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# World Heritage / Patrimoine Mondial

**Name:** Shafi Noor

**Surname:** Islam

**Nationality of author:** xxx

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**Title of thesis:** Sustainable Eco-tourism As a Practicable Site  
Management Policy? A Case Study on the Sundarbans Natural  
World Heritage Site in Bangladesh

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**Supervisors of thesis:**

Dr. Marie -Theres Albert

Dr. Maire Mulloy

**Institution of Supervisor:**

Brandenburg Technical University (BTU)

P.O. Box 101344, D-03013

Cottbus, Germany

**Please provide a 500 words abstract outlining your thesis; you may wish to attach a table of contents or any other relevant material:**

Forest and its elements are the gift of nature. Natural beauty and the universal value of a forest property give us natural heritage. Natural resources have created culture and civilisation for human beings. But human influence on nature, on the planet, is indelible, anthropogenic disturbance of nature have transformed natural landscapes through the process of fire, hunting, agriculture, climate change and industrial pollution. Nature is often presumed to be an objective reality with universal qualities unaffected by considerations of times, culture and place, an assumption especially evident in appeals to nature as a source of external authority. Nature can be divided into 5 categories; nature as the collective phenomena of world or universe, nature as an essence, nature is an inspiration and guide for people and source of authority governing human affairs and finally, nature as the conceptual opposite of culture. On the other hand culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. In the other sense there is a complex definition which points to 4 important characteristics stressed by cultural relativists- symbolic composition, systematic patterning, learned transmission and societal grounding. Some natural areas or sites have high natural and cultural values and heritage of the world communities. Many natural World Heritage sites are not nature reserves in the strict sense and some are multiple use areas that allow a range of extractive activities to take place. Many others permit and encourage tourism, which is not extractive, but has negative impacts on a site. The Sundarbans natural World Heritage site is one of this category. To realise the negative impact on the overall fragile situation of natural and cultural sites, the general conference of UNESCO in 1972 passed the world heritage convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage. Kagoshima International Conference on World Natural Heritage (KICWNH) in Japan in 2000 also recognised that the natural sites are diminishing on a global scale. Before Kagoshima conference 2000, in 1996 the IUCN's natural heritage programme initiated a global strategy for natural world heritage site. The compilation has provided a global perspective on the natural world heritage site covers of forests marine, wetlands, mountains, grasslands etc as well as geological features, biodiversity and management issues. Most of the natural sites are being used for tourist spots. But heavy use of a popular site can

bring environmental damage, congestion and cultural disruption, environmental impacts come directly from the disruption of flora and waste is indirectly generated. In south Asia there are 9 natural world heritage sites and Sundarbans is one of the largest among them. Annually 183,006 visitors visit in Sundarbans heritage site in 2001. Beside this further 50,000 people daily enter inside of Sundarbans for resource collection. The Sundarbans heritage site covers an area of 4143 sq.km. The whole area of Sundarbans is basically a cluster of numerous deltaic islands separated from each other by numerable tidal creeks, estuaries and stream of different size and shape. At UNESCO's 21<sup>st</sup> conference the Heritage Committee has declared the Sundarbans as a World Heritage site in Bangladesh in 1997. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> world heritage site in country and 522<sup>nd</sup> World Heritage site in the world. The Sundarbans people are facing a huge problem as a result they are losing their tradition and culture. The lack initiatives for adequate management and the protection of indigenous people's economy and culture which is very important for the participatory policy making, proper management and protection of the Sundarbans World Heritage site. The Sundarbans people's folk, tradition and culture, knowledge and skills can play a vital role to protect the site through development of eco-tourism marketing and local participation. The management of the Sundarbans has evolved under the influence of human activities, such a mass tourism and substantial use of natural resources are the main threats for site conservation.

The purpose of this study is to provide the initial framework for investigating the eco-tourism, economic and environmental potential for the sustainable management of the site, especially to know about the uniqueness of the Sundarbans natural World Heritage site and its significance in different aspects. Explore the concept of eco-tourism to research the applicability of the concept of eco-tourism to the site. The modified Eco-tourism Model development which is the finding of this study has been proposed for implementation in the Sundarbans site location. It would be the practicable policy, for sustainable resource utilisation and site management, in consideration of local benefits and long –term conservation of the site. It will become the spectacular eco-tourism destination in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Eco-tourism is demonstrated in a natural site for the researchers all over the world who love and would like to protect the natural World Heritage site.