

Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism in Nepal

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. It acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. Tourism plays a vital role to uplift the living status of people in specific areas worldwide. Tourism has potential for creating jobs and encourages income-generating activities and it also leads to infrastructure development. In Nepal, tourism has uplifted the socio-economical condition of the locals and given them ample opportunity to better their lives. It has created path towards the elimination of poverty and has significantly contributed to overall development of the nation. It is also one of the major sources of foreign exchange earning of the country. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, tourism has suffered unprecedented setback and its effect can be seen on global economy. It has rendered millions of people unemployed and huge investments have frozen and unable to generate business and move the economy. This study will analyze and study the challenges faced by tourism industry post COVID-19 in Nepal and try to provide answers

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for the recovery of tourism in Nepal. This study follows the qualitative methodology and the data is obtained through primary and secondary sources. As we move into the new era of travelling, tourism industry needs to adopt and focus on safety, personal hygiene and social distancing. Nepal is capable to adapt to the “new normal” and bounce back as it did post 2015 earthquake. But Nepal’s poor infrastructure, lack of implementation of rules and people’s laidback attitude could prove to be a hurdle and deter tourists and usher them to a more organized destination.

Introduction

Tourism has demonstrated its potential for creating jobs and encouraging income generating activities to benefit local communities in destination areas. In many countries it acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. The tourism industry is one of the influential industries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019), the tourism sector accounted for 10.4 percent of global GDP and 319 million jobs to 10 percent of total employment. Domestic tourism accounted for 71.2 percent of all tourism spending in 2018 and had the strongest growth in developing countries (WTTC, 2019). The tourism industry is one of the influential industries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019), the tourism sector accounted for 10.4 percent of global GDP and 319 million jobs to 10 percent of total employment.

Nepal has been a popular tourist destination since 1951. It has diverse topography and attracts about a million tourists from world over. Tourism is one of the main sources of foreign currency and employment in Nepal. Nepal was closed to foreigners till 1951 as it was under the Rana Regime. However, with the establishment of democracy in 1951 and the first ever successful ascent of Mount Everest on 29th May, 1953 by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary, Nepal caught global attention. This was the beginning of tourism in Nepal. From 1955, Nepal started issuing tourist visa. The same year a private airline called ‘Himalaya Airways’ started operations followed by state owned airline Royal Nepal presently known as Nepal Airlines in 1958. By late sixties the hippies started to come to Nepal. They followed a radical and liberal anti-war philosophy along with experimentations with drugs and religion in order to discover their inner-self and find peace. By 1973 Nepal declared hashish as illegal and by 1979 the hippies’ number began to slow down.

From 1975 to 1999, Nepal was a popular destination for tourists of all categories. Nepal’s topography is varied and it contains high mountains, rivers, valleys, national parks, flora and fauna. The holiday makers, adventure seekers and cultural tourist each found something to their taste. The tourist count increased year after year. In 1998 Nepal celebrated “Visit Nepal 98” to strengthen Nepal tourism. There was a brief

decline in tourism due to the Maoist movement in Nepal from 1999 to 2006. However it again recuperated till 2015. Figures released by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation show that the number of tourists has increased from 602,855 in 2010 – 2011 to 803,092 in 2011 – 2012. The earthquake of 2015 slowed down tourism for some time however it bounced back and registered positive growth and even crossing one million in 2018 and 2019. The first three months of 2020 showed progressive growth till the government of Nepal announced the first lockdown on 24th March 2020.

A novel coronavirus named severe acute respiratory coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was first identified in a seafood market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China, at the end of 2019 (Zhu et al., 2020). The contagious respiratory illness caused by this novel coronavirus is called coronavirus disease 2019 or, in short, COVID-19 (Wu et al., 2020). From February, COVID-19 cases soared across most of Europe, the United States, Australasia, Asia and on to Africa. Until now, the novel coronavirus continues to wreak havoc on daily life around the globe, affecting 213 countries, infecting 30,034,435 people and killing 945,086 people until 17 September 2020 (World meter, 2020).

Nepal went into relatively strict lockdown on March 24 and cases of COVID-19 were one of the lowest in the region and there was a very slow rise of confirmed COVID cases. The infected number of people remained under 1,000 up until May 28. However, cases have increased over ten times since then as tens of thousands of migrant workers began returning home from India, which eased its internal travel restrictions on June 1, and as Nepal began a phased reopening on June 15 but as the cases rose steadily, Nepal announced the second lockdown on 20th August 2020. Nepal's case tally is over 58,432 till date, although the death rate remains uncharacteristically low, so far 379 people have died till 17 September 2020 (World meter, 2020). This may be partly explained by the fact that, so far, most of the infected have been youth. On the other hand, the coronavirus crisis has brought to the front and aggravated a number of the Nepali state's long-standing weaknesses like corruption, poor service delivery, and a failure to provide employment opportunities for millions of citizens who instead migrated to the Middle East, India, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, and elsewhere for labor jobs and who now, unemployed, were coming back home, several were infected with COVID-19 and were instrumental in spreading and infecting others. Most of the people who were infected were Nepalese who came from India. As Nepal shares a long and porous border with India, in spite of lockdown, several people were able to cross the border and head home. These people were then able to spread it to their family and friends. Although the government has made arrangements for isolation shelters across the country, they are mostly ill managed and ill equipped along with poor hygienic standard. Few cases of people becoming sick and dying in these shelters have come to the light. This has highlighted the long standing problems in government

service delivery. As is evident, the public healthcare system is understaffed and under resourced and better handling of the situation is needed.

