

Literature Review

VISIT NEPAL! A REVIEW OF RECENT BOOKS ON TOURISM IN NEPAL

Mark Liechty

- Kunwar, Ramesh Raj. 2002. *Anthropology of Tourism: A Case Study of Chitwan-Sauraha, Nepal*. Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Pradhanang, Surendra Bhakta. 2000. *Tourists' Consumption Pattern and Its Economic Impact in Nepal*. Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Satyaj, Yajna Raj. 1999. *Tourism in Nepal: A Profile*. Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Satyaj, Yajna Raj. 2000. *Tourism Monograph of Nepal*. Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Shrestha, Hari Prasad. 2000. *Tourism in Nepal: Marketing Challenges*. Delhi: Nirala.
- Shrestha, Maheswor Bhakta. 2000. *Nepalese Aviation and Tourism*. Kathmandu: P.R. Shrestha

As I write this review, in the fall of 2003, Nepal's tourist industry is in the midst of the worst crisis in its fifty-year history, with no end in sight. Millions of rupees worth of investments evaporate as costly tourism infrastructure gathers dust instead of profits. The ongoing civil war and political stalemate threaten to turn Nepal into a post-tourist zone and to erase the country's precious Shangri-la image forever. In this context, the recent spate of books on Nepal tourism related topics seems ironic and even tragic. Published between 1999 and 2002, these works chart the phenomenal rise of tourism in Nepal. We can only hope that these books will ultimately be read as introductions to tourism in Nepal, and not as its obituaries.

This review begins with the most theoretically oriented work of the group, Ramesh Raj Kunwar's *Anthropology of Tourism: A Case Study of Chitwan-Sauraha, Nepal* before considering two more descriptive, statistical books by Yajna Raj Satyaj: his *Tourism in Nepal: A Profile* and *Tourism Monograph of Nepal*. I then turn to the three more topical

studies: Maheswor Bhakta Shrestha's *Nepalese Aviation and Tourism*, Surendra Bhakta Pradhanang's *Tourists' Consumption Pattern and Its Economic Impact in Nepal*, and Hari Prasad Shrestha's *Tourism in Nepal: Marketing Challenges*. Together these works serve as useful summations of existing primary and secondary material on tourism in Nepal while also providing valuable new original research data.



For readers unfamiliar with anthropological theory, Ramesh Raj Kunwar's *Anthropology of Tourism: A Case Study of Chitwan-Sauraha, Nepal* offers a host of analytical perspectives to better understand the complex cultural dynamics involved in motivating tourism and in the encounter between hosts and guests. The book presents a smorgasbord of theoretical perspectives, but its own original content is presented mainly in terms of applied anthropology with the aim of making policy recommendations for sustainable tourist development. In other words, the work tries to be conversant with theory, but does not really contribute to it.

Although Kunwar introduces various social science theories of tourism, one of the book's clear weaknesses is in the author's style of presentation. Much of the first half of the book consists of a literature review in which Kunwar lays out one idea after another but with little sense of development or narrative cohesion. Paragraphs often consist of extensive quotations taken from published sources. Strung one after another, it is often hard to tell what the author intends to convey beyond the fact that he has read and recorded this literature. In other cases, page after page is apparently taken verbatim from published sources. Most often the sources are cited but less often are quoted passages actually marked off with quotation marks. The result is a confusing *mélange* of texts shifting back and forth from the author's voice to other voices with no clear indication of whose is whose. This becomes especially confusing when the author of the cited (but not formally quoted) text uses the first person and it is unclear whether the *I/me/my* in the text is Kunwar or someone else. One of the side effects of this method is that many of the publications cited in passages that Kunwar includes in his text do not appear in Kunwar's bibliography. Large parts of the book have the feeling of a "cut and paste" job.

Chapter one begins with a discussion of various definitions of "tourist" and "tourism" that highlights what is at stake in how one

conceptualizes various travel phenomena. Kunwar offers a useful overview of analytical perspectives on tourism which shift depending on whether one views it as a cultural, economic, or geographic matter. The chapter concludes with a brief review of earlier literature on tourism in Nepal, and the author's research methodology.

