

 <p>ISSN 2631-2131</p>	<p>2. <b>BUDDHISTS TOURISM PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY TO NEPAL</b></p> <p>– By Acharya S.</p>
Author(s)	Sushma Acharya
Association	Lumbini Buddhists University (PhD Scholar)
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Email	sushma.acharya2@gmail.com, susma.phd21@lbu.edu.np

***After I am no more, O Ananda! Men of belief will visit the place with faith, curiosity, and devotion; Lumbini, the place where I was born, Bodhgaya, where I attained enlightenment, Sarnath, where I gave the first sermon, and Kushinagar, where I shall pass into Mahaparinirvana.***

- Buddha's life journey, in Shakya Muni's 'Mahaparinirvana Sutra

## **Abstract**

*Buddhists Tourism Promotional Strategy to Nepal, is the study of Buddhist tourism and its promotional strategy of Nepal. Buddha was born in Nepal, so Nepal must be like Jerusalem and Mecca are for Christians and Muslims of Buddhist, but still Nepal has difficulties to invite two million over all tourists. Why is it so? Nepal is the country of Buddha; every Buddhist must visit Lumbini Nepal at least once in life time but still status of arrival of Buddhist tourist is considerably low. The main objective of the study is to find out the Buddhists Tourism Promotional Strategy to Nepal. It is a review paper of Buddhist tourism. For this federal, provincial, and local governments have to work effectively with the assurance of good governance on the specified programs.*

**Keywords:** Buddhist Tourism, Promotional Strategy

## **Introduction**

Every Buddhist, a pure devotee, must visit Lumbini, Nepal before death, because at the time

of his departure (Mahaparinirvana) he had specifically named it at first in his Mahaparinirvan Sutra. Nepal must be able to teach the reality of faith of Buddhism and the values coined in Mahaparinirvana Sutra to the Buddhists' world. It is only possible through the development and promotion of Buddhism in the world. It is only possible through the development of Buddhist Tourism. Because, tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. It acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. Peace tourism plays a vital role to uplift the living status of people in specific areas worldwide. Tourism can improve government-to-government, government-to-private citizens and citizen-to-citizens' relationships. Peace tourism is defined as a phenomenon where every tourist's activity should be linked with peace as the aim for the visitors: locals, domestic or international visitors (Medhakar & Haq, 2018). The relationship between tourism and peace has also been endorsed by a number of institutions. Such initiatives highlight the co-relation and causal relationship between tourism and peace, and support the theory that tourism can be helpful in mitigating conflict and accelerating peace. The relationship between tourism and peace has also been endorsed by a number of international initiations (e.g., The UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, International Bureau of Social Tourism in 1963, The Helsinki Accord in 1975, World Tourism Organization's Tourism Bill of Rights & Tourist Code in 1985, United Nations World Tourism Organization's Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty 2003, etc.) (Upadhayaya, 2011).

Peace is a vital and most cherished dream of humanity; it is a state that not only indicates the absence of direct violence but also sustains peaceful relationships among all levels and segments of society and between society and nature. 'Peace' the word itself has a great harmony, stress-free, security and calmness. As tourism is a beneficiary of peace and peace brings hope for travel boom, tourism reciprocally has a key role in peace building by transforming itself in sustainable and participatory forms (Upreti & Upadhayaya, 2010). Buddha is the symbol of peace. Buddhist tourism can spread the peace around the globe. Buddhism in Nepal remains intermingled with Hinduism, and many consider the Buddha a reincarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. Buddhism has blended with Hinduism, historically and culturally, to the extent that people share their places of worship.

### **Problem statement**

Gautama Buddha represents as the symbol of global peace. Nepal is a beautiful country of having wide possibility in tourism because of birth place of Buddha and pristine massive Mountains. Buddhism and its philosophy now have a global following. Buddha seeks a middle way path

between the extremes of dogmatism and skepticism, emphasizing personal experience, a pragmatic attitude, and the use of critical thinking toward all types of knowledge, it explores the right and effective solutions. Buddhist tourism can appeal to a large number of faith-inspired travelers. Faith-based tourism has emerged as a significant niche today. The World Tourism Organization says that over 300 million tourists visit religious sites annually. Asia, home to 99 percent of the world's 535 million Buddhists, serves as an example of the resurgence of faith-based tourism (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). Although Nepal has difficulties to invite 2 million tourists annually in normal situation.

