

Tourism Attraction, Facilities, Flow and Assessment of Tourism Product of Manaslu Conservation Area

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the tourist attractions, major tourism products and their assessment in Manaslu Conservation Area of Nepal (MCA). MCA is a place well known both, nationally and internationally, for its scenic beauty, unique ecology, and rich cultural heritage, given by its geographic position and unique topography. The number of tourists visiting this area has been increasing every year. In 2001 the tourist flow was only 798 whereas in 2019 it was 7655. Such tourism growth has several socio-economic and cultural consequences. Along with the increased number of tourists, tourism-focused facilities and infrastructures like hotels and tea shops are also increasing in the area. There are 127 hotels with 1328 rooms and 2827 beds (as of 2019) providing food and accommodation services for the visitors. However, even though there are many potential areas for tourism development in the Manaslu Conservation Area, because of less promotional practices, there is very little tourism activity in the region. With the area's diverse physiography, unique landscape, biodiversity and the social-cultural dimension of the villages, the area could provide plenty of attractions for tourism.

Keywords: Manaslu conservation area, tourism product, scenic beauty, diversity

Introduction

In the study area, the tourism products include accommodations, tours, transportation, recreational activities and historic sites, etc. Therefore, it can be defined as the sum of physical and psychological satisfaction it provides to tourists during their travelling route to the destination (Butcher, 2008; Butler, 2015). It is anything that is offered in

a market for use or consumption by the consumers as per the market requirement is called a product (Leung, Law, Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Cooper, 2015). According to Philip Kotler that a product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need (Cooper, 2015).

The tourist product focuses on facilities and services designed to meet the needs of the tourist. It can be seen as a composite product, as the sum total of a country's tourist attractions, transport, and accommodation and of entertainment which result in customer satisfaction (Franzoni, 2015). Each of the components of a tourist product is supplied by individual providers of services like hotel companies, airlines, travel agencies, etc (Pike & Page, 2014). The tourist product can be analysed in terms of its attraction, accessibility and accommodation (Smith, 2015).

The Manaslu Conservation Area (MCA) is well known both, nationally and internationally, for its scenic beauty, unique ecology, and rich cultural heritage (NTNC, 2012). In terms of the tourism product, MCA is endowed with many attractions, accommodations and other facilities. Some of them still untapped and underdeveloped. The major attraction to any visitors in MCA is nature for hiking and trekking purposes. The two main trails are the major trekking trails in MCA. The one, which goes west through Nubri valley and crosses Larke pass linking with the Annapurna region. Another trail goes east to Tsum valley. Due to the weather condition, the main tourist season lasts from September to November. Almost 75% of the total trekkers visiting MCA trek towards Nubri valley and about 6% visit the Tsum valley, while about 18% of trekkers visit both Nubri valley and Tsum Valley (NTNC, 2018). Tsum valley offers cultural values along with wildlife sightings while Nubri valley offers adventure tourism of crossing the Larke Pass (5,106 m). Besides the trek, the Mt. Manaslu expedition is another major attraction in MCA along with the expedition of Mt. Himchuli, Larke Peak, and Naike Peak.

Another attraction is the richness in biological diversity. The CA's fauna includes species such as common leopards, jungle cats, dholes, jackals, Gray langurs, barking deer from the Indo-Malayan realm to snow leopards, Himalayan black bear, musk deer, blue sheep, and the Himalayan wolf from the Palearctic realm (NTNC, 2016). The MCA has also been divided into the traditional cultural division of Nubri, Kutang, and Tsum. Nubri, which means "The Western Mountains" in the Tibetan dialect, is the section of the Budi Gandaki valley west of Namrung. Based on primary and available secondary data and literature, this paper assesses the facilities and characteristics of tourism in MCA. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate a major tourist product available in MCA and their assessment.

Methods and Materials

Manaslu Conservation Area (MCA) has a very high potentiality to attract number of domestic as well as international tourists because of the richness on natural, man-made, site based and event tourist products (Smith, 2015). Based on these tourist products this area was declared as conservation area under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of Nepal, 2029 B.S on December 28, 1998 and unique tourist destination. It covers an area of 1,663 sq. km and includes seven wards of Tsum Nubri Rural Municipality of Gorkha District, including Samagaon, Lho, Prok, Bihi, Chumchet, Chhekampar and Sirdibas (Figure 1).

