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The Role of Natural Heritage for the Promotion of Tourism in Ilam

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Abstract

Heritage refers to those commodities which can be observed in their tangible and intangible forms. It is said that heritage is a raw material that authenticates and fabricates the past and the present for touristic consumption. It is a socially constructed and negotiated concept which evolves through time and across space. Mainly, heritages are classified into two categories: local and world heritage. Nepal is enriched in its different types of heritages. They are found in different parts of the country. Among them, the Ilam district is an important tourism destination of Nepal, located in Mechi Zone, Province no 1. It possesses archaeological, historical, cultural, religious, natural, and agricultural importance within its small territories. It has been safeguarding plenty of natural and cultural heritages from the beginning until this 21st century. However, the proper study regarding exploring and analyzing its natural tourism products is still seemed behind, which is considered a considerable research gap in academia. Realizing a strong need for a study, this article entitled " Role of Natural heritage for the promotion of tourism in Ilam" has been prepared for fulfilling two specific objectives such as to explore the important natural tourism heritages of the Ilam district and to examine the role of natural heritage for the promotion of tourism in the site. It has been prepared by using questionnaires as a tools and field survey method. It is based on a descriptive research design.

Keywords: Ilam, world heritages, natural heritage, tourism, tourism promotion, accommodations, facilities

Role of Natural Heritage for the Promotion of Tourism in Ilam

Heritage is a powerful word in its own right, for it is at once extraordinarily suggestive and ideologically charged but simultaneously vague enough to be applied to nearly everything across any space and time. It is a word whose significance changes with its myriad invocations, designations, or legislations (Di Giovine, 2009, p. 91). Heritage means the collective cultural and built inheritance and history of a group of people (or of a place) that can be used to construct an identity through telling stories. Heritage is often seen as the selective presentation and interpretation of elements of history (Hannam & Knox, 2010, p. 192). Heritage encompasses a broader scope of meanings ranging from cultural and historical significances, political implications, and spiritual and intellectual connotations to communications. Increasingly, culture becomes an ephemeral and vague concept, which is a state of constant flux (Park, 2014, p. 7).

In tourism, development heritage is classified into three main categories: built heritage, scientific heritage, and cultural heritage. The built heritage can be described as historical and artistic heritage, such as relics, forts, and modern towns, whereas the scientific heritage encompasses the elements such as plants, birds, animals, rocks, and natural habitats. The third one, cultural heritage, comprises folk and fine arts, customs, and languages (Park, 2014, p. 25). As of 2013, 962 World Heritage Sites are enlisted in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Park, 2014, p. 119). Nepal holds only ten out of them:

Pasupatinath, Swoyambhunath, Boudhanath, Changu Narayan, Patan Durbar Square, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, Lumbini, Chitwan National Park, and Sagarmatha National Park (Satyal, 2000, pp. 14-15).

In the context of Nepal, there are ample natural and cultural heritage sites. According to the survey of 1975, the Kathmandu Valley holds 888 heritage of

global significance (Kunwar, 2017, p. 401). IUCN Nepal and Nepal Heritage Society documented 1262 heritage sites in 72 districts outside the Kathmandu Valley. Ilam is also considered one of the important natural heritage sites with several natural places within it.

Ilam is located about 675 k. m. far from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Ilam derives from *the Limbu* dialect, meaning *Li* means twisted and *Lam* means road (Dulal, 2017, pp. 31-32). Geographically, it is a hilly district that is elevated from 610 meters to 3679 meters high above the sea level and lies between 26°42' to 27° 8' north latitude and 87°42' to 88° 7' east longitude of an area of 1703 square kilometers. It stretches from *Terai* to the upper hill belt in this Himalayan region (Rai, 2063, pp. 49-51).

The district area stretches from north *Panchthar* to *Jhapa* district to the South as well as *Darjeeling* district of India, and *Dhankuta* and *Morang* district of Nepal lies in the east and west respectively (Dulal, 2017, pp. 32). Jogmai, Puwamai, Sunmai, and Deumai are the main four rivers in the districts. Therefore, sometimes it is called Charkhola, meaning a district of four rivers (Dulal, 2013, p. 78). It possesses a sub-tropical climate with a cool temperature as a whole, is dry and cold in winter, while it is hot and rainy in summer (NTB, 2008, p. 5). It is also known as the land of endangered species of the red panda, which attracts many researchers who come here to research rare birds and the red panda.

