

**ADDRESSING SEASONALITY IN TOURISM:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROTOTYPE**

Conclusions and Recommendations resulting from  
the Punta del Este Conference, May 2014.

Report for UNWTO  
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June, 2014

## **INTRODUCTION**

Seasonality is a universal factor in tourism and has often been viewed as a problem, particularly in economic terms. As tourism has grown from a small element in global development to one of the major forces of economic and social development throughout the world, the desire to ensure destinations have a year-round tourism industry rather than a small seasonal activity has become stronger. However, despite many and varied attempts to achieve this goal, few destinations have managed to secure year round tourism. Seasonality is a complicated phenomenon, far more complex than simply a result of annual climatic variation, and thus actions need to address the underlying causes of seasonality and the reasons for it remaining a permanent characteristic of tourism. Rather than thinking in terms of “overcoming” seasonality, it would be much more sensible to see seasonality as a factor to be compensated for, and dealt with through adaptation and mitigation rather than attempting elimination of seasonal variation in numbers of tourists. The following sections discuss the nature and origins of seasonality, the principal factors driving the phenomenon and steps which have been taken by some destinations to reduce its effects. The concluding section outlines possible strategies which could be introduced in some destinations to mitigate seasonality in tourist visitation and lengthen the season during which visitors arrive.

## **SEASONALITY**

Seasonality is generally viewed as a problem that limits the economic returns that can be obtained from tourism and prevents the optimum economic benefits that might be gained if a destination were able to attract tourists year round. It has been defined as:

“a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions”

One of the unresolved problems associated with seasonality is how best to measure these temporal variations, whether they should be expressed in terms of bednights, total numbers of visits, monthly income generated, or people employed. In most cases total numbers of visitors or bednights are used. Generally, the number of staying visitors is a better indication of the potential value of tourism and return on investment than simple tourist visits as the latter will include day visitors and cruise ship visitors who generally have lower daily expenditure and a concentrated spatial pattern of impact to a limited part of a destination.

Whatever the unit of measurement, it is the temporal extent and pattern of tourism that is generally the most important factor under consideration. In some extreme remote locations (e.g. sub-polar regions), the season for visitation may be only a few weeks, while very few destinations other than capital and other large cities have large scale

visitation throughout the year. Even those destinations experience variations in the level of tourist numbers over a typical year.

From an economic point of view, and particularly the view of tourism operators and companies, the ideal situation would be a roughly equal level of visitation throughout the year, allowing the maximum use to be made of physical infrastructure and plant, employees to be retained on a full time basis throughout the year and thus maximum or close to maximum prices to be obtained throughout the year. In reality, many tourist businesses can only operate at or near capacity for a few months of the year, with shoulder seasons of one to two months at the most on either side of the peak period. Smaller peaks might be experienced at formal holidays such as Christmas and Easter or for other celebrations (e.g. Golden Week in China), such as anniversaries of independence and establishment.

It has to be acknowledged that very few destinations have been successful over the long term in meaningfully extending their tourist season, let alone converting a seasonal tourism pattern into a year-round non-seasonal pattern of visitation. The reasons for this failure will be discussed below. It has to be accepted that the more extreme the seasonality of visitation at a location, the greater the difficulty of removing or overcoming that pattern of visitation.

## **CHARACTERISTICS**

There are a number of characteristics of seasonality that enable its causes to be identified and thus may help in modifying its occurrence. In the first case it is generally regular and consistent, occurring at the same time for roughly the same duration each year. This means that unlike some other negative influences on tourism, both at the local level such as natural disasters, security issues or epidemics, or at the global level such as economic recession and war, seasonality is predictable and in a sense 'reliable' in terms of it being able to be anticipated and ideally, mitigated. This should mean that steps to counter its presence and or its effects should be more easy to conceive and to implement. The fact that success to date has been very limited suggests that perhaps the wrong steps have been taken which may stem from tackling the wrong "problems".

A second characteristic of seasonality is that it is not unique to tourism, it affects other major economic activities such as agriculture, fishing, and forestry at least equally if not more than tourism and it should be possible to learn from what has been done by operators working in those activities with respect to dealing with seasonality. There are of course some fundamental differences between tourism and many other economic activities stemming from the fact that tourism offers experiences rather than tangible products and its primary offerings, e.g. beds, cannot be stored for a sale at another time as may be the case with industries producing a tangible hard product.

