

Historical Study on Sustainable Tourism Practice in Nepal

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Abstract

Sustainability principles refer to the ecological, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development and a suitable balance between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Ecotourism is a burning issue and one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world tourism industry. Many developing countries like Nepal are trying to use ecotourism as a tool to achieve sustainable tourism goals. The UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 focuses on sustainable tourism. From the Nepalese perspective, tourism is gradually heading towards mass tourism. So it is the right time to implement the principles of sustainable tourism for its sustainable development. Nepal Tourism Policy 2009 identifies the tourism sector as an important vehicle for economic and social development. Directions set by the policy such as quality improvement of tourism services, increasing revenue, and expansion of employment opportunities to improve the living standard of Nepalese people. Vision 2020 focuses on sustainable tourism envisions of increasing tourist arrival to two million and tourism-related employment to one million. It is no doubt that proper use of sustainable tourism principles can be very beneficial in various aspects. Sustainable tourism has been priorities by the Nepal government for a long. However to achieve its objectives, in the context of the Nepalese tourism industry, much more has to be done in days to come.

Keywords: conservation, eco-tourism, eco-tourism projects, sustainable tourism.

Background

Tour and traveling have started along with the civilization of mankind. Traveling is a significant characteristic of human society. Tourism isn't a new phenomenon in world history. If we study prehistory or protohistory or archeology we will come to know that human beings have been moving from place to place for about 1 million years (Kunwar, 2012: 17).

Tourism is not new for Hindus. In Sanskrit literature, there is found different terms for tourism derived from the root *atan*, which means leaving home for some time to other places (Negi, 1982: 22). They had different types of tourism known as *partisan* (going out for pleasure and knowledge), *deshatan* (going to the places of religious importance), etc.

Till 1950 Nepal was isolated from international contact because of the closed-door Rana Policy. In 1950-51, a popular democratic movement was launched which overthrew the Ranas. After this, changes were witnessed in the country. Nepali people were liberated and Nepal was opened for the visitors (Ojha, 2018: 91). Before the 1950s only a handful of tourists visited Nepal under the strict permission of the Rana regime. Now, tourism has been recognized as a high paying industry and a very important source of earning.

Sustainable tourism is tourism while visiting the host region, which attempts to make low impacts on the local environment and the cultures and at the same time, generates employment for the local people and preserves the potential for the future visitors. Sustainable tourism is also called responsible tourism as each participant has to take responsibility.

Ecotourism is a burning issue and one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world tourism industry. Many developing countries like Nepal are trying to use ecotourism as a tool to achieve sustainable tourism goals. Nepal has a lot of opportunities in the ecotourism industry. Thus the government policy must be integrative, collaborative, and comprehensive to achieve a real outcome of ecotourism by realizing the importance of environmental, social, and economic imperatives.

Statement of the Problem

Nepal is a homeland for international visitors. The diversity in Nepal cannot be found in any other region of the world. The lowest point in Nepal is 59 meters above sea level in the Terai region while the highest point is Everest, 8848 meters above the sea level; the two points are in a straight line only 200 k.m. apart. Besides, a homely environment, friendly people, natural beauty, national heritages, flora, and fauna are the other products of the Nepalese tourism Industry. Because of such diversity –

1. Tourism is the backbone of the Nepalese hospitality industry.
2. The sustainable tourism model has been efficiently practiced in Nepal. Some national and international articles tried to address on sustainable tourism model and its practice in Nepal but they don't cover the overall aspects of sustainability.

This article intends to identify some unidentified problems in sustainable tourism practice in Nepal.

Research Question

So many such problems have been dealt with by so many researchers listed in the review of the literature. Some areas are not addressed that are being focused on by this research.

The research tries to answer the following question,

1. Why tourism is the backbone of Nepalese industry
2. How sustainable tourism is practiced in Nepal

The objective of the study

To present the study two main objectives were selected:

1. To analyze the sustainable tourism practice in the Nepalese tourism industry.
2. To explore tourism as the backbone of the Nepalese industry.

