

Exploring Tourism Potential in Bajhang District of Nepal: A Case Study

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Abstract

Bajhang district, located in Nepal's far-western Sudurpaschim Province, is a region of immense yet underutilised tourism potential, characterised by its rugged landscapes, sacred sites, and rich cultural heritage. This qualitative study explores Bajhang's key attractions, including the Saipal Himal, Surma Sarovar Lake, Khaptad National Park, and historic temples—while identifying critical challenges hindering tourism development. Through interviews with local stakeholders, including bankers, hoteliers, social workers, and business owners, the research highlights persistent issues such as poor infrastructure, unclear government policies, corruption, low public awareness, and insufficient funding. Despite these barriers, Bajhang holds significant opportunities for adventure, religious, and eco-tourism, provided there is coordinated investment in road connectivity, sustainable lodging, and community-based tourism initiatives. The study recommends policy reforms, infrastructure upgrades, targeted marketing, and stronger public-private collaboration to position Bajhang as a competitive tourism destination. By addressing these challenges, Bajhang can leverage its natural and cultural assets to stimulate local economic growth, reduce migration, and establish itself as a key tourism hub in western Nepal.

Keywords: Bajhang, community engagement, infrastructure, sustainable tourism, tourism potential

INTRODUCTION

Bajhang, a district in Nepal's Far-West region, is renowned for its natural beauty, cultural richness, and spiritual landmarks. Located in Sudurpaschim (Far-West) Province, it boasts rugged landscapes, traditional villages, and diverse heritage. The district's headquarters, Chainpur, serves as a gateway to adventure and cultural exploration, making it a popular destination for trekkers, pilgrims, and culture enthusiasts. Bajhang covers a total area of 3,422 square kilometres that consists of altitude from 900 to 7,035 meters above sea level. Deura is the lowest place in Bajhang while Mt. Saipal is the highest. For that reason, this hilly district offers a diverse climate in different locations (<https://www.nepaldatabase.com/>). Sudurpashchim Province is divided into nine districts. Parts of Bajhang, Bajura, Achham and Doti districts are part of Khaptad National Park and its buffer zone.

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In broader picture, [Joshi et al. \(2022\)](#) found that rural tourism in Sudurpaschim has a high potential (65%) and significantly benefits local people, hosts, and guests. Most of the people are farmers in rural areas, and rural areas are often neglected due to government policies focusing on urban areas. Rural tourism encourages growth in the agriculture sector and can be developed using rural products. Most rural tourism sectors are community-based, benefiting the whole community.

People often know Bajhang for the precious herb called Yarsagumba (a caterpillar fungus having unique combination of a parasitic fungus and its caterpillar host, found in the Himalayan region). Despite being a remote area, Bajhang has a huge importance in terms of tourism, religion, history and culture. It is home to several rivers and streams, waterfalls, mountains, lakes and religious sites. Bajhang is also the home of Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh who has ruled from 23 August 1877 to 15 October 1940, as a humanist king, played a vital role for the enhancement of education in Nepal. As a matter of fact, he is also known as one of the pioneers to write Nepali language grammar.

Bajhang is known for its rugged landscapes, traditional villages, and deep-rooted cultural heritage. The region is home to breathtaking mountains, rivers, and lush forests, making it an unexplored paradise for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Despite its natural beauty and historical significance, Bajhang faces several challenges, including poor infrastructure, lack of proper healthcare and limited economic opportunities.

Bajhang district has been divided amount ten municipalities, namely, Talkot, Masta, Khaptadchhanna, Thalara, Bitthadchir, Surma, Chhabis Pathibhera, Durgathali, Kedarsyu and Saipal and two municipalities of Jayprithavi and Bungal as per the political system of Nepal. The district is also divided between one parliamentary region and two provincial assembly regions. This study covers all major sites and prospects of Bajhang district located in different parts of the district.

Bajhang is in far western part of Nepal in hilly and mountains region. It has not been prioritised from government of Nepal for geographical development and social development due to remote locations from capital-Kathmandu. People of Bajhang district prefer to go Indian for foreign employment than Kathmandu because India lies very close from Bajhang district. Currently, government of Nepal has planned to construct a road from Khadpe to Taklakot as an alternative trade point from China.

