

The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism: A Case Study of Lumbini, Nepal

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Abstract

This research aims to discover and present the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism in the context of Lumbini and its premises. As COVID-19 spread globally, it has created many challenges in health and security, daily lives, the national economy, and the global tourism industry. The COVID-19 outbreak has been considered as the most challenging tragedy that occurred in the world after the 2nd world war. The World Health Organization (WHO) had listed Nepal also as a country with a high-risk zone of COVID-19. The travel restriction and nationwide lock-down implemented by many countries including Nepal have resulted in a stranded traveler's movement. As the consequences ticket reservation, flight services, transportation, hotel, and restaurants were closed and several job losses were registered in the tourism sector. The negative effects like fear, threat, frustration, and losing the confidence of tourism entrepreneurs appeared. This has brought changes in the tourists' behavior and their motivation to travel for the next few years. In Lumbini businesses like lodges, hotels, restaurants, and travel offices were also severely affected by the pandemic. Thus, the tourism sector has been

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facing serious threats due to the prolonged lockdown and closing of tourism activities than the terror of COVID-19 itself.

Background

Tourism is the largest growing economic sector accounted for 10.3% portion of the global GDP and 330 million jobs worldwide in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). It plays an important role in socio-economic growth-enhancing business activity, earning foreign exchange, and creating jobs. The global tourism industry is also very sensitive to negative factors like a pandemic, natural disaster, conflicts, terrorism, and economic crisis affecting the various aspects of international tourism needs (Madinios & Vassiliadis, 2008). The tourism industry is also among the first to close down and likely to be among the last to restart after the crisis (OECD, 2020). In recent years, the two massive drivers of change to the global economy are climate change and global health emergencies (James & Budke, 2020). The COVID-19 is an example of a health emergency currently scattered all over the world troubling the global tourism economy (James & Budke, 2020).

The tourism industry had experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in Hubei Province, Wuhan city in China earlier in December 2019 (Buckley, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has given devastating effects and fear to the main industries of tourism and hospitality sub-sectors such as aviation, accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, conference, and sporting (Gössling et al., 2020). The United Nations (UN) reported that the pandemic would cost the tourism industry approximately US\$ 1 trillion losses and threaten more than 100 million jobs worldwide. The numbers of international tourists' mobility are expected to decrease between 58% and 78% (850 million to 1.1 billion) in 2020 (Durkee, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has not only led to the terminate of the much-ambitious "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign but has brought an unexpected amount of insecurity in the tourism-based economy of Nepal (Pokhrel, 2020). According to the study made by Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), there have been losses of more than NRs. 50 billion in Nepal's tourism sector since the COVID-19 lock-down enforced in the country. It is estimated that more than NRs. 150 billion investment is at risk due to COVID-19 (Tourism Mail, 2020). The major tourist destinations like Pokhara, Chitwan, and Lumbini have been severely affected in the absence of tourists and tourism activities (Karki, 2020). In Pokhara, about 700 tourist-standard hotels with an investment of more than NRs. 400 million and around 17,000 employments are at risk of losing NRs. 130 million per day in the tourism sector (Paudel, 2020). In Chitwan including Sauraha, more than 225 tourist hotels with NRs. 30 billion investment and about 16,000 jobs are at risk due to closure for almost six months (Tourism Mail, 2020). Similarly, in Lumbini and its premises, tourism businesses were completely shut down for the last six months with many jobs at risk (Lumbini Times, 2020). Through this research, the author is going

to investigate the major impacts of COVID-19 on tourism in the context of Lumbini and its premises.

Tourism in Nepal

Nepal is a famous hub for mountaineers, trekkers and adventure seekers, spiritual and natural lovers. The global interest to visit and practice these explorations has put Nepal among the most desired destination for visitors and pilgrims (Ghimire, 2015). Nepal's pleasant climate, the eighth highest peak in the world, and the ever welcoming nature of the people is a remarkable possibility of tourism in Nepal (Khatri, 2018).

