

सङ्ग्रहालय

# The Museum

(JOURNAL OF MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE STUDIES)

Volume 2 | 2026



**ICOM** international  
council  
of museums  
Nepal (नेपाल)  
ICOM Nepal



Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation  
Narayanhiti Palace Museum and Republican  
Monument Management and Operation  
Development Committee

Narayanhiti Palace Museum



— सङ्ग्रहालय —

# The Museum

(JOURNAL OF MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE STUDIES)

Volume 2 | 2026

**Published by**

**ICOM** international  
council  
of museums  
Nepal (नेपाल)  
ICOM Nepal

In Association with



Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation  
Narayanhiti Palace Museum and Republican  
Monument Management and Operation  
Development Committee

Narayanhiti Palace Museum

**Publication Partnership**



Chumnuhari Rural Municipality  
Sirdibas, Gorkha  
Gandaki Province



## **ICOM Nepal**

ICOM Nepal is the national committee of Nepal of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), dedicated to the promotion and development of museums and heritage practices in Nepal. It works to strengthen research, professional standards, advocacy and international collaboration in the museum sector.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City -16, Chhetrapati

Katmandu, Nepal

**Email:** [icomnepal@gmail.com](mailto:icomnepal@gmail.com)

[www.icomnepal.org.np](http://www.icomnepal.org.np)

---

## **Narayanhiti Palace Museum**

Narayanhiti Palace Museum, operated by the Development Board of the Government of Nepal, is the former royal palace built in 1963 and converted into a museum in 2008 after Nepal became a republic. It displays artifacts related to the royal family, including the throne and palace structures, and is among the most visited museums in Nepal.

Durbar Marga, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Email:** [info.narayanhiti@gmail.com](mailto:info.narayanhiti@gmail.com)

[www.narayanhitipalacemuseum.com](http://www.narayanhitipalacemuseum.com)

## Foreword

ICOM Nepal is glad to bring out the second annual edition of *The Museum Journal*, (*Journal of Museums and Heritage Studies*). It has published by ICOM Nepal in association with the Narayanhiti Palace Museum. It has aimed to promote and disseminate the knowledge of museum, cultural heritage and other related activities, about Nepali museums. Since its inaugural publication last year, this journal has been established as a vital platform to disseminate knowledge, research and professional dialogue about the museums and heritage fields. It was conceived not merely as a publication, it is a dynamic forum to connect practitioners, scholars and institutions committed to advancing these disciplines.

It has been recognizing the growing importance of present Nepal's museum discourse for the global audience. In this year, the Journal issue has published in English language. The breadth of topics has tried to explore the complex and evolving challenges faced by museum professionals today, bringing together a diverse collection of articles which has engaged critically with the most pressing contemporary issues in the field.

We thank sincerely to each author, editor, reviewer, advisor and their team for their contribution to produce the knowledge resources of museum and cultural heritage as a research journal. Their scholarly contributions and teamwork have been made valuable to this journal. ICOM Nepal is enthusiastic to promote research, advocacy and sharing of knowledge on museum sector. In our view, we are confident that these types of little contribution will help to enhance museum field as a valuable and significant. We believe that The Museum Journal will continue to be an active forum to have proper dialogue and cultural learning at the national and international level in future.

Ramesh Prasad Dawadi  
President  
ICOM Nepal

## Editorial

We are pleased to offer the second volume of *The Museum (संग्रहालय)* (*Journal of Museums and Heritage Studies*) published by the International Council of Museums Nepal (ICOM Nepal) in Association with the Narayanhiti palace Museum. The journal features writers' diverse articles reflect on the current trend and developments in the discourse of museums and heritage. In this journal, eight articles cover various topics such as museum communication, conservation, intangible cultural heritage and museum and the challenges faced by museums in fast evolving society.

The articles reflect on the changed erythematic role of the museum and museum's role of space of dialogue, inclusive institution and knowledge provider. What is also worth mentioning is that this issue is produced in English: we decided to publish in English to promote the Museum Narratives of Nepal to the rest of the world as well as to encourage mutual learning outside the local context.

The articles in this issue show both the scholars' critical thinking and their professional experience. This is an issue of shared knowledge and professionalism. Many thanks to all our authors, high esteem reviewers and advisors, without their contribution it would be impossible to release this issue.

As we continue our journey, The Museum (संग्रहालय) hopes to develop as a trusted and prominent platform for discussion, research, and innovation. We hope this publication will stimulate additional research, collaboration and support the ongoing development of the museum and cultural heritage sector in Nepal and elsewhere.



## Advisor

Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha

## Editorial Team

Dr. Madhu Sudan Neupane

Dr. Shree Ram Khanal

Mr. Om Prakash Ghimire

© ICOM Nepal 2026. All rights reserved.

---

## Disclaimer

The Publication Team and Editorial Board of this journal have made the possible effort to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and quality of the information, facts, and details presented in this journal. However, the articles and writings published herein solely represent the personal views and opinions of the respective authors. Neither the publisher nor the institutions affiliated with the authors shall be held responsible for the content expressed in these contributions.

Any article or portion thereof published in this journal may be cited, or utilized for educational, research, public interest, and other non-commercial purposes, provided that proper acknowledgment and citation of the original source are clearly made. Unauthorized commercial use or reproduction without prior permission from the publisher is prohibited.

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

1. Museum: The Place of Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - <b>Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha</b>	<b>2</b>
2. Exploring the Museum as Transformative Arena of Well-Being Through Buddhist Wisdom in Lumbini - <b>Om Prakash Ghimire</b>	<b>18</b>
3. Visitors' Attachments and the Future of Patan Museum - <b>Ramesh Raj Poudel</b>	<b>35</b>
4. Digital Transformation of Museum Communication: Global Shifts and Emerging Landscape of Nepal - <b>Reeta Thapaliya</b>	<b>47</b>
5. Kankrebihar as a Living Open-Air Museum: Preserving Heritage through Knowledge Transfer - <b>Tribhuvan BC / Himal Gaire</b>	<b>63</b>
6. Role of International Mountain Museum in Promoting SDGs through Geo-tourism and Geo-education - <b>Jinesh Sindurakar</b>	<b>76</b>
7. Strengthening Museum Governance with Legal Reform in Nepal - <b>Pabitra Thapaliya</b>	<b>92</b>
8. Scientific Preservation of Kumari Chowk Records as Archival Papers in Nepal: A Scientific Approach - <b>Shobha Nani Shakya</b>	<b>109</b>
9. TSUM: A Community-Led Heritage Preservation	<b>122</b>
10. Narayanhiti Palace Museum	<b>126</b>

# MUSEUM: THE PLACE OF SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

**Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha**

Executive Director

Narayanhiti Palace Museum

Joint Secretary/Head, Culture Division, MoCTCA

sureshsuras@yahoo.com

## Abstract

*Museums have traditionally been perceived as institutions dedicated to the collection, preservation, and display of tangible cultural heritage. However, their role has significantly evolved to include the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH)—living traditions, expressions, knowledge, and skills recognized by communities as part of their cultural identity. This article critically examines the role of museums as dynamic spaces for safeguarding ICH, focusing on conceptual frameworks, institutional practices, community engagement, and contemporary challenges; using established theoretical frameworks and international conventions. It argues that museums must transform into participatory, community-centered institutions to effectively safeguard living heritage.*

**Keywords :** Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Community, Safeguarding, UNESCO, Documentation and Museums

## 1. Introduction

The concept of cultural heritage has undergone a paradigm shift, especially after the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Traditionally, museums were object-centered institutions; however, the increasing recognition of intangible cultural heritage has expanded their scope. Intangible cultural heritage includes oral

traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge systems. Museums are now expected to function not only as repositories of objects but also as active agents in safeguarding living cultural practices.

### **1.1 Conceptualizing Intangible Cultural Heritage in Museums**

The conceptualization of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) within museums represents a significant epistemological and methodological shift in the field of museology. Unlike tangible heritage, which is object-based and physically preservable, ICH is inherently dynamic, performative, and embedded in the lived experiences of communities. According to UNESCO (2003), ICH encompasses “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills” that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, highlighting its living and evolving nature. This definition fundamentally challenges traditional museum paradigms that prioritize the collection and conservation of material objects (Kurin, 2004).

Museums have historically functioned as repositories of artifacts, operating within a framework that privileges authenticity, materiality, and permanence. However, the incorporation of ICH necessitates a shift toward what scholars describe as “process-oriented museology,” where the focus moves from objects to cultural processes and practices (Harrison, 2013). This transformation is closely aligned with the broader movement of “new museology,” which critiques the authoritative and colonial legacies of traditional museums and advocates for more inclusive, participatory, and socially engaged approaches (Smith, 2006). Within this framework, museums are reimagined as spaces of dialogue, co-creation, and cultural exchange rather than mere custodians of static collections.

One of the central challenges in conceptualizing ICH in museums lies in its intangibility. Since ICH cannot be collected or stored in the conventional sense, museums must rely on alternative methods such as documentation, audiovisual recording, and digital archiving. These methods, while useful, raise

important questions about representation, authenticity, and context. As Kurin (2004) argues, any attempt to “fix” ICH in a recorded form risks detaching it from its social and cultural context, potentially leading to its misinterpretation or commodification. Therefore, museums must adopt reflexive and context-sensitive approaches that acknowledge the limitations of documentation.

Furthermore, the role of communities is central to the conceptualization of ICH. The UNESCO (2003) Convention explicitly emphasizes that communities, groups, and individuals are the primary bearers and creators of intangible heritage. This perspective challenges the traditional authority of museums as knowledge producers and calls for a redistribution of power toward community stakeholders. Participatory museology, which involves communities in decision-making processes, exhibition design, and interpretation, has emerged as a key strategy in this regard (Smith, 2006). Such approaches not only enhance the authenticity and relevance of museum representations but also contribute to the empowerment of cultural practitioners.

Another important dimension is the performative nature of ICH. Cultural practices such as rituals, festivals, music, and oral traditions are not static entities but are continuously recreated in response to changing social contexts. Museums must therefore move beyond static displays and create dynamic platforms that facilitate live performances, demonstrations, and interactive experiences (Harrison, 2013). This shift transforms museums into “living institutions” that actively support the transmission and revitalization of cultural practices.

In addition, the integration of digital technologies has opened new possibilities for conceptualizing and safeguarding ICH. Digital platforms enable the documentation, dissemination, and sharing of cultural practices across geographical boundaries, thereby enhancing accessibility and visibility (UNESCO, 2003). However, this also introduces ethical concerns related to intellectual property rights, consent, and cultural sensitivity. Museums must

navigate these complexities by adopting ethical guidelines and ensuring that digital initiatives are community-driven and culturally appropriate (Kurin, 2004).

In conclusion, conceptualizing ICH in museums requires a fundamental rethinking of museum theory and practice. It demands a shift from object-centered to people-centered approaches, from preservation to safeguarding, and from authority to collaboration. By embracing these changes, museums can play a vital role in sustaining living heritage while respecting the rights and identities of the communities that create and maintain it.

## **1.2 International Frameworks and Policy Context**

The UNESCO 2003 Convention emphasizes community participation, respect for cultural diversity, and sustainable safeguarding practices. Museums are increasingly aligning their policies with these principles. The Convention provides a comprehensive framework for safeguarding ICH, emphasizing community participation, respect for cultural diversity, and sustainable practices (UNESCO, 2003).

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has also recognized the importance of ICH in redefining museum functions in the 21st century. It has incorporated ICH into its evolving museum definitions, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and community engagement (ICOM, 2019).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The concept of safeguarding UNESCO-defined Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has gained significant global attention, particularly after the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention emphasizes that ICH is a living heritage expressed through practices, representations, knowledge, and skills that are continuously recreated by communities. However, despite this recognition, the practical integration of ICH safeguarding within museum institutions remains a complex and insufficiently addressed issue.

Traditionally, museums have been oriented towards the collection, preservation, and exhibition of tangible heritage. Their institutional frameworks, professional practices, and display methodologies have largely focused on physical objects rather than living cultural expressions. As a result, many museums struggle to effectively represent, interpret, and safeguard intangible dimensions such as oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, and traditional knowledge systems. This creates a fundamental mismatch between the dynamic nature of ICH and the static, object-centered nature of conventional museum practices.

In the context of countries like Nepal, where cultural heritage is deeply embedded in living traditions, community practices, and ritual performances, this gap becomes even more pronounced. Although Nepal is rich in intangible heritage, museums have yet to fully embrace their potential role as active spaces for safeguarding ICH. Limited policy frameworks, lack of community participation, insufficient documentation systems, and inadequate use of innovative interpretation methods further exacerbate the problem.

Moreover, there is a lack of clear conceptual understanding and practical guidelines on how museums can transform from object-based repositories into dynamic cultural spaces that support the safeguarding of living heritage. The absence of integrated approaches that connect tangible and intangible heritage, along with limited case-based research in the Nepali context, highlights a critical gap in both theory and practice.

Therefore, the core problem addressed in this study is the limited capacity and evolving role of museums in effectively safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, particularly in contexts where living heritage forms the foundation of cultural identity. This study seeks to explore how museums can reimagine their functions, adopt participatory approaches, and develop innovative strategies to serve as meaningful platforms for the safeguarding of ICH.

### **3. Objectives**

The overall objective of this study is to explore and analyze the role of museums as dynamic spaces for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH), in line

with the principles of UNESCO and the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The specific objectives of this article are as follows:

- a. To examine the conceptual relationship between museums and intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the context of evolving museum practices.
- b. To analyze the traditional roles and limitations of museums in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.
- c. To assess the current status and practices of museums in Nepal in relation to the safeguarding of ICH.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the evolving role of museums in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Given the interpretive and contextual nature of ICH, qualitative methods are considered most appropriate for understanding the relationship between museums, communities, and living heritage practices.

The study is primarily based on descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to describe existing practices and critically analyze the capacity of museums to function as spaces for safeguarding ICH. The research is guided by the conceptual frameworks provided by UNESCO, particularly the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The study is based on descriptive and analytical research design. It not only describes existing museum practices but also critically examines their effectiveness in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The research is guided by the conceptual and operational frameworks of UNESCO, particularly the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ensuring alignment with internationally recognized standards.

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data is collected through informal interviews, expert consultations, and interactions

with museum professionals, cultural heritage experts, and community representatives. These interactions help to understand practical challenges, levels of community participation, and the institutional roles of museums in safeguarding ICH. Secondary data includes books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, museum reports, and international guidelines, which are used to examine conceptual frameworks, review international practices, and analyze policy contexts related to ICH safeguarding.



**Secondary data includes books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, museum reports, and international guidelines, which are used to examine conceptual frameworks, review international practices, and analyze policy contexts related to ICH safeguarding.**

In terms of data collection methods, the study employs multiple qualitative approaches. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to explore the conceptual relationship between museums and ICH, as well as to understand theoretical debates and evolving museological practices. Policy and document analysis are also undertaken, including international conventions, operational directives, and institutional policies, in order to examine global frameworks and standards for safeguarding ICH. The key informant consultations through informal discussions with experts and practitioners provide valuable insights into institutional challenges, limitations, and opportunities for integrating ICH into museum practices.

The data collected is analyzed using a thematic and interpretive approach. The analysis is guided by key themes derived from the research objectives, including the conceptual understanding of ICH in museums, institutional roles and limitations, community participation and ownership, safeguarding practices and strategies, and policy as well as practical challenges. A comparative perspective is also applied to relate international best practices with the Nepali

context, thereby identifying existing gaps and potential opportunities for improvement.

The study primarily focuses on qualitative interpretation and selected case studies rather than large-scale empirical investigation. Due to limitations of time and resources, it relies significantly on secondary data and limited field interactions. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable; however, they provide valuable conceptual and practical insights into the role of museums in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

## **5. Scope and Limitations**

The study mainly focuses on conceptual understanding and selected case examples rather than extensive field-based empirical research. Due to time and resource constraints, the research relies more on qualitative interpretation and secondary data, which may limit the generalization of findings.

## **6. Museum as a place of safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Museums are no longer static institutions; they are becoming “living spaces” where culture is performed, transmitted, and experienced. Through live demonstrations, cultural festivals, storytelling sessions, and workshops, museums provide platforms for practitioners to share their knowledge and skills. Activities such as live demonstrations, festivals, and storytelling sessions enable museums to actively engage with ICH practitioners and audiences (Kurin, 2004). This transformation aligns with the concept of the “new museology,” which emphasizes participation and social relevance (Smith, 2006).

The role of museums as institutions for safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has gained increasing scholarly and practical attention in recent decades. Traditionally, museums were primarily concerned with the acquisition, conservation, and exhibition of tangible objects. However, with the growing recognition of ICH—defined by UNESCO (2003) as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills” transmitted across generations—museums

are undergoing a significant transformation in both their theoretical orientation and operational practices. This shift reflects a broader redefinition of heritage from static, material culture to dynamic, living traditions embedded within communities (Smith, 2006).

Museums today are increasingly understood as “cultural spaces” rather than mere repositories of objects. According to Kurin (2004), safeguarding ICH is not about preserving cultural expressions in a frozen state but about ensuring their viability and continued transmission within their original social contexts. This perspective requires museums to move beyond object-centered approaches and adopt safeguarding strategies that support living cultural practices. Such strategies include facilitating performances, organizing festivals, and creating platforms for cultural practitioners to actively engage with audiences (Harrison, 2013).

A critical aspect of museums’ role in safeguarding ICH is documentation and archiving. Since ICH is inherently intangible and ephemeral, museums rely on methods such as audio-visual recordings, oral history projects, and ethnographic documentation to capture cultural expressions (UNESCO, 2003). These documentation practices are essential for research, education, and intergenerational transmission. However, scholars caution that documentation should not replace the living practice itself; rather, it should complement community-based safeguarding efforts (Kurin, 2004). The risk of



**A critical aspect of museums’ role in safeguarding ICH is documentation and archiving. Since ICH is inherently intangible and ephemeral, museums rely on methods such as audio-visual recordings, oral history projects, and ethnographic documentation to capture cultural expressions (UNESCO, 2003).**

decontextualization where cultural practices are removed from their original meanings and settings—remains a significant concern (Harrison, 2013).

Community participation is widely recognized as the cornerstone of effective ICH safeguarding. The UNESCO (2003) Convention explicitly emphasizes the central role of communities, groups, and individuals as the bearers of intangible heritage. In this context, museums must adopt participatory approaches that involve communities in all stages of heritage management, including identification, documentation, interpretation, and presentation. Participatory museology challenges traditional power dynamics by shifting authority from institutions to communities, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment (Smith, 2006).

Education and public engagement are also key functions of museums in safeguarding ICH. Museums serve as important platforms for raising awareness about cultural diversity and promoting respect for different cultural expressions. Through exhibitions, workshops, educational programs, and interactive displays, museums can facilitate the transmission of knowledge and skills to younger generations (ICOM, 2019). These educational initiatives contribute to the sustainability of ICH by ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary society.

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies has further expanded the capacity of museums to safeguard ICH. Digital archives, virtual exhibitions, and online platforms enable museums to document and disseminate cultural practices on a global scale (Harrison, 2013). Technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) provide immersive experiences that can simulate cultural environments and practices. However, the use of digital technologies also raises ethical issues related to intellectual property rights, cultural sensitivity, and community consent. Museums must therefore adopt ethical frameworks that prioritize the rights and interests of cultural bearers (UNESCO, 2003; Kurin, 2004).

Despite these advancements, museums face several challenges in safeguarding ICH. These include limited financial and human resources, lack of specialized expertise, and institutional constraints rooted in traditional museological practices. Additionally, the commodification of culture—particularly in the context of tourism, poses a risk to the authenticity and integrity of ICH (Smith, 2006). Museums must navigate these challenges by adopting innovative, flexible, and context-sensitive approaches that balance preservation with cultural dynamism.

Furthermore, the concept of the “museum as a living institution” has emerged as a key paradigm in contemporary museology. This concept emphasizes the role of museums as active participants in cultural life, rather than passive observers. By hosting live performances, supporting cultural practitioners, and engaging with communities, museums can create dynamic environments that foster the transmission and revitalization of ICH (Harrison, 2013). Such approaches align with the principles of sustainable development, which recognize culture as a vital component of social and economic well-being (UNESCO, 2003).

In conclusion, museums have the potential to play a transformative role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. However, this requires a fundamental rethinking of their functions, methodologies, and relationships with communities. By embracing participatory approaches, leveraging digital technologies, and adhering to ethical principles, museums can effectively contribute to the sustainability of living heritage. Ultimately, the success of museums in safeguarding ICH depends on their ability to adapt to changing cultural contexts while remaining grounded in the values and practices of the communities they serve.

## **Documentation and Digitization**

Documentation plays a crucial role in safeguarding ICH. It is a key safeguarding measure for ICH. Museums use audio-visual recordings, digital archives, and databases to record intangible practices. Museums employ digital technologies such as video recording, digital archives, and online platforms to document and disseminate cultural practices (Harrison, 2013). Digitization enhances

accessibility and ensures long-term preservation, although it raises questions about authenticity and ownership (Smith, 2006).

### **Community Participation and Ownership**

Museums must collaborate with cultural bearers. Community-based approaches Community involvement is central to the safeguarding of ICH. Museums must collaborate with cultural bearers respecting their knowledge systems and ensure their active participation in decision-making processes (UNESCO, 2003). Community-based approaches promote ownership, empower local stakeholders and promote sustainable safeguarding practices. (Kurin, 2004).

### **Education and Interpretation**

Museums play a crucial educational role by interpreting and communicating ICH to diverse audiences. Educational programs, workshops, and exhibitions help raise awareness and foster appreciation among younger generations (ICOM, 2019). This contributes to the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge (UNESCO, 2003).

### **Case Studies and Best Practices**

Eco-museums and community museums have demonstrated effective models for safeguarding ICH. These institutions emphasize local participation, cultural continuity, and sustainable development (Kurin, 2004). They provide valuable lessons for mainstream museums seeking to integrate ICH into their practices.

In Nepal, museums and related cultural institutions have increasingly engaged in the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), it is still evolving within a broader transition from object-centered to community-centered museology. These institutions demonstrate a range of approaches that align with international frameworks while remaining rooted in local cultural contexts. The following case studies highlight best practices and illustrate how ICH safeguarding is being operationalized in Nepal.

One of the most prominent examples is the Hanumandhoka Durbar Museum complex in Kathmandu, which functions as a living heritage space where major cultural festivals such as Indra Jatra and Kumari Jatra are actively performed. These events are not merely exhibited but continue as community-led practices supported by traditional institutions such as the Guthi system. The museum space facilitates these practices by preserving the architectural setting and ritual environment necessary for their continuity, thus embodying the concept of “living heritage” (UNESCO, 2003; Shrestha, 2020).

Similarly, Narayanhiti Palace Museum represents an important example of how museums can safeguard intangible dimensions of national history and identity. Beyond its role as a former royal palace, the museum documents royal rituals, state ceremonies, and political transformations through archival materials and interpretive narratives. These elements contribute to the preservation of intangible aspects of Nepal’s socio-political heritage (Department of Archaeology, 2020).

Another significant institution is Patan Museum, widely recognized for its innovative interpretive strategies. The museum goes beyond displaying artifacts by contextualizing them within the living traditions of Newar culture, particularly metal craftsmanship and religious practices. By collaborating with local artisans and incorporating traditional knowledge systems into its exhibitions, the museum actively contributes to the safeguarding and transmission of ICH (ICOM, 2019; Toffin, 2011).

