

Fostering Tourism Potentials in Devdaha, Lumbini: Some Critical Remarks

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Abstract

This study uses a quantitative analysis based on a rapid questionnaire survey with 130 respondents from two wards that were purposefully chosen to investigate the dynamics of tourism in Devdaha Municipality, Nepal. The survey looked at a number of topics, such as the kinds of tourists that come to Devdaha, major stakeholders involving on it, how much people know about it as a pilgrimage site, how tourism affects local jobs and revenue. The results show that domestic travelers make up the majority of visitors, and a sizable percentage of respondents acknowledged the locations of Buddhist pilgrimages. Although governmental and non-governmental stakeholders are present, opinions about the professionalism and service qualities are critically observed. The paper also notes the expected advantages of tourism in fostering cross-cultural interchange and bolstering the local economy, while highlighting the major obstacles, such as infrastructure, promotional activities and economic concerns.

Keywords: tourism, Lumbini, Devdaha, opportunities and challenges

Introduction

The concept of tourism is intricate and multidimensional, encompassing a variety of travel-related experiences, relationships, and activities. Fundamentally, tourism is the travel of individuals for pleasure, business, or other reasons away from their customary area of residence. Tourism studies and its research often combines multidisciplinary tenets of geography, sociology, economics, anthropology and management to comprehend the dynamics and effects of travel and tourism. There is no universally valid and accepted definition of tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is defined as "a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes" (UNWTO, 2021). This definition highlights tourism as not merely a commercial or economic activity but a significant social and cultural experience that has substantial economic and socio-cultural implications.

Nepal's economy and socio-cultural life heavily depends on tourism, with a particular focus on religious and cultural travel since the history. It boosts a paradise of world famous destinations for ecotourism, cultural tourism, pilgrimage sites, adventurous tourism, agro-tourism, homestay tourism and many other forms of travel and recreation (Bhandari, 2018; Nepal, 2022). Being the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, Lumbini is a popular pilgrimage site that draws people from all over the world who are interested in learning more about their Buddhist roots (Bhandari, 2019; Poudel, 2022; Rai, 2020). Devdaha, which is close to Lumbini, is significant historically and culturally in this regard, adding to the region's all-around visitor experience.

Devdaha's historical significance and close proximity to Lumbini contribute to its role in enhancing Nepal's tourism offers, especially in drawing tourists eager to see Buddhist and regional cultural attractions (Tamang, 2023). This study employs a research question related to what kinds of tourism potentials exist in Devdaha, and how they can be explored for its betterment and sustainability in the long-run?

Method

The study is based on positivist approach followed with quantitative method. A rapid questionnaire survey was conducted in purposively selected two wards (ward- 4 and ward-5) out of the twelve wards in the Devdaha municipality. There are various religious, historical, archaeological and economically important places in Devdaha municipality. As a limitation, however, this study did not cover all such sites and was empirically based on these two wards:

- Ward 4 includes Bhawanipur (Buddhist pilgrimage site) and Kerwani (area of municipality head office). The other areas of this ward include Singhaha, Bhawanipur, Vijaypur, Soiya, Devidamar (Damruwa), Pipraiya, Pragati Toll, Prakriti Toll and Syanjali Toll.
- Ward 5 represents one of the core area of main market aligned with national east-west highway. Some popular settlement clusters of this ward include upper Khaireni, Khaireni Bazar, Putli Bazar (Pragati Bazar), Kaluva, Gurung Tola, Sagarmatha Toll, Namuna Toll, Plot No. 1, 2, 3, 4, Laukeshwar Colony, and Siddharth Colony.

A cluster sampling was done in the main settlement areas of these wards that allowed to employ a rapid questionnaire survey by covering 65 respondents from each ward. Henceforth, a total of 130 respondents were employed for the survey with closed ended questionnaire. The survey was conducted during the Baisakh Shukla Purnima time of 2024 (May 22-24, 2024, i.e., Jestha 9-11, 2081 BS). The data was analyzed by using simple statistical tools.

Result and Discussion

Historicity of Devdaha

As "Deva" means "god" and "Daha" means "pond" in Sanskrit, "Devadaha" literally translates to "pond of the gods." This holy pond is supposed to have formerly been used by saints and deities for bathing. It is also stated that Prince Siddhartha took a dip in this sacred pond when visiting Devadaha. Therefore, it is a historical and religious city. It is identified as the maternal home of Queen Mayadevi (mother of Lord Buddha), Prajapati Gautami (sister of Queen Mayadevi), and Princess Yasodhara (wife of Lord Buddha). Archeological evidences support that the Devdaha was a township of the ancient Koliya Dynasty which shared Rohini River as the Western border. It was the time while there was neighborhood of Shakya dynasty at the north-west, led of kingship of Suddhodhan, father of Lord Buddha.