Although COVID-19 has been considered a global pandemic and everyone has been affected by it Tourism is considered one of the hardest hits by the outbreak. With the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, countries banned the movement of people as preventive measures to curb the spread of the virus. Transportations, hotels, and restaurants are the worst-hit sectors by COVID-19 and these sectors are directly linked with the tourism industry. The worldwide Lockdown completely stopped the movement of people. Consequently, the labor intensive tourism industry disintegrated completely with the arrival of the pandemic.

The impact has already started to surface in number of different segments like tourism, supply and health, trade and production linkages. Particularly, the entire service industries: tourism, hospitality and aviation sector have been affected badly by the pandemic.

With the launch of visit Nepal 2020 campaign in January, the country was expecting to draw two million tourists, but due the corona pandemic the campaign got cancelled which has devastated the hospitality and tourism related all business zone. With this pandemic the tourist arrival rate has declined to below 10 percent, from 70 percent which was prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Tourism sector, being one of the major industries has been contributing about 8 percent to Nepal's economy. Likewise, cancellation of all spring mountaineering expeditions, including Everest ascents, has resulted in work loss of around 23,000 tour, trekking and mountain guides as well as tourism personnel.

Methodology

This study is based on analytical and descriptive methods. This study follows the qualitative methodology and the data is obtained through primary and secondary sources. International and Government sites, newspapers, websites, books, articles are also used for reference. This study has focused on professionals and people directly and indirectly employed in tourism along with hotels, travel/trekking companies, restaurants & transport operators.

Review of literature

Elliot (1997) defines tourism as the fastest growing industry in the world. Governments in various countries at all stages of development are increasingly dependent on it.

Raju (2009) explains and defines tourism as the world's largest industry whose growth is creating rapid social, economic and environmental changes. Tourism plays very important role for generating the revenues.

Burns and Noveli (2008) talk about the ways of tourism development that can work in least developed countries. It also says that tourism is the best alternative to any work or development. As a strategy to promote development worldwide, key targets were defined for the achievement of the development goals. The international response was vocal and enthusiastic. Tourism, in particular, is seen as having great potential for shifting wealth from rich countries to poor, and in some cases directly at the level of families and villages.

Chang (2007) explains that tourism appears to be an industry that anyone can understand, but in reality, it is a very complex subject. It is a meeting ground for economics, sociology, anthropology, geography, ecology and national priority issues among other challenges. Issues of employment, prices and contribution to GDP are all a part of the scope of this book, as well. This literature presents the latest thinking from around the world. The findings from this study should provide important information that can be used in the future planning and management of the tourism industry, allowing wholesale and retail travel agents to improve levels of service and to develop appropriate products to meet the expectations of the travel market.

With no one able to conceive of rebuilding to pre COVID levels of demand (Bariso, 2020), and all visitor serving enterprises knowing they have no other choice but to adapt to new gathering guidelines, business models are bound to change (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Domestic tourism seems destined to dominate, with the vast majority of customers or visitors likely to come from nearby catchment areas, everyone being told to be very selective about the number of trips they make.

The possibilities are exciting, except for the fact that many people have expressed caution and have conditions: The first being adoption of a sustainability platform, such as those proposed by Raworth (2020) and Rifkin (2019); and, the second being the need to inculcate 'anti-fragility' so as to avoid being blindsided again. This concept, proffered by Taleb (2013), reveals how companies, countries and communities can ameliorate the physical shocks (associated with both climate risk and pandemics, for example), while escalating ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit.

Gill and Sapkota (*The Diplomat*, 2020) explain how coronavirus crisis has exposed the weakness of the government in dealing with corruption, employment issues and service delivery. These issues have triggered protest from the people and the poor treatment of the migrants, inadequate facilities in the quarantine, partiality in repatriation flights have highlighted the incompetence of the government. The government's focus on intra-party power struggle has overshadowed the more important agenda of preparing the nation for the pandemic. The government's lack of concrete system to deal with the pandemic might cost the nation lots of suffering and heartache.

Poudel and Subedi (2020) analyse the impact of COVID-19 socioeconomic and mental health aspects in Nepal. The literature explains how the pandemic has seriously affected Nepal's trade and tourism industry, along with agriculture, education and health. The pandemic has increased mental stress due to job and food insecurity, housing instability. The lockdowns, self-isolation, quarantine and social distancing have impacted mental, physical and social wellbeing of the people of Nepal. The economic recession has added financial pressure resulting in conflict, abuse, domestic violence, depression and family feud. The pandemic has given birth to uncertainty, anxiety, fear and insecurity which needs to be addressed seriously and immediately to avoid further damage.

