

**SNOW RAFTING AS A NEW CONCEPT IN TOURISM DESTINATION:
A RESEARCH IN ABALI SKI CENTER FROM VAN PROVINCE**

Öğr.Gör. Kutbettin ERDURUR*

Öğr.Gör. M.Nuri SEVGİN†

Prof.Dr. Said KINGİR‡

Abstract

Main objective of this research is to contribute to the determination of tourism potential of snow rafting, which can be considered as a new sport activity. Another issue that is aimed within this study is to set Van a significant tourist destination center nationally and internationally and to mention shortages and measurements towards them by popularizing and developing snow rafting, which can be driving force for the sake of development and diversification of tourism.

Area of investigation for this study is Van Abalı ski center. Qualitative research method has been used in this study. Data have been collected through interview and observation. Ski center, primary subject of the research, has been analyzed on site. Findings related to current and possible prospective position of snow rafting as a tourism product have been revealed through interview and observation carried out. According to the findings obtained, it can be expressed that Abalı ski center is far below the level of its potential and in worse position than where its added value is expected to be in terms of tourism.

Keywords: Tourism Destination, Van Abalı Ski Center, Snow Rafting

Özet

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı, yeni bir spor faaliyeti olarak kabul edilen kar rafting turizmin potansiyelinin belirlenmesine katkıda bulunmaktır. Bu çalışma kapsamında ayrıca kar raftingini turizm faaliyetlerini

*Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Gevaş Meslek Yüksekokulu Otel Lokanta ve İkram Hizmetleri Bölümü, kutbettinerdurur@yyu.edu.tr

†Siirt Üniversitesi Kurtalan Meslek Yüksekokulu Yönetim Organizasyon Bölümü, nurisevgin@siirt.edu.tr

‡ Bartın Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi İşletme Bölümü, skingir@bartin.edu.tr

çeşitlendirici ve yaygınlaştırıcı bir itici güç olarak kullanılması ile beraber Van'ı ulusal ve uluslararası bir turizm merkezine dönüşebileceğine de değinilmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın alanı Van'ın Abalı Kayak Merkezi'dir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışma da veriler gözlem ve görüşme yöntemiyle toplanmıştır. Çalışma, çalışmanın öznesi olan kayak merkezinde yapılmış olup, bir turizm ürünü olarak kar raftinginin mevcut ve olası muhtemel pozisyonuna ilişkin bulgular yürütülen görüşme ve gözlem yoluyla ortaya konmuştur. Elde edilen bulgular ışığında Abalı Kayak Merkezi'nin potansiyelinin çok uzağında olduğu ve turizm üzerinden beklenen katma değeri yeteri kadar alamadığı tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turizm Noktası, Van Abalı Kayak Merkezi, Kar Rafting

Introduction

Today tourism has been an important industry all over the world and a considerable part of world population are employed within this sector (Patterson et al., 2008: 407). Moreover, tourism, a strong instrument so long, plays a huge role in development and economic growth of the region and increases foreign currency in the region (Brau et al., 2003). As a result, as a representation of love, respect and tolerance tourism can be acknowledged as a rapidly growing and developing industry that influences the society socio-culturally and economically.

Changes in tourism perceptions have paved the way for change in holiday and travelling habits by influencing them substantially. Travelling has been much easier today due to technological developments. People have had difficulties only in deciding where to go and see as a result of diverse alternatives (Çakmak and Kök, 2012: 81). Therefore, countries or regions have been making efforts for making their exclusive tourist attractions, historical and cultural values and natural beauties come into a position to attract tourists by providing a competitive advantage. Thus, snow rafting, an alternative tourism production for Van region, has been evaluated.

1. Tourism and Concept of Tourism Destination

The word “tourism” has derived from **tornus** meaning “to return”, “wander around”, “return back”. For the first time word “tour” was used in 18th century during visits of English noblemen to historical, cultural, scientific and naturally beautiful places in Europe for their training (Bulu and Eraslan, 2008: 45). Afterwards, besides reasons such as decrease in work days and hours, increase in income per capita, Access to far remote distances in transportation system and vehicles, reasons such as need for holiday and resting after working all year, visits to new places, will to know different cultures have been influential on tour activities (Zengin, 2006). That transportation is easier than it was in the past has made a domino effect on tourism.

