

Tourists and Local Community's Perception of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bangladesh: A Case Study on the Mosque City of Bagerhat

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Abstract: This research aims to identify different perceptions of a UNESCO World Heritage site among tourists and local communities. The site, Mosque City of Bagerhat, is in Bagerhat, Bangladesh. By examining the demographics, their experience, satisfaction level and recommendations, this research will try to understand identifying the difference in perception is a must to determine a site's cultural and historical value for better management of the site. This research has employed a quantitative data collection method. By using purposive sampling technique 100 participants were chosen for the survey. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the stakeholders of this site. The key finding of this research is that tourists and locals have similar different perceptions regarding the site. Tourists generally valued the site tourism spot whereas the locals mostly appreciated the site for its religious importance but also expressed concerns over the impact of tourism on their daily lives. This study also shows that both groups are partially satisfied with their experiences. This research provides a very valuable insight into heritage management and the development of tourism. Understanding the differences in perceptions among two major stakeholders can inform strategies for heritage management by ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage while promoting local community engagement and benefits in heritage sites.

Keywords: UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cultural Heritage, Mosque City of Bagerhat, Local Community, Tourist Perception, Heritage Management.

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Introduction

The Mosque City of Bagerhat is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the country that holds deep spiritual, historical and political significance which attracts tourists from different parts of the country and the world after becoming a World Heritage Site. Heritage is a cultural practice, involved

in the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings (Smith, 2006). Both history and legacy shape modern interpretations of the past (Lowenthal, 2009). The former wants the past intelligible, while the latter wants it to be enjoyable. From genes to galaxies, legacy is evident in everything thus one can hardly walk without coming across a historic site (Lowenthal, 2009). According to Zbucnea (2020), UNESCO World Heritage Sites are considered very valuable cultural and economic resources. Adopted by UNESCO in 1972, the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage acknowledges the main traits of a heritage site from the angles of history, ethnology, anthropology, arts, aesthetics, science, and nature (UNESCO, 1972). Article 5 of the treaty encourages governments to “adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programs.” This is achieved by putting into the planning activities the preservation of the legacy. Therefore, in order to provide better heritage management guidance, this study aims to understand if there’s a pattern in terms of the perception of a heritage site in the eyes of tourists and locals to enhance the safeguarding of the site taking the Mosque City of Bagerhat as a case study.

History of the Mosque City of Bagerhat

The mediaeval urban settlement of Bagerhat, located in southeastern Bangladesh at the confluence of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, is a notable example of a historic mosque city (Hasan, 1980). This historic settlement, which was originally known as Khalifatabad, reached its zenith in the 15th century AD and spans the southern bank of the old Bhairab River (Banglapedia, 2021). In 1985, it was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under criteria (iv) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2021). Bagerhat is home to some of the most noteworthy early Muslim architectural accomplishments from Bengal, spanning an area of approximately 50 square kilometres (Mitra, 2001). After the death of Khan Jahan Ali in 1459 the city grew rapidly and was later reclaimed by the forest (Ahmad, 1989). The remarkable concentration of Islamic holy sites in Bagerhat points to Khan Jahan Ali’s dedication, as shown by the etched inscription on his tomb. Unlike other mediaeval cities, Bagerhat lacks walls because the Sunderbans’ thick mangrove swamps offer a natural defence. Comprising cisterns, reservoirs, roadways, bridges, and complex systems for water supply and drainage, the city’s infrastructure shows a great degree of technical expertise and a planned approach to urban design.

Bagerhat is renowned for its unique regional architectural design, the Khan-e-Jahan style, which originated in the 15th century defined by the combination of Persian, Ottoman, and native Bengali architectural characteristics (Bari, 1980; Brown, 1976). Under the Department of Archaeology, Protection of Sites of the government of Bangladesh (Banglapedia, 2021), one of the most famous instances of this architectural design, the Shat Gambuj Mosque is under authority. Other notable buildings include the Singair, Bibi Begni, Chunakhola, and Nine Dome Mosques, each of which emphasises the area’s diverse architectural heritage (Ahmad, 1989). Khan Jahan flourished in Bagerhat during the fifteenth century AD under the guidance of Nasiruddin Mahmud I, the progenitor of the second Ilyas Shahi dynasty at Gaur (Alamgir, 2015). The inscription on Khan Jahan’s tomb is the main historical information on him. Attributed to Khan Jahan, the inscriptions Ulagh and Khan-al-Azam point to him most likely being a Sultan of Gaur’s subject rather than an independent king (Alamgir, 2015). Still, the local tradition points to a relationship with Delhi. Often known as Khanja Ali, Khan Jahan was a tehsildar in Bagerhat with extraordinary liberality and piety (Bari, 1980). a tomb built close by by Mohammed Taer (Tahir), also known as Pir Ali. Numerous Hindus were

