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PROSPECTS OF TOURISM IN NEPAL

A Study of Chitwan City

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ABSTRACT

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This study focused on tourism trends and its sustainable development strategies in Chitwan, a tourist hotspot with diverse biodiversity, and cultural heritage Nepal. In this study, we designed mixed-methods research where data were collected through both quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to identify the tourism pattern of domestic and international tourists visiting Chitwan. Site data was gathered from key tourist places like Sauraha, Meghali, Devghat and Madi. According to the results, domestic tourism is on the rise while international tourism recovers after a global disruption. Guests want to explore nature-based offerings, and the star attraction is Chitwan National Park while culture and adventure tourism is a growing segment.

Its research identifies the key difficulties like shortage of infrastructure, seasonality and environmental concerns. This Thesis propounds on the basis of analysis an integrated model for sustainable tourism development in Chitwan that strikes emphasis on economic benefits along with balancing environmental conservation and community empowerment. Recommendations are necessary such as infrastructure investments at a strategic level, tourism products diversification and better digital marketing and strengthened community participation.

The paper not only advances the literature on protected areas sustainable tourism development but provides concrete recommendations for policymakers, tourism industry actors and local communities of Chitwan as well.

Keywords	Tourism trends, sustainable development, Chitwan National Park, community-based tourism, eco-tourism, Nepal
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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the main generator of economic development, a bridge for cultural exchange and important source of jobs globally. Nepal has a larger role of development in it, especially the Chitwan City is one of the most important destination of tourism due to its wide range natural wonders, wildlife and culture. The following study discusses the tourism potential of Chitwan-Park as a prospectus.

1.1 Background of Tourism in Nepal and Chitwan

Tourism is a blend of social, cultural, and economic factors through which people travel away from their usual places for leisure, work, shopping, medical attention, and even religious activities. For Nepal, tourism has emerged as one of the principal industries which influences the economy along with the participation of international and local tourists being very vital for the development of the country. The tourism industry has proved to be a significant contributor to the creation of job opportunities, stimulating local economies, improving infrastructure, improving hospitality services, promoting cultural exchanges, and remitting foreign funds to developing countries like Nepal (Nepal Tourism Board, 2022; Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2021).

The tourists who travel to Nepal are motivated by the significant natural and tourist attractions of the country together with the rich culture and flora and fauna, and willing to undertake wide range of adventurous activities. As an illustrative fact, the country is home of the topmost world's Mount Everest and all the major tourism activities like trekking and mountaineering are focused on Nepal where 8 out of 14 mountains exceeding 8000 meters are found.

Chitwan, a Southern city in Nepal with fabulous biodiversity, culture and marvelous beauty has become one of the finest destinations of tourism in Nepal. Chitwan National Park, a World Heritage site of UNESCO in Chitwan is the chief tourist destination and sees more or less over 200,000 visitors per annum. The park is famous due to its conservation developments and primarily in the defense of endemic species such as one-horned rhinoceros, Bengal tiger and Gharial crocodile (UNESCO,2023). Nepal's first national park (the Beni Zone also included 1973) it is indicative project of an early wildlife conservation

role in Nepal and represents the national attitudes towards protecting wildlife and producing Eco-tourism. As in international tourism, Chitwan belongs to Nepal's subtropical inner Terai lowlands and the endemic feature of mountain areas are associated with Nepal (Gurung et al., 2011). Chitwan is 150 kilometers southwest of Kathmandu and fast emerging as one of the Must-visit destinations both for international (after Pokhara) and domestic tour packages with better transport amenities these days (K.C., 2023).

Chitwan has fantastic cultural and religious experiences apart from its natural beauty. Tharu indigenous people heavily influence the cultural landscape of the region through their own traditions, dances as well a lifestyle as one of the most ancient indigenous communities of Terai, but the cultural essence like traditional architecture, arts & crafts, festivals and agricultural practices of Tharu community adds an enrich cultural dimension in tourism in Chitwan.

Manifolds communities-based tourism projects give travelers a unique experience of Tharu life, and they can attend traditional program performances, stay with the local families in homestays or do culture tours.

Engaging sites of religious nature like Devghat (an important Hindu pilgrimage confluence of the Trishuli and Kali Gandaki rivers) and the best Tandoori Baba they really call Vishnu Baba to devotees coming not only from all Nepal but from India as well. Indeed, the religious sites as well as performative rituals happening within them work to cultivate Chitwan's appeal in various tourism dynamics- both religious and cultural, in addition to its natural beauty.

The waterways of the region, the Rapti and Narayani rivers support canoeing, boating etc.; along with sunset watching, make Chitwan an ideal place for nature lovers and adventurers alike. These rivers are not just beautiful to look at, but they also contain a wide variety of aquatic species, like their namesake the critically endangered Indian gharial crocodile; so, it's not just those terrestrials seeing wildlife in Chitwan National Park.

As the evolution of tourism in Chitwan has bestowed with varied dimensions like eco-tourism, adventure tourism and community-based tourism Category 1: This diversification only illustrates that the tourism industry has been considering and adapting tourist preferences change to a greater degree in recognition of sustainability concerns.

Indoor activities in the region are jungle safaris, bird watching, excursions to the Elephant Breeding center and cultural village tours. The activities target the various tourist segments: travelers interested in wildlife and adventure, culture seekers/traveling for education. It is evident that while expanding its range of accommodation (hotels, resorts & homestays) Chitwan signages growth in tourist reception and quality service delivery.

The Lodging sector in Chitwan has moved from humble guest houses/tents to a continuum of options—from affordable budget and nature-based wildlife villages to luxury wildlife resorts and community-managed homestays, in response to different tastes and budget constraints. The development of tourism infrastructure has promoted the realization of semi- and locally applicable tourism development approaches which consider the economic benefits gained from tourism, environmental preservation and cultural heritage preservation.

The tourism sector in Chitwan, like in the rest of Nepal, has faced significant challenges in recent years, particularly due to global events affecting international travel. However, the resilience of the sector and its capacity for adaptation have been evident in the increasing focus on domestic tourism and the diversification of tourism products to appeal to changing market demands. The post-pandemic recovery of tourism in Chitwan presents both challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development, underscoring the importance of evidence-based strategies informed by current research on tourism trends and impacts.

1.2 Research Problem and Gap

Though Chitwan has good tourism potential and is one of the most preferred destinations in Nepal, there is currently scant research on domestic and international tourism dynamics in terms of their needs experiences as well challenges within this region.

Well, the research lacuna precludes efficient planning and development of sustainable tourism strategies for Chitwan based on its distinct context.

While few studies have addressed both the conservation focus of Chitwan National Park and larger national tourism trends, Chitwan-specific phenomena have almost been hidden in both streams of literature. To illustrate, although studies such as Bhattarai et al. (2019) and Panthi et al. (2021), have assessed ecological effects of tourism in C. Yet, no

research has been done on the overall tourism ecosystem at the regional level comprising both inside and outside the national park boundaries. Dhakal & Nepal (2020), studies have discussed at large tourism trends in Nepal but do not provide a granular level view of tourism dynamics specific to Chitwan.

Further, there has been a very small amount of research concerning how tourism development interacts with local voice in Chitwan with its necessity of balancing the distribution of tourism benefits for shared benefits. As already mentioned within tourism literature (e.g. Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Regmi & Walter 2017), community-based tourism has increased its attention in recent years; however, little is known about how it works specifically in Chitwan. Lastly, the dynamic of national domestic tourism in Nepal particularly to Chitwan as a destination is another domain of understudy which should be addressed holistically in the comprehensive tourism planning.

For stakeholders engaged in tourism planning and management of Chitwan, such as government bodies, private developers or local communities who need up-to-date data driven tourism trends insights on Chitwan resorting in making responsible decisions for sustainable tourism. The absence of verified data regarding tourist preferences and satisfaction rates, spending habits and image perceptions hinders these stakeholders in making decisions about tourism direction and management within the region.

Besides, the dynamic nature of tourism post-pandemic setting means new directions at research level to understand the changes in tourist behavior and preference. Changing market segments, value chains that tourists' side with (or do not) and health/safety considerations — new shades in this picture that need some further dissect at Chitwan Tourism Climate.

In terms of theory, the demand is to employ and modify contemporary models of sustainable tourist development in accordance with Chitwan-specific socio-ecological conditions. While tourism sustainability has been widely researched throughout the world (Buckley, 2012; Hall, 2019), stochastic frameworks derived from this research for applying such principles to the particular circumstances of a wildlife-focused, cross-cultural site like Chitwan necessitate tailoring and synthesis.

Therefore, this research seeks to capture these lacunas and carry out an extensive examination of tourism in Chitwan (both domestic and international travelers), with recommendations for sustainable tourism development in the wider region. Through the analysis of tourist profiles, preferences, experiences and impacts from sites within Chitwan this research will aid the development of an evidence-based approach to sustainable tourism development.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

1. The primary objective of this research is to analyze tourism trends in Chitwan and propose the aim of this research is to find trends in tourism of Chitwan and make possible appearance sustainable tourism strategies in the region. In this study, we are specifically:
2. Review the demographics and motivations of local and overseas tourists visiting Chitwan. This is the goal about tourist characteristics, motivation, interests and behavioral patterns that will be on Chitwan tourists. The study tries to discover the disparities between domestic and international tourists with an historical perspective till date in recent global events adverse tourism growth.
3. **Assess the quality and adequacy of tourism infrastructure and services in Chitwan.** This objective involves evaluating the existing tourism infrastructure in Chitwan, including accommodation facilities, transportation networks, tourist information services, and recreational amenities. It aims to identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the current infrastructure and service provision, considering the needs and expectations of different tourist segments.
4. Study the socio-economic and environmental effects of tourism related activities in the area. Goal 1: Examine how tourism affects the economy, quality of life (and environment) within the community of Chitwan. It seeks to evaluate both the positive impacts like employment creation and economic diversification and negative impacts i.e. environmental degradation, socio-cultural disruption.
5. I Forecast and propose the challenges / opportunities of sustainable tourism development in Chitwan. This objective aims to understand what could hinder or

promote sustainable tourism development in Chitwan. It will be aimed at the policy barriers, infrastructure hiccups, capacity inadequacies, market conditions and environmental constraints as well as opportunities that tourism trends that are due for emergence in the market are creating.

6. Suggest tourism experiences that are well sustainable & benefits resort on community and sustainable development. This target is specifically on building potential strategies and suggestions that hold the type of relevance to stakeholders in or associated with tourism developments and management at Chitwan. The research emphasizes ways to enhance visitor experience while sustaining environment and maximizing social benefits for tourist industry in the region.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions will guide the study:

1. **What are the current trends in domestic and international tourism in Chitwan?**
 - What are the demographic characteristics of tourists visiting Chitwan?
 - How do the motivations, interests, and behaviors of domestic tourists differ from those of international tourists?
 - How have tourism patterns in Chitwan evolved over time, particularly in response to recent global events?
2. **What factors influence tourist preferences and experiences in Chitwan?**
 - What attractions, activities, and services are most valued by different tourist segments?
 - How do factors such as accommodation quality, accessibility, safety, and service standards influence tourist satisfaction?
 - What role do cultural authenticity and environmental quality play in shaping tourist experiences?
3. **How adequate are the existing tourism infrastructure and services for meeting tourist needs?**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current tourism infrastructure in Chitwan?
- To what extent do existing services meet the expectations of different tourist segments?
- What infrastructure gaps need to be addressed to enhance tourism experiences and sustainability?

4. What are the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism activities in Chitwan?

- How does tourism contribute to local employment, income generation, and economic diversification?
- What are the environmental implications of tourism activities in Chitwan, particularly in sensitive areas such as Chitwan National Park?
- How are the benefits and costs of tourism distributed among different stakeholders in the region?

5. What strategies can be implemented to promote sustainable tourism development in Chitwan?

- What policy measures, infrastructure investments, and capacity development initiatives are needed to enhance tourism sustainability?
- How can digital technologies and innovative marketing approaches contribute to sustainable tourism development?
- What mechanisms can ensure meaningful community participation and equitable distribution of tourism benefits?
- How can tourism development be balanced with environmental conservation imperatives, particularly in relation to Chitwan National Park?

1.4 Significance of the Study

For all the stakeholders in tourism development and management of Chitwan, this research possesses relevance. Policymakers and government agencies can get facts based taken on board from the findings for creating evidence-based tourism policies, as well as development plans. The Nepal Tourism Board and Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation can use the findings to prioritize strategies for Chitwan as the top destination, closing infrastructure deficiencies, and ensuring sustainable tourism.

The study comes into the critical time when Nepal travel industry is trying to get off its feet after some shocking global events. The study will give an insight into the current dynamics of tourist behavior in Chitwan to create responsive strategies that equip market conditions and tourists' taste. This is very important for tourism in the region, which the outcome of study carries substantial implications at a national level.

Private sector actors such as hotel owners, tour operators and services providers will get insights into what the tourist wants, desires from market, and thus optimize their offerings and service quality. Through a more precise analysis of each tourist segment, the stakeholders can create differentiated products /services which may give them an edge by increasing their competitiveness and sustainability in the competitive and dynamic market.

Suggested for People around Chitwan: Local participation in tourism as well as benefits distribution models to be considered with an equitable approach for all Local communities will be benefited by the recommendations reflecting their participation in tourism activities and fair distribution of benefits resulting from tourism.

Through demonstrating the feasibility of community-based tourism development and suggesting avenues for deeper community engagement in tourism planning and management, the study aims to contribute to more inclusive and participatory tourism development in the area.

From a broader environmental conservationist perspective, the study will help assess the toll of tourism on natural areas in the case of Chitwan (Chitwan National Park) implica-

tions. The results will support approaches of decreasing impacts on environment and enabling more tourism to benefit conservation messages through environmental awareness and financing for sustainability.

Focused on an academic level, this research will inspire literature on sustainable tourism dispensing in protected areas and their vicinities particularly in the Nepalese setting. The present study will also make a unique contribution to the evolving theoretical debate on applications and implementations of sustainable tourism frameworks in different socio-ecological settings by taking an empirical approach to Chitwan.

Further, the mixed methods design of the study—quantitative survey and qualitative interviews at various tourism sites in Chitwan — will build a robust analytical framework that gives an insight and can be used as a template for other tourism research destinations. This adds to the methodological tourism research literature, especially from a developing country perspective.

The results will also comprise a reference for future studies on tourism phenomena and destination-specific management in other places like Chitwan, thus establishing a baseline of data and analytical support for longitudinal research on how tourism could morph in Chitwan and places alike. This is especially useful because there is little evidence of tourism research at this res level and holistically in many developing countries' contexts.

1.5 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that may influence its findings and generalizability:

1. **Geographical scope:** The research is confined to selected sites within Chitwan (Sauraha, Meghauri Devghat, and Madi) so findings may not necessarily have general applicability for all tourism dynamics in the broader Chitwan area. Although these sites are chosen to reflect varied tourism contexts in Chitwan (wildlife, cultural, religious community-based tourism etc.), some other parts of Chitwan might have their own set of features not reflected in this study.
2. **Temporal limitations:** Data collection will be scheduled to take place over (January-March 2025) but tourism patterns could be seasonal or year-to-year, which

may restrict the breadth of these findings, at all stages through. Though the study does its best to identify historical trends via secondary data analysis, primary data are in a given period that would not seasonally and longitudinally account for the temporal context.

3. **Sample limitations:** Convenience sampling will be used for the questionnaire survey of the study — which can be biased because of participant profile, and not exhaustive, is one limitation. With due diligence to draw at least some degree of diversity from the sample tourists, types of interest tourism, nationalities and demographics, the non-probabilistic approach might compromise results-generalizability.
4. **Language and cultural barriers:** The challenges in communication with international tourists, local communities may sheer f the breadth and depth of data gathered. Although we tried to assist with translation in relevant places, there might be some losing nuances across cultures that could impair the richness of qualitative data ideally.
5. **Resource constraints:** Since this master thesis is limited by time and financial resources, it can only study a sample that is limited in size as well as going depth. Though this may also impact the statistical power of quantitative analyses and range of qualitative insights, especially on hard-to-reach tourism sites or stakeholder groups.
6. **Methodological limitations:** The use of self-reported data based on surveys and interviews bring possible biases of recollection, social desirability and subjective judgement. Data triangulation will be used to counter these biases, but the limitations of a given methodological approach remain intrinsic.
7. **Post-pandemic context:** The study is a snapshot taken during the ongoing recovery/transformation which is society currently experiencing as a result of global tourism disruptions — an unusual incidence in which to understand tourism trends going forward. This is great and all to gain insights into the recovery path, new trends started so far — but likely a poor representation of stable tourism dynamics in the long-term.

