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**NATURE, CULTURE AND GASTRONOMY EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE
EASTERN TOURISTS: THE CASE OF TURKEY**

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

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**NATURE, CULTURE AND GASTRONOMY EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE
EASTERN TOURISTS: THE CASE OF TURKEY**

ABSTRACT

The tourism sector is one of the most important global income sectors, and an increasingly important sector in Turkey. Turkey hosts tourists of different nationalities every year, and has recently attracted an influx of tourists from the Middle East. Therefore, it is important to understand the profiles, motivations and experiences of Arab tourists to ensure tourism development and tourist satisfaction in Turkey. We investigated Middle Eastern tourists' nature, culture and gastronomic experiences through qualitative case studies, interviews, and observations. Arab tourists, from different Middle Eastern countries, answered 32 interview questions each. We also included 9 questions for tour guides. Data were collected via interviews and observations with 26 participants, a focus group included 13 participants, and 7 tourist guides. In addition to them I have also interviewed a man who are service driver in August 2022. Most Arab tourists were primarily motivated to visit Turkey for its nature. This suggests that Turkey's natural beauty is one of the most powerful contributors to tourist satisfaction. While nature was the most attractive element, Arab tourists were also attracted by gastronomy and then culture. They were influenced by Turkey's socio-cultural values and, especially, by Turkish television programs. The tourists were deeply affected by Turkish culture, sometimes supplementing their own culture (or leaving it behind entirely) to imitate Turkish culture. This thesis concludes with suggestions for those working in the tourism industry to better appeal to Arab tourists and grow this emerging market in Turkey.

Keywords: Tourist experience, Tourist motivation, Nature, Culture, Gastronomy, Geopolitics.

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ÖZET

Tüm dünyada en önemli gelir sektörlerinden biri olan turizm sektörü Türkiye'de de en önemli sektörlerinden biri olmuştur. Her yıl farklı milletlerin turistlerine ev sahipliği yapan Türkiye, son zamanlarda Ortadoğulu turist akımına uğramıştır. Arap turistlerin profillerini, motivasyonlarını ve deneyimlerini anlamak. Türkiye'nin turizm gelişimi ve turistlerin memnuniyeti için çok önemlidir. Bu bağlamda bu tez Ortadoğulu turistlerin doğa, kültür, ve gastronomi deneyimlerini anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Bu çalışmada nitel yöntemi ve durum çalışması metodunu kullanılmıştır, turistlerle mülakat ve gözlem yapılmıştır. Örneklemimiz farklı Ortadoğu ülkelerinden gelen Arap turistlerdi. Katılımcılara toplamda 32 mülakat soru vardı, turist rehberlerine ise 9 soru. Ağustos 2022'de 26 katılımcı, 13 katılımcı içeren bir odak grup, 7 turist rehberi ve servis şöförü ile görüşme ve gözlem yoluyla veriler toplanmıştır. Sonuç olarak Arap turistlerin Türkiye'yi ziyaret etmelerinin temel sebebinin doğa olduğunu gördük. Bu sonuçlar, Türkiye'nin doğası turist memnuniyetini karşılayan en güçlü nesne olduğunu göstermektedir. Arap turistlerin en çok doğadan etkilendikleri ve memnuniyetleri için en çekici unsurun doğa olduğu, ikinci sırada gastronomi ve üçüncü sırada kültür vardı. Ayrıca, Türkiye'nin sosyo kültürel değerlerinde çok etkilendiklerini gördük özellikle türk dizileri ve programları. kültürlerini çok etkiliyor, kendi kültürlerini unutup Türk kültürünü taklit ediyorlar veya kültürlerine yeni şeyler katıyorlar. Tezin sonunda da Turizmde çalışanlar için önerilerde bulunduk kendilerini bu konuda daha fazla geliştirmeleri ve Türkiye'nin sahip olduğu Arap turistlerini kaybetmemek için.

Anahtar kelimeler: Turist deneyimi, Turist motivasyonları, Doğa, Kültür. Gastronomi, Jeopolitik.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations used in this study, along with their explanations, are presented below.

Abbreviations	Descriptions
WTO	World Tourism Organization
ETC	<i>Et cetera</i>
ET AL	<i>Et alia</i>
ELT	Experiential learning theory
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

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We raise in degrees whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is one (more) knowing {Yusuf, 76}.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the third largest global economic sector, only surpassed by manufacturing and agriculture (Naidoo & Sharpley, 2016, p.4). Tourism's economic benefits include enhancing cross-cultural communication and strengthening relationships between the peoples of all countries in the world; therefore, many countries prioritise tourism growth, regardless of the strength and diversity of their other economic sectors (2021, p. 381, عثمان. أ). One of the main purposes of tourism is to deliver enjoyable experiences. Recently, Turkey has seen a surge in Arab vacationers, and it is critically important to ensure they have an enjoyable stay. Yet, there is a dearth of studies on Arab tourist experiences in Turkey, including on the shortcomings and challenges they encounter. Therefore, this study drew on a sample of Arab tourists to determine how Arab visitors experienced Turkey and what they wanted from their vacations.

Much research has been conducted on the topic of travel. For instance, Neuhofer (2014) advocates the Technology-Enhanced Tourist Experience perspective. Many other scholars (Demir & Demirel, 2019; Akkuş, 2017; Keskin et al., 2020; Demir, 2019; Kırtıl, 2019; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Kim et al., 2012) have noted that quality tourism experiences are memorable and unforgettable. Cavlak and Ruziye's (2019) investigation considered similarities and differences in domestic and international travellers' experiences at the same location and at the same time. Akyürek and Kutukz (2020) looked at how food factors into visitor experiences, while Ban and Glec (2018) considered the impact of social media on vacations. Ercan's (2019) study examined accessible travel experiences for people with visual impairments. Ning (2017) investigated authenticity in the travel experience. Mannell & Iso-Ahola (1987) looked at the nature of tourism experiences. Finally, Çevik (2017) conducted a study on cultural environments and the tourism experience. To date, no research has simultaneously combined Arab tourists' nature, culture, and cuisine experiences. This significant gap motivated our topic selection.

The evolution of tourism research over the past 20 years is evidenced by the proliferation of specialist academic journals (Davies, 2003, p.97). They host research

from particular interest areas within the tourism and leisure sectors, including activities like entertainment, sports, hospitality, and events. Each of these industries exists to provide experiences for customers. Some companies, like those specialising in adventure tourism, strive to provide amazing and life-changing experiences, while others (e.g., a local café) concentrate on more ordinary activities that are nonetheless important to their clientele. Companies experience management allows them to maintain competitiveness in a globally competitive and accessible (via the internet) goods and services landscape (Morgan et al., 2010, p. 14).

The tourism sector is an experiential sector (Cavlak & Ruziye, 2019, p.163). This insight was originally documented by Holbrook and Hirschman in the 1960s, while the marketing literature derived the idea of 'experience' in 1982 (Akkuş, 2017, p. 224). Tourist experiences are created by what visitors do when they visit a place. Tourism experiences are meant to satiate visitors' needs for knowledge, fun, relaxation, escape from daily life and work, and interaction with people from various cultures (Keskin et al., 2020, p.240; Ryan, 2010, p.3).

The main reason Middle Eastern tourists favour Turkey as a destination is its nature. The guides agreed that Middle Eastern tourists admired Turkey's natural beauty, which contrasted with their dry, desert homes. They enjoyed Turkey's unique terrain, which offered ideal experiences for them to satisfy their yearning for nature.

We found that visitors from the Middle East are not particularly passionate about or interested in culture. Barely any tourists paid attention to Turkey's cultural landmarks while visiting. The tourists responded with phrases like, "Arabs today don't cherish the culture and don't teach their children." We presumed that historical and perpetual conflict in Arab countries has lowered residents' regard for culture and placed a greater emphasis on having a good time. In reference to the Covid-19 era, another tourist stated, "the whole world was under quarantine for a long time, aircraft were suspended, no one could get outside, and everyone was upset. Once life returned to normal, we all started going to natural regions to relax and forget the catastrophe because we are a part of nature." Our research indicates that tourists favour Turkey as a destination because it is a Muslim country and every restaurant serves halal meals.

While all tourists have a mild interest in Turkish food, a few had a strong passion for it.

Modern tourism ideas include Islamic tourism and halal hospitality (similar to the idea of "Halal food"). A recent trend in travel is halal tourism, which first gained popularity in the Middle East but later spread to many other nations. Arab and Muslim tourists often prefer to visit Muslim nations instead of European and North American destinations (Qaddahat et al., 2016, p.377-378).

Today's travellers want to do more than just see the sights—they may travel for cultural, natural, gastronomic, or other reasons. Throughout the tourist process, they seek out more remarkable objects, gather unique and exotic memories, and have unique experiences (Bilgimöz & Gülcan, 2021, p.143).

Aho (2001) outlined four primary categories of tourist experiences. The first is emotional influence, which records travellers' emotional impressions and emotional experiences. The second concerns what tourists know, that is, the knowledge they acquire through their novel and informative experiences. The third centres tourist actions: numerous activities have significant effects on human health in the travel destination, including competitive games, sports, and local games for tourists to enjoy themselves. During these activities, tourists can have 'practice experiences' by displaying some of their talents and honing their skills (Keskin et al., 2020, p.240). The fourth category of tourism experiences involves change: visitors interact with other people and take part in a variety of experiences and events while on tour. Each fresh experience influences visitors' ideas and opinions. These encounters can alter visitor's perceptions and even their way of life through transformational experiences (Aho, 2001, p.33).

A memorable "experience" might be the primary determinant of a tourist's contentment, engagement, and lasting impression of a place (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017, p.17). Therefore, enhancing the customer experience is a top priority for travel companies in the tourist sector (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019, p.207). To manage tourism destinations and achieve sustainable tourism development, destination communities

should understand how tourism experiences are best delivered based on the context and market of the destination (Kastenholz et al., 2012, p.207; Albrecht & Haid, 2023).

Tourists commonly encounter geopolitics when travelling; however, tourism studies still does not fully understand this ostensibly omnipresent behaviour. Researchers have examined the geopolitical implications of a number of tourism-related themes, including post-colonialism, war, military occupation, border security, nation-building, and popular geopolitics. However, the geopolitical implications of the *actual tourism encounter* have not yet been thoroughly investigated (Mostafanezhad & Promburo, 2018, Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019, p.70; Dittmer & Dodds, 2013). Therefore, this study connects geopolitics and traveller experiences. It focuses on Middle Eastern traveller's experiences with nature, culture, and food and examines Arab tourist's environmental, cultural, and culinary experiences in Turkey from a geopolitical perspective.

According to information from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Arab tourists accounted for a significant number of Turkey's 45,050,097 visitors from January to October 2022 (Figure 1).

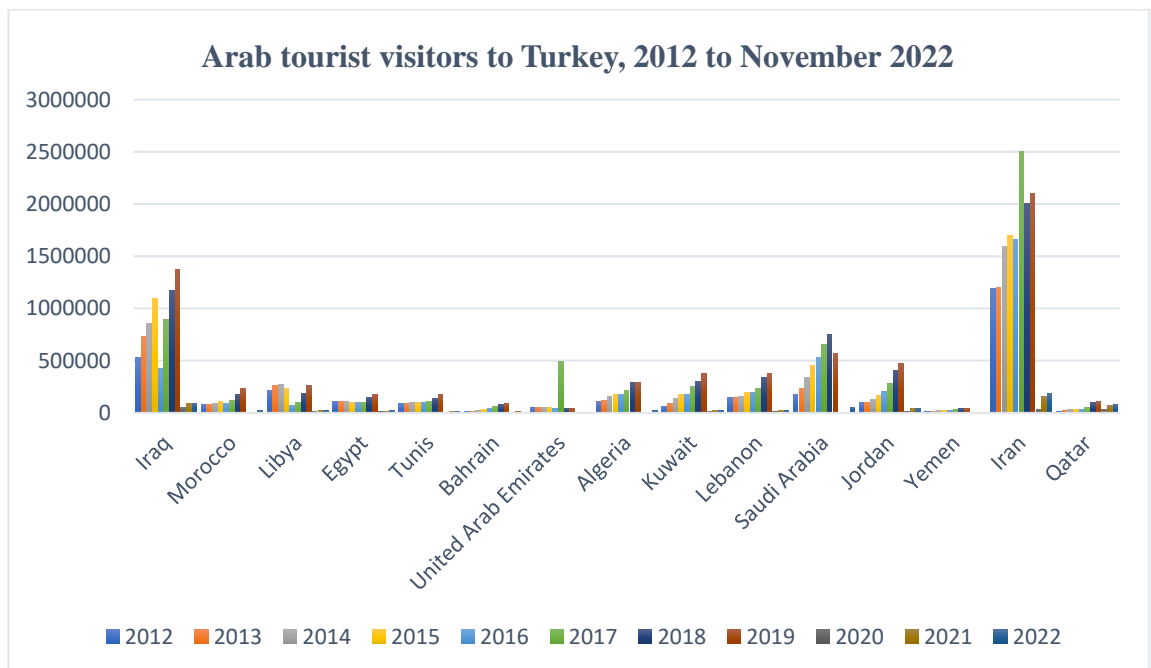


Figure 1: Arab tourist visitors to Turkey, 2012 to November 2022.

Source: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Table 1: Arab tourists to Turkey by country of origin, 2012 to November 2022.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Iraq	533149	730639	857246	1094144	420831	896876	1172896	1374896	54457	87497	93080
Morocco	77884	82579	89562	109775	87660	114155	176538	234264	1223	8108	21953
Libya	213890	264266	267501	234762	72014	99395	188312	259243	15397	24237	20596
Egypt	112025	107437	108762	100040	94871	100971	148943	177655	10182	15215	23420
Tunis	86595	91683	100612	102341	100185	111627	142372	172587	3484	15496	17565
Bahrain	13342	16230	24305	32476	41505	59442	77075	90299	306	8700	6636
United Arab Emirates	48071	52424	53736	51600	38315	493360	43292	37500	241	4017	7464
Algeria	104489	118189	160052	171873	176233	213333	288207	295512	1223	8108	21953
Kuwait	65167	88238	133128	174486	179938	255644	298620	374191	17100	27176	24164
Lebanon	144491	143629	161274	197552	191642	237476	338837	376721	12099	24543	22306
Saudi Arabia	175467	234220	341786	450674	530410	651170	747233	564816	674	874	56032
Jordan	102154	102871	131329	162866	203179	277729	406469	474874	11262	37307	39763
Yemen	11826	17354	26033	24237	25325	28491	39545	41673	1383	2482	3009
Iran	1186343	1196801	1590664	1700385	1665160	2501948	2001744	2102890	33795	15571 4	18594 5
Qatar	13971	18630	29743	35832	32681	48764	96327	108496	27591	69458	80174

Source: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

A. The Purpose and Importance of This Thesis

This is the first Master's thesis examining how Middle Eastern tourists interact with nature, culture, and cuisine from a geopolitical standpoint. The tourist experience concept is used to understand, study, and analyse Arab tourists in Turkey. These theories assume that people travel to experience many aspects of tourism, such as nature, culture, and gastronomy. Academics and industry professionals alike have recently paid close attention to the idea of the tourism experience (Tueanrat et al. 2021).

This study's primary goal is to examine the tourism experience from a geopolitical viewpoint. The 'tourism experience' concept has been a significant cornerstone of tourism research since the 1960s (Uriely, 2005). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) define experience as a consumer activity that generates various emotional associations for consumer goods (see also Bayraktar, 2020). In contrast, the Turkish Language Association (2019) defines experience as "all the knowledge a person has gathered throughout the course of their life or over a certain period of time".

