

# Mountain Tourism and Nepal's Mountain Tourism Policy: An Overview

Ang Tshering Sherpa  
Hari Prasad Shrestha

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**Abstract:** *Nepal is a prime tourist destination for many due to its natural scenic beauty, the world's highest snow-topped mountain peaks of Himalayas, beautiful lakes, flora and fauna, biodiversity, and rich cultural, religious and archeological heritage. As such, the tourism industry in the country is growing at a fast pace and making significant contribution to the national economy. The history reveals that tourism in Nepal began with mountain tourism. Mountain tourism has many different aspects and the most important ones of which are mountaineering expeditions and trekking. Every year, great many tourists all over the world come to the country of Mt. Everest for expeditions and trekking purposes. Although the scope of whole mountain tourism development in Nepal is very high, this paper is particularly concerned with the development of mountaineering expeditions and trekking. It is obvious that mountain tourism development needs proper government plans and policies and the enthused participation the private escort as well. However, the tourism experts have pointed out the poor track record of implementing government plans and policies has not developed mountain tourism as desired and expected. The reasons have been attributed to unstable politics, lack of vision and expertise, and lack of concerted and coordinated efforts from all the quarters concerned. Despite the new Tourism Policy, 2008 (2065 BS) has come into implementation; adequate focus on mountain tourism is still missing. The stumbling blocks in the development of mountain tourism must be removed to make Nepal the prime destination for mountaineering expeditions and trekking. For developing mountain tourism and having sustainable competitive edge over other competing countries in this sector of tourism, the paper offers some important measures as suggestions.*

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## I. GENERAL BACKGROUND

Tourism is regarded as one of the biggest and fastest growing industries in the world. It has a significant role in the socio-economic development of many developed

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Mr. Sherpa is Chairman of Asian Trekking P. Ltd. Kathmandu and former President of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

Dr. Shrestha is Professor at Public Youth Campus, Tribhuvan University.

and developing countries. Tourism in Nepal is perhaps the most important source of foreign exchange earnings and has great potential for the economic development of the country and the countrymen. Due to the endowment of natural wealth, cultural, religious and archaeological heritages, Nepal is emerging as an important tourist destination in the world. The Himalayas of Nepal and their scenic beauty are the prominent attractions for the tourists. Nepal is the country of Mount Everest, the land of the world famous climbers and the land of Lord Buddha. It's snow peak, mountains, rivers and lakes, conducive climate and mysterious charms are the attraction to visitors coming here. Nepal has eight cultural and two natural world heritage sites.

It offers nature-based tourism activities like trekking, mountaineering, rafting and wildlife sanctuaries. Having all the important ingredients for tourism development in the country, people from both East and West are attracted to visit Nepal. Today, tourism is one of the main sources of foreign exchange earnings for Nepal, provides good employment opportunities at different levels and promotes cottage industries, trade and other services sectors.

Mountain Tourism is one of the significant sectors of Nepalese tourism. Mountain tourism covers a wide range of areas. It is a part of the brother aspect of adventure tourism, revolving around the mountains. Mountain tourism as such includes mountaineering expeditions, trekking hiking, rafting, skiing, mountain biking, rock climbing, horse riding, study of the cultural, social, and economic reflections of the mountain people/community and so on. This article basically tries to focus on mountaineering expeditions and trekking aspects of mountain tourism in Nepal.

Mountaineering and trekking are considered major tourism products of Nepalese mountain tourism. It is mountaineering and trekking which increases the length of stay of the tourists, support the rural economy and have a pivotal impact upon the entire tourism industry of the country. Mountains are the 'key' to developing the tourism industry in Nepal, but the vast resources of tourism have not been tapped very adequately.

Mountains are the main source of attraction for many tourists, trekkers and mountaineers. There are numerous famous low, middle and high mountains in Nepal. Therefore, there is great scope for developing mountain tourism in Nepal (Shrestha, 2008:2). Among the 14 snow-topped high mountains over-8000m in height, 8 peaks i.e. Sagarmatha, (Mt. Everest (8848m) , Kanchenjunga (8586m), Lhotse (8516m), Makalu (8463m), Cho Oyu (8201m), Dhaulagiri (8167m), Manaslu (8163m) and Annapurna I (8091m) are located in Nepal.

Despite the huge potential for promoting mountain tourism, it has not been exploited properly. There are around 3,310 peaks along the Himalayan range of Nepal. Among them, there are 1,310 peaks above 6,000m. In recent times, the government of Nepal has opened 326 peaks for mountaineering, but there are still 120 unclimbed peaks. (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2007:121-132).

Everest, Annapurna and Langtang regions are the main destinations for trekking activities in Nepal. However, trekking around Manaslu, Lower Dolpa, Upper Dolpa, Mustang, Upper Mustang, Rara Lake, Dhorpatan Circuit, Kanchanjunga B.C. could be very popular, if the trek permit fees are lowered.

Up to 1949, foreigners were forbidden to enter Nepal and most of mountaineering activities in Nepal Himalayas took place from the Northern side, via Tibet. In 1949, Erich E. Shipton discovered the southern climbing route of Everest. After the advent of democracy in 1950, the doors were opened for foreigners to visit Nepal.