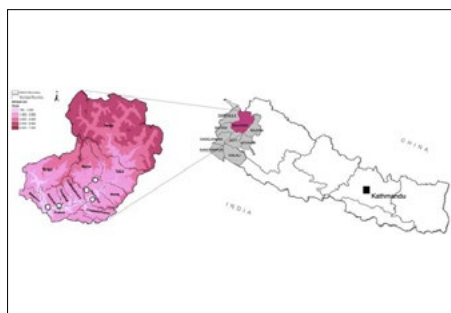
Sustainability is vital in tourism. [Sthapit \(2021\)](#) emphasised the importance of cooperation and collaboration in achieving sustainable tourism, identifying it as a key driver of recovery and growth in the post-pandemic era. [Badal \(2024\)](#) discovered that residents of Bajhang district were quite aware of conservation and sustainable development in relation to the district's tourism potential. Numerous constructions have already been made; however, they are in a terrible state. It is

advised that Hermitage, Triveni, Sahasralinga, Sitapaila, Temples, Guesthouses, Foot Trails, and Resting Stations be rebuilt and renovated with contemporary amenities like solar power and restrooms. The most important cooperation is with the buffer zone beneficiaries, local stakeholders, and Khaptad National Park.

Bajhang's natural, cultural, and religious tourism potential is underdeveloped due to poor infrastructure, limited government prioritisation, and insufficient investment. Key religious sites are neglected, and the remote location discourages investment in tourism infrastructure. Bajhang lacks a strategic tourism development plan integrating eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and religious tourism. Despite the availability of adventure tourism, cultural tourism, Eco-tourism, the religious tourism prospect, it hasn't been explored yet as requires. In this backdrop, the paper tries to explore the potential of tourism at Bajhang district and get an insight from the locals regarding the prospects and problems in the growth of tourism sector of the district.

Location Profile

Location and Geography: Bajhang District is bordered by Bajura and Humla to the east, Baitadi and Darchula to the west, Humla to the north, and Doti and Achham to the south. The elevation of the district from sea level is 900 meters to 7,035 meters.



Bajhang is a mountainous district characterised by high-altitude terrains, river valleys, and dense forests. The Seti River, one of the major water sources in the district, originates from the Saipal Himalayan range, providing water for irrigation and hydropower potential (1,200MW). The district experiences cold winters in the highlands and mild summers in the lower valleys, creating diverse climatic conditions that support both agriculture and livestock farming. It lies around 915 KM south-west of Kathmandu and around 273 KM north from Dhangadhi by road distance. The air distance from Dhangadhi (DHI) to Bajhang (BJH), specifically Chainpur, is approximately 109.64 kilometres. There is no direct air route from Kathmandu to Bajhang.

Demographic Profile: The population of Bajhang District is approximately 1,90,000 according to the latest census in 2021 AD with combination of 47% male and 53% female. Population Density is 55 persons per sq. km. Bajhang is home to a population that predominantly consists of Khas-Arya communities including Chhetri, Brahmin and Dalit groups. Beside this there are residences of indigenous Magar and Bhote populations in the higher altitudes. The people of Bajhang speak Nepali and its local dialect known as “Bajhangi” language. The district’s literacy rate is gradually improving trend. It has improved to 71% (2021 AD) from 55.4% (2011 AD) but many remote villages still face challenges accessing proper education. Due to limited job opportunities, a significant portion of the population migrates to India and Gulf countries in search of employment ([Province Government, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, 2022](#)).

