

## Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism in Sauraha, Chitwan, Nepal

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### Abstract

*Tourism destinations in the world are facing different challenges like natural disasters, conflicts, terrorism, economic crisis, and pandemic affecting the various aspect of international tourism needs. The coronavirus was emerged in Hubai, China at the end of 2019, remained a life-threatening outbreak and a major public health issue. In Nepal, the first case of COVID-19 was seen on January 23, 2020, and as part of the containment strategy suggested by WHO, the Government of Nepal imposed lockdown from March 24, 2020, made policies and regulations to control the national and international border (land & air). The Government also requested its citizens to maintain social distance and restrict the movement of people that has affected the Nepalese tourism sector severely. Chitwan is one of the most important wildlife-based tourism destinations of Nepal after the establishment of Chitwan National Park (CNP) and Sauraha is the main point to enter and visit Chitwan National Park. The tourism sector in Sauraha is also pretentious due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What is the status of tourism in Sauraha before*

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and during the Pandemic? The objective of this study is to know how has COVID-19 impacted on tourism in Sauraha in particular and Chitwan National Park in general. For the research, researchers have adopted a qualitative research approach. Primary and secondary data were collected and interviewed 30 respondents representing various sectors of tourism and hospitality in Sauraha. Findings reveal that the outbreak of pandemic has brought huge negative impact by a rapid shutdown on the tourism industry in Sauraha and this has resulted in the loss of revenue, increase unemployment, frustration, and poverty among local people as well as gave positive things like health awareness, consensus on business, time for training and maintenance of infrastructures, etc.

### **Introduction**

The tourism industry is one of the most important tools that play a vital role in socio-economic development mainly in developing countries (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). It has been the main and most energetic sector in today's global economy. It is the largest growing economic sector that generated about 10.4% (US\$ 9,170 billion) of global GDP and provided 334 million jobs worldwide in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The number of international tourist arrivals was 1.5 billion globally with approximately 1.47 trillion US\$ income from global international tourism worldwide in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020a).

Impact studies are crucial in as much as they allow tourism role players to understand the current status to inform policy and practice. Given the centrality of such studies, which are needed to understand how the pandemic's impact is evolving and affecting the tourism sector, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has set up a platform that monitors the global tourism sector.

### **Tourism in Nepal**

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council report 2020, Nepal's tourism industry contributed NRs. 247.5 billion i.e. 6.7% (USD 2,089.0 million) GDP in 2019 and the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment was 6.9% of the total employment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council reported that the travel and tourism investment in Nepal was NRs. 16.5 billion nearly 3% of the total investment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The total number of tourists who arrived in Nepal was 1197191 from different countries. 83% of the traveler came via airplane and about 17% of them came by land. The rising number of tourists in Nepal has a positive impact on different sectors of the country (Immigration Department of Nepal, 2019; in *Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*). The tourism industry is the backbone of the Nepalese economy. In 2019, approximately 1.2 million international tourists visited Nepal which is 2% greater than in 2018. The top five countries are India 21.2%, China 14.2%, USA 7.8%, the United Kingdom 5.1%, and Sri Lanka 4.7% respectively

and occupy almost 53% of tourists' arrival in Nepal in 2019. The average length of the stay of tourists was 12.7 days. The average length of stay in 2018 was 12.4 days (The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2019; in *Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*). The visit of international tourists in Nepal is a pleasure and holiday celebration that covers 65% and about 16.52% of tourist visit here for trekking purpose. Nepal is renowned for adventure tourism due to its prominent peaks and hills with different ecological tracks. Another 14.36% of the tourists are visiting Nepal for mountaineering (*Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*) and about 4.12% of the tourists came for the pilgrimage tour in 2019.

Lumbini is found as the most visited pilgrimage by foreigners. It was visited by 1,779,086 persons and 78.76% were Nepalese while 11.51% were Indians and 9.73% were from other countries. Similarly, 171,937 visitors from the third country visited Pashupatinath during the year 2019. Likewise, the total number of tourists visiting the Chitwan National Park was 159,043 in 2018/19, and in 2019/20 reached 182,435 tourists excluding the visitors who did not purchase entry permits to the park (*Chitwan National Park Authority & Yearly Report, 2018-2020*). The tourism sector is the foreign currency earning industry in Nepal. In 2019 almost US\$ 724,337 thousand was earned by Nepal which was 16% higher than 2018 earnings. The average expenditure of a tourist in Nepal is \$48 per day (*Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*). Thirty International airlines are actively operating in Nepal which is helping to connect tourists to Nepal directly. Thirty international airlines carried 4138764 passengers out of which 2245338 were outbound and 1893426 in-bounds by 32425 flights. The number of countries having civil aviation contracts reached 40. There are 19 airlines company for domestic movement (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, 2020; in *Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*). There are 1289 star and tourist standard hotels registered and operating in Nepal till 2019 with a bed capacity of 43999 beds per day and the number of registered travel agencies reached up to 3680 and trekking agencies are 2764 in 2019. The report shows that there are 4200 tourist guides and 17625 trekking guides (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2020; in *Nepal Tourism Statistics 2020*).

### **Tourism in Chitwan National Park**

The Chitwan National Park is a UNESCO world heritage natural site in Nepal which covers an area of 932 square kilometer and is located in the sub-tropical inner the Terai lowlands of south-central Nepal and extends to Parsa, Chitwan, and Makwanpur. This is the first national park established in 1973 that attracts a large number of tourists and visitors every year contributing to the national economy (Sapkota & Rijal, 2016). It is probably the finest tourist destination in Asia, Nepal (Pedersen, 2002). The biological richness of the Chitwan National Park is exceptional, including the endangered Asian one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*),

Asiatic elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), gaur (*Bos guarus*), Gangetic dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), Giant hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), Bengal florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), and Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) (UNESCO, 2003; WWF Nepal, 2006; DNPWC, 2008; Stræde & Treue, 2006; in Cook & Bardecki, 2016). Tourism in Sauraha is famous for elephant rides, jungle safari, jeep drive safari, elephant breeding center, crocodile hatching farm, bird watching, Ox cart riding, canoeing at Rapti river, Lamo Jharana Jalbire, Bishhajari taal, cycling, upper dang gadi trekking, Tharu culture and programs, museum, pilgrimage tours, etc.

The first safari hotel named Tiger Tops was opened in 1965 even before the establishment of Chitwan National Park. Later on, one simple lodge was established in Sauraha in 1977 (Kunwar, 2002). Until 1977, the park had only one lodge with approximately 5,000 annual visitors. By 2000, there were seven lodges operating inside the park and more than 70 lodges outside the park, predominantly based in the town of Sauraha (Whelpton, 2005, Bhusal, 2007). General authors argue that the endangered species in the park are indeed protected, but only to be commoditized for the consumption of high-class tourism (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Jones, 2007; Spiteri & Nepal, 2008b; in Cook & Bardecki, 2016, p.165).

### **Tourism in Sauraha**

Sauraha was practically uninhabited before 1950 except for a few scattered Tharu villages (Gautam, 2017). During that time, it was recognized as an important hunting ground for animals and the birds. Sauraha was declared as a buffer zone area of Chitwan National Park in 1996.

