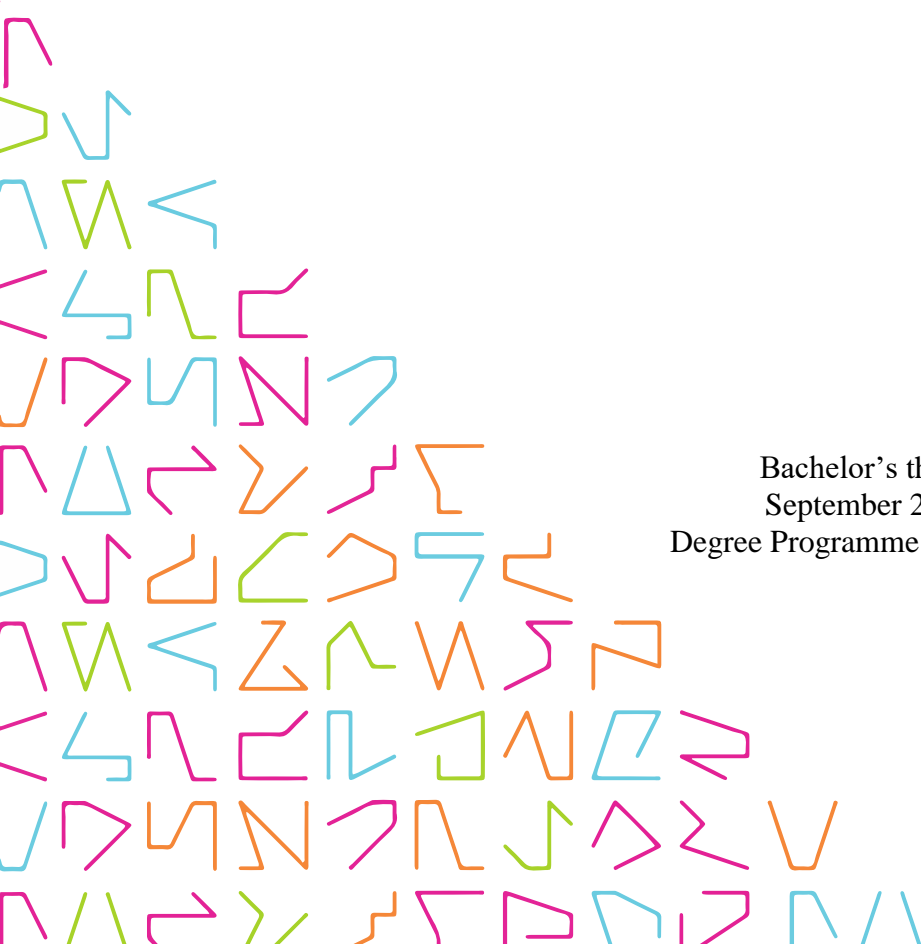


THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM ON NEPALESE ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

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Religious tourism is one of the main contributors to the Nepalese tourism industry. It has not only generated thousands of jobs but also has been one of the main media to promote Nepalese culture, lifestyle and traditions. At the same time, it has grown as a strong contributor to the Nepalese economy. The main aim of this thesis was to point out the impact of religious tourism on the Nepalese economy, to find out the main factors affecting religious tourism and to get views of people about the religious tourism.

The research for this thesis was done through collecting secondary data from various sources and by collecting primary data through online questionnaire survey. A survey website was used as a tool to collect the primary data while all the respondents were approached through social media.

The research pointed out the impact of the religious tourism on the Nepalese economy. Furthermore, the primary data collection results showed travelers' view about a religious trip. The amount of money we can expect from the random religious travelers and the services they look for are some key findings.

Key words: religious tourism, Nepalese economy, economic impact

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
NTB	Nepal Tourism Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IHA	International Hydropower Association
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
ADB	Asian Development Bank
EU	European Union
RMG	Ready Made Garments
WTO	World Trade Organization
UNWTO	The World Tourism Organization
UK	United Kingdom
ABC	Annapurna Base Camp
KM	Kilometer
SQ KM	Square Kilometer
BS	Bikram Sambat (Nepalese calendar date)

1 INTRODUCTION

Nepal has been a famous and unique destination for travellers with its very rich diversity of landscapes, religions, culture, languages and traditions. Religious tourism has been one of the main contributors to the Nepalese tourism industry and economy. Religious tourism itself has generated thousands of jobs in the tourism sector, which has benefited directly and indirectly towards individuals, society as well as nation.

The aim of this thesis was to point out the impact of the religious tourism on the Nepalese economy and to understand the view of the religious tourists. To achieve this objective, secondary data from multiple sources have been collected for the research. Furthermore, to get the view of the religious tourists, the primary data were collected through an online questionnaire survey. The Survey Planet website was used as a tool to collect quantitative primary data and Facebook was used as a platform to approach all the respondents.

The research showed the contribution of religious tourism on the Nepalese economy, and it pointed out the factors affecting religious tourism in Nepal. Furthermore, it revealed the views and opinions of people as well as religious tourists about their spending, choice of destination and services they look for.

2 NEPAL

2.1 Geography

Nepal is indeed a god gifted naturally beautiful country. Nepal is sandwiched between two Asian giants India and China. China is located on the northern border of Nepal, whereas it is surrounded by India from east, west and south. Nepal has a total area of 147181 square kilometers.

The country can be divided into three main geographical regions, Himalaya (northern part), High Hill / middle part and Terai / plain (southern part). The highest point of the country as well as the world Mt. Everest (8848 m) lies in Himalayan region while the lowest point of the country is Kechana Kalan (70 m) which lies in the Jhapa district of Terai region.

Eight of the top ten highest peaks in the world are in Nepal and the main river system of Nepal includes Mahakali, Karnali, Narayani and Koshi rivers which originate from the Himalaya in north and flows down to the south. Besides that, there are other medium sized rivers like Babai, West Rapti, Bagmati, Kamla, Kankai and Mechi which originate in the Midlands and Mahabharat range.

It has been said that Nepal has a potential of generating 80000 MW electricity by using its hydro-power resources (IHA 2016). But there has not been significant development in this sector. Despite of being naturally rich in hydropower resources, unfortunately the country is compelled to face frequent hours of blackouts.

There are many national parks and conservation areas in Nepal, which offer wide range of wild animals and species, among which some are only found in Nepal and few others are only found in few countries. So visitors can get chance to view the wildlife as well as the worlds endangered species. The green wild forest and wildlife gives the travellers a good idea about the natural life in the wild. Among them, some are also listed in UNESCO world heritage sites, too. The main national parks of Nepal are Sagarmatha, Langtang, Royal Chitwan, Shey Phoksundo, Khaptad, Royal Bardia national parks, there are also

few conservation areas which are Annapurna, Kanchanjunga, and Makalu Barun Conservation areas. Besides these, there are also few wildlife reserves which offer various types of wild animals to watch and to view the wildlife from near; these are Parsa, Koshi-Tappu, Shukla Phanta and Shivapuri wildlife reserves. There is also one hunting reserve as Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, where the licenced hunters can go for hunting.



PICTURE 1. Nepal geography, with the national parks and rivers (Nepalspiritadventure.com)

There are also many famous and beautiful lakes in Nepal, among them Rara, She-Phoksundo, Fewa, and Tilicho are the main ones. Besides that, there are other hundreds of lakes, glaciers and water falls which make Nepal very rich in water resources. The main cities of Nepal are located in the valley, Kathmandu, which is also the capital city. It is known as the city of temples, as there are hundreds of the temples in this city. Another major city, Pokhara which is famous as a tourist city, is also located in the valley. Other main cities are Biratnagar, Birgunj, Bhairahawa, Dharan and Nepalgunj which lies in the southern plain (Terai) part of the country.

2.2 Religions

The total population of Nepal in year 2011 was 26,494,504 (CBS, Census 2011). The main religions in Nepal are Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Kiratism and Christianity. The majority of the people follow Hinduism in Nepal, it is believed that more than 80% of the total population practice Hindu religion, followed by the Buddhists who are 9% of the population, and Islam is the third most followed religion which has almost 4% of the population as followers. Kiratism has almost 3% of the population as followers while the Christians are around 1.5% and rest of the people follow other religions (CBS, Census 2011).

Before becoming the secular country after the people's movement in 2006/7, Nepal was only Hindu kingdom in the whole world. Nepal was ruled by Shah Dynasty Kings for two and half centuries. Later after the success of the people's movement, Nepal was officially called "Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal", where every religion was treated equally and there was no difference between Hindus and other religion followers. Government announced public holidays on every religions festival which are celebrated by Nepalese people.

All the Nepalese people are free to choose their religion, and everyone respect each other's religion and festivals, regardless the number of followers. Though, Nepal was Hindu kingdom for centuries, there were always other existing religions but notably there was never a religious conflict among the people of Nepal.

Being the Hindu dominated country for such a long time, Nepal has attracted Hindu followers from all around the world, especially the number of Indians visiting Nepal is significant. Many of the Hindu holy sites as well as Buddhist major holy sites are in Nepal. Some examples of the holy sites and places for Hindu followers are Pashupatinath, Muktinath, Budhanilkantha and Mankamana temples while for Buddhists Boudhanatha and Swambhunath are major Pilgrim sites inside Kathmandu Valley. Above all, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha "Lumbini" is no doubt the most visited and major attraction for Buddhist as well as other religion visitors. Almost all of the above mentioned sites are listed under UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

2.3 Economy

Nepalese economy is mainly based on agriculture; the main occupation of the Nepalese people remains farmer. We can say that, farming is practised by almost every house in Nepal. Besides agriculture the main factors which contribute to the Nepalese economy most are services and tourism. Almost half of the GDP is equivalent to the remittance from abroad and another main contributor is tourism sector.

According to Trading Economics website, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nepal for the year 2015 was 20.88 billion US dollars and the GDP value of the Nepal represents 0.03 of the whole world economy. The all-time high GDP of Nepal was 20.88 billion USD which was of last year 2015 and all time low was recorded 0.50 billion USD which was back in 1963. This site also informed that all the data for the GDP were collected and reported by the World Bank.

The per capita income recorded for the year 2015 was 730 USD (World Bank). According to The Heritage Foundation report for economic freedom 2016, Nepal is placed on 151st in the world index and 34th in the Asia Pacific Region, with the overall 50.9 score in different economic freedom indicators. The annual economic growth went down to 3.0% from the last year's 5.1% after the country was hit by the devastating earthquake in April 2015 (Asian Development Bank, ADB). Also it is believed that the significant development on the people living under poverty line will be effected after this huge earthquake last year. Nepal was doing great job in poverty eradication, the number of people living under the poverty line was dropped to 24.70% in 2008 from 42% in 1995 (indexmundi.com). The Nepalese economy achieved remarkable results in terms of poverty reduction, growth and competitiveness, poverty rate in Nepal decreased from 80% to 57% of the population between years 2005-2014 (weforum.org, World Economic Forum 2015). Similarly, the unemployment rate was also dropped from 47% to 42% in 2001-2004 (indexmundi.com) but since then the rate has been increasing until now.

