

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN NEPAL IS GETTING ATTENTION



According to local tourism experts, Nepal should promote accessible tourism in order to effectively utilize its immense potential. In the travel sector, accessible tourism is a fast growing business opportunity. It ensures the accessibility of products and services to all people irrespective of their age, disabilities and physical limitations.

Experts opined that Nepal's knowledge about this segment is limited and there are many misconceptions as well. This was one of the thoughts presented at a recent meeting 'Accessibility Matters: Opportunities for Inclusive Tourism in Nepal', organized by Four Season Travel and Tour, US Embassy and International Development Institute.

Sagar Prasai, Nepal National Disability Federation activist, said that **it is well known that people who are differently abled are also passionate about traveling and are willing to spend money.** He added that Nepalese tourism has not so far understood the potential of the segment.

Among the large number of Nepal's hotels, wheelchair ramps are available only in a few because there are no accessible tourism regulations in the country. In the west, hotels have to strictly comply with rules and regulations so that the facilities are friendlier as far as people with different abilities are concerned.

There are more than one billion disabled individuals around the world. At least half of these people would travel if there are better facilities, according to Lonely Planet. Studies have also revealed that differently abled individuals alone spend over \$13 billion a year on travel in North America.

Cultural affairs officer in Nepal's US Embassy, William Holton, said that Nepal should focus on accessible tourism now. The President of the National Association of Hard of Hearing, Neeta Keshari Bhattarai, highlighted the need for training guides by travel operators so as to do away with communication issues. She also pointed out that people with hearing and vision impairments are suffering because of lack of signage in public places. Pankaj Pradhananga of Four Season said that differently abled foreign tourists would even want to participate in trekking, which highlights the potential of accessible tourism in rural Nepal.

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