converted to Islam as a result of Taer's intense religious activity (Alamgir 2015). Because of his steadfast commitment to Islamic customs, this person, who was originally Hindu, achieved notoriety for his holiness. Usually called to Delhi, he was executed under an imperial mandate. Despite this local custom, it is improbable that the Delhi sovereign could have interfered in Bengal's affairs during that time. However, Khan Jahan, who may have been an officer of the Gaur Sultan, exhibited a preference for the Tughlaq style of Delhi in his constructions (Dani, 1961). This architectural influence provides insight into his background and connections to the broader Islamic community. In Bagerhat, the Shat Gambuj Mosque is a prime example of the distinctive Khan Jahani architectural style, and it is safeguarded by the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Bangladesh (Hasan, 1980). The Bagerhat monuments are geographically divided into two primary zones, which are approximately 6.5 kilometres apart, and are situated within a partially recovered area of land that has been cleared of vegetation (Ahmad, 1989). The western zone is centred around the Shat Gambuj Mosque, while the eastern zone is anchored by the tomb of Khan Jahan, which is comprised of approximately fifty known structures (Ahmad, 1989). The eastern cluster consists of Reza Khoda, Zindavir, and Ranvijoypur mosques; the western cluster consists of Singar, Bibi Begni, and Chunakhola mosques (Ahmad, 1989).

Although the ceiling of the Shat Gambuj Mosque was overrun with tropical plants, W. W. Hunter's historical observations from 1871 show remarkable preservation of this mosque (Alamgir, 2015). The upper sections of the mosque's corner turrets had started to fall by 1875 (Alamgir, 2015). Along with the burials of Khan Jahan and Pir Ali, this site was listed on the List of 1879 (Grover, 2017). Lord Curzon cleared trees and strengthened the complex with barbed wire fencing for little conservation projects. Among the repair tasks were partial reconstruction of twenty-eight domes, complete reconstruction of fifteen others, and thorough changes to the four corner turrets (Alamgir, 2015). The great workmanship of these buildings preserves their architectural integrity even without plaster. The restoration of the Shat Gambuj Mosque and the mausoleum of Khan Jahan were the main priorities of the latter conservation projects in 1903–04 and 1906–07. The decay of the mosque made one consider the bricks that had first covered all pillars during repair. Edgewise brickwork was undertaken in 1929–30 replacing the former floor bricks (Alamgir, 2015). The mosque's dikka, or platform, and other unique characteristics suggested that it was meant to be a madrasah that is, a school (Brown, 1976). Originally written in 1914, Satish Chandra Mitra's historical accounts reflected regret about the state of the mosque and the later use of its brickwork for a range of uses (Mitra, 2001). The Shat Gambuj Mosque was designated as a protected monument under Gazette notice number 3119 on June 23, 1913, and was subsequently protected by the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1905 (Alamgir, 2015). In 1916, Munshi Muminuddin et al. transferred ownership to the government, along with a land grant of 2 bighas, 8 cuttas, and 6 chitaks (Alamgir, 2015). The Department of Archaeology, Government of Bangladesh, was responsible for the preservation of this culturally significant monument following Bangladesh's independence in 1971 (Banglapedia, 2021).

