

# **Understanding the Ban on Solo Travel for Foreign Tourists in Upper Mustang, Nepal**

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**Date of Submission:** 15-07-2024

**Total Page Number:** 72

**No of Characters with Space:** 175.917

## Abstract

This study paper investigates the impact of the solo travel ban on tourist safety and the effectiveness of the mandatory guide system in Upper Mustang, Nepal. In order to save its historic and delicate nature, Upper Mustang has implemented stringent laws that forbid foreign tourists from traveling alone. This research utilizes Netnography as a methodological tool to examine the influence of social media on the way international visitors perceive and adhere to solo travel limitations in Upper Mustang, Nepal. The research seeks to comprehend how internet communication influences the way tourists see and act in response to the harsh laws in the area that forbid international visitors from traveling alone. We acquire and evaluate textual and visual material about travel experiences in Upper Mustang by systematically monitoring Discussion forums, travel blogs, and social media channels that are popular among tourists. The results of this Netnography research enhance our comprehension of how social media influences visitor experiences and destination management strategies in culturally important and ecologically fragile areas such as Upper Mustang. The findings obtained from this research have important implications for the development of destination management strategies, the creation of policies, and the implementation of community involvement activities. These efforts are focused on promoting responsible tourism practices in destinations that are culturally significant and ecologically sensitive. The main objective of this study is to provide information that can be used to develop interventions based on evidence. These interventions should aim to find a balance between conservation efforts and the development of genuine and immersive tourist experiences in Upper Mustang, Nepal.

## Keywords.

**Upper Mustang, Tourist safety, Responsible tourism, culture and heritage, Rules and regulation, Solo travel, Nepal, Tourism.**

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Aalborg University Copenhagen for providing us with a precious opportunity to delve into practical and theoretical aspects through this research project. We express our sincere gratitude for the crucial contribution of our supervisor, Carina Ren. Throughout the research period, our supervisor's consistent direction, deep experience, and a generous amount of time have been essential in easily navigating this research.

In addition, we express our gratitude to all esteemed professors who have shared their expertise and insight throughout the last two years. Their contributions have established the foundation for our study, enhancing our comprehension and influencing our academic endeavors. We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to our beloved friends and family for their steadfast encouragement and unflinching support throughout this endeavor. Their unwavering faith in our abilities has consistently served as a driving force, moving us toward our goal of achieving academic greatness.

Finally, we express our sincere gratitude to everyone whose direct and indirect contributions have been crucial in achieving the goals of this thesis. We can stand here today and proudly display the result of our combined efforts.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

Upper Mustang is an isolated kingdom which is placed in the Himalayas of Nepal. Upper Mustang's magnificent scenery, rich history of culture, and distinctive way of life reflects the Tibetan influence (Amgai, 2021; Richon, 2016). According to Pandey (2017), the historic monasteries, breathtaking scenery, and traditional Tibetan communities have drawn visitors from around the globe. Cultural settings present in its ancient monasteries, traditional stone-built houses, and unique lifestyle constitute a key element of history (Richon, 2016). According to Aryal et al. (2012), the interdependence of historical, cultural, and environmental factors reflects the region's identity. UNESCO has listed Lo-manthang as a World Heritage site under cultural criteria (Regmi, n.d.), because of its cultural significance evident in the 15th century. Although Upper Mustang has mystical charm, several regulations and regulatory frameworks govern tourism in Upper Mustang restricting solo travel (Rawal et al., 2022). The historical isolation of Upper Mustang and its rich cultural history have greatly influenced its character and approach to the administration of tourism. The physical solitude of Upper Mustang has fostered a unique and lively Tibetan Buddhist culture, which is marked by a fusion of Tibetan influences and local customs (Chapagain, 2017). Monasteries like Thubchen Gompa and Jampa Gompa, embellished with Tibetan architectural designs and sacred artwork, functioned as centers of culture and spirituality (Richon, 2018).

According to Richon (2018), the Lo Kings actively advocated for the promotion of Tibetan Buddhist practices by providing funding for the establishment of monasteries, organizing religious festivals, and facilitating the education of monks. Upper Mustang began tourism in 1992 but with stringent rules. Von Der Heide (2016) states that the region's cultural identity is deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhism which is evident in its architectural stone-built houses and religious practices. According to Dhungel (2002), understanding the Lo Monarchy's history can help to illuminate the Upper Mustang's cultural evolution, and also adds to continuing conservation over tourist regulation and shows the complex balance between preserving culture and gaining economic benefits. The formulation of these restrictions was driven by a twin objective, namely the assurance of passenger safety and the preservation of the distinctive cultural history and unspoiled nature of the region. The imposition of restrictions on individual travel was motivated by apprehensions over the well-being of unaccompanied tourists, notably in response to instances of hikers becoming unaccounted for (Richon, 2016). According to Gross (2023), the government's bold decision

to ban solo travelers from traveling alone in the Upper Mustang is a preventive measure to ensure tourist safety and preserve the region's cultural value in its natural state. The Upper Mustang region was regulated in 2023 after 400 individuals were reported missing out of 400,000 who visited there in 2019 (Gross, 2023; Peter, 2023). Because of this incident, people should know better than to stroll alone in this area.

When international visitors wish to visit Upper Mustang, they are required to fulfill several requirements and follow the regulations that dictate their travel endeavors. One of the most significant regulations is the prohibition of foreign visitors traveling alone (Rawal et al., 2022). To promote responsible tourism and safeguard the cultural and environmental integrity of the region, strict regulations mandating that tourists travel in groups led by licensed guides have been enforced (Rawal et al., 2022). The purpose of this regulatory framework is to achieve a nuanced equilibrium between promoting tourism and protecting the cultural heritage of Upper Mustang from the adverse consequences of unrestricted visitation. The rationale for imposing restrictions on solitary travel in Upper Mustang is to safeguard its delicate ecosystem, visitors' welfare, and cultural heritage. Majdak and de Almeida (2022) argue that the progressive encroachment upon cultural sites leads to the deterioration of indigenous ecosystems and the disturbance of customary practices. These rules, meantime, have not been without controversy; some tourists have voiced discontent with what they see to be restrictions on their ability to explore the area autonomously. The argument over limitations to solo travel highlights the difficulties of regulating tourism in ecologically and culturally sensitive regions.

Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) is responsible for preserving both natural and cultural resources in collaboration with local communities (ACAP, n.d.). With over 1,000 hikers from Western nations annually and a noticeable rise of over 7,000 visitors between mid-July 2018 and mid-July 2019 (ACAP, n.d.), tourism brings in substantial money. Through entrepreneurial businesses like homestays, tourism has become important in maintaining the sustainable lifestyle of the local population, claim Kokkranikal and Morrison (2011). According to travel vlogger Harald Baldr (2021), Thakali Homestay has a variety of local products that tourists and empower local businesses to sustain their lifestyle in Upper Mustang. According to Khattri (2023), tourism plays a vital role in reducing poverty and promoting rural development, in line with sustainable development. While several studies have shown that tourism contributes to a better lifestyle through the provision of economic prospects, others emphasize the adverse repercussions, such as pollution, the imposition of alien influences on

local customs and traditions, and disruptions to social and cultural existence. Culturally, the Mustang people had significant exposure to the outside world because of their trading activities, even before the arrival of tourists. However, their population was small. Consequently, the implementation of tourism in Upper Mustang has resulted in few advantages for the local population, as stated by Shacklely in 1996. According to Amagai (2021), these regulations aim to promote responsible tourism by encouraging adherence to local customs, preservation of the environment, and assistance to the local population. Visitors are advised to embrace sustainable behaviors while on their trip, including the utilization of potable water, showing consideration for animals, and politely interacting with the local culture (Kornilaki et al., 2019).

In this chapter, we have tried to illustrate the overview of Upper Mustang and restrictions on solo travel in Upper Mustang, Nepal. This chapter can help to explore the topic for further examination about the impact of restrictions on tourist safety. This chapter also highlights the importance of culture and environment in Upper Mustang for local people in promoting tourism.

## Problem Statement

This problem statement primarily centers around the gap in the current literature and highlights the necessity for additional research to examine the effectiveness of a solo travel ban in achieving a harmonious balance between cultural preservation and responsible tourism practices. The implementation of a ban on solo travelers from outside Nepal aims to safeguard Upper Mustang's unique culture and environment, while also promoting responsible tourism practices (Rana, 2023). According to the Nepal Tourism Board (2023), to protect cultural sites and prevent harm to the environment, tourists are required to visit Mustang in groups and with certified guides, which regulates tourist activities. This measure also ensures that tourists are safe and helps to preserve Mustang's history. However, the prohibition also restricts the independence of individual tourists who want a more self-sufficient and intensive exploration experience. As an academic student, one may discover that the prohibition restricts their ability to form personal relationships with the terrain and fully participate in the authentic experiences provided by Mustang's rural communities and historic monasteries. The comparison between cultural preservation objectives and the inclinations of autonomous tourists underscores the complicated aspects of tourism management in Mustang.



This thesis investigates the impact of the solo travel ban in balancing the need for cultural preservation and responsible tourism with the desire for independent travel experiences in Mustang. The prohibition on solo travel in Mustang, Nepal, is a controversial regulation with justifications based on cultural preservation and safety concerns. Nevertheless, the extent to which the prohibition has accomplished these objectives remains uncertain. This thesis explores the rationales for the prohibition of solo travel and evaluates its effects on the preservation of culture, the implementation of responsible tourism practices, and the safety of tourists in Mustang.

## Research Objective

- To explore the effectiveness of the mandatory guide system in promoting responsible tourism practices within Upper Mustang.
- Discuss the impact of the solo travel ban on solo travelers' safety.

## Research Questions

- How does the ban effectively promote responsible tourism practices within the region?
- How does the ban demonstrably reduce safety risks for tourists trekking in the Upper Mustang?

## Research Gap

Finding research gaps is essential as it shows where there may not be enough material already published and creates opportunities for further investigation and involvement. Study gaps occur when reviewers are unable to come to conclusions, but they also provide a foundation for further study, claim Müller-Bloch and Kranz (2015). Several possible study gaps become apparent when one considers the prohibition on foreign visitors traveling alone in Upper Mustang, Nepal. One of the main reasons given for the prohibition of solo travel in Upper Mustang, Nepal, is safety. But there's a serious research gap over the availability of thorough information on instances involving visitor safety both before and after the ban was put into place. The absence of sufficient data makes it difficult to arrive at a conclusive

evaluation of the efficacy of the prohibition in resolving safety concerns. In addition, there is also a lack of clarity on the efficiency of the mandated guide system in terms of encouraging responsible tourist activities.

A better understanding of the ban on solo travel in Nepal's Upper Mustang may be achieved if researchers fill up these knowledge gaps. Literature evaluations reveal study gaps, but they may also motivate new investigations (Müller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015). Finding areas that need further research is an important part of any study since it shows where our current understanding is lacking. It may indicate whether other safety measures, such as skill classes for solitary travelers that are legally mandated, are equally effective, if not more so. Additionally, it may examine whether the prohibition is necessary to achieve responsible tourism objectives or if more stringent regulations for all trekkers would suffice. In the long term, our investigation will contribute to a more informed debate between the proponents and opponents of the solitary travel prohibition in Upper Mustang, resulting in a more responsible and secure tourist experience for all.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

A literature review is a vital component of any thesis, fulfilling various objectives. It offers a thorough examination of existing research and scholarly works related to the topic, setting the stage and relevance of the study (Reinstein, 2019). According to Fink (2019), by critically reviewing prior studies, researchers can detect limitations, disagreements, and unclear issues, thereby validating the necessity of their research and guiding the creation of hypotheses or research questions. According to Galvan, (2017), literature can be utilized to reinforce the argument, interpretation, and conclusion, enhancing the study's credibility. By analyzing existing research, the literature review can help to drive the progression of knowledge within the field, identifying tendencies, patterns, and emerging themes that shape future research directions and theoretical advancements. Specifically, in the context of tourism in Upper Mustang, it's a fascinating place, but managing tourism there is a complex issue with many layers. Historical, cultural, legal, economic, and even technological factors all play a role. The literature review aims to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of historical, cultural, regulatory, socio-economic, and technological factors that influence tourism in the region and their implications for tourism management.

### 2.1. Solo Travel

Solo travel has been very popular among a wide range of tourists. Bianchi (2022) defines solo travelers as tourists who prefer to travel alone, without companions. According to Yang (2020), Travelling solo can allow travelers to have complete control of their journey and they can enjoy the flexibility of their journey according to their best interest. Based on a worldwide travel study conducted in 2019, 76% of the participants had either traveled alone in the past or were contemplating doing so in the future, without any regard to their age, gender, or nationality (Klook, 2019). When traveling alone, one may enjoy the independence and adaptability to see the world as one pleases. Further adding to the rising trend of people traveling alone is the growing number of senior tourists, sometimes known as "silver globetrotters" (Lee Serre et al., 2017; Bosch et al., 2017). According to Teas (1988), western travelers perceive traveling to Nepal as the best opportunity for them to get away from their chaotic and busy Western society and enjoy nature.

Solo travel can be a profoundly transformative experience, allowing individuals to fully integrate into new cultures and adjust to alternate lifestyles. It is a distinctive opportunity to completely immerse oneself in the local environment, promoting authentic interactions and connections with the people and their traditions, when traveling alone. The growing popularity of solo travel can be attributed to a notable change in society's views, which now view it as a means of personal development and self-reliance rather than a solitary pursuit (Nguyen, 2018). Pereira and Silva (2018) argued that a growing demand for solo travel experiences is the outcome of demographic shifts. This tendency not only shows the increasing number of people who travel alone but also a change in perceptions of this form of self-discovery and adventure. According to Yang (2020), solo travel can happen by circumstances or by choice.

According to Zhang et al. (2024), Solo travel allows solo travelers to immerse themselves deeper into new culture, language, and local tradition and enjoy the local cuisine. Solo travelers are urged to engage in new cultures which makes them more receptive and adaptable as they are traveling alone and they have to adapt to the new environment for their favourability (Zhang et al., 2024). Chandrakala et al. (2024) explain that regular exposure to a unique setting helps foster the acquisition of essential life skills, such as empathy, tolerance, and problem-solving. By thoroughly immersing themselves in the local culture, solo travelers may get vital insights and unique views on other lives and beliefs. According to Burdisso (2024), lone travelers' personal development and contentment improve when they learn to fit a new and foreign environment and deftly negotiate cultural differences. Solo travel gives people the opportunity to explore without limitations and engage with a wide range of people, therefore acquiring access to a great worldwide depth of information (Mehmetowicz et al., 2001). In the end, solo travel not only helps one grow personally but also increases respect for cultural variety and openness to accept various points of view.

Solo travel has surpassed the simple act of exploring a place, transforming it into a process of self-discovery and empowerment. Solo travelers prefer traveling solo as they can travel to their preferred destination at their own pace rather than with the influence of other people (Bianchi, 2016). According to Pereira and Silva (2018), people are doing more solo traveling as they can travel around the world where they can build new skills and gain knowledge through multisensory- encounters and experiences. According to Bianchi (2016), Some people prefer solo travel as they might want to feel peace and have a break from their daily routine. According to Yang (2020), solo travel can help travelers foster personal growth

by providing them with an opportunity where they get the sense of challenge themselves, building self-confidence, and allowing them a sense of autonomy as the situation often encourages them to interact with local people and build self-confidence where they can encounter new culture and tradition where they can learn about those cultures (Bianchi, 2016).

### 2.1.1. Motivating Factors for Solo Travel

Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) argue that solo travelers tend to be motivated by several push factors where they are willing to discover new cultures and experience the feeling of being independent. According to Woodside et al. (2007), self-esteem and self-realization are also considered motivating factors for travelers to go for solo travel as they can sense accomplishment and their potential which allows them to realize their inner strength. After dealing with different challenges that arise during solo travel many travelers have realized the feeling of empowerment due to these obstacles influencing them to travel alone (Wilson et al., 2006). Terziyska (2021) also defines that travelers encountering challenging situations during their travel journey can help them overcome their fear of uncertainty and increase their sense of self-confidence and belief to tackle new obstacles. Often tourist who seeks to challenge their limit choose adventure tourism where they are involved with remote destinations and encounter nature (Buckley, 2006). Travelers seek adventurous travel to break their monotonous routines and test their physical and mental boundaries (Corbisiero et al., 2022).

According to Mäki (2024), when traveling alone solo travelers are fully focused on their interest and their passion. Solo travelers can have an interest in exploring new destinations, diving into new cultures, and learning about them or even they might have a passion for them. Photography which they can enjoy freely (Chandrakala et al., 2024). Solo travelers who are food enthusiasts spend a longer time exploring the local cuisines throughout the local markets (Pereira and Silva, 2018). Solo travelers fond of food indulge in culinary tours and savor local specialties at their own pace by enjoying the food. Whereas, solo travelers with a passion for photography can travel solo and take their time to capture the perfect shot (Mani & Jose, 2020). These solo travelers prefer to wake up early in the morning for the best shot and even revisit multiple of times at the same spot for good pictures. With the Ban on Solo travel in Upper Mustang, it stops solo travelers from moving freely and they will have to travel in a group where they cannot do the things they like at their pace rather they will have to consider other travelers as well.

Similarly, travelers who are interested in history and exploring ancient cultures and landmarks can spend their time exploring deeper into such places (Terziyska, 2021). Solo travelers can travel freely as their curiosity drives them and learn more about the fascinating history. Therefore, solo travelers can create their own activities such as hiking, rock climbing, visiting galleries, religious destinations or scuba diving and challenge themselves (Corbisiero et al., 2022). Solo travelers can challenge themselves and adjust their plans as they comfort according to their interests. The ability to adjust and manage their experiences according to their personal interest is one of the important factor that motivates solo travelers (Terziyska, 2021). This can make solo travelers journey adventurous and enjoying their personal interest that makes meaningful travel. This level of freedom to customize the activities helps to get greater satisfaction.

