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Reviving Tourism for the future of Pokhara: COVID-19 Policy, Responses and Recovery

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Abstract

Pokhara has many attractions for tourists including lakes, hills, religious and cultural sites. Due to the presence of Phewa Lake in the west, Begnas lake in the east has attracted large number of domestic and international tourists. However, the rapid development of the tourism has led urban sprawls at the watershed area of Phewa Lake and in the periphery of the lake causing environmental hazards as well as exerting increasing pressure on the limited infrastructural facilities of Pokhara. The number of tourists visiting Pokhara in the found decreasing over the last two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This research is based on quantitative approach. The primary information was taken purposively from 90 key informants' views of Phewa Lakeside areas. Facilities and services for new tourism activities need to be explored and managed in time. Provision of easy refinancing facilities from the financial institutions and subsidies and vaccination to the people involved in tourism sectors from related agencies should manage to reduce the influence of Covid-19.

Keywords: Tourism, Covid-19, pandemic, refinancing, employment

Introduction

Tourism is a worldwide phenomenon and concern for twenty first century which is spreading globally. Theobald (1997) stated that “etymologically, the word tour is derived from the Latin, ‘tornare’ and the Greek, ‘tornos’, meaning ‘a lathe or circle; the movement around a central point or axes. When the word tour and the suffixes –ism and –ist are combined, they suggest the action of movement around a circle. One can argue that a circle represents a starting point, which ultimately returns back to its beginning. Therefore, like a circle, a tour represents a journey in that it is a round-trip, the act of leaving and then returning to the original starting point, and one who takes such a journey can be called a tourist.” The history of tourism begins during Roman Empire about 27 BC to AD 476 for military, trade, communication and

political reasons to different perspectives of 20th century. (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2013). Meanwhile, the evolution of tourism in Nepal has a long history from Kirat to shah dynasty (Shrestha & Shrestha, 2012). In the period of annexation of Nepal by king Prithivi Narayan Shah seemed to be very cautious with the foreigners to protect the country from several enemies; after the Sugauli treaty (1816) under the Rana regime the British India become the key determinant for foreign affairs because of the support of Jung Bahadur Rana to the British thereafter international relations were enhanced and tourism also associated with western world. After granted membership of UN (1956), Nepali monarch officially visited to the UN was crucial for tourism development thereafter tourism age came to Nepal. (Chand, 2000). Tourism as an industry without chimneys has become one of the largest industries in the world. It generates a number of social and economic benefits such as employment opportunities, higher incomes, foreign exchange, national and international understandings, reducing balance of payment, national and international understanding etc. Tourism has thus, a socio-economic and cultural relevance. Life of tourism depends on the quality of the environment. A clear and unspoiled destination attracts the tourist but in return tourism affects the environment in many ways. Damage to vegetation, disturbance of natural habitats, loss of species, conflicting norms and values between tourist and host population are only a few examples. It is extremely difficult to repair the damage.

The tourism and hospitality industry of Nepal has suffered a massive loss in the course of the pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 cause the Nepal Government on March 1 2020 has suspended the campaign of “Visit Nepal 2020”. This campaign of visit Nepal has aimed to attract 2 million overseas tourists in the same year; however, COVID-19 disrupted everything. Nepal is a great vacation spot for trekking, journey tourism, natural world and culture. Therefore, an equal of 8-percentage of Nepal’s GDP comes from tourism, and the hospitality zone is closely depending on it. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has introduced uncertainty and spillover impact on almost all the sectors of economy, and its enduring upheaval on worldwide tourism is a burning issue. Tourism business enterprise is enormous, worldwide business enterprise accounting for 10.4% of GDP and 10% of worldwide employment (Menegaki, 2020). Similarly, Nepal has also been severely affected by the pandemic, and its impact recorded to 14.37% loss to Nepalese economy as a consequence of travel restrictions and flight cancellations by the govt. of Nepal (Shrestha, 2020). In 2018 Nepal’s tourism industry generated NRs. 240.7 billion which was 7.9 percent GDP (Tiwary, Miller & Prasain, 2019). There are around 200,000 individuals who are straightforwardly utilized in lodging, cafés, traveling, mountaineering, aircrafts and other the travel industry subsectors in Nepal (Hacking, 2019) and every one of them are fundamentally impacted by the pandemic. This isn't the primary emergency that travel industry of Nepal has encountered of this level, the area was hard-hit by disastrous quake and exchange disturbances along the southern boundary the year 2015 which had brought about 33% the travel industry decline (Neupane, 2021), and presently it is COVID-19 pandemic. Nepal hosted 230,085 tourists in 2020, a drop of more than 80 percent compared to 1,197,191 in 2019. Among many sectors that were terribly affected, the tourism and hospitality sectors were the sectors that had been hit the hardest.

