

From Ancient Paths to Modern Discoveries: The Backpacker Tourism Experience on the Lycian Way

Antik Patikalardan Modern Keşiflere: Likya Yolu'nda Sırt Çantalı Turizm Deneyimi

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Abstract

The experiences of backpackers hiking the Lycian Way have been thoroughly examined in this study. The study indicates that the path can be a means of experiencing several dimensions at once. The analysis of user comments collected on Google Maps revealed that the experiences of tourists were gathered into four primary dimensions. These dimensions are Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, and Spiritual. Gratefully, on one hand, the emotional dimension impresses the natural scenery to tourists which include the feelings of awe and peace they have. On the other hand, the physical dimension highlights the difficulties of the walk that require endurance. The intellectual dimension is an opportunity to gain new historical and cultural impressions of sites along the route while the spiritual dimension involves the deep connection to nature and self-growth aspect. The research shows that the Lycian Way is not only a physical activity but also an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experience. These results offer newer insights in sustainable tourism practices and destination management. Moreover, attention to tourism research through online user comments is underlined and stressed that it gives a realistic data source. Future research can be done on the influence of such occurrences in various tourist profiles and their contributions to the local economy.

Keywords: Lycian Way, Backpacker Tourism, Tourist Experience, Nature Trekking.

JEL Codes: Z39,L83,Z30

Özet

Bu çalışma, Likya Yolu'nu yürüyen sırt çantalı turistlerin deneyimlerini derinlemesine incelemiştir. Çalışma, rotanın sunduğu çok boyutlu deneyimleri ortaya koymaktadır. Google Maps üzerinden elde edilen kullanıcı yorumlarının analizi, turist deneyimlerinin dört ana boyut altında toplandığını göstermiştir. Bu boyutlar, Duygusal, Fiziksel, Entelektüel ve Manevi boyutlardır. Duygusal boyut, turistlerin doğal güzellikler karşısında hissettikleri hayranlık ve huzur duygularını içerirken, fiziksel boyut, yürüyüşün dayanıklılık gerektiren zorluklarını vurgulamaktadır. Entelektüel boyut, rota üzerindeki tarihi ve kültürel izlenimleri öğrenme fırsatları sunarken, manevi boyut ise doğayla kurulan derin bağ ve kişisel gelişim süreçlerini kapsamaktadır. Çalışma, Likya Yolu'nun sadece fiziksel bir aktivite değil, aynı zamanda duygusal, entelektüel ve manevi bir deneyim sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bulgular, sürdürülebilir turizm uygulamalarına ve destinasyon yönetimine dair yeni perspektifler sunmaktadır. Ayrıca, çevrimiçi kullanıcı yorumlarının turizm araştırmalarında kullanımının önemine dikkat çekilmekte ve bu yaklaşımın, daha geniş ve otantik bir veri kaynağı sunduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Gelecekteki araştırmalar, bu deneyimlerin farklı turist profilleri üzerindeki etkilerini ve bölge ekonomisine katkılarını inceleyebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Likya Yolu, Sırt Çantalı Turistler, Turist Deneyimi, Doğa Yürüyüşü.

JEL Kodları: Z39,L83,Z30

Introduction

The Lycian Way is a route rich in historical and cultural significance, featuring numerous remnants from ancient times to the present. Etymologically meaning "Land of Light," Lycia is an ancient region that spread across the area now known as the Teke Peninsula, between the Gulf of Antalya and Fethiye. This path encompasses numerous ancient cities and residences, along with different royal tombs and sarcophagi of notable figures. Travelers now perceive the region's natural beauty and rich historical knowledge. The hills brim with historical ruins from Byzantine times, further solidifying this fact. High mountains and deep canyons of the Lycian Way allow the present to go back in time to the times and reenounter the history and culture for those who look for it. Therefore, this route encompasses all the essential elements of a comprehensive tourism destination. It is also full of tourist attractions that reveal the wealth of the region, the symbols of its past, the beaches, and the settlements. This route includes the main tourist destinations such as Fethiye, Kaş, Finike, Kalkan, Adrasan, and Kekova that present vivid emotions to the travelers, and their experience blends with the memory of the trip. Furthermore, the route is well-arranged, meeting international standards that include information boards and red and white marks along the way, making it safer and easier for hikers to navigate the path. Meanwhile, another reason that grows the Lycian Way further is their out of bed creativity when it comes to an offer of the unique staying experiences along the way. The houses are spread all over the route and are available as camping sites, hostels, village houses, and bungalows. Therefore, the variety of accommodations available will make the place accessible to a wide range of individuals with varying budgets and preferences.

