



## Examining the Characteristics of Outgoing Package Tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan

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### Abstract

Over the past two decades, Azerbaijan's tourism has achieved significant growth and development. The country is promoting its rich history, cultural heritage, natural beauty, and modern infrastructure to attract tourists worldwide. During this process, the impact of Turkish tourists on Azerbaijani tourism is quite evident. Due to the historical and cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, Azerbaijan is a desirable travel destination for Turkish tourists. Package tours organized from Türkiye not only contribute to the revival and economic stability of Azerbaijani tourism but also allow Turkish tourists to have different experiences without language barriers. This study aimed to ascertain the general characteristics of package tours originating from Türkiye. First, a web search was conducted to locate package tour programs. This search identified 47 tour programs which were then subjected to content analysis. The analysis results reveal that most of the identified tours to Azerbaijan are single-destination, non-strictly structured, cultural-oriented hybrid city tours. Furthermore, it was determined that most tours depart with transit air transport to Baku from major cities in Türkiye, where touristic demand is intense. Alley of Martyrs, Ateshgah, Gobustan, Walled City (Icherisheher), and the Flame Towers were found to be the most frequently included cultural attractions.

**Keywords:** Package Tour, Group Travel, Tour Program, Cultural Tours, Azerbaijan

**JEL Codes:** L83, L93, Z32, Z33

### Türkiye'den Azerbaycan'a Yönelik Düzenlenen Paket Tur Özelliklerinin İncelenmesi

#### Öz

Son 20 yılda Azerbaycan turizmi önemli bir büyüme ve gelişme kaydetmiştir. Ülke, dünyanın her köşesinden turist çekmek için zengin tarihini, kültürel mirasını, doğal güzelliklerini ve oluşturulan modern altyapısını tanıtmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu süreçte Türk turistlerin Azerbaycan turizmi üzerindeki etkisi oldukça belirgindir. Tarihi ve kültürel bağları nedeniyle, Azerbaycan, Türk turistler için oldukça cazip bir seyahat destinasyonudur. Türkiye'den düzenlenen paket turlar ise Azerbaycan turizminin canlanmasına ve ekonomik istikrarına katkı sağladığı gibi, turistlerin dil bariyeri olmadan farklı deneyimler elde etmelerine olanak sunmaktadır. Bu araştırmada, Türkiye'den Azerbaycan'a düzenlenen paket turların incelenmesi ve genel özelliklerinin tespit edilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için yapılan web taraması ile Türkiye'den Azerbaycan'a yönelik 47 paket tur programı tespit edilmiş ve içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Analiz sonuçlarına göre, belirlenen turların büyük bir bölümünün tek destinasyona yönelik, sıkı yapılandırılmamış, kültürel ağırlıklı hibrit şehir turları olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, çoğunun Bakü destinasyonuna yönelik bir transit hava ulaşımı ile, turistik talebin yoğun olduğu Türkiye'deki büyük şehirlerden başladığı belirlenmiştir. Paket tur programlarında en sık yer alan çekiciliklerin Bakü'deki Şehitler Hiyabını, Ateshgah, Gobustan, İçeri Şehir ve Alev Kuleleri olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Paket tur, Grup seyahati, Tur programı, Kültür turları, Azerbaycan

**JEL Kodları:** L83, L93, Z32, Z33

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## Introduction

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Türkiye has been developing and intensifying over a considerable period, largely due to their geographical proximity and common cultural background. A substantial body of research has been undertaken on these relations, particularly within the domains of social sciences such as history, sociology, international relations, political sciences and economics. While the number of studies examining the tourism relations between the two countries has begun to increase in recent years, it is evident that this is not yet at the desired level. Azerbaijan, which is a bridge between Europe and Asia in the South Caucasus region, is located on the historical Silk Road, similar to Türkiye. Schuhbert et al. (2020) state that this geographical location of Azerbaijan can be seen as an important opportunity and that the development and revitalization of cultural tour routes within the scope of the "*One Belt One Road Project*" called the "*New Silk Road Project*" can trigger regional economic diversification. Similarly, Çeşmeci (2022) posited that the development of cultural tourism in the region has the potential to contribute to the economic growth of the region and to serve as a conduit for increased cooperation between the countries in the South Caucasus, thereby promoting peace and stability. Kaya et al. (2024) analyzed the tourism relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye and examined the role of the opening of the Zengezur Corridor in the development of tourism potential between the two countries. The establishment of this corridor is expected to enhance the accessibility of tourist flows originating from Türkiye, particularly those utilizing road-based travel options. Furthermore, it will bolster visitation patterns of Azerbaijani nationals to the eastern regions of Türkiye.

