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## Nature Based Tourism: The Need of Today, Tomorrow and Always

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### **Abstract:**

*Tourism is one of the world's largest industries in the world. The developing countries like Nepal depend on Tourism for the overall progress and economic growth. The economy of Nepal solely depends on tourism. The Mass tourism being hardly sustainable, so these days we are in need of sustainable tourism and nature based tourism. The sustainable tourism can be a milestone for the overall development of the nation as it is directly linked with the economic prosperity and cultural cohesion.*

### **1. Introduction**

Nepal is surrounded by two large countries, India in the South and West, and China to the North and it covers an area of 147,181 sq km. The belief in culture has been of the vital aspects of Nepal's tourism because the Nepalese people since ancient times have been grown with the attitude that guest are the gods due to which the people living in Nepal has high respect and love towards the visitors. The tourism industry in Nepal started in the early 1950s. The government of Nepal declared the "Visit Nepal 1998" with the aim of sustainable tourism in the year 1996 however, later it was affected by Maoist insurgency conflict and violence for a decade starting from 1996-2006. This has affected tourism of Nepal to large extent. The feelings of insecurity have affected the flow of visitors to Nepal in wide scale. But after November 21, 2006, the tourism in Nepal started growing gradually. In the year 2011, The program was launched with the aim to bring numerous tourists to Nepal with the slogan "Together with Tourism" but the goal was not achieved because the arrival of tourist to Nepal in the year was only 22%. The number of tourists were 736215 in the year 2011 followed by 803092 in the year 2012. The rise in flow of tourists was by 9.1% and the tourist visiting the Nepal during the period 2011-2012 were from the countries India, China, Srilanka, USA and UK. According to Nepal Tourism Statistics (2012), the reasons for visiting Nepal mainly includes vacation/ pleasure and the other reasons are Pilgrimage (14%), trekking and Mountaineering (13%) Business (4%) and others which include official, study/research/employment, conferences and even not specified. The number of tourists visiting Nepal has decreased by 0.7% in 2013. A total of 797, 616 tourists visited the Nepal in the following year. In the year 2013, Travel and Tourism's total contribution to the global economy raised to 9.5% of global GDP (US\$7 trillion) and even the outlook for the year 2014 was positive with total travel and tourism GDP growth reached 4.3% (www.wttc.org).

National Parks and Wildlife Reserves are the major tourist destination of visitors in Nepal. Tourism is one of the important businesses that can reflect the economic growth and development of the nation. Sustainable tourism determines that the future of the tourism relies on protecting and preserving the nature and natural resources. It integrates economic and ecological concerns by protecting the natural areas which in future could be the platform in generating revenues that can be used for overall development of the nation. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2013) the direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was 68.8 billion (3.9% of total GDP) in 2013 and has been forecasted to rise by 9.8% in 2014. The direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP is expected to grow by 4.9% pa to NPR 122.2 billion (4.7% of GDP) by 2024. Moreover, in 2013 the travel and tourism has generated 504,000 jobs (3.2% of total employment) and by 2024, it is expected to account for 762,000 jobs, an increase of 3.6%pa over the next ten years (www.wttc.org). The Nepal Tourism Statistics (2013) stated that the mostly preferred places by tourists are the Protected areas (PAs). So, protected areas (PAs) are the part of nature based tourism.

