

Assessment of Tourism Infrastructure in Pokhara and Its Efficacy as Tourism Capital of Nepal

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Abstract

Received: 13 Feb 2024

Revised : 5 April 2024

Accepted: 15 May 2024

Pokhara is the pioneer and prominent player of Nepalese tourism industry with stunning scenery, clement climate and smiling souls. Nearly half of the total international visitors and more than two-third of the total trekkers visit Pokhara every year. An exploratory study was done to assess the tourism infrastructure of Pokhara using qualitative data from nine key informant experts. These experts were purposively selected from diverse field having at least dozen years of experience. The study finds that Pokhara has natural beauty, cultural uniqueness, adventure sports, good hotels & restaurants and recreation means. Still, it needs to improve its accessibility related physical infrastructures as well as some service infrastructures to be well established as the best destination in the country. On the same mirror, announcement of Pokhara as Tourism Capital of Nepal seems to be a bit hurried publicity stunt. The policy makers should strongly show their commitment on developing tourism infrastructures before any other new announcements.

Keywords: *Pokhara, tourism infrastructure, tourism capital, infrastructure assessment*

Introduction

Pokhara is one of the most prominent destinations in Nepal with more than 40 percent of total tourist arrival in this single destination (Khatriwada, 2019). It is the gateway for Annapurna region which holds two-third (68 %) of trekkers in Nepal (PMC, 2021). It is also pioneer city of tourism development in Nepal as well as the warmest city from where one can see mountains very near (Malla, 2023). Pokhara has officially been declared as the "Tourism Capital of Nepal" in a ceremony graced by then-Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, organized jointly by the Gandaki Provincial Government and Pokhara Metropolitan City on March 17, 2024 (Chaitra 4, 2080 B.S.). Coming forward, Visit Pokhara Year 2025 has been passed by Pokhara Metropolitan Assembly targeting at least 15 lakhs tourist arrival in Pokhara and 60 percent of total international tourist arrival in the city (PMC, 2024).

On the other hand, Pokhara International Airport (PIA) is in operation from last two years with negligible number of international flights. Due to slow pace of Prithvi Highway upgrading work, domestic tourists are also declining in recent years with sharp decline in occupancy. Although, tourist arrivals in country is increasing and is nearby PRE-COVID statistics, tourism industry of Pokhara is still starving. Still Pokhara is experiencing mega investments and added events with a hope of returning the crowd back to Pokhara. Various discussions have been concerned on the role of tourism infrastructures in this destination. As per Velichkina (2014), tourism infrastructures are directly connected with tourism development as they can create positive dynamics or obstacles for it. Sugiyama, Oktavia & Karlina (2022) also concluded that quality of tourism infrastructures contributes tourists' satisfaction. It is the most important base for tourism development and utilization of resources in destination (Jovanovic & Ilic, 2016).

After analyzing data from 25 years (1995-2009) in Vietnam using panel data by nonlinear Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL), Nguyen (2021) resulted that increase in 1% of capital investment in transportation and communication infrastructures will lead to 0.78% of increase in arrivals of international tourists. Same investment in hotel and restaurant industry will contribute 0.75% of arrivals whereas recreation facilities will influence 0.4% of increment in this sector. On all these backgrounds, this study purposes to make a qualitative assessment of the

infrastructure development in Pokhara and find the gap between announcement from authority and the stakeholders' perspective on the announcement.

Literature Review

As per Encyclopedia of Tourism, tourism infrastructure is defined as the overall representation of “physical, legal, environmental and mental amenities which contribute to making tourism product enjoyable, reliable and sustainable” (Jafari & Xiao, 2016). Various literatures confirm that tourism infrastructures have immense role in maintaining tourist satisfaction as well as sustainability of the tourism. Wendt et al. (2021) concluded that transportation accessibility is the most important infrastructure for tourism development and also found that political obstruction can also harm the accessibility. The study carried by Sugiana, Oktavia & Karlina (2022) in Tasikmalaya Regency of Indonesia also agreed that accessibility quality and amenities quality has larger contribution whereas accommodation quality has also positive contribution in satisfying forest tourists. Wong and Wahap (2022) also agreed the same finding in their study in Bario Kelabit Highland of Malaysia. They also found that although accessibility and accommodation plays bigger role in enhancing tourist destination competitiveness which leads to revisit intention of the tourists, accessibility plays significant role compared to accommodation in larger frame.

Velichkina (2014) has constructed Tourism Infrastructure Index that ranges from 0-1000 points and includes various indicators under production infrastructure and service infrastructure. Production infrastructure included transportation, information and communication, public utility and ecological purification objects infrastructures whereas service infrastructures include, tour operators and travel agents, accommodation facilities, leisure and entertainment services, catering facilities, trade and security. Stepanova and Shulepov (2019) have also proposed a tool kit to assess the development of tourism infrastructure based on integration of four structural elements. These elements include infrastructures related to accommodation, food, leisure & recreation as well as tourists' service.

