

Cover Sheet

RESEARCH NOTE

Nepal Tourism in the Aftermath of the April/May 2015 Earthquake and Aftershocks: Repercussions, Recovery and the rise of new tourism sectors

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Nepal Tourism in the Aftermath of the April/May 2015 Earthquake and Aftershocks: Repercussions, Recovery and the rise of new tourism sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the application of the Pacific Asia Travel Association's (PATA) risk and recovery strategy for Nepal following the April/ May 2015 earthquake and aftershocks. The impact of the earthquake on tourism to Nepal, the establishment and evolution of PATA's Nepal Rapid Recovery Taskforce and strategic approaches to tourism recovery contained within the report and its outcomes are discussed. The methodology involved participant observation with three key players in the recovery process, email interviews of key informants, analysis of secondary data sources and reviews of management information systems. Collaborative theory was at the core of PATA's recovery process and provided a lens through which to understand the intent, direction and actions undertaken. The application of Nepal's recovery strategy is examined through volunteer tourism, which played a central role in Nepal's tourism recovery and accessible tourism as an innovative approach to introducing a new market sector in Nepal. Volunteer and accessible tourism enterprises provided opportunities for these organisations to create their own narratives and to include them in the broader media and marketing approach towards stimulating tourism recovery to Nepal between 2015-2017.

Keywords: Post-crisis, tourism, marketing, recovery, volunteerism, peace through tourism, accessible tourism, collaboration

1.1 Introduction

The massive earthquake that struck central Nepal on 25 April 2015 was followed by over 400 subsequent aftershocks, killed over 9,000 and injured a further 25,000 people (UN Despatch 2015). The earthquake measured 7.8 on the Richter scale with substantial aftershocks of 6.7 and 7.4 Ri were also experienced. Thousands of smaller aftershocks also directly affected 8 million of Nepal's 30 million people and imposed losses on all economic sectors.

Damage to villages, buildings and transport infrastructure was extensive in central Nepal, especially in the capital, Kathmandu. The *Gorkha Earthquake*, “occurred towards the end of one of Nepal's peak climbing and trekking seasons. A total of 89 tourists from 18 countries were killed” (Earthquake-Report .com 2015). The scale of destruction and casualties severely impacted Nepal's tourism industry. In the weeks following the quake, many tourists were evacuated or departed and forward bookings plummeted. Nepal's tourism industry leadership was inexperienced in managing a natural disaster of this magnitude.

Following on this brief contextual background, the focus of this paper is Nepal's collaborative tourism recovery strategy initiated by the Pacific Asia Travel Association's Nepal Chapter in cooperation with PATA's head office in Bangkok. Non PATA member Nepalese tourism businesses were also involved. Nepal's marketing recovery strategy was jointly formulated by PATA's team of volunteer international tourism recovery specialists working with Nepal's tourism industry leaders. In reviewing the recovery strategy, we focus on two forms of tourism that offer alternate and new opportunities for Nepal, volunteer tourism and accessible tourism.

Volunteer tourism emerged as a major element in Nepal's post –earthquake tourism recovery. PATA's strategy was initiated in early May 2015 with PATA's Nepal Tourism Rapid Recovery Taskforce report presented to Nepal's tourism minister, Mr Kripasur Sherpa on June 21, 2015 (Beirman, 2015). On June 8th, 2017 PATA received a commendation from the President of Nepal, Ms Bidya Devi Bhandari for the taskforces contribution to Nepal's tourism recovery (PATA Nepal Chapter 2017). Nepal's tourism recovery strategy marked a strategic shift from adding value (which dominated pre-earthquake strategic priorities) to a focus on re-developing basic infrastructure and enterprise facilities in damaged areas. This research examines issues around volunteer tourism and the introduction of inclusive tourism infrastructure in Nepal focusing on accessible tourism. As part of post-crisis recovery in Nepal we analyse specific strategies to redevelop and “build back better” (Beirman 2016).

1.2 Overview of tourism in Nepal

Nepal's primary tourist attraction is its diverse natural environment dominated by the world's highest mountains and complemented by its ancient, rich cultural/ spiritual traditions. Nepal attracts international tourists from varied tourist market segments including leisure travellers, pilgrimage, adventure and special interest tourists. In 2014, tourism represented 4% of Nepal's GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council 2015) and directly and indirectly employed 500,000 Nepalese. International tourist arrivals to Nepal have grown steadily since 1962, despite some notable short-term impacts due to civil and political factors (not examined in this paper). The mega-earthquakes of April and May 2015 were the first significant natural disasters since 1934 and represented a major setback to Nepal's tourism development.

