

QUIET AND BLESSED: RURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE AND VISITOR SATISFACTION IN THE SHADOW OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

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Abstract

Rural tourism has an increasing share of the country's tourism income and significantly contributes to the rural economy. Intensive research has been conducted on how Covid-19 affects the tourism industry and the challenges and opportunities the sector face. Although the rise of rural tourism is frequently highlighted post-Covid-19, research examining the satisfaction levels of visitors involved in rural tourism is almost nonexistent. The study's main aim is to determine customers' satisfaction levels from rural activities in and around the İznik District of Bursa province and to recommend improvement. We obtained data from a structured survey conducted with 408 people who visited İznik at least once. SPSS 23 program was also used to analyze the data obtained. Results show that visitors' satisfaction with nature and the environment is above average, and their satisfaction with the services provided is below average. The most critical dissatisfaction was the increasing environmental pollution, the loss of natural beauty, the local government's inability to do the necessary cleaning and maintenance work, and the lack of introductory information in places with historical and natural characteristics. Participants wanted to stay in caravans and tents rather than hotels and suggested expanding and improving those facilities. They suggested that local textures are preserved, and more local food and beverages are offered. The suggestion shows that visitors demand integrating more with nature, local life and historical texture.

Key words: Covid-19, new trends, rural tourism, rural development, tourist satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very fragile sector. It can be easily affected by all sorts of crises and negative situations that occur globally or locally. Terrorism, financial crises, pandemics, natural disasters, wars, political instability, etc. disrupt the tourism industry. The tourism sector is first affected in places that experience such unfavourable situations, and the number of tourists and tourism revenue falls severely.

The deadly new type of coronavirus (Covid-19), which emerged in Wuhan, China's Hubei province, in the last days of 2019 and spread rapidly due to the global transportation network, has caused unprecedented damage world economy while leaving tourism one of the most affected sectors. The Covid-19 Tourism and Accommodation Sector in Turkey Report prepared by Deloitte [14] states that industry managers are going through a tough time determining their operational strategies for the coming period and problems with booking cancellations,

personnel management, and financing configuration. According to the report, this period brings new business models and opportunities. The rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide accelerated the return from mass tourism to individual tourism activities. In this new challenging era, rural tourism activities are rapidly becoming widespread at national and international levels, where social distance can be maintained and carried out in small groups, and it is easier to control new hygiene requirements.

Literature review

Rural tourism

Villages around coastal centres and large cities, rural settlements near ancient cities, roadside villages, and towns are no longer unfamiliar to tourism in Turkey in recent years. Country restaurants and shopping exhibitions, even fish farms and rural roads, have met tourists or day-trippers. In addition to individual trips, travel agencies organize day trips to such places or the rural areas where they are located.

Rural tourism integrates with rural culture, natural environment and agriculture and can be easily integrated with other types of tourism. Rural tourism includes a wide variety of recreational activities. It is not a type of agricultural tourism but also includes trekking, hiking, climbing, camping, caravan, rafting, paragliding, horse riding, canoeing, fishing and bird watching [25].

Rural tourism prevents seasonal fluctuations and exceeds the regional carrying capacity by spreading throughout the year [44]. It increases rural income, complements agricultural activities, creates new employment opportunities, increases welfare in the countryside, and reduces migration from rural to urban settlements [30]. Rural tourism also aligns with new trends in the tourism market. Having lower stress factors than urban areas (pollution, traffic, noise, etc.), allowing more interaction with nature and local culture, and increased interest in outdoor recreational activities increase the share of rural tourism in this market [29]. Researchers predict that rural tourism will be on a rapid upward trend worldwide, especially with the impact of Covid-19 [2, 34, 40].

Rural tourist profile

Rural tourism has a specific customer profile. Page and Getz [39] state that tourists participating in rural tourism have high educational and income levels that are environmentally sensitive, and holiday spending is higher than mass tourism spending. Lane [33] also confirms that rural tourists are well-educated and better off than most. Although Lane [33] says that rural tourists are people of all ages, other authors characterize rural tourism as adult, senior, and family tourism. Nevertheless, they also underline that in recent years, various sporting events have become increasingly common in rural areas, and young people are becoming interested in this type of tourism. Villages or farms in rural areas gain a reputation by promoting horse riding, golf sports, nature walks and extreme sports or specializing in local handicrafts or food products [44].

Rural tourists have different priorities than mainstream tourists. The issues that they are satisfied with or not will also be different.

