

Tourism Trends and Analysis: Insights from Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021

Laxmi Kanta Sharma

Associate Professor

Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur

Email: laxmikantas@gmail.com

Vishal Paudel

Tribhuvan University; Email: revishalsearch94@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3475-2249>

Abstract

Tourism is a cornerstone of Nepal's economy, contributing significantly to GDP and employment. This study investigates tourism trends from 1995 to 2021, focusing on tourist arrivals, demographics, and economic impacts using data from the "Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021" report. The study reveals a peak in tourist arrivals at 1.2 million in 2019, followed by a severe decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw arrivals drop to 230,000 in 2020 and 150,000 in 2021. Despite this downturn, there was an increase in the average length of stay, indicating a shift in travel behavior. The research also documents a decrease in holiday visits, trekking, and pilgrimage activities during the pandemic, while noting a relative increase in tourism-related enterprises. The findings highlight the need for sustainable tourism strategies and investments in infrastructure to revitalize the sector and support economic recovery. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders to navigate post-pandemic challenges and foster long-term growth in Nepal's tourism sector.

Keywords: Tourism trends, Economic impact, COVID-19 pandemic, Sustainable development, Tourism recovery

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1. Introduction

Background

Tourism has long been a vital sector for Nepal, renowned for its unique blend of natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. The country is home to eight of the world's ten highest peaks, including Mount Everest, which has made it a premier destination for trekkers and mountaineers (Thapa, 2004). The Kathmandu Valley, with its ancient temples and palaces, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that attracts cultural enthusiasts from around the globe (Pradhan, 2014).

The origins of Nepal's tourism industry can be traced back to the 1950s when the country opened its doors to foreign visitors. Since then, tourism has steadily grown, playing a significant role in the nation's development (Shrestha & Shrestha, 2012).

Additionally, Nepal boasts other significant attractions such as Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, which draws pilgrims and history enthusiasts alike (Bhandari, 2019). The sacred temple of Pashupatinath is a major site for Hindu pilgrims (Dhakal, 2014). Janakpur, known for its connection to the Hindu epic Ramayana, is another cultural treasure. Beyond these historical and cultural sites, Nepal's abundant natural resources and breathtaking landscapes continue to captivate tourists from around the world (Gurung, 2017).

Importance of Tourism to Nepal's Economy

Tourism is a cornerstone of Nepal's economy, significantly contributing to foreign exchange earnings, employment, and regional development (MoCTCA, 2021). The sector supports a wide array of industries, including hospitality,

transportation, and local crafts, making it a crucial driver of economic diversification (MoCTCA, 2021). In 2021, despite the global impact of COVID-19, tourism remained a significant source of income and employment for many Nepalese (NRB, 2021). The industry's contribution to GDP and its role in infrastructure development, such as improved transportation networks and communication facilities, underscore its importance (WTTC, 2021). Additionally, tourism fosters cultural exchange and global awareness of Nepal's unique natural and cultural assets, further enhancing its international reputation (UNESCO, 2021).

Statement of Problem

Tourism is a significant contributor to Nepal's economy, providing employment, generating income, and promoting cultural exchange. However, the tourism sector has faced substantial challenges and fluctuations over the years, particularly due to external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite its importance, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of tourism trends to understand the evolving patterns of tourist arrivals, their behavior, and the economic implications for Nepal. The average length of stay of tourists in Nepal has fluctuated over the years, influenced by factors such as political instability, natural disasters, and global health crises. The tourism sector has had a profound economic impact on Nepal, with foreign exchange earnings being a major benefit. The average expenditure per visitor provides insights into the financial contributions of tourists (MoCTCA, 2021). The report indicates that the purposes of visits have evolved, with an increasing number of tourists coming for trekking and adventure activities, while pilgrimage and holiday visits have also shown significant trends. Analysis of international and domestic flight movements and passenger statistics reveals the critical role of transportation infrastructure in supporting tourism. These dynamics are essential for understanding how tourists' access and travel within Nepal (MoCTCA, 2021).

