

# THE IMPACT OF KATHMANDU'S ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON TOURISM

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*"Maidens and damsels pregnant with ecstasy  
With Gunakeshari flowers on their heads  
With friends they roam and ramble  
The heaven-on-earth - Kantipur"*

These lines were the product of the irresistible impact of Kathmandu's enthralling and exquisite beauty and its happy citizens on the Great Poet Bhanu Bhakta during his age.

Yes, the then-Kathmandu was a bunch of excitement and enchantment. It was a seat of culture, a house of art and architecture, and an urban system of order and harmony. Life was ordered by seasons and was like a series of festivals. The 'Shangrila', that the western tourists raved for just under one foot and all around him.

Time has changed, and so has Kathmandu, but unfortunately to a pitiful and pathetic state. Tourism industry, which accounts for the country's largest single source of foreign exchange earning, depends largely on the environment of the capital of this Himalayan country in many ways.

Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal. Hence, it should be unique than other urban areas of Nepal. Being a capital, it is the place where most of the Embassies, Ministries, International organizations' offices, etc, are located. It is also the place where various national and international seminars, workshops, conferences, etc, are held daily. Hence, it should be a fine place, with a good range of facilities.

Kathmandu itself is a great centre of tourism. Most of the tourists who come to Nepal, via land or air, visit and stay in Kathmandu. Here, they watch the Palaces of the ancient kings, and art and architecture of the by-gone periods of the three historical cities. They also observe the temples, stupas and various other monuments. Some of them also trek to or, or camp or relax at Gorkarna, Nagarjuna, Nagarkot, Shivapuri, Dhulikhel, Phulchowki, etc.

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While in Kathmandu, they stay at hotels and lodges. They eat at restaurants. They travel with the help of travel agencies and trekking agencies. They buy various articles, including the most-sought-after Nepalese handicrafts, carpets, *khukuris*, idols, Nepalese caps, etc. A large population of people are provided with short-term and long-term employment by tourism industry. Thus, the economy of valley people highly depends on the industry.

Most of the tourists don't come to Kathmandu to tour the valley only. They also visit Pokhara, Lumbini, Janakpur, Chitwan, etc. Some come for trekking, mountain-climbing, rafting, mountain-flights, etc. And some even go to Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan, Darjeeling, etc. via Kathmandu. Now, if Kathmandu is not a fine place to drop, then tourists may not come to the capital itself! Kathmandu is not only an ideal touring spot, but also makes a convenient centre for visitors to travel other places.

Various factors are contributing to the environment degradation of Kathmandu, thus, negatively affecting the tourism industry. They are :

- a) The most important factor is the increase in the influx of migrants into the valley from elsewhere, thus increasing the annual population rate, the population being about nearly 9% of the country's total population. This has resulted in the unplanned mushrooming of houses in the once agricultured or forested land. The uncontrolled urbanization has further led to bad sanitation, dirty environment and scarcity of facilities like telephone, electricity, good-drinking water, etc.
- b) Industries in the valley, which accounts for 20-30% of the total industries in Nepal, is another factor. Carpet industries are found to release various acidic and toxic chemical wastes during the dyeing and washing process polluting the land, water and even the atmosphere. Hundreds of brick factories destroy millions of top-soil every season, leave apart the exhaust smoke! Various chemical factories, tanneries, etc, are also highly responsible for the pollution in the valley.
- c) The third factor is the daily increasing number of vehicles. At present 85% of the country's total imported petrol and 65% of the diesel is used in Kathmandu alone! They produce carbon dioxide and other carbonaceous gases.
- d) Deforestation in around the valley is also an important factor which is gradually leading to ecological unbalances.



e) The bowl-like shape of the valley has further made the matter more worse, as the toxic gases which accumulates over the valley cannot disperse freely leading to various anti-environmental phenomena like smog, acid rain, artificial warming etc.

f) Last but not the least, is the lack of consciousness and awareness about the environmental degradation and its consequences among the multitude of the valley. The absence of proper planning and implementation, and the lack of sufficient economic resources from the government's side constitute the other important factors.

Number of difficulties are faced by tourists in Kathmandu due to the worsening environment, chiefly by those who tour unguided. According to WHO, water should not contain more than 3 coliform organisms per 100 ml. But the valley's contains more than 10 coliforms per per 100ml. Bagmati and Vishnumati Rivers are obvious demonstrations of intense water pollution. As a result, diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid, etc, are becoming wide spread. Another problem is the heavy traffic. Out of streets in Kathmandu and Patan, only 40% are in normal or in fair condition, others are narrow or below sub-standard. Sights of travel and tours buses and tourists in cycles struggling their way through the narrow lanes and roads of the ancient areas of the valley are not unusual. Due to high concentration of harmful gases in the air, various lung and eye-related diseases are becoming popular. The increasing uncertainty of the valley's climate has also posed some problems. For example, some tourists who come here to enjoy winter vacations experience fairly high temperature. Like wise, some summer tours are delayed or even cancelled due to the accidental rainfalls. These uncertainties are all due to the ecological unbalance, which is fast increasing. The highly polluted atmosphere and the increasing negligence among the people has become a threat to the longevity of the temples and shrine. The holiest river of Nepal Bagmati being converted into one of the filthiest rivers, the drying up of the traditional water-sprouts(Dhungedhara), etc, are some examples which are slowly fading Kathmandu's image of art and culture, thus slacking the tourism industry in the long run.

The above problems not only hamper tourism, but also the big and small industries related to it. Hence, to increase the influx of tourists and their stay-period government, municipalities, NGOs, etc, should work together for decelerating the uncontrolled urbanization, unbounded industrialization, afforestation, heavy traffic,

etc, by making strict and specific rules and regulations. Economic resources must be used with great vigilance. General awareness and consciousness about the dreadful impact of the debilitated environment on the human life should be aroused, especially in the young and ill-literate.

Finally, it can be concluded that the degrading environment of Kathmandu has a negative impact on tourism, and that it is high time to restore the 'Shangrila' and make the romantic lines of Bhanu Bhakta still apparent and meaningful.