Mainstream visitors prefer destinations known as the classic trio of sea sun sand, standard-serving hotels or even package holidays. However, rural tourists prefer places where they can stay alone with nature in smaller, less known, yet undiscovered places [22].

Due to the impact of Covid-19, the profile of tourists participating in rural tourism is diversifying. The demands of more adventurous, younger and more expectant rural tourists will be added to the well-known demands of the mainstream tourist profile. Therefore, business owners in rural areas will have to offer services that meet more visitor group characteristics to a higher standard without compromising local characteristics. For rural businesses that already have infrastructure problems, relatively low education levels, usually work as small family businesses and have minimal financial means, it will be challenging to satisfy this growing variety of tourists.

Tourist Satisfaction

As in almost all areas, customer satisfaction in the tourism sector is vital in terms of the sustainability of tourism activities at both the micro (tourism region or enterprise) and macro-level (country) [31]. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the changing tourist expectations and demands and create touristic products or services to increase the service quality for tourist satisfaction and thus create customer loyalty [45]. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction also impacts tourists' repurchase of tourism products and destination selection. Chen and Tsai [8] refer to tourist satisfaction as the general pleasure or satisfaction the visitor feels when the travel experience meets the visitor's interests, wishes, expectations and needs. The critical point here is that the tourists should feel that the performance at the end of the trip meets their desires and expectations before the trip. In other words, satisfaction occurs for tourists who are sure their expectations are met [23].

Rural tourism is seen as an essential development tool in today's tourism. Rural tourism movements such as nature walks and nature photography are experienced in rural areas brought to tourism with the necessary infrastructure and superstructure

improvements [13]. Therefore, it is critical to determine the satisfaction levels of visitors to İznik and Lake İznik and to evaluate them within the scope of rural tourism.

Research overview

As the coronavirus pandemic began, scholars quickly put forward research. Gössling et al. [21] analyzed the changes the tourism sector is going through globally due to Covid-19. Jones and comfort [26] discussed the pandemic in the context of tourism and sustainable development. Girish [20] examined the resilience of the tourism industry to pandemics at the macro, meso and micro-level within the Covid-19 pandemic. Chebli and Ben Said [7] evaluated the effects of Covid-19 on tourism satisfaction. At the same time, Karali [28] analyzed the threats of Covid-19 to tourism and suggested the measures to be taken from the tourism stakeholders' perspective. Farzanegan et al. [17] studied the impact of Covid-19 on international tourism in 90 countries and reported more deaths in countries with high global tourist flows. However, the number of studies on rural tourism is minimal [41, 51, 53].

As with the world literature, there has been a significant increase in academic research on Covid-19 and the tourism sector in Turkey. Özçoban [38] has underlined Covid-19's impact on Turkish tourism and stressed the potential of rural tourism. Arslan and Kendir [2] evaluated the opportunities offered by the pandemic in their study in Zile, Tokat. However, research conducted under Covid-19 and rural tourism have remained extremely limited. Bilim and Özer [5] and Şengel et al. [46] have suggested that camping and caravan tourism could be an alternative to the new social distance-based holiday. Düzgün [16] assessed glamping tourism for The Post-Covid-19 period. The only destination-focused research on rural tourism was conducted by Gürbuz and Özkan [24] and focused on the opportunities and challenges that the pandemic brought to rural tourism in Trilye, Bursa.

This research investigates visitor satisfaction in the rural tourism, which has become increasingly important in recent years but has

suddenly attracted attention with Covid-19. For this purpose, İznik district, a popular tourist destination with its historical and natural beauties in Bursa province, was selected as an example. The research also aimed to put forward recommendations for raising tourist satisfaction and addressing the problem that is a source of dissatisfaction.

The primary theoretical principles of this research testing are;

How satisfied were the tourist with the destination after the Covid-19 measurements were taken?

Are satisfaction levels differing in terms of visit characteristics?

What are the recommendations of tourists to improve satisfaction?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Case

İznik, known as Nicaea in ancient times, has been recognized by the Christian world as the third "holy city" after Jerusalem and the Vatican. The First Council of Nicaea was a council of Christian bishops convened in the Bithynian city of Nicaea (now İznik, Turkey) by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325. This ecumenical council was the first effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all Christendom. The city was the capital of the Anatolian Seljuk (1075-1097), Byzantine (1204-1261) and the Ottoman Empire (1331-1335).

The agriculture sector has the most prominent role in the district economy, and İznik has a high potential for agricultural tourism. The second primary sector in İznik is tourism. The city was accepted to the Unesco World Heritage Tentative List on April 15, 2014, and efforts continue to be included in the main list. One of the most critical assets of the town is Lake İznik, which also carries the town's name.

