

SECTOR BRIEF

Issue #16, February 2017



Sector: Tourism

Interventions: Trail Standards Guidelines and Auditor Training

Districts: National – Focus on Great Himalaya Trails districts

Standards and Quality Accreditation on the Great Himalaya Trails

Nepal's tourism industry has been under sizable pressure. Visitor expenditure is gradually in decline and product development is fairly limited leading to a low value expenditure model. The industry's development has been further stunted by the 2015 earthquake. The earthquake raised safety concerns putting many tourists off visiting the country and those who arrived often expected lower rates because of the low demand and deterioration of key tourism products.

| Year | Tourist spend per day (\$) |
|------|----------------------------|
| 2008 | 73.0 |
| 2009 | 65.3 |
| 2010 | 43.2 |
| 2011 | 39.9 |
| 2012 | 36.2 |
| 2013 | 48.8 |

MoCTCA, Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2014

Tourism is an important sector in Nepal because it is accessible to relatively poor communities which supports inclusive rural development. Tourism also has great potential to bring in high value returns from low capital investment. There are opportunities in the shape of two growing high value Asian markets in close proximity – India and China -and Nepal's unique mixture of mountain landscapes, natural beauty, welcoming culture and sites of religious intrigue. The lack of product development is seriously hindering Nepal's capability to capitalise on these advantages. Currently the industry is not meeting adequate quality and safety standards which has portrayed Nepal a budget destination.

Great Himalaya Trails (GHT), a quality brand promise to provide a comprehensive network of trails at an international standard

Samarth-NMDP are currently working towards endorsing Great Himalaya Trails (GHT) as a brand with the aim of providing holistic guidelines to both trail infrastructure and enterprises in the upper and middle mountain districts of Nepal to satisfy visitor expectations. These criteria cover safety, quality standards, environmental sustainability and fair working conditions in enterprises. The key principle of this intervention is that entrepreneurs who adhere these standards will be offering a better product and therefore can charge tourists at a higher rate. As the brand becomes more recognised, more enterprises will strive to these standards thus building a robust network of quality treks.

Training with Green Flag Trails



For the first time in the country's history, Nepal has eleven Green Flag Trails International certified trail auditors (<http://greenflagtrails.org>). They are equipped to monitor and assess trails to an international standard for development and maintenance. The training was done in partnership with Green Flag Trails and in association with World Trails

Network. Green Flag Trails is a quality and eco-label for trails with the goal of providing a status which guarantees the best possible trekking experiences. The Green Flag Trails system has international recognition and has been particularly successful in Southern Africa.

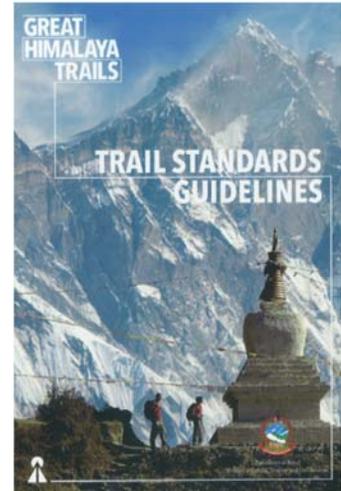
The training took place in the Annapurnas and lasted for 10 days during October 2016. The session was conducted by Dr. Leon Hugo of Green Flag Trails. Attendants were selected from a diverse range of industry representatives – trekking guides, tour operators, conservation officers, tourism specialists, engineers and development programme managers. The course included 2 days of theory and 8 days on trails from Pokhara-Dampus-Pothana-Landruk-Jhinu-Ghandruk-Ghorepani-Ulleri-



Birethanti. The training outlined a range of different criteria from signage to safety standards with a core focus on environmental sustainability and responsible management.

Production of Trail Standards Guidelines in Nepal

Samarth NMDP with the consultation of Galeo Saintz (World Trails Network) and Dr. Leon Hugo (Green Flag Trails) have produced a trail standards guidelines document. The purpose of this document is to define a quality standard at a national level and give consistent guidelines concerning trail maintenance and development for trail builders and managers. The document proposed all new trails should be built to the standards and existing trails should be upgraded to as close to these standards as time or resources permit. This document is endorsed by the Trail Standards Committee and approved by the level of Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA). The Guidelines were publically unveiled on 20 February 2017 by the Secretary of MoCTCA.



Quality standards are directly related to the primary elements that influence safety on trails and the trail user's experience of the trail infrastructure. Each one of these quality pillars work together to make the

overall experience of the trail both safe and a valued experience. When these standards are appropriately managed a trail can deliver world class experiences in a timely and efficient manner.

There are four key standard areas which represent an integral part of the trekking trail standards and certification. The first area concerns dissemination of the correct and useful information to hikers so that they can make an informed decision on whether the trek matches their interests and abilities. This includes an accurate grading system and signage. Secondly, a large focus is placed on safety arrangements for trail users in terms of path surface on the trails themselves and external factors which may affect trekkers. The guidelines instruct tight specifications for safety warnings, path width, surface, slope, steps, railings and bridges to ensure the best safety and experience for the hiker.

There is a core emphasis on environmental sustainability and management resulting in a better natural environment. This includes a rigorous management structure and approaches towards establishing ecotourism products. The final standard area concerns social reasonability for local communities. The guideline specifies responsible management and operation standards of enterprises and tourism products along the trekking trail routes.

Way Forward

Already the popular Annapurna Panorama trek has been fully accredited. Ruby Valley (Ganesh Himal) trekking trail has also been audited. Seven more trails have been selected to be done by the end of 2017 including Helambu, Manaslu, Kanchenjunga, Langtang and Annapurna Circuit. Alongside auditing, Samarth-NMDP is working on small infrastructure improvements on some of these treks such a coherent signage system. Some of these treks have been requested by collaborators (for instance Nepal Investment Bank and SDC) to be audited in partnerships with Samarth-NMDP. As recognition of the brand increases it is expected that more collaborations will happen. Additionally, as more trail auditors become trained, there will be more capacity for auditing and accrediting trails.

About Samarth-NMDP

Samarth-NMDP is a five year UK aid-funded program that aims to reduce poverty in Nepal. The programme follows a market systems development approach, addressing underlying causes in the performance of the market systems, to bring about more competitive and sustainable markets that work better for the poor.

Samarth-NMDP is a UK aid-funded programme managed in partnership with the Government of Nepal by a consortium comprising Adam Smith International, The Springfield Centre and Swisscontact. For more information on the programme, please visit www.samarth-nepal.com.