

Satisfaction Analysis of Recreational Quality of Erciyes Mountain Ski Center

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Abstract

In many countries, recreational tourism activities composed of winter tourism and sports that are performed in winter months constitute the majority of mountain tourism and sports. Individuals fond of winter sports prefer in their spare times known domestic or foreign ski resorts in order to rest and to have leisure. The most important preference determining factor here is the recreational quality of the facility.

The results of the survey which is one-to one applied to the visitors between February-March 2017 aiming to determine recreational quality of the Erciyes Mountain Ski facilities constitute the research findings. The survey is prepared to determine the skiers' demographic characteristics, ski experiences, snow sports exercised and recreational quality of the Erciyes Mountain Ski Resort.

Erciyes Mountain, as an important source for winter sports due to possibilities it provides, is a candidate for being a winter tourism resort demanded accelerating day by day in regional, national and international scales and rapidly extending within this respect. As it is in all recreation areas, the primary goal of the management is a systematic and controlled tourism planning compatible to natural and social environment and is the provision of qualified rational experiences to its visitors. As a result of this research, service facilities (82 %) are determined as the highest satisfaction value of Erciyes kayak facilities.

Keywords: Erciyes Mountain Ski Centre, Recreation area planning, recreational quality, visitor satisfaction, visitor management

Erciyes Dağı Kayak Merkezi'nin Rekreatif Kalitesinin Memnuniyet Analizi

Öz

Dünyanın birçok ülkesinde dağ turizmi ve sporlarının büyük bir bölümünü kış aylarında gerçekleştirilen kış turizmi ve sporlarından oluşan rekreatif turizm aktiviteleri oluşturmaktadır. Kış sporlarına ilgi duyan bireyler dinlenmek, eğlenmek için ayırdıkları serbest zamanlarında kış sporları rekreatif aktivitelerini

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gerçekleştirmek için imkânlarına göre yurt içi veya yurt dışında bilinen kayak merkezlerini tercih etmektedirler. Kayak merkezlerinin tercih edilebilir olmasındaki en büyük etken tesisin rekreasyonel kalitesidir.

Erciyes Dağı Kayak Tesisleri'nin rekreasyon kalitesinin belirlenmesi için hazırlanmış olan ve 2017 Şubat-Mart ayları arasında ziyaretçilere birebir uygulanmış olan anket sonuçları araştırma bulgularını oluşturmaktadır. Anket, ziyaretçilerin demografik özellikleri, kayak tecrübeleri, uğraştıkları kar sporları ve Erciyes Dağı Kayak Merkezi'nin rekreasyon kalitesini belirlemeye yöneliktir.

Kış sporlarına yönelik sunduğu fırsatlarla önemli bir rekreasyon kaynağı olan Erciyes Dağı, her geçen gün bölgesel, ülkesel ve uluslararası ölçekte daha fazla talep edilen ve bu bağlamda hızla büyüyen bir kış turizmi merkezi olmaya adaydır. Tüm rekreasyon alanlarında olduğu gibi kayak merkezlerinde de yönetimin öncelikli hedefi, doğal ve sosyal çevre ile uyumlu olan sistemli ve kontrollü bir turizm planlaması ile ziyaretçilere kaliteli rekreasyonel deneyimler sağlanmasıdır. Bu araştırmanın sonucunda Erciyes Kayak Tesisleri'nde ziyaretçilerin yüksek memnuniyet değerinin hizmet tesisleri (%81,80) olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erciyes Dağı Kayak Merkezi, rekreasyon alan planlaması, rekreasyonel kalite, ziyaretçi memnuniyeti, ziyaretçi yönetimi

1. Introduction

In the demand towards today's tourism activities a deviation and direction have been observed to alternative activities from those based on summer activities such as 3-S (sea, sun, sand). In this respect, winter tourism activities are seen forefront as an alternative to summer tourism. Therefore, tourists participating tourism activities in winter prefer the areas and regions offering efficient supply and having high winter tourism potential (Şahin and Yazıcı 2011; Sağlık and Kocaman, 2014).

