

TOURISM SEASONALITY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN PEJA

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Abstract: Tourism constitutes an important sector for the economic and social development of the city of Peja. Its geographical position, cultural heritage and proximity to the Rugova Gorge make Peja an attractive destination for visitors. Tourism activity in the area is characterized by seasonality, as a substantial share of visits is concentrated in the summer months and in selected winter periods. Such concentration directly affects hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, travel agencies and businesses providing recreational activities. During periods of high demand, businesses generate higher revenues, employ more workers and utilize their capacities more intensively. Conversely, off-season periods create both operational challenges and opportunities to develop new products, attract new visitor segments and improve year-round capacity utilization. Expanding services and adapting them to visitor needs can contribute to revenue growth, employment retention and improved service quality. Cultural, rural, gastronomic, mountain and adventure tourism, together with festivals and events outside the peak season, can diversify demand. Cooperation among the municipality, businesses and the local community is therefore important for positioning Peja as a four-season destination. Digital promotion and joint tourism packages can further support a more balanced distribution of visits throughout the year. Using official accommodation statistics and relevant tourism literature, this paper examines seasonal variation in Peja and discusses business-development opportunities associated with product diversification and destination cooperation. The analysis indicates that Peja has meaningful demand in both summer and winter, while the months between the main peaks offer the greatest scope for targeted product development. A more integrated year-round approach can strengthen business resilience, support employment and contribute to the long-term economic and social development of Peja.

Keywords: tourism seasonality, business development, Peja, tourism diversification, sustainable tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered one of the sectors with significant potential for economic and social development, especially in areas that possess rich natural, cultural and historical resources. In this regard, the city of Peja represents one of the destinations with high tourist potential in Kosovo, thanks to its favorable geographical position, cultural heritage, natural beauties and proximity to the Rugova Gorge and the surrounding mountainous areas. Peja is characterized by an important combination of natural attractions, cultural heritage and hospitality, which create a favorable basis for the development of sustainable tourism and the growth of economic activity in the region (Kuqi & Vishaj, 2024). One of the main characteristics of tourist activity in Peja is seasonality. The number of visitors and the demand for tourist services vary throughout the year, with a greater concentration of visits during the summer months and in certain periods of the winter season. These changes directly affect the functioning of hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, tourist agencies, transport and businesses that offer recreational and sports activities. Official hotel and tourism statistics allow for the assessment of changes in the number of visitors and overnight stays by period of the year, creating an important basis for analyzing tourism demand (ASK 2025).

During the high tourist season, the increase in the number of visitors creates opportunities for increasing revenues, expanding services and creating new jobs. Conversely, during months with lower demand, businesses may face reduced revenues, insufficient capacity utilization and difficulties in retaining the workforce. For this reason, seasonality management is an important issue for the sustainable development of tourism and for the long-term functioning of tourism businesses. However, off-peak periods can also be seen as opportunities for the creation and development of new tourism products. Mountain and adventure tourism, rural, cultural and gastronomic tourism, the organization of festivals, sports activities and various events can influence the attraction of visitors during a larger part of the year. Tourist guides are also of great importance and should be

regulated by law (Krasniqi et.al 2023). In particular, the landscapes of the Albanian Alps in Kosovo create opportunities for the development of local accommodation, traditional gastronomy, mountain hiking and other outdoor activities, creating potential for the economic development of local communities (Hasanaj & Kuqi, 2022). Cooperation between the Municipality of Peja, tourism businesses and the local community also plays an important role in this regard. The creation of joint tourist packages, digital promotion of the destination and improvement of the quality of services can contribute to increasing the competitiveness of Peja in the tourism market. At the same time, the promotion of Peja as a destination suitable for all four seasons can affect a more balanced distribution of visitors throughout the year. The promotion of natural attractions, tourist products and services is considered an important element for increasing visitor interest and further developing tourism in Kosovo (Kuqi & Millaku, 2024). In this context, the study of tourist seasonality is important to understand not only the movement of the number of tourists, but also the impact that these changes have on the development of local businesses. The analysis of accommodation statistics and relevant literature enables the identification of periods with high and low demand, as well as the assessment of opportunities for the development of new products and services. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze tourist seasonality in Peja and its impact on business activity, while simultaneously identifying opportunities for the development and diversification of the tourist offer. Special attention is paid to the potential for extending the tourist season, increasing capacity utilization, supporting employment and strengthening cooperation between local actors. Through such an approach, Peja can further develop its potential as a four-season tourist destination and contribute to the long-term economic and social development of the region.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper uses a descriptive and comparative approach to analyze tourism seasonality and business development opportunities in Peja. Secondary data are obtained from official hotel and tourism statistics, focusing on the monthly number of visitors and overnight stays. The data are compared by months and seasons to identify periods of high and low tourist demand. In addition, the scientific literature and relevant documentation related to tourism and business development in Peja have been reviewed. The analysis focuses on identifying opportunities for diversifying the tourism offer, especially in mountain, rural, cultural, gastronomic and adventure tourism. The results are presented through tables and graphs, in order to highlight seasonal changes and interpret their impact on local business development.

