Raju Kumar Gurung

MARKETING RELIGIOUS TOURISM DESTINATION

Case study: The Birthplace of Gautama Buddha, Lumbini, Nepal

ABSTRACT

Kokkola-Pietarsaari Unit	Date May 2016	Author/s Raju Kumar Gurung
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Lumbini is the birth place of Gautama Buddha who is the founder of Buddhism. Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world. There are about 350 million Buddhist people in the world and Lumbini is one of the important pilgrim places for them. Out of four major Buddhist pilgrimages in south Asia Lumbini is one of them. Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kusinagar are situated in India and they attract many Buddhist pilgrims but comparing with those destinations Lumbini is not able to attract a reasonable number of visitors.

The main aim of the thesis was to find out the better marketing tools and find the marketing area to focus to reach the target customers, analysing from the present research of Lumbini to attract a significant number of visitors. Also here we will discuss the present scenario of Lumbini including, tourism attractions, tourism services and types of tourism.

The quantitative research method was used here. Questionnaires were distributed to several visitors randomly and asked them how they knew about Lumbini and about attractions, accessibility, re-creation, accommodation, activities and price. The report analysed the present situation of Lumbini. Giving focus on the result, it will find which the areas to improve are and what kind of marketing tool should be used to achieve the goal.

ABSTRACT
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1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing of any product or service is a backbone of any business as marketing connects between producers and consumers; the more you connect, the more you get benefit. Tourism is one of the fastest growing business sectors with multiple competitors. To stand out all tourism operators have to apply good strategies to reach customers and satisfy them. Travelling trends have been changed from long holidays to short and frequent ones due to the development in transportation, communication and other various related services in tourism sectors. Motivation, pull and push factors and purpose of visit have been different than early years.

In the present era of tourism market customers are very conscious of services, which are offered. Due to the development of communication and technology information travel very fast and it is speedy to get the information about your desire. Only offering good quality service is not enough for consumers. Hot issues such as safety and security, environment impacts, workers rights, child labour and economic impacts should be addressed properly by the service provider to create a genuine status in the market.

Tourism industry is one of the largest growing sectors of business with a large number of service providers. Good quality service, nice place, good staffs, reasonable price and easily accessible destination, but you still need to make a bridge to reach your target customers. Marketing is the process which will help you to connect with your target customers. There is a process of proper marketing in tourism. Identifying supply and demand, market segmentation, correct way of promotion, branding, market research and marketing research are the key points of marketing to be obtained while marketing tourism products.

Lumbini is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. It lies in the southern part of Nepal. The majority of Buddhist followers reside in Asia. All the pilgrim sites have their own history and importance. Lumbini has its own importance religiously, historically and culturally among the Buddhist followers and other interest groups of people but it has not got enough exposure, as it should have gained comparing to the other Buddhist sites. According to the life cycle of Buddha there are four major pilgrim sites, three of them lie in India, and one in Nepal. There is a vast difference in the ratio of people visiting Buddhist pilgrim sites in India and Nepal. There could be various reasons behind getting a smaller number of visitors by Lumbini but some of them are very serious. False marketing by

neighbouring country is one of them. They claim Buddha was born in their country and still they are spreading the fake message to the world by very responsible persons of their country. This message will leave Lumbini in the shadow.

The main aim of this research is to find out the way how people get to know Lumbini and the prime motives to visit this particular destination and their concerns. It is also aimed to identify the loopholes causing Lumbini to get bold in the national as well as international tourism market. The ultimate objective of this thesis is to suggest the tourism stakeholders marketing channels to be focused in Lumbini to attract a large number of tourists. The main theoretical framework of this thesis is circled around marketing related literature and the current physical status of Lumbini. The empirical part of this thesis includes the writer's own survey. This survey is done using the quantitative research method for which a questionnaire survey module was chosen.

2 RELIGIOUS TOURISM AS A SPECIAL INTEREST

The precise stated interests of individuals and groups in which the provision of customized leisure and recreational involvement are driven is considered special interest tourism. The special interest tourist selects to participate in tourism products or services that satisfy their particular interests, this is why special interest tourism is assumed for a diverse and specific motive. Douglas, Douglas and Derrett (2001) mentioned Poon's (1997, 47) suggestions about special interest tourism in their book "Special Interest Tourism". And Poon advises that "new tourism is a phenomenon of large scale packaging of non-standardised leisure services at competitive prices to suit demands of tourists as well as the economic and socioenvironmental needs of destinations". (Douglas, Douglas & Derrett 2001, 3.)

Travelling with a fundamental motivation of entertaining or practising special interest is defined as special interest tourism. This could include different hobbies, activities, or a special destination. This type of tourism attracts a comparatively smaller number of highly dedicated visitors. This is an alternative to mass tourism, this tourist likes to engage with particular products or services that fulfil their special interest and needs. (Kim 2007, 27-29.)

Religious tourism is one kind of special interest tourism, which usually involves the followers of particular faiths visiting locations that are considered holy sites. Religious sites are not only visited by the pilgrims but also visited by non-religious tourists since they have cultural, historical and religious significance. Most niche of tourism industry is directly affected by economic instability but this religious tourism is less affected by these economic issues because the reason for travelling is very strong and it plays a very important role in their lives so money does not play a very vital role to stop from visiting a destination. (Destination World 2010.)

2.1 Religious beliefs in general

Several authors have defined religion in various ways. In general, it is a system of beliefs that directs people to live in discipline and carry on their daily lives in a spiritual way. The religions have their own histories and the concept refers to concrete cultural manifestations of different generations (Hultgård 2007/2008, 44). Hultgård, in his writing in Confluence interdisciplinary communications 2007/2008 mentioned a definition of religion given by Cicero as worship of the gods. According to

Richards, "religion is a system of beliefs in a higher being that are held with great faith and commitment. There is a universal belief in a higher being in all religions" (Richards 2007, 216). In the same way, Ketola have defined religion as a divided set of viewpoints that comprehend supernatural beliefs and answers related to them and in addition answers regarding the basic questions of human existence (Ketola 2008, 19). But these definitions hold only for the religious believers excluding atheism.

It has been expected that around 90 percent of people in the world affiliate to a religion. In many places of the world children are legally of the same religion as their parents which is one of the main reasons why a large proportion of people have religious beliefs. There are several factors which influences people to believe in religions. Superstitious and anthropomorphism nature, things happening for a reason, belief in justice, hope of afterlife and gathering people are the main reasons behind one's faith in religion. These factors play an important role in their lives. (Pepper 2013.)

Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhish are the four major religions in the world. The percentage of Christianity holds the highest (i.e. 33%) and the second highest is Muslims (19.6%) followed by Hinduism and Buddhism (13.4% and 5.9% respectively) (Robinson 2015). According to Ketola, the religions can be categorized into ten historic religious traditions, namely Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikkhism, Taoism, western esoteria, the modern religions and Neopaganism (Ketola 2008, 22).

2.2 Religious tourism and pilgrimages destination

Religious tourism is the pioneer form of tourism which has begun almost with the dawn of humanity. From the ancient times religious destinations were not only a part of the cultural landscape but they also had become a vital factor in local marketing and prime parts of the economy of hosted destinations. Some of the religious places such as Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Fatima in Portugal and Lourdes in France attract millions of religious tourists, charity workers, missionaries and humanitarians creating a huge financial transaction in the destination. (TN Global Travel Industry News 2014.)

Religious tourism, in the literature of tourism studies is, often described interchangeably as a cultural heritage tourism, cultural tourism, cultural heritage tourism and spiritual tourism by different authors. It is difficult to give a specific definition of religious tourism and the reason behind it is that cultural and religious travel are used synonymously. This is because the majority of cultural tourists visit reli-

gious destinations as a part of their itinerary and are thus referred to as religious tourists. (Nieminen 2009, 14).

The general meaning of religious tourism implies travelling with the prime motive of experiencing religious activities or the products they induce such as art, culture, traditions and architecture (Strategic Initiatives & Government Advisory Team 2012, 2). Religion and tourism are interlinked with each other. The pioneer form of tourism was in the form of visiting religious pilgrimages such as Christians travelling to Jerusalem and Muslims to Mecca (Destination BC corp. 2014, 2). Religious pilgrimages have always been one of the dominant factors for motivating people to travel. Tracing back to the religious history it is found that major religions have globally stimulated tourism as a foundation for spreading their own religious beliefs (Raj & Morpeth 2007).

The founders of the three main religions; Gautama Buddha (Buddhism), Prophet Mohammed (Islam) and Jesus Christ (Christianity) have inspired various acts of pilgrimage as a part of their establishment. A significant number of pilgrims travel every year to their particular sacred destinations to accomplish their religious missions. Some famous religious destinations for the pilgrimage in the world are: Mecca in Saudi Arabia – the Sacred Hall of Islam where prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven; Jerusalem – the Church of the Holy Sepulchure, the Islamic Aqsa Mosque and the Sacred Solomon Hall of Judaism; Bethlehem – home of King David of Ancient Israel for Judaism and Church of the Nativity; and the Vatican – the centre of the Catholic religion. (Raj & Morpeth, 2007, 98-99.)

Besides the above-mentioned religions there are several other religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism, which carry their own norms and values. They have their own special religious destinations. For example, Pashupatinath Temple in Nepal the most important pilgrimage destination of Hindus.

3 MARKETING RELIGIOUS TOURISM DESTINATION

This specific chapter deals with the relationship between marketing and religions. It also demonstrates the general concept of marketing. It also gives a clear idea of marketing research, strategy and marketing mix. Besides, it explains how social media marketing influences consumer behaviour. Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of branding in marketing products or services.

