



## Visit Nepal Year 2020: Some Imperatives



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### Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing socio-economic sectors of our times. It is also one of the linchpins of Nepalese economy. The purpose of this paper is to overview the tourism development trend in general, and Visit Nepal 2020 in particular, and discuss some ideas which are helpful in addressing current needs of tourism development in Nepal, and also serving as an asset base for future interventions. In this paper, we first analyse the tourism development trend, both global and national, to present the tourism scenario we have thus far created, and, setting aside the preparations done so far for undertaking soon-to-be-launched Visit Nepal year, discuss a few management thoughts which have strategic importance in making the tourism year more

effective. This call-to-action paper offers a range of last-minute pointers for tourism policymakers and practitioners, in the context of effecting Visit Nepal 2020, that are more likely to impact and, to some extent, guide the future directions of the tourism industry in Nepal.

**Keywords:** *Tourism; Visit Nepal 2020; tourism competitiveness; tourist profile; Nepal*

## Background

We begin this paper with an aphorism: *Nepal is well known for its rich cultural heritage and diversity.* However, we partly believe in this. It may be true that Nepal is rich in its cultural heritage and remarkable diversity of landscape, and it holds much tourism potential. However, we contend with disbelief that it is a well-known fact. Only a small segment of world tourists knows this, and even smaller segment is allured to this fact. This leaves room for us to promote, reach out and disseminate such information even more widely and also to extend our scope of tourism activities, including opening some banned spaces for expedition, if we really think of taking advantage of the tourism potential that our country offers.

The purpose of this paper is to overview the tourism development situation in general, and Visit Nepal 2020 in particular, and discuss some ideas which are helpful in addressing current needs of tourism development in Nepal, and which may also serve as an asset base for future interventions. In this paper, we first analyse the tourism development scenario, both global and national, re-counting where we stand today, and discuss a few management perspectives which have strategic importance in making the tourism year more effective.

## Scenario Analysis

Globally, tourism has become a thriving global industry and a major sector in many economies which has consistently been spreading out and undergoing diversification and thus became one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors (United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2019a). Indeed, tourism bears the potential to become the leading economic sector given its directly or indirectly related activities. Tourism is now viewed as “a means of attracting foreign exchange, providing employment, promoting regional development, and stimulating economic growth” (Lockyer, 2007, p. 34). As it is adequately evident, this sector can “stimulate economic growth, create decent jobs and business opportunities, helping millions of people to escape poverty and improve their livelihoods” (Pololikashvili, 2018, p. 9). Moreover, given its far reaching effects, it has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the goals set as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, it has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. Therefore, harnessing tourism's

benefits will be critical to achieving the sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda (UNWTO, n.d.) as well.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization declares that worldwide international tourist arrivals increased 6% in 2018, clearly above the 3.7% growth

registered in the global economy, and also reaching 1.4 billion two years ahead of UNWTO's long term forecast issued in 2010. Likewise, as Figure 1 illustrates, Europe accounts for half of the world's international arrivals, followed by Asia and the Pacific with 1 in 4 arrivals in the year 2018 (UNWTO, 2019b).