8. **Limited prior research:** Lacking extensive prior research on tourism in Chitwan, the underdeveloped body of knowledge where one could borrow from, or with which one might compare among previous studies is another limitation of this study. It also influences regional-specific comprehension of tourism up' the d affect comparative analytical capacity.

However, in spite of the limitations, the study seeks to give orientation in terms of tourism trend in Chitwan and suggestive recommendations for sustainable tourism development of such area. Using a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach to data collection and research ensures that some of these limitations are combated because it provides another angle and multiple lines of evidence for what the research found and recommended.

1.6 Structure of the Study

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, each addressing specific aspects of the research on tourism trends and sustainable development in Chitwan. The structure is designed to provide logical progression from the conceptual foundation to empirical findings and recommendations.

Chapter 1: Introduction presents context of research, elaborating on nationwide significance of tourism in Nepal and particularly within Chitwan. This explains the research problem, clarifies the knowledge gap existing in this field of research, defines research objectives and questions that frames the study, outlines significance of research for multiple stakeholders and also states limitations as well as a brief outline of thesis structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review offers a comprehensive examination of relevant literature across four main thematic areas:

- Tourism and economic development, exploring global tourism trends, tourism in developing countries, and the economic impact of tourism on local communities.
- Tourism in Nepal, covering its historical development, current state, and relevant government policies and initiatives.
- Sustainable tourism development, overviewing the main principles, strategies and community-based tourism.

- Tourism in Chitwan (especially to the Chitwan National Park with its UNESCO Heritage status, to the cultural-religious tourism in the area and adventure-eco tourism...)

The chapter ends with the establishment of a theoretical framework based on the literature review and, where relevant for the quantitative part of the research, formulation of hypotheses to be tested.

Chapter 3: These sections titled Research Methodology talk about the methodology used in the project. It defines research design, and the choice of a mixed methods strategy is justified. The chapter also talks about the Methods Section of the study, which included questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis. The sampling techniques used for participant selection, data analysis (quantitative and qualitative) and ethical issues in research are described.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis presents the empirical results of the research, organized around five key themes:

- Tourism trends in Chitwan, with separate analyses for domestic and international tourism
- Tourist preferences and experiences, examining motivations, activity choices, and satisfaction levels.
- Infrastructure and service assessment, evaluating the adequacy and quality of tourism facilities and services.
- Socio-economic impact analysis, examining employment generation, income effects, and community perceptions.
- Environmental impact assessment, exploring the ecological implications of tourism activities.

Chapter provides the Data in textual as well as visuals, like tables, charts & graphs to clarify the details and clear the view.

Chapter 5: Discussion relates the empirical results to the research questions and objectives within the study. It provides a critical review of important results, correlates the results with related literature to juxtapose compatibility and discrepancies and discusses implication of the findings for sustainable tourism development in Chitwan. This chapter combines a reinterpretation of data from both the quantitative and qualitative sources to provide deep tourism dynamics in the area.

Chapter 6: Recommendations offer practical recommendations to optimize sustainable tourism development in Chitwan based on both research findings and theoretical framework. It provides specific recommendations in five main areas:

Infrastructure development, addressing identified gaps and needs.

- Marketing and promotion strategies, tailored to different tourist segments and markets.
- Environmental conservation measures aimed at mitigating negative impacts and enhancing positive contributions.
- Community engagement and participation mechanisms, designed to ensure equitable benefit-sharing.
- Digital marketing and technology applications, leveraging technological innovations for sustainable tourism.

With each recommendation comes implementation considerations (stakeholders' impediments to implementation and resources required feasibility assessment).

Chapter 7: Conclusion: This paper summarizes the major results obtained in the study, presents its contributions to new knowledge within theoretical / applied research, and ends with research suggestions for future directions.

The paper is concluded with a detailed list of references and appendices—supplementary materials such as the research instruments (questionnaire and interview guides), statistical data tables, and visual materials such as maps, images of the area of study.

This framework leads the reader seamlessly from conceptual underpinning of research to its empirical findings interpreting them and suggesting practical implications, thus covering tourism trends and sustainable development in Chitwan comprehensively.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter presents a review of literature pertaining to theoretical basis for analyzing tourist trends and sustainable development in Chitwan (Nepal). Following the thematic organization, this review starts broadly with tourism and economic development and then narrows to the case of Nepal, sustainable tourism development frameworks before focusing on Chitwan tourism. The chapter ends by synthesizing the literature to provide a theoretical foundation and hypotheses to be tested through empirical research.

2.1 Tourism and Economic Development

Tourism is a potent engine for economic development, particularly in developing nations such as Nepal. It creates jobs, foreign direct investment and drives the local economy through higher demand of goods and services. However in places such as Chitwan, tourism does not only help in generation of income but in bettering standard of living and skill development to some extent among the locals of surrounding areas. Therefore tourism fosters both direct and indirect poverty alleviation as well as economic growth.

2.1.1 Global Tourism Trends

Tourism has become one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economic sectors, has profound implications for global development. Pre-pandemic in 2019 global international tourist arrivals reached (1.5 billion)—the fourth year of rise (most recent data by 4 % this year) and the highest ever number (UNWTO, 2020). As an economic force Tourism became established as one of the largest sectors of global GDP*, (10.4% in 2019) and creates one in ten jobs around the world (WTTC, 2020)

Recent trends in the global tourism industry as examined by literature are many. Peeters et al. (2018) highlight the proliferation of tourism markets, with these impressive signs of growth among the emerging economies in Asia and the Pacific, both for outbound and inbound tourism.

Digital platforms have revolutionized tourism by changing the way tourists search and experience destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2018) a technology-driven agency that makes selecting a destination more about following clicks than recommendations. In particular, social media has been one of the most significant forces in destination choice and travel behavior (Munar & Jacobsen 2014).

Tourism consumer preferences have experienced dramatic transformations with increasing demand for authentic, experiential and transformational travel experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Kirillova et al. 2017). High-ranking officials have identified the emergence of conscious tourism defined as "a new sense of alertness about the outcomes and consequences of tourism on the environment and social dynamics locally" with preference for ethical behavior (Dolnicar, 2020).

This trend is mostly recognized with the younger generations being influenced more by sustainability and authenticity in the travel decisions of millennials and Gen Z travelers (Buffa, 2015; Cavagnaro et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a turning point for global tourism as international tourist arrivals decreased 73% in 2020 (UNWTO, 2021). Recovery, although real, has been slow and has shown considerable variability across regions and new waves patterns the transformative transformation of tourism behaviors to health safety, less crowding destinations and outdoor/ nature-based tourism was ascribed by Zenker and Kock (2020) to the pandemic. In many cases, domestic tourism represents a buoyant part of recovery and rebounds faster than international tourism (Arbulú et al., 2021).

Yeoman, observed in advance (2012), and postma et al. (2017) predicted the continuation of global tourism with a twist — patterns may be evolving from demographic dynamics and concerns about climate change too in ways that shape the new tourism-usual.

This literature indicates that sustainability will play a more prominent role in the tourism development strategies with a growing realization that environmental and social aspects must be weighed against economic gains (Gössling et al., 2015; Hall 2019).

2.1.2 Tourism in Developing Countries

Tourism has been identified as a promising source of economic development in developing countries with foreign exchange earnings, employment growth, infrastructure provision & poverty alleviation (Sharpley & Telfer 2015). The United Nations state that tourism is related with Sustainable Development Goals; specifically Sustainable Development Goal 8, _ decent work and economic growth, Sustainable Development Goal 12, Responsible consumption and production), and life below water (SDG 14) (UNWTO 2017).

Several developing country contexts have been empirically documented with the contribution that tourism makes to the economy. For example, Croes & Vanegas (2008) found that tourism development in Nicaragua reduced poverty significantly; Mitchell and Ashley (2010) provide a range of examples where tourism both pressuates pro-poor growth via direct creation of employment, indirect supply chain linkages; dynamic economic effects. Alam and Paramati (2016) analyzed the data of 49 developing countries, and they examined that tourism is playing important role over economic expansion and less carbon emission in these settings.

At the same time literature underscores problems and shortcomings as well with respect to tourism development in developing countries. Tourism dependency theorists claim that tourism reinforces structural inequalities and perpetuates economic dependence, therefore providing a narrow range of benefits to local populations as well potentially disenfranchised local elites (Britton 1982; Mowforth & Munt 2016). Deceiving tourism-led development model (Pleumarom 2012), he stresses erstwhile known in cases as economic leakage, or environmental damage and cultural tarnish.

Given the concept of [enclave tourism"] is relevant to say development tourism models that are characterized by patterns of international visitors reliant on self-contained resorts with few if any links to the broader local economy (Freitag 1994). These patterns inhibit the ability of tourism to bring about general socio-economic development and can therefore worsen social-economic imbalances (Mbaiwa 2005). Nepal et al. (2016) has also indicated that national tourism policies in the least developed countries are often void of local place specifics and that the top-down approach to tourism development with government planning fails to capture the demographics needs or priorities of community.

However, existing literature also reveals that there are empirical approaches that can maximize the development potential of tourism in developing countries. [2013], Hampton; (2007;2011) Hampton et al. (2018) formulate two critical values of locally based tourism operations, creating correspondingly fairer economic benefits.

Torres and Momsen (2004) suggest improving the connector between tourism from local agriculture to increase multiplier effects in economic rice them. Since long, tourism development and community benefit (Murphy 2013; while to a lesser extent Dangi & Jamal

2016) has been widely promoted as the most equitable way to ensure that tourist industries actually benefit local populations due to the emergence of a possible tragedy of the commons.

The literature also stresses that it is essential to have contextual policy setting conducive to inclusive tourism. This role of regulation and incentives in fostering the local and sustainable sharing of tourism benefits by Scheyvens & Russell (2012). Development of human capital especially through education and skills training for local communities is critical the key to allow for meaningful participation in tourism economies (Liu & Wall, 2006) Increased infrastructure facilities which are beneficial to both tourist and local community is an important of literature (Khadaroo & Seetahah 2007).

2.1.3 Tourism's Economic Impact on Local Communities

There is abundant literature on the economic impacts of tourism to local communities, and pathways through which tourism activities involve local economies have been identified in the research. Examples of direct effects are job creation in tourism enterprises like hotels, restaurants, tour operations and transport services (Dwyer et al., 2004). Backward linkages with suppliers of goods and services to the tourism sector are called indirect effects (Stynes, 1997; Fletcher 2018), and the other induced effects reflect the spending of locally generated income that arises from tourists being induced by homestays within community economy.

Most empirical studies have shown large economic multiplier effects stemming from tourism expenditure. Thomas and Bautista (1999) computed for one dollar in international tourists' expenditure in Belize another 0.65 locally through the effect of indirect and induced consumption. Pratt (2015) found tourism multipliers of 1.14 – 1.27\$ across seven small island developing States indicating that each dollar of direct tourism spending resulted in US\$0.14 to \$0.27 in the production of new economic revenue through multiplier effect.

The literature suggests that a number of factors have the greatest potential for underpinning the size of tourism economic impacts acting on local communities. Telfer and Wall (1996) highlight the significance of local sourcing of goods and services in maximizing economic multiplier effects at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OE, 2011) and Lacher & Nepal (2010) illustrate that local ownership of tourism enterprises will influence how benefits of tourism are distributed. Meyer (2007) gives challenges for setting up functioning linkages in tourism — quality constraints, supply velocity and power imbalances along the value chain.

Torres & Momsen (2011) claim it could help to promote agricultural production and market outlets for local products, though our attention is also drawn to the weakened reality in which these linkages often hardly develop.

A major economic benefit of tourism often cited is employment generation for the local communities. However, the reality of tourism employment is a little more nuanced than that. Tourism can indeed contribute to substantial employment opportunities especially for women, young people and populations in rural areas with alternative labor markets limited (Baum, 2013) but also casts concern about quality and security of the jobs. Ashley et al. Tourism (2001) Tourism employment in many developing countries is often seasonal with low wages, few increments and insecure jobs.

Bakker and Messerli (2017), highlight the need for skills development and training programs (and) demonstrate that promotes tourism employment quality to comply in higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs for people living in the nation.

The impact of tourism on entrepreneurial attempts of locals has captured considerable attention from literature. Zhao and Ritchie (2007) refer to tourism as one of the enabling factors local entrepreneurs, linking the issuing possibilities that will provide chances for small business development and relatively low barriers to entry like handicrafts, food services and guiding.

Koens & Thomas (2015) demonstrate that informal tourism micro-enterprises are one way poverty alleviation can be offered to the unemployed and socially marginalized, although they have a lot to overcome in terms of access to credit, administrative restrictions and competition from large companies.

Research into the distributional impacts of tourism has focused more attention recently (e.g. Stubbs 2004, Fox and Dixon 2007). Tourism can do substantial good in terms of poverty alleviation by power structures and resource access within communities (Schilcher

2007). Governance Arrangements and the Fair Distribution of Tourism Benefits (Mitchell and Ashley 2010) Highlighted by that community-based tourism approaches are useful to address these distributional concerns, but the extent of their effectiveness varies widely from one implementation context to another (Dodds et al., 2018).

The economic effects of tourism also need to be seen against a backdrop of the possible detrimental impact on local communities.

The rise of these includes higher cost-of-living in general (especially with housing prices) displacing local residents (Walpole & Goodwin, 2000); tourism morphing to an economic phenomenon that can prove vulnerable to external shocks, (Chaperon & Bramwell 2013) and the cost opportunity disturbance caused Tourism land resources and resources populating rather than other uses (Sharpley, 2000).

In recent years, literature has pointed to resilience in tourism-dependent communities as an important topic. Lew (2014) describes community tourism resilience as the capacity to absorb disturbance and adjust while changing the system so as to maintain its primary functioning, structure, identity, and feedback. Possible interventions for increasing community resilience in tourism destinations are economic diversification and building top-down capacity alongside the development of adaptive governance mechanisms (Espiner et al., 2017).

2.2 Tourism in Nepal

Tourism is one of the main sources of income and employment in Nepal (per sector contributed to national income) Nepal world famous for its variety landscapes and culture adventure tourism Nepal is first a rural development, next heritage guardian and then international personality. Tourism as an engine of rural development, heritage preservation, and global visibility of the sector. Tourism, which has iconic destinations in the Himalayas, Lumbini and Chitwan stands as an essential pillar of Nepal's socio-economic development.

2.2.1 Historical Development of Tourism in Nepal

The history of tourism in Nepal began more towards the end of the 20th century when the country was opened to the world after an imposed isolation in Rana period that was started from 1937 and ended in 1956.

Simmons and Koirala (2000) point out that in the beginning, tourism to Nepal was largely exploratory in nature: mountaineers and adventure seekers lured by the Himalayan landscapes and Mount Everest, which was first reached by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953.

Organized tourism development in Nepal began during the 1960s when the Tourism Development Board which subsequently became Nepal Tourism Board (renamed in 1962) was established (Bhattarai et al., 2005). During this period, the very first tourism infrastructure was also born like Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation in 1958; first international-standard hotels opened in Kathmandu. Zurick (1992) elaborates that, the hippie trail of the late 1960s and early 1970 went heavy Western youth groups into Nepal, especially to the valley of Kathmandu, which caused for backpacker tourism infrastructure emerge at places like Thamel.

The inception of protected areas including Chitwan national park in Nepal (1973) was a landmark for the development of the tourism sector there, laying foundations to nature-based tourism (Gurung & Seeland; 2008). In the 1970s and 1980s, trekking tourism diversified from Everest region to other parts of the country like Annapurna region and Langtang National Park with the declaration of these region as conservation units having some kind of tourism management system (Nepal 2000),

During the Maoist insurgency and related conflict (1996–2006) Nepal experienced dramatic decrease in visitors' due reliability due to security reasons (Bhattarai et al., 2005). Yet, in the post-conflict era efforts were redirected towards tourism development as an instrument for recovery and peacebuilding. It was a bold initiative to rebuild the tourism industry after nine years of conflict when the Nepal Tourism Year 2011 campaign attempted to take on 1 million tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2009)

Recent challenges include two major earthquakes of 2015 that severely impacted tourism infrastructures and cultural heritage sites, as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic which severely impacted international tourism in 2020 (Nepal Tourism Board 2022). All of these crises have led to coping and recovery initiatives, showcasing Nepal tourism as resilient in how in severely it responds and recover from external shocks.

2.2.2 Current State of Tourism in Nepal

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal had a tourism sector on a growth path—international tourist arrivals hit a record of 1.2 million in 2019 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2020).

Tourism had been contributing some 7.9% in GDP and employed about 1.05 million positions directly (or supporting others at other establishments) amounting to 6.9% of total employment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020).

It also was one of Nepal's largest foreign exchange earners at the macroeconomic level.

The international tourists visiting in Nepal have a changing profile with significant growth among Jumla's neighboring visitors particularly for India and China.

