

## Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference Rural Development 2019

Edited by prof. Asta Raupelienė

ISSN 1822-3230 (Print)  
ISSN 2345-0916 (Online)

Article DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15544/RD.2019.022>

### SEASONALITY OF LITHUANIAN NATURE TOURISM: VISITOR'S PREFERENCES

**Iveta VARNAGIRYTĖ-KABAŠINSKIENĖ**, Kolping University of Applied Sciences, Raguvo g. 7, Kaunas, Lithuania; LAMMC, Institute of Forestry, Liepų 1, Girionys, Kaunas district, Lithuania. [iveta.kabasinskiene@mi.lt](mailto:iveta.kabasinskiene@mi.lt) (*corresponding author*)

**Ieva MAČIULYTĖ**, Kolping University of Applied Sciences, Raguvo g. 7, Kaunas, Lithuania, [maciulyteieva.im@gmail.com](mailto:maciulyteieva.im@gmail.com)

Seasonality in the tourism sector is described as a change in tourism due to seasonal changes or a temporary change in tourist flows. In Lithuania, the tourism seasonality is recognized as a problem requiring a solution. This study has identified that every visitor/traveller who likes nature, prefers nature-based tourism or has plans to spend some time in nature is facing the tourism seasonality in Lithuania. The results of this survey support the idea that the most popular time for nature trips in Lithuania is summer time or the warm light season of the year. There are several reasons why visitors wish to go out to nature: many visitors hope to get good quality and exciting entertainment or educations, others are expecting for nature's aesthetic and other values, including beautiful landscapes and fresh air. Lithuanians usually choose nature trips with family or friends travelling by car for an average 3–7 days. The most of survey respondents plan trips in advance, search for information on the Internet, social networks, or use the recommendations of friends to visit one or another natural object, and almost do not use the services of tourism companies. Interest in one or another natural object and its attendance is primarily determined by weather conditions, activities and educations adapted to the exact season. This survey has shown that people wishing to choose non-seasonal natural tourism facing many problems. Depending on the season, tourism infrastructure could be more suited to all seasons, as well as respondents expect new educations adapted to different seasons or their indoor alternatives. In the recent years, more frequent extreme climate periods (heat, rainfall in summer, cold or wet periods in winter) have begun to change, most often reduce, visitor flows.

**Keywords:** *nature-based tourism, seasons, seasonality mitigation*

#### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, tourism has become one of the most popular leisure activities. Different geographic regions and countries offer a variety of tourism services, promoting cross-border, sustainable, and high quality tourism throughout the year. Meanwhile, other regions face the challenges of seasonal tourism and are constantly looking for solutions to mitigate this problem.

Seasonality is one of the most important indicators in the tourism business, which means different tourist flows in different seasons. Seasonality can be described as a temporary disruption of the tourism activities, which is manifested by the number of visitors, the cost of visitors, the volume of traffic, the change in employment of the tourism sector for a certain period of time, month or week (Cooper et al., 2008; Butler, 2014). The most frequently evaluated climate indicators affecting the tourism sector are air temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind and sun duration (Mieczkowski, 1985; de Freitas, 2001). Climatic conditions are factors causing the travel direction and type, because the favourite and favourable weather conditions make the tourists happy, willing to spend their time actively and safely while travelling (Becken, 2010).

The first studies on the tourism seasonality appeared in 1975 (BarOn, 1975), but this problem still remains under discussion and searching for solutions. Even in the recent years, by boosting the competitiveness of the European tourism sector, the European Commission recommends to search for ways or methods to extend the tourism season, as seasonality is quite big problem in many countries in this region (Summaries of facts about the European Union, 2018). The same tourist routes can be popular for one season (resorts, skiing) and unpopular at other seasons of the year.

Despite the fact that trips are divided into seasonal and non-seasonal, ways, tools or new ideas are being sought to maintain the intensity of tourist flows throughout the year. For example, event or conference tourism helps to mitigate the seasonality of tourism in many countries. However, the tourism seasonality should not be seen merely as a disincentive factor to tourism development, but also as a driver for finding new solutions and attracting more tourists to certain areas.

