Chapter 9
Impact of Superior Destination Experience on Recommendation

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9.1 Introduction

As destinations became increasingly accessible, the competition intensified and offering a desirable experience becomes a major competitive advantage for destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 2005). Various studies discussed the positive relationship between tourist experiences and behaviors such as loyalty and recommendation (e.g. Gursoy, Chen, & Chi, 2014; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Tourist experiences are memorable activities, perceptions and events in a destination that positively affect tourist behavior. According to Huang and Hsu (2009), the tourism experience is influenced by tourists' multiple interactions with the physical and human environment, the nature of this participation being essential to the way the experience is lived. Hosany and Gilbert (2010) found that love, joy, positive surprise are emotions that can relate to experiences in the destinations. Sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual experiences have also been discussed as major sources of tourists experiences.

Destinations would be more successful in creating loyalty and recommendation if they would be able to understand the experiential components of their offerings (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Hence identifying and understanding the components of visitor experiences is critical for destinations' success (Kim & Brown, 2012). A stream of research has already explored experiences in different settings (hotels,

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attractions, theme parks, cruises, restaurants) (e.g. Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2016; Arnould & Price, 1993; Cetin & Walls, 2016) however the overall tourist experiences in destinations have been neglected or analyzed from psychological, social or affective perspectives and usually tried to describe tourists' experiences without clearly identifying the supply side objective measures. The data required for these scales (e.g. novelty, intellectual cultivation, relaxation, pleasure) are not easily available without a sophisticated system for collecting data on visitors' experiences.

Exploring the features of travelers' supra-experiential destinations would be considered as a more holistic and practical approach rather than merely concentrating on one destination. Instead of describing experiences from a demand perspective this paper also sets out to look at experiences from a broader and more holistic perspective including characteristics of superior destinations and their impact on positive tourist behaviors from the supply side. While doing so it also aims to provide managerial implications for DMOs and other stakeholders in the destination. The main purpose of this study therefore is to identify the environmental features of destinations defined as the best experience scape ever by tourists and how these affect their recommendation behaviors. Such an understanding might offer a better understanding for tourist experiences in destinations and suggest implications for tourism industry and other stakeholders in creating, managing and marketing better experiences for tourists.

9.2   Tourism Destinations

Destinations are defined geographical areas with political and legislative boundaries and places that facilitate creation of tourism experiences (Barnes, Mattson, & Sorensen, 2014). Hence tourist destinations in this study have been operationally defined as spatial brands and geographical locations that reflect a combination of services, products, infrastructure and environment that form an overall vacation experience for travelers. Destination "is the combination of goods, services and holiday experiences offered on a local scale" (Buhalis, 2000: 98). Similarly, Coltman (1989: 4) defined destination as "places that contain different natural charms and characteristics that would be considered attractive to tourists". Yavuz (2007) argued that destination is the main element in providing an integrated presentation of the sources, activities and other products for tourism. Generally, destinations are defined as confined geographic areas such as a country, an island or a city (Hall, 2000; Davidson & Maitland, 1997). However, it is widely acknowledged that consumers should have a subjective interpretive perceptual destination concept based on their travel plans, cultural backgrounds, visiting purposes, educational levels and past experiences. For example; Istanbul may be considered as a destination for a business traveler who is visiting the city for two days and return whilst Europe can be a destination for a Japanese tourist who visit six European countries in two weeks (Buhalis, 2000).

Despite various studies have looked into tourist experiences in different settings (e.g. hotels; attractions, restaurants), components of a holistic destination experience

are neglected. Experiences created through the interaction of the tourist with the tourism system (hotels, attractions, transportation, attractions etc.) are only a part of the overall experience. Thus the concept of destination including tourism industry and external factors (e.g. resources, infra-structure, local culture, climate etc.) can be regarded as the outer sphere of tourist experiences. Understanding tourist experience in destinations is more complex than measuring it for individual services also because the vacation extends for a period of time and involves a simultaneous and synergistic interaction and consumption of integrated and independent products and services (Burns & Holden, 1995). Therefore, destination is an integral part of tourist decision-making, however it is much more than the attractions, products and services in it. It is more complex than these components because it includes the interaction of these elements as well. The architecture, the hotel, local hospitality, activities, landmarks, nature, the taxi driver even the airport can affect the quality of overall vacation experience at the destination. Therefore, rather than experiences with individual tourism service providers this study focuses on the holistic experience produced in the destinations including exogenous factors besides the tourism industry.