Sauraha is located in Ratnanagar municipality of Chitwan district in the central part of Nepal, on the bank of the Rapti river and close to the Chitwan National Park. It is the main gateway to Chitwan National Park, which is the third most popular tourist destination in Nepal. Tadi is the main entrance point to Sauraha (Gautam, 2017). The distance between Kathmandu to Sauraha is 165 km and takes almost 4 hours to drive. In addition, Sauraha has also domestic airways connection, which takes only 15-20 minutes on a flight from Kathmandu. The culture and nature of the Sauraha is a popular attraction for national and international tourists (Sapkota & Rijal, 2016). Most of the tourists visit Sauraha on a package tour for 2 nights and 3 days and learn about the Tharu lifestyle, their unique style of houses, family structures, food, and clothing, etc. It is estimated that nearly 90% of all wildlife tourism in Chitwan is concentrated at Sauraha (Baral, 2013).

The number of service providers in Sauraha, Jankauli and Bagmara were collected during field work. The findings are based on those service providers in the context of COVID-19 impacts on tourism in Sauraha. According to Regional Hotel Association,

the tourist level hotels registered in Regional Hotel Association, there are 120 hotels, 57 restaurants, 29 micro-buses, 7 *Tanga* (horse carts), 17 curio shops, 32 jeep safari, 14 boats (in Jankauli), 22 canoes (in Bagmara), 90 elephants (40 owned by government and 50 owned by private), 1 museum, 1 culture house, 735 nature guides are in Sauraha. Few new hotels are under construction and some have completed their construction specially focusing visit Nepal Year 2020 are not registered up to November of 2020 due to COVID-19. Hotel owners have invested more than 800 billion, in which 400 billion in Chitwan and remaining in adjoining districts.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

The global tourism industry has been affected by various forms of crisis such as environmental hazards, terrorism attacks, armed conflict, and pandemics. The term 'pandemic' means serious infectious disease that spreads rapidly between people and occurs at the same time not only in one country but around the world ( Hawker, 2005; Crowther, 1998; in Sulkowski, 2020). The present coronavirus pandemic is a health crisis that has left the tourism industry with unprecedented challenges and restrictions in all possibilities of human lives such as free movement of people, fear of infection, closure of accommodation and leisure activities, etc (Kunwar, 2021a). It has not only brought the entire socio-economic structure to a halt but has also challenged the globalization and global operations of enterprises.

The travel industry worldwide has been dealt a vicious blow by COVID-19 (Hodson, 2020). According to Gössling, Scott and Hall (2020), the world has experienced a number of major pandemics in the last 40 years, yet none had similar implications for the global economy as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic outbreak are Malaria; Dengue Fever/ Yellow Fever; Ebola; Zika Virus; Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS); Bird Flu or Avian Influenza or H5N1; Mad Cow disease or Creutzfeldt- Jakob disease; H1N1 or Swine Flu; SARS; and COVID-19 (Menegaki, 2020). The COVID-19; whose mortality rate (1%-3.4%) is found lower than those of the MERS and SARS which reached 34% and 10% respectively and the seasonaeal flu mortality rate is (<0.1%) (Menegaki, 2020).

Novelli, Burgess, Jones, and Ritchie, (2018) talk about health communication strategies and measures (e.g. social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community lockdown, stay at home campaigns, self or mandatory quarantine, curbs on crowding) that have halted global travel, tourism, and leisure. Tourism becomes resilient bouncing back from various crisis and outbreaks (e.g. terrorism, earthquakes, Ebola, SARS, Zika, and COVID-19, etc.), vulnerable to numerous environmental, political, socio-economic risks challenging in values and systems, leading to a worldwide recession and depression. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused international travel to an abrupt halt and significantly impacted the tourism industry (UNCTAD, 2020).

Scholars have argued that COVID-19 is a risk that is “unfamiliar, invisible, dreaded, potentially endemic, involuntary, and disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations such as the elderly” (Chakraborty, 2020, p. 1; in Schneider, Dryhurst, Kerr, Freeman, Recchia, Spiegelhalter, & van der Linden, 2021, p. 2). Since the start of the pandemic researchers around the world have begun to investigate the determinants of risk perceptions of COVID-19 (e.g., Abdel Wahed et al. 2020; Bruine de Bruin, Saw, & Goldman 2020; Ding et al. 2020; Dryhurst et al. 2020; He et al. 2020; Karasneh et al. 2021; Liu, Zhang, & Huang 2020; Mertens et al. 2020; Qian & Li 2020; Shao & Hao 2020; Zhong et al. 2021; in Schneider et al., 2021, p. 2). Perhaps the largest comparative international study of risk perception is reported by Dryhurst et al. (2020; in Schneider et al., 2021, p. 2), who found that across ten countries in Europe, America, and Asia people’s personal experience with the virus, their individualistic and prosocial values, trust in government, science, and medical professionals as well as a sense of personal and collective efficacy were among the most important predictors of people’s holistic perception of the risk of COVID-19 (Dryhurst et al. 2020; in Schneider et al., 2021, p. 2).

The COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei province of China in December 2019 and it has impacted a lot in all the sectors all over the world. The World Health Organization designated the name of the virus as ‘COVID-19’ stands for the year, 2019 which is a high-risk disease spreading to other countries around the world (WHO, 2020). It is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Astuti, & Ysrafi, 2020, p.1; Jayaweera, Perera, Gunawardana & Manatunge, 2020, p.1). It is primarily spread through the respiratory tract, by droplets, respiratory secretions, and direct contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze; when a person touches a surface or objects that have the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose, and mouth (Baker & Rosbi, 2020 & Guo, Cao, Hong, Tan, Chen & Yan, 2020). It is mainly transmitted through aerosols and fomites (Jayaweera et al., 2020, p.1). Aerosols are minute particles in the atmosphere and fomites are inanimate objects that can carry and spread disease and infectious agents also called passive vectors (Zoppi, 2020). It is contagious during the latency period (Guo et al., 2020) as it can live up to 72 hours. According to [www.covid19statistics.org](http://www.covid19statistics.org), as of November 2020, approximately 53.3 million people worldwide had contracted the COVID-19 virus with a death toll of just over 1.3 million. The exponential rate of infection and spread of the virus led to economic shutdowns around the world as governments attempted to limit public exposure to the virus through physical distancing. By the summer, these shutdowns resulted in almost 200 million lost jobs worldwide (UN News, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 170). As Gössling, Scott, and Hall (2021; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 170) note, widespread restrictions on public gatherings and international travel bans affected 90% of the world’s population, causing most

world regions to experience a precipitous drop in both international and domestic tourism. These restrictions and bans have led to at least a temporary shift towards 'de-globalisation' (Niewiadomski, 2020) or an 'anthropause' (global reduction in modern human activity, specially travel, that occurred during COVID-19 pandemic coined by Rutz, Loretto, Bates, Davidson, Duarte, Jetz et al., 2020) (McGreevy, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 170) and from overtourism (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano, Cheer & Novelli, 2019; Pechlaner, Innerhofer & Erschbamer, 2019; Séraphin, Gladkikh & Vo Thanh, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 170) to undertourism or 'no tourism' (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2021; Gowreesunkar & Thanh, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 170).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a destructive impact in the main industries of tourism and hospitality sub-sectors such as accommodation, transportation, restaurants and bars, tour and travel agents, sporting and conferences (Kunwar, 2021a). It is estimated that the global GDP has been contracted by 5.2 % in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). The effect of a pandemic on the international tourism industry shows that the international tourist numbers have fallen by 22% just in the first quarter (Q1) of 2020 with a loss of US\$ 80 billion in tourism income. The number could fall by 60-80% over the whole year with an estimated loss of US\$ 300 billion to US\$ 450 billion in international tourism earnings in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020b).

