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**Tourism in Nepal: A Case Study of Thamel**

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**Abstract**

This research explores the tourism as one of the important contributors to economic and social development of Nepal. In this article, methodologically, twenty tourists are interviewed to carry out this research which unveils the image of Nepal in the international tourism market. Furthermore, Nepali as well as foreigners is asked to advise to promote the tourism in Nepal. Among the fifty respondents, thirty respondents tell international tourism market is one of the best ways to promote tourism in Nepal. This research aims to analyze the situation of the tourism industry area. The particular aims of this study are: to evaluate the influx of tourists in the two designated study areas, and to analyze the impact of tourism within these trading activities. Besides, this case study finds contrast between the historical development of tourism in Nepal and the need for current data to understand the present situation in Thamel. While the historical data reveals the evolution of Nepal's tourism industry, including the initial focus on infrastructure development and the gradual shift towards planned tourism policies. In addition, this research concludes that Thamel has the capacity to prosper, but the larger issues confronting Nepal's tourist sector hamper its chances seriously. Besides, the majority of visitors fall within the thirty one to forty five age groups, with a male predominance.

*Keywords:* tourism, data, Nepal, market, development

### **Introduction**

Nepal is a sovereign independent small beautiful Himalayan country. Area of this country is 147,181 sq. Km. She is situated between China in the north and India in the South Kathmandu Metropolitan is its capital city. More than 2.32 million people live in Nepal. Nepali is the national language. However, travel-trade people understand and speak English as well. Multi-party democracy with constitutional monarchy is its political system. This country possesses different climates but has four major seasons, namely, (1) winter: December-February (2) Spring: March-May (3) Summer: June-August (4) Autumn: September-November. Nepal can be visited the whole year round. Nepal has more than 61 ethnic groups and 70 spoken languages. Lightweight clothing is recommended for May through October; warm garments are required in October-march. An umbrella or a raincoat is a must for the rainy season. Nepal is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity due to its unique geographical position and altitudinal variation. The elevation of the country ranges from 60 meters above sea level to the highest point on earth, Mt. Everest at 8,848 meters all within a distance of 150 km resulting in climatic conditions from Sub-tropical to Arctic. Nepal is occupying only 0.1 per cent of the earth. As reported in Discover Nepal (2024), she has 2 percent of all the flowering plants in the world. Eight per cent of the world's population of birds (more than 848 species), 4 per cent of mammals on earth, 11 per cent of the world's 15 families of butterflies (more than 500 species), 600 indigenous plant families and 319 species of exotic orchids.

In this context, tourism is playing an important role in developing and strengthening the socio-economic life of the kingdom. Tourism as an invisible export trade has its great virtue in that it does not deplete our natural resources like other industries. With the importance of tourism and its increasing growth in the national economy, greater impetus has been given to the tourist industry in Nepal and hence the opening of the Ministry of tourism in 1977.

Throughout history, travel has existed as long as humanity, and inherently, people have a passion for exploring. Human travel began during nomadic periods when people roamed and migrated in search of food and shelter driven by natural urges. Traveling for the new discoveries was encouraged by human nature's anxieties and true consciousness. Therefore, "the history of the tourism industry dates back to the first time that people lived on Earth. There is undoubtedly a difference between traveling in the present and traveling in the past. However, civilization has advanced and human perspectives have changed.

The purpose of travel has changed from being necessary to being the desire to embark on amazing adventures. The most widely accepted definition of tourism was created in 1908 by the United Nations conference on the International Union of Official Travel

Organizations (IUOTO). Once more, the United Nation World Tourism Organization (2025) developed a schematic breakdown of all travelers, and in 1993, the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the updated Rome definition of tourism as a continuation of the discussions held at the Ottawa International Conference on Tourism Statistics. As per the World Tourism Organization's framework for the collection and publication of tourism statistics, Madrid, a traveler is defined as an individual journeying between two or more nations or between multiple locations within their country of habitual residence. According to Joey (Qtd. 2017), a tourist is a visitor that travels between 24 hours to less than a year. For Joey, the time spent by a tourist can extend up to a year.