Methodology

This article is based upon a qualitative analysis. Descriptive, analytical, as well as informative method, has been used in this research. This research consists of present context data but some historical references are cited in the appropriate places. The basic source of information for this research is secondary information. Relevant books, journal articles, and government publications have been used properly. All the information collected has been classified, summarized, analyzed and some reflection will be made for this research.

Review of the Literature

1. Sustainable tourism development

Sustainable Tourism involves social responsibility, a strong commitment to nature, and the integration of local people in any tourist operation or development. Sustainable tourism is defined by the [World Tourism Organization \(WTO\)](#), the [Tourism Council \(WTTC\)](#), and the [Earth Council](#) as:

Sustainable Tourism Development meets the needs of present tourists, host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biodiversity, and life support systems.

2. Eco-tourism as sustainable tourism

Ecotourism is defined as the science of the relationships between organisms and the environment. The definitions about ecotourism reported in the Travel Industry Association of America's study, *Tourism, and the Environment* are as follows:

- Ecotourism is an environmentally friendly travel that emphasizes seeing and saving natural habitats and archeological treasures.
- Ecotourism is a tool for conservation.
- Ecotourism is ecologically responsible for tourism.
- Minimizing the negative impact on the environment.

These kinds of literature don't support the raised research questions but it is partially helpful to fulfill theoretical aspects of sustainable tourism. Hence, I have reviewed the available literature for this research.

Discussion

The UN Sustainable Development Goals set a path towards the pursuit of global sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and were agreed among 193 countries in September 2015. The 17 goals and 169 targets will guide the decisions that countries take over the years to 2030 to help them achieve strong economic foundations and a better future. Goal 12 focuses on sustainable consumption and production (<https://www.wttc.org>, 2017).

Tourism is in flux. International tourist arrivals in Europe reached 1.4 billion in 2018 which is a 6% increment than in 2017. Asia and the Pacific recorded 343 million international tourist arrivals in 2018. Arrivals in South Asia grew 5%, in South-East Asia 7%, and in Oceania 3%. Arrivals to North-East Asia increased by 3%. 217 million international tourists visited America in 2018 whereas 67 million tourists visited Africa in 2018. The Middle East increased by 10% in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). 134 million Chinese tourists visited all over the world in 2018 and they spent about USD 120 billion (<http://www.globaltimes.cn>, 2019). In 2017, 2.5 million Chinese tourists visited Tibet. The average expense of the Chinese tourist is 100 thousand per person(Thapa,2018: 7) which is an encouraging figure in the tourism

industry. The growth of tourism in recent years confirms that the sector is today one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth and development. UNWTO has focused on 2019 on education, skills, and job creation (UNWTO, 2019).

According to World Travel & Tourism Council (2017), the Travel & Tourism generated 10.4 percent of global GDP and supported 313 million jobs or 9.9% of total employment in 2017, equivalent to 1 in 11 jobs in the global economy. The Travel & Tourism sector is expected to grow faster than the wider economy and many other industries over the next decade. It is anticipated to support over 370 million jobs by 2026 (WTTC,2017).

Tourist Trend in Nepal

Nepal Tourism Policy 2009 identifies the tourism sector as an important vehicle for economic and social development. Vision 2020 focuses on tourist arrival to two million and tourism-related employment to one million.

The trend of tourist arrival was in increased order up to 2012 which declined thereafter. The year 2015 seems most shocking having decreased by 32 percent compared to 2014(Nepal Tourism Statics, 2016: 11). After 2015 it gradually geared up. According to the Nepal Tourism Board, (NTB) total of 969,287 tourists visited Nepal via air and 203,785 tourists came via land in 2017. The tourism sector of Nepal enjoyed phenomenal growth in international tourist arrivals to Nepal in 2018. The consistent and upward momentum continued throughout the year and the annual arrival figures have reached well above the one million marks. According to the Immigration Department (and its offices) 969,287, international visitors came by air and 203,785 came overland. In aggregate, a total of 1,173,072 visitors visited Nepal in 2018, a cumulative increase of 24.77% over the same period in 2017. The overall arrivals from SAARC countries registered a speedy growth of 85 % in 2019.

