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Buddhism, Tourism, & Hospitality in Lumbini

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Abstract

This research examines the interrelationship among Buddhism, tourism, and hospitality in Nepal, with a particular focus on the monasteries in Lumbini. Buddhism is a religion (dharma) that is practiced worldwide. Lumbini, the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, is one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage destinations in Nepal. It attracts tourists, pilgrims, researchers, and spiritual aspirants from diverse cultures and backgrounds. The rapid increase in pilgrimage tourism in Lumbini has intensified the significance of monasteries not only as religious institutions but also as hospitality service providers for pilgrims and other visitors arriving from all over the world. Buddhist hospitality is the practice of respecting guests that reflects core Buddhist teachings and moral values such as generosity (dāna), compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (mettā), non-violence (ahiṃsā), and mindfulness (sati). Furthermore, the researchers shed light on the concept of trialectics, which is a newer approach in Buddhism, tourism, and hospitality studies. The objective of this study is to understand the connection among three

domains: Buddhism, hospitality and tourism. This study follows a qualitative approach. The primary and secondary data were collected and interviewed among five monks representing various monasteries in Lumbini. The findings conclude that Buddhist hospitality serves as a key element of pilgrimage tourism in Lumbini. It strengthens the relationship between religious practice and visitor experience. It is a value-oriented activity that highlights social, moral, and spiritual values, which is deeply rooted in the core Buddhist principles and practice of life, rather than a commercial activity.

Introduction

"Man is not meant for Buddhism. But Buddhism is meant for man" (Narada, 2011, p. xi).

Lumbini is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that attracts Buddhist pilgrims and spiritual tourists from around the world (Sharma, 2019). It is one of the major Buddhist sites associated with the life of Gautama Buddha and holds great religious significance for Buddhist travelers (Nyaupane, 2009; Kunwar & Ghimire, 2012). Beyond its historical and religious significance, Lumbini offers a unique form of Buddhist hospitality, where monasteries provide accommodation and services within a spiritual and moral environment guided by Buddhist values such as kindness, compassion, mindfulness, non-violence, and respect for all beings, while also offering opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and lifestyles (Giri, 2014; Acharya, 2022). This form of hospitality also supports the promotion of Nepal's cultural heritage and Buddhist teachings, making Lumbini a hub for Buddhist tourism and cross-cultural exchange (Kunwar & Ghimire, 2012).

The growth of tourism and pilgrimage in Lumbini has increased the demand for hospitality services such as hotels, restaurants, transportation, travel agencies, tour guides, and guest houses (Shinde, 2021; Acharya, 2006). Therefore, the study of Buddhism, tourism, pilgrimage, and hospitality in Lumbini is important to understand the relationship between religion, tourism development, cultural preservation, and hospitality management. It also helps to understand how Buddhism is connected with tourism and how Lumbini contributes to spiritual tourism and economic development in Nepal. This study is important as it explores how hospitality is viewed and practiced within the Buddhist context, particularly in the monasteries of Lumbini.

Lumbini is called a paradise for Buddhist tourists from all over the world (Giri, 2014). It is the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha in the ancient Shakya Kingdom and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997 under the cultural category as an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition associated with events and living traditions from the ancient period (Rai, n.d.). Its exceptional archaeological and religious value led to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997 (Kandel, 2025). Lumbini is perhaps the first and only proactive religious site because of its immense historical and archaeological importance and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), benefiting humanity (UNESCO, 2013).

Lumbini is home to more than 39 international monasteries and meditation centers representing diverse Buddhist traditions from around the world (Shinde, 2021). The Lumbini Master Plan is divided into three sections: The Sacred Garden, the Monastic Zone, and the Cultural Center. The Sacred Garden contains the Maya Devi Temple, one of the most

important historical sites in Lumbini, along with ancient monuments and ruins, the Ashokan Pillar, Pushkarini (the ancient pond), and several small stupas. The Maya Devi Temple is considered the heart of Lumbini (Nyaupane, 2009). These features are closely associated with the authenticity of the site, which is an essential aspect of cultural heritage (Larsen & Upchurch, 2012).

The Monastic Zone consists of the eastern and western monastic zones, separated by a central canal and developed under the Lumbini Master Plan designed by Kenzo Tange, which was officially approved by the Government of Nepal in 1978 (Tange, 1978). The eastern monastic zone mainly represents Theravada Buddhist monasteries, including the Royal Thai Monastery, Myanmar Golden Temple, Cambodian Temple, and Sri Lankan Monastery, while the western monastic zone was planned for Mahayana and Vajrayana monasteries such as the Chinese Monastery, Korean Monastery, German Monastery, French Buddhist Association, and Vietnamese Temple (Shinde, 2021). The third section, the Cultural Center, was envisioned as a place for cultural exchange among Buddhist followers from different countries. However, with only three major buildings constructed, this vision remains unrealized. The existing buildings include the museum, the auditorium hall, and the Lumbini International Research Institute (LIRI) (Shinde, 2021).

Lumbini has been recognized as one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimages in the world which is connected to birth place of Lord Buddha. Pilgrimage can be understood as a deeply meaningful journey to sacred places separated from ordinary everyday life and believed to inspire personal or social transformation. However, the meaning of what is considered “sacred,” who recognizes it as sacred, and how pilgrimage is practiced varies across cultures, societies, religious traditions, and even among individuals (Di Giovine, 2013a; Lincoln, 1996, in Di Giovine & Choe, 2019, pp. 1–23).

Cohen (1992) defined pilgrimage as a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that matters as a valued ideal. According to Preston (1992), a key feature of pilgrimage is spiritual magnetism, which refers to the special spiritual attraction that draws devotees to a sacred place. This attraction is shaped by historical, geographical, social, and cultural influences that together make the site spiritually significant. Although pilgrims may view this power as mysterious, it is connected to real social and cultural factors. Therefore, pilgrimages usually end at sacred destinations believed to possess strong spiritual importance (Preston, 1992). According to Cohen (1992), the relationship between pilgrimage and tourism can be understood through the concepts of convergence and divergence. The concept of pilgrimage is also connected with Buddhism.

Buddhism is a religion (*dharma*) practiced worldwide and stands as one of the universally acknowledged moral, intellectual, and spiritual systems guiding humanity into the third millennium of the common era (Narada, 2011). The essence of Buddhism is Buddha, which refers to Gautama Buddha, the enlightened teacher who discovered and taught the path to freedom from suffering. *Dharma* refers to the teachings and principles of the Buddha, including the Four Noble Truths which are connected to the Eight-fold Path. The essence of this truth is focused on suffering. While *Sangha* represents the community of Buddhist

monks, nuns, and followers who preserve, practice, and spread these teachings. Together, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha constitute the “Triple Gem,” the core foundation of Buddhist belief and practice (Spiro, 1967, in Choe & McNally, 2013). The authors have linked these dimensions with trialects for the first time in Buddhism. The concept of trialects has been studied by different scholars in relation to tourism studies (Tan et al., 2024; Hoppstadius et al., 2026). These three dimensions have a close nexus and a symbiotic relationship among each other which is one of the important aspects of this study.

Trialectics is a branch of philosophy or logic. It seeks to resolve contradictions by integrating three interrelated dimensions rather than relying on binary oppositions. In addition to philosophy, Lefevre (1991) and Soja (1996) stated that trialectics has been applied as an approach in the field of sociology, human geography and urban planning. The origin and expansion of this study came into existence with Aristotalian formal logic; Hegelian dialectic logic and Ichazoan trialectics logic.