Further, this research aims to analyze the situation of the tourism industry in the study area. It analyses the socio-economic impact on tourism in Thamel. The particular aims of this study are outlined as follows: to evaluate the influx of tourists in the two designated study areas, and to analyze the impact of tourism within these trading activities in study area; to evaluate the contribution of various promoting agencies of tourism in the study area, and to evaluate the employment situation of the tourism industry in the study area.

While problematizing, this research focuses on how the tourism industry began to prosper in Nepal after 1951. Before that foreigners' entry was restricted. However, during the early years, the country had no infrastructure, no transport facilities, communication facilities, or other supporting facilities that could make tourism attractive. In the context of Nepal, tourism can be a strong force to develop the nation. To develop the nation by tourism, the correct strategy should be made to develop the tourism industry. On the other hand, unsystematically developed tourism activities are bound to have an adverse impact on the national socio-economic structure itself.

Moreover, Kathmandu Durbar Square is famous for numerous monuments, temples, shrines, and stupas. As written in the web page of Nepal Tourism Board (2025), the home of the Living Goddess (Kumari Ghar), the powerful Kal Bhairav, the colorful monkey goddess, and numerous elaborate sexual sculptures are some of the Kathmandu Durbar Square's most noteworthy attractions. The plaza is alive with activity. One tree's wood is said to have been used to build the Kastamandap rest house, which is believed to provide Kathmandu Valley its name. There are big drums nearby that were pounded to announce royal decrees. One of the main places for tourists to view the region's exquisitely detailed wooden carvings, people, and architecture is Kathmandu Durbar Square. Additionally, the complex includes the Tribhuvan Museum which holds the souvenirs of various Shah Kings.

Additionally, Pashupatinath is also the most revered Hindu pilgrimage place in Nepal. The complex has images of Shiva in addition to sculptures, temples, and shrines dedicated to other deities. On this site, a Shiva temple was constructed around 879 A.D. However,

King Bhupatindra Malla built the present temple in 1697. The pagoda's structure is embellished with the finest wood carvings, silver doors, and a golden-plated ceiling. The Guheswari temple, restored in 1653 A.D., represents the feminine "force". It is dedicated to Satidevi, Shiva's first wife, who gave her life in her father's fire ritual.

Likewise, Durbar Square, World Heritage Site is home to several exquisite pagoda temples and stone sculptures, as well as the city's commercial center. Everywhere one looks, there is a work of art or a depiction of a god, showcasing the extraordinary talent of Patan's unnamed artisans. Other treasures found nearby are the Royal Bath (Tushahity), which has elaborate metal and stone decorations, and the stone temple devoted to Lord Krishna. The temple devoted to Lord Krishna has a prominent position inside the Patan's Palace complex. Although its design is not entirely indigenous, it is one of the finest examples of Nepalese temple craftsmanship.

### **Methodology**

To conduct this research, twenty tourists are interviewed in the study area about the image of Nepal in the international tourism market. Among them 10 tourist i.e. 50 per cent said Nepal is terrorist country. Nepali as well as foreigners is asked to advise to promote the tourism in Nepal. Among the 50 respondents, 30 respondents say the international tourism market is one of the best ways to promote tourism in Nepal. International tourism market is very weak in Nepal. The efforts should be done in the international tourism market to promote our tourism industry. Sixty per cent of the respondents suggest promoting the international market. Twenty respondents, i.e., 40 per cent advised to maintain peace in this context in another resort to promote the tourism in Nepal. They tell tourists are not come to Nepal due to insecurity. Nepal has to convince tourists that she is a safe destination for travel. Peace maintains is one of the main problems of our country. If government of Nepal success to manage the peace, certainly the inflow of tourist will increase.