Albeit the COVID-19 limitations have facilitated, it is as yet attempting to recuperate the tremendous misfortunes it had endured. The country's lavish lodgings had experienced its most noteworthy ever misfortunes in the last financial year that finished mid-July. Three regarded lodgings of Nepal - Annapurna Hotel, the Malla Hotel and the Shangrila Hotel needed to close as they had brought about monstrous misfortunes. Notwithstanding, a lodging have used this as a chance to revamp and reproduce their administrations and foundation to have the option to rival the forthcoming current lavish inns. The Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu experienced the most elevated misfortunes as the property was shut for a year. As per the inn's monetary report, the disturbances brought about a total deficit of NPR 260.47 million in the last financial year and the lodging's net benefit plunged by 489%. Today, the lodging's day to day normal inhabitation drifts around 20%.

The present subjects of this study are not only for economic recovery, locations status management, broadcasting management and publicity but also for the sustainable development of tourism in the Phewa Lakeside area during the COVID-19 pandemic. This impact had a direct influence on the tourism business in lakeside. The purpose of the current study explains " Reviving Tourism for the future of Pokhara: COVID-19 Policy Responses and Recovery ". The study was based on the field data before and after COVID-19.

Study Area

Pokhara Metropolitan City, Ward:06, Lakeside has been taken as the study area. The Pokhara valley is located between 27° 55' to 28°30' N and 83° 48' to 84° 11' E. The study areas lie between 28° 11'39" N to 28° 17' 25" N and the between 83° 47' 51" E to 83° 59' 17" E. The study has covered the area of Kedareshwor Temple in the east to Khahare, Gairako Chautaro, sedi to the west and Jarebar in the North to Phewa lake bank in the south. This place is the heart of tourism in Pokhara where many tourists visit from all over the world (figure 1).

Methods and Materials

The data was collected purposively in the Phewa lakeside areas of Pokhara. By and large 90 samples were taken, out of which 43 were hotels, restaurants and resorts, 14 trekking shops, 3 Puja Samagri shops, 10 Pieces of garment shops, 7 curio shops and 13 tea shops and others. For the optional information vital help was taken from the distributed and unpublished records of the public authority, INGO'S, NGO'S, private associations, library reports and related sites on the Internet. Alongside the surveys, interviews with key witnesses' and perceptions strategies were likewise utilized. Perception strategy was utilized to figure out the effect of Coronavirus on the Phewa Lakeside area. The poll was conveyed to the hoteliers, cafés and the travel industry business people. The gathered data was analyzed both subjectively and quantitatively. The got information was examined as table, graphs and figures. This paper generates and idea of the pandemic created in the travel industry of Phewa Lakeside. The momentum pandemic is a tremendous emergency so; subjective exploration is performed to give the data to future administration for its smooth operation.

