

Journal of Tourism & Adventure

Slow Tourism: Possibilities for Pokhara, Nepal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jota.v9i1.98749>

Article History

Received: 4 June 2026

Revised: 25 July 2026

Accepted: 29 July 2026

Keywords

Tourism, community,
authenticity, sustainability,
Pokhara.

To cite this article:

Subedi, A. (2026). Slow Tourism:
Possibilities for Pokhara, Nepal.
Journal of Tourism & Adventure,
9(1), 83-124. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jota.v9i1.98749>

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Abstract

Slow tourism has emerged as an alternative tourism paradigm that emphasizes meaningful travel experiences, longer stays, responsible mobility, community participation, cultural authenticity, and environmental sustainability. Despite growing international recognition, its potential application in Nepal remains largely unexplored. This study examines the concept of slow tourism and assesses its potential for tourism development in Pokhara, Nepal. It uses a conceptual, exploratory, and qualitative approach based on a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and analysis of national tourism policies, periodic development plans, and the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (2023). The findings reveal that slow tourism has evolved into a multidimensional approach. Pokhara possesses strong potential for slow tourism owing to its natural landscapes, rural settlements, cultural diversity, indigenous traditions, local gastronomy, wellness opportunities, and community-based tourism initiatives. The study concludes that slow tourism provides a promising framework for enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism in Pokhara. It contributes to the limited literature on slow tourism in developing mountain destinations and provides a conceptual foundation for future research and policy development in Nepal.

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most influential socio-economic activities globally, contributing significantly to employment generation, economic diversification, cultural exchange, and regional development. However, the dominant paradigm of mass tourism, characterized by high visitor turnover, short stays, standardized travel, and intensive resource consumption, has increasingly been criticized for its socio-cultural and environmental consequences. These include environmental degradation, resource depletion, congestion in visit sites, cultural commodification, concentration of visits only in popular destinations, greenhouse gas emission and uneven distribution of economic benefits (Butler, 1980; Hall, 2008). In response to these challenges, alternative tourism paradigms have emerged that emphasize sustainability, authenticity, and meaningful engagement with destinations and communities. Among these, slow tourism has gained prominence as both a conceptual framework and a practical approach to rethinking contemporary travel behavior. Rather than maximizing the number of destinations visited, slow tourism emphasizes the quality of experience, encouraging travelers to spend longer durations in fewer destinations. A central feature of slow tourism is its emphasis on meaningful place attachment and experiential depth. Unlike mass tourism, which often treats destinations as consumable products, slow tourism encourages immersive engagement with local communities, traditions, nature and everyday life. This approach aligns with growing demand among tourists for authenticity, personal transformation, and cultural learning experiences (Fullagar *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, slow tourism is not merely a niche market but a broader shift in tourism values that reflects changing global attitudes toward sustainability and well-being.

Environmental sustainability is one of the core dimensions of slow tourism. High-carbon mobility patterns, particularly frequent air travel and multi-destination trips, have been identified as major contributors to tourism-related greenhouse gas emissions (Gössling *et al.*, 2015). Slow tourism promotes low-impact mobility, longer stays, and reduced travel frequency, thereby contributing to climate-sensitive tourism practices. This aligns with global sustainability agendas, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, 2018), which emphasize responsible consumption and sustainable economic growth. Thus, within this changing tourism paradigm, slow tourism has emerged as an complementary approach but challenges the dominant principles of speed and standardized travel experiences.

Slow tourism is influenced by the broader slow movement, which originated from the slow food movement initiated in Italy during the late 1980s as a response to the globalization and industrialization of food systems (Petrini, 2001). The philosophy of slowness has gradually expanded into various sectors, including slow cities, slow living, and slow tourism, promoting values such as locality, authenticity, quality, environmental responsibility, and social connection (Parkins & Craig, 2006; Fullagar *et al.*, 2012).

Slow tourism does not simply refer to travelling at a slower physical pace; rather, it represents a fundamental shift in the way tourism experiences are produced, consumed, and understood. It encourages travelers to spend more time in destinations, engage deeply

with local cultures, reduce environmental impacts, and develop meaningful interactions with communities (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). According to Caffyn (2012), slow tourism emphasizes “quality of experience” over the “quantity of attractions visited”, encouraging visitors to appreciate local landscapes, traditions, food systems, and everyday lifestyles. Thus, slow tourism provides an opportunity to move beyond the conventional tourist gaze toward more reflective, responsible, and place-based forms of travel.

Although the concept originated in Europe, it has gradually evolved into a global discourse encompassing sustainable tourism, regenerative tourism, community-based tourism, rural development, and visitor well-being. Recent studies demonstrate that slow tourism is no longer understood merely as travelling at a slower pace, but as a multidimensional approach integrating environmental responsibility, cultural authenticity, local participation, and experiential quality (Oh *et al.*, 2022; Wulandari & Jayanti, 2025). This evolution has broadened the relevance of slow tourism for destinations seeking to balance tourism growth with conservation and community well-being.

The emergence of slow tourism is closely connected with the growing global emphasis on sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism seeks to balance economic benefits with environmental conservation and socio-cultural integrity, ensuring that tourism development meets present needs without compromising future generations (UNWTO, 2018). Slow tourism contributes to this agenda by promoting longer stays, reduced dependence on high-carbon transportation, support for local economies, and consumption of locally produced goods and services (Dickinson *et al.*, 2011). In this sense, slow tourism represents not only a tourism product but also a philosophy of responsible engagement with destinations.

A key feature of slow tourism is its focus on place attachment and authenticity. Unlike mass tourism, which often prioritizes quantity, rapid movement, and consumption of major attractions, slow tourism encourages visitors to experience destinations through local immersion, cultural practices, natural environments, and community interactions (Oh *et al.*, 2016a). This approach creates opportunities for rural areas, local communities, and culturally distinctive destinations to participate in tourism development while maintaining their identity and heritage. Slow tourism also aligns with community-based tourism approach by recognizing local knowledge, traditions, and resources as essential components of tourism value creation (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

The concept has gained increasing attention in the context of post-pandemic tourism transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities associated with overcrowded destinations and highly globalized tourism systems, leading to renewed interest in smaller-scale, nature-based, and meaningful travel experiences (Brouder, 2020). Travelers increasingly seek less crowded destinations, wellness-oriented experiences, authentic food system, and environmentally responsible choices. These changing preferences provide further relevance to slow tourism as a pathway toward more resilient and sustainable tourism futures.

In the context of Nepal, tourism has emerged as a significant contributor to its socio-economic development, supporting employment generation, foreign exchange earnings,

local entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and regional development. But Nepal's tourism development has also experienced challenges associated with rapid growth, uneven spatial distribution, environmental pressure, commercialization of cultural resources, seasonal concentration, and limited integration of local communities into tourism value chains (NTB, 2020; MoCTCA, 2023; MOCTCA, 2025). Nepal's tourism sector has traditionally relied on adventure like trekking and mountaineering and to certain aspect heritage tourism. However, challenges such as uneven tourism distribution, environmental pressure in popular destinations, commercialization of cultural resources, and limited community participation highlight the need for alternative tourism models.

Historically, tourism development in Nepal has largely focused on increasing visitor numbers, expanding tourism infrastructure, and promoting major destinations. While this growth-oriented approach has generated economic benefits, it has also contributed to concerns regarding destination carrying capacity, waste management, ecological degradation, cultural commodification, and dependency on highly concentrated tourism activities.

Although slow tourism is not explicitly mentioned in Nepal's policy documents, existing forms of community-based tourism, homestays, eco-cultural tourism and other forms of tourism initiatives closely align with slow tourism. Nepal's diverse topography, rich cultural heritage, and strong rural traditions provide a natural foundation for tourism models that emphasize immersion, participation, and locality. Community-based tourism in Nepal has been widely recognized as a mechanism for local empowerment, cultural preservation, and sustainable livelihood generation, particularly through homestay programs in rural and indigenous communities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2017; Gautam, 2023). These forms of tourism inherently reflect principles of slowness, as they encourage longer stays, direct interaction with host families, and participation in local livelihoods. Homestay tourism, particularly women-managed initiatives, has demonstrated positive outcomes in terms of income diversification and social empowerment in rural communities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2017). These initiatives reflect the broader principles of sustainable tourism by balancing economic benefits with socio-cultural and environmental considerations (UNWTO, 2018).

With its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, indigenous traditions, homestays and globally recognized natural attractions, Nepal, Pokhara valley in particular, is positioned as an important destination for nature-based, adventure, cultural, and spiritual tourism. The Himalayan environment, rural settlements, biodiversity, and living cultural heritages provide substantial opportunities for developing tourism experiences based on authenticity, community engagement, and sustainability. Therefore, the principles of slow tourism have particular significance for experiential tourism development. Slow tourism offers a potential framework for strengthening local economies, promoting responsible visitor behavior, and supporting sustainable destination management.

Recent tourism policy and destination management initiatives highlight the importance of environmentally responsible tourism, community involvement, and development of alternative tourism products (MOCTCA, 2025). However, despite policies of interest in sustainable and diversification of tourism, the specific conceptualization, implementation

mechanisms, and practical applications of slow tourism remain relatively underexplored in the Nepalese context. The tourism strategy of Nepal includes several types of tourism aimed at diversifying the tourism sector and promoting sustainable development. The review of strategy has examined adventure tourism, cultural tourism, rural and community-based tourism, wildlife tourism, wellness and meditation tourism, eco-tourism, agro-tourism, and gastronomy/food tourism (NTB, 2020; MOCTCA, 2025). But slow tourism has not been included as a stand-alone or as an integrated approach combining other types of tourism.

The Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2023 (STAP) emphasizes responsible destination management, environmental conservation, community involvement, improved visitor experiences, and sustainable use of tourism resources (ADB, 2023). These policy initiatives create a supportive foundation for integrating slow tourism principles into Pokhara's tourism development framework. Pokhara provides a particularly relevant context for examining slow tourism because it is one of Nepal's most important tourism destinations and has been declared as the tourism capital by Nepal Government. The destination possesses significant potential for slow tourism through its natural landscapes, lakes and wetlands, surrounding rural communities, cultural diversity, trekking routes, local food systems, and community-based experiences. But simultaneously, it is facing challenges associated with rapid urbanization, infrastructure development, commercialization, waste management, pressure on natural resources, environmental stress, and mass tourism expansion. These demonstrate the need for more sustainable tourism management approaches. Slow tourism may provide an alternative model for balancing economic benefits with environmental and socio-cultural sustainability in Pokhara.

Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the emerging discourse on slow tourism by examining its conceptual foundations, relevance, and potential application within the context of diversified tourism development. By reviewing existing literature, policies, and destination-level practices, the paper seeks to identify opportunities, challenges and gaps associated with adopting slow tourism principles for Pokhara.