Just as the tourists on Lycian Way do, backpackers are motivated by travel on their own, new experiences (Pereira & Silva, 2018), as well as the search for peace and quiet (Akgündüz & Kızılcıoğlu, 2016). Apart from this, these motivations that take after the Lycian Way in general are the most important reasons for tourist movements. The Lycian Way covers backpackers' wants with a combination of three elements: natural beauty, historical ruins, and cultural experiences. One of the other important features of backpacking tourism is the tendency to save on lodging as well as be flexible in their bookings (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Scheyvens, 2002). In this sense, the Lycian Way is the most suitable path, and it includes many options like a campsite, hostels, village houses, and bungalows. This variety caters to the needs of backpackers from different economic scales and personal preferences.

Generally, backpackers enjoy interacting with locals and learning about their local culture. They seek to engage with the locals and discover the authentic locations of their destinations (Tomljenovic et al.,

2015). The exploration of the Lycian Way, which originated in ancient times and connects to royal tombs, provides backpackers with an immersive cultural experience. This study is concerned with the experiences of the people who toured the Lycian Way, which is a long-distance trail in the southwest of Turkey. In this case, the data was taken from the reviews of Google Maps users, which is an internet platform. Online telling is a secure internet platform whereby tourists can write their reviews without the need for censorship or filtering. Unlike other correspondence or mouth-to-mouth inquiries, people naturally write these reviews inspired by their curiosity. Therefore, we can conclude that these reviews exhibit less bias (Fang et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2020).

This study aims to add a new dimension to the existing literature by analyzing the experiences of backpacking tourists on the Lycian Way. While previous research has generally focused on tourists' demographic characteristics and overall satisfaction levels (Akgündüz & Kızılcıoğlu, 2016; Tütüncü et al., 2020), this study focuses on Pine and Gilmore's (1998) emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual impressions felt by individuals during an event (Tung & Ritchie, 2011, p. 1368). In particular, analyzing online user comments obtained through Google Maps provides the study with a broader and more authentic data set. This approach allows tourists to express their experiences more spontaneously and unfiltered. It allows for a more diverse and comprehensive sample than traditional survey and interview methods. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the Lycian Way is a physical activity area and a multidimensional experience with emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual effects.

Conceptual Framework

In today's highly competitive marketing world, many products and services have become commonplace and do not contribute to the differentiation of organizations. Since consumers demand holistic and lasting personal experiences enriched with emotional memories, feelings, and symbolic meanings, more than these products and services are needed to meet their needs (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Therefore, consumers seek holistic and lasting experiences that appeal to them emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Radder & Han, 2015: 455). In the context of the experience economy, consumers seek unique and memorable experiences rather than simply buying products and services. In this new economy, consumers demand a distinctive added value for products and services that have already achieved a high functional quality (Oh et al., 2007). Experiences can deliver exceptional value to consumers, and a business can gain a solid competitive advantage when it builds on consumer experience (Wang, 2008). Carbone (1998) found that

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consumers are more influenced by the subconscious sensory and emotional elements of experience than by the tangible attributes of products and services (Ayob et al., 2011).

The tourist experience is a holistic structure formed by the interactions, experiences, and perceptions tourists encounter during travel. This concept encompasses all kinds of interactions, emotions, and experiences that tourists have throughout their journeys, representing the sum of impressions they acquire during their travels. The tourist experience includes the impressions tourists gain during their travels, which are shaped by environmental, cultural, social, and personal factors (Larsen, 2007).

Subjective evaluations made by individuals regarding their touristic activities during and after their travels are explained as tourist experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In other words, the tourist experience is a comprehensive concept that includes the impressions tourists gain during their travels, shaped by the combination of environmental, cultural, social, and personal factors they encounter (Moscardo, 2017). Experiences are subjective and occur under the control of individuals (Thorne, 1963; Abrahams, 1986; Arnould & Price, 1993). Experience is an individual and personal phenomenon. Moreover, experience has a multidimensional structure. Pine and Gilmore (1998: 99) explained this situation as follows; "While prior economic offerings – commodities, goods, and services – are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level." This perspective shows that experience is closely related not only to external factors but also to the person's inner world. This multidimensional approach reveals that experience is a comprehensive phenomenon that impacts the individual's emotions, bodily reactions, thought processes, and existential interpretations (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Individuals want to share the experiences they have gained during their travels with their close circles and narrate what they have lived (Gretzel et al., 2006; Willson & McIntosh, 2007). Tourists with positive experiences prefer the same touristic product and destination again (Uşaklı & Yüksel, 2021).

To understand the motivations affecting tourist experiences, it is essential to focus on the travel motivations of backpackers. In this context, studies on the travel motivations of backpackers have been examined. Ross (1997) revealed that various factors effectively shape tourist motivations. These factors, especially the sense of achievement and the feeling of control over environmental conditions, stand out for backpackers. These findings emphasize the complex interaction of psychological and environmental elements that affect tourists' travel experiences and preferences. This multidimensional

structure of travel motivations is essential in shaping tourists' decisions, from destination choices to travel styles and overall travel experiences.