Taragaon Museum also plays a notable role in documenting and presenting intangible heritage through visual archives and narrative storytelling. Its extensive photographic collections capture diverse cultural practices, rituals, and everyday life across Nepal, offering valuable documentation of ICH. The museum’s approach demonstrates how non-traditional museum formats can contribute to safeguarding through innovative curatorial practices (Hutt, 2014).

In the context of religious and pilgrimage heritage, Lumbini Development Trust provides an important model. As the managing body of the Lumbini World

Heritage Site, it supports ongoing Buddhist rituals, meditation practices, and pilgrimage traditions. These living practices form an integral part of the site's significance and illustrate how institutional frameworks can sustain ICH within a global heritage context (UNESCO, 2003; Giri, 2018).

Furthermore, the traditional Guthi system represents a unique indigenous institutional mechanism for safeguarding ICH in Nepal. Guthis are responsible for organizing festivals, maintaining temples, and ensuring the continuity of ritual practices. Their collaboration with museums and heritage institutions offers a hybrid model of safeguarding that combines formal and informal systems (Shrestha, 2020).

These examples collectively demonstrate that museums in Nepal are gradually transforming into community-oriented, participatory institutions that support living heritage. However, challenges remain, including limited resources, lack of specialized expertise, and insufficient policy frameworks. Addressing these challenges will require stronger institutional coordination, community engagement, and the integration of digital technologies (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013).

Nepali museums and related institutions provide valuable case studies in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Their practices highlight the importance of contextual, community-driven approaches and offer insights for both national and international heritage management discourse.

### **Museums and Cultural Sustainability**

Several museums worldwide have successfully integrated ICH safeguarding into their practices. Safeguarding ICH contributes to cultural sustainability by ensuring the transmission of knowledge and practices to future generations. Open-air museums, eco-museums, and community museums are particularly effective in preserving living traditions. Museums play a vital role in supporting this process through documentation, education, and community engagement (UNESCO, 2003).

Despite their evolving role, museums face several challenges in safeguarding ICH. These include the difficulty of representing dynamic cultural practices, risks of commodification and misrepresentation, limited institutional capacity and resources, and ethical concerns regarding ownership and intellectual property rights (Harrison, 2013). Addressing these challenges requires innovative and inclusive approaches (Smith, 2006).

### **The Role of Technology**

Emerging technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality and digital storytelling are transforming how museums engage with ICH. These tools enable immersive experiences and broaden access to cultural content (Harrison, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues such as consent, representation, and benefit-sharing are critical in safeguarding of the ICH. Museums must adopt a rights-based approach that prioritizes the interests and perspectives of communities (UNESCO, 2003; Kurin, 2004).

## **7. Conclusion**

Museums are at a critical juncture where they must redefine their roles to remain relevant. The integration of ICH into museum practices represents a significant shift towards inclusivity and sustainability. While progress has been made, there is still a need for stronger institutional frameworks and community-centered approaches (Smith, 2006). Museums must redefine their roles to remain relevant in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. The integration of ICH into museum practices requires a shift toward participatory, community-centered, and ethically grounded approaches.

Museums have the potential to serve as powerful institutions for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. However, achieving this requires a transformation in their philosophy, structure, and practices. By embracing community participation, technological innovation, and ethical responsibility, museums can effectively contribute to the safeguarding of living heritage (UNESCO, 2003).

The future of museums lies in their ability to adapt to changing cultural dynamics and technological contexts. Interdisciplinary approaches and fostering global collaboration will be essential for effective safeguarding of ICH (ICOM, 2019).

By aligning with international frameworks such as those of UNESCO, and embracing innovation and collaboration, museums can play a transformative role in safeguarding living heritage.

## References

- Department of Archaeology. (2020). *Annual report*. Government of Nepal.
- Giri, G. (2018). *Cultural heritage and tourism in Lumbini*. Kathmandu: Heritage Publications.
- Harrison, R. (2013). *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge Publication, London.
- Hutt, M. (2014). *Himalayan cultural heritage studies*. Oxford University Press. United Kingdom.
- ICOM. (2019). *Museum definition, prospects and potentials*. International Council of Museums.
- ICOM (2019). *Museum Definition and ICH Framework*, International Council of Museums.
- Kurin, R. (2004). Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: A Critical Appraisal, *Museum International*, 56(1-2), 66-77.
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge Publication, London.
- Shrestha, S. S. (2020). *Cultural heritage conservation practices in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Culture.
- Toffin, G. (2011). *Newar society: City, Village and Periphery*. Himal Books, Kathmandu.
- UNESCO (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO Publishing.

# EXPLORING THE MUSEUM AS TRANSFORMATIVE ARENA OF WELL-BEING THROUGH BUDDHIST WISDOM IN LUMBINI

**Om Prakash Ghimire**

(Museologist / Secretary, ICOM Nepal)  
prakashdocument@gmail.com

## Abstract

*Nepal has ancient cultures and traditions that represents the values of compassion, peace and moral performance that were influenced form the Buddhist wisdom which has appeared in the Himalayas more than 2,500 years ago as the place where Buddha was born. Lumbini is an important spiritual and historical landmark of this universe. As per the international museological principles, museums in national heritage landscapes are essential places for distributing Buddhist teachings and promoting learning, discussion and cross-cultural understanding. The methodical incorporation of fundamental Buddhist principles such as compassion, mindfulness and non-violence into museum understanding to address current social issues is still scarce. This study has used qualitative methods for multidisciplinary case study. This research takes part policy analysis, interpretive exhibition evaluation, secondary data analysis and literature review. The results demonstrate that the Lumbini Museum's has big potential and it in transformative location that takes advantage of current traveler for motivating visitor's participation to extend stay times in Nepal to improve heritage narratives. It is integrating understandings of Tilaurakot (ancient Kapilvastu), wellness initiatives and low-cost outreach tactics, the museum can transform Lumbini from a quick tourist end point into a fully immersive spiritual and cultural experience. In the end, the Lumbini Museum indicates a shift away from object-centered exhibits and toward education that is placed on experiences and values. It provides a valuable model for museums that address both heritage protection and current societal needs by cheering self-examination, emotional engagement and cross-cultural dialogue through mindfulness-oriented explanation.*

**Keywords** : Buddhist wisdom, Museum visitors, Well-being, Lumbini Museum, Tourists.

## 1. Introduction

Nepal is the land of an ancient, rich cultural and spiritual that values peace, compassion and a way of life based on benefit. The philosophy of Buddhism has been originated in Nepal over 2,500 years ago which offers philosophical ideas about the alleviation of suffering with the resolution of social conflicts (Gethin;1998). Being the land of the Buddha means even more for Buddhist's disciple living elsewhere in the world. In this context, the life of the Buddha forms a pilgrim and tourist destination, especially Lumbini and the surrounding archaeological sites and world heritage environment. These heritage sites have offered best venues for recital of Buddhist stories, they have provided a variety of images, relics and histories that encompass the supreme concepts of the teachings (Coningham & Young; 2015).

Museums has situated in these heritage contexts that can effectively act to communicate Buddhist philosophy worldwide, which has under the definition of the International Council of Museums, means museums collect, conserve, interpret and display the tangible and intangible evidence of our past for the education of present and future generations (ICOM, 2022). International Museum Day 2026 (commemorated on the 18th of May) is centered around the convincing theme of 'Museums Uniting a Divided World', announced by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). It is focusing on the role of museums as vital institutions to connect worlds, cultures, societies and countries that emphasizes the importance of providing a platform for meaningful encounters, dialogue and peace in gradually divisive world (ICOM, 2026).

Buddhist philosophy guides for spiritual motivation that promotes kindness-karma, compassion, and equanimity and offers a path to inner and outer peace. Museums become well centers for wisdoms that are permeated to promote for non-violence and peaceful co-existence (peace) and interconnectedness (harmony), as championed by UN SDGs 10, 16, 17 and giving power to communities over inclusive programs, adapting to climate change, reducing

inequality, and building resilient societies (Carbone; 2025). The slogan of International Museum Day 2026 and the Buddhist teachings thus uplift, transform museums from the storehouses to sanctuaries of healing and unity. This paper reflects on the way in which museums in the birthplace of Buddha, Lumbini might work to act as sites of peace education, cultural diplomacy and social engagement through the interpretation of Buddhist heritage and wisdom (Lucchiari et al., 2024).

## **Museums and Well-Being**

Museums are the institutions which preserve cultural property, civic places that serve as a place to exhibit ethical sensibilities, collective memory and intercultural communication in a multicultural society. According to Apsel et al. (2024), now a day, museums are paying attention to contribute for peacebuilding motives in everyday life of the people and the functioning of societies. Museum arises knowledge from the exhibitions and education that suggests language, friendliness and awareness among visitors and contribute for cultural education towards the peace.

Museums are known as social and cultural institutions and use their exhibitions, education programs and community programs to foster awareness about issues concerning human rights, and cultural diversity. There are some evidence to suggest that museum environments lower stress and anxiety which can assist in reflection and emotional experiences of cultural heritage through activities like mindfulness-programmes, art therapy projects and reflective exhibition work and increased visitor well-being and positive engagement with cultural narratives (Filipowska et al., 2024).

Academics engaged in peace studies have been examining for the most part how those Buddhist teachings that relate to ethical practices may help contemporary efforts to resolve conflicts and establish peace internationally (Gethin 1998). Thus, the focus on compassion and morality on Buddhist doctrine seems to conform with current peace education programs promoting understanding and faith among different societies (Loy, 2015). Museums that

interpret the Buddhist heritage clearly have the work of helping their visitors to understand the philosophy.

Museums are becoming places that encourage self-examination about the need for peace, turning inactive observation into active social replication and healing. Nepal's Lumbini as a museum plays a unique role, in this regard visitors are involved as both participants in ethical reflection and observers of heritage. By showcasing the Noble Truths of the Buddha alongside fundamental Buddhist concepts like compassion (*karuna*), mindfulness (*sati*) and non-violence (*Ahimsa*), the museum has critically examined the effective teachings methodology that can be internalized to address contemporary issues. It poses a crucial query about moral consciousness that has to be developed to address contemporary conflicts like social unrest and international polarization. according to Harvey (2013), it has to be resolved by the interpretive display of spiritual and philosophical values in a museum setting. Buddhist ethical concepts has been provided deep insights into the causes of suffering ways to achieve peace. This suggests that museums like Lumbini can serve as transformative cultural mediators that connect traditional wisdom with contemporary societal demands.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

As museology matured from custodianship into moral actors to encourage self-critique and dialogue across culture and the mind (Apsel et al., 2024), the concepts of *karuna*, *sati*, and *ahimsa* rooted in the Buddhist wisdoms are not prioritized systematically from exhibitions. Museums worldwide dedicated to peace, e.g. the Museum for World Peace in Kyoto, have used museum objects and stories to invoke empathy and reconciliation by exemplifying the pains of violence (Kyoto Museum for World Peace, n. d.). However, evidence of the use of Museum for Peace artifacts and stories for societal reconciliation in the areas of contemporary social conflict, inequality or trauma in terms of a link between museology and social justice seems soundless.

Nepal's context reveals a critical gap that despite Lumbini Museum's collection of relics and inscriptions embodying interdependence and impermanence,

there is limited evidence on their efficacy in addressing modern social strife, inequality, or trauma. Even though museums are becoming extensively accredited as transformative places that endorse social cohesion, peacebuilding and well-being. So, there are some critical knowledge gaps which has to function actually that has carried out, particularly in circumstances as culturally and spiritually important as Lumbini. In spite of having widespread collections, the representation of fundamental Buddhist way of teachings methods like compassion (karuna), mindfulness (sati) and non-violence (ahimsa) are important. So, there is some lacks in these issues. Similarly, the Lumbini Museum has to disseminate experiential data on how visitors understand, convey and adopt Buddhist philosophy and ideas.

It is unclear to convey perceptions from museum related programs and exhibition that has to benefit people to think ethically, heal emotionally and become aware of today's pressing global issues, such as polarization, inequality and social conflict. Though, international frameworks such as the International Council of Museums' theme "Museums Uniting a Divided World" (2026) has emphasized the potential of museums to promote communication for unity, there isn't a methodical valuation of how Lumbini Museum carries out this vision through ongoing peace education, cross-cultural interaction and well-being-focused practices. As a result, there has some gap between theoretical forecasts and real application. The world is changing rapidly as well as it is becoming more divided, the main challenge is determining whether and how Lumbini Museum can actively promote peace, cultural mediation and holistic well-being.

### 3. Objectives

- a. To explore meaningful links with Buddhist tradition strategically transform Lumbini's visitors into an engaged museum audience?
- b. To analyze the degree of Lumbini serve as a coeducational setting that incorporates the interpretation of Buddhist tradition to foster wellbeing and wisdom?

## 4. Applied Methods

The research has based on qualitative methods which has used interdisciplinary dimension. It is also related with the theoretical and case study approach whereas Lumbini as the case study. The research has explored some of the literature review of contemporary museology, peace education, and Buddhist philosophy Policy and framework analysis, such as UNESCO heritage governance and ICOM guidelines. The interpretative analysis of museum presentation, programs and spatial narratives of Lumbini Museum data derived from other sources of information (secondary data analysis) such as visitor numbers and information from organizations. As a combined approach, this framework allows for a theoretical assessment of the museum's function in relation to well-being and peacebuilding.

## 5. Buddhism, Museums and the Wellbeing Alchemy

Over the last one hundred years there have been great changes to museum studies. Early museums mainly focused on the collection and presentation of objects to relate to nationhood, colonialism and scientific ordering (Bennett, 1995). However, present museum theory has stressed the social function of museums as agencies of communication and public access. Contemporary museology pressures for community participation, interpretive narratives and reflective learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Museums are engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts as well. Museums for Peace projects has exemplified the role of museums as places to foster resolution and ethical reflection (Sodaro, 2018). ICOM has been promoted to make the importance of museums in the areas of peace, human rights and intercultural understanding. It has appeared Buddhist teachings and current museum well-being idea that have a significant connection in such concepts as human flourishing, ethical consciousness and social harmony.

In its foundation are the central values of compassion, love, non-harm and power of mind or consciousness that mark the origin and perspective of everything, promote peace making, raising ethical leader and intercultural learning in the modern world (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005). This knowledge

indicate that Buddhist social ethic is clearest to be appreciated for its role as the common ground/ universal resources for dialogue, tolerance, and sustainable development in the modern discourse. According to Shonin and Van Gordon et al (2015), mindfulness-based approach, which has its origin in Buddhism, shows positive effect on psychological health as well as emotional stability. Therefore, Buddhist wisdom creates effects not only on religious aspects but also on some indicators of well-being and social health. Likewise, current museums are more identified as well-being agents which serve as contemplative and signficatory spaces for developing identity, emotional stability and community (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Both models advocate dialogue, compassion and the voice of community. If Buddhism find peace in reinventing itself, museums strive for peace of mind in the space of interpretation, inclusion and community.

## 6. Museums as Learning Center for Buddhist Wisdom

Studies have identified the benefits of museum engagement to include an increase in life satisfaction, the reduction of stress, the development of a positive sense of identity, and increased social connection (Scott, 2010). ICOM has also identified museums as institutions that enrich and contribute to psychological, social and community sense of well-being (ICOM, 2022). In this context, Buddhist museums can harness their own specific capability in combining heritage interpretation with contemplation for the purpose of well-being. The Buddhist Museum in Lumbini falls under an inclusive system of global oriented governance that is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

“  
ICOM has also identified museums as institutions that enrich and contribute to psychological, social and community sense of well-being (ICOM, 2022).”

World Heritage is not only about protecting but preserving sites of exceptional universal importance for all human beings. Under this governance framework, museums deserve great potential to contribute to promoting the world heritage

site and various benefits of the heritage encouraging sustainable cultural tourism, promoting local community engagement and responsible heritage management. The structure of the museum is a further attempt to inscribe the archeological site within an interpretive framework that links the cultural artifacts, the Buddhist teachings, and the present-day peace dialogues while ultimately reinforcing UNESCO's larger objective of peace through education, culture and dialogue. Apart from governance, the Buddhist Museum also appears to serve as a form of cultural diplomacy.

Cultural Diplomacy is a term used to describe the utilization of a nation's cultural resources, exchange and dialogue in strengthening mutual understanding amongst different nations. Through communications, the museum introduces Buddhist wisdom as a philosophy of pacifism, compassion and well-being to the world; the museum is also committed to build up cross-cultural understanding, soft power and create a bases for global peace-oriented tourism. This is consistent with UNESCO's mission to promote peace through intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding of their values systems. In this way the Lumbini Museum stands as diplomatic channel whereby the heritage shapes global peace. Joining forces when Buddhist wisdom, museum-led well-being, UNESCO heritage governance and cultural diplomacy, the Buddhist Museum in Lumbini emerges as a multidimensional, sustainable peace instrument. Therefore, in a view of merging the functions of a museum for heritage preservation, for wise ethics, for benefit of the health and well-being of the people, and for international co-operation, the tradition of a museum becomes a vehicle that drives us towards sustainable human development.

## **7. Lumbini Museum**

Lumbini is the birthplace of Lord Buddha which has listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. It has been attracting over 1.1 million internal and external tourists yearly, it is major center for Buddhist pilgrimage place to have cultural exchange and spiritual reflection (UNESCO, 2023). It has often described as a living mandala, Lumbini continues to substitute global connection and devotion, particularly around sacred landmarks such as the Maya Devi Temple

and the Ashokan Pillar. The Lumbini Museum had inaugurated on 30 November 2004 by then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. It has historically significant institution, it has more than 200 archaeological and historical artifacts dating from the 6th century BCE to the 3rd century CE. It has also reopened in 2022 as a renewed facility, the museum is envisioned by its authorities as a “state-of-the-art museum in the birthplace of the historical Buddha.” The museum building, originally designed in the 1970s by renowned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, forms an integral part of the Lumbini Master Plan, brilliant a musical integration of heritage, architecture and spiritual landscape.

Although the museum has been in operation for more than 22 years since its partial opening, and is now used by a single general gallery, it will in future be used to develop six thematic galleries ‘Impermanence: Lumbini in Time’, ‘Interdependent: The Forest’, ‘Loving Kindness and Joy: The Divine Birth and Child’, ‘Compassion: Women and Questions of Buddhism’, ‘Equanimity: Lumbini’s Living Legacies’ and ‘Awakening: Buddhism and the World’ to enable an integrated, visitor centered presentation of Buddhist wisdom according to the authority. The museum plans to raise new standards in the preservation and presentation of heritage while assisting in transforming Lumbini, inspired by the Buddha's message of compassion, honesty and openness, into a truly international spiritual and cultural center. Its goals are to protect the archaeological, cultural and natural heritage of Lumbini and other important protected sites such as Ramagrama and Kapilavastu from damage and tell the story of Siddhartha Gautama's journey from a prince of the Shakya to a founder of Buddhism.

Museum's programmes focus on experience and wellbeing. Galleries are themed “Ground, Path and Fruition”, taking visitors through central events in the life of the Buddha. Digital storytelling, interactive displays, meditation, archaeology activities, ‘Eco Dharma’ stations are used to relate Buddhism to aspects of modern life such as meditation, ecology and compassion. Through its connection to Buddhist ideas and contemporary museum practice, the Lumbini Museum is more than a container for relics; it is both a place for contemplation and a place for education, where visitors are invited to gain

insight into human suffering, learn to meditate and find themselves reminded of their fellow human beings.

## 8. Blending Opportunities into the Museum

The museum acts as an interpretive connection between religious ceremonies and visual contemplation. With the valuable objects like manuscripts, sculptures, coins and terracotta from the Maurya and Kushan periods; it concretizes abstract Buddhist concepts such as impermanence and interdependence through material culture. The museum's self-declared vision to "shape a better world inspired by the Buddha's teachings of compassion, openness and truth" explicitly frames it as more than a repository; it aspires to be a value-based learning environment that supports peace and ethical reflection.

Over the last few decades, research by museum scholars has paid more attention to museums as places where education, intercultural dialogue and social reflection (Falk & Dierking, 2013). Planned Discovery Gallery, connecting Buddhist teachings to modern neuroscience and everyday well-being, positions the museum within the growing "museum and mental health" agenda, where visits can be benefitted to reduced stress, increased meaning, and social connection can translate this concept in practice which will optimize the wellbeing benefits of museum. This analysis explores two major dimensions that Lumbini Museum can contribute to uphold this Buddhism.

Firstly, stands as lucky institution which does not need to wander far away to invite Visitors. Visitors to the birthplace of the Buddha are a perfect audience for museum education programs. Every year some 1.5 million visitors come to visit the Lumbini site, where the museum is located. The museum can convert easily a good percentage of these tourists and pilgrims as its visitors by having good communication, convincing interpretation and the dissemination of information on the Lumbini area and using Lumbini as its outreach corridor. If only 30 percent of the annual visitors of Lumbini, attracted to the museum; Lumbini Museum will make the record of highest visitor museum in the country, which is possible by working in systematic and gradual process. Based on

the actual number of tourists' arrivals in Lumbini for the last three years, an indicative number of visitors who could be museum visitors are projected in estimated calculation in the following table.

### Estimated Potential Growth of Lumbini Museum Visitors

Year	Total Lumbini Visitors	If 10% Visit Museum	If 20% Visit Museum	If 30% Visit Museum
2023	998,938	99,894	199,788	299,681
2024	1,172,304	117,230	234,461	351,691
2025	1,114,266	111,426	222,853	334,280

Source: Lumbini Development Trust

This projection, which is imagined based on the real data of Lumbini visitors, illustrates that relatively small enhancement in visitor visitation would drastically increase number of visitors to museums. If only 20% of Lumbini visitors were driven to museum, it would be more than 200,000 visitors a year where the number can be reached more than 300000 if 30% of them can be connected to the museum. Significantly, this will not imply a substantial marketing investment. Rather, the promotion of the many low-cost initiatives like enhanced signage around the visiting area, offered by guides, packages with pilgrim service providers and educational programs could easily enable the museums to become integral part of the Lumbini experience. For this a good communication strategy and programme is needed.

Secondly, the museum can be a strategic center to lengthen staying duration of visitors. According to Carbon (2017) globally, museum visitors spend an average of 1.5–2.5 hours per visit, whereas some empirical studies indicate that a mean stay time of about 2 hours in art, history, and science related museums. With respect to Nepal there is presently no solid, nationally representative data for average museum visits durations, and even at the country's world most visited heritage sites such as Lumbini the average sightseeing duration has only been 30 minutes (The Kathmandu Post, 2026, March 24) which is very

short. If only 20 percent of Lumbini visitors can be linked to the museum they will spend at least additional 30 minutes which will contribute to increasing the staying time in Lumbini, which will ultimately benefit to the 2,000 tourism-related micro, small and medium enterprises and workers in the area.

Today, museum use is expanding beyond entertainment and education. In this context, museums can become places for wellbeing and contemplative experience with quiet galleries, mindfulness-based exhibits and sensory in harmony environments able to lengthen stays by encouraging slower, more thoughtful navigation (Botta & Chatterjee, 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2021). In the specific context of Lumbini, the addition of a museum that also offers well-being amenities such as meditation spaces and eco Dharma programming could even further the time spent at the site, establishing the Lumbini museum as a hybrid cultural spiritual well-being venue congruent with evolving musicological models.

