Ecotourism Perspective: The Case of Armenia: An Abstract

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Abstract Nature-, adventure-, and ecotourism (NEAT), often referred to as any kind of nature-related tourism, is recognized by the Government of the Republic of Armenia (Armenia) as a promising niche for tourism development. In light of the growing importance of the NEAT industry in Armenia, it is important to understand factors behind domestic and foreign tourists' choice of Armenia as a NEAT destination. This work-in-progress project is focused on the examination of tourists' beliefs, motivations, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions towards Armenia as a NEAT destination.

The data collection took place during the high tourist summer seasons in 2013, 2016, and 2017 via self-administered questionnaires distributed among attendants of eco-festivals (i.e. Ecotourism Festival in Vayots Dzor and HayBuis Festival in Tavush regions) as well as participants of guided eco-tours. The final sample of 114 participants is comprised of local tourists (52%) and foreign tourists (40%). Female respondents (65%) dominated the sample. The largest age category was the 21–30 years age group (34%), followed by those 31–40 years of age (23.3%).

The findings paint an interesting picture of the state of ecotourism in Armenia. The preliminary results suggest that tourists hold strong positive beliefs of Armenia as an eco-destination and that these beliefs are the strongest predictors of satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The factor analysis produced two separate summary constructs for satisfaction—destination satisfaction and service-tour satisfaction—and for future behavioural intentions: revisit and recommend. This invites further examination of the notion of satisfaction as different perceived types of satisfaction might impact various behavioural intentions differently. The ANOVA results indicate that, in ecotourism context, both satisfaction constructs are significantly impacted by natural and built environment beliefs. The results, however, point to a surprisingly weak impact of motivations on satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Out of three motivation constructs—historico-ecological, nature immersion, and social health—nature immersion had no impact either on satisfaction or

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behavioural intentions. Meanwhile, historico-ecological motivations were significant predictors of service-tour satisfaction and marginal predictors of destination satisfaction, and social health motivations were strong significant predictors for revisit intentions and marginal predictors of recommend.

The results suggest areas for practical improvement. First, there is a potential to improve Armenia's positioning as a NEAT destination among foreign tourists. Second, while the Armenian ecotourism industry enjoys positive destination satisfaction that impacts behavioural intentions, it misses out on the opportunity to capitalize on service-tour satisfaction. More targeted service policies and practices need to be developed to link service-tour satisfaction to positive behavioural intentions.

References Available Upon Request