Mohsin and Ryan (2003) obtained interesting results in their research which looked at the motivations, behaviors, and satisfaction of backpackers who were visiting the Northern Territory of Australia. It was found that the foremost reason backpackers had for coming to this area was their desire for enhanced cognition. The above result is to be found in one of the backpacker traits which is being generally prone to the exploration of places and learning about the different cultures in them.

Jensen and Hjalager (2018) executed a survey with the aim of determining the primary driving forces of backpacking. According to the authors, the most important motivational factors that were identified are stimulation, host-site involvement, and nature. However, against them, factors like sun and beach, gastronomic experiences, recognition, and volunteering had the lowest rating of motivation. The investigation of these findings is important as they help us to identify the factors that influence the minds of tourists as well as the ways in which tourists change their manners of traveling.

Uriely et al. (2002) classified the motivations of backpackers into 4 groups: experimental-experiential, humanistic, recreational-hedonistic, and multi-purpose. This classification identifies the reasons for travel and the kinds of experiences that backpackers look for. Torres Luque and Araya (2024) divided the motivations of Chinese backpackers who come to Chile into three main groups: enjoyment of nature, getting away from the routine, and recognizing cultural heritage. These groups give us an example of how travelers may have different motives and objectives when they go on a trip.

Theories of travel motivations are a multifaceted basis for understanding the travel experience of tourists who walk the Lycian Way. These theories help us to analyze the driving forces behind tourists' motivations, expectations, and experiences, as well as to get the information needed for the launch of new destinations and marketing efficiency. Especially, by taking into account the theoretical approach and applying it to the Lycian Way, it will assist in getting a comprehensive understanding of the route and why the tourists prefer this route over others.

Literature Review

Hiking the Lycian Way was subjected to different investigations indicating the detailed motivation of the traveler at one time. Akgündüz and Kızılcıoğlu conducted a survey in 2016 with 407 participants. The study pertains to demographic characteristics, travel motivations released, and the level of satisfaction displayed by the tourists. It appears that tourists

on the Lycian Way undertook the walk for reasons such as socialization, independent travel, exploratory nature, escape from busy life to peace and enlightening', and self-actualization. Moreover, they discovered that on a hiking trip, travelers with socialization and self-actualization motivation have more chances of being more satisfied and more likely to revisit.

Tütüncü, Pamukçu, and Tarrisever (2020) collected the data through a survey that reached 416 hikers. The exploration revealed that hikers expressed satisfaction with the safety measures in the areas they visited. Nevertheless, the hikers made the hubbub point out the issues such as water scarcity, environmental pollution, and the lack of informative signs. Kurar and Kavacak (2022) choose the Lycian Way to act through an alternative channel. The researchers examined the Lycian Way as a leisure activity and collected SWOT data from 12 representatives of various sectors. The internal environment analysis pointed out that amongst the assets could be counted the historical, cultural, and natural areas, along with the rich vegetation of that region. When it came to the external environment analysis, it was defined as being one of the alternative tourism centers, and the existence of empty buildings that can be turned into touristic areas was seen. However, the study also identified ignorance, insufficient security, and seasonal impacts as potential threats.

In conclusion, these researches present that not only are the reasons for the interest of tourists for the Lycian Way diverse, but also they have a big impact on their service experiences. The results of these studies are useful for the Lycian Way's actions and marketing.

The literature review shows that different data collection methods have been used in studies to determine backpackers' experiences. Sørensen (2003) used the participant observation method to examine the experiences of backpackers from Denmark. Although collecting data through observation can be time-consuming, this method offers the chance to experience daily life from the tourists' perspective. This ethnographic study suggests using a cultural concept to understand backpackers' social interactions, norms, and values. The results show that backpackers are a heterogeneous group and that this group forms an identity through social interactions. The concept of "road status" is an essential phenomenon in understanding the culture of backpackers. Road status includes paying local prices, finding the best deals, and experiencing dangerous adventures. This status is continuously reproduced through social interaction and status exchange among backpackers (Sørensen, 2003).

Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002) used in-depth interview techniques to examine the experiences of Israeli backpackers. While using interview techniques in

qualitative research methods limits the sample size, it allows tourists to describe their experiences in their own words, thus providing rich and detailed data. The research found that some backpackers described their travels as a period of rest, while others saw it as an opportunity to expand their knowledge and explore their souls. Similarly, Maoz (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with 25 backpackers. The study shows that the travel motivations of backpackers are shaped by the desire to escape from home and build a new identity. Noy (2004) analyzed the data through narrative analysis based on in-depth interviews conducted with 40 backpackers in Israel in 1998. The results show that the travels of backpackers play an essential role in personal change and identity construction. Participants stated that their travels helped them to know themselves better and become more mature individuals. The narratives emphasize how travel's authentic and adventurous moments are connected to internal change.

