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**BASIC CHARACTERISTICS, MOTIVATIONS, AND
ACTIVITIES OF ECOTOURISTS: A CASE OF LAKE VAN
BASIN AREA, TURKEY***

*EKOTURİSTLERİN TEMEL ÖZELLİKLERİ, MOTİVASYONLARI VE
AKTİVİTELERİ: VAN GÖLÜ HAVZASI ALANI ÖRNEĞİ, TÜRKİYE*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to determine the basic characteristics, motivations, and activities of ecotourists who visit the Lake Van Basin Area. The research sample is selected randomly and consists of visitors aged 18 or older. A two-page questionnaire is conducted through face-to-face interviews. A total of 306 domestic and international ecotourists participated in the survey during the period April–December 2011 and April–December 2012. The choice to collect data

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during this period is deliberate, as it allow researchers to maximize the chances of interviewing a large number of tourists.

The findings of the research reveal that exploring nature, visiting historical sites, experiencing new things, and learning about local culture are the main motivational factors for ecotourists. While international tourists place relatively higher importance on visiting historical sites and seeing religious places, domestic tourists assign more significance to visiting friends/relatives and shopping.

Furthermore, nature walks, rural tourism activities, swimming in the lake, and photo safari tours are ranked as the most popular activities by visitors. Based on the one-way ANOVA results, there is a significant difference in terms of tourism activities participated in (which include climbing, nature walks, rafting, photo safaris, and bicycle tours) by casual ecotourists, mainstream ecotourists, and dedicated ecotourists.

Even though the tourists surveyed state that they are dissatisfied with the area's entertainment centers, recreational facilities, local infrastructure, and tourism information; they express their happiness with the food and drinks on offer, as well as the hospitality of local people, and accommodation facilities. Generally, the mean degree of ecotourists' satisfaction in the research area is very high. Hence, majority of them state that they will recommend the area to their friends, and would like to come the region again.

Key Words: ecotourists, ecotourism activities, motivations of ecotourists, Turkey

Öz

Bu makale Van Gölü Havzasını ziyaret eden yabancıların temel özelliklerini, motivasyonlarını ve aktivitelerini araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Araştırma örneklemini 18 yaş ve üzeri ziyaretçiler arasından rastgele seçilmiştir. İki sayfalık anket katılımcılarla yüz yüze yapılan görüşmelerle uygulanmıştır. Toplamda 306 yerli ve yabancı ekoturist araştırmaya Nisan-Aralık 2011 ve Nisan-Aralık 2012 arasında katılmışlardır. Daha fazla turist anketin uygulanmasına katılımının sağlanması için, bu zaman özellikle dilimi seçilmiştir.

Araştırmada doğayı keşfetmek, tarihi alanlarını ziyaret, yeni şeyler keşfetmek ve yerel kültürler hakkında öğrenim ekoturistler için ana motivasyon kaynakları olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Uluslararası turistler tarihi ve dinsel alanları ziyarete göreli olarak fazla önem atfederlerken, yerli turistler arkadaş ve akraba ziyareti ile alış verişe daha fazla önem vermektedirler.

Turistler doğada yürüyüş, kırsal turizm aktiviteleri, gölde yüzmek ve fotoğraf safari turunu en popüler turizm aktiviteleri olarak belirtmişlerdir. Tek yönlü ANOVA testi sonuçlarına göre, katılan turizm aktiviteleri olarak tırmanış, doğada yürüyüş, rafting, fotoğraf safari turu ve bisiklet turu sıradan, temel, ve adanmış ekoturistler arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmaktadır.

