

Possibilities of Ecotourism Development in Rani Mahal Area, Palpa, Western Nepal

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Abstract: Nepal has significant potential for tourism due to its diverse flora and fauna, rich culture, and abundance of mountains, historical sites, and religious places. This study assesses the potential for ecotourism development in the Rani Mahal area of Palpa district. The research was based on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and field observations. In total, FGDs were conducted in five locations, and 38 KIIs were carried out. The study found that ecotourism activities such as white-water rafting, beach volleyball, homestays, and hiking are feasible in the Rani Mahal area. White-water rafting in the Kali Gandaki River (from Ridi to Ramdi) and beach volleyball in the Rani Mahal area were identified as highly promising for ecotourism. Similarly, homestays in Bote village (Dailathun) and Satuka (Syangja) were also found to have high potential. Additionally, hiking routes from Rani Mahal to Magar homestay (Baugha Gumha), Alamdevi temple (Syangja), Argali, and Ridi offer great potential for ecotourism activities. The results of this study provide valuable insights into tourism planning, infrastructure development, and the sustainable development of ecotourism in the Rani Mahal area.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Rani Mahal; Palpa District

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is the fastest-growing sector of the global economy (Birendra et al., 2021). It has been viewed as the smokeless industry, which contributes significantly to foreign currency exchange and the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of any nation (Gautam, 2011; Thapa, 2012). The industry is highly growing and supporting to the Nepali economy (Sharma, 2012). Tourism industry is high potential in Nepal due to having mountains and biophysical and cultural diversity (Badal & Kharel, 2019; Sharma, 2012). Historically, the number of tourists has been increasing trend. In 1962, the total number of tourist were 6,179, which increased to 2,30,085 in 2020 (MoCTCA, 2020).

Ecotourism is one of the fundamental components and new approaches in the tourism industry, which is the fastest-growing and largest industry in the world (Bhatt & Dhakal, 2017; Ojha, 2020; Wearing & Neil, 2009). It has been overcoming the problems of traditional tourism with minimum negative impact and maximum benefits for the local people and environment (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004). Ecotourism is alternative tourism that encompasses visiting natural areas in order to learn, study, or carry out activities that are environment friendly; that is, tourism based on the nature experience, which enables the economic and social development of local communities (Kiper, 2013). The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that preserve the environment, support the well-being of the local community and involve sightseeing and educational activities (Bricker, 2017). Since the late 1980s, ecotourism has been increasing consistently in Nepal (Bhatt & Dhakal, 2017). Ecotourism is fundamentally nature-based, which plays an essential role in reducing climatic problems, environmental cleanliness, sanitation, and conservation, valuing local culture, and finally, achieving development goals (Neupane et al., 2021; Ojha, 2020; Walter et al., 2018; Weaver, 2002).

Ecotourism provides mutual benefits between the environment and tourism (Romeril, 1985). It helps to protect the environment, prevent wildlife conservation, poverty elevation and economic development (KC, 2016), and encourages entrepreneurship at a local level (KC et al., 2015). Thus, it is environmentally, economically and socio-economically sustainable (Aryal & Maharjan, 2018; Weaver, 2002). Ecotourism is also accepted as a form of sustainable tourism (Kiper, 2013), community-based tourism, rural tourism, and green tourism in the country, which emerged before 30 years (Ojha, 2020). Nepal Tourism Policy 2009 and Vision 2020 have identified ecotourism as the primary means for sustainable tourism (Ojha, 2020).

Nepal has a high possibility of ecotourism. It is also called alternative tourism with various forms of ecotourism (Wearing & Neil, 2009), and it has been providing great support to the country's economy and employment opportunities. In total, the tourism sector contributed about 1.5% of Nepal's GDP in 2019/2020 (MoCTCA, 2020) and provided various forms of employment to about 2,00,000 people. To promote tourism in Nepal, Tourism Policy 2008 was developed with the aim of developing tourism infrastructures, increasing tourism activities, community-based tourism, and homestays, creating employment in the rural areas and sharing the benefits of tourism at the grassroots level (MoCTCA, 2008).

Rani Mahal is the most famous tourist site having a high potential for ecotourism in Palpa. There is a pond, temple, and garden with 56 feet wide and 112 feet height palace with a panoramic view of nature (BSP, 2014). Rani Mahal and surrounding places of ethnic groups, local food, flora and fauna are offering several ecotourism activities. In addition, water tourism (rafting, boating, and fishing) is likely to have great potential for ecotourism in the Rani Mahal surrounding area. Likewise, observing the agricultural farms in nearby Sutuka and Chherlung villages also have a high potential for ecotourism. However, still there are no studies carried out on the possibilities for ecotourism development in Rani Mahal area. In this regard, the study has aimed to study the possibility of ecotourism development in Rani Mahal area, Palpa district.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction of Study Area

The Rani Mahal is located in Tansen Municipality ward no. 13 of Palpa district, Lumbini Province of Nepal. The Rani Mahal is also known as the "Taj Mahal of Nepal". This palace is located on the river bank of Kali Gandaki which is around 12 km north from the Tansen city (Figure 1). The palace has built on a rocky outcrop on the banks of the Kali Gandaki River. It has been said that Khadga Shamser named Rani Ban (Forest) to the adjoining forest area and Rani Ghat near to the Rani Mahal. The palace is located around 200 m in elevation from sea level. Palpa is also called the "younger brother of Kathmandu Valley" (DTC, 2013). The district is also located nearby the birthplace of Lord Gautam Buddha, which is about 85 km distance from Lumbini, about 396 km from Kathmandu and 120 km from Pokhara city.

The Rani Mahal was built by the General of Palpa, Khadga Shamser Rana in 1893 to his wife's (Tej Kumari Devi) memory (Rana, 2019). He hired architects from abroad to make an impressive building structure in his wife's memory. To make a monument of love, Khadga Shamser hired a skilled British architect who was living in India, where it was taken five years to complete the Mahal. Recently, the Rani Mahal has been developed as a palace museum.