Figure 1
Study Area

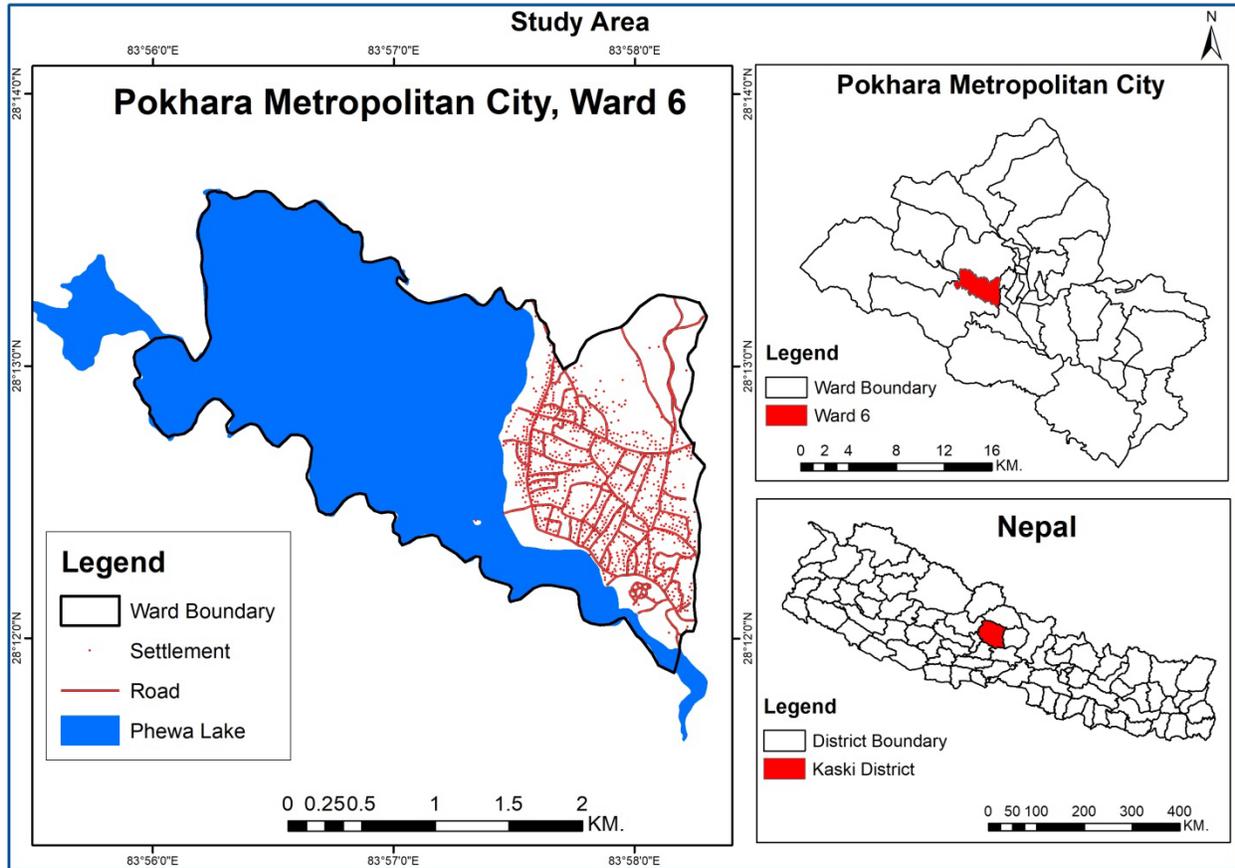


Figure: 1. Study Area

Results and Discussions

Pokhara is a natural beauty city located in the central part of the country. There are many touristic areas in Pokhara, including Lake Phewa, Begnas Lake, Dipang Lake, Kaste Lake, Niureni Lake, Rupa Lake, Gunde and so on. Similarly, there is Shanti Stupa, Bindhyabasini temple, Gupteshwor Cave, Mahendra Cave, Bat Cave, Matepani Cave, Seti Gorge, International Mountain Museum, Pumdri Kot, Sarangkot etc. This paper highlights the tourism infrastructure available in the Phewa Lakeside along with the tourism activities as well as the impact on the tourism due to COVID-19 in the Lakeside area.

Pokhara is a touristic center of Nepal which provide different tourist services. The Phewa Lakeside is well equipped with road networks, better security facilities along with various types of recreation facilities for the tourists. It has been found that there are 109 tourist quality buses, 1 domestic airport, 1 tourist bus park, 4800 taxis, 785 boats in the Phewa Lake, 592 hotels of international standards, 272 tourist restaurants, 116 trekking agency, 124 restaurants and bars, 11 dance bars and nightclubs, and 18 Paragliding Agencies

in the Phewa the Lakeside areas (Paudel & Upadhyay, 2021). Apart from this tourism industry around Phewa Lakeside currently has been providing several services like trekking equipment and clothing stores, parks and grounds, and transport services, trekking equipment's and clothing stores, boat clubs, book stalls, money changers and others. Phewa Lakeside has the ideal potential for natural beauty, socio-cultural space, and pleasant climate. Hiking around the lake, sightseeing, boating in Lakes Phewa are the major activities of recreation. Lake Phewa is famous Tal Barahi temple which is located in the center of the Lake. The lakeside area is also famous for religious and cultural tourism. Brahmin, Chhetri, Gurung, Magar, and Newar are different ethnic groups. People of the Phewa Lakeside follows Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and so on.

