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# Sea, Food, and Entertainment: Understanding Tourists' Daily Dinner Cruise Tour Experiences in Istanbul



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Article History	Abstract
Received: 16.11.2022	The purpose of this research is to examine and understand the experiences of tourists who
Accepted: 26.12.2022	participate in a daily dinner cruise in Istanbul. By analyzing tourist comments, this study used a qualitative case study approach to user-generated content. The data obtained from TripAdvisor, which is the most prominent travel site for tourists, obtained from tourist reviews (n:216) between 15 November and 10 December 2020. Daily dinner cruise tour experience findings are diverse and based on dimensions of satisfaction, memorable experience, service quality, food quality, value/price, entertainment, and deficiencies. Since there are no empirical studies on visitors' daily dinner cruise experiences in the tourism literature, it is expected that this study will make a substantial contribution to the existing body of knowledge and fill the gap.
Keywords	
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## INTRODUCTION

Tourist travel trends include actions such as escaping the mundane, gaining new experiences, and discovering and learning about new cultures (Şahin & Güzel, 2020; Yiğit & Şahin Perçin, 2021). In this context, tourists seek unique and authentic experiences and want their travel and vacation experiences to be memorable (Ching-Fu & Chia-Yi, 2021). In particular, the search for such experience has contributed to the concept of experience being an important research topic in the tourism and hotel management literature. In the context of tourism, experience can be defined as the sum of a tourist's emotional, rational, amusing, intriguing, and memorable memories gained from attending an event (Aho, 2001; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007).

Formerly a service-based economy, the global economy has shifted to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). With this shift, the tourism industry's service understanding and tourist expectations have shifted. Studies show that with this shift, tourists are more inclined to look for new ways to discover and take part in a tourist attraction or event (Chang, Backman, & Huang, 2014; Suhartanto et.al., 2020). Therefore, by generating distinctive and unforgettable experiences via imagination, emotion, and entertainment, tourist destinations aim to enhance the quality of tourists' holidays and provide a competitive edge. (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Additionally, Pizam (2010) argues that the purpose of today's tourism industry is to create and disseminate unique and memorable experiences for tourists.

Tourist experiences have always been the focus of the tourism industries (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Seyfi, Hall & Rasoolimanesh, 2020). Especially unique and memorable tourism experiences are a crucial issue for the competitive tourism industry, since they influence the behavioral intentions of tourists (Miao, Lehto, & Wei, 2014; Tsaur & Lo, 2020). Therefore, the tourism industry constantly strives to provide tourists with memorable experiences and events. At this point, gastronomy experiences offer important opportunities to offer tourists unique and memorable experiences. However, it is highlighted that positive gastronomic experiences require several elements, such as being novel, amusing, memorable, esthetically pleasing, informative, and out of the ordinary (Mkono, Markwell, & Wilson, 2013). Therefore, a positive gastronomic experience in a place can contribute to the total tourist experience (Kivela & Crotts, 2009). In this context, daily dinner cruise tours offer to tourists a unique and unforgettable gastronomic experience.

Istanbul offers tourists daily dinner cruise tours. These tours takes off from the European side of Istanbul and follows a route that includes the Anatolian side. Tourists dine on between two continents and usually daily dinner cruise tours take three or four hours. Dinner cruiser often include sample typical Turkish cuisine, traditional entertainment, belly dancing, folk music, and DJ performance. Daily dinner cruisers offer travelers an opportunity to experience local food, sightseeing places, local music, and dance at the same time. This allows tourists to gain information about the local culture of a destination in a short time. However, no empirical study has been conducted to investigate the dinner cruise experience of tourists. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate and comprehend the experiences of tourists that partake in a dinner cruise tour in Istanbul. It is hoped that this study will fill a gap in the literature on tourist dinner cruise experiences.

#### **Literature Review**

## **Dining Experience**

Tourism businesses distinguish and obtain a competitive edge in a world of severe competition by emphasizing the magnitude of their experiences rather than the characteristics of their goods and services (Schwarz, 1990). After the experience economy, the structural and strategic shifts in the world of consuming and marketing are the primary cause of this situation. Due to the shift from a conventional to an experience-driven age, businesses have forced to reconsider their organisation's goals (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008).

According to Walls et al. (2011), the rise of the experience economy has transformed the consumption of local foods and beverages into an experience that traveling tourists desire. Therefore, current gastronomic experiences have become touristic products that may fulfill the visitors' desire for novelty, originality, thrill-seeking, and familiarity with the local culture of the visited destination (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016). In the context of gastronomic experience, dining experiences are one of the most essential components in presenting visitors with new and distinctive experiences (Selwood, 2003).

