

1

Time and Tourism

Philip Goulding

Learning outcomes

By reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Describe the phenomenon of temporality in tourism using a 'systems approach' to understand its implications.
 2. Identify and differentiate terminologies associated with tourism 'seasonality'.
 3. Identify and differentiate different types of tourism seasonality across the world.
 4. Appreciate the construct of 'periodicity' in tourism related operations, as temporally distinct from 'seasonality'.
-

Introduction

The relationships between tourism and time are multi-dimensional and complex. At a macro level, the mass movement of people for touristic purposes within and across the various parts of the globe appears as a relentless surge of travel throughout the course of the year. However, in practice, the temporal spread of tourism is far from uniform. The reality is a complex mix of travel patterns that pulse in intensity at different times of the year according to geography, destination resources, climate, human motivations, personal circumstances, economic wellbeing, transport infrastructures and the activities of a sophisticated tourism industry that responds in numerous ways to temporal variations in demand. The shorthand for this is 'seasonality', a concept that has been synonymous with tourism ever since recreational travel became established (Butler, 2001; Bar On, 1975).

But while seasonality has traditionally been viewed as a dominant characteristic of tourism, it is by no means the only temporal construct that characterises the industry. Temporal variations in the demand for and supply of touristic services exist not only across 'seasons', but across shorter time spans at every duration: months, weeks, weekdays, weekends, public holidays, times of the day, diurnal and nocturnal periods, durations of festivals and of natural phenomena. This connotes 'periodic' variation (Hartmann, 1986; Goulding & Pomfret, 2022). Passenger transport and tourism businesses routinely construct their operational and strategic planning to accommodate and predict temporal variations in demand and supply over both longer (annual and several years in advance) and shorter (i.e. periodic) time frames.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to establish a framework of analysis to help appreciate time-related dimensions of tourism. It acts as a platform upon which the following chapters will develop particular temporal inter-relationships. This chapter will explore the concept of 'seasonality' and why it has been viewed as a challenge or 'problem' to be 'overcome' at destination level. Following on from this, the concept of 'periodicity' in tourism is examined, illustrating its implications in a number of operational contexts. Finally, a short case example of tourism seasonality in a UK region is examined.

An overview of temporality in tourism

In order to aid our understanding of how temporality, expressed as the various dimensions of time, is inherent within tourism, we can take a 'systems approach' based on the idea that tourism itself is a system of inter-related constructs and components (see for example Leiper, 1990, Page et al., 2001). In other words, temporality is a subset or dimension of the tourism system and which has consequences throughout that system.

First, consumer demand is temporally driven to a significant extent. For example, consumer market segmentation acknowledges 'time poor' consumers who may pay premium rates to travel within restricted time periods or where 'time is of the essence' in reaching a destination as quickly as possible. Conversely some consumer markets are 'time rich' and can adjust their travel to achieve best personal outcomes (eg lowest cost, greatest availability of services to choose between). Transport networks adjust pricing to reflect such temporality in demand. (This is explored in Chapters 7 and 8 of this book). Likewise destination services including accommodation are very