Description of the Heritage Site

The historic Mosque City of Bagerhat is a monument to the historical and cultural value of mediaeval Bengal. Efforts at preservation and World Heritage Site recognition have increased knowledge of its significance as a rare and remarkable example of South Asian Islamic architecture and planning. With 360 mosques originally intended, Bagerhat Mosque City is well-known for its amazing collection of mosques, mausoleums, and other Islamic monuments (Ahmad, 1989). There are just a handful of mosques left today that highlight the architectural genius and theological importance of the era. The architectural specifics of some mosques and mausoleums are compiled here in the table below:

Table 1: Khan Jahan Style Monuments in Bagerhat Mosque City

<i>Mosque Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Construction Period</i>	<i>Contemporary Style</i>	<i>Architectural Details</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
Shat Gumbad Mosque	On the eastern bank of the Ghoradighi, about three miles west of the present Bagerhat town	mid-fifteenth century CE.	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Oblong in Plan with eleven equal interior bays and seven rows, each grid is roofed over either a hemispherical dome or a charchala vault.	External: 148'6" x 101'4" Internal: 123'3" x 76'2"
Singair Mosque	About 620 feet to the south-east of the Shat Gambuj Mosque	Mid-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Square single chamber structure crowned with a single dome	External: 43'9" x 43'9" Internal: 26'0" x 26'0"
Bibi Begni Mosque	On the bank of the Ghoradighi, west of the Satgumbad Mosque	Early-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Square single chamber structure crowned with a single dome	External: 56'9" x 56'9" Internal: 32'9" x 32'9"
Rono Bijoypur Mosque	North of the Khan Jahan Ali's Tomb Complex, aligned with the tomb	Mid-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Square single chamber structure crowned with a single dome	External: 59'10" x 59'10" Internal: 35'4" x 35'4"
Chunakhola Mosque	One kilometer north-west of the Shat Gambuj Mosque	Mid-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Square single chamber structure crowned with a single dome	External: 45'5" x 45'0" Internal: 25'2" x 25'2"
Nine Dome Mosque	Western embankment of the Thakur Dighi, southwest of Khan Jahan Ali Tomb Complex	Mid-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Multi-domed square structure crowned with nine domes Single chamber	External: 60'4" x 60'4" Internal: 39'6" x 39'6"
Tomb of Khan Jahan Ali	Part of a larger complex with Khan Jahan Ali's dighi and a single-dome mosque	1459 CE	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Single-domed mausoleum, enclosed within a brick boundary	External: 47'0" x 47'0" Internal: 28'2" x 28'2"
Reja Khoda Mosque	On the bank of a local pond, approximately 200' north-west of Zinda Peer Mosque	Late-fifteenth century	Khan Jahan Ali style, Sultanate	Rectangular structure crowned with six domes	External: 54'2" x 41'2" Internal: 39'10" x 26'2"

Source: Ahmad, 1989; Bari, 1980; Hasan, 2007; Hasan, 1980

Apart from being monuments, the Bagerhat mosques are examples of regional Islamic architecture in Bengal. Among the several mosques in Bagerhat Mosque City, the most important and notable one is the Shat Gambuj Mosque. It is naturally more important because of its historical relevance and grandeur. It was built as Khan al-Azam Ulugh Khan Jahan's Jami mosque. This mosque is the largest historical mosque in Bangladesh and the only one located in Bagerhat Mosque City. As such, it is among Bangladesh's most often visited archaeological sites, attracting historians, archaeologists and tourists. The mosque has been the focal point for community life, celebrations, and worship throughout the years. It was Khan Jahan's secretariat as much as a mosque. It also provided a watchtower. Thanks to UNESCO's documentation, the Shat Gambuj Mosque has attracted attention among other mosques.

Review of Literature

Cultural heritage is linked to an aspect of culture or a community of a particular location (Zbucnea, 2020). The cultural heritage of a country represents an array of monuments, historic buildings, arts and crafts, indigenous skills and traditions (Basu and De, 2021). Conservation of heritage sites is an essential element of their management since they are irreplaceable resources for the tourism industry (Basu, 2020).

The perception of a cultural heritage site vastly differs from person to person and transcends the historical value. Cultural heritage sites not only represent tangible attributes but they are also linked to the intangible attributes associated with personal and collective identities. According to Graburn (2001), heritage is both owned and owned which implies that the legacy of a heritage site is personalised and interconnected with the experiences and identities of communities over time. It is essential for local communities and tourists to find an emotional bond with a location (Graburn, 2001). The heritage site triggers social, psychological and historical connections for local communities and tourists as these are not mere static attractions but rather dynamic entities shaped by multifaced factors. (Timothy and Boyd, 2006).

