

## Soft Adventure and Spiritual Tourism: A Case Study of Khaptad National Park

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### Abstract

*Tourism for lifetime pride is adventure tourism. Khaptad National Park and its core area are the land of meditation of renounced (sage) Yogi Khaptad Baba. It is a natural beauty hub and centre of soft adventure tourism in Far West Nepal. The land is adventurous from different dimensions of tourism. Thus, to find out the elements of adventure tourism in the Khaptad area the study has been conducted. To explore the elements, the study has analyzed the attraction component of adventure tourism in the zone. It is a case study of Khaptad National Park, Nepal. The facts were collected through field observation, focus group discussion, and qualitative interviews on qualitative exploratory approach. From the review, discussion, and analysis, it was found that the land is perfectly suitable for high-altitude hiking, trekking, bird and butterfly watching, rock climbing, yoga, meditation, and snow sports. Any type of outdoor sports (Cricket, football, mountain biking, running, skiing, and many more) at cool high altitudes can be organized in the Khaptad. The land can be the milestone for Nepalese soft adventure sports tourism including spiritual, cultural, and eco-tourism. However, infrastructure tourism development in the pristine land must be as much as environmentally friendly. One ring road around the Khaptad National Park is advisable but motorable roads should be constructed upward to the plateau. It is the land like a natural heaven that must not be indulged by concretization and modernization.*

**Keywords:** Khaptad Baba, Khaptad National Park, spiritual tourism, soft adventure

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## **Background**

The increase in the number of tourists to mountain regions poses both opportunities and challenges for sustainable mountain development. To achieve sustainable development, it is essential to examine societal, landscape, and population transformations in mountain regions (Sun & Watanabe, 2021). To examine the societal, landscape, and population transformation through the development of adventure tourism in the Khaptad National Park (KNP) area, the exploratory study was designed. KNP includes four districts of the Far western province of Nepal i.e. Achham, Bajhang, Bajura, and Doti. It is the centre of four districts of Sudurpaschim province of Nepal. This is an exploratory study of the beautiful, breathtaking nature, and smart awakening spiritual soft-adventure tourism destination of western Nepal. It is the exploration of adventure tourism of the palace of penance of the immortal yogi -Khaptad Baba.

Khaptad is one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the far-west - Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal. It is a soft adventurous land for meditation, yoga, trekking, hiking, bird watching, butterfly watching, and many more such tourism activities. However, it was the land of penance of Khaptadbaba where he had spent his 50 years and written many books like “Science of Thought”. Now, it is protected and preserved by KNP. It is the land of culture, nature, and adventure in integration as a package of tourism. These three qualities of tourism can be found in Khaptad which can attract millions of tourists around the globe. Different festivals, celebrations, customs, music, and dances are in a package that generates the cultural identity of the Far West Province of Nepal via Khaptad. It is a unique and awesome experience that can be figured out with traveling and observation. Nature is another best attribute of the tourism development element of Khaptad.

The rapid development of tourism can bring extraordinary changes in rural areas’ economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions. Many rural areas are experiencing landscape changes generated by the adventure rural tourism development strategy. Nature and culture-based tourism have prevailed as economic pathways for rural communities in many mountain areas. Like such mountain regions have fostered tourism development to boost economies through the provision of direct income and employment opportunities to local residents in many areas. Mountain tourism is irregularly distributed globally, and its benefits are unequally scattered from the local to the national level. However, Khaptad tourism can be a milestone for the province. Tourism product diversification is crucial for the competitiveness and sustainable development of a particular destination (K.C., 2016). Fifty thousand population with six thousand households in four districts of the Buffer Zone must be utilized through income generation for the tourism development of Khaptad.

Tourism is the primary source of foreign exchange and revenue in Nepal. The magnificently disparate natural landscape and rich cultural heritage have promoted the rapid development of tourism in the country. Since foreigners were first allowed to visit Nepal in

1951, the number of tourists has increased significantly, from 9,526 in 1964 to 1,197,191 in 2019. Trekking and mountaineering are the leading tourist activities in Nepal; the total number of trekkers and mountaineers in the country was 197,786 in 2019 to statistics on Nepalese tourism presented by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation. Thus tourism in Khaptad is based on nature and trekking. Tourists visiting Nepal must visit Khaptad as well. Research on ecotourism in protected areas (PAs) worldwide shows that developing countries are promoting ecotourism as an effective tool for sustainable economic development and conservation strategies (K.C., 2016). Ecotourism directly helps in environmental protection, wildlife conservation, poverty alleviation, and socio-economic development of the selected area.

