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Status of Tourists and Rural Tourism Impacts in Ghalegaun, Nepal

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of rural tourism's economic effects and potential in Ghalegaun, Lamjung, Nepal. It extensively covers the region's natural allure, cultural attractions, and the positive influence of tourism on the local economy. It stresses the importance of strategic marketing and development initiatives to fully leverage the area's tourism prospects while addressing existing hurdles. The article delves into challenges like the shortage of skilled labor and the necessity for enhanced tourism activities in Ghalegaun. Moreover, it discusses available infrastructure, tourist demographics (nationality, age, purpose of visit, occupation, duration of stay, and spending patterns). Ultimately, the study underscores Ghalegaun's rural tourism potential and its significant economic impact.

Keywords: Rural tourism, tourist, impact, Ghalegaun, Nepal

Introduction

Rural tourism alludes to travel and vacation experiences that take place in rural or countryside areas rather than urban or metropolitan locations. It involves visiting rural destinations to engage in activities such as experiencing local culture, participating in outdoor recreational activities, exploring natural landscapes, and interacting with local communities. Rural tourism offers visitors the opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of city life, immerse themselves in the tranquility of rural settings, and appreciate the simplicity and authenticity of rural lifestyles. It often promotes sustainable development by providing economic opportunities for rural communities and preserving traditional customs and environments (Hall & Page, 2014).

The rapid advancements in communication and transportation have transformed the world into a global village. This shift has expanded market economies, particularly within the tourism sector, prompting a need for adaptation to cater to the evolving international tourism landscape. Nations worldwide engage in fierce competition to position themselves as attractive tourist destinations, offering a range of compelling tourism products (Shrestha, 1995).

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Marketing in tourism transcends mere business success; it aligns with societal goals and public interests. Its influence extends beyond firm boundaries, contributing significantly to broader societal objectives. Given tourism's status as the fastest-growing and highly competitive industry, effective marketing becomes imperative. Unlike many other industries, tourism offers customers a vast array of choices, intensifying the competition among destinations. Therefore, tourism marketing stands at the core of all tourism activities, influencing and shaping operational strategies through both direct and indirect promotional efforts (Gurung, 1978).

Nepal, a small nation positioned between the emerging economic giants of China and India, boasts remarkable richness in geographical and climatic diversity. This diversity manifests through a spectrum of ethnicities, cultures, biodiversity, and societal traditions. Nepal's elevation spans from 60 meters above sea level to the summit of Mt. Everest, reaching 8,848 meters. With an average width of 192 kilometers, this diversity in topography leads to a range of climates, transitioning from subtropical in the southern regions to arctic conditions in the northern parts of the country (Shrestha & Rijal, 2016).

This extensive range of landscapes has nurtured a spectacular array of ecosystems, including the world's highest mountain range, dense subtropical jungles thriving with diverse wildlife, roaring rivers, forested hills, and icy valleys. Furthermore, the country is home to a diverse mosaic of ethnic groups scattered across local villages, each with distinct social structures and cultural customs (Shrestha, 2009).

Rural tourism holds significance within Nepal's ecotourism landscape. It offers visitors an opportunity to explore rural villages inhabited by diverse ethnic groups, each with its unique culture (Bhandari, 2011). Tourists have the chance to reside in typical Nepali villages, savor delicious local cuisine, experience warm hospitality, and find comfortable accommodations offered by host families. This immersive experience allows guests to engage with the local culture and traditions firsthand (Upadhaya, 2006). This paper analyzes the local infrastructure, prime attraction with demographic characteristics of tourist and overall impact of tourism, infrastructure, and distribution of tourist nationality in Ghalegaun, Nepal.

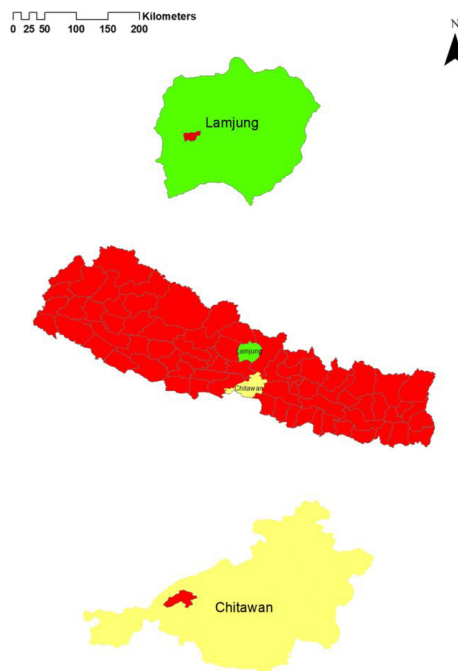
Methods and materials

Study area

Ghalegaun stands as a delightful hillside tourist spot nestled in the western precincts of Lamjung district, perched at an elevation of 2100 meters above sea level. Renowned as a pivotal hub for rural tourism, it serves as a paradigmatic village for tourism development in South Asia. Ghalegaun, nestled in the renowned

