

## Sustainable Adventure Sport Tourism: Evaluating Paragliding in Pokhara, Nepal

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### Article Info

Received : August 1, 2024

Accepted : October 17, 2024

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### Keywords

*Job Satisfaction, Paragliding, Pokhara, Sustainable Tourism, Sports tourism, socio-economic impact.*

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### Abstract

*This research, titled 'Sustainable Adventure Sports Tourism: Evaluating Paragliding in Pokhara, Nepal' aims to assess job satisfaction, and gather the perception of paragliding pilots and community members related to paragliding sport tourism. It significantly contributes to understanding the sustainability of adventure sports paragliding in Pokhara, Nepal. A mixed method (QUAN and qual) was employed, surveying 160 pilots from a population of 420. Observation and focus group discussion were conducted to determine the real situation and opinions on sustainability from the paragliding pilots and community people. Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation was selected to assess satisfaction as a key factor in analyzing the sustainability of paragliding. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Process of Social Science for quantitative data. Findings revealed that 96.3% of pilots were male, most had secondary education, 38.1% had 9-12 years of experience, and the majority expressed job satisfaction. The findings exposed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and hygiene factors. There were no significant associations between job satisfaction and marital status or annual income with statistical significance indicated by a p-value of 0.011. The study recommends stricter environmental regulations and diversification of tourism offerings as key strategies. Engaging the local community is essential as they are directly affected by tourism activities and can provide valuable insights and solutions to ensure sustainability*

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### Introduction

Tourism is a crucial industry for Nepal, providing significant foreign exchange and revenue. It plays a vital role in the country's socio-economic and environmental development. Adventure tourism in Nepal encompasses activities such as trekking, mountaineering, white-water rafting, paragliding, and jungle safaris, attracting thrill-seekers from around the globe. Key sectors include the Himalayan region for trekking and mountaineering, rivers for rafting and kayaking, and national parks for wildlife safaris and jungle adventures. This type of tourism significantly contributes to the country's economy by leveraging its natural landscapes and unique topography (Nepal Tourism Board, 2024)." Adventure sports tourism involves traveling to different destinations to participate in thrilling and physically demanding sports activities such as Paragliding, rock climbing, surfing, Parachuting, Parasailing, hot air ballooning, skydiving, and so on. This type of tourism attracts enthusiasts seeking unique experiences and adventures in natural or exotic locations. Adventure sports like paragliding attract many visitors. The growth of tourism, including air sports, has been pivotal in creating employment and promoting economic development in a country (Shrestha, 1978, p. 74).

Due to COVID-19, tourist arrivals in 2020 dropped by over 80%, causing a nearly 73% decline in tourism sector earnings compared to the previous year. Tourism sector earnings are directly linked to tourist arrivals. In 2020, the gross foreign exchange earnings amounted to 2,49,595 thousand Nepalis currency (approximately 217,007 thousand USD). Despite the overall decrease in gross foreign earnings,

the average daily expenditure per tourist slightly increased to 65 USD in 2020 (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2020). The loss was seen due to Covid 2019. Despite the impact of COVID-19, which saw a higher number of domestic tourists in 2020. Tourists' arrivals in Nepal are increasing after COVID-19. Sports related to tourism are increasing day by day in Nepal. One example was that Chinese sports came to Pokhara with charter flights in 2023 and 2024. A total of 1,014,882 tourists came to Nepal, which arrived by land at 100,612 and by air at 914,270. (MoTCA, 2023).

Nepal is celebrated as one of the world's top destinations for adventure, attracting numerous travelers over the years. Nepal provides many exhilarating activities for thrill-seekers, promising unforgettable experiences. These activities include mountain flights, paragliding, rafting, rock climbing, bungee jumping, and Everest skydiving. Paragliding is highly popular in Pokhara, Nepal (Swotah Travel, 2023). Paragliding is an adventure sport, that has been included in the 8th National Games for the first time in 2019. Nepal won its first silver medal in the 18th Asia Games in Jakarta, Indonesia (August 29, 2019). A team of Bijay Gautam, Bimal Adhikari, Sushil Gurung, Yukesh Gurung, and Bimal Thapa won the silver medal for Nepal in the Men's Cross-Country Paragliding, while Japan won the gold. Nepal scored 11,364 points to win the silver. Japan had 11,391 points. This is the second silver medal Nepal has won after 1998. In 1998, Sabita Raj Bhandari had won a silver medal in Taekwondo (Acharya, 2019). According to the Nepal Tourism Board, paragliding has become a prominent adventure sport in Nepal, with Pokhara being recognized as a prime destination due to its scenic landscapes and favorable conditions for flying (Nepal Tourism Board, 2019).