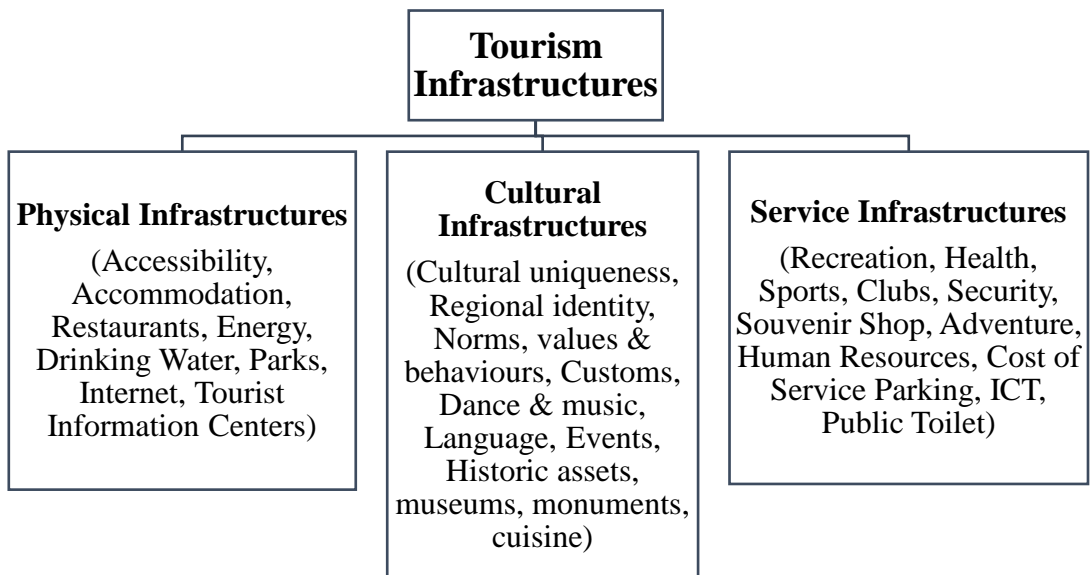
World Economic Forum (2024) has developed Travel and Tourism Development Index with five dimensions and 17 pillars. One of the major dimensions is infrastructure and service dimension having three pillars namely: Air transport infrastructure, Ground and port infrastructure as well as Tourism service

and infrastructure. Raina (2005) similarly classifies tourism infrastructure into four categories: Physical, Cultural, Service and Governance. Physical infrastructures include hotels, motels, restaurants, transportation, communication, water and electricity. Cultural infrastructures on the other hand carries culture, heritage, fairs and festivals, local art and music, dress and dance, language and food. Likewise, service infrastructures mean banking facilities, travel agencies, insurance agencies, tourist guides etc. On the same way, governance includes law and order machinery as well as customs and immigration.

Concluding the literatures, this study discussed the tourist infrastructure under these categories: Physical Infrastructure, Cultural Infrastructure and Service Infrastructure. They are further presented in Figure 1. On the base of the same, the qualitative study has been conducted for further assessment of the infrastructure in Pokhara.

Figure 1

Types of Tourism Infrastructure



Condition of Tourism Infrastructures in Nepal

Various study related to tourism development in Nepal clearly mentions that Nepal lacks tourism infrastructures. Most of these studies concludes that physical infrastructures are more lacking and even accessibility is very serious issue in the destinations inside Nepal. The summary of these studies are as mentioned below:

Table 1

Findings related to Tourism Infrastructures of Nepal

| Authors | Findings related to Tourism Infrastructures |
|---------------------------|--|
| Kafle (2022) | Rural tourism in Nepal lacks physical infrastructures such as roads, bridges, health posts etc. along with security, declining cultural heritages and sites, pollution, lack of sanitation etc. |
| Poudel & Upadhyay (2021) | Pokhara has enough tourism infrastructures such as accommodation, restaurants, equipment shops, bars, travel agencies, sports, adventures, health care and so on. |
| Bajracharya & Raju (2020) | Lack of proper physical infrastructures (transportation, communication, human resources), digital marketing, security, pollution, political instability and natural disaster have significant negative impact on tourism of Nepal. |
| Badal & Kharel (2019) | Nepal should improve poor infrastructures such as roads, airports, electricity, sanitation, tourist service, food, accommodation, human resources etc. |
| Parajuli & Paudel (2014) | Pokhara has very good natural beauty and many tourists have revisit intention but should improve its infrastructures such as transportation, accommodation, recreation activities, internet, health service, governmental service and guide service etc. |

Most of the studies finds that major challenges of Nepalese tourism industry are lack of tourism infrastructures. Although, there is no any literature that has been concreted on assessing the tourism infrastructures of Nepal. As Pokhara has been declared as tourism capital, the study will fill the gap on finding the efficacy of infrastructure in the tourism capital of Nepal.

