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Tourism and the Seasons

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Learning outcomes

This chapter will provide you with:

1. An understanding of how climate and weather influence global seasonal tourism demand.
 2. An appreciation of how institutional seasonality exacerbates the effects of natural seasonality.
 3. An awareness of how seasonal tourism demand will alter as a result of climate change.
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Introduction

This chapter focuses on climate as a key causal factor and determinant of seasonality. It will explore our understanding of how climate acts as an important construct to patterns of tourism in various parts of the world. It will illustrate how the weather in both the generating regions and the destination areas produces 'push' and 'pull' factors influencing tourism demand. It will also assess how institutional seasonality exacerbates the effects of natural seasonality creating peaks in tourism demand. Finally, the chapter will examine how global warming is changing the seasons, redistributing climatic assets among tourism regions and influencing global tourism demand.

Climatic variation and tourism demand

Weather is the atmospheric conditions over a short period of time and is affected by a number of factors including temperature, humidity, cloud cover, wind and precipitation. Climate is the weather averaged over a long period of time and represents the conditions anticipated at a specific destination and time. Climate defines the length and quality of tourism seasons in leisure destinations and determines a destination's attractiveness, such as the temperature, snow conditions, and wildlife productivity and biodiversity. Therefore, it is a principal driver of global seasonality in tourism demand (Mintel, 2012; UNWTO, 2008).

Climatic seasonality represents a significant challenge for the tourism sector due to the uneven nature of demand for visitor attractions and accommodation, and the relatively fixed nature of the supply of capacity and resources (Hadwen et al., 2011). Seasonality is driven by the permanent 22.5 degree tilt of the earth's axis as it orbits around the sun, which means that throughout the year different parts of the planet's surface are exposed to direct solar rays which impact the environment and human behaviour (Ulijaszek & Strickland, 2009). It is summer in the northern hemisphere when it's tilted towards the sun, winter in the southern hemisphere when it leans away from the sun and vice-versa. Correspondingly, climatic seasonality is less marked at the equator compared with higher latitudes, both north and south. The variation in sunlight at different times of the year influences global wind patterns, ocean currents and atmospheric moisture levels, which also contribute to seasonality together with the earth's topography, particularly altitude. While this natural seasonality has been considered to be relatively permanent and predictable, there is increasing evidence that the seasons are changing because of global warming, which is discussed later in the chapter.

Crucially for tourism, the weather changes in each season, in both the generating regions and the destination areas and this produces push and pull factors influencing tourism demand (Figure 3.1).

Climatic seasonality and its attendant differences in weather between tourists' origin areas and their intended holiday destinations is a key influence on tourists' decision making. In addition to this natural seasonality, 'institutional seasonality' (Butler, 1991), as discussed in the previous chapter, a combination of religious, social and cultural factors, also affects demand.