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Blending Work and Travel:

The Emergence of 'Bleisure' and the Digital Nomad Era

Arhan Sthapit¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2799-4936>

Rashesh Vaidya²

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1536-6032>

In today's interconnected world, the boundaries between work and leisure are increasingly dissolving, giving rise to transformative trends like 'bleisure' and digital nomadism. This new era, shaped by the remote work revolution and technological advancements (Sthapit, 2022), is redefining how professionals balance productivity with exploration. 'Bleisure' combines the words: 'business' and 'leisure,' and describes a new form of tourism: a business travel that is associated with leisure activities and which can involve guests of the business traveller (Talã et al., 2011).

'Bleisure' nomenclature

The term 'bleisure' was first coined by The Future Laboratory, an European brand and futures consultancies (LS:N Global, 2008). Hotels and travel destinations are adapting to this shift by offering hybrid accommodations, co-working spaces, and curated experiences that cater to the dual-purpose traveller.

Bleisure travel is a new type of travel in which people integrate leisure activities into their business trips (Chung et al., 2020). 'Bleisure' has also been termed as 'bizcation' (Carlson Wagonlit Travel, 2016), where the initial purpose is business, but people incorporate leisure into their travel, either adding it to their itinerary or extending their stay to include leisure experiences. Therefore, they were well-organised, futuristic, and

¹ **Prof. Dr. Sthapit** is Professor of Management at the Faculty of Management & Law, Nepal Open University. With 22.5 years of industry experience, he is a practitioner-turned-academician. He has published 98 papers mostly as single/principal author in peer-reviewed journals of international repute (including those Scimago/Scopus indexed).

² **Dr. Vaidya**, a visiting faculty (Management) at Nepal Open University, specialises in finance-related subjects and has published 50 papers in peer-reviewed journals (including those Scimago/Scopus indexed). He is also an advocate at the Supreme Court of Nepal.

competent in travel arrangements. However, this blending of work and travel also brings challenges, from managing productivity to addressing sustainability concerns. As these trends gain momentum, they promise to reshape the hospitality and tourism landscape, making work-life integration a cornerstone of modern travel.

Exploring ‘Bleisure’ for Nepal

The integration of work and travel, commonly referred to as ‘bleisure’ (a blend of business and leisure), has gained significant traction in recent years. This trend, fuelled by the pandemic-induced shift towards remote work, has transformed traditional notions of business travel and tourism. Nepal’s tourism industry has reportedly witnessed a significant boost in 2024, with total visitor numbers reaching 1.1 million till the end of this year (Department of Immigration, 2024). It signifies the revival of Nepalese tourism in the post-COVID era. As a Himalayan nation abundant in indigenous culture and vibrant festivals, Nepal is likely to hold immense potential to boost tourist arrivals, prolong their stays, and elevate tourist satisfaction through the introduction of customised ‘bleisure’ travel packages.

There is no denying that Nepal holds significant tourism potential, leveraging its well-established brand, “Naturally Nepal, Once is not Enough.” The country’s rich flora and fauna, diverse cultural heritage, ethnic diversity, and ‘neutral ground’ appeal make it a highly attractive destination for global visitors with varied interests (Sthapit, 2023; 2021; 2020; 2012). The recent operation of two new international airports— Gautam Buddha International Airport near Lumbini (the birthplace of Lord Buddha) and Pokhara Regional International Airport— has further bolstered optimism for increased international tourist arrivals in 2023, enhancing Nepal’s standing as a favoured travel destination. The introduction of customised ‘bleisure’ travel packages could further enhance Nepal’s tourism growth potential.

Key Drivers of Bleisure Travel

For policy makers and entrepreneurs of the hospitality and tourism industry, it is important to have a critical understanding of what drives ‘bleisure’ travel; those key drivers are discussed hereunder:

➤ *Remote Work Revolution*

The work-from-home model was sporadically practised in the ICT sector in the past, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic compelled organisations to adopt remote working systems (RWS); and this shift, initially driven by necessity, has since evolved into a global trend, continuing to thrive even in the post-pandemic era (Sthapit, 2022). The global shift to flexible working arrangements has allowed professionals to work from virtually anywhere with an internet connection (EKU Online, 2023). Companies are increasingly adopting hybrid work models, empowering employees to combine work commitments with personal travel (Global Asset Solutions, 2021). Hence, the rise of remote work culture has emerged as a key catalyst for the growing popularity of ‘bleisure’ travel in modern times.

