is 26.6%. All types of religious people live here with the bonding of love and peace. Approximately 70.50% of the population in this upazila are engaged in agriculture, which serves as the primary source of income. Moreover, the people of this upazila are very much well-mannered, friendly, and hospitable to tourists. Reliable and secure transportation facilities are available to reach this upazila. This upazila offers tourists to have a quiet, calm, and comfortable vacation experience while enjoying nature's serenity. Numerous opportunities exist to gain insight into the lifestyle of rural communities, such as cooking in a mud oven, milking cows, farming, cart riding, artisanal and craftwork, traditional dances, singing, local sports, etc. The weather of this upazila is also pleasant for the traveler and there is less risk of massive natural disaster. Villagers are very hospitable to make visitors comfortable and have an understanding of rural culture's customs and traditions. This place is also famous for various crops such as jute, wheat, paddy, potato, sugarcane, mustard, black gram, tobacco, betel leaf, ground nut, gram, chili, vegetables, etc. In addition, this area also produces crops like Kaun, corn, sesame, and linseed. Mango, jackfruit, coconut, banana, and papaya are also produced here. During monsoon, people catch fish from river, haor, and bill as an alternative of livelihood.

Table 1. Famous Tourist Spots and Attractions of Melandaha Upazila

Archaeological heritage sites	Traces of relics of Neelkuthi at Basuria, dighis of Fulkocha and Mohiramkul zamindars, and wreckage of kacharis (revenue offices).
Reminisce spot of the liberation war in 1971	During the liberation war, the freedom fighters conducted guerrilla operations at Dewanganj of the upazila. At that time, an encounter was held at a place near the Paila Bridge of the upazila between the freedom fighters and the Pak army.
Liberation war mass grave	Liberation war mass grave can be located in 4 places. These are: Adipoita, Kayetpara, Konamalancha, and Char Govindapur.
Traditional transport	Palanquin, soari (this kind of transports are nearly extinct, so tourists are interested to enjoy a ride in this traditional transport).
Handicraft products	Blacksmith, nakshi kantha, bamboo work, and cane work.
Haor Tourism	In rainy season, Roumari Bill and Tupkar Char become paradise for Haor tourism.
Religious Tourism	There are 519 mosque, Hazrat Shah Kamal (ra:) of Mazar Sharif, Durmut, and 7 temples which can be a great attraction for religious people (who loves to visit religious places for eternal peace).

Source: constructed by author

Table 2. Income Source of Rural People in Melandaha Upazila

Source of Income	Percentages
Agriculture	70.50%,
Non-agricultural laborer	3.02%,
Industry	0.44%,
Commerce	10.33%,
Transport and communication	2.58%,
Service and construction	5%,
Religious service	0.17%,
Remittance and others	7.96%,

Source: Banglapedia

This table illustrates that the majority of rural individuals are involved in seasonal agricultural work. During the remaining periods, they often lack opportunities for livelihood. Rural tourism can offer a viable alternative for these individuals, providing employment beyond their usual work and enabling them to earn additional income for their families.

The residents of Melandaha Upazila can engage in various rural tourism activities, offering these experiences to tourists as an additional source of income:

1. Natural sight seeing
2. Boat riding
3. Offering local food
4. Building resort with traditional mud house and thatched house for rejoicing rural life
5. Selling street food
6. Building restaurant for serving tourist as per their demand
7. Selling handicraft products, especially *Nakshi Kantha* (embroidered quilts), bamboo work, and cane work
8. Selling locally produced organic agricultural goods

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

120 respondents were used for data collection. Out of 120 respondents, 70 were rural people, 20 were experts and tourism business person, and the rest of the 30 were tourists. The majority of respondents expressed appreciation for rural tourism development, citing its positive impact on both economic growth and social wellbeing. This study conducted quantitative analysis to find out in which respect rural tourism can work as a growth stimulator for economic development.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increase Income	120	3.00	8.00	5.6000	1.43427
Job creation	120	5.00	9.00	6.6000	1.02408
Financial support for the conservation of ecosystems	120	2.00	8.00	5.4000	1.63162
Improving standard of living	120	2.00	8.00	5.5917	1.62696
High price of local products	120	2.00	7.00	4.4000	1.69230
Support other cottage industries	120	3.00	8.00	4.7917	1.48322
Increasing the rate of primary educated people	120	4.00	8.00	6.4000	1.36215
Greater profit sharing and local market creation	120	4.00	8.00	6.7000	1.27418
Alleviate poverty	120	4.00	9.00	6.6000	1.36215
Valid N (listwise)	120				

Source: Constructed in SPSS

This table presents the count of respondents, as well as the maximum, minimum, mean values, and standard deviations for ten attributes alongside the dependent variable ‘increasing income of rural people through rural

tourism'. In this table, the maximum average value of all attribute is 8. The mean value of the dependent variable is 5.60, indicating that rural tourism can significantly contribute to income generation by creating various opportunities. In this table, it is comprehensible that the independent variables have strong impact on the dependent variable. The mean value of the job creation attribute has 6.60 score, which represents its importance in increasing the level of income through rural tourism.