İznik Grape Festival, first held in 1964 in İznik, was changed to the international İznik Festival in 2006 and started to be organized as a more comprehensive event and is held annually in August. The İznik Fair has been organized since 1935 between October 5-9

every year. Crafts, local food and textile are introduced in the stands opened during the fair placed around Lake İznik. Recreational activities are also available. Since 2011, the İznik Ultra Marathon has been organized. It is held annually in April for two days and is the longest trail marathon in Turkey. İznik's most famous trekking route is the Evliya Çelebi Road, which follows the route Evliya Çelebi followed on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1671. Another gem of İznik is the Sansarak Canyon. This is a 7km long canyon in the forest, located in the village of Sansarak and contains pools that can be swum in summer and a medium-level trail of 1.7 kilometres. Trekking activities and nature tours have started in recent years. Hacı Osman Village and its surroundings have also begun to host people interested in paragliding and grass skiing.

Lake İznik, the fifth largest lake in Turkey and the largest in the Marmara region, is also suitable for swimming in summer. There are olive groves, vineyards and vegetable gardens around the lake. Besides, freshwater fish such as carp, trout and catfish in the lake provide added value to commercial businesses and tourism around the lake. The Equinox Festival is held in March and September every year to view the sunset on the lake. İznik also has an untapped potential for camping and caravan tourism.

İznik district was mostly preferred for day trips until the Covid-19 pandemic. It is only one hour away from Istanbul with the new Osmangazi Bridge. Its proximity to major industrial cities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Yalova and Kocaeli, being away from the coastal crowds and offering a wide range of rural activities make İznik a trendy rural tourism destination.

Measures

The primary material of the research is the data obtained from a survey conducted with visitors to the İznik district centre and İznik Lake in Bursa province. The survey consisted of four parts. The first part included demographic characteristics of visitors, such as gender, age, education, and income status. The second part included nine questions to determine the visit profile. These are the purpose of the visit, type of lodging, length of

stay, number of visits, destination information source, average daily spending per person, whom they holiday with, mode of transportation and whether they used a travel agency or individual travellers. The third part contained 11 statements to measure tourists' satisfaction levels with the area and services they received during their stay in İznik. The final section included 9 statements that contained suggestions for increasing the satisfaction levels of tourists. We used five-point Likert scale statements that possible responses ranged from 1=*strongly disagree*; 2=*disagree*; 3=*neutral*; 4=*agree*; 5=*strongly agree*.

The survey was self-administrated and structured. The preliminary survey was appraised by academicians who are agriculture experts and tested via Google Meet with ten people. Some statements have been rephrased to make them easier to understand, and the survey has been finalized.

We have used the convenience sampling method and activated the final survey on social media between July 1 and November 30, 2020, on Twitter, Facebook pages of the provinces in the Marmara Region, and related tourism/travel/travel guides hobby and travel pages. The study's target population consists of visitors living in the Marmara Region and have visited İznik and its surroundings between June 1, and September 30 2020, when the bans on intercity travel were lifted [35]. Due to reduced flights and coach services, we only included part of the country. The Marmara Region accommodates 30% of the total country's population [36].

Cochran's [10] formula gives the minimum sample as 384. We conducted an online survey, and we had the opportunity to reach a broader sample. Survey access was terminated when the number of participants reached 700. After carelessly completed surveys were eliminated, 648 surveys suitable for use were analyzed. Besides, additional comments left on the media platforms were considered when necessary.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the survey forms were processed into the SPSS 23.0 package program. We performed the Cronbach's alpha

test to measure the internal consistency coefficient of the items included in the questionnaire. We calculated Cronbach alpha as $\alpha = 0.824$; therefore, our survey meets the reliability criterion. Additionally, the mean, standard deviation kurtosis and skewness values of the variables were calculated. Next, we tested the normality assumption using The Shapiro-Wilk test. The analysis showed that [D(648)= 0.982 $p < 0.001$] the data does not provide normal distribution. Therefore, we used the skewness and kurtosis values and found a skewness of 0.257 (SE = 0.096) and kurtosis of 0.115 (SE = 0.192). George and Mallery [19] suggest that the data show the normal distribution in cases where the corresponding variables have kurtosis and distortion values are in the range of ± 2 . Frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation values were calculated in the data analysis. Non-parametric data were analyzed by the Chi-square and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic results

