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# **Strategies for enhancing Tourism in Nepal (Focusing on domestic tourism)**

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## Thesis abstract

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Nepal is famous for its beautiful landscapes and rich cultural history, making it a great place for international tourists. This thesis looks at ways to make Nepal more attractive to tourists within the country. It focuses on improvement required in basic infrastructure, promoting eco-friendly tourism, and using online marketing. The study also considers the impact of government rules for growth of domestic tourism. By tackling issues like difficult access and uneven tourist numbers throughout the year, the research aims to suggest practical solutions to enhance domestic tourism experiences and to increase the number of domestic visitors.

The study used surveys and analysis involving local people from Nepal and university students to find the main problems affecting tourism and to suggest solutions. It used both qualitative and quantitative methods through two surveys. The first survey looked at tourism in Nepal as a whole, while the second focused on domestic tourism. By collecting opinions from locals and students, the study successfully achieved its goals.

The study found the main problems stopping domestic tourism from growing in Nepal. It also investigated what young people think about traveling within the country and why they do not travel much. It also pointed out what young people expect and prefer when it comes to domestic tourism. The study suggested practical ways to encourage more Nepalese to travel within the country and to help improve local tourism while solving these challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords: tourism, eco-friendly tourism, economic growth, infrastructure and cultural heritage

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## 1 Introduction on Nepal tourism

According to Consulate general of Nepal, Tourism is the biggest industry in Nepal and the main source of income. With eight of the world's ten highest mountains, Nepal is a popular spot for mountaineers, rock climbers, and adventure seekers. Its rich Hindu and Buddhist heritage and cool climate also attract many visitors. The country's varied geography, climate, and cultures add to its charm. Friendly locals who speak English and Hindi, good travel services, and affordable, quality accommodations make Nepal even more appealing to tourists. Nepal, home to Mount Everest, is famous for its natural beauty. Adventure and eco-tourism, like mountaineering and trekking, are major draws. Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha and a UNESCO World Heritage site, along with other religious sites across the country, attract many pilgrims. Between mid-January 2014 and mid-January 2015, 790,118 tourists visited Nepal, staying an average of 12.4 days. Popular activities include mountain biking, bungee jumping, rock climbing, paragliding, rafting, and jungle safaris. Major peaks like Everest, Kanchenjunga, and Lhotse, along with important Hindu and Buddhist sites like Pashupatinath Temple and Swayambhu Nath, showcase Nepal's cultural and spiritual tourism appeal.

Despite having tremendous potential, the tourism sector is facing numerous challenges especially after covid-19. Tourism in Nepal is growing, with 1 million tourists visiting between January and December (2023), helped by China's border reopening and many arrivals from India (Prasain, 2023b). This is the first time in four years Nepal has reached this number, which is impressive given its economic challenges. In 2018 and 2019, Nepal had 1.17 million and 1.19 million tourists, but the pandemic caused a big drop in numbers. Now, better flight connections, especially from China, and more interest from India are helping tourism recover. More tourists have increased profits for luxury hotels. Popular attractions include Mount Everest, Lumbini, and religious sites like Muktinath and Pashupatinath Temple. The return of Chinese tourists, who spend a lot, is expected to boost Nepal's economy. Promoting new international airports in Bhairahawa and Pokhara could double tourist numbers next year (op. cit.).

This thesis explores ways to support and grow international tourism in Nepal by focusing on improving infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism, and using digital marketing. It aims to find practical solutions to enhance the tourist experience and attract more visitors. The study will also look at the role of government policies and partnerships with international travel agencies, addressing issues like accessibility and seasonal changes. By analysing

tourism trends and talking to key stakeholders, the thesis aims to create a plan for sustainable and inclusive growth in Nepal's tourism industry, ultimately boosting the country's economy and benefiting both tourists and local communities.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

The year 1950 marked a major change for tourism in Nepal. Before then, the Rana rulers allowed very few visitors (Bhandari, 2022). In 1950, tourism started to grow with Swiss geologist Tony Hagen calling Nepal the "Switzerland of Asia" and Maurice Herzog climbing Annapurna. In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa reached the top of Mount Everest. Tony Hagen mapped Nepal's geography, and the first tourist visa went to Russian hotelier Boris Lisanevich, who opened Hotel Royal (op. cit.). Since, then Nepal welcomes large number of tourists every year.

In a country like Nepal, which is economically underdeveloped but rich in natural beauty, tourism is crucial for balancing the economy. It supports other businesses, brings in foreign currency, and generates significant revenue. Tourism also creates many job opportunities, both directly and indirectly. Nepal has great potential for tourism, with around 1 million tourists visiting each year. Tourism encourages the government to build new infrastructure and improve existing facilities. To solidify tourism development, the Tourism Development Board was established in 1957, leading to the creation of the Nepal Tourism Board in 1998 (Shrestha & Shrestha, 2012, 57–62). The Tourism Department began tracking tourist numbers in 1962. In 1969, the Nepal Tourism Development Committee was formed to create tourism policies and plan future developments. When the Nepal Tourism Board was established in 1998, the government dissolved the Tourism Department and transferred the responsibility for new policies and plans to the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation (op. cit.). Tourism in Nepal has grown significantly since the 1950s, creating jobs and aiding development in remote areas, helping to reduce poverty. To further boost tourism's socio-economic benefits, it's crucial to use resources effectively and have supportive policies, requiring joint efforts from the government and private sector (op. cit.).

## **1.2 Thesis objectives**

This thesis aims to explore ways to improve Nepal's Internal tourism sector, looking at different problems creating threat for growth and sustainability of domestic tourism in Nepal. The study will examine the history, current state of domestic tourism in Nepal. It will provide a detailed overview of various enhancement methods, discussing their importance, impact, and possible solutions.

The research will explain the methods used to collect data and the challenges faced, covered in the project constraints section. The thesis will analyze these strategies using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including a survey conducted by the university level student of Nepal and some local people. In the final discussion and conclusion section, according to my overall study I will share insights from the research and offer recommendations for future efforts to strengthen Nepal's tourism industry by highlighting the major problems.

## **1.3 Importance of the research**

The main motive of this research is to benefit the tourism industry of Nepal. The research is important because it can find the most crucial reason to boost tourism sector and Nepal's economy. Despite having the huge potential several factors are hindering the development of tourism sector in Nepal. And to find out those main cause and the ways to eradicate it from root is the significant part of this research. By identifying effective strategies to attract more domestic tourists, the study can boost national income and generate numerous job opportunities.

It emphasizes sustainable tourism to ensure that growth is environmentally friendly. The findings can lead to improved infrastructure, such as roads and hotels, and help protect Nepal's rich cultural heritage. The research will offer valuable insights for the government to develop better policies and attract more investments. Ultimately, this research aims to position Nepal as a leading tourist destination, benefiting both tourists and local communities.

#### **1.4 Limitation of the study**

This study faces several challenges that could affect the accuracy and scope of its findings. Nepal's diverse and remote geography makes it hard to collect data, especially from rural areas, which can impact the results. Political and economic instability in Nepal might also affect tourism trends and make it difficult to implement strategies, making long-term predictions uncertain.

The small sample size from surveys may not represent the entire population, and seasonal changes in tourism could influence the data, as the number of visitors varies throughout the year, affecting the success of strategies depending on when they are implemented. Language and cultural differences could also make it harder to understand the needs of international tourists. External factors, like natural disasters, global economic shifts, or pandemics, can disrupt tourism trends and are hard to predict. Lastly, interpreting qualitative data may be influenced by the researcher's personal perspective.

## 2 Tourism in Nepal

### 2.1 Natural beauty

Since the first climb of Everest in 1952 and the arrival of hippies in the 1960s, Nepal has captured the hearts of travelers and adventurers (Parons, 2024). Whether you're looking for an exciting adventure or a peaceful retreat, people are drawn to Nepal by its breathtaking Himalayan views and rich, sacred culture. Although Nepal isn't a large country, it's slightly smaller than England and Wales combined, it can feel a bit overwhelming, especially for first-time visitors.

With its well-known mountains, many trekking trails, ancient Newari cities, and wildlife-packed parks, it can be hard to know where to start. Some of the most explored places are Kathmandu, Annapurna region, Mustang, Everest area, and south Terai. Whether you're interested in sightseeing, hiking, or trekking, Nepal has something to offer for all of you (op. cit.).

### 2.2 Adventure tourism

Lonely Planet describes Nepal as a "trekker's paradise," offering stunning Himalayan views, ancient temples, traditional villages, and rich wildlife (Wengel, 2020). In 2018, Nepal welcomed one million tourists, and through campaigns like the Buddhist Circuit Tour 2019, Asian Rural Tourism Festival 2019, and Visit Nepal Year 2020, the government aimed to double that number in 2020. While mountaineering is Nepal's main attraction, the country also offers various adventure activities such as rafting, paragliding, mountain biking, and bungee jumping (op. cit.).

