

# Heritage Tourism and its Impact on Livelihood: A Study on Heritage Site

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between heritage tourism and its impacts on social, cultural, and economic aspects of people's livelihood in the study area. This research is conducted in Changunarayan 4, Bhaktapur. The nature of the study is qualitative. Using Purposive Sampling method, research process is carried out in total 40 households involving in tourism business. This study unveiled positive impacts, including cultural revitalization and preservation, social identity development, and unity. However, it also identified negative effects such as cultural standardization, commercialization, and challenges like cultural clash and littering.

*Keywords:* social and cultural dimension, livelihood, heritage, tourism

## Introduction

Tourism has been the significant fields across the globe not only for the entertainment and recreational cause but also from the aspect of economic and social exchange. Nepal has also been involving since long in tourism business

due its natural richness as well as the blessing of cultural diversity. Hence, it is broadly accepted that Nepal is uniquely blended with rich environmental diversity, natural beauty, and a diverse cultural heritage that has captivated millions of tourists each year. While tourism in Nepal has ancient roots, it gained structured development after 1956, marked by the initiation of the first five-year plan and the establishment of the Tourist Development Board in 1957. Identifying Nepal's potential hub for nature, culture, and adventure, tourism has been emerged as a dominant service industry, contributing significantly to poverty reduction through employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour (Shrestha, 2017). In 2020, the travel and tourism sector contributed 3.6% to the national GDP, amounting to NRs. 132.1 billion (USD 1114.7 million), and accounted for 5.5% of total employment, providing 835.1 thousand jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). The evolving significance of tourism in Nepal is attributed to its diverse culture and natural landscapes, creating employment opportunities and directly contributing to poverty alleviation, foreign investment attraction, and government revenue generation (Regmi, 2016). The total number of international tourists visited Nepal in 2023 is 10, 14,876 (Tourism Board, 2023) Comparing the global context, Nepal itself has stands out as a globally the most preferred destination for nature, culture, and adventurous tourism. Recognizing the immense

potential of tourism for foreign exchange earnings and poverty alleviation, the Nepalese government has accorded high priority to tourism development (Thapa, 2016). Despite the substantial benefits, there exists a gap between Nepal's tourism potential and its actual performance, indicating a need for maximizing the utilization of its tourism resources (World Bank 2018).

While adventure and nature-based tourism have received attention due to Nepal's natural endowments, cultural tourism, despite its richness and importance, has been relatively neglected. Limited studies on cultural destinations, such as homestays in areas like Sirubari village and Tanahusar village, have shed light on the promotion of cultural tourism and the protection of local culture (Thapa & Thapa, 2010; S. Thapa, 2016). However, there is a notable research gap regarding the contribution and role of heritage in tourism, hindering effective planning and development initiatives by government, non-governmental organizations, and community groups. The insufficient exploration of cultural places associated with rural tourism has further impeded an understanding of the impact of cultural heritage on tourism and its consequences on various dimensions of society and people. This leads to the objective to assess the impact of heritage tourism on people's livelihood, focusing on economic, social and cultural aspect. So the study attempted to fulfill the research question of:

What are the possible impacts on socio-cultural and economic aspects of people's livelihood in the study area?

### **Methods and Materials**

This study demands qualitative nature of data and therefore, qualitative method was employed for collecting required data. The central aims of the study is to assess the satisfaction level of the respondents who are involved in tourism business and to understand their different perspectives regarding the changes that has made in local socio-cultural and economic fields after the emergence of tourism. Focus group discussions (FGD), and semi-structured interviews were executed as a tool for collecting primary data. The Changuarayan Temple, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is situated in the Changuarayan municipality at the Bhaktapur district. This study falls under the qualitative study because it has only looked at the level of perception, feelings, and satisfaction etc. of the respondents. Among the 120 households who are involved in the tourism industry there, total 40 households were selected as study population using purposive sampling methods.