3.1 Marketing in religious tourism

Religion has been transformed into a product, which can be sold in a marketplace. As we know, religions are based upon faith and faiths of all kinds must not only compete with each other instead with a great number of more entertaining and leisure activities. While marketing religious tourism, faith must be used as a brand name to compete effectively since the easily recognizable symbols and mediators with whom religious prospects can make immediate connections with the marketplace. (Einstein 2008.)

The interconnections of religion and marketing of religious products seem to be ineluctable in our culture with some striking similarities. Religious people see the religious products as a means of conveying their faith while sellers see them as a means of spreading faith. Religion and marketing institutions both depend on conveying a message and a willingness of people to believe in what is intellectually unbelievable. Through the means of rituals, practices and myths religions creates their meaning while marketing does the same through advertising and shopping. Similarly, religion is about accepting a belief system and marketing is accepting belief about a product. Religions have faith communities while marketing has brand communities. Religion and marketing have a symbiotic relationship, for example, religion is considered as a product and the products as religions. (Einstein 2008, 75-78.)

Religious products and faiths are both essential sources for identity creation. Through the process of marketing faith brands are popularized as spiritual products. The religious products may or may not be a tagline. For instance, it can be books, religious courses, spokespeople – monks, priest, a spiritual practice or a fusion of all of these. Mediator, for example, monks, priest or television personality or some public figures are an important aspect of the brand. (Einstein 2008, 92.)

3.2 Marketing concepts and strategy

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have a value for customers, client's partners and society at large (American Marketing Association, 2009). Now every marketer has to put the customer in the focal point, and they must be satisfied. To achieve this goal to capture customers need, values and satisfaction we should go through the proper process of marketing.

The importance of tourism and entry of many new destinations into the market have forced all to emulate and compete the battle at a global level (Reige et al 2001) Bakri Hassan, Soliman Abdel Hamid and Al Bohairy 2010, 270). The tough competition in the tourism industry led destinations to develop attractive, strong, innovative and competitive destination brands. Most tourism activities took place in a particular destination; therefore the destination itself forms a pillar of any modelling that is done for the tourism system. Destination can be seen as an area that includes all services and goods that a tourist consumes during his or her stay (Terzibasoglu 2004).

Destination should be marketed as a clear mirror no any artificial flavour added to allure customers if they did not find what was promised this will mislead in the future. To do a better destination marketing these factors should be considered: attraction, public and private amenities, accessibility, human resources, image and charter and finally price. If these above mentioned points are provided properly that could attract a reasonable number of visitors to a certain destination.

Marketing is essential in every business to reach its objective. Especially tourism industry is a highly competitive service industry. Customer's demand is getting higher and specific, so a service provider has to maintain the expectation of the customer. Safety, environment issue, price and quality of service are the key indicators for customers to choose the tourism product. To be able to explain better and satisfy customer about the product is known as marketing. Marketing is not just about selling, but also it is about selling service or goods satisfying customers. (Bennet, & Strydom,. 2001, 5-8.)

Tourism business is all about hospitality services, the better you care, handle customers through good quality service, the happier they are and give positive feedback. There are many different kind of people with various tastes, purchasing power and concerns, regarding this a service provider should offer them different kind of services and package programmes in different price ranges which meet their demand. The flow of tourists is not equal all year round so the volume is low and high in certain peri-

ods of time. To be able to sustain in the low season and be able to maintain well in the high season is a good part of hospitality management and marketing. (Bowie & Buttle 2004, 4-10.)

Now it is very easy to get the information about anything you want. The internet makes it easier and faster. People nowadays get acquainted with all related information before they plan or think about any place to travel. Price, quality of services, customer feedback, and travel books ratings, safety, and security and many more are the key issues to make the decision. Information can also be collected from travel agencies, tour operators and Destination Management Organisation. To make all information accessible for customers is all the process of marketing. (Weiermair & Mathies 2004, 97-100.)

In summary tourism industry is getting bigger and better every day though there are destination and tourism sectors not getting enough exposure but having enough potential. One of the vital causes behind this is proper marketing. In the present a scenario tourist can virtually travel to any part of the world any time if the information is available on online platform. Any tourism business not able to get attention of these virtual customers keeps on struggling in the market to gain success. So marketing should be done with the intention to get the attention of this virtual group of people who are the potential customers. So correct marketing strategy, use of modern technology and tools, good staff needs to be implemented to get two way communications between tourism business firms and potential customers. This is the key to successful business. (Solimar International 2014.)

Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers' requirements profitably. The marketing plan has to be the best available scenario, guideline and roadmap of actions for the company. Despite settings goals are not sufficient to achieve the target. Better marketing is a key to success of any business today. Though marketing is not a new process the importance of marketing has been more essential in this tough competitive era. Marketing tools should be used nicely and wisely fulfilling customer's demand having a profit margin. If this operation is executed properly any business could be able to survive in this tough business world. Today every sector is full of competition, sellers are trying their best to allure customers and clients have more option. There are many types of marketing tools and we can apply them according to the nature of our product and service. There are three most important duties while making a marketing plan and they are interrelated. The first one is to set the marketing objective, secondly target market and the last one is developing the marketing mix.

Marketing strategy is the heart of any business to achieve its objective. In simple way, which is the best way to gain the success? To gain success we should come up with a good plan. First we have to set business objective, there are different kind of customers and they all have different perception so we have to create awareness, and sales and advocacy. (Satell, 2013.)

3.3 Marketing research

Marketing research is an important element in introducing products and services that produce value in the mind of the customer. The customer's perception is changed over time, for example, what customers value this year may not be the same in coming years. As such, the features that generate value cannot simply be assumed from general knowledge, some data must be gathered and analysed. The ultimate goal of the marketing research is to guide the managers to make important marketing decisions. (QuickMBA 2010.)

Research is the process of identifying market value and target customers. Marketing research is vital in destination marketing. It is very essential to find out customer's perceptions about the product or service you are offering them. What customers want, who the target people are if services offered them meet their demand, if they are satisfied, how to communicate with them. Analysing this entire question will give a clear picture to make marketing a plan. Research will give you a clear picture of both negative and positive sides about the product, places needed to be improved and the correct way of marketing. (Brigs 2001, 55-66.)

Most business credibility is to attract customers to use its product again and again and also spread a positive message to other potential customers. Survey is one of the best ways to do research, including different types of interviews and following up the customers to find out more about product the and services problems, satisfaction and improvements. (Brigs 2001, 55-66.)

3.4 Market segmentation

Before launching any programme or offering any service or product, producers should have the right knowledge of the target market and its potential consumers. This is an important tool to identify target customers and their behaviours. Basically market can be segmented into four types: geographic seg-

mentation, demographic segmentation, psychographic segmentation and behavioural segmentation. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 212-227.)

Geographic segmentation is used in marketing to know the residing area of target consumers. This means which countries, cities or villages are the focal part to do marketing about your product. Especially when marketing religious a destination one should know the appropriate countries, cities or any area that practice related religion, thus, alluring them to visit the particular destination. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 212-227.)

In demographic segmentation, market segmentation is done on the basis of people's age, gender, income, religion, race, generation, nationality, and social class. Demographic factors are very vital in determining the consumers' needs and demands according to the interest of specific targeted groups. It gives a basic idea of a consumer's potentiality to consume specific product and services.

Psychographic segmentation is done on the basis of consumers' social class, lifestyles and personality characteristics. There are several motivational factors that attract customers to buy a product which increases the consumption of the related product and services of a company. While doing marketing of a religious destination, marketers should be able to exhibit all the sectors which convince their doubts such as, safety, variety of activity and atmosphere in the destination. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 212-227.)

In behavioural segmentation, market segmentation is done on the basis of customer's knowledge, attitude, buying and consumption behaviours. It is very important for marketers to know when they are marketing a religious destination for instance, when and where customers want to travel, where do they go to buy the product and what type of programme is suitable for them. Analysing this information service providers have to launch a marketing plan. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 212-227.)

In summary, market segmentation enables marketers to measure the needs, demands, and motivational factors that pull potential customers to travel to the offered destination and make a programme according to their choices. Thus, it helps in boosting to attract significant numbers of customers to the particular destination.

3.5 Marketing mix

Market is increasingly competitive; consumers have numerous options to buy the products and services. Any business firm or organisation has to find the demand of consumers and apply the right to way to satisfy the needs of them. To deliver your products and programme to customers in the right way you need to have a unique marketing strategy. This unique marketing strategy is called as a marketing mix or the Ps of marketing. It includes product, price, promotion, place, people, process and physical evidence.

Product is the main object we offer to our customer. It can be tangible and intangible too. Tangible products are those which can be seen and felt and services and activities are the intangible ones. A tourist buys the product based on the promise of the product. We should find first the need of the customers and develop the right product and promise them the right service. There are many sellers offering the same service but why would they choose our product, the answer should be given through the features of our product. We must know the purchasing capacity of the customers, so try to sell them what they can afford. The product must provide value for payment and follow- up regularly to maintain the quality and standards. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 4.)

Price plays a vital role in selling a product. The price of a product should be competitive, and the target group should be ready pay it. Price can be determined analysing a few basic things which are as follows: the cost of running a business, the demand of the service/product, the price in the competition, and the commission to the resellers. There should be a profit margin too to sustain the business. Regularly monitoring the price of the product in the market is essential to know whether it is still valid or not in the current market because there are some ups and downs in the price according to the demand and supply. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 4-5.)

Promotion is the process of telling your customers about you and your product or services. The right way of doing promotion could make huge differences in generating revenue. In this modern age there are many means of promoting your services and the most common and popular ones are these social media which are fast as well as cheap too. Beyond these newspapers, electronic media, mouth advertising are already on the line. New ideas are necessary because the same promotion theory for a long period of time cannot be used. It is necessary to invent innovative sales approach offerings and strategies to be on the game. In modern days, people are spending more and more in promotion to reach all their target customers through all kinds of means which are available in the market. Good promotion in-

cludes two way conversations with the customers if possible to know their opinion. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 5-6.)

