African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, Volume 6 (2) - (2017) ISSN: 2223-814X

Tourism seasonality and destination management implications for Mana Pools tourist destination in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study investigated tourism seasonality and its corresponding management implications for Mana Pools tourist destination. Seasonality represents one of the key challenging characteristics of the tourism industry. This study explored seasonality drivers, impacts on destination performance and the management strategies that have been adopted to alleviate the problems of extreme seasonality. Mana Pools is a peripheral ecotourism destination and protected area in Zimbabwe. The study was largely qualitative in nature targeting participants from both the supply and the demand side. Data analysis exploited the thematic approach. Research findings indicate that tourism seasonality leads to reduced tourist and revenue flows to a destination. Low revenue returns affect the park's long-term sustainability as conservation of natural systems directly depends on availability of financial resources. This was evidenced by stifled conservation programmes, skills flight and dwindling infrastructure in the destination. To curb the severity of seasonality, there is need to improve off season accessibility of the park and to adopt destination yield management strategies during the peak season. Given the element of predictability connected with seasonality, managers at destinations such as Mana Pools should anticipate the various negative impacts and put into action stratagems to adjust to possible negative effects.

Keywords: tourism seasonality, ecotourism destination, peak season, off season, destination performance, Mana Pools

Introduction

All forms of tourism are impacted by seasonality whether mildly or severely and this setback limits the value of investing in the tourism industry (Lee, Bergin-Seers, Galloway, O'Mahony & McMurray, 2008). Since the turn of the century, the tourism industry is undeniably becoming one of the leading industries around the world. However, seasonality remains a common phenomenon impacting on the industry and in other instances it threatens the value of investing in the tourism industry (Baum &

Lundtrop, 2001). Various comprehensive researches to provide an overview of the seasonality phenomenon have been carried out in many parts of the world, for example tourism seasonality studies by Kastenholz and de Almeida (2008) in Portugal and studies by Fernandez-Morales (2003) in Spain. Both studies seem to suggest the need for strategies to prolong the tourism season. Within the confines of Mana Pools, a peripheral tourist destination situated at the northern tip of Zimbabwe, managing the impacts of seasonality remains a key challenge.

Butler (1994) asserts that seasonality 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'.

The park is an ecotourism World Heritage Site designated as a protected area which focuses on conservation of pristine and fragile nature. As an ecotourism destination focusing on non-consumptive tourism there are limited seasonality management options available to alleviate the problem of extreme seasonality. Essentially, the successful conservation of pristine and fragile nature is based on tourism's support prompting the need to balance economic viability and environmental needs.

The research provides an insight into seasonality impacts on destination performance and proffers a range of strategies that can be instrumental in managing the impacts of seasonality in a pristine environment designated as a protected area. Proper adoption and operationalization of management strategies can result in the sustainability of the destination through enhancement of economic benefits, social benefits and most importantly ecological biodiversity conservation of this tourist destination.

Mana Pools National Park as one of the leading ecotourism destinations in Zimbabwe has not been spared the hazards of seasonality. This destination offers controlled recreational opportunities and amenities for visitors within the framework of the overall protection of all flora and fauna. According to the Mana Pools National Park General Management Plan (2009), since the discovery and ultimate development of Mana Pools National Park as tourist destination seasonality remains a key feature and major challenge to the administrators. Mana Pools destination provides a natural wilderness and tourist visits are mainly for non-consumptive ecotourism.

The nature of the tourism product offered at Mana Pools increases the destination's vulnerability to seasonality. Being a conservation oriented destination, implies management faces challenges in attempting to alleviate extreme seasonality as strategies have to be oriented towards conservation. This problem is further compounded by the development that since the political challenges experienced in Zimbabwe in the past decade most donor organisations funding wildlife and conservation programmes withdrew their funding protesting the governance issues prevailing in the country. As a result, funding to conservation programmes and protected areas like Mana Pools National Park has declined and destination managers have to devise innovative ways to sustain their operations.

Research based information on tourism seasonality is not readily available in the public domain in Zimbabwe. Destination and protected area managers mainly depend on findings outside Zimbabwe to develop seasonality management strategies. It is because of this background that the researchers were motivated to undertake a study at Mana Pools primarily to explore the management strategies that promote the viability of the

park as a conservation area that achieves self- sustenance in economic terms in the face of subdued funding from traditional financiers like Government and international conservation Non- Governmental Organisations.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate how tourism seasonality is affecting the performance of Mana Pools National Park as a tourist destination
2. To assess the effectiveness of management interventions to tourism seasonality at Mana Pools tourist destination
3. To explore strategies that can be adopted to reduce the severity of seasonality at Mana Pools tourist destination.

