

## The Ecotourism Perception of Graduate and Postgraduate Tourism Students for Antalya Destination

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### Abstract

Ecotourism, a new term in tourism literature, is defined as an approach that sustains using natural sources while preserving them in the context of ensuring their sustainability and accordingly economic development of local residents by providing them tourism activities while preventing from natural, social and cultural degradation. The comprehension of ecotourism phenomenon plays an important role for tourism students especially for the ones who are going to take part in decision maker positions in the future.

The present study is aimed to explore Akdeniz University undergraduate and postgraduate students' perception of ecotourism and Antalya destination. The questionnaire contains 24 items to measure students' vacation preferences, their considerations about ecotourism and ecotourism perceptions for Antalya destination. The questionnaire is administered to a total of 227 tourism students, 197 undergraduate, 30 postgraduate. Data gathered from 227 students are tested with specific statistical analyses methods and the results are considered as beneficial for the literature. According to the results, 53.3% of participants define ecotourism as "a tourism that explains nature and teaches it practically" and 47.1% of them define it as "a tourism that includes nature trips and related activities". It is determined that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of students who have participated in ecotourism activities before and the perception of the ones who haven't. In addition, the perception mean of the students who have participated in ecotourism activities is higher than the perception mean of the others.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism; Tourism students; Tourism education; Antalya destination

### Introduction

The change in the consumption demands of the tourists has caused to occur studies about varying touristic products and alternative tourism types emulously to the "sea-sand-sun" concept [1]. As a result of the local people's renting their own homes to the tourists who came to Alps, ecotourism (it is suggested by Hector Ceballos – Lascrain) has occurred and it means "getting pleasure from nature and know the value of the nature" [2].

Ecotourism which is a type of tourism bases on increasing awareness about protecting the nature and cultural differences and creating alternative work areas for local people, has the least affects on physical, economical and sociocultural environment [3]. In the Turkey's Tourism Strategy 2023 which is featured by The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, they give an importance to ecotourism and mentioned about some plans in this area [4]. This study consists of four main parts; literature search, methods, findings and results and suggestions.

### Ecotourism

As a result of the change in the consumption demands of the tourists after 1990s has caused to occur ecotourism which is more sustainable than mass tourism as environmentally and culturally. The tourism types such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, trekking, nature tourism, agrotourism, conference tourism, health and spa tourism, religious tourism, adventure and sports tourism have become upward trends in recent years [4]. The concept of special interest tourism is used as the synonym of trip, social tourism, ecotourism, educational tourism, environment tourism and sustainable tourism concepts [5].

United Nations Economic and Social Council declared the year 2002 as the "Year of International Ecotourism" [6]. Within the frame of

Year of International Ecotourism, World Tourism Organization made a search in Germany, Canada, Spain, Italy and England and it showed us that the tourists who are interested in ecotourism are ranging in age from 30 to 59, high income earner, highly trained, interested in gastronomy and culture [1].

International Tourism Community defines the ecotourism as "the tourism which protects the environment, increases the welfare level of local people and is sensitive to the natural areas" [2]. In their study while Kasalak and Akinci [3] defining the ecotourism as "the tourism which protects the environment, increases the welfare level of local people and a travel to the natural areas. Ceylan [7] defines it as a strategy which helps in protecting the natural settlements and developing the local people.

Ecotourism is seen like a bridge between the ecotourists and the local people because it helps local people economically and so they give importance to their own cultural values and protect them. Also, they interact with each other socioculturally. If ecotourism is planned correctly, economic, environmental and sociocultural negative effects can be decreased [3]. In some studies about ecotourism, it is determined that there are two types of ecotourism; soft ecotourism and hard ecotourism. According to Weaver ve Opperman the ideal

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**Received** January 02, 2017; **Accepted** January 21, 2017; **Published** January 28, 2017

**Citation:** Günay I, Akinci Z (2017) The Ecotourism Perception of Graduate and Postgraduate Tourism Students for Antalya Destination. J Tourism Hospit 6: 264. doi: 10.4172/2167-0269.1000264

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one is hard ecotourism in which participants contact with the nature intensively and in long term. On the other hand, soft ecotourism is a type of tourism in which participants contact with the nature in short term but more frequently. In the study of Weaver [8], the differences between the soft ecotourism and hard ecotourism are shown in the Table 1 [2].

Bozok and Özdemir Yılmaz [2] said that ecotourism would be unimaginable, if it was not sustainable. Cause it has occurred due to sustainability principles and so it is the key concept for the sustainable tourism.

