

Rural Tourism in Nepal: Opportunity and Challenges

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Abstract

This study is focused on rural tourism in Nepal, including its opportunities and challenges. Rural areas, where the majority of Nepal's population resides, have the potential to attract tourists and contribute to the country's economic development. Involving the local people or villagers in the tourism industry can also increase the value of local products, culture, and traditions. However, there are also negative impacts of tourism on society, and it is important to carefully manage the industry to ensure a bright future for tourism in Nepal. The objective of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges of rural tourism in Nepal.

Key words: Rural residence, Tourism industry, foreign currency & the impact of tourism

Introduction

Rural tourism involves tourism activities in rural areas, and Nepal is a country with many villages that have been attracting tourists for a few decades. The basic infrastructure for rural tourism, including food and accommodation, is essential for its development. The local culture, natural beauty, and friendly attitude towards tourists also play important roles in the success of rural tourism. Rural societies, their unique traditional cultures, and beautiful landscapes with panoramic views can all contribute significantly to the development of rural tourism (Thapa, 2005). Currently, there is a growing interest in developing rural tourism in Nepal.

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is the act of traveling outside of one's permanent residence for at least 24 hours (Netto, 2009). It is a multifaceted concept that involves entertainment and can serve various purposes, such as outbound tourism, which refers to people traveling to other countries for leisure or other purposes. Nepal has a long history of attracting tourists from different countries. To be considered a tourist, a person must leave their place of permanent residence temporarily and not for the purpose of generating income (Bhatia, 1996). The English word "Tourism" is derived from the French word "Tourisme," which in turn is derived from the Latin word "turnus," meaning a circle or spinning wheel. Over time, the word came to refer to people who traveled to different places, and their activities were referred to as tourism (Arthur, 1972). However, prior to the emergence of the concept of tourism, people traveled for trade, pilgrimage, research, and study, but these activities were not considered tourism. Today, travel for various purposes is considered a part of tourism.

Tourism is a significant economic phenomenon, business, and industry with vast dimensions and magnitude. It is a rapidly growing industry that has become a major force in the global economy. Despite its widespread popularity, there is still a lack of understanding about the various dimensions and areas of tourism. People's preferences for different types of tourism vary based on their interests. One such subcategory of tourism is rural tourism, which refers to tourism in rural areas. Many individuals who are tired of the hustle and bustle of city life find solace in visiting peaceful rural environments, even if only for a short period. Now tourism is known as a smokeless industry or an industry without chimneys. Rural tourism allows tourists to connect with nature and experience the local culture and way of life firsthand (Pololikashvili, 2022). Tourists can indulge in the local products, customs, and traditions of rural areas, immersing themselves in the authentic culture.

Rural tourism refers to the practice of visiting rural areas for the purpose of leisure, vacation, sightseeing or seeking a peaceful environment (Bhatia, 1996). Humans naturally seek out peaceful environments, and rural areas often provide a respite from the noise and pollution of urban areas. Tourists who visit rural areas often engage in activities and experiences that are unique to the local culture, such as enjoying the natural beauty, sampling local products, and learning about the traditions, professions, and religious heritage of the local people. In countries like Nepal, where there are many villages, rural tourism is gaining popularity as an alternative to urban tourism (Upadhaya, 2008). Overall, rural tourism offers a chance for tourists to escape the busy and crowded of city life and immerse themselves in the peaceful and authentic experiences of rural communities. By applying a heuristic approach, this study discusses various perspectives on the tourism industry. The object of this study is to examine rural tourism in Nepal, including its opportunities and challenges.

Methodology

This study is based on a historical framework, as it focuses on historical themes related to rural tourism in Nepal. The research design for this study is qualitative, and the findings are presented in an explanatory, analytical, and informative manner. The purpose of this study is to explore and discuss the opportunities and challenges of rural tourism in Nepal. The delimitation of the study is focused on the title and purpose, and it utilizes both current and historical sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development of rural tourism in Nepal. Secondary sources for this study include books, articles from journals, dissertations, websites, and other materials obtained from various libraries, private collections, and websites. Coding and analysis of the sources were conducted to ensure their relevance and reliability. Rural tourism is an emerging industry in Nepal, and this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of its trends and development through the adoption of a theory on tourism development.