Table 4. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
.621	9

Source: Constructed in SPSS

The internal consistency reliability for the 9 item is analyzed. This table shows that the value of Alpha is 62.1% which is above 50%. Most statisticians agreed with the notion that a Cronbach's Alpha value above 50% is acceptable. So it can be assumed that the data are reliable.

Table 5. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.994 ^a	.988	.987	.16282	.988	1140.404	8	111	.000

Source: Constructed in SPSS

In this table, the value of R is .994^a. Hence, this shows the moderate level of relationship existing between the dependent and independent variables. The value of R² is .988 and adjusted R² is .987, indicating that about 80% of the total variables can be explained by the estimated model.

Table 6. ANOVA

Model	Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	241.857	8	30.232	1140.404	.000 ^b
Residual	2.943	111	.027		
Total	244.800	119			

Source: Constructed in SPSS

This table examines the existence of relationships between dependent and independent variables by analyzing the variance of the variables. The significance level of the 'F' value shows the acceptability of the model. Here, the value of 'sig' is .000 which is less than .050. Consequently, the model is fit at 95% significant level.

Table 7. Coefficients Regression Y against X1, X2, X3, X4, X5, X6, X7 & X8

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-10.298	.355		-29.003	.000
Job creation	.622	.090	.613	6.905	.000
Financial support for the conservation of ecosystems	1.760	.053	2.002	33.229	.000
Improving standard of living	.456	.015	.517	30.156	.000
High price of local products	.407	.039	.481	10.400	.000
Support other cottage industries	-1.304	.042	-1.348	-31.154	.000
Increasing the rate of primary educated people	.022	.020	.021	1.088	.279
Greater profit sharing and local market creation	1.680	.036	1.493	46.239	.000
Alleviate poverty	-.465	.026	-.442	-18.219	.000

Source: Constructed in SPSS

This table shows all the coefficient of the independent variables and the degree of influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The equation given below is formulated to simplify the coefficient of the independent and dependent variables.

$$Y = -10.298 + .004X_1 + 1.760X_2 + .456X_3 + .407X_4 - 1.304X_5 + .022X_6 + 1.680X_7 - .465X_8$$

Here, Y= Increasing income of rural people through rural tourism, X1=Job creation, X2=Financial support for the conservation of ecosystems, X3=Improving standard of living, X4=High price of local products, X5=Support other cottage industries, X6=Increasing the rate of primary educated people, X7=Greater profit sharing and local market creation, and X8=Alleviate poverty.

The positive coefficients for job creation, improving standard of living, high prices of local products, greater profit sharing, and local market creation indicate their positive influence on the dependent variable. This suggests that the direct contributions of these independent variables explain how rural tourism acts as a catalyst for the growth of the rural economy.

The outcome of the significance test on regression constants is a = -10.298, with the significant value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of sig. < 0.05 (0.000 < 0.05). Alternatively, it can be stated that the constants in that model significantly influence the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism. The outcome of

significance test on regression X1 is $b = 0.622$, with the sign value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X1 variable or job creation significantly influences the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y). The outcome of the significance test on regression X2 is $c = 1.760$, with the sign value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X2 variable or financial support for the conservation of ecosystems has a significant influence on the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y). The outcome of the significance test on regression X3 is $d = 0.456$, with the sig value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X 3 variable or standard of living has a significant influence on the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y). The result of the significance test on regression X4 is $e = 0.407$, with the significant value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). In other words, the X 4 variable or high price of local products has a significant influence on the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y). The outcome of the significance test on regression X5 is $f = -1.304$, with the significant value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X5 variable or support other cottage industries has beta value of -1.304. Thus, this indicates that as the independent variable increases, the dependent variable is expected to decrease. On the contrary, X5 becomes a constraint since its regression correlation value is negative. The outcome of the significance test on regression X6 is $g = 0.022$, with the significant value of 0.279 (see Table 5), considered 'non-significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} > 0.05$ ($0.279 > 0.05$). The outcome of the significance test on regression X7 is $h = 1.680$, with the sig value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X 7 variable or greater profit sharing and local market creation has a significant influence on the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism (Y). The outcome of the significance test on regression X8 is $i = -0.465$, with the significant value of 0.000 (see Table 5), considered 'significant' as the value of $\text{sig.} < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$). Alternatively, it can be stated that the X 8 variable or alleviate poverty has beta value of -0.465. This indicates that as the independent variable increases, the dependent variable is expected to decrease. On the contrary, X8 becomes a constraint since its regression correlation value is negative.