Gender distribution shows that 62.7% of the participants were women, and 37.3% were men. A relatively even distribution of age: 50-64-year-olds were the highest with 31.4%, followed by 40-49-year-olds with 24%, 18-29-year-olds with 22% and 30-39-year-olds with 18.3%. Education levels show that 84.2% of the participants were university graduates, and 13.8% were high school graduates. Nevertheless, previous research has also reported that participants in online surveys are usually highly educated. The occupational distribution analysis reveals that white-collar employees in the private sector (25.2%) and civil servants (25.4%) were almost equally distributed. This was followed by retirees (19.3%). Finally, the individual income of more than half (59.8%) of the participating visitors was around ₺4,000-9,000 (₺=Turkish Lira). 17.2% were calculated to be just above the minimum monthly wage (Turkey's legal minimum monthly wage was net ₺2,324.70 in 2020).

Tourist satisfaction

Stringent measures were put in place across the country from March 2020, when the first case of Covid-19 was reported, until June 2020. Except for those in the compulsory sectors, a 'stay-at-home' order was applied for lengthy periods. Intercity movement is prohibited. Previously made reservations were cancelled, postponed or changed in destination preferences. As of June 1, with the new measures, tourism regions could start their activities. The people, who had already panicked and stressed by the stringent quarantine measures, determined their holiday preferences under the 'new normal' conditions. This study examines tourists' satisfaction with the specified destination under the new measures introduced. Hospitality scored the highest mean score (Table 1). Thus, the attitude of local people directly affects tourist satisfaction, especially in understanding more individual and experience-oriented holidays.

Table 1. Satisfaction levels of customers

Statements	M	SD
Hygiene standards and measures taken in food and beverage establishments are sufficient	2.69	1.04
Hygiene standards and measures taken in accommodation facilities are sufficient.	3.96	0.98
Hygiene standards and measures taken in entertainment and recreation facilities in the area are sufficient.	3.39	1.18
Accommodation facilities are affordable.	4.03	1.03
The Environment (City Centre, Lakeside, hiking trails) is clean.	2.56	1.14
The region's infrastructure (sewerage, road, water, etc.) is sufficient.	2.15	0.83
Local people are hospitable.	4.12	1.10
The natural beauty and animal species are protected.	3.44	1.15
The publicity of the region is sufficient.	2.45	1.14
Food and drink facilities are affordable.	3.55	0.98

M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Source: Field survey, 2020.

In his work to understand the local attitude towards tourism, Doxey [15] states that local people react at various levels depending on tourism development in their region. As they encounter tourism, their perceptions of tourism also change. The enthusiasm among the locals in the early years gives way to apathy, discomfort and even hostility over time [18]. Similarly, Butler [6] states that the stage of tourism at the destination and the number of tourists arriving at the destination are the main factors affecting the local attitude towards tourism. The increasing number of

tourists coming to the region will increase their income so that local people will favour tourists in the early years. However, every destination has a capacity threshold. Once this capacity is exceeded, in other words, as tourist-local people interaction increases over time, local people begin to think that tourists interfere with their daily lives, and their perception of tourism becomes less favourable [11,12]. Elimination of these negativities depends on the ability of the local people to be aware of the effects of tourism [48]. İznik and its surroundings have been open to tourism for a long time; however, it was more a transition point than the lead tourist destination. Therefore, the destination has not yet reached its saturation. In addition, with the economic contraction after Covid-19, local people saw tourism as a revival and showed maximum hospitality to the tourists. Thus, local hospitality achieved the highest satisfaction.

Participants believed that hygiene standards and measures in accommodation facilities were sufficient, and the region's prices were affordable. In 2018, 2,000 foreign tourists and around 35,000 local tourists stayed. This was equivalent to three days for the total bed capacity and 1.5 months' occupancy. Hotels were empty for the remaining ten months of the year. Due to these low occupancy rates, lodging was affordable in the pre-Covid-19 period. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has developed a Safe Tourism Certificate program. This program aims to implement cleaning, hygiene, and distance rules and ensure compliance with all services such as transportation, accommodation, food and drink [47]. This program obliges tourism enterprises to take extra hygiene measures, use disposable materials, and accept customers up to 60% of their available capacity. The need to comply with these measures has increased the running costs of accommodation facilities. Nevertheless, with many businesses closed and money circulation reduced, locals have tried not to reflect the cost increases in accommodation prices. This sacrifice was positively received by tourists and resulted in high satisfaction with the accommodation prices ($M=3.55$).

