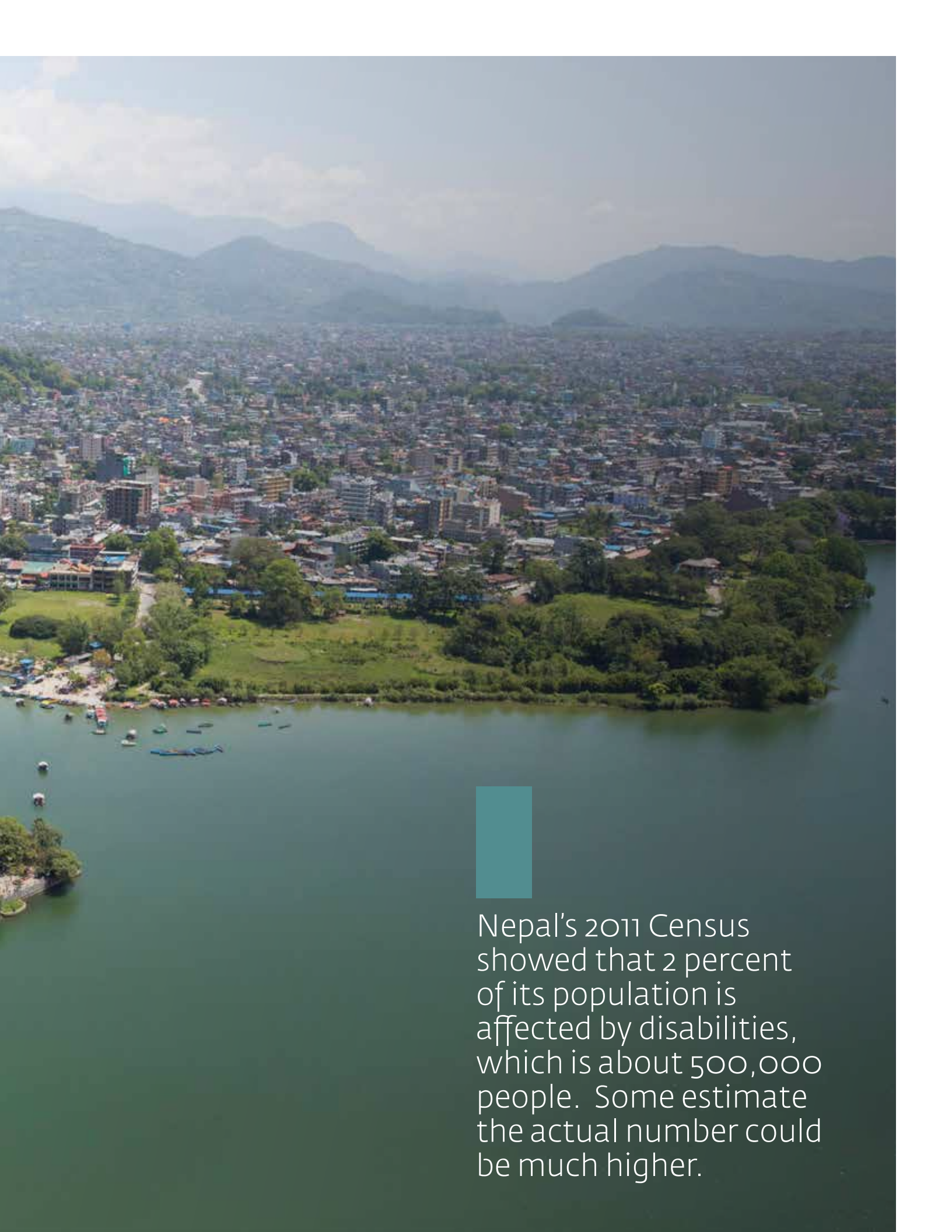


OPEN TO ALL: A SURVEY ON ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NEPAL'S HOTELS



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Nepal's 2011 Census showed that 2 percent of its population is affected by disabilities, which is about 500,000 people. Some estimate the actual number could be much higher.

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The survey for this report took place in February and March 2021, with 90 hotels across Nepal participating.

The SEJON team was led by Gajendra Budhathoki, managed by SEJON President, Bhim Gautam, and coordinated by SEJON member, Kedar Dahal. The team included SEJON members Prem Punathoki, Laxman Darlan, Surendra Pokharel, Sujana Subedi, Ranjan Koirala, Bhojraj Bhandari, Chhabi Sapkota, Dipendra Thapa, Hemanta Joshi, and Prem Chanda. We would like to thank the team members, the executive committee, and the secretariat of SEJON.

At IFC, the report was led by Communications Officer, John Narayan Parajuli, under the overall guidance of Country Manager for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, Wendy Werner, with translation and additional research by Vishal Rai. Additional inputs were provided by Regional Tourism Consultant, Sumit Baral, and Private Sector Development Specialist, Raihana Rabbani.

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IFC FOREWORD

Around one billion people are affected by some form of disability, according to the World Health Organization. People with disabilities have been traveling more than ever, but they still encounter numerous challenges in accessing and enjoying destinations because their specific needs have not been taken into consideration in designing tourism experiences. And it is not just people with disabilities who face these issues—they also impact the elderly, pregnant women, or families with small children.

Fortunately, a growing number of countries have recognized the value of developing accessible tourism to ensure that people with disabilities can have the same freedom to travel and see the world they live in, to indulge in its beauty and diversity, just the same as anyone else. Indeed, accessible tourism is an issue of human rights and social inclusion – it is about creating spaces and experiences that are open to all.

Disability is also clearly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals, in its aim to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. By 2030, Goal 10 strives to reduce inequality and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people. Goal 11, meanwhile, seeks

to make transport systems safe and accessible, and also provide universal access to public spaces.

What's more, accessible tourism also makes economic sense for businesses within the tourism sector. Travelers with disabilities are known to spend more than other people, and they usually travel with caretakers, friends, or family. The United States, Australia, and countries in Europe have long recognized the benefits of accessible tourism, with studies there showing the potential of a billion-dollar industry. However, accessible tourism remains an untapped source of potential revenue for most countries, including Nepal. According to disability-rights experts, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal received around 2,000 tourists with disabilities a year. But with improved facilities and conditions, this number could easily exceed 10,000. While this figure may not appear to be significant, it can still be a big boost for the COVID-battered tourism industry.

In early 2021, IFC collaborated with the Society of Economic Journalists—Nepal and the National Federation of the Disabled—Nepal to carry out a survey to explore the preparedness of Nepal's hotels in catering to people with disabilities. What do

business owners and staff think about accessibility? What infrastructural features or initiatives are already in place? What are the key barriers?

This report shares the findings of the study and recommends actions for the government, the tourism industry, and donor agencies. It shows that a move towards universal accessibility and accessible tourism will only be possible with combined efforts from the government, the private sector, and donor agencies.

On behalf of IFC, I would like to thank the Society of Economic Journalists—Nepal and the National Federation of the Disabled—Nepal for their efforts and contribution to completing this survey. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the participants of this study, and all individuals who were kind enough to share their time and knowledge with us.

Wendy Werner

COUNTRY MANAGER

*International Finance Corporation (IFC)
for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ensuring accessibility at tourism destinations for all travelers is key to responsible and sustainable tourism. Accessible destinations are those that have put in place the necessary infrastructure and services to help everyone to participate in and enjoy tourism experiences, regardless of physical limitations, disabilities, or age.¹

While accessible tourism serves the disabled and the aged, it also includes pregnant women and families with small children.² Not surprisingly, the accessible tourism market is a growing segment—because it makes sense from a human rights perspective, strengthens social inclusion, and, most of all, it presents a significant business opportunity.³

The increasing focus on accessible tourism is coupled with a growing awareness about the need to eliminate architectural barriers for persons with disabilities, particularly so in the accommodation sector. A 2017 study in Korea showed that people with mobility disabilities placed foremost emphasis on accommodation facilities that were accessible.⁴ This underlines how crucial it is to create welcoming spaces for persons with disabilities and to equate their needs with those of other guests.

But, how prepared are Nepal's hotels to cater to persons with disabilities?

To answer this, a study was conducted by the Society of Economic Journalists—Nepal, in collaboration with the National Federation of the Disabled—Nepal, with financial and technical assistance from IFC. Covering 90 star hotels in major cities of the country, the study found that while most hoteliers were aware of the concept of accessible tourism, they had not invested in disability-friendly infrastructure. The reasons for this were varied—some hotels had old structures, some cited geographical difficulties, and some said they simply did not receive many guests with disabilities.

Many of the surveyed hotels said the extra costs was a key factor in their failure to build ramps, purchase wheelchairs, or provide other accessible infrastructure and services; even though national and international studies have showed that such infrastructure adds up to less than 0.2 percent of total construction costs. There is also a provision of a 10 percent concession for accessible infrastructure. Moreover, readiness was poor on the human resources side, with no staff employed or assigned to assist guests with disabilities.

Another major issue identified by the study was the lack of clarity and understanding about universal accessibility and inclusive tourism practices, even in the concerned government departments, and

an absence of relevant policy and legal provisions. Disability rights experts state that engineers at the municipalities are also unaware of the Accessible Physical Infrastructure and the communication Services Directive (This directive is being revised with the technical support of the National Federation of the Disabled—Nepal)

As increasing numbers of people with physical limitations and disabilities travel around the world, and given the ethical and financial benefits of welcoming and catering to these travelers, it is clear that Nepal must take urgent steps to increase accessibility in tourism infrastructure, services, and products.

The study shows that the success can be forged only with efforts from the government, the private sector, and donor agencies working together to create a conducive environment in which the principles of universal accessibility is integrated into relevant legal and policy provisions, including building codes and tourism guidelines; best practices in the industry is recognized and rewarded; model accessible destinations are developed and promoted; and necessary support is provided for implementation of public-private partnerships at different levels—all with the participation of and feedback from persons with disabilities.

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/promoting-accessible-tourism-for-all.html>

² Zsarnoczky, M. (2017). Accessible Tourism in the European Union

³ World Tourism Organization (2016), Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context, UNWTO, Madrid

⁴ Lyu, S. O. (2017). Which accessible travel products are people with disabilities willing to pay more? A choice experiment. Tourism Management, Volume 59, April 2017, pp. 404-412

Although inclusive tourism is gaining significant ground globally, Nepal has been slow to embrace it.





INTRODUCTION

01

According to the World Health Organization, an estimated one billion people (15 percent of the global population) are affected by some form of disability; 690 million people with disabilities live in Asia and the Pacific.⁵ Nepal's 2011 Census showed that 2 percent of its population is affected by disabilities, which is about 500,000 people.⁶ Some estimate the actual number could be much higher.

As more persons with physical limitations and disabilities travel around the world, the more crucial it becomes to incorporate their needs into tourism strategies and policies. Accessible tourism is now considered a human right. In December 2006, the UN General Assembly formally

adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 9 of the convention calls for UN member states to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to facilities and services open or provided to the public.⁷

Disability is also included in various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular those related to education, growth and employment, inequality, and accessibility of human settlements. In 2015, the SDGs were adopted by all UN Member States with a view to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.⁸ Creating disability-friendly tourism

infrastructure has thus become a human right imperative.

Besides, accessible tourism also makes clear business sense by boosting visitor numbers and revenue. A 2013 study in Spain found that people with disabilities spent more as they usually tend to travel with companions and had the potential to generate at least €2.4 billion for the country's tourism industry.⁹ The first major statistically reliable survey on the disability travel market in the U.S. was in 2002, with a second study following in 2005. Both studies found that an adult with disability spent an average of \$430 during one trip. Overall, the travel expenses of persons with disabilities amounted to as much as \$13.6 billion a year. This figure could actually be doubled since it did not consider other expenses, for instance, those of traveling companions.¹⁰ A follow-up survey was conducted in 2020; it showed that the disability travel market contributed over \$50 billion to the travel industry in the U.S. In Australia, the accessible tourism market is worth over AUD 10.8 billion.¹¹

Given the benefits, it would be a missed opportunity if countries like Nepal did not pay attention to accessible tourism, starting by developing accessible accommodation. Designing accessible hotels requires a smart approach known as Design-for-All or Universal Design, which is "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent



⁵ <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284422296>

⁶ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/Nepal/Nepal-Census-2011-Vol1.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/promoting-accessible-tourism-for-all.html>

⁸ <https://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

⁹ Domínguez, T.; Fraiz, J.A.; Alén, E. (2013). Economic profitability of accessible tourism for the tourism sector in Spain. *Tour. Econ.*, 19, 1385–1399

¹⁰ World Tourism Organization (2016), *Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context*, UNWTO, Madrid. p. 25

¹¹ <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284422296>

possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”¹² The first step towards Universal Design is to learn about the basic requirements of persons with disabilities.¹³ Sweden's Scandic Hotels chain, for instance, has recognized the distinctions between the various disabilities and has set a standard of 101 accessibility measures across all its hotels.¹⁴

Although the term “accessible” refers to facilities that accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, the facilities will actually benefit all customers. In particular, accessible facilities are beneficial when guests include pregnant women, families with small children, tired or stressed clients, and even customers with heavy pieces of baggage.¹⁵ Furthermore, installing communication boards with pictures will support persons with intellectual/ learning disabilities and hearing disabilities.