Tourism was no longer a local event in 20th century. Tourism activity in industrialized and modern societies has become a mass event and internationally recognized rather than being exclusive to certain individuals, regions, social groups and classes (Hacıođlu et al., 2009: 1). Besides places where people inhabit, work and meet their needs as always, tourism is individual or mass traveling in order to be engaged in relaxation, entertainment, curiosity, sports, health, culture facilities and to participate in congress and seminars in addition to worshipping without intention to settle and make profit (Özgüç, 2003, 15). In order for these travels to be considered as tourism activities, tourists are supposed to accommodate there at least one night exceeding 24 hours (Usta, 2009: 7). Developments in society and increasing stress in working life have led to much more need for tourism.

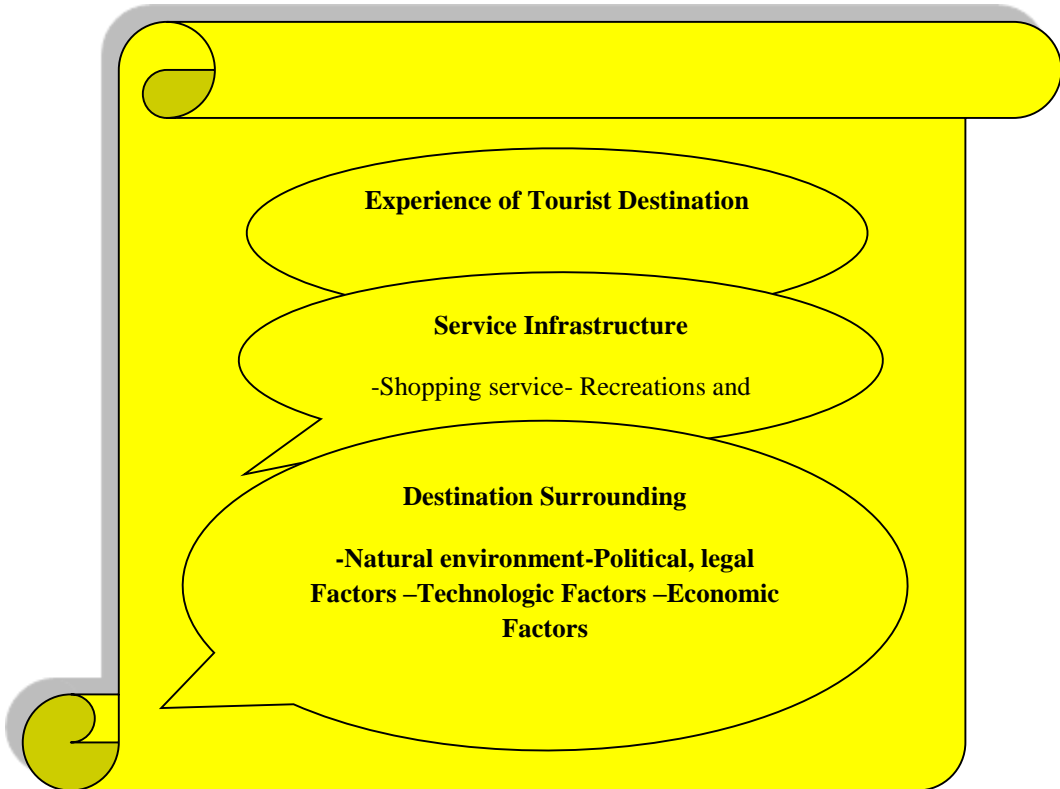
Usta (2009: 224) has defined destination as a location which creates demand on its own with attractions it creates and offers and which requires a planning to meet the secondary requirements emerging during primary visits. Murphy and fellows (2000) have defined destination which makes up tourists’ experiences as a region embodying components such as good restaurants, hotels, interesting sites, transportation networks of good quality apart from its nice climate, attractive views, a clean location, existence of historical and cultural sites and friendliness of locals.

Frisk (1999) has defined destination as a geographic location or region where touristic society and locals coexist (Lynch and Tinsley: 372). According to another definition, tourism destination can be defined as a branded geographic area or region having a certain

image, important touristic attractions, center of attractions, various activities, a good sub-structure and superstructure (tourist facilities, transportation networks, etc) (Hosany 2006: 638). Bahar and Kozak (2005: 78) have defined tourism destination as a certain branded and imaged geographic site having similar culture, climate and nature, natural and cultural richness, indigenous activities to offer customers, facilities such as accommodation, nutrition, transportation and communication, public services and tourist attraction centers. Tourism destination can be defined as areas or regions comprised of components such as natural attractions, historical and cultural values, holy sites, sports activities, shopping and entertainment facilities, artistic activities and festivals.

