

Tourism seasonality as a contemporary problem in the tourism industry

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Abstract: This article studies seasonality in tourism and how it affects tourist destinations. Contemporary trends in the tourism industry and the issue of tourist seasonality are analyzed, followed by a critical analysis of the future development of seasonality in tourism as well as trends and predictions of how tourism businesses will move. Finally, this article mentions case studies from the international arena.

Keywords: tourism, seasonality

1. Introduction

The 21st century was marked by dramatic historical events, significant technological innovations and extensive social and cultural changes. In their wake, the nature of tourism, its relationship with society, as well as sociological approaches to its analysis and interpretation, underwent a broad transformation. The modern world is characterized by a high degree of fluidity [1]. It is a world of accelerating economic, social and cultural changes, driven by the process of globalization, rapid technological progress and the revolution of communication and information. The hospitality industry, an integral part of the global tourism sector, faces a series of contemporary challenges that significantly affect its operational and economic landscape. Central among these challenges is the issue of seasonality in tourism. This review paper explores contemporary trends and challenges in the hospitality and tourism sector. The review adopted a qualitative approach with an emphasis on secondary data collection, followed by critical thematic analysis. It examines the general challenges and trends of the industry with an emphasis on the issue of tourism seasonality, presents predictions regarding the evolution of this specific issue for the coming years, as well as the possible causes leading to specific trends regarding the way new technologies affect the strategies of tourism businesses.

2. Modern trends and challenges in the tourism industry

The hospitality and tourism industry is highly competitive and often monopolistic, with many businesses offering similar products and competing for available customers. As such, the industry is exposed to trends and challenges that arise from both the internal and external environment [2]. According to Rosing [3], a trend is defined as "a general direction in which something is developing or changing. Trends involve examining the statistical analysis of historical data for a selected period of time and mapping the evolution". Therefore, they are patterns that emerge and are observed either in the market or in the industry. They are often associated with new markets, products, opportunities and challenges. They may require a change in strategies and tactics. Some contemporary examples of trends in the hospitality and tourism sector include: The development of niche tourism products, personalization, adoption of green businesses, popularity of digital marketing, focus on memorable experiences and customer-centric approach [4]. However, trends are constantly changing, thus requiring continuous research. Authors such as Fonseca [5] and Hole [6] have studied issues in tourism. Issues are defined as challenges that arise in the industry, which make it difficult or impossible to manage hospitality and tourism facilities. These challenges range from disasters, seasonality of tourism, insecurity and poor infrastructure. Changing economies, technology, sustainability, competition, safety and security standards are issues that hotels face [7]. These issues require the continuous development of strategies and tactics with the ultimate goal of limiting negative impacts.

3. The issue of tourist seasonality

Tourism is one of the most important industries associated with positive economic impact worldwide [8]. However, this industry is mainly characterized by seasonal fluctuations that lead to extremely high and extremely low travel and excursion seasons. The reason why the issue of seasonality was chosen is because of its multifaceted consequences. The negative impact of this problem on the economic viability of destinations, the difficulties it poses in better resource allocation and improving the overall visitor experience make it one of the most important challenges of the industry.

Seasonality in tourism refers to the temporal fluctuations of tourist activity in a destination, which usually manifests itself in distinct peak and off-peak periods. This phenomenon, which is due to factors such as climate, cultural events, holidays and school vacation schedules, creates significant challenges and opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industry. The analysis of seasonality is crucial for understanding its multifaceted impacts and developing strategies to mitigate its negative impacts while maximizing potential benefits [9].

Being an important aspect that characterizes tourism, Butler [10] and Hartman [11] consider it as a phenomenon that is not easy to control or modify. Therefore, this aspect has been considered and addressed by tourists and tourism operators around the world as a major problem of the industry. The biggest challenge that this issue poses in the tourism sector is the potential loss of income for most operators. In this regard, much attention has been paid to reducing seasonality. Many investors are seeking to adopt various strategies and techniques that can help to curb the "all-season" tourism season.

Most of the proposed ways to address the issue of seasonality, or at least reduce it, have not yielded particularly successful results. This failure is attributed to some extent to the focus on the supply or destination side rather than the demand side. Obviously, a given destination can make any modification to attract tourism, but the success of these efforts depends on whether the market is still able to visit these destinations during periods that are conventionally off-season. If not, these efforts may not be able to bring about significant changes in demand and participation. All types of tourism are affected by seasonality at some point, and the impact can be mild or severe. This limits the extent of investments that can be made in the sector [12].

