

Tourism destination brand image of Beypazari as perceived by hikers in Ankara

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Introduction

Beypazari is a district of Ankara with over 46.000 residents and it is located 100 km west of Ankara. It is recognized on both domestic and regional scales as an example of good practice because of the conservation of traditional architectural and cultural assets. With the contributions of local and central governments as well as the conscious and devoted efforts of its local community, tourism has become an alternative income-generating source and tourist arrivals have increased almost 100% between 1999 and 2009. Beypazari has an important potential in terms of tourism and the environment. The district is conserving architectural and cultural values, for example, it is maintaining its approximately 150-year-old lifestyle. During the summer time, there is an increase in short vacations to Beypazari with the number of visitors sometimes reaching 5,000 on weekends. Because of its proximity to two major cities – Istanbul and Ankara – Beypazari is preferred for excursions. The organization of different cultural activities such as festivals, trekking and practice-based workshops make Beypazari attractive for those who look for alternative choices for the weekends. Beypazari has emerged as a popular destination for daily or short time visitors mainly from Ankara and other neighbour cities because of its natural values in addition to its cultural attractions. These include trekking routes, rock cliff valleys, forests, wetlands, creeks and rare animal and plant species (Municipality of Beypazari 2010, Gunes et al. 2010).

The purpose of this study is to (1) identify the perceptions of trekkers about attributes and general attitudes and behaviours of Beypazari, and (2) understand the effect of natural features and wild animals on its brand image. Such wildlife occurs in surprisingly close proximity to Beypazari, which is unlike other destinations elsewhere in Turkey.

Methodology

The sample consists of 40 trekkers who have been in Beypazari and go trekking regularly around Ankara. Total number of trekkers in Ankara is estimated at about 200 (maximum) individuals (Kocak, 2010).

A questionnaire based on Baloglu et al. (1999) was conducted. This survey included 49 questions about demographic, affective, perceptual/cognitive, and open-ended evaluations of Beypazari. Affective evaluations of the destination were measured by using 6 affective image items on a 5-point scale. Perceptual/cognitive evaluations included 43 items and respondents were asked 33 questions including 7 items about nature tourism potential of Beypazari. Respondents rated each question on a 5-scale, from 1 that presents strong disagreement to 5 which represents strong agreement. There were 7 items about wild animals that respondents were asked to answer: whether they know one,

more, or none of the animals listed that live within the periphery of Beypazari. For unstructured images, respondents were asked to write down the first three concepts that occurred in their minds for Beypazari. Questionnaires were analyzed with SPSS 16.0. Descriptive questions comprised the frequency of respondent trekking tours and how many times visitors have visited and stayed in Beypazari.

Results and discussion

The majority (74,3%) of the respondents were in the age group of 20–39 years old and 59% of the respondents were female. Of the respondents, 69,2% were single and all have at least a bachelor's degree. All of the respondents had been in Beypazari several times, however, 74,4% of respondents did not stay in Beypazari before.

Respondents were in agreement with the expression of “Beypazari is a pleasant place” (4,23). On the contrary, respondents did not agree that “it is an extraordinary place (2,82)”. Evaluations on perceptual/cognitive items showed that respondents found Beypazari beautiful and might consider visiting again (4,13). Respondents most liked old restored mansions (4,44) and local culture (4,31). Most of the respondents tended to go to Beypazari to spend their weekends (4,21), to take photographs (3,79), have some local food (3,69), and for trekking (3,33). Respondents usually do not go to Beypazari for shopping (2,72), and generally felt safe in Beypazari (4,41) and found local people to be friendly (4,28).

To understand the respondents' views regarding nature based tourism in Beypazari, 7 items were asked. Respondents were most interested in trekking (4,41) followed by observation of the Egyptian vulture in Beypazari (4,36). Respondents were also interested in going bird watching in Inozu Valley (4,21) and seeing the endemic plants of Beypazari (4,21) as well. Respondents found Beypazari as naturally attractive (4,13) and eager to know more about its nature.

To find out whether respondents were aware of these creatures as a part of Beypazari's brand image, respondents were asked to mark if they know one, more, or none of the species listed that occurs around Beypazari. 53,8% of respondents knew that the Egyptian vulture occurs around Beypazari, followed by the black stork (41,0%). The least known species was brown bear (28,2). Finally, 33,3% of respondents were not aware of any species living around Beypazari while 66,7% were aware of one or more species.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of destination images of small towns as they try to generate income from tourism. Besides cultural and historical attractions, natural characteristics might be other important attractions to

increase the number of tourist arrivals. Women might be keener on trekking tours than men as indicated in our study findings. And, education level seems to be directly proportional to the number of trekking participations. Our study data also suggest that people with higher levels of education tend to participate in outdoor related tourism activities compared to people with lower levels of education. It appears that trekkers like visiting Beypazari to experience its famous old mansions and local food as well as its natural landscape. However, trekkers do not consider spending the night in one of those old mansions. Local authorities and tourism enterprises should consider increasing the number and diversity of tourism activities to increase the number of staying in Beypazari.

Beypazari has the potential to diversify tourism activities with respect to nature and wildlife tourism as it holds several large mammal and bird species and a diverse flora. Organizing wildlife observation trips and botanic tours for international tourists may help to increase the number of accommodation revenue in Beypazari.

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