Discussion and Analysis

This study delves into the topic of rural tourism in Nepal, exploring its potential benefits, opportunities, and challenges. It is well known that Nepal is predominantly rural,

and this study suggests that focusing on rural tourism and promoting local products could drive economic development in the region. Rural tourism has the potential to bring numerous benefits to Nepal, including cultural exchange and economic growth. However, it is also important to recognize and address the challenges that may arise in the implementation and sustainability of rural tourism in Nepal.

Activities of Rural Tourism in Nepal

Nepal is a small country located between India and China, with more than 80% of its land consisting of rural areas. It is home to the highest peak in the world, Mount Everest, which stands at 8,848 meters above sea level. The country is also known for its diverse landscapes, including the plains of the Terai region, the hills, and small and wide valleys. These rural areas are home to a mix of communities, including Aryan and Mongol cultures that have been present in Nepal since the ancient period (Acharya, 2011). In the context of religion, Hindus and Buddhists are the most religious groups in Nepal. The country is also home to a diverse population of people who follow a variety of religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, Bonism, Prakriti, etc. Nepal is a country with a rich cultural heritage, with more than 125 castes and languages spoken, and is known for its unity in diversity (Shrestha & Rijal, 2016). The geographical, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of Nepal makes it an ideal destination for rural tourism.

Since the implementation of planned development in Nepal in 1956, tourism has been given special importance. As a result, the construction of basic infrastructures such as transportation, communication, electricity, drinking water, etc. in rural areas was prioritized. These improvements attracted both domestic and foreign tourists to the rural areas, leading to the construction of hotels and view towers, as well as the training of tourist guides. The production of goods that could be purchased by foreign tourists also increased (Basnet, 2006). Religious and cultural sites, monasteries, palaces, and museums also became popular tourist destinations, and domestic flights were introduced to remote mountain regions. Currency exchange facilities were made available for tourists, and certain rural areas such as Nagarkot, Lumbini, etc. were designated as tourist destinations. Rural tourism was also promoted through activities such as walking, and the importance of agricultural products in supporting rural tourism grew. Brochures and other promotional materials were distributed to countries with an interest in visiting Nepal to spread awareness of the country's tourism offerings.

As rural tourism gained popularity in Nepal, the concept of homestay developed, encouraging local citizens to participate in the tourism industry. Both the government and non-government sectors invested in the development of rural tourism, and the means of communication, such as radio and television, were used to provide information about the weather. The private sector was encouraged to operate tourism businesses and produce tourism products, and the tourism police service was extended to rural areas to ensure the safety of tourists. Local bodies were also encouraged to build model rural tourism sites in each development region, and some of the highways in hilly areas were developed as

scenic routes (Gautam, 2021). Incentives, such as subsidies, were offered to encourage the production of handicrafts that were popular with tourists. These efforts have helped to expand the tourism industry in Nepal beyond urban areas into rural areas.

Rural Areas and Tourism in Nepal

There is low population density, landscape, and land use domination by agriculture and forestry in rural areas. The lifestyle of the rural people who live far away from the city is natural and traditional. The people of the rural areas use their own methods of treatment of their own style, production of agricultural tools, weaving of cloth, pottery, animals, and all tribal style. This is called indigenous knowledge. People living in rural areas do not know how to cheat. They are Wellweezers. Especially in rural areas, there are settlements of homogeneous type. There is a deep relationship between people of different castes. They produce their own food, vegetables, fruits, etc. Since the market system is also less, the goods are available at lower prices (Bhattarai, 2004). They welcome the tourists who come to such places collectively with their own clothes, speech, dances, music, etc. according to their customs. Affected by this, such tourists started recommending other tourists to visit the rural areas of Nepal.

