



SOUVENIR



BITM, 2023 Secretariat
May 11-13, 2023

nepal

Lifetime Experiences!



लुम्बिनी

Birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha



SOUVENIR

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**Prime Minister
Kathmandu, Nepal**



Message

I am delighted to learn that Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) in collaboration with Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation is organizing the next edition of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) with the theme of "Exploring the Buddhaland: A gateway to Buddhist Pilgrimages Circuits" from May 11 - 13, 2023. On this occasion, we are also marking the historic Silver Jubilee Celebrations of BIMSTEC. This event will play a significant role in promoting and networking the Buddhist tourism in the region.

Lumbini, hallowed by the birth of the Buddha Sakyamuni, is one of the most significant pilgrimage destinations in the world. Nepal is honored to have Lumbini on its territory. The newly-born Prince Siddhartha (who later was distinguished as Lord Buddha) took his seven steps and uttered an epoch-making message to the suffering humanity in Lumbini. The importance of Lumbini is so great that the Buddha himself advised his followers to make the pilgrimage to Lumbini. The greater Lumbini region encompasses several Buddhist-spiritual sites and houses and beautiful flora and fauna which can evoke spirituality, serenity and satisfaction in the minds of visitors. Today, Lumbini can be considered as a synonym of a world peace center and a top-class pilgrimage destination. Despite the political turmoil Nepal had experienced in last decades, time has come to promote Nepal as a peace destination.

Further, the academic and business discussions, presentations, sharing experiences and networking amongst scholars and business people at the Mart should be a milestone for promotion of Buddhist tourism, Buddhist circuits and overall tourism of Nepal. I hope BITM will definitely promote Lumbini as the first and foremost pilgrimage destination among all the Buddhist sites. The Mart should play a key role in diversifying and decentralizing Nepalese tourism which is heavily reliant on adventure tourism and, is focused on a handful of areas of the country. I hope, BITM will not only promote Buddhist heritage sites in Nepal but also offers new tourism products that Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs can sell in the international marketplace. China has kept Nepal as one of the desired destinations to visit, The branding of Lumbini together with other tourism products of Nepal, networking with neighboring countries and promoting regional tourism can attract a larger number of international tourists to Nepal. With the operation of Gautam Buddha International Airport, Bhairahawa near Lumbini and Pokhara International Airport, tourist flow is expected to increase significantly in Nepal.

Finally, I would like to thank Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Nepal Tourism Board and Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents together with all travel agents, tourism stakeholders and international organizations for their participation and support in BITM 2023. I wish the grand success of this mega event and hope that our distinguished guests will have a very pleasant and memorable stay in Nepal.

Puspa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'



लुम्बिनी प्रदेश सरकार

राप्ती उपत्यका (देउखुरी), नेपाल

मुख्यमन्त्री



CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

As the Chief Minister of the Lumbini Province, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to all the participants and esteemed guests of the Buddhist International Mart (BITM). It gives me immense pleasure to see such an incredible gathering of individuals who are passionate about tourism and its potential to promote cultural exchange and economic growth.

I am delighted to see the event being organized in collaboration with Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA) and Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and I commend them for their dedication and hard work in making this event possible. It is an honor for our province to host this prestigious event, and we are committed to providing the best possible experience for all the attendees.

The Sessions and panel Discussions during the event will undoubtedly provide valuable insights into the tourism industry, and I am confident that the knowledge and ideas shared will help to further promote tourism and its positive impact on society.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants, sponsors, and partners for their contribution and support towards making this event a success. Your participation is crucial in promoting tourism in our province, and we hope that this event will provide you with an opportunity to explore that unique cultural and natural beauty of our province.

Once again, congratulations to all the participants, and we hope that you have a fruitful and enjoyable time at the event.

Best regards,

Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary

Chief Minister

Lumbini Province



Government Of Nepal

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

Singhadurbar, Kathmandu



MESSAGE

I am delighted to state that Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is organizing the Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) with the theme of “Exploring the Buddhaland: A gateway to Buddhist Pilgrimages Circuits” from May 11 - 13, 2023 in Lumbini.

To promote Lumbini and other important Buddhist sites including newly operated Gautam Buddha International Airport is one of the main objectives of this Mart by providing common platform through the B2B meetings among buyers and sellers to establish and strengthen business relations among the tourism entrepreneurs in this region.

The birth place of Gautam Buddha, Lumbini is one of the most important and significant pilgrimage destinations in the world. Buddha, who is known as the “Light of Asia” is the true source of inspiration regarding world peace. His guidelines regarding good moral conduct, meditation and mental development and wisdom or insight are the great lessons for the development of human civilization. The greater Lumbini region encompasses dozens of Buddhist-spiritual sites including his birth place, the then royal palace and ancient settlement, flora and fauna which can evoke spirituality, serenity, and satisfaction simultaneously. Regarding these facts, we can promote Lumbini as the centre of world peace and pilgrimage destination. Furthermore we have been planning to connect Lumbini in the great circle with other famous places in the name of Buddhist Circle, which is enlisted in the BIMSTEC Tourism Plan of Action.

As Chair of Tourism and Culture theme in the BIMSTEC, Nepal prides in organizing such event with the positive hope of promotion of tourism and culture of this region. This initiative will be helpful to establish and expand people to people relations via tourism and culture which are instrumental in consolidating business ties among the tourism entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

Despite this fact we have identified various areas of our tourism industry based on nature, culture and adventure such as mountaineering, trekking, rafting, kayaking, cultural tourism, religious tourism, sport tourism, casino, film, education, health, and agricultural tourism.

I would like to request to promote the friendly relations and mutual understanding among the countries in the field of tourism, commitment to enhance capabilities for the promotion of cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual respect and benefit sharing among the BIMSTEC and around the globe.

In addition to encourage one another’s respective tour operators to promote package tours on mutual basis with a view to increasing the tourist flow among the countries and to support the joint promotion of our tourist attractions in international markets.

At last, my special thanks to the Nepal Tourism Board, and Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents together with all travel agents, tourism stakeholders, and international organizations for their participation and support in BITM 2023. We look forward to working closely for the promotion of tourism and reciprocal in upcoming days.

Thank You !

Sudan Kirati

Hon. Minister for the Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation of Nepal



Government Of Nepal

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

Singhadurbar, Kathmandu



MESSAGE

This gives me immense pleasure to state that Nepal Tourism Board is organizing Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) via a vis tour operators' Business to Business meetings from the BIMSTEC region in partnership with the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) and in support of various public and private stakeholders from 11th to 13th May 2023 in Lumbini.

The mart has set an objective of promoting Lumbini and other important Buddhist sites in Nepal as well as the new Gautam Buddha International Airport by organizing B2B meetings among buyers and sellers to establish and strengthen business relations among the entrepreneurs in this region.

As Chair of Tourism and Culture in the BIMSTEC, Nepal prides itself on organizing such events to garner strength and galvanize it for the promotion of tourism and culture of this region. This initiative is to establish and expand people-to-people relations via tourism and culture which are instrumental in consolidating business ties among the tourism entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

Buddhist Circuit, a much-coveted initiative of the BIMSTEC Member States can be best promoted and developed through events like this. I believe, this event will enhance the relation and business in the region and will undoubtedly promote Lumbini, the Birthplace of Lord Buddha, and other Buddhist sites in its vicinity. I wish this event a great success.

Suresh Adhikari

Secretary of Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

Chairman, BITM Main Organizing Committee



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Lumbini Development Trust
Sacred Garden Lumbini, Nepal.
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MESSAGE

Congratulations to the Nepal Association for Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) on successfully organizing the Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM 2023) in Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha! Your efforts have not only promote tourism but also brought attention to the importance of inner peace and tranquility. As we reflect on Buddha's teachings, let us be reminded of the importance of compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence in our daily lives. May this event inspire all visitors to seek inner peace and spread positivity wherever they go. Once again, congratulations, and may Lumbini continue to serve as a symbol of peace and enlightenment for generations to come.

Venerable Metteyya Sakyaputta

Vice Chairman Lumbini Development Trust

लुम्बिनी
लुम्बिनी



नेपाल पर्यटन बोर्ड Nepal Tourism Board

(नेपाल पर्यटन बोर्ड ऐन २०५३ द्वारा स्थापित)
(Established Under Nepal Tourism Board Act 1997)



MESSAGE

I am enthused to share with you that Nepal Tourism Board, the national tourism organization of Nepal is organizing the second edition of the Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in partnership with the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) and support from Lumbini Province Government, local levels, Lumbini Development Trust, Lumbini Development Council, tourism associations of Nepal under the guidance of Government of Nepal Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation from 11-13 May 2023 in Lumbini.

This event aims to organize Business to Business meetings between buyers from Buddhist markets primarily BIMSTEC region and sellers from Nepal; and to promote Lumbini, the Birthplace of Lord Buddha (Shakyamuni), and other important Buddhist sites around Lumbini like Tilaurakot, Ramagrama, Kudan, Gottihawa (Birthplace of Krakuchanda Buddha), Niglihawa (Birthplace of Kanakmuni Buddha), Devadaha, Sagarhawa and other sites which are related to Buddha's life and teachings. This mart also aims to promote the newly built Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa (23 km east of Lumbini) as the gateway to Buddhist Circuit that connects important Buddhist sites in Nepal, India, and beyond.

This international event is expected to bring tourism entrepreneurs, tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers, and other investors to a single platform, familiarize foreign delegates with their local counterparts and encourage investors to invest in this sector, and collectively promote Lumbini, the Fountain of Peace globally so as to encourage potential visitors, travelers, pilgrims to visit this holy site and other products and activities for the experience of a lifetime. I wish the event a grand success.

Dr. Dhananjay Regmi
Chief Executive Officer



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MESSAGE

It is with great pleasure that we present this Souvenir in celebration of the prominent Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) 2023, organized by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, co-organized by Nepal Tourism Board, and implemented by the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA). On behalf of the President of NATTA, the implementing partner of this event, I extend my heartfelt welcome and success of the second edition of the prestigious BITM.

We are bringing together the BITM with a theme of "Explore the Buddha Land: A Gateway to Buddhist Circuits," highlighting the potential of the Buddhist tourism sector and its associated circuits- Lumbini and beyond. I urge all stakeholders in the tourism industry to come together, share ideas and experiences, and explore ways to further enhance the growth of Buddhist tourism through Buddhist Circuits, which is a highly promising sector in the tourism industry. This annual marketplace of the Buddhist tourism industry not only plays a significant role in promoting Buddhist tourism but also serves as a vital platform for the development, promotion, and networking of various forms of tourism such as Adventure, Leisure, Cultural, Pilgrimage, MICE and many more in Nepal as well as in the South Asian Sub-continent.

On this occasion, we would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Nepal Tourism Board, the BITM main organizing committee, member secretary of BITM, Mr. Pramod Dahal, Executive Director, Mr. Vinay Shakya, BITM Secretariat team, and the NATTA team for their support in making this event a reality. We would also like to extend our appreciation to all partner associations in the tourism industry, as well as the international delegates, buyers, sellers, bloggers, media personnel, airlines, all the sponsors, well-wishers, and all other stakeholders for their invaluable contributions. In the same way, we are grateful to the article writers for the Souvenir, paper presenters/speakers, and session chairs at the international conference, who have shared their insights and experiences with us.

We look forward to fruitful discussions and collaborations in the promotion and growth of Buddhist tourism, its circuits, and in the coming days.


Ramesh Thapa
President





Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) Lumbini, Nepal

MESSAGE

The human being, since the time immemorial, has been in the quest for peace.

There are witnesses to many instances of sorrow and misery that individuals, societies, and nations had to suffer from in the absence of peace. Today, the world is in a deep grip of racial, ideological, and communal conflicts, tension, poverty, hunger, and diseases. All disputes and conflicts among families, communities, or nations should be settled by peaceful means, such as tolerance mutual respect, mutual agreement, and wisdom. The teachings of Lord Buddha are useful to tackle global challenges. Living in harmony with all people brings happiness. Despite the political turmoil Nepal had experienced in the last decades, Nepal can be promoted as a peace destination because of Lumbini. The time has come to think about reinitiating the "Peace Zone" proposal to Nepal initiated by Late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah. I urge Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) 2023 should play a key role in developing Lumbini as a peace destination.

As the Member Secretary of BITM-2023, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all the distinguished international delegates, speakers/presenters, buyers, sellers, bloggers, media personnel, and representatives from Tourism organizations to mark this second edition of BITM with the theme "Explore the Buddhaland: A Gateway to Buddhist Circuits. BITM brings people together to promote Inbound, Outbound, and Domestic Tourism in a unique style in Lumbini, Nepal. BITM offers unlimited opportunities for tourism stakeholders to explore the market and publicize their destination/ product/ organization in one place.

BITM aims to prepare a uniformed package of Buddhist circuits across the globe starting from Lumbini. The event further aims to create a platform for interaction between organizations, tour operators, and agencies that specialize in this sector. The event features international conferences, interaction and networking, B2B sessions, and many more.....The second edition of a mega-event is believed to be a great facilitation for the development, promotion, and revival of tourism in Nepal by promoting Buddhist tourism, and Buddhist Circuits, presenting Lumbini as the gateway to the Buddhist Circuits and the fountain of peace.

On this occasion, I express my sincerest gratitude to the Rt. Hon. President, Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Hon. Chief Minister, Lumbini Province, and other dignitaries for their goodwill messages on BITM Souvenir. My special thanks to the Hon. Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation: Mr. Sudan Kirati, Secretary of the Ministry of Culture Tourism and Civil Aviation: Suresh Adhikari, CEO of Nepal Tourism Board: Dr. Dhananjaya Regmi for their support. I also would like to thank members of BITM main organizing committee, BITM Sub-committee members, and NATTA Secretariat team for their backing. I express my gratitude to the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (Mo, Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Airlines Corporation, Lumbini Development Trust, and all the tourism-related partner associations for their invaluable support. Many thanks to the article writers for the Souvenirs, paper presenters/speakers, and session chairs at the international conference. I am grateful to the airlines, corporate houses, sponsors, banks, and travel agencies for their generosity. It was my great pleasure to work with the BITM Secretariat team. I'm very much thankful to Prof. Dr. Him Lal Ghimire and Vinaya Shakya for their professional works. Both of you were instrumental for the success of BITM. My words of thanks might not be enough for their untiring effort to plan and organize this mega event.

Vawatu Sabba Mangalam!

Pramod Dahal

Member Secretary, BITM 2023 and SVP, NATTA

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Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) Lumbini, Nepal



MESSAGE

The Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM 2023) is an event that aims to highlight Nepal's potential to the Buddhist tourism world. The purpose of the BITM is to promote Buddhist pilgrimage and overall tourism in Nepal.

The Mart provides a platform for buyers and sellers to meet, exchange business ideas, and promote their products. Participants include buyers from abroad and sellers from Nepal who will have the opportunity to share their packages and expand their businesses. National and international tourism organizations, tourism veterans, academicians, media, sponsors, invitees, Buddhist scholars, and volunteers will also attend to gain knowledge on Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism packages. The academic conference will guide the future of tourism trends in Nepal and the Greater Buddhist circuits. Additionally, this Mart will display the recently opened Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa.

BITM 2023 aims to put Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, on the map as a must-visit spiritual destination. Local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, hotels, restaurants, transport operators, airlines, and others will benefit from the Travel Mart.

Hosted by Nepal Government cohosted by Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents is working as implementing partner with other tourism organization. The organizers hope that BITM 2023 will increase tourist arrivals in the coming days, and the development of a niche Buddhist tourism product will help in the diversification of Nepalese tourism and support the national GDP. The organizers wish all the best to the invitees and distinguished guests from around the world. They believe that this event presents an excellent opportunity to promote Nepal's products and explore the country's Buddhist sites and natural beauty.

Vinaya Shakyas

Executive Director, BITM



We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !

We would like to extend our warmest welcome to all the distinguished international delegates, speakers/presenters, buyers, sellers, bloggers, media personnel, and representatives from Tourism organizations to mark this second edition of BITM.

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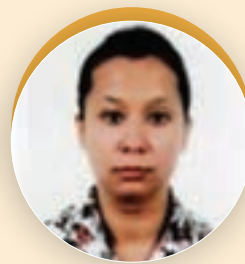
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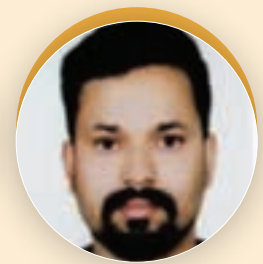
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We wish for the grand success of the Second Edition of BITM 2023 !

We are delighted to welcome all the distinguished international delegates, speakers/ presenters, buyers, sellers, bloggers, media personnel, and representatives from Tourism organizations in Lumbini, the Birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal.

NTB Representatives in BITM



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We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !

Our heartfelt welcome to all the participants of BITM in Lumbini.

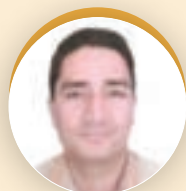
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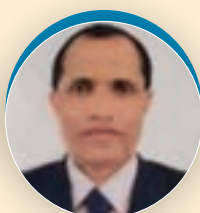
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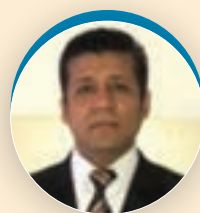
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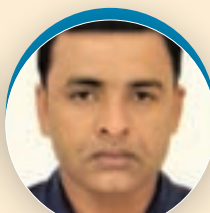
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Bravo! We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !

Our heartfelt welcome to all the participants of BITM.

BITM Secretariat



Mr. Pramod Dahal
Member Secretary



Mr. Vinaya Shakya
Executive Director



Prof. Dr. Him Lal Ghimire
Consultant/Tourism Expert



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NATTA & Associate Director, BITM



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Prof. Dr. Him Lal Ghimire

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Editor's Pen

Nepal is a Himalayan country with a unique and diverse living history, culture, and natural beauty, including Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain, and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha. It has been blending and carrying this history for thousands of years. The grove of Lumbini developed into a pilgrimage site soon after the *parinirvana* (physical death) of Lord Buddha. Lumbini's strengths in this respect are—to name just a few—that it is a high-class pilgrimage site, declared as a World Peace City, a World Heritage Site, and hailed as the Fountain of World Peace that may provide ultimate peace and nirvana. It hosts national and international Buddhist monasteries, and is, therefore, the home of monks, nuns, peace lovers, and spiritual leaders. There are more than 160 religious, historical, and archaeological sites related to the Buddha and his life in and around Lumbini.