In present-day political administrative provision, Devdaha Municipality is located in the northeastern part of Rupandehi District in Lumbini Province. According to the 2021 census, the municipality has a population of 72,457 residing in 17,300 households (CBS, 2023). Devdaha Municipality is bordered by Nawalparasi District to

the east, Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City and Tilottama Municipality to the west, Palpa District to the north, and Omsatiya Rural Municipality to the south, making it a hub for tourism. However, this area is also a hub of migration particularly from the northern hilly districts. Spanning an area of 135.95 square kilometers, the municipality is divided into 12 wards. Devdaha Municipality boasts several historical and archaeological sites, including the Pakari Tree, Kanya Mai, Bairi Mai, Dev Daha, Yashodhara Park, Bhawanipur, Gautam Buddha National Park, Smriti Park, Khayar Danda, and Mathagadhi Fort, among others. The municipality promotes various tourist and religious attractions under the slogan "Education, Health, Agriculture, Tourism, and Infrastructure: The Foundation of Prosperous Devdaha." This region bears a significant potential in agriculture and industry, abundant natural resources and cultural heritage from diverse ethnic groups.

Sample characteristics

The Table 1 highlights the history of migration in Devdaha while offering insights into employment and demographic landscape. There are more men than women among the 130 participants in the sample. The preponderance of men in the sample might be due to accidental, not intentional of the researcher. The majority of responders (41.5%) have been residents in Devdaha for more than ten years, indicating a firmly established and steady population. Nonetheless, a sizeable fraction (34.6%) is made up of recent immigrants, suggesting that migration from the northern upper hill areas is probably the cause of recent demographic changes. Migration trends have the potential to impact local dynamics, including job trends and cultural integration.

Table 1: Sample proportion by sex, migration history and major occupation

Attributes		N	%
Sex	Male	77	59.2
	Female	53	40.8
Migration	Resident of Devdaha more than last 10 years	54	41.5
	Newly migrants (less than 10 years)	45	34.6
	Native and locals since the past generation	31	23.8
Employment status of the respondents during last one year	Not employed in any sector	15	11.5
	Employed in tourism sector	17	13.1
	Employed in agriculture related activities	46	35.4
	Employed in trade and commerce related activities	29	22.3
	Wage/job holders (private sector)	20	15.4
	Job holders (government sector)	3	2.3
Total		130	100.0

Similarly, the majority of respondents (35.4%) work in jobs related to agriculture, which reflects Devdaha rural and agrarian character. There is evidence of economic diversification since large segments of the population are employed in trade and commerce (22.3%) and tourism (13.1%). There may not be many direct government

job prospects in the area, as indicated by the modest percentage of government job holders (2.3%).

Recognition of Devdaha as a pilgrimage site

"Devdaha" is a revered and esteemed name by itself. Given the historical significance of Devdaha in relation to Gautam Buddha, a sizable percentage of respondents acknowledged it as a place of Buddhist pilgrimage (Table 2). According to the survey results, 42.3% of respondents are aware that the main reason for Devdaha pilgrimage significance is because of its Buddhist past. Furthermore, 34.6% of respondents are aware of pilgrimage sites for both Buddhism and Hinduism, demonstrating a greater awareness of the significance of religion in the area. 6.2% are ignorant of the meaning of any pilgrimage, whereas a lesser percentage, 16.9%, are aware just of the Hindu pilgrimage location. This implies that although though the religious significance of the Devdaha is widely acknowledged, particularly in light of its Buddhist roots, there is still a knowledge vacuum regarding the complete context of its pilgrimages. Hindus also reverently attend and pray at the Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Devdaha, such as Kanya Mai Temple, Bhawanipur, and Devdaha Park. A number of recently settled areas have been named after the Buddhist and Hindu deities.