Trialectics has been adopted as a newer approach of study in academia since the time of Ichazo (1976). Ichazo (1960, 1976) originally coined to explain the unity of reality beyond the contradictions and emphasized in dialectics or the binary relationships of formal logic (Bahm, 1984). The concept was later elaborated by Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991), who applied trialectics to explain the interrelationship between spatial, social, and lived experiences in human geography and social theory. From a spiritual perspective, Ichazo (1976) associates trialectics with higher levels of self-realization. It describes a state of unity attained by enlightened beings such as the Buddha and Christ. More recently, Whitaker (2024) characterizes trialectics as “tripartite positions and alliances in interaction in history” or a “sociology of plural jurisdictions.” It highlights the dynamic relationship among three interacting forces. Ichazo (1982) and Kevelson (1987) stated that trialectics has become the ‘method of methods.’ Dei (2012) has followed three dimensions of body-, mind- and the soul. This study has been derived from Akan people of Ghana, Africa.

In broader aspects, Buddhism accommodates three words or trinities which are also foundational in Trialectics. It aims to introduce the relationship among the three dimensions; Buddha, Dharma and Sangha collectively called Triratna (three jewels) in Buddhism. These form the foundation of refuge and devotion for any Buddhist practitioners (Sangharakshita, 2005, p.15) followed by some other trinities principle like the Three Marks of Existence (Tilakkhana) as impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatta). These principles also serve as the core practical steps taught across all Buddhist traditions (Gethin, 1998, p.165). These three fundamental truths serve as the lens for contemplating the nature of reality (Harvey, 2013, p. 57). Similarly, there are other three fold trinitarian complex in Buddhism studies such as morality (sila), concentration (Samadhi), and wisdom (panna) (Gethin, 1998, p. 165). The above mentioned tripartite position is hence justified the concept of the trialectics. Now, the question arises how we understand the concept of Buddhism, and how Buddhism has been connected with tourism and hospitality.

However, this research aims to fill this scholarly gap by conducting a study on Buddhism, tourism, and Buddhist hospitality, with particular emphasis on the monastic communities

of Lumbini. This is the first original work on Buddhist hospitality. Through this research, the authors explore the meaning, values, norms, ethical principles, and practical expressions of hospitality as understood and practiced in Buddhist monasteries and examine how those practices contribute to the preservation and promotion of Buddhist moral teachings. This study also enhances spiritual tourism which is interchangeably used as Buddhist tourism, intercultural understanding, and community engagement in Lumbini, Nepal.

Review of literature

Literature review is regarded as one of the most important aspects of research because this is where the researcher must explore what other researchers have researched about on the similar topic. Literature review have different purposes depending on the nature of the inquiry, if the purpose is to advance a position about current state of knowledge, then it is basic literature review, and if the purpose of the study is to uncover a research problem for further study, then it is advanced literature review (Machi, & McEvoy, 2009).

Regarding this study, the author reviewed several existing works related to tourism, culture, religion, and development in Lumbini. Although several studies have examined Lumbini from tourism and hospitality perspectives, none has specifically addressed the concept of Buddhist hospitality within the monastic context. A few studies have explored Buddhist pilgrimage in India and Nepal since the 1970s (Doyle, 1997, 2003; Geary, 2009; Goldberg, 2011; Moran, 2004; Trevithick, 2001, in Thibeault, 2018). To understand Buddhist hospitality, the present study also draws on literature related to ancient hospitality traditions mentioned in Sanskrit texts such as the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. However, this does not mean that Buddhist literature is silent on hospitality. Texts such as the *Divyavadana* ("Divine Stories") discuss various aspects of hospitality that can be applied in the contemporary context to promote ethical service, kindness, and care towards visitors and pilgrims in the monasteries of Lumbini.

With regard to the relationship between Buddhism and tourism, a limited number of works discuss the conceptualization of Buddhism, tourism, and hospitality, including *Buddhism and Hospitality: Expecting the Unexpected and Acting Virtuously* by Andy Rotman, *The Awakening of Hospitality* by John Makransky, and *Hospitality as Mediation* by Kalpana Seshadri. Previous studies by Acharya (2006, 2022, 2025), Ghimire and Rai (2015), Ghimire (2015, 2019, 2025), Giri (2014), Kunwar and Ghimire (2012), Kunwar and Sharma (2020), Kunwar and Adhikari (2022), Kunwar (2021a, 2021b), Munasinghe et al. (2017), Nyaupane (2008), Page and Connell (2006), Pandit (2004), Rai (2020), Rotman (2011), Shinde (2021, 2022), Somaratne (2019), and Sharma (2019) have primarily focused on tourism, pilgrimage tourism, socio-economic impacts of tourism, environmental conservation, the historical significance of Lumbini, peace studies, culture, Buddhism, heritage, and religious tourism.

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in the 6th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), who was born and raised in the Vedic cultural environment (Rai, 2020; Karki & Ghimire, 2025). It is one of the oldest religions in the world, with about 500 million followers representing both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions (Singh, 2019). Buddhism is regarded as a science that

distinguishes knowledge through scientific methods and interpretation (Sapkota, 2025). It emphasizes the concepts of Right View, Right Meditation, and Right Conduct (Sapkota, 2025). Beyond its spiritual interpretation, Buddhism also has material dimensions that influence the daily lives of people and society (Sapkota, 2025). It has inspired movements addressing moral values, human rights, and social inequality (Acharya, 2022).

Unlike many religions, Buddhism does not center on the worship of a supreme God but emphasizes the attainment of Nirvana through intellectual meditation (Spiro, 1967, in Choe & McNally, 2013). Durkheim rejected belief in God as a defining characteristic of religion because Buddhism contains no such belief. Instead, he argued that religion is social and organized through collective representations of society and culture, where essential rites are performed collectively (Winzeler, 2008, in Choe & McNally, 2013).

Narada (2011) explains that Buddhism does not emphasize metaphysical speculation or ritualistic practices. It is neither skeptical nor dogmatic, neither self-mortification nor self-indulgence, but is based on realism. It is homo-centric rather than theocentric and presents a path of enlightenment. The original Pali term for Buddhism is *Dhamma*, which literally means “that which upholds or sustains,” and has no exact English equivalent (Narada, 2011, p. 295).

Today, Buddhism is often understood not merely as a religion but as a philosophy of life and a practical guide for ethical living. It emphasizes the application of the Buddha’s teachings in everyday life rather than rituals and worship (Narasu, 2009; Subedi, 2019). It promotes human dignity, self-respect, compassion, and values that contribute to individual and collective well-being while seeking liberation from suffering (Ghimire, 2025; Narasu, 2009; Subedi, 2019; Sharma, 2020). It also encourages harmony in society (Sharma, 2020).

The teachings of the Buddha focus on personal and spiritual development, interdependence, ethical responsibility, self-discipline, and the reduction of suffering (Ghimire, 2025; Rai, 2020). Buddhist temples symbolize the five elements: fire, air, earth, water, and wisdom (Acharya, 2022). Buddhism has its sacred texts, the *Tripitaka* (Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, and Abhidhamma Pitaka), first compiled in Sri Lanka around the first century BCE. These texts contain the teachings of the Buddha, collectively known as *Dharma* (Subedi, 2019). Buddhist principles of non-violence also share important parallels with modern human rights frameworks through their emphasis on respect for individuals and the commitment to avoid harm to others (Harvey, 2000).

In practice, Buddhism emphasizes tolerance, mindfulness, compassion, benevolence, peacefulness, simplicity, non-violence (*ahimsa*), positive social relationships, and the conservation of resources. It focuses on the development of the inner self rather than the accumulation of material wealth (Thimm, 2021). The concepts of Buddhism, hospitality, and tourism can be understood through Buddhist pilgrimage, which reflects holiness, righteousness, and dignity.