However, it was not possible to see the same positive picture of food and drink facilities and prices. Visitors found the current food and beverage prices in the area considerably high. Besides, the number and varieties available of these facilities were among the issues criticized by visitors. Although this is generally a problem in rural areas, visitors especially wanted to see more eateries, stalls, and cafes that sell local dishes and drinks.

Most likely, in direct proportion to the price of the service they receive, tourists were satisfied with hygiene measures in recreation and accommodation facilities but were not satisfied with restaurants and cafes. In a panic environment caused by Covid-19, everyone pays utmost attention to cleanliness and hygiene, which has raised expectations. While distance and movement can be controlled in accommodation facilities and recreation areas, the need to serve quickly in small restaurants might have created this hygiene dissatisfaction.

Visitors were satisfied with the natural beauty in and around İznik and the conservation of animal species. ($M=3.44$). On the other hand, they seemed to be very dissatisfied with environmental cleanliness ($M=2.56$). Especially the city centre picnic areas and popular walkways were not left clean by some visitors. The lack of garbage collection boxes provided and the inability to perform cleaning work effectively by local authorities played an essential role. Dissatisfaction with the region's infrastructure adequacy was high ($M=2.15$).

Local infrastructure services are insufficient in small settlements in Turkey. This inadequacy is more pronounced during the summer months when visitor numbers multiply. Existing municipal services that are set up for the small population cannot respond to the needs of this seasonally increasing crowd. Central governments carry out tourism plans and give priority to mainstream tourism. On the other hand, rural areas are prioritized for their problems with agricultural activities. Additionally, Covid-19 has increased the workload of the municipalities serving the countryside. The local government also had to do more social work and cleaning, with fewer employees (illness, work rotation and social

distance requirements). Thus, dissatisfaction with these issues, which was also the primary complaint in pre-Covid times, has become more apparent during the pandemic.

Visit characteristics and satisfaction levels

We examined the relationship between the satisfaction levels of tourists visiting İznik and the visit characteristics. Participants were asked to comment on their overall satisfaction and the specific expressions of satisfaction given in Table 2. The relationship between tourists' satisfaction and each studied variable was tested with Chi-Square and ANOVA analysis (0.05 and 0.01 significance levels). A statistically significant association was found between all the variables studied (excluding length of stay) and tourist satisfaction at 1%. The relationship was significant at 5% for the length of stay.

Research has shown that visitors were generally satisfied with the accommodation. Over 60% of visitors were satisfied with the stay. The previous section showed that visitors were satisfied with lodging prices and hygiene measures. Those who stayed with family and relatives (75%) and those who stayed in camps and caravans (65.2%) had the highest satisfaction, indicating that people were more satisfied in places where they felt attachment and controlled cleanliness and order. As mentioned in the early literature, a high level of satisfaction with camp and caravan accommodation indicates that caravan visits will quickly become the preferred type of holiday and accommodation. The social distance requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic, unspoilt nature, and the calm and peaceful environment could be why satisfaction in campsites is high.

The satisfaction was lowest in bed and breakfast (B&B). Similarly, the satisfaction of B&B residents (27.8%) was the lowest in the study conducted by Kılıç and Pelit [31] in the coastal countryside of Akcakoca in Düzce province, and satisfaction of those staying with family and friends was the highest (38.4%).

People who went to İznik and Lake İznik to escape the city crowds and be in nature

(66.7%), picnic or experience local cuisine (63.1%) had the highest satisfaction. The lowest satisfaction was seen in those who went with the hope of having fun (33.3%). Because of the pandemic, all entertainment activities were cancelled, and such places were closed. It was observed that those who visited for cultural purposes were relatively less satisfied with their visits. This dissatisfaction could be because museums closed and tour services terminated.

The tourists' satisfaction when it came to İznik and its surroundings by relying on their previous experience (60%) and recommendation (59.4%) was the highest. About half of those informed through the media and travel agencies were equally satisfied with their visit (44.4%). These findings are similar to those of Kılıç and Pelit [31]'s research. The highest level of satisfaction in the named study was achieved by those who came on advice (50.7%). Those who went with the information gained from the media scored the lowest level of satisfaction (38.3%).

Visitor numbers are directly related to their satisfaction; satisfied visitors will revisit the destination. Although the high satisfaction rate of the first visit (65%) decreased slightly on the second and third visits, the satisfaction of people who visited the region for the fourth and higher times increased (62.5%). Since previous visits were in pre-covid periods, visitors were satisfied with the measures taken in the region during the Covid-19 period.

