



Determinants of Tourists' Destination Preference: An Investigation on Kuakata Beach

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Abstract

Bangladesh has the potentials to develop its tourism sector as the most earning sector and can earn huge foreign currencies. Being a country of natural beauties easily can attract tourists of home and abroad. The paper aims at identifying and analyzing the factors that influence the preference of tourists for Kuakata as a destination. The study utilizes both exploratory to identify the factors and descriptive research approach to measure the importance of each factor. This study uses data collected via a questionnaire from 130 tourists for the period of October 2019 to January 2020. For analyzing the data, frequency distribution, and multiple regression model were used. The findings reveal that perceived destination image (i.e. exiting place, positive destination image, and eagerness to visit) and accommodation (i.e. cost, comfort, and safety of accommodation), and Integrated Marketing communication (i.e. social media coverage-facebook, instgram, whatsapp etc., offline and online media i.e. billboard, radio, tv etc.) are statistically significant while selecting Kuakata as tourist destination.

Keywords: Tourists, Destination, Preference, Kuakata, Bangladesh.

Introduction

One of the fastest-growing industries in the world is tourism (Mahadevan, 2017). 2016 was an outstanding year for tourism in terms of economic contribution to the world (UNWTO, 2017). To make a tourist destination appropriate; infrastructure development, proper management and marketing are essential. Tourism is now considered the single largest service industry all over the world (ref?). Many countries want to achieve excellence in this industry.

Kuakata sea beach, the second most famous beach and a rare scenic beauty spot on the southern part of Bangladesh is located at Patuakhali district, 320 kilometers from the capital city of Dhaka (Ataur, 2013). This sea beach is enriched with different natural beauties. Kuakata is the second largest sea beach in Bangladesh and it is situated in the southern part of Bangladesh (Wikipedia, 2019). Despite many potentialities, the tourism of this place did not develop as much as it should be now (Hassan, 2013). It can be said that this place is much neglected by Bangladeshi people and the beauty of this place is yet to be discovered properly by Bangladeshi and international tourists (Bellal, 2013). Kuakata offers a full view of the sunrise and sunset from the same white sandy beach in the water of the Bay of Bengal locally known as "ShagorKannya" (Daughter of Ocean), the long strip of dark, marbled sand stretches for about 18 kilometers (Wikipedia, 2019).

For obtaining success in the tourism industry, new concepts like country branding, or destination branding, or nation branding are getting priority (Hasan, 2013). Now tourism development entails community development. If handled appropriately, tourism can become an important engine for achieving broader social goals. Whereas societies may aspire to achieve these goals, communities are trying to manage tourism development effectively. Unfortunately, no integrative model exists for managing all facets of tourism development (Geoffrey, 1999).

Through the creation of a tourist destination, offers are seen not just as a simple mix of goods and services, but they will be focused on the needs relating to their experience (Capasso, 2018). In other words, tourist products are conceived on the basis of their ability to meet the real needs of the guests and to let them live a unique experience. Tourist behavior has always been a central issue in the tourism literature. Research

in this area has long focused on destination choices and purchase intentions. Most tourism products are accompanied by discounts or extra services designed to increase consumption (Yehn, 2009).

Tourists' preference is visitors' perceptions and comments on destinations after an actual experience and these can be positive, negative, and neutral (Yao, 2017). Tourist preferences and choices reflect the ability of different destinations to attract tourists and win the tourist market shares by utilizing tourism resources effectively. Besides, tourist preference acts as an important factor in destination competitiveness (Yao, 2017). The reason for measuring tourists' preference/choice is that it is very significant for producing visitor satisfaction to match destination tourism products and tourist preference (Gomezelj & Mihalic, 2008).

Now tourists are more conscious about security, safety, environmental issues, and quality of services, available information and expenses rather than visiting a place without proper prior information (Ahmed, 2010). Distance is no longer a major obstacle to visiting a location whereas more important is accessible information and destination preferences. The impact of tourism growth begins at the grassroots level and helps to reduce poverty and the country's overall development very quickly. The study is conducted for finding out the factors that influence tourists' choice for Kuakata as a tourist destination and identify the most important factors and evaluate them in order to make the study more effective.