Tourism is also a significant key to the economic participation and well-being of people and communities in Nepal. It is estimated that Nepal's tourism industry has contributed to NRs. 231 billion i.e. 6.7% (USD 2,051.4 million) to GDP in 2019 and the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment was 6.9% of total employment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that travel and tourism investment in Nepal was NRs. 16.5 billion nearly 3% of the total investment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The report from the Government of Nepal showed, there were 1.2 million international tourists visited Nepal in 2019 (Prasain, 2020). The table below shows the tourist's origin segregated by countries in the year 2019.

Table1: Tourists visiting Nepal in 2019

Country	Tourists Visiting Nepal
India	254,150
China	169,543
USA	93,218
UK	61,144
Sri Lanka	55,869
Thailand	41,653
Australia	38,972

Source: Prasain, 2020

The Government of Nepal had targeted to attract 2 million foreign tourists and aimed to earn US\$ 2 billion from tourism through the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign (UNDP, 2020). But, the global COVID-19 pandemic obstructed in making the targeted ambition into unsuccessful.

Tourism in Lumbini

Lumbini is popular all over the world as a birthplace of Lord Buddha, listed in the world heritage site since 1997 (UNESCO, 2013). The Buddhist heritage sites of

Lumbini include more than 200 historic sites associated with the life of Buddha and Buddhism culture attracting visitors from early ages (Rai, 2020). The Maya Devi temple is considered as the heart of all monuments in Lumbini (Neuphane, 2008). The tourist route named “Lumbini Buddhist circuit” connects the major Buddhist sites of the greater Lumbini area in Kapilavastu-Tilaurakot, Ramagram, and Devadaha (Ghimire & Rai, 2015). Pilgrims and travelers with diverse cultures reach to Lumbini for expressing their religious and mystical feelings in several ways (Rai, 2020). The different studies showed that pilgrimage lies in the third main purpose of visiting Nepal and Lumbini is the first and foremost on the list. Lumbini is also one of the best places for practicing meditation, spiritual vacation, worship, and charity work (Sharma, 2019).

The number of religious and cultural tourism has increased steadily in different destinations in the past years. In the previous year, Lumbini had seen growth in the arrival of visitors except in 2015, the year devastating earthquake crushed in Nepal (Rai, 2020). The credit for tourism growth in Lumbini goes to the implementation of the master plan projects, better accommodation, regional government support, and increasing in promotional activities (Anmol, 2018). The Government of Nepal is also constructing Gautam Buddha international airport at Bhairahawa to transform Lumbini into a world-class tourism hub (Anmol, 2018). This has resulted in huge investments in small-scale hotels, lodges, and restaurants in Lumbini and its premises (The Rising Nepal, 2019). The table below shows the number of tourists visiting Lumbini between the fiscal year of 2014-2019.

Table 2: Tourist arrivals in six years in Lumbini, Nepal

Year	Nepali	Indian	Third Country	Total	Percentage difference of succeeding year
2014	902621	154216	136991	1193828	-
2015	488852	130262	129180	748294	-37.32%
2016	1015158	134269	136253	1285680	71.81%
2017	1251346	155444	145796	1552586	20.80%
2018	1170571	193635	169904	1534110	-1.19%
2019	1178140	206171	174015	1558326	1.58%

Source: LDT, Information Centre, 2014-2019

Objectives and research methods

The main objective of this research is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises due to the restriction in religious and

pilgrimage movement. The study is based on a qualitative research method where the researcher has not only the opportunity to conduct unstructured interviews with the authorities but took a chance to observe and understand the circumstances as well. The research is exploratory and was undertaken from June to September 10, 2020, with the fieldwork carried out for a month in July 2020. The fieldwork took place in Lumbini, Bhairahwa, and Butwal. As the researcher is native, there was no problem with visiting the sites. Each interview lasted on an average of about 30-45 minutes with the related stakeholders. The questions were relevant to stakeholder's experience on COVID-19 and their thoughts regarding the impacts on the tourism industry in-context to Lumbini and its Premises. Pseudonyms are used to address the interviewees. The information collected from the stakeholders is analyzed and presented in the finding of the research.

The study is also based on secondary data sources. The published journals, articles, newspapers, textbooks, and emerging media coverage sources are used to obtain information for doing this research. The main difficulty of this research was that there were limited academic journals available on web sources about the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in Nepal.

