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**Examination of Nature-Based Adventure Tourism Routes in
Erzincan Province**

Erzincan İlinde Doğa Temelli Macera Turizmi Rotalarının İncelenmesi

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify nature-based adventure tourism routes to reveal the potential for adventure tourism in Erzincan province. The Wikiloc platform was used to determine these routes. This platform is a comprehensive international platform where participants in nature-based activities create and share their hiking trails. A qualitative and quantitative research method was employed in the study. In this context, the written and visual data on popular trails in Erzincan Province, as featured on the Wikiloc platform's website, were examined and subjected to content analysis. The data obtained were systematically categorised under the headings of adventure activities. Based on the findings from the content analysis and a review of the literature, a SWOT analysis was carried out to highlight Erzincan's potential for adventure tourism. The findings revealed that 1191 routes recorded in Erzincan are grouped under 16 different adventure activity categories. These activity types include hiking, car riding, off-road driving, running, enduro motorcycling, alpinism, road cycling, off-road motorcycling, mountain biking, walking, off-piste skiing, cycling tours, alpine skiing, via ferrata, and paragliding. The popular routes that have emerged under these headings include, first and foremost, the Kemaliye district, where numerous activities can be enjoyed: 'Taş Yol', 'Karanlık Kanyon', 'Via Ferrata' and 'Apçağa Village'; as well as 'Munzur', 'Ergen Ski Centre' and 'Girlevik Waterfall' in the regional centre and other districts, 'Sakaltutan', 'Cimin (Üzümlü)', 'İliç', 'Kemah', 'Ekşisu', 'Yedigöller Esence', 'Kazankaya', 'Otlukbeli', 'Aygır Gölü' and 'Konarlı Waterfall' have emerged as frequently visited and highly rated routes.

Keywords: Adventure tourism, Erzincan, Wikiloc, routes

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Erzincan ilinde yer alan macera turizmi potansiyelini ortaya çıkaracak doğada gerçekleştirilen macera turizmi rotalarının belirlenmesidir. Rotaların belirlenmesi için Wikiloc platformu kullanılmıştır. Bu platform, doğa temelli etkinlik katılımcılarının gezi parkurlarını oluşturup paylaştığı kapsamlı uluslararası bir platformdur. Araştırmada nitel ve nicel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Bu kapsamda, Wikiloc platformunun web sayfasında Erzincan ilinde yer alan popüler parkurlar, yazılı ve görsel verileri incelenerek içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Elde edilen veriler sistematik olarak macera etkinlikleri başlıkları altında kategorilere ayrılmıştır. İçerik analizinden elde edilen bulgular ve literatür değerlendirilerek Erzincan Macera turizm potansiyelini ortaya koymak amacıyla SWOT analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular sonucunda, Erzincan'da kaydedilen 1191 rotanın 16 farklı macera etkinliği altında toplandığı görülmüştür. Bu etkinlik türleri doğa yürüyüşü, araba, off-road, koşu, enduro motosiklet, alpinizm, yol bisikleti, arazi motosikleti, dağ bisikleti, yürüyüş, pist dışı kayak, bisiklet turu, alp disiplini, via ferrata ve yamaç paraşütü şeklindedir. Bu başlıkların altında ortaya çıkan popüler rotalar, başta birçok etkinliğin yapılabildiği Kemaliye ilçesinde; "Taş Yol", "Karanlık Kanyon", "Via Ferrata", "Apçağa Köyü", bunun yanında merkez ve diğer ilçelerde "Munzur", "Ergen Kayak Merkezi", "Girlevik Şelalesi", "Sakaltutan", "Cimin (Üzümlü)", "İliç", "Kemah", "Ekşisu", "Yedigöller Esence", "Kazankaya", "Otlukbeli", "Aygır Gölü", "Konarlı Şelalesi" sık tekrarlanan ve puanlanan rotalar olarak öne çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Macera turizmi, Erzincan, Wikiloc, rotalar

Introduction

Despite negative developments affecting many parts of the world, such as war, floods, and climate change, the tourism sector continues to grow year by year (UNTourism, 2025). The number of visitors to Türkiye is projected to approach 64 million by 2025 (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2026). 52.5% of these visitors come for activities such as "sightseeing, entertainment, sports and cultural activities". This percentage also includes visitors who come to participate in nature-based adventure activities. As with all types of tourism, destination image influences customer preferences in nature-based adventure tourism (Senachai et al., 2025). Although there are many destinations and routes for nature-based adventure sports around the world, new and previously unknown ones are emerging every day. ATDI (2024) states that countries such as Germany, France, Switzerland, and Norway are leading in this field. As of 2024, Türkiye ranked seventh among developing countries in this field and tenth in terms of infrastructure. These rankings indicate the potential for strengthening infrastructure capacity at the local level. In categorical classifications, Türkiye ranked second in Eastern Europe/Central Asia, and second only to China in the cultural resources category and first in the image category. Our high ranking in international rankings is promising. However, as is known, Türkiye is a leader in nature, history, culture, and tourism. Türkiye need to improve these features for promotion and marketing. Therefore, it is necessary to develop existing destinations and our existing infrastructure for nature-based adventure tourism and to create, promote, and market routes that travel agencies can include in package tours. In this regard, examples of gastronomic and heritage-based cultural routes (Cihangir & Demirhan, 2020; Avcı & Coşkun, 2023) are documented in the literature. In the context of cultural routes, Türkiye has joined the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme and cooperates with the Council of Europe and the European Union (Council of Europe, 2026). Some of the certified routes from Türkiye include the European Historic Thermal Towns Route, the European Ceramics Route, the Iron Curtain Trail - Eurovelo 13, and the Aeneas Route. Following these cultural routes is also considered an adventure. However, the limited number of studies covering types and routes of adventure tourism (Çetinkaya, 2014; Aydın, 2024; Samırkaş Komşu et al., 2026) was one of the main reasons for this study. Çetinkaya (2014) focused on rock-climbing routes in Antalya. Aydın (2024) examined nature walking routes in the province of Kastamonu from the perspective of nature tourism potential. Alternative findings suggest that adventure tourism routes could be evaluated alongside other forms of tourism—such as cultural, faith-based, eco-tourism and gastronomic tourism—and integrated into tours (Samırkaş Komşu et al., 2026). However, no studies have been found covering other destinations or all varieties of adventure tourism. Similarly, it is considered valuable to include all these types under the umbrella of adventure tourism in order to comprehensively highlight the potential of the relevant destinations. Specifically regarding Erzincan, a previous study (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016) has identified the types of adventure tourism. Moreover, as information on routes covering these types of adventure tourism in Erzincan is considered a niche area, it has so far only been examined in this study. However, the identification of adventure tourism routes remains insufficiently addressed in the literature. This gap in the literature has been deemed valuable, and the identification of main and alternative adventure tourism routes has been prioritized. Accordingly, identifying the trails that constitute popular routes has emerged as the main objective of this study.