Area of Study

Figure 1. Study Area-Mana Pools (World Heritage Site)
Source:http://www.africanworldheritagesites.org/assets/images/website.ManaPools-Location-.jpg

Mana Pools is a wildlife conservation area in Northern Zimbabwe constituting a National Park. Mana Pools is located in the Lower Zambezi Valley where the floodplain turns into a broad expanse of lakes after each rainy season. The park takes its name from the four pools that still lie in the abandoned river channels that run through the terraces. The name *Mana* means four in the local Shona language referring to the four largest pools

which hold water all year. The park is characterized by lush woodland vegetation of Faidherbia albida (acacia albidia), mahogany, ebony, baobab and fig trees. This luxuriant vegetation accounts for the herds of larger herbivores such as elephant, eland, buffalo, impala, zebra, waterbuck and kudu regularly seen on the river terraces. These herbivores provide a plentiful supply of prey for the lion, leopard, wild dog, hyena, and other predators and scavengers that inhabit the park. Mana Pools also has a large concentration of hippopotamuses and crocodiles. Further, the park has a wide variety of birds such as fish eagles, water-based fowls, carmine bee-eaters, Pels Fishing Owls, African Skimmers, Nyasa Lovebirds, yellow spotted nicators and many species of stork and heron.

Mana Pools is located far from any major town or human settlement. Tourist facilities at Mana Pools National Park include five lodges, all located along the Zambezi River, a communal campsite and exclusive campsites where the visitors can be alone and ensure their solitude. Tourist activities offered include camping, walking safaris, canoe safaris, lion tracking, game drives, photographic tourism, bird watching and limited fishing from the land. There are no boat launching facilities and motor-boats are not permitted on the Mana Pools river frontage because of noise, pollution and wave action disturbing the wilderness qualities of the park. At least 70 percent of tourists normally visit the park between July and October (Mana Pools National Park General Management Plan, 2009).

Mana Pools is 2 196 square kilometres in extent but is part of the 10 500 square kilometre Parks and Wildlife Estate that runs from the Kariba Dam in the west to the Mozambique border in the east. To the north, it is bordered by the Lower Zambezi National Park on the Zambian side of the Zambezi Valley. Mana became the first National Park in Zimbabwe to be designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 1984. The Mana Pools were also designated a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in 2013. This makes it a competitive tourist destination with unique wilderness experience compared to other national parks in Zimbabwe and southern Africa.

Literature review

Seasonality in the tourism industry

According to Lee et al. (2008) previous attempts to address seasonality in tourism sectors have been complicated by the diverse range of causes and impacts across different locations. The complex nature of the factors influencing seasonality is not easily addressed as such many attempts to alleviate it fails (Butler, 2001). There is no generally accepted definition of seasonality with reference to tourism. The widely used and most accepted definition was provided by Butler (2001) who defined seasonality as temporal imbalances in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as number of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment and admission to attractions. Previous definitions are overshadowed by the definition by Butler (2001) on the basis of being shallow, for example Chung (2009) narrowly defined seasonality as the effects occurring every year due to climate status, constraints of public holidays, special attractions (for example festivals), or personal lifestyle. The reality of seasonality in tourism is not disputed in literature, for example it is argued that seasonality is one of the most prominent features of tourism (Page & Connell, 2006). In support of the above notion Lee et al. (2008) argues that every tourism enterprise is impacted by seasonality

whether mildly or severely. Chung (2009) and Kastenholz and de Almeida (2008) observed that seasonality has some implications on destination performance owing to the distorted patterns in demand and consumption of the tourism product it causes. It is further argued that the annual peaking of tourism activity during a few hectic weeks or months will likely result in inefficiency within the industry and is a great burden on the physical and social resources of the destination area (Butler, 2001; Weaver, 2006). Resultantly this will contribute to tourist destinations carrying capacity problems.

Causes of seasonality

The widely presented and accepted causes of tourism seasonality include natural and institutional causes, which occur either in the generating area or receiving area or both (Butler, 2001). However, it has been noted that even though the broad causes of seasonality are well known, it is often stressed that they are not well understood (Koenig & Bischoff, 2005).