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism industries in the world (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). To understand the fast-growing industry, a case in Guimarães showed that the majority of the tourists visiting the site were influenced by the WHS status from UNESCO (Henriques, Moreira and César, 2016). The tourists' perspective on a cultural heritage site depends on historical and social value while trying to find an emotional connection with the place and its culture (Luekveerawattana, 2024). But regardless of the historical importance and connection with ethnicity, the WHS status from UNESCO serves as a beacon for attracting tourists throughout the year. The decision-making process and the behaviour of the tourists are influenced by many other factors, such as their age, the opportunity to learn something new and recreational purposes (Santa-Cruz and López-Guzmán 2017). Tourists' ethnic and religious identity also serves as an influential factor in a heritage site (Mălăescu, 2022). Aside from the WHS status, according to Poria, Butler and Airey (2004), a strong motivation behind visiting heritage sites is finding an emotional connection to the site based on his life experience. An individual visiting a heritage site might feel more connected to it if it is related to his own religious belief or ethnicity.

But the local community in a heritage site feels the emotion in a different manner. According to Morar et al. (2020), the socioeconomic growth of the local community because of a cultural heritage site severely influences their perspective regardless of the WHS branding. The study revealed that while the locals recognised the architectural and historical aspects of the Fortress of Oradea, their primary concerns were the economic benefits it had on their daily lives (Morar et al., 2020). Another study done on George Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, also shows the local community's perception towards a heritage site depends on the historical value and economic benefits that are generated from that site (Hanafiah, Jamaluddin and Riyadi, 2020). While few community members recognise the enormous potential of the development of World Heritage Sites, most of them anticipate both financial and non-financial gains. Another case study conducted on Varanasi, a historically significant city located in Uttar Pradesh, India shows a complex interrelation between heritage conservation and tourism (Pati and Husain, 2023). Tourism is an essential element for the economic growth of a country as it supports local SMEs. However, the conservation efforts help the preservation of the ethnic identity of the local community (Pati and Husain, 2023). Community participation is influenced by knowledge and opportunity, in addition to the perceived well-being linked to tourism at a World

Heritage Site (WHS) (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Heritage sites also assist in tourist attraction while impacting their educational and personal development. Studies suggest that travel and tourism can play a significant role in local businesses (Robinson and Smith, 2019). But it comes with complications like the stresses on infrastructure and the decline of cultural practices. The most crucial element in guaranteeing the mutual benefit and long-term preservation of the site is clearly the active engagement of society in the development of sustainable tourism practices and the safeguarding of cultural assets (Patterson, 2016). So, even though the local community understand the historical significance and an emotional connection, their priorities are still tied to the economic benefits that are generated from the heritage sites. Ultimately, effective tourism at a heritage site requires the participation, engagement, and empowerment of the local community while also having a substantial number of tourists (Chi, Cai, and Li 2017). It's clear that both tourists and local communities have different ideas about World Heritage Sites. A cultural heritage site could have historical significance as the tourists try to search for an emotional connection to find themselves. However, a cultural heritage site is often more personal for the local community as they feel a strong emotional connection with the site and essential for their economic benefits.

Research Gap

To understand the different perceptions of tourists and locals, several studies have been conducted around the world. However, despite the long list of studies done on different aspects of the Mosque City of Bagerhat including documentation and its history, there haven't been many studies that compare the perception of tourists and locals, two of the major stakeholders. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing the perceptions of tourists and locals regarding the Mosque City of Bagerhat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, for improving the heritage management of a historic site.