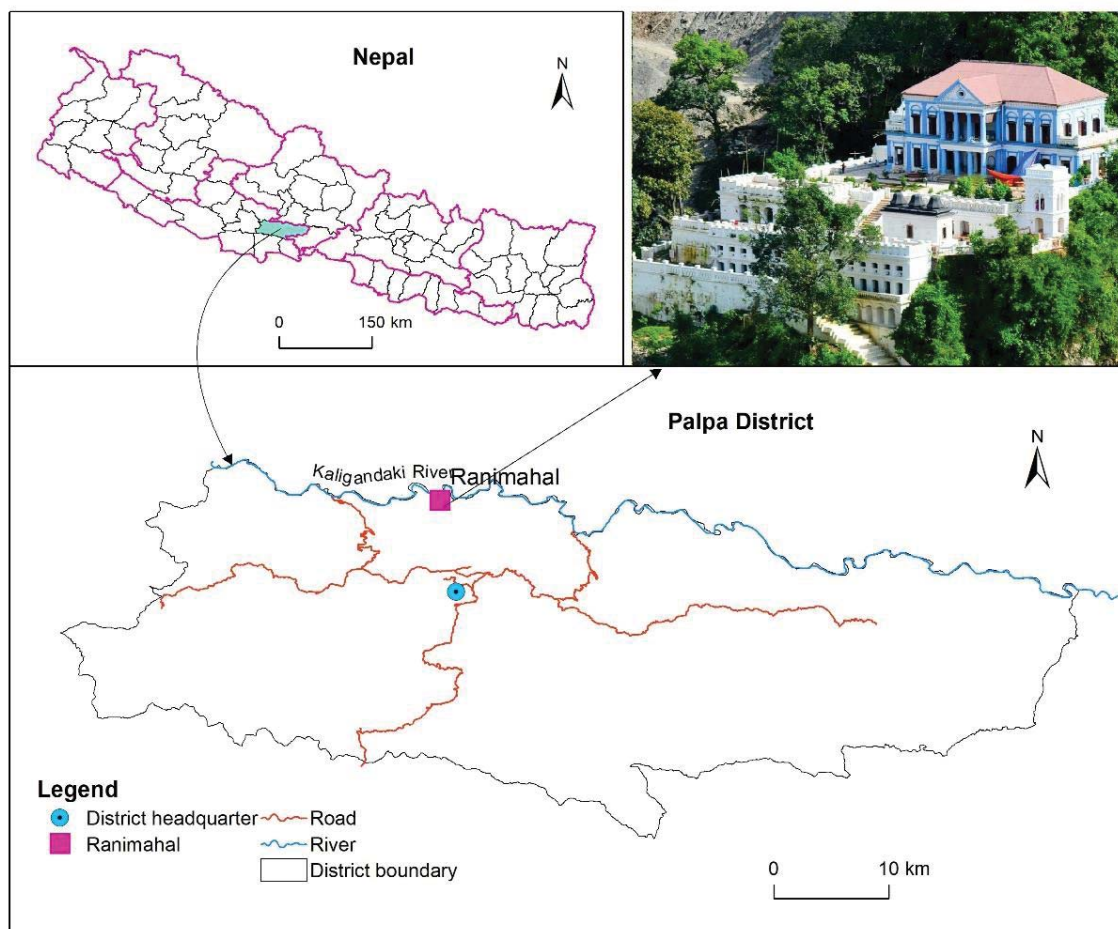


Figure 1. Location of the Rani Mahal in Palpa District

2.2 Data Collection

In order to get information on tourism destinations, tourism activities, and ecotourism potentials in Rani Mahal area and nearby, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted during fieldwork. In total, five FGDs were conducted in various places in the district. Tansen municipality office, Rani Mahal/ Ranighat, Baugha Gumha (Magar Homestay), Bagnaskali rural municipality office and Dailathun- Bote village (Bagnaskali Rural Municipality-7) were made for FGD. The FGD participants were taken as municipality/rural municipality chairman, vice-chairman, officers, national actors, businessmen, homestay owners, and tourism-related persons.

Likewise, KIIs also were conducted during fieldwork. Local leaders, ward chairman, officers, intellectuals, hotel owners, homestay owners, teachers/head teachers, museum officers, homestay chairman, local educated person, tourism/ecotourism experts, businessmen, etc., were taken as KII in the study. A total of 38 KII were taken from various places in the study area. Mainly, KII participants were made from Tansen, Ranighat, Satuka (Kaligandaki rural municipality, Syangja), Awal and Baugha Gumha (Tansen Municipality-13). Further, socioeconomic data, local culture, and festival data were collected from various secondary sources.

