

## PROSPECTS OF ECOTOURISM IN BANDIPUR

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### Abstract

*Ecotourism denotes ecological or environment friendly tourism. This study is confined to Bandipur area, a popular tourist destination in Tanahun district. Bandipur has a great prospect of ecotourism owing to natural beauty, scenic attraction and cultural diversity. It is rich in natural paradise and socio-cultural diversities. Accessibility, pleasant climate, richness of natural beauty, suitable place for view point, high stock of biodiversity and native culture of simple and friendly people make Bandipur unique ecotourism destination.*

Key Words: Tourism, ecotourism, biological diversity, cultural diversity, natural beauty, natural diversity.

### Introduction

Ecotourism is quite popular in tourism literature and tourism activities at present. Ecotourism means many things to many people. To some it means ecologically sound tourism while to others it is synonymous to nature tourism. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people". Likewise, Gurung (2007) states it as ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation. Ecotourism has benefited the environment by stimulating measures to protect physical features of the environment, historic sites and monuments and wildlife. The natural areas are becoming major attraction and constitute the basis for what is now known as nature tourism or 'ecotourism. It should have a minimum impact on resources and bio-physical processes, use little energy, cause little pollutions and contribute to the welfare of local and indigenous population.

Trekking, hiking, bird watching, nature photography, wildlife safaris, camping, mountain climbing, fishing, snorkeling, river rafting and canoeing, and botanical and zoological studies are some of the forms of ecotourism. According to Lars Eric, ecotourism in a single word is "Respect." Respect is the root of everything worthwhile and good- respect to nature, local people, culture, history, community, aspirations and tourist themselves (Cited in Chauhan, 2004). It is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial tourism. In addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy

efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocates of environmental and social responsibility (Tewari, 1994). Ecotourism discourages mass tourism, mass constructions of hotels, tourism resorts and mass activities in fragile areas".

Since 1980s ecotourism has been considered as a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. It includes programs that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. In addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. Ecotourism often appeals to advocate of environmental and social responsibility. The major components of ecotourism include travel, environment, economy, culture, people and development or change. Sustainable development has become prevalent concepts since the mid 980s, and ecotourism has experienced arguably the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry. The popularity represents a change in tourist perceptions, increased environmental awareness, and a desire to explore natural environments.

Ecotourism has greater implications in local as well as national economy. Sustainability as well as development concern of ecotourism destination is equally important. However, little attention has been paid to promote ecotourism by exploring possible ecotourism destinations in Nepal. In this context, this study aimed at highlighting tourism assets and tourism infrastructures and its future prospects of Bandipur area, a well known historic site of Nepal.

## Study Area

The study area Bandipur is located in the eastern part of Tanahun district (Figure 1). It is a pleasant as picturesque place, situated at an elevation of about 1000 m from the sea level. It is located at 28° 02' north and 84° 06' east. Bandipur bazaar area is situated south of the Prithivi Highway midway between Kathmandu and Pokhara (about 128 km west of Kathmandu and 74 km east of Pokhara), near the point where the Marshyangdi River takes a sharp turn east ward on its way to join the Trisuli River at Mugling. It is 7 km south up from a popular pick-up point at Dumbre bazaar on Prithvi Highway.