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing data from the "Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021" report. Specifically, the study seeks to understand the trends in tourist arrivals, the length of stay, the purposes of visits, the economic impact, and the transportation dynamics related to tourism.

The study ponders over the following research questions:

- Q1. How have the patterns and trends in tourist arrivals in Nepal evolved from 1995 to 2021, particularly considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Q2. How have the average length of stay and primary purposes of visits (e.g., holiday, pilgrimage, trekking) of tourists in Nepal changed over time, and what factors have influenced these trends?
- Q3. What has been the economic impact of tourism on Nepal in terms of foreign exchange earnings and average expenditures per visitor, and what insights can be drawn about trekking and expedition activities and trends in tourism-related enterprises?
- Q4. How do the data on international and domestic flight movements and passenger statistics relate to tourism trends in Nepal, and what do they reveal about transportation dynamics in relation to tourism?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of tourism trends in Nepal, utilizing data from the "Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021" report. The primary objectives are:

1. To analyze patterns and trends in tourist arrivals from 1995 to 2021, with a particular focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To investigate the average length of stay of tourists and the factors influencing these trends over the years. Additionally, this objective seeks to examine the primary purposes of visits, such as holiday, pilgrimage, and trekking, and how these purposes have evolved over time.
3. To assess the economic impact of tourism on Nepal, focusing on foreign exchange earnings and average expenditures per visitor. This objective also aims to provide insights into trekking and expedition activities, and trends in tourism-related enterprises.
4. To evaluate data on international and domestic flight movements, as well as passenger statistics. This analysis will help understand the transportation dynamics and how they relate to tourism trends.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state and future prospects of tourism in Nepal. The insights gained will be invaluable for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and academic researchers, enabling informed decision-making and strategic planning for sustainable tourism development.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Review: Sustainable Tourism Development

The concept of sustainable tourism, as outlined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), emphasizes the need to balance economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability. Bramwell and Lane (1993) discussed the principles of sustainable tourism, including minimizing environmental impacts, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting local economic benefits. Sustainable Tourism has long been a significant driver of economic development and cultural exchange. Research in this field spans various aspects, including economic impacts, socio-cultural effects, environmental consequences, and policy implications.

Economic Impacts

Studies highlight the role of tourism in economic growth, employment generation, and infrastructure development. For instance, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) reported that tourism accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and supported 319 million jobs in 2018. Moreover, tourism expenditure can have a multiplier effect, stimulating growth in related sectors such as retail, transportation, and hospitality (UNWTO, 2018).

Socio-Cultural Effects

Tourism can foster cultural exchange and understanding, but it can also lead to cultural commodification and loss of authenticity. Research by Smith (2009) emphasized the dual nature of tourism, where it promotes cultural preservation on one hand but may also lead to cultural dilution and commercialization. The impacts on host communities are complex, influencing social structures, lifestyles, and cultural expressions.

Environmental Consequences

Tourism's environmental footprint is substantial, including issues like pollution, resource depletion, and habitat destruction. Gössling and Peeters (2015) discussed how tourism contributes to carbon emissions, with air travel being a significant contributor. Sustainable tourism practices and eco-tourism have been proposed as solutions to mitigate these adverse effects (Weaver, 2006).

Policy Implications

Effective tourism policies are crucial for balancing the benefits and drawbacks of tourism. Dwyer et al. (2009) highlighted the importance of integrated tourism planning and management, involving stakeholders at all levels. Policies should aim at promoting sustainable tourism, protecting cultural heritage, and ensuring community involvement.

Theoretical framework

The analysis of tourism trends and impacts is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks. These frameworks provide a structured approach to understanding the complexities of tourism and its multifaceted impacts.

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

Butler (1980) proposed the TALC model, which describes the stages of tourism development in a destination: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and potential decline or rejuvenation. This model helps in understanding the dynamic nature of tourism development and the need for strategic planning to sustain tourism growth.

