

Leisure Tourism in Bhedetar¹

Kaushal Koirala

Instructor at Department of Management, Koshi Saint James College, Itahari

email: *kaushal.koirala00@gmail.com*

Abstract

This paper analyzes leisure tourism in Bhedetar, eastern Nepal. Leisure tourists usually enjoy beauty, nice hotels and resorts, and the atmosphere of natural and cultural heritage. The most popular activities of leisure tourism include social tours, cultural tours, religious tours, family tours, recreational tours, sports tours, and medical tours. Bhedetar lies at the confluence of two different geographical environments: the hills and Tarai. The geographical situation of Bhedetar plays an important role in the development of tourist destinations. Its exquisite scenic beauty, natural environment, and cultural heritage provide a reliable source of pleasure and refreshment for leisure tourists. This paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from field observation, interaction with local people, hotel service providers, and tourists using checklists, questionnaires, and personal interviews. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, and e-resources. Tables, charts, and diagrams are used for data analysis. The findings revealed that the increasing number of hotels and lodges at Bhedetar indicated an internal market for leisure tourism. However, there are a lot of hurdles and barriers hindering the promotion of leisure tourism in this area. This paper suggests that the tourism promotion authorities should initiate action to address these barriers for the development of Bhedetar as a chosen leisure tourist destination.

Keywords: cultural heritage, leisure tourism, scenic beauty, temporary movement

Introduction

Tourism is travel for pleasure or business, and the commercial activity of providing and supporting such travel. The World Tourism Organization defines tourism: "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only," as people "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure and not less than 24 hours for business and other

purposes" (in Ghimire & Tripathi, 2004, p. 15). Leisure tourism is the travel in which the primary motivation is to take a vacation from everyday life. Leisure travel is often characterized by staying in nice hotels or resorts, relaxing on beaches or in a room, or going on guided tours and experiencing local tourist attractions. Tourism has a connotation of leisure travel and tends to be synonymous with vacation. This is also reflected in dictionaries, which commonly refers to tourism as travel for pleasure. Tourism itself is the process of temporary

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movement in the particular destination undertaken by the human that starts from one point and ultimately ends at the point where one started the journey from. It is the phenomenon of human character related to tour and travelling at the particular area (Oli, 2011).

Tourism activities often bring about the changes in an environment which are socio-cultural and economic condition of the destination areas. These changes are tourism impacts. Travel for leisure purposes has evolved from an experience reserved for very few people into something enjoyed by many. Historically, the ability to travel was reserved for royalty and the upper classes. From ancient Roman times through to the 17th century, young men of high standing were encouraged to travel through Europe on a “grand tour” (Chaney, 2000). Through the Middle Ages, many societies encouraged the practice of religious pilgrimage, as reflected in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and other literature. According to Ghimire and Tripathi (2004), tourism is about people being away from their homes on short term temporary visits for particular ‘tourism’ purpose. The two reasons for travelling which makes people tourists are leisure and businesses. The complexity of tourism can be gauged from the number of activities and businesses it encompasses, including other things, different modes of transport, varieties of accommodation, choices of cuisines and eating ambiances, range of Bhedetar and leisure tourism activities, and innumerable players. Tourist pursuits are now becoming segmented into different areas like culinary, cultural, historical, health, wild life, sex, and outdoor adventure activities. Outdoor adventure

pursuits are again further subdivided into a plethora of activities such as trekking, mountaineering, mountain and flat land cycling, and paragliding. Driven by changing lifestyles, these activities are becoming increasingly popular with more people wishing to experience more rewarding leisure experiences (Richards & Hall, 2000).

Tourism is concerned with providing the different supplies like package tour/travel (holiday and prepaid tour arrangement). Means of transport such as aircraft, train, bus, ship, coach, limo, car, auto and taxi are also important. Similarly, different places of accommodation such as hotel, lodge, guesthouse and rent-house are used by the tourists. Food and beverages outlets such as restaurant, bar, café, pubs and cafeteria are other essential elements in tourism. Tourism supplies also need the facilities like recreation and health like club and yoga centre. Likewise, culture and special events namely folk cultural show and festive event are the other necessary materials. In addition, theme parks and sporting activities like botanical garden and sports center with places for shopping and souvenir supermarket, curio stalls and handicraft shop are also considered to be essential facilities for the tourists. Information and assistance points such as tourist related office, wholesaler and agency are the additional important supplies (Oli, 2011). With all these supplies, tourism includes both recreation and economic activities.