Araştırmaya katılan turistler eğlence yerleri, rekreasyon olanakları, yerel alt yapı ve turizm bilgilendirmesi konularında sorunla karşılaştıklarını; ancak, yiyecek ve içecekler, insanların misafirliği ve konaklama imkânlarından memnun olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Genel olarak ekoturistlerin memnuniyet düzeyleri yüksektir. Dolayısıyla katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu arkadaşlarına ve tanıdıklarına bölgeyi ziyaret etmeyi tavsiye edeceklerini ve kendilerinin tekrar ziyaret gerçekleştireceklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ekoturistler, ekoturizm aktiviteleri, ekoturizm motivasyonları, Türkiye

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth in demand for tourism to areas of the world perceived as having unspoiled nature has been a significant trend in the market of late. This growth (Holden and Sparrowhawk, 2002) has led to ecotourism becoming one the fastest growing market segments in the world, with increases of 10% per annum within the tourism industry (Wight, 2001). Ecotourism has been advanced as a form of sustainable tourism that is expected to support “environmental conservation as well as generating economic opportunities” (Zhang and Lei, 2013) and “development of local people” (Torres-Sovero, Gonzales, Martin-Lopez, and Kirkby, 2012: 545) within Turkey. It has also been promoted in the 2023 Tourism Strategy developed by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Ecotourists are individuals who spend a predetermined number of days engaged in environmentally based activities, and have unique motives for visiting natural areas (Palacio and McCool, 1997). According to Eagles and Cascagnette (1995), ecotourists are individuals who travel with the intent of observing, experiencing and learning about nature. The purposes of ecotourists’ visits seem to be enjoying, admiring and studying the natural environment and appreciating the cultural values of the areas (Subbiah and Kannan, 2012). This paper is based on empirical research into the characteristics, motivations, and activities of ecotourists in the Lake Van Basin Area of Turkey, a region that has become synonymous with the term “ecotourism” in recent years because of its unspoiled physical and cultural characteristics. This study provides one of the few examinations of the rapidly developing Turkish ecotourism market in the context of domestic and foreign visitation to Lake Van Basin Area in Turkey.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is considered to be one of the most important variables in understanding tourist behavior. Assessing tourist motivation allows us to understand travelers’ choices, preferences and needs (Bansal and Eiselt, 2004). Knowledge of ecotourists’ characteristics, particularly in terms of preferences and motivations, will facilitate planning regarding what, where and how to market natural areas to ecotourists (Palacio and McCool, 1997). To market effectively, it is essential to generate

more specific knowledge concerning travelers' motivations for visiting natural areas (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). By understanding the motives of ecotourists, tourism marketers can specifically benefit from these issues with regards to market segmentation, product development, service quality evaluation, image development and promotional activities (Fodness, 1994; Kozak, 2001). However, very little market information on ecotourists' characteristics, preferences and motivations in the context of Turkey exists to date.

Although there are evidently many factors influencing tourists' behavior, motivation is still considered a crucial indicator and force that explains why tourists behave in certain ways. There are a variety of motivations and characteristics within the market, and subsequently ecotourists are not a homogeneous group (Bricker, and Kerstetter, 2001; Wight, 2001). Tourists' motivation is regarded as the combination of needs and desires that affects the propensity to travel in a general sense, which can also vary according to the tourists' age, gender and nationality (Meng, Tepanon, and Uysal, 2006). Empirical research shows that ecotourists are well educated and earn higher incomes than average (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2001; Holden and Sparrowhawk, 2002; Honey, 1999; Wearing and Neil, 1999), and tend to be middle aged (Ballantine and Eagles, 1994).

A lot of research has been conducted to understand the reasons why ecotourists undertake trips to natural areas. Wight (1997) notes that ecotourists seek uncrowded, remote, wilderness, learning about wildlife, nature, and local cultures, community benefits and having physical challenge. In an early study, Eagles (1992) states that the motives of ecotourists include learning about nature", "being physically active", and "meeting people with similar interests. Ballantine and Eagles (1994) believe that ecotourists' prime motivation is to learn about nature in wild or undisturbed areas. Wood (2002) indicates that the main motivations for ecotourists are the observation and appreciation of natural features and related cultural assets. Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002) found that one of the prime motivations for ecotourists is a change from [the] daily routine. Visiting uncrowded destinations, experiencing remote and unspoiled nature, and interacting with native people have also been found to be motivations (Eagles, 1992; Eagles and Cascagnette, 1995; Wight, 1996a).

