

Assessing Tourism Potential and Ecotourism Attractions of Annapurna Base Camp Nepal through an Appreciative Inquiry Approach

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ABSTRACT

Nature-based tourism such as trekking and mountaineering has gained popularity in recent years due to the demand for experience-based tourism. Adventure tourism is one of the mainstays of Nepali economy and a major source of revenue. Trekking has brought employment and income opportunities and contributed to the living standard of local people. However, the influx of visitors has led to the depletion of natural resources and the degradation of environmental conditions in many areas. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a proper balance between social, economic, and environmental dimensions to ensure the viability of these tourism destinations. This study aims to assess the tourism potential and ecotourism attractions of Annapurna Base Camp through appreciative inquiry analysis. Based on the concept of ecotourism and its principles, we carried out the study keeping ecotourism in the center for exploring other possible forms of tourism at the study site. Through our primary and secondary data sources, we have designed a strategic plan to bring the results of appreciative inquiry into practice. The study emphasizes the adoption of strength-based approaches like appreciative inquiry in tourism studies that will help communities and destinations address social, environmental, and economic problems while ensuring their sustainability.

KEYWORDS

Trekking, Stakeholders, Strategic Plan, Design, Discovery, Destiny.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Globally, the tourism sector has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing and significant economic industries (Akbulak & Cengiz, 2014; Zhao & Min Li, 2018). The tourism industry serves as a key driver for economic, social, and cultural development, particularly in developing nations (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Kharel et al., 2022). Nepal's tourism potential is considerable due to its geographical position, rich culture and traditions, iconic landmarks, and abundant natural beauty (Bhatta, 2019). Major tourist attractions in Nepal include mountaineering, trekking, rock climbing, bungee jumping, paragliding, mountain biking, jungle safari, rafting, and canyoning. Due to the growing influx of tourists, Nepal's tourism sector holds immense potential for expanding its scope in terms of generating higher revenue, creating more job opportunities, and offering additional advantages (Thapa, 2003; Khadka et al., 2021). On the other hand, tourism destinations have experienced various effects on society, culture, and the environment (Ramdas & Mohamed, 2014; Bhattarai & Karmacharya, 2022). The effects of climate change result in the alteration of tourist patterns, leading to an increased number of risks rather than opportunities (KC & Thapa Parajuli, 2015). The linkage between climate and tourism is obvious in different forms of tourism such as ecosystem tourism, coastal tourism, mountain tourism, and nature-based tourism. The majority of the adventure tourism activities in the Himalayas are heavily influenced by climatic conditions. Therefore, unpredictable weather such as heavy rainfall, and dense fog greatly diminishes the overall quality of the trekking experience in these regions (Anup & Fernandez, 2022).

To minimize the negative effects of mass tourism, the Government of Nepal and tourism stakeholders have initiated practices of nature-based tourism (Dahal et al., 2020). Ecotourism, a form of nature-based tourism includes cultural and environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, and empowerment of local and host communities (Virijevic Jovanovic et al., 2021; Gautam et al., 2022). The concept of ecotourism has emerged as a promising prospect for developing countries as it encompasses responsible travel to natural areas, promotes environmental preservation, and enhances the well-being of local communities (Hosseini et al., 2021; Rahimian et al., 2022).

Furthermore, ecotourism centers around achieving objectives related to preserving the environment, alleviating poverty, and maintaining business profitability by utilizing sustainable practices (KC et al., 2015). Ecotourism not only considers environmental and cultural aspects but also emphasizes recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and the generation of economic opportunities for local communities (Isaacs, 2000; Dahal et al., 2020). Unlike mass tourism, ecotourism offers travelers the opportunity to not only observe and learn, but also contributes to the preservation of culture and the long-term sustainability of communities and natural resources. Therefore, the inclusion of multisector planning (Bin et al., 2008) and environmentally conscious features in ecotourism provide both ecological and economic advantages to the community and the entire nation.

Engaging in nature-based tourism activities (such as trekking) is a sustainable way to enjoy and appreciate the environment while preserving its natural wonders and wildlife (Brockelman & Dearden, 1990; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2020). These treks and tours can be conducted safely provided that proper planning, monitoring, and knowledge about the surroundings are ensured (Neupane et al., 2021). The employment opportunities generated by trekking have positively impacted communities living along the popular routes (KC et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that the perceptions of residents regarding these changes vary. Some embrace economic growth and improved social services brought by tourism, while others express concerns about potential impacts on their culture and climate (Nyaupane et al., 2014; Gautam et al., 2022). Overall, nature-based tourism offers a unique opportunity to experience the beauty of natural landscapes responsibly while supporting local economies.

Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) trek is one of the classical trekking trail (Baral et al., 2023) in the world. Annually, it receives thousands of trekkers across the globe because of its natural and cultural highlights. The journey of the trek takes you to the picturesque setting of the majestic snow-capped mountains, experiencing rich cultural heritage with a variety of natural scenery (Shrestha et al., 2023). Studies conducted in the past have focused on the perception of trekking and associated social and environmental changes (Nyaupane et al., 2014), rural energy consumption (Nepal, 2008), and ecotourist motivations (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002). However, there is a lack of sufficient literature and research that provides insights

into the tourism potential (Anup et al., 2023) and captivating attractions offered by the ABC trail. Therefore, this study aims to assess the possibilities for tourism and explore ecotourism opportunities along the ABC trail using a 4D (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) appreciative inquiry approach.