Annapurna region, is a small village inhabited by the Gurung/Ghale community. This village has emerged as a burgeoning rural tourism destination due to its rich cultural and natural offerings, making it an appealing choice for visitors. Tourists have the option to actively participate in local community activities or opt for home stays to immerse themselves in the experience. Ghalegaun is situated within the Kwolohasothar Rural municipality of Lamjung district. Formerly the domain of Ghale Kings until the 18th century, it currently houses 115 households of Gurungs and Ghales. Ghalegaun is approximately 10 kilometers northwest of Besishahar, the district headquarters. Accessible either by a four-hour trek from Besishahar or within one and a half hours by vehicle, the village offers convenient accessibility for travelers.

Location map of study area, Ghalegaun, Lamjung Nepal



Data and methods

This study is concerned on impact of village tourism based on mix method approach. Both primary and secondary data are used. Primary data gathered through field studies and tourist responses. Essential information is sourced from local inhabitants, home-stay proprietors, and local governmental entities to collect pertinent information from sample units, structured questionnaires were utilized. Specifically designed questionnaires were tailored for three distinct groups: tourists, home-stay owners, and local residents. 20 local inhabitants' owners, 30

international tourists and Ghalegaun tourism management committee are sources of information. Additionally, participatory observation methods complemented the questionnaire approach, capturing supplementary information observed during the field survey. Apart from primary data, secondary data were incorporated to augment the research's relevance, providing a comparative analysis and facilitating a deeper understanding of the economic, social, and cultural impacts of tourism in the study area.

Result and discussion

Prime Attractions of Ghalegaun

On the course of field visit, local peoples were asked about the prime attractions of Ghalegaun that can appeal the tourists. The responses are tabulated below.

Table 1: Prime Attractions of Ghalegaun

SN	Description	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Local cultural programme	2	10
2	View of Himalayan range	4	20
3	Natural beauty	8	40
4	Traditional Gurung museum	2	10
5	Handicrafts	1	5
6	Hospitality of local people	3	15
Total		20	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

The table above illustrates that the natural scenic beauty stands out as a significant highlight of Ghalegaun. A majority of respondents (40%) expressed their appreciation for this aspect, while 20% emphasized the allure of the Himalayan range. Furthermore, 15% acknowledged the hospitality of the local people, and 10% of respondents focused on the richness of the local culture as perceived attractions of Ghalegaun.

Infrastructure Facilities Available in Ghalegaun

The responses of local people towards the infrastructure facilities available in the Ghalegaun are tabulated below.

Table 2: Local People's Responses Regarding Existing Infrastructure Available in Ghalegaun

SN	Facilities	Excellent	%	Good	%	Don't Know	%	Bad	%	Very Bad	%
1	Water Supply	7	35	8	40	5	25	-	-	-	-
2	Communication	-	-	5	25	15	75	-	-	-	-
3	Electricity	-	-	7	35	8	40	5	25	-	-
4	Transportation	-	-	9	45	11	55	-	-	-	-
5	Environmental sanitation	4	20	10	50	6	30	-	-	-	-
6	View tower	2	10	11	55	7	35	-	-	-	-
7	Security management	-	-	12	60	8	40	-	-	-	-
8	Health service	-	-	3	15	3	15	10	50	4	20
9	Behavior of local people	12	60	8	40	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	Tourist guide	-	-	3	15	11	55	6	30	-	-
11	Accommodation cleanness	1	5	16	80	3	15	-	-	-	-

Source: Field survey, 2023

Note:

Excellent = When a particular facility is abundant

Good = When a particular facility is adequate

Don't Know = When a respondent doesn't have any idea about a particular facility

Bad = When a particular facility is in short supply

Very Bad = When a particular facility is scarce

According to the table above, key informants identified electricity, health services, and tourist guides as infrastructure facilities deemed inadequate. Conversely, they expressed agreement with the satisfactory status of other facilities.