Problem of the Study

Ilam is a beautiful district decorated with tea gardens and the other six cash crops. There are ample natural heritages on the site. Therefore, it can be developed as an essential eco-tourism destination in Nepal. Regarding the tourists and tourism perspectives, some studies have already been conducted. However, the detailed study and exploration of its natural heritage have still not been carried out properly, which is identified as the research gap in this paper. Hence, raising

the following two questions: What are the major natural tourism heritages of the Ilam district? And how far natural heritages are responsible for promoting tourism to the site? This paper has tried to fulfill the research gaps.

Objectives of the Study

Normally, this study has focused on fulfilling two types of objectives, i.e., simple and complex. Simple or general goals lay in reviewing the geographical description, geological condition, and ethnic groups, whereas exploring the significant natural tourism heritages of Ilam district and examining the role of natural heritage in promoting tourism in the site are the specific objectives of this study.

Review of Literature

A theoretical foundation is an important tool for any research work because it will be the lens through which a researcher evaluates the research problem and research questions. Reviewing the literature is only one approach to constructing a solid theoretical foundation. Thus, in social science research, it is one of the major components that help determine what theories might be used to explore the questions in a scientific study. Based on the above-mentioned doctrine, the following pieces of literature have been reviewed in this paper.

Regarding the heritages, tourists, and tourism perspectives the, studies such as Satyal (2000) Nepal and Exotic Tourist Destination, Di Giovine (2009) The Heritage-scape: UNESCO, World Heritage, and Tourism, Hannam & Knox (2010) Understanding Tourism: A Critical Introduction, Park (2015) Heritage Tourism, Kunwar (2017) Tourist & Tourism have been reviewed which help to generate the theoretical foundation for this paper.

From the tourists and tourism perspectives, especially about Ilam, there are some studies such as Dulal (2013) Folk dance: A Cultural Tourism Product of Ilam District, (2017) Folk dance an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal: A Case

Study of Ilam District, Lekali (2063) Ilam ka Gufaharu, Ilameli Bidhyarhi Samaj (2063) Chinari, (2064) Chinari, Paryatan Bisesanka, Gadtaula (2063) Jasbire Vanjyang ko Bibidhata, Ghimire (2063) Antuo Ko Gramin Paryatan ka Chunauti Haru, Gurung (2063) Chiyako Chintan Chautari, Baral, R. (2063). Kasari Bhayo Ilamma Paryatan Bikash, (2064) Ilam ka Paryatakiya Sthalharu, Khadka (2064) Paryatakiya Sthal Sriantu, Chapagain (2019). The number of tourists up by 42.06% in Ilam, Khanal (2064) Ilamako Paryatakiya Sthal Jhyaupokhari, Rijal (2064) Bibidhata Bichako Maipokhari, Sapkota (2064), Potentiality of Eco-tourism in Ilam have already been conducted and reviewed in this paper for generating information about natural heritages of study areas.

Finally, the previous literature mentioned above are quite useful for this research work. Although only a very few have studied the natural heritage in Ilam, many have been unable to explore and highlight the role of natural heritage in promoting tourism in a particular destination. Such pieces of literature that have not been able to explore the issues are also helpful in generating conceptual ideas and theoretical knowledge regarding natural heritages, tourists, and tourism.