As discussed by heritage tourism scholars, there can be a greater need for a story to connect two or more heritage sites in a tour (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). It's also important to discuss how the relative visibility of Kapilavastu, the palace of prince Buddha, which is near to Lumbini, is so under-read on account of the Shakya capital's evidence being so under interpreted for the majority of foreign 'visiting audiences. Its archaeological and documentary material are extensive and with the Lumbini Museum offering the site a contextual link, a case in point (Coningham & Young, 2015). By creating awareness 'for the people about Kapilavastu and of the 30 km journey east to Tilaurakot- the heart of the historic Kapilavastu-and by contextualizing the site's main gateways, walls, domestic and political arrangements in exhibitions, the museum could facilitate a conversion of a one-site experience into a plea of pilgrimage (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). A new World Bank initiative \$85 million Greater Lumbini Area Development Project provides an opportunity, through increased visitation, museum visitors, and learning opportunities about Buddhist wisdom as well. According to Gyanin Rai, the Senior Director of the Lumbini Development

Trust, the Lumbini Museum had collections initially, but it was not functional owing to various limitations (Rai, 2026, personal communication). He said that

*The World Bank has helped Greater Lumbini Area Development Project, which has a large component of renovation of the museum (The Kathmandu Post, 2026). It is to be a world class museum, exhibiting Buddha related objects including from National Museum of Nepal and Tilaurakot Museum Once completed, full operation of its 6 thematic galleries will enable the museum to attract both the “usual” pilgrims and the “probes” as well as new visitors for the true “well-being and the spiritual axis (Rai, 2026).”*

Through increased infrastructure, developing Greater Lumbini Buddhist ‘pilgrimage circuit’ between Lumbini and Tilaurakot, Ramgram and Devdaha, bringing in further museums and health-oriented services, a sustainable segment could be created that prolongs the stay and increases the value of a segment that traditionally hits and leave the world's highest relative stay. In this regard, Ramu Joshi, Executive Director of the Tourism Development Council of Lumbini Province, stresses that Lumbini has significant potential to attract and extend visitors’ stay but lacks engaging activities that connect tourists with local communities, culture, food, and natural surroundings (Joshi, 2026, personal communication). He further suggests that

*developing activities around the Buddha’s life cycle, sacred trees, peace oriented “peace avenues,” and tree planting can deepen visitor engagement. The Lumbini Museum can serve as a central hub to inform, educate, and guide visitors to wider Lumbini sites, thereby enhancing Buddhist learning, community connection, and local economic benefits.*

There is no doubt that Lumbini deserves lots of hidden opportunities to be explored to benefit both visitors, communities and even optimize the performance of Lumbini Development Trust office. Achieving this requires collective action by the federal, provincial, and local governments, communities,

and stakeholders, coordinated under the leadership of the Lumbini Development Trust and supported by institutional and structural reforms.

## 9. Aligning with Contemporary Museology

Macdonald (2011) cautions that contemporary museums have moved on from being safekeeping sites of objects, they have become places of conversation, dialogue and community. These quotes emphasize the capacity of the Lumbini Museum to communicate Buddhist teachings in such ways as to foster harmony and co-operation in society. In this context the museum may serve as an educational space for interpretation of Buddhist teachings in the face of social and moral crises.”

The Buddhist approach to explaining the issue of human suffering focuses on the teachings of compassion, mindfulness and non-violent behaviors (Harvey, 2013), which all appear to naturally match with the contents within peace education and conflict resolution materials today (King, 2009). Museum-based peace and social justice education programs have been proven to increase visitor participation rate, inspire reflection on contemporary issues and enhance visitors’ cognitive and affective resources. Therefore, mindfulness and compassion education programs, peer discussion circle based on common human values and school-oriented museum education programs have potential to further promote the peace message that stands behind the Lumbini Museum. The museum is still a significant element in the Lumbini Master Plan, developed by Kenzo Tange in 1978 that aims to develop Lumbini into an international pilgrimage site and cultural settlement.

## 10. From Potential to Practice

This study has revealed that the Lumbini Museum in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lumbini has the capacity to be a vibrant catalyst for peace education, wellbeing, intercultural dialogue and sustainable development. In a world of increasing social division and turbulence, and questions of moral certitude, museums are being viewed as spaces whereby dialogue, empathy and debate can be cultivated. Lumbini Museum is showing that a Buddhist

heritage establishment is more than about conservation of artefacts but can function as a site of living education in peace and cultural diplomacy, community healing and coexistence through Buddhist wisdom. The interpretation of the Buddhist concepts compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence accords with modern well-being paradigm and peace studies, these types of offerings resonate with visitors and can deepen reflection, heighten emotion and stir consciousness of global issues and global participation. In this way, it embodies the 2026 International Museum Day theme of “Museums Uniting a Divided World” by presenting a peaceful space in which pilgrims, tourists and residents from many different backgrounds reflect on pain, interdependence and moral responsibility.

However, the article reveals that this potential is already only partly fulfilled: interpretation is not yet fully harnessed, the correlation between a visit to the museum and quantifiable levels of wellbeing or peace literacy is unfocused. The main challenge, consequently, is not one of heritage or doctrine, but of more consciously creating, investigating and announcing how Buddhist knowledge expressed in museum settings can meet both individual and social needs, and support development in a sustainable fashion. Overall, the museum has huge potential in transforming itself into a global epitome of a museum as a peace, well-being and sustainability agent, if aided with any sort of systematic programming and impact assessment.

## 11. Conclusion

Lumbini Museum exemplifies a promising yet underutilized institution, which combines Buddhist ethos with current museum practices, seeking to serve as an agent for world peace, wellness and intercultural understanding. Although its conceptualization is promising, a desire for structured program implementation and the assessment of its influence is essential to establish Lumbini Museum as such.

## References

- Apsel, J., Barrett, J., & Tamashiro, R. (2024). *Museums and peace education*. *Journal of Museum Education*, 49(2), 150–165.
- Bennett, T. (1995). *The birth of the museum*. Routledge.
- Botta, A., & Chatterjee, A. (2020). The active museum: A framework for integrating health and wellbeing. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(2), 137–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2019.1657267>
- Carbon, C.C. (2017). Art perception in the museum: How we spend time and space in museums. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 615. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00615>
- Carbone, F. (2025). Integrating the contribution of museums for building peaceful and inclusive society and promoting justice. *Discover Sustainability*, 6, 24.
- Chatterjee, A., Botta, A., & Andrews, H. (2021). Museums as places of care: Curating wellbeing. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 64(3), 311–330. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12411>
- Coningham, R. A. E., & Young, R. L. (2015). *The Archaeology of South Asia: From the Indus to Asoka c. 6500 BCE–200 CE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Falk, J., & Dierking, L. (2013). *The museum experience revisited*. Routledge.
- Fancourt, D., & Finn, S. (2019). *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?* World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.
- Filipowska, A., et al. (2024). *Mindfulness in museums*. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 39(1), 45–60.
- Gethin, R. (1998). *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1994). *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*. Routledge.
- International Council of Museums (ICOM). (2022). *Museum definition*. <https://icom.museum>

- International Council of Museums. (2026). *International Museum Day 2026*. <https://icom.museum/en/international-museum-day-2/>
- Keown, D. (2005). *Buddhist ethics: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- King, S. (2009). *Socially engaged Buddhism*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kyoto Museum for World Peace, Ritsumeikan University. (n.d.). *Permanent exhibition*. <https://www.kyoto-museums.jp/en/museum/north/3913/>
- Loy, D. (2015). *A new Buddhist path: Enlightenment, evolution and ethics in the modern world*. Wisdom Publications.
- Lucchiaro, C., Banzi, R., & Filipowska, A. (2024). Museum mindfulness and stress reduction. *Behavioral Sciences*. [https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/16/1/116?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/16/1/116?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- Lumbini Development Trust. (2026). Visitor arrival statistics.
- Lumbini Museum. (n.d.a). *The Lumbini Museum*. <https://lumbinimuseum.org/the-museum/> [Derived from source content].
- Macdonald, S. (2011). *A companion to museum studies*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Prasain, S. (2026, March 24). *Nepal eyes Lumbini revival with major World Bankbacked push*. The Kathmandu Post. <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2026/03/24/nepal-aims-to-change-lumbini-s-image-as-hit-and-run-destination-with-85m-loan>
- Scott, C. (2010). *Museums and public value: Creating sustainable futures*. Routledge.
- Shonin, E., Van Gordon, W., & Griffiths, M. D. (2015). Mindfulness and Buddhist-derived interventions in psychological health. *Mindfulness*, 6(2), 305–313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0252-1>
- Sodaro, A. (2018). *Exhibiting atrocity: Memorial museums and the politics of past violence*. Rutgers University Press.
- Timothy, D., & Boyd, S. (2003). *Heritage tourism*. Prentice Hall.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Lumbini, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha: World Heritage property*.

# VISITORS' ATTACHMENTS AND THE FUTURE OF PATAN MUSEUM

**Ramesh Raj Paudel**

Executive Director, Patan Museum  
rameshrajpaudel@yahoo.com

## Abstract

*Patan Museum is a beloved museum among the national and international visitors. As evidence, there is an increasing trend in the visitors' statistics. Several heritage attributes attract visitors' day by day. The attractive key features are three courtyards, a garden, and a pond in this regard. Visitors not only enjoy the museum but also show their attachment by providing comments and recommendations for the improvement of the museum using the comment book and other channels. The museum management always accepts these comments, considering the valuable input for the future of the museum. Moreover, the management addresses the comments and recommendations through the annual program and the budget. In fact, these comments and recommendations not only track the ongoing improvements but also direct the future of the Patan Museum. Based upon the comments and recommendations, the future of the Patan museum is seen as a smart museum with a collective set of features such as a well-managed recognition of the museum, a well-managed system of logistics and infrastructure, a visitor-centered service provided by the museum staff, well-management for the retention of the heritage, and a fully open museum inside the museum boundary.*

**Keywords** : Patan Museum, Open Museum, Visitors' Comments, Smart Museum, ICT.

## 1. Introduction

The Patan museum has been delivering its services since 1996. This museum is an expanded version of the National Bronze Art Museum that was established in 1962. Now it has been managed under the legal instrument, the Patan Museum Establishment Ordinance (PMEO), 1996. The ordinance has provisioned its functions focusing on the educational, touristic, and cultural services (Government of Nepal (GoN), 1999). As per the ordinance, the governance of the Patan museum consists of a committee as the supreme governance authority. The committee is chaired by the secretary of the ministry of culture, tourism, and civil aviation. Similarly, the representation of the director general of the Department of Archaeology as a vice chair and a representative from the Lalitpur Metropolitan city, and three experts from the museum and heritage sector represent as members of the committee. There is Executive Director who represents the member secretary of the committee and is also responsible for the management of the regular activities of the museum as an executive director.

There is a one-door entry ticket management committee under the chair of the Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, with representations from the Patan museum and other metropolitan officials (Lalitpur Metropolitan City, 2019). This committee consists of regular staff who are responsible for the entry ticket management for the visitors. Besides these institutions, there are several other institutions that play contributive roles in managing the museum and its delivery service. Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, Department of Archaeology, Lalitpur Metropolitan City, etc., are core institutions in this regard. In addition, the contributive role of tourist guides, communities, and visitors, etc. is also remarkable.

Patan Museum is located at the medieval Patan Durbar complex. In other words, the museum represents the capital of the historic Malla city-state of Patan at that time. The existing three courtyards of this museum represent the palace of that period. Besides these courtyards, there is a famous archaeological garden (Bhandarkhal Garden), including a pond. The chronology of the three courtyards

is associated with three famous kings of that period. King Siddhinarsingh Malla, his son King Shreeniwass Malla, and another king, Vishnu Malla, made the beautiful courtyard (1647), the main courtyard, and the Keshavnarayan courtyard (Monument Conservation and Palace Maintenance Office, Lalitpur, 2012). All these courtyards collectively represent the medieval history, art, architecture, and civilization. Although Patan Durbar with the outer settlement itself is a beautiful medieval settlement, the history of some monuments and objects goes back to the Malla period and earlier.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The attachment of visitors to the Patan museum is seen in their expressions. Considering this attachment, the management of Patan Museum is always aware of the visitors' comments and recommendations for the enhancement of the existing museum services. As evidence, the management addresses the comments and recommendations through the planning and execution of the annual budget. However, there are still gaps between the management efforts and the expectations of visitors. This gap is seen in the latest comments and recommendations. The fulfillment of gaps based on the comments and recommendations directs the future of the Patan museum. On the other hand, the valuable comments and recommendations provided by the visitors also represent their expectations, and these expectations collectively shape the future of the Patan museum.

## **3. Objectives of the study**

There are several stakeholders responsible for the management of museum services. The government, communities, experts, activists, and visitors are key stakeholders in this regard. Among the stakeholders mentioned above, the role of visitors is seen in the enjoyment of services and feedback for improvements as customers. Therefore, this paper focuses on the future of the Patan museum based on the attachments shown by the visitors. More specifically, this paper aims to explore the future of the Patan museum as per the valuable comments and recommendations provided by the visitors.

## 4. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach. Under the document review, this study reviews legal instruments that are responsible for the management of museum services. Next, the study presents an overview of the comment books that have been preserved in the museum as archival resources. More specifically, this study extracts key points from the expressed texts of the visitors in the comment books. Based upon the extracted points, this study constructs two clusters, viz., positive comments and recommendations to be implemented for the improvement of museum services.

## 5. Results and Findings

### Flow of Visitor

The flow of visitors is a key outcome of the Patan museum. In fact, it reflects the efforts of the management team. The efforts consist of input instruments such as legal instruments, organizational instruments, and infrastructure instruments. The visitor entry management system is a key instrumental input in the case of the Patan museum. Since the fiscal year 2016/17, the one-door entry ticket system has been responsible for managing entry for visitors to the Patan Durbar Square and the Patan Museum. A committee under the chair of the mayor of the Lalitpur metropolitan city governs the system of visitor management. The committee consists of the representation of experts, municipal officials, and the Patan Museum. The committee staff and museum staff handle the visitors' entry and exit as per the tickets. According to the official records, the following table provides the latest statistics of visitor flow in the Patan Durbar Square and the Patan Museum.

**Table 1:** *Visitors' entry in the Patan Museum*

Fiscal Year	Nepalese Students	Nepalese Non-Students	South Asian	Foreigners	Total
2016/17	24,219	43,857	17,110	91,718	1,76,904
2017/18	31,209	65,607	26,884	1,20,513	2,44,213
2018/19	30,894	67,127	31,180	1,33,247	2,62,448
2019/20	21,851	45,088	19,887	89,025	1,75,851
2020/21	4,144	20,691	725	751	26,311
2021/22	19,000	57,200	15,869	15,534	1,07,603
2022/23	41,450	1,10,350	37,785	67,847	2,57,432
2023/24	44,100	1,19,050	41,998	1,06,550	3,11,698
2024/25	42,450	1,23,800	36,163	1,17,549	3,19,962

*Source: One Door Tourism Fee Management and Implementation Committee/Patan Museum, Lalitpur*

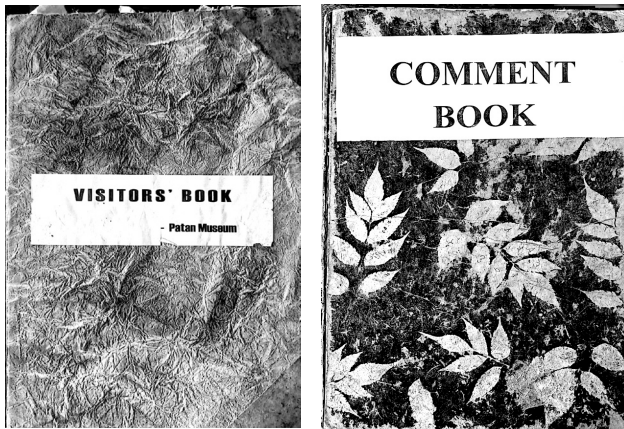
The above table shows the increasing trend of visitors except for the 2019/20 - 2021/22 period, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the table, the trend seems to be increasing not only in the total number of visitors but also in the categories of the visitors. The increasing trend of visitors indicates the increasing trend of choice to visit the Patan museum. These statistics also assist to forecast the future of the Patan museum in terms of the flow of visitors. Following the visitors' increasing trend, the museum management should take the appropriate responses, focusing on their attachment to the Patan museum.

### **Key Valuable Comments and Recommendations**

The above table not only provides the visitor statistics but also reflects the attachment of visitors to the Patan museum. More specifically, Visitors prioritize this museum to enjoy the inherent features associated with this museum, such as

medieval history, culture, and civilization of the Kathmandu Valley. Furthermore, visitors enjoy the different types of services delivered by the museum, such as galleries with objects, historic courtyards, and a historic garden with a pond. Visitors' expressions towards this museum are not limited to the deliveries mentioned above. A comment book kept in the entry counter, social media, and expressions among their groups are key platforms in this regard.

Image 1: Visitors'/Comment Book



Source: Patan Museum

The visitors'/comment book is an asset of this museum where the visitors' valuable comments and recommendations are collected and preserved. In other words, it is not only a collection of visitors' expressions about the museum but also shows the attachment and provides proper direction for the coming days. In the comment book, museum gets just signatures and artwork on some pages, whereas on others, museum gets a short sentence or clause to a full page of textual expressions from the visitor (Patan Museum, 1996–2026). Both national and international high-profile personalities have acknowledged the museum by signing their signature in the comment book. Under the artworks and textual expressions, visitors have expressed their comments and recommendations in the form of both positive expressions and actions to be taken for the improvement of the museum. The following themes reflect visitors' positive views, as expressed in the comment books.

## Box 1

### Positive comments

- This is a beautiful museum in terms of its courtyards, galleries, and objects
- Every character consists of a piece of art and architecture
- Wonderful presentation
- Very beautiful place to visit, to learn, and to see objects
- Will love to visit again
- Very fascinating exhibit
- Amazing and mind-blowing arts
- Attractive hub for tourists, visitors, etc.
- Wonderful architecture and culture

*Source: Visitors'/comment book, Patan Museum*

On the other hand, visitors have provided several recommendations. The following points represent the key recommendations.

## Box 2

### Recommendations

- The management should train the staff from time to time to make them more proactive to deliver the service
- The management should improve the visitor facilities as soon as possible: Toilet with good sanitation service, signage in the appropriate places, drinking water services, one way system for entry and exit, etc.
- The management should enhance the exhibition service to make observation easier: Captions in multiple languages, brochure in multiple languages, guide services as per the needs, etc.

- The management should take actions against the deterioration of the heritage: CCTVs, alternative lighting systems, preservation from pigeons, no photography, etc.
- The management should uncover the restricted places as soon as possible.

*Source: Patan Museum*

## 6. Expected Future Recognitions

Patan Museum always welcomes valuable comments and recommendations openly. More specifically, the museum accepts comments through all commonly used platforms. An individual can provide the comments in both verbal and written form, s/he can express the comments in a comment book, s/he can express his/her comments through information and communication technology (ICT) platform (Website, Facebook account, etc.), and so on. According to Sepe & Marzullo (2022), smart technology enables visitors to engage actively in the co-production of museum experience. These comments have been addressed by the management of the museum through the formulation and execution of the annual budget and activities.

The Patan Museum is the most popular museum among the Nepalese as well as foreign visitors. The visitors lie in different categories, such as general people, tourists, students, researchers, and academicians in this regard. They enjoy different contents of the museum as per their motivations and interests. For instance, architects enjoy architectural content, historians enjoy historical content, and culture professionals enjoy cultural content, and so on. On the other hand, visitors enjoy this museum, considering it a hub of educational, cultural, and touristic resource center. Concerning the discussions mentioned above, the future of Patan museum is seen in the integration of community engagement, heritage conservation, and tourism growth (Nyaupane, 2025). The following paragraphs explore the future of the Patan museum based on the comments provided by the visitors.

As per the comments provided by the visitors, Patan Museum must retain its inherent values to make its future better. In other words, the museum should promote positive expressions of the visitors. On the other hand, the museum should take immediate action against the negative actions and recommendations. The museum should execute parallel activities considering both aspects mentioned above. According to Ballantyne & Uzzell (2011), visitors' responses will shape the nature and role of museums in the future.

A smart museum is a visible recognition in the future for the Patan Museum. This recognition will expand beyond Nepal. Therefore, the management should focus on the future of the museum towards the attributes of more smartness. More specifically, an online ticket booking system as a replacement of the existing manual system, virtual museum services in addition to the existing physical system, and protection of the right to information through the updated website, email, and other social media sites are the key improvements for the future. According to Stamatoudi & Roussos (2024), technologies and innovations make museum services more accessible.

The well-managed system of logistics and infrastructure will be another recognition of the Patan museum in the future. In other words, the museum will provide adequate facilities for the visitors. The museum management should take regular initiatives to make the visit more fruitful by providing adequate logistics, such as smart toilet facilities, pure drinking water facilities, and smart entry and exit facilities through signage in appropriate places. In addition, the management should keep multilingual captions for the objects to facilitate visitors to enjoy more.

Visitor-centered service delivery is the next recognition in the future. The museum management will assign trained staff to deliver smart service in this regard. The staff will focus on visitors rather than other deviations, and the management team will regularly monitor the front desk staff to be aware of visitor-focused services. Future museums should try to address the diverse demands of visitors as much as possible (Falk, 2016).

The well-preservation of the heritage to retain the outstanding value is the next recognition in the future. The motivation behind this recognition is that the visitors expect to defend the cultural heritage and classical values (Ayala et al., 2021). Therefore, the museum management will focus on multidimensional security measures in this regard. In other words, the museum management will establish well security system against the possible deterioration and loss of heritage. More specifically, the museum management will establish automatic security measures with a sound backup against the deterioration and loss of heritage. In addition, the museum management will focus on capacity building for security personnel regularly.



**The well-preservation of the heritage to retain the outstanding value is the next recognition in the future. The motivation behind this recognition is that the visitors expect to defend the cultural heritage and classical values (Ayala et al., 2021).**

A fully open museum without any restricted galleries to visit and restricted objects to observe will be the next recognition of the museum in the future. First, the museum management will open all places to visit, retaining the historic and traditional value of some sacred places. Second, the museum management will explore, collect, and exhibit additional objects in consideration of the scope and limitations of the available space.

The future recognition mentioned above is based on both positive comments and recommendations provided by the visitors. In other words, the future of the Patan museum is a smart museum with a collective set of features such as ICT applications in each service, service delivery through the trained staff, well-management of logistics for visitors, and no restricted places inside the museum. In addition, the museum should apply all these features to deliver its services under the roles and responsibilities that have been provisioned by PMEO.

The management mechanism, as well as the visitors, are key counterparts for the future of the museum. In other words, visitors should increase their voices, and the management mechanism should address the voices regularly to make the museum smart. New and innovative mechanisms should replace existing mechanisms for the collection and response to comments and recommendations, which will be an effective measure in this regard. ICT-based portals, social media applications, and quick response systems are some well-known examples. The museum management should revise legal and other institutional systems to minimize the barriers of the existing mechanism.

## 7. Conclusion

Patan Museum is now completing three decades. During the period of these three decades, the museum has become a beloved museum among visitors. The increasing annual statistics of visitors are evidence. Next, the visitors have expressed their attachment through the comments and recommendations that direct the expected future. Furthermore, these comments and recommendations have become the foundation of the future of the Patan museum. As per the comments and recommendations provided by the visitors, the future of the Patan museum is seen as a smart museum with new features. A well-managed recognition of the museum, a well-managed system of logistics and infrastructure, the visitor-centered service provided by the museum staff, well-management for the retention of the heritage, and a fully open museum inside the museum boundary will be key features in this regard. In addition, the significant role of both the management team and visitors will be the key means of success for the future of Patan Museum.