The study contributes to the broader tourism literature by positioning slow tourism as a transformative approach capable of supporting sustainable, environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and culturally sensitive tourism development in Pokhara, Nepal. By synthesizing international and Nepal-specific literature, this review also identifies important research gaps and establishes the conceptual foundation for examining the potential application of slow tourism in Pokhara, Nepal.

Literature review

Reviews of literature include various scholarly publications on tourism including slow tourism, and documents related to tourism policies, plans and strategies of Nepal.

Theoretical foundations of slow tourism

Slow tourism is grounded in broader philosophical and theoretical perspectives that challenge the dominant growth-oriented model of tourism development. Rather than viewing tourism primarily as an economic activity characterized by increasing visitor arrivals and rapid

destination consumption, slow tourism emphasizes quality of experience, environmental stewardship, social equity, and cultural integrity. Its theoretical foundations draw upon the Slow Movement (Oh *et al.*, 2022; Petrini, 2001; Caffyn, 2012), sustainable tourism theory (Butler, 1999; Hall, 2019), experiential tourism (Heitman, 2011; Oh *et al.* 2022), place-based development (Oh *et al.*, 2016b), rural tourism (Lane, 2009), and more recently, regenerative tourism (Barbarossa and Pappalardo, 2025).

The origins of slow tourism can be traced to the Slow Movement, which emerged through the Slow Food Movement initiated by Carlo Petrini in Italy during the late 1980s. The movement arose as a response to increasing globalization, industrialization of food production, and the erosion of local traditions and cultural identities (Petrini, 2001). Rather than rejecting modernization itself, the Slow Movement advocates a more balanced way of living that values locality, quality, environmental responsibility, and meaningful human relationships. These principles have subsequently been extended into numerous sectors, including urban planning, education, healthcare, and tourism (Parkins & Craig, 2006).

Within tourism, these principles challenge the prevailing emphasis on speed, efficiency, and consumption. Instead of encouraging tourists to maximize the number of destinations visited within limited time, slow tourism promotes longer stays, deeper engagement with local communities, appreciation of cultural diversity, and environmentally responsible travel practices. Thus, “slow” refers less to physical speed than to a conscious philosophy of travelling that values immersion, reflection, and connection.

The concept is also closely associated with **sustainable tourism theory**, which advocates balancing economic development with environmental conservation and socio-cultural well-being (Butler, 1999). While sustainable tourism provides the overarching objective of minimizing negative impacts and maximizing long-term benefits, slow tourism offers a practical pathway for achieving these goals by encouraging low-carbon mobility, local consumption, community participation, and smaller-scale tourism development. Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) argue that slow tourism operationalizes sustainability through changes in tourist behavior, travel patterns, and destination management rather than relying solely on technological solutions or regulatory measures.

According to Heitmann *et al.* (2011), slow tourism to encompasses a broader set of orientations, including mindful consumption, authentic local engagement, environmental impact minimization, and the deliberate rejection of commodified tourist experiences.

Another important theoretical perspective underpinning slow tourism is the **experience economy**, which emphasizes the creation of memorable and meaningful experiences rather than the consumption of standardized products. As tourists increasingly seek authenticity, learning opportunities, personal transformation, and emotional well-being, destinations are encouraged to provide participatory and place-based experiences that foster stronger connections between visitors and local communities. In this respect, slow tourism shifts the focus from the quantity of attractions visited to the quality and significance of experiences gained.

Slow tourism also aligns with place-based development theory, which recognizes that tourism competitiveness should be built upon the distinctive environmental, cultural, and social characteristics of destinations (Oh *et al.*, 2016b). Rather than replicating standardized tourism products, place-based approaches emphasize local identity, heritage, landscapes, and community knowledge as the foundations of sustainable development. This perspective is particularly relevant for destinations such as Pokhara, where exceptional natural beauty, rich cultural diversity, traditional villages, and local food systems provide unique opportunities for developing authentic tourism experiences.

More recently, scholars have linked slow tourism with regenerative tourism, arguing that tourism should contribute not only to minimizing negative impacts but also to actively restoring ecosystems, strengthening communities, and enhancing destination resilience.

Wulandari and Jayanti (2025) argue that slow tourism should now be understood as a regenerative tourism paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability, psychological well-being, community empowerment, and technological innovation. Similarly, Barbarossa and Pappalardo (2025) demonstrate how slow mobility, particularly cycling tourism, can facilitate landscape regeneration, heritage conservation, and regional development. These emerging perspectives suggest that slow tourism has evolved beyond an alternative niche tourism product to become a comprehensive framework for sustainable and regenerative destination development.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives indicate that slow tourism is best understood not simply as travelling more slowly, but as a holistic tourism philosophy that integrates environmental responsibility, authentic cultural engagement, community participation, visitor well-being, and place-based development. This theoretical foundation provides an appropriate framework for examining the potential application of slow tourism within destinations such as Pokhara.

Conceptual evolution of slow tourism

The concept of slow tourism has evolved considerably over the past two decades in response to changing understandings of sustainability, tourist behavior, and destination development. Early discussions primarily associated slow tourism with reduced travel speed, alternative modes of transportation, and longer holiday durations. Heitman (2011) suggests that slow tourism should not be understood only by transport mode, rather it is a mindset that prioritizes quality of experiences over quality of destinations visited.

However, subsequent research has progressively broadened the concept to encompass environmental ethics, cultural authenticity, community engagement, experiential quality, and regenerative development.

Early scholarly research viewed slow tourism largely as a reaction against the negative consequences of mass tourism, characterized by rapid mobility, standardized tourism products, short destination stays, and intensive resource consumption. Fullagar *et al.* (2012) describe slow tourism as an approach that values slower rhythms of travel, deeper engagement, and meaningful experiences rather than speed and efficiency. Similarly, Dickinson and Lumsdon

(2010) argue that slow tourism represents “a different way of thinking about tourism,” encouraging visitors to spend more time in fewer destinations while developing stronger emotional and cultural connections with places and people.

As the concept matured, researchers increasingly recognized that the defining characteristic of slow tourism lies not in physical speed but in the quality of interactions between tourists, destinations, and host communities. Caffyn (2012) emphasizes that slow tourism involves a transformation in tourist behavior whereby visitors become more aware of their environmental, social, and cultural responsibilities. This perspective shifts attention from tourism consumption toward mindful participation, encouraging travelers to appreciate local heritage, support local economies, and reduce environmental impacts.

Recent scholarships have further expanded the conceptual boundaries of slow tourism. Based on empirical analysis of travel vloggers’ experiences, Oh *et al.* (2022) conceptualize slow tourism as a multidimensional phenomenon in which tourists spend longer periods at destinations, maintain flexible itineraries, and seek harmonious relationships with nature, local communities, and cultural environments.

This definition emphasizes that slow tourism is not merely a behavioral choice, but a holistic travel philosophy characterized by meaningful engagement, environmental consciousness, and experiential depth.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, slow tourism has gained renewed attention as destinations seek more resilient and sustainable development pathways. Wulandari and Jayanti (2025) argue that slow tourism should no longer be interpreted simply as travelling at a slower pace. Instead, they position it as a regenerative tourism paradigm capable of enhancing visitor well-being, environmental sustainability, community resilience, and destination regeneration.

This perspective reflects a broader shift within tourism research from sustainability, which primarily seeks to reduce negative impacts, toward regeneration, which aims to restore ecosystems, strengthen communities, and improve the overall health of destinations.

Overall, the literature demonstrates a clear conceptual evolution of slow tourism. Earlier studies focused primarily on mobility and travel behavior, whereas contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes slow tourism as a multidimensional framework integrating sustainability, cultural authenticity, community participation, experiential quality, and regenerative development.

This evolution provides an important conceptual basis for exploring the applicability of slow tourism in destinations such as Pokhara, where rich natural landscapes, cultural diversity, and community-based tourism resources offer significant opportunities for developing more responsible and meaningful tourism experiences.

Dimensions and characteristics of slow tourism

Although slow tourism has been interpreted in different ways through the literature, there is broad consensus that it is a multidimensional concept rather than simply a slower mode of travel. Contemporary scholarship identifies several interrelated dimensions that collectively

distinguish slow tourism from conventional tourism. These include slow mobility, meaningful experiences, place attachment, environmental responsibility, cultural authenticity, community participation, local economic integration, and visitor well-being. Rather than functioning independently, these dimensions reinforce one another to create a tourism experience that is environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, and culturally meaningful.

One of the defining characteristics of slow tourism is its emphasis on meaningful experiences. Unlike conventional tourism, which often encourages tourists to maximize the number of attractions visited within limited time, slow tourism values immersion, learning, reflection, and emotional engagement with destinations. Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) argue that slow tourism represents a shift from “seeing more” to “experiencing more,” encouraging visitors to spend longer periods in fewer places and to develop deeper relationships with local environments and communities. Consequently, the quality of experience becomes more important than the quantity of destinations visited.

Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) view slow tourism having the features such as longer duration stay at local small-scale accommodation, low-carbon transportation, sensory, spiritual and intellectual engagement, consumption of traditionally processed foods, and active engagement with local communities.

Gardner (2009) contributes to a typology distinguishing between intentional slow tourists (who consciously adopt slow practices), incidental slow tourists (who slow down due to circumstances such as injury, sickness or weather), and transitional slow tourists (who discover slow practices *in situ* and adapt their behavior accordingly).

Another important dimension is place embeddedness. Slow tourists seek to understand destinations through everyday life rather than through highly commercialized attractions alone. This involves engaging with local landscapes, traditions, food systems, and cultural practices, thereby fostering stronger emotional attachment to place. Oh *et al.* (2016b) suggest that authentic place-based experiences contribute significantly to visitor satisfaction because they enable tourists to develop a deeper appreciation of local identity and heritage. Such experiences also encourage destinations to differentiate themselves through their unique cultural and environmental resources rather than through standardized tourism products.

Community participation constitutes another central dimension of slow tourism. Unlike conventional tourism models, where residents local often remain passive beneficiaries, slow tourism recognizes communities as active partners in tourism planning, management, and service delivery. Lane and Kastenholz (2015) argue that meaningful involvement of local communities enhances tourism sustainability by strengthening local ownership, preserving cultural identity, and ensuring that tourism benefits remain within destinations. Community participation may take various forms, including homestays, locally guided experiences, handicraft production, cultural performances, and community-managed tourism enterprises.

Environmental responsibility is equally fundamental to slow tourism. Tourists are encouraged to minimize their ecological footprints by supporting environmentally responsible accommodation, consuming locally produced goods, reducing waste, and adopting lower-

carbon modes of transport. In this sense, environmental stewardship is not viewed as an additional component of tourism but rather as an integral part of the travel experience itself.

Recent research have expanded these dimensions further. Wulandari and Jayanti (2025) propose that contemporary slow tourism should be understood through three complementary dimensions: psychological restoration, technological mediation, and social harmony. Psychological restoration emphasizes mindfulness, relaxation, emotional well-being, and personal growth.

Technological mediation recognizes the role of digital technologies in facilitating accessible, low-carbon, and personalized travel experiences without undermining authentic local engagement.