### Antalya and the tourism

In Antalya the tourism sector has started to improve since 1960s, and it became the most important tourism destination with its natural and human geography properties in both Turkey and the World [9]. By year 2015, 41.617.000 [10] tourists have come to Turkey and 11.911.000 tourists have come to Antalya [11]. As it also understood from these results, 28.62 percent of the total tourists who visit Turkey come to Antalya. So, three out of every ten tourists come to Antalya. Antalya has a lot of natural beauties such as beaches, caves, national parks, forests, fountains, lakes, highlands and mountains [12].

Antalya is in Western Mediterranean Region and in this area it enables investment opportunities for rural and ecologic agriculture with its uncorrupted nature, wide flora and endless welcomeness. So, this area provides a basis for variable ecotourism activities. Some of these activities are; trekking, photo safari, agritourism, ornitotourism, observation of plants and animals, diving, rafting, spelaeology, paragliding, sailing and gastronomy [13].

### Objectives of the study

In this study the researchers tried to find the answers of the question stated below.

- a) What are the holiday preferences of the undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- b) What does it mean the concept “ecotourism” for them?
- c) Why do the people prefer ecotourism?

What is the perception level of tourism students about the ecotourism in Antalya?

### Materials and Methods

The research conducted is one of the quantitative research methods.

Hard (Active, Deep)	Soft (Passive, Shallow)
Strong environmental commitment	Moderate or superficial environmental commitment
Enhance sustainability	Steady state sustainability
Specialized trips	Multi-purpose trips
Long trips	Short trips
Small groups	Larger groups
Physically active	Physically passive
Physical challenge	Physical comfort
No services expected	Services expected
Deep interaction with nature	Shallow interaction with nature
Emphasis on personal experience	Emphasis on mediation
Make own travel arrangements	Rely on travel agent and tour operators

Source: Weaver 2001

**Table 1:** The differences between soft ecotourism and hard ecotourism.

The quantitative research is a type of research in which pre-prepared questions are used to make quantitative comments and generalization. In this research type by using samples, quantitative results are obtained which represent the universe. And so, statistical and mathematical analyses can be made about these results.

This research investigates the perception of Akdeniz University Faculty of Tourism Grade 3 and Grade 4 students and Institute of Social Sciences Department of Tourism and Hotel Management postgraduate students about ecotourism in Antalya. The survey method was used to collect required data. The questions were prepared literally by using the master thesis of Tas [14]. This survey is 2 pages and consists of 24 questions. The first four questions are about the demographic properties of the students. The other questions are like that: How often do they travel? With whom do they travel? What were the purposes of their travelling? What does “ecotourism” mean for them? Have they ever experienced ecotourism? And if they have experienced, what kind of ecotourism activities have they preferred?

On the second page, the students were asked to answer 15 questions by using five point likert scale “1 - strongly disagree and 5 - strongly agree”. In this study the participants were Akdeniz University Faculty of Tourism Grade 3 and Grade 4 students and Institute of Social Sciences Department of Tourism and Hotel Management postgraduate students. The number of the population in these departments was 859 in 2014-2015 Academic Years. The survey is conducted on a voluntary basis and the number of the participants were 227. According to Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan [15], at least 204 participants are enough among 859 students. If parametric analyses will be made, at least 30 participants should be in each group [16,17].

The population and the samples were determined by searching and investigating the data via survey method. The results were analyzed via SPSS program. Within the frames of this research, the data related to demographic factors were evaluated via using frequency, percent values and arithmetic means. The T-test and ANOVA analysis were used to determine whether the perception of the students about ecotourism vary due to their demographic properties or not.

### The hypotheses of the research

This research includes the hypotheses related to the perception of tourism students about ecotourism.

**H<sub>1</sub>** There is a significant difference between the gender of tourism students and their perception of ecotourism.

**H<sub>2</sub>** There is a significant difference between the age of tourism students (20-25, 26 and over) and the perception of ecotourism.

**H<sub>3</sub>** There is a significant difference between tourism students' situation to attend in ecotourism activities and their perceptions of ecotourism.

**H<sub>4</sub>** There is a significant difference between education of tourism students (Grade 3, Grade 4 and postgraduate) and their ecotourism perceptions.

### Results

This section includes the findings derived from the survey questionnaire conducted for the present research. In order to analyze the data obtained from the survey, different statistical methods were used.

In order to determine socio-demographic characteristics of those

who participated in the survey, participants are asked about their gender, age and level of education they study. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

54.2% (n=123) of our sample is composed of female participants; 78% (n=177) of the participants are between 20-25 years of age and 43.6% (n=99) of the sample is senior university students (Table 3).