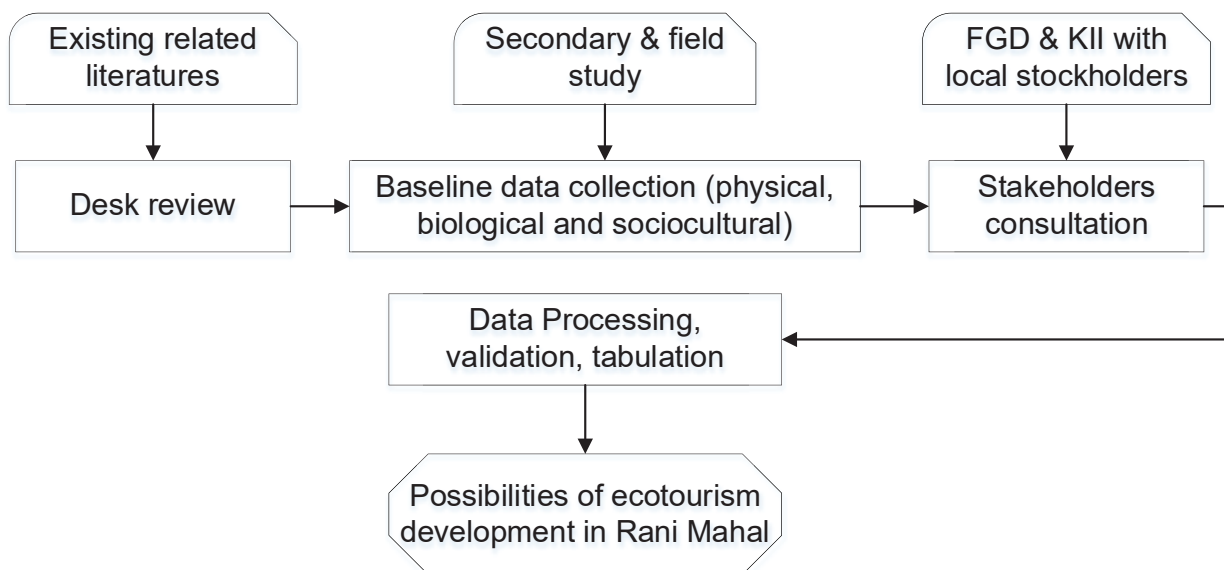


Figure 2. The Methodological Framework of the Study

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Tourism Destinations in Palpa

There are various religious, cultural, and historical places and palaces within the Palpa district. Likewise, historically significant buildings, temples, churches, mosques and other religious sites and archaeologically important areas are found within the district. Based on field study and secondary data, this study found various types of tourist sites within the district and nearby Rani Mahal (Figure 3).

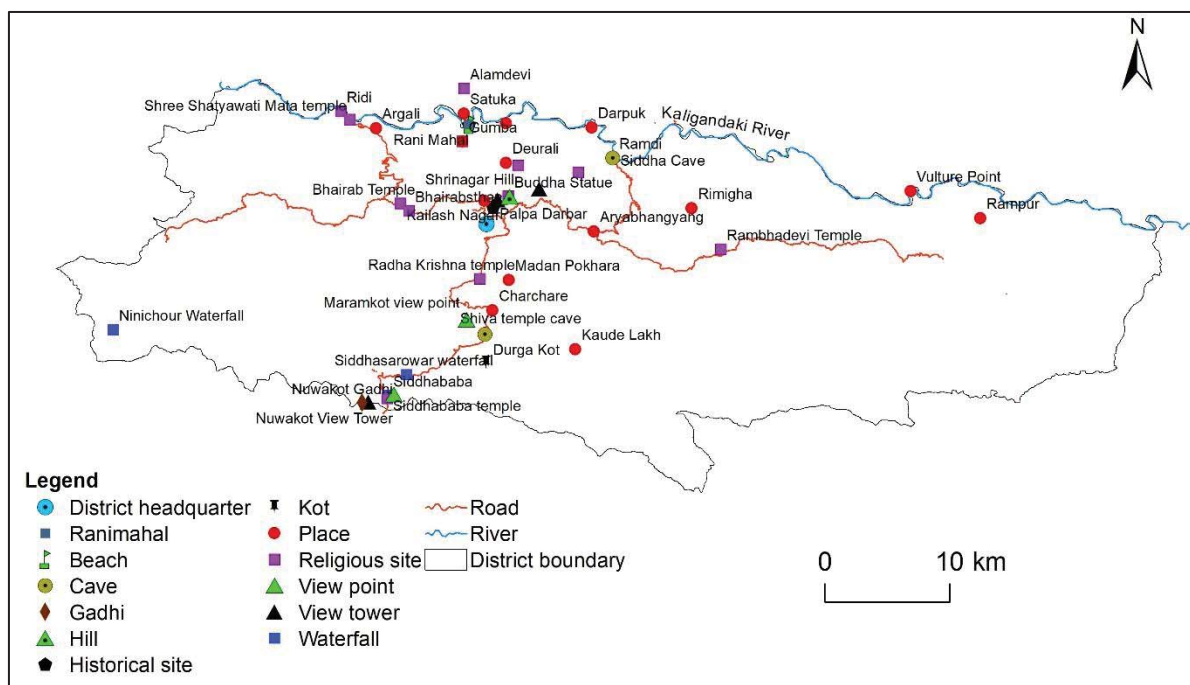


Figure 3. Tourist Sites in Palpa District

3.1.1 The Main Purpose of Visiting Rani Mahal

Based on field study, mainly tourists (domestic and international) used to come to visit Rani Mahal and the museum. This study has ranked to the responses of purposes. Likewise, picnic, rafting and refreshment are also the main purposes of visiting in Rani Mahal area (Figure 4). Similarly, only

a few visitors come to Rani Mahal for other purposes such as understanding history, shooting, beach activities, campfires, fishing, funeral, and marriage.