Literature Review and Model Formulation

Bangladesh is having various kinds of natural variations like hilly areas, sea beaches, mangrove forest and many historical places, has a huge potential in the scenario of world tourism (Islam, 2006). But the basic structure required for attracting the domestic as well as foreign tourists is yet to be developed. Though Bangladesh, since the industrial policy of 1999, that integrated tourism has been treated as an industry and termed it as an important sector, could not make its various tourist destinations sufficiently attractive to the foreign tourists (Islam, 2006).

The number of tourists' arrival in Bangladesh is very low and the speed of tourism growth is not very promising. In 2010, only 300,000 tourists came to

Bangladesh. Among them, more than 70% came for business and official purposes (Hossain, 2013). Total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was BDT 840.2bn (USD10.6bn), 4.3% of GDP in 2016, and is forecasted to rise by 7.2% in 2017, and to rise by 7.1% pa to BDT 1,783.0bn (USD22.6bn), 4.7% of GDP in 2027 (Turner, 2017).

In Bangladesh, insufficient infrastructural development at various tourist spots, lack of proper facilities for the tourists, scarcity of skilled and professional tour service providers and poor promotional programs are responsible for the lower response from the foreign tourists (Ahmed, 2010). Therefore the target customers are not being properly addressed and thus the tourism sector in Bangladesh is not flourishing at that pace as expected (Hassan, 2013). The paper thus looks at different factors affecting the choice of the tourists and examines the tour preference in terms of selection of different tour destinations.

Due to some lackings, Kuakata still not enjoys the success in attracting tourists like other tourist spots and accommodation facilities, transport system, communication (road) could not meet tourists' expectation (Sarker, 2012). The tourist satisfaction level on tourism can affect the future tours in that place (Hossain, 2013). If the customers are not satisfied with the service provided and tourist products and facilities available there, they will not revisit the place and disseminate negative reviews to others who might think of going to visit this place.

There is not sufficient and required structural, social, political and economic development in the tourism sector in Kuakata event though there is no lacking in the natural resources of the area. No planned action and policy were available here for beach development facilitating and influencing all types of tourists (Rahman, 2015). The infrastructural problem in Bangladesh tourism industry can be overcome by giving proper training and creating efficient and skilled manpower to work in the industry. Another major issue that needs to be focused on is doing proper publicity of the tourist destinations and allocating efficient budget to develop the natural and infrastructural facilities (Tuli, 2014).

The tourism industry comprises of various sub-functions of overall tourism industry in forms of transportation, food and lodging also security in some

cases. It is required to provide a basket of services in all those fields in order to satisfy customers (Neal, 2003). For providing a maximum level of customer satisfaction, it is necessary to understand what the customers really want. Various tour organizations thus adopt effective strategies, which involve providing consumers with a variety of services (Ahmed, 2010). The following factors affect the choice of tourists toward tourist destinations like Kuakata:

Transportation:

Integrated knowledge of transport and tourism is vital for the development of destinations, tourism enterprises and effective tourism policies, and to adjust to emerging local and global issues and conflicts (Peeters, 2011). To start with, the improved facilities stimulate tourism, and the expansion of tourism stimulates transport. Accessibility is the main function behind the basics of tourism transport. In order to access the areas that are mainly aimed, tourists will use any transportation mode. Air and road transports are the main mode of international tourism (Kroshus, 2003).

Accommodation:

Accommodation plays a functional role by providing the facilities that make travel convenient and comfortable. Hall (1995) considered accommodation one of the more critical components on the demand side since accommodation has a vital impact on the type of visitors who come to a destination. Cooper (1996) suggested that accommodation provide an essential support services to satisfy the wider motivation that brought visitors to the destination.

Integrated Marketing Communications:

Establishing a strong tourist destination becomes a competitive advantage for the heritage destinations since this helps them differentiate themselves from other destinations (Hankinson, 2004). One fruitful destination preference strategic tool tourism marketers may use in building a destination preference is through integrated marketing communications (IMC). This communication strategic tool unifies a promotional mix to deliver maximum communication effects to target audiences (Duncan, 1998). In practice, the IMC utilizes cross-functional marketing communication tools like advertisement, direct mail, public relations, and word of mouth, to achieve its destination communication goals effectively (Pike, 2004).