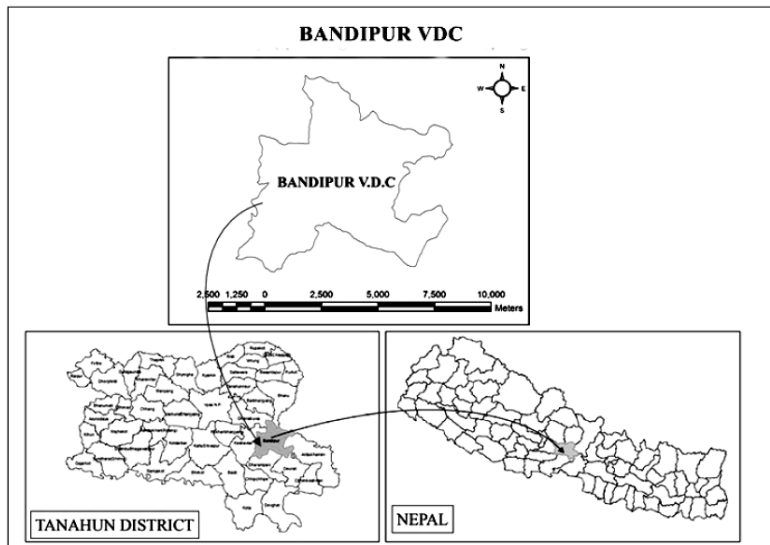


Figure 1: Location of Study Area

## Data Sources

This study covers only historically significant and natural paradise areas of Bandipur area. The study is confined only to ecotourism in Bandipur. Both primary and secondary sources of information are used. Household survey, field observation and key informant interview were the main techniques applied to obtain primary data and information. Intensive observation was also made to acquire necessary information. Secondary data was obtained from various published and unpublished sources like relevant literature, news papers, journals, research report and others.

## Ecotourism in Nepal

Nepal is one of the richest countries for the nature sources, culture and traditional heritages lays 7 world cultural heritage sites in her bosom. Nepal has more than 100 ethnic groups and their own cultural

heritages and more than 90 spoken languages represent various cultural practices. The country is rich in the diversified ecologically mountains, hills, flora and fauna, echoing rivers and lakes. Tourist loves to nature and enjoys its unique beauty. The combination of stunning natural environment and strong cultural heritage, make it a truly remarkable country for the development of ecotourism. Nepal is tourists paradise with an infinite variety of interesting things to see and do, it has many things to offer the visitors as a matter of fact, having along the greatest heights of the Himalayas, Nepal is the land of ancient history, colorful cultures and people, super scenery and some of the walking trials on the earth.

Nepal contains significant percentages of wildlife, such as 2.04 percent of the world's flowering higher plants and 8.6 percent of its birds. Nepal contains some 5,833 species of gymnosperms and flowering plants with some 315 endemic species of higher plants, 847 bird species, 185 mammal species, 43 amphibian species, 100 reptile species, 656 butterfly species and 185 fresh water fish species have been identified in Nepal. Nepal's combination of stunning natural environment and strong cultural heritage, make it a truly remarkable country for the development of ecotourism. In fact, ecotourism in Nepal tends to blend with adventure tourism

with the magnificent mountain peaks attracting trekkers and mountaineers from around the world. Various protected areas have been established in Nepal and play a vital role in ecotourism for the country.

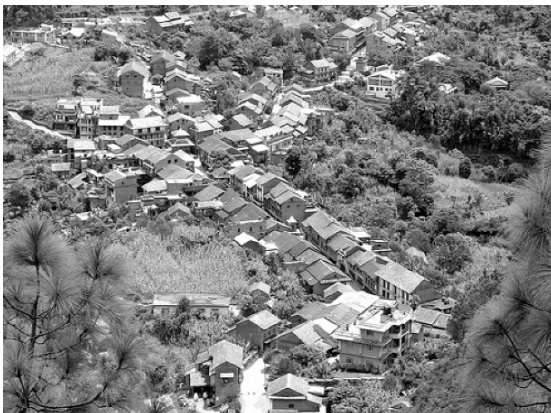
Tourism is the backbone and leading sector for the economic development of developing countries like Nepal, the contribution of tourism for the development of national economy is about (4 percent) and 18 percent of total foreign exchange earnings.

## Factors of Ecotourism in Bandipur

Bandipur offers varieties of attraction to the visitors. Visitors from all over the world have been visiting Bandipur to experience its cultural heritage, views of world famous Himalayan peaks, unique architecture preserved in ancient towns and the flora and fauna of this wonderful land (Suyal,1999). Bandipur is paramount of socio-cultural and natural assets. Diversity in nature and culture is the major component of ecotourism development. A glimpse of tourism assets are as follows:

## Diversity in Nature

**Scenic Beauty:** Bandipur is a nature gifted and nature paradise overlooking the incredible expanse of the Marshyangdi river valley and lush terraced field being strategically located in central areas of mixed canopy of pine and Sal forest (Raniban, Gurunchhe hill, Mukundeshwori ) for the finest views that the area has to offer. It offers a breath taking sweep of the Himalayan range from Langtang in the east to Dhaulagiri in the west (Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, Manaslu and the Ganesh Himal). From nearby hill tops one can see as far as Manakamana and Gorkha to the east, great Chitwan plains to the south. Among the panorama scene of beautiful mountains, Mahabharat range is the finest attraction for tourists, the view of Chhimkeshwori (one of the highest hill of Nepal) in the southeast of Bandipur and Mukundeshwori hill in the west of the Bandipur bazaar has equally contributed in the beauty and attraction of Bandipur. The view of glorious sunshine and sun set from Tundhikhel and Gurungche hill also attract the visitors. For the eco trekkers or eco tourists, high snow capped mountains, the Marshyangdi River, lush terraced fields all combine to offer a never ending blissful experience.