Chapter two ("Anthropology and Anthropologists") is a long and rather disjointed introduction to social science approaches to tourism. (Although the study is presented as one involving anthropological perspectives on tourism, Kunwar actually ranges across works from sociology and psychology, to regional planning and economics—as well as anthropology.) Although the overall intent of the chapter is not clear, it does manage to convey a range of analytical perspectives on tourism. What causes tourism? Is tourism ritual? performance? play? work? What do tourists seek to find? Should tourism be viewed as a matter of symbolic expressive culture, or in terms of regional and global political economies? Are there different kinds of tourists and what are they? Are there different kinds of tourism? How have theorists modeled the stages of tourist development? How have theorists understood the impact of tourism? Kunwar surveys answers to all of these questions in a way that should force anyone interested in tourism to acknowledge the real complexity of this global phenomenon.

Chapter three ("Tourism in Nepal") begins with some very general statistical and historical information before moving into an introduction of the research site, Sauraha near Chitwan National Park. The village is one of the main tourist service sites on the outskirts of the park. Kunwar charts the steep rise in tourist facilities in the village since the opening of the park in the 1970s. Among various statistics, Kunwar notes that 40% of the money tourists spend on a visit to the Chitwan area actually goes into the pockets of Kathmandu based agencies. On the standard three-day/two night package the community nets a profit of only about 500 Rs. or 10 dollars per tourist.

Chapter four ("The Chitwan National Park and its Impact") looks at the impact of the park's opening on Tharu life. The park and wider conservation practices "greatly affected" traditional means of livelihood such as agriculture and animal husbandry. Kunwar is clear that, in his opinion, tourism has transformed local life, mainly to the detriment of traditional Tharu culture including religious practices and material culture. His assessment of the park's economic impact is less clear. At some points he argues "little benefit has flowed from tourism and conservation" (p. 93) while elsewhere he notes "30-50% of the park's

revenue flow directly to the communities for development and conservation activities. . . . Tourism is currently generating 25 lakhs for the local community” (pp. 95-96).

Chapter five (“Employment”) has similarly perplexing findings. On the one hand “Tourism in Sauraha has been an important employment generator,” “tourist activities ... have a favourable economic impact,” and “There is high local employment” because of it (pp. 98-99). But on the other hand, “Less than 2% of the sample households were found to be employed directly by tourism sector. Indirect impacts ... has also been found to be limited. On the whole, the linkage of tourism with local economy is weak” (p. 103). This chapter also includes a rather condescending depiction of Tharus as “sincere and honest” (p. 101) but also profligate, given to alcohol, and “people who sit together around the fireplace for a long time” (p. 102). On the cultural front, Kunwar argues that tourism produces “xenocentrism”: “the belief that what is foreign is best” (p. 106). The result, especially for local youth, is that “outsiders are spoiling their life” (ibid). Yet Kunwar acknowledges that tourism is not the only transformative force at play. Mainstream Nepali culture, media (especially Hindi films), and “sanskritization” also contribute to local cultural degradation.

Toward the end of chapter five and in the final chapter (6, “Alternative Tourism: A New Paradigm”) Kunwar introduces Dean MacCannell’s well known ideas of “staged authenticity” and “reconstructed ethnicity” as outcomes of, or local responses to, the tourist’s desire for an authentic “other.” Yet what for MacCannell is a manifestation of postmodern alienation and cultural degradation as a result of tourism, for Kunwar becomes a goal for policy initiatives. Kunwar argues that cultural tourism is the key to future prosperity in this area and that local arts, crafts, dress, and life-styles have to be revived, mainly to sell to tourists. He recommends “different culture-based souvenir shops This will not destroy the natives’ culture. Rather it will help to revive the lost culture of the natives” (p. 133). Kunwar notes that “unfortunately, the living culture is already dead at the destination” (p. 138) but that with enough motivation and training, locals could “take benefit of their potential resources” by reviving everything from “song and dance programs,” “various village activities,” “cultural institutions like family, marriage, kinship ... culture, and personality,” “faith healing,” “shamanism” and especially handicrafts which “villagers should be encouraged to produce” (p. 137). Kunwar cites Bali as an example of a region where culture is sold to tourists without destroying it.

Although this is a flawed book, readers looking for a basic introduction to social science perspectives on tourism will find Kunwar's work useful. It is clear that Kunwar knows a great deal about tourism theory and that this book is the product of hard work and sincere effort. This makes it all the more unfortunate that the work does not adhere to scholarly citation conventions and that it was not rigorously edited.