Place plays a very vital role in this tourism industry. Tourism industry is based on service and destination. Thus, choosing the right place is very important. Place includes where the events take place and where the selling location and channel are. The selling place should be in the right place and the destination place should be displayed nicely. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 5.)

People are the backbone of any industry. People performance plays an important role and it cannot be under estimated in the impact on marketing. Staffs should be very dynamic. Especially front line officers and customers care staff have a direct impact on how your product is perceived. You should be aware of knowledge and skills of your working force and update motivating them too get enough efficiency. Marketing mix has an interrelated impact on each other but people part is the important one regarding marketing. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 6.)

Process means being easy to do a business with. This means we should be very easy with customers, sometimes they ask lots of questions which make you feel annoyed but you have to be patient and able to do what you are assigned. The process problems that are the most annoying to a customer are those that are designed for the provider's convenience, not the customer. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 6-7.)

Physical evidence can be seen in the picture and official websites of the company but the services can only be perceived by the customers and this could make buyers make the decision so we have to show them how our service would look like by providing physical evidence, pictures customers feedback and rating given by popular news, magazines etc. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 7.)

3.6 Tourism destination promotion

Promotion is that part of marketing which creates awareness and interest about a product and services to the customers. A company uses advertising, sales promotion, sales people and public relations to spread a message to allure interest in a product from target customers.

3.6.1 Branding

Branding is a very essential tool for marketing but it is more important when you are doing destination marketing because there are many sellers who sell a similar product. Beach, sun, sea, mountain, monasteries, churches and other tourism attractions are not enough to attract visitors unless they have a brand value. To have a brand value the destination needs to offer unique services and be able to distinguish them from other service providers. A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those other sellers.

When branding word comes up, the nation brand comes along with it. Especially when you are going to do branding of a destination, the nation brand plays a vital role. There are many countries or destinations offering the same kind of services but, the country's political, economic and cultural, security and other reputation make a direct impact on buyers to choose the destination.

The branding concept should include both producers and customers because marketing of a successful destination is affected by both pull factors and push factors. Destination branding is defined as: selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building (Cai Liping 2002.)

There are several benefits of branding and the most important of them are as follows. It helps to reduce the choice among many destinations and the impact of intangibility, minimises the risk factor of choosing a destination for a trip, and facilitates precise segmentation about a specified destination. Therefore, the main purpose of branding a destination is to establish credibility, and unique identity to get hold of from the crowded market to get chosen by potential customers.

3.6.2. Social media marketing

In the changes of time and technology, marketing tactics also have been changed. Traditional marketing is old now so people tend to like marketing in social media. Social media is a revolution in the world of communicating. Today it is an important part of millions of people's daily hangout junction. People surf on the internet for various purposes, and this is a phenomenon place for marketers to promote their products and services direct to the target customers. Today most of the business, from small to big have a main marketing agenda in social media marketing and get involved frequently connected with media to survive.

Social media marketing is marketing using online communities, social networks, blog marketing and many more. It is the hottest trend in the marketing sector. This is the fastest way to reach to the target people. It has lots of benefits, it is easy and fast to make communication, cheaper than other means of marketing. And another important side of social media marketing is that it helps to listen to customer suggestions and complaints to react instantly. A huge portion of travellers search and collect information shared by others travel experiences from their trips. There are billions of people surfing on the internet every day Graph 1 shows the statistics of active social media users of 2013. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube are some of the famous online platform to do marketing. (International Journal of Enterprise Computing and Business systems 2011, 1-9.)
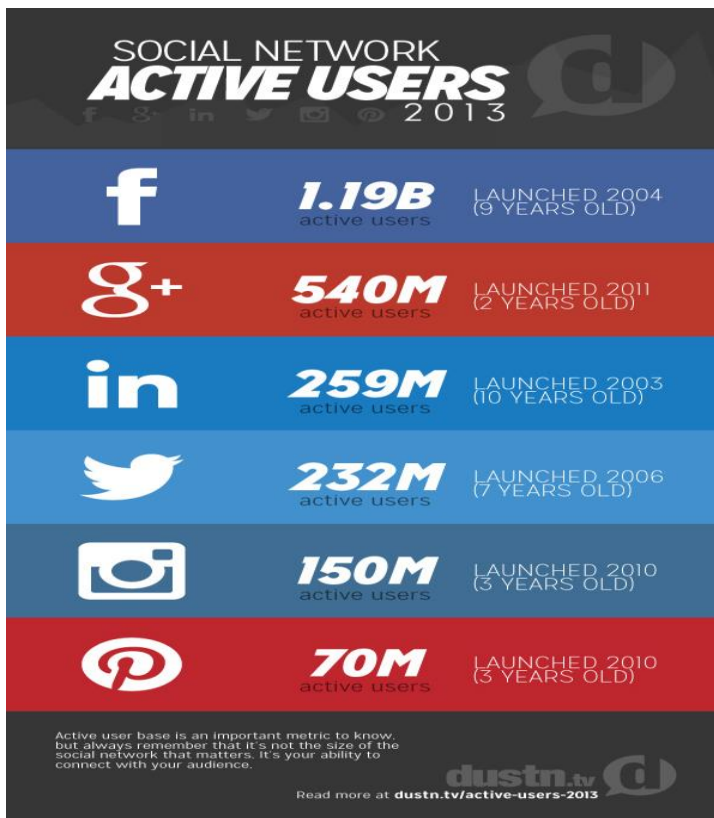
GRAPH 1. Social Media Active Users Statistics (Bennett 2013)

4 LUMBINI

Lumbini is one of the major tourist destinations for Buddhist and non-Buddhist people from all over the world. This chapter includes the descriptive history of Lumbini as well as its religious significance. The present scenarios of tourists and availability of facilities and services are also explained in this chapter. Along with it, the major attractions of Lumbini area are also mentioned.

4.1 History of Lumbini

Lumbini is the birthplace of Lord Gautama Buddha who is the founder of one of the world's great religions. Siddhartha Gautama was his real name. He was born in 623 BC. In Rupandehi district of Southern Nepal which was testified by the inscription on the pillar erected by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in 249 BC. He was born in Shakya dynasty as the only child of King Suddhodhana and Queen Mayadevi. The archaeological remains of Buddhists monasteries and stupas from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century AD provide the evidence that Lumbini is one of the major Buddhist pilgrimage centres from an early period. (UNESCO 2015.)

Lumbini was a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site until the 14th century A.D. Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of India visited Lumbini in 249 BC. To sanctify his visits to Lumbini he erected a pillar in which the inscription verified his presence. Similarly, two Chinese travellers Fa Hsien from the 4th century AD. And Hsuan Tsang from the 7th century AD described their visits to LumbiniThis is well documented in the chinese traveller's history. They have explained about stupas, gardens and other related aspects of Buddha's life. Khasa King Ripu Malla from Nepal also visited Lumbini in the 14th century and left evidence with an additional inscription on the Ashoka pillar. However, Lumbini remained isolated after the 15th century AD until an archaeologist Anton Führer and Khadga Shamser, a governor of Palpa, Nepal, rediscovered the Ashoka pillar and other archaeological remains of Lumbini in 1896 AD. Moreover, archaeologists discovered the flawless stones on the bank of a river which marks the exact spot of the birthplace of Lord Buddha in 1996. (UNESCO 2015.)

4.2 Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the largest religions of the world. The number of Buddhists is estimated at around 350 million comprising about 6% of the world population. Comparing with the other religions it is the world fourth largest religion. China, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar are the most Buddhism populated countries in the world respectively (Maps of World 2015). These countries have been practicing Buddhism since centuries in their own perspective.

Siddhartha Gautama, later known as Lord Gautama Buddha is the founder of Buddhism who was born in a royal family. He saw people getting old, suffering, greed and decisiveness. To get rid of these problems he mediated for a long time under a tree and finally one morning he found the solution to get free from all these hurdles. That is the time when he got enlightenment or nirvana. Nirvana is a stage when your mind is joyful and free from physical and psychological impairment. This is the way Buddha shows others to achieve nirvana and is known as Buddhism. It is the final goal of Buddhism to get the enlightenment.

Lord Buddha had found out four noble truths of life; to live is to suffer, suffering is caused by desire, suffering can be treated by destroying all attachment, and all this can be achieved if we follow his eight noble paths. The eight noble paths of Buddhist teachings include having the right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration (Got Questions Ministries 2015) which is shown below in graph 2.
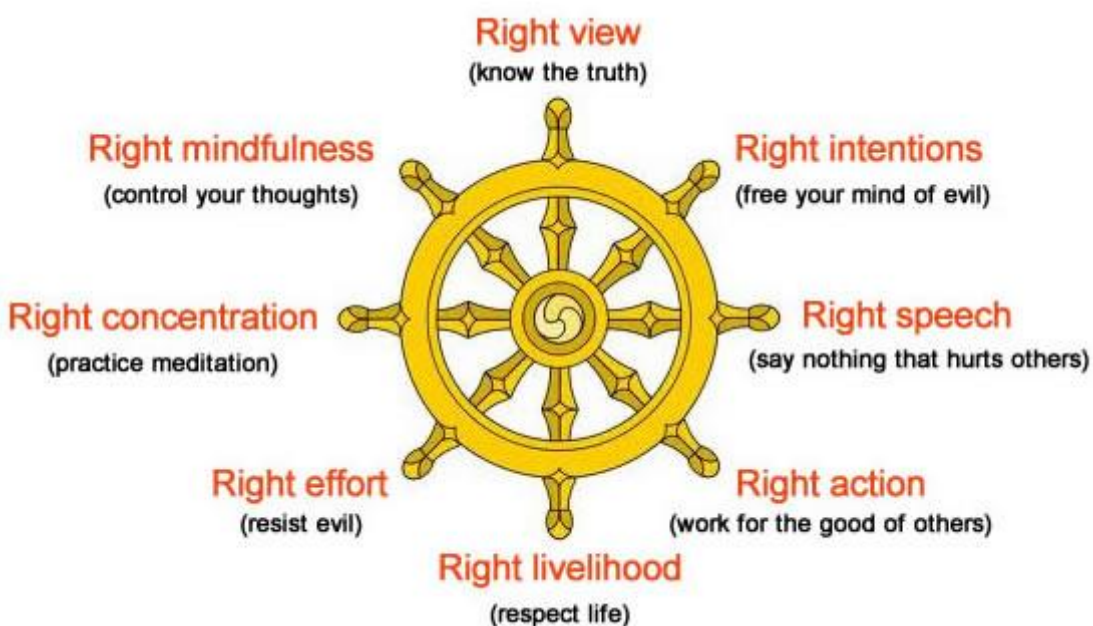
GRAPH 2. Eightfold path of Buddhism (Source: KNXtoday 2015)

4.3 Amenities

Amenities are the services that are offered in the destination to fulfil the demands of visitors in the destination. This contains a huge range of services, for instance shopping malls, restaurants, transportation, accommodation and hospitals. In many destinations these amenities are run by the private sector as well as government.