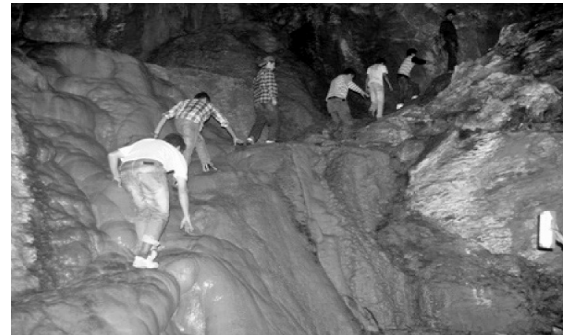
**Figure 2:** Bandipur bazaar

**Pleasant and favorable Climate:** Bandipur, “all seasons for all reasons” located in Mahabharat range at an altitude of 1030 m. above sea level, hilltop settlement faced directly snow capped mountains to the north and opened small hills and huge Terai Plains to the south has moderate cool temperate climate all the years around. The maximum temperature in winter is between 18 and 20°C. In the summer the maximum temperature goes up to 30°C and the minimum to 12°C. Due to the pleasant and favorable environment, natural treatment for the sick visitors suffered from tropical disease is also possible in open hill top area like Bandipur.

**Biodiversity:** Diversity in flora and fauna is the

product of nature. Bandipur is enormously important from the biodiversity aspect. The ecosystem of Bandipur comprises aquatic, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. According to the local, people more than 200 species of forest plants, more than 70 species of birds and 35 species of wild animals have been found in Bandipur area. A number of medicinal herbs are found in this area.

**Siddha Cave and Patalidwar:** Siddha cave, probably the biggest cave in Asia, is situated in the north of Bandipur bazaar. It takes an hour walk downwards from hilltop Bandipur bazaar to cave on the Prithvi Highway. The way inside the cave is 18 feet width and 50 feet height. The cave is huge and dark where numerous sub trials, gorge, holes and features created by water (stalactite and stalagmite) can be found. Big rock cliff carved different magical figures can attract the visitors. It may take approximately 2 hours to observe the cave inside. It is said that this cavern has not been fully explored. Patalidwar is another popular cave which has religious significance for the locals. The local called it as a way to go inside the earth. Patalidwar is about one and half hour away by the way of Dhungebari. Extra light (torch light or candle) is needed to explore this three storied geological marvel.



**Figure 3:** Tourists in Siddha cave

**Rocky slopes:** Rock climbing is being popular in mountain tourism. Very steep and high rocky slopes are also major elements attracting visitors in Bandipur. Tundikhel, Tandrang-Tundrung Chunpahara, Raniban rocky slopes can be used as rock climbing activities in Bandipur.

## Eco trekking

Among the tourist adventure activities in Nepal trekking is by far the most popular. The diversity in Nepal's nature and range of exotic culture makes this country ideal for trekking. Bandipur is also a most potential destination due to possessing most unusual and delightful trekking routes. Numerous foot trails constructed in ancient period and carrying historical and traditional significance, running as spider's webs are in Bandipur (Table 1).

**Table 1: Eco-trekking routes and characteristics**

Places	Time (hrs)	Peculiarity	Outlet to
Bandipur to Ramkot	1.5	Typical Magar village, round houses roofed with thatched and slate. Ethnic people and their culture	Return to Bandipur
Bandipur to Mukundeshwori	2	Temple, weapons of king Mukunda Sen, 13th century broken palaces, pond, flora, fauna and typical culture	Return Bandipur or go ahead to Chaudibarahi then Damauli
Bandipur to Siddha cave	0.5-1	Bats, rocks, statues, wonderful cave flora and fauna	Bimal Nagar
Bandipur to Patalidwar	1.5	Way to go inside the earth, wonderful cave, typical settlements of Brahmin, Gurung and Magar.	Satrasaya Phant
Bandipur via Hilekhadka to Chhimkeshwori	4	Forest of Rhododendron, views of cascading Marshyngdi, half garland of Himalaya and Tarai plain	Aanbu Khaireni
Bandipur to Chhaudibarahi	6	Holy place sacrificed shrines, typical culture of ethnic groups, diversity of nature	Damauli
Bandipur to Saranghat, Chipchipe, Devghat and Chitwan	2 days	Rafting in Seti and Trishuli, cross villages trekking through the typical ethnic villages, holy place Devghat.	Chitwan
Bandipur to Andhi Mool	3	A holy place, sacrificed fish pond	Satrasaya Phant
Bandipur to Dumre	1	Views of Himalayas, flora and fauna	Dumre Bazar

