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## Prospects of Cultural Heritage Tourism in Panauti, Nepal

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### Abstract

*Panauti, an open-air museum located near the Kathmandu Valley, holds enormous tourism potential rooted in its cultural richness and a longstanding tradition of hospitality. Despite its heritage value, limited scholarly attention has been given to Panauti from a cultural heritage tourism perspective. This paper aims to explore the prospects of cultural heritage tourism in Panauti by examining the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, the host's expression of hospitality, and how guests develop a sense of authenticity. It further examines government and local initiatives for protecting cultural heritage and promoting it as a tourist destination. A qualitative research method with an exploratory design was adopted, incorporating interviews, participant observation, and content analysis methods to analyze the topic of study. Key attractions identified around Panauti are temples, traditions, culture, museums, and festivals. Similarly, the homestay, the lifestyle of locals, slow food, and the hospitality culture are appealing to visitors as they enhance the feelings of authenticity. Despite having potential, the slow growth of*

*tourism in Panauti can be attributed to factors such as mismanagement, inadequate facilities, and a lack of effective promotion for domestic tourists. Even though the culture is in the gradual process of transformation, the Newars of Panauti are revitalizing their culture for tourism development. Finding suggests that Panauti is one of the prominent tourism destinations, and strategic promotion could increase the visibility of this place for both domestic and international tourists, leading to sustainable religious and cultural heritage tourism development. This study incorporates an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussions, and conclusion.*

## Introduction

Culture is a dynamic and evolving way of expressing civilizations (Eagleton, 2016). It is a model of behavior that is in a constant process of transformation and is 'designed for living' (Luger, 2000, p. 39). Luger (2000, p. 39) further explains that culture works like software, which is steered by communication, and refers to it as a 'black box' because of its complex, internal workings.

The knowledge and skills possessed by an individual are cultural capital, which helps in understanding the tourist destination (Sharpley, 2009, p. 161). However, Throsby (1999, p. 167; in Sharpley, 2009, p. 161) defines cultural capital as a stock of cultural value embodied in an asset. He mentions that the destination's cultural capital, both tangible (historic buildings, art) and intangible (festivals, ceremonies, traditional lifestyle), is an asset or attraction, and that may directly or indirectly generate income. Furthermore, intangible cultural capital can be enhanced through tourism, as cultural practices are revitalized and represented as tourist commodities or attractions. However, this may result in reducing the value of culture among the local community (Sharpley, 2009, p. 161).

Culture is a symbol that has a meaning and should be interpreted. These interpretations are the aesthetic values of culture. These values shape how art, music, literature, and other forms of creative expression are created, judged, and appreciated within that culture. These values include specific styles, symbols, motifs, and even the criteria that help to determine what is "beautiful" or "artistic" within that cultural context. Bista (1987) states that these aesthetic values are associated with the emotional experience of a person.

*"Tourism has less to do with what other people are really like and more to do with how we imagine them to be, and in this respect, is like any other form of representation, including ethnography"* (Bruner, 1989, P.439; in Leite, Castañeda, & Adams, 2019, p. 1).

Tourism is the practice of traveling to places outside one's usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes (Kunwar, 2017b). It can be divided into two major forms: natural and cultural tourism (Graburn, 1989, p. 31). Natural tourism is concerned with experiencing and appreciating the natural beauty of a place. The other form is closely associated with the culture and heritage of a place, as it highly influences the number of visitors who want to immerse themselves and experience the diversity of the place.

Usually, tourists tend to visit a place for five major activities: ethnic, cultural, historical, environmental, and recreational (Smith & Richard, 2013). Among these five major activities,

the culture is considered the heart of the tourism product, and is formally sold as 'heritage' or 'cultural tourism' (Harrison & Hitchcock, 2005; Kunwar, 2017b, p. 123).

As far as cultural tourism is concerned, Ritchie and Zins (1978, p. 257) have identified twelve elements of culture that attract tourists to a particular destination: i. handicrafts, ii. language, iii. traditions, iv. gastronomy, v. art and music, concerts, painting and sculptures, vi. history, vii. work and technology, viii. architecture, ix. religion, x. educational system, xi. dress, and xii. leisure activities. Tourists often visit places to experience the culture, heritage sites, and local cuisine, making it cultural tourism/immersion (Bonet, 2011).

Even the quality of the experience for visitors in any cultural attraction is crucial (Lasten & Upchurch, 2012, p. 20). Performance quality, experience quality, overall satisfaction, and revisit are the four major criteria that are taken into consideration to determine the quality of experience (Cole & Scott, 2004; in Lasten & Upchurch, 2012, p. 20). This experience ultimately authenticates the place as a good destination. Destinations are collections of people, inhabitants, enterprises and agencies located within a recognised geographical or political area who serve tourists relatively independently of one another (Pollock, 2019, p. 10).

The term authentication is defined as a process by which something, a role, product, object, or event, is confirmed as 'original,' 'genuine,' 'real,' or 'trustworthy' (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, 1296; De Bernardi, 2019a). Even the tourists look for 'coolly' authenticated objects, but in the end, have subjective feelings related to 'hot' authenticity (Mkono, 2013; in De Bernardi, 2019a).

Heritage is the legacy of tangible and intangible elements (UNESCO, 2004). It is inherited from past generations and holds value for a particular society or group (Vecco, 2010). Heritage tourism is a specific kind of travel in which experiencing and learning about a destination's historical, cultural, and archeological importance is the major point of attraction (Kunwar & Chand, 2016). This encompasses tangible elements like structures, monuments, and artifacts, and intangible components like conventions, traditions, and folklore.

*"Our future is where our past is"* (Katriel, 1993). *"The past is a foreign country"* (Lowenthal, 2015). These statements reveal how the heritage of the past is important in the field of cultural heritage tourism. Furthermore, each author acknowledges the influence of the past on the present and future. However, Katriel states that our past heritage is the foundation for shaping our future, while Lowenthal states that our past is different and its distinctiveness is used to interpret our heritage in the present day.

Heritage tourism is rapidly emerging as a crown jewel, particularly for developing countries (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). It depicts a nation's cultural and historical identity, from ancient archaeological sites that echo the stories of forgotten civilizations to bustling marketplaces where ancient traditions are woven into the fabric of everyday life. The spectrum of heritage tourism is diverse, whether it is religious sites that attract pilgrims from around the globe, or ancestral villages that offer a chance for diaspora communities to reconnect with their roots in the name of experiencing authenticity, or museums that act as a bridge between the present and the past.

The museum was founded as a safe repository that stores reminiscences of the past, mostly tangible heritage, and sometimes intangible heritage. Beyond being central repositories of history and culture, museums even guide visitors towards a deeper interpretation of a place. Guides are essential at any destination, directing visitors towards specific experiences (Kunwar, 2011). Further, they serve as crucial mediators and facilitate meaningful interpretation so that visitors can connect and gain a real image of a place (Kunwar, 2009).

Similarly, interpretation in heritage tourism is crucial as it is specific to the destination and related to the past (Puczkó, 2006). Visitors' experience can be analyzed through two interpretation methods: the personal and impersonal. The personal method involves cultural performance, guides, and their interpretative skills, whereas the impersonal method depends on the use of signs and symbols (Puczkó, 2006, p. 239). This form of authentic immersion enables meaningful connections and contributes to effective tourist interpretation (Tilden, 1957).

Cultural heritage is a rich art woven from the threads of the past (Blake, 2000). It encompasses not just the tangible things we can see and touch, like grand monuments and ancient artifacts, but also the intangible aspects that shape our identity. This includes traditions, languages, stories, and knowledge passed down through generations. Cultural heritage is not simply everything from the past; it is a carefully curated selection of elements considered worthy of preservation and that continue to hold greater value in the present. Cultural heritage holds meaningful value as a cultural core because it relies on irreplaceable material and intangible assets, including shared values, knowledge, and traditional skills, spanning artistic, cultural, and professional aspects (Hall, 2004; in Della Lucia & Trunfio, 2018).

Culture, heritage, and tourism have a stronger relationship as culture and heritage portray the beliefs and values of the place, and when tourism focuses on these elements, it becomes a valuable tool for promoting sustainable tourism (Kumar, 2017). The intricate connection between cultural tourism and cultural heritage highlights how cultural heritage resources can be utilized sustainably for tourism (Cros & McKercher, 2020).

Unlike traditional tourism, which often involves long-distance travel, proximity tourism encourages exploration of local areas, short trips to nearby destinations, and the rediscovery of the unique and interesting aspects of everyday surroundings (Salmela et al., 2021). Alongside this trend, a new spectrum of specialized tourism approaches, like creative, regenerative, niche, and rural tourism has started to surface.

The concept of proximate tourism was not new, but the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted international travel, causing a huge decline in inbound tourism for many destinations (Romagosa, 2020). This crisis forced a shift towards proximate tourism, with a surge in travel within local regions. This shift, driven by travel restrictions, has the potential to increase the sustainability of the tourism industry by fostering a greater reliance on local markets (Romagosa, 2020).

Similarly, creative tourism is an emerging field in tourism that moves beyond conventional mass tourism as it emphasizes travelers' desire for more meaningful participation and deeper engagement with their destinations. "Creative tourism offers visitors the opportunity

to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken” (Richards & Raymond, 2000; in Duxbury et al., 2021). Despite the evolution in the definition of creative tourism, this definition by the author is notable in academia due to its originality.