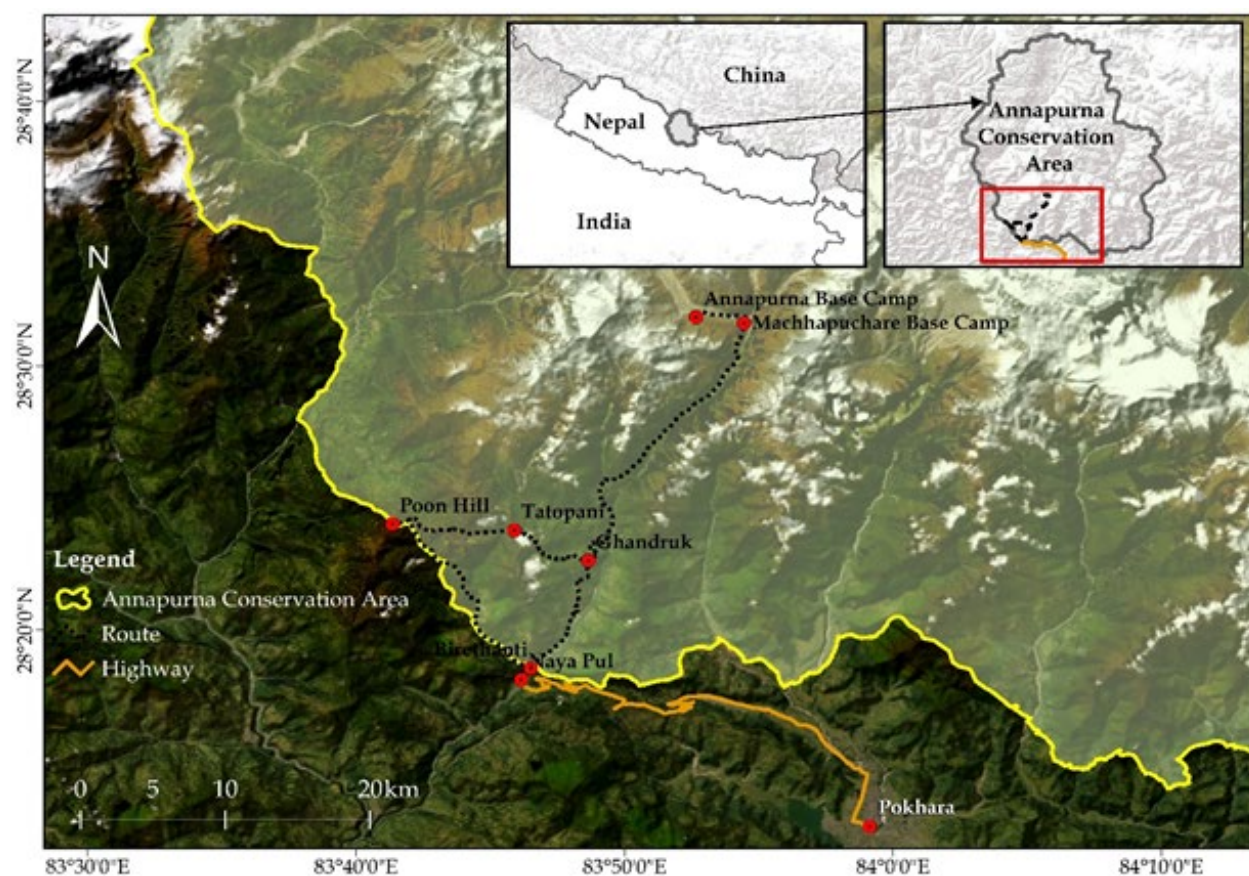
First proposed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1987, appreciative inquiry has experienced exponential growth and has been widely applied in many social science and development sectors, including organizational development (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Ashley & Carney, 1999; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Koster & Lemelin, 2009). Appreciative inquiry is a participatory research method that explores the strengths of individuals, organizations, and societies. It focuses on identifying the factors that contribute to the growth and success of human systems by promoting their liveliness, wellness, vigor, and performance (Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Bloom, 2003; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Without isolating the rural population from research, this tool provides a straightforward and reliable way to comprehend their knowledge, requirements, and priorities (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012).