Ecotourism leading soft adventure tourism affects environmental, social and economic components of the community and the whole country in its development. K.C. (2016) further says it has different forms which are named according to the preference of the country. Developed as well as developing countries, like Nepal, are promoting ecotourism leading soft adventure for sustainable development of the nation. Khaptad is one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in Nepal. It can be developed by either cultural development, ecotourism development, or soft adventure tourism. Thus, the study has selected, among three, the soft adventure mode of tourism development in the Khaptad Area. It is an exploratory study of soft adventure tourism in the Khaptad of the Far West province of Nepal.

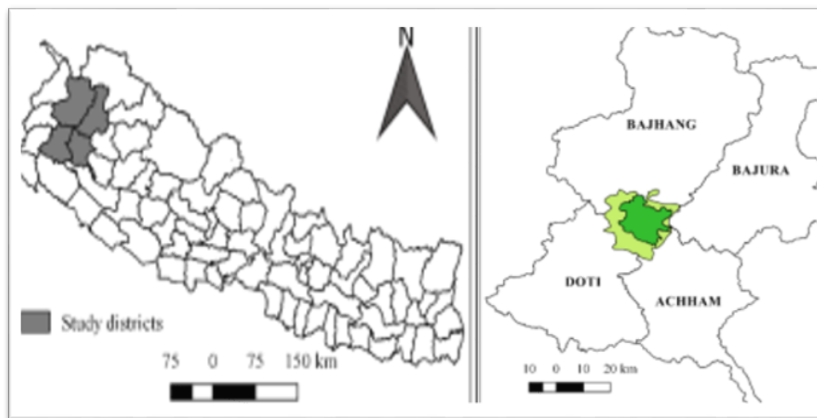
**Table 1**

*District-wise land ownership of KNP*

District	Area in sq. km	Percentage
Achham	39.5805	17.63
Bajhang	88.6392	39.47
Bajura	10.8998	4.85
Doti	85.431	38.05
Total	224.55	100

*Source:* Upadhya, 2009

KNP is a protected area situated in the Far-western Province of Nepal. It covers an area of 225 sq. km. as a core zone and a buffers zone of 216 sq. km. The national park occupies over four districts: Achham, Bajhang, Bajura and Doti. The park is the only mid-mountain national park in the western part of Nepal. The altitude of KNP ranges from 1,400 m to 3,300 m above sea level. It is the most beautiful land of far western part of Nepal.

**Figure 1***Khaptad National Park in Map*

*Source: Shrestha, 2021*

The landscape consists of 22 subalpine meadows, locally called Patan or Kharka, which is the major attraction of this area. Khaptad is well known for its flora spread over Patans. In the spring, Khaptad has a magical touch when flowers such as primulas, buttercups, wild berries and bistortas are blooming. The lush green and pristine forest are filled with fir, oak, hemlock, laurel, Nepalese alder and rhododendrons. The nature, the culture, and the adventure in an integration is Khaptad.

### **Problem Statement**

In the last 9 years, only 258 international tourists have visited in KNP. Tourism is a serious industry and consists of all those firms, organizations, and facilities, which are intended to serve the specific needs and wants of the tourists. Why is tourism growth almost negative? To find out the reasons for the un-development of Khaptad tourism a study has been conducted. Joshi (2004) and Upadhyaya (2009) have given detailed comprehensive information on the social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of Khaptad from the tourism perspective in their dissertation. The land is like heaven-cool colorful meadows above 3000 meters. According to history and mythology, this holy place is like a heaven and is said to be the home of many Gods like Shiva, Vishnu, Saraswati, Varuna, Kubera, and other Khechar (Sky traveling) Gods. All these scholarly works have specifically recommended that further study is necessary for a detailed exploration of Khaptad. Actually, what is Khaptad? Why is it so beautiful? What are the romances of adventure in Khaptad? The possibility of adventure tourism in such a beautiful land has not been studied. Kunwar (2021), in his book, has explained almost every dimension of Khaptadbaba and the beautiful land, even though he shows the gap in Khaptad exploration. KNP is a diverse and beautiful

landscape with magnificent vegetation but is less explored. Thus, to explore possibilities of tourism the study was designed and conducted from 26th April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May of 2022.