These studies demonstrate how different methodologies are used to examine backpackers' experiences. Each methodology has advantages and disadvantages, and researchers generally try to choose the method or combination of methods that best suits the aims of their studies.

This study used data from user reviews on the online platform Google Maps to understand the experiences of backpackers walking the Lycian Way. Online platforms provide a large amount of data, allowing researchers to conduct large-scale analyses. These data can be used to examine various aspects of tourist experiences—satisfaction levels, complaints, suggestions, and expectations.

This study aims to deeply examine backpackers' experiences walking the Lycian Way and reveal various dimensions of these experiences. Using data obtained from user reviews on online platforms like Google Maps, a comprehensive analysis of the Lycian Way experiences of backpackers will be presented. This research aims to contribute to the backpacking tourism literature and provide new insights into understanding tourist experiences, specifically on the Lycian Way. The study's findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for destination managers, tourism businesses, and policymakers, making the Lycian Way a more attractive and satisfying experience for backpackers. Additionally, methodological contributions regarding online user reviews in tourism research are expected. This study presents a holistic analysis of the multidimensional experience of backpackers walking the Lycian Way.

Research Area

The Lycian Way is a marked hiking route in southern Turkey, stretching from Fethiye to Antalya and totaling 760 km. Walking this route takes an average of

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29 days. The path mainly consists of Roman roads, ancient trails, and mule paths; it is often rocky and stony, thus unsuitable for mountain biking. Located between the coast and the mountains, this route frequently includes steep elevations. British/Turkish amateur historian Kate Clow researched, designed, and marked it in 1999. As Turkey's first long-distance hiking route, the Lycian Way was created to identify and preserve some of Turkey's ancient roads. The route's starting point is in Ölüdeniz, which is 2 hours away from Dalaman Airport. The endpoint is Geyikbayırı, accessible by bus from Antalya. The best times for hiking are the spring (February–May) and autumn (September–November). The summer months can be too hot for long walks in Lycia. Hikers can find many places to camp near water sources (Culture Routes Society, 2024).

Methodology

Data collection from online platforms is becoming an increasingly common and valuable method in tourism research. These platforms provide a rich data source where tourists can directly share their experiences and opinions. Online user reviews offer significant advantages, reflecting tourists' experiences and providing a broad sample (Ayeh et al., 2013). These online platforms' reliability and widespread use make them an attractive data source for tourism researchers (O'Connor, 2010). Additionally, data obtained from such platforms can provide in-depth insights into tourists' behaviors, preferences, and satisfaction levels (Fileri et al., 2015). In this study, a total of 2008 user reviews from 2018 to 2024 were analyzed using document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. The reviews were collected from Google Maps on August 5, 2024. Of the 2008 user reviews, 994 were excluded from the analysis as they only contained rating scores. The Lycian Way appeals to backpackers by nature. In this context, the comments obtained are assumed to belong to backpacker tourists. The Lycian Way is an ideal destination for backpackers due to its challenging terrain, long distances, and the camping and hiking equipment that usually needs to be carried. These characteristics make the Lycian Way typically preferred by independent and flexible backpackers in search of nature and adventure. The accommodation and logistical options along the route are generally geared towards low-budget backpackers. In addition, the promotion and tourist attractiveness of the region is often done in a way that attracts backpackers. In this context, Google reviews frequently employ backpacker vernacular and themes pertinent to their experiences, indicative of their journeys.

Document analysis is a qualitative research method involving the extraction of information from carefully examined written materials that report on a speci-

fic phenomenon or several phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This method enables researchers to examine extant sources, saving time and resources, and reach a broad sample (Bowen, 2009). Historical research, policy analyses, and educational research frequently employ document analysis (Merriam, 1988). This method calls for the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of documents and visual materials that are relevant to the research topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The availability of data, cost effectiveness, and retrieving original document are some of the advantages of document analysis (Bowen, 2009).

Following the criteria set by Guba in 1981 ensured the study's reliability. The audit trail method was integrated into this model to strengthen the study's comprehensibility. In this process, a proficient external research auditor properly examined and reported the findings of the study, analysis, and the used methodologies. He carried out a verification procedure and also justified the integrity of the data obtained with the contents of these sections. The point of this operation is to heighten the process of the research's trustworthiness. The detailed explanation of the methodology and the stages of the research also improves the clarity and replication of the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this enables other researchers to replicate the study. The data collection, processing, analysis, interpretation, and concluding processes were clearly defined. As Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) state, these clear definitions increase the reliability of the research and support the robustness of the findings. Thus, the scientific quality and validity of the study were strengthened. Considering all these explanations, it can be said that the study meets the reliability criteria. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the questions suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 279-280) were answered. The methodology and other stages of the research were described in detail and clearly. The processes of collecting, processing, analyzing, interpreting and interpreting the data and obtaining the results were clearly stated. The results are linked to the data, and the researcher clearly states the methods used to collect the data. The researcher remained independent of personal biases and assumptions. Diverse views and alternative interpretations were taken into account. The raw data are available for review by other researchers. During the data analysis process, the researcher carefully read all the reviews. Expert support was sought for reviews in Russian and Ukrainian. The reviews were documented separately and transferred to a qualitative data analysis program to initiate the analysis process. Different researchers voluntarily participated in the data coding process and compared the coding.