According to Wight (1996a), being in a wilderness setting was the most important feature for the experienced ecotourism traveler, followed by viewing wildlife, hiking/trekking, and visiting national parks/other protected areas. The features that were found to be most important to the general consumer were very similar: casual walking, viewing wildlife, learning about other cultures, visiting national parks/other protected areas, and being in a wilderness setting. The opportunity to enjoy scenery and/or nature was the number one reason cited by most ecotourists for their next ecotourism vacation. The experienced ecotourism traveler tends to be more interested in outdoor-related activities. Males demonstrate a higher propensity for wilderness settings and physically challenging activities, whereas women rate casual walking, learning about other cultures, and interpretive education

programs as being more important (Wight, 1996b). It seems that both attractions and social factors play an important role in this context (Eagles, 1992; Page and Dowling, 2002).

Ecotourists are interested in a wide range of activities. Wright (1996a) indicates that casual walking, viewing wildlife, and hiking/trekking are the most preferred activities by ecotourists. Water-based activities are also important, particularly for experienced ecotourists. According to Tourism Canada (1995), the most preferred ecotourism activities are trail riding, canoeing, nature observation, and viewing wildlife. Ecotourists desire multi-activity vacations (Ayala, 1995); they are interested in more than one type of activity for their next vacation, and they expect to incorporate different experiences into their total trip (Wright, 1996a). Weaver and Lawton (2001) found that national park visits, hiking/bushwalking, viewing wildlife, guided trail walks, and visiting historical sites/museums were the activities usually undertaken by respondents during their ecotourism travel in Lamington National Park in Australia.

Some researchers have attempted to segment the ecotourist market on the basis of behavior and motivation. Kusler (1991) identifies groups such as do-it-yourself ecotourists, ecotourists on tours and school or scientific groups, while Laarman and Durst (1987) argue for a distinction between “hard” and “soft” ecotourism experiences. Lindberg (1991) categorizes ecotourists according to their dedication to nature as “hard-core”, “dedicated”, “mainstream” or “casual”. Hard-core ecotourists are interested in tours designed specifically for education and/or involvement in environmental projects, such as wildlife monitoring. Dedicated ecotourists are travelers who undertake tours to see protected areas and experience local natural and cultural history. Mainstream tourists are primarily interested in taking unusual trips, such as to the Amazon, or to view animals such as gorillas in Rwanda, or elephants, lions, or giraffes. Casual ecotourists are interested in participating in natural and cultural tours as an incidental component of a broader trip.

Although the characteristics and motivations of ecotourists are more widely understood now compared to 10 years ago, a lack of empirical research into the motivations of such tourists still exists (Holden and Sparrowhawk, 2002). This study will make new contributions to the literature on ecotourism in eastern Turkey by means of identifying the motivations and activities of ecotourists, of which there is relatively limited understanding at present.