1.3 Positioning natural hazards/earthquake in tourism crises

Tourism is sensitive to crisis events: war, terrorism, natural disasters, crime waves and epidemics. Compelling natural tourist attractions often include extremes in landscape, climate, terrain and vulnerability to earthquakes, volcanoes, storms and sea surges (Weaver and Lawton 2014). Perceptual and attitudinal changes, prompted by natural disasters, can damage marketability, tourism products and services. Negative destination perceptions, magnified when heavy casualties occur, may remain well after the event and the recovery phase (Ritchie 2009; Avraham and Ketter 2016). Recovery to pre-disaster levels depends on shielding negative images from the tourist gaze. “No tourism destination is immune from crisis. Consequently, destination management organisations require risk and crisis management strategies for crisis events from their onset to rapidly implement recovery” (Beirman and Van Walbeek 2011 pp. 2-3).

1.4 Impact of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake on Tourism

Figure 1, illustrates international tourism growth trends to Nepal since 1962. By 2013, international visitation had reached 800,000 (Nepal Ministry of Tourism 2014). In 2014 Nepal attracted 790,118 tourists but due to the 2015 earthquake this dropped to 538,978, 32% less than the previous year and the largest recorded annual reduction of inbound tourism numbers. Inbound tourism recovered substantially after 2015 to 734,000 in 2016 and Nepal’s Department of Immigration revealed that international tourism for the period January-June 2017 had reached 460,000 (a 41.4 % increase on the same period in 2016) (Kathmandu Post 13 August 2017). The preliminary figure for international tourism arrivals in 2017 was an all-time record of 940,218, representing a growth of 24.86% over the 2016 levels. (Twari 2018) Strategies discussed in this paper have significantly contributed to this recovery.

Figure 1 About Here

International visitation to Nepal is numerically small by global standards. However, Nepal’s labour intensive adventure and trekking sectors are characterised by lengthy stays and significant per capita expenditure, benefiting the poorest people living in remote mountainous regions of Nepal. The 2015 earthquakes extensively damaged Nepal’s most densely populated region, the capital, Kathmandu, plus villages and towns in the surrounding Kathmandu Valley. Landslides rendered some popular trekking trails, notably the trail to Everest Base Camp, impassable. Trekking trail routes and bridges in several conservation areas were severely damaged (Upadhyaya 2016) and global media coverage indicated that visitors from all Nepal’s key tourism source markets were among the casualties. Many of these countries sent rescue and relief teams to support Nepal’s overstretched emergency services.

The earthquakes presented a reputational challenge for Nepal’s tourism industry. However, the crisis also evoked a high level of public, industry and international tourists’ sympathy (Upadhyaya 2016). Nevertheless, media focus on death and destruction generated widespread perceptions of all of Nepal as a disaster zone, despite the fact that 85% of the country was unaffected. Nepal’s tourism industry leadership sought to rapidly implement a tourism

marketing and recovery program to forestall a collapse of tourism to Nepal after the monsoon season finished in September 2015.

2.0 Research Design

The research design involved participant observation, email interviews with key informants, analysis of secondary data sources and reviews of management information systems (Veal 2011). The core methodology employed was participant observation (Spradley 2016). One author was a participant in the PATA Nepal Rapid Response Taskforce Report, the strategic core of this paper, another is directly involved in the development of volunteer tourism programs in Nepal and a third is the principal of a Nepalese tour company specialising in accessible tourism. **Participant observations is interwoven within the paper.**

Secondary and tertiary sources amplify and broaden the context of cases discussed. The relative centrality of the researchers to Nepal's recovery, their access to key informants, the grey literature, NGO and INGO documents, and practitioner based secondary data was more accessible than for an external research groups. The methodology drew on "natural data" that did not require a contrived data manufacturing process (see Silverman, 2016).

3.0 Post-earthquake Tourism Recovery Strategy: Mobilization of the PATA Nepal Tourism rapid recovery taskforce

Following the April 2015 earthquake, PATA's Nepal Chapter, comprising major Nepalese tourism businesses, asked PATA's Bangkok head office to assist them in developing a recovery marketing strategy for Nepal. The recovery strategy emphasised collaboration engaging international tourism crisis and recovery specialists and local (Nepalese) tourism industry leaders. Final implementation decisions resided with the Nepalese partners and action steps were resolved in a meeting between senior PATA executives and PATA's Nepal Chapter on May 8th, 2015. (PATA 2015). The 2015 Nepal Tourism Rapid Recovery Taskforce maximised involvement, empowerment and ownership of the Nepalese contributing to the report and implementing its recommendations.

3.1 Applying Collaborative Theory to Tourism Recovery

The theoretical basis of PATA's Nepal tourism recovery program is collaborative theory. This emphasises implementation of a common goal, in this case a tourism marketing recovery strategy, requiring collaboration based on commonly agreed outcomes by all key stakeholders. Key stakeholders included the Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal's tourism industry private sector and the transnational Pacific Asia Travel Association. (d'Angela and Go 2009, Selin 1994, Pennington-Gray et al 2015).

