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International Tourism

By the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Describe factors that influence bilateral tourism flows
- Identify why tourism is a politically selective activity
- Analyse the role of Bilateral Air Service Agreements in international tourism
- Describe the Freedoms of the Air
- Critique the role of the World Trade Organization in tourism

Introduction

International tourism is influenced by both small and big 'P' politics. Political factors influence who can visit a country and who is not welcome. As Artal-Tur et al. (2015) note, the impact of diplomatic relations on tourism flows is immense. Political relationships influence international air service agreements and through the General Agreement of Trade in Services, controlled by the World Trade Organization (WTO), influence the internationalization of tourism in all areas. To understand international tourism, then, you need a general understanding of the international trade dimensions that guide it and the politics behind some of them.

Bilateral tourism flows

Before starting though, it is worth appreciating that a number of conditions must exist before international tourism can occur. First, one country must recognize the existence of the other. Travel by Israelis is very difficult to many countries in the Islamic world and virtually impossible to many more due to the fact that they have never recognized Israel's existence. The same holds true for some breakaway republics in the former Soviet Union. Second, there must be diplomatic relations between countries. Third, commerce or trade agreements must be signed. While tourism may be a recreational activity pursued by individuals, at a national level, it is a highly sought after trade commodity. Then acceptable entry arrangements must be agreed upon that outline how people can visit, under what conditions and how long they can stay. These conditions include such features as the need for passports or visas as entry requirements and other entry conditions. They vary from country to country and are negotiated by each country as part of their diplomatic relations. Finally, a range of other barriers must be removed. As Prideaux (2005: 781) writes

The quantum of the flow between country pairs is a function of a matrix of interrelated factors that includes the public and private sector structures supporting flows, diplomatic relations, and economic and noneconomic factors. Countries that have removed barriers to citizens undertaking foreign tourism have limited capability to regulate outbound flows, but still retain significant capacity to increase inbound flows through measures designed to enhance destination competitiveness and encourage citizens to substitute domestic for international tourism. Policies designed to alter the level of inbound and outbound flows through non-regulatory measures may become important where countries facing a balance of payments crisis decide to adopt policies designed to increase exports and reduce imports of tourism.

It is for this reason that Webster and Ivanov (2016) contend that one of the major barriers to allow people to travel is not the cost but political regulation of borders. Karaman (2016) adds that tourism flows are affected by political, economic and cultural factors whereby security conditions and international relations have a direct influence on mobility.

Politics of visas

While those of us in the Western world may take travel for granted, nowhere in international law does the right to enter foreign spaces exist (Neumayer, 2010). Instead, it is a privilege granted by both the generating and receiving country.

Either or both can grant easier access to facilitate movements or can create barriers to restrict movements (Liu and McKercher, 2014). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in principle, gives individuals the right to exit and enter their own country but not a right to enter foreign spaces. Indeed, it is estimated that approximately two-thirds of the world's population require a visa prior to departure, 15% can acquire a visa on arrival in country and only 18% are able to enter destinations on a visa-free basis (Bangwayo-Skeete and Skeete, 2017).

The issues of entry into different countries and terms of stay have received remarkably little attention within the tourism literature. Yet, they are fundamental to the understanding of tourism for they can encourage or discourage the free movements of people. As much as tourism is portrayed as a democratic activity accessible to most, in reality international tourism is highly politicized where certain types of undesirables are actively discouraged from entering a country while desirables are encouraged. Mau et al. (2015) comment that border selectivity is a central reaction to the opportunities and risks stemming from globalization. They further note that visa policies are seen as a central instrument in mobility restriction as a form of remote control or preemptive action. In essence whether governments impose or remove restrictions on cross-border mobility is a reflection of the friendliness between countries and the presence or absence of reciprocal trade agreements (Whyte, 2008). Webster and Ivanov (2016) indicate that states generally have policies that favour open borders, unless they are states that tend to face some type of real or perceived external threat.

People can enter a country in any number of ways. They may migrate on a permanent basis, come in through various professional and investor migration schemes, enter on student visas and perhaps be allowed to stay afterwards, come in as foreign workers, be identified as quality migrants, come in as part of a family reunion scheme and many other ways, including visiting as a tourist. The easiest way to gain access is as a tourist, especially since many people can gain visa-free entry. As a result it is also the easiest to abuse. Indeed, the vast majority of illegal immigrants enter a country legally as tourists and then overstay (Neumayer, 2006). It is because of this fact that many countries impose visa requirements as a means of creating a hurdle for visitors, as well as providing a means of tracking them once in the country (Whyte, 2008).

Countries face a difficult balancing act of, on the one hand, encouraging the free flow of people for political, social, economic and other beneficial reasons while, on the other hand, deterring people in order to maintain immigration control and uphold security (Neumayer, 2006). Visa policies fulfil this dual role for they act as a powerful screening mechanism that manages demand (Beenstock et al., 2015). But as Neumayer (2010) notes, visas are a crude mechanism to manage this trade off. Entry can be denied for a number of reasons, as shown in Table 6.1.