Long road back to Shangrila

Ever since Time magazine printed a story in 1992 titled ‘Goodbye Shangrila’, Nepal’s travel trade and government have tried to clean up the country’s international image.

Visitor arrivals plummeted during the conflict years, and even after the ceasefire there was negative publicity about the instability, strikes and shutdowns. The earthquake and the Blockade also hit tourism hard.

But Nepal is a solid brand, and such a unique tourism product, that visitor numbers are picking up again. Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatiwada is credited with picking the target of 2 million as a way to revive income from tourism to help balance Nepal’s growing trade deficit.

In the 1990s, tourism made up 22% of Nepal’s GDP. It now contributes only 4%, not necessarily because tourism is down, but because other sectors like remittances and trade have grown. Under Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari, 2020 was chosen to promote Nepal internationally so that we could reach the magic 2 million figure.

But Adhikari was killed in a helicopter crash last year, and travel trade executives say promotion activities have not been effective enough. President Bidya Devi Bhandari inaugurated Visit Nepal Year 2020 at Kathmandu’s main stadium on 1 January with fireworks and a flypast of military helicopters. But critics said the money would have been better spent on promotion abroad.

Instead of promoting Nepal within Nepal, the government should have cleared up Nepal. The country’s image has suffered lately because of social media posts by visitors shocked by Kathmandu’s squabble and pollution.

Tourism Minister Yagyes Shrestha has been ridiculed in social media for visiting Sydney this week, in the middle of a bushfire emergency, to promote Nepal. The government has also run into flak for a draft proposal to mandate every Nepali worker flying out to wear Vietri Nepal t-shirts and caps.

Shrestha admits that airports need to be upgraded and service improved. But he adds: “There have been improvements at Kathmandu Airport, we are taking steps to make the travel experience more pleasant.”

The travel industry says the emphasis should be on making a Nepal trip as convenient as possible for visitors by streamlining the airport, its tawdry visa-on-arrival process, and sprucing up the country’s crumbling infrastructure. There should also be a moratorium on excavators digging roads over treksking trails. The other deterrent is that Nepal is an expensive place to travel to because the price of aviation fuel here is double that in other airports in the region.

Says hotelier Yegendra Shrestha: “Nepal is ideally placed to tap the vast tourism potential from India, China and Southeast Asia, and promotion should focus there first.”

Mukesh Pokharel
THE NEPAL BRAND

O n new year’s day, President Bidya Devi Bhandari inaugurated the new Nepal Airport 2020, aimed at attracting 2 million tourists this year, at a lavish show in Kathmandu’s main stadium with fireworks and a flypast of military helicopters.

This was only one thing wrong with the event: it was in Kathmandu and not in the countryside from which it is trying to attract visitors. The money would have been better spent on targeted promotion in selected countries.

It might have been an even better idea to spend the money sprucing up Kathmandu airport, fixing the roads, and cleaning up a once-beautiful Valley that has become an ulcer — before bothering to convince tourists to come.

All seven provinces inaugurated the campaign with much fanfare, but none of the parades were performed by Nepalists and the spectacles were Nepalis. How does that help more tourists to Nepal?

Number of tourists in Nepal

Well-intentioned as it may be, the entire Visit Nepal campaign has been mediocre and sloppy every step of the way — planned and executed by people without imagination or knowledge about the tourism industry.

The travel industry is generally unenthusiastic, and it is understandable why:

- There has been insufficient preparation in the countries we should have prioritised for promotion.
- Publicity and marketing should have started at least two years ago, not on January 1.
- The Ministry of Tourism has shown utter lack of planning by asking ambassadors to send senior ministers for the 1 January event in Kathmandu. (Why would anyone cancel a new year’s holiday and travel all the way to such short notice?)
- Minister of Tourism Yogesh Bhattarai travelled to Australia to launch the campaign in the middle of a national fire crisis for non-existent airlines.
- Bhattarai then announced that Nepali workers travelling abroad would mandatorily have to wear Visit Nepal caps and t-shirts. Everyone ignored this edict.
- Nepal Tourism Board lost its chief at the start of VNT 2020.
- There should be a revenue target, not a target of 2 million visitors.

Instead of promoting Nepal within Nepal, the government should mark Visit Nepal 2020 by cleaning up Nepal in 2020.

The only aerial gateway to Nepal is a disgrace. It seems impossible for maximum convenience, with an incomprehensible visa-on-arrival process and an excruciating queue at the ‘mental’ free-way.

Nepal sells itself cheap, but it is an expensive destination to get to mainly because of the high cost of aviation fuel which airlines are compelled to pass on to passengers.

The miracle is that despite everything we do to dissuade them, tourists still come to Nepal. The country has such high brand equity that even though we have done everything to wreck it with all the squaudry and discourtesy in Kathmandu’s Byzantine bureaucracy, tourists still come.

We have never destroyed the countryside with hap hazard mud-reconstruction along popular trekking routes — treacherous passages that even the least fit to travel.

Instead of promoting Nepal within Nepal, the government should mark Visit Nepal 2020 by cleaning up Nepal in 2020. The trekking trails need to be preserved and cleared of plastic garbage, it has to be convenient and safe to get to the hinterland; and visitors should be encouraged to spend their money where it is needed most — in the villages through which they hike.

