
UNIT 19 SEASONAL MARKETING

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19.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the role of seasonality in tourism,
- appreciate the reasons which contribute towards seasonality in tourism,
- learn about the problems that emerge because of the seasonality factor,
- know the advantages of seasonality,
- familiarise yourself with the various methods adopted to deal with the problems of seasonality, and
- list the marketing strategies adopted by tourism organisations in relation to seasonality.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

You are aware with the features of the tourism product/services. Besides intangibility, perishability, inseparability, etc. seasonality is an important characteristic that needs proper handling in relation to marketing. The highly elastic tourism demand is to a large extent linked with the seasonality aspect. Both, the tourist generating markets as well as destinations have seasonal limitations. There are peak seasons and lean seasons in tourism which are measured in terms of the demand and supply situation.

This Unit starts with a discussion on the types of seasonality and the factors that contribute towards them. It further discusses the problems emerging because of seasonality from the point of view of tourism suppliers. The types of alternatives that are used by marketing managers to increase the tourism season and deal with other related problems have also been dealt with. At the same time this Unit also attempts to examine the benefits of seasonality for the destination and its environment.

19.2 SEASONALITY IN TOURISM

All varieties of tourism have an element of seasonality linked to them. There are peak seasons, lean seasons or off seasons for a destination or a tourist generating market. An analysis of tourist arrivals at any destination would demonstrate monthly fluctuations. Similarly, in the case of individual services the seasonality concept can be further applied to demonstrate weakly or hourly fluctuations. For example,

- there is more rush on weekends in a museum or a resort,
- there may be more rush in morning or evening flights in comparison to afternoon flights, etc.

Such analysis is extremely useful from the marketing point of view as it helps in deciding the marketing mix. For example, products can be designed, rejuvenated or dropped as per the seasonal requirements. Similarly, separate prices may be charged for lean seasons along with a different promotion policy. The man power requirements would be higher in peak season and lower in lean seasons. This may affect the recruitment patterns adopted by the employers. Even the capacity utilisation is varied, say from 100% in peak season to even closing down in off seasons. Goa can be cited as an example in this regard. Hence, it is necessary to understand the different types of seasonality and the reasons behind it.

19.2.1 Types and Reasons

There are different types of seasonality and the tourist seasons emerge because of different reasons. Raphael Raymond BarOn (1993) attributed the development of tourism seasons to the climate at the origin and/or at the destination and also to non-climatic attractions like festivals, celebrations, etc. However, a number of other factors have also been found to be contributing towards seasonality in tourism. R.W. Butler (1994) has pointed towards the lack of research in this area in spite of the concerns expressed in this regard. Besides climatic and non-climatic reasons Butler has added other factors like human decisions, tradition, social pressure and fashion. Let us briefly examine them.

- i) **Climatic Seasonality** is related to the natural climatic seasons in a year. For example, there is a movement of tourists from hot climate regions towards cooler destinations in summer months and this becomes the peak season for hill stations. Similarly, to escape the winter snow and extremely cold weather conditions the tourists move in search of sunny beaches. Since the climatic variations are similar every year (minor variables may be there) the tourist season and the monthly cycles of tourist movement are more or less easily identifiable. For example, the maximum tourist arrivals from the Western countries in India are between October and February.
- ii) **Non-Climatic Attractions** or what can be termed as **institutionalised seasonality** in tourism emerges out of religious, cultural, ethnic and social aspects of human life. Festivals, pilgrimage and fairs, etc. are examples to be cited in this regard.

Other elements in this form of seasonality which is a result of human decisions include:

- public holidays,
 - educational holidays,
 - industrial holidays, and
 - family holidays.
- iii) **Social Pressure or Fashion** is another aspect which brings about or effects tourism seasonality. This has also been termed as **social seasonality**. The affluent, elite and dominant social classes set certain trends where in it becomes socially necessary to participate. Soon these trends are imitated or picked up by others. Travel for honeymoon can be cited as one such example in this regard. Sooner or later such trends become accepted social activities among a larger populace.
 - iv) **Sporting Season** is another aspect which has resulted out of the varied nature of recreation and tourist activity. Winter sports like skiing and water sports like surfing are the examples to be cited here. Further, there is a lot of tourist movement during major sporting events like Olympics, cricket, hockey and football matches, etc.
 - v) **Tradition** also plays a role in seasonality. According to Butler "**many people take holidays at what are peak seasons because they have always done so, and old habits tend to die hard.**" For example, a family was always taking a trip when schools were closed for longer durations. A stage comes when the children have grown up, they are no more learning and the family trip should not be tied up with school holidays. Still the family takes a holiday during those months because of the old habit.