Leisure tourism has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in the last few decades, driven by steadily increasing incomes and discretionary spending powers in the advanced and industrializing nations,

cheaper air travel, strong western currencies, globalization, the emergence and consolidation of a unipolar world, and the opening of numerous tourism destinations and experiences (Mowforth & Munt, 2003). Tourism industry also remains as a complex environment made of different sectors with their own complex environment. Tourism in Nepal, too, has all these facilities, challenges, complexities and possibilities.

Bhedetar is a village development committee which lies in Dhankuta district of eastern Nepal. It is located at the height of 1420 meters from the sea level. It is a border of Dhankuta and Sunsari districts. It is a small hill station which is 16 km away from the centre of Dharan sub-metropolis. There is a tower in this place named as Charles tower from where people can view Dharan city and few mysteriously beautiful hills and beautiful green forest. Bhedetar is famous for its unpredictable weather condition, such as a moment it hides into the blanket of thick fog and another moment it reveals itself as a crown of urban Dharan. The simple reason to visit Bhedetar is to stay on a peaceful environment watching beautiful scenarios with an interesting type of weather condition and to chill out with friends, families, and relatives to make the holidays wonderful.

The importance of Bhedetar for tourism got increased after the visit to this place by the then British Prince Charles and the built up of Charles tower at the point from where he observed the terai (Charles Point) in the 80's. This provided impetus to

Bhedetar to attract more tourists from within and outside the country. Now it is the station for all the sorts of the people and especially for the youth to spend the time for eating, drinking, pleasure and sightseeing particularly in the summer days (www.wonderofnepal.com). On this background, this study concentrates on the present condition of leisure tourism in Bhedetar to find the answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the trends of tourist inflow in Bhedetar?
2. What are the prospects of leisure tourism in Bhedetar?

Method

This is a qualitative research based on field observation, survey and review. I visited the place to observe the inflow of the tourists and had discussions with the local people as well as tourists about their views on Bhedetar as a tourist destination. Their opinions have been presented in tables, graphs and pie charts. To find the history of the place, I reviewed the writings about Bhedetar. Many information has been collected conducting the semi structured interviews with the locals and the tourists there. The number of informants was 10. In the analysis of the data, descriptive and analytical research design has been used.

Results and Discussion

This subsection focuses on presentation and analysis of data within the scope of research objective followed by interpretation and respective conclusion.

Survey Results

Table 1

Purpose of Visiting Bhedetar

Purpose of Visiting in Bhedetar	No. of People	Percentage
Family vacation (Holidays)	4	40
Adventure	2	20
Business Purpose	1	10
Religion / Culture	3	30
Total	10	100

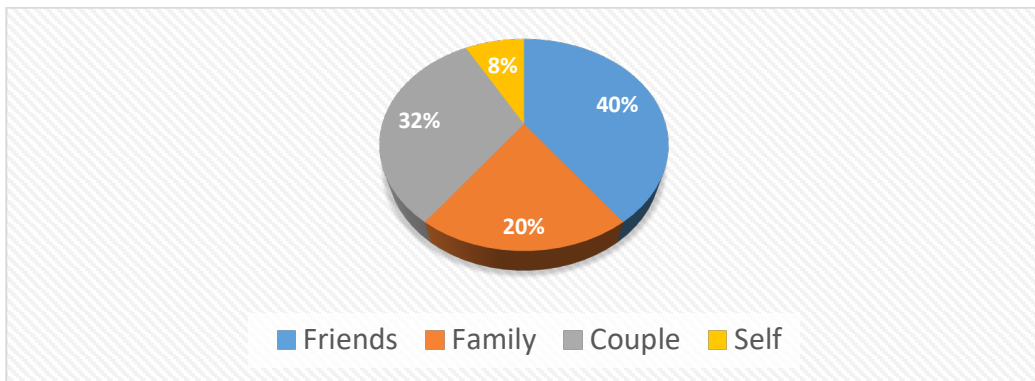
Source. Field Survey, March 27, 2022

The table represents the number of people visiting Bhedetar for different purposes. The above table depicts that 40 percent visitors prefer to visit Bhedetar in the family vacation / holiday, 20% prefer to visit for adventure, 10% for business purposes, and 30% for religious and

cultural purpose. From the above finding we can conclude that the majority of visitors who visit Bhedetar are more in holidays or in family vacation in comparison with the other reasons like adventures, business, and religion or culture purposes