The Buddha was the first Buddhist pilgrim, and his life story is one of pilgrimage, in which he leaves home to travel in search of the truth. The Buddha himself enshrined pilgrimage as an essential act in the life of a practitioner. After the *parinirvana* (physical death) of the Buddha, the relics of His body were collected from the funeral pyre and divided into eight parts. These were distributed to the claimants and *stupas* were erected on the relics. The practice of pilgrimage in Buddhism probably started with visits to these places, and the purpose could be to achieve personal advantages such

as rebirth in a good location and honour the great master. Pilgrimage to the holy places mentioned by the Buddha is a once-a-lifetime undertaking by Buddhists. In answer to Venerable Ananda's concern that the monks would no longer see Lord Buddha and pay their respects after His Mahaparinirvana, Lord Buddha



Pilgrimage is a moving meditation. On pilgrimage, you walk; however, it is the process of concentration and awareness, spiritual purification in your body and mind. That is what the Buddha had said.

mentioned four places that a pious disciple should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence.

Pilgrimage is a moving meditation. On pilgrimage, you walk; however, it is the process of spiritual purification in your body and mind. This spiritual practice is for concentration and

awareness. That is what the Buddha had said. Pilgrimage allows you to discover who you are and where you stand. It develops your mind and beliefs. Pilgrimages serve as a means for ordinary people to enter the religious specialist's world, even if temporarily. It is a recurrent feature of pilgrimages worldwide. It has been seen as a means of acquiring merit that could enable people to overcome bad karma and ensure better rebirths for themselves and their kin.

Thousands of years ago, a large part of the life of Gautam Buddha was spent in Nepal and India. The Buddhist circuit is a route that follows in the footsteps of the Buddha from Lumbini in Nepal where he was born, through Bodhgaya where he attained enlightenment, to Sarnath and Kushinagar in India, where he delivered his first teachings and the place of His Mahaparinirvana. There are other influential sites where Lord Buddha performed his great miracles and where he and the *sangha* held their rain retreats. The circuit has places having grand Stupas, ancient monasteries, Buddhist chants, and a steady stream of Buddhist pilgrims and monks who come here for meditation and worship. What a devout can perceive of the entire life of Lord Buddha in this area, cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world. The Buddhist Circuit Tour is a visual aid to Buddha's life and the development of Buddhism. If anyone is looking for enlightenment in life, this is the Circuit to visit. Buddhist pilgrimage is not limited to four major sites alone. There are Buddhist

monuments in other countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, South Korea, Japan, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos, among others. Most of these sites are still to be connected to the Cross-Border Greater Buddhist Circuits.

Pilgrimage visit to multiple sites has been widely practiced for a long time in Hinduism (e.g. four dhamma visits in India are supposed to be completed by the final visit of Pashupatinath in Nepal). Likewise, the Buddha mentioned four places that a pious disciple should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence. Thus a salient characteristic of multiple-site routes is that they contain a set number of places that have to be visited in the context of the pilgrimage. There are two world-famous Buddhist Circuit pilgrimage practices in Japan. Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of thirty-three Buddhist temples devoted to the Bodhisattva throughout the Kansai region of Japan and the Shikoku pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of Eighty-Eight Sacred Buddhist Temples Pilgrimage circuit in Shikoku island in Japan.

The next edition of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is organized with the theme “**Exploring the Buddhaland: A Gateway to Buddhist Pilgrimages Circuits**” from May 11 - 13, 2023. International Conference is an integral part of BITM. The academic and business discussions, presentations, sharing experiences, and networking amongst scholars and business people at the conference should be a milestone for the promotion of Buddhist tourism, Buddhist circuits, and overall tourism of Nepal. BITM will definitely promote Lumbini as the first and foremost pilgrimage destination among all the Buddhist sites. The importance of Lumbini is so great that the Buddha himself advised his followers to make the pilgrimage to Lumbini. Today, Lumbini can be considered as a synonym of a world peace centre and a top class

pilgrimage destination. BITM should play a key role in diversifying and decentralizing Nepalese tourism which is heavily reliant on natural and adventure tourism. BITM will not only promote Buddhist heritage sites in Nepal but also offers new tourism products that Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs can sell in the international market. The branding of Lumbini together with other tourism products of Nepal, networking with neighboring countries, and promoting regional tourism can attract a larger number of international tourists to Nepal. Tourism is an activity bringing together people living in different geographies and offering to opportunity to meet and know each other. With the operation of Gautam Buddha International Airport, Bhairahawa near Lumbini, tourist flow is expected to increase significantly establishing Buddhist pilgrimage as an important segment in Nepal.

The market for Lumbini is so massive. Lumbini is the nerve centre for Buddhists around the world and a centre of attraction for others. It can attract millions of tourists every year. Lumbini is symbolically related to peace and harmony and is a place of reverence for all peace-loving people, but also for those people interested in history and archaeology. In order to improve tourism, local capacity needs to be enhanced in several areas, since the local communities' role in enhancing the attractiveness of the holy site is meaningful. Proper marketing in the international market can attract more tourists to Lumbini and the satisfaction of their visit can lengthen their stay period, revisit the site and recommend others to visit Lumbini. Seasonality is one of the important problems as the summer especially July, August, and September are very hot, humid, and rainy months in Lumbini. Lumbini should be developed into a contemplative place where visitors can feel quietude, tranquillity, serenity, and divinity free and far from noise, crowds, disturbances, and pollution. Lumbini, the birthplace

of the Buddha is a peerless spiritual tourism destination of its kind in the world; however, it has not been developed and tapped in full swing yet. Hope, faith, and compassion are the biggest strengths of humanity. When they are united, the Buddha's Dhamma will become the world's belief and Buddha's realization will become the belief of humanity. Lumbini has a big potential to be World Peace City but it requires a sincere and combined effort. Nepal's government should of course take the initiative for a shared contribution from the global community to make it possible. Successful implementation of the plan will help develop Lumbini into a world-class spiritual tourism destination that will bring peace, prosperity, harmony, and spirituality to the whole world, and Nepal will have extra bonus without any doubt.

The success of BITM-the event in Lumbini can achieve various outputs. UN, different countries, Buddhists from around the world, peace loving organizations are very much interested to develop Lumbini as a pilgrimage destination and world peace centre. Worldwide attention and focus on Lumbini not only because pilgrimage site but because for all mankind Lumbini has special meaning as a place of meditation and spiritual renewal, a centre of cultural exchange, a symbol of peace, and ultimately the faithful destination.

Finally, it is my great pleasure to be associated with Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) 2023. My special thanks to NATTA and the BITM Main Organizing Committee for this opportunity. I would like to express genuine gratitude to all the writers in Souvenir, speakers/presenters at the conference, buyers, sellers, sponsors, and media persons involved in BITM. Likewise, I would like to express my indebtedness to the BITM Secretariat team and volunteers for their diligent efforts to make this event successful.

Vawatusabba Mangalam!



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Destination Images – Challenges to Sustain Tourism Growth in Greater Lumbini Development Area

Introduction

The study of destination image is somewhat recent addition in to the field of tourism research. However, various study show that destination images do, indeed, influence tourist behaviour (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Chon, 1992a; Pearce, 1982; Hunt, 1975). Every individual is believed to have own perception of reality. Of all the stimuli that confront traveller, he/she receives only those that conform to his/her own image. Traveller sees and hears not what is there, but what they prefer to see or hear (Mayo, 1973). Likewise, destination image has thought to have a decisive role in an individual's travel purchase related decision making process. The individual travellers satisfaction / dissatisfaction with a travel purchase largely depends on a comparison of his/her expectation about the destination, or a previously held destination image, and their perceived performance of the destination (Chon 1990, 1992).

However, the remarkable growth in the tourism industry during the last ninety years has brought major challenges in tourism marketing. With the development of new area in the world for tourism, the destination choices available to consumers have continued to expand. Moreover, present consumers who

are facilitated by increased leisure time, wider and varied sources of information, high disposable income and efficient transport networks, have ample opportunity to choose the best one from larger variety of nations. As a result, in this complex and competitive global and regional market place, the tourism marketers are facing them busy, influencing consumer to make decision in their favour. This challenging situation has created the need for positioning the destination into an effective way (Calantone et al., 1989). Furthermore, various study suggest that, in order to promote destination successfully in the targeted market, the product should be favourably differentiated from the competitors or it should be positioned positively in the minds of the consumers (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Cohn, 1989, 1990, 1992; Christopher, 1984; Batson, 1991), whereas, creation and management of a distinctive and appealing perception or image, is the key element of the positioning process.

As suggested by Goodrich (1978) and Chon (1990) the strong, positive images are more likely to be marketed and preferred in the travel decision process. The awareness of the tourism product which is made up of experiences, learning, emotions, and perceptions, can be described as

knowledge producing a specific image of the tourism product, which could affect an individual's preferences and motivates towards tourism. However, while developing a strong destination image, it needs creativity and hard work. It cannot be implanted in the public's mind overnight nor seeded by one media vehicle alone. Furthermore, it should be carried out in every communication vehicle available, with regular intervals. Images, beliefs and perceptions of an individual what Hunt (1975) suggests will contribute for the successful development of new tourist areas, equally, as a tangible recreation facilities and other tourist resources contributes towards destination.

Pizam et al. (1978) supporting Hunt suggest that the consequence of the interaction between a tourist experience at the destination areas and the assumptions he/she had about the destination is the satisfaction of the tourist. Mayo (1980) also state that among alternative choices available to travel destination, the subjective judgement a traveller makes about alternatives available is dependent on a number of factors among which the most important of these of the image of the each alternative and its perceived ability to satisfy his/her needs. To conclude, traveller's satisfaction and dissatisfaction is the comparison

between travellers' accumulated image and actual image which is gathered from travel experience. The change arising from satisfaction and dissatisfaction would have a lot to do with the destination image.

In recent years, because of the rapid growth of both travel demand and the tourist industry, the need to study the destination choice process has become more important. Together with this growth, the struggle of the destination to attract more potential tourists has also grown. At the same time, tourist have become more experienced and sophisticated in both destination choice and their expectations towards "tourism product". There is no doubt, therefore, that solving the destination choice perplexity and constituting a sound theoretical framework for this process are no longer becoming a matters of purely academic interest, but also has become applicable to the highly sensitive tourist industry, urging a better understanding of this process. This situation has created a fundamental question as to the course of action that should be taken in order to attain a better understanding of the mechanism behind the destination

choice process.

Greater Lumbini Development Area as Tourism Destination

Tourism development has strong potential to drive economic growth and job creation in Greater Lumbini Area (GLA). Sustainable and responsible tourism rests on the effective preservation and value add to the Greater Lumbini area's cultural assets, the capacity of local governments to plan and provide adequate infrastructure and services, and reliable connectivity infrastructure for transport and communication. In addition to these fundamental building blocks for tourism development, a number of sector-specific interventions are required to support private sector tourism initiatives and investments based on a partnership between private and public stakeholders.

The GLA (Table 1) is well positioned to take advantage of global and national tourism trends and to benefit from high-yield cultural and religious tourism. Lumbini is both a cultural site of global interest with a rich variety of cultures and archeological

sites and, most important it is a religious/spiritual/cultural center for Buddhist pilgrims from around world as it is the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, Lord Buddha. It's position as one of the most sacred places from one of the world's great religions, gives it a unique and compelling comparative advantage, particularly as a designated World Heritage Site.

The Buddhist sites of Kapilvastu, Devdaha and Ramgram including Lumbini are packaged as Greater Lumbini Buddhist Circuit tour in Nepal (Figure 1). This product has potential to be linked with Indian Footsteps sites of the Lord Buddha, including Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar and Srawasti.

Currently, there are many barriers to increasing high-yield, low impact tourism and maximizing the benefits of tourism in the GLA. These include factors such as inadequate tourism infrastructure, poor business climate, a lack of coordination both within the cluster and with external networks, and weak backward and forward linkages throughout the tourism value chain. All these

Table 1. Key Tourism Sites of Greater Lumbini Area

District	Municipal Area	Site	Remarks
Rupandehi	Lumbini Sanskritik Municipality	Lumbini	Birthplace of Lord Buddha
	Devdaha Municipality	Devdaha	Maternal home of Queen Mayadevi, Gautam Buddha's mother
Kapilvastu	Kapilvastu Municipality	Tilaurakot	Palace of Gautam Buddha's father, King Suddhodhana.
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Kudan	King Suddhodhana met Lord Buddha for the first time after he returned from cosmic enlightenment
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Gotihawa	The birthplace and the place of Nirvana of Krakuchhand Buddha
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Niglihawa	Birthplace of Kanakmuni Buddha and his enlightenment
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Arurakot	Remains of ancient natal town of Kanakmuni Buddha
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Sagarhawa	Site identified as the "Palace of the Massacre of the Shakyas"
	Kapilvastu Municipality	Tilaurakot	Palace of Gautam Buddha's father, King Suddhodhana.
Nawalparasi	Kapilvastu Municipality	Sisahaniya	Unexcavated archaeological site related to Buddha
	Ramgram Municipality	Ramgram	One of the eight major Buddhist sites with Buddha's astu (remains)



Figure 1. Greater Lumbini Buddhist Circuit

works constrain the positive growth potential of the regional tourism industry.

doing economic analysis for Greater Lumbini Tourism Development Plan, Western Urban (Terai)

influences and future course of actions to be taken for improvement.



Figure 2. Jagdispur Lake, Kapilvastu Municipality

There is a general perception that tourism industry cannot be developed in an isolation. Hence, a coordinated approach from all sectors and at all levels of government is crucial for its development and success. While on

Corridor (WUC) regional tourism site/area development concept will be imperative to assess the overall tourism development scenario from different perspective such as: its internal conditions, external

According to the National Urban Development Strategy (NUDS) 2017 and the Western Urban Corridor – Integrated Development Strategy (WUC-IDS) Study, the West Urban Corridor (WUC) region

located within the Lumbini Province and encompassing Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) with a total area of 3,802 km² and population 1.65 million, has a significant tourism development potential with varied reasons such as this region having Lumbini – the World Heritage Sites (WHS) and the birthplace of Lord Buddha,

the accessibility to the overseas pilgrims for visiting Buddhist circuits in Nepal including South Asia Buddhist Circuits. Likewise, upgrading and development of the road networks such as East West highway, district feeder roads and postal roads has further enhanced facilities to the potential neighboring

Rupandehi District being the major entry point for almost 80 % of the total overland tourists (categorized by Nepal Government as tourists) to Nepal (as of 2019 statistics), and the Gorakhpur City of India being one of the major railway junction with links to almost major cosmopolitan cities of India is another opportunity for

Table 2. Tourist arrival by entry points (land), 2012 – 2021

Entry point	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021*
Kakarvitta, Jhapa	4743	5642	9947	8921	6205	6205	6997	8480	2021	40
Birgunj, Parsa	1008	1097	1118	906	229	1100	1069	1192	388	36
Bhairahawa, Rupendehi	79428	119159	117246	120637	147608	150841	165818	161396	43272	208
Nepalgunj, Banke	275	354	332	513	351	456	590	442	94	0
Dhangadhi, Kailali	44	26	34	46	27	36	76	108	34	0
Gaddachauki, Kanchanpur	1602	1803	1796	1952	2567	2739	2923	2976	621	53
Kodari/Timure, Rasuwa	52676	74687	73664	-	23452	18264	26312	26713	525	0
Total	204834	202768	204137	132975	180439	179641	203785	201307	46955	337

Source: Department of Immigration, Nepal (2012 – 2021), *COVID 19 Impact.

and a major tourist and pilgrimage destination to Buddhist of Asian as well as to the rest of the world. The recent opening up of Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) has further enhanced

Indian tourists and domestic tourists, as well as eased to link all Buddhist sites within the region. Over 15% of the total tourists' arrivals to Nepal is from land (Table2). Belhaya at Siddharthanagar Municipality,

tourism development and promotion to WUC region. Besides it, there are other three popular entry points such as Barhni at Krishnanagar municipality, Khunwa at Kapilbastu municipality and Kakrahwa at



Figure 3. Tourism Site/ Area Development

Lumbini Sanskritik municipality for the Indian visitors/tourists only.

Owing to various reasons, the WUC's nine municipalities hold high potential to drive economic growth and job creation through tourism development as well. Among these municipalities in WUC, majority of them are well aware of their tourism resources and are desirous to enhance, promote and develop tourism activities. Likewise, they have shown consideration to develop tourism sites combining various natural and cultural scattered sites together with proposed manmade attractions (Figure 2).

The aim of regional corridor development is also to support the development of tourism in the Greater Lumbini Districts of Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, and Nawalparasi to attract higher yield tourists and increase tourism investments with the aim of growing tourism revenues and generating employment and fostering linkages to other related industries that can further enhance the tourism product. Development has envisaged to undertake in line with the values and sanctity of the sacred sites associated with the birth and life of the Lord

Buddha.

GLA's tourism strategy and implementation program is intended to be focused on three factors: i) increase, numbers, days, and expenditures of high--yield visitors; ii) increase income that stays in the local economy; and iii) preserve and improve local assets in order to increase the quality of life for local residents over generations. All of these objectives can be met by: a) improving, expanding, and differentiating the visitor experience; b) improving local capacity to harness opportunities; and c) ensuring that cultural and natural heritage is preserved and enhanced over time.

Challenges and Opportunities to GLDA and WUC to meet tourism demand and destination image building

Currently, WUC region consisting nine municipalities such as Ramgram, Devdaha, Butwal, Tillottama, Rupandehi, Lumbini Sanskritik, Kapilvastu, Krishnanagar and Sainamaina depend on fragmented visual identities and do not adequately represent Buddha's teachings and life thematic pilgrimage route and tourism product. In these municipalities, additional

infrastructure development activities supports the formulation of guidelines for a unique brand identity and marketing strategy for the Buddhist Circuit as a whole with the objective of enhancing people's understanding of the value of these assets from a historic, religious and cultural perspective, while better positioning the Circuit as a tourism product in the national and region market.

However, levels of private investment in and along the Buddhist Circuit are very low due to a number of policy constraints and infrastructure bottlenecks, among other factors. An in-depth understanding of the private sector investment climate across the region is required to stimulate the necessary private sector engagement and investment, particularly to increase the quantity and quality of tourism services and products along the Buddhist Circuit.