History of Buddhist travel

Historically, Buddhism has been a religion of conversation and relationships, originating as a social reform movement that adapted to various cultural contexts such as Sinhala Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Newar Buddhism, American Buddhism, and Chan Buddhism (Bailey & Mabbett, 2003). During the Buddhist period, education became more accessible, as people from different social groups and genders had opportunities to receive education (Acharya, 2025). The expansion of Buddhism beyond Nepal was facilitated by important historical events, such as Emperor Ashoka's mission of sending his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka and the marital alliance between the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo and the Nepali princess Bhrikuti (618–649 CE), which played a significant role in the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet (Karki & Ghimire, 2025; Tuladhar, 2025).

According to the teachings attributed to the Buddha, every devoted follower should visit four sacred pilgrimage sites during their lifetime to awaken *Saddhā* (devotion rooted in understanding) and preserve the memory of the *Dhamma*. These four sites are Lumbini, the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha; Bodh Gaya, where he attained enlightenment; Sarnath, where he delivered his first sermon; and Kushinagar, where he attained *Mahāparinirvāṇa* (Ulak, 2022).

The authentic history of Lumbini begins with the pillar inscription erected by Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE (Kunwar & Ghimire, 2012). In 249 BCE, Ashoka visited Lumbini, already an important Buddhist pilgrimage site, and erected the famous pillar inscription recording the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha (UNESCO, 2006, in Weise, 2013, p. 123). The development of Lumbini as a pilgrimage destination continued for several centuries after Ashoka's visit. Its significance is further reflected in the visits of Chinese pilgrims such as Seng Tsai, Fa Hien (5th century CE), and Hiuen Tsang (629–645 CE), followed later by Prince Ripu Malla of the Western Malla Kingdom of Nepal. After his visit, Lumbini gradually became covered by dense forests and remained forgotten for several centuries (Weise, 2013).

In the early twentieth century, archaeologists studied Ashokan edicts and identified the sacred places mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* as the modern sites of Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. The establishment of a coherent pilgrimage circuit linking these four sites was therefore a modern development (Bareau, 1980; Foucher, 1987, in Thibeault, 2018, p. 85). Modern Buddhist reformers, including Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), contributed significantly to the revival of these sacred places by reinterpreting Buddhism through rationalism, empiricism, and universalism (Huber, 2008, in Thibeault, 2018).

The rediscovery of Lumbini (1896–1956) dates from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Credit for its rediscovery goes to Khadga Shumsher, then Governor of Tansen, Nepal, and A. Führer of the Archaeological Survey of India (Shinde, 2021). In Buddhism, Charika (Pali: *Cārikā*) refers to the religious journeys undertaken by the Buddha and his disciples to spread the *Dhamma*. The Buddha encouraged monks to travel individually to preach the teachings, making Charika one of the earliest organized forms of Buddhist religious travel (Harvey, 2000).

After the first *Dharmachakra Pravartana* (Turning of the Wheel of Dharma) at Sarnath, the Buddha instructed the first sixty arahant monks as “Go forth, monks, for the welfare and happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world. According to Ryff, the meaning of happiness is psychological well-being (1989) and eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 2017). Teach the Dhamma that is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end” (Vinaya Mahāvagga I.11.1).

In the Pali texts, this instruction appears as:

“Caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya...”

This instruction marked the beginning of the Buddhist Sangha and the systematic spread of Buddhism throughout India (Divyāvadāna Sutta). It also laid the foundation for the tradition of Charika, which played a vital role in the expansion of Buddhism and the development of Buddhist pilgrimage travel, contributing to the emergence of Lumbini as one of the world's leading pilgrimage destinations.

Tourism

Tourism is about mobilities, encounters, experiences, images and imaginaries. It is intimately related to societal norms, morals and ideals. Tourism is formative to consumption patterns and subjectivities. As such tourism as a phenomenon, and as a set of practices, is a key agent of design of everyday life (Hoppstadius, Tesfahuney, & Åkerlund, 2026). Tourism is also a crucial arena for the production, circulation, and negotiation of knowledge about the past (Post, 2025, in Pfoser, 2025). Tourism and memory are closely intertwined, as tourist destinations are often promoted as providing a journey into the past, promising an experience of a time stood still or turned back (Groebner, 2018; Stach, 2021, in Pfoser & Stach, 2024). Tourism is also driven by individual memories of past visits, personal and family ties that make places meaningful and stimulate a desire to revisit. Moreover, tourism creates new memories through stories, photographs, and souvenirs that visitors take home and share with others.

Goeldner and Ritchie (2011) define tourism as the “processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in attracting and hosting visitors” (p. 4). The understanding of tourism will be incomplete if one fails to understand tourism commodification. So far tourism commodification is concerned, it is linked to the development of tourism. “Commodification refers to all the goods and services through which the sense of place can be accessed, both for insiders and outsiders. Commodification, as well as heritagization, operates within the framework of commemorating and forgetting. What is remembered usually comprises these elements which might interest people from the outside and, therefore, might sell well.” (Demski–Czarnecka 2018, p.44; in Czarnecka, 2019). Serageldin (1999; in Shaw & Williams, 2004, p.24). provides a useful economic framework for understanding tourism that the heritage site as a source of value. According to the author, the heritage provides three sources of value which are as follows: extractive use value, derived from the services that support the site e.g. payment of entry fee and buying souvenir goods, non-extractive use value (also called recreational use

value e.g.shops,restaurants,hotels etc.) and non-use value (also called existence value such as historic buildings).

Like tourism commodification, travel, is also a part of tourism, which is influenced by many aspects of life, including religion, culture, economy, environment, and politics (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Among these, religion is deeply rooted in human nature, has emotional and moral components, and is widely shared among travelers around the world (Hung, 2015). Scholars have identified differences in tourism experiences based on tourists' religious beliefs and faith, where people travel to sacred sites in search of spirituality (Poria et al., 2003). Scholars such as Christie and Mason (2008, in Kunwar, 2011) emphasize the importance of tour guides in interpreting heritage sites for visitors from different cultural backgrounds. According to Cohen (1985, in Weiler & Black, 2015), tour guides perform four major functions: instrumental, social, interactionary, and communicative.

Tourism authenticity is one of the core concepts of tourism. When people travel they seek to experience something new outside their daily lives. MacCannell (1973) noted that pilgrims' desire to be in a place associated with religious meanings was comparable to the attraction of tourists to places embedded with social, historical, or cultural significance. Wang (1999) offers a theoretically leading framework that posits objectivist, subjectivist, and postmodernist conceptualizations of authenticity. Belhason et al. (2008) study calls for an integrative analysis of authenticity that moves beyond the solely subjective to highlight the intersection of three central factors—place, belief, and action—as part of pilgrims' lived experiences of authenticity. The authors illustrated that the search for authentic experiences during the visits to the holy sites is shaped by three interrelated components: the theopolitical ideology underlying the pilgrimage, the places visited, and the activities undertaken by the pilgrimages (Belhasen et al., 2008; Kunwar & Ghimire,2012).

In the context of heritage interpretation, tour guides facilitate connections between physical heritage sites, the built environment, and cultural meaning. They help visitors understand the significance beyond the material features of heritage places. Tilden (1977, McArthur, 1999, in Kunwar, 2011) argues that interpretation reveals the larger truths behind facts. Heritage interpretation also promotes understanding of conservation, sustainability, and respect for heritage sites (Moscardo, 1996, in Zhu, 2021).

Zhu (2021) proposed a five-step ladder of heritage interpretation comprising visitors' entertainment and consumption, knowledge and fact sharing, understanding and recognition, imagination and reflection, and healing. These stages progressively enhance visitors' engagement with heritage, ultimately fostering reconciliation, peace, and mutual understanding among different groups.