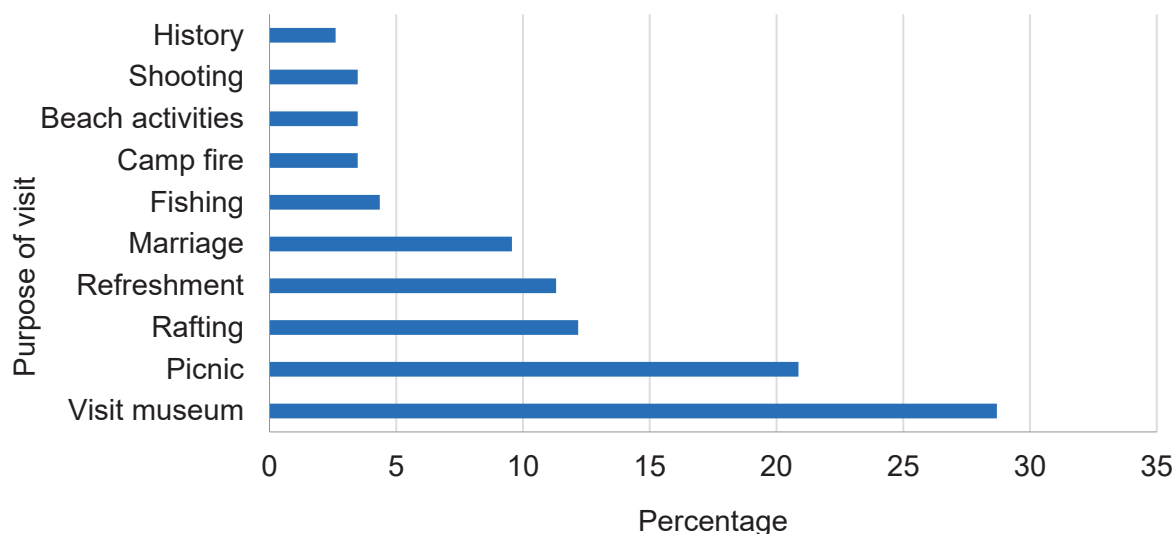


Figure 4. Purpose of Visit Rani Mahal

3.1.2 Existing Tourism Facilities in Rani Mahal area

Based on KII and FGD, this study was surveyed the tourism facilities in the Rani Mahal area. This study has tabulated the rank of facilities. In physical facilities, this study was asked mainly about accommodation (hotel, resort, and homestay), transportation, communication and electricity in the Rani Mahal area. Based on the study, still, homestay facility is insufficient in the Rani Mahal area. Likewise, other facilities in the Rani Mahal area are moderate only. There are not sufficient facilities under the physical facilities (Figure 5). To stay tourist in the Rani Mahal area, there are only a few small local hotels and few restaurants for food and lodging. Likewise, there are no public transportation facilities from Tansen to Rani Mahal. Visitors can visit by hired vehicles. To get physical facilities, tourists need to go Tansen city. Likewise, the service facilities such as Banking facilities/ ATM, tourist guide, health service facilities are found lacking in Rani Mahal area (Figure 6).

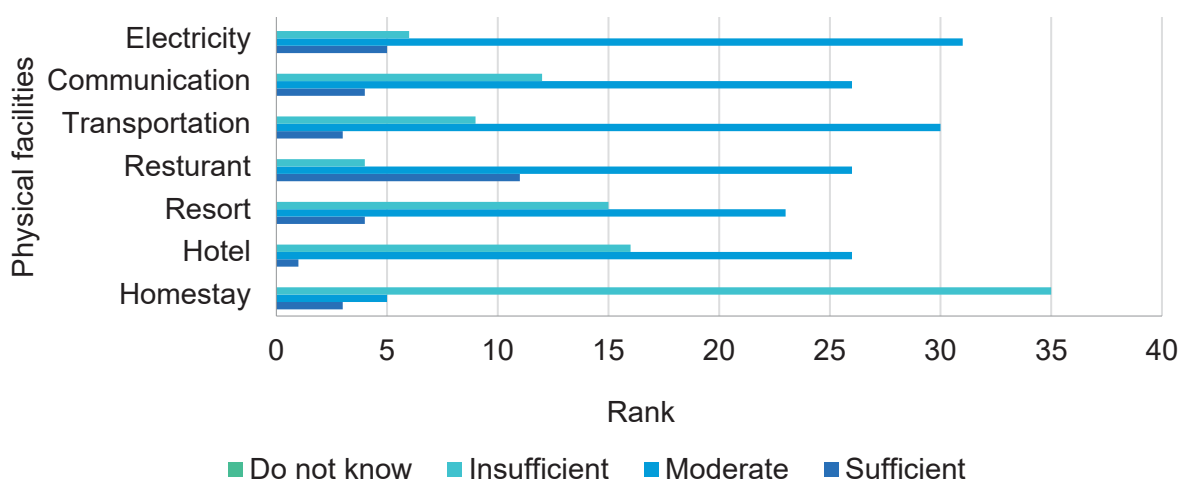


Figure 5. Physical Facilities in Rani Mahal Area

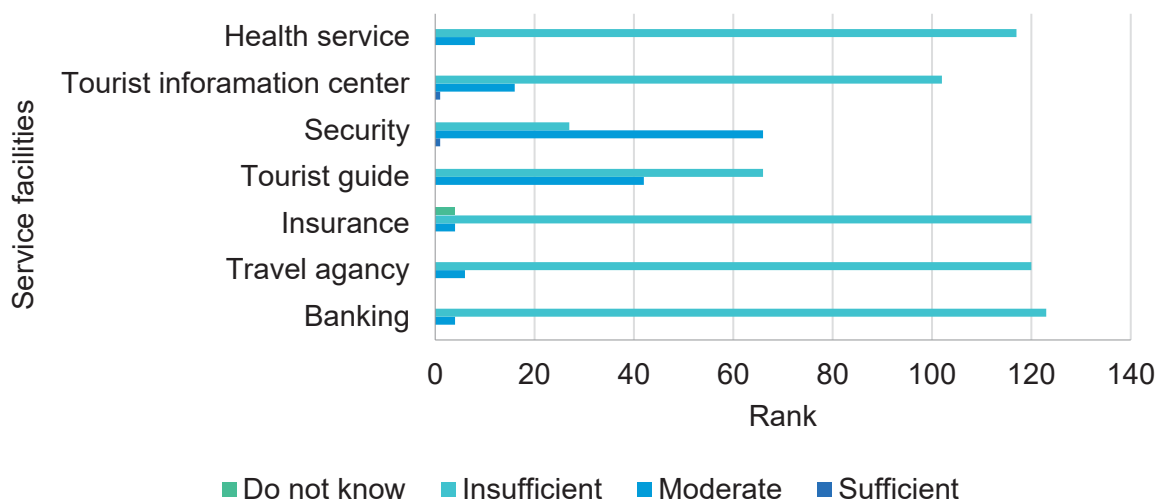


Figure 6. Service Facilities in Rani Mahal Area

3.2 Possibilities for ecotourism development in Rani Mahal area

There are various tourist sites nearby the Rani Mahal area. However, some ecotourism activities can be done with almost zero environmental impact in the Rani Mahal area. Mainly, water based tourism activities (rafting, boating, and fishing), hiking, and homestay are found suitable places around the Rani Mahal area. From Jan 15, 2022 to Jun 20, 2022, a total number of 42,237 visitors, including domestic and international, visited the Rani Mahal and museum. From Jan 16, 2022, Tansen Municipality is responsible for conducting the Rani Mahal and museum.