3. RESULTS

Analysis of data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics shows that tourism activity in the Peja Region is characterized by significant changes throughout the year. Monthly data on visitors and overnight stays indicate that tourism demand is not evenly distributed, but varies between periods of the year (Kosovo Agency of Statistics [KAS], 2025). In August 2024, the Peja Region recorded 13,439 domestic visitors to hotels and 35,466 overnight stays. These data ranked Peja as the region with the highest number of domestic visitors to hotels during this month (KAS, 2024a). This shows the importance of the summer season for tourism activity and businesses related to accommodation, gastronomy and recreational

Table 1. Domestic visitors and overnight stays in hotels in the Peja Region, selected months of 2024

Month	Internal visitors	Night stays
January	19,472	33,080
APRIL	7,240	28,369
May	7,247	31,301
JUNE	7,734	28,898
August	13,439	35,466
October	8,578	30,353
December	10,365	30,913

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (ASK, 2024a; ASK, 2024b; ASK, 2025).

The data presented show differences between the selected months. August is characterized by high activity, with 13,439 domestic visitors and 35,466 overnight stays (ASK, 2024a). October also presents considerable activity, with the Peja Region registering 8,578 domestic visitors and 30,353 overnight stays (ASK, 2024b). These monthly changes demonstrate the importance of analyzing seasonality for planning the activity of tourism businesses.

Table 2. Comparison of characteristic months of tourist activity in the Peja Region, 2024

Period	Representative month	visitor	Night stays	Night stays per visitor
Winter	Januar	19,472	33,080	1.70
Spring	April	7,240	28,369	3.92
SUMMER	August	13,439	35,466	2.64
Autumn	October	8,578	30,353	3.54
End of the year/Winter	December	10,365	30,913	2.98

Source: Author's elaboration based on KAS data.

The annual results reinforce the importance of Peja in domestic tourism. According to KAS, during 2024, the Peja Region recorded the highest number of overnight stays of domestic visitors in Kosovo, with a total of 591,673 overnight stays (KAS, 2025). At the Kosovo level, during 2024, 698,068 domestic and foreign visitors and 1,522,890 overnight stays were registered. Compared to 2023, the number of domestic visitors increased by 4.2%, while the number of foreign visitors increased by 18.3% (KAS, 2025). Overall, the results show that Peja has a significant tourist demand base and potential for further development of tourism throughout the year. Periods with lower activity can be used to develop rural, cultural, gastronomic and adventure tourism, while periods with higher demand create opportunities for increased income and greater utilization of tourism business capacities. **Tourism and diversification of the tourist offer in Peja, In** addition to statistical indicators of visitors and overnight stays, the tourist potential of Peja is closely linked to the diversity of natural, cultural and gastronomic resources. The Rugova Gorge and the Rugova Mountains create opportunities for hiking, climbing, Via Ferrata and other recreational activities, while the cultural-historical heritage and traditional gastronomy complement the tourist offer. This diversity creates the basis for the development of Peja as a tourist destination throughout the year.

Figure 1. Rugova Gorge – natural potential for tourism



Source: By the authors 2024

Tourism is increasingly developing thanks to natural resources and beauties. Nature creates numerous opportunities for tourist and recreational activities. Natural landscapes attract visitors and influence the economic development of areas. Therefore, the protection and promotion of nature are essential for sustainable tourism.

Figure 2. Via Ferrata



Source: Outdooractive / Peja Tourism 2024.

Figure 3. Haxhi Zeka's Mill, Peja – cultural heritage



Source: Authors 2026

Figure 4. Flija – traditional food of Kosovo.