The result of significance test on the multiple regression analysis is:

$$Y = -10.298 + .004X_1 + 1.760X_2 + .456X_3 + .407X_4 - 1.304X_5 + .022X_6 + 1.680X_7 - .465X_8,$$

Regarded as 'significant' as the value of significant, $0.00 < 0.05$ (see Table 5). However, such a result also signifies that the model can be used to predict the stimulation of increasing income of rural people through rural tourism using the data of variables $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, X_7,$ and X_8 if all of the independent variables have been identified.

Testing Hypothesis

Based on the findings from the above coefficient table, it can be stated that income generation and economic growth are upwarding through job creation (.919), improving standard of living (.000), support other cottage industries (.000), increasing primary education rate (.279), and alleviate poverty and sharing profit among rural stakeholder (.000). These variables have strong (significant at 0.050 level) relationship with the development of rural tourism. So, null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this information, it can be assumed that rural tourism can be a stimulator of economic growth and income generation of rural people. Rural tourism has positive impact on new job creation, alleviating poverty, and on the overall improvement of the living standards of rural communities.

7. SWOT Analysis of Selected Destination

To understand and identify the competitive advantage of this upazila for rural tourism, a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) framework assessment is presented below.

Table 8. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scenic and untouched natural beauties and landscape ● Established access for transport ● Available local food supply by agricultural products ● Availability of land for tourism infrastructure ● Peaceful and hospitable local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate marketing approaches - Lack of tourism infrastructure - Lack of trained tourism workforce - Lack of information - Lack of diversification of industries - Shortage of power availability
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An adequate supply of low-cost agricultural goods ● Friendly local community ● Satisfactory security system ● Ongoing infrastructural development ● Proximity to old Brahmaputra River ● The current trend in tourism- eco-tourism, recreational tourism, and so on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demographic changes ● Climate change and other natural disasters ● An unstable political situation arises ● Sluggish down the speed of economic development ● Disagreement with the local community ● Robbery, theft, and other security issues

Source: Constructed by author

8. Major Findings of the Study

- a. By doing descriptive analysis, it is clear that rural tourism can contribute to income generation through opening of different job and business opportunities.
- b. From the above analysis, it is found that the outcome of the significance test on regression X1, X2, X3, X4, X5, X7, and X8 is considered 'significant' as the value of sig. < 0.05 (0.000 < 0.05) except X6. This proves that the development of rural tourism can have a positive impact on rural tourism and on the economic growth of rural residents. This result supports the major objective of this study. So it can be said that: Yes, rural tourism can stimulate rural growth and the economic development of rural communities.
- c. SWOT analysis reveals that Melandaha Upazila has a number of features that will draw tourists. Even so, there are risks and weaknesses that can be surmounted. Certainly, rural tourism in this location is feasible to begin.
- d. The investigation revealed that the existing accommodation facilities at this destination are inadequate, presenting a notable barrier to effective tourism promotion.
- e. Developing infrastructure of rural tourism can create new business and job opportunity for local people that can alleviate the poverty level.

- f. By developing rural tourism, it can also be ensured that rural people are getting involved in decision making process, environment conservation, and overall development of this destination.
- g. This study also shows that developing rural tourism can promote the importance and need of primary education for everyone.

9. Recommendations

Rural tourism development can be beneficial to rural people if they can realize their potential and increase the value of their natural and cultural resources. The following suggestions could help to relish the benefits of rural tourism to Melandaha Upazila:

- Constructing accommodation and theme-based resorts in remote places with traditional styles and locally available materials to align with local design and culture.
- Maintaining hygiene, cleanliness, and standard of food and beverage operation and offering traditional meals.
- Ensuring security and safety of visitors and their belongings in the visitor area.
- A local market should be created for selling locally produced unique handicrafts and other products. It also needs to be ensured that profit earned from rural tourism should be properly distributed in that area, and this would help to ensure economic sustainability.
- The local government of Melandaha Upazila should work with The Ministry of Tourism to promote rural tourism.
- The government should considerably boost budgetary provisions to improve the effective promotion of rural tourism.

Conclusion

In order to support the sustainable economic growth of rural communities, this paper has identified the key characteristics of rural tourism. Rural tourism can help to increase local employment and ensure revenue earnings. Rural tourism development can ensure sustainable economic condition and reduce economic leakage. It also helps to continue the harmony with other existing sustainable infrastructure development. Melandaha Upazila of Jamalpur District is enriched with natural beauties and attractive rural resources. This place has all the physical appearance to be a prominent rural tourism spot in Bangladesh. Rural tourism can also help rural people to be more efficient in their own spaces and be aware about their rural resources. Therefore, it can be assumed that rural tourism is one of the effective instruments to ensure stimulating rural growth and economic development in Bangladesh. Engaging rural residents in rural tourism businesses ensures

economic and social benefits for these communities. This participation guarantees tangible advantages for rural people both economically and socially. Tourist also can be served with expanded rural tourism products and services.

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