The Nepal Air Sports Association (NAA) ensures the regulation and safety of paragliding activities, contributing to Pokhara's reputation as a world-class paragliding destination. In 2018, 5919 domestic and 15098 international tourists participated in paragliding, with the majority being Chinese. Paragliding remains a premier adventure activity in Pokhara, attracting 16925 domestic and 5350 international tourists in 2020 (MoTCA, 2020). Paragliding is one of the sports in Nepal and Pokhara is one of the best places for it.

Sustainable means able to be maintained at a specific rate or level. Sustainable tourism aims to reduce the negative impacts of travel on the environment, society, and economy while improving the well-being of local communities. Key areas within sustainable tourism include ecotourism, which promotes responsible travel to natural areas focusing on conservation and low-impact practices, benefiting wildlife and regional economies. Community-based tourism allows local communities to manage tourism activities, ensuring that the benefits directly support them and promote fair economic distribution. Agro-tourism combines agriculture and tourism, allowing visitors to experience farming life and supporting sustainable agricultural practices and rural economies (Swotah Travel, 2023). Cultural tourism involves experiencing a destination's heritage and arts, helping preserve cultural sites, and supporting local artisans. Green tourism emphasizes environmentally friendly practices such as reducing carbon footprints, conserving resources, and minimizing waste, with green hotels and transportation being key elements (What Nepal, 2023). Together, these areas promote ethical travel, protect natural and cultural resources, and support economic development in host communities.

This research examines sustainable tourism from the perspective of paragliding pilots and community people, focusing on how paragliding, a growing sector in sports tourism, impacts the local environment and community. Paragliding, a form of sports tourism that involves travel to engage in or view sport-related activities, has seen a significant flow in popularity in recent years. Among the various forms of sports tourism, adventure sports like paragliding have gained prominence due to their thrilling nature and the unique experiences they offer (Grand View Research, 2024). In the context of Nepal, Pokhara, known as the 'Gateway to the Himalayas,' stands out as one of the most popular destinations for paragliding, attracting thousands of tourists annually with its incredible views and challenging terrains.

Paragliding has a relatively short history in Nepal, beginning in earnest in 2000 with the establishment of Sun Rise Paragliding in Pokhara, the country's first registered paragliding company. Founded by British pilot Adam Hill, the company capitalized on Pokhara's geographical and climatic advantages, making it an ideal location for paragliding. The area offers stunning views, Annapurna,

Dhaulagiri, and Manaslu, and consistent weather conditions suitable for the sport. Initially, Pokhara was the sole paragliding destination in Nepal until 2012, when Bandipur in Tanahun and Sirsekot in Syangja were also permitted to offer paragliding (Umami Goes Where, 2024). In Pokhara, key take-off points include Toripani and Mandredhunga, with landing sites around the northern areas of Harpan Khola (Chankhapur, Pame, and Baskot). The sport has significantly boosted tourism, contributing to more extended tourist stays and increased local income and employment.

NAA, headquartered in Pokhara, oversees 22 companies and has organized an annual international paragliding championship for the past 20 years. This competition, recognized by the Federal Aeronautic International (FAI) as a category-II sports class event, attracts around 200 pilots from 25 countries. Pokhara's unique location between the Great Himalayas and the Mahabharata Range allows for unparalleled views of high mountains while sitting below 1000 meters above sea level (MoTCA, 2012). This attractive city, also a gateway to the Annapurna circuit trekking trail, offers thrilling paragliding experiences, including tandem flights and certified courses, all while soaring with views of snow-capped peaks, original lakes, and luxurious valleys. Paragliding in Nepal has grown in popularity since it began in 1995; pilots, whether solo or tandem, can fly with experienced guides and obtain international licenses. Equipment is available for hire, though private pilots must adhere to local flying regulations to avoid conflicts with domestic airline paths.