In Tables 3-5, the data regarding the travel frequency of participants, with whom they travel, the purpose of travel, what the concept of ecotourism means for them, whether they engaged in ecotourism activity and in the case they did, their motives behind this preference are presented (Table 3).

39.6% (n=93) of our participants reported that they travel more than 3 times a year. When the answers given to the question “With whom do you travel?” are examined, it is seen that 45.8% (n=104) stated that they prefer travelling with their friends, while 38.3% (n=87) reported that they prefer traveling alone. When purposes of travel are questioned, it is seen that visiting acquaintance (n=102), holiday (sea-

sand-sun) (n=94), education (n=80), seeing natural beauties (n=67) and seeing cultural and historical attractions (n=40) are reported as purposes of travel respectively by 44.9%, 41.1%, 35.2%, 29.5% and 17.6% of the participants (Table 4).

When the participants are asked to choose among the descriptions of ecotourism given to them, which they think best reflect the concept, it is seen that the descriptions that are chosen by the majority of the participants are the components of the ecotourism concept. The result that students who participated in the survey chose two descriptions which are utterly important descriptions for the concept of ecotourism shows that students are sensitive to environmental issues and environmentally conscious. Furthermore, only 31 respondents chose the statement that “a tourism which offers an expensive and fashionable travel”, which does not fit the description and nature of ecotourism concept shows that the concept is well understood by students (Taş 2012) (Table 5).

38.8% (n=88) of those who participated in the survey indicated that they engaged in eco-tourism activity before. Those who indicated that they engaged in eco-tourism activity before reported “being alone with the nature” (43.2%, n=38), “moving away from the city’s noise and fresh air” (37.5%, n=33), “curiosity” (31.8%, n=28), “experiencing a different holiday and getting rest” (30.7%, n=27), “passion of adventure” (29.5%, n=26), “learning about natural beauties of the region” (26.1%, n=23), “Perform activities i never done before” (25%, n=22) and “participate in transhumance activities and festivals” (21.6%, n=19) as the reasons for why they preferred ecotourism (Table 5).

In order to determine the mean and standard deviation of the statements of participants regarding their “perception of ecotourism”, for all of the subjects who participated in the survey (N=227), on the basis of their statements the mean and standard deviation were calculated and presented in Table 6.

According to the findings, among all statements, “For development of ecotourism in Antalya, the environment should be protected and monitored” (x=4.38) had the highest mean and it was followed by these statements respectively: “With its natural beauties, Antalya and its around is a suitable area for ecotourism” (x=4.26), “As well as ecotourism, Antalya has sufficient tourism potential in terms of other alternative types of tourism” (x=4.15). The statement that “In the region of Antalya, locals have negative attitudes toward tourists” had the lowest mean (x=2.72) (Table 6). Reliability analysis of the scale employed in the present research reveals Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.61, which shows that the scale is a reliable measure.

In order to investigate whether there is a significant difference between respondents’ perception of ecotourism and their gender, we conducted a t-test. Result of the analysis revealed no significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of their perception of ecotourism (p<0.05) (Table 7).

		N	%
Gender	Female	123	54.2
	Male	104	45.8
Age	Between 20-25 years of age	177	78.0
	26 and over	50	22.0
Level Of Education	Grade 3	98	43.2
	Grade 4	99	43.6
	Postgraduate	30	13.2
	Total	227	100.0

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

		N	%
How often do they travel?	More than 3 times a year	93	39.6
	2 times a year	49	20.9
	1 time per year	47	20
	3 times a year	38	16.2
	Total	227	100.0
With whom do you travel?	Friends	104	45.8
	Alone	87	38.3
	With my family	54	23.8
What were the purposes of their travelling?	Acquaintance visit	102	44.9
	Holiday (Sea - Sand - Sun)	94	41.4
	Education	80	35.2
	Seeing natural beauties	67	29.5
	Seeing cultural and historical attractions	40	17.6
	Business/Congress	33	14.5
	Health and thermal	31	13.7
Festival (Other)	1	0.4	

\*Expressions for multiple options marked in proportion to all participants (N=227).

Table 3: Travel preferences of participants.

