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*Araştırma Makalesi*

## ECOTOURISM ROUTES OF ISPARTA AND THEIR INVESTIGATION WITH PESTE ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Ecotourism is a type of tourism whose main motivation is to protect the integrity of the ecosystem with a responsible tourism scientist and should be handled under the umbrella of sustainability. In ecotourism, natural areas are accepted as the home of all of us, with the principles of protecting nature and not destroying nature. In addition, ecotourism is envisaged as a tool for the protection of natural areas and sustainable development. Isparta province is a rich destination in terms of ecotourism activities with its unspoiled nature and rich ecology. Various studies have been carried out on ecotourism in the region and projects related to ecotourism are supported. In the study, firstly, the nature-based ecotourism routes in the destination were discussed, and a focus group interview was conducted to determine the economic, political, socio-cultural, technological and ecological dimensions of ecotourism in the destination with PESTE analysis, which is a strategic and external environment analysis. The opportunities and threats of ecotourism activities in the destination for the region were examined. It has been concluded that strategic ecotourism planning studies should be carried out and these plans should be maintained in a sustainable way in Isparta province, which is a destination rich in nature-based ecotourism routes. It has been concluded that the infrastructure facilities of ecotourism routes should be improved, technological developments should be benefited and environmental destruction on these routes should be prevented. It is thought that the study will contribute to the field of tourism and ecotourism activities and projects to be carried out in the region.*

**Keywords:** *Ecotourism, Nature-Based Ecotourism, Ecotourism Routes, PESTE Analysis, Isparta*

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## ISPARTA İLİ EKOTURİZM ROTALARI VE PESTE ANALİZİ İLE İNCELENMESİ

### Öz

*Ekoturizm, sorumlu turizm bilinci ile temel motivasyonun ekosistemin bütünlüğünü korumak olan ve sürdürülebilirlik çatısı altında ele alınması gereken bir turizm çeşididir. Ekoturizmde doğaya sahip çıkmak ve doğayı tahrip etmemek ilkeleri ile doğal alanlar hepimizin evi olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ayrıca ekoturizm doğal alanların korunması ve sürdürülebilir kalkınma için bir araç olarak öngörülmektedir. Isparta ili bozulmamış doğası ve zengin ekolojisi ile ekoturizm faaliyetleri açısından zengin bir destinasyondur. Bölgede ekoturizm konusunda çeşitli çalışmalar yapılmış olup ekoturizm ile ilgili projeler desteklenmektedir. Çalışmada, öncelikle destinasyondaki ekoturizm rotaları ele alınmış olup ekoturizmin destinasyondaki durumunu stratejik ve dış çevre analizi olan PESTE analizi ile ekonomik, politik, sosyo-kültürel, teknolojik ve ekolojik boyutların belirlenmesi için odak grup görüşmesi yapılmıştır. Destinasyondaki ekoturizm faaliyetlerinin bölge için fırsat ve tehditleri incelenmiştir. Doğa-temelli ekoturizm rotaları açısından zengin bir destinasyon olan Isparta ilinde stratejik ekoturizm planlama çalışmalarının yapılması ve bu planların sürdürülebilir bir şekilde devamlılığının sağlanması gerektiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Ekoturizm rotalarının altyapı imkanlarının iyileştirilmesi, teknolojik gelişmelerden yararlanılması ve bu rotalardaki çevre tahribatının önüne geçilmesi gerektiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmanın turizm alanına ve bölgede yapılacak ekoturizm faaliyetleri ve projelerine katkı sağlaması düşünülmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ekoturizm, Doğa-temelli Ekoturizm, Ekoturizm Rotaları, PESTE Analizi, Isparta.

### INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, which is considered the largest global service sector in the world, is one of the most growing sectors, especially in developing countries. According to the UNWTO tourism report data, 1 billion 326 million people in the world in the last year, with an increase of 7% compared to the previous year and approximately 1.5 billion people with a growth of 3.5% for the last nine years in a row, traveled as tourists in 2020 (Önal, 2020, p. 371). The increase in touristic activities along with the travel behavior of people brings along environmental problems. Experiencing intense competition in coastal tourism (sea-sand-sun) and exceeding the carrying capacity on the coasts cause irreversible consequences such as environmental pollution and destruction. For this reason, offering environmentally friendly touristic activities with small groups in the company of expert travel agencies in different destinations appears as a viable option to reduce the environmental impacts of tourism. From this point of view, ecotourism, which is one of the special interest tourism types, is accepted as an international tool to reduce the negative effects of tourism on the environment and climate, taking into account the sustainability of the natural environment (Moons, Pelsmacker & Barbarossa, 2020, p. 1).

Ecotourism is a type of tourism that is abbreviated form of ecological tourism (in other words, it is formed by combining it), which is respectful to nature,

and which aims at increasing the welfare of local people. Ecotourism contributes to the development of rural areas with its basic principles and multifaceted structure such as being a sustainable type of tourism with high interaction in terms of integration with the natural environment, presenting the lifestyle and cultural values of the local people with all its sections. The main purpose of ecotourism is the sustainability of the natural environment and economic gain to the local people (Kaypak, 2010, p. 103).

According to the global travel market data, ecotourism has a market share of 5-10% and is one of the fastest growing tourism types in the tourism sector with a growth rate of 5% (Castellanos-Verdugo et al., 2016). Ecotourism is a tool of change and development. For this reason, ecotourism activities to be carried out in the region must be managed in the best way in order to be sustainable activities and contribute to sustainable development. It is necessary to provide reconciliation between tourism-based economic development, environmental quality and to balancing competitive interests (Ödemiş & Hassan, 2019, p. 61). The development of ecotourism brings with it some difficulties such as the protection of natural resources, the difficulty of providing diversity of activities, finding entrepreneurs, and the reluctance of local people to participate. For this reason, it is necessary to first conduct a situation analysis of the region in the area where ecotourism will be carried out, and then start potential development studies (Tseng et al., 2019). In the ecotourism studies of Isparta province, it is important to analyze the external environment and to examine this issue in terms of contributing to the field and the sector.