In Nepal, the travel and tourism sector contributes to 8 percent of GDP, 6.7 percent of total employment, and it generates 6 percent of the total foreign exchange earnings. Nepal Tourism Board estimates that loss of 85.2 billion USD monthly from tourism sector only and three in five employees lost their jobs due to COVID-19 in Nepal. The "Visit Nepal 2020" campaign had cancelled which aimed to attract 2 million tourists in the country this year. Tourism sector has already suffered a huge loss, and it is going to take quite to restore. The government should form special task force to create economic response package that will support Nepalese, their job, their businesses from the global impact of COVID-19, and to ready the economy to recover (Panthhe, 2021). There are different sections, sets and subsets in Buddhism, entire all of them follow or pretend to follow the teaching of Gautama Buddha (Leve, 2015). There are also shifts in research priorities arising out of debates in tourism studies, and in surrounding areas of study and established disciplines (Meyer-Arendt, 2004). Tourism is rapidly growing in Nepal which can be largest economic industry for the intake of foreign currency of proper infrastructure development is maintained and security is generated (Karmacharya, 2013). The fact is that it is necessary to find out the solutions to increase the tourists in Lumbini or in other Buddhists sites. The Nepalese tourism sector has problem on largely remains labor-intensive, political instability and many social issues and due to insufficient investment in quality infrastructure, technology as well as current types of pandemic and these kind of epidemic effects on tourism sectors. Even in this background, the tourism sector contributes a significant share of GDP and employment in Nepal. This paper assist to know what are the effective elasticities to various tourism indicators helps to understand sustainability in tourism.

An international airport is being built near Lumbini. The profile of Lumbini has been enhanced with the establishment of a Buddhist university and the creation of an international peace award named after the Buddha. A plan is also underway to build a Buddhist circuit around Lumbini (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also presents a bigger opportunity in intra-regional Buddhist tourism. This initiative links the region through a vast

network of highways, railways, waterways and transmission lines. Nepal is one among more than 65 countries participating in this massive initiative. Thus Nepal must analyze the fact and purpose a scientific Buddhists tourism strategy with China.

The travel and tourism industry could not avoid the negative impacts and consequences of these events (Berki, 1986). Moreover, some of these events manifested the vulnerability of tourism both on global and regional levels. Therefore, this fact necessitates the research and study of the relationship between security issues and tourism, including the creation of a new, up to date definition of the notion security and safety in tourism (Kunwar & Ghimire, Lumbini as International Pilgrimage Destination: Authenticity and Significance, 2012). To invite global Buddhist tourists Nepal must develop a smart policy including smart security. At present there are 535 million Buddhists population and it is worlds the 4<sup>th</sup> largest religion. What should be the best policies and strategies to invite such a big pools of Buddhists people around the globe? To find out the appropriate policies and strategies the study has been prepared.

### **Objectives and Method**

In Every society, every situation, every moment and every activity have its own importance and possibilities. 'Everything teaches us something new' likewise from this epidemic, has to learn what are the opportunities of peaceful sustainable Buddhists tourism strategies? What can be done to promote the sustainability of Buddhists tourist destinations? These are the specific objectives of the study. Methodologically it is the review of secondary sources to present the strategy and sustainability of Buddhists Tourism in Nepal. The references are used as the list of data sources.

### **Discussions**

#### **Concept of Buddhists Tourism**

Buddhist tourism is the tourism based on Buddhist faiths and beliefs for liberation for both believers and non-believers. There is not any differences or discrimination in Buddhism. The philosophy and practice (meditation) of getting internal peace and happiness is Buddhism. Tourism for mental peace and happiness is Buddhists Tourism. With this philosophy Buddhists tourism infrastructures must be developed. Constructing a 'place' of Buddhist tourism is not merely reliant upon physical structures and/or landscape. Instead, other factors come into play (Bruntz & Schedneck, 2020). It means simply construction of stupa or garden or Bihar does not give any senses. Contemporary Buddhist tourism is best understood through the places where Buddhists and non-Buddhists directly encounter the religion. Buddhists are taking part in business, government, technology,