A third characteristic is that it is caused and influenced by both endogenous and exogenous factors and thus actions against it may have to be taken at both local and external levels, and thus involve local and external agencies. It is clearly driven by different causes, and successfully dealing with one cause may have little or no effect on another driving force. Each destination will have a number of different factors affecting seasonality of tourism there and thus “solutions” may have to be location specific to be effective.

Finally, as with most aspects of tourism, both supply and demand need to be taken into account if changes in patterns of use are to be achieved.

## **CAUSES**

The universal cause of seasonality in general is the movement of the earth around the sun. This can be magnified or diminished by the inclination of the earth towards the sun, and for specific places, the location, particularly the latitude, of a particular place on the earth. Seasonality, in terms of the four conventional seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) is reflected in varying amounts of sunshine, rainfall, cloud cover, hours of daylight, and perhaps above all, temperature. These factors in turn influence and control the growing season for plants of all types and the breeding patterns of wildlife, both terrestrial and marine. For many centuries these seasons controlled or at least heavily influenced the pattern of human existence and activity, for example in agriculture and fishing communities in particular. These factors can be combined as “natural” causes of seasonality.

Increasingly, however, humankind has imposed its own patterns of behaviour, including temporal constraints on human activities, and these influences are best termed “institutional” or social, in that they are created and established by human social, political, religious, and economic agencies. The earliest forms of such seasonality were the religious Holy Days that celebrated events in various religious and pagan calendars such as Christmas, Easter, Saints’ Days, Passover, Ramadan, Solstices, and phases of the moon. Travel such as pilgrimages at specific times were the earliest form of seasonality in tourism and were followed by feasts and markets at set times of the year to reflect agricultural timetables in many places.

Similarly, with the introduction of widespread education in the nineteenth century in particular, school holidays were established to allow children time from education to assist with harvesting of crops. Such periods of leisure, or time away from traditional work, have become firmly established in many countries, albeit different in form in various areas, and the traditional summer school holiday period is believed to be the major institutional cause of tourist seasonality, at least in western developed countries. Changing such by now well-established patterns is extremely difficult, partly because of widespread public preference for consistency and inertia, and other constraints on potential and actual visitors as discussed below.

## ISSUES

There are a number of issues that make seasonality a difficult phenomenon to modify, not the least being that it has impacts upon all aspects of a destination, economic, social, cultural and environmental. In an era of declared sustainability, it is essential to consider all of these issues when contemplating trying to change the seasonal pattern of tourism to a destination.

Combating seasonality is a difficult task and few places have managed to do this effectively over the long term. It is rarely possible to achieve such changes successfully at the destination level alone, because successful intervention needs integrated efforts, not only with respect to airlines and other forms of transport, but also with the full range of accommodation and other facilities being available throughout the year or the extended season. A destination will not appear attractive “out of season” if means of access are offered on an infrequent basis and only a limited range of opportunities and facilities are available compared to the traditional high season.

Secondly, what is being tasked is to change peoples’ leisure behaviour. Tourism (as a part of leisure) is essentially about freedom of choice (in destination selected, in activities engaged in, in time of engagement in tourism) and potential tourists are not likely to accept being forced to change their behaviour.

To affect changes in behaviour involves:

1. removal or mitigation of negative constraints on behavior;
2. provision of information leading to increased awareness and knowledge of alternatives;
3. provision of attractive opportunities; improved travel and access;
4. in addition, possibly a changed economic relationship (price and demand).

Thirdly, not all parties/stakeholders may desire year-round or non-seasonal tourism. A “rest” season from tourism is often welcomed by residents, especially those who are not directly involved in the tourism industry, however supportive of tourism in principal they are. Ignoring this is likely to result in opposition to changes in tourism and even create a negative attitude among some segments of the resident population and even some tourism operators (especially niche operators offering a season specific product that may be vulnerable to overuse).

Fourthly, in some destinations, year-round tourism may represent a serious problem to the ecology in terms of wildlife and vegetation with no respite from visitors and their actions and thus no time for breeding or re-growth and self-restoration from wear and tear. This in turn could reduce the appeal of the destination if the natural environment is a major factor in its attractiveness.