Social conviviality highlights cooperation among tourists, residents, businesses, and public institutions in creating inclusive and resilient tourism destinations.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that slow tourism has evolved into a comprehensive tourism framework encompassing environmental sustainability, cultural authenticity, community participation, experiential quality, and human well-being. This multidimensional understanding provides a useful analytical framework for assessing the tourism resources and development potential of destinations such as Pokhara.

Slow tourism, time, and mobility

Time occupies a central position within slow tourism philosophy because it fundamentally shapes how visitors experience destinations. Conventional tourism is frequently characterized by compressed itineraries, rapid sightseeing, and the pursuit of multiple destinations within limited time. Such patterns often encourage superficial engagement with places and contribute to increased environmental impacts associated with intensive transportation. In contrast, slow tourism advocates a more deliberate use of time, allowing visitors to develop meaningful relationships with local environments, cultures, and communities.

Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) argue that slow tourism involves “taking time to travel, experience, and understand destinations” rather than simply consuming tourism products. Longer stays enable visitors to participate in everyday community life, appreciate seasonal rhythms, explore local traditions, and develop emotional connections with places. Time, therefore, becomes a valuable resource for learning, reflection, and cultural exchange rather than merely a constraint to be minimized.

Empirical studies suggest that tourists increasingly value experiences that promote personal well-being, relaxation, authenticity, learning and meaningful social interaction. Oh *et al.* (2016a) found that slow tourists are motivated less by the desire to maximize sightseeing opportunities but by more by opportunities for cultural immersion, learning, and psychological restoration. This reflects broader changes in tourist preferences, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, where increasing attention has been given to wellness, mindfulness, and experiential travel.

Closely associated with time is the concept of slow mobility. Transportation represents one of the largest contributors to tourism-related greenhouse gas emissions, particularly through frequent air travel and high-speed transportation systems. Consequently, mobility has become a major focus within slow tourism research. Rather than treating transportation merely as a means of reaching destinations, slow tourism reconceptualizes the journey itself as an important component of the visitor experience.

Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) identify slow mobility as one of the defining characteristics of slow tourism. Walking, cycling, public transportation, rail travel, and other low-carbon forms of mobility encourage visitors to engage more closely with landscapes and local communities while simultaneously reducing environmental impacts. Such mobility also enables tourists to experience gradual transitions between places, observe everyday life, and appreciate environmental and cultural diversity that may otherwise be overlooked through rapid travel.

Nevertheless, slow mobility should not be interpreted as opposition to technological advancement or transport efficiency. Rather, it advocates selecting mobility options that balance accessibility, environmental responsibility, and experiential quality. Recent studies suggest that digital technologies can support slow mobility through improved journey planning, real-time transport information, cycling networks, and interpretation services that enrich visitor experiences while encouraging sustainable travel behavior (Wulandari & Jayanti, 2025).

Overall, the literature indicates that time and mobility are closely interconnected with slow tourism. By encouraging longer stays and lower-impact travel, slow tourism simultaneously enhances visitor experiences, strengthens local economic benefits, and reduces environmental pressures. These principles are particularly relevant for destinations seeking to balance tourism growth with sustainability.

Slow tourism, cultural authenticity, and community participation

Cultural authenticity represents one of the most frequently discussed themes in slow tourism literature because meaningful interaction with local culture lies at the heart of the slow tourism experience. As tourists increasingly seek experiences that are distinctive, educational, and enriching personally, destinations are placing greater emphasis on preserving local traditions, heritage, and everyday cultural practices rather than relying solely on purpose-built tourism attractions.

Richards (2018) argues that contemporary cultural tourists increasingly seek participatory and creative experiences that enable them to engage actively with local communities rather than simply observe cultural performances. Slow tourism supports this transition by encouraging activities such as homestays, participation in traditional farming, local food preparation, handicraft production, cultural festivals, storytelling, and community-guided heritage interpretation. These experiences enable visitors to gain a more nuanced understanding of local culture while strengthening appreciation of destination identity.

Kunwar (2017) has explored the relationship between food, culture, and tourism. As local food is one of the important components of slow tourism, Kunwar's perspective on food tourism fits well with slow tourism. He argues that food is not only a basic human necessity but also a major expression of a community's identity, traditions, and cultural heritage. Authentic local cuisines attract tourists because they provide experiences connected to place, history, and social practices.

However, the concept of authenticity remains contested. MacCannell (1973) introduced the notion of staged authenticity, suggesting that tourism may sometimes encourage communities to modify or perform cultural traditions primarily for visitor consumption. While such performances may satisfy tourist expectations, they risk weakening the cultural significance and integrity of local practices. Consequently, the challenge for slow tourism is not merely to provide authentic experiences but to ensure that local communities retain ownership and control over the ways in which their cultural heritage is presented.

Community participation therefore becomes essential for maintaining authenticity and ensuring equitable tourism development. Slow tourism recognizes local residents not as passive recipients of tourism benefits but as active partners in designing, managing, and delivering tourism experiences. Community involvement strengthens local decision-making, encourages equitable distribution of tourism income, and enhances social acceptance of tourism development.

Lane and Kastenholz (2015) emphasize that successful rural tourism increasingly depends upon creating place-based experiences that integrate local knowledge, culture, landscapes, and community enterprises. Similarly, Banskota and Sharma (2006) argue that sustainable tourism development in Nepal requires meaningful participation of local communities in planning, resource management, and tourism service provision. Such participation contributes not only to economic development but also to cultural preservation, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

Collectively, the literature suggests that cultural authenticity and community participation are mutually reinforcing dimensions of slow tourism. Authentic experiences cannot be sustained without active community involvement, while meaningful community participation enhances both visitor satisfaction and destination resilience. These characteristics are especially relevant for culturally rich destinations where tourism development depends upon preserving local identity while generating sustainable livelihoods.

Slow tourism and sustainable development

The relationship between slow tourism and sustainable tourism has become one of the most prominent themes in contemporary tourism research. Although the two concepts are closely related, they are not synonymous. Sustainable tourism provides the overarching goal of balancing economic development, environmental conservation, and socio-cultural well-being, whereas slow tourism represents one practical approach for achieving these objectives through changes in tourist behavior, destination management, and tourism planning.

The emergence of sustainable tourism reflects growing concerns about the environmental and social consequences of mass tourism, including excessive resource consumption, biodiversity loss, carbon emissions, destination congestion, and the commercialization of local cultures. Butler (1999) argues that sustainable tourism requires tourism development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to benefit from tourism resources. Achieving this balance requires not only environmental protection but also equitable distribution of tourism benefits and meaningful participation of local communities. UNWTO (2018) highlights that sustainable tourism should balance environmental protection, economic development and social inclusion. Environmental benefits depend on actual transport choices and destination management systems, meaning slow tourism is “potentially sustainable” rather than inherently sustainable model (Heitman, 2011).

Within this broader sustainability agenda, slow tourism offers an alternative model that prioritizes quality rather than quantity. Instead of measuring tourism success primarily through visitor arrivals or tourism receipts, slow tourism emphasizes visitor satisfaction, community well-being, environmental quality, and cultural preservation. Dickinson *et al.* (2011) demonstrate that slow tourism can contribute to climate-conscious tourism by encouraging longer stays, lower-carbon modes of transport, and reduced dependence on frequent travel. Longer visits also tend to increase local expenditure while reducing the environmental costs associated with repeated transport movements.

Recent academic works have further extended the relationship between slow tourism and sustainability through the concept of regenerative tourism. Rather than focusing solely on minimizing environmental impacts, regenerative tourism seeks to restore ecological systems, strengthen local communities, and enhance destination resilience. Wulandari and Jayanti (2025) argue that slow tourism increasingly represents a regenerative tourism paradigm by integrating environmental stewardship, visitor well-being, community empowerment, and technological innovation. Similarly, Barbarossa and Pappalardo (2025), using the Magna Grecia Cycle Route in southern Italy, demonstrate that slow mobility infrastructure can contribute to landscape restoration, heritage conservation, local identity, and regional economic revitalization. Their study illustrates that slow tourism can become a catalyst for broader territorial regeneration rather than merely an alternative tourism product.

Nevertheless, scholars caution against assuming that slow tourism is inherently sustainable. Hall (2019) argues that any form of tourism, including slow tourism, may generate environmental and socio-cultural pressures if visitor numbers exceed local carrying capacities or if tourism development is poorly managed. Sustainability therefore depends not only on the characteristics of tourism products but also on effective governance, destination planning, community participation, and responsible visitor behavior.

Overall, the literature suggests that slow tourism provides a practical pathway towards sustainable and regenerative destination development by encouraging environmentally responsible mobility, strengthening local economies, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing community well-being. However, its success ultimately depends on destination-

specific planning approaches that balance tourism development with ecological integrity and local aspirations.

Slow tourism in Nepal: Policy context and emerging opportunities

Although the concept of slow tourism has received limited scholarly attention in Nepal, many of its underlying principles are already reflected in the country's tourism resources, development strategies, and community-based tourism initiatives. Nepal's exceptional natural landscapes, rich cultural diversity, traditional rural settlements, indigenous knowledge systems, and strong community institutions provide favourable conditions for developing tourism experiences consistent with slow tourism principles.

Historically, Nepal's tourism industry has been dominated by mountaineering, trekking, adventure tourism, and nature-based tourism. These products have successfully positioned Nepal as a major international tourism destination while generating employment and foreign exchange. However, increasing visitor concentration in a limited number of destinations has also created concerns regarding environmental degradation, waste management, pressure on fragile ecosystems, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and the commercialization of cultural heritage.

Recognizing these challenges, Nepal's tourism policies have progressively shifted towards more inclusive and sustainable development approaches. Community-based tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, eco-tourism, agro-tourism, and homestay programmes have been promoted to diversify tourism products, strengthen local participation, and distribute tourism benefits more equitably across rural areas. These approaches share many of the core principles associated with slow tourism, including community ownership, cultural authenticity, local resource utilization, and environmentally responsible development.

Banskota and Sharma (2006) emphasize that sustainable tourism development in Nepal depends upon meaningful participation of local communities in tourism planning, management, and benefit sharing. Community involvement not only improves local livelihoods but also strengthens conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. Similarly, Kunwar (2017) highlights the growing importance of community-based tourism in promoting local entrepreneurship, traditional food systems, handicrafts, and indigenous cultural practices.

The evolution of Nepal's tourism policies further demonstrates increasing recognition of sustainability and product diversification. Khatiwada and Sharma (2025), through their analysis of Nepal's First to Sixteenth Periodic Plans, identify four broad phases of tourism development. Early plans focused primarily on tourism infrastructure and international promotion, followed by expansion of adventure and nature-based tourism. Subsequent plans increasingly emphasized rural tourism, eco-tourism, village tourism, community participation, poverty reduction, and sustainable tourism development. More recent plans have further diversified tourism products to include wellness tourism, religious tourism, domestic tourism, and quality improvement initiatives.