Basically, nature tourism is described as responsible travel to natural areas, which does not leave a remarkable ecological footprint and does not reduce the attractiveness of the natural landscape (European Wilderness Society, 2018). This way of travelling also contributes to the well-being of local communities and is an appropriate alternative to the mass tourism (Bell et al., 2007). Nature travellers, visitors or tourists choose the nature tourism for a variety of reasons: to enjoy the nature and different landscapes; to escape from urban life, people and traffic jams; to experience the natural environment; to know and monitor the environment; to participate and contribute to environmental conservation.

In Lithuania, natural tourism comprise a significant part in the whole tourism sector: people like travelling to forests, protected areas, near the lakes and the Baltic sea for various reasons such as bird watching, photography,

camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, education and knowledge or just for slow recreation (sunbathing, rest). In Lithuania, one of the most popular tourist seasons is summer, but recently, resorts, rural tourism homesteads and national parks organize various activities to attract tourists in the autumn, winter or spring. Otherwise, tourism seasonality in Lithuania is still recognized as one of the main challenges for tourism development (Bružaitė, Šadeikaitė, 2016). The problem of the seasonality of tourism is topical at the national level and has a negative impact on tourism development in the regions and resorts. These authors also highlight several types of tourism that help to reduce the tourism seasonality. Various types of tourism could be promoted in Lithuania: local tourism; conference tourism; health and sports events tourism; creation of cultural routes; traditional celebrations and crafts; create niche tourism products. The mentioned tourism forms are less dependent on the season than such as beach or nature tourism.

Future climate changes will have both positive and negative consequences for tourism in the Baltic Sea Region (Kūle et al. 2013). Climate change in the Lithuanian coastal region will create new challenges for the entire tourism system, but will also provide new opportunities for future use of recreational resources under new environmental conditions (Bukantis et al. 2007). The higher temperatures and longer periods without rain could increase the number of nature tourists from the southern regions of Europe (Romikaitytė, Kisieliauskas, 2012) or, oppositely, the extremely hot periods could lower the number of visitors who wish to spend the time in nature in summer time.

The aim of this study was to find out the influence of seasonality on the choice of natural tourism routes in Lithuania.

## METHODS

In order to ascertain the influence of seasonality in the selection of natural tourism routes in Lithuania, a quantitative survey (a questionnaire survey) was conducted. This method was selected as an effective way to achieve the required number of respondents in a short time. The survey was organized in advance by preparing a questionnaire with 20 questions. The purpose of the survey was stated in the questionnaire. Respondents were able to express their opinion on their choice to travel to nature, to which natural tourism groups attribute themselves, what weather conditions would force them to abandon nature trips, as well as what activities they would prefer during different seasons. Respondents were able to choose from the answers provided or there was given the opportunity to offer their answer. The study was anonymous.

Since this topic is of interest to those who are interested in natural tourism in Lithuania, the target population was selected for this survey. In order to conduct a targeted survey of those interested in the nature tourism, a survey was conducted at the International Exhibition on Tourism and Active Leisure ADVENTUR in January 25, 2019. In this survey, 60 respondents were interviewed. Only those respondents who indicated that they are actively interested in Lithuanian nature tourism were finally selected as respondents of the survey. The survey was conducted almost equally between men and women; people of 18-45 years old were the majority (about 90 percent) of those who were actively interested in nature tourism.

## RESULTS

Nature tourism is a tourism type that directly depends on the season, as travellers spend most of their time outdoors. In some cases, this could be seen as a major drawback for the nature trips, for example, when hiking or cycling in the forest is hampered or interrupted by heavy rain, extremely high or very low temperatures, thunderstorms, forest fires; the water level in rivers is too low for canoeing; snow cover is not sufficient for skiing during the winter season, etc.

The survey data showed that the majority of respondents (61 percent) travel to nature mostly during the summer, and 30 percent of respondents like travelling to nature in the spring (Fig. 1). A small proportion of respondents had chosen the autumn and winter as the seasons for travelling to nature.