Connectivity between sites within destinations and at regional levels in western corridor is particularly problematic due to infrastructure gaps (e.g., poor road conditions, inadequate road connections), among other issues. Reliable, fast, safe, multimodal and affordable



Figure 4. Enchanting view from Malmala Temple site at SainaMaina Municipality

connectivity between sites of the Buddhist Circuit as well as between other tourism attractions and its main source markets is critical for its sustained development. It is projected that worldwide the Buddhist population was over 507 million in 2022. Within top 10 Buddhist countries alone in Asia, the number of Buddhist population has been more than 357 million (Table 3). Cambodia, Thailand,

population visit the sacred Buddhist sites of South Asia including Lumbini in Nepal.

Since, with the operation of new Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa, it has anticipated that in near future, these Buddhist population could be the potential source direct markets for the Greater Lumbini Buddhist Area and Circuits in Nepal. However,

coming to Lumbini after visiting Indian Buddhist sites (through Indian travel and tour operators) are not staying in Nepal including Lumbini. Mostly, they do come for day visit in a packaged program without contributing to the local as well as national economy.

Out of 11,97,191 tourists visited Nepal in 2019, according to Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), over that

Table 3. International Buddhist Population as of 2022

Buddhist by percentage as of 2022

SN	Country	Number of Buddhists	Buddhists %	2022 Population
1	Cambodia	15,690,000	96.80%	16,767,842
2	Thailand	66,120,000	92.60%	71,697,030
3	Myanmar	41,440,000	79.80%	54,179,306
4	Bhutan	620,000	74.70%	782,455
5	Sri Lanka	15,440,000	68.60%	21,832,143
6	Laos	4,630,000	64.00%	7,529,475
7	Mongolia	1,730,000	54.40%	3,398,366
8	Japan	41,380,000	33.20%	123,951,692
9	Singapore	1,890,000	32.20%	5,975,689
10	South Korea	10,950,000	21.90%	51,815,810

Source: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/>

Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Mongolia constitutes over 50 percent of their total population as Buddhist population. It is estimated that only 0.005 percent of the total Buddhist

till date there is a major concern among the Nepalese hoteliers and travel and tour operators that the international Buddhist pilgrims

period about 1.7 million tourists have visited alone in Lumbini (Table 4). Since, there is no mechanisms in WUC municipalities to keep records

Table 4. Tourist arrival in Nepal & Lumbini by year 2015-2022

Year	Total Arrivals to Lumbini				Total Arrivals in Nepal		
	Foreigner	Domestic Nepali	Indian	Total	Foreigner	Indian	Total
2015	129,180	488,852	130,262	748,294	464156	74814	538970
2016	136,253	1,015,158	134,269	1,285,680	634,753	118,249	753,002
2017	145,796	1,251,346	155,444	1,552,586	779386	160832	940,218
2018	169180	1155544	192410	1517134	978749	194323	1,17,3072
2019	173083	1401178	204825	1779086	943041	254150	1,197,191
2020*	45469	197252	37206	279927	189749	40336	230085
2021*	1197	463963	43732	508892	86290	64672	150962
2022	23942	230863	649063	903868	405535	209334	614869

Source: Department of Immigration, Nepal 2022, LDT, 2022, MoCTCA, 2021, * COVID-19 Impacts

for tourists' arrivals, the record maintained by LDT and Bhairahawa Immigration Office at the India-Nepal border have been the only authentic sources of information at the WUC areas.

Before 2019, visitors number at Lumbini was in increasing trend, however, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism trend worldwide is jeopardized since 2020 – 2022. This has also been badly impacted in Lumbini in Nepal and other Buddhist sites such as Nalanda, Vaishali, Bodhgaya, Kushinagar, Rajgir, and Sarnath in India (Table 5).

perspectives of the domestic tourism market, five municipalities such as Siddharthanagar, Lumbini Sanskritik, Kapilbastu, Krishnanagar and Sainamaina Municipalities within WUC areas are planning to develop tourism sites/locations based on their natural resources (sites) as well. The tourism development at natural sites such as wetland, lake, ponds and green forests not only improve the local tourism industry, but also helps to boost the economic condition of the local community's and their life styles.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, international tourism has continued to show

related restrictions as of December 2022). The uncertain economic environment seems to have nonetheless reversed prospects for a return to pre-pandemic levels in the near term. However, rising inflation and the spike in oil prices has resulted higher transport and accommodation costs worldwide, putting consumer purchasing power and savings under pressure.

After stronger than expected recovery in 2022, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has forecasted that year 2023 could see international tourist arrivals return to pre-pandemic levels worldwide. Based on UNWTO's

Table 5. Tourism Statistics of Buddhist Sites of India

Years	Nalanda		Vaishali		Bodhgaya		Kusinagar		Rajgir		Sarnath	
	Domestic	Foreigner	Domestic	Foreigner	Domestic	Foreigner	Domestic	Foreigner	Domestic	Foreigner	Domestic	Foreigner
2015	926995	139066	775844	88871	1751602	236539	805553	68803	4381293	166610	924552	388102
2016	1041240	145339	918067	100307	1694321	241514	825218	73514	1568285	170334	957320	409242
2017	961635	163390	916323	90993	1757509	283116	861760	76221	1514279	169444	1024589	430682
2018	888348	160091	928482	94532	1446535	270787	897546	80147	3921761	159976	1070035	435752
2019	1069913	170778	888301	92740	1370709	253	1006764	89693	1782277	177643	1132615	336136
2020	343059	52101	199726	12788	376233	91469	301424	22465	550131	58267	384760	76308
2021	72548	0	17526	0	351372	46	177002	0	598357	27	519900	325

Source: Bihar and UP State Tourism Development Corporation (2015 - 2021). The domestic and foreign tourists' visits in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar States of India were reduced from 2019 and onwards because of lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic.

However, with the beginning of 2022, a ray of hope has been perceived worldwide in tourism sector, with an increase of both domestic and international arrivals in Nepal as well including in Lumbini (Table 6). It is assumed that the tourism trend will be resumed in pre pandemic stage after couple of years and will follow the normal growth then after.

It is well known that the Greater Lumbini Area's tourism strategy and implementation plans of Nepal are designed in line with the development and marketing concept of the Greater Lumbini Buddhist Circuit, which connects the relics, stupas, museums, and historical heritages representing Buddha's teachings and life thematic pilgrimage route. However, in addition, looking at the present trends and wider

strong signs of recovery from 2022. The steady recovery reflects strong pent-up demand for international travel as well as the easing or lifting of travel restrictions to date (116 destinations had no COVID-19

forward-looking scenarios for 2023, it has expected that international tourist movements could reach 80% to 95% of pre-pandemic levels this year, depending on the extent of the economic slowdown, the ongoing

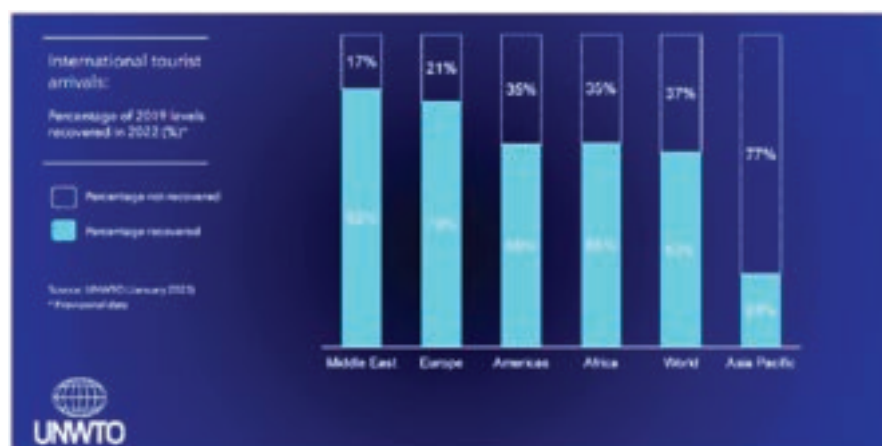


Figure 3. International tourist arrivals in percentage of 2019 levels recovered in 2022.

recovery of travel in Asia and the Pacific and the evolution of the Russian offensive in Ukraine, among other factors.

UNWTO has anticipated a strong year for the tourism sector even in the face of diverse challenges including the economic situation and continued geopolitical uncertainty. Preliminary numbers below in figure 3 and Table 6 show that, more than 900 million tourists have travelled internationally in 2022, which was double the number recorded in 2021, however, this arrivals figure worldwide has been only 63% of pre-pandemic levels. However, Asia Pacific region has been the lowest recipient with only 23% recovery in 2022 (Figure 3).

Despite headwinds such as the emergence of Omicron at the beginning of the year 2022, the start of the Russian offensive on Ukraine or a challenging economic environment, international tourism showed resilience, as reflected in its strong recovery in arrivals: from -59% versus 2019 levels in the first quarter of 2022 to -28% in the last quarter (Table 6).

UNWTO has also forecasted that the recent reopening of several Asian source markets and destinations will contribute to consolidate the recovery in 2023. The removal of COVID-19

the choice of destinations will be shaped by the availability and cost of air travel, visa regulations and processes, as well as COVID-19 related restrictions.

Conclusion

The Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) within this WUC is well positioned to take advantage of global and domestic tourism trends and to benefit from high-yield natural, cultural and religious tourism. Lumbini is both a cultural site of global interest with a rich variety of cultures and archeological sites and, most important it is a religious/spiritual/cultural center for Buddhist pilgrims from around the world as it is the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, Lord Buddha.

Present initiatives planned by all Terai based municipalities in GLDA for new natural and cultural sites development can bring added value for tourism destinations with building better images of the sites, tourist's memory and experiences, increasing number of visitors, and increasing their expenditure patterns. Similarly, for municipalities, such initiatives will help to generate perennial sources of income and employment opportunities for the local communities, and additional marketing opportunities for the local products and services as well.

University (LBU), Lumbini Province Government, District Administration Offices and Police Offices, together with all nine Municipalities can play a pivotal role to develop natural, cultural and heritage sites.

Similarly, National Tourism Organisation (NTO), Tourism industry associations both at local and national levels, District and site level Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Local Tourism Development Committees, individual tour operators and hotel operators can develop special tour packages and market these tourism sites, to deliver high quality visitor experiences using high quality and consistent information on natural and Buddhist heritage sites and circuits. However, connectivity within the sites of the WUC region including Buddhist Circuit as well as between other tourism attractions and its main source markets (domestic and international) is critical for its sustained development.

Similarly, the widespread concern and impression of the domestic tourist source markets as these three districts are "difficult" destination, needs to be overcome if tourism is to grow in the region. In addition to destination marketing programs promoting these common products

Table 6. International tourist arrivals recovery (2019 – 2022).

International Tourist Arrivals by (Sub)region																		
											Monthly/quarterly data series							
				Share	Change (%)							Change (%)*						
(million)				(%)				vs. 2019		2022 versus 2021 ¹				2022 versus 2019				
2019	2020	2021*	2022*	2022*	20/19	21/20*	22/21*	21/19*	22/19*	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
World	1465	409	455	917	100	-72.1	11.2	101.6	-69.0	-37.4	190	226	68	62	-59.0	-39.4	-28.4	-28.2

related travel restrictions in China, the world's largest outbound market in 2019, is a significant and much welcomed step to the recovery of the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific and worldwide. In the short term, the resumption of travel from China is likely to benefit Asian destinations in particular including Nepal. However,

At policy level, major institutions such as Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation MoCTCA, Department of Archaeology (DoA), Department of Tourism (DoT), Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Lumbini Buddhist

to niche markets, other programs should aim at facilitating travel through such means as improving road connectivity, general security and transport safety, and improving public tourism services—such as public transport, good accommodation and tourist information services.

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We are delighted to welcome all the participants of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal.

We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !



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Birthplace of Buddha Identified with Lumbini

Gautam Buddha is a contributor to Buddhist philosophy. His teachings became the way of life in the synchronous times. Peace, love, wisdom, happiness, kindness, compassion, tolerance, coordination, and partnership are universal issues in the current century. His discourses became the universal tools and methods for gradually overcoming minds in cases of anger, jealousy, and ignorance. Globally, peace lover people as well as high authorities of the developed countries are also searching for peace and partnership. In such a critical situation the value of peace is increasing day to day. The signification of the Buddhist philosophy and sacred sites, related to Buddha like Lumbini, Kapilavastu, Saranath, Kushinagar, Ramagrama, etc, are going to be remarkable issues in the twentieth-one century. Krakuchhanda Buddha and Kanakamuni Buddha had also born in Gotihawa and Niglihawa areas respectively before the Gautam Buddha. The western Terai region is known as the sacred place of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. Among the many Buddhist sacred sites, Lumbini is the major site due to the birthplace of Gautam Buddha. Almost all academicians, historians, archaeologists, and authorities have agreed that Lumbini is the birthplace of Gautam Buddha. But, at any time and on some occasions the issue of

identification with Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, has been raised questions. So, the article has concentrated on the identification of the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, Lumbini. Historical evidence from Buddhist literature, Chinese pilgrims, archaeological findings, and versions of eminent scholars have been taken as the real evidence for it.

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is situated about 22 km from Bhairahawa, the foothills of the Himalayas, on the western bank of the Telar River in Rupandehi district of Lumbini Province in Nepal. He was born under a *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) tree when Mayadevi was going to her maternal town on the occasion of delivery (Hill, 1972). *Suttanipata* has mentioned the earliest description of the birth of Buddha in Lumbini. The site is spelled as Rummindei or Rupandei (beautiful lady), the perverted form of Rupadevi, the queen of Anjana, the king of Devadaha which was situated to the east of Kapilavastu in ancient times (Warren, 1986). It is also known as Paderiya (*Parariya*) where the Asoka pillar is located in the Nepalese Terai (Smith, 1904).

The name of the site is spelled *Lumminigame* and Lumbini *Vanain* the Asoka pillar Edict still stands at the same place. Mukherji has also mentioned the name Rummin-dei in

his report. In the Magadhi language, being used in the north-eastern pillar edicts in India and Nepal, 'la' invariable subsisted for 'ra'. The location of Lumbini is pointed out in the Buddhist literature, as well as, in the records of the Chinese pilgrims who visited India and Nepal in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth centuries CE. As mentioned in the *Jataka* story this *sal* garden was in joint possession of the Shakayas and Koliyas during the lifetime of Buddha. The *Mahavamsa*, a Ceylonese chronicle, and *Nidana Katha* have also located between Kapilavastu and Devadaha. The *sal* garden was a place of recreation during the reign of the Shakyas and Koliyas. *Buddha Charita* of Asvaghosa describes Lumbini as "gay like the garden of *chittaratha* with trees of every kind. According to Fa-Hien it is located about 50 *li* east of Kapilavastu. Hiuen-Tsiang also pointed out that it was about 80 or 90 *li*. (21.729 or 24.445 km.) north-east of arrow-well (Beal, 1994). It was linked through the popular '*Uttara path*' to Kapilavastu, Ramagrama, and other important cities during the Buddhist period. The present location of Lumbini, the exact birthplace of Lord Buddha, is absolutely clear (Rijal, 1996).

The Buddhist texts *Lalitavistara*, *JatakNidankatha*, *Divyavadana*, and *Mahavamsa* have stated Lumbini

as the birthplace of Lord Buddha. When Buddha was lying down on his deathbed at the age of eighty in Kusinagar his disciples, monks, and nuns had surrounded him. On that occasion, he advised with feeling of holy reverence and awe, viz. the place where the *Tathagata* was born (Lumbini grove), the place where he had reached perfect enlightenment (Bodha-Gaya), the place where for the first time he had proclaimed the law (Deer park near Varanasi), and the place of his final extinction (Kusinagar). Thus, Lumbini was declared the sacred spot to the pilgrims and was visited by scholars, nobles, Royalty, and devotees from all over the world. According to *KundalaVadana of Divyavadana* having led King Asoka into the Lumbini jungle, venerable Upagupta indicated with his right hand and said "*Asmin Maharaja pradasebhagavanjatah*", meaning 'Oh Great king! Here the Blessed one was born!' King Asoka made an offer of one hundred- thousand gold coins and established the first *cetiya*

or pagoda. In the next chapter *Asoka vadana of Divyavadan* we find the description of the site. In the Asoka pillar of Lumbini, it has inscribed that "Here *BhagwanSakyamuni* was at the Lumbini village". It is translated by Fuhrer to mean King *Piyadasi* beloved of the Gods (or dear to the Gods), having been anointed 20 years came himself and worshipped saying: "Here Buddha Shakyamuni was born", and he got a stone (capital) representing a horse, and the stone pillar erected. Because here the worshipped one was born, the village of Lumbini has been made free of taxes and a recipient of wealth (Fuhrer, 1972). According to Hultzsch, it means, 'when king, beloved of gods, had been anointed twenty years he came himself and worshipped (this spot).' Here Buddha Shakyamuni was born. He got a stone-bearing horse made at this place. Hiuen-Tsiang's remark that the capital of the pillar contained a horse figure confirms this interpretation. "As quoted by Rhys Davids, Buhler also says that "a stone

horse was made and put on a stone pillar". King Asoka installed the stone column with a clear legend inscribed on it that it is the spot of Lumbini where the Blessed One was born. In Lumbini, a brick railing was erected at a distance of 48.76 cm. from the base of the pillar and it had dentils also. A large number of artifacts from the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana, and Gupta periods have been recovered in the course of various excavations. It is thus clear that it continued to be a place of pilgrimage from the third century BCE till to date (Giri, 2003).