Nature-based adventure tourism is attracting tourists who want to escape the intensity and stress of daily life and engage in various activities. Although package tours created by travel agencies for alternative tourism types have increased in recent years, package tours including routes for

nature-based adventure tourism should be developed and increased in number (Tokat & Ekinci, 2017). Routes should be determined for both the domestic market and international demand. Based on this need, the aim of this research is to examine nature-based adventure tourism routes in Erzincan, one of the provinces that has come to the forefront with alternative tourism routes in recent years. The Wikiloc platform, preferred by consumers who have created significant demand nationally and internationally, was chosen for data collection. It is a platform with millions of users where adventure tourism routes are shared (Wikiloc, 2026). Championships and festivals showcasing its adventure potential in recent years have made it necessary to designate routes in the province of Erzincan (Şen, 2026). By selecting Erzincan province on the platform, upper and sub-themes that can be evaluated within the scope of nature-based adventure tourism were determined. The routes included under these themes were identified and classified. In this way, the routes that travel agencies will include in their nature-based adventure tourism package tours have been clarified. In addition, the identification of routes will provide preliminary information for the certification of existing routes under the adventure tourism heading in the future. Visitors will be able to choose popular and niche routes in nature-based adventure activities they will participate in individually and in groups. It will also benefit local administrations in creating infrastructure and determining destination and route content that can be used in promotion and marketing.

Conceptual Framework

Nature-Based Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism (UNTourism, 2026) is defined as a type of tourism that takes place in destinations with specific characteristics such as landforms and landscapes and is associated with physical activity, cultural exchange, interaction, and connection with nature. It is also known that this interaction and experience involve some physical risks and require physical and mental effort. Adventure tourism (UNTourism, 2026) encompasses various activities generally carried out in nature, such as mountaineering, trekking, bungee jumping, rock climbing, ice climbing, camping, orienteering, rafting, skiing, mountain biking, canoeing, hiking, climbing, motocross, diving, jumping, and skydiving. Although some adventure activities can be carried out indoors, this study considers only routes that include activities performed outdoors. By their nature, the routes are located outdoors, outside any indoor environment.

A review of the literature reveals that adventure tourism has been addressed from various perspectives. Studies have examined adventure tourism from the perspectives of tourists (Bingöl & Akoğlan Kozak, 2021; Gülmez et al., 2025; Teng et al., 2025), employees (Asan & Tağraf, 2026), market and marketing (Guliyev & Nuriyeva, 2017; Smith and Jenner, 1999; Garda, 2010), sustainability (Steynberg & Grundling, 2025; Zurick, 1992), risk and safety (Page et al., 2005; Gülcan, 2004), and destination-based approaches (Dar, 2014; Çetinkaya, 2014; Çelik Yetim and Şen, 2016; Tokat & Ekinci, 2017; Yaprak & Özhavzalı, 2019). Based on the studies reviewed, adventure tourism remains an understudied form of tourism (Stăncioiu et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2025). The common point emphasized in the studies is the benefits of adventure tourism for the development of local communities. It generates income and creates employment for local communities (Ahmed & Nihei, 2024). Furthermore, it minimizes negative environmental impacts and is considered a strong and effective option for sustainable development. Therefore, attracting adventure tourism participants by revitalizing alternative routes should become a goal for destinations. This is because adventure tourism participants are generally environmentally conscious and have high income levels (Kaba, 2019).

Popular Routes

Routes, in their simplest sense, mean "the path to follow" (Güngör, 2022). Tourist routes are potential drivers of local economic development. By establishing tourism routes, rural areas can become instruments of economic development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Positive rural development can be achieved with proper planning and sustainable policies (Lourens, 2007). When the literature on tourist routes is examined, it is evident that gastronomy and culture-related routes are predominantly studied (Akyürek et al., 2024; Bruwer, 2003; Gürler & Soydaş, 2021; Çakmak, 2022; Kösele et al., 2019; Avcı & Coşkun, 2023). Other studies are grouped under the heading thematic routes (Stoddart, 2008). The Mozart Route, the Andalusian Heritage Route, and the Viking Route are examples of thematic routes. Examples of such routes in Türkiye include the Mimar Sinan Route, the Saint Paul Route (Alkan, 2018), the Aeneas Route, and the Lycian Way. Among these, the Lycian Way has become quite popular internationally. By hiking along the route, one can see beautiful ancient cities and wonderful landscapes where blue and green merge. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has identified and is developing seven thematic corridors in the Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023 (2007): the Olive Corridor, the Winter Corridor (Erzincan, Erzurum, Ağrı, Kars, and Ardahan), the Faith Tourism Corridor, the Silk Road Corridor, the Western Black Sea Coastal Corridor, the Highland Corridor, and the Thrace Culture Corridor. In addition, there is the Turkish Cultural Routes Association (2026). This association collaborates with the European Institute for Cultural Routes (EICR) and the World Trails Network. The association focuses on the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Studies are being conducted on routes such as the Way of Abraham, the Way of the Sultans, Via Egnatia, the Lycian Way, the Carian Way, the Kaçkar Mountains, the Küre Mountains, Mount Ararat, the Way of St Paul, the Sarıkamış Trails, the Yenice Forest Trails, the Troy Cultural Route, the Hittite Route, the Phrygian Route, the Evliya Çelebi Route, the Gastronomy Route, and the Independence Route (CRS, 2026). Despite the existence of these routes, a review of the relevant literature reveals that adventure-tourism routes have not been sufficiently examined, and further studies are needed in this area.