Jamal and Stronza (2009) assert that collaboration is integral to responding to a common threat, involving multiple stakeholders and require an inter or multi organizational response. In Nepal, the entire tourism industry was affected by the earthquake and all of Nepal's tourism sectors

needed to be engaged in a common recovery strategy. This approach is required to overcome the tendency towards inter-sectoral fragmentation, which has traditionally characterised the tourism industry and serve as a driver for collaboration. (Drucker 2007, Dwyer et al 2009)

The first step for PATA's Nepal marketing recovery program involved brainstorming sessions led by the Taskforce Chairs. Over 100 Nepalese tourism leaders participated on May 22 and 24, 2015. The taskforce involved eight teams each focusing on a specific element of tourism recovery. Each team included at least one Nepalese member and one volunteer international tourism crisis and recovery specialist. They distilled over 200 brainstorming session recommendations into manageable, economic recommendations which could be readily implemented by Nepal's tourism industry to position Nepal as "Nepal, back on top of the world". All teams submitted their recommendations to the Taskforce chair in early June 2015 as outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2 About Here

Implementation of the PATA Task Force Report

The PATA Taskforce Report was widely endorsed by Nepal's tourism industry leadership as a blueprint for the marketing recovery of Nepal. Key outcomes from the PATA report were:

1. The Nepal Tourism Board and the Nepalese tourism industry established a Facebook site www.facebook.com/nepaltourismboard and a web site focusing on positive tourism recovery stories in Nepal featuring international visitors to Nepal in real time describing their experiences and impressions of Nepal.
2. Celebrities including Hollywood Actress, Susan Sarandon and Chinese action movie star Jacky Chan visited Nepal in 2015 and called on support for Nepal through visitation. The celebrity visit with the most widespread impact was Prince Harry's five-day visit in March 2016. Footage of the prince helping out in damaged villages boosted visitation to Nepal especially-volunteer tourism. Although Prince Harry's visit was part of a broader British – Nepalese relationship its serendipitous timing complemented PATA's tourism recovery strategy.
3. During 2015, Nepalese diplomatic legations and adventure tour operators jointly hosted information evenings for travel professionals and consumers in key international source markets including China, India, Japan, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand UK, and Germany. They were promoted by PATA, and other print and on-line travel industry media outlets.
4. The Nepal Tourism Board and larger tourism operators hosted familiarisation trips for travel journalists, leading travel agencies and wholesale tour operators during late 2015 and 2016. These generated many positive travel features about Nepal's tourism recovery from late 2015 to early 2017 in both global and major city print and on-line publications in Nepal's core source markets.
5. Samarth-Nepal Market Development Program ran a one day training seminar on the subject of post crisis tourism recovery for Nepalese tourism professionals in Katmandu in November 2015. Although a separate initiative, this followed up PATA's work and was within the parameters of the PATA's strategy.

6. The PATA report placed considerable emphasis on broadening Nepal's tourism appeal and encouraging the development and promotion of varied tourism product and new sectors. In this respect volunteer tourism, with the proviso that it was properly managed was highlighted as a means to accelerate the recovery and growth of Nepal's tourism.

3.2 Earthquake led and induced consequences on tourism sector

Nepal's tourism sector sustained significant physical damage in districts, representing 15% of Nepal's land mass (Figure 2). The industry's initial priority response involved informing key stakeholders that Nepal was largely undamaged. Separating fact from perception is a common challenge for destinations experiencing natural disasters and Nepal's challenges were exacerbated by the disruption to electronic communications outside major cities due to the rugged natural landscape. (PATA 2015)

Figure 3 about Here

3.3 Consequences on tourism based income

The consequences of the earthquake on Nepal's tourism sector were both immediate and long term. The sector sustained a financial loss of approximately NRs. 18,862.81 million (US\$182 million) in infrastructure and assets as immediate losses, the majority of which came from hotel accommodations.

Table 1 about Here

In addition, long-term consequences were expected to affect the sector including rebuilding visitor's confidence. Nepal's tourism sector faced the following primary challenges:

- Search, rescue and security risk mitigation;
- Safety reputation crisis: Risk perception from negative media hype (due to interpretative -not informative - shocking videos of the dead, injured, destruction and the panic);
- Negative travel advisories from key source markets (China, India, USA, Germany, Japan, France, etc.);
- Lack of travel insurance availability for Nepal; and
- Increased liability insurance cover for tour companies in/to Nepal (Cortez 2017).

