

**TOURIST EXPECTATION AND SATISFACTION TOWARDS  
EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES IN  
GOLESTAN NATIONAL PARK, IRAN**

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**TOURIST EXPECTATION AND SATISFACTION  
TOWARDS EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE IN  
GOLESTAN NATIONAL PARK, IRAN.**

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The previous study had shown that tourists' satisfaction and expectation had related mainly to tourism infrastructures. Thus, this research is aim to identify the most important and applicable tourism infrastructures in Golestan national park in Iran.

Tourism infrastructures are the main aspects studied to measure the variable that could have a positive effect on the Tourists' satisfaction and expectation levels, which consist of accommodation, accessibility, and facility. Using online survey approaches with a total number of 146 complete responses are gathered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results also show that tourism infrastructures can have a key role on tourists' satisfaction and expectation levels. In conclusion, this study is significant to all tourism stakeholders, especially managers of the national park and tourism operators, which they should have attention to both hard and soft ecotourism that each one has a special infrastructure.

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian sebelumnya menunjukkan bahawa kepuasan dan harapan pelancong sangat berkaitan dengan infrastruktur pelancongan. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti infrastruktur pelancongan yang paling penting dan berguna di Taman Negara Golestan di Iran.

Infrastruktur pelancongan adalah aspek utama yang dikaji untuk mengukur pemboleh ubah yang dapat memberi kesan positif bagi meningkatkan kepuasan dan harapan pelancong, yang terdiri dari tempat tinggal, aksesibilitas, dan kemudahan. Menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan dalam talian dengan jumlah 146 respons telah lengkap dikumpulkan dan dianalisis menggunakan Pakej Statistik untuk Sains Sosial (SPSS). Hasilnya juga menunjukkan bahawa infrastruktur pelancongan dapat memberikan pengaruh yang sangat baik pada tingkat kepuasan dan harapan pelancong. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini penting bagi semua pemegang taruh kepentingan pelancongan, terutama pengurus taman negara dan pengusaha pelancongan, yang mana mereka harus memperhatikan ekowisata yang keras dan lembut yang masing-masing memiliki infrastruktur khas.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UTM	-	University Teknologi Malaysia
GNP	-	Golestan National Park
SPSS	-	Statically Package for Social Science
UNWTO	-	United Nations World Tourism Organization
ITTO	-	Iranian Tourism & Touring Online
NP	-	National park
ICHTO	-	Iran's Cultural heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization
WCPA	-	World commission on Protected Area
IUCN	-	International Union for Conservation of Nature's
CPEC	-	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
BNP	-	Boujagh National Park
SWTO	-	Strength, Weaken, Treat and Opportunity
M	-	Mean
SD	-	Standard Deviation

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Tourism has come to be one of the main driving forces behind economic growth in several countries and world regions. Tourism has also become a social phenomenon as a result of people's increased leisure time, rising disposable income, and the development of more efficient transport, whereby making more countries accessible. Based on the definition by world tourism organization (UNWTO, 2019), tourism can be described as traveling beyond the typical atmosphere from one point to another within one year.

There are many reasons why people travel, such as leisure, recreation, sport, education, and business. Based on the highlights of the UNWTO tourism (2019), just over half of all international tourist arrivals (1.4 billion) in 2019 accounted for travel for holidays, recreation, and other forms of leisure. Tourism is significant and has a direct effect on the development of economic, social, and culture in the destination regions and countries.

UNWTO has been attention in the field of ecotourism since the early 1990s and has established a series of recommendations focused

on the critical connection between protected area and tourism, intending to ensure that tourism contributes to and does not compromise the goals of protected areas.

Ecotourism's relation to modes of tourism with the following characteristics is focused on the UNWTO (2019) definition:

1. Both nature-based travel industry styles in which the visitors' essential motivation is the understanding and appreciation of nature, even as the traditional cultures dominate in natural areas.

