

Tourist Regions and Attractions Course

Assignment 2

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Based on your country of origin or personal experience:

Explain the relationship between tourism and commodification, with a special focus on the following questions:

Which aspects of culture are being commodified for tourism purposes (festivals, crafts, traditions)?

Ans: Nepal's rich cultural heritage has become extensively commodified to meet tourist expectations. Religious festivals like Dashain, Tihar, and Holi are now packaged as "authentic cultural experiences" for visitors, with tour operators creating specific itineraries around these celebrations. Many traditional crafts such as Thangka paintings, singing bowl productions, pashmina shawls and wood carvings, are now made according to common designs instead of using time-honoured techniques. The iconic architecture of Kathmandu Valley's temples and palaces has been transformed into photo opportunities and entrance-fee attractions.

Mostly among Sherpa, mountain touring has become a business in which the sacredness of sacred peaks is often ignored. Traditional foods like dal bhat, momos, and chang are served in "cultural restaurants" that prioritize tourist palates over authentic preparation methods. When meditation and yoga are sold as part of retreats, they may not cover the original teachings they were based on.

Nepalese hospitality practises, traditionally motivated by care for their guests (Atithi Devo Bhava), have been applied as service rules in hotels. Cultural activities such as dress, music and dance happen for audience enjoyment rather than as living traditions. Instead of teaching people important phrases to communicate, courses may only teach tourists cute Nepali sayings for selling reasons, so there is not much real contact with the culture.

How has this commodification changed these cultural aspects or the way people engage with them?

Ans: As a result of commodification, Nepalese communities now interact differently with their traditional practises. With visitors playing a larger role, the churches hosting such festivals have begun changing their ceremonies, timing and content to suit a broader and more modern audience. As a result, residents can attend real festivals in private and put on more eased-up versions for guests.

The making of artisan items has become less about passing down skills from families and more about creating them in companies. Learning to make crafts quickly in large quantities has replaced the old method of training young people in both skill and tradition. To attract customers worldwide, designers often simplify or redesign traditional designs which slowly changes the meanings behind the original patterns.

Because religious spaces are now a popular tourist attraction, communities' relationship with them is not the same as it used to be. Whereas monasteries and temples often just had religious use, many now include some business activities. Because of this, the relationship between conserving ancient architecture and increasing tourism has become strained.

Using the language has become different and in most popular places for tourists, English often takes the place of the community's usual language and dialects. Being involved in tourism usually means young adults focus on learning new words for tourists, while neglecting their tradition of passing down stories and memories. The commodification has created a generation that understands their culture partially through the lens of what appeals to outsiders, potentially losing deeper cultural meanings and practices that don't translate well to commercial contexts.

What are the negative impacts of such commodification on local communities?

Ans: The selling of Nepali culture has led to trouble for many local communities. Reliance on tourism has left many areas at risk of external impacts which became clear after the 2015 earthquakes and COVID-19 pandemic when tourism money stopped all at once, leaving people without other ways to support themselves. As a result of this dependency, some gain wealth from tourism while others are never part of it.

With so many tourists coming, traditions are changing and younger people sometimes have difficulty separating real cultural practices from ones aimed at tourists. Traditional ideas about medicine, farming and religious beliefs are disappearing as people in these communities learn skills needed for tourism.

When a culture is turned into something to sell, there is more damage to the environment and popular destinations face greater waste, pollution and pressure on their resources. Overcrowding and improper actions by guests at sacred sites happen because many visitors are unaware of how to behave. The continual display of culture to tourists may eventually wear out community members and make them lose interest.

Traditional roles are being replaced by ones that suit the needs of tourists. Some tourism activities restrict women, while by abandoning their usual work for paid jobs, men disturb family and community order. The pressure to maintain a "exotic" image for tourists can prevent communities from naturally evolving and adapting their practices, creating cultural stagnation. The use of sacred or ceremonial items for commercial purposes often lessens their religious meaning which may stress or upset communities that consider such items sacred.

What strategies can be used to balance tourism development with cultural preservation?

Ans: Successful ways to manage tourism and cultural preservation in Nepal should rely on community involvement and letting local people be in charge. If tourism in a community is managed by local people, who also keep the earnings, the cultural traditions stay honest and provide financial help for the locals. These models should include extensive consultation processes where communities decide which aspects of their culture they're comfortable sharing and which should remain private.

Learning programmes for tourists and those working in tourism are absolutely necessary. Pre-visit orientation programs can teach visitors about cultural protocols, appropriate behavior, and the significance of what they're experiencing. Because of this, there is less need for communities to change their traditions to please tourists. Education for local guides ought to stress how to tell storeys and share interpretations from actual culture, instead of offering simple accounts.

To improve things, the legal rules covering tradable aspects of intangible heritage should be updated. Intellectual property rights are created for traditional designs, music and practises to help communities make use of their culture. Requirements for cultural impact assessments should be similar to those for reviewing the environment in tourism development.

Diversification strategies that don't rely solely on cultural commodification are essential. This includes promoting Nepal's natural beauty, adventure tourism, and sustainable practices that complement rather than exploit cultural heritage. Supporting traditional livelihoods alongside tourism ensures communities maintain their authentic practices and aren't entirely dependent on cultural performance.

Eventually, setting up cultural preservation funds from tourism allows for recording the culture, ensuring traditional arts are passed on and creating local centres that protect the main use of the culture while letting everyone appreciate it.