Methods and Materials

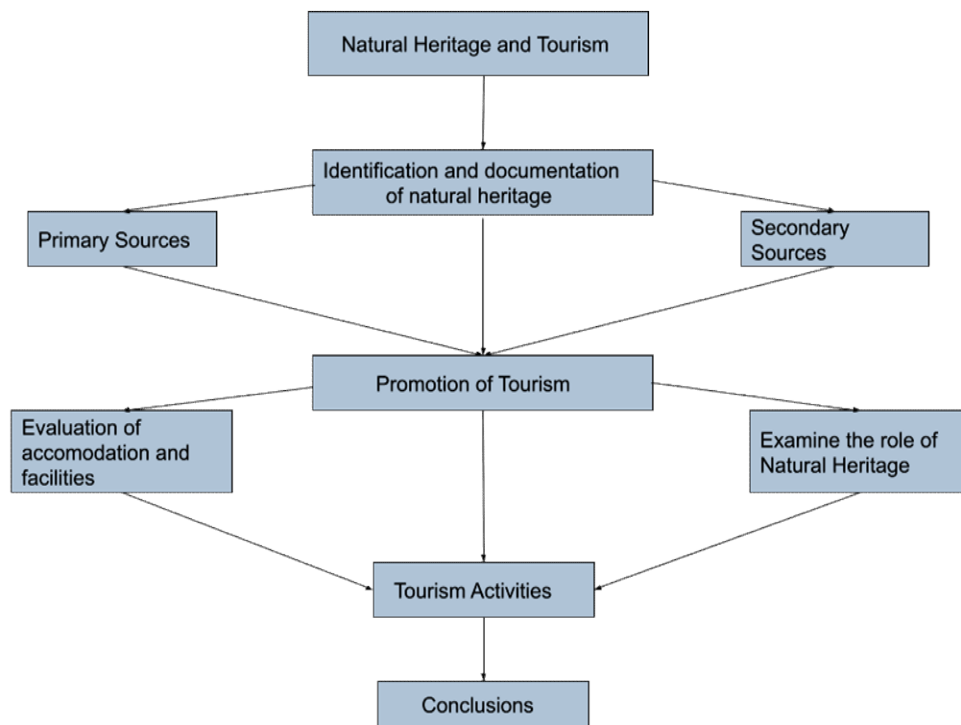
This article is based on a field study conducted in 2008 and 2018 as well. In totality, two weeks have been taken to perform the fieldwork. Meanwhile, the researcher has applied a descriptive research design. The secondary data have been collected through the published and unpublished literature. Similarly, primary data has been collected through the field survey by using general observation, interview, and questionnaire tools and techniques. During the field survey, 50 local people and 25 visitors, including four international tourists, were selected as the key informants for filling out the questionnaire.

Conceptual Framework

Along with the identification and documentation of natural tourism products of Ilam this paper helps to explore the significant natural tourism heritages of Ilam district and to examine the role of natural heritage in the promotion of tourism on the site. To address the above mentioned research gaps and problems and fulfilling the determined objectives, this paper has been prepared by applying the conceptual framework developed by the author, presented in figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for the Paper



Due to its natural heritage, Ilam has gradually become one of the important natural tourism destinations in the tourism market for the eastern part

and entire Nepal. However, till now, concerned stakeholders have not succeeded in utilizing its potential. Despite some studies and publications, no analytical research work has been carried out from the perspective of nature tourism in Ilam. Therefore, keeping it in mind, this research paper has been carried out to partially fulfill the above-mentioned queries based on the above-mentioned conceptual framework.

Findings and Discussion

In this paper, the researcher has applied observation and interview methods to collect primary data. Based on research objectives, the researcher has asked questions such as the major natural heritages of Ilam? How far are they considered responsible for the promotion of tourism? What is the situation of tourism activities of Ilam? to the local people while conducting fieldwork? Finally, after completing the field survey, the discussion and findings of this paper have been presented, including the natural tourism heritages, the role of natural heritage in the promotion of tourism, available accommodations, and tourist and tourism activities in chronological order.

Natural Heritages of Ilam

As mentioned above, there are several tourist heritage sites in Nepal, including *Ilam*. Because of its different heritages, *Ilam* is known by different names such as "Queen of the Hills" and "City of Beautiful tea Garden," District of Greenery Hill, "Capital of Agro- tourism," Home of Red Panda," District of Charkhola (four rivers)," "District of Six Cash Crops," "District of Sunrise and Sunset," Heterogeneous Cultural Park," "City of colorful Wooden Houses." Apart from the cultural beauty, it provides opportunities to observe the natural heritage of the visitors. The following are known as the outstanding natural heritages of Ilam.

Antu Danda

Antu Danda lies in Suryodaya Municipality, 35 kilometers from Ilam Bazaar, with an elevation of 2328 m above sea level (Sharma, 2063). Shri Antu Danda and adjoining areas, renowned for the splendor of their lush green hillocks, spectacular landscape of tea gardens, and cultural and historical uniqueness, hold great cultural and eco-tourism potential. It is an unspoiled site that beguiles tourists coming to the *Ilam Bazaar* of Nepal and Darjeeling of India (Dulal, 2069).