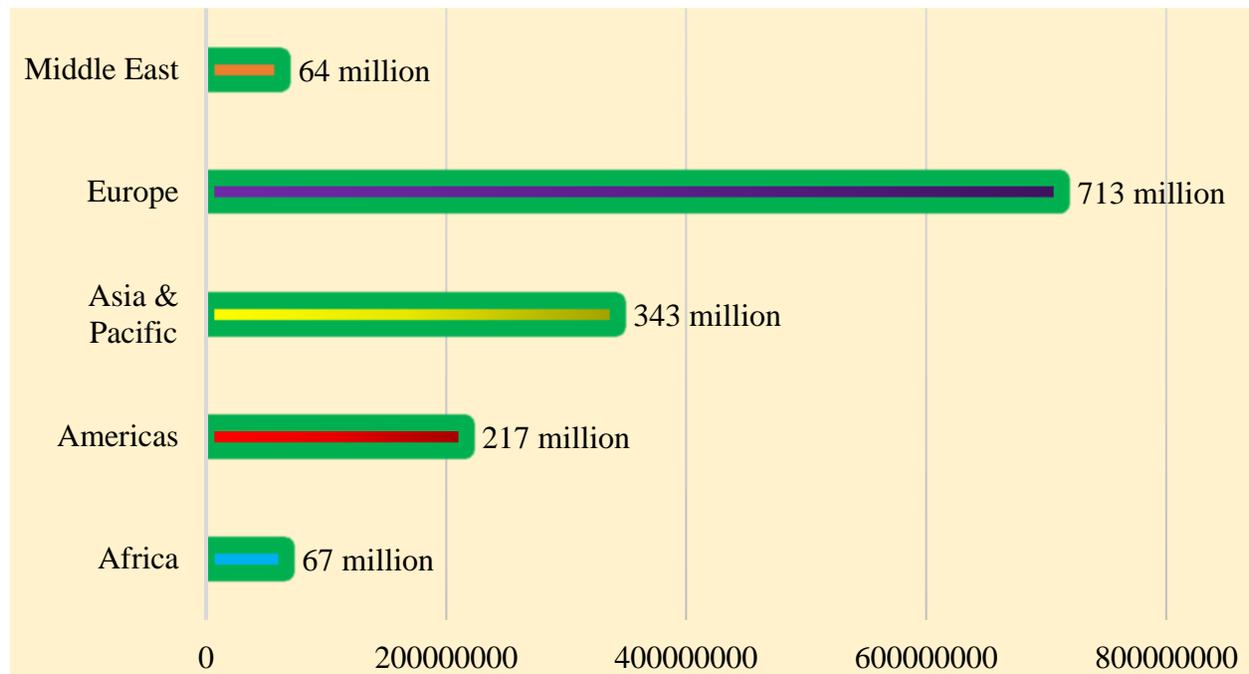


Figure 1. International tourist arrivals by regions, 2018 (UNWTO, 2019b).

Furthermore, the UNWTO statistics (UNWTO, 2019b) on the international tourist arrivals by regions in the year 2018 records that Middle East (+10%) and Africa (+7%) led growth, while arrivals to Asia and the Pacific and Europe (both +6%) increased in line with the world average. As the year 2019 progress, growth was led by the Middle East (+8%) followed by Asia and the Pacific (+6%) in the first quarter of 2019 (UNWTO, 2019c). The data further reveals that growth in South Asia was in line with the regional

average, where smaller destinations Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives all recorded double-digit growth while India and Sri Lanka also showed positive results but at more modest levels (UNWTO, 2019c).

As indicated by the world tourism statistics, Nepal's tourism industry is also booming lately in a similar vein. It has occupied a distinctive place in Nepal's economy. Nepal's *Tourism Policy 2065* identifies tourism sector as one of the most important engines for economic and social

development (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation [MoTCA], 2009a). In fact, tourism has become a fundamental pillar for the economic growth of all countries. Therefore, developing the tourism industry becomes a key economic development strategy of the country (Visit Nepal 2020 Secretariat, 2019b). Revenue from tourism sector is observed from foreign currency exchange made by tourists and tourism industries as proxy of income, excluding domestic contribution (Ministry of Culture, Tourism

and Civil Aviation [MoCTCA], 2019). Citing Nepal Rastra Bank report, MoCTCA (2019) shows that total foreign currency exchange for 2018 stood at NPR 69,750,584 thousand (Around 617,263 thousand USD). This was almost 17% higher than previous year. A trend analysis shows that Nepal's Tourism Revenue reached USD 643 mn in Dec 2018, compared to USD 551 mn in the previous year (CEIC, 2019a). Figure 2 illustrates the overall trend of revenue collection from the tourism sector in Nepal.



Figure 2. Nepal tourism revenue from 2010 to 2018 (CEIC, 2019a).