Tourism is a complex human experience integrating various personal characteristics with clues acquired in a destination (Gunn, 1988). Traveler experience is also an amalgam of services and products consumed at the destination and interactions with the host community (Cetin & Yarcan, 2017). Hence, destination experiences can be framed based on different stakeholders in the destination including tourism resources, and the industry, residents, public bodies and tourist themselves (Oz, Demirkol, & Ozkoç, 2012). Ozdemir (2007) defines tourism as a complex product consisting of various tourism resources that a tourism destination possesses and services that are directly or indirectly provided by many institutions and organizations that attract and host the tourists.

Destinations provide the environment for tourists to fulfil their needs related to their travel experiences (Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012). On the other hand, each destination can match and satisfy certain types of demand. Therefore, tourism marketers need to evaluate travel motivations to develop offerings and brand their destinations appropriate for the right target markets. In order to determine the suitable target segments in destination marketing, it is necessary to understand different types of destinations first. Buhalis (2000) summarizes destination categories as follows:

- Urban: Urban destinations have been in tourism since the first years of civilization. Urban destinations attracted visitors who participated in meetings, conferences and business-related events and exhibitions. Many urban destinations are well equipped in terms of transportation and accommodation infrastructure, conference and exhibition halls that will facilitate major events. Urban destinations are also well supplied with educational institutions and hospitals. Thus they are usually attractive for education and health tourism as well.
- Seaside: Seaside destinations offer leisure vacations for tourists. While typical European leisure travelers spend their annual vacation on the Mediterranean coast, North Americans visit southern areas such as Florida, California and the Caribbean.

Beaches, climate and entertainment options are developed in such sun-lust destinations.

- Mountain: Mountain destinations are attracting tourists who come for winter sports such as skiing, as well as those who participate nature based tourism activities in all seasons. Mountain destinations also attract mountain bikers, hikers, trekkers, campers, adventure tourists and so on. Because of mountain destinations are usually close to the city centre, they are easily accessible by private car, many of which are still undiscovered and offer authentic experiences to visitors. Lakes and scenic areas add to the attractiveness of mountain destinations.
- Rural: Rural tourism is developing rapidly. Tourism is seen as an alternative tool for economic development of many rural areas where agriculture is loosing its. Rural areas usually attracting day trippers offer; natural and cultural resources, but still trying to adopt to the needs of holiday-makers on a daily basis.
- Authentic 3rd World: Authentic destinations are often described as unfooted third world countries. Tourists like to experience places where tourism develops is under developed in volume. Emerging destinations in Asia, South America and Africa are attracting a larger numbers of adventurous tourists who are ready to forgo their comforts for interaction with pristine regions and local communities.
- Unique-Exotic: Certain destinations are marked as "asexual" destinations because they offer unique and valuable experiences. Such destinations focus on maximizing revenue per visitor and offer luxury customized services.

Therefore, destinations have diverse resources and characteristics that offer different experiences to their visitors. Although there are numerous papers on experiences from individual services (e.g., hotels, airlines, restaurants) in the destination, literature on creation of holistic destination experience that might be applicable for all destinations has been overlooked (Karayilan & Cetin, 2016).

9.3 Tourist Experiences in Destinations

Traditional tourist theories are no longer sufficient in explaining changing tourist needs and motivations (Mossberg, 2007). From mid-80s the tourism product has transformed into more experiential and informative features. The common characteristics of these travel types (e.g., adventure tourism, cultural tourism) are that they are more enriching, engaging, creative, adventuresome and informative than traditional mass tourism (Karayilan & Cetin, 2016). Mass tourism destinations are being replaced by alternative experience intensive tourism destinations (Butler, 1990) and many established superior quality sun-lust destinations in the tourism history are suffering today. The choice of a destination is heavily dependent on the potential quality and quantity of experiences available at the region. Tourists actively search for experiences during their holidays; they seek "experience rich" destinations. Hence experiential dimensions are becoming main antecedents of destinations' sustainable

competitive advantage success (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and there is a need to redefine experiential attributes of destinations.