Destination product can be defined as an experience of destination comprised of elements of service infrastructure such as shopping, food, transportation, accommodation and which is created by intersection of destination surrounding composed of natural environment, political, legal, economic, cultural and technological factors (Özdemir, 2007: 2). Murphy and his fellows represent conceptual model of destination product as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A conceptual Model of Destination Product



Reference: Murphy P., Pritchard, P. M. and Smith B., (2000), “The Destination Product and Its Impact On Traveler Perceptions”, *Tourism Management*, 21 (1), 46.

2.Winter Tourism and Snow Rafting

Winter tourism is defined as a complement of activities and relations composed of travels to snowy and pitched areas where ski sport is in the centre, accommodation and other services. Since it involves largely a number of activities depending on snowy settings, winter tourism necessitates presence of factors such as local and foreign incomes, price, transportation expenses and convenience (Falk, 2010: 912). In addition to places with certain height and pitch enabling skiing and other trekking and climbing sites (Kaya and Arıkan, 2009: 397). Today besides skiing, doing snow rafting with boats of those in streams can be considered as a marketing instrument of winter tourism.

Snow rafting can be defined as a kind of winter sport which is done individually or in groups with varied sized boats. Today this uncommon sports branch has become a focus of interest for everyone who would like to feel different excitements and particularly young people play a key role in this branch. As snow rafting is new sports branch, it does not have its special boats and thus, it is conducted through rafting boats applied in streams. Production of boats convenient to thickness and quality of the snow will make this sports branch appealing. Moreover, it is better that snow rafting be done in areas where pitch is proper, for, control of boats will be hard where there is high pitch and following that possibility of accidents may increase.

3.Objective and Importance of the Research

Main objective of this research is to contribute to determination of tourism potential of snow rafting, which can be considered as a new sport activity. Another issue that is aimed within this study is to set Van a significant tourist destination center nationally and internationally and to mention shortages and measurements towards them by popularizing and developing snow rafting, which can be driving force for the sake of development and diversification of tourism.

4.Method

Area of investigation for this study is Van Abalı Ski Center. Qualitative research method has been used in this study. Data have been collected through interview and observation. President of Rafting Organization of Developing Sports Branches Association has been interviewed (10.02.2014) about appropriate area and pitch for snow rafting; moreover, after observation (06.03.2013), a present condition analysis (SWOT) has been conducted related to snow rafting as an alternative touristic product in Van and as a result of this analysis, findings related to current and contingent condition of this sports activity have been revealed.

5.Findings

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Van Province Abalı Ski Center

	Long winter months and snow cover duration (4-4.5 months)
Strengths	Snow depth at adequate level
	Proper pitch for snow rafting
	Insufficiency of required sub and superstructure.
Weaknesses	Shortage of publication and marketing
	Having no special boats.
	Availability of many alternatives (ski center) cross the world)
	Easy accessibility (highway and airway)
Opportunities	Opportunity for snow rafting due to pitch.
	Densely young population in Turkey (a sports activity addressing to young population)

Changes in wishes and needs of people (increase in adventurism)

Threats

There are a lot of famous ski centers all over the world and therefore it is ambiguous whether Van province Abalı ski center will benefit from market share and this constitutes a risk

Shortage of substructure and superstructure is a huge threat.

Insufficiency of activities and indifference of state institutions and organizations and private corporations and organizations.

5.1.Abalı Ski Center

Abalı Ski Center, located in the boundaries of Abalı village from Van province, Gevaş town is approximately 34-35 km far to the center of Van, 11-12 km to Gevaş town and has an area of 15 km situated in the slopes of Artos Mountain. Business administration of the ski center bound to Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports is carried out within the body of 4 star Merit Şahmaran Hotel in Van currently. Furthermore, there are two cafes and one ski room in the ski center. Present condition analysis (SWOT) related to “snow rafting” done in Van province Abalı ski center can be given as in Table 1.

Height of the ski center, where the snow cover duration is 4 - 4.5 months, is between 2200 and 2300. Having a convenient location and pitch for snow rafting the ski center offers a different experience and excitement for all ski lovers.

In accordance with the data obtained from President of Rafting Organization of Developing Sports Branches Association (10.02.2014), it has been stated that starting and final point of the racetrack is of importance for snow rafting and thus starting pitch should be 65 and pitch for final point should be 20 or no less. Moreover, it has been added that the most convenient areas are valley seams where boats cannot go out of control.