4.3.1 Accommodation

Accommodation is one important part of tourism industry. Where ever people make a trip they need a place to sleep. As time has passed, a lot of improvements and facilities have been added to make accommodation services comfortable. High standards and comfortable accommodation services give support to popularise the destination. There are different kinds of accommodation services offered according to the purchasing capacity and interest of customers. Accommodation does not directly allure tourists but it plays a vital role to support tourists to choose or recommend the destination. (Enugu state Tourism Board 2015.)

Accommodation service is good in Lumbini. There are various types of accommodation services available and you can choose according to your budget and personal interest. The price range is very diverse from 5 dollars to 128 dollars. Prices may differ according to the season. There are nine well-furnished and equipped with modern facility hotels and eighteen bed and breakfast places in Lumbini region. You can search information and can book hotels in Lumbini online. (TripAdvisor 2015.)

4.3.2 Transportation

Transportation has a vital role in the tourism industry. People travel from their residence to the destination for various purposes and there need a transportation service. Transportation service connects travellers to the preferred destination. People can choose the modes of transportation according to their budget, time and interest. (Research gate 2015.)

Lumbini is situated in the southern part of Nepal. It is 286 kilometres from the capital city and the bus takes about six hours depending on the traffic in the highway. There are two easy means of transportation to reach Lumbini, one is by flight from Kathmandu which costs around 180-220 and another one is catching a local or tourist bus which charges around 10$ and 15$ respectively. The flight takes thirty minutes and the bus can take five to six hours. You can also hire motorbikes or private cars to reach Lumbini. (The Longest Way Home 2015.)

4.3.3 Attractions

Attraction is the key factor to motivate a tourist to travel to the destination. As being the birthplace of Gautama Buddha most of the attractions of Lumbini are related with the life of Buddha. The main attraction of Lumbini is Mayadevi Temple dedicated to the mother of Lord Buddha. It contains a sandstone carved with scenes of Buddha's life and ancient ruins. To the south of this temple lies a holy pond or Shakya Puskarini pool where Mayadevi took a dip ritual bath prior to Buddha´s birth. Another attraction is Lumbini Museum. It has a varied collection of Mauryan and Kushana coins, religious manuscripts, terra cotta fragments and stone and metal sculptures. Moreover, the significant numbers of monasteries built by the various countries China, Myanmar, Japan, Thailand, Korea and Vietnam have also increased the architectural significance of Lumbini. (Adventure Thirdpole 2015.)

Lumbini falls under tourism master plan developed by a Japanese architect Kenzo Tange. This plan has been designed to give tourists an experience of worldly activities to the path of spiritual experience through spiritual purification. This plan was approved in 1978 and estimated to wrap up in 1985. But, it is not able completed in that specific time frame. In 1985, Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) was established to implement the elements of Kenzo Tange master plan. Kenzo Tange master plan covers an area of 5 x 5 miles with the central square mile being the Sacred Garden where the UNESCO world heritage property is located. The 1 x 3 mile area of the master plan includes three zones: New Lumbini Village, Monastic Zone and the Sacred Garden, which are parts of Lumbini Project Area. The remaining area is the buffer zone which was designed to protect the 1 x 3 mile Lumbini Project Area. (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 15.)

The zone in the North of the Lumbini Project Area is New Lumbini Village that represents "worldly" activities from which pilgrims enter the site to initiate their spiritual journey. This zone contains the

tourists' related services and facilities such as hotels, restaurants, tourist and administration centres, museums and research institute. As per the master plan, components of this zone are yet to be implemented. The estimated budget required to implement the remaining components of this zone is USD 23,131,000. (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 20.)

The Monastic Zone is in the middle of the Lumbini Project Area which has been designed in such a way that visitors are to attain knowledge and undergo spiritual purification before they proceed to the sacred place where lies the birthplace of Lord Buddha. This zone consists of 42 plots for the construction of various Buddhist monasteries from around the world. This zone has been divided into West and East Monastic Zone with the Central Canal in the middle separating the West from the East. The West Monastic Zone has 29 plots that symbolize the Mahayana (and Vajrayana) schools of Buddhism. Similarly, the East Monastic Zone has 13 plots that represent the Theravada school of Buddhism. In these zones there are also meditation centres for pilgrims and visitors. At present, it was found that six plots remain for the construction of new monasteries. The estimated budget required to complete the remaining components of the Monastic Zone is 26 million US dollars. (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 21.)

The central attraction of Lumbini is the Sacred Garden within which lies the UNESCO world heritage property. The Sacred Garden consists of important archaeological remains which provide the evidence that Lord Buddha was born in this sacred place. It consists of the Marker Stone inside the Mayadevi Temple, which depicts the exact spot of Buddha´s birthplace, and the Ahoka Pillar, which was erected in 249 BC by Emperor Ashoka. UNESCO declared Lumbini as the birthplace of Lord Buddha which was testified by the inscription on this pillar (UNESCO 2015). The nativity sculpture inside Mayadevi Temple also depicts Queen Mayadevi giving birth to Lord Buddha. The Sacred Garden represents enlightment. The construction is going on according to the master plan for the protection of this place. The estimated budget required to complete the remaining components of the Sacred Garden is USD 5,976,000. (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 23.)

A Central Link connects the three zones of the 1 x 3 mile Lumbini Project Area. It consists of a canal along with pedestrian paths on both sides and symbolic pavilions. This canal is 12 metres wide. It literally signifies transition from worldly life to the stage of enlightenment. It is planned that tourists can travel by boat through this canal but without using combustion engines. (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 24.)

Besides the attractions mentioned in the Tange's master plan, the Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) consists of a significant number of attraction sites. The GLA consists of three districts namely Kapilvastu,

Rupandehi and Nawalparasi (UNDP/UNESCO 2013a, 13). Each district concentrates on a major archaeological complex within which lies Lumbini. The central attraction is Lumbini and it lies in Rupandehi district. The two sites given as Tilaurakot in Kapilvastu and Ramagrama in Nawalparasi are on Tentative WH lists (UNDP/UNESCO 2013b, 22-23). Tilaurakot is the place where Buddha spent his life as Prince and Ramagrama is said to have one of the eight relics of Lord Buddha.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For collecting data and information, there are two different types of research methods. The author in this thesis used the quantitative research method to find the solutions to the sophisticated problems regarding marketing in religious destinations for which Lumbini was taken as a case study. A questionnaire survey module was prepared which is attached in appendix I in this thesis.

5.1 Quantitative research methods

A quantitative research method literally relies on the numerical evidence where collected data are statistically analysed. It is one of the key components of research methods. To conduct the research through the quantitative method the collected data and information have to be in numerical form in which mathematically based methods can be used to analyse the data. Thus, quantitative research methods deals mainly with collecting numerical data to illustrate a certain phenomenon of specific questions (Aliaga & Gunderson 2000).

A questionnaire survey was conducted in Lumbini tourism site. It was conducted in the month of April. There were altogether 22 questions. The questionnaire was distributed randomly to several visitors out of which 31 people responded. To analyse and interpret the data, collected numerical values were statistically analysed through SPSS program. SPSS stands for the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences which is used in the statistical analysis of data developed by SPSS incorporated and acquired by IBM (International Business Machines) in 2009 (Janalta 2016).

5.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability is the extent to which the measurements of the data are consistent meaning that the degree of any research findings would be the same when the research was to be repeated at a later date or with a different sample of subjects. It is quite challenging to find the same results in social science research due to the varying and ever-changing social situations of human nature. Validity is the extent to which our measurements are accurate meaning that the degree to which collected information truly reflects the phenomenon being studied. In social science research, it can rarely be obtained since the empirical

research is mainly concerned with people's attitudes and behaviours on which the researchers are relying upon people's own report in the form of responses to the interviews (Veal 2006, 41.)

It is quite assured that the information and data gathered in this thesis are reliable and valid. It can be reliable and valid on the extent to which the information are analysed by the authors by viewing the authentic situations of Lumbini tourism site and people's perception.