### **Objectives**

Generally Objective (Research Question) of any research is to identify the issue for further study. It is the study of soft adventure tourism in KNP preserved and pioneered by renowned sage Baba Khaptad. Thus, the main objective of the study is to explore the elements of adventure tourism, the study has analyzed the tourism components of Khaptad.

### **Literature Review**

Khaptad is *Vuswarga*- heaven on earth (Balayar, 2000). In research writing, such a metaphorical word may mislead the context but the languages and emotions in expression from the writing of different scholars. Cameron (1995), specifically says the land (Khaptad) is a paradise of flora and fauna. Thus, Khaptad is a beautiful land like heaven on earth. Das (2022) has metaphorically described the beauty, potentiality, and routes to visit the holy snowy land –Khaptad. The land is absolutely beautiful. It means the Khaptad area is full of natural, and cultural attributes. Risal (1996), in his *Mahakabya*- the epic of Khaptadababa, says environmentally the land is suitable for spiritual enlightenment. One who visits there will be rich and close to salvation. This is the land where Khaptadbaba has spent his 50 years of life. He has contributed greatly to the welfare of humanity by spreading his scientific spiritual thoughts. He healed many sick people suffering from both mental and physical sickness. He has written several books containing great knowledge about ways of living a human life on earth from the scientific dimension of Hinduism and spirituality for eternal salvation.

Nepal is an enthralling beautiful country having the potential for adventurous tourism such as trekking, rafting, kayaking, paragliding, jungle safari, wildlife reserves, mountaineering, hiking, bungee jumping, and many more to explore adventure tourism in Nepal (Adhikari, 2019). Thus, Nepal is filled with abundant natural resources, diverse cultures, ethnicity, tradition, and religious heritage; and the tourism industry has the ample potential to create employment opportunities and increase national income. Khaptad is one of the 10 top-rated destinations in Nepal for soft adventure tourism. Khaptad is one of the most beautiful triangular confluences of tourist destinations in western Nepal. The centre of KNP is the meditation centre of Khaptad Baba. The meditation area includes temples of lower Triveni. It is a very powerful meditation area with the secret Tantric value of Khapar Mashto, also known as Khecharardri (Sky Travellers). There are no restrictions for visitors that everyone can visit for the purpose (Upadhyaya, 2009). In the core zone, however, grazing animals, cutting firewood, and activities like drinking alcohol and smoking are strictly prohibited. Tourism without health precautions is an illusion. It is the land of health and wellness.

In a wide sense, outdoor touristic activities and programs are often commercialized and involve an interaction with the natural environment away from the participant's homeland range and contain a certain degree of elements of risk; in which the outcome is influenced by the participant, setting, and management of the touristic experience (Weiler & Hall, 1992) is adventure tourism. Visiting Khaptad and organizing different campaigns for pleasure, peace, and adventure is actually –Khaptad Tourism. It is the land of yoga, meditation, peace, knowledge, and healthy snow sports. It is the land of mountain biking, horse riding, trekking, nature walking, and many more. The adventure in Khaptad is a lifetime memory.

Khaptad trekking trail enters the KNP which covers an area of 225 sq. km and spreads over the four districts of Achchham, Bajhang, Bajura, and Doti. This is a wonderful land for bird and butterfly watching in nature. The Khaptad area is one of the endangered spots of subalpine ecology and biodiversity (Cameron, 1995). Thus Khaptad is one of the most spectacular tourist destinations of Nepal, it must be preserved as pristine as today in the future.

In general, adventure tourism is activity-based tourism, which incorporates the risk of different dimensions at different levels. Levels of risk and uncertainty are the keys to motivating adventure seekers to opt for a destination of activity-based tourism. The origin of adventure tourism could be traced back to the urge to satisfy the ego aspects of the consumers. So, it is categorized as ego tourism from a travel motivation perspective by many scholars. Ego tourism is a function of serious leisure in which the tourists have opportunities to satisfy their ego by expressing abilities, fulfillment pursuits, and identifying as unique human beings. It is different. Adventure tourism is supported and supplemented by ecotourism attractions, and the mountain tourism industry has reached its climax. The ego and superego turn into a symbol of peace and harmony due to the influence of the philosophy of Khaptada Baba. When body and mind both are healthy certainly the age of human beings will be high and it may be possible through the visit to the holy land - Khaptad. It is the land of ecotourism as well.