Twenty tourists (foreigners) are interviewed in the spout. They were from different countries. The question about the motivating factors to the tourist has been asked. Above table indicates that among the 20 respondents, 10 respondents (foreign) (or 50%) answered that they were influenced by their friends to visit Nepal. It shows our international marketing of tourism is very weak. Seven respondents (i.e., 35%) said they came to Nepal due to tourism promoting agencies like travel agencies and trekking agencies. It is followed by a friend influencing people to travel to Nepal. Fifteen percent of the tourist come to Nepal through the international market.

The largest age group of respondents was between 31-45 years, i.e., 50 per cent. Male dominated respondents are found in the study area. The majority of the respondents are Nepali, and others are foreigners, i.e., 60 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Three

hundred and sixty tourism promoting agencies are involved to promote and develop the model tourism sector in the Thamel area such as travel agencies, trekking agencies, Airlines, Thamel tourism board, etc.

There is plenty of accommodation available in Thamel. There are 252 hotels; restaurants and rafting agencies in this area. Various tourist facilities such as cargo, communication, massage, Bank and finance, money exchange, etc., are offered to serve tourists. About 915 different types of business organizations are established in Thamel. All of the business organizations are conducted in rented rooms. Although there is a significant variation in rent, a range of Rs. 10,000 to 30,000 is considered normal.

Due to the decreasing numbers of luxury tourists and the inflow of budget tourists (tourists who do not have high purchasing capacity), almost all business organizations are running in loss and they could not pay the rent to house owners in time and salary to the staff also could not pay timely. Employment situation of the Thamel tourism area is deteriorating. The existing figure of employers in this area is 11,285. This figure is 50 percent less compared to two years ago.

As concluded by Dhakal (2014), since 2000 the arrival of tourists in Nepal as well as in Thamel is decreasing year by year. But after the restoration of democracy in 1990 to 1999 the inflow of tourists was increasing. The arrival of male tourists is greater than female tourists in Nepal. The number and percent of male tourist arrivals is always high till now.

### **Review of Literature**

Tourism is perhaps the only sector of economic activity in which the principles of free trade still apply. More important, according to Naylor (1967), it is now possible for underdeveloped countries to improve their economies not only by increasing exports via low cost production, but also by tourism. Moreover Christaller (1964) notes that, many developing countries choose tourism not only for its economic benefits to the national economy but also as a regional development agent. Tourism is one of the important contributors to economics and a social development of any country.

Similarly, Dhungel (1981) sought to examine the trend, structure, and makeup of tourist arrivals, to evaluate the interconnections between this sector and various other economic sectors, to assess the leakages in these sectors related to imports, and to analyze the effects of the sectors on employment, income, and output in Nepal's economy.

Tourism can increase opportunities for the rural poor in their own communities. It also has the potential to help reduce rural out-migration to urban areas, increase employment opportunities for the urban poor, and give them additional income to provide for their families in the rural areas. According to Dangi (2004), tourism related skills gained by the urban poor could be applied in rural areas, helping to reverse the migration process. Tourism provides employment opportunities by diversifying and increasing incomes that

help reduce the vulnerability of the poor. Additional funds can be diverted to poverty reduction programs through increased national income (foreign exchange earnings and taxation).

In conclusion, the existing literature has explored the tourism of the Thamel area. However, regarding the attitude of trends, employment, and market prices, this research, different from previous studies, has focused on the core situation of tourism.

### **Analysis**

The influx of tourists to Nepal from mid-December 2002 to mid-December 2003 experienced a notable increase of 21.5 percent. As written in the thesis of Basnet (2016), the average length of stay for each tourist rose from 7.92 days to 9.5 days during this timeframe. Regarding their visit, most tourists were drawn to Nepal for recreational activities, trekking, and mountaineering. Specifically, during the period from mid-December 2002 to mid-December 2003, 40.0 percent of arrivals were for recreational purposes, 21.5 percent for trekking and mountaineering, 6.2 percent for trade, 6.5 percent for official business, 4.5 percent for pilgrimage, and 21.3 percent for various other reasons. Regarding tourist origin, it is estimated that 31.9 percent hailed from Western Europe, 7.7 percent from North America, 3.1 percent from Australia and the Pacific, 1.9 percent from Eastern Europe, 1.0 percent from Central and South America, and 0.4 percent from Africa during the specified period. Asian tourists constituted 54.0 percent of the total, with 24.0 percent coming from India alone. The Kingdom boasts 108 Star category hotels, with four new establishments added between mid-December 2002 and mid-December 2003. Non-star hotels reached 858, including 19 newly added during the same period.