## References

- Ayala, I., Cuenca-Amigo, M., & Cuenca, J. (2021). The Future of Museums. An Analysis from the Visitors' Perspective in the Spanish Context. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 51(3), 171-187. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2021.1901813>

- Ballantyne, R., & Uzzell, D. (2011). Looking back and looking forward: The rise of the visitor-centered museum. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 54(1), 85–92. <https://doi.org/> <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2010.00071.x>
- Falk, J. (2016). Museum audiences: A visitor-centered perspective. *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, 39(3), 357–370. <https://doi.org/> <https://doi.org/10.1080/07053436.2016.1243830>
- Government of Nepal (GoN). (1999). *Patan Museum Development Committee (Formation) Order, 1999*. <https://www.tourism.gov.np/publications/36>
- Lalitpur Metropolitan City. (2019). *One Door Tourist Entry Fee Management Proceedings*. <https://lmc.gov.np/en/>
- Monument Conservation and Palace Maintenance Office, Lalitpur. (2012). *Shree Manigla*. Monument Conservation and Palace Maintenance Office, Lalitpur. <https://doi.org/https://mppmopatan.doa.gov.np/content/37/useful-information/>
- Nyaupane, P. (2025). Visitor Management Strategies at Patan Museum: A Tourism Perspective. *Nepalese Culture*, 18, 31–42. <https://doi.org/> <https://doi.org/10.3126/nc.v18i1.78286>
- Patan Museum. (1996–2026). *Visitors’/Comment Book*.
- Sepe, F., & Marzullo, M. (2022). Making smarter museums through new technologies. In *Handbook of Research on Museum Management in the Digital Era* (pp. 75–98). <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-9656-2.ch005>
- Stamatoudi, I., & Roussos, K. (2024). A Sustainable Model of Cultural Heritage Management for Museums and Cultural Heritage Institutions. *ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1145/3686808>

# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF MUSEUM COMMUNICATION: GLOBAL SHIFTS AND EMERGING LANDSCAPE OF NEPAL

**Reeta Thapaliya**

Culture Communication Professional

Member, ICOM Nepal

rithapaliya@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*This study explores the opportunities, difficulties and changing practices associated with Nepal's museum communication and its digital transformation as per the worldwide trends. As factors of cultural heritage, museums have used conformist communication methods to involve audiences, as well as publications, guided tours, demonstrations and public outreach. As digital media become more widely used, museums are developing into participatory, interactive places that provide social media engagement, virtual tours and online learning materials. According to the National Culture Policy, the Digital Nepal Framework and constitutional provisions have supported these changes in Nepal. The lack of organized communication strategies, financial limitations and the absence of digital skills among museum employees have been incomplete for practical application. Digital communication has potential to recover convenience, reach larger audiences and encourage active engagement in cultural learning despite these obstacles. Public trust is a crucial issue. Nepali households trust social media as a source of information. This study shows that more than two thirds of the majority of households have internet access. This study has also portrayed that the effective incorporation of digital communication is not optional, but it is an essential for Nepali museums to fulfill their cultural, educational and participatory orders, ensuring sustainability, credibility and global importance in the digital era.*

**Keywords :** Museum Communication, Digital Transformation, Nepalese Museums, Audience Engagement, Cultural Heritage, social media and Public Trust.

## 1. Introduction

Worldwide movement away from organizations focused toward the interactive, audience-centered platforms has reflected in digital transformation of museum communication. Digital tools that recover availability and engagement outside of physical spaces include social media and virtual displays. Nowadays, museums are becoming participatory symbols to represent culture of a particular nation through the media organizations that promote inclusivity and discourse, according to scholars (Parry, 2007). This change has taken place in Nepal, which presents fresh chances for inclusive heritage communication (Simon, 2010). One of the museum professionals of USA Chiara Bernasconi in her interview once said that "digital space is increasingly another space we live in, modern museums must merge online and offline to reflect our hybrid culture" (Colombo, 2017). According to Zuanni (2019), the growing importance of digital media in museum practice has been observed to know the insights that has become even more relevant as a digital platform increasingly to dominate communication worldwide. Though, the challenge for museums lies in applying digital space in an ideal, systematic and sustainable way. This concern is particularly significant in present contexts such as Nepal, where museums endure to face fundamental active limitations that hamper to have effective digital transformation (Zuanni, 2019).

It has been accepted that museums are the guardians of cultural memory which has carried out history, art and social development among the different societies. These items can have significantly memorable to the people. Green Hill (2000) has insisted about the role of communications in museums is vital for museum management within a society. Greenhill also explains that the museum conveys important messages to have proper meaning that has happened between institutions and audiences. Though, the communication component in museums has been prioritized in 1960s by various museums and

experts. After 2000s, it has frequently discussed to have arranged specially, with the advent of digital communication technology.

Nowadays, the concept of communication in museums has extended largely as a response to technological developments and expectations of audiences. According to Kidd (2014), museums function in a wide media environment of social media, digital and online, thus museums appear more as cultural media organizations producing cultural contents for modern participants. In the past, museums have communicated with their visitors via exhibitions, labels, guided visits and education, furthermore, Greenhill (2005) states that museums serve as a variation of the media of mass communication, which deliver information through exhibitions, publications, audiovisual media and the internet and intranet. This argument seems valid for changing definitions of museum to endorse by ICOM that widens museum communication in every later day.

### **Scope of Museum Communication**

An examination of the past reveals that after the New Museology movement of the 1970s, museum communication expanded significantly. The emergence of New Museology allowed museums to transition from object-focused establishments to experience-oriented venues, as noted by Greenhill (1994). The field of visitor studies first became well-known in the middle of the 20th century, thanks in large part to the research of Bourdieu & Darbel (1991), who looked at the social factors that affect museum attendance and greatly advanced our understanding of the significance of museum communication.

Over time, the museum's definition has changed in tandem with community involvement and more general shifts in technology, culture, and society. An alternative concept for museums in the early 20th century has concerned for handling and preserving collections which has been redefined by International Council of Museums (2022) to discuss New Museology concept. However, it has emphasized to have proper community engagement, participation, education and communication. ICOM has defined museums in 1974 as long-

term organizations that support society collecting, conserving, studying, disseminating and showcasing the material and immaterial heritage of people and their surroundings for educational to make advancement (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010).

The most recent ICOM (2022) has emphasized the need of communication to meet professional and ethical adaptation with community involvement. Diverse experiences are stimulated for learning, enjoyment, introspection and knowledge generation. This definition demonstrates that communication is essential to museum operations rather than being a side activity.

The notion of contemporary museums that serve as communication institutions has been supported with interpretation, learning, knowledge transfer and participation which has denoted communicative processes. Museums have historically been used with traditional communication methods to interact the visitors, disseminate information to understand cultural heritage. Different public relation tools like posters, exhibits, artifacts, interactive exercises, guided tours, gallery talks, workshops, seminars, conferences and in-service training were part of this. Moreover, museums have been used in libraries, archives, books, catalogs, the media and a diversity of community to outreach and take the initiatives to spread knowledge around world. Today, old-fashioned tools are available in digital instead of physical forms. By drawing in visitors, reaching a wider audience, facilitating more interaction which has enhanced the institution's reputation and image and digital technologies that have improved museum



**ICOM has defined museums in 1974 as long-term organizations that support society collecting, conserving, studying, disseminating and showcasing the material and immaterial heritage of people and their surroundings for educational to make advancement (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010).**

communication. Li (2024) also emphasizes this significance, contends that the motivations, educational experiences, and behavioral patterns of museum visitors have underscore the importance of communication. Additionally, communication has been becoming more and more acknowledged as a crucial and integral part of museum practice in international conceptual frameworks, definitions, and principles.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Nepali museums are facing major effective and structural obstacles which has hindered to enhance their ability for successfully implementing and maintaining digital practices to face the global advancements in digital transformation of museum communication. In spite of the fact of digital platforms deliver chances to increase the accessibility, connection and inclusive representation of heritage. Most of the museums in Nepal lack the necessary technological infrastructure, qualified staff and effective communication diplomacies. There is a need of examining how museums in Nepal can adopt a methodical, sustainable and context-appropriate digital communication strategy that is crucially disconnected between local institutional capacity and global digital trends.

## **3. Objectives**

- a. To identify the changing trends of museum communication, towards integrated digital communications from conventional mode.
- b. To explore the contemporary condition, and new opportunities, of museum communication in digital age within the constitutional and policy framework of Nepal.

## **4. Methods**

This study has applied qualitative research design which includes secondary sources of information, written as a literature review such as research papers, books, research articles etc. In addition, digital platform observation and document analysis are carried out to investigate audience participation, different communication practices and obstacles in Nepalese museums.

## 5. Analysis, Results and Findings

Digital change is not merely a useful tool but a necessity and a vital component in assessing Digital revolution is a core requirement for appraising the performance and long-term sustainability of museums in Nepal. According to Parry (2013) and Zollo et al. (2023) have argued that digital indicators such as online visitor services and social media engagement across multiple platforms serve as key institutional power for future viability. Effective communication is a core part of maintaining museum significance, helping to create viable and culturally diverse environments. It helps to foster public dialogue, community participation, and broader access to cultural heritage.

Digital applications are enabled rapid global dissemination of information and generate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that is significantly influenced public perception and attracts new audiences (Claes & Deltell, 2019). This development extends traditional communication tools. Though, museums often face some of the limitations including limited financial resources, insufficient digital skills among the staff and unclear policy frameworks of the government to take digital initiatives. Despite these challenges, many institutions are gradually accepting digital tools to improve engagement. In this context, digital communication is essential to fulfill museums education and cultural mandates to promote people's participation. Policy frameworks and digital access have been continued in Nepal. Museums lack strategic communication policies as well as effective digital practices. This gap has limited digital opportunities in audience engagement, institutional visibility and sustainable development.

### **Museum and Public Confidence**

Strong institutional direction, demanding research practices and effective museums management has contributed to building public confidence in museums. Proper communication efforts help to improve institutional credibility, visitor satisfaction and overall experience. In this sense, communication is not only a dissemination tool, but it is also a strategic instrument for trust-building and audience retention. Similarly, evidence from large-scale studies have supported the claim. United States of America had conducted a nationwide

survey on Museums with the help of, American Alliance of Museums, found that nearly 9 out of 10 Americans reflect museums to be highly trustworthy, ranking them second only to family and friends, the media, government and business institutions. This study also has discovered that visitors who had joined a museum within the past year has rated museums as the most trusted source of information (American Alliance of Museums, 2021). Likewise, another study has been conducted by Erasmus University which has demonstrated that several leading European museums has achieved higher levels of trust and status than other globally recognized brands such as Rolex and LEGO. In some cases, it has ranked the museums in the United States (Van Riel & Heijndijk, 2017). These findings have been insisted the unique position of museums as highly credible knowledge institutions with the comparison to media organizations, corporations and commercial brands worldwide.

### **Digital Shift and Museum**

As already mentioned, museums had been building up trust since the post-1970s communication era in which new museology emerged and changed paradigm radically to visitor-centered communication. And such trust had been gained through normalized communication practices firmly led by the institution. But that long-trusted paradigm of communication was challenged by the advent of digital media because the reach was enormous and the dangers of misinformation and disinformation became real. These conditions are perhaps much needed in this chaos and false information on social media today when museums are the only reliable sources of reliable knowledge. For a country like Nepal where systematic research on the trust that people have had on museums is relatively less, this contextual research proves even more significant. This worldwide proliferation of digital media provides unparalleled opportunities for museums to reach a broader audience.

In 2020, the pivot to digital communication was propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the closure of all museums and arts organizations on the globe. The International Council of Museums' (ICOM, 2020) global survey on museums reported virtually "all museums experienced more online

communication, with more than half saying they had seen increased use of social media and 84% saying staff had been working remotely using digital tools in order to engage the public.” As a similar example of the pandemic effect on cultural institutions that managed their digital transition well, UNESCO (2020) announced that almost 90 per cent of the world’s museums which together numbered over 85,000 were temporarily closed; in response to this, museums quickly took to offering digital means of experiencing culture, setting up virtual tours, online exhibitions, and digital educational material.



**The International Council of Museums’ (ICOM, 2020) global survey on museums reported virtually “all museums experienced more online communication, with more than half saying they had seen increased use of social media and 84% saying staff had been working remotely using digital tools in order to engage the public.”**

UNESCO and ICOM both argued that the shift to digital would not be short-term and pointed to the longer-term potential for museums to adapt. In the post-pandemic era, digital technologies have transformed communication in all sectors. Museums are no exception. As stated in the Digital 2026 Global Overview Report, 68.7% of people around the world (about 5.66 billion users) use social media and spend 2 hours and 23 minutes a day on the web. On the one hand digital media offers a chance for museums to extend beyond their geographical limits, as ICOM suggested that “museums are no borders, they have networks”. Through the internet, museums can access the entire world using websites, virtual visits and Facebook pages. On the other hand, digital media are generally seen as unreliable because of a lot of false information. A survey conducted by Ipsos for UNESCO in 16 countries reveals that barely half of the internet users trust the social media news. For traditional media,

the trust was at 66% for TV, 63% radio and 61% print. Conversely, 68% of people considered social media the main route of misleading information and a worrying 85% of people worry about its effect on society (UNESCO & Ipsos, 2023). This reveals a paradox between the reach of digital media and the risk to its credibility.

This is simultaneously an opportunity and a challenge for museums. Digital channels give institutions the ability to reach audiences well beyond their physical location and put their collection and cultural stories online for free. However, using these less trusted channels demands that museums work to maintain their credibility by employing anti-misinformation approaches like fact checking, selective content publishing, and outreach. When appropriately managed, digital communication plays an important role in museums. According to research by Russo et al. (2008), social media improves visitors' participation and decreases budget. Nevertheless, more crucially, it brings participatory communication and interaction through comments, sharing and conversations, thus forming closer user- museum relationships. Digital instruments also help with immediate feedback allowing museums to have a better understanding of what visitors prefer and how they communicate (Marty, 2011). It also helps the cultural heritage gain more international consciousness: ICOM shows that digital innovations are the part of being open and accessible and relevant to museums. MDR also tells us that more museums become digital producers of content by launching podcasts, videos, online exhibitions and social media campaigns.

### **Reflection of Nepali Context**

Museums have progressively shifted toward visitor-centered communication, fostering public trust and institutionally guided practices since the emergence of New Museology in the post-1970s period, (Greenhill, 2000). However, this paradigm has challenged digital media, whereas the scale of information dissemination has augmented the risks of misinformation and disinformation. Museums remain among the most credible sources of knowledge. This study is particularly relevant in contexts of Nepal, whereas systematic research

on public trust in museums remains limited. At the same time, the global development of digital media offers museums extraordinary opportunities to reach wider and more varied audiences beyond their physical limits.

According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2020), almost all museums increased their online communication efforts, with more than half reporting a rise in social media use and more than four out of five (84%) representing that staff engaged greatly through digital tools. Similarly, UNESCO (2020a) reported that almost full majority (90%) of the world's approximately 85,000 museums were temporarily closed. ICOM and UNESCO have emphasized that this transformation would have long-term consequences in museum practices. Digital communication has become essential across sectors, including museums in post-pandemic era. As per the Global Overview Report, more than two thirds (68.7%) of the majority shows that global population of about 5.66 billion people are using social media for their interest, spending an average of 2 hours and 23 minutes daily. This widespread reach allows museums to exceed geographical limitations, aligning with ICOM's notion that museums function within global networks without borders (ICOM, 2022).

Though, this growth also presents a credibility inconsistency, meanwhile, digital platforms recover convenience. A survey has been conducted among the 16 countries of the world by Ipsos and UNESCO (2023) which has highlighted that half of internet users trust social media news, that has compared to higher trust levels in traditional media like television (66%), radio (63%) and print (61%). Also, 68% of the respondents have identified that social media as a major source of misinformation as well as 85% of the respondents have articulated concern about its social impact (UNESCO & Ipsos, 2023). So, these facts have shown opportunities and challenges for museums visitors. Similarly, digital platforms promote institutions to disseminate cultural content widely that have engaged global audiences. They also need strategies to maintain credibility like fact checking and content curation which makes responsible communication practices. Digital communication enhances outreach and institutional trust effectively. So, this study insists benefits of digital engagement to use media museum communication. Russo et al. (2008)

claim that social media adopts participatory communication that is hopeful communication with sharing and dialogue to decrease communication costs. Similarly, Marty (2011) emphasizes the need of digital tools to enable real-time feedback to understand visitor preferences for museums.

Additionally, digital knowledges indorse the global prominence for preserving cultural heritage to keep museum safe. ICOM (2022) highlights the status of digital revolution in protection that museum keep on open, accessible and relevant. Museums are gradually acting as digital content creators which has developed podcasts, videos, online exhibitions and social media campaigns to expand their communicative role (MDR, 2023).

Museums in Nepal have a long history that begin with the establishment of the National Museum in 1939 that has aimed to educate the public about the National cultural heritage. A diverse range of museums counting palace museums, community museums and specialized institutions such as the Patan Museum that has emerged to preserve Nepal's history, art and ethnographical richness. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides a strong legal foundation to grant federal, provincial, and local governments authority to establish for proper management of museums in Nepal. As a result, museum development has been accelerated approximately 1,000 museums (ICOM Nepal, 2025).

The reputation of museum communication has grown significantly in terms of policy, practice, and institutional sustainability. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees cultural rights under Article 32, ensuring citizens' rights to participate in cultural life and safeguard heritage, while Article 27 ensures access to information of public bodies to all the citizens. Despite these provisions, communication practices in some of the Nepali museums that remains underdeveloped, mostly in terms of communication strategies and policies. Though, policy frameworks such as the Government of Nepal (2010) has emphasized the uses of mass media for cultural promotion and the Government of Nepal (2019) that advocates digital transformation in different sectors including tourism and culture. Digital communication grips specific significance for museums, offering cost-effective tools to reach broader

audiences and generate valuable data on visitor participation. Nevertheless, most of the Nepali museums lack formal communication plans as well as lack of ability to capitalize on digital prospects. At the same time, increasing internet diffusion presents a significant opportunity. Government shows that, over 80% of households have internet access and more than 85% of Nepali people have their own mobile phones (Government of Nepal, 2026).

Despite this growth, trust in digital media remains some challenges. While 86.2% of internet users in Nepal seem very active on social media (CMR, 2025), whereas only 3% of users report trusting social media as a source of information with comparing 32% for television users (Sharecast Initiative Nepal, 2022). This inconsistency emphasizes the credibility of museums that has to navigate to adopt digital communication strategies. Digital media is increasingly changing museums from static, object-centered spaces into interactive platforms for dialogue and cultural exchange (ICOM, 2023). Different tools such as social media, virtual tours and online services, museums can stand-in participation, co-creation and audience participation. National Museum, Patan Museum, Hanuman Dhoka Palace Museum and Narayanhiti Palace Museum have been adopted such tools to enhance the accessibility and global reach. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have enabled museums to share cultural descriptions through multimedia storytelling platforms. Though, the museums have expanded their digital presence, maintaining public trust.

## 6. Key Findings

The findings of the study reveal that Nepali museums have been expanded significantly with the support of constitutional provisions with a growing number of institutions. Though a clear gap persists between policy frameworks and their practical implementation, particularly in the absence of communication strategies within the museums. Increasing internet penetration and widespread social media have used to get opportunities for digital participation. There are a notable trust deficit remains, as audiences rely on traditional media than digital sources. At the same time, digital technologies are slowly converting museums into more interactive institutions which are applying suitable tools

to disseminate information from social media, virtual tours and online services. However, certifying credibility and addressing misinformation emerge as critical challenges in the evolving digital communication landscape.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, museums in Nepal are at a pivotal stage. Traditional heritage preservation is progressively interconnecting with digital communication prospects. Likewise, constitutional provisions and policies provide a strong foundation for cultural promotion and public engagement for practical implementation which remains limited. Digital technologies present significant potential to enhance accessibility, audience participation and global visibility of Nepali museums, transforming them into interactive and participatory cultural spaces. However, challenges such as low public trust in digital media, lack of formal communication policies and the risk of misinformation highlight the need for strategic planning and capacity building. For museums to fully realize their educational, cultural, and societal mandates, integrating reliable digital communication practices while maintaining credibility is essential.

## References

- American Alliance of Museums. (2021). *Museums and trust 2021*. American Alliance of Museums. <https://www.aam-us.org>
- Bourdieu, P., & Darbel, A. (1991). *The love of art: European art museums and their public* (C. Beattie & N. Merriman, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 1969).
- Claes, F., & Deltell, L. (2019). Museum communication in the digital era: The role of social media and electronic word-of-mouth. *El Profesional de la Información*, 28(2), e280214. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.mar.14>
- CMR Nepal. (2025). *Nepal social media users survey 2025*. Centre for Media Research.

- Colombo, M. E. (2017, October 2). Museum digital matter – Interview 4: Chiara Bernasconi, Assistant Director in the Digital Media Department at MoMA. *Medium*. <https://medium.com>
- Constitution of Nepal. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal 2015*. Government of Nepal.
- DataReportal. (2025, October 14). *Digital 2026: Global overview report*. Kepios; We Are Social; Meltwater. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-global-overview-report>
- Desvallées, A., & Mairesse, F. (2010). *Key concepts of museology*. International Council of Museums.
- Government of Nepal. (2010). *National culture policy 2010*. Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.
- Government of Nepal. (2019). *Digital Nepal framework*. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.
- Government of Nepal. (2026). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2024–25*. Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, National Statistics Office .
- Greenhill, H. E. (2005). *Museums and education: Purpose, pedagogy, performance*. Routledge.
- Greenhill, H.E. (2000). *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. Routledge.
- ICOM (International Council of Museums). (2022). *Museum definition*. Retrieved from <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>
- International Council of Museums (ICOM). (2022). *Museum definition*. <https://icom.museum>

- International Council of Museums (ICOM). (2023). *Museum communication and digital transformation guidelines*. ICOM.
- International Council of Museums. (2020). *Museums, professionals and COVID-19: Survey results*. ICOM.
- Kidd, J. (2014). *Museums in the new mediascape: Transmedia, participation, ethics*. Routledge.
- Li, P. (2024). Cultural communication in museums: A perspective of the visitors' experience. *PLOS ONE*, 19(5), e0303026. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0303026>
- Marty, P. F. (2011). My lost museum: User expectations and motivations for creating personal digital collections on museum websites. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33(3), 211–219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2010.11.003>
- MDR (Museum Digital Report). (2023). *Digital trends in museums: Global insights*. MDR.
- Parry, R. (2007). *Recording the museum: Digital heritage and the technologies of change*. Routledge.
- Parry, R. (2013). The end of the beginning: Normativity in the post-digital museum. *Museum Worlds*, 1(1), 24–39.
- Riel, V. & Heijndijk, P. (2017). *The reputational landscape of museums: A study of European museum brands*. Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- Russo, A., Watkins, J., Kelly, L., & Chan, S. (2008). Participatory communication with social media. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 51(1), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2008.tb00292.x>
- Sharecast Initiative Nepal. (2022). *Nepal media survey 2022*. Sharecast Initiative Nepal.
- Simon, N. (2010). *The participatory museum*. Museum 2.0.

- UNESCO, & Ipsos. (2023). *Survey on trust in media and misinformation*. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-literacy/survey-trust-media-misinformation>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Museums around the world in the face of COVID19*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2020a). *Museums around the world in the face of COVID19* (2nd ed.). UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
- Zollo, L., Filieri, R., Rialti, R., & Yoon, S. (2023). Unpacking the role of digital transformation in museums: Impacts on visitor engagement and cultural value creation. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 174, 121-273.
- Zuanni, C. (2019). *Digital heritage and museum communication: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge.

