



Determining how the Covid-19 pandemic affects ecotourism in Giresun province

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is a type of activity in which people spend time in natural environments having fun and admiring nature's wonders. One of the most important characteristics of natural beauty is its potential to foster social and cultural calm. The Covid 19 pandemic outbreak began in Turkey in March 2020. The purpose of this research was to find out how many individuals visited Giresun's ecotourism destinations between 2018 and 2021.

The number of tourists to the area had decreased, particularly in 2020. Visitors to Giresun Province are registered at the city's entrance by the Provincial Directorate of Tourism. The existence of tourism agencies facilitates the identification of both domestic and foreign tourists. In 2018 there were 182313 tourists; in 2020 there would be only 105064. There were 77249 fewer tourists in just two years. Despite pandemic restrictions, local tourists prefer ecological places because they provide clean air and a nice way of life. Domestic visitors to the remote Giresun province stayed in ecotourism zones. Despite the fact that our region has several ecotourism destinations, it is obvious that many visitors are leaving for adjacent provinces owing to a lack of infrastructure, transit alternatives, and lodging options.

Research Article

Key Words: Naturalness, Giresun, migration, region, Türkiye, economy

Giresun ilinde Covid-19 pandemisinin ekoturizmi nasıl etkilediğinin belirlenmesi

ÖZ

Ekoturizm, insanların doğal ortamlarda eğlenerek ve doğa harikalarını hayranlıkla izleyerek vakit geçirdikleri bir aktivite türüdür. Doğal güzelliğın en önemli özelliklerinden biri sosyal ve kültürel sakinliğı sağlama potansiyelidir. Türkiye'de Mart 2020'de Covid 19 pandemisi salgını haini almaya başlamıştır. Bu çalışma, Giresun'un ekoturizm destinasyonlarını 2018-2021 yılları arasında kaç kişinin ziyaret ettiğini belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Özellikle 2020 yılında bölgeye gelen turist sayısı azalmıştır. Giresun İli'ne gelen ziyaretçiler, İl Turizm Müdürlüğü tarafından kentin girişinde kayıt altına alınmaktadır. Turizm acentelerinin kayıtları hem yerli hem de yabancı turistlerin tespitini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Giresun iline 2018 yılında 182313 turist ve 2020 yılında 105064 turist gelmiştir. Covid-19 pandemisi nedeniyle turist sayısında iki yılda 77249 azalma olmuştur. Pandemi kısıtlamalarına rağmen yerli turistler temiz hava ve güzel bir yaşam tarzı sağladığı için eko-turizm mekânlarını tercih etmişlerdir. Giresun'a uzak bölgelerden gelen yerli turistler ekoturizm bölgelerinde konaklamışlardır. Bölgemizde çok sayıda ekoturizm destinasyonu bulunmasına rağmen altyapı, ulaşım alternatifleri ve konaklama imkânlarının yetersizliğı nedeniyle çok sayıda ziyaretçinin çevre illere yöneldiğı de tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğallık, Giresun, göç, bölge, Türkiye, ekonomi

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1. Introduction

Tourism refers to every social, cultural, and economic policy that the residents of that area have put into place (Artuer et al., 2013; Karagiglioğlu ve Akbaba, 2016; Alptekin, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic is viewed as a new calamity with far-reaching implications for a range of businesses, particularly tourism, which has been identified as the pandemic's primary victim. This pandemic is the worst worldwide epidemic since World War II, with the biggest global impact. According to some, the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact on the tourism industry compared to previous pandemics (Amador-Jiménez et al., 2020; Dewi, 2020; Rahimian et al., 2022). Urban regions where mass tourism is used without thinking, natural resources are destroyed, cultural heritage is rejected, the population is growing quickly without planning, and all of these things have a detrimental impact on city dwellers. Ecotourism is defined as a trip, a visit, and a contribution to pristine natural regions where there is a chance to learn about the environment, human culture, and safety. These areas are deliberately preserved, which benefits the local population (Cakir et al., 2008; Akın, 2016; Cakir et al., 2019; Amador-Jiménez et al., 2020; Santos and Moreira, 2021). Ecotourism has developed between urban and rural areas, although its goals, definition, and outcomes have been debated (Sivrikaya et al., 2011; Dewi, 2020).

Our nation is one of the six most visited countries, according to statistics from international tourism organizations. Examining

the data for Europe reveals that our nation's share of tourism in the world is 3.5% and 6.8% in Europe (WEF, 2020). The rise in ecotourism and the number of eco-tourists is a result of people looking for ways to conquer nature as environmental awareness grows. Protecting cultural values, cultural exchanges between people and tourists can be made and socio-cultural influences can be ensured. Ecotourism has been given importance in recent years throughout the province in order to provide more income all year with abundant natural areas (Kalın et al., 2014; Rodrigez et al., 2018).

This study was prepared to investigate how ecotourism was affected during the pandemic in Giresun province. By evaluating the necessary data sources, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which can be quite effective in our lives, on ecotourism were investigated. The data obtained were evaluated in the findings and discussion section.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study area

Our study area covers tourism activities within the borders of Giresun province. In addition, interactions at geographical borders will also be considered. The areas where ecotourism will be made are shown with the sources. Giresun province, located in the Eastern Black Sea Region of the Black Sea Region, is located between 37° 50' and 39° 12' east longitudes and 40° 07' and 41° 08' north latitudes.

Table 1. Various ecotourism areas in Giresun Province

Types of eco-tourism	Areas
Photo-safari	Şebinkarahisar (Arslanşah,-Üç köprü-Tutak mount), Alucra (Çakrak-Çikrikkapı), Görele (Bayazıt-Sisdağı), Dereli (Kulakkaya-Çaldağı), Bulancak (Döngeri-Çambaşı), Şebinkarahisar (Sayderesi-Şehitler), Giersun Center(Erimez), Yağlıdere (Ekindere-Ayvat)
Mountain and Trekking	Since almost every part of Giresun is mountainous and hilly due to geographical conditions, there are many places for these areas.
Plateau tourism	Kümbet Plateau, Kulakkaya Plateau, Karagöl Plateau, Sisdağı Plateau, Gölyanı Plateau, Çakrak Plateau, Bektaş Plateau
Camp-caravan tourism	Kümbet, Koçkayası natural park, İnişdibi ağaçbaşı natural park, Kulakkaya plataeu, Alçakbel, Kümbet Plateau, Uzundere, Aymaç
Rafting sports tourism	Harşit Stream, Kelkit Stream, Pazarsuyu Stream, Gelevera Stream, Yağlıdere Stream
Cycling, hiking, fishing, paragliding, botanical tourism	Aksu festival area, Tirebolu Hidrellez hill, Espiye Karaovacık plateau, Eğribel gateway (GİRTAB)

Giresun is geographically one of the prominent cities of the Black Sea. Its center is shaped like a peninsula and has a mythological history. It has the only island of the Black Sea and is famous for its forests. With its geographical location, temperate climate in the coastal areas, continental climate in the interior, suitable for all kinds of winter and nature sports, historical richness and natural beauties, Giresun tourism is multi-faceted with the world's best quality hazelnut growing in Giresun, handicrafts, fishing, hunting, and plateaus offers opportunities (GCTD, 2021).

Table 1 displays a number of the province of Giresun's ecotourism destinations. You can take a brief pause and enjoy a cup of tea while enjoying the wonderful view from Giresun Castle as you begin to glimpse the city. Historical Trade High School Building, Catholic Church Used as Children's Library,

Giresun Museum, where various artifacts from every period of history are exhibited, Zeytinlik District, where historical Giresun houses are located, and other tourist destinations in the province where you can see every shade of green together with streams, waterfalls, and pine forests. Kümbet, Bektaş, Kulakkaya, Sisdağı Highlands, which have been declared tourism centers, and the other Cikrikkapı Highlands, Gölyanı Obası, Karagöl, Paşakonağı Highlands in our region are natural wonders and offer beauties that our guests will admire (GCTD, 2021).

The provincial culture and tourism directorate's annual reports of the tourist facilities in the area, along with field observations, demographic changes, and the number of visitors staying in the area, were used (GCTD, 2021). The ecotourism areas of Giresun Province were examined as the study's subject.

The Culture and Tourism Directorate had provided tourist and lodging data, which was broken down by month. Giresun province's population changes were tracked on a monthly basis. Moreover, 14 operators' annual service volume has been taken into consideration. Results were compared between two times.

2.2 Material

The provincial directorate of tourism registers visitors to Giresun province at the city's entrance. Both domestic and foreign tourists can be easily identified because they are accompanied by travel agencies (GCT, 2021).

2.3 Methods

Giresun province has an enormous number of tourist attractions. Many tourists come to explore the city's historical and cultural sites. Visitors were detected in the province by the Giresun Tourism Provincial Directorate. At specified times, the numbers at tourist attractions in province-wide destination sites are also recorded. People who fled Giresun province during the pandemic returned to avoid restrictions. Local visitors who returned to their rural communities resumed ecotourism operations on the plateaus. Domestic and international tourists were counted on a monthly basis. The study's calculations were based on the number of tourists who visited each month.

Additionally, it has been found that some of the people who previously migrated from the Giresun province occasionally

visited this area. The migrants left Giresun in search of employment and educational opportunities. It was impossible to precisely calculate how frequently these individuals would return home, so their number could not be added to that of domestic travelers.

3. Results and Discussion

As demonstrated in Tables 2 and 3, the pandemic has significantly affected the tourism sector. It was observed that there were more foreign visitors in 2018 than there were in 2021. The fact that the nations of the outside world forbid travel can be used as justification for this. Ecotourism operations have decreased as a result of a global decline in both domestic and international tourism numbers. It has been shown that there is a decline in lodging and overnight stays when the contribution of Giresun local tourists to ecotourism is investigated.

Individuals preferred to escape from crowds and go to quieter environments. Domestic visitors can engage in hazelnut work in our city, which is a product of the city. Locals engage in ecological tourism by traveling to natural regions whenever they have the chance. The state of the lodging facilities is inspected, and an assessment should be given based on the months. From March to September, ecotourism is possible thanks to the pleasant weather. Ecotourism has benefited from the increase in the average air temperature. Rainfall's impact on ecotourism activities and earnings is another consideration. This raises the province's economic stake in ecotourism.

Table 2. Number of Domestic Tourists Visit and layover Facilities from 2018 to 2021 (GCTD, 2021).

Months	Domestic Tourist							
	Visit Giresun (Years)				Layover to Giresun (Years)			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	10293	7903	13493	7075	14818	12061	20215	11134
February	11829	8041	12665	5604	16472	11502	17912	8948
March	13540	8775	8090	8355	19691	13327	11673	12143
April	16577	12798	2052	7438	25846	18649	320	11652
May	14261	9751	1959	5395	21541	14198	2782	8011
Jun	15505	16566	7809	11118	21965	21767	10022	15695
July	24885	24587	15135	21034	34187	31532	19608	26903
August	26323	22930	19127	17472	34299	28958	25821	22934
September	19612	15234	12376	14932	26993	19784	18280	21910
October	11439	9195	11232	14548	16764	13040	16285	21036
November	11245	7239	9648	14302	16290	10138	13821	21287
December	6804	10254	6710	10314	9462	14531	10706	16290
TOTAL	182313	153273	120296	137587	258328	209487	167445	197943

Considering the restrictions made by the Republic of Turkey due to the pandemic, ecotourism activities had to be almost zeroed. However, this situation differed in our province. Annual sales data of some enterprises were evaluated, and the economic income of the province was analyzed in this way 14 working facilities where is gastronomy facilities were reached and the following data obtained (Tables 2-3 and Figures 1-4). Among these business types that offer lodging are hotels, motels, hostels, and vacation houses. In the plateaus, dining

establishments and food restaurants can be used as examples to talk about nutrition. In the area of gastronomy in ecotourism regions, precise visitor data was acquired from both restaurants and on the plateau rather than from hotels. Giresun provincial citizens who come to outside of the province might not have their personal information processed correctly.

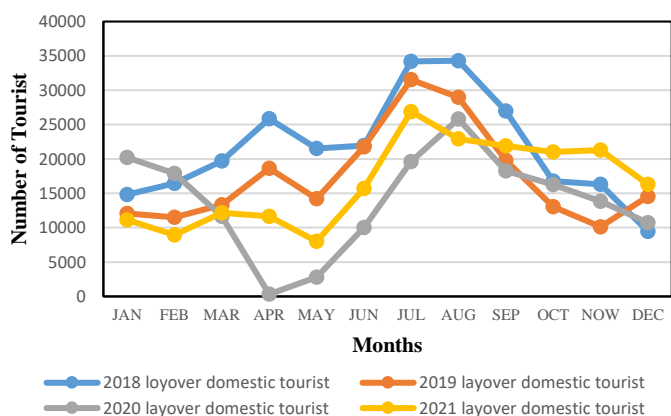


Figure 1. Layover to Giresun Province domestic tourist from 2018 to 2021

According to the data provided by nine businesses, they sold between 85 and 90 lambs during the 2018–2019 and 160–170 lambs during the 2019–2020 seasons. Five businesses in various regions of the province claimed that at this period, their sales climbed from 110–120 lambs to 180–185 lambs. There has been an upsurge in sales, as witnessed in 2018–2019. Although these firms work to adhere to the cleanliness regulations during the pandemic, their costs have also gone up. These costs cover the cost of disinfectants, masks, liquid and solid soaps. During this time, state officials forbade anyone from visiting tourism organizations without a mask. The organization gave out masks to those who didn't have any. When evaluated in accordance with Tables 2 and 3, it can be seen that there are decreases from 2018 to 2021 in terms of the number of tourists arriving and staying. Ecotourism activities were not sufficiently explained, ecotourism cannot be diversified, and lodging facilities are some

of the causes of this decline. The covid-19 pandemics were one of the main causes of this outcome.

In the pandemic, the number of foreign tourists in particular has been close to zero. The closure of the country's doors to foreign countries and the pandemic rules has been effective in this process. Travel restrictions during the pandemic period were especially effective. In terms of the number of domestic tourists, increases were observed in certain periods, above the expectations. But this was not reflected in the accommodation. The reason for this is that reservations are limited due to the fact that few tourists are hosted in accommodation facilities due to pandemic rules. It has been determined that the insufficient number of accommodation facilities causes the economic return of ecotourism to be low.

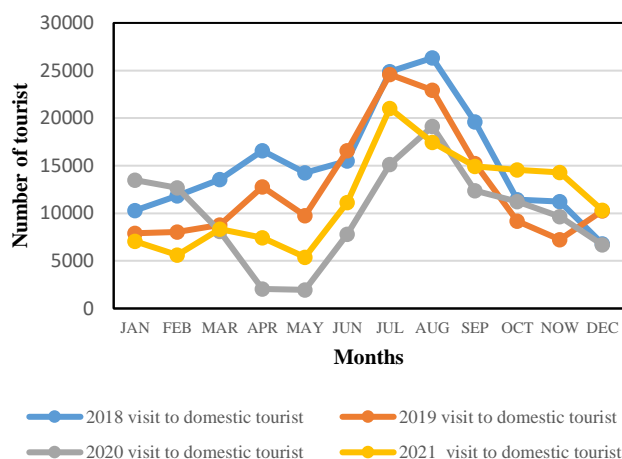


Figure 2. Visit to Giresun Province domestic tourist from 2018 to 2021

Table 3. Number of foreign tourists visit and layover facilities from 2018 to 2021 (GCTD, 2021)

Months	Foreign Tourist							
	Visit to Giresun (Years)				Layover to Giresun (Years)			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	163	85	185	39	372	153	320	73
February	172	86	147	37	268	166	217	61
March	258	268	78	68	696	405	145	80
April	264	170	0	67	456	259	0	187
May	383	246	2	113	1123	333	2	208
Jun	664	355	36	170	880	489	53	244
July	708	1066	157	386	1160	1448	282	769
August	1871	1079	238	455	2804	1431	373	723
September	1026	548	200	362	1562	710	422	701
October	428	226	83	205	703	446	254	392
November	186	125	82	147	365	254	172	294
December	87	141	40	181	110	299	71	384
TOTAL	6210	4395	1248	2230	10499	6393	2311	4116

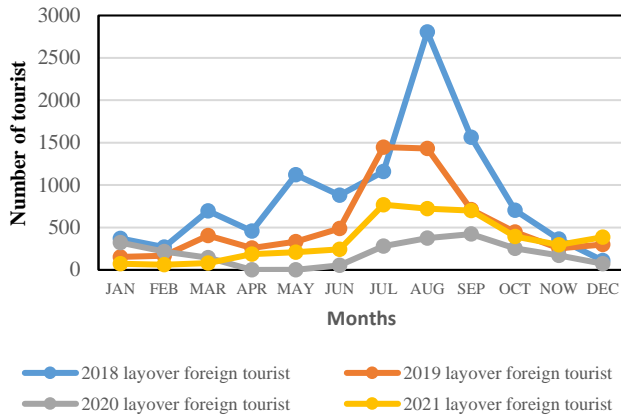


Figure 3. Layover to Giresun Province foreign tourist from 2018 to 2021

Due to flexible working and closed workplaces in this period, the people who wanted to get away from their suffocating and stressful life in their city generally preferred their hometown. The main reason for the increase in ecotourism activity in the rural area had come from people who want to get away from the pandemic restrictions. It was the citizens of Giresun province who prefer a calmer nature life, especially away from the city life. These citizens had come both for a healthier life in the countryside and to harvest hazelnuts. Since the harvest season coincides with July-August, there have been seasonal migrations to the region.

The plateaus of Giresun province are considered as ecological areas together with the plateaus of other neighboring provinces. Therefore, it is said that it also affects the cultural interaction in these provinces. It is observed that the view of ecotourism in these regions is almost the same. The number of facilities opened in accordance with the legal rules where eco tourists coming to the region can stay is 80. Considering Giresun in general, these facilities are insufficient for the incoming tourists. The capacities of the facilities were reduced in this period, so the rate of overnight tourists was decreased.

In order for ecotourism operations to be healthy, it is required to act holistically and to ensure the development of rural people can be organized. Ecotourism development in rural regions might be seen as a useful instrument for the future. The individuals who live in this area now have more money thanks to the action that lessens environmental influences on natural places. The ability to see the historical and cultural treasures that protect the natural beauties in a certain consciousness is a double-sided benefit. It will be advantageous to assure continuity that the planned and programs of ecotourism activity are incorporated in the legal legislation during the covid-19 process, taking into account the social and economic environmental benefits. Financial assistance and incentives should be provided to encourage the development of interpersonal relationships. If not, it could be said that the value of the individual in ecotourism activities that grow daily. The trust that will develop as a result of the ecotourism effectiveness studies will increase over time.

Administrative sciences NGOs should establish an inspection process to develop unique approaches for tour operators to inspect ecotourism regions. Ecotourism can have both positive and bad effects if it cannot be demonstrated.

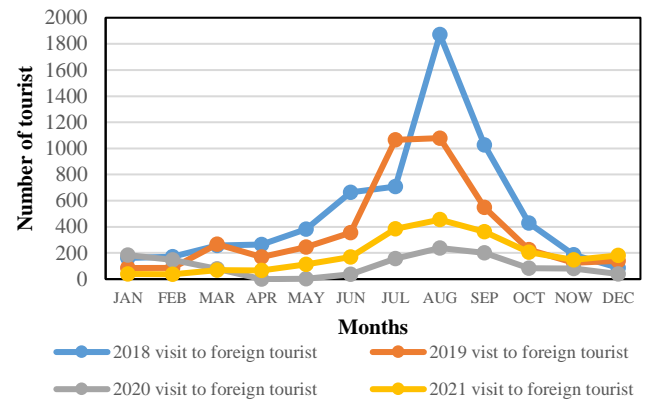


Figure 4. Visit to Giresun Province foreign tourist from 2018 to 2021

Auditing firms require qualified, skilled, and conscientious employees. The mutual love and trust of individuals working in the ecotourism business will serve as the foundation of the collaboration system, which will be a successful and long-lasting solution. The province's full ecotourism potential should be assessed, and studies should consider the appropriate balance of usage and protection. 4.

4. Conclusion

It can increase both public and private investment, promoting ecotourism more successfully. Organizations that inform businesses about all tourism activities that are suited for their goals should be designed in order to enhance the number of tourists. It is essential to guarantee that ecotourism attractions are reachable and that security personnel are monitoring standards. Transfer excursions account for 12,000 of the 35,000 visits to the area. Managers should refine their strategies in this area going forward. The income scale that will be supplied to announce the planned economic activities will expand with the active usage of local TV channels and social media. Education and basic understanding are needed initially in order to support ecotourism. Even during the development process, ecological tourism, one of the alternative forms of tourism, will inevitably grow as more people show an interest in it.

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