The capacity of Star-level hotels increased by 2.4 percent, while non-star hotels saw a 1.5 percent rise in bed availability. The total bed count for Star and non-Star hotels has now reached 10,535 and 27,735, respectively. Overall, there was a 2.4 percent increase in the number of hotels, and the total number of beds grew by 1.7 percent during the review period. An analysis of mountaineering expeditions and the number of mountaineers arriving between mid-January and mid-June 2003 (FY 2002/03) and mid-July to mid-December 2003 (FY 2003/04) indicated declines across all metrics, including the number of expeditions, seasonal employment, royalty receipts, and mountaineer expenditures. However, seasonal employment during the period from mid-January to mid-July of FY 2002/03 showed an increase compared to those of FY 2001/02.

Further, the Nepal Tourism Board is dedicated to elevating the quality of the tourism sector, enhancing and developing infrastructure, and promoting as well as managing the international tourism market. Its ongoing tourism promotion initiatives encompass producing feature films, organizing tourism-related festivals, creating and distributing

tourism materials, and international exposure efforts. Additionally, numerous other promotional programs are executed in collaboration with government agencies and the private sector. The "Destination Nepal" campaign plays a crucial role in promoting tourism and raising public awareness.

As written in research work of Bhandari (2022), the year 1950 is a watershed moment in Nepal's history. Prior to the 1950s, only a few visitors were permitted to visit Nepal by the Rana dictatorship. In historical context, after the unification of Nepal at the end of the 18th century by Prithivi Narayan Shah, few Westerners dared to venture into this country as the route demanded then to walk through the malarial jungles of the southern Terai. However, it was in 1816 that the western world got to hear about the existence of Nepal, although the information was limited to the Kathmandu valley.

Although Nepal followed an open door policy after the advent of democracy in 1951, it was the conquest of Mt. Everest on 29th May 1953 by the late Mr. Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Mr. Edmund Hillary that drew global attention to Nepal, which subsequently led to the development of tourism and industry within the country. Nepal also began to enhance its diplomatic relations with various international organizations, including UNESCO, WHO, and FAO. Following its admission to the United Nations in 1955, Nepal gradually gained recognition on the global stage. The coronation of King Mahendra on May 2, 1956, marked a significant milestone in the advancement of tourism, attracting numerous visitors to Nepal. The inaugural group tour, comprising 12 Americans and 2 Brazilians, was organized by the pioneering agency Sir Thomas Cook and Sons, arriving in Kathmandu in the autumn of 1956. In 1966, the Department of Tourism was established under the Tourism Development Act of 1964. Although the framework for tourism administration had been in place since 1956, with the Tourist Development Board founded in 1957 and a tourist information center established in 1959, Nepal further achieved membership in various international tourism development organizations, such as the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO), the South Asian Travel Commission (SATC), the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA), and the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). The national flag carrier, Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC), was established in 1958, and several quality hotels were constructed in the late 1960s.

Systematic tourism in Nepal commenced in 1966 with the establishment of several hotels. The industry gained further momentum following the introduction of a tourism master plan in 1972, which prioritized the development of the tourism market, including sightseeing, trekking, eco-tourism, and recreational and adventure tourism. Nepal began implementing planned tourism policies with the launch of five-year economic plans starting in 1956. Prior to 1951, political instability hindered the formulation of specific tourism policies and plans. Learning from the international community, Nepal recognized



the importance of planning for development activities, leading to the initiation of its first five-year plan in 1956. Although the tourism industry in Nepal began to flourish with the establishment of the Nepal Tourism Master Plan (NTMP) in 1972, it was only then that it was fully operationalized at the national level. Nepal Tourism Master Plan projected programs came up two phases as the first phase 1972 at national level.