Aslan (2019), in his study conducted in Burdur province, stated that activities such as bird watching, trekking, caving, hunting, scuba diving, air sports, angling, horseback riding, cycling, wildlife observation, river tourism, photo safari, and camping are carried out. These are activities that can be used within the scope of adventure activities. Four different routes were identified where these activities are carried out. The first, designated the Red route, generally covers the area around Lake Burdur (115 km). It includes wildlife observation and botanical monitoring. The second route, the Blue route, covers the southeast of the province and includes the city forest, ancient city, mountains, lake, and scenery. The third, the Yellow route, offers opportunities for Salda Lake, public beaches, birdwatching, trekking, camping, and natural scenery (mountains, lakes, and forests). The fourth, the Green route, encompasses dams, forests, and natural areas. Aslan's (2019) study shows that the routes actually contain multiple points and features. However, in each route, activities, nature, scenery, and food stand out as fundamental components.

As an international example, the Las Grullas waterfall in Barinas, Venezuela, has been examined for its agroecological tourism potential and the sustainability of adventure hiking (Fernandes, 2025). Coffee and ecological trails, biodiversity observation, adventure trails, and the Las Grullas waterfall have emerged as prominent routes. Road safety, variety of activities, and carrying capacity are areas requiring regulation. It has been emphasized that diversification can be achieved through the participation of local communities, birdwatching, and gastronomy, and that

sustainability education is essential for responsible tourism. Another study presents examples of "adrenaline tourism" (Čech & Javorská 2023) in Slovakia, which is also referred to as a "challenging" version of adventure tourism, involving climbing on safe routes (*vis ferrata*). A similar example exists in the Kemaliye district of Erzincan province in Türkiye. Although it is a risky climbing route, it has been made safe and provides visitors with adrenaline-filled moments. The studies examined reveal that the routes are varied and exhibit different dynamics depending on the activity undertaken. Erzincan Province is situated along the winter corridor in Turkey's tourism strategy. In this regard, it is noted to stand out for its winter sports and tourism. However, adventure sports can be practised both individually and in groups, and there are many different types. The data obtained from this study have been used to determine which types of activities are carried out at this destination and how they are incorporated into the various routes.

Existing literature has identified specific types of adventure activities in Erzincan and highlighted the advantages of the city's adventure tourism potential (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016). Research has also been conducted on winter tourism, its diversity, and its sustainability (Güneş, 2019). Furthermore, the positive impact of participant quality and the nature of the experience on satisfaction levels in adventure sports activities has been observed (Şen, 2026). However, a gap in the literature regarding the specific adventure routes available has been identified. Therefore, it is believed that defining routes that showcase the city's adventure tourism potential will make a significant contribution to the literature.

Method

Wikiloc is a website and mobile application where community members create, record, and share trails for a wide range of outdoor activities, including nature and adventure sports. Wikiloc was developed in 2006. It has won numerous awards over the years. As of 2024, the platform serves 15 million members in over 20 languages, featuring 50 million routes worldwide and 100 million community-uploaded photos (Wikiloc, 2026). It has received the Best of the Year award from Google Play and won numerous international awards. In the application, community participants can experience existing trails or create and share their own. It provides services such as maps, locations, distances, times, and difficulty levels. Each route also generates a TrailRank score, which other users can use to rate it. This score enables the identification of prominent routes on the platform. Filtering is also possible according to the type of activity performed. The main activity themes are categorised under hiking, cycling, climbing, snow, water, animals, wheeled, accessible, car, air, and other. Under these main headings, 82 different activity filters can be applied, including nature walks, off-road, enduro motorcycling, road cycling, rafting, hiking, mountain biking, off-road motorcycling, train, and car. Based on this information, the aim of this study is to evaluate the nature and adventure sports routes listed on the Wikiloc website for Erzincan province. A qualitative and quantitative research method was used in the study. Written and visual data regarding popular adventure tourism routes in Erzincan province, were analyzed using the content analysis method. The study examines the content of the Wikiloc website on a route-by-route basis. When searching for Erzincan province on Wikiloc, 158 routes appear (May 15, 2026). However, when clicking on any route and selecting "show all activities", it is seen that the most popular routes in Erzincan province are 1191. Among these, searches can be performed by selecting activity themes such as hiking, car, road motorcycling, off-road, running, and enduro motorcycling. Trails/routes are listed under each theme; however, since it is not possible to include all of them within the scope of this study; the top five most popular trails resulting from the search have been listed and presented in a table. The method for accessing the data from the

webpage is described above. The obtained data are presented in Table 1. under the "Activity Type" heading, details such as route name, distance, elevation, difficulty level, and TrailRank values—entered into the platform by adventure participants—are listed. Secondly, the map of the trail that ranks first under each activity topic (16 activity types) is presented as the most popular trail. Thirdly, a SWOT analysis has been applied to assess the potential of adventure tourism, based on a summary of the data obtained. In addition to the SWOT analysis derived from content analysis data, the study utilized literature and secondary data sources. The SWOT analysis enables a systematic identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the Erzincan destination and its adventure tourism routes. This approach, which combines content analysis with SWOT analysis, was chosen because it provides robust insights into the destination's potential. Indeed, SWOT analysis is one of the oldest and most widely used analytical methods (Puyt et al., 2023). Finally, the prominent routes in Erzincan province have been evaluated and interpreted based on the information obtained.

Findings

This section lists the "best trails/routes" in Erzincan province on the Wikiloc platform. Among the popular trails/routes, the top five are ranked by activity type (hiking, driving, off-road, running, enduro motorcycling, alpine skiing, road cycling, off-road motorcycling, mountain biking, walking, off-piste skiing, cycling tour, alpine skiing, via ferrata, paragliding).

Table 1. Activity-Based Trail and Route Metrics

Activity Type	Trail/Route	Distance	Altitude	Difficulty Level	Trailrank
Nature Walk/Hiking	Taş Yol Karanlık Canyon Kemaliye	18.21 km	456m	Medium Difficulty	91
	Karanlık Canyon Kemaliye	6.56 km	12m	Medium Difficulty	91
	Kemaliye Via Ferrata Eğin Mountain Kemaliye	5.36 km	629m	Medium Difficulty	87
	Kemaliye Sırakonak Apçağa Yuvaköy Kemaliye	14.84 km	475m	Medium Difficulty	84
	Kemaliye City Tour: Historic Streets, Lökhané, Mani Road, Bayraklı Hill, Kemaliye	3.44 km	125m	Medium Difficulty	79
Car Routes	Erzincan - Erzurum - Tortum - Tortum waterfall - Hemşin	509.50 km	3873m	Medium Difficulty	49
	Erzincan / Erzurum road - Pülümür - Nazımiye - Düzgün Baba - Tunceli - Halbori Springs - Munzur Valley - Munzur Springs	197.18 km	4302m	Medium Difficulty	49
	Erzurum~Erzincan road - Mertekli - Uluköy - Çağlayan - Gürlevik Waterfall	12.70 km	15m	Easy	41
	Erzincan-Kemaliye	151.31 km	3449m	Medium Difficulty	41
	Kemaliye, Erzincan	151.71 km	3057m	Medium Difficulty	41
Road Motorcycle	Erzincan-Kemah-Kemaliye-Taşyol-Divriği	230.12 km	4639m	Difficult	37
	Tercan - Konarlı Waterfall	51.79 km	1010m	Medium Difficulty	30

