



## Trend and Growth of Religious Tourist Arrivals in Nepal: A Time Series Overview

<sup>1</sup>Shankar Datt Bhatt, <sup>2</sup>Ruchi Dwivedi, PhD

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Management,  
Far Western University, Central Campus,

Email: bhatt.1977@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0001-7024-038X

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University (MJPRU),  
India Email: ruchidwivedi@mjpru.ac.in, ORCID: 0009-0003-3639-8189

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jotmc.v9i9.90417>

### Abstract

Religious tourism is a part of overall tourism industry and is a significant driver of Nepalese economy, spurring substantially to the creation of employment, foreign exchange reserve, and promoting cultural exchange. Despite its immense contribution, the systematic study and analysis in this regard is still sparse, scant and even neglected in the Nepalese context. The aim of this paper is to examine the trend and pattern of the tourist arrival and specially focusing on the religious tourist arrivals in Nepal, and discuss its association with business growth of local economy. This study uses the time series data spanning between 1993 to 2023 on the total tourist and religious tourist arrival to examine the trend of religious tourist arrival. The evidence suggests that during the period 1993–1997, the share of religious remained quite low, ranging mostly between one percent to three percent, whereas the late 1997 to early 2000s saw a gradual increase, but the most notable change is observed between the period 2002 and 2004. However, religious tourist arrival between the period 2011 and 2016 showed considerable volatility, with multiple sharp drops, possibly due to disruptive events such as natural disasters or socio-political upheavals seen during the period of constitution of Nepal Promulgation. The period between 2016 to 2020, strong recovery could be observed, ranging religious tourist arrival 14-16 percent, showing optimistic scenario after full-fledged declaration Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. But, a sharp dip occurred in 2021 due to COVID-19 lockdown and global travel restrictions, but a recovery followed in 2022–2023, with percentages climbing back above 14 percent. The trend of religious tourist shows a steady upward indicating, potentiality for Nepalese economy. It also suggests policy implications for boosting pilgrimage and cultural tourism. The findings highlight that several religious sacred sites including Pashupatinath's, accounting for a significant proportion of international arrivals.

**Keywords:** Religious tourist, growth of tourist inflow, trend and pattern, economic implication

## Introduction

Nepal, a landlocked country located in the snowcapped Himalayas, boasts a unique diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, spiritual traditions and natural flora and fauna. Nepal being situated from the perennial snow-covered peaks in the north to the subtropical lowlands towards south makes Nepal one of South Asia's most unique travel destinations in natural and cultural perspectives. Similarly, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2023), tourism contributed 6.7 percent to Nepal's GDP and supported over one million jobs in recent years, marking its crucial role in national development (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). Nepalese tourist inflow consists of mix of natural site seeing, religious, cultural, and adventure. Nepal is rich various holy sacred sites including the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Muktinath of Mustang, Janaki Temple of Janakpur, Lumbini the birth place Gautam Buddha and so on. Obviously, the Pashupatinath Temple renowned as a prime attraction for devotees of Hindu religion, reflecting profound spiritual significance. Apart from this, it attracts scholars of ancient's Hindu civilization to deep dive on the content based on lively experience the sacred site visitors.

Nepal's diverse flora and fauna, rich culture, spiritual sacred sites and heritage also adds attraction for travelers around the world. Moreover, Pashupatinath Temple, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979 and a sacred Hindu pilgrimage destination, attracts thousands of religious devotees annually. In this context, Bhatt et al. (2025) stated that pilgrimage sites and shrines attract millions of tourists based on their religious faith, thereby creating employment opportunities, and substantial scope for income as well as income generation. In this regard, it is pertinent to have better understanding of the tourist arrivals in general and religious tourist arrival in particular in Nepal, especially in the popular sites like Pashupatinath, is critical for tourism planning and cultural conservation. Therefore, Nepalese tourism sector has evolved into a key pillar of the national economy over the last few decades.

Moreover, religious tourism, especially pilgrimage tourism, has been regarded as a cornerstone of Nepal's tourism economy. Furthermore, Pashupatinath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is not only the most revered Hindu site in Nepal but also one of the most sacred Shiva temples globally. The temple draws pilgrims and tourists from Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and across the Hindu diaspora, locating on the banks of the Bagmati River in Kathmandu (Sharma, 2021). Notably, Pashupatinath Temple is renowned not just for its spiritual magnetism but also for its rich architecture, and cremation ghats that reflect the spiritual acceptance of life and death in Hinduism philosophy. Most importantly, the events like Maha Shivaratri attract over 700,000 domestic and international religious visitors annually, highlighting its pilgrimage tourism potential (NTB, 2023).

