

Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Bandipur, Tanahun District

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Abstract

Nepal is uniquely endowed with rich and diverse natural and imaginative attraction due to its geographical location and cultural uniqueness in the Himalaya. Tourism is the backbone and leading sector for the development of Nepal. Rural tourism refers to tourists staying in or near rural village, often traditional villages in remote areas, and learning about the village way of life. The main objective of the study was to reveal the challenges that impede sustainable rural tourism development in Bandipur. Household survey with structural questionnaire, FGD, KII and field observation methods were applied for primary data and published/unpublished documents were reviewed and analyzed for secondary data. The findings of the study indicated that there is potential for natural and cultural tourism due to the existence of a variety of related resources in and around the study area. However, raising social awareness, capital investment to maintenance natural and cultural resources, prioritization in infrastructure development and the promotion of local communities' participation is essential for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: eco-tourism, environment, local communities, opportunity, socio-cultural

Introduction

Tourism is one of the important sources in economics for social development of any country. Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment. Tourism is based on the desire for the pursuit of happiness (Enzensberger, 1996). Tourism has been linked with poverty reduction for a number of reasons, such as its ability to thrive in rural areas using readily available natural and socio-cultural resources thus creating job opportunities for the local residents (Ashley & Roe, 2002).

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Tourism is a forefront industry in the context of globalization which helps us to put forward our distinct products to international market that can generate income and employment (Upadhyay, 2005). Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside, their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (WTO, 1999). Tourism has various economic, social, cultural and environmental effects on tourism destinations (Vanhove, 2005). Tourism is 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, 2015). In rural tourism, the rural population benefits a lot by increasing the level of productivity in rural areas, creating employment, maintaining native culture and attracting the participation of local people (Hwang and Lee, 2015). Sustainable ecotourism aims to minimize the environmental and cultural damages, optimize visitor satisfaction, and maximize long-term economic growth for the region (Gupta, 2015). Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Ad hoc development and ignorance of environmental impacts, demand conditions and competition or supply side consideration lead to encounter the issues of sustainability in rural areas (Mitchell & Hall, 2005). There is no consensus on the definition of rural tourism since it is quite heterogeneous in terms of its characteristics (Wegren, 2016).

Natural and manmade geography of rural landscape provoke the potential for tourism. Rural tourism is an image or a set of images constructed by the tourists and sellers throughout the history, geography and culture of the territory (Canoves et al., 2004). To ensure that development and promotion of rural tourism using locally available resources is sustainable, local community participation is inevitable (Wahab & Pigram, 2004). The efforts of the authorities are underpinned by the understanding that the success of tourism development depends on the extent of involvement of local communities in the tourism planning and development processes (Page & Dowling, 2002). Rural tourism consists of leisure activities carried out in rural areas, and includes different types of tourism activities such as community-based tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, guest tourism, back packing, riding and agritourism (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007). Cultural tourism is a meeting with diverse cultures in the world which help to understand the different ways of life style, their customs, traditions, and cultural heritage (Dong, 2020). Village tourism is that

activity where tourist is staying in or near the villages, preferably unspoiled traditional village to learn about and experience village life. It involves the provision of local style accommodation, locally produced food items on the menu and the organization of visitors' participation in village activities (Parr, 2001).

Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and secular country, which possesses its own type of attitude, norms and values with diversified landscape that is the major attraction for visitors (NTB, 2011). Nepal is famous destination for pilgrimage due to its prominent, glorious and prideful historical and sacred places. Lumbini, being birth place of Lord Buddha and Pashupatinath, a centre of faith for Hinduism is major among many important places (MoCTCA, 2019). Tourism is a vital sector of Nepalese economy as it contributes 7.9% to the GDP (NRB, 2018) and to generate the employment opportunities. Nepal's cultural and ethnic diversity on one hand and the complex biodiversity on the other hand are appealing, attractive and unique tourism products in the world tourism market (NTB, 2003). Physical, climatic, and socio-cultural diversities are the vast tourism resources of Nepal (Chapagain, 2017). Development of tourism largely depends upon proper marketing efforts of the countries. Tourism marketing is defined as systematic and co-ordinate efforts exerts by the National Tourism Organization or the tourist enterprises at international, national and local levels to optimize the satisfaction of tourists groups and individuals in view of the sustained tourism growth (Bhatia, 1994). Proper planning in tourism, conservation and economic development can be done with the help of knowledge and experience of local people (K.C. & Thapa, 2016).