There is the idea that only Kathmandu, Pokhara, Lumbini and Chitwan are Nepal’s tourist attractions. There is fundamental ignorance among policymakers about what a tourist is looking for in Nepal — they do not come here to be ejected every step of the way with two-time pricing for tickets to museums or religious sites.

In the past, the Maoist insurgency, a decade of political instability with frequent shutdowns, hotel bans still carry “tourist only” on it wholesale. It’s so exhausted by the time the earthquake and the blockade could have been blamed for fewer new visitors. We have no more excuses. Nepal now has a vibrant democracy with a strong government.

Publicity within the country for Visit Nepal 2020 must be channelled to making people aware about cleanliness, maintaining infrastructure, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and streamlining procedures to make visitors stay as convenient as possible by treating them really as gods, not as wallets.

Only then will tourists once again be a strong pull of the economy. The industry that once contributed 22% to the national GDP now contributes only 4%. Tourism income can help Nepal rediscover its growing trade gap.

Nepal’s location is ideal for tourism. We need to expand the country’s national airway, spread its network and rebuild the Nepal brand.

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT’S TRENDING

Stay in Nepal to create jobs

by Krishna Thapa

Delhi-based travel operator Gatway.com is working on a démarche aimed at encouraging travel and tourism to start-ups its partners in order to start-up its own international business. Today, they are commissioning a new 10 million in Nepal Times.com to meet its success story.

Chinese tourist influx to Nepal in 2020

by Keshi Wang

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Huang Zongzhi and former Chinese tourism activities on are growing. Prominent Nepal-Visitors 2020 is likely to bring 500,000 Chinese from China to 2020. But what are Chinese citizens saying about Nepal on social media? Find out in this much read report.

Most popular on Twitter

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

This is bullshit by Keshi Wang

When a popular social media page in Kathmandu that promote tourism and tourism activities in Nepal, Chinese-activities in China are growing. Prominent Nepal-Visitors 2020 is likely to bring 500,000 Chinese from China to 2020. But what are Chinese citizens saying about Nepal on social media? Find out in this much read report.

National Times

Times.com

Good News

We need more positive stories like this one (Staying in Nepal to create jobs) by Namish Thakur (#001). The negativity surrounding our country is killing me.

Rishi Sunti

PREPPING FOR TOURISTS

Stake certain percent of income from tourism to clean up the city and expand sanitary infrastructure (Chinese tourist influx to Nepal in 2020, johnson, Ramesh Shrestha)

Nepal

What I missed in argument FDH Nepal is earthquake risk to single runaway of Kathmandu airport having all international flights (#15 points for end against Nepal airport, $950,000, Edwin van Taalvingen)

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The Nepali Times edition of March 19, 2010 on years ago was full of a motivator of events between Aranju Khadka, editor and Bishaw Harish. Even the last page of the Yarli’s columns were full of fun stories by Satyab Kant, Satyab Kant, and all Nepalis have been made in a beautiful story, but for Sirum Bahadur and his express a dramatic realism. The ongoing attempts to mangle the entire state, its people, and their power and how manipulative it could be for the sake of not permitting the process.

By cătătura Satyab and his ‘in-again’ as Bishaw Harish by capturing the image prime minister in August 2006 and incorporating Earth’s views at that time. The second year was for the tone of the new government, the emergence, the mistakes of the 25th century away from counterpoints and living.

ECOLOGICAL WITH MISS MOTI

KIRISHI JOSHI

An LED light uses 90% less energy than an equivalent incandescent or halogen bulb because it doesn’t use as much heat to produce light.

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RELAX MORE

Freshen up and relax before your flight, taste some exceptional dishes, have a massage.
More to discover in Istanbul Airport Turkish Airlines Lounge.
Back to the future in Nepal

For Nepalis who migrated to New South Wales, it must feel like going from the frying pan into the fire.

Yet, many Nepali migrants have chosen these very countries as greener pastures. Yes, Nepal is plagued with political uncertainty, corruption, nepotism, and bad air quality. But for Nepalis who have migrated to New South Wales in Australia, it must mean escaping from the frying pan into the fire. If the USA many Nepali Americans face the possibility of being drafted into an escalating war.

If we stopped focusing on the past and making irrelevant comparisons, we could actually begin to look at Nepal’s future more objectively. For example, Nepal is an upstream country, but this is not often used to describe Nepal and what its comparative advantage could be. Being an upper riparian has numerous advantages and opens up all kinds of possibilities.

A country of 30 million is not small. And Nepal is not poor, just poorly governed. So let us stop describing ourselves as “a small and poor country”. Having a young population is not a liability but a historic opportunity that is the envy of rapidly aging countries like Japan.

After all, we want the young people who are moving abroad to restore our faith in ourselves. Recently, climbing the stairs of triple-D (Dhundu, Dhundu, Dham) fellow warrior remarked, “If people stop to work with the same faith as they do when they go to temple, Nepal would surely develop.”

Anil Chitrakar, President of Siddhie.

RAW TEXT OF IMAGE

Anil Chitrakar
Torture systematic in South Asia: ICJ

South Asian states continue to use torture to control and punish dissent, fail to pass laws to criminalise the practice and, where laws exist, do not use them to good faith, concluded a recent regional meeting in Kathmandu. Organised by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the meeting last month brought together lawyers, human rights experts and activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, ahead of global Human Rights Day (10 December).