Today it can be stated that cultural tourism is the most prominent tourism type in Azerbaijan and has the fastest development potential. For example, Huseynli and Toksöz (2024), conducted research to determine the current situation and potential of cultural tourism in Baku, and identified lack of promotion, inadequate diversification of touristic products, and lack of qualified personnel as obstacles to the development of cultural tourism in the city. In a similar vein, Aliyev and Kızılırmak, (2023) addressed the present status and prospective possibilities of cultural tourism in the region of Karabakh, proposing recommendations for future action. Package tours are one of the tools that can be used to promote the development of cultural tourism and attract more foreign tourists to the destination (Liao & Chuang, 2019: 231). They can also play an important role in accelerating tourism in general, because the package tour industry functions as an intermediary that integrates both the supply and demand sides (Ren, 2022: 331). Package tours represent the optimal solution for most types of travelers, but especially for those who want to participate in cultural tourism activities. Today package tours continue to be an important component of international tourism movements (Gül Yılmaz, 2023: 2381) because compared with individual travel they are cheaper, offer guarantee, comfort and personal confidence, and provide the opportunity to meet different people and make new friendships (İçöz, 2003: 236; Wong & Kwong, 2004: 586; Çeşmeci, 2004: 12-14).

In Türkiye, hundreds of thousands of tourists embark on international travel or holiday trips each year, with package tours representing a significant proportion of these journeys. While the number of citizens traveling abroad was around 500 thousand in the 1970s, it exceeded 10 million in 2019. Furthermore, the number of people traveling for sightseeing, entertainment, sporting, and cultural activities has also risen in comparison to previous years.

Nevertheless, kinship and spatial proximity have been shown to exert a more significant influence on destination country preferences (Kervankıran ve Bađmancı, 2020: 686). Despite this, there is a limited number of studies in the literature, especially on tourists who purchase package tours abroad (Ceylan ve Güven, 2017: 517) or on the characteristics of the package tours they purchase. To better understand Turkish tourism as a whole, it is necessary to look at the mobility of outbound tourism from the opposite direction (Kervankıran ve Bađmancı, 2020: 690). The main purpose of this study, which also aims to fill this gap in the literature, is to analyze package tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan and to determine their general characteristics. To achieve this goal, a literature review on the subject was carried out first, then the package tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan were identified through a web search and their tour programs were subjected to content analysis. The findings obtained after the analyses were systematized, tabulated, and written down.

By analyzing and identifying package tour characteristics, the destination country can obtain some clues to increase its competitiveness compared to its competitors and better predict its position in destination marketing. In addition, as Oppermann (1995) points out, through route analysis of package tours, market segmentation can be made according to the travel routes of tourists arriving at the destination. In addition to all these, the results obtained from this research are expected to contribute to travel companies organizing tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan to develop marketing and tour operation strategies that increase product diversification and tourist satisfaction.

In the first part of the study, the literature on tourism in Azerbaijan and tourism relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is presented, and information on the concept of package tours and types of package tours is provided. In addition, similar research on this subject and their main findings are briefly mentioned. In the second part of the study, information on the research methodology is given and the results are evaluated.

### **1. Azerbaijan Tourism and Tourism Relations Between Türkiye and Azerbaijan**

When considered as a tourist destination, Azerbaijan can be seen as a destination that is still developing, as stated by Demirođlu and Müller (2021). A review of the academic literature on Azerbaijan tourism reveals that the country is still in the early stages of development as a destination. Evidence for this is that there is a substantial body of research examining the role of tourism in the national economy and the economic impact of tourism (Seferov & Hesenov, 2006; Salihova & Akbulaev, 2016; Musayeva & Silinevica, 2016; Bayramli & Aliyev, 2020; Gaziyev & Boyacıođlu, 2021; Azizov, 2021; Huseynli, 2023b; Muradov, 2023). In particular, Rzayev and Əsgərov (2023) focused on the role of incoming tourist movements in the socioeconomic development of the country. However, there have also been studies on the creation of tourism regions and recreation areas (Valiyeva, 2019) and tourism competitiveness analyses, either national (Ahmadov et al., 2021) or regional (Halis et al., 2016). In recent years, there has been increasing research on destination marketing issues such as destination management (Demirođlu & Müller, 2021), competitiveness (Ibragimov, 2023), and branding (Huseynli, 2023a). İslamlı and Polat Üzümcü (2022) undertook an analysis of the websites of several organizations in Azerbaijan, including the State Tourism Agency, the Tourism Bureau, the Hoteliers' Union and the Tourist Guides' Union. They put forward recommendations aimed

at enhancing the comprehensiveness of the information provided about Azerbaijan and its various sub-destinations, as well as increasing the linguistic diversity on the websites of these associations, which play a pivotal role in destination marketing. Ardiç Yetiş (2020), on the other hand, employed the semiotic method to analyze the Azerbaijan tourism promotion film, concluding that it is effective in showcasing the country's touristic potential, particularly its cultural heritage.

Some studies have also been conducted on different types of tourism in Azerbaijan. Heikkilä et al. (2014) researched developing service design for sustainable rural tourism; Seferov and Kurbanova (2018) on winter tourism potential and opportunities; Hasanzadeh (2023) on agricultural tourism opportunities; Imrani et al. (2022) on development of speleotourism; Hasanov (2024) on the impact of event tourism development on tourism enterprises; Aliyev (2021) on the popularization of halal tourism concept in the country and determining the gastronomy tourism potential of Ganja (Aliyev 2022). In addition, Huseynli and Toksöz (2024) conducted a study on the current situation of cultural tourism in Baku, including suggestions for the development of potential resources.