Tourism in Nepal has not followed a linear trajectory through the study period. The development of the tourism sector of Nepal has been shaped by a mix of ups and downs caused by enablers and constraints. Obviously, political instability during the armed conflict launched by Maoist during 1996–2006, the 2015 earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) are found to be cause of sharp declines in total tourist arrivals as well religious tourist arrival (Ghimire, 2020). Despite these ups and downs, Nepalese tourism business has witnessed noticeable recovery and resilience, particularly religious tourism related with visiting sacred sites. The facts and figures indicate a strong recovery after Covid 19, surpassing tourist arrival figure one million in 2023.

Moreover, it went up to more than 577,000 arrivals as per the record of the first half of 2025 (NTB, 2025).

Religious sacred sites also meeting points to promote human fraternity meant for cultural diplomacy and interfaith exchange (Morpeth, 2007). The popular religious and spiritual sacred sites also serve the same can be instrumental bridging the relation amongst neighboring nation sharing common culture and tradition. Therefore, his analogy is useful to formulate appropriate strategy and policy to deepen cultural integrity.

Rich cultural capital and endowment including several world-renowned religious heritage sites, there remains a notable evidence gap in the longitudinal analysis of tourist arrival patterns. It is pertinent to have better understanding of trend and patterns in a time-series context that can offer important insights for policymakers and planners. In this regard, the paper tries to seek the answer of the following pertinent research questions:

- a. How is the trend of international tourist arrival in general and religious tourist arrival in particular?
- b. What are factors associated with the fluctuation in tourism arrival in Nepal?
- c. What would be the trend of tourist arrival in next 25 years?

The general objective of this study is to assess the trend of tourist arrival in time-series framework in Nepal, with a special emphasis on Pashupatinath Temple, to assess historical patterns, disruptions, and recovery trajectories. The specific objectives are:

- a. To examine longitudinal trends of total international tourist arrivals and religious tourist arrival in Nepal.
- b. To identify potential major factors influencing fluctuations in pilgrimage tourism.
- c. To estimate and forecast the total tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival for next 25 years.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

The authors acknowledge the following limitations relating to this study:

- a. This study entirely relies on secondary data, which may have gaps or inconsistencies.
- b. This study focuses on the trend and pattern of total tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival.
- c. The study excludes arrival of Indian nationals from some datasets.
- d. The study is absence of primary fieldwork.
- e. The study uses annual time series data to present trend and pattern of tourist arrival.

#### **Literature Review**

##### **Theoretical Review**

Tourism is seen as a stimulus for the economy as well as a sociocultural force. Scholars from various disciplines including economics, anthropology, geography, and pilgrimage studies are drawn to the multifaceted concept of tourism. Within the larger field of pilgrimage tourism research, with a particular emphasis on the economic lens, the current study has theoretical and practical value. A more comprehensive understanding of how religious tourism survives in the face of sociopolitical upheavals and pandemics is made possible by the combination of resilience theory, place attachment frameworks, and cultural heritage views. By doing this, the study

advances scholarly knowledge of pilgrimage tourism as a robust socio-cultural and economic phenomenon.

pilgrimage tourism has strong theoretical underpinnings from several disciplines including sociology, psychology, and tourism studies. In this context, Push-pull theory postulated that push factors consist of internal, psychological motives for spiritual growth, peace, cultural curiosity, or even escaping the banality of routines. On the other hand, pull factors means the external attributes that characterize a destination and therefore attracts numerous visitors with its architectural beauty, pilgrimage significance, cultural heritage, and perceived sanctity. In this setting, Pashupatinath Temple, with its recognition as a globally religious site of sacredness and a UNESCO World Heritage Site status, presents a very important pull destination for Hindu pilgrims around the world (Dann, 1977).

Staged Authenticity Theory suggested that modern tourists seek authenticity in their experiences, especially in a world increasingly marked by commodified and staged attractions (MacCannell, 1976; MacCannell, 2018). Theory of collective effervescence asserts that the role of pilgrimage tourism to promote social unity and spiritual fulfillment thereby overall social cohesion. The theory argues that participation in collective rituals and sacred gatherings creates a sense of communal belonging and emotional betterment (Durkheim, 2016; Turner & Turner, 2011).

Rite of Passage Theory underscore that pilgrimage as a liminal experience a transition phase in which religious devotees symbolically leave their everyday roles and enter a sacred space (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Turner & Turner, 1978). Moreover, religious tour is not merely a journey; it is an experience where participants immerse themselves in rituals, sacred meanings of life, and symbols. Therefore, religious tourism provides multidimensional experience combining spiritual, emotional, and sometimes even economic as well as physical transformation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

In the Nepalese context, these theoretical underpinning are path finders and instruments that help to explain the sustained attraction of Pashupatinath Temple to both domestic and international tourists. Essentially, religious tourists or pilgrims do not visit only for sightseeing; rather they seek healing of their inner core wound, fulfillment, bestowed with blessings, and connections to the almighty God, and to make history. Hence, religious tourism is a blend of motivation, ritual, symbolism, and authentic cultural performance that requires a theoretical framework rich in both psychological and sociological interpretations.

