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Causal Factors of Seasonality and Temporal Imbalances in Tourism

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Learning outcomes

Having read this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Assess the relevance of a broad range of factors that influence the causation of temporal imbalances in tourism.
 2. Identify, explain and apply a range of institutional factors that influence temporal demand patterns.
 3. Distinguish how demand-derived and supply-side factors are moderated by interventions from various types of intermediaries.
 4. Appreciate the role of business operating behaviours and motivations in affecting temporal patterns, particularly at local levels.
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Introduction

The previous chapter established the prevalence of temporality in tourism, discussing dimensions, characteristics and terminologies of the phenomenon. It identified the traditional label of 'seasonality' as the main characterisation of temporal imbalances, while introducing 'cyclical' and 'periodic' dimensions, the latter more significant at micro-level, such as the availability or non-availability of tourism services within a shorter timeframe. The focus of

this chapter is to unravel underlying causes of temporal fluctuations in tourism, to help build an understanding of why temporal peaks and troughs in demand patterns exist, what factors affect the temporal nature of consumers' holiday and wider travel patterns and therefore in turn, influence service providers in terms of the availability, nature and pricing of their tourism services.

A 'causal influence framework' is introduced to provide an overview of the various elements and their inter-relationships, after which each is explored in turn. However, while climate is a fundamental causal factor in explaining the temporal nature of tourism, it is examined more fully in Chapters 3 and 4. Hence the various perspectives of climate as a causal factor of temporal imbalances in tourism are not discussed in detail within the current chapter.

An overview of causal factors for temporality in tourism

Tourism is predicated by time, often characterised by waves of movements within and between countries that vary according to time. Bar On's (1975) pioneering longitudinal study of seasonal variations in 16 countries over a 10 year period not only provided ample evidence of the universality of seasonality in tourism but also highlighted the commonality of causal factors. Butler (2001) suggested that the pattern of tourism seasonality at any specific destination will be the result of interactions between a number of causal elements in both the generating (origin) and the receiving areas (destinations) and further modified by distribution channels and transport availability and by intermediaries, which may include tourism and non-tourism entities spanning the public/governmental and private (corporate/small business) sectors or a coalition of these. Figure 2.1 provides an adaptation and update of Butler's original model.

The inference of the framework is that no single factor is entirely responsible for the seasonal or temporal patterns of tourism in any specific location, rather, it is explained by the interplay of a number of factors across the spectrum of demand, supply and the moderating forces of the business environment and external interventions. They are not mutually exclusive. The chapter goes on to discuss and exemplify some of these causal factors.