Review of literature

Concerning this research, the author has reviewed literature about the impact of COVID-19 in tourism through different scholar's articles. In-context to Lumbini, there was also a review of the literature but those studies were directly or indirectly related to the promotion of tourism in Lumbini. However, this is the sectorial basis review of COVID-19 impacts in Lumbini. Therefore, the present author has made effort to highlight the impacts of COVID-19 in the Lumbini area. This is going to be the first study on the impacts of COVID-19 in Lumbini and its premises.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The name "coronavirus" was invented in 1968; appeared to be similar to a "corona"-like or crown-like structure when observed through the electron microscope (Weiss & Martin, 2005). Thus, the COVID-19 crisis is not the first situation in the world as numerous coronavirus were encountered in the past years causing serious effects in humans and animals. On January 12, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) initially named "coronavirus" as 2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) and on February 11, 2020, officially titled the disease as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the 2019-nCoV outbreak to be a public health emergency of international concern as well as a pandemic on January 30, 2020, and March 11, 2020, respectively (WHO, 2020).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili justify, coronavirus is an acute respiratory illness transmitted

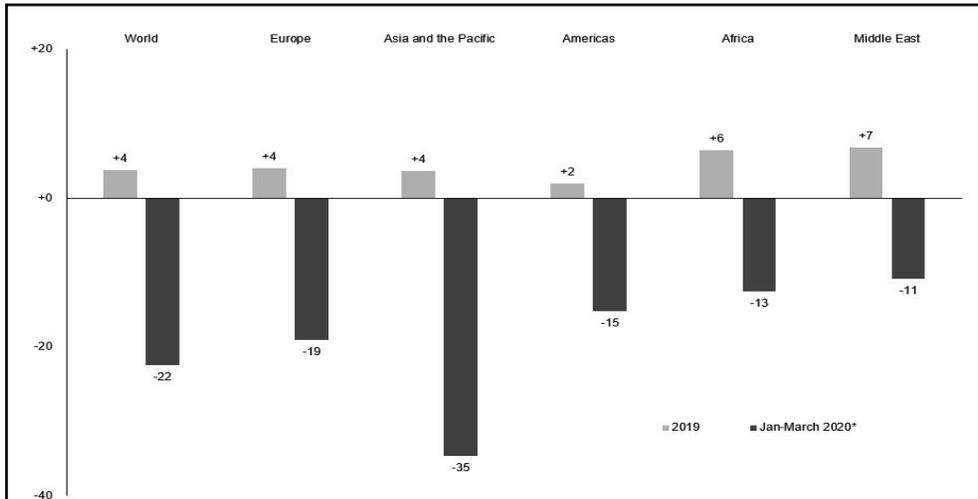
from person to person through droplets (UNWTO, 2020). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) president, Gloria Guevara argued, coronavirus is a global pandemic threatening the lives, livelihood, and everyone across the world (WTTC, 2020). In the same way, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also responded COVID-19 pandemic similar to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), as a humanitarian crisis affecting people's lives that have produced a global economic crisis (OECD, 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 in global tourism

The international, regional, and local restrictions on travel, business operation, and people-to-people interaction have directly affected the national economy including the tourism system to an end (Gössling et al., 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasted on April 24, 2020, that due to the coronavirus there are more than 100 million jobs at risk in the global tourism industry and the estimation would be even more worrying for the dependent portions of the population (WTTC, 2020). Similarly, The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated on June 1, 2020, 156 governments have announced travel restrictions to international tourism by closing their borders (UNWTO, 2020).

The pandemic has influenced on the tourists' behavior, disturbing the arrival of domestic and international tourism (OCED, 2020). Thus, the visitor arrivals, employment, profit in the private sectors, and eventually revenue of the government is affected by pandemic (Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008). In the United States, it was estimated a loss of around US\$ 3.4 billion for March 2020 due to the regulated travel ban for European travelers (Statista, 2020). The coronavirus had created numerous limitations on domestic and international travelers to gather and celebrate "Chinese Lunar New Year" in January 2020 (Jamal & Budke, 2020). Similarly, the coronavirus outbreak has transformed the prime tourism destination such as Venice and Milan of Italy into red quarantine zones, avoiding free movement of 16 million visitors (BBC, 2020; The New York Times, 2020). The number of tourist arrivals in Asia has also been influenced by the coronavirus pandemic dropping in the travel and tourism revenue (Policy Center, 2020). The figure below shows the arrival of international tourists in all regions of the world between 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.