Source: Field Survey, 2008

On the way of traveling, the tourist enjoy with farmers in agricultural farms, local culture (Rodhi, Chutka, Balun, Sorathi) and local foods. The visitors can do paragliding, rafting in Seti and Trishuli including rock climbing and, bee hunting.

### Sightseeing around Bandipur

A number of places are favorable for sightseeing around Bandipur by walk (Table 2).

**Table 2: Sightseeing around Bandipur**

Name of the places	Time taken (minutes)	What to see
Goat research center	45	Different types of goat and trees
Bhanu high school	5	Oldest school of Tanahun district
Gurunche hill and Thanimai Temple	50	From where you can see beautiful valleys and hills, 180 degree views of Himalayas and human shaped Bandipur etc.
Bhanjyang	30	Paragliding spot and resting place
Baghtal (Tiger top)	60	Good spot for watching Sunrise
Sericulture/ Silk farm	30	Life cycle of silkworm to silk thread, items made from cocoon and silk plus beautiful berry garden and forests, hills etc.
Bandipur guest house	5	Oldest typed palace house and museum
Bazaar Area		Wooden craft, slate roofed full of art, architecture and culture and parallel lined houses
Padam Pustakalaya		60 years old community library
Bindhyabasini temple		100 years old Temple
PaharapaniMahadev	15	Deep gorges, Gupteshwor Mahadev, oldest bathing place of Bandipure
Tundikhel	10	Ground from where you can see scenes of forest, valleys, Marshyangdi river plus ranges of Himalayas

Bandipur mountain Resort	10	A well fascinated resort in the heart of pine trees, beautiful garden things remind ancient civilization, swimming pool etc
Martyr's Memorial park	20	See this park for good scenarios. And remember martyrs
Baralthok	20	A specific Magar village
Khagda Devi Temple	10	100 years old temple, big festival in Dashain
Notre Dame School	10	One of the best and popular school of Nepal for the quality education
Tin Dhar Holy Place	20	Full of Temples, shrines, natural spring water
Slate quarry	30	Slate stone (Bandipur product)
Silthok /Gadhi	20	A specific Magar village
Rani ban	30	A beautiful well preserved forest full of birds, different trees, flowers etc
Solay river, Aspate	60	Visit this river for swimming
Tandrang Tundrng sound	15	A deep cavern where you can through stone and hear the eco sound
Seto Gurans child care center	10	Health care center

Source: Field Survey, 2008

## Socio-cultural Diversity

Socio cultural assets are also crucial components to pull the tourists. Sites and areas of archeological interests, historical building and monument, place of historical significance, museum, modern culture, political and educational institutions and religious institutions are socio cultural products in any destination. National festivals, arts, handicrafts, music and folklore, native life and customs are also traditional products. These above all socio cultural or traditional products are the great assets of Bandipur to compel the tourist to travel, stay and enjoy for more and more days in there, as they expected.

Bandipur, an ancient Newari mountain town having abundance of ancient houses, temples of great significance and historical architecture, this medieval era town boasts festivals all year around, besides a plethora of cultural offerings neighboring Magar, Gurung, Bahun, Chhetry, Damai and Sarki villages all contribute to the cultural diversity of the region.

## Historical Monuments

**Medieval Hilltop Town:** Main bazaar of Bandipur is occupied by ancient Newar settlement. Newars had migrated from Kathmandu valley during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The typical Newari houses in main bazaar are built on double lane and the main street is paved by the slate. Major things to observe are wooden craft, slate roofed houses, and full of art, architecture and culture.

**Bindebasini Temple:** Bindebasini Temple is located at the center of the Bandipur bazaar. This pagoda style temple was built 100 years before. Wooden carvings and details brass work make the temple

replicas of pagoda structures of Kathmandu valley. Bisketjatra (Newari festival) on the occasion of every New Year is celebrated at the temple.