Though many studies in the tourism literature concentrate on the visitor experience, few have situated Middle Eastern travellers from a geopolitical perspective. We examine tourist experiences in Turkey to understand what motivates Middle Eastern visitors to travel (e.g., cuisine, culture, or natural beauty). Understanding the tourist experience is important for the development of the tourism sector in Turkey. Therefore, the lack of research on Middle Eastern tourist experiences in Turkey informed the topic selection. This research will benefit anyone looking to invest in any tourism industry serving Middle Eastern travellers. It will also be useful for governmental actors charged with enhancing Turkey's tourism. Researchers can also learn from our findings on Middle Eastern tourists' motivations for travelling to Turkey. Finally, anyone interested in the travel motivations and values of Arab tourists

will find utility in this study. In the short term, this study hopes to conceptualise the thoughts, desires, and experiences of Middle Eastern tourists.

Research questions:

1. How do Middle Eastern tourists experience nature, culture, and gastronomy in Turkey?
2. What social and cultural ideals shape their experience?
3. How do Turkey's geopolitics affect Middle Eastern tourists?
4. Why do Middle Eastern tourists want to revisit Turkey?

B. Research Problem

Turkish tourism businesses catering to Arab tourists frequently encounter issues and deficiencies when providing services. Therefore, it is important to understand what Arab visitors to Turkey like and dislike, how Turkish culture affects them, and what foods they prefer. Middle Eastern visitors to Turkey also encounter many difficulties in their tourism experiences. We offer solutions that will provide Arab tourists with a more memorable trip and encourage them to visit Turkey again. This study also contributes to emergent work in the geopolitics of tourism by bridging the two concepts in examining Middle Eastern visitors to Turkey and their experiences. We elucidate Arab tourists' experiences with natural, cultural, and culinary tourism in Turkey. Lastly, we examine how Turkey's geopolitics affect travellers from the Middle East.

C. Research Gap

Middle Eastern travellers have been more attracted to Turkey in recent years, and visitor numbers have grown over time. Therefore, it is important to understand why tourists choose to come to our country and what kind of wonderful experiences with Turkish nature, culture, and cuisine they seek. Despite numerous studies on the tourist experience (a significant part of the tourism literature), certain gaps remain.

This includes the experiences of Arab tourists, which has only been addressed by a small amount of research.

It is crucial to understand the visitor experience to improve the Turkish tourism industry. Yet, there is a dearth of studies on Middle Eastern tourists' experiences in Turkey. Most recent research has concentrated on just one facet of the tourist experience (e.g., nature, culture or gastronomy). However, this thesis is unique, as it examines three aspects of the tourist experience (nature, culture and gastronomy) from a wider perspective. It also contributes to a newly emerging subject that the travel literature tourism from a geopolitical perspective, as we think this issue is critical for Turkey's existing tourism sector. These findings will help develop the nature, gastronomy and culture elements of Turkey's tourism. This study contributes to my Master's project profiling Arab tourists and investigating how to provide unforgettable experiences and increase revisit intentions so that Turkey's nature, culture and gastronomy tourism may become more sustainable.

D. Historical, Cultural and Political Relationships Between Turkey and Middle Eastern Countries

The phrase "Middle East" first became popular at the turn of the 20th century and is now more of a political concept than a cultural or geographical one. Over time, the regions, countries, and physical areas that make up this idea have evolved. Thus, it has always been unclear exactly where 'the Middle East' is located or where its borders start and stop. However, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and the Arab countries are generally considered part of the Middle East (Sinkaya, 2016, p.2).

There were many historical relations between Turks and Arabs. However, Turkey broke with its traditional foreign policy to expand its political, cultural, and economic presence in the Middle East in recent years (Akgün et al., 2010, p. 3). Turkey and the Middle East are geographically linked, but this proximity goes beyond physical nearness. For instance, the importance of Islam and Muslim identity in Turkish foreign policy has grown, and Middle Eastern nations have embraced this shift (Turkish

foreign policy formerly had a western-oriented identity). Turkey's relations with other nations in the region have improved due to shared unfavourable sentiments toward the West after the US invasion of Iraq (Yilmaz, 2020, p.14). Turkey's Middle East strategy has traditionally been influenced (positively and negatively) by its alliances with the West. However, in recent years, this connection seems to be inversed. In this new era, Turkish involvement in the Middle East is now so intense that it sometimes negatively impacts the country's relations with the West (Sinkaya, 2011).

The region is globally relevant due to its increased economic, strategic, cultural, and demographic features. It is also historically significant as the birthplace and development nexus of civilisations, and the hub of monotheistic religions. Today, the Middle East's politics are characterised by complexity, uncertainty, instability, shakiness, and a lack of democratic systems traditional structures and processes often resist democratisation. This is not simply a problem of the current age, but a common problem carried over from history to the present (Dursun, et al., 2005, p.311).

Turkey's Middle East strategy is influenced by a wide range of factors. In addition to history, geography, and social elements, Turkey's regional policies are influenced by political elites' preferences for foreign policy and the geopolitical makeup of the area (Sinkaya, 2011). As Bayraktar (2015) states, Turkey's relations with the Middle East are influenced by a variety of internal and foreign variables due to their shared geographical, historical, political, and cultural heritage. Internal variables influencing Turkey's Middle East policies include Turkey's geopolitical, geostrategic, and strategic importance and the Middle East's role in geopolitics, geo-strategy, and geo-importance. It is more difficult to control the external forces influencing Turkey's Middle East policies. The Great Powers' Mediterranean policies (i.e., toward Turkey and the Middle East) have pressured Turkey, even occasionally cornering its options.

The Middle East has perhaps been the most significant world region throughout history and into the present, particularly in terms of political, strategic, cultural, economic, and overall international relations. Primary political determinants in the region include geography, culture, oil, religion, transit routes, and demographic

affluence. The Middle East, as a cultural region, has had an incredible influence on human history. Notably, three major world religions Islam, Christianity, and Judaism were developed here. These religions originated, evolved, and expanded from the holiest locations on earth (in Egypt, Palestine, and the Hejaz) (Dursun et al., 2005, p.311-312).



CHAPTER 1

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

1.1. Literature Review

The tourism industry is one of the most critical industries for national growth generally, and it is one of Turkey's largest income sources. Therefore, it is essential to examine the characteristics of visitors from the Middle East who visit Turkey and their motivations for doing so to better develop sustainable tourism. This study investigates the ecological, cultural, and culinary experiences of Middle Eastern tourists from a geopolitical perspective.

There are as many different types of tourism experiences as there are tourists (Sharpley & Stone, 2010). However, one key reason individuals engage in tourism and tourism-related activities is to gain new experiences. Destination service providers should be dedicated to giving visitors satisfying experiences. This study closes a research gap by shedding light on Middle Eastern tourist's (natural, cultural, and culinary) experiences in Turkey from a geopolitical perspective. Few studies have examined travellers from the Middle East (Birenboim, 2016), so studies on this topic and from this perspective are scarce.

Arab countries are often said to lack natural beauty due to their arid and dry characteristics (they generally focus on iconic built environments over natural ones). Therefore, Arabs prefer to travel to Turkey, which is renowned for its eclectic nature. Nature is the most priceless gift from earth since mountains, seas, forests, lakes, and hills are necessary for our survival. It is crucial that we appreciate this gift from nature and preserve it for future generations. Many nations, particularly those in the Middle East, choose to combat dryness and deserts, rather than taking advantage of these unique qualities.

Turkey also still retains and maintains many of its cultural traditions and customs. It is well-known for its historical and archaeological sites from the imperial era. The Turks have admirably maintained and repaired the country's historical and cultural treasures, allowing culture to be a crucial feature in driving the country's growing tourism market. Tourists are often said to look for historical sites and museums in order to learn more about the history, culture, and traditions of the countries they visit. However, our investigation revealed that, in contrast to our predictions, shockingly few Middle Eastern tourists visited Turkey's cultural landmarks.

Turkish people have long placed great importance on their food and gastronomy. The Turkish culinary tradition involves a long history of flavours. Turkish cuisine, which originated in the 10th and 11th centuries, is based on the Seljuk and Ottoman empire periods, has undergone significant development, and now has flavours to suit any palate. According to our research, some consumers liked the taste of Turkish food, while others did not. Most Middle Eastern tourists enjoyed Turkish kebab, Turkish baklava, and grill. The tourists who did not like the taste of Turkish cuisine frequently ate extremely spicy foods at home and were served was also of a low quality. They believed the meals lacked salt and were bland. Others acknowledged that they were not used to such flavours and needed some time to get acquainted with them. Most visitors from the Middle East regarded Turkish cuisine as excellent in terms of cleanliness and hygienic presentation.

These understandings of the tourists and demographics will allow tourism agencies to better comprehend what foreign visitors enjoy and dislike about Turkey. Our recommendations can help businesses in the tourism industry to improve their performance while also guiding scholars interested in Middle Eastern tourist's experiences.

This study only examined the (natural, cultural, and gastronomical) experiences of Middle Eastern tourists. To generalise these findings, future research might include tourists from other countries and areas. Such research could assist companies in the tourism industry in better addressing the issues we outline in the

suggestions section. For instance, service providers in destinations could improve their foreign language skills and treat Arab tourists better to improve their travel experiences and make them more memorable. This research also serves as a roadmap for tourism researchers who are interested in the topic.

One of the main motivations people engage in tourism and tourism-related activities is to get new experiences. Destination service providers work hard to provide tourists with positive experiences. This study addresses a gap in the literature and clarifies the (natural, cultural, and gastronomic) experiences of Middle Eastern tourists from a geopolitical viewpoint because little research has examined Middle Eastern visitor's experiences (Birenboim, 2016).

1.1.1. Nature-Based Tourism

Tourists who want to experience nature can visit national parks, zoos, protected regions, and other locations with unaltered natural structures (Funda et al., 2021). Nature-based travel has become one of the most well-liked forms of tourism in recent years. (Namazov, 2021), though climate change has created serious obstacles (Nourmohammadi & Gómez-Martn, 2022, p.1). In nature-based tourism, experiences differ according to climates. in this context, Spatial and temporal analysis of nature-based tourism is very important (Şeremet & Cihangir, 2022). Nature-based travel is the fastest-growing alternative tourism category in Europe (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). The primary function of nature in the tourism industry is to draw visitors to the destination (Valentine, 1992; Fredman et al., 2012).

Packer et al. (2014) investigated the needs, interests, and experiences of Chinese nature-based visitors to Australia. They examined the attitudes of Chinese and Australian (domestic) tourists toward the environment, animals, and nature using a questionnaire. They found that Chinese visitors had feelings of fear or Apprehension for animals and were less experienced with them than Australian visitors. Similarly, Kastenholz & Lima (2012), Carneiro et al. (2015), and Kastenholz et al. (2012) concentrated on tourist perspectives of Portugal to evaluate the nature of the tourist experience, perceptions, legacy, and traditions of rural landscapes. Travellers who

visited Portuguese villages reported that they were most impacted by the colour green; the country's landscapes left them with the best impressions of their trip. The most significant elements that drew and satisfied tourists were the emotional, natural, cultural, and social characteristics of rural tourism locations.

Curtin & Brown (2019) studied participants' Natural experiences on an elephant conservation trip in Nepal's Bardia National Park using qualitative research methods, including participant observation. Similarly, Filep (2012) also used qualitative methods (ethnographic participant observation) to explore happiness in the context of travel experiences. At the end of the tour, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted over two days; an informal, semi-structured interview format was used. The findings revealed that participant's desires to volunteer were secondary to their desire to travel.

Brun et al. (2020) measure the impact of tourist's experiential tendencies (cognitive and affective/sensory) on the social dimension of the tourist experience in the travel agency sector. They also explored the impact of social experience on customer trust levels in travel agency providers. The findings indicate an emotional/sensory predisposition that positively influences social experience with varying results (in-institution and online). While cognitive disposition had no effect, the results also confirmed some effects on trust.

Tourists may or may not wish to share their travel experiences on social media platforms after their trip. Tourists differ in sharing their travel experiences and in their pre- and post-trip behaviours. The most significant factor in determining why travellers posted their vacation experiences on Facebook was perceived satisfaction. They also found that posting travel-related content can be enjoyable. However, travellers who choose not to share their travel impressions are generally concerned about their security and privacy (Oliveira et al., 2020).

1.1.2. Cultural Tourism

Research on cultural tourism began in earnest in the 1980s; however, culture and tourism have long been intertwined, according to the World Tourism Organization

(WTO) (Richards, 2018). According to Zare (2019), culture refers to the moral principles that a vast majority of people in a society uphold and learn via shared experiences, often as children. Chen and Rahman (2018) define cultural tourism as excursions that teach visitors about historical locations, cultural heritage sites, or people's ways of life. According to the World Tourism Organization, cultural tourism makes up 37% of all travel (Richards, 2003).

Zare (2019) examines how cultural facets of travel experiences and unique cultural elements can make trips unforgettable. Their study drew on 75 online questionnaires with Iranian tourists. Participants were invited to write about their most unforgettable experience and explain why it was special to them. A grounded theory approach was then used to draw themes from the data. The findings revealed four Iranian cultural themes that contributed to traveller's outstanding travel experiences: cohesion, independence and control, spontaneity and flexibility, and distinctiveness.

Tourist's historical and cultural desires now rank among basic tourism necessities like shelter, food, and health care. Traditions and cultural heritage are critical to these demands; we must preserve cultural heritages and pass them on to future generations (Pelit & Türkolu, 2019; Güneş & Alagöz, 2018). Cultural tourism (Emekli, 2006) journeys designed for visitors to engage in artistic pursuits, including festivals, plays, exhibitions, and historical sites and ways of life.

Tourism professionals, managers and guides from different cultures can offer tourist's different experiences (Ersoy & Ehtiyar, 2015). Many studies have researched tourist's museum experiences in Turkey, including at the Istanbul Toy Museum (e.g., Erdoğan & Kırcova, 2017; Eryılmaz & Öksüz, 2021; Harman & Akgündüz, 2014; Çalışkan, et al., 2020). Factor analyses were used to summarise the museum experience dimensions. The resulting scale consisted of five dimensions: learning, entertainment, escapism, and nostalgia (see also Gilmore and Pine's (1998) model of experience dimensions). The authors then measured the effect of each dimension on tourist satisfaction to determine that the 'nostalgia' and 'flowing' dimensions had a significant positive effect on satisfaction, while the 'learning' and 'escape' factors did not have a significant effect.

Kadioğlu & Yüksek (2021) investigated whether visiting a museum with a guide (as opposed to no guide) produced different results in tourist satisfaction. They selected an experimental research model: firstly, tourists were pre-tested, and then questionnaires were distributed face-to-face. The study revealed a statistically significant difference between those who visited the museum with a guide and those who did not. Tourists who visited the museum with the guide gleaned more information from the signage, were more impressed with the museum, and got more pleasure. This confirms that cultural guides, managers, and tourism industry specialists can provide unique experiences for visitors (Ersoy & Ehtiyar, 2015).

1.1.3. Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomic tourism, refers to tours designed to teach visitors about local cuisines and culinary traditions (Zdemir & Altner, 2019; Kılıç & Çakır, 2022; Sarışk & Zbay, 2015; Semerci & Akbaba, 2018; Seyitolu, 2018; Bucak & Aracı, 2013; Cömert & Sökmen, 2017; Küçükkömürler et al.2018). Tourist's gastronomic experiences are shaped by how they feel about the food and drinks they consume (Zengin & Erkol, 2015). Turkish cuisine, which is influenced by the cuisines of various other nations (Seyitolu & Alışkan, 2014), is often considered one of the richest and most varied cuisines in the world.