➤ *Technological Advancements*

High-speed internet, collaboration tools (e.g., Zoom and Microsoft Teams), and cloud-

based platforms enable seamless remote work (EKU Online, 2023). Additionally, mobile apps for time management, travel planning, and communication support productivity while on the move (Global Asset Solutions, 2021). Technological advancements, therefore, play a significant role in promoting the growth of 'bleisure' travel.

➤ *Traveller Preferences*

Post-pandemic travellers seek experiences that prioritise both well-being and professional growth (Global Asset Solutions, 2021). Many business travellers extend work trips for leisure, exploring destinations during off-hours (UNWTO, 2023). Even individuals attending international research conferences, seminars, and other business or academic meetings increasingly prefer to incorporate leisure activities into their trips, exploring nearby touristic destinations.

Hospitality Industry Adaptations

To cater to bleisure travellers, the hospitality sector should adapt in various ways, they are likely to include the following:

- *Co-Working Spaces:* Following the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, hotels and resorts began offering co-working facilities (Sthapit, 2022), featuring ergonomic furniture, private meeting rooms, and reliable Wi-Fi (EKU Online, 2023)—a trend that shows no signs of fading but reflecting a growing preference for promoting co-working spaces. Brands such as Accor and Selina have launched dedicated 'workation' packages targeting remote workers (Global Asset Solutions, 2021).
- *Hybrid Accommodations:* Properties are merging leisure and business facilities, featuring rooms designed with desks, printers, and noise-cancelling features alongside recreational amenities (EKU Online, 2023).
- *Longer Stays:* Extended-stay discounts and flexible check-in/out policies cater to travellers combining work with exploration (UNWTO, 2023). Prolonging the stay of tourists has always been one of the top policy priorities in Nepal's tourism industry.
- *Curated Experiences:* Destination-specific leisure activities, wellness programmes, and cultural tours are bundled with professional amenities to enhance the overall experience (EKU Online, 2023).

Digital Nomadism: A New Subset of Bleisure

Digital nomadism, a lifestyle characterised by full-time remote work while traveling, is an extension of the 'bleisure' trend, namely, a new subset of the 'bleisure'. According to the UNWTO, governments have made reforms in their visa policies: countries like Portugal, Estonia, and Barbados offer 'digital nomad visas' to attract remote workers (UNWTO, 2023).

Secondly, countries promote nomad-friendly destinations. Cities with excellent connectivity, affordability, and vibrant cultural scenes, such as Chiang Mai (Thailand), Bali (Indonesia), and Lisbon (Portugal), for example, have become hubs for digital nomads (Global Asset Solutions, 2021).

Challenges and Considerations

Although blending work and travel presents numerous benefits, it also brings several challenges, including the following:

- *Maintaining Productivity*: Managing time zones, overcoming distractions, and ensuring a conducive work environment can be demanding (EKU Online, 2023).
- *Employer Policies*: Companies may need to adjust tax, legal, and cybersecurity policies to accommodate remote workers abroad (Global Asset Solutions, 2021).
- *Sustainability*: Frequent travel raises concerns about environmental impacts, prompting calls for eco-conscious travel practices (UNWTO, 2023). Tourism should contribute directly or indirectly to all the SDGs, and has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption, and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively (UNWTO, 2021).

Outlook: Concluding Remarks

The line between work and leisure will likely continue to blur, with businesses and destinations tailoring experiences to meet the needs of this dual-purpose traveller. As the trend grows, it is set to redefine the hospitality and tourism sectors, fostering innovation and flexibility in how we perceive work and travel (UNWTO, 2023). This shift will not only transform the way we travel but also create new opportunities for businesses to adapt and thrive in an increasingly interconnected world and it is extremely important for developing countries like Nepal.

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