3.4 Secondary natural disasters

The earthquakes and aftershocks of April/ May 2015 triggered secondary natural hazards and disasters, including rock falls, landslides, liquefaction, glacial lake outburst floods and avalanches, exacerbated by approaching monsoon seasons. Safety emerged as critical issue for Nepal's destination image. Additionally, trekking paths suffered from surface erosion, destruction of trail steps and filling of gaps with stones and rocks which altered drainage patterns.

3.5 Immediate and midterm recovery actions

Nepal's recovery emphasised redeveloping basic infrastructure in destroyed or damaged areas. Rebuilding the destination, its reputation and image required assured safety and quality standards in the tourism sector. The revamped tourism brand incorporated added-value through (i) Supply side product development emphasising quality, safety and communication and (ii) Building demand side by stimulating market demand through confidence building measures and multi-platform media communication (UN Despatch 2015).

Tourism recovery priorities focused on attracting financial and moral support for restoring damaged attractions. Sangaham Prasain reported in the Kathmandu Post that immediately following the 2015 quake per capita tourism spending and length of stay actually increased, economically stimulating (Prasain 2016) regions of Nepal where tourists visited or stayed. Much visitation was focused on reconstruction projects involving volunteers including the launch of the PATA recovery strategy and safety audits of key trekking trails. This phase occurred between June 2015-November 2016.

3.6 Volunteer Tourism and its rise in the context of post-earthquake Tourism Recovery

Volunteer Tourism: Introduction

Volunteer tourism involves ordinary people providing services for those in need in the community (Wearing, 2001). It's a bilateral, mutually reinforcing relationship enabling volunteer tourists to cement their relationship through acts of giving or humanitarianism outside their usual environment. Volunteering is based on the principle that people with 'haves' can give to people who 'have not'. Volunteers can play important roles for promoting values and morals without money necessarily changing hands (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

Volunteer tourists generally come from developed tourist generating countries. They gain mutual learning, friendship and unique cultural experiences and undertake programs without the expectation of financial gain. The Institute of Development Studies (Burns, et al 2015) states that volunteer tourism contributes to sustainable tourism development in poor and marginalised communities. Increased awareness, demands for 'giving back', and consumer trends towards local and sustainable initiatives have contributed to the growth of volunteerism/volunteer tourism.

Conversely, Burns et al (2015) observes that volunteer tourism, insufficiently regulated by recipient communities, reinforces Western political dominance. Although there are few statistics to determine the exact size of the volunteer tourism market, the Adventure Travel Trade Association's 2013 survey of 140 tour operators indicated that 55% of the companies surveyed ran volunteer trips and 41% of the remaining companies were considering future volunteer programs. Volunteer tourism is cited as a rapidly growing sector of the global tourism market (TTG, 2017).

3.7 Evolution of Volunteerism in Nepal

Nepal's volunteer tourism grew after the April and May 2015 earthquakes and was integral to Nepal's tourism recovery. According to the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA), nearly 30% of tours booked to Nepal consisted of volunteering combined with a philanthropic purpose. Table 2 reflects the various purposes of volunteer tourists who have visited Nepal since the earthquake.

Table 2 About Here

These volunteer tourism activities enhanced the quality of the life for people in tourism destinations while placing communities at the heart of the tourism initiative and fulfilled demands for a range of post-earthquake recovery needs.

Channels for the engagement of volunteering

The involvement of volunteers in the post-earthquake recovery had three forms (Swarte, 2017; VIN, 2017):

- (a) Involvement through organizations (of both international and national capacity and of both inbound and outbound programs organized by government agencies, NGOs and not for profit organizations.
- (b) Directly as individuals
- (c) Directly, through the tour operators.

While all represent common practice, the involvement of NGOs for logistical arrangements (e.g. air tickets, ground transfers, tours, food and lodging, etc) are not legal and ethical in the Nepalese context which focusses exclusively on the provision of volunteer programs, not associated travel arrangements.

Volunteering combined with philanthropy is common during emergencies. In Nepal, this merge grew significantly during the post-earthquake period. For example, European outbound tour operator, Adventure Alternative, stated 'by volunteering with them, participants are asked to pay for their accommodation, living costs, and fundraise for the charity. This "enables" them to experience how development in action is integral to successful jobs which turned whole communities around, after years of civil conflict and natural disasters (Adventure Alternative, 2017).

3.8 A critical look at volunteer tourism

Concerns exist in Nepal over some mismanaged volunteer tourism programs offered by commercial tour operators. Programmes prioritising the needs of the traveller and operating companies, over those of the local communities are inimical to ethical volunteer tourism. Other negative issues include a lack of financial transaction transparency, non-compliance with international standards of responsible business practice and mismanaging relations between volunteers and the local community. Negative practices, when exposed in the media undermine the reputation of volunteer tourism in Nepal.