Traveller's desires to experience regional flavours in tourism destinations are conceptualised as gastronomy (Sormaz et al., 2015). Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) conducted the first formal study on gastronomy, though recent work also supports the link between food and tourism (Kivela & Crofts, 2005-2006). Sims (2009) argued that eating locally grown food can significantly contribute to a sustainable travel experience. His findings imply that "local" food is significant in sustainable tourist experiences, and that food can contribute to the growth of sustainable tourism in many ways. Another study evaluated the culinary tourism experiences of travellers on food tours in Delhi (Kaushal & Yadav, 2020). They found that tourists held biased perceptions of Delhi's infrastructure, hygiene, and Indian dishes' brand impressions. Most of the reviews expressed pleasure with the tour, despite some problems that led to unfavourable client experiences

Putra (2019) examined how the gastronomy tourism industry in Cirebon City (Indonesia) contributes to a sustainable travel experience. The city has the potential to advance culinary tourism in Indonesia's West Java region, which has a mix of Chinese, Arab, and Indian acculturation and readily available ingredients. The capacity to produce food, religion, beliefs, and global flavours all impact Cirebon City's gastronomy tourism identity. The study was conducted with qualitative methodology and data triangulation, a SWOT analysis, and a flow model analysis.

While gastronomy was not always taken seriously in the tourism industry, it is now often "the peak of the tourist experience" (Kyriakaki et al., 2016). For instance, the "Greek Breakfast" boosted the tourism industry in Greece, enhanced visitor experiences, and promoted both local producers and cultural traditions. Research on "Greek Breakfasts" in hotels shows that: a) there is a close connection between agriculture and the tourism industry; b) using local products has numerous positive effects on the empowerment (cultural and economic) of local communities; and c) local gastronomy enhances the tourist experience.

Kaşlı et al. (2014) used a questionnaire (n=367) and convenience sampling to evaluate the visitor's gastronomic experiences and revisit intentions in Eskişehir. Some of the intention to revisit (7.4%) can be explained by gastronomic experiences ($r=.299$). Arslan (2020) used content analysis to evaluate TripAdvisor reviews of five Tokat kebab restaurants (one of the most important Turkish gastronomic delicacies). The author created two positive and negative word clouds from the tourist's online comments. Travellers made more favourable remarks than negative ones. The word cloud's positive phrases include "wonderful, gratifying, and recommended," while the negative terms include "tough meat, charred, and pricey."

Some researchers have examined the mediating role of personality in the relationship between tourist experiences and revisit intentions to understand any experiential differences between domestic and foreign tourists (Kahraman, 2019; Kahraman & Tanrıverdi, 2021; Cavlak et al., 2019; Demirel, 2020; Aydın & Bayar, 2020). Personality features do mediate an association between the desire to return to a destination and an unforgettable travel experience. Openness to experience, in

particular, mediates the relationship between unforgettable tourism experiences and the intention to return. There were some differences between domestic and foreign tourist experiences, with domestic visitors reporting a more emotional experience in the destination than foreign visitors.

Yener and Zkaya (2021) used a questionnaire to collect information from 400 visitor's culinary experiences in the Artvin province. They had mainly favourable feedback for Artvin's cuisine. The tourist's culinary experiences were significantly correlated with their gender, nationality, age, marital status, level of education, occupation, and reasons for choosing Artvin. However, there was no correlation between financial status and preferring Artvin food. Akyürek & Kutukz's (2020) set out to investigate the culinary encounters of gastro tourists taking part in gastronomy tours. To this end, semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted with 35 tourists and TripAdvisor reviews of gastronomy tours were reviewed. The results showed that the experience elements of gastro visitors were made up of 4 themes and 25 codes. The topics that emerged were experiences based on products, relationships, activities, and environments.

Keskin et al. (2020) examined interactions among tourists who visited the Cappadocia (i.e., their experiences, contentment, and readiness to return). Outstanding travel experiences had a favourable impact on contentment, and satisfied travellers promoted Cappadocia to others and revisited the region (Zen and Güneren, 2017). Data were collected from Chinese, Turkish, and other tourists participating in a balloon tour. Balloon experiences had a significant impact on destination image alteration or renewal, this influence fully modified the relationship between their balloon experience and their behavioural intentions. Aşan et al. (2015) also examined postmodern tourist encounters with bicycle tourism. They observed that postmodern characteristics, such as uniformity, pluralization of experience, and perception of novelty and subjectivity impacted cycling tourist's experiences.

Tourism research has extensively examined the connection between tourism and religion (Battour et al., 2010, p.1). Many Muslims travel for reasons like employment, study, health, culture, recreation, and prayer. They also seek to travel in

accordance with Islamic values. Halal tourism denotes travel products and services that are provided to Muslim travellers in accordance with Islamic teachings and values (Dinçer & Bayram, 2017; Akmaz, 2019; Mohsin et al., 2016; El-Gohary, 2016). Yüzbaşıoğlu & Çaylak (2019) argue that halal food service is a major element of halal tourism (see also Akmaz, 2020).

There are relatively few studies on domestic halal tourism that examine the topic in light of the Qur'an and Hadiths (Dinçer & Bayram, 2017). In the existing studies, the concept of halal tourism, its principles, and practices have been evaluated within the scope of the Qur'anic verses and Hadiths. Dilek & Çakmak, 2017 investigated whether consumer halal tourism trends change based on factors like demographics and income level.

Pamukçu & Sarıışık (2017) argued that halal tourism should be prioritised to capitalise on Turkey's current cultural and religious leanings. They examined the strategies and strengths of the countries where halal tourism practices are available. While strategies for halal tourism are widely implemented (even in non-Muslim countries), strategies targeting this market have not yet been instituted in Turkey.

Sezer (2017) evaluated halal tourism in Trabzon province's hotels. He found that accommodation facilities in Trabzon did not fully implement the concept of halal tourism. Yet, some aspects were present, including the possibility of taking ablution, providing prayer mats or the Quran, restrictions or prohibitions on alcohol, separate prayer rooms for men and women, the presence of a mosque or other place of worship, the uniformity of the staff, and preparation of iftar and sahur menus during Ramadan. Henderson (2016) also analysed halal food issues and the significance of halal tourism in Malaysia and Singapore, which have majority and minority Muslim populations, respectively.

The success of tourism destinations depends on visitor's experiences. Therefore, destinations should strive to give visitors life-changing experiences (Demir, 2019; Akkuş, 2017). For instance, these researchers examined remarkable winter sports tourism experiences of Polish and Iranian tourists. Polish visitors had more favourable experiences in Erzurum than Iranian tourists. Many studies have examined

traveller's experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Yachin, 2018; Akyürek & Kutukz, 2020; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019; Isçi et al, 2020; Sop et al, 2020; Arslan, 2020; Akyürek & Kutukz, 2020). This includes studying visitor comments on shared online forums like TripAdvisor (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Shao et al., 2019). TripAdvisor, due to its popularity and size, is the most prominent user-generated content platform for the travel industry (Yachin, 2018).

1.2. Concepts and Theories on Tourist Experiences

Experience is a highly subjective, ethereal, and individual phenomenon (O'dell, 2007, p. 36). The term "experience" describes two distinct states: the lived experience (*erlebnis*) felt in every moment, and the assessed experience (*erfahrung*) that is evaluated and given meaning. Most studies on the tourism experience are concerned with the evaluated experience, and commonly describe the interior conditions of the people who participated in an event. The emotional, physical, spiritual, or intellectual levels are said to create enduring impressions (Morgan et al., 2010, p.3).

Every tourist seeks slightly different experiences based on their daily lives and professions (Light, 2000, p.160) and the availability of new products, locales, and distinctive experiences (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015, p. 368). People's interpretations and reactions to such knowledge depend on their experience (Kolb, 2007, p.7). Of course, travelling is a complex and varied experience, and it would seem difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the essence of 'the tourist experience.' Individual differences in tourist experiences what travellers do on vacation are as distinct as the individual tourists themselves. There are two distinct approaches to conceptualizing the tourist experience. First, it may be seen as an assortment of goods or experiences that a traveller enjoys when away from home. It can also be framed as a collection of products and/or experiences produced or provided by the numerous businesses, organizations, and people who make up the tourism sector (Sharpley & Stone, 2012, p.17).

Postmodern tourism academics in the 1990s disputed the common framing of tourist experiences as distinct from the daily grind. The classic assumption was that

the modern age is marked by processes of differentiation among moral, aesthetic, and institutional domains of social activity. However, postmodernism involves processes of de-differentiation that obscure these differences. Scholars refer to this as "the end of tourism," as the distinctions between daily living and tourist experiences grew increasingly hazy. A variety of scenarios in daily life now offer experiences that were formerly exclusive to travel (e.g., enjoyment aspects of foreign cultures). For instance, one can now use video and virtual reality displays to enjoy attractions from the comfort of their home. Similarly, virtual environments can combine multiple sites and views from across the world into a nearby theme park or shopping mall. Thus, a variety of tourist-related activities are now accessible without the need to actually travel to different destinations. Whether on vacation or when going about daily life, people frequently act like tourists (Uriely, 2005, p.203; Lash and Urry, 1994). The tourist experience can be conceptualised using the following criteria:

- (1) Experience is to the soul what air is to the body. In other words, our souls require emotional resonance and fulfilling experiences (Curtin, 2005, p.3).
- (2) A tourist experience is a personal past travel incident that was pleasurable enough to endure in one's long-term memory (Larsen, 2007, p.15; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017, p.19).
- (3) Skills developed over years of practice, and the methods utilized to get them.
- (4) Past experiences impact how people think and behave.
- (5) An event or activity that affects you in some way.
- (6) Behaviours or knowledge that all members of a particular group share and impact their behaviour.

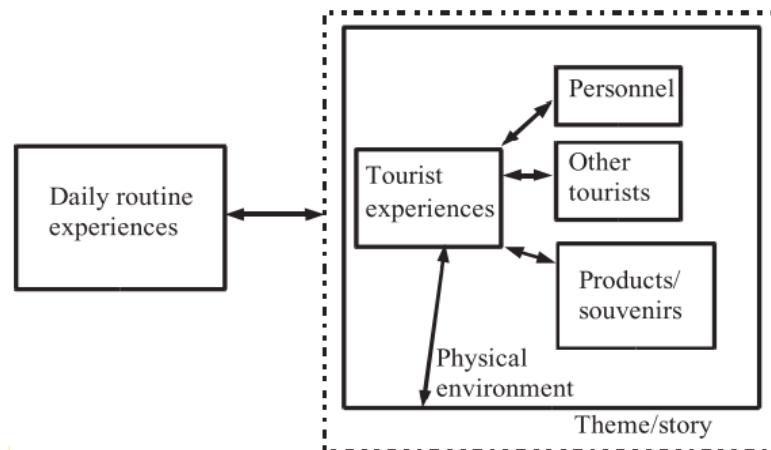


Figure 1.1: Key elements affecting tourist's overall experiences as consumers
Source: Mossberg (2007, p. 64-65).

Experiences in leisure and tourism are directly influenced by physical and social surroundings, that is, by the personnel and other guests. These components are part of the experiential setting, where both utilitarian and sentimental values are important. Many successful companies and locations have also promoted and coordinated their services using a theme or a story (e.g., giving items and trinkets). Figure 1 shows the factors that potentially affect visitor's experiences (Mossberg, 2007, p.64–65; Kahraman & Tanriverdi, 2021, p.43).

Few scholars have taken distinctive approaches to studying experiences (Aho, 2001, p. 36; Jurowski, 2009, p. 2). The traditional 'before, during, and after' stages of a tourism experience can actually be expanded to seven stages (Figure 1.2): direction (awakening interest), adhesion (strengthening interest), going to (actual visit), analysis (comparisons), keeping (photos, souvenirs, memories), introspection (repeated presentations), and enrichment (ongoing relationships with networks, keepsakes, and new skills acquired while travelling).

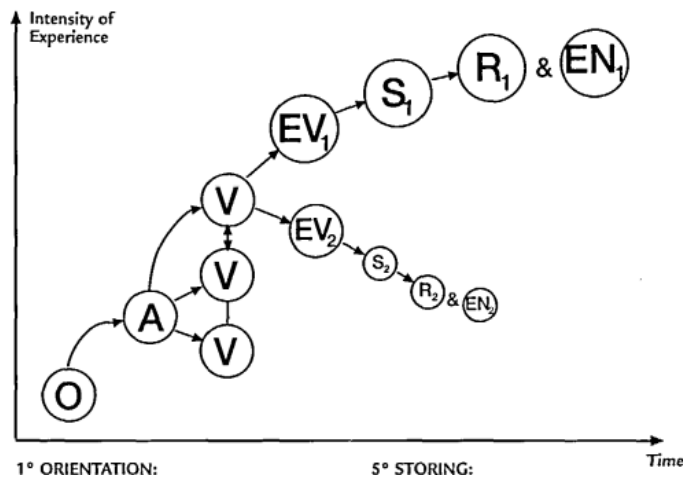


Figure 1.2: The stages of experience

Source: Aho (2002)

The first two stages occur in the pre-trip phase, while the last four are post-trip. These theoretical perspectives may be useful to those in charge of marketing and

strategic management, given that travel experiences serve as the foundation for tourism marketing and development.

1.2.1. Cohen's Theory of Tourist Experience

Cohen's (1979) classic interventions are well-known in the literature and have drawn much attention for their theoretical (phenomenological) reasoning (see also Lengkeek, 2001). He begins by considering how much attention travellers give to the Other and the Unknown in order to let go of familiar surroundings. Cohen uses tourist's overall viewpoint on culture and the environment to create five sequential tourist modalities (Cohen, 1979, p.22):

- A.** Recreational mode: People who deviate from the norm in search of entertainment.
- B.** Diversionary mode: People who seek to temporarily escape the stresses of daily life.
- C.** Experiential mode: Those who feel that ordinary life lacks depth, and that deeper experiences with people, culture, and nature must be explored elsewhere.
- D.** Experimental mode: People who risk losing themselves in daily life and make an effort to rediscover themselves in a foreign environment, nature or a social setting; alienation has a significant negative effect on them.
- E.** Existential mode: One feels as though they are both living in the wrong place and time due to a great dissociation from daily life; a better world is sought overseas, in the vacation destination, and if possible, permanently.

CENTRE	CENTRE OUT-THERE
MODES OF EXPERIENCE	
ENTERTAINMENT	RECREATIONAL
RECHARGING ENERGY	DIVERSIONARY
(STAGED) AUTHENTICITY	EXPERIENTIAL
REDISCOVERING ONESELF	EXPERIMENTAL
ULTIMATE NOSTALGIA	EXISTENTIAL

Figure 1.3: Cohen's modes of tourist experiences.

Source: Lengkeek, 2001, p.175.

1.2.2. Experiential Theory

Kolb proposed the most well-known experiential learning theory for higher education. The method proposes a learning cycle to organize a session or a whole course. The various cycle stages are linked to diverse learning styles (Healey & Jenkins, 2000, p. 185). The foundations for experiential learning theory (ELT) are rooted in 20th-century scholars who emphasized the importance of experience in their theories of human learning and development. This includes creating a multi-linear model of adult development and a comprehensive description of experiential learning (Kolb, 2005, p.2).