Sustainable tourism is to preserve the financially viable and social reward of tourism development while reducing any unwanted impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment that is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists in the destination (Joshi & Rajopadhyay, 2018). Bandipur is focused on the potentials and sustainable eco-cultural destination, which will provide strength for other economic activities. Its location provides the credible of a substitute place to stay at a convenient distance between Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Chitwan. However, there is a gap of research in sustainable tourism development in Bandipur area. The main objective of this study were to identify natural and socio-cultural resources that can be used for rural tourism development and to reveal the challenges that impede sustainable rural tourism development in Bandipur of Tanahu district.

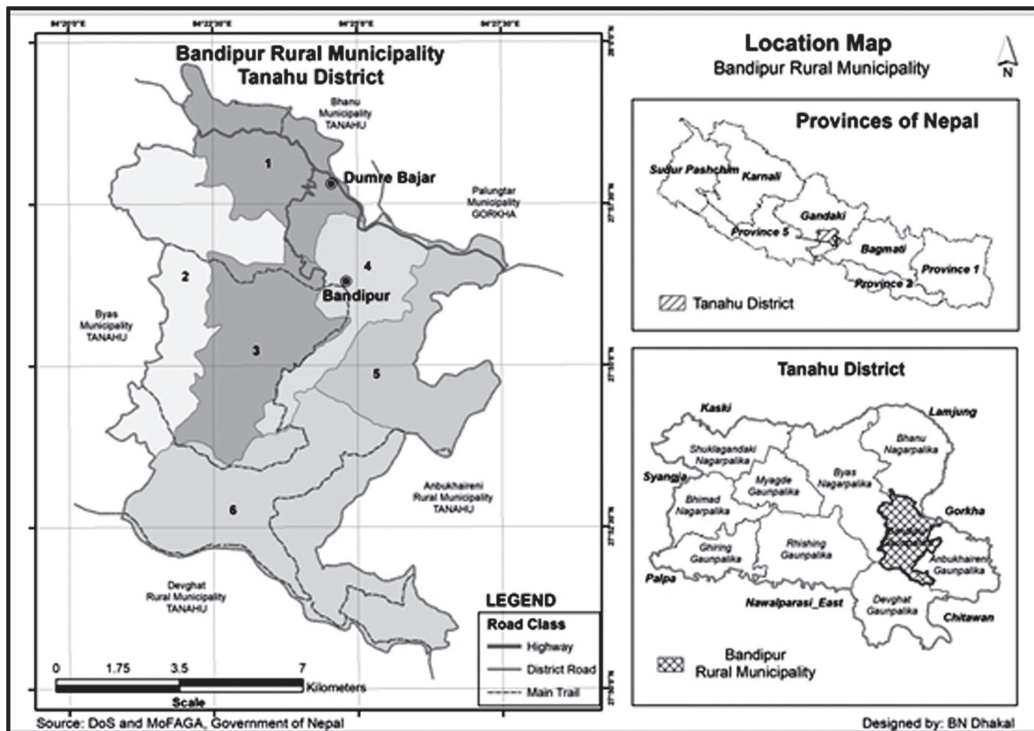
Method

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches has been used to address the research questions. To ensure the best results, respondents have been selected from three wards that cover the main market area of Bandipur (1, 3 and 4) out of six wards that make up Bandipur Rural Municipality. The total of 86 households from ward number 4 out of 799 households, 31 households from ward number 3 out of 500 households and 9 households from ward number 1 out of 843 households have been selected based on the coverage of market area within ward boundaries. It has been informed that out of 2142 household in three wards only 601 households have been associated in urban and tourism related activities during the field study. Simple random sampling has been used to get the total sample size of 126 respondents from the three wards. Primary data has been collected through individual structured questionnaires from the hotel owners (34), local people (69) and available tourists (23) during the field survey. During the individual survey, hotels owners have been consulted for available facilities in their hotels including socio-economic conditions with their perception on tourism development, similarly origin of Bandipur as a trade and tourism center, development trends, sources of goods in the market and existing services, problems and prospect of tourism in the future etc. have been asked with local people. Further, perception on available resources, behavior of local communities, their expectations, future plan and suggestions for sustainable development of tourism in Bandipur area have been discussed with tourists during the field survey. In addition to this, field observation, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) techniques have been consulted with senior citizens, teachers, government officials and ex-officials and members of hotel association, members of local community development associations, members of transportation management committees, and members of local youth clubs for detail information on origin and trend of tourism activities, existing available resources, location of tourist hot spots, status of infrastructures development, problems and prospect of tourism development with their perception in Bandipur area. Apart from these, secondary data have been also collected from published and unpublished government documents i. e. profiles of Rural Municipality, annual report of district coordination committee, research papers, maps and tourist guide books. Quantitative analysis has been done through the application of software packages i. e. Ms Excel and SPSS for available data.

