



# TOURISM, TERRORISM AND TURMOIL IN NEPAL

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**Abstract:** Tourism has been embraced as a source of post-industrial employment and foreign currency to promote development. Given Nepal's geography and state of underdevelopment, its attractive natural scenery has yielded adventure tourism as a viable economic activity to develop remote areas. However, the industry faces many hurdles; the most problematic being the ongoing Maoist war and September 11 impacts, along with its dependency on foreign capital. Additionally, the industry's uneven growth, monopolistic class character, and neglect of rural impoverishment are all preventing it from taking off. Given this scenario, regionally-based religious pilgrimage, especially oriented towards Asian markets, could be more promising than Western-oriented adventure tourism. **Keywords:** adventure tourism, terrorism, political turmoil, Maoist war, commoditization. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Tourisme, terrorisme et agitation au Népal. On a embrassé le tourisme comme source d'emplois post-industriels et de devises étrangères pour promouvoir le développement. Vu la géographie et l'état de sous-développement du Népal, ses paysages naturels attrayants ont produit le tourisme d'aventure comme activité économique viable pour développer les régions éloignées. Pourtant, l'industrie fait face à beaucoup d'obstacles, dont les plus problématiques sont la guerre maoïste actuelle et les impacts du 11 septembre, ainsi que sa dépendance au capital étranger. En plus, la croissance inégale de l'industrie, le caractère monopolistique des classes et l'appauvrissement rural délaissé concourent pour l'empêcher de décoller. Étant donné ce scénario, les pèlerinages religieux basés sur le plan régional, orientés surtout vers les marchés asiatiques, pourraient être plus promoteurs que le tourisme d'aventure, qui vise plutôt l'Occident. **Mots-clés:** tourisme d'aventure, terrorisme, agitation politique, guerre maoïste, commoditisation. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Adventure tourism in the underdeveloped world is often viewed as a post-industrial activity of the developed world and as a potent source of employment and foreign currency (Scheyvens 2002). Through its

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exchange earnings and employment generation, it is expected to induce entrepreneurship, bringing hope to rural economies characterized by low agricultural productivity and industrial backwardness. Given its land-locked situation, poor resource base, and state of underdevelopment, Nepal's prospect of urban-industrial development is limited. One of the principal paths Nepal has pursued in its attempt to develop rural/remote areas basically amounts to tourism commoditization of the commercial potential embedded in its enchanting natural sceneries, mountainous terrain, relatively unadulterated rural-agrarian life, and artistic heritage. In essence, it is tantamount to privatization of public resources and bucolic life, leading to the formation of what may be called "geocapital", or the cumulative economic value derived from the commoditization of geographical attributes/features, including place-specific locational advantage or cultural traditions. In view of the country's diverse geographical features, adventure tourism was seen as a viable strategy of rural development (Zurick 1992).

However, the promise of this industry, born on the notion of sustainability, faces difficult hurdles as the trekking, mountain climbing, and hotel sectors are highly dependent on external agencies for promotion and growth as well as on internal sociopolitical stability and support. Other internal impediments include its uneven growth and its elitist, exclusionary character, along with Kathmandu's longstanding myopic neglect of rural constituencies, its cumbersome bureaucracy, and its political corruption; all of which work against expanding the network of adventure tourism. The problem is further compounded by entrenched urban biases in the country's development processes (Lipton 1977) and recent neoliberal emphasis on market-led economic growth—a latest arrival in the long parade of models that the World Bank has prescribed for underdeveloped countries (Panday 1999). As neoliberalism sweeps the national thinking as it has since 1990 when democracy had its second dawn, the market imperative inherent in the model seems to have only reinforced the prevailing urban bias in development.

While such internal problems are severe enough to inhibit adventure tourism's sustainability, the global social climate spawned by September 11 has apparently emerged as a threat to Third World development reliant on tourism dollars. As the world is now more beset by international and domestic terrorism than previously, the industry is highly vulnerable, often negatively affecting the fortunes of local areas (Richter and Waugh 1986; Ryan 1993). Nepal exemplifies this situation, a country where global terrorism, coupled with the ongoing domestic Maoist war, has wrecked its image as a Shangri-La (Shrestha 1998). The World Trade Center disaster of 2001 not only increased the scale and scope of international terrorist activity, but it ushered in the current US administration's global "war on terrorism," significantly heightening concerns about security almost everywhere.

What makes the Nepal case interesting and somewhat unique is the coalescence of internal and external crises surrounding the terrorism-tourism nexus (Richter and Waugh 1986). As a result, Western-oriented adventure tourism's viability was fundamentally challenged,

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