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical research on pilgrimage tourism in Nepal has grown significantly in recent decades, paralleling the rise of tourism as a development strategy. Much of the earlier academic work focused on the general tourism statistics, economic benefits, and infrastructure development. The majority of the existing studies found to be emphasizing general tourism trends focusing on short-term fluctuations, few have systematically explored the long-term evolution of pilgrimage tourism at a sacred site of such cultural magnitude (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Similarly, the studies have also focused on the aggregate annual figures or short-term fluctuations rather than systematic examination on how various events and crises such as natural disasters, armed conflict, political unrest, and pandemics affected both general tourism and site-specific religious tourism. Evidently,

Nepal has experienced sharp declines in international tourist arrivals during the shocks like Maoist armed conflict period 1996–2006, the last devastating earthquake event of 2015 with Gorkha as epicenter, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, there has been limited scholarly inquiry into how sites like Pashupatinath perform during and after aforementioned shocks (Ghimire, 2020; Sharma, 2021). This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by analyzing historical data on total tourist arrivals, religious tourist arrival, careful examination of fluctuations, and assessing the factors that influence these trends over time. Pilgrims of the sacred sites, including the Pashupatinath Temple sacred site, are often motivated by spiritual or ritual obligations rather than leisure preferences. Intuitively, their travel decisions may be less susceptible to economic uncertainty or political instability (Raj & Morpeth, 2007).

Baniya and Paudel (2019) study found that religious tourism, particularly visiting frequency to Pashupatinath and Lumbini remained comparatively resilient even during socio-political instability, indicating that religiously and spiritually motivated tourist are less influenced by socio-political factors.

Ghimire (2020) revealed that pilgrimage tourism, while a smaller segment in terms of luxury expenditure, provides substantial and stable economic input due to high volume and frequency. Pant and Basnet (2018) found that pilgrimage tourism promotes local business like small-scale entrepreneurship, especially among women and marginalized groups who set up stalls, run guesthouses, or offer pilgrimage paraphernalia. However, the findings highlighted the challenge of seasonal income, lack of training, and poor infrastructure as barriers to maximizing benefits.

Sharma et al. (2021) study focused specifically on religious tourist arrival at Pashupatinath Temple concluded that religious ambiance, ritual authenticity, and spiritual appeal rank high among tourists' satisfaction indicators, several problems persist. The study also indicated key issues as inadequate waste management, lack of guided interpretation, and poor crowd control during peak times.

Kunwar and Thapaliya (2021) conducted a preliminary assessment of the socio-economic impacts of Barahachhetra pilgrimage site on the local community, focusing on aspects like employment generation, local business development, and infrastructure growth. The study also highlights the challenges faced by the residents of the area, including inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, and lack of proper management hampering hinder its potential for sustainable tourism development.

Singh (2023) examined the behaviour of Indian pilgrims at Pashupatinath and discovered that more than 60 percent of Indian visitors to Nepal do so for pilgrimage. The study concludes that bilateral visa convenience, language familiarity, and shared cultural history all strengthen their allegiance. But in order to keep and expand this group, Singh identified crucial advancements in transportation, sanitation, and pilgrim-friendly services. Urban planners, tourist officials, and cultural asset managers may all benefit from the study's practical, evidence-based ideas. Therefore, it is crucial for stakeholders to comprehend the historical trends and recovery paths of pilgrimage tourism in order to create stronger frameworks for resource allocation and contingency planning. Furthermore, this study is particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions, which brought attention to the vulnerability of the global cultural tourism industry (Gossling et al., 2020).

Thus, the study serves as a useful instrument for guaranteeing the long-term sustainability and resilience of holy heritage tourism in Nepal in addition to enhancing academic scholarship. In general, the comprehensive knowledge of religious tourism in Nepal is supported by empirical literature. Economic systems, political environments, and infrastructure realities all play a role in spiritually driven tourism. It is essential for maintaining regional economies, protecting intangible cultural assets, and promoting cross-cultural ties. However, focused investments in site management, environmental sustainability, and community-based tourism are necessary to fully realize its potential.

Oli and Woli (2024) study discusses considerable potential as a religious tourism destination in Nepal and indicated inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing and promotion, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders as challenges that hinder its development. Moreover, the study emphasizes the need for investments in infrastructure, enhanced marketing strategies, and improved collaboration among stakeholders. The study highlights religious tourism's potential as a means to promote economic development and support cultural preservation in the region.