“Torture and other ill treatment are prevalent in South Asia, and in some countries widespread and systematic, with perpetrators enjoying impunity for the crime,” said ICJ in a press release.

The trend is supported by a “mistrust of the justice system”, as shown by an incident last week in India, where police who killed four men accused of raping and murdering a woman were celebrated by crowds as heroes, said Reema Omer, ICJ International Legal Advisor for South Asia.

“More troublingly, however, the perpetrators of such human rights violations — be it extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances or torture — are rarely held accountable but instead, are often protected and even celebrated by the state,” added Omer in an interview.

“This has to be distinguished from the responses of the general population as regardless of how “popular” such conduct is, the state still has a duty to ensure an effective and impartial investigation leading to the prosecution of the perpetrators. Unless there is accountability, such violations will persist,” she added.

She said that torture and ill treatment are used in similar ways across the region, one major difference being in areas of conflict, such as Kashmir or the former federal administrated tribal areas in Pakistan. There, “torture is also used as a means of control and as a reprisal against dissenters and those who go against the state’s policies”, she noted.

“There are also some differences in who the vulnerable populations are in each country, who are disproportionately subjected to torture and other ill treatment.”

One positive development is the new penal code in Nepal, which came into force in 2015 and recognises torture as a distinct crime. Other countries in the region have standalone laws on torture while India and Pakistan do not.

Even when officials are held accountable, they are often charged with lesser crimes than torture, such as assault, battery, coercion or abuse of office, which carry relatively low punishments. Lower or middle-ranking public officials are often targeted rather than their superiors.

When torture charges are laid, they frequently fail because of the difficulties in proving the crime, which include finding witnesses who will testify, inadequate or conflicting medical evidence and threats of reprisals against victims and witnesses. If these barriers are overcome, immunities that protect public officials from prosecution can allow perpetrators to escape accountability.

Military and intelligence agencies, in particular, have extensive and unaccountable powers, including for arrest and detention, which facilitate the practice of torture and other ill treatment’, said the statement.

The conference looked at possible models for reform in the region, such as laws in Ireland and the Ukraine. Omer said they could potentially be used to guide the ways lawyers and activists approach the investigation and prosecution of torture in their own countries.

Under international law, states must ensure protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The ICJ said when there are reasonable grounds to believe such a crime has been committed, states must investigate allegations comprehensively, impartially, independently, promptly and thoroughly.
Memories of a London Nepali hangout

Travelling back in time to The Garage to relive the diaspora dream

Sunil Pun
in London

The street opposite the Gurkha Store in the west London suburb of Feltham is a row of terraced, semi-detached houses. Among them is "The Garage", where local Nepalis used to hang out to produce music, art, videos, and to write. Owner Shirish Gurung remembers a time when The Garage was a vibrant venue, bustling with the activity of young Nepalis adjusting to their new country. Hooted indie artists, screened short films and a place where scripts were written for films that were never shot.

Sometimes artists meditated to get their creative juices flowing, or performed collective shamanistic dances for cathartic purposes to the rhythmic beating of the metal and drums.

They were Nepalis in their mid-teens to early twenties who found themselves in the UK through their parents' Gurkha connection. Their common background and culture shock brought the youth together. Young people moving to a new country often feel a sense of isolation and long to belong, but lack the confidence to assimilate. It was this shared experience that brought this group of youth together in this secure place where they could express themselves artistically.

The Garage could accommodate six cars comfortably, but Shirish DeYed it into a homemade band rehearsal studio. Multiple layers of egg crepes plastered on the walls and ceiling acted as a partial sound-proofing and electricity was wired in from the main house for the electric guitars and amp. A second-hand Pearl drum kit sat in the corner.

The conversion of the space into a band rehearsal studio was a necessity rather than a hobby. Back then, Shirish was playing for a band called the Lemon Curve, which had regular gigs, from performing original content at a jam-packed venue in Camden to covering crowd-friendly songs at Indian weddings in Southall. Converting the garage space into a rehearsal studio was done in a cut coat.

Word of the available rehearsal space spread across the community, and interested musicians from the diaspora. Apart from rehearsing musicians, The Garage also attracted onlookers, who began to congregate to witness the creative process and to ensure that beer and tobacco did not run out. Long after Lemon Curve became history, The Garage was still the place to be.

— Some of the artists who frequented The Garage during its heyday were Yogi Gurung, Haimi, Arunari, Nandu Band, Flicker Pilot, Jeevshi Rai, Shreyas Rai, Bijay Gurung, and Ashish Gurung. To name a few.

Junkiri Session, a YouTube channel led by Awek Gurung that captures live performances of UK-based Nepali artists, also began as an idea at The Garage.

The Garage also screened short films, some of which were Shirish’s own creations, and others via Pause Pio which included Kesari, Viicced, Kokapapa, I Hear the Raven’s Call, Pause Pio, Shuffles (shot in Nepal) and Mulkberry Muddness. Feature films included Lato Kesere and Heera Hariro.

The films revolved around themes of existentialism, alienation and a sense of displacement. Though they sounded gloomy, the content experimented across genres, from dark comedy to horror.

Shirish has remained loyal, either by choice or circumstance, to the definition of indie films — low-budget, autonomous, small-scale, using actors selected from West London Nepali youth on local locations.

