

Tourism development planning in local level government: A proposal for Devdaha Municipality, Nepal

Bal Bahadur Tamang*

**Mphil-led PhD Student, Tribhuvan University and Development Professional*

Email: balbdrtamang@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v1i02.58272>

Abstract

Tourism development has been a prominent issue in Nepal's development. With the promulgation of a new Constitution in 2015 and federal delineation in the country, the local governments have been further provided with the rights of development planning and implementation. In this context, tourism has been an unavoidable part of development planning at the local levels. This paper is based on the case study of the tourism development plan of Devdaha municipality of Rupandehi, Lumbini province. Following both primary and secondary sources of data, this paper discusses different potentialities, challenges, policies, strategies and action plans for 10 years (2023-2033). The plan prepared for the tourism development gives a guideline for bringing about changes in the tourism sector in this Municipality.

Keywords: Devdaha Municipality, tourism development, planning, local level

Introduction

Tourism represents a journey of tourists to make entertainment through various tourism activities within a short period of time (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2013). More so, governments of developing countries, international development agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) see tourism promotion as an opportunity to initiate development processes. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that the travel and tourism sector account for a sharing of 7.6 percent of global GDP in 2022 which is an increase of 22 percent from 2021 but 23 percent below that in earlier COVID pandemic period 2019 (WTTC, 2023). Meanwhile, in another estimation, international tourist

arrivals increased by 102 percent from 2022 to 2021 but remained 37 percent less as compared to 2019. International tourism receipts recovered the USD 1 trillion mark in 2022 and reached 64 percent of pre-pandemic levels (WTO, 2023).

Nepal is also known as an important tourist destination in the global tourism market. That is why the trend of investing by public and private sectors in tourism service infrastructure also has increased annually. The tourism sector has become an important segment for economic growth, employment generation and poverty alleviation. The government of Nepal has implemented a tourism development decade for 2023-2033 which is just a boosting of another policy intervention as National Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025. While there was an arrival of around 12 lakh international tourists in Nepal it significantly reduced to 230 thousand in 2019 and 151 thousand in 2021 due to the COVID pandemic. However, the arrival started to take momentum after recovery and thus 614,869 tourists visited Nepal in 2022. As a destination, Lumbini is the most visited site. 904 thousand tourists (both domestic and international) in total, including 649 thousand Nepali tourists visited Lumbini in 2022. However, there is a pessimistic figure of the contribution of the tourism sector (accommodation and lodging) to national GDP. While the sector has contributed only 1.9 percent in the last fiscal year it is expected to have a slight improvement making a 2 percent contribution in the current fiscal year (Economic Survey, 2023).

With the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015, Nepal has adopted a federal system of governance, planning and development. At the bottom level, there are 753 local level governments which as per the Constitution (Part 5) could exercise different powers of executive, legislature, and judiciary (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). They have been granted 22 specific rights (Schedule 8), also with some concurrent rights as provisioned with the federal and provincial government (Schedule 9). The study of tourism is more focused on the core region of Lumbini rather than focusing on the peripheral places which could be also a significant part of sustainable tourism (KC, 2016; Ghimire, 2013; Shinde, 2021). In this

context, this paper aims to recommend a strategic development plan for the tourism sector in a popular destination of Devdaha which is historically and mythologically linked to the concept of the greater Lumbini area, the birthplace of lord Buddha.

Methods and Materials

The Devdaha has been selected purposively as a case study for this study. The place is known as the motherland of Gaudatm Buddha and the homeland of his wife too. For the primary data collection, six key informant interviews (KIIs) have been conducted (1 with development expert, 2 with civil society leaders; 1 with Chief Administrative Officer of the municipality and 2 with elected representatives (Mayor and Deputy-Mayor). Two focused group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted in wards 1 and 5 to explore the local people's perceptions and expectations about tourism development in Devdaha municipality. To complement these primary tools of data collection, some secondary sources of information have been also taken from different literatures, official records of the Government, and publications of the municipal office of Devdaha.

Description of the study site :

Devdaha Municipality is the ancient capital of the Koliya Kingdom. In Sanskrit Dialect, 'Deva' implies god and 'Daha' implies a lake thus the strict meaning of Devadaha is "lake of the divine beings or the gods". It is also the maternal home of Queen Mayadevi, Prajapati Gautami and Princess Yasodhara. It is believed that Prince Siddhartha (Lord Gautam Buddha) had spent some years of his childhood with his stepmother Prajapati Gautami in Devdaha. Being close to the Indian border and rich in ancient histories of Buddhism, it has a high potential for tourism development. The shadowed tourism destinations and products need to be explored and publicized, to bring economic development in this region.