and capitalism—transformations of the modern world that have especially resulted from economic transitions and international market developments. Similarly, they further say, in Japan Buddhist tourism is directed toward romance, and Buddhist rituals are marketed to young singles as efficacious for meeting one's love match. Essentially, in this process of commodification, priests and companies are connecting Buddhism to an imaginary of love, are shaping the temple space to accommodate this newly marketed image, and are marketing Buddhist temples and shrines as effective for finding love (Bruntz & Schedneck, 2020). Thus Buddhism is not simply the story of monks and nuns. It is the blessing or gift of Lord Buddha for peace and development of humanity around the globe.

### **Buddhists Tourism in Nepal**

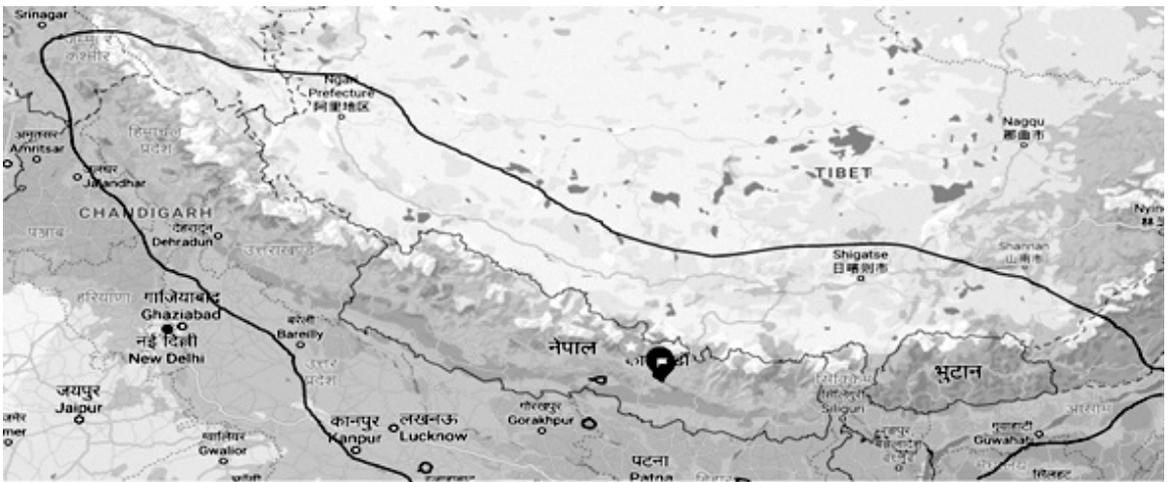
Lord Buddha is symbol of global peace. Nepal along with Lumbini is the land of Buddha, Yoga, Meditation, Religion, and Spiritualism. It is the land of Buddha and eternal peace. Meditation tourism may contribute to whole tourism industry in several ways. Meditation tourism may breed peaceful individuals who will inspire many people to visit places for meditation purpose. This can begin with meditation tourism to Lumbini. Therefore, this study suggests the stakeholders to build meditation centers where accommodation, teachers, facilities and required interpretations are available in every *Bihar*, *Gumba*, or in stupas. Buddhist tourism helps to establish some ethical values such as non-violence. Buddha suggested non-violence as first precept but in Lumbini, there are many slaughterhouses. This is not ethical according to Buddhism. Meditation practitioners will avoid non-vegetarian food; killing animals in Lumbini will slowly come to end. As people find peace of mind during meditation, they will be ready to pay the meditation centers (Sharma N. P., 2020). Therefore, Buddhist tourism is a guideline of scientific modern tourism with ethics and moral values to bring sustainable happiness to human beings.