Neal et al. [37] state that the duration of time spent on vacation will affect the tourist's satisfaction from vacation. So, the longer the tourists' vacation, the higher their satisfaction will be. Because the longer the tourists stay on vacation, the more they will benefit from the region's opportunities, interact more with the local people, and gain more experience.

Therefore, the satisfaction of those who stay more on the trip will be higher than those who do not. Contrary to mentioned research, current research has shown that the visitors with the highest satisfaction are day visitors.

Table 2. Comparison of tourist profiles and satisfaction levels

Profile	Satisfaction levels							
	N	%	SA	A	N	D	SD	
<i>Accommodation Type</i>								
Summer Rents	78	12	15.4	46.2	30.8	7.7	0.0	
Bed and Breakfast	156	24.1	19.2	34.6	26.9	15.4	3.8	
Hotel	30	4.6	0.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	$X^2(20) = 171.69$ $p < 0.001$
Family & Friends	24	3.7	25.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	
Day Trip Only	222	34.3	25.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	
Camp/Caravan	138	21.3	17.4	47.8	30.4	0.0	4.3	
Purpose of visit								
Trekking	96	14.8	31.3	18.8	25.0	18.8	6.3	
Swimming/Water Sports	68	10.5	10.3	44.1	26.5	8.8	10.3	
Restaurant/Picnic	65	10.0	26.2	36.9	27.7	9.2	0.0	
Rest / Escape to Nature	216	33.3	27.8	38.9	19.4	8.3	5.6	$X^2(28) = 108.17$ $P < 0.001$
Fishing/Hunting	63	9.7	17.5	38.1	25.4	9.5	9.5	
Family & Friends Visit	36	5.6	16.7	33.3	33.3	16.7	0.0	
History/Culture	50	7.7	24.0	24.0	24.0	16.0	12.0	
Entertainment	54	8.3	11.1	22.2	44.4	11.1	11.1	
<i>Number of visits</i>								
First	120	18.5	20.0	45.0	25.0	5.0	5.0	
Second	156	24.1	15.4	34.6	19.2	15.4	15.4	$X^2(17) = 118.87$ $p < 0.001$
Third	132	20.4	18.2	22.7	40.9	13.6	4.5	
Fourth and more	240	37.0	20.0	42.5	25.0	7.5	5.0	
Information Source								
Media	72	11.1	16.7	33.3	33.3	8.3	8.3	
Past Experience	330	50.9	16.4	43.6	23.6	12.7	3.6	$X^2(12) = 125.55$ $p < 0.001$
Recommendation	192	29.6	25.0	34.4	21.9	12.5	6.3	
Travel Agencies	54	8.3	11.1	33.3	33.3	11.1	11.1	
Length of stay								
Day Trip	222	34.3	25.0	36.4	18.2	11.4	9.1	
Weekend Break	258	39.7	25.0	30.6	16.7	13.9	13.9	$X^2(12) = 32.74$ $p = 0.001, p < 0.005$
Up to 1 week	138	21.3	13.0	34.8	34.8	13.0	4.3	
Above a week	30	4.6	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	
Average daily spend (TL)								
0-50	156	24.1	23.1	34.6	23.1	15.4	3.8	
51-100	198	30.6	12.1	48.5	24.2	12.1	3.0	$X^2(4) = 54.66$ $p < 0.001$
101-250	144	22.2	25.0	37.5	16.7	12.5	8.3	
251-500	78	12.0	7.7	30.8	38.5	15.4	7.7	
500+	72	11.1	8.3	58.3	25.0	0.0	8.3	
Arrival								
Travel Agency	48	7.4	12.5	25.0	62.5	0.0	0.0	$X^2(4) = 43.77$ $p < 0.001$
Individual	600	92.6	19.0	28.0	31.0	13.0	9.0	
<i>Accompanied</i>								
Family	291	44.9	11.7	41.9	29.6	10.3	6.5	
Friends	109	16.8	33.0	22.0	18.3	21.1	5.5	$X^2(16) = 89.01$ $p < 0.001$
Individually	81	12.5	29.6	33.3	22.2	14.8	0.0	
Partner	98	15.1	14.3	29.6	24.5	19.4	12.2	
Other	69	10.6	17.4	30.4	26.1	17.4	8.7	
Transportation								
Caravan/ motorbike	72	11.1	16.7	33.3	33.3	8.3	8.3	
Private Car	335	51.7	23.3	43.0	17.6	12.5	3.6	$X^2(16) = 134.39$ $p < 0.001$
Public Transport	192	29.6	25.0	34.4	21.9	12.5	6.3	
Tour/Agency	49	7.6	12.2	36.7	36.7	12.2	2.0	

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, N: Neutral, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree
 Source: Field survey, 2020.