Milestones of Tourism in Pokhara

Pokhara has been first visited by a Japanese Buddhist Scholar Ekai Kawaguchi in 1899 during his travel from India to Tibet (China). On his book written about this travel, he mentioned “all my travels in the Himalayas, I saw no scenery so enchanting at that which enraptured in Pokhara” (Parajuli and Paudel, 2014). Another Swiss Geographer Tony Hagen in his book “Nepal: The Kingdom of Himalayas” has mentioned “The trip to Pokhara by road will be a tourist attraction of the first order. It is the most beautiful part of the country, unmatched by any other scenery in the world” (Hagen, 1971). These signifies the brand value of Pokhara from its past till date. Furthermore, the milestone of development of tourism in Pokhara has been discussed in Table 2.

Table 2

Milestones of Development of Tourism in Pokhara

| Date (A.D.) | Event Details |
|--------------------|---|
| 1899 | Japanese Buddhist Scholar Ekai Kawaguchi was the first foreigner to visit Pokhara |
| June 3, 1950 | Historic ascend of Mt. Annapurna (10 th highest peak of the world; 8,091 meter elevation) by French mountaineer Maurice Herzog, which was the first peak above 8 thousand meter to be achieved by humankind. |
| 1956 | First ascend of Manaslu (8 th highest peak of the world; 8,163 meter elevation) |
| 1960 | First ascend of Dhaulagiri (7 th highest peak of the world; 8,167 meter elevation) |
| 1966 | First commercial trekking started by Jimmy Roberts collaborating with Thomas Cook |
| 1953 | Pokhara connected by airways |
| 1957 | Pokhara connected by jeep |
| 1961 | First Tourism Information Center was established |
| 1961 | Pokhara visit by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip from UK |
| 1968 | Construction of Siddhartha (Sunauli-Pokhara) Highway |

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| 1974 | Pokhara Physical Development Plan |
| 1976 | Construction of Prithvi (Kathmandu-Pokhara) Highway |
| 1980 | Pokhara visit of Prince Charles from Wales |
| 1986 | Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was started |
| 1998 | Celebration of “Visit Nepal 1998” where contribution of Pokhara was notable |
| 1998 | Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal (REBAN), Pokhara started Pokhara Street Festival on New Year Eve of 1999 |
| 2002 | Pokhara Tourism Council (umbrella organization of tourism organizations in Pokhara) established |
| 2002 | Aaha! Rara (Former Aaha) Gold Cup started as international annual football tournament by Sahara Club in Pokhara |
| 2007 | Celebration of “Visit Pokhara Year 2007” |
| Jan 1, 2023 | Inauguration of Pokhara International Airport |
| 2023 | United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres visited Pokhara |
| Mar 17, 2024 | Pokhara declared as “Tourism Capital of Nepal” |
| 2025 | Pokhara is celebrating Visit Pokhara Year 2025 |

Compiled by author from various sources

Research Methodology

Exploratory research design was adopted to make assessment of the infrastructure in Pokhara. In-depth interviews were done with nine experts from diverse fields in order to collect qualitative data. These nine experts were purposively selected from diverse stakeholder groups having experience of more than a decade in the related field. The details of these experts are as presented in Table 3.1 Each of these interviews were of about 1 hour using semi-structured open-ended checklist. The checklist was self-administered using rigorous literature review as well as discussion with the experts before starting the interview. The checklist was flexible so that more information can be achieved.

The details of the Key Informants are as provided below:

Table 3

Key Informants of the Study

| S.N. | Expert Code | Representative From | Years of Experience |
|------|-------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. | E1 | Nepal Tourism Board | 18 years |
| 2. | E2 | Tourism Researcher | 14 years |
| 3. | E3 | Tourism Lecturer | 14 years |
| 4. | E4 | Tourism Journalist | 14 years |
| 5. | E5 | Pokhara Tourism Council | 13 years |
| 6. | E6 | Pokhara City Planning Commission | 15 years |
| 7. | E7 | Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal | 15 years |
| 8. | E8 | Trekking Agency Owner | 31 years |
| 9. | E9 | ICT Expert | 20 years, PhD |

The interviews of the experts were recorded for the purpose of analysis. These records were transcribed into nine transcripts. The transcripts were codes as E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8 and E9 so as to maintain the secrecy of the experts. On the basis of these transcripts, various themes and sub-themes were generated to draw the conclusion from the research.