Despite these important policy developments, the term slow tourism has not been explicitly incorporated into Nepal's tourism planning framework. While many tourism products

already reflect slow tourism principles, they have generally been developed independently rather than within an integrated conceptual framework. Consequently, opportunities remain to strengthen policy coherence by explicitly linking existing community-based, rural, cultural, and nature-based tourism initiatives under a broader slow tourism approach.

Overall, Nepal possesses many of the fundamental attributes required for successful slow tourism development. The country's diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, traditional villages, local food systems, protected areas, and strong community institutions provide an enabling environment for developing tourism experiences that prioritize sustainability, authenticity, and meaningful visitor engagement.

Potential for slow tourism in Pokhara

Among Nepal's major tourism destinations, Pokhara appears particularly well positioned for the application of slow tourism principles. Internationally recognized for its spectacular mountain scenery, lakes, forests, rivers, caves, and rich cultural diversity, Pokhara offers a combination of natural, cultural, and community assets that align closely with the characteristics identified in slow tourism literature.

Although Pokhara has traditionally been promoted as a gateway to the Annapurna trekking region and as Nepal's leading adventure tourism destination, the city and its surrounding rural areas possess a much broader range of tourism resources than adventure tourism alone. Visitors can experience traditional Gurung, Magar, and other indigenous cultures, participate in community homestays, explore rural villages, enjoy locally produced foods, engage in agricultural activities, undertake nature walks, cycling, bird watching, meditation, yoga, and wellness experiences, and interact directly with local communities. These activities emphasize immersion, learning, and cultural exchange rather than rapid sightseeing, thereby reflecting many of the core principles of slow tourism.

The geographical setting of Pokhara further enhances its suitability for slow tourism. The proximity of lakes, forests, agricultural landscapes, traditional settlements, and protected areas enables visitors to experience multiple dimensions of local life within relatively short travel distances. This reduces dependence on long-distance transport while encouraging longer stays and more meaningful engagement with local environments and communities.

Moreover, Pokhara's growing interest in sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and local entrepreneurship provides a favorable institutional environment for integrating slow tourism into future destination planning which are included in STAP (ADB, 2023). Rather than replacing existing tourism products, slow tourism has the potential to complement adventure tourism by diversifying visitor experiences, extending average lengths of stay, reducing seasonal concentration, strengthening local value chains, and enhancing destination resilience.

Despite these favorable conditions, the potential of slow tourism in Pokhara has received very limited scholarly attention including in Pokhara STAP. Existing studies include adventure tourism, trekking, nature tourism, or destination marketing (ADB, 2023), with little consideration of how slow tourism principles could contribute to more sustainable

destination development. Consequently, there remains an important opportunity to explore how Pokhara's existing tourism resources may be reinterpreted and integrated within a slow tourism framework.

Research gaps and conceptual justification

The body of literature reviewed above demonstrates that slow tourism has evolved from a niche alternative to mass tourism into a comprehensive framework for promoting sustainable and regenerative destination development. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes slow tourism as a multidimensional approach integrating environmental responsibility, cultural authenticity, meaningful visitor experiences, community participation, local economic development, and visitor well-being. Consequently, slow tourism has become an important area of tourism research, particularly in relation to sustainability, climate change, rural development, and destination resilience.

A recent bibliometric analysis by Yogaswara and Rahma (2025), covering publications between 2009 and 2025, and a systematic assessment of literature published on slow tourism between 2010 to 2021 by Balaban and Keller (2024) confirm the rapid growth of academic interest in slow tourism, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis identifies sustainability, environmental conservation, cultural heritage, authentic experiences, local community development, and responsible travel as the dominant themes within contemporary slow tourism research. This expanding body of scholarship reflects an international shift toward tourism models that prioritize quality, resilience, and well-being rather than simply increasing visitor numbers. Despite this growing literature, several important research gaps remain.

First, much of the existing research has been undertaken in Europe and other developed tourism destinations, where tourism systems, governance structures, transport infrastructure, and visitor behavior differ considerably from those found in developing countries. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how slow tourism principles can be adapted to countries such as Nepal, where tourism depends heavily on rural livelihoods, mountain environments, cultural diversity, and community participation.

Second, while numerous studies have examined the conceptual foundations and sustainability benefits of slow tourism, relatively few have explored its application as a destination development framework. Existing research has often focused on tourist motivations, travel behavior, or sustainable mobility, whereas less attention has been given to how destinations possessing diverse natural and cultural resources can strategically integrate slow tourism into tourism planning and policy.

Third, although Nepal has increasingly promoted community-based tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, eco-tourism, homestay programmes, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism, these initiatives have generally been developed as separate tourism products rather than as components of a broader slow tourism strategy. As a result, the conceptual relationship between these approaches to tourism and slow tourism has received very limited scholarly attention.

Fourth, despite Pokhara being Nepal's second-largest tourism destination and one of the country's most internationally recognized tourism hubs, existing research has concentrated

primarily on adventure tourism, trekking, destination marketing, hospitality, and visitor satisfaction. Little attention has been given to examining whether Pokhara's rich natural landscapes, traditional villages, indigenous cultures, local food systems, wellness opportunities, and community-based tourism initiatives collectively provide the characteristics necessary for developing a slow tourism destination.

Finally, recent tourism research increasingly emphasizes the transition from sustainable tourism toward regenerative tourism, highlighting the importance of restoring ecosystems, strengthening community resilience, and improving destination quality. However, few studies have investigated how slow tourism can contribute to this transition within Himalayan destinations facing increasing tourism pressure, environmental challenges, and changing visitor expectations.

These gaps indicate that further conceptual and contextual research is needed to examine how slow tourism principles can be interpreted and applied within Nepal's tourism system and, more specifically, within Pokhara. By synthesizing international literature with Nepal's tourism policy context and the characteristics of Pokhara as a destination, this study contributes to the emerging literature on slow tourism by exploring its potential as a framework for sustainable destination development in Nepal. In doing so, the study extends the geographical scope of slow tourism research beyond its predominantly European focus and offers insights that may inform tourism policy, destination planning, and future empirical research in Nepal and other mountain destinations.

Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual, exploratory, and qualitative research approach based primarily on a comprehensive review of published literature and relevant tourism policy documents. Since slow tourism is an emerging and multidisciplinary concept, a conceptual review was considered appropriate for examining its theoretical foundations, key characteristics, and potential application in the context of Pokhara, Nepal.

The study follows a narrative literature review methodology, which enables the synthesis and interpretation of knowledge from diverse academic disciplines and policy sources. Narrative reviews are particularly useful for emerging research areas where concepts are evolving and where the objective is to integrate knowledge, identify patterns, and develop conceptual understanding rather than statistically aggregate empirical findings.

Relevant literature was identified primarily through the Google search engine and Google Scholar using combinations of keywords such as "slow tourism," "slow travel," "sustainable tourism," "community-based tourism," "rural tourism," "food tourism," "local gastronomy," "responsible tourism," "experience-based tourism," "Pokhara tourism," and "Nepal tourism." Reference lists of relevant publications were also examined to identify additional literature. Preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and reports published by recognized international organizations and government agencies.

The literature selection emphasized publications that discussed the conceptual development of slow tourism, its principles, relationship with sustainable tourism, visitor experiences, local food systems, community participation, environmental sustainability, and destination development. Publications providing theoretical insights, empirical evidence, and practical examples from different countries were included to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Studies that were not directly relevant to the objectives of this paper or lacked sufficient academic credibility were excluded.

The review process was guided by the principles of literature review proposed by Hart (1998), who describes literature review as a systematic process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing scholarly work to understand a research topic and position new research within it. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that literature review places a study within the existing body of knowledge by identifying established theories, concepts, and research findings. Snyder (2019) further notes that literature reviews enable researchers to synthesize existing knowledge and develop comprehensive conceptual understanding, while Booth *et al.* (2016) and Machi and McEvoy (2016) highlight their importance in identifying knowledge gaps and informing research directions.

In addition to academic literature, relevant tourism policy documents of Nepal were reviewed to understand the national policy context and tourism development priorities. A particular attention was given to the Nepal Tourism Policy 2082 BS, the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (ADB, 2023), and other related tourism planning documents. These policy documents were analyzed to examine the extent to which the principles of sustainability, community participation, destination diversification, local culture, food tourism, and responsible tourism are reflected in current tourism planning and to assess their relevance to slow tourism.

The collected literature and policy documents were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. During the review process, recurring concepts, themes, and ideas were identified, compared, and synthesized. Attention was given to themes including sustainable tourism, environmental conservation, visitor experience, mobility, local food systems, cultural heritage, community participation, rural livelihoods, destination management, and tourism policy. The relationships among these themes were critically examined to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the potential applicability of slow tourism in Pokhara.

Pokhara was selected as the focus of this study because it is Nepal's leading tourism destination, often regarded as the country's tourism capital. Its exceptional natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, traditional settlements, local gastronomy, surrounding rural communities, and increasing interest in sustainable tourism collectively provide favorable conditions for exploring the potential of slow tourism. The city also faces challenges associated with rapid tourism growth, making it an appropriate case for examining alternative and more sustainable tourism approaches.

This methodological approach is particularly suitable because slow tourism is a multidimensional concept encompassing environmental sustainability, socio-cultural values,

community participation, mobility practices, food systems, destination governance, and visitor experiences. Understanding these interconnected dimensions requires critical interpretation and synthesis of concepts, policies, and existing practices rather than measurement through quantitative indicators alone. Therefore, a conceptual and exploratory qualitative approach was considered appropriate for achieving the objectives of this study.

To enhance the credibility of the review, literature was drawn from multiple types of sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference proceedings, and official policy documents. Information from different sources was compared and cross-checked to ensure consistency of key concepts and interpretations. Priority was given to recent publications while also incorporating seminal works that have significantly contributed to the conceptual development of slow tourism and sustainable tourism.

Limitations of the study

This study adopts a conceptual and exploratory research approach based primarily on the synthesis of published literature and the review of tourism policies, strategies, and planning documents relevant to Nepal and Pokhara. While this approach provides valuable theoretical insights into the applicability of slow tourism, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study does not incorporate primary empirical data collected from tourists, local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, or policymakers. Consequently, the findings represent a conceptual assessment of the potential for slow tourism rather than an evaluation based on stakeholder perceptions or observed tourism practices. Empirical research involving key stakeholders would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the feasibility and acceptance of slow tourism in Pokhara.

Second, the analysis is largely based on secondary sources, including scholarly publications, policy documents, and planning reports. Although these sources provide a robust foundation for conceptual analysis, their scope and quality vary, and some policy documents may not fully reflect current implementation practices or emerging tourism trends. As tourism is a dynamic sector, policy priorities and destination conditions may evolve over time.

Third, the study focuses specifically on Pokhara as a case study. While many of the findings may have relevance for other destinations in Nepal and the Himalayan region, they should not be generalized without considering differences in tourism resources, infrastructure, governance, community capacity, and socio-cultural contexts. Each destination possesses unique characteristics that influence the suitability and implementation of slow tourism.