Economic Aspects: Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in Bajhang. The fertile valleys allow for the cultivation of rice, maize, wheat, barley, millet, and potatoes, though traditional farming techniques and inadequate irrigation systems often limit productivity. Animal husbandry such as yak, sheep and goats plays an essential role in the local economy by providing various agro products such as dairy products, wool and meat are produced and traded. The district is also rich in medicinal herbs and forest products with valuable plants such as yarshagumba, jatamansi and silajit being collected for sale in domestic and international markets. Recently, Fivebig hydropower projects (Kalanga Gad Hydroelectric Project-15.33MW, Upper Kalanga Gad Hydroelectric Project-38.4MW, Bungal Hydro Limited-10.7 MW) have been running and other projects (Chainpur Seti Hydroelectric Project-210 MW and Suni Gad Hydropower Project-11.05 MW, Gurans Hydro Electric Project-41.06 MW, Set Nadi-3 Hydroelectric Project-87 MW) are on the way. The district’s hydropower potential remains largely untapped, and it could significantly boost the local economy and improve living standards after exploration of remaining projects. Banks are available to all local authorities. There are nine commercial banks, one development bank, nine microfinance companies, eight life insurance companies and two non-life companies operating at Chainpur, district headquarters of Bajhang. [G.C. et al. \(2019\)](#) found that community forests have led to a reduction in poverty in Nepal. This is due to increased ecosystem

services like ethnomedicine, aesthetic value, and ecotourism. However, poverty remains higher in rural areas, particularly in the Bajhang district of Sudurpashchim Province.

Cultural Heritage: Bajhang is a culturally rich district with a strong connection to Hindu traditions, ancient rituals, and folklore. Traditional festivals such as Dashain, Tihar, Gaura Parva, and Maghe Sankranti are widely celebrated, bringing communities together through religious ceremonies and cultural performances. The district is also known for its folk music, dances, and storytelling traditions, which have been preserved over centuries. Religious sites such as the Jalapa Devi Temple, Surma Devi Temple, and Bhumiraj Mandir hold deep spiritual significance for the local people. These temples and shrines attract pilgrims from across Nepal, especially during festival times. Bajhang's unique cultural identity, combined with its historical temples and traditions, makes it a fascinating destination for cultural tourists ([Province Government, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, 2022](#)).

Education System: Education in Bajhang district is gradually advancing but many schools face teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of resources. Currently, Bajhang district has 7 campuses such as Bajhangdeep Campus (located in Kedarsyu Rural Municipality, provides Bachelor course in Education and Management affiliated with T.U.), Sunkuda Campus (located in Bitthadchir Rural Municipality, provides Bachelor in Education and Management affiliated with T.U.), Thalara Multiple Campus (located in Thalara Rural Municipality, provides bachelor course in Education affiliated with T.U.), Seti Campus (located in Chhabispathivera Rural Municipality, provides bachelor course in education affiliated with T.U.), Shanti Aadarsh Campus (located in Chabispathivera Rural Municipality, provides bachelor degree in education affiliated from T.U.), Shree Triveni Aadarsh Multiple Campus (located in Bungal Municipality, provides bachelor in Education affiliated from T.U.) and Jay Prithavi Campus (located in Jay Prithavi Municipality, provides bachelor degree in Art, Education and Management affiliated with Far-West University) are running. Most of campus of Bajhang districts provides higher education in education, humanities and management but most students seeking specialised studies must migrate to cities like Dhangadhi or Kathmandu. The district's average literacy rate is 71percent. Various NGO and government programs are working to improve literacy rates and provide vocational training opportunities. Satyabadi Higher Secondary School in Bajhang, Nepal, is a historic institution with cultural and educational significance, offering potential for heritage and educational tourism. Its unique architecture and connection to Nepal's history could attract travellers exploring offbeat destinations. The school was established on 1906 AD (1963 BS) by reforming, Jaya Prithivi Bahadur Singh, also considered "the first Nepalese to write Nepali-language grammar". He played a key role in the management of Gorkhapatra in its early days ([Lueder, 2021](#); [Malla, 2022](#)), and Gorkhapatra is one of the earliest Nepalese newspapers.

Tourism Avenues and Attractions

Bajhang district is a hidden gem for adventure tourism, offering breathtaking landscapes, religious sites, and trekking trails, which have been elaborated as below:

The Saipal Himal: Saipal is a mountain in the Himalayas of north-west Bajhang district in Nepal with aerial view at highest point of 7,031 meter. The Saipal Himal, one of Nepal's highest peaks, attracts trekkers and mountaineers looking for challenging expeditions. It is a challenging and remote trekking adventure, offering breathtaking views of the Saipal Himalayan range. Saipal is one of the lesser-explored and less frequented regions of Nepal, making it an ideal destination for trekkers seeking a more off-the-beaten-path experience with high mountain peaks, dense forests and possibly remote villages with unique cultural experiences.