Result and Discussion

Description of Study Area

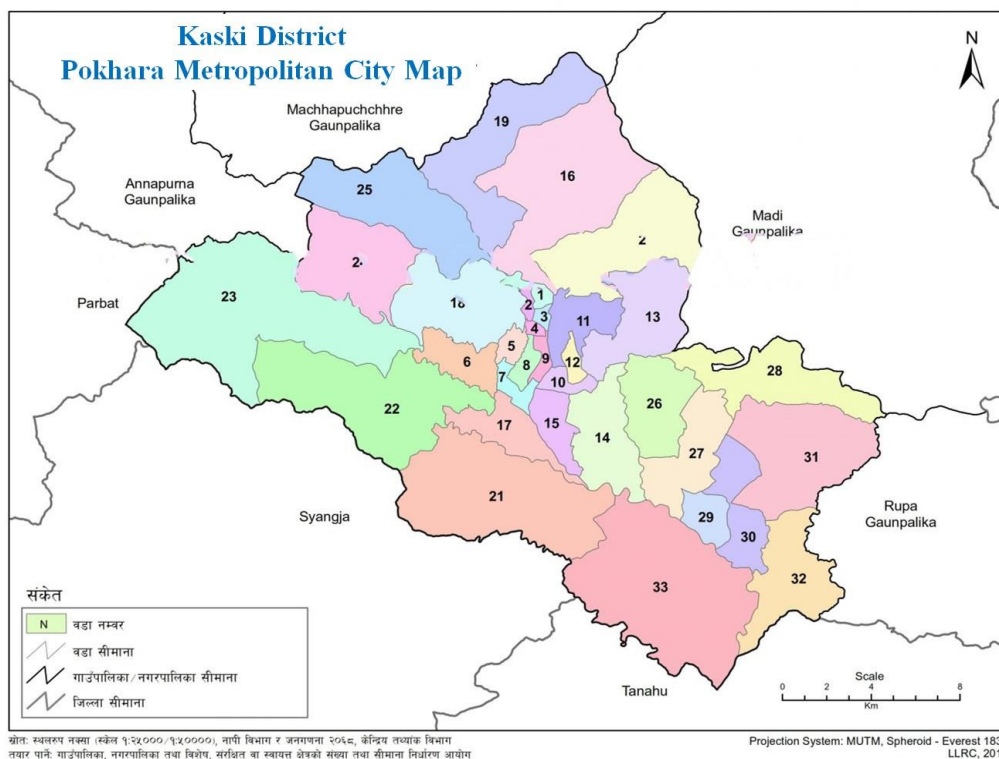
Pokhara as administrative unit falls under Gandaki Province of Nepal and is the biggest Metropolitan City of Nepal on the basis of geographical area and second biggest on the basis of population. Pokhara was declared as municipality in 2016 B.S., Sub-Metropolitan City in 2052 Magh 18 B.S. and later on Metropolitan

City in 2073 Falgun 27 B.S. It shares its boundary with Madi and Rupa Rural Municipality in the east, Annapurna Rural Municipality, Parbat District and Syangja District in the west, Machhapuchhre and Madi Rural Municipality in its north and Syangja and Tanahun District in its south (PMC, 2023).

Pokhara has total area of 464.24 square kms and total 513,504 people reside here under 140,459 household. The population of female is 266009 whereas that of male is 247495 in Pokhara (NSO, 2021). The share of tourism and hospitality sector in Pokhara is 18% with 5304 business firms providing jobs to 19,489 people (PMC, 2023).

Figure 2

Map of Pokhara Metropolitan City (PMC)



Map Source: Pokhara Metropolitan City Official Website (Extracted on 2024 October 29) <https://pokharamun.gov.np/resource-maps>

Pokhara as a Unique Destination

Before starting the interview on assessment of infrastructure of Pokhara, the first question was asked on uniqueness of Pokhara. All of the experts told that Pokhara is natural destination and adventure as well as culture is associated on the same. It is in the central part of Nepal, easily accessible to other destinations inside the Golden Triangle of Tourism in Nepal such as Kathmandu, Butwal, and Chitwan in about a 4-6 hours' drive and only less than 30-minute flight (View of all Experts). Still, it can be made more accessible through fast tracks to connect these destinations (E9).

The landscape of Pokhara is very majestic and stunning with mountains, hills, and lakes. The natural beauty, cleanliness as well as greenery of this city are the other features (View of all Experts). Three Top-Ten mountains are only at an aerial distance of 31 km from Pokhara (E3).

The climate of Pokhara is moderate as it is situated in valley surrounded with green hills. The temperature difference between summer and winter is also not too much; 10-15-degree winter and 25-30-degree summer (View of all experts). The summer is even pleasant as it gets rainfall almost every afternoon. (E5). In recent days, due to impacts of climate change, weather has been unpredictable: colder winter, hotter summer, late snowfall and late monsoon etc. has been experienced (E8).

The tourism of Pokhara is still alive due to the abundant natural factors prevalent in Pokhara. It is the heart of the self-made brand (View of all Experts). Due to these natural assets, Pokhara is also termed a natural film studio (E2). Recent development of a road track along trekking routes has resulted in a shortened length of stay for tourists. In the long term, this trend may lead to a significant diversion of visitors to alternative destinations (E7). Mountain peaks from every part of Pokhara have been naturally blessed (E8).

