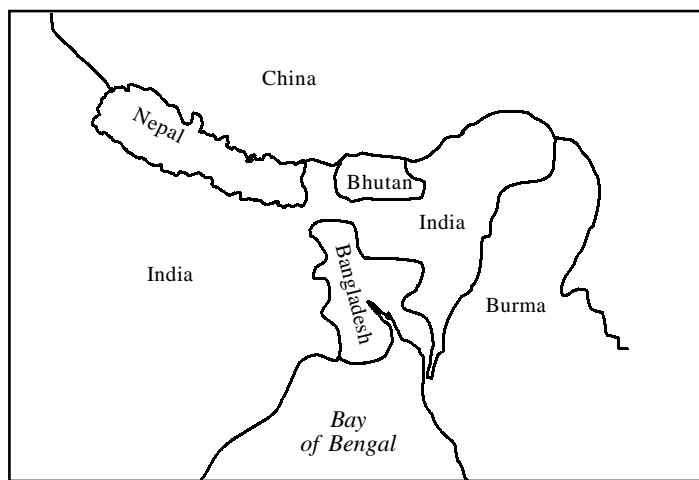




Tourism in Nepal

Tourism is the world's biggest industry. In 1999, over 500 million tourists created 11.7% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employed 200 million workers which is equivalent to 8% of all employment. One quarter of all this tourist trade goes into ELDCs such as Jamaica, Egypt, Kenya, Costa Rica, Thailand and Nepal. Tourism offers rapid foreign exchange earnings compared to their income from exporting goods. Nepal is classified by the United Nations as one of the five most underdeveloped nations in the world, and has a GNP per capita of US \$220 (1999), compared to the UK level of US \$20,870. As Nepal is without significant quantities of natural resources, tourism is needed to provide for its population of 24.3 million which is increasing by 2.5% a year.

Fig 1. Location of Nepal



Attractions for Tourists

Nepal has been receiving western tourists from the "hippie trail" days of the 1960s, with the first organised party of trekkers arriving in 1965. The Himalayas include 8 of the 10 world's highest peaks including Everest, Kanchenjunga I, Makalu I, Cho Oyo, Dhaulagiri I, Manaslu I and Annapurna I. Sagarmartha National Park – the ridge around Mount Everest – and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) are the two most popular trekking regions in Nepal.

Yet Nepal has a varied landscape with jungle, wetlands and low foothills. There is great biodiversity – 6,000 species of plants, 850 species of birds, 600 species of butterflies and 175 species of mammals including tiger, rhino, snow leopard, red panda and elephant. Nepal is officially a Hindu country but the Sherpas and other mountain people are Buddhists. This cultural diversity has been further increased by recent immigrants from Tibet.

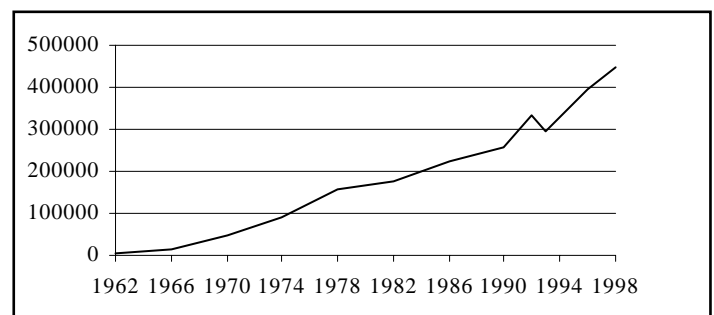
Tourist Figures

1996 figures show that tourism:

- represented 3.8% of GDP
- earned US \$117million in foreign exchange earnings (approximately 22% of the total) – trekking accounts for over 25% of tourist income. However it is estimated that almost 50% of potential tourist income goes back to developed countries as many of the tour operators are based in MEDCs
- employs over 100,000 people

Tourist arrivals have increased dramatically since the 1960s (Fig 2).

Fig 2. Tourist arrivals in Nepal 1962 - 1996



The largest groups of tourist arriving in Nepal arrive from wealthy MEDCs (Table 1). Although Nepal is linked with the image of young budget backpackers, 60% of arrivals are over 30 years old and have relatively large amounts of money to spend.