However, the rapid growth of paragliding tourism raises questions about its sustainability. This study aims to investigate the current state of paragliding tourism in Pokhara, assess its sustainability, and suggest measures to mitigate adverse impacts while enhancing positive outcomes. The research is guided by the need for balanced development practices that can preserve environmental integrity, foster socio-cultural harmony, and ensure economic viability for the long term. The study will focus on three core areas: environmental, financial, and socio-cultural impacts. This comprehensive analysis of sustainable sport tourism in Pokhara, Nepal, underscores the urgent need for balanced development practices that can preserve environmental integrity, foster socio-cultural harmony, and ensure economic viability for the long term. The pressing ecological and social issues must be addressed promptly to ensure the long-term sustainability of paragliding tourism, which significantly contributes to the local economy. This study assesses the job satisfaction of Paragliding pilots and explore the perception of paragliding pilots and community members.

### **Methods**

The study was based on the QUAL quan method. First quantitative data was taken and presented descriptively. Secondly, the perception was taken from the community people. All the paragliding pilots and community people were included in the population of this study. According to the Office of the Nepal Air Sport Association, there were 420 paragliding pilots. More than one-third of the pilots, 160, were selected randomly. Interview schedule, observation, and Focus Group Discussion were the tools for data collecting. The questionnaire's content validity was ensured through consultations with subject experts, faculty members, paragliding stakeholders, and colleagues. For reliability, a pilot survey was conducted with five pilots in similar conditions before finalizing the questionnaire. Respondents were informed of the purpose of data collection before the interview began. Their privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded regarding all information shared. Verbal informed consent was obtained, and the questionnaire was personally distributed. Paragliding pilots' satisfaction was evaluated based on Herzberg's theory. After collecting the data from the questionnaire and interview, those facts and figures were analyzed descriptively. Descriptive design describes the rate, ratio, percentage, proportion, value, pattern, trend, and level. It is computed using statistical methods (SPSS) to calculate the quantitative data. All the data were presented in tables, charts, and figures. Necessary comparisons were made with other's findings and conclusions. Key themes such as environmental conservation (sustainability) and economic benefits were the main themes that were taken from the perception of paragliding pilots and community people to understand Sustainability.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Status of Paragliding Pilots

This section deals with the demographic analysis and interpretation of primary data collected through questionnaires distributed to Paragliding Pilots doing Tandem and solo flights in Pokhara. This helps to get insight into the demographic characteristics of the respondents under study. All the respondents were from Nepal. The respondents' demographic status characteristics showed the study's findings, which include age, sex, occupation, and economic condition, as well as the demographic features necessary to meet the objective. A vast majority, 96.3%, were male, and 3.8% were female. Regarding marital status, 66.9% of pilots were married, 32.5% were single, and a small fraction, represented by one individual, was divorced. Additionally, 73.8% of pilots, equating to 118 out of 160 respondents, engaged in other jobs during their leisure time, while 26.3%, or 42 respondents, did not have additional employment outside their tandem flight duties.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Situations of Paragliding Pilots in Pokhara.*

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
Below 24 years	10	6.3
25 to 30 years	50	31.3
31 to 35 years	46	28.7
36 to 40 years	37	23.1
41 and above	17	10.6
<b>Education</b>		
No Formal Education	2	1.3
Basic	29	18.1
Secondary	94	58.8
Bachelor	35	21.9
Total	160	100.0

Table 1 highlights several demographics of paragliding pilots in Pokhara. Age-wise, the largest group of pilots, indicating a predominance of younger individuals in the profession. Only 1.3% of pilots had no formal education, 18.1% had basic education, 58.8% had secondary education, and 21.9% held a bachelor's degree. Thapa and Lamichhane (2020) studied 150 customers' satisfaction and this study was done with 160 Paragliding pilots' satisfaction.