Sah and Sigdel et al (*July, 2020*) have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism of Nepal. The writers reiterate that tourism is one of Nepal's largest industries and it contributed 7.9% to the GDP and provided over 1.05 million jobs. By 2029, tourism could provide over 1.35 million jobs in Nepal. After the lockdown of 24th March, hotels, airlines and thousands of employees lost their livelihood. The Remittance contributes about 15% to the GDP and the pandemic has had an adverse impact on it as well. This is in sharp contrast to post 2015 earthquake when foreign remittance jumped 20%. The pandemic has also severely impacted the economy as well as health care system. The government has increased the budget for the health sector to 6% which is still below the WHO recommended of 10%.

The COVID-19 has reiterated the fact that Nepal requires long-term plan to prevent and tackle current and future health crisis. This includes a plan to incorporate an affordable service to all citizens of Nepal.

Pun SB, Mandal S, Bhandari L, et al., reiterate how a two weeks period of quarantine is not sufficient to prevent the spread of COVID-19 hence it is essential to increase the quarantine period to effectively tackle the spread of COVID-19 virus. In current scenario, quarantine & social distancing are the most effective way to stop the spread of virus in Nepal. However, poor knowledge about these issues and lack of awareness among people is preventing that from happening. Social media and volunteers can play a significant role in providing awareness about the benefit of social distancing and quarantine and help curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Impact of COVID-19

The outbreak has affected people's lives as well as private and public sectors. Banks are suffering in loss of their investments in hospitality and aviation due to the coronavirus tourist slump. Not only this, the impact has been also visible in the manufacturing industries. As most raw materials including pharmaceutical chemicals come from China, supply of these raw materials has decreased drastically. Foreign employment has not only been addressing the Nepal's unemployment issues

but has also been contributing significantly to the country's economy in the form of remittance. The money that labor migrants sent back in 2019 contributed 26 percent to the country's GDP. Increased infection rate of the virus has impacted remittance inflow and government revenue collection as majority of the destination countries attractive for the outbound workers have declared a lockdown while the import has also started to decline as of late. In the current circumstances, coronavirus' effect on remittances is catastrophic. In the past two months, the remittance source has contributed less than one percent to country's economy. The downturn in remittance has created brutal impact on overall economy of the country. Apart from remittance issue, several daily wages workers, employees in different private sectors and service industries have lost their job. Many factories, consumer goods vendors/suppliers, businesses and a lot of restaurants, hotels etc have closed for good.

Among all the sectors, tourism is perhaps the hardest hit and is experiencing a rapid and sharp drop in demand and a surge in job losses at global level, including Nepal, putting many SMEs at risk. In Nepal, the tourism sector is an important source of revenue and jobs. According to the Ministry of Tourism there are 129 Star Hotels and 1151 Non Star Hotels which adds up to 43999 total beds. Similarly there are 3508 Travel Agencies and 2649 Trekking Agencies. An average tourist spends 12.4 days in Nepal. In 2018, the sector employed 573,000 workers (8 per cent of total employment) and accounted for 26 per cent of total exports. Three-quarters of workers in the tourism sector are in informal jobs, leaving them with no protection and no income as the sector has come to a total stop. Over 4126 tour guides, over 16248 trekking guides, over two hundred river guides along with several hundred naturalists and workers in service industry lost their livelihood due to the pandemic. Similarly, there are over 65 Tourist Vehicle Service providers that employ over four thousand drivers and helpers who are also currently jobless. It is a clear understanding that even when the other sectors will start operating after the situation is under control, tourism along with all the service/hospitality industries will be the last to recover. This situation has rendered millions of people unemployed globally and thousands in Nepal. The government of Nepal or any other authority has not shown any interest whatsoever to compensate or to support these informal workers. In several developed countries like the USA, informal workers received benefit cheque from the government allowing them to maintain their lives. In other countries like Bhutan they were given alternate jobs so that they can earn their livelihood. But so far in Nepal no concrete step has been taken to provide any form of relief to them. Some of the people involved in tourism have started alternative work, helped by family and friends but not all are lucky enough.

Despite tourism's proven resilience in responses to other crisis, the depth and breadth of the current pandemic will likely have a longer lasting effect on international

tourism compared to other industries, more likely to recuperate once major restrictions will be lifted. This is also due to the probable long term changes in behaviors with travelers likely to become more cautious about travelling overseas in the future.

In Nepal's context resurgence of tourism may take even longer as most of the travelers come to Nepal via India. As India is currently the second worst infected nation in the world, the road to recovery seems long and distant.

Economic impact

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the international tourist arrivals will be down by 20% to 30% in 2020 when compared with 2019 figures, equivalent to a loss of 300 to 450 US\$ billion in international tourism receipts (exports) almost one third of the US\$ 1.5 trillion generated globally. The direct contribution of the travel and tourism industry accounts today for 3.3% of the total global GDP and 4.4% in OECD countries (average) with picks of 14%, 13% and 18% for countries like Spain, Italy and Greece respectively. Some countries are predicted to face more substantial blows than others due to their high reliance on the sector especially when considering an interesting comparison: out of the top 10 destinations by international tourists arrivals (France, Spain, United States, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, UK and Thailand), 8 result to be the hardest hit by COVID-19, implying that the economic shock on tourism will be further exacerbated in these countries.