Fourth, the study examines slow tourism primarily from the perspective of sustainable destination development. Other important dimensions, such as tourist psychology, market demand, destination competitiveness, business models, digital transformation, climate adaptation, and economic impact assessment, were beyond the scope of this research. Incorporating these perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of slow tourism.

Finally, the study proposes a conceptual framework for integrating slow tourism into Pokhara's tourism development but does not empirically validate the framework. Its practical

effectiveness will depend on future implementation, stakeholder collaboration, policy support, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Despite these limitations, the study provides an important foundation for understanding the relevance of slow tourism in Nepal and contributes to expanding the application of slow tourism theory to Himalayan destinations. It also offers a conceptual basis for future empirical research, policy development, and destination planning.

Findings and analysis

Slow tourism as a multidimensional framework for sustainable destination development

The synthesis of the literature reviewed demonstrates that slow tourism should not be understood simply as travelling more slowly or extending the duration of a holiday. Rather, it has evolved into a multidimensional tourism paradigm that promotes a fundamental shift in the way tourism is planned, experienced, and managed. Contemporary scholarship consistently emphasizes that slow tourism integrates environmental responsibility, cultural authenticity, community participation, local economic development, meaningful visitor experiences, and personal well-being into a holistic approach to tourism development. It therefore represents a transition from quantity-oriented tourism, which focuses primarily on increasing visitor arrivals, toward quality-oriented tourism that values meaningful experiences, sustainability, and destination resilience.

One of the defining characteristics of slow tourism is its emphasis on time. Unlike conventional tourism, which often encourages visitors to maximize the number of destinations visited within limited periods, slow tourism advocates spending more time in fewer places. Longer stays allow visitors to develop stronger emotional and intellectual connections with destinations, gain a deeper understanding of local culture and everyday life, and experience places beyond their iconic attractions. Time is therefore regarded not merely as a practical consideration but as a fundamental component of authentic tourism experiences. The literature consistently suggests that slower rhythms of travel contribute to greater visitor satisfaction, stronger place attachment, and more memorable experiences.

A second dimension is slow and responsible mobility. The journey itself becomes an integral part of the tourism experience rather than simply a means of reaching a destination. Walking, cycling, public transport, boating, and other low-carbon modes of travel encourage closer interaction with landscapes and local communities while reducing environmental impacts associated with rapid transport. This perspective challenges the traditional tourism model that prioritizes speed, convenience, and multiple destination visits. Instead, mobility is viewed as an opportunity for observation, learning, and appreciation of the geographical and cultural transitions that occur along the journey.

The literature also identifies authenticity and meaningful experiences as central components of slow tourism. Contemporary tourists increasingly seek opportunities to participate in local life rather than merely observe it. Authentic experiences include interacting with local communities, participating in cultural traditions, learning traditional skills, enjoying indigenous cuisines, attending local festivals, and appreciating everyday

lifestyles. Such experiences enable visitors to move beyond passive sightseeing toward active participation and cultural learning. Consequently, the value of tourism is measured less by the number of attractions visited and more by the depth, quality, and personal significance of the experiences gained.

Another important dimension is community participation and local value creation. Unlike conventional tourism, where benefits are often concentrated among large external enterprises, slow tourism emphasizes locally owned businesses, community-based tourism initiatives, homestays, family-operated restaurants, handicrafts, traditional agriculture, and local guiding services. This approach strengthens local economies by retaining tourism expenditure within destinations while simultaneously empowering communities to participate actively in tourism planning, management, and decision-making. Community participation also enhances destination authenticity because tourism experiences are developed from local knowledge, traditions, and cultural practices rather than externally designed products.

The reviewed literature further demonstrates that local food and gastronomy constitute a distinctive component of slow tourism. Food represents more than a basic tourism service; it reflects the history, identity, environment, and cultural values of host communities. Traditional cuisines locally produced agricultural products, indigenous recipes, and seasonal foods provide visitors with opportunities to experience destinations through their culinary heritage. The growing popularity of food tourism therefore complements slow tourism by encouraging tourists to consume local products, support local producers, and appreciate the cultural meanings embedded within traditional food systems. This relationship strengthens local economies while contributing to the preservation of culinary heritage and agricultural biodiversity.

Environmental sustainability constitutes another fundamental pillar of slow tourism. The reviewed literature consistently associates slow tourism with lower environmental impacts through reduced transport emissions, longer visitor stays, responsible consumption patterns, and greater appreciation of natural and cultural resources. However, contemporary research also emphasizes that slow tourism should not automatically be regarded as environmentally sustainable. The sustainability of any tourism model ultimately depends upon effective destination planning, visitor management, community participation, and governance. Consequently, slow tourism should be viewed as a framework that creates favorable conditions for sustainable tourism rather than as a guarantee of sustainability itself.

More recent studies extend this perspective by linking slow tourism with the emerging concept of regenerative tourism. While sustainable tourism primarily seeks to minimize negative impacts, regenerative tourism aspires to restore ecosystems, strengthen community resilience, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance destination quality. Within this context, slow tourism provides opportunities to reconnect visitors with local environments and communities while contributing to broader social, cultural, and ecological regeneration. This perspective broadens the role of tourism from reducing harm to actively generating positive outcomes for destinations and their residents.

The literature also reveals that these dimensions are highly interconnected rather than operating independently. Longer stays encourage greater interaction with local communities; authentic cultural experiences stimulate demand for local food and handicrafts; responsible mobility reduces environmental impacts while enriching visitor experiences; and stronger community participation contributes to both cultural preservation and economic resilience. Together, these mutually reinforcing dimensions distinguish slow tourism from conventional tourism models that frequently prioritize rapid movement, standardized products, and increasing visitor numbers.

Based on this synthesis, six interrelated dimensions emerge as the principal analytical framework for evaluating the potential of slow tourism in Pokhara:

- Time and longer stays, emphasizing deeper engagement with destinations.
- Slow and environmentally responsible mobility, promoting walking, cycling, public transport, and low-carbon travel.
- Authentic and meaningful experiences, encouraging cultural immersion and learning.
- Community participation and local economic development, ensuring that tourism benefits remain within local communities.
- Local food systems and cultural identity, strengthening destination distinctiveness and visitor engagement.
- Environmental sustainability and regenerative destination development, balancing tourism growth with ecological integrity and community well-being.

These six dimensions provide the conceptual basis for assessing Pokhara's tourism resources, policy environment, and development opportunities. Rather than examining individual tourism products in isolation, they enable a holistic evaluation of whether Pokhara possesses the characteristics required to evolve into a slow tourism destination.

Assessing Pokhara's potential for slow tourism

The synthesis of the reviewed literature and policy documents indicates that Pokhara possesses many of the characteristics regarded internationally as prerequisites for slow tourism development. Although Pokhara has traditionally been promoted as Nepal's leading destination for adventure tourism and as the gateway to the Annapurna Conservation Area, the analysis suggests that its tourism resources extend far beyond these conventional tourism products. The valley's diverse natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, surrounding rural communities, traditional food systems, wellness opportunities, and community-based tourism initiatives collectively provide a strong foundation for developing tourism experiences based on the principles of slow tourism.

To assess Pokhara's potential, the six dimensions identified in the preceding section were used as an analytical framework. The assessment indicates that Pokhara demonstrates a high degree of compatibility with most dimensions of slow tourism, although several institutional and infrastructural constraints require further attention.

Time and longer stays

One of the defining characteristics of slow tourism is the opportunity for visitors to spend more time at destinations and to engage more deeply with local environments and communities. Pokhara already offers considerable opportunities for extending visitor stays beyond the conventional two- or three-day sightseeing itinerary.

Besides serving as the principal gateway to the Annapurna region, Pokhara provides a wide range of complementary tourism experiences that encourage visitors to remain in the destination for longer periods. Trekking, village walks, bird watching, boating, meditation, yoga, wellness retreats, agricultural experiences, cultural programs, photography, nature interpretation, and educational tours can all be combined into longer and more meaningful itineraries. The surrounding rural municipalities further provide opportunities for homestays, farm visits, and participation in traditional lifestyles, enabling visitors to experience everyday life rather than merely observe tourist attractions.

From a slow tourism perspective, these diverse opportunities support a transition from short-duration sightseeing towards immersive and experience-based tourism that enhances visitor satisfaction while increasing local economic benefits.

Slow mobility and low-carbon travel

Literature consistently identifies environmentally responsible mobility as one of the distinguishing characteristics of slow tourism. Pokhara possesses favorable geographical conditions for promoting walking, cycling, boating, and nature-based mobility because many of its tourism attractions are located within relatively short distances of one another.

The lakeside area, wetlands, forest trails, viewpoints, and nearby villages provide significant opportunities for developing integrated walking and cycling networks. Traditional foot trails connecting villages surrounding Pokhara, together with trekking routes extending towards the Annapurna region, already reflect aspects of slow mobility. Similarly, non-motorized boating on Phewa, Begnas, and Rupa Lakes provides tourism experiences that combine recreation with appreciation of natural landscapes.

However, the analysis also identifies important challenges. Rapid urban expansion, increasing motor vehicle use, traffic congestion, inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, and limited cycling facilities reduce the attractiveness of environmentally friendly mobility. Although the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan recognizes the importance of improving walkability, green infrastructure, bicycle networks, and visitor mobility, these initiatives remain at an early stage of implementation.

Consequently, Pokhara demonstrates substantial potential for slow mobility, but realizing this potential will require significant investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and visitor-friendly urban design.

Authentic experiences and cultural immersion

Authenticity represents one of Pokhara's greatest comparative advantages for slow tourism development. The valley is characterized by exceptional cultural diversity, where several ethnic

communities have maintained distinctive traditions, festivals, handicrafts, music, dances, and food cultures.

Visitors have opportunities to participate in community festivals, observe traditional agricultural practices, visit local markets, interact with artisans, experience indigenous lifestyles, and learn about local history and culture through direct engagement rather than passive observation. Museums, religious sites, traditional settlements, and cultural landscapes further enrich the destination's experiential diversity.

Unlike standardized tourism products that emphasize rapid sightseeing, these experiences encourage learning, participation, and emotional attachment to place. Such characteristics closely correspond with the experiential dimensions of slow tourism identified in literature and provide opportunities for developing tourism products that emphasize authenticity rather than commercialization.

Community participation and local economic development

The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes that successful slow tourism depends upon meaningful community participation and the retention of tourism benefits within local economies. The analysis suggests that Pokhara already possesses a favorable institutional foundation through its growing network of community-based tourism initiatives, rural homestays, community forestry programs, local cooperatives, agricultural enterprises, and small-scale tourism businesses.