Tourist experiences were initially explored under four realms of customer experiences offered by Pine and Gilmore (1998). According to them education, entertainment, escape and esthetic features of a product or a service create an additional value for consumers. Various other studies have also integrated these concepts into tourism (e.g. Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Sundbo, 2009; Williams, 2006). The entertainment realm is related to events that create enjoyment, this is the most basic experience (e.g., jokes). Educational experiences are concerned with tourists' need for intellectual development (e.g., museums). Esthetic experiences are related to travelers' needs to appreciate beauty and harmony (e.g., nature). Escapist dimension of experiences calls for people's desire for novelty (e.g., adventure). Although these four realms have not been used in a holistic destination setting, they have the potential to explain the destination experience as well.

Tourism is more of a hedonic activity involving a distinctive physical, emotional and spiritual engagement rather than a rational consumption (Jansson, 2002). Hosany and Gilbert (2010) discuss love, joy and positive surprise as emotional outcomes of an experience. Sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual factors were listed as components of tourist experiences by Barnes et al. (2014). Involvement, hedonism, happiness, pleasure, relaxation, stimulation, refreshment, social interaction, spontaneity, meaningfulness, knowledge, challenge, sense of separation, timelessness, adventure, personal relevance, novelty, escaping pressure, and intellectual cultivation were also considered as dimensions of tourist experience (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). Thus tourist experience is a multidimensional outcome formed by different factors and it is challenging to determine which are the key components. Although tourist experiences at destinations lacks a shared definition there are common characteristics mentioned in the literature that can be utilized to create a holistic factor pool of experiences.

The desire to visit destination is at the core of tourism flows (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Larsen (2007) defines tourist experience as a strong personal travel related event that is memorized. Various destination attributes (i.e. pull) and personal factors (i.e. push) might have an impact on quality of experiences in destinations (Gunn, 1988). Notwithstanding the crucial role of all destination features and the 'sensescapes' they provide (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013), visitors play, an active role in producing their own experiences (Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Eusébio, 2015). Involvement emerges as an antecedent of experiences and can be defined as the identification and interest of the tourist in the destination characterized by enjoyment and self achievement (Selin & Howard, 1988). Thus interacting with different elements in the destination tourists co-create their subjective experiences and destinations can be considered as the pull factor for tourists. When deciding on a destination, travelers evaluate different attributes of the destination which might also be referred to as the pull factors. Mill and Morrison (1985) list attractions, facilities, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality as basic pull components of a destination.

According to Arnould and Price (1993) the peak experience emerges when experiencing something unique, unexpected and has a surprise dimension into it. Quan

and Wang (2004) however argues a positive experience is only possible if the peak experience is accompanied by supporting experiences. They discuss service related destination qualities as supporting experiences. Thus accommodation facilities, service staff, physical comfort, safety, cleanliness, landscaping, public transportation in the destination might also be regarded as a part of tourists' experience (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). Hence the total experience quality in a destination depends both on peak and supporting experiences.

Infra-structure, value for money spent and costs, accessibility, local culture, physiography and climate, entertainment, environmental management (e.g. crowd, noise, cleanliness), landscapes, quality of service, variety of activities, signage, availability of information, local food, traffic, safety and security, special events and hospitality are also listed as experiential factors in a destination (Cetin, Alrawadieh, Dinçer, Dinçer, & Ioannides, 2017; Cetin & Okumus, 2018; Kim 2014; Okumus & Cetin, 2018). Weather, hotel standards, cleanliness and upkeep, geographical setting and scenic beauty, safety, ease of reach, friendliness and helpfulness of locals, artistic and cultural amenities, ease of getting around, crowding and congestion, nightlife and entertainment, quality restaurants, shopping alternatives, attractiveness of prices and adequacy of public services were identified by Haywood and Muller (1988). Authentic and novel perceptions of the destination also result in positive tourist experiences (Urry, 1990). Other research focusing on destination experience discuss social interactions with locals, servicescape, public services, knowledge enhancement, feeling comfortable, and welcome, having challenges and active participation as salient attributes of destination experience of tourists. These attributes are also widely covered in destination competiveness literature (e.g. Crouch & Ritchie, 2005).

Experiences during a trip might either be positive or negative. According to Ozdemir, Aksu, Ehtiyar, Çizel, Çizel, and İçigen (2012) attributes of the destination play an important role in determining satisfaction and positive future behaviors of visitors such as loyalty and recommendation. These experiences might be so powerful that the tourist might become emotionally attached to the destination and become loyal visitors visiting the same destination several times (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) and recommend the experience to others (Cetin & Dincer, 2014a). If a tourist is not satisfied with his experience in a destination it is unlikely that he/she will return or recommend the destination which affects the future number of visitors to the destination. Despite valuable contributions on destination experiences no study so far attempted to analyze the relative importance of these items and their impact on tourist behaviors in destinations identified as superior by tourists.