Yang (2021) describes that solo traveling as an encouragement to develop confidence and courage. Solo travelers are more likely to take risks and have, more desire to explore new cultures when planning their journey (Hyde and Lawson, 2003). Facing and conquering difficulties like exploring unknown areas or surpassing linguistic obstacles cultivates a feeling of confidence and skill in addressing problems (Pereira & Silva, 2018). Consequently, those who travel alone frequently come back from their trips with more self-assurance and a newly acquired capacity to confront the challenges of life with grace and resolve (Yang, 2021). According to Osman et al. (2019), despite an individual having family and friends they tend to travel solo. Solo travelers are extremely motivated to travel solo by the choice of their freedom, flexibility, and escape (Osman et al., 2019; Seow & Brown, 2018; Bianchi, 2016). According to Osman et al. (2019), solo travelers traveling to new places, interacting with local people and other travelers, and receiving kindness from strangers can be key motivating factors for solo travelers. Likewise, Bianchi (2016) identified that interacting with people helps travelers get a sense of satisfaction and often local businesses interact with solo travelers providing socially oriented activities. According to Pung et al. (2020), there are gender differences in solo travel as well where female travelers are more aware of their embodied feelings, and self-consciousness, while male travelers are more focused on the sense of community and adaptation.

### 2.1.2. Risk of Travelling Solo

Safety concerns are one of the most discussed topics in solo travel aspect as there are several challenges presented in solo trips. According to Burdisso (2024), safety is an important aspect to be considered while traveling as it can play a significant role in shaping the traveler's experience and decision-making. When travelling alone the potential risk that can come across during the journey is significantly important to consider. According to Dowling and Staelin (1994), the risk that can arise while traveling alone is uncertain which can bring negative outcomes as they cannot experience and evaluate the situation before they get to the destination. Therefore, solo travelers are supposed to consider the uncertainty with the available information and assess the destination beforehand. Mizrachu, et al. (2016) states that safety concerns have been highlighted over the past years through extensive research and frequent occurrence of incidents. Wilson and Little (2008) state that traveling alone without any partner can potentially make solo travelers more vulnerable to crime and other problems along their journey. According to Su and Wu (2020), most of the female travelers perceived sexual harassment as the top concern of their journey. Whereas even male travelers traveling solo without a companion have reported vulnerability and safety concerns (Bianchi, 2016).

Solo travelers, especially women, are frequently reported to experience harassment or assault when traveling alone, which can be caused by unequal dynamics between men and women. In fact, Tarlow (2014), argues that female travelers are being harassed or taken advantage of most of the time by individuals from the tourism sector like tour guides, hotels, or even shop owners. According to Mapjabil et al. (2021), due to lack of knowledge about the safety concerns while traveling alone and information about local traditions, emergency services, dependable lodging, and secure transit risk solo traveler's safety (Rawlins, 2012). Rawlins (2012), states that the language barrier has also put solo travelers at risk as they cannot seek assistance effectively when required due to lack of language skills. According to Bianchi (2016), the challenges of facing unfriendly service providers and local people can also be faced by solo travelers during their journey. Therefore, travelers need to be aware of potential risks and need take necessary precautions to avoid any unwanted incidents themselves. Solo travelers should also be mindful of their behavior and dress appropriately according to the local social construct to prevent any unwanted attention.

According to Allianz (2023), while traveling solo one needs to have efficient and frequent communication with one's trusted friends and family members. Staying in frequent contact and sharing the accommodation location frequently can help solo travelers feel safer knowing that they can rely on someone in case of danger. Whereas Xess et al. (2021); and Kiroohuntz (2023) argue that not every destination has reliable transportation infrastructure, and it is critical decision of solo travelers to choose secure and dependable transportation for a better travel experience. Travelers traveling to any destination are required to research the destination and understand the local culture which can help them handle certain situations (Elizabeth, 2015). These precautions can help travelers to have a thorough awareness of the destination and familiarize foreign surroundings. Also, Madelyne (2023), states that travelers are supposed to be alert about their surroundings and be alert about indications of danger by avoiding the use of headphones and taking the busy route rather than quiet roads.

### 2.1.3. Solo Travel and Technology

Technology has fundamentally changed how people used to travel alone, providing a wide variety of tools and services that greatly increase the comfort, safety, and confidence of solo travelers (Yang, 2021). Dobson (2015) also says that the technological development and huge platform of online presence have provided a great digital space for people to share their thoughts. Yang (2021) further states that lone travelers may easily manage currency fluctuations, use offline maps, translate languages, and arrange their holiday plans using travel websites. Online booking system users may confidently make airline and lodging reservations due to the ability to securely perform transactions and develop adaptable trip plans (Antonyuk et al., 2019). Technology functions as a safeguard, offering worldwide messaging applications and video chats that enable those who are traveling alone to maintain communication with their loved ones and seek assistance during emergencies (Orandn, 2017). Digital platforms have provided people a place to express themselves which helps them to feel empowered by sharing one's travel experience (Sharmin et al., 2021). According to Oktadiana et al., (2020), Digital platforms like blogs have given travelers to archive their stories, reflect their reflections as well as advice, and also share their insights about the destination to a global audience. Moreover, the emergence of social media groups and internet forums created especially for solo travelers promotes a sense of community and belonging (Molz, 2012).



Vida et al. (2019) state that for personal control over their experience, travelers tend to document their journey through the lens of self-discovery, cultural immersion, and exploration throughout their trip. Online platforms have provided solo travelers an opportunity to form virtual communities and exchange their stories, find friends, and also seek advice (Rhodes et al., 2023). These sites enable lonely travelers to make friends, share experiences, ask for advice, and get help from other travelers. Even though one is traveling alone throughout the world, this helps one feel more at home and less lonely. According to Molz (2012), technology has become a necessary travel companion, providing lone travelers with the tools and connections they need to confidently begin their trips. Similarly, Instagram has become a popular virtual platform where solo travelers create Instagram posts and comments on those posts become discussions where they can share their stories, relate with themselves, and often have questions and offers of answers or recommendations (Hawes, 2023). In recent times, we can see that many blog posts are popping up in social media discussions about the current events happening in the tourism Industry. Recently, in Japan due to Over-tourism the government of Japan has covered the place with a huge curtain where tourists gather to see the view of Mount Fuji (CNA, 2024).

With the increasing threat of traveling solo, several innovative technologies have been invented. Apps like Life 360, and GPS can be used as essential location tracking tools which allows solo travelers to share their current location with their most reliable person (Life 360, 2023). Linwood (2020), states that offline map apps are very useful in a situation where there is no internet access as an individual can download the offline map of the destination and navigate through. Similarly, Liu et al. (2019), identify that Smartphone translation apps are very helpful to overcome language barriers, allowing them to interact with local people and also ask for help in their local native language with the help of apps. Likewise, Heather (2023) also identifies that devices that make noise in critical situations must be with travelers which allows them to make noise in situations where they are required to ask for others' help. Solo travelers can carry personal alarm gear, a flashlight, or a whistleblower which can make noise or flashlight during dangerous situations for travelers.

#### 2.1.4. Need and Industry Adaptation to Solo Travel

In response to the growing demand for independent travel experiences, the travel industry has adjusted to accommodate this diverse clientele. Yang et al. (2023) report that hotels

generally impose greater charges on solitary travelers in comparison to group visitors. This is making solo travelers more difficult to travel alone in terms of financial aspects. Similarly, Yang (2021) defends the statement by saying that solo travel can be categorized into ‘solo by circumstance’ and ‘Solo by choice’ therefore, the authors identified that traveling in groups makes travelers more confident to overcome safety and social constraints. Whereas Sebova et al. (2021) argue that solo traveling can provide cheaper air tickets, build transport infrastructure and they can have free movement. Hotels are presently providing single-occupancy accommodation at affordable prices, therefore reducing the economic disadvantage frequently linked to traveling alone. Tour companies are creating personalized trip itineraries for solo travelers, emphasizing group activities and social interaction to foster companionship and the formation of collective memories.

These travelers prioritize safety and security, necessitating reliable access to information about local customs and emergency contacts, as well as access to medical facilities (Al-Ababneh et al., 2022). Tourism stakeholders involved in tourism must adapt to the needs of tourists towards the sustainable development of tourism (Amagai, 2021). Logistic support is also a crucial thing to consider as it deals with ensuring the safety of tourists, navigation, and reliable transportation facilities. Enhanced safety measures should be allocated to travelers with experience with local guides and emergency services for tourists (Bartl et al., 2016). With the help of technology improved digital presence must be provided to the tourists where they navigate freely and meet other travelers through social media and boost their experience.

Furthermore, there is a growing trend among hostels and resorts to create co-working spaces tailored for solo travelers. These spaces provide dedicated work areas for remote work and encourage social interaction in the evenings (Elsrud, 2005). These initiatives improve the accessibility and appeal of solo travel to a wider range of demographic groups. They guarantee that regardless of whether you are a youthful professional in search of excitement or an elderly individual satisfying a vacation wish list, there is a solitary travel experience ready to be explored. The travel industry has adjusted its offerings to accommodate the growing need for individual travel experiences, to meet the needs of this diverse group of customers. Yang et al. (2023) found that hotels often impose greater prices on single travelers in comparison to group visitors.

### 2.1.5. Tourist Impact on Social and Economic Aspects

According to (Chung et al., 2020), solo travelers tend to spend more in tourist destinations by purchasing local products and local services, as they are not obliged to share the cost with others. Also, solo travelers are more likely to immerse themselves in the local culture and their practices as they are not influenced by other preferences which can happen in guided tours (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021). People are increasingly embracing the autonomy to create their journeys, design their schedules, and fully engage in experiences customized to their interests. Bianchi (2022) argues that the motivation of solo travelers is mostly driven by their intrinsic enjoyment of exploring and immersing themselves in local customs and culture. According to Allianz (2023), embracing local culture and engaging in local culture can enrich a solo traveler's journey to create unforgettable memories. Tourism can bring huge benefits economically by boosting the local economies where job creation and infrastructure are developed. Also, the spending power of people increases as their earning capacity increases. This economic activity can elevate living standards and enhance the local economy where poverty will be reduced and economic growth. Tourism enhances foreign exchange will contributes to the local economy.

Murray (2009) establishes that tourism is considered beneficial in terms of social impacts, influencing the economy, and socio-culture, and promoting local culture. Archer et al. (2005) state that a better understanding of diverse cultures can promote respect for local culture and heritage. Therefore, Rana (2024) argues that the compulsion of getting a travel guide can enhance the knowledge and respect towards local culture and heritage. Tourism helps to foster stability and improve living standards where education, health facilities and infrastructure development will be carried out (Murray, 2009). Moreover, tourism promotes local business and encourages entrepreneurs which can empower the local community as well as preserve local crafts and culture. However, challenges can be seen when tourists disrupt community cohesion and their traditional way of life without respecting local customs (Rogerson, 2000). Tourism and the community is a very complex topic to understand. As it complements each other as well as it affect adversely if not monitored properly.

However, with the economic benefits, there are several other disadvantages of tourism. As more economic spending capacity of locals increases, they start to spend excessively and this will increase inflation causing to increase price of basic goods as well. As the over-tourism

demand increases over-use of local resources will create environmental strains like water and energy shortages. Without proper monitoring and balanced distribution of the economy, it will gradually impact local people who are not involved in the tourism industry and don't have a source of income. The increasing number of tourists who are seeking pleasure and entertainment can put a strain on local resources and hurt the traditional values and lifestyle of local people (Tsundoda & Mendilinger, 2009). Social tension and an increase in crime can be sensed with the over-tourism that will impact cultural integrity and harmony.

#### 2.1.6. Impact of Tourism on Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises

Tourism plays an important role in encouraging the establishment of new small and medium-scale enterprises and developing existing businesses to welcome tourists and tourism development. The tourism enterprises can be categorized into four main suppliers i.e. accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation and excursions services, and crafts and shopping items. The residents and entrepreneurs have experience in developing their small businesses to sell fruits, meals, cafes, sweets, handicrafts, wood carvings, pottery, accommodation, etc. Some with high financial resources combined with tourism knowledge started with hotel services, travel agencies, elephant riding, nature tracking, souvenir and handicraft shops, etc. Some are invested in foreign partnerships that have more experience and network in overseas connections. Further, the tourism entrepreneurs make their towns more developed (Phoummasak, Kongmanila & Changchun, 2014).

Tourism does have a significant impact on local business, especially in Upper Mustang. Travelers traveling to Upper Mustang support local businesses throughout their journey where they go to restaurants and local hotels and buy local arts and crafts (Rana, 2024). According to Gurung (2023), travelers tend to spend a lot during their journey in the local tourism market to gain a good experience of travel. Tourism even creates job opportunities for the local people which plays a vital role in the local economy (Rana, 2024). Therefore, local businesses small as well as medium try to provide better service to diverse travelers and increase their reach. To provide service there can be high competition among local businesses and it can even make some businesses keep running as traveler flow increases and decreases according to seasonality (Chung et al., 2020). This can even risk increasing the use of natural resources to its maximum extent (Nepal, 2021). Therefore, while tourism brings substantial economic benefits to the

destination it also brings negative impacts along with it. So, careful management to ensure the sustainability and a balanced flow of the economy must be monitored.

## 2.2. Responsible Tourism Practices

The notion of responsible tourism has gained significance due to the increasing influence of tourism on places around the globe. According to Chettiparamb & Kokkranikal, (2012) responsible tourism is a form of tourism that respects the host's natural, built, and cultural environments and the interest of all parties concerned. In addition to minimizing negative social and environmental impacts, responsible tourism encompasses a wide range of tourist activities that engage with and benefit local people. Responsible tourism is a complete approach for tourism policy, development, and planning that ensures a fair distribution of benefits among governments, visitors, local communities, and investors. On the other hand, Caruana et al. (2014) state that tour operators are nearly five times more likely to use responsible tourism. It focuses on a comprehensive strategy that gives top priority to the safety of visitors, the preservation of the environment, and the safeguarding of the cultural legacy of host communities. Fundamentally, social, economic, and environmental aspects of tourist development are interrelated (Fennell, 2008).

Researching the ban on solo travel in Upper Mustang, Nepal, you will find that responsible tourism literature looks at how safety, the environment, and culture interact. The primary justification for the prohibition of solitary travel is to preserve the cultural heritage and traditions of the Upper Mustang (Gurung, 2023). The region's cultural identity is inextricably linked to its architectural elements, religious ceremonies, and social traditions, as it is a significant center for Tibetan Buddhism and contains numerous ancient monasteries. The integrity of cultural assets is at risk due to the potential for damage, larceny, and inappropriate behavior by visitors, which is a result of unrestricted individual travel (Pololikashvili, 2020). The authorities intend to alleviate these concerns by requiring that foreign visitors travel in organized groups, accompanied by certified guides.

The limitation on solo travel for foreign visitors in Upper Mustang, Nepal, stems from the need to conserve cultural assets, safeguard the environment, and assure visitor safety. The single travel prohibition represents a holistic approach to sustainable tourist management in

this unique Himalayan enclave, taking into account historical legacies, cultural preservation concerns, environmental conservation aims, and safety issues. The restriction of solo travel for foreign visitors in Upper Mustang has substantial effects for responsible tourism practices, as it contributes to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and the promotion of sustainable tourism development. Visitors are limited to traveling in groups with approved guides. This creates a more controlled and regulated tourist experience that puts protecting the environment, preserving culture, and getting involved in the community first (Bala & Stevenson, 2024).

### 2.2.1. Tourist Safety

As part of responsible tourism, it is essential to prioritize visitor safety and implement appropriate risk management techniques. It is essential to give priority to this matter in adventure tourism destinations like Upper Mustang, Nepal, where there are inherent hazards. Traveling alone has its own set of difficulties not encountered by guided groups, such as the need to rely more heavily on one's own knowledge and abilities, less access to assistance in times of crisis, and the difficulty of navigating foreign landscapes (Wilson & Little, 2008). The increased elevation introduces an additional level of intricacy, including possible hazards such as altitude sickness, severe meteorological conditions, and interactions with animals. The presence of inadequate medical resources and misconceptions arising from cultural differences emphasize the necessity for proactive risk management (Planet et al., 2015). According to Roe et al. (1997), unregulated tourism has the potential to degrade and damage the delicate flora and fauna, dry climate, and rough landscape of the area. Leung (2018) argues that by governing visitor access and restricting the number of travelers through guided trips, authorities may reduce the ecological footprint of tourism and promote sustainable practices that mitigate environmental impact (Leung, 2018).

Responsible tourism practices address these issues by implementing a variety of activities. Pre-departure information provides travelers with knowledge of potential hazards, essential gear, and emergency protocols (Valtonen, 2024). According to Mirehie et al. (2023), training and certification programs enhance the preparedness of solo travelers by equipping them with outdoor survival skills, first aid knowledge, and proficiency in high-altitude trekking. Registration and permission systems enable authorities to monitor the movements of tourists and provide aid more effectively in emergencies. According to Planet et al. (2015)

Upper Mustang's remote location and high altitude have unpredictable weather conditions which creates a danger to solo travelers during their trek. It can make solo travelers difficult to navigate the way, difficult to attend emergency medical facilities, and also, travelers are exposed to natural hazards like landslides and avalanches. Enhancing infrastructure, such as well-maintained pathways, emergency accommodations, and upgraded communication networks, enhances safety in isolated regions (Kaba, 2021). Although your research primarily centers on the prohibition of solo travel, responsible tourism recognizes the importance of skilled guides, especially in difficult settings.