Finally, an off-season can represent a time for refurbishment, repair, and replacement of facilities, infrastructure, and attractions. If this does not exist, then a deliberate “close” season may have to be introduced.

## **CONSTRAINTS ON VISITATION**

Constraints to participation and visitation at destinations exist in various forms and some are relevant to understanding why visitors come at particular times of the year and not at others. In order to enlarge or change a market and the demand for a product/destination it may be appropriate to consider what, if any, constraints exist on potential visitors that deter or prevent them from coming outside the current period of visitation.

Constraints are not all absolute, they may be temporary or permanent, climatic, perceptual, financial, physical, social, cultural, and access or ability related. Some of them are capable of being mitigated or adapted to, and overcoming or reversing their negative effects varies with the nature and characteristics of the attraction and of the market of potential users.

Traditionally they have been thought of as being of three categories:

**Intrapersonal**, which refers to psychological states and attributes that interact with leisure preferences, relating to personal needs, socialization and reference group attitudes, and these tend to predispose people towards certain activities and locales, and presumably specific time periods, as suitable or unsuitable;

**Interpersonal** are those relating to friends and family in particular and may have more impact more than preferences of a specific individual, e.g. family disagreements over preferences;

**Structural** constraints represent factors conceived of as barriers to participation, such as cost, policy issues (e.g. operating procedures, requirements), accessibility, and may be the constraints most feasible to be modified and mitigated by destination agencies.

Participation and choice of time, location, and opportunities are partially dependent on the level of constraint perceived or experienced, but many constraints are not absolute barriers and can be **negotiated** with modification by potential participants.

1. People can decide not to participate (reactive response) **passive responders**;
2. Continue despite restraint (successful proactive response) **achievers**;
3. Participate in an altered manner (partly successful proactive response) **attempters**.

It is clear that constraints are perceived individually and thus responses by agencies need to be as personalised as possible and targetted specifically at small relevant groups to achieve maximum possible modification.

Not all if many constraints are permanent, so potential exists to modify and mitigate those which act as barriers to participation. There is much less known about how constraints work in a group context where individuals mutually influence each other and this is a particular problem in the context of tourism and tourist markets which frequently operate in a group or mass context.

## **ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION**

There are a number of actions which can be taken to mitigate the effects of seasonality, not all are appropriate for any specific destination. While the general goal of reducing what are seen as the negative effects of seasonality is common to most destinations, there may be other desired changes to the pattern of tourist visitation that is influenced by seasonality.

### **1. EXTENDING THE SEASON**

The most common action is to attempt to lengthen the main season at a destination, most often by reducing prices charged for accommodation and services in the months immediately before and after the peak season. The goal is to increase the attractiveness of the existing offerings through price reduction, thus attracting a wider market. Success depends on the market being flexible in its travel arrangements to be able to visit outside the peak season, and being susceptible to price reductions making the location appear an attractive destination at a different time of year. This option requires little or no alteration to the physical plant and attributes of the destination; it does require coordination to ensure that sufficient, if not all, attractions and services remain open for early and late visitors and that transportation services are available outside peak season.

### **2. OFFERING DIFFERENT ATTRACTIONS OUT OF SEASON**

If it is felt that it is not possible to attract people out of peak season, perhaps because key attractions are only available during that time of year (e.g. sea bathing dependent on air and water temperatures or transient wildlife viewing), then a destination may decide to offer different and additional attractions outside the peak season. Commonly these attractions will not be dependent on weather conditions, so may be indoor attractions, or events and attractions that can be attractive regardless of temperature and precipitation. Events such as festivals, competitions, and displays are the most common attractions used in this strategy. This strategy requires considerable organization, marketing, and investment and may take a considerable time (years) to become a permanent feature of the tourism calendar, particularly if similar events occur in neighbouring destinations.

### 3. REVAMPING THE DESTINATION

In a few cases (Atlantic City, USA is the best example), a destination may decide to change its image, facilities and market completely in order to attract a new market that is not seasonal. Such a step is rare and requires extensive redevelopment of the destination, major investment and promotion, and sometimes legislative change (e.g. permitting activities previously not allowed). Success depends greatly on the existing and future competition and there is considerable advantage in being the first destination to take such a step, although it is inevitable that competitors will follow and that will result in continued re-investment being required. Any attraction that is created by people can be eclipsed by larger, more expensive, better equipped and promoted attractions in other destinations, thus revamping is an ongoing process. The new attraction has to be capable of drawing people throughout the year to pay for the high cost of development.