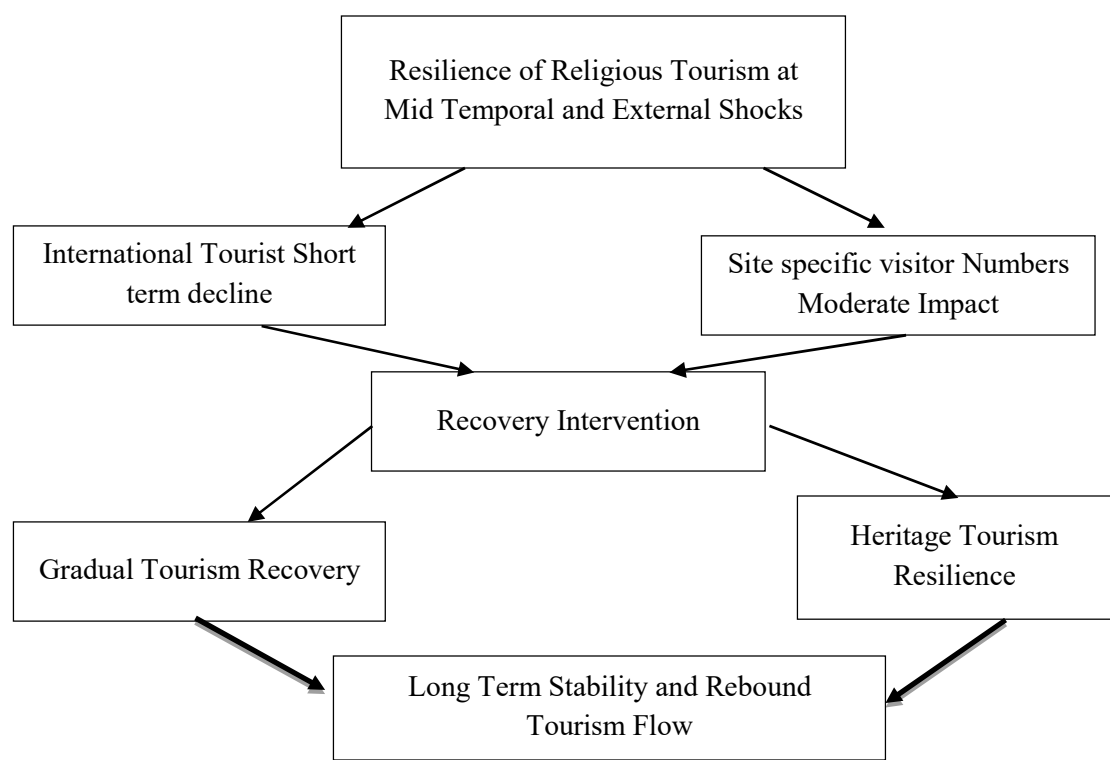
Pradhan and Koirala (2024) findings indicate the significance of international tourism for Nepalese economy, which has suffered a significant decline due to the pandemic. The study provides insights for policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism sector, highlighting the necessity for sustainable tourism development and infrastructure investment to recover and capitalize on Nepal's tourism potential. Similarly, the review paper of Bhatt et al. (2025) underscore that pilgrimage tourism arrival sites are significant economic drivers, attracting millions globally through religious faith and essentially creating substantial employment and local business growth.

Pandey (2025) study estimated long-run coefficients for government consumption expenditure, gross fixed capital formation, and total trade volume, and found positive and statistically significant association, indicating a positive relationship with economic growth.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Based on the literature review, the authors have developed a conceptual framework to proceed the overall complete overall article composition. Figure 1 below demonstrates the conceptual framework precisely.

**Figure 1**  
 Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Basnyat et al., 2020

**Data and Methodology**

**Research Philosophy**

The study relies on observable numerical data on pilgrimage tourist arrivals over a long period and uses statistical tools to detect trends, growth patterns, and structural changes. This indicates that it follows a positivist research philosophy. The aim is to explain trends and patterns through empirical data rather than subjective interpretation. The researcher applies objective analytical procedures. In ontological perspective, the study adopts an objectivist ontology, relating to trends and growth patterns in total tourism arrival with special focus on religious tourism. In this regard tourist arrival data are treated as real, measurable phenomena that exist independent of the researcher. In other words, variables such as annual tourist arrival figures, trends, and growth rates are considered external facts that can be quantified, analyzed, and compared over time.

Moreover, in epistemological perspective, the study uses a positivist epistemology, emphasizing measurable knowledge derived from statistical analysis. Obviously, valid knowledge comes from the concrete data collected through official sources such as published sources and government authority. Essentially, verification is based on empirical evidence, not subjective judgment. Furthermore, from an axiological perspective, the research maintains value neutrality with best effort. In this regard, the researchers avoid introducing personal or cultural bias regarding

specific religions, sacred sites, and tourism policies. The focus is strictly on empirical patterns within the data. In this regard, the scope of ethical considerations is limited because the study employs secondary data, but transparency, accuracy, and responsible reporting of findings. Finally, the study adopts a quantitative, annual secondary data on religious tourist arrivals from 1993 to 2023. Likewise, the data are displayed using line graphs, descriptive statistics, growth analysis, and statistical summaries.