After 1950, Nepal started developing different aspects of her social, economic and political life. Similarly, the origin of tourism in the modern sense started since 1950. After the successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I (8091m), on June 3, 1950, by French duo Maurice Herzog and Louis Lachenal, many mountaineers were attracted to Nepal. Annapurna I was the first successful ascent among the 14 over-8000m peaks of the world. Three years later, in 1953, the successful conquest of Mt. Sagarmatha (8848m) (Mt. Everest) by Tenzing Norgé Sherpa of Nepal and Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand was, indeed, a great landmark in the mountaineering history of Nepal and the world as well. The successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I and Mt. Sagarmatha of Nepal was publicized all over the world (Lama, 2003:1). Similarly, all the other remaining 6 peaks over 8000m. of Nepal were successfully summited by different nations' climbers in the 1950s. So, in the 1950s, all the over-8000m peaks were successfully climbed, and the decade is referred to as the golden era of Nepalese mountaineering history.

To facilitate the growth of mountain tourism, trekking agencies also grew since 1964. Mountain Travel was the first agency to provide trekking and mountaineering services to tourists visiting Nepal, and was established with the initiation of Col. Jimmy Roberts. It was registered with the government office in the year 1964, and began operation from 1965. Since then a lot of development has taken place in this sector. Mountaineering is being developed as an important facet of Nepalese tourism. Tourism policies were also developed, but they do not seem to have adequately addressed mountain tourism. There are lacunae of adequate thrust in policies. Further, unbalanced growth is noted. In certain areas, there is overcrowding and unsustainable growth while in many areas; even minimum growth has not taken place. This may have resulted due to the inconsistent policies and lack of participatory planning. However, with development, a number of questions have also emerged. Have we really been able to exploit our potential adequately? Have the tourism policies really contributed to the growth of tourism? What needs to be done to match development with potential? Only if we answer these questions, mountain tourism can be developed in a sustainable manner. To answer these very questions, this enquiry was carried out. In this paper, attempts have been made to assess the importance of mountain tourism plans and policies for mountain tourism development, to identify the problems concerned and recommend measures for development of mountain tourism in Nepal.

## **II. TOURISM POLICY**

In Nepal, for the first time, a full-fledged tourism policy was announced in the year 1995. Before this, the tourism sector was guided by the industrial policy, industrial enterprises act and the periodical plans. The main objective of 'Tourism Policy, 1995' was to promote Nepal as an attractive destination by utilizing its resources and make it

a vehicle of national development. This tourism policy included different working policies some of which are participation of the private sector and general people in tourism infrastructure to be upgraded, popular religious tourism sites to be promoted, Nepal to develop as a centre for adventure tourism, quality of service and security to be upgraded, regional imbalances to be corrected and marketing in tourist originating markets to be strengthened. In the tourism policy, the government's role was limited to the involvement in infrastructure development, coordination and motivation for tourism development and hereby encourages the participation of the private sector in the overall development of the tourism sector (HMG/ N, 1995). Thus, the tourism policy of 1995 accorded special significance to the role of the private sector in tourism development.

After a considerable gap of some 13 years, after the Tourism Policy, 1995 came for implementation, the need had been felt for timely reforms and changes, which are reflected in the Tourism Policy, 2008 (2065 BS). The needs were many for bringing out the Tourism Policy, 2008. The main focus in the new Tourism Policy, 2008 is the need for the distribution of the benefits accruing from tourism services to the local community and the people. For this, the objective of any tourism policy has to be to expand and promote rural tourism activities through the search and identification of new tourism sites, tourism infrastructure development, enhancement of the quality of services offered for the tourists, increase in accessibility, safe destination, increasing the length of stay, etc. The need arises for tourism development by aligning poverty alleviation and new economic development with foreign exchange earnings, increasing employment opportunities together with raising the living standard of the people. As the qualitative and quantitative development of the tourism sector is not possible with the efforts of the government only, the need is for the joint partnership of the public, community and private sectors in the venture. In the backdrop of this, the new tourism policy has been brought out by effecting relevant changes in the earlier policy to take tourism promotion to new heights for laying the ground for economic change (Government of Nepal, 2008).

The new tourism policy has certain objectives in this direction. One of the objectives is the diversification and extension of the tourism sector for developing self-employment initiatives in the people for eco-tourism and village tourism in line with poverty alleviation to raise the living standard of the people, and prepare a major basis for the national economy. It also talks about the development and conservation of the natural, cultural, and other resources of Nepal, besides the development of the tourism infrastructure.

The special features of the policy include attracting more tourists, marking Visit Nepal Year or Nepal Tourism Year in designated years. It also envisages making Nepal an all-season destination for tourists. Preparation is also to be undertaken for developing a complete package program aimed at the different categories and levels of tourists, after a thorough study of the international tourism market. While making an air service agreement with a tourist originating market, the provision of tourism promotion would also be included. Promotional programs are to be organized in countries other than the traditional markets. It also talks about according recognition as "Friends of Nepal" to world famous mountaineers, globally renowned personalities who have positive thoughts about Nepal, etc.

As per the policy, the following activities are to be undertaken for the diversification, expansion and development of mountaineering. The plan is to make mountaineering more organized and environment-friendly, to make Nepal an excellent destination for mountaineering. The royalty fee is to be waived for some time for mountaineering in feasible areas which have not come to light. The Himalayan peaks would be gradually opened up for mountaineering expeditions. The peaks that are below a specific height and considered easy by technical standards are to be developed as trekking peaks.