Doxey's Irritation Index (Irridex)

Doxey (1975) developed the Irridex model to explain the social impacts of tourism on host communities. According to this model, residents' attitudes towards tourists evolve from euphoria to apathy, irritation, and antagonism as tourism development intensifies. This framework is useful for analyzing community responses to tourism and the importance of managing tourism growth to maintain positive host-guest relationships.

Tourism Systems Theory

Leiper (1979) introduced the tourism systems approach, which views tourism as an open system comprising generating regions, transit routes, and destination regions. This holistic perspective helps in understanding the interconnections between different components of the tourism system and the external factors influencing tourism dynamics.

3. Data and Methodology

Data collection

The report collected data from multiple sources to ensure its accuracy and comprehensiveness. Data on tourist arrivals, length of stay, and demographics were obtained from immigration records maintained at various entry points, including Tribhuvan International Airport and land border crossings. Surveys conducted among tourists provided additional insights into the purpose of visit, average expenditures, and satisfaction levels. Information on economic impact and revenue generation was compiled from official reports and records maintained by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation and the Nepal Rastra Bank. Data from hotels, travel agencies, and trekking companies were gathered to assess the operational aspects and trends within the tourism industry.

Methodology

The study on tourism trends in Nepal employs a variety of statistical methods and analysis techniques to delve into the dynamics of tourism in the country. Trend analysis is utilized to identify patterns and changes in tourist arrivals, length of stay, and other key indicators over the years 1995 to 2021, shedding light on significant trends and shifts in tourism dynamics.

Comparative analysis is also utilized, comparing different years, demographic groups, and purposes of visits to understand variations and similarities. For instance, the study examines tourist arrivals before and after the COVID-19 pandemic to assess its impact.

Basic statistical measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and percentage changes are employed for descriptive statistics, providing a clear and concise representation of tourism statistics. This aids in summarizing and describing the data effectively.

Moreover, graphical representation through graphs, and tables plays a crucial role in visualizing the data, making it easier to interpret and analyze trends. Visual aids help in identifying patterns that may not be immediately apparent from raw data.

By utilizing these methodologies, the study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of tourism trends in Nepal, offering insights that can inform policy decisions and strategic planning for sustainable tourism development.

4. Results

Tourist arrival and average length of stay in Nepal (1995-2021)

Tourist Arrival

The trend analysis of tourist arrivals in Nepal from 1995 to 2021 reveals several significant patterns and shifts. Total tourist arrivals exhibited a steady increase from 1995 onwards, reaching a peak in 2019 with approximately 1.2 million visitors. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact, leading to a sharp decline in tourist numbers in 2020 and 2021, with total arrivals dropping to approximately 230,000 and 150,000, respectively. Regarding arrivals by air and land, the majority of tourists arrived by air throughout the period, with air arrivals following a similar trend to the total arrivals. On the other hand, arrivals by land, though significantly lower in number, showed some fluctuations and also experienced a sharp decline during the pandemic years (Table 1).

The Average Length of Stay

The average length of stay for tourists in Nepal exhibits notable variations over time. Between 1995 and around 2002, the average length of stay fluctuated, with a notable dip to approximately 7.92 days in 2002. Subsequently, post-2002, the average length of stay increased, reaching a peak of 15.5 days in 2021. This increase indicates that while fewer tourists visited during the pandemic, those who did stay longer, possibly due to travel restrictions and quarantine measures. Before the pandemic, the average stay typically ranged from 12 to 13 days. The increase in the average stay during the pandemic years reflects a shift in travel behavior, likely influenced by the global health crisis. Overall, the trend analysis highlights significant growth in Nepal's tourism sector until the global COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a substantial decline in tourist numbers. Nonetheless, the increase in the average length of stay during the pandemic suggests changes in travel patterns, possibly due to travel restrictions, and provides a basis for further research into the factors driving these trends and the pandemic's lasting effects on Nepal's tourism industry.