Impact of Tourism Development in Ghalegaun

During the field visit, the respondents were asked about the changes that occurred along with the increased number of visitors. The view regarding the changes in the village can be presented as below.

Table 3: Impact of Tourism in Ghalegaun

SN	Description	Positive		Negative		No Change	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	Employment opportunity	15	75	-	-	5	25
2	Business or market expansion opportunity	12	60	-	-	8	40

3	Development of cottage industry	9	45	-	-	11	55
4	Conservation and promotion of natural and cultural assets	10	50	-	-	10	50
5	Development of infrastructure	18	90	-	-	2	10
6	Environmental pollution	-	-	5	25	15	75
7	Price of local products	19	95	-	-	1	5
8	Social awareness	20	100	-	-	-	-
9	Tradition, Religion and Cultural aspects	-	-	10	50	10	50

Source: Field survey, 2023

The table above indicates that the local population perceives the overall impact of tourism as predominantly positive. Among the respondents, 75% acknowledged the increased employment opportunities, while 100% recognized a positive enhancement in social awareness. Conversely, 75% of the respondents expressed concerns regarding environmental degradation associated with tourism.

Most Appreciated Features of Ghalegaun, According to Tourists:

The trafficking of tourist depends on the special features possess by the place. The appreciated features of Ghalegaun are given below in the table

Table 4. Most Appreciated Features of Ghalegaun

Features	No. of Tourists	Percentage
Natural Scenic Beauty	7	23.3
Culture	5	16.7
Accommodation	2	6.7
Homely Environment	3	10
All of the above	13	43.3
Total	30	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Above table reveals that most of the respondents i.e. 43.3 per cent of tourists replied all of the features attracted them. Similarly, 23.3 per cent liked the natural scenic beauty of Ghalegaun, 16.7 per cent of tourist like cultural and traditions like GHANTU, 10 per cent like homely environment only, and 6.7 per cent of tourists like accommodation facilities any.

Above table depicts that most of the tourist 63.3 per cent stay there for two days and one night while another 16.7 per cent stayed for three days and two nights. Similarly, 13.3 per cent of tourist stayed for four days and three nights.

Distribution of Tourist by Nationality

The field visit was conducted in 2023. The total number of visitors during the field visit was found to be 209. The distribution pattern of tourist by nationality is shown in table below.

Table 5: Distribution of Tourist by Nationality

SN	Countries	No. of Tourist	Percentage
A	Domestic (National)	179	88.17
B	International		
1	India	6	2.46
2	USA	3	0.99
3	France	3	1.48
4	UK	6	2.46
5	Japan	4	0.99
6	German	4	1.97
7	Australia	4	1.48
Total		209	100

Source: Field survey, 2023 and Ghalegaun Tourism Management Committee

Above table shows the tourist arrival in Ghalegaun from different countries during the field visit. It shows that comparison to domestic tourist the percentage arrival of foreign tourist is really less. Among the international tourist Indian and the tourist from UK occupies top generating market, having 2.46 per cent of total tourist arrival followed by German tourist, which covers 1.97 per cent.

30 tourist respondents are selected for the study out of total 65 respondent. Among this, 15 are domestic and remaining 15 are foreign tourist. Among 15 international tourist 20% were from India, 6.7 per cent from USA, 6.7 per cent from France, 26.6 per cent from UK 6.7 per cent from Japan, 13.3 per cent from German and remaining 20 per cent from Australia.

Distribution of International Tourist by Age

In this part, researcher wanted to know the distribution of tourist respondent by age during the field visit. For the purpose the questionnaire provided to tourists is strictly followed.

Table 6: Distribution of International Tourist by Age

Age group	Number of Tourist	Percentage
Below 20 years	9	30
21- 40 years	18	60
Above 40	3	10
Total	30	100

Source: Field visit, 2023

The above table shows that 30 per cent of the respondents are below 20 years while 60 per cent are within the age group of 21 to 40 years and 10 per cent of respondents are above 40 years.

Distribution of International Tourist by Purpose of Visit

The arrival of tourist by purpose can be tabulated as below, according to the responses given by them.

Table 7: Distribution of International Tourist by Purpose of Visit

Purpose	Number of Tourists	Percentage
Sight –seeing	26	86.7
Study or research	3	10
Official work	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table shows that the high percentage of tourist i.e. 86.7 per cent of tourist visit Ghalegaun for the purpose of sight-seeing. It means most of the international tourist visit Ghalegaun to enjoy the views. Similarly, 10 per cent of tourist visit for the purpose of study or research and remaining 3.3 per cent of tourist arrive here to perform official duties.