Dining is an essential part of the tourism experience and is ranked as one of the top five tourist activities to do while on vacation (Pizam et al., 2004; Vu et al., 2019; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). Dining experiences can have a variety of cultural, spiritual, spatial, and temporal effects on consumers, in addition to meeting a physiological need (Sims, 2009). It also provides sensory triggers for future remember of their experiences (Lupton, 1994; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Previous research has found that external factors such as food quality, food culture, physical food, and social environment all have an impact on dinner memorability (Cutler & Carmicheal, 2010; Knutson et al., 2010; Wijaya et al., 2013). Dinner memories are often associated with a specific situation. For example, even usual activities (such as having dinner) during travel or vacation can be considered "unusual" due to the food or environment (Stone et al., 2018).

Unique and memorable dining experiences can add tremendous value to destinations from an organisational perspective. Studies show that when tourists gain a satisfying and positive dining experience, the experience turns into a deep and lasting memory (Hancfors & Mossberg, 2003). Tourist dining memories have significant implications for decision making, behavioral intentions, and word of mouth, and provide destinations with a significant competitive advantage (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014; Cao et al., 2019).

## Methodology

Examining and understanding the experiences of tourists who participate in daily dinner cruise tours in Istanbul is the aim of this research. In order to reach this aim, tourists who had daily dinner cruise tour experience in Istanbul were purposefully chosen as the study's sample group. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, as well as the user-generated content (UGC) technique. For tourists and tourism companies, UGC is a vital source of information (Narangajavana-Kaosiri et al., 2019). Tourists around the world have a unique opportunity to use UGC to share their travel experiences and assist them in making travel decisions (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Ažić & Bačić, 2020). In the literature, qualitative case studies are thought to be valuable and appropriate for studying social phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). Because qualitative analysis is not designed for generalization, it is more necessary to attempt an in-depth understanding of the occurrence or phenomena under consideration than to attempt

to quantify it.

TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites for tourist, was the source of the data used in the study (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Between November 15 and December 10, 2020, tourists' internet reviews (n = 216) describing experiences they had between December 2017 and December 2020 were collected. From December 2020 to older reviews, all daily dinner cruise tour reviews in Istanbul on Tripadvisor are included. The study employed a systematic content analysis point of view. The raw data filtering procedure was conducted, and then appropriate tourist statements for the research were chosen. The themes were established by two separate encoders with competence in qualitative techniques and data processing.

Researchers who use the content analysis approach should consider issues such as content analysis reliability. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), Elo and Kyngas (2008), and Hsieh and Shannon (2005), researchers can demonstrate the reliability of content analysis using a variety of approaches. Firstly, to ensure reliability, comprehensive information regarding the research process and the stages of the study should be provided. In this vein, it was tried to give precise and detailed information about the research process and stages used in this analysis. Readers will be able to see exactly what stages the study went through and how it was carried out in this manner this way (Özdemir & Nebioğlu, 2015). Another way to ensure reliability is to quote the analyzed text to show the relationship between data and findings. Therefore, direct quotations from the comments of the participants have been used to accompany each finding in this study.

Coding is a critical method in content analysis for reliability. The coding process must be carried out by at least two different encoders in order to assure reliability (Hall & Valentin, 2005). Therefore, two coders who are experts in qualitative research independently conducted the coding procedures for this study. The author who conducted the study read all of comments many times. In the meantime, the researcher completed the coding procedure, determined the categories, and named the categories. Following the readings, the coding scheme was developed and with the created coding scheme, the code was assigned to the text content. Two independent researchers and the author carried out this process separately. The independent two researchers and the author then came together to discuss their findings. The disagreements over the codes were resolved at the conclusion of these negotiations, and a final agreement was reached.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The data analysis revealed that the comments of tourists on a dinner cruise in Istanbul, who were included in this study, could be divided into seven key dimensions: satisfaction, memorable experience, service quality, food quality, value/price, entertainment, and deficiencies.

## Satisfaction

Satisfaction is often used to measure how consistent an experience is (Ryan, 2002). Tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction is determined by a person's general feeling or attitude toward a purchased goods or service (Solomon, 2002). Tourists have to be kept satisfied and happy during their travel or vacation experience (Hui, Wan, & Ho, 2007) before they would even consider revisiting destination or recommending to other tourists. Following are some comments made by tourists on their satisfaction:

"...we will definitely do it again next year. recommend it to all people who are searching for a romantic night in

this romantic city of Istanbul" (T143).