Figure 1: Tourist arrival and average length of stay

Analysis of tourist distribution by purpose of visit

The analysis of the distribution of tourists by purpose of visit provides valuable insights into the motivations driving tourists to travel to Nepal. This examination focuses on the distribution of tourists by purpose of visit over selected years, highlighting trends and shifts from 1993 to 2021.

Holiday/Pleasure Visits have consistently been the most common reason for visiting Nepal, accounting for 66.8% of all visits in 2021. This category witnessed fluctuations but remained dominant throughout the years. For instance, in 1993, 58.0% of tourists visited for holiday/pleasure, which slightly increased to 70.0% in 2017 before dropping to 66.8% in 2021 due to the pandemic's impact on global travel.

Trekking and Mountaineering, crucial components of Nepal's adventure tourism saw varying levels of interest over the years. In 2021, 10.3% of tourists visited for trekking and mountaineering, significantly lower than the 15.6% in 2020, attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions.

Pilgrimage visits also experienced notable changes. In 2021, 7.4% of tourists visited Nepal for pilgrimage, down from 12.4% in 2020. Notable pilgrimage sites include Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, and Pashupatinath Temple, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

The 'other' category, which includes visits for business, official reasons, conventions/conferences, and unspecified reasons, constituted 15.5% of tourist arrivals in 2021. Business travel, official visits, and conventions/conferences have seen less fluctuation compared to holiday and adventure tourism but still contribute significantly to the overall tourism landscape.

Trends from 1993 to 2021 reveal that while the percentage of tourists visiting for holiday/pleasure remained high, there was a slight decrease in the pandemic years, reflecting the stability of leisure tourism as a significant draw for Nepal. Trekking and Mountaineering saw peaks and troughs correlating with global interest in adventure travel and external factors like natural disasters and global pandemics. Pilgrimage tourism has had a steady presence, though recent years showed a decline due to travel restrictions and health concerns during the pandemic. Business-related travel and other miscellaneous purposes have remained relatively stable, highlighting the diverse motivations of tourists visiting Nepal beyond leisure and adventure.

The analysis of the purpose of visit trends reveals the resilience and changing dynamics of Nepal's tourism sector. While holiday and leisure travel remains predominant, the adventure tourism sector experienced a significant downturn due to the pandemic. Pilgrimage tourism also faced challenges, while the 'Others' category saw an uptick, suggesting evolving travel motivations. Understanding these trends is crucial for developing targeted strategies to bolster tourism in Nepal, ensuring sustainable growth and diversification in the future.

Tourism Revenue

Gross Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism

Tourism has been a significant contributor to Nepal's economy, particularly through foreign exchange earnings. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted this revenue stream.

According to the Nepal Rastra Bank, foreign exchange earnings showed a consistent upward trajectory from 2000/01 to 2018/19. However, this trend sharply reversed in 2019/20 and 2020/21, largely due to the global pandemic. In 2020/21 alone, there was a significant decline of 88.2% in earnings, marking a substantial drop compared to previous years.

Table 1: Gross Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism (2000/01 - 2020/21)

Fiscal Year	Earnings (NRs. Mn)	Earnings (US \$ Mn)	% Change US\$
2000/01	11717.0	158.7	-
2001/02	8654.3	112.6	-29.1
2002/03	11747.7	151.0	34.2
2003/04	18147.4	245.9	62.8
2004/05	10463.8	145.2	-41.0
2005/06	9555.8	132.1	-9.0
2006/07	10125.3	143.6	8.7
2007/08	18653.1	286.9	99.7
2008/09	27959.8	363.7	26.8
2009/10	28138.6	377.5	3.8
2010/11	24610.7	340.5	-9.8
2011/12	30703.8	379.0	11.3
2012/13	34210.6	389.0	2.6
2013/14	46374.9	472.0	21.4
2014/15	53428.6	537.0	13.8
2015/16	41765.3	392.7	-26.9
2016/17	58526.9	551.0	40.3
2017/18	68521.7	656.5	19.1
2018/19	75374.1	667.7	1.7
2019/20	60885.0	523.5	-21.6
2020/21	7266.3	61.6	-88.2