Homestays established in villages surrounding Pokhara enable visitors to experience local lifestyles while generating direct income for rural households. Similarly, community-managed tourism enterprises, local guides, handicraft producers, cultural performers, and small restaurants contribute to local value creation by encouraging visitors to purchase locally produced goods and services.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that greater emphasis is needed on strengthening local ownership, improving community participation in tourism planning, enhancing entrepreneurial skills, and ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Community participation should extend beyond service provision to include active involvement in destination governance, tourism product development, marketing, and decision-making.

Local food systems and gastronomy

One of Pokhara's most distinctive assets for slow tourism lies in its rich culinary heritage. The valley and its surrounding rural areas offer diverse traditional cuisines representing different ethnic communities' local food traditions. Local agricultural products, organic vegetables, millet, maize, buckwheat, locally produced dairy products, freshwater fish, honey, and seasonal fruits further strengthen the destination's gastronomic diversity.

Food tourism provides opportunities for visitors not only to consume traditional dishes but also to understand local agricultural systems, food preparation techniques, cultural values, and community traditions. Farm visits, cooking demonstrations, traditional food festivals, and farm-to-table experiences can therefore become important components of slow tourism packages.

The integration of local food systems with community-based tourism also strengthens local economic linkages by supporting farmers, food producers, restaurants, and rural households while preserving traditional knowledge and culinary heritage.

Environmental sustainability and regenerative potential

Pokhara's internationally recognized natural environment provides perhaps its strongest foundation for slow tourism development. The valley's lakes, rivers, forests, caves, wetlands, scenic landscapes, biodiversity, and proximity to the Annapurna Conservation Area create exceptional opportunities for nature-based tourism that emphasize appreciation rather than intensive consumption of natural resources.

The Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan places considerable emphasis on environmental conservation, waste management, climate resilience, sustainable destination management, and enhancement of visitor experiences. These priorities correspond closely with the environmental principles of slow tourism and provide an enabling policy environment for future development.

At the same time, the analysis identifies several environmental challenges, including increasing urbanization, traffic congestion, solid waste management problems, pressure on lake ecosystems, and concentration of tourism activities within a limited geographical area. These challenges suggest that future tourism development should move beyond simply accommodating increasing visitor numbers towards managing tourism within ecological limits.

In this regard, slow tourism offers opportunities not only for reducing environmental impacts but also for supporting regenerative destination development through landscape conservation, biodiversity protection, cultural preservation, and strengthened community stewardship of natural resources.

Table 1: Assessment of Pokhara's potential for slow tourism

Slow Tourism Dimension	Evidence from Pokhara	Assessment	Strategic Implication
Time and longer stays	Trekking, wellness, homestays, rural experiences, nature activities	High	Opportunity to increase average length of stay
Slow mobility	Walking trails, cycling potential, boating, trekking routes	Moderate	Improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
Authentic experiences	Indigenous cultures, festivals, heritage, local lifestyles	High	Developing immersive cultural tourism products

Slow Tourism Dimension	Evidence from Pokhara	Assessment	Strategic Implication
Community participation	Homestays, community tourism, local enterprises	Moderate–High	Strengthen local ownership and governance
Local food systems	Diverse ethnic cuisine, local agriculture, farm experiences	High	Promote gastronomy and farm-to-table tourism
Environmental sustainability	Lakes, forests, biodiversity, protected areas	High	Integrate conservation with tourism planning
Policy support	Tourism Policy 2082 and Pokhara STAP	Moderate	Explicitly incorporate slow tourism into policy
Destination branding	Slow tourism is not yet recognized	Low	Develop Pokhara as Nepal's leading slow tourism destination

To synthesis, the analysis demonstrates that Pokhara already possesses most of the essential characteristics associated with successful slow tourism destinations. Its comparative advantages lie not only in its outstanding natural beauty but also in the close integration of landscapes, culture, rural communities, gastronomy, and community-based tourism initiatives. These assets provide opportunities to diversify tourism beyond adventure tourism and to create more immersive, sustainable, and beneficial experiences of local visitors.

However, the assessment also indicates that these resources currently operate largely as independent tourism products rather than as components of a coherent slow tourism strategy. Strengthening sustainable mobility, improving destination governance, enhancing community participation, and explicitly incorporating slow tourism into tourism planning and branding would enable Pokhara to reposition itself as a model destination for slow and regenerative tourism in Nepal.

Alignment of slow tourism with Nepal’s tourism policies and the Pokhara sustainable tourism action plan

The analysis of Nepal’s tourism policies and planning documents demonstrates a substantial convergence between the fundamental principles of slow tourism and the country’s contemporary tourism development agenda. Although the term slow tourism does not explicitly appear in the Nepal Tourism Policy 2082 BS, the Sixteenth Periodic Plan (2024/25–2028/29), or the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) 2023, many of the strategic priorities articulated in these documents closely correspond with the core dimensions of slow tourism identified in the international literature. This finding suggests

that Nepal already possesses a favourable policy environment for introducing slow tourism as a complementary approach to sustainable destination development.

A review of Nepal's periodic plans reveals a clear evolution in tourism policy over the past seven decades. Earlier plans primarily emphasized the development of tourism infrastructure, international promotion, and increasing tourist arrivals as a means of generating foreign exchange and employment. Over time, however, tourism planning has gradually shifted towards broader objectives that include sustainability, product diversification, community participation, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and improved visitor experiences. This transition reflects an important change in national tourism priorities from maximizing visitor numbers towards enhancing the quality and sustainability of tourism development.

The review further indicates that many tourism products promoted in successive periodic plans share strong conceptual links with slow tourism. Rural tourism, village tourism, eco-tourism, community-based tourism, agro-tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, and heritage tourism all encourage longer visitor engagement, appreciation of local environments, interaction with host communities, and the use of local resources. These tourism forms collectively provide a foundation upon which a comprehensive slow tourism strategy could be developed without requiring fundamental changes to existing policy directions.

The Nepal Tourism Policy 2082 BS reinforces this policy orientation by emphasizing sustainable tourism development, diversification of tourism products, destination quality, environmental protection, responsible tourism practices, community participation, and improved visitor experiences. These priorities are highly consistent with the principles of slow tourism, which advocate meaningful travel experiences, local economic participation, environmental responsibility, and cultural authenticity. The policy also recognizes the importance of strengthening rural tourism, promoting domestic tourism, improving tourism infrastructure, enhancing destination competitiveness, and encouraging partnerships among government, the private sector, and local communities.

Together, these objectives provide institutional support for integrating slow tourism into future tourism planning and destination management.

Similarly, the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) 2023 reflects many characteristics associated with slow tourism. The Action Plan promotes sustainable destination management through improved environmental conservation, visitor management, mobility, waste management, destination quality, stakeholder collaboration, and diversification of tourism products. It also recognizes the need to disperse tourism activities beyond the highly concentrated Lakeside area by strengthening tourism opportunities in surrounding rural communities and natural landscapes. These strategic directions closely correspond with the objectives of slow tourism, particularly its emphasis on longer stays, community engagement, local economic development, and balanced spatial distribution of tourism benefits.

Pokhara STAP, 2023 also identifies several practical interventions that could directly support slow tourism development. These include improving pedestrian facilities, expanding cycling infrastructure, developing green public spaces, strengthening walking trails, enhancing interpretation of natural and cultural heritage, promoting responsible visitor behaviour, and improving the overall quality of visitor experiences. Such initiatives contribute to creating destinations that are more accessible, environmentally friendly, and attractive for visitors seeking immersive and low-impact tourism experiences.

Despite these strong policy linkages, the analysis also reveals several important gaps. Most notably, slow tourism has not yet been explicitly recognized as a distinct tourism development model within national or local tourism policies. Consequently, there are no specific policy guidelines, implementation frameworks, destination standards, or monitoring indicators designed to support slow tourism. Existing tourism performance is still measured primarily through indicators such as visitor arrivals, tourism revenue, and foreign exchange earnings, while comparatively little attention is given to indicators associated with slow tourism, including visitor length of stay, quality of visitor experiences, local economic retention, community well-being, environmental quality, or cultural preservation.

Furthermore, although policy documents emphasize community participation and sustainable tourism, implementation mechanisms remain relatively weak. Greater coordination among government agencies, local governments, tourism entrepreneurs, community organizations, and conservation institutions will be necessary to translate broad policy objectives into practical destination-level initiatives. Capacity building, destination branding, product development, digital marketing, and sustainable mobility planning also require greater attention if slow tourism is to become an operational component of Nepal's tourism system.

Overall, the policy analysis demonstrates that Nepal has already established many of the institutional conditions required for the adoption of slow tourism. Rather than requiring a completely new policy direction, slow tourism could be integrated into existing tourism strategies by strengthening the implementation of current sustainability objectives and providing a coherent framework that connects rural tourism, community-based tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, and nature-based tourism under a shared vision of high-quality, responsible, and locally beneficial tourism development.

To illustrate this relationship more clearly, Table 2 summarizes the correspondence between the major dimensions of slow tourism and the priorities reflected in Nepal's tourism policy framework.

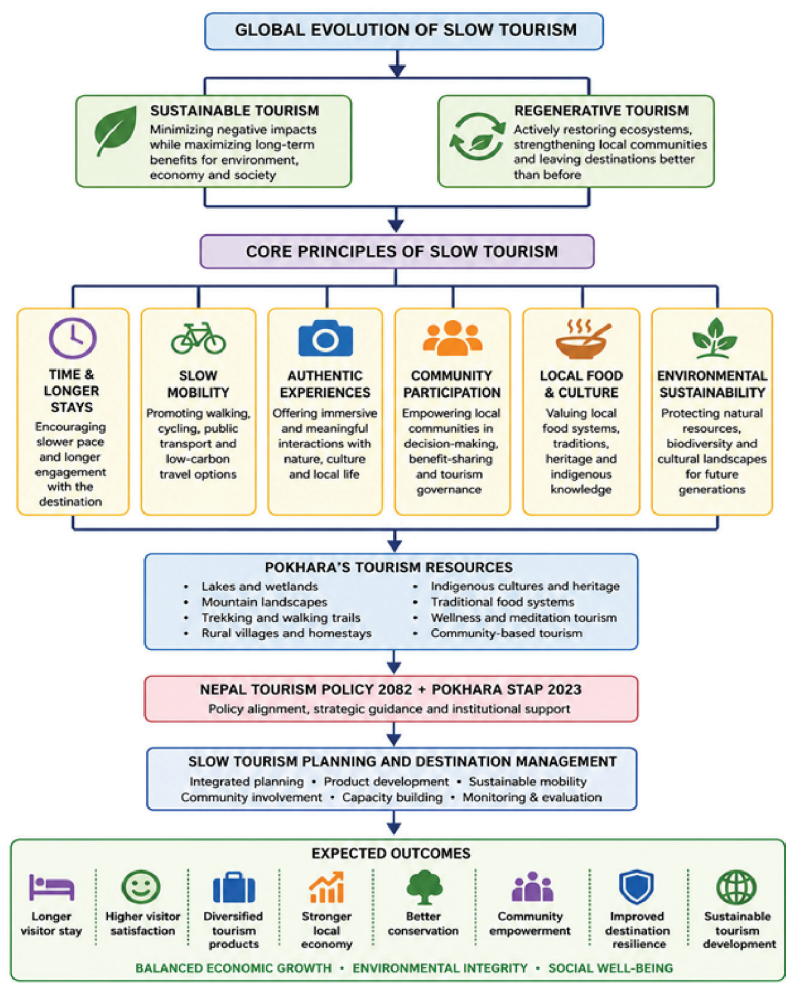
Table 2: Alignment between Slow Tourism Principles and Nepal's Tourism Policies