The average temperature of Khaptad is 0 to 20 degrees centigrade all over the year which is the best temperature for sports athletes – mild adventure tourism. It is the land of Baba. Khaptad Baba- a Yogi who did his penance for more than 50 years lived for 130 years (Kunwar, 2021) in the land. So the place is KNP. He was a Medical Doctor by profession born in Kashmir as Dogra Brahman, left his career and everything became a head monk (Sachidananda Saraswati) of Hindus in Banaras then he entered Nepal (Risal, 1996). The land is perfectly pure and pollution-free and normally people who live here can live more. Therefore, the land is also suitable for health-conscious soft adventure lover tourists. The land is very useful for soft adventurous tourism and sports activities in a cool atmosphere. The livelihood status of the villagers was taken into consideration and adventure tourism is

appraised for its scope of providing new employment and fresh income (Chakrabarty & Sadhukhan, 2019). The representatives of the local provincial and federal governments of Nepal have to take it seriously that the holy land is sufficient to create thousands of jobs for local people, but needs honest project planning and implementation of Khaptad Tourism.

Adventure tourism mixed with yoga and snow sports, makes people visit the place. The Yoga techniques include the practicing of physical Asanas, meditation, and breathing techniques to strengthen the body, calm the mind, and eventually lead to spiritual enlightenment, citing Smith and Kelly (Kunwar & Sharma, 2020). Snow- sport is another milestone of Khaptad that is linked with health. Health tourism as one of the most important forms of tourism is not an exception and preparing strategies for its development will not be possible without considering its specific and extraordinary environment (Khanal & Shimizu, 2019). We can ponder that the land is the heaven – the land of health.

According to the presentation of Pathak and Aryal (2021), institutional arrangement, strategic program of action, coordination and cooperation, and sharing of tourism activities to the livelihoods of mountain people are very few as compared to other means of livelihood in Khaptad. Tourism activities driven by the private sector seem to be able to promote the tourism potential. However, the real benefit of the tourism activities could not penetrate the rural households. Thus, Khaptad region, despite being a culturally unique and potentially powerful economic region of Nepal, has rarely been studied from the perspective of tourism and rural livelihoods. Tourism must be linked with rural livelihood for its sustainability. While various policy and program interventions have been carried out to promote tourism development, the livelihoods of the mountain people living in the Khaptad region have not changed substantially. The development of tourism is completely dissatisfactory. In 1993 only 24 tourists were recorded as visitors to the area, whereas in 2003 there were only 30 records and it was 67 in 2019. For the last 30 years, the tourism industry has been sleeping in Khaptad (Pathak & Aryal, 2021). Why is it so depressive? Tourism is a composite phenomenon, which incorporates the diversity of variables and relationships to be found in the travel process.

### **Materials and Methods**

Advancement in nature, culture, and adventure diversities of Nepalese tourism; linkage with Indian and Chinese economies; development of PPP (Public, Private, Partnership) model; disaster resilience chances; chances of development of eco, cultural, rural, adventure tourism; tourism decentralization, and massive investment opportunities are the specific opportunities of the Nepalese tourism industry (Badal, 2019). Governments, Private sectors, and third sectors must invest time and effort in tourism development and environment conservation in Khaptad. It could be the preliminary study of the Khaptad tourism development plan. To explore the elements of adventure tourism in the holy land of KNP, the study was designed. It is an exploratory analysis of elements of adventure tourism.



To explore the elements of adventure tourism, the study has analyzed the attraction component of tourism in the Khaptad zone. It is a case study of KNP, Nepal.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The facts were collected through field observation (FO), focus group discussion (FGD), and qualitative interviews (QI) with a qualitative exploratory approach.

**Adventure Tourism Development Field Observation (ATDFO):** ATDFO is an enlarged form of Field Observation for Adventure Tourism Development in a specified area. It is simply a field observation to check the probable adventure tourism attraction in a specified area. It should be justified by stakeholders through interviews or discussions. The list of Adventure Tourism includes bungee jumping, canoeing, canyoneering, caving, cycling, exploring, hiking, jungle walking, mountain biking, mountaineering, paragliding, rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, sandboarding, scuba diving, snow-sporting, trekking, and zip-lining. It is a trekking with a motive of tourism development. The probability of the development of tourism sites is observed with the help of the specified list. Note-taking, photo and videography, GPS sensing, and trespassers talking were applied.