5.3 Data Analysis

The outcomes of the research through SPSS are demonstrated in the following paragraphs. Each graph illustrates particular questions of the survey questionnaire.
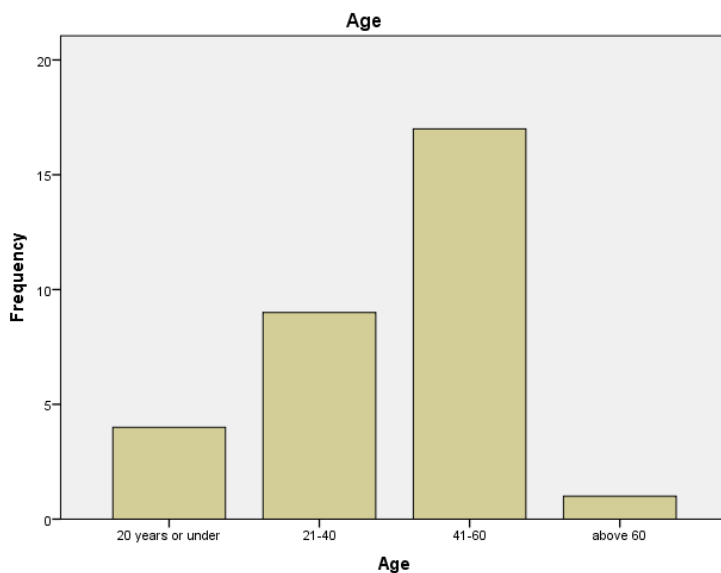
GRAPH 3. Age of the participants

The age group is divided into four groups as shown above in graph 1. The majority of the participants in the survey were from 41-60 scoring 54.8 percent and it was followed by 21-40 age group, 20 years or under and above 60 respectively. It suggests that most of the visitors belong to 41-60 and the number of senior citizens is very little.
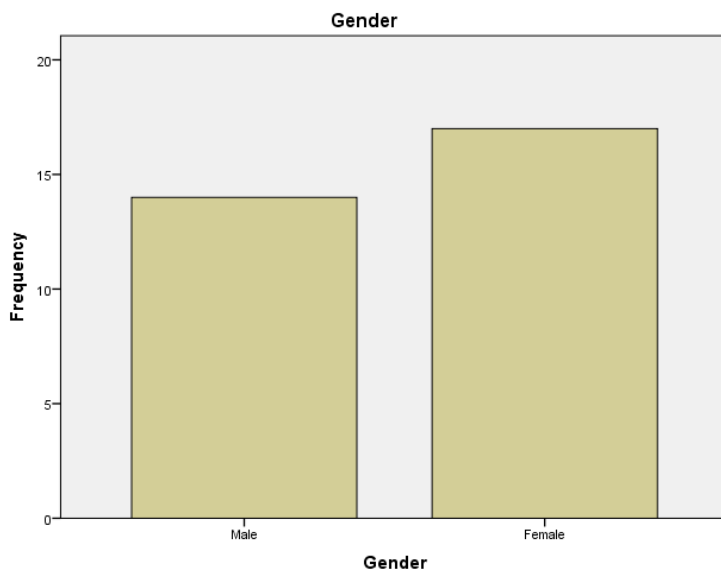
GRAPH 4. Gender

Graph 4 shows the percentages of the female and male participants in the survey which comprise 54.8 percent and 45.2 respectively. This graph reveals that female participants are more than male.
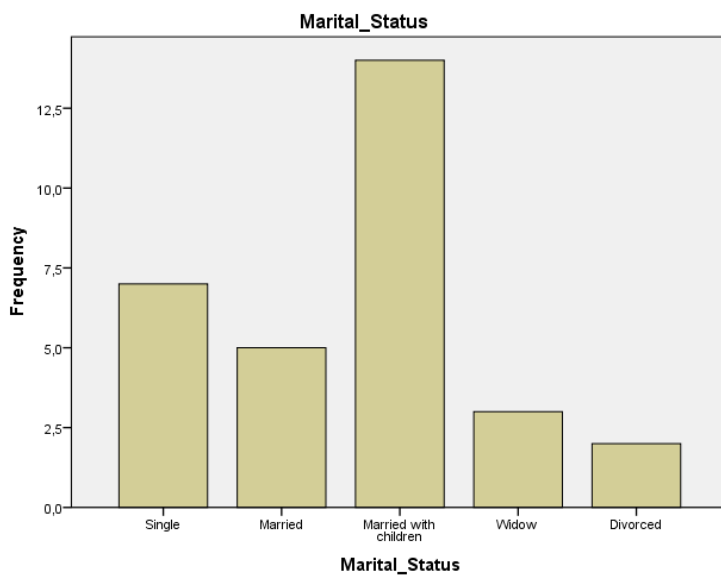

GRAPH 5. Marital status

Graph 5 demonstrates the participant's marital status. The highest percentage of the participants was from the marital status representing married with children which was 45.2 percent. It was followed by single marital group then by married, widow and divorced denoting 22.6, 16.1, 9.7 and 6.5 percent

respectively. From this graph it is found out that visitors who are married and have children are the ones who are travelling to Lumbini.

TABLE 1. Nationality

Country	No. of participants	Percentage
Nepal	11	35.4
India	6	19.4
Sri-lanka	4	12.9
Germany	3	9.6
Thailand	2	6.5
Britain	2	6.5
Japan	2	6.5
China	1	3.2
	Total =31	Total = 100%

Table 1 shows the nationality of the visitors. It explains that domestic visitors are more than the international visitors. It also supports that the visitors from Asian countries are more than other parts of the world and the main reason behind this is that most of the Asian countries that are shown above practice Buddhism. It is followed by European visitors significantly.
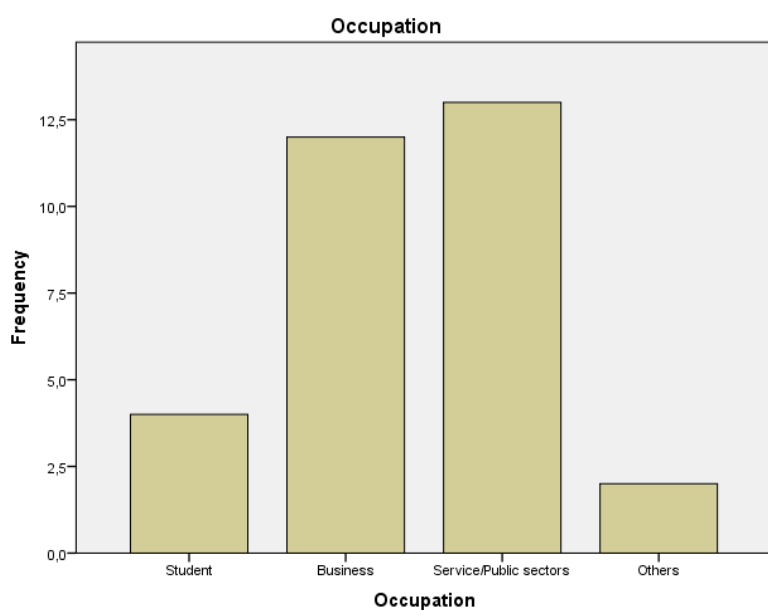
GRAPH 6. Occupation

Graph 6 defines the occupational status of the visitors. It shows that the highest percentage of visitors are those who are working in government and public sectors representing 41.9 followed by business people scoring 38.7 percent. People who have low income such as students and others are fewer in numbers visiting the destination.
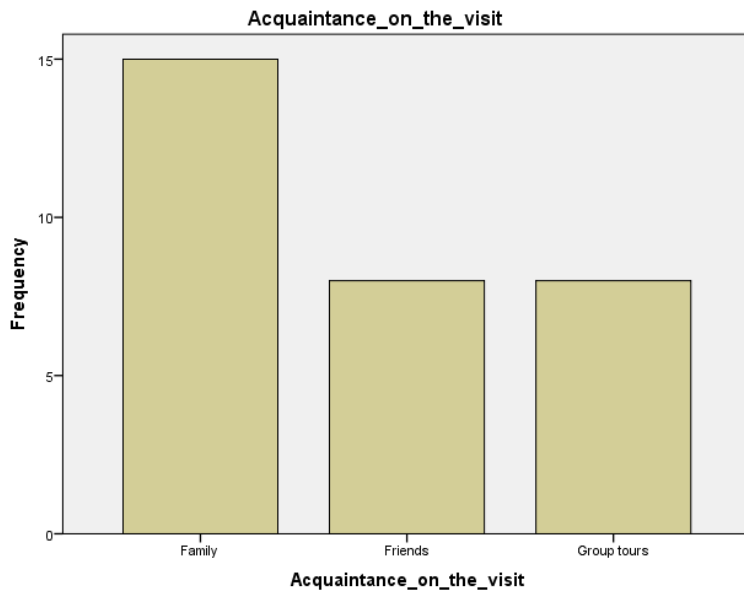

GRAPH 7. Acquaintance on the visit

Graph 7 represents the acquaintance on the visit of people. From this graph, it is found out that most of the visitors come with their family scoring 48.4 percentage. Furthermore, it is seen that group tours and tours with friends are relatively similar.
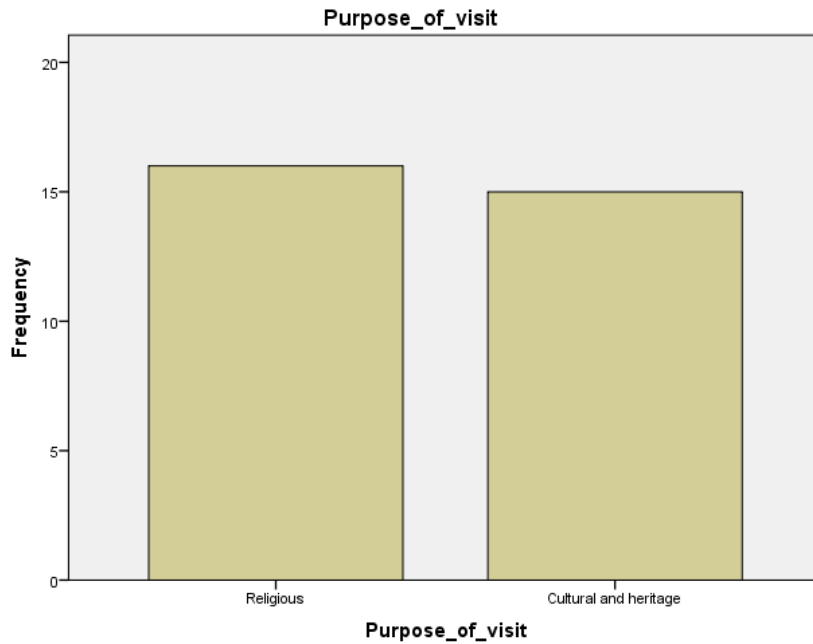
GRAPH 8. Purpose of visit