Bandipur is located in 27°56' N latitude and 84°25' E longitude an elevation of 1030m on a mountain saddle (Mahabharata range) approximately 700m above from

the Marsyangdi river valley, 143 km to west of Kathmandu and 80 km to the Pokhara. Bandipur is surrounded Bhanu Municipality in the north, Anbkhairni in the south west, Devghat Municipality in the south and Byas Municipality in the north east. Bandipur is a hilly area encountered with a panoramic view that eludes both the local and outsiders mostly by its pleasant view of the Annapurna range and livable climate and a renowned history. Bandipur Bazar is situated on a ridge above the Highway town of Dumre, and presents sightseers with a heady mix of history, architecture, incredible views, awesome caves and unspoiled landscapes. As majority of the people living there are Newars, the place presents a typical newari culture, however, still some other tribal religions and their cultures can be observed. Bandipur presents an enchanting place for trekking and hiking place and experiencing a warm and humid comfortable climate throughout the year, with 32^{0c}-33^{0c} summer temperature and 12^{0c}-13^{0c} winter temperature. The place is also significant for its age-old traditional festivals like chudka, dhan nach, ropai nach etc. All these aspects has made Bandipur rich in its socio-cultural aspects added with the pleasant environment, that has been successful in eluding more and more tourist year-around. Nonetheless, the friendly nature of the people makes the stay longer and mesmerizes any visitors with a warm hospitable.

Figure 1: Location map



Result and Findings

Bandipur has believed abundance of natural, cultural and traditional attraction center as a form of tourism that can contribute economics to local communities' development. Number of tourist by purpose of visit is a major indicator for tourism sector productivity. This indicator is very useful for evaluation of characteristics, type and economic and social contributions made by tourists to plan and manage existing infrastructure, services and promote market economy accordingly. It also shows inflow of high value tourists. Historical data has shown more than 65 percent of the tourist arrived with purpose of holiday celebration and pleasure in Nepal, followed by adventure including trekking & mountaineering (16.5 percent), pilgrimage (14.5 percent) and other purposes (4 percent) (MoCTCA, 2019). It is noticed that most of the tourists visit the study area that come to visit in Nepal (NTB, 2018). While presenting a set of questionnaire to the tourists in the study area, the finding also proved that most tourists expressed the importance of the study area as they broadcast that Nepal is Bandipur. They further added their attraction in sightseeing monuments, scenic beauty of Himalayas, and welcoming by hotels with unforgettable ancient arts and sculpture to live as well as cultural and religious attraction in the Bandipur.

Socio-economic structure of respondents

This study has found the representation of respondents by different age group. 67.5 percent of them were representing from the age group between 16-59 years, whereas 24.6 percent were above 59 years of age and some of them (7.9 percent) were below the age of 15 years.

Table 1: Respondents by Age structure

Age group	No of respondents	Percentage
Below 15	10	7.9
16 to 59	85	67.5
Above 59	31	24.6
Total	126	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Further, the study has also noticed the literacy status of respondents. Among them 6.4 percent of respondents were illiterate, 26.2 respondents were literate, similarly 35.7 percent respondents were up to SLC qualification and representing of 31.7 percent of respondents with higher than SLC educational qualification during the field study. Some of the people have little knowledge or experience on rural tourism.

Table 2: Literacy status

Qualification	No of respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	8	6.4
Literate	33	26.2
Up to SLC	45	35.7
Above SLC	40	31.7
Total	126	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

In addition, the study has also observed the sources of income and occupational structure of respondents. Among them 32.5 percent of them were involving in their business including hotels and groceries, 21.4 percent of them were involving in agriculture, 15.1percent of them were maintained their life from the remittances from foreign employment. Similarly, 7.1 percent of them following daily wages for their subsistence and remaining of 15.9 percent of respondents were involving in other different activities like government and private services.