Devdaha is located just about 5-7 kilometers east of Butwal, 7 km east-north from Bhairahawa and around 35 km north-east from the birthplace of

lord Buddha (Lumbini). The previous two village development committees-VDCs (Devdaha and Kerwani) were merged and this municipality was formed on 8 May 2014. Then, Siktahan VDC was merged into Devdaha municipality and it got a further extension on 10 March 2017 along with the state restructuring of 753 local levels. The Devdaha municipality has a total area of 135.95 sq km with 12 wards in total. As per the Census 2021, the total population of this municipality is 72457 (which was 53523 in 2011), including males 34033; and females 38424 along with 17300 households (CBS, 2023). Devdaha municipality has a strategic linkage to the different locations which are also closely proximate for tourism promotion. The municipality has Nawalparasi west in the east; Butwal Sub-metropolitan city and Tilotamma Municipality in the west; Palpa district in the north and Omsatiya rural municipality in the south.

Potentiality of cultural and tourism development

Social and cultural diversity:

This municipality has a mixed type of population structure in terms of caste/ ethnicity where 56 groups have been listed in the census 2021. It is dominated by the Magar ethnic group (17433), followed by Bramhin-Hill (15980), hill Tharu ethnic group (6310), Kshetri (5755) and Tarai Dalit Bishwokarma (5202) significantly. There is a growing trend of immigration in this municipality from different hilly districts and new settlement areas have been also developed.

Major tourist destinations in Devdaha:

The famous holy and giant Pakari Tree with a trunk of about 82 feet in circumference and a height of about 96 feet. The branches are wide spread creating a circumference about 500m, and is believed to be one of the biggest trees in Asia. The large Pakari Tree is to be believed from the time of the Shakyas. The fact that birds never nest on it, vultures and crows never perch on it and elephants never go near it, amaze the people. Similarly, Bhawanipur is the historical site of tourism which has a famous temple dedicated to Queen Mayadevi. It has also archaeological

importance and objects like a long stone column (some consider it to be an Ashoka Pillar), a stone image of the Sun God, and ancient brick well, etc.

Kanya Mai Temple located in the municipality is believed to be built in the memory of Queen Prajapati Gautami, the step-mother of Lord Buddha. Similarly, Devdaha Park is the eastern front gate of Devdaha contains a huge garden and a pagoda where lies is a big statue of Buddha The garden contains various flowers including Bodhi Brichha. The municipality consists of at least 30 numbers of Tourism Places and destinations like parks, *shanti stamba*, homestay, gumba, view tower, homestay and Kamdhenu Gausala. Moreover, it has at least 23 numbers of religious and cultural heritages like temples, stupas and so on. Last but not least, Devdaha seems rich in its social and cultural networking where there are many social institutions and organizations in every ward, such as youth club, ama *samuha*, *mahila samuha*, *Krishak samuha*, children club, and milk dairy.

Agro-tourism and Local Products:

The major agriculture center of this municipality includes Sarantari, Wangali, Pakdi, Budhanagar Godaha area, Jaleku, Dhaldhale, Mudawas, Satiyota, Trisuli etc. Similarly, the major crops in the region comprise paddy, wheat, maize, and mustard for livelihood. Fruits like mango and litchi are also famous in this place. People have started commercial horticulture of cow, buffalo, goat, pig, and fish in almost every ward, and farming of high-value cash crops and vegetables as well.

Ecology, Flora and Fauna:

Devdaha is at an altitude of 200m from mean sea level with around 60 percent coverage of forest area. The tree species found here are Sal, Sajh, Sisau, Bajhi, Harro, Barro, Amla, Kurilo, Jamun, Karma, Amliso, and mango. Likewise, the wild animals like Tiger, Deer, Monkey, Rabbit, Dear, Wild pig, Dumsi. Bear, Jackal etc are often seen in the nearby forests.