Chinese pilgrims have given a more accurate and authentic description of Lumbini. Shui-Ching-Chu describes that at Lumbini the Asokan tree which was gripped by Mayadevi at the time of Siddhartha's birth was still in a living condition and an image of Mayadevi was placed there where devotees used to offer *puja* articles. At the spot where Siddhartha's feet touched the earth first, Asoka got Siddhartha's footprints shielded with stones. His description has been

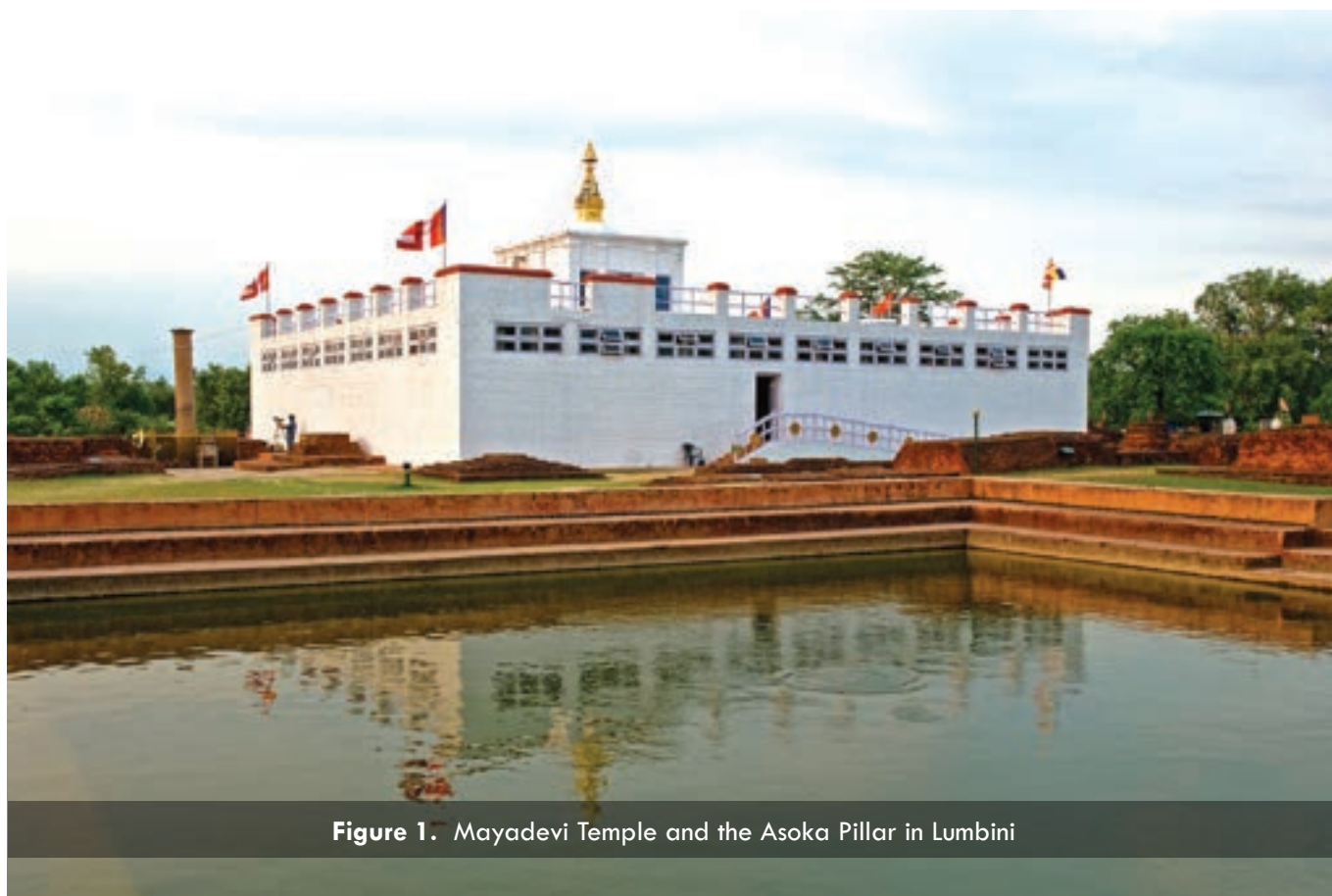


Figure 1. Mayadevi Temple and the Asoka Pillar in Lumbini

ratified by the noticeable findings discovered during the joint excavation of the Department of Archaeology, Lumbini Development Trust, and Japanese Buddhist Federation from 1993 to 1997. It is clearly seen that Asoka had shielded Siddhartha's footprints with stones in order to secure them. This significant news of the findings of the excavation was publicly declared by then-Honorable Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on February 4, 1996. According to Fa-Hien in Lumbini the queen (Mayadevi) having entered the pool to bathe, came out on the north side, and after walking twenty paces, raised her hands and grasped the branch of a tree. She brought forth the Heir Apparent facing to the east. On reaching the ground, the Heir Apparent walked seven steps, and two dragon-kings washed his body. At the time of washing the tank was used. In this context, Hiuen-Tsiang had stated that there was the bathing tank of the Shakyas, the water of which was clear as a mirror and the surface of which was covered with a mixture of flowers. 24 or 25 paces to the north of this there was a fallen Asoka flower tree on the birthplace of Bodhisattva. To the east of this place, there was a stupa built by Asoka-*raja* on the spot where the two dragons bathed the body of the prince. Bodhisattva walked without assistance in the direction of the

four quarters, seven spaces in each direction, and said, «I am the only Lord in heaven and earth; from this time forth my births are finished». To the east of this stupa were two fountains of pure water, by the side of which two stupas were built. To the south of this was a stupa, where *Sakra*, the Lord of *Devas*, received Bodhisattva in his arms. When Bodhisattva was born they wrapped him in a golden-colored cotton vestment and brought him to his mother, and placed him on a golden slab (*bench*).

They said, "The queen may rejoice indeed at having given birth to such a fortunate child!" If the *Devas* rejoiced at the event how much more could the men. By the side of these stupas there is a great stone pillar, on the top of which was the figure of a horse built by Asoka (Giri, 2003). It was broken off in the middle and fell to the ground due to the contrivance (thunder stroke) of a wicked dragon. By the side of it is a little oil river flowing to the southeast, where Mayadevi had brought forth her child to wash and purify herself (Beal, 1994). After Hiuen-Tsiang many other pilgrims visited this place from time to time. One of them was Wu-Kung who came in 764 CE. Due to the absence of records, very little is known about the condition of the area. The monumental and habitation

structures, stone sculptures, terracotta human and animal figurines, and fragments of pottery belonging to the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana, Gupta, Vardhan, and Sena-Pala periods, found here prove that Lumbini was well-populated till the early-medieval period and was frequently visited by the monks, nuns from ancient period.

In the present situation, the Sacred Archaeological Garden of Lumbini complex is enriched with ancient structural remains and artifacts. Mayadevi temple, Asokan monolithic pillar, Puskarini tank, stupas, viharas, and Nativity sculpture of Siddhartha are living as heritages, which has been listed as a World Cultural Heritage site in 1997 CE. In the course of the geophysical survey, structural remains of the complex have been pointed out the chronological order before the sixth century BCE. All the evidence has been evaluated by UNESCO in the course of processing the Heritage list. There is no confusion that Lumbini is the accurate birthplace of Siddhartha Gautam Buddha. All these above-mentioned evidence are recognized by the archaeologists, historians, as well as academicians of other, stems during the conferences, seminars, workshops, and interactions, which were organized in Nepal and foreign countries.

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Buddhist International Travel Mart: A Gateway to Promote Nepalese Tourism

Tourism is the movement or travel of people from one place to another; whether it is within their own country or to other countries, for pleasure, business, pilgrimage, and other purposes. Nepal is a beautiful country with diverse tourism potential and is situated between China and India. Nepal is a geographically, naturally, and culturally rich country. The top of the world, Mt Everest with a number of snow-covered peaks (Eight out of the ten highest peaks in the world) is located here. The green high hills and current flowing rivers are way down to the Terai region the food store of Nepal. Three different geographical regions such as mountains, hills, and Terai have resulted in a variety of natural resources and vegetation. The flora and fauna are different in all places as the temperature and climate are as per region. Not only that Nepal has resulted in the diversity in lifestyle as one can see the variety of cultural practices going on. Nepal is a multi-ethnic country enriched with a variety of cultures and traditions, castes, and communities. There is a huge variety of traditions followed by people living here with unique practices and different mother tongues. The fest and festivals have added joy and local food is never failed to add a star in taste.

The history of tourism in Nepal is

very short. Up to 1951AD, Nepal was absolutely separated from other countries of the world. After the first documented ascent of Everest in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, Nepal was able to take a pick up in the tourism sector, especially on mountaineering and adventure tourism like trekking and white water rafting. Since then possessing 8 out of the 10 highest mountains in the world, Nepal is a hotspot destination for mountaineers, rock climbers, and people seeking adventure during the late 1960s, the hippie trial started and Nepal witnessed an inflow of foreigners. The hippie movement has contributed a lot to the tourism development of Nepal. Jhhochhen tole, Freak Street place in the southern part of Kathmandu Durbar Square holds unique historical importance due to hippies.

Kathmandu, a cultural city is the capital of the nation. Within a 7km radius, the capital city and its surroundings offer several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as Pashupatinath Temple, Swayambhunath Stupa, Boudhanath Stupa, and the ancient cities of Patan and Bhaktapur. The city has a rich collection of archaeological, historical, and artistic creations from the past and present. The festivals

and fairs in Kathmandu Valley are amazing and full of joy. In fact, with more festivals than days of the year, there is nowhere else in the world that can offer as many festivities as Nepal.

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha and one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites is the abode of peace and an ultimate pilgrimage to Buddhist devotees and peace lovers from around the world. Lord Sakyamuni Buddha was born here in 623 BC and preached the universal message of peace and compassion; therefore, it is regarded as one of the most sacred places to visit for people who believe in Buddhism. Recalling the history, we are aware that Siddhartha Gautam was the first outbound pilgrim, and traveled to different parts of Nepal, India, Pakistan, Magnolia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Afghanistan, China, Japan, and Malaysia. Faxin the Chinese Buddhist monk travelled on foot all the way from China to India via Nepal visiting many sacred Buddhist sites. Because of Lumbini, Nepal is symbolically a peace-loving county known as the land of peace. The important religious and cultural site of the Hindu temple of lord Shiva Pashupatinath and Janakpur Dham the birthplace of Sita is here, followed by famous religious sites like

Mukthinath and numerous shrines of other gods and goddesses.

The Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) covers an area of 5260 sq. km. and includes Rupandehi, Nawalparasi, and Kapilvastu districts in the southern plains of western Nepal. The area is home to many archaeological and religious sites relevant to Lord Sakyamuni Buddha's life, including his birthplace Lumbini. Besides Lumbini, the Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) includes Tilaurakot, Taulihawa, Niglihawa, Gotihawa, Sagarhawa, Devdaha, Ramgram, Kudan, and many more. These places consist of universal values and holistic places for Buddhist followers. It is the place where one can observe the environment of that time when Lord Gautam Buddha lived his life. The archaeological remains of the Buddhist Viars (monasteries) and stupas (memorial shrines) from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century AD, provide evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centers from a very early period. There are several beautiful shrines have been

built by devotees from Buddhist countries. A visit to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha is not only for spiritual enlightenment but also for the solace and satisfaction that one gets in such a calm and peaceful place.

The second edition of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is going to be held on 11th – 13th May 2023 in order to enlarge the market and discover new trends in tourism. BITM is playing a vital role in the development, promotion, and networking of Buddhist tourism. It is a mega event giving a platform to tourism businesses to have mutual benefit via exchange along with the contribution to the locals in terms of tourism growth.

This travel mart will help to develop a peaceful culture and decentralize tourism in Nepal. There will be several sessions such as Plenary sessions, Business Talks, and Academic Sessions for the development, promotion, and networking of Buddhist tourism, the Buddhist Circuit, and many more.

BITM will lead to expand the tourism market of Nepal and also create opportunities for locals to network with international markets focusing on the subcontinent and South East Asia. The discussion outcome will give focus on the implementation of the previous strategy along with proper planning and programming with a new dimension to develop tourism in Nepal.

Having huge potential in tourism, Nepalese tourism sectors are not able to achieve the targets. There is a lack of branding, promotion, and networking in the international market due to which we are not able to achieve as per the potential. Through BITM there will be a huge market exchange. The involvement of governmental and non-governmental bodies along with the national and international participants will definitely help to promote Lumbini and Buddhist tourism in Nepal. BITM could be an appropriate forum to project Lumbini as the nerve center for the Buddhist Circuits.



Figure 1. Patan Durbar Square in Kathmandu Valley



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Tourism content and re-branding of Nepal to attract International tourists: An experience of Japan

Tourism in Nepal started after Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hilary conquered Mt. Everest in 1953. Ever since international tourists have traveled to Nepal and most of these are focused on mountains as the core tourism content. Now, whenever I hear people talking about tourism in Nepal, they start by praising nature for gifting Nepal an invaluable natural heritage, cultural diversities, religion, and history.

For many decades, tourism in Nepal has been dependable on tourism resources that were created decades ago, and for the last 20 – 30 years, even if there are a lot of new trekking routes, hiking trails, and few new places explored, the idealistic packaging of “tourism contents” is not performed, hence failing to a chance of huge amount of international currency being spent in experience/activities and longer holidays in Nepal.

In this article, I will talk about how nice tourism content is created to sell in the international tourism world, what kind of measures should Nepal take to make better and more content, and how the diversity of tourism content can lead Nepal to a country with high tourism revenue.

I will use my knowledge and

personal experience of working with local governments in Japan for a decade to create tourism content, and promoting those in the international world, focused on the United States, Europe, and Australia, and make suggestions for Nepal’s tourism industry for the pre-eminence of Nepal in the tourism industry.

What is a Tourism Content?

In my experience, any tourism contents are those which can attract tourists from outside a particular area. Tourism contents are made by using local attractions, local technologies, or history/cultural resources. Many tourism contents are based on experiences, where storytelling is vital to give visitors a better sense of what a local supplier is offering. Here, a local supplier means any business owner who holds the probable attraction an outsider may be interested in visiting. There are some factors that need to be fulfilled for a local attraction or resource to become tourism content.

First, the local supplier should be aware that they have tourism content, where a domestic/ international tourist may want to visit and spend some money for the experience and shopping. For

that, the local suppliers should know what tourists want from their places. As an example, if a supplier from Hile in Dhankuta makes local *Raksi*, international tourists may be interested to know how Nepalese *Raksis* made. In this case, the local *Raksi* maker can offer an experience to the tourists. It could be, meeting the tourists at some point, the local staff guiding tourists about their *Raksi* production, offering some *Raksi* for testing, and showing their shop for a tourist to spend money. This could be one tourism content.

Based on the requirements, popularity, and a will to promote, suppliers may create their own websites or pamphlets explaining who they are and why they are making a difference in a particular region of Nepal. While making these contents, the local suppliers should always be aware of the fact that Western tourists love being with the locals, like to spend money locally, talk to the people, and know more about all the new things that don’t happen in their country, and curious tourists.

Local guides to promote local tourism

Local guides are any person who can explain the local experiences to a tourist, can act as a mediator

between the supplier and the tourists, and have local knowledge. Nepal has circumstances like one must have completed a bachelor's degree to become a tour guide, people cannot guide international tourists without a license, etc. These circumstances are not helping Nepal to increase tourism, but have led the benefit of tourism in Nepal to a certain group. The circumstances could be an option, not a compulsion. How many tourism company owners in Nepal have a bachelor's degree? Why one needs a bachelor's degree to guide a tourist when they have knowledge and skill? The role of local government is crucial in training and creating local tourist guides. Local government can recruit experienced international tourist guides to train the locals to be guided. Those training can be "On the Job Training" or OJT, where the contents are already made and the suppliers are ready to offer their service.

The guide as well as the trainer/trainee could go to one place of experience where the trainer can demonstrate the guiding skills, and the trainees can practice on the field. Those training could be any period based on how many local suppliers each region has for the experience. In my experience, I have trained people for a period of one month to a year. I have had experiences with local suppliers being the trainer as well as the international tourism expert being a trainer. I can be case by case. The regional governments can issue a guide identity card based on the skills of a person or the training he/she has participated in.

Promotion – Promotion

I hear a lot about the word "promotion" when it comes to tourism in Nepal. Everyone is running after promotion, which is not giving a lot of results. From the perspective of tourism professionals working for several local governments in Japan, the main reason Nepal's tourism has not

developed significantly compared to what it was in the 1990s is that the stakeholders are trying to promote more, while less focused on local creation. My suggestion until to stage of promotion would be to create content, make locals aware of tourism, train guides, and then step into the promotional stuff.

I have met a lot of Nepal Tourism Board officials in international tourism seminars/business meetings, and seen the tourism promotion material they bring in all of them are similar for example, "The Everest poster", "Pashupatinath poster", "Chitwan poster", "Lumbini poster", etc. I have not heard from a tourism official mentioning new tourism content, guide arrangements, transportation fleets, etc. It is important for Nepalese Tourism entrepreneurs to know that most international tourists know that Everest is in Nepal, and they can trek to the base camp, while many Hindu people in the world know that Pashupatinath is in Nepal, or Buddha was born in Nepal. It's nothing of promotion.

Nepal cannot keep on pulling tourists with all these old slogans, so tourism content creation is vital. There are numerous villages in the trekking areas, and all of those villages have their own culture, religion, food, architecture, and more. Tourism stakeholders should work with the locals to inform them that all of these cultural, religious, and culinary resources are valuable, and the locals can work to offer experiences about their region.

As an example, the "Ubbouli or Udbouli festival" in east Nepal, or the "Jhakri festival" in Rukum could be tourism content, if the locals are willing to accept tourists for those festivals, hence creating a flow of how to make tourists experience those, how the guides can cooperate with the locals to show the tourists around, etc. After all of the flow is settled, with a clear classification of roles of the locals, suppliers, guides,

and others, it will become a time to start thinking of "promotion".

A "real" international promotion

If Nepal wants to do a "real" international promotion, it should start playing with the numbers. One example could be, how many new newsletter subscribers increased after one travel fair show in Japan, how many questionnaires could one staff get from their promotional trip to Germany, or how many international agents made contracts with the personnel of Nepal Tourism Board or other government officials when they were on a promotional trip to the USA, etc.

I personally don't talk every time I meet the government officers on their international promotional trips, but as I participate as one part of many projects I am involved in, I see that government officers do have not much to say.

Is it possible to make one PowerPoint slide to speak with the tourists rather than just distributing the abovementioned "posters"? Can someone in the office use that same money to travel abroad to speak more about the logistics to the real agents/tourists?

The other promotion I see in a relatively low number is the FAM trips. Again, all the FAM/monitor trips should be conducted after one tourism content is made, or many new tour products are made based on local tourism content.

International agents are ever looking for new tours, new tour content, or new tour products, as competition is an ever-existing factor in the tourism world. So, when a region makes tourism content, international agents are willing to sell it, if it meets the requirements of the travel product an international travel agent is looking for.

International travel media are also important when promoting Nepal. People in Nepal are very happy to share the link of Lonely Planet

when it lists Nepal as one of the top-class travel destinations with their own research and valuation, but what are local contributions to that? I hear people saying that “We have better than this in Nepal” or “Our landscapes are much more beautiful”, but the “better” places of Nepal are not simply listed in renowned international media because these are not simply put together as content. There is no supplier, no local guide, and no option to accommodate international tourists in those “better” places while in another international world, the similar is bound in one tourism content and tourists are well informed about what they can expect if they go to one place, or who hosts them or what they can eat or who guides them, etc.