### **Research Design**

This study is descriptive and analytical and summarizes trends and patterns in tourist arrival using quantitative data of time series nature. In this regard, the special focus is on the religious tourist arrival in annual basis in Nepal and general international tourist arrival patterns, especially during the periods of crisis, shocks and recovery.

### **Nature and Sources of Data**

This study is entirely based on the secondary time series data collected from Nepal Rastra Bank and other government authority. In this regard, the study used data spanning from 1993 to 2023, to conduct trend, pattern and growth analysis. This comprehensive dataset supports a robust exploration of the resilience and adaptability of religious tourism in Nepal.

### **Tools and Techniques of Data Analysis**

The study used MS Excel to analyze the secondary time series data which contains with 31 data points on annual basis. The quantitative analysis is focused on trend, pattern, and growth of total tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival. The analysis of the is associated with Nepal's socio economic, political, and natural ups and downs that was observed during the period that can be various types of shocks causing sharp fall in tourist arrival due to pessimism followed by recovery due to optimism.

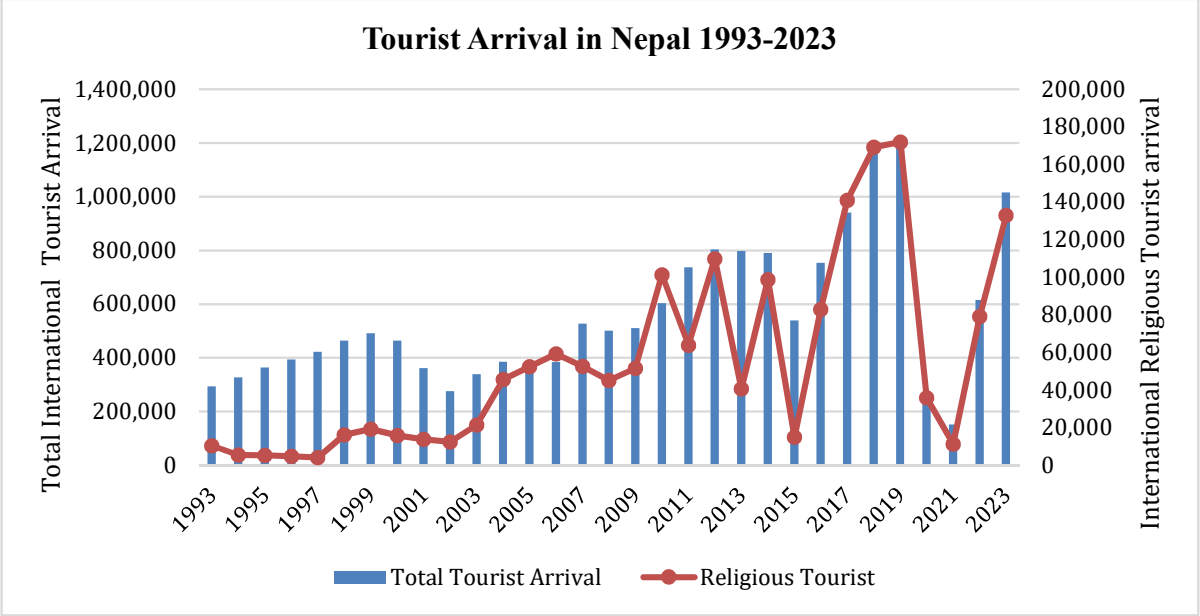
## **Results and Discussion**

### **Trend of Pilgrimage Tourist Arrivals in Nepal**

Figure 2 below demonstrates Nepal's total tourist arrivals and religious tourist arrivals data in annual basis spanning from 1993 to 2023. Moreover, the figure demonstrates three types of data; total tourist arrival, percentage of religious tourist/ pilgrimage tourist arrival of total tourist and tourist other than pilgrimage. with a particular focus on the percentage share of religious tourists. The trend analysis of this data reveals several important insights into the evolution and role of pilgrimage tourism within the broader context of Nepal's tourism industry. Based on the trend and pattern, we can draw some valuable insights.



**Figure 2**  
Scenario of Total Tourist Arrival, Pilgrimage Tourist Arrival



*Note.* Figure 2 demonstrates total tourist arrival, and religious tourist arrival in Nepal from 1993-2023.

*Source,* Nepal Rastra Bank 2025.

**Low and Gradual Increase: Early Period (1993–2003)**

Figure 2 demonstrates total tourist arrival, and religious tourist arrival in Nepal from 1993-2023. Evidently, the figure shows that total tourist arrival is less than 5 hundred thousand and religious tourist arrival fluctuated below 30 thousand. The figure of religious tourist arrival fluctuated less than 5 percent during the period 1993- 2002. This period is regarded as a beginning phase of religious tourism development of Nepal. This is possibly due to weak promotion of religious sacred sites, limited infrastructure, and political instability in the country. However, by 2003, there was a noticeable rise, with pilgrimage tourists making up 6.33 percent of total arrivals. Evidently, the data suggests that pilgrimage tourism started gaining momentum during the early 2000s, setting the stage for more substantial growth in the following years.