Historically, after the 1950s' Himalayan peak conquests, land-based activities like trekking and mountain climbing have dominated Nepal's adventure tourism (Wengel, 2020). Trekking is a low to moderate-risk activity, while mountain climbing is a more dangerous "hard adventure". Other established activities include white water rafting, paragliding, and jungle safaris, while emerging activities such as skiing, mountain biking, canyoning, and zip-flying are gaining popularity (op. cit.).



Figure 1. Adventure tourism in Nepal (Nepal trek, n.d.).

### 2.3 Culture and society of Nepal

According to Consulate General of Nepal, Nepal's culture is a blend of rich traditions developed over centuries, shaped by its diverse ethnic, tribal, and social groups. This cultural heritage is expressed through music, dance, art, languages, literature, religion, festivals, and food. Dances, such as the ancient Dishka performed at weddings, vary across regions and reflect daily life themes like harvests and love stories. Nepal is home to 123 languages, with Nepali being the national language, while others like Maithili and Bhojpuri are also widely spoken.

Religiously, Nepal is predominantly Hindu, with significant Buddhist, Islamic, and indigenous Kirant communities. The country celebrates many festivals, the most important being Dashain, along with Tihar and Buddha Jayanti. Temples, monasteries, and places of worship across Nepal, such as the Pashupatinath temple and Lumbini, reflect its deep spiritual roots. Additionally, Nepal is rich in architectural heritage, with over 1,200 significant historical sites.

## 2.4 Wildlife and tourism

Tourism in Nepal has been linked to poverty reduction since the 1960s, but the benefits haven't fully reached local families, especially marginalized groups (Szydowski, 2024). Much of the tourism income comes from national park entry fees and elephant-back safaris, a practice that's been common in Nepal for the past 50 years.

However, views on using animals in tourism, particularly among tourists from Western countries, have changed (Szydowski, 2024). Many are now against using endangered elephants for tourism, leading to fewer tourists from these regions participating in such activities. As a result, the number of privately-owned tourism elephants has decreased. Despite this, the drop in Western tourists has been balanced by a rise in visitors from Asian countries, who are now the biggest users of elephant safaris. This shift in tourism trends may further commercialize endangered animals without benefiting the marginalized communities that need it most (op. cit).

## 2.5 Community and local tourism

According to Prasain (2023a), In recent years, there has been a significant change in how people view tourism. Rather than just going to famous spots and ticking off items on their bucket list, many travelers now look for meaningful, connected experiences. However, not all parts of the tourism industry have caught up with this trend, as many are still focused on promoting only a few well-known destinations. In Nepal, while some less-visited places are being promoted, local people often don't have the skills or resources to present their local products or connect directly with travelers. As a result, their potential to offer genuine local experiences is not being fully realized.

A good example of this is CHN's Ranjana Lipi and Aila workshop, now offered to guests at Kirtipur Community Homestay (Prasain, 2023a). The community saw a chance to promote Ranjana Lipi, an ancient script for Nepal Bhasa (Newari language), to a wider audience. CHN supported this idea by organizing events to promote the script. To make the event successful, CHN worked closely with the Kirtipur Community Homestay chairperson and two experts, Gyan Bahadur Maharjan and Buddhilal Maharjan, who played key roles as trainers (op. cit).

## 2.6 Mountain tourism in Nepal

According to Nepal Tourism Board (n.d.) Climbing Mt. Everest is the goal for many mountaineers, but nearby peaks like Lhotse and 326 other mountains in Nepal offer equally challenging adventures. The Himalayas, with eight of the world's highest peaks including Everest, Kanchenjunga, and Annapurna, are a mountaineering paradise. Besides these giants, there are many unclimbed peaks, offering climbers exciting opportunities.

Nepal's climbing history began with British explorers, and by the 1960s, a thriving trekking and mountaineering industry developed (Nepal Tourism Board, n.d.). Today, experienced companies handle logistics for expeditions, while the Sherpas, known for their strength and reliability, play a vital role. Peaks like Lhotse, Ama Dablam, and trekking peaks like Mera and Island are often climbed, though the spotlight remains on Everest. Conservation areas and national parks protect key mountain regions, but remote and restricted areas are more challenging to access. Climbers usually aim for the pre-monsoon season for better weather conditions.



Figure 2. Mountain tourism in Nepal (Sindurakar, 2021).

## 2.7 Growing trend of domestic tourism

Nepal is a popular tourist destination worldwide, attracting climbers, trekkers, and those visiting historical and religious sites. However, domestic tourism often doesn't get the same attention as international tourism in terms of revenue and popularity.

According to World travel and tourism council, Domestic tourism has a significant impact on Nepal's economy. In 2018, domestic travelers contributed 56% of the total tourism revenue, which was around Rs 240.7 billion. In 2016, after the earthquake, local tourism spending accounted for 65.6% of the direct travel GDP, while foreign visitors made up only 34.4%. This shows that domestic tourism has always been important for Nepal, even if we sometimes overlook it.

Several areas have seen a rise in domestic visitors, including popular spots like Pokhara, Chitwan, and the Annapurna Circuit. Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha. New places, like Mugu Lake, are also becoming popular. Social media has greatly boosted domestic tourism, especially during the pandemic. It helps promote destinations quickly, with locations like Manahukot and Teen Dhare Jharana gaining attention. In the picture below I have attached a picture of a place in the Tanahaun district, Nepal. After going viral in TikTok, more than 10,000 people visited this place in a single day.



Figure 3. Domestic tourist crowd in Tanahun, Nepal (Halkar, 2024).

### 3 Current state of Tourism in Nepal

In 2023, Nepal saw over one million tourists, marking the first time in four years that it hit this number, with the last peak in 2019 when 1.19 million visitors came (Prasain, 2024). The Covid-19 pandemic caused a sharp drop in tourism, with only 230,085 tourists in 2020 and 150,962 in 2021. However, the numbers improved in 2022 with 614,869 visitors. Experts believe that by the end of 2024, Nepal could welcome 1.2 million tourists, and if proper marketing is done, especially in China, the number could rise to 1.6 million. To avoid disrupting the busy season, Kathmandu's airport expansion is suggested to be delayed from November to December (op. cit).

Nepal has opened many luxury hotels, ensuring enough accommodation for tourists, and is also improving infrastructure like roads and airports to attract more visitors (Prasain, 2024). However, air safety remains a concern. The government has not addressed the issue of air safety, which has been flagged in many travel advisories since 2013, when Nepali airlines were blacklisted by the European Commission for not meeting safety standards. The government has also delayed an important aviation reform, which involves splitting the civil aviation body into a regulator and service provider, a plan that has been discussed for 15 years but not yet implemented (op. cit).

#### 3.1 Stats of tourism in Nepal (1994–2021)

Below is the picture that shows the number of tourists that has arrived in Nepal from different country from year 1994-2021. It also shows the change in growth rate in tourists' number in the past 27 years. The highest number of tourists arrived in the year 2019 while the least came in year 2021 and it was because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Year	Total		By Air		By Land		Average Length of Stay
	Number	Growth Rate (%)	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1994	326,531	11.2	289,381	88.6	37,150	11.4	10.00
1995	363,395	11.3	325,035	89.4	38,360	10.6	11.27
1996	393,613	8.3	343,246	87.2	50,367	12.8	13.50
1997	421,857	7.2	371,145	88.0	50,712	12.0	10.49
1998	463,684	9.9	398,008	85.8	65,676	14.2	10.76
1999	491,504	6.0	421,243	85.7	70,261	14.3	12.28
2000	463,646	-5.7	376,914	81.3	86,732	18.7	11.88
2001	361,237	-22.1	299,514	82.9	61,723	17.1	11.93
2002	275,468	-23.7	218,660	79.4	56,808	20.6	7.92
2003	338,132	22.7	275,438	81.5	62,694	18.5	9.60
2004	385,297	13.9	297,335	77.2	87,962	22.8	13.51
2005	375,398	-2.6	277,346	73.9	98,052	26.1	9.09
2006	383,926	2.3	283,819	73.9	100,107	26.1	10.20
2007	526,705	37.2	360,713	68.5	165,992	31.5	11.96
2008	500,277	-5.0	374,661	74.9	125,616	25.1	11.78
2009	509,956	1.9	379,322	74.4	130,634	25.6	11.32
2010	602,867	18.2	448,800	74.4	154,067	25.6	12.67
2011	736,215	22.1	545,221	74.1	190,994	25.9	13.12
2012	803,092	9.1	598,258	74.5	204,834	25.5	12.16
2013	797,616	-0.7	594,848	74.6	202,768	25.4	12.60
2014	790,118	-0.9	585,981	74.2	204,137	25.8	12.44
2015	538,970	-32	407,412	75.6	131,558	24.4	13.16
2016	753,002	40	572,563	76	180,439	24	13.4
2017	940,218	25	760,577	81	179,641	19	12.6
2018	1,173,072	25	969,287	82.63	203,785	17.37	12.4
2019	1,197,191	2.05	995,884	83.19	201,307	16.81	12.7
2020	230,085	-80.7	183,130	79.6	46,955	20.4	15.1
2021	150,962	-34.3	150,625	99.7	337	0.3	15.5

Source: Department of Immigration, Nepal

Figure 4 with numbers. Stats of tourism in Nepal (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2021).