Today, though The Garage is still used as a hangout for occasional drinking, it can no longer boast its earlier youthful energy. There are still memories of the past the old leather sofa, a retro lamp and clock, vintage box television, guitar with broken strings and the tattooed sleeping bag used when activities went late into the night. People got older, took on responsibilities and commitments, or otherwise moved on. But The Garage space remains a place that once captured the hopes and aspirations of young Nepalis adjusting to their new lives.
Chinese farmer strikes roots in Nepal

Standing in his field on the outskirts of Pokhara and below the dazzling snows of the Annapurna mountains, Xiang Shubin points to peach saplings in his orchard.

The seedlings were sent to him by his son and daughter who are studying back home in China. And just like Xiang himself, the peach are striking roots in Nepal’s soil.

Xiang first came to Nepal 10 years ago as a tourist, travelled to Pokhara and was so enamoured by the place and people here that he never left.

Today, he rents 2 hectares of farmland and is growing lettuce, chrysanthemum and fruit trees commercially to sell to the market and restaurants in the lakeside tourist town. He also works as a subcontractor at Pokhara airport, and at other infrastructure projects.

“In the beginning, it was only supposed to be for three years, and if it did not work out, I planned to go back to China,” Xiang recalls. “It has not all been smooth sailing, but it has been worth it.”

Xiang now has his father and wife helping out at the farm. The fact that he came from a farming family back in Shandong where the climate and soil are similar to Nepal, has been helpful.

Xiang says his most challenging period was during the 2015 earthquake, where supplies were scarce. He felt like quitting, but realised he had greater responsibilities.

“Actually, I could have left, but that would have meant that my Nepali employees would be out of their jobs,” recalls 45-year-old Xiang, who speaks Nepal better than Pekua. “It is a difficult period, but I tried to be the main pillar as a farmer.”

Xiang’s nursery has grown to 20,000 peach trees, and he now employs 40 people.

Xiang says it is not easy running a farm in Nepal, but he enjoys the local culture and people.

Xiang says his goal is to work for 5-10 years, before returning to China.

“Nepal is a beautiful country, and I would like to leave a legacy here,” Xiang says. “But I want to come back to China to spend more time with my family.”

Xiang is an example of how foreign investment can benefit the country, offering new opportunities for locals.

However, Xiang’s success is a rare example of a foreign farmer succeeding in Nepal.

Many foreign farmers have struggled to find success, due to cultural differences and lack of support.

Xiang’s story is a testament to the resilience of Nepali farmers, who continue to grow crops even in the face of challenges.

“Nepal is a tough place to grow crops, but I have been lucky to find success,” Xiang says. “I hope others can follow in my footsteps.”

Xiang’s success is a reminder that despite the challenges, there are opportunities for those willing to put in the work.

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A road trip is not an established genre in Nepali films. Like romance, action or comedy, even though they may have all these elements. But in the last few years more than a few have made it into commercial cinemas.

Road trip movies tend to be more romantic and usually feature a guy and a girl trekking to Jomsom or Mustang with a guggle of friends to hitch and eventually fall in love. Delights of crude and convoluted sex jokes spice up the script, and keep the plot moving.

There is usually a dead parent, a crowded brother or a fatherless orphanage in the mix as part of a thinly established backstory or a point of conflict. The mountains always paint the background as romance blossoms. Such clichés are something Nepali movie-goers have to suffer through.

However, a few memorable road trip films have been produced over the last couple of decades. Baznas, Kargahi and Highway come to mind. In the genre of adventure, horror, and political drama respectively.

Ama Khandu is an addition to this list. It is an intimate comedy-drama depicting the journey of two families from Lo Manthang in Mustang to Pokhara. The families make the road trip annually, but this year it is different. Especially for the little boy who, along with his father, is the film's protagonist.

The eponymous Khandu of the movie's title is Ama, or mother, to a school-skipping, fight-picking 10-year-old who never seems to listen to his father, while the film's central relationship is between these two. Khandu and his son Dandup—the family friends who travel with them also drift in and out of the film's focus.

Lobang, the older son of the other family, struggles with having to abandon his studies for lack of money, and has a tense relationship with his father because of this. Khandu, a financially vulnerable single mother, is also frustrated with her son and worried for his future. The elders in the story are concerned about their children's prospects in the difficult term of Mustang as the world class in. Even though they are conflicted about the idea of the city, its bustle and pollution are a draw.
is now a day’s drive in Nepal

Climate change has changed rain and snowfall patterns, but on the Lipizal, it has also had positive impact: cucumbers, tomatoes and vegetables that never used to grow here because of the cold are now plentiful. Mustard plants can now grow in areas which were previously not suitable for orchards.

On balance, road connectivity has provided a strong boost to the economy through tourism. It has connected produce to markets, workers to jobs, students to schools, and patients to hospitals.

The once forbidden kingdom is now connected to the world, and it is at a critical crossroads. It is vital that decisions balance development with conservation of nature and cultural heritage be taken now so Mustang’s fragile beauty is preserved for the next generation.

For young adults like Lobzang the idea of remaining farmers is financially and socially unattractive. Much like many of our young migrants overseas, they can only be nostalgic for a homeland they are already moving away from.