4. Critical analysis regarding the future development of the issue of seasonality in the coming years.

The future of seasonality in tourism promises to be significantly transformed by technological innovations, changing traveler preferences, and sustainable tourism practices. With advances in transportation and communication technology, travelers have greater flexibility and access to information than ever before. This empowerment allows them to seek out destinations that offer unique experiences beyond traditional peak seasons [13]. As a result, destinations are likely to focus on diversifying their attractions and marketing efforts to attract tourists throughout the year, thereby reducing their dependence on peak seasons for revenue.

Furthermore, the ongoing shift toward sustainable tourism practices is expected to play a key role in reshaping seasonality patterns in the industry [14]. Tourists are increasingly aware of the environmental and social impacts of their travel, resulting in a growing demand for responsible and environmentally friendly options. In response, destinations are prioritizing sustainable development initiatives and promoting low-impact tourism activities that can be enjoyed year-round. By integrating sustainability into their tourism strategies, destinations can attract visitors seeking authentic and environmentally conscious experiences, thereby reducing pressure during peak tourist seasons and promoting a more balanced flow of tourism throughout the year.

In addition, the global pandemic has caused a reassessment of travel behavior and destination choices, accelerating existing trends towards off-peak travel [15]. Travelers have become more flexible in their plans, seeking quieter and less crowded destinations to minimize health risks and maximize their experiences. This shift has forced tourism stakeholders to rethink their approach to seasonality, focusing on delivering quality experiences rather than relying solely on peak season inflows. As destinations adapt to these changing dynamics, collaboration between the public and private sectors will be essential to develop sustainable tourism strategies that promote year-round visitation while preserving the natural and cultural heritage of destinations.

5. Trends, forecasts and the reaction of tourism businesses

Seasonality in tourism is due to a multitude of interrelated factors that shape travel patterns and preferences. A prominent cause is the natural environment and climatic conditions of a destination. Tourists are often attracted to locations with pleasant weather, leading to predictable peaks in tourism during certain seasons. For example, coastal destinations experience high levels of visitor arrivals during the summer months, when warm temperatures and sunny skies attract travelers seeking relaxation and outdoor activities. Conversely, mountainous areas may experience increased tourism during the winter for sports such as skiing and snowboarding. These seasonal weather variations play a significant role in shaping tourism trends and forecasts [16].

Cultural and social events also exert a significant influence on tourism seasonality. Festivals, holidays, and special occasions can create surges in visitor numbers during specific times of the year. For example, cities that host famous cultural festivals or sporting events often experience tourism booms as eventgoers flock to participate or watch [17]. Similarly, religious pilgrimages draw crowds to sacred sites during important religious holidays, influencing tourism flows and accommodation demand. Understanding the timing and importance of these events is crucial for predicting tourism patterns and tailoring marketing strategies to capitalize on seasonal peaks.

In addition, economic factors play a key role in driving seasonality trends in tourism. Economic stability, exchange rates, and disposable income levels influence travel decisions and spending patterns. During periods of economic prosperity, tourists may be more willing to spend money on international vacations or luxury experiences, leading to increased tourism activity during peak periods. Conversely, an economic downturn may prompt travelers to seek budget-friendly alternatives or prioritize domestic travel, resulting in shifting seasonality patterns. Anticipating these economic fluctuations and their impact on consumer behavior is essential for predicting seasonality trends and designing resilient tourism strategies that respond to different market segments [18].

Tourism operators employ a variety of strategies to address the challenge of seasonality and mitigate its impact on their businesses. A common approach is to differentiate products and services to attract visitors throughout the year. By offering a range of activities and experiences that appeal to different interests and preferences, operators can attract tourists during off-peak periods when traditional attractions may be less appealing. For example, a beach resort might introduce wellness getaways or culinary experiences during the low season to attract a different demographic of travelers. This differentiation not only helps to distribute tourism demand more evenly throughout the year, but also enhances the overall attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination [19].

Another effective strategy is to implement narrow marketing campaigns to promote the off-peak and peak seasons. Tourism operators can leverage digital marketing channels, seasonal discounts, and special packages to incentivize travel during quieter periods. By highlighting unique attractions, events, or experiences exclusive to certain seasons, operators can stimulate demand and encourage travelers to explore the destination beyond its peak periods [20]. Collaborative marketing efforts among a destination's stakeholders can amplify the impact of these campaigns, creating synergies that benefit the entire tourism ecosystem. In addition, investing in infrastructure improvements, such as transportation networks and accommodation facilities, can enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of the destination, further supporting efforts to attract visitors throughout the year [21].

6. Case studies and the problem of seasonality

Here are 25 more case studies from real-life tourist destinations where seasonality causes significant problems, along with an analysis of the causes:

1. Húsavík, Iceland

Problem: Peak tourist season for whale watching in the summer months, almost zero traffic the rest of the year.