In the Regional Development National Strategy and the 2023 Action Plan of the Turkish Tourism Strategy, the Lakes Region, which includes the provinces of Isparta and Burdur, and the province of Antalya are specified as ecotourism and cultural tourism development regions, and it is aimed at developing alternative tourism types in a planned and qualified manner in these areas (BAKA, 2021, p. 15). Due to the strong potential of Isparta province in terms of natural and ecological areas, it is a strong destination in terms of touristic product diversification and the implementation of sustainable tourism activities (BAKA, 2020). In recent years, public institutions and organizations such as the Western Mediterranean Development Agency (BAKA), Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate, local governments and Isparta Governorate have been working for and supporting ecotourism. From this point of view, ecotourism routes determined in Isparta province were examined in this study. A focus group meeting was held in order to examine the status of ecotourism activities in Isparta province with PESTE analysis. Ecotourism activities of the destination were examined in terms of economic, political, socio-cultural, technological and ecological (environmental) factors with focus group discussion. It is aimed to support the studies of the region on ecotourism with PESTE analysis in terms of strategic analysis and external environment analysis, and it is thought that the study will contribute to the field. The increase in

ecotourism activities in the region plays an important role in contributing to sustainable development by transforming its current potential into economic gain.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Ecotourism

Although there is no consensus in the literature about the etymology of the term ecotourism, some researchers argue that the origin of the term goes back to Hetzer's writings on ecotourism in 1965 (Kuter & Ünal, 2009, p. 148). Since the 1970s, with the increasing prevalence of mass tourism, tourism activities have started to cause serious damage to the natural environment. For example, with the Southern Antalya Tourism Development Project, with the incentives and investments that started in the 1970s, it was planned to develop mass tourism in an area of 80 kilometers on the southwest coast of Antalya. In the beginning, the protection of agricultural and forest areas was given importance within the scope of the project, but as a result of the changes made in the following years, the protection of natural resources was ignored and the irregular tourism structuring increased (Selçuk et al., 2020, p. 88). By the 1980s, ecotourism activities under the umbrella of sustainability began to develop due to the destruction of mass tourism on the natural environment. It is known that the first scientific studies on ecotourism started by Ceballos-Lascurain (1983) (Cosmescu & Cosmescu, 2007, p. 67). In Turkey, the understanding of ecotourism has started to become widespread since the 1990s, and ecotourism projects have been started to be carried out in line with the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to protect the environment (Yüksek, 2013, p. 43).

Ecotourism plays an important role in the sustainable development of destinations with touristic resources related to ecotourism, due to its contribution to both environmental protection and economic development (Zhang & Lei, 2012, p. 916). The concept of ecotourism, which is accepted as a sustainable tourism model from time to time by some researchers (Higgins, 1996, p. 11) has been evaluated as an alternative tourism model (Wearing & Neal, 2009, p. 4) and has been defined differently in terms of marketing opportunities of destinations (Self, Self & Bell-Haynes, 2010). For this reason, the concept of ecotourism, on which it is very difficult to give a definition that everyone agrees on, has been defined in different ways and in fact, it is intertwined with different types of tourism such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, scientific tourism, educational tourism, rural tourism, nature tourism and agricultural tourism, with the characteristics of the concept and the activities it offers (Wearing and Neal, 2009, p. 4).

One of the most comprehensive definitions in the literature was made by Wallace and Pierce (1996). Wallace and Pierce (1996, p. 848) defined ecotourism as *“a type of travel that is made to relatively protected natural areas for work, recreation, or voluntary assistance and deals with the flora, fauna, ecosystems, and geology of an area and the people living nearby and their needs, culture, and*

*relationship to the soil*” The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defined ecotourism in 2015 as “Sensitive and responsible travel to natural areas, with training and revitalization programs which involve both guests, staff and local people that protect the environment, support the sustainable well-being of local people” (TIES, 2021). In this context, ecotourists are conscious tourists who visit the natural environment and local cultures, try to understand and learn, protect and sustain it, and participate in activities that provide income to the local people (Demir & Çevirgen, 2006, p. 119-120). Ecotourists do not need luxury standards like other tourist groups in accommodation, food and beverage and entertainment services (Bezuhla, 2020, p. 35). On the contrary, ecotourists are more willing to use local products and benefit from local services.

It is possible to examine ecotourism activities in three groups as leisure-based (such as adventure tourism, balloon tourism, trekking, equestrian trekking, bicycle tourism.), learning-based (such as cultural tourism, faith tourism, botanical tourism, agriculture/farm tourism) and leisure-based (camping and caravan tourism, health and spa tourism) (Tekin, 2017, p. 380). In this direction, the types of tourism carried out within the scope of ecotourism can be listed as trekking, bird watching, butterfly watching, wildlife (fauna) watching, highland tourism, cave tourism, sportive angling, underwater diving tourism, air sports tourism, river tourism, bicycle tourism, horse trekking, photo safari, botanical tourism, agriculture and farm (agro) tourism, camping and caravan tourism.

Various studies on ecotourism have been carried out in the literature. Among these studies, Tekin (2017) examined the ecotourism potential of Konya in his research and suggested alternative ecotourism routes. Kasalak et al. (2018) conducted interviews with 5 ecological farm entrepreneurs who carry out both agriculture and tourism activities in Antalya within the scope of the Ta-Tu-Ta Project of the Wheat and Supporting Ecological Life Association. It has been determined that ecotourism entrepreneurs experience problems in the areas of entrepreneurial prejudices in the family and environment, lack of incentives and government support, inability to organize ecotourism entrepreneurs, lack of capital, economic return (earnings), the abundance of official (bureaucratic) transactions, lack of sectoral information, lack of certification and lack of ecotourism standards. Ödemiş and Hassan (2019) in their study, examined the ecotourism potential of Gümüşhane based on the information provided on the official websites. They determined that Gümüşhane has an important ecotourism potential with its protected areas, flora and fauna diversity and geological/geomorphological richness. Kaya and Yıldırım (2020) in their study, determined the ecotourism activity areas in the provinces of the Eastern Black Sea Region. They concluded that the Eastern Black Sea Region has a rich diversity in terms of ecotourism, tourism practices such as trekking, mountaineering and highland tourism come to the fore, and farm tourism remains in the background compared to other ecotourism types in the region. Çavuş and Zede (2021) investigated the ecotourism perception of the local people in Giresun, one of Turkey's provinces with an important ecotourism potential. Eser and Kanca (2022)

in their study investigated the tendencies of individuals living in Turkey and the countries where ecotourism is prominent, regarding the concepts of Ecotourism/Ecotourism through Google searches.