**Period of Growth and Consolidation (2004–2010)**

Evidently, the sharp rise in the proportion of religious tourist arrival in 2004, that jumped to 11.85 percent, followed by the further rise to 15.45 percent in 2006. This dramatic and optimistic rise is likely associated with the improved recognition of Nepal's pilgrimage sites and spiritual destinations, especially Pashupatinath, Muktinath, and Lumbini particularly from India. Moreover, the period from 2006 to 2010 marks a consolidation phase, where the share of religious tourists remained consistently high. The figure reached to 16.81 percent in 2010, demarcating peak point so far (Figure 2).

### **Fluctuation and Rebalancing (2011–2015)**

This period witnessed turbulence in terms total tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival both. Evidently, the percentage of religious tourists declined after 2010, gone down to 8.66 percent in 2011 and high fluctuation till 2015. Moreover, percentage of religious tourist arrival dropped to 5.10 percent in 2013. This figure went even as low as 2.78 percent in 2015 (Figure 2). Possibly, this decline in religious tourist arrival is due to several factors, including the impact of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, which damaged many pilgrimage and heritage sites, reducing tourist confidence and accessibility. However, even during this period of fluctuation, the absolute number of pilgrimage tourists remained significant, showing that pilgrimage tourism retained its relevance despite broader challenges in the tourism sector.

### **Rebound and Sustained Growth (2016–2019)**

The evidence also shows a clear rebound of tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival both from 2016 to 2019. In other words, the share of pilgrimage tourists rose again to 11 percent in 2016, and remained between 14–15 percent from 2017 to 2019. This consistent growth is reflective of the national prioritization of cultural and religious heritage, improved sacred site infrastructure, and an increase in faith-based travel globally. Notably, in the year 2019 there was sudden rise of religious tourists over 171,000, out of 1.2 million total tourists which is around 14.36 percent.

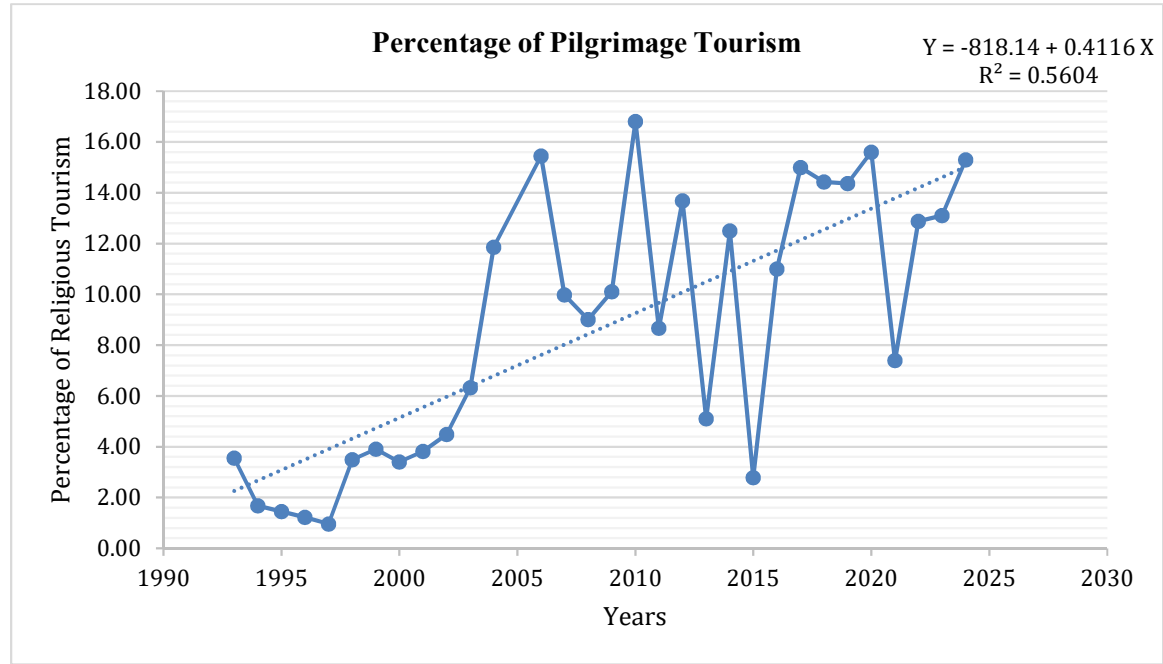
### **COVID-19 Impact and Post-Pandemic Recovery (2020–2023)**

Evidently, following the previous trend, in 2020, religious tourist climbed over 230,000 which is 15.60 percent of total tourist arrival. This indicates the persistent nature of religious motivations even during crises. After Covid 19 pandemic period (2021–2023), pilgrimage tourism has shown strong recovery. The percentage of religious tourists rose steadily 7.40 percent in 2021, 12.87 percent in 2022, and 13.10 percent in 2023. In summary, the percentage share of religious tourists has shown a long-term increasing trend, from under 2 percent in the mid-1990s to over 15 percent in 2010. Hence, religious tourism in Nepal has demonstrated resilience, especially post-COVID, and contributes meaningfully to the country's tourism industry.