Table 5: Total Number of Visitors in Rani Mahal

SN	Visitors	Total number	Remarks
1	Domestic	39,265	From Jan 15, 2022 to Jun 20, 2022
2	SAARC	882	
3	Students	2,000	
4	Others	90	
Total		42,237	
The projection for a year		Up to 1,00,000	

Source: Rani Mahal museum ticket officer (Bishnu Bahadur Thapa), June 20, 2022

3.2.1 Water-based Ecotourism Activities

Based on field study, the Kali Gandaki is the river for water activities without impacting the environment. Mainly, rafting, beach activities (volleyball and camping) and boating are the main possibilities in the Rani Mahal area (Figure 7). Beach volleyball is a sand-based outdoor game played between two teams on the sand by the sea, river and stream. In Nepal, there are several rivers and streams can be played beach volleyball for tourism activities. Rani Mahal area could be made a hub of beach volleyball in the future.

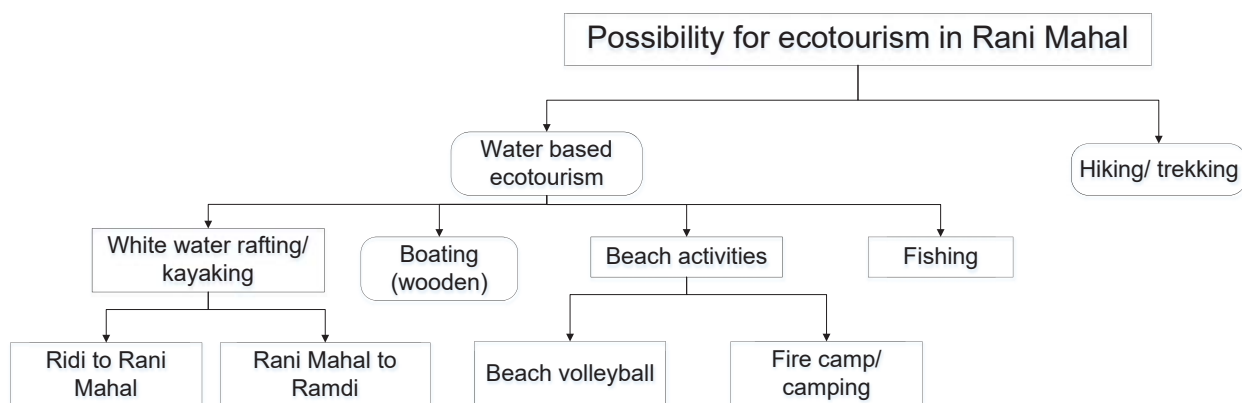


Figure 7. Possibilities of Ecotourism in Rani Mahal Area

3.2.1.1 White Water Rafting from Ridi to Rani Mahal

Rafting and kayaking are highly possible in two sections; Ridi to Rani Mahal and Rani Mahal to Ramdi. Ridi to Rani Mahal is about 13 km long distance (Figure 8). Due to Kali Gandaki Hydropower 'A' project, the volume of water is very low in this section. Most of the water has been used for the hydropower project. Therefore, the water volume and velocity of Kali Gandaki River in this section is very low. Due to low velocity, rafting takes around 2 hours from Ridi to Rani Mahal. Based on rafting guide Padam Rana, yearly, about 12/15 rafting activities used to done in Kali Gandaki River from Ridi to Ramdi. Mainly, the rafting starts from Ridi and ends at Ramdi. But some groups used to stay a night on the beach with a campfire. They use Rani Mahal ground camp or Satuka beach (Syangja side). Satuka beach has enough space for camping and a view of Rani Mahal and is comparatively safe from flood.



Figure 8. Ridi to Ramdi Rafting (Red Color is Low Water Rafting and Blue Color is High Water Rafting)

3.2.1.2 White Water Rafting from Rani Mahal to Ramdi

Based on KII, some groups start from Rani Mahal to Ramdi for rafting (Figure 8). This section has two parts; low-water rafting and high-water rafting. Due to Kali Gandaki Hydropower 'A' project, there is low water rafting from Rani Mahal to Beltari, which is about 8.50 km long. It takes about 1 hours to reach Beltari from Rani Mahal. However, from Beltari to Ramdi, there is high water rafting. The hydropower generates electricity at Beltari then the water velocity gets high in this section. The high water rafting (Beltari to Ramdi) is about 5.44 km long distance (Figure 8), which crosses within an hour. In this section, tourist experiences low to high-water rafting. Overall, from Ridi to Ramdi takes about 4 hours of rafting.

3.2.1.3 Wooden Boating from Rani Mahal to Bote Village

There is Bote (Majhi) community at Dailathum. Based on FGD on villagers, Bote caste is doing wooden boating and fishing profession for their generations. They have their own culture, language and customs. They want to make Bote homestay to preserve their culture and language. They are very professional in fishing and boating. For the traditional wooden boating experience, Bote wants to boat for tourists from Rani Mahal to Bote settlement. It's about 4.5 km to reach Bote settlement from the Rani Mahal (Figure 9).