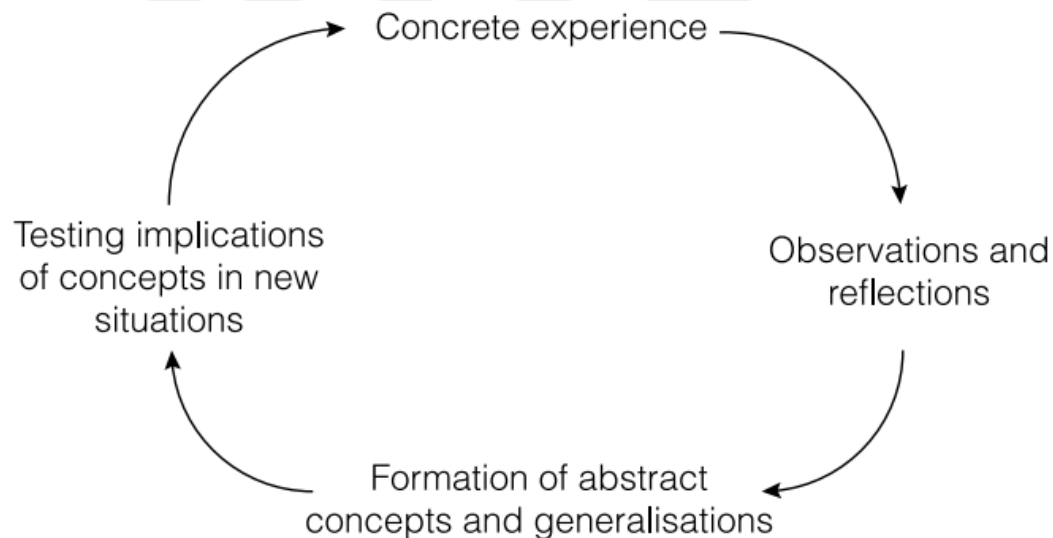


Figure 1.4: Kolb's experiential learning model.

Source: Ord (2012, p.56)

Kolb's theory has been disputed and questioned. However, perhaps its most important contribution is the promotion of more active and involved forms of learning. The idea of active learning is based on the core tenet that learning is inherently an active undertaking. Learning by doing is especially advantageous, as it enables

students to move beyond rote learning and to achieve more deeply embedded and lasting learning. This includes methods like project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and problem-based learning (Seremet, 2013, p. 25).

When applied to tourism, Kolb's experiential theory can describe student's educational experiences. Experiential tourism allows travellers to gain information via their interactions with the environment (Anggrahini, 2022, p.22). Marvell and Simm observed how "palimpsest" fieldwork changed their student's experiences (2016, p. 128). Many tourists are driven by mysteries: their observations and discoveries of Eastern cultural customs, architecture, and daily life reflect their experience of cultural tourism. The value of a visitor's presence comes from the distinct sense of identity and belonging that each person possesses. Experiential tourism is also a key element of cultural tourism (Anggrahini, 2022, p. 22).

1.2.3. Authenticity

Authenticity is essential to most traveller's experiences. The concept of "authenticity" was first introduced by Dean MacCannell in 1973. MacCannell contended that travelling itself is a search for "authenticity" (Yamashita, 2015). Authenticity is defined as being true, original, or unaffected. Hillman (2007) asserts that the idea of "authenticity" stifles traveller's true desires for in-person interactions (Cohen, 1988, p.372).

Marx argued that contemporary society creates alienation that keeps people from understanding who they really are. Therefore, people travel to see new cultures and learn about the "genuine" to detach from their regular life. A genuine visitor experience may be unachievable in the modern world (Boorstin, 1962). Thus, the pursuit of authenticity is less common than relying on fake images while planning a trip. Travellers often read guidebooks before leaving on their journey. Upon arrival, they visit the listed locations and take photographs that closely resemble those in the booklet. Boorstin calls this a "pseudo-event". Following then, the "pursuit of authenticity" and "pseudo-event," that constitutes the tourist experience end up fluctuating. The mainstay of tourism in space and time is now pseudo-events,

simulations, fabrications, staged events, and scripted performances that are a sort of fake imitation of real occurring. But not every traveller looks for authenticity, and not every travel experience is a fake one (Yamashita, 2015).

1.3. Concepts Related to Tourist Experience

1.3.1. Sensual Experience

The significance of the senses in tourism received insufficient theoretical and empirical attention in tourism studies until the beginning of the twenty-first century (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011; Pritchard, Morgan, Ateljevic & Harris, 2007). This implicitly positioned tourists as passive observers, not as active agents who interact with the physical and social world through their senses.

Sensory components of tourism encounters are essential in improving visitor experiences (Agapito et al., 2013; 2014). Market researchers consider the role of sensory systems in the consumer experience, reflecting a recent growth of "sensory studies." The bulk of studies on sensory tourism use standard Aristotelian classifications and rankings of the five senses: sight, then hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Tourism sensory studies have focused on traveller's various sensory experiences and activities that are specific to a particular sense (e.g., music festivals, gastronomy, and wellness services) (Hultén, 2011; Meacci & Liberatore, 2018; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Markwell, 2001; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Agapito et al., 2014). Personal identities develop in relation to certain environments and contribute to a sense of place. Living experiences shape knowledge and emotions about a place and, thus, contribute to one's sense of self. To convey a feeling of place, one must describe its physical and human characteristics, as well as the processes that shaped them and the human acts that added to their meaning and interpretation.

Everyone responds differently to ambient and external stimuli, so "seeing" encompasses both what the eye sees and how meanings are constructed based on seeing and being in a particular place. (Marvell & Simm, 2016, p. 126). John Urry acknowledges that the tourist experience goes beyond the gaze; the development of sightseeing as a romantic, contemporary method to enlighten the self has always been accompanied by a wide range of other sensory experiences (Adams, 2006, p.23).

1.3.2. Gazing

The tourist gaze draws on old sociological arguments dressed up in modern tourist garb (Marshall & De Villiers, 2015, p. 417). British sociologist John Urry, who significantly contributed to studies on tourists (Franklin, 2001, 115), theorised why people take vacations and why they visit particular places. He posits that the "tourist gaze" involves observing specific features of a place, like a famous cathedral, a breathtaking view, or another attraction (Hospers, 2011, p. 27). Urry distinguished between the "romantic" and the "collective" categories of the tourist gaze (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 2179). Later, Maoz added the conceptual variation of the "mutual gaze" (Maoz, 2006), while Holloway et al. (2011) contributed the "intratourist' sight."

"Sightseeing" is generally said to be the default tourist activity. This ocular-centric bias in tourism stems from the Occidentalist preference for sight over other senses (e.g., "attractions" in German are "*Sehenswürdigkeiten*" or things worth seeing). The tourist gaze established by Urry (Agapito et al., 2013, p. 65) offers an ocular theoretical framework for prioritising and classifying visual input (Cohen & Cohen, 2019, p.8). Urry (1992, p. 172) believed the visitor experience was predominantly visual. However, tourists do engage in other sensory activities while travelling, including experiencing extreme heat, trying unexpected foods, experiencing intense passions, hearing unusual noises, and smelling unfamiliar things.

"If an ethnic group residing in a region is occasionally manufactured and presented as a visitor attraction, another way of expressing this is to state that ethnic differences, the "strange," may occasionally serve as a "theme" to draw people for gazing (Phua & Miller, 2014, p.78). According to Phua & Miller, cultural practices "have degenerated into mere raw materials in the formation of ethnic identities, which are mediated by official nomenclature as well as by the influence of the tourist gaze." However, this also "gives domestic tourists a chance to gaze at international tourists and absorb a foreign atmosphere on the local land." (Phua & Miller, 2014, p. 78). When Urry first wrote on the tourist gaze in the 1990s, "globalization" was not yet fully upon us. The "internet" was only recently developed and not yet impacting almost every aspect of social life.

Imagination and fantasy construct some places to be gazed upon due to expectations of great pleasure (either on a different scale or involving new senses from those typically encountered). Tourists seek landscapes and urban environments that are distinguished from everyday life. People long for such a glance, which can be visually objectified in photographs, postcards, movies, models, and other media (MacCannell, 2001, p. 25). For Urry, the gaze drives tourists to seek out experiences beyond their own social norms (Neill et al., 2016, p.142). The tourist's gaze also frequently shifts (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p.189).

1.3.3. Taste

Restaurants are an essential component of the food service industry and are well-known in tourist destinations. Neighbourhood restaurants often serve a range of regional dishes and drinks. Academic studies on restaurants emphasize the importance of factors like restaurant preference, client happiness, and tourist or consumer behaviour. Studies that examine tourism-related eating behaviours often concentrate on factors like the chef's use of regional cuisine. However, there is no quantitative research on the kinds of restaurants serving tourist destinations (Yilmaz & Zdemir, 2017, p.81).

For the past three decades, research on tourism has focused heavily on food and travel, food tourism, and the close associations between food and travel (Belisle, 1983). Observers have only recently noted the unprecedented expansion and popularization of food in the tourism literature. About one-third of visitor spending is on food, the amount of food for tourist consumption can significantly affect the economic and social implications of tourism (Ellis et al., 2018, p.250; Belisle, 1983, p.498).

Eating local cuisine during the tourist experience breaks up the monotony of daily life by exposing the traveller to new gastronomic realms. People can even distance themselves from daily life while in their home country by eating 'strange' or "ethnic" foods. Cohen and Avielli distinguish between two fundamental attitudes that define vacation time: a leisure posture, the so-called break, and a position in continuity with a daily routine. Through these attitudes, Recreational travellers try to learn about

the region's culinary customs, but travellers who are committed to continuity give this less consideration (Bessiere & Tibere, 2013, p.3420).

The consumption of food during travel has altered the progression of civilization (Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016, p.95). According to Everett (2008), "Food tourism" captures the desire to experience a particular dish or a particular cuisine. Long (2003) first conceptualised "culinary tourism" in 1998 to refer to travellers who learn about different cultures via gastronomy (Kivelan & Crotts, 2005, p. 41). Food tours improve already-existing tourist attractions and help local tourism industries thrive (Barre & Brouder, 2013, p.4). Visitors commonly express a desire for "genuine" food experiences while on tour. Such experiences seem more genuine when local cuisine is consumed in a local setting. Authentic experiences are signalled by tradition or naturalness. For example, tourist sites must not appear unduly new or manufactured since authenticity demands associations with the distant past. Legitimacy arises from doing certain rituals and actions over generations. The concept of heritage is also relevant here; visitors seem to value local cuisine not only because it is perceived to be local but also because it is believed to be a source of "tradition" (Sims, 2009, p.329).

1.4. Arab Tourist's Experiences and Motivations

People routinely visit places with different cultures and seek out fresh experiences (Daher, 2006, p.151). Tourist's desires impact tourism motivations and influence travel demand. Motivation is the force that propels people to take action (Cassidy & Pegg, 2008; Albughuli, 2011, p.11; Sandybayev et al., 2017, p.2). According to Urry, the only motivation for leisure travel is a desire to leave the comforts of home and try new things (MacCannell, 2001, p.24). Arab tourists visit Turkey to experience its historical, cultural, and ecological attractions (Egresi, 2016).

Arabs have travelled more widely since the turn of the century, and the (global) significance of Arab tourists is beginning to become clear. This is especially true since Arab tourists participate in high levels of consumption wherever they go (Abodeeb et al., 2017, p.220).

Several studies on tourist motivation have been conducted in various geographic regions and at various scales. They generally investigate why people travel, and pull-push factors that structure traveller's motivations. This largely addresses the needs of individuals for socialization and acceptability in the group. In the hectic speed of everyday activity, the latter is about avoiding social isolation. (See also Almuhrzi et al., 2017; Abdeeb et al., 2017; Mansour & Mumuni, 2019, p.28; Prayag & Hosany, 2014, p.37; Anggrahini, 2022, p.11). Push and pull factors also determine how a person chooses a destination: after feeling an initial desire for travel, travellers are drawn in by inner forces (push). Pull factors, in contrast, are external to the individual and generally location-specific (Abodeeb et al., 2017, p.222, Baloglu & Uysal, 1996, p.32, Kim et al., 2015, p.3).

The number of Arab tourists visiting Turkey has rapidly risen in recent years. The reasons for this remain poorly understood. Despite the economic potential of the Arab markets, little work has considered how nations like Turkey can offer the best possible experience for Arab visitors seeking environment, culture, and cuisine (Almuhrzi et al., 2017; Engin & McKeown, 2012, p.3).

1.5. Geopolitics and Tourism

Geopolitics refers to the geographic study of how humans and materials affect politics and international relations. Thus, geopolitics and the growth of tourism are inextricably interwoven (Hazbun, 2008, p.77). International travel is always a geopolitical activity. Geography, economy, demographics, and culture all impact state politics and businesses in tourism destinations. Tourism entails everyday geopolitical interactions between the host and the guest. According to Hazbun (2008), the politics of tourism continues to play a significant, yet understudied, role in peace processes and their outcomes.

Geographers explore various facets of politics, peace, and conflict (Dalby, 1991, p.269). However, few studies have directly addressed the important connections between geopolitics and tourism (Norum & Mostafanezhad, 2016, p.226). Modern geopolitical conversations seldom include the topic of tourism, while tourism literature rarely has a geopolitical focus. Yet, international tourism is a geopolitical phenomenon

that involves massive population transfers across borders (if only overnight visits are included, there are one billion such transfers annually). This is made possible through the sovereign powers of both the origin and destination states (Weaver, 2010, p.48). According to Saarinen (2018, p. 170), international travel is a form of mobility influenced and informed by geopolitics. Colonialism and unequal socioeconomic and cultural exchange are responsible for much of tourism's history. The modern international tourism system is also impacted by neo-liberal governance, multinational corporations, money, laws, and neo-colonialism.

Geopolitics presents various viewpoints on the world; it is visually appealing and easily incorporates maps, tables, and photographs (Dodds, 2007). Geopolitics concerns how we view the world, and how the world is divided into distinct nation-states that are influenced by foreign policy objectives. Foreign policy can significantly affect who, when, and why people are permitted to freely cross international boundaries (Hannam, 2013, p.79).

Geopolitics and tourism tend to focus on opposing theories, methods, and interpretations. Weaver (2010) explains that geopolitics are latent within the tourism industry, as international tourism depends on governmental collaborations. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) projects that there will be over two billion international tourism movements by 2030, so such links will continue over the ensuing decades (UNWTO, 2014b).

Turkey's shifting geopolitics can be evaluated by examining tourist experiences and their popularity among Arab travellers. Turkish tourism has become a significant source of hard currency, which can enhance economic liberalization and economic integration, and spur economic growth for policymakers and entrepreneurs. While political unrest and regional conflicts often make it difficult to travel throughout the region, tourism reinforces national efforts to enhance internal security and order. The growth of the tourism industry influences the political, economic, and cultural ties between societies and encourages new patterns of border crossings and transnational flows. Many Middle Eastern nations develop the tourism industry to acquire foreign investment and project an external image of stability, prosperity, and economic

openness. However, these efforts are often hampered, as these nations are located in a region that is perceived to be unstable and crisis-prone. Political geography nuances the complex impacts of tourism expansion (Hazbun 2008, p. 11). It is vital to carefully examine how geopolitical terminologies are formed and the significant societal implications they entail (Daher, 2006, p.3).