Natural seasonality

The natural phenomenon is widely accepted as a major cause of seasonality (Sainaghi & Canali, 2011). Natural seasonality refers to temporal variations in natural aspects particularly those associated with cyclical climate changes of elements such as temperature, precipitation, wind and daylight. This is echoed by Yu, Schwartz and Walsh (2010) and Page (2009) who contends that climate conditions play a significant role in shaping the patterns of visitation. The studies by Lee et al. (2008) also identified natural factors as a major determinant of types and numbers of visitors to a destination. This is also supported by Goulding (2006) who noted temperature and hours of daylight among other climatic elements such as rainfall. It has been noted that the majority of outdoor tourism activities relying on natural climate-dependent attractions are most likely to experience a pronounced influence of natural seasonality on the destination (Mendiratta, 2011). Notable is that climate can be a constraint to tourism development.

Institutionalised seasonality

Institutionalised seasonality refers to traditional temporal variations formed by human decisions that are often enshrined in legislation (Butler, 2001). Institutional causes of seasonality reflect the social norms and practices of society typically based on religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic aspects epitomised by natural seasonality. Public holidays are one of the most common forms of institutionalised seasonality (Koenig & Bischoff, 2005).

Lee et al. (2008) contends that institutional factors are complex as they are based on human behaviour. Scheduling of school and statutory holidays shapes tourism demand (Higham, 2005). The staging of events is often identified as an influencing institutionalized factor. As presented by Lee et al. (2008) institutional causes of seasonality are linked to three key factors; all forms of holidays and the availability of leisure time; travel habits and motivation, affected by other factors such as changing tastes, social pressure, fashion and inertia; and finally, mega-eventing.

Travel habits and motivations have been supported by the works of many (Goulding, Baum & Morrison, 2004; Page & Connell, 2006; Page, 2009). Higham (2005) argue that many people travel during certain periods because they have always done so. It is contented that this cause of seasonality is the hardest to break. Institutional seasonality is also supported by Rowe, Smith, Demaire, Stewart, and Warbarton (2006) who argue that some tourists enjoy visiting destinations during off peak periods. According to

Cuccia and Rizzo (2012) seasonality can be influenced by the type of tourists visiting a destination. Cuccia and Rizzo (2012) give an example of the Sicilian World Heritage Site where patterns of visitation depends on whether visitors are Italians or foreigners.

Kastenholz and de Almeida (2008) identify distance of attractions from capital cities as a factor which contributes to the shaping of seasonal demand for the tourism industry. During the off season periods the distance decay factor has a negative bearing on demand patterns for peripheral destinations (Kastenholz & de Almeida, 2008; Page & Connell, 2006). Page and Connell (2006) emphasise the influence of pricing and promotion strategies employed by different suppliers in contributing to seasonal variations in demand.

Impacts of seasonality and their implications on destination performance

Seasonality can have both positive and negative impacts on tourist destinations. Higham (2005) views seasonality as a disease that needs to be cured or at least modified in effect. Boniface and Cooper (2005), further reiterate that seasonality affects profitability and overall well-being of a destination. This perception of seasonality is also reflected in Lee et al. (2008) who maintain that seasonality threatens the viability of investing in tourism. This is so considering that seasonality affects utilisation of facilities which have a greater portion of fixed costs (Chung, 2009). Because of such a problem, seasonality is often blamed for limited investment in tourism. Goulding, Baum and Morrison (2004) further noted that opportunity cost results from underutilisation of resources. As indicated above, in as much as economic issues are concerned seasonality largely has a negative implication on destination performance as it generally reduces revenue available to finance operations and earn attractive profits.

Seasonality characterised by high numbers of tourist flows particularly during the peak periods is presented as a problem impacting negatively on performance. Over concentration of tourists during peak seasons is undesirable as it results in non-optimal use of resources. According to Roberto and Guiseppe (2012) congestion during the peak season may also have negative impacts to the local communities who may feel swamped by the high numbers of tourists. Crowding has a negative bearing on service delivery as suppliers fails to deliver according to customers' expectations thereby affecting the image of the destination and reducing repeat visits (Boardman, 2008). Notable is that over concentration as an intervention strategy of peak season can compromise destination performance.