Total Route 55	Kemaliye-Samsun	510.66 km	7912m	Medium Difficulty	26
	Karkoçlu - Kemaliye Bridge - Ziyaret Geçidi - Malatya - Anıtkabir - Alibeyköy	1544.98 km	17418m	Medium Difficulty	26
	Kız kalesi	17.25 km	216 m	Difficult	23
Off-Road Total Route 54	Sinan deniz sakaltutan offroad 1. Etap (stage 1)	36.37 km	1396m	Medium Difficulty	37
	Kemaliye Taş Yol	9.76 km	64m	Medium Difficulty	34
	Konarlı Waterfall	54.70 km	1172m	Medium Difficulty	35
	Kılıçkaya Village plateau access	8.70 km	592m	Medium Difficulty	28
	Erzincan/ Girlevik Waterfall	98.07 km	1133m	Medium Difficulty	26
Running Total Route 43	Kemaliye Ultra Trail	51.65km	2345m	Difficult	33
	Kemaliye Taş Yol Race	22.14 km	814m	Medium Difficulty	33
	Kemaliye Short Trail	28.66 km	1398m	Difficult	31
	Kemaliye Festival	5.18 km	146m	Easy	28
	KemaliyeST30-240519-2	30.57 km	1405m	Difficult	23
Enduro Motorcycle Total Route 36	Cimin - Aygır Lake - Turna Çayı dam - çamlık - Erzincan	112.35 km	3335m	Difficult	40
	Kemaliye - Kovancılar Elazığ	348.12 km	7796m	Medium Difficulty	36
	Esence Yedigöller Trip	143.46 km	4226m	Difficult	31
	Kemaliye - Divrigi ulu Mosque - Koçköprü	144.80 km	3390m	Medium Difficulty	24
	Erzincan-Otlukbeli Trip	176.11 km	3889m	Medium Difficulty	20
Alpinism Total Route 32	Kılıçkaya Village Plateau / Munzur Akbaba (Ağbaba) peak	19.37 km	1650m	Difficult	59
	Munzur Akbaba peak (3449 mt)	19.53 km	1649m	Medium Difficulty	52
	Yedigöller Esence Peak	7.87 km	641m	Medium Difficulty	41
	Kazankaya (Erenos)Mountain Peak Climbing	19.88 km	1435m	For experts only.	40
	Yedigöller - Esence (Keşiş) Peak	7.88 km	615m	Difficult	40
Road Cycling Total Route 31	Erzincan - Sakaltutan - Erzincan	91.05 km	1078m	Medium Difficulty	22
	Beytahtı Bicycle Tour	25.96 km	86m	Medium Difficulty	19
	Işıkpınar Tour	17.37 km	159m	Medium Difficulty	16
	Ekşisu Bicycle Tour	33.38 km	78m	Medium Difficulty	15
	Atatepe Tour	20.32 km	406m	Difficult	13
	Horevenk - Cimin	30.58 km	858m	Difficult	37
	Günbağı	35.16 km	624m	Difficult	21

Off-road Motorcycle	Karanlık Canyon	270.69 km	5347m	Difficult	17
Total Route 31	Kemaliye(Eğir), Malatya, Nemrut Mountain Stage	264.16 km	4300m	Medium Difficulty	17
	Erzincan - Kemaliye - Ovacık - Nazimiye -Pülümür - Tercan - Bayburt -D915 - Trabzon	971.45 km	23366m	Difficult	16
Mountain Biking	Erzincan - Gürlevik	58.27 km	326 m	Medium Difficulty	69
Total Route 26	Erzincan Kemaliye Taş yol - Karanlık canyon	36.15 km	324 m	Medium Difficulty	52
	Erzincan Başpınar - Kemaliye	35.96 km	559m	Medium Difficulty	49
	Göyne plateau	17.67 km	913m	Medium Difficulty	31
	Erzincan - Girlevik Waterfall - Erzincan	73.64 km	335m	Medium Difficulty	21
Walk	Apçağa - Kemaliye	7.12 km	107m	Easy	40
Total Route 25	Kemaliye Karanlık canyon	5.49 km	288m	Medium Difficulty	38
	Kemaliye	7.54 km	246	Medium Difficulty	38
	Kemaliye-Apçağa	2.64 km	15m	Medium Difficulty	31
	Kemaliye Apçağa village trip	0.45 km	29m	Easy	31
Off-piste skiing	Munzur	6.59 km	1317m	Medium Difficulty	26
Total Route 23	Ergan Mountain	12.58 km	12.94m	Medium Difficulty	20
	Yaylabaşı Ergan Peak	12.65 km	1264m	Medium Difficulty	16
	Ergan 3300m ski touring	1.62 km	178m	Medium Difficulty	14
	Tatlısu - Çangılı	8.02 km	1433m	Medium Difficulty	12
Bicycle Tour	İliç-Karanlık Kanyon-Kemaliye	58.56 km	1479m	Medium Difficulty	38
Total Route 23	Kemaliye	22.74 km	1030m	Medium Difficulty	23
	Kemaliye - Karanlık Canyon	22.04 km	1158m	Easy	22
	Erzincan/Ekşisu Bicycle Tour	31.81 km	110m	Medium Difficulty	16
	Kemaliye - Bağıştaş - İliç - Aydınlık Canyon - Bağıştaş	73.79 km	2128m	Medium Difficulty	11
Alpine Skiing	Ergan Ski Center	6.09 km	12m	Medium Difficulty	19
Total Route 19	Ergan Peak	39.97 km	3675m	Medium Difficulty	29
	Ergan Night Skiing	5.69 km	408m	Medium Difficulty	21
	Yaylabaşı	5.78 km	383m	Medium Difficulty	8

