

PROSPECTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NEPAL

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Article Received: 10-02-2023, Revised: 01-03-2023, Accepted: 19-03-2023

ABSTRACT:

Most of the tourists visiting Lumbini were from Asian countries, large percentage is from Sri-Lanka 42.74 percent because of the faith in Buddhism and more interested in the birth place of Lord Buddha. After Sri-Lanka the tourists from Thailand, China visit Lumbini mainly of its religious value and mostly staying in Lumbini for 1 to 3 days so it shows that extra religious activities like guided tours to the sites related to Lord Buddha, cultural activities, eco-tourism should be developed to lengthen the stay-period of tourists in Lumbini.

INTRODUCTION:

Nepal has written its small territorial compass sign mainly due to its tourist attraction including various sites full of art, architectural master piece and pilgrimage places in the background of natural panorama. Nepal has a most favorable position as it possess exciting fascination owing to the vastness of natural attraction, the high standard of cultural achievements, pleasant, coolness of climate and uniqueness of its flora and fauna. It featured attractive ranging from magnificent alpine scenery to the colossal Himalayan panorama. It is truly a bewitching land of contrasts consisting of rugged mountain ranges, green vallies with various pilgrimage sites. Cool and fertile flat lands, tropical forests and the pristine glory of perpetual snows, Nepal in reality are not only geographical mosaic but also a human mosaic. It has a population of 20 million and is divided into 61 ethnic groups speaking in 70 languages and dialects. Due to different indigenous Nationalities, have their own mother tongue, folk culture, beliefs and practices, dance and music, art and artifacts, festivals, life cycle rituals and traditional healing practices (Bhattachan, 2000). So these are thousand of pious places of pilgrimage in Nepal. Thousands of Nepalese go to several places of pilgrimage to neighboring country India. Likewise million of Indian pilgrims come to Nepal every year to pay thus homage to thus favorite God and Goddess. In this way, the exchange of this type of religious visits

increase, the age-old relationship between the two countries. Lumbini, being the birth place of Lord Buddha, has been a sacred ground for Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist has great prospect in expanding it as a religious site which can make further economic contribution for the whole country. Lumbini is a small town in the southern Terai plains of Nepal, where the ruins at the old city can still be seen. It has been a holy ground for Buddhist all over the world. The restored garden and surroundings of Lumbini have the remains of many of the ancient stupas and monasteries. A large stone Ashoka in 250 BC bears on inscription about the birth of the Buddha. An important part of Lumbini is the temple of Maya Devi. It has a stone image of Maya Devi giving birth to card Buddha as she holds into a branch. It has been well worn by the strikers of basin women hoping for fertility. To the south of the temple is a pool where Queen Maya Devi is said to have bathed and given her son his first purification bath. Lumbini is now being developed under the master plan under the Lumbini Development Trust, a non-governmental organization dedicated to be restoration of Lumbini and its development as a pilgrimage site. The development will include a monastic Zone, the circulars sacred garden surroundings the Ashoka Piller and Maya Devi temple and Lumbini village, where visitors will find lodges, restaurants, a cultural centers and tourist facilities. An important archeological site near Lumbini, Kapilvastu

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How to Cite:

Bhubaneshwar Lamichhane. (2023). PROSPECTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NEPAL. *The Journal of Social Sciences Studies and Research*, 3(02), Page: 54–61. Retrieved from <https://tjsssr.com/index.php/tjsssr/article/view/87>
<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7749961>

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evokes, the ancient place where Lord Buddha spent his formative years, scattered foundations of the place are abundant and archeologist have now discovered 13 successive layers of human habitation dating back to the eighth century B.C. A must for archeological and historical buffs! Besides its religious and historical significance, Lumbini offers cultural insight into the village life of southern Nepal. If possible try to coincide we visit with the weekly Monday Bazaar when villagers come from miles around to buy Spices, pottery jewelry and various other items. It may appear as a scene and of the Arabian Nights, with colorful merchandise spread out under the mango trees and the air perfumed with incense. So, Tourism point of view. Lumbini has its own importance for its religious and archeological value and nevertheless, it has enough prospects in developing tourism market and act as a socio-economic force for developing country like Nepal.

Objective of the Study:

Main objective of this study is to know the prospects of religious tourism in Lumbini.