The literature, secondary data and participant observation on the volunteer tourism's growth revealed a need to enhance volunteering ethics for systematic development (Moving Mountains, 2017; Weible, 2012; Encounters Nepal.com, 2017; Tourism Concern, 2017a; VSO, 2017). Ethical considerations start with preparation and arrangement for volunteer tourists. Content from EncountersNepal.com (2017) revealed that several NGOs and INGOs operating in Nepal also organise trekking and tour services outside their official function. "Some trekking agencies require participants to pay for performing voluntary work in Nepal...exploitation of the system is completely unregulated in Nepal." (EncountersNepal.com, 2017).

Community welfare organizations are legally required to prepare needs based volunteering programs. However logistical matters are to be handled by the tour and trek operators but many NGOs continue handling the logistics and in so doing breach ethical and legal codes. In this context, some trekking agencies in Nepal oppose NGOs and INGOs, which initiate invitations to volunteers, create and sell trekking packages to those volunteers and manage operational matters (Personal communication received from Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal Executive Members while meeting on 27 August 2015 in Kathmandu).

4.0 The establishment and development of Accessible tourism in Nepal

In researching this paper, the authors recognised that Nepal is a difficult destination for tourists with disabilities. There is minimal infrastructure to support accessible tourism. Nevertheless, as two of the authors have considerable background and expertise in accessible tourism, we recognised that the challenge Nepal poses to travellers with disabilities serves as an attraction, especially to the more adventurous traveller.

Accessible tourism is founded on collaborative processes (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011) and has become an emerging tourism market for Nepal. Recently, the significance of the global disability tourist market has been recognised by Nepal's tourism industry with high profile visits by Prince Harry and injured military veterans undertaking voluntary rebuilding and trekking activities. According to Buhalis and Darcy (2011), travellers with a disability (temporary or permanent) comprise 10% of the global tourism market (UNWTO 2013) and is likely to grow as the populations of tourism generating countries age. Disability is a heterogeneous construct with underlying complexities involving a typology of disability (mobility, vision, hearing, intellectual, mental health etc.) and their level of support needs (independent, low, medium, high, very high). People requiring either mechanical or other assistance for mobility share the same desire to travel and experience destinations as the unencumbered (Darcy, 2010).

For many travellers with disability, Nepal's spiritual and scenic attractions along with its physical challenges represent a compelling destination. Pankaj Pradhananga, Director of Kathmandu based, tour operator Four Seasons Travel in Nepal has long advocated accessible travel to Nepal. They hosted their first wheelchair using client in May 2014 and Pradhananga's (E Turbo News 01 June 2016) company has sought collaborative partner agencies in Nepal to facilitate ongoing hosting of travellers with disabilities. Post-earthquake repositioning of Nepal has emphasised commitments to responsible tourism although demand

for accessible tourism is growing in Nepal, accessible tourism accommodation, transport and attraction infrastructure is still limited and, hence, appeals to tourists with disabilities that have an adventurous spirit.

4.1 Destination Nepal embraces Accessible Tourism

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) “recognizes discrimination against any person on the basis of disability violates the inherent dignity and worth of people. It emphasises accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment” (UN 2008, McIntyre 2017). The convention was signed by over 160 countries including Nepal. Yet due to the supply side issues already noted, accessible tourism still remains a distant dream in Nepal. As McIntyre (pp 38-43) points out, the lack of accessible infrastructure remains the biggest barrier to accessible tourism growth in Nepal,

Interest in accessible/inclusive tourism in Nepal grew after the 2015 earthquakes. The earthquake increased the number of Nepalese with disability by over 4,000 and a tourism community event, *Passion to Travel*, held in 2015 brought various stakeholders together to host an excursion in the Godvari Botanical Gardens in Kathmandu to boost morale among Nepalese with disability (E Turbo News 17 June 2015). Since the 2015 quake there is growing interest in building more accessible and inclusive infrastructure which will benefit both the local population and international tourism visitors to Nepal (The Himalayan Times 22 May 2016). A recent example includes a 1.3 km accessible tourism trail built at Kaskikot, Pokhara. This trail is designed to be accessible for visitors with mobility and physical disabilities. It has been developed as part of the Great Himalaya Trails (GHT) certified trail auditors. Some of the design attributes of this differential trail in Nepal will include a two- metre wide trail with two-way traffic provision for wheelchair users plus side barriers, handrails and accessible toilet and washroom facilities. The trail, designed for the use of international and domestic visitors was officially opened during a three-day conference on accessible adventure travel held on March 29, 2018 (The Kathmandu Post 02 March 2018).

