

Consequences of Ecotourism in Nepal

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Abstract

Ecotourism focuses on ecological resource, environmental conservation, community development and economic development by maintaining low-impact and non-consumptive use of local resources. Various forms of ecotourism have emerged globally, including community-based ecotourism, ecosystem ecotourism, cultural ecotourism, nature-based ecotourism, protected area ecotourism, and rural ecotourism. Ecotourism, which prioritizes the conservation of natural resources, biodiversity, and the sustainability of ecosystems, yields more positive impacts on the environment, society, and culture than negative ones. It fosters social cohesion and mobility, strengthens traditional cultures and hospitality, and mitigates political conflicts. Economically, it generates direct employment in hospitality sectors like hotels, lodges, and tourist restaurants, playing a crucial role in the development strategies of many nations, particularly those in the process of development. For instance, in Nepal, ecotourism contributes significantly to enhancing forest cover, biodiversity, and other environmental benefits such as alternative energy sources. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in poverty alleviation, rural development, agricultural transformation, community enrichment, and empowering women. However, during the initial stages of ecotourism development, challenges may arise in engaging adequate private agencies and local communities in providing accommodations, food services, tour management, and other tourism activities, especially during peak visitation periods. This study focused to the study of ecotourism in Nepal and its impacts on different sectors of the Nepalese society.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Socio- Economic, Impacts, Nepal

Introduction

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism which enhances tourism in the biophysical environment and supports ecologically sustainable activities, conservation supporting measures and involvement of local communities (Dowling, 2000; K. C., 2016). The concept also concentrates on fostering community growth, alleviating poverty, conserving wildlife, protecting the environment, and upholding traditional economic activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and hunting (Duffy, 2008). It advocates for employment opportunities, market development, cultural preservation, local ownership, effective management, coordination, wildlife preservation, and fair distribution of benefits within the community (Sindiga, 1999). Ecotourism

emphasizes responsible travel to natural settings, aiming to conserve the environment, enhance the well-being of local residents, minimize ecological impact, raise environmental awareness, and provide direct financial benefits, empowerment, and respect for local cultures (Honey, 2008). Rural ecotourism specifically occurs in rural settings, showcasing rural life, traditional culture, agricultural attractions, farm experiences, and rural accommodations and entertainment options (Degang & Xiaoting, 2006). Cultural ecotourism centers on local cultural traditions, community life, minority cultures, and heritage (Genzong, Penghua, & Shaoxia, 2007). Nature-based ecotourism focuses on natural resources found in parks and protected areas, emphasizing environmental quality (Eagles, 2002). Responsible ecotourism involves activities aimed at minimizing the negative impacts of conventional tourism on the environment and preserving the cultural integrity of local communities. It includes promoting recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creating economic opportunities for locals (Randall, 1987). Ecotourism entails environmentally conscious travel to pristine natural areas for the enjoyment and appreciation of nature, promoting conservation with minimal visitor impact and active involvement of local communities in socio-economic aspects (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). It supports biodiversity conservation, local development, job creation, market opportunities for local products, and fosters cultural sensitivity in guest-host interactions. Integration of national tourism objectives with local needs and minimal direct benefit sharing and planning are essential aspects of ecotourism. It is seen as a catalyst for fostering ecologically sustainable development while maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature, local communities, and their cultural traditions (Sindiga, 1999). Ecotourism is considered a vital tool for conservation and community development in rural areas, relying on its ability to generate local economic benefits while preserving ecological resources through low-impact and non-consumptive utilization. Successful ecotourism initiatives mitigate issues like solid waste accumulation, habitat disruption, and trail degradation, which could otherwise threaten the very resources upon which ecotourism relies. Furthermore, ecotourism contributes to the financial support of protected areas through revenue generated from tourism-related park fees (Stem, et al., 2003).

Research problem

The research questions are:

1. What the situation of ecotourism in Nepal?
2. What are the consequences of ecotourism in Nepal?

Objectives

The specific objectives are:

- To highlight the situations of ecotourism in Nepal.
- To explore the consequences of ecotourism in Nepal.

Limitation of the study

Although there is a need of analyzing overall impacts of ecotourism in Nepal on the whole socio-economic aspects of Nepal, due to lack of time and money, availability of resources and data

constraints, this study confined within limited things, which are the limitations of the study. Every research has its own limitation so the research was no exception either.

Methods

This study was conducted on the thematic analysis based on the secondary sources. The nature and sources of data were secondary sources which were collected from the different sources such as, books, journals, newspapers etc.

Study Area

Nepal is a landlocked country surrounded by India in the south, east, and west and China in the north. Nepal has a population of 2, 64, 94,504 (Census, 2011).

Research Design

This was a descriptive and explorative study to highlight the situations of ecotourism in Nepal and its consequences in Nepal.