### **Result and Discussion**

Heritage tourism, encompassing cultural and historical resources, represents a substantial and rapidly growing sector within the tourism industry. Cultural heritage, often designated as World Heritage Sites, plays a crucial role in

shaping Nepal's tourism industry, recognized as a prioritized sector by the government (Pradhananga, 2020). It is argued that, Heritage tourism not only serves as a source of pride for local communities, allowing them to cultivate their unique identity, but it also contributes to people's sense of identity and self-respect (Molstad et al., 1999). However, heritage tourism is a double-edged sword, capable of supporting conservation when well-planned, but also posing a risk of severe damage if mismanaged (Kamamba, 2003). According to Chauigain, 2021, indigenous culture tourism can encourage employment, revive and empower culture and tradition on the border of extinction, alleviate poverty, empower the local community and allow them to nurture a sense of pride, when managed responsibly and sustainably. The interconnection between culture and tourism is evident, with cultural sights, attractions, and events acting as motivators for travel, and travel, in turn, influencing and generating culture (Badal, 2021). This leads to the objective to assess the impact of heritage tourism on people's livelihood, focusing on economic, social and cultural aspect. Heritage tourism encompasses both tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage. Tangible aspects include monuments, historic buildings, farms, castles, churches, museums, and prehistoric ruins. Intangible elements encompass music, dance, religion, language, food ways, and festivals. Heritage is not confined to the past; it includes the modern-day

utilization of historical elements. Cultural heritage and tourism share a symbiotic relationship, with heritage providing a foundation for tourism growth, and tourism generating funds for heritage conservation (Timonthy & Boyde, 2003; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Timonthy & Boyd, 2006; Timonthy & Nyaupane, 2009; Pradhananga, 2020). Molstad et al. (1999) also affirm this mutual dependence, highlighting the role of tourism funds in heritage conservation.

Broadly speaking, culture-based tourism is when people travel to learn about the lifestyle, history, art, architecture, and religion of different places and the people who live there (Ahebwa et al., 2016). According to Pandey & Kunwar, tourists visit heritage sites for various reasons, including learning new things, engaging in recreational activities, satisfying curiosity, feeling nostalgic, experiencing spiritual growth, relaxing, escaping from home, spending time with loved ones, or even discovering more about themselves.

Modern theory explains tourism as a process of temporary movement of people, and basically from, developed to developing countries. Here, modern theory is explained as a crucial process because it introduces change into the system drastically. The capacity to explore and comprehend different cultures without sacrificing modern values and customs will boost the number of tourists from developed nations. This theory actually deals with the economic

growth and development of the society with required social reforms suggesting that this development framework offers a foundation for comprehending the evolution of tourism and how it functions as a development tool (Rostow, 1960).

### **Changunarayan temple and its basic features**

Changunarayan temple is UNESCO enlisted world heritage site which has religious as well as aesthetic virtues of its own (Shrestha, 2015). It is visited for religious purposes by both Hindus and Buddhist for worshipping Lord Vishnu as well as for historical stone sculptures such as in the 8th century, there were statues made of Lord Vishnu called Vishwarup and Vishnu Vikranta, another statue from the 9th century depicts Narasimha Avatar, which shows Lord Vishnu as half-lion and half-human. (Nepal Tourism Board, 2011). Another attraction location of the heritage is the Changu museum and Ethnographic Museum, which treasure collection of ancient coins, tools, arts, and architecture etc. preserving antique, historical, artistic, religious, archaeological, cultural, and other unique items. The main entrance of Changunarayan's Toran has the oldest rice grain from Satya Yuga or from 4,800 divine years ago, which is believed to be the holiest and the first ever rice that grew on the earth (Shrestha, 2015). There are several major occasions commonly called, "*jatra*" attracting the tourists to the temple. Changu Narayan

Jatra falls on either the end of December or the start of January in *Poush Shukla Purnima* as per Lunar calendar (Babu, 2021). During the jatra, every year people smash the earthen pots (Ghyampo) that eventually led to naming the event as '*Ghyampo Phodne Jatra*', which symbolizes the creation of a terrible sign for the gods. The local Newari people held the belief that seeing a smashed clay pot while traveling is a bad omen and thus the smashed pots would cease the journey of the god and goddess of the temple from leaving the city. Mahashanan is an equally notable event in Changu Narayan, which celebration lasts for six days, beginning with *Marga Sukla Ekadashi*. People from the mahaguthi worship at the temple, offer one tola of gold, raw pulses, and paddy to Changu Narayan. The priests and guthiyars sacrifice five animals; he-buffalo, he-goat, sheep, duck, and hen, to Chhinna Masta goddess and later they enjoy the feast at *Kuchhe Bhairab temple* (Babu, 2021). Along with such events, the area is famous for its artefacts and sculptures. It has numerous gift shops and handicraft stalls near its periphery where local arts like *pauwa*, *thanka*, *khwopa* and sculptures can be bought as souvenirs.