### 4. MAKING THE DESTINATION UNIQUE AND PRESTIGIOUS

There is no guarantee that such a step can succeed but the basic purpose is to make the destination so different that it will attract a market because of the human desire to visit the unique and also to gain vicarious reflected prestige from visiting a particular place. This is the principle behind “Last chance tourism”, namely the opportunity to see something that is going to disappear before it is gone. Polar Bear Tourism in Churchill, northern Canada, has achieved this because of the fact that polar bears may disappear because of global warming, and thus tourists visit outside what was the conventional short main season to see polar bears in close proximity. The site is unique and may not be in existence in a few years time. In this case it is the provision of access and services to a unique opportunity that has made the destination successful, not the creation of the opportunity (presence of polar bears) itself. For most existing destinations this option is unlikely to manifest itself unless there is a fortunate coincidence of features.

An alternative approach is to supplement or change the existing offerings (fetes, festivals, shows, performances, fashion events), to whatever will attract the trendsetters and “beautiful people” of the current or potential market in the hope that if they visit the destination, other less glamorous tourist will follow their example. As in alternative 2 above, this is dependent on considerable investment of time, money, and promotional efforts.

### 5. ADDING A SECOND MAIN SEASON

It may be possible to create a second season at a destination if conditions are appropriate. The best example of this is to add either a winter sports season to an established summer destination (Aviemore in Scotland from the mid 1960s is an example), or to add a summer season to an established winter sports destination. Destinations in mountainous



regions such as the Alps or the Rockies have managed to do this with considerable success, (for example, Vail and Aspen in Colorado, St Moritz, or Innsbruck in the Alps). They have achieved success by offering outdoor attractions such as hiking, fishing, hunting, wellness, water sports and extreme activities such as mountain biking and rock climbing, often utilizing winter sports facilities such as chair lifts to provide access to the high country. Such added attractions can also enlarge the traditional summer or winter markets and also make the destination attractive for permanent residence as opposed to summer or winter second home operations. Clearly the appropriate climatic and physical attributes (snow and mountains to establish a winter season, natural opportunities such as lakes, rivers, wildlife for a summer season) have to exist in the destination for such a step to be successful.

An alternative way to add a summer season to an established winter season (which is far less common than adding a winter season to a summer one) is demonstrated in some Caribbean destinations. The main season there has traditionally been the winter, providing sun and warmth for residents of cold northern origins, with the summer being seen as too hot for most northern visitors. This has been balanced to some extent by attracting emigrants from the Caribbean back home in the previous “off season”, in part with reduced prices for visits at that time of the year perceived as too hot or humid for other visitors. Again, it is the result of a fortuitous coinciding of climatic and social factors that has made this strategy successful.

## 6. ADDING NON-CONVENTIONAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

In most cases this involves promoting a destination to two specific market segments, business and residential. In the case of the business market, the most common approach is through the establishment of one or more convention centres and associated facilities. This normally involves one or more large hotels (upwards of 1000 guest capacity for example), and facilities such as casinos, sports facilities, and entertainment venues. The convention market is extremely large and lucrative but competition is strong. Conventions range widely in size, from a few hundred delegates to many thousand, the latter being restricted a limited number of potential destinations by virtue of the numbers involved. Most destinations would not be able to host the largest conventions as there would not be enough high quality accommodation units available, and probably no event centre large enough to host and feed the numbers involved. The second and third tiers of conventions are more numerous but any destination hoping to attract such events needs excellent transportation links to key market origins, a high visibility to appeal to such visitors who can in many cases, choose any destination in the world, and a range of additional attractions if the destination hopes to attract such a market out of the conventional high season, and also to attract families of delegates and encourage them to stay longer than the event itself.

In terms of the residential market, this can take either or both of two forms, one based on amenities and environment, the other on amenities and facilities. The first type is mostly

retirement living, with incomers taking advantage of the high amenity and attractive environment found in many tourist destinations. In some cases this will represent a conversion from a second home to a permanent retirement home, either in the form of condominium developments or individual properties, in other cases purpose built accommodation for retirees or conversion of formerly tourist accommodation into permanent housing. Developments in the USA in particular have experienced this form of development with Florida and other “sunshine” states having numerous examples. In Japan the city of Atami is another example, where the traditional summer tourist season has become uncompetitive but easy access to Tokyo has meant redevelopment as both a retirement and a dormitory commuting city has become possible.