4.2 Post-Earthquake Challenges and Opportunities for Accessible Tourism in Nepal

While signatories to an international agreement, legal protection for people with disabilities in Nepal is provided by the Protection and Welfare of the Disabled Persons Act, (1982) and PWD Regulation, 1994 which includes mandatory provisions for access to public places and structures for people with disabilities. However, according to Mr Shordosan Subedi, President of Nepal’s National Federation of Disabled, Nepalese authorities continue to treat disability access as a low priority issue. Unfortunately, Nepal challenges PWDs arriving by air. The only ambulift at Kathmandu airport is rarely used to assist wheelchair passengers. However, despite the barriers of inaccessible infrastructure, accommodation and transport, cooperative initiatives have been established with some hotels, airlines, disabled peoples’ organizations and the Nepal Tourism Board. Nepal’s repositioning efforts in the international travel market as a compelling (post-earthquake) destination will be enhanced if Nepal is perceived as an inclusive destination.

While lack of infrastructure is a constraint, there have been some significant initiatives by not-for-profit and commercial operators. In 2016, Four Season Travel with International Development Institute hosted a tour group of 23 American ex-servicemen and amputees called the “Wounded Heroes Trek to Nepal” (Pradhananga 2016, Galimberti 2016). The group undertook a trek in Nepal’s rugged Annapura region. The theme of World Tourism Day, September 27, 2016, “Tourism for All” also emphasised accessible tourism and support to enhance the accessibility of Nepal is growing from attractions, guides, hotels and other tourism services.

Conclusions

Collaboration between the various sectors of Nepal’s tourism industry was integral to Nepal’s tourism recovery from the 2015 earthquake. Enterprises from all tourism sectors collaborated to market Nepal and despite leadership instability at government level during 2015 and 2017, cooperation was maintained between the government and private tourism industry sectors. Nepalese and international NGO’s contributed to implementing tourism recovery.

The Pacific Asia Travel Association, backed by an active Nepal chapter developed a strategic approach to the remarketing and re-imaging of Nepal. The PATA taskforce report provided Nepal with a national strategic approach to post-earthquake recovery. Although PATA is described as an elitist organisation, participation in PATA’s Nepal recovery program was open to all Nepalese tourism businesses.

PATA’s strategy emphasised a marketing recovery for Nepal focussed on key international source markets highlighting Nepal’s ability to host tourists via social media and traditional marketing channels. Although volunteer tourism was mentioned in PATA’s report there was a lack of emphasis on volunteer tourism in PATA’s recovery strategy. There is now a growing tradition of galvanising the support of global and transnational tourism associations for countries experiencing natural disasters. Volunteer tourism was a core element in the recovery of Nepal’s damaged infrastructure. Immediately following the earthquake, volunteers required by Nepal were those with technical, engineering, construction, emergency management and medical skills. However, as recovery advanced there was greater emphasis on volunteers with soft or no specific skills other than a desire to help.

Nepal’s newly emerging accessible tourism offerings were given impetus by the *Ghorka* Earthquake. All tourists, including those with disabilities value Nepal’s spiritual and scenic attractions but only since the earthquake has there been a focus on providing tourism services for this group. The high profile visits and treks by military veterans with disabilities are a vanguard that have the resources to challenge the relatively poor accessible infrastructure, create a climate for improved facilities and services, and open the market to other people with disability in the future.

Nepal’s tourism recovery since the 2015 earthquake has been significant and the tourism industry has demonstrated a commitment to crisis management. The main lesson learned from the recovery experience is the importance of a diversified tourism offering with the growth of volunteer tourism and the emergence of accessible tourism linking risk with opportunity. These

opportunities have been reinforced in Nepal through the collaborative processes fostered by PATA who strategically positioned the Nepalese government, not-for-profit and commercial operators as central to the recovery operation.