Like heritage tourism, commodification is closely linked to tourism development. It refers to the goods and services through which the sense of place can be accessed by both insiders and outsiders. Commodification, like heritage tourism, operates within the framework of commemorating and forgetting (Demski-Czarnecka, 2018, in Czarnecka, 2019).

The Lumbini Buddhist Circuit connects the major Buddhist sites of the Greater Lumbini Area, including Kapilavastu–Tilaurakot, Ramagrama, and Devadaha (Ghimire & Rai, 2015). Lumbini is also recognized as a center of meditation, spiritual restoration, cultural exchange, and peace (Kunwar & Ghimire, 2012). The contemporary significance of Lumbini as an international pilgrimage destination increased following the visit of U Thant, the then UN Secretary-General, in 1967 (Shinde, 2021). According to Keith (1988), Lumbini is regarded as a “power place” because of its spiritual significance and its ability to attract pilgrims seeking religious merit, inner transformation, and connection with the sacred (Dowman, 1988). Pilgrims to Lumbini can be broadly classified into three groups: national pilgrims, international pilgrims, and Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims, each differing in their motivations, religious practices, and patterns of engagement with the sacred landscape (Shinde, 2021; Nyaupane, 2009).

Recently there was happened a recognized visit to Lumbini in June 16, 2026 by Aloka, a peace dog accompanied with Buddhist monk in the ‘walk for peace’ (see in detail https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walk_for_Peace?). This is a turning point in the field of pilgrimage tourism that laid one more step for popularizing Lumbini as Buddhist tourism destination in the world. With the growth of tourism, the number of hotels in Lumbini gradually increased. Hospitality in Lumbini is provided through two major sectors: the commercial hospitality sector, including hotels and restaurants, and the religious hospitality offered by Buddhist monasteries. According to the Lumbini Hotel Association, there are 73 hotels with 493 rooms, 32 restaurants, and 1,263 employees. Several new hotels have been completed or are under construction but have not yet been registered with the Lumbini Hotel Association. Hotel owners have invested more than NPR 25 billion in Lumbini. According to the Lumbini Development Trust, Information Center, the tourist arrivals in the year 2025 were 11,14,266, out of which 7,02,910 were Nepali, 2,70,387 were Indian and remaining 1,40,969 were from Third countries.

Buddhism and tourism

Though Buddhist pilgrimage tourism became very popular throughout Asia in later periods, the study of Buddhism in relation to tourism has not theoretically flourished. Although there are some studies on Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimages, they remain largely silent on tourism. These studies are connected to the concepts of the Tibetan pilgrimage system, which has been described as ‘Buddhacisation’ (McKay, 2013), ‘Buddhicismation’ (Buffetrille, 2013), ‘Buddhi-isation’ (van Spengen, 2013), and “Buddhalisation,” a term used in the study of Chinese Buddhism (Wong, McIntosh, & Ryan, 2013), referring to the process of becoming a Buddha or an enlightened being (Too, 2003, in Wong et al., 2013).

There are many forms of tourism motivated by Buddhism, including visiting Buddhist temples and monasteries, participating in Buddhist retreats, pilgrimages, and festivals, or simply staying in a Buddhist-themed hotel or eating Buddhist temple food (Son & Xu, 2013, in Thimm, 2021). This type of tourism is predominantly found in Asian countries such as Japan, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, China, Thailand, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and South Korea (Stausberg & Auckland, 2018; Chun, Roh, & Spralls, 2017; de Silva, 2016; Agrawal et

al., 2010; Hung & Wang, 2015, in Thimm, 2021), but is also increasingly practiced in Western countries (Choe & McNally, 2013; Thibeault, 2018, in Thimm, 2021).

Thibeault (2018, p. 85, in Thimm, 2021) coined the term *Buddhascape* to describe the space where Buddhist tourism takes place. Given that many countries have at least a Buddhist minority, it can be assumed that the Buddhascape now has a global reach, with many Buddhist destinations at the Buddhism–tourism interface, such as Bodhgaya, Sarnath and the Kusinagar in India (Thibeault, 2018; Thimm, 2021). Thibeault (2018, p. 87, in Thimm, 2021) also observed the dual phenomena of the Buddhification of tourism and the touristification of Buddhism: tourists justify their travel by embedding it within Buddhist practices while rejecting the label of being ordinary tourists, whereas Buddhist institutions seek to expand their outreach by engaging with tourists. According to Geary (2002), the touristification of Buddhism offers another untapped opportunity, as the global popularity of Buddhism may encourage Buddhist centres to attract tourists seeking enlightenment.

However, Buddhist institutions must strike a balance between commercial interests and spirituality, as Buddhism itself is the primary attraction of the destination (Hung et al., 2017) and requires the participation of local communities to support both the sacred site and complementary businesses (Wimalaratana, 2014). Through a conceptualization of religion and tourism, Thibeault writes, “I arrive at the operational concepts of touristification and religionification (and its correlate Buddhification), which I use to explain the process of the mutual modelling between religion and tourism” (Thibeault, 2018, p. 87). If the relationship between Buddhism and tourism leans too far toward commodifying its spiritual essence, the perceived authenticity may be lost for tourists (Porananond, 2015), negatively affecting the Buddhist tourism experience (Levi & Kocher, 2012, in Thimm, 2021).

Through the religionification of tourism, touristic communication is shaped by religious (Buddhist) communication. Consequently, Buddhified touristic communication becomes more meaningful to participants who reject the identity of being tourists. By drawing upon their Buddhist imagination of India as the land where the Buddha walked, they describe their journeys using symbolic expressions such as “path” to convey Buddhism as a journey of self-discovery. It may therefore be asked whether these travelers are motivated by a form of “Buddhamania” (Michel, 2009, p. 476, in Thibeault, 2018), that is, a search for Buddhism rooted in a quest for well-being rather than in religion itself.

Hospitality and Buddhism

The terms “hospitality” and “hospitableness” are often used interchangeably. *Hospitableness*, derived from *hospitable* with Latin and Old French roots, refers to the friendliness a host shows toward guests (Oxford University Press, 2025, in Pokhrel & Thapa, 2026). Telfer (2000, pp. 42–46, in Pokhrel & Thapa, 2026) distinguishes hospitality from hospitableness by defining the latter as a personal quality of hospitable individuals—a genuine and voluntary effort to meet guests’ needs, driven by sincere and generous motives. Similarly, Lugosi (2008) describes hospitableness as a transient emotional connection between guests and hosts. Hospitableness highlights human interaction between service providers and

consumers and should be embedded in core hospitality activities, including the provision of goods and services for sustenance and entertainment (Tasci & Semrad, 2016; Pokhrel & Thapa, 2026). In the literature, hospitableness is often discussed alongside hospitality, creating some conceptual overlap. Hospitality has been regarded as relevant to religious, social, moral, and business aspects of human life (Lashley, 2007, in Tasci & Semrad, 2016).

Hospitality plays an important role in providing accommodation, food, comfort, and other services to tourists and pilgrims, contributing to a welcoming travel experience (Kunwar, 2017b). Its understanding varies according to geographical location, faith, field of study, and socio-cultural context (Munasinghe et al., 2017). The act of hospitality involves “an action (a welcome), an attitude (the opening of oneself to another... and the offering of one’s house to a stranger), and a principle (disinterestedness)” (Jelloun, 1999, in Kunwar, 2017b, p. 64). It comprises the warm welcome and care shown by the host to the guest (Somaratne, 2019). Hospitality also contributes significantly to the global service economy (Ottenbacher et al., 2009).