Abalı ski center will be a tourist destination and preferred once publication and marketing substructure is constituted by making up the shortage of necessary services in substructure together with cooperation between state and private institutions and organizations and locals. In other words, attraction and appeal of a destination can be provided with

coexistence of components such as a good publication, accommodation, refreshments, transportation and entertainment in addition to its natural beauties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Today, changes and developments in touristic motives and needs pave the way for the increase in the number of destinations and tourism diversification. Tourism destinations spread an effort to meet the requirements of tourists and compete or outclass the rival destinations. In this direction, Van province has a huge potential to appeal tourists with its natural beauties, fresh air, historic fabric and rich cultural values.

Abalı Ski Center, situated in the slopes of Artos Mountain from Van province, Gevaş town has grand potential in terms of winter tourism not only with its snow cover duration, snow depth and quality but also with its ski racetrack and ground convenient for snow rafting. However, unfortunately Abalı ski center is not at its well-deserved place. Deficiency of sub and superstructures (transportation, accommodation, refreshments etc..), shortage of publication and marketing and lack of proper boats for snow rafting bear negative qualifications for this potential to come to the forefront. Local administrations have responsibilities for publication and marketing. Through more visional perspective by local administrations in this issue about creating appropriate publication, advertisement and marketing strategies, Abalı ski center will be more appealing and attracted. In addition to all of these, presence and readiness of such places as hotels, restaurants and shopping centers to meet the requirements and requests will contribute to tourism in the region.

In accordance with the observations conducted, it has been determined that Abalı ski center has a convenient racetrack, however, lack of appropriate boats pose a challenge for this sports activity. Supply of better boats suitable for ground and snow rafting overall will contribute to development and sustainability of this sports activity.

Cooperation between state and private institutions and organization and local people will substantially contribute to recognition of Abalı ski center by tourists and thus providing this center with being preferred and appealing for people.

References

- Bahar, O. and Kozak, M., (2005). *Küreselleşme Sürecinde Uluslar Arası Turizm ve Rekabet Edebilirlik*, Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.
- Bulu, M. and Eraslan, İ. H., (2008). “Bolu İli Turizm Sektörünün Uluslararası Rekabetçilik Analizi”, *SOİD*, 5 (1), 44-56.
- Çakmak, Ç. A. and Kök, T. İ., (2012). “Destinasyon Pazarlaması ve Safranbolu’nun Destinasyon İmajının Ölçülmesi”, *Ticaret ve Turizm Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2, 80-101.
- Falk, M., (2010). “A Dynamic Panel Data Analysis of Snow Depth and Winter Tourism”, *Tourism Management*, 31 (6), 912–924.
- Hacıoğlu, N., Gökdeniz, A. and Dinç, Y., (2009). “Boş Zaman ve Rekreasyon Yönetimi” *Örnek Animasyon Uygulamaları*, (2. Baskı), Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.
- Hosany, S., Ekinci, Y. and Uysal, M., (2006). “Destination Image and Destination Personality: An Application Of Branding Theories to Tourism Places”, *Journal of Business Research*, 59 (5), 638-642.
- Kaya, E. and Arıkan, İ., (2009). “Türkiye’de Kış Turizmi ve Bölge Ekonomisine Etkileri”, *10. Ulusal Turizm Kongresi*, Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık, 397-408.
- Murphy P., Pritchard, P. M. and Smith B., (2000). “The Destination Product and Its Impact on Traveler Perceptions”, *Tourism Management*, 21 (1), 46.
- Patterson, M. T., Niccolucci, and Marchettini, N., (2008), “Adaptive Environmental Management of Tourism in The Province of Siena, Italy Using the Ecological Footprint”, *Journal of Environmental Management*, 86 (2), 407-418.
- Peter M., Mark P. P. and Brock S., (2000). “The Destination Product and Its Impact on Traveler Perceptions”, *Tourism Management*, 21 (1), 43-52.
- Tinsley, R. and Lynch, P., (2001). “Small Tourism Business Networks and Destination Development”, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 20 (4), 367–378.

Usta, Ö., (2009), *Turizm Genel ve Yapısal Yaklaşımı*, (2. Basım), Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.

Zengin, B., (2006), “Turizm Coğrafyası” (Türkiye Genel ve Bölgeler Turizm Coğrafyası), (2. Basım), İstanbul: Değişim Yayınları.