

A Study on the Determination of the Gastronomic Tourism Development Level in Hatay Province

[CITATION]

Dođan, M. and Yılmaz, M. (2022). A Study on the Determination of the Gastronomic Tourism Development Level in Hatay Province [Extensive Summary], *Journal of Turkish Tourism Research*, 6(4): 1146-1164.

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Journal of Turkish Tourism Research

2022, 6(4): 1146-1164.

DOI: [10.26677/TR1010.2022.1143](https://doi.org/10.26677/TR1010.2022.1143)



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Abstract

This study aims to determine the level of development of gastronomy tourism in Hatay. The survey, created using the “Gastronomy Tourism Development Level” scale, was found to be suitable for factor analysis based on statistical analyses. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed a four-factor structure consisting of 34 questions, which differs from the original scale. The analysis results showed significant differences in sub-dimensions such as gastronomy culture and qualified personnel. The study concludes that development strategies focused on gastronomy tourism should be created for Hatay, and that analyses in this direction will positively contribute to Hatay's tourism.

Keywords: *Gastronomy Tourism Development Level, Gastronomy Tourism, Gastronomy, Hatay.*

Introduction

Gastronomy tourism involves visiting a region to experience its food and drink culture. This type of tourism plays an important role in introducing cultural heritage and discovering local cuisines. The cultural wealth of destinations enhances their attractiveness by providing both economic and social benefits through gastronomy tourism. Hatay, which is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, is one of Turkey's leading gastronomic destinations, boasting a rich historical background and over 600 types of dishes.

Today, tourists expect to learn about and experience cultural elements in the places they visit. Gastronomy activities positively contribute to the destination's brand image and competitive advantage. This study was conducted to determine the level of development of gastronomy tourism in Hatay and to contribute to the field of gastronomy.

Conceptual Framework/Literature

Gastronomy Tourism as an Alternative Tourism Type

Gastronomy is not only about food recipes but also a social symbol that unites societies through the kitchen. Mosaic works have depicted these social scenes in various ways throughout history. In this study, Roman mosaics were examined using the semiotic method. A document review was conducted to analyze the mosaics, with examples collected from official museum websites. The study identified 15 mosaic works containing gastronomic elements. Semiotics examines how visual objects are used to understand social events. The study sought to answer what Roman mosaic artists thought and what inspired them when creating their works.

Gastronomy tourism includes activities such as experiencing the culinary culture specific to destinations, visiting production areas, and participating in culinary events. This type of tourism combines culture, agriculture, and tourism, contributing to destination branding, economic development, and the preservation of local cuisines. Gastronomy tourism is particularly popular among well-educated, high-income individuals, and it increases the tourism mobility of destinations while supporting the development of rural areas.

Gastronomists are individuals who seek to learn about new cultures and experience gastronomy. Promoting local food and beverages is crucial in encouraging tourists to choose certain destinations. Elements such as local markets, restaurants, wineries, and cooking schools attract tourists. Furthermore, emotional bonds can be established between locals and tourists through gastronomic tourism, which strengthens the destination's image.

Sustainable gastronomic tourism contributes both to the income of local people and to the preservation of cultural heritage. Additionally, individuals' eating and drinking experiences create sociological, psychological, and physiological effects. Therefore, gastronomy tourism is important not only economically but also socially.

Turkey's Gastronomy Tourism Potential

This article highlights how Turks enriched their culinary culture by migrating from Central Asia to Anatolia. The nomadic lifestyle of the Turks and their interactions with various cultures have been documented in important written sources such as Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, *Kutadgu Bilig*, and *İbn-i Batuta Seyahatname*. Turkey is home to a rich gastronomic culture and hosts the cultural heritage of many civilizations. French, Chinese, and Turkish cuisines are considered the top three cuisines in the world, and Turkey has the potential to be a major player in gastronomy tourism with this strong food culture.

Hatay's Gastronomy Tourism Potential

Located in the southern Mediterranean region, Hatay is a city rich in cultural, historical, and gastronomic assets due to its cosmopolitan structure. With its Mediterranean climate, vast plains, mountains, and plateaus, Hatay has hosted many civilizations throughout history, including the Hittites, Phoenicians, and Arameans, earning the nickname “Queen of the East.”

Hatay is a cultural mosaic where different religions, sects, and ethnic groups live peacefully, and this is reflected in its culinary culture. The cuisine has created a synthesis influenced by Assyrian, Arab, Armenian, and Turkish traditions. Famous for unique dishes like kunefe, surk, tray kebab, and kaytaz böreği, Hatay's cuisine also includes special flavors that appear during religious holidays and rituals. For instance, Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter feature special dishes, while the Arab Alevi community offers unique flavors like the “Nakfi” drink and “Hrisi” meal. The Vakıflı Armenian village produces wine, jams, and walnut desserts, while local products such as handmade trays and Yayladağı Turkish Delight are also notable.

Hatay's historical background, geographical diversity, and cultural richness have allowed its culinary culture to preserve traditions despite the effects of globalization.

Method

Tourism in Turkey is generally centered around entertainment, sea, sand, sun, and sightseeing, with a seasonal character. However, diversifying tourism activities is vital for economic sustainability. Hatay, with its cultural and culinary wealth, attracts attention but has not fully realized its gastronomy tourism potential. This study aims to assess the level of development of gastronomy tourism in Hatay and to provide guidance for the development of related strategies.

The research was conducted in Hatay and its districts between March and June 2022, targeting individuals with gastronomy knowledge and experience. A total of 428 participants were reached using a convenience sampling method. Data were collected through quantitative research methods and analyzed using the “Gastronomy Tourism Development Level” scale. The study tested four hypotheses:

1. Gender influences the level of development of gastronomy tourism.
2. Age influences the level of development of gastronomy tourism.
3. Income status influences the level of development of gastronomy tourism.
4. Education status influences the level of development of gastronomy tourism.

Data were collected via phone, email, and social media; factor analyses were performed, and hypotheses were tested. The study received approval from the Istanbul Gelişim University Ethics Committee. The research concluded that gastronomy-focused strategies are crucial for the development of Hatay's tourism.

Findings and Discussion

The gender distribution among participants was nearly equal, with 50.23% male and 49.77% female. The age distribution was predominantly between 36-45 years, with the highest education levels being primary school and undergraduate graduates. In terms of income, the majority belonged to the income group of 8001 TL and above.

The confirmatory factor analysis revealed a four-factor structure for the scale, which demonstrated a high level of reliability. Normality tests indicated that the data were normally distributed.

No significant gender differences were found in the overall scale and sub-dimensions. However, significant differences were observed in the gastronomy culture and qualified personnel sub-dimensions across age groups, with the 25 and under group showing a higher perception of gastronomy culture than other age groups. Regarding income status, participants in higher income groups had lower perceptions in dimensions such as gastronomy culture and product promotion.

In conclusion, significant differences were found in factors such as gastronomy culture and personnel qualifications based on age and income status.

Conclusions and Suggestions

This research was conducted using an adapted scale to determine the level of gastronomy tourism development in Hatay, and statistical analyses were performed based on the data collected. The factor analysis revealed a structure with 34 questions and four factors, differing from the original scale. Significant differences were found in factors like gastronomy culture, qualified personnel, and product promotion. Additional analyses also revealed differences in terms of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, income, and education.

This study presents a simplified version of the scale used in previous research to assess the level of gastronomy tourism development. Hatay's gastronomy tourism potential, based on its rich culinary culture and cosmopolitan structure, should be further developed with appropriate strategies. It is recommended that Hatay's gastronomy tourism be taken to higher levels through cooperation with local governments.

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