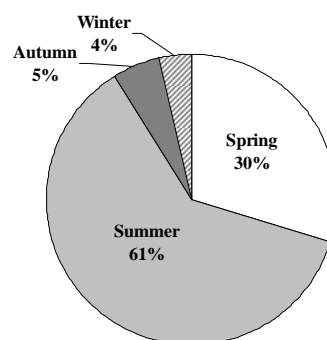


Figure 1. The proportion of respondents' answers to the question „Which season of the year do you usually choose to travel to nature?“, in percentages

Respondents were asked to identify why they choose to travel to nature. First of all, they expect quality and interesting entertainment or educations (47% of respondents); others mostly travel to nature because of the beautiful

landscape and the ability to stay in the fresh air (Fig. 2). A small number of respondents are searching for accommodation of good quality and low cost services.

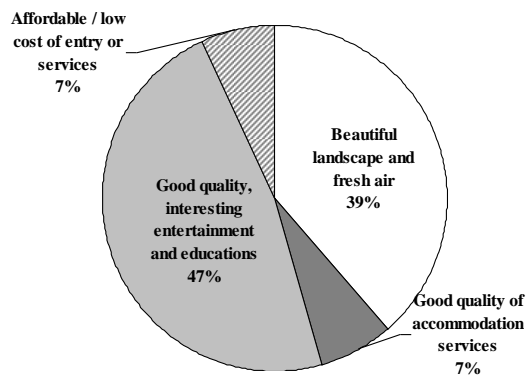


Figure 2. The proportion of respondents' answers to the question „What criteria cause your choice to travel to nature?“, in percentages

The survey data showed that almost half of respondents like to travel to nature with friends; large part of respondents (44 percent) prefers travelling with their family and relatives (Fig. 3).

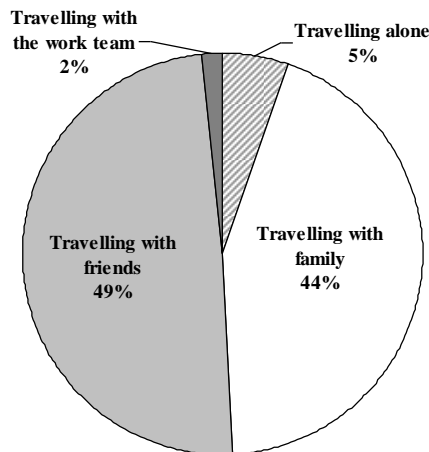


Figure 3. The proportion of respondents' answers to the question „Which company do you often choose to travel to nature or visit natural objects in Lithuania?“, in percentages

The study found that the largest proportion, even 60 percent of all respondents, choose a car for the nature trip, which seems to be the simplest and quickest way to reach the destination (Fig. 4). The smaller part of respondents (18 percent) chooses to travel by bus. If the distance is not too long, cycling and walking trips (hiking) were chosen by 11 percent of the respondents.

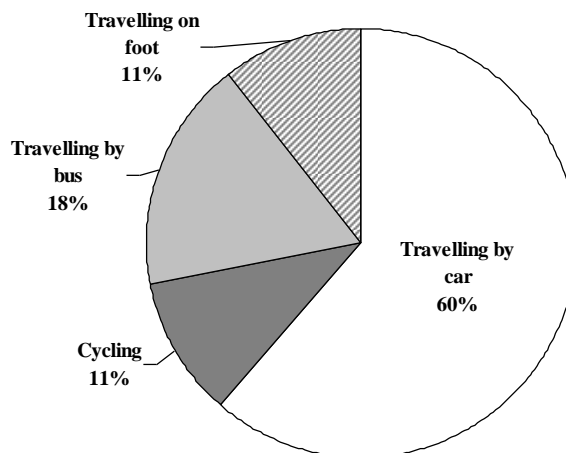


Figure 4. The proportion of respondents' answers to the question „What type of travel / transport do you prefer to travel to nature?“, in percentages

The respondents were asked whether they were visiting the same nature objects at different seasons of the year, and were asked to explain their choice to visit it repeatedly or not. The survey showed that a large proportion of respondents were interested in the same nature objects or sites at different seasons because the landscape is changing, some have pointed out that weather conditions do not affect their decision to travel to nature. However, many respondents would not choose to visit the same nature sites at different seasons because they prefer and would better enjoy new places; also some nature objects or landscapes are beautiful only during a certain season, for example in autumn.