**Mahalaxmi Temple:** It is located in the southern part of the bazaar just five minute walk to downwards from the main Bazaar. Pagoda style exquisite woodwork in its struts, doorways and arches decorate the temple. Newar community in particular and other cast people in general worship Mahalaxmi as the goddess of wealth.

**Khadgadevi Temple:** It is the most revered shrine in Bandipur. The two storied Khadgadevi temple is famous for Khadga which exists still today. The Khadga is said to have been left by Mukunda Sen who was given the sword by Shiva as a 'gift of divinity' has been kept wrapped in cloth. The temple is opened once a year in October during the Dashain festival when 50-60 livestock are sacrificed at the temple's premise. During this period local people as well as people of neighboring districts come to worship goddess.

**Mukundeshwori Temple:** The hilltop shrine of Mukundeshwori where the 10<sup>th</sup> century king Mukunda Sen of Palpa had maintained his hide out. This site is an hour and half away. On the way, the priest in Muchchuk village shows the visitors the artifacts left behind by that famous king: a blow horn, Damarus and Chimta, Khadga, Sikka etc. used during the time when Nepal was still struggling under the 2200-2400 principalities. The shrine here is festooned with numerous belts tridents and it is especially revered by Gurung tribes.

**Gurunche Hill and Thanimai Temple:** It takes roughly 25 minutes to the top north east of main bazaar where there is a small shrine as well as the Thanimai temple and a Chautaro or rest platform. Thanimai temple

revered especially by Magar groups established in 1997 holds strong religious belief within the villagers. The temple invites number of devotees from Bandipur and it's surrounding as well as Chitwan, Kathamandu and Gorkha. The devotees visit the temple every Tuesdays and it holds more importance in the months of December and January when week-long poojas are observed. The visitors/devotees can enjoy the bird eye view of the Bandipur area and the Himalayas that fills the horizon.

**Tundikhel:** Tundikhel is a large table top field located at the northern part of Bandipur Bazaar. It is famous for sightseeing of half garland of Himalayas, Cascading Marshagdi River and its basin. It is popular among domestic tourists for picnic spot as well as international tourists for camp fire.

Besides, Parpani Mahadev, Mahadev Temple, Narayan Temple, Martyres Memorial Area and Tin Thana are also importance for place of Bandipur.

### Colorful Festivals

Diversity in caste system produces the multiplicity of festivals in Bandipur. Almost Brahmin, Magar, Gurung and other ethnic groups of Bandipur have their own specific festivals celebrated in different occasions. Among them some major are as follows:

**Table 3: Colorful Festivals**

Festivals	Belongs to
Gaijatra	Newar
Lakhejatra	Brahmin and other caste groups
Ropainjatra	All caste groups
Baghjatra	Newar and other caste groups
Khadagjatra	Magar
Bisketjatra	Newar
Dokonach	Magar and Gurung
Ghatunach	Gurung
Rodhinach	Gurung
Chudkanach	Brahmin and Chhetri
Balun/Bhajan	Brahmin and Chhetri

*Source: Field Survey, 2008*

Beside these, festivals of national character like Dashain, Tihar, Shivaratri, Holly, Tiji, Krishan Asthami, Fagupurnima etc are also widely observed by the locals of Bandipur.

### Conclusion

Bandipur is a new emerging ecotourism destination characterized by natural beauty, scenic attraction and cultural diversity. It is the land of nature gifted and natural paradise overlooking the incredible expanse of the Marshyangdi river valley and lush terraced fields, offering a breathtaking sweep of spectacular Himalayas with lofty peaks from Langtang in the east to Dhaulagiri in the west. Similarly, it is an ancient mountain settlement of Newars with an abundance of ancient houses, temples of great significance and historical

architecture. In addition, accessibility, pleasant climate, suitable place for view point and simple and friendly people make Bandipur unique ecotourism destination. Many tourists visit this area for trekking, sightseeing, rock climbing, paragliding, bird watching as well as study or research. These ecotourism activities can have significant impacts on employment, education, and income level of local people.

Bandipur-Ramkot, Bandipur-Chhimkeshwari, Bandipur-Chhabdibarahi and Bimalnagar-Bandipur eco-trekking routes are unique and mysterious having natural and cultural diversity especially typical Magar settlement with round houses, the forest of the rhododendron and orchid. There is a cultural integration among Newar, Magar and Gurung communities.

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