

Adventure Tourism in Nepal

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About the author



IAN WALL worked at Plas-y-Brenin the National Mountaineering Centre (UK) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and admits that his friendship with John A. Jackson, a leading Himalayan climber of that period, shaped his future life. Ian has climbed extensively throughout the UK, the Alps and in Norway. He has led treks in Africa, Ladakh, Tibet and in Nepal where he now lives. Ian is an international advisor to the Kathmandu International Mountain Film

Festival and CEO of the Kathmandu Environmental Education Project. With a background of mountaineering and education Ian has been involved in developing training opportunities and has delivered training courses for the Nepal Mountaineering Association, The Nepal Mountain Academy, Indian

Mountaineering Foundation Mountain Leader programs, the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal as well as many of Nepal's trekking agents. He is also the Nepal correspondent for the Alpine Journal and contributes to several other travel magazines. In his spare time he's out exploring his 'back-yard' of Nepal.

Introduction

From the earliest of times Nepal has always conjured up images of a romantic Himalayan destination. Little was known about the country or even the Himalayan mountains that form the back bone of the country and protect northern border. To the south the Ganges and the densely wooded Tarai region again provided an almost impenetrable southern border. The early migrants from both the northern and southern plains rotated into Nepal - to the east the people from the north arrived and to the west those from the south. As in most migration circumstances these people were looking for a better life and or escaping famine or religious or political persecution. By the 16th century other adventurous travellers were eyeing Nepal for other reasons, then came the Pundits, the British Residents, the scientific explorers (flora and fauna) the anthropologists and then eventually the adventurous 'travellers' and tourists.

The political turmoil in Tibet was part of the catalyst that persuaded the Nepal Monarchy to open the borders to the French in 1950 and the mountaineering industry developed. The Hippy Trail provided adventure tourism of a different sort in the 1960s and white-water rafting and trekking started to develop. With a change of the monarchy in 1972 Adventure Tourism was given another boost.

By the mid-1990s 'Adventure Travel and Tourism' was a fully commercial operation producing millions of dollars of foreign revenue for the Nepal Government. Things started to change when the political situation played a major role in the governance of Nepal. Since then adventure tourism has never been the same. Today there are many underlying and potentially disturbing issues having a negative impact on Nepal tourism, in some quarters trust has been lost in Nepal's tourism industry by international operators.

At one time Nepal was the Premier Adventure Tourism Destination but now many other countries have followed Nepal's lead and are rapidly developing their own adventure tourism destinations, all in competition with Nepal. While adventure tourist numbers are increasing Nepal seems reluctant to embrace new ideas, technologies and potentially lucrative opportunities are being missed, client expectations are not being fully understood or addressed.

The disastrous earthquake of 2015 provided an unwelcome break in the flow of tourists but at the same time it was an opportunity for the industry to address some concerns and future policies, but again the opportunities slipped by.

For Nepal to keep its grasp on the Premier Adventure Tourist Destination crown and its potential for increased generation of foreign income it must revisit its tourism policies and bring them into line with client expectations and modern thinking.

In this article I have tried to write a short history of 'foreign visitors' coming to Nepal and their effect on Nepal's tourism industry while concluding with some ideas as to how to meet certain client expectations in the mountain tourism industry.

From the early dawn of adventure and exploration in the Himalaya to 1950



The saying goes; 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' and Nepal has 'beauty' in abundance but maybe now we should reconsider the definition of '*adventure*' in the context of Nepal. 'Nepal has adventure in abundance but adventure is in the mind of the visitor' - I say this because the definition of *adventure*, according to the dictionary is '*the involvement, willingness or participation in things that involve uncertainty and possibly physical risk with unknown outcomes*'. In today's adventure industry in Nepal the elements of '*uncertainty, possibly physical risk and unknown outcomes*' have to a greater extent been virtually eliminated in all but the mind of the activist.

The history of Nepal began in, and generally centred on the Kathmandu Valley. Over the last two centuries Nepal's boundaries have been extended to include huge tracts of neighbouring India which was at that time ruled by the British East India Company on behalf of the British Empire, and then contracted to little more than the Kathmandu Valley and a handful of nearby city-states. To the very few that had even heard of Nepal the territory was considered to be only that area of land known as the Kathmandu Valley, beyond that few had little idea of the country or its natural wealth and beauty. Though it has ancient roots, the modern state of Nepal emerged only in the 18th century.



Foreigners have been visiting the land we now call Nepal since ancient times. Some of the most famous visitors from a bygone era (between 1,500 and 2,000 years ago) included a Chinese monk called Huyen Shang (who wrote a description of the Kathmandu Valley), the Indian Emperor Ashoka (who erected a tower in Lumbini.), and his daughter Charumati (who reputedly built Buddhist shrines in Kathmandu). However, there is no record of any Europeans arriving in Nepal until the first quarter of the 17th century. In 1628 AD, a Portuguese Jesuit called Father Juan Cabral arrived in Kathmandu. He was received by the then King Laxminarasing Malla, who awarded him an auspicious copper plate and allowed him to preach Christianity and so Juan Cabral and his team of Jesuits were most probably the first known and recorded Europeans to visit Nepal.