The second type of residential development relates to amenity living taking advantage not only of a pleasant environment but specific facilities, often golf, or mountain activity related facilities. Residential development adjacent to high class golf courses has taken place in the USA and in European countries also, providing destinations with visitors, if not year round, at least for a longer period than the peak summer season. The economic well-being of both the golf facilities and the residential developments are closely linked and rely on good access facilities and a range of amenities in the destination geared to what is generally a high income group of property owners.

## **KEY QUESTIONS**

There are a number of key questions which need to be addressed by any destination wishing to extend its tourist season. Some relate to goals, some to conditions, some to the existing and potential markets.

- 1 What is the principal goal to be achieved?

Much will depend on whether the goal is to make the destination a year-round destination with no off-season, or to extend the primary main season into the shoulder periods and perhaps add minor peaks at other times, such as Christmas or National holidays. If the former, then major revisioning may be necessary, if the latter, minor additions may be sufficient.

- 2 Is there agreement on goals and the intent to lengthen the tourist season?

If there is not near unanimity amongst not only the elements of the tourism industry but also local residents about the desire to extend the season of visitation, attempts may not be successful. It would be unrealistic to assume that all local residents would desire tourists to be present at peak numbers throughout the year, and problems associated with the environment have already been noted earlier. The advantages and needs to extend the season need to be identified and promoted to all stakeholders in the destination, and, of equal importance, to transport agencies and other stakeholders who may be based outside the destination.

3 What are the causes of the current pattern of seasonality?

It is necessary to identify the natural causes of seasonality, normally climatic factors, and the institutional causes such as statutory holidays, traditional images and perceptions and formal constraints to visitation at specific times. Without understanding these, it is almost impossible to mitigate and modify the pattern of seasonality. It has to be taken into account that seasonal variation in the market origin regions also influence when visitors arrive and leave destinations and modifications of those patterns may need to change conditions at the visitor origins as well as at the destinations.

4 Are the conditions appropriate for redevelopment?

A key question is whether there are the necessary space (land/water), labour, capital available in the destination for significant redevelopment. The answer to this question may determine the nature of any revisioning and the feasibility of its success.

5 Does the demand exist for any new offering?

It is important to determine if there is sufficient demand in existing or new markets to make any redevelopment financially viable in terms of being able to attract the necessary numbers of visitors. This involves consideration of existing and potential competition in current and planned elements of tourism to be promoted. For example, would any redevelopment be in immediate competition with other destinations, and if so, would this be locally, nationally or internationally; or would there be a period in which the new development would not face direct competition and have an opportunity to become accepted and established?

6 What would be the effects of redevelopment on existing tourism?

Any radical redevelopment would have to take into account the possible effects upon the existing tourist market segment. If exclusivity is a key factor, broadening the appeal and making the market less exclusive may deter current visitors from returning. There has to be careful consideration of the effects on the image of the destination, and awareness that these can be both positive and negative.

7. What are the long term issues to be considered?

It is important to look a considerable time ahead to anticipate not only the effects of any redevelopment but what factors might intervene or impact on the redevelopment in the future. One issue for the long term is climate change, and while forecasts are still of dubious accuracy, some trends and possibilities need to be taken into account. Other exogenous factors include changes in transportation services including modes of transport, and also the cost of fuel in the case of destinations which attract a mostly long-haul market. It might also be necessary to consider regional political and economic circumstances and any likely changes that would affect the destination when

redeveloped. Global political and economic changes are rarely predictable as shown by world events in the past three decades, but regional issues are more easily foreseen.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Seasonality has proved an issue which is extremely difficult to overcome. Extremely few destinations have succeeded in moving from a seasonal pattern of visitation to a year round one. Attempts to extend the peak season or to add a second season can be successful but are costly and success cannot be guaranteed. In general it is much better to adopt a policy of adjustment to and mitigation of seasonality in tourism than to attempt to overcome this phenomenon. Other economic activities live successfully with seasonality, even if they do not achieve complete economic efficiency of operation. Modification and mitigation measures will have to include actions relating to the demand side of tourism as well as adjustments to the supply (destination) side if they are to have much chance of success. The failure to do much more than modify current offerings at destinations explains to a large degree the relative failure of most efforts to deal with what is not necessarily a problem. Acknowledging that some elements of seasonality may simply not be feasible to overcome or even to mitigate significantly in some destinations is an unpleasant fact of life but a more intelligent step than wasting resources in fighting the inevitable.