### Respondents According to Income Status

Economic status and income play essential roles in human living standards. When people have a good economic standard, family lifestyles improve as well. Economic resources also impact employment factors, so the salary earned is directly linked to the job satisfaction of paragliding pilots. The table below presents the annual income status of tandem pilots.

**Table 2**

*Annual Income of the Paragliding Pilots*

Income NRS	Frequency	Percent
Below Rs 350,000	2	1.3
Rs 350,000 to Rs 400,000	15	9.4
Rs 400,000 to Rs 450,000	22	13.8
Above Rs 450,000	121	75.6
Total	160	100.0

Table 2 illustrates the annual earnings of paragliding pilots, revealing significant income disparities. The majority of tandem pilots, 75.6%, earn an annual income exceeding Rs. 4,50,000, highlighting a generally favorable income level within this profession. The data highlights a notable income gap among paragliding pilots, with a small group earning significantly more than the rest. Understanding the reasons behind this disparity is crucial for assessing job satisfaction and fairness within the industry. While most pilots earn a satisfactory income, a significant portion falls within lower

income brackets, raising questions about the financial sustainability of a paragliding career, especially for those on the lower income scale. The potential for higher income influences the attractiveness of a paragliding career, aiding industry growth. Conversely, significant income disparities might deter potential pilots, impacting the future availability of skilled professionals.

**Table 3**  
*Job Satisfaction with Hygiene and Motivation Factors.*

Particulars	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Satisfaction mean	1.58	.25
Hygiene means	1.81	.14
Motivation means	1.62	.15

Table 3 exposed one sample of statistics on all three factors. The overall mean of job satisfaction is 1.5828, the mean of hygiene is 1.8170, and the mean of motivation is 1.6239. Job satisfaction means it is less than the other two factors, so we can say that paragliding pilots are more satisfied with job satisfaction. Standard deviation measures the dispersion of data. The greater the standard deviation value, the more data disperses from the mean. The mean is the average, and the median is the number in the middle when you order all the numbers from least to most lavish. The associations of job satisfaction, hygiene, and motivational factors with age group, annual income, job duration, and education using the Kruskal-Wallis test which is primarily used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between the medians of three or more independent groups. It is a non-parametric test, meaning it does not assume a normal distribution of the data, making it suitable for ordinal data.

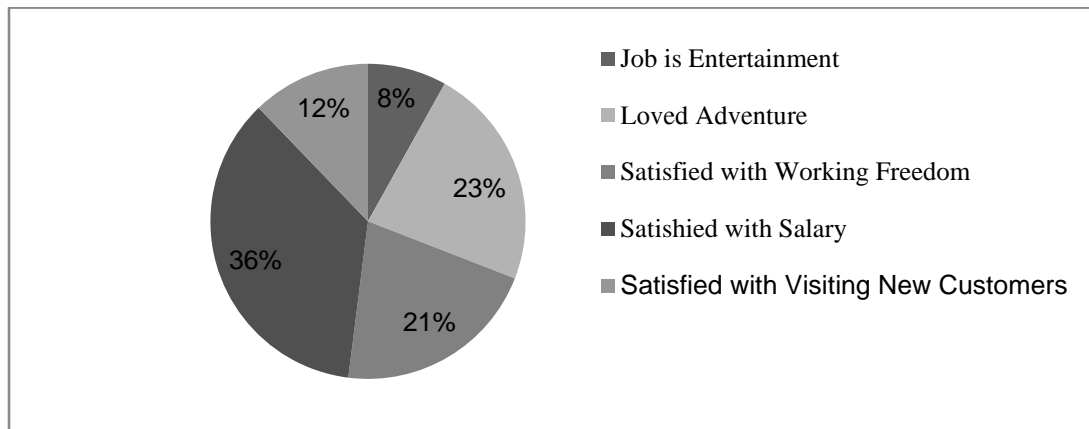
**Table 4**  
*Associations with Age Group, Annual Income, Job Duration, and Education*

Particular	Motivation Mean	Hygiene Mean	Job Satisfaction Mean	Kruskal-Wallis H	Df	Asymp. Sig.
Age Group	9.42	9.42	9.42	9.42	9.42	9.42
Annual Income	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00
Job Duration	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26
Education	2.39	2.39	2.39	2.39	2.39	2.39

Table 4 displays each variable's associations by comparing mean ranks for motivation, hygiene, and job satisfaction across different age groups, annual income, job durations, and educational levels. The table includes the Kruskal-Wallis H-statistic, degrees of freedom (Df), and Asymptotic Significance (Asymp. Sig.), which help determine if differences across groups are statistically significant.