# KANKREBIHAR AS A LIVING OPEN-AIR MUSEUM: PRESERVING HERITAGE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE TRANSFORMATION

**Tribhuwan BC**

Assistant Professor, Mid-West University  
tribhuwan.bc@mu.edu.np

**Himal Gaire**

Development worker and Policy Specialist

## Abstract

*The concept of a living open-air museum was launched to preserve cultural heritage within the unique ecological and social context. So, the living open-air museums are known as eco-museums that create immersive environments to make the active visitors engagement to flow active participants rather than passive observers. This study opines that Kankrebihar as a living open-air museum, which highlights its role towards cultural knowledge transfer, heritage preservation and tourism promotion in Nepal. This study has employed purposive sampling whereas the data were collected from key stakeholders in Surkhet Valley with over focus group discussions, key informant interviews and field observation which is analyzed thematically. Kankrebihar is a 12th-century Sikhara-style stone temple complex from the Khasa Malla period, which is located in Birendranagar, Surkhet, it has reflected religious syncretism with the combination of Hindu and Buddhist foundations, with carvings portraying the Buddha's life, various deities and symbolic themes. A Buddhist monastery is connected to earlier religious traditions. Restoration efforts have preserved the site's authenticity for promoting knowledge transfer through community involvement, traditional craftsmanship, interpretive materials and ecotourism initiatives as well.*

**Keywords** : Kankrebihar, Heritage, Open-air Museum, Preservation, Knowledge transfer, Cultural tourism

## 1. Introduction

Over the past 150 years, open-air museums have emerged as a separate field of museology, becoming well-known throughout the world for their capacity to provide engaging, contextualized learning experiences (Moolman, 1996; Young, 2006; Williams-Davies, 2009). Unlike traditional indoor museums, they draw a variety of audiences and frequently have higher visitor satisfaction rates because they place heritage in authentic settings. Several have also shown a high degree of economic sustainability. Open-air museums often face obstacles like seasonal operations and limited capacity for long-term strategic growth, despite these advantages. According to Lyth (2006), Rentzhog (2007), and Colomer (2002), traditional crafts represent both material and immaterial cultural values within the broader heritage sector. These crafts enhance educational experiences and increase economic viability when successfully incorporated into outdoor museum programming (Paardekooper, 2012). According to Cavalli et al. (2017) and the Heritage Crafts Association (2017), many of these traditional skills are still in danger of extinction. The economic and social potential of traditional crafts is constantly highlighted by scholarship, but in modern practice, this potential is still not fully realized (European Commission, 1998; KPMG UK for the Crafts Council, 2016).

The idea of a living outdoor museum has been provided for pleasing framework to deal with the issues. Living open-air museums is known as eco-museums globally to preserve heritage for the ecological and social context that is encouraged for active visitor engagement rather than passive observation. In contrast to traditional museums that looks frequently separate artifacts from their original contexts too (Davis, 2011). Their ability to depends for efficient transfer of specialized, frequently understood cultural knowledge between generations and communities (Howard, 2003). Cultural heritage has to continuously pass down through the generations to generation which runs the risk of becoming static and disconnected from the living communities that is intended to represent.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The living museums are facing rapid destruction of implied knowledge that challenges related to authenticity and depth of heritage understanding. Implied knowledge depends on personal experience based on that is developed through years of practice which cannot be easily transferred over written means. Many heritages of Nepal are facing number of problems such vernacular architecture, traditional metallurgy and indigenous cultural protection. These challenges are intensified because of the weak mentorship structures and the increasing commercialization of heritage spaces where entertainment-driven models can replace skill-based knowledge.

Archaeological sites in Karnali Province of Nepal are associated with the Khasa Malla civilization which are under momentous risk from urban expansion, environmental hazards, inadequate conservation practices as well as lack of effective interpretation systems. There is a risk to damage physical structures and accelerate the disappearance of associated intangible heritage that is including oral traditions, craftsmanship and local knowledge systems. So, the sites like Kankrebihar have been experienced with physical refurbishment. They remain underutilized as platforms for education, interpretation and cultural transmission. In the absence of organized programs for documenting and transferring traditional knowledge like storytelling, artisan training and community engagement which create a serious gap for heritage sustainability.

## 3. Objectives

- a. To explore the potential of living museum approaches in Nepal for promoting tangible and intangible heritage sites like Kankrebihar.
- b. To analyze the key strategies to strengthen knowledge that transfer for community participation, and authentic interpretation in Nepal's heritage management.

## 4. Review of Previous Work

To preserve historical structures, landscapes and living traditions in their natural environments, both in situ and relocated, the open-air museum concept

was first introduced in Europe by Skansen in Sweden in 1891 and has since expanded throughout the world (Ali, 2010; Olinsson, 2023). Such strategies are seen in living heritage sites as an archaeological park in Asia, to meet the "spirit of the place" that combines physical artifacts with continuous moral and cultural endurance (Tahseen, 2020).

The living architecture, craftsmanship and cultural practices of Nepal's is a historic urban center, like Patan and Bhaktapur museums that often make them the moniker "living museums." There hasn't focused to have proper research about Kankrebihar. Previous research on Karnali heritage tourism site emphasizes the potential in comparison with the places like

the Sinja Valley and its civilization, but it also identifies substantial infrastructure and explanatory facility deficiencies (Dhakai, 2024). In opposition to modernization and globalization, the preservation is crucial, according to the broader studies on cultural heritage (Banda, 2024).

Open-air museums remain the most useful strategies for preserving rural architectural heritage (Pedram et al., 2018). Across Europe, about 300 archaeological open-air museums have functioned to provide education facilities rather than recreated background. A wide-ranging study of 199 such institutions have been exposed significant difference in funding models, visitor demographics and management practices that leads for practices across six key areas such as management, staff, collections, marketing, interpretation and visitors (Paardekooper, 2013). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that

“

**A wide-ranging study of 199 such institutions have been exposed significant difference in funding models, visitor demographics and management practices that leads for practices across six key areas such as management, staff, collections, marketing, interpretation and visitors (Paardekooper, 2013).**

open-air museums depend heavily on intangible heritage to create successful mediation and pedagogical experiences (Olinsson, 2023). While many visitors associate the term with translocated buildings, the concept also encompasses in-situ preservation, replicas, hypothetical reconstructions, and combinations thereof (Gailey, 1999).

## 5. Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Social Constructivism and Situated Learning Theory. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978) posits that learning occurs through social interaction between more knowledgeable individuals and learners. In an open-air museum context, this manifests in the interactive exchanges between interpreters and visitors that transform heritage from static information into lived understanding. According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of learning within Communities of Practice that has emphasized "legitimate peripheral participation that gradually move toward mastery with authentic social engagement (Wenger, 1998). This type aligns has related closely with Tilden's (1957) Heritage Interpretation Theory that views the primary goal of interpretation as provocation—encouraging learners to forge personal connections between past events and present lives.

The research has designed and guided UNESCO's framework of living (intangible) cultural heritage that stresses dynamic, intergenerational transmission rather than static objects (UNESCO, n.d.). Knowledge transfer has been theorized with community-based models that involve oral traditions, artisan skills and experiential learning via tourism and pilgrimage. These processes have been supported with the constructivist view in which visitors actively construct meaning through direct interaction with the site.

## 6. Empirical Review

Empirical studies in museology consistently affirm that hands-on, apprenticeship-style learning is most effective for sustaining heritage. Deacon and Smeets (2013) reported a 30% increase in youth engagement at museums featuring "living national treasures" compared with those relying

solely on digital repositories. At Skansen, intergenerational knowledge transfer has demonstrably strengthened local communities' "psychological feeling of ownership," resulting in higher volunteer retention (Rentzhog, 2007, p. 19). Magelssen (2007) showed that performative, living-history approaches yield greater historical accuracy than static exhibitions. Harrison (2013) highlighted the risk of organizational "knowledge leakage" when non-codified learning between senior and junior staff remains unrecorded.

## 7. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case-study method to examine Kankrebihar as a living open-air museum in its natural context. The fieldwork was conducted in Birendranagar, Surkhet Valley, Karnali Province, Nepal. Data were gathered through four FGD involving 32 participants and 10 KII representatives who could provide diverse perspectives on the site's heritage attributes and knowledge-transfer processes, representing residents, local journalists, community leaders, and higher level of provincial authorities. Sessions with a semi-structured questionnaire were executed in Nepali language, audio-recorded with written informed consent, and transcribed verbatim for accuracy.

## 8. Limitations

Constraints of this research involve its qualitative nature, localized site focus, and dependence on purposive sampling, which offers depth but constrains broader applicability. Subsequent studies might utilize mixed-methods strategies or comparative evaluations among different Karnali heritage locations. In the end, by emphasizing the sharing of knowledge, Nepal can guarantee that invaluable cultural traditions continue to thrive, stay pertinent, and endure in a time of swift modernization.

## 9. Results and Findings

Thematic analysis of the FGDs and KIIs with community members, media professionals, Ministry of Social Development officials, and higher provincial authorities yielded four interconnected themes that illuminate how Kankrebihar

functions as a living open-air museum and the critical role of knowledge transfer in its preservation.

**Theme 1:** Embodiment of Living Open-Air Museum Attributes Participants across all stakeholder groups consistently described Kankrebihar as an inherently living open-air museum that requires no additional physical museum infrastructure. The existing stone structures, sculptures, ruins and forested hill backdrops have and direct, immersive experience awareness of history which has provided home to local fauna like birds and deer (FGD participants, community). Even though, stakeholders have emphasized its rich archaeological significance as a high value as national heritage site that is associated with the Khasa Malla civilization.

They also pointed out that there is a lack of serious academic research in this area (KII, provincial authority). Similarly, Hindu artifacts were normally mentioned to those potent symbols of cultural identity, religious syncretism and tolerance. These symbols were enhanced by oral traditions and regional folklore, such as the Salibehna stories and Pandava associations (KII, media professional; FGD, community). Participants have been advocated to view the site as an integrated eco-cultural system that encompasses the forest ecosystem, biodiversity and cultural assets, rather than treating it as a standalone monument (KII, Ministry of Social Development). Davis's (2011) view on eco-museums is related to Paardekooper's (2013) that emphasis on in-situ archaeological sites whereas the natural and social environment itself becomes the interpretive medium.

**Theme 2:** Mechanisms of Knowledge Transfer FGD and KII data have revealed multifaceted pathways for transmitting about the tacit and explicit knowledge. The restoration has involved hands-on training for local youth with Bhaktapur master artisans that is enabling intergenerational skill transfer in traditional stone craftsmanship being duration of 2015 to 2021. Interpretive signage, guided tours led by community members and oral folklore shared during visits were identified as a key vehicle to convey historical and cultural narratives. Stakeholders, particularly media professionals and provincial authorities,

highlight the emerging role of social media platforms and digital archives as effective tools for knowledge transfer, awareness raising, and youth engagement (KII, media professional). Participants also stressed the site's potential as a learning and research hub for archaeology, architecture, and cultural studies, recommending integration into local curricula and field-based learning supported by interpretive tools (KII, higher provincial authority). This community has implanted practices aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) social communication. As per the perceptions of Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation and UNESCO's dynamic intangible cultural heritage framework that is effectively preventing the "memory gap" identified by Polanyi (1966) and Chhabra (2010).

**Theme 3:** Community Pride, Environmental Consciousness, and Intergenerational Linkage Locals can see Kankrebihar as their ancestral heritage as a living example of religious syncretism and cultural resilience. The restoration and tourism activities have strengthened their sense of pride and ownership (FGD, community). Land donations from local community seems the strong desire to participate in protection and promotion of this area as long as financial gains and recognition are guaranteed that they are highlighted (KII, Ministry of Social Development). Many emphasized how eco-tourism initiatives and educational visits transmit values to younger generations while heightening awareness of environmental stewardship within the forested landscape. These outcomes align with Rentzhog's (2007) findings on psychological ownership and demonstrate that place-based learning strengthens community bonds and long-term preservation commitment.

**Theme 4:** Challenges, Limitations, and Untapped Potential Despite evident successes, participants identified several critical challenges. A major tension exists between conservation and commercialization, including debates over transforming the site into a "zoo" or heavily commercialized area (FGD, community). Additional concerns consist of inadequate research and documentation, poor interpretation and information systems (for instance,

absence of information signage and guided services), limited access routes for the community, minimal economic advantages, lack of involvement in decision-making processes, and environmental hazards associated with infrastructure projects that may disturb wildlife pathways (KII, provincial authority; FGD, community). Institutional and coordination deficiencies between government entities, local organizations, academic institutions, and the media further hinder progress (KII, higher authority).

Nonetheless, parties involved demonstrated considerable hope and provided specific suggestions. These recommendations encompass prioritizing in-situ conservation and authenticity, enhancing multidisciplinary research efforts, implementing a holistic eco-cultural management strategy, boosting community engagement and income prospects through community-centric tourism initiatives, advancing interpretation and digital initiatives (such as QR codes and multimedia resources), encouraging responsible and sustainable tourism practices, and forming coordinated governance frameworks with a comprehensive long-term plan that aligns with a potential World Heritage nomination (KII, Ministry and provincial authorities). These perspectives support the literature's call for integrated management strategies (Olinsson, 2023; Pedram et al., 2018) and imply that formally designating Kankrebihar as a living open-air museum could address existing gaps and maximize its capabilities. In summary, the results verify that Kankrebihar's physical and cultural characteristics closely align with those of thriving open-air museums, while mechanisms for knowledge transfer anchored in community involvement, experiential learning, and collaboration among various stakeholders are crucial in preserving both material and non-material heritage.

## 10. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that community ownership is a key driver of sustainable management of Kankrebihar as a living open-air museum. However, the conditional nature of community engagement - often tied to expectations of economic benefit, underscore the need for carefully designed community-based tourism model. This study also contributes to museology and heritage

studies to demonstrate that participatory restoration and interpretive strategies grounded in social constructivism and situated learning offer a viable model for sites facing similar challenges in Nepal and beyond.

So, Nepali policymakers and heritage managers has to consider formally recognizing Kankrebihar as a live museum. This study also identifies about the weak site interpretation, inter-stakeholder coordination gaps, environmental risk and limited participatory mechanisms as key challenges for managing such museum in Nepal. So, it is necessary to get formal recognition of Kankrebihar as a living open-air museum that must be supported by multidisciplinary research, digital tools and artisan mentorship, could significantly strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer, enhance international visibility and transform the site from static ruins into a dynamic cultural asset.

## References

- Banda. (2024). [Full details not located in public sources; retain or replace with complete citation if available].
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cavalli, A. (2017). *The master's touch: Essential elements of artisanal excellence*. Marsilio.
- Chhabra, D. (2010). *Sustainable marketing of cultural and heritage tourism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855416>
- Colomer, L. (2002). Educational facilities in archaeological reconstructions: Is an image worth more than a thousand words? *Public Archaeology*, 2(2), 85–94.
- Davis, P. (2011). *Ecomuseums: A sense of place* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

- Deacon, H., & Smeets, R. (2013). Authenticity, value and community involvement in heritage management under the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage Conventions. *Heritage & Society*, 6(2), 129–143. <https://doi.org/10.1179/2159032X13Z.0000000009>
- Dhakal. (2024). [Full details not located in public sources; retain or replace with complete citation if available].
- Dhungana, K. (2023, June 22). Kakrebihar: Tale of ruins, restoration efforts, and folklores. *Farsight Nepal*. <https://farsightnepal.com/news/kakrebihar-tale-of-ruins-restoration-efforts-and-folklores/>
- European Commission. (1998). *Promoting creation and development of sustainable employment in the rare crafts sector*.
- Farsight Nepal. (2023). [See Dhungana (2023) above for the primary article; retain or merge as needed].
- Gailey, A. (1999). Domesticating the past: The development of open-air museums. *Folk Life*, 38(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1179/flk.1999.38.1.7>
- Harrison, R. (2013). *Heritage: Critical approaches*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203108857>
- Heritage Crafts Association. (2017). *The Radcliffe red list of endangered crafts*. Heritage Crafts Association.
- Howard, P. (2003). *Heritage: Management, interpretation, identity*. Continuum.
- Kathmandu Post. (2021, September 10). 12th century Kakre Vihar restored to its former glory. <https://kathmandupost.com/karnali-province/2021/09/10/12th-century-kakre-vihar-restored-to-its-former-glory>
- KPMG UK for the Crafts Council. (2016). *Innovation through craft: Opportunities for growth*. Crafts Council. [https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/documents/876/Innovation\\_through\\_craft\\_full\\_report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/documents/876/Innovation_through_craft_full_report_2016.pdf)

- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyth, P. (2006). Selling history in an age of industrial decline: Heritage tourism in Robin Hood county. In *XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki* (pp. 1–17).
- Magelssen, S. (2007). [Full details not located in public sources; retain or replace with complete citation if available].
- Malcolm-Davies, J. (2004). Borrowed robes: The educational value of costumed interpretation at historic sites. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10(3), 277–293.
- Moolman, H. (1996). Site museums: Their origins, definition and categorisation. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 15(2), 163–170.
- Olinsson, S. B. (2023). A museology for open-air museums. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 21(1).
- Paardekooper, R. (2012). *The value of an archaeological open-air museum is in its use*. Sidestone Press.
- Paardekooper, R. (2013). *The value of an archaeological open-air museum is in its use: Understanding archaeological open-air museums and their visitors*. Sidestone Press.
- Pedram, B., Emami, M. A., & Khakban, M. (2018). Role of the open-air museum in the conservation of the rural architectural heritage. *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage*, 18, 101–120.
- Polanyi, M. (1966). *The tacit dimension*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rentzhog, S. (2007). *Open air museums*. J. Förlag & C. Bokförlag.
- Tahseen. (2020). [Full details not located in public sources; retain or replace with complete citation if available].

- The Himalayan Times. (2024, August 8). Kakre Bihar: A 12th century stone temple in Surkhet. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/photo-gallery/kakre-bihar-a-12th-century-stone-temple-in-surkhet>
- Tilden, F. (1957). *Interpreting our heritage*. University of North Carolina Press.
- UNESCO. (n.d.-a). Intangible cultural heritage. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>
- UNESCO. (n.d.-b). [Full details not located in public sources; retain or replace with complete citation if available].
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Williams-Davies, J. (2009). 'Now our history is your history': The challenge of relevance for open-air museums. *Folk Life*, 48(1), 7–21.
- Young, L. (2006). Villages that never were: The museum village as a heritage genre. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(4), 321–338.
- Zipsane, H. (2006). Lifelong learning in open air museums – A fascinating part to play in Europe. Paper presented at the 22nd Conference of the European Association of Open Air Museums, Åbo, Finland.

# ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN MUSEUM IN PROMOTING SDGS THROUGH GEO-TOURISM AND GEO-EDUCATION

**Jinesh Sindurakar**

Chief Administrative Officer

Nepal Mountaineering Association & International Mountain Museum

jinesh.file@gmail.com

## Abstract

*The International Mountain Museum (IMM), established in Pokhara by Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) is considered as a source of information related with mountain tourism, environment, mountain culture and heritage, training and other mountain activities. This paper explains about the artifacts and exhibits being displayed at museums and tries to build relationship with geo-tourism and geo-education. The study of both the streams, geo-tourism and geo-education, help the interested students and visitors to understand about geography, landscape, cultural and natural heritage. The visit to IMM helps the visitors to get wide knowledge of the elements of geo-tourism and geo-education and assists in connecting them with the emerging global concept of tourism. Another vital piece of information that IMM is contributing to the accomplishment of SDGs. The study explains the role of IMM in following the paths that has adopted by UN for SDGs. This study inspects the role of the International Mountain Museum (IMM) in promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by geo-tourism and geo-education. The study has applied qualitative and descriptive methods that analyzes museum exhibits, programs and partnerships. The findings of the study show that IMM improves awareness of mountain environments, cultural heritage and climate change over educational displays and interactive learning. It pays to SDGs, particularly in education, sustainable tourism and environmental conservation. Nevertheless, limited resources and weak program incorporation compel its full potential.*

**Keywords** : International Mountain Museum (IMM), Geo-tourism, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Climate change, Mountain tourism.

## 1. Introduction

IMM houses provides widespread information on peaks above 8000 meters along with geological specimens collected from various mountain ranges. The museum effectively showcases the culture and lifestyle of indigenous mountain communities that is enabling visitors to gain a deeper understanding of their traditions and daily lives. Operated by a team of approximately 19 staff members. It functions as an educational platform that enables meaningful engagement with the world of mountaineering (NMA, n.d.). The museum has organized into four thematic exhibition halls like the Hall of Mountain People, the Hall of World Mountains, the Hall of Mountain Activities and the Hall of Temporary Exhibitions. It has covered a total floor area of 3,052.32 square meters which is recognized as one of the largest mountain museums internationally. It indicates around 4,000 artifacts that attracts nearly 300,000 visitors annually average of 800 daily visitors. It has generated revenue exceeding NPR 3 crore per year (Government of Nepal, 2025). It has targeted students as future protectors of mountain environments and cultural heritage. The museum has emphasized educational creativities that promote sustainable mountain tourism (Dowling, 2013).

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Out of Nepal's total area of 147,516 sq. km, Nepal has more than 2000 mountains, government has officially given permission for 462 mountains for climbing and mountaineering. Among these mountains, different 14 mountains are the world's highest peaks rising above 8,000 meters. Approximately 83% out of 147,516 sq. km the Nepali land that has covered by mountainous landscapes, including the Himalayas, they are popular for their pristine natural beauty and rich cultural heritage.

The Himalayan range has lied within the vast Hindu Kush Himalaya civilization that is extending over 3,500 km from Afghanistan in the northwest to

Myanmar in the southeast which spans about 800 km. This covers from Byasrishi Himal in Darchula in the west to Kanchenjunga in the east (Upadhyay and Upreti, n.d.). As per the Central Bureau of Statistics (2021), the total people of the mountain region are 6.8 % of the total population of Nepal (The Himalayan Times, 2023). Mountain tourism holds the third position in the purpose of visit with 14.50% i.e. 166,394 number of mountaineers and trekkers in 2024 (Nepal Tourism Statistics 2024) and hence it is taken as the backbone of our tourism economy, but due to the increment in global warming causing the unnatural change in climate is having tremendous effect on our mountain tourism. The rapid glacial melting, glacial outburst floods and shifting in weather patterns are some of the consequences of global warming and climate change. It also resulted in the migration of mountain people to other parts of the country in seek of comfortable life and better opportunity for the family members leaving the villages with old people, children and women.

Although, the International Mountain Museum (IMM) purposes to indorse geo-tourism and geo-education to raise social awareness about sustainability issues. Due to the limited resources insufficient program integration and weak institutional collaboration, its potential remains underutilized. Accordingly, a critical problem lies effectively, IMM contributes to geo-education to secure justifiable tourism to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### 3. Objectives

- a. To study the role of International Mountain Museum (IMM) for promoting geo-tourism and geo-education.
- b. To analyze the contribution of IMM toward in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mainly in relation with sustainable tourism and environmental awareness.

### 4. Methods

The qualitative and descriptive approaches are used in the article to determine the role of IMM in geo-tourism, geo-education and SDGs. All the exhibited materials have been studied qualitatively and descriptively to identify whether

they narrate distinctly about geo-tourism and geo-education. Analyzing the global definition of geo-tourism, geo-education and SDGs, the study of the exhibited materials exhibited, institutional partnership with other organizations and annual programs have been conducted to find the possible discrepancies are and suggested for the necessary actions to follow to meet the global standard.