Distribution of Tourist by Occupation

The sample consists of tourist of different occupations. The table presented below express the occupational differences of tourist arrived.

Table 8: Distribution of Tourist by occupation

Occupation of Tourist	Number of Tourist	Percentage
Student	14	46.7
Professional	7	23.3
Business	4	13.3
Others (social worker)	5	16.7
Total	30	100

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that 46.7 per cent of respondent were students, 23.3 per cent were professionals, 13.3 per cent were business persons and remaining were from other occupations like social work and so on.

Length of Stay of Tourist

The length of stay is a crucial factor in tourism development. In order to develop tourism industry, it is necessary to increase the number of tourist as well as their length of stay. The length of stay depends on time, money and desire of tourist.

The length of stay of tourist visiting Ghalegaun is presented below.

Table 9: Length of Stay

Duration	No. of Tourist	Percentage
Day Excursion	2	6.7
Two days/one night	19	63.3
Three days/two night	5	16.7
Four days /three night	4	13.3
Five days /four night	-	-
Total	30	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Above table depicts that most of the tourist (i. e. 63.3%) stay there for two days and one night while another 16.7 per cent stayed for three days and two nights. Similarly, 13.3 per cent of tourist stayed for four days and three nights.

Expenditure Pattern of Tourist

The main theme of the study is obtained from the expenditure pattern of tourist. It deeply influences the economy of the study area. It will be beneficial to

encourage tourists to spend more during their short stay rather than to make their stay long. The distribution of expenditure is shown in table below.

Table10: Expenditure Pattern of Tourist

Amount in US\$	Lodging Expenditure	Percentage	Fooding Expenditure	Percentage	Other	Percentage
Below 10	30	100	21	70	18	60
11-20	-	-	7	23.3	12	40
21& above	-	-	2	6.7	-	-
Total	30	100	30	100	30	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

In Ghalegaun 'Home stay' facility is available. Each household having the facility of homestay has two single beds. If large numbers of tourists come together, the Ghalegaun TourismManagement Committee manages for all.

From the above table it can conclude that 100 per cent of tourists spend below 10 US\$ on lodging while 70 per cent of tourist spend below 10 US\$, 23.3 per cent of tourists spend 11to 20 US\$ and 6.7 per cent of tourists spend more than 21 US\$ on fooding. Similarly, 60 percentof the tourists spend below 10 US\$ and 40 percent of tourists spend between 11to 20 US\$ for other items like local handicrafts and local products.

Conclusion

Tourism in Nepal has been strongly emphasized as a catalyst for economic development, attributed to the nation's natural and cultural allure. Rural tourism particularly stands out as a significant alternative for economic prosperity. However, to ensure equitable national development and income distribution and prevent societal conflicts, the tourism industry must be developed strategically.

This study primarily investigates the economic impact and potential of rural tourism in Ghalegaun. Given its natural beauty, proximity to the Himalayas, and recreational opportunities, Ghalegaun is poised to become a key destination for nature enthusiasts. Despite this potential, the government's efforts to attract foreign tourists to Ghalegaun seem inadequate. The study suggests that while the government should initiate destination promotion, the management of products and services should be entrusted to the private sector.

Key findings indicate Ghalegaun's immense potential for rural tourism, highlighting its breathtaking mountain views, local traditions and culture including the Gurung Museum, Goal Ghar, Uttarkanya Mandir, natural bee hives for honey

hunting, Didibaini Jharana, Talangyon Tal, panoramic views, among others. Additionally, tourist traffic in Ghalegaun is on the rise, with visitors perceiving the local community as welcoming and harmonious.

The region's unpolluted environment and diverse flora and fauna are identified as unique attractions, alongside cultural shows performed by locals. Ghalegaun is seen as an affordable destination, yet only a fraction of households offers homestays for paying guests. Despite its potential, significant tourism activities have not been established in Ghalegaun. However, the positive impact of tourism on the local economy is acknowledged by residents, evident in increased employment opportunities, income generation from local products, and an overall improvement in the economic status of locals.

Challenges persist, notably the lack of skilled manpower affecting the quality of services rendered to tourists. Nevertheless, the increasing influx of tourists contributes to the gradual economic betterment of the locals, celebrated through warm receptions, traditional performances, and the sale of local products.

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