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study Area

The ABC trek is a high-altitude trekking route stretching through multiple environments in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) (Figure 1) of Western Nepal. ACA is the largest protected area in Nepal covering an area of 7,629 km² with an abundance of flora and fauna (Shrestha et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Map of Nepal Showing ACA and the Trekking Route of ABC



Source: GIS and Google Earth

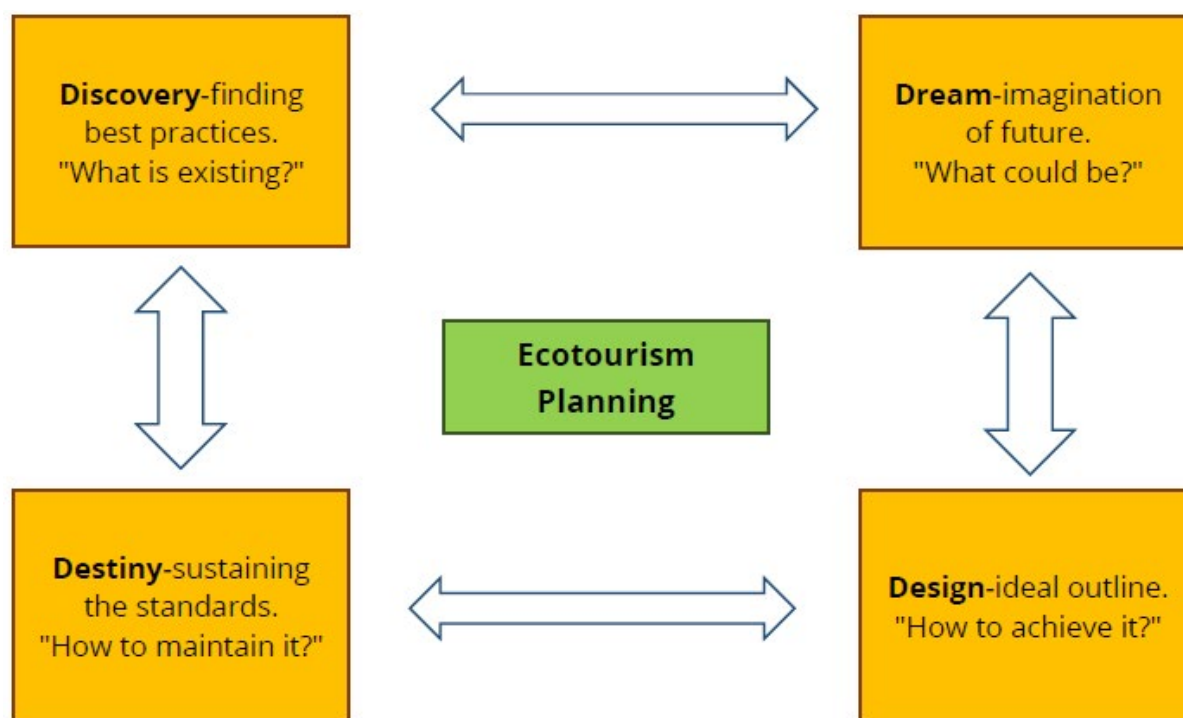
Beginning amidst lush forests and picturesque rice terraces, the trail gradually ascends to its pinnacle at ABC situated at an elevation of 4100m. The camp offers panoramic views of some of the world's highest

peaks, Annapurna I (8091 m), Annapurna South (7219 m), Machapuchhare also known as Fish-tail (6993 m), and Hiunchuli (6441 m). Due to its rich natural and cultural attributes, ACA has become the top choice for trekkers in the country. It is a tea house trek, meaning there are plenty of teahouses and hotels along the way. The rich biological diversity found within the Annapurna region is complemented by its vibrant cultural tapestry (KC et al., 2015). Gurung and Magar are the main inhabitants in the south, whereas Thakali and Manange are dominant in the north. The local people reside in five districts of 15 rural municipalities of the Conservation Area (Shrestha et al., 2023).

2.2 Research Methods

Appreciative inquiry was chosen as a research method against other research approaches based on its effectiveness in situations where multiple stakeholders with different interests collaborate, as indicated by previous studies (Reed et al., 2002; Carter, 2006). The success of this method relies on understanding the social dynamics, conflicts, and various socio-cultural, historical, political, and economic factors that shape a community (Messerschmidt, 2008). In the AI approach, individuals involved in the research process are prompted to share narratives that highlight positive aspects within their organization or community. This approach serves as a means to gain deeper insights while also facilitating the mobilization of transformative actions (Grant & Humphries, 2006). The adoption of strength-based approaches like appreciative inquiry in tourism studies helps communities and destinations to get rid of social, environmental, and economic problems and ensure sustainability (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). Based on the tourism attractions, ecotourism resources, and its potential for the future, we gathered our information to design a framework incorporating 4D (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) approach (Figure 2). Drawing on the principles of community building, historical achievements, experience, opportunities, and aspirations for an ideal workplace, we designed an ecotourism framework incorporating a 4D approach. Our main objective was to establish sustainable connections between tourism, conservation, economic growth, and social development in the Annapurna region.