The significant attractions of *Antu Danda* are its natural, cultural, religious, and historical dimensions. The landscape and biodiversity include pine forests, terraces, slopes, flatlands enriched with varying vegetation, cash crops, lakes and ponds, sub-tropical NTFPs, and wildlife, including some of the world's endangered species. It is also famous for its views of the Himalayas to the north and the flatlands of the *Terai* to the south. Tourists can enjoy sunrise and sunset on the mountaintop, especially during the month of *Kartik* and *Mangsir* (October-December). However, *Aswin* (September) and *Falgun* to *Baisakh* (February-April) are also favorable seasons to visit the area. Tiger Hill of *Ilam* is another attraction for tourists. It has a long cave with a carved image of Lord Buddha (Khadka, 2064).

Mountain biking, pony riding, camping sites, angling, boating, rock climbing, village tour, jungle safari, bird watching, skiing, and paragliding are possible tourism products developed in the area. In terms of existing facilities, *Antu Danda* has electricity, a communication facility, camping grounds, simple tea stalls, simple accommodations, seasonal bus service, dirt roads, and trails (Sapkota, 2064).

Sandakpur

Sandakpur is situated in Sandakpur Rural Municipality at an elevation of 3650 meters above sea level. Its height and its slope provide opportunities for skiing. Its natural aspect seems highly promising for eco-tourism development in the area. Due to its height, sunrise and sunset are the most exciting time to spare in the area (Sapkota, 2064; Baral, 2064a). *Chhintapu* is famous for the finest rhododendron & other picaresque scenes of the Himalayas; Todke Jharna in Maimajhuwa (Todke falls; 280 ft. High); Guranse for sightseeing, rhododendron (different varieties in colors); Tarunpani famous for the natural phenomenon; Sandakpur peak (3636 meters') famous for sunrise and panoramic scene of nearly all the snowcapped mountains (Sagarmatha to Bhutanese Himalayas); Bio-diversity like Kandevyakur, Red Panda, Yak and medicinal herbs (Panchalua, Bikhma, Cardamom, etc.) and tea farming; Gumba (Monasteries) in Mabu, Chitre, and Meghma; Kuivir for Rock climbing; Jaubari for Sherpa village and Hangetham for watching different varieties of birds and butterflies are the major tourist attractions and products of the site:

Siddhithumka hill is famous for sunrise and sunset sightseeing and Siddhdevi temple; Devi Dhanda or Ratna Gufa for rocky area as one can find natural but unique shapes in stone of different things like the shape of the Sun; Ajambare Danda for sightseeing and Jeetpur for a pond Jhaunpokhari are the major tourism attractions and products. Siddhi Thumka is located in the Deomai Municipality, the western part of the Ilam Bazaar, at an elevation of 1800 meters height above the sea level. It is ideal for a short trek and panoramic views of the mountains and plains wrought in sunset and sunrise colors. It takes a 4-hour trek to reach Siddhi Thumka from Ilam Bazaar. It can also be reached by road from Ilam Bazaar (Ghimire, 2063, pp. 155-156).

Mirmiredanda

Mirmiredanda lies in Suryodaya Municipality 2300 m in height, 40 Km east from headquarters city of Ilam, surrounded by Kanyam Tea Garden. The most exceptional opportunity of this mount is the chance to view the rising sun. The picture is the result of the reflective light of the rising sun toward the Bay of Bengal and the Bengal Sea (Subhechhu, 2064).

Kuti Danda

Kuti Danda is located in Rong Rural Municipality, about three hundred meters North West through the Jasabire George. Headquarters of Ilam district was there in the same place before a hundred and fifty years ago. According to the legends, Kuti danda had selected as headquarters by the surveyor Ram Kunwar at the same time. Then, GajarajThapa, the first senior district officer daughter-in-law of Janga Bahadur Rana, had made the district headquarters to the same hill. After Gajaraj Thapa, Harka Jung J.B.R. was appointed as the senior district officer and maintained Kuti Danda as the district headquarters. However, after Harkajung J.B.R, Bhoga Sumsher, who was appointed as the senior district officer, changed headquarters from the same place to the Ilam Bazar in his ruling time. Thus, Kuti Danda is a natural and historical place.