Duxbury et al. (2021) classified five distinct models for structuring creative tourism projects: i. stand-alone offers, demonstrated by creative hubs and workshops that provide dedicated spaces for activities like crafts or music; ii. a series of creative activities, focusing on interconnected creative businesses and individuals within creative clusters; iii. a localized network for creative tourism, which emphasizes creative trails and routes linking various sites or experiences along a specific theme; iv. small-scale festivals that include creative tourism activities, serving as creative events and festivals designed to attract visitors through meaningful experiences; and finally, v. creative accommodation, which facilitates structured connections and learning opportunities about destinations through their accommodation. These models focus on the interests of both locals and visitors by fostering meaningful interaction through small-scale activities within the community. Therefore, creative tourism serves as a framework for developing sustainable cultural tourism by making it interactive.

Duxbury et al.’s (2021) study highlight the importance of creative and regenerative tourism and their interconnectedness, where creative tourism serves as a potential pathway to achieve regenerative outcomes by fostering deep, authentic engagement between visitors and local contexts. The simple meaning of ‘regenerate’ is to renew, reinvigorate, or replenish (Dredge 2022, p. 270). The meaning of regenerative is “to give new life, strength, or vigour” (Plaut, Dunbar, Wackerman, Hodgin, 2012, p.113). The opposite term of regenerative is degenerative which means ‘to decline in value or worth’ (Plaut et al., 2012). According to Hutchins & Storn (2019), as cited by Hussain (2021), have stated the meaning of ‘regenerative’ as ‘creating the conditions for life to continuously renew itself, to transcend into new forms, and to flourish amid ever-changing life conditions’ (p. 5). “Regeneration is a rebirth of thinking about our role and regenerating our role on the planet,” says Bill Reed (page 6; in Regenerative Travel 2020). Rhodes (2017, pp. 103-104; in Hussain & Haley, 2022) goes on to argue that ‘regenerative’ means ‘the capacity to bring into existence again’; hence, if an item or the system is regenerative, it has the inherent capacity to bring itself into existence once more”. Regarding regenerative tourism, Duxbury et al. (2021) state that it goes beyond sustainable tourism to focus on ‘giving back’ and contributing to the proactive regeneration of communities, cultures, heritage, places, landscapes, and so forth. Therefore, the main objective of regenerative tourism is to leave a place better than it was found by actively contributing to the flourishing of its ecosystems, cultures, and communities. This can be achieved by empowering local communities to design and deliver experiences rooted in their unique heritage and skills, creative tourism not only provides meaningful encounters for visitors but also strengthens local culture, facilitates new connections, and builds platforms for collaboration and development, therefore directly contributing to the revitalization and long-term well-being of the destination.

Regenerative tourism is a niche innovation pioneered by three non-indigenous practitioner groups based in the UK, USA, and Chile (Dwyer, 2018; Mang & Reed, 2012; Pollock, 2012b;

Teruel, 2018; in Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022). This falls under the broader category of niche tourism, which presents a distinct alternative to the traditional tourism market by segmenting the market based on the specialized interests of tourists (Robinson & Novelli, 2005, pp. 5-6). These interests are categorized into macro niches (such as cultural, heritage, rural, and sports tourism) and then further subdivided into specific micro niches (including geo-tourism, gastronomy tourism, and cycling tourism) (Robinson & Novelli, 2005, pp. 5-6).

In the coming years, luxury will be comprised of rare goods, such as time, silence, conviviality, and a healthy environment. This creates a demand for new tourism, which will be more oriented towards these values. Rural tourism has been identified as a real opportunity for the regeneration in these contexts (Commission of the European Communities, 1996; European Commission, 2003; OECD, 1995; in Dezio, 2020). Rural tourism is an established concept in tourism literature, having existed since the late nineteenth century (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; in Arman, Ali, & Qadir, 2023). Due to the complexity of the phenomenon, there is no univocal definition of rural tourism in literature, but Lane (1994; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Dezio, 2020) tries to list the characterizing factors: localized in rural areas; small-scale; small businesses; involves contact with agriculture (landscape and products) and with local traditions and culture; traditional character; connections with local community; developed by local actors in a long-term perspective; the integration of environment, economy and history. Some research has reconceptualized rural resources as “countryside capital” (Garrod et al., 2004; Garrod, Wornell & Youell, 2006; Dezio, 2020), which means “the fabric of the countryside, its villages and its market towns” (Countryside Agency, 2003, p. 45; in Dezio, 2020, p. 56). This definition includes both material and immaterial elements (Gambi, 1961), environmental, cultural, and settlement components (Garrod, Wornell & Youell, 2004, 2006). Essentially, this involves the re-casting of rural resources as a kind of capital asset, on which it is possible to invest, and from which a stream of benefits and services may be responsibly drawn. This concept is borrowed from the ecological and economic approaches the principles of “capital” (Costanza & Daily, 1992; Costanza, 1997; in Dezio, 2020, p. 57), “ecosystem services” (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005), and “sustainable development” (UN, 2015; in Dezio, 2020).

A territorial entity that, alongside the rural, normally refers to non-urban space. Until recently, recreational and tourism activities in the countryside were closely associated with its rural character, and were passive and relaxing (see Quiet environment). Lately, new demands and expectations have brought more challenging and active tourism (JSA, 2015, pp. 114-115). Bunce (1994; in Fairclough & Sarlov Herlin, 2005, p. 13) points out that “the countryside is a cultural commodity, packaged and used to sell goods and services.” Bunce claims that the word refers to “the aesthetic and amenity qualities of a universally domesticated landscape” and especially to “the landscape of agricultural enclosure”. The latter may be arguable, but we would agree with the emphasis on amenity. Bunce chooses a generous interpretation of the word ‘countryside’: “at once cultural and geographical, encompassing a whole range of environments that constitute the objects of the countryside ideal; from wilderness to market town” (Bunce, 1994).

John Tillman Lyle (1994, p.25) states landscape is an external appearance. Lyle (1994) further elaborates that the word landscape is “to include all the life and nonliving materials within and on the land, both natural and human, invisible processes and visible forms, buildings, roads, and whatever else humans or others may have put there” (p.25). Thus, landscape is the physical context of an ecosystem and its visible manifestation. It is a community. In its complex range of activities, this community carries on a process to support itself and others (p.25).

Place is defined as an area or portion of space that somebody or something can occupy (Plaut et al., 2012, p.122). Place refers to more than just a physical geographic location, tangible and intangible examples of regenerative principles such as caretaking, honouring and restoring both the physical place and the cultural, social and sense of place (Bellato et al., 2022; Ho, 2020; McEnhill et al., 2020; in Price, Taylor, Turnbull, & Stafford, 2025, p. 5). Infrastructure is also of benefit to the community, and also repurposing and realising the potential of existing spaces. Additionally, the potential for preserving heritage, instilling pride and confidence among the community and providing a platform for the sharing of local stories (Price et al., 2025, p. 5). According to Lyle (1994;), Place is a unique, multi-layered, dynamic network of natural and human ecosystems within a geographic region. This network forms a socio-ecological whole that is the result of complex interactions through time between and within its constituent ecosystems. The natural ecosystems include wildlife and vegetation, local climate, mineral and other deposits, soil, water geologic structures, etc.; human ecosystems include distinctive customs, expressions of values, economic activities, forms of association, ideas for education, traditions, physical artifacts such as buildings and constructed infrastructure, etc. which has been followed by many different scholars (e.g., Mang, 2009; Cole, 2006; Reed, 2007; Gabel, 2009; in Mang & Reed, 2012, p. 490). Bellato et al. (2024) point out that the place is a central tenet of regenerative tourism (p. 1169).

According to Garrod et al., (2004; in Garrod et al., 2006), the constituent elements of countryside capital (or features or assets) are: Landscape, including seascape, wildlife, both fauna and flora, biodiversity, geology and soils, air and air quality, hedgerows and field boundaries, agricultural buildings, rural settlements, from isolated dwellings to market towns, historical features, such as historic buildings, industrial remnants, tracks, trails, bridleways, lanes and roads, streams, rivers, ponds and lakes, water and water quality, woods, forests and plantations, distinctive local customs, languages, costumes, foods, crafts, festivals, traditions, ways of life.

This paper aims to explore the prospects of cultural heritage tourism in the Panauti heritage site by analyzing its diverse tourist attractions, particularly its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and major festivals. Furthermore, it examines the influence of community on tourism and vice versa, along with the distinct tourist setting, the dynamics of host-guest interaction, and how Newar hospitality traditions and slow food culture shape the perception of authenticity among visitors. The study also shows the crucial role played by guides in shaping visitors' perception of how they interpret the destination, ultimately demonstrating how these combined factors elevate Panauti's status as a prominent cultural heritage site.



## Panauti

Panauti is an ancient place steeped in history, which is situated 32 kilometers southeast of Kathmandu, where the Rosi and Punyamata rivers converge. It is situated in a picturesque setting surrounded by different hills on all sides. On the eastern side, there lies Sharada, Batase. To the west, there is Kusadevi. Similarly, on the northern side, there is the Ugratara forest. Finally, the southern borders of Panauti touch Kalati hill. Panauti is easily accessible from nearby towns. It is located 7.7 kilometers from Banepa, 3.3 kilometers from Khopasi, and 10.9 kilometers from Namobuddha (Kayastha, 2021). Regular public transportation, including buses and taxis, is available to reach Panauti from these locations, making it a convenient day trip or weekend getaway. Its well-preserved architecture offers a glimpse into the past. The Panauti Bazar is considered to be one of the oldest settlements in the country, with plenty of old temples constructed in the 15th century and later. It has historical, social, cultural, and economic importance. Regarding the historical and socio-cultural aspects, it was a small state given by King Bhupatindra Malla as a dowry to his sister.