The year 2019 seems a remarkable improvement in tourist arrivals. In aggregate, a total of 1,173,072 visitors visited Nepal in 2018, a cumulative increase of 24.77% over the same period in 2017. Data published by NTB in February 2019 has witnessed a continuing growth trend. According to the Immigration Department (and its offices) 97,694, international visitors came by air and 26,727 came overland. In aggregate, a total of 124,421 visitors visited Nepal in February 2019, a cumulative increase of 39 % over the same period in 2018 which is a good sign for Nepalese Tourism.

Average Duration of Stay

In contrast to the rising tourist arrival trend, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation statistics indicate a drop in the average duration of foreign tourists' stay in Nepal in 2017, terming that as a seven-year low. According to the department of tourism, 2017 saw a 6% drop in the duration of stay, year-on-year, missing the target of 14 days. The average duration of stay was just **12.6** days in 2017, less than **13.4** days in 2016, **13.16** days in 2015, **12.44** in 2014, **12.60** in 2013, **12.16** in 2012, **13.12** in 2011, and **12.67** in 2010. The department analyzed the length of stay of 400,000 tourists as part of the survey. The fluctuation in statistical calculation has occurred because of an increasing number of tourists visiting more than two places during one travel. So, they have a shorter stay in Nepal (MoCTCA,

2018). Recent data hasn't been updated yet. The number of tourists by the purpose of the visit is a major indicator of tourism sector output. This indicator is very useful for the evaluation of characteristics, type, and economic and social contributions made by tourists and to plan and manage infrastructure, services, and market economy accordingly. It also shows the inflow of high-value tourists.

Table1.*Tourist Arrival in Nepal*

Indicators	2015	2016	2017
Tourist Arrival by			
Air	407412	572563	760577
Land	131558	180439	179641
Total	538970	753002	940218
Average Length of Stay	13.16	13.4	12.6
Sex			
Male	289158	399091	509598
Female	249813	353911	430620
Top Five Country in Nepalese Tourism			
Rank 1	India	India	India
Rank 2	China	China	China
Rank 3	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	USA
Rank 4	USA	USA	United Kingdom
Rank 5	Thailand	United Kingdom	Sri Lanka

(Source-Nepal Tourism Statistics 2018. P.11)

Eco-tourism as Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices apply to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus-

building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

Sustainable Tourism Practice in Nepal

With an aim of poverty alleviation through sustainable tourism, the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) is an initiative of the Nepal Government toward eco-tourism in Nepal with technical and financial support from various international development agencies and non-government organizations. It is believed to contribute to the poverty alleviation objective of the government through sustainable tourism development that is pro-poor, pro-environment, pro-rural communities, and pro-women, making the benefits of tourism reach a grass-roots level in the specific program sites.

Recent developments on the major trekking trails especially on the Annapurna and Everest region have been a serious concern to both the environmentalists and locals and for ecotourism. The increased number of tourists and teahouses in the trekking trails and unplanned road connectivity indirectly increased the demand for wood and fuel which led to deforestation as well as spoilt nature. Another problem is solid waste management. Waste matter such as plastic materials, oxygen cylinder, and so on, in the trekking trail has been increasing rapidly without the proper mechanism for disposal.

Eco-tourism development requires a partnership and friendly relation between tour operators, travelers, local stakeholders, and the concerned government authorities. Working with a range of National and International partners we have built up a wide range of Green tourism experience (<https://www.acrosshimalaya.com>)

Eco-tourism Practice in Nepal

Ecotourism has been practicing in a different part of the country to uplift the living standard of the local people engaging them in economic activity. They are:-

a) Annapurna Conservation Area Project

This project is established in 1986 covering a vast area of almost five districts of the western development region of the country. The project, supported by many national and international organizations, is well-known for its outstanding model for natural resource conservation and community development (<http://www.welcomenepal.com>).

b. Ghalegaon Sikles Ecotourism Project (GSEP):