Figure 1

Types of People who Visit Bhedetar



The pie chart represents the types of people who visit Bhedetar. Friends circle are often seen more to visit in the place rather than other i.e. 40% which is followed by 32%, 20% and 8% in regard with couple, family, and self respectively. The

data and observation have shown that the majority of the teenagers and friends visit the place. Secondly, couple are seen to visit the place in more ratio than the family groups and then only the number of individual visitors is found.

Development of Tourist Destination in Bhedetar

The survey disclosed that Bhedetar was unknown and desolated place until 1977. There was not a single house and the area was used for grazing flocks of sheep during the winter season as transhumance by the Gurungs from places of surrounding districts such as Taplejung, Terhathum, and Sankhuwasabha. Perhaps the name of this place etymologically became “Bhedetar” as *bheda* means sheep and *tar* refers to terrace land for grazing.

About 50-60 years ago, Dharan began to develop as the market center for people of surrounding hills districts like Dhankuta, Bhojpur, Terahthum, Khotang, and Sankhuwasabha. During that time the British camp was also established in Dharan; and gradually the town was covered by the *lahures* (working or retired military men). Later, the *lahure* families developed the kind of culture known as ‘lahure culture’, which meant the people especially from the lahure families used to visit Bhedetar for spending the time for pleasure and relax out of the pierce hot summer down in Dharan. At that time, there were no houses and facilities for eating, drinking and rest; they had to be back home after spending a short duration

there. Bhedetar gradually got eating facilities and resting place for a public bus traveler after the opening of Dharan Dhankuta highway in 1982. Then, gradually other activities for tourism increased.

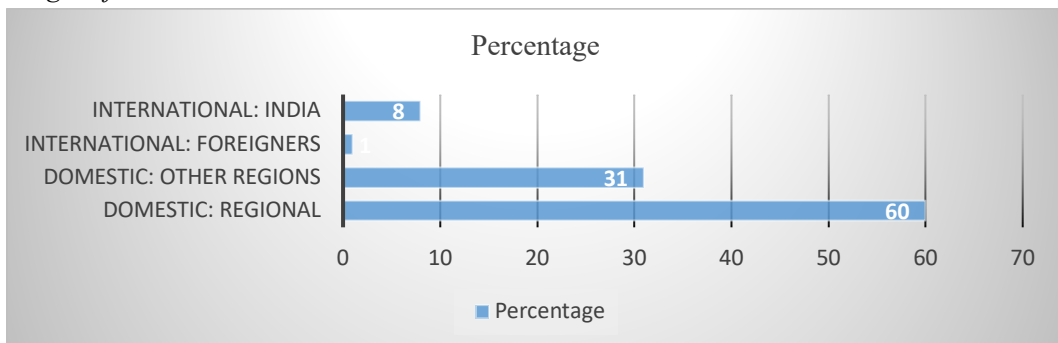
Now Bhedetar is the station for all sorts of people, and especially for the youth to spend the time for eating, drinking, pleasure, and sightseeing particularly in the summer days (www.wonderofnepal.com).

Places of the Origin of Tourists

The origin of tourists at Bhedetar is mainly of domestic one. The origin places of the domestic tourists from the eastern region include Dharan, Itahari, Inaruwa, Biratnagar, Dhankuta, and other places, and the people from these as well as from the nearby cities of India such as Jogbani, Siliguri, Darjeeling, and Farbesgunj. Besides, groups of people representing different organizations and education institutes from different part of the country such as Kathmandu, Birjung, Janakpur, Hetauda, Ilam, and Jhapa also visit Bhedetar under the package tour program. The tourists from Europe and USA have no special season to visit Bhedetar.

Graph 1

Origin of Tourists



The above bar graph shows that people travel from different places for the leisure and recreational purpose. The origin of tourist at Bhedetar is mainly of domestic one, accounting for 60%. It comprises eastern region and other regions within Nepal.