For children like Dhondu, who do not care for much beyond food, entertainment and his long lost father, these larger socio-economic realities do not interfere in his small adventures, but they will eventually decide his fate.

The film is made up of little moments, small talk and chance encounters. There are no spectacles here, but much like the colossal mountains that make for the background in this journey, brooding themes of love, loss and identity are quietly visible under the surface. Here at least, the mountains do stand for something. Here is a road movie where the characters are real and the emotional stakes highly resonant.
Parasite
FICHT Film Series. Organised by Film Critics Society Nepal, presents ‘Parasite’ by South Korean film director Bong Joon Ho. 
16 January, 6.30pm, Hotel Chautari, Gardeshala (677) 410207.

Antoine
in concert at the Forum, offers a unique blend of music genres with a Performance by Antoine. 
16 January, 6.30pm, Forum, Kathmandu, (981) 722205.

Serenade
Bring a friend to Full Moon Serenade, sit by the jasmine, and enjoy live music and good food. 
19 January, 6.30pm, Hotel Surya, Kathmandu, (981) 722205.

French Movie Night
A film screening of ‘La Chose du dimanche’ that tells the story of a couple who visits the Eiffel Tower and is able to speak human language, but when the rabbit dies, the man decides to teach him about the Torah.
19 December, 8pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, (981) 5027387.

Book Launch
“Audubon: Restoring the Great Signature” a book of images created by Nepali photographer Mani Lama. The book looks at the past and present of Audubon and explores its significance to Buddhists and its role in the history.
21 January, 6pm onwards, The Forum, Kathmandu, (981) 722205.

Reggae Party
Nepali artists from a diverse range of backgrounds and artistic styles will be presenting their take on reggae songs. 9 January, Forum, Kathmandu, (981) 722205.

Borderlands Eco Resort
Transported to natural Himalayan splendour, the resort is located a mere three hours north of Kathmandu. A quick getaway to wild nature — one of the weekend’s must-visit destinations. 

Meditation Hike
Relieve stress and take a meditation hike through the lush forest of the January pre-registration required.
21 January, 6.30am to 9.30am, 600 per person. Meet at Sunshine Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lamosang (981) 400174.

Almodia & Innov8
Almodia Uwejy, singer, songwriter, computer and music producer, will be performing with the sounds of ambient, rock and jazz.
23 January, 8pm, Almodia, Kathmandu, (981) 5027387.

Live Music
Enjoy a musical performance by Uttam Shrestha, Sunita Ghimire, Swapna Karky, and Abhik Malik every Friday evening at the beautiful gardens at UMLF Residency. Every Friday, 8pm, SUSHKE Gardens, Budhanilkantha, (981) 5027387.

Mango Manor
This popular family Derneği hosts a variety of Gardeners, highly-rated restaurants and an exclusive rooftop garden overlooking the city.
20 January, 4pm onwards, Bandipur, Lalitpur, (981) 4017366.

Buddha Maya Garden Hotel
Jazz and blues to the heart of a London DJ and resident of the Buddha Maya Garden Hotel. 
Take a stroll along Lumbini World Heritage Garden and meet the heart of London DJ and resident at the Buddha Maya Garden Hotel.
20 January, 4pm onwards, Bandipur, Lalitpur, (981) 4017366.

Grand Norling
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, marvellous and deer heads, and not to forget, the garden.
20 January, 4pm onwards, Bandipur, Lalitpur, (981) 4017366.

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Chex Caroline
Tasteful drinks from the street-side teahouse and fumi, it is the place to visit for authentic streetside and Continental fumi in Nepal. Try their famous fumi or a texture filled with vanilla ice cream and fruit smoothenes.
20 January, 4pm onwards, Bandipur, Lalitpur, (981) 4017366.

The BUD
The newly revamped restaurant at Hotel Royal Singh serves healthy and flavourful gluten-free meals. Don’t believe it? Try the samosa lababha served with grilled viewers of cucumber, mushroom, and pepper, onion and cheese.
18 December, 5pm onwards, Bandipur, Lalitpur, (981) 4017366.

Captain Egg
Egg lover can rejoice at this egg themed restaurant. Like a Sunday brunch buffet at Egg Chole, Paratha (Egg Roti) or even an Egg Tiffin. 
Ghantaghar (981) 4017366.

Congratulations on 10 years of service.

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU, 3 - 9 January

Thanks to another winter monsoon flurry, the AQI has improved slightly, but is expected to be unhealthy next week. AQI measured at some of the concentration of pollutants smaller than 1.5 micrometers trapped from above 2000 ft. The city’s AQI is below 150. For those with asthma, and there were signs during morning and evening rush hour when pollution levels were high. 
This weekend’s outlook remains mixed, with the air quality worsening as temperatures rise. The AQI is expected to fall to unhealthy levels.

https://apenepal.gov.np/embassy/air-quality-monitoring
For the past five days, Tsamcho Gurung and her friends have been waiting for a flight out of Jumla airstrip in Dolpo to go down to Nepalgunj and then Kathmandu. The third major snowfall this winter has meant there is little chance of flights till at least Friday.

Having spent all her money waiting at a lodge near the airstrip in Jumla, Gurung has now decided to return to her home in Saldang. But she may not be able to make it back home either because heavy snow has covered the high passes.