Findings

In this study, which addresses the experiences of backpacking tourists walking the Lycian Way, four categories and eight themes were obtained from data analysis. Table 1 shows each category, theme, and

the sub-themes under each theme. The naming of the categories was inspired by the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998). The meanings contained in the categories and themes are presented in detail in the findings section.

Table 1. Experience Dimensions and Themes of the Lycian Way

Categories	Theme	Sub-theme
Emotional Dimension	Admiration and Awe	Breathtaking landscapes - Admiration of natural beauty - A sense of adventure and excitement
	Relaxation and Renewal	A sense of peace and calm - Escape from the stress of everyday life
	Emotional Experiences	Swimming in cool mountain waters - Feeling the fresh air and pine scents - Enjoying local food and drinks
Physical Dimension	Physical Difficulty	Challenging hiking and climbing- Endurance of difficult terrain- Sense of physical achievement
Intellectual Dimension	Learning and Discovery	Explore historical sites and ruins - Learn about local culture and traditions - Develop hiking and nature skills
	Reflection and Contemplation	Time for introspection and self-discovery - Gain new perspectives - Appreciate simple living
Spiritual Dimension	Connection with Nature	A sense of oneness with the natural environment - A sense of the sublime and transcendent - Gratitude for the beauty of the Earth
	Personal Development	Overcoming challenges strengthens character - A sense of renewal and transformation - A sense of achievement and pride

Emotional Dimension

Pine and Gilmore (1999) emphasize the importance of emotional engagement in creating lasting memories and generating economic value, highlighting that experiences are inherently personal and exist only in the individual’s mind (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Chan & Saikim, 2022). The emotional dimension is significant in forming loyalty and image in tourism experiences (Joy et al., 2021). The Emotional Dimension category articulates the emotional and sensory facets of backpacking visitors’ experiences traversing the Lycian Way. This category includes tourists’ emotions, moods, and inner experiences during the walk. The main topics of this category are the wonder and amazement that nature’s beauty triggers, the pleasure of the hike that the walk provides, and

the sensations made by sense organs that are parts of the emotional process.

Admiration and Awe

The Admiration and Awe theme expresses the deep admiration and respect felt by backpacking tourists walking the Lycian Way in the face of the magnificent beauty of nature. This theme encompasses the astonishment and admiration experienced by hikers in the face of breathtaking views, the enthusiasm felt when encountering natural beauties, and the sense of adventure and excitement experienced throughout the journey. It shows that tourists are deeply affected by the enchanting impact of the natural beauties around them.

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"My fifth visit, and one of the rare places where I walk with peace every time. For the first time, I also entered the canyon water, which is priceless, especially in this heat of Antalya." (Participant 14, July 6, 2019)

"A dream-like walking place in magnificent nature... Natural waterfalls and ponds are magnificent. The path starting from Göynük Canyon is the most beautiful of colors: blue, green, and others. The mountains and rocks are perfect. Must be seen." (Participant 439, February 7, 2021)

"A route that will enchant you with its incredible nature, with green on one side and blue on the other. Definitely, a trail that must be walked; all you need is your backpack, tent, and a good travel companion." (Participant 52, January 31, 2023)

These statements reflect the profound impact of the natural beauties of the Lycian Way on users and the feelings of admiration and awe that these beauties evoke in them.

Relaxation and Renewal

The Relaxation and Renewal theme expresses the feeling of physical and mental refreshment experienced by backpacking tourists walking the Lycian Way. This theme encompasses the relaxation and peace that hikers find by spending time in nature, away from the stress of daily life. It also indicates that the time spent in the tranquility and beauty of nature helps tourists clear their minds and gain spiritual calmness.

"Peaceful, calm, relaxing..." (Participant 377, May 12, 2022)

"A place to cool off in hot weather." (Participant 525, September 1, 2019)

These statements reflect the opportunities for relaxation and renewal offered by the Lycian Way and the peace and tranquility felt by hikers during these experiences.

Emotional Experiences

The Emotional Experiences theme refers to the various emotional experiences of backpacking tourists walking the Lycian Way during their journey. This topic is about different emotions that visitors have when they are in the park: calmness they feel from nature, the adventure they encounter, and the achievement they receive from facing challenges. Cultural elements encountered along the way.

"It's a really nice place that we were hiking along with our two-year-old baby for, like, two hours and that was the most fun we've ever had with nature." (Participant 13, January 19, 2021).

"My 535-kilometer journey in my imagination is just this path. I shall do my very best to carry the process out from the beginning to the very end the whole of

time this life is in this body." (Participant 15, October 4, 2021).