Table 2: Perception about the Devdaha's pilgrimage importance

Attributes	N	%
Known about the pilgrimage site of Buddhist	55	42.3
Known about the pilgrimage site of Hindu	22	16.9
Both Buddhist and Hindi co-exist	45	34.6
Unknown about this idea	8	6.2
Total	130	100.0

The perception of local people regarding the significance of Devdaha as a pilgrimage site indicates a notable degree of awareness regarding its Buddhist legacy, encompassing both Buddhist and Hindu sites. Because of its dual religious significance, Devdaha can serve as a focal point for the creation of all-encompassing tourism initiatives that position the destination as welcoming to a varied range of pilgrims. Increasing awareness and drawing in a larger audience through improved educational and promotional initiatives could support the cultural exchange and economic growth of Devdaha and its surrounding areas.

Nature of tourist arrival in Devdaha

The data as presented in Table 3 pertaining to Devdaha's tourism patterns indicates that, at 83.1% of total visitor traffic, domestic tourists make up the majority of visitors, with international tourists making up a smaller share at 16.9%. When it comes to the timing of visitor arrivals, most (62.3%) arrive at various times of the year, suggesting a consistent stream of visitors, whereas 37.7% only come during the busiest times of the year. In general, the visit of tourists in rainy season is less while it increases with the season of Dashain Festival. This pattern indicates that Devdaha has a strong year-

round tourist industry, despite certain seasons of the year when visitor densities are higher.

Table 3: Perception about the origin of the tourists and the most followed travel hours

Attributes		N	%
Types of tourists often visited to Devdaha	Domestic	108	83.1
	International	22	16.9
Peak hours of tourist arrival in Devdaha	Seasonal	49	37.7
	All Seasons	81	62.3
Total		130	100.0

Research findings reveal that Devdaha is mostly a domestic tourism site that sees a steady influx of tourists throughout the year, with the exception of a seasonal boom. Potential opportunities for expansion are indicated by the comparatively low number of foreign visitors, particularly if Devdaha's cultural and historical significance can be more successfully marketed to a worldwide audience, which can be also expanded to Butwal, Bhairahawa, Parasi and Sunwal. In order to retain or grow the number of seasonal visitors, the municipality should also look at measures to improve their experience. By doing so, it may be possible to balance out seasonal variations and guarantee steady economic gains from tourism.

Employment opportunities due to tourism

While tourism has helped 26.2% of the respondents find more work opportunities, the majority (53.1%) credit job growth to a number of causes other than tourism. This is according to data on employment opportunities and household income in Devdaha presented in Table 4. This implies that employment generation is not solely driven by tourism, even though it does play a part. In terms of household income, 15.4% of participants specifically mention a rise in income from tourism; but, a greater percentage (64.6%) attributes income growth to a mix of sources, such as business, agriculture, and remittances. This suggests that although household income is influenced by tourism, other factors have a substantial role in enhancing financial well-being. Overall, the data highlights how diverse Devdaha's economic development is, with tourism playing a significant but not exclusive role.

Table 4: Income and employment activities in Devdaha due to tourism

Attributes		N	%
Employment opportunities for local people	Increased particularly due to tourism	34	26.2
	Increased by different causes	69	53.1
	Reduced by different causes	14	10.8
	No any changes I observed	13	10.0
Household income of people	Increased particularly due to tourism	20	15.4
	Increased by different causes (including agriculture, tourism, business, remittances)	84	64.6
	Reduced by different causes	18	13.8
	No any changes I observed	8	6.2

Total	130	100.0
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Devdaha has seen a general increase in employment opportunities and household income, which can be attributed to a combination of tourism and other economic activity. Even though it has increased employment and income, tourism is not the only industry that has made a substantial contribution; business, remittances, and agriculture all play important roles. Nonetheless, there are still significant obstacles to overcome, since some members of the populace report lower household income and work chances. These observations can guide focused measures to support economic expansion and deal with particular issues in Devdaha.

Assessment of promotional activities in Devdaha

As evident in Table 5, a substantial majority of respondents (77.7%) to a survey on tourist-related efforts in Devdaha identify the existence of tourism projects in the area, demonstrating a strong concentration on tourism development. Only 40.8% of respondents, on the other hand, say they are motivated to work in or invest in the tourism industry; 39.2% say they receive no encouragement, and 20.0% say they are demotivated. There is a dearth of entrepreneurial training opportunities; only 27.7% of respondents reported having received training, and 72.3% of respondents said they had no access to such programs. 66.9% of participants in tourism seminars, festivals, or workshops do not attend, indicating a need for more easily available and interesting educational programs to encourage local involvement and investment in tourism.