### **PESTE Analysis**

PEST analysis is a method commonly used in environmental analysis. It is used as an analysis tool that evaluates the situation of organizations in the external environment and helps the organization determine its strategic position as a result of these assessments. PEST analysis is a form of analysis that helps to determine the factors that can be defined as opportunities and threats in the environment by revealing the current situation of the factors with the potential to be affected in the external environment, which are evaluated to analyze the position of an organization and in which direction it is heading. With this feature, PEST analysis is a very useful analysis tool that helps to see the big picture in the environment in which the organization operates (Arabacı, 2010, p. 40; Edin et al., 2016, p. 104; Epik & Gökşen, 2020, p. 12).

The name of PEST analysis, which is the first known study of “Business Environment Analysis” techniques and tools, and made by Francis J. Aguilar (1967), comes from the initials of the factors involved in the external environment factors as political (P), economic (E), social (S) and technological (T) (Arabacı, 2010, p. 40; Özbay & Özcan, 2021, p. 26). In later studies, the analysis was developed by adding different factors. For example, studies on general analysis techniques, which are characterized by various names and initials, have been carried out such as PESTE or STEEP (added ecology factor) PESTLE or PESTEL (added legal factor), EPISTEL or EPSTLE (added information), STEEPLE (added ethics) or STEEPLD (added demographics) (Allen, 2001; Bensoussan & Flesher, 2012; Stanford, 2013).

In the literature, there are studies made with PEST analysis in destinations and tourism sector. Hussain et al., (2012) examined the health tourism in the destination with PEST and SWOT analyzes in their studies in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In his study, Gregorić (2014) evaluated the business tourism perspectives of two different destinations (Croatia and Qatar) with PESTEL analysis. The main features and conditions of the destinations were analyzed and two destinations were evaluated in terms of advantages and disadvantages, one (Croatia) being a natural attraction center and the other (Qatar) being a mostly human-made attraction center. Sijabat (2019) examined the macro environment of the Indonesian tourism sector with PEST analysis. The results of the PEST analysis provided information about the current state of the tourism industry in Indonesia. Lianfeng (2019) used PEST analysis in his study and stated that mobile e-commerce can be realized in areas such as mobile information management, mobile marketing, mobile consumer relationship management in ecotourism. He researched the application of mobile e-commerce in ecotourism and evaluated it with the PEST method. In his study, Bezuhla (2020) evaluated the impact of the macro environment on the ecotourism infrastructure with PEST analysis. After examining the impact of

macroeconomic indicators on ecotourism infrastructure, he claimed that was is the most appropriate indicator to highlight economic benefits and protect their own habitats.

### **Isparta Province Ecotourism Routes and Possible Tourism Activities**

The province of Isparta is located in the Lakes Region in the north of the Mediterranean Region. There are many lakes, ponds, streams, canyons, mountains, plateaus, forests, caves, national parks and nature parks in the province. In addition, it is a destination where many alternative tourism activities can be done with its natural beauties, historical and cultural riches. Isparta province has a great potential for ecotourism with its rich ecosystems, unspoiled nature and villages where traditional rural life continues in the interior (BAKA, 2021). In the province of Isparta, which has a favorable geographical location many ecotourism activities such as rose and lavender tourism, mountain and nature hiking, horse rides, plant and animal observation, ornithotourism, photo safari, farm tourism, underwater diving, caving, mountain biking, mountaineering, skiing, camping and caravan tourism, paragliding can be carried out (Korkmaz & Başkalkan, 2011, p. 68; Topay & Parlardır, 2015, p. 307).

Isparta province is one of the provinces rich in endemic plants. Especially the region between Dedegöl and Barla mountains, Isparta-Egirdir-Kovada Lake is in the category of important plant area of Turkey. There are 3 nature parks, 2 national parks, 2 nature protection areas, 2 recreation areas and 13 natural monuments within the borders of Isparta Nature Conservation and National Parks (BAKA, 2020).

In the literature, various studies have been carried out on tourism activities and ecotourism in Isparta province in recent years. To give an example, Akkuş and Gül (2020) determined the urban ecotourism routes of the city of Isparta in their study. Nişancı and Tatkan (2020) examined the ecotourism potential of Yenişarbademli district of Isparta province with SWOT analysis in their study. Akın and Gül (2020) discussed the ecotourism potential and tourism routes of Isparta-Atabey district in their study. Bulgan and Akşap (2018) evaluated the Kasnak Oak Nature and Conservation Area in Isparta in terms of ecotourism. İşçi et al., (2018) examined the potential of the natural and cultural values of Isparta city and its immediate surroundings in terms of urban ecotourism. As a result of the study, they offered suggestions for the development of this potential. Ongun and Türkoğlu (2016), in their study on the tourism potential of Isparta province, determined that although Isparta had a great potential in ecotourism, its existing potential could not be fully utilized due to the insufficient level of promotional activities. Topay and Parlardır (2015) determined ecologically, economically and culturally suitable areas for some alternative tourism activities that can be done in Isparta province by using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools. From this point of view, nature-based ecotourism routes in Isparta province are discussed in this study. It is thought that making a situation analysis related to the region in the areas where ecotourism will be made and conducting studies to improve the ecotourism potential of the

destination will contribute to the field. For this reason, the study differs from the above studies with its handling of nature-based ecotourism routes in Isparta province and PESTE analysis.

Isparta province is a rich destination for ecotourism activities and is one of the types of tourism that needs to be developed. There has been a great acceleration in the number of tourists in Kuyucak Village with the projects, infrastructure and promotional activities prepared in recent years. To explain with an example, the number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting Kuyucak Village was approximately 5 thousand in 2015, while the village and its surroundings were visited by 20 thousand in the summer season of 2016, 140 thousand in 2017 and 190 thousand in 2018. According to the statement made by the Isparta Governorship, the number of visitors, which was approximately 250 thousand in 2018, increased to 750 thousand in 2019 (Kılınç, 2022, p. 269). Along with Kuyucak Lavender Village, the ecotourism routes of Isparta province are examined below.