However, the task of implementing effective risk management systems and ensuring the autonomy of visitors is rather challenging. The prohibition of solo travel in Upper Mustang is an extreme precautionary step aimed at minimizing hazards for people. The literature on responsible tourism examines several strategies that might be used to accomplish safety objectives without resorting to a complete prohibition (Hayat et al., 2024). One option available is risk classification, which allows individuals to choose fewer challenging routes when they are traveling alone. Although solo travel is not completely prohibited, travelers' level of readiness might be improved by the implementation of compulsory safety equipment and training programs (Daud et al., 2024). The best way to evaluate the effectiveness of ban on solo travel in Upper Mustang is by analyzing it from the perspective of tourism. The investigation will consequently investigate the reason behind the implementation of the restriction and investigate alternative methods that could achieve the same goals while still allowing for conscientious individual journeys. Gurung (2023) says the safety of tourists is of paramount importance to Upper Mustang, Nepal, as it impacts the region's reputation, visitor satisfaction, and long-term viability).

According to Dwyer (2022), destination management authorities can improve the tourist experience, reduce risk, and increase trust and confidence in the location by focusing on tourist safety (Liu et al., 2019). As a result, this encourages favorable promotion through word-of-mouth and encourages people to visit Upper Mustang, which leads to the economic development of local communities. According to Heredge (2003) assessing risk, preparation for emergency, and crisis management can help to manage destinations efficiently and provide priority to proactive steps to address safety problems. Tourism operators, such as tour companies, housing providers, and transportation services, have the responsibility of adopting safety measures, training their personnel, and teaching tourists about safety practices. Local

communities, in their role as hosts and representatives of the destination, have a strong desire to guarantee the safety and welfare of visitors. They may actively engage in safety measures, such as community policing, emergency response, and risk management (Shakya, 2019). International organizations and NGOs may provide technical help, financial resources, and specialized knowledge to aid in the management of tourist safety in destinations. By engaging in partnerships with local stakeholders, these organizations may contribute to the creation and execution of all-encompassing safety initiatives that are in line with globally recognized best practices and standards.

### 2.2.2. Environmental Protection

The concept of carrying capacity is fundamental to responsible tourism, which places significant emphasis on environmental protection. An area like the Upper Mustang can only accommodate so many visitors before the environment suffers irreparable harm. According to Caruana et al. (2014), sustainable tourism aims to attract specific types and numbers of tourists in order to reduce the impact of their activities on the destination, whereas responsible tourism goes beyond resource management and emphasizes the ethical responsibilities of tourism businesses to the local communities and environment. Overtourism, when it is beyond the established limit, results in issues such as heightened pressure on natural resources, degradation of soil, and pollution. The research conducted by Bhavan & Sariskumar (2018), found that responsible tourism practice has a significant positive relation with destination sustainability.

The implementation of a restriction on solo travel has the ability to decrease the number of tourists, therefore minimizing the environmental effect and establishing a more regulated tourist experience that promotes conservation initiatives. Nevertheless, ethical tourism extends beyond the mere restriction of guests. The notion's popularity on a global scale can be partially attributed to the business sector's crucial role in minimizing the effects of tourism and its increasing popularity with corporate social responsibility initiatives (Caruana et al., 2014). It puts an emphasis on using environmentally friendly methods throughout the whole experience of visitors. These encompass promoting responsible utilization of resources, such as water and electricity, encouraging the adoption of environmentally friendly modes of conveyance (e.g., trekking), and ensuring efficient refuse management. The research carried out by Dębicka and Oniszczyk-Jastrząbek (2014) found out that the Polish travel business does not offer their customer travel based on ethical principles towards the local environment, economy, and



community. MK Travelling in Krakow is one travel company that encourages eco-friendly travel.

Furthermore, the travel office works with the Foundation for Climate Care, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by making up for losses the environment has suffered as a result of human activity and offers financial support to a student from Madagascar who comes from a low-income family (Dębicka & Oniszczyk-Jastrzębek, 2014). State and local governments are pursuing responsible tourism more and more as a way to interact with the private sector, even though it's not yet a "movement". By analyzing the prohibition from this perspective, the research may investigate if it, together with these activities, leads to a more environmentally friendly tourist model in Upper Mustang. In order to protect the upper Mustang's distinctive environment, it is crucial to evaluate the ban's efficacy in attaining this aim. Several major tourist sites and tourism-related businesses have now formally endorsed responsible tourism.

### 2.2.3. Culture Protection

Preserving culture is an important principle of responsible tourism. This entails protecting and preserving local traditions, customs, and identities while promoting respect and admiration (Wilson & Little, 2008). This lens may be used to study the prohibition on solo travel in the Upper Mustang. On one side, it can safeguard against the commercialization of culture, a danger in which customs are transformed into inauthentic spectacles for visitors. According to Francioni (2017), a decrease in the number of tourists might alleviate the need to market cultural traditions, therefore preserving their original meaning and relevance. Furthermore, a decrease in the number of visitors might perhaps provide a better chance for genuine cultural engagement. Fan et al. (2023) state that persons who go on solo travel and seek social interaction are more likely to initiate meaningful connections with local inhabitants. However, the ban might possibly lead to unintended consequences. Diminished tourist participation has the potential to isolate communities that rely on tourism for economic support or cultural exchange (Al-Ababneh et al., 2022).

The cultural heritage of the Upper Mustang is a precious gift that has been entrusted to the community's stakeholders. These individuals are the custodians of the region's invaluable knowledge and traditions, which have been passed down through generations, as Gurung

(2023) eloquently states. Within the context of preserving and promoting the cultural traditions, rituals, and artifacts that are fundamental to the identity of the Upper Mustang, these stakeholders play a crucial role. As active members of the community, these stakeholders understand the importance of safeguarding their cultural legacy. As Dahal (2021) notes, these stakeholders not only improve the visitor experience but also help to preserve Upper Mustang's distinctive cultural character by financing community-led activities including cultural festivals, historical tours, and artisan workshops. Furthermore, the study should examine the consequences of the limitation on the financial prosperity and self-governance of nearby communities (Morgan et al., 2015). To assess the ban's effect on cultural preservation, it is necessary to evaluate if it effectively protects traditions, enables significant interaction, and empowers local populations. These are all essential elements of responsible tourism.

## Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

This research illustrates the solo travel ban in Upper Mustang and tourism policies for governance and ensuring sustainable development for the destination. This chapter will first introduce the theory of tourism policy, destination governance, and sustainable development, with a discussion of how this framework has been adopted by scholars in the solo travel ban of Upper Mustang studies. Furthermore, this research is also influenced by the impact of the solo travel ban in social and economic aspects. The importance of this intersectionality when studying the solo travel ban can provide deeper insight into how the ban can impact on economic and social-cultural development of the destination.

### 3.1. Tourism Policy

According to Guo et al. (2019), tourism policy is the guidelines, regulations, and strategies made by governments or tourism authorities to manage tourism activities within a specific region or country. According to Richter (1989 p.11), tourism success or failure is largely affected by how political and administrative actions align with each other. Policymaking generally encompasses several aspects of development criteria such as infrastructure development, sustainability, cultural preservation, tourist management, and the distribution of the economy equally (Guo et al., 2019). An early author from the tourism field (Wahab, 1974) states “State intervention in the tourism industry is necessary”. The reason behind this statement is that international tourism involves foreign relations and politics where one country must work on foreign relations and a large amount of capital spending and planning must be done (Crick, 1989). Tourism creates economic flow inside the country stimulating economic growth where tourist spends foreign currency through taxes and expenditure, creating job opportunities, and fostering entrepreneurial business activities (Airey, 2015). It can promote local businesses where local crafts, hospitality, and transportation are boosted to generate income. Guo et al., (2019) state that an effective tourism policy can help the government to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources minimize the negative environmental impact, and preserve the cultural heritage for an oncoming generation.

According to Adiputra and Darmawan (2024), existing tourism policies often focus on protecting the cultural identity and promoting the traditions of the local community by stopping

the erosion of cultural values because of mass tourism. Tourism policy plays a vital role in the development of any destination as it creates job opportunities, uplifting economic activity, empowering local craftsmanship, fostering local traditions (Ojonta & Ogbuabor, 2024). Upper Mustang tourism management is managed by a regulatory framework that seeks to strike a balance between conservation and development goals (Sharma & Paudel, 2024). The restriction on individual travel for foreign tourists is an essential step in this regard, as it seeks to regulate the number of visitors while also protecting the region's cultural and natural characteristics (Hall & Lew, 2009). Additionally, tourism policy can also facilitate infrastructure development of remote and underdeveloped tourist destinations by improving healthcare, education, and overall quality of lifestyle (Gurung, 2023). Therefore, involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making ensures that development aligns with their interests, minimizes negative impacts, and maximizes benefits distribution.

### 3.1.1. Importance of Tourism Policies

In Upper Mustang, Nepal, the implementation of a solo travel ban is a notable aspect of tourism policy aimed at preserving cultural and environmental integrity (Hall & Lew, 2009). According to Acharya (2023), for tourism policy to be effective and sustainable, it must prioritize environmental conservation, respect local cultures and traditions, and ensure adequate infrastructure investments. It must also include many stakeholders, such as local communities, businesses, NGOs, and government agencies, in order to foster inclusive decision-making and equitable sharing of benefits. Hall and Lew (2009) argue that this approach helps to limit environmental degradation by limiting tourist numbers and activities that might threaten sensitive ecosystems, while simultaneously protecting Upper Mustang's distinctive Tibetan culture and legacy from the potential negative effects of mass tourism and cultural dilution. While conserving culture and the environment, the prohibition may limit economic prospects for local populations that rely on tourist revenue and restrict individual travel freedoms (Stikhina et al., 2023). Thus, the strategy adheres to sustainable tourism principles by balancing tourist expansion with environmental and cultural preservation objectives. The impact of the prohibition on local livelihoods and cultural preservation must be constantly assessed and addressed in response to community concerns (Rana, 2024). The effectiveness of the restriction in achieving its goals, without unduly harming local economies or infringing upon individual rights, must be continually assessed.

Upper Mustang tourism management is managed by a regulatory framework that seeks to strike a balance between conservation and development goals. The restriction on individual travel for foreign tourists is an essential step in this regard, as it seeks to regulate the number of visitors while also protecting the region's cultural and natural characteristics (Hall & Lew, 2009). The ban on solo travel has been in place since the Tibetan kingdom when the old trade routes were stopped by the monarch in Upper Mustang's historical setting (Powers, 2012). The area has seen geopolitical dynamics and territorial struggles throughout its history, resulting in times of isolation and foreign influence (Chapagain, 2011). In response to these challenges, local authorities have implemented initiatives to save the cultural heritage of Upper Mustang and protect it from the negative impacts of unregulated tourism. The main rationale for the prohibition of solo travel is to save the cultural legacy and customs of the Upper Mustang (Gurung, 2023). Multiple authors have researched the evolution of tourist policies in Upper Mustang, starting from its classification as a restricted region to the implementation of laws specifically aimed at single visitors. These rules, which were brought to safeguard cultural assets and guarantee visitor safety, have sparked debates over their effectiveness and methods of implementation.

Gurung (2023) states that the goal of Upper Mustang's tourist strategy is to promote sustainability, cultural preservation, and economic growth. The historical history of the solo travel restriction examines the growth of tourist regulations, emphasizing elements that led to its establishment, and providing policy context and justification for the ban. Legal and regulatory frameworks analyze existing laws governing tourism in Nepal, especially in restricted areas like Upper Mustang. Stakeholder analysis investigates the roles of governmental bodies, local communities, and tourism operators (Dahal, 2021). All stakeholders have their part of the role to play in the tourism industry. As national and regional governments focus on refining the policy, local residents provide their perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of tourism, as well as their opinions on the prohibition (Sharma & Paudel, 2024). The answers of tourist operators are evaluated with consideration for both business operations and livelihoods. The effect evaluation on the restriction of solo travel has taken into account several elements, such as tourists' experiences, the financial performance of local firms, employment opportunities, and ecological implications.

### 3.1.2. Effectiveness of Tourism Policy

In order to enhance tourism management in Upper Mustang, it is essential to evaluate the ban's effectiveness in achieving economic, sustainability, and cultural preservation objectives, propose future strategies, and suggest modifications or alternatives based on feedback (Neshat et al., 2024). The ban's adoption and implementation can be understood by applying theoretical perspectives such as policy diffusion or incrementalism. To analyze the broader implications, tourism management frameworks like sustainable tourism development or carrying capacity theory can be utilized (Hajarian, 2024). According to Klijn and Koppenjan (2000), policy activity is directly connected with socio-economic, cultural, and political aspects that are defined by government theories. Therefore, it highlights the interconnection between top-down and bottom-up processes among policymakers, policy implementers, and affected groups (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) official website NTB (n.d.) states that all trekkers are required to use the services of a qualified trekking guide and obtain a Tourist Information Management System (TIMS) Card through approved trekking agencies approved by the Nepalese government after 2023 (Rana, 2024). After identifying numerous issues that impacted tourism in the Upper Mustang region, including health concerns, route-finding challenges, and natural calamities, the new regulations prohibiting solo travel were implemented on March 31, 2023. Additionally, the initiative aims to discourage illicit trekking activities and increase employment opportunities in the tourism sector for local community members (Rana, 2024).

Examining the negotiation and bargaining between social groups and individuals around government-developed policies is crucial, while recognizing the state's significant power. According to Gurung (2023), tourists are also required to get the TIMS card that keeps track of their travel during their stay in the Nepal mountain region. The costs for the TIMS Card have been revised to NPR 1000.00 for SAARC citizens and NPR 2,000.00 for those from non-SAARC nations (NTB, n.d.). Diplomatic missions are not subject to the TIMS Card requirement; however, they must still be accompanied by a certified guide. The news release furthermore furnishes the contact details for the Nepal Tourism Board. Differing views on policy desirability, objectives, relevance, and practicality are influenced by state intentions and their alignment with various actors interests (Bramwell & Cox, 2009). According to Dodds (2007), Government policies often reflect broad state roles in capitalist countries, such as supporting capital accumulation, providing physical security and social order, maintaining

human capital, and securing political legitimacy. These varying interests and views in society lead to conflicts and negotiations around policy implementation.

### 3.1.3. Policy Implementation and Society

Implementing regulations in the tourist industry presents a number of issues that need for a deeper comprehension of theoretical frameworks as well as actual realities. The growth of indigenous tourism in Upper Mustang is hampered by a number of issues (Rana, 2024). Stakeholders are often left without clear guidance in the lack of comprehensive implementation mechanisms, which has led to uneven performance and policy failure (Gurung, 2023). Furthermore, the policy's execution is made worse by the lack expertise of local players, such as government representatives and tour companies (Shakeela & Becken, 2015). Furthermore, disagreements between implementers and policymakers might cause friction that could compromise the effectiveness of policy formulation. While practitioners often focus the short-term economic advantages, policymakers may place a higher priority on the preservation of the region's natural environment and cultural heritage (Adiputra & Darmawan, 2024). This disparity results in mismatched priorities between public plans aimed at sustainable development and the private sector's goals of maximizing short-term profits. These factors collectively contribute to the inefficacy of policy execution at the local level, similar to the challenges described by Lai, Li, and Feng (2006) in the context of China.

Upper Mustang has gained popularity among trekkers, but jeep tours have increasingly become more prevalent in recent times (Amburgey, 2024). Despite of being highly restricted area in Nepal, tourists are required to acquire an entry permit from the Nepal Immigration and ACAP offices. Several studies highlight common obstacles that governments face when implementing tourism policies. Government agencies play a pivotal role in establishing regulatory frameworks, enforcing safety standards, and offering support and direction to tourism stakeholders in Nepal (Rana, 2024). Tourism operators, encompassing tour companies, accommodation providers, and transportation services, are accountable for implementing safety measures, training personnel, and educating visitors about safety protocols (Guo et al., 2019). The region is marked with official "Mustang" border signs, indicating the start of the restricted area. Therefore, to get the travel permit for Upper Mustang individual tourists might need to join the group of tourists of other individual tourists which will cost them \$500 for 10

days tour. In addition, if tourists wish to stay longer, they might need to pay \$500 for an additional day.

In his in-depth study, Dodds (2007) analyses the execution of sustainable tourism policies in Mallorca more specifically targeting Calvia. The study highlights problems such as planning, stakeholder involvement, policy alignment with criteria for selection of sites; the outlook to address the next political engagement, and economic rents at short-term social goals rather than long-term environmental (Dodds, 2007). This case study illustrates the challenges of balancing tourism objectives with real-world constraints. Existing literature stresses the significance of backing and organizational capability in implementing policies. Inadequate financial resources and fragmented local collaboration can hinder well-meaning initiatives (Gurung, 2023). Additionally prioritizing stakeholder needs and integrating tourism strategies with agendas are essential, for achieving sustainable results. For Upper Mustang, Nepal, for instance, the single travel prohibition reflects a major tourist strategy meant to protect cultural and natural integrity. Using this approach runs into some difficulties and requires different strategies (Rana, 2024).

It is necessary to have a balance between the preservation of the special Tibetan culture and the delicate environment for the financial advantages of tourism (Amburget, 2024). While the ban on solo travel is aimed at preventing environmental harm and cultural degradation, it inhibits local companies reliant on tourist income using economic possibilities (Rana, 2024). Consequently, there is a misalignment between the conservation aims of legislators and the population's financial needs (Gurung, 2023). These issues are on top of the lack of political will, inadequate funding, and weak institutional capacity that the strategy confronts (NTB, n.d.). An effective legal application of sustainable tourism management is hindered in Upper Mustang by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of resources for monitoring and enforcement (Caruana et al., 2014). Moreover, there are cases where local government agencies and interested parties lack comprehensive implementation strategies and actual knowledge. While environmentalists and politicians focus on long-term sustainability, local communities could give the temporary financial benefits of tourism top importance (Planet et al., 2015). This mismatch could lead to conflicts and less teamwork in the effective implementation of the ban on solo travel. Therefore, the diversity in objectives and points of view among many stakeholders hinder the process of carrying out policy.