Nepal’s mountains and the true Himalayan districts of Mugu, Dolpo, Mustang and Manang experienced snow much earlier than usual in December, and another heavy snowfall now. This has caught many locals unprepared. Usually, people of Upper Dolpo like Tsamcho Gurung travel to the lower valleys for the winter. This year, since the snow came early, many have been stranded.

Karma Dolma and her parents are planning to spend the winter in Kathmandu, going on pilgrimage to Buddhist shrines like Boudhan, and getting health checkups while there. Dolma made it across the Kangla and Shopy La passes with great difficulty in waist-high snow, only to find out in Jumla that there have been no flights because of bad weather.

"Crossing the pass is easier than waiting here at the airport," Dolma says. "The uncertainty is killing us. We could try to hire a jeep, but it takes several days and the roads are treacherous." 

Alishwarya Bokaya has a Tika Air ticket to Nepalgunj where she needs to get admitted to hospital for a stomach ailment, but says she has had enough of waiting. "If the plane doesn’t come tomorrow we have no choice but to go back home. What to do. I am sure the pain will get worse."

Students from Crystal Mountain School in Dho walked for four days across snowbound passes to get to the airport, and have now been waiting for three days. The annual winter migration from Upper Dolpo includes children who use the school break to descend to warmer climes.

At the airline counter in the airport, there is a class every morning with no information from airline staff. Passengers on mobiles try to contact relatives in Nepalgunj to ask about the weather and if the plane has taken off.

"The weather is unpredictable here in Dolpo, but we cannot control the clouds," says the Tika Air manager here. "If it clears up we can make up for two flights, but there is a big backlog of people who have been waiting for many days."

Dolpo is served only by Tika Air and Six Air, and both airlines have not operated here for nearly a week now. The shortage of flights means there is a thriving black market in tickets, and distributors who own lodges give priority to their guests by asking for an extra fee.

ALL ABOARD: Dharma Shanker Pasareng, passengers boarding the last flight out of Jumla airport in Dolpo on 29 December.
Snowbound Phoksundo Lake: This week’s 1st climb has blocked most of the high passes in the trans-Himalayan stoner.
Stranded passengers at Jumla airport last week.
Why has zero-cost migration not Irresistible forces: wage differentials and demographic trends

Recruiters are still taking advantage of the desperation of workers for a better shot at life

Labour migration touches every Nepali in one way or another. The pain of departure at the airport, the joy of reunion. Aspirations drive us to move whenever we get more credit, recognition, or money.

The confidence with which a person faces the next beck-on a plane reveals whether Doha is the final destination or just a place of transit — and that decision is treated by eight attendants. Regardless of these differences in whom, when and how we move, we are all aspiring for a better shot at life.

The migrant industry has evolved: the private sector has seen an opportunity for arbitrage, the government tries to regulate it with policies, and the media, human rights organizations and non-profits are story-tellers, watchdogs and advocates.

Platforms like the Global Compact for Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals advocate a ‘whole-of-society’ approach where different stakeholders will work collectively to advance the goals of good migration.

We have come a long way, but we need to see more tangible impact. The discussions have to move from what should be to how we actually are. The chasm between de-jure and de-facto in the foreign employment industry is so wide that it is easy to fall between the cracks.

Everyone is quick to point out that zero-cost migration is not happening. There is public litigation and there are supreme court orders. We hold rallies and conferences and we write about the issue. There are random surveys at airports that seek to find out what workers are paying. And guess what; it is not zero.

While this attention is necessary to keep the debate alive, the focus of our discourses should now shift from ‘if’ it can be implemented to ‘why’ it has not been, and how it can be enforced.

Workers are willing to pay. Let’s start there. They are convinced there is a brighter future waiting for them. If you take me to Atittara, I will pay you $40,000. If you get me a junior job in West Asia, I will pay $5,000. If you find me a security guard or driver job, I may pay you $5,000.

The cases that end up coming to the notice of authorities are those in which there is no job in return for the money spent. By the time this becomes clear, it is too late because the worker does not have proof of the transaction. On the

In many parts of the world, the ratio of the working-age population to the elderly population is in decline. By 2050, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries will lose more than 1.3 million workers, and gain 1.6 million elderly individuals.

In contrast, developing countries are experiencing a youth bulge, including Nepal, which is in the middle of a demographic window of opportunity expected to last until 2057. With 5,000,000 Nepalis entering the labor market annually, not all of whom can be absorbed, the pressure to migrate for work.

‘To order for labour migration to be an industry for good, it has to be a good industry,’ said Oxford University professor Larry Hinton, at a seminar on migration. It was noted that the results came a week after Minister Garun Bista was quoted for trying to push workers to fly by reforms by targeting illegal profiting.

Hinton highlighted two aspects of the global economy that make labor Mobility by a “simple irresistible” force of the future—demographic trends and wage differentials. Hinton and his colleagues came up with the concept of ‘price premium’ persisting wage differences for workers with the same productivity across borders, adjusted for the cost of living.

The impact of these two factors is being felt in Nepal. In April 2015, the Nepalese government signed an agreement with Japan, a country with a severely ageing population, to mobilize workers in 14 skills under the Special Skilled Worker Visa category. It is ironic, Nepali workers will remain equal pay for equal work, which means the income gains of moving will be in order of magnitude. However, such a win-win situation has not always been realized in practice. When a few months of salaries of a 24-month contract period are spent repaying loans and interests, the wage differential that drew the decision to move is nullified.