**Kuyucak Lavender Route:** Although it varies according to species and varieties, climate and soil conditions, altitude and direction, it reaches the full flowering period in July and is harvested in this period (Aslanca & Sarıbaş, 2011). In this period, the areas with the gardens are painted purple and become a destination that attracts the attention of local and foreign visitors. Trekking and photography can be done in lavender gardens (Doğa Rotaları, 2021). There are restaurants, pensions, local and lavender product shops in the village.

**Figure 1:** Kuyucak Lavender Routes



**Source:** Isparta Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022.

***Güneykent Rose Route:*** In Güneyken town of Isparta, you can trekking among the rose gardens spread over wide areas and visit the historical rose oil factory and modern rose oil factory in the town. There are also small workshops in the town that produce rose oil and rose water using traditional methods. The Rose Museum, the rose house where local products are produced and sold, and the tomb considered to belong to Yunus Emre can be included in the route. The route, which is planned as 4 km, generally starts in mid-May when the roses start to bloom and lasts until mid-June (Doğa Rotaları, 2021).

***Sorkuncak Trekking Route:*** It is located in a position that overlooks Lake Eğirdir from the south, and it is a region with high viewing pleasure. Due to the high altitude, it is in a position that delays the harvest time of plants such as rose and lavender. Sorkuncak Village trekking route is planned as 4 km. Sorkuncak Village rose gardens are among the most beautiful gardens with lake view. Trekking and photography can be taken during the rose harvest that starts in mid-May (Doğa Rotaları, 2021). It is also expected to be the center of attraction of the region with the lavender planted in recent years.

***Aksu-Sorgun Dam Trekking Route:*** The route, which is 9 km long, starts from the Aksu district and reaches the Zindan Cave next to the Aksu Stream. In front of the Zindan Cave, there is an open-air temple of the God Eurymedon, church ruins dating to the early Christian period, and a Roman bridge. After the cave, the track, which proceeds on the edge of the trout farms, reaches Başpınar Nature Park. There are bungalow houses for accommodation in Başpınar Nature Park. Sorgun Dam is 800 meters away from Başpınar Nature Park and is the last point of the hiking route (Doğa Rotaları, 2021). Alternative activities, Sorgun Plateau cycling and Zindan cave excursions can be made.

***Kovada Lake National Park Trekking Route:*** Kovada Lake and its surroundings are first degree protected areas. Kovada Lake is a very shallow lake with unique flora and wildlife diversity, located 29 km south of Eğirdir District. Nature research, camping, trekking, watching the landscape, birdwatching and climbing can be done in and around the 6534 hectare national park. In the park, which offers a visual feast especially with the riot of colors in autumn, some trees turn yellow and shed their leaves, while others turn red (www.isparta.gov.tr/kovadada-sonbahar, Date of access: 20.03.2022).

Kovada Lake National Park contains different tree and plant species and a wide variety of ecosystems such as forests, lakes and wetlands. There are various types of trees in the National Park such as cedar, Taurus Fir, laurel, hackberry, and maple. In addition, the eastern plane tree monument tree with a width of 9.80 cm has been taken under protection in the park. In the National Park, 59 local, 26 winter migrant, 48 summer migrant, 20 transit migratory bird species and a total of 167 different bird species were identified. There is a watchtower and wooden piers in the park for birdwatching. There is a small space in the park where the stuffed bodies of

animals that died due to traffic accidents, electric shocks, etc., are exhibited (Rotam Isparta, 2015).

**Eğirdir-Sivri Hill Trekking Route:** The route starting from Eğirdir district center is planned as 9 km. You can reach Akpınar Village from Eğirdir. In Akpınar Village, there are places such as viewing terraces and food establishments that overlook Eğirdir and Lake Eğirdir from above. The track that continues from Akpınar Village to Eğirdir Sivri Mountain passes near the ruins of the ancient city of Prostanna. The last part of the track is Sivri Mountain. Although Sivri Mountain does not require a technical climb, it is quite steep and tiring (Doğa Rotaları, 2021).

**Adada- Yazılı Canyon Route:** The route in Sütçüler district has been planned as 22 km. The track, which starts from the ancient city of the island, passes through the historical Roman Road and reaches Sütçüler district center. Accommodation is available in tents or bungalows, approximately 3 km from the town centre. As an alternative to this route, it is possible to continue hiking from the town center to Yazılı Canyon and to camp at the entrance of Yazılı Canyon or to stay in the accommodation facilities at the entrance of the canyon (Rotam Isparta, 2015). Written Canyon was declared a Nature Park in 1989. Covering an area of 600 hectares, the canyon takes its name from the "Free Man" poem of Epictetus, which was found on the rock inside the canyon. The source of the Göksu river in the canyon comes out of the canyon and pours into the Karacaören dam lake. The canyon is a rich conservation area with its endemic flora and fauna and biodiversity. Yazılı Canyon is a suitable canyon for activities such as trekking, rock climbing, landscape photography, camping, and angling. Climbing routes in the canyon are determined and bolted. The walking route is marked on the map, and the walking routes and directions in the field are shown with signboards and are marked with red-white paints (Doğa Rotaları, 2021).