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (2020) stated that in 2019, Indian by far was the destination market (21.2%), followed by China (14.2%), US (8.3%), UK (5.7%) and Sri Lanka (4.8%) source market. This represented a departure from the patterns typically seen when many other western European and North American tourists were prevalent leading (Bhandari, 2019).

Tourism is a chronically seasonally phenomenon in Nepal; therefore, peak seasons are experienced from spring (March–May) in which weather conditions favorable for trekking and mountain activities (Nepal Tourism Board, 2022). The seasonality of tourism creates difficulties for a year-round workforce and businesses in the industry. Although some progress has been made on winter and monsoon tourism attraction promotion efforts to reduce seasonality these are still very niche markets (Khadka et al., 2021).

The tourist product mix in Nepal has expanded from a narrow niche of mountaineering and trekking tourism to include wildlife tourism, cultural tourism, religious pilgrimages, adventure sports or wellness tourism (Upadhyaya, 2013).

This diversification mirrors, as much a shift in market desire as an effort to create new tourism experiences and reduce dependency upon specific types of tourism.

As international travel restrictions ratcheted up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism has boomed particularly; Sharma and Bhusal (2021) add that the domestic tourism in Nepal has been following on rising income levels of a growing middle-class, reinforcement of road connectivity, soaring popularity of domestic destinations through social media as well as alteration in leisure practice. Some of Nepal's go-to domestic destinations are Pokhara, Chitwan, the religious sites Muktinath and Pashupatinath, hill stations Nagarkot & Dhulikhel.

Policy for tourism in Nepal is based under Tourism Vision 2020 (2009) which envisages high target of destination for tourist flows at the inference of increased employment generation in tourism sector as a purpose for experiencing tourism delivery at both national division. GNI Contribution to GDP, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (2009). The sustainability of tourism development in terms of quality improvement and diversification of tourism products / markets. Neupane & Timothy (2010) however point out the weaknesses of these policies, by assessing these policy goals against sense based on reality on the ground.

2.2.3 Government Policies and Tourism Development

Tourism in Nepal has long been a top-down focused sector (recognized by dozens of policies and plans over the last decades as the priority sector for economic development).

Overarching this is the Tourism Policy 2008 with its targets to tourism's contribution to national economy, job creation, regional balance in development of tourism and promoting Nepal as a premier tourist destination (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation 2008).

This is a policy matrix which has been thereby reinforced by sectoral tourism plans and campaigns. Nepal Tourism Year 2011 was largely a consolidative campaign to achieve visitor inflows post-civil conflict (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation 2009). In the recent times, Visit Nepal 2020 was launched and an attempt to lure 1 million tourist international tourist which eventually got impacted by the COVID-19 however (Nepal Tourism Board 2019).

Tourism governance in Nepal is institutionalized at multiple levels within an essentially decentralized administrative system. At the national level, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation is the single most powerful body for policy related matters. Founded

in 1998 as a public-private partnership, the Nepal Tourism Board specializes in destination marketing and promotional services (Sharma: -2009).

While the Constituent Assembly passed a 2015 Constitution that laid out federal responsibilities for tourism among provinces and local governments, Bhandari (2018) reports that the capacity constraints as well coordination challenges have hindered able implementation of these den FEDERATED arrangements in Nepal since its transition to a federal system of government.

Key issue-based policy areas are infrastructure development, human resource development, promotion, marketing product diversification and quality control. The Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank, 2018) financed the Tourism Infrastructure Development project to enhance tourism facilities and accessibility in some destinations. New National Tourism Strategic Plan — 2016–2025 highlights the development of new tourism products and experiences to diversify the tourism economy beyond existing offerings (Ministry of Culture Tourism and Civil Aviation 2016).

Nepal has history of conservation policies shaping tourism development around protected areas in particular. Protected areas and tourism were legislated with the 1973 National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act while subsequent regulations have guided tourism activities in these designations (Gurung 2008).buffer zone [27] Concept Introduction adopted during the 1990s, has instituted governance mechanisms for community benefit-sharing whereby airport entry fees—the buffer zone is part of the national park were used as a tool to utilize funds for community development project development.

A number of the scholarship also has examined the quality of implemented Nepal's tourism policy. Upadhyaya (2013) stresses the well-documented gap between policy rhetoric— such as sustainability and community development and social capital benefits and the grounded fact that actual practices usually serve short-term profit-oriented agendas (often for big money) and high-level concerns. Bhandari (2019) points out the top-down manner in which most tourism development projects are implemented and propose approaches that are more bottom-up, which would engage local communities and civil society in decision making. Neupane and Timothy (2010) point out implementation-related

challenges such as low organizational capacity, poor coordination among different government agencies financial shortfalls for policy introduction and no long-term planning due to political instability.

Recent policy initiatives aimed at crisis management and tourism resilience were particularly responsive to the experiences of the two 2015 earthquakes as well as COVID-19. After the 2015 earthquakes, the National Planning Commission developed Post Disaster Recovery Framework containing provisions for tourism sector recovery such as infrastructural reconstruction tourist marketing programs to rebuild confidence among visitors and assistance to tourism enterprises/workers in the affected areas (2016). Likewise, the Tourism Recovery Action Plan conceived to deal with the aftermath of COVID-19 provided support to tourism enterprises during crisis period and shaped strategies to reboot tourism when movement restrictions eased (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2021).

2.3 Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism development wants to fulfill the demands of the present tourist and host communities without compromising the opportunity for the future. It is about environmental stewardship, culture of preservation and social participation. Sustainable tourism is necessary in Nepal, particularly in areas like Chitwan (a UNESCO world heritage site) as it balances the economy with resources natural/ cultural over a sustainable period-for the locals and also the visitors.

2.3.1 Principles of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism has been established as an overarching guiding principle for tourism development, embodying wider aspirations to sustainable development more broadly in practice. In this view, the concept is grounded on the sustainable development defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED, 1987, p. Sustainable tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2005: 12) defines this as follows “as tourism which takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

Key principles of sustainable tourism, as synthesized from the literature, include:

1. **Environmental sustainability:** Tourism Development should maintain more of the essential ecological processes, conserve biodiversity and natural heritage, and exploit environmental resources sustainably (Buckley 2012; Hall 2019). This principle embodies the dependency of tourism on nature assets and the need to secure ecological well-being upon which tourism experiences thrive.
2. **Socio-cultural sustainability:** Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, preserving their cultural heritage and traditional values and promoting intercultural understanding and respect (Richards & Hall 2000; McKercher & du Cros, 2002) Tourism. This principle acknowledges the fragility of cultural resources to tourism impacts together with their great importance in terms of place making for place-based tourism experiences.
3. **Economic sustainability:** Tourism must safeguard the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, secure their cultural heritage and traditional values (Richard & Hall, 2000; McKercher & du Cros, 2002). This principle acknowledges the weakness of cultural resources upon tourism impact as well as their centrality in defining character – tourism experiences.
4. **Stakeholder participation:** All stakeholders in the tourism planning and development process should be engaged (Murphy 2013; Byrd, 2007), including local communities whose tourism affects. This principle acknowledges the need for sustainable results to be higher where tourism stakeholders are able to participate in an actual decision-making process.
5. **Long-term perspective:** The planning horizon for tourism development should view both long as well as short-term effects and demands (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Hall 2019). This principle emphasizes the need for strategic approaches that end up balancing short-term economic concerns with long-term sustainability needs.
6. **Adaptive management:** Tourism management ought to be adaptive and respond to monitoring, adjusting based on feedback and context changes through learning-by-doing, improving (Farrell and Twining-Ward, 2005), Butler 1999). If this principle is about tourism systems and the dynamic nature of such systems, then flexible solutions should be possible that can accommodate new information and contexts over time.

While these principles offer a normative lens to study sustainable tourism, their everyday application is by nature highly contextual. Liu notes that the idealistic notions of sustainable tourism are usually not realistic in practice, especially in the developing country contexts which are highly economically constrained to realize certain aspirations. Likewise, Buckley (2012) describes the chasm between theory and how the tourism industry actually operates pointing also to regulatory frameworks and market-based instruments for closing that gap.

2.3.2 Sustainable Tourism Practices

The literature identifies numerous practices and approaches that can contribute to sustainable tourism development across environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions:

Visitor management strategies to limit tourism impacts on local natural environs (Manning, 2007), green certification programs defining and validating the environmental profile of tourism businesses (Font & Buckley 2001); in the areas of energy, water or waste management, Gössling (2015) call for action and address measures to let be resource efficient; carbon offsetting to offset for example tourism's climate change impacts (Becken & Hay 2007); and sites which seek to link tourism directly with funding conservation through eco-tourism (Buckley 2010).

Under the umbrella of high-tourism settings — protected area tourism has been studied in particular where numerous models have been elaborated for balancing visitor pressures and quality experiences, Eagles and McCool (2002), see Rivett 2000 for just a couple of the many tickets available in strategy such as Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Limits of Acceptable Change and Visitor Impact Management frameworks which are systematic methods for dealing with planning and visitation to sensitive natural environments anywhere they occur.

Manning (2007) highlights the critical role of carrying capacity concepts in protected area tourism management through physical limits on the numbers of visitors, spatial and temporal redistribution of use, modifying visitor behavior by means education and prescription.

Socio-cultural practices: McKercher & du Cros, 2002; cultural heritage management strategies which balance the conservation and commodification of tangible and intangible cultural assets by striving to facilitate visitor access and interpretation (McKercher, & du Cros 2002), codes of conduct for visitor and tourism operators' use (Mason & Mowforth, 1996), cultural tourism which serves to perpetuate and promulgate cultural traditions in a way that also brings forth economic benefits (Richards, 2014) and public educational programs that may help to better understand and respect the culture of the host community (Moscardo 2014).

McKercher and du Cros (2002), in their call for a balance between conservation and commodification in cultural heritage, state that cultural assets need to be brought out visible to the tourist while remaining whole.

Community Participation and Interpretation (Timothy & Boyd, 2006) - Where the interpretations are authentic and respectful to local values Moscardo (2014) outlines how well-designed interpretive experiences can contribute to greater visitor awareness and support for cultural conservation outcomes.

Local economic practices which can be both nature based and locally focused : economic linkages with the surrounding community through local procurement policies (Meyer, 2007); fair employment policies which guarantee adequate working condition, and career advancement (Baum, 2013); distribution of benefits and revenue shares with the community so that tourism efforts are funds (Simpson, 2008); tourism value chain projects that increase local participation within tourism markets (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010); reduction of over-dependency on tourism (telfer and sharpley, 2015).

Ashley et al. (2001) similarly advocate for pro-poor tourism strategy that aims to promote the net benefits of tourism for the poor. These could be tourism corporate social responsibility alternative approaches such as: encouraging local employment in tourism enterprises; encouraging entrepreneurship through micro-finance and business development services; community enterprises project development; partnering between communities and private sector operators. Spenceley and Meyer (2012) describe how tourism certification initiatives that contain social and economic criteria drive business practices which increase local economic benefits as well as ensure fair labor practices.

The use of these practices will demand governance arrangements that mediate stakeholder coordination and sustainability orientation. Collinge and Lane (2011) discuss the idea of cooperative governance in sustainable tourism, presenting public sector agencies, private businesses, community representatives and civil society organizations at decision-making processes.

For how the different tourism stakeholders all too frequently come with conflicting interests (Jamal & Getz 1995) these are approaches that can steer through.

Eagles Looks at protection area tourist governance models that vary from fully public management to different kinds of public-private partnerships and community-based management (2009)

Among the implications that he categorizes, a range creates opportunities for different levels accountability, cost-effectiveness, service excellence and community integration in community development. Likewise, Beaumont and Dredge (2010) investigate local tourism governance architecture and probe how these newly developed network networks enable or impede tourism outcomes.

Monitoring and assessment frameworks are central to the sustainable tourism practice, offering ways to measure the progress of tourism, detect new issues, and adapt management as new knowledge. A study of the literature revealed different strategies, from sustainability indicator systems (Miller & Twining-Ward 2005); measures for environmental and social impact assessment (Simpson 2008) as well certification/ eco-labeling programs (Font & Buckley 2001) to reporting frameworks such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC 2013).

Torres-Delgado and Saarinen (2014) provide a review of indicator systems for sustainable tourism, but state some of the difficulties in building good scientifically valid and applicable measures across relevant contexts. They argue that indicators should be specific to context and reflective of local priorities & conditions that allows some cross comparison with global frameworks while still be practically measurable. Tanguay et al. (2013) develop a methodological framework for the selection of sustainable tourism indicators, considering the trade-off between breadth and merriment and focusing on those indicators that are of most relevance for destination specific situations.

2.3.3 Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism (CBT) is an articulation towards tourism and its development with focus on locally based ownership, control and benefit-sharing Murphy (1985) theorized that tourism should be developed with and for host communities, not from external market forces only. Since then, CBT has been established as a Tourism development framework that is applicable globally, especially in developing countries where the major role of tourism as a rural enterprise and poverty alleviation (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

The literature identifies several core principles of CBT, including:

1. **Local ownership and management** of tourism enterprises and resources (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008)
2. **Democratic participation** in decision-making processes regarding tourism development (Manyara & Jones, 2007)
3. **Equitable distribution** of benefits among community members (Simpson, 2008)
4. **Cultural and environmental stewardship** that preserves local heritage and natural resources (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010)
5. **Small-scale, low-impact development** that is within the carrying capacity of the local environment and social fabric (Reid, 2003)

The general interventions of CBT generally incorporate activities like homestays, cultural performances conducted by local performers and guides; nature walks on a guided group basis; handicraft production, agricultural tourism etc. All to create authentic educational experiences focusing on lifestyle and tradition of indigenous population (Asker et al., 2010).

CBT is especially common in buffer zone regions surrounding protected areas, where the approach can, for example, offer improved livelihoods to communities hindered by conservation restrictions while conservation is made economically feasible and aware (Kiss, 2004).

Most of these studies on CBT have dual nature mixed findings. Literature-based examples that indicated success include the Namibian conservancy program (Naidoo et al., 2016), where employment and income creation have gone with responsible wildlife manage-

ment; similar to cooperatives across Thailand and CBT networks which enabled community participation in cultural preservation (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014) or Nepal's Annapurna Conservation Area project (Neupane & Thapa 2004) which laid foundation for integrated conservation & development through community based tourism.

Although CBT initiatives face a number of criticisms, it is clear that they are far from without challenge. Other factors include remote and infrastructure-poor location [Mitchell & Muckosy 2008]; poor business/career skills and tourism service quality (Goodwin & Santilli 2009); power and governance discrepancies such as elite capture of benefits, bureaucratic systems torn by internal conflict (Blackstock 2005); very high dependence on external funding and support (Kiss 2004); and low independent economic gains compared with many other forms of tourism development (Harrison & Schipani 2007).

Structural Operational, and Cultural Constraints on Citizen Participation in Tourism Development of Developing Country Context (Tosun,2000) Centralized public administration; the issue of none coordination between stakeholders, limited information availability, high participation costs and elitist culture; lack of interest on tourism-related issues among community members Blackstock 2005 critiques idealized forms construction of community as homogenous, and presents that CBT initiatives typically fail to account the varied interests, power inequalities and various order that are operative within communities.

Current literature converges more towards the integration of CBT with large-scale tourism markets and value chains. Mitchell and Ashley cited a line of argument (2010) that CBT cannot be considered something that should replace conventional tourist tourism but rather, in the slightest degree, simply be linked to other points in the larger framework tourism systems allowing local communities access to the revenue pathways etc.

Partnerships are mentioned by Spenceley and Meyer (2012) in their documentation of models for overcoming the market access and quality challenges of stand-alone CBTS with private sector operators.

Multiple factors such as quality of Leadership, capacity building is not there, ownership in tourism assets, partnership-support networks and quality in tourism product impacts sus-

tainability of CBT (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). Long-term success requires institutional frameworks that spell out well-delineated rights and responsibilities; clearly benefits-sharing systems; conflict resolution; (Salazar 2012). We state that Stone and Stone (2011) assert that there is a need for phased, incremental development processes which communities must be able to develop both capacity and confidence but also minimize risk.

2.4 Tourism in Chitwan

Chitwan is one of the top tourist attractions in Nepal for you to come across huge biodiversity, cultural assets and rural experiences. Chitwan National Park — The UNESCO World Heritage Site which sees native as well as international tourists thrive on wildlife safaris, birdwatching and natural beauty. In addition to Tharu culture, traditional villages and adventure activities-rafting, canoeing, jungle walks provide more tourism interest. This tourism has been a cornerstone of economic development, job creation and cultural preservation in Chitwan.