The data shows that age group has a mean rank of 9.42 across motivation, hygiene, and job satisfaction. Annual Income shows a higher mean rank of 14.00, indicating possible differences in satisfaction factors related to income. Job Duration has a mean rank of 9.26. Education has a mean rank of 2.39, suggesting limited differences in job satisfaction, motivation, and hygiene across educational levels. This analysis explores the relationship between job satisfaction, hygiene, and motivational factors in connection with demographic and job-related variables such as age group, annual income, job duration, and education, using the Kruskal-Wallis test. This non-parametric test checks for statistically significant differences between the medians of three or more independent groups without assuming normal data distribution, making it ideal for ordinal or non-normally distributed data.

**Figure 1**  
*Job Satisfying Factors*



The pie chart illustrates the distribution of satisfaction factors among pilots. The majority, 55%, 35% enjoy the adventurous nature of their job. A smaller segment 12.5%, find their job entertaining, while 18.8% are satisfied with the opportunity to visit new customers. It helped them with their business marketing and personal network. Thapa and Lamichhane (2020) The data shows that overall gender satisfaction scores are positive; to enhance male satisfaction, paragliding companies should deliver services as promised, while females, should promptly address issues and show empathy to improve satisfaction levels.

#### **Paragliding Pilot's Perception of Sustainability of Paragliding in Pokhara**

Paragliding pilots were evaluated on how they responded while taking interview schedules for quantitative data. They were selected based on their interactive mood and time. The researcher made one group of eight pilots ask sustainability of their jobs. The FGD was conducted within an hour. The researcher had only eight guiding statements and questions to ask in FGD. The feedback from the focus group discussion (FGD) with paragliding pilots in Pokhara has yielded several important themes and suggestions for improving their working conditions and overall welfare. These suggestions can be categorized into four main themes: Policy and Planning, Employee Welfare, Operational Standards, and Work Environment.

Nearly half of the paragliding pilots said that most of the companies create and implement effective plans and policies. These policies should focus on enhancing the welfare and working conditions of paragliding pilots, ensuring they have a structured and supportive work environment. Pilots called for an increase in employee benefits to ensure they are well-compensated and motivated. This includes better salaries, health insurance, and other bonuses that can improve their overall job satisfaction and well-being. Guaranteeing job security was highlighted as crucial. Pilots need assurance of stable employment, along with efficient job allocation to prevent overworking or underworking, which can impact their performance and safety. There is a need to develop paragliding packages that meet market demands and maintain consistency across companies. This can attract more customers and ensure a steady flow of business. Ensuring that all pilots have access to sufficient safety equipment is vital. High safety standards must be maintained to protect pilots and customers alike. Fixing stable prices for customers and reducing unhealthy competition among companies is essential. This can ensure fair market practices and prevent price wars that could undermine the industry's sustainability. Creating standardized contracts for pilots can help in the fair negotiation of terms, including salaries and working conditions, between pilots and companies. This ensures transparency and fairness. Treating employees well and fostering a respectful work environment with proper job rules and regulations is crucial. A pilot-friendly atmosphere can enhance job satisfaction and productivity. Continuous training, workshops, and

refreshment programs are necessary to keep pilots' skills and knowledge up to date. This not only improves their professional capabilities but also ensures safety and quality service. Encouraging cooperation and unity among employees can create a cohesive working environment. A united workforce is more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and perform better collectively