	Ergan Ski Touring	1.28 km	162m	Medium Difficulty	8
Via Ferrata Total Route 13	Kemaliye Via Ferrata	5.36 km	795m	For experts only.	65
	Erzincan Kemaliye via ferrata and hiking	6.95 km	1252m	Medium Difficulty	47
	Kemaliye Via Ferrata ve Eğin Gabanı trekking	5.62 km	547m	Difficult	46
	Kemaliye Gate to Eden via Ferrata Eğin	6.05 km	810m	Medium Difficulty	45
	Via Ferrata - Kemaliye (K.H.)	11.90 km	6193m	Medium Difficulty	37
Paragliding Total Route 11	Ekşisu Landing Area	0.42 km	1m	Difficult	9
	Karanlık Canyon Basejump	0.47 km	2m	For experts only.	6
	Yamaç24	6.41 km	227m	Medium Difficulty	6
	Tatlısu Training Hill	3.64 km	139m	Medium Difficulty	1
	Karakaya Training Hill	2.53 km	85m	Medium Difficulty	1

Trailrank is a route rating system based on visitor reviews.

Table 1 summarizes the top five adventure tourism routes obtained from Wikiloc (<https://tr.wikiloc.com/rotalari/outdoor/turkiye/erzincan>), categorized accordingly. Based on this data, Erzincan is a rich and diverse destination for adventure tourism. This result is also supported by earlier studies in the literature. It has been reported that there are more than forty types of adventure tourism activities in the province (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016; Şen, 2026). Examination of the data reveals that the Kemaliye, Eğin, Karanlık Canyon, and Munzur lines are rich in terms of trails. Throughout the province, there is a wide variety of trail networks, including nature walks, car trails, road motorcycling, off-road, running, enduro motorcycling, alpinism, road cycling, off-road motorcycling, mountain biking, hiking, off-piste skiing, cycling tours, alpine skiing, via ferrata, and paragliding. The routes are also known to locals and stakeholders. This situation has demonstrated that, in addition to the adventure participants, the local population is also aware of the trails and the variety of activity types (Kızıllırmak et al., 2017). Additionally, trails can intersect depending on their length and type, and it is observed that many types of adventure can be practiced on a single trail. It is noteworthy that the trails are generally of medium difficulty, and there is a scarcity of adventure types requiring specialized expertise (via ferrata, alpinism, paragliding). In particular, routes such as Taş Yol Karanlık Kanyon Kemaliye, Karanlık Kanyon Kemaliye, and Kemaliye Via Ferrata Eğin Mountain Kemaliye have high trailrank values, which, according to the evaluations of those who have experienced them, reveals the significant appeal of these routes. The nature walks category, which has the highest number of routes (611 routes), is noteworthy for both its popularity and its richness in terms of trekking and hiking. Given that hiking can be enjoyed by everyone, this highlights how effective Erzincan is for these activities. Furthermore, the availability of extreme sports such as alpinism, via ferrata, off-piste skiing, and paragliding indicates the presence of sports tourism. The fact that difficulty levels are generally moderate suggests that Erzincan may be preferred by more experience-oriented and adventure-seeking tourists. Moreover, the availability of adventure tourism activities that can be enjoyed not only in winter but year-round highlights the advantages of sustainable tourism. Therefore,

Erzincan is an important destination with high potential for adventure tourism (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016; Güneş & Alagöz, 2018; Şen, 2026) that can be managed in line with sustainability principles.

In the second phase of the study, the first trail map for each activity type is visually presented from the collected data. First, the first activity type is "nature walk/hiking", and the first trail is the Taş Yol Karanlık Canyon, Kemaliye trail. It is 18.21 km long and stands out as the route with the highest visitor score, with a TrailRank of 91. The second activity type is the "car" route. The first trail is Erzincan-Erzurum-Tortum-Tortum Waterfall, Hemşin. It is 509.50 km long. The third activity type is "road motorcycling". It consists of the Erzincan – Kemah – Kemaliye Taşyolu-Divriği trail. It is a challenging trail covering 230.12 km. The fourth activity is "off-road" and the Sakaltutan route. For the fifth activity type, "running", the most popular trail is the Kemaliye Ultra Trail. It is 51.65 km long and has a high difficulty level. The sixth type of event, "enduro motorcycling", has its most popular route as follows: Cimin (Üzümlü district) – Aygır Lake – Turna Çayı Dam – Çamlık – Erzincan. The most popular trail for the seventh activity type, "alpinism", is the Kılıçkaya Village Plateau/Munzur Akbaba (Ağbaba) Summit, a challenging trail of 19.37 km. For the eighth activity type, "road cycling", the most popular trail is the Erzincan – Sakaltutan – Erzincan route, a 91.05 km trail of moderate difficulty. For the ninth activity type, "motocross", the most popular trail is Horevenk-Cimin, a challenging 30.58 km route. For the tenth activity type, "mountain biking", the Erzincan–Girlevik trail is another popular route of moderate difficulty with a TrailRank score of 69, spanning 58.27 km. For the eleventh activity type, "hiking", the Apçağa–Kemaliye trail stands out. This 7.12 km trail is easy and popular. Other popular hiking trails are generally located within Kemaliye itself. For the twelfth activity type, "off-piste skiing", Munzur is the most popular route. It is followed by Mount Ergan, which is part of the Munzur mountain range. It stands out for its opportunity to ski uninterrupted for 12 km. For the thirteenth activity type, "cycling tour", the most popular route is İliç – Karanlık Canyon – Kemaliye. This 58.56 km route is moderately difficult and has a TrailRank of 38. The fourteenth activity type, "Alpine skiing", has its most popular route at Ergan Ski Center. For the fifteenth activity type, "Via ferrata", the Kemaliye Via Ferrata is an adventure tourism route recommended only for experts. It is 5.36 km long, 795 m high, and has a TrailRank score of 65. For the sixteenth activity type, "paragliding", the Ekşisu landing area is among the most popular routes. Maps of the featured routes are listed below.

