Analysis of the Seasonality of Tourism Market in Thanjavur District

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Abstract

Traveling is a favorite pastime and passion shared by many. Many national and international studies have well proved the importance of tourism in economic prosperity and employment opportunity. The number of tourist arrivals to a destination has direct relationship with its local economy and employment generation. The climate of a place and holidays play a major role in the volume of tourist arrivals at a particular destination. The fluctuation in the tourists' arrival during a year is generally termed as seasonal variation. Only by knowing the actual variation in the tourist arrivals, a tourism product can be marketed efficiently to the target customers. Analysis of the seasonality in tourist visits is essential to optimize marketing programs' Return on Investment. This helps the tourism service providers to plan suitable strategies to market their products or services to the relevant customers. The aim of this paper is to study the seasonal variation of domestic and foreign tourists flow in one of the important tourist destinations, Thanjavur District in the State of Tamil Nadu, India.

Keywords: Tourism, Marketing, Seasonality, Thanjavur, Domestic Tourists, Foreign Tourists.

Introduction

Today tourism is recognized as one of the major industries in terms of providing employment, income generation, foreign exchange earnings and regional development. Currently, travel and tourism industry employs, directly and indirectly, around 200 million people and, according to some estimates, participates in overall employment in the world with 6-7 per cent (Conrady and Buck, 2011). All these developments highly depend upon the number of tourists visit at a particular destination. It is recognized that seasonality is one of the most distinctive features of tourism. Seasonality generally indicates the phenomenon of fluctuations of demand or supply in the tourism industry. The seasonality is associated with temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism and also it can be explained in terms of diverse elements including numbers and expenditures of visitors, traffic of transportation, and employment (Butler, 1994). Most researchers pointed out that a seasonal pattern is an uncontrollable situation resulting in a number of negative effects and generates cost losses called "Seasonal Loss". It also seriously influences all kinds of tourism supply including employment, marketing, economics, and management (Baron, 1975; Laws, 1991). According to Tesone and Pizam (2008), the pattern of tourist demand creates seasonal employment, rather than permanent. This form of employment has far-reaching consequences for regional and national unemployment structure especially in small countries mainly dependent on tourism which is extremely seasonal.

Seasonality is a global tourism phenomenon caused by temporary movement of people. In terms of natural factors, temporary movement takes place because every country has different climatic patterns (Baron, 1973). The seasonal variations may be systematic throughout the year (Higham and Hinch, 2002) and it might not only vary within a year but also within a month, a week, or even a single day (Holloway, 1994). Cooper *et al*., (2005) has suggested that 'Natural' seasonality and 'Institutionalised' seasonality are the two basic causes of seasonality in tourism. Natural seasonality is related to the regular and recurring temporal changes in natural phenomena at a particular destination, which is usually associated with climate and seasons of the year. The distinctive seasonal variations in climate obviously affect many recreational activities such as swimming, sun-bathing, camping and also the associated tourism expenditures.

Institutional seasonality is the result of religious, cultural, ethnic and social factors. The two important form of this seasonality are the school/college vacations and statutory holidays. The dates and periods of school holidays vary considerably throughout the world, and there is usually some variation even within the same jurisdiction. Many individuals choose to visit friends and relatives, or take brief vacations, on statutory holidays. School holiday periods dictate when families with children can take a vacation. The timing of statutory and school holidays has a major impact on the seasonal pattern of tourism expenditures.

In India, summer vacations start around late March and ends at approximately early July. There are lots of holidays for many Indian special occasions. A separate vacation like Pooja holidays, Diwali holiday, Christmas/ New Year holidays are given to students for approximately ten days during the festivals which typically comes after the end of one school term. India has almost 17 public holidays, apart from the summer break, depends upon the regional state students have term break which is maximum two week (Wikipedia, 2012). These holidays plays a decisive role in planning a tour programme in the case of domestic tourists.

