

## Visitor Survey Results

For the purpose of the case study, a total of 40 visitors were interviewed during September, which marks the beginning of the peak season. The surveys were carried out in the Ghandruk (20) and Ghorepani (20) trekking circuit areas. Visitors residing in different lodges as well as group tourists camping in the area were randomly selected and asked to fill out the survey questionnaire. Generally, all responded to most of the questions asked.

Trekkers to mountain destinations are generally categorised into either free independent trekkers (FITs) or trekkers whose trips are fully organised by local travel or trekking agents (hereafter GT or group trekkers), including meals and accommodation (Banskota et al. 1994). Both types of trekkers visit the area. About 55 per cent of the trekkers surveyed in the study area were FITs, and the remaining were GT. Of the visitors surveyed, 55 per cent were females compared to 45 per cent males. Among the FITs interviewed, male and female trekkers shared equal percentages, whereas, among the GT, female trekkers constituted a relatively larger percentage (61%). Given the random nature of the surveys carried out, it appears that more females prefer to trek in groups than males (Table 4.27).

The age group distribution of trekkers indicates that the large majority of trekkers in both the groups fall in the 19-35 age group, followed by the 36-50 age group, and finally the 51-plus age group. Such an inverse relationship between trekkers and their age is found to be more pronounced in GT compared to FITs. Note that female trekkers surpass males only in the older age group (above 51 years) in the case of FITs, whereas females predominate in all age groups in the case of GT. The 35-55 age group constitutes the largest among both FITs and GT. Other details are provided in Table 4.28. The majority of trekkers visiting the area were Europeans (80%), followed by Asians (10%). The distribution of trekkers by nationality does not vary much between FITs and GT (Table 4.28).

### *Duration of Stay*

Trekker's duration of stay depends on the number of days they have applied for in procuring trekking visas, and, among other things, the quality of tourist

products and facilities available. About 75 per cent of the visitors surveyed had planned to trek for about a week in the area, and the remaining 25 per cent reported to have planned two weeks of trekking. The majority of the group trekkers (56%) planned to spend around two weeks trekking, while FITs planned for a week of such activity (Table 4.29).

The average number of days trekked or planned for each of the two groups by continent of origin, age group and sex is provided in Table 4.29, along with their respective standard deviations. The mean numbers of trekking days for independent trekkers was 9.68, and for the organised group trekkers 13.82. The average number of trekking days for the GT increases with the increase in their age, whereas the relationship is mixed in the case of FITs. Similarly, the result indicates a variation in the duration of stay by nationality, with the lowest number of trekking days being spent by Asian tourists (about one week) in both groups of trekkers. The estimated length of trekking days of the male trekkers, furthermore, has been found to be relatively higher than that of female trekkers in both FITs and GT.

### *Accommodation*

Private lodges, camping sites, and private homes (or paying guest accommodation) are the main accommodation facilities available to trekkers visiting the conservation area. Visitors were asked to provide information on the number of nights stayed at different facilities while in the conservation area. Some trekkers use a combination of these facilities. Group trekkers reported a preference for tents (i.e, camping) and lodges, while FITs reported one for lodges and private homes. Females also reported more use of lodges and tents than private homes. It appears that trekkers prefer to use a combination of facilities rather than use only one. Use of private homes for accommodation appears to be the least preferred option. The average number of nights stayed under the lodge-only category was nine for FITs compared to about two for GT. FITs were found to stay 2.5 nights on an average in private homes compared to less than two nights in the case of GT. Group trekkers, on the other hand, were found to stay on an average 11 nights in tents (camping). Other details are provided in Table 4.30.

### *Perceptions*

Visitors were asked to comment on the quality of meals and accommodation facilities and rank them as being good, fair, or bad (low) (Table 4.31). The majority of both independent and group trekkers (57%) reported the quality of

meals to be good, and, for the remaining 43 per cent of the trekkers the quality of meals was thought to be fair. With regard to rooms, only 20 per cent of all trekkers reported the quality to be good, and a small proportion (10%) of visitors ranked room quality as bad. Regarding hygiene and sanitation conditions in the facilities used, the overall ranking made by the majority of the visitors was fair (56%) (Table 4.31).