### **Trend of Religious Tourist Arrivals in Nepal**

The figure 3 demonstrates trend and growth of religious tourist arrival in Nepal during the period 1993-2023.

**Figure 3**  
Percentage Share of ReligiousTourists from Total Tourist Arrival



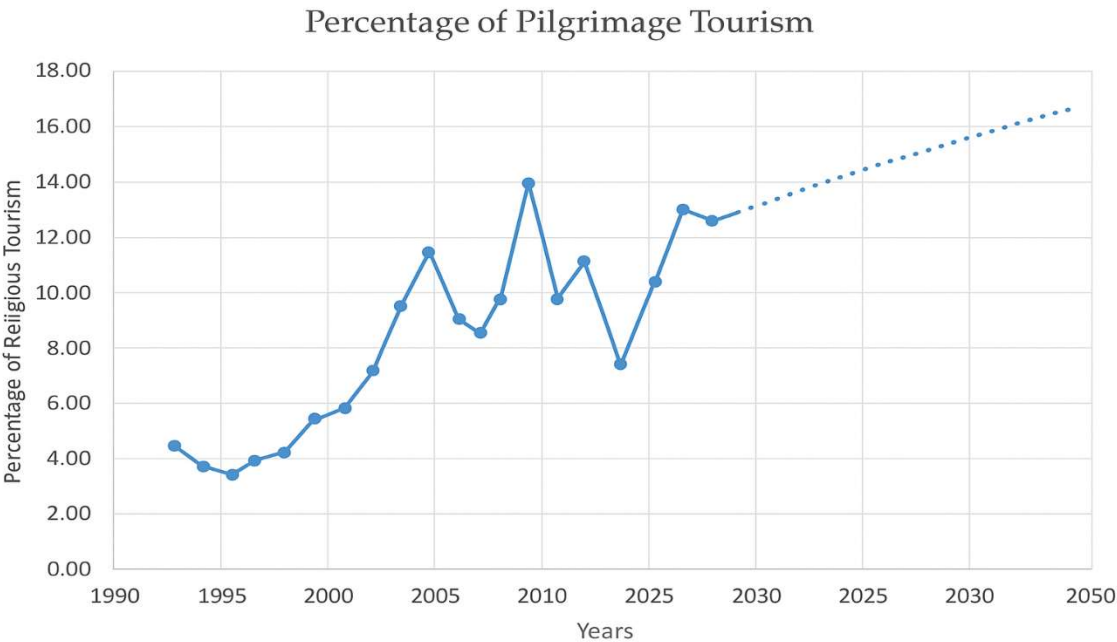
*Note.* Figure 3 demonstrates Percentage Share of Pilgrimage Tourists (1993–2023)  
*Data Source,* Nepal Rastra Bank 2025.

Figure 2 above demonstrates the percentage of pilgrimage tourists of total tourist arrival in Nepal from the period 1993 to 2023. Evidently, during the period 1993–1997, the share of religious tourist arrival remained quite low, ranging mostly below 3 percent. Likewise, from 1997 to early 2000s, the figure witnessed a gradual increase. However, the most notable change can be observed between 2002 and 2004. During the period, the percentage sharply rose from below 6 percent to over 12 percent. Notably, the figure rose sharply and reached to 15.81 percent in 2006, followed by a sharp surge in 2010 pushed the value to around 17 percent marking the highest point in the entire series. This indicates exceptional growth for entire study period. However, the period between 2011 and 2016 was full of considerable volatility, notably in 2015, falling close to 2 percent. This implies that during the period, Nepal faced some disruptive events such as natural disasters and prevalence of socio and political instability. All of a sudden, COVID-19 lockdown and global travel restrictions caused sharp fall in 2020 and 2021. Fortunately, a recovery followed in 2022–2023, with percentages climbing back above 14 percent. To sum up, the data reflects three distinct phases of ups and down in the religious tourist arrival. An initial low and stable period, a sharp growth phase with high volatility, and a recent recovery toward pre-decline stability. This volatility highlights both the resilience and sensitivity of religious tourism to external shocks.

**Forecast of Religious Tourist Arrivals (2023–2050)**

The figure 4 below demonstrates possible scenario of religious tourist arrival for coming two and decades based on the past trend during the period 1993-2023. In other words, it is a statistical projection on the assumption of all things remaining the same or status quo.

**Figure 4**  
Forecast of Religious Tourist Arrivals (2025–2050)



*Note.* Figure 4 demonstrates forecasting of percentage share of religious tourist arrival based on past data of 1993–2023.

*Data Source,* Nepal Rastra Bank 2025.