Jasabire Bhanjyang

Jasabire Bhanjyang is located at the Ilam Municipality, about 1700 meters above sea level, and situated between 27° to 27°25' north latitude and 87°56' to 87°09' east longitude. It is famous for the Sunuwar community and various agricultural products where the visitor can get an opportunity to observe the seven things initiating from the same vowel sound 'A' in Nepali.

Maipokhari

Maipokhari is located Sandakpur Rural Municipality ward no. 1, at the height of 2150 m from the sea level about 2 km northeast of *Ilam* bazaar. This

place is vital from natural, religious, cultural, and archaeological perspectives. Maipokhari is one of the essential watersheds of this region, covering around 450 hectares of land surrounded by dense forest. Its 2.5 hectares of land exclusive to the pond area have been conserved as a natural forest with a proper fence (Dulal, 2069). The forest harbors various valuable species of plants like ground orchids, white rhododendron, and other precious plants. It still preserves some rare animals and three hundred species of birds such as red panda, musk deer, leopard, porcupine, jackal, *kalij*, Tibetan duck, and so on (Rijal, 2064).

Naturally, Maipokhari having nine corners, has a circle with about 188 hectares. The pond's edges are supposed to be the symbols of nine goddesses of Hindu mythology named *Shailputri*, *Brahmacharini*, *Chandraghanta*, *Kusmanda*, *Eskandhamata*, *Katyayani*, *Kalratri*, *Maha Gauri*, and *Siddhidhatri*. According to the local legend, in the ancient period, God *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* disguised their form as Swans. They used to stay in this beautiful pond by taking full enjoyment, love, and romance. It is believed that *Shiva* and *Parvati* visited the place once a year during *Kartik Ekadashi*. As a result, there is a big fair of *Shivaratri* and *Haribodhini Ekadashi*, where people from surrounding villages and distant places, even from India, come to take a bath and worship God and Goddesses. The folk dances like *Chandi* and *Maruni* are demonstrated during the fair (Baral, 2064b). In this area, there is a Shiva temple, *Bhagawati* temple, and a *Vedic* hermitage, which provides the knowledge of *Vedas*, *Upanisads*, *Smritis*, Mythology, and other religious scriptures as a center of education. At this very holy place, there is a historical place called *Satkhalde*, where seven people had got martyrdom while fighting for the national freedom campaign in the 2018 BS.

Jhayun Pokhari

Jhayun Pokhari is situated at Deomai Rural Municipality, the west part of the Ilam district. It looks like Mai Pokhari, but it remains in shadow due to its lack

of proper management. In the evening in the provinces, one can hear the beautiful sound of insects called Cricket or Jhayunkiri. Due to this event, the pond is called Jhayunpokhari. There is a small hill in the lake's center and a temple on the top of the mountain. The temple was made under the leadership of Pramila Chapagain, a teacher at Jeetpur Secondary School (Khanal, 2064).

Chulachuli

Chulachuli region is located Chulachuli Rural Municipality, the southwestern part of the district. It is the name of the hill where several small hills can be found, including Mainachuli. It is famous for horticulture production, where various orange family fruits are produced. Likewise, this site is famous for bio-diversity where animals and birds like leopard, bear, deer, wild boar, wild buffaloes, golden monitor, porcupine and monkey, Kalis, Danesh, parrot, maina various species of butterflies, etc. can be found. It is believed that on the night of *Laxmi Puja* festival, the jungle of the *Chulachuli* hill is fully lit by the supernatural light.

Teenkhutte

Teenkhutte of Suryodaya Municipality is another natural tourism product of the site. The hill's height is believed to be more than that of Shree Antu. Through the top of the mountain, visitors can observe the beautiful sunrise views in the winter season. Likewise, the visitors can quickly get an opportunity to see the indigenous culture of the Yolmo ethnic community, the principal inhabitants of the site. Of course, if Teenkhutte can be developed as a tourist destination, the visitors can get two types of opportunities: observing Yolmo culture and sunrise views (Sharma, 2064).