Fair Price:

Price being the most effective element relates to the audience in destination selection behavior (Bellal, 2013). To make Kuakata a successful destination, marketing and related authorities need to ensure a reasonable price that will attract more tourists (Kamenidou, 2008). Shopping may be part of the travel experience or it may be the primary focus of travel. Shopping is an activity that crosses all market segments.

Quality Food:

All indications are that local food holds much potential to create sustainability in tourism sector; contribute to the authenticity of the destination, boost up the local economy and environmentally friendly infrastructure (Rand, 2008). Food certainly plays a major role in tourism and hence services related to food are very important. The required and preferred food items in destinations highly rely on the cultural and geographic background of the guests (MacDonald, 1997). The guest experience is determined by a variety of interrelated factors from menu design and place settings to plate presentation and style of service.

Security:

Security is considered one of the key selling points in the practice of destination selection. Security and emergency preparedness are increasingly becoming affiliated with branding practices and utilized by governance regimes to promote and brand particular locales as safe, secure and resilient to attack (Coaffee, 2008). More than any other economic activity, the success or failure of a tourism destination relies on the ability to provide tourists with a safe and secure environment (Ahmed, 2010). People cannot be complacent, since there is an emerging consensus that crime - which raises safety issues - is a growing concern among tourism stakeholders who fear the potential damage that it may inflict on the perception of safety and, by extension, the industry (Volker, 2002).

Perceived Image:

One of the most important factors in tourist destination is a need to effectively position a destination. To successfully promote tourism in the target market, destination should be differentiated from the competition, or positively positioned in consumers' minds (Sameer Hosany, 2006). Destination image refers to a set of beliefs, impressions, and ideas that people attach to a given place (Kamenidou, 2008). Destination image has a direct impact on

travel behavior and hence it plays a vital role in the choice of destinations, since tourists usually choose a destination with a favorable image (Prayag, 2008).

Overall service:

Quality of service and customer satisfaction are critical concepts in the fields of recreation and tourism as well as in marketing because they may be used as indicators of profitability and the successful achievement of organizational objectives. Most studies have paid attention to the distinctiveness of these concepts, the ways and means to measure them, and their interrelationship as well as their influence on outcomes (Lee, 2001). Tourists want to pay more when they find hospitality properties offering services that meet or exceed their service expectations.

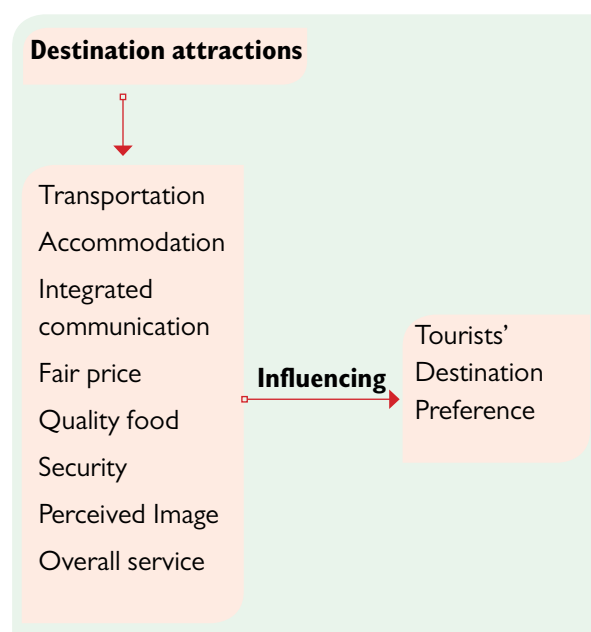


Figure-01: Conceptual framework of Tourists' Destination Preference

(Source: Authors' constructed)

Rationale of the study

Tourism has become an important and dynamic sector in developed and developing countries (Gartner and Lime, 2000). Kuakata is a promising tourism destination in Bangladesh but no planned initiatives and policies to promote and influence tourism of every form of beach were given here (Rahman et al., 2015). So far the researchers know, very few studies have been conducted on this aspect in Bangladesh. That's why the researchers felt interested to work on this area. This study will help the marketers to know the factors that matter to the proper flourishing of Kuakata

and they can easily take steps to create Kuakata as a successful tourist destination. The insights found from the study will also flourish marketers' understanding of tourists' choices and preferences to visit a tourist destination that will help marketers design their marketing programs effectively and also be useful to the policy makers, researchers and students. Related entities will get favorable information that will help to create and maintain the tourist spot more alive.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses Development

The objective of the study is to identify and analyze the factors determining tourists' preference for Kuakata as a tourist destination.