There are also provisions for trekking tourism. The trekking tourism of Nepal, an excellent tourism heritage, would be made safer, reliable and attractive. The trekking related policy-level and other management tasks will come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. The focus is also in attracting high-income tourists by making the trekking areas in operation more organized. New trekking routes are also to be identified and developed for which government investment would be given priority. It also talks of making the participation of the local community more effective.

Whatever has been mentioned in the Tourism Policy, 2008, they have to be effectively and efficiently implemented. But, as far as mountain tourism is concerned, some changes have been made in comparison to the Tourism Policy, 1995, but all the mountaineering-related issues have not been addressed.

In fact, different plans and policies have been introduced for the development of tourism in the country. But, proper implementation is required to translate the plans/policies in order to attain conducive development of tourism in the country. In most of the periodical plans of Nepal, importance has been accorded to product development, presentation and diversification. Only since the Eighth Plan, promotional and mandating measures have been specifically mentioned. Thus, the economic plans of Nepal did not seem to have been able to address the marketing issues adequately and in a conducive manner to develop tourism as a vital aspect of the economy.

An evaluation of Nepal's tourism plans and policies was presented through a study entitled "Tourism Marketing in Nepal" in which an attempt was made to analyze the views of 32 foreign and Nepalese tourism experts. Of the total respondents, about 40 percent rated the Nepalese tourism plans and policies as average, followed by 31.25 percent rating them satisfactory, while 18.75 percent found them less satisfactory and

Table 1: Rating of Plans/Policies of Tourism

| Rating              | No. of Response | Percent       |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Highly Satisfactory | -               | -             |
| Satisfactory        | 10              | 31.25         |
| Average             | 13              | 40.63         |
| Less Satisfactory   | 6               | 18.75         |
| Unsatisfactory      | 3               | 9.38          |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>32</b>       | <b>100.00</b> |

9.38 percent respondents rated them unsatisfactory. None of the respondents rated the

plans and policies as highly satisfactory. It showed that our tourism plans and policies may be rated only as average and, therefore, they need immediate attention.

Some notable observations include "liberalizing the policies alone is not enough, facilitation and practical support to the efforts/endeavors of the private sector is necessary," "policies may be fine, but there is no supporting programmes," "policies are not based on realities," "plans and policies are always good but there is problem in implementation," "policies are only on paper, there are immense short falls in implementation," "policies and plans made by bureaucrats having no knowledge or idea of tourism," "the government policies and plans are not bad but the implementation part is very weak," "all the policies and plans related to tourism in Nepal need review and update based on the critical analysis of their implementation," "basically, plans and policies have been changing due to unstable government in the country and due to the belief that plans and policies of one government should be changed. Even if plans and policies are good, but are not properly implemented they may not bear fruits" (Shrestha, 1998: 241-242).

The responses clearly indicate that the major problem is poor implementation. However, some viewed that unstable policies, lack of vision and expertise have also affected policy formulation.

### **III. MOUNTAIN TOURISM AND POLICY**

In Nepal, mountain tourism being a major tourism product, its proper evaluation and development is needed. Thus, proper planning and policy formulation is needed for sustainable mountain tourism development in the country. But, the various policies, master plans, tourism development plans and policies do not seem to have addressed the issues of mountain tourism adequately.

In the beginning, mountain tourism was not seriously taken as an important tourism product, but only later it can be seen that it was developed as an important tourism product.

Earlier, most of the tourists coming to Nepal came with the holiday/pleasure objective. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of tourists coming with the objective of mountain tourism or trekking/mountaineering, while there has been a decline in the number of tourists coming with the holiday/pleasure objective.

According to Table No. 2, in 1965, only 0.4% of the tourists came for trekking/mountaineering but by 2001 the numbers peaked to 100,828 (27.9%). The figures for 2009 reveal that 132,929 (26.1%) came with the purpose of trekking/mountaineering.

Similarly, in 1965, the tourists coming for holiday/pleasure purpose was 93.9% but which declined to 8.0% in 2009.

According to the data for 2009, most of the incoming tourists (26.1%) came for mountain tourism. This proves that mountain tourism is the prominent tourism product of Nepal and the country is the market leader in this sector.

Table 2: Tourism Arrival in Nepal by Purpose

| Year | Holiday/       | Trekking/ Mountaineering |
|------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1962 | -              | -                        |
| 1965 | 8815 (93.9)    | 40 (0.4)                 |
| 1970 | 41881(91.1)    | 556 (1.2)                |
| 1975 | 20124(75.9)    | 12587 (13.6)             |
| 1980 | 130600(80.2)   | 19302 (11.8)             |
| 1985 | 128217 (70.8)  | 28707 (15.9)             |
| 1990 | 161839 (63.5)  | 39999 (15.7)             |
| 1995 | 183207 (50.4)  | 84787 (23.3)             |
| 2000 | 255889 (55.2)  | 118780 (25.6)            |
| 2001 | 187022 (51.8)  | 100828 (27.9)            |
| 2002 | 110143 (40.01) | 59279 (21.5)             |
| 2003 | 97904 (29.4)   | 65721 (19.4)             |
| 2004 | 167262 (43.4)  | 69442 (18.0)             |
| 2005 | 160259 (42.7)  | 61488 (16.4)             |
| 2006 | 145802 (38.0)  | 66931 (17.4)             |
| 2007 | 217815 (41.4)  | 101320 (19.2)            |
| 2008 | 148180 (29.6)  | 104822(21.0)             |
| 2009 | 40992 (8.0)    | 132929 (26.1)            |