Table 4.32 shows visitors' opinions on the prevailing price of meals and rooms. Among those who responded, over two-thirds perceived the price of both meals and rooms as being reasonable or fair. A very few respondents, mainly FITs (who are mostly low-budget tourists), felt the prices of meals were high. It is interesting to note that about 50 per cent of the group trekkers compared to 26 per cent of FITs even perceived the prices of rooms to be low. Likewise, the prices of meals were rated to be low by 25 per cent of the visitors. Group trekkers did not once indicate that meal and room prices were high. This could be because group trekkers do not use local outlets for meals and accommodations. On the whole, the prevailing prices of both meals and accommodation were found to be reasonably fair by majority of visitors in the case study area.

### *Visitors' Expenditure*

The total cost of a trekking trip for an average visitor doing the complete Annapurna circuit arranged through a trekking agency in a group was Rs 20,955, while for an average independent trekker the cost was about Rs 2,446. For the FITs, the cost does not include the round-trip transport cost or other costs incurred before reaching the area but only after arriving in Nepal. Similarly, average expenses run up by GT visitors for local products, such as handicrafts, drinks, and fruits within the trekking circuit, were Rs 6,524, while an average independent trekker spent about half this amount, namely, Rs 3,318 (Tables 4.33 & 4.34).

The average daily expenditure of independent trekkers for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and drinks in local outlets exceeds that of group trekkers, as expected. It is to be noted that the estimated daily expenditure for these items for the use of group trekkers refers to expenditure at local outlets other than those for meals prepared and served by the trek organiser. The result further indicates that the average daily expenditure of independent trekkers for local products, such as fruit and handicrafts, is also relatively higher (Rs.144) than that of group trekkers (Rs 58) (Table 4.35).

## *Demand for Porters*

Various responses have been obtained from visitors regarding the hiring of porters and the wages paid to them. Results have been summarised in Table 4.36. Porters are mostly hired by the group trekkers. About two thirds of the group trekkers, compared to only 15 per cent of the independent trekkers, reported hiring porters during their trekking trip. The average number of porters hired by group trekkers (13.40) was more than double the number hired by independent trekkers (6.2). While it appears that females are seldom used as porters by FITs, about one- third of the GT reported hiring female (3.2) porters. Given the relatively longer duration of trekking days spent by GT than FITs, the former generated porter employment for relatively longer periods of time (13.5 days per trekker) than the latter (6.3 days). It is, however, noted that not all porters hired by the GT are from the conservation area, as it is common practice to hire porters mostly from outside the entry points. No information, though, was solicited from visitors regarding the place of origin of the porters hired. The results showed considerable variation in daily wage rates between male and female porters. The average daily wage of male porters hired by the GT was almost twice that of female porters (Rs 85/day). Wage rates also varied between FITs and GT, as shown in Table 4.36.

## *Visitors' Motivation for Visiting the Annapurna Region*

In order to understand visitors' motivation in visiting the Annapurna region, a set of pre-specified factors was submitted for ranking, with one standing for the highest, two for the second highest etc. The results indicate variation in the motivating factor, meaning that different visitors travel to the region with different motives. Viewing scenery and experiencing nature together may be considered the main motivating factors for both FITs and GT, with nearly 75 per cent indicating so. Among the FITs, trekking as a motivating factor ranked first only for 15 per cent, while among the GT it ranked first for 36 per cent. Visiting Nepal was ranked first by 67 and 36 per cent of the GT and FITs respectively. Among the latter, a large majority (60%) responded that other factors (not identified) were the motivating ones (Table 4.37).

## *Visitor Sickness*

Eighty-five per cent of all respondents provided responses to the question on sickness. Of them, about 30 per cent were independent trekkers and the remaining were group trekkers who reported that some of their friends became sick during the trip. About 82 per cent of them reported that the cause of the

sickness was due to drinking contaminated water. No other reasons were reported by the visitors.

### *Knowledge about the Annapurna Region*

Visitors were asked if they had heard about the Annapurna Himalaya and Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) before arriving in Nepal. More than eighty-two (82.5) per cent of all visitors reported having heard of the Annapurna Himalaya before arriving in Nepal, and the majority of them were FITs. However, only 27.5 per cent of all visitors knew of ACAP before arriving in Nepal, and the majority of them were again FITs (Table 4.38). In response to the question concerning whether they knew that the conservation fee they paid to visit the area was used fully for the development of the area, only 36 per cent of all visitors (58% of FITs compared to 42% of GT) answered in the affirmative, and the rest, 52.5 per cent, were not aware of this (Table 4.38).

A final question asked to the visitors was whether their trip had been as enjoyable as expected or not. More than ninety-four per cent of all visitors expressed an affirmative opinion, with five per cent of independent trekkers answering that the trek was enjoyable but not as much as expected (Table 4.39).