**Qualitative Interview (QI):** Interviews collecting qualitative data were based on open-ended subjective questions linked with Adventure Tourism Development Field Observation (ATDFO). The questions were based on the problem statement and objectives of the study. What are the attributes of nature, attributes and hidden secrets of the un-exploration of a naturally beautiful tourism destination – KNP? The Qualitative Interview (QI) was conducted conveniently with: President of NATTA Sudurpaschim Province; the Focal person of the Ministry of Tourism Sudurpaschim Province; the Chief Executive Officer of Khaptad Area Tourism and Management Committee; the Assistant Warden KNP; and the Chief of Nepal Army Unit in KNP.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** The FGD was linked with FO and QI. The agenda for the focus group discussion (FGD) was as follows: the attributes of the nature of Khaptad Tourism, the attributes of the adventure of Khaptad Tourism, and the hidden secrets of the un-exploration of a naturally beautiful tourism destination – KNP. Seven (7) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with, 1. General staff of Ministry of Industry Tourism Forests and Environment, Sudurpashchim province, 2. Members of Tourism Development Society, Dhanagadhi, 3. Members of Tourism Action Groups (TAGs) located in 9 districts of the far west, 4. Members of the Hotel Professionals' Association at Dhangadhi, 5. Hotel Professionals' Association at Doti, 6. Members of Homestay Professionals at Darugaun Bajhaang, 7. Members of NATTA Far West, Dhangadhi. Question/Agenda related to adventure tourism in the qualitative open-ended mode were set as the subject of discussion and interview with different stakeholders in Dhangadi, Doti, and Bajhaang districts of far western Nepal. FGDs were taken in the Dhangadi district with the staff of the Tourism



Ministry and Members of NATTA, in Doti district with members of the Hotel Association, and in Bajhang district with the Local Community.

The study was conducted from 26th April to May 3rd, 2022 for eight days. The present study was carried out on both sides along the walking trail from Jhigrana to KNP and further to the Bajhang. The study work started from the Jhigrana (about 2200 m asl) and reached up to Bajhang via Bichpani, Khaptad Headquarters and Baba Ashram. The study area falls in the temperate and sub-alpine zone with elevations ranging from 2200 m to about 3200 m.

### **Results**

From the collected information from Field Observation (FO), Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and Qualitative Interview(QI) to develop KNP from a tourism perspective three elements were found. They were Construction, Cooperation, and Conservation from the philosophy of sustainable development. The plateau of KNP is 225 sq. km which is bigger than Kathmandu Valley which is just 220 sq. km. The data revealed that there was the common voice of most of the people about the construction, cooperation, and conservation of the Khaptad area for tourism development. Scenic beauty, pleasant climate, vegetation, flora and fauna, and socio-cultural heritage including Khaptad Baba's hermitage are the basic attractions for tourism in the KNP area (Upadhya, 2009). It means tourism in Nepal is a perfect mixture of nature, culture, and adventure. Tourism is a triangular confluence or perfect mixture of touristic quality of nature, culture, and adventure that can be noticed and studied in KNP.

The summary of the Qualitative Interview (QI):

*Nepal is the land of tourism but policymakers do not think it is a primary matter of development, Nepal has spent billions of rupees to develop the country but the result is zero. Many of the policymakers are old and outdated. We need a new visionary leader to develop Khaptad as a land of snow sports, hiking, and rock climbing centre. Khaptad needs construction, cooperation, and conservation.*

The summary of Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

*Khaptad is the most beautiful tourist destination in Nepal. It is the land of beautiful nature, awesome and unique culture, and soft adventures like trekking, hiking, bird watching, butterfly watching, rock climbing, snow sports, yoga, and meditation. These entire components should be checked and analyzed individually. It means it needs construction, cooperation, and conservation for sustainable tourism development.*

Thus, Khaptad is the land of tourism from nature, culture, and adventure must be explored through construction, cooperation, and conservation.

**Construction**

From the collected sources of information, the spectacular peace and lonely plateau with 225 sq. km needs to construct some Research Centres, an International Yoga and Meditation Centre, International Sports Centres, Cultural Centre, Museum, Eco Smart Foot Trail, Ring Road, Stations, Solar Energy, Clinic, and Cable Cars from all four sides of four districts. Nature first- construction must be nature-based because it is the national park for nature conservation.

**Cooperation**

Most of the respondents are highly conscious of sustainable development and conservation. There are already many constructions but in a pitiable situation. Reconstruction and renovation of Hermitage, Triveni, Sahasralinga, Sitapaila, Temples, Guesthouses, Foot Trails, and Resting Stations with modern facilities with toilets and solar energy are recommended. Cooperation with the KNP, local stakeholders, and buffer zone beneficiaries are the most. Khaptad Baba was born in Dogra Brahman related to the royal family of Kashmir India. Khaptad is as beautiful as the natural Kashmir of India. Nepal and India can work together.