Methodology

The research is based on primary research by integrating a quantitative method. For this study, a well-crafted balanced strategy with 50 visitors and 50 residents totalled 100 people. To guarantee equal representation from both groups, the sampling was random. Based on the fourteen questionnaires, the

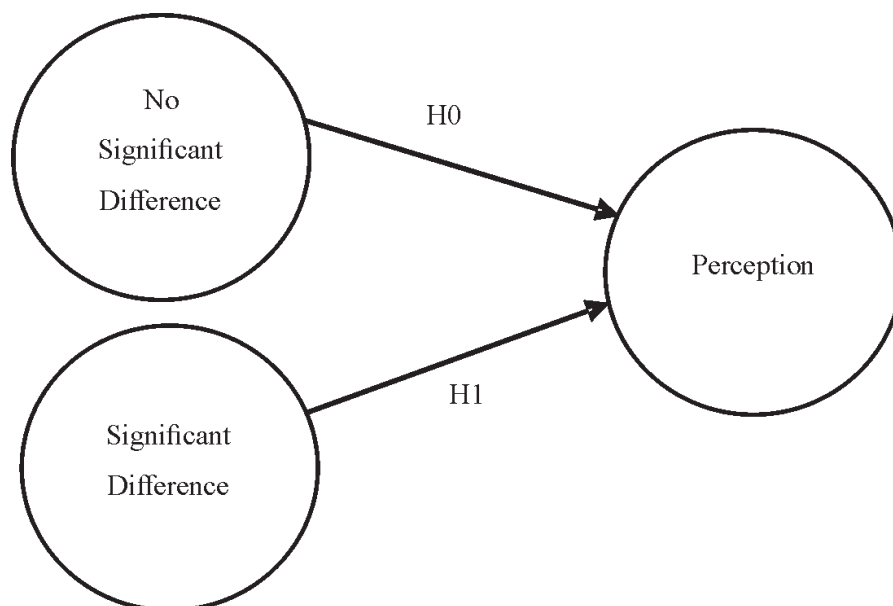


Figure 1: Research Hypothesis

information gathered from the participants, four were for understanding the demography profile and ten were designed based on the 5 Likert scale. The descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS to grasp the viewpoint of the tourists and local population on the Mosque city of Bagerhat. The Mann-Whitney U test was chosen for the hypothesis test because of its effectiveness in managing non-normal distributions. To understand whether or not the perspectives of tourists and local communities at a UNESCO World Heritage Site are similar, two hypotheses have been formulated. These are,

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the perception of the Mosque City of Bagerhat between tourists and the local community.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the perception of the Mosque City of Bagerhat between tourists and the local community.

Results

Demographic Profiles

Table 2: Demographic Profiles

Demographic profiles	Tourists		Locals	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	34	68%	46	92%
Female	16	32%	4	8%
Age				
Below 18	2	4%	4	8%
18-30	34	68%	2	4%
31-40	10	20%	16	32%
41-50	4	8%	8	16%
50+	0	0%	20	40%
Occupation				
Student	34	68%	4	8%
Teacher	2	4%	0	0%
Service Holder	6	12%	8	16%
Business Owner	6	12%	20	40%
Labourer	0	0%	14	28%
Housewife	2	4%	2	4%
Retired	0	0%	2	4%
Religion				
Islam	44	88%	45	90%
Hindu	4	8%	5	10%
Christian	2	4%	0	0%
Buddhist	0	0%	0	0%
Note(s): N=100				

Source: Author

Note: The demographic profile from the survey data shows information on the individuals both tourists and locals from a heritage site. The survey had an equal number of tourists and locals totaling 100 participants. Demographic information such as gender, age, religion, and occupation of the tourists and locals are shown in Table 1.

Based on **Table 1** the demographic analysis informs about the gender disparity among locals with a higher number of male participants showcasing the male-dominated societal structure that indicates that women are underrepresented in community engagement of a heritage site. The majority of the

participants are male, with tourists male participants ($N=34$; 68%) and local male participants ($N=46$; 96%). Approximately 68% of the tourists were aged between 18 to 30 years indicating there's interest among the younger people to come to heritage sites. On the other hand, 32% of local participants are aged between 31 to 40 and 40% of the local participants are aged 50+. There is a noticeable connection between the two groups in terms of age and occupation. Most tourists are students ($N=34$, 68%), which is in line with the younger age group. Conversely, locals represent a wide variety of professions that includes service holders under the heritage management, business owners and labourers which indicates the economic significance of the heritage site. Most of the participants were Muslim, with Muslim tourists ($N=44$; 88%) while local Muslims ($N=45$; 90%), showcasing people from other religions don't feel connected to this site as it's a Muslim heritage site.