**Source:** Nepal Tourism Statistics 2009, Government of Nepal Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Katmandu

**Note:** Figures in parenthesis represent percentage of the total.

As mountain tourism has an important place in the scheme of things, special emphasis should be given to it while making plans and formulating policies. Earlier, the reasons for the less attraction for mountain tourism could be because of not according it a special place to it in the plans and policies. However, now, in the context of mountain tourism being an important tourism product of Nepal, the need is to accord greater priority to it mandatorily. Mountain tourism should receive due focus in the future tourism policy.

There should be the proper identification of mountain tourism products, marketing and appropriate policy for competing with other countries in this sector. Various problems seen in this sector are because of the lack of a suitable mountain tourism policy.

#### IV. PROBLEMS OF MOUNTAIN TOURISM

Various problems of Nepal's mountain tourism sector can be presented as follows:

1. There is a pronounced lack of vital infrastructure for mountain tourism development. Because of the access problem in almost all the Base Camps of the Himalayan peaks in Nepal, it takes more time during expeditions, increase in expenses for transportation of goods and for other headings which means that the operating costs run very high.
2. In comparison to neighboring countries like China, India, Pakistan etc., the Royalty Fees for expeditions to the high Himalayan and other peaks in Nepal are very expensive.

3. There is a lack of standard service offered in Nepal because of the high customs rate that makes transport vehicles and other goods for tourism purpose very expensive.
4. Government policy, rules and procedures are quite complicated and time-consuming.
5. There is a lack of experienced liaison officers, those deputed make unnecessary demands and many of them do not reach the places concerned, return abruptly etc., which generates complaints and dissatisfaction from the foreign mountaineers and professional organizations.
6. Mountaineering and trekking activities are confined to limited popular peaks and areas.
7. There is no adequate effort to promote and take necessary measures to attract mountaineers and trekkers to peaks that have not become very popular and new trekking routes respectively.
8. We are unable to attract mountaineers to the border peaks. So the benefits could not be generated in these regions.

## **V. SUGGESTIONS**

**Infrastructure Development :** The weak infrastructure in Nepal has led to mountaineering activities becoming more expensive and time-consuming. Nepal does not have transportation facilities to the Base Camps of important Himalayan peaks like in other countries. From Lukla Airport it takes 7 days to reach Cho Oyu Base Camp. Similarly, it takes 7 days to reach Sagarmatha Base Camp. And it takes 11 days to reach Kanchenjunga Base Camp from the nearest road link while going from north side and 9 days from south side. It takes 7 days to reach Annapurna I Base Camp and 8 days for Dhaulagiri Base Camp. As the transportation and other costs are exorbitant for transporting the necessary goods to the Base Camps, therefore the operating costs become very high. In comparison to Nepal, the rival nations like India, China and Pakistan have roads till the Base Camps, which makes mountaineering activities cheaper and time-saving. For example, trucks reach the Sagarmatha Base Camp when making the expedition from Tibet in the north, while yaks can be used to transport goods to the Advanced Base Camp. One truck can transport 12-13 tons of goods for which the cost is US\$1,000. The transportation facilities help in reducing the time required and the goods arrive intact. Therefore, mountaineering becomes less time-consuming, cheap and convenient. In Nepal, while transporting about 10 tons of goods to the Sagarmatha Base Camp, on an average US\$ 25,000 has to be spent. Transporting goods by porters to the Base Camp and back is expensive as well as time-consuming, besides making it difficult to get the goods in good condition. Thus, to attract foreign mountaineers to the Nepali peaks, transportation facilities should be upgraded, and the construction of small airports, aid posts, refreshments, lodges in places that have no road link ought to be speeded up. So, it is urgent to formulate a policy for the development of the necessary infrastructure for the development of mountain tourism.



**The Reduction in Customs Rates for Transport Vehicles and other Goods for Tourism Purposes :** The high customs rates on imported vehicles and other goods for tourism purpose make it difficult to provide standard services. For example, the imported transport vehicles for tourism purposes are very expensive because of the high customs rates. Such vehicles are available in India and China at half the cost in Nepal. Because of the good transportation system in those countries, the movement of vehicles is very smooth. The cheaper price of vehicles in those countries and good condition of roads has facilitated the unhindered movement of tourists. It has also been found that the high customs rates, in Nepal, on other goods for the tourism sector has led to a lower standard of services offered to the tourists. In our neighboring country China, most of the necessary goods for the tourism sector is produced and manufactured in the country itself so they are cheaper and high standard of services are offered. Therefore, necessary policy should be formulated for providing customs concessions for the goods required for providing standard tourism services. Moreover, the customs duties and taxes levied on mountaineering gears are on commercial basis which makes mountaineering in Nepal very expensive. There is, therefore, the need for liberal customs rates on mountaineering equipments and other goods.