**Conservation**

It is the land of thousands of natural flora and fauna. Thus, nature conservation and culture conservation are the most considerable. Under watershed management, the rivers and lakes must be preserved from landslides and soil erosions. Many lakes like Bukidaha are dried out, they must be revived. Khapardaha, the lake of Danfekot must be preserved for future generations. Under Meadows and Forest, Management entire (Patan and Jhoti) must be preserved as it is historically defined like Ghodadauna Patan can be utilized for the school of horse riding. It would be wise to establish a Herb Research centre (Cultivation) and ecotourism nature-friendly centres. From the cultural perspective cultural conservation of Deuda, Dasahara, and Darshan, must be preserved as the culture of the identity of the Far West. Without Deuda play, Dashahara celebration, and Darshan of Khaptad Baba, Triveni, Khapardah, and Saharshling including many cultural heritages of KNP, the identity of people of the far west is not possible. These are the most important cultural elements of the Far West so everyone from the Far West must visit KNP at least once in a lifetime. Thus, Khaptad is a perfect destination from an adventure tourism perspective; it is the land for Trekking and hiking, Bird and Butterfly watching, Rock Climbing, Yoga, and Snow sports.

**Discussion and analysis**

Nepal is known as an ideal destination for adventure tourism with its diverse natural attractions, adventure, and cultural heritage. Adventure tourism is a trip that includes involvement in physical activity, engagement with the natural environment, and a culturally immersive experience that interacts with local residents. In this way, presenting physical

challenges provides travellers with high levels of sensory stimulation (Genç, 2021). That makes people visit the place. The challenge is beautiful.

Having such a unique topography and climatic conditions, Nepal is one of the dream destinations of many tourists around the world, especially for adventure activities such as mountaineering and trekking. According to the tourism statistics of 2018, out of the total number of tourists during the year 2018, by the purpose of visit, more than two-thirds visited for vacation/entertainment, trekking, and mountaineering. It is a huge prospect for adventure tourism, natural tourism, and adventure sports tourism. This is the way to promote snow tourism by introducing a new and untapped adventure tourist activity and market segment, that may lead to the development of the economy and the tourism industry (Paudel et al., 2022). Thus, adventure tourism in Khaptad is only one idea to attract tourists from Kathmandu and other markets.

### **Soft Adventure Tourism**

Adventure tourism is to be described as “soft” or “hard”, the first involving less risk, such as trekking, while the latter is more challenging and involves higher risks, like white water rafting, rock climbing, and mountaineering. Adventure tourism is activity-based. A tourist that is considered to be skillful in certain activities might also be considered unskillful in another activity. Adventure tourism is undertaken with the view of ‘obtaining a state of exhilaration, an adrenalin rush, or a state of well-being that will often have both immediate and possible long-term benefits. Adventure recreation, as a core element of adventure tourism, has an impact on participants’ group development, leadership, and decision-making changes and consequently, these changes could be transferred to everyday life (Cheng et al., 2018). According to this guideline of adventure tourism, the Khaptad zone is suitable for soft adventure tourism. Khaptad zone is one of the fabulous landscapes with the jungle, rivers, and plains, and the cool isolation justifies its adventure attributes.

When it comes to adventure tourism, the three main components are the crucial factors for determining adventure tourism activities which consist of physical activities, natural and cultural exchange. The point is that every adventure tourism activity can be related to any kind of cultural, natural or physical aspect. Adventure Tourism is all about being connected to a new culture or landscape, at the same time being physically active with what you do. Adventure Tourism is not about doing something risky or pushing boundaries every time, in fact, it is especially important to know and respect limits while in an unfamiliar area or when doing different activities (Ale, 2019). Every sporting activity in Khaptad will be a fantastic adventure for sportsmen and tourists. This is the land of guests and the host both are outsiders. Taking a Bath at Triveni Dham and swimming in Khapar Dah only can give the immense pleasure of adventure to the tourists. Development of trails and supporting infrastructure (Pathak & Aryal, 2021), with a strong commitment to nature conservation, is advisable.