Moreover, migration in Nepal has also entailed giving up basic rights, including freedom of movement and access to justice. The economic migrant has always been portrayed as a right ‘jobless’ workers. Stories of abuse, discrimination, and inadequate labour protection abroad have shaped a more cautious migration discourse in Nepal; despite its high dependence on remittances.

The emphasis on addressing misprications, in recruitment and employment of migrant workers is warranted, but Nepali must also be forward-thinking and take advantage of potential opportunities opening up in Europe and other ageing societies.

Without predictions we are entering an unprecedented demographic era in which the narrative in many ageing countries will change from how we find jobs for workers to how to find workers for jobs. Temporary labour market programs can meet the needs of ageing countries for their integration, and of sending countries worried about losing their productive workforce.

Nepal needs more active labor diplomacy, especially in Europe, to benefit from these opportunities. Nepali need skills for jobs of the future, such as in hospitality and care, which meet international standards and are in shortage in various countries.

Private intermediaries have some advantage for workers, but it is not all costless in terms of job marks or recruitment costs. If this is not addressed early on as new job marks emerge, we can expect recruitment costs for the new destination marks to be significantly higher than now. The

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NATION

Back to Nepal for good

On 31 December, Malaysia’s amnesty program for migrant workers called Back for Good (BfG) came to an end. By doing so, 89,070 (91%) and takes back home, the scheme gave undocumented migrant workers the opportunity to return home without facing the penalty of up to RM15,000 (US$3,500) for overstaying and imprisonment of up to five years.

Over 17,000 raids were conducted in 2019 alone, and many Nepali workers were caught up in the sting. Many Nepalis became undocumented despite being aware of the risks and consequences of getting caught, and some employers are equally involved in the process but play a very small role.

"What was different this time was the proactive role played by the Nepali embassy in Kuala Lumpur," said Dhruv, a Nepali worker living in Malaysia for a decade. "They made sure that agents were not involved in the process to assist those who wanted to benefit from the program."

An employer has to apply through hoops to obtain an approval to hire a foreign worker. A recent World Bank report details a lengthy two-year process involving multiple visits to the Malaysian ministry and payment of fees, insurance policy, security bond, etc. to hire a worker. There are also formalities in the Nepali side including demand letter verification and labor agreements.

Alternatively, employers can easily recruit migrant workers in Malaysia by simply providing a salary premium and ensuring food and financial costs associated with recruitment and formal costs such as insurance and levies.

An accredited worker is easier to hire, as he is seen as highly skilled and qualified.

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Suicide by pesticide

Sonia Awale

Of the 25,308 suicides recorded by the police in Nepal in the past five years, poisoning was the method of choice of 6,213 and pesticides were the most common form of poison used. Suicide by pesticides is the easiest, cheapest and the quickest way to kill oneself in Nepal.
A 2011 study by Chitravan showed that 90% of all poisoning cases resulted from deliberate ingestion of pesticides. A recent nation-wide and forensic data over the years reveal that pesticide self-poisoning kills at least 1,000 people in Nepal annually.

"Pesticides are in fact a greater threat than what police records show. There are many people who make the attempt and survive due to insufficient dose or medical treatment," says Ravi Shukla, a mental health specialist at Patan Hospital. "If we could count attempted suicides, pesticide is the most preferred method of suicide in Nepal."
Shalinee Thapa Chhetri of Nepal Police agreed. "Toxicity, hanging used to be the most common method of suicide, as people had the easiest access to ropes. Now, access to pesticides is even easier. Almost every household has pesticides, whether to kill cockroaches or to spray in the farms."

And as the impact of pesticides increases, the hazardous chemicals will only be more accessible for self-harm. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development claim that Nepal’s pesticide consumption is 396g per hectare but research by the Netherlands-based Wageningen University shows it to be 2.46g per hectare in vegetable patches.

"Pesticides that kill people are readily available in the market, they do not need prescriptions and anyone can buy it," says Dilli Ram Sharma, former Director General of the Department of Agriculture. "It makes matters worse, farmers always go for the most toxic chemicals that kill all pests at once."

A 2014 National Forensic Science Laboratory study that looked at the trends of clinical toxicology cases in Nepal from 2002-2012 showed that of the total poisoning cases due to pesticides, 72% were by ingesting the organophosphorus compounds Methyl parathion and Novaluron (Dichlorvos). Pyrethroid, carbamate and organochlorine were also used. Some of these pesticides are actually banned in Nepal, but available over the counter.

A Central Police Forensic Science Laboratory study conducted over the past three years shows organophosphorus compounds and aluminium phosphide as the most common active ingredients in poisoning cases. Data from seven tertiary hospitals across Nepal found Glyphos (aluminium phospide used to kill rodents) as the most common pesticide in those admitted for poisoning.

The Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh and Nepal Public Health Foundation is collecting three years worth of hospital and forensic data to analyze self-poisoning. Prof Michael Eddleston of the University of Edinburgh was the principal investigator and was recently in Nepal.

"I don’t think it’s ever possible to use pesticide safely. You have to make pesticides toxic to humans, animals and the environment. We are trying to identify the problematic pesticides that are killing people here and provide that information to the concerned authorities so that they are banned and replaced with safer chemical options," Eddleston told Nepal Times.