Trail 1. Nature Walk / Hiking / Taş yol Karanlık Canyon, Kemaliye



Trail 2. By car / Erzincan – Erzurum – Tortum – Tortum Waterfall – Hemşin



Trail 3. Road Motorcycle / Erzincan-Kemah-Kemaliye-Taşyol-Divriği



Trail 4. Off-road / Sakaltutan Off-road 1. Stage



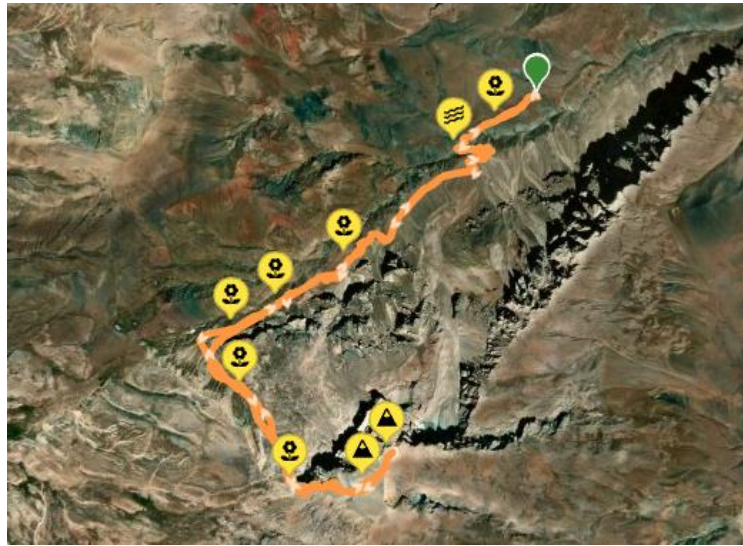
Trail 5. Running / Kemaliye Ultra Trail



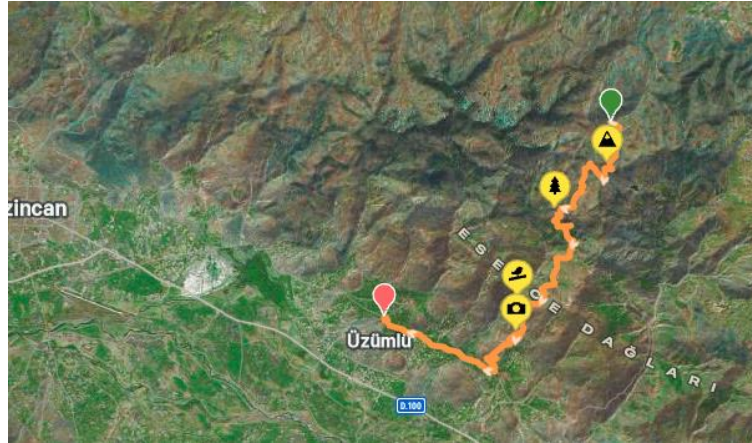
Trail 6. Enduro Motorcycle / Cimin – Aygır Lake - Turna Çayı Dam – Çamlık-Erzincan



Trail 7. Alpinism / Kılıçkaya Village Plateau / Munzur Akbaba Peak



Trail 8. Offroad Motorcycle / Hoverenk – Cimin



Trail 9. Road Bike / Erzincan - Sakaltutan -Erzincan



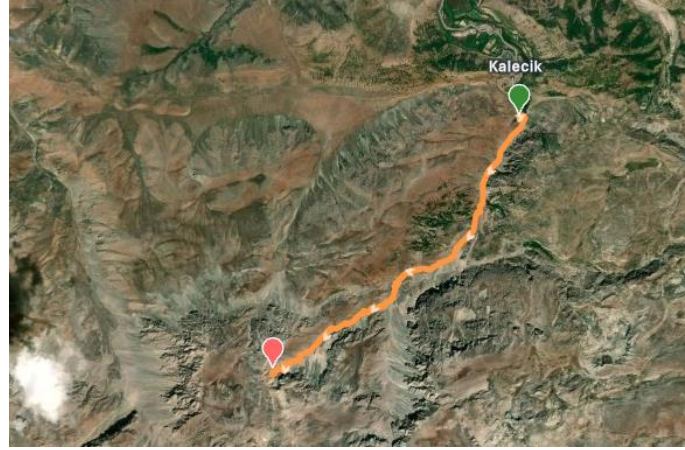
Trail 10. Mountain bike / Erzincan – Gürlevik



Trail 11. Walking / Apçağa – Kemaliye



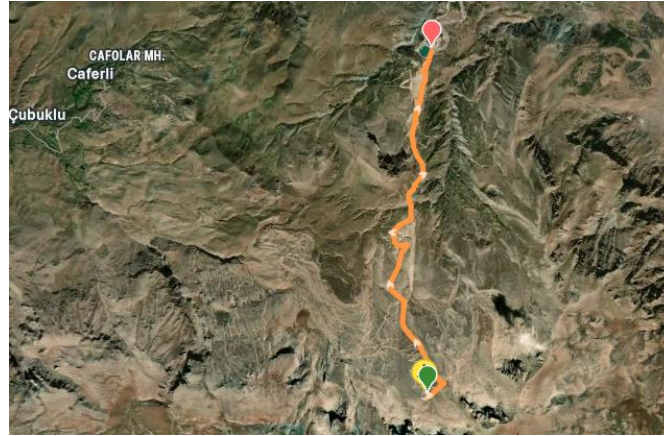
Trail 12. Off-piste skiing / Munzur



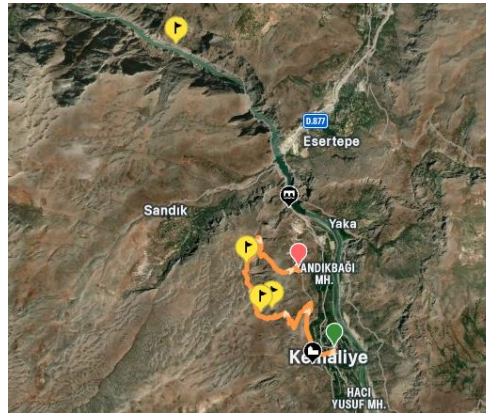
Trail 13. Bicycle Tour / İliç – Karanlık Canyon – Kemaliye



Trail 14. Alpine Skiing / Ergon Ski Center



Trail 15. Via Ferrata / Kemaliye Via Ferrata



Trail 16. Paragliding / Ekşisu Landing Area



In the continuation of the study, a SWOT analysis was conducted to summarize the obtained data and provide a framework for the development of adventure tourism in the region. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified for increasing the adventure tourism potential of Erzincan province were listed (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016; Güneş & Alagöz, 2018; Şen, 2026).