Descriptive Analysis

The Table below shows descriptive statistics of the dependent variable for the two groups, tourists and locals.

Table 3: Comparison between the perception of tourists and locals about the Mosque City of Bagerhat

		Tourist			Local		
		Mean	Median	SD	Mean	Median	SD
1	I think Shat Gambuj Mosque is historically significant	3.38	4	1.41	3.46	4	1.37
2	I think Shat Gambuj Mosque is a place for prayer	2.16	2	1.09	3.7	4	1.54
3	I think Shat Gambuj Mosque is a place for recreation	3.48	4	1.63	1.79	2	0.87
4	I know the history of the Mosque City of Bagerhat	3.06	3	1.46	2.3	2	1.8
5	I think other surrounding Mosques besides Shat Gambuj Mosque are equally significant	3.72	4	1.18	3.94	4	0.96
6	I had a wonderful experience interacting with Locals/Tourists	2.92	3	1.21	4.14	4	0.95
7	I think people from other religions should visit Shat Gambuj Mosque	3.88	4	1.29	3.74	4	1.32
8	I think the role of a museum in a heritage site is essential	3.28	4	1.44	3.48	4	1.37
9	I am content with the services and facilities provided by the management	3.2	4	1.31	2.76	3	0.89
10	I think conserving world heritage sites is essential for our future generation	3.86	4	1.13	3.28	4	1.47

Note(s): $N=100$

(Source: Author)

Statement 1: Historical significance of the Shat Gambuj Mosque is acknowledged by both locals and tourists. Both groups agree on the significance of the subject, as evidenced by the median score of 4, which is 3.38 for tourists and 3.46 for locals. The mean scores are thus nearly identical. Consensus regarding their perspectives is indicated by the fact that the standard deviation (SD) for tourists is 1.41 and for locals, it is 1.37.

Statement 2 & 3: When it comes to the Shat Gambuj Mosque as a place of prayer or recreation, different people have different opinions. The mean of 2.16, median of 2, and SD of 1.09 indicate that visitors consider it less of a place of prayer, possibly more of a historical monument. On the other hand,

the mean, median, and SD values indicate that the locals place a higher spiritual value on it. Therefore, the value is 1.54. With a mean score of 3.48, median score of 4, and standard deviation of 1.63, tourists are more likely to think of the mosque as appropriate for recreational use. However, locals give it a much lower rating for recreation (mean of 1.79, median of 2, and SD of 0.87), presumably because they place more value on its religious holiness.

Statement 4: According to the survey, locals and visitors have vastly differing degrees of historical awareness about Bagerhat's Mosque City. Tourists had a strong degree of comprehension, as proven by statistical studies yielding the following results: mean of 3.06, median of 3, and standard deviation (SD) of 1.46. Locals, on the other hand, appear to know less about the true history of Bagerhat's Mosque City, with a mean of 2.3, a median of 2, and a standard deviation of 1.8.

Statement 5: Regarding the perceived importance of mosques besides the Shat Gambuj Mosque, there is a similar perspective among tourists and locals. Tourists have shown a positive response to their significance with a mean of 3.72, median of 4, and SD of 1.18. Similarly, the locals have rated them with a mean of 3.94, a median of 4, and a slightly lower SD of 0.96 showing a common ground between tourists' and locals' perceptions.

Statement 6: The results suggest that locals had a more pleasant experience interacting with the tourists, with a higher mean of 4.14, a median of 4, and a smaller standard deviation of 0.94. Tourists have a little less pleasant experience on average, with a mean of 2.92, a median of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.21, indicating a wider variety of experiences.

Statement 7: Tourists as well as locals have a good attitude towards individuals of different religions that visit the Shat Gambuj Mosque. Tourists had a somewhat higher average approval rating, with a mean of 3.88, a median of 4, and a standard deviation of 1.29. Locals similarly had an optimistic outlook, but with a little lower mean of 3.74, the same median of 4, and a roughly comparable standard deviation of 1.32, indicating a similar range of reactions.