In Europe, where the tourism industry employs around 13 million people, around €1 billion revenues per month is expected to be lost as a result of corona virus. According to the latest estimates, Asia will see the highest overall drop in travel and tourism revenue in 2020, with China accounting for the major share of lost revenue. Tourism is one of the most thriving and fast growing service sectors in Nepal which contributes about 6.7% of the GDP (WWTC, 2019). This includes both direct and indirect contribution of tourism to GDP. In terms of employment, the tourism industry in Nepal provides total employment to 700 thousand people with 500 thousand direct jobs.

The COVID-19 has been proven fatal to the world's tourism sector, including Nepal. The tourist arrivals in Nepal fell by almost 73 percent in March 2020. Nepal Rastra Bank on year on year analysis has mentioned that tourist arrival in FY2019/20 is expected to fall by 31.6 percent. The tourism based sectors such as hotels and restaurants and transportation are expected to hit hard by this pandemic. Similarly, the Central Bureau of Statistics projects a contraction in gross value addition of hotel and restaurant sector and transportation sector by 16.30 percent by 2.45 percent respectively. In 2020, the visit Nepal campaign was aimed at bringing 2 million tourists in the country by the end of the year. But the campaign was called off at the end of March due to the massive outbreak of the corona virus. The tourism sector is

likely to lose 85 thousand direct jobs and 36 thousand indirect jobs amounting to a total job loss of 121 thousand.

The budget of 2077/78 has some encouraging and positive articles in it for tourism sector. The main concern is the implementation of these articles as the government hasn't had credibility to deliver.

Tourism and Aviation in Nepal Budget 2077/88 show some hope for the industry. It has set uplifting tourism and aviation, which have been hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic, as one of the objectives.

Among others, the budget continues allocation of resources for soon-to-be completing prestigious aviation projects, such as Gautam Buddha International Airport and Pokhara International Airport. On the other hand, internal tourism has been considered an important element in the tourism section of the budget.

In the context of the dire need for providing guardianship to the industry, the budget has made some important and positive provisions as follows:

1. 5% interest bearing NPR 50 billion loans through Nepal Rastra Bank for the tourism industry for operating cost and salary payments,
2. 25% wages as a relief to the otherwise unaddressed workforce,
3. 5% interest bearing NPR 100 billion loans for tourism and other industries hit by COVID-19 pandemic,
4. social welfare fund contribution to be borne by the government for the lockdown period and borrowing from the fund possible for the private sector,

Even though it is not complete, the budget is able to cover several aspects of Nepal's tourism. Plans for airport improvements, introducing latest technology, and better air service are positive. An encouraging aspect of the budget is the mention of the trekking sector including others. The interest rate of 5% to be offered to tourism entrepreneurs will probably be helpful but would not be sufficient to guarantee the existing jobs.

The main concern ahead is to implement the budget by incorporating the financial plan into the functional guidelines of the government. The previous governments have a bad track record of not properly implementing previous budgets. Hence it is essential that during this pandemic when tourism industry really requires strong support from the government, the government should ensure the effective implementation of the budget. So that all stakeholders, big or small, benefit from it.

Impact on education

The pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools and universities. According to the World Bank (2020b),

the COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth in 161 countries to be out of school, which is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. Several schools and universities have been conducting virtual classes to deliver the lectures however due to the conflict among parents and educational institutes, most of the private schools in Nepal have stopped their online classes affecting thousands of children. As a result, children have more free time so they are addicted to their cell phones and social media sites as well as online games. This has reduced healthy interaction with other children and nature. The addiction to cell phone is making children prone to irritation and mood swings.

In regard to tourism education, there are more than 50 educational institutes in Nepal that provide education related with all aspects of tourism and hospitality industry. These include all necessary services in hotels and restaurants like cooking, serving, housekeeping including all operational and management services. Some institute focus on providing essential training to produce manpower and qualified personnel for hospitality/service industry like Tour Guides, Trekking and River Rafting Guides. Apart from this, tourism and hospitality is now a lucrative career option and it is taught as an academic subject in several colleges and Universities. However, due to the pandemic and lockdown most of the educational activities are either suspended or only a handful of institutes are conducting online classes. This has resulted in fewer students joining in and those without access to smart phone/laptop and internet are not able to join the course. The pandemic has thus put a question mark on the future of the students.

Social impact

Lockdown and social distancing measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 have heightened fears of increasing levels of domestic violence, which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The concentrated time spent in lockdown means that vulnerable people are more exposed to abuse and it is more difficult for them to seek help. The coronavirus pandemic has been followed by a concern for a potential spike in suicides, exacerbated by social isolation due to quarantine and social distancing guidelines, fear, and unemployment and financial factors. Many countries have reported an increase in domestic violence and intimate partner violence attributed to lockdowns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial insecurity, stress, and uncertainty have lead to increased aggression at home.