The main business partners of Nepal are India, USA, China and EU. The biggest import partners for Nepal are India and China while its major export partners are India, USA and EU. Nepal exports tea, jute, sugarcane, carpets, and clothing while it imports mainly gold, machinery and equipment, petroleum products and fertilizers. The country is member of

the WTO (World Trade Organization) and it also receives the subsidy and custom discount in its export goods, especially in RMG (Ready Made Garments) in USA and few other countries. Besides that, Nepal also gains foreign aid annually from the UK, India, Japan, USA, EU, China, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries.

2.4 Tourism

Tourism is widely considered as an effective contributor to socio-economic development, particularly in less developed countries (Tourism and Development in the Developing World, David J. Telfer & Richard Sharpley). No doubt, Nepal has a lot of potential in tourism sector, it can be verified by the number of tourists visiting the country by airway which was 598,204 in 2012 (Nepal Tourism Board, NTB). Besides that, the equal number of tourists come to Nepal yearly from India with the religious purpose, by crossing the open boarder between Nepal and India.

Tourism is one of the main contributors to the Nepalese economy, according to WTO, Year book of Tourism Statistics, Nepal has gained 502,000,000 USD from tourism sector in year 2014, and this amount has been increasing in graph since 2006. Nepal which is very rich in flora and fauna attracts all kinds of tourists from all over the world. Nepal has a variety of tourism activities and contrasts to offer, from its natural variety of topography to the diverse cultures and religions; the tourist can enjoy everything. Nepal is also home to adventure travellers starting from the mighty mountaineering to rafting, sky diving, paragliding and bungee jumping. Trekking is the most famous activity among all the travellers visiting Nepal, the experience of nature and sightseeing done through the trails of ABC (Annapurna Base Camp) and other popular trekking destinations make forget all the tiredness of the trekkers and make them feel happy and satisfied, very close to nature where they find peace and harmony.

There are other kinds of tourists, too, who come to Nepal with some different kinds of purposes. Nepal, being the only Hindu kingdom for centuries and capital of Hindu followers all around the world, Nepal has been welcoming hundred thousands of religious tourists, Pilgrims. Other tourists in this category come to visit Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, among them the Buddhists are in highest number. There are various numbers of activities done by the government tourism authority NTB, which attract more visitors, some examples are Visit Nepal 1998 and Nepal Tourism Year 2011.

3 MAJOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN NEPAL

3.1 Pashupatinath Temple

Shiva, the destroyer, is historically the god most worshipped by Hindu followers in Nepal and all around the world. Pashupatinath is one of the major temples of god Shiva, which is visited by hundreds of thousands of worshippers from all over the world. Pashupatinath temple is situated about 5 km northeast of Kathmandu, on the right bank of the holy Bagmati river. It is believed that the Pashupatinath temple has been rebuilt and renovated several times in different ages. The current temple is believed to be built almost thousand years ago. The temple complex was listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1979.

The main temple of Pashupatinath is a building with a bunk roof and golden spire. This square shaped pagoda temple, built on a single platform measuring 23.6 meters from the ground, is considered as a masterpiece of the Hindu architecture. It is a cubic construction with four main doors, all covered with silver sheets. The two storey roof is made with copper and covered with gold. The temple is decorated with the wooden sculptures on the doors and other parts of the temple (pashupatinathtemple.org).



PICTURE 2. Pashupatinath Temple (anilblon.wordpress.com)

There are also other temples inside the courtyard where Pashupatinath temple is located, among them Bhairav, Vasukinath, Suryanarayan temples are some. There are also some temples outside the courtyard, among them Ram mandir and Guhyeshwari temples are the main ones.

Pashupatinath is the most visited holy site among the Hindus. There are several festivals around the year which are celebrated with huge significance, some to mention are Shivaratri and Hartalika Teej. Hartalika Teej, also known as Rishi Panchami is the Hindu festival dedicated to the females, married females as well as the single, and this festival is celebrated with great joy and excitement. The married females fast hard whole day even without drinking water for the prosperity and good health of their husband, while the unmarried ones fast to get the good, suitable and capable husband. This day attracts thousands of the internal as well as external religious tourists, especially females from all over the country as well as from outside the country. Shivaratri, the Shiva's night, is the most important festival for the god Shiva's followers. This festival alone attracts up to 70-80000 devotees from outside the country. They all are religious tourists who want to worship god Shiva on his favourite day/night. This is the best time when we can see the happenings around the Pashupatinath temple. Besides these festivals devotees, there are many tourists arriving here from all around the world to visit this heritage site.

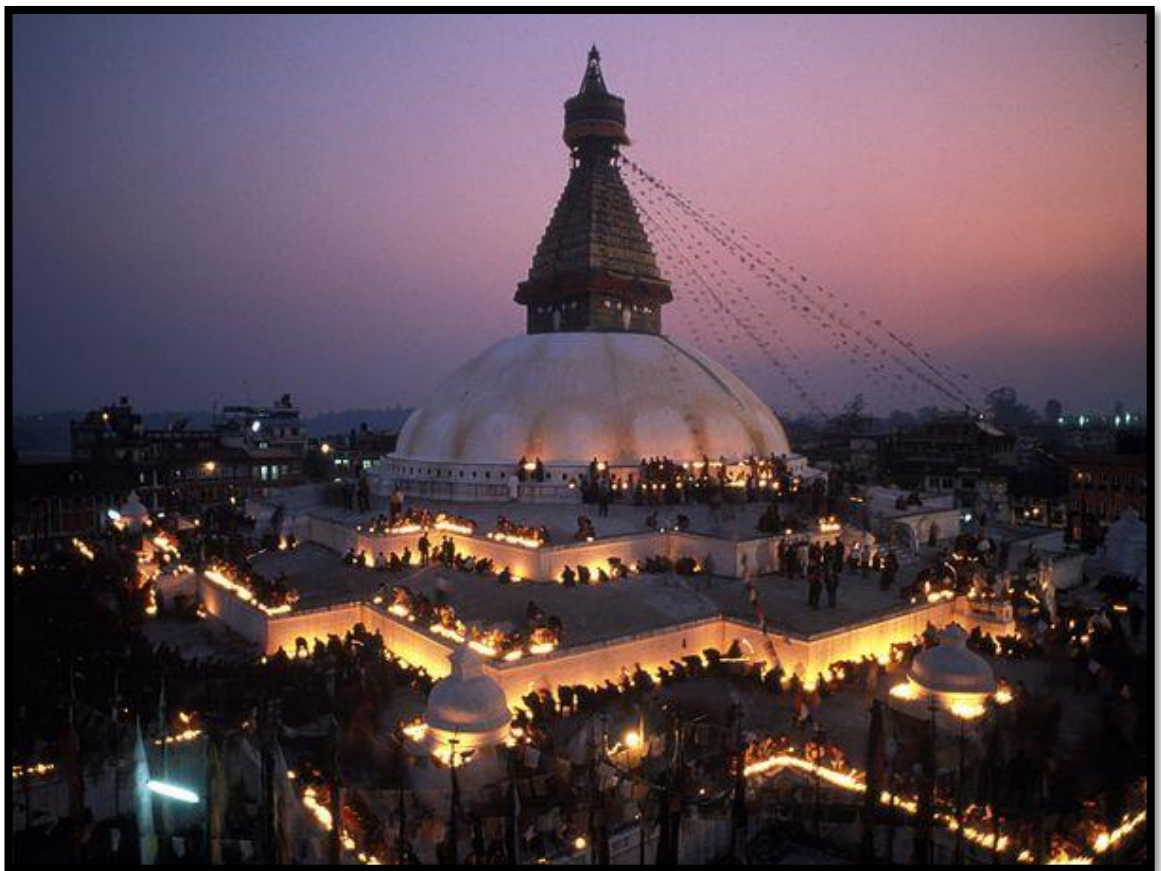


PICTURE 3. Pashupatinath during Shivaratri (skyscrapercity.com)

3.2 Boudhanath and Swayambhunath

Boudhanath: Boudhanath is the largest stupa in Nepal. It is also known as the holiest Tibetan temple outside Tibet. It is the centre of Tibetan culture in Kathmandu and very rich in Buddhist symbolism. The stupa is located in the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu, in the town of Boudha (sacred-destinations.com).

Boudhanath is believed to be built in 14th century, after the invasion of Mugal, during the Chinese invasion in 1959 BS (Bikram Sambat, Nepali calendar date), there were thousands of Tibetans who came along, and this temple became the most important centres of Tibetan Buddhists. Today this site has remained as the most important pilgrimage and meditation centre for not only the Tibetan Buddhist but all the Buddhists all around the globe. This site is also one of the main tourist centres in Nepal. This cultural heritage site is also listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



PICTURE 4. Boudhanath (travel.nationalgeographic.com)

Swayambhunath: Swayambhunath is also known as monkey temple, situated in the west hill top of Kathmandu valley. This heritage site is also listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Meaning of Swayambhu is self-created or self-existent. The legend says that the hill where Swayambhunath is situated used to be an island with stupa, when Kathmandu valley was a lake. It is believed that for ages ago when Kathmandu valley was a lake, Manjushree later on drained the water of the lake by chopping the Chovar hill. From ancient days, it has been believed that if the wind passing through the stupa touches you then your wish will come true.

Swayambhunath is surrounded by many other monasteries, stupas, shrines, temples, towers and museums. This place is one of the highest point in the Kathmandu valley, so visitors get a very good view of the Kathmandu valley from this place. Because of this reason also there are many tourists attracted towards this viewpoint. Unlike Boudhanath, Swayambhunath is worshipped by Hindus, Vajarayana Buddhists of northern Nepal and Tibetans, and Newari Buddhists of central and southern Nepal.



PICTURE 5. Swayambhunath (swayambhu.buddhism-foundation.org)

Each day at the morning time before dawn, hundreds of pilgrims walk through the straight up hill climbing 365 steps of the staircase that lead to the main entrance of the Swayambhunath. Everyone besides the Newari Buddhists make series of circles, clockwise around the stupa while the Newari Buddhists just do opposite, they make circles anti-clock wise. It can be found in the history that there were visitors coming to this place from India, Tibet, Sri Lanka, China and other countries. Today also Swayambhunath remains as an attractive religious tourist site among the visitors who come to see Kathmandu valley and Nepal, whether they are domestic or from other parts of the world.

3.3 Lumbini

Lumbini needs no introduction, it is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha (lord Buddha), a well-known religious, spiritual, historical as well as a cultural tourist place. Situated in the foothills of Himalayas, this place is visited by thousands of tourists in a month. Lumbini is located in the Rupendehi district of modern Nepal, this place is situated in plains in mid-western part of Nepal.

Lumbini is quite famous especially among the Buddhist followers. People come from all over the world to view the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and experience the surrounding of the Lumbini. Lumbini is also listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites and this place is looked after by Lumbini development trust which works in the development and conservation field of this site. Lumbini historical site is spread in 8 sq. km. There are also many monasteries, stupas and meditation centres at the international monastic zone built or being built by different countries such as Japan, Korea, China, India, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, France and Germany. These monuments give the message of universal friendship and brotherhood.

There is no doubt that Lumbini itself attracts hundred thousands of tourists from all around the globe, they are not only Buddhist followers but they might also be of other religions, travellers, historians, researchers, peace seekers, nature lovers. Lumbini area is considered as the open university for the students and researchers who want to know more about the history and life style of Gautama Buddha.