As per the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the population of Panauti Municipality is approximately 51,504 (*Census Nepal*, 2021), and there are 12,806 households in Panauti Municipality (Population | National Population and Housing Census 2021 Results). The entire town covers an area of about 33.78 sq km. The village falls at the Longitude of 27° 33'-27°37' N and the Latitude of 85°29'-85°33'E. The village's height is around 1340m to 1825m above sea level (Panauti Municipality Data).

Panauti village is surrounded by six neighboring dispersed villages which is locally known as Sanga, Nala, Banepa, Dhulikhel, Srikhandapur, and Chaukot locally called *Sat Gaon* (Seven Villages). Similarly, there are seven toles in Panauti Bazar: Aagchhe, Dikshya, Dumangal, Kolachhe, Pamadi, Wolachhe, and Yalachhe.

Panauti is a historical landmark with a rich legacy covered in myth and legend. Over time, it had many names. According to inscriptions found in temples, it was once known as '*Punyawati Puri*' and later as '*Punyawati*.' Other historical documents refer to it as '*Aasampur*' and '*Panautigram*.' There is even evidence of it being called '*Paanchal*' in the past. One legend suggests the name comes from the Newari language, where '*Pa*' means bamboo, '*La*' means rock, and '*Ti*' means a place of pilgrimage, which was later changed to Panauti (Tamrakar, 2023).

Panauti is a triangular-shaped town that lies at the confluence of the two rivers Rosi and Punyamati, however, it is believed that a third river, Lilawati, which is invisible, flows beneath the Brahmayani temple and joins with Rosi and Punyamati, making it a sacred *Triveni ghat* (tri junction of rivers) (Toffin, 2022a). A visit or just an ablution to the *Triveni ghat* enables the visitor to be freed from many sins and anxieties, as this confluence of rivers is considered to be holy (Toffin, 2012). The sacred tri-confluence of rivers found in this village, which is known as Uttar-Prayag, adds spiritual value to this valley (Lakoju, 2022).

Panauti municipality is inhabited by multi-ethnic/caste groups. As of 2015 AD, Panauti is the second largest municipality in terms of population in the Kavre district after Panchkhal



municipality. The municipality mainly consists of Newars, Brahmins, Chhetris, Giris, Magars, and Tamangs. Most Newars live in the Panauti heritage site.

Similarly, the Newar caste group is further categorized into *jhu pim* and *ma jhu pim* based on their status in their society, where *jhu pim* are the so-called touchable and *ma jhu pim* are the so-called untouchable (Gellner et al., 2012). The term is rarely used these days, but its effect is deeply rooted in the minds of older generations.

Panauti heritage site is an open-air museum of Newari culture as it has its own religious, cultural, and historical identity and importance (Lakoju, 2015). This small riverside village serves as both evidence of civilization's origins along rivers and a living museum, preserving its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Panauti's artistic soul is evident in its exquisite architecture and intricate wood carvings. The valley's history stretches back to the Kirat period, with evident historical remnants from the Lichhavi era. This layered past, combined with its artistic tradition, religious tolerance, and cultural diversity, paints a captivating picture of Panauti. To preserve this unique historical and cultural identity of the village for future generations, the Panauti Museum was established in 2011.

The residents of Panauti have a long and vibrant tradition of celebrating various fairs and festivals, known as *jatras* and *parva*, throughout the year. This rich cultural heritage is documented by Lakoju (2022) and Toffin (1984), emphasizing the valley's year-round festivity through celebrations like *Panauti jatra*, *Krishna jatra*, *Namobuddha jatra*, *Indra jatra*, *Buddha Purnima*, and *Sithi Nakha*. These festivals reflect the people's way of life, serving as a powerful reminder that culture is the identity of a community, and without these traditions, humanity risks losing a vital part of itself, becoming similar to 'an animal with no tail and horn'—a metaphor for the loss of meaning and purpose without cultural connection (Lakoju, 2022).

### **Tangible cultural heritage of Panauti**

Beyond its natural beauty, Panauti possesses a rich artistic heritage that captivates visitors worldwide. These ancient relics are a source of immense pride for the town and a major draw for tourists. *Layakus* (courtyards), *dabalis* (open community space), grand temples of varying sizes, *patti* (rest stop) and *sattal* (rest house), *lo hiti* (stone tapped water), *ghats* (river banks which considered holy and are even used as a place to cremate dead bodies according to Hindu traditions), and intricate carvings adorning historical structures paint a vivid picture of the town's artistic legacy.

The pagoda-style *mandir* (temples) like Indreshwar Mahadev, Unmaat Bhairav, Banshagopal, Bramhanya, Jaleswor Mahadev, Tolananarayan, Badrinarayan, Bhadrakali, Dhaneshwor Mahadev, Pashupatinath, Ram mandir, Kedarnath, Mukteshwar Mahadev, Manshwori, Gorakhnath, Madhavnarayan, Basuki Nagaraj, Panchamukhi Mahadev, Bhagwati, Kanthanganesh, and Dharmadhatu Mahabihar stand as testaments to Nepal's remarkable architecture (Lakoju, 2022). Art enthusiasts from around the world flock to Panauti to witness its magnificent sculptures. The single-stone statue of Lord Tolayanarayan, the statue of Ram, Sita, and Hanuman, the Kedarnath and Badrinath statues, and the statue of Gorakhnath on Gorakhnath Hill are just a few examples. Hundreds of other statues showcase the exquisite hand-carving skills of the past. Panauti also

houses a collection of ancient paintings that defy time. The murals depicting the various avatars of Lord Vishnu in the chanting hall of Triveni Ghat and the paintings adorning the roof of Brahmanya Mandir exemplify the town's artistic richness.

*Dabali* is a raised platform or open space where people can open a pop-up market or showcase their traditions. It is strategically located in the heart of settlements, ensuring easy access and community participation in social events. *Dabali*, like Layaku, Navadurga, Harisiddhi, Mahadev (Indreshwar), Jala, Naasa, and Kalika (Lakoju, 2022), show the thoughtful design by Newar people and their commitment to sustainable practices and their ability to adapt traditional architecture to meet modern needs. These *dabalis* serve as excellent examples of planned settlements with open community spaces.

Visitors can see paintings in and around Panauti, which are beautiful and artistic. The artistic spirit of Panauti extends beyond temples and sculptures. The town is adorned with ornately designed windows, traditionally crafted doors, and decorative temple staples that captivate tourists, leaving a lasting impression on visitors. This centuries-old repository of ancient handicrafts and artwork represents the enduring artistic talent of Nepal and is preserved in the Panauti Museum. Similarly, the presence of Dharmadhatu Mahabihar (Buddhist monastery) showcases the religious harmony. Therefore, Panauti is a true treasure trove for art and history lovers as it encompasses arts and artifacts from the history.

### **Intangible cultural heritage of Panauti**

The cultures and traditions of any society evolve with time. Similarly, the rich heritage of Panauti reflects this ongoing development, shaped by the needs and beliefs of its people for centuries. The residents of Panauti are known for their devotion to their faith. They find joy in artistic expression, particularly within their religious practices. The founding principle of Nepalese hospitality is that guests are treated as revered figures, "*Atithi Devo Bhava*" (the guest is God). Benevolence is another guiding principle. The Newar of the Panauti also follow the same founding principle. So, hospitality is deeply rooted in their values, which are guided by benevolence.

Festival is one of the intangible cultural heritages. Festivals shed light on the culture and the functioning of the society, which is why sociologists and anthropologists have spent so much effort studying them (Getz, 2007). A festival is an aggregate of rituals observed mostly on an astronomically or ordinarily fixed date and time and celebrated with rejoicing, pomp, and grandeur by an ethnic group or a community (Maitra, 1986, p. 126; in Kunwar, 2000, p. 23). Similarly, festival tourism is an important aspect of event tourism, where tourists primarily visit a place to attend a festival or event (Page & Connell, 2012).

Panauti comes alive throughout the year with a vibrant calendar of festivals. Among these, the Panauti 12-year Makar Mela is observed once every 12 years. This festival is named *Makar Mela* as the sun transits from Sagittarius to Aquarius. This festival is observed from the first day when the sun enters the Aquarius sign until the sun stays there for a month (Lakoju, 2022). Similarly, other popular festivals are Dashin, Yomari Punhe, Madhav Narayan, and Holi. These festivals help to promote the festival tourism in Panauti.

Different traditions like *jatras*, and dance are also observed throughout the year in Panauti. Similarly, *jatras* are another important intangible cultural heritage, and people of Panauti have been celebrating different *jatras* like *Panauti jatra*, *Krishna jatra*, *Khopasi Bhimsen jatra*, *Namobuddha jatra*, *Indra jatra*, *Siddhivinayak jatra*, *Mahalaxmi jatra*, *Baagh Vairav jatra*, *Kantha Ganesh jatra*, *Fulchowki jatra*, and *Maneshwori jatra* throughout the year with grand celebrations (Lakoju, 2022). This intangible cultural heritage is the asset and identity of the people of Panauti.

Even *naach* (dances) are another important intangible cultural heritage, and the people of Panauti have been celebrating and expressing their traditions and culture through their cultural dances like *Nawa Durga naach*, *Lakhe naach*, *Devi naach*, *Hari Siddhi naach*, *Mahakali naach*, *Varahi naach*, *Brahmayana naach*, and *Indrayani naach* (Lakoju, 2022). The *Lakhe naach*, *Hari-Siddhi naach*, and *Devi naach* attract a huge number of tourists.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in Panauti, shaping the town's traditions and cultural beliefs. For generations, the people of Panauti have embraced both Hinduism and Buddhism. Panauti is a beacon of religious tolerance and a power place. Power places are the destination of pilgrims, where they can feel the sacred ambience of that place, its noumenal energy, and where their wishes are fulfilled (Dowman, 1988, 1995). People from various faiths coexist peacefully, demonstrating a remarkable acceptance of diverse beliefs. This spirit of unity strengthens the village's vibrant cultural fabric.