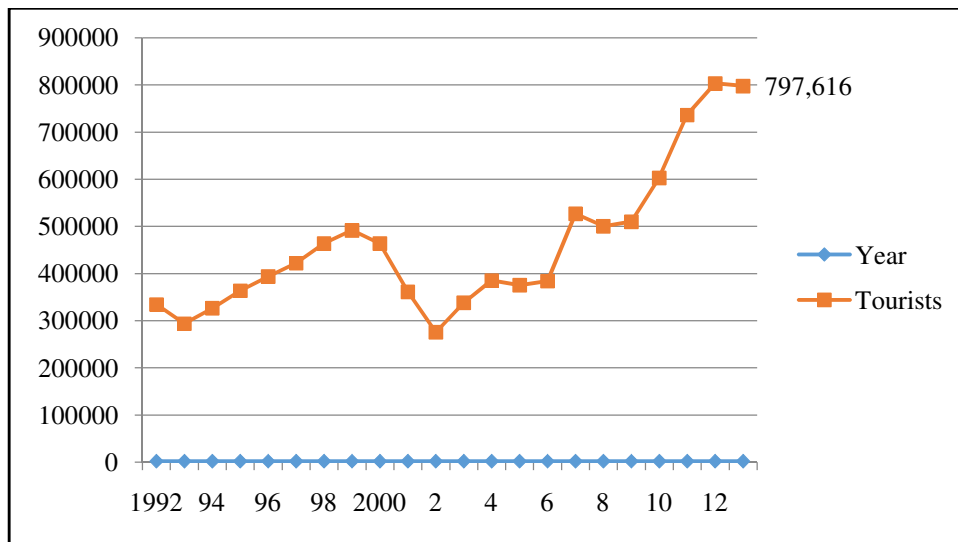


Figure 1: Tourist Statistics in the case of Nepal (1992-2013)

The tourist visit to Nepal is for different purposes however the figure above describe that the flow of tourist has been escalating day by day. Mostly, the purpose of visit to Nepal by visitors has been for recreation and spending the holidays. The places preferred by visitors in Nepal are Kathmandu, Pokhara and then Chitwan.

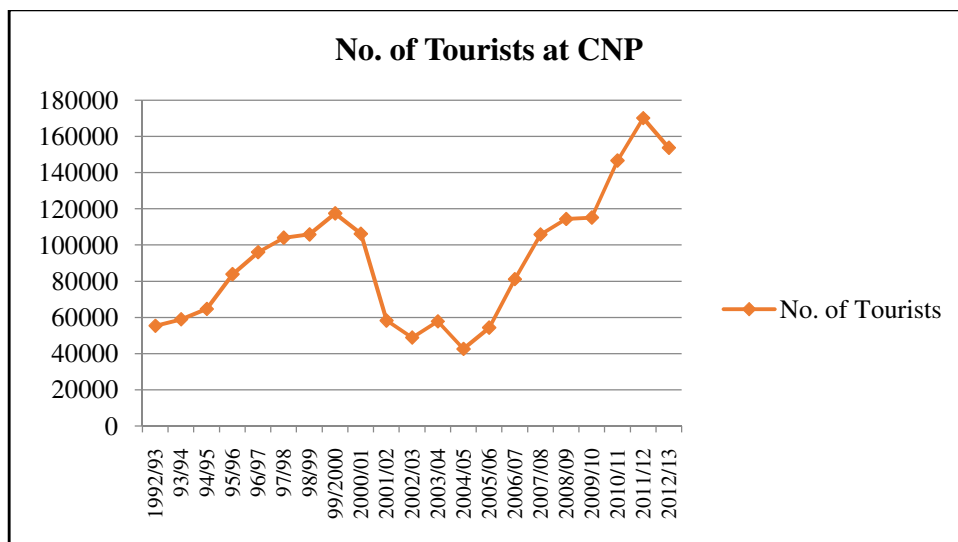


Figure 2: Tourist Statistics in Chitwan National Park (1992/93-2013/14)

The figure above shows that the flow of tourists is increasing gradually as compared to previous years. The number of Visitors visiting Chitwan National Park (CNP) stood at 172,425 in fiscal year 2013-14 and as per the records received recently from the authorities of the Park, a total of 178,220 tourists visited the National Park in the fiscal year 2014-15. Thus the figure shows that the CNP has been the tourist attraction site.

**2. Study Area**

Chitwan National Park (CNP) is the first National Park of Nepal which is established in 1973 and has been recorded in the world heritage site in 1984. It covers an area of 932 sq km. The major attractions of Chitwan are the panoramic view of the nature made beauty, the wildlife the area holds and the cultural diversity. The park has magnificent fauna and flora. The faunal diversity comprises 50 species of mammals, 526 species of birds, 49 species of herpeto-fauna, and 120 species of fishes (WWF Nepal, 2006) and the floral diversity comprises 600 plant species that includes 3 gymnosperms, 13 pteridophytes, 415 dicotyledons, 137 monocots, 16 species of orchids (UNESCO, 2003). CNP is rich in many endangered and vulnerable animal species and this park has the world’s second largest population of one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) along with large population of tigers (*Panthera tigris*). Other animals found in the park are leopards (*Panthera pardus*), gaur bison (*Bos gaurus*), sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*), wild Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), marsh mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*), gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) and the Gangetic dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) (BES, 1998). More than 526 species of birds have been recorded in the Park, many of which have been recorded in the buffer zone community forests (BES, 1998). The CNP also has some of the highest population densities of large