Historically, it is a serious fact that, Buddha's legacy has been monopolized by India. Nepal needs to reclaim the Buddha and his legacy as a fundamental part of nation's identity and narrative (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). Buddhism was initiated from Nepal. As Nepal is a mountainous country, Buddhism has always been deeply connected to the Himalayas, referred to as the "Snow Mountains" in the early of Buddhist texts. Sumedha, the first figure in Jataka-Nidana, and an earlier incarnation of the Buddha, became an ascetic in the Himalayas. Prince Siddhartha himself lived as an ascetic in the mountains. Simply linking Himalayas with Lumbini through Buddhist's philosophy, Buddhist's tourism in Nepal will take its original form. It declares the Nepal school of Buddhism (Integration of Buddhism of Himalayan Buddhism, Indian school of Mahayani and Theravadi Buddhism, Newar Buddhism, and Tamang Buddhism).

## Tourism Promotion

Historical geography of Nepal, common culture, common linguistic identity, say, Nepal was spread, Kashmir in west, Kailashparvat, Mansarovar in North, Kamakhya in east and Ganga River in south. The border of Nepal was extended to Tista in the east and to Kangada fort in the west. Similarly, to the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna Rivers in the south and to the Himalayan range of Singatse and Tasilhunpo monastery in the north (Paudyal, 2013). From the study we can claim that Himalayan area (Kasmir Laddakh, Sigatse, Asham, Yamuna, Ganga, and Brahmaputra) was Nepal. Due to the political war and treaty the political border is changed, Nepal seems smaller but still the cultural tie up of entire three countries (Tibet of China, India, and Nepal) is cordial. Vedism and Buddhism were originated and flourished and spread to the world from the land. The integrated language, religion, culture, relations, and brotherhood in this location with a cultural identity we can say it is Nepal. Thus Nepal is the land of Veda and Buddha culturally.

## Tentative Map of Ancient Nepal



(Source: Google, 2021)

India was previously known as Bharat. It was named by legendary king Bharath of Suryabamshi (Solar Dynasty). The heroic age of the ancient Shakya people, a proud solar race, and the dynasties established by their legendary King Ikshvaku (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). Thus Nepal, Lumbini should be defined as the ultimate spiritual center of Asian and world Buddhism. It is the pride of both the countries. It is time to redefine the history of Buddhism, because Kushinagar, Sarnath, and Lumbini including Bodhgaya are the cultural assets of Nepali school of Buddhism.

To promote the culture Nepal can learn from Japan as well. In Japan, state participation in the promotion of temples and pilgrimages has led to an increasing emphasis on the tourist dimensions of visiting Buddhist sites. While commercial involvements have helped revitalize local pilgrimages and Buddhist practices, there also exists a broader trend of emphasizing tourism as the main appeal of visiting or going on pilgrimage to Japanese Buddhist sites, resulting in temples losing their place in society as sacred spaces (Bruntz & Schedneck, 2020). Nepalese Buddhist community first of all they must follow the principle of impermanence and no self. They must leave communal clots, show the love and compassion among them and entire organism on the mastership of Gautama Buddha. The faith system in individual level is the democratic culture of Nepal. We can worship thousand Buddhas individually.

In Nepal, where tourism has largely remained a seasonal business, pilgrimage tourism can be a perennial source of income especially because Nepal is home to some of the world's most important sacred Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage destinations (Kunwar & Thapaliya, 2021). Buddhist tourism is also a pilgrimage tourism of Buddhists. Lumbini of Nepal is like Jerusalem and Mecca are for Christians and Muslims. There are 535 million Buddhists around the world.

From the Buddhist Tourism, Nepal can make cordial relations with the people of India, China, Bhutan, Myanmar in the promotion of Buddhist philosophy, general business, and business internationalization of South Asian spiritual tourism. It will not only achieve economic development objectives, but also social and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and bi-lateral diplomatic goals for regional peace and prosperity (Haq & Medhekar, 2020). Thus Nepal needs to take initiation with her neighboring economies.