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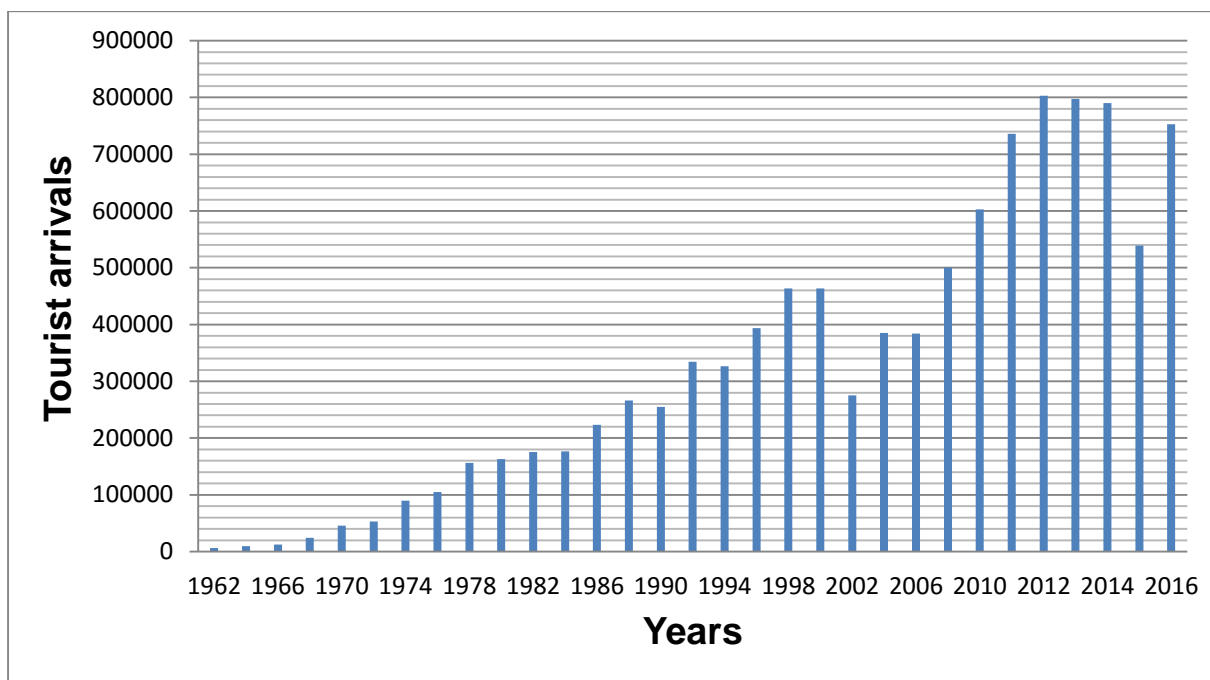
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Figure 1: International Tourism Arrival to Nepal 1962-2016

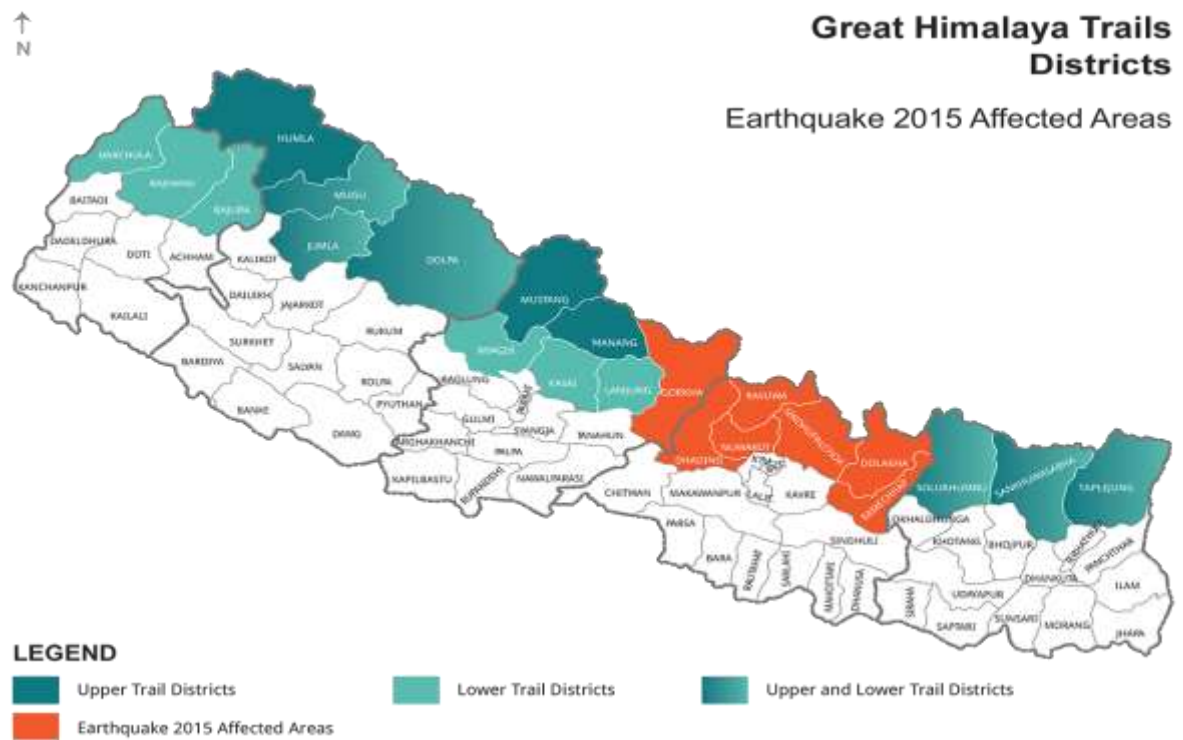


Source: Authors' compilation from Nepal MoCTCA (2017). NB. The 2017 preliminary numbers were 940, 218, based on data from The Nepal Department of Immigration.