The main access to the MCA is from Arughat of Gorkha district, which has located at the bank of the Budhi Gandaki River. It takes about 3:30 hours by car and about 6 hours by bus to reach the Arughat from Kathmandu via Dhading Besi. Similarly, it takes about 2 hours by car and about 3 hours by Bus to reach Arughat from Gorkha, the district headquarters. Most visitors at present prefer to travel to Machhakhola from Arughat (about 12 km) by jeep. It takes one hour and From Machhakhola to Jagat (the entry point to MCA) one full day trekking along with Buddhi Gandaki River (TRM, 2019).

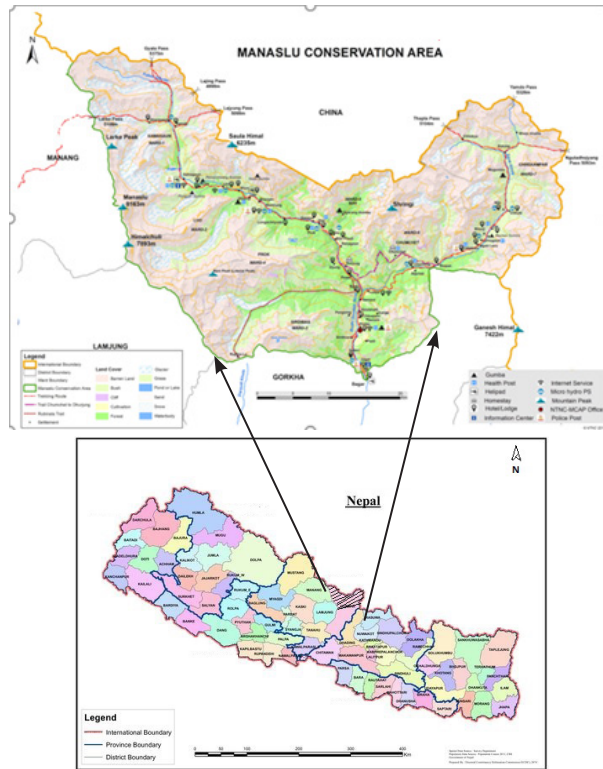


Figure 1. Location of study area

Data for this paper are collected from the review of several documents research reports published by government, non-governmental organization, maps and newspapers. An inventory sheet was also used to collect information about different types of tourist products available in the study area, that includes the number of hotels, size, location and details of the available services and facilities. Similarly, checklist also used to collect primary data about the site of tourist attractions located along the main routs of MCA between Jagat (the entry point to MCA) to Samagaun and Tshum Valley.

Results and Discussion

Attractions

Of the three basic components of a tourist product (i.e., attraction, accessibility and accommodation), attractions are very important (Oliver, 2010). Unless there is an attraction, the tourist will not be motivated to go to a particular place. Attractions are those elements in a product which determine the choice made by particular tourist to visit one particular destination rather than another (Munar, 2012; Cooper, 2015). The attractions could be cultural, like sites and areas of archaeological interest, historical buildings and monuments, flora and fauna, beach resorts, mountains, national parks or events like trade fairs, exhibitions, arts and music festivals, games, etc. Tourist demands are also very much susceptible to changes in fashion (Pike & Page, 2014).

MCA has a vert huge potentiality to attract to the tourist. It lies on the eastern slopes of the Kali Gandaki river basin, which is known as a unique and virgin natural and scenic beauty. Its northern border is co-incident with Nepal's national border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China is another typical characteristic of this area. The elevation of MCA ranges from 1,239 m in the south to 8,163 m at its highest point, Mt. Manaslu. Other major peaks include Himalchuli (7,893 m) and Shringi (7,187 m). Important high passes include Larke La (5,205 m) and Gya La (5,375 m) passes respectively. Major rivers draining the MCA are Budhi Gandaki and Syar Khola, while Kalchuvan (Kal Tal) and Birendra Tal are important high-altitude lakes in the conservation area (DDC, 2012).

Table 1. Plant species and faunal types reported in MCA

Dicotyledons	102	589	Birds	201
Monocotyledons	13	107	Reptiles	5
Gymnosperms	4	13	Amphibians	4
Pteridophytes	18	37	Fish	1
Lichen	2	3	Butterflies	13
Mycophyta	2	7		
Total	141	756		

Source: MCAP, 2018.