If conducted such wooden boating from Rani Mahal to Bote village, tourists can take experience about an hour of wooden boating with a view of Kali Gandaki beach, forest and surrounding clean environment. Such water-based ecotourism may support to Bote community, culture and livelihoods and overall economic improvement of this place.



Figure 9. Wooden Boating from Rani Mahal to Bote Village

3.2.2 Beach Volleyball

A national women's beach volleyball tournament was held in Rani Mahal from April 7 to 9, 2022, which was organized by Sanjay Smriti Memorial Foundation. The officials of the organizing committee have said that there is ample potential for this game in most of the river and stream banks of Nepal. The organizer noted a playground of international standards and a jury in Rani Mahal for the competition.

3.2.3 Campfire/ Camping

Camping in and of itself is a sustainable activity in which the person is able to be in nature and enjoy anytime with nature. Camping is only a way to connect with nature and to appreciate the symbiotic relationship. It is sustainable activity; there are ways that the camper can be even more sustainable during their safe camping trip. It is a prime opportunity to learn more about nature and know about how to coexist in a sustainable way with the surrounding natural areas.

Based on the field study, some people used to campfire nearby Rani Mahal. Many visitors come to stay a night to refresh and to take on new experiences in a campfire. There are several places for camping along with Kali Gandaki River, mainly including Rami Mahal beach (also called Tej Kumari Beach), Satuka (Figure 10) and many more. During the camping, visitors can do a physical activity that involves a variety of activities such as short hiking, constructing the tent, gathering firewood and sometimes even swimming, climbing or other cardio-rich activities. Based on KII, visitors used to come to stay camping from Tansen elsewhere by bus as well as doing rafting from

Ridi. Visitors mostly like to stay Satuka, Syangja (across the Rani Mahal). Visitors can view and observe Rani Mahal and other panoramic views.



Figure 10. Nearest Suitable Camping Site from Rani Mahal

3.2.4 Fishing

Traditional fishing by net and hook are the main profession of Bote/Majhi community. They have been doing such activities since their forefathers for their livelihoods. According to FGD, there are several fish species found in Kali Gandaki River. Sucker head, Mahaseers, Bhoti and Hile, Singhi, Loaches, Faketa, Catfishes, Sidra and Pothi are major species of fishes found in the river, which are economically important species. Mainly Bote follows the sustainability of fishing such as they catches only matured big fishes. They do not catch baby fish and endangered species of fish found in the Kali Gandaki River. In addition, they do not use electric current or poison to kill fish in the river.

3.2.5 Hiking

Trekking/ hiking or eco-trekking is often defined as a form of tourism that is environment friendly tourism. There are various places that have trekking/ hiking routes, but few are very important to ecotourism nearby Rani Mahal.

3.2.5.1 Rani Mahal to Baugha Gumha Magar Homestay hiking

The hiking route is about a 2 km distance between Rani Mahal to Baugha Gumha, Magar Homestay (Figure 11). The route lies on a highly steep slope, which is a kind of adventure hike. Most of the parts of the route have been made with stone steps. After walking for about 2.5 hours, Magar homestay offers local culture, foods and cultural dance. A total of 178 households belong to Magar community in the village and only a household belongs to Brahmin. There is a community homestay involved of 25 households. There are cultural dances Jiwai Mama, Panche Baja, Kathe Jhamre Nach, Krishna Charitra are the main cultural activities in this village. The Panche Baja (five musical instruments) and their rhythm also have unique and typical instruments of this locality. In addition, tourists have the chance to test local foods, learn the local language, dress and can learn many local activities.

During the hike, tourists can observe nature, Kali Gandaki River, typical villages, dark green forest and many tree species along with several wild species. Based on locals' experiences, tourists can see several wild species of including monkeys (langur having black faces with a long tails),

porcupines, birds, leopards, tigers, deer, etc. In addition, tourists can test edible many wild fruits on hiking. Due to the under-construction of Kali Gandaki corridor road, the hiking route has been partially damaged by landslides, which need to repair to conduct the hiking route.



Figure 11. Hiking route from Rani Mahal to Baugha Gumba, Alamdevi, Argali and Ridi

3.2.5.2 Rani Mahal to Alamdevi Temple Hiking

The Alamdevi temple is located in Kali Gandaki rural municipality, Syangja district, which is popular destination for religious tourism. Mainly, the temple is the main god of the Shah dynasty (Nepal's former kings), where Shah family used to visit the temple for worship. It is believed that Alamdevi fulfills all the wishes of her devotees if visitors visit temple with a good heart. There is no statute or the idol of a goddess inside the temple. Instead of that, a tree named Bhimsen Pati is inside the main temple. All the devotees worship that religious tree and take blessings. It is believed that the tree is more than a hundreds of years old. According to the locals, the tree is the same as it was 100 years ago; no changes in the tree have been noticed in several decades.

Religious tourism can boost by hiking from Rani Mahal to Alamdevi. It is about 5.5 km north of Rani Mahal to Alamdevi (Figure 11), where it may take about 3-4 hours to reach the temple. During the hike, tourists can see several wild animals, wild fruits and testing of local foods. Magar is the predominant caste in this place, which has its typical culture, customs, rituals, and foods. Among them, Maruni dance, Lakhe, Ghatu, Nachari, Kheli, Salejo, Rodi, etc., are the main culture of this locality. Tourists can enjoy this culture as well as typical local organic fresh foods.

3.2.5.3 Rani Mahal to Argali- Ridi hiking

The Rani Mahal to Ridi is about 13 km Kali Gandaki River corridor hiking, which is about half a day hiking through Rani Mahal, Chherlung, and Arghali village (Figure 11). Argali village is famous for its diverse agricultural practices. Argali durbar, Austa Bhuza temple, Badrinath temple, Siddha cave, etc., are found along the hiking route. Argali is considered the Banaras of Nepal. This is where Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shamsar spent the last days of his life. The remains of the palace can still be seen in Argali. Argali is situated close to Kali Gandaki River and Ridi. It is about 38 km from Tansen.