mammals including tigers and rhinos in South Asia and large numbers of mammals are reported from here. CNP has been well-known globally because of its unique and diversified ecosystems, thus has international significances. The ecosystem constitutes of eight types which includes seven forest types, six grassland types, five wetland and three main river system habitats (DNPWC, 2008). Moreover, it's listing as a world heritage site by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1984 has been more advantageous. Chitwan has been explained as a heart of jungle because the tourist's attraction includes Jungle walk, Elephant Safari, Jeep Safari, bird watching, canoeride (Nepal Tourism Board, 2013). The Elephant breeding centre, Gharial breeding centre, Museum of Kasara, Chitwan also falls under the attraction to visitors. Sauraha, the commercial centre, which is also recognized as "Thamel of Chitwan" is famous for local products and handicrafts and the place has been the destination for tourists to stay and enjoy.

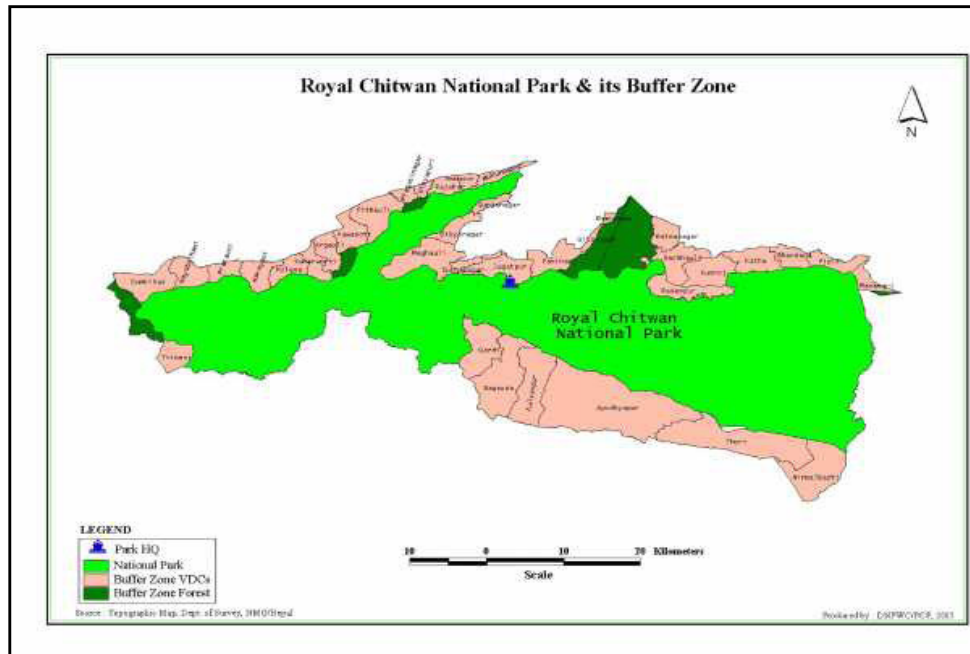


Figure 3: Map of Chitwan National Park(CNP), Nepal (Source: CNPO, Kasara)

Tourism, though is the major industry for raising the economic standard of the Country, the tourism activities have both positive and negative impacts on the natural, culture and socio-economic environment. The impacts also occur at different scales: local, regional and global. In many developing countries, protected areas (PAs) rely a lot on tourism fees. Local people living nearby the Protected areas (PAs) are benefited from the ecotourism because the increase in tourism provides the opportunities to the local people, employment, enhances livelihoods and in some cases empower the local people. Ecotourism changes the attitude towards conservation. The principles of ecotourism are nature based; ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial and main important is it generates the satisfaction to tourist (Newsome-Moore-Dowling, 2012). However, there are some negative aspects as well. The loss of community consistency, modification in local culture, rise in crime and violence, escalating prices in daily needs resources are some of the negative sides of Tourism. Moreover, the other associated consequences include the increase in the litter, erosion, fires, disturbance to wild animals.

The sustainable tourism can provide financial incentives to the Conservation. In the protected areas (PAs) the government administered fees like entrance fees, fees taken for jungle visit, elephant safari etc. can be administered to manage and develop the area. For this, there should be the activities and attraction which can invite as many as tourists to the place and it is very urgent to make tourist positive and satisfied because their experiences in the area can figure out the importance of visit to the place sending a good message throughout the world.