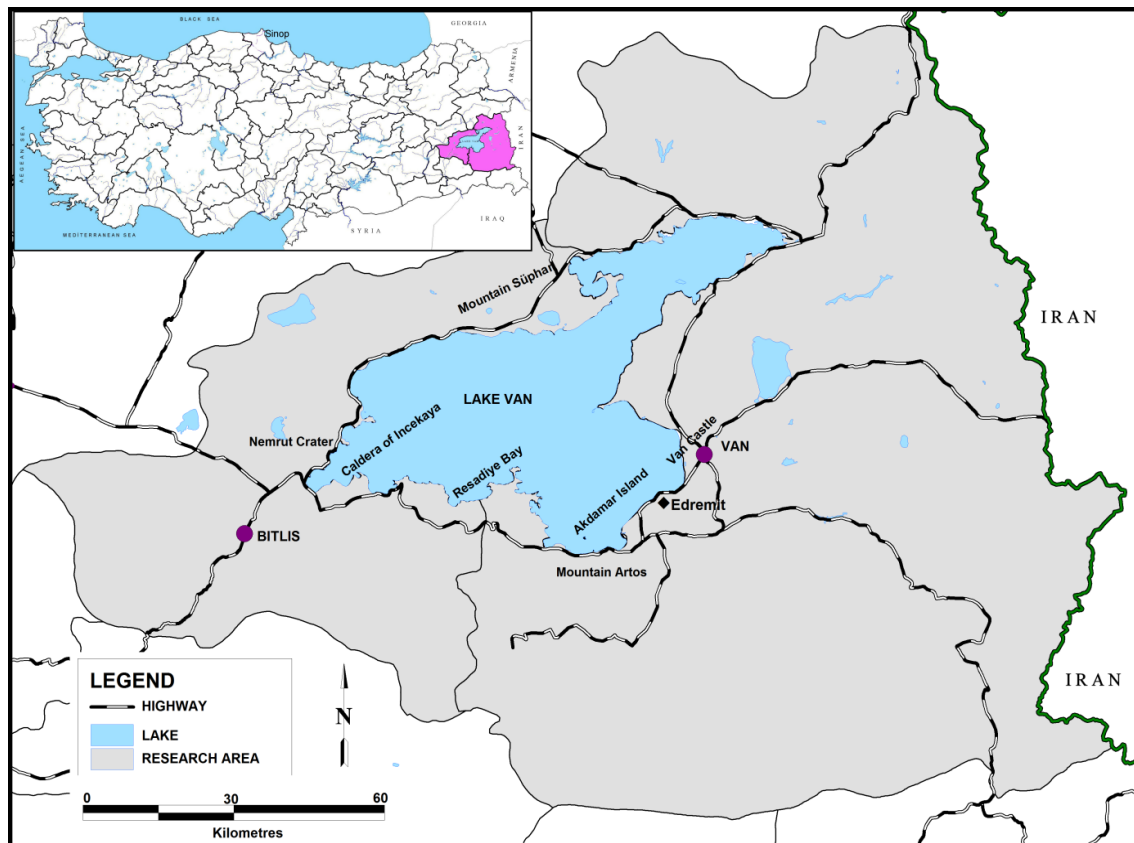
3. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the Lake Van Basin Area in Turkey. Lake Van Basin Area, which measures 13,672 km², is located in the east of Turkey on the border of Iran, and covers the provinces of Bitlis and Van. The research area can be seen in Figure 1. Lake Van Basin Area, as one of the best-preserved natural areas in Turkey, represents an ideal area for ecotourism development and offers unique ecotourism experiences. Attractive geological structures, beautiful natural landscapes, cultural

monuments, a high-quality environment and a large number of biological species and ecosystems provide great potential for sustainable development in this area.

Data were collected during the period April–December 2011 and April–December 2012. The choice to collect data during this period was deliberate, as it allowed us to maximize the chances of conducting questionnaire with a large number of tourists. The survey was conducted at natural attractions such as the island of Akdamar in which the Armenian Akdamar Church is located, around Lake Van, and at the Lake Nemrut Crater, Van Castle, Artos Mountain, Süphan Mountain, Reşadiye Bay, and Caldera of Incekaya. Furthermore, the questionnaire was sent to the hotels in the cities of Van and Edremit (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of the research area



The survey questionnaire was first prepared by researchers in English after a detailed literature review, and then translated to Turkish by the researchers. Pre-test was conducted with 31 tourists to test the clarity of measures' items and to understand clearances of the questions and revised in order to measure it for clarity and ease of use. These questionnaires were not included for analysis since some of the questions were updated after taking initial results. For example, initially basic tourism activities were measured based on a yes no question; however, this question was later covered to a 5-point Likert type scale (i.e., 1 for *low interest*, 5 for *high interest*) to make

comparison. The final version of the questionnaire were updated in consideration of recommendations from experts such as hotel managers and scholars. Then, questionnaire were conducted via face-to-face interviews.