Various studies showed that people who are quarantined are very likely to develop a wide range of symptoms of psychological stress and disorder. Moreover, these days, people are inducing a considerable degree of fear, worry, and concern due to the uncertainty of lifting lockdown by the Government of Nepal and the time frame for complete eradication of virus to return to normal life. The most common mental

disorders are low mood, irritability, stress, anxiety, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, anger, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms and suicide. The pandemic related restraints, such as spatial distancing, isolation and home quarantine, are impacting on economic sustainability and wellbeing, which may induce psychological mediators such as sadness, worry, fear, anger, annoyance, frustration, guilt, helplessness, loneliness and nervousness (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020). The data compiled by Nepal Police shows that, from the onset of lockdown, 23 March till 6 June, a total of 1,227 suicide (16.5 a day) cases were filed, which is seriously high compared with the total of 5,785 people (15.8 a day) in the previous year. Most of the victims were either students or employees who lost their job. People with low income along with older citizens, care providers, people in the front line (medical staff, nurses, doctors, security personnel etc) and people with underlying health issues are most vulnerable and prone to extreme measures such as depression, anxiety and in some cases suicide.

Extension of quarantine and lack of knowledge and awareness to cope with COVID-19 has resulted in various mental health disorders in Nepal for diverse groups in the society such as older adults, care providers, and people with underlying health conditions, women, children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80% live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

Other major social impact in Nepal is the suspension of all religious activities in the country. This includes the closure of temples, mosques, churches, monasteries and all religious centers in the country. This has hampered domestic tourism as pilgrimage as well as religious sites are shut down. Several of the religious sites in Nepal like Pashupati in Kathmandu and Mayadevi temple in Lumbini are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They have global appeal as pilgrims from Nepal as well as neighboring countries like India, Srilanka and whole of Indochina visit it for pilgrimage and spiritual purpose. But due to the pandemic, all these sites are closed incurring revenue loss and suspension of domestic and religious tourism. Apart from that all socio-religious and cultural activities like wedding, initiation ceremony and all other cultural/religious festivities are banned because of the pandemic. This has also hampered domestic tourism and all income generation activities related to festivals and social ceremonies.

Safety measures and health guidelines

According to the Operational Guideline with Health Protocol of Tourism Sector, a Nepal Government and Nepal Tourism Board initiative, following measures are to be taken during and post COVID-19 pandemic scenario:

Considering the looming crash in economy and job losses, once the Lockdown reopens, the Hospitality sector will have to look into reopening with safety and hygiene protocols in place. Bearing in mind that the health and safety of people:

employees and guests should be the first and foremost priority, safety guidelines and protocols should be implicitly followed.

In preparation for reopening, airports, hotels, restaurants, bars and all other infrastructures will need to implement workplace safety protocols, which could include providing masks, social distancing, physical workspace modifications, and screening and tracing protocols. Additionally, written policies and enforcement mechanisms are needed to ensure compliance with those protocols.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, regulation and monitoring of the protocols and sustainability guidelines will be an essential part of the implementation and will be carried out in the Central, Provincial and Locals levels as per procedures laid out by the authorities. The following measures are to be taken:

- a. Temperature screening of all personnel entering the property by trained personnel wearing appropriate protective gear
- b. For larger hotels, consider a sanitization tunnel for staff, guests, luggage and goods.
- c. Install an information board with COVID-19 safety and precautionary measures in a visible area of hotel
- d. In case of anyone found symptomatic, hotels shall process to refer them to a government designated health facility
- e. Mandatory wearing of Masks by all
- f. At entry point a log book Sheet with name, contact details of the guest date and time of arrival/departure to be maintain for contact tracing.
- g. Provision of COVID-19 audio broadcast in the premises
- h. Stock masks, gloves and mini sanitizers (complimentary/for sale) for in-house guests.
- i. Social Distancing Measures, Hand Cleaning, and Respiratory Hygiene
- j. Monitoring Guests for Potential Infection
- k. All staff in each service providing facility should perform personal hygiene like regular hand washing and respiratory hygiene frequently.
- l. Guests should be reminded when entering and leaving the restaurant, breakfast, or dining room to disinfect their hands with disinfectant gel, preferably located at the entrance to those facilities.

Future impact on tourism

Various industry organizations have already published estimates of the consequences of COVID-19 for the global tourism industry in 2020. As indicated,

these estimates necessitate to be treated with general caution, as it remains basically uncertain how the pandemic will develop until September, and how travel restrictions and huge job losses will impact tourist demand during the important northern hemisphere summer season and beyond. While no organization has a crystal ball, the expected extent of the impact is vital to understand COVID-19 is no ordinary blow to global tourism and has no analogue since the massive expansion of international tourism began in the 1950s.