Figure 2. 4D Research Framework Centered on Ecotourism Planning

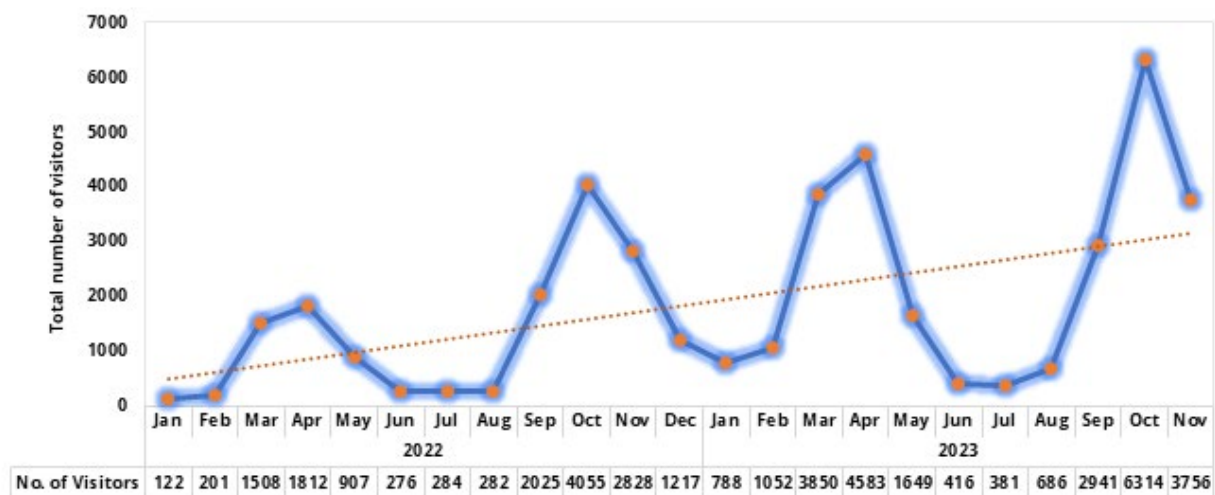


Source: 4D cycle modified from Stavros & Torres (2005) and Truschel (2007)

2.3 Data Collection

To understand trekker's experience and to explore the possibilities of tourism in the Annapurna region, we carried out in-person interviews using a questionnaire. The onsite questionnaire survey was conducted from 20 March to 27 March 2023. March to May (spring) are the best months to trek ABC. A convenience sampling method was adopted for primary data collection as it captures as much variation as possible with respect to demographic features of visitors such as gender, age, nationality, and education level. The interviewers remained at the designated locations to select individuals from the population and request participation in the interview. Convenience sampling was found to be the most practical and realistic sampling method considering the sample size, and the researcher's ability to reach individuals. We interviewed altogether 107 visitors who consented to take part in our study. In the month of March 2023, there were a total of 3850 tourists traveling around ABC. At first, a set of printed questionnaires was handed out to tourists who had consented to participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of different sections like demographic information, travel features, and trekking experience. These questions consisted of objective type multiple choices, yes or no (dichotomous choice), a five-point Likert scale, and a few open-ended questions. Care was taken not to re-interview those who had already been interviewed.

Figure 3. Visitor's Arrival Trend at ABC in the Year 2022 and 2023



Source: Annapurna Conservation Area Project Office, Pokhara

After the COVID-19 pandemic, from the year 2022, the number of tourist arrivals gradually increased in the ABC region (Figure 3). September to November (autumn), and March to May (spring) are the best months to trek ABC. June to August (monsoon) are the rainy months and December, January, and February are the winter months of the year.

3. Results

3.1 Discovery

During the discovery phase, we engage in a process of rediscovering and recalling our achievements, capabilities, and moments of outstanding performance. This involves acknowledging the finest aspects of "what exists". We achieve this by directing our attention towards the most remarkable instances in the lives of individuals, communities, and institutions. We have identified and observed various potential ecotourism endeavors that can be pursued in the future. These activities have been categorized into three distinct groups.

3.1.1 Nature-based Tourism

Annapurna Base Camp is naturally one of the best destinations for ecotourism. The serene landscapes with diverse flora and fauna and the local ethnic groups with an authentic folkway of life make the Annapurna region unique from others. Its geography, high altitudinal range lands, rare and endemic biodiversity are tourist destinations for nature-based tourism. The rhododendron forest, birdwatching, waterfall, hot spring, bamboo forest, thick pine forest, rice terraces, and paddy farms are additional attractions for visitors. Similarly, tourists also come to the Annapurna region for photography, research, and educational purposes.

3.1.2 Adventure and Sports Tourism

Hiking, honey hunting, rock climbing, and seasonal skating are the major attractions for adventure tourism. The horses found along the trail to ABC are widely recognized throughout Nepal for their unique and indigenous characteristics. So, we have discovered sports such as horse riding, horse racing, horse polo, archery, and high-altitude sports as sports tourism activities.

3.1.3 Culture Tourism

Various cultures, like Magar, Gurung, and Thakali culture are the prime attractions for culture-based tourism in the Annapurna region. Their unique dresses, songs, languages, and handicrafts are major attractions for both domestic as well as international visitors. Also, the cultural and religious activities they follow are attracting tourists in that area.

3.2 Dream

Dream is the situation of imagination, 'What could be?' Besides several potential ecotourism activities that we have discovered, we dream of Annapurna Conservation Area as an ideal destination for other forms of tourism such as trekking tourism, agro-tourism, water-based tourism, and high-altitude adventure tourism.