Results and Discussions

Ecotourism in Nepal

Nepal has an area of 147,181 sq. km. with great diversity of topographic, ecoclimatic, natural and cultural features. It is rich in Himalayan ranges, natural beauty, protected areas, biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage and ethnic diversity (Bhusal, 2007). Nepal stands out as one of the world's most adventurous cultural and ecotourism hotspots, offering numerous trekking routes and natural sites for ecotourists to explore from east to west and north to south (K. C., 2016; K.C., et al., 2015; Musa, Hall, & Higham, 2004; Nepal, 1997). It is renowned for its significance in adventure, culture, and ecotourism, largely due to the majestic Himalayas and a variety of cultural and natural attractions. Nepal is home to eight of the world's fourteen peaks exceeding 8000 meters, including the tallest, Mt. Everest. The country features fragile, pristine, and undisturbed natural areas dedicated to low-impact, small-scale tourism, ecological conservation, economic development, and the political empowerment of local communities, cultures, and human rights. Ecotourism in Nepal emphasizes the participation of local people in tourism planning and management, enhancing community development, nature conservation, and tourism interconnections, as well as using tourism revenues to protect resources.

The Government of Nepal has established protected areas and cultural heritage sites aimed at wildlife conservation, cultural preservation, and boosting ecotourism (Baral, Stern, & Hammett, 2012). In these areas, tourists can experience stunning mountain ranges, natural beauty, protected biodiversity, landscapes, cultural heritage, and ethnic diversity (Bhusal, 2007; K. C., 2016). Rural tourism initiatives have already turned tourism into an alternative source of income for many rural and cultural villages in Nepal (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; K.C., et al., 2015).

Trend of tourism development in Nepal**Table No. 1: Number of Tourists Arrival in Nepal 1962-2010**

Year	Number of Tourists	ARPC	Index
1962	6179	-	100
1965	9388	15.0	152
1970	45970	37.4	744
1975	92440	15.0	1496
1980	162897	12.0	2636
1985	180989	2.1	2929
1990	254885	7.1	4125
1995	363395	7.4	5881
2000	463646	5.0	7504
2001	361237	-22.1	5846
2002	257468	-23.7	4167
2003	338132	22.7	5472
2004	385297	13.9	6236
2005	375398	-2.6	6075
2006	383926	2.3	6213
2007	526705	37.2	8524
2008	500277	-5.0	8096
2009	509956	1.9	8253
2010	602867	18.2	9757

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 2010, Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Govt. of Nepal, 2010.

Since 1962, Department of Tourism had started maintaining the statistics of tourism and the number of foreign visitors to Nepal has been increasing every year since the beginning year, 1962, except in the years 1965, 1981, 1984, 1989, 1993, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2008. The tourist arrival in 1962 was 6179 and after a decade in 1972 it reached 52,930, which was an increase by 8.6 times. Similarly, in the following decades in 1982, 1992 and 2002 the total number of tourist arrivals increased 1,75,448, 3,34,353 and 2,75,468 respectively which was an increase by 28.4, 54.1 and 44.6 times respectively in every decade in comparison to the year 1962. In the year 2010, the number of tourists reached 6,02,867 by recording a growth of 18.2 percent over 2009 which was the highest figure of tourist arrival in Nepal until the year 2010. The total number of tourist arrivals 6,02,867 in the year 2010 reached 98 times increase in comparison to the beginning year 1962.

Total number of tourist arrival in Nepal decreased at the rate of 0.95 percent from 797,616 in 2013 to 790,118 in 2014. Average length of stay had also decreased from 12.51 in 2013 to 12.44 in 2014. Before 2013, annual growth rate of tourist and average length of stay was in increasing trend. Out of total tourist arrival in Nepal, 47.3 percent tourist arrives for the purpose of holiday in 2012 and it increases to 51.5 percent in 2013 (K.C., 2016). The devastating earthquake of April 2015 and its aftershocks had also affected the flow of tourist in Nepal. Many trekking routes in the Langtang, Gaurishankar, Manaslu, Gosainkunda, Rasuwa, Sindupalchowk and Dolakha were affected badly. These areas are in reconstruction process and it will take time to recover so that the flow of tourist will increase as that of past.

Challenges of Ecotourism

In the initial stages of tourism development, private agencies and local community involvement in providing tourism facilities is often inadequate. Lodging, food services, tour management, and tourism activities appear unplanned during peak visitation seasons. Training in nature guiding, cooking, and other tourism services is needed (Yip, Mohd, Ghani, & Emby, 2006). Finding competent and dedicated human resources with strong networking skills in ecotourism is challenging (Bertella, 2011). A major obstacle for tourism development is the lack of English language skills and education (Clifton & Benson, 2006; Schellhorn, 2010). Climate change poses significant challenges for local communities in Nepal, including in the Manaslu Conservation Area, manifesting as rising temperatures, irregular rainfall patterns, and reduced snowfall (K.C. & Thapa Parajuli, 2014a).