Due to the misinterpretation of Nepali History, Buddhism's holiest land remains largely unspecified. Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, is uniquely positioned to become the most important Buddhist holy land, just like Jerusalem and Mecca are for Christians and Muslims. Nepal should be branded as a top destination for world Buddhist pilgrims. Tourist arrivals may grow steadily. However, most travelers consist of sightseeing tourists and climbers. Now it is time to link Himalaya with Lumbini with positive influences. Compared to the 3.5 million pilgrims to Jerusalem and two million to Mecca, the number of Buddhist visitors to Nepal is still low, despite a huge potential to attract millions of tourists. It should integrate Himalayan tourism and Buddhist tourism, making them into two pillars of the national brand (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). Himalayan tourism is a well-developed industry in Nepal. However, high royalty fees, seasonal nature of mountaineering, environmental pollution, and exploitation of porters have already caused negative publicity in the international media. In addition, retreat of glaciers due to global warming will adversely

affect local environment and livelihood. As a sustainable option, Buddhist tourism and Himalayan tourism should be integrated. Buddhists from the China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, India and Sri Lanka, world Buddhist institutions, including Buddhist associations, other societies with Buddhist faith communities, and government agencies on religions, plus international celebrities who are Buddhists or are known to have affinities toward Buddhism must be targeted. At least these communities must be integrated in the name of Dharma. They must be aware about the birth place of lord Buddha and its surrounding.

### **Promotional Strategies**

There is only one single problem of good governance in Nepal. If entire governments work with highly conscious accountability, responsibility, and transparency. The following promotional strategies are identified from the review.

#### **Federal Government**

1. Amendment in Constitution
2. Definition of Nepali Buddhism
3. Narration of Real History of Nepali geography and Culture
4. National Pride Program of Buddhist Tourism
5. Tourism Master plan of Greater Lumbini Area
6. Continuous International conferences on Buddhists study in Lumbini
7. Buddhist Tourism Branding

#### **State Government**

1. Provincial Buddhists religious circuit development
2. Monitoring and evaluating the Buddhists religious tourism development projects
3. Linkage of local government and federal government in the national pride projects
4. Buddhists settlement management in Lumbini Sanskritik Municipality
5. National and international media mobilization, Publications, and Study
6. National international marketing

#### **Local Government**

1. Participating in planning and policy formulation of provincial and federal government
2. Mobilization of Local resources and private investment environment
3. Local festivals reorganization as tourist friendly

4. Following investment in tourism attractions, experience and infrastructure of local authorities
5. Mobilizing schools and colleges in the promotion of Buddhists Tourism
6. Local Security system and media mobilization
7. Tourism Development Environment
8. Hospitality monitoring to stakeholders

Internal as well as external branding is important for consensus among tourists. Network with Buddhist institutions and associations globally and encourage organized groups to visit the holy land (Adhikari & Zhang, 2019). A variety of cost-effective, promotional materials in different languages and forms should be created to brand Lumbini as the most important Buddhist holy land. International media tactics may include documentary films, advertorial videos, print media ads, feature stories, interviews, social media etc. Journalists and travel bloggers may also be invited. India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan need to collaborate to create a corridor of Buddhist holy sites. The corridor may consist of Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, Gandhara etc. A regional rehabilitation committee may be created to oversee the collaboration.

### **Future of Buddhist Tourism**

According to the Ministry of Tourism there are 129 Star Hotels and 1151 Non-Star Hotels which adds up to 43999 total beds. Similarly, there are 3508 Travel Agencies and 2649 Trekking Agencies. An average tourist spends 12.4 days in 2018 and 12.6 days in 2017 in Nepal the three-year development plan (2016-2018) of the government had aimed to increase the length of stay of foreigners to 14 days by 2018, which ranged from eight to 13.5 days in the past. In 2018, the sector employed 573,000 workers (8 per cent of total employment) and accounted for 26 per cent of total exports. Three-quarters of workers in the tourism sector are in informal jobs, leaving them with no protection and no income as the sector has come to a total stop (Shivakoti, 2021). The data must be changed after the implementation of this vision.