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (2021)

Average Expenses per Visitor per Day

According to the Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021, the average daily expenses per visitor were 65 USD in 2020, but this figure decreased to 48 USD in 2021. This data indicates a significant reduction in visitor spending, reflecting a year-over-year decline. The decrease from 65 USD to 48 USD per day suggests either a reduced spending capacity among visitors or shorter trip durations, likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trends in Tourism-Related Enterprises

The tourism sector in Nepal showed notable resilience and some growth amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic in 2020-2021. Despite the global downturn, star hotels in Nepal expanded significantly by 14.1%, indicating a robust recovery in the hospitality segment. Non-star hotels also saw a slight increase of 1.0%, albeit more modest compared to their star-rated counterparts. The total number of beds available across all types of accommodations grew by 5.5%, reflecting an increase in capacity to meet tourist demands.

Table 2: Number of Tourism-Related Enterprises (2020-2021)

Category	2020	2021	Percentage Change
Star hotels	142	162	14.1
Non-star hotels	1171	1183	1.0
Beds(Total)	45850	48412	5.5
Travel Agencies	3743	3801	1.5
Trekking Agencies	2797	2821	0.9
Tourist Guides	4241	4557	7.5
Trekking Guides	11766	19166	7.9

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. (2021)

Travel agencies and trekking agencies experienced marginal growth rates of 1.5% and 0.9%, respectively. This suggests that despite initial setbacks due to travel restrictions and safety concerns, these sectors adapted and managed to attract visitors, contributing to the overall recovery. The number of tourist guides and trekking guides saw more substantial increases of 7.5% and 7.9%, respectively. This growth underscores the importance of guided tourism experiences in Nepal and their appeal to visitors seeking local expertise and adventure.

In conclusion, the tourism-related enterprises in Nepal demonstrated resilience and adaptability during the pandemic period of 2020-2021. The increases in hotel accommodations, travel services, and guiding personnel indicate positive momentum and readiness to capitalize on future tourism opportunities as global travel conditions continue to stabilize.

Trekking and Expedition

In 2021, Nepal's trekking tourism exhibited distinct seasonal patterns. April emerged as the peak month with 1500 trekkers, driven by optimal weather conditions and high tourist interest. Conversely, the monsoon months (May to July) recorded no trekkers due to heavy rainfall, which typically deters outdoor activities. Trekking activities gradually resumed post-monsoon in August, signaling a cautious return of tourists. The autumn months (September to December) experienced a resurgence, attracting substantial numbers of trekkers (675 to 1060), drawn to Nepal's clear skies and moderate temperatures. December closed the year strongly with 1060 trekkers, emphasizing Nepal's appeal as a premier trekking destination despite seasonal fluctuations.

Table 3: Number of Trekkers by Seasons Month (2021)

Month	Total trekkers
January	700
February	500
March	850
April	1500
May	0
June	0
July	0
August	285
September	675
October	1390
November	912
December	1060

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. (2021).

Data from Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021 reveals significant trends in trekking and expedition activities. In 2020, Nepal recorded 153 expedition teams comprising 447 members. By 2021, these figures surged to 762 teams and 3446 members, indicating a substantial increase. This growth reflects a strong recovery and renewed interest in adventure tourism despite the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic. The rise in expedition teams and members underscores Nepal's enduring allure as a top destination for adventure enthusiasts seeking trekking and mountaineering experiences.

Flight and Passenger Movement

The detailed analysis of international flight and passenger movements from 2011 to 2021 reveals clear seasonal trends and significant variations in monthly data. December consistently emerges as the peak month for both flight and passenger activity, recording the highest numbers with 891 departures, 893 arrivals, totaling 1,784 flights, and 143,277 departing passengers. The total passenger movements in December reach 219,325, indicating the substantial impact of holiday travel on airport operations.