### Literature review

A literature review provides a synthesis of published literature on a topic and describes its current stance on a particular topic (Ferrari, 2015; Snyder, 2019; in Kunwar & Ulak, 2023). It is a valid approach and a necessary step toward structuring a research field and forms an integral part of any research conducted (Arman et al., 2023; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; in Kunwar, 2024). It involves identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scholarly articles, books, and other sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in a field. There are 14 types of literature review (Grant & Booth, 2009; in Kunwar & Ulak, 2023). The researchers have used theoretical, historical, and critical reviews in this research.

The Newar community and their culture have been extensively studied by scholars in Kathmandu (Nepali, 1965), in Sankhu (Shrestha, 2012), in Bhaktapur (Levy & Rajopadhyaya, 1990), in Dhulikhel (Gellner & Quigley, 1995), and in Panauti (Barré et al., 1981). The *Guthi* (religious or socio-cultural institution or trust) system is an organic part of Newar's social and cultural life (Löwdin, 1998, p:146). This socio-cultural institution of the Newar works towards the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, as they are their identity marker. Similarly, the *Guthi* system (Toffin, 1996), along with the society and structure of the Newar (Toffin, 2005), have been studied over time. These studies have emphasized the anthropological and sociological importance of the Newar community. Over time, anthropologists who have studied tourism have shifted towards the ethnography of tourism (Bruner, 2005; Leite, Castañeda, & Adams, 2019).

Panauti has been the subject of extensive academic study by various scholars, such as Barré et al. (1981), Toffin (2012, 2021, 2022b), Ulak (2012, 2014), Lakoju (2015, 2021, 2022), Kayastha (2021), and Tamrakar (2023), who have confined their study to the history, architecture, religion, and festivals, along with some aspects of tourism in Panauti.

Especially, Barré et al. (1981) conducted a foundational anthropological study in Panauti, where they explored the architecture and social organization of the Newar community. This initial anthropological work had a profound influence on other scholars, encouraging them to conduct diverse studies within Panauti. For instance, Toffin (1984, 1996, 2005) conducted the study in Panauti and provided an in-depth analysis of the Newars' social structure, religion, festival, and their importance. Later on, Toffin (2012, 2022b) shifted his focus towards the sacredness of the Panauti, specifically exploring Makar Mela, the valley's major festival, and its importance to the local people and visitors.

Similarly, scholars like Granoff & Shinohara (2012), Tamrakar (2023), and Toffin (2012, 2022b) have conducted studies on the major festival of Panauti, particularly Makar Mela and Panauti Jatra. The Makar Mela is a month-long festival celebrated once every twelve years in Panauti (Granoff & Shinohara, 2012). This festival attracts a huge number of devotees within and outside the country who come to cleanse themselves by immersing themselves in this sacred water, as there is a confluence of three rivers in this pilgrimage site (Toffin, 2012). The continued celebration of the Makar Mela by the people of Panauti demonstrates a commitment to preserving their cultural tradition. Even the Panauti heritage site's proximity to the Kathmandu valley helped to attract a huge number of pilgrims, which has contributed to a rise in religious tourism and positively impacted the local economy (Toffin, 2022b). These festivals, customs, and traditions are the identity of Panauti Valley, and attract huge numbers of tourists (Toffin & Shrestha, 2021).

While scholars like Kayastha (2021), Toffin (2012), and Ulak (2012) have explored the prospect of tourism in Panauti, their research primarily focuses on festival tourism. This leaves gaps in understanding how hospitality and the broader culture of the area function as key attractions for visitors. Hospitality simply means entertaining guests (Kunwar, 2017c). Hospitality can be seen in three domains: social, private, and commercial (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). Lashley & Morrison (2000) further categorized the social and private domains of hospitality into three major components: the home, the host, and the guest. Home serves as the instrumental platform where the service takes place, while the host and the guest are the key actors in the service interactions. However, it has transitioned from simple guest entertainment to a lens for understanding society. In the context of South Asia, there are three types of hospitality: obligatory, customary, and voluntary (Prakash, 1961, p. 101; Khare, 1993, p. 238; in Kunwar, 2017b, p. 362). The first one is institutionalized, the second one is superficial, and the third one is driven by kindness. While hospitality plays a crucial role in attracting visitors to a destination. The hospitality culture of the Newar residing in Panauti has not been studied from the aspect of tourism by these scholars.

The potential of Panauti as a tourism destination has been studied by Ulak (2014), who appreciates the Panauti heritage site, stating that it presents a unique opportunity to combine

natural beauty with heritage, even exploring the aspect of ecotourism where the region can thrive as a tourist destination by prioritizing sustainability. Similarly, its rich heritage, such as the town's diverse temples, *jatras*, arts, and architecture, reflects its unique cultural identity and serves as an asset in attracting tourists (Ulak, 2012). These identity markers of the Panauti can be used to promote the place through 'creative tourism' (Duxbury et al., 2021).

However, both articles fail to look at the hospitality tradition of Newar as a unique cultural capital in a tourist destination like Panauti. Similarly, the crucial role of community tourism and host-guest interactions in enhancing the authentic visitor experience has been missed. When these elements are paired with cultural heritage tourism, it helps to create truly immersive experiences and increase authenticity. Tourists are indeed drawn to Panauti because of its culture and heritage, but their desire to engage with the local community and immerse themselves in daily life for authenticity is equally vital. This engagement is key to establishing Panauti as a truly authentic tourist destination and building the Panauti heritage site as a distinct brand in tourism, with its culture and heritage as the major assets.

Panauti has been the subject of various studies, explored by different authors through anthropological, sociological, and tourism lenses. While existing tourism research has undoubtedly helped in promoting the area, the broader potential of cultural heritage tourism in Panauti has not been explored yet. This means scholars have not tapped into its rich possibilities for cultural heritage tourism and ethnographic exploration. Consequently, there is a clear gap in the research regarding ethnography and cultural heritage tourism within Panauti, which is why the researchers chose this topic for study.

### Methodology

Research consists of three aspects: problem, theory, and methods/tools (Chang & Katrichis, 2016; Liao & Wen, 2007; in Kunwar, 2024). Research design refers to the decision about how to achieve research goals, linking theories, questions, and goals to appropriate resources and methods (Flick, 2018, p. 102; in Jaakkola, 2020). To sum up, it is a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that helps to answer the question (Ragini, 1994, p. 191; in Jaakkola, 2020).

This study uses a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design. Its goal is to build a complex, holistic understanding based on field data gathered directly from a natural setting. A primary objective of this research is to thoroughly examine the prospects of cultural heritage tourism by integrating insights from published literature and fieldwork. Primary data for this research was gathered at the Panauti Heritage site.

The researchers spent quality time in the field, conducting interviews, observations, and participating in tourist activities, making it an ethnographic study. An ethnographer may also collect data from other sources, such as social media, travel websites, and online reviews (Bruner et al., 2019).

*"What is tourism ethnography? We define it here simply as that which takes place within the context of tourism or with people who identify themselves as tourists"* (Andrews, Jimura, & Dixon, 2019, p. 7).

The study was initially undertaken by the second author as part of her Master's dissertation. Following its completion, we (the research supervisor and the researcher) decided to revise and expand the entire study to focus on the proposed topic. In the course of data collection, the researchers conducted multiple field visits, even after the initial work was finished. The researchers conducted 35 visits to the site during various periods from September 2023 to August 2024. The site's proximity to the valley helped with convenient data collection during these periods.

This research utilized both primary and secondary data collection methods. For primary data, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were employed. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including authorities from the Tourism Development Center (TDC), museum personnel, local cultural experts, scholars, youths, women, priests, local community members, and owners of homestays and restaurants. The researchers also noted and subsequently translated colloquial terminology into English for analysis. Secondary data were comprehensively gathered from published reports, official documents of international bodies and government agencies, relevant books, and academic articles.

The researchers initially conducted a phenomenal observation to understand the structure of Panauti as a cultural heritage destination, later shifting to ideational observation. This synchronic study has been further supported by diachronic evidence. For this purpose, the researchers attended key cultural events such as the Panauti Jatra, Madhav Narayan Jatra, Yomari Punhe, and Holi to build rapport and deepen their understanding of the place. They meticulously observed interactions between hosts and guests, particularly in local community homestays and restaurants. While myths, legends, stories, and oral traditions were primarily sourced from published literature, additional field visits were made during special occasions to enrich observations.

All collected data, from both primary and secondary sources, underwent rigorous qualitative analysis. The findings are presented through interpretations primarily derived from interviewee responses, focusing on their personal stories and experiences to address the research questions. Data analysis involved a thorough examination of interview transcripts and detailed field notes, with information originally collected in Newari being translated into English for comprehensive interpretation. A narrative analysis approach was specifically employed to interpret the data within defined thematic frameworks, with the qualitative nature of the information guiding the entire analytical process.

## **Findings**

### **Tourist attractions in Panauti**

Panauti witnesses maximum tourist flow from March to July and from August to December, as during this time, the tourists visiting the valley head towards Panauti. Mostly these tourists visit Panauti to see and experience its culture, heritage, along its authenticity through the homestay.

**Table 1: Seven toles of Panauti Heritage Site and its major tourist attraction as per the Tourism Development Center (TDC)**

Agachhe Tole	Dikshya Tole	Dumnagal Tole	Kolachhe Tole	Pamadi Tole	Wolachhe Tole	Yalachhe Tole
Mahalaxmi Temple	Residence of Priests	Birth place of Namobuddha	Karyabinayak	Buddha Stupa	Harsiddhi Dyo:chhe	Panauti Museum
Indrayani Temple		Dharma Dhatu			Dhawkha Fale	Unmatta Bhairav
Bhadrakali Temple		Layaku Durbar			Jalbinayak	Indreshwar Temple
		Brahmayani			Suryaabinayak	Bhagawati Temple
		Doyo Chhe				TolaNarayan

Panauti is a living museum, which has well preserved its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The table above categorizes these heritage sites by their respective locations, showcasing the well-planned settlement and distribution of important monuments throughout the town and how these monuments serve as a major point of attraction in Panauti.

The head of TDC, when asked why people visit Panauti and what the major tourist attractions in the destination are, said, “Panauti is a sacred village with lots of temples, arts, and architecture. This destination attracts a diverse range of tourists. Some are here for a short trip to view the beauty of this village. Meanwhile, others are here to immerse themselves in the culture, traditions, jatras, and festivals. The visitors can relive these experiences through community homestays. The temples like Indreshwor, Triveni Ghat attract a great number of tourists as the place has huge religious significance. Similarly, jatras like Panauti Jatra/Jya: Punhi, Namobuddha Jatra, Harisiddhi Jatra, and Makar mela attract thousands of domestic and international tourists. The food enthusiasts are drawn to Panauti for authentic food like Yomari, and Newari food during different festivals like Yomari punhe, and Siti: Nakha to savor the authentic taste of slow food.”

Regarding the tourist inflow in Panauti, there has been a gradual increase in visitors over the decade, and the major reason for it is its culture and heritage, along with its serene beauty and proximity to the valley.

**Table 2: Record of tourists visiting Panauti from 2014 to 2023 as per the Museum**

Year (in AD)	Foreigners (SAARC+ non-SAARC)	Domestic	Total
2014	3102	1612	4714
2015	1266	1613	2879
2016	2592	1940	4532



Year (in AD)	Foreigners (SAARC+ non-SAARC)	Domestic	Total
2017	3251	2613	5864
2018	4361	2959	7320
2019	3182	2100	5282
2020	29	394	423
2021	514	4707	5221
2022	3056	2948	6004
2023	4150	3135	7285
<b>Total</b>	<b>34616</b>	<b>28591</b>	<b>63207</b>

Note: The annual tourist data as recorded by the Museum of Panauti. The data is more reliable in comparison with the Panauti TDC because the development center has been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is an inconsistency in its data recording system. Meanwhile, the Panauti Museum records this data based on the tickets purchased by the tourists.

The table shows the number of tourists visiting Panauti within a decade, broken down into two categories: foreigners and domestic. In 2014, there were 3,102 foreign tourists and 1,612 Nepali tourists. The number of foreign tourists increased steadily from 2014 to 2019. There was a sharp decrease in foreign tourists in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is a surge in the number of domestic tourists, given its proximity to the capital. Overall, the data shows an increasing trend in the number of tourists visiting this place, with both foreign and domestic tourists contributing to the growth. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact in 2020, but the tourism industry seems to have recovered well in the following years.

The Panauti Heritage Site is popular among French tourists, who constitute a huge portion of its international visitors. Interestingly, the first foreign tourist to visit Panauti was also French, which depicts a longstanding affinity for the region. The TDC records indicate that 1,352 French visitors visited Panauti from August 2023 to July 2024, followed by 688 Germans and 550 Italians (*Panauti Tourism Development Center*, 2024). However, the researchers found inconsistencies in the TDC’s data collection methods, potentially leading to inaccurate tourist counts. The researchers observed tourist activity near the heritage site but noticed a lack of systematic recording efforts by the TDC.

In response to the researcher’s question about the few records of domestic visitors in their system, the TDC staff responded, “Usually we record the information of those visitors who inquire the TDC staff about Panauti. Since the domestic tourists usually explore the place on their own so this resulted in discrepancies in the data of domestic visitors. Further, we are planning to make Panauti an international tourist destination. However, we acknowledge a missed opportunity to tap into the domestic tourism market. Despite the growing trend of domestic tourists seeking authentic experiences in places like Ghale Gaun and Ghandruk,

*Panauti's proximity to Kathmandu has not been fully leveraged. We are working towards proper marketing and promotion to establish Panauti as a recognized international tourist destination brand that could considerably increase the flow of both international and domestic tourists. However, making a brand takes time, and with proper support from our local government and youths, we are taking a step towards it."*

The researchers observed that Panauti is embedded with different tangible and intangible cultural heritage, along with the different components of hospitality, which can be showcased in community homestays and through their food culture in local restaurants, which serve as a major attraction for tourists.

## **Findings and discussion**

### **Cultural heritage tourism**

Panauti is one of the popular pilgrimage sites in Nepal. The Triveni Ghat of Panauti attracts thousands of pilgrims each year for different festivals and *jatras* because of its religious significance. Pilgrimage is a part of cultural heritage, and Panauti boasts a rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, like temples, *sattals*, *patis*, *layaku*, *dabalis*, sculptures, paintings, art, architecture, festivals, dance, and *jatras*. This showcases their richness of culture and traditions. Therefore, pilgrimage plays an important role in the development of both religious and cultural heritage tourism in Panauti.

Traditionally, cultural heritage tourism is often associated with pilgrimage or religious tourism. Even religion and pilgrimage are still the strongest motives to travel. People tend to visit pilgrimage sites because of their belief and faith, and to experience spirituality. According to Morinis (1992), the pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal. At its most conventional, the end of the pilgrimage is an actual shrine located at some fixed geographical point. The place has acquired a reputation that draws pilgrims (Morinis, 1992, p. 4). However, in modern times, tourists are typically motivated by cultural, historical, or architectural interests rather than solely spiritual reasons.

The priest of the Indreshwor temple stated the reason why people visit Panauti, "*Panauti is a holy land, this place holds huge religious value. Visiting this holy land gives people salvation. Devotees within and outside the country visit the place during different festivals and jatras to worship the god and goddess. Makar Mela is the biggest festival of Panauti, which happens once every 12 years. Devotees around the world visit here to take a holy dip in the Triveni Ghat with a firm believe that it removes sins.*"

A local respondent stated, when asked why Panauti is a popular heritage site, "*Panauti is rich in heritage, as it has an abundance of tangible and intangible assets. Within a single-kilometer radius, there are over 42 tangible heritage sites, making Panauti an open-air museum. The village boasts more than 70 tangible and intangible heritage elements in total. The traditional values and culture are our assets and should be preserved, as it is the reason why tourists come to visit our place, and they are our identity. So, we need to embrace our culture and heritage. This will ensure that Panauti remains a cherished destination for future visitors because of its unique*

*and authentic culture, heritage, jatra, dance, music, and festival.”*

Spirit of place could be defined as a unique experiential quality or character of a place that is exclusive to that place, and therefore, an essential part of its (Norberg-Schulz 1980; Garnham 1985; Silva, 2015, p. 3). This distinct sense of locality gives ‘meaning, value, emotion, and mystery to the place and its experience (ICOMOS 2008, 2; in Silva, 2015, p. 3). Thus, each place has a certain spirit (Silva, 2015).

In the context of Panauti, this town possesses a unique spirit where religious and cultural heritage tourism coexist. The town’s religious spirit plays a huge role in drawing pilgrims to experience its sacredness. However, the commercialization of tourism has introduced modern elements to this ancient place, as evidenced by the modern buildings constructed near the bus park.

### **Festivities in Panauti**

Rituals, prayers, and offerings are the essential features of Hindu festivals (Kunwar, 2000). The people of Panauti celebrate different festivals as they are an integral part of their lives, shedding light on their civilization and culture. Visitors can find out about these vibrant festivals in the festival calendar of the Panauti Museum (Festivals, Panauti Museum, 2011).

A member of the TDC, explained, why festival is a key factor driving tourism in the region *“During the 12-year Makar Mela, which falls during the month of Magh (January - February), Panauti’s Triveni Ghat attracted thousands of Hindu devotees from both within and outside Nepal, who come specifically for pilgrimage purposes, including taking a holy dip in the ghat. This religious importance, combined with the cultural heritage of Panauti, makes it one of the few places in South Asia to host a Kumbha Mela, a major religious gathering. Other festivals and jatras like Yomari Punhe, Panauti jatra, attract a huge number of tourists. People visit during these festivals to have the Newari delicacies and immerse themselves in the culture and tradition of the valley.”*

Many respondents indicated that large numbers of domestic and international tourists visit Panauti during festivals such as *Makar Mela, Panauti Jatra, and Holi*. Among them, Panauti Jatra holds special importance as it is a major *jatra* of the village, observed for three days in *Jestha* (May - June), the second month of the Nepali calendar year. However, its preparation is done eight days earlier. The preparation of the *jatra* begins from the day of *Sithi: Nakha*, where the Newar celebrate by worshipping their clan deity and having a feast together. The ninth day of the *Sithi: Nakha* marks the first day of the Panauti jatra, known as *Dyo Kwoha Bijyaigu* (the Gods to step down) (Tamrakar, 2023). The devotees take goddess Bhadrakali from her temple and send her to her paternal home, which is the temple of Brahmayani. On the second day, known as *Mu:jatra*, people worship all the gods and goddesses around the town and host feasts in their homes. A grand celebration is held on the third day, known as *Dyo Thahan Bijyaigu* (the day God returns) (Tamrakar, 2023). The chariots of the three gods, Mahadev (lord Shiva), Bhairab (Manifestation of lord Shiva), and Bhadrakali are collided where the chariot of Lord Bhairabh and goddess Bhadrakali is collided first, and then the chariot of Lord Shiva and goddess Bhadrakali (Lakoju, 2022). The collision of the chariots represents the mating of the gods and has an amusing folklore behind it (Ulak, 2012). The Panauti jatra, as explained by

Tamrakar (2023), has both cultural and aesthetic values as it uses a lot of signs and symbols.

In addition to the mythology of the Panauti jatra, there are other beliefs surrounding it. According to this myth, people celebrate the jatra to invoke heavy rainfall, which is vital for successful rice plantation, as this jatra is important for farmers; therefore, naming this jatra as '*hile jatra*', '*jya:punhi*', or '*ghum jatra*' (Lakoju, 2022). This myth shows the deep connection between the festival and the farmers and how it plays a major role in their livelihoods because water is necessary for farming. These celebrations have been part of Newari culture and traditions for ages, and people visit here to observe this unique celebration of belief and religion.

The people of Panauti are working to revive their lost culture and traditions, as these cultures are their identity. Among them, *Devi naach*, which is performed during the festivities of Dashain (one of the biggest festivals Nepalis celebrate in October - November), is showcased in Panauti from the Indreshwor, paying homage to the goddess Durga, and has been revitalized. People masquerade as different deities and dance with different musical instruments. This dance performance was showcased in Panauti up until 2005 BS, from the first day of Dashain, which was later stopped from 2038-2053 BS, and then in 2054 BS, the dance was performed on the day of Panauti Mahotsav, and this tradition has been continued to date (Lakoju, 2022). Similarly, dances like *Kumari naach* (a dance dedicated to the living goddess Kumari) and *Hari Siddhi naach* (a dance which pays tribute to lord Hari Siddhi, and is showcased once every 12 years) were revived through the effort of locals and the government. Even the old monuments are reconstructed in the heritage site. This revitalization of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Panauti shows the dedication of the Newari people towards their culture and tradition, further stepping toward 'regenerative tourism' (Duxbury et al., 2021).

Panauti is a sacred place and has huge religious importance. However, this place welcomes people from different religions during festivals, which is evident in the data of TDC. Even the response of the respondent indicates how this destination has thrived because of festival tourism, ultimately motivating them to revitalize their culture and heritage.

### **Community tourism**

Community tourism can be defined as a tourism in which the local people have more involvement in the tourism and its related industries, and the community holds a major benefit from that industry (Kunwar, 2009). The involvement of the community in tourism leads to increased interest from tourists and even motivates locals to explore economic opportunities, such as establishing community guest houses/home stays/hometels.

Homestays offer an authentic cultural experience (Bastola, 2023). Homestay businesses encourage the local community to get involved in the tourism industry (Samsudin & Maliki, 2015; in Janjua, Krishnapillai, & Rahman, 2021). Similarly, it is an intense host-guest interaction zone (Walter et al., 2018; in Janjua, Krishnapillai, & Rahman, 2021) which focuses on three core elements: environmental, cultural and local employment protection for sustainable community-based tourism (Reimer & Walter, 2013; in Janjua, Krishnapillai, &

Rahman, 2021). These rural homestays have different variations, including cultural homestay, farm stay, heritage homestay, agricultural homestay, leisure homestay, and cottage homestay (Hamzah, 1997; in Janjua, Krishnapillai, & Rahman, 2021).

Similarly, homotel is an emerging concept in the field of community tourism as everything is offered as per the interest of the visitors, be it snacks, food items, and different types of drinks (Kanel, 2024, p. 126). The author further distinguished homotel from home stay as the homestay is supply-driven and homotel is demand-driven (Kanel, 2024, pp. 126-127). Even restaurants serve as an important function of social connection and can provide social value (Mottiar et al., 2018; Warner et al., 2013; in Boluk & Panse, 2022, p. 354).

As per the local Panauti has more than 40 *pahan chhen* known as homestays. These homestays are registered and operated under the umbrella association of the Panauti Homestay. Mostly, these homestays are owned and managed by women. Similarly, many local restaurants known as *kaula chhen* in the Panauti heritage site are run by women.

The researchers found that the majority of these restaurants are operated by women, which demonstrates their passion and enthusiasm for their profession and how they have a sustainable source of income, indicating the inflow of tourists. Additionally, local women have embraced entrepreneurship by weaving shawls and sweaters to sell to visitors.

When the researchers approached a worker at a community-run restaurant, she explained that *"It is a busy day for us as my staff are busy preparing all the food since the morning, as we always host a lot of domestic tourists during the weekends. They come to enjoy the local cuisine here, along with participating in cultural fare where we are dressed in our traditional attire and serve the guests, giving the feeling of traditional hospitality."*

Many domestic and foreign visitors visit the heritage site to experience the food and hospitality culture. Community-led tourism projects offer travelers unique opportunities to engage in authentic experiences, such as experiencing culture, food, and culinary traditions as visitors seek to experience in 'creative tourism' (Duxbury et al., 2021).

This fosters a symbiotic relationship between visitors and the community, contributing to the economic and social development of residents, particularly women. Community homestays and restaurants in Panauti provide excellent examples of community-led tourism.

### **Tourist setting**

Every tourist destination has tourist settings where its environment, commodities, and services are presented for visitors to experience the spirit of the place and generate perception about it. MacCannell (1973) states that these tourist settings can be real or staged. He added that how a cultural heritage site in the setting is presented and interpreted is important, as tourists seek authenticity. Furthermore, staged authenticity helps to present a version of the past/reality that visitors perceive as real.

As visitors approach Panauti's heritage site, they will encounter a vibrant market lined with shops selling various local delicacies and goods. The entrance leads to a charming brick-paved pathway that winds through a picturesque blend of traditional homes with

intricate wood carvings. In front of each house, there is a small holy sanctum known as *pikha lakhu*, which is painted with *rato mato* (red ochre), a traditional technique of cleaning which signifies sanitation and religious importance. Usually, female members paint and worship this sacred place every morning as part of their ritual. These are the identity markers of the Newars.

Rest stops, known locally as *falcha* and *loh hiti* known as water taps, are interspersed throughout. The pathway leads to the renowned Triveni Ghat, where a combination of beautiful art, architecture, temples, and a museum is seen.

According to staff at a local homestay in Panauti, when asked about the perception of tourists visiting the area answered, “*Many tourists arrive with limited knowledge of the region’s culture and importance. However, after experiencing Panauti’s unique heritage and immersing themselves in the local lifestyle, their perspectives often shift. European tourists, in particular, are drawn to the cultural heritage and authenticity of Panauti, which they find lacking in their home countries.*”

The tourists visiting the Panauti heritage site are fascinated by the architecture of the city. Furthermore, the cultural legacy of Newar, heritage, and the hospitality of the locals create an appealing tourist setting in the town.

### **Authenticity**

“*Authenticity is ‘son or daughter’ of culture*” - (Lasten & Upchurch, 2012)

In tourism, authenticity is considered a crucial factor in attracting tourists, as it is important for visitors when selecting a destination. Authenticity is subjective to each guest, the place they visit, and the host they interact with (Kunwar & Ghimire, 2012). Therefore, the cultural attraction of a place, its hosts, and their behavior are indicators that help to measure the authenticity of the place. Even though authenticity is rooted in genuineness, it is understandable that alienated people often seek authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). While many studies have criticized how the local population is portrayed in the name of indigenous and cultural tourism to attract tourists (De Bernardi, 2019b). However, one cannot argue that it is a subjective feeling. Therefore, authenticity depends on what the tourists have observed and how they feel about the destination and the host.

The staff of the Panauti Museum, when asked about the preference of tourists visiting Panauti, stated, “*Tourists usually prefer to immerse themselves in the culture and heritage of the destination. The intricate carvings on houses, windows, and temples are a key attraction for European tourists. These distinctive architectural features showcase the rich cultural heritage of the region, and the visitors are always in awe seeing these arts and architecture. Even the culture and sacredness of serve as a major attraction point as tourists visit during different festivals, dances, and jatras held in the area. Recently, tourists have been visiting the community homestay and local restaurants as well.*”

The hosts dressed in traditional Newari attire often invite guests to participate in local activities like *dhikki jato* (rice husking with wooden tools and grinding lentils in stone) and

*mohi tulaune* (making butter from curd), where they can experience constructive authenticity. Panauti's diverse communities and cultural heritage create a living museum where visitors can immerse themselves in the region's agricultural roots, culinary practices, social customs, and deep-rooted traditions, and immerse themselves in objective authenticity. The valley has attracted many domestic tourists to view its serene beauty and engage in 'existential authenticity' (Wang, 1999).

In the context of Panauti, the visitor gets the feeling of authenticity from their observation and the host's hospitality. Panauti presents a unique case, offering both 'front region' authenticity through its homestay experiences and 'back region' authenticity via its preserved cultural traditions, *jatras*, and festivals.

### **Guides and interpretation**

Guides interpret and give meaning to the symbols and signs present in the destination, as these symbols are the identity markers of the destination. Visitors are always welcomed with warm smiles and friendly greetings in the Panauti heritage sites. Guided tours are available for groups, while solo travelers can roam freely but are typically greeted by welcoming locals who offer assistance and guidance. This friendly atmosphere contributes to a positive and memorable experience for all visitors.

When asked, a member of TDC, how tourists navigate the heritage site, he responded, *"To assist tourists, the Panauti TDC maintains a dedicated staff at its office. These staff members are readily available to provide guidance and support to visitors, helping them navigate the town and explore its attractions, especially for foreigners. However, domestic tourists can get guidance from any local, as everyone is hospitable. If unable to assist directly, they will seek assistance from other staff members or local guides whom they have given training to provide informative tours. The Panauti Museum also serves as a valuable resource for tourists, with dedicated staff available to provide information and assistance. The museum staff maintains records of visitor arrivals and is ready to answer any questions or inquiries."*

The researchers found that this type of formal and informal guided tours helps visitors to know about the history, culture, heritage, legacy, and people of the destination. This, in turn, facilitated the visitor to interpret the cultural value and aesthetic value of the place, along with developing a sense of connection and attachment with the place and its people.

The TDC of Panauti has thus trained local guides who can provide visitors with firsthand accounts and original stories. The way the guide interprets the signs, symbols, culture, heritage, and legacies of the town gives visitors an image of the importance of this tourist destination.

### **Hosts-guests interaction**

Beyond cultural sites and historical values, the host-guest interaction plays a vital role in shaping tourist experiences. Authentic tourist experiences are shaped by host-guest interaction (Kunwar, 2009). This interaction with locals can help generate the feeling of authenticity, which enhances a traveler's understanding and appreciation of a destination. Homestays



offer a unique opportunity for tourists to immerse themselves in local life and experience genuine hospitality. Panauti's homestays are particularly popular among both domestic and international travelers seeking authentic encounters.

When asked a member of the homestay regarding the emergence of homestays in Panauti and its impression among tourists, the person responded, *"Panauti has many homestays, many of which are community-owned, while a few are privately run. Despite this abundance, only a fraction is officially registered due to the prevalence of branch homestays operating under the umbrella of registered community homestays. Homestays are quite popular because the quality of services provided, including the journey to and from the homestay, lodging, food, hospitality, cultural experiences, entertainment, and overall service, highly impacts visitor satisfaction. The visitors have had positive interactions with hosts, which creates a lasting impression and encourages them to visit again."*

A French couple shared their admiration for Panauti's rich culture and architectural heritage. *"We were impressed by the skill and creativity of the local artisans and will certainly revisit Panauti. We got to experience Panauti's authentic charm in the homestay. We experienced genuine hospitality and found that cultural and heritage sites, along with hospitality, are major attractions and retention points for tourists. By prioritizing authentic experiences and maintaining a welcoming atmosphere, destinations like Panauti can ensure long-term success in the tourism industry."*

Many international visitors to Panauti are drawn to the region's homestay culture, seeking authentic interactions with local hosts. Hospitality is a key factor in the success of homestays, as tourists often return to places where they feel welcomed and valued. Homestays offer a unique opportunity for tourists to experience local life firsthand, participating in cultural activities and using traditional tools. These experiences can enhance visitor satisfaction and create lasting memories.

The researchers found that locals were proud and pleased to welcome visitors from diverse backgrounds, recognizing the economic benefits of tourism. Women in particular expressed satisfaction with the opportunities for empowerment, skill development, and economic independence that tourism has brought.

### **Social hospitality**

Brotherton (1999) provides a foundational definition of hospitality as a voluntary, contemporary human exchange focused on enhancing mutual well-being through the provision of accommodation, food, or drink. Extending this concept, Selwyn (2000) defines socio-cultural hospitality as a process where hosts and guests engage in exchanges of both tangible and symbolic elements, with the core purpose of strengthening their relationships.

The prevalence of *atithi satkar* (guest hospitality) in Hindu culture is based on the principle of '*atithi devo bhava*' (the guest is a god). As Lawrence Babb, cited by Rotman (2011), explains that the principle is built on the act of worshiping or serving the god and goddess, making it a form of hospitality, and even deriving hospitality as a form of worship. Rotman (2011) further explains that the term *atithi satkar* is derived from the Sanskrit roots where *atithi* combines

'at' (to move or wander) with 'tithi' (auspicious date), while *satkar* (hospitality) is formed from 'sat' (virtuous) and 'kara' (deed). Interestingly, *atithi* can also be interpreted as the opposite of *tithi*, referring to an unscheduled date. This refers to a visitor who arrives spontaneously, without adherence to any auspicious timing, and someone who is not a permanent resident at one's home but is just passing through. Therefore, the *atithi satkar* refers to the act of performing virtuous deeds for the guests (Rotman, 2011).

Adhering to the same principle of hospitality, the culturally rich Newars of Panauti consistently offer a warm welcome, known as *atithya* (hospitality). From a hospitality perspective, there is involvement of two distinct groups: the host (*chhen naya* refers to the male host and *chhen naakin* refers to the female host) and the guest (*pahan*). Their lasting tradition of *atithya* is deeply embedded in their historical and cultural heritage, serving as an important element of their social capital.

The culture of hospitality can be seen in the houses of Newars towards particular groups and subgroups representing caste, sub-caste, and non-caste. In Newar culture, three major types of hospitality are offered, each with distinct characteristics. The first is *hane kane yayegu*, which encompasses comprehensive general hospitality and mandatory invitations to relatives and kin groups for ceremonial, cultural, and festive events, often including the invitation of an *achaju* (priest) for rituals. The second category, *pahan sategu*, which also reflects comprehensive hospitality, where invitations are directed at various groups: this includes inviting close relatives, *guthiyar sategu* (Guthi members), *phuki sategu* (one's consanguineal kinship or immediate family), and other sub-caste groups within the Newar community. Distinct from these more formal or kinship-based practices, the third type is *pahan pasa sategu*, which involves inviting ordinary people, including friends, to take part in a feast, characterized by its less formal nature compared to the first two categories.

Hospitality begins at home. In the entrance of a Newari household, a guest can see a small mandala-shaped ritual site known as *pikha lakhu*, which is a sacred and holy symbol of the god Kumar from Hindu mythology. It also symbolizes the demarcation between public and private space. Once the guest crosses the *pikha lakhu*, they have entered the private space of the host. While welcoming the guests who are known as *pahan* in local colloquial terms, the male and female hosts perform a gesture of respect by folding their hands and uttering the phrase *jo jo lapa*, which means *Namaskar* in the Nepali language. After the initial greeting, guests are invited into the home, locally known as *chhen*. The guest is taken to the *chota* (second floor) of the house. The guest is served snacks and refreshments by female members as a gesture of hospitality in the *chota*. These foods are made in the kitchen, which is in the *baigha* (top floor) of the house. For the midday meal, guests are offered a traditional spread of beaten rice, curry, and meat. When the guest is about to leave, the host requests the guest to visit them again in a polite gesture by saying the phrase *hakanan jhasan*. This form of hospitality is extended to close relatives, neighbors, and uninvited guests in Newari households.

In the context of guests, who are formally invited at home, they are taken to the *chota*, where they are served *sagan* (a ritual where some food or item is offered to the special guest of their community to show them respect). This hospitality is provided to the close relatives of

the family by following the special rules and regulations, in which they will follow a particular method of providing hospitality known as *sagan/soka biu* (service provider) and *sagan/soka kayau* (service receiver). The most important part of this ritual is the hand posture of the service provider when serving the *sagan*. The host offers *khay-y* (eggs), *nay* (fish), and other food items from *jepa laha* (left hand), and liquor by *java laha* (right hand) at the same time, saying *chemma naayi* (forgive me if there is anything wrong).

This ritual demonstrates how the Newar show their hospitality and respect to their guests through their food and ritual. This type of hospitality is known as obligatory hospitality since it is deeply rooted in the Newar culture. This serving is similar to a starter or appetizer. After that, the guests are presented with a series of snacks and later a lunch or meal.

Löwdin (1998, p. 175) mentions that during feasts and festivals known as *nakha*, Newari hospitality can be seen properly. Similarly, the feasts are hosted in three distinct locations to accommodate various social and ritual needs. These include *agambo* (at home), *khyobo taiga* (at a designated place to worship clan deity), and *dugu deo bo teugu* (food offered to the clan deities at the host's residence). Distinct foods are offered in each location. Guests are formally invited for *bhoye*, known as a feast, and upon arrival, they are greeted with traditional respect. They are then seated in hierarchical rows on a *sukul* (hand-woven paddy straw mat), with the eldest positioned at the starting point of the mat. Meals are served on *laptya* leaf plates, which are secured with sticks, and soups are served in *bota* leaf bowls. The meal progresses from snacks, such as boiled eggs and fried soybeans, to a main course featuring beaten rice, curry, meat, and wine, culminating in desserts like *dhau* (curd), sweets, and *sisu pusa* (fruits). Wines are crucial in the Newari feast as locally fermented beer, *chhyang*, and distilled wine, *aiyla*, are presented in *salincha* (clay bowls) and *kholcha* (small metal bowls), respectively, from the eldest to the youngest, reflecting the hierarchical status. This illustrates how hierarchical hospitality is prominently displayed during Newar feasts and festivals. Once everyone is done with the meal, the host bids goodbye to the guest known as *subhya*.

An old respondent, when asked about the hospitality culture of Panauti, stated that, "*Panauti has a long-standing tradition of welcoming guests, as evidenced by the numerous falcha, sattal and pattis (rest houses) found throughout the town's various toles (neighborhoods). These structures, designed to accommodate travelers' needs, showcase the creativity and practicality of local builders. Examples of these rest houses include Flacha, a convenient resting place for daytime travelers, Sattals, guesthouses for overnight stays, and Dabali, multi-purpose platforms used for community events. These structures demonstrate the sustainable planning and architectural ingenuity of the Newar people, the native inhabitants of Panauti Valley.*" He further added, "*The integrated settlement pattern of Panauti reflects the urban planning principles of Nepal's Malla period and has given space to the visitors as well.*"

Thus, the Newar have a culture of social hospitality that prioritizes guests' security and psychological well-being based on hierarchy, fostering enduring positive perceptions among visitors. Furthermore, their culture and traditions always require the presence of the guest for every event and ceremony, showcasing their tradition of welcoming guests.

### Slow food

Slow food is that food which is traditional, original, delightful, and has been produced sustainably (Kunwar, 2017a, p. 103). These foods are made without any technological or chemical processing and often promote local food. Local food tourism plays a crucial role in promoting sociocultural sustainability, environmental awareness, and enhancing regional identity (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; in Boluk & Panse, 2022, p. 354). In case of tourists who want to experience and immerse themselves in the authentic experience of a destination, they prefer slow food as this gives them an image of the destination. Further, foodies embark on culinary adventures, savoring regional specialties and traditional cooking methods.

The Newari food culture is amazing and diverse (Toffin, 1977; in Löwdin, 1998, p. 34). The Newars residing in Panauti have a variety of food platters, and the same can be seen in the restaurants operated by the locals there. Panauti has potential for slow food, given the huge number of *kaula chhen* in every nook and corner of the heritage site and the visitors who come to savor the food. Restaurants like Panauti Kaula Chhen, Café Agha Chhen, and Café Lampati are a few that serve a huge number of domestic tourists who visit every weekend from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Banepa to have this slow food, be it the *chattamari* (Newari rice crepe/pizza) or *yomari* (rice dumpling filled with sweet) or *bara* (pan cake), or Newari lunch set, which includes *baji* (beaten rice) with meat, different curries, and pickle on the side. Even the homemade liquor is available in the restaurants. Festivals like Yomari Punhe attract people to have a Newari food platter and Newari desserts.

Usually, the kitchen is on the top floor of the house, and all the cooking is done there. The guest is supposed to take off their shoes on the *chedi* (ground floor) and head to the *matan* (first floor) or even the *chota* (second floor), where they sit on a mat. Once the order is taken, the host prepares the food and serves the guest. One of the most important characteristics of *kaula chhen* is that the visitor can immerse themselves in the traditional food and the physical landscape of the Panauti heritage site.

The diverse food culture of Newar in Panauti can be reflected in the menus of the *kaula chhen*. The development of the menu is an innovation in the context of food tourism in Panauti. This reflects the sign of urbanization and modernity. Despite this, the Newar have a culture and tradition of preparing and enjoying particular foods for each festival. These festivals attract visitors, apart from the Newar community, who visit Panauti to enjoy the slow food and discover the taste of these Newari delicacies.

### Discussions

Panauti possesses a rich cultural heritage that attracts both domestic and international tourists. While the government has designated Panauti as a “monument area” and UNESCO has proposed its inclusion as a World Heritage Site, a lack of collective efforts from stakeholders has hindered its progress. Despite its potential, Panauti lacks effective marketing and promotion strategies to attract a huge number of visitors within and outside the country. The same can be leveraged to develop unique cultural tourism experiences, such as heritage walks,

traditional festivals, and workshops on local crafts, which usually happen on Saturdays and festivals to attract domestic tourists, be it through slow food culture or cultural immersion. Panauti has numerous community-led homestays. They are a popular choice for tourists in Panauti. However, some visitors prefer hotel accommodations in neighboring areas such as Dhulikhel, Banepa, or Khopasi, or return to Kathmandu or Bhaktapur.

Meanwhile, the local government of Panauti is working hands-on with the TDC to empower and engage youth in tourism activities through their entrepreneurial skills, such as homestays and community-run restaurants, crafting traditional handicrafts as tourist amenities, which helps to generate income and preserve local culture. This leads to the involvement of people in community tourism. Furthermore, the center is working on posting clear and correct signs of place, placing dustbins, reconstructing old monuments, and focusing on sanitized and hygienic accommodation within the place. This has resulted in minimizing its environmental impact and ensuring long-term tourism development.

A substantial number of domestic tourists were seen visiting the heritage site, given its proximity to the capital. These visitors were primarily students on educational trips or individuals or groups seeking history, art, and architecture, a cultural environment, heritage sites, sacred sites, authentic local cuisine, and a peaceful escape from urban environments. Similarly, these visitors were also interested in the local handicrafts, as they are souvenirs that hold the memory of the place.

**Table 3: Types of niche tourism in Panauti and attractions associated with it.**

Heritage Tourism	Cultural Tourism	Community Tourism	Gastronomy Tourism
Indreshwar Mahadev Temple,	Makar Mela	Panauti Community Homestay	Slow Food
Brahmayani Temple	Panauti Jatra	Cultural Exchange	Yomari Punhe
BansaGopal Temple	Madhav Narayan Jatra	Hiking and Trekking	Community Restaurants
Basuki Naag Temple Patis/Sattals	Nawa Durga Naach Hari Siddhi Naach		

The table above depicts the macro niche tourism prevalent in Panauti, as per the respondents. The *Indreshwar* temple is mostly visited heritage site. *Makar mela*, *Panauti jatra*, and *Madhav Narayan jatra* host a huge number of visitors as they reflect the culture, tradition and identity of the place. The Panauti community homestay is popular among domestic tourists to escape the hectic place and replenish themselves in the natural beauty and authentic hospitality. Similarly, the Newari food platter is a popular slow food among visitors visiting local restaurants. Therefore, Panauti offers a range of niche tourism experiences, and the proximity to the Kathmandu Valley serves as a contributing factor.

### **Initiatives to develop tourism in Panauti**

The TDC has recently trained 22 local people as tourist guides regarding hospitality and English language skills to enhance the quality of interactions between hosts and guests. The most recent one is the launch of a website (Panauti Tourism Development Center [PTDC], 2024), where a tourist can access an offline map of the place, another one is a list of the festival calendars and heritage passports where the tourists can get glimpse of all tangible and intangible cultural heritage present in the different part of the village, and list of activities the tourists can immerse themselves in and around the destination. A collaborative project between the center and local government was launched, where intergenerational skill transfer was done, where skilled older women taught traditional handicraft techniques to younger generations.

This region has seen a huge number of tourists because of festival tourism. These festivals, jatras, and dances are the identity markers of the people of Panauti. The TDC, along with the government, is working together to promote and protect them. In recent years, Panauti has witnessed efforts to rebuild destroyed monuments and revitalize its intangible cultural heritage, like the Devi Naach, a cultural performance which was discontinued once, is now showcased regularly. Similarly, incorporating a festival calendar on their website shows the region's initiative to welcome tourists during these festivities. Similarly, the Panauti Museum's efforts to preserve and protect the ancient relics and artifacts of Panauti are praiseworthy, especially given the risk of theft. The tourism center's efforts to promote Panauti internationally are notable. However, a balanced approach that recognizes the importance of domestic tourism would be beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

Smith (1989) has categorized tourism into two types: nature and cultural tourism. Places, landscape, and countryside capital including others, are the important aspects in the geography of a destination. In the course of travelling, the visitors will not only gaze at cultural products but also, they will have gaze at the natural surroundings of the destination. Cultural tourism also includes the heritage of the destination. Therefore, it is cultural heritage tourism. Cultural heritage tourism is a type of tourism where tourists visit a destination to learn and experience the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of a destination (Datzira-Masip, 2006). The recent study of Duxbury et al. (2021) shows the relationship between cultural heritage tourism and regenerative tourism, where the importance of community tourism has been focused. The identity of a place is based on its culture and heritage. It involves visitors immersing themselves in the unique material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society. These identity markers, along with the interaction with the host, help visitors form a perception about the place. MacCannell (1973) states that the tourist setting and the guide's interpretation play a crucial role in fulfilling the quest of visitors who seek authenticity. Authenticity is the backbone of cultural heritage tourism. The visitors in Panauti can experience real authenticity through the culture and heritage of the town. The cultural heritage and hospitality tradition of the Newars make Panauti a major cultural heritage tourism destination.

The Panauti heritage site is triangular in shape as it is based on the banks of two rivers, which possess different tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Panauti is home to the Newar community, which is rich in cultural aesthetic values. The village includes a great cultural capital that attracts huge visitors. Its intricate architecture, from traditional houses to ornate temples, showcases a remarkable blend of artistic and historical importance. The town's deep-rooted history is evident in its ancient *ghats* and centuries-old temples, which offer a glimpse into the past. Moreover, Panauti's vibrant cultural traditions, including festivals, dances, culinary delights, and customs, are portrayed through creative tourism along with niche tourism, and regenerative tourism as it captivates visitors with their authenticity and charm. For those seeking an authentic experience of traditional Nepalese culture, Panauti is an ideal destination. This authentic experience can leave a lasting impression on travelers, making them fall in love with the destination's unique charm. Similarly, Panauti's tradition of hospitality dates back centuries, as evident by the *sattals* and *patis*, traditional resting places for travelers. This legacy continues today through *pahan chhen* (community guest house), where visitors can experience authenticity and the warmth of Newari culture and cuisine. Additionally, local restaurants known as *kaula chhen* offer a unique opportunity to savor the region's slow food delights. While this study specifically focuses on cultural heritage tourism, its scope broadens to encompass and provide insights for other forms of tourism such as proximate tourism, rural tourism, creative tourism, regenerative tourism, and niche tourism.

The prospects of cultural heritage tourism in Panauti are characterized by its rich and enduring tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the warm hospitality of the Newari people, and proximity to the Kathmandu valley. This unique combination creates a welcoming and immersive experience for a diverse range of visitors, fostering a sense of connection with the community and providing authentic experiences that last in the memories of the visitors. Even though culture is in the gradual process of transformation, the Newars of the Panauti, with the help of their traditional cultural institution like *guthi*, and recently innovated cultural tourism, are revitalizing their culture for tourism development in the Panauti. This ultimately contributes to the host community's economic growth and sustainable development. Further, Panauti is a power place that possesses a unique spirit rooted in its rich cultural heritage. This, combined with authentic local interactions and stunning natural surroundings, positions Panauti as a prime destination for cultural heritage tourism.

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