## **PUNTA DEL ESTE PROTOTYPE**

The conference held in Punta del Este in April 2014 had as its goal the creation of a prototype for action to deal with seasonality in tourism at destinations. The conference began with a discussion of the issues, problems, and potential courses of action outlined above. Emphasis was placed on the need to adopt a range of potential actions with the goal of mitigating the negative effects of seasonality and focusing on adapting to the problems created by seasonality rather than attempting to overcome the phenomenon. The following session outlined the model of the prototype for urban tourism recently developed by UNWTO which revealed a number of areas of potential value for tackling seasonality.

The major implication was clearly the need for coordination of efforts and actions by both the public and private sectors involved in tourism. It is impossible to deal effectively with the issues of seasonality without such a unified approach. Government efforts alone rarely resolve the issue of the multi-faceted goals of the different private sectors in tourism, which reflect the widely varying scale of operations and the different needs and priorities of subsectors. Similarly private individual initiatives are rarely able to deal with the complexities of seasonality and the need to act on a range of levels from local to national or even international scale.

Another session illustrated the importance and effectiveness of combining a number of segments of tourism in destinations to achieve a longer season of visitation. The convention market is a well established and major element in tourism at certain destinations and can result in visitation outside the major season and attract delegate visitors with a higher spending profile than normal tourists. Allied to this aspect is the importance of applying the benefits of new technology, both in the marketing of destinations and in the services provided to visitors at destinations. Visitors coming outside of any main season need specific attributes to attract them, and unique and special accommodation allied with outstanding food and beverage offerings present one approach which has been effective in some areas. The “slow food” movement is one example, and the more widespread policy of emphasizing the unique food and beverage of specific regions is well established in attracting discerning visitors. Another segment with particular potential is that of the senior market, a significant proportion of which may be interested in relocating to areas of high amenity such as selected tourist destinations. Such a market places a premium on services and facilities, combined with high quality and ease of movement. Cultural features are highly attractive attributes to this market.

The next panel session illustrated the value of an integrated approach to revisioning a destination (Gramado, Brazil) and the subsequent success in attracting tourists throughout the year because of selective and appropriate development of specific offerings that were appropriate to that community. Local festivals, some tied to food, some to amusements and some to cultural features ensure a range of segments find

such communities attractive as destinations. A similar approach has worked effectively on the larger and more established tourist destination of Malaga, located in a major tourist area, the Spanish Costa del Sol, where residential development has attracted many incomers, especially where this has been integrated with sports facilities such as golf. Again, a mature premium market finds such re-development attractive beyond the traditional summer season when it is carefully and specifically promoted to appropriate segments. Finally, the ancient but recently revived practice of wellness was demonstrated to be highly attractive throughout the year at specific destinations. The link between health and tourism is one of the oldest relationships in tourism and this has been restored and effectively developed through spas and more broadly with the concept of wellness, as distinct from medical tourism. Successful destinations in places such as India, Austria and the USA demonstrate what can be achieved by appropriate development for this growing market.

Finally, the conference concluded with remarks concerning the appeal of rural areas to different markets with a reduced emphasis on seasonal offerings and a reiteration of the potential of the convention market linked to the forthcoming convention centre to be developed in Punta del Este.

It is in the symbiotic relationships that can be developed by alliances between different elements of tourism that the best hope of mitigating seasonality can be conceived. The public/private nexus has already been emphasized and it is important this take place, as argued, at various scales and levels as tourism is multi faceted and complex. Similarly the links between, for example, wellness and appropriate food and beverage offerings makes for a strong selling point or attraction for destinations which can be promoted at various times of the year as such tourism is not highly seasonal and can target specific markets such as the mature and retired segments. The wellness and food attributes can be combined equally well with convention traffic and be highly attractive additional marketing features when trying to attract conventions and conferences to a destination. The rural hinterland of many destinations is often rich in attributes that can appeal to tourists with appropriate promotion. Agro-tourism, in conjunction with slow tourism, healthy food, and selected rural activities also has considerable potential to attract tourists outside the main, generally summer, season and again, may be an appropriate setting for specific festivals and events tied to local production.