Nepal depends a lot on tourism so it is evident that the government and all stakeholders should revise and rework a concrete future plan to adapt to the new way of traveling. The road to recovery will be slow and difficult as travelers have chosen to stay home rather than travel and risk getting infected with COVID-19. So the current mindset of a traveler is to wait and watch and judge how a country is dealing with the pandemic. So, the quintessential factor is to ensure the potential traveler that Nepal is a safe destination. The impact of the pandemic will certainly affect the staff, service providers as well as the tourism infrastructure. If these stakeholders are unwilling or unable to improvise and modify their product and meet the global safety/hygiene standard, they will face a grave consequence.

As highlighted, UNWTO (2020b) has projected a 20 to 30% decline in 2020 international arrivals that would translate into losses of tourism receipts of US\$300 to 450 billion. Much higher is the estimate by WTTC (2020), expecting a loss of up to US\$2.1 trillion in 2020. These figures show that COVID-19 has had an unparalleled impact on tourism but as it has been seen in the past, tourism has revived and bounced back several times after a crisis. A key question for all tourism subsectors is thus when travel, international as well as domestic, or when tourism and hospitality businesses such as accommodation, bars, cafés, entertainment zones or restaurants can reopen and whether the travelers will be willing to travel long distance or overseas soon.

The COVID-19 crisis should thus be seen as an opportunity to critically reconsider tourism's growth arc, and to question the logic of more arrivals means greater benefits. This may begin with a review of the positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, as a result of the significant decline in demand, airlines have begun to phase out old and inefficient aircraft (Simple Flying, 2020). Video conferences, a missed opportunity to reduce transport demand (Banister & Stead, 2004) for years, has become extensively accepted by home office workers, including students forced into online learning, and business travelers avoiding non essential air travel. As affirmed by Cohen et al. (2018), many business travelers will gladly welcome opportunities to fly less. Importantly, even high profile exchanges, such as the G20 Leader's meeting on 26 March 2020, have for the first time been organized through video conference (European Council, 2020). After months of these new work arrangements, for how many organizations and workers will perceive benefits of continued or partial adoption? More generally, views on mobility

may also have transformed in everyday contexts, as countries without full lockdown have seen a significant rise in cycling and outdoor activities.

These ongoing positive changes may be seen as signs for change on a broader level that will lead the global tourism system reoriented towards the SDGs, rather than “growth” as an abstract notion benefitting the few (Piketty, 2015). To this end, resilience research in tourism has highlighted the need to consider the zero carbon imperative in combination with destination models seeking to reduce leakage and to better capture and distribute tourism value (Hall, 2009; Gössling et al., 2016). There may be an insight that tourism in its current form is not resilient, as profitability and liquidity are often marginal; a situation owed to overcapacity in air transport and accommodation, which again can be linked to subsidies, market deregulation, and the apparent disinterest of policy makers for a radical change.

Recovery methods and strategies

The crisis is ongoing but in different parts of the world, the impact of COVID-19 is waning and lockdown has been eased down with caution. Similarly, the number of infected cases are also decreasing apart from the US, Brazil and India. In Europe, several countries have opened up their borders to tourists. Nepal has somehow stabilized the situation after a rise in cases and recovery rate is impressive. The government is contemplating to restart international air connection in near future.

Nepal has taken initiative to open up tourism related activities following safety guidelines. Mountain expeditions are to be allowed, following which climbers have started arriving in Kathmandu. Upon arrival, apart from temperature checking, negative results from a PCR test acquired within 72 hours prior to departure from the country of origin are essential for entry. Similarly, tourist buses as well as limited domestic flights will start operating at half capacity from 21st September.

While this looks like a step towards recovery, travelling has taken a whole new meaning and dimension than before. The COVID-19 impact has raised questions like “What are the short term and long term solutions that can be implemented?” It is a difficult question to answer in a developing country like Nepal which is ill equipped to handle crisis and formulation and implementation of rules are difficult to manage.

However, to rejuvenate tourism all stakeholders must be actively involved. The authorities should have a resolution about what actions to take to recover as quickly as possible? There is a need to learn the lessons and be prepared for the next crisis. There is also the need to observe the situation to notice what the longer term implications and/or predicted duration will be. Based on it, the stakeholders need to set up resilience plans. The plans should be based on the fact that usually rapid recovery occurs after the crisis is over.

To begin with, initiating the formation of a public/private partnership crisis management team to manage crises and develop recovery strategies. The rebuilding of trust should be done in a concerted and cooperative effort involving government, DMOs, and industry. The government also needs to reconsider the balance between volume and quality of target markets for tourists and develop system wide recovery and crisis strategies while Identifying and focusing on sustainable competitive advantages.

The other recovery methods that can be effective and suitable for Nepal, is to establish recovery objectives and timelines, stratify and prioritize target markets, work with intermediaries as well as the stakeholders. Being positive and honest in communication; treating media, including social media as an ally would be essential. Nepal also needs to develop a new branding strategy as the old one may be tarnished by the crisis. The government and travel companies should look at ways of diversifying the market post-recovery as the more reliable/regular markets like US and India is reeling under the COVID-19 impact. This could be a new opportunity to restructure and open new avenues for business.