9.4 Tourist Recommendation Behaviors

Majority of products and services such as automobiles, financial services and tourism attracts high involvement from customers' perspective as they relate to high risk and a larger amount of finances. Tourism is an intangible service, with limited pre-established standards and is consumed less frequently. Therefore, it is harder to evaluate it prior to actual experience (Cetin & Dincer, 2014a, b). In order to minimize the

risk, tourists spend a great amount of time, effort and share of valet for a positive vacation experience without unpleasant surprises. In order to minimize this risk, tourists depend on word of mouth of others (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017). Various research identified tourist find C2C (Customer to Customer) interactions and online reviews more credible than traditional advertising. Particularly importance of E-Wom and social media in tourism is well-covered in tourism (Cetin, Akova, Gursoy, & Kaya, 2016a). Tourists' favourable experiences in a destination may lead to revisit intention and more importantly they influence friends and relatives around them through positive word of mouth (Opperman, 2000). Recommendation about a destination for potential tourists is considered the most reliable source of information (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Recommendations both from relatives or friends and social media, affects touristic buying decisions (Cetin et al., 2016b; Song, Yi, & Huang, 2017).

9.5   Methodology

Tourism is an experience intensive service and have been used as an ideal domain to study customer experiences. Vacation as a leisure experience is hedonic by motivation and the impact of rational evaluations are limited compared to a manufactured product. This paper explores the experiential characteristics of travelers' supra destinations through existing knowledge and an empirical study. Based on various experiential destination characteristics mentioned in the literature, a pool of experiential items was identified and a survey was designed. Travelers were asked to rate these destination features based on their best leisure destination experience. The survey was based on extant literature on customer experience, tourist behavior, and destination management. Participants' tendency to recommend the destination was also enquired in order to identify which attributes had a greater impact on word of mouth. Tendency to recommend is also suggested an important feature of positive customer experiences.

The first version of the survey included 34 items identified in the literature. These items were then refined during an expert panel of three tourism scholar. For example, scenery was considered under natural attractions and prices were merged with value for money. Information provision was also merged with quality of tourist services; night-life with entertainment; peacefulness with relaxation during the peer discussion. The survey included some demographic queries as well. This instrument was then pilot tested on 30 respondents to improve validity of items used. Based on respondents' feedback the questionnaire was modified to ensure a better understanding. The data was also checked for reliability and loadings of the items. Some items had a large inter-correlation; these were merged others and items with weak loadings were removed. Three attributes were further removed or merged based on their loadings during this stage. For example, crowdedness received a lower rating with a large standard deviation, meaning this item is perceived both positive and negative by the respondents. Transportation network and public transportation were also perceived under accessibility and created confusion. Thus removed from the

item pool. The final version of the questionnaire included 22 items that describe various characteristics of the destinations.

Data collection took seven weeks in May-June 2016 in Istanbul, domestic tourists were approached at well known attractions of the city as well as domestic departure terminals of two international airports. A total of 500 surveys were collected. 29 surveys were eliminated because of missing data and "ja" saying bias and a total of 472 surveys were included in data analysis. Respondents were requested to rate their best leisure destinations based on their experiences on a five point Likert scale. Some demographic (e.g. gender, age, marital status) and tripographic (e.g. frequency of travel) information were also requested. The screening criteria used for the surveys were being older than 18 years and to have traveled at least twice within the past year. Various descriptive statistics were utilized in order to identify the attributes that have higher loadings. In order to determine the impact of these experiential items on loyalty and recommendation, a stepwise regression was also utilized. These are discussed in the findings section.

9.6 Results

Concerning the demographic profile of respondents; among 472 respondents, 258 were male, 391 were between 20 and 40 years of age. 228 were married and 441 had university education. Descriptive statistics revealed that among 22 attributes; *being a well known destination*, *availability of detailed destination information*, *natural attractions*, *climate* and *value for money* were the highest rated items while the rest of the attributes also scored higher than three on a five point Likert Scale. Therefore, destinations' marketing communications (branding, information provision), the inherent features (natural attractions and climate) and value for money were rated as most important items. But all other items were also rated above average. Table 9.1 displays mean values of superior destination attributes.