### **Review of literature**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry is tremendous even in its early stage (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The pause of tourism activities due to the halt of travelers' mobility amid the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a devastating crisis for the industry (Ulak, 2020). The travel restrictions that governments across the world imposed disrupted the tourism industry's supply and demand (Dube, Nhamo & Chikodzi, 2021; Dube, 2021). The imposition of lockdown came at a great cost to various sectors of the tourism economy, such as casinos (McCartney, 2020; in Dube, 2021), the car rental industry (Nhamo, Dube & Chikodzi, 2020c; in Dube, 2021), the leisure industry (Lee & Chen 2020; in Dube, 2021), museums (Antara & Sen, 2020; in Dube, 2021), aviation industry (Suau-Sanchez, Voltes-Dorta & Cugueró-Escofet, 2020; Abu-Rayash & Dincer, 2020; in Dube, 2021), hotel industry (Hao, Xiao & Chon, 2020; in Dube, 2021) and the restaurant and hospitality industry (Dube, 2020) to mention but a few.

The impact studies have been conducted in Malaysia (Foo, Chin, Tan & Phuah, 2020), Nepal (Ulak, 2020a, 2020b; Shivakoti, 2021; Kunwar 2021a, 2021b; Gautam & Khatri, 2021; Khanal, 2020; Sah, Sigdel, Ozaki, Kotera, Bhandari, Regmi & Dhakal, 2020, and India (Jaipuria, Parida & Ray, 2021), to mention but a few. Rogerson and Baum (2020) argued that COVID-19 arouses new tourism research agendas in

subjects such as market confidence, community tourism, informal tourism sector resilience, to mention but a few (Rogerson & Baum, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic has created on ‘uncertainty’, ‘unpredictability’ and ‘indecisiveness’ (Benaraba, Bulaon, Esposito, Narvaez, Suinan, & Roma, 2021). This is not untrue that Gschwind (December 30, 2020) said ‘uncertainty’ is the “enemy” of the tourism industry. From an economic perspective, these closures and travel bans reduce productivity directly in a way that is akin to temporary drops in employment (Baldwin & di Mauro, 2020, p.12). Demand shock-When it comes to COVID-19’s immediate aggregate demand shock, two aspects are worth distinguishing: practical and psychological. Practical since some consumers are or will be prevented from getting to stores, so their demand disappears from the market. Likewise, some home delivery services are suspended, so goods and consumers are coming together less frequently. Psychological since-as happened in the wake of the Global crisis-consumers and firms tend to embrace a ‘wait and see’ attitude when faced with massive Knightian uncertainty (the unknown- unknowns) of the type that COVID-19 is now presenting to the world (Baldwin & di Mauro, 2020, p.15). COVID-19 was first seen as a China shock, then as a regional shock. The unknowable unknown is true uncertainty and is definitionally not reducible by advance action. The only way to “manage” uncertainty is to be ready to respond to conditions as they change unpredictability ,in part by learning from situations as they unfold (based on Frank Knight,1921) This is justified by the study of Ragheb (2020), Sułkowski (2020) and Sulkowski & Ignatowski (2020).

Recession, virtualization of communication, and the growing need for coordination of epidemic, health and medical activities between countries can force national governments and international organizations to strengthen cooperation on a global scale. On the other hand, de-globalization tendencies may take over (Balsa-Barreiro, Vié, Morales, & Cebrián, 2020, pp. 1–4; Kozlov & Sokolova, 2020, He, Lin, & Zhang, 2020; in Sulkowski 2020).

While writing about COVID-19 and its impact on Pacific people, Scheyvens, Movono, and Auckram (2021) have raised some questions is for tourism scholars and government policymakers around the globe who have been debating what we can learn from this pandemic and how tourism could either recover, or, more significantly, be ‘reset’ (Prayag, 2020), or ‘re-imagining’ (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020), ‘re-packaging’ (Boyd, Reddy, Kulshrestha, & Nica, 2021), ‘restart... reinvigorate’ (Olsen & Timothy, 2020) and ‘re-invent’ the tourism industry ‘community-by-community’, ‘destination-by-destination’ (Haywood, 2021). It is time for reset not only for the tourism industry but for tourism researchers as well! (Prayag, 2020, p. 183). Hodson (2020) writes, “The industry will recover, but travel will never be the same again and the year 2020 will be a defining moment in the history of the tourism sector”. While this pandemic may be resolved with a vaccine, climate change will not. Even if we



eschew the micro-adventure approach, in order to mitigate climate change and avoid future pandemics, global travel must change (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020, p. 5).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a surge in academic publications focusing on both the immediate impacts of the pandemic on global travel and, more importantly, how the pandemic marks the chance to restart, reset, and reinvigorate tourism in a more sustainable way. This would be done by off-setting the resumption of unsustainable tourism practices based on transforming institutional logistics and systems of tourism based on capitalism, old business models, growth-paradigms, and trajectories through to the creation of a 'new normal'—a tourism system more community-based and regenerative, and facilitating and minimizing structural inequalities through environmental reparation, ecological justice, and racial reconciliation (e.g., Ateljevic, 2020; Benjamin, Dillette & Alderman, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Cave & Drudge, 2020; Corssley, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Jamal, 2020; Sigala, 2020; Turner, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, pp. 170-171). These transformations and efforts are a part of the critical turn in tourism studies (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2013; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 171) and efforts to move towards 'hopeful tourism' (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011) or 'human-centered tourism' (Carbone, 2020; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 171). In this vein, the UNTWO (2020c; in Olsen & Timothy, 2020, p. 171), has suggested six 'lines of action' the tourism industry should take to restart in a more responsible and sustainable manner. These revolve around the themes of public health, social inclusion, biodiversity conservation, climate action, the circular economy, and governance and finance.