Slow tourism principle	Nepal Tourism Policy 2082 BS	Pokhara STAP 2023	Degree of alignment
Longer visitor stays and quality experiences	Product diversification and quality improvement	Visitor experience enhancement	High
Environmental sustainability	Environmental protection and responsible tourism	Sustainable destination management	High
Community participation	Community-based tourism and local participation	Stakeholder engagement and benefit sharing	High
Local economy and rural development	Rural tourism, homestays and local entrepreneurship	Tourism diversification beyond core urban areas	High
Authentic culture and heritage	Cultural tourism and heritage conservation	Heritage interpretation and cultural experiences	High
Slow mobility	Limited policy attention	Walkability, cycling and green mobility	Moderate
Regenerative destination development	Indirectly reflected through sustainability goals	Landscape conservation and resilience	Moderate
Explicit recognition of slow tourism	Not included	Not included	Low

The policy review clearly indicates that Nepal's tourism planning has progressively moved towards sustainability, destination quality, community participation, and diversification of tourism products - all of which are fundamental principles of slow tourism. While slow tourism has not yet been formally incorporated into tourism policies, its core values are already embedded within existing strategic priorities. This creates a favorable opportunity to introduce slow tourism not as a completely new tourism product but as an integrative framework capable of connecting existing tourism initiatives into a more coherent, resilient, and sustainable destination development strategy. For Pokhara, such integration could strengthen its position as Nepal's leading destination for high-value, experience-based, and environmentally responsible tourism.

Figure 1 below illustrates a proposed conceptual framework on how the principles of slow tourism can be integrated with Pokhara's tourism resources and existing policy framework to support sustainable destination development.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for integrating slow tourism into Pokhara’s sustainable tourism development



Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that slow tourism provides a valuable conceptual framework for strengthening sustainable tourism development in Pokhara. Although the concept has received limited attention in Nepal’s tourism literature and policy discourse, the analysis demonstrates that many of its underlying principles are already reflected in existing tourism resources, community-based initiatives, and national policy priorities. The study therefore suggests that slow tourism should be understood not as an entirely new tourism product but as an integrative framework capable of bringing together diverse forms of tourism- including rural tourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, wellness

tourism, agro-tourism, and nature-based tourism - under a shared vision of sustainability, authenticity, and local well-being.

Slow tourism as an emerging paradigm for destination development

The evolution of tourism over recent decades has been accompanied by growing concern regarding the environmental, social, and cultural consequences of mass tourism. Increasing visitor numbers have generated significant economic benefits but have also contributed to overcrowding, environmental degradation, commercialization of culture, and unequal distribution of tourism income. Against this background, slow tourism has emerged as an alternative paradigm that challenges the conventional assumption that tourism success should be measured primarily by growth in visitor arrivals.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which characterizes slow tourism as a multidimensional approach emphasizing longer stays, meaningful visitor experiences, responsible mobility, community participation, and environmental stewardship (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Fullagar et al., 2012; Oh *et al.*, 2022). However, the present study further demonstrates that these principles are mutually reinforcing rather than independent. Longer visitor stays encourage greater engagement with local communities; authentic cultural experiences stimulate demand for local products and services; responsible mobility reduces environmental impacts while enriching visitor experiences; and stronger community participation contributes simultaneously to economic resilience, cultural preservation, and destination sustainability. These interrelationships suggest that slow tourism should be viewed as an integrated destination development strategy rather than simply as a niche tourism market.

Pokhara's comparative advantages for slow tourism

One of the principal findings of this study is that Pokhara possesses exceptional comparative advantages for the development of slow tourism. Unlike many destinations where slow tourism requires the creation of entirely new tourism products, Pokhara already possesses many of the resources that international literature identifies as essential characteristics of successful slow tourism destinations.

Its lakes, forests, mountain landscapes, surrounding villages, ethnic diversity, cultural heritage, traditional lifestyles, local gastronomy, wellness opportunities, and community-based tourism initiatives provide a diverse portfolio of tourism resources capable of supporting immersive and place-based visitor experiences. Importantly, these resources are closely interconnected within a relatively compact geographical area, enabling visitors to combine nature, culture, food, recreation, and community interaction within longer and more meaningful travel itineraries.

This finding supports the argument that destinations possessing rich natural and cultural assets do not necessarily require continuous expansion of tourism infrastructure to enhance competitiveness. Instead, improving the quality, integration, interpretation, and accessibility of existing tourism resources may generate greater long-term benefits than pursuing further growth based primarily on increasing visitor numbers. For Pokhara, this represents an

opportunity to reposition itself not only as Nepal's adventure tourism capital but also as a leading destination for high-value, experience-based, and sustainable tourism.

Extending slow tourism theory to the Himalayan context

A significant contribution of this study lies in extending the application of slow tourism beyond the predominantly European settings in which the concept has evolved and traditionally been examined. Existing literature has focused largely on rural Europe, cycling tourism, heritage landscapes, and low-carbon transport systems, whereas comparatively little attention has been given to mountain destinations in developing countries.

The present study demonstrates that the principles of slow tourism are equally relevant within the Himalayan context, although their practical expression differs according to local geographical, cultural, and socio-economic conditions. In Pokhara, slow tourism is less dependent on rail transport or long-distance cycling - features commonly emphasized in European studies - and more closely associated with walking trails, trekking, village tourism, indigenous cultures, traditional food systems, wellness practices, and community-based tourism.

This broader interpretation contributes to the growing body of literature that recognizes slow tourism as a flexible and context-specific framework rather than a standardized tourism model. It also supports recent discussions that advocate adapting sustainable tourism concepts to local cultural and environmental realities instead of transferring models developed in fundamentally different contexts.

Slow tourism as a complementary rather than alternative tourism model

The findings also suggest that slow tourism should not be viewed as a replacement for existing tourism sectors. Adventure tourism, mountaineering, trekking, and conventional sightseeing will continue to play central roles in Nepal's tourism economy. Rather than competing with these established products, slow tourism offers opportunities to enhance their sustainability and increase their economic and social benefits.

For example, trekkers spending additional days in surrounding villages, participating in cultural activities, consuming local food, or engaging in wellness experiences contribute more extensively to local economies while enriching their own travel experiences. Similarly, visitors who combine adventure tourism with community-based tourism or agro-tourism are more likely to develop stronger emotional connections with destinations and to distribute tourism expenditure across a wider range of local enterprises.

Accordingly, the relationship between fast and slow tourism should be regarded as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Destinations are likely to benefit most from maintaining a diversified tourism portfolio capable of responding to different visitor motivations while encouraging more responsible patterns of travel wherever appropriate.

Implications for sustainable destination development

The study further indicates that adopting slow tourism as a strategic framework could strengthen destination resilience and sustainability in Pokhara. Contemporary tourism policy increasingly recognizes that long-term competitiveness depends not only on attracting more visitors but also on maintaining environmental quality, preserving cultural identity, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits.

The analysis demonstrates that many of these objectives are already reflected in Nepal's tourism policies and in the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. However, the absence of an explicit slow tourism framework has limited the integration of existing initiatives into a coherent destination strategy. Recognizing slow tourism within future tourism planning could therefore provide greater strategic coherence by linking mobility, community participation, environmental management, cultural heritage, local entrepreneurship, and destination branding under a common framework.

At the same time, successful implementation will require overcoming several challenges identified in this study, including inadequate infrastructure for sustainable mobility, fragmented destination governance, limited stakeholder capacity, and insufficient monitoring systems. Addressing these issues will be essential if Pokhara is to realize the full potential of slow tourism while avoiding the environmental and social pressures associated with uncontrolled tourism growth.

Overall, this study suggests that slow tourism offers more than an alternative tourism product. It represents a strategic approach to destination development that aligns tourism growth with environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, community well-being, and high-quality visitor experiences. In the context of Pokhara, adopting such an approach could support the transition from a predominantly volume-based tourism model towards one that is more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

Policy and management implications

The findings of this study indicate that slow tourism has considerable potential to strengthen the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of tourism in Pokhara. While many of the fundamental principles of slow tourism are already reflected in Nepal's tourism policies and destination planning documents, the concept has not yet been explicitly incorporated into tourism development strategies. The following policy and management implications emerge from this study.

Recognizing slow tourism as a strategic tourism development approach

A major implication of this study is the need to formally recognize slow tourism as a complementary tourism development approach within Nepal's tourism policies and destination strategies. Rather than creating an entirely new tourism product, slow tourism provides an overarching framework that can integrate existing forms of rural tourism, community-based tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, and agro-

tourism. Such recognition would provide clearer strategic directions for destination planning and encourage greater coordination among tourism stakeholders.

Diversifying tourism products through experience-based tourism

The findings suggest that Pokhara should diversify its tourism portfolio by developing experience-based tourism products that encourage visitors to stay longer and engage more deeply with local communities. Opportunities include village tourism, guided cultural walks, traditional cooking experiences, farm-based tourism, wellness and meditation retreats, birdwatching, handicraft workshops, storytelling programmes, photography trails, research and educational tourism. These products would complement existing adventure tourism while increasing visitor satisfaction and local economic benefits.

Strengthening sustainable mobility

Slow tourism requires transport systems that allow visitors to experience destinations at a slower pace while reducing environmental impacts. Priority should therefore be given to improving pedestrian infrastructure, cycling routes, leisurely walking along lakeside, village walking trails, public transport connectivity, and environmentally friendly mobility options. The recommendations contained in the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan regarding walkability and cycling infrastructure provide an important foundation for achieving these objectives.

Enhancing community participation and local ownership

The study demonstrates that meaningful community participation is essential for successful slow tourism development. Local communities should not be viewed merely as service providers but as active partners in tourism planning, product development, destination management, and decision-making. Expanding community-managed homestays, supporting local cooperatives, strengthening small and medium tourism enterprises, and promoting local entrepreneurship would increase the retention of tourism benefits within host communities while reinforcing destination authenticity.

Promoting local food systems and cultural heritage

Local gastronomy represents one of Pokhara's strongest comparative advantages for slow tourism. Tourism planning should therefore encourage the preservation and promotion of indigenous cuisines, traditional agricultural practices, local food festivals, farm-to-table experiences, and culinary heritage trails. Similarly, greater emphasis should be placed on protecting traditional heritage, cultural landscapes, festivals, crafts, music, and indigenous knowledge systems as integral components of tourism experiences rather than isolated cultural attractions.