Assessment of Tourism Infrastructure in Pokhara

From the interviews of nine experts, the detail assessment of various infrastructures of Pokhara has been carried. The compiled themes generated from the analysis of the transcripts has been as mentioned in Table 4.

Table 4*Assessment of Tourism Infrastructures of Pokhara*

| a) Physical Infrastructures: | |
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| International Airport | Pokhara International Airport is not fulfilling Pokhara's dream as it was the most important indicator of Tourism Capital (View of all Experts). E1 argued the investment in the airport could have been replaced by fast-track tunnel express highways to Pokhara and Bhairahawa so that Pokhara could be reached in one or two hours and it could make the destination pure and perfect as it is. The relocation of paragliding has harmed the adventure industry in Pokhara (E7). Due to the unusual weather of Pokhara (frequent rainfall and fog) mainly on morning or rainy days' flights are often delayed resulting the crowding in the airport (E2, E6, E9). The pollution in the airport gate area is a really bad experience on arrival (E9). On the other hand, E7 contended that the introduction of late-night flights at the new airport has positively influenced tourism. |
| Transportation | The road experience to Pokhara from Kathmandu and Sunaulai as well as local public transportation is very frustrating. It needs to be made smooth, regular, and wider. However, the extension of Prithvi Highway now and Siddhartha Highway shortly can add great opportunities for Pokhara. (View of all Experts) The road network inside the valley and leading to Pokhara is poorly managed, narrow, and insufficient for large numbers of visitors (E8). Public transportation is also not trustworthy as bus take long waiting time and cabs are too expensive (E6). The drivers of public transportation should have hospitality training and public bus should be operated using apps (E9). Lakeside should be announced as no-vehicle zone (E6, E8) |
| Tourist Information Centers (TIC) | TIC is not sufficient in Pokhara. Most of the hotels offer mini-TIC which is dependent on the maps published by some private sector only (E3). NTB has tried to develop its office as an information center too but the approach isn't complete. Integrated and IT-based TIC is needed (E5). Enough English-speaking police and staff with weather information and options for the destination points are also needed (E4, E8, E9). But as per E1, it is an outdated concept, TIC can now be digitalized |

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| | with information from websites and apps or call centers. |
| Bus-park | Public Bus-park in Pokhara is a problem for all, so it needs to be improved. The tourist bus park is better and satisfactory (View of all Experts). The question of the sustainability of this bus park may arise shortly after Pokhara gets getting good number of Nepalese and foreign (especially Indian) tourists after the construction of good roads in the next few years. (E9). Well-managed Bus terminal outside the valley is the most essential thing to be constructed immediately for Pokhara for its long-term benefit (E5, E8). |
| Hotels & Restaurants | Tourists can get various options of hotels and restaurants in Pokhara as per price and quality they choose from the star level to the simple one. Hotels are a bit problem in events such as Street Festivals but in other rest of the days, occupancy is not issue. (View of all Experts). Although the accommodation price of Pokhara is cheaper compared to its competitor destinations, the cost of food is higher (E9). Food quality has improved in registered restaurants, but issues remain in unregistered ones. Quality inspections are making a positive impact (E7). Local-level hotels are sufficient somehow but the international level halls and hotels are very few. Likewise, if massive tourism arrivals there is not the proper capacity for restaurants to serve (E8). |
| Drinking Water | Tap water is not possible to drink due to its purity. Mineral water dependency is more on the visitors but it is not so big deal as most of the tourists don't rely on tap water in their next destination, even the domestic tourists. (View of all Experts) The new drinking water project of JICA has been helpful for people in Pokhara and also the tourism industry now (E2) but if big number of tourist arrival will be noticed, the project can still be deficient (E8). Hotel guests receive mineral water, but many still buy it because of limited access to quality drinking water(E7). |
| Energy | The energy problem was noticed some years ago but now due to the regular electricity supply of the Nepal Electric Authority; the problem has been solved. Still, unplanned power cut-offs sometimes (unscheduled load-shedding) have been a notable |