PICTURE 6. Maya Devi Temple Lumbini (Gettyimages.com)

3.4 Muktinath

Muktinath-Chumig Gyatsa is one of the main and most important pilgrimage sites for both religions, Hindu and Buddhist followers. It is a great example of sacred site, shared in harmony by devotees of two world religions (Muktinath foundation). This statement also explains the importance of Muktinath for the two biggest religions' followers in the country. This temple is one of the main and important pilgrimage sites in Hindu religion, they call it Mukti Kshetra which means "place of salvation" and this temple is regarded as one of the most ancient temple of god Vishnu. Buddhists call it Muktinath-Chumig Gyatsa, which in Tibetan means hundred waters. Buddhists believe that this place is the place of Dakinis goddesses known as Sky Dancers. This temple is situated at the north side of the mid-west Nepal at an altitude of 3,710 meters (12,172 feet) in the Mustang district of Nepal.

Behind the temple there are 108 stone faucets, with the semi circular wall at the height of seven feet. The devotees bath here in all 108 faucets with the ice cold water of Kali Gandaki river believing that all the sins are washed out with the bath in this spritual holy place. The number 108 has a great significance in Hindu religion, as there are 12 zodiac or Rashi and 9 planets or Graha, giving a total of 108 if we multiply it. Also there are 27 Lunar mansions or Nakshatras, which are divided in 4 quarters, or Padas each giving a combination of 108 (sacredsites.com). The Kali Gandaki river is the sole source of Shaligrams which are most important stones required to build a god Vishnu temple anywhere in the world.

Having its unique image among the devotees of both the religions Hinduism and Buddhism, this temple has been attracting hundred thousands of religious as well as trekking tourists from inside as well as outside the country. This place is so peaceful and spiritual that the trekkers passing through also stop here to see the temple and the surroundings. There is no doubt that a little bit more development and advertising of this site will make it one of the most visited tourism destinations in Nepal.



PICTURE 7. Muktinath Temple (Youtube.com)

4 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NEPAL

Tourism in its present dimensions is a relatively new phenomenon, though travelling in leisure time has been a feature of life since time immemorial (viz. the ancient Olympic Games or the pilgrimages of the Middle Ages) (chapter 1, *The Impacts of Tourism*, Tamara Ratz & Laszlo Puczko). This statement also suggests that the religious/pilgrimage tourism was always there since the starting of the tourism itself.

However, in the Nepalese case the official tourism started very late as mentioned in the book, *History of Tourism in Nepal* by Raju Lama, Leela Sangpang Rai & Sujana Prasai, “first tourist visa in Nepal was issued in 1955 to a Russian citizen Boris Lisanevich, a legendary hotelier & pioneer in Nepalese tourism”. This fact tells us that the development in official tourism started lately in Nepal but the same book suggests us that during 1500-1600 “Chinese, Tibetans and Indians used to visit Nepal especially with the religious and commercial motives”, which also makes us compel to think about that there were tourism activities and religious tourism was also in existence during this time.

While in the modern age the rapid growth and development of the Nepalese tourism started when Nepal became the official member of UNWTO (The World Tourism Organization) in 1975. Before this there also were tourism activities but especially they were focused in the field of mountaineering, in 1953 Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa became the first humans to conquer the peak of Mount Everest (8848 m). During this era, before this incident and after that also there were many climbers who came with the purpose of becoming the first person to climb the peaks. This can be proved by the fact that during 1950s, 7 out of the 10 highest peaks in the world which are in Nepal were climbed successfully.

Religious tourism generates revenue in a way as no other kind of tourism does. It has distinct edge over other kinds of tourism due to the pull of huge crowds in the form of tourists (*Religious Tourism: An Introduction*, Monisha Chattopadhyay 2006). This statement also reflects the scope of religious tourism, especially among the Hindu religion followers where there is a culture of visiting the different religious sites and there is no doubt that it collects a lot of revenue. While we talk about the impact of tourism in Nepalese economy it has been an important part of it. Even if we talk about only India, it had a population of 1288.7 billion in 2015 (indianonlinepages.com) out of which more than

80% are Hindu and if only 10% of them also visit Nepal, than the amount of religious tourists will rise very high. Considering the fact that there is a trend and culture of visiting the holy sites in Hinduism and having an open boarder between India and Nepal this possibility looks to be a very likely one.

Description	Upto mid-January 2014	Upto mid-January 2015
Total Number of Tourist Arrival	797616	790118
Length of Tourist Stay (Average day)	12.57	12.44
Earnings from Tourism (In Rs. 10 Million)	34211	46375
Per Tourist Per Day Expense (USD)	42.8	46.4
Contribution to GDP (Percent)	2.0	2.6
International Airlines having Regular Flight to Nepal	26	26

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and Nepal Rastra Bank

FIGURE 1. Major indicators of tourism sector (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation & Nepal Rastra Bank)

According to the government of Nepal economic survey 2014/15, as shown in figure 1, the total number of tourists visting Nepal were 790,118 up to mid-January 2015, out of which 50.01% came for vacation and recreation travel purpose, while 12.5% came for religious trips. This shows that the religious travel is one of the main motives of the people visiting Nepal. This data might miss the number of religious tourists who come from India crossing the open border between India and Nepal because there is no one to keep this record there. Evaluating the given data, we also can see that the second biggest contributor to the tourism sector is religious tourism. This survey report also claims that the number of tourists were down by 0.9% compared to the same period last year. The most important information provided by this report is that analysing the last ten years' data in terms of the tourist purposes, it has been seen that more than two third of the tourists visiting Nepal came with the purpose of vacation/recreation, trekking/mountaineering and religion, which also explains that the number of religious tourists in Nepal has been in significant number in the last few years. This report further says the number of pilgrims arriving in the Lumbini pilgrimage site for that period were 1,193,828, out of which 902,621 were domestic, 154,216 were from India, and 136,991 were from other countries. Surprisingly, this number of visitors this year was higher by 41% than the last year. This data also

suggest that the Lumbini is becoming the hub among the pilgrims, especially the Buddhist followers. The ongoing development and completion of the master plan of the Lumbini project will definitely increase this number in coming years.

Major Place Visited by Tourist	2013	2014
National Parks and Wildlife Reserve	390297	431673
Pashupati Area (Excl. Indian)	156858	166173
Lumbini (Excl. Indian)	125496	132926
Manaslu Trekking	4439	3764
Mustang Trekking	2862	3883
Humla Trekking	1603	492
Lower Dolpa Trekking	585	1117
Kanchanjunga Trekking	837	777
Upper Dolpa Trekking	338	469

FIGURE 2. Most popular tourist destinations in Nepal (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation)

As shown in figure 2, the most popular destinations among the tourists after wildlife and national parks are religious sites. This figure also gives validity to the fact that religious tourism is one of the main contributors to the Nepalese economy.

The author believes that, besides these facts there are many development work run by the government in private as well as public sector, which will enhance the economic growth and development of tourism sector in Nepal. The improved infrastructure and development in this field will not only generate the foreign currency but it will also help in generating the tourism related jobs and ensure the economic development as well.

Even if we analyse the number of religious tourists arriving in Nepal in recent years, as shown in table 1, it looks like the number is in growing rate except in some of the years.

With this reference we can say that the religious tourism is contributing more every year towards the Nepalese economy. The number of jobs created by religious tourism will not only affect the individual's life but it will also make contribution to the society and nation. The religious heritages also get funding through the income generated from religious tourism, which is used in conservation, renovation, promotion and development of particular sites.

TABLE 1. The percentage of religious tourists compared to the total number of tourist arrivals in Nepal (mof.gov.np, economic survey report)

Year	Total Tourists	Pilgrimage Tourists	% of Pilgrims
1997	421857	4068	1.0
1998	463684	16164	3.4
1999	491504	19198	3.9
2000	463646	15801	3.4
2001	361237	13816	3.8
2002	275468	12366	4.5
2003	338132	21395	6.3
2004	385297	45664	11.9
2005	375398	47621	12.7
2006	383926	59298	15.4
2007	526705	52594	10.0
2008	500277	45091	9.0
2009	509956	51542	10.1
2010	602867	101335	16.8

5 FACTORS AFFECTING RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NEPAL

To travel for economic or religious reasons (e.g. to pilgrimage sites) is an ancient human activity as anyone possess (Callimanopulos 1982; Fisher, 1986, 37), this statement clearly suggests the beginning and existence of the religious tourism. Pilgrimage is the opening of tourism in Nepal. Pilgrimage by Hindu and Buddhist saints to different parts of Nepal are an example (Poudel 2059 BS). As mentioned here the religious tourism in Nepal is as old as the tourism itself. Though it was not commercially recognised by its stakeholders but it was there since the starting of the religion and travelling related with it. Religion has been a powerful force which has long caused people to travel to religious centres in many parts of the world. Travel to the ancient cities of Palestine and Christendom, Mecca, Medina and Bangkok is part of the world folklore history (Modi 2001, 18). This statement suggests us about the capacity of religious tourism.

As the modern age is getting equipped with new kinds of machinery and technology, there are more findings about the ancient cultures and traveling habits, it has also shown many sacred places which were unknown for centuries. Lefebvre, in Vukonic (1996), defines religious tourism as consisting of a range of spiritual sites and associated services, which are visited for both secular and religious reasons. This definition argues that the religious tourism is not only related with the religion and pilgrimage site but it can also be an artificial site or manmade which people consider as religious.

Some people also believe that the travel which is done with the purpose of visiting secular religious like site should also be considered as the religious tourism. For example, the soccer/football lovers or cricket lovers consider that particular sports as their religion and visit the ground or the site with similar sentiments as religious. The classification of the religion based attraction by Shackley (2003, 161) gives more power and light to this belief. The classification is as follows:

- ❖ Natural phenomena (sacred lakes, mountains, island, groves)
- ❖ Building and sites originally constructed for religious purposes
- ❖ Building with a religious theme
- ❖ Especial events with religious significance held at non-religious sites
- ❖ Sacralised secular site associated with tragedy or politically significant events (e.g. Nelson Mandela's prison on Robben Island)

There might be some differences between these kinds of religious tourism destinations but there is one similarity between the religious tourists, and this is that they have to travel to their religious destination. While in Nepal's context almost all these kinds of religious tourism are in practice, as mentioned in earlier topics, Nepal is quite rich in its natural heritage sites, among them many have religious as well as cultural value. For example, some lakes, mountain and rivers have holy names and they have especial value and importance among the Nepalese people as well as the Hindu followers from all around the world.

According to da Graca Mouga Pocas Santos (2003, 40), religious tourism should have at least five characteristics which are,

- ❖ Voluntary, temporary and unpaid travel
- ❖ Motivated by religion
- ❖ Supplemented by other motivations
- ❖ The destination is a religious site (local, regional, national or international status)
- ❖ Travel to the destination is not a religious practice

These characteristics also hint that there is some kind of economic activity going on with the religious tourism simultaneously. Especially in the Hindu religion and culture where people are so motivated by the religious beliefs that they have a goal for life to visit fixed number of religious sites and pilgrimage in their lifetime. Hindu religion also teaches to donate and spend money in their religious trip, which they believe god pays them back with interest and bonus. So attending the holy festivals, taking part in the worshipping becomes an important part of the dedicated devotees and followers.