A convenience sampling that is “simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility” (Bryman and Bell 2007: 197) was used. Hence, the sampling frame in this study was selected randomly and consisted of domestic and international visitors, aged 18 or older, to Lake Van Basin Area since choosing of this sample allows researchers to make comparison between domestic and international tourists’ perception of ecotourism. Out of 356, a total of 306 usable questionnaire were returned with an acceptable level of 86%. The ratio of those who did not wish to participate in the study was 14%.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections containing 19 questions. The first part of the survey contained questions relating to demographic variables such as age, education, gender, household income, and marital status. In the second section, the information sources and tourists’ travelling styles were searched. The third part of the questionnaire included the purpose of the tourists’ visit and their basic motivations. In addition, one question was asked about whether the tourists would define themselves as casual, mainstream, or dedicated nature tourists. Casual ecotourists refers to those who happened to be in the research area without any ecotourism purpose. Mainstream ecotourists are those whose main aim is not ecotourism, but who have chosen to take part in an ecotourism experience during their trip. Dedicated ecotourists are purely ecotourists, whose fundamental aim for the trip is ecotourism. In the fourth section, accommodation types, duration period, and opinions about the region were explored. In the final part, willingness to visit again and degree of satisfaction were identified. To measure the information types and importance of visits a five-point Likert scale was utilized (1= Low importance, 5= High importance). Similarly, a five-point Likert scale was used to identify their opinions about the region (1= Very bad, 5= Very good) and the basic activities on offer (1= Low interest, 5= High interest).

The data obtained from the survey was analyzed using SPSS 18 for Windows. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean values, and standard deviations (SD) were applied. One-way ANOVA was used to determine the differences between the casual, mainstream, and dedicated ecotourists in terms of their motivations and tourism activities. Furthermore, the Tukey test was used to determine how the groups differ from one another, and an independent sample t-test was also employed to compare the mean scores of international and foreign tourists in terms of basic motivations and activities most interested in at the statistical meaningfulness level of $p=.05$. Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .819 for basic motivations and most desirable activities items, which indicates the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Characteristics of Ecotourists

Most of the participants are male (60.5%), married (53.3%), hold a college (39.9%) or university (52.0%) diploma or a degree, and are aged between either 18-28 (24.8%) or 29-39 (26.5%). Their average monthly income is primarily between 1001-2000\$ (30.1%) or 0-1000\$ (18.3%) (see Table 1).

Furthermore, 40.8% of participants spent five or more days on their trip, followed by three days and two days at 17.6% and 16.0%, respectively. While 42.8% of them prefer a tour to visit the region, 57.2% do not. A total of 26.1% of the visitors were travelling alone, 31.0% with their families, and 32.0% with friends. The majority of the tourists were visiting the area for the first or second time, at 46.1% and 23.9%, respectively. Most of the tourists prefer to stay in a hotel (72.2%). Almost half of the respondents describe themselves as mainstream nature tourists (50.3%), while 27.8% were casual and 21.9% dedicated nature tourists.

Word of mouth ($M=3.23$), the recommendation of a travel agency or tour operator ($M=2.85$), previous visits ($M=2.93$), and the Internet ($M=2.77$) are the four main information sources that have an effect on the ecotourists' travel decision making.

4.2. Basic Motivations of Ecotourists

The findings of the research reveal that exploring nature ($M:3.69$, $SD:1.430$), visiting historical sites ($M=3.54$, $SD:1.551$), experiencing new things ($M:3.29$, $SD:1.520$), and being with local people to learn about their culture ($M:3.29$, $SD:1.484$) are the main motivations of the ecotourists visiting Lake Van Basin. This result is consistent with the findings of the literature, in which nature is the main motivation of ecotourists.

Based on the independent sample t-test employed to compare the mean scores of the basic motivations of domestic and international tourists, the mean degrees of visiting friends/relatives, visiting historical sites, seeing religious places, and shopping are statistically significant, since international tourists place relatively higher importance on visiting historical sites and seeing religious places, while domestic tourists place more significance on visiting friends/relatives and shopping (see Table 2).

The one-way ANOVA results reveal that with regards to basic motivations, there is a significant difference among casual, mainstream, and dedicated ecotourists in terms of exploring nature, observing flora and fauna, visiting friends/relatives, visiting historical sites, having an adventure, seeing religious places, experiencing new things, feeling healthy, escaping the stress and noise of city life, being with local people to learn about their culture, and participating in sporting activities. The Tukey test was conducted in order to determine how the groups differ from each other (see Table 3).