Specific objectives:

The specific objectives are as follows:

- i) To identify the demographic profile and purposes of the tourists visiting Kuakata.
- ii) To analyze the factors that affect tourists' preference for visiting Kuakata as a tourist spot.
- iii) To identify the importance of each factor that contributes to tourists' preference; and
- iv) To provide policies and recommendations based on findings for future tourism destination.

Hypothesis:

H0: The coefficient of multiple determinations in the population is zero ($R^2_{pop}=0$).

H1: The coefficient of multiple determinations in the population is not equal to zero. ($R^2_{pop} \neq 0$).

Research Methodology

The study utilizes both exploratory and descriptive research. At first, exploratory research was conducted to identify the factors on building tourists' preference for Kuakata as a tourist destination. Then an attempt was made to measure the determinants'' of building tourists' preference for Kuakata (descriptive research). For this study, researchers choose adults (Male/Female) touring at Kuakata. The extent of this study was only on the Kuakata sea beach area. In this study, non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed. The formula of ' $N > 50 + 8m$ ' was used

for selecting the sample size. Where, N = number of Participants, m = number of independent variables (Tabachnick, 2007). In this study, there were eight independent variables. The number of samples was $(50+8*8=114)$ which is realistic to the equation. As per making the number easy to analyze, the total size of the sample was 130.

For this study, both primary and secondary data were used. The respondents were interviewed in the targeted area with a structured questionnaire for primary data collection. The researchers performed the field survey between October 2019 to January 2020. Secondary data have been collected from different sources like articles, journals, newspaper and other web-based sources. For this study, five-point Likert scale was used. The points were: 1= strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The questionnaire covered two sections. In the first part, there were the demographic characteristics of the respondents and in the second part; there were the questions that helped to identify factors affecting tourists' preference for a tourist destination. For this study, the multiple regression analysis and frequency distribution table were used. Researchers used the regression analysis by using the software IBM SPSS 23. The research model of the study was as $TDP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TR + \beta_2 AC + \beta_3 IMC + \beta_4 FP + \beta_5 QF + \beta_6 SC + \beta_7 OS + \beta_8 PI + e_i$ whereas $TDP =$ Tourists' Destination Preference, $\beta_0 =$ The Value of regression coefficient, $TR =$ Transportation, $AC =$ Accommodation, $IMC =$ Integrated Marketing Communication, $FP =$ Fair Price, $QF =$ Quality Food, $SC =$ Security, $OS =$ Overall Service, $PI =$ Perceived Image and $e_i =$ Error Term.

Data Analysis and Result

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the sample (Table-1) shows that 49% of respondents are male and 51% of respondents are female. That indicates that the gender has no impact on visiting Kuakata. People of all genders have almost the same preference for visiting Kuakata. From the point of occupation, the researchers found that most of the respondents (40%) were from the private sectors. This indicates that people from the private sectors have more preference for visiting

Kuakata. Most of the respondents completed their MBA/Masters and BBA/Honors degree (39% and 36% respectively) which indicates that the respondents are highly educated. And it also can be told that highly educated people have more inclination to visit at Kuakata. The largest percentages of respondents (39%) have a monthly income in the range of 31000 Tk to 40000 Tk. It indicates that people with favorable income level have much preference for touring. Most of the respondents are married couple (58%) that indicates that the respondents with spouses and other family members prefer Kuakata as a tourist destination mostly. In addition, the largest percentage (41%) of people makes their tour at Kuakata for refreshment purposes.