Strengths

- The availability of a wide range of adventure tourism activities, such as hiking, climbing, off-roading, motocross, skydiving, rafting, camping, and cycling.
- Thanks to the numerous lakes and dams, as well as water-based activities on the Karasu River—one of the headwaters of the Euphrates—the region offers summer activities; additionally, high-altitude areas such as Mount Ergon and Mount Keşiş make it suitable for winter tourism. With locations like Dumanlı Nature Park and Yedigöller, tourism activities can be enjoyed throughout all four seasons.

- The Dark Canyon and Kemaliye route is currently one of the province's most significant and well-known tourist attractions. However, Ergan Mountain, Dumanlı Nature Park, Ekşisu (Erzincan Ekşisu is one of the Turkish Aeronautical Association's paragliding training sites) and the Yedigöller region also possess significant potential.
- Considering the adventure tourism potential, the difficulty levels of the routes in Kemaliye are appealing to users.
- These routes—along with the events and festivals held along them—are frequently shared on digital platforms, and local governments are conducting promotional activities, leading to a steady increase in the number of people experiencing them.
- High-altitude locations such as Mount Ergan, Mount Esence, and the Munzur line attract adrenaline enthusiasts and thus are preferred.
- The presence of attractions boasting natural beauty, such as Girlevik Waterfall, Ekşisu, Dumanlı Nature Park, and Yedigöller.

Weaknesses

- Adventure activities carry inherent risks. Furthermore, the difficulty level of the courses here is not suitable for all types of tourists (They are not appropriate for elderly tourists or families. However, courses tailored to them can be developed).
- Erzincan is a city situated on a plain surrounded by mountains. Although its setting offers opportunities for high-altitude adventure tourism, the geographical terrain makes transportation difficult.
- In terms of accessibility, the routes are suitable only for small groups; although this may appear to be a disadvantage, it represents a positive starting point for sustainable and responsible tourism.
- Despite the high potential that exists, adventure tourism is not sufficiently promoted.
- Adventure tourism activities are widespread, particularly in Kemaliye and its surrounding area. There are fewer routes in the other districts; however, routes in those regions could also be highlighted.
- Experts have highlighted the inadequacy of safety and wayfinding signage. To address this issue, a comprehensive inventory of adventure routes should first be developed, followed by the installation of appropriate signage along these routes.
- There is a shortage of adventure tourism guides. As the number of guides in the province increases, adventure guides must also be trained.

Opportunities

- Erzincan possesses immense potential in terms of the diversity of adventure tourism. Notable are the valuable routes that offer opportunities for interaction with the local community, where cultural, natural, and sporting activities intertwine.
- It offers the opportunity to expand adventure tourism alongside other forms of alternative and niche tourism.
- The abundance of natural areas enables an increase in nature-based experiences (ecotourism, rural tourism, slow tourism, digital detox, technology-free tourism activities, etc.).
- It offers the potential for sustainable and responsible adventure tourism.
- The availability and abundance of areas suitable for extreme sports, and the opportunities provided for engaging in them.
- The existence of infrastructure capable of hosting national and international sports events (such as the World Downhill Skateboarding Championship at Ergan Mountain and the International Culture and Nature Sports Festival in Kemaliye).

Threats

- Precautionary measures should be taken now against environmental degradation that could result from overuse.
- The likelihood of accidents and safety risks occurring.
- Equipment and requirements suitable for different seasonal conditions due to climate conditions.

- Low international recognition needs to be increased. Target markets and countries must be identified.
- The destination management model is not being developed based on adventure tourism. Provisions regarding adventure tourism potential and its management should be added to the tourism strategic plan.

The findings obtained are presented in three stages. In the first stage, Wikiloc data regarding activity-based trails and routes were tabulated (Table 1) and reported. Secondly, popular trails derived from the Wikiloc data were ranked. Identifying the starting and ending points of these routes is considered essential for adventure participants to prepare for the trail experience, metrics, and difficulty levels. Furthermore, this information can be utilized by local stakeholders in the planning and preparation of adventure tourism tours. Knowledge of popular routes offers insights into key considerations for their marketing and promotion. In the third stage, the details of the SWOT analysis—derived from the collected data and supported by literature—systematized the study's findings and highlighted factors requiring attention regarding the destination's future adventure tourism potential.

Conclusion and Discussion

The main objective of this research is to identify popular routes in Erzincan province for developing adventure tourism products. Accordingly, data from the Wikiloc platform show that popular routes exist across 16 activity types in the province. These activity types include hiking, car riding, off-road driving, running, enduro motorcycling, alpinism, road cycling, off-road motorcycling, mountain biking, walking, off-piste skiing, cycling tours, alpine skiing, via ferrata, and paragliding. In their analysis of systematic studies on adventure tourism, Türk and Erdoğan (2022) demonstrated that the vast majority of the 41 national publications released between 2010 and 2020 focused on only one or two activities. Some studies were addressed under categories such as air sports (Diker et al., 2016) and winter sports. Studies concerning underwater diving—an activity not practiced in Erzincan—were also encountered (Yarmacı et al., 2017). There are few studies in the relevant literature that combine multiple types of activities (Çelik Yetim & Şen, 2016). Çelik Yetim & Şen (2016) stated that Erzincan is suitable for more than forty types of adventure sports. Compared to this information, there should be more routes. Therefore, it is evident that the existing routes need to be recorded and diversified. These activity types should also include orienteering, rafting, base jumping, rope jumping, ice climbing, rock climbing, camping, canoeing, skateboarding, downhill skateboarding, ski paragliding, batwinging, etc., as these activities are already practised within the province during nature sports and youth festivals. The downhill skateboarding championship is also held at the Ergen Mountain Ski Center (Şen, 2026). The course for this sport should be added to the Wikiloc platform. This would allow more adventure activities to be promoted nationally and internationally.

According to the research results, the most popular routes are in the hiking (611) category. All five top results are from trails in the Kemaliye district. Kemaliye offers a natural environment suitable for many types of nature sports, with the Taş Yolu and Karanlık Canyon standing out among the challenging trails. The Via Ferrata trail attracts professionals with its adrenaline and scenery, while the wingsuit base jump offers an extraordinary experience. As part of the Sırat on Fırat project, base jumping and rope jumping can be done inside the canyon using a steel cable installed at a high point. Sırakonak, Apçağa, and Yuvaköy (84 trail ranks), located near the district center, as well as the historical streets, Mani Yolu, Lökhané, and Bayrak Tepe (79 trail ranks) in

the district center, are popular routes for hiking. These points are also indispensable for day trips. These results suggest that Kemaliye is a unique hiking destination in its own right. Just as there are many trails on the Lycian Way (Tütüncü et al., 2020), creating an alternative route map for Kemaliye would be beneficial for its promotion and for those interested in it.