Motivational Factors

Bhedetar is a beautiful place with rich and diverse natural and cultural resources that attract the tourists for short time refreshment. The place is famous for its unpredictable weather condition. It is a place to stay on a peaceful environment watching beautiful scenario around with an interesting type of weather condition and to chill out with friends, families, and relatives to make the holidays wonderful. Secondly, the geographical location of Bhedetar on the top of the hill offers panoramic view of the plain land, *Charkoshe Jhadi*, the Saptakoshi River, and Dharan bazaar down to the south, and the Himalaya ranges and peaks such as Makalu, Gaurishankar, Mt. Everest, Mt. Kanchanjunga, Singhlila and Kumbakarna to the north. Not only Himalayan peaks, it is also a good point to glance southern plains of Nepal including its southern border with India. Visitors can either take a bus or a taxi to get to Bhedetar. Private bikes, scooters, cars, and vans are most often used to visit the place.

One of the beauties and attractions of Bhedetar is its cool, fresh weather with warm sun shine that provides pleasing weather to the tourists there. This is a key element of tourism. There are different factors that motivate people to travel in the leisure time. Refreshment of body and mind, health purposes, sport and pleasure are some examples of physical motivation.

Whereas, cultural factors such as to know the life style of the local people, music, art, folklore, and dance are the other factors. In addition, interpersonal motivation such as a desire to meet new people, to visit friends or relatives, and to seek new experiences are the other factors. Desire for the continuation of hobbies and education are also seen to be concerned with the desire for recognition and attention from others, in order to boost the personal ego.

There are different places to visit in Bhedetar conducting and experiencing different activities. Pathibhara temple is one of the very famous religious shrines for both Hindu and Kirati people all over the world. It can be reached within half an hour walk from Bhedetar bazaar. The Pathibhara temple of Bhedetar is a branch of main Pathibhara temple in Taplejung. Second, Singsuwa (Namaste) fall, also known as *Namaste Jharana*, is a famous site these days. This fall is some 8 kilometers away from Bhedetar bazaar. It is more than 50 meters tall. Third, there is Namje Village with famous Namje Homestay. This spot is just 2.5 kilometer away from Bhedetar bazaar. This Magar majority ethnic village has unique Magar culture, language, ethnic attires, and their very famous typical dance namely Hurra. Hilltops of this village are dotted with various transmission towers of Nepal including those of FM radios, televisions, and mobile service providers. This place also contains a place called Aatma Ghar, designed by American architect Travice Price. Price collected stones from 231 graves of this place and assembled them at a place and made a collective grave. This is described as a 17th wonders of the world. CNN has listed this

village on of the top 12 underreported travelling destination in the world.

A western hilltop of Bhedetar bazaar is called Sailung Danda or Charles Point. It is said that 16 districts of east Nepal can be seen in binocular views from this point. The next is serpentine Tamor River and probably the biggest banyan tree of Asia can be seen from this Hilltop. Situated in 3 hours walking distance from Bhedetar, this place has seen rising numbers of hotels and home-stays. Graveled road to reach this place is being upgraded. Okhre view tower is located in Sanghurigadi rural municipality-5. This place can be reached within six-kilometer road distance from Bhedetar bazaar on the way to Rajarani. Similarly, another place to visit is Rajarani Taal (lake), which is at an altitude of 1500 meter above the sea level. Ever blooming lotus flower is seen at the middle of this natural lake. Travel agencies describe it as the biggest and most beautiful lake in hilly areas of east Nepal. This lake contains two little ponds called Sude Daha and Kali Daha, and a little fall as well. Visitors can enjoy boating and fishing in this beautiful lake. This valley-like place has huge touristic potential. It takes around 5 hours walk from Bhedetar to reach this lake. Vehicular ride from Bhedetar to Rajarani takes around 1 hour. Touristic hotels and some homestays are available in this area.