Surma Sarovar Lake: Surma Sarovar Lack is known as mini-Kailash by Hindu is holy lake which is situated at an altitude of 4,333 meter in Surma Rural Municipality. It is holistic place but also equally adventures journey of Western Nepal with amazing views of mountains peaks like Jethi Bahurani, Rocky structures, huge grasslands and beautiful lakes are the major attractions of the area. The trekkers who want to pass of 4,859 meters to reach this place, trekkers need to be cautious of high-altitude sickness. The area is rich in beautiful wildflowers, poisonous flowers/plants, herbs/spices are found plenty here. Similarly, animal species like small black Bear and barking deer ([Province Government, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, 2022](#)).

Khaptad National Park: Khaptad National Park spans four districts in Nepal i.e. Bajhang, Bajura, Achham, and Doti and ranges in elevation from 1,400m to 3,300m. The area of buffer zone is 216 sq.km. The reason behind the naming of this national park from the name of late Khaptad Swami settled in the region for his worship and meditation. He became well-known as a spiritual saint after living as a recluse for almost 50 years. There is an extraordinary adventure into the pristine wilderness, offering a truly off-the-beaten-path journey with amazing natures sites such as lots of grasslands (Patans), Khaptad Ashram, Triveni Dham, Kedar Dhunga, Shahstraling, Khapar Dah etc. Bears, leopards, common langurs, musk deer, and over 260 species of birds thrive in this sanctuary. The park is also home to more than 500 types of herbs, highlighting its natural pharmacy ([Province Government, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, 2022](#)). [Bhatta et al. \(2023\)](#) highlighted challenges in Khaptad's tourism growth, including poor infrastructure, inadequate accommodations, weak marketing, and government involvement. It suggested a tourist-centric approach, emphasising tourists' motivation and behaviour, and focusing on unique selling points like natural beauty and cultural diversity. Similarly, [Ghimire \(2024\)](#) found a dearth of employment prospects the National Park or the service industry catering to tourists. There is a lot of lower-level employment with less stability and pay in the tourist industry.

Historical Prospects: Bajhang district has a long and rich history, once being part of the Baise-Chaubise principalities, a collection of small kingdoms that existed before Nepal's unification (Regmi, 1966). The region has preserved several ancient temples, forts, and artifacts that provide insight into its historical legacy. Bajhang was historically an important trade route between Nepal and Tibet, with local markets facilitating the exchange of goods such as salt, wool, and herbs. There is a palace of King of Bajhang at Bhopur, Bajhang (Provincial Government, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, 2022).

Other notable tourist sites: Beside these several are other several religious sites and natural sites are waiting for religious, natural and adventures tourist. The district's rich biodiversity and pristine landscapes make it an excellent destination for eco-tourism, trekking, and nature exploration. Some other religious and natural sites are as under:

- Devasthan Mandir (Chainpur, Bajhang)
- Baril Waterfall (Chainpur, Bajhang)
- Chuli Tika (Chabbis, Bajhang)
- Ram Mandir (Kada, Bajhang)
- KhulmourKedar Mandir (Kedarsue, Bajhang)
- Thali (Durgathali, Bajhang)
- Baddi Jyaban Bar dev (Bungle, Bajhang)
- Kalika Devi Temple (Juji, Bajhang)
- Dadar Masta Temple (Mata, Bajhang)
- Banni Masta Temple (Chabis Pathibhera, Bajhang)

STUDY METHODS

The paper follows the qualitative approach to build a profile of the sampled destination. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences and behaviors. In contrast, qualitative research that measures tourism demand involves collecting data on various factors like the number of visitors, their transportation methods, length of stay, accommodation choices, and spending habits. This study is based on prevailing natural and cultural elements of the Bajhang District where the author has observed and noticed their characteristics (elements) for a long period. The discussion of the subject matter uses a simple elaboration. Similarly, opinions from the locals of the districts were gathered through informal communication regarding the barriers in growth of Bajhang district as a tourism destination.