### 3.2. Destination Governance

Destination governance is the coordination and supervision of different entities and assets in the tourism industry to promote sustainable growth (Zhang, 2014). According to Pechlaner et al. (2006), governance generally manages and regulates the law, contracts, and agreements in a collective way to manage destinations efficiently. This process involves many stages in which interaction and various techniques are employed to make decisions on the growth of tourism (Pechlaner et al., 2012). Effective governance balances the different interests of stakeholders, promoting sustainable practices and achieving long-term economic, social, and environmental goals. The active involvement of all stakeholders is essential for effective governance which guarantees accountability and transparency by an institutional framework that encompasses laws and regulations (Islam et al., 2018). Therefore, Volgger et al. (2017) argue that collaboration of governance from government and corporate focuses on better engagement of stakeholders to balance sustainable development.

Gowreesunkar et al. (2024) say active participation of all stakeholders including local communities, businesses, government, and NGOs can help to make effective governance. According to Cizel et al. (2016) destination governance which includes laws and regulations can assure accountability and transparency in the tourism industry. Coordination mechanism is an important aspect of aligning actions and strategies across stakeholders for better governance (Luntungan, 2024). According to Islam et al. (2018), policies and strategies for sustainable tourism development are formulated and implemented, and continuous monitoring and evaluation assess the effectiveness of governance structures and policies. Building trust and cooperation among stakeholders is essential to address authority distribution, power imbalances, resource restrictions, and coordination. (Pechlaner et al., 2012).

Rana (2024) states that governance in Upper Mustang helps to balance tourism development along with culture and environment conservation. Also, local communities are actively involved in tourism activity as well as community-based tourism initiatives (Gurung, 2023). The institutional framework includes regulations to protect cultural heritage and guidelines for sustainable practices (Nepal, 2000). For the enhancement of the destination, the local government and international organizations collaborate to elect effective leadership (NTB, n.d.). Effective policies and sound governance are crucial in safeguarding cultural assets and fostering sustainable tourism. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are crucial for

ensuring sustainability by systematically recording visitor numbers and measuring the consequences, as highlighted by Heslinga et al. (2024). Stakeholder engagement, clear institutional frameworks, strong leadership, and policy monitoring may help destinations balance economic expansion with cultural and environmental preservation (Zhang, 2014). Upper Mustang's strong administration protects cultural assets, promotes sustainable tourism, and benefits local people, setting a good example (Pechlaner et al., 2024).

### 3.3. Sustainable Development

According to Yanan et al. (2024), sustainable development aims to preserve the environment, and culture as well as balance economic growth. This approach to sustainable development helps to meet the present need for tourist destinations without harming the current environment and culture for future generations (Muhamediyeva et al., 2024). World Tourism Organization was the first institution that brought the concept of sustainable tourism development. According to Abbasi et al. (2024), a harmonious relationship between human activities and nature requires an integrated strategy that can take into consideration for long-term impacts of development decisions in tourism destinations. Upper Mustang region is known for its unique Tibetan-influenced culture and fragile ecosystem which poses multiple challenges and opportunities through tourism (Gurung, 2023).

The main goal of sustainable tourism development is to achieve positive enhancements and benefits in the domains of ecology, economics, sociocultural, and institutions for all stakeholders engaged in the tourism sector (Stojanović et al., 2024). The main emphasis of tourism development is on the people and visitors, who are regarded as the fundamental stakeholders (Glyptou, 2024). According to Muhamediyeva et al. (2024), it is very important to consider nature and its elements when planning, developing, and monitoring tourism activity in a protected area when considering sustainable tourism in the context of tourist development. Neglecting sustainable development can cause global challenges where depletion of mountains can cause a rise in sea level and overuse of water resources can impact the entire ecosystem causing irreversible environmental damage (Abbasi et al., 2024).

In Upper Mustang, addressing challenges while promoting solutions for sustainable development involves balancing economic benefits with environmental and cultural

preservation. The region strives to create diverse income sources through tourism while safeguarding its delicate ecosystem and rich heritage.

### 3.3.1. Economic Sustainability:

Li et al. (2024) argue that sustainable tourism preserves the environment and culture while maximizing economic potential. According to Hussain et al. (2024), UNWTO and WTTC have taken initiatives globally in sustainable tourism development to transform into a green economy. Technological development is considerably referred to as the advancement of all manufacturing processes that focuses on minimizing the carbon footprint (Pilloni et al., 2020). This has significantly, minimized the ecological depletion of natural resources and it also boosts economic prosperity (Ahmad & Wu, 2022). According to Jabeen et al. (2024), many industrialized and emerging economies employ development strategies aimed at reducing energy consumption by improving efficiency, intending to shift away from nonrenewable energy sources. Koçak et al. (2020) argue that the tourism industry contributes huge economic benefits to the world however, it also possesses a greater adverse impact on the environment.

According to Gurung (2024), sustainable development in Upper Mustang plays a crucial role in providing varied and stable income sources for residents. This approach includes boosting tourism activities that benefit local business owners, artisans, and service providers (Nepal, 2021). Yanan et al. (2024) suggest that economic sustainability ensures that the money earned from tourism is reinvested into local development projects, enhancing living standards while conserving natural resources for future generations. The idea of economic sustainability in Upper Mustang focuses on generating diverse income streams for the community, especially through tourism that supports local entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and service providers (Alipio, 2024). Regardless, both tourists and businesses in the region have experienced the consequences of the recent imposition of the solo travel limitation. According to Gurung (2023), visitors visiting Upper Mustang are now required to have guides, which increases travel expenses and limits their ability to explore freely. Nematpou et al. (2024) argue that after this change it might discourage solo travelers and alter the region's travel dynamics. On the other hand, local communities that depend on tourism for their economic stability might face difficulties if the number of visitors decreases due to these new regulations (Li et al., 2024).

This could potentially impact the income opportunities of guides and service providers, as well as community development initiatives that are funded by tourism revenues (Alipio, 2024). Nevertheless, this regulation may also have unintended consequences for community development initiatives that depend on tourism revenue (Amburgey, 2024). According to Amagai (2021), the total number of visitors may decline if the higher expenses and limitations dissuade some tourists, especially those who go alone and value the ability to explore on their own terms. Rana (2024) states that a decline in visitor numbers may lead to a fall in money generated from tourism, which often serves as a major financing source for many community development projects. The sustainable growth of Upper Mustang relies on the execution of these projects, which might include improvements in infrastructure, educational programs, and healthcare provisions (Darnal, 2017).

Ensuring the conservation of Upper Mustang's cultural and ecological legacy while implementing sustainable economic strategies is crucial in this particular situation. Gurung (2023) asserts that the need of guides might provide a beneficial influence on the conservation of heritage. Tour guides have the ability to provide knowledge to guests about the indigenous culture, historical background, and ecological surroundings, therefore encouraging conscientious and considerate conduct (Amagai, 2021). This can help mitigate the potential negative impacts of tourism on cultural sites and natural landscapes. However, to ensure that economic sustainability is achieved, it is important to adopt a comprehensive approach that considers the needs and preferences of tourists while safeguarding the interests of the local community (Khattri, 2023). Furthermore, Maharjan (2021) states that engaging the local community in the decision-making process is crucial. Their collaboration and perspectives may facilitate the creation of policies that are both efficient and widely accepted, thereby enhancing the economic benefits of tourism and reducing its negative consequences. Engaging with the community may also foster a sense of accountability and ownership in the context of sustainable tourism practices (Neupane, 2019).

### 3.3.2. Environmental Sustainability:

Dada et al. (2024) describe environmental sustainability as acceptable and non-destructive engagement with the environment that preserves natural resources and maintains environmental quality over time. This concept incorporates a broad variety of initiatives,

including waste reduction, ecosystem conservation, biodiversity enhancement, and efficient use of renewable resources (Yang & Solangi, 2024). The preservation of the scenic and varied natural ecosystems of Upper Mustang is of utmost importance, regardless of the expenses involved. Sustainable practices include activities such as resource and waste management, eco-friendly tourist marketing, and conservation efforts (Abbasi et al., 2024). The overall health of the population is enhanced due to a decrease in the prevalence of respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and waterborne infections. Unregulated tourism has detrimental consequences on fragile ecosystems, including pollution, depletion of resources, and contribution to global warming, which is a matter of environmental apprehension (Muhamediyeve et al., 2024).

Many species that are vital for preserving ecological balance will be likely to survive if we help to safeguard their natural habitats and promote diversification. Gurung (2023) claims that environmental sustainability in Upper Mustang aims to protect the vulnerable ecology while motivating visitors to support regional businesses. The area implements policies meant to avoid tourism-related natural resource loss (Dhakal, 2023.). However, the recent limitation on solo travel has created new dynamics for environmental preservation initiatives, hence lowering negative environmental effects as over-trekking and littering (Gurung, 2023). Environmental sustainability aims to slow down the consequences of climate change by supporting renewable energy and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Local communities, heavily reliant on tourism, face the challenge of balancing economic benefits with environmental conservation. Hayat et al. (2024) assert that it is important to address these challenges to preserve the environment and maintain tourism as a means of promoting community prosperity and conservation. As well, it guarantees that future generations will have the same opportunities for health, prosperity, and well-being as the current generation.

Notable sustainable development initiatives in Upper Mustang include the promotion of cultural tourism, which highlights the region's unique heritage and generates income for local communities. Environmental conservation programs, such as reforestation projects and the establishment of eco-friendly infrastructure, contribute to the region's ecological health. These efforts demonstrate the tangible implementation of sustainable development concepts, therefore creating a tourist business that is both robust and harmonized. The enforcement of a ban on solo travel, aimed at controlling tourist activities, has posed difficulties and required adjustments. There is a clear correlation between the prevalence of escorts in modern tourism

and changes in visitor dynamics and the local economy. By regulating visitor behavior and promoting eco-friendly vacations, this regulation aims to preserve cultural artifacts and reduce negative impacts on the environment.

### 3.3.3. Cultural Sustainability

Cultural sustainability, as defined by Maziliauske (2024), refers to the deliberate effort of safeguarding and advancing the cultural heritage, traditions, and principles of a particular group or society, ensuring its endurance and significance for future generations. In addition to social and economic progress, it also focuses on safeguarding cultural variety and promoting the growth of cultural identities, practices, and manifestations (Ruiter, 2024). According to Rana (2024), Upper Mustang's rich cultural heritage, including its monasteries, festivals, and traditional lifestyles, is a vital component of sustainable development. Initiatives aim to protect and promote this heritage, ensuring that tourism activities do not erode cultural values (Gurung, 2023). This includes providing assistance to local craftsmen, safeguarding old architectural structures, and promoting the participation of visitors in behaviors that demonstrate respect and cultural sensitivity (Ruiter, 2024). Cultural sustainability ensures the preservation and continuity of the distinct identity and legacy of communities. Encouragement of cultural sustainability is the passing on from one generation to another knowledge, skills, and habits (Shepherds, 2002). Many ancient civilizations have great relationship with their environments and possess great knowledge on environmentally friendly practices. Maintaining these cultural practices could help to maintain biodiversity and improve environmental sustainability (Amagai, 2021).

Upper Mustang's goal in preserving its rich past is to safeguard it while using tourism as a tool for sustainable development (Rawal, 2022). In light of increasing visitor attractiveness, the region works to protect its unique culture, architecture, and way of life. The recent prohibition on solitary travel (Nepal, 2021) has had a significant impact on local efforts to preserve culture and attract visitors. The requirement that visitors pay guides in Upper Mustang ensures that excursions are more meticulously planned and culturally sensitive, with a reduced impact on indigenous life. For the local residents, striking a balance between the preservation of their cultural legacy and the financial gains from tourism presents difficulty (Ruiter, 2024). Amagai (201) contends that the restriction might affect the way people visit the area, therefore influencing their view of the cultural sites and practices. Effective management of these ties

will help Upper Mustang to retain its cultural legacy and employ tourism for community development and cultural preservation.

Notable sustainable development initiatives in Upper Mustang include the promotion of cultural tourism, which highlights the region's unique heritage and generates income for local communities. In response to these challenges, community-driven initiatives have emerged to promote sustainable tourism practices. For example, local communities have partnered with tour operators to offer culturally immersive experiences that respect traditional customs and support community-led development projects. By integrating local knowledge and expertise, these initiatives foster economic resilience while preserving cultural authenticity and environmental integrity.

#### 3.3.4. Community Involvement:

In order to achieve sustainable development, it is crucial to include local communities in the process of decision-making and planning. Dhakal (2023) argues that Community-based tourism initiatives provide residents with the means to actively participate in and get advantages from travel-related endeavors. This collaborative strategy mitigates any adverse impacts and facilitates aligning the expansion of tourism with the preferences of the local community. Darnal (2017) shows how community participation in Upper Mustang stresses empowering local people via environmentally friendly travel methods. Efforts are directed on guaranteeing equitable distribution of tourist advantages among community people, so promoting economic possibilities, and so safeguarding of cultural legacy (Amagai, 2021). But the latest solo travel prohibition brings adjustments impacting local community engagement as well as visitors. Rising visitor traffic causes environmental damage, cultural dilution, and uneven distribution of tourism profits that confronts Upper Mustang. Dealing with these difficulties calls both adaptive management and coordinated planning with stakeholder involvement. Community-managed conservation zones, for instance, include local people in sustainably exploiting natural resources, therefore offering alternative livelihoods and lessening dependence on unsustainable activities.

Nowadays, visitors must hire local facilitators, which might help local businesses by creating job possibilities and hence promote cultural interaction (Dhakal, 2023). Nonetheless, problems emerge because of the possible influence of more control on visitor count and the

change of community dynamics dependent on tourist income. In order to preserve the cultural and environmental integrity of the region while yet allowing tourism to enhance local life, Upper Mustang must find a balance between these two competing concerns. This will help ensure the long-term viability of the community, the economy, and its cultural heritage. Together, environmentalists, legislators, and local residents kept a watch on visitors, limited the number that may enter, and ensured that guidelines for sustainable tourism were followed. These initiatives improve the experience for visitors by means of cultural interactions and training programs, therefore lessening the impact of tourism on natural surroundings and cultural sites. By adopting sustainable practices and engaging local communities, Upper Mustang can protect its natural and cultural heritage, provide economic opportunities for residents, and ensure that it remains a vibrant and viable destination for future generations. This approach underscores the importance of sustainability in maintaining the region's unique identity and ecological integrity while promoting long-term prosperity.

An in-depth study is conducted on the tourist policy of forbidding solo travel in Upper Mustang, Nepal, using a theoretical framework that integrates components from policy assessment, economics, sustainability, stakeholder analysis, and cultural preservation. An explicitly delineated tourism plan is essential for conserving the region's historical and environmental assets, while also facilitating fair and balanced growth that advantages both residents and visitors. The prohibition on independent travel in Upper Mustang, implemented to encourage sustainable tourism, requires continuous evaluation and modification to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.



## Chapter 4. Methodology

The methodology chapter serves as a guide for the remainder of the study, providing a detailed explanation of the approach, techniques, and instruments used to address the research objectives. This chapter tries to elucidate the study methods used to investigate the prohibition of unaccompanied foreign tourists in Upper Mustang, Nepal. Well-structured methodology ensures your research is conducted rigorously and provides a clear path to answering your research questions. “Research is a process that people undertake systematically to find out things, thereby increasing their knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.7). The research methodology is a procedure used to identify, select, process, and analyze the information about the topic and therefore it is crucial to apply an appropriate methodology for an effective thesis (Saunders et al., 2016). Additionally, Saunders et al. (2016) explain the components of research methodology are research design, research philosophy, and research approach.

### 4.1. Research Design

According to Saunders et al. (2016), the research design refers to the process of translating research challenges and goals into a practical plan for a research endeavor. A research design is a systematic strategy that is implemented to ensure the successful completion of a research study and the acquisition of accurate findings. This study used a qualitative research technique to provide a full knowledge of how Upper Mustang tourists perceive and act in response to constraints on solo travel. Qualitative approaches, such as content analysis, and participant observation, allow for the exploration of multidimensional perspectives, experiences, and motivations. Saunders et al. (2016) define research designs as exploratory, descriptive, evaluative, and hybrid studies.

### 4.2. Data Collection Methods

The primary method of data collection in this project is Netnography (Bartl et al., 2016), which is used to examine online discussion forums, social media, and digital interactions related to solo travel in Upper Mustang. Immersing oneself in virtual areas frequented by travelers allows one to observe and analyze relevant user-generated information, debates, and

interactions. In order to examine the consequences of the prohibition on solo travel in Upper Mustang, this thesis will utilize Netnography, an investigative technique that focuses on online discussion forums and social media platforms (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). A considerable number of prospective participants in our study probably disseminate their experiences and viewpoints through online platforms. An individual with a passion for travel often joins internet forums, social media groups, and travel documents to acquire knowledge or share their experiences with other travelers (Bartl et al., 2016). Participants in online communities have the opportunity to access a vast amount of information, including their personal experiences and viewpoints.