### 3.2 Purpose of Visit

According to Nepal tourism Statistics (2019), in 2019, more than 65% of tourists came to Nepal for holidays and leisure. Another 16.52% visited for adventure activities like trekking and mountaineering, while 14.36% came for religious purposes, and the remaining 4.12% had other reasons. Nepal is famous for adventure tourism, especially due to its well-known peaks. In that year, 1,921 expedition teams, totaling 8,202 climbers, were granted permits.

The highest number of climbers came from the USA, UK, China, India, Germany, and Japan. Popular mountains include Everest, Amadablam, and Manaslu. Out of 1,197,191 tourists,

195,621 trekked across Nepal, and 429,746 visited various wildlife conservation areas (op.cit.).

### **3.3 Challenges of Tourism in Nepal**

Nepal lacks modern transportation and communication facilities, which are vital for any country's tourism development (Pant & Bisht, 2018). Poor infrastructure makes it difficult for tourists to explore beyond major cities. Additionally, recreational facilities such as cinemas, parks, adventure activities like rafting, boating, and hunting are very limited, reducing the length of tourists' stays to around 13 days on average. Although Nepal has many beautiful and scenic locations such as Gosainkunda, Rara, and Dhorpatan, most of these places are underdeveloped as tourist destinations. As a result, tourists often limit their visits to Kathmandu and Pokhara. The limited number of tourist centers offering essential services like information, currency exchange, and maps adds to the problem. Security concerns in some areas also discourage tourists from venturing beyond well-known destinations (op.cit.).

There is also a shortage of quality hotels and lodges outside the Kathmandu valley. Tourists prefer comfortable accommodations, and the limited availability of these facilities affects the overall tourism experience (Pant & Bisht, 2018). Pollution is another major issue in Nepal, with poor waste management leading to polluted air, water, and streets, particularly in tourist spots. Moreover, there is a lack of international promotion and advertising of Nepal's tourism potential. Many tourists are unaware of the country's hidden gems. Finally, the shortage of qualified and skilled manpower in the tourism sector further hampers its development. To fully develop its tourism industry, Nepal needs to improve its infrastructure, provide better security, develop tourist sites, and invest in training qualified professionals (op.cit.)

## 4 Possible Strategies

According to Pradhananga, (2023), Nepal needs to improve its tourism industry by upgrading workers' skills and building better infrastructure to stay competitive. Managing tourist spots well and using smart marketing are key in today's economy. Nepal must decide whether to focus on attracting many tourists who spend less or fewer tourists who spend more, while keeping sustainability and competition in mind.

Traveler habits are changing, with more people caring about sustainability, though not everyone is willing to change their behavior, like flying less. Since most tourists want to relax and enjoy their trips without worrying about sustainability, Nepal should aim to attract those who are ready to make responsible and sustainable travel choices (op.cit.)

### 4.1 Infrastructure development

The government declared 2023–2032 as the "tourism decade," but just making announcements isn't enough without proper infrastructure (Maharjan, 2023). Tourists seek variety and new experiences, but Nepal continues to offer the same old destinations. While the government talks about diversifying tourist attractions, little has changed. Infrastructure, even in the capital, is poor, with roads becoming muddy in summer and dusty in winter, causing pollution. Local governments should focus on building proper roads and improving sanitation, especially in rural areas, which remain underdeveloped (op.cit.)

According to Maharjan (2023), many tourists enjoy rural settings, but these areas lack basic facilities, leading to migration to cities. The government should work to improve rural areas and build quality hotels there to attract tourists. New attractions, like canopy walks in national parks, could add to existing jungle safaris and draw more visitors. However, challenges like inadequate promotion and publicity, poor road access to many tourist spots, and a lack of tourism centers and security also need to be addressed for the tourism sector to thrive.

### 4.2 Eco tourism and Community Involvement

According to Nepal Tourism Board, staying with locals in Nepal offers travelers an authentic cultural experience. Homestays are available in various villages like Panauti, Bardiya, Shree Antu, Palpa, Nuwakot, and Nagarkot.

These stays allow visitors to enjoy home-cooked Nepali meals and participate in everyday life and local festivals, providing a deeper understanding of Nepali traditions and customs. Guests can also take part in community-led activities such as hiking, exploring rural lifestyles, attending arts and cooking workshops, and discovering local wildlife. It's a unique way to create meaningful connections and experience the real Nepal.

### **4.3 Variation In Tourism products**

According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal (n.d.), Nepal offers a wide range of wilderness and adventure tourism activities that draw thrill-seekers from around the world. Visitors can enjoy mountain biking, trekking, rock climbing, and mountain climbing in the Himalayas. There are also exciting options like bungee jumping, paragliding, ultralight aircraft flights, and hot air ballooning, all of which provide stunning views of the mountains. Water-based activities like rafting, kayaking, and canoeing are popular in Nepal's rivers, while jungle safaris in the Terai region allow tourists to explore national parks and spot wildlife like rhinos, deer, and even Bengal tigers.

Nepal is also rich in religious and cultural sites. Kathmandu is home to Pashupatinath Temple, one of the most significant Hindu pilgrimage sites. For Buddhists, Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, is a key destination. Other religious landmarks include Muktinath, which is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, and many temples scattered across the country. Nepal's cultural heritage is evident in the Kathmandu Valley, which boasts seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Tourists can experience the country's art, architecture, and festivals while exploring the historical and spiritual heart of Nepal.

### **4.4 Marketing and Promotion**

Marketing tourist destinations becomes especially challenging when political issues make a place seem unsafe, as seen in Nepal's case (Heredge, 2006). Over the past decade, Nepal has faced political instability that has affected its tourism industry. For example, in 2005, King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency, which caused a sharp drop in visitor numbers.

Later, in early 2006, travel warnings from countries like the US, UK, and France led to another significant decline in tourists. These examples highlight how political unrest can harm tourism.

To attract visitors despite these issues, marketers often use a model called (AIDA) Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action (Heredge, 2006). First, potential travelers need to be aware of Nepal's attractions, which marketers can achieve through social media, websites, and influencers sharing positive experiences. Next, building interest involves sharing appealing information on Nepal's natural beauty and culture while addressing safety concerns to ease fears. To create desire, marketers emphasize unique experiences like trekking in the Himalayas or exploring ancient temples. Finally, the action stage involves encouraging bookings by making trips easy to arrange and offering flexible, secure options. Throughout each stage, perception is crucial, as travelers rely on positive impressions and reassurances about safety, accessibility, and cost. By using AIDA and carefully managing travelers' perceptions, marketers can help make Nepal seem like a safe and appealing choice, even in politically unstable times (op.cit.).

## 5 Literature review

### 5.1 Domestic tourism in Nepal

Domestic tourism in Nepal is growing in popularity, with many Nepali people visiting religious and cultural sites like Pashupatinath, Lumbini, and Janakpur. Nature spots like Pokhara, Chitwan National Park, and Nagarkot also draw local tourists, especially during festivals and holidays (Republica, 2010). However, there are challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited transport, and a shortage of affordable places to stay in some areas. Also, a lack of promotion for lesser-known destinations holds back domestic tourism from reaching its full potential.

In recent years, more Nepalis have begun exploring lesser-known villages and scenic spots, discovering new places beyond the usual destinations (Republica, 2010). Festivals and holidays are popular times for travel, allowing people to connect with their heritage, join traditional celebrations, and spend time with family. Domestic tourism fosters a deeper appreciation of Nepal's diverse cultures and natural beauty while boosting local economies by supporting small businesses, hotels, and tour guides. This growing interest in travel is also building pride in the country's rich history and resources.

### 5.2 Issues and challenges

Nepal's domestic tourism faces several challenges. A key issue is the limited variety of destinations, with most tourists visiting well-known international spots like Pokhara, Chitwan, and Lumbini. Newer places like Mustang and Rara Lake are not well-developed or promoted. Poor infrastructure, such as bad roads, lack of places to stay, and concerns about food safety, keep people from exploring less-visited areas. Many local spots also don't have enough activities to keep tourists engaged (Basnyat et al., 2020, pp. 43–47).