The British had a history of mountaineering and exploration in the European Alps and Norway and by the fact that they were the rulers of India under the British Empire they soon developed a keen interest in the Himalaya, but at that time not for mountaineering purposes but for the study of flora, fauna and culture. The first British citizen to arrive in Nepal was probably William Hunter Douglas Knox, a Resident

(emissary) of the British Empire. He arrived in Kathmandu in 1802 but then left a year later. He was followed by John Peter Bolleau and then Edward Gardener. Brian Houghton Hodgson became, up to then, the longest serving First Resident staying in Nepal over the period 1829 – 1843. Hodgson was a pioneer naturalist and ethnologist working in Nepal where he was a British Resident. He described numerous species of Himalayan birds and mammals and several birds were named after him by others such as Edward Blyth. Hodgson was a scholar of Newar Buddhism and wrote extensively on a range of topics relating to linguistics and religion. For these travellers a visit to Nepal certainly encompassed the adventure elements of uncertainty and possibly physical risk.



During this time Nepal was under-going a radical change and King Prithvi Narayan Shah was successful in bringing together diverse religious-ethnic groups under one nation. He was a true nationalist in his outlook and was in favour of adopting a closed-door policy with regard to the British. Not only his social and economic views guided the country's socio-economic course for a long time but his use of the imagery, '*a yam between two boulders*' in Nepal's geopolitical context, formed the principal guideline of the country's foreign policy for future centuries. The combination of a closed borders and national turmoil made Nepal very much off limits for many explorers and travellers at that time.

However, 'adventure' in and 'exploration' of the unknown have always been a key driving force of humanity and on a September day in 1863, a Moslem named Abdul Hamid entered the Central Asian city of Yarkand. Disguised as a merchant, Hamid was actually an employee of the British Survey of India, and he carried concealed instruments to enable him to map the geography of the area. He was the advance guard of the elite pundit group of Indian trans-Himalayan explorers and adventurers recruited, trained, and directed by the officers of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India who were to traverse much of Tibet and Central Asia during the next thirty years. Babu Sarat Chandra Das was an Indian of a different order from the other pundits of the Survey of India team; he was a highly-educated and sophisticated man, who has been accurately described as a "*traveller, and explorer, a linguist, lexicographer, an ethnographer and an eminent Tibetologist*". Das also played an important diplomatic role during the Macaulay mission of 1885-86. When, in 1901, Kipling immortalized the pundits in his famous work *Kim*, the character of the secret agent Huree Chunder Mookerjee was most probably based on Das and *Kim* became a 'must read'

adventure story reaching far beyond the readers within its own generation. There was a natural desire on the part of the personnel of the British Survey of India to obtain as much credit as possible from the exploits of their trans-Himalayan adventures and exploration. Men such as Montgomerie, Trotter, and Walker naturally wanted to publicize their own adventurous achievements and those of the pundits, particularly through the meetings and publications of the Royal Geographical Society. These lectures and presentations all went to give south-east Asia and in particular Nepal a high public profile. Thirty years then elapsed between the first experimental pundit dispatches of 1863 when Montgomerie sent Abdul Hamid off to Yarkand, and the pundits' last known exploration when Hari Ram and his son travelled in Nepal and Tibet in 1892-93.

These pundits were adventurers and explorers in the true sense of the definition and their expeditions had all the ingredients of true adventure and exploration literally having to find their way from one valley to the next and from one community to the next using stealth and survival skills to avoid detection and capture, yet mixing with the local people enough to be able to sustain themselves. There were no maps or guide books, no internet or telephone; they had to be self-reliant, independent and resourceful. Yet they had a mission to accomplish, to gain knowledge of the geography of Nepal, Tibet and Central Asia since adventure tourism was their 'occupation'. However, from the late 1890s to 1950 there was little to report in terms of foreign travellers in Nepal.

The first recorded Himalayan expedition was that of Scottish mountaineer, Alec Kellas along with *Sherpa* Sony and 'Tuny's' brother succeeded on Pauhauri, stated as being the source of the Teesta River on the border of Tibet, China, Sikkim and India.

All pre-World War II Himalayan mountaineering expeditions had avoided entering Nepal due to the closed border situation and had travelled via Tibet or India, but in 1949, alarmed that the communist regime in China seemed to be gaining momentum, Tibet expelled all Chinese officials and closed its borders to foreigners. In October 1950 Tibet was occupied by the People's Republic and its borders remained closed indefinitely.