**Figure 2:** Written Canyon Route

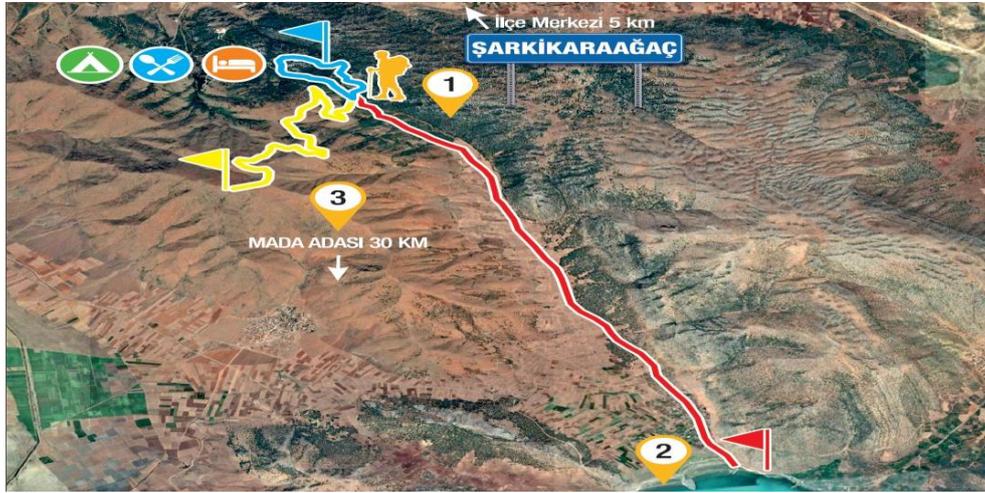


**Source:** Isparta Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022.

**Kızıldağ National Park Route:** Kızıldağ National Park is located between Şarkikaraağaç and Yenişarbademli counties in Isparta Province. It was registered as a natural protected area in 1988 and was declared a National Park in 1993. Pınargözü Cave is located in the national park, which has a geologically karstic structure. In addition, Beyşehir Lake and its islands are also located in this park. The national park is a rich park with its flora and fauna. There are a total of 201 endemic plant species in the park, of which 169 are wide and 32 are narrow endemics. There are over 80 medicinal and aromatic plant species. With the abundant oxygen production of the blue cedar tree forests in Kızıldağ, it is a preferred area for the treatment of some respiratory diseases. In addition to blue cedar trees, there are larch, juniper, fir, oak, poplar, linden and willow tree communities in the park. There are also many animal species and 180 species of waterfowl (Akyol & Tolunay, 2012).

There are chalets and camping sites in the national park. There is trekking by climbing Büyüksivri Hill at an altitude of 1840 meters. It is also preferred for camping, health tourism and recreation activities. or camping, areas with electricity and water infrastructure, a restaurant to meet the food and beverage needs, and walking paths spread over a wide area have been determined ([www.kizildagmilliparki.com/](http://www.kizildagmilliparki.com/), Date of Access:18.03.2022).

**Figure 3:** Kızıldağ National Park Routes



**Source:** Isparta Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022.

**Aksu-Yaka Canyon Cycling Track:** The depth of Yaka Canyon, located in Yaka Village of Aksu district, varies between 30 and 100 meters, and its width varies between 1.5 and 2.5 meters. In the canyon, waterfalls, rich vegetation, bird and some animal species, colorful butterflies are worth seeing. The road leading to Yaka Canyon through the village can be used as a mountain bike track. The road to Yaka

Village at the 22nd kilometer of Aksu - Yenişarbademli Highway is accepted as the starting point of the track. Turn right (south) from the headman's office in the village and proceed from the bridge that is encountered after 2 km on the road. You can reach the entrance of the canyon by going 1300 meters further from this separation ([www.kulturportali.gov.tr](http://www.kulturportali.gov.tr), Date of Access: 28.03.2022).

**Gölcük Nature Park Route:** Gölcük Crater Lake and its surroundings are first degree natural protected areas. Gölcük Lake, which is 12 km away from the city center, is a protected area with its vegetation, geomorphological structure, wildlife, landscape beauty and recreation opportunities. The lake is surrounded by volcanic ash hills that reach 150-300 meters. The lake resembles a circle and its diameter reaches 1,500 meters and its depth reaches 32 meters in places. It is the second caldera of Turkey together with the Nemrut caldera (eruption crater). It is a protected place because it is the only caldera of Western Anatolia. Gölcük Nature Park has been given the status of a nature park due to its vegetation, wildlife and natural beauties. There are daily usage areas and accommodation facilities in the region. Outdoor sports such as angling, trekking, photography, cycling, picnicking, orienteering are carried out in Gölcük Nature Park ([www.isparta.gov.tr](http://www.isparta.gov.tr), Date of Access: 28.03.2022).

**Melik Plateau Route:** It is located within the Kızıldağ National Park within the borders of Yenişarbademli district. Dedegöl Mountain, Melik Plateau, Pınargözü Cave, Pınargözü Recreation Area, a 700-year-old Beyçam Memorial tree with a diameter of 155 cm, a circumference of 465 cm and a height of 28.5 meters are located in the forest formed by centuries-old pine trees (Nişancı & Tatkan, 2020, p. 54). In addition, Dedegöl Mountain, located between Yenişarbademli and Aksu districts, is 2998 meters. It is suitable for mountain hiking, climbing and camping in the field. Melik plateau is preferred by mountaineers as a camping place. Dedegöl Mountaineering and Climbing Festivals are held every year at the end of May. Pınargözü Cave, Turkey's longest cave (approximately 16 km), and the plant diversity around it, are worth seeing. The flat area on the upper part of the plateau where the nomads stay is like an observation terrace. Since Melik Plateau is "one of the darkest spots in Turkey", the Milky Way galaxy can be seen with the naked eye in summer. It's also ideal for stargazing and night photography (Doğa Rotaları, 2021).

**Figure 4:** Melik Plateau Route

**Source:** Isparta Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022.

**Kasnak Oak Nature and Conservation Area:** The Kasnak Oak Forest, which is located within the borders of Yukarı Gökdere Village of Eğirdir, is called "volcanic oak" or "pulley oak" by the local people (Bulgan and Akşap, 2018, p. 218). Kasnak oak is seen individually in many provinces in Turkey. Since it is only in the Yukarı Gökdere village as a forest, it has the status of a nature protection area and has been taken under protection. Kasnak Oak Forest Natural Protection Area, 57 km from Isparta and 22 km from Eğirdir, is an important area with its rich flora and interesting insect fauna. is widely spread (Korkmaz & Başkalkan, 2011, p. 65). Kasnak oak is included in the group of white oak and is a species that grows only in Turkey with its smooth body, used in coating and parquet production, and is used in the production of barrels and flexible materials, and is a species called pulley oak by the local people (Eğirdir Gezi Rehberi, 2012, p. 21). Endemic plant watching, trekking, orienteering, birdwatching, photo safari are carried out in the Kasnak oak forest (Bulgan & Akşap, 2018, p. 218). Only visitors to the forest are not allowed without an appointment, but those who want to visit the area for scientific and educational purposes should get permission and appointment from the Nature Conservation National Parks (NCNP) Isparta Branch Office.