Supporting Factors of Tourism in Bajhang District

Transportation: Bajhang district's transportation is characterised by challenging terrain and limited road infrastructure. The Khopde-Bajhang Road (Jayaprithvi Highway) connects the Bajhang district to Dhangadhi. Public buses, small micro vans are available from Dhangadhi/ Attariya to Bajhang. Beside this, Bajhang

District has an airport, Bajhang Airport, located in the Jayprithavi Municipality, which is an alternative means of transportation. It lies around 915 KM south and west from Kathmandu and around 273 KM north from Dhangadhi of road distance. The air distance from Dhangadhi (DHI) to Bajhang (BJH), specifically Chainpur, is approximately 109.64 kilometres.

Infrastructure and Development: Infrastructure development in Bajhang is slow but steadily improving. The road network remains underdeveloped, with many villages still lacking proper access to all-season roads. Electricity supply has expanded in recent years, with small hydropower projects and solar energy initiatives providing power to households and businesses. However, many remote villages still lack consistent access to electricity. Mobile networks and internet connectivity are improving but communication services remain unreliable in certain areas. Nepal government has developed a road from Chainpur to Taklakot, which will be smallest route for Chinese trade and reach Kailash Lack/ Mansarowar, which is under development.

Lodging and Fooding: Chainpur lies in the mid north part of Bajhang district where lots of medium level hotels and lodges are available for lodging and fooding. Besides this, there is several home stays are available at key tourist spots in the district. All types of Nepalese foods are available everywhere with organic flavour. Since all tourist spots are situated in different parts of the district full of mountains and jungles, lodging and fooding facilities are available to nearby key spots only.

Opinions on Challenges in Boosting Tourism in Bajhang District

There are many challenges in tourism prospect of Bajhang district. The following interviewees were interacted with by the author:

Table 1
Interviewees' Profile

Interviewee	Date/time	Gender	Profession	Address
Interviewee GBG	09/05/2025, 3:00 PM	Male	Banker	Bungal Municipality
Interviewee SS	09/05/2025, 3:30 PM	Male	Hotelier	Jayaprithvi Municipality
Interviewee BPJ	10/05/2025, 8:00 AM	Male	Social Worker	Jayaprithvi Municipality
Interviewee GRJ	10/05/2025, 9:00 AM	Male	Registered Auditor	Chainpur Municipality
Interviewee-MM	12/05/2025, 4:00 PM	Male	Businessman	Chainpur Municipality

Note. From personal interviews in the field

Of the total interviewees, all of them are male residing from three different municipality of Bajhang District.

Geographical difficulty, lack of clear-cut government policy and lack of tourism base expenditure by government are major reasons for under development of tourism industry in the district [Interviewee-GBD].

Intension of local leaders are not clear in tourism development, and they are deeply engaged in corruptions and commission-based development [Interviewee-SS].

Poor economic status of public, lower awareness among public towards tourism industry, bias behaviours of government towards Sudurpaschim Province in infrastructure development regarding tourism are major issues and challenges of tourism development [Interviewee-BPJ].

Government and public in remote areas face issues like lack of funds, unstable systems, corruption, and limited resources. The public focuses on living and easing, leading to rapid migration and desertification. Strong commitment from both is needed for a stable government. So, there has been no strong commitments to the development of tourism facilities in the district [Interviewee-GRJ].

We can't develop the tourism industry alone. Bajhang was a holy land and meditation land of Lord shiva, Khaptad Baba and another Saint in different timeframe. Bajhang district can be cultural and religious pool of both China and India and several tourists from both countries can't be attracted by infrastructure development and publicity of tourism development. Joint combination of Sudurpaschim province might be world level tourist spots as equivalent to Jammu and Kashmir of India [Interviewee-MM].