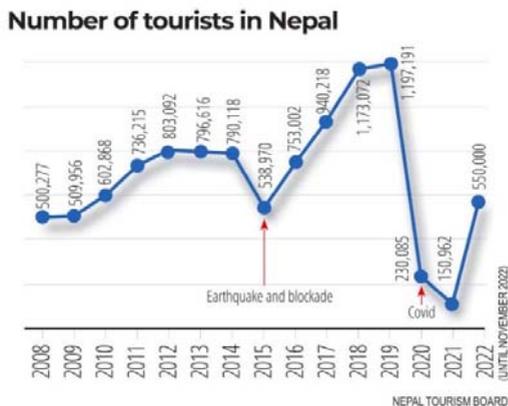
The study investigated the influence of heritage and tourism on the social and cultural dimensions of people's livelihood in Changunarayan. The primary reasons cited for tourism at the Changunarayan site were the observation of cultural heritage, festivals, and traditions. Tourists predominantly visited during

events such as *jatra*, *puja*, or festivals. The highest influx of tourists occurred from the months of September to January, coinciding with significant cultural events. In contrast, the minimum tourist flow was reported during the end of June and the start of August, corresponding to the monsoon season.

Local people are granted access to the temple on the ninth day of *Dashain*, typically falling in the months of October or November (Jha, 2018). Consequently, the peak season for tourist flow aligns with the months of Ashwin to Magh, while the monsoon period in the end of June and start of August sees a decline in tourist numbers.

**Figure 1**

*Number of tourists in Nepal, 2008-2022*



Source: Nepal Tourism Board

**Note: Figure of 2022 refers until the November**

Nepal tried to attract tourists with its Visit Nepal 2020 campaign, but unfortunately, COVID-19 affected the plans. Even now, the reminder of the unsuccessful campaign is on Nepal Airlines jets. Tourism is slowly recovering after a two-year decline. Even if more tourists come, Nepal might not benefit as much as it could because it is not charging enough. On average, tourists in Nepal spend only US \$48 a day. In comparison, Bhutan makes tourists pay US \$200-\$250 per day with its 'high cost, low impact' approach. Despite having unique attractions like mountains, wildlife, and heritage sites, Nepal's tourism industry contributes to less than 2 per cent to the national economy. In 2019, before COVID-19, the income from tourism was Rs 60.8 billion, making up only 4.6 per cent of the country's total foreign exchange earnings. Back in 1981, tourism was a big part of Nepal's income, making up 36.8 per cent, but it has declined since then. Finding ways to make tourism more profitable and sustainable could be essential for Nepal's economic growth, (Nepal Times, 2023)

### **Type of engagement of respondents in tourism industry**

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to type of engagement of respondents in tourism industry in the study site.

**Table 1***Engagement of respondents in tourism industry*

<b>Engagement in tourism industry</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Full time	24	60
Seasonal or Part-time	16	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

The majority of the respondents (60 per cent) were engaged in full-time. And 40 per cent were engaged on seasonal or part-time basis

#### **Impact of heritage on economic and physical dimensions:**

Tourism has significant impact on economic and physical aspects of the community. It directly or indirectly helps in uplifting the living standard of people through creation of employment opportunities and development of infrastructure. Apart from this, negative impacts such as inflation of price of commodity or deprecation of heritage are also possible.

#### **Average earning from the tourism industry:**

The average earning from the tourism industry was reported as Rs. 97756 per day during on-season whereas during off-season it was Rs. 2224 per day

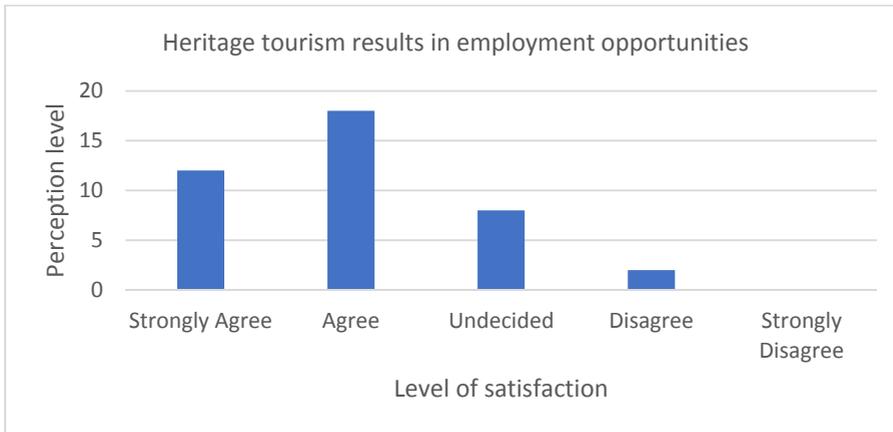
#### **Employment opportunities:**

Tourism sector is of immense importance which generates employment opportunity to all kinds of human resource either be it unskilled, semi-skilled

