

Tourism and Demography



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An Ageing Population and Changing Family Structures

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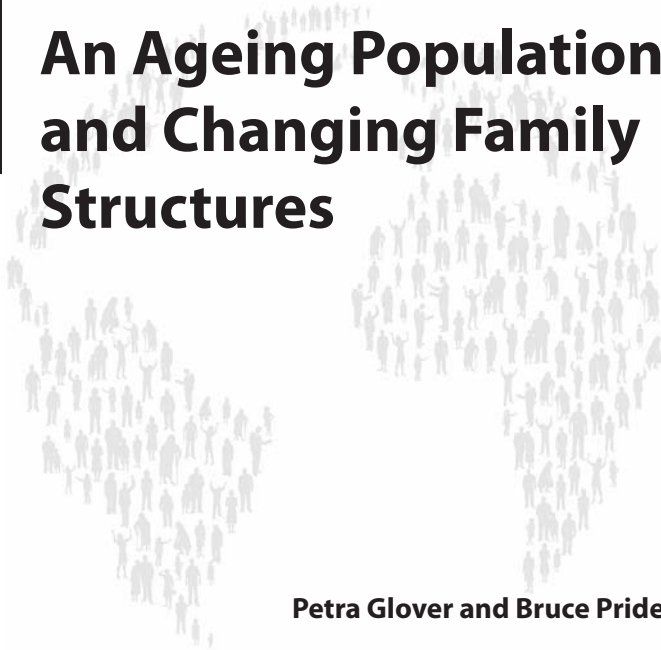
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An Ageing Population and Changing Family Structures



Petra Glover and Bruce Prideaux

Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is:

- ◆ To discuss the importance of population ageing and changing family structures for future tourism demand;
- ◆ To illustrate potential changes in tourism demand due to population ageing and changing family structures;
- ◆ To demonstrate the relevance of such changes for different generations,
- ◆ To create greater awareness of the uncertainties in predicting the future tourism environment;
- ◆ To present a possible scenario of future tourism demand based on the findings of a Delphi study conducted in Australia, combined with population projections for 2021.

Introduction

In recent years, the potential impacts of demographic change on a range of societal issues have influenced public debate. In many developed nations this discussion has centred on the growth in rapidly ageing populations and the impact that this phenomenon, described by the theory of demographic transition (Galor and Weil, 2000; van de Kaa, 2001), will have on the economy and on the work force. In Australia, aspects of demographic change that have occupied the debate in the public arena include the increased cost of government pensions, the growth in health care cost, the impact of population growth on urban areas, and the emergence of new family and household structures due to delayed family formation, declining birth rates and growing divorce rates. The direction and composition of demographic trends will have significant impacts on the shape of future society including the structure of tourism demand. Surprisingly, the potential impacts of demographic change on tourism demand have received little attention from tourism researchers. While this chapter focuses on two crucial aspects of demographic change (population ageing and changing family structures) it is acknowledged that other external factors including technological innovation, economic development, infrastructure development, environmental change, political stability, safety concerns (World Tourism Organization, 1995) and in the near future, climate change will also play an important role in determining tourism demand.

Tourism demand has changed over time and today's tourists expect products and services that are different from those that were common and accepted in the past. For example, the demographic characteristics of cruise tourists in the Caribbean changed during the 1990s when families and adventure tourists joined the predominantly older segment of couples (Paige, 1999). Similarly, Malta has experienced a move from beach to heritage tourism, spearheaded by an increasing number of older travellers, but also assisted by younger cohorts of backpackers and language tourists (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2005). In many developed countries, falling birth rates are likely to have significant impacts on the future demand for tourism, as well as impacting on the supply of labour to service the industry. It is likely that demographic change of the nature predicted by the demographic transition model will continue, thus affecting future domestic and international tourism demand. Therefore, it is prudent for the tourism industry to invest in research that examines anticipated changes in tourism demand, assists the industry to make necessary adjustments to existing tourism products and services, and identifies new opportunities to develop products and services that will resonate with this new market.

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