Place “promotion” is one part, Nepal also needs “experience” promotion, “product” promotion, “souvenirs” promotion, “people” promotion, and other different aspects of promotions.

Branding and re-branding

Branding is anything that helps others to think about a product/ place/country. When we talk about the branding of Nepal tourism, for decades it is branded as a place of the Himalayas only. I have guided thousands of Japanese tourists on their trips, and when people talk about me and my country, people say “Nepal is a mountainous country”, or “Is there anything other than mountains?” etc. People know only those things that we say, we have promoted mountains, and people know about mountains. When we

start promoting “Char Jaat Chhatis Varna”, people start knowing about this. When we start telling people about our festivals, our food, our costumes, they start talking about this too. Having said that, we must prepare each in a proper content form: what a client does when they reach a particular place, who guides them, what are the story of each of the content, information of why people visit those places, what are the price to visit or do experience. All of these should be documented and presented. With all the new content creation and documentation, I believe Nepal’s tourism can be re-branded from what we are doing as a mountainous destination.

Public Private Partnership

Public-private partnership is essential when it comes to tourism



Figure 1. A tour guide (author) with a pilgrim at Shikoku Buddhist Pilgrimage in Japan

development. The local government can use the money to fund nice projects, and the private sector can use this money to develop new tourism content as well as tourism products. As an example, Province 01 can call for proposals with ideas to promote tourism in Province 01, and from many proposals, a team of experts can choose 1 proposal, and fund the best proposal to work to develop tourism in Province 01.

The type of these projects could be content creation projects, tour product development projects, international sales projects, international promotion projects, international tourism fair participation projects, video-making projects, high-end tour projects, guide/supplier training projects, FAM tour projects, MONITOR tour projects, and more.

The public sectors are responsible to check if every task mentioned in the proposal is completed or not, and the private sectors are responsible to conduct each task and make a yearly report to submit to the government. There must be a target to complete, and if the target is not completed, the private sector is not paid. The private sector could be travel agents, tour operators, local accommodations, local tourism promotion committees, tourism experience providers, and more.

Increment in regional tourism companies

Whenever we see the tourism companies' website, such as travel agent or tour operator, all the information or offer they have for trekking, tour, transfer, air ticketing, etc. For an international tourist or travel agent, it is really hard

to differentiate the strength or weaknesses of a travel agent to start working with them. As a result, most of the agents are chosen based on the price that is offered, or only those who are top on search engine results.

For a lot of travel agents in major cities like Kathmandu, the owners come from different backgrounds and have their own strengths. Some have come from the East and know the best of the East, while others have come from the West or North and know their region very well. When a travel agent starts selling tourism products that they are very well at, and others follow it, it simplifies the "I-can-give-you-cheap" competition.

As an example, someone who is from Gorkha can be very strong in the Manaslu region, while one from Pokhara can be very strong in the Annapurna region. The same goes for people from Rukumkot, who may be very detailed about the Dhorpatan, while those from Phungling can be very detailed about the Kanchenjunga region.

Why not establish travel agents locally, and get all diversified? A company in Kathmandu that has a lot of international tourists can contact all these local agents to make the best of the tour. It helps the locals to get benefitted from tourism while helping the centrally located travel agents/tour operators get the best of local tours.

Establishment of DMOs

Destination Management Organization (DMO) plays the best role in creating and developing local tourism in each area. Generally, DMOs are semi-government-

funded organizations that do several tourism-related projects throughout the year to promote their destinations.

Since Nepal is separated into different provinces and municipalities, it is a good idea to establish one DMO in one region that would be responsible to create tourism content of their area and bring it to the mainstream tourism product line of Nepal. The travel agents can work with the DMOs to promote the tour contents/tour products and arrange local tours for domestic/international tourists. The more the DMOs conduct projects each year, the more fund they can get for the next year for their tourism development.

With all these experienced-based ideas and suggestions for Nepal tourism, a few things that we must take into consideration are the following.

1. Accessibility of each place by bus/airplane and other modes of transportation.
2. Education to the locals about how tourism can help them rise-up their life.
3. Establishment of locally owned factories that make local souvenirs.
4. Establishment of hotels/restaurants in places other than big cities.
5. Etc.

Hope the stakeholders in Nepal understand tourism promotion from developed countries and learn good things to develop tourism in Nepal for the betterment of locals living in different parts of the country.





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NATTA at a Glance

Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) is a pioneering association that has been in existence for over 54 years. It was formed in 1966 by travel agents with the objectives to unite tourism entrepreneurs, safeguarding their interests, and promote professional entrepreneurship for the promotion and development of the tourism sector as a foundation for economic growth and prosperity of the country.

Over the years, NATTA has been successful in bringing together professional travel and tour operators and agents, guiding and leading the private sector tourism enterprise as

a collective strength, and promoting Nepal as a chief holiday destination in the global tourism market. NATTA has also worked closely with the government, INGOs, national/international tourism organizations, and other stakeholders to identify bottlenecks and constraints in the tourism industry and provide possible assistance in solving them. It has addressed the concerns of its members for common benefits and contributed to the growth and prosperity of Nepal's tourism sector. As a non-political, non-profit making, non-governmental association, NATTA has gained a significant stature in the travel industry. It accommodates all

provinces of Nepal through its six NATTA provincial committees and two NATTA chapters.

NATTA organizes various events throughout the year as planned in its calendar that include international tourism promotion events in various countries. Major events celebrated by NATTA are the celebration of World Tourism Day, Blood donation/charity, sports events, seminars/workshops, training on topical issues of tourism, national convention on various themes, and celebrations of National/International Days. NATTA has made a significant contribution to



the development of Nepal's tourism industry by partnering with the government and other private sectors in the implementation of policies and programs, generating employment, and bringing foreign currency into the country. It has also made a significant presence in the international arena by marketing Nepal's tourism products and services, taking part in various international fairs, marts, sales missions, roadshows, exhibitions, familiarization tours, and much more. NATTA is closely associated with international organizations such as the United Federation of Tour and Travel Agents (UFTAA), the International Mountain Tourism Alliance (IMTA), and the World Tourism Alliance (WTA), China. In summary, NATTA is a well-established pioneering national association in the travel industry, dedicated to promoting Nepal as a leading tourist destination and supporting for the growth and prosperity of Nepal's tourism sector. The statute of NATTA summarizes its objectives below:

The Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) aims to contribute to the healthy development of the tourism industry and trade, while also promoting the welfare and professional interests of its members. Other objectives of NATTA include providing consultations and cooperation to the Government of Nepal for the promotion of tourism, undertaking research work for the promotion of tourism, promoting and safeguarding the interests of other professionals, trades, and industries ancillary to tourism, and obtaining national and international recognition of the association.

Executive Board of NATTA

The Executive Board of NATTA is elected by its general member companies through voting in every two years. The statute envisions that the president of NATTA can serve only for a single term that allows emerging tourism leaders to serve the industry with their visions. The present executive board has been

serving since 31st March 2022 and were elected by the General Meeting held in Kathmandu. The executive board of NATTA serves as a voluntary contribution to the industry.

NATTA Secretariat

NATTA in its endeavor to achieve its objectives as mentioned in the statutes and envisioned by its prominent founders carries out various tasks. For its smooth operation, NATTA has its own secretariat with efficient staff. NATTA's head office is located in Naxal, Kathmandu. The NATTA provincial committees have their secretariat in respective provincial cities. The Secretariat works under the direct supervision and guidance of the NATTA Executive Board and remains accountable to it directly.

Past President Council of NATTA

NATTA statute has envisioned a council consisting of past presidents of NATTA that acts as patron to the NATTA Executive Board. The president of NATTA remains an ex-officio of the council and bridge between the NATTA Executive Board and the Past President Council. The Past President Council is convened on a rolling basis every two years from the senior most past president to his immediate junior in terms of their service period in NATTA as the president. The council meets a minimum of 3 times a year and provides policy-level guidelines to NATTA Executive Board to make its existence more effective and respond relevantly to the emerging challenges in the industry.

NATTA Provincial Committees and Chapters

After Nepal entered into the federal governance system with the promulgation of the new constitution, NATTA also aligned its structure accordingly. As a result, 6 NATTA provincial committees have been formed in 6 provincial cities with the central office in Kathmandu in Bagmati province i.e. the capital city of Nepal. The NATTA provincial committees are

active in the promotion of tourism destinations in their respective province, safeguarding the interest of the entrepreneurs, promoting, and developing tourism movement in their province, and lobbying with the federal government, and national and international agencies for tourism development and promotion.

NATTA's Partnership with NTO and Government

NATTA is a long-standing trusted partner of the national tourism organization of Nepal i.e. Nepal Tourism Board. The formation of NATTA has a history longer than the formation of the Nepal Tourism Board which indicates the contribution of NATTA to the tourism industry in Nepal. As the most trusted partner, Nepal Tourism Board and NATTA jointly organize tourism promotional activities at the national and international levels. NATTA coordinates the participation of Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs in most of the international tourism trade fairs, sales missions, and promotional events like FITUR Travel Trade Fair Spain, China Sales Mission, Cross Border Sales Mission, Buddhist Circuit Sales Mission, etc.

Similarly, NATTA works with the government of Nepal for creating an environment conducive to flourishing tourism through policy recommendations and practical suggestions.

Conclusion

NATTA has been working as a prominent national association of Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs, a trusted partner of the Nepal Tourism Board, and international tourism-related associations like UFTAA, IMTA, and WTA. It is serving the best interest of the Nepalese tourism industry and for the tourism promotional and developmental initiations both at local, national, and international levels. The Executive Board of NATTA remains a voluntary contributor to the industry and is accountable to its valuable members.



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Nepal Tourism Board at a Glance

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is a national tourism organization (NTO) established in 1998 by an act of Parliament, the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) Act, 1997, in the form of a partnership between the Government of Nepal and private sector involved in tourism industry to develop, promote and market Nepal as an attractive tourist destination in the international marketplace. NTB provides a platform for vision-drawn leadership for Nepal's tourism sector by integrating Government commitment with the dynamism of private sector. NTB has been

promoting Nepal in the domestic and international markets and is working towards repositioning the image of the country. It also facilitates tourism product development activities in the country. Being an NTO and statutory body, NTB's central office and Provincial office in Pokhara have been entrusted with certain duties and responsibilities by the NTB Act, 1997 which are as follows:

- To develop and introduce Nepal as an attractive tourist destination in the international marketplace.
- To promote the tourism industry

in the country while working for the conservation of natural, environmental, and cultural resources.

- To work towards increasing the gross domestic product and foreign exchange earnings by means of promoting the tourism industry.
- To work towards increasing employment opportunities in the tourism industry.
- To develop and brand Nepal as a safe, reliable, and attractive travel destination in the world.



- To work towards providing quality services to the tourists visiting Nepal.
- To conduct research on issues related to tourism development and promotion.
- To promote and develop institutions for the promotion of tourism industry in the country.

The Act has also defined the NTB's ancillary responsibilities, which allows it to undertake a wide range of tourism developmental functions within Nepal and marketing activities both in Nepal and overseas. These responsibilities also stress the NTB's consultative and advisory functions to the Government.

The executive committee of NTB comprises 11 members including the Chairman, who is the secretary of Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation. The CEO of NTB serves as a member secretary of the executive committee.

As a tourism marketing and promotional body, NTB along with Nepali travel and trade companies have been participating in different tourism promotional fairs and sales missions around the world. These fairs and sales missions are good platforms to disseminate firsthand information to potential consumers as well as to create business-to-business (B2B) contacts with the buyers. NTB is also massively promoting Nepal through in-house as well as private-sector digital marketing tools. NTB is working for enhancing the capacity of human resources working in the field of tourism in Nepal. NTB has played a pivotal role in the tourism promotional campaigns declared by the Government such as

Nepal Tourism Year 2011 and Visit Nepal Year 2020. When it comes to rural tourism promotion, NTB has prioritized and implemented community-based rural tourism development projects, employment generating opportunities for tourism laborers through Sustainable Tourism Livelihood Recovery projects in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in various parts of the country. Undoubtedly, these projects have significantly contributed to poverty alleviation in rural Nepal.

The NTB's central office is operating its functions through five departments: Tourism Marketing and Promotion, Public Relations and Publicity, Tourism Product and Resources Development, Research, Planning and Monitoring, and Corporate Services.

Tourism Marketing and Promotion Department carries out promotional activities in international markets to promote Nepal as a premier holiday destination. The Department coordinates with other Departments of NTB to effectively plan the marketing strategy and programs.

The major promotional activities focus on B2B (Business to Business) and B2C (Business to Consumer), communication in major tourist generating and potential markets with the active involvement of the private sector. The goal of NTB's marketing and promotional programs basically lies in enhancing visitors' numbers, increasing their average length of stay (ALOS) and spending in Nepal. With the growing realization of focused and targeted marketing for better results, Tourism Marketing and Promotion Department has been making certain strategic shifts in its marketing approaches. The significance of the markets selected and targeted is made basically in relation to the travel trend patterns of the major generating markets and to the visible returns from those markets vis-à-vis the marketing investments.

The Public Relation and Publicity Department works as a bridge between national/international communities (Organizations/individuals) and Nepal's tourism fraternity by creating a strong information/relation network through various channels of communication in targeted markets. It has been disseminating information about Nepal's tourism products, services, and activities so as to update the readers and viewers about the established as well as emerging tourism attractions of Nepal and to uphold the positive image of the country. In addition, the department aims to build a strong and sustainable relationship with national/international media, tourism-related organizations, diplomatic missions, and other tourism stakeholders so that all of them can contribute to the promotion of tourism industry in Nepal.



The Tourism Products and Resources Development Department has a priority in diversifying tourism products and activities in different parts of the country. It works in coordination with a wide and extensive network of stakeholders both from the Government and private sector. It deals with human capacity building for the tourism industry through regular training and refreshment courses. In coordination with local government bodies and stakeholders, it has been working on building and maintaining the very basic tourism infrastructures. It also promotes various events and festivals nationwide to promote Nepal as a happening destination.

The Research, Planning, and Monitoring Department basically carries out research on tourism in a scientific and systematic manner by providing superior research information that supports improved decision-making, marketing, tourism product, and resource development for the Nepalese tourism stakeholder. Such research is undertaken with a focus not only on user patterns and behavior but also on the contribution of tourism to regional development and the means by which tourism should be managed and promoted. The major tasks undertaken by this department are research-based consumer outbound studies of potential markets and acquiring marketing and promotional

intelligence, studies on various product development possibilities keeping in mind the demand and supply sides, statistics forecasting, exploring possibilities in Nepalese tourism, and overall strategic planning.

The Corporate Services Department deals with important issues of NTB such as human resource and financial discipline, and its overall management. Besides administrative works and accounting of NTB's financial transactions, it also collects revenue from outgoing foreign air passengers as "Tourism Service Fees" and TIMS (Trekking Information Management System) fees from trekkers.





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Spiritual Path: A Tool for Tourism Sustainability

Tourism is a major engine of growth. The growth faces setbacks in different forms (Covid-19 is one), interrupting a well-oiled engine. The tourism industry virtually came to a standstill in 2021. The World Travel and Tourism Council reports that the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted heavy losses on the travel and tourism sector, which suffered losses of almost USD 4.9 trillion, with its global contribution to GDP declining by 50.4% year-on-year, compared to a 3.3% decline in the global economy. However, the year 2022 brought a ray of hope. According to the UNWTO, international tourism recovered 63% of its pre-pandemic levels in 2022. Over 900 million tourists travelled internationally in 2022, double those in 2021, though still 37% fewer than in 2019. Based on UNWTO's scenarios for 2023, international tourist arrivals could reach 80% to 95% of pre-pandemic levels this year. The fact is further strengthened by the World Travel and Tourism Council, which shows that in 2022, the Travel and Tourism sector contributed 7.6% to global GDP, an increase of 22% from 2021 and only 23% below 2019 levels (pre-COVID-19). Further, in 2022, there were 22 million new jobs, representing a 7.9% increase in 2021, and only 11.4% below 2019.

Like the global tourist arrivals

trend, Nepal registered a slump in tourist arrivals during the COVID period. Nepal registered 230,085 and 150,962 in 2020 and 2021, respectively. However, Nepal is springing back from the post-pandemic, as it registered 614,148 tourist arrivals (306% growth) in 2022, giving much relief to the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Travel and tourism consumption patterns have changed in the post-COVID-19 era. Most of the visitors are seeking to reconnect with nature. They are increasingly looking for value of spending their time and money in the cultural and natural spheres. George W. Stone, Editor in Chief of National Geographic, has aptly said, "To me, a journey of a lifetime begins with a quest and produces an understanding that endures. My experience has led me to believe that travel alone does not transform you; instead, travel creates a space for you to transform yourself, often with the help of others. Travel is about seeking knowledge and experience in the world to enrich the geography of your mind and, — engaging with the people we meet along the way — quite possibly helping the world we share." Overall, travel is all about experiences that should be immersive and interactive, eventually leading all the way to incredible experiences!

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), along with the public and travel-trade sectors, has been working on several programmes and events to unleash forces to stimulate the tourism sector in post-COVID time. NTB works in the spirit of public-private partnerships, with participation giving a much-needed boost to the tourism sector. In recent times, Nepal has hosted two mega international events: the International Sustainable Mountain Tourism Development Conference and the UNWTO International Workshop on Measuring Tourism, drawing worldwide attention towards Nepal and cementing its place as a major destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE). Buoyed by the success of such mega events, Nepal is all set to organize and host a series of events. The second edition of the Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM), adventure conferences, and tourism marts are in the pipeline. Visitor satisfaction is paramount to the Nepalese tourism sector. Tourism infrastructure and product diversification are given high priority. One of the reasons for organizing BITM is also to showcase Buddhist sites in Nepal. Recently, the mid-hills of Nepal are being promoted as new destinations because of their

potential for hill stations and cultural trails.