For over one hundred years Nepal, ruled by the Rana Dynasty, had not allowed explorers or mountaineers into the country. However, by 1946 the possible communist-sponsored revolution in Tibet was considered even less welcome than Western influences in Nepal so the latter opened diplomatic discussions with the United States that privately hoped to be able to use Nepal as a Cold War launching point for missiles. Scientific expeditions became permitted but two requests in 1948 from Switzerland and Britain for purely mountaineering expeditions were refused. However, a year later mountaineers were allowed to

enter Nepal if they were accompanying scientific travellers.



The British had a long history of attempting Everest all-be-it from the Tibetan side and in 1953 they successfully summated, subsequently Everest has become one of the most sought after destinations for 'adventurers' since its discovery as the highest mountain during the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India in 1856.

With the French success on Annapurna and the media hype associate with it, the first of its kind, a truly adventurous mountaineering expedition and the recognition of the romance that it entailed in a magical Himalayan Kingdom fired the imagination of many who saw themselves as potential adventurers in this Himalayan Kingdom.

Despite the fact that there have been foreign travellers in Nepal for many years from the early Jesuit Priests, the pundits, the early British Residents and naturalists their travel and exploration was by default 'an adventure', there was little or no information on travelling in Nepal. The first focal point for actual mountain generated tourism, a specific mountain attracting real traveller's attention was in fact Kanchenjunga. The third-highest mountain in the world which was, at that time believed to be the highest mountain once Dhaulagiri had been rejected as such. The enormous mass of Kangchenjunga lies on the border of Nepal and Sikkim. Rising straight up out of the eastern plains of India and being in the east of Nepal it is the first of the mighty Himalayan peaks to catch the early sunrise and in certain conditions as the Sun hits the summit ridge the snow glows in a fine golden yellow light as if a golden thread was floating high in the dark sky. With Darjeeling developing as a British Hill Station in 1835 visitors were soon arriving with the sole intention of witnessing the wonders of this great giant. Even in the mid-nineteenth century it was quite possible to make a one week tour from Calcutta travelling by train from Siliguri and then by 'gharry' to Darjeeling. Many inspiring works across all artistic genres were produced about Kanchenjunga during the nineteenth century, poems, paintings, travel accounts and reports on the flora and fauna of the region. All these formed the initial foundations of mountain tourism in the Himalaya which was accessible to the masses, all-be-it the financially well-established masses.

In 1851 a small company was established in the UK by Thomas Cook who initially dealt with a domestic market but by 1855 he had organised his first tours

to Europe and then in 1866 to the USA. Thomas Cook had acquired business premises on Fleet Street, London by 1865 and the office contained a shop which sold travel accessories, including guide books, luggage, telescopes and footwear. In 1866, Thomas Cook organised the first escorted tours of the United States for British travellers, picking up passengers from several departure points. They then introduced the first escorted round-the-world tour which departed from London in September 1872. It included a steamship crossing of the Atlantic, a stage coach across America, a paddle steamer to Japan, and an overland journey across China and India. The tour cost around £300 and lasted 222 days. By 1888, the company had established offices around the world, including three offices in Australia and one in Auckland, New Zealand, and in 1890, the company sold over 3.25 million tickets. A husband and wife might, for example, pay £85 for a Thomas Cook tour of Germany, Switzerland, and France over six weeks. While expensive enough the trip would likely be the only once in a lifetime adventure, the company would arrange for a variety of activities new to the middle class including museum visits, the opera, and mountain climbing. Access to romantic and adventurous parts of the world had suddenly become a lot easier and with the new 'package' deals the numbers of adventurous travellers and explores travelling the world looking for adventure rose dramatically.

Introducing modern adventure tourism in Nepal 1950 – 1992

Boris Lisanevich (1905-1985), was a Russian émigré to Nepal, he was a ballet dancer, an hotelier and a restaurateur, but above all he was an entrepreneur and the father of the mass adventure tourism industry in Nepal. He opened Nepal's first hotel, the Hotel Royal in 1951, a converted Rana Palace, and later he created the Yak & Yeti Hotel and The Chimney Restaurant. At that time, 1951, visas were difficult to obtain for Nepal but in 1955 in an attempt to reform this process, Lisanevich convinced a group of 20 tourists from his 'Club 300' based in Kolkata (Calcutta), mostly women, to come to Nepal, he then proceeded to have an intense discussion with the newly crowned King Mahendra about granting them a 15-day visa. Boris convinced the king that people would like to visit Nepal and would actually pay for the experience, citing to the King that the country could make profit from these visits. Finally the king relented, the guests arrived and Boris held the country's first handicraft exhibition. The Royal Hotel and the Yak and Yeti bar went on to become the meeting place for climbers from the 1950s right up to 1971 when the Royal Hotel was closed.