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| | problem in energy consumption (View of all Experts) |
| Internet Facility (WIFI) | The availability of Free WIFI has been a very nice offering to tourists in Pokhara compared to other Asian destinations. But is a bit expensive relative to their speed and service (View of all Experts). Speed is good, in fact, better than India (E3) but depends upon the package and the company (E5). Easy access to sim cards at the arrival point of Tribhuvan International Airport and other mobile and electronic shops with passports has added more advantages (E9). |
| Parks | Park is not Eastern culture rather it is European culture (E5). But now there is a need for human-made parks in Pokhara (E3). New Natural Parks should be planned along with the management of the old ones to enjoy the natural environment as well as to provide service in case of emergencies (E1, E8). |
| b) Cultural Infrastructures | |
| Cultural Uniqueness | The uniqueness in culture can be observed when a visitor goes to a homestay more than in Lakeside. The cultural aspects are slowly deteriorating, which should be preserved for sustainable destination branding (View of all Experts). |
| Regional Identity | Pokhara is the hub of Gurung Culture (View of all Experts) and Gandharva Culture (E2) |
| Norms, Values & Behaviors | Smiling behavior, caring people, kindness, helpfulness, and respect for visitors as God (<i>Atithi Devo Bhawa</i>) are the norms, values, and behavior of people in Pokhara towards visitors (View of all Experts). |
| Customs | Westernized customs have been more influencing custom in Pokhara now but the cultural customs are used in events and traditional functions, which is a positive thing (View of all Experts). Some homestays such as Ghandruk have provided experience of Gurung dress for their homestay visitors. Such points can also be made in other points such as the International Mountain Museum etc. (E2) which may add attraction to the visitors. <i>Dhaka topi</i> (National Cap) and clothes made from natural fibers such as <i>Ganga</i> , <i>Allo</i> , <i>Sisno</i> , etc. can also be added to identity (E6). Due to cultural collaboration, the Chettri, |

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| | Magar, and Tamang dresses have also been prominently representing their respective cultures (E7). |
| Dance and Music | Cultural shows in restaurants of Lakeside have a good impact on the tourists. But the original traditions of folk music and dance, <i>Dohori</i> and <i>Rodhi</i> culture, <i>Ghatu</i> and <i>Sorathi</i> dance are now slowly in the phase of extinction (View of all Experts). The role of Gandaki Academy in restoring nearly extinct cultural dance and music is a nice initiative and now they should be showcased to tourists as a regular daily event in Pokhara (E6) It's essential to revive the traditional instruments of dance and music (E7). |
| Language | The tourism sector of Pokhara can work in multiple languages including Nepali, Hindi, and English in most places. Recently some Chinese classes have made people able to communicate in Chinese in a basic way (View of all Experts). However, E4 doesn't find the significance of language in the process of branding Pokhara. |
| Events (Fairs and Festivals) | A number of events in Pokhara are frequent but its offerings, uniqueness, and service are poor (E5). Some events such as Ropain Mahotsav, Street Festival, Aaha Rara Gold Cup, Nepal Literature Festival, etc. are notable in the eyes of visitors coming to Pokhara (E2). Some events such as International Balloon Festival and Dragon Boat Race have added new tastes for a new segment of tourists which can be extended to the International Adventure Festival in the offseason to attract more adventure seekers to Pokhara (E9). Many of the regular International Events have been hosted by various institutions in Pokhara such as Pokhara University, Gandaki University, Gandaki Academy, etc. which should be associated with promoting and branding Pokhara (E6). Pokhara has also can be developed as the hub for many other events turning it into a MICE destination if we can develop some big convention centers (E4). Events in Pokhara are well organized by hiring private security, implementing effective crowd management, and offering various facilities that enhance the city's beauty (E7). |

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| Historical Assets | There are few historical places in Pokhara. Shah dynasty was started from Kaskikot of Pokhara, which can be a good product due to the historical aspects and natural beauty of that place and can be developed as a historical hill station of Pokhara (E5, E6). Old Bazar from Ganesh Tole to Bindyabashini Temple was the ancient trade center of Pokhara, which needs to be preserved (E3, E8). But on the view of E1 as there are not so many points having an archeological value in Pokhara like Kathmandu, so we can skip this part from branding and go for natural branding. |
| Museums | The Museum of Pokhara is quite unprofessional (E5) and small in size with very little information. The tour of 10-15 minutes can make the museum tour of most of the museums finished (E3). Only the International Mountain Museum is acceptance of that but this should also be extended. (View of all Experts) |
| Monuments | Pokhara lacks notable monuments but the World Peace Pagoda and Shiva Statue in Pumdikot are the ones with great value (View of all Experts). Kaskikot can also be the next destination point where some big monuments representing the Shah dynasty can be constructed in order to increase the length of stay of the tourists in Pokhara (E5). Monuments signifying Pokhara's brand image are still lacking (E9). |
| Cuisine | Chinese and Indian foods along with Nepali cultural foods are available in Pokhara. The <i>Thakali</i> dish is the cultural dish of Nepalese society which is famous all over the country which was originated from this city from the Thakali community (View of all Experts). However, the cultural cuisines of other ethnic communities such as Gurung, Magar, Newar, etc. have been slowly replaced by other international menus in Pokhara, which can harm the brand in the long term (E4). <i>Jethobudo</i> rice (E2, E6), <i>Pahele</i> rice, <i>Jhinuwa</i> rice, and Millet (E6) can be branded as one of the original cuisines of Pokhara as of <i>Marsi</i> for western Nepal. Similarly, cultural food and traditional wine tours can also be one of the amenities for the tourists visiting Pokhara, if we can manage the package of it (E6, E9). |