In recent years, the country's tourism industry has witnessed positive signals along with an uptick in the inflow of foreign tourists (Mahatara, 2019). The Economic Survey 2018/19 reports that the progress of tourism sector has been satisfactory with gradual extension of domestic tourism (Ministry of Finance, 2019). According to the MoCTCA (2019), the number of tourist arrivals in 2018, excluding overland travellers, was 1173072, which was 25 per cent more than in 2017. A bitter fact, however, is that despite the

increment in the number of tourist arrival, the average length of stay decreased in the year 2018. In 2017 average length of stay was 12.6 days with USD 54 per day per tourist expenditure, whereas, in 2018, the average length of stay of tourist has been 12.4 days and per day per tourist expenditure has been USD 44, the lowest in six years. Figure 3 paints a dismal picture which illustrates a declining trend of the average length of stay of foreign tourists over five years in Nepal.

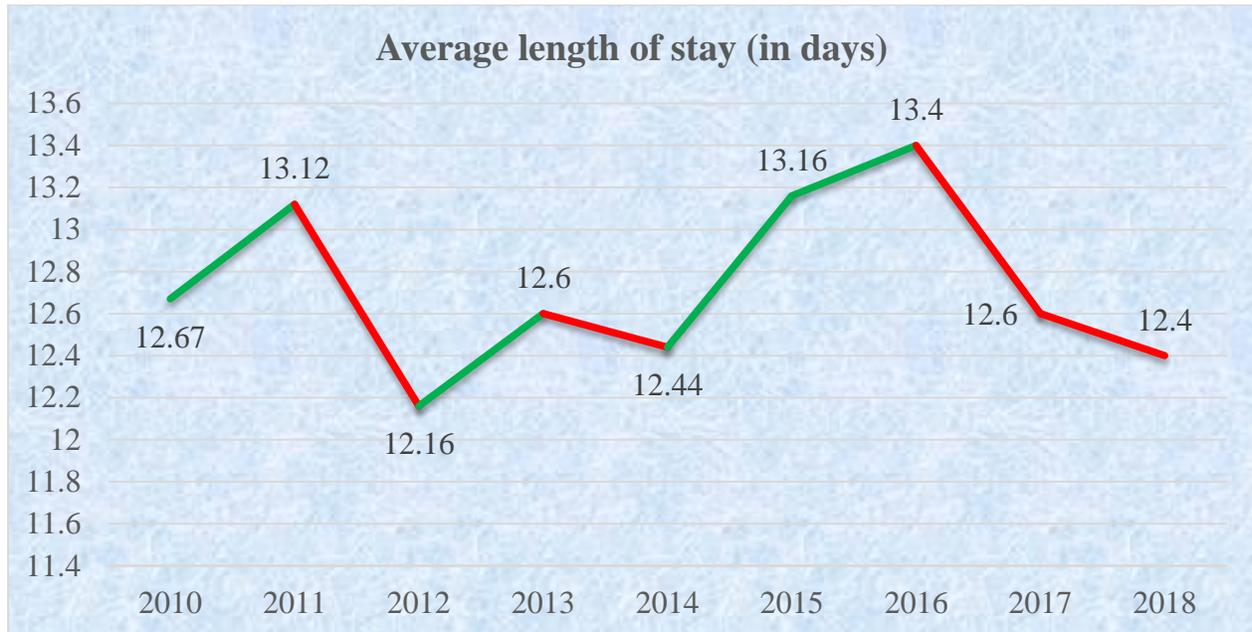


Figure 3. Average length of stay of foreign tourists over last five years (MoCTCA, 2019).

This signifies that the number of high-spending tourists in Nepal is declining in recent years (in fact, it dropped by 22.73 per cent in 2018 compared to 2017) against the government's plan to increase the inflow of such travellers. As such, the governments' three year development plan (2016-2018) fell flat in its target to increase the average length of stay of foreigners to 15 days and their daily expenditure to USD 60 by 2018 (National Planning Commission, 2016). Moving on, Visit Nepal Year 2020 aims to increase the average spending per tourist per day to over

USD 75 (Visit Nepal 2020 Secretariat, 2019b), which, given the experience, seems ambitious.

In the year 2017 and 2018, the top five countries with largest number of tourist's arrival have been India, China, USA, Sri Lanka and the UK. The share of China, Thailand and Sri Lanka in the total tourist arrival has been increasing in recent years. Figure 4 illustrates the tourist inflow between 2017, 2018 and 2019 (till October) from these top five countries.