**Table 1:** Nature-based Ecotourism Routes in Isparta Province

Gölcük Lake Trekking Route	Akkeçili Bicycle Route
Adada-Written Canyon Trekking Route	Lake Kovada Cycling Route
Kızıldağ National Park Trekking Route	Written Canyon Climbing Area
Aksu-Sorgun Dam Trekking Route	Kuzukulağı Plateau Climbing Area
İslamköy-Atabey Trekking Route	Kapıkaya Climbing Area

Egirdir-Sivri Hill Trekking Route	Altinkum Beach Island Road
Meliks-Pnargözü Trekking Route	Kizildag National Park Campground
Sorkuncak Trekking Route	Melik Plateau Campground
Güneykent Trekking Route	Egirdir Caravan Parking Area
Kuyucak Trekking Route	Gelendost Caravan Parking Area
Apple Orchards Cycling Route	Başpınar Nature Park Park Area

**Source:** Doğa Rotaları, 2021.

### Research Design and Methodology

In the study, it is aimed to examine the ecotourism routes and the status of ecotourism activities in Isparta province with PESTE analysis. For this purpose, focus group interview method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used. A focus group interview can be defined as a series of carefully planned discussions to gain opinions on a predetermined topic in a moderate and non-threatening environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 158). In other words, understanding what people think and feel about a topic, product or service is the main purpose of the focus group discussion. It is appropriate for 6-8 people to participate in this study, with a choice based on the common experience of the subject, product or service among the people who will participate in this study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 163).

The reason why the focus group method was preferred in the study is that the method in question has certain advantages. It is possible to list some of these advantages as developing more creative ideas as a result of group interaction and group dynamics, solving problems faster, and generating more options (Kitzinger, 1994). In addition, group dynamics is an important factor affecting the scope and depth of answers to questions. Thanks to this feature of focus group interviews, it is aimed to create a rich data set (Akıncı, 2015, p. 47).

Ecotourism routes in Isparta province are explained in the literature, and participant interviews are needed for PEST analysis on ecotourism. For this purpose, focus group meetings were held with Isparta Province Culture and Tourism Directorate, Western Mediterranean Development Agency (BAKA) officials and academicians in Isparta province. The interviews were held between 4 / 15 April 2022. The interviews, which were carried out in groups, were planned by making an appointment in advance and lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. Participants consist of people residing in Isparta, having information about the destination and working in the field of tourism. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed without any changes. Keywords were given to the participants in order to guide them about which topics these topics might contain. Key words Dinçer et al. (2011, p. 185) based on the keywords in the study, it was adapted to the subject of ecotourism and some additional items were added.

In addition, the following questions were asked to the participants in the study about the ecotourism routes and ecotourism activities of Isparta province.

- When we consider the ecotourism routes and activities of Isparta province from an economic point of view, what can you say about the opportunities and threats?
- When we consider the ecotourism routes and activities in Isparta province from a political (administrative) perspective, what can you say about the opportunities and threats?
- When we consider the ecotourism routes and activities in Isparta province from a socio-cultural perspective, what can you say about the opportunities and threats?
- When we consider the ecotourism routes and activities of Isparta province from a technological point of view, what can you say about the opportunities and threats?
- When we consider ecotourism routes and activities in Isparta province from an ecological (environmental) perspective, what can you say about the opportunities and threats?

The reason why PESTE analysis was preferred in the study was to systematically examine the current situation for ecotourism activities in Isparta province and to see the big picture about the destination.

Determining the opportunities and threats with PESTE analysis and turning the ecotourism-related opportunities of the destination into advantage are important in terms of taking the necessary precautions to minimize the threats of the destination.

The ethical suitability of the research was approved with the decision numbered E.13772 taken at the meeting of the Scientific Research and Publication Board of Isparta University of Applied Sciences, dated 16.03.2022.

## **Results and Discussion**

In Table 2, the participants' opinions about the keywords the answers given according to the level of importance are seen. Below the **Economic factor**, interest rates and private sector initiatives and foreign investments in the region; below the **political factor**, change of government policies, customize and crime rates in the region; below the **socio-cultural factor**, migration mobility, demographic changes and income distribution; below the **technological factor**, adaptation to new technologies, new products and patents and state's technology investment policy; below the **environmental (ecological) factor**, environmental protection activities and alternative energy sources are qualified as "Very Important" with a ratio of more than 50%.

**Table 2:** Importance of Keywords in PESTE Analysis

<b>Economic</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>T</b>
Change in Gross National Product	6		2	8	Change of Government Policies	2	5	1	8
Available Income	8			8	Customize	1	3	4	8
Currency Fluctuations	5	1	2	8	Tax Policy	5	3		8
Economic Business Cycles	6	2		8	Political stability	6	2		8
Interest rates	2	5	1	8	Destination and tour security	4	2	2	8
Inflation	5	2	1	8	Crime rates in the region	3	3	2	8
Budget Allocated for Ecotourism	5	2	1	8	<b>Socio-Cultural</b>				
Energy, transportation, communication, raw material costs	7		1	8	Family and Lifestyle	4	4		8
Private sector initiatives and foreign investments in the region	2	4	2	8	Education level	8			8
<b>Technological</b>					Health Conditions	8			8
Technology change rate	5	2	1	8	Cultural Values	6	1	1	8
Communication opportunities	8			8	Migration Mobility	3	3	2	8
Transportation Facilities	7		1	8	Leisure and lifestyle behaviors	8			8
Adaptation to new technologies	3	3	2	8	Attitudes and Value Judgements	5	2	1	8
New products and Patents	3	3	2	8	Demographic changes	2	4	2	8
State's technology investment policy	2	2	4	8	Income distribution	2	6		8
New research initiatives	2	5	1	8					
<b>Environmental (Ecological)</b>									
Effects of ecotourism activities on the environment	8			8					
Conscious management of natural resources	5	1	2	8					

Climate change and global warming	8			8				
Environmental protection activities	2	3	3	8				
Alternative energy sources	2	6		8				

**(DESCRIPTIONS:** A: Very important, B: Moderately important, C: Insignificant, T: Total), (Created by the author).

**Political Factors:** Laws, government policies, the decisions taken by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local governments are influential in ecotourism activities in the destination. In addition, the government's approach to issues such as natural areas, environment, ecology, sustainability, tourism, and ecotourism and its policies on this issue are among the factors that closely affect ecotourism projects and investments.