| c) Service Infrastructures | |
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| Recreation Facility | Pokhara is a musical city with many events for recreation (E3). But big public investment from the government sector is needed (E5) for better recreation zones. Culture centers to showcase local culture for recreation are also needed as Pokhara is more concentrated on foreign music and westernized culture which can harm its identity in the long term (E7, E9). |
| Clubs and Discos | The clubs and discos have also attracted visitors in Pokhara so big investments have been made in this sector. Some renowned clubs in Kathmandu have also invested in Pokhara due to the same flow of customers. (View of all Experts) Clubs and discos should operate in a way that protects today's youth, enforcing strict guidelines to ban entry for those under 18 (E7). |
| Security | Security in the city area including Lakeside is good. (View of all Experts). CCTV on the lakeside in all main streets is monitored by Nepal police and tourist police, which the private sector also supports in CCTV fitting, maintenance, and repair in the Lakeside (E3) The police of Nepal have been helpful but in recent days, some challenges have also been observed in the trekking sites, which should be addressed in time (E5). Tourist police lacks resources (E1, E5, E7). TIMS tracking is also not properly working in all sites due to the lack of ICT infrastructure in the trekking sites (E9). |
| Health Facility | Health facilities should be improved in Pokhara. (View of all Experts) Some of the clinics in Lakeside make international tourists pay more as they have health insurance, which is a very bad practice (E2). Evacuation and rescue mechanisms should also be more systematic (E6). The emergence of health facilities has been lacking; there needs to be improved government hospitals to provide better services at an affordable rate (E7). English and multilingual staff in the medical sector are also needed to support the treatment of international patients as the number can rise shortly (E9). |

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| Sports Facility | Pokhara Stadium is the biggest stadium in Nepal, which is in Pokhara, that can Explore a great opportunity for sports tourism (View of all Experts). Indian cricket clubs and Indian university students often visit Pokhara to play in this beautiful Pokhara Stadium. Asian-level tennis and golf tournaments also have been organized in Pokhara (E2). Dragon boat race has been medium of cultural exchange between Nepal and China too (E8). There are even bigger possibility of developing Pokhara as Cricket hub (E1 & E6) and water sports (E4) in Pokhara. |
| Souvenir Shop | Pokhara now lacks the original souvenir representing Pokhara such as garments and handicrafts in the past decades. Most of the souvenirs in tourist zones are crafted from China, so we have to improve this scenario (E5) but E4 denies this opinion and argues that there are many good souvenirs available in the real taste of Pokhara, but a visitor should fetch them. Sarangi can be the best souvenir if we brand it with the music and culture of it with Pokhara (E2). Pokhara Metropolitan has started Jethobudho rice as a souvenir for international guests as well as Rupa Rural Municipality has started Theko, Ghee, and Himalayan Honey as a souvenir for guests, which can also be used as the identity of Pokhara (E6). Handicrafts with brand logo or image of Pokhara can also create value as well as jobs for local people (E9). But in the opinion of E3 souvenirs only can't be amenities for branding Pokhara. |
| Public Toilet | The situation of public toilets in Pokhara is very pathetic. Very few public toilets are available even on the lakeside and they are also not in good condition. Tourists often go to restaurants or cafes and pay for tea, cold drinks, or coffee if they need a toilet. (View of all Experts) E7 expressed the view that the introduction of movable toilets is crucial and emphasized the importance of adapting to new technologies in this area. |
| Parking | There is a problem with public parking in the major city centers as well as in Lakeside (View of all Experts). Pokhara Metropolitan Office or the private sector should immediately start multi-storied parking in major areas (E3, E6, E9). In some points, parking has improved slightly due to underground |

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| | parking facilities, but it remains insufficient(E7) |
| Adventure | <p>Pokhara is the number one adventure destination in South Asia till date (E5) The adventure of paragliding, ultralight, rafting, boating, zip liner, bungee, sky diving, hot air balloon, mountain flight etc. with stunning natural view is rare round the globe (View of all Experts) Still some water adventure is needed to be added for more experience of the visitors (E3).</p> <p>Adventurers are always ready for risk and in fact, enjoy the thrill, so minor risk is not a matter but quality control and assurance are needed. The insurance facility is given to the visitors (View of all Experts). But general error should be minimized (E5).</p> |
| Costs of Service and Amenities | <p>Pokhara is a mid-range budget destination where the cost of living is affordable and reasonable (View of all Experts). Pokhara offers bigger sort of options in price as per the quality one chooses (E3). It has been ranked as the cheapest but the best destination in the world by many international magazines too, which has helped in increasing the volume of tourists to Nepal but higher-end tourists can hesitate to visit due to the same reason (E5). Formal and informal unequal price systems in airlines, museums, restaurants, taxis, etc. have created some hurdles for tourists in Pokhara as the visitors can feel that they have been exploited (E2). Charging higher price in airlines to non-Indian tourists has directly impacted Chinese and other tourists traveling to Pokhara. The price of around 100 USD for 25 minutes flight is one of the most expensive and restaurant menus are also very expensive compared to similar destinations in India, China, and East Asia (E9). Pokhara is considered one of the more expensive cities in Nepal, and visitors have also felt it. The high prices are challenging for middle-income tourists (E8). But as per E7, costs of services are now categorized based on the quality and type of services provided, facilitating a more structured and efficient assessment process.</p> |
| Human Resources | <p>Human Resources in the hospitality field of Pokhara are friendly and helpful (E2) and they have orientation for the best service with a smile (E3). However, there is a lack of qualified</p> |