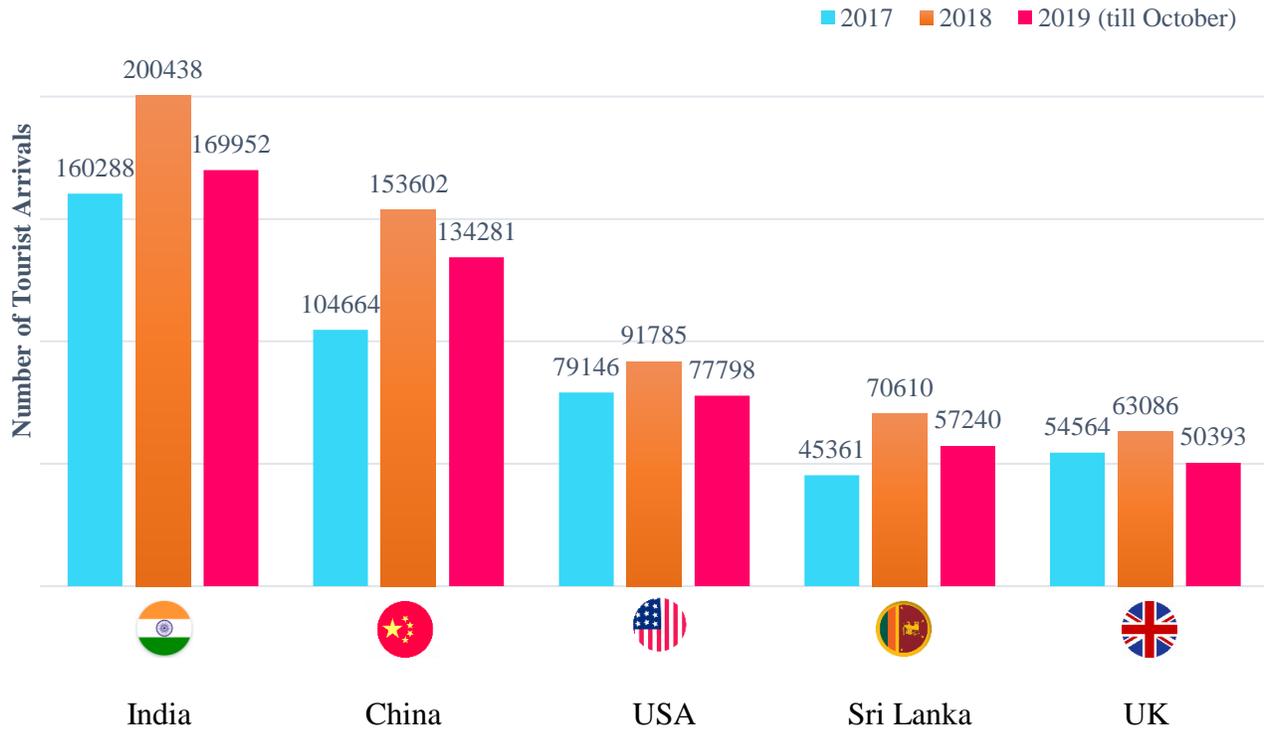


Figure 4. Number of tourist arrivals by top five countries in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Adapted from Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2019).

Tourists from these countries have occupied 48.85% of total tourists. The proportion of tourists from these countries and others are illustrated in Figure 5.