Todke Jharana

Todke Jharana, or waterfall, is located in Sandakpur Rural Municipality, 20 meters north of the Ilam municipality, the headquarters city of the district

(Sapkota, 2064). This is a long and high fountain of Ilam, which is decorated by the tea garden and other natural and planted plants. The fountain falls from a 285-meter height, where visitors can see one and more beautiful scenes of the rainbow in a single sight.

Deurali Jharana

Deurali fountain is located Deomai Rural Municipality, about 2 to 3 miles western part of the main market. The fountain closely lies with the Setidevi temple. The fountain falls from 12-meter height, considered a beautiful natural gift of Ilam (Dulal, 2064). This is a source of attraction to plenty of domestic and international visitors, uniquely Indian tourists, every year.

Charkhola

Ilam is also known as the district of four rivers: Deomai, Puwamai, Jogamai, and Sunmai. Deumai flows from the western part, whereas Puwamai and Jogamai flow from the west and east, respectively. Likewise, the Sunmai moves from the eastern lap of the headquarters city. Due to the ever-flowing four rivers with fresh spring water, the beauty of Ilam is increased.

Khandrung Cave

Khandrung cave is located in Deomai Rural Municipality near Sidithumka Hill. One can easily enter the cave, and there is a big room; then, there are several rooms one after another with an entrance gate in each room. Another important feature of this cave is that there exists on the top of the cave. The length of the cave hasn't been noticed yet.

Chitre Cave

Chitre Cave is located in Phakaphokathuma Rural Municipality, an important historical cave of Ilam. It was not a natural cave, and it was built by the freedom fighter Ratna Kumar Bantawa. At the time of the revolution against the

Rana ruler in 2007, B.S. Martyr Ratna Kumar was made the cave to gate save from the administrators.

Pyang Cave

One new cave has been found in Maijogamai Rural Municipality, in the northeast of Ilam bazaar. It is situated about 5000 meters above sea level. Visitors can see a black hole after walking ten minutes inside the cave. It is wonderful that one can hear the sound of water when throwing a stone through the black hole. It suggests that there is a well in the inner part of the cave. Nobody has declared the fact of the cave yet. Many surprising thoughts about the cave have been collected, but it would be better if we could advertise the cave among tourists (Lekali, 2063).

Puse Cave

It is one of the important caves located between Sukrabare and the New Bazaar of the Ilam district. One can reach up to Puse Cave after crossing the Jogmai River, and it is ahead of Sukrabare Bazaar. On top of the cave, there is a beautiful village with a new market. There is also a beautiful jungle between the villages.

Caves of Mangmalmung

Three beautiful caves are situated in Mansebung Rural Municipality of Mangmalung hill in the west part of Ilam. The hill and caves are named Mangmalmung as the name of the stone God. The meaning of the word Mang is God, and Lung is stone. According to legends, there is a big stone weighing two tons, which a little figure of general people can move. From a very early, people of the *Rai* community have been worshipping the stone god on this hill.

Beautiful Tea Garden

Ilam is a beautiful district decorated with tea gardens and the other six cash crops. So, it is considered an important agro-tourism destination in the

country. Kanyam, Sri Antu, Fikkal, Panchkanya, Pashupatinagar, Irautar, Samalbung, Maipokhari, Sangrumba, Mangalbare, Jitpur, Sankhejung, Fuatappu, Phakaphoka, and Ilam municipality are famous for tea garden. These sites can be developed as natural tourism destinations as well.

Role of Natural Heritage for the Promotion of Tourism

As a whole, *Ilam* district is a beautiful tourist destination, where there can be found several natural heritages as mentioned above. Tourists can observe magnificent natural tourism products in this destination during their excursions. During the field survey, the researcher asked a question regarding the role of natural heritage in promoting tourism to the local people. The local respondents have provided the perceptions are given below in the table 1 below.