Furthermore, it has been argued that off season provides management with recuperation time, especially for life style and small firms (Commons & Page, 2001). Other aspects critical to destination performance can be addressed during the off-season period, for example staff training and refurbishment and development (Page & Connell, 2006). For Mana Pools destination, this is desirable so that the park is not over commercialised. While this review is by no means exhaustive, it can be concluded that seasonality is largely undesirable especially to the supply side's economic perspectives. It is also notable that seasonality management strategy development and implementation is influenced by causes and perceived impacts, and varies from destination to destination because of the complex nature of the seasonality phenomenon. As for Mana Pools tourist destination, its resource base is a fragile ecosystem which could easily lose its special ecological and wilderness qualities if tourism impacts are not carefully monitored and controlled. There is therefore need for serious management intervention to ensure that visitor thresholds to the park even during peak season remain sustainable so that

the UNESCO World Heritage status of the destination is maintained. This can only be maintained if park administrators and destination management organisations in Zimbabwe manage to retain the wilderness values of Mana Pools.

Methodology

The study was based on the use of a qualitative design to assess the extent to which tourism seasonality is affecting destination performance. An intensive literature review was conducted to have a theoretical grounding of tourism seasonality. Informed by the literature review semi-structured interviews were conducted with key Mana Pools management and general staff. The interview focused on respondent awareness of seasonality dynamics at the park, and knowledge of seasonality impacts. The interviews further solicited responses on how seasonality impacted on park performances with respect to its biological significance and revenue generation. The research aimed to answer the question, "what is the extent to which seasonality affects destination performance and what are the best strategies that can contribute to the effective management of the impacts of seasonality primarily to promote destination sustainability in the conservation of resources to improve destination performance?" Data analysis was restricted to the use of qualitative techniques. Therefore, the data was analysed using the thematic approach. Data coding was followed by identification and refinement of themes.

Research findings and discussion

The study unearthed that seasonality at Mana Pools has vast negative impacts affecting destination performance from the perspectives of both the supply side and the demand side. The supply side is largely concerned about revenue issues, staffing issues, service delivery issues and environmental issues while the demand side is mainly concerned about unsatisfactory peak season service delivery and peak season crowding which undoubtedly compromises destination competitiveness. Workers at the lodges and tour guides based at Mana Pools National Park complain that they are overworked during the peak season and are almost idle during the off-peak period. Tourists also note that peak season crowding negatively impacts on the wilderness experience of Mana Pools and service delivery thereby reducing satisfaction. Peak season crowding also negatively impacts on the fragile and sensitive ecological environment found at Mana Pools. The study further explored that the major strategies that can be employed are infrastructure development, developing additional facilities, diversification of activities to reduce crowding, improved marketing, resource mobilisation, staff training and mega-eventing.

Seasonality impacts and implications on Mana Pools tourist destination performance

At Mana Pools seasonality has more negative impacts than positive as such it is viewed as largely undesirable. The study unearthed that seasonality at Mana Pools results in low annual revenue. The off season characterised by very low demand has virtually no contribution to revenue generation. The park views this as one of the key challenges which needs to be addressed. Revenue generated during the peak season has to be spread to cover for annual operating costs. Because of the problem of low return on investment safari operators in the park temporarily close operations during the off season. The issue of low return on investment is one of the often-mentioned problems of seasonality. Sullivan (2002) also found that in the United States of America (USA) seasonality crippled many sky resorts in USA because of low returns on investment. Various studies also blame seasonality for underutilisation of facilities yet fixed assets

have a large part of annual costs (Chung, 2009; Jang, 2004; Cuccia & Rizzo, 2012). Low annual revenue returns at the park reduces the financial resources available to finance conservation and to develop suitable infrastructure. Low revenue returns also implies staff remuneration is relatively low. Evidence on the ground reveals a skills flight from the Park establishment thereby compromising the ability of the park to discharge its conservation mandate.

The study revealed that seasonality affects employment. During the peak season the park normally operate with few employees. The safari operators in the park hire employees on a seasonal basis. This has a negative implication on staff training and service delivery. Poor staff training reduces service quality there by affecting visitor satisfaction which ultimately results in reduced repeat visits. Literature presents staffing problems as one of the negative impacts of seasonality (Goulding, 2006; Jang, 2004; Chung, 2009; Jintranum, Sriboonchitta, Calkins & Chaiboonsri, 2011). The idea that instability in employment affects visitor satisfaction and reduces repeat visits has also been identified by Boardman (2008). In general, unstable employment and staff shortages negatively affect the performance of the organisation particularly with issues regarding service delivery and visitor satisfaction critical in sustaining a competitive advantage.