Public Service Delivery and Economy:

Siddhartha Highway and East-West National Highway (Mahendra Raajmarga) are the two major links to connect Rupandehi with the rest of the country. Gautam Buddha Airport connects Rupandehi with the rest of the country via Airways. Thus, Devdaha municipality is quite accessible along roadways and airways. Unique to this place, we can find E- E-rickshaws as the means of public transportation. The main market areas of the municipality include Khaireni, Shitalnagar, Tatera etc. including financial organizations. There are different sources of drinking water in Devdaha municipality. However, most people use tubes well for drinking purposes.

The literacy rate of this place is 83.13 percent (as per CBS, 2023) where people shared that there are around 100 educational institutions in different categories. Similarly, people also shared that there are nearly 30 health service institutions including hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies. Likewise, the rivers like Trishuli Rohijikoshir, Charenge Khola in Ward 10, Rohini River and Kayara River in ward 3, Parimai Khola in ward 4, Kajarar in ward 5, Kauli Khola, Saratra Khola in ward 6 could also be taken as the main source of irrigating the farmlands. The municipality has been completely electrification. Most of households use electricity as the major source of energy, despite the use of LPG and other petroleum products is not also unavoidable.

As different kinds of literature have suggested that tourism is a function of ‘A’. This is expressed in terms of 3 ‘A’s as well as 4 ‘A’s which is also extended up to 8 ‘A’s. Table 1 illustrates such as in the context of Devdaha which is envisioned during the data collection.

Table 1: Components of Tourism of Devdaha Municipality

Components	Categories
	-Availability air and road transportation
Accessibilities	-Trekking routes located around the proposed Lumbini Buddhist Circuit
Accommodations	-Small hotel, restaurant and tea stall in a few numbers -Greenery forest land, agriculture and pasture land having altitude of 200 m from mean sea level
Attractions	-Archaeological sites, river streams, ponds, typical royal palaces, temples, church, caves, water fall and old care center -Buddhism, Hinduism and diverse ethnic cultural norms and values
Amenities	-Traditional musical instruments Panche Baja and Bhajan Samuha (A group of people singing a religious song with traditional musical instruments) -Religious and cultural feasts and festivals as well as trade fares -Spiritual activities performing in Kamdhenu Gausala
Activities	-Pilgrimage tourism around Pakari Tree, Mayadevi Temple, Devdaha Park, organic local food, sightseeing, trekking and hiking
Actors	-Youth club, fathers group, mothers group, cultural

	groups, saving groups, government and non-government organizations as well as Rohini Sinharya Ayojana tatha Paryatarkiya Chetra Bikas Samittee
Affinities	-Mutual understanding among villagers belonging to all religious groups
Advertisements	-Descriptive information through maps and magazines -Hosts request guests to visit again in the villages -Networking with tour and travel agents

Source: Field visit, 2023

Strategic plan proposed for the tourism development (2023-2033)

As discussed in an earlier analysis, Devdaha carries a huge potential to be developed as a tourist destination. It would contribute as an adjacent part of the overall tourism regime of greater Lumbini. The municipality has currently adopted different policies for tourism development in this area, which are not planned scientifically and rather scattered. In this context, the following components would reveal the strategic initiatives of tourism development in Devdaha municipality for the coming decade, i.e. 2023-2033.

Vision: “Developing tourism sector for the economic prosperity of Devdaha Municipality”

Mission: The mission of this plan is to develop tourism for economic prosperity through the conservation of natural and cultural resources, in particular context of Buddhism

Goals: The goals of this strategic plan are two-fold. First, it aims at developing the tourism sector for economic progress and creating employment opportunities. Second, promote sustainable growth through the conservation of natural and cultural resources thereby promoting tourism in particular the Buddhist pilgrimage.

Objectives: The objectives of the plan has been set as:

- To develop Devdaha Municipality as a new tourism destination by devising and implementing a tourism development plan.

- To identify and preserve important cultural heritage sites in the Municipality.
- To explore and preserve non-material (intangibles) cultural resources in the Municipality.
- To appraise the strengths and challenges of tourism development approaches in the Municipality.