Tourism is a rapidly growing industry that has the potential to bring economic development and improvement to the standard of living in developing countries. By shifting from a traditional agriculture-based livelihood to a business-oriented agricultural system, tourism has helped to create new employment opportunities and increase income for individuals in these countries (Tooman, 1997). In fact, many governments have recognized the benefits of tourism and have included its development in their state policies as a way to earn foreign currency and boost their economies. Overall, tourism is a valuable resource for economic growth in developing countries.

Nepal is a country with great potential for tourism, due to its diverse culture, language, religion, and geography. In particular, the rural areas of Nepal offer a unique opportunity for tourists to experience the local way of life and participate in activities such as infrastructure development, food production, and distribution (Regmi, 2016). Rural tourism in Nepal is becoming increasingly popular, as it allows visitors to escape the business and disturbed city life and find inner peace in a peaceful and natural environment. Rural tourism can be enjoyed by families, groups of friends, and business travelers alike, as well as by those seeking a spiritual journey (Satyal, 1999). Overall, rural tourism in Nepal is a rewarding and enriching experience that offers travelers a chance to connect with the local community and immerse themselves in the beauty and culture of the country.

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on exposing visitors to traditional businesses, cultures, and practices. It is characterized by its ability to take place in open, natural spaces, often at a low cost, and provides an opportunity for tourists to learn about local traditions and techniques (Lane, 1993). Rural tourism can be developed without significant investment, as it involves commercializing the activities that are already being carried out in the local community. This type of tourism often involves the integration of

local agriculture or natural resources into the tourism business, as well as close contact with the natural environment. Rural tourism is also typically based on traditional societies, and practices, and involves staying with local families and establishing a sense of community with them (Bramwell, 1994). As it is largely driven by the local community, the level of rural tourism development is often determined by the villagers themselves.

Today, tourists are seeking authentic, reliable, and unique experiences, and rural tourism provides a chance to immerse oneself in a new and unfamiliar culture and environment. Eco-friendly rural tourism in Nepal is especially rare and offers a diverse range of rich experiences for visitors (Hall, Kirkpatrick, & Mitchel, 2005). As over eighty percent of Nepal's population lives in rural areas, tourists have the opportunity to directly interact with and learn about the local culture and way of life. Rural tourism in Nepal allows tourists to quickly gain a deep understanding of the Nepali people, particularly those living in the hills, mountains, and Terai region. As the development of rural tourism in Nepal continues to grow, its importance and appeal are also increasing.

Role of Homestay in the Development of Rural Tourism in Nepal

The concept of homestays has emerged as a solution to provide accommodation in remote areas, rather than constructing standard hotels, with the growth of rural tourism globally. In Nepal, homestays have played a crucial role in the development of rural tourism due to the government's economic liberalization policy adopted after the restoration of democracy in 1990 (Pangani, 2019). tourism is seen as a key means of reducing economic inequality in the country, and homestays have helped to expand it to rural areas. As a result, homestays have been given priority in various countries around the world, with the government of Himachal Pradesh in India promoting their establishment for the advancement of rural tourism in 1908 (Gangotia, 2013). The local community fully supported this initiative, leading to its success and the expansion of rural tourism through homestays to other parts of India.

In 1988, a homestay program was established in Malaysia to promote rural tourism. The program was successful, and the Malaysian government has continued to support it (Leh & Hamzah, 2019). Similarly, Thailand introduced the concept of homestays in 2000, but it was not fully implemented until 2011 (Georgopoulos, Churyan & Duangsaeng, 2015). Nepal also recognized the benefits of homestays for rural tourism and introduced them in 1997 with the Siruwari Homestay in the Syangja district (Thapa, 2005). Since then, homestays have become a popular way to experience rural tourism in Nepal, with over 500 homestays now operating in various parts of the country, such as Ghandrung Homestay in Kaski District, Ghalegaon Homestay in Lamjung District, Panaiti Homestay in Kavrapalanchok District, Thumki Namje Homestay in Dhankuta, etc (Karki, 2022). Homestays allow tourists to experience local culture and cuisine in a welcoming family environment, making them valuable assets to the development of rural tourism.