Limitations of the Study:

This present study is only concentrate religious tourism of Lumbini province no. five of Nepal.

Literature review:

In the middle ages, merchants' explorer, pilgrims and student travelled in various places and despite the upheavals caused by the invasions of the Arabs, the Normans and Hungarian, the movement of person was far from ceasing completely. "Students attracted by the master mind of such renowned universities of Bulgaria, Paris, Rome, Salamanca, Cairo and Nalanda and Kikramshila in India travelled after to heart them'. (Upadhyay, 2003: 1-2). In Sanskrit literature, we find three defined for tourism derived from the root, which means leaving home for some time to other places. According to Negi (1990:23) the three terms are:-

- Paryatna : It means going out for pleasure and knowledge.
- Desatna : It means going out of the country primarily for economic gains.
- Tirthatna : It means going out to places of religious.

According to rebels - bus curtain tourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the objectives of admiring, studying and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals as well as cultural features found there (Lascurain, 1991, pp 24-31). According to Figgis, travel to remote of natural areas aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and cultural heritage while according damage or deterioration of the experiences for others (Penelope, 1992). Tourism Master plan 1972 has

provided guidelines for tourism development in Nepal. Sightseeing tourism, trekking tourism, recreational tourism, trekking tourism, recreational tourism as well as internal pilgrims are the potential aspect of Nepalese tourism. This plan indicates tourism can be one of the most important industries to achieve the aims like increasing foreign exchange earnings, develop a profitable sector of the private economy, creating animallize towards the development of National and regional economy and diverting development impulses to the retarded regions. This plan shows that Nepal has been spending large amount of foreign exchange earnings, develop a profitable sector of the private economy, creating an impulse towards the development of National and regional economy, and diverting development impulses to the retarded regions. This plan shows that Nepal has been spending large amount of foreign exchange to import basic tourism components. To make the favorable balance of foreign exchange, this plan has formulated policies like reduction of imports, developing saving habits, strict control over foreign exchange and development of air services as well as travel agencies. (Tourism Master Plan, 1972).

"Among the Mountains, I am the Himalayan'- Lord Krishna in Bhagvad Gita signified the sanctity or Nepal as one of the holiest places on earth. The Himalaya, or the "abode of snow' is referred to as the home of Lord Shiva and his consort, Parvati. Goddess Parvati presented as the daughter of the Himalaya, the majestic mountain range in the world. The Himalaya has a particular importance to the followers of Hinduism since time immemorial. The mythological period covering the Salya, Treta and Dwapar Yuges or ages also contains numerous references regarding the temples, Marines and holy places of the country. Many reflections are expressed in the ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts about the holiness of Nepal as the land of spiritual blessing and tranquility (Satyal 2002).

"Nepal houses innumerable holy shrines of Hindu and Buddhist deities. Hindu and Buddhist from all parts of the world come to pay homage at Nepal's many places of pilgrimage. A large number of devotees of both the religious visit the temple of Pashupatinath. Ram Janaki Temple, Janskipur, Goyaikunda. Baudhanath, Swayambhunaih and Lumbini to pay homage each year. Similarly many religious sites in and out of the Kathmandu Valley have served also as great attractions for international tourists; while some are beautiful and intricately carved temples built by master builders of ancient times. Other places are the center of religious fairs and festivals. Many such religious sites be near a river or stream with holy water of which the devotees undergo early morning ablutions. (Satyal: 2002).

Travel for religious purposes assumed a significant importance. The practice of traveling for religious, going on a pilgrimage, for instance, became a well established custom in many parts of the world. By the end of the Middle Ages a large number of pilgrims were traveling to the main shrines in Europe, and travel again assumed an interesting character. However, it was still dominated by religious motivations very little actual pleasure travel was undertaken. The adoption and spread of Christianity subsequently led to numerous pilgrims making their way to the holy land. So deep and strong was the hold of faith that the ritual of pilgrimage flourished over the countries. Religion was a great unifying force pilgrimage strengthened religious bonds. It provided the impetus for a 'society' agrarian society to break out of its narrow geographical confines. It also exposed people to new manners and costumes different kinds of food and modes of dress. It encouraged exchange of ideas and also fostered trade. It served as a powerful means of forging unity and understanding between peoples from widely different regions. The powerful influences of a crusading religion that slowly penetrated a foreign land, such as Christianity in Europe and later in America and Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism in Asia took place to permit an assimilation and perpetuation of very distinctive languages, literature, music, art architecture, philosophy and forms of government. Religion thus played and continues to play a crucial part in travel (Bhatia, 2003).