### 3. Objectives

The main objective of the research is to assess the experience of tourist visit at Chitwan National Park. On the basis of the experiences gathered from Tourists, the recommendations and further investigations and analysis could be generated so as to make the area tourist-focused.

### 4. Methodology

The questionnaire survey was done in the year 2015 from September to December, especially in the Core area, where the flow of tourists was high and it was Sauraha, the centre town of Chitwan which is near to Chitwan National Park.

The Sampling method used by the researcher was Purposive type. The number of tourists taken as sample was 85 in numbers which comprises both national and international visitors. The question constitutes both closed type and open type and prior to interview; the purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants along with the ethics in research like maintaining confidentiality.

**5. Results**

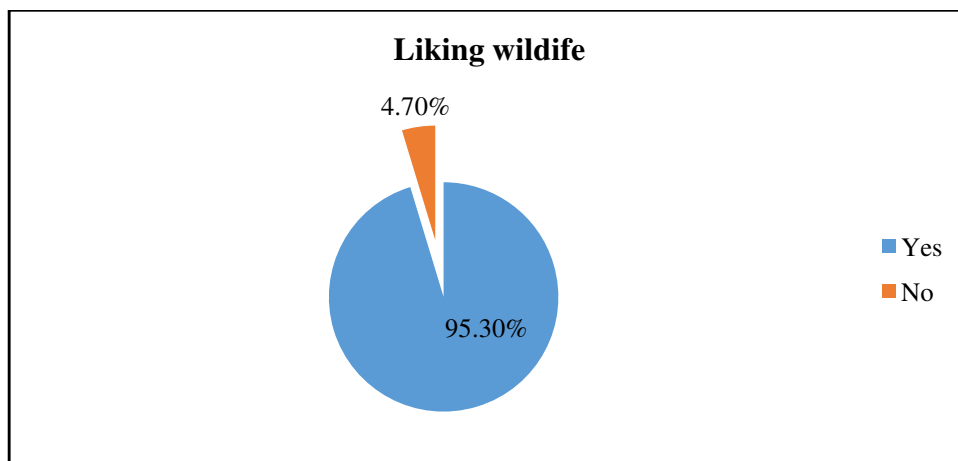


Figure 4: Participants answer for attitude towards wildlife

About 95.30% visitors answered that they like wildlife and one of the reasons they prefer to visit CNP is because the place constitutes species diversity. 24.7% participants explained that they like wildlife because they are magnificent, 3.5% stated that the wildlife have recreational value, 8.2% stated that the wildlife is aesthetic, 29.4% explained that wild animal is important because it balances nature and ecosystem is maintained and remaining participants explained because of survival value they like wildlife.

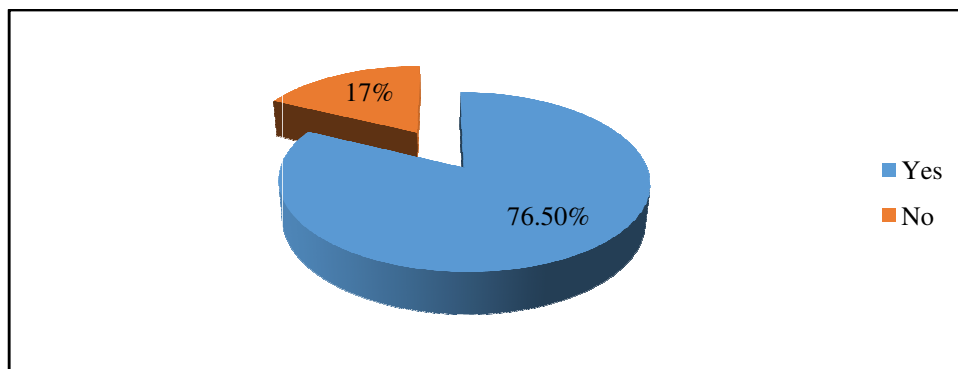


Figure 5: Responses from tourists regarding habitat alteration caused by tourist flow

About 76.50% participants stated that the high flow of tourist can alter the natural habitat of wildlife. It can disturb the wildlife which can affect them and may lead to their dispersal so this might be the reason that wild animals are found visiting the human habitat and creating lot of destruction and disturbances heightening the conflict between wild animals and human. While 17% stated that the habitat alteration is not because of tourist flow but is because of natural calamities and inhabitant's encroachment to the jungle to collect the natural resources.