Brotherton (1999, in Kunwar, 2017b, p. 64) defines hospitality as “A contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink.” This definition emphasizes reciprocity, mutual well-being, and the exchange relationship between host and guest. Such interaction also contributes to visitors’ feelings of authenticity and improves their understanding and appreciation of destinations (Kunwar & Phuyal, 2024). During the late 1970s, hospitality emerged in the United States as a distinct field associated with tourism and service industries catering to visitors (Lashley, 2007; Walker, 2004; Ottenbacher et al., 2009, in Kunwar, 2017a; Tasci & Semrad, 2016). Lashley (2000, pp. 4–5) proposed three domains of hospitality—**social**, **private**, and **commercial**—to broaden its theoretical understanding (Kunwar, 2017b).

Hospitality transactions involve the interpretation and negotiation of identities, power relations, property relations, and social space (Kunwar, 2017b). Hospitality extends beyond providing food, drinks, and accommodation to include generosity, respect, and genuine care for guests (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). In Buddhism, hospitality (*sakkāra-sammāna*) is an important social value based on treating and respecting guests, although the concept is interpreted differently across contexts (Munasinghe et al., 2017). Despite the centrality of the host–guest relationship, neither tourism nor hospitality studies provide a universally accepted definition of hospitality (Kirillova et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the host–guest relationship remains fundamental in shaping tourists’ experiences (Selwyn, 2000; Kunwar & Phuyal, 2024).

Rotman (2011) explains that the term *atithisatkara* is derived from Sanskrit roots, where *atithi* refers to a visitor who arrives without prior notice and *satkara* denotes hospitality or virtuous treatment. Thus, *atithisatkara* refers to performing virtuous deeds for a guest. In Hindu culture, this idea is reflected in the principle of **Atithi Devo Bhava** (“The guest is God”), where hospitality is regarded as a form of worship (Lawrence Babb, in Rotman, 2011, pp. 115–121). Both Nepalese and Indian Hindu traditions symbolically treat God as the divine guest through rituals of hospitality (Tyagananda, 2011). In contrast, Buddhism emphasizes

a radical hospitality or “**inter-being**,” which seeks to overcome divisions between self and others through compassion and mutual respect (Kearney & Taylor, 2011, p. 1).

The concept of travel in Buddhism appeared to have been initiated by the Buddha himself (Acharya, 2022). The Buddhist philosophy of hospitality is closely connected with values such as compassion, generosity, respect, and kindness planted by Lord Gautam Buddha (Acharya, 2022). It is believed that the Buddha was ‘welcoming, friendly, polite and generous’ towards guest who came to see him (Tripitaka). One of the traditional duties of a lay person in the monastery was to make the fivefold offering, and warm welcome providing water, food, accommodation and helping to guests (*atithibali*), a practice that Buddha approved and encouraged. The Buddha considered failure to offer hospitality to the guest is viewed as inappropriate and disrespectful. The Buddha’s teachings provide a philosophical foundation to promote harmony among the human beings (Thapaliya, 2025). Thus, Buddhist hospitality constitute in the form of giving not only a material thing but also an ultra-material (beyond materials) idea related to karma (Munasinghe et al., 2017).

According to Somaratne (2019), guest in Buddhism is treated with four source of care: generosity (*dāna*), compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and selflessness (*anattā*) service without attachment to profit status (Somaratne, 2019). In Buddhism, providing hospitality to the guest is a sacred act and a part of social structure that connects people and communities across cultures, and create mutual relations with each other’s (Munasinghe et al., 2017). The guests are not literally called God but are honored with worthy of respect and care in Buddhism. It means that it is about treating and respecting guests, that can spread love, care peace and harmony among each other in the world (Somaratne, 2019). There is also a story of Sujata that shows hospitality in Buddhism is based on kindness, generosity, and compassion toward all beings. A simple act of offering a bowl of milk-rice by Sujata not only helped Siddhartha to recover his strength but also showed the act of devotion and generosity. This story is often used to illustrate how small acts of hospitality can have great spiritual significance.

The guests are considered as a “merit-field” (*Puñña-kkhetta*) where the hosts could plant the seed of “religious merits” refers as planting seeds in fertile ground (Somaratne, 2019). Buddhist hospitality is a wholesome act that can transform the individual internally from “selfishness” to “selflessness” (Somaratne, 2019). The practice of hospitality is a worthy act that brings happiness and happiness is the best indicator to the spiritual activity and the act is considered as a thoughtful good investment for future in Buddhism (Somaratne, 2019). Thus, the act of hospitality has potential to transform the perception of individual and allows them to enter to the deeper truth of life which is selflessness (Somaratne, 2019).

Buddhist hospitality is deeply rooted in the principles of generosity, compassion, loving-kindness, mindfulness, and selfless service, which encourage hosts to treat every visitor with respect and without discrimination. Therefore, Buddhist hospitality offers a unique ethical perspective and practices while treating and respecting the guest in a way that reflects core Buddhist teaching and moral values. These characteristics make Buddhist hospitality more

appropriate in promoting peaceful and spiritually meaningful experiences in the contemporary tourism and hospitality industry

Foodscape

Food, drinks and accommodation are the core components of hospitality industry and among them, food plays a vital role in hospitality and tourism (Keken & Go, 2006; in Kunwar, 2017a). Bell (2009, in Kunwar, 2017a) has explored urban “foodscape”, “drinkscape” and “restscape” which are considered as important aspect of hospitality industry. Food is a common language used to communicate, share emotions and touch (Kunwar, 2017a). Food is also related with attitudes, rituals which differ from culture to culture (Kunwar, 2017a). For the British and Japanese tourist, food is an important part of the good vacation, whereas for Australian, it is placed third, for German it is fifth and for the French tourist, it is not at all important as other (Sheldon & Fox, 1989; in Reisinger, 2009, in Kunwar, 2017a). Therefore, food is an important element in the marketing of tourism and determining visitor satisfaction.

Food consumed in Buddhist monasteries can generally be categorized into three forms: religious food, associated with ritual offerings and ceremonial practices; secular food, referring to the daily meals consumed for survival; and sacred food, which acquires spiritual significance through offerings of respect, blessings, and mindfulness (Wang, 2024). According to Per Lowdin (1998), food is divided into three categories: 1) sattvic, 2) rājasic, and 3) tāmasic. The first is the food of saints. The sattvic diet is strictly (lacto) vegetarian and also regards certain vegetables as impure, e.g., onion, garlic, and radish. The second is the food for kings and warriors. The rājasic food contains meat from goat and chicken as well as eggs. The tāmasic is the food of demons and titans. It permits all the items in the two previous classes, as well as buffalo meat, fermented foods, spirits, garlic, onion, etc., in short, many of the foods which are directly excluded from the sattvic and rājasic diets.

Among three different types of food, monks and nuns preferred to have sattvic food in the monasteries. Sattvic food is very popular in the monasteries. The underlying conception is that the food determines men’s moods and actions. Sattvic food will make a man saintly; rājasic food will make him a ruler or warrior, i.e., powerful and sexually potent; tāmasic food will make a man an uncontrollable victim of lewd desire, like a demon or a titan. This is a gross simplification. Hindus are well aware that not all people can be saints or kings, but nevertheless it reflects the ideas Hindus have about the effects of food on the state of mind. Newars (of Nepal), as mentioned by Per Lowdin (1998), apply the phrase expressed in this classification, but only selectively, for instance, at virtual days when the pious observe a fast or, according to this classification, avoid consuming contaminated foods, e.g., meat, garlic, onion, and alcoholic beverages. Sattvic food stuffs are offered to certain deities, notably, to Mahadev and Narayan (Vishnu), who are thought to be vegetarian and who do not accept blood offerings. Milk, grains, sweetmeats, etc., which are offered them are later eaten by the devotees as prasād. The sattvic food is associated with the Hindu current which regards renunciation of caste and society, abstinence from meat and alcohol, and celibacy as the proper means to attain salvation (Lowdin, 1998, in Kunwar, 2017a).