The social inclusion of persons with disabilities is part of the process of improving their ability, opportunity, and dignity to take part in society. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework stresses the need to empower persons with disabilities to participate in, and benefit from, the development process.¹⁶ As part of the World Bank Group's commitment to support disability-inclusive development by 2030, IFC is obligated to enhance its due diligence of disability inclusion¹⁷ in private sector projects. This means creating an enabling environment

through campaigns and advocacy to support disability-inclusive development in the private sector. As IFC invests in the private sector, it makes sense for us to launch a

campaign to promote disability-friendly tourism infrastructure that has elements of both market creation and development impact for an underserved community.



SHREEJANA RANA

President, Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN)

Do you keep accessibility for all in mind when constructing hotel infrastructure? If yes, what do you pay attention to?

In order to raise our standards to international levels, we have collaborated with the Government of Nepal and recently published a set of standards for hotels and resorts. Point number 56 in the Hotel Standard 2077 (2021) has a provision that states that at least one room should be disability-friendly. Hoteliers have definitely taken this into consideration during construction. According to the same arrangement, each hotel floor and every toilet and restroom should be disability-friendly.

Do hotels provide employment to people with disabilities?

It depends on the type of disability and the knowledge or skills of the person. For instance, instead of working as a frontline employee, a person with disability can be placed in the accounting division if they possess the skills. Since we are a service industry, we haven't really followed this. A few restaurants have taken initiatives and they have been effective. On a personal level, I feel that we need to focus on this issue.

What should the government do to facilitate the operation of disability-friendly hotels?

In my opinion, the state should encourage people with disabilities to run hotels. For this, grants should be provided by the state, and various taxes and revenue should be waived for five years. Currently, we have been witnessing more money being spent on purchasing land than on constructing hotels. In order to stem this situation, government land should be provided on lease for longer periods of time.

Do you provide training on accessibility to hotel staff? If no, do you have plans to make training mandatory?

The main objective of HAN is to provide efficient services to domestic and foreign guests, so we have been conducting such training programs. The issue now is about providing training to workers and employees with disabilities, which we have been doing, but only occasionally.

Do you have provisions for disability-friendly vehicles for persons with disabilities? Do you have plans to make such vehicles mandatory?

We have heard about government plans to bring in disability-friendly vehicles, which is a major factor in attracting tourists. In order to mitigate the process for hotels to procure such vehicles, they should be completely tax exempt.

¹² <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/>

¹³ Buhalis, D., Darcy, S., Ambrose, I. (2012). Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism. 241

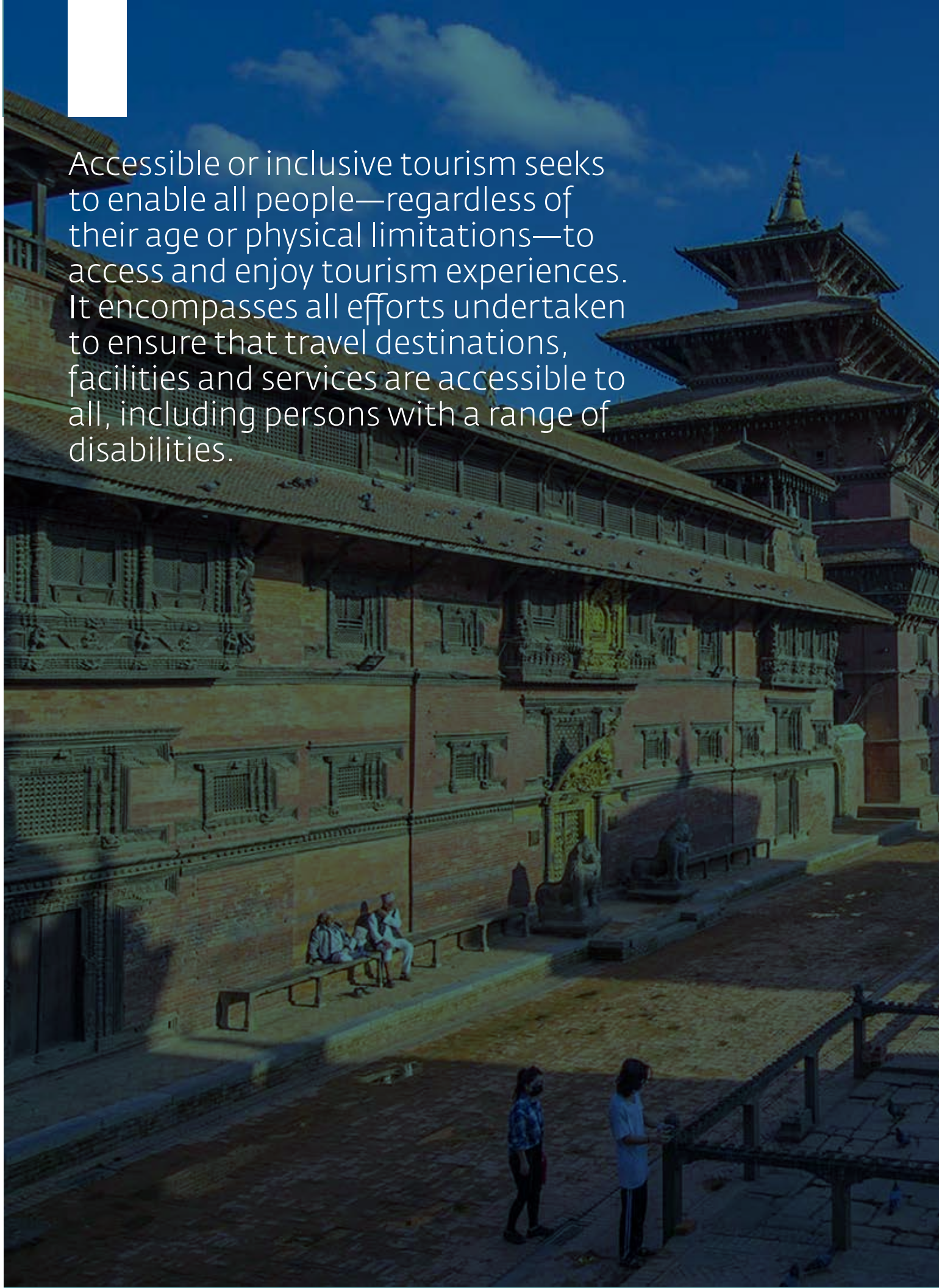
¹⁴ World Tourism Organization (2016), Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context, UNWTO, Madrid. 40

¹⁵ Buhalis, D., Darcy, S., Ambrose, I. Best Practice. 244

¹⁶ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/437451528442789278/pdf/126977-WP-PUBLIC-DisabilityInclusionAccountabilitydigital.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/07/24/world-bank-group-announces-new-commitments-on-disability-inclusion>

Accessible or inclusive tourism seeks to enable all people—regardless of their age or physical limitations—to access and enjoy tourism experiences. It encompasses all efforts undertaken to ensure that travel destinations, facilities and services are accessible to all, including persons with a range of disabilities.





ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN NEPAL

02

2.1 Accessible Tourism in Nepal

Nepal's natural beauty and cultural diversity, among other factors, make for myriad opportunities for the country to become a top tourist destination. The country opened for tourists in the 1950s and in just a few decades earned a reputation as a mountaineering destination—eight of the world's 14 peaks over 8,000 meters high are in Nepal and 400 peaks have been opened for climbing. The tourism industry is one of the largest in the country and a major source of foreign exchange.

Despite Nepal's immense tourism potential, poor tourist infrastructure has been a persistent obstacle. The more focus on developing such infrastructure, the more the tourism sector can contribute to the national economy. The sector is also a major source of employment; one of every nine jobs in Nepal is linked to tourism. Tourism can be an important means of poverty alleviation for the country if forward and backward linkages is further expanded.

A particularly unexplored area of Nepal's tourism industry relates to accessible tourism. Although inclusive tourism is gaining significant ground globally, Nepal has been slow to embrace it. The Government of Nepal has set certain criteria to ensure access for all in the construction of physical infrastructure, but the tourism sector is yet to implement this in a significant way.

Examples of efforts in accessible tourism are few and far between. In 2018, Nepal's first accessible trail



was inaugurated near Sarangkot in Pokhara.¹⁸ Among the hotels in Pokhara, The Lakeside Retreat has constructed a ramp according to international standards, and the ground floor is accessible for wheelchair users. The staff have also received training on supporting persons in wheelchairs. In Kathmandu, Hotel Hardik has constructed disability-friendly infrastructure and employed people with disabilities.¹⁹

Nepal attracts a large number of adventure tourists, among whom are persons with disabilities, particularly those who have lost limbs, are blind, and are speech and hearing impaired. In fact, 13 persons with disabilities have successfully climbed Mt. Everest so far.

Trekking is a major attraction for individuals with various physical disabilities. Over the years, people with artificial limbs and visual impairments—accompanied by helpers—have trekked across the country's routes. However, the country's physical infrastructure, even in its major cities, is not disability- or even wheelchair-friendly. Even in the capital, Kathmandu, the road office has only just begun to construct disability-friendly sidewalks.²⁰ So, while Nepal's geographical, natural, and heritage features are tourist attractions, much of it is not accessible to people with physical disabilities.

¹⁸ <https://undpnepal.exposure.co/open-to-all>

¹⁹ <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/making-nepal-accessible-to-all/>

²⁰ <https://kathmandupost.com/valley/2021/04/02/departments-of-roads-starts-disabled-friendly-pavement-project-in-kathmandu>



MITRA LAL SHARMA
President, National Federation
of the Disabled – Nepal

What kind of infrastructure and facilities should hotels provide for people with disabilities?

There are a number of requirements for persons with disabilities, many of which are not present in Nepal. At present, the common perception is that all that persons with disabilities require is a wheelchair ramp. And when we talk about accessibility, we pay attention only to people with physical disabilities. People with low vision need enough light in the rooms and the rooms should be bright enough for the deaf to communicate in sign language. Additionally, people who are visually impaired need railings that lead to their rooms. But the reality is that it's difficult for the visually-impaired to even order food because no hotel has Braille menus.

So, when it comes to accessibility, there are no facilities for people with disabilities. Hoteliers do not consider people with disabilities to be tourists. Most of the attention is on wheelchair users, not on other types of disabilities.

Have you seen many hotels with special facilities for people with disabilities in Nepal?

I don't think hoteliers have people with disabilities in mind at the very start of their projects. That's why there are no disability-friendly hotels and we are forced to make do.

What are the laws and policies of the government for disability-friendly hotels? Are they being implemented?

The national building code stipulates that the first floor of a building should be disability-friendly. This is as strict as

the law gets. I think the government should make binding laws.

There are many hotels under construction in Kathmandu. What are your suggestions for disability-friendly facilities in those that have completed construction?

Firstly, hoteliers should build ramps for people with disabilities. Secondly, the toilet doors should be wide, and the insides of the toilets should be spacious. There should be disability-friendly beds; taps and latches should be reachable by people with short stature; rooms should be brightly lit; and hotel services should be disability-friendly. More attention should be paid to the use of sign language and Braille menus should be kept in restaurants.

Similarly, the transport system within the Kathmandu Valley is not disability-friendly. In the same way that hotels provide taxis and other vehicles for guests, four-wheeled scooters, wheelchairs, and white canes should be made available for guests with disabilities.

We have surveyed almost a hundred hotels. They say they have installed elevators to make their hotels disability-friendly. But, according to you, no hotel is disability-friendly. What are your suggestions for them?

First of all, they haven't paid attention to this issue. They have invested millions but if they spend a few hundred thousand rupees more, their hotels would be accessible for all. That is all that's required. Good hotels have installed lifts, and ramps can be connected if hoteliers spend around

2.2 Accessible tourism around the world

Worldwide, over the last two decades, a number of successful initiatives have addressed the needs of persons with disabilities, including providing information on available accessible services. An example is Canada's Kéroul project, which developed a tourist brochure and interactive website for persons with disabilities.²¹ In Australia, the Sydney for All website offers information on accessibility for visitors with disabilities. In Europe, Accessibility Information Schemes (AIS) provide databases of accessible tourist venues and services. One such AIS scheme is Europe For All, which helps persons with disabilities plan their trips easily.²²

Transport is an often-overlooked part of accessible tourism research even though accessible transport adds to the value chain of accessible tourism. It benefits not just persons with disabilities but all users. In Spain, the ONCE Foundation, with support from IMSERSO (Spain's Institute for the Elderly and Social Services), provides accessible taxis (Eurotaxi), where wheelchair users do not need to leave their wheelchairs. This project started in 1990 and the taxi fleet has grown since then.²³

The presence of staff trained to serve persons with disabilities and specific access requirements is important in helping guests overcome barriers. In Europe, the transnational European Training Certificate Accessible for All in the Tourism Sector (ETCAATS) project,

CONTINUED...