The other factor which attracts foreign tourists to Nepal and to the religious sites is the diversity of culture in Nepal, there are so many cultures and festivals. It has been said that everyday there is some kind of festival going on, besides that there are some major festivals which are recognized and celebrated all over the country. Tourists can view, enjoy and participate in different, religious activities and cultures even inside the Kathmandu valley. If one just walks around in a kilometre distance, there is very chance that he/she can see Hindu worshipping, Buddhist chanting, meditating in various places. This might

even happen at the same spot as in the cases of Muktinath and Swayambhunath where religious sites and heritage are shared among the Hindu and Buddhist followers in Nepal.

Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation as applied to pilgrimage and religious tourism (adapted from Herzberg, 1974).			
Hygiene factors	Application to pilgrimage and religious tourism	Motivators	Application to pilgrimage and religious tourism
Salary	Income to afford travel, accommodation, time off work	Sense of achievement	Personal satisfaction, overcoming physical hardship of travel
Job security	Security of destination, travel arrangements	Recognition	Photograph, certificate, participation in ceremony
Working conditions	Quality of travel, destination, accommodation, freedom from conflict	Responsibility	Responsibility for own religious achievement, responsibility for others <i>en route</i> and at destination
Level/quality of supervision	Couriers, accommodation management	Nature of the work	Pilgrimage, experience at religious destination, participation in ceremony
Company policy and administration	Policy affecting religious travel and pilgrimage, administrative efficiency	Personal growth and advancement	Religious experiences <i>en route</i> and at destination
Interpersonal relations	Local inhabitants, fellow travellers, staff and volunteers at destination, travel company, accommodation		Satisfaction of spiritual needs, survival skills acquired and used on pilgrimage

FIGURE 3. Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation as applied to pilgrimage and religious tourism (Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective, Razaq Raj, Nigel D. Morpeth)

As shown in figure 3, Herzberg's theory of motivation, the pull factors for the religious tourists can be various. Some of them can be described as the religious tourists feel personal satisfaction and overcome the physical hardship of the travel when they reach to the destination, moreover they feel kind of achievement when they are at the religious place. Another strong motivator of the religious tourism, especially in modern age when there is a big role of social media in every individual's life, is social recognition. People go to the different religious sites and take the photograph and post it in the social media by which they feel social recognition, certificate of participation and taking part in the religious ceremonies are some other points which give people recognition. Besides this the feeling of achievement when people visit religious sites or pilgrimage is one.

Similarly, Herzberg has pointed out that the personal satisfaction which people get after visiting the religious tourism site is also a strong motivator. Religious experience, social trend of travelling and positive comments from fellow travellers are also mentioned as the motivation factors for the religious tourism. Especially, in the Nepalese context or in Hinduism, the social trend and religious experience can be counted as the strongest motivation factors for the religious tourism, religious achievement and social recognition come after.

While we talk about the positive factors which can affect religious tourism in Nepal, there might be some negative impacts too. For example, the religious sites might get effected or in other words there might be some damage, after the large gathering of people during festivals and religious occasions. The site can lose its authenticity after the modification, renovation and hence, can fail to attract more tourists. Another negative impact is loss of valuable statute and monuments from the religious site due to the flow of huge number of people. There are more chances that the priceless things around the monument can get stolen and destroyed, which will directly affect the religious site as well as religious tourism. Some people argue that there are number of places where people organize the cultural and religious programmes and ceremonies, quit often to attract the tourists. This can be considered as another negative impact because the original ritual programmes and ceremonies will lose their value by doing so.

These are some human related factors, while some can be influenced by the nature, too. Like the devastating earthquake in April 2015, at one hand, there is the very chance that this kind of a natural calamity can completely destroy the thousand years old religious monuments while at other hand it gives impression to the tourists that the place is not safe for visiting. The other kind of a natural factor can be floods, landslides and storms which can harm the religious tourism sites.

6 RESEARCH PROCESS, METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

6.1 Research process and methodology

The research method used by the author was a combination of collecting both primary data and the secondary data. The author went through different books, journals and reports and collected the secondary data and evaluated them. The author also went through the quantitative primary research process where the survey was done about the views and experiences of the respondents regarding the religious tourism and the author also believes that by evaluating the results of the survey the research goals were met.

6.2 Secondary research

The author went through a wide number of journals, reports and books and collected a lot of information, especially the numerical data were taken from the government institution like CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) Nepal, NTB (Nepal Tourism Board), MOF (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Nepal, UNWTO (The World Tourism Organization), ADB (Asian Development Bank) and World Bank.

6.3 Quantitative data collection

The author did the primary quantitative data collection through the help of an online questionnaire, where sixteen questions were asked among different nationalities about their views and experiences about religious tourism and especially the religious tourism in Nepal. The online application Planet Survey was used as a tool to collect primary data where different Facebook groups were used as a platform to get the required number of respondents. There were total of 77 respondents from different countries and professions.

6.4 Limitations, validity and reliability of the research

All the data taken with the purpose of the research are valid and taken from the reliable source. There are some limitations of the information collected during the research which cannot be made public because of the confidential reason and in order to keep the privacy of the respondents.

7 ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

7.1 Findings and major problem

Quantitative data collection method was used during the research and an online questionnaire was made, the website Survey Planet was used as the response tool and Facebook groups were made platforms from where all the respondents were approached. There were sixteen different questions asked among the respondents out of which fifteen were multiple choice and one question was of an essay kind. There were 77 respondents from different countries. Most of them were residents of Tampere in Finland, while others were from the different parts of the world, mainly from Europe and Asia.

The author made it clear to the respondents at the beginning of the questionnaire that all the information collected will be treated as confidential and used only for the study purpose. The results of the questionnaire survey are analysed with the help of the donut pie charts.

The first question asked was about the nationality. The results were that most of the respondents were Nepalese, 54 in number which was 70.01% of the total amount of the respondents, followed by the Finnish 13%, and there were six other respondents from Pakistan, 1 from India, among the others option there were American, Polish, Kurdish, Slovenian and British respondents, all were equally a single representative of their nationalities.

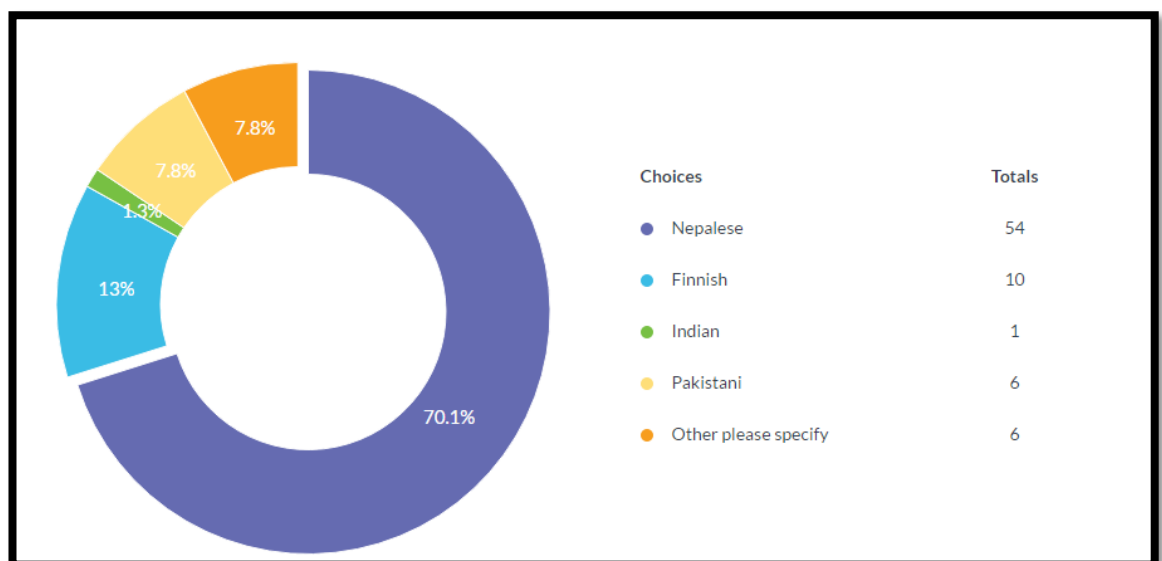


FIGURE 4. Respondents by nationalities

The second question asked was about gender and there were 56 male respondents with the 72.7%, followed by the female respondents who were 21, consisting the rest 23.3% of total 77 respondents. The results can be clearly seen in figure 5.

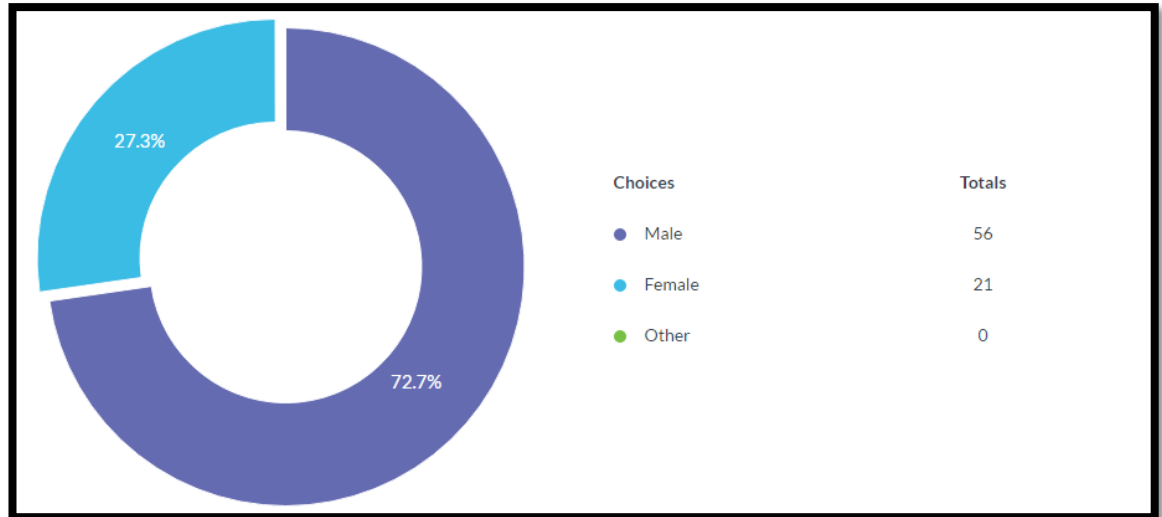


FIGURE 5. Gender of the respondents

The third question asked to the respondents was about their age. As shown in figure 6, most of the respondents were from 26-30 age group, 37.7% who were 29 in number, followed by 30+ age group who were 26 in number and 33.8%, followed by 20 of the 21-25 age group who were 26% of the total respondents, the lowest number of respondents was of 15-20 age group who were 2 in number and 2.6% of the total amount of the respondents. So this data shows that the most of the respondents were grown adults who were 26 or more years old.