For those wishing to travel by car (93 routes), the most popular routes include Erzurum, Tortum, and Hemşin, followed by the Pülümür - Düzgün Baba - Tunceli – Munzur route. Thirdly, the Mertekli-Uluköy-Çağlayan Girlevik route is also popular. Girlevik Waterfall, located approximately 30 km from the city, offers a natural attraction. For road motorcycles (55 routes), Kemaliye is again a top choice, while alternative routes include Konarlı Waterfall, Samsun, and Kız Kalesi. For off-road (54 routes), Erzincan offers a natural environment. The Sakaltutan area, Kemaliye Taş Yol, Konarlı waterfall, Kılıçkaya village, and Girlevik waterfall are popular routes. All of these routes offer opportunities for adventure and adrenaline. However, Konarlı Waterfall, despite being difficult to access and far from the city center, has become popular in recent years. In the running category (43 routes), Kemaliye and its surroundings are the most popular area. For Enduro Motorcycles (36 routes), the distinguishing features are routes starting from the Cimin (also known as Üzümlü) district, passing through Aygır Lake – Turna Çayı Dam – Çamlık, and ending in Kovancılar, Esence Yedigöller, Divriği, and Otlukbeli. While the Kovancılar and Divriği routes originate from Kemaliye, the other routes are challenging courses with high elevations in and around Keşiş Mountain (also known as Esence Mountain), located north of Erzincan. The lake and nature views are invaluable. The geographical formations are worth seeing. Otlukbeli Lake is a natural travertine dam lake, a rare formation known worldwide. It should be one of the things you do at least once in your lifetime. Due to its high levels of iron and sulfur from naturally occurring minerals, it is also known as red water (Kızıl su). The area around Erzincan is characterized by mountainous terrain and vineyards in the center. Therefore, it is very suitable for alpinism (31 routes). Munzur Akbaba Peak, Yedigöller Esence (Keşiş) Peak, and Kazankaya Peak are popular destinations. For road cycling (31 routes), Sakaltutan, Beytahtı, Işıkpınar, Ekşisu, and Atatepe routes stand out. Sakaltutan is the highest pass on the intercity road on the Eastern Anatolian trade route. Beytahtı is the first pass on the road to the Kemah district. Access is moderate. Işıkpınar is an alternative close to the city center. Ekşisu is one of Erzincan's popular picnic areas. It is also the point where the famous Böğert mineral water emerges. It is famous for its hot springs and healing waters. In addition, its spring water makes it a natural habitat, hosting many wildlife and offering a suitable environment for birdwatching. Atatepe is the location of the world's largest portrait of Atatürk. It seems that the activities are carried out not only for the importance and functionality of the vehicle used, but also as an added attraction. For example, a visitor using a road bike can explore different routes on different days.

For off-road motorcycling (31 routes), Horevenk – Cimin, Günbağı, and Kemaliye stand out. There are also routes that pass through nearby provinces and districts, such as Malatya and Tunceli. For mountain biking (26 routes), Girlevik Waterfall, Kemaliye, Başpınar, and Göyne Plateau are prominent. For hiking (25 routes), Kemaliye dominates, as it does for nature walks. For off-piste skiing (23 routes), the areas around Munzur Mountain and Ergan Mountain are particularly appealing. Heli-skiing was practiced on Ergan Mountain years ago. Today, a ski version of paragliding is available. Recent investments in accommodation on Ergan Mountain have significantly contributed to its development as an adventure tourism center. Therefore, it offers alternatives for day trips as well as multi-night package tours. Cycling (23 routes) generally starts or ends in Kemaliye and includes connections to nearby districts and villages. Alpine skiing (19 routes) mainly consists of routes around the Ergan Mountain Ski Center. Via Ferrata (13

routes) is located in Kemaliye. Alternative routes also take place there. Finally, for paragliding (11 routes), Ekşisu Reedbed and Picnic Area, Karanlık Canyon (base jump), Tatlısu Training Hill and Karakaya Training Hill routes have been created and shared.

This study considered only routes that encompassed activities carried out in nature and outdoors. The study showed that identifying routes for activities conducted in air and water is not easy. As seen in paragliding, determining a route in the air is difficult. Furthermore, Erzincan is a popular destination for water sports. The Karasu River, located in the upper basin of the Euphrates River, flows through the province's borders, offering opportunities for water sports such as rafting and canoeing. Tokat and Ekinci (2017) support the finding that rafting stands out among water sports in Erzincan. The results are consistent with those of the two studies. However, identifying activities in this area on the platform has proven difficult. Suitable dams, lakes, and streams exist for sports such as sub-boarding and paddleboarding, which have become popular in recent years. Therefore, routes could be identified for these areas. Additionally, routes could be created to locations such as Sohmarik, Merg Plateau, Polat Lake, and Ardos Lake, which have been promoted in local and national media, thus combining adventure, sports, and tourism.

This study presents an overview of the adventure tourism potential of Erzincan province using a consumer-oriented approach. Popular routes and activity types should be taken into account when local stakeholders, particularly travel agencies, design their tour packages. Furthermore, organizing training activities alongside specialized trails and routes would be beneficial. This study is subject to certain limitations. The adventure tourism routes were sourced from the Wikiloc platform, and the scope was restricted to routes within Erzincan province. A key strength of the study is its inclusion of multiple activity types. While the literature contains studies on tourism routes (Alkan, 2018; Albuz 2022) and adventure tourism (Türk & Erdoğan, 2022), only one study focusing specifically on adventure tourism routes (Aydın, 2024) was identified. In that study, Aydın (2024) also utilized the Wikiloc platform to evaluate nature-based routes in a different destination (Kastamonu). Although the findings offer positive insights for destination marketing, it is recommended that further research be conducted on this topic for other destinations. Additionally, this study focused on the five most popular activity-based routes; future research could also examine niche routes. Subsequent studies might also explore these routes in conjunction with culture, gastronomy, and other forms of tourism.

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As a single-authored article, the author contributed 100%.

Ethics Approval Statement

This study falls into the category of research that does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no financial relationships or affiliations with any parties that could be considered relevant to this study; therefore, there is no conflict of interest.

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