²¹ Zsarnoczky, M. (2017). Accessible Tourism in the European Union. 34

²² https://www.accessibletourism.org/resources/2015-04-02-eu-supply-study-final_report.pdf

²³ World Tourism Organization (2016), Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context, UNWTO, Madrid. 35

CONTINUED...

\$600. A white cane costs \$4, a wheelchair costs \$170, and the cost of training for a sign language interpreter is around \$700. Free training is available as well. As for Braille menus, hotels may need only a couple of them, and they can be printed at any press. So can Braille business cards if you add \$5.

Additionally, if hotels spend around \$1700 on a four-wheeled scooter, and if they provide it for a fee to guests who have disabilities, those guests will keep returning to the same hotel. But since hoteliers refuse to understand such a simple matter, what can we do?

What is the employment status of persons with disabilities in hotels, tourism, and other related sectors? What are the benefits of employing them?

As per the Disability Act, if there are more than five workers with disability employed at an establishment, the business is eligible for certain benefits although the exact nature of such benefits is not clear. Clarity on these benefits and concessions would provide businesses with incentive to employ persons with disabilities.

At present, we are working on an important plan to provide employment to 1500 to 2500 people in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Kapilvastu, Rupandehi, and Morang. Some cafes already employ people with disabilities, which is exemplary. We are trying to take it further.

Urbanization has increased rapidly. Is disability-friendly infrastructure being added or are things much the same?

It has increased, but much of it seems like a formality because it hasn't been done in a proper manner. For instance, a disability-friendly overhead bridge was constructed in Butwal but a lot needs to be done in its management. Another example is the installation of tactile tiles on the sidewalks of Bharatpur in Chitwan. Although this is a positive step, there are gaps and holes between the tiles. So even if the tiles are installed, they are not as effective as they could be.

While things have improved compared to the past, the issue still has not received sufficient attention. Engineers have not stressed on accessibility when coming up with designs, even though the government has come up with a building code, which is a law in itself. If the licenses of engineers who do not comply with that

law are revoked, the building code will start being applied. But we do not have such a law.

Will the addition of disability-friendly infrastructure lead to a rise in the number of tourists?

Yes, there will be an increase in foreign tourist numbers. People with disabilities will finally be able to enjoy Nepal's attractions. There is a lot of money in accessible tourism, but the tourism industry has not paid attention to this. Public places, including parks and view towers, need to be disability-friendly as well. Such facilities are useful not just for people with disabilities but for children, pregnant women, and the elderly too.

Do you know how many tourists with disabilities come to Nepal annually?

Around 2000 tourists with disabilities currently. But with the problems they face here, they do not recommend the country to others. Therefore, the number of foreign tourists with disabilities is declining. But if conditions were improved and facilities made more disability-friendly, that number could easily be over 10,000 people a year.

which ran for two years, gave tourism providers training instruments and professional certification. The goal was to make all staff aware of and have the skills to cater to persons with disabilities, elderly people, and those with specific access requirements.²⁴

Another example is Sweden's Scandic Hotels chain, renowned for its accommodating persons with various disabilities.²⁵ Under its Accessibility Standard, Scandic offers

a comprehensive training course on accessibility for its employees, including how to treat guests with hearing impairments, how to prepare and serve food for persons with visual impairments, and how to provide service to persons with mobility problems.²⁶ Accessibility related work is included in the hotels' general budgets.

In Spain, the ILUNION hotel chain has continuously worked on accessibility,

and its hotels are the only ones in the country to have implemented an Accessibility Management System. Staff has received training on accessibility and personnel include people with disabilities. In fact, two of the chain's hotels employ more than 70 percent of staff with disabilities.²⁷

The ILUNION chain's model of employing persons with disabilities could be replicated in Nepal as well. The 2011 National Population Census

²⁴ Ibid. 45

²⁵ Ibid. 40

²⁶ <https://zeroproject.org/practice/prai81172swe-factsheet/>

²⁷ WTO. Manual on Accessible Tourism. 43

of Nepal found that there were around 500,000 Nepalese who had some form of disability and, among them, 163,000 were youth aged between 16 and 40. According to the National Living Condition of Persons with Disabilities, access to employment for persons with disabilities is extremely low.²⁸ While a few hotels and restaurants in the private sector—such as Hotel Hardik and some Bakery Cafe outlets—have employed persons with disabilities, it needs to be done on a larger scale for greater positive impact.

In some cases, longer life expectancies and aging populations have also led to the creation of accessible tourism services. A case in point is Japan, with its aging population and high volume of tourists from Europe and the United States. Combined, these factors have motivated Japan to incorporate accessible elements throughout its tourism value chain—examples

include a tourism center providing specific information on accessibility and an enhanced transport system with a Design for All approach.²⁹

Europe has a number of historic cities that are visited by thousands of tourists each year. A major challenge in such places is finding a balance between accessibility and protecting cultural heritage. In 2010, the European Foundation Centre launched the League of Historical and Accessible Cities (LHAC) project, which has been using innovative solutions to reconcile the two. The LHAC project is implemented in six cities in five countries—Italy, France, Denmark, Bulgaria, and Spain—and focuses on improving accessibility in historic cities while protecting cultural landmarks and promoting sustainable tourism.³⁰ Similar initiatives could be replicated in the historic city centers of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur.

There are other examples of efforts to ensure tourism activities and experiences are fully accessible. In France, the Hérault General Council started the *La mer ouverte à tous* (An open sea for all) initiative, which makes beaches fully accessible. It has been running for more than 15 years now.³¹ In Argentina, accessible infrastructure was added to 40 hectares surrounding Iguazú Falls. Started in 1995, the project turned out to be a social and economic success, with developers consulting with persons with disabilities to make specific areas accessible.³² In Sweden, cruises are offered by the *Wetternvik* company for persons with disabilities in the northern *Vätterns* archipelago. The fleet of boats include wheelchair lifts, induction loops, and adapted toilets. Implemented by the *Askersund* municipality and the company, this is a prime example of public-private collaboration.³³

²⁸ <https://nfdn.org.np/employment-pwds/>

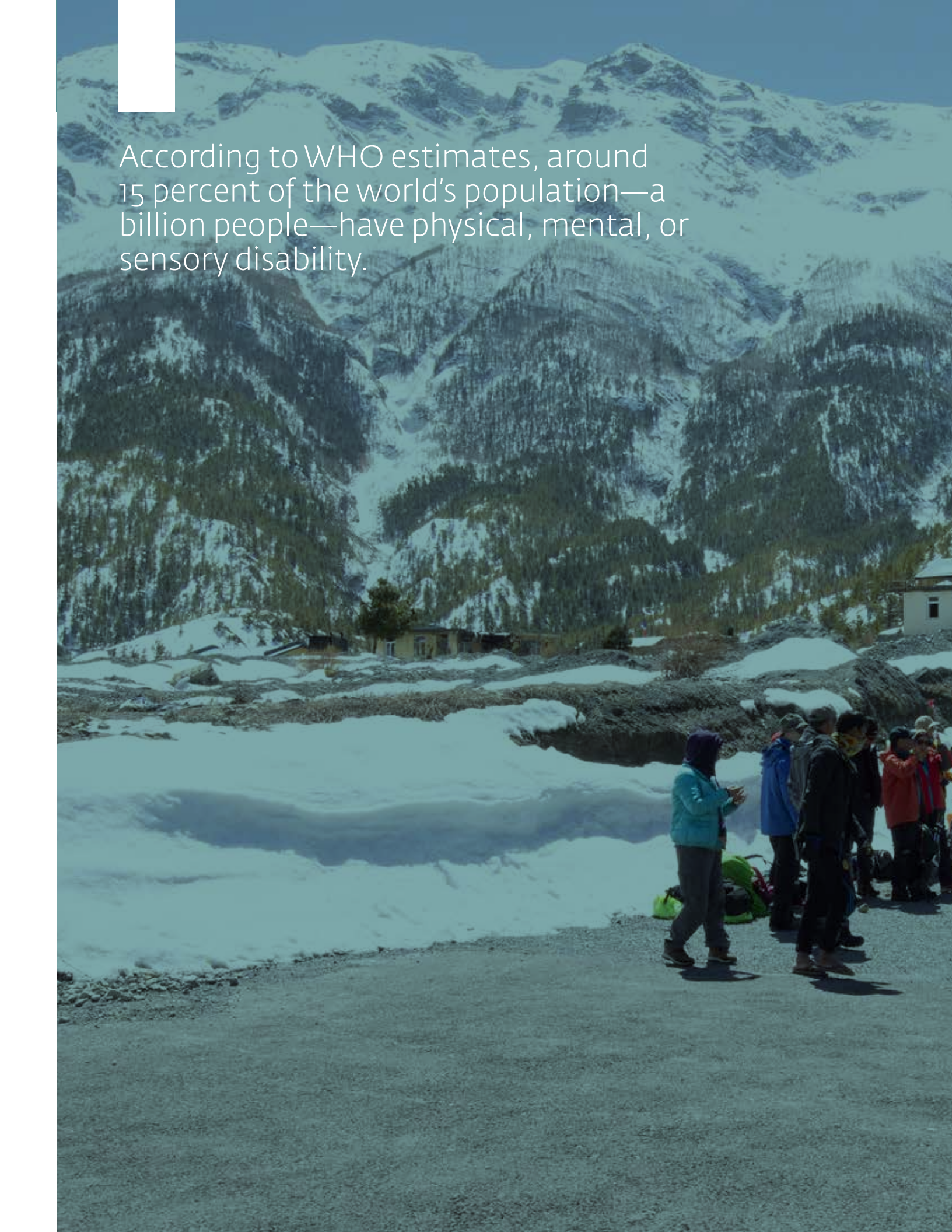
²⁹ WTO. *Manual on Accessible Tourism*. 52

³⁰ *Ibid.* 55

³¹ *Ibid.* 64

³² *Ibid.* 67

³³ *Ibid.* 68

A group of people, including a woman in a bright blue jacket and a man in a dark jacket, are standing on a paved road in the foreground. They are looking towards a small village nestled in a valley, surrounded by snow-covered mountains and evergreen trees. The scene is set in a high-altitude, snowy environment.

According to WHO estimates, around 15 percent of the world's population—a billion people—have physical, mental, or sensory disability.



BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

03

3.1 Accessible Tourism for All

Globally, the concept of accessible tourism has gained ground in recent times. Accessible or inclusive tourism seeks to enable all people—regardless of age or physical limitations—to access and enjoy tourism experiences. It encompasses all efforts undertaken to ensure that travel destinations, facilities, and services are accessible to all, including persons with a range of disabilities.

In Nepal, the concept is still new and, considering the country's focus on adventure tourism, may take some time to permeate. Nepal, in fact, severely lacks accessible

infrastructure.³⁴ While the Disability Rights Act was enacted in 2017, accessible tourism regulations are still absent. As a result, efforts have been few and far between, limited to installation of wheelchair ramps in a few hotels, restaurants, and banquet halls.

In recent days, however, calls for focus on accessible tourism, beyond wheelchair access, are growing louder. The National Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, for instance, has underscored the need to train travel guides in sign language to make communication easier and has called attention to the absence of signs in public places for the visually and hearing impaired.

In 2015, an interactive program—Accessibility Matters: Opportunities for Inclusive Tourism in Nepal—was organized by Four Season Travel and Tour, in partnership with the U.S. Embassy and the International Development Institute. At the event, tourism experts urged the government to promote accessible tourism to exploit Nepal's untapped market for tourists with disabilities looking for adventure activities, such as trekking.³⁵

Considering its social and economic benefits, especially in a post-COVID world, where losses for the tourism industry are estimated to be above \$300 million,³⁶ this is a good time for Nepal to prioritize accessible tourism.

Four Season Travel & Tours: Bringing Accessibility to the Fore

"We know that accessible tourism is achievable in Nepal," says Pankaj Pradhananga, director of Four Season Travel & Tours, a tour operating company involved in accessible tourism since 2014. In the years following that, Pradhananga has gained a fair amount of expertise in the sector, and was even part of the panel at the World Summit on Accessible Tourism—Destinations for All event in Brussels in 2018.