The Lakes Region (Burdur, Isparta, Konya, Afyon) has been declared an Ecotourism Development Region in the 2023 Action Plan of Turkey's Tourism Strategy. The state's prioritization of ecotourism activities and investment allocations in this region is an opportunity for the region. Projects are encouraged and fund support is provided for those who want to invest in ecotourism in Isparta. This situation can be evaluated as an opportunity for the development of ecotourism activities in the destination.

It is necessary for public and local governments to have environmental awareness about the protection of the natural beauties and ecosystems of the region, and to make tourism infrastructure investments that are compatible with the environment and protect the natural life. In the regions where ecotourism routes are located in Isparta province, there are tourism investments suitable for the ecotourism concept, even if the number is small. For example, there are bungalows and tent areas in Sütçüler, Kızıldağ National Park, Aksu, and lodging houses in Kuyucak Village. This situation can be considered as an opportunity for the destination to attract the attention of ecotourists.

Ecotourism studies in the destination should be supported, directed and informed. *“There should be an ecotourism platform in the destination and the works should be carried out under one framework...”* (P 8). Although the absence of such a platform is a shortcoming in terms of destinations, the studies of the Western Mediterranean Development Agency (BAKA) on ecotourism are remarkable. *“The fact that the headquarters of BAKA, which carries out studies for Antalya, Isparta and Burdur provinces, is in Isparta is a great opportunity for the destination in terms of coordination...”* (P 7).

Threats related to ecotourism activities in the destination, lack of coordination among institutions in the protection of ecotourism areas, lack of natural life protective measures, lack of planning on ecotourism, and inadequate inspections can be listed. In addition, the existence of confusion of authority is among the threats.

To give an example, *“The activities of the marble quarries in the province cause the destruction of nature. This situation does not coincide with the ecotourism activities to be carried out in the province. Marble quarries opened with legal permission in ecotourism areas are one of the important threats...”* (P 1).

**Economic Factors:** Within the framework of sustainable economy principles in ecotourism, it is possible to talk about positive effects such as providing economic benefits and business opportunities to the local people, an increase in environmentally compatible investments, and the development of ecological-organic-sustainable products. Ecotourism activities in the destination provide opportunities such as diversification of touristic products, increase in tourism investments, economic contribution to local people, increase in foreign exchange income, employment opportunities, and increase in local entrepreneurship. It provides an economic contribution by promoting local products such as local products, handicraft products, and culture that reflect the culture of the local people. Rose and lavender, which are agricultural products, are evaluated as touristic products in the destination and offered to the visitors.

The inability to spread the economic impact obtained in the ecotourism activity areas of Isparta province to the general population, economic instability, international crises and wars in the neighboring countries of Turkey can be considered as threats. Although the infrastructure investments of the ecotourism areas in the destination are sufficient, there are inadequacies at some points. For example, *“The roads of Kuyucak Village (lavender tourism) are beautiful, but the parking lots in the village are insufficient...”* (P 2). It is extremely important that investments are made in a planned manner.

There are some economic problems in the province regarding ecotourism activities and ecotourism routes. For example, *“Our facilities, which we can consider completely as ecotourism, are insufficient. Unfortunately, daily trips are made in our city. Isparta province is insufficient in terms of ecotourism entrepreneurs and ecotourism guides. Privatizations in national parks only carry out activities for saving the day and for profit, unfortunately they do not make much effort in promotional activities...”* (P 6).

Burdur province can be seen as a competitor in Isparta province ecotourism routes and ecotourism activities. But the opportunity of Isparta being a village is an opportunity and should be evaluated. In addition, *“Burdur province can be seen as a rival destination in lavender tourism in the coming years with the lavenders planted in recent years. However, it can create a positive situation in terms of the carrying capacity of that region in terms of reducing the density experienced in a certain period in Isparta. Currently, that region is pushing the carrying capacity in lavender time...”* (P 1).

**Socio-Cultural Factors:** The development of tourism activities is very important in reducing the development gap in the destination and preventing

migration from rural areas to cities. The lack of activities that satisfy young people in rural areas and the lack of opportunities to earn money are effective in the escape of educated young people from the countryside to the cities. It can be foreseen that the ecotourism activities to be carried out in the destination may slow down this process and there may be returns to the region.

The fact that the region has a young and dynamic population for ecotourism activities in Isparta province, the increase in the education rate, environmental awareness activities carried out by non-governmental organizations, the increase in the awareness of the local people about the protection of the natural environment, and positive interactions between cultures can be considered as opportunities. Tourists want to see different places, cultures, values, lifestyles. Isparta province is one of the destinations where rural culture and village life continue. The destination offers the opportunity to see different traditions and customs, traditional handicrafts, traditional production of agricultural products (rose). In addition, the destination is “*very rich with cultural assets, intangible cultural heritage elements and tourism types...*” (P 7).

The fact that the authenticity of the local people's culture cannot be preserved with the ecotourism activities to be carried out in the destination, the current employed personnel are not trained on ecotourism, the lack of ecotourism awareness, the local people are not ready for ecotourism, and the lack of professional knowledge and experience are the threats.

**Technological Factors:** Today, technological factors greatly affect the travel and tourism industry. Technological developments should be used to ensure the sustainability and development of regional development in the destination. It can be said that by eliminating the infrastructure problems of the destination, the risks that may occur in the future can be reduced.

With the development of infrastructure opportunities, it can be predicted that there will be an increase in transportation and investment activities. Isparta province has been selected as a pilot province by the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). This is a situation that will contribute to the promotion of the destination. In addition, there are technological applications on some routes in the destination. To give an example, “*In Kuyucak Village, Street View, Navigation applications, promotions with VR glasses are carried out...*” (P 1). Having an airport in the destination and proximity to Antalya province, which is one of the destinations attracting the most tourists in Turkey, and Antalya airport is a positive situation.

Various studies are carried out on the promotion of destinations. To give an example, “*Rotamisparta.com application for nature routes in the destination, and "gezsenisparta" and "go\_isparta accounts" for promotional purposes were opened on the social media platform via Instagram. There is also the website www.goispartaturkey.com...*” (P 3).