Sayok Yak (Sanghuri Fort) is an ancient fort made by Sayok Hang, an ancient Limbu King, after winning Thebohang. Sayok Yak is called Sanghurigadhi these days. This point was an ancient strategic point of Limbu Kings. There are 10 stone rooms in this fort where army soldiers guarding this fort used to live

in. Still, there are some remnants of this ancient fort. Stone of this fort were brought from Phusre stream of Dharan. This fort is a good location to have views of Dharan and parts of eastern terai. Another place to visit is Bishranti temple, and an elderly home in east Nepal. Around 50 elderly citizens are staying in this temple. They are provided with free treatment, food and housing. Located on the lap of popular rafting river Tamor which originates from the Himalayas, this temple is good travelling point both on religious and philanthropic grounds. Visitors from Nepal and India crowd this temple almost all the days in a week. Rafters make rafting from this place to Chatara of Sunsari for one-day rafting package.

Paragliding was commercially introduced in Koshi Province since October 2015. The takeoff station of the pioneer adventure sport is on the southern slope of Bhedetar namely Chhoti Morang. Bhedetar is the only hill station in this province with paragliding facility. The flight starts from 1250 meter above the sea level and lands at 390-meter height of Dharan-14, Bijaypur. Since 7 March 2020, zip line came into official operation in Bhedetar. This 650-meter-long zip line starts from the welcome gate of Bhedetar and descends to Devithan of Dharan-4. The thrilling 45-second journey is offered in three categories, namely classic, superman and tandem.

Tourists also make a hike in these hilltops: Sailung Danda (1450m) some twenty-minute walk from the Bhedetar square, Okhre Danda (1700m) at some 6 km away from Bhedetar, and Dhwaaje Danda (2040m) some 14 km away from Bhedetar. Bhedetar is also a good shopping

venue for varied locally grown products. Avocado, local hilly fruits, and green vegetables are loved by shoppers from Nepal and neighboring Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal. In addition to this, Churpi (hard cheese) and famed coconut biscuit of Dhankuta are among the shopping menu of Bhedetar. It is also famous for its orange groves.

Tourists' Perception

Tourist perception can be defined as tourists' opinions, either positive or negative, towards certain things (Fauziah & Fathiah, 2011). It is also about tourists with their previous experience (Rajaratnam et al., 2015). Distinct tourist perception is tourist's evaluation on certain things (Ahadi et al., 2015). Thus, tourists' perception can be defined as opinion on what tourists actually faced during their vacation. Each and every tourist has different level of expectations which lead to different level of each type of their perception. The knowledge-attitude-behavior (KAB) model divides human behavior into three processes: acquiring knowledge, generating belief and forming behavior. According to this theory, attitude is the best predictor of behavior; knowledge is the basis of changes in attitude; and the degree of knowledge mastery affects the consistency of attitude and behavior. Thus, tourism knowledge is the key to the development of attitudes and travel behavior. But this knowledge is different from knowledge in the objective sense; rather it is an abstracted perception of knowledge that directly affects tourists' psychology and decision-making practices, as through the arousal of confidence and willingness to act (Quintal et al., 2010; Sharifpour et al., 2014).

Challenges and Barriers

There are different challenges and barriers that should be faced and should be solved for the sustainability of tourism such as environmental consciousness among people, realized importance of forestry by the local people, and the need of preservation of local culture and tradition. The challenges also come for the growth of cultural pride and value with the exposure of the people. Infrastructure development, and improvement in the level of life standard are the other challenges and barriers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper attempts to argue that Bhedetar is a leisure tourism destination in east Nepal. It is a popular tourist destination not only from eastern Nepal, but also from the neighboring areas of India. The natural, historical, cultural and scenic beauty of this area are the attraction for tourists. Its ideal location offers a very pleasant weather condition, the historical place of Sanguriyok, Charls tower and homestay of Namje provides for both scenic and recreational environments for holiday making. The modernized life style and competition market have set a new trend in local community as well. Tourism has provided benefits to the people working in this sector, but Bhedetar has to expand its activities to attract many more people from within the country as well as from abroad, particularly from India to lengthen their stay in Bhedetar. Only then, many people will get benefits from tourism. For instance, if infrastructure is built such as cable car from Bijaypur, Dharan to Bhedetar and airport in Dharan may help to increase tourist in Bhedetar. Health and education facilities are other needs for

enhancing tourism in Bhedetar. Further, community-based tourism such as village or home stay tourism in the Magar village in the surrounding areas of Bhedetar which have already got successful in many other parts of the country requires to be developed for enhancing tourism.

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