"The Location of Kapilvastu and Archaeological' a book by Tara Nanda Mishra quotes the most of the Buddhist sites like Saranath, Vaisali, Kusinagar, Bodhagaya and Shavarti etc. have been identified on the basis of the description about them given by the famous Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hian and Huen Tsang. Therefore their description about Kapilvastu also will be proved very helpful towards the identification of the so-called lost site. Fa-Hian came and visited the Buddhist sites between 399-414 A.D whereas Huen Tsang traveled the places in between AD 629-645 ha Hian while describing about Kapilvastu says that the city was thirteen miles east (nearly one hundred miles east) of Sravasti. Huen Tsang places the city 16 miles (nearly eighty six miles) to the southeast of Sravasti. He says that there were ten deserted cities in the country. Both the travelers describe the city of Kapilvastu as deserted, in ruins and without people or king. Fa-Hian says that there were some monks and a score or two familiar of common people. At the old place of king Suddodana there were images of prince and his mother. At places where that son appeared mounted on a white elephant when he entered his mother's womb, and where he turned his carriage sound.

"Pilgrimage Tourism in Nepal' by Rakesh has stated " in the material world the Lord is situated in different areas multi (Deities) in the temples, just to increase the material activities of the conditioned soul and increase his spiritual activities. Faithful Hindus visit these holy places for perfection of spiritual realization.' A tourist to Nepal long ago has called it a home of gods and land of festivals. The authenticity of this remark can be judged from the scores of images of various gods and goddesses to be found in this land. The valley of Kathmandu is itself full of the images of hundreds of Hindu and Buddhist divinities. So this valley presents the beautiful picture of different religious and different sects. Thus, Nepal has become a decent destination for pilgrimage tourism with a large number of both Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage sites and shrines and temples. There are valuable and vibrant and very important assets of this Himalayan Hindu kingdom of the world. They have contributed significantly in the development of the pilgrimage tourism as well as domestic tourism. This is a marvelous, mystic and mysterious meeting place of many Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses. They unfold a colorful picture of human vigor and joy of the immensely religious minded people of this lovely land. The attitude of the Nepalese people at large displays a unique spirit of mutual trust and tolerance toward different religions. The old aged interaction between the Hindu and the Buddhists presents and produces beautiful balances in which gods lose their sectarian character. There is a street synthesis of different religions. There is a religious harmony between the Hindu and the Buddhist. Which has existed from time immemorial? A devout Hindu devotee goes to Swayambhunath and Bouddhanath and a true Buddhist goes to Pashupatinath to pay homage irrespective of his or her religious faith. Thus our country's strength has been expressed through its cultural solidarity and religious bond since the creation of this universe (Rakesh, 2002).

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

The research is descriptive as well as exploratory research design has been applied.

Nature and sources of Data:

This study, primary and secondary data has used, in which primary data were collected by survey using formal and information interviews and field observation and as well as secondary data have been collected to get more reliable information from the related different published and unpublished materials, books, literature, reports, articles. Journals, project report, department of

tourism, Library and information centre of Lumbini Development Trust.

Universe and Sampling:

The first category of respondents was the tourist visiting Nepal at the time of 2018 AD. This category was used to collect information, support the analysis and find out real needs and understand perception of tourist towards religious tourism in Nepal. Altogether 55 tourists were selected for the interview. The second category of respondents includes tourism entrepreneurs like hotel owners, tourist guide and other related persons.

Data Analysis and presentation:

The researcher has edited the collected data and then each part of information has descriptively been analyzed and some have been tabulated for the nature of qualitative and quantitative study.