These are the utterances of the participants who felt the deepest-most powerful emotional experiences that they dealt with while they were walking the Lycian Way and the emotions that those experiences stirred in them. Walking is not just a form of movement it is a complex set of emotions and interactions which can be reframed by personal, social, and natural elements. Appreciating the emotional aspects of walking can promote friendliness and create rewarding emotional moments during walking activities.

Physical Dimension

The Physical Dimension category deals with the Lycian Way's physical effects on hikers and their bodily experiences. This section of the test confronts the issues of the trail's toughness, the amount of physical endurance needed, the track conditions, and the landscape features. The matter of the route's appeal on the proposed fitness level, the stiffness of the walk, and the ways of coping with the tasks are, as well as those, what are involved in the testing process. Besides, the dimension also introduces the physical dimensions such as the differences in the soil, the wetness levels, and the traversing time of the path. This area is the most important one, as it helps us to grasp the way one can feel the Lycian Way physically and how people react to it.

Physical Difficulty

The Physical Difficulty theme explores the effects and requirements of the Lycian Way on hikers. This theme discusses the length and the hardness of the route, the level of the endurance one should keep, and the target places' difficulty. It assesses the sustainability of the way based on the fitness levels of the hikers, the roughness of the terrain's structure worsening of the elements such as the climate. Additionally, it takes a look at the impacts of long-distance hikes on the body, the endurance levels and damage, as well as the ways to overcome the challenges. This theme is the most important one for the nature of the Lycian Way experience and the necessary hikers' preparation.

"I have a suggestion for those of you who want to trek from Adrasan to Olympos. Commence walking from Adrasan and go towards Olympos. The slope is more gentle. We goofily got off from Olympos to Adrasan. The climbing of the steep hill was really exhausting..." (Participant 21, January 4, 2020)

"It offers a unique experience for those who trust their feet." (Participant 40, January 26, 2023)

In addition to these statements, many comments include the words "difficulty—hard." These expressions describe the physical challenges of the Lycian Way for hikers and how to cope with these challenges.

ges. The theme of physical challenge emphasizes the bodily impacts and demands of the Lycian Way on hikers. The route requires hikers to have high endurance and good physical condition, as the terrain and climate conditions can be challenging. The variations in elevation along the hiking trail directly affect the hikers' experience, while the fatigue and strain levels brought about by long-distance hikes must also be considered. To cope with these challenges, hikers must prepare well and develop strategies.

Intellectual Dimension

The intellectual dimension aims to offer customers rich experiences on mental and cognitive levels (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). This dimension signifies that experiences are enriched physically, emotionally, and mentally, allowing for deeper and more meaningful experiences. The intellectual dimension includes the impact of the Lycian Way experience on hikers' cognitive and mental functions. This category examines the contributions of historical, cultural, and ecological elements along the path to the cognitive frameworks of hikers. Hikers' intellectual development increases from the knowledge they have gained about ancient sites, indigenous cultures, and biological diversity. The tests and new meetings lead to the problem-solving and creative thinking of the children. The hiking route not only comprises the understanding of the broader scope of things such as cultural diversity and ecological principles but also the realization of the interaction of nature and mankind. For this reason, the Intellectual Dimension explores such components of the Lycian Way phenomenon as the mental horizon expansions and enhance the cognitive capacities of hikers.

Learning and Discovery

The Learning and Discovery theme involves the cognitive and intellectual development of the hikers as they make their trek along the Lycian Way. This topic covers knowledge, discoveries, and insights that travelers have gained from old sites seen, cultures, and nature around during their travel. It includes acquiring information in diverse domains, including history, archeology, botany, geology, and regional cultures. Additionally, it addresses how this new knowledge and experience expands and enriches the worldviews of travelers. The Learning and Discovery theme emphasizes that the Lycian Way experience is not just a physical activity but also a rich intellectual and cultural exploration process.

"On one side, the endless blue of the Mediterranean appears and disappears along the way; on the other side, lush pine forests, magnificent mountain views, and ancient cities witness history..." (Participant 53, April 13, 2022).

"...Some sections of the Lycian Way are suitable

for mountain biking. In some places, experienced downhill and single-track enthusiasts can carry their bikes on their backs and traverse the entire trail. However, it is also possible to use alternative forest and village roads that are partly on and parallel to the Lycian Way." (Participant 20, May 23, 2023)

These quotes highlight the various learning experiences and discoveries encountered by hikers along the Lycian Way. They demonstrate the rich learning opportunities the Lycian Way offers, including historical ruins, natural landscapes, and different ways to explore the route.