2.4.1 Chitwan National Park and UNESCO Heritage

Chitwan National Park (CNP) is the engine of tourism in the Chitwan area. CNP (932 km²) is one of the largest remaining contiguous tracts of subtropical lowland tropical forest in south-central Nepal established in 1973 as Nepal's first national park (UNESCO, 2023). Park inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list in 1984 to acknowledge this undisturbed natural area, which was instrumental to many endangered species, including the greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), Bengal tiger (*Panthera Tigris Tigris*), and gharial crocodile (*Gavialis gangeticus*): UNESCO, 2023

CNP literature is replete with the ecological significance of this forest. It preserves a major remnant of the last remaining original Terai ecosystem with its riverine forests, tall grasslands and marshes (Bhujju et al.) It has a huge biodiversity with more than 68 mammal species, 544 bird species, and 161 reptile and amphibian as well as 56 fish species (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation 2022). The second largest population of greater one-horned rhinoceroses in the world is located at CNP with a 2021 census recording 752 individuals representing an important conservation success story (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation 2021).

Pursuant to the establishment of CNP, tourism development in its areas known as Central National Park has drastically changed over time. Müller-Böker (2000) writes about the urbanization process of Sauraha — the main tourism hub just south of the park — from a village with few hotels and restaurants to an "alluvial basin of tremendous hotels... tour operators... restaurants"(Sarver-Schmidt etc. *Beckand) Unlike most of the sometimes world's protected areas, CNP allows several types of tourism, such as jeep safaris, elephant rides, walking tours, canoe trips & bird watching conducted by licensed guides within regulated standards (Bhusal 2007).

Tourism management in CNP is a mixed model where the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation is responsible for everything within the boundaries of the park and tourism services are provided through an amalgamation of private operators, community entities and concessionaires (Budhathoki 2004). A buffer zone system implemented in 1996 covers an area of 750 km² around the park that allows regulated use of resources and development activities (Sharma 2011). In these areas, Budhathoki 2004 noted the Buffer Zone Management Committee and User Groups are stakeholders who receive 30-50% share of park entrance fees for community development and park conservation activities.

Tourism trends in CNP have been heavily volatile over time due to a number of factors including political stability, infrastructure and travel patterns in tandem with global events. 2022) indicate that the annual number of CNP visitors varied from ~87K to 185K in the decade before the covid-19 pandemic, with international visitors expected to make up 70–75% of national arrivals. Travel restrictions under pandemic resulted in a steep decrease of visitation leading to over 80% loss in 2020. However, this has started to partially recover (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation 2022).

Literature review indicates some issues faced by tourism in CNP There are tourism seasonality like high numbers of visitors during the low season (the dry winter) which puts pressure on infrastructure and wildlife views (Jones et.al 2007) but if we add how human and wildlife conflict in buffer zone communities affected, sometimes biased by tourism behaviors that influence wildlife behavior (Bhattarai & Fischer, 2014) and the ecological impacts of some tourism activities i.e. vehicle based safari may disturb habitat on wildlife-being & causing wildlife stress (Panthi et al., 2021).

Despite these difficulties, CNP is considered a working model of protected area tourism where money conservation and economic benefits for local community's alike flow in large quantities. Revenues from entrance fees account for a large portion of operational budget for the park and provide the influx of income into community development projects in buffer zone (Bhusal 2007).

Tourism jobs and business prospects have replaced forest resources for earning alternative livelihoods implying a reduction in dependence on forest leading to emergence of conservation objectives (Bookbinder et al., 1998; K.C. et al., 2021).

UNESCO World Heritage site has been a key factor in making the branding of CNP into international tourism. The designation has increased the visibility of the park (Acharya and Halpenny 2013), particularly with regard to international visitors interested in nature conservation and biodiversity. This designation also carries implications for the management standards and priority between tourism planning and conservation in and around the park (UNESCO 2023).

2.4.2 Cultural and Religious Tourism in Chitwan

Regionally, centered on the Chitwan National Park much of the tourism traffic also comes from nature-based tourism, while cultural and faith-based trails offer an important second dimension to this package. Chitwan area is rich culturally, there are substantial populations of Tharu (the locally indigenous people), Brahmin, Chhetri, Tamang, Gurung and Newar communities with their own history, festivals, architecture, cultural parameters (K.C. Cultural diversity is therefore the rich bedrock upon which tourism experiences far above wildlife viewing from the region.

A culturally significant component of Chitwan's cultural tourism, the indigenous Tharu people I mean. Being the original settlers of the Terai lowlands, Tharu have a culturally significant tradition with their own adaptation unique to the subtropics — architecture, crafts, agriculture practices and cultural dances (Guneratne, 2001). Müller-Böker, 2000 mentions the incorporation of Tharu culture in the tourism product, especially traditional dances like the stick dance (Danda Nach) and Peacock Dance (Mayur Nach) in places like Sauraha.

Some cultural tourism initiatives include Tharu community managed cultural museums focusing on preserving and exhibiting Tharu heritage; Tharu Village Tours that offer an experience of traditional village life; cultural performances displaying classical music and dance (two traditional musical styles of Nepal viz. other folk music; handicraft production & sales; cuisine focused culinary experiences (Kunwar & Chand, 2016). Such activities are mostly evident in the buffer zone communities near Chitwan National Park and frequently connected with nature-based tourism (Parker & Thapa, 2011).

The religious tourism focus of Chitwan is mainly on Devghat—the confluence of Kali Gandaki and Trishuli rivers, a scenic spot with many religious importance in Hindu tradition called the Valmiki Ashram and Triveni Dham (Joshi, 2018).

Devghat is also a popular destination for pilgrims, mostly during religious festivals like Makar Sankranti on the 14th of January and Maghe Sankranti around half a month's January/ February.

For such events, numerous devotees converge to river temple bathing and perform religious rites (Nepal Tourism Board, 2022).

Among religious places of Chitwan, there are Bikram Baba Temple, Devnagar, Baghmara where one can find Kali temple less shrines and temples across the area. Mainly domestic religious tourists are the consumer pool of these sites, they have made the tourism circuits much more extensive in aim (Bhatt 2019).

Literature describes various impediments for cultural and religious tourism development in Chitwan mentioned above. These are: cultural commodification and authenticity issues related to Tourist Performed Tharu Cultural Performances (Guneratne 2001); poor linkage between nature-based and cultural tourism products offering little visitor interaction with culture except a few cultural shows (Kunwar & Chand 2016); lack of infrastructure and services at pilgrim destinations especially during peak festival periods (Joshi 2018) and also ineffective advertising and promotion of cultural / religious attractions compared to wildlife tourism (K.C.).

Despite these challenges, there is considerable scope to diversify tourism in and around Chitwan and spread the benefits more widely with cultural and religious tourism. Cultural

tourism (K.C. 2021) offers more direct community benefits than nature-based tourism because usually revenues from tourism are higher locally owned and controlled. On the other hand, Bhatt (2019) argues that this could be an opportunity for most non-wildlife tourism developed regions to attract economic benefits from religious tourism — backed by relative infrastructure investments.

There has been growing efforts to enhance Chitwan's cultural and religious elements in tourism. In this regard, promotion of community-based tourism villages focused on authentic cultural experiences; tourism service enhancement through capacity building projects (Nepal Tourism Board 2022; K.C., 2021), identification of intangible cultural heritages and creation of routes of cultural tourism connecting several sites as well with many local populations. These initiatives are indicative of the changing priorities indicating that cultural (and religion...) tourism is considered an important mechanism to make Chitwan tourism more diverse, resilient and inclusive.

2.4.3 Adventure and Eco-Tourism in Chitwan

Chitwan is well known as a destination not only for wildlife watching and cultural experiences but also for adventure tourism and niche eco-tourism activities aimed at different segments of travelers. A wonderful mix of landscapes (rivers, forests and hills) provides adventure activities to be done in natural environments, biodiversity richness supports exclusive nature-based experiences beyond traditional wildlife watching.

Adventure tourism-Chitwan is known for its many river-based activities. A series of rivers — the Rapti, Narayani and Riu rivers run through the area and whitewater rafting, kayaking and canoeing or fishing exist as potential for tourism (Nepal Tourism Board 2022). Those following traditional dugout canoes over the more placid areas of these rivers offer adventures with wildlife viewing opportunity because of waterways with many bird species, crocodiles and sometimes close encounters with rhinos or other mammals on the banks (Kunwar & Chand 2016)

Adventure activities on land; jungle hiking and trekking, mountain biking, jeep safaris on hard terrains. Although these activities are well with wildlife watching but have gained popularity among visitors for having a more in-depth and active alternative to the tradi-

tional vehicle-based safaris. In the buffer zone areas, specialty hikes have also been promoted by guards to take one place from short hikers walks to somewhat arduous (Sharma 2011).

Adventure tourism in Chitwan has been enabled through the provision of conducive infrastructure facilities such as safety equipment training of guides and operators' response mechanism for emergencies, activity-specific facilities. As observed by Pandey (2016), these services were put in place largely through the private sector investment, a number of specialized adventure tourism operators are now located in Sauraha and Meghauli. Operators usually market packages targeting as wide an audience as possible; combining adventure experiences with wildlife viewing and many of a visitor interest.

In Chitwan, nature tourism includes bird watching, butterfly watching, herbal and medicinal plants tracking tours as well as wildlife photography expeditions. The park is amongst the avian biodiversity hotspots of South Asia with over 540 species recorded to have occurred in it (Baral & Inskipp, 2009). Special bird-watching tours with dedicated guides aim at both serious ornithologists and casual enthusiasts are set up, where they concentrate along the riversides, in grasslands and forest edges where avian diversity and behavior are high.

Bhusal & Khanal, 2018 Said: the presence of bird watching tourism has lengthened the season of visitors from their traditional peak months, since some migratory species may be best watched during monsoon or shoulder seasons.

The rise of digital photography technology has been the impetus for large scale photography-focused eco-tourism. Gurung et al. (2019) provide evidence of the development of customized wildlife photography tours that offer exclusive vehicles, professional assistance and a second visit to popular bird sites.

High value tours are usually amongst the higher price ranges but hopefully through slightly reduced environmental impacts (smaller groups, and increased visitor awareness of appropriate wildlife viewing behavior).

There are many other factors which have come into play modern adventure and specialized eco-tourism in Chitwan. The position of adventure tourism as a destination in Nepal

has been positioned more broadly to create market awareness and demand beyond trekking routes (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2020). A better transport network, especially the improvement of links from Chitwan to Kathmandu and Pokhara have made the place accessible for the domestic as well international adventure seekers (Bhattarai et al., 2019). Similarly, policy initiatives such as tourism diversification and a push to increase visitor stay have spurring operators to come out with new programs (Nepal Tourism Board 2022)

Adventure and specific eco-tourism in Chitwan have grown, but the region as it faces challenges etc. Seasonal constraints limiting water-based activities due to high watermarks and strong currents during monsoon periods are as per Pandey (2016) safety standards and risk management practices are under threat raising concerns for uneven policy enforcement especially in more rural areas (Prasain 2020).

Paudel (2019) concerns expanding adventure activities from an ecological perspective, especially of the sensitive habitat and wildlife behavior in buffer zone where regulatory enablement may be weaker is something to think of.

Such tourism segments that are more specialized have significant consequences for sustainable tourism developments in Chitwan. Karma and Dorji (2021) state that specially designed eco-tourism activities usually yield higher price per visitor and employment to local educated youths having specialization in tourism-related amenities. Adventure and eco-tourism (Sharma & Bhujju (2021), can provide a mechanism to extend tourism benefits to buffer-zone communities to create economic conservation incentives in areas beyond core protected areas.

2.4.4 Tourism Infrastructure and Services

Patterns of tourism development and sustainability outcomes have been affected by the emergence of Chitwan as part in national park, to the later construction of infrastructure and services in the development of tourism facilities since its creation. Accommodation facilities are the most visible of this infrastructure, from international three-star hotels to locally operated homestays.

Chitwan district, 2022 reports around 120 registered accommodation establishments in addition to more than 5000 beds (est.) located across the sub-districts of Chitwan, Dharan, Nawalparta, Dumela grd.

The facilities are located primarily in Sauraha, there are secondary clusters in Megghauli and Patihani, and the buffer zone communities make buffer zone share of this. This sector has big differences in terms of its scale, standards and ownership profile. Dhakal (2020) categories Chitwan accommodation into four classes: international chain hotels (in Megghauli), regular chain hotels/resorts in Sauraha; Budget guesthouses & hostels in buffer zone villages under community-management.

The spatial organization of accommodation is both the direct result of development history and strategic location to park access points. Sauraha is the main tourism hub in Chitwan as documented by Müller-Böker (2000) that has grown organically due to its location at the Eastern gate and considerable accessibility from the jungle highway. In a more recent development, Megghauli is becoming second tourism destination right behind Pokhara up country from western part of temple city with luxury accommodations catering to premium tourism markets (Kunwar & Chand, 2016) The development of community based tourism in buffer zone villages has also expanded choice of places to sleep beyond these main centers, however the capacity that saturates is still low in these peripheral areas (K.C. et al., 2021).

Chitwan, Nepal transportation infrastructure supports the tourism. There have been great improvements in road connectivity over the past decades with the East-West Highway serving as main artery, and a number of highways and maintained roads connecting tourist hotspots park destinations with each other from (Department of Roads, 2021). Bhattarai et al. Road infrastructure has reduced travel time to Kathmandu (2019) journalists writing under a heading of "From Kathmandu to X" claimed that it usually takes about 5- to 6-hours treks allowing trekking and self-drive international tourists to redress. An alternative air access point might be Gautam Buddha International Airport (approx. 110 km west from Chitwan) that was completed in Bhairahawa in 2022, and believed to alter the structure of visitor movement compared to Kathmandu (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, 2022)

Major transport within the Chitwan region offered by public buses with connectivity among large settlements; hire of private taxis and rentals; tourism specific services like safari vehicles (legally registered or unlicensed), bicycle rentals, tourists' transportation etc. ridden tale since the latter has slipped greatly due to welfare concerns. Thapa (2018) says the transportation services remain abysmal for far-off seekers to penetrate beyond thriving Tourist Zone, public transport not always available in limited public and erratic nature of private offerings towards peripheral areas.

Public infrastructure associated with tourism is at different levels of investment. Bhattarai et al. Basic utilities (e.g., electricity, water supply and communication) had greatly improved in main tourism spots, according to (2019) who observed that as a service quality enhancement and business operations at least demands.

However, Dhakal (2020) mentions issues such as variable waste management systems, absence of sewage treatment facilities at many places and lack of public amenities like rest areas, signage and information stands in secondary tourism locations.

Supporting services, restaurants, retail facilities, guide services and activity providers are supporting services & these have been developed non-uniformly across the region. And Sauraha has the best service ecosystem (restaurant, shop, booking office, information) with many are restaurants and sell tickets and tourist articles (Kunwar & Chand, 2016). Guides are very critical for Adventure Tourism in Chitwan as everybody has to be accompanied by licensed guide for all the activity inside the national park (i.e., no traverse without the presence of a guide for one unauthorized person or is illegal). Among the 500 registered nature guides available throughout the Chitwan area (2022) according to the Regional Hotel Association Chitwan, some guides are specializing whereas others are not; some are language-literate, and some others are not.

Several problems and issues in regard to tourism infrastructure, service concerns have been identified from existing literature Borgers 2005; This list also includes seasonal effects that lead to infrastructure being largely unutilized during off-seasons (Jones 2007) and environmental effects on tourism infrastructure, particularly in vulnerable areas adjacent to park borders (Patnaik et al., 2021) as well as quality standardization problems among service providers (Dhakal, 2020). Peak periods are overshadowed by infrastructure

carrying capacity according to Timilsina and Neupane (2020) and what they mean is that the visitor experience and ecological systems fail in high-load area due to congestion.

Infrastructure governance is intricate and involves various actors with various interests sometimes at cross purposes. Although the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Department has a jurisdiction over infrastructure inside the park itself, after federal governance in Nepal (2008), local governments were supposed to take over infrastructure planning and development beyond parks surroundings Sharma (2019). Through advocacy, private investment and planning processes community groups also affect infrastructure development Tourism entrepreneurs' associations, conservationists etc. The governance landscape in this theme Sharma (2019) also describe as " fragmented and often reactive, (not strategic) driven by tourism, is influenced by tourism entrepreneurs' associations. represented by protected area base stakeholders.

2.4.5 Tourism Impacts in Chitwan

Chitwan: Because of the various economic-environmental-social implications related to tourism development in Chitwan, there are unseen repercussions at the level of sustainable development of the broader region. This is important as identifying the impacts would help the control and management of tourism for greater benefits with minimum loss.