Table 1

Opinion of Locals on the Role of Natural Heritage in Tourism Promotion

S. N.	Level of Opinion	Resp. No.	%
1.	Very high	7	14
2.	Medium	9	18
3.	Satisfied	12	24
4.	Not satisfied	19	38
5	Not state	3	6
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 1 shows the level of the opinion of local people on the roles of natural heritages in the promotion of tourism in Ilam. The statistics presented in the table indicate that among the total 50 respondents, the maximum number of 19 (38 %) who evaluated the role does not seem satisfied. In contrast, the lowest of 3 (6 %) respondents did not have any ideas regarding the issue. Similarly, 12 (24 %) mentioned being satisfied, 9(18%) seemed to have a medium level of satisfaction,

and the remaining 7 (14 %) seemed very high satisfied through the role being played by the natural heritages for the enhancement of tourism in Ilam. During the field survey, the respondents who stated not being satisfied mentioned that there is a huge potential for promoting tourism, but the concerned authorities and stakeholders have not been able to utilize it to the extent possible.

Accommodations and Facilities Available in Ilam

Available accommodations and facilities such as hotel and resort, food catering, transportation, communication service, guide service, souvenir center, and hospitality of host people can play a vital role in the proper enhancement of tourism in Ilam. Among them, hotel accommodation is considered more important from the tourism perspective. Padma Lodge, Summit hotel, Chiyabari Cottage, Hotel Green View, Green City Guest House, The Paradise Cottages, Panorama Hotel & Lodge, Hill Hoods Resort, Omega hotel & Lodge, Hotel Darbar, Almost Heaven Farms Antu Cottage, Mirage Resort, and Hotel Fikkal Kanyam Inn, Rinchen Hotel & Lodge, Habre's Nest, Singalila Jungle Lodge, Hotel Chamu, Kulung Family Tea Farm, Deurali Hotel & Lodge, Bidyasagar Homestay, Dhotrey Homestay, Gopal Homestay, Druk Homestay, Chintapu Home Stay, Santi Home Stay are the main hotel, lodge, resorts and homestay of Ilam which have been providing hotel accommodations to the visitors. Apart from the hotel accommodation, other facilities such as transportation, communication service, guide service, souvenir center, and hospitality of host people are considered equally important for promoting tourism. Therefore, in this paper, local people's satisfaction level regarding tourist accommodation and facilities has been measured and discussed. The researcher discussed this issue with 25 visitors during the field survey, including four international tourists. The following responses have been collected in table 2.

Table 2*Local Visitors' and International Tourists' Opinions on Facilities*

S.N.	Facilities	Evaluation				Total
		Excellent	Good	Moderate	Not good	
1.	Hotel accommodation	3 (12%)	14(56%)	6(24%)	2(8%)	25
2.	Transportation facilities	7(28%)	8(32%)	6(24%)	4(16%)	25
3.	Communication services	13(52%)	6(24%)	4(16%)	2(8%)	25
4.	Guide service	4(16%)	9 (34%)	7(28%)	5(20%)	25
5	Hospitality	14(56%)	5(20%)	4 (16%)	2(8%)	25
6	Souvenir centre	4(16%)	4(16%)	11(44%)	6(24%)	25

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 2 deals with the level of evaluation of available accommodations and facilities such as hotel and resort, food catering, transportation, communication service, guide service, souvenir centre and hospitality of the host people. The statistics show that regarding on hotel accommodation out of 25 respondents 3 (12%) response excellent, 14 (56%) good, 6(24%) mention moderate and 2(8%) reply not good. Similarly, towards transportation facility rest of total respondents 7(28%) response excellent, 8(32%) good, 6(24%) mention moderate and 4(16%) reply not good. Likewise, on the communication services among the 25 respondents 13(52%) response excellent, 6(24%) good, 4(16%) mention moderate and 2(8%) reply not good. Similarly, regarding on guide service, rest of 25 respondents 4 (16%) have responded excellent, 9(34%) good, 7(28%) mention moderate and 5 (20%) reply not good. Likewise, on the hospitality, among the 25 respondents 14(56%) have responded towards excellent, 5(20%) good, 4(16%) mention moderate and 2(8%) reply not good. Similarly,

towards souvenir centre rest of total respondents 4(16%) response excellent, 4(16%) good, 11(44%) mention moderate and 6(24%) reply not good.