The geopolitical turn in tourism reflects tourism's growing place in local and international politics. Tourism is one of the most important geopolitical trends of the twenty-first century. The tourism business—commonly framed as geopolitical interactions between "hosts" and "guests"—involves more than one billion tourists crossing international boundaries each year. In addition to the materiality of geopolitics, scholars have studied geopolitics as "a discourse that characterizes, explains and supports particular ways of perceiving how territorial powers are formed and experienced" (Mostafanezhad, 2018, p.343). Turkey's geographic position and national identity have a significant impact on its geopolitical connections (Cihangir et al., 2022, p.146).

CHAPTER 2

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Methods and Materials

This study utilised a qualitative research approach. The broad phrase "qualitative research" includes a variety of approaches and ideas (Hennink et al., 2020, p.10). It is rooted in early 20th-century anthropology, psychology, and sociology research that sought to qualitatively understand the nature and mysteries of human life (Baltacı, 2017, p.1). From its inception, qualitative research has been described by different names, including "natural research" (to emphasise the of identifying natural phenomena), "interpretive research" (for acknowledging a researcher's positionality and interpretations), and "field research" (for its in-depth analysis of a subject in a particular social context) (Baltacı, 2019, p.). Qualitative research is usually used to address complicated and delicate themes (Brown & Osman, 2017, p.15).

This study used in-depth interviews, focus group interview, observations, focus groups, content analysis, visual approaches, and life histories or biographies to understand tourist's experiences (Silverman, 2020; Hennink et al., 2020, p.10; Baltacı, 2018, p.234). Understanding qualitative research means understanding what, how, when, and where something occurs, as well as its goal, essence, and context, and is essential to understanding how things work (Berg, 2019, p.13).

Data collection for qualitative research does not involve the use of questionnaires or any other kind of measurement tool. Instead, the researcher is the most crucial instrument for data collection. In this study, the researcher undertook participant observation (i.e., both participation and observation) after getting approval from the group being studied. If the researcher can gain the group's trust, they will provide reliable and comprehensive information (Aydin, 2018).

Qualitative research has the capacity to comprehend situations from the perspective of the study participants; it elucidates the meanings and interpretations

given to behaviour, events, or objects (Hennink et al., 2020, p.10). The distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches are displayed in Table 2.1.

Table 2. 1: Differences between qualitative and quantitative methods

	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Objective	To gain a contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, motivation.	To quantify data and extrapolate results to a broader population
Purpose	To understand why? How? What is the process? What are the influences or context?	To measure, count, or quantify a problem. To answer: How much? How often? What proportion? Which variables are correlated?
Data	Data are words (called textual data)	Data are numbers (called statistical data)
Study population	Small number of participants; selected purposively (non-probability sampling)	Large sample size of representative cases
	Referred to as participants or interviewees	Referred to as respondents or subjects
Data collection methods	In-depth interviews, observation, group discussions	Population surveys, opinion polls, exit interviews
Analysis	Analysis is interpretive	Analysis is statistical
Outcome	To develop an initial understanding, to identify and explain behaviour, beliefs or actions	To identify prevalence, averages and patterns in data. To generalize to a broader population

Source: Hennink et al. (2020, p.10)

As seen in Table 2.1, qualitative research is used to comprehend people's behaviours, attitudes, and motivations. Qualitative inquiries begin with 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions (e.g., what is the procedure? what conditions or factors exist?). "Textual data" refers to data in the form of words, while "subjects" and "interviews" refers to a small group of participants who were specifically chosen to contribute to the study (i.e., non-probability sampling). Qualitative research employs techniques like in-depth interviews, observations, group discussions, and interpretive analysis. Qualitative methodologies evaluate and illuminate concepts and meanings instead of attempting to generalize correlated links. Qualitative research cannot be boiled down

to the numbers (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011, p. 107). Its final objective is to offer understandings that identify and explain conduct, beliefs, or behaviours

According to Toloie-Eshlaghy et al. (2011), four basic strategies are typically employed in qualitative research: 1) anthropology, 2) grounded theory, 3) action study, 4) case study. Case studies, in particular, have gained popularity in the social sciences, especially for small-scale studies (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011, p.120). A case study describes a particular problem or incident based on real-world facts. It frequently focuses on institutions and analyses (if possible, solves) the problem illustrated. When using the case study technique, real information emerges as a result of group discussions, not just when studying that situation. (Roselle, 1996, p.30). For instance, Longdell revived a case study created by a Chinese philosopher in the 1880s and applied it to business, law, and medical schools. Longdell believed students would learn more if they dealt with actual judicial convictions beyond the legal books. This method is now frequently used in instruction for a range of subjects, and many case studies have been conducted around the world (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011).

We used interviews and observations in our research, as we believed this would be most convenient and lead to clearer information. Our fieldwork involved 26 interviews with participants from different Middle Eastern countries, a focus group with 13 people, and interviews with 7 tour guides. In addition to them I have also interviewed a man who are service driver. During the fieldwork, the researcher also participated in all the tours attended by tourists to make observations. Our sample consisted of tourists from the Middle East who travelled to Istanbul and spent at least one night in the city. To accomplish our research objectives, we offer a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative techniques are an important tool for investigating "life as it is lived, things as they happen" (Seremet, 2013, p.74; Cihangir & Şeremet, 2022). Furthermore, case studies facilitate improved data collection for the researcher through in-depth interviews and participant observation (Cihangir et al., 2021).

2.2. Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis

This study, conducted in August 2022, set out to examine Middle Eastern tourist's travel experiences. We drew on Arab travellers from various Middle Eastern nations who visited Istanbul in August and stayed in the city for at least one night. The data included in-depth interviews with Middle Eastern tourists, tour guides, and observations of their excursions. The interviews consisted of 32 interview questions (participants) and 9 questions (tourist guides); all of the questions dealt with Turkey's nature, culture, and cuisine. We also investigated how Turkey's geopolitics impacted the tourists. Our interview instrument was also piloted with 5 participants. Interview questions were translated into three languages (Arabic, Turkish, and English); however, only Arabic questions were used in the fieldwork since all the tourists were Arab and knew Arabic. To learn more about tourist's profiles, the first section of our questionnaire collected demographic data. We also compared Arab tourist's responses to those of the tour guides to validate our precise results. Some of the interviews were voice-recorded, and the researcher also took field notes in a notebook.

This research investigated Middle Eastern tourist's experiences with nature, culture, and gastronomy in Turkey. The sampled tourists hailed from different countries, including Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, and Bahrain. Our study lasted six days, during which we visited different parts of Turkey to observe six different tour groups (see Table 2.2).

Table 2. 2: Tour groups observed.

Tour	# of Tourists	Date
Istanbul Bosphorus tour	44	09.8.2022
Sapanca tour	41	10.8.2022
Bursa tour	48	11.8.2022
Shile tour	23	12.8.2022
Istanbul Bosphorus tour (2)	44	13.8.2022
City (Culture) tour	22	14.8.2022

The information gathered from our field study of Middle Eastern tourists in Istanbul was analysed using a descriptive analytic method. Computer applications were also used to analyse the data gathered from the audio recordings.

2.3. Researcher Reflexivity

I, Jailan Abdulkareem Musa, am a master's student from Iraq. I finished my bachelor's degree in tourism and hotel management at the University of Duhok in Iraq. I then came to Van Yüzüncüyıl University in Turkey to complete my higher education. My two supervisors were Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emine Cihangir (head of the Department of Tourism Management) and Vice-Dean Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Şeremet. My supervisors and I selected tourist experiences as a subject for our study with Middle Eastern tourists; we sought to explore natural, cultural and gastronomical experiences in Turkey. I also had more personal aims beyond the theoretical and scholarly ones. I wanted to comprehend how I became the person I am today and learn more about myself as a researcher contributing to greater knowledge production.

As a Middle Eastern girl, it was quite difficult to visit a large, unknown city like Istanbul alone, but I accepted my supervisor's decision. This choice has greatly affected my life I have learned to stand on my own, believe in myself, and depend on myself; I also learned that there is no fear in this life that we cannot face when we face our fears, we overcome them. My values and beliefs have affected my data and observation analysis. I have long lived in an Arabian country, so I had insider insights into the tourist's narratives and behaviours; even when people did not wish to speak with me, I understood their reasons as an Arab person. However, I was personally affected and bothered when Middle Eastern tourists did not want to answer my questions.

My trip from Duhok to Istanbul for fieldwork took 32 hours by bus. It was the first time that I had travelled to such a distant place alone. At first, I was afraid since the road was very long and tiring. However, there were never-ending refreshing and beautiful greenery views from my vantage point in the first seat. Fatigue aside, there were numerous difficulties along the way. especially about the toilet because the driver

did not take rest breaks for long periods, and when he takes rests, he gave too much time so, our journey was delaying and this was very annoying. I also had difficulties with the meals; the food served at the rest facilities was nearly inedible, so I resorted to eating junk food, which I was not used to. Fortunately, I did not encounter any personal issues as a woman travelling alone. Everyone was kind, and no one bothered me, perhaps because I was conservative and wearing hijab.

When I arrived in Taksim, Istanbul at 9:30 PM, I experienced a range of emotions fear, fatigue, and happiness. The next day was my first tour, so I was also excited. During the tours, I tried to be friendly and learn about Middle Eastern tourist's thoughts about Turkey's nature, culture, and gastronomy from a geopolitical perspective. I recorded their answers, made comparisons between answers, and observed to ensure accurate information.

2.4. Profiles of The Observed Tours

The following sections offer more details on the six tours I took for research purposes.

2.4.1. Bosphorus Tour

Our first tour with Middle Eastern tourists was to Bosphorus on 9 August 2022 at 9:35 AM. As this was my first tour, I was excited to meet the tourists and curious about their profiles. I travelled with the guide to collect the tourists from their hotel. The tour consisted of Jordanians, Bahrainis, and Moroccans. When we arrived at the Straits, the area the crowded but we soon managed to get on the ship. As the ship moved, the guide welcomed the tourists and explained (in perfect Arabic) the history of the surrounding buildings. After the Bosphorus tour, we went to the mall where, despite complaining about high prices, the tourists shopped fervently. Unfortunately, I struggled to communicate with the tourists due to the noise and loud music. They also were not keen to answer my questions while shopping, informing me, 'I can't focus on the shopping while talking to you.' Questions (and answers) emerging from this experience included:

1. Were the tourists focused and listening to the guide? Why? My observations suggested that only the older tourists were listening to the guide and asking him questions. Younger tourists were more focused on their drinks, watching the sea, and taking pictures. They later told me that they had come to Turkey to have fun, not to participate in a school-like history routine.
2. As a researcher, was it easy or difficult to interact with tourists? Why? It was very difficult to talk to the tourists, who did not want to answer my questions. Furthermore, those who were willing to talk did not want me to audio record out of fears common in Arab countries.
3. Why did tourists complain about high prices while still shopping and buying many things? Turkey is much cheaper than my country; however, the tourists were comparing contemporary prices in Turkey to historically cheaper ones.

2.4.2. Sapanca Tour

Our second tour with Middle Eastern tourists was to Sapanca on 10 August 2022 at 8:40 AM. This group of 41 tourists were mostly Egyptian and Saudi. As before, I went to the hotel to collect the tourists. We ended up waiting a long time for them to slowly finish their breakfasts. They did not seem to care about us, which made me feel upset. The tour guide asked me to document this experience in my journal as a rebuttal to everyone who is unaware of the difficulties of this ‘amazing’ job. After we finally left, the tourists complained about the distance of the drive. The tour guide told me, “Arab tourists don’t value the culture and knowledge; it’s very hard to work with them, they only love shopping.” This was a difficult day for me, as it is very difficult to communicate with Saudi tourists who do not want to talk. As I was greeting them, they got up to leave. This tour also contained many activities (e.g., buggy riding, ziplining), so the tourists were not available to talk to me. Questions (and answers) emerging from this experience included:

1. Why is it difficult to communicate with Saudi people? Respondents said that they did not have time or that their husband did not let them talk. Those willing to talk were not willing to be audio recorded.
2. What was the most interesting experience during this day? For me, the most interesting thing occurred when a Saudi man said of his veiled wife, “I don’t want her to eat in public, can you set a table away from here?”
3. Why do tourists take pictures first when they arrive? Taking pictures and sharing them on social media gave me happiness because everyone asked where I went.
4. What was your terrible experience? An Arab was shouting and complaining about the price of tea, “how can a single tea cost 20tl”?
5. What do they think about the food and hygiene in Sapanca? The tourists did not like the food because it was cold, and they were concerned about hygiene as there was too much trash nearby.
6. What do you think about Turkey’s nature? Turkey has an amazing nature; it has every shade of green.

2.4.3. Bursa Tour

Our third tour was to Bursa on 11 August 2022 at 6:40 AM. This group of 48 tourists was mainly from Jordan and Palestine. This tour was the best for me because the guide included me in his work. He asked me to collect the tourists from the hotel alone, which excited me. I went to the hotel, successfully collected the tourists, and took them to the bus; this allowed me to communicate with them more easily. The tour guide introduced me and told the group that I was an MA student doing research. Therefore, I was able to talk to many more tourists than in the previous days. This was a very long tour, but the guide constantly played games to keep the group entertained. At a cable car activity, the guide took the first family, and I went with the last family

so that the tourists would not get lost in the crowd. On the way back, we did the same thing, but with different families, so I had the opportunity to talk to two different groups. The tourists loved the cable car. I agreed that it was amazingly high, with so many trees and amazing cloudy weather that made it seem like we were on top of the world.

1. What does the tour guide think about Arab tourists? The guide believed that Arab tourists were not clean, did not listen, and wandered off: “I have to look for them, when I told them why they do that? They say, ‘we want to see everything that is around we don’t want to be tied to a place.’”
2. What do the tourists think about Turkish nature? Most tourists were attracted by Turkey’s nature. They felt happiness and relaxation in this different world (compared to most Arabian countries, which are deserts and buildings).
3. What do they think about the weather? They admired the weather at Bursa Mountain since Arabian countries are generally hot (especially in August). They were shocked to see such cloudy, cold weather in August.
4. What was your terrible experience? The second family I was supposed to guide down the cable car got lost, so I had to look for them for a long time. The Arab tourists did not respect the guide or the time, and when I found them, they said they were taking pictures.

2.4.4. Shile Tour

Our fourth tour with Middle Eastern tourists was to Shile on 12 August 2022 at 9:00 AM. The 23 tourists were from Jordan. Unfortunately, no one was listening to the guide as he explained Turkish history on the bus ride. Some tourists even fell asleep with glasses on to hide the fact they were sleeping. The tour guide said, “as you see, no one is listening to what I say about history and culture. I just want to leave them in

the mall and let them shop however they want.” Later the guide told them about a mosque and prayer places, which made them happy. Yet, the tourists constantly complained that they could not go shopping on this tour.

1. What do they think about the food and hygiene in Shile? The tourists did not like the food because it was cold. They also worried about the food hygiene, as there were cats in the kitchen.
2. What do they think about religion in Turkey? Why? The tourists perceived Turkey as a very religious country since there were mosques everywhere, and the guide reminded them that they could pray anywhere.
3. What do you think about the Arab tourists? I think Arab tourists are quite rough. For instance, one woman I wanted to talk to said loudly, “I told you that I don’t want to talk to you, why you are asking again today?” I did not remember that I had tried to talk to her before.
4. What was your terrible experience? A Syrian man who was acting as a tour guide argued with our guide roughly, telling him, “You give low prices for the ship, don’t say this price in front of my tourists.”