There is no doubt that there are travellers who refuse to travel to the nature because of the weather conditions that are inappropriate for them or they are not well prepared. As natural tourism is one of the most weather-dependent forms of tourism, travellers may be confronted with rather extreme, difficult-to-predict travel conditions or unexpected air changes. Such changes can undoubtedly complicate the trip, and in some cases, such a trip may become even risky to their health.

The respondents were asked to identify the weather conditions that would stop them and change their plans to go on nature trips. The majority of respondents (even 45 percent) would change their plans and do not go to nature if the weather conditions were quite extreme, such as predicting heavy rain, flooding, strong winds, etc. (Fig. 5). Also, respondents would not go to nature if there was heavy rain in the field; and 27 percent of respondents would not like to travel if air temperature is very high. At least 4 percent of respondents would refuse to travel to the nature if the air temperature was too low. However, this low percent could only show that, basically, winter season is not as much popular for nature visitors in Lithuania.

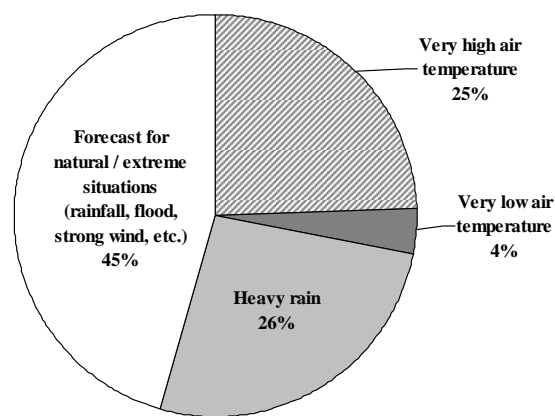


Figure 5. The proportion of respondents' answers to the question „What weather conditions would force you to change your plans to go on nature trips?, in percentages

It was important to find out what would encourage the respondents to choose nature tourism routes, especially for travelling on foot, in different seasons. The answers were very different, for example, some respondents replied that the most important reason for nature trips would be good weather, most likely without rain and strong wind, in spring and in autumn. During the summer, good weather – no rain and mild air temperature – would encourage hiking. In the winter season, the respondents would prefer to have more snow for more extreme experiences.

In order to mitigate tourism seasonality that affects Lithuanian nature tourism, the respondents gave some recommendations: to install buildings for temporary rest; to donate or sell raincoats if necessary; to create different directions, adapting travellers to the weather and organizing more indoor educations in complex with outdoor trips; to organize interactive exhibitions and educational activities.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Nature tourism is the tourism type mostly dependent on different seasons. Public awareness and educations during the nature trips, also adaptation of infrastructure could lead to greater interest in nature tourism in Lithuania all the year round.

Visitors/travellers to Lithuanian nature are local people or come from foreign countries planning to spend the weekend or vacation in the nature. According to a local tourism survey conducted in 2018 (VTD, 2018), about 70 percent of the Lithuanian population spend their holidays in Lithuania; therefore, they help developing the regions and reducing seasonality.

In this study, having discovered the criteria that determine the choice to travel to the nature at all seasons of the year, it turned out that visiting of the nature objects is mainly dependent on the weather conditions, as well as the supply of activities and educations adapted to a particular season. The active tourism season in Lithuania lasts only four months. Meanwhile, in non-seasonal period, tourist flows are decreasing, which has a negative impact on job creation and tourism income. The problems faced by nature tourism enthusiasts showed that tourism infrastructure in Lithuania (pedestrian and bicycle paths) is not fully adapted to different seasons everywhere, there is also a lack of different seasonal educations in the field or their alternatives indoors, insufficient dissemination of information.

The study also revealed that it is not enough to offer nature tourism routes and natural heritage sites for tourists. In order to reduce the seasonality of nature tourism, attractive services for every season should be offered for visiting, relaxing, enjoying and learning. Natural resources in Lithuania, mainly national and regional parks, nature reserves

and natural heritage sites are interesting all year round, but are mostly visited during the warm season of the year. In order to reduce seasonality, it is necessary to disseminate information, involving various nature objects into the events, tours or educations.