In addition to the contents implied by its title, Yajna Raj Satyal's *Tourism in Nepal: A Profile* also introduces the reader to global tourism. Satyal pays special attention to international tourist organizations and regulations, how the tourism industry is organized worldwide, and how Nepal fits into this larger picture. He lays out the basic patterns and principles in international tourism and provides a range of typologies: types of tourists and tourisms, types of transport and accommodations, etc. In fact the book often bogs down in these generalities at the expense of providing much new information on Nepal.

The book proceeds systematically through chapter-length discussions of tourism administration, air transport, accommodations, travel agencies, trekking, parks, etc. Chapters typically begin with general overviews of the particular industry sector. These discussions tend to be ideal portrayals built around typologies and are much less interesting or original than Satyal's discussions of the development histories of specific tourist sectors *in Nepal*. Scattered throughout the book are a number of useful, and occasionally fascinating, pieces of information such as statistical data on the growth of the hotel industry in Kathmandu, an account of the first tour group to arrive in Kathmandu in 1955 (p. 75), and insights into why HMG began to promote "trekking" in the mid 1970s. Also useful are Satyal's accounts of how tourism fit into successive five-year plans, a history that indicates a changing awareness of tourism, its potentials, and pitfalls. Unfortunately these accounts tend to be scattered throughout the book and don't receive the kind of focused analytical attention that they probably warrant.

This book's strengths derive from the author's long first hand experience with tourism in Nepal and his access to hard-to-find materials on tourism. Indeed the book's bibliography lists many items that are important to the history of tourism in Nepal but very hard to access: unpublished reports on tourism from the 1950s, '60s and '70s, souvenir publications from travel conventions, seminar reports, government policy

papers, etc. One only wishes that the author had added to these print sources by using his personal contacts to interview people involved in tourism since the 1950s to provide more in-depth and nuanced accounts of key developments. Indeed the best parts of this book, where the author provides glimpses of the history of various tourist sectors, are intriguing but leave the reader longing for more. Perhaps the least useful parts of the book are the introductory and concluding chapters that tend toward platitudes and promotions of tourism.



Published one year after his *Profile*, Yajna Raj Satyal's *Tourism Monograph of Nepal* covers much of the same ground as the earlier work, though in much greater statistical and analytical detail. Furthermore, *Monograph* is presented in a more formal and scholarly manner. Unlike *Profile*, this book is more carefully documented (with extensive endnotes after each chapter) and includes an index. Like *Profile*, *Monograph* has a bibliography but its non-standard format (un-alphabetized, inconsistent citation style) makes it difficult to use.

The strength of this work is its comprehensive treatment of available statistical evidence on tourism in Nepal. This book serves the very important function of bringing together dozens of tourism reports, studies, and government documents produced over the last fifty years, aggregating the available statistical evidence, and providing a basic evaluation of trends. Satyal takes the raw data on every aspect of tourism—arrivals, foreign exchange earnings, employment, seasonality, duration of travel, infrastructure development, transportation, public and private administrative bodies—and lays it out for the reader in systematic analysis. His concerns are mainly to follow developments over time, identify patterns, document the important role of tourism in the national economy, and make recommendations for the advancement of the national tourism industry.

The book's findings are too numerous and varied to list but it is clear that this book will be a standard reference for anyone interested in tourism in Nepal. From one chapter to the next Satyal uses statistical information collected over the years by HMG's various tourism bodies to lead the reader through detailed accounts of historical trends. For example, there is interesting information on changing patterns of age composition of visitors between the 1950s and '70s. Satyal shows what countries produced the most tourists and how these statistics have

changed over the years. He charts the impact of the “adventure tourism” trekking boom in the 1970s and ‘80s on length of stay figures and tourist expenditures. He documents the profoundly seasonal nature of Nepal tourism and suggests ways that the industry might ameliorate the problem. The book shows how tourists from different parts of the world, and even specific countries, come to Nepal at different times and for differing durations.