Reflection and Contemplation

The Reflection and Contemplation theme encompasses the inner journeys and mental processes of hikers experiencing the Lycian Way. This theme includes the moments of deep thinking and contemplation experienced by travelers when alone with nature, their existential inquiries, and personal insights. This theme focuses on hikers distancing themselves from the chaos of daily life, turning inward in the silence of nature, contemplating the meaning of life, and feeling a spiritual connection. Additionally, it includes experiences of contemplating past civilizations among historical ruins, reflecting on the cycle of nature, and pondering the transience of human life. This theme demonstrates that the Lycian Way is a mental and spiritual journey.

"Cengiz Aytmatov has a very beautiful saying. There are not enough words to explain everything, nor is there a need... I don't have enough words to describe the Lycian Way..." (Participant 67, November 1, 2023)

"To feel the mystery of the Lycian land, the endless blue of the Mediterranean, the summit of Mount Tahtalı, the nomads collecting thyme in the mountains, the bitter taste of carob, solitude, nature, and tranquility, one needs to experience the adventure of the Lycian Way within time and space." (Participant 411, October 6, 2021)

These statements reflect that walking on the Lycian Way and being alone with nature lead to moments of deep thinking and contemplation, allowing hikers to reflect on past civilizations and the beauties of nature. Reflecting on past civilizations among historical ruins and contemplating themes such as the cycle of nature and human life's transience deepens this journey's spiritual dimension. The Lycian Way offers a physical, mental, and spiritual adventure.

Spiritual Dimension

The spiritual dimension aims to provide customers with profound spiritual and emotional experiences. This dimension seeks to enrich customers' experiences physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, offering more meaningful and authentic experien-

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ces. From a tourism perspective, the spiritual dimension aims to make experiences more meaningful by providing customers with inner satisfaction and spiritual fulfillment.

So the point of the category is to deal with the heart, the spirit, the whole existence of people through the Lycian Way. The close bond of individuals with natural things, experiences of quietness and the calmness they had and their personal evaluations of themselves and understanding are under the spiritual dimension. This also covers the the spiritual bond established with past civilizations among historical ruins, reflections on the cycle of nature, and thoughts on the transience of human life. Spiritual Dimension is the sum of lunging, existential curiosity, and manifesting of the inner self that a hiker may partake in when one is faced with the daily humdrum and seeks a quiet space in a natural environment.

Connection with Nature

The Connection with Nature theme is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing the physical, emotional, and spiritual interactions that hikers establish with the natural environment along the Lycian Way. This theme examines the existential experience of humans within nature and the inner transformations this experience creates.

"You feel at the heart of nature with the enchanting beauty of forest, mountain, and sea views. It is a route that must be walked." (Participant 61, November 28, 2023)

"On the road from the mountains to the sea, it is ours as long as we can protect it." (Participant 552, June 20, 2022)

"Perfect scenery intertwined with nature, crystal clear flowing water." (Participant 227, August 11, 2020)

"One of the most beautiful places I have seen and visited in my life. The natural life is unspoiled and peaceful, and I recommend that everyone go there at least once in their lifetime. It is a great place to clear your mind and be one with nature." (Participant 355, June 6, 2024)

These quotes emphasize the deep connection hikers establish with nature on the Lycian Way, the beauty of the landscapes, and the feeling of being in the natural environment.

Personal Development

Within the framework of the Lycian Way experience, the Personal Development topic includes the transforming experiences individuals have throughout a nature hike that tests their physical and mental boundaries. This subject encompasses the enhancement of self-awareness, the cultivation of skills to surmount problems, the fortification of character characteristics such as patience and perseverance,

the formation of a bond with nature, and the achievement of inner tranquility. It encompasses aspects such as the experience of minimalist living, the cultivation of empathy and communication skills through social interactions, and the transformation of life perspectives.

"I believe it is an endeavor that everyone ought to undertake in their lifetime..." Participant 372, August 14, 2020

"The vistas are extraordinary, awe-inspiring at the summits, and excellent locations for meditation and spiritual purification." Participant 789, April 1, 2024

"An incredible place with an untouched atmosphere. You feel so small, and all your problems become insignificant." (Participant 808, October 20, 2020)

These statements show that the Lycian Way offers personal development experiences such as overcoming challenges, personal transformation, and a sense of accomplishment.

Conclusion

This study seeks to thoroughly investigate the experiences of hikers traversing the Lycian Way. Following the examination of user reviews sourced from the Google Maps platform, tourists' experiences were categorized into four primary dimensions: emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. These categories thoroughly represent the many experiences of tourists, consistent with the experience levels outlined in Pine and Gilmore's "Welcome to the Experience Economy," published in the Harvard Business Review in 1998. The experiences provided by the Lycian Way throughout the four primary dimensions enhance the comprehensiveness and validity of the feelings. In the emotional dimension, the feelings of admiration and peace that visitors feel in the face of natural beauty stand out. These emotions represent the connection of tourists with nature at a deeply emotional level and escapism from the turbulences of everyday life. In the physical aspect, obstacles along the way and the actual experience of overcoming them make it possible for the participants to see how far they can go with respect to their physical strength. This is a tour during which people get to know themselves better instead of simply being passengers. On the intellectual level, the Lycian Way is like an open book on the history of these places and a great place to learn and interact with people from different cultures. This openness, in return, to the tourist's perspective and the consequent diverse experiences they have of different ways of thinking or living, changes and affects them positively. In the spiritual dimension, the relationship between man and nature and their inner growth are of ultimate importance for their personal development and spiritual realization. The research results confirm the Lycian Way to be a vibrant area and an