"...A nice planned around 3 hours cruise on the bosphorus the pick up and drop is a good idea you can get to see the Asian and European sides of Istanbul don't miss this if you are in Istanbul highly recommended thank you guys for you great service" (T131).

*"Amazing cruise, really recommend it. From the pick up to drop off, everything was very well managed and the food was delicious from starter to dessert..." (T3).* 

"...We do highly recommend this tour to all whom which to visit Istanbul wither for leasure or business." (T66).

#### **Memorable Experience**

A memorable tourism experience is one that is recalled years after the event has taken place (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2010). Previous experiences are regarded as dependable and important information sources by tourists, and they have a substantial influence on future behavioral intentions (Hoch & Deighton, 1989; Chen & Rahman, 2018). Tourists' memorable experiences can influence their revisit decisions and their intentions of positive word of mouth (Ali, Ryu, & Hussain, 2016). The following are some relevant comments made by visitors:

"My daughter and I had the most wonderful and relaxing experiences of our near 3 weeks visit to Istanbul..." (T8).

"It was exceptional... To be honest the tour were extraordinary full of fun and joy..." (T65).

"A nighttime cruise was a wonderful pictorial experience with added dinner of small amounts of Turkish foods..." (T89).

"It was an amazing experiment and bosphorus was incredibly attractive as it always has been...". (T172).

## Service Quality

Service quality is a commonly accepted concept as an important variable in the accommodation and food and beverage industry. Tourist loyalty, as well as other critical marketing constructs like tourist satisfaction, brand image, and perceived value, have been shown to be influenced by service quality in numerous studies (Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017; Hussein & Hapsari, 2014; Hussein, 2018). The following are samples of comments regarding this topic:

"...I was picked up on time at my hotel and brought over to the port. I was seated at my table and was offered great service during the show..." (T1).

"It was good tour they pick up us from our hotel boat was good and big staff was friendly they helped everything..." (T32).

"...We felt like royalties and honoured guests. The waiters were fantastic, noticing in seconds that we need more tea, drinks, etc..." (T81).

"... Thanks to the staff on board who were really helpful and made our night even more memorable." (T24).

#### **Food Quality**

When the literature on food quality is examined, there are several different characteristics that can be used to assess food quality. Food quality varies according to the presentation or appearance of the food, taste, food health

characteristics, the amount and type of food (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang, Ha, & Silkes, 2009; Karim & Chi, 2010; Ryu & Han, 2010). Food quality, according to Sulek and Hensley (2004), is one of the most critical aspects of the dining experience. For example, Correia et al. (2008) and Namkung and Jang (2008), found links between food quality and concepts like satisfaction, behavioral intention, and loyalty in tourist behavior. In addition, offering local foods and drinks belonging to a destination to tourists contributes to the tourism value of the destinations (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007; Robinson & Getz, 2014; Demirkol & Ciftci, 2020). The following are some instances of tourist comments about food quality:

"...Had a full 3 course meal. I chose the traditional meatballs since I haven't tried it and it was so delicious..." (T4).

"...We enjoyed the delicious dinner served on the boat (main courses: meatballs, chicken, fish and even vegetarian food available)..." (T20).

"The appetizers was so beautiful! The food very good and the beverages came a lot and delicious..." (T151).

"... The food was also very nice, starting with a cold meze and finishing off with fruits and baklava for dessert. We went for the fish as a main which was the best choice, as the it was fished on that day... (T83).

#### Value/Price

The importance of price in offering an objective clue about the quality of goods and services is emphasized (Yi, Zhao, & Joung, 2018). Price, according to Oh (2000), is a crucial antecedent when measuring a product's quality during a customer's dining experience. Chiang & Jang (2006) concluded in their studies that the price of the product positively affects the quality and value perceptions of the customers. As a result, if customers find the price of a product reasonable, they are more likely to be pleased with their dining experience. Some of relevant comments of tourists are given as follows:

"Dinner menu with unlimited local alcoholic drinks was great value..." (T72).

"...For the price - you get a beautiful clean boat, food is good, unlimited drinks non alcoholic, there is entertainment on board as well..." (T164).

"...Prices for such a good service was affordance as well..." (T15).

"We book our cruise from their web sites it was really good price..." (T162).