2. Ecotourism attributes positively influence satisfaction and indirectly influence revisit intention, while eco-lodge attributes positively influence eco-lodge motives and indirectly influence revisit intention.

3. It promotes the restoration of the natural areas used as destinations for ecotourism by:

- Offering economic incentives to local populations, organizations, and agencies that maintain natural areas for restoration purposes;
- Bringing new jobs and earning prospects to local communities;
- Raise understanding among visitors and locals of the protection of natural and cultural properties.



In order to visit protected areas has long been a crucial aspect of park operations. If the number of tourists rises, the organizational problems do so. Two changes in recent years are an increased recognition of the importance of ecological protection, and the Mobility of ecotourism infrastructure (Ghosh-Harihar, 2019). There are multiple guiding factors behind the movements and amounts of tourism inside parks. These are comprised of variables such as rising income, evolving environmental perceptions, technical change, economic transformation, and services that impact park visits (Heagney & Kovač, 2018). Protected parks and areas provide natural, educational, leisure, science, environmental, and cultural benefits to domestic and foreign tourists that affect communities and societies generally. While people profit from these factors, certain people want to be interested in decisions relating to their establishment and management. They do want to be allowed to share their opinions on the region management. Many citizens would like the criteria to allow them to enjoy safe area advantages (Oviedo-García et al., 2019).

Efficient management and sustainable tourism can come about if protected area managers include stakeholders in the tourism facilities management phase at the earliest possible stage. Tourism management in parks and protected areas are mainly influenced by main tourism infrastructures in the areas: a) accommodation, b) accessibility, and c) facility. Each of the groups views tourism from their unique perspective (Albayrak & Caber, 2108). In a park, a management strategy that is successful and detailed will provide an awareness and respect of each group's expectations. In contrast, lack

of understanding and resolving of all tourism infrastructures can contribute to short-sighted management (Wang, 2016).

Tourist satisfaction is also a revered to subject of marketing studies. There is no question that satisfaction plays a crucial position in the preparation of goods and services for marketable tourism (Yousaf et al, 2018). It also influences the destination expectations, the buying of products and services, and the tourists' plan to stay. Although there have been numbers of research done to determine consumer behaviour and tourist satisfaction, there is a small plurality on it. The satisfaction of the tourists is measured by comparing the anticipated impression of quality and the actual output encountered by the tourists (Yun & Pyo, 2016).

It is stated that the satisfaction of tourists is measured by comparing the predicted impression of quality and the actual quality that the tourists encounter. Besides, the satisfaction of tourists is the product of contrast of tourist perceptions and encounters where an encounter meets or is equivalent to the perceptions of tourists (Chand et al., 2016). However, satisfaction is known as being mainly affected by the standard of service. Loyalty would, therefore, be increased if the efficiency of the service is enhanced. Nonetheless, recent research has reported that there are big variables that make one of them affect satisfaction and standard of service. Measuring tourist satisfaction in a specific destination is not solely determined by the level of service offered by several different service providers (Khuong & Quyen, 2016).

There are numerous activities and experiences which are not connected to specific organizations. Many significant factors are significant and have huge impacts on tourist satisfaction, including the natural environment, social climate, green management, lodging, size, accessibility, leisure activities, and perceived interest of tourists (Viet, 2019).

In recent years, many researchers in the field of tourism continue also examine the effect of the perceived importance of visitors on different aspects of tourists behaviour. The personal interest of visitors has been empirically observed and has been of considerable significance in the tourism industry. It studied the relationship between perceived value and satisfaction, and the results showed that perceived value is both a source and a primary determinant of tourists' satisfaction (Kanwal et al. 2020).

Based on ecotourism defined a general assessment of tourists about the tourism infrastructures that is focused on the understanding of what is obtained and what is used or perceived value is a cognitive-affective assessment of tourists satisfaction and expectation. Satisfies is related to the procurement of a good or service and relies on a calculation of the quality and services resulting from the evolving conditions, circumstances and situations in which the evaluation is produced (Kim et al., 2015).