3.2.1 Trekking Tourism

Annapurna Base Camp is famous for trekking as trekking routes such as Chomrong, Deurali, Bamboo, and Machhapuchre Base Camp, pass through it. So, we can promote this area as a trekking tourism hot-spot by connecting the trekking trail from Mardi Himal to the Annapurna trail.

3.2.2 Agrotourism

The production of agricultural products such as cheese, potato, and buckwheat are viable in the region. The village is adorned with empty paddy terraces. Upon conducting feasibility studies, it is recommended to encourage the residents to engage in agro-product farming. This initiative will not only support the consumption of locally sourced food but also contribute to the development of agro-tourism within the region.

3.2.3 Water-based Tourism

Following the construction of a dam, there is an opportunity to promote various water-based ecotourism activities like boating, fishing, and swimming. During our visit, we encountered numerous waterfalls that could also be utilized for other water-based tourist pursuits, like canyoning. Additionally, the hot springs in Jhinu could provide another attraction for visitors seeking relaxation and rejuvenation in warm waters.

3.2.4 Bungee Jumping and Rock Climbing

The long bridge near Jhinu village could be used for bungee jumping, which will help to increase tourist flow in the area. There are numerous Rocky Mountains along the Annapurna base camp trail, which can serve as ideal spots for rock climbing.

3.3 Design

The objective of the design phase is to establish and develop organizational frameworks, procedures, and connections that facilitate the achievement of our objective. During this stage, we thoroughly examine the situation and determine the necessary actions to transform our vision into tangible results. Initially, our primary concern was identifying stakeholders and organizing their respective roles and responsibilities while prioritizing the needs of tourists at all times. In Table 1, we identified the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in tourism. For an instance, local people are responsible for providing lodging, food, and other hospitality services to the tourists. Non-governmental organizations should help in awareness, capacity building, marketing, and promotion of tourism in the area. Researchers should conduct studies on assessing feasibility of tourism and helps to identify demand and supply scenario. Governmental organizations should prepare policies and support in tourism infrastructural development in the area.

Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders Involved

Stakeholders	Roles and Responsibilities Involved
Local People	Accommodation, Hospitality, Participation.
Tourism Development Committee	Capacity building, Awareness, Marketing, Promotion, Research.
Researchers/Academicians	Feasibility and effectiveness assessment.
Private sector/NGOs/ INGOs	Investment, Capacity building, Awareness.
Annapurna Conservation Area Project	Rules and regulations, Fund allocation, Mapping, Description, Signboard, and Fence on the trail.
Government of Nepal	Policy, Budget allocation, Safety and Security, Health Post and camps, Infrastructure development, Exploration, and Research.

Source: Own Elaboration

3.4 Destiny

Destiny pertains to the execution and implementation of the design, as well as clarifying responsibilities and roles. To ensure the success of this ecotourism plan, it is crucial for all stakeholders to actively fulfill their duties and obligations. Furthermore, visitors must also be mindful when enjoying the tourist destination by appreciating nature without causing harm and extending support to stakeholders in promoting and conserving the area.

3.5 Strategic Plan

From the 4D analysis, we have figured out some strategic vision and objectives to overcome the existing issues and challenges of promoting sustainable tourism practices in the ABC region (Table 2). According to the objectives, different stakeholders should perform their activities within a given time frame for tourism development of the area.

Table 2. Strategic Plan of ABC

Objectives	Strategic objectives	Concerned authorities and Stakeholders	Time frame When to do it?	Remarks/Priority
Biodiversity conservation around the ABC trail	Conservation of rare and endangered flora and fauna	TMC, HMC, ACAP, Travel and tour operators Local, Province, and State government	5 years plan	Establish a good trekking route
Increase Agro-farming	Vegetable farming Livestock farming	TMC, HMC Local people	5 years plan	Aid to the local economy and production of organic foods
Connect Mardi and Annapurna Base Camp trek	Construct a trekking trail from Mardi High Camp to Landruk Maintain Landruk to Jhinu trekking trail Construct a suspension bridge above the Mardi River	TMC, HMC, ACAP, Local and provincial government	5 years plan	Establish a short circular trek starting from Machhapuchhre to Annapurna Rural Municipality
Rescue operations	Establish health posts and check posts at different locations throughout the trail. Ensure tourist tracking system using GPS.	Health Department TMC, ACAP	1 year plan	Ensure the safety of tourists Rapid Response team
Alternative trails	Maintenance of damaged trails from rural road construction	Tourism Department Road Department Community stakeholders	2 years plan	Make sure the road network doesn't reduce the charm and quality of the trekking route
Recreational activities	Honey hunting Rock climbing Bungee jumping Bird watching High altitude sports	Forest Department TMC, ACAP	5 years plan	Increase the duration of stay of tourists Alternative income sources
Quality tourism	Insurance of tourist Different schemes for tourism activities Neat and clean environment	TMC, HMC, NTB, ACAP Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation	5 years plan	Reduce mass tourism and maintain the quality of tourism experience Increase foreign exchange and revenue

Abbreviations used: TMC for Tourism Management Committee, HMC for Homestay Management Committee, ACAP for Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and NTB for Nepal Tourism Board.