All of these elements require coordination, initiative, leadership, and support from industry, government, and local residents to be successful. Vision and innovation are key elements in success. Those areas which have managed to mitigate the negative effects of seasonality have been those in which symbiotic relationships between the various stakeholders in tourism have been developed, generally because the mutual benefits of appropriate actions have been demonstrated and accepted by the vast majority of those stakeholders. The key elements in all cases have been integration and coordination of efforts with clear accepted goals.

## **PUNTA DEL ESTE**

In the case of Punta del Este, it is likely that financial constraints do not apply to the existing market, and thus offering reduced rate deals out of season is unlikely to be effective in generating significant new demand. Such a step might result in a slight increase in visits in shoulder seasons by elements of a new market segment but not a major shift in the primary market in terms of time of visitation. Constraints in such a case are most likely to be social and perceptual, relating also to climatic factors. As the climatic factors cannot be changed appreciably and as all-weather facilities are unlikely to be seen as realistic substitutes for the current seasonal opportunities, major changes in patterns of demand and use will most likely be dependent on providing alternative opportunities which are not climate dependent and are appealing to the current market in one or more alternative forms.

Creation of new demand for short periods might be accomplished by the establishment of specific events and festivals that appeal to the established seasonal market and some of these are already in place. These could include high profile sporting events held on an annual basis at a regular time to establish a new pattern of regular visitation, festivals such as art and film festivals, particularly if they are supported by the presence of related infrastructure such as theatres and galleries. Nice, in France, is one place which has a highly successful film festival that attracts large volumes of a high status market out of its traditional main season, as does Venice with its film festival and also its Carnival. Clearly such events can be costly to offer and require considerable publicity to become established. Competition is high and there may be a relatively long lead in time before such an event is regarded as established and worth attending. Individually such events do not constitute a “season” comparable in length to the normal primary season, but can be one way of extending the established season and creating an image of the destination as being worth visiting at an alternative time.

The most successful example of creating a year round season from an established summer season is found in Atlantic City in the Eastern United States, which came about with the legalization of gambling and subsequent massive redevelopment of accommodation (casinos) and accessibility. In the case of Punta del Este, a casino already exists but the chances of being meaningful competitor to Las Vegas, Atlantic City or Macau, as well as other smaller centres, is unlikely without massive investment and image manipulation, and even then, its location from major international markets is somewhat against the likely successful development at such a scale.

The most realistic option would most likely be to focus on overcoming constraints on visitation out of the main season combined with the provision of a number of significant events of various types in the shoulder seasons in order to stretch visitor numbers over a longer period of time. There is potential for encouraging absentee property owners to visit out of the peak season, given such an investment has already been made in the destination. Additional attractions as well as additional facilities are likely to be necessary to achieve this. The provision of facilities such as golf courses, land based activity centres for extreme sports, shooting, fishing and hunting opportunities, and

marketing of wellness facilities may be successful with respect to this market segment and succeed in attracting new segments. The wellness segment of tourism has grown rapidly in recent years and generally is not tied to climatic seasons. Combining such facilities with local produce such as wines, sea food, and agricultural produce could prove attractive to a high end regional market at any time of the year.

Improvements in transportation to Punta del Este could improve visitation also. Providing or encouraging services to the airport from major markets might stimulate short term visitation out of season, and would undoubtedly benefit the proposed convention centre. As noted earlier, to attract conferences and conventions requires not just a convention centre, but first rate accommodation and access as well as related services. The relatively high visibility of Punta del Este in South America should enable it to attract at least regional conventions and conferences although it is unlikely to have the capacity or attraction to gain the very large first tier international meetings involving several thousand delegates.

To suggest more actions for Punta del Este would be inappropriate in the absence of detailed knowledge of the destination, its offerings or its markets. Based on the conference presentations and a very brief visit it would seem that the actions most likely to successful would be those aimed at broadening the market appeal of the destination, particularly but not exclusively out of peak season and not to follow the common but not always financially successful step of lowering prices out of season. Making the destination more attractive to a wide market is likely to result in a more positive overall future than focusing narrowly on overcoming seasonality, a task which few have ever managed to accomplish.