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**Challenges of Winter Tourism in Albania: A Review**

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# INTRODUCTION

- Tourism is a critical component of global economic development and an important source of revenue.
- In Albania, the tourism sector is anticipated to contribute 9.3% of the GDP by 2028, a considerable increase in the sector's economic impact.
- In 2019 travel and tourism served as a significant economic engine and job creator, contributing 20% to the Albanian economy and creating 244,000 jobs, or one in every five jobs in Albania (WTTC, 2022).
- Albania's law system places a strong emphasis on preserving the nation's extensive natural and cultural heritage in order to capitalize on the potential for tourist expansion.
- The 2019 National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development outlines policies to strike a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being.
- Albania's terrain may be most notable for its multiple succeeding mountain ranges, which have an average elevation of more than 700 meters.
- Given that dominantly mountainous terrain, winter tourism industry has recently gained attention from both local and foreign tourists. But like any expanding business sector, it confronts a number of difficulties that call for meticulous planning and thought.

# METHODOLOGY

- This scientific review aims to investigate existing official reports and scholarly articles on the current situation of tourism in mountainous areas of Albania, in order to identify potential drawbacks with an emphasis on infrastructural constraints, seasonality problems, environmental difficulties, and the need for sustainable growth.
- By increasing awareness on these issues, the parties involved can properly address them and encourage a vibrant and robust winter tourist business.

# INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITATIONS

- One of the major obstacles for winter tourism in Albania is the lack of infrastructure in mountainous areas.
- The absence of effective transportation links and lodging amenities limits travelers' mobility and ease of access. 80% of the hotels are located on the seaside area; 10% are in the capital; and just 10% are located in other parts of the country, including mountainous regions (Burlea-Schiopoiu & Ozuni, 2021).
- And even when these facilities exist, they are mostly family run businesses rather than large professionally managed groups, which in turn affects the quality of service.
- The absence of specialized facilities needed to practice activities typical for the winter season, such as skiing or other snow based activities. There are just a few unequipped ski areas. There are just ten ski areas, although none have five or more lifts, according to the 2022 International Report on Snow & Mountain Tourism (Vanat, 2022)

# SEASONALITY ISSUES

- The high frequency of tourist visits at specific times of year has a significant impact on sustainability. In reality, it not only substantially decreases the sustainability of businesses and their ability to provide year-round employment, but it may also put a strain on communities and natural resources at times, leaving an oversupply of capacity at other times of the year (Selmanaj, Gorica & Murati, 2018).
- Winter tourism in Albania is primarily reliant on the brief and frequently unpredictable winter season. Seasonality difficulties cause changes in visitor arrivals as well as economic insecurity for enterprises that rely on the winter tourism sector.

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

- Despite the legal provisions and references to sustainable tourism, as well as a small number of initiatives undertaken by the government to initiate a discussion on sustainable tourism development in Albania, the Albanian government and tourism sector have limited notions of sustainable tourism development (Nientied, Porfido & Ciro, 2018).
- The rapid growth of the tourism industry has also led to concerns about the preservation of Albania's natural and cultural heritage. There have been instances of overdevelopment in sensitive areas, as well as damage to historical and archaeological sites due to the influx of tourists (Ilollari & Kociaj, 2023).
- The fragile alpine ecosystems in Albania's mountain regions are vulnerable to the environmental impacts of winter tourism. Ski resort development, increased traffic, and improper waste management pose threats to the biodiversity and natural beauty of the areas.

# NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- Education is vital in guaranteeing sustainability in tourism sector because as Deale and Barber (2012) point out it helps to produce graduates who have the knowledge of sustainability concepts, and their applications, to meet the challenges of the workplace.
- In Albania, although the supply of human resources in tourism services is abundant, it lacks quality. This might be due to a lack of awareness on the importance of the services sector in tourism, as well as lack of training, contemporary curricula for tourism university system schools and university, as well as entrepreneurs or managers to maintain high level of services, to customer satisfaction and increase the value of the service (Prifti & Zenelaj, 2013).

# DISCUSSION

- In Albania, nature based tourism is now an established activity.
- For many years, the country has been regarded as a mainly summer destination, indicating that the Albanian tourism product is highly correlated to “sea, sand and sun”. Approximately 68% of annual international arrivals happen between May and September (UNDP, 2022).
- Despite the popularity of the country during the summer months, winter tourism in Albania holds immense potential for economic growth and cultural exchange.
- However, it faces several challenges that require careful attention and proactive measures.
- First, the limited infrastructure in the mountainous regions hinders accessibility and convenience for tourists, requiring investment in modern transportation networks and lodging facilities.
- Second, the heavy reliance on the short and unpredictable winter season creates seasonality issues, leading to fluctuations in tourist arrivals and economic instability.
- Additionally, the fragile alpine ecosystems are susceptible to the environmental impacts of ski resort development and increased traffic, necessitating eco-friendly practices and proper waste management to preserve the natural beauty of the areas.



# CONCLUSIONS

- Winter tourism in Albania, is undoubtedly a promising industry that has the potential to attract both local and international travelers.
- In order to take full advantage of this growing sector and to ensure continuity of this business, it is critical to balance economic growth with environmental conservation.
- By addressing the challenges identified in this review through collaborative efforts and evidence-based policies, Albania can foster a resilient and thriving winter tourism sector, ensuring a positive impact on the country's economy, environment, and cultural heritage.