## 5. Results and findings

Geo-tourism is sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing the earth's geological features in a way that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation, and is locally beneficial.

### The Center of Geo-Tourism & Geo-Education- IMM

It is about creating a geo-tourism product that protects geo-heritage, helps build communities, communicates and promotes geological heritage and works with a wide range of different people (Dowling, 2013). The term "geotourism" was introduced by the National Geographic Society (NGS) and is a relatively new concept in the tourism industry that has emerged worldwide as a rapidly growing form of tourism (Turner, 2006). Geotourism is a form of



**The term "geotourism" was introduced by the National Geographic Society (NGS) and is a relatively new concept in the tourism industry that has emerged worldwide as a rapidly growing form of tourism (Turner, 2006).**

tourism that emphasizes geology and landscape as central elements of the tourist experience. There are many geotourism that can identify as cultural, adventure, educational, sustainable, recreational, scientific, photographic, urban and rural phenomenon to know the geotourism (Yeison et al., 2024). So, the geo-education encompasses interactive that exhibits, guided tours, and educational materials so, the visitors have got opportunity to learn about the

geological processes that have formed the landscape over millions of years. It has played a vital role in nurturing a sense of interest and obligation for the natural world. Geo-education has enabled the students to better understand about their surroundings, natural resources, geographical features and definite challenges among the local communities. Furthermore, it helps to grasp the importance of sustainability, proper resource management and to make prompt decisions to preserve the environment as well as ensure food security.

The IMM has underwritten in geo-tourism with the improvement and protection of natural character, including its culture, heritage, environment, aesthetics and the well-being of the mountain region to promote sustainability for the well-being of local Communities. According to the visions of National Geographic Society, geo education as the tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.

IMM exhibits customs, traditions and culture of the mountain people of Nepal. Some of the Nepalese mountain people are Sherpas, Gurungs, Tamangs, Thakalis, Chhantyal, Pun Magars, Yakkhas, Rais, Limbus and Sunuwar. Their dresses, ornaments, musical instruments, household utensils and cultural activities of the have been placed mountain people section in an attractive way. International Mountain Museum also exhibits the mountain people from Slovenia, Japan and Korea.

In museum, visitors can see traditional activities of mountain people such as cooking food, making tea with the traditional kitchen equipment shade light on the daily lifestyle of mountain people of Nepal (Updhaya & Uperti, n.d.). Different religious activities of the mountain region are conducted in a separate and sacred place, that is called Lakhang which can be managed inside the IMM where gods are worshipped as per the Himalayan culture. One of the religious and holy monuments in the Buddhism culture is Chhorten that is also called stupa, is established in the premises of IMM. It is surrounded by Buddhist flag- Lungdar and people revolve around this sacred monument in clockwise direction called Kora, is an act of high merit (Snellgrove, 1987).

Traditional daily life of indigenous people of the mountain region seems a living museum that has constructed on the southeastern side outside the main building of IMM. It gives a glimpse of the typical mountain people's village and provides insights to the visitors into what the traditional home of mountain looks like (National Geographic Society, n.d.).

The experience of daily life of mountain people and their religious activities, IMM also offers detailed explanations of the 8,000m mountains with special focus on historical background. The process of formation of mountains and their structure, rocks and stone collected from the different mountain zones help to create a sense of curiosity to the visitors (Nepal Mountaineering Association, n.d.). Two pieces of rock from the highest peak of the world- Mt. Everest and lowest section of the world-- Dead Sea are placed are another geological attraction of the museum (Royal Geographical Society, n.d.).

A section with the display of necessary equipment required for climbing mountains and rocks explained with the usage and method during the mountaineering is also managed in the museum (Nepal Mountaineering Association, n.d.) The collection and display of mountain garbage collected from Everest and Lhotse in 2000 and 2003 symbolically share information about the types of garbage found in the mountain region. The photos received from British Council and the Royal Geography Society explains about the attempts to ascend Everest that started in 1921 until the successful expedition of 1953 (Royal Geographical Society, n.d).

The visit of IMM shares information related to the historic first mountaineers of Edmund Hillary, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, Maurice Herzog, Junko Tabei, Toshio Imanishi etc. The display of the mountaineering equipment used in those major expeditions makes the present mountaineering generation understandable about the expeditions conducted in 1950s with the limited resources they owned at that time (Messner, 2001). The displayed materials are illustrative that explained will-power, courage, patience and hardworking played a pivotal role in successfully conquering mountain expeditions. Similarly, Manaslu- the eighth highest peak of the world, was first climbed on 9 May 1956 by Toshio

Imanishi and Gyalzen Norbu, is structurally built of the stone with the height of 31 feet, colored with white. It remains one of the major exhibits of the museum with most of the visitors interested in climbing.

Yeti, the abominable snowman, which is considered to inhabit at the high mountains, and the Sherpa community take this giant animal as the guardian of the mountain, but still not traced. Lot of fables have been tailored by many mountaineers, Sherpa community about this cryptid making mountain tourism not only for the mountaineering, but many more stories remain to narrate to the world and yeti is one of them (Sharma, 2010). NMA has the tradition of respecting and recalling the great personalities, who envisioned IMM and turned into reality making it one of the invaluable assets of the country.

### **Issues of Climate Change and SDGs**

Climate change has referred towards the long-term shifts in temperatures to know the weather patterns. Such type of shifts can have natural, due to changes in the sun's activity and large volcanic eruptions. Because of the human activities, climate change begun around 1800s due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas (United Nations, 2015). Mountainous country like Nepal, having similar mountain specification and development constraints. Nepal has diverse climatic condition which are reaching from tropical in the south to alpine in the north. So, temperature varies with topographic variation and decreased from South to North. Nepal produces 3.04 million tons of Carbon dioxide per year. It is 0.0126% CO<sub>2</sub> emission shared globally (WRI, Earth trends, 2011). Global warming- one of the major factors for the climate change for which Nepal's contribution is negligible, but we are going to be one of the most affected countries. Therefore, NMA coordinated with ICIMOD for the management of Climate Change Corner inside IMM to disseminate about the cause of global warming and climate change and how the mountain people are affected. The illustrative pictures presented in an understandable way explain the emission of black carbon, its role in the speed of melting of snow on the mountain with the approaches that should be adopted to reduce carbon emission.

There are 132 images and maps being displayed at IMM with the illustrative pictures narrating about GLOF, formation of glacial lakes, air pollution, water flood in urban areas, garbage on the mountains etc. The images of the most dangerous lake called - Imja glacial lake, which is the fastest growing lake in the Himalaya are on display. Similarly, images like Gapche Glacial Lake, expansion of Tulagi Glacial Lake, Gyaja glacier etc. present the alarming state of global warming and its effect on the unnatural climate change that contributes in the rapid melting of ice forming the glacial lakes. Some of the images show the landslide in Kathmandu as the result of uncontrolled deforestation leading to the unplanned development of urban areas. The illustrative pictures of Seti flood of 2012 destroying many villages leaving 13 people dead and 36 people still missing are also on display.

### **IMM'S Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals**

The United Nations adopted SDGs in 2015, which is also known as the Global Goals which is made for elevating poverty to protect the planet that is ensure till 2030 for the global peace, prosperity happiness of the people. The 17 SDGs are integrated that recognize the action which is done in one area will affect outcomes of the other area. It has developed for balancing social, economic and environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2015).

The concept of sustainable development as a harmonious process of social development within environmental limits began in 1972. Sustainable development is essential for society in social, economic, and environmental aspects (Abrahams, 2017). Sustainable development reflects an effort to balance economic growth, environmental integrity, and social wellbeing (Mensah, 2019). The Our Common Future document, better known as the Brundtland Report 1987, defines the concept of sustainable development for the first time as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN, 2015).

The IMM contributes for the attainment of SDGs through the preservation of mountain culture and heritage with the creation of awareness about climate change and global warming for the sustainable development of tourism.

**Table 2:** *Contribution of IMM in achieving SDGs*

SDG Goals	Key Contribution of IMM
SDG 4: Education & Awareness	The establishment of IMM is to disseminate information about the history of global mountaineering to educate the present generation and therefore, it narrates the story of great mountaineers and their contribution to mountain tourism and community. IMM creates awareness to the visitors through the display of information about global warming, climate change, mountain diversity, culture, natural heritage etc.
SDG 11 & 8: Sustainable communities & tourism	IMM has an exhibition of artifacts of mountain people that explain their local culture, heritage, daily livelihood etc. and call for their preservation for the sustainable development of tourism to upgrade the economic status of the mountain region.
SDG 13: Climate Action	The highest number of students in the IMM shows that the museum is regarded as the center of education on the biodiversity conservation, mountain tourism, global warming and its effect on the fragile mountain environment. It encourages the visitors to adopt responsible actions that help to combat global warming and climate change for the sustainable development of mountain tourism.
SDG 15: Life on Land	IMM is the home for more than 170 birds and planted with different herbal plants, trees etc. The display of different types of butterflies found in Nepal, flora and fauna, geological information with the exhibition of culture and heritage of mountain people depicting their daily livelihood help to understand our natural, cultural habitat and mountain biodiversity.

## **Institutional Support & Exchange Programs**

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) represent a global vision for future society, acknowledging the impact of contemporary human activities on the quality of life of generations to come. Partnerships that arise to achieve SDGs aim to improve life through the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental (Yevdokymova, 2024). The institutional partnership and exchange programs support in fostering knowledge exchange, joint initiatives, and coordinated action on global development priorities.

The International Committee of Museum (ICOM) believes that the exchange Programmes in which two countries respectively host a museum professional of the partner country in order to work together and share ideas in different perspectives for the development of an exhibition. The periodic organization of photo exhibition in collaboration of Patan Museum, Hanumandhoka Durbar Museum, National Archives of Nepal, Swiss Alpine Museum, Royal Geographical Society, Alliance Française etc. widens IMM's connection with international institutions expanding its reach and offer diverse experience to the visitors. Therefore, it is converting as the hub for community involvement and sustainability.

NMA has coordinated with Patan Museum to display the photos of the longest festival of Nepal- Rato Machhindranath at IMM with an objective to disseminate about the Red Lord of Fishes. The festival has believed to be celebrated 1300 years ago to end long term drought in the valley, because of lack of rain in the Kathmandu valley for the long period of time. The Kathmanduties worship Machhindranath as the god of protector against natural calamities and brings prosperity of the people. Hanumandhoka Durbar Museum Development Committee organized a photo exhibition about Hanumandhoka's palace area, monuments, various Jatras, festivals and people's life including the important properties of Hanumandhoka Palace area. Taleju Temple has stone pillar with the family of Pratapa Malla, Malla period's Mulchok, Mohanchok, Kaliyadaman statue, Nepal Army preparation for the First World War, the damage and rescue of the 1990's massive Earthquake etc.

In coordination with National Archives of Nepal, the news published on the national daily, *The Rising Nepal* about the first ascent of all mountains above 8000m is also on display, which is very interesting and informative to explore at the museum. The historic photos of *The Fight for Everest 1924* contain the images that were taken over 100 years ago explain the attempts to climb Everest in 1921, 1922 and 1924. With an objective to celebrate the centennial anniversary of 1924 Everest Expedition, the Royal Geographical Society made available these remarkable photos to NMA for the display at IMM. The images of the major expedition members like George Mallory, Andrew Irvine, Charles Bruce, Gyalzen Kazi, Karma Paul, Ang Tsering etc. demonstrating their effort to conquer Everest in 1924 also shades light on many more important aspects of that expedition.

Honey hunting- the oldest and most traditional method used to gather honey from wild bee colonies, is one of the most adventurous activities of mountain people. The attractive model of honey hunting managed by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is another example of the effort of IMM to showcase the sustainable practice adopted by the indigenous community timed with the seasons to protect bees and their habitats. IMM has the tradition of highlighting such program, which follows sustainable village development through the usage of renewable energy with the proper management of health posts and schools. Just adjacent to the replica of honey hunter, the yak value chain model is placed which is a perfect example of sustainable development program.

As part of the Platinum Jubilee Celebration of Mt. Kanchenjunga (8586m) – the third highest mountain in the world, the photos of 1955 British Expedition are on exhibition in partnership with British Embassy and Himalayan Trust UK. The first climbers to ascend this mountain – Joe Brown and George Band on 25 May 1955 chose to leave the final summit untouched to honor their promise made to the Choegyal of the Kingdom of Sikkim. Charles Evans, Dawa Tamang, Tashi Sherpa were the other member of the first successful expedition team, and their exceptional skills of mountaineering and teamwork were also clearly mentioned in the exhibition.

Alpine Association of Slovenia (Planinska zveza Slovenije-PZS)- The alpine association from Slovenia, which played a crucial role in starting mountaineering training in Nepal through the assistance in building Manang Mountaineering School in 1979 in Manang. In cooperation with PZS, 50th anniversary of the first Slovenian ascent of an Eight-Thousander over first climb and 30th anniversary of the ascent of the last of all fourteen with descent on skis was organized at IMM. Mathias Herzog - the son of first ascender of Annapurna Maurice Herzog made his special presence on the occasion of the completion of the 75th years of the first ascent of Annapurna. He also handed over the ice-axe used by his father in 1950 French Annapurna Expedition and is currently on display at the museum.

Bird Conservation Nepal in collaboration with the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) installed the 3D model of Nepal, showcasing the routes and habitat of different bird species found along the Central Asian Flyway.

### **Celebration of International Mountain Day**

The United Nations General Assembly designated 11 December as a "International Mountain Day". As of 2003, it has been celebrated every year to create awareness about the importance of mountains with life which has been highlighting the opportunities and constraints in mountain development and to build alliances that will bring positive change to mountain peoples and environments around the world. On the occasion of International Mountain Day- 11 Dec, the annual program Mountain Festival (MF) is being organized since 2015 in the premises of IMM with an aim to explore the best practices and techniques that helps in the restoration of mountain ecosystems with the active participation of mountain people. The MF helps to enhance the livelihood of mountain community, climate change and adaptations, mountain farming and its importance for sustainable development and the different sources of income mountain environments provide such as tourism, high value mountain products and handicrafts. The MF also supports building strategic partnerships and creates space for resource and information sharing between governmental organizations, research institutes, private sectors, national /

international organizations, local organizations, representatives of mountain communities and other civil society groups with an interest in mountain ecosystem and how its restoration benefits the local communities and their sustainable development.

### **IMM'S Position in Pokhara Tourism**

Pokhara region is the most attractive tourism destination for general interest as well as special interest tourists. It is admired by different types of tourists like holiday spenders, honeymooners, adventure lovers, pilgrims and many more. It is the only place in the world from where we can enjoy the magnificent view of snowcapped massive mountains of above 8000-meter elevation while sitting below 1000 meters above sea level. Out of the 14 highest mountain peaks of the world elevating higher than 8000 meters, three of them Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Manaslu can be seen from Pokhara (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2020).

It is an enchanting city nestled in a tranquil valley which is also gateway to the world of adventure like trekking, mountaineering and many more. Being called Pokhara as the tourism capital of Nepal, IMM is the another added feather on the cap of Pokhara, which has the objectives to record, document and chronicle the past and present development of mountaineering activities in the world in general and to preserve the saga of the momentous feats in the history of mountaineering in the Himalayan peaks in particular. The visitors can have knowledge of initiatives of different national and international organizations for the conservation of mountain environment and mountain communities. Some of the vital information related to natural biodiversity, flora, fauna, mountain culture etc. are being shared at IMM due to which the museum is on the way to being established as one of the favorite tourism destinations of Pokhara (Nepal Tourism Board, 2022).

## **6. Conclusion**

IMM is the largest human made tourism product of Nepal, which plays a significant role in the promotion of tourism of Pokhara- the tourism capital

of Nepal. The International Mountain Museum has played important role in promoting geo-tourism, geo-education and SDGs in Nepal for integrating cultural, environmental and educational viewpoints. It effectively raises awareness about sustainability, climate change and mountain livelihoods. In spite of its contributions, challenges such as limited resources, outdated displays and insufficient collaboration reduce the effectiveness that can enhance partnerships, modernizing exhibits and expanding educational initiatives can strengthen its impact. IMM has strong potential to become a important center for sustainable tourism and environmental education which has to contribute significantly to long-term sustainable development goals.

## References

- Abrahams, G. (2017). Constructing definitions of sustainable development. *Smart and Sustainable Built Environment*, 6(1), 34–47.
- Carrillo-Hernández, Y. M., Ríos Reyes, C. A., & Villarreal Jaimes, C. A. (2024). Geotourism and geoeducation: A holistic approach for socioeconomic development in rural areas of Los Santos Municipality, Santander, Colombia. [*Journal name*], [*volume(issue)*].
- Dowling, R. K. (2013). Global geotourism – An emerging form of sustainable tourism. *Czech Journal of Tourism*, 2(2), 59–79.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (n.d.). *International Mountain Day*. <https://www.fao.org/international-mountain-day/en/>
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. (2025). *Nepal tourism statistics 2024*. Government of Nepal.
- Mensah, J. (2019). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action – Literature review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1653531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531>

- Messner, R. (2001). *The big walls: From the North Face of the Eiger to the South Face of Dhaulagiri*. Mountaineers Books.
- Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA). (2020). *Nepal tourism statistics 2019*. Government of Nepal.
- National Geographic Society. (n.d.). *Earth science and geography resources*.
- National Geographic Society. (n.d.). *Global warming*. National Geographic Education. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/global-warming>
- Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA). (n.d.). *International Mountain Museum*.
- Nepal Tourism Board. (2022). *Pokhara: Tourism capital of Nepal*. Kathmandu: NTB.
- Nepal Tourism Board. (n.d.). *Paradise Pokhara*. Nepal Tourism Board.
- Nye, J. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>
- Royal Geographical Society. (n.d.). *Everest expeditions archives*.
- Sharma, P. (2010). *Folklore and mythology of the Himalayas*. Kathmandu Publications.
- Snellgrove, D. (1987). *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan successors*. Serindia Publications.
- The Himalayan Times. (2023, March 27). *Editorials: Census results out*. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/editorials-census-results-out>
- Turner, S. (2006). Promoting UNESCO Global Geoparks for sustainable development in the Australian–Pacific region. *Alcheringa*, 30(1), 351–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03115510609506872>

- United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). *What are the Sustainable Development Goals?* <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *What is climate change?* <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>
- Upadhya, P. K., & Upreti, B. R. (n.d.). *Mountain tourism in Nepal: An overview on the sustainable inclusion of local communities.*
- Upadhya, P. K., & Upreti, B. R. (n.d.). *Mountain tourism in Nepal: An overview on the sustainable inclusion of local communities.*
- World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our common future*. United Nations. <https://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/home/media/publications/sustainable-development/brundtland-report.html>
- World Resources Institute. (2011). *EarthTrends: The environmental information portal.*
- World Resources Institute. <http://www.earthtrends.wri.org>
- Yevdokymova, A., Kovalov, B., Balahurovska, I., & Kubatko, O. (2024). Ethical partnership between representatives of institutions in the implementation of sustainable development projects. *Journal of Sustainability Research*, 6(3), e240052.

# STRENGTHENING MUSEUM GOVERNANCE WITH LEGAL REFORM IN NEPAL

**Pabitra Thapaliya**

Board member, ICOM Nepal  
thapaliyapabi@gmail.com

## Abstract

*As institutions of cultural preservation, education, public enlightenment, active community concern and sustainable development, today's museums are repositories with a purpose. In Nepal, museums have proved crucial for the preservation of a wide variety of cultural heritage, and the promotion of cultural tourism. A qualitative comparative analysis of national legislation and relevant international instruments including UNESCO guidelines and ICOM standards is used to demonstrate the importance and urgency of unifying various legislation for museum operation and argues for the need of a dedicated museum law for better governance and professionalization. It has opined that there is emphasizing the role of museums in sustainable consumption and production, tourism and development in Nepal. This study explores Nepal's institutional and legal framework for museums. Nevertheless, the substantial growth in museum operations over the previous 90 years has seen that there is a lack of specific museum law which led inadequate coordination between federal, provincial, and local authorities because of its inconsistent registration procedures, weak governance and low professional standards. The study makes the case that there is urgent need for a comprehensive law pertaining to the museum sector that has to create national standards, unify disparate legal provisions. A qualitative, document-based and comparative legal approach has been used in the research to find gaps and suggest a single legal framework that is in line with international best practices.*

**Keywords** : Museum Law, Cultural Heritage, Museum Accreditation, UNESCO, community.

## 1. Introduction

Museums were once regarded as a kind of pleasant place where people use to visit to observe objects. Though, in the present-day, museology has emphasized the active engagement of museums with visitors and communities those are addressed both theoretical and practical concerns to strengthen their socio-cultural and educational roles. According to the International Council of Museums (2022), a museum is an institution that conserves and shows heritage. It also looks after inclusive participation, learning and community construction to protect social norms, culture and values. ICOM defined museums as:

*A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that research, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage which has established for public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.*

This broad definition has reflected the comprehensive scope of museums, that is highlighting the connection for multiple dimensions of human society. As a result, museums have been recognized by policymakers for their contribution to achieving sustainable development goals. UNESCO has given clear vision to protect and promote museums and their collections. It has emphasized as to play a vital role in the safeguarding of cultural heritage, education, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue” (UNESCO, 2015). It is indeed beyond resource-rich nations. Many countries are characterized to have diverse native and ethnic identities and museums that serve as spaces and collect, preserve and represent many surfaces of these cultural expressions.

Nepal has witnessed for the significant growth in museum activities after 1990. Different types of Nepali museums including national, palace, thematic and community museums have been established that are contributing for

heritage conservation, tourism development and educational advancement. Though, despite these developments, there remains a strong demand among professionals and stakeholders for policy harmonization across all types of museums to ensure more coordinated and effective governance (Ghimire & Khanal, 2025).

The country's museums are often placed under miscellaneous and non-central statutory and administrative frameworks, resulting in indirect, fragmented governance that is not aligned with professional standards, civic accountability, accreditation procedures, or systematic collection management. Registration and licensing processes are inconsistent across institutions, and there is no unified system for assessment or standardized benchmarks for institutional performance, despite the steady growth in both the number of museums and their visitors. According to Ghimire (2025), approximately 1,000 museums are registered in the country, attracting around three million visitors annually (p. 13). Moreover, in the absence of a comprehensive, specialized law governing all museums, these institutions remain subject to more than a dozen different legal provisions, leading to fragmented, traditional, and inefficient systems of registration, certification, and monitoring.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Nepal has a history of nearly nine decades of operating modern public museum after the open of Nepal museum in 1938 AD. Despite significant growth of museums in the country in these nine decades, the absence of dedicated and comprehensive legislation that explicitly addresses the concerns of museum development, museum governance, staff development and professionalism is common concern issues. The existing laws are patchy; they have primarily focused on heritage preservation or organizational registration only and have not concentrated on a comprehensive management of museums.

There is also inconsistency of registration process, lack of institutional co-ordination between the federal, provincial and local government structures, lack of common standards for administration, collection management,

conservation, outreach and public engagement activities. There has been a lack of professional capacity, museum classification mechanisms and accreditation system for the museums. Similarly, there is lack of prominent museum law which would have been dedicated to museums. It is hindering the development of a professional system, a common mechanism for the quality control and utilization of the museums in Nepal.

### **3. Objectives**

- a. To find out Nepal's fragmented legal and institutional part for museums and to identify key gaps in governance, professional standards and coordination.
- b. To analyze the museum status to have impacts in its specialized museum-sector law, integrating international norms on cultural rights, heritage preservation, tourism and sustainability.