Adventure Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing subsets of the Tourism Industry. The Asian market has started contributing to the main market, and it is estimated that 60 million people in China practice adventure sport tourism. Indian Adventure tourism market is estimated at INR 18000 million by a maiden report submitted by Neilson in October 2016 to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. In the nature reserve, ecotourism activities such as bird watching, forest walks, cycling, wildlife photography, and butterfly observation, reptiles and amphibians (Khanal, 2020) enhance soft adventure tourism.

Nepal has come a long way in developing adventure tourism products. However, it's true that the country is not in a position to lure a large number of adventure tourists despite having a variety of adventure products - trekking, mountaineering, rock climbing, mountain biking, mountain flights, paragliding, ultra-light flights, rafting, kayaking, canyoning, boating, bungee jumping, hunting, honey hunting, jungle safari and bird watching (Gurunga & Ojha, 2019). Thus, Khaptad can be developed as the land of soft adventure tourism with sports types of adventure activities.

### **Trekking and Hiking**

Mountaineering and trekking are the major tourism products of Nepal's mountain tourism that increase the length of stay of the tourists, support the rural economy, and create a pivotal impact on the entire tourism industry. Rural tourism has tremendous potential to flourish tourism because most of the tourism destinations of the country lie in rural areas and the most common or classic form of trekking is mountain trekking (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2020). Mountaineering and trekking in Nepal are mainly concentrated in three areas viz. the Annapurna, Everest, and Langtang regions because they were popularized by foreign mountaineering expedition teams (Upadhyay, 2019). Trekking is a physical sports activity that is deeply rooted in these trends of healthy living.

Trekking is walking in nature for more than a day. Khaptad is a popular trek route. The KNP Trek is a short and medium to easy trek. It starts from Dhangadhi and ends at Silgadhi (Das, 2022). Sahasralinga is about 15 minutes climb from Danphe Kot. The trails need to be cleared and improved. If one wants to go to Chaukhutte post in Achham district, it will take a four-hour walk. Sahashra Linga is another religious site situated at the highest point (3200m) of the Park. KNP is an offbeat and underrated destination in Nepal. It is located in the extreme west corner of Nepal and is utterly beautiful. This National park is completely untouched which makes it more beautiful and at its full potential (Das, 2022). There can be many hiking and trekking trails in the entire four districts. However, Khaptad needs to make master plan for soft adventure tourism development trekking routes.

### **Bird and Butterfly watching**

The park also offers excellent bird-watching opportunities, with 287 species of birds, the common ones being different varieties of Impheyan pheasant, partridges, flycatchers, bulbuls, cuckoos, and eagles. KNP has a huge number of birds. It makes this park an ideal location for birdwatching. Once travellers reach the top, of the national park, they can start observing nature and the beautiful creatures it has created (Das, 2022). On that plain meadows, many types of colorful flowers bloom every year and the visitors can enjoy the beauty of the butterflies. Bird watchers are more interested in walking through the forest trails. All these plants and flowers attract a diverse array of butterflies, moths, and insects. Bird watchers can enjoy for 287 bird species where 23 species of mammals living in Khaptad include leopards, musk deer, barking deer, wild boar, goral, Himalayan black bear, yellow-throated marten, wild dogs, and rhesus and langur monkeys.

Rural Nepalese communities are specifically characterized by high levels of unemployment and deprivation, on low levels of skills rich in natural resources, so ecotourism is one of the potential sustainable land uses that can help local communities' economic well-being (Khanal, 2020). Bird-watching tourism services and experimenting with sedentary bird photography are increasing. Bird watchers as a rest point for entry into the reserve or its buffer zone. Local communities have experience providing paid services as porters and guides and providing accommodation to visitors. In the process, they have also gained scientific knowledge about local biodiversity and the environment. In mountain areas, location is often a major determinant of opportunities (Basnet et al., 2021). Thus, Khaptad is the best site for Birdwatching tourism and photography. Residents take tourists to watch for the birds because it is the best destination for bird watching. KNP is the land of Bird and Butterfly watching.

### **Rock Climbing**

Rock climbing is a common form of sport and recreational activity in Nepal. With the commercialization of mountain climbing, the sport has flourished. Climbing enthusiasts, including local inhabitants, enjoy the sport throughout the year. One can enjoy climbing rocks in some of the most exotic and least explored northern regions of Nepal. Also, an amateur course is provided to anyone doing mountain climbing in Nepal (Gurunga & Ojha, 2019). Nepal is a hotspot destination for mountaineers, rock climbers, and people seeking adventure. In Nepal, it is none other than Khaptad.