The interviewees highlighted several key challenges hindering tourism development in Bajhang district:

1. Geographical and Policy Issues: Difficult terrain, unclear government policies, and insufficient tourism-related expenditures by authorities.
2. Governance and Corruption: Local leaders lack clear intentions for tourism development and are involved in corruption, prioritising commission-based projects.
3. Economic and Awareness Barriers: The public's poor economic status, low awareness of tourism benefits, and government bias against Sudurpaschim Province in infrastructure development.
4. Funding and Systemic Problems: Lack of funds, unstable governance, corruption, and limited resources lead to migration and neglect of tourism facilities.
5. Need for Collaboration: Bajhang's religious and cultural significance (linked to Lord Shiva and Khaptad Baba) could attract tourists from India and China, but

requires joint provincial efforts, infrastructure development, and global-level promotion akin to Jammu and Kashmir.

Overall, weak government commitment, corruption, poor infrastructure, and lack of coordinated efforts are major obstacles to boosting tourism in the district.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Bajhang District, nestled in Nepal's far-western Sudurpaschim Province, is a region of immense natural beauty, cultural richness, and untapped tourism potential. From the towering Saipal Himal and sacred Surma Sarovar Lake to the biodiversity-rich Khaptad National Park and historic temples, Bajhang offers diverse attractions for adventure seekers, pilgrims, and cultural enthusiasts. However, despite its potential, the district faces significant challenges that hinder tourism growth, as highlighted by local interviewees.

Bajhang's rugged terrain and underdeveloped road networks make accessibility difficult, limiting tourist inflow. Lack of clear tourism policies, corruption, and weak local leadership have stalled development efforts. Low public awareness of tourism benefits, combined with economic hardships, discourages community participation in tourism initiatives. Insufficient government investment, unstable governance, and migration trends further exacerbate underdevelopment. Despite Bajhang's religious and cultural significance (linked to Hindu and Buddhist heritage), coordinated provincial and national-level promotion is absent.

Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development

To harness Bajhang's tourism potential, the following measures are recommended:

1. Infrastructure Development

- Upgrade road networks, particularly the Jayaprithvi Highway and Chainpur-Taklakot route, to improve connectivity.
- Expand airport facilities at Bajhang Airport to enhance accessibility for domestic and international tourists.
- Develop eco-friendly accommodations, homestays, and resting stations near key attractions like Surma Sarovar and Khaptad National Park.

2. Policy and Governance Reforms

- Formulate a clear tourism master plan with input from local stakeholders to ensure sustainable development.
- Strengthen anti-corruption measures and ensure transparent allocation of tourism funds.

- Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract investment in hospitality and adventure tourism.

3. Community Engagement and Awareness

- Conduct tourism awareness programs to educate locals on the economic benefits of tourism.
- Train communities in homestay management, guided trekking, and cultural tourism to create employment.
- Encourage youth involvement in tourism entrepreneurship to reduce migration for foreign employment.

4. Marketing and Promotion

- Position Bajhang as a "Spiritual and Adventure Hub", leveraging its religious sites (Jalapa Devi, Khaptad Ashram) and trekking trails (Saipal Himal).
- Collaborate with Nepal Tourism Board and international agencies to promote Bajhang in global markets, particularly targeting Indian and Chinese pilgrims.
- Develop digital marketing campaigns showcasing Bajhang's unique attractions through documentaries, blogs, and social media.

5. Sustainable and Eco-Tourism Initiatives

- Promote Khaptad National Park as an eco-tourism destination with wildlife safaris, birdwatching, and herbal tourism.
- Implement waste management and solar energy projects to maintain ecological balance in tourist areas.
- Introduce regulated trekking permits to preserve fragile ecosystems while boosting adventure tourism.

Bajhang District has all the ingredients to become a premier tourism destination in Nepal—breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and spiritual significance. However, unlocking this potential requires strong political will, infrastructure investment, community participation, and strategic marketing. By addressing governance gaps, improving accessibility, and fostering sustainable tourism practices, Bajhang can emerge as a key player in Nepal's tourism economy, reducing poverty and preserving its unique identity for future generations. With coordinated efforts from the local government, private sector, and communities, Bajhang could transform from a neglected frontier into a thriving eco-cultural tourism hub, contributing to the broader development of Sudurpaschim Province and Nepal as a whole.

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