**Reforms in Expedition Royalty Fees :** Nepal's competitors in the mountaineering sector are Pakistan, India and China. Compared to those countries, the expedition Royalty Fee in Nepal is very costly. Moreover, the operating costs for reaching peaks concerned for expedition teams are very high. As expedition teams also have to bear the cost of the liaison officer, the expedition costs run high. This is the reason why mountaineers are attracted to other countries rather than Nepal.

Nepal has the maximum number of high peaks in the world, with Sagarmatha being the tallest. Yet, Nepal has not been able to reap the benefits by attracting a greater number of mountaineers to the country. The over-8000m peaks like Cho Oyu, Sagarmatha, Lhotse and Makalu lie on Nepal-China border and so mountaineering activities take place from both from Nepal and China. Similarly, Kanchenjunga lies on the Nepal-India border and so mountaineering activities take place for the peak from both the countries. The expedition Royalty Fees fixed by China and India are far less than those fixed by Nepal for the shared border peaks. In China, the fees have been fixed at \$5000 for a team of 11 people ascending Sagarmatha, while in Nepal ascent for a team from the normal route South Col has been fixed at \$70,000 for an expedition team consisting of seven persons and if another route is taken then the fee is fixed at \$50,000. In this way, the cost per person for ascent to Sagarmatha in China is \$454.5 while it comes to \$10,000 per person ascending from the normal route and \$7142.9 if another ascent route is taken in Nepal. China charges 10 percent or \$500 per person if the expedition team consists of more than seven members. In Nepal, if the total members exceed seven, the fees are fixed at \$10,000 per extra person till a maximum of 15 members. The Table No. 4 shows the comparative mountaineering royalty structure and other fees of China, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

Besides Sagarmatha, the royalty fees fixed by China for other peaks over 8000m is far lower than those fixed by Nepal. The royalty fee fixed for Cho Oyu, Lhotse and Makalu

**Table No. 3 : Comparative Royalty Structures***Comparative Statement of Peaks Royalty Fees Charged by the Himalayan Countries*

|                                      | <b>China</b>  | <b>India</b>   | <b>Nepal</b>  | <b>Pakistan</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
|                                      | <i>For 11 Persons</i>   | <i>For 12 Persons</i>  | <i>For 7 Persons'</i>   | <i>For 7 persons</i>  |
| Mt Everest (South Col)               | --  | --   | US\$70,000  | --  |
| Mt Everest (Other Routes)            | @US\$5,000  | --   | US\$50,000  | --  |
| Peaks above 8000M Cho Oyu Xixabangma | @US\$3000   | @US\$4000 +@US8000   | ..  | --  |
| K-2, 8611 M                          | --  | --   | --  | US\$ 6000   |
| 8001-8500M                           | --  | --   | --  | US\$ 4500   |
| 8000M Peaks                          | @US\$ 1760  | --   | US\$ 10,000   | --  |
| Eastern Karakoram                    | --  | @US\$4000  | --  | --  |
| Num & Kun                            | --  | @US\$3000  | --  | --  |
| 7501M to 7999 M Peaks                | @US\$1080   | @US\$3000 +US\$7000  | @US\$4000   | --  |
| 7501-8000 M                          | --  | --   | --  | US\$2000  |
| 7001M to7500M Peaks                  | @US\$1080   | @US\$3000 +US\$6000  | @US\$3000   | US\$1250  |
| 6501 -7000M                          | @US\$700  | US\$ 2000 +US\$ 5500   | US\$ 2000   | US\$750   |
| 6000M to 6500M Peaks                 | @US\$ 700   | @US\$ 1500 +US\$ 5000  | @US\$1000   | --  |
| Below 6000M peaks                    | @per Climber US\$ 30  | @US\$ 1500 +US\$ 5000  | @US\$1000   | --  |
| Specific Remarks                     | <p>a) The registration fee for each extra member shall be 10% additional.</p> <p>b) For a new route, fee will be twice the normal rate.</p> <p>c) If expedition team admits members from other countries (including high altitude porter third country) shall be charged 10% of the registration fee</p> <p>d) The environmental protection fee is US\$ 25 per person.</p> <p>e) Cine-photo fee is US\$1350 to 6760</p> <p>f) Satellite telephone fee is US\$2000.</p> <p>g) A special registration fee shall be charged for the first ascent of virgin or newly opened peak in China</p> | <p>a) If more than one peak is climbed royalty for second peak is at 50% scale.</p> <p>b) This fee is for 12 members. Addl. US\$ 300 per member for 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>.</p> <p>c) Environmental Levy US\$ 400 upto 16 persons.</p> <p>d) Fees for restricted area US\$4000.</p> <p>e) Plus charges by State Govt. of Sikkim.</p> | <p>a) Beyond 7 persons following fees are extra, per person, upto 15 members<br/>MT Everest (Via South Col)<br/>- US\$ 10,000 Other Routes<br/>- US\$ 10,000<br/>- 8000M peaks-US\$ 1500<br/>- 7501-7999M-US\$ 500<br/>- 7000-7500M-US\$ 400<br/>- 6501-6999M-US\$ 300<br/>- 6500M &amp; Below-US\$200<br/>b) For trekking, the charges are US\$ 300,<br/>c) Environmental fees Mt Everest US\$4000,8000-Mpeaks-US\$3000 Below 800M-US\$ 2000 (Refundable depending upon LO's report).<br/>d) Satellite telephone fee is US\$ 5000.</p> | <p>a) Beyond 7 persons, extra charges per person<br/>K-2 US\$1000<br/>8001-8500M-US\$ 750<br/>7501-8000= US\$ 250<br/>7001-7500 M-US\$ 150<br/>6000-7000M-US\$ 100<br/>b) All peaks under 6000M are free for access unless near the frontiers.<br/>c) US\$200 plus US\$1000 environmental deposit which is forfeited is rubbish is left behind.</p> |

**Source:** Alpine Club of Pakistan**Note:** The data on Nepal, China and India is based on printed information

for an 11-member expedition team is fixed at \$1760 in China, while for the same peaks Nepal has fixed the fees at \$10,000 for a 7-member expedition team.