Figure 1: International tourist arrivals, in 2019 & first quarter of 2020 in all regions of the world (% change)



Source: UNWTO, 2020

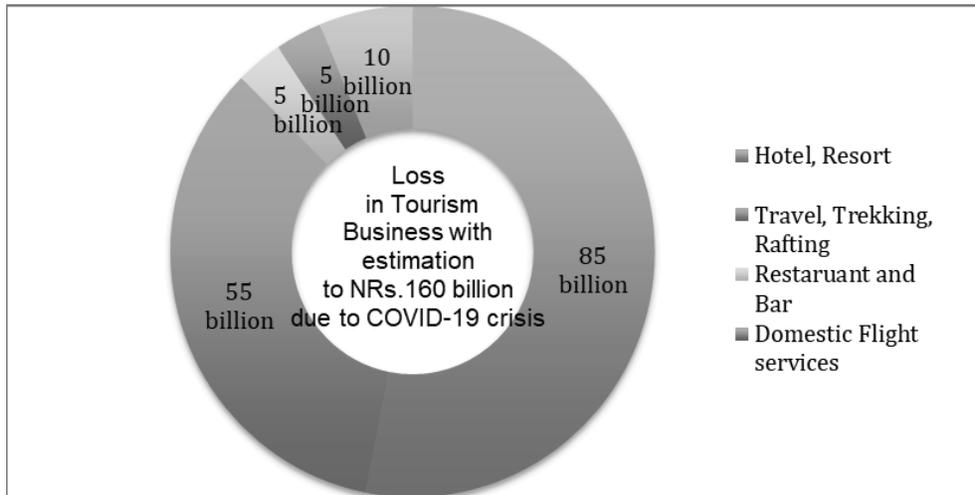
There has been an estimation by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that coronavirus has resulted in a 22% decline in international tourist arrivals with a loss of US\$ 80 billion in tourism incomes during the first quarter of 2020. The numbers could drop with 60% - 80% over the whole year with an estimated loss of US\$ 300 billion to US\$ 450 billion in international tourism earnings in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020; Pokhrel, 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 in Nepalese tourism

The coronavirus crisis has created an unexpected amount of insecurity in the tourism industry of Nepal. The number of tourist arrivals in Nepal has dropped by 33% in the fiscal year 2019/2020 and is expected to decline by 62% in the year 2020 (UNDP, 2020). According to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA), the Nepal tourism industry has reported a loss of up to US\$ 330 million because of the COVID-19 lockdown imposed from March 24, 2020, by the government (Travel Biz News, 2020). The COVID-19 has more significantly affected the tourism industry of Nepal than the Earthquake in 2015. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB), the number of domestic and international tourism has dropped by 2% and 1% during January and February 2020 respectively due to the COVID-19 lockdown (Sanghai et al., 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that there has been a minimum loss of US\$ 141 million of possible earning from tourism between mid-March and mid-May 2020 in Nepal (UNDP, 2020).

The former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Deepak Raj Joshi forecasted that the Nepal tourism industry could lose up to NRs. 160 billion in tourism sectors in the year 2020 (Sijapati, 2020). The figure below shows the estimated loss by tourism business in Nepal due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Figure 2: Estimated loss in tourism business due to COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Sijapati , 2020

The hotels, lodges, airlines, tours and travels, trekking agencies, and nearly one million Nepalese depending on tourism are highly affected by the pandemic. The Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) stated that the coronavirus lockdown has impacted in closing down of nearly 1300 star and tourist standard hotels across the country, losing nearly NRs. 3 billion during March and April 2020 (Pokhrel, 2020; UNDP, 2020). The GDP growth of 7.33% during the fiscal year 2019 from hotel and restaurant in Nepal is estimated to remain negative at 16.30% during the fiscal year 2020 (Sanghai et al., 2020). The Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agencies (NATTA) declared that all its bookings were canceled during the major tourist season of the year (UNDP, 2020). In the same way, Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) conveyed that more than 3500 travel and 2600 trekking agencies have already closed their services, losing around half a million jobs and revenue of NRs. 600 million from mountaineering (Pokhrel, 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 in Lumbini

Lumbini as a birthplace of Lord Buddha, a foundation of peace in the world and the heart of the Buddhist circuit has been severely impacted in the arrival of domestic and international tourists since the coronavirus outbreak. According to Lumbini Development Trust (LTD), about 13,107 international, 13,978 Indian and 67,942

Nepali tourists have visited Lumbini in January 2020, which was 48,060 less than in January 2019 (Habib, 2020).