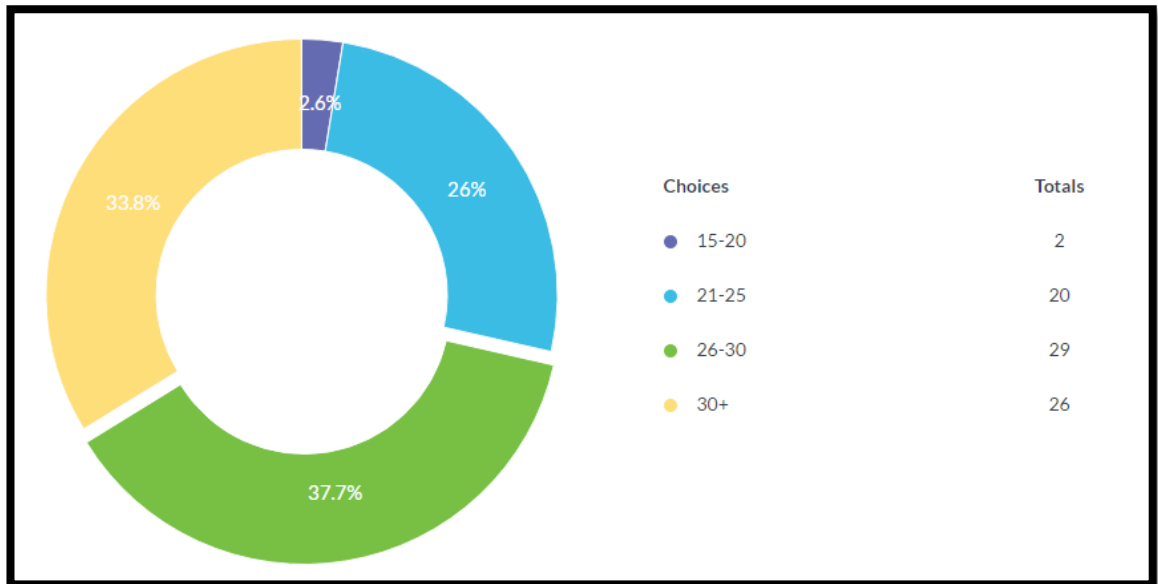


FIGURE 6. Age of the respondents

On the fourth question, the author asked the respondents about their status. The majority of the respondents, 48.1%, 37 in number were married, followed by 28.6%, 22 who were single, 20.8%, 16 were unmarried while one person was divorced and one person said that he/she did not want to specify his/her status. So these answers show that the most number of the respondents were married followed by single. The results can be seen in figure 7.

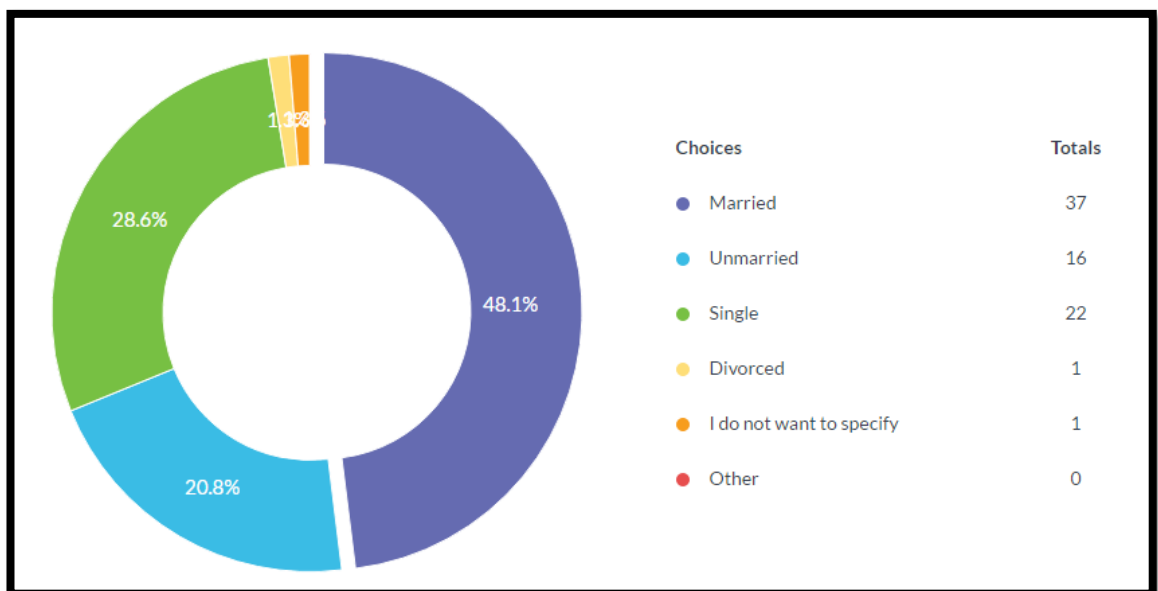


FIGURE 7. Status of the respondents

The fifth question was related with the profession of the respondents. The results show that almost more than half of the respondents, 50.6% were students, followed by 26% who said they belong to the other category, which they mentioned as self-employee, businessman, office worker, entrepreneur, insurance advisor, IT specialist, librarian, engineer, employee in private firm, researcher, deliverer, cleaner, and office boy. 14.3% of the respondents said that they do not want to specify what they are doing, 3.9% was equally divided between doctor/nurse category and teacher/lecturer/professor, and one person was a government employee. The results are shown in figure 8.

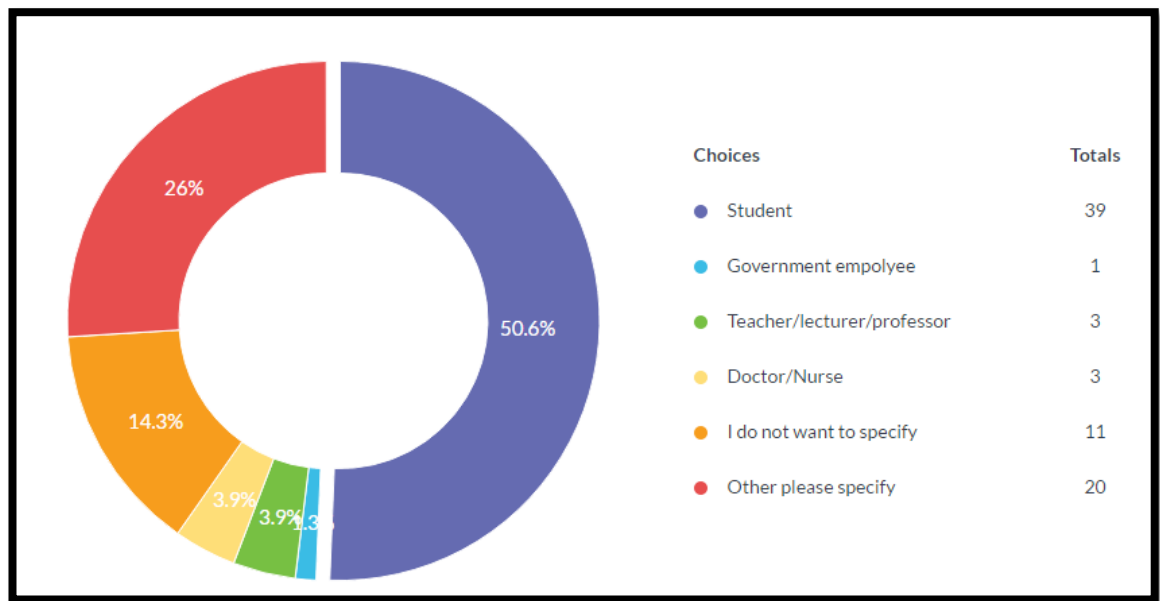


FIGURE 8. Respondents by the profession

The sixth question was about the religious tourism. It was asked whether the respondents are aware of religious tourism, have they ever heard of it, do they know what it means. 51.9% of the respondents, 40 people said that they know the term religious tourism while 35%, 27 people answered that they have heard of religious tourism but they do not know what it is and 13%, 10 people said that they have never heard about religious tourism. The majority of the respondents were aware of what religious tourism is and what it really means. The results of this question are shown in figure 9.

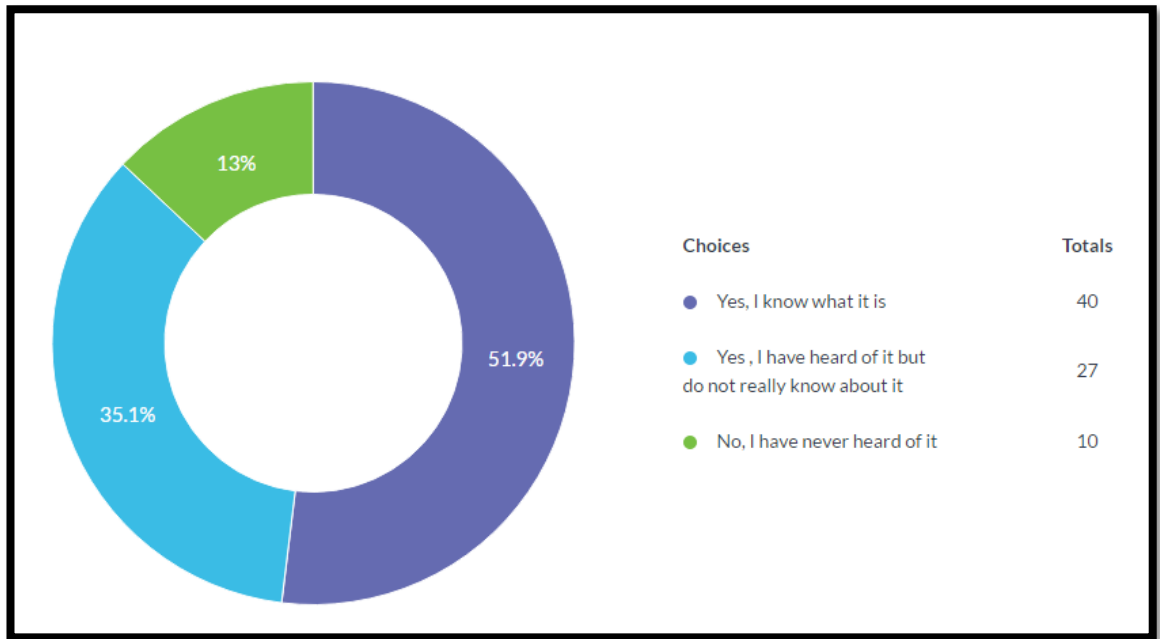


FIGURE 9. Knowledge of the respondents about religious tourism

The seventh question was: have you ever been on a religious trip? 48.7% of the respondents said they have never been on a religious trip while 36% said they have been on a religious trip a couple of times and 14.5% said they have been on a religious trip only once. There were no participants who go on a religious trip every year. Figure10 shows the results of this question.