Table-01: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Respondents N= 130	Frequency (%)
Gender		
Male	63	49%
Female	67	51%
Occupation		
Public service	38	29%
Private service	52	40%
Student	26	20%
Others	14	11%
Education Level		
PhD	9	7%
MBA/Masters	51	39%
BBA/Honors	47	36%
HSC	19	15%
SSC	4	3%
Income		
≤20, 000 TK	9	7%
21,000-30,000 TK	30	23%
31,000-40,000 TK	50	39%
41,000-50,000 TK	41	32%
51000TK and above.	0	0%
Marital Status		
Single	75	58%
Married	55	42%
Purposes of Tour		
Entertainment	43	33%
Academic development	22	17%
Refreshment	53	41%
Others	10	8%

Source: Survey data

Scale Reliability

In Table 2, it was apparent that maximum constructs have higher scores than the acceptable level of Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients, ranging from 0.71 to 0.85, show a satisfactory requirement of reliability to continue research. Basically, Cronbach' Alpha is used to determine the internal consistency of the factors. It is stated that an alpha of 0.7 is acceptable for a measurement scale, which is chronicled, in a very amusing paper by Lance(CE, 2006 Apr). The reliability estimates of constructs (TR=0.896, AC=0.931, IMC=0.875, FP=0.927, QF=0.849, OS=0.768, SC=0.529, PI=0.940) have a value higher than 0.70 and enough to continue research activities. Nunnally (1978) suggests that Cronbach's Alpha value 0.5 is acceptable. Since Cronbach's alpha value is above 0.5; all variables are accepted as being reliable for the research.

Table-02: Reliability of the study

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
TR (Transportation)	.896	03 (Transport System, Safety, and Availability)
AC (Accommodation)	.931	03 (Comfort, Low cost, and secure)
IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication)	.875	04 (Strong destination spot, Social Media Coverage, Appealing message, offline and online media)
FP (Fair Price)	.927	03 (Fair Shopping Price, Reasonable service price, price stimulate to buy)
QF (Quality Food)	.849	03 (Good food, Local food, and ethnic food)
SC (Security)	.529	03 (Most Secure, Free movement, security system)
PI (Perceived Image)	.940	03 (Exiting place, Don't miss chance to visit, Positive destination image)
OS (Overall Service)	.768	03 (Variety of enjoyment, warm greetings by local people, revisit)

Pearson's Correlations between Latent Factors

The correlation of Bivariate Pearson is used to evaluate data linearity as well as to assess the degree of correlation in data for preliminary analysis and whether a deviation from the linearity may have an effect on the correlation (Field, 2006). Table-3 presents the product of the Bivariate Pearson correlations for all latent factors/predictors. All latent factors were linked positively and significantly to each other ($p < .01$).

Table-03: Correlation Matrix

	TDP	TR	IMC	FP	OS	QF	AC	PI	SC
TDP	1.000								
TR	.311	1.000							
IMC	.288	.477	1.000						
FP	.590	.365	.271	1.000					
OS	.329	.455	.288	.470	1.000				
QF	.319	.461	.266	.342	.434	1.000			
AC	.789	.397	.428	.703	.444	.378	1.000		
PI	.794	.304	.308	.595	.338	.332	.889	1.000	
SC	.200	.372	.201	.163	.255	.354	.190	.163	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Result of Regression Analysis

In statistical modeling, regression analysis is a set of statistical processes for estimating the relationships among variables. In this study researcher's used predictors as: transportation, accommodation, security, overall service, perceived image, quality food, integrated marketing communication, fair price impact on tourists' destination preference of Kuakata beach.

Table-04: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.820	.672	.650	.42175

This study found that the value of R is .820, which indicates a strong relationship between predictors and tourists' destination preference. In table 4, it can be noticed that the value of R² is 0.672. This indicates that the regression model can explain 67% of the variance in tourists' destination preference of kuakata beach, and the value of adjusted R² = 0.650 suggested that addition of other predictors does not make a contribution in explaining the variation in the tourists' destination preference.

Table-05: Coefficients'

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.678	.438		1.548	.124
TR	.009	.065	.010	.144	.886
IMC	.025	.130	.260	-.417	.037
FP	.094	.072	.100	1.305	.194
OS	-.027	.060	-.029	-.449	.654
QF	.011	.082	.009	.139	.890
AC	.301	.127	.328	2.365	.020
PI	.420	.110	.447	3.824	.000
SC	.081	.086	.054	.941	.348

a. Dependent Variable: TDP

b. Predictors: (Constant), TR, IMC, FP, OS, QF, AC, PI, and SC

Using the values from the given coefficients table, the regression model becomes following: Tourists' Destination Preference = 0.678 (Constant)+0.10 (Transportation)+0.260 (Integrated Marketing Communication) +0.100 (Fair Price) -.029 (Overall Service) + 0.009 (Quality Food) + 0.328 (Accommodation) +0.447 (Perceived Image) + 0.054 (Security) + ei

Comment on Significance

It can be said that tourists' preference for tourist destination is dependent on various factors like transportation, accommodation, fair price, perceived image, overall service, security, quality food, integrated marketing communication. The probability value of perceived image (0.00), accommodation (.02), and integrated marketing communication (.03) < 0.05; which indicate the rejection of null hypothesis. Perceived image (0.00), accommodation (0.02), and integrated marketing communication (0.03) are highly significant at 5% level.