Strategies:

- Coordinating with public, private, cooperative and community sector to promote and develop tourism.
- Developing easy accessibility/connectivity with nearby tourist destinations.
- Planning the training regarding homestay for hospitality and other tourism related activities.
- Providing good facilities for resorts, hotels, paying guest houses, homestays and other sorts of accommodations.
- Offering economic benefits to the local people through tourism entrepreneurship.
- Promoting internal tourism by conducting tourism activities in all seasons.
- Integrated and facilitative infrastructure development in already available and newly explored touristic sites.
- Developing and differentiating the tourism sector and attracting foreign investors as well as Non-Residential Nepali.
- Developing local-level tourism development and management committees for planning, implementing and monitoring tourism-related projects providing tourism services.
- Making arrangements for Tourist Police to advise and assist tourists in safety and security during traveling, trekking, and other adventurous sports and night staying.
- Promoting sustainable livelihood programs linked with tourism by the commercialization of rural products and providing training to them as of such.
- Marketing of tourism-related services in the national and international tourism market.

- Encouraging and attracting private sectors' investment in the tourism and agriculture sectors.
- Establishing cultural museums, fun parks, view towers and learning resource centers.
- Initiating a powerful research cell for the conservation, culture and tourism development in the Municipality.

Potential risks and challenges for the successful implementation

There is less infrastructural development related to the tourism industry in Devdaha municipality, despite the fact that the travel and accommodation facilities are being developed. The incoming entrepreneurs have not envisioned the possible growth of tourism here. Central-level tourism development organizations do not show interest in promoting new tourism destinations especially outside Kathmandu or the already established destinations. There is a lack of promotion and marketing of tourism products in this Municipality as most of the development activities are confined to the core area of Lumbini.

The encroachment of historic properties by development activities such as road construction is on the increase. The number of tourists visiting this Municipality, the length of their stay and the amount of their daily expenses have not increased significantly. Tourism-related information are not available in a scientific database system. Tourism revenue benefits are not systematically recorded and they are not equitably distributed among the direct and indirect beneficiaries. The tourism services and destinations are yet to be categorized. Identified peculiar tourism products are yet to be promoted effectively.

Strengths and opportunities for the targeted outcomes

The Devdaha municipality is rich in cultural diversity involving both Tarai-origin caste/ ethnic groups and Hilly groups. Community-based organizations and financial/social institutions are functioning well in different wards of the municipality. The gradual development of tourism

infrastructure such as electric power, internet facilities and networks of mobile phones is taking place. The private sector's investment in tourism and agriculture sector is increasing. The federal government as well as the provincial government of Lumbini have prioritized the reconstruction of touristic and archaeological heritages. The high flow of remittance in the municipality can be invested for developing tourism services and infrastructures. The highly educated and skillful local youths can be mobilized in the agriculture and tourism sectors that are interrelated to economic progress.

The Local Governance Act 2074 has granted power to the local levels to collect revenue from local tourism entrepreneurs and tourists. That fund can contribute to the sustainable development of tourism infrastructures. The devolution of power to the local governments has helped in developing the tourism sector, and its promotion and expansion by identifying, implementing, monitoring and evaluating projects. The local governments have devolved power to conserve and develop language, culture and fine arts by preparing local-level policies, laws and plans. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has guaranteed the right to property and it has also equipped every citizen with the right to gain profit from the tourism business. This can also contribute to the development of the tourism sector. In particular, the ward offices can facilitate and monitor homestay tourism falling under its jurisdiction as well.

Action plans for the tourism development

Along with the above-mentioned objectives and policies, specific action plans should be followed for the strategic departure and improvement in tourism in Devdaha. Table 2 proposes 13 such strategic plans some of which have been further deduced in operational terms:

Table 2: Action plans for tourism development in Devdaha (2023-2033)

1	Programs for the increase in tourism in the city
	1.1 Formation of Tourism Development & Management Committee (TDMC) in every wards 1.2 Preparation of implementation guidelines & monitoring framework 1.3 Construction of Buddhamaya International Peace Garden in ward 3 and 4 1.4 Enhancing tourism development
2	Empowerment of tourism development actors and duty bearers
	2.1 Organizing workshops/training for planners & policy makers
3	Generate employment opportunities and conserve biodiversity and cultural diversity
	3.1 Organizing trainings to local people about hospitality management, handicraft making & awareness raising on natural & cultural conservation
4	Mobilizing the highly educated and skilled youths for tourism activities
	4.1 Establishment of roster of local youths highlighting their academic and professional expertise in tourism sector 4.2 Offering diploma level hotel management program in selected secondary schools
5	Conservation of the historical and religious sites to promote tourism
	5.1 Management of parks, gumbas, temples 5.2 Management of places related to Buddhist religion 5.3 Programmes for attracting tourist 5.4 Construction of Sthamba inside Devdaha in Buddha Mawali 5.5 Maintenance of religious sites such as Mathgadi Mandir (Temple), Sidheswor Mahadev Mandir, Durga Mandir, Boudha Gumba and Naghdhan Mandir 5.6 Conserving Khyardada Palace (Darbar) 5.7 Conserving Odhala Budhakalin Inar (well) 5.8 Advancing Devdaha Jungle Pond, Rohini Nadhi River and Satpatre Simsar as tourism hubs 5.9 Training for cultural conservation
6	Proper utilization of the water & land resources to develop and promote agro tourism