The coronavirus had resulted in the closing-down of the tourism activities in Lumbini that has affected the livelihood of many people engaged in tour and travel agencies, hotels and restaurants, transportation companies, tourism institutions, and other businesses related to tourism in Lumbini and its premises. To put a scale to the effects of coronavirus on tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises; the data collected from interviewees are presented as findings below.

Findings

This section presents the key findings of this research. The findings are associated with the stakeholders' perspectives on the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism sub-sectors of the Lumbini area. 7 interviewees had participated in the interviews for this research. Among them are; a chairman of Siddhartha Regional Hotel Association, a general secretary of Lumbini Regional Hotel Association, a chairman of Nepal Association of Travel and Tour Agent (NATTA)- Province 5, a vice-president of West Nepal Bus Entrepreneurs Association, a member secretary of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Assistant Professor of Lumbini Buddhist University and a resident who has also businesses at Bhairahawa.

According to Richter and Waugh (1986), tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and lodges are highly sensitive during the crisis that affects the external appearance and attraction to visitors with huge financial losses (Sanghai et al., 2020).

According to the Chairman of Siddhartha Regional Hotel Association, Krishna Shrestha (Pseudonym) believed,

“The coronavirus lock-down has resulted in closing down of more than 67 hotels consisting of 3,464 rooms and 5,607 beds and about 3500 employees have lost their jobs. There has been an estimated loss of more than NRs. 2 billion in the last six months in Bhairahawa.

Further, he added the following when asked about the investment and bank loan in the hotel sector in Rupandehi district.

The total investment of more than NRs. 20 billion has been injected with bank loan NRs. 10 billion in hotels targeting the “Visit Nepal Year 2020” campaign.

In addition to the above, the interviewee of the Lumbini Regional Hotel Association has its perspective on the impacts of COVID-19 in the hotel sector of the Lumbini area. According to the general secretary of Lumbini Regional Hotel Association, Ram Mani Sharma (Pseudonym) mentioned,

“About 70% of the hotels booking mostly by the Chinese groups were canceled during the peak season of the year due to travel restriction and lockdown in the country. As a result, more than 85 hotels were shut down and about 4500 employees were sent home. There has been a loss of more than NRs. 1 billion in the hotel sector in Lumbini”.

Similarly, tour and travel agencies are severely disturbed in the COVID-19, as social distance and travel restriction remain the main strategy to regulate the spread of the pandemic. This has resulted to terminate most of the bookings for summer and upcoming autumn. According to the chairman of NATTA- province-5, Suman Adhikari (Pseudonym),

“It is estimated that there are about 171 tour and travel agencies and 11 tourist transport entrepreneurs operated in the province-5 of Nepal with 350 employees. The COVID-19 lock-down has led to a loss of more than NRs. 2 billion in the last six months. The unemployment percentage has grown-up and the livelihood of people who are directly or indirectly dependent on tour and travel has been affected”.

More, he also added the following when asked about other impacts.

“The pandemic has also hindered the different projects planned by NATTA– province-5 i.e. welcome center for tourists at Belahiya border point with an estimated investment of NRs. 400 million”.

In the someway, tourism transportation is a key stakeholder of Nepal’s tourism in-term of capital investment and services. But, the COVID-19 lock-down has challenged a lot of problems in the transportation sectors in the country (Online KTM, 2020). According to Rajan Sharma (Pseudonym) –vice-president of West Nepal Bus Entrepreneur Association, Butwal assumed,

“The transportation sector in Lumbini has been severely affected by the coronavirus lock-down. There have been estimated losses of more than NRs. 2 billion in the transportation sector as 2500 buses were remained stable without providing service for the last 6 months. More than 10,000 jobs in the transportation sector were affected.