In mountainous areas change in elevation led to changes in biological resources (Botkin & Keller, 2000). The altitudinal variations and complex terrain of the MCA have created different types of habitats and micro-climatic conditions, which have contributed to the floral diversity. A total of 756 species of plants were recorded during a 1998 and 2010. Of these, 696 species belong to 115 angiosperm Families, 13 species to 4 gymnosperm Families, 37 species of Pteridophytes, 3 species of Lichens, and 7 species in the Mycophyta group (Table 1).

Cultural diversity is another unique feature of MCA. There are 56 major villages in MCA. Samagaon ward has only two villages, while Sirdibas ward has 17 villages. Settlement patterns and the resulting population densities are governed largely by the availability of arable land, climatic conditions, and road/trail accessibility. The total population in MCA is 6,923 comprising of 3,665 females and 3,258 males (CBS, 2011). The average family size is 3.5 persons per household, with 1,949 households. Sirdibas ward has the highest (572) and Prok ward has the lowest (187) number of households.

The major ethnic group in all wards, except Sirdibas, is Bhotia (also known as Lama). Gurung and Karki are the major ethnic groups in ward number 3, Sirdibas. The majority of the people in MCA follows Buddhism. Tumba, Nhubriba, Kutangba, and Gurung are the major languages spoken by the inhabitants. Culturally, Tsum Valley is declared as an area of nonviolence, and killing of animals is strictly prohibited.

Gurung is the major social groups in Prok and Chhekampar villages and most of them are Buddhists. They celebrate Buddhist festivals. Lhosar in the month of Falgun (February-March) is an important festival. Many communities also celebrate occasional festivals with mane Nach (dance), arrow shooting, and offering puja in Gompas. The people of the upper part of the valley speak a western Tibetan dialect, whereas the people of Kutang speak a unique Tibeto-Burman vernacular called “Kukay”, which seems to be a blending of Tibetan and Gurung. The Nyingmapa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is most prevalent in the Nubri Valley, which contains a rich assortment of religious artifacts and deep-rooted Tibetan Buddhist beliefs. The monasteries of Nubri still have a profound influence on the daily livelihood of its inhabitants, and the public still regards the high Lamas with the utmost respect.

Accessibility

It is a means by which a tourist can reach the area where attractions are located. Tourist attractions of whatever type would be of little importance if their locations are inaccessible by the normal means of transport. A Tourist in order to get to his destination needs some mode of transport (Pike & Page, 2014). In MCA, there are a number of modes of transportation facilities available. This mode may be a motor car, or a coach,

which enables him/her to reach his predetermined destination of MCA. According to the local people that before construction of road or no transport can reach or inadequate transport facilities, it became of little value. But now, the tourist attractions, which are located near the tourist-generating markets and are linked by a network of efficient means of transport, receive the maximum number of tourists in this area every year.

Accommodation

The accommodation and other facilities complement the attractions. Accommodation plays a central role and is very basic to tourist destinations. After removing the compulsion of organised trek in MCA from 2013, the number of tourists in MCA is in increasing trend. Along with the increased number of tourists, tourism facilities and infrastructures like hotels and tea shops are also increasing in the area. There are 127 hotels with 1328 rooms and 2827 beds (as of 2019) providing food and accommodation services for the visitors. Except in Chumchet and Chhkempar, the hotels are also having attached toilets with hot shower facilities (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of accommodation facility

Wards	No. of Hotels	Rooms			
		Attached	Normal	Total Rooms	Total Beds
Samagaon Ward No. 1	23	14	260	274	612
Lho Ward No. 2	27	5	258	263	566
Siridibas Ward No. 3	26	20	236	256	517
Prok Ward No. 4	17	15	202	217	476
Bihi Ward No. 5	9	1	77	78	156
Chumchet Ward No. 6	9	0	107	107	234
Chhekempar Ward No. 7	16	0	133	133	266
Total	127	55	1273	1328	2827

Source: MCAP, 2018.

Twenty-two campsites managed by community as well as private sectors are also available for organised trek groups in all wards within MCAs (Table 3). These campsites can accommodate 298 trekkers easily. Such facilities at Philim in Sirdibas, Deng and Ghap in Prok, Lhi and Syala in Lho, Sama and Samdo in Samagaun have been available for many years.