Similarly, over 4126 tour guides, over 16248 trekking guides, over two hundred river guides along with several hundred naturalists and workers in service industry lost their livelihood due to the pandemic. There are over 65 Tourist Vehicle Service providers that employ over four thousand drivers and helpers who are also currently jobless. But so far in Nepal no concrete step has been taken to provide any form of relief to them. Some of the people involved in tourism have started alternative work, helped by family and friends but not all are lucky enough (Shivakoti, 2021). For the recovery of tourism industry, tourism sub-sectors' employees need extensive trainings and orientations to maintain highest standard of sanitation and hygiene. There should be strong

monitoring mechanism for the actual implementation of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for sanitation and hygiene guided by the protocol in the field, if any breaches or gaps are identified then immediate corrective actions must be taken, it is very essential to keep the employees in discipline to mitigate and eliminate the chance of coronavirus transmission. Hence, this practice will boost up the confidence level of flaccid travelers and motivates them to travel once again. Scholars are advocating tourism will revive through the domestic tourist movement and gradually international tourist mobility will help provide oxygen and spectrum to the tourism industry which has gone to coma being a patient of COVID-19 (Ulak, 2020). The tourism sector is likely to lose 85 thousand direct jobs and 36 thousand indirect jobs amounting to a total job loss of 121 thousand (Shivakoti, 2021). Peace (Buddhist) tourism is not just an income-generating industry, but also a great platform for enhancing positiveness (Herath, 2010).

Sustainable effective ability will hinge on our efficiency mitigate the risks while harnessing the opportunities that these social-psychological effects may present the long-term implications of the pandemic are reaching from the economy to governance and from healthcare to education (Chan Ghee Koh, 2020). Using emphasizing personal experience, a pragmatic attitude, and the use of critical thinking towards all types of situations we can get a great solution for sustainability of tourism industry. The negative effects like fear, threat, frustration, and losing the confidence of tourism entrepreneurs appeared (Badal, 2018). This has brought changes in the tourists' behavior and their motivation to travel for the next few years. In Lumbini businesses like lodges, hotels, restaurants, and travel offices were also severely affected by the pandemic. Thus, the tourism sector has been facing serious threats due to the prolonged lockdown and closing of tourism activities than the terror of COVID-19 itself (Kunwar B. B., 2021).

The prominent factors for building resilience in the tourism industry: government response, technology innovation, local belongingness, and consumer and employee confidence. They argue that using such inclusive resilience; the tourism industry may transform into a new global economic order characterized by sustainable tourism, society's well-being, climate action, and the involvement of local communities (Sharma, Thomas, & Paul, 2021). All stakeholders should be prepared to provide quality services including clean healthy environment and advertise tourism with focus on health & hygiene as a given priority to promote domestic tourism and proper management must be done in the tourism sector. They must learn to live with nature as well as develop food banks and wages for the unemployed should be provided (Rana, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

At this time Nepal government must be able to impose the peace philosophy of Buddha in tourism

to attract global tourists with changing environment, mask and physical distance with complete assurance of security of tourists. In the name of Buddha Nepal can promote Yoga, Meditation, Religious, and Spiritual tourism in Lumbini as well as in Nepal. Tourism is not just an income-generating industry but also a great platform for enhancing positive peace. It is a clear understanding that even when the other sectors will start operating after the situation is under control, tourism along with all the service/hospitality industries will be the last to recover. This situation has rendered millions of people unemployed globally and thousands in Nepal. The government of Nepal or any other authority has not shown any interest whatsoever to compensate or to support these informal workers. In several developed countries like the USA, informal workers received benefit cheque from the government allowing them to maintain their lives. In other countries like Bhutan they were given alternate jobs so that they can earn their livelihood.

Federal Government has to follow the points, Amendment in Constitution, Definition of Nepali Buddhism, Narration of Real History of Nepali geography and Culture, National Pride Program of Buddhist Tourism, Tourism Master plan of Greater Lumbini Area, Continuous International conferences on Buddhists study in Lumbini, Buddhist Tourism Branding. State Government has to follow, Provincial Buddhists religious circuit development, Monitoring and evaluating the Buddhists religious tourism development projects, Linkage of local government and federal government in the national pride projects, Buddhists settlement management in Lumbini Sanskritik Municipality, National and international media mobilization, Publications, and Study, National international marketing. Local Government has to follow, Participating in planning and policy formulation of provincial and federal government, Mobilization of Local resources and private investment environment, Local festivals reorganization as tourist friendly, Following investment in tourism attractions, experience and infrastructure of local authorities, Mobilizing schools and colleges in the promotion of Buddhists Tourism, Local Security system and media mobilization, Tourism Development Environment, Hospitality monitoring to stakeholders.

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