Besides, he added the following when asked about investment in tourist buses.

“The transport entrepreneurs in Lumbini have also invested NRs. 1 billion in super deluxe buses aimed to support the “Visit Nepal Year 2020” campaign but the COVID-19 has brought everything into unpredicted losses”.

The above stakeholders’ perspectives are also supported by the member secretary of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Shree Ram Pandey (Pseudonym),

“As the effect of COVID-19 is still ongoing and the government has not given permission to open the religious sites, the Lumbini sites will also remain closed for visitors until the connectivity of flights will not be feasible & the terror will not minimize. This has also slumped revenues of Lumbini Development Trust”.

Besides, he also added the following when asked about other impacts.

“The coronavirus pandemic has also impacted the construction of Gautam Buddha International airport at Bhairahawa and International conference hall in Lumbini planned to finish in 2020”

The private schools, colleges, and universities are facing financial difficulties due to interruption in the academic enrollment with the pandemic in Lumbini. The researcher tried to collect the perception of the impacts of COVID-19 from the Assistant professor of Bachelor in Travel and Tourism Management (BTTM) at Lumbini Buddhist University, Ramesh Aryal (Pseudonym),

“We have been running our tourism program at Lumbini and Butwal in province-5 of Nepal. The COVID-19 has resulted to convert the on-campus lecturing to online that had affected many students as only limited are connected to virtual learning. The COVID-19 has bothered campus exams, employees, meetings, and other academic activities”.

The behavior of people is influenced by several factors such as personal, economic well-being, change in cost, and health risks, which is the result of pandemic (Lee & Chen, 2011). The health and disease risk create mental pressure among the people that affect the decision making of the travelers (Schneidge, 2020). According to local person Dipak Chhetri (Pseudonym) expressed,

“We are still in a struggling phase and the COVID-19 had not only led to financial burden like we were unable to pay wages to employees and rent in time but we have also faced unseen mental stress in the daily lives. Everywhere whether it is a cellphone, newspapers, television, pamphlets, social media it's all about coronavirus”.

Discussions

In this section, the author will discuss the results regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Lumbini and its premises. Although tourists are the main economic source in tourism, the coronavirus pandemic has created long-term uncertainty and economic threats on the tourism industry of Lumbini and its premises. The tourism destination, transportation, tourists' behavior, mass media, health, and security are the five factors that change after the crisis (Yang et al., 2008). The nation also suffers economically, socially, morally and spiritually, if the tourism industry cannot offer safe and fear-free travel experiences (Kunwar, 2016).

The different literature has also confirmed that the pandemic like COVID-19 has brought serious effects on the tourism industry causing socio-economic impacts in the country. However, it is highly debated whether the impacts of the crisis on the tourism industry would disappear in a short period or not?

In a crisis, tourist and tourism businesses are more exposed to risk than anything else (Drabek, 1995). According to Ghaderi et al., (2015), crisis creates unexpected fear and uncertainty in tourism leading to massive loss of life and physical damage in the destination. The COVID-19 infection is not only limited to human transmission but has infected harshly economic structure, socio-cultural formation, and living of people (Ulak, 2020). The restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic such as social distance, isolation, and home quarantine have affected traveler's mobility (Paudel & Subedi, 2020). The 10,000 tourists who had entered Nepal before the lockdown was also left trapped in different parts of Nepal (Adventure Bound Nepal, 2020). The right to travel and enjoy the service of hospitality and tourism has been reduced in an unparalleled way (Baum & Hai, 2020). Thus, the special campaign named "#Travel tomorrow" has become the common advice to the current crisis underlining the long-term values of tourism (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). The result of this research indicates that Chinese tourists who desired to visit Lumbini in March and April have decreased with the outbreak of COVID-19. The situation has resulted to cancel holiday bookings, hotel reservations, extensive unemployment, loss in income sources, and promotion activities in Lumbini and its premises. The mega projects like Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa and the International Conference Hall in Lumbini are expected to delay because of a shortage of materials and technicians who were not able to return to Nepal during the worldwide lockdown (Subba, 2020). Similarly, the road expansion of Bhairahawa to Lumbini is also much more disturbed by the coronavirus that would make inconvenience for tourist arrivals soon.