Table 3. Number of campsites and restaurant service

Wards	Community Owned	Private	Total Campsites	Total Capacity	Total Restaurants	Total Capacity
Samagaon Ward No. 1	4	0	4	50	13	146
Lho Ward No. 2	2	1	3	50		
Siridibas Ward No. 3	0	2	2	30	6	65
Prok Ward No. 4	1	2	3	45	2	45
Bihi Ward No. 5	0	2	2	21		
Chumchet Ward No. 6	0	2	2	30	2	25
Chhekempar Ward No.7	0	6	6	72		
Total	7	15	22	298	23	281

Source: MCAP, 2018

Similarly, additional 23 restaurants in 4 wards alone can provide food services to 281 trekkers at a time (MCAP, 2018). However, due to high transportation cost, the price of all food items is in higher side in Samagaon and Tsum Valley compared to other lower Manaslu areas. There are inadequate tourism infrastructures such as the Visitors Information center (VIC), museums, local handicraft shops, Banks, good WiFi and telecommunication facilities required to promote tourism in the MCAs. Local private entrepreneurs have not been able to invest adequately in the tourism business. The existing facilities and services are poor. There are no interpretation facilities in the CAs. There are limited facilities and arrangements for visitors for side treks. There are not enough local nature and cultural guides to help visitors in the areas.

Tourist flow

Tourist flow in this area has increased as compared to the past few years. In 2001, the total number of tourists was only 798 whereas in 2019 it was 7655. Table4 shows the tourist flow of the region of the past 10 years. As we can see that the tourist flow was high in the early 2010s but due to the massive earthquake in 2015, the flow decreased thereafter.

Table 4. Tourist flow in MCAs

Year	Flow	Change (%)
2010	2162	32
2011	2813	30
2012	3319	15
2013	4439	34
2014	3764	-15
2015	2134	-43
2016	4650	117
2017	6632	43
2018	7371	11
2019	7655	04

Source: MCTCA, 2020

Manaslu Conservation Area is a nature-based destination in which also the cultural component plays a relevant role. Pristine natural environment mostly oriented to nature lover tourists that engage in wildlife viewing and conservation activities. Cultural tourism for those who love to understand and experience the local native culture of the areas with rich heritage within this Conservation Area. There are two major trekking areas in MCA such as Nubri Valley and Tsum Valley. These areas are considered to be the best alternative trekking areas after shortening of the most popular Annapurna Circuit within ACA after construction of the motor roads up to Jomsom and Manang.

Conclusion

Tourism product is something that can be offered to tourists to visit a tourist destination. The products which satisfy the leisure, pleasure, religious or business needs at places other than the normal place of residence are known as tourism products. Tourism products are offered in the market with a cost. Tourism product are the prime reason for tourist to choose a destination. Tourism product helps in fetching revenue for the destination. So, they should be properly marketed and preserved.

MCA offers visitors a glimpse of pristine natural and cultural traditions, unique customs and a rich heritage. There is not significant built heritage in the area. The CA has a number of attractions for domestic and international tourists. There are a number of tourism resources that attract tourists. Undisturbed and wilderness of the areas and wildlife sightings specially Snow Leopard, Lynx, Gray Wolf, Musk Deer, Assamese Monkey, Blue Sheep, Himalayan Thar etc. The Bhotias the ethnic group with a strong sense of attachment towards their traditional local culture and rich natural heritage.

Ancient Gumbas, Mhane walls, Kahne and Chortens that attracts representing the rich cultural heritage of the region.

One of the highest mountains and world's eighth highest peak of Mount Manaslu (8,163m) is the major attractions of the region, including Manaslu Base Camp, Ganesh Himal Base Camp. Unique landscapes, waterfalls, forests and lakes such as Dudhkunda, Kaltal and Birendra Tal are the other attractions of the region. Beautiful Pristine ecosystem and adventure experience in Budhi Gandaki River. In addition, there is also the facility of village tours and home stay facilities.

Though there are many potential areas for tourism development in the Manaslu Conservation Area, because of less promotional practices, there is very little tourism activity in the region. With the area's diverse physiography, unique landscape, biodiversity and social cultural dimension of the villages, the area could provide plenty of attractions for tourism.

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