Regional inequality is another problem, as only wealthier people from big cities like Kathmandu can afford to travel, leaving smaller towns and villages out (Basnyat et al., 2020, pp. 43–47). This limits opportunities for rural communities to benefit from tourism and creates a gap in access to travel experiences. Lastly, the government and tourism organizations don't

share enough information to encourage more domestic tourism, and many Nepalis remain unaware of the affordable travel options available (op.cit.).

### **5.3 Growing trend**

Nepal's tourism has made a strong recovery, largely thanks to the rise in domestic tourists, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Rai, 2023). More Nepali people are now traveling, visiting popular destinations with family and friends. This increase in local tourism has led to a rise in hotel bookings in areas like Thamel, Pokhara, and Chitwan, where most guests are now Nepalis. Businesses are also seeing more local customers buying travel goods, which is contributing to the growth of the economy. In the past, places like Thamel were mainly visited by foreigners, but now, locals are exploring these areas as well.

Tourism in rural destinations like Nagarkot and Dhulikhel is also thriving, as young people and students are increasingly interested in exploring new places (Rai, 2023). These areas are becoming popular weekend getaways for Nepali families and youth groups. As more locals travel, it is creating new opportunities for businesses in these regions.

### **5.4 Domestic tourism for economic development**

Domestic tourism in Nepal is growing fast, with about 3 million Nepalis traveling within the country each year, especially during festivals like Dashain and Tihar (Dhungana, 2024). This rise in local tourism helps the economy by boosting business for hotels, restaurants, small shops, and craftspeople. Many hotels say 10–30% of their guests are Nepali tourists, showing how important local tourism has become.

As Nepalis visit places from the temples and historical sites in Kathmandu Valley to the natural beauty of Mustang and the spiritual sites in Lumbini, they spend on places to stay, food, transport, and local products (Dhungana, 2024) These spending benefits small businesses, farmers, and artisans by giving them more customers. Domestic tourism also creates jobs in hospitality and transport. Still, there are challenges, like fixing roads, reducing pollution, and adding more parks and green spaces. By improving these areas and making tourism easier and safer, Nepal could increase its domestic tourism even more, creating new job opportunities and helping the economy.

## **6 Research Findings associated with problem in tourism in Nepal**

In my thesis, “Strategies for Enhancing Tourism Development in Nepal, Focusing on Domestic Tourism,” I researched ways to promote domestic tourism to support Nepal’s economy and encourage more Nepalis to travel within their own country. To gather useful insights, I de-signed two surveys, and I transferred them to two groups of people, university level students and normal people. The survey focused on understanding the interests of younger people, especially their needs for affordable travel options and interests in adventure and cultural experiences. This helped reveal ways to make domestic tourism more appealing to youth, who may not typically prioritize traveling within Nepal.

The survey on the other hand also includes people of various ages and backgrounds to gain a broader view. Their feedback highlighted general awareness of local attractions and factors, like cost and convenience, that affect their travel choices. By collecting input from these two groups, my research identifies key factors affecting domestic tourism in Nepal, helping to develop strategies that engage both young people and the wider population in exploring Nepal’s attractions. After conducting the research, I have found out few major problems that are hindering development in Nepal.

### **6.1 Infrastructure deficiencies**

The country struggles with bad roads, limited transport options, and a lack of basic services. Many roads are unpaved, unsafe, or prone to damage from landslides, especially in the mountains where trekking and adventure tourism are popular. Air travel is also underdeveloped, with limited flights and poorly maintained airports, making it hard for tourists to reach different places.

While accommodation in main cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara has improved, trekking vil-lages mostly offer basic lodges with few facilities, which can turn away tourists looking for more comfort. Unreliable electricity and the internet add to the inconvenience, especially for international visitors who depend on these services. Clean water and proper sanitation are also hard to find in remote trekking areas, making travel even more challenging.

## **6.2 Political instability**

Political instability has greatly affected the growth of Nepal's domestic tourism industry, with frequent government changes, political unrest, and the Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006 causing uncertainty and disruptions. This has led to inconsistent or abandoned tourism plans, making it hard to achieve long-term goals. Safety concerns during conflicts, such as the Maoist period and frequent strikes, have scared off tourists, hurting the economy, especially small businesses that depend on tourism like hotels and restaurants.

Unstable politics also means tourism policies often change or are neglected, delaying important projects like infrastructure and marketing. This discourages both local and foreign investment in tourism. Nepal needs consistent policies, even during political shifts, and must prioritize safety, security, and sustainable tourism to attract more tourists domestically as well as internationally and ensure steady industry growth.

## **6.3 Environmental concerns**

The environmental impact of tourism in Nepal is becoming a serious concern, especially in areas with high numbers of visitors. Although tourism brings significant economic benefits, it also creates environmental challenges that threaten the natural attractions that draw people to the country. In popular trekking areas like the Annapurna Circuit and Everest Base Camp, unchecked tourism has led to issues such as deforestation, pollution from waste, and damage to natural habitats.

A key issue is the amount of waste generated in popular trekking and climbing spots. Tourists and the businesses that serve them produce a lot of non-biodegradable waste, such as plastic bottles and food packaging. In remote areas without proper waste management, this trash builds up in landfills or is dumped into rivers and forests, causing pollution. The Everest region has even been called "the world's highest garbage dump" due to the large amounts of waste left behind by climbers.



Figure 5. Sherpa collecting garbage in Everest region (Sherpa, 2010).

#### 6.4 Limited Marketing and Promotion

Nepal's tourism strategies often focus too much on trekking and mountaineering, missing the chance to showcase its wide variety of attractions like cultural heritage, religious sites, and wildlife reserves. This narrow focus limits its appeal to even domestic tourists and youths who aren't interested in adventure activities. Campaigns like "Visit Nepal" have had some impact, but the overall marketing lacks consistency and coordination, both locally and globally.

Nepal's weak digital presence and minimal use of social media make it hard for potential visitors to learn about its diverse offerings, such as spiritual and eco-tourism, which could attract families, older travelers, and wellness seekers.

The country has largely depended on word-of-mouth recommendations and returning visitors instead of using a solid, well-funded marketing plan. Limited involvement from tourism boards and the private sector has resulted in weak promotion in key international markets. To attract more tourists, Nepal should highlight lesser-known experiences like cultural festivals, wildlife safaris, and wellness retreats. A stronger online strategy, partnerships with influencers, and

collaborations with travel agencies and airlines could help reach new audiences, making Nepal more appealing beyond just adventure tourism.

## **6.5 Seasonality and Accessibility**

Nepal's tourism heavily depends on specific seasons, with most domestic tourists traveling during spring and autumn for outdoor activities. During the off seasons, such as the monsoon and winter months, tourist numbers drop, causing economic challenges for local businesses and leaving many destinations underutilized. Overcrowding during peak times also strains infrastructure and reduces the quality of travel experiences.

Accessibility remains a challenge for domestic tourists, especially in remote trekking areas. Poor roads, limited flights, and a lack of affordable transport options make it difficult for locals to explore these regions year-round, further discouraging domestic travel outside peak seasons.

## **7 Research methodology**

The research for this thesis uses a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a complete analysis. Two sets of questions are created and sent to university level students and some local people in Nepal. First set of questions include the student and Nepali people perspectives on the tourist condition of Nepal. And the second sets are focused on the strategic part. These bring a range of perspectives, offering both academic insights and real-world experience. The quantitative method allows for statistical analysis, providing clear, measurable data on topics like the effectiveness of tourism strategies, tourist preferences, and the economic impact of tourism. This approach is useful for comparing results and identifying general patterns.

The qualitative method, on the other hand, gathers in-depth responses from locals and students with hands-on experience. It is important for understanding the detailed challenges and cultural factors that numbers alone can't explain. Using both methods ensures a thorough understanding of how to improve domestic tourism in Nepal, combining concrete data with deeper, context-based insights.

### **7.1 Research aims and objectives**

This research aims to find ways to improve domestic tourism in Nepal by looking at its challenges and growth potential. The study will examine different types of tourism, such as cultural, adventure, and eco-tourism, and evaluate how well they are performing. It will also explore the role of the government and private businesses in developing tourism and how better infrastructure, digital marketing, and sustainable practices can improve the visitor experience.

Surveys with university students and local people will help gather opinions. The aim is to offer practical suggestions for growing Nepal's domestic tourism in a sustainable way, benefiting both local communities and the economy.

## 8 Research results

This section explains the methods and approaches used to achieve the objectives of this research. The study aimed to explore effective strategies for boosting domestic tourism in Nepal. To accomplish this, a mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the topic by combining numerical data with individual perspectives.