Figure 4 above demonstrates projection of religious tourist arrival in Nepal from 2024 to 2050 suggests a steady upward trend in the percentage of religious tourism. The projection is made based on the assumption that at policy scenario will remain the same. Essentially, the share is forecasted to grow gradually from about 13 percent to nearly 17.5 percent by 2050, following the recovery seen around 2023. Moreover, the projection assumes fewer disruptions, pointing to a more resilient sector.

**Conclusion and Implication**

The study finds notable fluctuation and disruption in the total international tourist arrival and religious tourist arrival both during the study period 1993-2023. Moreover, Nepal's international tourist arrivals declined sharply during crises such as the Maoist armed conflict (1996–2006), the 2015 earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidently, religious tourism especially to culturally significant sites exhibited greater stability and faster recovery. Despite the fluctuation

and disruption, tourism industry of Nepal maintained commendable resilience and recovery in the industry.

### Policy Implication

Nepal has huge potential for religious tourism growth and its contribution to the economy as a whole. Intuitively, Nepal has several religious sacred sites that are revered by the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism. These both religions are popular in neighboring country India, China and many other South east Asian nations. In this context, Nepal need make unique package of foreign religious tourist attraction to harness the benefit of having world famous religious sacred sites of Hindu and Buddhist. In this regard, policy to be formulated to capitalize holy belief of people from around the world by increasing their frequency of visits by investing in destination management, cross-border pilgrimage routes and packages, infrastructure around and religious sacred sites for unique spiritual experience.

### References

- Baniya, R., & Paudel, N. (2019). Political instability and tourism in Nepal. *Nepal Journal of Economics*, 5(1), 34–45.
- Basnyat, S., Shrestha, S., Shakya, B., Byanjankar, R., & Basnyat, S. (2020). Domestic tourism in Nepal: Issues and challenges. *Tourism Review International*, 24(1), 37-49.
- Bhatt, S. D., Subedi, K. R., & Dwivedi, R. (2025). Review paper on the methodological choice for assessing the economic contribution of pilgrimage site. *The Management Review*, 1(1), 136-154.
- Dann, G. M. S. (1977). Anomie, Ego-Enhancement and Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*.
- Durkheim, E. (2016). The elementary forms of religious life. In *Social theory re-wired* (pp. 52-67). Routledge.
- Ghimire, R. (2020). *Tourism Development in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities*. Kathmandu: Himalayan Press.
- Gossling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 29(1), 1-20.
- Ibarra, H., & Obodaru, O. (2016). Betwixt and between identities: Liminal experience in contemporary careers. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 47-64.
- Koirala, S., & Singh, A. (2023). Digital Tourism in Nepal. *South Asian Tourism Review*.
- Kunwar, R. R., & Thapaliya, N. (2021). A preliminary study of pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra, Nepal. *The Gaze: Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 12(1), 126-170.
- MacCannell, D. (1976). The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class.
- MacCannell, D. (2018). Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social. *Tourists and tourism: A reader*, 29.
- Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). (2023). *Tourism Statistics 2022*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation.
- Oli, L. B., & Woli, L. (2024). The potential for religious tourism in the Panchakoshi area of Dailekh. *Medha: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 7(1), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.3126/medha.v7i1.73900>

- Pandey, B. (2025). Tourism and economic growth: Assessing the role of tourism industry in Nepal. *Cognition*, 7(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3126/cognition.v7i1.74716>
- Pant, S., & Basnet, D. (2018). Pilgrimage tourism in Nepal. *Journal of Tourism Studies*.
- Pradhan, B. L., & Koirala, P. (2024). Analyzing and forecasting international tourist arrivals in Nepal: Trends, patterns, and future prospects. *International Journal of Operational Research Nepal*, 12(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijorn.v12i1.73153>
- Raj, R., & Morpeth, N. D. (2007). Religious tourism and pilgrimage management: An international perspective. CABI.
- Raj, R., & Morpeth, N. D. (2007). *Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management: an international perspective* (pp. viii+227).
- Sharma, K., Kc, A., & Pokharel, B. (2022). Status and challenges of reconstruction of heritage structures in Nepal after 2015 Gorkha, Nepal earthquake. *Heritage & Society*, 15(1), 89–112.
- Sharma, K. (2021). Pashupatinath as a cultural heritage: Tourism and ritual significance. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37(2), 221–239.
- Thapa, J., & Adhikari, B. (2022). Mapping pilgrimage networks in Kathmandu Valley. Kathmandu Geospatial.
- Thapa, J., & Adhikari, B. (2022). Mapping Pilgrimage Networks. Kathmandu Geospatial.
- Turner, V. W., & Turner, E. L. (2011). *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture*. Columbia University Press.
- UNWTO. (2022). Tourism and Resilience Report. World Tourism Organization.
- World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). (2023). *Economic Impact Report: Nepal*. [www.wttc.org](http://www.wttc.org)