Method

The seasonality of the tourist arrival in a destination can be characterized with the help of the seasonal coefficients (KS_L). A seasonal coefficient is a measure of how a particular season compares with the average season which are calculated as percentage ratio between the average level of each month registered on a period of a few years ($\bar{X}_L$) and the general monthly average ($\bar{X}_G$):

$$KS_L = \frac{\bar{X}_L}{\bar{X}_G} * 100$$

The average of each month over a period of a few years ($\bar{X}_L$) is obtained as an arithmetic mean of the levels registered in the same month over the period (in years) that is being considered. The general average ($\bar{X}_G$) is calculated as a monthly average of the whole period. The general average can be obtained as a ratio between the total number of tourists registered over the three years and the total number of months of the period (Constantin Secăreanu, and Daniela Firoiu, 2011).

The seasonal coefficients have the property that their sum must be equal to their number (twelve for the monthly analysis), multiplied by a hundred. In this study, the whole period is ten years that is 120 months and the sum of all the seasonal coefficients is

$$\sum_{L}^{12} KS_L = 1200$$

Profile of Thanjavur District

Thanjavur District, one of the 32 districts of the State, is situated on the East Coast of Tamil Nadu in South India. The famous river Cauvery washes its banks. Thanjavur district stands unique from time immemorial for its agricultural activities and is rightly acclaimed as "*the Granary of South India*", '*the green mansion'* of the South, and the "*Rice bowl of Tamil Nadu*". The district is very rich in tourism potentiality: the Big Temple, Saraswathi Mahal Library, the Palace, Navagraha temples around Kumbakonam, Airawatheeswarar Temple are few of them. Thanjavur District, well known for its temples which are the symbols of spirituality and more importantly, of national integration and communal harmony, attracts a large number of domestic as well as foreign tourists with its pilgrimage, cultural, and heritage significance.

The climate of this district is monsoonic and the calendar year has been divided into four season viz., Post monsoon (January - March), Summer (April - June), Pre monsoon (July - September) and Monsoon (October- December) (Prince et al, 2011). The month of November, December, January and February are the pleasant months in a year with climate full of warm days and cool nights. From the end of March, the climate becomes sultry and the temperature reaches its peak by the end of May and June depending upon the set of summer rain. The monsoon in the month of October brings complete relief. The South-West monsoon sets in June and continues till the month of September.

Seasonality in Tourist Arrivals in Thanjavur District

Thanjavur District attracts millions of tourists from upcountry as well as from abroad throughout the year. The total number of tourist arrivals in each year from 2001 to 2010 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Tourist's visits in Thanjavur District during the period 2001-2010

Year	Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
	Number of Tourists	Growth rate Percent	Number of Tourists	Growth rate Percent
2001	988609	12.4	29401	9.4
2002	1061578	7.4	30871	5
2003	1223413	15.2	33012	6.9
2004	1347648	10.2	38127	15.5
2005	1540578	14.3	12899	-66.2
2006	1745603	13.3	49625	284.7
2007	2237415	28.2	61472	23.9
2008	2581906	15.4	75461	22.8
2009	2915617	12.9	92456	22.5
2010	4915587	68.6	98591	6.6

Source: Tamil Nadu Tourist Office, Thanjavur.

The monthly mean arrival of domestic and foreign tourists' for the period 2001 - 2010 is given in Table 2. Table 2 also shows the computed seasonal coefficients for the arrival of the two types of tourists in Thanjavur district. Figure 1 depicts graphically the seasonality of the domestic and foreign tourist visits.

Table 2. Monthly Mean and Seasonal Coefficients of Tourists' Arrival in Thanjavur District

Month	Total*		Seasonal Coefficient	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
January	1396466	64928	82	149
February	1498710	55728	87	128
March	1789155	43534	104	100
April	2185999	21802	128	50
May	2373456	7838	139	18
June	1726305	11799	101	27
July	1612021	22135	94	51
August	1654651	32708	97	75
September	1752284	47830	102	110
October	1449529	58780	85	135
November	1441343	76059	84	175
December	1678034	78772	98	181

Source: Tamil Nadu Tourist Office, Thanjavur.

