

# The influence of weather and climate on recreation and tourism

**Keith Smith**

Department of Environmental Science, University of Stirling

Tourism and outdoor recreation is one of the most important and rapidly growing service industries throughout the world. In 1993 more than 17 million foreign tourists are expected to visit the UK and spend more than £7 billion. Overall, the UK tourist industry is a larger employer than the National Health Service and it is the premier industry in Scotland, where some 10–15 million visitors are attracted annually. A similar reliance on tourism exists in many less-developed countries. For example, more than 10 million tourists visit the Caribbean islands every year and the industry makes up nearly 80 per cent of the gross national product of the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands. Apart from its economic importance, tourism and outdoor recreation also satisfies social needs and aspirations.

During recent years, there has been a steady growth in tourist activity. Figure 1 indicates the increase in the number of UK residents making holiday visits by air during the third quarter of the year (July, August and September) to three of the most popular Mediterranean destinations. Over the 1979–91 period, the total number of visits to these countries has more than doubled. With a long-term trend to more leisure time, partly created by a rising proportion of retired people in the population, and more disposable income amongst the population as a whole, the importance of tourism is unlikely to decline in the future.

It seems almost self-evident that tourism is dependent on weather and climate. Whatever the specific type of holiday enjoyed, most outdoor tourism rests on the attraction of certain renewable biophysical resources, such as forests, lakes, or beaches, all of which are climate-dependent. In some parts of the world, it is the climate itself which is the main feature

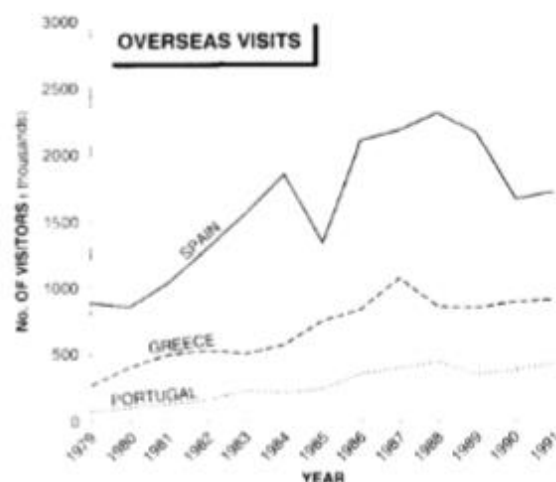


Fig. 1 Growth in the number of UK residents making summer holiday visits by air to Spain, Greece and Portugal (source: International Passenger Survey, Department of National Heritage)

promoting tourism. But there have been comparatively few investigations into the relationships between weather and climate and tourism. One possible reason for this is that meteorologists and leisure specialists rarely communicate with each other. Also, atmospheric conditions are only one factor influencing tourist decisions, so the direct linkages between the weather and the behaviour of the leisure consumer are often difficult to demonstrate.

## Weather-sensitive tourism

Weather-sensitive tourism exists in those parts of the world, like Britain, where the seasonal climatic conditions are insufficiently reliable to attract mass travel and leisure participation on their own. It includes so-called 'cultural tourism' (visits to historic cities and heritage