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## Using ICTs, CAN Nepal attract one million tourists by 2011?

### -The Visit Nepal Year

by Ksheetij Thapalya  
and Amod Pokhrel

Ksheetij Thapalya is a graduate student in Hayward, CA and Amod Pokhrel is a graduate student in Berkeley, California. Ksheetij Thapalya can be contacted at: [npthapaliya@gmail.com](mailto:npthapaliya@gmail.com) and Amod Pokhrel can be contacted at: [amod@berkeley.edu](mailto:amod@berkeley.edu)

#### Introduction:

Tourism plays a significant role in the national economy of Nepal. It has been estimated that annually tourism generates about \$200 million as foreign currency. In the year 2007, the trade and tourism contributed to about 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generated about 500,000 jobs, which is 5.0% of total employment, or 1 in every 20 jobs<sup>1</sup>. Considering the huge contribution of tourism in national economy, the government of Nepal is targeting to attract at least one million tourists by 2011- 'the visit Nepal year'<sup>2</sup>.

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA) has not yet spelled out in detail how it is going to attract such a huge number of tourists. But if applied appropriately, information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help the government achieve this target.

The tourism industry requires a diverse range of information. Lately, various features of ICTs like internet, multimedia is changing the dynamics of global tourism industries. In the case of Nepal, the application of ICTs in tourism sector is very poor at the present. According to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), even many high ranking star hotels in Kathmandu do not have websites dedicated to their business. In one survey when the NTB

randomly picked 60 star hotels from the list of 200 hotels in Kathmandu- it found that one third of star hotels did not have proper websites or information on the web<sup>3</sup>.

As many tourists are internet savvy these days, they just don't want to depend upon what the traditional tour operator or the travel agents tell them or deliver. They like to compare services and prices. They prefer to see reviews of hotels and other services before opting them. They also prefer to reserve services online. Unfortunately, even in Kathmandu, the majority of hotels do not have online reservation systems.

As there are approximately 345 hotels in Kathmandu with 100 star hotels<sup>4</sup>, application of various components of ICTS including online reservation can help increase the occupancy and boost businesses of hotels at minimum operating cost. Similarly, as the optical fiber networks are expanding in many parts of Nepal, the ICTs can be expanded to at least 600 hotels scattered around the country.

#### Current tourism arrival trend:

Some people say that Nepal has three main religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Tourism. Nepal, due to its rich natural, cultural, and religious assets has always been a natural destination for tourists. Unfortunately after the start of armed conflicts in 1996, the tourist arrival declined sharply till 2005. But with the end of the armed conflict, in 2006, the number of tourist arrival has started picking up again. In the year 2007, the tourist arrival increased by 47% compared with 2006. The increase in the number of

<sup>1</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council 2007

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/DEL356966.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Nepal Tourism Board 2008

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tourism.gov.np/tourismstatistics.php>

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