In 1950 the French got permission from the Nepal Government to undertake an expedition to Dhaulagiri, at one time thought to be the highest mountain in the world as the mighty south face viewed from the plains of India rose in one unbroken 7000m leap to the summit, or failing that, Annapurna which was considered at the time to be of lesser importance. This was the first expedition to

attempt an 8000m peak and the first permitted to undertake a mountaineering expedition in Nepal in over a century. After failing to climb Dhaulagiri 1 at 8,167m the team attempted Annapurna 1, 8091m with Herzog and Louis Lachenal reaching the summit on 3rd June 1950. The expedition was a great achievement for French mountaineering and caught the public's imagination with front-page coverage in a best-selling issue of the magazine the Paris Match. Herzog wrote the immensely popular book 'Annapurna' which was full of vivid descriptions of heroic endeavour and the anguish suffered on the expedition. The region had only previously been casually explored and the mountain

heights had been determined by surveyors with precision using theodolite technology based far away in India as part of the Indian Survey. Other nations felt that they should have been given priority but Nepal had favoured France. The Maharajah of Nepal appointed G. B. Rana as the local liaison, translation and general organisation officer to accompany the expedition.

But it was not until the French gained permission from the Nepal Government for Annapurna in 1950 that the tide of Himalayan 'adventurous' mountaineering and exploration really started. Within four years 1953 – 1957 Everest, Cho Oyu, Chomo Lonzo, Makalu, Kanchenjunga, Ganesh I, Lhotse, Manaslu, and Machhapuchhare had all been climbed.

All these expeditions were undertaken in the true sense of the word 'adventurous' mountaineering tourism, there were no paths, hotels or lodges, no domestic flights, maps or other technologies and no other services that we now take for granted.

The 'adventure tourism industry' was born. After the initial rush of expeditions in the early 1950s people got to learn of the treasures and natural beauty of Nepal. Books were being written, lectures were given and Boris had opened the first hotel and restaurant for tourists and companies like Thomas Cook were facilitating more accessible travel arrangements. But there were still adventures to be had.





The Hippie Trail was conceived!

The hippie trail (also called the Overland Trail) was the name given to the overland journey taken by young adventurers from the hippy subculture from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. These overland journeys occurred between Europe, the USA and South Asia travelling mainly through Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal. The hippie trail was a form of adventure tourism, and one of the key elements was travelling as cheaply as possible, mainly to facilitate and extend the length of time away from home for these tourists, there was little planning and the return 'tickets' were often the last thing on the hippies' mind. The term "hippie" became current in the mid-to-late 1960s and led to the prosperity, in relative terms, of the old marijuana shops, lodging, rented rooms and cafe businesses of Jhocchen, (Freak Street) Kathmandu.

In every major stop along the hippie trail, there were hotels, restaurants and cafés for Westerners, who networked with each other as they travelled east and west. The hippies tended to interact more with the local population than the traditional middle or upper class sightseers of the day did. However, these adventure travellers didn't spend all their time in a marijuana haze and at some point went seeking out other opportunities for adventure and the white water rafting sector was born as an alternative way of spending time outside of the valley but still involving a low-cost adventurous past-time.

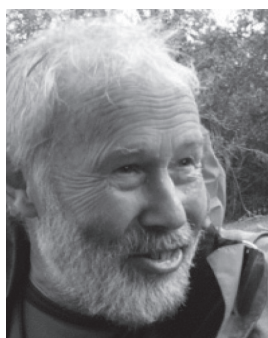
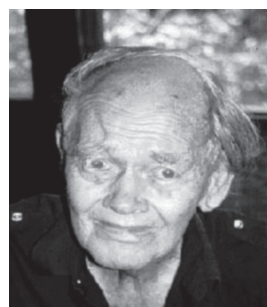
The hippie trail largely ended in the late 1970s after the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan closed the route to Western travellers. But this chapter was another defining factor in establishing Adventure Tourism in Nepal.

One of the early travel guides to Nepal was the BIT Guide. This recounted the collective experiences of travellers and was then reproduced at a fairly low cost as little more than a duplicated stapled-together bundle of foolscap sheets with a pink cover providing information for travellers. It was updated by those on the road warning of pitfalls and places to see and stay. The 1971 edition of The Whole Earth Catalogue devoted several pages to the "Overland Guide to Nepal".

Many of these overland travellers arrived in Nepal and headed to Kathmandu initially staying in the Freak Street locality, but in 1968 a Sakya family opened a guest house - Kathmandu Guest House - offering 13 rooms for rent at a maximum rate of 5 US \$ per night, the KGH herald another chapter of 'Adventure Tourism in Nepal'.

Up to this point the history of adventure tourism in Nepal was based on two factions, the mountaineering expeditions and well-heeled travellers who tended to stay in the old Rana Palaces with large gardens suitable for preparing and packing expedition equipment and logistics on the one hand while the hippies and overland travellers focused on the small private Newari houses where they could rent very cheap rooms in private quarters on the other. There was little mid-way accommodation available.