Table 3: Sources of income and Occupational structure

Activities	Number of respondents	Percentage
Business	41	32.5
Agriculture	27	21.4
Foreign employment	19	15.1
Daily Wages	9	7.1
Others	20	15.9
Total	126	100.0

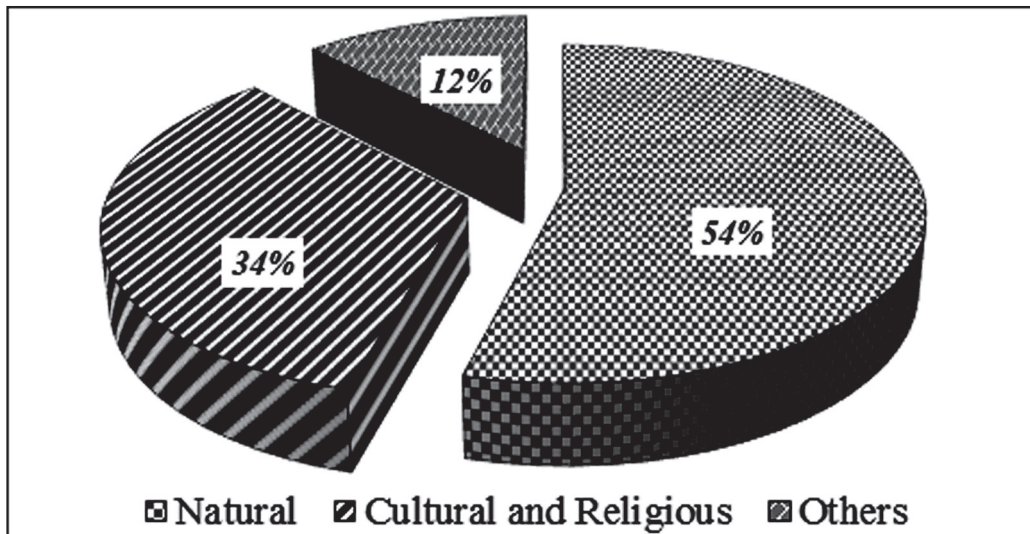
Source: Field Survey, 2018

Nature and sources of tourists

The study found that that 54 percent of tourists visit Bandipur for the purpose of adventure including trekking and hiking, along to mountain climbing, paragliding and mountain biking which is followed by religious and cultural tourists (34 percent) which means to see and enjoy with the traditional culture, cultural heritage, folk songs, folk dance etc. of village people and other purposes like business and meditation etc. comprising 12 percentage of total tourists. Further, it is found that the most of the tourists (58 percent) spend up to 5 to 15 days, similarly 17 percent of tourists spend more than

15 days and 25 percent of them spend only less than 5 days in and around the Bandipur area. The study also reveals the flow of tourist according to their nationalities. Out of sample survey of 23 tourists, majority of them (33 percent) visited from European countries, followed by 21 percent from India, 18 percent from Americans, 16 percent from Japanese and Chinese and 12 percent were from other nationalities.

Figure 2: Nature of tourists in study area



Existing problems

The study has found various types of problems in the study area. Most of the respondents (64.3 percent of them) informed that they are facing the problem of infrastructure including lack of proper maintained and upgraded road system, reliable communication facilities and sufficient and standard accommodation facilities in Bandipur area. Further, 47.6 percent of respondents have facing the market problems including not availability of fresh and hygienic vegetables, fruits and other goods in the market. Similarly, 45.2 percent of respondents have noticed the problem of insufficient information centers, trained and professional guides with native language for tourists. In addition to these, many of the respondents (51.6 percent) mentioned the problem of sanitation due to the lacking on proper management of wastage, not availability of modern toilets. In addition to these, 16.7 percent of respondents indicated the problem of seasonal tourist, 18.3 percent of respondents indicated the problem of insufficient ATM facilities and money exchange centers, 29.4 percent of them shared the problem of insufficient medical and hospital facilities, lacking of accidental rescue facilities. Apart from these, 21.4 percent of respondents claimed the problem of untimely natural

disasters like threat of earthquake, heavy rainfall, and fuggy winter also caused the problem for tourists. To support on this situation, some of the respondents (17.5 percent) have claimed the problem of unstable government policies on tourism development are responsible behind the present problems in Bandipur.