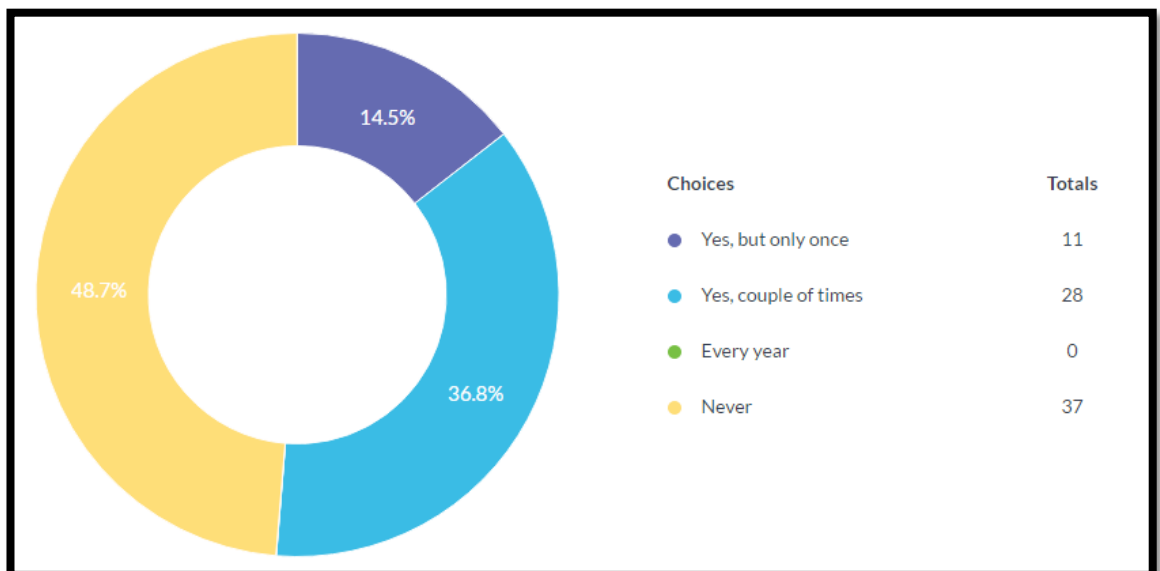


FIGURE 10. Respondents' experience of a religious trip

The eighth question was focused on if the respondents have been already on a religious trip who did they went with. This was not the mandatory question as all of the respondents might not had been on a religious trip. Among the ones who answered to this question 66.7% percentage of the respondents said that they went with the family, 18.8% said they went with friends, 12.5% said that they went with others. One person said that he/she went alone and no one said that they went as a couple on a religious trip. This result shows that most of the respondents tend to go on a religious trip with their family. Figure 11 shows the results of this question.

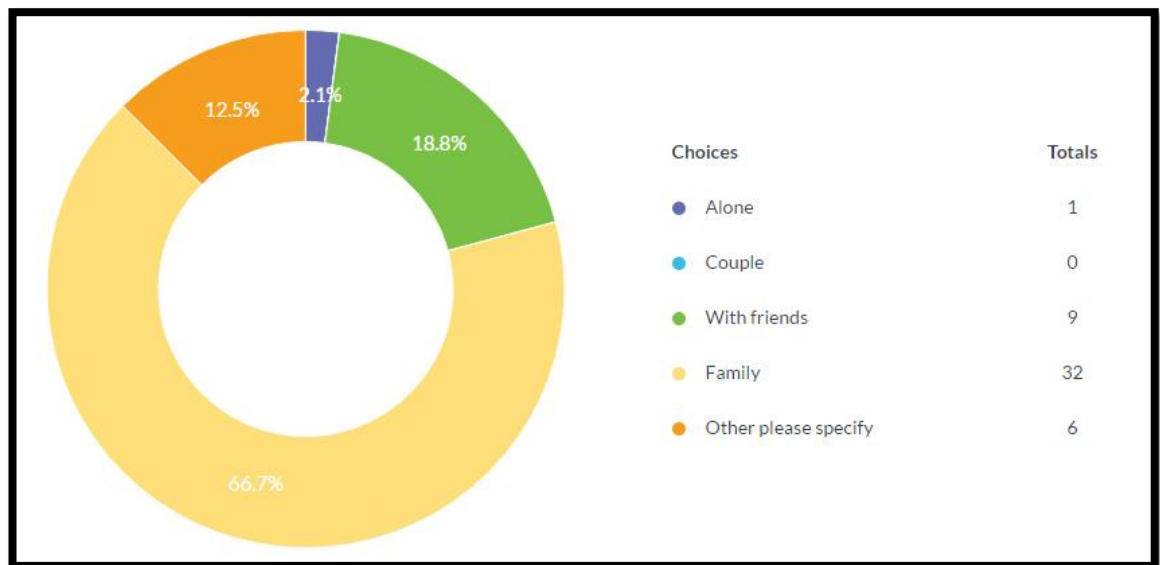


FIGURE 11. Respondents by travel partner on a religious trip

Ninth question of the survey was focused on whether the respondents consider themselves as a pilgrim or not. 68.8% of the respondents said that they do not consider themselves as a pilgrim, while 19.5% said they do not know what a pilgrim is and 11.7% of the respondents said that they consider themselves as a pilgrim. This means that most of the respondents even if they go often on a religious trip, do not consider themselves as a pilgrim. The author also thinks that this result might also suggest that the respondents exactly do not know the difference between a pilgrim and a religious tourist. Figure 12 reveals the results of this question.

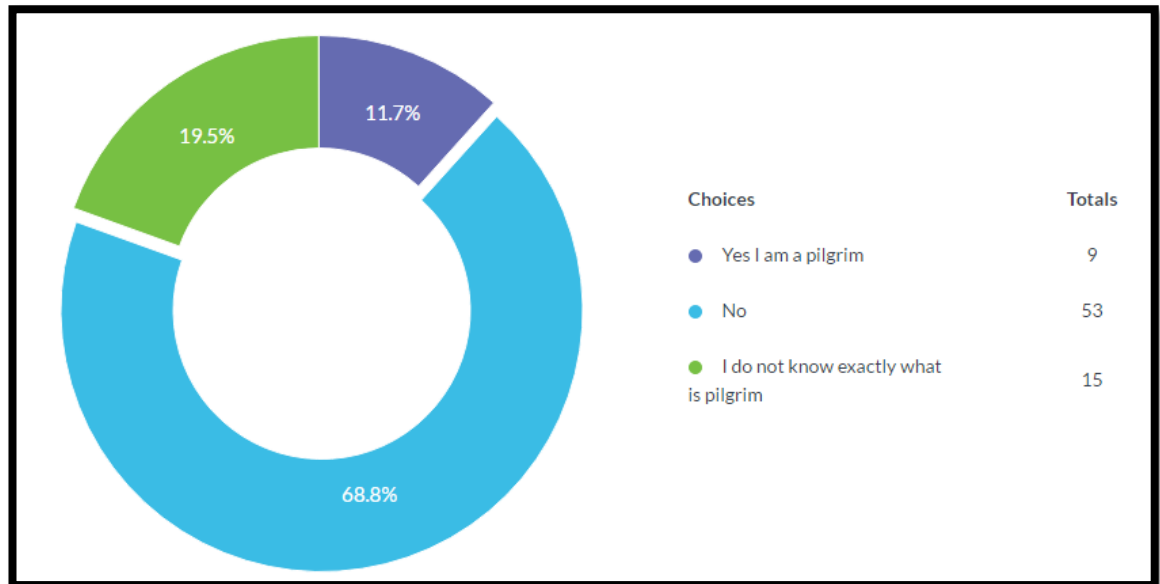


FIGURE 12. Respondents' consideration of being a pilgrim

Tenth question of the survey was focused on the selection of the destination of religious tourism. If the respondents had already been on a religious trip, where did they go. This was also a non-obligatory question because the author was well known about the fact that not all of the respondents might have been on a religious trip. Out of total amount of the respondents 61.7% said that they have been to Nepal for a religious trip, 18.3% said that they have been to India for a religious trip, 10% said that they have been to some other religious destination than the given options, which some of them mentioned as Turkey and Middle East, 5% said they have been to Pakistan for a religious trip, 3.3% said they have been to Finland, while one person said that he/she has been to Vatican City for a religious trip. The author believes that this result also shows that the majority of the respondents visit Nepal but at the same time this number might have been affected by the fact that most of the respondents of the survey were Nepalese. The results of this question are shown in figure 13.

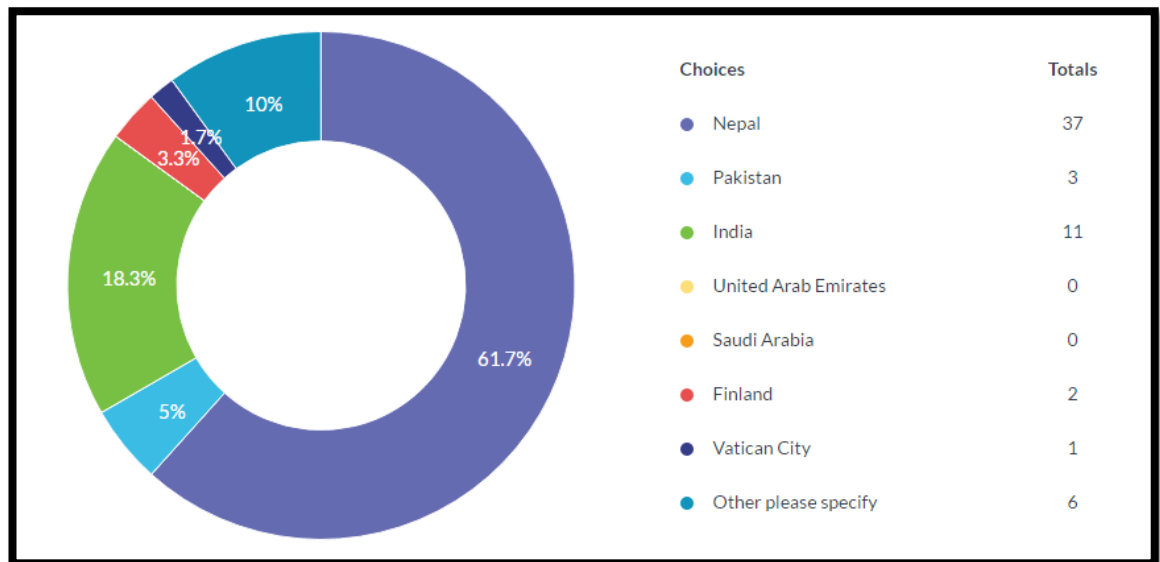


FIGURE 13. The destination of a religious trip

Eleventh question was focused on the purpose of the tourists visiting Nepal. The author wanted to know about the opinion of the respondents, what do they really think about the purpose of tourists visiting Nepal. This was a multiple choice question and the respondents were free to select as many alternatives or options they want. The results showed that the respondents think that mountaineering is the most famous purpose of the tourists visiting Nepal with 23.9% getting 64 answers out of 77, while trekking/sightseeing got the second popular position with 22.4% selecting for this option, there were total of 60 answers for this option out of available 77. The third most popular purpose was nature and wildlife with 20.5%, 55 out of 77 respondents chose this option, similarly adventure seeking got 20.5% with 48 answers, religious/pilgrimage got 13.8% with 37 answers, there were three who selected other options, and they were mentioned as business purpose and other types of visit by the respondents. One selected the option no idea. From the author's viewpoint, these results show that most of the respondents might have assumed mountaineering as first option because Nepal has most of the highest peaks on the earth and there are many climbers coming with the purpose of conquering the highest peaks.

The author also thinks that the selection of the option trekking and sightseeing was quite obvious because most of the tourists come to view the unmatched scenery of Nepalese trails. The author got little amazed with the third most selected option as nature and wildlife because there are not that much of tourists found to be interested in seeing nature and wildlife than in adventure seeking or for the religious purpose. Figure 14 puts light on these results.