India has fixed the royalty fees at \$4,000 for a 12-member expedition team to Kanchenjunga, while in Nepal it is \$10,000 for a 7-member team.

Pakistan has fixed the royalty fees for the world's second highest peak Karakoram (K2) at \$6,000 for a 7-member expedition team, and for other over-8000m peaks it is \$4,500 for a seven-member expedition team. In Nepal, the royalty fee to other peaks over-8000m is \$10,000 for a seven-member expedition team.

In comparison to other countries, the Royalty Fees for mountaineering in Nepal for, 7000m and 6000m or peaks below that height are also very high. Thus, the Royalty Fees for mountaineering in China, India and Pakistan are far lower than in Nepal. Even if Nepal slashes its Royalty Fees by half, it will in general still be higher than those in the other countries.

Because of the high mountaineering fees, Nepal has not been able to attract mountaineers significantly to attempt the various Himalayan peaks. Therefore, it is necessary to make the necessary reforms in the Royalty fee structure to attract a greater number of mountaineers to Nepal. Recently, the government has effected some changes in the Royalty Fee structure. According to the new scheme, the Royalty Fees have been reduced by 50% for expeditions in winter and summer seasons, 75% rebate in the autumn season while the fees for spring expeditions have been retained as before. No Royalty Fees are to be levied on mountaineering expeditions to peaks in the Mid- and Far-Western Development regions for five years. Providing 25% rebate in mountaineering fees is appropriate for expeditions in the spring season. The necessity is to make timely reforms in the Royalty Fee structure so that Nepal will be able to attract a greater number of mountaineers.

**Reforms in Government Policy, Rules and Work Procedure :** In Nepal, receiving the official permit for mountaineering and fulfilling other formalities are very complex and time-consuming as compared to the neighboring countries. So, reforms are necessary in the process. In Nepal, mountaineering permit is issued by the Tourism Ministry, Communications Ministry for communications equipment, national park or reserve office if the national park or reserve is to be entered, and the Home Ministry for entering a prohibited area. The need to go to various ministries and offices for permits is bothersome and time-consuming for the foreign mountaineers. Compared to Nepal, in Tibet all the necessary works for the mountaineers are done at the Base Camp through one office. Moreover, the mountaineering permit and certificate for successfully making the ascent is provided by the Liaison Officer at the Base Camp instantly. If the issuance of various permits required for mountaineering is done through one office, the process would not only become simpler but would also be time-saving. Thus, if Nepal is to attract foreign mountaineers timely reforms must be affected in the administrative procedure and reforms in the policy and rules and regulations.

**Reforms in Provision of Liaison Officer Appointment :** At present, there is a provision to appoint a liaison officer for mountaineering expeditions to peaks over 6,500m, and restricted trekking areas. But, the professional institutions and mountaineers/

trekkers have complained that the liaison officers deputed to accompany mountaineering expeditions lack experience, do not reach the designated place, return before the end of the prescribed duration, lack the necessary knowledge, tendency to bargain for allowances and equipment, etc. These complaints make it necessary to make reforms in the present system of appointing liaison officers. In Tibet, China, one liaison officer is appointed for one area, and he monitors and controls all the expedition groups in that area. In Nepal also, for solving the problem conveniently, the policy of "one area, one climate, one liaison officer" should be adopted. If this is done, it will lead to qualified liaison officer being appointed, lowers costs, and makes such an officer more responsible and convenient to evaluate and monitor his fulfillment of the duty. The appointment of one liaison officer being able to play representative role for the different ministries and national parks and reserves should be the reform in the present provision in this regard. It would be convenient for the Tourism Ministry that appoints the liaison officer to bear the liaison officer's allowances and cost of the equipment, the costs of which to be collected from the expedition team concerned.

**Environment and Clean-up Campaigns :** With the objective of keeping the Himalayan peaks and the environment clean, Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation and Nepal Mountaineering Association that grant the mountaineering permits for mountaineering expeditions, for the management of the refuse and garbage generated during mountaineering expeditions, collect Garbage Deposits while issuing the permits. The mountaineering expedition teams are given the responsibility of managing their garbage adhering to the set standards. The provision for the Garbage Deposit has been made for the concerned expedition team to manage the garbage they generate. Yet, the monitoring and supervision of the garbage management has not been effective. And, with this system in force, the garbage pile up in the Himalayas has, in fact, increased rather than being on a declining trend. Therefore, instead of the present Garbage Deposit system, the mountaineering expedition teams should be charged the Environment Fees based on the height of the peaks that they attempt. A special fund has to be created from the fees collected for utilization in garbage management, clean-up works and Himalaya Rescue Association (HRA) health post at the Base Camps of our popular mountains.

