Tourism seasonality in Iceland

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Introduction

Tourism is a seasonal phenomenon even though travelling habits are changing and few destinations, usually cities, are unaffected by some kind of seasonality. School holidays and the weather in the host country are thought to be the most influencing factors for people's decision to travel, especially during the winter time(Butler, 2001). Unpredictable weather and darkness canadd special excitement to the journey and make the destination interesting (Lundtorp et al., 2001).

People are breaking free from previous holiday habits. The experiences tourists are seeking are also changing. People now want to experience something new and adventurous and have an exclusive experience(Koc and Altinay, 2007). Northern Europeans who used to spend their summer holidays on the beaches of the Mediterranean are now going further away during the summer break, and additionally taking short holidays during the winter period(Rosello et al., 2004).This diversification of travel practices is more visible in countries with cold climate and influences all parts of planning and management of tourist destinations (Baum and Lundtorp, 2001).

Objectives

Tourist seasonality is typicallyanalysed from the number of visitors, arrivals, departures or from overnight stay data (Lundtorp, 2001). Overnight stay data has been used in Iceland to analyse seasonality regionally. The overnight stay data show where the visitors sleep butdoes not measure the impact touristshave on the destinations they visit. In Iceland off season visitors tend to stay in differentregions fromthe ones they visit. Therefore new methods or approaches of analyses are needed.

The objective of the presentation is to analyse tourist seasonality using data from vehicle counters in thirteen destinations. Half of the destinations are in Vatnajökull National Park and the other half are popular destinations in South and West Iceland.

Destinations

The destinations are different and have different annual visitation numbers. Geysir, the most popular destination in Iceland, is a hot spring area and Þingvellir, a national park, are on the popular route, the Golden Circle. Both destinations are in about an hour drive from the capital area. Seltún is a hot spring area near Keflavík International Airport. Hraunfossar is a picturesque area in the West where spring waterstreams out of the lava. Djúpalónssanduron Snæfellsnes Peninsula in the West is a rocky coastal area. Sólheimajökull is an outlet glacier that is popular by recreationists for ice climbing and glacier walks. The destinations in Vatnajökull National Park are also nature destinations. Jökulsárlón, Fjallsárlón and Hoffellslón are glacier lagoons in the South. Svínafellsjökull in the South gives the opportunity to experience a glacier at close quarters. Skaftafell in the South is a natural area close to Iceland's

highest mountain, Öræfajökull (glacier) that provides a wide natural experience. Heinaberg in the South is a rocky area at the edge of Vatnajökull glacier and Dettifoss in the Northis the most powerful waterfall in Iceland and probably in Europe.

Methods

The number of visitors is the basic unit to measure tourism seasonality. In this presentation it will be analysed by the Gini coefficient in a number of tourist destinations. The Gini coefficient is a well-known tool to measure inequalities and is derived from the Lorenz curve. When all measurements are equal the Gini coefficient is 0, but a complete inequality gives the value 1 (Lundtorp, 2001). The Gini coefficient will be compared to other data about the destinations that is the annual number of visitors and the visitation from May 1st to September 30th (Table 1).

Results

By using the Gini coefficient to analyse seasonality in various destinations it can be seen that the lowest seasonality is in destinations on the Golden Circle, Þingvellir and Geysir, as well as in Sólheimajökull (Table 1). From May to September 54% of all foreign visitors visit Geysir, the most visited destination in Iceland, 59% visit Sólheimajökull and 61% Þingvellir.

Jökulsárlón and Svínafellsjökull in Vatnajökull National Park have the same Gini coefficient, but the number of visitorsis very different. Destinations close by and on the same travel route, for example Skaftafell, Fjallsárlón, Heinaberg and Hoffellslón have different Gini coefficients, but the visitor numbers are very different.

Table 1. Seasonality in twelve destinations.

Destination	Gini coefficient	Annual number 2015	Visitation from May to September
Geysir	0,21	1.240.404	54%
Sólheimajökull	0,28	198.783	59%
Þingvellir	0,29	695.583	61%
Jökulsárlón	0,41	448.181	74%
Svínafellsjökull	0,41	88.471	71%
Seltún	0,45	136.750	74%
Skaftafell	0,48	433.059	80%
Hoffellslón	0,52	20.368	80%
Hraunfossar	0,55	152.830	84%
Heinaberg	0,56	6.710	79%
Djúpalónssandur	0,57	99.137	86%
Dettifoss	0,62	139.272	91%
Fjallsárlón	0,62	159.653	88%

Conclusion

As can be seen from the data there is a difference in seasonality in the destinations,even though they are close. Destinations few kilometres apart have completely different seasonality as computed by the Gini coefficient. That indicates that it is necessary to analyse seasonality on a smaller scale that is from destinations rather than large regions. This is particularly true if the purpose is to use the data for destination management or protection.

To get a complete picture of the situation in Iceland more data is needed from destinations in the North wherethe seasonality is higher than in the South as can be seen from Dettifoss. The transportation system can influence the seasonality, the mountain roads up North are sometimes closed during the winter because of bad weather and snow.

The results show that seasonality cannot be fullydescribed with the Gini coefficient. Annual visitation numbers are also important.

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