Table 5: Perception about the promotional activities in Devdaha for tourism

Attributes		N	%
Tourism projects in locality, i.e. Devdaha region	Yes (having)	101	77.7
	No(not having yet)	20	15.4
	Not known	9	6.9
Encouragement for local to work invest in tourism	Yes (encouraged)	53	40.8
	No any encouragement	51	39.2
	Demotivation and discouragements	26	20.0
Entrepreneurial training activities	Yes	36	27.7
	No	94	72.3
Attendance in tourism seminar programs	Yes	43	33.1
	No	87	66.9
Total		130	100.0

The information shows that although there are ongoing tourist initiatives in Devdaha and some support for the people to travel, there are still large gaps in the local economy. Many respondents are deterred from engaging in tourism, if they are not inspired to do so. In order to empower people and increase their ability to contribute to and benefit from the tourism sector, there is a noticeable deficiency in the availability of entrepreneurship training and participation in tourism seminars and workshops. The local population in Devdaha may gain most from the economic and social advantages of tourism if these gaps are filled with focused interventions and assistance. The role

of municipal government and tourism related local stakeholder can play leading role in this regard.

Nature of benefits and its pattern of distribution

According to data on the benefits of tourism and how they are distributed in Devdaha, the local community is positively impacted (Table 6). The main advantages are the establishment of job possibilities (22.3%) and the promotion of cultural exchange (27.7%). Though its function in maintaining local heritage is less stressed (10.0%), tourism also contributes to the development of local community emotion (20.8%) and awareness (19.2%). With respect to how these benefits are dispersed, the majority of respondents (63.1%) think that the community benefits from tourism in an appropriate way. Nevertheless, a sizeable percentage (23.1%) believes that the gains are not shared at all, while 13.8% are unsure. This implies that even if most respondents agree that tourism is good, there is still opportunity to ensure that its benefits are distributed fairly.

Table 6: Categorization of major benefits and distribution system

Attributes		N	%
Benefits of tourism to local people	Helps to develop local community sentiment	27	20.8
	Helps to promote cultural exchange	36	27.7
	Builds local economy and creates job opportunities for the people	29	22.3
	Preserves the local heritages	13	10.0
	Helps to increase the local people's awareness	25	19.2
Distribution of benefits related to tourism to local community	It is properly distributed	82	63.1
	Not distributed at all	30	23.1
	I don't know	18	13.8
Total		130	100.0

Thus, tourism is seen as having a number of advantages in Devdaha, especially when it comes to boosting local economic growth, facilitating cross-cultural exchange, and strengthening community ties. While the majority of respondents think that these advantages are allocated fairly, a sizeable minority disagrees or is unsure. This indicates that in order to guarantee that the entire community may profit from tourism development, there is a need for enhanced procedures for the fair distribution of tourism benefits as well as greater communication and transparency. By addressing these issues, we can increase the beneficial effects of tourism and promote more local support for the sector.

Assessment of challenges and threats

The examination of challenges and threats to Devdaha's tourism industry, as presented in Table 7, reveals a distinct pattern, with over half of the respondents (55.4%) citing infrastructure and economic concerns as the biggest obstacles. The challenges related

to the environment (19.2%) and political-administrative issues (13.8%) come next. Concerning particular threats, unplanned development ranks highest (39.2%), implying that rapid or insufficient planning is compromising sustainable growth. Environmental degradation and government failures at different levels are also significant threats, impacting 10.0% and 16.9% of respondents, respectively. These findings highlight the critical need for thorough planning, enhanced infrastructure, and efficient governance to overcome the main challenges facing Devdaha's tourism industry.

Table 7: Challenges and threats in Devdaha due to tourism

Attributes		N	%
Major challenges for tourism development in Devdaha	Socio-cultural and religious challenges	15	11.5
	Economic & infrastructure-related challenges	72	55.4
	Political- administrative challenges	18	13.8
	Environmental challenges	25	19.2
Major threats (specific issues) of tourism in the community	Environmental degradation	13	10.0
	Local government's failure	22	16.9
	Failure of provincial and federal government	30	23.1
	Unplanned development	51	39.2
	Cultural change	14	10.8
Total		130	100.0

There are several challenges and threats to Devdaha's tourism growth, the most significant of which are infrastructure and economic in nature. The main perceived threats are unplanned development and various levels of government failure, indicating the necessity for strategic planning and efficient governance to enable sustainable expansion in the tourism industry. To optimize the positive effects of tourism while minimizing its detrimental effects on the surrounding area and ecosystem, it will be imperative to tackle these concerns.