Ridi is a pilgrimage site of cultural and religious significance, which is known as Ruru Kshetra. Located in the tri-junction of Gulmi, Palpa and Syangja districts. Mukund Sen, the first king of Palpa, discovered the deity of God Rishikesh while having a holy dip in Kali Gandaki River and established the temple of Rishikesh. It is believed to obtain Moksha if one takes a holy bath on Kali Gandaki River for three days and worships in Rishikesh Temple. The Rishikesh Complex of Ruru Kshetra is on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage tentative list. Ridi is famous for Saligrams (ammonite fossils) that are

found in the riverbank. For decades, Ridi Mela (festival) has been a fair held in this region for three days during the festival of Maghe Sankranti.

3.3 Disaster and Waste Management Practices in Rani Mahal Area

Preparedness for disasters: There is an early warning system for floods in Kali Gandaki River. There are already installed alarming instruments for the flood to be alert and move to a safer place. The alarming sounds give at least an hour (4-5 km distance) before coming flood. During the rainy season, Kali Gandaki River floods come upto the stairs of Rani Mahal. In addition, the nearest Barandi Khola (adjoining to Rani Mahal) is most dangerous for the nearest few small hotels, which brings big boulders, floods, and sands, which yearly washout some temporary structures.

There is not enough open space for evacuation centers for possible hazards. Only Kali Gandaki beach (Satuka beach) has a large area for an evacuation center. The Tej Kumari beach is very small with a high risk of floods. There are not found dumping/garbage sites to manage garbage produced by visitors during the visit to Rani Mahal. In addition, public toilets are also not found around the Rani Mahal. A small public toilet is found in the Rani Mahal, which is very tiny and not well managed.

4. Suggestions for the Development of Ecotourism in Rani Mahal Area

There is highly potential for ecotourism development in the Rani Mahal area. However, there needs to be improved accommodation, transportation, and tourist information centers, promotion of local entrepreneurship, security, and health services. There is essential to make more attractions for tourists so that they spend at least a day in Rani Mahal area.

4.1 Homestay

The accommodations facilities such as homestays, hotel, and resorts are not enough for tourists for night stay in Rani Mahal area. Tourists should return Tansen city or need to go others places for night staying. Based on the field study, Bote (Majhi) village, Dailathun and Satuka village (Syangja) are suitable places for homestay conduction (Figure 12, and 13). To reach Bote village, tourists can walk around 3 km (about an hour) along the Kali Gandaki corridor with a view of beautiful nature. During the walk to Bote village, tourists can see the Kali Gangaki beach, forest, various wild species, birds and various types of trees as well as wild fruits. Alternatively, the Bote community aimed to conduct wooden boating from Rani Mahal to their homestay. The community has a traditional fishing system to catch fish for their livelihoods. Since their forefathers, they have had only allowed conducting wooden boats in Kali Gandaki River.



Figure 12. Bote Village, Dailathun

Likewise, Satuka village also has a high potential for homestays. After visiting Rani Mahal, tourists can walk about 25 minutes to reach Satuka village (Figure 13). There are mixed communities and have diverse types of agricultural practices with tunnel farming, drip and tunnel irrigation farming systems. In addition, visitors can view Rani Mahal, Kali Gandaki River and other environments. Tourists can hike from Satuka village to Alamdevi temple.

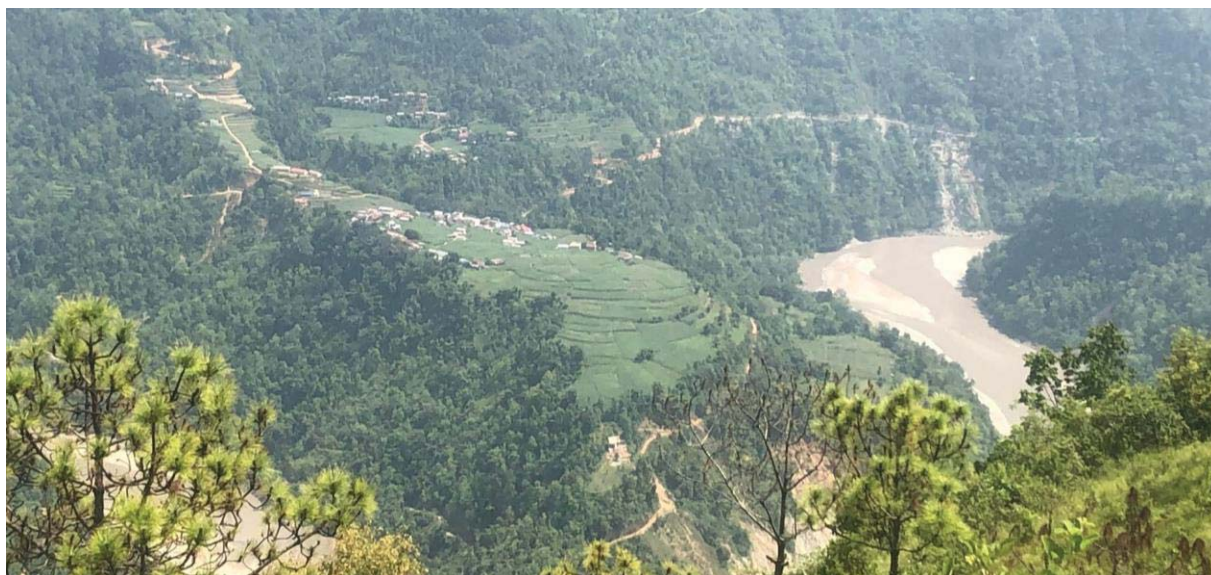


Figure 13. Satuka Village, Syangja

4.2 Beach Activities

Beach activities such as beach volleyball, football, camping/ campfire, and wooden boating are possible nearby Rani Mahal area. There is already started beach volleyball, which needs to be promoted and continued in the future. Not only volleyball, football also should be started soon in the coming future. Tourists can observe evening and night views of the colorful Rani Mahal. In addition, tourists can sunbathe and try fishing in Kali Gandaki River while camping nearby the river. The Rani Mahal area is also famous for picnic spot. There should manage picnic spots including drinking water, public toilets and rest houses. The river is also famous for Saligram; people can search it for souvenir gifts for their relatives. Further, visitors can take photographs of the sunset with the background of Rani Mahal.