In the 1950s the Nepalese government allowed only one expedition to attempt Everest in any one season. But in 1965 Colonel Jimmy Roberts (1916–1997) recognised the potential of developing adventure tourism in Nepal and introduced the idea of 'trekking'. Jimmy Roberts was one of the greatest and most prolific mountaineer explorers of the twentieth century; a highly decorated British Army officer who went on to be acknowledged as "The Father of Trekking". His idea, innovative at that



time, was to take the adventurous mountaineering experience and adapt it making it a bit easier and more assessable for those looking for adventure in the Himalaya. His ideas included providing tents to the hikers and having them readily available, paired together with the Sherpa, for guidance in the wild and remote



terrain of the high Himalaya. The focus of his idea became a huge success and was embraced by many, which then gave direct access to the mountaineering field to a wide and varied sector of the travel market. To say the least, his

pioneering activities within this new field of mountain tourism became a great success and went on to become an absolute crowd-puller. Jimmy Roberts had spent years in Nepal attached to the British residency and accompanied Tilman on his first trek. In 1965, Roberts founded "Mountain Travel" in the Kali Gandaki area, the first of Nepal's trekking companies and the embryo for the adventure travel industry of today.

While the 1950s saw the first ascents of the 8000m peaks the 1970s witnessed a new mountaineering dawn – true adventure was alive and kicking. Chris Bonington (now Sir Chris Bonington) established a new 'extreme' genre. His vision of climbing steep, committing and technically difficult Himalayan faces opened with his audacious ascent of the South Face of Annapurna in 1970, he followed this in 1975 with another mind-boggling expedition that put Doug Scott and Dougal Haston on the summit of Everest by a new route on the Southwest Face of Everest. Reinhold Messner raised the bar in another direction in 1980 with his truly solo and supplementary oxygen free ascent of Everest. At the time no one knew of the impact of attempting such challenging feats or even if they would come back alive and without brain damage. These truly adventurous and challenging expeditions that ended successfully created a lot of media attention, books were written and lectures given, all stimulated adventurous mountaineering exploits in the Nepal Himalaya.

With the death of King Mahendra in 1972 the newly crowned King Birendra took a more proactive role in developing Tourism with one of his main goals being to rid Nepal of its 'freak and drug heaven' image and to replace it with 'adventure tourism'. Within a very short period of time Nepal established its first Ministry of Tourism, its first National Park and Wildlife Preserve and its first Cultural Zone. Jimmy Roberts' trekking initiative got a boost from the Nepal Government as it began to promote Nepal as an 'Adventure Tourism' destination. Up to this point tourism in Nepal had more or less developed accidentally. From 1973 all that changed.

With improved logistics and transport infrastructure the tourism focus was again shifting from the high-on-time-low-on-cost philosophy of the hippies to the high-on-cost-low-on-time philosophy of the middle-class adventure tourist market.

From 1973 through to the mid-late 1990s the adventure travel and tourism market of Nepal flourished. In 1973 Nepal received 68,047 tourists with an average stay of approximately two weeks (14 days) by 1999 this number had risen to 491,504 tourists but again the duration of their stay was approximately still only two weeks.

In 1988 Tek Chandra Pokharel and the Trans-Himalayan Tours organisation was handling the formal arrangements required to undertake any form of expedition

in Nepal. He did not operate as an agent but merely as a facilitator to the rapidly growing groups of tourists visiting the country and over the next 50 years he made major contributions to develop Nepal's tourism sector and became an icon of the diversification of Nepal's tourism industry.



In the early 1970s he was a Founding President of many tourism related associations of Nepal including Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents, Trekking Agents Association of Nepal and the Himalaya Rescue Association. Being well versed in tourism he was involved in Nepal's Tourism Master Plan. With a view of attracting the high end of the adventure tourism market Pokharel paid particular attention to developing high mountain luxury tourism and was closely associated with the Everest View Hotel in Sayangboche, at one time known as the highest luxury hotel in the world!

It is obvious through analysing the data available to recognise that although more travellers and adventure tourist were visiting Nepal the length of stay was remaining static. If Nepal was to capitalise on tourism then there would need to be a bit of fine tuning of the 'adventure experience'.

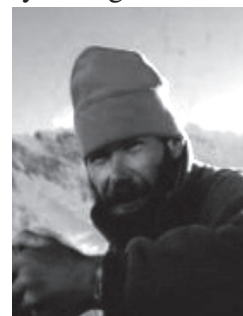
All the early 1950 - 1990 mountaineering expeditions were undertaken in the true sense of the words 'adventurous mountaineering', there were no paths, hotels or lodges, no domestic flights, maps or other technologies and services that we now take for granted weren't even thought of. However, international travel agents were not allowed to directly operate in Nepal, they were not familiar with developing trekking holidays nor did they understand Nepalese administration. With a new-found enthusiasm for adventurous travel there now developed an opportunity for a new business operation in Nepal, the Nepalese Trekking Agent and in 1974 TAAN was established.