Sustainable Tourism for Livelihood Recovery Project (STLRP), a joint initiative by both the Nepal Tourism Board and UNDP, was launched in 2021 with programmes totally designed for the benefit of the bottom of the pyramid working in the tourism sector. The STLRP specifically focused on providing immediate livelihood needs through short-term employment opportunities to vulnerable tourism-dependent communities, particularly women and people from disadvantaged groups in the tourism sector that have lost their jobs or income due to COVID-19, and generating employment and income for tourism workers through the renovation and development of tourism products in major tourist destinations. Partnerships with different tourism associations were made to impart skill-based training such as river guide training; advanced cooking guide training; trekking guide training; restaurant and bar standard management training; and restaurant and bar management training to develop quality human resources.

Unplanned development fraught with natural calamities and disdain for conservation and preservation is modern tourism's Achilles heel. Given the vulnerability of the climate, long-term adaptation planning with mitigation as a priority has to definitely take a leaf out of Buddhist teaching. The BITM platform offers an opportunity to discuss various matters. Buddhist discourse is a kind of management that can help highlight the spiritual dimensions of ecological action. Buddhist teachings have a lot to offer when it comes to dealing with global warming. Buddhism's precepts emphasize the interdependence of all things, compassion, non-harm, and mindful consumerism, all of which can help guide policymakers, industry, and individuals toward human behaviors that will minimize the consequences of global warming and reduce their environmental footprint.

Lumbini, the venue for BITM, is in itself an aesthetic world and a special place of inherent sacredness that receives international attention. Lumbini, as the hub of Buddhist heritages, demands a more caring and precautionary approach to maintaining it. As the word heritage

itself means preservation, the place with unmatched aesthetic value in the world needs to be preserved with compassion and wisdom.

Let BITM carry forward the philosophical basis of the teachings of Buddha as found in the Sutta Pitaka, or Pali Canon. The work and discourses at BITM should endeavor to explain and evaluate critically and comparatively the fundamental ideas and doctrines of Buddhism towards Mother Nature. Hence, it is imperative for BITM participants to revive the ancient knowledge and seek the window of opportunity that brings benefits to Mother Nature and people.

The real solution is to take action. As Buddha said, "An idea that is developed and put into action is more important than an idea that exists only as an idea." Nepal should move beyond symbolizing its past spiritual connectivity to develop esoteric wisdom to lead Buddhist philosophy in the 21st century. Overall, Buddhist teachings can help guide actions that will mitigate environmental impact and promote tourism sustainability.





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Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) : Opportunities and Challenges

Background

Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) is a key development project in Nepal, aimed at reducing air traffic congestion at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) and promoting religious tourism in Greater Lumbini Area. The airport was constructed with the ADB's Special Funds under the South Asia Tourism Infrastructure Development Project amounting to \$42.7 million, a loan from the OPEC Fund for International Development for \$15 million, a loan from the Government of Nepal for \$23.7 million, and \$3 million from the Asian Clean Energy Fund (ACEF), making the overall project cost an estimated \$97.2 million.

The aviation industry in Nepal plays a significant role in the development of tourism. The growth and success of the aviation and tourism industries are mutually dependent; tourism relies on aviation to bring in visitors, and aviation relies on tourism to generate demand and fill seats. Airlines play a crucial role in promoting Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha as a top-class tourist destination by partnering with local authorities and tourism service providers to develop infrastructure and services that cater to the needs of tourists. The GBIA

and improved connectivity are essential for promoting Lumbini. It has a parking capacity for four international planes and the ability to carry up to 72 planes daily, targeting two million passengers annually.

Challenges

Nepal's aviation industry faces numerous challenges, including difficult terrain, a lack of infrastructure, and safety concerns. Despite the airport's significant investment and development, it has struggled to attract enough passengers to sustainably operate airline flights. GBIA has faced low passenger turnout, with Himalaya Airlines suspending its chartered flight to Malaysia within just a month and a half after launching its business there. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) mandated that airlines running three international flights per day from TIA must also offer service from GBIA. Jazeera Airways also cut down its flights within a month after beginning operations in September 2022.

Bad weather is another reason for the suspension of international flights from GBIA. During the months of December and January, flights had to be diverted to Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu due to poor visibility at GBIA. In

addition, the airport's Instrument Landing System (ILS) is not operational. Other issues that the government must address include obtaining permission from India, making necessary agreements, providing necessary services, and developing a concrete plan to increase passengers. India has not provided entry routes, causing flights to take longer route through Simara, and foreign airlines prefer TIA over GBIA due to increased operating costs.

GBIA also lacks the necessary infrastructure and services like visas, medical examinations, and insurance services, which can hinder the airport's ability to attract international airlines and passengers. Once a person goes to Kathmandu to obtain the necessary documents, they prefer to fly via TIA instead of returning to Bhairahwa. Furthermore, the poor condition of the Butwal-Narayanghat road leading to the airport as well as other highways connecting Bhairahwa has affected passengers' ability to travel to and from the airport, thus reducing the charm of the airport.

Opportunities

Nevertheless, Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) presents several opportunities for

Nepal, particularly for the tourism industry. Firstly, it will reduce air traffic congestion at the existing Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) and provide take-off and landing facilities for large aircraft. This will enable airlines to offer more direct flights to Bhairahawa from different parts of the world, making travel to Lumbini, a key Buddhist tourism destination, more convenient.

The airport is expected to serve over 750,000 passengers annually, which will increase visitors from countries such as India, China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, and South Korea. This, in turn, will boost tourism in the Lumbini region, which is an important Buddhist pilgrimage site. This will help increase the number of tourists visiting Nepal and contribute to the growth of the local tourism industry. GBIA will allow for direct flights from countries where Buddhism is practiced, such as China, Japan, and South Korea. This will make it easier for Buddhist pilgrims to visit Lumbini and other religious sites in Nepal.

Secondly, GBIA's location in the Tarai belt of Nepal will benefit migrant workers by allowing them to fly out directly from Bhairahawa, avoiding the need to travel to Kathmandu for international flights. This will save time and expenses

for migrant workers and make it easier for them to travel back to their home countries. Thirdly, the airport has arranged attractive incentives to attract international aviation companies. For example, it offers a 100 percent discount on landing fees, aircraft fees, communication and aviation service fees, and security check fees for the first year, as well as a 50 percent discount on ground handling. These incentives are designed to encourage international airlines to operate from GBIA and increase passenger traffic. At GIBA, all-electric ground vehicles are intended to be employed. The airport currently has nine fast charging stations installed. There are plans to completely solar-power the airport, making it only the second airport in the world to do so after Cochin International Airport. This eco-friendly strategy can be promoted by GBIA. Finally, GBIA can promote economic growth and create employment opportunities in the region by encouraging businesses and services related to the aviation and tourism industries to develop in the area. The airport can also act as a catalyst for the development of infrastructure such as roads, hotels, restaurants, and other essential services in the region, thereby contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the region.

The Gautam Buddha Airport in Bhairahawa is the nearest airport to Lumbini and is located at a distance of 22 km. The role of airlines in promoting Lumbini as a Buddhist tourism destination cannot be overstated. Airlines can play a significant role in promoting

Lumbini by offering direct flights to Bhairahawa from different parts of the world. This will not only make travel to Lumbini more convenient but will also contribute to the growth of the local tourism industry.

Moreover, the promotion of Lumbini as a Buddhist tourism destination requires the development of infrastructure and services that cater to the needs of tourists. Airlines can play a key role in this regard by partnering with local tourism authorities and private businesses to develop hotels, restaurants, and other services that cater to the needs of tourists. Such partnerships can also help promote the cultural and religious heritage of Lumbini and generate more interest in the site.

Conclusion

GBIA has the potential to boost Nepal's tourism industry, improve air connectivity, and promote economic growth in the region. The government and the aviation industry need to address the challenges faced by GBIA and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the airport to ensure its long-term sustainability and success. GBIA presents both opportunities and challenges for the aviation and tourism industries in Nepal. While the airport has the potential to promote tourism in Lumbini and reduce air traffic congestion at TIA, it faces several obstacles, including low passenger turnout and safety concerns. To ensure the success of the airport, the government must address these challenges and work to improve infrastructure and services that cater to the needs of tourists and airlines.



**We wish for the grand
success of BITM 2023 !**



Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM), a mega-event is believed to be a great facilitation for the revival of the tourism business in Nepal. We anticipate the Mart will play a key role in diversifying and decentralizing Nepalese tourism and boost the tourism industry for the prosperity of the country.

We would like to welcome all the participants of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal.



Mr. Hem Raj Dhakal

- **Chairperson:** Commodity Council (FNCCI)
- Vice President (Commodity)

Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and
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Travel Marts: A Look at Emerging Trends in the Travel Industry

Travel marts play a significant role in promoting the tourism industry by bringing together travel agents and industry professionals from around the world in one place to network, and promote their products and services. It also allows the participants to learn about the latest trends and innovations in the industry. Travel Mart, a trade show or exhibition involves participants such as airlines, hotels, tour operators, and destination management companies to meet with travel agents, tour operators, and other travel industry professionals at a place. If we go through the history and evolution of travel marts, they have a long history dating back to the early 20th century and have evolved significantly over time.

While exploring the first-ever travel mart in the world, is difficult as there is no widely accepted origin of the term “travel mart. However, one of the earliest and most well-known travel trade shows was the ITB Berlin (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin), which was first held in 1966. Since then, the ITB Berlin has grown into one of the world’s largest travel trade shows, attracting thousands of exhibitors and visitors from around the world each year. Another notable travel trade show is WTM London (World Travel Market London), which was first held in 1980. Just then FITUR another global meeting

point was founded in 1981 and the ATM (Arabian Travel Market), was first organized in 1994. These events, among others, had played a significant role in shaping the global travel industry and remain important platforms for travel professionals to connect and showcase their offerings. Also, these international travel fairs are quite prevalent among Nepalese stakeholders. The first-ever Mart in Nepal was NATTA Himalayan Travel Mart in the year 2005 organized by the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA).

Lumbini in Nepal is the birthplace of the Buddha, the Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is another unique event organized by NATTA setting the trademark that showcases the huge potential of Nepal’s Spiritual tourism and promotes both traditional and new tourism products. BITM 2023 is the second edition to stay ahead emerging as a major Travel Mart in Nepal.

Mart, a festival for tourism enthusiasts has become an increasingly popular way for travel businesses to connect with potential customers and network with other industry professionals. Also, it is an effective tool for the promotion of the products. Moreover, at a Travel Mart event, suppliers set up booths or exhibits to showcase their products and services. Simultaneously, they

may also participate in workshops, seminars, and networking events to connect with other professionals in the industry. The buyers attend the event to purchase the best travel package, discover new travel products, negotiate deals, and learn about emerging trends in the travel industry.

A travel mart can showcase the country’s tourism products and services to potential buyers, such as travel agents, tour operators, and hoteliers, thereby increasing the likelihood of attracting more tourists. The event provides a platform for travel and tourism professionals to network and establish business relationships, which can lead to partnerships, collaborations, and new market opportunities. Hosting a travel mart can generate revenue for the country by attracting exhibitors, buyers, and attendees who spend money on travel, accommodations, food, and other services. Travel marts can feature cultural performances, displays, and exhibitions that showcase the country’s unique cultural heritage, which can help promote the country’s image and reputation. Travel marts can inspire innovation in the travel and tourism industry by providing a platform for businesses to showcase new products and services, as well as new technologies and trends. Attendees can participate in educational

sessions and seminars, which can improve their industry knowledge and skills, and help them stay up-to-date with the latest trends and best practices. Overall, hosting a travel mart can provide a range of benefits for a country's tourism industry, including increased tourism, business partnerships, revenue, cultural promotion, innovation, and knowledge improvement.

In the context of Nepal, although Travel Mart could be an excellent opportunity to promote Nepal's tourism industry and establish business relationships with international travel trade professionals, there are also several challenges that organizers and participants face. Firstly, the lack of proper infrastructure and facilities, including transportation, accommodation, and communication. It can be challenging for international visitors to attend the event and explore Nepal's various tourist destinations. Political instability and security issues are always concerns of international visitors, which can affect the confidence of tourism professionals. Based on previous experiences, the major challenge has always been a limited marketing budget. Our major financial backers like Nepal Tourism Board and other tourism-related organizations should broaden and extend welcoming hands to such events which ease and aid to promote the event to a wider international audience.

The travel industry is undergoing a transformation. It's already moving

from a linear to an exponential phase, as new technologies and digital platforms are being developed at lightning speed. The travel industry is constantly evolving and adapting to new trends and technologies. Several emerging trends have been observed in the travel mart space in recent years. They are now being reflected as travel mart experiences. One such trend is the rise of virtual travel marts, which allow attendees to participate in the event from the comfort of their own homes or offices. This has dramatically increased accessibility to these events, making it easier for travel professionals from around the world to connect. Another trend is the incorporation of technology into travel marts, such as mobile apps that provide attendees with real-time updates and networking opportunities. Additionally, there has been a growing emphasis on sustainable travel at these events, with many travel companies showcasing their eco-friendly initiatives and promoting responsible tourism practices. There are several trends in wellness tourism, Solo Travel, Slow Travel, and experiential travel, and examine how travel marts are adapting to meet the needs and interests of modern travelers.

With the proliferation of mobile devices combined with the availability of quality and reliable internet across the world and people are no longer tied to a desktop device. Many travelers are combining work and travel by becoming digital nomads. Also, clients have the freedom to do contextual research

on their desired product. With the emerging trends, the future of travel marts is likely to evolve in several ways in the coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly increased virtual participation in many of the events. There are likely to be hybrid (in-person and virtual) events that could incorporate a wider audience. Likewise, the pandemic helped in focusing local travelers and promoting tourism destinations. Not just focusing on international visitors travel marts will focus more on promoting domestic and local travel options. Sustainability has become a major trend in the travel industry and shall remain in the future with travelers increasingly seeking out eco-friendly and socially responsible options. With the AI mania in today's date, travel marts may incorporate more advanced technology such as augmented reality and virtual reality to enhance the buying and selling experience for attendees.

As travelers increasingly seek authentic and meaningful experiences, travel marts may focus on showcasing destinations and products that offer a deeper cultural immersion. Marts will offer more opportunities for buyers to tailor their itineraries and connect with suppliers who offer unique and customizable travel products. Overall, these emerging trends are shaping the future of travel marts and providing new opportunities for travel professionals to connect and grow their businesses.





Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM 2023)

Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is an annual marketplace of the Buddhist tourism industry conceived by the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA). BITM, a mega-event is believed to be a great facilitation for the revival of the tourism business in Nepal. In continuation of the promotion of spiritual tourism, NATTA is organizing the next edition of BITM in Lumbini, Nepal from May 11 - 13, 2023.

The main objective of organizing the Mart is to explore the immense potential of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism and heritages in Nepal. BITM will not only promote Buddhist heritage sites in Nepal but also offers new tourism products that Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs can sell in the international market and vice versa. BITM is organized to introduce and enhance the status of Buddhaland, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha in Lumbini, Nepal to the world. It will highlight the Buddhist sites of Nepal spreading the message that Nepal is a center for world peace and a gateway to the Buddhist Circuits. It will create an opportunity for the niche market of pilgrimage in Nepal and help expand travel products. Also, the Mart will play a key role in diversifying and decentralizing Nepalese tourism which is heavily reliant on adventure tourism and is focused on a handful of areas of the country.

BITM brings people together to promote Inbound, Outbound, and Domestic Tourism in a unique style in Nepal. BITM offers unlimited opportunities for tourism stakeholders to explore the market

and publicize their destination/ product/ organization in one place.

Who will be benefitted?

The main purpose of organizing the event is to explore the Buddhaland and develop Lumbini as a "Must Visit" destination. The local people get economic benefits by selling their local products in and around Lumbini. Local hotels, restaurants, travel companies, and airline companies will have additional opportunities to expand their business with this event.

Who are involved?

BITM is organized by NATTA under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation. Nepal Tourism Board is working as an organizing partner. Tourism-related stakeholders such as government, non-government, semi-government, and private organizations are also involved in the successful completion of BITM.

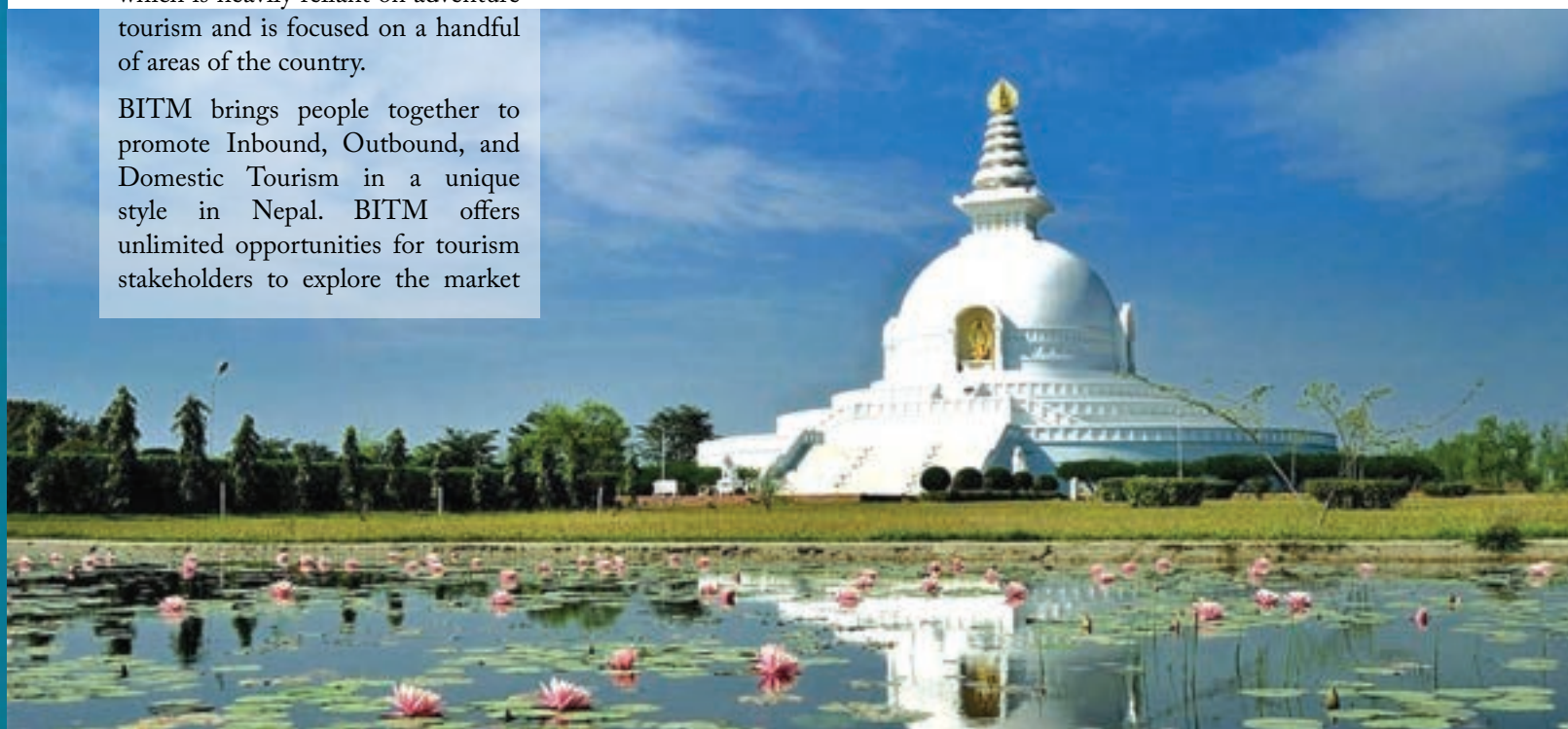
Who can be a part of it?