Table 1. The profile of ecotourists

		Gender		Marital Status			Education			Age					Monthly Income				
		Male	Female	Single	Married	Divorce/Separated	Primary/Secondary Education	College/High/Technical School	University Degree	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	More than 61	0-1000\$	1001-2000\$	2001-3000\$	3001-4000\$	More than 4000\$
All tourists	N	185	121	118	163	25	25	122	159	76	81	55	48	46	56	92	48	15	30
	%	60.5	39.5	38.6	53.3	8.1	8.1	39.9	52.0	24.8	26.5	18.0	15.7	15.0	18.3	30.1	15.7	4.9	9.8
International tourists	N	131	59.8	84	113	20	21	93	105	42	52	43	38	44	36	63	31	5	27
	%	88	40.2	38.4	51.6	10.0	9.6	42.5	47.9	19.2	23.7	19.6	17.4	20.1	16.4	28.8	14.2	2.3	12.3
Domestic tourists	N	54	62.1	34	50	3	4	29	54	34	29	12	10	2	20	29	17	10	3
	%	33	37.9	39.1	57.5	3.4	4.6	33.3	62.1	39.1	33.3	13.8	11.5	2.3	23.0	33.3	19.5	11.5	3.4

Table 2. Output for Independent Sample T Test

	Tourist type	N	Mean	S.D.	F	df	t	p
Exploring nature	domestic	87	3.83	1.269	11.265	304	1.065	.288
	international	219	3.63	1.488				
Observing flora and fauna	domestic	87	3.01	1.574	.455	304	.130	.897
	international	219	2.99	1.516				
Visiting friends/relatives	domestic	87	3.09	1.789	7.256	304	3.502	.001*
	international	219	2.36	1.603				
Visiting historical sites	domestic	87	2.84	1.758	28.989	304	-5.183	.000*
	international	219	3.82	1.369				
Searching adventure	domestic	87	2.90	1.664	6.343	304	-.524	.601
	international	219	3.00	1.514				
Seeing religious places	domestic	87	2.40	1.573	3.873	304	-4.537	.000*
	international	219	3.25	1.425				
Experiencing new things	domestic	87	3.37	1.564	.219	304	.557	.578
	international	219	3.26	1.506				
Feeling healthy	domestic	87	1.86	1.416	4.937	304	-1.921	.056
	international	219	2.23	1.564				
Escaping stress and noise of the city life	domestic	87	2.87	1.731	6.278	304	-.309	.758
	international	219	2.94	1.540				
Being with local people to learn their culture	domestic	87	3.33	1.484	.002	304	.291	.771
	international	219	3.28	1.487				
Participating sport activities	domestic	87	1.94	1.392	4.638	304	-1.953	.052
	international	219	2.31	1.497				
Shopping	domestic	87	2.69	1.572	2.519	304	2.362	.019*
	international	219	2.23	1.507				

*p<.05

The findings indicate that casual tourists place higher emphasis on visiting friends/relatives than dedicated tourists do. The reason behind this finding is that the main motivations of casual tourists are not related to nature; hence, they may visit the area in order to visit friends and relatives, and at the same time attended a nature tour.

Dedicated tourists place relatively higher importance on exploring nature, visiting historical sites, having an adventure, escaping the stress and noise of city life, being with local people to learn about their culture, and participating in sporting activities, compared to casual tourists. Dedicated tourists also place higher importance on observing flora and fauna, experiencing new things, and feeling healthy than mainstream tourists do. Dedicated tourists assign higher importance to seeing religious

Table 3. Results of one-way ANOVA test for basic motivations according to types of ecotourists