		N	%
What does “ecotourism” mean for you?	A tourism type that explains nature and teaches it practically.	121	53.3
	A tourism type that includes nature trips and related activities.	107	47.1
	A tourism type that provides relief and escaping from stress	60	26.4
	A tourism type that helps to local and regional development.	49	21.6
	A tourism type that inconvenient, offering simple and straightforward , facilities.	40	17.6
	A tourism type that provides realization of sporting activities.	36	15.9
	A tourism which offers an expensive and fashionable travel.	31	13.7
*Expressions for multiple options marked in proportion to all participants (N=227).			

Table 4: Findings relevant to the literature.

		N	%
Have they ever experienced ecotourism?	No	139	61.2
	Yes	88	38.8
	Total	227	100.0
What kind of ecotourism activities have they preferred?	*Being alone with the nature	38	43.2
	*Moving away from the city's noise and fresh air	33	37.5
	*Curiosity	28	31.8
	*Experiencing a different holiday and getting rest	27	30.7
	*Passion of adventure	26	29.5
	*Learning about natural beauties of the region	23	26.1
	*Perform activities i never done before	22	25
	*Participate in transhumance activities and festivals	19	21.6
	*Discover yourself	18	20.5
	*To deal with mountaineering and extreme sports	15	17
	*Get to know the local people in the region and make new friends	13	14.8

\*Expressions for multiple options marked in proportion to those found in ecotourism activities (N=88)

**Table 5:** Participants' previous experience with ecotourism and the motives of those who engaged in ecotourism activities previously.

	Ort.	S.S.
1 With its natural beauties, Antalya and its around is a suitable area for ecotourism	4.26	0.76
2 As well as ecotourism, Antalya has sufficient tourism potential in terms of other alternative types of tourism.	4.15	0.82
3 Numbers of centre of attraction and tourist destinations are sufficient for the development of alternative tourism in Antalya..	3.80	1.07
4 The environment should be protected and monitored for development of ecotourism in Antalya.	4.38	0.79
5 Increasing of the numbers of protected areas around Antalya has contributed to the conservation of natural structures.	3.68	1.16
6 Necessary infrastructure and superstructure works are realized to to achieve the desired level of alternative forms of tourism bin Antalya.	3.41	1.05
7 Antalya and its surroundings are appropriate and sufficient access facilities for ecotourism.	3.48	1.10
8 More flights to domestic and international routes in Antalya and Gazipaşa Airports provide increasing of the alternative tourism potential in the region of Antalya.	3.97	0.98
9 The number of professional travel agencies which are interested in ecotourism and alternative forms of tourism is enough.	3.05	0.98
10 Promotion of Antalya destination and region is done enough for the introduction of alternative tourism in the region.	2.83	1.08
11 Recreational facilities in the transport network, services such as road signs and information boards are insufficient.	3.04	1.06
12 Antalya and its around existing facilities (infrastructure) and ecological accommodation was very limited.	3.04	0.89
13 In the region of Antalya, locals have negative attitudes toward tourists.	2.72	1.05
14 Guides are not equipped have not enough information about the historical, natural and cultural features of Antalya region.	3.05	0.84
15 Ministry of Tourism and Culture does not make enough publicity and information about ecotourism.	3.34	1.20
16 People have not enough information about Perception of Ecotourism	3.48	0.39

**Table 6:** Mean and standard deviations of participants' statements regarding their perception of ecotourism.

	Female (N=123)		Male (N=104)		p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perception of Ecotourism	3.49	0.35	3.47	0.44	0.784

**Table 7:** The effect of gender on the perception of ecotourism.

	20-25 age range (N=177)		26 and over (N=50)		p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perception of Ecotourism	3.49	0.39	3.46	0.41	0.612

**Table 8:** The effect of age on the perception of ecotourism.

In order to see whether there is a significant difference between the perception of ecotourism and the age of the participants, a t-test is conducted. The analysis revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of ecotourism between the participants who are in 20-25 age range and those who are at the age of 26 and over ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 8).

In order to see whether there is a significant difference between participant's perceptions of ecotourism and having an ecotourism experience a t-test is conducted. The analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in terms of the perception of

ecotourism between those who have previous ecotourism experience and those who did not engage in ecotourism activities before ( $p < 0.01$ ) (Table 9).

In order to compare the statements regarding the perception of ecotourism and the participants' level of education (university junior, senior and graduate student), analysis of variance (ANOVA) is conducted. In order to see which level of education produces this significant difference, Scheffe test is conducted.