## Entertaintment

People enjoy and anticipate entertainment. Talk shows, musicals, magic shows, and dance shows are only some of the entertainment options available (Luo, Lam, & Fan, 2020). Researchers have different approaches to entertainment tourism. Hughes (2000) considers entertainment to be a means of artistic expression. However, Xu (2010) emphasizes that entertainment is a tool and part of tourism to provide a memorable experience. Rather than classifying them as a part of something, Vogel (2014) described entertainment as activities that produce interesting and engaging experiences, promote and create new experiences. Some comments relating to this subject are given as follows:

"...dance show team was great we dance with belly dancer..." (T51).

Yiğit, S.

"...Good food and enjoyable entertainment on board. I just had to get up and belly dance to the live music it was such a good atmosphere..." (T72).

"...There were about 5 traditional dance shows that were spaced out during the travel time, but the last bellydancing show was amazing..." (T136).

"...the entertainment was sensational. Classic Turkish dances mixed with modern entertainment. The audience was engaged at all times and the performers were very talented..." (T149).

### Deficiencies

According to the results, although most of the tourists' comments about the dinner cruise are positive, there are some negativities pointed out by the tourists. These negativities are related to "food quality" and "service quality". Concerning food quality, tourists complained about the taste of the food on offer. Examples of comments relating to this subject are given as follows:

"Worst food we had in Turkey..." (T211).

"Very, very poor food. Don't expect anything spectacular. Street food is much better ... " (T152).

Another issue that tourists complain about is service quality. They were complaining about the cruise's crowd and table choices. Some of the relevant comments of tourists are given as follows:

"The cruise was very crowded, first we had a table close to the centre, as we reserved but our place was occupied so we were relocated in the back..." (T198).

"Our seats were on the same table with 4 guys that we don't know (fortunately they weren't annoying). If you get a seat away from the dance floor, watching the show will always be blocked by people standing or taking pictures..." (T103).

## Conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine tourists' daily dinner cruise tour experiences in Istanbul by analyzing comments on TripAdvisor. Satisfaction, memorable experience, service quality, food quality, value/price, entertainment, and deficiencies were found to be the seven dimensions (Figure 1) of Daily dinner cruise tour experiences in Istanbul. These seven dimensions that affect the quality of the Daily dinner cruise tour experiences and the satisfaction of the tourists. This study is one of the first studies to examine daily dinner cruise tour experiences in depth. Since there is no study in the literature similar to this study, the findings obtained from this study are evaluated as the original.

Considering the negative comments of the tourists, the problems in the daily dinner cruise tours should be eliminated. In this way, a truly memorable experience can be offered for tourists coming to Istanbul. Food experiences are a crucial concept of destination marketing. Travel satisfaction and positive word of mouth have been linked to memorable food and beverage experiences (Stone & Migacz, 2016). To remain competitive in the fierce market that characterizes international tourism, destination managers need to offer truly memorable experiences to their visitors (Kim et al., 2010).



Figure 1. Proposed Daily Dinner Cruise Tour Experience Dimensions

The findings show that daily dinner cruise tours are seen by tourists as a positive and memorable activity. Daily dinner cruise tours are one of the activities that should be experienced by tourists coming to Istanbul. Istanbul is a complete tourism destination with its historical, cultural and natural beauties. In addition, due to the geopolitical location of Istanbul, dining experience between the two continents can be seen in very few places in the world. It is seen as very interesting in terms of tourism that the cruisers introduce both Turkish cuisine, Turkish entertainment culture and the beauties of Istanbul at the same time. More attention should be paid to the marketing of daily dinner cruise events, with emphasis on the characteristics of this experience as being extremely unique and memorable.

This research has implications for companies that provide daily dinner cruise tours. This research uncovered the dimensions of the daily dinner cruise tour experience, which may help service providers develop strategies to ensure that visitors' daily dinner cruise tour experiences are satisfied. According to participant reviews, daily dinner cruise tours could be a significant alternative activity for tourists. Therefore, the results provided service providers with significant managerial insights. It was essential for tourists visiting a place to have a memorable experience. When evaluating the importance of memorable experience in a daily dinner cruise tours, service providers should place a primary emphasis on memorable experience.

This study has some limitations due to its method. The analysis unit of this study consists of online reviews and commentaries that reflect the tourists' experiences of dining in the Istanbul region. Finally, the study findings cannot be generalized since the sample size is restricted to tourists visiting Istanbul and participating in a dinner cruise. As

a result, future studies should include face-to-face interviews with daily dinner cruise tour participants.

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