Testing the overall significance

Table-06: ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	44.100	8	5.513	30.991	.000b
Residual	21.523	121	.178		
Total	65.623	129			

The value of F statistic is calculated at 0.05 significant level in which F value is 30.991, which is strongly significant at .000 level.

Discussion and Policy Recommendation

The purpose of this research was to identify and analyze the factors affecting the tourists' preference for visiting tourist destination like Kuakata sea beach. This study analyses various factors that affect the people's tour preference adapted from different previous literature as well as using field survey. Finally, the study examines the effects of the factors in explaining the tourists' tour preferences through the regression model.


Eight factors related to different aspects of tourism such as transportation, accommodation, integrated marketing communication, security, fair price, overall service, quality food, perceived image were used as

independent variables where tourists' preference for tourist destination was used as dependent variable of the model. Among the eight variables selected for the study, three variables (Perceived image, accommodation, and integrated marketing communication) are significant at 5% significance level. So, these variables largely affect tourists' preference for Kuakata as a tourist destination. Perceived image is the most important factor in describing the tourists' preference for tourist destination. Accommodation is the second most important factor and integrated marketing communication is the third important factor that affects the tourists' preference to make a tour to Kuakata.

Policy Recommendations

Information on factors affecting tourists' preference for a tourist destination like Kuakata can help the tour guiding organizations and the marketers to make new strategies. The following recommendations can be suggested: i) Perceived image is the most important factor in describing the tourists' choice for tourist destination. To make Kuakata more attractive, tour marketers must have to create flexible touring opportunities for the target customers. Highly professional and technical human resources should be employed in tourism sector in Kuakata. ii) Accommodation is another important factor that affects the tourist to make a tour to Kuakata. People and organization related to this sector need more attention to make this sector more convenient and appealing to the potential customer as well as the tourists. iii) Studies suggest that related information be provided by specific communication tools in light of the tourists' unique features (Cai et al.,2004). Tourism marketers should design unified messages to deliver to target tourists for creating strong destination image and increasing persuasive value for Kuakata as a tourist destination. iv) Special offers can be given to the tourists who tour with family or group since married couples are mostly seen to visit Kuakata. v) The government should take the necessary initiatives at developing the infrastructure required for developing the tourism sector in Kuakata, and the tour operators of Kuakata should take effective marketing strategies to make Kuakata a preferred destination nationally and internationally.

Conclusion and Future Research Scope

Bangladesh is trying to foster its economic development through utilizing country's resources and expertise in service sector like tourism industry. The culture, climate, geographic location, price of essential commodities and services; and price and convenience of accommodation and quality of food are quite favorable for developing an organized and professional tourism industry in the southern part of Bangladesh. If Kuakata gets the highest concentration, it will also generate huge employment opportunities and thereby help develop the country's overall economic environment. Tourists' preference for Kuakata as a tourist destination depends on many variables. Among them, perceived image and accommodation are more important. Problems related to these aspects can build a negative attitude towards the factors affecting tourists' choice for a tourist destination. So, the authorities of these sectors need to monitor these aspects and take corrective measures whenever something goes wrong. The research findings presented in this paper can provide an in-depth understanding of the variables that the tourists observe while touring to the destination spot like Kuakata. In addition, there are some recommendations that may proceed toward a new study in the near future. The study was only limited to Kuakata sea beach area. The result of the paper might be changed if any similar study is conducted in other parts of Bangladesh. The study was also conducted with one hundred and thirty samples, which can be extended to get more acceptable results. A future study can be focused on the overall tourists' satisfaction on destinations in Bangladesh or make a comparative study among national and international scenario, it will be more inclusive. 

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