For the next 20 years or so adventure tourism steadily developed in Nepal and as the numbers of adventure tourists increased so did the tourist facilities with the honey pot areas, specifically Annapurna and Everest not only taking the lion's



share of business but also leading the way in developing tourist infrastructure. Annapurna received particular attention when ACAP was formed under King Birendra.

By the early 1990s two companies, Mountain Madness and Adventure Consultants, started as a result of



experienced mountaineers deciding to become guides to lead people to reach the top of Everest. This provided the founders of these companies with not only a good opportunity to earn money, but also the chance to help people who wanted to summite Everest and to make their dreams come true. The first commercial expedition to Everest in 1992 was a raging success with Hall, Ball and Cotter reaching the summit with six of the clients and four Sherpas.

Hall and Ball had proved their ability to pull together a successful expedition with attention to detail that was the envy of the other 'start up' guided expeditions that were beginning to stamp their mark at the same time. There were many firsts to the summit that day, first Israeli, first Belgian woman, first from Hong Kong.

Since the early 1990s there have been no limits on the numbers of expeditions attempting Everest each season. In place of the national teams of leading mountaineers that long dominated Himalayan climbing, commercial operators put together ad hoc groups of clients who now pay £25,000-£50,000 and in many cases more, each to 'bag' the world's greatest trophy peak.

How would the fathers of the Nepal tourism industry view the 'developments' of the present generation?



Although today 'Adventure Tourism' contributes around 7.5% to the national GDP its potential is far from exhausted. The grass-root operators see the value of tourism as supporting their financial sustainability but in the vacuum created by a lack of direction from Government level they are taking things into their own hands. Development is taking place

in the mountain regions that is not always conducive with the expectations of visitors and trekkers, buildings are being constructed that do not represent cultural traditions and design and new roads are becoming intrusive in the remote and so far untouched areas. The Khumbu and the valley areas of Everest are now the direct flight paths for a new breed of high-end tourist with many helicopter companies offering several fixed time departures a day creating a constants buzz of noise from these air borne tourist flights. In line with policies outlined



in the Constitution the Zonal Development has created a rift between local and national administration which again is causing a great deal of confusion for the trekker tourists and indeed local agents. As ever politics play a major role in Nepal with just about every citizen holding strong political views and while this is a major element in establishing 'inclusion' it can also be seen as a disruptor to sustainable development. Although there are systems in place which were established during the early days of adventure tourism in Nepal to manage positive development a lack of transparent monitoring by some of the major players of today has also allowed some dubious practice to enter into the industry and in many areas this is having a negative impact on Nepal reaching its tourism potential.



Adventure tourism is based on the premise of 'adventure', 'exploration' and 'travel' that may also hold a 'perceived or actual, risk' potentially requiring specialized skills, physical exertion and possibly experienced leadership to help develop the specialised skill base required to meet certain assessed risks that might jeopardise the outcome (not having the right technical skills to meet the challenge).

Adventure tourism has grown world-wide in recent decades, an estimated 65% from 2009 to 2012 – the most recent year for which data is available.

Tourists are seeking many different kinds of 'adventure' based experiences, but the measurement of market size and growth is hampered by the lack of a clear operational definition, especially here in Nepal.

In a country like Nepal there are so many unknowns but as a result of a modern time-constrained life-style and the imposition of so many restrictive regulations and permits, certain elements of 'adventure' have been removed from the travel packages offered in Nepal. Itineraries are planned to fit with flight schedules thus removing the element of the unknown time away from home experience and risk assessments are developed to avoid any element of possible danger and the failure of clients to meet their overall expectations of a trip to Nepal in the old-fashioned sense of the word 'adventure'. Having said that every trekker, mountaineer or adventure tourist has his or her own threshold of what they perceive as adventure and comfort zones. According to the U. S. - based Adventure Travel Trade Association, adventure travel may be any tourist activity, including at least two of the following three components; physical activity, cultural exchange or interaction and engagement with nature.

It is estimated that four out of ten international travellers incorporate some

adventure activities into their travel plans. With such rapid growth, greater numbers of businesses and guests are entering the marketplace, and the industry needs clear guidance with respect to adventure travel guide qualifications and performance.

It is interesting to note that the Mount Everest Foundation (UK) issued 26 financial grants for expeditions in 2017, however only six of those grants were for expeditions to Nepal the rest were for the Antarctic (1), Arctic (2), North America (1), South America (4), Pakistan (5), Nepal (6), Central Asia (3) and East Asia (1). Although Nepal had the single biggest number of MEF sponsored expeditions there was a lot of competition from expeditions going to other adventure tourism destinations around the world. Maybe if Nepal wants to retain the crown of the 'Premier Adventure Tourist Destination' then it needs to check out the competition!