Iran (a name from 2500 years ago), a country in Asia (middle east), as a country with four seasons and various types of animals and plants, has 26 NPs, which many of them are being used as tourist

destinations due to their natural and cultural attractions. Golestan National Park (GNP), is located in the eastern Alborz (Elburs) Mountains range and the western edge of the Kopet Dag range. It comprises 91,890 hectares and Elevations in the Park Range from 1,000–1,400 meters (3,300–4,600 Ft.) above sea level. GNP has a variety of habitats, such as temperate broadleaf forests, grasslands, Shrublands, and rocky areas. The diverse flora contains stands of white *Eremurus Kopetdaghensis*, *Iris Acutiloba* Subsp. *Lineolata* and *Iris Kopetdagensis* (Iranian Tourism & Touring Online (ITTO)).

GNP, as one of the most famous NPs in Iran, has tackled ecotourism problems as there is no suitable framework to understanding the concept of tourism infrastructures for getting tourist satisfaction and expectations and evaluating and selecting the existing strategies. Moreover, the literature shows there is a lack of focus on promoting the strategic concept of tourism infrastructures in NPS in the Middle East countries such as Iran; thus, the findings can be beneficial for all managers in this industry.

On the other hand, due to the increase of public awareness about the tourism infrastructure issues, managers of the national park have to consider the tourism infrastructures in their managing process for getting tourist satisfaction; otherwise, they cannot compete in the market (González et al., 2019). That is the reason behind many managers of NPS all around the world trying to improve their tourism infrastructures. Therefore, Mobility of infrastructure to enhance sustainable tourism development concerning tourist satisfaction is very helpful for the managers of NPS (Penteriani et al., 2017).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Tourism industry is one of the most important financial resources. One of the sections of this industry-focused by many researchers is ecotourism. Based on the obtained reports, NPS is one of the classes in which the issue of ecotourism has received much attention. The improvement of tourism infrastructures in several NPS is receiving strategic sensitivity for maintaining tourism sustainability (Jusoh et al., 2015). Various researches concentrating on this issue have it is mentioned that there is a mismatch among improving the satisfaction of tourists and expectation in NPS and tourism infrastructures among Middle East countries (Wang et al, 2016).

However, the previous studies are very general and theory-based and have not taken the practicality and the applicability of the proposed strategies in real-world into consideration. It brings into light the need for creating a practical and fit tourism infrastructure for taking tourists' satisfaction and expectation in NPS to realize the concept of the sustainable tourism environment, determine the most significant factors, and select the most suitable strategies for sustainable ecotourism in the NPS under their responsibility (Vu, 2018).

Apart from that, although the studies showed that the level of awareness among tourists is increasing, there is still uncertainty among the tourists to pay more for the sake of both hard and soft ecotourism infrastructures adapted by some national parks (Ern, & Ching, (2017). Thus, it is also essential to emphasize the satisfaction

and expectation of tourists regarding their attitudes and contribution to the hard and soft ecotourism infrastructures in national parks. There is a lack of studies conducted on tourism infrastructures and tourists' satisfaction, particularly in GNP Iran. Therefore, this study aims to find tourism infrastructures to provide satisfaction to tourists to enhance sustainable tourism development in GNP.

### **1.3 Research Aim**

Due to the lack of knowledge on tourists' satisfaction and expectations levels in the area of ecotourism, the management of GNP of Iran needs to know the definition of the effective tourism infrastructures on sustainable tourism development. So they can perform appropriate strategies in the context to improve their ecotourism performance. Current research aims to determine the most appropriate hard and soft ecotourism infrastructures for tourists' satisfaction and expectation by searching in the literature and listing the existing factors applied in the previous studies. Also, to determining the tourist satisfaction levels on infrastructures in the area of hard and soft ecotourism by developing a questionnaire for evaluating the satisfaction levels from the infrastructures, finally, to recommend improvements based on the sustainable tourism development of GNP in Iran.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

This research is constructed to identify tourism infrastructures to the tourist satisfaction in Golestan national park in Iran. Within this aim, the main objectives to be achieved areas listed below:

1. To assess the expectation of tourists in terms of tourism infrastructures in GNP of Iran.
2. To evaluate the level of tourists' satisfaction in GNP of Iran.
3. To recommend improvements based on sustainable tourism development of GNP in Iran.