Opportunities for Rural Tourism in Nepal

Nepal is a country with many villages, but due to its rugged and hilly terrain, it has been challenging to build transportation and other infrastructures, such as education,

health care, electricity, etc. in these rural areas. This lack of development has made it difficult to build hotels with modern facilities in these remote regions. Homestays, on the other hand, has emerged as a popular option for developing tourism in these areas. Homestays not only provide tourists with comfortable accommodation, but they also benefit the local community by providing an additional source of income and increasing awareness about health and cleanliness (Upadhaya, 2008). This, in turn, improves the living standards of the people living in these areas. Additionally, rural tourism provides employment opportunities for local youth and helps reduce migration from villages to urban areas or abroad. Overall, rural tourism can play a vital role in the development and prosperity of Nepal's villages.

Currently, homestays play a crucial role in the development of rural tourism in Nepal. They are a cost-effective form of accommodation that does not require the construction of large hotels, resorts, or restaurants, and they do not harm the environment through the use of building materials and other resources. Instead, homestays operate in existing houses and often employ local experts to make any necessary renovations. This not only provides employment opportunities for the local community but also allows them to learn new skills and knowledge from tourists (Dharell, 2006). By participating in rural tourism, the local people of Nepal are able to improve their standard of living, become more educated and cultured, and adopt new means of livelihood. Overall, rural tourism has the potential to bring significant benefits to the communities it serves, even when tourism is not at its peak.

With the growth of rural tourism, the local community becomes more actively involved in the infrastructure development of their area. This can help to ease the burden on the government and reduce the challenges involved in building new tourist destinations. Rural tourism also offers the advantage of using existing resources and facilities as tourism products, rather than constructing new ones, which can help to minimize the cost of building large hotels and the impact on the local environment. Homestays provide affordable accommodation for tourists, while also helping to preserve the local forests and reduce the need for large-scale construction (Baniya, 2006) In addition, rural tourism can provide an opportunity for local people to supplement their traditional occupations with income from tourism. It can also increase the value of indigenous knowledge and skills in rural areas, making it a valuable contributor to the development of these communities.

The rural areas of Nepal offer a unique opportunity for tourists to learn about the culture and traditions of the local people. By visiting these areas, tourists can gain insight into the weddings, festivals, and costumes of the locals, and even have the opportunity to participate in these events. Tourists who are dedicated to providing service can also identify and work to solve local problems, which can lead to increased social and economic opportunities for the local community (Adhikari, 2006). Rural tourism can also be a source of knowledge and education for the locals, as they can learn from the more culturally advanced tourists. This can help to improve the overall development and

awareness of the local people. The development of rural tourism in Nepal can also have a positive impact on the lifestyles and living standards of those living in these areas. To fully develop rural tourism in Nepal, it is important to financially empower the village people and to explore various types of tourism such as homestays, farm tours, village stays, and eco-tourism (Kaini, 2019). There are many possibilities for the development of rural tourism in Nepal, and it can be a key factor in improving the lives of those living in these areas.

Challenges of Rural Tourism in Nepal

Despite the government's efforts to promote rural tourism in Nepal, the industry has struggled to gain traction. A lack of research and planning has hindered the development of necessary infrastructures, such as roads, bridges, health posts, etc. Additionally, issues of security and housing have not been adequately addressed, further hindering the growth of rural tourism. In order to truly succeed in this industry, it is essential for the government and related organizations to take a more active role in conducting research and implementing comprehensive strategies for the development of rural tourism (Kaini, 2019). Only then can Nepal hope to fully capitalize on the potential of this important sector.