In order to identify the impact of these experiential items on recommendation a stepwise regression was run. As presented in Table 9.2, seven items out of 22 were found to explain 0.52 of the variance in recommendation ($R^2 = 0.52$). These are; value for money ($\beta = 0.49$), climate ($\beta = 0.12$), service staff ($\beta = 0.1$), local hospitality ($\beta = 0.1$), tourist services ($\beta = 0.09$), entertainment ($\beta = 0.08$), and authenticity ($\beta = 0.09$).

9.7 Conclusion and Implications

The holiday is a risky purchase, often costs a lot of finances and a dedication of personal paid vacation time which is also limited. Therefore, includes a prior planning and usually a long process of decision making. It is also often loaded with emotions, day dreams and expectations (Goossens, 2000). Tourists' actually start experiencing the destination long before they travel to destination at home. Hence

Table 9.1 Relative importance of superior destination features

Destination attributes	Mean	Std. dev.
This is a well known destination	4.59	1.51
Tourism infrastructure is sufficient	4.3	0.9
I received good value for money	4.4	0.83
Tourism services are of high quality	4.26	0.83
Daily spending is affordable	3.65	1.03
Service staff are of high quality	4.02	0.89
Natural attractions are sufficient	4.45	0.8
Cultural attractions are sufficient	4.17	0.88
This destination is safe	4.32	0.84
This destination is geographically close	3.69	1.47
Detailed information about the destination is available	4.50	0.75
Entertainment services are sufficient	4.17	0.98
Diverse activities are available at the destination	4.11	0.95
The locals are welcoming	3.92	1.04
The climate is nice	4.43	0.74
Shopping alternatives are adequate	4.00	0.94
This destination is calm and quite	4.18	0.96
This destination is lively and exciting	4.12	1.01
This destination is clean	4.37	0.77
Local food is attractive	3.94	0.99
This destination is authentic	3.74	1.12
This destination is cheap	3.25	1.22

destination experience is a process, and includes a number of challenges during the travel from information search to departure for the vacation (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2012). Once in the destination tourists also interact with various actors and destination features depending on their motivations, environmental factors and availability of activities. Thus, tourist experiences do not occur in a vacuum and requires a great deal of planning at destination level and within the individual services in the destination. Travelers in way create their own experiences by interacting with these different elements and actors at the destination. Therefore, a number of factors have the possibility to affect the experience of tourists during this actual travel process (Karayilan & Cetin, 2016). Without a unified identity in the destination that is supported by individual elements, a positive overall tourist experience is at risk. Converting experiences into encounters and creating them in the destination is still a challenge. But identifying the dimensions of an overall destination experience is the first step. This paper offered 22 items that relate to these factors that affect over-

Table 9.2 Results of regression explaining the impacts of destination attributes on recommendation

Independent variables	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.44	0.20		2.17	0.03[a]
Value for money	0.46	0.04	0.49	2.79	0.01[b]
Climate	0.13	0.04	0.12	4.24	0.00[b]
Service staff	0.09	0.04	0.1	2.48	0.01[b]
Tourist services	0.08	0.03	0.09	2.42	0.03[b]
Hospitality of locals	0.08	0.03	0.1	2.86	0.05[a]
Entertainment	0.06	0.03	0.08	2.1	0.04[a]
Authenticity	0.06	0.02	0.09	2.49	0.01[b]

Note B: Coefficient; SE: Standard Error; β: Standardized Coefficient; t: t-Value; Sig.: Significance, Dependent Variable: Recommendation; $R = 0.72$; $R^2 = 0.52$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.52$; Standard Error $= 0.54$. Insignificant items were excluded in this table
[a]Significant at $p < 0.05$ level
[b]Significant at $p < 0.01$ level

all destination experience. Understanding these attributes might be paramount for designing and enhancing positive visitor experiences in destinations.

By identifying the experiential characteristics of superior destinations this paper offers valuable empirical findings. The findings might be used by destination planners, and industry professionals to rate destinations based on the items identified in this study and benchmark competing destinations. This way various gaps might be identified and emphasis would be stressed on the experiential factors that differentiate destinations. Destination planers and all stakeholders should strive for producing or creating the facilitating environment for positive tourist experiences to emerge. These distinct experiences should also be used in the promotional materials of destinations. For example, *being a well-known destination* and *availability of destination information* might be improved through marketing communications. *Value for money* was also rated higher by respondents, while describing their superior destinations while *being cheap* and *affordable* were rated the lowest. This might refer to the fact that tourists are willing to pay more for experiential services that they value. Literature also confirms that tourists are willing to travel far and pay more for desirable experiences (e.g. Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Thus destinations have the opportunity to increase per tourist spending as long as additional cost is supported with the experiential value offered.