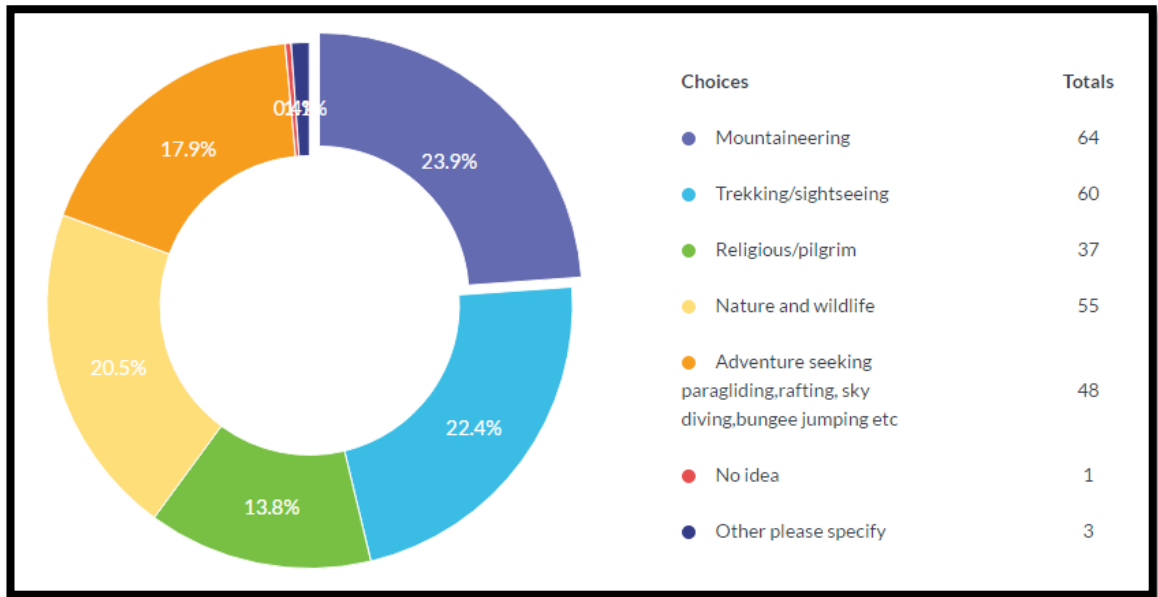


FIGURE 14. Respondents’ opinions about the purpose of tourists visiting Nepal

Twelfth question to the participants was what do they think about the scope of religious tourism in Nepal. 30 of the respondents which was 39% of the total response rate said that they think there is excellent scope of the religious tourism in Nepal, while 27.3%, 21 people said that there is good scope, 22.1%, 17 people said that do not know how the scope of religious tourism is in Nepal, 7.8% said that there is fair scope and 3.9% said there is poor scope of religious tourism in Nepal. So in author’s view this result also put light on the statement that there is excellent scope of religious tourism in Nepal. The result of this question can be seen in figure 15.

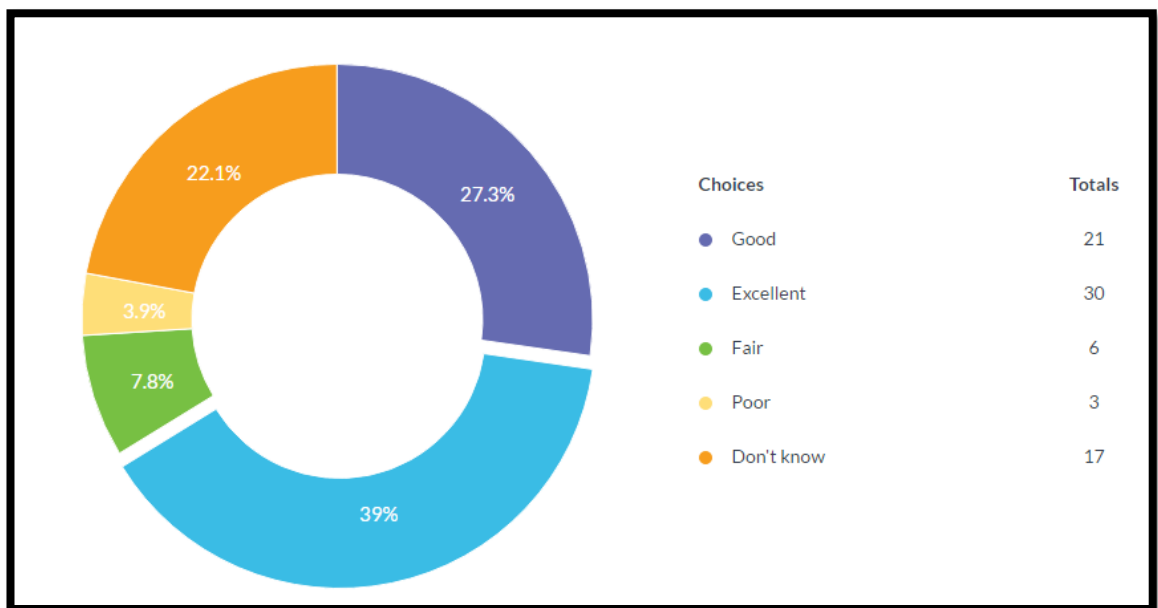


FIGURE 15. Opinion of the respondents about scope of the religious tourism in Nepal

Thirteenth question of the survey was related with the view of the respondents whether they think religious tourism can affect the Nepalese economy or not. 41.6% of the respondents said that definitely religious tourism can affect the Nepalese economy while 28.6% said that it can affect to some extent, 18.2% said that it may affect economy of Nepal, 6.5% thought it will not really affect the Nepalese economy and 5.2% of the respondents said that they do not have any idea, if religious tourism can affect Nepalese economy or not. This result shows that most of the respondents think that religious tourism can affect the Nepalese economy. The results are shown in figure 16.

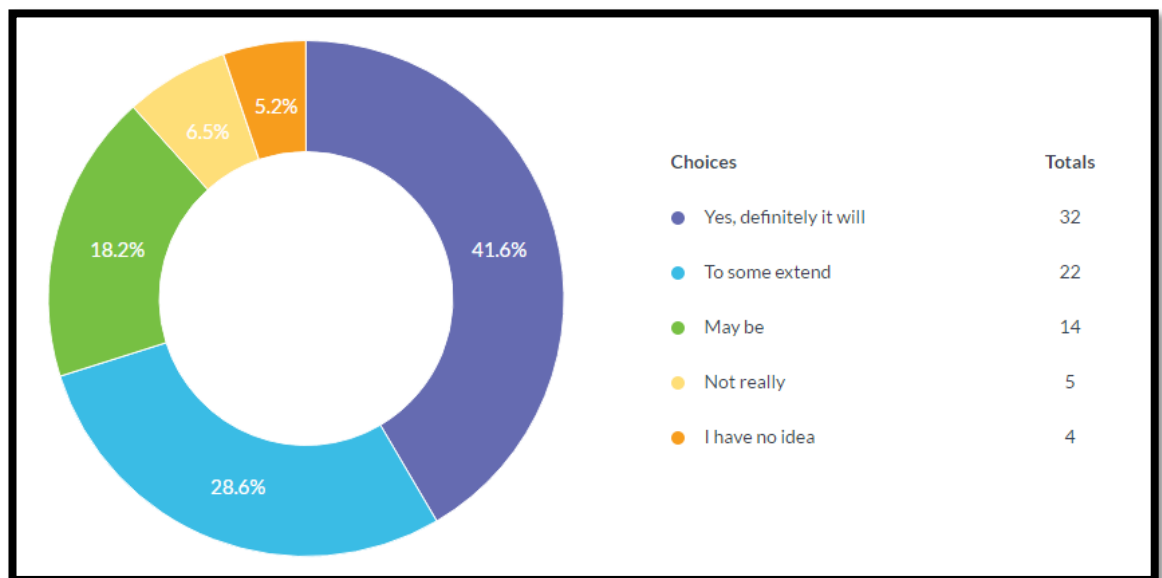


FIGURE 16. Respondents' view about the influence of the religious tourism on the Nepalese economy

Fourteenth question of the survey was focused on the type of services the respondents would focus on if they intend to go on a religious trip. This was also a multiple choice question and the respondents were free to select multiple options. The majority of the responses were given for the option security with the 59 answers out of 77 which was 27.3%, followed by accommodation, chosen by 55 people, 25.5%, similarly 53 people selected the option transportation, 44 chose the option guide, and 5 chose the other option. This result shows that the respondents are concerned about the security even though they are going on a religious trip. The incidents and unrest going throughout the different parts of the world have made people to think about the travel and selection of the destination. The results of this question are shown in figure 17.

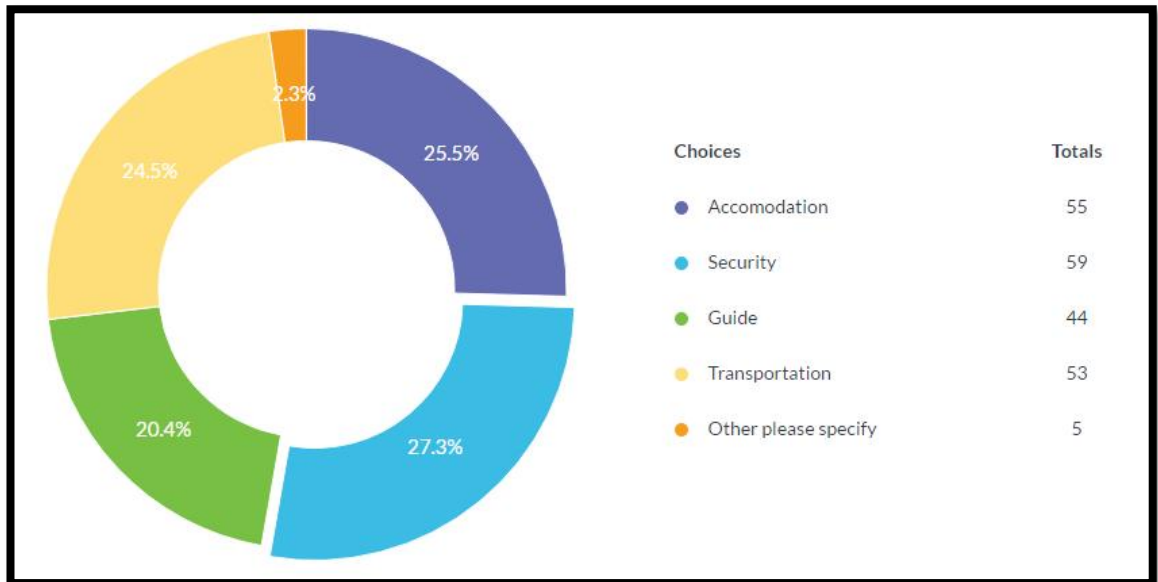


FIGURE 17. Types of services the respondents focus on, if they intend to be on a religious trip

Fifteenth and the last multiple choice question on the questionnaire was about the spending of the respondents when it comes to the religious trips. More than half of the respondents 54.5% said that they would like to spend between €500-1000 for a religious trip, while 24.7% said they can spend €1001-2000, 3.9% said that they might spend €2001-3000 for a religious trip, similarly 2.6% said that they can spend €3001-4000, 1.3% said that they can spend €4001-5000, 2.6% said they can spend even more than €5000 for a religious trip. 10.4% said that they would spend less than €500 or they actually do not want to spend any money on a religious trip. These results show that the majority of the respondents are ready to spend an average amount of money for the religious trip, which might be considered as a good sign for the religious tourism growth. The results for this question are shown in figure 18.