Source: Own Elaboration

Strategic planning helps to provide a forward-focused vision, draw attention to weaknesses, and align and track progress. However, it is important to note that strategic planning is a continuous, ongoing process, not a one-time consultation or meeting. It should be amended and updated as per the need. The strategic plan can be utilized to prioritize actions, effectively allocate resources to achieve the desired objectives, and ensure those objectives are backed by facts and valid reasoning.

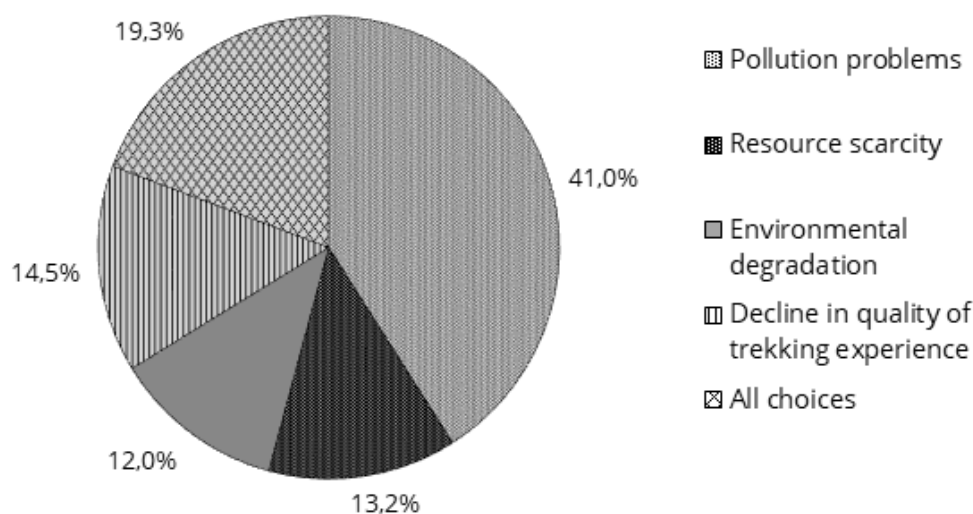
Table 3. Demographic and Travel Features of Tourists

Demographic Features			Travel Features		
Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Frequency of visit		
Female	46	43.0	First time	70	65.4
Male	61	57.0	Previously visited	37	34.6
Age in years			Preferences		
15-29	35	32.7	Primary	81	75.7
30-44	38	35.5	Secondary	26	24.3
45-60	34	31.8	Source of information		
Marital status			Friends/Family	60	56.1
Married	88	82.2	Social media/Internet	40	37.4
Unmarried	19	17.8	Travel agents/Tour guides	5	4.7
Nationality			Others	2	1.8
Nepali	43	40.2	Visitor's companion		
SAARC countries	39	36.4	Alone	23	21.5
Other	25	23.4	Group	84	78.5
Education level			Estimated length of stay		
Informal Education	20	18.7	Less than one week	98	91.6
School Level	23	21.5	7-10 days	9	8.4
Higher Secondary level	17	15.9	Main purpose of the trip		
Bachelors	26	24.3	Trekking	55	51.4
Masters/Postgraduate or higher	21	19.6	For holiday pleasure and fun	33	30.8
Occupation			Education and research	2	1.9
Student	20	18.7	Wildlife photography	11	10.3
Agriculture	17	15.9	Others	6	5.6
Travel and tourism	24	22.4	Use of trekking guide		
Business	23	21.5	Yes	28	26.2
Employed in service	22	20.6	No	79	73.8
Retired	1	0.9			

Number of visitors interviewed N=107.

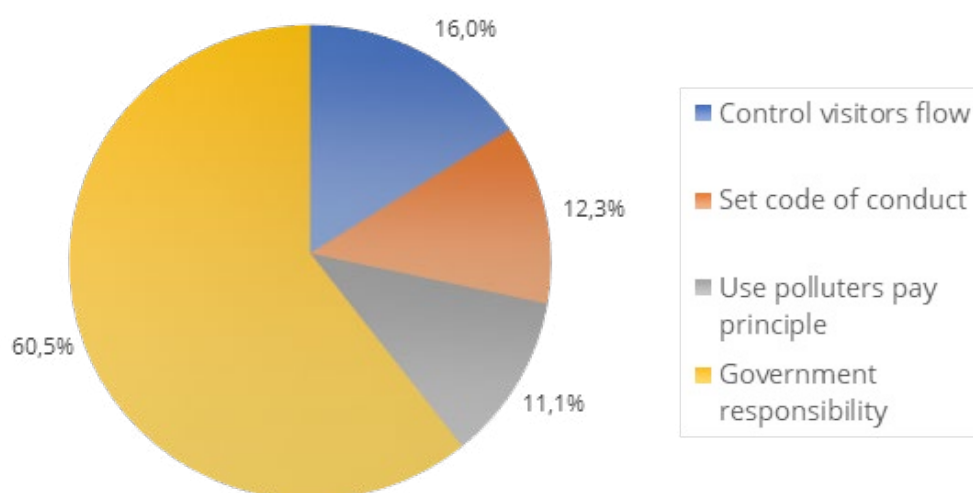
Source: Own Elaboration

The survey conducted had 107 participants, with a higher proportion of male than female. There were both domestic and international tourists. Approximately, two-thirds of the respondents were first-time visitors and the majority of them had ABC as a primary preference for their trip (Table 3). 78.5 percent of the respondents were in a group and the rest of them were solo trekkers. More than half of the tourists prioritize trekking as their primary reason for visiting, with holiday enjoyment, educational pursuits, photography, and other motivations following behind.