Concerning recommendation *value for money* has the largest effect on tendency to recommend. While *climate, quality tourist services and service staff*, *hospitality of hosts, entertainment* and *authenticity* have also significant impacts on recommendation. These items were also discussed as important in tourism literature. All of these items except *climate* might be enhanced through a better destination management. The climate factor on the other hand is and inherent characteristic, yet is also valuable considering its subjective nature. For example, a sunny and hot destination climate might be attractive for sun-lust tourists yet the cultural tourists on the go

might prefer a milder climate (e.g. Demiroglu, Turp, Ozturk, & Kurnaz, 2016). Thus the climate also emerges as an important factor for positioning the destination and targeting suitable segments. Experiential resources of a destination can also be used as a competitive advantage and a tool for differentiation and positioning. Segmentation and targeting strategies are also important. Based on the potential resources, experiences and desirable markets, destination should position themselves among competition and focus on specific target markets that it can satisfy better and create positive experiences and offer additional value.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested five key principles to design memorable experiences. These are theming the experience, harmonizing impressions with positive clues, eliminating negative clues, mixing the experience with memorabilia, and engaging all five senses. Morgan (2006) discuss six principles as abundant choices, moments of amazement, shared experiences, fringes at the heart, local distinctiveness and positive values. Aho (2001) distinguishes among four essential core elements of the touristic experience: emotional experiences; learning experiences; practical experiences; and transformational experiences. Yet, because of the subjective nature of tourism destination experience, DMOs and tourism industry alone can not provide the experience to tourists. Rather they can only create the facilitating environment for tourists to create their own experiences. Different than its most previous studies focusing on meanings, emotions, this paper offers operational items that might affect the environment of destination experience and offer practical implications for destination stakeholders. Yet some of these stakeholders have competing interests. The real challenge for destinations is to arrange these relationships in such a way they also cooperate for the overall experience rather than compete on creating different individual experiences.

Scholars might also use the experiential items offered in this study for future research on destination competitiveness and tourist experience. The findings might also be used in positioning and design of marketing communications for destinations as well as measuring success of DMO related planning, management and marketing activities. Satisfaction acts as a processor of sensory and affective destination experience, governing the relationship between experience and visitor loyalty. In addition, current satisfaction is a strong predictor of future satisfaction (Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, & Schlesinger, 2009). Tourism providers should therefore take every opportunity to plan for and ensure consistent visitor relationship management throughout all touch-points with a visitor and to measure and monitor the level of satisfaction with the services delivered to visitors.

There are various limitations to this study. Tourists with different motivations and personal backgrounds might perceive the qualities of a destination different. Travelers from various cultural backgrounds and personal characteristics might interpret their experience differently from the same destination. Even for the same people, their moods at the particular moment might affect their interpretation of the environment. Previous travel experiences might also play a role in perception of destination qualities. Experiences are subjective and depend very much on personal interpretations and perceptions. A sun-lust tourist might desire passive elements of destination experience such as relaxation, esthetics and entertainment themes

however a heritage tour might require more active engagement and education. Hence destination experiences are both subjective and context specific. Thus both pull (e.g. destination characteristics) and push (e.g. target markets) factors should be considered when trying to create experiences in destinations. According to Volo (2009) subjective nature of experiences and difficulties with standardizing environmental factors makes it challenging to create same level of experiences for everyone at each time. Commodification of experiences is also another challenge. If it is standardized and charged, its experiential value and authenticity decreases. Moreover, Larsen (2007) also indicate that tourists' experiences are based on their expectations and will influence their expectations from the next visit, creating a cycle.

Yet a general diagnostic tool like the items used in this study might still be utilized to measure the experiential potential of a destination. Thus we encourage future studies, explore a scale of destination features that might measure an experiential potential in a destination. Moreover, the study is focused on domestic tourists. Various political and security concerns have affected the international arrivals to Turkey during recent years mostly stemming from the political instability in Middle East. The international demand to the country decreased rapidly from 35 million to 25 million arrivals. Hence domestic market became an important market. Yet, concentrated on international European tourists for years, destinations in Turkey lack the knowledge on how to satisfy the needs of citizens. Hence, although the study is limited with domestic tourists, it also fills an important gap in the literature on destination choices of Turkish domestic tourists.

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