### **Perceptions of the Sustainability of Paragliding in Pokhara**

Most of the community people perceived main two issues for the sustainability of of paragliding in Pokhara. The first is that environmental and ecological sustainability. The community members near the paragliding take-off and landing areas in Pokhara have raised several environmental concerns. Frequent use of these areas has led to noticeable soil erosion and vegetation loss, which threatens the local ecosystem. Additionally, the noise and human activity from paragliding operations have been reported to disturb local wildlife, impacting their natural behaviors and habitats. The increased tourist step has also increased waste management challenges, as higher volumes of waste are generated, straining the local waste management systems. The second concern is that socio economic sustainability. Paragliding has significantly impacted the community in various ways. It has become a vital source of revenue for Pokhara, contributing to the livelihoods of many residents and creating numerous jobs, from paragliding instructors to hospitality staff. However, this economic advantage has not been evenly distributed, leading to growing disparities between those who benefit directly from tourism and those who do not. Despite this, paragliding tourism has facilitated cultural exchange, enhancing mutual understanding between locals and tourists. Furthermore, the arrival of tourists has driven infrastructure development, benefiting the broader local community.

The researcher found two main impacts (environmental and socio cultural) of paragliding while observing the flights, paragliders' behaviors and talking with community people. The environmental impacts of paragliding tourism in Pokhara, Nepal, should be noted. They include land ruin, wildlife disturbance, and increased waste generation. Take up land near Toripani and Mandredhunga. The trees nearby were cut down, making it easier for the place to paraglide. Similarly, land was used for other buildings, sitting areas, and rest areas where people grew crops. Both areas are situated near the jungle, so wildlife went far due to the human sounds. Studies have shown that the intensive use of take-off and landing sites can lead to significant soil erosion, transforming once pristine areas into barren landscapes and habitat destruction, disrupting the delicate balance of the local ecosystem (Buckley, 2004; Gössling & Hall, 2006).

Paragliding significantly contributes to the local economy by generating revenue through tourism-related activities, creating employment opportunities, and promoting local businesses. However, economic benefits must be balanced with sustainable practices to avoid long-term detrimental effects (Nepal, 2008; Newsome et al., 2012). From the observation it was found that people can share their culture among community people and other national and international clients. Community people can lease and sell their land to operate paragliding activities. They also create a local market for their agro products. The community's people get engaged in various jobs created by paragliding activities. It helps to uplift the purchasing power of customers in society. The Nepal Air Sports Association (NAA) conducts the Paragliding championship which helps to increase the source of income for the community, attracting tourists and contributing to the local economy. The industry creates various employment opportunities, including paragliding instructors, equipment suppliers, and support staff in the hospitality and transport sectors. Increased tourist boosts local businesses, including restaurants, hotels, and retail shops. Paragliding attracts international tourists, promoting cultural exchange and enhancing mutual understanding between visitors and the local community. Various infrastructure and amenities related to tourism can uplift and develop.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis indicates that while motivational and hygiene factors are significantly associated with annual income, they are not significantly associated with age group, job duration, or education level. Job satisfaction is significantly associated with job duration but not with age group, annual income, or education level. The recommendations provided by paragliding pilots emphasize the need for comprehensive plans and policies, enhanced employee benefits, standardized paragliding packages,

adequate safety equipment, a respectful work environment, regular training and workshops, job security and proper allocation, stabilized customer pricing, standardized pilot contracts, and unified employee practices to improve the welfare, motivation, job satisfaction and overall sustainable of paragliding in Pokhara of Nepal. Sustainable sports tourism in Pokhara, particularly paragliding, holds the potential to bring substantial economic benefits while fostering cultural exchange and community development. However, addressing environmental degradation, socio-cultural impacts, and economic disparities is crucial for long-term sustainability. By implementing sustainable practices and involving local communities in tourism planning, Pokhara can ensure that paragliding remains a vibrant and sustainable component of its tourism industry. Further research is needed to identify factors affecting income levels, such as experience, qualifications, working hours, and demand. This understanding could help improve income opportunities for all pilots. Income significantly impacts job satisfaction, with higher earnings likely leading to greater job satisfaction due to financial security, while lower incomes may result in dissatisfaction, affecting performance and retention.

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