Table 1. Origin of Nepal's tourists by country

Year	Origin of Tourists (%)					
	N.America	Europe	Japan	Australia	India	Others
1993	8.6	37.6	6.0	2.7	28.4	16.6
1994	8.0	37.2	6.0	2.4	31.4	15.0
1995	8.1	33.2	7.0	2.5	32.3	16.9
1996	7.8	29.9	7.3	2.5	31.1	21.4

Arrivals peak in the dry season from October to March. Despite the increase in overall numbers in tourists to Nepal, there has been virtually no growth in the length of stay per visitor, which is averaged at 10 nights. The seasonal nature of tourist-based employment can present serious problems as does the widely varying popularity of different areas. The average daily expenditure has remained low – below US \$20 per day. However, there has been a shift away from general holidays, towards focused trekking and mountaineering holidays (Table 2).

Table 2. Tourists by Purpose of Visit (%)

	1980	1990	1996
Holidays/Pleasure	80.2	63.5	53.2
Trekking and Mountaineering	11.8	15.7	22.6
Business	3.4	4.6	6.4
Official	2.9	10.4	5.1
Others	1.7	5.8	12.7

Trekking and Mountaineering

- The most popular trekking areas are to Mount Everest, Langtang and Helambu and Annapurna, with the latter being twice as popular as the other two combined (Table 3). Although these activities are also moving into more difficult and expensive area of the Upper Dolpo and Mustang, trekking permits to Mustang are limited to 1,000 organised treks a year.

Table 3. Trekking permits issued (1995)

Trekking routes	Permits issued
Everest Trek	14 997
Langtang Trek	8 427
Annapurna Trek	50 012
Other Areas	11351

- Average trek is 14 days but ranges 3 to 30
- Independent trekkers follow tourist trails, carry their own belongings and buy food along the way

- 300 agencies now organise porter and Sherpa led treks which again use local food outlets and accommodation
- Adventure Travel Companies based in the tourists' country of origin provide leaders, guides, cultural interpreters, first-aiders and official directors. Such treks often involve camping but lodges are also available.
- Mountaineering expeditions are tightly controlled. The Ministry of Tourism requires a Liaison Officer and a royalty payment. Costs range from US \$15000 for Lhotse (8501 metres) to US \$50,000 for Mount Everest.

The impact of mountain tourists

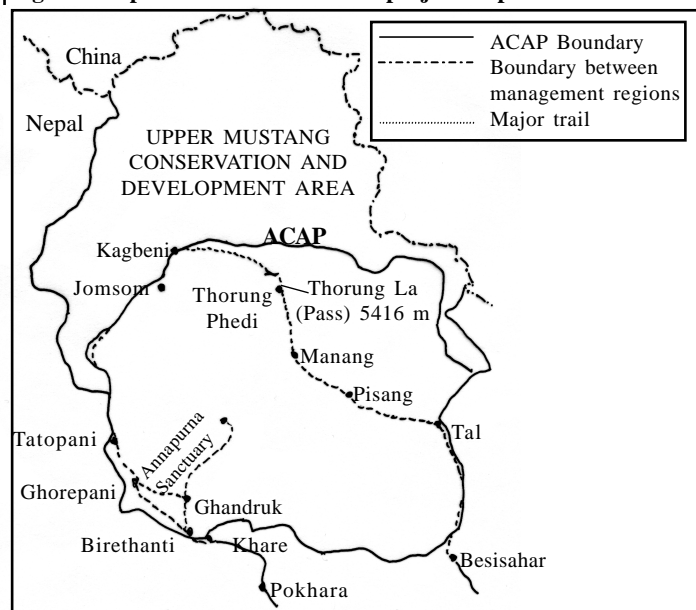
Mountain tourists generate employment in the form of porters, cooks, kitchen boys and guides. Workers can earn 10 times as much working for trekking and mountaineering parties as they can from agriculture. The numbers employed however varies with the type of trekking (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of Guides and Porters employed per person

	Guides	Porters
Groups in tents	0.51	3.1
Independent trekkers in lodges	0.07	0.09

Case Study – Annapurna

Fig 3. Annapurna conservation area project map



Conclusions of the project so far:

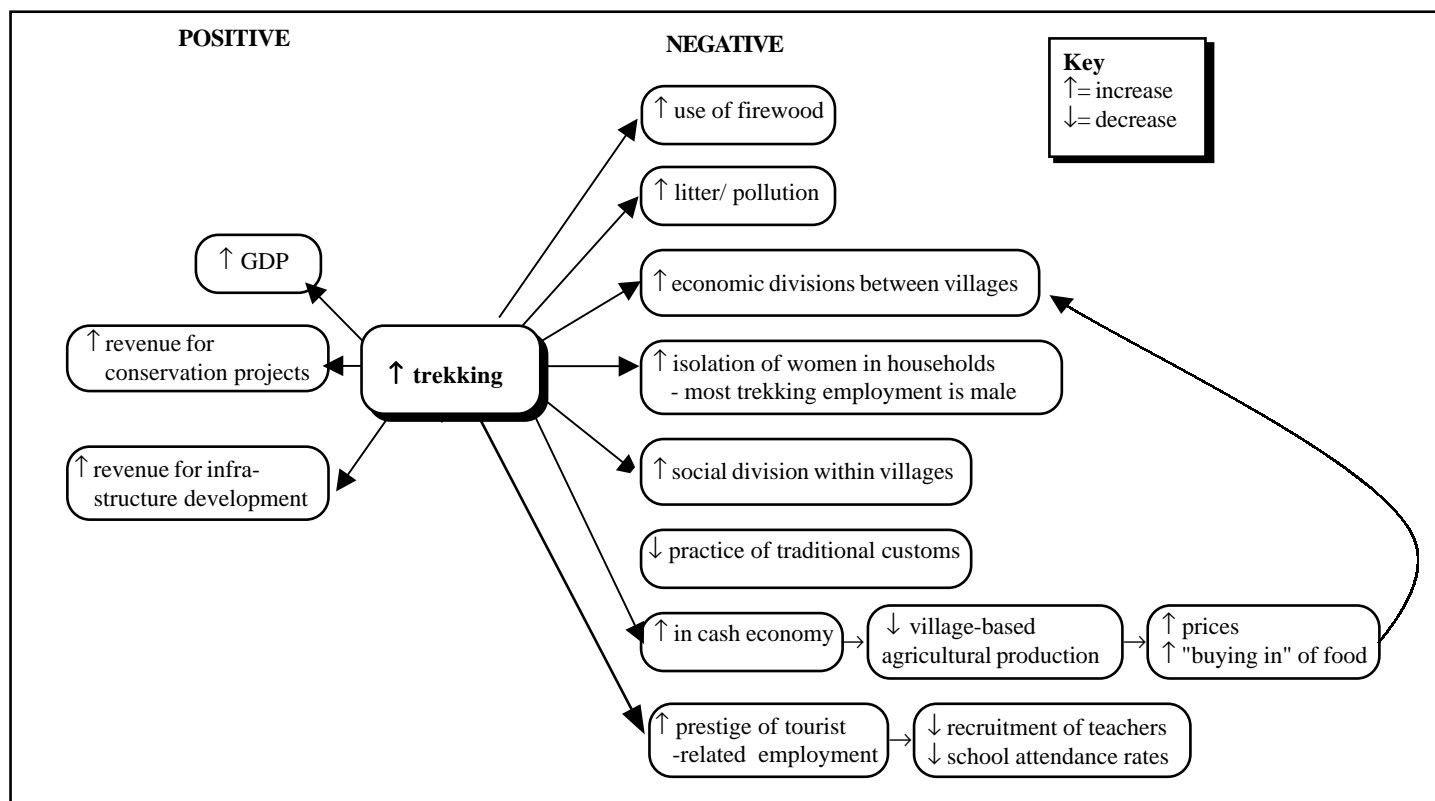
- ACAP receives 50,000 trekkers annually, most of whom are independent trekkers mainly from North America and Europe
- These trekkers pay 1 million US \$ annually
- Per capita spending is much higher in group treks (4 times that of independent trekkers) but independent trekkers spend most of their money within the ACAP whereas group trekkers fees go to agencies usually in Pokhara or Kathmandu
- There are over 700 lodges and teashops in the area but these are thought to retain between 7-10% of the tourism revenues. The income is spent on imported goods and services mainly benefiting the urban areas. Virtually all food and housekeeping items have to be imported from Kathmandu and Pokhara.
- Household questionnaires reveal that villagers spend the equivalent of one full day per week collecting firewood which will last 3.2 days
- The village of Tatopani (182 households, average 4.8 people per household) uses 20,000 bundles of firewood annually
- Tourist lodges use 6,500 average of bundles annually – approximately 25 % of the total
- Tourist use of fuel may not be representative of villages in ACAP because:
 - Tatopani is at a low elevation therefore relatively warm
 - hot springs supply the tourists with hot water
- ACAP has introduced wood burning stoves, micro-hydro electricity projects, back-boiler water heaters and solar water heaters to try to decrease deforestation
- ACAP has sponsored trail maintenance and bridge construction