Interestingly, as the stay length increased, the satisfaction level somewhat decreased. Nevertheless, satisfaction levels again rose in visitors who stayed a week and above, confirming Neal et al. [37]'s thesis. Thus, as the rate of stay in the region increases, the decrease in satisfaction may be related to reducing existing activities and amenities due to Covid-19 measures. Holidaymakers have been left in situations such as constantly paying attention to distance and hygiene requirements, queueing longer, and

understanding firms providing more services with fewer employees.

Being satisfied with the holiday is highly related to whom the holiday was spent. The expectations and agenda of each individual who makes the holiday are different, and it is not easy to meet and satisfy the expectations of each individual at the same time. It also concerns social structure and habits with whom the holiday will be spent. In Mediterranean origin and family-oriented countries, such as Turkey, the tradition of going on vacation alone has not yet become

widespread. Instead, holidays are usually held with family members or groups of friends.

Numerous studies in the literature examine the relationship between tourists' spending levels and their satisfaction. Jurdana and Frleta [27] research showed that satisfaction increases tourists' daily expenditure. The results of Chen and Chang's [9] research confirm that higher visitor satisfaction leads to higher spending. Kim et al. [32] showed that festival satisfaction is an essential determinant of tourist spending. Serra et al. [42] agreed that satisfaction affects tourist spending, with less satisfied tourists tending to spend less. On the other hand, the results of Wang and Davidson's [49] research underlined that satisfaction with travel is not significantly associated with total tourist spending. Kim et al. [32] caution that there is a need for a better understanding of the role of visitor satisfaction in influencing individuals' spending levels.

Current research has not found a linear relationship between daily spending levels and satisfaction levels. However, the satisfaction of those with daily expenses above ₺500 was higher than those above ₺50 and below (The legal minimum daily wage was gross ₺98.10). A similar trend has been recorded in the Kılıç and Pelit [31] research. Although satisfaction at the lowest spending level (31.9%) increased at the next level, it declined rapidly, but satisfaction at the highest spending level became the highest (42.3%).

The satisfaction levels of those who came individually to the study scored highest (62.9%). Visitors who came with friends were the second most satisfied group (55%), followed by family members (53.6%). In the Kılıç and Pelit [31] survey, the lowest satisfaction was obtained from individual visitors (29,8%). The satisfaction levels of those who came with their spouses were the lowest (43.9%). It is reported that stress and disputes have increased in couples who are constantly at home since the break of Covid-19 [4, 50]. Although rural environments are designed to give people peace and relieve stress, research shows that couples cannot relax and are unhappy with their holidays. Although the lowest satisfaction in the current

study came from couples, compared to similar studies, their satisfaction levels remain high [31, 36.8%].

The satisfaction of those who came with private vehicles was highest (66.3%), while the satisfaction of those who came with public transport (59.4%) and tours (48.9%) was relatively low. This may have been caused by the worry of contracting the virus and staying in crowded and closed spaces. However, visitors were happy to take a caravan holiday, but they were not happy to travel by caravan. This may have been caused by infrastructure deficiencies in transportation to the campsite.

Suggestions to increase tourist satisfaction

This section puts forward visitors' suggestions to increase their satisfaction with İznik and its surroundings. Table 3 summarises the participants' suggestions for improving visit satisfaction.

Due to the outbreak, tourism activities decreased, and hotel occupancy rates were significantly reduced. Those who wanted to get away from crowded holiday destinations such as hotels and pensions began to show interest in rental homes, villas, camping or caravans. Bungalows, caravans and tents have been heavily favoured as campsites allow for maintaining social distance [3, 46, 52]. Yetiş [52] pointed out that glamping combines luxury and camping and is an option for visitors who wish to escape to nature but do not want to compromise their comfort. Düzgün [16] likewise confirmed that interest in glamping tourism has increased depending on tourist preferences in Turkey and worldwide after the pandemic. Akpur and Zengin [1] stated that Lake İznik and its surroundings have a rich potential in camping and caravan tourism. They also emphasized that the region can be a preferred camp centre if businesses increase service standards. They raised concerns that no certified camping facility complies with international standards in and around Lake İznik. They also reported that the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism office, whom they interviewed, said no planned work on camping and caravan tourism in the region. However, the authors emphasized that the destination has a compelling potential for camping and caravan

tourism. The results of this research support the literature [43]. Participants mostly suggested increasing the number of caravan and tent sites and improving the facilities of these cities (M = 4.72). Having shops selling or hiring camping equipment was another point that visitors recommended increasing visitor satisfaction (M=2.88).