Data collection was carried out using two surveys. One survey focused on residents to understand their travel behaviors, perceptions of domestic tourism, and any obstacles they encounter. The other survey targeted university students to gather insights into the views of younger people, their interest in exploring Nepal, and the factors influencing their travel decisions. The survey responses provided valuable information about the attitudes, motivations, and challenges experienced by these two groups. These findings formed the basis for identifying actionable strategies to promote domestic tourism and pinpointed areas where improvements are needed.

### 8.1 Survey to know tourism state of Nepal

A total of 30 responses were collected for this research through first survey, which included participants from both local communities and university students in Nepal. The surveys were open for two weeks, from November 5 to November 22, and were shared using Google Forms. With the help of friends, the survey links were sent to 30 people, making it possible to gather a range of viewpoints.

The surveys aimed to explore the current situation of tourism in Nepal, the challenges it faces, and possible ways to improve it. Respondents shared their experiences with domestic travel, their opinions on tourism in Nepal, and the obstacles they encountered. The feedback provided useful ideas for improving domestic tourism, addressing existing challenges, and encouraging more people to travel within the country. The following is the summary of the data collected.

### What do you consider the biggest challenge facing tourism in Nepal?

Most of the Nepali people address limited infrastructure as the biggest challenge of tourism in Nepal (Figure 6). 38% of the respondents thinks poor infrastructure is hindering tourism development of Nepal. Many also think improper marketing of available resources is also a vital problem.

Nepal's huge area is covered by mountains and hills because of which many landslides, flood and earthquake are common here. 13.8% regards this as the biggest challenge facing tourism in Nepal. And the least number of people addresses safety concerns as the biggest challenge.

What do you consider the biggest challenge facing tourism in Nepal

29 responses

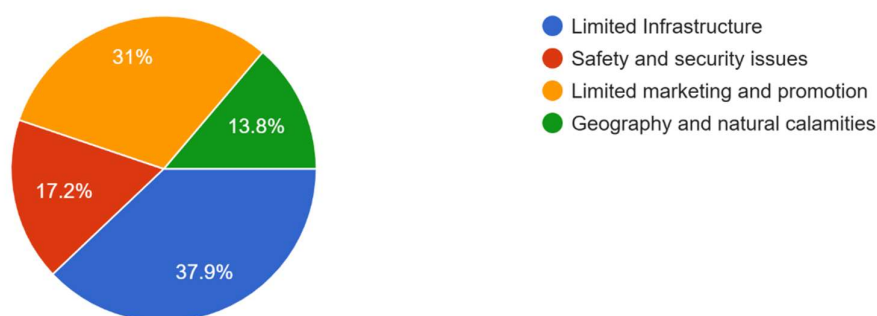


Figure 6. Biggest challenge facing tourism in Nepal.

### How would you rate the current quality of tourist infrastructure (e.g., roads, hotels) in Nepal on a scale of 1 to 5?

For the question about the quality of tourist infrastructure in Nepal, the responses ranged from 1 to 5. Out of 30 participants, 10 people gave it a 3, and 8 rated it a 4. The lowest score, 1, was given by 5 people, while only 2 rated it a 5. The average rating was 2.90, showing that most respondents felt the infrastructure was average.

How would you rate the current quality of tourist infrastructure (e.g., roads, hotels) in Nepal on a scale of 1 to 5?

30 responses

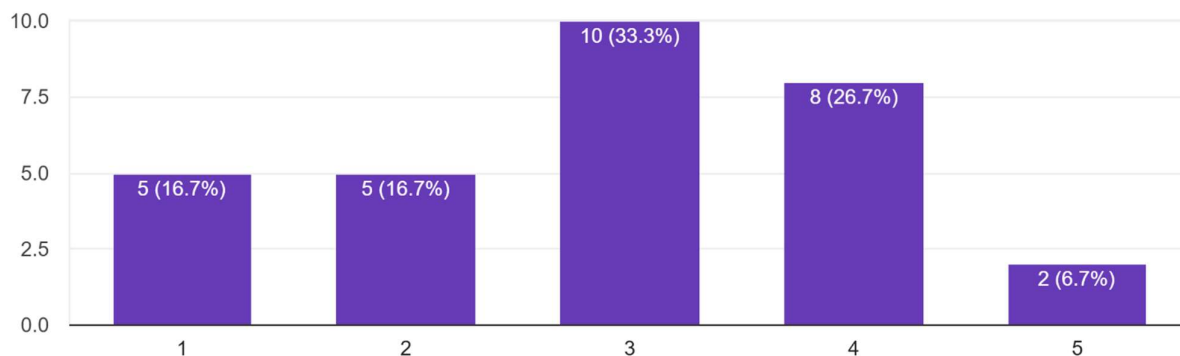


Figure 7. Average rating.

### What type of tourism should Nepal prioritize to enhance its appeal?

When asked which type of tourism Nepal should focus on, most participants (36.7%) suggested mountain tourism as a priority. Adventure tourism came second, with 20% of people choosing it. Religious and cultural tourism was next, with 26.7% of the responses, while 16.7% preferred community-based tourism.

What type of tourism should Nepal prioritize to enhance its appeal?

30 responses

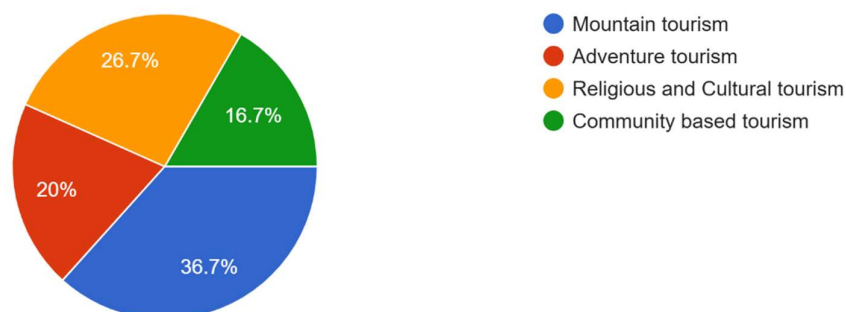


Figure 8. Types of tourism.

**How effective do you think current government policies are in promoting tourism in Nepal?**

How effective do you think current government policies are in promoting tourism in Nepal?

30 responses

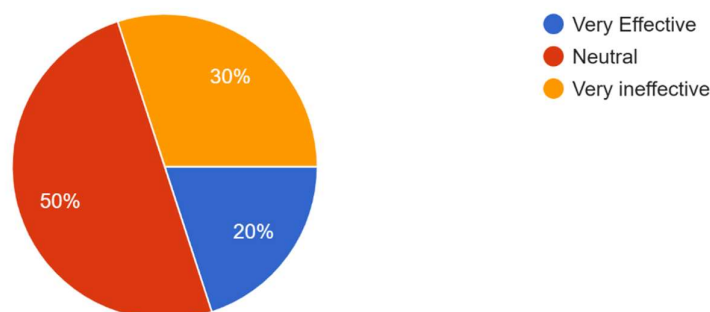


Figure 9. Government policies' effectiveness.

The question regarding how well government policies is promoting tourism in Nepal, half of the respondents (50%) felt neutral. About 30% thought the policies were very ineffective, while 20% believed they were effective. This shows a range of opinions, with many feeling that the policies need to be improved.

**What specific strategies do you think could help boost tourism in Nepal? (Choose all that apply)?**

14 people (46.7%) mentioned improving infrastructure and promoting sustainable tourism as key strategy to boost tourism in Nepal. 12 people (40%) thought better marketing campaigns and improved security were important. Lastly, 4 people (13.3%) suggested developing new tourist destinations.

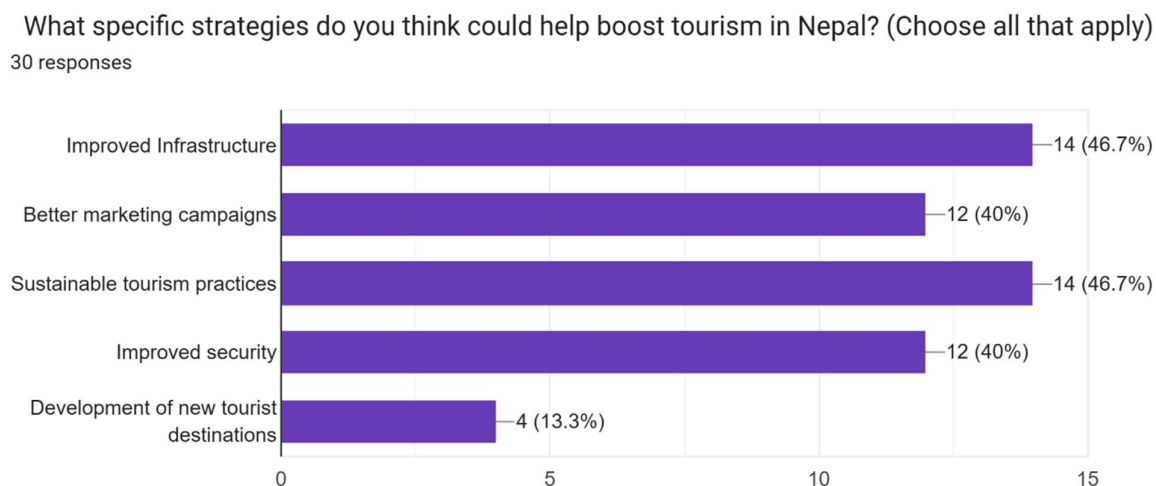


Figure 10. Specific strategies.