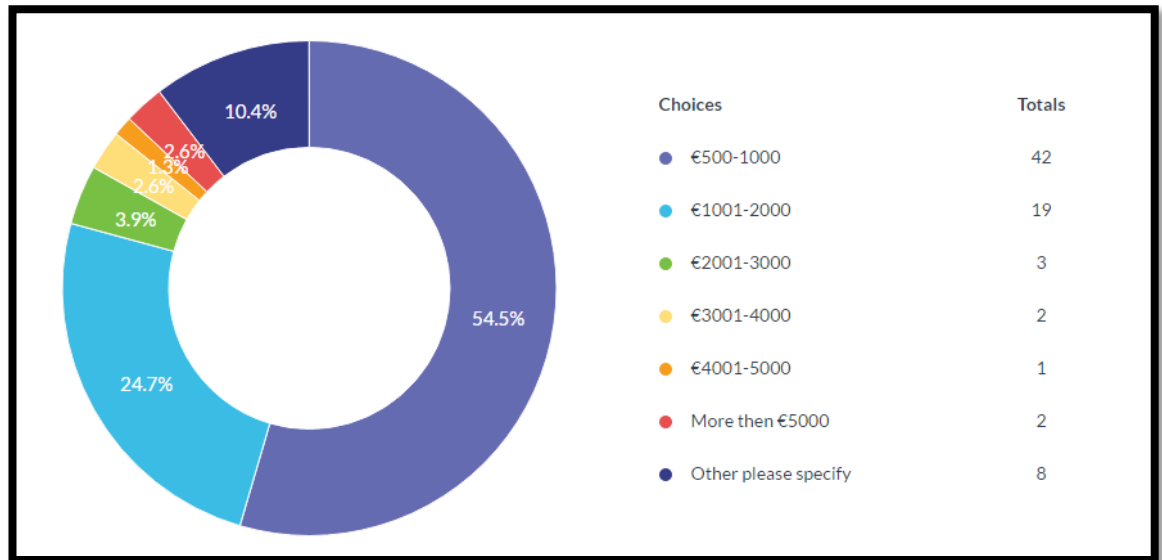


FIGURE 18. Intentional spending of the respondents if they intend to go on a religious trip

The last and final question asked was about the opinion or the suggestion of the respondents about the religious tourism in Nepal. Most of the respondents said that there is a good scope of religious tourism in Nepal, particularly related with the religions Hinduism and Buddhism that can attract a lot of more religious tourists and pilgrims to Nepal. If the infrastructure will be developed and some development is made in this sector, Nepal can boom its economy thoroughly.

7.2 Advantages and opportunities

As religious tourism is already the second most important contributor to the Nepalese tourism, there are many sectors which can benefit from it. From the airline company who board religious tourists to the guides, transport providers, food and beverage suppliers, accommodation providers and local shopkeepers, all involved parties can benefit from it. The number of jobs created by the tourism and especially religious tourism in Nepal is in increasing trend with the flow of tourists going up every year. The society, people and government everyone can get something from the development of religious tourism. While they get an opportunity to show their culture and lifestyle to the world, at the same time they can also learn from the visitors about their culture and lifestyle. Religious tourism is another medium to enhance the peace and friendship through this process.

8 CONCLUSION

Nepal is known for its famous landscapes and rich cultural heritage. From highest peaks in the world to the nature and wildlife, Nepal has it all to offer for the diversity of tourists. Religion, ever welcoming people, diversity in culture, language and traditions make Nepal as a unique destination around the globe. Many people just come to see Nepalese lifestyle and unity in diversity. The combination of Hinduism and Buddhism makes it a religious hub for both religion followers. Nepal is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and has some of the main temples of Hindu religion, which attract hundreds of thousands of religious tourists every year.

The tourism industry in Nepal is growing year by year, this has created thousands of job for the people of Nepal. When Nepalese economy is not doing well, this opportunity has served as a lifeline for many people. Religious tourism is one of the main contributors to the tourism growth and economy.

This study has put more light on the impact of the religious tourism on Nepalese economy. Furthermore, this study has pointed out the factors affecting religious tourism in Nepal. During the study, the views and experiences of the respondents from various nationalities were collected. These have not only expressed the potentiality of this sector but also have given suggestion about the areas to work on. The services random religious tourists seek for and what amount of money they intend to spend can be considered as key finding of this study.

Finally, the author thinks that there are still some areas to work in the religious tourism sector in Nepal. With proper development, conservation and advertising of religious tourism destinations in Nepal, soon the religious tourism sector can be the main contributor to the Nepalese tourism industry and economy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Online questionnaire

1(4)

Primary Quantitative Data Collection, Initial online Questionnaire Form

Application used: Survey Planet

Link:<https://app.surveyplanet.com/questions/57e02578c45a3306bc0eae73>

Platform: Different Facebook Groups

Welcome text: Hello Everyone! My name is Ramesh Pandey. I am a tourism student at TAMK (Tampere University of Applied Sciences). Please help me by answering some questions below, it will just take couple of minutes and everything you answer will be treated as confidential. Almost all the questions are multiple choice, so you just need couple of clicks. It will be a great help for me to complete my thesis. Thank you!

E-mail address of the participants(optional)

Survey Title: Religious Tourism in Nepal

Questions marked with * are compulsory to answer.

1. What is your nationality? *

- Nepalese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Finnish
- Other, please specify

2(4)

2. What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female

3. What is your age? *

- 15-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

4. What is your status? *

- Married
- Unmarried
- Single
- Divorced
- I do not want to specify
- Other

5. What is your profession? *

- Student
- Government employee
- Teacher/Lecturer/Professor
- Doctor/Nurse
- I do not want to specify
- Other, please specify

6. Have you ever heard of religious tourism? Do you know what it is? *

- Yes, I know what it is
- Yes, I have heard of it but do not really know about it
- No, I have never heard of it

7. Have you ever been on a religious trip? *

- Yes, but only once
- Yes, a couple of times
- Every year
- Never

3(4)

8. If you already have been on a religious trip, who did you went with?
- Alone
 - Couple
 - With friends
 - Family
 - Others, please specify
9. Do you consider yourself as a pilgrim? *
- Yes, I am a pilgrim
 - No
 - I do not know exactly what is pilgrim
10. If you already have been on a religious trip, where have you been?
- Nepal
 - Pakistan
 - India
 - United Arab Emirates
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Finland
 - Vatican City
 - Other, please specify.....
11. What do you think about purpose of tourists visiting Nepal? (you can select multiple answers for this question) *
- Mountaineering
 - Trekking/sightseeing
 - Religious/pilgrim
 - Nature and wildlife
 - Adventure seeking, paragliding, rafting, skydiving, bungee jumping etc.
 - No idea
 - Others, please specify
12. What do you think about scope of religious tourism in Nepal? *
- Good
 - Excellent
 - Fair
 - Poor
 - Don't know

13. What do you think, can religious tourism affect Nepalese economy? *

- Yes, definitely it will
- To some extent
- Maybe
- Not really
- I have no idea

14. What type of services will you focus on, if you intend to be on a religious trip? *

- Accommodation
- Security
- Guide
- Transport
- Other, please specify.....

15. How much would you like to spend for a religious trip? *

- €500-1000
- €1001-2000
- €2001-3000
- €3001-4000
- €4001-5000
- More than €5000
- Other, please specify

16. What is your opinion or suggestion about religious tourism in Nepal? *

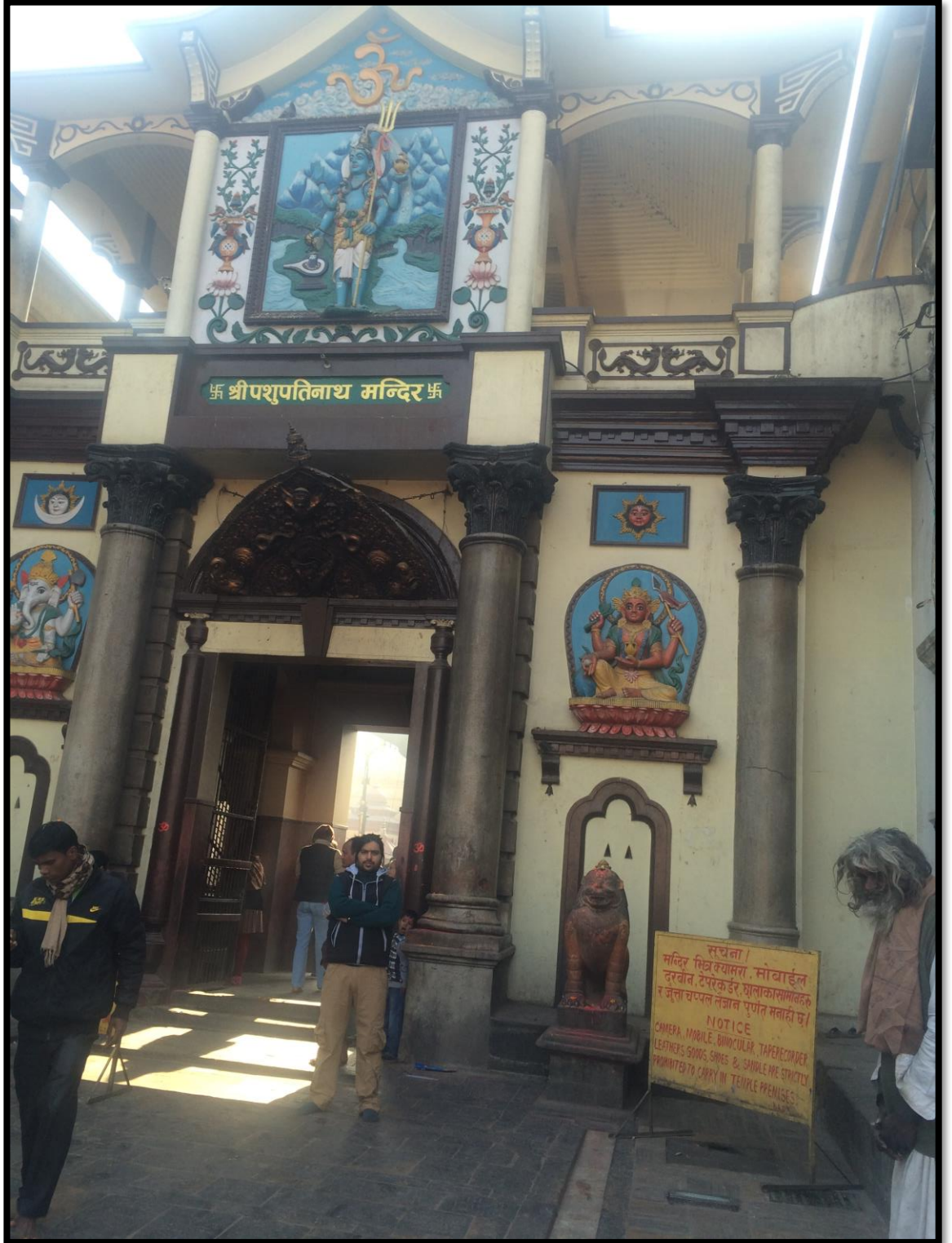
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Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 2. Picture



Author at Pashupatinath Temple