In contrast, May and June represent the lowest points in the annual cycle. May records only 238 departures and 244 arrivals, totaling 482 flights, and has the least passenger traffic with 21,912 departures and 11,119 arrivals, summing up to 33,031 passengers. Similarly, June has the lowest flight movements with 157 departures, 156 arrivals, and a total of 313 flights. Passenger movements in June are notably imbalanced, with only 12,206 departures compared to 53,871 arrivals, reflecting potential variations in travel patterns such as an influx of tourists or specific international events.

Table 4: Number of International Flights and Passenger Movement (2011-2021)

Month	Flight movement			Passenger Movement		
	Departure	Arrival	Total	Out	In	Total
JAN	437	443	880	44,488	52,040	96,528
FEB	413	412	825	42,308	56,100	98,408
MAR	504	503	1,007	55,224	67,569	122,793
APR	554	555	1,109	65,731	76,205	141,936
MAY	238	244	482	21,912	11,119	33,031
JUNE	157	156	313	12,206	53,871	66,077
JULY	263	259	522	24,096	22,787	46,883
AUG	424	424	848	52,715	46,745	99,460
SEPT	548	545	1,093	77,786	65,109	142,895
OCT	687	691	1,378	89,502	104,973	194,475
NOV	762	757	1,519	119,082	76,036	195,118
DEC	891	893	1,784	143,277	76,048	219,325
Total	5,878	5,882	11,760	748,327	708,602	1,456,929

Source: ATSSRO (ATS/SAR Division), Terminal Management Division, Air Cargo Service Division (TIACAO)

On an annual scale, the data shows a balanced overall flow of flights, with a near-equal split of 5,878 departures and 5,882 arrivals, totaling 11,760 flights over the period. Passenger movements also present significant figures, with a total of 748,327 departures and 708,602 arrivals, culminating in 1,456,929 passengers over the eleven years. However, the monthly analysis highlights discrepancies, such as the higher number of arriving passengers in certain months, suggesting that specific periods might attract more inbound tourism or international visitors.

Understanding these trends is vital for effective airport and airline management. The peak month of December requires enhanced resource allocation, including additional staff, increased operational capacity, and improved passenger services to handle the surge in travel demand. Conversely, the off-peak months like May and June offer opportunities for maintenance, strategic planning, and potential promotional activities to boost travel during these quieter periods.

Overall, the data provides valuable insights into seasonal travel patterns, helping optimize flight schedules, improve passenger experiences, and enhance the efficiency of international travel operations. By leveraging these insights, airports and airlines can better manage their resources, anticipate passenger needs, and maintain high standards of service throughout the year.

Passenger Movement Data

Table 5: Domestic Flight and Passenger Movement at TIA (2021)

Year	Flight Movement		Passenger Movement		
	DEP	ARR	TOTAL	IN	OUT
2011	39635	39625	79260	796992	796992
2012	35444	35433	70877	786694	788365
2013	34544	34532	69076	769100	773504
2014	34270	34266	68536	728857	721701
2015	32944	32921	65865	683130	680918
2016	36938	36938	73876	880895	876701
2017	46563	46534	93097	1250102	1138481
2019	47788	47779	95567	1472082	1375704
2019	47307	47396	94640	1711753	1595247
2020	19306	19292	38598	690419	715358
2021	40585	40587	81172	1797403	1779539

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. (2021)

5. Discussion

The normative thesis addresses how tourism should be managed and developed sustainably to balance economic growth, socio-cultural integrity, and environmental preservation. The literature review emphasizes sustainable tourism development, outlining the principles of minimizing environmental impacts, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting local economic benefits (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). It suggests that effective tourism policies are essential for balancing the benefits and drawbacks of tourism, promoting sustainable practices, and ensuring community involvement (Dwyer et al., 2009).