There has been an increased focus on economic impacts in literature. Numerous studies highlight that Chitwan tourism contributes largely to employment (Department of Tourism, 2022), and it is recorded that tourism provides employment to 15 – 20% directly and indirectly, implying an increase in the district's employment ratio (Figure. 11 K.C. et al. Tourism generates a variety of employment patterns, and employment in hotels and tour operations remains well-paying work opportunities for skilled workers that occupy high levels of skilled labor who trace from construction, transportation and agribusiness-based supply chains (2021).

They observe that tourism has been especially significant for women and marginalized groups whose other prospects might be scarce.

In Chitwan park the tourism revenue flows are at park entrance fees, in-park accommodation and service expenditure and souvenir money. For example, Bhusal (2007) records

the national park's payment-oriented revenue sharing mechanism whereby 30-50% of entrance fees to the buffer zone communities for development in the area which has resulted fund mobilization for community projects such as infrastructural development and solarization phasing out kerosene driven light system investments in alternate energy projects or educational pursuits.

A further estimate by Sharma (& ndash;2011) indicates that in non-pandemic times these funds had been making a contribution of approximately NPR 250–300 million (~ USD 2.0 – 2.5 million) annually to community development.

As such, much of the extant literature surrounding these beneficial contributions is marred by problems related to economic leakage and distribution of benefits. Pandey (2016) calculate that 40–45 % of tourism expenditure in Chitwan slips into the recognized economy as imports (and spends outside the locality) or for external ownership or lack of local staffing in higher levels management. K.C. (2021) emphasizes spatial disequilibrium of benefits, where larger communities surrounding major tourism centers take an overwhelming share of the benefits in relation to distant buffer zone settlements.

Dhakal (2020) calls for economic dependency, tourism dependent communities exposed to the risks brought about by natural disasters owing to their dependency on this single tourist-based source such as political instability for example globalization and it influence on travel pattern surrogates, were severely challenged by COVID-19.

Complexity of environmental impacts of tourism to Chitwan Dhaknal et al Environmental impacts in Chitwan are of complex nature. While some scientists see facets of tourism that are outright good, many researchers hold that tourism has increased conservation incentives and outcomes. Bookbinder et al., (1998) describes how economic benefits derived from tourism have buffer zone and community residents escaped from forest resources dependency could therefore relieve stress on park ecosystem. Nepal and Weber (1995) suggest that the perceived value of tangible benefits arising from tourism lead to increased public support for conservation policies, as tourism has tied conservation actions to concrete economic returns derived from protected area maintenance.

Increased tourism revenues were cited as a reason for the remarkable recovery of greater one-horned rhinoceros' populations, which rose from around 100 individuals in the 1970s into ~752 by 2021 (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation 2021)

There are also demonstrable negative environmental impacts. Panthi et al. Tourism activities are a matter of concern as highlighted by (2021) habitat disturbance from vehicular movement; change in wildlife behavior due to viewing pressure of tourists; vegetation impact due to elephant grazing raising those infrastructure development; waterlogging because of indiscriminate disposal of sewage and in localized air-quality from transport emissions. These are evident in key tourism hotspots and especially hiking along popular wildlife trails. Bhatta (2019) lists several constraints in tourism destinations that he identifies as unsustainable patterns of consumption plaguing these places: water demand, energy requisites and solid waste disposal.

Socio-Cultural impacts Tourism as a phenomenon on local community and culture. Socio-economic impacts is tourism determines Local communities' interaction with tourism are renowned to have positive repercussions on cultures also facilitated interest of tourists leading to regeneration by tourism.

Literature identifies positive impacts: Cultural interest of people due to tourism interest in their traditions, customs. Kunwar and Chand (2016) observe that tourism demand facilitates the maintenance of traditionally practiced Tharu cultural dances and music, which are under pressure to change with modernization.

They also mention the aspect that tourism is also a source of creating market demand, for the traditional crafts and architectural styles so may help in the continuation of this as well.

Benefits of education and awareness are shared by both the locals as well as host communities. Parker and Thapa (2011) observe that resident communities participating in tourism tend to have a greater public awareness of conservation related issues and value for nature manifestations.

They say that these results stem from being within environmentally friendly tourist experiences, and participation in the activities of conservation-oriented tourism.

But there are sociocultural challenges too. Müller-Böker (2000) describes a process of cultural commodification, as cultural practices are adapted to fulfill tourist expectations and time restrictions, which risks transforming authenticity and cultural value. K.C., (<https://etonreview.org/2021/05/tourism-cultural-representation-indigenous-tharu-featured/>) expresses a worry about representing the culture how it is touristed. Unequal access to tourism opportunities can further contribute to socioeconomic disparities among communities, influenced factors such as land ownership, education status (access to information) innate capital and social connections that will help individuals benefiting the tourism (Sharma 2011).

Tourism impacts governance challenges involve poorly structured interactions among conservation authorities, tourism entrepreneurs and local communities in terms of coordination; result oriented management (management for action) constrained by insufficient monitoring systems and policy implementation gaps between official regulations and actual practices (Sharma 2019). These challenges are further exacerbated by the diverse and often competing tourism goals that are all intended to be accomplished together (conservation funding, economic development; cultural preservation; visitor satisfaction).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Importance to the review in the above literature review, some important themes and concepts about sustainable tourism development in buffer zone communities of a protected area namely Chitwan National Park

Incorporating these insights, the latter chapter builds upon a conceptual model that frames the empirical study in what follows.

This framework will integrate key theoretical perspectives such as sustainable livelihoods, institutional analysis and tourism value chains. The sustainable livelihoods alternative describes the ways in which tourism impact on the community's assets and capabilities (Scoones 1998). Tourist development and benefits distribution are the formal and informal rules that focus attention on institutions (Ostrom 2011). The value chain lens identifies links between tourism economy sub-systems and the wider economic system, laying

claims to practice-based pathways for local engagement and/or benefit derivation (Mitchell & Ashley 2010). Structure of conceptual framework: Five central components that structure sustainable tourism outcomes in buffer zone communities of Chitwan.

1. **Community Assets and Capabilities:** Based on the sustainable livelihoods' framework, this part studies how various forms of capital: natural, physical, financial, human & social capital affect the community's engagement into and leverage from tourism. Wildlife, forests and landscapes that tourists seek; infrastructure and facilities Physical capital; financial capital is access to finance resources; skills / health / knowledge and networks and relationship that make collective action easier (Human, social capital; Scoones 1998). This part understands that communities have different assets they are operating from in relation to these assets and with may influence tourism development paths.
2. **Institutional Arrangements:** This component addresses the legal, institutional and normative aspects pertaining to tourism development outcomes and benefit distribution that are formal as well as informal. Key Formal institutions: Legal provisions, rule of protected areas and formal organizational such as BZMCs, TMCS Informal institutions – cultural norms or customs that guide decision making and resource allocation (Ostrom, 2011) The framework recognizes the operation of institutions at different levels-national policy to community level that are bound together via complex interactions between these levels.
3. **Tourism Value Chains:** This element investigates the expenditure fates of tourism in the local economy, linkages, leakages and potential enhancement on local benefit capture. This looks at both direct (e.g. accommodation, guiding, foodservices) and indirect chains (e.g., agricultural inputs or outputs, handicrafts/constructions/...) within the value chain, It is acknowledged that the position within the value chain affects economic benefit distribution with upstream position (e.g., planning and organizing)and downstream (direct service provision) activities capturing a larger share than middle-chain activities or intermediation services (Mitchell & Ashley 2010).
4. **External Influences:** This section acknowledges tourism development in the buffer zones of Chitwan is influenced by forces that transcend local level that

range from national tourism policy, global trends in travel, macroeconomic variables – climate change; international migration priorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the kind of external shocks that can systematically disfigure tourism systems and hence institutions and communities demand adaptive responses (Sharma 2019).

5. **Sustainability Outcomes** The last facet focuses on multi-dimensional tourism development outcomes in economic, environmental, social and governance terms. Economic outcomes are income, employment and development of enterprises. Environmental outcomes are biodiversity conservation, habitat preservation and management of natural resource social outcomes: cultural heritage, community social cohesion, equity Governance outcomes has something to do with participation, transparency and effectiveness (Torres-Delgado & Saarinen 2014).

This framework conceptualizes these elements as mutually conferred and embodied, in contrast to single axis representations. Community assets and capabilities have important simultaneous influences on both institutional arrangements to no little utilities. While tourism value chains have institutional contexts, community assets are at once affected by investment and revenue flows. External influences apply to all components and are at the same time modified by local conditions and outcomes. Assets, institutions and value chains in a sustainable system are dynamically transformed as sustainability outcomes return to the system through adapting processes.

The integrated framework mentioned above is used for the analysis of complex relationship between tourism development processes and sustainability outcomes within Chitwan's buffer zone communities. It recognizes the multi-scalar dimension of tourism systems, the role of both structure and agency and the complexities in understanding what condition's "objective" are versus "subjective" towards sustainability. The study also seeks to unpack these mutually reinforcing components with the potential for implications on policy, practice and theory, in relation to sustainable tourism development in this context.

2.6 Literature Gaps and Research Contributions

The identified literature review shows there are certain chinks in the armor of current knowledge concerning sustainable tourism in buffer zone communities of protected areas and concentrating specifically on Chitwan National Park.

Here, in this section the gaps are identified and how the present study attempts to fill them.

1st, Community-based tourism and protected area tourism though deeply researched in isolation, but little has been explored by other studies on the specificities of the tourism dynamics in buffer zone communities. Sharma (2011) noted that buffer zones are sites in which conservation policies, tourism opportunities and community objectives discriminate interacting. The research is novel in its examination of the interface areas, looking at how sectoral characteristics affect tourism development processes and outputs from these locations.

Secondly, previous studies can be said to primarily focus on tourist effectiveness mechanisms or community resources in determining tourism outcomes but rarely how these interact. This research can be said to close the gap by taking an integrated view that considers operational conditions (institutions, policies, markets) and community abilities (assets, capabilities, strategies) as integrated mechanisms which structure tourism development (Ostrom 2011; Scoones 1998).

Literature on tourism in Chitwan is largely predated the important change in Nepal governance structure, specifically federalism that has divided national, provincial and local government powers (Sharma 2019). This study fills a knowledge gap by focusing on the impacts of these governance changes on tourism planning, management and benefit distribution in buffer zone communities.

Finally, while increasingly acknowledged to be prone to external shocks, the literature on zonation buffer communities in terms of their responses to such unprecedented disruption from the covid-19 pandemic has been limited.

Sharma (2019) explains this gap and proposes the study about the norms, adaptive strategies and legibility as part least but no less important constitutive components to learn about tourism system resilience within protected area communities using pandemic context.

Fifthly as a number of studies are done on economic and environmental implications of tourism in Chitwan, we found very few such studies on social dimensions especially concerning equity, inclusiveness and cultural authenticity Sustainability (IEER report).

This research fills the gap by applying a holistic sustainability assessment method that recognizes social and cultural elements in addition to economic and environmental aspects (Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014).

Second, much tourism research in places with legal protected status (the vast majority being a national park etc.) focusses on conservations issues such as ecological results or benefits to developments (e.g. This paper contributes, for example, by analyzing in a systematic way the tensions and co-benefits between development and conservation objectives in tourism within a buffer zone setting (Bramwell& Lane, 2011).

Filling the gaps of these research paradigm, this study tries to establish theoretical edge on sustainable tourism development in buffer zone context, while offering pragmatic readings for all stakeholders (tourism entrepreneurs, policy makers) as well as communities across Chitwan and similar protected area destinations for achieving improved sustainability outcomes.

3 METHODOLOGY

Through mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative data) the current study attempts to explore tourism in Chitwan City. The data as primary were collected from surveys and interviews with the local people involved in tourism, tourists, tourism profession publics. Government reports, Nepal Tourism Board books, and existing research studies were the secondary data. The statistical tools and a thematic analysis of the data enabled us to identify main points in Chitwan tourism sector, trends as well opportunities & challenges etc.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

Research is from a critical realist philosophical standpoint which understands that there exists an objective reality and all human understanding about that reality is always conceptual and socially constructed (Bhaskar 1978). This may be the opposite of studying sustainable tourism development, an area that integrates objective conditions (ecosystem, economic exchanging and institutional designs etc.) and subjective elements like human perceptions, values, interpretations resulting to interactions among these conditions (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Critical realist stratified ontology distinguishes between empirical events, actual events and the underlying causal mechanisms that give rise to what we see and experience in observable tourism practices that produce outcomes (Fletcher 2017); more fundamentally these insights are used to move beyond descriptive statements on tourism development as a causal process.

Qualitative research is the main research focus of this study, which represents the characteristic that social sciences investigate complex social processes, context-dependent dynamics and the meaning of tourism development for stakeholders (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Data collection and analysis: This is complemented with multiple quantitative elements, especially when examining trends in tourism, economic impacts and different parts of sustainability evaluations, indicating how a mixed-methods approach harnesses the advantages of more methodological traditions.

This research design is abductive logic that uses elements of deductive (testing theoretical propositions out of literature) as well inductive aspects (identifying new theoretical implications from empirical data) (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). It permits a systematic inquiry into existing theoretical frameworks and flexibility to surfacing novel findings, as well provides initial avenues for unexpected alternative explanations which are important given the complexity and dynamism of sustainable tourism development.

3.2 Research Design

Research Design: A comparative case study design is used in this research to explore three buffer zone communities of Chitwan with unique attributes, and varied trajectories of tourism development. It is particularly suitable for the research as it is aimed to explore contemporary phenomena in real-life settings (Yin, 2018), since the boundary between phenomenon and context are vague. Drawing from better practices through the comparative approach to establish both recurrent patterns and context-dependent factors behind sustainable tourism outcomes.

The three selected case study communities are:

1. **Baghmara Community Forest User Group Area:** Situated beside Sauraha (Major Tourism Hub of Chitwan) the main village with years old experience in tourism based upon Community managed Forest resources-oriented efforts. It is a fairly developed tourism destination with institutions and driven visitors' numbers in place.
2. **Amaltari Buffer Zone User Committee Area:** This is a recent development for the community located in Western part of Chitwan National Park near Megghauli, tourism offering higher end experiences but with major private sector participation. It is a different market to Baghmara — an emerging destination.
3. **Mrigakunja Buffer Zone User Committee Area:** This community is situated in the eastern buffer zone, with restricted tourism development channeled to isolated villages but, ownership and overall management mostly in local hands. Think of it as a peripheral destination with its own issues and benefits.

The combination of cases selected accounts for variation in tourism development stage of destination, market orientation, arrangements for the provision of services and their

location within buffer zone that makes it possible to examine how these factors contribute to sustainability outcomes. The cases are bounded spatially geographically in the administrative boundary of user group/committee areas and temporally with an emphasis on decade-long developments, especially since the governance restructuring of Nepal and consequent onset of COVID-19.

Methodologically, the research design combined several units of analysis from community and household to enterprise-level tourism development processes as well as their outcomes. Using this nested design enables an exploration of the scale at which sustainability is realized and allows interactions between scales to shape the performance of the system as a whole (Yin, 2018) It also features longitudinal aspects, such as long-term tourism stream analysis and developments of state and its response to shocks from the wider world.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The research employs multiple data collection methods to address its objectives and ensure triangulation of findings. These methods include:

A combination of purposive sampling and stratified random sampling was used.

- **Tourists:** The total of 70 tourists (domestic and international) were selected by stratified random sampling of age, nationalities and types of tour. Surveys done at tourist ingress ports and accommodations
- **Stakeholders and Experts:** Purposeful sampling of 15 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders/persons having expertise or directly involved in tourism dealing with Chitwan.
- **Community Members:** 6–8 local residents focus group discussions were conducted, one with each group representation by demographics, occupations and tourism-involving communities.

Data collection takes place during two different fieldwork periods — first one for immersion and relationship building, data gathering in the initial phase and then the main data collection using all the methods in second one.

The following tools were used to gather data:

- **Questionnaire Form:** Simple and Precise: it was pre-tested to a small group of tourists, then refined for final administration.
- **Interview Guide:** A checklist of open-ended questions to ensure that the interviews are all fairly and offer flexibility for spontaneous answers.
- **Observation Checklist:** Used to document observations related to service quality, cleanliness, accessibility, and tourist engagement.
- **Recording Devices:** Where consent was provided, interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

As the diverse data are analyzed, both qualitative and quantitative will be employed through a mixed-methods analytical framework for the study. The analysis process will run through several inter-connected stages, which include.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data were compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, averages, and frequency distributions were used to interpret trends in tourist behavior and satisfaction.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Interview transcripts and FGD notes were coded thematically. Emerging themes related to challenges, opportunities, stakeholder perceptions, and policy issues were grouped and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions.

A triangulation method was applied to compare insights across different data sources, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to ethical principles and practices that respect the rights, interests, and well-being of research participants and communities. Key ethical considerations include:

1. **Informed consent:** We will ensure that all participants have a transparent idea of research aim, methods, potential benefits and harms and data use. Consent for interviews, focus groups and surveys shall be written with particular emphasis

placed on interpretation among less literate participants. For instance, verbal consent mechanisms will be employed when applicable and were doing so appears respectful in specific settings.

2. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Anonymization of data in analysis and reporting will protect the participants identities. Direct quotations will only be attributed to stakeholder group representations rather than individual sources unless the names have been specifically authorized for identification. Information will be kept safe and only the research team will have access to the data.
3. **Avoiding harm:** In an effort to reduce any potential adverse effects on subjects/participants and in the general community, the research is. To prevent causing distress or escalate community conflict: Questions will be asked with tact Research will be done to allow research activities do not interfere with daily productive life of participants.
4. **Benefit sharing:** It is intended to raise value for participants through knowledge sharing, capacity building and policy recommendations. Communities will also be provided accessible summaries of the findings, and spaces for co-creating actions informed by research will be further explored.
5. **Cultural sensitivity:** Research methods and processes will honor local cultural norms, traditions and protocols. Local research assistance will be used assist in culturally appropriate communication and interpretation.
6. **Institutional ethics approval:** The research will be approved by the ethics committee of the University and will ensure institutional ethical guidelines are followed during the study.
7. **Research permissions:** Informed permissions from concerned authorities like the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Buffer Zone Management Committees, and local government authorities have been sought.

These ethical considerations will be ongoing throughout the research process, revisited and modified as required to maintain ethical conduct in response to changing circumstances and issues.

3.6 Limitations and Challenges

Several limitations and challenges are anticipated in the research process:

1. **Accessing diverse perspectives:** Although the research design seeks to include a variety of stakeholder views, power relations and social hierarchies are not conducive to inclusive representation of marginalized groups. Strategies such as conducting separate focus groups with women, time the activities so that this can be adapted by livelihoods patterns, and using local facilitators will be used to address this issue.
2. **Language barriers:** The researcher has very basic knowledge of Nepali language and may find it difficult to communicate in depth. Our trained research assistants will offer interpretation and focus on semantic and conceptual equivalence rather than a literal translation.
3. **COVID-19 constraints:** Field logistics and participant availability may be influenced by the continuing pandemic. Flexibility in scheduling and adherence to health protocols as well as contingency measures for data collection (e.g., remote interviews) if needed.
4. **Recall bias:** Recalling past events and conditions can be the basis for some data collection, which may be tainted by memory constraints and retrospective interpretation. Triangulation among multiple sources and methods can help alleviate this limitation, but it also must be acknowledged that perceptions of how things were, is data too.
5. **Seasonal variation:** Clear seasonality of tourism in Chitwan (different agro based activities, impacts and stakeholder experiences vary across seasons) As good as the research design is, with fieldwork carried out throughout the seasons still cannot provide widespread annual cycles. These limitations will be pointed out in data interpretation and findings.
6. **Attribution challenges:** Investigating the complex, multi-causal tourism development processes make it difficult to establish clear causal relationships between particular factors and sustainability outcomes. It attempts to solve the challenge in this paper by tracing processes and comparing findings, while remaining cognizant of the weaknesses of causal claims when applied to social systems.

7. **Researcher positionality:** The background, experiences and perspectives of the researcher will no doubt impact on how research is carried out. While reflexive practice (using a researcher journal, deliberate recognition of potential biases and humility when interpreting results) can help frame, it cannot eliminate this influence.
8. **Generalizability limits:** Since this is a case-study based investigation results should not be directly generalized to other contexts. This limitation is addressed by their research; they concentrate on the analytical rather than statistical generalization, yielding theory relevant to the subjects being studied without becoming uncritically entrenched in a particular case-specific context.

These limitations will be explicitly acknowledged in reporting research findings, with discussion of their implications for interpretation and application of the research.

4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section contains a major part of data analyzed on tourism in Chitwan City. Immediately the analysis shows that it has a lot to do with the local economy by providing jobs and business due to tourism. The main purpose of visitors are Chitwan National Park and cultural experience. However, issues like weak infrastructure, environmental issues and seasonality all hamstring tourism growth. Opportunities for improving sustainability and tourism marketing were also extracted to improve the potential for tourism in this region.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines primary/secondary data analysis from surveys, interviews, focus group discourses and fieldworks as well as key findings. Data analysis used a mixed approach (the integration of statistical data, surveys and qualitative interpretation of the text). This chapter intends to make sense of these findings in tourism development in Chitwan City framework – tourist behavior, satisfaction, local stakeholder viewpoints infrastructure considerations and future opportunities.

The author has illustrated the finding of research done via survey and analyzed the data. Author has shown the complete analysis of a survey among 70 participants. 80 sample were distributed among the domestic and international tourists in Chitwan valley where only 70 responded. The responses got from the visitors are shown via pie chart in the first part and in the second part author has discussed the possibility of growth of tourism industry in Chitwan city which author has analyzed during her research.

4.2 Tourist Profile and Behavior

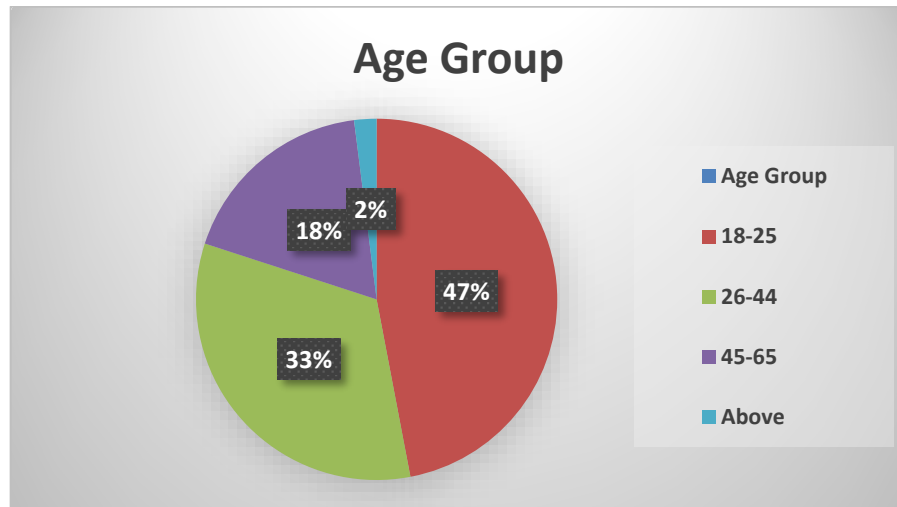


Figure 1: Age group

Analysis of the demographic characteristics of Chitwan tourists by survey indicates a wide range of tourist groups. International tourists (60%, of the 63 respondents mainly Indian, European and East Asia) vs. Domestic (40%) 55% male/ female ratio During the participants ages, the tourists' group in general have an average age of 26-44 years (43% sample) and the younger tourists aged 18 – 25 immediately follow. That might mean that travelers aged 18–25 are chomping at the bit for now, likely hooked into activities with a nature component and/or adventure

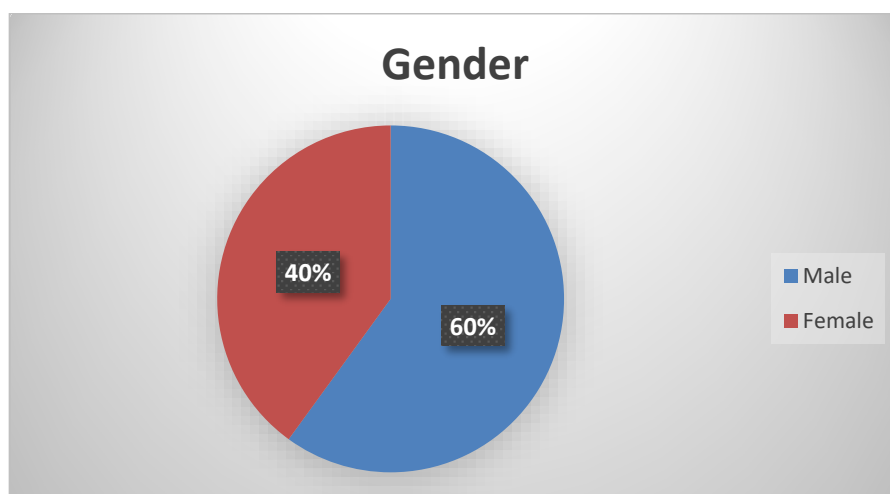


Figure 2: Gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage of male and female that have participated in the survey. In the questionnaire, there were two options to choose from, i.e., 'Male' and 'Female'. The proportion of male respondents was higher than the female. In the above figure, it can be observed that 60% are male and 40% are female.

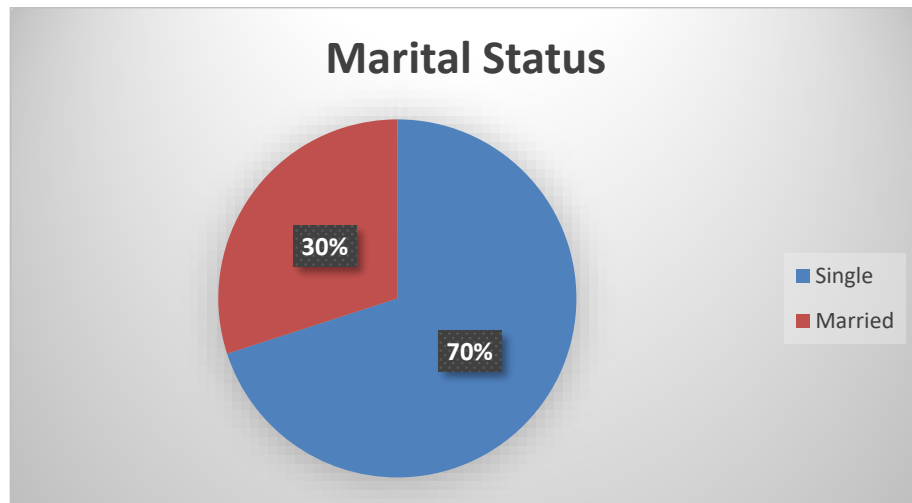


Figure 3: Marital Status

Figure 3 describes the third primary question of the survey where participants were asked to choose the status of being married or single. The respondents were provided the options of 'Married', 'Single'. The above figure shows that the majority of respondents were married, i.e., 70% and single were 30%.

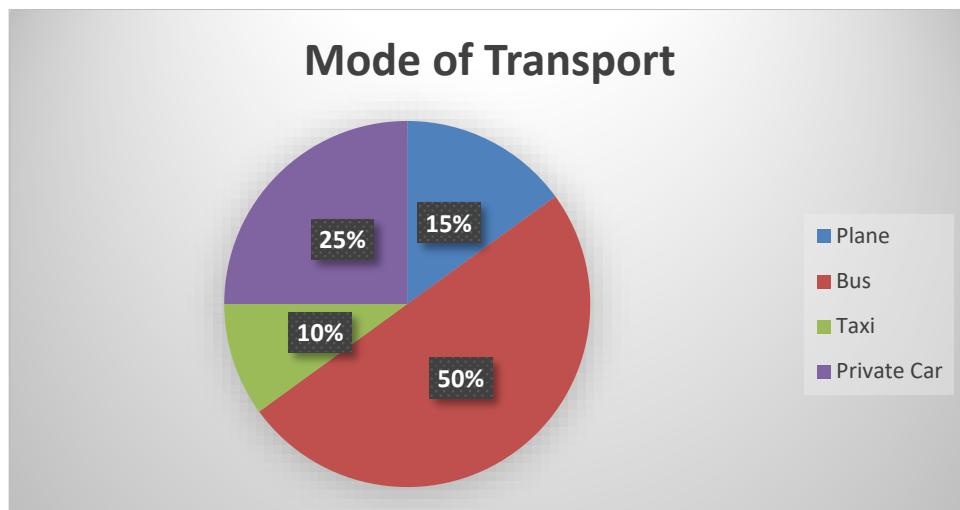


FIGURE 4: Modes of Transport

Another question for participants was which mode of transport they prefer to travel? Where they have given four options 'Air', 'Bus', 'Private vehicle', and 'taxi' to choose. The given figure 4 depicts that 50% of participants' preference for mode of travel was bus whereas 10% chose air transport, 25% preferred private vehicle and the remaining 10% participants preferred taxi as a mode of transport to travel.

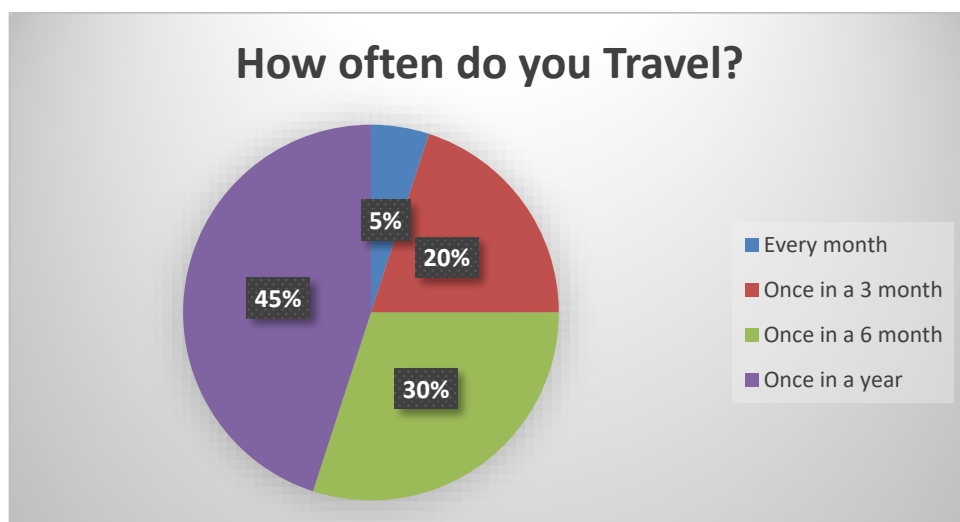


Figure 5: How often do you travel

The fifth question of the questionnaire was how often you visit Chitwan where 60% of participants have chosen the option depends upon the situation which shows that they frequently travel as their purpose of visit. Alike, people visiting once a year and once in six months are 45% and 30% respectively. This survey result shows 20% of tourist often visit once in a three month and 5% of them visit often every month.

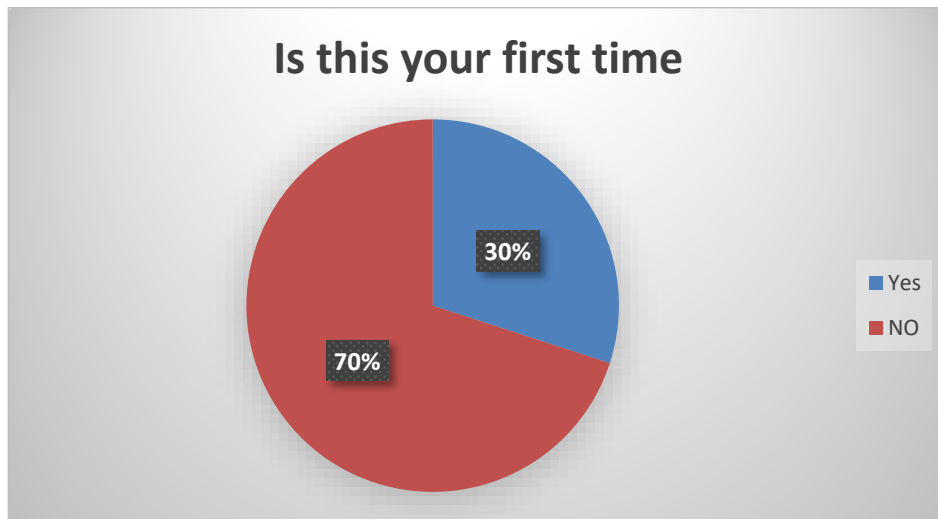


FIGURE 6: Is this your first trip to Chitwan?

This figure 6 explains the answer to the question that this is the respondents' first visit to Chitwan. Two options were given where participants had to choose either 'Yes' or 'No'. 70% of the participants chose 'No' and 30% chose 'Yes'.