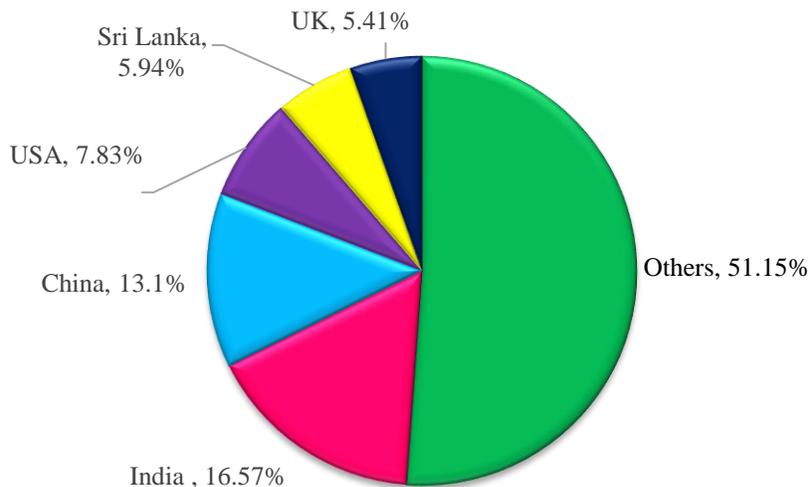


Figure 5. Tourist inflow from different source countries in 2018 (MoCTCA, 2019).

The 2018 data further shows that share of foreign direct investment (FDI) in tourism was 11.47% at Rs 23,855.50 million (MoCTCA, 2019). Similarly, CEIC Data reveals that 975557 tourists have already visited Nepal in the year 2019 (January to October) (CEIC, 2019b) and is likely to tally with 2018 record.



Figure 6. Tourist arrivals in Nepal 2019 (till October) (Adapted from CEIC, 2019b).

In this context, in order to further promote the country's tourism industry, the government has initiated a range of "market-friendly" policies, marketing campaigns, and investment programmes. An immediate focus area of the Government is the 'Visit Nepal 2020' campaign that aims to bring in two million tourists by 2020, as envisioned by the Tourism Vision 2020 (MoTCA, 2009b). Visit Nepal Year 2020 is announced with the resolve to establish tourism sector as the major foundation for the country's economic prosperity.



Figure 7. Logo of Visit Nepal 2020 (Visit Nepal 2020 Secretariat, 2019a).

Guided by Nepal Tourism Vision 2020 (MoTCA, 2009b), Nepal has already held Nepal Tourism Year 2011 and now Visit Nepal 2020 is at our doorsteps. However, this campaign is not devoid of dark sides. The tourism industry under current conditions is confronted with a number of key challenges. In one hand, given the current scenario, the target of attracting 2 million tourists by 2020 is almost 100% increase compared to 2018 or

also 2019. On the other hand, despite our ambition and initiatives geared towards promoting tourism, a recent global index, on the eve of Visit Nepal 2020, ranks Nepal poor in terms of its tourism competitiveness. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 puts Nepal in the 102nd position among 140 countries included in the index (World Economic Forum, 2019a).