In comparison, the results and findings section provides a real-world context, demonstrating the impacts of tourism on Nepal's economy and society. The sharp decline in tourist arrivals due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding decrease in foreign exchange earnings highlight the vulnerability of Nepal's tourism sector to external shocks (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2021). Despite these challenges, the sector showed resilience, with an increase in star hotels and bed capacity, indicating efforts to strengthen the infrastructure and capacity to meet future tourist demands. This aligns with the normative thesis that sustainable tourism development requires continuous investment in infrastructure and strategic planning to mitigate risks and enhance the sector's resilience.

The descriptive thesis focuses on providing an empirical analysis of the trends and patterns observed in the tourism sector. The literature review discusses the economic impacts of tourism, noting that it contributes significantly to GDP, employment, and infrastructure development (WTTC, 2020). It also highlights the socio-cultural effects, where tourism fosters cultural exchange but can lead to cultural commodification (Smith, 2009). Environmental consequences, such as pollution and resource depletion, are significant concerns, with sustainable practices suggested as mitigation measures (Gössling & Peeters, 2015).

The results and findings section offers detailed empirical data on these aspects. Tourist arrivals in Nepal showed a steady increase from 1995, peaking at 1.2 million in 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic decline in arrivals to 230,000 in 2020 and 150,000 in 2021. This reflects the sector's susceptibility to global health crises. Interestingly, the average length of stay increased during the pandemic, reaching 15.5 days in 2021, suggesting a shift in travel behavior possibly due to travel restrictions and quarantine measures (MoCTCA, 2021). The analysis of the purpose of visits revealed that holiday/pleasure visits remained predominant, but trekking and mountaineering saw a significant downturn during the pandemic. Pilgrimage tourism also faced challenges, reflecting the broader trends discussed in the literature review regarding the socio-cultural impacts of tourism.

Economically, the pandemic caused a significant decline in foreign exchange earnings from tourism, with an 88.2% drop in 2020/21 compared to previous years. The average daily expenses per visitor decreased from 65 USD in 2020 to 48 USD in 2021, indicating either reduced spending capacity or shorter trip durations. This empirical data supports the descriptive thesis by providing a concrete analysis of how tourism trends and economic impacts unfold in response to global events.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The tourism sector in Nepal, historically a significant contributor to the nation's economy, has faced severe challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic but continues to demonstrate resilience. Traditionally, tourism has been crucial for foreign exchange earnings, employment, and regional development, with major attractions like Mount Everest, the Kathmandu Valley, and Lumbini drawing global visitors. According to the "Nepal Tourism Statistics 2021" report, tourist arrivals peaked at 1.2 million in 2019 but dropped to about 230,000 in 2020 and 150,000 in 2021 due to the pandemic. Despite this decline, the average length of stay increased during the pandemic, suggesting a shift towards longer stays amid travel restrictions.

In 2021, holiday and pleasure visits dominated the reasons for travel to Nepal, representing 66.8% of total arrivals, while adventure tourism like trekking and mountaineering saw significant declines. Conversely, the 'other' category, encompassing business and official visits, remained relatively stable, highlighting the diverse motivations behind travel to Nepal. The economic impact of tourism was also evident from a drop in foreign exchange earnings from 2000/01 to 2018/19 due to the pandemic, and a decrease in average daily visitor spending from 65 USD in 2020 to 48 USD in 2021.

Additionally, trekking and expedition activities showed clear seasonal patterns, with the peak season in April and a lack of trekking during the monsoon months from May to July. Passenger and flight data revealed that December is the busiest month, reflecting a consistent annual trend in travel activity. These insights underscore the importance of adapting to seasonal fluctuations and effective management of airport and airline services to accommodate peak periods.

Overall, despite the setbacks caused by the pandemic, the tourism sector remains a vital economic pillar for Nepal. The data from 2021 offers crucial insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers to navigate the recovery phase and strategize for sustainable tourism development. The sector's adaptability and the potential for future growth underscore the importance of continued investment and strategic planning in Nepal's tourism industry.

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