The Nepal Tourism Master Plan projected programs were divided into two phases: the first phase spanned from 1972 to 1975, lasting four years, while the second phase extended from 1976 to 1980, covering five years. Although the First Five Year Plan (1956-1961) did not specifically address tourism development, it placed significant emphasis on establishing essential infrastructure, including roads, water supply, electricity, and airport construction. The Tourism Development Board and the Tourist Information Center were established in 1957 and 1959, respectively. During this period, a hotel survey was conducted, and training for tourist guides was implemented. Recognizing tourism as a vital source of foreign exchange, the Second Three Year Plan (1962-1965) prioritized the promotion of tourism both domestically and internationally, alongside the development of travel agencies and hotels. A key achievement of this plan was the enactment of the Company Act in 1964, which aimed to regulate and enhance the tourism sector. An allocation of Rs. 2 million was designated for tourism initiatives. New tourist resorts were identified and developed in locations such as Pokhara, Lumbini, Kakani, and Nagarkot. Additionally, the Tribhuvan International Airport was under construction, with efforts focused on upgrading it to modern standards.

Additionally, Third Five Year Plan (1965-1970) Efforts were highlighted to enhance tourism infrastructure through the establishment of hotels and the expansion of aviation facilities, as well as promoting Nepal internationally, producing promotional films related to the country, and distributing tourism materials. Additionally, there was a focus on the conservation of temples and historical sites, along with the development of the Mahendra Museum (NPC, 1965). Essentially, during this period, the primary objectives were to boost the number of incoming tourists and increase foreign exchange earnings. To achieve these goals, the policy concentrated on the establishment of hotels and the expansion of aviation facilities.

Similarly, the Fourth Five Year Plan (1970-1975) sought to enlarge the scope of tourism with trade as an important source of increasing national income and foreign exchange earnings. However this initiative was not backed by adequate and clearly formulated policies. The Nepal Tourism Master Plan (1972) formulated during the fourth five-year plan period, put forward a comprehensive set of policies to promote tourism immediately and in future. The subsequent periodic plans have been Longley guided by the master plan and have focused on Major areas identified in the master plan.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1975-1980) focused on the preservation of historic. Cultural and natural attractions of the kingdom to promote tourism and sought to spread its growth in other potential areas from the Kathmandu valley where tourism was mostly concerned. To realize these objectives, the fifth five-year plan emphasized on lengthening the days of stay of the tourists as far as possible.

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) also draws heavily on the master plan recommendations. The main objectives of the plan was to increase foreign currency reserve to improve the balance of payment situation by increasing numbers of tourists and the duration of stay emphasis was also given to encourage the establishment of import substitution industries in the tourism sector and to enhance employment generation through growth and expansion of tourism.

The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990) also emphasized retaining maximum foreign currency earnings from tourism to improve the balance of payment situation, creating more employment opportunities and diversifying tourism activities to potential areas with basic infrastructure facilities.

Moreover, different tourists visit Thamel with different purposes like pleasure, mountaineering and trekking, pilgrimage, business, convention and conference and others but majority of tourists come to Nepal for holiday pleasure. The highest number of tourists arrives from different countries by air rather than land. Average length of stay is different each year. The lowest average length is seven days and highest length of stay is 13 days. But 10 days of length of stay is normal length of stay in Nepal. Many kinds of problems are faced by tourists in Thamel such as street guides, forced sale, beggars, and congestion on roads. There is no single reason to decrease tourist inflow in Nepal but lack of convincing power in the international arena and moist insurgency are the main reasons.

Nepal is recognized as a terrorist and politically unstable country in the international arena. International marketing in tourism and peace maintenance is the prime factor to promote the Nepalese tourism industry. Friend influencing is the main motivating factor to travel in Nepal, i.e., 50 percent. Tourism is a big and smokeless industry. It is a means of employment generation. It is the backbone of the Nepalese economy. Nepal is the birthplace of Lord Buddha, destination of hidden valleys and Crystal Mountains, and is a country full of greenery. The Nepalese, their habit and traditions on social, religious and cultural phenomena can be unique attractions for the tourists arriving in Nepal.