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| | <p>human resources along with the problem of retention due to higher salaries in abroad countries. So often the human resources in Pokhara learn and become well-trained and apply for foreign employment to get better-paid jobs (View of all Experts). Even the established business house in the tourism industry of Pokhara lacks a Human Resource plan and they are operating it as their family business causing the deficiency of good service for high-end foreign tourists (E4, E7). Management, owners, and human resources themselves should be motivated to change the situation with the help of the government sector (E5). The new generation is coming into hospitality studies with better skills, exposure, and experience, which is a good sign for the tourism sector of Pokhara (E4).</p> |
| Information Communication Technology (ICT) | <p>ICT infrastructure is the most important infrastructure but is only possible after physical infrastructure is ready. It depends on the physical infrastructures and so during the planning of physical resources, ICT should be component and should go hand in hand (E9). Although Pokhara has been developing more in ICT, still more than two-third of the tourists' book by phone call & social media or as Free Individual Travelers (FIT) not from the booking platforms (E8). Use of ICT in booking, promotion, maps, security etc. should be done (View of all Experts).</p> |

Source: Field Survey, 2024 (Compiled by the author as per the responses of nine Key Experts)

View on Tourism Capital and Visit Pokhara Year

Final question was asked on the announcement of Pokhara as Tourism Capital of Nepal and Visit Pokhara Year 2025. In this question, most of the experts (except E2 and E9) found the announcement as very nice step towards development of tourism of Pokhara. E4, E5 and E7 furthermore stated that if the announcement was not done, any other city of Pokhara could have announced itself as tourism capital and could have impacted the brand image of Pokhara. E6 worked on the announcement works directly and found that it was the best time as Pokhara has already developed or is on the final stage of completion of major tourism infrastructures. Since Pokhara is pioneer of tourism in Nepal, welcomes about half of the tourists and has already developed various accommodation, service, adventure, security, transportation, recreation etc. the declaration was only formality.

E9 strongly opposes the verdict of E5 and E6 and claims that the declaration of tourism capital is creating negative brand image in the tourism of Pokhara. He put forwards the thought that it would have announced after completion of Prithvi Highway extension and after about 5-7 regular international flights in Pokhara International Airport. The mechanism of pollution control, gardening, safety, public transportation management, digital information centers etc. would have done before announcement of tourism capital. E2 furthermore comments the hurry done by Pokhara Tourism Capital Declaration Committee (PTCDC) made to announce tourism capital. The committee recommended the timeline for declaration but no timeline was provided for infrastructure development strategies. This hurry could signify the potential political pressure from the province government and PMC for publicity stunt or the pressure from private sector involved in tourism industry of Pokhara.

Conclusion

Pokhara is a pioneer as well as prominent player of Nepalese tourism industry. It is still most appealing destination to domestic as well as international visitors due to its natural, cultural and adventurous dimensions. There is availability of varieties of quality hotel & accommodation, cozy and elegant restaurants, diverse means of recreation facilities, good internet service, adventure with natural taste, cultural uniqueness etc. Still, Pokhara lacks well-functioning of different accessibility infrastructures such as Pokhara International Airport lacks regular

international flights and major highway upgrading is expected to complete till the end of 2025. Almost every literature suggests accessibility is the foremost infrastructure than any others. Similarly, availability of sufficient information centers, reliable public transportation, pure drinking tap water, public toilets, skilled human resources, ICT connectivity, pollution control, controlled cost of cuisines etc. is still lacking.

On these backgrounds, we can conclude that the announcement of Pokhara as tourism capital of Nepal is a very welcoming step for tourism development of Pokhara but the timeline was a bit fast initiated. The announcement of tourism capital at the end of 2025 with major improvement of accessibility as well as other infrastructures could have created a new message that Pokhara is ready with new taste. On the same run, the announcement of Visit Pokhara Year would create new promotion wave for promoting sustainable brand image for Pokhara.

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