Figure 2. PATA Nepal Recovery Teams and their Roles

Team No	Team Name	Team Role
1	Business to Business non-Asian recovery of sales	Familiarisation trips to Nepal for industry leaders and media from these markets. Dissemination of positive messages about Nepal tourism to non-Asian source market tourism professionals.
2	Business to Business Recovery from key Asian source markets	In addition to the above, focus on encouraging testimonials from visitors placed on social media and websites. An overall message that visiting Nepal supports post-quake recovery.
3	Nepal Tourism Accessibility	Focus on upgrade to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport and selective visa waivers to travellers from key source markets. Prioritise repair to damaged tourism infrastructure and trails.
4	E Media and Social Media	Direct positive stories of Nepal in social media and feed updated information on Nepal tourism to selected bloggers.
5	Traditional Media Travel industry	Disseminate updated travel information and destination audit on Nepal to editors and journalist in selected print, radio, TV and on line publications and platforms.
6	Business to Consumer social media promotion	Upgrade of Nepal's destination website. Use the site as a portal to social media and other private sector Nepal product. Enhance Nepal Tourism Facebook site
7	Redefining Brand Nepal	Recovery Slogan <i>Nepal Back on Top of the World</i> to symbolise repositioning Nepal from victimhood to restoration.. Supported by celebrity visits.
8	Traditional Media Platforms targeting consumers	Briefing of foreign diplomats to enhance accuracy of travel advisories, hosting of consumer orientated foreign journalist, Nepalese legations organised Nepal information evenings with Nepal tour specialists to consumers in key source markets. Communication with travel journalists from all sections of traditional media and host selected familiarisation trips. Prominent Nepal presence at consumer travel expos in key source markets.

Figure 3: Areas in Nepal heavily affected by earthquake in 2015



Source: Nepal Ministry of Tourism

Table 1: Summary of financial impacts on tourism sub-sector

Tourism subsectors	Disaster Effected Financial Losses (USD Million)			Distribution of Disaster Effects (USD Million)	
	Damages	Losses	Total	Private	Public
Hotels and others	16,295	-	16,295	16,295	-
Home stays	1,720	495	1,720	1,720	-
Eco-lodges	415	-	415	415	-
Trekking trails	426	5,711	6,137	-	6,137
Tour operators	7	4,924	6,137	-	6,137
Tourism revenues	-	47,013	47,013	47,013	-
Air transport revenues	-	4,720	4,720	4,720	-
Restaurant revenues	-	11	11	11	-
Total	18,863 (23%)	62,379 (77%)	81,242	75,105 (92%)	6,137 (8%)
Other impacts in tourism					
Damages of over 150 Km of trekking trails (Manaslu & Langtang) which accounts for only 15%	20% of touristic heritage sites destroyed		Estimated 35% reduction in tourist arrivals in 2015 than 2014 (pre-earthquake year) Lowering on tourists' spending from Per day USD 43 to USD 35		

Source: Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015

Table 2: Volunteering engagements Post the April/May 2015 earthquake

S. No.	Varied focuses of volunteer tourism in Nepal	Remark
1.	Earthquake rebuild: reconstruction of damaged houses and schools in villages	Volunteers mainly contributing by assisting construction work and helping children to learn in school when villagers are unable.
2.	Running medical and dental clinics	International volunteer medical and dentistry professionals and students working with Nepalese medical professionals
3.	Health camp (mobile health services) with medical clinics	Offering free medical and dental attention, treatment, and advice.
4.	Collecting medical data	Helpful to gain a better understanding of the most common health issues in the area volunteer projects are planned in the future
5.	Providing some basic medical education to the local people such as basic first aid skills, hygiene and primary healthcare	Helping to create a proper medical support network, which has a reach of thousands of people
6.	Volunteering on water supply projects	Helping to connect water pipelines
7.	Volunteering on accounting, filing, paperwork, promotion, social media, film making, correspondence, etc.	Individual interest and capacity based volunteering
8.	Analysing work done in villages (data collection, analysis, impact measurement, research and feedback),	Volunteering work for the evaluation and feedback of the earlier works
9.	Helping the staff in villages employed for teaching, nursing and project management	Helping employees for particular work
10.	Hydroelectricity project	Volunteering in remote areas with hydro project site
11.	Working as teachers of foreign languages (English/German/Chinese), computer and mathematics.	Mainly engaged by students in gap period and people engaged in teaching profession
12.	Services at the child care centres and orphanage	Offering service
13.	Helping install Solar-power generators and panels	Helping with environmentally friendly technology
14.	Social welfare or community development projects (e.g. construction of school, toilets, bathrooms, renovation and, landscaping)	Support for community development
15.	Environmental education (responsible trekking and waste	Contribution for environmental conservation

	management, tourism best practice study)	
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Source: (UN Volunteers 2016)