4.3 Disaster Management

The Rani Mahal beach is at risk of flood. The Kali Gandaki River and Barandi Stream (Khola) have always been at risk for Rani Mahal beach and risk for surrounding structures. The floods and sands come to a high level, which destroys the Rani Mahal garden and parking area and temporary restaurant (khaja ghar). The check dam should be built soon to control floods. The check dam can be used to modify the velocity of river/ stream flows, reduce erosion and also traps amounts of channel sediment (Khonkaen & Cheng, 2011).

4.4 Converting into Heritage Hotel

There are several former palaces turned into luxury hotels in the world. Such as Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, India, Çiragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul, Villa d'Este, Lake Como, Italy, Aman Summer Palace, Beijing, China, Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad, India, Gritti Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Venice, Four Seasons Hotel Lion Palace, St. Petersburg, Russia. The first heritage hotel in India was Ajit Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur built in 1927, which has been played a vital role as the pioneer "Heritage Hotel" in India (Kantikarn, 2016). Likewise, The Gangtey Palace is the only palace in Bhutan also converted into a heritage hotel, where visitors can enjoy the royal experience, old architecture, and the surrounding beautiful natural environment. Not only

in other countries, Nepal also has some hotels that were palaces in historical times, such as Shanker hotel, which is a luxury heritage hotel that opened in 1964. The former palace was made for General Jit Shumsher Rana (Southern Commanding General of the Army). The hotel (Lazimpat durbar) is characterized by exquisite and authentic objects d'art with carved windows displayed in the lobby bar that are over 200 years old. In addition, Heritage Garden (Shant Bhawan), Hotel Yak and Yati (former Lal durbar), Keshar Mahal, Hotel Annapurna (Seto durbar), and Babar Mahal Villa (Babar Mahal).

4.4.1 Rani Mahal as a Heritage Hotel

Likewise to the existing former durbar hotels in Nepal as well as other countries, the Rani Mahal also can be opened as a 'heritage hotel' by preserving its historical, archeological, religious and cultural significance. The hotel can be made a 'honeymoon destination'. It can be aspected that if Rani Mahal is developed as a heritage hotel and promoted in India and other countries, a lot of tourists can be visited. Nepal tourism board is already concerned to make it a heritage hotel without damaging its real structure and style. Board has aspected to do water-based tourism activities such as rafting, swimming, fishing in the Kali Gandaki River in front of the palace and hiking around the Rani Mahal. Similarly, horse riding also can be created on the beach. The local people also desired to convert into luxurious hotel. If the Rani Mahal is turned into a hotel, it can provide employment to the locals, direct revenue from folk dance/ songs performance as well as supply of local products such as vegetables, fruits, and dairy products. Moreover, it is expected to have a positive impact on the livelihoods of the local people.

4.4.2 Argali Durbar as Hotel/ Resort

Arghali is known as the Banares of Nepal where Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher spent the last days of his life (Rana, 2019). It is about 38 km from Tansen. The Argali durbar is abandoned and the dilapidated situation now, which also can be turned into a hotel/ resort or homestay with the renovation of the building. The Durbar has become dilapidated day by day in the absence of the owning body, which needs proper planning and conservation to increase tourism activities.. With the establishment of a hotel/ resort, it also can be done various tourism activities, such as hiking, and water-based tourism, which promote the local foods, culture, history and overall positive impact on livelihoods and environments.

4.5 Others

There are not enough tourist information centers in Rani Mahal. The tourist sites, homestays, hiking routes, and other tourist destinations (religious and historical sites) and travel details and available facilities should be kept in Rani Mahal. For example, there are various tourist sites nearby Rani Mahal that needs to be promoted. Among them, Baikunthe waterfall also has a high possibility of canyoning. The Baikunthe waterfall is located about 1 km south of Rani Mahal to Tansen highway. It is a nearly 100 feet tall waterfall, where waterfalls on a very steep (about 80-90 degrees) slope. It could be adventure canyoning in this area. Internationally, canyoning is one of the most popular adventure sports and recreational activities. Likewise, based on field study and collected suggestions, recreational areas such as parks, children's parks, fun parks, and souvenir shops need to be kept in the Rani Mahal area to keep tourists a little longer in the Rani Mahal area. Likewise, there should build a *Bibaha Mandap* (wedding ceremonies house) nearby Rani Mahal. Based on FGD and KII, the ghat (funeral place) and the recreational area should be separated and kept a distance. Ghat needs to be placed down parts of the Rani Mahal area.

5. Conclusions

This study has analyzed the possibilities of ecotourism development in Rani Mahal area. This study concluded that ecotourism activities such as white water rafting, beach activities, homestays, and hiking are found highly possible in Rani Mahal area. The white water rafting from Ridi to Ramdi, and beach volleyball in Rani Mahal area are found to be highly possible for ecotourism.

Similarly, Bote village and Satuka and Baugha Gumha are also found suitable areas for homestays. Likewise, hiking from Rani Mahal to Baugha Gumha, Alamdevi temple, Argali and Ridi have great potential for ecotourism activities. In addition to these tourism activities, the conservation of Rani Mahal palace/museum to heritage hotel also likely to be a popular destinations with good earnings from visitors.

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