Since inviting Dr. Scott Rains, an advocate for accessibility and inclusion, to Nepal in 2014, Four Season Travel has been a key player in promoting accessible tourism in the country. Rains worked with Four Season, helping to link Nepal's tourism sector with organizations working for persons with disabilities and developing an accessible tourism strategy. In 2015, the company organized a trek in the Annapurna route for people with vision impairments; the route itself was field tested by a visually-impaired person. A year later, Four

Season partnered with the International Development Institute for the Wounded Heroes Trek to Nepal, in which a group of amputee U.S. army veterans trekked to Poon Hill. This was part of the 2016 UNWTO World Tourism Day celebrations. Four Season also brought the former Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, Mirko Tomassoni—a wheelchair user—to Nepal in 2019.

Recognizing that accommodation for people with disabilities is an integral part of accessible tourism, Four Season has encouraged hotels to take up accessibility—by drawing a connection between its humanitarian aspects and its economic benefits. "In doing so, we're able to bring in interested people and convert local stakeholders," he says. While global chains—such as Marriott, Aloft, and Hyatt—already follow international guidelines on accessibility, only some mid-range hotels have accessible facilities in place, says Pradhananga.

However, inclusion does not end with accessible facilities. "We also need to focus on technology," says Pradhananga. For instance, the Independent Living Center (ILC)—a non-profit organization run by persons with disabilities, which works in tandem with Four Season—was gifted an accessible vehicle by a Korean NGO. This occurred after ILC and Four Season organized an event focused on tourists with disabilities from Japan, Korea, and South East Asia. The vehicle is the only one of its kind in Nepal.

Currently, tourism has come to a standstill due to the pandemic, but Pradhananga foresees a steady growth in tourists with disabilities in the days to come. "While we don't get a huge amount of inquiries, they are certainly increasing," says Pradhananga. "More people are aware that Nepal is working on accessible tourism and that we have experienced-backed competencies. We are heading towards the right direction slowly."

³⁴ <https://nfdn.org.np/article/inclusive-tourism-in-nepal/>

³⁵ <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2015/12/02/nepal-urged-to-promote-accessible-tourism>

³⁶ <https://thehimalayantimes.com/blogs/covids-impact-on-tourism>



Around 15 percent of the world's population—one billion people—have physical, mental, or sensory disability, according to WHO estimates.

3.2 Benefits for the industry

According to WHO estimates, around 15 percent of the world's population—a billion people—have physical, mental, or sensory disability. Persons with disability—as well as the elderly—are often not unaccompanied. These individuals, and those who are directly affected by their disability, such as friends and family, make up over a third of the world's population. People with disabilities are travelling more than ever—a 2015 U.S. market study shows that disability travel generated \$17.3 billion per year.³⁷ A follow-up survey in 2020 found that disability travel

contributed \$58.7 billion to the U.S. travel industry.³⁸ In the European Union, accessible tourism contributed 3 percent of GDP in 2012.³⁹ By 2025, it can generate possible revenues of €88.6 billion.⁴⁰ In Australia, it contributed around \$10 million to the tourism industry in 2011.⁴¹ By 2018, the accessible tourism market was worth AUD 10.8 billion.⁴²

The term “disability” encompasses a wider range of people. It is not just limited to disabilities and impairments, but includes people with allergies and other sensitivities, invisible disabilities, and the elderly.⁴³ It is therefore a huge market. In hotels, accessibility is looked at as a feature for persons with disabilities.

However, accessibility adds whole new levels to comfort and services.⁴⁴

Inclusive tourism is only set to increase in the coming years. Life expectancy is growing, which will lead to a growth in less mobile, elderly travelers. If Nepal's tourism industry can focus on accessible tourism, it will be able to attract significantly higher numbers of visitors.

Although hotels in Nepal have been reluctant to move towards accessibility, Hotel Hardik's recent success is an indicator that the construction of accessible infrastructure is an advantage for businesses. Ever since it constructed ramps and accessible bathrooms, Hotel Hardik has seen an increase in venue bookings.⁴⁵

3.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To evaluate the status of accessible tourism
2. To learn about the hotel industry's perceptions of accessible tourism in Nepal
3. To gain insights into challenges related to accessible tourism
4. To raise awareness of accessible tourism among concerned stakeholders, including the Government of Nepal, Nepal Tourism Board, and the tourism industry
5. To provide recommendations to the government and the industry on promoting accessible tourism.

³⁷ <https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.news.1812>

³⁸ <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284422296>

³⁹ <https://www.accessibletourism.org/resources/toolip/doc/2014/07/06/study-a-economic-impact-and-travel-patterns-of-accessible-tourism-in-europe---fi.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JTF-03-2015-0012/full/html>

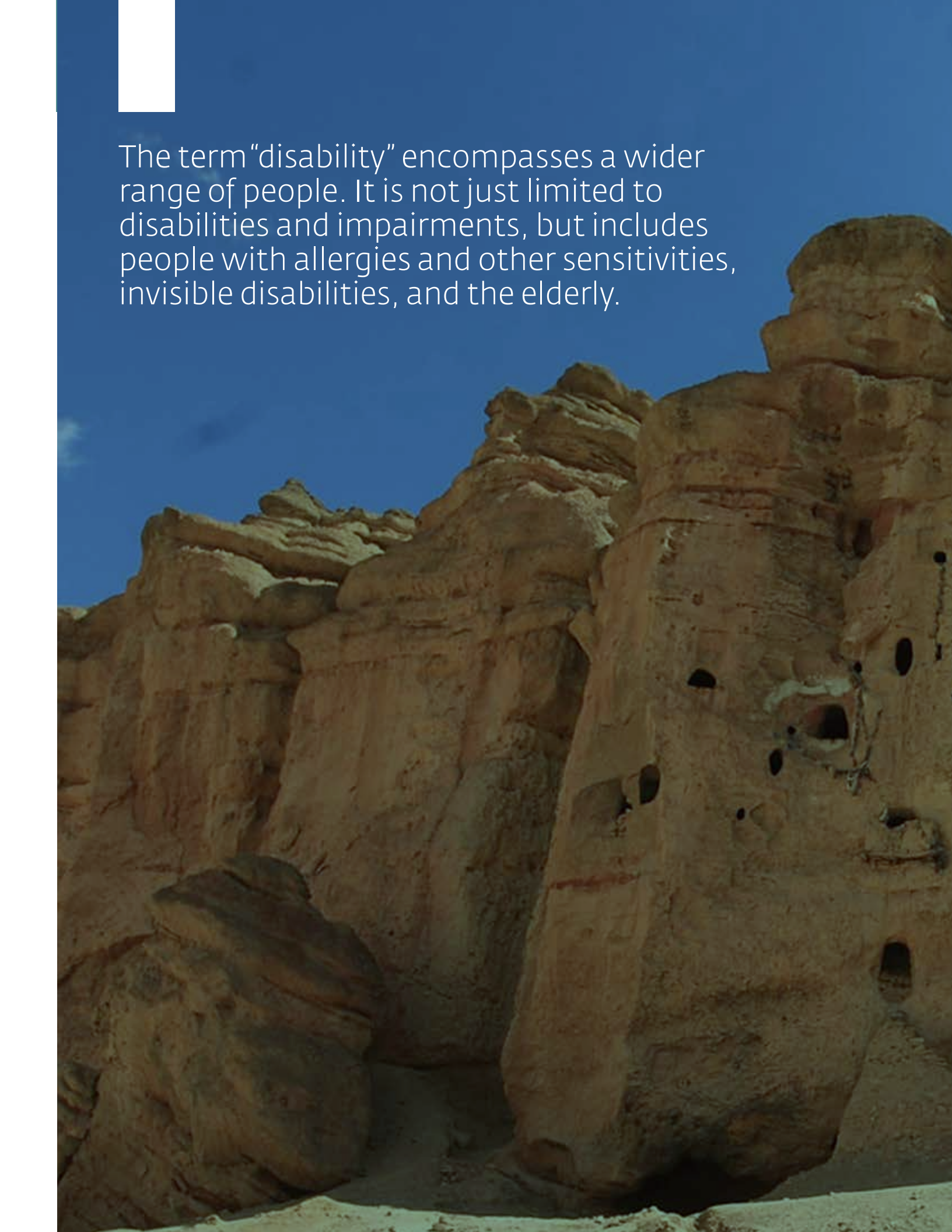
⁴¹ <https://www.wheelchairtraveller.org/contribution-to-development/>

⁴² <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284422296>

⁴³ Zsarnoczky, M. (2017). Accessible Tourism in the European Union. 31

⁴⁴ Eichhorn, Victoria. (2014). Economic Impact and Travel Patterns of Accessible Tourism in Europe: Full Report. 26

⁴⁵ <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/making-nepal-accessible-to-all/>



The term “disability” encompasses a wider range of people. It is not just limited to disabilities and impairments, but includes people with allergies and other sensitivities, invisible disabilities, and the elderly.



STUDY METHOD

04

4.1 Interview/survey

The study was conducted among 90 star hotels in major cities of the country—Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan, Nagarkot, Dhulikhel, Birgunj, Lumbini, and Kailali. Twenty-four questions on accessible tourism

were prepared for the study. Financial journalists visited the hotels and conducted the survey among hotel operators, managers, and employees. The questionnaire and the list of hotels are included in the annex.

4.2 Study documents

Existing documents on Nepal's tourism market, the global tourism market, and various national and international practices on accessible tourism were also examined for this study.



GAJENDRA BUDHATHOKI
Senior economic journalist

You have a lot of knowledge about Nepal's tourism sector. How disability-friendly is Nepal's tourism infrastructure?

Disability-friendly tourist infrastructure is practically non-existent in Nepal. We should be talking more about disability access than a disability-friendly tourism sector. There are many weaknesses in our understanding of accessibility. Accessibility is not just about disability—it includes senior citizens, pregnant women, and those who are physically ill. Prior to the 2015 earthquake, people with physical disabilities would visit Nepal, but they were never regarded as tourists. From the very beginning, disability-friendly infrastructure was ignored while building tourism infrastructure. The fact that accessible infrastructure is beneficial to everyone was never considered. We should look to countries like Japan, China, and India that have taken concrete steps to make tourism disability-friendly.

In 2014, world traveler Scott Rains, a wheelchair user, came to Nepal. He was responsible for making people aware of the potential of accessible tourism. I too became involved in the project and in 2016, for the first time in Nepal, wheelchair users traveled the Annapurna Circuit. After returning from the Annapurna Circuit trek, there was an interaction with Pokhara's tourism entrepreneurs on the issue of accessibility. That led to some amount

of knowledge-building. However, I have noticed that there is still little focus on making tourist destinations accessible.

What does it take to be truly accessible?

We should understand that wheelchair users are not the only ones who use ramps—they are useful for pregnant women and the visually-impaired too. Accessibility means that every service—from rooms to toilets—should be accessible to all. If it is a necessity, it should be accessible. In Nepal's case, minor infrastructure is installed and passed off as accessible. There are many such examples in Kathmandu. Even older five-star hotels lack proper accessibility—what some refer to as "ramps" are just inclined pathways for trolleys. I visit these hotels for conferences. In order to reach a function hall in one of these hotels, you first need to go up to the third floor and then take an elevator.

Some hotels have rooms for wheelchair users, but they do not have the services that they require. People with disabilities are not considered clients in Nepal's hotels and tourism sector. In general, when five-star hotels have a couple of rooms with some open space, they are considered accessible rooms. The understanding of accessibility itself is inadequate in most cases.

CONTINUED...



CONTINUED...

How can accessible tourism infrastructure affect Nepal's economy and employment? How many foreign tourists will it bring?

Currently, most tourists with disabilities seem to travel only to countries with accessible facilities. An average tourist spends up to \$50 a day, while a tourist with a disability is willing to spend up to \$75. Studies conducted in different countries, such as Kenya and Thailand, have shown that people with disabilities spend more than ordinary people.

Just because a person has a disability doesn't mean she/he can't afford to go on vacation. If we build accessible infrastructure, we will have more persons with disabilities visiting Nepal, who will, in turn, spend more. We need to create a favorable environment for them so that Nepal can be known as an accessible tourism destination.

A good accessible tourism destination example in Nepal is the Chandragiri Cable Car. Talks about accessibility at Chandragiri first came up during a general interaction program. Now, there's a wheelchair ramp that goes right up to the temple. The fact that even a steep hill is wheelchair accessible has changed many perceptions about accessibility. So, whenever anyone asks me about tourism destinations in Nepal that are accessible to wheelchair users, I always mention Chandragiri Cable Car—it's accessible for wheelchair users as well as the visually impaired. Accessibility is both about infrastructure and service facilitation for users.

From a legal angle, what should we ask the government to do to overcome any legal hurdles?