According to Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA), the tourism industry of Nepal has reported a loss of up to US\$ 330 million because of the COVID-19 lockdown imposed from March, 24<sup>th</sup> 2020 (Kunwar, 2021a). It was estimated to cross US\$ 332 million loss if the lockdown continued until July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020 (IANS, 2020). As one of the authority of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) predicted, Nepal's civil aviation, trekking, and hospitality industry could lose overall NRs. 160 billion in 2020, of which hotels and resorts stand to lose NRs. 85 billion, trekking, mountaineering, and adventure tourism losses will be NRs. 55 billion, domestic airlines, restaurants, and bars will lose NRs. 5 billion (Sijapati, 2020). The major tourist hubs like Thamel, Pokhara, Bandipur, Lumbini, and Chitwan have been severely impacted in the absence of tourists and tourism activities (Karki, 2020). According to Thamel Tourism Development Council, there are over 200 nighttime businesses with an average daily turnover of NRs. 50 million but the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions have reversed these businesses into losses (Ojha, 2021). In Pokhara, nearly 700 tourist standard hotels with an investment of more than NRs. 400 million and nearly 17,000 employment are at risk, losing NRs. 130 million every day in the tourism sector due to the COVID-19 lockdown (Kunwar, 2021a).

Chitwan National Park is the most visited protected area in Nepal in 2019 (Nyaupane, Poudel, & York, 2020). The number of tourists visiting the area in Chitwan National Park has constantly increased, from 57,876 in fiscal year 2003-2004 to 187,109 tourists in the fiscal year 2018-2019 (Chitwan National Park, 2015; 2019; in Nyaupane et al., 2020). Sauraha is a popular destination according to Nyaupane et al. (2020) and it reveals that tourism is important.

In Chitwan, the first positive case of COVID-19 was found on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 22, 2020. In Ratnanagar Municipality, the first positive case was noticed in ward number 7 of Ratnanagar Municipality. The first positive case was reported on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020 in Sauraha. The number of infected cases in Sauraha, Ratnanagar Municipality and Chitwan in Chitwan district was 5157 till 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Due to the infection and policy of the government, even domestic tourists were feared to visit Sauraha and this has hit hard in the revenue collection of the local government. The entrepreneurs have decided to cut down their staffs. Thus, these circumstances have encouraged the researchers to carry out the study on impact of COVID-19 in Sauraha, Chitwan.

The questions are: What is the status of tourism in Sauraha before and during the Pandemic? How did COVID-19 become a threat to the tourism industry of Sauraha? The objective of the research is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in the context of Sauraha, Chitwan.

The tourism industry is an umbrella industry connected with many other sectors in the economy (hotel, agriculture, travel and transportation, construction, real estate, retail shops, etc) in which large amount of income in payment for goods and services create significant opportunities for employment in the service sector of the economy.

Nepal being in a developing stage and surrounded by giant populated nations (China and India), posed vulnerability by pandemic where thousands of migrants enter and exit without any regulation and restriction on the border. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism in Sauraha is a burning issue and none of the researchers have done a study in the context of Sauraha, Chitwan. This study will give baseline information for future researchers, students, people who are working in the tourism field, social workers as well as stakeholders on the effect of COVID-19 on tourism sectors in Sauraha. Thus, this research has been done by reviewing above mention papers as well as other documents to study depth in the mentioned topic.

After the introduction to tourism in the Terai region of Nepal, many different scholars (Bhusal, 2007; Pandit, Dhakal, & Polyakov, 2015; Hajortsø, Straede, & Helles, 2006; Mclean & Straede, 2003; Cook & Bardecki, 2016; Bhandari, 2012; Pandey, Chhetri, Ghimire, & Kunwar, 1995; Kunwar, 2002; Stræde & Treue, 2006; Nyaupane & Paudel, 2011; Nyaupane et al., 2021; Bookbinder et al., 1998; Jones, 2007; Spiteri

& Nepal, 2008b; Sofield, 2000) carried out their research in Chitwan National Park including Sauraha who shed light on the importance and its popularity in the field of tourism, conservation, bio-diversity and anthropology of tourism.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the socio-economic lives of tourism employees. Many tourism employees were condemned to poverty as most companies adopted a furlough programme (Chen, 2020; in Dube, 2021), reduced working days, and some companies closed altogether, which resulted in job layoffs (Suau-Sanchez et al., 2020). Jung, Jung, and Yoon (2021) bemoaned the impact of COVID-19 on job security and turnover for hotel employees. The study found that the impact of COVID-19 had been disproportionate and affected Generation Y than Generation X. This attests to the much-acclaimed differential impact of the pandemic on various groups of people. The COVID-19 had also a psychological, economical effect on tourism employees who had to deal with multiple challenges imposed by the pandemic and infections (Mao, He, Morrison & Andres Coca-Stefaniak 2020; Ozdemir, 2020; in Dube, 2021).

### **Research methodology**

The methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the research. This research is based on a qualitative approach. In this study, a primary and secondary source of data has been collected to make the research more effective. It is based both on exploratory and explanatory studies drawn from field work. Fieldwork for this study was conducted by the second author between November to December 2020. He carried out this research for the purpose of submitting his master thesis, which has been thoroughly revised by the present authors. Sauraha was the field area for this study. Information was collected through different books, journals, articles, online portals, reports related to the topic, as well as a series of interviews and focus group discussions. Information were also collected from tourism information centre, government officials to find the status of tourism business during the COVID-19.

The researchers selected Sauraha because it is the main entry point for tourists to visit Chitwan National Park. It is a popular destination for grasping living experiences of people in the tourism business from different walks of life. The unstructured questions were asked to the tourist entrepreneurs who were from hotels, restaurants and bars, community forests, jeep safari, elephant co-operatives, transportation sectors (bus, micro, auto, and horse cart), small tourism business organizations, guide associations and others.

### **Findings and discussion**

This portion highlights the main outcomes of the research and addresses the results regarding the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in Sauraha. Although Sauraha is famous for wildlife and eco-tourism but due to the pandemic, the tourism sector

in Sauraha has been rigorously affected. Tourism destinations, transportation, tourist behavior, mass media, health, and security are the five factors that change after the crisis (Yang, Chen & Wang, 2008). If the world's travel industry cannot promote a safe and worry-free travel experience then the nation will suffer economically, socially, morally, and spiritually (Kunwar, 2016, p.3). According to Richter and Waugh (1986), tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and lodges are highly sensitive during the crisis that affects the external appearance and attraction to visitors with huge financial losses (Sanghai, Khadka & Baral, 2020). The findings of this research are related to the stakeholder's perspectives about the impact of COVID-19 on tourism sub-sectors in Sauraha, Chitwan. The impact of COVID-19 in different sub-sectors in Sauraha are discussed below,

### **Hotels/ Lodges**

After in-flowing COVID-19 in Nepal, the government had imposed restrictions in the movement of people and requested for maintaining social/physical distance, etc. had reduced the flow of tourists in Sauraha. The hotel owners had severely faced problems in their business like payment of interest, installment of loans, and taxes. It has created a havoc situation for entrepreneurs that have resulted to go bankruptcy and chanced of losing their properties. As one authority of Regional Hotel Association reported:

*There are more than 120 hotels with 5,550 tourists capacity at a time in Sauraha in which the occupancy rate during the tourist season was 65%, but now the occupancy is hardly 15%. Many tourist hotels do not have money to pay rent or lease as per their agreement each month. Due to the COVID-19, 4-5 owners of hotels want to sell their business as they were unable to pay the loans.*

Owners of hotels mentioned that their business was in zero and takes one or two years to reach their business in the condition as before the COVID-19. He added as:

*In normal condition in each day around 700 guests used to visit in hotels and spent average NRs. 15000 (\$130) per day but due to the coronavirus, the hotels are closed for seven months in 2020, hotels have lost average NRs. 30 crore (US\$ 25 million) due to the pandemic situation.*

Around 70-80 percentage of hotel owners have a loan in the government and commercial banks for enhancing their business. There are around 5000 employees working in the various hotels in Sauraha but because of the COVID-19 lockdown, the staff have been cut off to less than 35% in 2020.