Major infrastructures and services in Devdaha

As the research findings suggest in Table 8, the most often seen infrastructure (42.3%) is hotels and lodges, indicating that Devdaha has a reasonably developed lodging industry that serves both local and foreign visitors. Subsequently, 36 participants (27.7%) identified roads and trekking routes as crucial infrastructure, indicating the significance of transportation networks in bolstering tourism and enabling accessibility to diverse locations within Devdaha. A nearly equal percentage of respondents (26.2%) mentioned the accessibility of travel and transportation services, which is essential for visitors' freedom of movement within the area.

Similarly, the analysis of the sufficiency and insufficiency reveals that 92 respondents, or 70.8%, think that Devdaha's current infrastructure is insufficient. This suggests that although there is some infrastructure in place, it is not sufficient in terms of quantity or quality to meet the demands of the expanding tourism industry. After that, only 38

respondents (29.2%) believe that the infrastructure as it currently exists is adequate and profoundly developed.

Table 8: Tourism- related major infrastructures and their sufficiency

Attributes		N	%
Major infrastructures	Hotel and lodges	55	42.3
	Travel and transport (vehicles)	34	26.2
	Roads and treks	36	27.7
	Others	5	3.84
Sufficiency of the service	No (need more)	92	70.8
	Yes (workable)	38	29.2
Total		130	100.0

Although Devdaha has some developed infrastructure, including roads, hotels, lodges, and transportation services, the majority of respondents view it as inadequate. A major obstacle to the area's tourism industry's sustainable growth is the inadequate infrastructure. Significant infrastructure upgrades and expansions are required to fully realize Devdaha's tourism potential, especially in the areas of lodging, transportation, and road networks.

Responsible stakeholders and their quality service for tourism

Governmental stakeholders are the main responsible actors in the Devdaha tourist business, according to statistics on stakeholders, with 39.2% of respondents naming them as important stakeholders. This is a noteworthy trend in the industry. Of the respondents, 28.5% acknowledged the existence of non-governmental stakeholders such as hotels and travel agencies, and 32.3% believed that both kinds of stakeholders had a role to play. Regarding professionalism and service quality, the trend indicates that most respondents (54.6%) think stakeholders are relatively professional. This indicates a majority opinion of moderate professionalism. On the other hand, only 17.7% of stakeholders are seen as being extremely professional and responsive, while 27.7% believe that stakeholders lack professionalism. This pattern highlights the need for improved service quality and training for Devdaha's tourist stakeholders (Table 9).

Table 9: Tourism stakeholders and their functional modality

Attributes		N	%
Major stakeholders (types) in tourism industry of Devdaha	Governmental bodies (any branches of government; federal to local)	51	39.2
	Non-governmental bodies (e.g. hotel associations, tours and guide, travel companies, etc.)	37	28.5
	Both	42	32.3
Professionalism and quality service of the stakeholders	Not at all	36	27.7
	In some extent	71	54.6
	Yes, they are highly professional and responsive for tourism	23	17.7

Total	130	100.0
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In Devdaha, the tourism sector is predominantly led by governmental stakeholders, although non-governmental bodies or agencies also make noteworthy contributions. Though most people believe that stakeholders are at least somewhat professional, a sizable portion believe that they are not at all professional. As a result, opinions regarding professionalism and service quality are divided. This demonstrates that in order to effectively serve tourists, tourism stakeholders must raise quality and provide better training.

Conclusion

As the research findings inform, the tourism business in Devdaha is heavily impacted by governmental agencies, however non-governmental stakeholders (particularly the local government of Devdaha Municipality) also play a considerable role in the sector. Notwithstanding this, stakeholders' varying assessments of professionalism demonstrate the obvious need for improvement in service quality. Although most respondents consider the stakeholders to be fairly competent, there appears to be a gap in high-quality service standards that might be filled with focused training and development.

The results emphasize even more how complex tourism's effects are on Devdaha, where its economic advantages are acknowledged but still reliant on a number of variables not related to travel and tourism. Even if tourism has a favorable impact on revenue and employment development, other factors like agriculture and remittances also matter. It is imperative to tackle the issues that have been highlighted, namely those pertaining to infrastructure and planning, in order to augment the efficacy of tourist development can foster to contextualize the theme and spirit of 'Greater Lumbini', a pride for Nepal and Nepali.

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