Status of the travel industry in Phewa Lakeside

Every place of the world has a well-defined objective, which belongs to huge socio-economic and physical effects. The impact on tourism can be both negative and positive. The Phewa Lakeside has a significant economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact. In addition, tourism in this area has produced a large number of positive economic results by creating the highest level of employment opportunities and foreign exchange earnings. In addition, well-run tourist destinations have potential positive implications and play an active role in improving the economy. On the other hand, when there are uncontrolled tourism activities, there may be negative effects on different aspects. It has a bad effect on a particular location when nature cannot control the flow of tourists. Furthermore, a well-managed and accurate examination of tourist activity and tourist flow help in the outcome of actual mechanism and strategy to reduce negative effects (Paudel & Upadhyay, 2021). Tourism has increased employment opportunities. Additional jobs, from low-wages to well-paid specialized positions in administration and technology, produce earnings and increase living standards for those in the tourism profession in the study area. This study was based on the major touristic areas and they are classified according to the flow of tourist on a regular basis in Phewa Lakeside. Various types of small and big business associated with tourism have been found in the study area (table 1).

Table 1: Types of Business in the Study Area

| Types of Business | No. | Per cent |
|--|-----|----------|
| No. of Hotels, Restaurants and Resorts | 43 | 47.78 |
| Trekking Shops | 14 | 15.56 |
| Puja Samagri Shops | 3 | 3.33 |
| Garment Shops | 10 | 11.11 |
| Curio Shops | 7 | 7.78 |

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Tea Shop and Others | 13 | 14.44 |
| Total | 90 | 100.00 |

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The table 1 shows the major types of business in the Phewa lakeside. The sample survey was done in 43 hotels, restaurants and resorts, 14 trekking shops, 3 puja samagri shops, 10 garments shop, 7 curio shops and 13 were tea shops including others. According to the field survey the business in the Phewa lakeside was severely affected by the pandemic.

Table 2 shows the involvement of the people in different types of business related to tourism from less than 5 years to more than 20 years. The table 2 reveals that 18.89 percent respondents had started tourism business before 5 years, 13.33 percent of them started their business in between 5-10 years, 26.67 percent of them started their business from 10-15 years ago. The number of people who started their business in between 15-20 years ago is 21.11 percent while only 20 percent respondents were found doing their business before 20 years.

Table 2: Business Operation in Years

| Years of Involvement | No. | Percent |
|-----------------------------|------------|----------------|
| <5 | 17 | 18.89 |
| 5-10 | 12 | 13.33 |
| 10-15 | 24 | 26.67 |
| 15-20 | 19 | 21.11 |
| >20 | 18 | 20.00 |
| Total | 90 | 100.00 |

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism of Pokhara

Pokhara, a capital of the travel industry, is a delightful city with the mixture of mesmerizing views, confounding waterways and falls, completely clear lakes, high approaching flowing white mountains, green slopes loaded with birds and butterflies, strange caverns, different culture, historical centers, sanctuaries and landmarks (Sharma, 2008). Pokhara is similarly renowned among travelers from touring to journey, journeying to mountaineering, canyoning to shake getting over, sailing to wilderness boating.

Pokhara was likewise viewed as probably the best objective for the Western travelers during the 1960s and 1970s, and the Europeans were the main adventurer to visit the Annapurna area of Pokhara. French resident Maurice Herzog and his gathering of mountain climbers scaled Mount Annapurna I (8,091

m) on June 3, 1950. From that point forward Pokhara was turned into the doorway to the Annapurna. Pokhara and its encompassing pulled in 298,975 global and 600,000 domestic travelers in 2018, producing NRs. 30 billion or 10 percent Gross domestic product of Gandaki Province (Prasain, 2021). In 2018 the Pokhara paid a revenue of 7.9 percent of the income. It served 2 million of tourists and created a new business with \$2 billion (NTB, 2018). In 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic lost its transmission and the travel industry pay has diminished the country's economy generally because of two periods of lockdown in the year 2020 and 2021. The pandemic has demolished the movement business in Pokhara. This impact was clearly seen in the tourism sector of Phewa Lakeside.