Most of the hotel's staff and employees said that their families are dependent on their income and they earn NRs. 8000 (US\$69) to NRs. 36000 (US\$310) salary, plus 10% allowances (sharing all staff), flooding, lodging, tips from the guest before pandemic but they had suffered a lot to run their livelihood after the pandemic.

Kandel (2020) mentioned that the widespread outbreak of coronavirus; it has not received domestic as well as international tourist arrivals in recent times in Sauraha. It is assumed that more than NRs. 8 billion investment in the hotel industry in Sauraha is at risk due to the coronavirus lockdown (Adhikari, 2020). It has increased their personnel loan and most of the staff and employees are on contract leave and some are jobless now. Most of the staff were not paid since last year but are still working in the hotels and lodges.

### **Restaurant and Bar**

In Chitwan including Sauraha, there has been huge investment in the hospitality sector in 2019 but because of the COVID-19, most of the investment is at risk. The authority of restaurant and bar association expressed as:

*There are more than 80 plus restaurants in Sauraha in which 55 are affiliated with the association and new are in the process of membership. Sauraha had expected to welcome 400000 visitors in the Visit Nepal Year 2020 and invested a lot to maintain the reputation of the government but due to the spread of COVID-19, it has been affected brutally and had lost NRs. 8 crore (US\$6,76,572).*

In the same way, vice-president of restaurant and bar association expressed:

*While the owners, employees, and staff are directly affected by the pandemic, the vendors, vegetable farming, poultry farms, local market of Chitwan like Tandri and Narayangath are indirectly getting its negative impact.*

In Sauraha; around 30% of restaurants and bars are on lease or rent, others have their own property. Due to the pandemic, some leaseholder owners have closed their businesses and some are in process of sale. Pandemic has increased financial burden and added to unemployment. The report shows that there are more than 1200 staff working in restaurants and bars in Sahara but only 20-30% of staff were working till November 2020.

While interacting with the owners and staff of the restaurants and bars, most of them are found unpaid, some have lost their job and other employees were sent home on unpaid leave. The employees who have lost their job are engaged in different activities like poultry, farming, labor work, painting and some have started their own small businesses to sustain themselves for the long run. Positive things due to pandemic like awareness of health care, a good time with family, change in the lifestyle, more time for preparing quality service, time for conducting training for cooks, waiters to provide quality service, etc.

### **Transportation**

The transportation sector is one of the main elements in any emergency preparation and response. The tourism segments such as public transport, air transport, railways

are directly affected by the occurrence of pandemics (Gössling et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19, the daily bus services provided from Kathmandu to Chitwan were 9, from Pokhara to Sauraha were 2, and from Bhairawa to Sauraha was 1, and vice versa. Due to the pandemic and the lockdown, the bus services have been closed. The driver of buses was getting US\$180-US\$200 salary and an additional US\$ 10 per trip and helpers were getting US\$ 9-13 salaries with an additional allowance of US\$ 5 before the pandemic but they did not receive any salary after the lockdown.

The local transports used in 2020 from Tandri to Sauraha are micro, auto, hotel jeep and inside the Sauraha there are 7 Tanga (7 horse carts) and Oxen carts are serving as a means of transportation. While talking with the accountant of OM Santi Micro transportation service mentioned that:

*There are 29 minibuses serving from Taadi to Bhotani, Harnari, Bardauli, Madhabpur, and Sauraha. It goes to Sauraha on a rotation basis and each minibus has to pay a committee fee NRs. 200 (US\$1.72) either they earn or not. The owner and the driver of Magic informed us that before COVID-19, we used to earn NRs. 3000 (US\$26)-3500 (US\$30.2) per day but during a pandemic, we have earned only NRs. 200 (US\$1.72) - 600 (US\$5.2) in October 2020 and this has affected our daily living.*

The transportation sector in Chitwan has encountered problems because of the COVID-19 lockdown. This has created difficulty in supporting daily expenses like fuel lubricants (for example daily expenditure NRs. 6000 (US\$52)-NRs. 8000 (US\$69) for Bus), increased personal loan, taxes, several job losses were registered, hard to run their daily life of people working in the field, hard to supply medicine for their family members, etc. The coronavirus pandemic has made it difficult for transport entrepreneurs to survive in the business world in Chitwan as the transport sectors were affected a lot by the pandemic.

#### **Small Tourism Business Organization (SMEs)**

Small tourism business organizations also called small, medium entrepreneurs that include many businesses like agriculture-related shops, souvenir or curio shops, grocery stores, provision stores, hair-cutting, guide association, etc. with which many of the shops are attached with the organization and some are not. Rukmini Chalise (pseudonym), president of small tourism business organization mentioned that:

*The most of the shops have zero business from April 2020 to September 2020, where 50% business is in rent and every outlets have to pay NRs. 10000 each month. 17 Souvenir or Curio shop business owners have left their business and some have transferred their business thinking that it will take time to recover tourism in Sauraha and two of the business-man had done suicide due to economic problem.*

Due to the fewer number of tourist arrivals in recent years in Sauraha, it has directly affected on the earning of the people working in the different sectors in Sauraha. While interacting with the owner of Parkland souvenir who has invested more than US\$43200 now, and had started the business 12 years ago, said that before the pandemic the daily sales were US\$45-US\$90 in which they earned more than US\$470 monthly. With the spread of COVID-19, shoddier effect in his business and recent time minimum daily sales is zero to maximum US\$18.

According to small tourism business organization, there are (7-agriculture shops, 27-Souvenir or Curio, 27-provision stores, 4-hair cutting, 3-guide association, 2-grocery store in which they earn around US\$1750, US\$6500, US\$2160, US\$880, US\$1300, US\$880 monthly from each sector respectively but due to pandemic these businesses have been closed for the seven months in 2020. The businesses affected during the pandemic were souvenirs or curio shops. The SMEs are not in line to survive because of the lockdown and restrictions in tourism mobility in Sauraha. Thus, this has impacted severely on the overall tourism development of Sauraha.

