

Culture and Tourism

The preceding paragraphs are meant as a background and serve to provide a perspective on tourism planning and related activities in Nepal before entering into the subject of tourism's relationship with culture. It is acknowledged by everyone that culture has a direct relevance and use for tourism. There is a phraseology in vogue underlining this relationship – "cultural tourism" – whatever such an expression may mean in reality.

Culture is a term that can have many connotations, and it is not easy to give it a precise and succinct definition. It is interpreted, either narrowly or broadly, depending upon the context or the background of the person using it. It seems that, in tourism, culture is understood in a very broad sense. As a leading hotelier in Kathmandu put it: "*culture and country are inextricably linked; they are coterminous*" (personal communication: Shyam Bahadur Pandey, Hotel Shangrila). In tourism, it is usual to speak of nature and culture equably and together, as if they mean similar, if not identical, things. In any reference to tourism in which its possible adverse impacts are the subject of discussion, cultural and environmental degradation are mentioned in the same breath. An anthropologist has made an observation that the Khumbu tourists' main concern is with the degradation of the environment (Fisher 1990: 109). Thus, where tourism is concerned, culture is understood in environmental terms. Cultural and natural heritage are terms to be used simultaneously. Of course,

one part of this heritage refers to nature, ecology, and the general environment. In Nepal, this heritage has been given a concrete, tangible expression through the recognition and implementation of the national park idea, first started in 1973 (Tenzing and Banskota 1992: 163). It is hoped that the idea of protection and conservation of the environment does not just apply to national park areas, but to the country as a whole where there are more places of unique heritage value. Cultural heritage itself should more appropriately be referring to a community's belief system, its social organisation, its productive and reproductive activity, and its aesthetic creations and handiworks. However, where preservation and conservation work of such a cultural heritage is concerned, much of this heritage becomes subordinated to and overwhelmed by an ever-present process of change.