One of the more interesting (though mainly implicit) themes in the book is the dialectic between the largely unanticipated and unplanned boom in tourism on the one hand, and HMG’s gradual awareness of tourism’s potential and the need to manage it on the other. In particular, Satyal’s analysis shows clearly how the early 1970s mark the point where Nepal’s government began to take an active role not only in promoting tourism, but also in attempting to manage Nepal as a tourist destination. From efforts to preserve cultural monuments and the establishment of National Parks, to the development of a new tourism “Master Plan” and the promotion of “adventure tourism,” Nepal’s leadership began to consciously constitute the country as a tourist attraction beginning around 1972.

The weaknesses of Satyal’s *Monograph* are less in terms of content than in style or presentation. The book tends to be annoyingly, even numbingly, repetitive. In almost every chapter the same points are made over and over again, and then often repeated again in subsequent chapters. In a number of cases extended block quotes are repeated in different parts of the book (e.g., pp. 145, 168). Often entire sentences are repeated verbatim on successive pages, in successive paragraphs, and sometimes even within the same paragraph (e.g., p. 155). A good text editor could have reduced this book by at least one third, saving everyone time and money.



Maheswor Bhakta Shrestha’s *Nepalese Aviation and Tourism* is a compact, well-produced work that provides a great deal of information on air transportation in Nepal. Shrestha presents his data in a very succinct manner through focused text and countless charts and graphs. In his introduction Shrestha makes it clear that the book’s aim is more to provide data in an easy to use format than to provide historical or prescriptive analysis. The layout is crisp, clearly organized, and easy to read—all of which contribute to its effectiveness as a reference work.

In fact, simply in terms of quality of presentation (everything from editing and language use to consistency of data and quality of printing), this book—more or less self-published and printed in Nepal—is probably better than any of the other works under review here. The sheer sloppiness of some of the books published in India is inexcusable from both technological and editorial standpoints.

This book's major contributions are in chapters two and three: "Development of Aviation" and "Some Issues in Airline Management." In chapter two Shrestha offers detailed information on the growth of Nepal's civil aviation fleet, the development of airstrips around the country, government aviation policies, passenger and freight statistics, trends in market share, international air service, aviation treaties with other countries, etc. Chapter three is less useful in terms of reference documentation but does provide insights into economic and management challenges that the aviation sector in general, and RNAC in particular, have faced in the past several decades. Comprised of a series of previously published essays, speeches, and reports, chapter three does not have much narrative continuity but, taken together, the different parts do offer a picture of how RNAC, and later private airlines, have tried to balance the social and economic demands of, for example, tourist vs. domestic passenger routes, or costs vs. revenues.

Although some of the information in these chapters is found in the two books by Satyal, here the aviation data is much more extensive and clearly presented. Most importantly, Shrestha gives detailed information on the post-1992 deregulated aviation scene in Nepal—in which many small private airlines are competing in the domestic market—an area that Satyal barely even mentions.

Less useful are chapters one and four: "Perspectives on Nepal" and "Tourism Development in Nepal." In chapter one, discussions of climate and topography might have some bearing on aviation and tourism but it is less clear why Shrestha provides data on ethnicity and "mother tongue," or telephones and post offices, not to mention long lists of Lichhavi, Malla, and Shah kings. Some of the data in chapter four, on general tourism statistics and trends (arrivals, foreign exchange, employment, etc.), is treated in more detail by Satyal (especially in his *Monograph*). Yet Shrestha's discussion of government policy toward tourism, and the place of tourism in several decades of government planning, is much more systematic and understandable than Satyal's handling of the same material. Other parts of the chapter are interesting, yet force one to ask for whom Shrestha is writing. For example, the lengthy discussions of

Nepal's tourism assets (everything from mountains and rivers to tigers and butterflies, yetis and pagodas to Gurkhas and "living goddesses") are of more interest to tourists (who probably wouldn't buy this book) than to tourism researchers and professionals.



In the preface to his book *Tourists' Consumption Pattern and Its Economic Impact in Nepal* Surendra Bhakta Pradhanang writes that "The objectives of this study are to identify and examine the consumption pattern of tourists, to analyze the use of local resources in tourist consumption and their effect on employment, to probe into capacity utilization of hotels in relation to tourists' number and length of stay and to examine the change in government revenue resulting from the tourist export.... The study, therefore, attempts to examine the impact of tourism" (p. i).