### **4. Methodology**

This research has applied qualitative methods as a document-based and comparative legal methodology. It considers the most significant digital contemporary Nepali legal and constitutional measures that has related to museums and cultural heritage, Constitution of Nepal 2015 and relevant laws. International Council of Museums has identified museum which is based on Code of Ethics as standards of its practices to pay the attention for international resolutions and institutions like the 2015 UNESCO which has recommended museums that has examined policies, research and museum sources from Nepal. This study observes museum law and cultural rights across different countries which are using a limited set of informant inputs and extra communication records. It has adopted a conventional comparative legal and regulatory analysis, identifying relevant legal provisions, situating them within their broader legislative contexts and evaluating them against established standards and outcomes. The research does not involve quantitative primary data collection; instead, it is grounded in interpretive and normative analysis.

## 5. Status of Museum Law in Nepal

Modern museum practice in Nepal began in the Rana period, initiated from the arsenal house constructed at Chhauni, Kathmandu in 1824 B.S. by prime minister Bhimsen Thapa and it was renamed as Chhauni Silkhana (Arsenal Museum) under the rule of Ranas and was opened as Nepal Museum on 12 February 1939 and further to Rastriya Sangrahalaya (National Museum) in 1967 (National Museum of Nepal, 2024). Most of the museums have been opened by various government, non-government, private and community organizations but not under one legal framework rather various fragmented laws till now (Ghimire & Khanal, 2025).

Looking at the Nepalese legal and institutional framework, the country needs comprehensive Museum Specific Law to effectively preserve, interpret and promote cultural heritage. The present Article 17 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 on Cultural Rights, provides that the right to preserve and promote culture shall be ensured for all communities and peoples and the right to research, excavate and publish cultural heritages shall be guaranteed to all citizens and the state shall make necessary arrangements for research, excavation and publication of cultural heritages (Government of Nepal, 2015). It defines the distribution of powers both horizontally (Federal, Provincial and Local levels of government) and vertically which is included the right to operate museums among concurrent powers.



**The present Article 17 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 on Cultural Rights, provides that the right to preserve and promote culture shall be ensured for all communities and peoples and the right to research, excavate and publish cultural heritages shall be guaranteed to all citizens and the state shall make necessary arrangements for research, excavation and publication of cultural heritages (Government of Nepal, 2015).**

The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1956 rings on excavation; definition of monuments and objects and the handling of various related issues such as conservation, ownership (Department of Archaeology, 1956) and it forms the operational document of many Government museums, but its archaeological nature makes its broadness in terms of other museum registration, administration, functions such as education, interpretation and reaching audiences narrow.

With the same limitation, the Development Board Act 1956 empowers the establishment of independent boards and abiding by this provision some Government Museums like Patan Museum, Narayanhiti Palace Museum and Hanumandhoka Museum are operated by granting administrative independence but withholding any uniform framework because they are also directed by the department of Archaeology by limiting their working freedom in practice.

One of the most used laws to register the museum by Non-Government Sector is The Association Registration Act 1977. Similarly, the Company Act 2006 help the spread of private and non-profit museums, displaying a pluralistic institutional environment, but making museums to be treated like general organizations. By reviewing the existing provisions of this law, one can find that these laws are concerned only for registration of museums like general organization. On the one hand most of the non-government museums are registered and operated under this law but they are unhappy with the silence of law to regulate and facilitate the museum and request government for new museum specific law to the government (An interaction programme on the topic of Museum Operation and Management : Existing Law of Nepal, Organized by Narayanhiti Palace Museum and ICOM Nepal in Kathmandu 2081, Push 20)

At the municipal level, the Local Government Operation Act 2017 significantly reinforces decentralization of cultural governance as it 'mandates the municipalities to preserve the heritage and to build-up museums' in addition to its ethic-based authority and the federal-level inclusiveness and participative principles (Government of Nepal, 2017). Many local governments have

developed their own museum related laws in connection with the Local Government Operation Act by addressing the power given to the local government by the constitution. The first local government to formulate this kind of museum specific law at local level is Dullu Municipality of Dailekh District. The municipality enforced this law in 2017 and opened the Dullu Museum as well. But this museum is closed now. According to the municipality's authority the museum was closed due to the lack of human resources and financial resources (Sushil Bhandari, Interview, Chair of ward No.8 of Dullu Municipality, 2082, Badhara 12).

Other legislations such as Guthi Corporation Act 1976, Archives Preservation Act 1989 and trust-centered legislations including Lumbini Development Trust Act 1985 and Pashupati Area Development Trust Act 1987 address the preservation of religious, archival and site-specific heritage respectively and gives legal space to operate museums related to their sector. However, these agencies are mostly focusing on operating museums, mostly as collection and conservation houses which are accepted by the expert and museologist and they claim that the museum's functions of education, research, and communication are not performed with priority (Gyanin Rai, Personal Interview, Senior Director, Lumbini Development Trust. 2082/12/15).

A critical comparison between these laws indicates that the Museum sector in Nepal is currently governed by a fragmented and overlapping system of laws where issues surrounding archaeology, administration, nonprofit organizational management and local authorities are all interconnected but not consolidated. As stated in ICOM (2017) nevertheless, legal framework largely confines museums to collection, preservation, and display functions, without fully embracing their potential roles in knowledge production, dissemination, participatory engagement, and the fostering of international and intercultural relations between communities and nations.

As outlined by UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), there must be nationally valid legislation promoting professional principles of collection management, public access, research, community participation and

access to information (ICOM, 2022; UNESCO, 2015). The UNESCO 2015 Recommendation for Museums and Collections recommend the development of a legal framework for collection management and documentation, conservation activities, disaster preparation and appropriate interpretation.

Although the constitutional mandate to respect cultural diversity and inclusion as well as secure cultural heritage through institutional preservation is reflected in the above acts, owing to the void created from the lack of a dedicated museum act, they are not sufficient enough to serve the emerging needs of a modern museum under face-to-face encounter with the international standards of museology (ICOM, 2022).

Grounded upon this review and assessment, it is firmly recommended for policy development of single, unified museum law to consolidate these existing acts, by bringing in thorough federal-provincial coordination, incorporating internationally recognized norms of professional standards, and requiring inclusive participation of all community levels. The policy would shift Nepalese museum landscape towards wider contemporary perceptions of what museums are and what they can do as sites of knowledge creation and sharing, reflection, and intercultural dialogue for diverse generation of people focusing youth, as suggested in ICOM's newly adapted museum definition and UNESCO's orientation for museums in the identity-politics blending in communities (ICOM, 2022; ICOM, 2017).

### **One law to harmonize multiple issues**

For Nepal's diverse history, growing museum sector and emerging sectors, the legal environment remains patchy, and until very recently unable to begin matching international standards in protecting the cultural rights, learning and participation for museum visitors (ICOM, 2017, 2022; UNESCO, 2015). Existing law covers registration and heritage protection, but offers very little instruction on issues surrounding governance, education, and research which are closely connected to museum sustainability.

The resulting disjoint between international practice, the national legal sphere, the expectations of visitors and government regulation are thus stark. In light of this, the paper points to some key dominant aspects that lend significance to why a specialized museum law is needed: adhering to international standards, delineating federal/provincial/local responsibilities, integrating disparate systems, consolidating the profession, and establishing museums as “co-citizenship classrooms” for active citizenship/dialogue (Democracy & Culture Foundation, 2015; Wergeland Centre, 2023) . To realize this conceptual and principled vision of the museum, the country must lead the sector with clear legal framework aligned with international obligations, global professional ethical standards and the effective implementation of constitutional provisions on museum development.

Nepal has agreed with human rights treaties, for instance the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, due to article 15 obliges the State to secure cultural rights for all (United Nations, 1966). As a Member State of UNESCO, Nepal should make its legislation and policies for the people to feel conform to tangible and intangible heritage and culture related commitment to protect museums. It demands a clear legal and institutional framework to realize museums through their educative, social and hereditary functions (UNESCO, 2015, 2019). Such legal requirements make a comprehensive museum policy and legal infrastructure indispensable.

In the above recommendation UNESCO (2015), there are clear demands to enhance national laws which can oversee activities of Museums in collection, caring and disaster planning while making heritage accessible to public (UNESCO,2012). ICOM has recommended standard of ethical, professional responsibilities and inclusiveness of stake holders (ICOM, 2022). Museum laws therefore also act as a means of translating international standards and museum practices into national policies thus allowing states to put into law UNESCO recommendations and ICOM principles and stay answerable to global standards of heritage management (ICOM, 2017; UNESCO, 2015; Vrdoljak, 2021).

Similarly, constitution of Nepal 2015 allocates powers over museums to federal, provincial and local governments, and considers the museum sector as part of concurrent powers and cultural rights. This division creates opportunities for more inclusive federal governance, but at the same time produces confusion over institutions' roles and responsibilities as well as coordination mechanisms resulting from the lack of integrative legal provisions for museums. Museums represent as an institutional vehicle to seek cultural rights to allow the citizen to have proper access and participation in both material and immaterial culture as well and they can utilize the right through exhibitions, research and education related programs, transforming constitutional commitments into tangible cultural experiences.

### **Establishing Common Professional and Ethical Standard**

Current legislation of Nepal has also addressed the archaeological preservation, registration of institutions, local management relating with culture, but there is a need to define museums, and it establish criteria for community management to make people's access easily (Department of Archaeology, 1956; Government of Nepal, 2017). This legal framework has to meet international standards that must be articulated as per the norms of UNESCO (2015). Museums are importance in securing cultural rights of the people to enable research, support education, and engage with communities (ICOM, 2022; UNESCO, 2015). Nepal has required a specific legislation on museums which is combining scattered provisions, setting a national museum regulation authority and classification framework participating with universal principles. It enables museums to become democratic spaces for protecting cultural rights, education, tourism and sustainable development (The Rising Nepal, 2025).

### **Expected Changes Within the Strong Legal Domain**

Though both the number of museums and museum visitors are increasing in the country, the practice of museum as sites of civic participatory learning is in low level; or tools for realizing cultural rights, outlined in 21 st century museology and human rights approach. (ICOM, 2022; UNESCO, 2015). This brings the museologist amongst them in calling forth for a dedicated museum

law in Nepal that can usher up a national system of museum establishing clear public-serving institutions that function in accordance with ICOM norms and Best Practices Recommendation on museums and collections (UNESCO, 20115).

The formation of museum law is also expected the assurance to set up a National Museum Council or Authority. This would ideally be an effective point of reference for museum policy at federal, provincial and local government levels. The Council would maintain a national directory of museums, approve new ones and control institutions according to internationally agreed criteria. Its responsibilities would include creating national standards for collection management, conservation, documentation, public access and ethical practice according to the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, which sets the minimum requirements for professional standards worldwide (ICOM, 2017, 2022). The law can facilitate Nepali museum with the clear provision of ownership of collections, suitable storage and conservation facilities, qualified staff, basic governance, access to the public and educational and interpretation services. Standards like those applied internationally in that legal recognition and public trust are contingent on the institution meeting professional and ethical standards (ICOM, 2017; UNESCO, 2015).

Experience internationally with other national accreditation schemes (such as, in the United Kingdom and U.S.A.) demonstrates that license- or membership-based accreditation schemes tied to regular review are successful in encouraging improvements in governance, collections care, public engagement and visitor services and signaling quality and accountability to funders and the public (American Alliance of Museums, n.d.; Arts Council England, 2025 ). Nepal can also impose operating licenses that would need to be reviewed periodically, through an accreditation framework that would give incentives for reaching higher levels of performance across conservation, research, gallery design, public programs and visitor services.

The law would categorize museums on ownership, mandates and themes, e.g. national, provincial, municipal, community, private and thematic museums

(e.g. natural history, ethnology, science). Explicit categorization, supported through law, would enable the government and partners to adopt regulatory framework, funding modalities and capacity development support while enforcing minimum norms for the sector (UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 2024).

A Museum specific law of this type would all in all because of its clearly defined museum nature, recognize museums as public institutions involved with culture and education and participation, make legally binding the cultural rights enshrined in the constitution, translate international obligations into binding legal entitlements, create the conditions, the environment and framework for museums to further contribute more efficiently and robustly to cultural tourism, creative economies and sustainable development. (ICOM, 2022; UNESCO, 2015).

## 6. Findings

This study opined that the museum sector in Nepal is currently governed by a fragmented legal framework that are more than a dozen different museum laws which have been disseminated across the multiple legal instruments. These laws include Constitution of Nepal, Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, Development Board Act, Association Registration Act, Company Act, Local Government Operation Act, Guthi Sansthan Act, Archives Preservation Act, Lumbini Development Trust Act, Pashupati Area Development Trust Act, Industrial Enterprises Act and Patent Design and Trademark Act.

However, national statutes give some explicit recognition to museums, they also firmly embed the function and role of museums within broader institutional mandates. The explicit mentions of museums are to be found in the Industrial Enterprises Act (2076) and the Local Government Operation Act (2074). The Industrial Enterprises Act (2076) explicitly defines museums as an industry within the tourism and service sector, thus situating the museums permanently within the national economic and legal policies. The Local Government Operation Act (2074) explicitly puts museums as important components of culture, heritage, archaeology, fine art etc. which can be harnessed by local

government. On a level below national legislation, metropolitan cities are mandated explicitly to have at least one museum as one of the indicators of the metropolitan City. Metropolitan city status, in this case, necessarily requires the mandated first-ever project of establishing at least one museum.

The Guthi Sansthan Act (2033), a piece of legislation that also deals with heritage property, supplies implicit, but explicit, legislative support for museums, as something as telling as the inventory and custodians' requirements for trust-controlled properties support the core conservation functions of museums. Two key organizations that can help support this development are the Lumbini Development Trust Act 2042 (first amendment 2050) and the Pashupati Development Fund 2044 (first amendment 2049). Both have broad mandates that allow them to carry out conservation and education related work referring to the museum as part of their objectives. This flexibility means they can include museum-related tasks such as establishing new museums and providing ongoing support within their current scope of work. As a result, these institutions can play an important role in building the institutions and infrastructure needed for museums. Similarly, the Patent design and trademark Act 2022 (Amendment 20244) specifically assigns its sole demarcation of the role of the museum in the nation to the Government Museum as the single official repository and custodian for patent models and maps.

These isolated laws addressing the museum to some extent but not in full fledge to represent the museum's global standard as a result the present legal protections have not aligned with global criteria which have been established as a global norm by UNESCO (2015). Similarly, ICOM also enforces that Nepal's priorities to protect cultural rights as well to give proper people's access, community participation and sustainability are the most important component to make the museums successful (ICOM, 2022; UNESCO, 2015). So, the study finds out that there is a lack professional standards, cross-federal coordination, institutional strength and sector-wide potential to strengthen the museums in Nepal. The study finds that Nepal's museum sector has operated under fragmented and overlapping legal frameworks, lacking with such coordination and standardization. Existing laws primarily focus

on heritage conservation and institutional registration. So, the government should not neglect these fields. There is no unified accreditation system in Nepal. Classification mechanism and the consistent funding structure have lacked in Nepal. Institutional capacity remains weak. Here are limited trained professionals and inadequate infrastructure. Despite increasing numbers of museums and visitors, the absence of comprehensive museum law hampers quality control, policy coherence and effective implementation of international standards like UNESCO and ICOM.

The study concludes that in Nepal, about 90-year development of museum sector with increasing museum institutions have within itself fragmented and non-coherent museum-specific legal status. It has been unable to implement the Museum-related International Council of Museums and UNESCO standards; rather it has been providing limited scope in museum sectors like archaeological studies, collection and conservation, while undermining educational, research, communication and community outreach programs. Due to these limitations, museums' institutional performance, realization of cultural rights and socio-economic sustainability are limited. It is thus necessary to have a museum law to bring the sector in a coordinated, professional and non-discriminate manner, and in compliance with constitutional and international cultural norms.

## **7. Conclusion**

Article concludes that a comprehensive, even museum-specific law is urgently needed in Nepal to streamline disconnected legal provisions, define the federal-provincial-commune characteristics, and formalize internationally accepted standards of professionals and ethic. Such a law would formalize a national museum body, minimum registration and accreditation standards; a categorization of museums by ownership and purpose, and proactive position museums as spaces serving cultural rights, civic education and the creative economy. If adopted with conscious enforcement, this framework can dramatically increase its institutional integrity, professional quality and practice, sustainable funding and tourism, and overall institutional sustainability. Nepal's museum sector has necessary a comprehensive and specialized

legal framework to address disintegration that has to ensure professional with coordinated governance. A unified museum law aligned to the national practices with international standards that will strengthen institutional capacity and promote cultural rights, education as well as sustainability. Accreditation systems and institutional coordination mechanisms are essential clear policies for transforming museums into dynamic public institutions contributing to national development.

## References

- American Alliance of Museums. (n.d.). *Accreditation*. <https://www.aam-us.org/> (For the discussion on accreditation frameworks.)
- Department of Archaeology. (1956). *Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 2013 (1956 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Feteris, E. (2016). Methodology of comparative legal research. In M. Adams & J. Bomhoff (Eds.), *Practice and theory in comparative law* (pp. xx–xx). Cambridge University Press.
- Ghimire, O. P. (2025). *Museum: New opportunity sources for the creative economy* (in Nepali: संग्रहालय : श्रृजनशील अर्थतन्त्रको नयाँ अवसर श्रोत). In *Hanumandhoka Durbar Journal* (pp. 10–20). Kathmandu: Hanumandhoka Durbar Museum.
- Ghimire, O. P., & Khanal, S. R. (2025). *Sangrahalaya (The museum)*. ICOM Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (1976). *Guthi Act, 2033 (1976 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (1977). *Association Registration Act, 2034 (1977 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (1985). *Lumbini Development Trust Act, 2042 (1985 AD)*. Government of Nepal.

- Government of Nepal. (1987). *Pashupati Area Development Trust Act, 2044 (1987 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (1989). *Archives Preservation Act, 2046 (1989 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (2006). *Company Act, 2063 (2006 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal, 2015 (2072 BS)*. Government of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (2017). *Local Government Operation Act, 2074 (2017 AD)*. Government of Nepal.
- International Council of Museums (ICOM). (2022). *Museum definition*. ICOM.
- International Council of Museums. (2017). *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. ICOM.
- Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals. (2019). *Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals*.
- National Museum of Nepal. (2024). *National Museum of Nepal*. Nepal Tourism Board. <https://ntb.gov.np/en/national-museum-of-nepal>
- National Museum of Nepal. (2024). *National Museum of Nepal*. Nepal Tourism Board. <https://ntb.gov.np/en/national-museum-of-nepal>
- UNESCO. (2012). *Running a museum: A practical handbook*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Report on the implementation of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2024). *National concept for museums based on sustainable development goals*. UNESCO.

- United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
- United Nations. (1966). *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.
- Vrdoljak, A. F. (2021). Translating international heritage standards into domestic law. In A. F. Vrdoljak & F. Francioni (Eds.), *The 1972 World Heritage Convention: A commentary* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- ICOM. (2017). *ICOM, World Heritage and the role of museums*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249542>
- Museums and deaccessioning. (2018, January 4). *Accreditation scheme*. <https://www.museumsanddeaccessioning.com/>
- Onlinekhabar. (2022, March 16). *You must visit the top 10 museums in Kathmandu*. <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/>
- Wergeland Centre. (2023, December 18). *Museums as sites of citizenship: An open discussion*. <https://wergelandcentre.org/>
- The Rising Nepal. (2024, June 7). *Museums for knowledge and economic development*. <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/44096>
- The Rising Nepal. (2025, January 19). *Specific laws needed to regulate museums*.
- Arts Council England. (2025, February 3). *UK Museum Accreditation Scheme*. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>
- Democracy & Culture Foundation. (2015, November 10). *How museums become catalysts for active citizenship*. <https://www.democracy.community/> (For “cocitizenship classrooms” / active citizenship.)

# SCIENTIFIC PRESERVATION OF KUMARI CHOWK RECORDS AS ARCHIVAL PAPERS IN NEPAL: A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

**Ms. Shova Nani Shakya**

Museologist

shovanani.shakya@gmail.com

## Abstract

*This study explores records which are important foundations of nation's historical, administrative, legal, and cultural identity. In Nepal, records preservation is a responsibility of the National Archives. Scientific methods, proper management and regular monitoring are essential for the long-term preservation of records. The conservation process has been carried out in several stages. The first stage involves identification, classification, and cataloguing of records. Throughout this stage, the physical condition of documents have been examined, and damaged, torn, moisture-affected papers be separated. The second stage includes cleaning and treatment activities. The third stage involves controlling temperature and humidity. According to the scientific standards, a temperature of 18°–22° Celsius and relative humidity of 45–55 % are required. Historical records are stored in acid-free folders and boxes to protect from bio-deterioration of the paper. The fourth stage be focused on digital preservation. Old and fragile documents are scanned to create digital copies that reduces handling of the original materials and supports long-term preservation. Digital data are stored in secure servers with backup systems. The final stage of the historical documents and records have comprised regular monitoring and records management. The condition of records is periodically assessed, and necessary repairs and conservation measures are carried out. In this way, the scientific preservation and management of records ensure the long-term protection of national heritage. Records are not only papers; they represent the historical memory of the nation their preservation is a vital responsibility of the state.*

**Keywords** : Conservation Techniques, Documentary Heritage, Environmental Control, Digital Archiving and Archival Preservation.

## 1. Introduction

Kumari Chowk has functioned as one of the few endlessly operating administrative offices during Rana regime (1846–1951 AD). In this period hereditary prime ministers exercised widespread political and financial control in Kathmandu valley. Serving as the Department of Audit (Kumarichowk), it has maintained systematic records of revenue, expenditures, construction activities and the maintenance of government infrastructure. These financial documents, including ledgers, budgets and accounts formed the administrative foundation of Rana rule that is still reflected with the close relationship between fiscal management and political authority (Pradhan, 1984).

Ensuuing the political transformation of 1951, Nepal has undergone a series of administrative reforms aimed at modernizing governance structures. One of the major developments was the establishment of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) on 29 June 1959 as the apex audit institution of Nepal. This type of office arose as the institutional successor to earlier auditing bodies that include Kumari Chowk, in that way, it has been transferring public auditing functions from palace-controlled systems to an independent constitutional entity (Office of the Auditor General, 2013). Though, the formal legal documentation concerning the closure of Kumari Chowk has limited as a historical source that suggests its functions that have gradually absorbed into newly established institutions.

This study is related to a field of preservation as a major responsibility of National Archives of Nepal. So, it focuses the scientific preservation and conservation of Kumari Chowk documents to examine the physical condition, identifying the causes of deterioration as well as applying suitable conservation techniques. It evaluates the role of scientific conservation methods and archival management practices to ensure long-term preservation and accessibility of these historically important records.

## National Archives of Nepal

Records are defined as documents of national importance under the Archives Preservation Act, 1990, including genuine written, printed, or digital materials with administrative, historical, legal, or cultural significance. The collection, preservation, administration, and study of historically significant documents from various eras of Nepalese history are all vitally depend on the National Archives of Nepal (National Archives of Nepal, n.d.).

Guthi records, official correspondence, royal decrees (Lalmohar), handwritten manuscripts, inscription transcripts, documents received from various government ministries, and documents in a variety of languages and scripts are among the archival holdings (National Archives of Nepal, 2025). The Kumari Chowk documents, which are housed in the Records Branch's Records Sub-Section, are a significant collection of administrative records. In 1997 AD, the Ministry of Finance, the Office of the Financial Comptroller General, Kumari Chowk, and the Tahasil Office at Babarmahal, Kathmandu, relocated these records to the Archives (Nepali Times, 2023).