Statement 8: The data reflects a positive valuation of museums' roles at heritage sites among both tourists and locals. Tourists rate the necessity of a museum with a mean of 3.28, a median of 4, and a standard deviation of 1.44, indicating a generally favourable view but with some variation in opinion. Locals, on the other hand, show a slightly higher mean of 3.48, but with a median of 3 and a standard deviation of 1.37, suggesting that while they also see museums as important, there is a wider range of sentiment about their essential role.

Statement 9: The survey indicates that tourists are happy with the services and amenities, with a mean of 3.2, a median of 4, and a standard deviation of 1.31, which shows a pleasant but diverse experience. Locals, on the other hand, report lower levels of satisfaction, with a mean of 2.76, a median of 3, and a smaller standard deviation of 0.89, indicating a more steady but less optimistic outlook.

Statement 10: The survey demonstrated a strong need to safeguard world heritage places for future generations. Tourists had a high level of agreement, with a mean of 3.86, a median of 4, and a standard deviation of 1.13, indicating a positive outlook. Locals also agree on the importance of conservation, as demonstrated by a mean of 3.28, the same median of 4, but with a greater standard deviation of 1.47, indicating a more diverse range of perspectives among them.

Hypothesis Test

Without the assumption of normality, the Mann–Whitney U test shows the differences in opinion between tourists and locals. So, each observation included in the study leads to a more accurate picture of how the groups really differ. A significance level (alpha) of 0.05 was used to decide whether the theories should be accepted or not. A p-value less than 0.05 would mean that there is a statistically

significant difference between the views of tourists and locals, which would mean that the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted. The null hypothesis (H0) would be accepted if the p-value was greater than 0.05, indicating that there was no discernible difference between the views of the two groups.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics (Author)

		<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>Wilcoxon W</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Accepted Hypothesis</i>
1	Historical Significance of Shat Gambuj Mosque	1211.500	2486.500	-0.273	0.785	-0.02733	H0
2	Shat Gambuj Mosque as a Place for Prayer	602.000	1877.000	-4.596	0.000	-0.4596	H1
3	Shat Gambuj Mosque as a Place for Recreation	549.000	1824.000	-5.000	0.000	-0.49996	H1
4	Knowledge of the History of the Mosque City of Bagerhat	881.000	2156.000	-2.609	0.009	-0.26087	H1
5	Significance of Surrounding Mosques besides Shat Gambuj	1140.500	2415.500	-0.787	0.431	-0.07869	H0
6	Experience in Interacting with each other	536.000	1811.000	-5.087	0.000	-0.50873	H1
7	Visits by People from Other Religions	1164.000	2439.000	-0.621	0.534	-0.06214	H0
8	Importance of a Museum in a Heritage Site	1170.000	2445.000	-0.566	0.571	-0.05664	H0
9	Satisfaction with Services and Facilities	939.000	2214.000	-2.220	0.026	-0.22203	H1
10	Necessity of conserving Heritage Sites	982.000	2257.000	-1.906	0.057	-0.19065	H0
*p<0.05							

The results show that opinions of the Mosque City of Bagerhat are significantly different between tourists and locals, particularly when it comes to how it is used for prayer and recreation, how locals and tourists interact, and how satisfied people are with the services and amenities. Regarding the historical value, the significance of the adjacent mosques, the visitors from other religions, the function of a museum, and the preservation of world heritage monuments (Statements 1, 5, 7, 8, and 10) there is no significant difference between the perception of tourists and locals as evidenced by the $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. On the other hand, regarding whether or not Shat Gambuj Mosque is a place for prayer or recreation, knowledge of the history of the Mosque City of Bagerhat, interactions and facilities provided by the management (Statements 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9) there is a significant difference between the perception of tourists and locals as evidenced by the $p\text{-value} > 0.05$.