Hence, we see that today it is not just because of the climatic variations that the tourism seasonality gets affected but a variety of other factors also contribute to it.

19.2.2 Problems

You may ask here that why are we bothered about the concept of seasonality for tourism marketing. Well, this is because seasonality and seasonal fluctuations create certain problems for both, the destination as well as the producers of tourism services.

During the peak season the problems which emerge are related to the carrying capacity, serving capacity, lack of trained manpower, etc. The lean or off season brings the problems of:

- declining profits,
- high maintenance costs,
- unemployment,
- closures, etc.

In fact off and lean seasons in tourism are always seen as a problem which:

- reduces the volume of business and reduces profits,
- deters investment as the returns on the capital invested may not be possible.

Thus, all efforts are geared towards solving this problem by over coming, modifying or reducing its affects. For example, how to cope with weekend rush? or how to deal with under utilisation of resources during lean or off seasons.

19.2.3 Benefits

If we judge purely from the point of view of environmental impacts and interaction between the locals and the visitors, the seasonal nature of a destination proves to be a boon in disguise. Murphy has mentioned that "seasonality is not necessary bad for everyone." Individuals, according to him, need release from stress and a certain population may not be able to bear the stress of catering to the tourists through out the year. An often quoted view point in this regard is that of Jordan:

"locals view the approaching season with mixed feelings and value the off season when only permanent residents are present."

The social and cultural patterns of a community at a destination can be disrupted by tourism. It is only the off-season which provides a breather to them and allows them to perform their activities. Similarly, an offseason offers recovery to the destination from the environmental point of view. In fact, many eco-fragile areas are intentionally closed to increase their life cycle. Thus, seasonality, which is a problem from the economic point of view becomes beneficial from the point of view of environmental conservation.

Check Your Progress-1

1. What do you understand by seasonality in tourism?

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2) Besides climatic what other types of seasonality are there in tourism?

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3) Seasonality in tourism is a problem as well as a boon. Comment.

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19.3 ALTERNATIVES-I

Practically every tourist destination should attempt to evenly spread seasonality. However, few destinations pay attention to this aspect. Initially the aim is to get larger number of tourists and little but no thought is given to the time they are to be attracted. The image that has been built of the Indian tourism product in the world markets is a typical example in this regard. The months April to August were not promoted which has resulted in creating offseason problems for many destinations.

BarOn examined certain countries in the 1970's and found that the expansion of tourism was "largely an expansion of the main season." He has, however, listed the benefits of more evenly spread seasonality:

- 1) More enjoyable holidays for larger numbers of people, without the overcrowding so common in the peak seasons.
- 2) Optimal utilization of tourism facilities - hotels, aircraft and other transport, beaches and entertainment, it will then not be necessary to build so many hotels for a particular number of tourists each year, with ecological as well as economic advantages.
- 3) More even employment of hotel and other tourist staff, aiding their careers and improving the service offered.
- 4) Reduced average prices and/or increased profitability.

In fact an evenly spread seasonality attempts to tackle the problems of peak season rush or those of a single main tourism season. The alternatives tried in this regard include the following in the case of a single season tourist destination:

- extend or lengthen the main season by adding more attractions before or after the peak season months,

**Marketing Mix:
Specific Situations**

- providing such activities like conventions, festivals, special interests, etc. which are not dependent on the climatic conditions and can be timed outside the peak season.
- establishing additional seasons (second season or third season) after re-assessing the cultural, climatic or natural attractions of the destination. For example, some hill stations in north India have been able to build a second tourist season which is linked with snowfall and winter sports. As soon as the media reports a snowfall in Shimla, Nainital or Mussoorie people from the neighbouring regions rush there. The duration of stay is not long, may be two or three days only but from the business point of view it is an additional season. No wonder one hears comments in social circles: Oh Shimla is too crowded in summers, we only go when there is snowfall! On the cultural side, an example that can be cited in this regard is the Dusshera at Kullu which attracts tourists in the month of October.
- promoting and encouraging tourism outside the peak season,
- encouraging domestic tourism in periods that are off-season for international tourism.