Tourism development in rural areas of Nepal has led to the proliferation of cement houses, often at the expense of traditional Nepalese sally houses. This has contributed to the destruction of cultural heritage and the decline of old customs and social values. The influx of tourists to these areas has also led to an increase in population and migration, as well as the spread of epidemics and communicable diseases. Additionally, tourism has been linked to an increase in social crime and drug addiction, and the rise in expensive and flashy clothing and jewelry has disrupted traditional social norms. The encroachment on ancient and traditional heritage sites, such as monasteries and statues, has also been a negative consequence of tourism (Rayamajhi, 2011). Furthermore, the influence of foreign fashion and marketed products have contributed to a trend of overspending in rural Nepalese society.

Tourism can bring employment opportunities to rural areas, but these jobs are often temporary and can lead to negative effects on the community. The influx of tourists can lead to a more materialistic and competitive mindset among local residents, and the demand for locally produced handicrafts may decline as people become more interested in foreign goods. In addition, tourism in countries with distinct seasons, like Nepal, is not a reliable source of employment as it only operates during certain times of the year. When tourism is slow, unemployment and social issues such as alcohol abuse, gambling, and prostitution may increase (Kunwar, 1997). Overall, while tourism can bring economic benefits to rural areas, it is important to carefully consider and address its potential downsides as well.

The development of rural tourism has had a detrimental impact on the environment and local culture in Nepal. Infrastructure construction, such as hotels, restaurants, and resorts, has led to the degradation of the natural landscape and has contributed to

environmental issues such as excessive rainfall and drought. The proliferation of these tourism-related businesses has also commodified long-standing cultural practices and rituals (Sharma, 2001). Additionally, the cutting down of trees and damage to the environment has resulted in the depletion of water sources, leading to desertification in some areas. The influx of tourists to rural areas has also led to an increase in crime, such as theft and murder, and has disrupted the traditional way of life for many locals, including those who rely on agriculture as their primary source of income. The increased movement of people in these areas has also contributed to various forms of pollution, including water, air, noise pollution, etc.

As rural tourism continues to grow and incomes rise, more and more people are leaving behind traditional agricultural practices and opting for urban goods. This shift has led to shortages of locally produced items such as vegetables, milk, and poultry in village homestays. The adoption of gas stove systems has also replaced traditional cooking methods, resulting in all of the income from tourism going abroad rather than benefiting the local community. Additionally, a lack of training in areas such as cleanliness, health, and hospitality has left tourists disappointed and deterred others from visiting (Sharma, 2011). These challenges have hindered the success of village tourism in Nepal.

Conclusion

Tourism is a major global industry and has been used as a business in Nepal since the fall of the Rana regime in 1950. Rural tourism in Nepal has the potential to be a viable and sustainable form of tourism that can benefit both local communities and tourists. One of the main opportunities for rural tourism in Nepal is the opportunity for local communities to generate income and improve their standard of living through the tourism industry. Rural tourism can provide employment opportunities for locals, as well as the chance to showcase and share their culture, traditions, and way of life with tourists. This can also help to preserve and promote the unique cultural heritage of Nepal. In addition, rural tourism can help to improve infrastructure and services in rural areas, such as the development of roads, accommodation, and amenities. This can help to attract more tourists and improve the overall tourism experience. However, there are also challenges facing rural tourism in Nepal. One of the main challenges is the lack of infrastructure and facilities in many rural areas, which can make it difficult for tourists to access and explore these regions. In addition, there may be a lack of trained personnel and resources to manage and promote rural tourism in Nepal. Another challenge is the need to balance the interests of tourists with the needs and values of local communities. It is important to ensure that rural tourism is developed in a way that is sensitive to the local culture and environment, and that it does not have negative impacts on the local community or environment. Overall, rural tourism in Nepal has the potential to be a successful and sustainable form of tourism, but it will require careful planning and management to overcome the challenges and maximize the opportunities.

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