Figure 4. Strategies to Tackle Issues in the Study Area

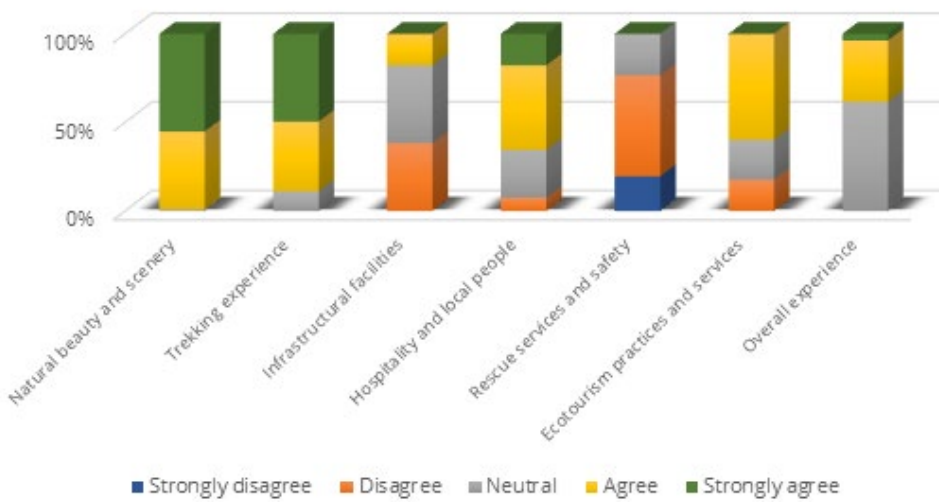
Source: Own Elaboration

Furthermore, visitors were asked if they noticed any problems related to tourism and trekking experience at the study site and, they replied with their responses and ways to tackle the existing issues. About 15 percent of the tourists shared the lack of adequate resources, rescue, and emergency health services in the region (Figure 4). Every year large number of visitors at ABC is creating a negative impact on the environment and leading to problems of pollution such as solid waste generation (paper, plastics, glasses), presence of smoke, noxious smell, and decline in air quality. These issues are not only affecting the local environment, flora, and faunal diversity but also contributing to the decline in the quality of trekking and tourism experience in the Annapurna region.

Figure 5. Satisfaction Level of Visitors for Various Experiences at ABC

Source: Own Elaboration

More than half of the respondents suggested it is the government responsibility to preserve and maintain the resources of the Annapurna region. About 16 percent of the respondents shared that the conservation area management committee should control visitor flow to save and maintain the beauty of the region (Figure 5). Over one-tenth of respondents suggested the adoption of polluter's pay practices and its effective implementation should be checked by the governing authority and the remaining respondents suggested setting a code of conduct and guidelines for visitors would help to overcome the existing issues like pollution problems at the study site.

Figure 6. Satisfaction Level of Visitors for Various Experiences at ABC

Source: Own Elaboration

We used a five-point Likert scale to check the satisfaction level of visitors for various amenities, services, and attractions at ABC. Most of the tourists were satisfied with the beauty of ABC trek such as the eye-catching view of the mountains as shown in figure 7(A), well guided information boards 7(B) and their trekking experience, but they expressed dissatisfaction with infrastructure facilities, rescue services, and safety measures (Figure 6). Mixed thoughts were observed regarding local people's hospitality and ecotourism practices and services. Overall, tourists seem to get some level of satisfaction from their visit.

Figure 7(A). View of the Majestic Snow-capped Mountains seen from the ABC Trail

Source: Own Elaboration

Figure 7(B). Signpost and Information Board in the Trail

Source: Own Elaboration

4. Discussion

Based on the appreciative inquiry analysis, our study revealed the Government of Nepal, Annapurna Conservation Area, local communities along with travel, and tour operators have not been able to utilize the resources and get the full economic advantages of tourism in the study site. There is an immense potential for various forms of tourism development and recreational activities such as adventure and sports tourism, including Bungee jumping, rock climbing, water-based tourism, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism, apart from trekking tourism (Kharel et al., 2022). We have envisioned and discovered these forms of tourism which could further aid the local and regional economy by providing more employment opportunities, capacity building, environmental awareness, and socio-economic development of the Annapurna region without affecting the quality of the tourism experience (Lamichhane et al., 2020). It is undeniable that tourism destinations have had several problems related to social, economic, and environmental spheres, like problems of pollution (Ramdas & Mohamed, 2014) (air, water, land), impact on natural resources, influence on cultures, loss of authenticity, and equitable share of benefits among the stakeholders (Anup & Fernandez, 2022). The Hindu Kush Himalayas are already at the forefront of climate change and vulnerable to natural calamities like earthquakes, landslides, and erosion. Various anthropogenic activities and overconsumption of natural resources are further exacerbating these risks. Mass tourism and the waste materials (plastics, paper, bottles) consumed and produced by the trekkers are inflicting severe threats to the biodiversity and pollution problems in the region (Bhattarai & Karmacharya, 2022). In the design phase, we have scrutinized the role of relevant stakeholders whose actions can transform our vision into tangible results.