Graph 8 represents the purpose of visit. This graph demonstrates that the religious visitors are relatively higher than cultural and heritage visitors. The interesting fact about this graph is that the number of religious visitors and cultural heritage visitors are approximately the same which signifies the importance of marketing Lumbini not only as a religious but also a cultural and heritage tourism destination for attracting more visitors to the particular destination.
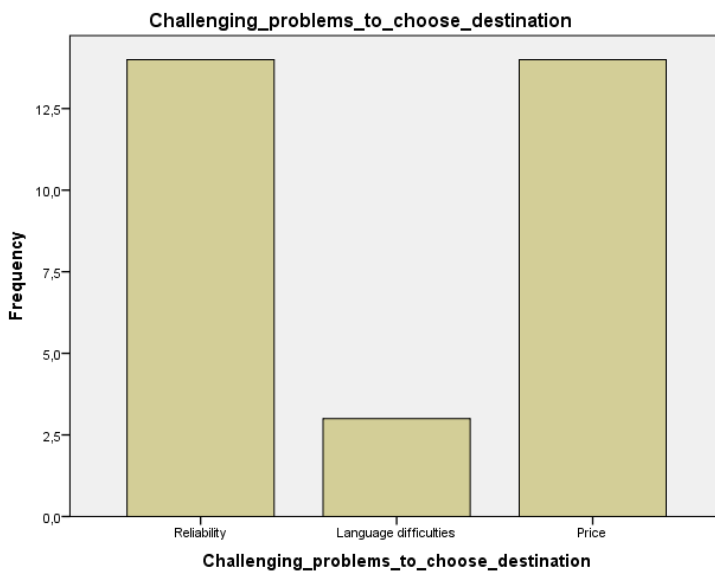

GRAPH 9. Challenging problems to choose a destination

Graph 9 revealed the problems for the people to choose the destination. They were given three options "reliability", "language difficulties" and "price". It was found out that reliability and price were the main challenging problems for the visitors to choose the destination. It accounted 45.2 percent equally. Language difficulties were not a big problem because English is used in most of the tourism destinations so it has a 9.7 percent result.
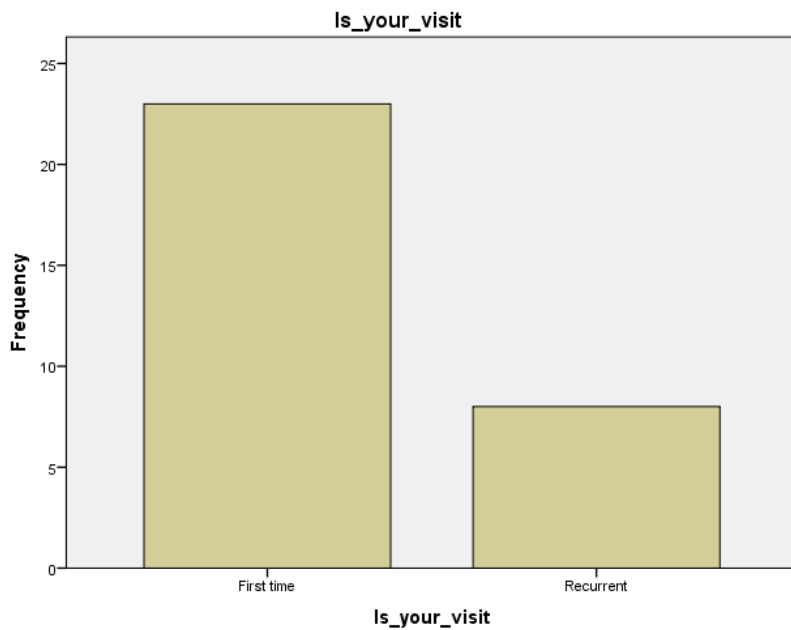

GRAPH 10. Is your visit first time?

Graph 10 exhibits the people travelling to Lumbini for the first time or their recurrent visit. In this particular questions, it is discovered that first time visitors were significantly more than recurrent visitors. This particular question points out the problems regarding the smaller number of recurrent visitors to Lumbini.
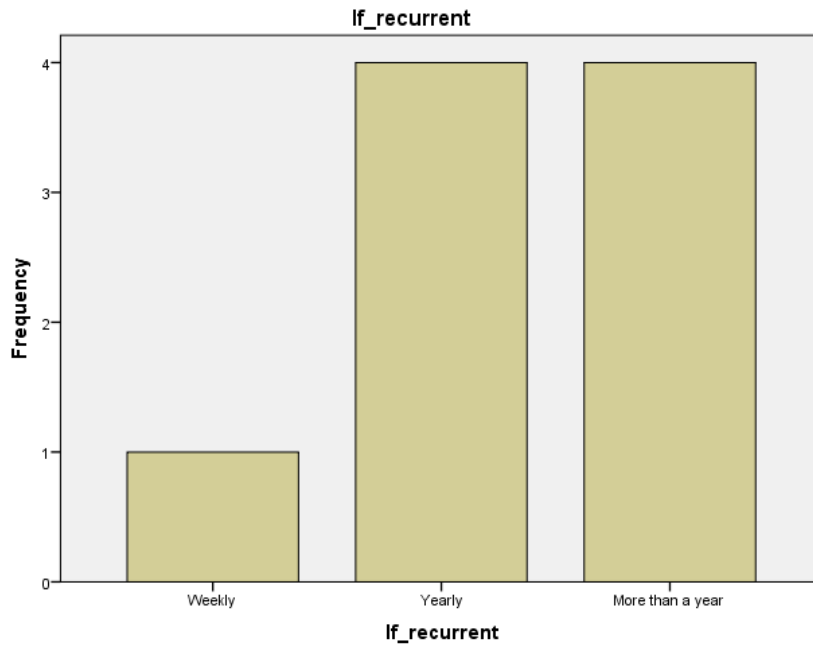
GRAPH 11. Recurrent visit in Lumbini

Graph 11 is concerned regarding how frequently people are visiting Lumbini. Graph 8 shows that the people are visiting Lumbini in a yearly and more than a year basis. Only a few people visit often.
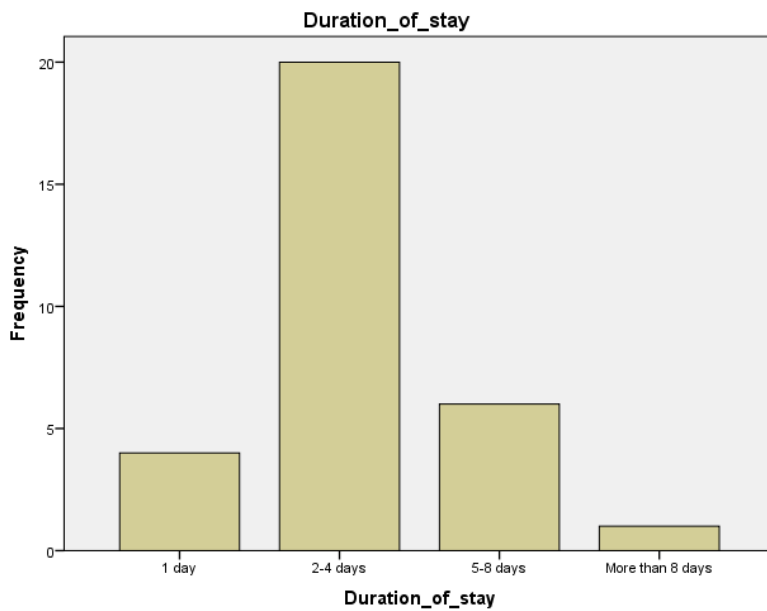

GRAPH 12. Duration of stay

Graph 12 represents the duration of stay of the visitors. It shows that people usually stay 2-4 days in their visit which comprises 64.5 percent. Secondly, visitors staying 5-8 days are 19.4 percent. The visitors staying in Lumbini for one day and more than 8 days are relatively low.
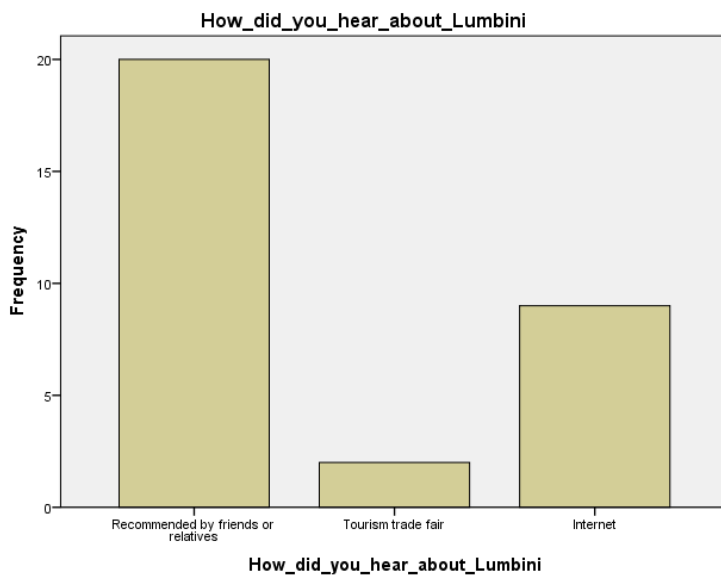

GRAPH 13. How did you hear about Lumbini?