	Exploring nature	Observing flora and fauna	Visiting friends/relatives	Visiting historical sites	Having an adventure	Seeing religious places	Experiencing new things	Feeling healthy	Escaping the stress and noise of city life	Being with local people to learn about their culture	Participating in sporting activities	Shopping
	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D	C M D
N	85	154	67	85	154	67	85	154	67	85	154	67
Mean	3.52	3.62	1.461	2.88	2.86	3.43	2.93	2.58	2.06	3.06	3.63	3.94
S.D.	1.385	1.461	1.363	1.507	1.534	1.490	1.731	1.683	1.536	1.628	1.555	1.290
F	3.292	3.602	5.127	6.289	3.468	11.156	8.236	4.333	4.438	4.358	9.022	1.492
p	.039*	.028*	.006*	.001*	.032*	.000*	.000*	.014*	.013*	.014*	.000*	.227
Significant Difference**	Casual and dedicated	Mainstream and dedicated	Casual and dedicated	Casual and both dedicated and mainstream	Casual and dedicated	Casual and both mainstream and dedicated, Dedicated and mainstream and dedicated	Dedicated and Mainstream	Casual and dedicated	Casual and dedicated	Casual and mainstream	Casual and dedicated	No Significant Difference

*p<.05, ** Tukey test results. C: Casual ecotourists, M: Mainstream ecotourists, D:Dedicated ecotourists

places than either casual or mainstream tourists do. From these findings, it is clear that nature and nature-related motivations are the main concerns for dedicated ecotourists.

Mainstream tourists assign higher emphasis to visiting historical sites, seeing religious places, and participating in sporting activities than casual tourists do.

4.3. Most Desirable Tourism Activities of Ecotourists

Nature walks (M=3.55), rural tourism activities (M=2.96), swimming in the lake (M=2.75), and photo safari tours (M=2.58) were ranked as most desirable tourism activities in the region (see Table 4).

Table 4. Mean degrees of most desirable tourism activities

Activities	All tourists (N:306)		International tourists (N:219)		Domestic tourists (N:87)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Nature walks	3.55	1.457	3.56	1.493	3.53	1.371
Rural tourism activities	2.96	1.665	2.97	1.657	2.94	1.694
Swimming	2.75	1.610	2.64	1.612	3.03	1.581
Photo safari tours	2.58	1.652	2.60	1.665	2.55	1.627
Winter sports activities	2.52	1.485	2.49	1.513	2.60	1.418
Water sports	2.43	1.427	2.37	1.451	2.59	1.360
Camping	2.33	1.525	2.28	1.503	2.45	1.583
Bicycle tours	2.28	1.439	2.17	1.428	2.55	1.437
Climbing	2.24	1.482	2.33	1.531	2.00	1.329
Bird-watching	2.14	1.412	2.17	1.422	2.06	1.392
Fishing	2.12	1.401	2.07	1.389	2.24	1.430
Horseback riding	1.94	1.346	1.96	1.396	1.90	1.220
Caving	1.92	1.311	1.97	1.352	1.80	1.199
Rafting	1.91	1.344	1.95	1.395	1.82	1.206

Table 5. One-way ANOVA test results for desirable tourism activities in terms of ecotourist types

	Climbing			Nature walks			Caving			Water sports			Winter sport activities			Rafting			Photo safari tours			Bicycle tours			Bird-watching			Fishing			Horseback riding			Swimming			Camping			Rural tourism activities		
	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D	C	M	D			
Mean	1.99	2.10	2.87	3.26	3.40	4.25	1.94	1.88	1.99	2.61	2.29	2.54	2.22	2.65	2.60	1.94	1.71	2.34	2.58	2.31	3.22	2.29	2.10	2.66	2.12	2.05	2.37	2.18	2.06	2.19	1.84	2.04	1.85	3.06	2.69	2.52	2.20	2.31	2.55	2.98	2.84	3.21
F	8.222			10.969			.154			1.673			2.391			5.402			7.419			3.511			2.37			.310			.819			2.366			1.040			1.127		
P	.000*			.000*			.858			.189			.093			.005*			.001*			.031*			.282			.734			.442			.096			.355			.325		
Significant Difference**	Dedicated and both mainstream and casual			Dedicated and both mainstream and casual			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			Dedicated and mainstream			Dedicated and both mainstream and casual			Dedicated and mainstream			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference			No Significant Difference		

*p<.05, **Tukey test results. C: Casual ecotourists, M: Mainstream ecotourists, D:Dedicated ecotourists

The independent sample t-test was employed to compare the mean scores for desirable activities for domestic and international tourists. The results indicate that the mean degree for “bicycle tours” as a tourism activity statistically differs in terms of domestic and international tourists ($t=2.111$, $df=304$, $p=.036$). Domestic tourists perceive bicycle tours as a more desirable tourism activity ($M=2.55$) than international tourists do ($M=2.17$). Other tourism activities do not statistically differ between international and domestic tourists.