Reasons associated with experiences	Percentage
Poor facilities	28.2
Insecurity	15.3
Fear towards wildlife	3.5
Attitude of local people	1.2
Others	51.8
Total	100

Table 1: Participants explaining their experiences of visit to CNP

The flow of tourist to CNP was praiseworthy and many of the tourists explained that they were happy to visit the place and the animals like one horned rhino and tiger has been the major source of attraction to them. However, there were some issues that the visitors would like to explain and these issues were affecting the atmosphere of the area. 28.2% participants stated that the area has

poor facilities, 15.3% explained insecurity as an issue, 3.5% stated they have fear towards wildlife and it is because they are not allowed to carry protective devices with them while visiting the Jungle nor the tourists guide were well trained. Even the attitude of local people has been the issue as stated by 1.2% because they tend to increase the price of an object once they get to know they are visitors.

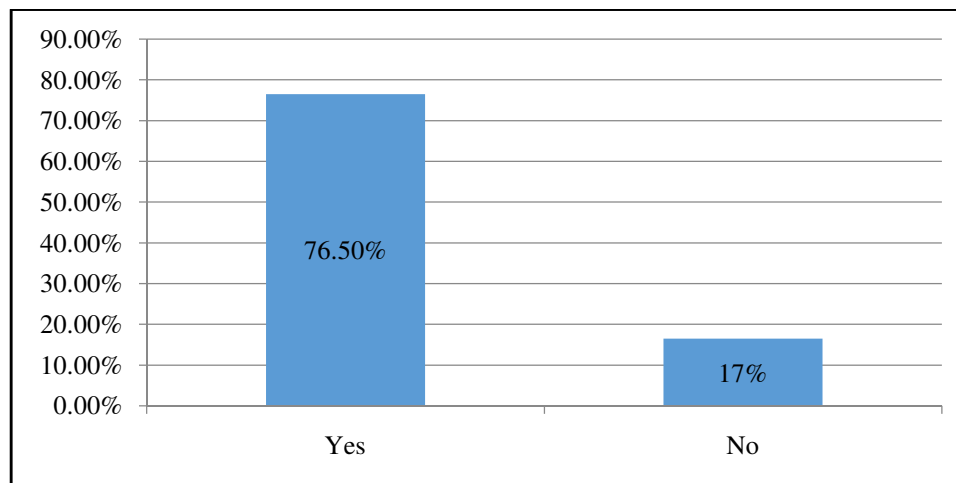


Figure 6: The Positive attitude of Participant towards Park

When the tourist was asked whether they were happy with the management of the Park or not then 76.50% replied that they were satisfied and they have no complain regarding it however, 17% stated that the management is still poor and should be improved.

## 6. Conclusions

The increase in the number of tourist has been a challenge though the tourist visit helps in raising the economic growth of the country. The challenges are because the obstacles arise in making conservation priorities and meeting the demands of the tourist. The expectation of tourist increases because they think they have been spending for their comfort. The report prepared by UNESCO suggest that the Chitwan National park is facing a lot of challenges because of poor understanding regarding the impact and influences of visitor's visit to the wildlife habitat. The results obtained by the researcher also shows that the high influences of tourist can affect the Protected Areas (PAs). The attraction of wildlife influences tourist visit but besides wildlife the past experiences that the visitors has gathered can influence tourism therefore management should be well systematized to raise the tourist growth and meet up to their expectations. Therefore, nature based tourism is the need of today, tomorrow and always.

## 7. Recommendations

1. There is a need of social equity to maintain tourism because it develops understanding and respect to the cultural diversity between nations and people.
2. Tourism is the major driver of economic growth and sustainable tourism can contribute in reducing poverty. Therefore, economic prosperity takes place when the system is well managed.
3. The work should be done so as to maximize the economic and employment benefits of tourism.
4. The fair distribution of the benefits to the local people nearby the PAs should be done because the attitude of the local people influences tourism.
5. Government should make a certain policy so that the gap between the needs of tourists along with the conservation can be filled up.
6. Wildlife and natural resources are the major attraction of tourists so the concern regarding wildlife management should be done properly.

## 8. References

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