The World Health Organization (WHO) listed Nepal as a country with a high-risk zone of COVID-19 that made Nepal ban all international flights from March 22, 2020. The travel restriction by the government of Nepal was put into action as a strategy to control the spread of COVID-19 infection, which tremendously affected tourism activities in Lumbini. This has created fear and insecure situation to travel in Lumbini and its sites. Thus, domestic and international tourism in Lumbini and its premises has been severely impacted by the COVID-19. According to a financial survey of 2019-2020, Lumbini was one of the most visited places in Nepal with an estimated revenue of US\$ one hundred forty-five thousand in the fiscal year 2019-2020 (LDT, 2020). But, from February to August 2020, Lumbini has lost more than eight hundred thousand tourists in the major visiting time of the year due to the travel restriction and lock-down in the country (Paudel, 2020). The economic impacts of crises arise because of the efforts of government such as lock-down and travel restrictions (Kuo et

al., 2009). The hotel, restaurants, tour and travel agencies, souvenir shops, recreation groups, aviation service, tourism transport association, local businesses, in Lumbini areas are shut down since March 24, 2020, causing tourism entrepreneurs in a line to bankruptcy. Hence, the huge investment in tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises is at risk. The tourism industry of Lumbini characterizes small workers, guides, souvenir shops, and ground handlers like a tourist bus, car services are severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The postponing of the “Visit Nepal Year 2020” campaign and interruption of on-arrival visas along with countrywide lockdown has resulted in thousands of tourism jobs at risk in Lumbini (Prasain, 2020). Thus, the tourism industry in Lumbini and its sites have experienced diverse impacts since the coronavirus lock-down occurred in Nepal. Therefore, a clear strategy is necessary to address the problem of tourism entrepreneurs and employers in Lumbini and its premises.

There are around 152 star and tourist standard hotels registered in regional hotel association Nepal (RHAN) in Siddharthanagar and Lumbini, which are seriously affected, as there had not been any business in the hospitality sector in the last six months. There has been an estimated loss of more than NRs. 3 billion in the hotel and restaurant sector in Lumbini and its premises since the lock-down started. The pandemic has not only affected the tourism business but also people who were, directly and indirectly, dependent on the tourism industry in Lumbini, and its sites have been seriously impacted. The coronavirus crisis has impacted severely as thousands of employees working in Lumbini areas were sent home affecting their jobs. It has impacted mostly on the daily wages of staff and employees in Lumbini areas that have made difficulty to manage their daily necessities. Therefore, to cope with this situation; the government of Nepal has declared relief packages so that the tourism business can sustain it in the crisis. But it has been tough to obtain these supports in time due to difficult bureaucratic frameworks, centralized power, and unclear guidelines of the government.

Likewise, tour and travel agencies provide tourism services to the public on behalf of the suppliers such as airlines, cruise lines, package tours, car hires, and local transports, etc. There are altogether 171 tour and travel agencies operated in the Lumbini and its premises, which are seriously affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The main attractions of Lumbini and its sites are temples, architecture monasteries, museums, stupas, central canal, eternal peace flame located in Lumbini, Kapilavastu, Ramagram, and Devadaha. But, these attractions have been closed for the last six months and there is no indication when will the religious and pilgrim sites will re-open again. The tour and travel agencies are closed, as the mobility of tourists is controlled in Lumbini areas. The number of international and domestic tourists who visited Lumbini in 2019 was 1.5 million and there was a huge number

of tourist arrivals in January 2020. But, despite traveler's eager to visit Lumbini areas, the health, and safety concern has changed their travel plan. Hence, Lumbini has lost masses of tourists since the last six months of the coronavirus pandemic. While the author interviewed the chairman, the respondent stated that the pandemic has led to job losses of many employees on tour and travel in Lumbini areas disturbing their livelihood. The tour and travel groups are not in line to sustain due to lock-down and restriction in tourism mobility in Lumbini. Thus, this has impacted severely holiday bookings and travel packages during the high season of the year in Lumbini and sites.