### **Jeep Safari**

Tourists use or hire a four-wheel jeep for various purposes while visiting Sauraha. There are 3 jeep safari associations (Royal jeep safari, Nikunja Safari and visit Chitwan safari) with 85 jeeps providing services in buffer zone, inside and outside the Chitwan National Park. 80 more hotel jeeps provide services in buffer zone, Sauraha area, and up to Tadi. According to Roshan Shrestha (pseudonym), president of Nikunja jeep safari mentioned that:

*There are 32 jeep safari (16 of royal and 16 of Nikunja) that provide services to visitors inside Chitwan National Park and others including hotel's jeep safari is providing services up to buffer zones and Sauraha area, the investment for each jeep safari is US\$14,660.*

Jeep provides different services in the Chitwan National Park area where they are taking US\$ 95-130 per day. The capacity of a jeep is 10 passengers, run through hotel contact, guide office, personnel contact, and physical presence to jeep office. If someone visits Chitwan National Park on sharing basis, they have to pay US\$ 11 for each person for the jeep. In addition, each visitor also pays to Chitwan National Park an entry fee of US\$ 1.3 for Nepali and US\$17.5 for foreigners for 2 days.

Jeep services were halted badly due to the spread of COVID-19 for seven months where owners had lost daily net profit of US\$44, increased interest of the loan and increased vehicle maintenance cost. This has also impacted the employees working in the jeep safari sector as they have not received any payment for a longer period of time. While interacting with driver and staff they said:

*Before the pandemic, each vehicle has a separate driver with a monthly salary of US\$ 105, food facility and tips were given up to US\$ 9 when foreigners guest were happy. In normalcy condition, buffer zone drivers earn US\$138 - US\$147 monthly, and the park jeep driver earns an average of US\$260-US\$302 including tips but during the COVID-19 period only 10-15 drivers were working, and have received US\$ 4.3 for each trip without the food facilities and tips. After the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, the number of domestic visitors has increased in Sauraha and this has increased the average earning of jeep provider up to US\$ 17.5 per day.*

After the COVID-19 pandemic most of the staffs and drivers working in jeep safari in Sauraha have left their job and are involved in farming, fruit & vegetable shop, panting, poultry farms, etc. The COVID-19 restrictions had not only created serious psychological impact such as fear, frustrations, and pain among the employees of Sauraha but also have shown sudden economic suffering, and unemployment. This had also led to a significant increase in the number of people committing suicide. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic had smitten the employees and entrepreneurs of Sauraha physically, mentally, socially, and financially.

#### **Jankauli Madyabarti Community Forest**

It is a tourist business that provides boat service to visitors in Sauraha. According to employee Ram Nath Ghimire (Pseudonym) said:

*The community forest has 14 boats (only 8 are in good condition) with a different size that carries 2-15 tourists from the community forest to the elephant breeding center. The cost of each boat is US\$ 865 to US\$ 3450 and they have invested US\$21,555 in boats. The earning is around US\$605 in the peak season and US\$ 90 on the normal days. Due to COVID-19, the boat services have been closed for more than seven months in 2020. After October 2020, with the flow of domestic visitors, it has earned US\$3.5 - US\$ 90 per day.*

Likely, boat drivers also informed that:

*Before the COVID-19, we received salary of US\$70-US\$130 on the basis of seniority but after the pandemic, we have received only half of the salary till July 2020. The number of drivers working in the boat service company was 3-4 during the pandemic and others are on unpaid leave for the last seven months in 2020. Thus, most of the drivers are engaged in labor work, farming, etc. now a days.*

There are various factors that are influenced by the pandemic such as livelihood of people, economic growth, business activities, and behavior of the people (Lee & Chen, 2011). The coronavirus pandemic had also created long-term uncertainty and economic challenges for the tourism industry of Sauraha. The above quotations also



clarify that the COVID-19 pandemic has directly impacted the lives of the people engaged in the tourism sector in Sauraha.

### **Bagmara Madyabarti Community Forest**

It is involved in the conservation of forests and enhances eco-tourism in Sauraha. It provides services such as jungle safari by an elephant in community forest Kumroj, Chittransen, and Bagmara and light tour events where tourists stay in the night time. An employee working at the community forest expressed as:

*About 32 people were employed in the different tasks and earned US\$ 5175 per month before the pandemic. It facilitates canoe service up to the breeding center. It has 22 canoes with the capacity of carrying 3-18 passengers; 18 people were working as canoe drivers before the pandemic but due to the pandemic only 4 drivers were engaged till half of November 2020 in a day. We charge US\$4 per passenger (US\$2.75 for canoe and US\$1.25 is paid as entry fee per day to Chitwan National Park. Before the pandemic, we used to get salary, allowance, tips but now we are getting 50% payment of the salary only. The pandemic has badly affected the stakeholders and employees. Thus, people are involved in fishing and collecting different forest vegetables now a days to survive (Mushroom & Niuro).*

It is also proved from various studies that the people engaged in the tourism sector are much more wedged by the coronavirus pandemic and the above citation also shows that the coronavirus had impacted a lot in the tourism sub-sectors in Sauraha.

### **United Elephant Cooperative**

United elephant cooperative was established in 2006 for providing elephant ride business in Sauraha. While interacting with the elephant driver in Sauraha expressed:

*In Sauraha, there are ninety elephants for elephant rides and baths (40 government and 50 private). Each elephant has a daily income of approximately US\$515-US\$605 after an investment of more than US\$ 7200. In Sauraha, there are 100 elephant drivers, and they earned roughly NRs. 13500 (US\$117) salary per month and tips around US\$1 - US\$13, if the guests were delighted. Since COVID-19, elephants were unable to engage in various activities for the last seven months in 2020, negatively impacting on the income of people in Sauraha. As a result, five elephants have been sold and three more are in the process of being sold.*

Due to the spread of coronavirus, the owners were unable to run the elephant business properly, and were facing trouble to provide salaries to the elephant drivers and staffs. It is also hard to provide necessary food to the elephants. The situation has created difficulty for elephant owners, staff, and drivers working in the Sauraha area, and a huge loss of revenue has been seen in the tourism sector in Sauraha.

### **Sauraha Tharu Museum and Research Centre**

In order to preserve the culture, the Tharu museum in Sauraha was established in 2005 called Sauraha Tharu Museum and Research Centre. Traditional equipment of Tharu people like wheel cart, Janto (stone grinding mill), equipments are used when a baby is born, funeral ceremony, marriage ceremony, and traditional Tharu dresses are the main attraction for the tourists.

One informants said:

*This is the only museum in the country which tries to save Tharu cultural assets and promotes tourism. It should be modern and things that are in the museum are not enough.*

As one authority of museum management committee said:

*The museum had earned US\$8620 income last year but since the outbreak of virus there has been zero income.*

According to a staff member of the museum, an average of 200 tourists have visited the museum every day before the COVID-19 pandemic and they were charging an entry fee of NRs 200 for foreigners, NRs 100 for Nepali domestic tourists, and NRs 50 for the students. Besides these, National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), Biodiversity Conservation Centre (BCC), a volunteer from an international country also provide funds for running the museum. Due to pandemic and lockdown situation, the museum has been closed for the seven months in 2020 and it has been impacted a lot to manage the museum in a proper way economically and socially.

### **National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)**

In 1989, after Smithsonian Institution, USA completed its assignment in Chitwan National Park (CNP), and handed over the Nepal Terai ecology project to NTNC, the Trust established the Nepal Conservation Research and Training Centre (NCRTC) to conduct biological research and monitoring of flora and fauna in the low land Terai areas of Nepal.