Tourist Accommodation:

There is many hotels and lodges as well as modern hotels in and around Lumbini that can easily manage the present number of tourists. The available data shows that Lumbini has an accommodation capacity of more than 700 beds where as average tourist arrivals are approximately 200 per day in peak season. Among these visitors, only 25% stays overnight in Lumbini. Lumbini changed into a religious site soon after the Parinirvana of Lord Buddha. A monastic site evolved around the sacred spot of Buddha's birth. The birth spot being the most sacred point in the whole of the holy land of Lumbini draw the attention of generous devotees who erected structures to pay homage to the great master. These constructions were of religious nature. Along the religious complex, a civic settlement also sprang up to meet the gracing need of the religious community visiting or living in the lady holy complex.

World Heritage site: The sacred Garden:

The sacred Garden is the focal point of Lumbini since it includes the main archaeological monuments and the Maya Devi Temple. If the sense of peace and sanctity can be preserved and restored It could function as a magnet to attract move pilgrims and tourists. Kenzo tange's Master Plan gave high priority to the preservation of the sacred garden, which was planned as a circle enclosing a square in order to represent the mystic symbol of the universe in its purity and simplicity.

The Maya Devi Temple:

The Maya Devi shrine complex is the heart of all monuments at this holy site. The complex also bears

testimony of several layers of construction over the centuries. The main objective of worship here is the Nativity sculpture (4th century AD), which is known by the name of Maya Devi Temple. MG/ Nepal and LDT jointly restored the temple. The ground floor consists of the remain of the foundation of the early Maya Devi Temple that dates back to 3rd century BC. The sanctum sanctorum is the birth spot of the Lord Buddha. The upper floor consists an open meditation platform, on which stand the dome and the gold plated shrine pinnacle.

The Marker Stone:

This stone conglomerate located deeply buried in the sanctum sanctorum pinpoints the exact location of the birth of Lord Buddha. This was discovered after meticulous excavation of the Maya Devi Temple site in 1996. The exact size of Marker Stone is 70 x 40 x 10 cm. This is now covered with a bulletproof glass.

The New Face of Lumbini:

The United Nations secretary General U Thant's Pilgrimage to Lumbini in 1967 became a milestone in the recent history of the development of Lumbini. It is deeply influenced by Lumbini's sanctity. U Thant discussed the matter with His Majesty the then king Mahendra and suggested HMG./Nepal to develop Lumbini as an international pilgrimage and a tourist center. In 1970, he also helped formation of an international committee for the Development of Lumbini consisting of 15 member nations to support the development of Lumbini through the United Nation's involvement. Professor Kenzo Tange of Japan was assigned the task of designing of Master Plan for the development of Lumbini.

Master Plan of Lumbini:

In 1978, the Master Plan designed by Prof. Tange was finalized and approved by HMG/ Nepal and the UN. In the meantime, HMG/ Nepal was directly involved in the planning and development of Lumbini through the formation of the Lumbini Development committee. The committee acquired the necessary amount of land, relocated the villages and commenced the task of creating basic infrastructure including the afforestation program in the planned area. The Master Plan thus changed the face of Lumbini. In 1985, the Lumbini Development Trust Act came into existence and Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) was formed accordingly. Now. the Trust is responsible for the implementation of the Master plan and for the overall development of Lumbini.

The Nativity Sculpture:

The image of Maya Devi, also known as the Nativity Sculpture dated back to 4th century A.D. depicts Maya Devi, holding the branch of a tree with her right hand for support. Next to her Gautami Prajapati, her own sister, in supporting posture in the time of delivery is standing upright on a lotus pedestal, with two celestial figures receiving him?

The Sacred Pond or Puskarini:

The sacred pond or Puskarini close by the Asokan Pillar on the southern side is the sacred pond, the Puskarini-believed to be the sacred Pond in which Maya Devi took bath just before giving birth to the Lord Buddha. It is also the site where the infant Siddhartha was given his first purification bath. The pond has terraced steps and is riveted by beautifully layered bricks.

The Asokan Pillar:

The Asoka Pillar bears the first epigraphic evidence relating to the birthplace of Lord Buddha. It is the most noteworthy monument and an authentic historic document of Lumbini. The inscription engraved by Asoka is still intact and testifies the authenticity of the birthplace. The text written in Brahmi script and Pali language is translated as follows.

Twenty years after his coronation king Priyadudarsi, Beloved of Gods visited this spot in person and offered worship at this place, because the Buddha, the Sage of the Sakyas, was born here. He caused to be built a stonewall around the place and also erected this stone pillar to commemorate his visit. Because the Lord Buddha was born here, he made the village of Lumbini free from taxes and subject to pay only one-eighth of the produce as land revenue instead of the usual rate.