or skilled. Figure 2 shows the perception of respondents about employment generation by heritage and tourism.

## Figure2

### *Heritage and tourism results in increased employment opportunity*



*Source:* Field Visit, 2023

Among 40 respondents, majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “heritage and tourism results in increased employment opportunity”.

### **Development of Infrastructure:**

In order to facilitate the tourist visiting the area, local bodies are concerned about developing the infrastructures. The respondents were asked about this matter and their perception is presented in following Table 2.

**Table 2***Heritage tourism has resulted in the development of Infrastructure*

<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	36	90
No	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

A huge majority (90 percent) of the respondents agreed that heritage and tourism is responsible

#### **Impact of heritage on economic and physical dimensions:**

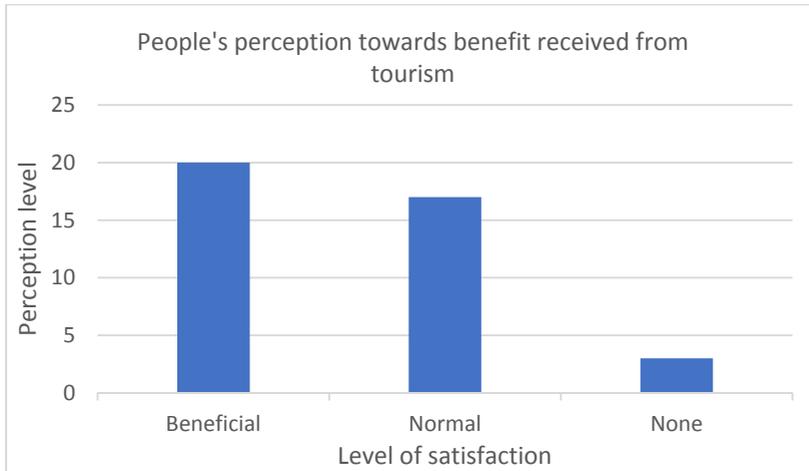
Tourism has significant impact on economic and physical aspects of the community. It directly or indirectly helps in uplifting the living standard of people through creation of employment opportunities and development of infrastructure. Apart from this, negative impacts such as inflation of price of commodity or deprecation of heritage are also possible.

#### **People's perception towards degree of benefit received from heritage and tourism:**

Not all members of society are directly benefitted from heritage and tourism. The respondents were asked about their perception on this matter which is shown in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

#### *People's perception towards benefits received from tourism*



*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

Out of 40 respondents, 50 percent respondent perceived heritage and tourism to be beneficial, 42.5 percent perceived the benefits received from tourism to be normal and the remaining 7.5 per cent perceived no any benefits of tourism.

#### **Increase of living standard of the people:**

The respondents were asked about the change in their living standards with the promotion of tourism in the study area. Their response is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

#### *Tourism has resulted in increased living standard of the people*

Increased living standard	Number	Percent
Yes	32	80
No	8	20

<b>Total</b>	40	100
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*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

Majority (80 percent) of the respondents agreed that heritage and tourism have resulted in the increase of living standard of the people.

#### **Inflation of the price of food, daily items or property:**

With the development of the tourism sector, the flow of tourists is bound to bring changes in the purchasing capacity. Table 4 shows the perception of the respondents towards inflation of price of food, daily items or property.

**Table 4**

*Inflation of price of food, daily items or property:*

<b>Inflation of price, food, daily items and property</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	19	47.5
No	21	52.5
<b>Total</b>	40	100.0

*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

Out of 40 respondents, nearly equal percentage of respondents reported for and against observation of price inflation due to heritage tourism.

Impact of heritage on social and cultural dimension

Identify oneself with heritage

Almost all of the respondents preferred themselves to be associated with cultural heritage. Cultural heritage provided the local people with a sense of identity and pride, consequently strengthening the sense of unity and harmony.