The transportation is also one of the main elements in any emergency preparation and response (Masozera et al., 2006). However, tourism segments such as air transport, cruises, public transport, and railways services are immediately affected by the outbreak of pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020). In the context of Lumbini and its premises, there are about 2500 public buses and eleven-tourist transport entrepreneurs, which are being seriously affected by the COVID-19 lock-down and travel restrictions imposed by the government. As argued by the respondent, the transportation sector in Lumbini and sites had encountered huge financial difficulties and job losses of many employees that have impacted economic and social development. The coronavirus has made trouble for transport entrepreneurs to survive in the business world in Lumbini as it gets affected immediately with the pandemic and takes maximum time to restart. Thus, there is a need for better teamwork with the tourism stakeholders and the local government to support the transport sector in Lumbini and sites with survival and restart package.

The World Bank and the international monetary fund have declared the coronavirus pandemic as the biggest financial crisis after 1930 in the world that has impacted the academic sector (Bajracharya et al., 2020). It is expected that the majority of universities and institutions in Lumbini and its premises can be re-open, but the social gathering should remain limited to less than 25 people in the situation of COVID-19. Therefore, it is not possible to open schools, institutions in Lumbini areas as they have been placed in a risk zone. The coronavirus is going to hamper the academic activities of about one hundred thousand students in Lumbini areas this year. The Private and Boarding School Organization Nepal (PABSON) Rupandehi has decided to begin a digital education system to continue the teaching-learning process. This has further troubled many students, as they do not have proper internet access. Most of the universities, schools in Lumbini sites are closed for the last six months and the private schools, colleges, and universities are facing financial difficulties due to the interruption in the academic enrollment of students. The final exam, which was supposed to finish in late March and April month by universities in Lumbini and sites, were been postponed until further notice (Lumbini Times, 2020).

The COVID-19 has brought serious psychological impacts such as pain, fear, frustration, loneliness, and nervousness among the public, students, and health workers around the world. The pandemic has shown that the sudden economic fall, unemployment, social distance, and economic suffering had led to a significant rise in the number of people committing suicide (Paudel & Subedi, 2020). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people physically, mentally, socially, financially, and emotionally in Lumbini and its premises. The livelihood of local and businessman in Lumbini and its sites has been disturbed a lot because of the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction to keep the business close down. However, it is a prime responsibility of the government to provide mental health counseling to the public through phone and other media to reduce the risk to mental health.

Although the Government of Nepal had permitted to operate aviation sector, hotel, and restaurants, trekking and transportation through following the health and safety procedures from September 17, 2020, the religious and pilgrims' sites are still not in a phase of operation and these could create a huge amount of losses in the destination like Lumbini.

The significant literature and results of this research also clarify that tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises have been extremely impacted by the COVID-19 causing multiple effects in tourism-related business, social structure, and daily lives of people. The seven of the interviewees of this research also responded that there have been huge losses in the tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises since the last six months of coronavirus lock-down. However, at the moment the supports from the central government, Lumbini developments trust, and local government are important to tackle the financial and other problems faced by the tourism business in Lumbini and its premises.

Conclusion

This research tried to investigate the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism from the viewpoint of Lumbini and its premises. The COVID-19 pandemic had created huge impacts on the tourism industry of Lumbini and its premises particularly when Nepal had planned the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign. The tourism entrepreneurs in Lumbini areas have lost their confidence because of the financial and mental burden created through the countrywide lock-down. However, it is also appreciated that lock-down is not a permanent solution for the elimination of crisis. The different on-going projects on the tourism sector in Lumbini have been postponed.

Although, the tourism sector of Lumbini is heavily affected by pandemic the mobilization of people will never end forever, as Lumbini is a holy zone and is based on authenticity. Thus, the revival will take place sooner or later after the pandemic. There was also a different crisis in the past in the tourism sector like an earthquake,

Tsunami, SARS, Ebola, etc. but were eliminated with time, and hence tourism was recovered. The different travel policies will be developed by the tourism sectors in near future to inspire tourists' to travel. The religious and pilgrimage tourism will also continue to re-start sooner or later as the Lumbini Development Trust (LDC), Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), and Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA) are engaged together in formulating health and safety protocols to resume the spiritual tourism. However, as the coronavirus outbreak is still ongoing, therefore, the first concern is to focus on the health and security of people through ignoring unnecessary travels and maintaining social distance.

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