**How important is it for local communities to be involved in tourism development?**

Sixty percent of respondents said it is very important for local communities to play an active role in Nepal's tourism growth. 26.7% thought it was important and needed, while 13.3% were neutral. None of the respondents felt it was unimportant. This shows that most people believe local community involvement is key to tourism development.

How important is it for local communities to be involved in tourism development?

30 responses

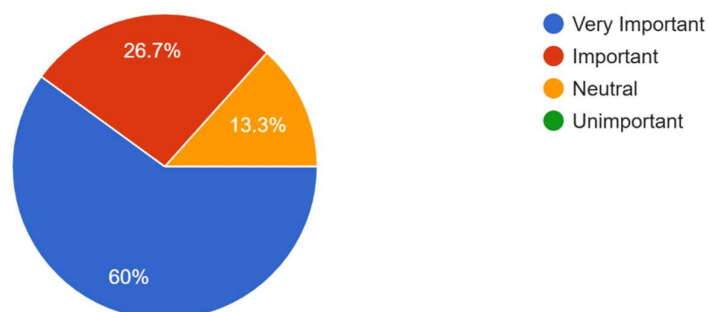


Figure 11. Local communities' involvement.

**How do you feel about the impact of domestic tourism on Nepal's economy?**

Out of all respondents 50% that is 15 people feel impact of domestic tourism on Nepal's economy as positive. 40% stay neutral and don't want to comment on either side. While 10% respondents feel domestic tourism has negative impact on Nepal's economy.

How do you feel about the impact of domestic tourism on Nepal's economy?

30 responses

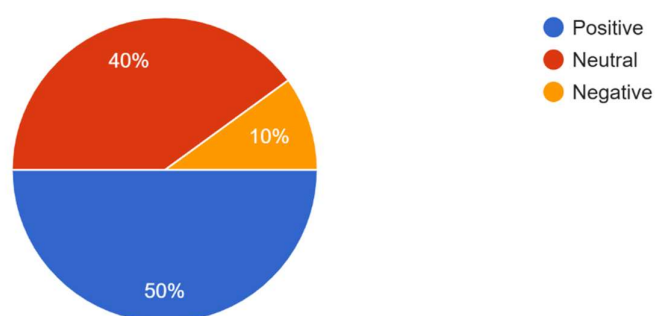


Figure 12. Impact of domestic tourism.

**What improvements do you think are necessary for promoting tourism in Nepal?**

Around half of the respondents think marketing is the most crucial factor needed to promote tourism in Nepal. 30% say better transportation services are required to promote tourism in Nepal. While other thinks more tourist information center and more affordable accommodation options are essential for promoting tourism in Nepal.

What improvements do you think are necessary for promoting tourism in Nepal?

30 responses

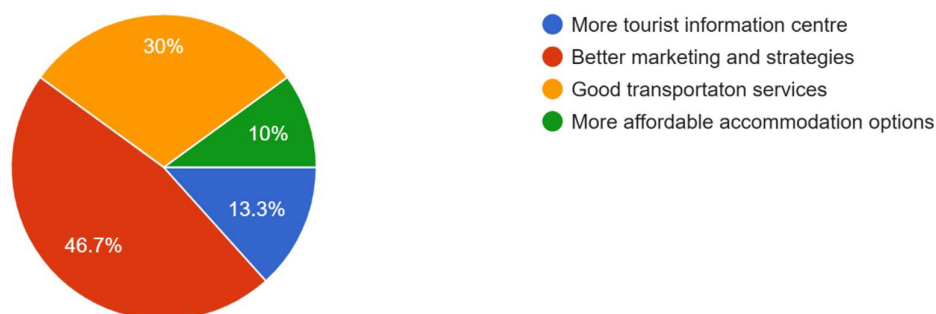


Figure 13. Improvements for promoting tourism.

### **What role do you think the government should play in enhancing tourism in Nepal?**

When asked about the government's role in boosting tourism in Nepal, several key points came up. Many people felt that the government should play a big part in promoting tourism by improving infrastructure, like roads and transportation, and ensuring tourist safety.

There were also suggestions for better marketing of Nepal's cultural, religious, and natural attractions, as well as preserving its traditions. Respondents thought the government should focus on maintaining a clean environment, offering good quality accommodations, and using technology to improve tourism services. Additionally, ensuring political stability and making travel affordable were seen as important for attracting more tourists.

**Please provide any additional comments or suggestions for addressing the problems facing tourism in Nepal:**

This was an open-ended question for additional suggestions for addressing problems facing tourism in Nepal. Many respondents have given various kinds of suggestions. Most of them respond for political stability, proper security and improved infrastructure.

Please provide any additional comments or suggestions for addressing the problems facing tourism in Nepal:

24 responses

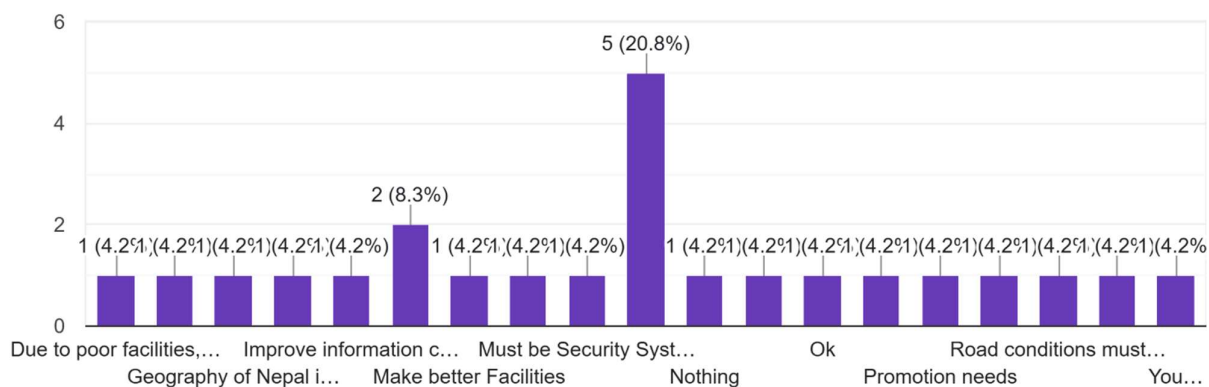


Figure 14. Additional comments.

## 8.2 Survey on domestic tourism

The second survey received 17 responses and focused on university level students of Nepal. It was open for 14 days and aimed to gather their views on domestic tourism, their preferences, and ideas for improving tourism in the country.

This survey looked at how young people perceive domestic tourism, their travel habits, and their suggestions for making it better. Participants shared their thoughts on challenges and strategies to boost tourism. Their responses provided useful insights into how youth can contribute to shaping domestic tourism and highlighted key areas for improvement. Below is a summary of the collected data.

### Age

Most of the students were over 26 years old. To be exact 88.2% were university level students. The remaining 12% were 25 and below.

What is your age?  
17 responses

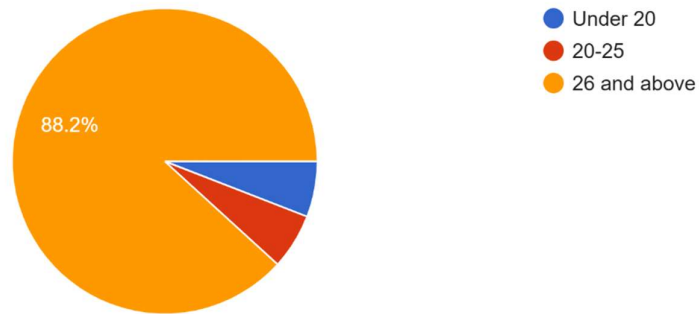


Figure 15. Age.

## Gender

58.8% of respondents were males while remaining 41.2% were females.