Source: Authors 2026

Selected photographs illustrate the diversity of Peja's tourism product. Combining nature and adventure tourism with cultural heritage and gastronomy can contribute to extending the tourist season, more balanced distribution of visits and increasing the utilization of local business capacities throughout the year. From a business development perspective, this diversity creates opportunities for integrated packages that include accommodation, traditional gastronomy, cultural visits and outdoor activities. Such an approach can increase the length of stay, consumption of local services and economic activity even outside peak periods.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The results of this paper show that tourism in Peja is characterized by significant changes in demand throughout the year, confirming the importance of seasonality as a factor that affects the functioning and development of tourism businesses. The analyzed data show that tourist activity is not concentrated in a single period, but presents potential both during the summer season and during certain periods of winter. This result is in line with international literature, according to which seasonality constitutes one of the main characteristics of tourist demand and can affect the economic sustainability of destinations (Duro & Turrión-Prats, 2019). Recent studies also show that seasonality should be analyzed not only through the magnitude of fluctuations, but also through changes in the temporal pattern of tourist flows (Rosselló & Sansó, 2021). In the case of Peja, seasonality is closely related to the natural and geographical characteristics of the destination. The Rugova Gorge and the Bjeshkët e Nemuna offer opportunities for mountain hiking, mountaineering, Via Ferrata, nature exploration and other recreational activities during the warmer periods, while the mountain conditions also create opportunities for winter activities. (Hasanaj & Kuqi 2022) emphasize that the landscapes of the Albanian Alps in Kosovo, characterized by mountains, forests, rivers, lakes and rocky areas, constitute important resources for the development of local tourism. The authors also highlight the potential for the development of local accommodation, gastronomy and mountain activities. This supports the interpretation that Peja has the potential for a tourist offer that is not limited to one season. The importance of this tourist potential (Kuqi & Vishaj 2024), who identify the Peja region as an area with considerable potential for the development of sustainable tourism, relying on the combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage and local hospitality. In this sense, the results of this study suggest that the main challenge is not only to increase the number of tourists during peak periods, but to create a supply structure that can generate demand even during the months with lower activity. Such an approach could contribute to the positioning of Peja as a four-season destination. Official data also support the importance of Peja in the tourism structure of Kosovo. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, in 2024, a total of 698,068 domestic and foreign visitors and 1,522,890 overnight stays were registered in Kosovo. Compared to 2023, the number of domestic visitors increased by 4.2%, while the number of foreign visitors increased by 18.3% (ASK, 2025). At the same time, monthly data show the important position of the Peja Region in domestic tourism; for example, in October 2024 Peja registered the highest number of domestic visitors to hotels among the regions of Kosovo, with 8,578 visitors and 30,353 overnight stays (ASK, 2024). These results indicate that there is a real demand base on which further strategies for extending the tourist season can be built. However, the concentration of demand in certain periods creates challenges for local businesses. Hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, tourist agencies and providers of recreational activities need to adapt capacities, number of employees and operating costs to changes in demand. Martín Martín et al. (2020) argue that the alternation between peak and low demand periods can create economic, social and environmental consequences and limit sustainable development, especially in rural areas. Similarly, studies on households and businesses involved in rural tourism show that during the high season, labor and capital needs increase, while in the off-season local actors have to use alternative strategies to maintain income (Li et al., 2023). For Peja, this means that reducing the negative effects of seasonality should not rely only on increasing the number of tourists, but on diversifying tourism products. One direction with considerable potential is rural tourism (Lajçi et al., 2022). The development of guesthouses, local products, traditional experiences and community-related activities can create additional sources of income. The literature shows that tourism can serve as a mechanism for diversifying the livelihoods of local communities and that integrated tourism development policies are important for maximizing these benefits (Ahebwa et al., 2020). In the context of mountain areas, tourism ventures based on authenticity, experience and local networks can also create new economic opportunities (Bosworth & Farrell, 2020). Another potential component is gastronomic tourism. Gastronomy can serve not only as a complementary service for tourists.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this paper and their comparison with the literature show that seasonality in Peja should be treated both as a challenge and an opportunity for development. Seasonality creates pressure on businesses due to changes in demand, employment and capacity utilization, but the characteristics of Peja create real opportunities for diversifying the offer. Combining mountain and adventure tourism with rural, cultural and gastronomic tourism can help create a more balanced product throughout the year. In this context, cooperation between the municipality, businesses and the local community, together with digital promotion and protection of

natural resources, appears as an important condition for the long-term development of the destination. Consequently, the discussion suggests that Peja's tourism policy should gradually shift from an approach focused mainly on peak periods towards integrated management of the destination throughout the year. This approach can improve the utilization of existing capacities, create more sustainable employment opportunities and increase economic benefits for the local community. At the same time, development must maintain a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and preservation of cultural identity, positioning Peja as a competitive and sustainable four-season destination.

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