I don't think we are weak legally. The United States enacted its disability act only 30 years ago, whereas in Nepal, laws for persons with disabilities was enacted 44 years ago, in 1977. The current Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2074 (2017) is one of the best in the world, and is a provision in the

constitution itself. The National Building Code of 2065 (2008) states that all public infrastructure needs to be disability-friendly.

The problem in Nepal is not in laws and policy, it is in people's interpretations and understanding. When we talk to hoteliers, they say that people with disabilities as guests are rare, which is why they do not want to allocate funds for accessible features. We have failed to understand that it is possible to make simple changes to older physical infrastructure, and that it can make facilities accessible for all people.

The implementation of the policy and legal system has become weak. Due to a lack of mandatory legal provisions, the building construction code itself has not been implemented. And because of the absence of a binding system, the public and tourism sectors in Nepal are not disability-friendly.

How was your trip to the Annapurna Circuit made possible?

As I stated earlier, I met Scott Rains when he visited Nepal, and I wanted to make the trek along with him. We set out on what we later called the "Doko Trail" of the Annapurna Circuit, named after the traditional dokos (wicker baskets) that are used to carry goods. We took our wheelchairs where we could, and were carried in dokos where it wasn't possible. Although it was expensive, we made it to Annapurna Base Camp. This was in 2016.

When we returned from the trek, the UN-WTO came up with the slogan "Tourism For All" in 2017. At that time, the Minister of Tourism was the late Rabindra Adhikari, who wanted to declare an accessible tourism year in Nepal. He proposed the formation of a task force for this, and he wanted me to be a part of it, but he unfortunately passed away while the proposal was being developed. We could not take the concept forward after his demise.

After our return from Annapurna Base Camp, a wheelchair trail was built in Pokhara, the result of campaigning on the part of the city's tourism entrepreneurs. A similar trail is being constructed in Chitwan too. I have also talked to people in Bardiya. This means that wheelchair trails will be developed in three locations in Nepal.

Since Scott Rains, there have been advancements towards accessible tourism. There has been interest from the Nepal Tourism Board, and the Society of Economic Journalists–Nepal (SEJON) has carried out a study on the topic. In the near future, SEJON will be raising the issue of accessible tourism in Nepal through extensive interactions.

What did the study find?

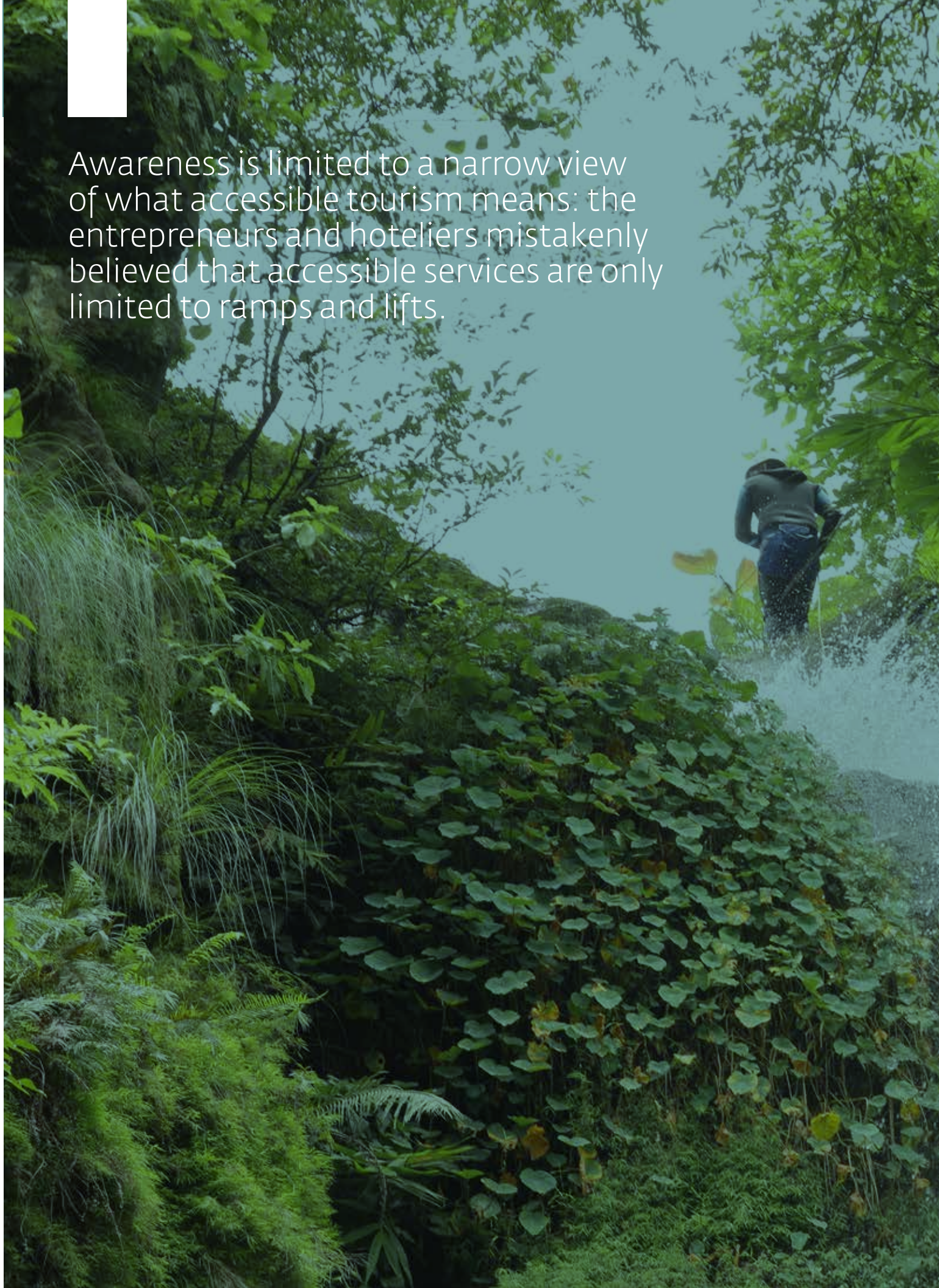
Fifteen members of SEJON visited 90 hotels across Nepal for interviews. They found that entrepreneurs knew about disability-friendly infrastructure, but the misconception is that it is limited to wheelchair accessibility.

Access to the hotel sector in Nepal is particularly weak for the visually impaired. We found that some hoteliers believed that just adding ramps and lifts would make their hotels accessible. Initiatives need to be taken on this issue too.

Additionally, star hotels still do not have wheelchair-friendly infrastructure. However, an exception is Hotel Hardik in Baghbazaar, Kathmandu. The hotel was built under the supervision of U.S.-based engineer, Ananta Baidya. Hardik Hotel has a simple design. It has five rooms set apart for wheelchair users. The hotel spent up to \$8500 to construct a wheelchair-friendly hall and bathroom, which is a model for accessible bathrooms in Nepal.

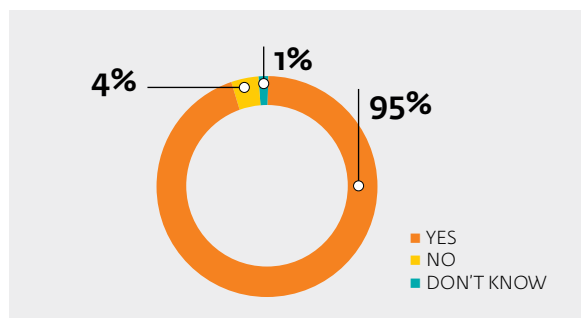
We found that the problem in Nepal is not money but a lack of knowledge. Instead of piecemeal donations to social causes, businesses should focus on channeling funds through more comprehensive corporate social responsibility efforts.

Awareness is limited to a narrow view of what accessible tourism means: the entrepreneurs and hoteliers mistakenly believed that accessible services are only limited to ramps and lifts.



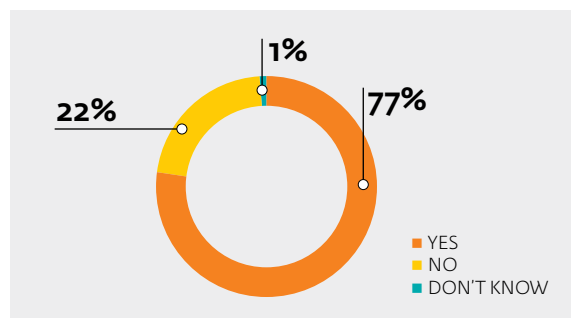
A person wearing a red helmet and a blue backpack is rappelling down a waterfall. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing away from the camera. The waterfall is a wide, powerful cascade of white water. The surrounding area is lush with green vegetation, including ferns and other plants. The background shows a rocky cliff face. The overall scene is dynamic and adventurous.

FINDINGS 05

FIGURE 1: Are you aware of accessible or inclusive tourism?

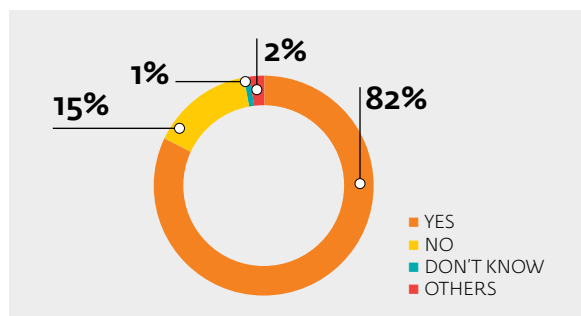
Are you aware of accessible or inclusive tourism?

A majority of the participants (about 95 percent) of the study said they were aware of the concept of accessible tourism. However, awareness is limited to a narrow view of what accessible tourism means: the entrepreneurs and hoteliers mistakenly believe accessible services are only limited to ramps and lifts. Nepal's law on disability rights, in fact, classifies ten types of disabilities. In developed countries, easy access to services is ensured for people with extreme obesity, those with short stature, and the aged.

FIGURE 3: Does your hotel/restaurant have accessible tourism support facilities?

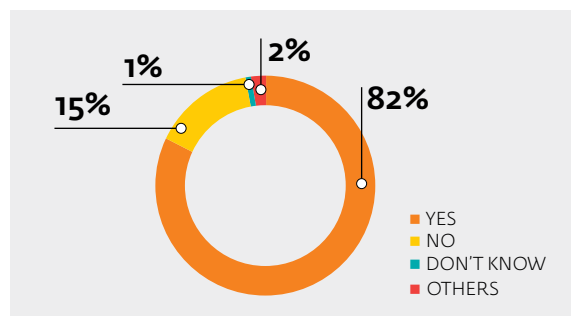
Does your hotel/restaurant have accessible tourism support facilities?

Among respondents, 77 percent said their hotel/restaurant had accessible ancillary facilities, while 22 percent stated their hotels/restaurants did not have such services.

Figure 2: Do your employees/staff have proper knowledge or training on accessibility for all?

Do your employees/staff have proper knowledge or training on accessibility for all?

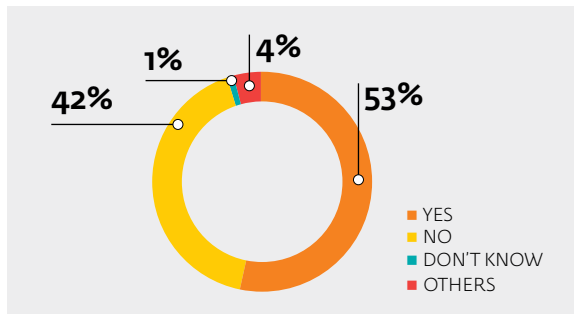
An essential part of accessibility is the presence of trained management and customer service staff. If staff-members are appropriately trained, they can help persons with disabilities to overcome barriers—both physical and sensory.⁴⁶ About 82 percent of participants said their hotel staff were aware of or had been trained in accessibility for all. Only 15 percent said they did not have the proper knowledge and around 2 percent said they would teach or train their staff on the issue. This highlights the possibility of proper treatment and management of guests with disabilities or different physical and mental conditions in Nepal's hotel industry.

Figure 4: Does your hotel provide parking facilities for guests with physical disabilities?

Does your hotel provide parking facilities for guests with physical disabilities?

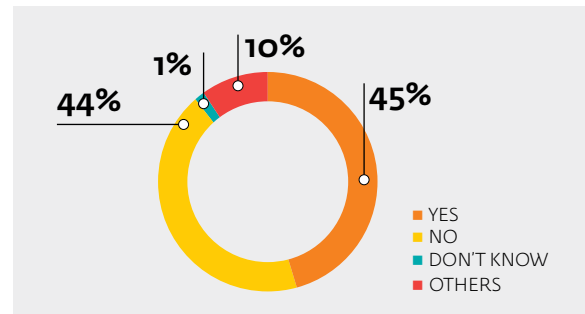
Parking facilities were provided for guests with disabilities in a majority (81 percent) of surveyed hotels/restaurants. Only 15 percent of respondents said they were unaware of such provisions. Around 3 percent said such facilities were under construction.