Today Türkiye is not only an important tourism partner for Azerbaijan but a country that serves as a role model in many respects concerning the development of tourism. Since 1990, when Azerbaijan declared its independence, Türkiye has started to establish close relations with Azerbaijan in every field and was the first state to recognize its independence (Məmmədov, 2015: 177; Önen, 2021: 930). The development of relations between these two countries, which share a common history and cultural identity, in the field of tourism can be traced back to that period. One of the first agreements between the two countries was the cooperation agreement in the field of tourism (Məmmədov, 2015: 177; Çokişler, 2021: 126). For a considerable period, Türkiye was among the top 5 countries in terms of the number of tourists it sent to Azerbaijan. In the last few years, however, due to the instability in the Caucasus and the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye has started to be among the top three countries sending the most tourists to Azerbaijan (Table 1). This is a good indication of how important Türkiye is as a market country for Azerbaijan tourism.

**Table 1:** Top 10 Tourist-generating Markets to Azerbaijan from 2017 to 2023

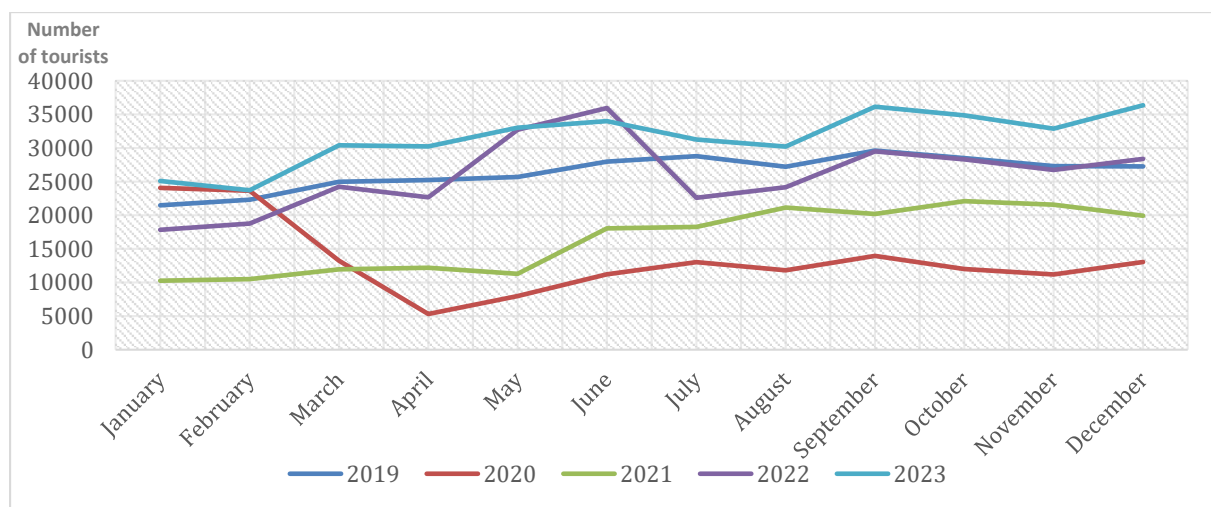
Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Russian Federation	853082	878391	932198	225214	257959	446831	625106
Georgia	537710	610124	725174	184253	62512	82225	104473
Türkiye	301553	291259	316404	160513	197472	311880	378204
Iran	362597	240483	255571	72796	124877	170533	165346
Saudi Arabia	33273	72935	106994	11945	8826	96231	80677
United Arab Emirates	102360	93835	68289	7951	17275	41085	45759
India	14173	39013	65058	12769	5695	60731	117302
Ukraine	57756	57640	59003	16954	17403	27746	31277
Kazakhstan	36115	37679	47495	8497	6916	3035	58072
Pakistan	17558	41268	46586	7774	2940	51700	55161
Other Countries	375791	482235	545097	87016	88107	310591	425066
<b>Total Tourists</b>	<b>2 691 968</b>	<b>2 844 862</b>	<b>3 167869</b>	<b>795 682</b>	<b>789 982</b>	<b>1 602 588</b>	<b>2 086443</b>

**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on Azerbaijan Tourism Board, 2024a.

As evidenced in Table 1, in addition to Türkiye, Azerbaijan's principal source markets for international tourism are its neighboring countries, namely the Russian Federation, Georgia and Iran. Following the global pandemic of 2020 and 2021, the number of international tourists visiting Azerbaijan declined significantly. However, there was a subsequent recovery in 2022 and 2023.

Considering the distribution of the number of tourists arriving to Azerbaijan by months (Figure 1), it can be stated that there is no major seasonal fluctuation, but there are significant increases in the number of tourists in late spring and early summer (May-June period), in the fall (September-October period) and before the New Year (December). This trend gives rise to the hypothesis that most tourists visiting the country do so with the intention of engaging in cultural tourism.

**Figure 1:** Distribution of the Number of Tourists Visiting Azerbaijan in the Last Five Years by Months



**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on Azerbaijan Tourism Board, 2024c data.

Today, economic, cultural and political relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan are gradually strengthening and developing. Following the Karabakh War in 2020, it can be asserted that the bilateral relations between the two countries have become considerably more robust, a development that is also discernible in the sphere of tourism mobility. Before 2020, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Iran were the most traveled countries by Azerbaijani citizens, while after 2020, Türkiye has become the most traveled country (Azerbaijan Tourism Board, 2024b). The most important contribution to this issue was the agreement that entered into force on April 1, 2021, allowing citizens of the two countries to travel without passports, only with new types of identity cards. There is a consensus among researchers that in the future, especially with the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor, the flow of tourists will be facilitated by land and even by rail, and the mutual tourist flow between Türkiye and Azerbaijan can be strengthened much more (Bağırov, 2023: 313-314; Gençoğlu, 2023; Memmedov & Hasanoğlu 2023: 339; Kaya vd., 2024: 20).

## 2. The Concept and Classification of Package Tours

Sheldon and Mak (1987: 13) define a package tour as “a combination of the many components of a vacation such as transportation, accommodation, sightseeing, and meals which are sold to customers at a single price.” The most important reasons for the preference for

package tours are that they are cheaper than individual trips, tour expenses are known in advance, they are guaranteed arrangements, and they offer time-saving, assurance, experience, and learning opportunities for tourists (İçöz, 2003: 236-237; Çeşmeci, 2004: 11-14). The reason for the rapid growth in package tour sales in the world since the 1970s is airline transportation, which has become widespread since these years (İçöz, 2003: 228-229) and has become increasingly diversified and cheaper since the 2000s (Bieger & Wittmer, 2006: 41). Today, in addition to airlines, which offer fast, comfortable, and cheap transport, tour operators are also keeping pace with changing tourism trends in the design of the package tours they produce. Travel companies follow and consider the needs and wishes of tourists as much as possible and produce package tours with different contents and features.

There are quite different approaches and criteria in the literature on the classification of package tours (Gül Yılmaz, 2023: 2383) and often, tours may fall into multiple categories simultaneously. Among the most frequently used criteria in the classifications are (a) tour attributes (b) purpose of travel and (c) geographical scope or number and type of destinations visited (İçöz, 2003: 238-246; Çeşmeci, 2004: 17-27). In terms of their attributes, package tours can be divided into four categories: independent tours, hosted tours, conducted (escorted), and special tours (İçöz, 2003: 238-243; Çeşmeci, 2004: 17-22). Independent tours are tours designed for individuals, families, or groups of friends who prefer to travel independently and have the flexibility to customize their itinerary. In these tours, the tour operator or travel agency bundles essential tour components (such as accommodation and transportation or transportation and rental car) and offers them as a package to the tourist (İçöz, 2003: 239). Hosted tours are tours that are primarily recreational or entertainment-oriented holidays, involving vacationing in a single accommodation establishment in a single destination. These tours are distinguished from independent tours by two key features: firstly, tourists are offered optional daily tours of the region in the destination for an additional fee; and secondly, tourists have access to a tour operator representative who can provide guidance and assistance throughout their holiday (İçöz, 2003: 240; Çeşmeci, 2004: 18-19; Ahıpaşaoğlu, 2006: 78). Conducted (escorted) tours adhere to a fixed schedule and itinerary, and typically offer a comprehensive cultural experience. Led by a tour leader and/or a tour guide throughout the tour, these tours aim to facilitate the visitation of numerous tourist attractions in destinations while immersing tourists in the local way of life and providing insights into local culture and history (İçöz, 2003: 241; Ahıpaşaoğlu, 2006: 79). Special package tours represent a subset of package tours that do not appeal to the broadest cross-section of potential visitors. These tours are typically organized as incentives for the employees of major companies, or as a follow-up to events such as congresses and conferences, for the participants in those gatherings.

According to the purpose of travel, package tours can be classified as leisure and relaxation-oriented tours; learning and culture-oriented; religious or ethnic-oriented; sports and adventure-oriented; ecological and nature-based tours. In addition to these types, special interest tours, which are geared towards each specific interest, can be also included in this category. For example, gastronomy tours or bird-watching tours are organized for the purpose of special interest travel (İçöz, 2003: 244-246; Çeşmeci, 2004: 24-27).

According to their geographical scope or the number of destinations to be visited, package tours can be categorized into two main groups. Package tours to a single destination and package tours to multiple destinations (Çeşmeci, 2004: 23-24). This distinction is in accordance with the distinction made by Oppermann (1995: 59) between "single destination patterns" and "multiple destination patterns," which encompass individual or group tourist travel. The terminology used to describe package tours to a single destination can vary depending on the duration of the tour, the characteristics of the destination, and the purpose of the travel. For instance, cultural tours with a relatively short duration of two to four days, which focus on historical cities (capitals) or cities where specific events are held, are often referred to as "short-break" or "city-break" package tours (Çeşmeci, 2004: 23; Dunne, 2009: 30). Leisure tours of longer duration and to resorts are called "holiday package tours" (Jacobsen et al., 2014: 189).

A multi-destination tour is one that encompasses at least one additional destination of significant importance, the purpose of which is not solely to provide an opportunity to spend a night, complete transportation transfers, or facilitate passenger drop-offs or pick-ups (Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2003: 167). Package tours to multiple destinations (multi-destination package tours) may include more than one destination within the same country or may include visits to more than one destination in more than one country (Çeşmeci, 2004: 24).

### **3. Studies Examining the Characteristics of Package Tours in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, several studies have been conducted examining domestic package tours and their programs. Additionally, several studies have been undertaken analyzing package tours from abroad to Türkiye and from Türkiye to abroad. To illustrate, Kızılırmak (2011) analyzed the Eastern Black Sea tour programs designed for domestic highland tourism. The findings revealed that the tours deviated significantly from the core characteristics of highland tourism, lacking an environmentally conscious approach and prioritizing commercial interests. In another study, Akbulut and Doğancılı (2018) employed content analysis to examine package tours organized by travel agencies in Ankara to the provinces of the "Eastern Black Sea Project". According to the results of the research, it was determined that Rize province was the most prominent for accommodation in package tours, Rize and Trabzon provinces for cultural visit points, and Rize province was the most prominent in terms of recreational activities in tour programs. Kızılırmak et al. (2015) conducted a content analysis of the programs of Anzac tours to Çanakkale from Australia and New Zealand and found that the tours mostly cover historical and archaeological sites and include experience-oriented activities. Öztürk et al. (2017) investigated the motivations of Iranian tourists travelling to Türkiye and their satisfaction levels with package tours. Among the main findings of the study, factors such as predetermined tour program and tour price, high service quality and reduction of extra expenses were identified among the reasons why tourists prefer package tours when travelling to Türkiye. In addition, another important finding was that there was a high level of satisfaction with package tours. Kızılırmak et al. (2016) examined package tours from Türkiye to the Balkan Peninsula, with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a case study. They employed content analysis to analyze the tours and identified 133 different tours in total. Of these, 25 were for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors noted deficiencies in the tour programs, including a lack of information on price, transportation, and route. Ceylan and Güven (2017) conducted research on how domestic tourists evaluate the outgoing package tours they purchased and determined that tourists are

most satisfied with the guidance services and least satisfied with the food and beverage services in these tours. In another study, Güven (2018) investigated the effect of package tour service quality on behavioral intention in a sample of domestic tourists purchasing package tours abroad. According to the results of the study, it was concluded that the quality of accommodation and guide services had a significant effect on behavioral intention, while food and beverage services had a very low effect and transportation services did not have a significant effect on behavioral intention. Çeşmeci (2022) examined cultural tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan and Georgia through content analysis and found that most of the tours organized to Azerbaijan are oriented towards Baku, while Ganja and Sheki destinations are included in cultural tour programs to much lesser extent. It was also found that longer cultural tours to Azerbaijan were mostly part of tours passing through Georgia or tour programs including Iran and/or Armenia.

As evidenced by the literature review, the number of studies examining the characteristics of package tours originating from Türkiye and destined for international destinations is relatively limited. As observed by Ceylan and Güven (2017: 517), despite the prevalence of package tours sold annually from Türkiye, there is a paucity of research in the existing literature examining the tourists who purchase these tours, particularly regarding the attributes of the purchased package tours.

#### **4. Package Tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan and Their Characteristics**

##### **4.1. Research Methodology**

Given the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate. In qualitative research, the document analysis method is frequently used in cases where observation and interviewing are not possible or to provide data in addition to them. This method involves the examination of written materials containing information about the phenomenon or phenomena to be researched (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021: 190). Documents that can be used in document analysis and subjected to a systematic evaluation include meeting minutes, manuals, brochures, diaries, event programs, letters and memoranda, maps and charts, press releases, application forms, and various public records (Bowen, 2009: 28). The data obtained from the documents are subjected to content analysis according to the purpose of the research and the results of the analysis are interpreted (Sak et al., 2021: 236). In this context, and following the purpose of this study, the population is constituted by all online tour programs that include travel from Türkiye to Azerbaijan. The sampling method employed was criterion sampling. The criterion sampling method is based on the inclusion of all situations (objects/individuals) that meet certain criteria predetermined by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021: 120). The criterion sought in the package tours included in the sample in this study is that the tour program should start in Türkiye, continue within the borders of Azerbaijan and return to Türkiye. Tours incorporating additional countries beyond Azerbaijan in their tour itinerary (such as Georgia and/or Iran) were excluded from the scope. In this context, a web search was conducted independently by the researchers between 10 December 2023 and 20 January 2024 to identify package tour programs organized from Türkiye to Azerbaijan. The keywords “*Azerbaijan tour*” and “*Azerbaijan tours*” in Turkish were used in the search. The programs and itinerary information of the tours identified by each researcher were recorded in



the data collection form and then compared and duplicate records were removed from the data set. It should be noted that tours offered by the same travel agency/tour operator and comprising the same program (in terms of both the point of departure and the attractions visited) were recorded as a single tour, even in cases where the tours were offered for sale on different dates and at different prices. A content analysis was conducted for each distinct tour program to ascertain the defining characteristics of the identified package tours. Initially, the content analysis was undertaken separately by each researcher. Subsequently, the researchers convened to conduct the analysis anew, resulting in a consensus regarding the findings. This approach was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the research through the integration of both data-driven triangulation and researcher triangulation (Başkale, 2016: 25).

## 4.2. Research Findings

After the document review, 47 different package tours organized and offered for sale by 32 different tour operators or travel agencies throughout Türkiye were identified. The findings obtained after the analysis of these tours and the general characteristics of the tours are given in the following section.

### 4.2.1. Starting Points of Tours and Transportation Means to the Destination

It was found that all the identified package tours are started with a transit air transportation to Baku airport and their starting points were airports located in major cities of Türkiye such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, and Trabzon (in Table 2). Only one tour (2.1%) was found to include road transportation from Erzurum to Nakhchivan and a flight from the airport there to Baku. The number of tours departing from İstanbul was 27, accounting for more than half (57.5%) of the total number of tours identified from Türkiye. The number of tours starting from Sabiha Gökçen airport on the Asian side of İstanbul was 6 (12.8%), while the number of tours starting from İstanbul airport on the European side was 21 (44.7%). It was determined that 8 (14.9%) of the tours started from İzmir, 7 (14.9%) from Ankara, 2 (4.2%) from Antalya and the other 2 (4.2%) from Trabzon airports. Although there are flights from some airports in Türkiye to Ganja airport, no tour was found targeting this destination (airport).

**Table 2:** Distribution of Identified Tours According to Starting Airports

Departure and Arrival Airports of Tours	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
İstanbul (IST) → Baku (GYD)	21	44,7
İstanbul (SAW) → Baku (GYD)	6	12,8
İzmir (ADB) → Baku (GYD)	8	17,1
Ankara (ESB) → Baku (GYD)	7	14,9
Antalya (AYT) → Baku (GYD)	2	4,2
Trabzon (TZX) → Baku (GYD)	2	4,2
By road from Erzurum to Nakhchivan, then Nakhchivan (NAJ) → Baku (GYD)	1	2,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

### 4.2.2. Duration and Prices of Tours

When the durations of the identified package tours were analyzed, it was determined that 3 nights 4 days tours were in the majority (Table 3). Forty of the tours (85.1%) were in this duration range. Four of the tours (8.5%) were 5 nights and 6 days and all four were ski-oriented tours to Shahdag ski resort. However, it was determined that the programs of these tours

included also a one-day Baku city tour as standard (last day before departure back to Türkiye) and a one-day "Red Town" cultural tour with an extra fee as an optional daily tour. A total of two tours of 2 nights and 3 days (4.3%) and one tour of 4 nights and 5 days (2.1%) were documented. However, these tours represent a negligible proportion of the overall number of tours. Summarizing the findings related to the duration of tours, it can be stated that out of a total of 47 tours analyzed, 43 (%91,5) can be classified as "short-break" or "city-break" package tours based on their duration.

**Table 3:** Distribution of Tours by Duration

<b>Duration of Tours</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
2 Nights 3 Days	2	4,3
3 Nights 4 Days	40	85,1
4 Nights 5 Days	1	2,1
5 Nights 6 Days (Shahdag Ski Tours)	4	8,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

A comprehensive price analysis was not conducted, as most identified tours offer different accommodation options with varying quality and comfort (3/4/5-star hotels) and prices were presented in different currencies. But it can be stated that among the tours scheduled to depart in January, February, or March 2024, the lowest-priced tour was identified as \$250 per person, while the average price per person was approximately \$600. The average price of tours to Shahdag ski resort with five nights' accommodation was determined to be \$1,000 per person. It was observed that prices gradually increase in April, May, and June tours. Another result based mostly on general observation of tour programs is that some large tour operators carry out back-to-back operations to Azerbaijan. In these consecutive tour operations where the same tour program is applied (Ahipaşaoğlu, 2001), there may be a difference only in tour prices depending on the seasonal intensity, but everything else related to the tour remains the same.

#### **4.2.3. Touristic Attractions and Activities Included in Tour Programs**

The content analysis of the 47 package tour programs identified which attractions and activities are most frequently included in the tours. In addition, it was determined which attractions or activities are included in the package tour price (free of charge) and which ones are visited on optional day tours for extra fee (Table 4).

According to the analysis, it was found out that the most frequently mentioned tourist attraction in the tour programs to Azerbaijan is the Alley of the Martyrs with Turkish martyrdom. This attraction is included in almost 90% of the tour programs studied. Although it may not be as important to tourists of other nationalities, it is important for Turkish tourists because it is seen as a symbol of the common culture and history. Ateshgah of Baku is another tourist attraction included in 66% of tour programs, but perhaps because of its distance from the city center, it is included in the programs of optional paid tours. Similarly, Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, which is included in 63.8% of tour programs, is not included in the package tour price. In addition to Gobustan, which is on UNESCO's world heritage list, Azerbaijan's other world heritage site, "Icherisheher" or "Walled City of Baku", is among the most frequently included (61,7%) attractions in tour programs. The Flame Towers (61,7%) have become a symbol of the modern city of Baku and are therefore another attraction often included in tour programs. Shirvanshah's Palace (57,4%) and Maiden Tower (57,4%) are inside the

Walled City of Baku, and in UNESCO's world heritage list. That's why they are must-see attractions in the city.

It has been determined that some activities are also included in package tour programs, although not in large numbers and variety. For instance, including such activities as the Azerbaijan night (17%) and the Caspian Sea boat tour (8,5%) in the tour programs, even for a fee, will help to improve the tourist experience.

**Table 4:** Distribution of Inclusion of Touristic Attractions and Activities in Tours

<b>Tourist Attraction or Activity</b>	<b>Included in Tour Package (Free)</b>	<b>Optional Daily Tours (Paid)</b>	<b>Number of Tour Programs Included (n)</b>	<b>Percentage of Tour Programs Included (%)</b>
Alley of Martyrs	✓		42	89,4
Ateshgah of Baku		✓	31	66
Gobustan		✓	30	63,8
Walled City of Baku (Icherisheher)	✓		29	61,7
Flame Towers	✓		29	61,7
Palace of the Shirvanshahs	✓		27	57,4
Maiden Tower	✓		27	57,4
Absheron Peninsula		✓	25	53,2
Yanar Dag		✓	19	40,4
National Assembly Square	✓		16	34
Mini Venice	✓		16	34
Mud Volcanoes		✓	15	31,9
Museum of Miniature Books	✓		15	31,9
Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center		✓	14	29,8
Nizami Street (Tarqovi)	✓		13	27,7
National Flag Square	✓		11	23,4
Green Market		✓	9	19,2
Azerbaijan Night		✓	8	17
Baku Eye Ferris Wheel	✓		8	17
Baku Crystal Hall	✓		5	10,6
Shahdag	✓		4	8,5
Red Town		✓	4	8,5
Caspian Sea Boat Trip		✓	4	8,5
Fountain Square	✓		4	8,5
Bukhara and Multani Caravanserais	✓		4	8,5
Baku Boulevard	✓		3	6,4
Bibi-Heybat Mosque	✓		3	6,4
The Alley of Honor (Fəxri Xiyaban)	✓		2	4,3
Military Trophies Park	✓		1	2,1
Nizâmî-i Ganjavi Literature Museum	✓		1	2,1
Heydar Aliyev Museum (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Carpet Museum (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Hussein Javid Museum House (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Mumine Hatun Mausoleum (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Palace of Nakhchivan Khans (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Ashab-ı Kəhf Caves (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1
Clock Square (Nahchivan)	✓		1	2,1

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following can be said about the main characteristics of package tours organized from Türkiye to Azerbaijan:

- In terms of their attributes, package tours to Azerbaijan have the characteristics of conducted (escorted) tours, as they have a structured tour program and mostly include visits to cultural attractions. However, they can also be classified as hosted tours because they involve mostly a visit to a single destination, including accommodation in a single hotel, and on the second and/or third day of the tour program they often include optional tours at an additional cost. Therefore, it can be stated that most of the tours are package tours with hybrid characteristics.
- In terms of the purpose of travel, most of tours fall into the cultural or heritage tours category. Although limited in number, it can be stated that there are also tours for sports, adventure, and recreation-type tours (ski tours to Shahdag ski resort).
- According to their geographical scope or the number of destinations visited, it can be stated that most of the package tours organized in Azerbaijan are short-break or city-break package tours since most of them have limited duration, include single-destination visits, and are mostly culture-oriented tours. Besides that, the destination visited is a historical city and capital. Only 5 out of 47 tours were multi-destination tours with a visit to a destination other than Baku. Four ski tours to Shahdag and one with a one-day visit to Nakhchivan.

Based on the basic three-criteria classification we mentioned in the conceptual part, it can be concluded that most package tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan are single-destination, non-strictly structured, cultural-oriented, hybrid, short-break, or city-break package tours. This finding is supported by the distribution of the number of tourists arriving in Azerbaijan by months (Figure 1), considering that the peak demand for city package tours is during some official or religious holidays (Çeşmeci, 2004: 23) when there are three to four days of vacation. Especially in December, there is an increase in the number of tourists coming to Azerbaijan, probably due to the New Year holidays.