Appreciative inquiry analysis is widely used in studies that are problematic where researchers try to explore the deficiencies and drawbacks (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). We strongly encourage and recommend the use of appreciative inquiry analysis in social science and tourism research which helps to solve various issues prevalent in a social system that are complex, non-linear, and dynamic (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). Furthermore, appreciative inquiry is a strength-based participatory action research method that incorporates equality in the representation and expression of ideas and perspectives of the stakeholders in strategic planning, restructuring, redesigning (Morgan et al., 2022) key performance indicators, and

systems for quality assurance using an appreciative inquiry summit model. The study reveals the power of quality appreciation as an approach that elicits a shared vision for quality definitions and standards and serves as a historical marker in the higher education shift from data-driven faculty performance approaches to strengths-based, inclusive methods. Method: The retrospective business case outlines one university's 2018 Appreciative Inquiry Summit, 5D (define, discover, dream, design, destiny/deliver and in the effective implementation of action plans and policies in the study site.

The study has envisioned and designed a strategic plan to bring the results of appreciative inquiry analysis into practice. Strategic planning is positively related to ecotourism, which is a tourism and hospitality industry (Ugwu, 2021). Although it is argued that implementation of a strategic plan and stakeholder participation in ecotourism is hard to practice (Simpson, 2001) it still needs to be tested in the context of the ABC region, where most of the local livelihood, conservation initiatives, and development rely heavily on tourism. A strategic plan is guided by its objectives, which help to identify specific activities required for the implementation. Stakeholders have to implement those activities or support to implement those targeted activities within the specified time frame.

Our objectives revolve around ecotourism and its principles. The strategic plan includes a set of activities whose implementation creates synergy between conservation and livelihood (Neupane et al., 2021). For example, the conservation of rare species around trekking trails will enhance aesthetic and intrinsic value of the trekkers while at the same time meeting the goals of biodiversity conservation. Some objectives are aimed at improving existing issues, like better trails, delayed rescue operations, unsafe and unhygienic problems (Lamichhane et al., 2020). To achieve these objectives, the construction of alternative trekking routes, increase in recreational facilities, use of modern technology like tracking systems, insurance of tourists, sanitation activities, and well-managed resources for rescue operations are needed (Baral et al., 2023). Practices of improved farming and organic agriculture can ensure food security, and financial benefits that help to promote agrotourism in the region. During the interview survey, we found the majority of visitors; 51.4 percent visit ABC primarily for trekking. Also, 75.7 percent of the respondents shared ABC as the primary preference for their trip, which illustrates the immense tourism potential of the study site. Initiation of adventurous activities like bungee jumping, honey hunting, rock climbing, water-based sports, and recreational facilities could increase the duration of stay of visitors and boost their entertainment (KC & Thapa Parajuli, 2015). The primary stakeholders are local people who can collaborate with the tourism management committee, homestay operators, environment protection committee. They need to be supported by other relevant stakeholders, the ACA project, and government of Nepal (Anup et al., 2023). Proper implementation implies using a holistic approach, stakeholder participation and effective monitoring and evaluation that could help to achieve the best possible outcomes (Ruhanen, 2004). To implement these activities, social, cultural, and environmental aspects, organizational structure, available technology, economic effects, and tourism impacts need to be carefully considered (Chersulich et al., 2020). In order to address the existing issues and to ensure the sustainability of the ABC region, collaborative approach of multiple stakeholders, efficient planning and monitoring, and adoption of environment-friendly approaches is a vital necessity.

5. Conclusion

The study attempted to examine the tourism potential and ecotourism attractions of ABC using an appreciative inquiry approach. We use this method to understand the community needs, ensuring the representation of all stakeholders who are key to the success of tourism. Following the principles of ecotourism and steps of appreciative inquiry, we have framed a strategic plan. The active implementation of the strategic plan will help to maximize the benefits of tourism without losing the quality of the visitor's experience. The study found many opportunities for the development of adventure and sports-based tourism in the Annapurna region. Development of these forms of tourism could increase the duration of stay of trekkers, enhance their experience, and aid in the local and regional economy. Therefore, we strongly advocate the use of appreciative inquiry for understanding the tourism potential and promotion of tourist destinations in rural communities, especially in the case of developing countries.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Prior to conducting an interview or questionnaire survey, we obtained the consent of all the participants. We informed them that the information collected would be solely used for this research. Additionally, respondents were given the assurance that their identity would remain confidential and undisclosed.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be made available after the request for the data.

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