⁴⁶ World Tourism Organization (2016), Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context, UNWTO, Madrid. 45

FIGURE 5: Does your hotel have ramped access from the entrance to the reception?

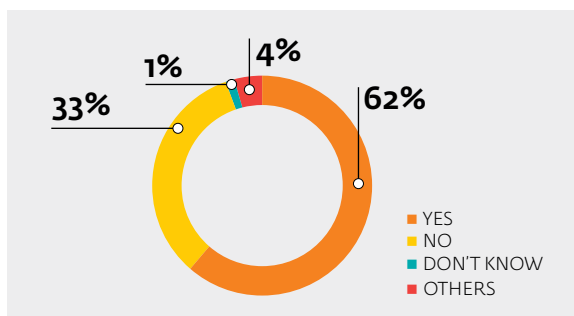
Does your hotel have ramped access from the entrance to the reception?

About 53 percent of respondents said their hotels had ramp access from the entrance to the reception, while 42 percent did not have such facilities. About 4 percent said access was provided by other means. This shows that almost half of the hotels have poor access for wheelchair-bound guests. Although four and five-star hotels have constructed ramps, most hotels have failed to do this.

FIGURE 7: Do you have ramps from the reception to the rooms?

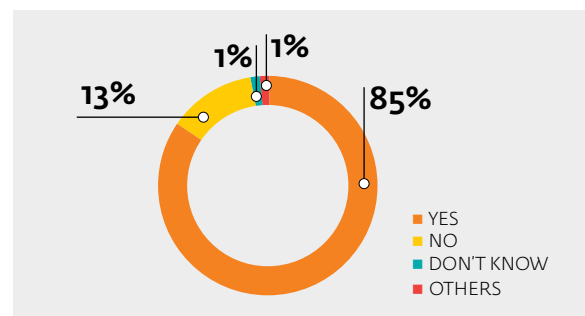
Do you have ramps from the reception to the rooms?

Less than half (45 percent) of respondents said their hotels had ramps from the reception area to the rooms, whereas around 44 percent stated they did not have ramps or any other type of access facility. Around 10 percent of the hotels either had ramps under construction or provided access through elevators.

FIGURE 6: Does your hotel have stair-free/barrier-free access from the entrance to the reception?

Does your hotel have stair-free/barrier-free access from the entrance to the reception?

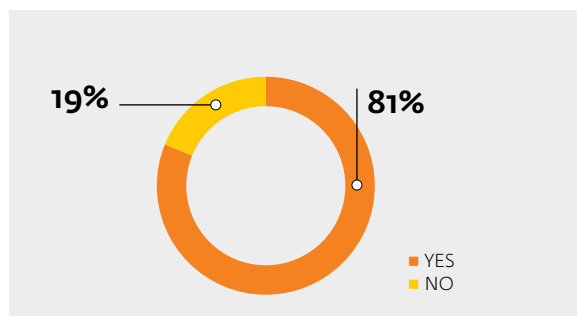
About 62 percent of respondents said access to the reception from the hotel entrance was stairless and barrier-free. This was not the case in 33 percent of the hotels, while around 4 percent said such structures were under construction. Stairless and barrier-free structures facilitate access for wheelchair users and also for visually-impaired and other physically-challenged guests.

FIGURE 8: Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the rooms?

Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the rooms?

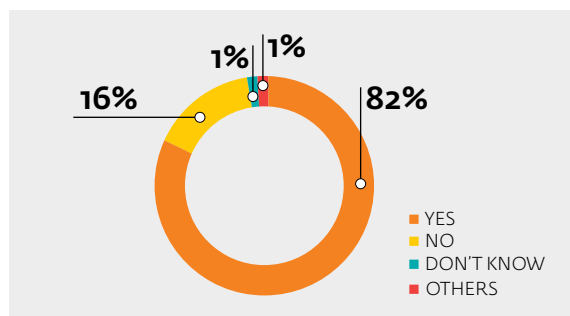
While improving accessibility may require more space, especially for wheelchair movement, there are a number of ways to go about this. For instance, with careful arranging of furniture, even small rooms can be functional for wheelchair users.⁴⁷ Although disability access was found to be lacking in the hotels, most rooms were spacious enough for wheelchair users to move freely. Among respondents, 85 percent said their rooms were big enough for wheelchair users, while around 1 percent said it depended on the rooms. On the other hand, almost 13 percent of respondents replied in the negative, saying there was not enough space for wheelchairs in the rooms.

⁴⁷ Buhalis, D., Darcy, S., Ambrose, I. (2012). Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism. 244

FIGURE 9: Can wheelchair users be easily transferred to the beds?

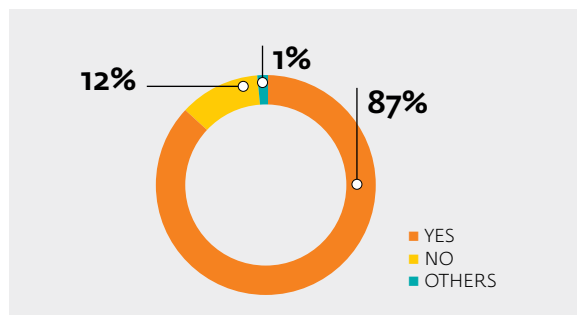
Can wheelchair users be easily transferred to the beds?

Similarly, almost 81 percent of respondents said their hotel beds were wheelchair-friendly; users could easily move or be moved to their beds. The remaining 19 percent of hotels did not have such provisions.

FIGURE 11: Are all facilities accessible to the guests?

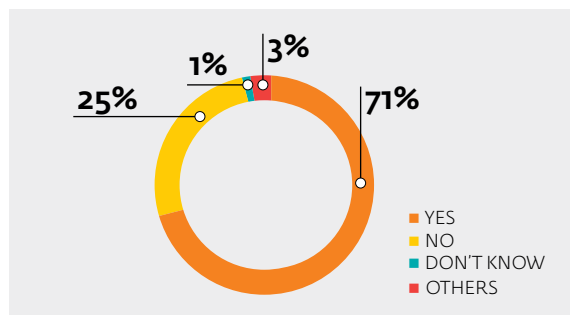
Are all facilities accessible to the guests?

When it came to hotel facilities, about 82 percent said all amenities could be accessed by guests, while 16 percent replied in the negative. Around 1 percent of respondents said there were plans to make their facilities accessible to all guests.

FIGURE 10: Are light switches within reach of the beds?

Are light switches within reach of the beds?

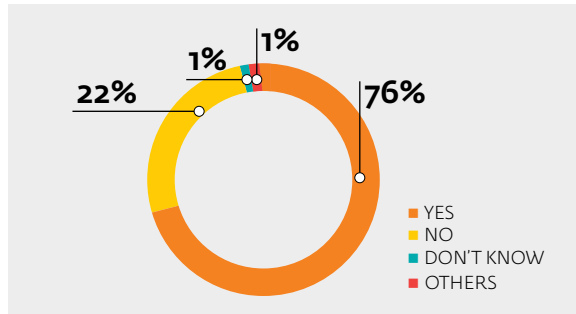
Of the participants, around 87 percent said light switches were easily accessible from the beds, while this was not the case in about 12 percent of the hotels. Around 1 percent said this depended on the room.

FIGURE 12: Can guests with disabilities easily open and close the bathroom doors?

Can guests with disabilities easily open and close the bathroom doors?

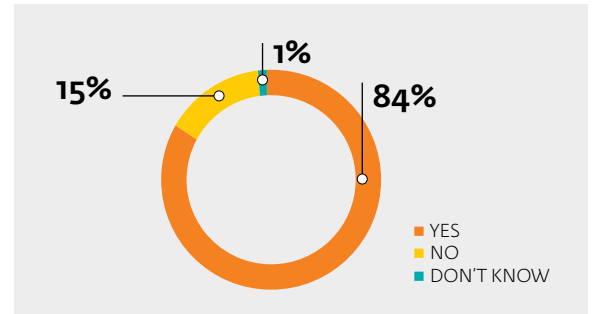
The study found that bathrooms were mostly accessible for people with disabilities. Slightly more than 71 percent of respondents said bathroom doors could be opened and closed easily by physically challenged guests, and 76 percent stated there was enough space to turn a wheelchair in the bathrooms. Participating hotels that did not have such facilities was 25 percent and 22 percent respectively. A small percent mentioned that some of their bathrooms were large enough for wheelchairs while others were not spacious enough.

FIGURE 13: Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the bathroom?



Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the bathroom?

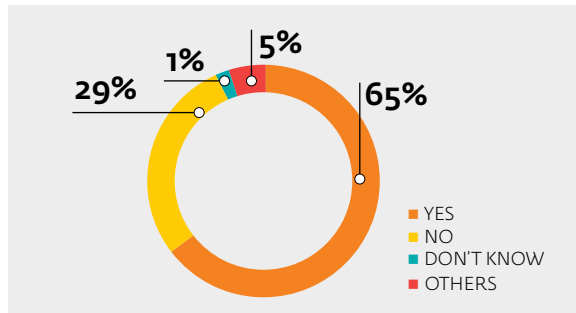
FIGURE 15: Can the restaurant doors be opened and closed easily?



Can the restaurant doors be opened and closed easily?

About 84 percent of respondents said their restaurant doors could be opened and closed easily. This was not the case in 15 percent of participating hotels.

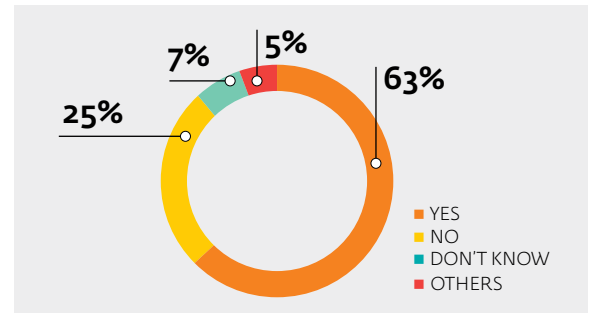
FIGURE 14: Is the access to restaurant free of steps or other barriers? Is it accessible?



Is the access to restaurant free of steps or other barriers? Is it accessible?

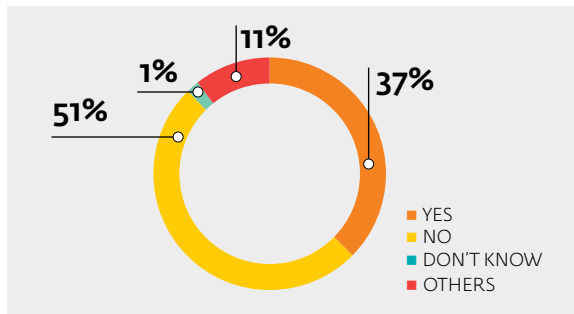
About 65 percent of respondents said their restaurants did not have stairs and other barriers; the restaurants could be accessed in other ways even if stairs did exist. However, 29 percent said their restaurants had stairs and were inaccessible for people with disabilities. A small percentage said all areas could not be accessed, while some hotels did not have their own restaurants.

FIGURE 16: Do you have plans to install ramps in your hotel?



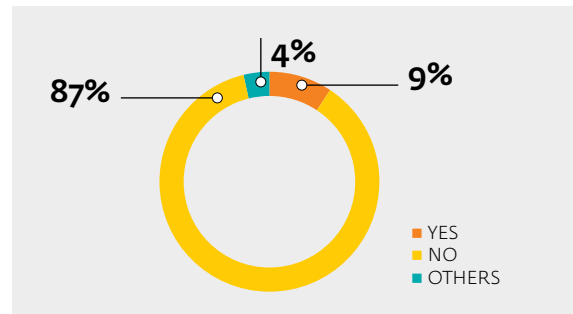
Do you have plans to install ramps in your hotel?

Of hotel operators and managers who participated in the study, 63 percent planned to construct ramps, while 5 percent did not have such plans as the hotels had elevators or were already accessible. A little more than 25 percent of the respondents had no plans to install ramps.

FIGURE 17: Do you have support staff for visually impaired guests?

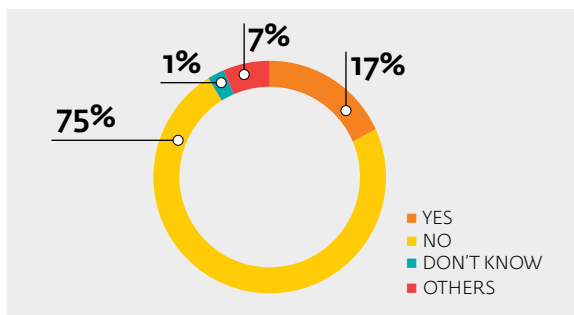
Do you have support staff for visually-impaired guests?