The Khaptad area is a plateau. It is also famous for a thousand statues of lord Mahadev (Sahasralinga). It means that there are many rocks and stones of different shapes and sizes. Those stones can be used for different types of rock adventures. Besides different means of potentialities in the adventure tourism sector, trekking, rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, paragliding, bungee, cannoning, mountain biking, mountain climbing, jungle safari, and mountain flight are the ones which are famous and exist in various parts of the

country. Rock climbing in a way can be a challenging sport for outdoor lovers. There are two popular rock climbing situated near Kathmandu known as Nagarjun rock climbing and one in Shivapuri National Park area. The cliff here is 12-15 m high and is suitable for both beginners and experienced ones. In Pokhara, an artificial climbing wall named after French alpinist Maurice Herzog, the first mountaineer ever to summit at 8,000m peak, Annapurna I, in 1950 is open at the mountaineering museum which is 23m high (Ale, 2019). We can make some rock climbing residential training centers that attract thousands of tourists.

### **Yoga Tourism**

Yoga tourism focuses on the union of body, mind, and spirit, that is considered to be aspects too. The Yoga techniques include the practicing of physical Asanas, meditation, and breathing techniques to strengthen the body, calm the mind, and eventually lead to spiritual enlightenment, citing Smith and Kelly (Kunwar & Sharma, 2020). The land Khaptad originated from the name of Khaptad Baba, so it is the land of yoga and meditation. An international yoga centre should be built here. Now people are more health conscious. Health tourism based on yoga, Ayurveda and meditation is growing steadily in Nepal (Joshi, 2004). Health tourism, as one of the most important forms of tourism, is not an exception and preparing strategies for its development will not be possible without considering its specific and extraordinary environment (Khanal & Shimizu, 2019). Khaptad is the land of yoga and meditation. For the promotion of yoga, meditation center should be established. .

It could be a milestone for Vichar Bigyan Yoga. The place where many mines of gold and jewels were found in ancient times and which is regarded as the divine home of plants and trees of Gods, where wildlife, birds, lakes, rivulets, waterfalls, and natural floral gardens make Khaptad heaven in this world. This place is so healthy that all diseases vanish once we worship the Gods of Khaptad – Yoga and meditation in Khaptad. Skandha Purana and Manasa Khanda tell much more about this place. It is also known that Bhagwan Dattatraya had meditated and built a temple of Sahasraling. In upper Tribeni there is also a temple of Jagannatha (Bhujju et al., 2007). Such heavenly monuments, the real tourism product with the perfect cultural value of the place are explored positively.

### **Snow-Sports Tourism**

Tourism that can take place in snowy meadows with different sports events is snow-sport tourism. Well-being items load on one factor in the snow sport tourism context (Mirehie & Gibson, 2020). The increase in the number of mountain tourists and persons participating in high-altitude sports including climbing, trekking, and various snow sports (skiing, snowboarding, etc.) has been exponential in recent years (Davies et al., 2019). These 22 Patans (Meadows) are very useful for any type of sports in cool weather. Snow skating, snow cricket, snow tennis, etc. can be played and organized in below 10-degree

centigrade temperatures. Snow bathing and Meditation in snowing could be the fine soft adventurous events of Khaptad. Snow-sport-related travel behaviour yielded two clusters, frequent travelers (56% boarders) and occasional riders (43% skiers) in Germany (Wicker, 2018). Therefore, the Khaptad area could be a fantastic soft snow-sport tourism center in Nepal.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, in general, KNP is one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in Nepal, which is still in the shadowed zone from a sustainable tourism development perspective. The land of soft adventure tourism is based on ecotourism for trekking, hiking, bird watching, butterfly watching, yoga meditation, and snow sports. It can be developed as the center of postmodern tourism. In Khaptad zone, tourist arrival is considerably low so accommodation and ancillaries should be added to the area. Similarly, some constructions of guesthouses, meditation centers, trekking routes, rock climbing training centers, research centers, and sports centers are necessary. The cooperation among national park, environment, forest, and tourism ministries, seems lacking. The most important component of sustainable development is conservation. Nature conservation is a must. So, entire tourism development activities must be carried with the mode of the philosophy of sustainable development- protection of the environment. One ring road around the KNP is advisable but motor-able roads should be constructed to the plateau- top of the mountain. It is the land like a natural heaven that must not be polluted by concretization and mechanical modernization. The land is itself so beautiful that it can attract thousands of tourists by publicity of its natural beauty.

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