Main Recommendations

- Construct visitor information centres near the immigration offices in Kathmandu and Pokhara which stress environmental problems associated with trekking
- Increase trekking fees (questionnaires have shown that trekkers are aware of the environmental problems they cause and are willing to pay more for environmental protection)
- Promote independent trekking

- The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACAP) receives 60% of all trekkers.
- It is composed of three areas (Fig 3)
 - Upper Mustang Conservation and Development Area
 - Annapurna Conservation Area
 - Annapurna Sanctuary – a sacred valley
- The aim is to reduce the volume of degradation caused by trekking
- The approach:
 - involve local people in the reserve
 - provide economic development to locals
 - preserve the environment
 - encourage minimum impact – tourist should conserve firewood
- ACAP has now been running 14 years

Fig 4. Mountain Tourism in Nepal



All types of trekker have to pay park fees to enter the national parks or conservation areas. In 1999 trekkers also had to pay for permits to visit any areas. As part of its commitment to liberalising tourism policy, the Ministry of Tourism has decided to waive the permits for Everest, Annapurna and Langtang, the three most popular destinations, but the permit still applies to all other areas. The government intends for 30-50% of park fees to be fed back into the local communities.

Besides deforestation, tourism has led to serious litter and pollution problems. In 1984 it was estimated that a group of 15 tourists on an organised trek produced a total of 25 kg of non-biodegradable waste (Table 5).

Table 5. Litter deposit in mountain environments (kg)

Area	Number of trekkers	Total Litter in kg
Annapurna	37,902	56,853
Everest	11,366	17,049
Langtang	8,423	12,635
Others	3,582	5,373

Waste includes plastic water bottles and batteries. The Everest trek used to be referred to as the Andrex Trail, from all of the toilet paper left alongside the route. It is also estimated that about 50 tonnes of litter from climbing expeditions is spread over and around the Mount Everest area. Pollution of water sources has occurred by siting toilets too close to or over stream and by the use of chemical soaps for washing.

In the **Sagarmartha National Park** part of the royalties paid from mountaineering is used by the Sagarmartha Pollution Control project created in 1991. However, the extent of the rubbish problem has also created a unique form of tourism, where groups have paid to join expeditions to remove the rubbish from Everest. With the help of local volunteers and national park staff, over 30,000 kg of rubbish was removed. Since then a deposit system has been organised and refunds are paid to expeditions only when their litter has been removed. All human waste must be transported from Everest Base Camp for disposal.

Social and Cultural Impacts

Tourists have introduced and accelerated the uptake of **western fashion**, music and accessories such as Walkmans. “Trekking Sherpers” now wear imported hiking boots, colourful wool sweaters and down Parkas and are immediately distinct from farming neighbours.

Amongst the Sherpa communities there has been a significant decrease in **agricultural production** and **school attendance rates** have fallen as young Sherpers are attracted by the prospect of acting as guides. Jobs such as teaching which were previously viewed as prestigious are now much less so. Villages are becoming more dependent on cash rather than the more traditional means of barter or reciprocal labour. Thus, previously self-reliant villages are becoming tourist dependent. An increasing proportion of food is purchased rather than grown within the village. This has led to increasing food prices, which further disadvantages the villages which are not on the tourist trail.

In the Kingdom of Lo (Mustang) which was opened for trekking in March 1992, it has been reported that tourism has produced significant effects - children begging for food, money and sweets - children pestering visitors to buy small objects or mobbing those who wish to take photos unless a bribe was paid - children using swear words and gestures which have been taught by visitors and the loss and theft of antiquities estimated at £800,000 per year. The major effects of tourism are summarised in Fig 4.

Acknowledgements:

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