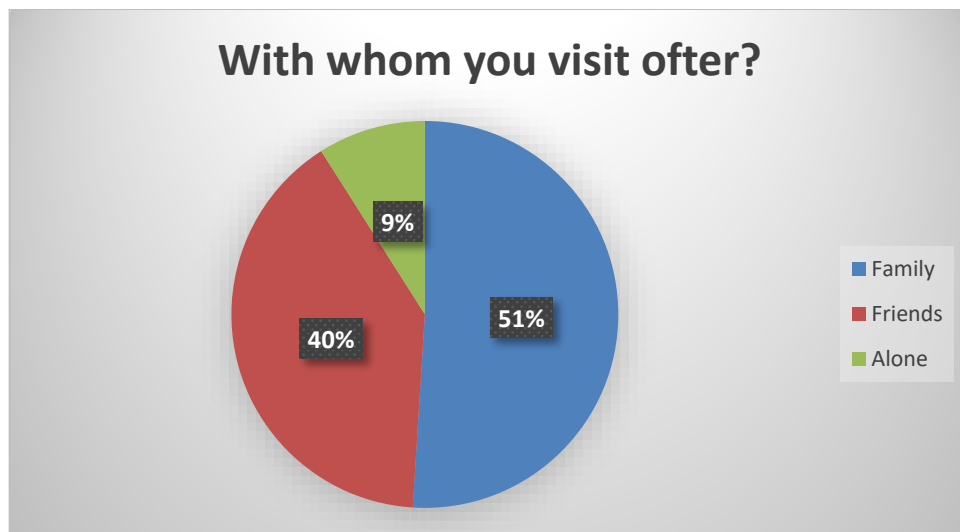


Figure 7: with whom you visit often?

Survey question number seven is all about the companionship. People usually go with family or friends or colleagues and sometimes alone to travel to different places with a different purpose. The question was with whom you visit often where four options were given as 'Family', 'Friends' and alone, where 51% participants responded 'Family', and 40% chose 'Friends'. Likewise, for the option 'Alone', the results stood at 9%.

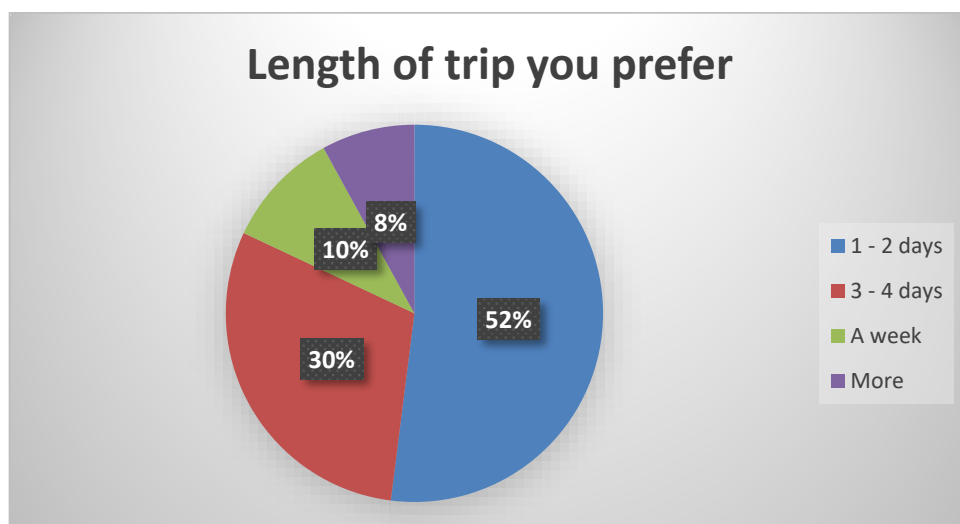


Figure 8: Length of trip you prefer

Figure eight illustrate the answers to question number nine i.e. 'what is the length of trip you prefer?' The options were given as 1-2 days, 3-4 days, a week, and more than a week. According to the figures above, 30% of participants prefer the trip length of 3-4, 52% prefer 1-2 days, 10% prefer a week, and more than a week is preferred by 8 %.

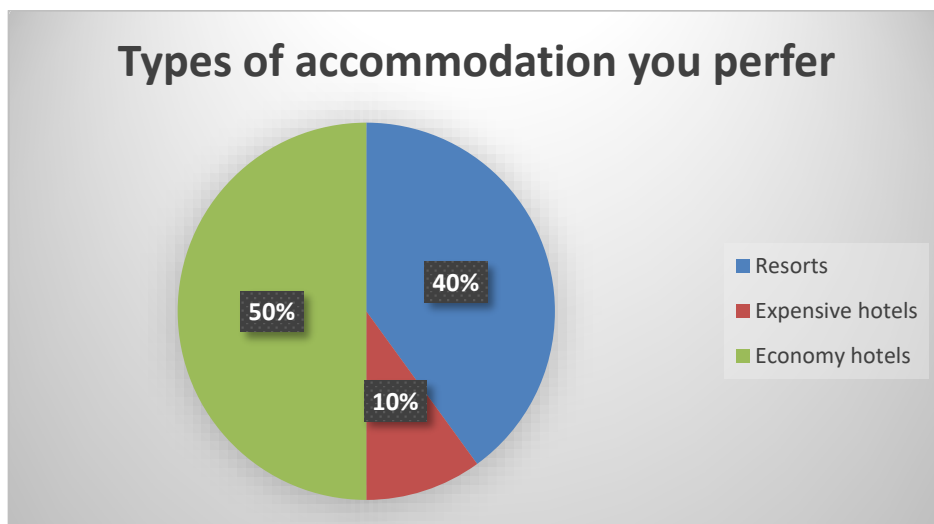


Figure 9: Types of accommodation you prefer

The above figure is the analysis of question number nine of the distributed questionnaire. 'What types of accommodation you prefer during your travel to Chitwan?' was asked to the participants where three options were given to choose from. The options for accommodation were 'Resorts', 'Expensive Hotels', and 'Economic Hotel' where the percentage of participants choosing an economic hotel was the highest. 50% of respondents chose the economic hotels while the percentage of respondents choosing resorts and expensive hotels were 40% and 10% respectively.

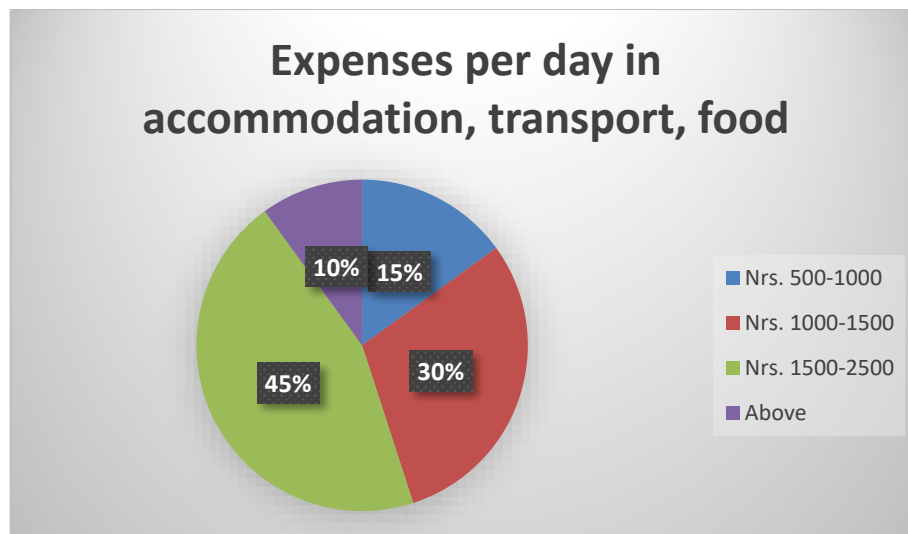


Figure 10: Expense per day in accommodation, transportation, and food

In tenth questions, participants responded about how much they spend per day on accommodation, transportation, and food. Prices were given in Nepalese currency because it would be easier to calculate for domestic travelers and the author's commissioner's travel agency and few hotels from Chitwan were helping the international travelers to fill the questionnaires. The options were given as NRS 500-1000, NRS 1001- 1500, NRS1501-2500, NRS 2501-5000, and above NRS 5000. The percentage of people who spend NRS 1001-1500 and above NRS 5000 per day is the same. Likewise, 10 % chose NRS 2501-5000, 45% chose NRS1501-2500, and 15% chose NRS 500-1000 as their daily spending on accommodation, transportation, and food. This figure shows the spending habits and capacity of people in the tourism sector.

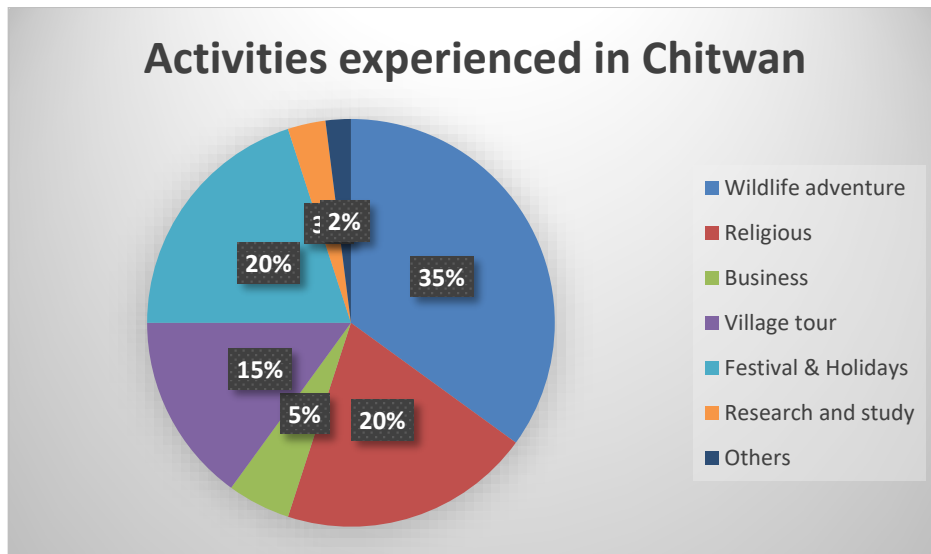


Figure 11: Activities experienced in Chitwan

In question number eleventh participants were asked to choose at least 6 activities that they have experienced in Chitwan where 14 (Fourteen) options were given to choose. Chitwan is a place where visitors can experience multiple tourism activities. People can experience more than fourteen tourism activities in Chitwan but here only popular activities have been mentioned. According to figure 11, most of the people were interested in the wildlife adventure and religious in Chitwan. 15% of participants had experienced a village tour and another 20% was involved in festival and holidays. Similarly, other experienced activities were Business 5% and research and study 23%. This survey result shows that people are still not so much known about adventure activities. Adventure activities should be promoted too. Government and other organizations should have focused on promoting adventure tourism by creating a safe environment and technically well developed.



Figure 12: The same purpose of visiting Chitwan

In this question number twelfth, the question would you like to visit Chitwan often for the same purpose was asked. Three options 'Yes, I would', 'No, I would not', and 'I am not sure' were given there to choose where 70% respondents have responded as 'Yes, I would', 10% has denied visiting for the same purpose and 20% were not sure about it. This survey shows that most people would like to visit the same place often for the same purpose.

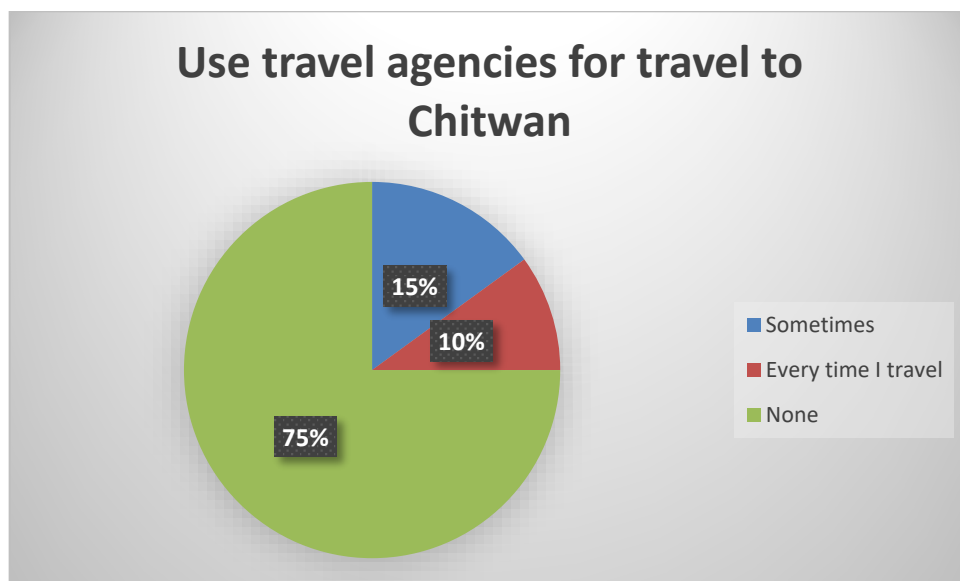


Figure 13: Use travel agencies to travel to Chitwan.

The available options were 'sometimes', 'Every time', and 'None'. From the above figure, it is identified that using a travel agency sometimes is 15% and not using is 75%. It describes that only in few cases and few trips, travel agencies are used. Domestic travelers only use the travel agency if they are in a group or else, they get the cheap travel package. But International traveler uses travel agency as they already booked the trip via online.

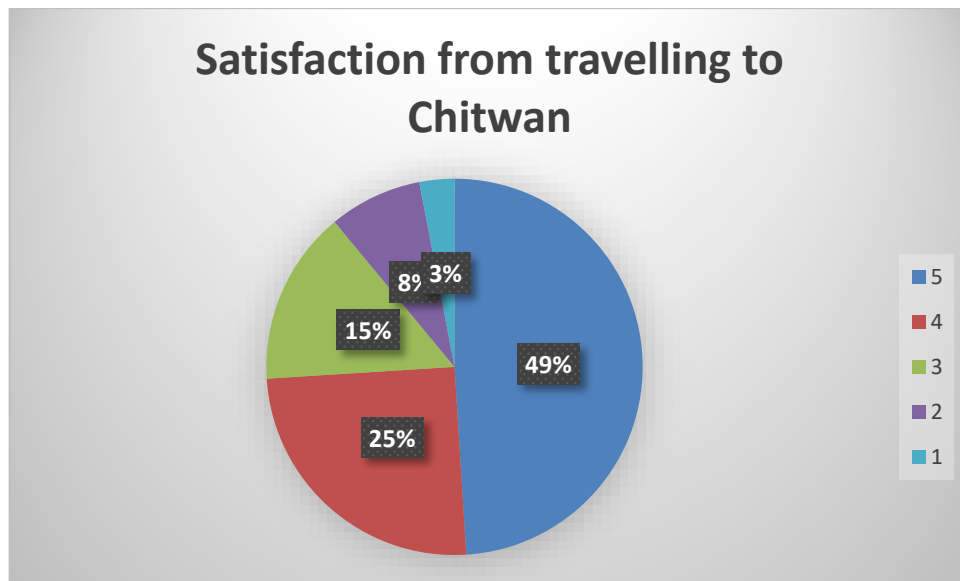


Figure 14: Overall satisfaction from traveling to Chitwan

The last question for participating in the survey was to rate their level of satisfaction from 1 to 5 where 1 stand for worst and 5 stands for best. According to the figure, 3% of participants have rated 1 for their satisfaction from the journey to Chitwan. Similarly, 8% has rated 2, 15% has rated 3, 49% has rated 5 and 25% have rated 4 respectively. Nepal tourism board and Chitwan Tourism organizations should still work hard for the development of tourism industry in Chitwan using all the available resources.

4.3 Tourist Satisfaction and Experience

The survey responses indicate good satisfaction among tourists in terms of services and experiences that are available in Chitwan. 82.2% of the respondents were happy with accommodation facilities (very satisfied) Tourism especially loved the eco-friendly lodges right inside the national park and the friendliness of staff. Still, road conditions in some remote lodges and spotty electricity in rural areas of Angeles City kept some tourists concerned

Chitwan also good service-wise in another area. Tourist guides, hotel staff, and people in the locality were remarked as hospitable, friendly and knowledgeable. Forty percent said local hospitality was excellent, citing genuine cultural warmth and helpfulness of the citizens. Similarly, 62% of the tourists appraised the natural environment and biodiversity conservation within and around Chitwan National Park.

However, 25% stated the availability of litter in commercial or urbanized zones including along the highway from Sauraha.

More broadly, 85% of all tourists reported an intention to recommend Chitwan as a tourist destination and 72% indicated a willingness to return at a later date, clearly indicating high visitor loyalty.

4.4 Stakeholder and Community Perspectives

Interviews with hotel owners, tour operators and officials from the local government showed that all were quite positive about the rise of tourism in Chitwan.

A diverse range of stakeholders indicates a rising number of tourists arriving over the last couple of years with oxidative factors like improved road connectivity, communication infrastructure and awareness on Chitwan offerings.

Nonetheless, several stakeholders were worried about the absence of long-term planning, weak coordination between the public and private sectors and inadequacy in policy implementation. It was also noted that there were seasonal tourist fluctuations — with roughly half of all visitors focused on the period October to March, making for an erratic income stream for tourism-based businesses.