We characterized package tours as non-strictly structured because at least one or two days of the tour programs are usually devoted to optional tours, which are available for an additional fee. Such a hybrid tour configuration (a mix of conducted and hosted tours) can be a big plus for young, high purchasing power, freedom-loving tourists who know the destination or want to explore it themselves. However, this may cause low-income, middle-aged, or elderly tourists to spend too much or get bored if they cannot afford the additional tours. Especially in cultural tours, too many free time slots (gaps) in the tour program other than sightseeing and activities can be considered as additional non-monetary costs, because tourists get bored and feel they are wasting their time (Koçak et al., 2004: 111). This may harm the perceived value of the tour and tourist satisfaction (Duman, 2003: 51). Therefore, it is important to inform tourists about this issue during the sales phase of the tours.

It was found that the most frequently included tourist attractions in the programs of package tours organized from Türkiye to Azerbaijan are located mainly in the Absheron region including the capital Baku. The Absheron region, home to a substantial portion of Azerbaijan's tourism resources, is the most developed in terms of transportation infrastructure, the availability of qualified personnel, and the utilization of tourism resources (Bayramli & Aliyev, 2020: 252). The most popular attractions in tour programs were found to be, the Alley of Martyrs, Ateshgah of Baku, Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, Walled City of Baku (Icherisheher), and the Flame Towers. This finding is largely consistent with results of the research made by Huseynli and Toksöz (2024: 8) on Baku's cultural tourism potential. The most significant difference between that study and our results is that the Alley of Martyrs was not mentioned in their study. Since this is an attraction that mainly appeals to Turkish tourists, it is a natural result that it was identified as the most frequently included attraction in the tour programs examined in our study. The low number of activities in the package tour programs studied is also notable. Except for the “Azerbaijan Night” and the “Caspian Boat Tour”, no other activities that could enrich the tourist experience have been identified. As McKercher (2002: 33) points out, even though cultural tourists' main motivation is the culture and heritage of a destination, most tourists are pleasure-seekers and look not only for in-depth learning experiences but also for fun and entertainment. Therefore, it may be recommended to add activities and events in addition to natural and cultural attraction visits to enrich the tourist experience on tours.

Another important result of the research is that most package tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan start with a transit air transportation to Baku destination and their starting points are airports located in major cities of Türkiye (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, and Trabzon). There are no coach tours with multi-destination visits and probably the most important reason is the lack of a direct road connection between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Coach tours are much cheaper than tours that use air transportation enabling tourists to see many attractions along the route. It can be stated that the number of multi-destination coach tours from Türkiye to Azerbaijan may suddenly increase very quickly with the opening of the Zengezur Corridor.

Factors such as the time spent for transportation to the destination and the comfort of the journey are of great importance for package tours. Since tourists may perceive the negativities in these factors as an additional non-monetary cost (Koçak et al., 2004: 111), they may not prefer package tours that offer a long transportation time and uncomfortable transportation to the destination. In the preparation process of tour programs, in addition to considering the demands, expectations, and preferences of tourists, the characteristics of the touristic supply in the destination should also be kept in mind (Karamustafa & Çeşmeci, 2006: 76). In this regard, for diversification of touristic products and to obtain high-quality standards it may be suggested to cooperate with local travel agencies and tourist guides in the destination by utilizing their knowledge and experience. Continuous innovation in the content of package tours can create benefits for the whole destination. As Liao and Chuang (2019: 241) assert, suitable tour planning and design can lead to innovation, which is efficacious strategy for destination development. This is because it can facilitate the introduction of distinctive products and services, ideas, processes, and systems that overcome consumer indifference and provide value to multiple stakeholders.

The number, diversity, and richness of the content of package tours can lead to an increase in the number of tourists and a multifaceted increase in relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The development of tourism relations between these two countries will greatly contribute to the economic development and stability not only for these two countries but also for the Caucasus region. Furthermore, enhanced collaboration in the tourism sector between the two countries, coupled with the adoption of sustainable practices, can facilitate the growth of tourism benefits in both countries while simultaneously safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations.

The results of this research focus on the analysis of package tour programs identified through a web search covering a relatively short period of one month. In addition to this limitation, the fact that the data was collected during the winter months is also a very important limitation. Since the content of travel agency websites is very dynamic and the intensity of marketing activities may increase during the summer months, there may be an increase in the variety of tours. Although efforts were made to access tour programs on all travel agency and tour operator websites, some of them may have low visibility in search engines and therefore could not be accessed. Another important limitation of the study is the exclusion of tours covering countries such as Georgia and Iran in addition to Azerbaijan. It would be beneficial to incorporate multi-country tours into future research endeavors. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal studies spanning multiple years and examining the shifts in tour types, tour durations, and itineraries across different periods could offer valuable insights. Investigating outbound tours from Türkiye to various regions and countries could also elucidate tourist preferences and facilitate the provision of superior data not only to tourism academics but also for sector representatives.

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