Support staff for visually-impaired guests was provided by 37 percent of the hotels and 11 percent said current staff helped when necessary. Half of the participating hotels did not have support staff for persons with disabilities.

FIGURE 19: Do you have staff who are trained in sign language?

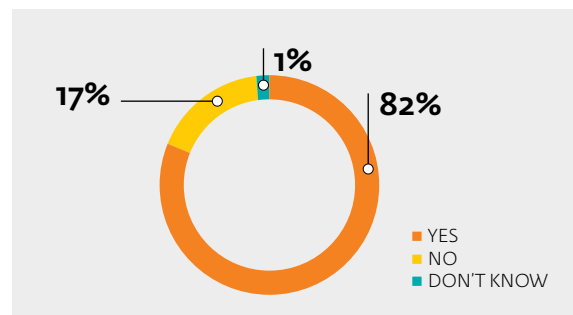
Do you have staff who are trained in sign language?

Only about 9 percent of the hotels had staff that were trained in or had basic knowledge of sign language. Around 87 percent of the hotels did not have such personnel.

FIGURE 18: Does your hotel have signs for the convenience of visually impaired guests?

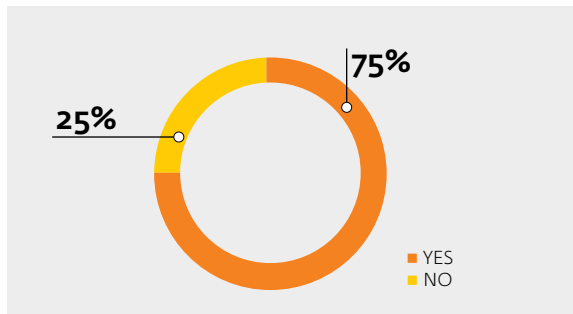
Does your hotel have signs for the convenience of visually-impaired guests?

Only 17 percent of the hotels had put up signs for the convenience of visually-impaired guests, while 7 percent had plans to do so. The study found that almost 75 percent of the hotels did not have such signs in place.

FIGURE 20: Are the hotel premises easy to navigate for visually impaired guests?

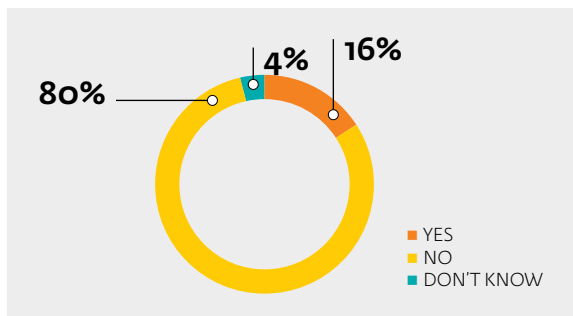
Are the hotel premises easy to navigate for visually-impaired guests?

According to the study, 82 percent of their hotels' premises could be easily navigated by visually-impaired guests, while only about 17 percent were not visually-impaired friendly.

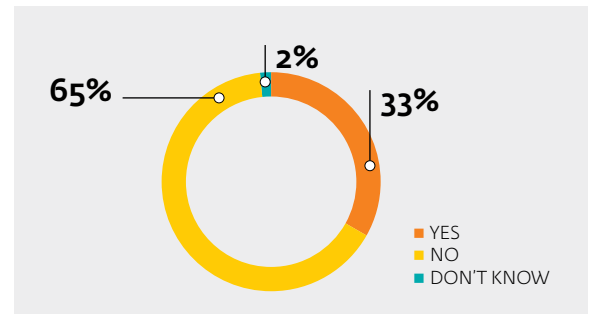
FIGURE 21: Do you have Braille signage on your door plaques?

Do you have Braille signage on your door plaques?

A majority of the hotels did not have Braille indicators on their door handles and room directories. Even among those hotels with Braille signage, 17 percent of managers still admitted lack of adequate knowledge about what Braille actually means. Experts say that a more effective method of communication would be to install audio recordings in elevators for the visually-impaired, and communication boards with pictures for persons with autism and intellectual/multiple/hearing disabilities.

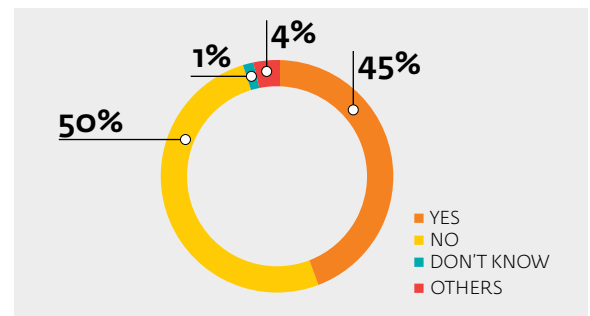
FIGURE 22: Do you have Braille signage in your room directories?

Do you have Braille signage in your room directories?

FIGURE 23: Does your hotel have extra wheelchairs?

Does your hotel have extra wheelchairs?

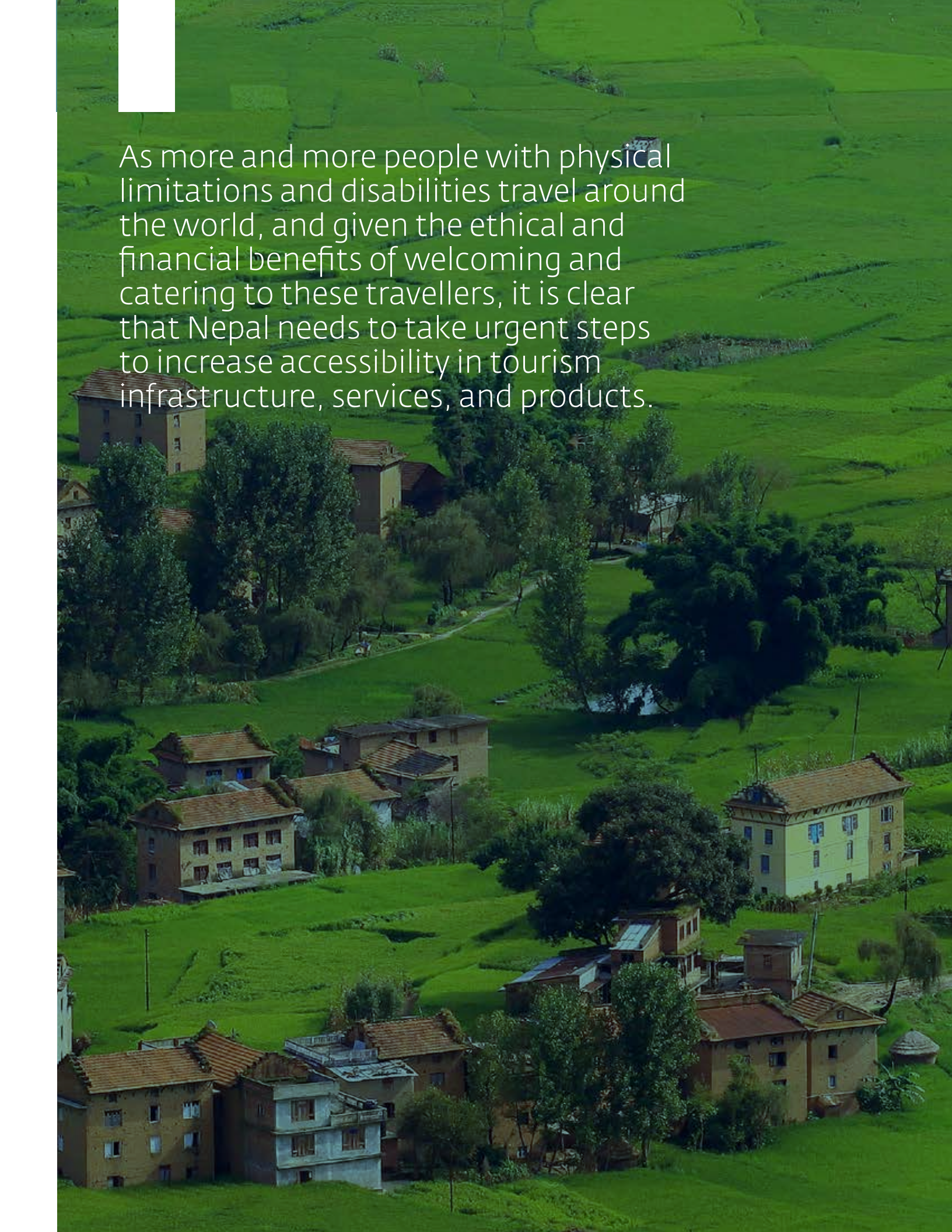
The study found that only 33 percent of the participating hotels had extra wheelchairs for guests.

FIGURE 24: Does your hotel have accessible transportation for the convenience of guests with disabilities?

Does your hotel have accessible transportation for the convenience of guests with disabilities?

A Korean study found that persons with disabilities were willing to pay higher rates for vehicles with accessible features.⁴⁸ About 45 percent of participants in our study said they provided accessible vehicles for persons with disabilities, while 4 percent said such vehicles could be provided when needed. However, half of the respondents stated that they did not have accessible vehicles.

⁴⁸ Lyu, S. O. (2017). Which accessible travel products are people with disabilities willing to pay more? A choice experiment. *Tourism Management*, Volume 59, April 2017, pp. 404-412

An aerial photograph of a village nestled in a lush green valley. The village features several multi-story buildings with terracotta roofs, interspersed with dense green trees. The surrounding landscape is a patchwork of green fields and hills. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

As more and more people with physical limitations and disabilities travel around the world, and given the ethical and financial benefits of welcoming and catering to these travellers, it is clear that Nepal needs to take urgent steps to increase accessibility in tourism infrastructure, services, and products.

An aerial photograph of a village nestled in a lush green valley. The village features several traditional buildings with reddish-brown tiled roofs and light-colored walls. A dirt road runs through the village. The surrounding landscape is a vast, rolling green field, likely a rice paddy, with some scattered trees and a small cluster of trees on a hillside in the background.

CONCLUSION

06

This study shows that although most hoteliers are aware of the concept of accessible tourism, this knowledge has not led to the establishment of accessible structures. There are various reasons for this. Some hotels are housed in old structures, while some have difficulties in constructing such facilities due to their geographical locations. For other hotels, building accessible structures is not a priority because they do not receive many guests with disabilities. Additionally, most hotel operators and managers have a perception that persons with disabilities are limited to individuals using wheelchairs. As a result, there are few provisions for the visual and hearing-impaired or

persons with other forms of disability. There is also a practice of discouraging persons with disabilities from making bookings. They are either told that the hotels do not have accessible facilities or are informed they will be levied additional service charges. However, on a positive note, some tour companies are working to create packages for persons with disabilities and are facilitating travel for such guests. Hoteliers in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan, Kailali, and other destinations are also catering to guests with disabilities.

The government appears to lack understanding of universal accessibility and inclusive tourism.

As a consequence, there has been an absence of policy and legal provisions regarding the issue, due to which hotels are not sufficiently motivated to construct accessible infrastructure or employ trained staff to cater to persons with disabilities. Additionally, studies show that constructing accessible infrastructure adds up to less than 0.2 percent of total construction costs, and there is also the provision of a 10 percent concession for accessible infrastructure. Yet, the study found that hotels, citing extra expenditure, have refrained from building ramps, purchasing wheelchairs, or providing other forms of accessible infrastructure.



As more and more people with physical limitations and disabilities travel around the world, and given the ethical and financial benefits of welcoming and catering to these travelers, it is clear that Nepal needs to take urgent steps to increase accessibility in tourism infrastructure, services, and products. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has dealt a severe blow to the industry and has necessitated a ramping up of all efforts. But the path

ahead requires strong collaboration between government, the private sector, and donor agencies to create a conducive environment wherein the principle of universal accessibility is integrated into all aspects of the sector—from legislation to guidelines, infrastructure design, capacity-building of human resources and partnership strategies, among others, all to be taken forward with consultation and collaboration with persons with disabilities.



All forms of public and private service delivery—in the tourism industry and beyond—should follow the principles of universal design.