Food tourism may be defined as ‘visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel’ (Hall & Mitchell, 2001a; in Kunwar, 2017a, p. 91). Food tourism has involved a significant junction of cultural heritage and spiritual exploration, where the act of dining exceeds physical nutrition to become a form of “sacred worship” (Wang, 2024). In Buddhist contexts, this phenomenon attracts travelers seeking to experience the purity and self-sufficiency of monastic life through its culinary systems (Wang, 2024). By integrating traditional food rituals with heritage preservation, religious tourism, it will not only increase global awareness of cultural understandings but also provides important resources for local development and the conservation of Buddhist sites.

Research methodology

The research design is exploratory in nature, for which a qualitative research approach was followed. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The “Monastic Zone,” comprising the Eastern and Western Monastic Zones of the Lumbini Master Plan, served as the field area for this research. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and informal discussions with monks and nuns representing various monasteries in Lumbini, Nepal. An ethnographic approach was employed to study Buddhist hospitality, whereby the second author had the opportunity to observe and interact with monks and nuns in various monasteries located within the heritage zone of Lumbini. Semi-structured interview questions were designed to collect primary data, while secondary sources complemented the study. The fieldwork was conducted from January 25, 2026, to February 28, 2026. During this period, the second author observed the practices of Buddhist hospitality in five monasteries within the Monastic Zone of Lumbini and conducted unstructured interviews with monks residing in different monasteries and temples.

A total of five respondents participated in the study. They were selected through random sampling, in which only the intended stakeholders were included. Each interview lasted approximately 25–30 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded, translated into English, and subsequently analyzed and presented in the findings. As the second author is a native of Nepal, there were no language barriers during the interviews with the relevant stakeholders. The interview questions focused on the monks’ perceptions of Buddhist hospitality and how guests are welcomed and treated in Buddhism. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the interviewees.

Likewise, the study reviewed various secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, newspapers, publications, and online materials, to analyze the subject comprehensively and gather information on tourism and hospitality in the context of Lumbini. The researchers chose Lumbini as the study site because its monasteries regularly welcome pilgrims, monks, scholars, and international visitors, providing rich real-life settings for examining how Buddhist teachings are applied in guest reception, accommodation, food offering, etiquette, and interpersonal communication. Lumbini also offers an ideal setting to observe authentic expressions of Buddhist values such as compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), generosity (*dāna*), mindfulness, and ethical conduct as practiced in hospitality. These

characteristics make the monasteries of Lumbini an authentic and rich field for ethnographic observation of Buddhist hospitality practices.

Findings and discussion

Hospitality (*sakkāra-sammāna*) is a virtue far excellence for it relates to our social, moral, and spiritual value system. It is about treating and respecting guests. It is a social act: its practice builds benevolent “social” bonds connecting peoples and communities across cultures. It is a moral act: its doer undergoes an internal moral transformation to care for others. It is a spiritual act: (a) its practice generates religious “merits” that bring happiness to the doer here and now and in the future; and (b) moves the doer upward in his or her spiritual journey from the ignoble state of selfishness to the noble state of selflessness. Hence, Buddhism views it as the practice of hospitality that brings happiness close to the concept of eudaimonia. It is the happiness (*sukha*) enduring state of wellbeing achieved by eliminating mental poison- greed, hatred, and delusion- and perceiving reality clearly (Bodhi, 2010, p. 14).

Happiness is the best indicator of the spiritual quality of an act. “Merits” condition happiness here in this very life and in the next. As a Canonical text puts it: “When one departs this life, the self- control over body, speech, and mind, and the deeds of merit lead him to a happy destiny” (A.I.155 (3.51): *yoḍha kāyena saṃyamo vācāya*; in Somaratne, 2019). The same text concludes: “One should do deeds of merit that bring happiness” (A.I.155 (3.51): *puññāni kayirātha sukhāvahāni*; in Somaratne, 2019).

The concept of hospitality in Buddhism is about self-respect of human and humanity in this universe (Sharma, 2020). Buddhist hospitality is a wholesome act that can transform the individual internally from “selfishness” to “selflessness” (Somaratne, 2019). Thus, Buddhist hospitality leads to the creation of harmony in the society in the achievement of life substantially (Sharma, 2020). One of the respondent monks from Nepal monastery in Lumbini expressed it as follows:

Although the modern concept of hospitality may not available in Buddhism as it is a new concept, this does not rule out the possibility of hospitality in Buddhism. The underlying principles is deeply embedded in Buddhist teachings. Buddhism is known for its philanthropic approach to work for the benefit, for the sake of happiness of many and perceive the world through compassionate perspective what we call *karuna* in common. In many Buddhist texts, it is highly recommended that people, earth infinities merit (*punya*) in serving long term or bed ridden patients, travelers of long distance, and it is always wanted that you put others before you. Hence, modern concept of hospitality is very limited and personal when it comes to the holistic approach in Buddhism. There is no particular term for guest in Buddhism as far as my understanding goes. However, the word guest can be spotted here and there when it comes to Buddhist hospitality. We provide a good care for guests who have been travelling from a long distance (T. Lakpa, pseudonym, informal discussion, February 7, 2026).

Similarly, a German monk named Norboo (pseudonym) reported the issue as follows:

There are different perspectives on hospitality in Buddhism. It depends on the monastery and the individual. In most cases, we welcome guests, we manage what facilities they need, we make the proper arrangement of food and drinks for guest. Specially for the guests who come to our monastery, proper arrangements are made with food, accommodation and other activities. The main objective is to understand the wishes and needs of the guests. Some come to learn here about the Buddhist teachings, moral values and norms, while others come to meditate. Most people come in search of peace and for meditation. In my experience so far, the expectations of the guests are not very high, they prefer to enjoy with the environment here (P. Norboo, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

In the same way, a monk from Canadian monastery named Sonam (pseudonym) reported the concept of Buddhist hospitality as follows:

In many contemporary contexts, hospitality is often associated with gaining recognition or financial benefit. In contrast, within the Buddhism, hospitality is ideally offered without any expectation of return. So, this applies differently in Buddhism. We ask how the travel was? whether it was pleasant or not, and provide a platform to share their experience. Even in Buddhism, guests are well received and well welcomed. We teach them about Buddhist moral values such as comparison, love, kindness, generosity. This is a very good thing. So, not only the gurus, everyone is welcomed equally in the monastery (A. Sonam, pseudonym, informal discussion, February 15, 2026).

The findings indicate that Buddhist hospitality is different from commercial or service-oriented hospitality. In Buddhism, hospitality is based on the principal of *karuna*, and is expressed through caring the guests, especially travelers who are in need as a means of generating merit (*punya*) and promoting collective well-being (Somaratne, 2019). In Buddhism, providing hospitality to the guest is a sacred act and a part of social structure that connects people and communities across cultures, and create mutual relations with each other's (Munasinghe et al., 2017). It means that Buddhist hospitality is about treating and respecting guests, that can spread love, care peace and harmony among each other in the world (Somaratne, 2019). The responses from monks in different monasteries signify the practices of hospitality to each other. There is a shared focus on welcoming guests with respect, providing basic needs such as food and accommodation, and facilitating spiritual learning and meditation through love, care and harmony. Like modern hospitality, which often focus on individual's satisfaction and commercial exchange, Buddhist hospitality adopts an entire approach that belief on simplicity, equality, and inner peace. Thus, monasteries are the symbolic representation of residents and spaces for cultural exchange, moral teaching, and spirituality.

In Buddhism, the acts like offering a seat, water, or maintaining respectful silence reflect a mindful and humble approach to welcome visitors as a part of hospitality teachings (Munasinghe et al., 2017). It is believed that during the Buddhist period, education also

became a universal opportunity since every social group together with people from all the social statues and genders could access to the education (Acharya, 2025). The monk from Nepal monastery expressed his form of hospitality as follows:

Up to now I did not come across any Buddhist texts describing the hospitality like in modern tourism. In monastery, hospitality is not taught as a separate subject but it is part of our daily practice of Dharma. Offering a seat, water, or even silence to the guest is part of the hospitality in the monastery. In the training, younger monks learn by observing seniors. There are no formal classes on hospitality, but monastic communities are guided by disciplinary rules that strongly emphasize what modern people called 'hospitality' arguably to a greater extent than the modern concept of hospitality through which they understand how to behave with humbleness and respect in the monastery (P. Dorje, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

Similarly, a monk named Norboo (Pseudonym) from German monastery again reported as:

In monastery, there is a seal, which tells about how to behave with the visitors and guests. The seal is kind of Buddhist moral heart and it is like ethics, it's a path of discipline in Buddhism. The hospitality is taught by the senior monks or teacher in the monastery, which is an essential part of Buddhist teachings in the monastery (P. Norboo, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

In the same way, a monk named Karma (Pseudonym) residing in a Thai monastery shared a different opinion on hospitality as follows:

Yes, hospitality is taught in the monastery. It is taught in all the Buddhist texts. It is taught in all the subjects. In the monastery, everything is based on the five precepts. Thus, everything in the monastery teaching are enclosed with the practices such as compassion, generosity, respect, and kindness taught by Lord Gautama Buddha which is all about respecting and caring the guest. There is no such thing as disciple in the monastery which describe hospitality (B. Karma, pseudonym, informal talk, February, 15, 2026).

The teachings of Gautama Buddha expresses values such as compassion, mindfulness, and ethical conduct, which naturally guide how guests are treated in the monasteries (Thapaliya, 2025). While interacting with the monks in the different monasteries in Lumbini, the respondents stated that hospitality is not taught in the monasteries, but is a part of their daily routines and practices in the monastery. Both the respondents from Nepali and German monastery stated that hospitality is learnt informally through observation, and daily routines rather than class-room lessons, whereas the monk from the Thai monastery shared that hospitality is basically taught through all aspects of monastic education, particularly through the practice of the five principle and core values such as compassion, generosity, kindness, and respect. The education system during the Buddhist period was also different from present approaches since it focused on complete personal development by combining

morale training and core values with mental development and intellectual learning (Acharya, 2025). The monastic discipline further shows that behavior toward others, including guests is regulated by ethical principles with Buddhist teachings. Similarly, moral “seals” (precepts) indicate that hospitality is closely linked to moral conduct and spiritual development. Overall, the responses suggest that hospitality in monasteries is not a separate knowledge but is a reflection of Buddhist values adopted through education, experience, and guidance from senior monks and nuns within the monastic community.

The concept of host-guest interaction was first coined by Valene L. Smith in her book *Hosts and Guests* (1977). Since then this became a very powerful tool for establishing relationship between the two. In the monasteries, hospitality represents a typical fusion with spiritual attribute, cultural tradition, and practical service delivery, prioritizing the simplicity, mindfulness, and ethical conduct, while offering the services to guests. A monk named Dorjee from Nepal monastery added the forms of hospitality as follows:

Senior monks apply Buddhist teachings, social and conventional norms to serve in the monasteries including hospitality while young monks/nuns are taught by seniors to provide services to the guest. Traditionally, monks and nuns took turns preparing food. Over time, this practice has changed, and many monasteries now employ lay cooks, although monastics often continue to assist in the kitchen. However, if it is a monastery monk, monks serve the guests but in modern monasteries, they have their own canteen etc. and guests are served by either monks or other lay staff (P. Dorje, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

In the same way, a monk named Sara Thero (Pseudonym) from Sri-Lankan monastery stated the trend of hospitality inside the monastery as follows:

In the monastery, services are not provided by a single person or group alone. There is a committee with a group of monks and laymen who receive, welcome and serve the guest in the monastery. The resident monks take responsibility for daily activities such as rituals, teaching, guiding visitors, and maintaining cleanliness in the monastery. At the same time, the lay men (devotees) also play a very important role in the monastery. They offer food, help with cleaning, assist visitors, and support religious activities (S. Thero, pseudonym, general interview, February, 18, 2026).

The host-guest interaction acts as a collective, powerful and control measure in hospitality sector, which plays a vital role in shaping tourist experiences (Selwyn, 2000; in Kunwar & Phuyal, 2024). The responses from the monks show that services in monasteries are carried out collectively rather than by a single individual. Both the respondents Dorjee and Sara Thero also highlighted that host and guest interaction in the monastery are connected with the Buddhist teachings as well as the social and cultural norms. It is not only about providing food, drinks, and accommodation to the guest, but also about the host being hospitable through the feeling of generosity, a desire to delight, and an authentic respect for a guest (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). In the context of monasteries in Lumbini, the senior monks play an important role in teaching younger monks and nuns to serve guests nicely, ensuring that the values such

as respect, care, and discipline are maintained. At the same time, monasteries do not depend only on monks, and lay people (devotees) to provide services to the guest but each of them contribute significantly by offering food, helping with cleaning, and supporting visitors.

In some modern monasteries, services are further organized through committees and may include facilities like canteens, where both monks and lay staff assist in serving guests. Overall, the findings suggest that host-guest interaction in the monasteries is a shared responsibility that reflects cooperation, learning, and involvement.

Hospitality etiquette is the collection of social norms, manners, and professional behaviors that promote respectful, humble, and welcoming interactions between hosts and guests, thereby enhancing the overall guest experience (Matey, 2024). In Buddhism the hospitality etiquette is a key to the social artifact of many socialites and is based on the single principle of treating and respecting the guest (Munasinghe et al., 2017). A monk named Sara Thero (Pseudonym) from Sri-Lankan monastery added the subject as follows:

As monasteries are devoted for educational and spiritual spots, definitely maintenance of peace and harmony is a requirement. Apart from that, showing at least normal respect to the monastic environment, greetings, kindness, caring and loving are another important hospitality etiquette (S. Thero, pseudonym, general interview, February, 18, 2026).

In the same way, a monk named Karma (Pseudonym) from Thai monastery again added the issue of hospitality as follows:

In our monastery, hospitality is a moral and spiritual responsibility. When a guest arrives in the monastery, we receive them with mindfulness and respect. The first principle is *mettā* (loving-kindness), which guides us to welcome every guest without discrimination. We usually greet guests calmly, often with a gentle bow or *añjali* (palms together), showing humbleness and respect. We avoid unpleasant or unnecessary words and our speech is soft during the communication with the guest. Offering is also an important part of our etiquette. Even with limited resources, we offer water, tea, or simple vegetarian food. This reflects *dāna* (generosity), which is key to Buddhist teachings. We also maintain and follow discipline (*Vinaya*) in the monastery which is a important etiquette maintained in monastery (B. Karma, pseudonym, informal talk, February, 15, 2026).

The result from the research indicates that etiquette in monasteries is deeply connected in the spiritual values rather than formal rules. Both the monks emphasize that maintaining peace and harmony is the primary expectation within the monastic environment. In the monasteries, respecting each other's is another important etiquette used in the monasteries. At the same time, hospitality is practiced as a moral duty directed by key Buddhist principles. For instance, the idea of *mettā* (loving-kindness) encourages monks to welcome all guests equally with calmness and humbleness, often expressed through simple gestures like bowing or greeting with folded hands (Somaratne, 2019). Similarly, *dāna* (generosity) is reflected in offering basic items such as water, tea, or simple food, even when resources are limited

(Somaratne, 2019). The desire to Vinaya (monastic discipline) further shapes how monks communicate, behave, ensuring politeness, soft speech, and mindful interaction (Somaratne, 2019). Overall, the findings suggest that monastic etiquette are not a separate concept but an integral part of daily spiritual practice, displaying through respect, discipline, and compassion in dealing with visitors.