Reason: The product is based on a seasonal attraction—whale watching. Businesses have excess capacity only in June–August.

2. Algarve, Portugal

Problem: High traffic volume in summer, very low traffic in winter.

Reason: Primary destination for sunbathing and golf—winter activities do not compensate for the loss of visitors.

3. Mediterranean Islands (general)

Problem: Economy and environment under pressure due to uneven distribution of visitors between summer and winter.

Reason: Statistically recorded intense concentration in a few months and "dead season".

4. Southern Spain (Mediterranean)

Problem: Extreme heat and drought accelerate the peak, causing a shift in the tourist season.

Reason: High temperatures and climate crisis phenomena limit summer travel.

5. Lapland – Rovaniemi, Finland

Problem: Overcrowding only during the Christmas season at Santa Claus Village.

Reason: Seasonality around Christmas themes limits activity.

6. Galápagos Islands (Ecuador)

Problem: Ecological overload during the tourist months.

Reason: Limited capacity and high demand cause environmental damage.

7. Iceland – Fjaðrárgljúfur

Problem: Overcrowding after viral video, need to close area.

Reason: Social media exposure triggers massive influx of tourists.

8. Venice & Cinque Terre, Italy

Problem: Tourist congestion less than infrastructure capacity.

Reason: Ease of access—cruises—social media cause visitor peaks.

9. Lake Como, Italy

Problem: Single-issue pressure on infrastructure, uneven distribution throughout the year.

Reason: Short-term rentals and social media increased concentration.

10. Dubrovnik, Croatia

Problem: Overtourism Old Town – significant congestion and pressure in a city of 41,000 inhabitants.

Reason: Cruises and Game of Thrones increase tourism by 36 nights/inhabitant.

11. Florence, Italy

Problem: High tourist season, deterioration of residents' quality of life.

Reason: Airbnb, low flight costs and cultural consumption.

12. Prague, Czech Republic

Problem: High volume of visitors in summer, little diversification.

Reason: Central city-breaks model has no alternative in shoulder seasons.

13. Barcelona, Spain

Problem: Congestion and increased cost of living for residents.

Reason: Combination of tourism, Airbnb and cruises.

14. Amsterdam, Netherlands

Problem: High volumes of visitors, ban on new hotels.

Reason: Economic pressure on residents, unreliable infrastructure.

15. Hallstatt, Austria

Problem: Small town full of tourists – "Frozen" fans.

Reason: Social-media tourism – bus jams.

16. Iseltwald (Lake Brienz, Switzerland)

Problem: Congested tourist traffic.

Reason: Typical photos stir up crowds – no more selfies.

17. Mount Fuji, Japan

Problem: Pressure from crowds of photographer's forces barrier to be folded.

Reason: Viral moments cause uneven distribution of visitors.

18. Portugal – Sopron-Fertő regions (Hungary)

Problem: Extensive seasonality of tourism.

Reason: Need for product-development out of season.

19. Greek Heatwaves – Athens

Problem: Heat stress and failure to attract tourists in the summer months.

Cause: Climate crisis affects accessibility and comfort.

20. Rhodes – Forest fires

Problem: Fall in travel flows due to forest hazards.

Cause: Climate phenomena determine seasonality and trust.

21. Portugal – Algarve Water Scarcity

Problem: Water shortage during high demand summer periods.

Cause: High temperatures + tourism = resource crisis.

22. Slovenia – Floods

Problem: Tourism loss due to infrastructure shocks.

Cause: Climate instability causes disruptions in the winter tourism product.

23. Iceland – Reykjanes earthquakes

Problem: Drop in visitors due to geological instability.

Reason: Visits leave only peak economic benefits.

24. Poland, Baltics (War Ukraine)

Problem: Instability and decrease in tourist flow.

Reason: Proximity to conflicts limits seamless seasonality.

25. France – Paris/Nice (Terror Attacks)

Problem: Drop in tourism after attacks, especially in shoulder seasons.

Reason: Unforeseen events change the occupancy of areas.

7. Conclusion

The tourism industry, a vital component of the global economy, faces a multitude of contemporary challenges that require innovative solutions and adaptive strategies. These challenges, and in particular the issue of seasonality, highlight the need for a multifaceted and proactive approach. Economic instability, environmental pressure and social impacts highlight the need for innovative strategies and sustainable practices. By diversifying tourism offerings, dynamic pricing, leveraging technology and promoting sustainability, stakeholders can mitigate the negative impacts of seasonality and ensure a more balanced and resilient tourism industry. Addressing seasonality not only enhances economic stability, but also contributes to the overall well-being of destinations and their communities, promoting a more sustainable and inclusive future for global tourism.

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