In case there exists a more than one peak season situation for a destination the efforts are directed towards filling the gap periods by adding more activities, events and attractions.

The peak season rush creates certain problems at the destination and in most of the cases these problems are aggravating. For example, these include:

- the pressure on local-bodies to deal with the garbage and waste,
- price rise, and
- shortage in essential supplies like water and electricity to the local residents.

All these have affected the nature of guest-host relationships (see **Units 3 and 4 of TS-2**) and the carrying capacity of a destination is a major variable for destination planners and marketing managers in dealing with tourism seasonality.

Another aspect to be taken note of is the seasonality variation as per the destinations location. This could be between:

- national, regional and sectoral levels,
- central and remote locations,
- urban and rural locations.

Studies in these areas have demonstrated that large cities have a less seasonal pattern compared to tourist resorts. In 1984 a **World Tourism Organisation** report mentioned that **"destinations supported by large urban centres, while having high points of activity, have more continuous operation throughout the year because they depend upon a more diversified demand."** Butler has listed the reasons behind the greater degree of seasonality experienced by remote or peripheral destinations in comparison to the centrally located destinations:

- remoteness implies difficult access and longer travel time,
- services tend to be limited and may operate at certain times of the year when demand justifies their availability,
- some destinations in remote areas are from the climatic point of view accessible for limited time periods, and
- visitation to certain remote destinations is attractive or even practical only at specific times in a year.

Such situations encourage the seasonality aspect. Marketing managers must be aware of the seasons mentioned and the alternatives discussed in this Section. However, the applicability of these alternatives will vary destination to destination. The attitudes of host population, environmental concerns, role of local bodies and the developmental role of marketing (see Block-3) must be taken into account while planning the marketing mix.

19.4 ALTERNATIVES-2

Besides taking into account the alternatives suggested in the earlier Section for evenly spread seasonality the tourism industry has adopted certain promotional and pricing measures to attract tourists during the off season. Let us list some of these methods.

- Price reduction,
- Differential pricing for products/services,
- Price variations,
- Seasonal discounts,
- Extra services,
- Special fares, etc.

All such prices discounts/incentives have to be quoted much in advance for the packaged tours. The marketing manager has to take note of this fact that any tourist will take a tour outside the peak season only when there are sufficient incentives. For example, discounted pricing may attract those tourists who otherwise could not have afforded the holiday. Its a different matter that the organisation offering discounts may also cut down on some of the services or facilities or offer extra services.

Special promotional and advertising campaigns are carried out for increasing off season sales. Most of the tourism producers depend heavily on intermediaries for selling. However, during off season or lean periods they do adopt a direct sales approach through personal selling and advertisements.

Check Your Progress-2

1) What are the benefits of evenly spread seasonality in tourism?

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2) How does seasonality affect remote or peripheral destinations?

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3) What type of price measures are adopted to attract customers in off season?

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19.5 LET US SUM UP

The approaches adopted to tackle seasonality have been directed at both - the destinations as well as target markets. In spite of the efforts made in this regard the problem remains far from being tackled. Seasonality has positive and negative features. Off seasons create problems of unemployment and underutilization of the infrastructural facilities. On the other hand they help in environmental conservation and giving some relief to the locals from seasonal stress. There are various ways to evenly spread seasonality. These start from creating more attractions to offering incentives and discounts. The element of seasonality has to be a part of the marketing plan right from its inception stage.

19.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sec. 19.2.
- 2) See Sub-sec 19.2.1.
- 3) Discuss the problems as well as benefits related to environment and local population. See Sub-secs. 19.2.2 and 19.2.3.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sec. 19.3.
- 2) See Sec. 19.2.
- 3) See Sec. 19.4.