The government needs to work closely with tourism industry to develop a series of packages that can be launched at short notice. Packages can include special rates for airfare, accommodation, food, and beverage, etc. But while doing so the need of the hour is to try and minimize fixed costs. One of the ways to achieve this is to restrict all marketing activities as consumer confidence has been damaged and will not return until the crisis passes. Advertising and heavy discounts do not work if consumers are unwilling to travel. As an alternative, social media can be utilized effectively while incurring no cost. While cost cutting for advertising is essential same principle can not be applied to the tour packages. While price cuts can deliver a brief spike in volume, they can also result in long term pain for any business that pursues this strategy. As Nepal already has a reputation for being a backpacker's paradise and a cheap travel destination it is imperative to try and shake off this tag in order to attract high end tourists.

The financial sectors should facilitate the tourism entrepreneurs by securing additional funding to launch the recovery when the time is right, the fund can support retraining, short term job search skills, support groups, etc. Coordination and help from financial institutions for finance, credit and loan restructuring is required to survive. Since the pandemic is far from over, the initial focus should be domestic and nearby markets. Reassuring the local community is necessary. Encourage local residents to visit the local attractions or spots first. People are more aware of the real situation of the local epidemic, so they are more confident to have some tourism related activities with family in local areas.

Marketing should be progressive and gradual with expansion aiming at cured markets first and then expanding to more markets. One great example is to follow PATA's nine step marketing and communication process:

- Step 1: Get the prime message out: We are open for business; tourists are welcome and wanted;
- Step 2: Setting out the facts: Our destinations/hotel/tour/ attraction/flights are operating; outline restrictions and limitations;
- Step 3: Complementary alliances with principals. Joint arrangements with hoteliers, resorts, restaurants, attractions, land tours, and air links; value added arrangements between complementing principals;
- Step 4: Restoring confidence in source markets. Travel agents and travel writers' familiarization trips: choose opinion leaders;
- Step 5: Protecting profitability during marketing recovery: offer incentives which will enable the business to sustain profitability, value add rather than discount;
- Step 6: Reimage the business and the destination: retheme advertising and promotion;
- Step 7: Incentives which attract tourists, value added products;
- Step 8: Publicize the positives: positive news of resurgence of tourist arrivals, rebuilding and enhancements of infrastructure;
- Step 9: Reporting and monitoring progress: publicize the changes and enhancements made.

The focus should be the big picture policy initiatives that can be considered, such as visa waiver changes. The government should also provide a grace period on local taxes, simplify visa rules, reduce or waive travelers' taxes and support economically hit destinations with promotion and marketing to attract tourists. Coordination by governments at all levels (national, state, regional, local) to deliver a consistent message to the consumer is essential. This in turn will assure consumers the destination is safe. Remind them of any actions the destination may still be implementing (such as virus checks, other security measures, etc.). Sanitization of the vehicles, toilets, restaurants, hotels should also be strictly managed. COVID-19 negative certificate issued by their home country should be made mandatory. This will build on trust and relationship and assure people involved at every level that their safety and health is also important and it will keep them dedicated and motivated.

Once the tourists arrive, appropriate screening measures on check in such as temperature screening should be implemented along with detailed cleaning/sanitation.

Advanced technological solutions to address fears (contactless and robotized access, information) and cutting down on unnecessarily human close contacts is essential. The stakeholders should reassure customers that you are doing all you can to make the destination/business safe. This in turn will enhance safety for domestic as well as international tourists.

The key to provide high quality service is to ensure that well trained and qualified staff is available at any site and destination. It is also important to keep the staff safe and motivated. It is significant to keep tourism staff in their jobs and develop mutual solutions as much as possible and to empower them to make decisions and make mutually beneficial arrangements.

Protection and welfare of workers from unemployment and loss of income (short time work schemes, upskilling and reskilling programs) and support for self employed tourism stakeholders is needed as it will lead the way to be prepared for a strong rebound in demand. Like a coiled spring, the harder it is depressed, the stronger it bounces back.

Findings and discussions

The world has witnessed a number of key epidemics/pandemics in the last 40 years, yet none had parallel effects for the global economy as the COVID-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is changing and challenging the world. With no vaccine and limited medical capacity to treat the disease, non medical measures is the main strategy so far to contain the pandemic. Most countries reacted with various types of interventions, including lockdown (home isolation, voluntary/required quarantine), social distancing (vulnerable or entire populations), closure of schools/universities and non essential businesses/workplaces, cancelling or postponing events (conferences and trade shows, concerts and festivals, political debates and elections, sports events and the summer Olympics), and bans on gatherings of people over certain numbers even for most essential social gatherings like weddings, funerals etc. Apart from socio-economical impact, the pandemic has left a deep impact on educational and psychological wellbeing of the people.

International, regional and local travel controls immediately had an effect on national economies,

including tourism, i.e. international travel, domestic tourism, day visits and sectors as diverse as air transport, cruises, public transport, accommodation, cafés and restaurants, conventions, festivals, meetings, or sports events. With international air travel quickly declining as a consequence of the crisis, and many countries imposing closing borders, travel bans or introducing quarantine periods, international and domestic tourism slowed down steeply over a period of weeks. Countries scrambled to return travelers home, which in the case of important

outbound markets involved hundreds of thousands of citizens stranded in all parts of the world.