Graph 13 concerns the question regarding the popularity of Lumbini. It is found out that most of the people visiting Lumbini were recommended by their friends and relatives consisting of 64.5 percent. It is also found out that people got the information through the internet. Only a few people have got the opportunity to participate in a tourism trade fair about Lumbini.
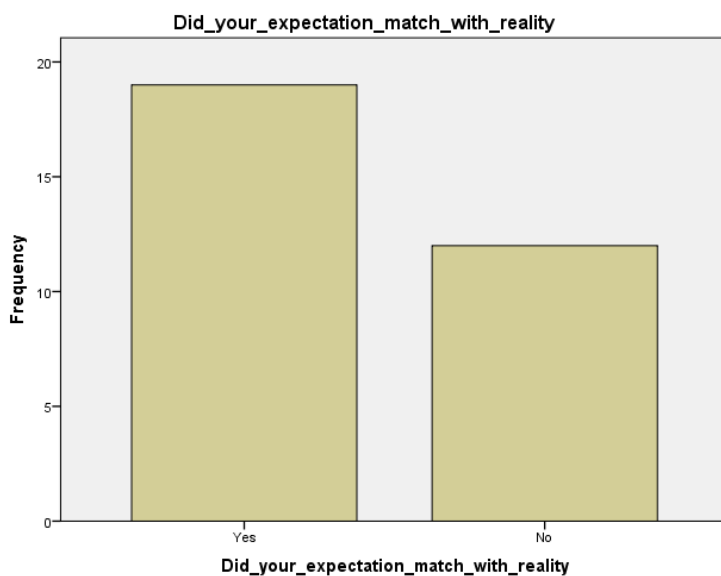

GRAPH 14. Did your expectation match with reality?

This particular graph 14 shows if the visitor's expectations are met. It was found out that 63.3 percent of the visitor's expectations were met while 38.7 percent of people's expectations were not met. From this statistics we came to know that one-third of the visitor's expectations were not fulfilled.
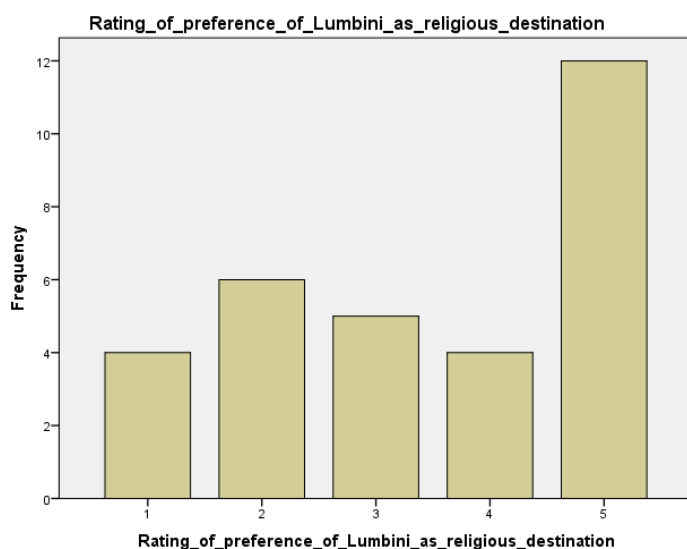

GRAPH 15. Preferable religious destination

Above graph 15 illustrates the preference degree to visit Lumbini as a religious destination by the visitors who took part in the survey. It can be seen from the graph that 12.9 percent of the participants prefer Lumbini as a religious destination with very low preference, 19.4 percent of the respondents expressed Lumbini as "is not bad" religious destination while 16.1 percent felt Lumbini is good and 12.9 percent accept it as a very good religious destination. 38.7 percent of the visitors believe that Lumbini is an excellent religious destination. This graph demonstrates that people travel to Lumbini not only for a religious purpose but also with other motives.
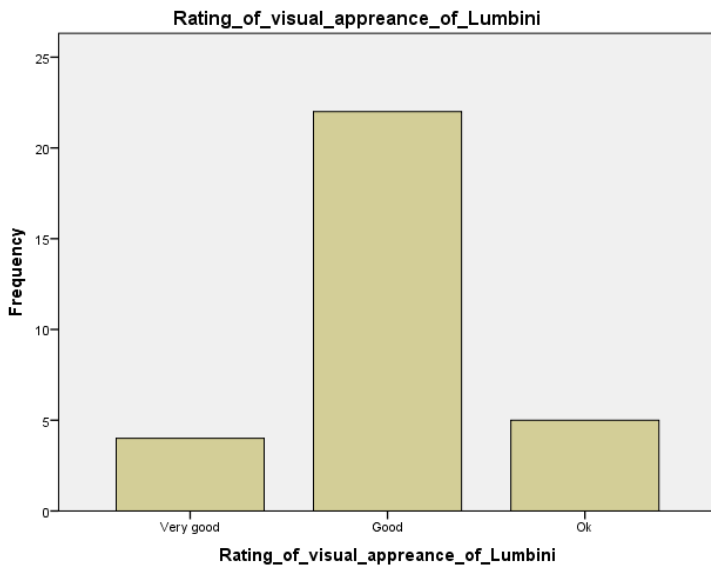
GRAPH 16.Visual appearance

Respondents were asked to rate the physical appearance of Lumbini. The results are shown in graph 16. There were five options to choose for the rating system in which two of the options "bad" and "very bad" were not chosen by any of the respondents. This graph exhibits that majority of the people (71 percent) considered visual appearance a good one while 12.9 percent felt very good. But 16.1 percent of visitors thought to be "Ok".
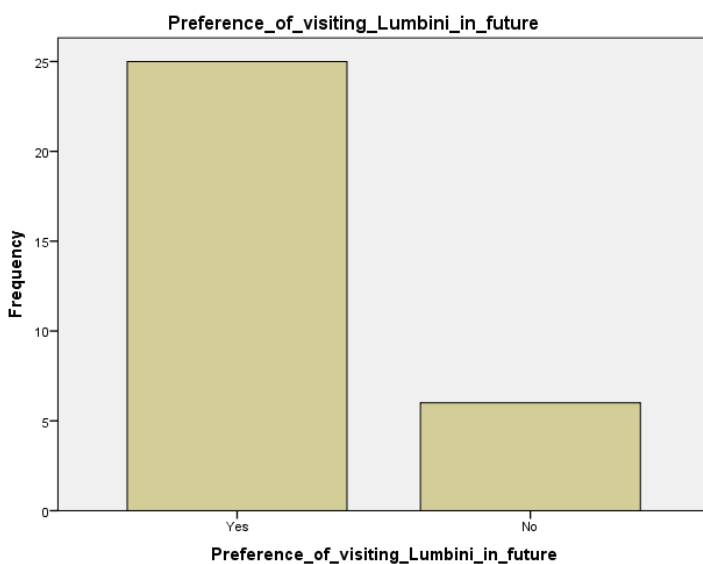
GRAPH 17. Visiting Lumbini in future

This graph 17 illustrates the percentage of people who would like to visit again or not in the future. It was revealed that 80.6 percent of people would like to visit again while 19.4 percent don't want to visit this place in the future.
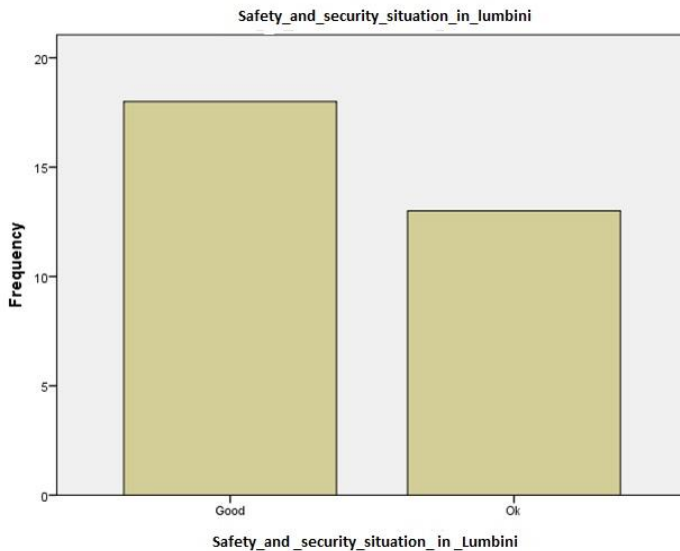
GRAPH 18. Safety and security situation in Lumbini

Graph 18 reveals the safety and security situation in Lumbini. For this, there were five options given to choose. Out of five, three of them "very good", "bad" and "very bad" were not chosen by the participants. This graph shows that 58.1 percent of the visitors accept that the safety and security situation is good whereas 41.9 percent of them accept as "Ok". Thus, safety and security situation is not bad but there is still need to progress the situation.


GRAPH 19. Accommodation services

This graph 19 discloses the condition of accommodation services in Lumbini. From the graph it can be seen that the majority of the people (58.1 percentage) accept them as good followed by "Ok" with 29

percent. There were only a few participants who regard the accommodation services very good and bad scoring 6.5 percent equally. One of the options "very bad" was not considered by any participants. Accommodation services in Lumbini ranges from high and low cost and they have different character-istics.