Tour operators from abroad can participate as buyers. All tourism entrepreneurs in Nepal can participate as sellers in BITM. Sellers will have the opportunity for business deals directly with the hosted and paid buyers from the global travel market. The buyers will meet the sellers directly in the Mart.

Registered participants and sponsors will get access to the conference and mart venues but not to the B2B session. Volunteers will have access to scheduled programs only. There will be participation from national and international travel media, travel vloggers, bloggers, travel writers, and TV journalists to highlight the mart.

BITM International Conference

International Conference is one of the integral parts of BITM and will take place from May 11-12, 2023. The conference brings spiritual leaders, scholars, writers, presenters, policymakers, administrators, and tourism stakeholders from different countries. There will be several sessions at the conference. The inaugural session anticipates spiritual preaching and motivational speech from spiritual leaders, commitment from the government, congratulatory messages, support, and collaboration assurance from the international community. Plenary sessions, Business Talks, and Academic Sessions will be scheduled for the development, promotion, and networking of Buddhist tourism, the Buddhist Circuit, and many more. A BIMSTEC session is also planned for promoting trade and economic relations, and business promotion through Tourism in the BIMSTEC region.





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Keynote speech

Abstracts

Exploring the Buddhaland: A gateway to Buddhist Pilgrimages Circuits

Travelling to sacred places – vulgariter called pilgrimage – has been part of Buddhist practice since the very beginning, instigated, if we recur to the Buddhist sources, by the Buddha himself. In the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, a relatively long canonical text about the last weeks of the Buddha before his *parinirvāṇa*, the Buddha recommends laypeople to visit and venerate the four most important places of his lifetime and, in a way, sets the standard for religious travelling to sacred places. This talk will look at the historical development of Buddhist sacred travelling or pilgrimage, practices, and concrete sites in South Asia from the Mauryan period to the medieval period and the resurgence

of these sites in the 19th century with the “discovery” of Buddhism and its historically most sacred sites, the places linked to the event in the life of Buddha, through Western scholars and the revival of Buddhist pilgrimage to these sites. It will, however, also emphasize that already in early historical times, new Buddhist ideas and practices led to a refocusing of religious travelling in more regional and culturally diverse settings. Central Asia, East Asia (China, Japan, Korea), and Southeast Asia (pre-Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) developed Buddhist pilgrimage circuits of their own. Nepal is a good example of the juxtaposition of what

could be called traditionally developed pilgrimage to Buddhist sites like the SvayambhuNāth or the *stūpa* at Boudha in the Kathmandu valley and the late 19th century retrieved “root” sites in the Tarāi linked with the biography of the Buddha, Lumbinī and Kapilavastu (Tilaurakot). The presentation will conclude with some observations on the relationship between Buddhist sites and possible approaches to traveling which are neither neglecting history and cultural context nor the religious and educational needs of the targeted clientele.

Key Words: Buddhist practice, sacred places, juxtaposition, Buddhist circuits.





Dr. Dhananjay Regmi
Chief Executive Officer
Nepal Tourism Board

Business Talk

Abstracts

NTB's Strategy and Effectiveness for Tourism Destination Promotion

The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is the official national tourism organization of Nepal which works towards establishing Nepal as a premier holiday destination in the world. The Board provides a platform for vision-drawn leadership for Nepal's tourism sector by integrating Government commitment with the dynamism of the private sector. NTB is promoting Nepal in the domestic

and international markets, and is working toward repositioning the image of the country. NTB works with the vision to position Nepal as the world's most unique experiential and lifetime-value destination. NTB's mission is to unleash Nepal's huge tourism potential for the sustainable development of the country by growing Nepal's inbound international tourism arrivals to 2

million by 2024 and daily spending to above US\$80.

"Inspire Nepal's tourism industry to develop, promote and sell extraordinary experiential tourism products. This involves engaging with multi-sector industries and Government of Nepal departments to leverage Nepal's reputation as a unique, high-quality destination" is NTB's STRATEGIC GOAL.





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Business Talk

Abstracts

Marketing of Buddhist Tourism: Challenges and Opportunities

Lumbini had been buried in the annals of history for a long time. In 1896, German archaeologist Dr. Alois Anton Führer with the support of General Khadga Shamsher Rana brought back Lumbini again to the notice of common people. After the visit of Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant to Lumbini in 1967, the global community started to know more about Lumbini and with his initiation, Lumbini Masterplan was designed with the help of Architect Prof Kenzo Tange.

There are many challenges to bringing Buddhist pilgrimage tourists into Lumbini due to various reasons. One of the challenges is to retain overland international Buddhist tourists coming from India to Lumbini at least for two days. Another is about how to bring direct flights to Gautam Buddha International Airport from Buddhist nations. There is a need for

an integrated approach to promote and market Buddhist tourism which requires the combined effort of the Lumbini Development Trust, the Nepal Tourism Board, and the Entrepreneurial Stakeholder Sector. So far the promotion of Buddhist tourism has revolved around Lumbini which needs to be extended to other Buddhist Heritage sites such as the Greater Buddhist Circuit of Lumbini Kapilvastu Ramgram with the Birthplace of Mother Mayadevi, in the land of Krakuchand Buddha, Kanakmuni Buddha, and Sakyamuni Buddha.

There are plenty of opportunities for Buddhist tourism in Nepal. But to harness it, we have to take a new approach through effective international marketing. Since most of the pilgrimage sites related to the life of Buddha are in India, we have to collaborate with the Indian

government and tour operators both officially and commercially for the marketing of Buddhist tourism internationally, to establish a new concept of cross-border tourism between the nations of Nepal and India. As Buddhism is becoming a global religion and Buddha a global brand, Lumbini can be promoted as a center for peace and enlightenment. The government must attract the people of Buddhist nations by providing special privileges including visa exemption coming directly to Gautam Buddha International Airport and rebated rates in the domestic airlines. Landing and parking fees should be waived for airlines coming from Buddhist nations.

Key words: Global community, Buddhist pilgrimage, promotion, cross-border.





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Business Talk

Abstracts

NATTA's Vision and Networking with World Buddhist Destinations

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors that generates a number of economic and social benefits with foreign exchange earnings and employment creation. Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) is established by seasoned and visionary professionals in the tourism industry of Nepal with the objectives to unite tourism entrepreneurs, safeguarding their interests, and promote professional entrepreneurship for the promotion and development of the tourism sector as a foundation for economic growth and prosperity of the country. It is a forum that serves as the most reliable partner of the government of Nepal and international tourism associations/agencies. NATTA has been guiding and leading the private sector tourism enterprise, collaborating with international and national tourism organizations, and

promoting Nepal as a chief holiday destination in the global tourism market. NATTA organizes Marts, conferences, exhibitions, etc., and takes part in various international fairs, marts, sales missions, exhibitions, etc.

Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is a novel product of NATTA. The first successful BITM event was held in 2019 AD in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha. BITM aims to popularize Lumbini among the global audience, particularly Buddhist followers and pilgrims. It introduces the Buddhist Circuit tours, including the four world Buddhist destinations, namely Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. This event is an exemplary platform that brings together travel agents and tour operators from around the world for popularizing Buddhist sites of Nepal, developing

itineraries, and marking in the world for Buddhist pilgrims and followers. Tour operators provide a range of pilgrimage packages connecting world Buddhist Destinations. Along the Buddhist Circuit, there is a range of accommodation options that are connected by road, rail, and air. The Buddhist destinations have the potential to attract a large Buddhist population from nearby Asian countries – year on year, only 0.005% (very minimal) of source market Buddhists visit the Buddhist Circuit destinations. The Buddhist circuit connecting the four major Buddhist sacred sites can be extended to other associated sites in South Asia. NATTA should collaborate with travel agents and other tourism stakeholders for the joint package development, promotion, and benefit sharing in the world Buddhist destinations.





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Business Talk

Abstracts

Hospitality Management : The Essentials About Hospitality

A reporter from the New Zealand news channel was doing live reporting during the time of the 2015 massive earthquake from a village in Kavre east of Kathmandu, Nepal. He was pleasantly surprised when he was offered food by an elderly woman whose house was completely destroyed by the quake and she herself was living in the local community relief centre. We have many such accounts which display many hotels, lodges and guest houses owners and families cooked and fed their guests and locals even when their businesses were shut down by quakes. These incidents sufficiently explain how close hospitality is to the hearts of Nepalese people.

We, Nepalese from our early childhood are taught “Athiti Devo Bhaba” which means “Guests Are God”. This noble principle is preserved and practised sincerely by Nepalese in their daily life. When Nepal opened to tourists in 1951, thousands of accommodations of varied standards and sizes have come into existence, practising the noble

principle of “Athiti Devo Bhaba”. The national standard of hospitality/ accommodation, both physical and service, set by the Government of Nepal also strongly emphasized this very principle.

Nepal’s hospitality sector is spread all over the nation, especially in touristic regions, comprised of hotels in different star categories managed by both reputed chains of global brands and locals, budget tourist standard lodges, guest houses, homestays especially in trekking routes and highways are catering the requirements of international, regional and local guests. That is why a high percentage of visitors repeat their visit to Nepal. We take pride to state that the standard of the Nepalese hospitality sector (accommodation, food, MICE and entertainment) comfortably meets contemporary high international standard and successfully provide worthful of standard services.

For skill enhancements of the service staff, both the Government and private sector accord high priority,

conduct vocational/technical occupational courses and spend a sizable national budget. There are nearly 4 dozen Hospitality Management colleges and more than one thousand technical and vocational training institutions across the country. A proposal to set up a separate university dedicated only to Hospitality and Tourism education has already been announced. Nepali hospitality sector workers, managers, and executives are in high demand abroad.

It is noteworthy that investment in high-end quality accommodations and related facilities in Lumbini as well as across Nepal is on a steep rise and hotel room inventory is increasing over the years. Increased international commercial flights from Gautam Buddha International Airport are sure to cater to the increased number of visitors. Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) is definite to impact positively on the promotion of tourism and hospitality of the Lumbini region and across the nation.





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Business Talk

Abstracts

Travel industry and digital transformation: When tourism goes digital

The travel industry has always been a major contributor to the global economy. It has been identified as one of the drivers of sustainable development. Over the years, it has evolved, adapted, and grown. Today, technology is playing a significant role in the transformation of the travel industry. The travel industry in Nepal has been lagging behind in adopting digital transformation, which has become increasingly important for staying competitive in the global market. As the world becomes more connected and travelers rely on digital channels to plan, book, and share their experiences, it is crucial for Nepalese travel companies to adapt to these changes. However, the industry in Nepal is still dominated

by traditional business models, and there is a lack of awareness and investment in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and cloud computing.

There is potential for digital transformation in the Nepalese travel industry and its impact on the economy, society, and environment. A data-driven approach to tourism can help Nepal attract more visitors, improve the customer experience, and optimize operational efficiency. There are challenges and opportunities for Nepalese travel companies to embrace digital transformation, including infrastructure limitations, skills gaps, and regulatory issues. Examining case studies on digital transformation in emerging markets, it helps to provide

insights into the unique context of the Nepalese travel industry. With the right discussions and policies, the Nepalese government, policymakers, travel companies, and stakeholders will be able to unlock the benefits of digital transformation.

Incorporating Digital Transformation into the tourism sector by using cutting-edge ICT to innovate products, services, and business models, is an urgent issue for improving Nepal's tourism competitiveness. It is also indispensable to improve productivity and add value to the tourism business through Digital Transformation in order to rebuild the local economy that has been seriously damaged by the novel coronavirus.





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Business Talk

Abstracts

Role of Media on Branding of Buddhist Tourism, Culture, and Heritage

The development of ICT has dramatically changed the nature of tourism communication. Today the tourism industry is engaging travelers and guests with stories, and content through various media spaces; so without a doubt, media will drive future tourism communication and marketing. While media can clarify the values, importance, and civilization of Buddhist tourism, culture, and heritage and can widespread information which will ultimately lead to activating tourist attractions

towards the destinations. It is proved that the majority of people make travel decisions based on various media reports, the presence of quality information and good reporting would enhance the tourist inflow in particular tourism destinations. Destinations in Nepal like the Lumbini-The Birth place of Lord Buddha, Pashupatinath, Muktinath, Manakamana, Sworgadwari, Ruru, and Supa Deurali areas have developed their own image and importance over the years, proper branding of such destinations can

enhance the overall image of Nepal for religious and spiritual tourism. Since it is observed that the use of media platforms has had an important impact on destination promotions and sharing experiences with the international community, Nepal needs a clear digital marketing and branding strategy to reach the target market segments. The advancement of digital media such as Television, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, etc. and other social media are helping in branding, promoting and diversifying the tourism attractions.





Most Venerable Vivekananda

International Meditation Teacher, Panditarama
Meditation Center Lumbini

Academic Session

Meditation for busy life (Special Talk and demonstration)



We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !

Our sincere welcome to all the well-known international delegates, speakers/presenters, buyers, sellers, bloggers, media personnel, and representatives from Tourism organizations to mark BITM in Lumbini.

Dr. Subodh Kumar Gupta

President: Nepal Chamal, Tel, Dal Udhyog
Sangh and

Executive Member

Federation of Nepalese Chambers of
Commerce and Industry (FNCCI)





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Academic Session

Abstracts

Responsible Tourism in Buddhist Heritages: A Case of Greater Lumbini Area

As the birthplace of the Lord Buddha, testified by the inscription on the Asoka pillar, the sacred area in Lumbini is one of the most holy and significant places for one of the world's great religions and its remains contain important evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centers from as early as the 6th century BCE. Where, Siddhartha Gautama (Sakyamuni Buddha) was born in 623 BCE. To the better preservation and management of the site, Lumbini Development Masterplan was prepared with the auspicious of the United Nations in 1978. The site was inscribed in the list of world heritage properties in 1997. Five of the United Nations

Secretary-General have physically visited the site. The Greater Lumbini Development Area covers *Lumbini, Tilaurakot-ancient Kapilavastu, Gotihawa, Niglihawa, Sagarhawa, Sisaniya, Araurakot, Kudan, Devadaha, and Ramagrama*, which are directly or indirectly related with the life of the Lord Buddha. Pilgrimage tourism is one of the most fostering tourism in the Greater Lumbini Area because about 235 historical archaeological sites have been identified. This study assesses the history, Buddhist heritages, current research, improvements, and tourism potentialities of this area for responsible tourism. Before spreading the COVID-19 pandemic,

the Lumbini receives more than 1.6 million visitors for different purposes every year. The results of this study show that the proper marketing and promotion of the site is very important and heritage management should consider both tourism and heritage values. This will help to foster pilgrimage tourism while uplifting the local as well as national economy. There is no denying fact that the Greater Lumbini Area has enormous potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination and cultural heritage saying with a hub of Peace.

Key words: Pilgrimage, Tourism, Heritage, Master Plan





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Academic Session

Abstracts

Trans-National Buddhist Circuits: Effectiveness, Opportunities and Challenges

There is a global interest in revisiting and promoting Buddhist heritage for tourism. A recent study by UNWTO has shown that Buddhist pilgrimage circuits are one of the main offerings in Nepal and India which are imagined as the place of Buddha's historical and eternal presence. This presentation builds on the findings of that report, and extensive fieldwork to discuss the nuances of Buddhist circuits in India and Nepal. These circuits are largely traversed by the international community of Buddhist

practitioners but significant differences are found in their travel patterns in terms of routes, itineraries, and engagement with the local tourism economy. It was found that domestic tourists outnumbered foreign visitors in all Buddhist sites and this has a quantitative and qualitative impact on the tourism industry. The presentation will highlight these differences in the patterns of travel, expectations, and experiences of tourists and pilgrims, both international and domestic, and then suggest ways to

increase the engagement of circuit travelers and domestic tourists with the local heritage of the places and people and encourage their participation overnight stays and contributions to the economy. recommendations will also be offered for different stakeholders to make Buddhist tourism practice a sustainable tourism strategy for better economic and social outcomes for the local communities. Key words: Circuits, heritage, economy, sustainable, outcomes.





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Academic Session

Abstracts

The Influence of Mindfulness on Tourists' Emotions and Satisfaction in Lumbini

The business of tourism is likely to suffer a state of dormancy in the absence of mindfulness on the part of the ones who deal with the potential client in the course of designing itineraries or so keeping in view the options provided. It is not only the case where mindfulness has to function in the top gear. Mindfulness is equally applicable to both – the buyer and the seller. Once the tourist lands at the airport or makes access through the entry point at the border, all the circumstances the visitor passes through are very crucial that create indelible impacts in the minds of the incoming guest. The hassles he confronts could turn him reluctant to stay longer and cut short his fixed itinerary. Psychologically visitors always long for easy and comfortable access. S/he aspires to be taken care of, right from the beginning till s/he is back at the airport or immigration exit at the border. (It would be utter immodesty on my part if I fail to mention the exceptions of Monks, pilgrims, or Spiritual visitors who are selfless and eremitic and thus they never aspire for any such favor). However, the following points need to be considered seriously to keep the psyche of the visitors unperturbed.

- Attitude of the Immigration personnel towards the tourist(s) coming in

- Welcoming of the individual/group by the tour operator or his closest agent on arrival
- The conveyances arranged to proceed further to the place of their accommodation
- Empathy (experiencing the emotions, and thoughts of your clients)
- Togetherness with the visitor(s), filling all the formal gaps in human relationship
- Take extra care of (in case) any member suffering from any kind of ailment

These are only a few tips the company, tour operator, or seller needs to consider while dealing with tourists or visitors on the move.