The adventure tourist guide

Today the dynamics of the adventure tourism industry have radically changed from the perceptions and expectations of the bye-gone era. In those times a guide was a local community member with local knowledge of the paths, trails and valleys. Today all visitors without exception will have done some form of research before coming to Nepal and with so much information out there the work of the adventure guide is demanding and the expectations of clients are very high.



Nepal has excellently qualified guides in many different disciplines with internationally recognised qualification and many with Nepali qualifications who are working towards their international qualification. Nepal is the mother of trekking, an adventure tourism activity copied by just about every other adventure tourism destination in the world. It is quoted that in Nepal the trekking industry has a short fall off approximately 1000 trekking guides at the present time and that does not take into account future demand through initiatives like the 2020 Tourism Year yet it's been nearly 60 years since Jimmy Roberts arranged the first trek in Nepal and Nepal has only just started running training courses that touch on Intermediate Level training, let alone Advanced Level training for trekking guides. (Need to be clarify again)

It would greatly enhance the adventure industry in Nepal if the Tourism Ministry



were to consider a policy to initiate a national training program for all Adventure Activities so that within, for example 5-years Nepal could boast that all Adventure Tourism Guides in all disciplines held a national qualification of intermediate level (a level and standard above the nationally recognised entry level training and licensing level that is now the legal requirement for trekking guides)

A guide with a good general knowledge of a variety of skill competencies (i.e. skill based, leadership, eco-issues, first aid, cultural, interpretive and mountain knowledge etc.) is essential to facilitate a group of guests through a variety of terrains, environments and locales in a safe, manageable and respectable manner. At present, visitors do not know of the standard or experience of the guides leading them, whether they are qualified and attached to an agency or experienced freelance guides or whether they are just students on vacation from college looking to make a bit of extra pocket money during their vacation.

For visitors adventure travel guides are at the crux of the adventure travel experience. They provide safety for trekkers, valuable and interesting information and stories about the landscapes, the culture and the way of life in the hill districts of Nepal and ensure the overall quality of the experience, and ultimately deliver and safeguard the adventure travel company and Nepal's reputation. Still further, an excellent guide in one destination can raise the bar for the industry, while less competent administration in another can just as easily set the industry back decades. *A trekking guide should be viewed by the visitor as being an added value to the Nepal experience;* the guide should not be legally imposed on trekkers who wish to go solo. This legal requirement will only lead to tension and a further tarnish Nepal's premier adventure destination title.

Despite the recognised value and importance of quality adventure tourism travel in Nepal the Tourism Ministry has so far not taken on the responsibility of raising quality standards and implementing a vigorous monitoring system. There is an international ISO for adventure tourism ISO 21101 and ISO/TR 21102, although this standard and quality assurance mark does not cover all the aspects necessary for excellent adventure



travel guiding it does provide a starting point, a model upon which further policies can be built.

In an effort to support the adventure travel industry as it continues to expand and professionalize, the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) has initiated an Adventure Travel Guide Qualification and Performance Standard. The standard was developed between the months of November 2014 and July 2015, by a group of 17 sector professionals organized by the ATTA. The working group participants came from 15 countries and included guides, business owners and industry partners. Nepal has only one company registered with ATTA.



Adventure Travel is an extremely diverse sector within Nepal's tourism market. Diverse in terms of geography, with adventure travel businesses specialising in specific locations and diverse in terms of activities, with a constantly evolving list of new activities and products for adventure travel guides to introduce to guests. If Nepal wants to keep attracting repeat visitors then it needs

to develop new 'adventure' activities, after all if you are stuck in Kathmandu due to poor weather and flight delays visitors can only visit the temples so many times before tourists become bored. This developing diversity has resulted in a multitude of approaches for incorporating standards into training schemes. Government involvement, through laws and regulations also impacts the enactment of standards. Despite this diversity, universal qualifications have emerged for Adventure Travel Guides (ATTA), regardless of the activity or destination, a nationally recognised or internationally recognised professional qualification is essential as an element of a hall mark quality standard that is internationally recognised and respected. The role of an adventure travel guide is generally deemed to encompass areas of due care and attention with the specific remit of meeting client expectations. Additionally, a guide is responsible for relationship management with both guests and local people, monitoring impacts on the environment, they must be able to communicate in the relevant local language(s) or through interpreters, and possess intercultural communication and interpersonal skills.

Guides must be trained with an emphasis on customer service. A core value of the Adventure Travel sector is sustainability, including environmental, economic and social sustainability. The way guides interact with local partners, and share local cultures and history is central to ensuring a positive impact that adventure

tourism can have on communities. Guides contribute to sustainability by operating in such a way that environmental and cultural impacts are minimized and sustainability practices are focused on meeting client expectations.