2.4.5. 2nd Bosphorus Tour

Our fifth tour with Middle Eastern tourists was also to Bosphorus on 13 August 2022 at 10:00 AM. This day started badly because the guide forgot to take me. I waited for an hour on the road before he called to say he had forgotten me and that I should take a taxi to catch up with the group. I was a bit afraid to go alone, but I did it and arrived. However, the day did not improve as I could barely speak to the tourists who were taking pictures on the ship and not listening to the guide. I only spoke to two women but could not audio record as they were afraid of problems (most Arab countries are facing political problems and war).

After the Bosphorus tour, I shadowed the hotel's transfer man, and I joined to his Transfer in taking a Jordanian family from the hotel in Laleli to the airport. This was a great experience since, for the first time, I really felt like I was working in the tourism sector. During the ride, I spoke with the family's daughter about Turkish food. She did not love Turkish food, and preferred to eat fast food. She complained that Turkish food was not as spicy as Jordanian food, and fast food was more delicious and consistent around the world. Meanwhile, her father was complaining to the transfer man about hotel prices.

We arrived at the airport and waited for an Egyptian family to shuttle to the hotel. They did not care about Turkish culture at all since they believed Egypt was the most cultured country with its world wonders and pyramids. They were only visiting Turkey to shop (Turkey is cheaper than Egypt) and visit the country's diverse nature sites. The Egyptian family only asked the driver how to get to the malls, how late they were open, and whether women could shop alone in the late hours. In Egypt, women cannot go to malls or be outside late at night, as the police will take them home. They have freedoms in Turkey that they do not have in their own country.

2.4.6. City Tour (Culture Tour):

Our sixth tour with Middle Eastern tourists was a city tour to historic places on 14 August 2022 at 9:00 AM. There were only 22 tourists in this group, a smaller number than on the nature tours. This further evidenced that Arab tourists are less likely to travel for culture. We visited historical places, including the blue mosque, Hagia Sophia, and Topkapi Palace. As the guide explained the history of these places, most of the tourists were taking photos and filming the guide. Personally, I enjoyed the Hagia Sophia Mosque with its excellent architecture. While there was a large crowd, I felt comfortable and safe my heart was filled with peace.

1. Why don't Arab tourists value the culture or prefer cultural tours? Many Arabian/Middle Eastern countries are facing war, political problems, and danger. Perhaps when Arabs come to Turkey, they just want to relax and feel safe. They may

prefer nature tours since nature helps them feel calm. Culture is not always valued (children tend to prioritise phones and technology).

2. What was your terrible experience? As in previous days, the tourists did not listen to the guide, did not take care, and got lost. The guide looked for them, but we had to wait under the sun for 30 minutes. When the guide found them, they said they were not coming back with us and that he should take the group to their hotels.
3. What do they love the most? The tourist's favourite thing in Turkey was shopping. They loved to shop without limits, especially with Turkey's cheap but high-quality products. The tourists were often flamboyant people who wanted to show the world what they do and what they buy.
4. What do you think about Turkish food? I love Turkish food. However, this tour was not a good representation of Turkish food, as it was unsalted and cold. This is likely why the tourists said they did not like Turkish food (the problem was the tour food).

2.5. Interview Difficulties

Some limitations of this study included difficulties recording audio due to the crowds, people's reluctance to speak, fears of voice recording, the short time frame, and tour guide's unwillingness to provide information. Most Saudi women refused to talk to me, as they live in a secluded environment. Many women cover their faces with veils at home, but remove them upon arriving in Turkey. This makes them hesitant to communicate for fear of being identified. These challenges resulted in researcher ignorance, lost time, and increased work and fatigue.

2.6. Concluding Notes

Most of the tourists I talked to compared ‘old Turkey’ to ‘nowadays Turkey.’ They complained about prices and people’s behaviour, stating that Turkey used to be cheaper and kinder. Nowadays, Turkish people were seen as rough and cheats, a fact attributed to the increasing number of Arab tourists. Most Saudi women refused to talk to me since they belonged to a closed society. Most of the women normally wear veils but remove them when they come to Turkey and are afraid of being recognized.



CHAPTER 3

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Demographic Information

Tourism is one of the most crucial industries for economic growth, and is particularly significant in Turkey. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the profile and preferences of Middle Eastern visitors to Turkey to ensure sustainable tourism operations. The findings reported here investigate the geopolitical, ecological, cultural, and gastronomic experiences of visitors from the Middle East.

The findings are derived from qualitative interviews and observations with 26 participants from different Middle East countries, a focus group included 13 participants, and 7 tour guides. In addition to them I have also interviewed a man who are service driver. These interviews were conducted in August 2022 and focused on Turkey's natural, cultural and gastronomical tourism. This chapter categorises the findings into main themes supported by tourist's commentaries on their experience in Turkey. Individual interviews, group interviews, and observations were conducted in Istanbul. More women (58.8235%) were interviewed than men (41.1764%). They ranged in age from 18 to 75 years, with (76.4705%) being educated and (23.5294%) being uneducated. These descriptive data are displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3. 1: Tourist's Demographic Information.

Gender		Age	Status	
Female	Male		Educated	Uneducated
58.8235%	41.1764	18 to 75 years	76.4705%	23.5294%

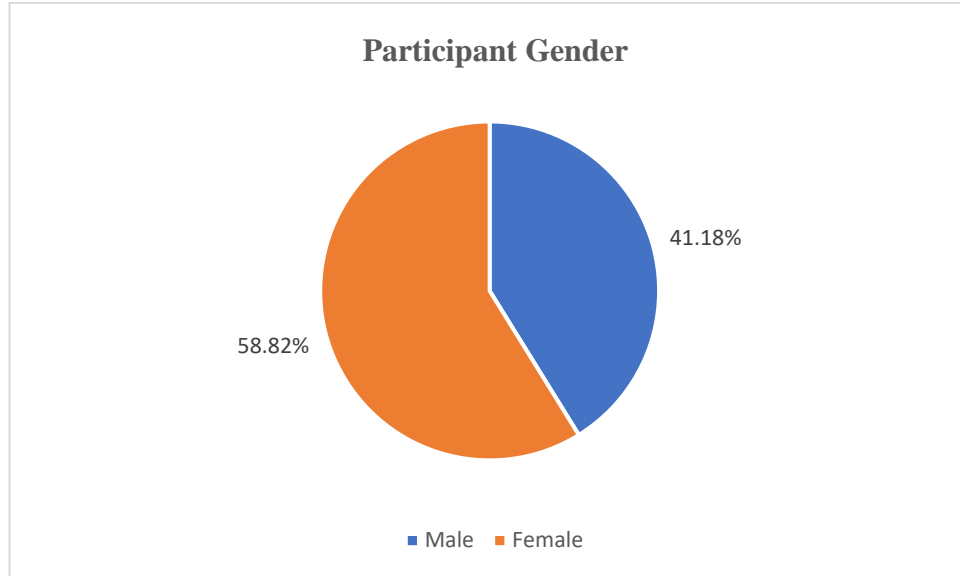


Figure 3.1: Participant Gender.

Since there were more female participants, this could mean that women are more interested in experiencing Turkey's natural, cultural, and culinary tourism (Figure 3.1).

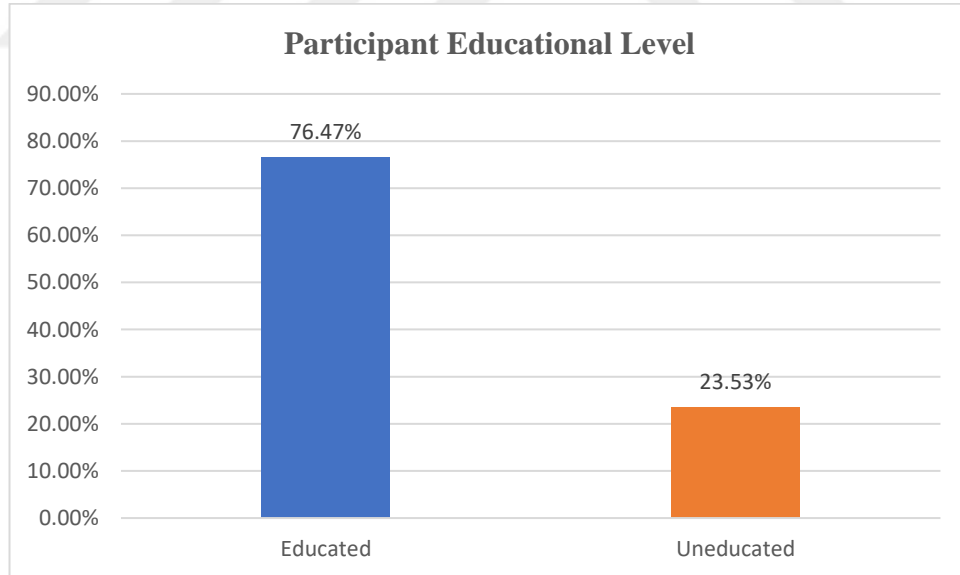


Figure 3.2: Participant educational level.

The number of educated tourists visiting Turkey is much higher than the number of uneducated tourists. Educated people seem to be more likely to visit Turkey (Figure 3.2).

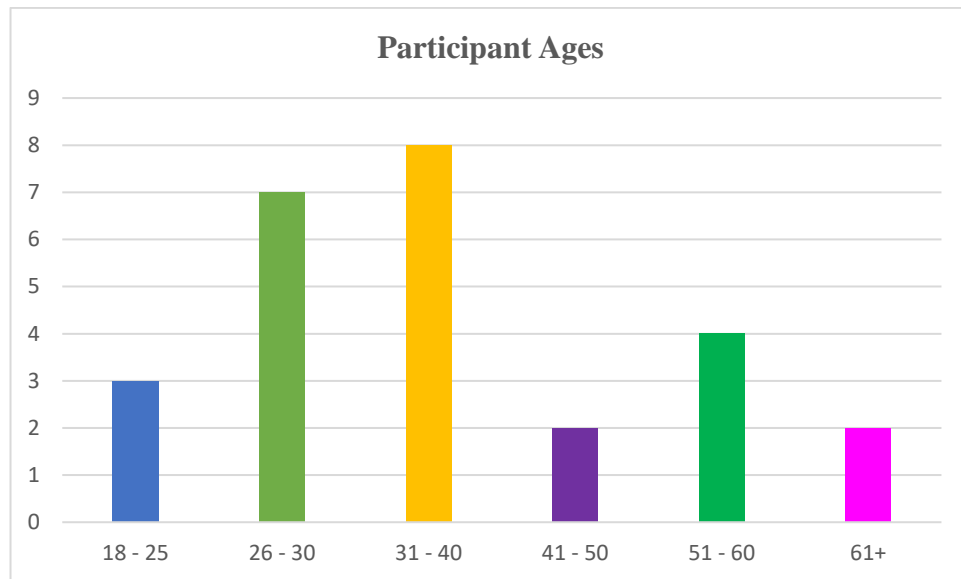


Figure 3.3: Participant ages.

Figure 3.3 sorts the Arab study participants into six age brackets. The largest group was 31-40 years, followed by 26-30 years, and the last group was 61+. (Figure 3.3). The next section draws on the participant's qualitative remarks to elucidate major themes.

3.2. Tourist Typology

According to Cohen (1979), tourists fall into five modalities: recreational mode, diversionary mode, experiential mode, experimental mode, and existential mode. Many of the Arab tourists fit into the recreational mode a desire to have fun motivated them to join the tour. For instance, one respondent explained, "I want to have fun and take pictures" (female, Jordan, 40 years, housewife). Other tourists were in Cohen's diversionary mode. Their main goal was to get away from the stress of work, life, and routines: "I want to relax there and have a coffee. I want to forget my daily routine" (female, Morocco, 35 years, pharmacist). Some tourists behaved according to the experiential mode; they were motivated by a desire to see and explore new places. As one respondent told me, "I want to discover it, and take pictures." (Female, Palestine, 30 years, housewife).

Some respondents aligned with Urry's (1990) ideas of the tourist gaze. For instance, one tourist explained, "I want to relax and watch this beautiful nature." (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist). Others mentioned their sensory experiences and the importance of place. They described using sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch to enhance their travel experiences. One woman told me, "I want to feel the place and learn about its story" (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist), and another man explained, "The feeling is more important; the pictures are just for memories" (Male, Palestine, 75 years, engineer).

3.3. Interview Results

3.3.1. Tourist Experiences

Arab tourists prefer to visit Turkey for three reasons: nature, culture, and gastronomy. According to our results, the tourists most wanted to see and experience Turkey's nature, with culture in the second place, and gastronomy distant third (Figure 3.4).

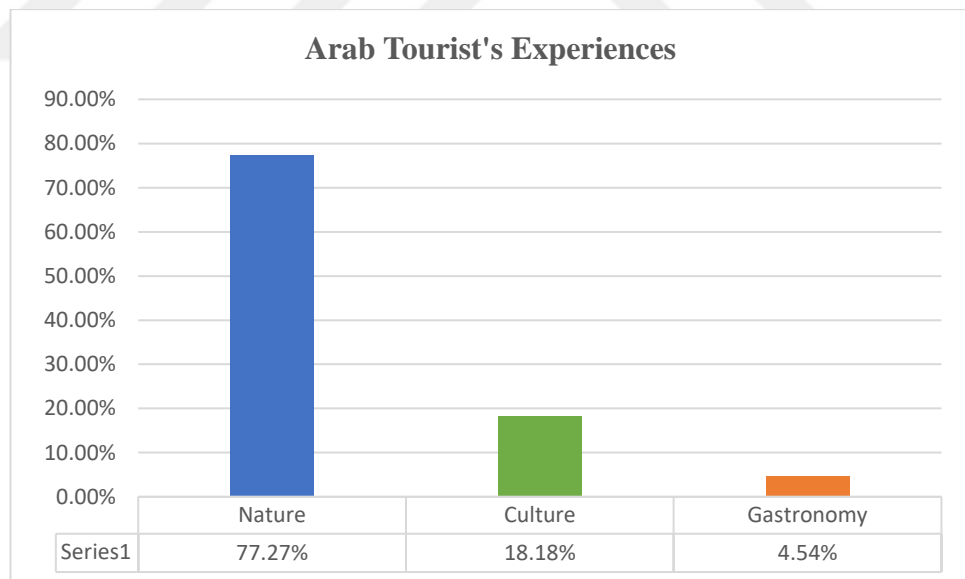


Figure 3.4: Arab tourist's experiences

3.3.2. Natural Experience

Arab countries are thought to lack natural beauty because the majority of them are dry deserts. As a result, Arab tourists enjoy visiting Turkey to satisfy their craving for its unique characteristics. The most priceless resource that our planet has to provide is nature; mountains, seas, forests, lakes, and hills all help us thrive. Most nations, particularly those in the Middle East, opt to struggle with dryness and deserts instead of making use of these unique features.

Turkey's lovely nature attracted many Arab tourists, with (77.27%) of visitors citing it as their primary reason for travelling. The joy of being in and unwinding with such stunning and distinctive nature helped them forget their everyday schedules and professional lives. For some particularly jovial visitors, enjoying the scenery, having fun, and participating in activities was more important than unwinding. As one woman concluded, "the best thing in Turkey is nature" (Female, Jordan, 45 years, housewife). When asked to describe Turkey's nature, the tourists replied:

"The nature is amazing and full of trees; Turkish nature is virgin as no one visited it before, Turks has protected their nature 100%" (Female, Jordan, 40 years, housewife).