Based on data provided by NTNC, biodiversity Conservation Centre, Sauraha, the actual tourists visited to see wildlife display information centre and elephant ride in Sauraha shows that the domestic tourists were more than the international tourists in which the actual income from a ticket from different visitors in three fiscal years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 were NRs 2592250 or US\$ 22347 in (2017/18), NRs. 3069250 or US\$26460 in (2018/19) and NRs. 2206560 or \$19022 in (2019/20), which also showed that total income had increased in 2018/19 than 2017/18 but due to the pandemic the revenue collection has been reduced in 2019/20. Similarly, the actual income from the elephant ride for the same fiscal years in 2017/18 was NRs. 1633750 (US\$14,084), in 2018/19 was NRs. 1590250 (US\$13,709) and

in 2019/20 was NRs. 1554800 (US\$13,404). Based on the data, high income was gained in 2017/18 then, it gradually decreased in 2019/20 due to the pandemic and lockdown in the country.

### **Cultural centers**

There are privately owned two cultural centers with various capacities. One is Tharu cultural program house with 135 capacities and another is the new Sauraha cultural program house with 500 capacities. One of the employee working in the cultural house stated:

*The cultural house in Sauraha, which opens only in the nights, hires four groups of entertainers, each with 10-15 Tharu men and women. The owner paid NRs 100000 (US\$862), in which they distributed NRs. 30,000 (US\$259) to female and NRs. 70,000 (US\$603) for male dancers on a monthly basis. In hotels, the group earned NRs. 3000 (US\$26)- NRs. 4000 (US\$34.5) for the dance. There are roughly 150-200 Tharus who are well-known for the cultural activities.*

Due to the pandemic, the cultural house is closed up to November 2020, in which dancers, staffs, and owners were badly suffered from income but the owner got good time for maintenance and repair of the hall. Besides Tharu culture, there are also pubs or dance bars like Red house and Lion's Den, which were closed for a long time because of the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Nature guide**

To support the tourism business, a lot of people from different places have taken the nature guide license and are involved in the work. Altogether 735 people have registered as nature guides of which only 500 are working as a guide. In the real field, only 350-400 persons are serving as a nature guide and others in their own business like hotels, restaurant, elephant ride, guide office, etc. A nature guide earned NRs. 15000 - NRs. 45000 (US\$130 - US\$388) monthly and NRs. 1500 (US\$13) on to daily basis depending on the capacity, experience, knowledge, and skill. Most of the guides renewed their permits from two places Kasara and Sauraha.

Due to the spread of the COVID-19, many guides were migrated to their homes town and only 209 from Sauraha and 44 from Kasara have applied for renewing their license until November 2020. The COVID-19 restriction and lockdown has reduced the number of nature guides in Sauraha as they have faced difficulties in their job and income.

### **Effects on revenue collection in Sauraha**

Due to the spread of COVID-19, different activities are closed in Sauraha, that have affected the revenue collection. According to the annual report of Chitwan National Park of different years, the total revenue collection in different activities like accommodation charge, entry fee, elephant rent, jeep safari, tender of canon and road

facility in five different fiscal years from 2071/72 to 2075/76 was NRs. 231075789 (US\$ 1939316.96) in 2071/72, NRs.102651492.82 (US\$ 861508.61) in 072/73, NRs. 139978 (US\$ 1174.77) in 073/74, NRs. 204843113 (US\$1719157.71) in 074/75 and NRs.67513809.29 (US\$ 566613.56) in 075/76 in Chitwan National Park, in which we observed that revenue collection was less in 2073/74 due to the mega earthquake in 2015. Then, the revenue had increased but after the outbreak of COVID-19, as the tourist activities in Sauraha were decreased from April 2020 to September 2020, had resulted in the decrease in revenue collection in Sauraha.

While interacting with the local government leaders, they expressed different views regarding the impact of COVID-19 on tourism. One authority of Ratnanagar Municipality expressed that:

*Total estimated investment in the tourism of Sauraha was US\$ 25 billion and there are 120 hotels and 57 restaurants. Due to the pandemic and lockdown situation, each and every sector was badly impacted in the first seven months of 2020 in which hotels and businesses were completely shut down. 95% of the imports and exports were paused. So compared to the previous year, business tax, registration fee, house, and land tax, etc. were badly affected and some businesses have not been renewed.*

Likewise, according to the ward chairman of ward number 7 reported:

*As the virus spread rapidly, the movement of the national and international tourists was reduced. There are 40 hotels & 22 restaurants in the ward. Sauraha has not received any tourist and has resulted in raised in unemployment, decreased in income and increased in loan and interest of the entrepreneur.*

Similarly, according to the ward chairman of the ward, number 5 said that:

*COVID-19 situation has reduced the local youth cultural performance at night time, the different activities in restaurant, hotels and other business-related to tourism has been decreased and this has created problems in business.*

The local level also faced challenges in revenue collection, different events like business tax, registered fee, attested fee, house, and land tax, and other fees have been severely affected due to pandemic. According to ward number 5, 6 & 7 focal people and tax officers, the status of revenue collection by local level in Sauraha area before and during a pandemic are shown in the following table. The table below shows the status of revenue collection by local level before and during pandemic.

**Table 1: Status of revenue collection by local level before and during pandemic**

S.N.	Months	Ward No. 5		Ward No. 6		Ward No. 7	
		Before	During	Before	During	Before	During
1.	Chitra-2076	97740	45008	690329	77530	79940	52950
2.	Baishak-2077	208650	5380	348566	0	122205	11640
3.	Jestha-2077	265920	11920	211874	25980	180749	18710
4.	Ashad-2077	335920	52146	511861	577115	206298.29	142520
5.	Sarwan-2077	45000	229333	937888	657037	397273.29	267811
6.	Bhadra-2077	15690	21305	724219	134260	89784	39455
7.	Ashoj-2077	48676	145726	730882	830210	76920	201990
8.	Kartik-2077	76465	72265	326514	81015	76990	79,050*
Total Up to Mid of Kartik		1094061	583083	4482133	2383147	1230160	735076

Source: Ratnanagar Municipality (Tax Officer), Ward number 5, 6 & 7

The above data shows that all wards had a good collection of revenue before the coronavirus pandemic and the highest revenue was collected. Ward number 6, which covers main part of tourism in Sauraha area was badly affected and other wards had also a negative effect due to pandemic.

From the findings of our research, it is proved that the tourism business in Sauraha, Chitwan has been affected quite badly by the coronavirus pandemic causing multiple effects in the tourism-related business, revenue collection of the government, jobs, social system, and daily lives of the people. The majority of the respondents of the research also agreed that there have been tremendous losses on the tourism sector in Sauraha since the COVID-19 lockdown started in March 2020. The different literature also confirmed that pandemic like COVID-19 had brought a serious impact on the tourism industry in the country. However, support and relief package from the central government and local government is important for the businesses that have suffered from the COVID-19 lockdown.