Discussion

People's perceptions about a heritage site are formed by their prior knowledge and personal interpretation. These factors act as interpretive lenses which shape how important and valuable a site is to the people. Each heritage site has a different meaning based on its history and cultural impact. How each demographic perceives them depends on their backgrounds, reasons for visiting and the circumstances of their visit which is the reason tourists and locals have very different ideas about the Mosque City of Bagerhat. The Mosque City of Bagerhat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bangladesh, is a location that is a popular site to both locals and tourists. This research also shows statistically significant data proving notable variations in the perspectives of locals and tourists on several aspects of the site. The demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, and the Mann-Whitney U Test offer significant insights into a heritage sight in Bangladesh. From the perception of both tourists and locals, the descriptive analysis presents a thorough analysis of the Mosque City. The

Mann-Whitney U Test further establishes the substantial disparities in perceptions between tourists and locals. These variations comprise their degree of historical knowledge, their usage of the site, their relationships, and their degree of pleasure derived from the given facilities. These results make it very crucial that tourist services, educational outreach, and conservation initiatives be refined to close perceived gaps and improve the experience for every stakeholder. Tourists visit the Shat Gambuj Mosque because they know how significant it is historically based on the books or articles they had read from different sources. It supports the cognitive theory of tourism which says that people often visit a place with certain expectations from what they've learned, seen in the media or heard in their educational institute (Scott et al., 2024). For Locals, the heritage site became a part of their culture as they were growing up. Because of the personal connection, they feel a strong emotional connection. As the Shat Gambuj Mosque is a living mosque and locals visit five times for prayers, they have shown more awareness of its spiritual site rather than it being a place for recreation and entertainment. In addition to being a place of worship, the mosque is also a place where locals gather and socialise, particularly during the Friday prayer. Therefore, the locals' perception is deeply influenced because they live in close proximity as it's not just a relic from the past, it's still a source of their cultural pride and community. As this site is both a historically important religious site and a very famous tourist spot in Bangladesh it is important to consider every narrative related to this site. As it is a living mosque and closely related to local myth and belief, local people want to protect it as their religious space and many have suggested plastering the wall or colouring it regularly. However, their suggestions are against the Venice Charter (1964) article 9 that conservation efforts must aim at preserving and revealing the aesthetic and historical value of monuments while ensuring that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historical evidence (ICOMOS, 1964). As it is a famous tourist attraction many tourists have asked for including facilities like good quality restaurants, rides for children, souvenir shops etc. Though ensuring these facilities will increase visitor satisfaction increasing the number of tourists can play a negative role in the protection of this historic site. The ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999) emphasised tourism management to avoid adverse impacts on the site's condition and to promote a balance between tourism and heritage conservation (ICOMOS, 1999). To avoid this type of situation, collaboration among stakeholders (authority, tourists and locals) is a must.

Recommendations

1. Train local students in the historical and heritage value of the site to appoint them as authorised guides for the site to provide guided tours of the site to the tourists. It will make the locals aware of the site's management system and help to create employment in the locality. For tourists, this will work as a great way of making them aware of the historical importance of the site.
2. Arrange annual workshops including seminars, open discussions and conservation practice training for promoting the ideas of protecting heritage sites among both locals and tourists.
3. Create an online platform for easy access to all the information related to the site. Site documentation (photographs, videos and ground plans), historical documents related to the site and access to the authority through online media will help to create awareness and interest among both locals and tourists.

Conclusion

The perception of the stakeholders plays a significant role in the management of a site. Bagerhat The Mosque City of Bagerhat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bangladesh, is a location that

is popular with both locals and tourists. This research has illustrated these two groups have very different perceptions of the site. Encouragement of increased cooperation and communication among all the stakeholders engaged in the upkeep of historical sites including visitors, locals, and government agencies is of great relevance. Considered by both visitors and locals equally as a site of considerable importance, the Shat Gambuj Mosque is a cultural jewel with rich historical background. Conversely, each group clearly views the features and services provided on the site in somewhat different ways. Regarding the mosque, most tourists see it as a destination of historical importance and enjoyment. Conversely, the locals give the mosque's spiritual relevance and daily use more importance. The existence of this conflict shows how difficult it is to run a site that offers the residents of the area both aesthetic and functional worth. This research clarifies the traits of both locals and tourists, therefore enabling a better knowledge of the community. To fit the many demographics that exist, the involvement of each must be taken in individualised approaches. By incorporating everyone's perception in the site management policy, the authority can promote a more suitable approach to safeguarding heritage.

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