Other Attractions:

Nepalese and international Monasteries/ Vihar representing different architecture and culture of Buddhist countries and Buddhist organizations are other attractions of Lumbini. The Vihar of Royal Thai (Thailand), Chinese Monastery (China). Mahabodhi Society of Calcutta, International Nun's Society (Nepal). The Great Lotus Stupa (Tara Foundation Germany), Myanmar Monastery (Myanmar). Manang Sewa Samaj (Nepal), Linhson Temple (France), Sakyo Temple (Japan), Garden international (Austria), Sri Lankan Monastery Complex (Sri Lanka), Korean Mahabodhi Society (S. Korea). Dharmodaya Sabha (Nepal). Drigung Kagyud Meditation Center (India) Panditarama Meditation Center (Myanmar), Vipasana Meditation Center (Nepal), Lumbini Museum, Lumbini international Research institute (LiRi), Eternal Peace

Flame, Crane Sanctuary and Peace Bell dotted in the Mid and then Northern Zone a.

Tourism Enhancement in Lumbini

Government Actions:

In 1972 HMG of Nepal formulated in the Nepal Tourism Master Plan for the overall development of tourism in Nepal. The plan recommended developing Lumbini as an international pilgrimage destination and as one of the important sightseeing destinations for tourists in Nepal. The plan focused on the promoting a Kathmanu-Gorkha-Pokhara-Tansen-Lumbini-Chitwan Kathmandu tour. Lumbini was expected to play a pivotal role in the promotion of national tourism. The plan also gave directions for the implementation of Kenzo Tange's Master Plan for the overall development of Lumbini, in order to promote the site in the international tourism market. According to the Tourism Plan, one of Lumbini's limitations is that it is remote and isolated for both pilgrims and tourists. A strategic development of Lumbini would help Nepal to foster its socio-religious heritage and would provide considerable economic development. Lumbini could increasingly attract pilgrims and tourists from Buddhist countries, and would thus represent an international tourist attraction.

Kenzo Tange's Master Plan (1978) is the basis for all actions in Lumbini, and provides a very comprehensive framework for the overall development and conservation of the site. In this regard as an important pilgrimage destination, but also as a destination for different purposes, such as historical, natural, archeological and cultural reasons.

Non-governmental actions:

Besides the governmental organizations in Lumbini the following non-governmental institutions are involved in tourism: Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) The LDT is established by the Lumbini Development Trust Act. 2042 (1985) for the purpose of developing Kenzo Tange's Master Plan. His Majesty the King of Nepal is the patron of the Trust. In terms of tourism, LDT is formulating and implementing different policies and programmes for the development of the area. LDT has established an information center in front of the Maya Devi Temple with an information officer, tourist guides and supervisors to disseminate information to tourists and pilgrims. Additionally, LDT has organized events such as the World Buddhist Summits and the International Buddhist Conference, and promoted the construction of the international monasteries.

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB):

The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is a national organization established in 1998 in partnership between

HMG of Nepal and the private tourism industries to develop and market Nepal as an attractive tourist destination. NTB provides a platform for the development of tourism in Nepal by combining the governmental commitment with the dynamism of private sector tourism industries.

Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP):

The Government of Nepal, together with international agencies like UNDP, SNV and DFID established the tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) in order to formulate policies for sustainable tourism development, and to work towards poverty alleviation in the Lumbini area. TRPAP aims to reduce rural poverty by developing sustainable rural tourism models and introducing them in a local self-governance system in and around Lumbini. This involves extensive exercises at grass roots level, which include working with local communities, providing training to understand the theory and practice of tourism, supporting local people to improve rural areas, building skills to serve the industry, assisting with funds to initiate tourism enterprise, institutionalizing the process and supporting it with appropriate policies and guidelines from local to

national level. The programme follows ‘bottom up’ and community participatory approaches.

International Monasteries:

Jointly with LDT or independently, the international monasteries are a working for the promotion of tourism in Lumbini.