The one-way ANOVA results reveal that in relation to the most desirable activities, there is a significant difference among casual, mainstream, and dedicated ecotourists in terms of climbing, nature walks, rafting, photo safari tours, and bicycle tours (see Table 5). The result of the Tukey test, which was applied to identify how the groups differ from one another in terms of these tourism activities, indicate that dedicated ecotourists assign relatively higher importance to climbing, nature walks, and photo safari tours than either mainstream or casual tourists do. Furthermore, they also place relatively higher importance on rafting and bicycle tours than mainstream ecotourists do.

4.4. Satisfaction Degree and Willingness to Recommend

Even though the tourists surveyed stated that they are dissatisfied with the area’s entertainment centers, recreational facilities, local infrastructure, and tourism information, with mean degrees of 2.38, 2.53, 2.53, 2.79, respectively, they expressed their happiness with the food and drinks on offer, as well as the hospitality of local people, and accommodation facilities (with mean values of 4.01, 3.81, and 3.79, respectively). Generally, the mean degree of ecotourists’ satisfaction in the research area is 4.03 (SD: 0.970, min: 1, max: 5). Hence, 91.5% (280) of them stated that they will recommend the area to their friends, and 85.9% (263) would like to come the region again.

5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to determine the demographic information, travel motivations, and ecotourism activities of ecotourists visiting Lake Van Basin. Furthermore, in addition to the differences between domestic and international ecotourists, the differences between casual, mainstream, and dedicated nature tourists were also identified in terms of their basic motivations and most desirable activities. Hence, this study offers an initial step in uncovering the motivations and activities of ecotourists’ in the underresearched area of Lake Van Basin Area.

The findings indicate that ecotourists are generally male, married, hold a university degree, are middle aged, and have a middle income level. These findings are consistent with findings of Bricker and Kerstetter (2001), Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002), Honey (1999), and Wearing and Neil (1999) by means of educational level and with the results of Ballantine and Eagles (1994) by means of age; however, most of the

research results show that the ecotourists have higher income level that are different from this survey result. Furthermore, they generally spend five or more days on their trip, travel with friends, prefer to stay in hotels, define themselves as mainstream nature tourists, and are influenced by recommendations from friends or family when making a decision on where to travel.

In relation to the most important reasons for traveling, the results reveal some interesting findings, in particular that “visiting historical sites” is the second most important travel motivator in terms of destination for ecotourists, which is not in line with other research findings. This finding indicates that there is a close link between ecotourism and culture tourism. The other most important motivations, “exploring nature”, “experiencing new things” and “learning about local cultures”, are consistent with the literature (Eagles, 1992; Wight, 1997). This paper makes a significant contribution to the literature that ecotourists’ motivations and activities participated in vary according to their dedication to nature. While “visiting friends/relatives” is the most important motivation to travel for casual ecotourists, “winter sport activities” is significant for mainstream ecotourists and “exploring nature” is the main motivation for dedicated ecotourists.

Besides walking, rural tourism activities, swimming in the lake, and photo safari tours are the most desirable activities for ecotourists to participate in. There is some indication in the literature that walking is the most popular activity for nature-based tourists in many destinations. Water-based activities are also important, particularly to the experienced ecotourists (Wight, 1996b). Differences were also found between the mainstream, casual, and dedicated ecotourist groups in terms of ecotourism activities participated in, such as climbing, nature walks, rafting, photo safari tours, and bicycle tours; domestic ecotourists assign higher importance to bicycle tours than international ecotourists do.

As a limitation of this research, seasonal changes were not taken into consideration in the analysis of the findings. Different results may have been obtained if the study had been carried out in the whole year. Hence, future studies may be conducted in more than one ecotourism area to see whether the findings differ or not by taking seasonal changes into account.

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