This study revealed that according to the supply side perspectives the peak season is desirable as it is the time operators can earn better revenue necessary to finance operations. Operators capitalise on the better levels of demand in order to earn revenue which is spread to cover for annual costs. This is supported by Page and Connell (2006) who suggested that operators can capitalise on the peak season and develop more facilities in order to earn more revenue to cover for annual costs.

Despite the fact that there is relatively less crowding at Mana Pools the study indicated that visitors are concerned about peak season crowding. Crowding is presented as undesirable in literature (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2012; Jang, 2004). Crowding is viewed as undesirable considering that it is a complex factor which exits at both physical and psychological levels (Holloway, Humphreys & Davidson, 2009). Crowding has an adverse effect on guest experiences critical to promote repeat visitation and viral marketing (Boarding 2008). The result of such a negative impact is poor performance even during the main season.

A few visitors at Mana Pools view high prices as an issue of concern. This is regardless of the fact that there is no significant seasonal differential pricing at the park. Visitors feel that they are being overcharged to cater for off season's poor performance. Jang (2004) also found that charging high prices during peak periods is a cause for consumer irritation and may reduce a destination's competitive advantage through negative publicity and lack of repeat visitation.

Management Strategies to alleviate the problems of seasonality

The research explored that infrastructure development is one of the major strategies that can be employed to increase off season visitation. The low off season visits are directly linked to poor infrastructure particularly roads easily affected by rainfall. Considering that Mana Pools receive very low rainfall the impact of the rain should not affect visitations to the extent of causing extreme seasonality as is the current case. Infrastructure development will arguably increase accessibility of the park especially during the wet

season when travel in the park is very difficult. Infrastructure expansion will improve the accessibility of the destination. Research by Lee et al. (2008) also highlighted the importance of infrastructure development in alleviating the problem of extreme seasonality.

The research also explored that there is a need to increase activities offered by the park especially during the rainy season. The study found that the park currently offer no other additional activities during the off season. This is despite the fact that there is a very low range of activities offered even during the peak season. Diversification of activities mainly presented as product diversification in literature is one of the most successful measures in alleviating extreme seasonality (Higham, 2005; Mendiratta, 2011). Page (2009) also found that to counteract seasonality a destination can provide a new series of innovative products that are less weather sensitive, especially for visitors coming during off season periods. In support, Cuccia and Rizzo (2012) suggested offering specialised holidays, for example cultural experiences tailored to various segments of the demand side in line with their specific interests. The research found that product diversification is also supported by the demand side. Proposed activities include motor boating and helicopter game viewing during the off season. These are likely to increase visitation during the off season and the competitive advantage of the destination even during the peak season.

The research unearthed that Mana Pools is poorly marketed especially in the local arena. Improved and diversified marketing is one of the key strategies suggested among management strategies proposed by various participants. There is optimism that improved marketing will increase off season visits. Targeting groups during the off season can be effective to alleviate seasonality, for example educational groups not affected by climatic seasonal changes. In literature, diversified marketing is provided as one of the key strategies. For example, Page (2009) suggested market campaigns for example through print media and the internet to highlight a region's indigenous culture and tap different markets with different travel habits. Market diversification is further supported by other researchers, for example (Dawson, Fountain & Cohen, 2010; Boardman, 2008; Highham, 2005; Koenig & Bischoff, 2005; Lee et al., 2008). Cuccia and Rizzo (2012) stress the importance of transforming destinations into distinctive places and promoting them adequately. Improved marketing initiatives will result in tapping of different market segments with different travel patterns and can help improve destination performance during different seasons.

The research found that there is a need to develop additional facilities at the park in order to capitalise on high peak season demand. The park is sometimes fully booked during the peak season. Owing to shortage of accommodation, some tourists intending to stay overnight have to be turned away. This results in revenue loss as high competition ensures that there are always alternative destinations elsewhere. This is supported by Page and Connell (2006) who suggested that a destination can develop more facilities to earn more revenue during the peak season and use the off season for development and maintenance. In support Jang (2004) indicated that employing revenue increasing techniques to capitalise on high demand during the peak season demand is critical in enhancing performance. In recognition of this fact a lodge is currently under construction and respondents suggested formalising temporary extended camps. Such a move can improve the park's annual revenue returns and its ability to actively manage conservation of resources.