The environment charges are also collected in this manner in neighboring countries like India and China, and this system seems to be quite effective. Thus, the Garbage Deposit system in Nepal is not observed to be practical because of many reasons like, monitoring is difficult, there is more administrative harassment, and refunding the deposit is complicated, the Deposit is collected in foreign currency and refunded in Nepali currency. Therefore, it is befitting to collect a fixed amount as environment and clean-up fees according to the height of the peak that an expedition team is to attempt. This will not only be practically feasible but also contribute to effective management of the peaks and the Himalayan environment.

**Rebates and Facilities for use of Communications Equipment:** Mountaineering is an adventure as well as a risky activity. In mountaineering activities, there is a thin line between

life and death, so it becomes necessary for the use of different types of communications equipment by the mountaineers during expeditions. During mountaineering, if there is some sort of accident then communications equipment like walkie-talkie, satellite phone, radio, etc. are necessary to carry out rescue missions immediately. The use of communications equipment in Pakistan, India and China is common during mountaineering and they have a liberal policy for the import of such equipments. In Nepal, such equipment are taken as sensitive and such imported equipment are very expensive due to high charges of Government fees besides the present system for getting a permit for such is quite complex. Therefore, for the convenience of the mountaineers, trekkers and adventure seekers, the policy for the import of the communications equipments must be simplified and reforms must be made in processing the same and Government fees should be reduce.

**Opening up of New Peaks for Mountaineering, and New Trekking Routes, and Promoting those which are Opening :** In Nepal, at present, it is observed that mountaineering activities are confined to the old and popular peaks, while trekking activities are limited to the major trekking areas. Despite the government opening up 326 peaks for mountaineering, mountaineering activities are taking place only in 63 peaks while there is no activity on the other remaining other open peaks. The lack of mountaineering and caravan routes to many peaks is the reason why mountaineers have not been attracted to other peaks, besides their publicity and promotion are inadequate. There are many feasible peaks for mountaineering in Nepal, but they lack appropriate mapping, caravan routes, and have not been named which has resulted in their not being used for mountaineering activities.

Similarly, trekking is confined to specially Annapurna, Langtang and Sagarmatha areas. There are many trekking areas open like Manaslu, Lower Dolpa, Upper Dolpa, Mustang, Upper Mustang, Dhorpatan Circuit, Kanchenjunga B.C. etc but they have not been publicized and promoted. Rara Lake, the paradise on earth, lacks transportation facilities, high charges of trekking permit fees and has not received either publicity or promotion.

Without the development of transportation reach and adequate publicity and promotion, foreign tourists cannot be attracted. Therefore, where there is feasibility, new peaks must be gradually opened for mountaineering and new trekking destinations have to be identified and opened for trekkers. Meanwhile, both the old peaks and new peaks to be opened have to be promoted. Similarly, new trekking routes should also be opened and receive adequate promotion together with the existing popular ones.

**Incentives for Producing Documentaries on Mountaineering:** Documentaries about mountains and mountaineering activities can be an excellent medium to popularize and promote Nepal in foreign countries, and they can play an important role in the development of mountain tourism in the country. Therefore, the production of such documentaries must be encouraged. In our neighboring countries such documentary production is looked upon with tourism promotion viewpoint and it is found that in this regard the policy, rules and the process have been simplified. For this, one liaison officer, who takes up the representative role for various sectors, does the task. But, in Nepal, though the mountaineering permit is granted by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, one liaison officer is deputed by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, one

person is appointed by the Ministry of Information and Communications, and if they need to enter a national park or conservation area is necessary then a representative of that office is also deputed. Moreover, if a tourist has to enter prohibited areas like Mustang, Dolpa, Simikot, Manaslu, etc. then there is a provision to depute one environment officer by the government. The necessity for the inclusion of various representatives of various offices leads to documentary-making becoming very expensive, and there are complaints regarding such an arrangement. Therefore, a policy should be formulated to depute one liaison officer who can represent all the various offices. This will not only lead to less government human resources being used, but also lead to fewer expenses by the documentary producer. In this manner, the incentives to produce documentaries on mountains and mountaineering activities of Nepal would be promoting mountain tourism.

**Promotion of Border Peaks:** In total, there are 92 peaks on the border with India and China. Among them, many have received attention from the viewpoint of mountaineering and promotion, but Nepal has not been able to reap adequate benefits from them. Many border peaks have not been opened for mountaineering from Nepal side, and those peaks which have been opened lack the basic infrastructure to reach the Base Camp, and because of the lack of publicity and promotional activities they have not become attractive destinations. Therefore, Nepal has not been able to benefit from the border peaks, and so development has not reached those areas and places. But, India and China have been benefitting by developing the border peaks as attractive destinations. The mountaineers are attracted to scale Cho Oyu from China side and they are increasing in number, while mountaineering activity from the Nepal side is negligible. According to records, only 13 mountaineers have so far climbed Cho Oyu from Nepal side 11 till 1994 and 2 in 2009. From China side, annually 60-80 expedition teams attempt scaling Mount Cho Oyu. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that in order to reap benefits from such border peaks, necessary infrastructure has to be developed, the Royalty Fees must be heavily slashed and it must be waived for particular peaks for some years through selection, and there is also the vital need to go for sustained publicity for the promotion of the border peaks.