### **Tourism resilience**

Resilience can be considered to be a constellation of characteristics and capacities that mitigate the impact of biological, psychological, and social factors that threaten an individual's health (Kaplan, 1999; Ungar, Dumond, & McDonald, 2005; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). It can also be defined as a 'bouncing back' from a negative event (Masten, 2009; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). Finally, Hammond (2004; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011) posits that resilience suggests the presence of an adaptive system

that uses exposure to stress to provide resistance to future negative events. It is the development of this adaptive system through structured and challenging activities and experiences often offered through Adventure Education (AE) that serves as the underlying basis of this study.

Resilience is derived from the Latin word *resilio*, meaning 'to jump back' (Klein, Nicholls, & Thomalla, 2003; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). The roots of resilience are found in two bodies of literature: the psychological aspects of coping and the physiological aspects of stress (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). There is disagreement within the research community as to what resilience is; a set of traits (Jacelon, 1997), an outcome (Vinson, 2002; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011), or a process (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). Resilience is distinguished from 'recovery' (Bonanno, 2004; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011) in that recovery connotes a trajectory in which normal functioning is temporarily replaced by a threshold psychopathology (e.g. depression) and then gradually returns to pre-event levels. By contrast, resilience can be thought of as reflecting the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium, often through protective systems such as a supportive group or improved self-efficacy beliefs. Martin and Ho (2009; in Ewert & Yoshino, 2011) remind us, however, that resilience is a cultural-based term that can often have different connotations, depending on the locations from which it is used. In this paper, resilience is linked to an individual's tourism business ability to resist stressful situations or recover from such pandemic (COVID-19) situations.

The resilience of small business, which is often vital for tourism, is regarded as being relatively unexplored but vital (Herbane, 2010; in Hall, Prayag & Amore, 2018, p. 36), as understanding the resilience of small business owners in the wake of disasters, for example, is important not only in terms of lost revenue but also in terms of the damage to services, local communities, supply chain capacity and business capability (de Vries & Hamilton, 2016; in Hall et al., 2018, p. 36). Biggs et al. (2015; in Hall et al., 2018, p. 36) define resilience as a business's ability to maintain and adapt in the face of disturbance while maintaining its identity. Doern (2016; in Hall et al., 2018, p. 36) analysed small business owners' resilience during the London riots of 2011. She considered the preparedness and immediate impact of a major crisis, and regarded small business resilience as a mindset that is both anticipatory and containment oriented.

Resilience theory postulates that change is fundamental and the only constant that we can depend on (Butler, 2017; Cheer & Lew, 2017; Hall et al., 2017; in Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder, & Salazar, 2020, p. 1). Because all things change with time, systems (from a single entity to the entire planet) must adapt to their changing context or perish in some way. The resilience adaptive cycle suggests four general phases of a change event:

Phase 1: (Re-) Organization (innovation and creativity),

Phase 2: Growth (exploiting opportunities that arise from phase 1),

Phase 3: Consolidation (establishing fixed institutions and rules for phase 2),

Phase 4: Collapse (failure of fixed institutions in phase 3 to adapt to context changes), which results in a return to the Re-organization (phase 1) or, alternatively, the complete dissolution of the system. (Lew et al., 2020, p. 2)

Systems do not need to move through all four of these phases. The collapse phase could, theoretically, be avoided if the system maintained a culture of constant innovation to match its changing context (i.e. staying in phases 1, 2 and 3 only). Similarly, a system can be 'stuck' in a collapse sequence if it is unable to effectively exploit its opportunities and resources (i.e. staying mostly in phases 1 and 4). In addition, the intensity of each phase can vary considerably. For example, a collapse (phase 4) can be minor and easily overcome, or it can be a pandemic; and it can be a common occurrence or a rare, once-in-a-lifetime event (Lew et al., 2020, p. 2).

### **Conclusion**

As a result of rapid virus proliferation, a revolutionary change is taking place in the dominant modes of communication. For reasons of health security, business, education, and even central and global administration moves online. This is a profound change involving: technical infrastructure and software, but above all the shaping of new socio-cultural patterns. It seems that the transition to web-based communication methods is taking place at a rapid pace and also includes training, motivating and controlling employees (Sułkowski, 2020).

The most sensitive and at the same time most affected by the epidemic sectors will include tourism, hotel industry, gastronomy, culture, show business, cinematography, transport, education and health (Albulescu, 2020a). Trade, financial, banking and insurance sectors as well as fuel extraction and processing, and many other activities are also sensitive (Albulescu, 2020b). Few types of specialized activities related to pharmaceutical production, medical devices, protection and OHS, as well as selected types of ICT activities can count on maintaining or even increasing the growth rate. Probably the most threatened are entities from the SME group that do not have the resources to survive the crisis (Sułkowski, 2020).

Recession, virtualization of communication, and the growing need for coordination of epidemic, health and medical activities between countries can force national governments and international organizations to strengthen cooperation on a global scale. On the other hand, de-globalization tendencies may take over (Balsa-Barreiro, Vié, Morales, & Cebrián, 2020, pp. 1–4; Kozlov & Sokolova, 2020, He, Lin, & Zhang, 2020; in Sułkowski, 2020).

In order to know about the reason behind the lockdown in 2020, the readers are suggested to go through the International Commission of Jurists, Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1984) and the academic works of Baum & Hai (2020, p.2398), Rubenstein and Decamp (2020), and (Sun, 2020).

There have been many disastrous events and tourism crisis in the past like terrorist attacks, conflicts, or even pandemic situations like SARS, MERS, Ebola, Zika virus that have impacted global tourism brutally. In 2019, the coronavirus outbreak started in China and spread all over the world causing huge disruptions to the global economy and tourism sector. Chitwan was also not immune to the pandemic. The pandemic-related limitations on movement have wreaked havoc situation on the tourism industry of Sauraha in 2020. The tourism activities remained closed for the time being. Many hotels, restaurants, and bars, as well as business owners, cultural houses, museums, local government, employees, transportation, etc., have faced numerous issues like decreased income, increased unemployment, difficulty to pay taxes, livelihood issues, inadequate medical treatment facilities, etc.

Following the entry of COVID-19 in Nepal, the government imposed restrictions on the movement of people's by implementing the closure of the border on a national and international level, suspending travel, requesting people to stay at home, maintaining physical and social distance as well as imposed lockdown resulting to the cancellation of travel reservations and refunding their money in advance. The flow of tourists was also reduced in Sauraha, resulting in decrease in revenue collection in Chitwan National Park, local level & wildlife museum, raised poverty, increased unemployment, increased losing of jobs, and business owners were unable to pay taxes, staff salaries, interest, and loan installments. As a result, people were looking for other ways to make money.

It is undeniable that the pandemic has impacted the entire world, as well as all sectors of Nepal. To boost tourism in Sauraha, the government should provide tax breaks, low-interest loans, corona care hospital facilities for locals and tourists, a solid plan for disaster preparedness, create a safe environment for tourists, build Sauraha exclusively as a tourist destination, and assurance insurance policies for owners, employees, and locals, so that they are well prepared in the period of pandemic and during the other disasters, a loan assumption policy, and the development of a high-level task force at the national as well as in the community level, comprised of experts and stakeholders from Nepal's tourist sector, are all urgently needed to develop a strategic plan to prevent further losses and damages.

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