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# Seasonality and Overtourism

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## Learning outcomes

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This chapter will provide you with:

1. An understanding of the concept and definition of 'overtourism'.
  2. The inter-relationships between seasonality and overtourism and the factors inherent to that inter-relationship.
  3. An appreciation of how overtourism and seasonality in tourism can be open to mitigation or prevention.
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## Introduction and context

Writing at a time when Covid-19 has been prevalent throughout the world, to discuss issues such as seasonality and overtourism may seem both inappropriate and insensitive. Many tourist destinations and most elements of the tourism industry have, during 2020 and 2021, severely suffered economically from an absence of tourists rather than an imbalance or surfeit of visitors. The concerns about overtourism in particular, expressed so strongly in the last years of the second decade of the 21st century (see for example, Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano et al., 2019), now seem strangely irrelevant and unmemorable. However, it is likely that what are viewed as major difficulties in tourism, both seasonality and overtourism, are almost certain to return to many destinations in the not too distant future. The fact that so

many potential tourists were denied the opportunity to travel, particularly to foreign destinations, for almost the whole of 2020 and much of 2021, means that there is a great deal of latent demand forcibly pent up in most, if not all, of the traditional major origin countries.

At the time of writing the Covid pandemic has made overtourism and seasonality almost irrelevant, but when Covid-related restrictions are reduced or removed, it is hard to imagine that tourist numbers will not rise rapidly almost immediately, perhaps not to the previous record levels of 2019 but certainly to levels causing crowding and negative responses in more popular destinations. How quickly tourist numbers will rise and in which destinations will depend on a number of factors: the perceptions of tourists about health and safety risk and the availability of medical care; the removal of enforced quarantine at both destinations on arrival and at home on return; the removal of other government restrictions on travel; the availability of transportation services (aircraft being in the appropriate place and in service for example), of accommodation and related services, and of appropriate intermediary services to make travel possible. If constraints are removed or at least significantly reduced, crowds can be expected to return to popular sites and sights and the spectre of overtourism to reappear, despite the possibility of forces opposed to tourism in general attempting to seize what they may see as an opportunity to significantly and permanently reduce the scale of the activity (Butcher, 2020; Tourism Geographies, 2020).

In light of the above, this chapter explores the inter-relationships and debates around overtourism and seasonality, the difficulties caused by inconsistency in terminology, and the reluctance of authorities to tackle the 'wicked problem' of excess visitation. The example of Venice is used to illustrate the long-lasting nature of the problems faced by some destinations.

## Overtourism

The phenomenon of overtourism, an 'excessive number of visitors', has become highly visible in tourism, both academically and more particularly in reality, during the last half decade, finding its strongest expression in a number of locations, mostly urban centres, especially in western Europe (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Places such as Venice, Barcelona, Dubrovnik, Prague, Edinburgh and Paris all have featured in both the popular press and news media sites and in academic sources (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano et al.,