Winter tourism is a type of tourism performed overwhelmingly in the elevation belts getting efficient amount of snow cover (Doğaner, 2001; Altaş et al. 2015). Travels to the areas where skiing is performed suitably under convenient snow and sloppiness conditions are the complete activities including accommodation, eating-drinking, recreation, entertainment and sight-seeing which can be done in only a certain period of a year (İlban et al. 2008; Altaş et al. 2015).

Winter tourism is a tourism type where some activities related to and depending on snow covers in the preferred regions are performed and other sports can be seen (Oktayer et al. 2007; Daştan et al. 2016).

The first activity when mentioned winter tourism is the skiing and it is one of the most effective activities to develop winter tourism in an area. Therefore, mountains with a certain elevation are suitable for skiing and they are the areas where winter tourism can develop together with other factors. Winter sports tourism has long taken place in world tourism and the number of its participants increases every year. Winter tourism is special and important since it can be performed out of familiarized tourism season (Altaş et al. 2015).

Today, great number of tourists prefer travelling in also winter months and going to winter tourism centers for some reasons such as to relax, recreate themselves, entertain, attend different activities and get away from the stress of complex living conditions. There are several compelling motivations and attractions for tourists to go such areas. By knowing such motivations, tourism marketers can determine their expectations from winter tourism and develop new products to meet their demands and needs (Albayrak, 2013). As it is in all recreational areas, primary target of the administration in ski centers is to provide visitors with quality recreational experiences in a systemic and controlled tourism planning compatible with its natural and social environment (Göktaş et al. 2016).

Expectations and demands of winter tourists coming to ski resorts are to find comfortable chair lift and teleski possibilities (Hallman and Breuer, 2010), well maintained and secure long runways (Bahar and Kozak, 2005), quality and long lasting snow cover (Won and Hwang, 2009), suitability of seasonal conditions (Yanık, 2016). As an example, Sağlık and Kocaman (2014) carried out a study in Palandöken Ski Centre to determine service quality perceptions of tourists in ski centers and found that the main perception of tourists in that case was the size of runways. From this point of view, tourist performing ski sports can be affected by the physical elements such as the number, length,

and width of runways, the use of modern devices and tools and characteristics of accommodation facilities.

Lack of publicity in winter tourism centers, lack of snow to stay, and lack of space planning affect the tourism and recreation quality of the city in which they are located. Accurate space planning in winter tourism centers increases the tourism and recreation quality of the city they are connected to. In this context, in the research of Gül et al. (2016) to determine the effects of the city of Isparta Davraz Ski Center lack of publicity on international and national scale, limited and variable profit duration in terms of winter tourism, insufficient investment and finance facilities, insufficient landscaping, lack of public transportation and transportation services, lack of entertainment, recreation and shopping facilities, stated that there are problems such as the lack of an effective and competent management unit and organization, and that the tourism of Isparta region will develop with the solution of the current problems.

For this purpose, to develop the hostels for tourism purposes in the villages near Davraz Ski Center, restoration of old village houses and opening them to tourism, in the section of Davraz chalets, it was suggested to serve local and foreign tourists with local dishes and food produced in the village. (Ceylan ve Demirkaya, 2008; Gül et al., 2016)

According to Gül et al. (2016), as the objective of strategic approach at the national level, the selection of the location of the winter tourism areas should be correct and development of the existing areas should be considered and planning and management of the organization should be a priority. For this reason, all components must be organized together in a holistic and sustainable way and with the participation of the relevant stakeholders.

There are many researches in the foreign literature to determine the recreational quality, service quality and visitor satisfaction in ski facilities. They have done research on the quality of service at ski facilities (Hudson and Shephard, 1998; Alexandris et al., 2006; Kyle et al., 2010); recreation quality (Vitterso et al., 2004; Needham and Rollins, 2005), visitor behavior (Vassiliadis et al., 2013).