* Total calculated for the 10 year period 2001-2010.

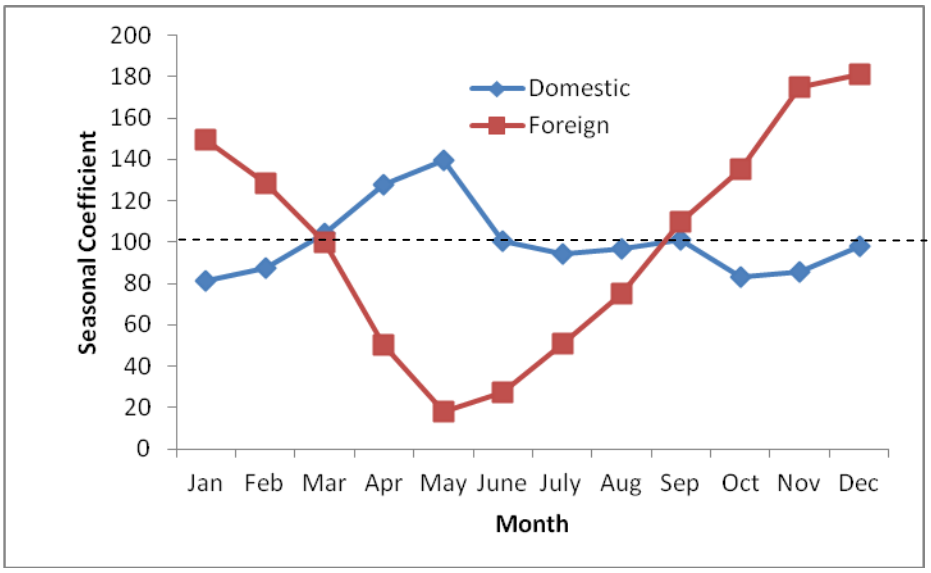

Figure.1.Seasonal Coefficients of Tourist Arrivals in Thanjavur District

The total number of tourist's visits and their distribution over the four seasons of the district namely, Post monsoon, Summer, Pre-Monsoon and Monsoon are given in Table 3. The percentage share of the domestic and foreign tourists during these seasons can be visualized through Figure 2 and 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Tourist Visits in the Four Seasons of 2001-2010

Season	Number of tourists		Seasonal coefficient		Percentage of share	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Post Monsoon	4684331	164191	91	126	23	31
Summer	6285760	41439	122	32	31	08
Pre Monsoon	5018956	102673	98	79	24	20
Monsoon	4568906	213611	89	164	22	41

Source: Tamil Nadu Tourist Office, Thanjavur.

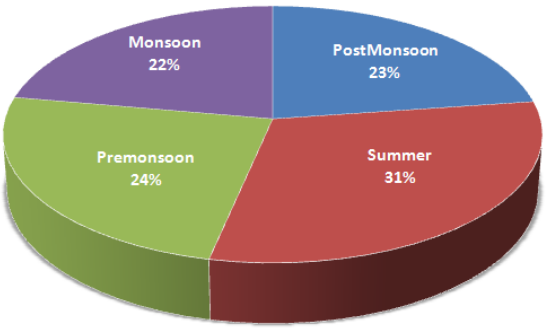

Figure 2. Seasonal Share of Domestic Tourist Visits

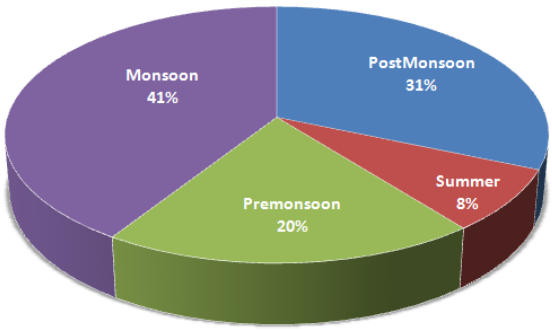

Figure 3. Seasonal Share of Foreign Tourist Visits

Results and Discussion

The results that arise from the analysis of the seasonality of the tourism activity the Thanjavur district are synthesized as follows:

During the fourth quarter, 41per cent of the foreign tourists visit Thanjavur district and in first quarter it is 31 per cent. The other two quarters (second and third) have witnessed very low (8 –20 per cent) foreign tourists inflow. This indicates that the period from October to March (that is the monsoon and post monsoon seasons of the year) is most preferred by the foreign tourists to visit the destination. The seasonal factor has a favorable influence on foreign tourists in the months of December (181 per cent), November (175 per cent), January (149 per cent), February (128 per cent), October (135

per cent) and September (110 per cent). The seasonal factor has unfavorably influenced the foreign tourists activity in the other two quarters (summer and pre monsoon) and the most reduced level of the seasonal coefficient has been registered in the second quarter, especially in May (18 per cent) followed by June (27 per cent) and April (50 per cent).

It is observed that the peak foreign tourist arrivals are witnessed from October to March with the largest arrivals during the month of December. The seasonality coefficient varies from the minimum of 18 per cent to the maximum of 181 per cent indicates that the foreign tourist visits in Thanjavur district is highly seasonal and is mainly attributed to climatic or natural seasonality.

In case of domestic tourists, 31 per cent of them prefer the second quarter (summer) for their visit to Thanjavur district. The seasonal factor has a favorable influence on domestic tourists in months of May (139 per cent), April (128 per cent), March (104 per cent), September (102 per cent) and June (101 per cent). In addition, the months July, August and December have seasonal coefficient nearly 100 per cent. The remaining months January, February, October and November also show a seasonal coefficient between 80 per cent and 90 per cent. Since the seasonal coefficient varies from 82 per cent to 139 per cent during the entire study period, it is inferred that the domestic tourist visits is not as highly seasonal as that of foreign tourists.

The peak domestic tourist arrivals is observed in the months of May and April followed by March, September and June with largest arrival during May which is mainly attributed to institutional seasonality. From the percentage share (Table 2) and seasonality coefficients (Table 3) of domestic tourist visits, it is inferred that Thanjavur district has almost steady inflow of domestic tourists throughout the year which might be due to the temples in Thanjavur district which have played a significant role in attracting pilgrims irrespective of the seasons. This implies that the employment and local economy related with domestic tourism activities are not much affected by the seasonality

Findings

- The first and fourth quarters of the year together receives 72 per cent of foreign tourists.
- Foreign tourist visits are very poor during the third quarter (i.e.) summer season.
- Domestic tourists prefer the summer season or the main vocational period.

- The arrival of foreign tourist's is influenced by seasonal climatic variation
- Institutional holidays and pilgrimage are the controlling factors in the domestic tourist visits
- The seasonal coefficient varies from 82 per cent to 139 per cent in the case of domestic tourists indicating more or less a steady flow throughout the year in comparison with foreign tourists.
- Thanjavur district has excellent marketing potential for pilgrimage tourism. Better infrastructure facilities at places of worship would definitely go a long way in attracting more pilgrims and tourists.

Suggestions

- The Department of Tourism of Tamil Nadu government should emphasis on provision of infrastructural facilities and basic amenities at pilgrim centres in order to attract more domestic tourists.
- The architectural potentiality of Thanjavur District should be exposed through proper promotional efforts to attract both domestic as well as foreign tourists.
- Active information centres should be made available at important places in the district to provide timely information to the tourists.
- The niche marketing strategies should be framed for promoting pilgrimage, cultural, and heritage tourism segments.

Conclusion

Tourism paves way for regional and national development and prosperity. Though Thanjavur District is primarily agriculture oriented, it has high potential to develop tourism industry. The seasonal coefficients of the domestic tourist arrivals indicates that though there is seasonality variation in the domestic segment it is not so high as in the case of foreign tourists. This is due to the spiritual attractions of the destination. If marketing efforts are taken by the state government and local authorities to expose the district's tourism potentiality fully it will become a year around destination in attracting both domestic and foreign tourists.

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