As a result of the political instability at the turn of the century tourist numbers began to decrease dipping to as low as 275,468 in 2002. This had serious financial implications not only for the benefit of greater Nepal but right across the tourism spectrum affecting not only the agents but also the trekking staff right down to the grass-root level. In a bid to attract business many Nepalese operators were looking at a variety of ways to gain an advantage over the competition. Many of the methods employed left clients confused as to what was a 'good deal' and as a result of the under-cutting process by some agents and the lack of understanding on the clients' part as to exactly what was involved in organising a trek many looked upon those agents charging as higher tariff as being out to 'cheat' clients of additional funds. In fact it was the reverse, those agents charging a lower tariff could be accused of under-paying their trek and expedition staff and of providing a lesser quality service to clients.

As the tourism industry developed the supply increased and there was an upsurge of 'Agents' in the developed world looking at engaging with potential clients with a certain amount of disposable income. They created itineraries and travel packages to meet their client needs and expectations and in turn looked to the Nepalese Agents with the skill and man-power to deliver them. At the same time the Nepalese Agents were developing their own products and looking to sell



them to the foreign market. Both elements were considering client expectations with specific regard to fitting into the two week average time frame for a visit to Nepal. From the high-on-time-low-on-cost philosophy of the hippies to the high-on-cost-low-on-time philosophy of the middle-class adventure tourist itineraries had to be strictly managed and the risk of not meeting deadlines or goals was a critical issue resulting in - Arrive, have an adventure and Depart, on time. To this end the critical element of an adventure, that of an unknown

outcome had to be managed, there was no room, or at least very little for the unexpected, outcomes had to be guaranteed and achieved. In mountaineering terms this went right across the board from short low-altitude treks to Everest summit attempts. For some an adventure is simply the flight to Lukla while for others it is a multi-day expedition on a challenging steep and technically difficult 8000m mountain face with many different levels in between.

The large commercial operators are not only crucial to today's Everest economy but also the economy of Nepal. These companies employ a large local workforce that play a critical role, preparing the route and supporting clients of variable technical skill and experience. They put up fixed ropes and prepare the way for their clients, most of whom would be unable to climb the mountain without such help. Almost all use bottled oxygen for the final stages, which means they require even more manpower to get them up the mountain. Unsurprisingly, the commercial guiding companies do not want anyone to interfere with the smooth progress of their operations, and nor do their Nepalese employees.



In general terms the costs for a major 8000m summit expedition would cost at least \$30,000 but most people pay about \$45,000 and some as high as \$130,000! This all takes time to raise and at the end of the day some clients 'demand' a summit for those sums of money. Failure is not often an option. Similarly, sometimes within the trekking industry clients expect to complete their trek successfully and on time, weather, domestic flights and other potential delays often cause stress for all concerned, clients and Nepalese staff and in some cases death. These unknowns are all part of the adventure but for some clients they are just not acceptable, they want their 'soft' adventure in tightly packaged compartments.

Again in the context of adventure tourism in Nepal and in the Himalaya there is an inherent risk and clients need to accept personal responsibility and to take appropriate and due care.

However, for various reasons Nepal and several adventure associated organisations seem to want to take all 'adventure' out of adventure tourism all in the name of 'safety', job creation or increasing income/profit margins. Mountain expeditions are one thing and I believe the majority of those wanting to climb Everest or any other of the 8000m peaks realise they could not do it without Nepalese help. But within the trekking arena many clients want to trek



independently and without a guide yet there are forces at work trying to make taking a guide a legal requirement. In many cases the clients have a far broader mountain experience than the guide does and by imposing such policies often creates conflict. Surely, it is not up to Nepal to take responsibility for the safety of all visitors, providing the trekkers are made aware of their role in their own safety then it is up to individual choice, a guide or not? In my opinion Nepal should develop a national and professional adventure guide work force that is not only respected but deemed to be essential

by the visitor as one element that will enhance their stay in Nepal. Nepal should not be looking at ways to make, by law, it a legal requirement to travel with a guide. This, in some instances takes away the very last elements of 'adventure' and turns potential visitor away, often to focus their attention and finances on other destinations with less restrictive practices.

Although I have focused very much on the mountaineering and trekking forms of adventure tourism in this article there have been of course many other forms of adventure activities developing in Nepal over the last decade: mountain biking, trail running, paragliding, white water rafting, skiing and heli-skiing is now beginning to develop as a mountain sport.

However, the core principles of adventure tourism remain the key to a valued experience as perceived by the visitor and if Nepal wants to retain its crown as the Premier Adventure Destination then there should be a professional administration body, maybe under the Ministry, tasked with the remit of developing a robust adventure tourism plan that not only meets the expectations of the adventure tourist of today but is also transparent and able to monitor and maintain professional standards within the industry. Nepal needs to regain the confidence and trust from its foreign partners.

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