"I have visited all over the world, lived in USA for long time, I didn't find a nature as the nature of Turkey anywhere" (Male, Palestine, 75 years, engineer).

Some visitors were affected by the green fields and trees, noting, "Turkish nature is very beautiful. There are trees everywhere" (Female, Morocco, 35 years, pharmacist).

While many visitors were happy with the scenery, others grumbled about the lack of activities. One woman complained, "I want [to] do many activities there, but here in Turkey, we don't have activities to do" (Female, Jordan, 27 years, pharmacist). As a researcher, I concur that there should be more activities, better infrastructure, and *most importantly* better restaurants. With so much competition in the tourism industry, visitor happiness and revisit intentions should be prioritised. My personal observations aligned with these results; I witnessed Middle Eastern tourists admiring Turkey's unique nature. They spent long periods of time breathing in the beautiful air and taking

souvenir photographs of beautiful moments. The guides also confirmed that nature was the main reason Arab tourists flocked to Turkey.

3.3.3. Cultural Experience

Each culture has its own traditions and practices that set it apart from others. Many cultures existing today has survived for generations longstanding traditions and rituals still impact people's day-to-day lives. Turkey has certainly upheld its traditions, customs, and culture. For instance, its historical and archaeological sites from the Ottoman Empire's reign are still maintained. Turkey has done an excellent job of maintaining and restoring its historical and cultural landmarks, which contribute to the country's growing tourism industry.

Many travellers visit museums and historical sites to learn about the history, culture, and traditions of the nations they are visiting. Our findings revealed that only (18.18%) Middle Eastern visitors travelled to Turkey for its ancient cultures. When asked Do Arab tourists show interest in cultural tours, the tourists responded:

“Arabs since childhood just want to go to beach and nature, from their childhood they're not interested in culture. Some of them loves culture, but most of them don't. They think that what you learned in school is enough for them, they never try to search, discover and learn something new” (Female, Jordan, 30 years, physiotherapist).

Another tourist stated that Arab tourists don't show interest in cultural tours and explained, “I think it's because of COVID-19. All over the world, the people were closed for a long time, so their interest in culture has decreased and they started to prefer nature more” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, biologist).

A Moroccan woman rejected the idea that Arab tourists do not appreciate culture: “I love culture so much, only children don't love history and culture, they don't see their future in history” (Female, Morocco, 36 years, accountant). Most of the tourists who loved Turkish culture were inspired by the mosques and castles; as one

tourist put it, “The architecture I have seen in Turkey is not available in all over the world” (Focus group). Others stated that Turkey has a rich culture, “Turkey has distinguished country in terms of culture, they got a rich culture and tourists can enjoy it, and Turkey has a great urban progress” (Male, Palestine, 75 years, engineer). A female Jordanian tourist was most affected by Turkey’s religious and cultural history:

“The Turkish culture is rich and ancient. The aspect of the Islamic character and the ottoman empire are amazing. I loved the mosques of Turkey so much, and in all places the mosques are similar in terms of architecture. They maintain their Islamic, Ottoman and Turkish culture together” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse).

My observations supported the finding that Arab tourists were not generally interested in cultural areas and tours. Many tourists did not listen when the guides explained historical sites. Additionally, cultural tours involved more walking, which tourists did not prefer.

One tour guide suggested that Arab visitors were less interested in Turkey’s culture since they were coming from countries with rich cultures:

“Most of Arab countries are countries with a rich culture, and there are many important historical sites in their country, so the historical places of Turkey don’t attract them. Unfortunately, tourism companies have a huge share here, they see Arab tourists [as] more money-oriented, so they keep them away from cultural tours and direct them more to commercial tours” (Male, Turkey, 27 years, tourist guide).

Other guides simply believed that Arabs loved shopping: “they don’t love cultural tours because they only love shopping” (Male, Turkey, 35 years, tourist guide). A female tourism worker added:

“Tourist shows us their personality when first they arrive [at the] airport, [some] ask us too much questions about Turkey, culture and history, this makes us so happy, but this kind of tourist are very few. Most of them come for shopping and to spend money” (Female, Turkey, 25 years, transfer).

Another guide explained that the tourists prioritise nature over culture:

“Tourist who don’t visit historical places are those who has visit Turkey many times. Another reason is that they don’t love to walk, and historical places need walking. Most of tourist are from Saudi and Bahrain, they prefer nature and shopping, the reason is that their longing to nature because they don’t have in their country. And shopping, to stay in a cold area, they don’t love the hot weather” (Male, Turkey, 30 years, tourist guide).

Lastly, a guide pointed out a culture of consumerism:

“They do not come here for cultural tours, because our cultural places and tours are not promoted well. And many tourism companies direct tourists to commercial stores in order to earn more money as a result of serious competition, which leaves the cultural tours in the background” (Male, Turkey, 31 years, tourist guide).

3.3.4. Gastronomical Experience

Food is the most significant aspect of our everyday existence because it links us to life. It is also an important component of culture, and every country has its own distinct flavours, dishes, and cooking methods. Since food plays such a significant role in our daily lives, it is necessarily one of the tourism sector's most crucial components. Turks have a long culinary tradition that has centred nutrition, cuisine, and flavours. Modern Turkish cuisine which has roots in the 10th and 11th centuries and the Seljuk and Ottoman Empire periods has undergone significant development and now offers flavours to suit nearly any palate.

However, (4.54%) of tourists said that Turkey’s Gastronomy is their main reason to visit Turkey, this number is quite low for a country like Turkey which have an ancient and diverse cuisine.

(36.36%) of people did not like the flavour of Turkish food, claiming, “Turkish food has less taste, less quality, and there is no variety” (Focus group). On the other

hand, (63.63%) of people believed “nothing is better than Turkish cuisine, their food is perfect” (Focus group). Most travellers from the Middle East adored Turkish cuisine. One Egyptian woman stated, “It tastes good, especially kebab, köfte and fasuliye” (Female, Egypt, 35 years, teacher). However, those who disliked Turkish food said, “[it] is unsalted and unspicy” (Focus group).

Others claimed they needed time to get used to the new flavours since “Turkish food tastes different from Arab cuisine, so you need some time to get used to the taste” (Focus group). One tourist explained, “it’s completely different from Arab’s cuisine; they use sauces too much, and Arab are used to spicey food” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, biologist).

When we asked Question about the hygiene, (75%) of participants believed that Turkish food is clean, even in affordable and well-liked restaurants.

focus group participants stated, “the best thing about Turks is the cleanliness of food.” However, (25%) believed Turkish food was unclean and unhealthy due to dusty surroundings, waiters and chefs who did not wear masks and gloves, dirty tables, And dishes with hair (Focus group).

Many of the Arab tourists (82.35%) thought the meal presentation was excellent, even when the food did not taste good. For instance, a focus group respondent claimed, “Turkish food presentation is great. Even if the food doesn’t taste good, their presentation make desire that food.” However, (17.64%) of visitors did not like the food presentation.

My observations suggested that many tourists do not have a problem with the hygiene and presentation of Turkish food. They often thought it was beautiful and appetising. However, the most important feature was that halal food was found everywhere: “Turkish food tastes good and its halal not like Europe” (Focus group). Some tourists were hesitant about the taste, saying that their homeland’s dishes were very spicy and sauced. One major problem was the price, as the tourists found the food to be very expensive.

The guides believed that Arab visitors did not like the food or find it hygienic. They explained, “the reason why they don’t like Turkish food, is that they usually compare to their own food, their spices are different, so the dishes here don’t suit their own tastes” (Male, Turkey, 35 years, tourist guide). However, the transfer driver refuted the idea that Arab tourists do not like Turkish food:

“I think that they love Turkish food. Of course, it varies from a person to other, but most of my guests ask me when can we eat traditional Turkish food, and where make it the best, for real, they love Turkish food so much. Only young generation prefers fast food, I think because it’s popular, what young generation prefers [*sic*] are shaped by popular things, unfortunately” (Female, Turkey, 25 years, transfer).

3.3.5. Encountering

The Middle Eastern tourist’s most intriguing experiences always involved nature. Their favourite experiences the Bosphorus tour and Bursa cable cars—were tied to Turkey’s distinctive natural beauty. When I asked about the most interesting event encountered, one tourist responded, “Hagia Sophia, I can’t forget about its history anymore. I have loved it so much” (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist).

Others were most affected by amazing Ottoman structures and the intelligent humans who must have built them: “This tour helped me to learn about the effects of the Ottoman Empire” (Female, Saudi, 55 years, geography teacher). A Palestinian woman added, “it reminds me of the time of sultans. And history of Turkey” (Female, Palestine, 60 years, housewife). A Jordanian woman marvelled, “when I went to Sultan Ahmed Mosque, I felt that the history went back to [the] time of Ottoman Empire. I wish that Jordanians took care of their culture and history as Turks did” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse). These tourists were very impressed by the Ottoman-era palaces, buildings, and mosques. The empire’s achievements, which can still be seen today, significantly contribute to Turkey’s tourism industry, and have helped Turkey become one of the world’s top cultural tourism destinations.

Arab travellers were continuously forming religious relationships with Turkey and comparing it to their own nation. They appreciated that Turkey was a familiarly Muslim nation where they could readily find halal cuisine and perform their religious rituals wherever they chose. Turkey is quite distinct from Arabic nations (e.g., language and customs). According to the tourists, there is more life in Turkey since individuals may travel freely; they also felt safer in Turkey than in their own nation. As one Palestinian woman stated, “There is more life in Turkey comparing to Palestine. Here people are leaving freely.” (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist).

3.3.6. Popular Culture

Every country has its own culture and traditions to distinguish it from other nations. People who live their everyday traditions often try to transfer them to future generations. Many traditions and customs have continued from ancient times. Younger generations have been entrusted to protect these traditions and customs (though this does not always occur). Sometimes, people are influenced by neighbouring cultures and begin to draw from them in acts of hybridity.

Many of the Middle Eastern tourists (45.83%) are affected by Turkish TV series. Consequently, some Arab adults began to imitate Turk’s lifestyles, fashion, and traditions. One Moroccan man explained, “only adolescent and old women are affected by the TV series, in terms of fashion” (Male, Morocco, 65 years, teacher). A Palestinian woman confirmed, “Turkish series affect our adult’s culture too much, affects their lifestyle and fashion” (Female, Palestine, 60 years, housewife).

Others said that Turkish media negatively affected society, especially family relationships: “It affects our life too much, half of the country divorced because of the series” (Focus group). An elderly housewife added, “It affects our culture too much; the wives behave her husband as she is in a series, their lifestyle and fashion” (Female, Palestine, 60 years, housewife). Another housewife complained, “Turkish series make people get away from them religion” (Female, Palestine, 30 years, housewife). A Jordanian biologist agreed, “It affects too much on Jordanian culture and people...do

what they see on the TV. Our culture is changing because of series” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, biologist).

However, some tourists said that Turkish series positively affected their societies: “we inspire their lifestyle, luxury life, emotions” (Female, Egypt, 35 years, teacher) and “They affect my culture and my lifestyle we learn from them” (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist). Many others (20.83%) said that they were not affected by TV series. A Saudi teacher explained, “It not affects our culture; our cultures are completely different we never dress like them” (Female, Saudi, 55 years, geography teacher). Yet, tourists seek out the places they have seen in series, and participate in the activities they saw on TV. Thus, the series serve as an effective tourism marketing strategy in Middle East markets.

I observed that most of the tourists were influenced by Turkish culture and TV series. This was evidenced by their lifestyles, clothing styles, and even their children’s names. The guides agreed, suggesting that Arab tourists want to look luxurious and rich. Shopping is an important activity for tourists in Turkey because Turkish goods are of higher quality and hold more prestige.

3.3.7. Tourists Complaints

When tourists were asked about problems they encountered in Turkey, many complained about the price of goods. For example, a Moroccan man explained, “prices became very expensive comparing to previous years” (Male, Morocco, 65 years, teacher). Another major problem was the English language. Service providers often do not speak English, so the tourists cannot make their purchases: “the main problem is the language, if they want to success in tourism, those who work in tourism must learn English” (Female, Saudi, 55 years, geography teacher). The focus group also produced the following sentiments:

“Language, they can’t speak English, they only speak Turkish. But their country is amazing even if they can’t speak English everyone wants to visit it. Another problem is high prices”

“Language, and they are not hospitable, the reason is increase in the number of Arab tourists. There’s a lack of trash. Signs are just in Turkish; they must be translated to English”

The tourists also complained about transportation: “The main problem is the transportation; we don’t know which one goes to which direction and how to buy tickets. Taxis cheat tourists because they can’t speak Turkish, [transit has] high prices and [is] crowded” (Female, Palestine, 33 years, pharmacist). Lastly, some tourists complained about tourism sector staff: “Employees in restaurants and hotels were not kind to us, they were angry. There is a lot of shortage of hotel services" (Focus group).



CHAPTER 4

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates the geopolitical experiences of Middle Eastern tourists in Turkey in terms of nature, culture, and cuisine. The term "geopolitical" is defined first, followed by examples from the tourist's experiences and relevant literature. The results of our thesis created in the preceding part are presented in this section. We investigated how Middle Eastern tourists experience Turkey's natural beauty, rich culture, and delectable cuisine. Middle Eastern travellers were primarily motivated to travel to Turkey for its nature. The guides agreed that Arab tourists loved Turkey's natural beauty since many Middle Eastern nations are dry deserts. The tourists enjoyed Turkey's distinct landscapes, which fulfilled their desires for nature.

Middle Eastern tourists in our study had little interest in culture, and hardly any of the tourists visited Turkey's cultural sites. The tourists expressed sentiments like "Arabs nowadays don't cherish the culture and don't teach their children." We postulated that Arab nation's historical experiences with war, may have diminished their appreciation for culture and pushed them toward vacations where they can have a good time. Another traveller blamed COVID-19, stating,

"The whole world was under quarantine for a long time, aircraft were suspended, no one could get outside everyone [was] upset. We all began to visit natural areas to unwind and forget the calamity once life returned to normal because we are a part of nature" (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse).

Middle Eastern nations are also cosmopolitan nations with long histories. Many of the world's most significant historical regions are located in Arab nations, so the tourists did not find novelty in Turkey's ancient regions.

The Arab tourists did adore shopping. According to the transfer driver, "when Arab visitors first arrive, they ask about shopping centres." Arab visitors typically prefer to shop as soon as they arrive, as they believe Turkey is more affordable than their home countries (and they often benefit from exchange rates). The Arab visitors

seemed to value easily-recognisable luxury brands. They wanted to look flashy and flaunt their wealth in daily life and on social media. They considered Turkey to be an ideal vacation site with plenty of opportunities to post luxurious images on social media.

Tourist guides also confirmed that Middle Eastern tourists are committed to shopping (and shop more than other nationalities). The tourists we observed seemed happiest in the shopping malls and wanted to spend most of their time there. They would even become angry if there was no shopping included in the day's itinerary. A guide explained, "They especially love shopping in Turkey, because Turkey is cheap for them" (Male, Turkey, 35 years, tourist guide). The transfer driver also told me, "They usually ask about shopping, as soon as they arrive, they search about the names of shopping centres and they want to go there" (Female, Turkey, 25 years, transfer).

The tourists appreciated that Turkey is a Muslim nation and every restaurant serves halal food. Most tourists had a moderate interest in Turkish cuisine, some were particularly enthusiastic about it. Most travellers we interviewed wanted to try "local" food and beverages, rather than just looking for something "different." The tourists sought out meals that gave them insights into the local culture and its inhabitants.