Community-Level The local Tharu community had a diverse set of feelings from them, Tourism spelled bright economic times to some, with new jobs and diversified income streams. At the same time there were worries about cultural tourism and commodification and the dilution of more traditional practices for profit. The focus group discussions also found local youth anticipating increased employment in tourism related jobs, however there is no real opportunity to train them in hospitality, guiding or language skills etc.

Community members also pointed out that unchecked development and overcrowding in peak seasons has led to major environmental degradation.

4.5 Strengths and Attractions of Chitwan

Chitwan, the natural and cultural strength in that it is — makes for an excellent tourism destination. The Chitwan National Park where you can find another one of those endangered animals such as one horn rhinoceros, Bengal tiger and the gharial crocodile, is well known for its natural beauty by wildlife explorers/researchers.

After the wildlife, authentic cultural experience is altogether unmatched with Tharu Homestays and the traditional dance living with local cuisine of course in this region. Chitwan remains especially popular because of how close it is to the East-West highway or Bharatpur Airport, which offers easy access in particular for short-term travelers.

Having so many options of what it can optionally do like jungle safaris, canoeing, bird watching, village walks, or cultural shows capitalize on the tourists based on their taste.

Eco-lodges and sustainable tourism efforts also position Chitwan with the present worldwide popularity of responsible tourism, that centers around being community-based.

4.6 Challenges to Tourism Development

Chitwan possesses a number of challenges which can slow its long-term tourism development despite its merits. A huge problem being the developing infrastructure of rural and buffer zones where roads conditions and utilities — water, electricity etc. are still very inconsistent from an environmental perspective as well, and this is becoming an important factor particularly in waste management and ecological pressure created by tourism around the national park. The second biggest problem is the acute dearth of skilled manpower. Local tourism workers e.g. guides, hotel employees and transport operators

are the least trained, a few in aspects of service or foreign languages which all contribute to the larger picture of a sketchy visitor experience.

Furthermore, the absence of proper marketing and digital promotion has kept Chitwan way less visible at global level when compared with say Pokhara or Kathmandu destinations which are internationally known.

Tourism being seasonal means that business viability gets tilted absolutely and unstable employment/incomes, clearly make it worse.

4.7 Opportunities for Growth and Development

If the right things are done, Chitwan has enormous potential to take off sustainable tourism. The other is eco-tourism, which diversifies more by means of getting visitors to follow guided nature walks, organizing bird watching tours or through eco-friendly stay lodging. Community-based tourism can be expanded further with more homestay programs and entrepreneurial strategies that work for the people.

Enormous room for strengthening of online ecosystem and digital marketing through social media campaigns, global partnership in tourism mailings multilingual websites as well are some possibilities that exist.

This can be further diversified through offering wellness retreats, agrotourism and educational tours to appeal to niche tourist segments to drive length of stay. Career and Hospitality Education for the local population will pave way to better service quality and hence inclusive economic development through investments in vocational training.

4.8 Summary

In Chapter 4 gives a full treatment of the major findings from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of our study. This chapter aims to not only describe the data collected for this study but also contextualize tourism development in Chitwan City within wider lenses. It started off profiling the participants, local and tourist alike: Age, Gender Nationality Education Level Purpose of visit were just some examples.

It was found from the profiles that Chitwan has been among the hot destinations of young educated, environment conscious tourists and this ilk attracted many through wild-life/beauty/Tharu combo.

High overall satisfaction with tourist experience was evident from the data collected with regard to Chitwan (e.g. in accommodation, guide services and cultural experiences). Several per cent of the tourists said that they would go back again and recommended Chitwan to others, indicating robust destination loyalty. The scenery of Chitwan National Park, and the people were repeatedly praised for the hospitality. Challenges were however also noted, especially concerning infrastructure (poor road conditions in some areas, unreliable wi-fi), as well as seasonal overcrowding.

Investigations into stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions provided a richer picture. Tourism, which is traditionally considered a key driver of local economic development, among others, was also the object of numerous stakeholder concerns including lack of coordinated planning between the public and private stakeholders, limited efforts to promote Chitwan globally as a World heritage tourist destination and lack of training among tourism service providers.

There were many environmental worries as well: fears that uncontrolled development and visitor pressure would upset the ecological balance in Chitwan National Park as well as the host communities. Lastly, while community-based tourism was celebrated with enthusiasm locals claimed the decision-making processes were not inclusive and tourism dividends (or should there be revenues) were not shared more equitably.

SWOT of Tourism in Chitwan was also discussed under this chapter. The key strengths were biodiversity treasure houses, historical past and all sorts of log distances. Infrastructure, skill shortages and seasonality were the chief weaknesses. Eco-tourism, digital marketing and capacity building were seen as opportunities and environmental degradation, political instability, or over-commercialization of culture represented threats.

In this recounting, the chapter shed a holistic and refined insight into tourism of Chitwan City. Not only did it measure tourist souvenirs and choices but also highlighted the vast social, economic and environmental context of tourism development. The results showed a strong need for integrated sustainable and people-oriented tourism. These insights were instrumental in the determinations, recommendations and conclusions intimated in the final chapters.

5 DISCUSSIONS

This study shows that Chitwan City has many possibilities for tourism, but also some challenges. The most popular tourist attractions include Chitwan National Park and the indigenous Tharu culture, which are important for eco-tourism. These natural and cultural sites attract both domestic and international tourists, and the number of visitors is growing every year. This shows that Chitwan is becoming more well-known as a tourist destination.

One key finding is that many tourists today are not only interested in jungle safaris or elephant rides, but also want cultural experiences like traditional Tharu dance performances, village homestays, and local food. This reflects a global trend toward sustainable tourism and experiential travel, where people want to connect with nature and local culture. This fits in with what sustainable tourism theory proposes, which makes tourism development a procedure allowing preservation of environment and benefits to be minimum environmentally managed together by local communities (Butler, 1999; Weaver 2006). Sustainable tourism is all about finding a balance between visitors and objectives, as well as conservation, and community wellbeing (Gössling et al., 2012; Nepal & Nepal, 2016).

Chitwan has made progress in areas like hotels, lodges, and transportation, especially after the improvement of Bharatpur Airport and road access. However, the study found some problems that need attention. For example, waste management is still poor in some tourist areas, and many local tourism operators do not have a strong digital presence, which makes it hard for visitors to find information online. Also, during peak seasons, tourist hotspots can get very crowded, which can reduce the quality of the visitor experience and harm the environment. This relates to destination life cycle theory that tourism areas need to be steered in a manner avoiding overuse, environmental deterioration and decreased attractiveness (Butler, 1980; Oppermann 1993). Sound management promotes long-term growth and preserves the destination as an attractive place (Gartner, 1996; Prideaux 2000).

The role of local communities and government policies is also very important. The study found that only some villages benefit from tourism, while others are left out. This uneven

participation can create problems and feelings of unfairness. In addition, government support and investment seem to happen in a random or unplanned way, without a long-term strategy. This suggests a need for better coordination. The results help in the perspective of community-based tourism where local people are included actively in tourism planning and have proper economic, social benefits (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Timothy 2002).

Another challenge is the lack of education and training in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Most people working in tourism in Chitwan have not received proper training in areas like customer service, foreign languages, or digital skills. Providing short training programs, language classes, and computer literacy workshops can help local youth improve their skills and offer better services to tourists. This supports the theory that local capacity building is necessary for sustainable tourism.

Compared to other major tourist cities in Nepal like Pokhara and Kathmandu, Chitwan is still less developed. But it has a lot of untapped potential in new types of tourism, such as birdwatching, agrotourism (farm visits), and wellness retreats. Developing these niche areas can help reduce Chitwan's heavy dependence on wildlife-based tourism and attract a wider range of visitors. Fourteenth [Tourism diversification theory] states that providing variety in tourism experiences provides a more resilient destination to change in the market or to a more diverse group of visitors (Page & Dowling, 2002; Ritchie & Crouch 2003). Reducing reliance on one tourism product and encouraging sustainable development (Hall & Williams 2008; Simpson, 2008).

In summary, this study shows that Chitwan has great potential to grow as a leading tourist destination in Nepal. To achieve this, it needs to focus on sustainable tourism practices, improving basic infrastructure, involving local communities, and building skills through education and training. These efforts will not only improve the experience of tourists but also help protect the natural environment and support the well-being of local people.

5.1 Reliability, validity and objectivity

It is crucial to the findings, but first we need to talk about three concepts about research quality: reliability, validity and objectivity are as follows.

Reliability is simply whether the research results will be the same and dependable over time and across contexts. A credible study produces reproducible results when the study is repeated under similar situations as done by Golafshani (2003).

Validity means to what extent the research is measuring what it was intended to measure. It is a measure of accuracy and truth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) which means that it does not only claim that but proves based on the evidence gathered.

Objectivity implies that the research is neither a product of bias nor whimsical influences but rooted irrefutably to facts being observed rather than the researcher's perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

Reliability was tackled in this study through the application of structured mixed-methods approach (quantitative survey and qualitative interview structure). The survey questions were written in a standardized way and piloted prior to data collection to guard against vagueness and variability. Data collection approaches were homogeneously executed across participants to reduce variability. Granted tourism perceptions are subjective; however, we also anticipated some variance in responses.

The study used diverse data sources—like surveys, interviews and secondary data from reputable sources (Nepal Tourism Board) to ensure validity. Data triangulation allowed us to verify the information but also reinforced information accuracy. Great care was taken to make sure the questionnaire questions were answered directly related to the research objectives proving content validity.

Limitations were noted, such as data from the peak season (seasonal bias) and hence results might not be generalizable.

objectivity was sought by staying neutral during data collection and analysis. The interview questions were developed to avoid the use of pre-phrasing or biased wording. Coding and data interpretation were performed systematically, as well, when possible, actual quotes were used from participant responses to stay authentic.

The researcher concluded by stating the importance of reliability, validity and objectivity through procedures such as design, standardized tools, triangulation and reflexivity. All studies are not limited free from limitations, yet these are steps taken to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results and discussion of the study, the following recommendations are given to improve the tourism potentiality of Chitwan City in sustainable and inclusive manner as follows:

1. Promote Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Tourism

- Emphasize conservation-based tourism by enforcing strict environmental guidelines in and around Chitwan National Park.
- Encourage eco-lodges, green certifications for hotels, and responsible wildlife viewing practices.

2. Enhance Infrastructure and Accessibility

- Improve transportation facilities, including roads, signage, and access to remote tourist areas.
- Upgrade basic services such as sanitation, waste management, internet connectivity, and clean water facilities to meet the expectations of international travelers.

3. Develop Community-Based Tourism

- Support local homestays and cultural tourism initiatives, particularly those involving the Tharu community.
- Ensure local people are trained and involved in decision-making processes to foster inclusive growth.

4. Strengthening Marketing and Digital Presence

- Invest in digital marketing campaigns that highlight Chitwan's unique attractions.
- Create an integrated tourism website and social media presence for Chitwan, providing multilingual content and booking options.

5. Capacity Building and Training

- Offer vocational training programs in hospitality, tour guide, language skills, and eco-tourism practices.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to develop tourism-focused curricula and internships.

6. Policy and Institutional Reforms

- Develop a long-term tourism master plan for Chitwan in coordination with local stakeholders and environmental experts.
- Establish a local tourism board or committee to monitor progress, address challenges, and coordinate with national tourism bodies.

7. Diversify Tourism Products

- Expand tourism offerings beyond wildlife safaris to include activities such as bird watching, agrotourism, cultural festivals, trekking routes, and wellness retreats.
- Promote lesser-known areas around Chitwan to reduce pressure on popular spots and encourage longer stays.

8. Encourage Private Sector Participation

- Attract responsible private investment in tourism infrastructure and services, with incentives for eco-friendly practices.
- Foster partnerships between local businesses, NGOs, and international tourism operators.

Following these recommendations will help Chitwan City can contribute to being one of the top tourism destinations of Nepal, and tourism development can be viable, sustainable and inclusive in benefits for all stakeholders.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aimed to explore prospects for tourism in Chitwan City, a Central, Nepal that has assumed a higher notch of popularity as an emerging tourist spot over the decades owing to its amalgam of natural beauty, cultural diversity and proximity.

Using the lens of trends over history, contemporary sanitation and layout, stakeholder opinions as well policy frameworks this research has evidenced that Chitwan has potential to emerge as a leading model of sustainable and diversified tourism in Nepal.

The research identified a number of strengths of Chitwan tourism. The immediate stand-out among these is the Chitwan National Park (UNESCO), drawing tens of thousands of tourists yearly for jungle safaris, bird watching and wildlife photography. Lastly, the cultural component of the Tharu people—folk dancing and traditional foods, and homestay experiences—provides a further dimension of real flavor that captivates domestic and international tourists with taste for authenticity tourism.

The research though also raised lots of roadblocks that the region would stumble long way forward in terms of tourism years. This means a dearth of infrastructure (poor roads in the countryside, little digital presence) and environmental concerns like waste disposal and over-tourism leading to ecological abuses, institutional voids, Governments with inconsistent policies and on run strategy of promotion. Further, the wider participation of local communities (while recognized more in the past decades) needs to be greatly amplified in making and benefiting-sharing processes.

There are numerous tourism opportunities which look bright, though restricted by these constraints in Chitwan. Sustainable tourism and experiential are the global tourism trends which finely complement Chitwan — eco-tourism, cultural engagement, biodiversity. Through better planning, infrastructure investment and capacity building Chitwan certainly could have redoubled its tourism product offering to lengthen the tourist's average length of stay. It can also emerge as a center of dedicated tourism segments such as wellness, agro, Edu-tourism and conservation volunteering.

The research theme could be seen as an extension to the growing literature on regional tourism development in Nepal with this paper contributing a more focused case study of

Chitwan. It lays out how good management and promotion of local assets can encourage mutually inclusive economic growth while simultaneously preserving the cultural and environmental heritage. As such, we accept that the study was restricted in certain ways, especially around data collection where access to field was very limited and some stakeholder perspectives had only been able to be incorporated into analysis to an extent. These limitations call for care in the generalization of the results to the extent of Chitwan.

Studies of this type might be furthered in the future, through individual longitudinal studies of tourism impact on livelihoods and the environment, or through investigation of use digital technologies for disseminating rural attractions. We could gain some useful knowledge for the policymaking and investment strategy with the comparative studies between this study and other emerging destinations in Nepal such as: Chitwan-Lumbini (or Ilam).

Lastly, Chitwan City has an important crossroads in its tourism roadmap. Fertile with all the background natural beauties, cultural wealth and emerging connectivity, it is very well placed to become a top-class South Asian destination. The biggest challenge is to actualize this potential in tourism development that contributes for responsible development – growth but working on sustainability, inclusiveness and resilience. In that process, not only will Chitwan be able to add a great value to its local economy, but it will be a fire for inspiration of sustainable tourism development throughout Nepal.

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APPENDIX

I am Sapana Khanal, a student at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, is writing my final thesis. I am doing this survey to find out the possibility of tourism growth in Chitwan city by analyzing people's attitude and behavior towards tourism activities and Chitwan city through their eyes. The questions were made to find out the prospects of the tourism industry in Chitwan city and distributed among you all. So, I kindly request you all to fill the questionnaire to help me out to find out the possible outcomes for my thesis. Your participation is appreciated, and I am grateful to you all for helping me to analyze the fact through your answers. Below are the questionnaires you should fill to help me to get the proper data and to meet my objective.

Sapana Khanal
Vaasa University of Applied Sciences

Survey Question

Study on attitude and behavior of Tourist

1. Which age group do you belong to?

- 18-25
- 26-44
- 45-65
- Above

2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

3. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married

4. What is your purpose of travel?

- Spiritual
- Religious
- Adventure
- Business

- Family Holidays
- Others

5. Which mode of transport do you prefer?

- Plane
- Bus
- Taxi
- Private Car
- Others

6. How often do you Travel?

- Every month
- Once in a 3 month
- Once in a 6 month
- Once in a year

7. Is this your first travel to Chitwan?

- Yes
- No

8. With whom do you visit Chitwan this time?

- Family
- Friends
- colleagues
- Alone

9. What is the length of this trip?

- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- A week
- More

10. What kind of accommodation do you use on this trip?

- Resorts

- Expensive hotels
- Economy hotels

11. How much do you spend on a trip for transportation, accommodation & Food per day?

- Nrs. 500-1000
- Nrs. 1000-1500
- Nrs. 1500-2500
- Above

12. What activities have you experienced in Chitwan?

- Wildlife adventure
- Religious
- Business
- Village tour
- Festival & Holidays
- Research and study
- Others

13. Would you like to visit Chitwan often for the same purpose?

- Yes, I would
- No, I would not
- I am not sure

14. Do you use travel agencies or your trip? If so how often?

- Sometimes
- Every time I travel
- None

15. How do you measure your overall satisfaction with the tourism activities in Chitwan? Rate it 1 to 5 (1 being the worst & 5 being the best)

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1