Table 3. Participants' suggestions to increase satisfaction levels.

Suggestions	M	SD
Tents and camping facilities should be expanded.	4.27	1.00
More local food and homemade products in stalls and shops	4.12	1.05
It would be helpful to have guided tours for visitors outside organized tours.	4.06	1.08
More food variety in restaurants and eateries should be available.	3.84	1.05
The presence of information boards related to natural/historical sites makes the visit more beneficial	3.77	1.10
Free local maps should be available on the tourism information points	3.45	1.27
Promotion of local amenities needs to be done better	3.34	1.06
Selling non-local products should be restricted	3.00	1.07
There should be shops that sell and rent tents and camping equipment.	2.88	1.36

M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation
 Source: Field survey, 2020.

Another vital aspect expressed by visitors was that instead of selling souvenirs that are now seen everywhere and believed to have been brought from China, shops sell hand-made products (mostly food) specific to the region (M=4.12). A considerable number of participants suggested a ban on selling non-local products (M=3.00). This demand was influenced by the desire to protect the local people, whom the pandemic has badly hit. Also, it is thought that the fear of disease transmission from products that will be imported from China is also compelling.

Respondents highlighted the need for small guided tours for independent visitors (4.06). Visitors also suggest placing information plates on the historical and natural sites would benefit the visit (M=3.77). In the same line, they stressed the need for free local maps (M=3.45). As stated in the previous section of the survey, visitors were dissatisfied with the area's food and beverage facilities and choices. They suggested increasing both the number of facilities and the varieties offered.

CONCLUSIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed people's tourism preferences, and a general trend towards rural tourism activities has begun, where individual activities can be carried out, and social distance can be maintained. The opportunities Covid-19 brings to the tourism sector are predominantly in rural tourism. However, seizing the opportunities and sustaining rural tourism's success is only possible by satisfying the tourists.

This study evaluated tourists' satisfaction levels and determined some factors that positively and negatively impact their satisfaction. We also tried identifying the characteristics of visits where satisfaction levels were highest. Finally, we asked tourists about suggestions that could increase their satisfaction levels and listed the most critical suggestions identified by them.

The hospitality of the local people was the top reason for satisfaction. The most critical dissatisfaction highlighted by the participants was the increasing environmental pollution, the loss of natural beauty, the inability of local governments to do the necessary cleaning and maintenance work, and the lack of introductory information in places with historical and natural characteristics.

Findings related to 'visit characteristics' showed that those who stayed with family and friends or in a caravan, who wanted to escape the city's crowds and be in nature, and who travelled individually and spent 500TL and above were the highest satisfied visitors. The least satisfied visitors were those who came with the hope of entertainment, stayed in B&B and used public transport.

The survey showed a significant increase in demand for camping and caravan accommodation in İznik. An inventory study should determine areas suitable for camping and caravans. One of the most significant shortcomings in İznik is the lack of infrastructure investment. Caravan tourism participants and campers are turning to areas with available infrastructure. Especially investments such as caravan parks and campgrounds should be planned to gain a share of this new and proliferating market.

The National Camping and Caravan Federation states that caravan tourism is not included in the tourism diversity list published by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Caravan tourism should be included in the list immediately.

In addition, adequate signposting and local guidance should be provided.

Tourist satisfaction should not be seen only as a problem of small rural enterprises. Instead, local governments should support rural businesses. The number of non-governmental organizations such as 'Green Suitcase' supporting rural tourism should increase. Within the scope of the IPARD (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance on Rural Development) 2 call, farmers are given 50% to 70% of the hotel, motel or hostel investments made for rural tourism as grants until 2020. However, farmers are often unaware of these grants or do not apply because they find the application process over complicated. Rural tourism aid packages should be increased, and these should be simple enough for rural people to understand; applications should be eased.

Training programs should be developed to improve the rural tourism management and communication skills of the rural people.

In addition to the 'Tourism and Hotel Management' departments in universities, the 'Rural Tourism Management' department should be opened. An effective rural tourism management unit should be set up within the Ministries of Tourism.

This research is limited to the District of İznik. Therefore, to better analyze the changing tourist preferences and satisfaction after Covid-19, similar studies must be repeated in different rural destinations with other characteristics. The results drawn from this study will guide local administrators, local businesses and policymakers, especially considering the scarcity of studies on the satisfaction of rural tourists.

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