Unfortunately, some tourists described Turkish cuisine as "cold, tasteless, unspicy, and unsalted." Yet, almost all the tourists appreciated the cleanliness and food presentation. The guides claim that Arab visitors enjoy Turkish cuisine, but are unsatisfied with the meals provided on tours. The Arab visitors seemed to have a distinct palate and frequently consumed extremely spicy foods with copious amounts of sauce (which is different from Turkish food). The restaurants selected by the tour companies were often very busy, which may also have contributed to food issues. Some travellers favoured fast food due to its low prices or because they perceived it as more dependably halal. Additionally, fast food brands are consistent around the world, so they were familiar to the tourists.

This study also asked how tourist's sociocultural values impacted their experiences. Most Middle Eastern tourists watch (and are impacted by) Turkish television programmes. These programmes are said to have a negative impact on

young people in terms of their culture, fashion, way of life, home decor, and social lives. Young people may begin to imitate Turkish culture, either forgetting or supplementing their own culture. Even though Islam is dominant in Turkey and Arab nations, the Turkish television series depict characters dressing, behaving, and forming relationships in ways that are not acceptable in wider Muslim society. This can impact relationships between families and friends. Turkey's television series serve as excellent promotion for the country in the Middle Eastern markets. Many tourists who travel to Turkey express a desire to visit the locations featured in their favourite shows. Some even become interested in Turkey's past and enjoy visiting sites depicted in historical period dramas.

A large proportion of Turkey's tourism visitors come from Arab nations; these visitors seek out nature, culture and gastronomical experiences. They often feel safe and free in Turkey, and are generally satisfied with the services offered. They love Turkey's natural sites and were also very impressed by Turkish food and the unique Turkish (Ottoman) culture. The tourists were eager to participate in all the activities offered in touristic areas and often purchased souvenirs to take home. We predicted that Arab tourists would prefer taking pictures over feeling connected to the place they were visiting. However, Arab tourists refuted this assertion, saying they only took the photos as souvenirs and that it was more important for them to feel where they were.

Turkey's tourism numbers are growing by the day. For instance, visitors from Saudi Arabia increased five-fold in a year, according to data from Tourism Actuel website. According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (November 2022), only 932 Saudi tourists visited Turkey in November 2021—this number rose to 65,039 in 2022. Between January and November of 2022, 460,450 Saudi tourists visited Turkey, an almost 5-fold increase over the same period in the previous year. This growth was largely due to the normalisation of relations between the two nations.

Arab tourists flock to Turkey, in part, because of its geophysical location and its geopolitical politics, Turkey is near many Arab countries and has many seas, mountains, rivers, and hills. Turkey also has a 'perfect climate,' and amazing weather

with distinctions between four seasons. Many tourists cited Turkey's weather as a main motivator for travelling:

"Turkey is more beautiful; it has amazing weather." (Female, Palestine, 30 years, housewife).

"The nature is wonderful, especially Trabzon. And the weather is perfect."

"The most interesting thing for me was the nature and weather of Uzungöl you can see the four seasons in one day" (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse).

Most tourists who travelled to Turkey after being inspired by television shows and social media found the country to be more beautiful in person than on television and in photographs. Television and social media only showed the famous and opulent locations, not Turkey's many beautiful everyday sites. A few tourists claimed that representations in media and TV series differed from the reality of Turkey: "it's completely different because of series they only show the luxury side of life" (Female, Morocco, 28 years). Many tourists noted that the prices for goods were much more expensive than depicted on social media. Turkish people were also more conservative and more religious in reality.

Most tourists were quite satisfied with the services and experiences, and intended to visit Turkey again. Some tourists even loved Turkish nature so much that they wanted to settle in the country. A Jordanian housewife exclaimed, "I want to buy a house in Turkey's nature and live there" (Female, Jordan, 40 years, housewife) and a physiotherapist confirmed "I will visit many more times; I hope I could settle here" (Female, Jordan, 30 years, physiotherapist). A Moroccan student also stated, "I will come again to visit the places I didn't visit this time and discover them; may I think of settling here" (Male, Morocco, 18 years, student).

On the other hand, some tourists would not visit Turkey again due to bad experiences or a lack of experiences. For instance, a female tourist complained, "I will never visit Turkey again, they're not helpful at all, everything is getting more

expensive” (Female, Jordan, 45 years, housewife). A focus group participant added, “We don’t want to come again because everything has been changed” (focus group).

The Middle Eastern tourists chose to visit Turkey because it is a safe and religious country. As a Saudi male explained, “The thing that attracted us the most is that Turkey is a Muslim country and I can pray wherever I want. Turkey is more suitable for families” (Male, Saudi). The focus group added, “It’s safe place even in late nights you can be outside, and they respect women so much” (Focus group). A Jordanian nurse summed it up: “The nature, religion, culture, and their rich history attracted me the most” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse).

Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) and visual media (TV series, movies, advertisements) greatly impacted Middle Eastern tourists and prepared them to visit Turkey. A Palestinian woman stated, “The series affected me too much to visit Turkey. I can say 90%” (Female, Palestine, 30 years, housewife). A Jordanian woman confirmed, “The series has a great impact on us, we wanted to visit the place series were filmed.” (Female, Jordan, 23 years, Business administration). Other tourists added:

“In social media, we see the beauty of Turkey and their social life this inspire us to visit” (Female, Egypt, 35 years, teacher).

“The social media attracted me to visit Turkey. I wanted to feel the places that I have saw in social media. It helped me to know what clothes to bring with me and how is the weather there. And it showed me what kind of food will I taste” (Female, Jordan, 33 years, nurse).

A tour guide confirmed that:

“a good marketing strategy is done by TV series to Arab countries, there’s nothing they can’t give or pay only to see an actor they have seen on TV series, trying out the things they saw on TV series and the famous thing are the best activity for them” (Male, Turkey, 27 years, tourist guide)

Sometimes Arab visitors in Turkey encounter some issues. Most Middle Eastern tourists experienced problems with transportation. Tickets and signage were

usually in Turkish, so they did not know which vehicle to board. The tourists especially complained that "taxis are incredibly expensive here, and they often want to cheat on us." Similarly, the Arab visitors found the Turkish language to be very uncomfortable, and urged tourism providers to learn English. Furthermore, many visitors were troubled by how the Turks treated them. They complained that the Turks were sometimes rude and inhospitable to them and expressed dissatisfaction with food prices, which they attributed to the sharp rise in Arab visitors to Turkey. Most Middle Eastern travellers said they would return to Turkey many more times, but did not want to settle there as they already had a life and a job in their own country.

All the Arab tourists were from Islamic countries and adhered to their customs, traditions, and cultures. Turkey is also an Islamic country, so tourists felt more able to adhere to their religion and order halal meals. Turkey is among the first countries Arab tourists consider when planning a family holiday according to Islamic rules. Arab tourists rarely have financial constraints, and generally want to shop at luxury places. As a tour guide stated, "their difference from other groups is that they allocate more time to shopping places rather than touristic places" (Male, Turkey, 35 years, tourist guide).

Some guides complained about working with Arab tourists:

"Arab tourists don't obey with the time; they don't care about the guide at all and never try to learn something from me. They love to spend money on their own pleasure. They like to implement things that everyone sees popular, such as going to places like Czn Burak restaurant, Nusret steakhouse, and Hafiz Mustafa baklava to take photos there, for them this can be the best travel memories in Turkey. They desire to share on social media and see places that will envy others. Due to the cheapness of Turkey, there's an unlimited shopping desire for them" (Male, Turkey, 31 years, tourist guide).

"They always get late for the time we gave them; the main problem is that they behave freely and rough because they paid money. They're very impatient people, they want us to implement everything they want immediately. They hate

waiting but always make us wait for them. For them, there's no fear that 'the guide will leave me if I get late, because he knows that the guide won't leave him, even if the guide leave, I will catch him by taxi. I have money.' Another problem with them is that they talk very loudly even if they talk among themselves, those who see them from afar will think they're fighting" (Male, Turkey, 27 years, tourist guide).

"They like Turkey because it's cheap for them, it's a Muslim country and food is halal. When they travel to Europe, it's hard for them to find halal food, so they prefer Turkey. European don't love Arabs at all, so Turkey is an ideal country for them to visit. Our traditions and cultures are close to each other, for example, they get happy when they hear the Adhan, they can find it in Europe. But the most they love is shopping" (Male, Turkey, 29 years, tourist guide).

The transfer driver also complained about working with Arab tourists:

"They are completely different from other tourist groups, they are stubborn, they want us to do whatever they ask for, they see themselves like king and queens. For example, the European tourist feel shy and embarrassed when we carry their luggage and they thank us, but Arabian tourists act as you are obliged to carry their luggage. This annoys us, it's not our job to carry them, but sometimes there tired or sick or have kids, so we get sad for them and want to help them. But when selfish Arabs come, I never help them. In general, they're rude, rough, and stingy" (Female, Turkey, 25 years, transfer).

Arab tourists tend to travel in large groups, mismanage their time, and keep the guides waiting. They are also excited and curious when visiting Turkey, as it is geographically very different from their country.

4.1. Suggestions

- The tourism sector is one of the most important economic sectors in Turkey. Turkey hosts tourists from all around the world, but has attracted many Middle Eastern tourists in recent years. Therefore, more work should consider how to improve these visitor's tourism experiences and make them memorable.
- The restaurants selected for the tours should be improved or changed. The meals offered should be diverse, hot, and fast; kitchen areas must also be kept clean.
- The number of activities and entertainment venues in nature tours should be increased, especially for children. Areas for older tourists to rest and relax should also be created.
- There are many shortcomings in the cultural tours, despite the significance of Turkey's history and culture. Such tours should show culture and history in more interesting (not boring) ways.
- Foreign languages are important in the tourism sector and essential for increasing tourist satisfaction. The personnel working in Turkey's tourism sector were inadequate in this regard their foreign languages were lacking. The tourists suggested enrolling the tourism personnel in English language courses.
- The Middle Eastern tourists were also uncomfortable with transportation and taxis. Taxis should use sensors and meters to ensure that drivers are not cheating the tourists. English should also be added to the street signs for tourist's convenience.

If these problems are not resolved, Turkey may soon lose its market share of Middle Eastern tourists.

4.2. Future Work

Future studies should investigate Middle Eastern tourist's experiences, especially in terms of geopolitics. Scholars may also generalise our results (on nature, cultural, gastronomical experiences) by carrying out similar research with tourists from different countries.

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APPENDIX

Turkey Middle Eastern Tourists Interview Questions

This survey has undertaken under the MA Project (of Jailan Abdulkareem MUSA who is MA student in Tourism Management) which was supported by Turkey's Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. This research aims to collect detailed information about the tourist profile in the country. Interview questions includes 5 sections. These sections were personal information, experience, encountering, popular culture and closing. As a visitor, your participation to this study makes an important contribution to success of the study. This survey's data will be kept strictly confidential and will be destroyed after the study. Many thanks in advance for your participation.

Doç.Dr. Emine CİHANGİR & Doç. Dr. Mehmet ŞEREMET

Project Leaders

Van Yüzüncü Yıl University

Participant questions:

A. Personal information:

1. Where are you from?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your education status?

B. Experience:

1. What do you think about the tastes of the food and drinks you experience?
2. What do you think about the hygiene of the food and drinks you experience?
3. What do you think about the presentation of the food and drinks you have experienced?
4. How would you describe the natural areas you visited? Why?
5. How do you prefer to experience natural areas? Why?
6. What do you think about culture (building, museum, temple)?
7. Is it more important to feel the places you see or to take pictures of them?

C. Encountering:

1. What is the most interesting event you encountered during your trip? Why?
2. What kind of historical ties has this touristic experience helped you to establish?
3. What kind of cultural connection did the taste and presentation of the food you eat provide you with?
4. What similarities did you discover between your daily and cultural life during your touristic trip?
5. What kind of differences do you observe between your daily and cultural life during your touristic trip?

D. Popular Culture:

1. Do Turkish TV series affect your daily life? in which direction?
2. What kind of feelings/emotions/thoughts did the things you see indirectly (seeing, watching) evoke in you?
3. After seeing Turkey, what similarities and differences did you observe between what you saw on social media and visual media (films, TV series, etc.)?
4. Does the Turkish culture you see in TV series cause your own culture to change in daily life? Why?
5. How did social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) and visual media (TV series, movies, advertisements, etc.) contribute to your preparation for this visit?
6. What similarities or differences did you observe between the visuals of the local culture in Turkey on TV and serials?
7. How did it make you feel to be in a country where you watched Turkish TV series and photographs of Turkey from afar?
8. What was the most compelling reason for you to visit this country? How did you decide?
9. How do you make sense of Turkish culture after your experiences on the trip?

E. Closing

1. What are your most memorable experiences during the tour?
2. Do you think that your cultural, gastronomic and nature experiences will make a difference in your own life? Why? In which direction?

3. How did you find the nature, gastronomy, and local culture of Turkey (your experiences)?
4. What part of Turkey were you most impressed with? (Nature, gastronomy, culture).
5. What are the main problems you encountered during your trip and how did you solve them?
6. Do you intend to come to Turkey again? Or would you consider settling in this country? Why?
7. Why Arabs are not interested in culture tours?
8. Why Arabs are not interested in Turkish food?

Tourist guide questions:

1. What are the advantages of working with Arab tourists?
2. What are the disadvantages of working with Arab tourists?
3. What do they like in Turkey?
4. What do they dislike in Turkey?
5. What are their thoughts on Turkish food? What are their preferred foods?
6. Do Arab tourists show interest in cultural tours? which ones?
7. What are the different aspects of Arab tourists compared to other tourist groups?
8. Do Arab tourists feel like guests or more customers? What do they attribute this to?
9. How do you make sense of Arab tourists as a guide? What does it mean for you, for example, just a customer or a guest?
10. What are their most interesting experiences?

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Turizm ve otel işletmeciliği

29.07.2019

Birincilikle.

İş Deneyimi

Yok

Yabancı Dil

Kürtçe, Arapça, İngilizce, Türkçe

Hobiler

Fotoğrafçılık, Kitap okumak, Seyahat etmek, Yeni kültürler keşfetmek, yeni şeyler öğrenmek.



VAN YÜZÜNCÜ YIL ÜNİVERSİTESİ

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

LİSANSÜSTÜ TEZ ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

25/01/2023

Tez Başlığı / Konusu:

Nature, Culture and Gastronomy Experiences of Middle Eastern Tourists: The Case of Turkey

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu belirlenen tez çalışmamın Kapak sayfası, Giriş, Ana bölümler ve Sonuç bölümlerinden oluşan toplam 85 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 25/01/2023 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından TURNITIN intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtreleme uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 9 (dokuz) dır.

Uygulanan Filtreler Aşağıda Verilmiştir:

- Kabul ve onay sayfası hariç,
- Teşekkür hariç,
- İçindekiler hariç,
- Simge ve kısaltmalar hariç,
- Gereç ve yöntemler hariç,
- Kaynakça hariç,
- Alıntılar hariç,
- Tezden çıkan yayınlar hariç,
- 7 kelimedenden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 7 words)

Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Tez Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılmasına İlişkin Yönergeyi İnceledim ve bu yönergede belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal İçemediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini bilgilerinize arz ederim.

25/01/2023

Jailan Abdulkareem MUSA

Adı Soyadı : Jailan Abdulkareem MUSA
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U Y G U N D U R

..... /..... /20....

Prof. Dr. Bekir KOÇLAR

Enstitü Müdürü