"A visit to Nepal" was celebrated in 1998 AD this added extra touch to the tourism history of Nepal. Moreover, various resorts, Tourist standards hotels, five-star deluxe properties, coffee shops, pubs, bars, and restaurants in cities also enchant tourists of any nationality. Besides this, the exciting location of the sightseeing attractions area even adds another flavor to tourism.

According to the travel Guide to Thamel (2024), Thamel is the most popular tourist area of Kathmandu. It offers a wide range of hospitality ranging from hotels, lodges, and restaurants to travel agencies, trekking agencies, shopping complexes, and rafting operators. Everything is available to the visitors within one square kilometer.

The tourism industry in Nepal has been decreasing since 2000 AD. Due to the political instability, insecurity, Maoist insurgency, lack of convincing power in the international tourism market, this industry is going to reduce in size year by year. Tourist arrival in Nepal as well as Thamel is very low. For more than two years, the travel trade and other businesses have been running at a loss, and they are going to close in Nepal and in Thamel too. The employment and economic situation of Thamel tourism is very severely affected by the sick industry of tourism.

### **Findings**

This research finds that the historical evolution of Nepali tourism and the current facts comprehends the current state of affairs in Thamel are contrasted in this study. Although the historical data shows how Nepal's tourist sector has changed over time, including the early emphasis on infrastructure development and the slow transition to planned tourism regulations, it is important to acknowledge that the data does not accurately reflect the current situation. Unquestionably, the tourist scene has changed due to the major political, economic, and technical changes that have occurred since the early 2000s, making the previous statistics useless for comprehending Thamel's current dynamics. As a result, it would be deceptive and incorrect to use this historical data to assess Thamel's tourist industry now.

Similarly, this study unfolds that Thamel's present tourist scenario is another topic covered in this case study. This comprises market research studies, Thamel-specific economic data, and recent visitor arrival figures, internet data from travel platforms, and visitor surveys and comments. Finding and examining this current data is crucial to comprehending the possibilities, problems, and trends facing Thamel's tourist industry now. Any evaluation of Thamel's tourism would be lacking and maybe faulty without this current data. The focus on up-to-date data emphasizes how dynamic the tourist sector is and how crucial it is to modify research approaches to account for these shifts.

### **Conclusion**

This research concludes that males make up the bulk of visitors, who are mostly between the ages of 31 and 45. The reason for Thamel's appeal is that it offers a wide range of amenities in a little space, meeting the demands of all types of tourists. The Maoist insurgency, political unrest, insecurity, and poor international marketing are all blamed for Nepal's alarming tourist decline since 2000 AD, according to the report. Thamel has been severely affected by this downturn, which has resulted in business losses, job losses,

and a generally worse local economy. Essentially, Thamel has the capacity to prosper, but its chances are being seriously hampered by the larger issues confronting Nepal's tourist sector.

### **Recommendations**

To increase the inflow of tourists in Nepal and to strengthen and flourishing the tourism industry, the current political situation should be addressed.

Maoist insurgency is necessary to bring the main political stream.

Strike, blocked and street demonstration must be closed.

To inform the right situation about Nepal, the international tourism market should be promoted.

There should be proper coordinated efforts among various concerned organizations such as the ministry of culture, civil aviation and tourism, Nepal tourism board and various tourism promoting agencies to develop the tourism industry.

For preserving and developing the tourism spout of Thamel coordination among the house owner, business entrepreneurs and Thamel tourism board should be done. And the existing rent of a room or house in the current situation (in recession time or tourist lessening time) should be reduced by about 25 to 30 per cent.

It should control beggars; street tourist guides who harass tourists and the environment to walk freely and smoothly should be arranged by restriction of entrance of rented car vehicles and heavy vehicles in Thamel area.

State should support the tourism industry in the future, such as providing facilities for taking banking loans and low rates of interest.

The construction of a dreamy garden and Tridevi temple should be advertised in the international arena.

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