Incomparable global travel restrictions and lockdown orders are causing the harshest disruption of the world economy since World War II. Thousands of people were on layoffs and bankruptcies followed with hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars and other service and goods industries unable to generate any business at all. Several developed countries provided beneficial cheque to affected workers and citizens where as developing countries like Nepal was broiled in controversies, mismanagement and corruption.

With international travel interdicts affecting over 90% of the world population and widespread controls on public gatherings and community mobility, tourism largely come to an end since March 2020. Early data on impacts on air travel, cruises, and accommodations have been distressing. While highly tentative, early projections from UNWTO for 2020 suggested international arrivals could decline by 20 to 30% comparative to 2019, the revised forecast is that it could reach the staggering figure of 70 to 80%.

Within countries, the virus had the worst effect on virtually all divisions of the hospitality value chain. The brunt of cancelled events, closed attractions and accommodations, became immediately felt in other parts of the supply chain, such as catering and laundry services. Cafes, bar and restaurants had to close as well, though in some countries, a change to delivery/takeaway sales was allowed after some time to continue operations.

Tourism is especially vulnerable to measures to thwart pandemics because of restricted mobility and social distancing. The situation is unique. Within the space of months, the structuring of the global tourism system moved from overtourism (e.g. Dodds & Butler, 2019; Seraphin et al., 2018) to non tourism, vividly demonstrated by blogs and newspaper articles illustrating popular tourism sites in 'before' and 'after' photographs (Condé Nast Traveller, 2020).

The general conviction is that tourism will rebound as it has from previous crises (CNN, 2020). However, there is much indication that COVID-19 will be different and transformative for the tourism sector.

Every pandemic changes society, the economy, and tourism, and some of the key research needs to comprehend these changes and add to a more sustainable post pandemic tourism sector. As soon as the virus is restrained, there will be an energetic push by many to go back to business as usual, possibly to overcompensate for losses by even more forceful growth. However, the future of tourism is going to be transformative and the definition of success and failure has also changed. Tourism 'success' has been historically defined by virtually all tourism organizations: UNWTO, ICAO, CLIA, or

WTTC as growth in tourism numbers. This perspective has already been questioned in the context of the global financial crisis (Hall, 2009) and as the challenges of over tourism, climate change and COVID-19 pandemic further illustrate, this perspective is outdated. So, a more sustainable and nature friendly approach is required in future to survive in this competitive industry.

Remarkable and extensive research is being done to fast track the development and testing of vaccines, but the estimated timeline for the commercial availability of the vaccine remains 12 to 18 months. In the meanwhile, tourism industry and its stakeholders must be prepared and be ready to operate and run businesses in near future. This means rebuilding, restructuring or modifying infrastructure, keeping in mind the “new normal” i.e. reducing human contact, maintaining social distancing, upgrading sanitization and retraining staff. Tourism, in particular air travel and airports, must be part of new international monitoring and rapid response plans. This would also include a better understanding of tourism’s role in pandemics and modifications required to sustain. It is too early to know the full nature and impact of these changes but it is evident that they will be transformative for the whole world and every destination will require recreating its tourism from the base. All necessary steps for recovery should be taken considering the fact that a strong rebound in demand is to be expected which is a natural phenomenon, like a coiled spring, the harder it is depressed, and the stronger it bounces back.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has badly affected global tourism, resulting in unprecedented economical crisis and triggering unemployment, mental stress and uncertainty.

The crisis holds important messages regarding the resilience of the tourism system, with fears of a new recession and financial collapse, times like these calls for resilient and strong leadership in healthcare, business, government and wider society. Immediate relief measures need to be implemented and adjusted for those that may fall through the cracks. Medium and longer term planning is needed to rebalance and reenergize tourism following this crisis.

Indeed, if there is one thing that has been learned from the pandemic, it is preparedness and brutal honesty, even though these lessons are only gradually becoming self evident. Even so, those destinations likely to be quick off the mark will be those that have already placed a premium on travel and tourism, with government officials and business leaders recognizing them not as afterthoughts, or as a tertiary economic sector, but equivalent to a special kind of innovative and entrepreneurial cluster, even as a new form of a super cluster (Brookfield Institute, 2017).

It is essential that during this pandemic when tourism industry of Nepal really requires strong support from the government, the government should provide full cooperation and support ensuring facilitating and monitoring of the safety guidelines. Tourism sector will have to look into reopening with safety and hygiene protocols in place, bearing in mind that the health and safety of employees and guests is top priority. Without going into the special characteristics of tourism as a super cluster, one stands out: The desire and ability to work collaboratively, as a collective unit. To ensure revival of tourism in Nepal, the government, the tourism industry, employees and all stakeholders need to collaborate and work collectively.

As this pandemic has pointed out that the world is indeed a global village and people are all interconnected as well as interdependent. So, it is evident that global cooperation, dynamic thinking and progressive leadership are required during the crisis. As mankind has survived several grave crises due to its ability to adapt in the past same is required to survive this pandemic as well.

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