Impacts of Covid on Hotels and Restaurants and other Business

The outbreak of COVID-19 has restricted the flow of tourists in Phewa Lakeside. The tourism tycoons have closed their business as the first case of COVID-19 was seen in Nepal on 23 January 2020. During and after the first wave of COVID 19 the number of tourists' arrival in Pokhara was decreased. The first locked down has affected the business in the Phewa Lakeside. Table 3 reveals that 32.56 percent of hotels remained closed for more than a year, similarly, 25.58 are still closed, 2.33 percent of hotels did not remain closed even during the pandemic period. Pokhara metropolitan city gave consent for the business operation only after August 2020. Before the permission granted by the metropolitan city few of the hotels and restaurant have provided quarantine and take way service. This service took place only in the Phewa Lakeside area. Figure 2 shows the number of hotels and restaurants providing service of quarantine and take away services.

Table 3

Business Affected in the Hotels and Restaurants during COVID-19 Pandemic

| Duration | No. of Hotels | Percent |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Not at all | 1 | 2.33 |
| 1-5 Months | 6 | 13.95 |
| 5-9 months | 11 | 25.58 |
| More than a year | 14 | 32.56 |
| Still Closed | 11 | 25.58 |
| Total | 43 | 100.00 |

Source: Field Survey, 2022

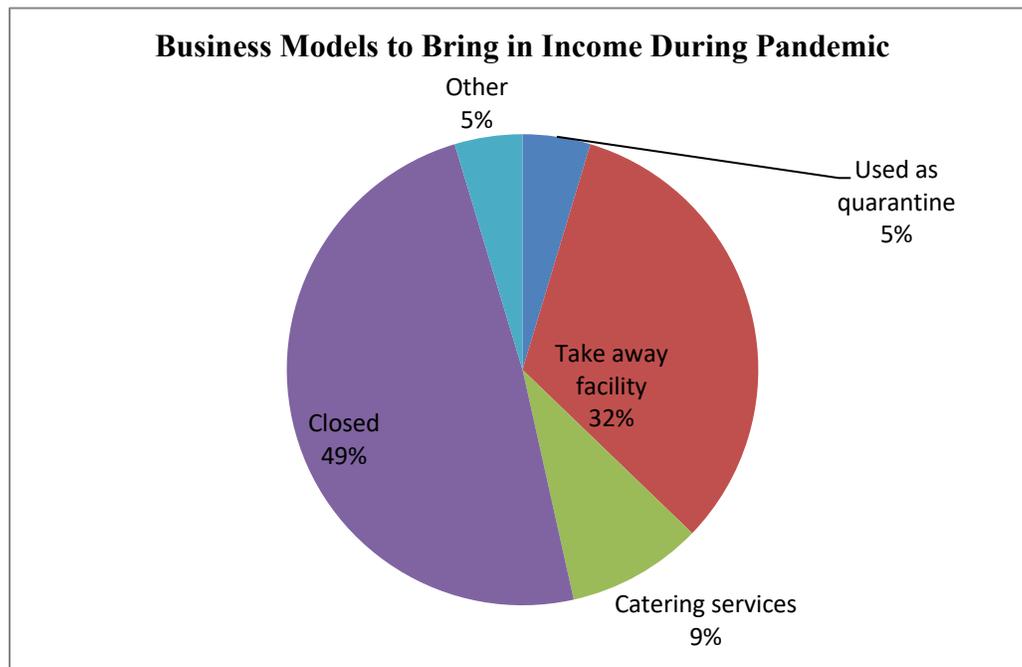
Figure 2*Business models to bring in income during pandemic*

Figure 2 shows that 5 percent of hotels in Pokhara were used as quarantine, 32 percent of them provided take away facility, 9 percent of them earned with catering services and 49 percent hotels remained closed and 5 percent hotels provided with other facilities. The other types of business-like curio shops, puja samagri shops, garment shops, tea shops and others were also highly affected. They also remain closed during the lock down period. They stated that they were not supported financially from any organization. They also cut off the workers. Other business operators also claim that the provincial and the federal government should ease financial institutions to bear bank interest and rent of their shops during the lockdown period. Likewise, the key informants such NTB, HAN, PTC, REBAN, NATTA, TAAN etc. has suggested the following measures to boost up the tourism industry of Phewa Lakeside area.