It can be said that the infrastructure and superstructure investments related to ecotourism in the destination are currently insufficient, and if there is an increase in the touristic demand to the region with promotional activities, investments in this regard will increase. Deficiencies in waste management practices in the destination can be considered as one of the negative situations.

**Environmental Factors:** In ecotourism, while focusing on activities that aim to minimize the negative effects on the environment due to tourism activities, it is necessary to evaluate the used areas and take into account the ecological durability limits, instead of contributing to the protection and development of natural areas, opening new areas and resources to tourism activities. According to the sustainability principles of ecotourism activities, environmental protection should be encouraged with environmental education.

In the destination, which has an important wildlife, handling the habitats and ecosystems with a sustainable tourism approach without deteriorating, informing the visitors about nature protection will contribute to the protection of natural life. In addition, the production of renewable energy in the destination is an environmentally positive situation. *“Renewable energy is produced in the region with solar energy fields and windmills...”* (P 5).

One of the most important factors that negatively affect ecotourism activities in the destination is climate change and global warming. It is a rich destination for regional medicine and aromatic plants. However, the fact that the region does not receive enough rainfall and the weather is dry causes the lavender to dry prematurely and the roses to not fully develop. For this reason, one of the most important criteria considered as a threat in terms of ecotourism activities in the region has been stated as climate change and global warming.

Destruction of nature and environmental pollution is one of the factors that negatively affect ecotourism activities in the destination. The garbage and wastes that people leave to the environment as a result of nature activities are one of the causes of this pollution. In order to prevent this, it is necessary to reduce the amount of waste production and increase awareness about waste management. In addition, the ineffective and conscious use of water resources in the destination located in the Lakes region is one of the important threats. To give an example, *“The destruction of nature by the hydroelectric power plants built in the destination and the change of direction of the water resources in the region is a negative situation for ecosystems...”* (P 4).

## CONCLUSION

The interest in ecotourism, which is accepted as one of the alternative tourism types in the world, is increasing day by day. Ecotourism activities are generally carried out in areas with natural beauties, especially in the form of walking tours, tours about flora and fauna, observation tours, accommodation in

environmental camps, participation in agricultural activities, and tours with low-participation guests.

The province of Isparta is a destination that allows many activities to be carried out under the roof of ecotourism with its natural beauties, historical and cultural riches, ecosystems. It is also rich in wildlife and endemic plant species that will attract the attention of ecotourists. Isparta province has a rich ecotourism potential with Nature Conservation and National Parks, Nature Parks, nature protection areas and natural monuments. These riches should be considered as the most important opportunities for ecotourism activities of Isparta. In this context, nature-based ecotourism routes in Isparta province were examined and touristic activities that could be done on these routes were discussed. In this context, nature-based ecotourism routes in Isparta province were examined in this study and touristic activities that could be done on these routes were discussed. In this regard, Akkuş and Gül (2020) determined the potential of Isparta province and its immediate surroundings in terms of urban ecotourism and differs with their studies in which they determined the actions of urban ecotourism routes.

Ecotourism activities in the destination provide an increase in the added value by product diversification by converting agricultural products (rose, lavender, etc.) into touristic products in economic terms. The diversification of the income of the local people contributes to the regional economy and rural economy by providing entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. It was stated by the participants that the facilities to serve ecotourists in the destination were insufficient, the shortage of expert guides, and the tours to the region were made as daily tours. In order to eliminate these negativities, it is necessary to inform the local people and provide the necessary incentives for ecotourism investments. In addition, enriching the tour plans in the destination with various touristic activities, increasing the number of tours with accommodation will contribute to the increase in the tourism revenues of the region.

It is necessary to carry out strategic planning studies on ecotourism in the destination and to ensure inter-institutional cooperation in this regard. In his study, Nayir (2009) investigated the determination of ecotourism demands and trends in protected natural areas of Isparta region. The results of this study show that there should be spatial and point action plans for ecotourism, there should be an institutional structure or activities for the coordination, organization, monitoring and supervision of activities in natural areas, and there should be dialogue and cooperation between ecotourism stakeholders. Politically, sustainability and continuity should be ensured in tourism plans and policies. The region has significant advantages in terms of destination and tour security. Socio-culturally, the young and dynamic population of the region, the high level of education and health conditions are sufficient. The increase in ecotourism activities in the region will reduce migration from rural areas and create new employment opportunities in rural areas.

The rapid change of technology has taken its place in the tourism sector and touristic travel plans. With the technological innovations used in ecotourism routes, it provides various conveniences for ecotourists by planning their travels, collecting information and providing accessibility during travel. It will contribute to the visit of more ecotourists to the region, especially with technological opportunities, information about ecotourism routes, markings, directions, route information and promotional applications in the destination.

Since the activities of marble quarries and hydroelectric power plants in the region cause destruction of nature, it is seen as a threat to ecotourism activities to be planned in the region. In this regard, the destruction of nature should be prevented with the cooperation of the relevant institutions. It should not be forgotten that the environment is the most important resource for ecotourism. Since ecotourists are the most important criteria in their travels for natural beauty and scenery, the damage to be encountered during the tour will reduce tourist satisfaction. From this point of view, suggestions about ecotourism activities and ecotourism routes in Isparta province,

- Ecotourism action plan should be prepared.
- Ecotourism promotion strategies should be established.
- Ecotourism accommodation facility investments should be made in harmony with the environment and in accordance with the local architecture.
- Studies should be carried out to increase the number of expert guides in the destination.
- Ecotourism routes can be combined with cultural and religious routes.
- Eco-village projects can be realized by identifying suitable areas as a result of field research in the destination.

As a result, the ecotourism market is a small and high-income group (Moons, De Pelsmacker, & Barbarossa, 2020). For this reason, investments in ecotourism in the destination and increase in the number of tourists in the destination can contribute to the increase in income from tourism. Evaluating the potential of the region in terms of ecotourism and turning it into economic gain will increase regional incomes. In addition, it can contribute to the spread of the tourism demand, which is concentrated in the coastal areas in the region (Western Mediterranean), especially in the summer season, to the whole region and to all seasons.

The study is limited to only nature-based ecotourism on a subject basis. In this direction, other types of tourism are not considered. In terms of scope, the study was limited to the ecotourism routes of Isparta province and ecotourism activities. In this context, ecotourism activities and ecotourism routes in other provinces are not included in the study.

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