Developing a destination branding strategy for slow tourism

Although Pokhara is internationally recognized as Nepal's adventure tourism capital, the findings suggest considerable opportunities to expand its destination image through slow tourism. A destination branding strategy could position Pokhara as a place where visitors experience nature, culture, wellness, gastronomy, and community life in an integrated and

sustainable manner. Such branding would complement existing adventure tourism rather than compete with it and could attract visitors seeking authentic, high-quality, and responsible travel experiences.

Building institutional capacity and strengthening partnerships

The successful implementation of slow tourism will depend upon effective collaboration among national and local governments, tourism businesses, community organisations, conservation agencies, educational institutions, and development partners. Capacity-building programmes should focus on experience design, destination interpretation, sustainable business practices, digital marketing, visitor management, and community entrepreneurship. Universities and research institutions can also play an important role by supporting research, innovation, and evidence-based tourism planning.

Establishing monitoring and evaluation indicators

Current tourism monitoring systems in Nepal focus largely on tourist arrivals and economic contribution. The findings indicate the need for broader performance indicators that better reflect the objectives of sustainable and slow tourism. Future monitoring frameworks could include indicators such as average length of visitor stay, visitor satisfaction, local economic retention, community participation, environmental quality, carbon emissions, conservation outcomes, and cultural heritage preservation. These indicators would provide a more comprehensive assessment of tourism's contribution to sustainable destination development.

A strategic framework for slow tourism in Pokhara

Based on the findings of this study, the development of slow tourism in Pokhara may be guided by five interrelated strategic pillars:

- Sustainable mobility – promoting walking, cycling, boating, and low-carbon transport.
- Meaningful experiences – developing immersive cultural, natural, gastronomic, educational, and wellness experiences.
- Community prosperity – strengthening local ownership, entrepreneurship, and equitable sharing of tourism benefits.
- Environmental stewardship – protecting landscapes, biodiversity, lakes, and cultural heritage while encouraging responsible visitor behaviour.
- Collaborative governance – improving coordination among government agencies, tourism businesses, communities, and civil society through integrated destination management.

Together, these pillars provide a practical framework for integrating slow tourism into Pokhara's long-term tourism strategy while supporting environmental sustainability, social inclusion, economic resilience, and high-quality visitor experiences.

Table 3: Strategic Priorities for Implementing Slow Tourism in Pokhara

Strategic Area	Key Actions	Expected Outcomes
Tourism policy	Recognize slow tourism within national and local tourism policies	Clear strategic direction
Tourism products	Develop immersive cultural, nature-based, gastronomic, wellness, and rural experiences	Diversified tourism portfolio
Sustainable mobility	Improve walking, cycling, and environmentally friendly transport	Reduced Environmental Impacts
Community development	Strengthening homestays, local enterprises, and community participation	Increased local economic benefits
Cultural heritage	Promote indigenous culture, gastronomy, and traditional knowledge	Stronger destination identity
Destination branding	Position Pokhara as a leading slow tourism destination	Enhanced competitiveness
Capacity building	Training, research, digital marketing, and stakeholder partnerships	Improved service quality
Monitoring	Introducing sustainability and visitor experience indicators	Better destination management

Future research directions

The growing international interest in slow tourism, together with Nepal’s commitment to sustainable tourism development, presents numerous opportunities for future research. Building upon the conceptual findings of this study, several research priorities are identified.

First, empirical studies should investigate the perceptions, motivations, and behavioral characteristics of both domestic and international tourists regarding slow tourism. Research examining tourists’ willingness to participate in slower, experience-oriented travel, their preferred activities, length of stay, expenditure patterns, and overall satisfaction would provide valuable evidence for destination planning and product development.

Second, future studies should examine the perspectives of local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, local governments, and destination management organisations. Understanding stakeholder expectations, opportunities, and concerns will be essential for designing slow tourism initiatives that are socially inclusive, economically viable, and culturally appropriate.

Third, comparative research should explore the applicability of slow tourism in different tourism destinations within Nepal, including mountain regions, protected areas, pilgrimage

sites, cultural heritage destinations, and emerging rural tourism areas. Comparative studies could identify destination-specific opportunities and constraints while contributing to the development of context-sensitive slow tourism models.

Fourth, there is a need to develop and empirically test indicators for measuring slow tourism performance. Future research could design and validate indicators related to visitor experience, average length of stay, local economic retention, community participation, environmental quality, carbon emissions, cultural preservation, and destination resilience. Such indicators would support evidence-based tourism planning and monitoring.

Fifth, future research should explore the role of digital technologies in supporting slow tourism. Digital interpretation, mobile applications, destination storytelling, online marketing, geographic information systems, and smart tourism technologies may enhance visitor experiences while promoting lesser-known destinations and encouraging responsible travel behavior.

Sixth, longitudinal studies are required to examine the long-term impacts of slow tourism on local livelihoods, environmental conservation, cultural heritage, visitor satisfaction, and destination resilience. Such studies would provide valuable evidence regarding the sustainability of slow tourism over time and its contribution to achieving national and global sustainable development goals.

Finally, future research should examine the relationship between slow tourism and emerging concepts such as regenerative tourism, circular economy, climate-resilient tourism, nature-positive tourism, and well-being tourism. Exploring these relationships would contribute to the continued evolution of tourism theory and help identify innovative approaches for addressing the complex challenges facing destinations in the twenty-first century.

Overall, future research should move beyond conceptual discussions toward interdisciplinary, participatory, and evidence-based investigations that support the practical implementation of slow tourism. Such research will be particularly valuable for destinations like Pokhara, where abundant natural and cultural resources provide favorable conditions for developing tourism that is environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, economically beneficial, and experientially meaningful.

Conclusion

This study examined the concept of slow tourism and explored its potential application in the tourism development of Pokhara, Nepal, through a conceptual and qualitative analysis of scholarly literature and national tourism policy documents. By synthesizing international research on slow tourism and examining its relationship with Nepal's tourism policies and the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) 2023, the study assessed whether Pokhara possesses the characteristics necessary for adopting slow tourism as a complementary approach to sustainable destination development.

The review of the literature demonstrates that slow tourism has evolved from the broader slow movement into a multidimensional tourism paradigm that emphasizes longer stays, meaningful visitor experiences, responsible mobility, community participation, local economic development, cultural authenticity, and environmental sustainability. Rather than promoting slower travel alone, contemporary slow tourism encourages a fundamental shift from quantity-driven tourism towards quality-oriented, experience-based, and place-sensitive tourism development.

The analysis indicates that Pokhara possesses many of the essential attributes required for slow tourism. Its exceptional natural landscapes, lakes, surrounding rural settlements, cultural diversity, indigenous traditions, local gastronomy, wellness opportunities, and community-based tourism initiatives provide a strong foundation for developing immersive and sustainable visitor experiences. These resources, when viewed collectively, suggest that Pokhara is well positioned to diversify its tourism beyond its established image as an adventure tourism destination and to evolve into a destination that also offers authentic, community-centered, and environmentally responsible tourism experiences.

The study further reveals that although the concept of slow tourism has not yet been explicitly incorporated into Nepal's tourism policies, many of its underlying principles are already reflected in national tourism priorities. Sustainable tourism, community participation, product diversification, environmental conservation, rural tourism, wellness tourism, and destination quality are consistently emphasized in the Nepal Tourism Policy 2082 BS, successive periodic plans, and the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. Consequently, the policy environment provides a favourable basis for integrating slow tourism into future tourism planning without requiring fundamental changes to existing policy directions.

However, the study also identifies several challenges that need to be addressed before slow tourism can be effectively implemented. These include the absence of an explicit policy framework for slow tourism, limited infrastructure for walking and cycling, fragmented destination management, uneven stakeholder capacity, concentration of tourism activities in a few locations, and limited monitoring systems for measuring sustainability and visitor experience. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action by government agencies, local governments, tourism businesses, communities, and development partners.

One of the principal contributions of this study is the development of a conceptual framework for assessing the applicability of slow tourism in the context of a Himalayan destination. While previous studies have focused largely on European rural destinations, this research demonstrates that slow tourism can also provide a valuable framework for destinations such as Pokhara, where rich natural landscapes, cultural diversity, and community-based tourism already exist. The study therefore contributes to expanding the geographical scope of slow tourism research and highlights the importance of adapting tourism concepts to local socio-cultural and environmental contexts.

Overall, the study concludes that slow tourism should not be regarded as a replacement for existing tourism products but as a complementary approach that strengthens sustainability,

enriches visitor experiences, enhances local livelihoods, and supports the conservation of natural and cultural resources. By integrating slow tourism principles into destination planning, Pokhara can position itself as a leading destination for high-value, experience-based, and sustainable tourism in Nepal.

“In an era when destinations around the world are seeking tourism models that balance economic prosperity with environmental integrity and community well-being, slow tourism offers Pokhara an opportunity not only to grow, but to grow wisely.”

Such a transition would contribute not only to improving destination competitiveness but also to achieving a more balanced, resilient, and inclusive model of tourism development.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on slow tourism in several ways.

First, it extends the application of slow tourism theory to the Himalayan context, where research on the concept remains limited. While previous studies have largely focused on European rural destinations and developed tourism economies, this study demonstrates the relevance of slow tourism to Nepal, particularly Pokhara, by examining how its principles align with the destination's natural, cultural, and community-based tourism resources.

Second, the study provides a conceptual analytical framework for assessing the suitability of destinations for slow tourism through a comprehensive review and synthesis of international literature together with national tourism policies and planning documents. By integrating theoretical perspectives with policy analysis, the study identifies the major dimensions of slow tourism and evaluates their applicability to Pokhara's tourism development.

Third, the study contributes to tourism policy and destination management by examining the alignment between slow tourism principles, Nepal's tourism policies, and the Pokhara Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) 2023. The analysis identifies policy gaps, implementation challenges, and strategic opportunities for incorporating slow tourism into future destination planning.

Finally, the study proposes policy and management implications that may support the transition towards more sustainable, community-centered, and experience-based tourism. The findings provide a useful reference for policymakers, destination managers, tourism entrepreneurs, local governments, and researchers seeking to promote tourism development that balances economic growth with environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community well-being.

Acknowledgements

The author had presented a paper on the philosophy, concept and approaches of slow tourism in an international conference entitled “Transforming Higher Education in Nepal: Pathways to Global Competitiveness” held on 27-28 March 2026 at Janapriya Multiple Campus, Pokhara. Inspired by the suggestions at the conference presentation, this paper has been elaborated and further developed into a full paper for publication in this journal. The author is, therefore, thankful to the organizers of the conference and Janapriya Multiple Campus, Pokhara, for inviting the author to participate and present the paper at the conference. The

author gratefully acknowledges the encouragement and suggestions provided by Professor Dr. Ramesh Raj Kunwar in finalizing this paper.

Declaration

There was no funding from any external sources for this study. Author has also no conflict of interest.

Author introduction

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