Our Netnographic approach will include a variety of approaches. First, we'll look for appropriate online communities by looking for discussion forums, Facebook groups, or subreddits on solo travel, adventure travel, or Nepal trekking. Additionally, travel blogs or online media that specialize on the Himalayas or Upper Mustang will be targeted. After identifying these communities, data collection will use various methods. To discover relevant discussions on these online platforms, we will do keyword searches such as "solo travel," "Upper Mustang," "Nepal trekking," and "ban on upper mustang." In addition, we will use active participation via participant observation. This includes analysing post about travel in upper mustang, monitoring online interactions, and making notes on developing topics, and opinions within online communities. If individual internet conversations or blog postings provide comprehensive experiences or perspectives, we will treat them as in-depth case studies for further investigation. Throughout the Netnographic procedure, a complete record of discoveries will be maintained. This may contain screenshots of internet chats, transcripts of forum threads, or snippets from blog posts, as well as our views and interpretations on the data gathered.

### 4.3. Sampling Strategy

This thesis utilizes Netnography to examine the consequences of the prohibition on solo travel in Upper Mustang, Nepal. Although participant selection may not follow standard methods, using a meaningful sample technique is essential. We will focus our efforts on online forums that are regularly visited by our intended demographic: individuals who travel alone, enthusiasts of adventure travel, and people with an interest in trekking in Nepal. Among them are internet forums, social networking groups, and travel blogs that specialize in conversations

and material about trekking in Nepal and the Himalayas, backpacking in Asia, and solo travel. Our main focus inside these groups will be on participating in discussions, threads, or blog posts that particularly address the ban on solo travel. We encourage members to relate their own experiences of embarking on solo treks in Nepal or provide firsthand reports of trekking in Upper Mustang both before and during the implementation of the ban if such testimonies are available. To get a well-rounded stance, we will actively seek opinions from both supporters and critics of the restriction.

Along with the opinions of locals or trekking guides who participate in these internet forums, we will also consider feedback from solo travelers with varying degrees of experience. Up until data saturation is reached, data collecting will continue to ensure that a wide range of experiences and opinions from the particular online communities being targeted are included. Ultimately, we will overcome any language obstacles by using translation technologies. Additionally, we will give utmost importance to ethical issues by seeking consent before citing postings and ensuring the anonymity of user identities while presenting our discoveries. This deliberate sampling technique will guarantee that our netnographic study collects significant and relevant data for analyzing the efficacy of the solo travel prohibition in Upper Mustang.

#### 4.4. Data Collection Procedures

The effect of Upper Mustang, Nepal's solo travel prohibition will be examined via data collecting for this thesis using Netnography, the study of internet communities. Several phases will be included in the procedure. Initially, we will determine which relevant internet forums our target market is solo tourists, adventure seekers, and those interested in Nepali trekking. Search engines will be implemented to identify forums, social media groups (such as subreddits and Facebook groups), and travel blogs that are relevant to these interests. To target online communities that are explicitly dedicated to solitary travel, independent adventure travel, backpacking in Asia, or trekking in Nepal and the Himalayas, keywords such as "solo travel," "adventure travel," "Nepal trekking," "Upper Mustang," and the "solo travel ban" will be employed. Additionally, publications and travel resources that are designed for solitary travelers or those with an interest in Upper Mustang will be examined.

The use of active engagement and observation will begin as soon as relevant online groups are found. For this, we will join communities, subscribe to groups, and read related trip

blogs. Online discussions, threads, and blog posts pertinent to the research inquiries will be closely monitored during participation. Emerging themes, opinions, and experiences regarding the solitary travel prohibition in Upper Mustang will be meticulously documented. To enhance the quality of the data collection, keyword searches will be implemented within the specified online communities to identify specific discussions that pertain to the solitary travel prohibition. Content analysis will be applied to pertinent blog posts, discussions, and threads, focusing on opinions about the ban and its alleged impacts as well as firsthand accounts of solo hiking in Nepal. Comprehensive blog posts or online discussions that provide in-depth firsthand accounts or viewpoints will be considered potential case studies for focused inquiry.

During the data collection process, ethical consideration has been significantly prioritized. Online community members' privacy has been maintained with consent before using the direct quote and anonymizing names with usernames rather than actual names while presenting the results. Therefore, we will also be complying with the particular regulations and social conventions of any community that we will be engaging. By following these rules we will be collecting useful data from different online data sources that are present on restrictions on solo travel in Upper Mustang.

## 4.5. Data Analysis

In this research, thematic analysis will be used for our qualitative research method which will be employed to analyze the Netnographic data that we have gathered. With the help of this method, we can identify, analyze, and interpret the recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data that have been gathered from online sources on the effectiveness of the solo travel ban in Upper Mustang. During our data analysis process, we will first immerse ourselves in data (forums, discussion threads, Blog posts, social media, Online News, and official Government sites), so that we can understand the scenario properly. As we become familiar with data, we first will understand the data and what it says about the ban on solo travel in Upper Mustang then we will categorize themes and articulate the data into our themes. With the help of thematic analysis, we can easily extract valuable data from our Netnographic data and gain a deeper understanding of perspective and experience on Solo travel ban in Upper Mustang.

## 4.6. Reliability and Accuracy

Triangulation is a research strategy that involves using multiple sources, investigators, theorize, and methods to study the phenomena. The purpose of this triangulation is to get a better understanding of the research problem and get more accurate results. Using consistent data sources will help to reduce biases and provide better credibility as triangulation helps research by testing the consistency of findings through different instruments and methods. According to Chao et al. (2013), reliability is the ability to provide accurate and trustworthy service on time. In our research, we are incorporating data triangulation through multiple data sources, and involving multiple researchers as well as using multiple theoretical perspectives.

## 4.7. Limitations

This study offers a valuable perspective on the effects of the solo travel prohibition in Upper Mustang on foreign visitors, however, numerous limitations must be considered. Initially, the generalizability of the results to a broader tourist demographic and other tourist destinations may be restricted by the small sample size and limited scope of the investigation. Using Netnography as a primary data collection for this study can create bias about the representation of the sample and validity of data, especially reliability in online interaction and discussion. The mentioned constraints highlight the complexity of studying the shifting patterns of tourism in locations that are culturally and geographically diverse. They also indicate possibilities for more investigation and improvement in research methods.

Furthermore, depending too much on online interactions and conversations via Netnography might not fully represent the range of travel experiences and emotions as not all visitors use social media or online forums to express their ideas. The most outspoken participants may also affect this approach, thereby maybe changing the portrayal of more general visitor viewpoints. Moreover, the dynamic and fast-changing character of tourist patterns calls for constant and flexible study strategies. Including both qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed-methods approach will help to improve the resilience of future research by thus offering a more complete knowledge of the effects of travel restrictions. A deeper understanding of the long-term consequences of these limitations might come from field polls, interviews with nearby stakeholders, and longitudinal research. Adopting many study approaches will be essential to overcome the noted constraints and enhance our understanding

of tourist trends in geographically and culturally special sites like Upper Mustang. This multifarious strategy would help to maintain tourism in such vulnerable areas and better guide governmental choices.

#### 4.8. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on our research future researchers can investigate different aspects of solo travel restriction, such as innovative technology to manage tourists, community-based tourism projects, and implementation of eco-tourism initiatives. Alongside this future researcher can also investigate how tourist perception and action change over time, which gives insightful information about how tourism is changing in Upper Mustang. Conducting comparison assessments with other limited regions and cultural heritage places might provide significant insights and exemplary methods for managing destinations and ensuring sustainability. By investigating how different areas address tourism management and sustainability challenges, researchers can identify best practices and innovative solutions that could be tailored to Upper Mustang. These contrasting ideas will enable the area to remain a sustainable and appealing place for next generations by helping to balance tourist expansion with environmental protection.

## Chapter 5. Analysis

In this section, the main themes that were found through a thorough analysis of the Netnographic data are presented and also examines the importance of these themes in connection to the study questions about the efficacy of the solo travel restriction in Upper Mustang, Nepal. To enhance our comprehension of the prohibition, we will examine it from many theoretical frameworks. This approach will allow us to get insight into the viewpoints of different stakeholders, anticipate probable effects, and assess its compatibility with wider tourist practices. The research aims to assess the impact of the required guide system and the restriction on solo hiking on safety, tourist experiences, visitor numbers, and the general sustainability of trekking activities in Nepal. The study aims to offer insights into the impact of these rules on cultural preservation, tourist behavior, and the local economy. It aims to illuminate the delicate balance between encouraging safe travel practices and conserving the distinct experience of solo trekking in Nepal.

### 4.1. Balancing Tourism and Culture in Upper Mustang

According to Klook (2019) and Yang (2021), there is a tension between cultural preservation, ethical tourist marketing, and solo travel liberty. One positive aspect of solo travel is the independence it gives, which may lead to greater personal growth and richer experiences as one sees the world and its different cultures. However, this independence may sometimes conflict with the local need to preserve culture and promote responsible tourism. The arrival of visitors, particularly single travelers who pose safety concerns, can have an adverse effect on local customs, historical sites, and communities. Balancing the desire for travel freedom with the imperative to protect and preserve cultural heritage as well as encourage responsible tourism poses a significant challenge in the contemporary world, requiring thoughtful consideration and sustainable tourism practices to ensure the harmonious coexistence of cultural exploration and preservation.

Tourists traveling to Upper Mustang often seek to immerse themselves in the local culture and lifestyle of Upper Mustang which is similar to Tibetan culture. Therefore, it offers a unique opportunity for those travelers who are unable to visit Tibet to witness the Tibetan tradition (Banskota & Sharma, 1998). Travel agencies like Lonely Planet (2015); Himalayan glaciers Adventure and Travel Company (2023); and Index Adventure (2023) often mention



Upper Mustang as ‘Mystique Valley’, ‘Mini-Tibet’, ‘Last Forbidden Kingdom’, and a Mountain Desert’. Index Adventure (2023) travel agency also argues that because of nicknames, discussions, and pictures about Upper Mustang beauty on social sites make tourists more curious and want to check Upper Mustang by themselves. Tourists often use Upper Mustang as a route to travel Annapurna Mountain as they can witness the panoramic view of several mountain peaks like Nilgiri, Dhaulagiri, and Annapurna as well (‘Nepal’ 8th Wonder of the World, 2018). Tourists are also, appealed to medieval Buddhist monasteries, art, architecture, ancient caves, and the history of the Bon dynasty (Peissel, 1992).

In 2021, the Reddit user thejournaloflosttime posted a photograph in the r/travel forum showcasing the awe-inspiring grandeur of Upper Mustang. This post ignited a spirited debate among the participants of the forum. The user conveyed their deep appreciation for the cultural traditions and awe-inspiring beauty of Upper Mustang in this exchange. He also discussed the current situation on regulation where a solo travel ban has been implemented for foreign tourists. Many participants shared their hopes for traveling to Upper Mustang shortly. This conversation emphasizes the importance of balancing the preservation and accessibility of tourists in historic destinations. This discussion in the Reddit forum reflects there is collective interest among users where they wished to explore the remote area, but also they have a keen awareness about sustainability and respect for local nature and regulations



*Figure 1: Trekking the Upper Mustang Valley (thejournaloflosttimes, 2021) [Reddit]*  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/travel/comments/qgz0zh/trekking\\_the\\_upper\\_mustang\\_valley\\_nepal\\_formerly/](https://www.reddit.com/r/travel/comments/qgz0zh/trekking_the_upper_mustang_valley_nepal_formerly/)

Lochrann replies on the r/travel community thread,

“Incredible. Making me want to go back to Nepal! Gotta wait for the border to open first...”  
(Lochrann, 2021) [Reddit]



According to a post on Reddit's r/travel, a community user named Lochrann expressed a strong desire to travel to Nepal again after seeing the beautiful picture of Upper Mustang. Although he has already visited Nepal before, the mesmerizing picture and landscape of the Upper Mustang have reignited his desire to visit Nepal again. However, he is hesitant to make a plan to visit Nepal due to its existing regulations where Solo travelers are banned from entering Upper Mustang. This expression of his in the comment reflects his understanding of the regulation and the cautious approach to challenges that many travelers have faced while traveling to remote areas like Upper Mustang. Concerned about these restrictions, Lochrann has decided to wait until the borders reopen and solo travel becomes permissible again. His anticipation of future travel indicates a deep appreciation for the region and a hopeful outlook for a time when he can experience its beauty firsthand once more.

Similarly, a user named Sailaw in a Reddit discussion also said,

"Fantastic shots! I was in the Annapurna many years ago and would have loved to have been able to explore Mustang, which was not accessible then. You are a lucky person - and thanks for sharing." (Sailaw, 2021) [Reddit]

Sailaw (2021), a member of the Reddit community shared his travel experience from a visit to Nepal many years ago. During his visit, he never got a chance to explore Upper Mustang due to the prohibition of entering into the Upper Mustang Territory in that period. However, he appreciates Lochrann for posting pictures showing the beauty of Upper Mustang in the r/travel discussion although he missed his chance back then. Sailaw's appreciation reveals that the impact of visual storytelling in travel communities has a significant effect on the viewers. These images not only evoke the nostalgia of travelers but also inspire them to understand the destination more deeply. This supports the statement of Regmi (n.d.), that it was prohibited to enter Upper Mustang before the 2008 fall of Monarch. As to Oschetti (2016), tourists exhibit a strong enthusiasm for traveling in order to explore natural aesthetics, indulge in the serenity of beautiful landscapes, and immerse themselves in novel cultures that provide fresh insights and lifestyles. Sailaw's comment also unfolds the broader enthusiasm among travelers to discover a destination that may have been restricted previously but has opened for tourist in present.

According to Peter (2012), the sky caves of Nepal are supposed to be a Shangri-la according to the Buddhist religion where saints used to come and meditate. Because of this myth tourists visiting Upper Mustang are highly interested in seeing the ancient mountain caves and immersing themselves in the local way of life (Timestravel, 2023). Travelers are interested to explore the ancient mountains not only to witness the unique geology and landscape but also to engage with the spiritual heritage that promotes destination. Timestravel (2023) reports that several Archeological researchers and climbers were drawn to the discoveries in cave temples, where archaeologists successfully identified a significant number of human remains.



*Figure 2: Experiencing Nepal's remote Mustang Region.(Oschetti, 2016)*

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/nepal-tibetan-kingdom-mustang/index.html>

According to Shyglow reddit user showed interest in Sky caves and asked questions about the way to visit Sky caves in Nepal.

“I've been trying to find how to trek the area but haven't been able to obtain much information. Has anyone ever been? Thanks!” (Shyglow, 2013) [Reddit]

Furthermore, purpleyam from the same reddit thread shares,

“If I'm not mistaken this is a hike to Upper Mustang, it usually takes more than 7 days hike to go there. Requires a 500USD permit and the minimum is 2 people to get a permit. Last bastion

of Tibetan culture. I might be going there in April, after trekking in EBC.” (purpleyam, 2013)  
[Reddit

According to Shyglow (2013) from a Reddit thread, he wished to visit Nepal to travel to Upper Mustang. However, he found that a lack of information about the region it stopped him from traveling to Upper Mustang. Syglow seeks advice in the Reddit travel forum about the destination. forum but due to a lack of information, Shyglow inquired about Upper Mustang in the Reddit Travel community. In response, another user named Purpleyam replies to the Skyglow inquiries contributing valuable insight regarding the necessary permits to travel to Upper Mustang. However, with the increase in technology and widespread information about Upper Mustang through the Internet volume of tourists is supposed to increase. This highlights the usefulness and collaboration of online travel communities. This specific exchange of information reflects the growing trend where one traveler lacking information is relying on another peer’s advice through shared knowledge to navigate their journey.

Due to increased accessibility of the internet access to information and data is very easy through technology. The interest in Upper Mustang is increasing significantly more potential tourists are becoming aware of the unique offering Upper Mustang has to give to tourists. This phenomenon highlights the important role of the internet and online platforms in shaping the travel decisions of tourists. Similarly, YouTube channel titled “Nepal: 8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World” (2018), interest in visiting Upper Mustang has gradually increased over time, primarily due to its beautiful landscape, culture, and heritage. However, travelers are increasingly viewing Upper Mustang as an alternative trekking route to reach popular destinations like Annapurna Mountain. Upper Mustang offers its centuries-old stone-built homes with remarkable deep history and traditional lifestyle that enhance the traveler’s experience.

## 4.2. The Ban on Solo Travel for Foreign Tourists in Nepal

The prohibition of solo travel for foreign tourists in Nepal, particularly in regions like Upper Mustang, reflects a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and practical considerations. Upper Mustang has a harsh and challenging terrain with a remote nature that poses a risk to travelers who are traveling alone without a guide. Safety concern is a critical factor that plays a vital role in shaping policy. It also has a fragile ecosystem which can easily disturbed by human interference. Ban on solo travel has limited unattended tourists and made

regulated guided travel, this can minimize the environmental impact and preserve it for the future. Ban on solo travel can limit the flow of tourist and prevent the adverse impact of unregulated tourism over its unique tradition, old monasteries, and their lifestyle. Guided tours can help Upper Mustang maintain the integrity of local cultures and foster respectful interaction between tourists and the local indigenous group of people. This approach also helps to ensure that tourism development is sustainable and benefits the local economy without overwhelming the region and also, ensuring the safety of tourists in such environments necessitates guided travel, where experienced guides can provide essential support and emergency assistance.

#### 4.2.1. Safety Concerns:

The ban on solo travel in Nepal, including the requirement for guided tours and group travel, primarily aims to enhance safety in the country's rugged and remote terrains, especially in regions like Upper Mustang. Nepal's challenging terrain, sparse population, and unpredictable weather conditions can pose serious risks to inexperienced travelers. For instance, incidents of hikers getting lost or encountering difficulties in isolated areas have highlighted the need for precautions to prevent accidents and ensure the well-being of visitors. There have been several incidents where solo travelers have gone missing or encounter life threatening situations in isolated region. These incidents have overly highlighted the concern on local and national government for stringent safety measures. In Upper Mustang guided tours provide additional layer of security for tourist while traveling, as professional guides are trained and they have skill to navigate these terrain. These guides also, have been trained for emergency situation and offers first aid in case of need.