“

**Guthi records, official correspondence, royal decrees (Lalmohar), handwritten manuscripts, inscription transcripts, documents received from various government ministries, and documents in a variety of languages and scripts are among the archival holdings (National Archives of Nepal, 2025).**

The Kumari Chowk collection includes a wide range of record types such as legal documents, royal orders (Sanad), administrative decisions, cadastral maps (Naapi Kheshra), temporary land certificates (Myadi Purja), and support deeds (Muchulka). The subset of documents examined in this study dates

from approximately 1946–1947. These records vary in size from about 69 × 49 cm to 14.5 × 15 cm and are written on handmade Nepali paper using black, red, and blue inks, along with thumbprints and official seals.

Though, the physical condition of these documents are deteriorated considerably. Basically, Biological agents are the major agents of damage and fungi whereas environmental factors including moisture and improper handling are also affecting the documents. In several cases, erosion from iron gall ink is visible, additional weakening the paper structure. Ink solubility tests used to indicate that red and blue inks are highly sensitive to water and alcohol that is complicating conservation treatments. As a result, the brittleness of these documents poses significant challenges to handle, digitize and use.

It has given their historical and administrative implication so, there is an urgent need to implement scientific conservation strategies. These measures are essential not only to stabilize the physical condition of the records, but also to facilitate safer digitization and improve accessibility. The ongoing preservation initiatives undertaken by the National Archives highlight the growing recognition of scientific conservation as a key component in safeguarding Nepal’s documentary heritage (Nepali Times, 2018).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Archives of Nepal that represent a vital source for understanding Nepal’s administrative, financial and socio-political history during and after the Rana period. Though, these records are currently at risk due to severe physical worsening caused by biological agents (insects and fungi), environmental factors (humidity and temperature variations), chemical instability (ink corrosion and acidity) as well as prolonged improper handling. The brittleness of handmade Nepali paper that has combined with the high solubility of positive inks that complicates conservation interferences and limits safe access for research and digitization.

Despite their historical significance, there is a lack of systematic scientific valuation and homogenous conservation practices tailored to the specific

material that is made of composition the documents. Lack of documentation of prior preservation efforts is inadequate and limited integration of modern preservation technologies further hinders long-term sustainability. Therefore, the core research problem lies in classifying effective, scientifically grounded conservation strategies which can have stabilized the physical condition of the Kumari Chowk records to ensure accessibility and usability for upcoming generations.

### **3. Objectives**

- a. To identify the major causes of deterioration of archival documents of Kumari Chowk.
- b. To appraise and apply appropriate scientific conservation methods for long-term preservation and its accessibility.

### **4. Methods**

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the scientific preservation and conservation of Kumari Chowk documents at the National Archives of Nepal. It is primarily empirical, based on observation, and documentation of conservation processes within an institutional setting.

In the study the data were collected with the physical examination of documents to evaluate the damage caused by dust, moisture, insects and handling. Scientific tests, including pH analysis, lignin detection and ink solubility tests (using water and alcohol) that were conducted to guide conservation decisions. The archival records as well as earlier conservation reports were revised to understand institutional practices.

### **5. Results**

This section presents a practice-based framework for the scientific preservation of archival records, addressing a significant gap in South Asian conservation literature.

## **Applied Scientific Conservation of Kumari Chowk Records**

The conservation effort has carried out at the National Archives of Nepal and involved a systematic process that is beginning with assessment and scientific testing such as pH analysis, lignin detection and ink solubility tests, followed by appropriate treatment methods that can be controlled storage. The conservation treatments comprised dry vacuum cleaning, flattening, repairs using acid-free handmade paper, Japanese paper consolidation (lining/overlying), traditional binding and archival storage with cataloguing (IIC, 2015). It was also given equal emphasis that was placed on safety standards guided by the International Council on Archives and the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works that uses personal protective equipment (PPE), proper chemical handling and environmental control (18° – 22°C temperature and 45–55% relative humidity) (Ogden, 2001).

The study highlights that Nepali handmade paper is inherently durable and largely free from acid and lignin. Nevertheless, red and blue inks are highly water-soluble, that requires non-aqueous conservation approaches like Carboxymethyl Cellulose (CMC)based lining. Similarly, International Council of Archives (2016) study also opines those fluctuations in temperature and humidity are major causes of deterioration. So, systematic conservation meaningfully improves physical stability and accessibility (ICA, 2016).

### **Conservation Process**

The conservation process has been tracked with a holistic and scientifically informed approach that is emphasizing both the stabilization of fragile documents and the preservation of their original authenticity. The early stage involved dry cleaning techniques to eliminate collected dust and its surface pollutants. This was followed with non-invasive page numbering to maintain the integrity of the materials (Ogden, 2000). Fragile and folded pages were flattened carefully to control the heat and applied weights to avoid further damage. Such damaged edges had been repaired to make acid-free, handmade paper selected for its compatibility with the original material. Afterward, the documents were traditionally bound into manageable packages and housed

in archival-quality storage boxes that are under controlled environmental conditions to minimize further weakening. The aim of the conservation effort was to avoid future damage through scientifically grounded protection methods that ensure detailed documentation of each stage, including condition assessment, testing and treatment actions. Systematic storage, labeling and environmental management practices were implemented to care for long-term convenience and preservation (Ritzenthaler, 2010).

### **Safety Standards in Archival Conservation**

Safety regulations are vital parts of scientific conservation that have protected conservators' health and archival materials. Maintaining it secure, the preventive conservation, reversibility and negligible involvement has been emphasized for the international guidelines (IIC, 2015; ICA, 2016). To maintain environmental conditions within proposed ranges of 18–22 °C and 45–55% comparative humidity is essential for avoiding chemical and biological declining (Ogden, 2001). Applying personal protective equipment (PPE) such as goggles, masks and gloves are very crucial to work with chemicals delicate documents (Canadian Conservation Institute, 2018). Supplementary safety defenses include staff training, disaster preparedness, fire prevention systems and suitable chemical labeling and storage. For combining these procedures to reduce workplace hazards to guarantee long-term preservation.

### **Scientific Preservation Methods**

A series of scientific conservation methods were systematically applied to ensure the preservation and stability of the documents.

**Sorting and Cleaning:** Preliminary procedures have involved for the careful elimination of surface dust using soft brushes that is followed with the categorization of document bundles as their condition and content. Such types of protective cleaning are essential to minimize further deterioration (Ashley, 1999).

**Documentation:** Each of the documents was assigned with the page numbers and its detailed condition reports which were prepared. High-resolution photographic records were created to create a visual baseline for upcoming reference and monitoring as well (International Council on Archives, 2016).

**Scientific Testing:** In this scientific testing, material analysis was directed to assess the chemical stability of the documents. pH testing had also confirmed that the paper was non-acidic, reducing the risk of acid-induced degradation. Lignin testing was designated for good durability, whereas ink solubility tests recognized potential risks that are associated with aqueous conservation treatments (Banik & Bruckle, 2011).

**Flattening:** Inaccurate and folded documents were treated over controlled destruction processes that were using weights and carefully regulated heat to restore their original form deprived of producing structural damage (IFLA, 2010).

**Repair and Consolidation:** In this process, damaged areas were also strengthened by using acid-free handmade paper in combination with carboxymethyl cellulose (CMC) adhesive. It was ensured chemical compatibility and long-term stability of the repairs (Banik & Brücke, 2011).

**Binding:** Traditional sewing techniques were applied to rebind the documents with reinforced edges and defensive covers to improve durability to maintain historical authenticity.

**Storage:** In conclusion, the documents were housed in acid-free archival boxes with proper labeling in this stage. Storage conditions were controlled carefully to include temperature and humidity to prevent environmental worsening and ensure long-term protection (ISO 11799, 2015).

## 6. Learnings and Applicability in Museum

The National Archives of Nepal has given significant contribution to develop capacity through practice-based projects such as the conservation of Kumari

Chowk records which are using scientific techniques including pH testing, ink solubility analysis and CMC based repairs (National Archives of Nepal, 2025). Nepali museums are holding important paper documents such as old registers, correspondence, and curatorial records, but they generally lack in house specialists in paper conservation. By contrast, the National Archives of Nepal has developed significant expertise through practice based projects like the conservation of Kumari Chowk records, using scientific methods such as pH testing, ink solubility analysis and CMC based repairs. It has accumulated knowledge to have technical achievement in paper conservation as a key intellectual resource for the wider heritage sector. Integrating archival conservation expertise into museum practice is particularly relevant in Nepal, whereas Nepali museums hold fragile paper records but lack specialist conservators as per the experiences of this conservation work. These interventions showed that handmade Nepali paper is chemically stable and largely free of harmful acids which is extremely vulnerable to biological agents and environmental stress, while red and blue inks are highly water soluble, making aqueous treatments risky (Prachin Nepal, 2025).

As senior chemist and conservation expert notes that systematic conservation “not only stabilizes fragile documents but also makes them more accessible for study and digitization, turning technical work into an enabler of research and public use (G. Shrestha, personal communication, April 24, 2026). He further asserts that Nepali museums hold important paper documents but they are lacking the paper conservation experts. The National Archives has developed significant expertise based on the in-housework that can be shared with museums through training, advisory services and joint projects (G. Shrestha, personal communication, April 24, 2026). This can be like GLAM (gallery, library, archive and museum) type of collaboration model in which the Archives acts as a technical hub for other three institutions viz. galleries, libraries and museums providing guidance on environmental control, acid-free storage, handling protocols, preventive conservation, and digitization standards (Library and Archives Canada, 2017; Government of Canada, 2025).

Library and Archives Canada promote structured collaboration among GLAM institutions to share preservation expertise and the UK National Archives issues "caring for archives" guidance that is widely used by museums to manage paper collections (Library and Archives Canada, 2017). Likewise, the U.S.A National Archives paper conservation programme produces guidance and training resources that museums can adapt for their own collections (National Archives and Records Administration 2021). Nepal can adopt these practices to formalize a national framework where the National Archives can act as a scientific and advisory hub for paper conservation in museums. Positioning the National Archives of Nepal as a documented, officially recognized center of excellence and encouraging museums to consult and co-produce conservation solutions would therefore align with global standards while responding to Nepal's specific capacity gaps.

## 7. Key Findings

The National Archives of Nepal's conservation study of the Kumari Chowk documents shows that Nepali handmade paper is excellent for long-term preservation because it is naturally durable and mostly free of lignin and dangerous acids. Nevertheless, the paper's strength, the inks which are used particularly the red and blue had discovered for making water-soluble whereas, black inks exhibit partial solubility as well. For the reason of these features, the use of aqueous conservation treatments is strictly limited and non-aqueous that lining and consolidation techniques utilizing adhesives like carboxymethyl cellulose required.

The study also emphasizes that the main causes of deterioration are totally dependent on environmental factors. That is uncontrolled temperature and humidity. Differences in these conditions have resulted in physical harm like warping, brittleness and ink deterioration as well as biological harm such as mold development and insect invasion. The deterioration process has enhanced with improper handling and prolonged exposure to dust and moisture. Those are affecting many fragile documents and challenging access for digitization

and research. The study also shows the physical stability and usability of archival records that can be greatly enhanced with the methodical uses of scientific maintenance techniques, such as flattening, dry cleaning, repair with acid-free materials and proper binding and storage. The adoption to control the storage environments and cataloguing have improved preservation and accessibility. Overall, the conservation approach has applied in this study to provide a practical and replicable model to preserve similar archival collections across South Asia.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study opines about the role of scientific conservation to preserve historically important archival materials like Kumari Chowk records as a National Archives of Nepal. Although, traditional Nepali handmade paper has been contributed to their longevity, the documents have suffered from environmental fluctuations, biological damage and repeated handling over time. The study also demonstrates that systematic, science-based conservation methods can be effectively stabilized and prolong the life of breakable records. There is need to apply suitable techniques on cleaning, flattening, structural reinforcement with acid- and lignin-free materials and accurate page numbering carefully which can improve physical integrity and traceability. The traditional obligatory methods have enhanced durability, while archival-quality storage materials reduced future risks as well.

It is needed to protect the archives with preventive conservation that is equally essential. Proper labeling, storage in acid-free boxes and controlled environmental conditions are improved significantly for the preservation and accessibility. These measures do not only protect the records from further deterioration, but they also support research, digitization and administrative use. In general, the study shows that integrating scientific treatment, preventive care and systematic documentation are the keys for sustainable archival management. This method provides a practical and replicable model for conserving documentary heritage across Nepal and the wider South Asian region.

## References

- Ashley-Smith, J. (1999). *Risk Assessment for Object Conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Banik, G., & Bruckle, I. (2011). *Paper and Water: A Guide for Conservators*. Routledge Publication, London
- Government of Canada. (2025). *Galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAMs)*.
- International Council on Archives (ICA). (2016). *Principles and functional requirements for records in electronic office environments*. ICA.
- International Council on Archives (ICA). (2016). *Principles of archival conservation*. Paris.
- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). (2010). *Guidelines for the Care and Handling of Library Material*.
- International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC). (2015). *Code of ethics and guidance for practice*. IIC.
- ISO 11799. (2015). *Information and Documentation – Document Storage Requirements for Archive and Library Materials*. International Organization for Standardization.
- Library and Archives Canada. (2017). *Collaboration between galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAMs)*.
- National Archives and Records Administration. (2021). *Paper conservation at the National Archives: A brief overview*.
- National Archives of Nepal. (2025). *Annual Report*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- National Archives of Nepal. (2025). *National Archives digital repository*.
- National Archives of Nepal. (n.d.). *National Archives – Institutional profile*.
- Nepali Times. (2018, October 2). *Preserving Nepal's historical documents*. Kathmandu.

- Nepali Times. (2023, April 20). Archival transfer and preservation in Nepal.
- Ogden, S. (2000). *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials: A Manual*. Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC).
- Ogden, S. (2001). *Preservation of library and archival materials: A manual*. Northeast Document Conservation Center.
- Pradhan, K. L. (1984). *Administrative system in Nepal (1767–1846)*. Kathmandu: [Publisher].
- Ritzenthaler, M. L. (2010). *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* (2nd ed.). Society of American Archivists.
- Shrestha, G. (2026, April 24). Personal communication.
- The National Archives (UK). (2016). *Caring for archives; Archives sector guidance*.

# TSUM: A COMMUNITY-LED HERITAGE PRESERVATION

**Nima Lama**

Chairperson, Chumnubri (Tsum-Nubri) Rural Municipality  
nimalamatsumvalley@gmail.com



Nestled high in the Himalayas within Chumnubri (Tsum-Nubri) Rural Municipality of Gorkha, Tsum Valley is widely known as a hidden valley of happiness where culture, spirituality, and nature coexist in remarkable harmony. The valley is especially renowned for its centuries-old Shyagya tradition, a community-led practice deeply rooted in the Buddhist principle of Ahimsa (non-violence). Unlike many conservation approaches imposed through external policies, Shyagya is a locally created ethical system that has guided the daily lives of the Tsumba people for generations. Through this

tradition, the entire valley has become a living example of how cultural values can successfully protect biodiversity, social harmony, and fragile mountain ecosystems.

The Shyagya tradition was formally institutionalized in 1922 (1977 B.S.) by the respected Buddhist master Drukpa Rinpoche (Serap Dorje) during Buddha Jayanti. The commitment was documented in Tibetan Sambhota script and has continued to be renewed collectively by the community for more than a century. Under this customary code, hunting, trapping, forest burning, honey hunting, and animal slaughter are prohibited throughout the valley. Livestock such as yaks, sheep, goats, and cattle may be raised for milk, wool, and labor, but they cannot be sold for slaughter. Even meat trading within the valley is restricted. These practices reflect a unique understanding that all living beings deserve protection and compassion.

As a result of these community-enforced values, Tsum Valley has evolved into a sanctuary for both people and wildlife. Rare Himalayan species such as snow leopard, Himalayan brown bear, and numerous birds and medicinal plants continue to survive within this protected landscape. The untouched forests, peaceful settlements, and trust between humans and animals clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of this indigenous conservation system. In many ways, Tsum functions as a living open-air museum where the most important heritage is not a monument or artifact, but an intangible cultural tradition practiced in everyday life.

In contemporary heritage discourse, intangible cultural heritage is increasingly recognized as one of the most valuable dimensions of human civilization. Traditions, ethical values, rituals, and indigenous knowledge systems are now viewed as essential elements of sustainable development and cultural identity. In this context, Shyagya represents one of Nepal's most significant intangible cultural assets. Tsum Valley offers visitors not only scenic beauty and Buddhist culture, but also a deeper experience of mindfulness, compassion, and ecological responsibility. Visitors can learn directly from the Tumba community about

non-violence, environmental ethics, and traditional ways of life, making the valley an important destination for cultural tourism, educational exchange, and spiritual reflection.

A major milestone in the preservation of Shyagya came in 2023 when Chumnubri Rural Municipality enacted the “Tsum Shyagya Protection Act, 2079” under the leadership of Chairperson Nima Lama. This legal recognition transformed the traditional social practice into an officially protected local heritage system. The Act empowers local committees and conservation groups to safeguard the tradition and ensure its transmission to future generations. By combining ancient Buddhist wisdom associated with Padmasambhava and modern local governance, the people of Tsum have created a globally inspiring model of community-led heritage preservation and environmental stewardship.



Despite its success, the sustainability of Shyagya faces growing challenges. Increasing populations of wild animals such as Himalayan thar and langurs often damage crops and agricultural fields, creating difficulties for local farmers. Illegal poaching and external pressures continue to threaten wildlife protection efforts. At the same time, migration of young people for education and employment opportunities, along with the influence of urbanization and modernization, is gradually weakening traditional lifestyles and collective

practices. These changes pose important questions regarding the long-term continuity of Shyagya and the preservation of Tsum's cultural identity.

Nevertheless, Tsum Valley remains a powerful example of how indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and community participation can contribute to sustainable conservation. The Shyagya tradition demonstrates that heritage preservation is not limited to monuments or museums; it can also exist through living ethical practices that shape relationships between humans, animals, and nature. In an era marked by environmental crises and cultural transformation, Tsum offers the world a meaningful lesson in peace, compassion, and sustainable coexistence.

# NARAYANHITI PALACE MUSEUM

## **Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha**

Executive Director

The establishment of the Narayanhiti Palace Museum took place after Nepal was officially declared a federal democratic republic. Located at Durbarmarga, Kathmandu, the federal capital city of Nepal, the museum was formally inaugurated on 15 June 2008 (1 Ashar 2065 B.S.) by the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and was subsequently opened to the public on 28 February 2009 (15 Falgun 2065 B.S.) by the then Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The name Narayanhiti is believed to have originated from the Narayana Temple, built in the multi-roofed style and located in the eastern section of the palace complex, along with a stone waterspout nearby. In the Nepal language (which is also known as Newari Language), a waterspout is called hiti; thus, the combination of the two words "Narayana" (Hindu God Vishnu) and "hiti" (waterspout) gave rise to the name Narayanhiti.

Historical records indicate that the present palace site was originally granted by King Rana Bahadur Shah to Dhokal Singh Basnyat (whose family is associated in Nepal's unification wars under Prithvi Narayan Shah), who built a magnificent palace known as Kirti Mandir in 1793 (1850 B.S.). Prior to the Kot Massacre of 1846 (1903 B.S.), this location served as the residence of Kaji Dhokal Singh Basnyat. Following the assassination of Ranodip Singh in 1885 (1942 B.S.), Bir Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana took possession of the property. In 1886 (1943 B.S.), he demolished the old structure and constructed a new palace designed by Nepali engineer Jogbir Sthapit Bhajuman.

After the Shah kings shifted their residence there, the palace came to be known as Narayanhiti Palace. Parts of the palace built by Bir Shumsher were damaged

during the 1877 (1934 B.S.) Great Nepal–Bihar Earthquake, during which two daughters of King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah lost their lives. Subsequently, Tribhuvan Sadan was constructed under the design of Nepali architect engineer Surya Jung Thapa. The tragic Royal Palace massacre of 2001 occurred within this very building.

The current Narayanhiti Palace was designed by American architect Benjamin Polk and construction began in 1963 (2020 B.S.), being completed in 1970 (2026 B.S.)

The palace complex covers 754 ropani, 8 aana, 1 paisa, and 3 daam (38.39 hectares) of land. The palace structure itself occupies approximately 40,820 square feet. It contains 52 rooms, each named after different districts of Nepal. The main entrance gates are also named after various Himalayan peaks of the country.

Inside the palace are numerous meeting halls, bedrooms of the king and queen, guest suites used by royal visitors, kitchen spaces, dining halls, and other functional rooms. Of these, 32 rooms are currently open for exhibition.

In addition, the museum displays Shree Sadan (Shree House), the private garden of the former Queen Aishwarya Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah, aircraft and helicopters used by the royal family, and royal automobiles, which are accessible for public viewing.

## **Major Attractions of the Museum**

The palace itself is one of the museum's greatest attractions due to its unique Nepali architectural style and interior design. Originally constructed for both residential and state purposes, Narayanhiti Palace represents a remarkable architectural heritage worthy of close observation.

The various rooms and halls reveal insights into the private lifestyle, daily routines, interests, character, and administrative activities of the former royal family.

**Many rooms have been preserved in their original state and converted into exhibition galleries, including:**

- Gaurishankar Gate
- Kaski Hall
- Myagdi Hall
- Parbat Hall
- Rukum Hall
- Rolpa Hall

These spaces display historically significant photographs, official documents, and records associated with the royal administrative system.

**Other key attractions include the following:**

- The royal crown (Shreepech)
- The private residence of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah
- The royal golden carriage presented as a gift by Queen Elizabeth II to King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah
- The beautifully landscaped palace gardens
- The Republic Memorial Area

## **Museum Opening Hours and Entry Fees**

The museum remains closed every Tuesday and Wednesday and on all public holidays observed by the Government of Nepal.

### **Winter Schedule**

Kartik 16 (Early November) – Magh 15 (Late January)

- Museum hours: 09:00 AM – 4:00 PM
- Ticket sales: 09:30 AM – 2:30 PM

## Summer Schedule

Magh 16 (Early February) – Kartik 15 (Late October)

- Museum hours: 09:00 AM – 5:00 PM
- Ticket sales: 09:30 AM – 3:30 PM

## Entry Fees

- Nepali citizens: NPR 200
- Nepali students: NPR 50
- Chinese and SAARC nationals: NPR 500
- Other foreign nationals: NPR 1,000

The museum offers both online and offline ticketing services. Visitors can conveniently book or purchase tickets online or obtain them in person by visiting the museum's ticket counter.









## ICOM Nepal

Kathmandu Metropolitan City -16, Chhetrapati  
Katmandu, Nepal

**Email:** [icomnepal@gmail.com](mailto:icomnepal@gmail.com)

[www.icomnepal.org.np](http://www.icomnepal.org.np)



Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation  
Narayanhiti Palace Museum and Republican  
Monument Management and Operation  
Development Committee

## Narayanhiti Palace Museum

Durbar Marga, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Email:** [info.narayanhiti@gmail.com](mailto:info.narayanhiti@gmail.com)

[www.narayanhitipalacemuseum.com](http://www.narayanhitipalacemuseum.com)



## Chumnuabri Rural Municipality

Sirdibas, Gorkha

Gandaki Province

**Email :** [chumanuwrimun@gmail.com](mailto:chumanuwrimun@gmail.com)

[www.chumanuwrimun.gov.np](http://www.chumanuwrimun.gov.np)