Table 4: Problems of tourism

Problems	Respondents	Percentage
Infrastructure (roads, communication and accommodations)	81	64.3
Market	60	47.6
Information centers and tourist guide/languages	57	45.2
Unstable government policies on tourism development	22	17.5
Occurrence of natural disasters	27	21.4
Seasonal tourism	21	16.7
ATM/ money exchange	23	18.3
Sanitation/Pollution	65	51.6
Others (culture, hospital, security/rescue etc.)	37	29.4

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Perception and recommendation by respondents

All of the respondents agreed that environmentally destructive activities should be discouraged and existing rules of managing the resources in the area are inadequate. However, most of the tourists revealed their satisfaction with overall situation of the infrastructure available in the study area. Additionally, they are satisfied with the behavior of the local people and also available natural and cultural beauties in the village. They have recommended managing sanitation; toilets and solid waste disposal system should be upgraded and systematized as it may create problems for sustainable village tourism development in future.

Promotion of home stay program to involve and increase the level of local participation in promoting tourism is crucial in the study area. Further, long-term financial and technical support is essential if tourism is to play an effective rural development role. In addition, tourism resource map of the study area and capacity building trainings like language and communication skills, rural tourism management and hospitality trainings are lacking for rural tourism development. Preparation of tourism management plan, promotion of tourism and environmental awareness programme,

and marketing of the village via internet or latest mode of communication are needed to internationalize its scope in global level.

Discussion

Nepal has a high potential in the development of its tourism industry; therefore, village tourism could be the ultimate source or the backbone that could enrich the tourism industry from the root. The qualities of infrastructure and health facilities are not only the indicator but also the friendliness of residents towards visitors; easy communications between them are the foundations of sustainable rural tourism development (Petrovic et al., 2018). In rural tourism, the rural population benefits a lot by increasing the level of productivity in rural areas, creating employment, maintaining native culture and attracting the participation of local people. Bandipur has a unique destination with its marvelous temples, monasteries and historical monuments, all have a charm of their own. The old beautiful buildings and temples, inflated with elaborately carved windows and balconies; the convoluted monument in stone, and the works of art in wood, terracotta, and metal bear witness to living traditions which are highly appreciated by the tourists. The range of natural, cultural and heritage tourism products found very wide in the study area.

The development of rural tourism in Nepal has several benefits for the country in addition to the local community. Sustainable development of rural areas preserves the immense natural and cultural resources of the country, ultimately promoting the uniqueness of the place and the people. A sustainable rural tourism is the product of the apprehensive planning, management and monitoring of tourism development. Sustainable tourism defends and benefits the local community and their environment. Development of infrastructure like transportation, communication, accommodation and health services are still inadequate in the study area that has tampering the development of tourism.

Conclusion

Nepal has different types of landscapes, climate, bio-diversity and socio-cultural richness.

Tourism is one of the major activities which inspired the process of socio-economic progress of the country. Nepal has also believed that tourism can substantially contribute to national economic development due to its comparative advantages. It represents an important sector of the Nepalese economy which earns foreign exchange for the

nation; provides employment opportunities for local communities and contributes to the growth of various accompanying industries. Besides this, tourism is not only the backbone of our national economy, it also plays vital role in promotion and continuation of our tradition, culture and heritage.

The representation of respondents has been found higher from the active age group having experience of tourism activities from the past. More than 65 percent of respondents having basic and higher level of education were sharing their knowledge in rural tourism. The diverse type of occupations and sources of income has been noticed from the study. Higher portion of them have been involving in their business including hotels and groceries, similarly agriculture, remittances, daily wages, government and private services have been found other type of occupations and sources of income for their subsistence and way of living life in the study area. It has been found different nature of tourist in the study area. Most of them, as a natural tourists visit Bandipur for the purpose of adventure including trekking and hiking, which is followed by religious and cultural tourists. The dominance of tourist flow has been found from European countries.

It has found various types of problems in the study area. Insufficient infrastructure (road communication facilities and accommodation), market, tourist guides, sanitation, ATM facilities and money exchange centers, medical and hospital facilities, accidental rescue facilities are the major problems noticed in Bandipur area.

It is concluded that the prospect of developing tourism in Bandipur seems very potential. However, we still need to increase awareness among the local people and their communities about conservation of the natural & cultural resources as well as social integrity to flourish tourism. In addition, without the development of basic facilities and the promotion of domestic tourism, the study area will be far from seeing growth of tourism in the region. To make village tourism sustainable and to promote it through the concept of sustainability, especial target should be given to local community for their active participation as well as use of local product. Rural tourism management will only be meaningful if the benefits of the tourism are accessible to the poorest people and women in grass root level, they should be involved in tourism management through the utilization of their art and skills. Therefore, public awareness about the importance of natural as well as cultural resources, support from the private as well as government sectors, a repeated monitoring and collection of feedback from the local communities about their needs have to be taken into consideration for the sustainable development of rural tourism.

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