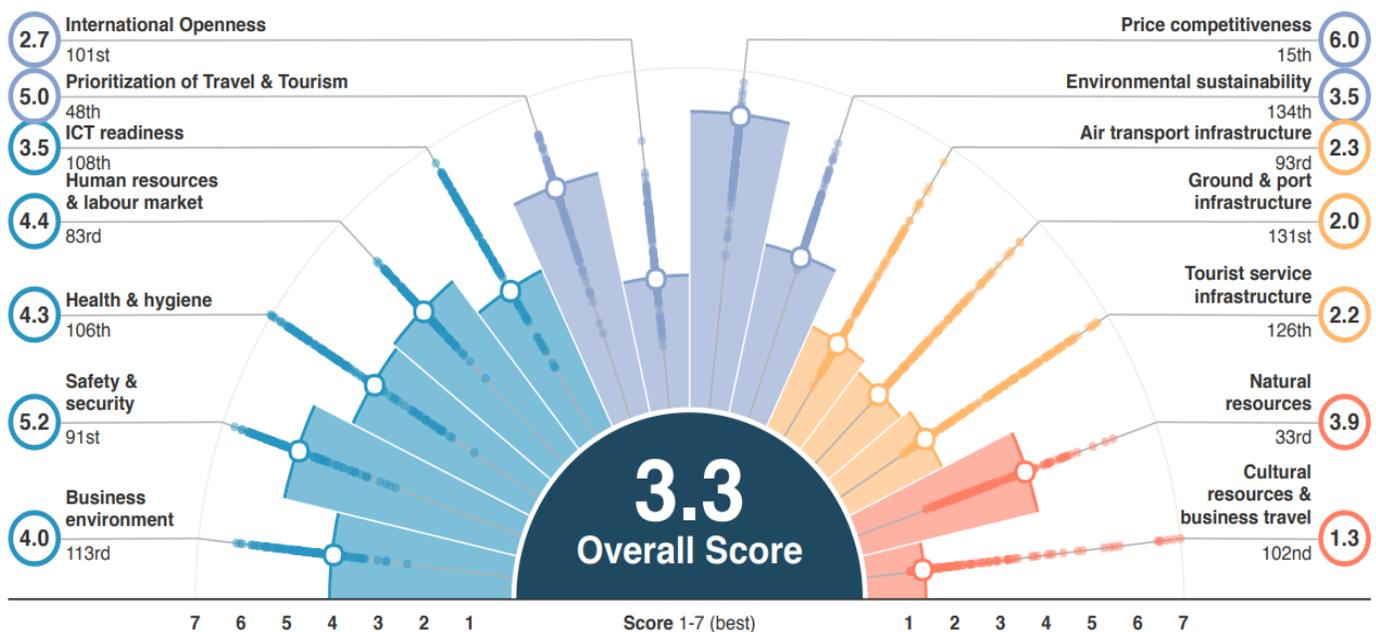


Figure 8. Nepal performance overview (World Economic Forum, 2019b, p. 1)

This adds to our challenge and demands strenuous efforts and investment from all sectors to intensify initiatives to boost the sector. The index however also provides us with a framework to help us set our strategic priorities to develop travel and tourism sector. It informs policies and investment decisions related to travel and tourism business and industry development (World Economic Forum, 2019a). It further helps us identify specific indicators from a vast range

that need to be improved and thus we can take appropriate action likewise. Moreover, such guidelines will generate new tourism streams, thereby further strengthening the industry's global competitiveness into the future (Anwar & Hamilton, 2005). Therefore, if we adopt the framework, it helps us to identify our strengths and areas for development to enhance our tourism industry competitiveness.



Figure 9. The travel and tourism competitiveness index 2019 framework (World Economic Forum, 2019a, p. ix).

Learning from this index framework and accepting the myriad challenges our tourism sector is confronting, we can still intensify initiatives to uplift the sector including by highlighting the tourism attractiveness of main destinations, features, and offers, and by rekindling ‘*Atithi devo bhawa*’. Since Visit Nepal 2020 is positioned as “a Lifetime Experience in a bid to position Nepal as one of the world’s most unique experiential and lifetime value destination” (Visit Nepal 2020 Secretariat, 2019b, p. 2), Nepal, this time, has to not only bring in more tourists, but also offer better tourist experiences.

### What We Can Do

Since there’s little learning, for lack of clear evidence on varied aspects, from earlier

tourism years, it is important that this year we start with some strategic moves which will further inform our future initiatives and programmes. In fact, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA), Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the private sector have already done a lot of preparations. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has launched National Tourism Strategic Plan of Nepal 2016-2025, which envisages a fivefold increase in tourist traffic to 2.52 million annually by the year 2025. This plan has set 11 specific plans of action for the overall development of tourism: branding target; marketing target; focused programs and development target; tourism economy; improvement of business investment target; human resource development; infrastructure development

target; improvement of tourism quality; reforms in institution and management; conservation of cultural heritage; and zero carbon target (MoCTCA, 2016). Likewise, the Department of Tourism had requested suggestion on the contemporary issue relating to Tourism in late June this year so as to act on developing the sector. By the same token, each province and local level has come up with their tourism development strategies and priorities. However, given the somehow bleak picture portrayed in the recent years, except for exciting arrivals, even tourism sector officials are uncertain if we are ready for the Tourism Year. Despite anyone's reservation or unpreparedness, Visit Nepal 2020 is imminently setting foot. In this context, leaving aside all other preparations, which have recently been completed or are underway, there are a few things which we can still do.

### **Offer Free Airport Shuttle**

As learned from other countries' experiences, complimentary airport shuttle around the city and major tourist accommodation destinations within the city is important not to attract more tourists but to give them a welcome feel. Therefore, free airport shuttle can be run both by the airport management authority and transport ministry besides specific hotels providing this service. This is the right time to begin, if not late, to offer this service, not just during 2020, but beyond. The concerned government agencies or tourism associations may also partner with local transportation services. Airlines can also offer that service as part of a ticket bundle. Similar complimentary airport

shuttle service needs to be offered in all domestic airports as well.

