

The Tourist Profile

An attempt will be made below to present a thumbnail sketch of the incoming tourist to Nepal which might give us some idea of what sort of person he/she is. This sketch is based mainly on the Nepal Tourism Statistics (1992), an annual publication of the Department of Tourism.

Although the tourism statistics give six or seven broad types of tourists that arrive in Nepal, this categorisation is vague and imprecise (see Summary Table 2). It is doubtful whether all categories of visitors to Nepal can be called tourists unless this definition is stretched to include anyone bringing in foreign currency and spending a few nights in a hotel. Again, it leaves out an important tourist category, which is that of the rafter, for which the numbers are increasing each year with the extension of rafting to new areas.

The majority of tourists arrive by air; over 50 per cent of them are Western and European in origin; are in the 25-45 age group, in which the number of males is greater than females; 80 per cent of them come to visit Kathmandu, Pokhara, and the jungle resorts of Chitwan. These are the tourists who buy a package trip, stay in star hotels, and are driven in luxury coaches and limousines on a day's sight-seeing trip from the hotel. This class of tourist demands every possible facility for lodging, food, and drink, and these should meet Western tastes and specifications wherever such tourists spend the night. This kind of tourist is the holiday/pleasure type mentioned in the Tourism Statistics Book. This is also the class which brings in the most in terms of tourist dollars. The average length of stay for this class of tourist is 10-14 nights. In Eric Cohen's terminology this is the "institutionalised" or "conventionalised" individual or organised "mass" tourist (Cohen 1988: 31-32).

Summary Table 2: Tourist Numbers by Types

Year	Number Type		Business	Pilgrimage	Official	Convention/ Conference	Others	Total
	Holiday Pleasure	Trekking Mountaine- ering						
1962	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	6,179 (100)
1988	200,755 (75.5)	36,937 (13.9)	12,008 (4.5)	-	9,781 (3.7)	-	6,442 (2.4)	265,943 (100)
1992	237,711 (71.1)	35,166 (10.5)	31,765 (9.5)	7,219 (2.2)	20,967 (6.3)	815 (0.2)	710 (0.2)	334,353 (100)
1993	170,279 (58.0)	69,619 (23.7)	19,495 (6.7)	10,429 (3.5)	15,812 (5.4)	5,367 (1.8)	2,566 (0.9)	293,567 (100)

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 1992/93

Indian tourists account for another 34 per cent, and they mainly come to visit Kathmandu, Pokhara, or some other border town in the *terai*.

An important class of tourists, which deserves separate treatment, is that of the Japanese tourist. Unfortunately, they are lumped into the "other" category. The Japanese tourists, along with other Asian tourists, come in good numbers. Many of them also come for the purpose of pilgrimage. In other respects, however, the Japanese tourist has an identity closer to the Western/European tourist, as far as his travel, stay, and spending behaviour are concerned.

The other three categories of tourist are actually sub-categories of the same type, and these can be termed "adventure" tourists; viz., trekkers, mountaineers, and rafters. A greater part of their stay in Nepal is used up in trekking and camping activities along popular trekking trails (see Summary Table 3), so that their length of stay in hotels and lodges is minimal. Their length of stay, however, is for a longer period at an average of 25.8 nights (Banskota and Sharma 1993: 4). They form the main clientele of the various trekking, mountaineering, and rafting agencies. There are two types of trekkers — the group-trekkers, who are handled by trekking agencies, and individual trekkers. This latter type describes the tourist who likes to travel alone or travel with one or two friends. This is the low-profile, low-budget, loner type tourist who, in Eric Cohen's terminology again, is the "non-institutionalised" or "non-conventionalised" "drifter" or "explorer" (Cohen 1988: 31-32). The money spent by such a tourist mostly goes to pay the local host. The trekking behaviour of this type of tourist remains the most unpredictable. In some publications, this tourist is hailed for his adventurous spirit, his passion for taking the difficult and less-trodden path that average tourists are inclined to avoid, and as someone who craves to "drink in" the uncontaminated and unsullied beauty of nature (O'Connor 1990: 6).

Summary Table 3: Popular Trekking Areas by Tourist Numbers

Year	Everest Trekking	Helambu-Langtang Valley Trekking	Annapurna-Manang, Jomsom Trekking	Dolpa Trekking	Kanchanjanga Trekking	Others	Total
1979	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	19,868
1980	5,836	4,113	14,332	-	-	3,179	27,460
1988	11,366	8,423	37,902	-	87	3,495	61,273
1992	12,325	9,457	42,553	698	436	5,970	71,439

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 1992

In the industrialised societies from which most tourists come, studies have been carried out that focus on the sociology of the tourist. A similar study, based on the host people and those who are directly involved in conducting tourism business, or in dealing with tourists, might reveal a lot about their attitudes. How are tourists viewed by them? For example, are they really meted out the treatment befitting a guest? as glossy tourist publications are wont to describe them. Is there much feeling of philanthropy, or is the behaviour only business-like and governed strictly by the desire to make a profit? What are the tourists taken to be? Are they looked upon as i) friends, ii) charitable providers, iii) milching cows, iv) suckers, v) seekers of truth and happiness, or vi) gullible fools? Are people in the tourism business showing their true or masked face to them? Does a long exposure to the tourism trade harden them? Do they end up being cultural uproots, neither being fully modernised, nor feeling too comfortable within their own culture? In any tourism-related study in Nepal, providing such insight would prove extremely valuable. This is, however, a type of study which is yet to be carried out.