According to myRepublica (2019),

“An Italian tourist died in Mustang on Friday morning. The deceased has been identified as Marco Roccufrancufoc Morelio, 68, according to the Gandaki State Police Office, Pokhara.”

An Italian tourist was found dead at Lo-Ghekar Damodarkunda because of altitude illness. Similarly, due to difficult geography and harsh environment, there was another case where a group of tourists was lost with their guide during their trekking through Dolpa – Mustang to whom Nepal police rescued them after 5 days and they starved for three days without food and any communication (Pokharel, 2023). By mandating the use of licensed

guides and group travel for foreign tourists, authorities aim to mitigate the dangers associated with solo trekking, particularly in regions where infrastructure is limited, communication is unreliable, and sudden weather changes are common. This measure is intended to provide a safety net for travelers, reduce the likelihood of accidents, and ultimately enhance the overall security and experience of tourists exploring Nepal's diverse landscapes.

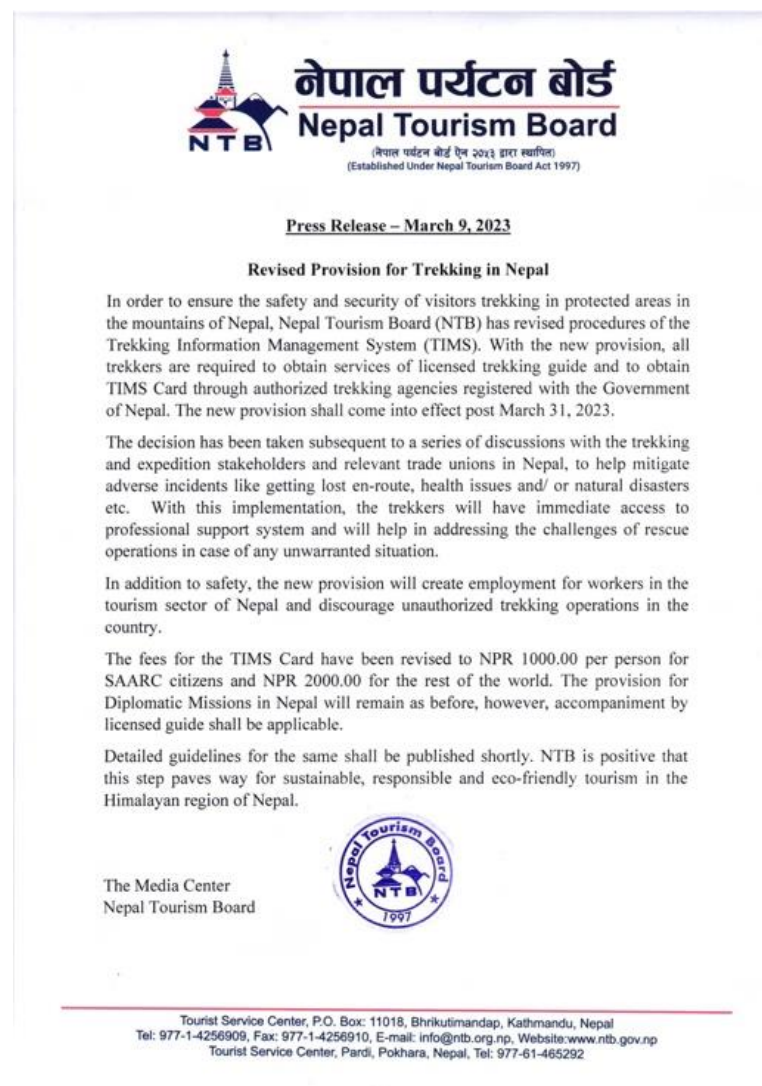


Figure 3: New Provision for trekking in Nepal (N.T.B, n.d) <https://ntb.gov.np/en/latest-travel-updates>

Kasyao\_Losat (2024), replies to the comment on Reddit when is the best time to visit Upper mustang for safety reason.

“We too would like to travel in the 3rd-4th week of June. [...]. Plan is to fly from Kathmandu to Pokhara, stay in Pokhara for a few days, then fly to Jomsom then take 4x4 to Lomanthang. [...].” (Kasyao\_losat, 2024) [Reddit]

In a discussion forum on Reddit, a user asked what the best time is to visit Upper Mustang for safe travel. Therefore, Kasyao\_Losat (2024), explains that after research they are planning to visit during June month for a better travel experience and, they are taking flights for faster travel time. According to Index Adventure (2023), Spring to November is the best time to visit Upper Mustang as the weather is dry, bright, and warm which makes travel ideal in Upper Mustang. During these months, the weather is typically dry, bright, and warm which is good for traveling in these conditions. This period avoids monsoon season when heavy rainfall occurs and it increases the risk of landslides, flood and it is even difficult to navigate in these seasons. Whereas, between Spring and November skies are clear and make astonishing landscapes which increases the travel experience in this weather. According to Kasyao\_Losat planning a trip through flights can also improve the travel experience where one doesn't have to spend lots of time walking on dangerous routes. Travelers can enjoy their remaining time exploring the Upper Mustang and its unique culture. This kind of approach where selecting favorable seasons and efficient travel can be underscored as a well-thought-out plan to ensure safety and a better experience.

#### 4.2.2. Environmental Conservation:

Nepal's rich biodiversity and fragile ecosystems are highly susceptible to the impacts of tourism, including habitat degradation, pollution, and habitat loss. To mitigate these environmental threats, regulations are implemented to control tourist access and minimize ecological footprints in sensitive areas (DiscoveryHimalaya, 2023). By requiring tourists to travel in groups accompanied by licensed guides, authorities aim to minimize human disturbances and protect pristine natural habitats from the adverse effects of unrestricted visitation. From an environmental perspective, the ban on solo travel has contributed to the protection of fragile ecosystems and natural habitats in Nepal (ACAP, n.d.). Furthermore, According to ACAP (n.d), the revenue generated from permit fees and tourism taxes can be reinvested in conservation initiatives, habitat restoration projects, and sustainable development programs aimed at enhancing the resilience of local ecosystems and communities.

According to @bijayamatya2 he supports government decision to restrict solo travelers in Upper mustang as its carrying capacity is limited and government has taken proper step at right time before the culture and environment is completely degraded.

“Perhaps it's high time that our government does carrying capacity study of Upper Mustang (Lo-Manthang) and puts a cap on the visiting travellers number before it's cultural and environmental degradation.” (@bijayamatya2, 2024) [Twitter X]

However, the effectiveness of these conservation efforts may be contingent upon effective enforcement mechanisms, community participation, and adaptive management strategies that balance conservation priorities with socio-economic needs. While the regulation aims to address safety concerns, promote environmental conservation, and preserve cultural heritage, its implementation has implications for tourism flows, economic livelihoods, social dynamics, and ecological sustainability. To ensure the effective implementation of regulations enforcement mechanisms must be efficient and effective. Monitoring and regulating tourist activities, enforcing permit requirements, and effective compliance with environmental guidelines must be ensured for enforcement.

Local community participation is another important component where local communities step forward towards fostering the ownership and responsibility of preserving their natural and cultural heritage. This kind of participation helps to create a more strong and sustainable tourism model that balances both environment preservation as well as local lifestyle. Local stakeholders must adopt adaptive strategies where conservational efforts can be flexible and responsive according to changing environments and requirements. With the help of these conservational measures, we can understand that it is not only effective and equitable but also balancing the needs of local communities and tourists. Implementation of this regulation will regulate the flow of tourism which will eventually reduce tourists coming to Upper Mustang. This can gradually enhance tourist safety and affect economic livelihood by restricting income generated from tourism. Therefore, identifying the balance between economic opportunity and regulation is necessary to make balance in social and economic harmony.

According to @manixk024 (2024), due to the increasing number of tourists and busy trekking routes climate change has become a major problem of Upper Mustang. The environment is degrading at a very fast pace and the Himalaya ecosystem is collapsing with the rise of temperature. The temperature rise not only melts the glaciers but also harms the landscape and alteration of local weather patterns. These changes have a negative impact on



the ecological balances of Upper Mustang as well as local communities that depend on the environment for agriculture and tourism.

“The dire situation in the Upper Mustang region, where communities are increasingly crumbling one by one due to multiple threats posed by climate change.” (@manixk024, 2024) [Twitter X]

@manixk024 (2024) argues that climate change has forced snow to retreat farther to the north and a huge problem of melting snow can be seen. This can pose the threat of avalanches and other natural disasters such as drought in the Upper Mustang Region. Therefore, by regulating tourist access and behavior, the restriction helps minimize the ecological footprint of tourism activities, reducing the risk of habitat degradation, wildlife disturbance, and resource depletion (Baloch et al., 2023). Tourists coming to Upper Mustang is beneficial from an economic perspective, but it leads to overuse of the trails, and natural resources increase pollution and create environmental disparity. Biodiversity will suffer degradation when human activity disrupts the natural habitats.

#### 4.2.3. Cultural Preservation:

The cultural heritage of Nepal, particularly in regions like Upper Mustang, is deeply intertwined with Tibetan Buddhism and ancient traditions. The preservation of this cultural tapestry is of paramount importance to both local communities and international conservation efforts. To safeguard cultural sites, religious monuments, and traditional practices from the negative impacts of mass tourism, regulations are enforced to control visitor behavior and promote respectful interactions with local communities (Francioni, 2017). By limiting solo travel and mandating guided tours, authorities seek to ensure that tourists respect local customs, traditions, and sensitivities, thereby minimizing the risk of cultural commodification or misappropriation (ACAP, n.d.).

Beyond its economic impact, the ban on solo travel has broader socio-cultural implications for local communities in Nepal. The regulation may influence social interactions, cultural exchange, and community cohesion by shaping the nature of tourist-host interactions and perceptions. While guided tours can facilitate meaningful cross-cultural encounters and educational experiences, they may also create barriers to authentic engagement and mutual understanding between tourists and locals (Bassols, 2023). Moreover, the restriction may reinforce power dynamics and stereotypes, perpetuating narratives of dependency and



exoticism in tourist-host relationships. As a result, there is a need for greater dialogue and collaboration between tourism stakeholders and local communities to ensure that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and culturally sensitive (Jamal & Stronza, 2009).

Khattari (2023) says Loba people from Upper Mustang also have culture to worship snake god for the rain,

“It is a community ritual performed collectively by the households. In this ritual, the snake/serpent God is worshiped, as the Loba believes the snake god brings rain and fertility and also prevents weather-related disasters.”

Upper Mustang's main source of income has become tourism at present however before tourism flourished people of Lomanthang were dependent on trade, horticulture, and agriculture where rain is very important. Having harsh weather, it rains very little in the upper Mustang and according to their culture, they pray to the snake god for rain and prosperity. They believe their culture and tradition play a vital role in their way of life in Upper Mustang's harsh geography and weather (Khattari, 2023). Tourists are drawn to the Upper Mustang area because of the unique combination of Buddhist and Tibetan traditions, which is evident in the local lifestyle, according to Ruiter (2024). For instance, the Lama ceremonial dance is done in public with tremendous enthusiasm, and Tiji is especially beloved by foreign tourists. The Tiji Festival is a unique cultural event that offers guests the opportunity to fully engage with the diverse customs and culture of Nepal's Upper Mustang area. The three-day celebration showcases vibrant parades, traditional dances, and ancient rites that are steeped in historical and spiritual significance.



Figure 4: Tiji Festival trek (Baral, 2023) <https://www.nepalvisitors.com/tiji-festival-trek/>

According to Kvom01 from Reddit travel community says

“I did the Mustang trek in May, 2009 attending the Tiji festival in Lo-Manthang. 13 days total [...]. Definitely worthwhile. [...]”(Kvom01, 2017) [Reddit]

Also, Kvom01 states that

“When I went there were about 100 Westerners. We had to pay a small entry fee but also got seats on a small grandstand. The festival lasts 3 days so plenty of photos. The celebration takes place mainly in the small main square in Lo, and consists of many different dances in costumes, about 3 hours in the morning each day.” (Kvom01, 2017) [Reddit]

According to Kvom01 Reddit users recommend visiting the Upper Mustang during the Tiji festival as it is the best time and worthwhile. He also, disclosed that many Western tourists were attending the festival already, but they were required to pay the entry fee for attending the festival. This fee, however doesn't decrease the incoming tourist, which highlights the festivals significance as a major attraction. As a result, the Tiji festival is a prominent attraction that draws a large number of tourists while also promoting tradition among foreigners. It can also help people retain their culture while also promoting local culture. During the visit to Upper Mustang 3-day Tiji festival Traverart a YouTube travel vlogger experienced that people from surrounding villages were gathered to get the blessing from the senior Lama who comes specially only for Tiji festivals. (TraverArt, 2022) [Youtube]

#### 4.2.3.1. Sky burials

The walled town of Lo-manthang, with its ancient monasteries, palaces, stupas, prayer wheels, prayer flags, and the rich Buddhist cultural heritage of Upper Mustang, offers a compelling draw for tourists. Unique cultural practices like friendly polyandry among elderly residents, Tibetan Buddhism, and the sky burial customs of the Lobas intrigue foreign visitors (Nepal, 2000). According to the Buddhist culture from Upper Mustang Sky burial is a process where a dead body is offered to the Himalayan Vultures as a compassionate farewell to a mortal body (Pande, 2023). Lonmanthang is the center of attraction among tourists as it is the capital of Upper Mustang where many sacred Buddhist myths can be found, and tourists can also see the remains of Guruu Rinpoche in Lama monastery (Pande, 2023). Archeologists find fascination in exploring the prehistoric cave settlements and the ancient ritual of sky burial.



Figure 5: Sky burial. (BeyondtheDash, 2020) <https://beyondthedash.com/blog/cultural-spotlight/what-is-a-sky-burial/7305>

According to Lonelyplanet et al., (2015), with express permission photographers and film crew were permitted to document the sky burial which is highly discouraged. Lonely Planet's travel guide advises:

“Tourists should not be visiting the Sky Burial ceremony in Tibet, regardless of whether it's free or costs money, as it may offend many locals and could result in a fine from influential individuals. On the other hand, in Nepal, trekkers may be able to witness the ritual with the approval of residents and other relevant individuals, provided they are granted permission.” (Pande, 2023)

Likewise, Mary Ane (2023),

“I’ve never heard of a sky burial. This is so interesting!” (Anne, 2023) [Tiktok]

As LonelyPlanet et al., (2015) say they do not encourage people to attend any Sky burial ceremony as it is taken as offensive behavior by the local community. However, with special permission from family members tourists can attend the ceremony although there is no specific mention of how many people can attend the ceremony at a time according to lonelyplanet et al., (2015), the film crew was able to document the ceremony. Although influenced by Tibetan culture, Upper Mustang has evolved its own distinct cultural aspects, such as the veneration of local deities and the tradition of sky burials. Sky burial is a distinctive ritual that is based on Buddhist teachings and the need to adapt to the environment. It involves the offering of dead to vultures on mountaintops (Eng and Aldenderfer, 2011; pp 9-32). The symbolization of impermanence and release of the soul is combined with the practical considerations of cremation in the rugged landscape of Upper Mustang. The cultural distinctiveness of the region is further exemplified by the presence of the native language, Lhoba, and unique customs. The region's cultural distinctiveness is further exemplified by the indigenous language, Lhoba, and unique customs (Darnal, 2017).

Similarly, an audience from TikTok posts her comment in one of the TikTok posts on Sky Burial, she shows interest in Sky Burial subject as she has never heard of such a ceremony before. The region's identity is deeply rooted in its rich cultural legacy, which highlights the local community's dedication to safeguarding its distinctive way of life. Therefore, Sky Burial also has its significance in attracting tourists and showcasing the cultural heritage to tourists. Since death is an inherent part of existence, the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism center on the concept of Rodhip (Powers, 2007). The Buddhist path emphasizes the need to be mindful of one's own mortality and the fact that there are two types of deaths: natural and accidental. Class,

caste, age, and political position are among of the social factors that impact how people deal with death, even if it is seen as a natural event (Khatttri, 2021).

The Loba people of Upper Mustang use one of four different funeral rituals, the most common of which is Phumbhu Jyalathov. The sky burial is a method of feeding vultures and preserving the common environment in arid regions. According to Khatttri (2021), this unique cultural tradition draws numerous tourists to Upper Mustang. The region's funeral rites serve multiple purposes, such as fostering connections between religious authorities and laypeople, conveying the concept of impermanence, and transcending death (Powers, 2007). Emphasizing the cultural heritage significance of Upper Mustang as a tourist attraction, Shackley (1994) highlights Lo-manthang as a crucial site preserving untouched Tibetan art, architecture, religion, and culture. The Loba people's Buddhist beliefs are reflected in the region's architecture dominated by monasteries and stupas adorned with traditional grey, white, and yellow stripes on red walls.

### 4.3. Infrastructure and Natural Disasters

The increasing number of tourists in Upper Mustang is attributed to the expansion of tourism businesses and a reduction in tourist fees, making the region more accessible to a broader range of visitors (Bessiere, 1998). However, the growth in tourism has also led to challenges, such as the negative impact of road construction and transportation services on the trekking experience due to increased air and sound pollution. Some tourists opt to travel directly to Lo-Manthang using a vehicle, which has a limited impact on tea house operators along the way. The disparity in transportation fares for foreign tourists, who pay double the local fare, has proven to be a lucrative source of income for Loba Jeep owners. Additionally, natural disasters and accidents, such as the 1988-89 GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood) impacts (Fort, 2015), floods caused by landslides and heavy rainfall (Khadka, 2023); (Dhakal, 2023), and accidents due to the difficult road conditions (myRepublica, 2023); (Posch et al., 2019), have further complicated the situation for tourists and locals alike.