The aim of present study is to analyze effects of indicators reflecting physical, social, natural and administrative factors which are the components of visitor satisfaction in Erciyes Ski Centre on recreational experience quality; to determine general satisfaction value and evaluate difference between visitor profiles and satisfaction levels.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Material

Material of the study is the Erciyes Mountain ski zone (Figure 1), the highest point of Middle Anatolia ranging between 1800 m and 3000 m and an important centre for mountain and winter tourism. It has wide and long runways with varying sloppiness convenient with international acceptances and F.I.S. rules. Erciyes skiing zone is at an elevation of 2200 m from sea level at the beginning point (lower station) and 23 km away from the city center of Kayseri. This area is called Tekir Yaylası (highland). At this point, where the facility was funded, parking are is not so efficient and public transportation possibilities are not enough. Therefore people mostly prefer to use private cars to reach the area (Anonymous, 2006).

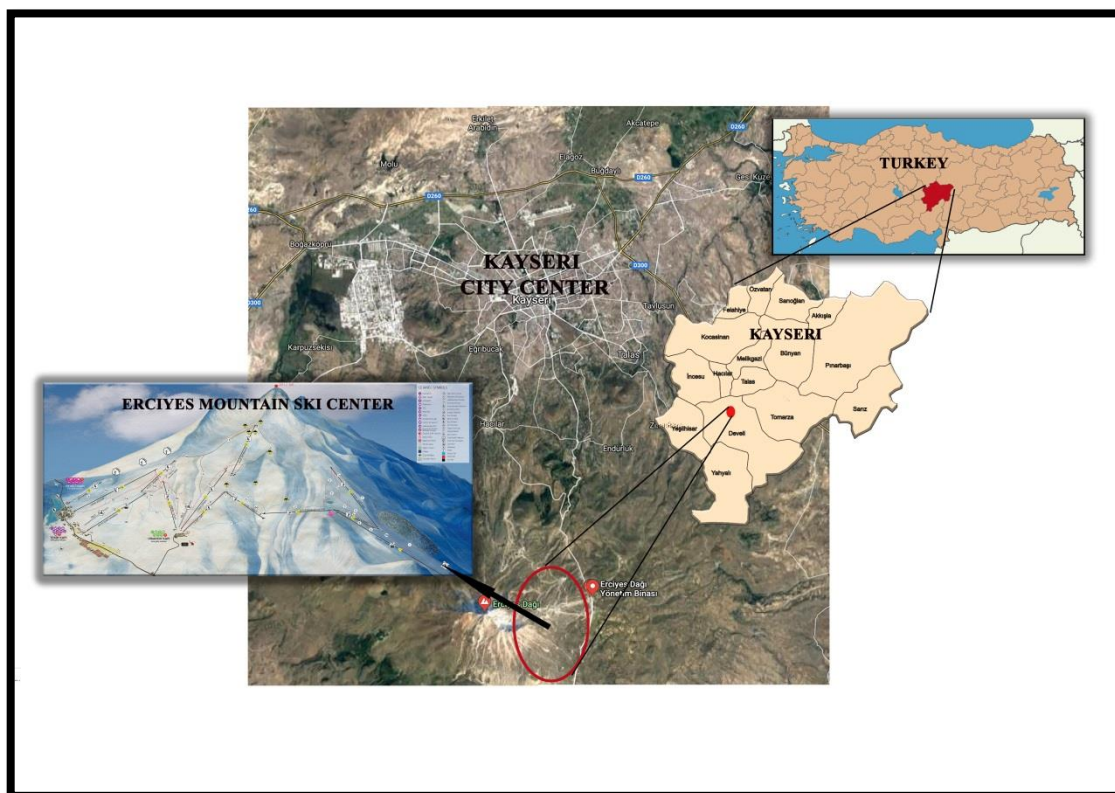


Figure 1. Location of the Study area

Among the winter activities offered for Erciyes Mountain are Alp style ski, Snowboard, Telemark skiing, free style skiing, ski tours, heli-skiing, Cross Country skiing, Biathlon, snow kite, snow sledge, snow tubing, inflated plastic sledge, snow rafting, snow motor jet ski, ice skating, snow trekking with snow shoes (traditional) (Anonymous, 2006).