All of these seem like interesting and laudable objectives. Yet the limitation of this book is its highly technical presentation. Written as a Ph.D. dissertation for the Department of Economics at Tribhuvan University, this study—whatever its contributions—is more or less indecipherable for readers not versed in economic theory, methods, and terminology. Unless one understands correlation coefficients, multivariate equations, input-output analyses, technical coefficient matrixes, forward and backward linkages, output multipliers, induced effects, elasticity, etc., etc., it is difficult to get much out of this book. The author could have done much more to make his research accessible to people outside of his academic field. Terms could have been defined and procedures could have been explained. But most of all, the author could have done a better job of explaining his results and what all of his elaborate calculations actually prove.

Pradhanang's book is based on previously published works, plus his own original data. The latter is derived from a survey that the author prepared and apparently distributed to various tourists in 1987-1988. (The survey instrument is included in the appendices [2.A], but there is no discussion of how, when, or where the survey was administered.) The survey asks tourists to record their expenditures on a list of 12 categories: lodging, food, sight seeing, beverages, telephone and telex, local transportation, handicrafts, curios and jewelry, carpets, garments, medicine, and other. Apparently the figures given on the surveys were tourists' post-facto recollections of what they had spent so there are

questions as to the accuracy of the data. The survey also asks for the tourist's nationality, age, profession, and "main purpose of travel," among others. [Strangely, under "purpose of travel" the tourist was given eight choices, three of which were almost identical ("leisure," "holiday," and "pleasure").] Pradhanang's survey allows him to make some interesting observations. He found, for example, that Europeans spend much more on lodging than on souvenirs while for North Americans the opposite is true (p. 100).

In addition to data from his own survey research, Pradhanang also provides comparative and series data from several earlier studies. This allows him to trace developments from 1974 to 1988. Even though the book was published in 2000, there is no data beyond 1988. This book will mainly be of use to economic policy professionals.



Of the six works under review here, Hari Prasad Shrestha's *Tourism in Nepal: Marketing Challenges* is probably the most original and substantive in its methods and data, and scholarly in its presentation. Shrestha carefully quotes and cites secondary literature, he writes accurate and effective English prose, his charts and figures are clear (with sources attributed), and the overall layout is professional. Like Pradhanang's economic survey, Shrestha's book is also based on a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Tribhuvan University. More than Pradhanang however, Shrestha has worked to make his questions and methods clear, his findings accessible, and the implications of the study apparent.

Shrestha's goal is "to assess and evaluate the existing tourism marketing and promotional efforts and its impact on tourism development in Nepal" (p. 333). But he also provides many intriguing insights into tourists' perceptions, motivations, and experiences.

Shrestha's introduction (chapter one) is a model of scholarly clarity. In it he lays out his study problems, objectives, hypotheses, research methods, analytical procedures, and limitations. Chapters two through five cover many of the topics dealt with by the other works reviewed here such as Nepal's tourism assets and infrastructure, the role of tourism in the national economy, and characteristics of the Nepal tourism market. Readers who want a very detailed, historical/developmental perspective on these matters should probably read Yajna Raj Satyal's *Tourism Monograph*. But for a general overview of trends, Shrestha's presentation is effective.

By far the most important part of the book is chapter six—"Presentation and Evaluation of Tourism Marketing and Development Efforts as Perceived by Tourists, Organizations, and Experts" (pp. 171-286)—in which Shrestha lays out the results of his own original research. In 1997 Shrestha set out to survey a wide range of participants in Nepal's tourism scene—from tourism experts, to tourism service providers, to tourists themselves. His aim was to find out what the tourism experience looked like from each of these perspectives and to ask what implications these perspectives had for past and future marketing initiatives.

Shrestha first presents the results of his tourist survey. Shrestha interviewed 151 tourists from Western Europe, the Americas, India, East Asia and the Pacific with an age and sex profile that roughly corresponded to average arrival figures. Using a seven-point scale, Shrestha asked tourists to rate various tourism products and services as well as evaluate their own experiences and expectations. He also used the survey to query various motivational factors that led tourists to visit Nepal as a way of assessing their exposure to tourism marketing/promotional efforts.

The results are surprising and even encouraging. For example, Shrestha's survey indicates (p. 174) that 40% of tourists in Nepal are repeat visitors with 25% having visited *four or more times*. Even more surprising, the survey finds that 85% of visitors are college graduates, almost 75% have some graduate-level education, and an amazing 12% have Ph.D.s! (This almost confirms the old joke that every other foreigner you meet in Nepal is a professional anthropologist!) Although Shrestha never discusses these figures, it is clear that Nepal attracts a very unusual crowd in terms of demographics. Even within a broad cross-section of international tourists this is far from a representative sample.