The Nepal Public Health Foundation is also organizing a two-day national conference (9-10 January) focused on healthy farming and reducing pesticide use.

Instead Bangladesh, Korea and Sri Lanka have shown that removing highly hazardous pesticides from agricultural practice is key to preventing suicide deaths without affecting agricultural output. The good news is that some of the most toxic pesticides are being banned in Nepal.

In 2020, when the Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention pivoted Dichlorvos and 3g tablets of aluminium phosphide as the most common cause of pesticide suicides in Nepal, the Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre placed a ban on both the pesticides, to be enforced after a grace period of two years for the chemicals already on the market.

Similarly, before Methyl (Methyl parathion) was prohibited in 2006, up to 58% of Nepalese killing themselves were using the chemical. After the ban, this figure came down to 15%, indicating the prevention is better than cure and that is exactly what pesticide ban does. And this ban a double benefit it reduces suicide death while also bringing down the rampant use of pesticides in agriculture, leading to a decline in pesticide residue," adds Sharma, who retired after banning the two pesticides.

Despite the ban, however, the smuggling of pesticides across the open border with India remains a challenge, and experts call for cross-border cooperation to fight it.

Says Rakesh Ghimire of Teaching Hospital: "Control of pesticides especially in agricultural area is important, but as important is pesticide information centre and treatment when the poisoning happens."

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Nepal’s suicide rate vastly

The official statistics for people taking their own lives are bad enough, but the actual number is much greater

SUICIDE METHODS IN NEPAL

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A note on suicide notes

With the spread of social media, police have to contend with suicide notes not just on paper but also on the internet platforms. But the real challenge of dealing with suicide notes is not the same: the mental health. Would the detection of a dead person be believable? And if the dying declaration blames someone else for the suicide, how and why is the allegation?

Kamal Shrestha, a physician at Patan Hospital says that dying declarations are usually held to be unverifiable evidence. “When someone declares that they are going to die and proceeds to kill themselves, we have every reason to doubt such a note seriously,” says Shrestha.

“How ever, if they blame another person, we cannot assume guilt based on the note. We have to take into consideration that the person who committed suicide could have been mentally ill.”

Police also take such suicide notes seriously, but priority criminal investigation over mental health. “A suicide note is evidence, so we treat it with utmost care. We analyze the handwriting to make sure it matches the dead person’s. If the dead person blames another person, we consider them under suspicion until they are proven innocent,” says Shakti Thapa at Nepal Police. The police do not necessarily question the sanity of the person who wrote the note, therefore solving the mental health aspect of the suicide.

For the first time, the Ministry has included mental health as a priority in its proposal to the National Planning Commission, hoping to see that reflected in the next five year plan. But till that happens, there are other things to be done.

“Mental health still has a stigma and people are not willing to acknowledge it or seek help. The first step is to raise awareness of mental health and suicide,” says Udi Maharjan, public health researcher and co-editor of a paper on suicides in Nepal. “We need suicide helplines and people should be made aware of how to access them so they can open up.”
FAQ Nepal

There are many things about Nepal that flummox visitors who step into the country’s sovereign territory from time to time. In order to help them make sense of this country which is a riddle wrapped in a mystery and stuffed inside a conundrum, the Ass provides this one-stop window containing answers to some Frequently Asked Questions about Nepal.

Q: Where is Nepal?
A: A good question. We’re just trying to figure that out ourselves. In a philosophical sense you could say that we don’t know where we are at the present juncture of history, or the direction we are headed as a nation state.

Q: Why doesn’t Kathmandu have any working traffic lights?
A: Because an automatic traffic light has not yet been invented which can detect an approaching VIP motorcycle and slow all vehicular movements at intersections for a minimum of one hour.

Q: How is Nepal promoting tourism in 2020?
A: Nepal will meet the 2 million target in 2020. It will exceed it. The Minister of Tourism, Mass media and Tourism is in Australia as we speak to offer people there safe haven in Nepal. The minister also got the Australian government to require all of Nepal’s 4 million overseas workers to wearAmazingly relaying if construction sites in Saudi Arabia and in palm oil plantations in Malaysia.

Q: What is Nepal best known for?
A: The birthplace of Lord Buddha.
  - Home of Lord Ram’s in-laws.
  - The highest mountain in the world.
  - As the highest per capita producer of instant noodles.
  - Always 5 minutes ahead of Indian Standard Time.
  - For the world’s friendliest and most trustworthy crooks.

Q: How do people commonly greet each other in Nepal?
A: “Namaste!” (translation: Have you partaken in a bhang yet?)

Q: What are some common Nepali customs?
A: Never offer anything with your left hand, it is considered taboo. Taboos under the table, taking with either hand is OK.

Q: Any tips on dining etiquette?
A: To blend in with your hosts, chew loudly with your mouth open. After finishing your meal, show gratitude and appreciation by burping in a loud and carefree manner.

Q: What other cultural sensitivities should I keep in mind?
A: Public display of affection is considered offensive. Refrain from holding hands in the streets unless you are of the same sex.

Q: How do I ensure that my visit will help Nepal’s economy?
A: Never insist on paying three times more than what locals pay for meals, museum tickets and domestic air transport

Q: Is there any reason why you shouldn’t be in preventive custody under the new IT bill?
A: None whatsoever.