The Mountain shelters two ski runways, one is on its eastward slope, Tekir Highland and the other is in northeast side Derin Dere. The mentioned two runways are important since they are Alp discipline skiing areas and they are compatible with international standards with runway lengths, different elevations and sloppy sides. Runways have sloppiness from 25 to 50% changing in difficulties for the users as easy, middle and advanced. Their length is also changing from 243 m to 5138 m. Elevation of ski facilities is between 2150 m and 3400 m (Anonymous, 2006; Erdoğan and Aklibaşında, 2016).

Winter tourism and sports centers have been developed depending on the characteristics of the area (i.e. climate, topography etc.) The area is suitable for mountain and ski sports and attraction center for the city dwellers of Kayseri who desire to perform recreational activities due to its easiness to reach, clean air, noiseless environment (Erdoğan and Aklibaşında, 2016). General overview of Erciyes Mountain Ski Centre is given in Figure 2.



Figure 2. General overview of Erciyes Ski Center

2.2. Methods

Totally, 19 indicators were determined in the study to define physical, social, natural and administrative factors thought to affect the quality of visitors' recreational experience. In the first part of the questionnaire, it was aimed to determine the significance level of indicators on recreational quality. In the table in the questionnaire, participants were asked to rank the situations given in the page which are thought to affect the travel to the ski resort. Scoring was performed using 5-interval Likert scale (1; not significant, 5; very important). In the second part of the questionnaire, it was aimed to determine satisfaction level of each indicator. Participants were asked if the indicators are efficient in the ski center and to score them. Scoring was performed again using 5-interval Likert scale (1; not significant, 5; very important). In the last part of the questionnaire, questions were asked to determine visitor profiles. Totally 139 participants completed the questionnaire forms between February and March 2017.

3. Results

The questionnaire was prepared for the research subject. According to the expert team who prepared the Erciyes Mountain Master Plan, the number of visitors coming to Erciyes Mountain Ski Center during the winter season 2016-2017 is 1 900 000. In this case, the size of the sample is 1 900 000. The following formula used by Özdamar (2003) was used to determine the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N \cdot P \cdot Q \cdot Z_{\alpha}^2}{(N-1) \cdot d^2}$$

N: Number of sample units, n: Sample size

P: Observation rate of X in the sample

Q: (1-P): Not observed rate of X

Z_{α} : $\alpha = 0.05$ for 1.96

d: Sample error

For sample= 0.05 (d=0.10) the sample size with the sampling error (p=0.5; q=0.5)

$N = 1\,900\,000 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1.96)^2 : (1\,900\,000 - 1) \cdot (0.10)^2 = 96$

Sample size was found to be 96. More questionnaires were taken into consideration, given the possibility of an empty and incomplete answer and 139 complete and healthy responders were evaluated.

Percentage distributions of variables were determined first in research findings. Table 1 gives demographic characteristics of visitors like gender, age, marital status, education level, occupation, income, settlement, skiing experience, winter sports they perform and their percentage distribution.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of visitors and their winter sports experiences

(N=139)					
Variables	Percentages (%)	Variables	Percentages (%)	Variables	Percentages (%)
Gender		Occupation		Experience in skiing	
Male	51,8	Private sector	52,5	Starter	18,0
Female	48,2	Public sector	15,8	Inexperienced	20,1
Age		Worker	2,9	Low – moderate	10,1
15-24	19,4	Pensioner	7,2	Moderate	18,7
25-35	48,9	Housewife	4,3	High – moderate	15,8
35-50	20,1	Other	16,5	Advanced	9,4
51-65	10,1	Income		Specialist	7,9
65 and above	1,4	Less than 1000 TL	5,8	Sport Type	
Marital status		1000-3000 TL	30,9	Skiing	48,2
Married	38,1	3000-5000 TL	27,3	Snowboard	24,5
Single	56,1	5000-7000 TL	28,8	Skiing and Snowboard	12,9
Other	5,8	7000-10000 TL	5,2	None	14,4
Education		10000 TL and above	2	Nationality	
Primary ed.	4,3	Dwelling		Turkish	97,8
High school	19,4	Kayseri	61,2	Other	2,2
University	58,3	Other Turkish city	36,0		
Postgraduate	18,0	Other country	2,9		

From Table 1, it can be seen that the ski center is visited by men and women in nearly the same rates, mostly 25-35 age group (48.9%), single (56.1), university graduate (58.3%), private sector worker (52.5%), with a monthly income of 1000-3000 TL (30.9%), living in Kayseri (61.2%).