### **24-Hour Tourist Assistance Hotline**

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) should activate a 24-hour dedicated tourist assistance hotline, with operators speaking at least both English and Nepali, in association with Tourist Police to provide information or assistance. This service may include travel and event information for tourists. The hotline can also be used for assistance when lost, if wishing to complain about tourism services, or to be connected with travel agents. Further, assistance centres can be established in major tourist destinations across the country. Moreover, such information needs to be vividly communicated or disseminated at the airport itself.

### **Go More Digital**

Globally, there is a high promise of digital initiatives in the travel, tourism, and hospitality sector (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, & Frost & Sullivan, 2018). Therefore, to attract more guests and boost the tourist flow, it is important to go more digital – right from developing promotional materials and tourism maps to marketing (including ticketing and booking), tracking (destination management and real-time tourist tracking) and experience survey.

For any project to be successful, we should keep the local community at the center and thereby also promote local knowledges and understandings (Dhakal, 2014, 2016; Parajuli, 2014). Therefore, local governments

and communities led initiatives would contribute significantly to this national imagination. For instance, every local government should develop some digital materials, e.g. apps, to profiling the popular to potential tourism destinations in their territory, which can be integrated into the provincial and federal national tourism framework. A tourist visiting a rural municipality in Mugu should be able to seek information on nearby tourist spots, weather conditions, and activities available. Moreover, it is critical for the local governments to monitor if the available information is reliable. Furthermore, we can share and encourage our guests to share blissful travel experiences and testimonials on forums and social media so that upcoming tourists' choices of destinations can be shaped and their stay prolonged likewise.

A call-to-action for every local level is to install some digital signage, maps, and self-service touchscreen booths or interactive kiosks to provide tourism information. Travel and tourism kiosks can allow visitors to navigate their destination (find their ways) and encourage them to explore their surrounding area with interactive information (Meridian, 2019). They may also provide visitors with information on local restaurants, hotels, shopping, and attractions (Meridian, 2019). In addition, offering the choice of language (at least covering the top five arrival countries) would add to the benefit of the visitors.



*Figure 10.* A specimen touchscreen interactive kiosk. (Image source: [https://teksmart.tv/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/multimedia\\_kiosk-white-3.jpg](https://teksmart.tv/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/multimedia_kiosk-white-3.jpg))

Moreover, Federal and Provincial authorities should coordinate to connect some important monuments and heritage sites with sensor/ Internet of Things (IoT) technology, QR codes, and radio frequency identification (RFID) tags to provide detailed information.

### **Maintain Tourist Portfolio**

First, we need to develop an integral framework for the database of tourist mobility. Information on tourism's multiple facets is pivotal in advancing knowledge of the sector. Such information can be used in monitoring progress, promoting results-focused management, and highlighting strategic issues for policy decisions (UNWTO, 2019a). Likewise, "Tourist profile and preferences are critical information for a successful and sustainable tourism marketing, destination management,

and customer relations management which lead to tourist satisfaction, motivation, and consumer retention” (Baser, 2018, p. 223). Maintaining tourist profile is not only important for immediate purpose of fixing immediate problems, but a pool of technical and professional experts may be invited for later research and development purpose.

Tourist profile will help us analyse and determine the characteristics of different sector tourists, including sports, wellness and medical, religion, adventure, recreation, walking, cycle, vacation, educational, etc.). The profile database will be the evidence for future policymaking including for ‘accessible tourism’ (UNWTO, 2016) – targeted at the disabled people and elderly age groups. Until now, we do not have a systematic database that sorts out the characteristics, interests and preferences (including the use of mobile applications to obtain information about their visit) of different types of tourists and thus we largely fall short in addressing their needs. If only we could develop a database of tourist profiles that could provide some evidence to the popularity of different kinds of tourism (including for different age groups, and source countries) and thus our future actions will be geared towards selling out hotspots and improving on our notspots. More importantly, the information on the trends of tourist flow in a particular sector may contribute to the competitiveness of a country’s tourism for tourist satisfaction as well as destination marketing and management by contributing to the tourism policy, planning, strategies and practices (Baser, 2018).