	6.1 Developing agro tourism hubs in more potential areas especially on the bank of water streams
7	Minimization of disaster risk
	7.1 Assessing the disaster prone sites in the tourist places
8	Promoting tourism marketing and tourism market segmentation
	8.1 Promoting tourist sites within the municipality via social media
	8.2 Formation of the national & international “ <i>Youth Samparka Manch</i> ”
	8.3 Preparation of the visual documentary of the touristic sites, and uploading it in websites & social sites
	8.4 Constructing cable car service at Mathgadi Mandir
	8.5 Developing Shiktahan Community Forest Area as Picnic Spot
	8.6 Establishment of resorts facility for tourist
	8.7 Promotion of water based adventure tourism
	8.8 Training program for youth on conservation & tourism
	8.9 Develop proper trekking route
	8.10 Establishment of cultural museum
	8.11 Establishment of fun parks
9	Increasing the flow of national and international tourists in the municipality.---- Establishing the Travel & Tours Companies in central level by the local entrepreneurs
10	Increase the flow of tourists in the municipality; celebrating the Tourism Visit Year-2028 (at the middle phase of this plan)
11	Known as popular tourism destination in national and international tourism market
	11.1 Organizing the cultural tourism & trade fare (<i>Mahotsab</i>)
	11.2 Establishment of Cultural centre
	11.3 Establishment of research cell (or learning resource centre) for the conservation, culture & tourism development
12	Establishment of tourism information centre for the tourist entry record and information facility
	12.1 Keeping the Tourism Information Desk nearby Municipality office with digital information boards
13	Tourists will be self-aware on the different tourism destinations
	13.1 Keeping the sign-posting at different strategic locations

Conclusion

This paper concludes that tourism development is a planned task. It needs a specific vision, mission, aims, goals, policies, and strategies. The strategies then should be equipped with defined action plans. Devdaha municipality has a huge potential for tourism development which could be ensured along with planned intervention. This plan must incorporate a collective responsibility of different stakeholders. However, the leadership role of the local government should be promoted institutionally. Only the establishment of infrastructures is not a sufficient condition for tourism development but the quality services and recreational activities are equally important. While international tourists are more inclined to visit in Lumbini area, domestic tourists should also be kept a priority to attract in Devdaha despite the fact that they cannot stay for a long time and don't spend much.

References

- CBS. (2023). *National housing and population census 2021. Results and Updates*. Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Government of Nepal.
<https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results>
- Constitution of Nepal (2015)*. Nepal Law Commission, Government of Nepal.
<http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/documents/2017/10/pdf/>
- Economic Survey, 2023 (2079-80BS)*. Ministry of Finance. Government of Nepal.
<https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3248>
- Ghimire, H. L. (2013). *Impacts of Pilgrimage Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development: Special Focus on Lumbini* (Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Statistics).
- KC, R. (2016). *Problem and Prospect of Tourism in Lumbini (A Case Study of Tourism in Lumbini, Kapilvastu District)* (Doctoral dissertation, Central Department of Sociology).
- Shinde, K. (2021). "Imported Buddhism" or "Co-Creation"? Buddhist Cultural Heritage and Sustainability of Tourism at the World Heritage Site of Lumbini, Nepal. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 5820.
- World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2013). *UNWTO News Conference on International Tourism Results and Prospects for 2014*. HQ, Madrid, Spain.

World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2023). *Statistical Updates*.

<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-tourism-dashboard>

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). (2023). *Economic Impact Research 2023*. [https://wtcc.org/research/economic-](https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20Travel%20%26%20Tourism,)

[impact#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20Travel%20%26%20Tourism,and%20only%2011.4%25%20below%202019](https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20Travel%20%26%20Tourism,and%20only%2011.4%25%20below%202019).