GRAPH 20. Transportation services

This graph 20 is concerned about the transportation services in Lumbini. The highest percentage of visitors (54.8%) admitted as "Ok" followed by 29.0 percent as good and 9.7 percent as bad. There were only a few people who regard the transportation services very good. There were not any people who felt that the transportation services in Lumbini are very bad.
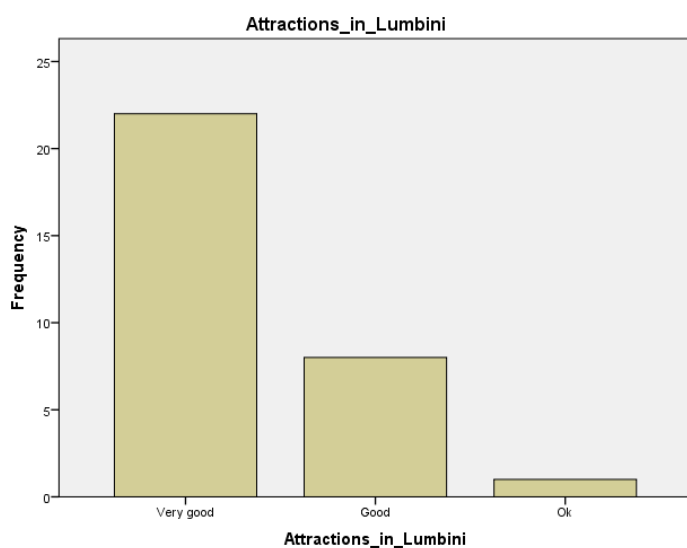
GRAPH 21. Attractions in Lumbini

71 percent considered that the attractions in Lumbini are very good which is shown in graph 21. It is followed by 25.8 percent as good and very few (3.2 percent) people believed the attractions in Lumbini are "Ok".
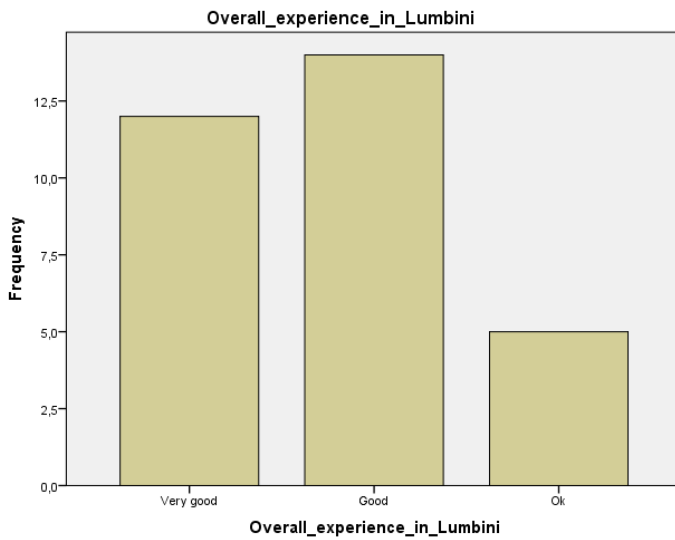
GRAPH 22. Overall experience

Graph 22 is about the rating of the overall experience of the visitors in Lumbini. Half of the people (45.2 percent) have a good experience followed by 38.7 percent who experienced very good and 16.1 percent has experienced ok. There were none experiencing bad and very bad.
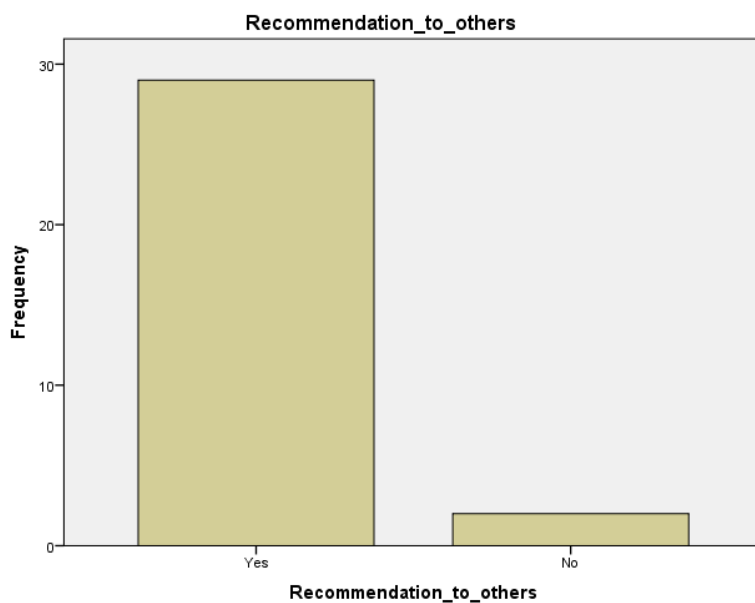
GRAPH 23. Recommendation

Graph 23 illustrates the number of people who recommend other people to visit Lumbini or not. Most of the people (93.5 percent) would recommend friends and relatives to visit while only 6.5 percent would not like to recommend to visit Lumbini.

5.4 Findings and conclusions

As per research, many related questions have been asked the participants about Lumbini. Most of the visitors were from Nepal and others were from different part of the globe. From the research survey, it was found that Lumbini is a major tourism destination that attracts tourists. The survey was taken to find out the problems in attracting a significant number of religious tourists to this particular destination. Through the statistics, it was revealed that many of the tourists have experienced and had positive thoughts about Lumbini. In the same way, it exposed that the tourism facilities and services are satisfactory. While talking about the safety and security situation people visiting Lumbini have found to be safe and secure. In most of the questions, the statistics show satisfactory results by the tourists. This recommends that the government and tourism stakeholders have to work together to make them excellent.

The main interesting thing is that tourists visit Lumbini not only for a religious purpose but also for cultural and heritage significantly. This indicates that marketing experts for Lumbini should not only rely on religious tourists instead they should build a new strategy to all other types of tourists. The results of the survey also show that many of the people come to visit Lumbini with their families. It was found that only a few people travel in group tours which suggests that tourism experts and marketing experts should work together to develop a package programme which can attract group travellers.

Furthermore, it is also found that most of the people know Lumbini in the traditional way which is very depressing. The biggest and fastest source, the Internet has not been a good source of marketing Lumbini yet as well as tourism trade fairs and other social events have not done much to reach the potential customers. Thus, considering the above results from the survey a planned marketing is to be done to attract a significant number of tourists in Lumbini.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis provides a general idea on special interest tourism, especially focusing on religious tourism in Lumbini. The tourist of this special interest tourism has to be focused on faith based tourism. Various kinds of marketing strategies have to be applied by the marketers to attract tourists to the destination. This research portraits the present situation of Lumbini. Overall infrastructure, safety and security, transportation accommodation and other services related to tourism are on satisfactory level though the number of tourists was not as significant as other similar destinations attract.

The main reason behind this whole problem is the absence of the right marketing. Mouth marketing and recommendations by friends and family have been the main channel of marketing Lumbini to attract visitors so far which is revealed from the research. Lumbini has not been able to allure tourists via the internet significantly. E world is the fastest and biggest platform to do marketing and Lumbini is not able to use this platform efficiently. Lumbini is exposed only as a religious tourism destination which is not a positive move to attract a huge number of visitors. From this research we come to know that people come to Lumbini for different purposes. The share of cultural and heritage tourists is very exciting and this thing should be taken seriously

In summary Lumbini is a very important tourist destination in Nepal. It is popular in Nepal as well as across the border. Tourists who came there had an overall good experience and would like to spread a positive message, but recommendations of friends and family and visitors are not enough for Lumbini to become a big tourism destination. So it is suggested to all the stakeholders of Lumbini tourism destination to focus on applying better marketing to reach its potential customers

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QUESTIONAIRE SURVEY
MARKETING RELIGIOUS DESTINATION. A Case Study of Lumbini.

The purpose of this research was to expose the present marketing channels which has been applied to attract visitors and find out better way of marketing to allure more visitors in Lumbini. This questionnaire is distributed randomly to the visitors in the Lumbini destination

Participants are anonymous so identity will not be disclosed. Thank you very much for you valuable time.

1 Age
a) 20 years or under b) 21 – 40 c) 41-60 d) 60 above

2. Gender
□ Male □ Female

3. Marital Status
□ Single □ Married □ Married with children □ Widow □ Divorced

4. Nationality _____

5. Occupation
□ Student □ Business □ service/public sectors □Others_____

6. Acquaintance on the visit?
□ Family □ Friends □ Group tours

7. Purpose of visit
□Religious □Cultural & heritage □Others

8. Is your visit
□ First time □ Recurrent

9. If recurrent indicate the frequency of visit in the blank below
□Weekly □Monthly □Yearly

10. How long do you usually stay at these destinations?
□ 1day □ 2–4 days □5–8 days □ more than 8 days

11. How did you hear about Lumbini?
□Recommended by friends or relatives
□Tourism trade fair

□Internet
□Travel agency
□other Specify _____

12. Did your expectation match with reality?
□ Yes □No

(1=lowest, 5 = highest)
13. Is Lumbini your preferable religious destination?
□ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5

14. How do you rate the visual appearance of Lumbini with other religious places?
□Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad□ Vey Bad

15. Would you prefer to visit Lumbini and its religious places in future?
□ Yes □ No

16. What are the most challenging problems that you face when choosing a destination?
□ Reliability □ Language difficulties □Price

17. How is the safety and security situation in Lumbini?
□ Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad □ Very bad

18. How is the accommodation services in Lumbini?
□ Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad □ Very bad

19. How is the transportation services in Lumbini?
□ Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad □ Very bad

20. How is the attractions in Lumbini?
□ Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad □ Very bad

21. How is the overall experience in Lumbini?
□ Very good □ Good □ Ok □ Bad □ Very bad

22. Do you recommend this place to visit to your friends and relatives?
□yes □no

If you have any other comments and suggestions, please free to do so.

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