It is also one of the successful ecotourism projects of the country, established in 1992, designed by KMTNC and ACAP, and funded by the Asian Development Bank for tourism infrastructure development. The main aim of the project is to contribute to the conservation of natural resources and local community development through responsible tourism. The project has been doing various significant tasks in the field of nature conservation such as

foot trail construction, forest zoning, river training, sustainable forest harvesting, promoting alternative energy devices from solar, micro-hydro projects, and fuel-efficient ovens (<http://www.welcomenepal.com>).

c. Kanchenjunga Community Based Ecotourism Project:

The project initiated its major plan in 1998 with 84 tourists. However, it facing overcrowded with trekkers who leave out much garbage and rubbish. Thus the project has major duty to manage wastes and conserve the natural environment with the help of maximum involvement of locals. In the area, there two major projects, the Kanchenjunga conservation project and the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRRAP) which are working together for sustainable development of infrastructure, nature, and culture conservation, ecotourism development, agro-forestry, and capacity building for local people. (<http://www.welcomenepal.com>)

d. Manaslu Nature-Based Ecotourism Project:

The project was established in 1999 with a special purpose of conservation and community development. The area is now being managed by KMTNC to develop the area as the Annapurna Conservation Area Project model to manage the area effectively for the promotion of responsible tourism to provide the maximum benefit to local people through their genuine involvement. To conserve the area and develop ecotourism in the park, there is a project named Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRRAP) which is working for environmental conservation, participation of local people, supporting the local economy, development of infrastructures, and supporting disadvantaged gender, ethnic groups. (<http://www.welcomenepal.com>)

It is established in 2000 with the key aim of preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage through sustainable tourism management. The project also basically focuses on capacity building of local for their active participation in planning, management, and monitoring of the project which can enhance the lifestyle of local people and conservation of the local environment. The project was supported by ACAP in various aspects to gain the required success of the projects. (<http://www.welcomenepal.com>)

e. Simikot, Humla Development Project:

The project mainly emphasizes conserving Buddhist cultural and religious heritages and natural resources of the northwestern region of the country which comprises a trekking route to Mt. Kailash and [Mansarovar Lake](#) a center of pilgrimage. The project is getting financial support from the Netherland Development Organization (SNV) and local networks in Humla to run various significant works such as paving the trails, management of waste, sanitation, and drainage, improving different lodges and religious heritages. And it also conducts skill development training to village guides, porters, local lodge owners to increase the involvement of locals (<http://nationalecotourism.com>)

f. Others:

There are so many other ecotourism projects which are effectively working on the way to support ecotourism directly or indirectly. They are Makalu Barun Development Project, Tansen Development Project, [Dolpa Development Project](#), The Partnership for Quality Tourism Project, etc. are other more ecotourism projects work in various natural and tourism sites for promoting eco-tourism effectively. (<http://nationalecotourism.com>)

Conclusion

From the Nepalese perspective, tourism is gradually heading towards mass tourism. So it is the right time to implement the principles of ecotourism in the growing field of tourism so that it can help to conserve natural ecosystems and promote local culture while protecting generation old cultural and religious heritages by curbing the fast growth of tourism for its sustainable development. Ecotourism could provide maximum benefits for local communities with environmental conservation through maximum involvement of all stakeholders of the tourism industry to aware of the need for ecotourism as responsible tourism to promote balanced development in the country.

It is no doubt that the proper use of ecotourism can be very beneficial in various aspects. Nepal is blessed with various resources for attracting tourists in different ways. These resources need to be utilized properly, and ecotourism can be the best vehicle to deliver socio-economic enhancement of remote and rural areas and also to safeguard the environment of the host community.

It is hard to say exactly when ecotourism had started in Nepal. But it is generally believed that the importance and necessity of ecotourism were realized significantly with the enactment of the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act in 1973 and the establishment of various natural Protected Areas in the hope of conservation of ecosystem and development in the community and other sectors in an integrated way for sustainable development of Tourism. Now ecotourism gets heightened every single tourism activity. However to achieve its objectives, in the context of the Nepalese tourism industry, much more has to be done.

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