Totally, 19 indicators were determined in the study to define physical, social, natural and administrative factors thought to affect the quality of visitors' recreational experience. Significance level of the effect of the each indicator on recreation experience quality and satisfaction level were analyzed. Recreational experience quality is the sum of satisfaction levels resulting from each determined indicator. However, each indicator does not have the same level of significance on satisfaction level. Therefore, significance level of each indicator (weighing coefficient) must be multiplied with satisfaction level resulting from each indicator. This figure expresses weighing satisfaction level. Recreational experience quality value is the ratio of weighing recreational experience quality (average of weighing satisfaction level of each indicator) maximum weighing recreational experience quality (average of maximum weighing satisfaction level of each indicator) and expressed in percentage (%). Table 2 gives the formula to calculate "Recreational experience quality value".

Table 2. Recreational experience quality value

No	Indicator	Significance level (weighing coefficient)	Satisfaction level	Maximum Satisfaction level	Maximum Satisfaction level	Weighing Satisfaction level
1	Snow cover	S ₁	sa ₁	5	S ₁ X sa ₁	S ₁ X 5
2	The number of lifts	S ₂	sa ₂	5	S ₂ X sa ₂	S ₂ X 5
...					
19	Evergreen plant cover in the mountain	S ₁₉	sa ₁₈	5	S ₁₉ X sa ₁₉	S ₁₉ X 5

$$\text{Recreational experience quality value (\%)} = \frac{[(s_1 \times sa_1) + (s_2 \times sa_2) \dots (s_{19} \times sa_{19})]}{[(s_1 \times 5) + (s_2 \times 5) \dots (s_{19} \times 5)]} \times 100$$

The method given in Table 2 and developed to determine recreational experience quality value was applied to the results of visitor questionnaires in Erciyes Ski Centre. Table 3 gives quality indicators evaluated according to questionnaire results, significance levels, satisfaction levels, satisfaction values and recreational experience quality.

Table 3. Quality indicators, significance levels, satisfaction levels, satisfaction values and recreational experience quality

Quality indicators (N=139)	Significance level (weighing coefficient)	Satisfaction level	Weighing Satisfaction level	Maximum weighing Satisfaction level	Satisfaction value (%)
Snow cover on runways	4,12	3,68	15,16	20,60	73,60%
Lift number	4,21	3,59	15,11	21,05	71,80%
Length of runways	4,19	3,59	15,04	20,95	71,80%
The number of runways	4,24	3,53	14,97	21,20	70,60%
Daily lift fee	4,37	3,13	13,68	21,85	62,60%
Closeness of parking lots to runways	4,06	3,63	14,74	20,30	72,60%
Car park efficiency	4,14	3,25	13,46	20,70	65,00%
Easiness to reach runways from accommodation area	4,06	3,73	15,14	20,30	74,60%
Diversity of food and drinks	4,10	3,30	13,53	20,50	66,00%
Price of food and drinks	4,19	2,88	12,07	20,95	57,60%
Efficiency of superstructure and sanitary installations	4,24	3,03	12,85	21,20	60,60%
Daily maintenance services and quantitative efficiency of staff	4,19	3,23	13,53	20,95	64,60%
Behaviour of staff	4,22	3,19	13,46	21,10	63,80%
Location, quantity and quality of accommodation venues	4,24	3,01	12,76	21,20	60,20%
Crowds on runways	4,27	3,87	16,52	21,35	77,40%
Crowds in service facilities	4,14	4,09	16,93	20,70	81,80%
Waiting time in lift queue	4,22	3,94	16,63	21,10	78,80%
Snow covered mountain scene	3,96	3,70	14,65	19,80	74,00%
Evergreen plant cover of the mountain	3,51	2,18	7,65	17,55	43,60%
Total		64,55	267,89	393,35	68,10%
Recreational experience quality value					68%

Mathematically, maximum satisfaction value of any given indicator may be 100% while minimum satisfaction value is 20%. In this respect, threshold satisfaction value is 60%. As can be seen in Table 3, recreational experience quality value of Erciyes Ski Centre was found to be 68%.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Totally, 19 indicators thought to be effective on visitors' general satisfaction levels were determined in the study. Effectiveness of each indicator on recreational experience quality and satisfaction level of each indicator were also determined and then weighing averages were calculated to determine recreational experience quality level.