According to the `mustang_nepal_himalaya` Instagram page, which is dedicated to promoting Mustang as a Himalaya tourist destination,



“Truck nearly to fell down on river on Tatopani, Myagdi (Beni-Jomsom Road) Road is getting more difficult to travel in rainy season this day.” (mustang\_nepal\_himalaya, 2023) [Instagram]

In this post, mustang\_nepal\_himalaya a travel page on Instagram wants to showcase how difficult the road infrastructure of Nepal is right now during the rainy season and the risks that it brings to tourists and local people while traveling through pictures. It creates lots of hindrances for tourists who are trying to travel to Upper Mustang or similar destinations through those routes during the rainy season. Khattri (2023), states that most tourists have very limited time and a fixed budget to complete this travel, but these accidents can cost them their holiday, sometimes even their lives. However, natural calamities due to the rainy season or other calamities can drastically alter their plans, which causes delays and adds costs on top of that. This can also, worsen the cases where accidents can even endanger tourists' lives. The infrastructure of Upper mustang can have difficult position for people traveling to Upper Mustang in bad weather which requires immediate concerns from appropriate government bodiesofr minimizing risks. Throught the help of Instagram post, mustang\_nepal\_himalaya aims to create awareness about the current situation of obstaclels which is making hindrance for travelers to choose that path to travel.



Figure 6: Mustang rainy Season (mustang\_nepal\_himalaya, 2019) [Instagram]  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B3EHeHPA-Za/>

With the very high altitude of the climate and low oxygen, most of the tourists face challenges during their trek (Rana, 2024). Many tourists accounted for altitude sickness due to the lack of oxygen in this area. Therefore, Patricia (2022), a tourist who recently visited Upper

Mustang left a comment on the travel agency website saying, that the beauty of Upper Mustang is breathtaking and has a rich natural beauty, but it is very difficult to reach the destination due to its altitude and road condition. Patricia mentioned that despite being physically fit and well-prepared for the journey, she experienced symptoms of altitude sickness. She was feeling short of breath and dizzy during her trek, so she had to drop her journey and return to lower ground.

For future travelers, she advised that they should take necessary precautions, such as staying well-hydrated, consulting with guides about safe trekking practices, and readiness with medicine. Patricia also suggests travelers be aware of their limits and should not push themselves hard in harsh environments as high altitudes can be unforgiving. She praised local guides for how supportive they are towards tourist and their sharing of knowledge for crucial situations which were very important during her symptoms for safety. Therefore, her comments serve as a reminder for potential visitors who seek to travel to Upper Mustang and want to experience the thrilling journey and inspiring landscape. Proper preparation is important before traveling to this kind of destination and adequate information must be acquired beforehand.

“[...]We want to visit the top destination Everest and Mustang within a limited days’ time frame [...]. We stayed at Royal Mustang Resort in Lo-Manthang and experience the area. One of the best itinerary and premium experiences we ever had, once in a lifetime memories. [...]. Thank you.” (Patricia, 2022 July 28)

We know that vacations are meant to be for limited periods, and we cannot complete travel to all the places where we want in a short period. Especially, a destination like Upper Mustang is geographically difficult to visit and the lack of Oxygen in this region makes it even harder to trek. Patricia says that with the limited time of their vacation, they preferred a helicopter to travel to Upper Mustang which made them exclude walking for 7 days. Even though people can travel faster in the air it is also not fully safe because of weather changes. NewsPolar covered news about the plane crash in the Upper Mustang region,

“Spokesperson of Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) Teknath Sitaula said 21 dead bodies were recovered from the site and 10 of them were brought to Kathmandu in the first phase. The Tara Air Twin-Otter plane crashed due to bad weather, a preliminary investigation by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) shows.” (Newspolar, 2022)



Figure 7: Tara air crash. (NewsPolar, 2022)[News] <https://enewspolar.com/tara-air-plane-crash-10-dead-bodies-brought-to-kathmandu/>

Due to geographical structure traveling to Upper Mustang or making it an alternative route can be a little dangerous during the rainy season or winter season. In this period weather changes a lot faster and the weather forecast can be wrong sometimes (Khattri, 2023). Due to unpredictable weather and inadequate infrastructure required for safe tourism Upper Mustang does count as an adventure tourism destination. However, with the presence of all these risk factors tourist safety is at risk. Proper care and preventive measures are necessary to protect the tangible heritage of Upper Mustang and ensure the safety of tourists and locals (Khattri, 2023). Natural disasters occur when nature is used to its maximum extent. As we can take the example of many other countries like Barcelona, Italy, and the Netherlands over-tourism and pollution from these tourist activities has depleted the environment for a long period which can take many years to overcome this problem. We can understand that we cannot avoid natural disasters but we can eliminate the casualties that can happen in these situations by taking preventive measures.

#### 4.4. Government Policies & Regulations

The revised provision mandates that all trekkers must engage the services of a certified trekking guide and secure a Tourist Information Management System (TIMS) Card through



authorized trekking agencies sanctioned by the Government of Nepal (Rana, 2024). TIMS was introduced to keep track of tourists who visit Nepal difficult places. Several tourists were reported missing during the last 10 years and to address this challenge government implemented the TIMS Card which is monitored by ACAP. Incidents of facing challenges in rescue operations due to the lack of proper infrastructure prompted the implementation of measures to enhance tourist safety and promote responsible tourism. New rules were implemented on 2023 march 31. According to AACAP (n.d.), the cost of a TIMS card was NPR 1000 for SAARC citizens and for the rest of the tourists who are from non-SAARC nations would cost NPR 2000 (Himalaya Glaciern, 2023).

Figure 8: TIMS card (Tamang, n.d.) [Travel] <https://www.nepaltrekkinginhimalaya.com/pages/nepal-trekking-permit-information>

According to the Tamang (n.d.), trekkers are supposed to fill in their details and Picture for their identification. In the TIMS card, there are written rules on what needs to be done and what tourist cannot do during their travel. The TIMS card will categorize tourists according to the color of the card whether they are traveling in a group or individually. However, for Upper Mustang they can only get a Blue TIMS card, and they are given a trekking area where they can travel. This can help ACAP, and local authorities easily track tourists and regulate rules to guide travel.

However, in Upper Mustang only blue TIMS card is issued for trekking to manage tourist activities preciously within sensitive area. This system helps ACAP and local authorities to effectively monitor tourist, ensuring compliance with regulations and guidelines provided to

tourist. By categorizing tourist destination and designation specific trekking zones, TIMS card system helps to maintain safety and prevent cultural heritage from damaging. It also allows authorities to quickly identify problems and trek tourist for quick assistance. TIMS card, Particularly Blue card for Upper Mustang helps to ensure sustainable tourism and balance the needs of tourism and environment and culture of that region.

#### 4.4.1. The Upper Mustang Permit System

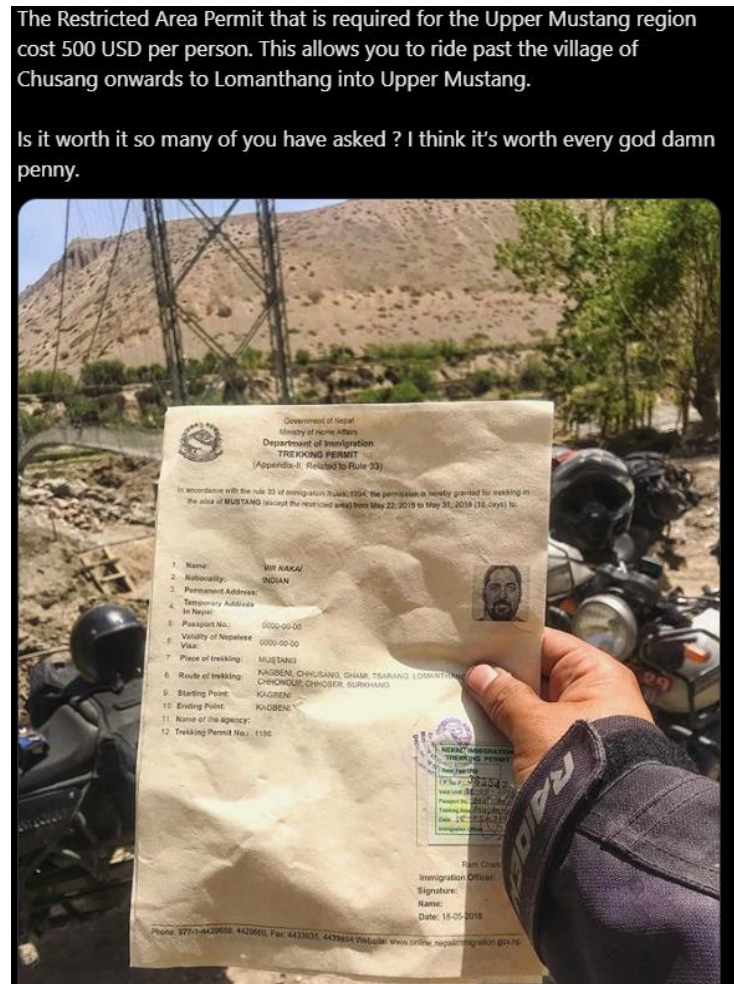
A Restricted Area Permit (RAP) which is also known as Upper Mustang permit. It is essential for all international visitors visiting the Upper Mustang restricted area. According to the Nepal Tourism Board (n.d.), this regulation was implemented to manage the flow of tourists, regulate tourist safety, safeguard cultural artifacts, and ensure the preservation of the ecosystem in this delicate region. Protecting the Upper Mustang's cultural and environmental treasures from the overexploitation that would result from unfettered tourism is the principal goal of the Upper Mustang permit.

TheMenWhoStareAtMountains (2023), comments on the [LouisePatterton] Trip Advisor post about the ban on solo traveler in Upper Mustang where he says,

“For the budget trekkers who are not going to do that, and still trek alone, they will trek in the popular areas at first, then move to less popular and so are spreading money to other deserving regions. Perhaps a third of these budget trekkers would not come to Nepal if the restrictions are too onerous, and so there is not lost income, rather Nepal is successfully collecting from every strata (well done!!).” (TheMenWhoStareAtMountain, 2023) [Tripadvisor]

TheMenWhoStareAtMountains (2023) says that the regulation on the Solo travel Ban can help Nepal attract tourists in less popular regions of Nepal as well. Budget trekkers and tourists who are still willing to trek alone will trek to less popular areas where there are no regulations on solo travel and less expensive to get a permit. According to TheMenWhoStareAtMountains (2023), Eventually, Nepal will successfully have an advantage in terms of getting tourist revenue from other tourist destinations as well. Some of these requirements include paying the necessary fees for permits and supplying personal data, passport information, and trip plans (Rana, 2024). Tourists must also follow the rules and restrictions set forth by the local government and travel with a certified guide. The permit is

valid for a limited duration, typically ranging from one to three weeks, and may be subject to renewal or extension under certain circumstances. Tourists are also required to hire professionally trained guide from travel agencies.



tourist flows, distribute benefits equitably, and minimize negative externalities associated with unregulated visitation.

“The Restricted Area Permit required for the Upper Mustang region costs 500 USD per person. This allows you to ride past the village of Chusang onwards to Lomanthang into Upper Mustang. Is it worth it so many of you have asked ? I think it’s worth every god damn penny.” (Virnakai, 2018) [Twitter]

According to Virnakai (2018), regardless of entry permits and fees, tourists are still willing to travel to Upper Mustang. The entry permit system represents a critical component of tourism management and sustainability in Nepal. By implementing tourist access in Upper Mustang government tends to balance the demand for tourism and the need to conserve nature and cultural resources (Richon, 2018). The implementation of this restriction is to ensure the sustainable development of tourism while safeguarding the cultural heritage and its exceptional natural resources for future use. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of cooperation between the Government and local stakeholders to guarantee the effectiveness of the permit system and address any difficulties that may arise.

In Nepal, hiring guides have great potential to expand local businesses like homestays, local art, and souvenir shops that can benefit the local community and people. Inspiring visitors to support the local economy, guides are essential in directing them to locally-owned companies such as restaurants, stores, and cultural centers. This helps to encourage sustained development in Upper Mustang while ensuring the economic benefits of tourists and distributing more evenly. Guides also can help to spread word of mouth about homestays in communities and local businesses, which give tourists a real, full experience and help the families and communities in the area directly. Mandating guides to travel in restricted areas in Nepal can potentially help local businesses such as Homestays, and other small shops that are locally owned. Guided tours are more informative and can add more interesting experiences to the travel experience compared to exploring solo on their own. Guided tours are more

## 4.5. Impact of the Ban on Solo Travel on Tourism and the Local Community

The tourism industry and the local populations may both suffer greatly if foreign tourists are not allowed to travel alone in Upper Mustang. The ban on solo travel is in place, according to NTB (n.d.), to guarantee the safety of tourists, save the environment, and maintain cultural legacy. According to NTB (n.d.), this restriction could have a negative impact on tourists where the number of visitors will be decreased, and the tourist travel experience will deteriorate. According to Bindloss (2023), the ban on single travel has already changed the kinds of tourists who arrive and their travel inclinations. Tourist destinations, claims Shepherd (2002), have become too commercialized, losing their originality and cultural worth. Rules designed for lone travelers might send them elsewhere.

A post from @NoNext\_Question has been taken for the analysis impact on tourism as it shows us the perfect example of how solo travelers are feeling right after the implication of regulations. @NoNext\_Question posted a picture of famous vlogger Harald Baldr with his quote “I will make more trekking Videos, Just not in Nepal. Sadly!”. This statement represents the frustrations felt by many travelers on the solo travel ban in Upper Mustang. There has been an active discussion about the regulations and the perception of people over the regulations.

The accompanying discussion surrounding this post highlights the broader sentiment of travel community regarding the ban of solo travel in Upper Mustang. Many users express their disappointment over the regulation that restrict them to explore Nepal independently. Although the regulation was brought into implementation with the motive to ensure tourist safety and environmental preservation, solo traveler felt exclusion from traveling to Nepal who value freedom and travel independently. As the conversation explores the perception of travelers and their dissatisfaction over the implication of regulation. Some argue that Nepal itself perceived its beauty to extreme level and its limiting traveler, so they are willing to seek alternative destination with similar nature but without any limitation. Whereas some discussed that there is need of regulation for regulating tourist activities as tourism itself has huge negative impact on touristic destination if not regulated and can deplete the beauty of destination over time due to over tourism.





Figure 10: New Rules on Solo travel (@NoNext\_Question, 2023)[TwitterX]  
[https://x.com/NoNext\\_Question/status/1644641474800222208/photo/1](https://x.com/NoNext_Question/status/1644641474800222208/photo/1)

According to @NoNext\_Question (2023) in the above picture, famous YouTube vlogger Harald Baldr stated that he won't be visiting Nepal anymore due to ridiculous rules and regulations of the government.

"Solo travelers will never travel with a guide...if they can't trek here then they'll change their destinations to India or Srilanka or some other nations. Ridiculous law by the Nepalese government." (@umang305) [TwitterX]

As @umanga305 states with the restriction on solo travelers for traveling to different places in Nepal, they would not prefer to travel with a guide due to their nature of traveling. They prefer to enjoy the trek by themselves without any other influences and submerge with nature (Bianchi, 2022). He argues that instead of compromising with the regulation solo travelers would change their destination to alternative countries that allow solo travel. It is a serious matter of discussion because regarding controlling the tourists it might not be a good

idea to stop tourists visiting Nepal. The desire for autonomy in solo travel is fundamental to their experience where regulation particularly intervenes with their autonomy forcing them to travel in groups or guide. According to Umanga305, rather than compromising with regulation, solo travelers might not travel to that destination or shift their destination that favor their choice. This cause can eventually cost Nepal its tourism industry as tourists drawn to other countries will be returned if they are retained by other tourism countries.

The discussion surrounding this issue raises many serious questions about the long-term effect of such regulations that ban solo travel. Although the intention of this regulation was positive, a ban on solo travel has a negative impression on travelers and it can backfire in Nepal costing potential tourists. If Nepal wishes to maintain its tourism flow government stakeholders must reassess the approach where several alternative regulations can be implemented rather than banning solo travel. Instead, stakeholders must seek ways to provide tourist safety and health facilities in these areas where they lack them and put more effort on building quick rescue teams and building proper infrastructure.

Similarly, @birdsay states

“Currently this new rule is being ignored by the NTB when issuing permits and unenforced on the trails. Lodges and small business owners are alarmed at the potential damage it will cause them. The general consensus is that it is a bad idea in almost every way.” (@birdsay) [TwitterX]

Small businesses are going to get damaged by the regulation the most because it can reduce the number of solo travelers who used to stop and spend time and money during their travel. It might be the wrong decision to implement the ban when there are no balanced regulations regarding destination preservation and retaining tourists in that destination.

Supporting @birdays argument, TheMenWhoStareAtMountain (2023) said

“BUT in those restricted areas it is the LOCALS WHO ARE GETTING SCREWED and have been screwed by central govt for decades. Imagine how many lodges and millions of dollars would enter Upper Mustang if there weren't the restrictions and the \$500 permit.” (TheMenWhoStareAtMountain, 2023) [Tripadvisor]

According to TheMenWhoStareAtMountain (2023), implementing these regulations where tourists are forced to pay huge amounts is significantly reducing tourist inflow in Upper Mustang gradually. Tourists are seeking alternative routes to trek and the impact can be upon the local peoples. Businesses such as homestays that are open to target tourists could have more income generated if there were no restrictions and if the permit doesn't cost that high tourists would even explore Mustang more with a lengthier stay. To obtain an Upper Mustang permit, foreign tourists must fulfill certain conditions and requirements set forth by the Nepalese government.