Hiking and cycling trails are mostly used only during the warm season, but they can also be used for the winter season: skiing, tobogganing and other activities. The reducing of tourism seasonality requires to adapt existing natural resources to all seasons of the year; to expand the offer of leisure entertainment and educations during the cold season, to popularize winter tourism by organizing various events, winter festivals; to create packages of nature tourism services, such as hiking in combination with visiting nature and cultural heritage objects, active entertainment, offering education and accommodation in rural tourism homestead, etc. In different regions, several routes with attractions and entertainment offered for different seasons could be specifically created. Also, more focus on nature tourism marketing is needed.

The key challenges for reducing the seasonality of nature tourism services are also discussed under country level, first, increasing the supply of cultural events and entertainment in the non-tourist season and, the second, increasing and expanding the supply of rural tourism services in the non-tourist season.

## REFERENCES

1. BarOn R.V. 1975. Seasonality in Tourism. A Guide to the Analysis of Seasonality and Trends for Policy Making. London: The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd., Technical Series No. 2.
2. Becken S. 2010. The importance of climate and weather for tourism. Literature review. Land Environment and People. Research paper, 23 p. Available at <http://www.lincoln.ac.nz/PageFiles/6750/WeatherLitReview.pdf>.
3. Bell S., Tyrväinen L., Sievänen T., Pröbstl U., Simpson, M. 2007. Outdoor Recreation and Nature Tourism: A European Perspective. Living Reviews in Landscape Research 1. Available at <http://lrlr.landscapeonline.de/Articles/lrlr-2007-2/download/lrlr-2007-2Color.pdf>.
4. Bružaitė V., Šadeikaitė G. 2016. Darniojo turizmo plėtra Lietuvoje. Darniojo turizmo plėtros Lietuvoje probleminių sričių analizė [Development of Sustainable Tourism in Lithuania. Analysis of problematic areas of sustainable tourism development in Lithuania]. Available at [http://kurkl.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Problemines-sritys\\_galutinis.pdf](http://kurkl.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Problemines-sritys_galutinis.pdf) (In Lithuanian)
5. Bukantis A., Dailidienė I., Česniulevičius A., ir kt. 2007. Klimato kaita: prisitaikymas ir jos poveikis Lietuvos pajūryje [Climate change: adaptation and its impact on the Lithuanian seaside]. Vilnius, 108 p. (In Lithuanian)
6. Butler R. 2014. Addressing seasonality in tourism: the development of a prototype. Conclusions and Recommendations resulting from the Punta del Este Conference, May 2014. Report for UNWTO. Available at [http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/final\\_notes\\_richard\\_butler.pdf](http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/final_notes_richard_butler.pdf)
7. Cooper, C., Wanhill, S., Fletcher, J., Gilbert, D., Fyall, A. 2008. Tourism: principles and practice, Pearson Education, Harlow.
8. European Wilderness Society 2018. Available at <https://wilderness-society.org/natural-tourism-is-a-chance-for-nature/>.
9. Kūle L., Haller I., Varjopuro R., Alberth J. 2013. Climate Change Impacts on Coastal Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region. Baltadapt Report No. 6. Danish Meteorological Institute, Copenhagen.
10. De Freitas C. R. 2001. Theory, Concepts and Methods in Tourism Climate Research. Proceedings of the first international workshop on climate, tourism and recreation. Matzarakis, A., de Freitas, C. (eds.). October 5-10, 2001, Greece, pp. 3–20.
11. Mieczkowski Z. 1985. The Tourism Climatic Index: a method of evaluating world climates for tourism. The Canadian Geographer 29, pp. 220–233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.1985.tb00365.x>
12. Romikaitytė B., Kisieliauskas J. 2012. Lietuvos turizmo sektoriaus plėtrai įtaką darantys veiksniai. *Management theory and studies for rural business and infrastructure development*, Vol. 2, No. 31, pp. 125–135.
13. Summaries of facts about the European Union 2018. Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/lt/sheet/126/turizmas>.
14. VTD 2018. Vietinio turizmo tyrimas: 70 proc. Lietuvos gyventojų pagrindines atostogas leidžia Lietuvoje [Local tourism survey: 70% of Lithuanian residents spend their main holidays in Lithuania]. Valstybinis turizmo departamentas [State Department of Tourism]. Available at <http://www.tourism.lt/lt/naujienos/vietinio-turizmo-tyrimas-70-proc-lietuvos-gyventoju-pagrindines-atostogas-leidzia-lietuvoje>. (In Lithuanian)