That Nepal's tourist base is highly educated and very loyal may have something to do with tourists' expectations of, and levels of satisfaction with, Nepal. It turns out that Nepal's number one attraction isn't its mountains or adventure potential, but its culture and people. All tourists, but especially those from Western Europe and the Americas, came to Nepal mainly because of its "cultural value," "to experience cultural difference," and to be "close to" and "understand" the people of Nepal. The survey found that nature (mountains, wildlife), religion, historical places, and even adventure ranked behind "culture" as motivating factors leading tourists to choose Nepal. Interestingly (though Shrestha doesn't explore it), most of those surveyed indicated that their goal in visiting

Nepal was not to “vacation.” Instead, most were there for “intellectual enrichment” and for “unique” and “special” experiences. Another fascinating insight that the survey revealed was that even though most tourists said that they had *not* come to Nepal to “seek real adventure,” almost all of them ranked “like to travel to adventurous places” very highly! Or, in Shrestha’s words, “the primary attraction may not be adventure. But visitors from all nations seemed to come to *see adventurous places*” (p. 186, my italics). Surely this throws “adventure tourism” in a whole new light, and has huge implications for how Nepal should be marketed. “Vicarious adventure tourism” might be the real name of the game. Another whole set of intriguing data concerns differences among visitors from different parts of the world in terms of motivations for coming to Nepal. The survey shows clearly that Nepal means very different things in different places. Finally, Shrestha’s survey nicely confirms what many have long suspected: namely, that the large majority of tourists are motivated to come to Nepal based on “word of mouth” recommendations, not as the result of any organized tourism promotion.

In addition to finding out why tourists decided to come to Nepal, Shrestha also surveyed how satisfied they were with a range of experiences and services. The results were encouraging: tourists reported a high degree of satisfaction. Interestingly, by the time they were ready to leave Nepal “culture” dropped behind “scenery” and “sense of authenticity/remoteness” in the ranking of most satisfying dimensions. But overall, tourists reported a high degree of satisfaction with those things that they had come looking for. (Everyone rated “nightlife” poorly but since no one had come to Nepal for this kind of entertainment, no one left dissatisfied because of it.)

The second and third components of Shrestha’s original research involved surveying representatives from 53 tourism-sector businesses and 35 independent tourism experts. Uniformly these people felt that tourism promotion was critical if Nepal was to increase its market share, and that the Government of Nepal had failed to adequately promote Nepal as an international destination. Shrestha found that the private sector itself was investing in tourism promotion at rates not unlike other comparable country destinations. But because almost all of this promotion was done “in country” the result was more to exacerbate already cutthroat competition than to actually increase tourist arrivals. Furthermore, these organizations and experts felt that Nepal’s tourist products and services were either poor or declining in quality.

In his summary discussion Shrestha notes the ironic fact that Nepalis involved in the tourist trade often had a more negative assessment of the Nepal tourist experience than did tourists themselves! Tourism professionals “seemed to have exaggerated the existing problems and inadequacies of efforts” in the tourism sector (p. 284). Things may not be as bad as people think and the tourism industry has to pay attention to what tourists actually want and expect. On the other hand, there was also a good deal of agreement between tourists and Nepali tourism experts and professionals. For example, all agreed that pollution and sanitation (especially in the Kathmandu valley) were major problems that threatened to lower tourist’s overall satisfaction. Shrestha’s two final chapters offer formal conclusions on his initial hypotheses and recommendations for more effective tourism promotion.

Perhaps my main disappointment with this work was that Shrestha often did not play out the implications of his own work. For example, Shrestha’s data show that tourists from different parts of the world come to Nepal with very different expectations and standards. In his conclusion Shrestha recommends regionally tailored promotional efforts but he doesn’t use his own data to sketch out what these different marketing campaigns might look like. Nevertheless, Shrestha’s study is a valuable contribution not just to aspects of tourism marketing, but to our understanding of the very nature of tourism itself in Nepal.