Tourism Activities

There is no authentic evidence that provides the history of travel and tourism in Ilam. On the basis of literary sources, the antiquity of *Ilam* can be traced to the historic period. *Srimadbhagawat Geeta*, a tremendous religious text of Hindu, there is a description of *Ilam* and *Maipokhari*, which helps to trace the antiquity and significance of such destinations. This statement suggests that *Ilam* and *Maipokhari* were the famous and popular religious places today and from the very ancient time. Several holy saints are also said to have visited during different periods. The travel of Maha Prabhu Kapilananda from Sworgadwori in 1947 CE and the visit of Balaguru from India in 1998 BS are a few noteworthy illustrations of the tourism activities of Ilam. Later on, the visit of Swamy Somesworananda from Godawal, India, in 1949-50 BS is also noted.

It is believed that before the unification, there were not any tourism activities in Ilam. After the Treaty of Sugauli, the famous Botanist Sir Joseph Hooker traveled to Ilam and Darjeeling of India and Kathmandu. Likewise, a famous scholar, H.A. Oldfield, visited Ilam during his field survey, which is considered an important event in tourism in Ilam. Similarly, Rana Priminister Deva Shamser visited Ilam with his five women servants in 1958 BS. After establishing democracy in 1951 CE, Nepal was formally opened to foreigners. At the same time, the then Home Minister B.P. Koirala, President of Nepali Congress Mr. Matrika Pd. Koirala and Mrigendra Shumser of Gorkha Parisad paid their visit to Ilam. Likewise, King Mahendra and the then Prince Birendra traveled to Ilam in 2020 BS and 2028 BS, respectively (Baral, 2063, p. 84-85). All these events are quite considered essential landmarks for the tourists and tourism perspectives in Ilam.

The number of tourists visiting the hilly eastern district of Ilam has increased by 42.6 percent in the last fiscal year. According to the Tourist Information Center based at Jarekalash between Ilam and Jhapa districts, the number of tourists coming via Jhapa has been increasing drastically. As per the information center, 134,077 tourists visited Ilam in the Fiscal Year 2018/19, which increased to 40,000. Most of them are domestic tourists (Chapagain, 2019). However, the exact number of tourists coming to the district may be higher than the above-mentioned statistics because many do not enter their information with concerned authorities.

Implications

These are the fundamental attraction of tourism in *Ilam* with green forests, snow-capped mountains, and hospitable people. *Ilam* quickly draws the attention of the tourists. It is evident that *Ilam* holds various valuable natural tourism products such as *Sriantu, Sandakapur, Kothidanda, Siddhithumka, Todke Jharana, Jasabire Bhanjyang, Charkhola, Khhandrung cave, Chitre cave, Pyang cave, Puse cave, caves of Mangmalung hill*, beautiful tea garden, flora and fauna within its small territory. These are its indigenous identity, core attractions, images, and authenticity, which should be commoditized in tourism markets. But the available statistics regarding tourists' inflow cannot assure proper utilization of its potentiality. Therefore, the government, concerned authorities, and stakeholders should be made appropriate plans, policies, and programs to develop the site as an important tourist destination in Nepal. In this circumstance, the researcher believes that this paper might be useful for future planners, concerned authorities, and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Ilam is regarded as the Queen of Hills of Nepal. It might be addressed with the same adjectives because of its charming scenery, along with a perennial

view of greenery and enhancing scenes of nature. No doubt, it is the richest in its natural assets. Visitors must visit Ilam to enjoy its natural beauty. Hills covered with green tea gardens, wonderful rivers, waterfalls, ponds, caves, the views of the sun rising and the sun setting, snowy mountains, beautiful and romantic sceneries, and so on are the natural tourism products of Ilam. On the solid platform of above mentioned natural heritages, Ilam could be welcomed and attract thousands of local and international tourists every day in a season. The natural heritages of Ilam can generate several opportunities for different tourists following their interests. The researcher, investigator, and explorers can study and explore new things regarding the heritages of the destinations. The recreational visitors can also fully enjoy and pleasure themselves by observing the products. Similarly, for the tourists who visit to experience a homely environment and specific hospitality, this destination can serve typical *Ilameli* hospitality such as smiling faces, food, drinks, dresses, ornaments, etc., in every step of their journey. Likewise, it provides opportunities to those visitors who want to purchase curios like Dhaka productions, bamboo crafts, metalwork, orthodox tea, and other things within the market.

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