experience that changes people in many ways—mentally, intellectually and even spiritually. Furthermore, these discoveries are beneficial both to managing the destination, and the tourism market development through directing their marketing efforts, and also in which way to uplift the Lycian Way and make it a positive experience. Besides, it lays out locuses for future studies on the intensity and pattern of the effects of the Lycian Way on the local community and the economy.

Emotional Dimension group emotions of the purposefulness of silence, the mind-defying capabilities or mindfulness, happiness, self-renewal, and comfort, are some of the most evident ones. The finding is in agreement with those retrieved by Akgündüz and Kızılcıoğlu (2016) who underscore natural tranquility as a significant drive. Also, these findings corroborate the literature on the experiential motivation mentioned by Pereira and Silva (2018). The Physical Dimension category identified factors that have different effects on the route and make it challenging for the tourists to reach the end. This point consistent the study by Tütüncü, Pamukçu, and Tanrısever (2020), who pointed out the difficulties hikers face. The Intellectual Dimension category, by contrast, emphasized the range of potential educational and discovery opportunities one can take at the Lycian Way. This is in tune with the aspiration for authentic experiences mentioned by Tomljenović et al. (2015). Furthermore, the theme of contemplation and reflection embodies the psychological and spiritual journey that this path pursues. The Spiritual Dimension category revealed the tourists' qualities of oneness with nature and their personal development experiences. These outcomes are akin to Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai's (2002) thoughts on the transfiguring power of backpackers' encounters. The findings of this study reveal the multidimensional and transformative nature of the Lycian Way experience. Tourists' experiences go beyond being merely a physical activity, encompassing emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. This agrees with Moscardo's (2017) idea about the multifaceted nature of tourist experiences.

The study comprehensively analyzes backpackers' experiences on the Lycian Way. This analysis reveals not only the physical challenges of the route but also its emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. In particular, the tourists' deep connection with nature and personal growth experiences are unique findings of this study. Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four impressions (emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual) were applied in the tourism context. These impressions also formed the dimensions of the research and showed how effective they can be in understanding tourism experiences. The effectiveness of these four impressions in clarifying the Lycian Way experience provides a basis for their broader use in trekking research as a form of tourism.

The study employed internet user reviews to obtain more authentic and diverse data by capturing tourists' unfiltered and spontaneous viewpoints. This strategy facilitated the involvement of a broader sample compared to traditional survey or interview procedures. Within the scope of practical suggestions within the scope of the study, considering that the Lycian Way offers a four-dimensional (emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual) experience, activities and services on the route can be designed to strengthen these dimensions. For example, scenic spots can be created to emphasize natural beauty for the emotional dimension; alternative routes can be offered according to difficulty levels for the physical dimension; historical and cultural information boards can be increased for the intellectual dimension, and meditation and yoga areas can be created for the spiritual dimension. Customized route suggestions and activities can be offered according to different tourist profiles. Environmentally friendly practices (recycling points, eco-lodging options, etc.) can be increased to protect the natural beauty of the route. Projects can be developed to increase the participation of local people in tourism. Security measures on the route can be increased, and emergency contact points can be established. Special events (e.g., winter walks and photography tours) can be organized to make the route attractive during low seasons. Theoretically, longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine the long-term transformative effects of the Lycian Way experience on tourists. New methodological approaches can be developed to analyze tourist comments on social media and online platforms. Studies can be conducted comparing the Lycian Way experiences of tourists from different cultures. How the Lycian Way can be used as a model for sustainable tourism can be investigated. The effects of trekking and long-distance routes on psychological health can be examined in more detail. Future research can examine the long-term effects of these experiences and possible differences among different tourist profiles. Comprehensive studies can be conducted to measure the impact of the Lycian Way on the regional economy. These recommendations aim to place the study's findings in a broader context and advance both practical applications and academic research.

Among the study's limitations are the collection of data only from the Google Maps platform and examining reviews from only a specific period. Future research can overcome these limitations by including different online platforms and covering a more extended period. Additionally, quantitative data can support qualitative findings for a more comprehensive analysis.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature and practical applications by revealing the multidimensional and transformative nature of backpackers' experiences walking the Lycian Way. The stud-

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y's findings show that the Lycian Way is not just a hiking route but also a platform offering profound emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experiences. These results provide new perspectives on sustainable tourism and experience-oriented destination management.

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