On the basis of the results obtained through the analysis of the database, tourism marketers can put more efforts in arousing people's awareness of their motives for a particular tourism sector. Moreover, possible professional and cross-country sectoral exchange and knowledge sharing can be enhanced through communication with the relevant tourist source countries or institutions.

**Manage real-time tourists counting and tracking system.** We have been loosely using the Visitor Tracking System in the airport. But we should do so also in major tourist destinations and hotels. Furthermore, we should also ensure safety with GPS/GPRS based or Mahabir Pun’s ‘eTag’ tracking for visitors, especially, for those traveling/trekking in some precarious places. In some risky zones, it must be mandatory – to locate and rescue those who have got in trouble, whereas in some areas it should be optional.

**Know our guest.** We must know the detailed profile of our guest – qualification, jobs, expertise, interests so that we can offer them proper services, channel them for support to other guests when needed, or use them as experts for our intended/ongoing tasks. We can develop a thematic pool/roster of them and seek their expertise in future.

**Exit interview/survey.** Since welcoming and making the visitors feel welcome is not a one-off event, we need to get their feedback on their experience of spending time in Nepal. For this, we can conduct some exit interview or survey with the visitors. This task can be done by the Tourism Board itself

or it can hire some reliable third party research organization for consultancy.

Some of the popular ways to do carry out exit interview/survey include installing a visitor survey kiosk at the airport (departure lounge), which provide a platform on which visitors can respond to surveys and leave feedback on their experience, prior to making their departure (Meridian, 2019). Similarly, an automatic survey sent to all visitors' email once they scan their passport for departure could be an equally important way. Even though the response rate is merely 5%, the data would be more than enough for us to analyse their experiences and preferences, and thereby to set our priorities for promoting tourism in days to come. An exit interview with selected visitors upon their consent could explore their emotions, feelings and experiences. Also offering a disk drive with major tourist attractions in Nepal and also a link to a Visit Nepal banner web portal which can further navigate to all other tourist destinations in the country – which will self-promote for future tourism.

The Tourism Ministry, Provincial Tourism Ministries, and Nepal Tourism Board as the key players of the tourism sector are called upon to find ways to collaborate and/or implement the tourist tracking and profiling jobs. These all may seem a daunting task; however, IT experts with social science researchers can seek simple answers to what many would consider complex questions.

## **Conclusion**

Globally, tourism has advanced over the past decades into one of the fastest-growing

sectors with close linkages to other sectors. It has emerged as a driving force in the global economy. With our current attention on venturing into Visit Nepal 2020, there is a high level of local, provincial, national, and international enthusiasm for tourism promotion in Nepal. However, for tourism (not just tourism year) to be successful, several key challenges need to be overcome. For this, there should be some resolute efforts of the government and its mechanisms to ensure that tourism activities are carried out responsibly and meet economic, social and environmental objectives. Moreover, government, industry, destination communities and other stakeholders should engage in setting priorities for implementing a long-term and sustainable vision for the tourism sector. Above all, promoting tourism is the responsibility of everyone; however, the public sector must lead this process by involving businesses and sensitize the whole society.

Often, there are darker sides to observing any celebrations or making our commitments. Observing some national or international days like Tourism Day, Children's Day etc. might easily be taken for granted and thus they turned out to be only ritualistic, let Visit Nepal 2020 not become another mere ritual – since we have announced and are launching it, let's accomplish this with far reaching outcomes. Additionally, the year 2020 should not only boast of bringing in the targeted 'number' of visitors, but it should also be an opportunity for Nepal to spotlight its international image of tourism.

## Author Contributions

The research is designed by Rashmi. The statistical data and literature were collected by Rashmi. Discussion and analysis of data were handled by Rebat. Finally, the paper is written by Rebat and Rashmi. Both the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr. Sambidhan Acharya, IT expert from Knowledge Enhancement Network (KEN), Lalitpur, Nepal for his initial inputs in framing this paper.

## Competing Interests

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

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