**Developing the Great Himalayan Trail:** The Great Himalaya Trail (GHT) is a network of existing trails which together form one of the longest and highest walking trails in the world. Winding beneath the world's highest peaks and visiting some of the most remote communities on earth, it passes through lush green valleys, arid high plateaus and incredible landscapes. Nepal's GHT has 10 sections comprising a network of upper and lower routes, each offering something different to the trekkers, be it adventure and exploration, authentic cultural experiences, or simply spectacular Himalayan nature.

The 1600km Nepal section of the trail begins near Kanchenjunga on the eastern border and heads west navigating the domains of eight of the world's 8000m peaks, from the beautiful but lesser-known Makalu to the famous Everest. The upper GHT starts from Jhinsang Bhanjyang in the east and Darchula in the west whereas the lower GHT starts from Chiya Bhanjyang in the east and Darchula in the west. The promotion of this trail is expected to be highly beneficial as it helps in the development of the remote and so far untouched areas of Nepal.

**Reduce Trekking Permit Fees of Regulated Trekking Areas :** Unlike the popular trekking areas of Nepal like Annapurna , Langtang and Sagarmatha, trekking in the regulated areas like Manaslu, Dolpo, Mustang, Kachenjunga, Simmikor-Hilsa is shadowed because of the high government charges and limitation in the number of visitors. Therefore, it is vitally necessary to reduce the government fees and restriction on number of visitors and to develop basic tourist infrastructure in those areas.

**Strengthen National Flag Carrier (Nepal Airlines) :** It is of vital importance to strengthen the National Flag Carrier in order to promote the tourism sector in the country. Because most of the international tour operators prefer to fly with the national flag carriers (airlines) rather than other international airlines. An example of it can be the number of tourists coming to Nepal prefer to fly with the Nepal National Flag Carrier i.e Nepal Airline Corporation. If we compare the flow of tourists now with at the time when Nepal Airline Corporation used to conduct direct flights, the result is not so satisfactory. So, the National Flag Carrier should be given more precedence and strengthened for the sustainable development of Nepal's tourism sector.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Tourism is developing as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. In Nepal's economic development, tourism sector is also developing as an important sector. Today, Nepal has become one if the prime destinations in the world because of its natural wealth, religious and archeological heritages. The world renowned low, middle and high mountains stand as attractions here. Nepal has products like rivers, lakes, falls, deepest gorge, glaciers, moraines, natural sceneries, landscape, jungles, flora and fauna, village lifestyle, and customs and cultural aspects that have the feasibility for the development of mountain tourism. In fact, tourism in Nepal took off with mountain tourism. There is great scope for the development of mountain tourism in Nepal, but it has not been capitalized upon and the country has not been able to take the advantages. The development of mountain tourism relies on the plans and policies of the country's government. Appropriate plans and policies make it possible to make mountain tourism development sustainable. For the overall development of tourism in the country, the government had for the first time brought out the Tourism Policy 1995. Prior to this, the tourism sector was guided by the industrial policy, industrial enterprise act and periodical plans. After a gap of 13 years, after Tourism Policy,1995 came for implementation another Tourism Policy, 2008 came out.

According to one study, 40% tourism experts have pointed out in their evaluation of the tourism plan and policy that it was average, while 31.25% found it satisfactory and 18.75% have found it less satisfactory. According to those tourism experts, the main problem with Nepal's tourism plans and policies was poor implementation. Unstable policies, lack of vision and expertise have also affected the implementation aspect.

The tourism policies of Nepal has not been able to adequately address the appropriate development of mountain tourism, and this has given rise to various problems. In

Nepal's tourism development, as mountain tourism is the major product, there has to be appropriate plans and policies and their effective implementation. But, there is a lack of appropriate policy for mountain tourism. In the beginning, there were very few tourists who came with the purpose of mountain tourism; therefore it is possible that this sector was not adequately addressed. If Nepal wants the majority of tourists to come for mountain tourism, and as mountain tourism is a prominent tourism product, there is a need for appropriate policy for the overall development of the sector.

The major hurdles seen in the development of mountain tourism are the lack of essential infrastructure, high operating and Royalty Fees for expeditions, low standard of services offered, complex and harassing government policy, rules and regulations and work procedure, complaints regarding the liaison officer, mountaineering and trekking activities confined to the limited popular peaks and trekking routes respectively, inadequate publicity and promotion campaigns, inability to reap benefits from the border peaks, lack of environmental and clean-up management of the mountains, inconvenience in the use of communications equipment and the like. The other major countries that are competitors to Nepal in mountain tourism activities are Pakistan, India and China. Compared to those countries, the royalty fees for mountaineering in Nepal are very exorbitant; the mountaineering expedition costs become expensive due to the high operating costs, the government policy, rules and regulations and work procedure are complex, time-consuming etc. Because of these reasons, Nepal is having difficulty in facing the competition which has not led to the requisite development of mountain tourism despite the immense possibilities. Despite that, Nepal's special geographical situation, immense natural beauty, world renowned Himalayan range etc. for which the foreign mountaineers and trekkers have special attraction and, as a result, Nepal is leading the world in mountain tourism. For Nepal to compete with the rival countries and sustainable mountain tourism development and to give continuity to its lead role in the sector, steps have to be taken according to the abovementioned suggestions and recommendations

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