Most tourists/ visitors come to Nepal only after undergoing a thorough study of Nepalese people, their culture, age-long taboos & traditions including the general lifestyle (rural and urban). Sometimes we find one or two or if they are in a big group some of them are well-versed in local lingua-franca.

The emotion and satisfaction of the tourists can be fairly observed manifested in their countenance when they revisit us. It is there we could be right in assuming that our

mindfulness towards our guests had been warm and affable. No doubt, their socio-economic and cultural setting is absolutely unknown to us at first instance but when they, after having spent their holidays in this land of never-ending peace and love, get ready to fly back, we, at times, happen to notice their eyelids wet. This is what we might love to say is a win-win scenario in dealing with the tourists and drawing satisfaction from both parties. Understanding our clients/visitors is in other words, understanding of their unspoken words and sentiments.

The tour operators or the agents need to use their noodles and never ever egg someone on following the ways you follow. You must always remember your guests are big cheese and thus your parochial disposition might spoil the game at any time.

Other than the ones stated above, there could be hundreds of ways to keep your guests satisfied emotionally. Nonetheless, the primary key points to be rooted in our thoughts are :

- Always Smile
- Kindest Hospitality
- Best Support with love and humility
- Hearty Greetings (if possible in their language) viz. *Nibau*

to Chinese, *Buenos dias* to Spanish, *Ohayo Gozaimasa* to Japanese, *Bonjour* to French, *Guten Morgen* to Germans and *Selamatpagi* to Indonesians etc

- Use of their language while in discourse might unfold an unimaginable win-win sequel
- Avoid personal, cultural (or political) intrusion
- Adaptation to their culture while in their company
- Understanding of human language

One of the major basics of tourism in Nepal is ecology/environment. Tourists love to gain more experience being in unspoiled natural sites, not in man-made concrete hazards. Nature

needs to be conserved. The example of National Parks can be cited here. In our context currently out of 753 local governments including Rural and Urban, hardly 200 destinations without any concrete constructions have proved to be the Best and most coveted ones for both foreign and domestic visitors. Any activity rendering no excitement, delight, and satisfaction kindling curiosity and amazement of partakers can be termed as a tourism activity. The vignettes of tourism are all colorful and throbbing creating ripples of pleasant sensations if viewed from an appropriate vantage.

Why do foreign tourists prefer ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) and similar other places like Phok-sundo, Rara, Namche,

Khaptad, Shuklaphanta, Chitwan, etc. to others? The answers you get are not likely to vary.

Finally, the significance of the topic given can abundantly be observed especially in the Khumbu Region of Solukhumbu as well as in numerous other places located in the outskirts of Pokhara Valley like Ghandruk and Dhampus, etc. including Sirubari of Syangza district. The empathetic attitude of the local denizens towards visitors has raised their human values and grace manifested in their personal behavior and lifestyle. Sure enough, people love to visit such places.

Keywords: Empathy, Intrusion, Adaptability, Vignettes, Vantage, Humility





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Academic Session

Abstracts

Spiritual and Heritage Tourism in the Himalayan region of Nepal

Understanding the basic concepts of heritage tourism in terms of culture, tradition and iconography of Himalayan region on one side and tourism and hospitality, authenticity, commodification, management, marketing of heritage products on the other are the principal aim of this presentation.

Visiting cultural and historical sites is one of the largest, most pervasive, fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry today. Heritage tourism appears to be growing much faster than all other forms of tourism, particularly in the developing world and is thus viewed as an important potential tool for poverty alleviation and community economic development. Heritage tourism is predominantly concerned with exploring both material and non-material intangible remnants of the past. Importantly, heritage is not a fixed or static outcome of the past, particularly when it is presented and

represented in the context of tourism. Heritage is constantly reconstructed and reinterpreted in an attempt to meet specific demands of tourists. Therefore, the relationship between heritage and tourism is complex, intricate and symbiotic.

Understanding the relationship between nature and culture, culture and civilization of Himalayan region is the focal objective of this attempt of discussion. Likewise, giving a try of grasping the concept of metempsychotic journey and metempsychosis ideology including 'to escape to fantasy' versus 'to escape to reality' within the field of cultural heritage tourism on one side and also better understanding the importance of heritage tourism, heritage tourism resource, education about the past, cultural capital, cultural aesthetic values, interpretation, Buddhization, authenticity, heritage management, tourism as economic powerhouse, community

development, revitalization of Himalayan Buddhist heritage on the other are the points of importance of the presentation.

In substance, a focused discussion about promotion of heritage tourism on the Himalayan region of Nepal will be the subject of this presentation.

The discussion will thus include the following content:

- a. Nature and culture,
- b. Definition and concept of spiritual and Heritage Tourism,
- c. Himalayan heritage as a tourism resource
- d. Buddhist pilgrimage tourism destinations
- e. Himalayan Buddhist and general festivals

Key words: Hospitality, authenticity, culture and civilization, aesthetic values.





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Academic Session

Abstracts

Spiritual Adventure: A New Dimension in Tourism

Nepal has been successful in attracting a diverse range of tourists from around the world due to its mighty mountains, varied terrain, and rich cultural settings. However, the country's dependence on conventional mass tourism has tarnished its image as the last Shangri-la. Fortunately, Nepal's spiritual and adventure strengths offer an opportunity to reposition itself as a hub for 'Spiritual Adventure' tourism. The concept of spiritual adventure combines the best of adventure, spirituality, and religious tourism to fill the void that exists within these categories. In recent years, there has been an increased interest and innovation in designing tourism experiences that

aim to attain a higher mental state and great psychological satisfaction, thus fueling the urge for 'peace through spiritual adventure' around the globe. Countries such as India, Nepal, and Thailand have witnessed an increase in trips that often combine spiritual adventure with physical risks (Buckley, 2003). This trend is also visible in California and Europe, where adventure is purely spiritual. Nepal's Lumbini, Bouodhanath, Swyambhunath, Muktinath, Pashupatinath, Janakpur, Tyangboche Monastery, Shey Monastery, and other such places are blessed with an aura that attracts both - novice spiritual adventure seekers, and highly divine body.

To further explore this concept, the study employing the grounded theory method aims to investigate the facets of spiritual adventure and present it as a viable alternative dimension to the prevalent form of tourism in Nepal. By highlighting the strengths of spiritual adventure, Nepal can not only attract more tourists but also provide them with a unique and fulfilling experience. By repositioning itself as a spiritual adventure destination, Nepal can break away from its dependence on mass tourism and create a niche for itself in the global tourism industry.

Keywords: Spiritual Adventure, Sustainability, Well-being, Peace





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BIMSTEC Session

Abstracts

Tourism Potentials and Joint Package Promotion in BIMSTEC Countries: Way Forward

Second BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held in Dhaka from 18 to 19 December 1998 identified tourism as one of the first six areas of cooperation in BIMSTEC. The First BIMSTEC Summit emphasized the need for joint marketing of tourism packages, exchange of visits, and sharing of information as well as tourism promotion in the BIMSTEC region. Networking and

joint package amongst the tourism organization of BIMSTEC countries help in strengthening relationships by providing avenues for rediscovering shared roots, understanding common and different histories, and learning each other's cultures. There are various aspects of tourism that have the potential to bring the people of BIMSTEC countries closer, including: religious tourism;

adventure tourism; heritage tourism; eco-tourism; wildlife tourism; and medical tourism among others. To facilitate increased rates of tourism, policymakers and stakeholders should prioritize on easing of requirements for obtaining visas, connectivity, tourism infrastructure and product development for joint package in the region.





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BIMSTEC Session

Abstracts

Prospects of cultural and spiritual tourism in BIMSTIC region

A majority of global tourists are currently activity-oriented and participatory in nature. They love to participate actively in cultural functions, attend rituals and take memories while visiting a destination. Cultural and spiritual tourism is becoming a prominent industry. The BIMSTEC region possesses unique cultural diversity and spiritual practices. Since time immemorial, this region has produced a plethora of cultural traits as an expression of its geographical location, climatic conditions, and people's practices. The Indian Subcontinent region was also ruled by a variety of kings, Sultanates, and Mughal dynasties, which left a multitude of cultural and spiritual legacies. This region is

the abode of many major religions and they are still practiced vibrantly. The major religious practices are Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Every religion contributes to shaping the cultural characteristics of this region. The BIMSTEC region has significant potential for attracting tourists based on its cultural and archaeological sites and living heritages. There is a strong historical connection between all BIMSTEC member countries' living cultural heritages. It is possible to explore these and offer common package tours among three or two member states of BIMSTEC. They could also experience the region's vibrant culture through music, dance, and cuisine. Hence, both tangible

and intangible heritage are the main elements of cultural and spiritual tourism in this region. The spirituality of the Lalong song, the holiness of the Paharpur Buddhist Temple in Bangladesh, the romance of the Taj Mahal and the Sanctity of Nalanda in India, the devotional practices at Swambunath Temple in Nepal, the mysticism and magnanimity of Buddhist temples in Thailand, Bhutan, and Myanmar are still wonders of the world. BIMSTEC's rich heritage can be preserved with careful planning and management of cultural and spiritual tourism that contributes much to the economic development of the region.

Key Words: Diversity, heritage, cultural, spiritual, tourism.





We are delighted to welcome all the participants of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal.

We wish for the grand success of BITM 2023 !





Explore the Buddhaland, a gateway to Buddhist Circuits



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BIMSTEC Session

Abstracts

Positioning Eastern South Asia Through Cross-Border Tourism

The eastern part of India, along with its sub-Himalayan eastern neighbors Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, has enormous potential for the tourism industry due to its strategic location and proximity to international borders. Cross-border tourism can be a significant driver of inbound traffic to the region. To tap into this potential, the tourism industry across the region must reinvent the Eastern South Asian circuit and create products beyond borders.

In the past four years, the idea of positioning regional tourism across Eastern South Asia has gained momentum, and the industry has created cross-country products for the global market, generating a

remarkable response. The industry and government agencies from the region should jointly initiate activities to promote cross-border tourism, such as industry awareness, a joint marketing campaign, product discovery, cross-country partnerships, regional connectivity, and facilitating seamless international tourist traffic across the borders of Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.

Industry awareness is crucial to developing a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing the tourism industry in the region. Joint marketing campaigns will promote the region as a tourist destination, and product discovery will lead to the creation of new

and exciting cross-border tourism products. Cross-country partnerships will facilitate cooperation between different countries in the region, leading to the development of integrated tourism products that showcase the unique culture, heritage, and natural beauty of Eastern South Asia. In conclusion, the development of the Eastern South Asian circuit has the potential to become the highest-selling tourist circuit in the next five years drive economic growth, create jobs, and promote cultural exchange across the region.

Key words: Cross-border, integrated, circuit, joint marketing.





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BIMSTEC Session

Abstracts

Silver Jubilee Year of BIMSTEC and Contribution in Culture and Tourism Development

BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) was established in 1997, as 'a viable bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia' (Comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand as member states). Nepal joined BIMSTEC in 2004. Thailand is the current chair of BIMSTEC since March 2022. We are celebrating Silver Jubilee of BIMSTEC this year.

BIMSTEC Secretariat was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh in September 2014; the Secretary General, who serves as head of the Secretariat, is appointed in

alphabetical order from the Member States and each Member state sends one Director to the Secretariat. Current Secretary General H. E. Mr. Tenzin LekPhell is from Bhutan since November 2020.

BIMSTEC has seven areas of cooperation each one led by one Member State: Trade and Investment, Environment and Climate Change, Security, Agriculture, and Food Security, People-to-People Contact, Science-Technology- Innovation and Connectivity. Tourism is one of the important areas for regional cooperation in BIMSTEC. Being a region bound by shared civilizational foundations and cultural values with

diversity in geographical alignments and climatical zones, it has a huge potential to explore for development of tourism. By connecting South and Southeast Asian countries together BIMSTEC forms a huge potential market itself and very diverse and attractive destinations to the rest of the world.

Against this backdrop, BIMSTEC is in the process of finalizing a comprehensive road map for the development of regional tourism by providing a lead role to the stakeholders for exploiting its full potential in regional cooperation to promote people-to-people contact.



BITM 2023: Main Organizing Committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Suresh Adhikari	Chair/Convener	Secretary: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Chairperson: Nepal Tourism Board
2	Sajaruddhin Musalman	Member	Mayor, Lumbini Cultural Municipality
3	Gyan Prasad Dhakal	Member	Chief, Tourism Division, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation
4	Dhan Bahadur Oli	Member	Joint-Secretary, Ministry of Foreign
5	Hom Prasad Luitel	Member	Director General, Department of Tourism
6	Bharat Mani Pandey	Member	Chief District Officer, Rupandehi
7	Chandra Rijal	Member	Vice-Chairperson, Nepal Tourism Board
8	Dr Dhananjay Regmi	Member	Chief Executive Officer, Nepal Tourism Board
9	Sanu Raja Shakya	Member	Member-Secretary, Lumbini Development Trust
10	Ramesh Thapa	Member	President, NATTA
11	Binayak Shah	Member	President, HAN
12	Nilhari Bastola	Member	President, TAAN
13		Member	President, Bouddha Vikhu Mahasang
14	Santosh Panta	Member	Director, NTB
15	Nima Nuru Sherpa	Member	President, Nepal Mountaineering Association
16	Shiva Adhikari	Member	President, Nepal Association of Rafting Agents
17	Pramod Dahal	Member-Secretary	Senior Vice President, NATTA

BITM 2023: Programme Implementation Sub-Committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Pramod Dahal	Chair	Senior Vice President, NATTA, Member-Secretary, BITM
2	Mr. Laxman Gautam	Member	Head, Tourism Promotion and Marketing Dept, NTB
3	Mr. Rohini Prasad Khanal	Member	Manager, NTB
4	Ms. Shradha Shrestha	Member	Manager, NTB
5	Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya	Member	Secretary General, NATTA
6	Mr. Raj Kumar Devkota	Member	Treasurer, NATTA
7	Mr. Uttam Prasad Devkota	Member	CEO, NATTA

BITM 2023: Buyer Selection Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Pramod Dahal	Chair	Senior Vice President, NATTA, Member-Secretary, BITM
2	Mr. Govinda Dahal	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Ms. Sabala Bhandari	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
4	Mr. Sagar Shrestha	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Procurement and Finance Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Raj Kumar Devkota	Chair	Treasurer, NATTA
2	Ms. Geeta Dhakal	Member	Joint Treasurer, NATTA
3	Mr. Suresh Amgain	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
4	Mr. Udaya Bhattarai	Member	Manager, NTB
5	Mr. Pradip Gaire	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Media and Publicity Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya	Chair	Secretary General, NATTA
2	Ms. Shradha Joshi	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Mr. Bishnu Pandey	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
4	Mr. Gopal Bhandari	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Hospitality Management Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Varun Mehta	Chair	VP, NATTA
2	Mr. Bishnu Pandey	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Mr. Parshuram Ghimire	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
4	Mr. Yubraj Gurung	Member	Officer, NTB
5	Ms. Roshni Poudel	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Transport and Other Logistic Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya	Chair	Secretary General, NATTA
2	Mr. Raj Kumar Devkota	Member	Treasurer, NATTA
3	Mr. Dhakanath Kafle	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
4	Mr. Namaraj Bhetuwal	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
5	Mr. Ram Sovit Nayak	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
6	Mr. Suman Ghimire	Member	Manager, NTB
7	Mr. Pradip Basnet	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Delegates & Speakers Liaison Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Ms. Yubika Bhandari	Chair	Secretary, NATTA
2	Ms. Shradha Joshi	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Ms. Sabala Bhandari	Member	Executive Member, NATTA

4	Ms. Rachana Pant Bhattarai	Member	President, NATTA, Lumbini Province
5	Govinda Raj Oli	Member	Manager, NTB
6	Ms. Srijana Nepali	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Research & Evaluation Liaison Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Ms. Yubika Bhandari	Chair	Secretary, NATTA
2	Mr. Suresh Amgain	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Mr. Parsuram Bhandari	Member	Executive Member, NATTA

BITM 2023: Volunteer Mobilization Liaison Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Varun Mehta	Chair	VP, NATTA
2	Mr. Dendi Sherpa	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
3	Mr. Barun Gyawali	Member	Advisor, NATTA, Lumbini Province
4	Mr. Santosh Ghimire	Member	Manager, NTB
5	Mr. Prem Prasad Bhattarai	Member	Officer, NTB

BITM 2023: Sponsorship and Support Coordination Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya	Chair	Secretary General, NATTA
2	Ms. Yubika Bhandari	Member	Secretary, NATTA
3	Mr. Raj Kumar Devkota	Member	Treasurer, NATTA
4	Ms. Geeta Dhakal	Member	Joint Treasurer, NATTA
5	Mr. Dhakanath Kafle	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
6	Mr. Ram Sovit Nayak	Member	Executive Member, NATTA
7	Ms. Shradha Joshi	Member	Executive Member, NATTA

BITM 2023: NATTA Province Coordination Sub-committee

SN	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1	Mr. Hari Ram Adhikari	Advisor	President, NATTA Gandaki Province
2	Ms. Rachana Pant Bhattarai	Chair	President, NATTA Lumbini Province
3	Mr. Udaya Kumar Shrestha	Member	President, NATTA Koshi Province
4	Mr. Mohan Sharma	Member	President, NATTA Madhesh Province
5	Mr. Padam Bikram Singh	Member	President, NATTA Sudurpaschim Province
6	Mr. Nirmal K.C.	Member	President, NATTA Karnali Province



Figure : Rt. Hon. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, India and Rt. Hon. Sher Bahadur Deuba, the then Prime Minister, Nepal in Lumbini



Figure : Pashupatinath, Kathmandu





BITM 2019

NATTA organized first edition of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in Lumbini from 10-12 January 2019, under the theme, “Explore the Buddhaland: A Gateway to Buddhist Circuits”. There were participation from more than 15 countries representing buyers, bloggers, media and speakers. This forum became the great opportunity for every tourism stakeholder to promote and highlight Nepal as a Buddhist destination.



BITM 2023

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Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM), a mega-event is believed to be a great facilitation for the revival of the tourism business in Nepal. We anticipate the Mart will play a key role in diversifying and decentralizing Nepalese tourism and boost the tourism industry for the prosperity of the country.

We would like to welcome all the participants of Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM) in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal.



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