The social and cultural significance of food is finally gaining the identification it deserves (Cook & Crang, 1996), as in the role of food in tourism (Hall, 2002; in Kunwar, 2017a). The food items are categorized base on religious food, secular or daily food and sacred food (Wang, 2024). A monk named Norboo (Pseudonym) from Germany monastery in Lumbini highlighted the practice of food hospitality as follows:

Most of the academic monasteries have their own mess (common kitchens) where monks or lay people cook turn by turn for everyone. There is generally no formal classification of food within monasteries, as far as I understand. Everyone is typically served the same meal in a common dining hall. The monastery food is mainly for sustenance of sangha members, therefore, lavish (fancy) foods are rarely find except on special occasions such new year, dedicated sponsors, or other programs. Therefore, in most of the monasteries there is no second kitchen. Thus, in many cases, guests no matter what background or what category should accept the normal vegetarian dining service (P. Norboo, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

In the same way a monk from Thai monastery named Karma (pseudonym) reported it as mentioned below:

In our monastery, food is not prepared as a form of luxury, but as a need to sustain the body for spiritual practice. We usually serve simple vegetarian meals or drink, such as rice, lentils, vegetables, and sometimes fruits as a gesture of kindness and generosity to the guest who arrives in the monastery. However, dining areas are sometimes separated for teachers and administrators. If the guest request, we will arrange a separate meal but if there is no such case, we will eat the same food cooked in our common kitchen (B. Karma, pseudonym, informal talk, February, 15, 2026).

In Buddhist monastic tradition, food is regarded as a means of sustaining the body for the purpose of practice and spiritual development (Lee, 2015). The responses from monks in both Germany and Thai monastery stated that food and drink practices are managed as necessity and simplicity rather than luxury or guest-oriented service. In most academic monasteries, foods are prepared in a common kitchen by monks or lay cooks on a rotational basis, reflecting communal living and shared responsibility. Food is primarily used to sustain the members of the *sangha* (Grumbach, 2022). As a result, food and drinks in the monasteries are typically simple and vegetarian with basic items such as rice, lentils, vegetables, and fruits. Special or luxury foods are only prepared during festivals, new year celebrations, or when someone sponsored for the events. It is considered that guests visiting the monastery are generally expected to accept the same food served to the monastic community, regardless of their background or status, which highlights the values of equality and feeling. However, there

are some flexibility, as monasteries may arrange separate foods if guests make specific requests. Overall, these practices reflect Buddhist principles of generosity, compassion, loving-kindness and non-violence, where food is viewed as a means to support spiritual practices.

In Buddhism, providing accommodation to the guest is a sacred act and a part of social structure that connects people and communities across cultures, and create mutual relations with each other (Munasinghe et al., 2017). The monastery accommodations are usually small in structure, with clean rooms often including a bed, basic amenities. One of the monk named Sonam (Pseudonym) from Canadian monastery described the guest stay and hospitality management in the monastery as follows:

There are three four rooms in the monastery with attached bathrooms for the priest. The other rooms are just normal rooms. Everyone has to use the shared toilet and kitchen. Everyone who live in the monastery are happy with the environment here. The guest is also welcomed to stay here but they need to inform us one or two days before their arrival so that we can make ready with the accommodation. The guest can stay in the monastery varies from monastery to monastery and guest to guest, invited guest for special purpose like teaching or any other purpose. While uninvited, strangers, and volunteers are only welcome for a short period of time (A. Sonam, pseudonym, informal discussion, February 15, 2026).

Similarly, a monk named Dorjee (pseudonym) from Nepal monastery reported the way of tourist accommodation in the monasteries as follows:

In many monasteries, accommodation is not like hotels or commercial lodges. There are no separate rooms for guest. It has a basic room, shared bathroom and common kitchen. Guests may be allowed to stay for a short period, but this depends on the rules of each monastery. There is no any fixed charge for the accommodation. Instead, visitors can provide donations (dāna) according to their capacity, which reflects the Buddhist practice of mutual support. If someone want to stay for a day, you have to inform us a head before so that we will make that ready (P. Dorje, pseudonym, general interview, February, 10, 2026).

The respondents stated that accommodation in the monasteries is normally simple, common, and concentrated by spiritual values rather than commercial values. The most of the monasteries do not provide facilities like in hotels; instead, they offer basic rooms with shared bathrooms and common kitchens (Keown, 2013). Overall, the findings highlighted that the accommodation facilities available in monastery zones are generally basic, simple and reflect a natural approach to fulfill the visitors' spiritual needs rather than commercial hospitality services.

In the context of this research, Buddhist hospitality may likewise be understood as a trialectical relationship among Buddhist philosophy and ethical teachings, monastic hospitality practices, and tourism experiences. These three dimensions do not operate independently but mutually reinforce one another. It creates a holistic framework through which hospitality is practiced, experienced, and sustained within the monasteries of Lumbini.

Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between Buddhism, tourism, and hospitality in the monasteries of Lumbini, Nepal. Buddhism is a science that distinguish knowledge as inherent to scientific methods and interpretation. It imagines the concepts and approaches of Right View, Right Meditation, and Right Conduct. Beyond, the spiritual interpretation of Buddhism, it has some material sources that are inclined to the daily life of people and day to day activities of the society (Sapkota, 2025). Tourism is the largest economic sector that plays important role in socio-economic growth and development of the country (Kunwar, 2021). It is not just an aggregate of commercial activities, but also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition, as stated by Desmond (1999, p. xiv; in Marschall, 2012, 2014b). Buddhism provides the spiritual foundation that attracts pilgrims and tourists to Lumbini, while tourism serves as a medium for spreading Buddhist teachings, values, and cultural heritage to people from different parts of the world. Buddhist hospitality in monastery is not only about providing food, drinks, and accommodation to the guest, but also about the host is being hospitable through the feeling of generosity, kindness, a desire to delight, and an authentic respect for a guest (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). Buddhist hospitality focuses on selfless service, respect, care, and spiritual well-being, aiming to create a meaningful experience for guests. The monks and monastic communities in Lumbini use hospitality as part of their spiritual and disciplinary responsibility, managed by the principles of generosity (*dāna*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and non-violence (*ahimsā*). These values are reflected in the ways monasteries welcome, accommodate, guide, and support visitors during their arrival, stay, and departure. The study also highlights that hospitality in the monasteries in Lumbini is different from the other commercial hospitality which are experienced in the modern hospitality industry. The findings declare that Buddhist hospitality is deeply united in Buddhist teachings and practices and serves as an essential component of pilgrimage tourism in Lumbini.

The concept of Buddhism is understood through the interconnected relationship between Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha which is theoretically designed by the concept of Trialectics in Buddhism.

Additionally, the research demonstrates a strong connection between Buddhism, tourism, and hospitality, highlighting how Buddhist hospitality strengthens the relationship between religious practice and visitor experience, promotes spiritual and cultural exchange, and reflects the endless significance of Buddhist moral values in contemporary tourism.

Thus, the study concludes that Buddhist hospitality is important in promoting spiritual tourism. It plays a significant role in protecting Buddhist heritage as well as enhance cross-cultural harmony and cooperation among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, as tourism grows, there is a need to protect the authenticity, ethical relations, rituals and traditions so that it can balance the Buddhist values with modern tourism demands. Overall, the research provides the understanding of Buddhism, tourism and hospitality into a broader form through trialectics. This study leaves further space for the future researchers to contribute additional understanding and developing theories which will be connected to Buddhism and tourism in a better way.

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