However, regardless of criticism @Bipin\_Dangi (2023),

"I have been there, I have seen first hand! "Guided High altitude trek" is very essential for Health and Safety in higher places! Altitude sickness is not a joke! This is a good decision! I hope Nepal gov sticks on this decision!"

Despite criticism of how it can reduce the number of tourists @bipin\_Dangi in the following thread argues that Guided tourism is very important in the geographically challenging areas where most accidents occur. According to @Bipin\_Dangi in the high altitude, it is very important to have someone with you as there cannot be any emergency medical services. If people travel in groups they can have several support regarding travel.

Despite, @Green\_Yogi disagree with @Bipin\_Dangi saying

"I've seen the opposite way you're forced to go along with the pace of the group no matter what your standard is I saw more cases of altitude sickness than those who are trekked alone"

According to @Green\_Yogi (2023), when people travel in a group no matter what there can be some dissatisfaction. However, traveling in a group has pros and also has cons of it. @Green\_Yogi states that when people travel in groups they are forced to travel at the pace of other travelers. @Green\_Yogi has tried to explain how keeping pace with other travelers can increase the risk of altitude sickness. When one has to keep up with another traveler who is more energetic and healthier it can increase the rate of altitude sickness for those who are less familiar to trekking and have a bad health background. This eventually impacts the overall



experience of traveling when one must stop when there is a problem with some other traveler and if they are sick.

#### 4.5.1. Economic Impact on Local Communities:

Although tourism offers prospects for economic expansion, it also entails several obstacles that must be tackled. On a positive note, this regulation has led to the formalization of the tourism sector, fostering employment prospects for indigenous guides, porters, and service staff. An important concern is the phenomenon of leakage, which refers to the outflow of funds created from tourism that do not remain within the local economy (Rylance & Spenceley, 2017). This phenomenon arises when visitors choose to buy imported products or avail of services provided by major multinational companies, leading to the outflow of revenues from Upper Mustang instead of being circulated within the local population. In addition, even if the economy is clearly growing, locals may find it difficult to afford basic needs due to inflation caused by the influx of tourists (Chaitanya & Swain, 2023) as a consequence of the increased demand for goods and services. The paradox of the situation lies in Chhoser and Chhonhup, as the local people of this area are only protectors and conservationists of their cultural practices and conserve biodiversity. Still, they do not receive the benefits of employment and income-generating opportunities directly from tourism. These areas are considered security sensitive as they are bordered to China. As per the trekking rule, foreign tourists can only visit during the day after breakfast and must return to Lo-manthang in the evening.

According to Pokharel et al. (2021), the study emphasizes the importance of inclusive development strategies that prioritize community empowerment and participation. Nevertheless, the emphasis on organized excursions and group travel has the potential to exclusively concentrate tourist benefits in the hands of larger tour operators and established firms, excluding smaller-scale businesses and grassroots community initiatives. Khattri (2023) states that restrictions on solo travel can have both positive and negative effects on society regarding the entry fee. Entry fees can help the government to support environmental projects and infrastructure development. However, it can adversely affect budget tourists as their first preference might not be the Upper Mustang or any other restricted destination where they need to pay a high entrance fee to the government.

There is ongoing debate about whether the government should charge tourists fairly while the local communities do not get the benefits. A Norwegian tourist shared their perspective on this matter, stating that:

“We, the tourists, are paying good money to visit this place. We wish that the Nepali government support local people and maintain the tangible and intangible cultural heritages of local people, but I see very poor conditions. No renovation is carried out to maintain the tangible heritage; they are in a situation of collapse. The trekking tracks are also very bad. I like peacefully walking in this wonderful land”. (Harald Baldr, 2023) [Youtube]

According to a YouTube vlogger based on travel videos Harald Baldr (2023), has been traveling to Nepal a few times back and forth. He generally travels solo everywhere and enjoys the aesthetic experience of nature. @ChhakMagar1 explains that mandating guided tours should not only viewed from the perspective of tourists, especially solo travelers. Either way, we should evaluate the challenges of solo travel as well as the opportunities of a mandatory guide system equally.

@ChhakMagar1 states,

“[...] guide will have more opportunities second is their own safety.” (@ChhakMagar1, 2023) [TwitterX]

@chhakMagar1 argues that mandating a guide for traveling to Restricted areas is not only for the safety of the tourist but also creates job opportunities in the field of the tourism industry. According to Adedoyin et al. (2022), there is a direct impact of natural disasters to the tourism industry. Therefore, Mihalic (2020) explains how an increase number of tourists can affect the environment gradually like harming the alpine trees leading to erosion and it can trigger natural disasters such as landslides, and avalanches. Upper Mustang may achieve the advantages of tourism while ensuring its long-term economic prosperity and cultural legacy by finding a harmonious equilibrium between economic expansion and environmental conservation.

The socio-economic implications of tourism in Upper Mustang are multifaceted, impacting both local communities and the broader tourism industry. While tourism serves as a vital source of income and employment for many residents, concerns persist regarding issues

such as income inequality, cultural commodification, and environmental degradation. Tourism in Upper Mustang attracts a large number of visitors, which in turn has the potential to generate substantial economic development. This progress is seen in several sectors, beginning with the generating of revenue that distributes wealth across society. The accommodation industry is now thriving, offering locals the chance to either start their own lodging enterprises or secure jobs in the hospitality sector (Hassanli & Ashwell, 2020).

In a similar vein, the food and beverage sector experience a surge in demand, resulting in a higher number of employment opportunities for chefs, waitstaff, and other personnel. In addition, tourism generates a need for local guides and porters, offering them great opportunities to earn revenue. Similarly, Dębicka & Oniszczyk-Jastrzębek (2014) also state that instead of staying in a chain of hotels, travelers on trips with MK Tramping take advantage of the area's resources, transportation, and lodging options. Transportation services flourish due to the demand from visitors who need local modes of transportation for their travels (Virkar & Mallya, 2018). Additionally, the unique handicrafts of Upper Mustang attract visitors, which in turn provides economic aid to local artisans and helps to preserve traditional handicrafts (Nepal, 2000).

Additionally, the cash that is created by tourism catalyzes the development of infrastructure, which ultimately leads to the strengthening of communication networks, the construction of roads, and the improvement of sanitary facilities. Tourist initiatives possess the capacity to not only stimulate economic expansion but also directly contribute to community development by means of investments in critical services such as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and healthcare establishments. However, according to Stikhina et al. (2023), effective tourism management is crucial to ensure the sustainability of these benefits and their fair allocation to a greater proportion of the local population.

#### 4.5.2. Illegal Entry

Despite strict regulations on Solo travel in the Upper Mustang region still many tourists try to enter knowingly or unknowingly without permits. Although restrictions have been implemented not all tourists will follow the regulations. There are many news that record tourists found in the Upper Mustang region without an RAP permit. As Harald Baldr (2023), states tourism in Nepal is very expensive although traveling in Nepal has a different experience.

According to Purpleyam (2013), it costs foreign tourists 500 dollars to get an entry permit. Not all tourists can afford that amount, and some don't want to pay. This high cost can impact many potential budget travelers who wish to visit but find it difficult to pay a high price to enter Upper Mustang. Due to this, some travelers might even disregard the regulations and enter restricted areas to experience what Upper Mustang has to offer. Most of the time due to lack of information travelers are taking such steps whereas some might desire to explore despite of challenges.

An online newspaper publishes news about solo travelers getting caught while entering Upper Mustang Illegally.

“Chinese national Wu Xialong was detained from Lomanthang, Upper Mustang last month for being in the area without obtaining the necessary permit from the authorities.” (myRepublica, 2016) [Online News]

According to myRepublica (2016), two Swiss women, Lea Johanna Burger and Dolores Zoe Berth Thinger, were also arrested in the same area for the same reason (myRepublica, 2016). These foreigners, although possessing visas for staying in Nepal, had failed to acquire permission to travel to Upper Mustang, a semi-restricted zone for foreign tourists. Chief of the Immigration Department in Pokhara Ram Chandra Adhikari has emphasized the rate of such incidents occurrences and the shocking number of visitors to Lomanthang without permits (myRepublica, 2016). He underlined the importance of increased surveillance and close supervision to stop others from entering the forbidden area covertly. Despite the allure of the natural beauty, unique culture, and traditions of the communities living in Upper Mustang, including its caves, gumbas, and palaces, tourists must adhere to regulatory requirements and obtain the necessary permits before venturing into the region.

Despite the restriction due to lack of coordination and loose security on the Upper Mustang region results in a breach. However, effective coordination with local authorities and local people is necessary for better security in Upper Mustang. People enter the Upper Mustang without risking themselves which can affect later to them if any mishappens occurs for the rescue team. Harald Baldr (2023) in his travel vlog mentioned the border of Upper Mustang and Lower Mustang where he mentioned it is very easy to cross the border as there is no one to check. This highlights the major broader issues of inadequate coordination and monitoring

in the monitoring area where there are breaches to travel restriction. This kind of unauthorized border entry not only weakens border control but also risk other travelers and local people living in the area.

There must be an effective coordination among local authorities, local communities, and tourism stakeholders to address these security gaps. By establishing robust monitoring mechanism and implementing stricter enforcement on entry can mitigate risk associated with border breach problems. Such initiatives are not only necessary for saving sensitive ecological and cultural heritage of the region but also to ensure safety among travelers and keeping peace.

“This is the upper mustang boarder as you can see there are no one to check us here” (Harald Baldr, 2023) [YouTube]

This clearly shows us that government authorities are not that serious even after they implement rules that are to be on paper. This shows that governments are more concerned about getting revenue from tourists, but effective implications have not been into places. It has a safety concern related to tourists and these regulations were supposed to keep tourist safe at all times.

## Chapter 6. Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss our findings about the Solo travel ban on Upper Mustang and its effectiveness in promoting responsible tourism in Upper Mustang. Our findings will also, unveil the impact of the solo travel ban on solo travelers' safety. The main objective of the ban on solo travel in the Upper Mustang is to ensure the tourist's safety according to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB, n.d). Upper Mustang is considered a risk destination because of its hard geography and unpredictable weather. This ban aims to reduce the risk by mandating license guides provided by travel agencies. Tourists choose the Upper Mustang because of its extraordinary natural landscape, unique historical culture, and its connecting route to other popular destinations. According to Ruiter (2024), tourists select this destination as the primary choice because of a unique combination of Buddhist and Tibetan traditions which reflects the Tibetan lifestyle.

There are several reasons we have identified from our analysis for the ban on solo travel in Upper Mustang. Firstly, we discuss the positive impact of the ban on solo travel that brings to responsible tourism. By mandating tourists to hire guides and get entry permits, the regulation promotes sustainable tourism development and helps to preserve destination culture and natural heritage. From our analysis, we found that culture, heritage, and environment play the most significant role in attracting tourists. If these aspects are not safe we cannot ensure sustainable tourism in such destinations. Revenue generated from entry fees and guides in tours can help generate economic benefits for local destinations and contribute to the sustainable development of tourist development projects. Therefore, the presence of guides ensures that tourist respects the local customs, and regulations, minimizing the negative impact

From a health and safety perspective also mandating tourists to get a licensed guide from travel agencies will provide significant improvement in tourist safety during their travel. From our respondents, we can understand that traveling in a group has helped them enhance their travel experience as they share their thoughts and experiences along their journey with groups through regular communication. For instance, Shiva Bastakoti, a guide for the Nepali trekking agency Snow Cat Travel, noted that a solo trekker passed away due to acute mountain sickness (AMS) at Everest Base Camp. He believes that if the tourist was traveling with a guide, the result might have been different. Similarly, Ram Chandra Sedai, CEO of the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal, emphasizes that the mandatory use of guides helps

to formalize the work of guides and porters, providing them with improved social security services, better wages, and safer working conditions. Guides possess expert knowledge of the area, including the history, culture, and terrain, which they can share with tourists through engaging storytelling, thereby enriching the travel experience. In emergencies, guides' familiarity with the local terrain and medical facilities is crucial.

From our study, we have identified several negative impacts of the ban on solo travel as well where it ruins the experience of solo travelers where they cannot immerse into nature as they used to. According to one of our observations, we came to light that traveling in groups can also hurt the travel experience. She describes how a tourist in a group must adjust their pace according to their group, which can be frustrating and they cannot enjoy their trek. She also argues that because of this reason, there is a greater risk of having altitude sickness compared to solo trekking. Additionally, traveling in groups or organized groups might be concentrated towards larger businesses rather than local, small businesses due to its group preference nature.

For many tourists, the attraction of adventure and discovery is linked to the freedom of self-travel. Because finding guides and getting permits might be more difficult and cost more, these tourists might look for places where they can move more easily and cheaply. The impact of this change on local businesses that rely on tourism earnings might be negative since it could lead to fewer visitors visiting Upper Mustang. The limitation on solo travel and the entrance price for permits have significant economic consequences. Upper Mustang's economy is mostly driven by tourism, which also greatly supports local jobs. Because the area relies heavily on tourism, any decrease in tourist numbers may have a significant effect on the local economy. The compulsory employment of certified guides and the accompanying permit charges contribute to the total expenses of visiting Upper Mustang, possibly dissuading cost-conscious visitors and those who choose self-directed travel.

For businesses in the local market, the limit can be both good and bad. While it gives guides and workers jobs, it may also make it harder for people to start their own businesses or run their own tourist projects, which could hurt the economic diversity and stability of local communities. Also, tourists who like to travel alone might choose other places with fewer rules, which could mean less money for Upper Mustang from tourists. The price of licenses and organized trips could keep tourists on a tight budget, which would lower the general number

of guests and have an effect on the local business. India, Bhutan, and Tibet, which are close to Nepal, have similar environmental and cultural draws, but travel is more or less limited in those places. For example, India is a good option for tourists because it has a lot of different types of landscapes, a lot of cultural history, and not many rules about traveling. Ladakh in northern India is a similar mix of Tibetan culture and beautiful Himalayan scenery, but you don't have to go on a strict tour and pay a lot of money for a pass.

The solo travel ban, while beneficial in promoting responsible tourism and ensuring safety, has mixed economic impacts on local communities. The requirement to hire licensed guides and obtain permits supports sustainable tourism development and cultural preservation but also poses challenges for independent travelers and local businesses. The overall impact of the ban on tourism and local communities underscores the need for a balanced approach to tourism management that addresses both the benefits and drawbacks of the current regulatory framework.

However, from our analysis, we identified that people consider the ban on solo travel to have a greater adverse effect on the tourism industry of Nepal Overall. But we should take a step back and look into the consequences of over-tourism in the Himalayas where there was long traffic of tourists trying to climb Everest. We can see the current situation of global warming where most of the world takes the example of Everest's height declining due to global warming and over-tourism. We must take the example of other countries like Italy, the Netherlands, and Japan where over tourism has already caused significant damage to the destination. We can learn from their steps to tackle these problems where they limit the tourists and even restrict certain areas from visiting. In our opinion, we also think that we should not only think of the present situation but also have to think about the future which relies on nature.

## Reflection

We have always been fascinated by the idea of conducting tourism research on our homeland about current issues, as Nepali students. Our primary objective is to identify a captivating topic that has not been previously investigated. We have reached a mutual understanding that we should conduct our investigation on the Upper Mustang and the Solo Travel prohibition with entry permits after discussing a variety of topics. Consequently, we engaged in informal conversation. I have decided to visit Upper Mustang for my next holiday. However, we recently learned that this destination is prohibited for solitary foreign tourists.



Therefore, we decided to comprehend the prohibition of this location among international individual travelers. It was quite challenging for us to locate relevant literature as none of the researchers had conducted studies on the same issue. However, with the guidance of our supervisor, we dissect the subject matter and begin our work on it.

Working together on many projects together before made collaboration easy. We split the work of the project and spoke about our contributions at the same time. This cooperative strategy turned out to be very helpful in enabling us to exchange thoughts and information. Comparably, collecting data for this specific subject presented serious difficulties, which led us to investigate Netnography as our supervisor recommended. Using Netnography, one may collect qualitative data pertinent to a certain research subject by examining online communities and interactions. By use of this approach, we were able to explore social media, internet forums, and other digital venues where people interact with the subject matter. This method gives us insightful information and viewpoints that support our study endeavors.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion

Ultimately, this research has examined the consequences of prohibiting solo travel in Upper Mustang on both the tourist sector and the local population. The results indicate that the prohibition has played a role in establishing a tourist model that is more environmentally friendly and promotes responsible tourism. However, it has adverse effects on local businesses and solo travelers where both of them are directly related to each other. Our research emphasizes the need for taking economic and social aspects into account while implementing new regulations. From our analysis, we have identified that restriction on solo travel has consequently resulted in decreased trade for local businesses. The ban on solo travel in Upper Mustang has demonstrably reduced safety risks for tourists trekking in this region. Tourists are getting information about the safe time for traveling to Upper Mustang when there is less risk of calamities. Therefore, the rule guarantees that trekkers have someone with them who has a thorough understanding of the location, including the topography, risk factors, and emergency procedures, which allows them to improve safety by requiring foreign visitors to be accompanied by licensed guides. However, the mandatory guide system has also created employment opportunities for porters and guides that help to promote responsible tourism. There are still complex relationships between tourists, local people, and the environment that need further research. The study's findings also, highlight the necessity of more research on the social and economic effects of tourism tactics on nearby communities.

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