### **Increase of living standard of the people**

The respondents were asked about the change in their living standard with promotion of tourism in the study area. Their response is presented

**Table 5**

*Tourism has resulted in increased living standard of the people*

<b>Increased living standard</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	33	82.5
No	7	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field Visit, 2023*

Majority (82.5 per cent) of the respondents agreed that heritage and tourism have resulted in the increase of living standard of the people.

### **Positive Impacts of Heritage Tourism**

Following positive impacts of heritage tourism were reported from the survey:

- Revitalization of culture and art
- Development of social identity and unity
- Preservation of local culture

**Problems in heritage site and impact on tourism:**

Air, water and sound pollution have increased, and distortion has increased.

Distortion has spread in imported things more than in their originality.

Inadequate investment, lack of accommodation and lack of market areas, poor coordination among different agencies, political instability and lack of information center were identified as major problems associated with heritage tourism at Changunarayan site based on the review of relevant literature and preliminary field visits.

It is true that along with the positive changes, certain negative effects of the tourism sector can be observed in the heritage site.

**Increase of living standard of the people:**

The respondents were asked about the change in their living standards with promotion of tourism in the study area. The majority of the respondents agreed that heritage and tourism have resulted in the increase of living standard of the people.

**Analysis of the findings**

The impact of heritage tourism on the Changunarayan municipality, shedding light on key aspects related to tourism flow, employment engagement, economic dimensions, and community perceptions.

First, the identification of the peak tourist season from Ashwin to Magh indicates a seasonal pattern, aligning with significant cultural events and festivities. This observation provides a basis for understanding the temporal dynamics of tourism in the region. The substantial engagement of respondents in the tourism industry, with 60 per cent involved, underscores the sector's importance in the local economy. Notably, 40 per cent of respondents are engaged full-time, highlighting the diversity of employment structures within the tourism sector, which includes both permanent and seasonal/part-time engagements.

Second, the reported average earnings from the tourism industry showcase a significant disparity between the on-season and the off-season, with Rs. 97756 per day during on-season and Rs. 2224 per day during off-season. This economic dimension reflects the seasonal fluctuations in income, emphasizing the dependence of local livelihoods on tourism-related active ties.

The field survey indicates a consensus among respondents regarding the positive impact of heritage tourism on employment opportunities, as a majority strongly agreed or agreed with this proposition. This aligns with the broader understanding that tourism contributes to job creation in the community.

Third, the overwhelming agreement (90 per cent) among respondents attributing responsibility for infrastructure development to heritage and

tourism reinforces the perceived role of tourism in fostering local development, not only economically but also in terms of community infrastructure.

The diverse perceptions regarding the benefits of heritage tourism, with 50 per cent perceiving it as beneficial, 42.5 per cent considering benefits as normal, and the remaining respondents perceiving no benefits, reflect the varied experiences and expectations within the community. This diversity suggests the need for nuanced approaches to address the different perspectives on tourism benefits. The alignment between the perception of heritage tourism's benefits and the reported increase in living standards, as acknowledged by the majority (80 per cent) of respondents, underscores the potential socio-economic improvements associated with tourism activities.

Last, the study shows that almost all of the respondents preferred themselves to be associated with cultural heritage and majority of the respondents i.e., 82.5 percent agreed that heritage and tourism have resulted in the increase of living standard of the people.

### **Conclusion**

Tourism is really important for Nepal. It helps the country in many ways, like giving people jobs and making money. It is identified that Changuarayan, is famous for its old buildings, different cultures, and fun festivals such as

*Dashain, jatras* and major pujas. According many of the respondents, lots of tourists visit during special months (September to January), and this helps the local businesses. It is also found that the tourists buy local handicrafts and gift items, stay in hotels, lodges, and homestays and this in turn, and has positively impacted the living standards of the local population. Various organizations and *guthi sansthas* actively participate in promoting local rituals and traditions, with the awareness generated by tourist flows contributing to the preservation of indigenous culture and languages. The major findings of the research is that the very cultural tourism in changunarayan has helped to promote local cultural product and the branding of local culture and identity. Similarly, it has made a great deal of positive impact on increasing self-employment opportunities and thereby sustaining better economy. It also provided a sense of identity and pride, consequently strengthening the sense of unity and harmony to the local people.

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