Consequences of Ecotourism in Nepal

Source of Foreign Exchange

The Nepalese government prioritizes tourism as a key sector and a major economic contributor. Tourism generates approximately US\$170 million annually, accounting for about 4% of GDP and 15% of foreign exchange earnings. Over 200,000 people are employed directly or indirectly in tourism. The per capita expenditure by tourists was US\$499 in 1980/1981, which decreased to US\$474 in 1995, and further to US\$400 in 1997 (NTB, 2001). Despite these challenges, tourism is recognized for job creation and economic contributions nationally. Trekking, a major tourism activity, involves individual trekkers, groups, or those with support staff, utilizing local accommodations or tents, distributing tourism benefits to remote areas. The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA), Sagarmatha (Everest), and Langtang National Park attract over 90% of trekkers (MoCTCA, 1999/2000). Mountaineering also plays a crucial role in Nepal's tourism, with 141 expeditions in 1998 spending over US\$5.6 million, although this dropped to 132 expeditions in 2000, generating US\$9.74 million (KC, 2002).

Community Development

Ecotourism is vital for local economies, with significant potential for poverty alleviation. It directly brings exchange and investment to local levels, contributing to rural development, agricultural transformation, community enrichment, and social empowerment, particularly for women (Shrestha & Walinga, 2003). Infrastructure improvements such as better water, sewerage systems, electricity, and telephone services enhance residents' quality of life and facilitate tourism, as seen in ACA (Pradhan, 2000). Ecotourism can generate local revenue through informal employment for guides and vendors, local culture and festival involvement, and local souvenir production, with incomes returning to the local economy, creating a multiplier effect.

Employment

Tourism creates jobs directly through hotels, restaurants, taxis, souvenir sales, and local guides, and indirectly through the supply of goods and services needed by tourism-related businesses. In 2002, it was estimated that tourism and travel created 714,991 jobs, or 6.8% of total employment.

By 2012, this was projected to reach 1,115,670 jobs, or 7.9% of total employment (NTB, 2001). Thus, tourism has significant potential as an employment provider in Nepal.

Social Aspects

Ecotourism addresses gender inequities, fosters social pride and excitement among children, and promotes peace and prosperity, as seen in Barpak. Coordination between community members, government agencies, and tourism entrepreneurs has led to successful ecotourism projects (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Ecotourism has helped curb antisocial activities, conserve religious and cultural heritage, maintain peace and prosperity, and foster cooperation among people with different religious beliefs (K.C., et al., 2015). For sustainability in SNP, local participation, economic viability, education dissemination, tourist satisfaction, and minimizing tourism impact are crucial.

Economic Aspects

Tourism significantly uplifts tourism-dependent communities and contributes to Nepal's economy. In the fiscal year 2012/13, foreign exchange earnings from tourism were 34,210.6 million, contributing 2.0% to GDP (K.C., 2016). Tourism has spurred economic development and job creation in local villages through the establishment of hotels, restaurants, tea shops, bakery cafes, grocery and gift shops in Ghandruk (K.C., et al., 2015). It generates income and helps local people meet basic household needs in the Manaslu Conservation Area, playing a crucial role in employment generation and socioeconomic development (K.C., 2016). The development of Pokhara and the Annapurna Conservation Area exemplifies economic growth driven by ecotourism (K.C., 2016).

Environmental Aspects

Ecotourism enhances forest cover, flora, fauna, greenery, alternative energy sources, and biodiversity in Ghandruk (K.C., et al., 2015). ACA offers quality lodging, local cuisines, natural scenery, and positive interactions with host communities (Nepal, 2007). However, tourism development activities have led to deforestation, pollution, and cultural degradation in the Sagarmatha area (Musa, et al., 2004). To promote ecotourism, managing greenery, forest resources, water resources, and other natural resources is essential to enhance biodiversity. However, infrastructure development has reduced scenic beauty, affecting tourist flow.

Conclusion

Sustainable tourism development and management require proper use of tourism resources, demand management, and expertise in park and financial management. Ecotourism impacts communities and the nation environmentally, socially, and economically. In Nepal, ecotourism aids in environmental conservation, social enhancement, and economic development in areas where it is promoted. Biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage preservation, improved accessibility, pricing policy liberalization, community empowerment, tourism facility development, nature-based tourism product incorporation, interdisciplinary and interdepartmental efforts, and collaboration between conservation and tourism authorities are essential for

ecotourism development. Ecotourism entrepreneurs and tourists face many challenges in the early planning and management stages. Successful ecotourism considers beneficiaries, socioeconomic constraints, resource base impacts, local benefits inclusion, economic viability, education dissemination, and tourist satisfaction. Poverty alleviation, rural development, agricultural transformation, and community enrichment are promoted by ecotourism in Nepal. Local community support and participation in tourism planning and development are crucial for conservation and management, preventing serious conflicts and ensuring sustainable ecotourism. Community involvement, environmental education, and leadership training are essential for sustainable ecotourism development.

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