What is your gender?  
17 responses

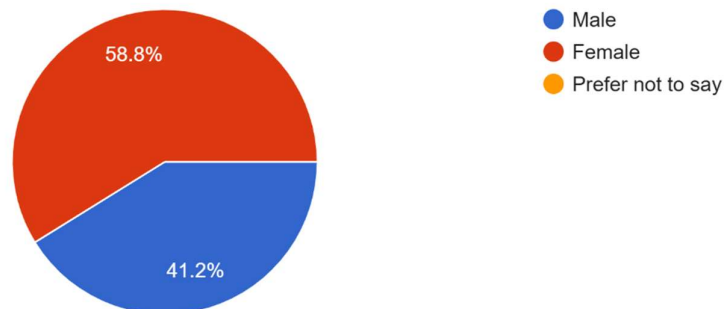


Figure 16. Gender.

## Which university are you currently attending?

Below is the summary of the university respondents are attending. Most of them are from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. There are few respondents from seamk, Pokhara and Kathmandu university.

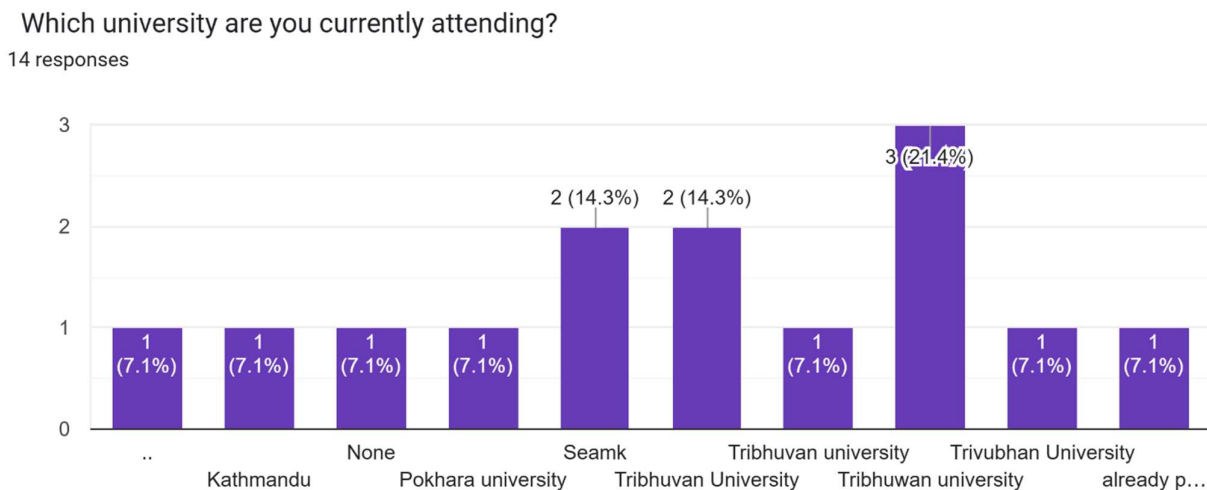


Figure 17. University attendance.

## How often do you travel within Nepal?

Out of 17 students most of them at least travel once a year inside Nepal. There is also a significant number of students who travel 2–3 times a year. And those who don't travel at least once a year are very few.

How often do you travel within Nepal?

17 responses

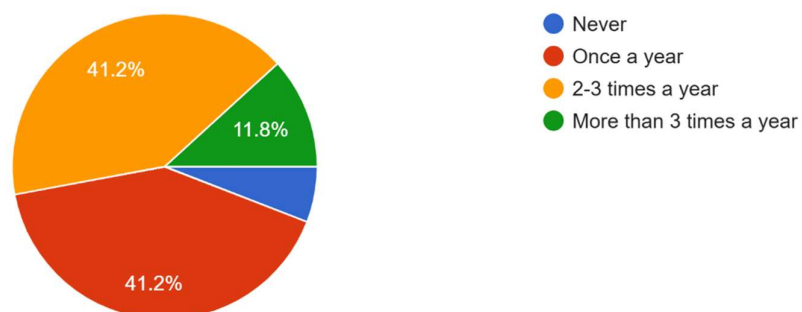


Figure 18. Travel within Nepal.

### What types of domestic tourism do you participate in?

When asked about the types of tourism students often participate in, most of them have participated in adventure and religious tourism. There are very few who participate in eco-tourism and wildlife tourism.

What types of domestic tourism do you participate in? (Select all that apply)

17 responses

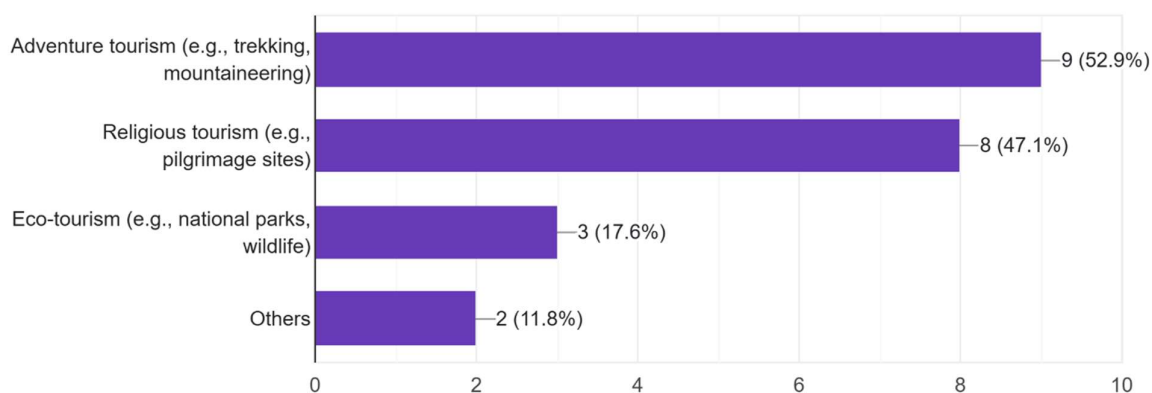


Figure 19. Participation in domestic tourism by type.

### What motivates you to travel domestically?

The youth preference is to explore new places within the country. 35.3% motivation to travel domestically is to explore new places. There are many who like to travel for adventure and activities. And 23.5% motivation is to spend good time with friends and family.

What motivates you to travel domestically?

17 responses

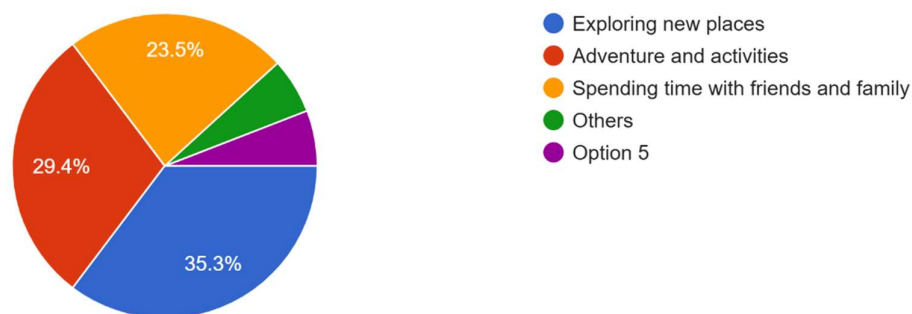


Figure 20. Travel motivation.

### What are the top three destinations you would recommend for domestic tourism in Nepal?

For the top three destinations for domestic tourism in Nepal, participants mentioned many different places, reflecting the country's variety of attractions. Pokhara, Mustang, and Manang were the most frequently recommended. Other popular destinations included Kalinchowk, Chitwan, Lumbini, Rara Lake, Annapurna Base Camp, Mardi Himal, and Nagarkot. A few respondents also suggested unique locations like Shivapuri National Park, Tsho Rolpa, Shey Phoksundo Lake, and Thorangla pass.

### What challenges do you face when traveling within Nepal? (Select all that apply)

The chart below shows the summary of the challenges respondents face while traveling inside Nepal. Most of them think poor infrastructure, especially roads and transportation is the biggest challenge while traveling. 64.7% have faced this challenge. There were 7 students who faced obstacles regarding information of destinations. While 2 had faced safety concerns.

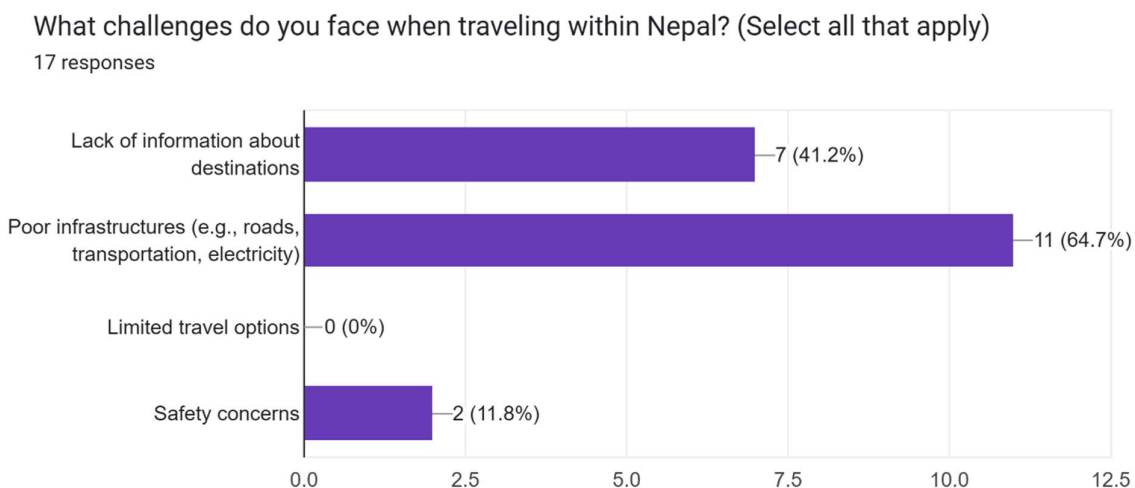


Figure 21. Challenges while traveling.