The study unearthed that the government should intervene through funding for infrastructure development and other operations to promote successful implementation of seasonality management initiatives. As suggested by the respondents the government should also assist in marketing initiatives designed by the park. Given low revenue generated at the park the government should come to the rescue of the park. More so, infrastructure development is normally a government's responsibility. In some instances, counteracting seasonality requires state initiated measures (Higham, 2005; Lee et al., 2008). Goulding et al. (2004) also presented staggering of holidays over prolonged periods as a state initiative that counteracts seasonality and at least reduce its undesirable impacts. Authorities may also facilitate regional cooperation which, according to Dawson et al. (2010) assists in alleviating extreme seasonality in order to enhance overall performance.

The research indicated that Mana Pools staff and safari operators holds the view that establishing links with other operators and other Zimbabwean protected areas to develop a coordinated approach of managing seasonality will help alleviate extreme seasonality. This move supported by Dawson et al. (2010); Cuccia and Rizzo (2012); Camprubí, Guia & Comas (2008) will result in coordinated research and marketing, and exchanging of visitors among other things. Essentially, a network strategy in marketing may result in realisation of reciprocal benefits (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2012). Indeed, there is justification to support establishing linkages as a move towards alleviation of extreme seasonality.

To manage the negative environmental impacts linked to crowding the study found that visitors are concentrated in areas that can best handle them and are required to respect the environment. This together with the current rules which restricts certain tourist behaviours needs to be enforced to ensure that ecological footprints of visitors are kept to the minimum acceptable levels. This move is succinctly supported by Eagles and McCool (2002) who present various visitor management tools to reduce negative visitor impacts on the environment. Page (2009) supports visitor management techniques designed to minimize ecological footprints. Enforcement of visitor management techniques not only during the peak season, but also during the off season can be useful in alleviating the negative impacts of crowding often blamed on seasonality.

The study found that the safari operators at Mana Pools close business during the wet season (November-March) as a way of reducing expenditure as business during the wet season is virtually non-existence. This move can be appropriate at enterprise level especially when financial reasons are an issue of overriding concern (Jang, 2004; Higham, 2005). However, such a measure is viewed by some as problematic particularly at destination level (Dawson et al., 2010). The argument here is enterprises which close businesses during the off season are unwilling to participate in seasonality management initiatives formulated by local authorities. Therefore, seasonal closure is not one of the most appropriate measures to deal with seasonality.

The research found that price discounts during the off season are not likely to work at Mana Pools. Operators argued that price discounts are not likely to improve off season visitation; instead they may have a negative bearing on the popularity of the destination. The same perception on discounts was found by Lee et al. (2008) who studied several destinations in Australia. Operators argue that discounts may simply devalue the destination as they simply react on consumers' sense of judgement about value for money (Rowe et al., 2006). The research found that the majority of the consumers does not support price discounts as a measure to alleviate extreme seasonality. Instead both

the supply side and the demand side opt for service differentiation during different seasons as a key measure to alleviate extreme seasonality.

Conclusion

Seasonality is a complex phenomenon with a wide range of causes. It is apparent that seasonality undeniably has perceived positive or negative impacts on destination performance particularly to the supply side perspectives. The supply side reflect a negative connotation of seasonality. Within the confines of Mana Pools seasonality is blamed for low annual revenue returns thereby threatening the viability of conservation as project management will be very difficult. The competitiveness of the park is also seriously compromised by seasonality as this pause challenges that have adverse impacts on customer satisfaction and the environment. It is critical to reduce extreme seasonality in order to promote sustainability of conservation through enhancing economic viability which promotes self-sustenance of the park in financial terms. A primary disquiet about seasonality focuses on the effective planning and use of resources during what is termed the off-peak period. Maintaining service quality and satisfying tourist needs and wants is critical. While the impacts of seasonality vary significantly from one location to another, it is important to seek to keep tourism as an ongoing experience.

The recommended strategies in managing seasonality in this research include infrastructure development, product diversification, improved marketing, initiating and enhancing linkages, developing additional facilities, government initiatives, employment and training of temporary employees and zoning and use of tight regulations to reduce negative environmental impacts. The strategies are relevant to address under-utilisation of resources which negatively affect active management of resources owing to low revenue returns. The study found that while price differentiation can be effective in other places, at Mana Pools discounts are not likely to be effective. The study also indicated that seasonal closures are not an appropriate measure in managing seasonality especially considering that managing seasonality requires a coordinated approach. Apparently, strategies explored in this study are not only seasonality specific but, can improve overall year-round performance of the destination.

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