Taken together, these studies offer some intriguing insights into the prospects for tourism in Nepal. But by studiously ignoring the clouds of disaster looming over the sociopolitical horizon, these studies also seem to be textbook examples of the myopic view that many Nepalis have taken of their country’s emerging Maoist crisis. With the prospects for tourism hanging in the balance precisely because of these conflicts, I would have welcomed some reflections from, for example, Yajna Raj Satyal—a seasoned tourism expert—on the relationship between politics and tourism, past, present, and future. Yet nowhere does Satyal analyze, or even acknowledge, the impact of politics and political instability on the tourist industry and its development in Nepal—despite noting that “Tourism thrives on peace” (1999:14). Instead, Satyal falls back on characterizations of Nepal and Nepalis that are at best flowery and at worst unrealistic. It is one thing to rapturously (and endlessly) extol the scenic grandeur of Nepal’s mountains and plains, as he does in his

Tourism Monograph. But it is another, given Nepal's current bloody civil unrest, to speak of Nepal as a land of "everlasting peace" with a "peaceful and tranquil atmosphere" (2000:279). Satyal's rhetoric sometime sounds like a cross between Panchayat era propaganda and British Gurkha stereotypes as when he describes Nepalis as "a happy breed of people, frank, fearless, honest and loyal" all "linked to one another by strong bonds of national unity" with an "allegiance" to "the national language, Nepali" (2000:241). No one could expect Satyal to focus on post-1990 *janajāti* politics or the more recent Maoist rebellion, but for a book published in 2000 to omit any discussion of these developments seems irresponsible—and the same goes for the other books reviewed here. Given that the ongoing support for tourism seems to be one of the few things that HMG and the Maoists have in common, it is possible that tourism might even play a role in national reconciliation.

In spite of their failure to address the current threats to tourism, these books do help bring into unusually sharp focus exactly what stands to be lost. These studies show that tourism in Nepal is truly a rare and delicate thing. For example, Hari Prasad Shrestha makes it clear that, in a world of mass marketed mass tourism, tourists come to Nepal (in most cases, again and again) not because of market promotions but because of "word of mouth." In a world where most tourists are looking for "leisure," tourists come to Nepal looking for "intellectual enrichment." Rather than "the three Ss"—sun, sand, and shopping (or sex)—tourists come to Nepal because of its "cultural value" and a wish to be "close to" the Nepali people. Their extraordinarily high levels of education, interest in "culture," and non-vacation orientation suggests that tourists coming to Nepal (via word of mouth) are an uncommon breed and very different from those looking to buy a "fun" package vacation.

These findings also suggest how extremely precarious Nepal's prime tourist attractions really are. If tourists are coming largely "to experience cultural difference"—not mountains, wildlife, temples, and so on (as H.P. Shrestha found)—how is Nepal going to preserve, let alone promote, what it has to sell? Will promoting "cultural tourism" destroy the very intangible essence that entices foreigners to "discover" Nepal, given that what they come looking for are largely figments of their own imaginations? Maheswor Bhakta Shrestha's inclusion of Shangri-la, yetis, Sherpas, Gurkhas, and other fabled constructs in a discussion of Nepal's "tourism assets" reminds us that much of what attracts tourists to Nepal is as imaginary as it is real. The global fantasies that have grown up around Nepal are indeed perhaps its greatest tourist assets and go a long way

toward explaining how, in Satyal's words, tourism in Nepal seems to have "just happened" by "world media exposure" and "word of mouth recommendations," not because of intentional planning or promotion (Satyal 2000:259). Perhaps the greatest threat to tourism in Nepal is the risk of squandering these fantasy assets and having them replaced by negative images (pollution, violence, etc.).

To end on a somewhat hopeful note, a recent *BBC* article—after noting the slight upswing in tourist arrivals in Nepal in the last half of 2003—went on to report that many people on the main trekking routes listed informal meetings with Maoist rebels as one of the highlights of their visit to Nepal! This probably doesn't suggest that the civil war will become a tourist attraction in and of itself, but it does point to the incredible amount of what, for lack of a better term, we might call "goodwill" that international tourists bring with them to Nepal. The fact that tourism survives even in limited form, despite death tolls and travel advisories, shows that Nepal's main imaginary resources are still in play. The challenge will be to nurture this fragile flame of international goodwill without extinguishing it in the process.