### What factors would encourage you to travel more domestically? (Select all that apply)

Most of the respondents want better promotion of domestic destinations. That is the reason why most of them have selected promotion as the major factor to encourage domestic tourism. 29.4% respondents put improved infrastructure as their encouraging factor. While 4 respondents each encouraging factors are affordable travel options and special events.

#### What factors would encourage you to travel more domestically? (Select all that apply)

17 responses

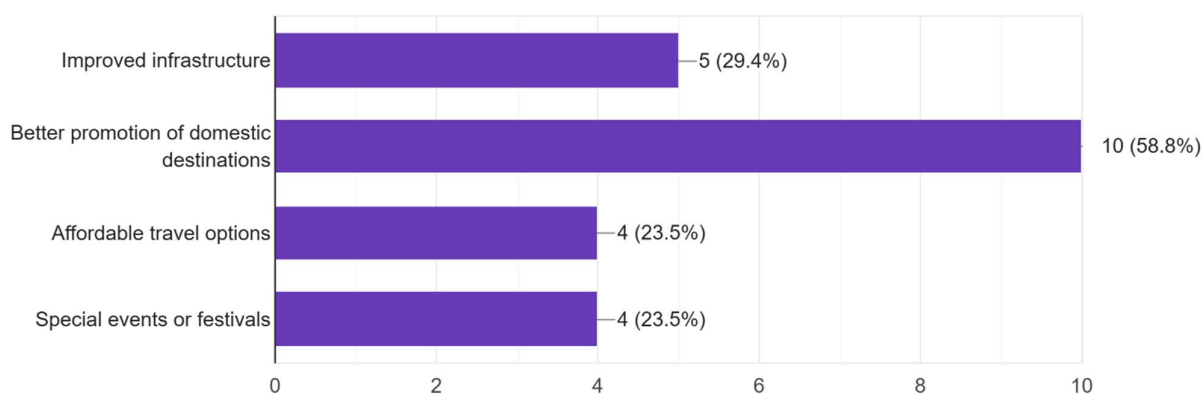


Figure 22. Encouraging factor.

### How important do you think social media is in promoting domestic tourism?

82.4% of students think that social media can be very crucial for promoting domestic tourism. The youth engagement in social media may be one of the factors for this. Remaining respondents think it is somewhat important. However, none of the students address that social media is an unimportant platform for promoting tourism.

How important do you think social media is in promoting domestic tourism?

17 responses

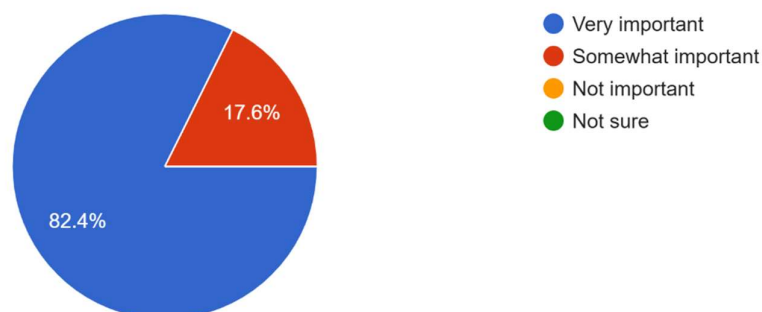


Figure 23. Importance of social media.

**In your opinion, what strategies should the government or tourism bodies implement to promote domestic tourism in Nepal?**

Participants shared a variety of ideas regarding the strategies the government or tourism board should come up with. Many addressed the importance of improving infrastructure, such as better roads and facilities, along with ensuring safety and security. Some suggested promoting lesser-known tourist spots through good marketing and offering seasonal discounts or travel deals. Others pointed out the need for sustainable development and better management to support tourism. Affordable hotels, better information services, and organizing events, like inviting international artists, were also mentioned.

## 9 Conclusion

In conclusion, domestic tourism in Nepal faces several key challenges that limit its growth. Poor infrastructure, such as bad roads, limited lodging, and lack of basic services in remote areas, prevent the country from fully utilizing its tourism potential. Political instability and inconsistent tourism policies have further discouraged investment. Environmental problems like waste and deforestation also threaten the natural beauty that draws visitors.

Nepal's tourism promotion has focused too much on adventure activities, overlooking cultural, spiritual, and eco-tourism experiences. Seasonal patterns and poor accessibility add to the issues, with businesses struggling in the off-season and facing overcrowding during peak times. To address these challenges, Nepal needs to improve infrastructure, ensure political stability, and adopt sustainable practices. Diversifying tourism options and using modern digital marketing can boost domestic tourism, while promoting sustainability and community-based tourism will make travel more attractive and accessible for Nepali travelers.

Domestic tourism in Nepal is growing in popularity, with many Nepali people visiting religious and cultural sites like Pashupatinath, Lumbini, and Janakpur. Nature spots like Pokhara, Chitwan National Park, and Nagarkot also draw local tourists, especially during festivals and holidays. However, there are challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited transport, and a shortage of affordable places to stay in some areas. Also, a lack of promotion for lesser-known destinations holds back domestic tourism from reaching its full potential.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Survey question set 1

Appendix 2. Survey question set 2

**Appendix 1. Survey question set 1**

1. What do you consider the biggest challenge facing tourism in Nepal?

- a. Limited Infrastructure
- b. Safety and security issues
- c. Limited marketing and promotion
- d. Geography and natural calamities

2. How would you rate the current quality of tourist infrastructure (e.g., roads, hotels) in Nepal on a scale of 1 to 5?

3. What type of tourism should Nepal prioritize to enhance its appeal?

- a. Mountain tourism
- b. Adventure tourism
- c. Religious and Cultural tourism
- d. Community based tourism

4. How effective do you think current government policies are in promoting tourism in Nepal?

- a. Very Effective
- b. Neutral
- c. Very ineffective

5. What specific strategies do you think could help boost tourism in Nepal? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Improved Infrastructure
- b. better marketing campaigns
- c. Sustainable tourism practices
- d. Improved security
- e. Development of new tourist destinations

6. How important is it for local communities to be involved in tourism development?

- a. Very Important
- b. Important
- c. Neutral
- d. Unimportant

7. How do you feel about the impact of domestic tourism on Nepal's economy?

- a. Positive
- b. Neutral
- c. Negative

8. What improvements do you think are necessary for promoting tourism in Nepal?

a. More tourist information center

b. better marketing and strategies

c. good transportation services

d. More affordable accommodation options

9. What role do you think the government should play in enhancing tourism in Nepal?

10. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions for addressing the problems facing tourism in Nepal.

**Appendix 2. Survey question set 2**

1. What is your age?

- a. Under 20
- b. 20-25
- c. 26 and above

2. What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Which university are you currently attending?

4. How often do you travel within Nepal?

- a. Never
- b. Once a year
- c. 2-3 times a year
- d. More than 3 times a year

5. What types of domestic tourism do you participate in? (Select all that apply)

- a. Adventure tourism (e.g., trekking, mountaineering)
- b. religious tourism (e.g., pilgrimage sites)

c. Eco-tourism (e.g., national parks, wildlife)

6. What motivates you to travel domestically?

a. Exploring new places

b. Adventure and activities

c. Spending time with friends and family

7. What are the top three destinations you would recommend for domestic tourism in Nepal?

8. What challenges do you face when traveling within Nepal? (Select all that apply)

a. Lack of information about destinations

b. Poor infrastructures (e.g., roads, transportation, electricity)

c. Limited travel options

d. Safety concerns

9. What factors would encourage you to travel more domestically? (Select all that apply)

a. Improved infrastructure

b. better promotion of domestic destinations

c. Affordable travel options

d. special events or festivals

10. How important do you think social media is in promoting domestic tourism?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not important
- d. Not sure

11. In your opinion, what strategies should the government or tourism bodies implement to promote domestic tourism in Nepal?