Visitors' satisfaction ratios in Erciyes Ski Centre towards snow cover in runways, the number of lifts, length of runways and number of runways were found to be 78.60%, 71.80%, 71.80% and 70.60%, respectively. Such quality indicators may affect the preference rates of ski resorts. According to Doğaner (1997), it is desired for skiing areas to have runways for people at all competency levels. The number, length and difficulty levels of runways seem to be important for visitors and in this respect Uludağ, Palandöken and Kartalkaya are accepted to be the most favorable centers.

In terms of visitors' skiing expertise levels, Erciyes Ski Center is preferred in great majority by inexperienced people. According to Doğaner (1997), runways in Uludağ, Palandöken and Kartalkaya Ski Centers are suitable for those expert in skiing. In other areas, easy, moderate and advanced runways can be seen. Erciyes Ski Center takes place in this group.

The lowest satisfaction level was found to be for evergreen plant cover in Erciyes Ski Center (43.60%). According to Doğaner (1997), skiing zones should be naturally sloppy and open in forests. The areas surrounded by forests not only provide visual quality but also create suitable possibilities for skiing by screening wind.

The largest satisfaction rate was given to crowd level in the facilities (81.80%). Erciyes Ski Resort is preferred by people out of Kayseri in the rate of 36%, which makes the area more crowded. According to İncekara (1998), factors such as scene, flora, and cultural values together with mechanical facilities, food and drink, entertainment units are the most important element to increase the attractiveness of the products (Koşan, 2013). According to Kämpf and Kaspar (2005), such equipment in ski zone forms main element of touristic infrastructure by meeting recreation needs of either locals or visitors. Another main element of being successful in ski zones in the long – run is the competitiveness of destinations (Koşan, 2013).

Among the objectives of Turkey's tourism strategy in 2023, it is stated that prepared the master plan for the further development of winter tourism. Accessibility the facilities by road or lift, availability of distance between accommodation facilities and ski facilities, adequate accommodation facilities, ski center to be planned by taking a good survey of the ski center, transportation links between the center and other tourism centers will be improved, and ski slopes will be organized taking international standards into consideration, National and international competitions will be organized and publicity will be provided under the coordination of the relevant governorships, local administrations, youth and sports headquarters and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (URL-1).

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As stated in the regional plan covering the years 2014-2023 for TR72 Region prepared by Oran Central Anatolia Development Agency; The investments made in Erciyes Ski Center in recent years

made a significant contribution to infrastructure and accessibility. When the Erciyes Master Plan is completed, Kayseri's winter tourism will be an important center at the international level (URL-2)

The investments made in the scope of Erciyes Winter Tourism Master Plan are hosted by national and international important organizations. The region, which hosts a large number of international organizations, is increasing its potential day by day with ongoing investments. The first European Snowboard Cup of Turkey in 2015, World Snowboard Cup, one of the most important competitions of winter sports in 2016, The second World Cup was held in Erciyes Mountain in 2017. World class runways, ease of accommodation and transportation, trained and experienced human resources and organizational capability and capacity have chosen Erciyes for the third time in 2018 by the International Ski Federation (FIS) and World Snowboard Cup was held on March 3, 2018 again in Erciyes (URL-3)

Erciyes Mountain offers the best quality snow for skiing, powder snow. Therefore the area is an attraction center for ski enthusiasts. The mountain has turned out to be a consistently growing recreational source with the opportunities it offers towards winter sports and gained more and more demands from regional, national and international scales. As it is in all recreational areas, primary target of the administration in ski centers is to provide visitors with quality recreational experiences in a systemic and controlled tourism planning compatible with its natural and social environment.

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