As can be seen in Table 10, regarding the ecotourism perception

	Experienced (N=88)		Inexperienced (N=139)		p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perception of Ecotourism	3.58	0.35	3.42	0.41	0.003*

\*p<0.01

**Table 9:** The effect of previous experience with ecotourism on the perception of ecotourism.

	Educational Background			F	p	Significant Difference
	Grade 3 (N=98) (A)	Grade 4 (N=99) (B)	Postgraduate (N=30) (C)			
Perception of Ecotourism	3.58	3.38	3.51	6.75	0.001*	A – B

\*p<0.01

**Table 10:** The effect of education on the perception of ecotourism.

there is a difference between junior and senior university students, the analysis reveals no significant difference among other variables ( $p=0.001<0.01$ ).

## Discussion

Results and recommendations of this study, aimed to find the perception of ecotourism for Antalya destination of Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty's 3rd and 4th grade students and Tourism and Hotel Management Department of Social Sciences Institute's graduate students, can be summarized as follows;

In this study, students' answers of questions about holiday preferences are examined.

It is understood that a large number of students, more than 3 times, mostly with his friends and they go on a trip alone per year and their travel purpose are generally friendly visit, vacation (sea - sand - sun) and education. These results are expected when we consider the formation of the universe from students. Another question posed to the participants is their expression of ecotourism. More than half of the participants in the answers given to this question (53.3%) understand ecotourism as "a tourism that explains nature and teaches it practically" and another part of 47.1% understand ecotourism as "a tourism that includes nature trips and related activities". The answers overlap with the Tas's [14] study and students' high rate choices of these two options means that they are sensitive to environment, and they have high level of environmental awareness.

38.8% of the students who participated in this study, they state that they have participated in eco-tourism activities before. When we asked about preference reason or cause of eco-tourism to this participant the first five were located as "Being alone with the nature", "Moving away from the city's noise and fresh air", "curiosity", "Experiencing a different holiday and getting rest" and "passion for adventure". To test the hypothesis, the t-test (independent samples) and one way variance (ANOVA) analysis are used. The results of the hypothesis about the participants' perceptions of ecotourism (rejection/acceptance) are as follows:  $H_1$  hypothesis is rejected which in the form as: "There is a significant difference between the gender of tourism students and their perception of ecotourism". With this result, it was seen that there is no meaningful differences between students' genders and their perception of eco-tourism.  $H_2$  hypothesis in the form of "there is a significant difference between the age of tourism students (20-25, 26 and over) and the perception of ecotourism" is rejected. In this result as the  $H_1$ 's result, it was seen that there is no significant effect between students' ages and their perception of ecotourism.

It has been understood before that there is a significant difference

between participants who attended in ecotourism activities and who didn't attend. The average perception of ecotourism of participants who attended ecotourism activities was higher (3.58) than the average perception of ecotourism of participants who didn't attend any ecotourism activity (3.42). In the light of this result, hypothesis  $H_3$  which is "there is a significant difference between tourism students' situation to attend in ecotourism activities and their perceptions of ecotourism" has been accepted. According to ANOVA test has been done, there is a significant difference ( $p<0.01$ ) between 3rd grade and 4th grade students. It has emerged that 3rd class students' perceptions were higher than 4th grade students' perceptions of ecotourism activities. As a result, hypothesis  $H_4$  which is "there is a significant difference between education of tourism students (3rd grade, 4th grade and graduate) and their ecotourism perceptions" has been accepted.

## Conclusion

In the context of sustainable tourism, the recognition and applicability of ecotourism are of vital importance, as it stands out as a social, cultural and environmental alternative to mass tourism. This study attempts to reveal the perceptions of ecotourism among the students currently receiving tourism education, who are potential future managers and decision-makers in tourism sector. The results of this study indicate that tourism students who have participated in ecotourism activities are more conscious and have sufficient knowledge about ecotourism than do the students who have not participated in ecotourism activities and that they have sufficient knowledge of ecotourism opportunities in the destination of Antalya. Therefore, we believe that the inclusion of ecotourism in the curricula of tourism schools, along with its theoretical knowledge and practical applications, will make a significant contribution to the awareness about ecotourism among the students receiving tourism education.

As in all scientific studies, certain limitations in terms of time, costs and opportunities are involved in this study. Due to such limitations, our research could be performed in the undergraduate and postgraduate students attending the Akdeniz University Faculty of Tourism. Thus, future studies with larger samples including students from other universities are needed to make more comprehensive and detailed comparisons.

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**Citation:** Günay İ, Akıncı Z (2017) The Ecotourism Perception of Graduate and Postgraduate Tourism Students for Antalya Destination. J Tourism Hospit 6: 264. doi: [10.4172/2167-0269.1000264](https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0269.1000264)

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