

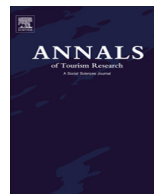


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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/atoures



Determinant factors of senior tourists' length of stay



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 May 2014

Revised 1 August 2014

Accepted 9 August 2014

Available online 29 August 2014

Coordinating Editor: Josef Mazanec

Keywords:

Length of stay

Spanish seniors

Aging demographic

Negative Binomial model

ABSTRACT

The current tendency to undertake more trips, but of shorter duration, throughout the year, has meant that the tourist industry has started to show greater interest in attracting those market segments that opt for more prolonged stays, as they are especially profitable. One of these segments is that of seniors. Given the aging demographic of the population worldwide, which is particularly noticeable in Spain, the object of this study is to identify the variables that determine the length of stay of Spanish seniors at their destination. The Negative Binomial model was adapted to the context of length of stay by Spanish seniors and the determinant factors identified were: age, travel purpose, climate, type of accommodation, group size, trip type and the activities carried out at the destination. This study is a contribution to this field from an empirical point of view, given the scarcity of studies of this type and their eminently descriptive character; as well as from a practical level, with interesting implications for the sector.

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Introduction

Length of stay is a variable of special interest for any tourist destination, given its positive relationship to tourism income (Barros, Butler, & Correia, 2010; Martínez-García & Raya, 2008). Tourists who stay at their destination longer visit more attractions and generate more business for the destination

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than those who stay for a shorter time (Barros & Machado, 2010; Martínez-García & Raya, 2008). Hotels, for their part, maximise profits, reduce fixed costs and maintain high occupation rates as tourists increase the length of their stay (Barros & Machado, 2010; Peypoch, Randriamboarison, Rasoamananjara, & Solonandrasana, 2012). This is also one of the most important variables in a tourist's decision-making process, and therefore it is one of the key aspects in destination planning and management (Alegre & Pou, 2006; Salmasi, Celidoni, & Procidano, 2012). However, despite the importance of this variable for tourist destinations, up until now there have been few studies related to the length of stay at the destination, notably: Alegre & Pou, 2003, 2006; Alegre, Mateo, & Pou, 2011; Barros & Machado, 2010; Barros et al., 2010; Ferrer-Rosell, Martínez-García, & Coenders, 2014; Fleischer, Peleg, & Rivlin, 2011; Gokovali, Bahar, & Kozak, 2007; Grigolon, Borgers, Kemperman, & Timmermans, 2014; Martínez-García & Raya, 2008; Meng & Uysal, 2008; Nicolau & Más, 2006, 2009; Peypoch et al., 2012; Salmasi et al., 2012; Seaton & Palmer, 1997; Wu & Carson, 2008.

The reduction of the length of the stay at the destination in favour of shorter trips taken more often throughout the year, is one of the tendencies that has characterised the tourism industry in recent years (Alegre & Pou, 2003; Barros & Machado, 2010; Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2014; Fleischer et al., 2011; Gokovali et al., 2007; Salmasi et al., 2012). This tendency has been recently fostered by an increase in business trips and the appearance of low-cost airlines (V.V.AA. in Barros & Machado, 2010). Martínez-García and Raya (2008) advised that the reduction in the duration of stay of tourists in Spain involves a reduction in tourist spending, the total expenditure only being offset by an increased flow of visitors. Given the importance for destinations to have long-stay tourism, it is necessary to undertake an in-depth analysis of this variable in order to identify exactly which factors affect the length of stay. This will provide the necessary tools to allow the relevant bodies involved in destination planning and management to attract those travellers who show a greater predisposition to more prolonged stays.

One of the groups that show a greater tendency to make more prolonged stays at destinations are seniors. As they lack certain obligations (work, family) and have more free time to travel, as well as higher discretionary income than other groups, they tend to enjoy more prolonged stays at their destinations than other travellers (Alegre & Pou, 2003; Blazey, 1992; Nicolau & Más, 2006; Romsa & Blenman, 1989). Interest in this group's mobility patterns has increased in recent years as a consequence of the population aging process being experienced on a global scale (Moniruzzaman, Páez, Habib, & Morency, 2013).

If the population ages globally, in Europe it does so at a precipitous pace. Spain will be one of the countries with the oldest population in Europe in the next few years, to the extent that by 2050, one in every two people in Spain will be 50 years old or over (United Nations, 2013). The UNWTO has estimated that, by 2050, the population above 60 years old will make up more than 2 billion international journeys, as opposed to 593 million in 1999 (Patterson, 2006). In 2012 in Spain, 62.1% of homes comprised of people between 51 and 65 years old made some sort of trip, with foreign visitors older than 64 being those who spent the most on tourism in Spain (JET, 2012a, 2012b).

The demographic aging being experienced globally, basically in the more developed regions, will mean that senior tourism will be considered to be one of the most important markets with the fastest growth in the tourism industry, this segment becoming the 'growth engine' of tourism (Schröder & Widmann, 2007). Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, and Wanhill (2007), Glover and Prideaux (2008) and Ryan (1995) noted that the aging baby boom generation is one of the most relevant markets in the tourism sector.

The purpose of this study is to identify those variables that influence Spanish senior citizens' length of stay at the destination, given their importance for the tourism industry, since the predictions for the next few years indicate that Spain will be one of the countries with the most aging population in the world (United Nations, 2013). This study intends to make an empirical contribution to the topic of length of stay in destination of the mature Spanish population, given the scant number of existing studies and their eminently descriptive character (Bai, Jang, Cai, & O'Leary, 2001; Blazey, 1992; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Fleischer & Seiler, 2002; Jang, Yu, & Pearson, 2003; Lawson, 1991; Oppermann, 1995; Romsa & Blenman, 1989; Wang, 2005; Wang, Zhang, Xia, & Wang, 2008). The relevance of the study is even reinforced by the potential implications of the findings. For example, if length of stay depends on age, a proper trip design in terms of number days should be prevalent; if motivations condition trip duration, the search of adequately motivated seniors should be a priority;

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