Private and non-governmental organizations. The private hotels and resorts, together with organizations such as hotels associations, travel agents associations and tourist guides associations are also involved with Lumbini tourism. the Siddharthanagar Hotel Association, in cooperation with the Hotel Association of Nepal, organized the ‘Lumbini Festival - 2004’ in Bhairahawa. They also developed in the 2 nights/ 3 days package tour programme including the sites around Lumbini.

Local People:

Increasingly local people are getting involved with the tourism activities in Lumbini. They are participating in the establishment of middle class hotels and guesthouses and by becoming professional tour guides, rickshaw drivers, and shopkeepers selling traditional products etc.

Existing Situation and Challenges in Lumbini:

Existing situation	Challenges	Prospects	Steps to be taken
Air pollution due to existing dirt roads, and industrial activities	Environment polluted, affects plants and animal life, as well as human.	If the roads are newly constructed & easy accessibility to road, flow of tourist will increase.	Roads should be paved reconstructed and industries should be shifted far from the area.
Insecurity	robbery, crime, insecure in life.	When visitors feel secure they will freely come to visit Lumbini.	Provision of tourist police, will provide security.
Lack of International airport	due to near from border there is highrisk and as well as it threatens the tranquility and solitude of Lumbini.	If international airport will be there tourist directly visit Lumbini, inflow rate will be increased	Plans and strategy should be formulated by government without hampering the site.
Unsystematic way for the visit around sacred garden (where Maya Devi Temple lie)	Visitors attending the sacred garden for meditation purposes being disturbed by the uncontrolled flow of tourist and lack of proper meditation cells.	When the visitors feel comfortable to visit and meditation, it attracts more tourist who have faith in religion.	Entrance gate for entering the sacred garden should be made two- way system like from one side tourist enter and from another side they came out. For meditation, rules should made that for one time this no. of tourist only enter

Still local people are not benefiting from the tourism in Lumbini	Poverty, tourism will not flourish sustainability.	Being world Heritage site its sustainability also relies on the quality of life of the local communities. When local people involve in tourism activities it has great prospect in the field of Tourism.	Awaring the local people, introducing environment friendly income generating activities such as non-timber forest productive (NTFP), horticulture, tree nursery and handicraft.
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Source: Field Survey, 2022

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation:

Major findings:

- From year 2001 to 2008 the number of tourists was increased than after 2008 to 2012 the number significantly drop down and from year 2013 the number was increased gradually the maximum growth rate of tourists arrival in Lumbini in the year 2017 by 43.26 percent. The large number of tourists visited Lumbini in the months of November, December, February, and March that means in winter season. There is low flow of tourists in Summer Season may be due to the failure of promotion of domestic tourism in Lumbini. But in time of COVID, the numbers of tourists significantly drop down.

- Most of the tourists visiting Lumbini were from Asian countries, large percentage is from Sri-Lanka 42.74 percent because of the faith in Buddhism and more interested in the birth place of Lord Buddha. After Sri-Lanka the tourists from Thailand, China visit Lumbini mainly of its religious value and mostly staying in Lumbini for 1 to 3 days so it shows that extra religious activities like guided tours to the sites related to Lord Buddha, cultural activities, eco-tourism should be developed to lengthen the stayperiod of tourists in Lumbini.

- On the basis of Purpose of visit, most of the tourist 54.545% visited Lumbini with the purpose of going on a pilgrimage and as well as (32.72% of tourist wanted to sightseeing. And majority of tourist (72.73% visited Lumbini for the first time and response that they want to visit again. Thus using local Bus because of over crowding and the use of slow and old vehicle.

- Tourists are found not satisfied with transportation facilities. Most of the tourist prefer to travel by tourist Bus due to the lack of international airport they can't able to directly land at Bhairahawa, (nearest city from Lumbini), so few tourist use plane as a means of

transportation. From Bhairahawa to Lumbini, the roads are not pitched, and full of dirt, the tourist feel uncomfortable to visit Lumbini.

- For any area to be a tourist destination, it must have some major attraction that motivate tourist. In the case of Lumbini, most of the tourist (36.36% love its historical movements, and then good archeology, Temples (Maya Devi) because of its religious value.

- It is found that most of the investment to establish basic infrastructures in Lumbini like hotels originates from outsiders. It means that local people are not involving in tourism activities may be they can't competitive with outsider, so they can't able to get benefit from the tourism activities in Lumbini.

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