A photograph of two riders on horses in a desert landscape. The rider on the left is wearing a white jacket and a fur hat, holding a long, colorful prayer flag. The rider on the right is wearing a dark red jacket and a fur hat. They are riding towards the camera on a sandy path. The background is a vast, hazy desert with low-lying vegetation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

07

7.1 Recommendations for the Government

1. Internationally, accessible tourism is a rapidly expanding market. For Nepal to capitalize on this, it first needs to address its main obstacle: the lack of necessary physical infrastructure. Airports and arrival centers in major tourist destinations, in particular, could be accessible to all or at least have physical obstructions minimized to help travelers with disabilities. This could be resolved to a large extent through mandatory adherence to the building code prepared and implemented by the Government of Nepal.
2. The Government of Nepal needs to introduce the necessary policies for accessible tourism, addressing legal and policy provisions that promote equality and non-discrimination and protect of the rights of persons with disabilities. Such accessible tourism policies need to provide information that is relevant and applicable to a variety of contexts, environments, products, and services.
3. The subject of accessible tourism could be included in the curriculum at all levels of skills training and educational programs targeted at tourism professionals. Trainings for tour and travel operators, guides, and hotel management could include courses on providing services to persons with disabilities, those with special physical conditions, and senior citizens.
4. All forms of public and private service delivery—in the tourism industry and beyond—could follow the principles of universal design.
5. The Nepal Tourism Board and the hospitality industry need to prepare national guidelines for accessible tourism in accordance with UN-WTO guidelines. These guidelines could provide accurate information on a range of subjects: from reservation to food, accommodation, access to transportation for all, safety and security, inclusion, and different services in a variety of situations and contexts.
6. The Nepal Tourism Board and the Hotel Association of Nepal could identify and create a list of accessible tourist destinations and hotels. It could provide details on the hotels and areas that people with disabilities can easily access, and the services available to them within these. The creation of such a database can contribute to the promotion of Nepal as an accessible tourist destination at the international level.
7. There could be a system of honors/awards at the national level to



motivate best practices in terms of accessibility. This will motivate entrepreneurs and tourism workers that have contributed to the field of accessible tourism and will inspire others to replicate these good practices.

7.2 Recommendations for the Tourism Industry/Private Sector

1. The tourism industry needs to internalize and promote access for all. Regular orientation programs should be organized to provide key information on areas such as international standards of accessible tourism and expansion of accessible travel experiences for all. In addition, incentives should be provided for businesses that have proactively contributed to accessible tourism.
2. Networks should be expanded at the national and international levels to help better market accessible tourism ventures. This would create significant opportunities for Nepal's tourism industry and entrepreneurs to participate and capture a share of the international market.
3. Accessible tourist destinations should be promoted heavily through national and international media, as well as social media.
4. Accessible tourism includes accessibility of communication materials. Hotel booking and ticketing websites should be designed and developed with a focus on web accessibility so that

persons with disabilities can use them without assistance.

5. Infrastructure is a key determining factor when it comes to expanding the potential of the tourism sector.⁴⁹ The length and distance of trips very often depend on the type of infrastructure available at the chosen destination. Investors, therefore, will have to go beyond architectural standards. People with disabilities should be involved right from planning to the implementation phase and their suggestions and feedback incorporated throughout. Ramps, which are the foundation of accessible infrastructure, should be constructed following international standards. Tactile signs should be installed for the visually-impaired, and elevators should have audio recordings that announce floor numbers and emergency numbers.
6. While future buildings can be designed to be fully accessible to all guests, this might be difficult to achieve in already-existing structures. Managing costs will be more effective if it is included when the building is being designed. While it can be expensive if carried out later,⁵⁰ any possible efforts to improve accessibility should be undertaken. If there are parts of the hotel's building that cannot be made completely wheelchair accessible, ways to render it suitable for people with other forms of disabilities should be explored.
7. Even in the absence of legislation that specifies minimum number of accessible rooms in hotels, hoteliers

should work to ensure that a maximum of rooms are wheelchair friendly. These rooms will not only accommodate disabled guests, but will also provide added comfort for non-disabled guests.⁵¹

7.3 Recommendations for Donor Agencies

1. Necessary financial assistance and technical support should be provided to encourage the Government of Nepal and the private sector to pursue good practices in accessible tourism that meet international standards.
2. Assistance should be provided to the government and the tourism industry for the development of a national system in accordance with the accessible guidelines, directives, and other provisions prepared by international organizations, including the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization.
3. Necessary support should be provided to ensure suitable policy arrangements and practical guidance for the implementation of public-private partnerships aimed at expanding understanding and acceptance of accessible tourism at the government, private sector, and community levels.
4. Necessary financial and technical assistance should be provided for the development of model accessible tourist destinations.

⁴⁴ Zsarnoczky, M. (2017). Accessible Tourism in the European Union. 33

⁴⁵ Buhalis, D., Darcy, S., Ambrose, I. (2012). Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism. 244

⁴⁶ Ibid. 245


BISHNUHARI SHARMA DAHAL

President, Himalayan Fewa Trail

The areas around the rural parts of Fewa Taal are important from a tourism point of view. If these places can be developed as tourist destinations and jobs created, local youth would not be as compelled to go abroad for employment. It would also help to promote local products.

Nine years ago, in 2012, we envisioned the establishment of a 74-kilometer tourist footpath from Jarebar in Fewa Taal and across Sarangkot, Kaskikot, Naudada, Dhikur Pokhari, Pangdur, Bhadaure Tamagi, Panchase and Shanti Stupa. The footpath is boosting earnings and livelihoods of local communities.

The 74-kilometer path is divided into three sections: Jarebar to Sarangkot is a footpath, the 8-kilometer section from Sarangkot to Deurali in Kaski is a cycling trail, and a 3-kilometer section from Kaskikot to Naudada is a disability-friendly trail. The disability-friendly trail, in particular, is of international standards; most likely the first to be deemed such in South Asia, and certainly the only one of its kind in Nepal.

Although not very long, the disability-friendly path ensures that persons with

disabilities are able to engage in and enjoy tourism activities just like anyone else. That is their human right. We also kept the visually impaired in mind when constructing the path. There are iron railings to help them get from one place to another, and we also installed iron nets on one side of the railing to make their walk safer and easier.

We have also built disability-friendly toilets. One has been constructed within the 3-kilometer disability-friendly path and the other is under construction. Thus, there will be one disability-friendly toilet on either end of the footpath.

Rest stops have been set up at various points along the trail as well. Two have been constructed already, and two more are planned. We plan to build four rest stops across the 3-kilometer stretch. We also intend to place iron benches on the sides of the path. We hope to make the path as picturesque and informative as possible. For this, we have plans for gardens on both sides of the pathway and information boards at different locations along the way.

So far, half of the construction work on the disability-friendly path is complete. After

its completion, and post-pandemic, we estimate that the area will be flooded with tourists, especially because of the scenic views of Fewa Taal and the mountains, as well as the area's wildlife. As more tourists arrive, we expect an increase in sales of local products and a rise in local youth employment.

There were quite a number of challenges that we encountered when constructing the trail. It was not easy because the 74-kilometer path included private property belonging to thousands of people. Convincing and coordinating with a large number of people to move the project ahead was a major challenge for us. For the disability-friendly path, we needed to run through several forested areas—we were trying to avoid steep stretches. This meant a lot of discussions and negotiations with local forest committees.

It was while working as a temporary teacher that I had come up with the concept for the footpath. I then faced a major dilemma—I had a family to support, so I had to choose between my job and my dream of building a footpath. I thought it over and, in the end, I quit my job and started work on the trail.

Annex:

Questions:

Are you aware of accessible or inclusive tourism?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do your employees/staff have proper knowledge or training on accessibility for all?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel/restaurant have accessible tourism support facilities?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel provide parking facilities for guests with physical disabilities?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel have ramped access from the entrance to the reception?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel have stair-free/barrier-free access from the entrance to the reception?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have ramps from the reception to the rooms?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the rooms?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Can wheelchair users be easily transferred to the beds?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Are light switches within reach of the beds?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Are all facilities accessible to the guests?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Can guests with disabilities easily open and close the bathroom doors?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Is there enough turning space for wheelchairs in the bathroom?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Is the access to the restaurant free of steps or other barriers? Is it accessible?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Can the restaurant doors be opened and closed easily?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have plans to install ramps in your hotel?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have support staff for visually-impaired guests?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel have signs for the convenience of visually-impaired guests?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have staff that are trained in sign language?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Are the hotel premises easy to navigate for visually-impaired guests?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have Braille signage on your door plaques?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Do you have Braille signage in your room directories?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel have extra wheelchairs?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:

Does your hotel have accessible transportation for the convenience of guests with disabilities?

Answer options:

Yes

No

Don't know

Options for open answers:



Hotel List:

The following hotels were included in the research:

1. Hotel Season Thamel (Kathmandu)
2. Hotel Ganesh Himal (Kathmandu)
3. Hotel Shambala (Kathmandu)
4. Hotel Marsyangdi Mandala (Kathmandu)
5. Hotel Pawan International (Bhairahawa)
6. Hotel Kamal (Kathmandu)
7. Hotel Central Plaza (Kohalpur)
8. Hotel Saathi (Dhangadhi)
9. Hotel Diamond Palace (Kanchanpur)
10. Bodhi Red Sun Hotel (Bhairahawa)
11. Hotel Akama (Kathmandu)
12. Lumbini Hotel (Butwal)
13. Hotel Yak & Yeti (Kathmandu)
14. Hyatt Regency (Kathmandu)
15. Gautam Hotel (Nepalgunj)
16. Radisson Hotel (Kathmandu)
17. Hotel Himalaya (Lalitpur)
18. Hotel Shangri-La (Kathmandu)
19. Tiger Palace Resort (Bhairahawa)
20. Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza (Kathmandu)
21. Airport Hotel (Kathmandu)
22. Soaltee Shiva Bikram Hotels and Resorts (Nepalgunj)
23. Hotel Mystic Mountain (Nagarkot)
24. Hotel Crowne Imperial (Kathmandu)
25. Hotel Dhulikhel (Dhulikhel)
26. Krishna Hotel (Nepalgunj)
27. Hotel Ama Dablam (Kathmandu)
28. Hotel Siddhartha (Nepalgunj)
29. Hotel Aura (Kathmandu)
30. Hotel Shanker (Kathmandu)
31. Hotel Dhulikhel Lodge (Dhulikhel)
32. Hotel Bazra (Kathmandu)
33. The Fulbari Resort & Spa (Pokhara)
34. Hotel Vishuwa (Birgunj)
35. Samjhana Hotel (Birgunj)
36. Hotel Welcome (Dhanusha)
37. Royal Resort (Itahari)
38. Hotel Eastern Star (Biratnagar)
39. Hotel Ichchha (Simara)
40. Rupakot Resort (Pokhara)
41. Hotel Kathmandu Family (Kathmandu)
42. Summit Hotel (Ilam)
43. Hotel Tulsi (Pokhara)
44. Hotel Royal Singhi (Kathmandu)
45. Hotel Crystal Palace (Pokhara)
46. Pokhara Village Resort (Pokhara)
47. Hotel Harati (Kathmandu)
48. Chitwan Tharu Village (Chitwan)
49. Mountain Resort (Nagarkot)
50. Summit Hotel (Kathmandu)
51. Hotel Ganga Jamuna (Kathmandu)
52. Hotel Manang (Kathmandu)
53. Hotel Tibet (Kathmandu)
54. Hotel Marshyangdi (Kathmandu)
55. Hotel Center Point (Kathmandu)
56. Hotel Classic (Kathmandu)
57. Kathmandu Marriott Hotel (Kathmandu)
58. Hotel Sunset (Nagarkot)
59. Hotel Star Banquet (Chitwan)
60. Hotel Landmark (Pokhara)
61. Hotel Lion (Kathmandu)
62. Aloft Kathmandu Thamel (Kathmandu)
63. Seven Seas Holiday (Biratnagar)
64. Hotel Big Point (Pokhara)
65. Sankalpa Hospitality (Kathmandu)
66. Hotel Moonlight (Kathmandu)
67. Hotel Shree Nagar (Palpa)
68. Chitwan Village Resort (Chitwan)
69. Hotel Seven Star (Chitwan)
70. Eden Jungle Resort (Chitwan)
71. Taragaon Regency Hotel (Kathmandu)
72. Hotel De L'Annapurna (Kathmandu)
73. Hotel Oriental (Kathmandu)
74. Pokhara Grande (Pokhara)
75. Hotel Thamel (Kathmandu)
76. Tibet Guest House (Kathmandu)
77. Hotel Manaslu (Kathmandu)
78. Hotel Chautari (Kathmandu)
79. Hotel Plattiam (Kathmandu)
80. Fairfield by Marriott (Kathmandu)
81. Malla Hotel (Kathmandu)
82. Grand Hotel (Kathmandu)
83. Dreamland Gold Resort (Rupendehi)
84. Hotel Amadablam (Kathmandu)
85. Hotel Valley View (Kathmandu)
86. Sujan Hotel (Birgunj)
87. Hotel Kailash (Birgunj)
88. Royal Mustang Resort (Mustang)
89. Hotel Shambala (Kathmandu)
90. Hotel Saathi (Dhangadi)

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Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities