

Market for Mountain Tourism

Compared to other Asian countries, tourism in Nepal has grown at a slower rate, primarily because Nepal does not fall into the tourism mainstream (Touche Ross 1990). Thailand, within less than a decade, has been able to develop itself as a major tourist destination with over four million tourists visiting it annually. India has a strong market for domestic tourism, and international tourism in India has also been growing faster than in Nepal. Within the last two decades, the composition of international tourists to Nepal in terms of nationality has been changing, with Asian tourists from South East Asia accounting for a bigger share of the total arrivals. If Indian tourists are included, these comprise the largest share of total tourists to Nepal.

Many parts of South East Asia do not have the type of HER that Nepal has. Increasing concern for the global environment and its conservation has multiplied the demand to visit places like the Himalayas. From Japan and heading west, Nepal is the only country that has relatively accessible HER. India has such HER but, due to problems in Kashmir and northern Uttar Pradesh, such HER are not accessible to many tourists who desire to experience them. Pakistan is also endowed with such resources but tourism has only recently received attention in this country. Thus, in a sense, Nepal is the only country in the world where international access to these unique Himalayan Resources is relatively easy.

Nepal's Himalayan resources continue to attract consumers from the traditional tourism markets of Europe and America, and this market is likely to remain strong. Moreover, the income growth of South Asian tourists has been increasing at one of the fastest rates in the world. Income growth in India has also been increasing modestly within the last few years. Growth in income of neighbouring countries, therefore, provides additional scope to develop HER for MTD, and hence MTD. Clearly, there is a market on which Nepal can capitalise. What is required is a vision to develop new product-based HER for the tourist market which can provide the basis for sustainable mountain development.