- Facility of easy load from the financial institutions at very low interest.
- Facility of grants in the Equated Monthly Installment (EMI) in the loan.
- Relief of taxes in the business for at least one year.
- Discount on the rent by the house owners.
- Booster dose vaccination to the tourism enterprises and workers on a regular basis.

The field study also found that the tourism Personal have cut off the workers after the COVID-19 pandemic as it pushed them to close the tourism business for longer period of time due to the two consecutive lock down in two years in the Phewa Lakeside area.

Table 4

Number of Workers Before and After COVID-19 Pandemic

| Types of Business | No. of Workers | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Before Covid | After Covid |
| Hotels, Restaurants a | 86 | 35 |
| Curio Shops | 7 | 3 |
| Puja Samagri Shops | 5 | 2 |
| Garment Shops | 24 | 4 |
| Tea Shops and Others | 11 | 3 |
| Total | 133 | 47 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 reveals that the tourism business persons at lakeside area have largely cut off the workers after COVID-19 pandemic, out of 133 workers before Covid was reduced to 47. The cut off of large number of workers is found in hotels and restaurants. The workers have not got subsidies from the owner after leaving the jobs. So, a large number of workers have been compelled to wash their hands from their job and this has increased the amount of unemployment in the study areas. The salary of the on-job workers has been found reduced. The owner of the hotels and restaurants blame that they have not got rent subsidies by the house owner as well as any other subsidies from the side of the government.

Major Findings

The major findings of the study are:

- i) The major tourism infrastructures of Phewa Lakeside area are hotels, restaurants, bar, tour and travels, trekking equipment shops, curio shops, garment shops, puja samagri shops, boating services in the lakes, health services, air sports and so on.
- ii) Different organization like NTB, HAN, PTC, REBAN, NATTA, TAAN are working together for the promotion of tourism in Pokhara.
- iii) Tourism rises job opportunities. Additional work generates income, from very low wages to highly paid salaried in administration and technology, and increases the quality of life of those involved in the tourism business in Pokhara.
- iv) Due to COVID-19, "VISIT NEPAL- 2020" was suspended due to spread of virus. Tourism is interlinked in all directions from job, hotels, restaurants, transport etc.
- v) All travel to Pokhara has been cancelled and now the lockdown is a chain break for the Virus. The local administration is strictly applying lockdown in Kaski when the positive cases increased.

- vi) The organizations related to tourism and tourism entrepreneurs of the study area demanded speedy implementation of monetary policy introduced by Nepal Rastra Bank last year as it is yet to be executed

Conclusion

Phewa Lakeside area is well equipped with a variety of tourist infrastructures and tourist attractions. Pokhara is home to a large number of tourist arrivals every year. Adventure, religious and cultural, recreation, wellness, boating and other tourist activities are available here. Tourism in general is considered as a "smokeless" industry as hotels, restaurants, shops are the major attractions of the study area. In response to the rapid rise in global measures and increasing public concern due to COVID-19 pandemic, the government postponed the "VISIT NEPAL 2020" on March 3. The international and domestic tourism fell down in January 2020 after tourist arrivals fell to 2 percent compared to 2019. Majority of tourism workers of Phewa Lakeside areas have lost their jobs, which has decreased the ratio of employment. Many of them have been returned to their native place. It was happened because the hotels and restaurants entrepreneurs have not been supported by the government due to this pandemic. Curio shops, puja samagri shops, garment shops, tea shops and other varieties like business were badly affected. It is expected that the after the second COVID-19, will drive to return to economic activity and the restoration of the tourism industry.

Recommendations

In order to smoothly operate tourism operations in Phewa Lakeside area after the pandemic, the following proposals have been developed.

- High quality hotels are only in the Phewa lakeside area, whereas there are standard quality hotels in rest of the study area, so quality hotels with better facilities should be established in other areas.
- There are many tourism spots in the Phewa Lakeside area, but there is lacking in the infrastructures and promotion, so the concern authority needs to provide the necessary services for the tourists.
- Government should provide financial subsidies to the tourism entrepreneurs and tourism workers of the study area.
- There should be the provision of easy refinancing facilities from the financial institutions, provision of subsidies in the EMI decreasing the interest rate.
- There should be coordination with government, tourism organization and local people of Phewa Lakeside area to enhance the tourism.

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