## **1.5 Research Question**

The main consideration for this research is the level of satisfaction and expectation of the tourist regarding tourism infrastructure in Golestan national park would lead to their contribution to the practices and hence encourage sustainable tourism development in Golestan national park. It is a consideration that was threaded through the following question:

1. What are the expectations of tourists in terms of tourism infrastructures in GNP?
2. What are the level of tourists' satisfaction regarding to ecotourism infrastructures in GNP?
3. What are the recommendations of improvements that suitable to suggest in GNP?

## **1.6 Scope of Research**

The scope of studies in the effort of determining the levels of tourist satisfaction and expectation in terms of ecotourism infrastructures to enhance sustainable tourism development in Golestan national parks in Iran is divided into three sub-sections. The scope of the study is outlined to ensure this research is done strictly by fulfilling the goal and objectives. Below is the scope of the study of the research.

There are three sub-sections in this part, including:

1.6.1. This research focuses on recognizing the levels of tourist satisfaction and expectation. Previous studies show that how attributes of tourism infrastructure can give a positive image towards the tourist, which can influence the satisfaction and hence influence



their decision purchase making in choosing the type of facilities such as accommodation, accessibility, and so on during travel.

1.6.2. To identify the most applicable tourism infrastructures in Golestan national park. The tourist satisfaction of the infrastructures will be identified based on their experience of the national park issues and how far it will affect the tourist decision making to stay in the GNP. Thus, this scope of the study will be looking at the effects of tourism infrastructures on tourists' satisfaction to pay more or stay longer in GNP, which applies sustainable development in tourism.

1.6.3. Recommend the best strategy for tourist satisfaction and expectation regarding tourism infrastructures in GNP for reaching sustainable tourism development. This scope of the study will be looking into the satisfaction of the tourist as well to study whether they are aware or not about the importance of ecotourism infrastructures. The previous study showed different contexts, such as demographic backgrounds and tourist behaviour, in their finding. Those from a younger age, high levels of income are more likely willing to pay for better facilities. Thus, Iran, with different backgrounds of tourists, is essential to study and compare the level of satisfaction and expectation regarding infrastructures between different demographic backgrounds of the tourists in GNP.

## **1.7 Significance of Study**

This study is essential to contribute to increasing tourist satisfaction through the identification of tourism infrastructures by Golestan national park in Iran. Besides that, this study is conducted to identify tourist expectations in applying tourism facilities during their stay. Furthermore, throughout this study, the satisfaction of tourists who prefer applicable infrastructures can be identified.

The significances of this research are:

1. Developing the most suitable attributes in terms of facilities in the tourism industry.
2. Defining the concept of tourism infrastructures for the managers of GNP in Iran.
3. Determining the most important and applicable ecotourism infrastructures for tourists' satisfaction and expectations levels.
4. Realizing the potential strategies in the national park in Iran, evaluating them, and selecting the fit strategies for reaching sustainable tourism development.

## **1.8 Organization of the Study**

Consists of five chapters in this review. Chapter one starts with an overview, a general analysis of this thesis, and the research context. The following portions contain this study's issue statement, research issues, research priorities, and scope. Chapter Two reviews the previous literature in Iran and other countries' ecotourism and the current movement of tourism infrastructures in the world. This study is variable, and the reasons are given accordingly.

Chapter Three reflects on the methods and architecture of the study. Other similar issues are also addressed in this portion, such as the creation of study framework-based questionnaires, the sampling design, the system of data collection, the used variables and calculation, and the process of data analysis.

The study results are explored in chapter four. The analysis was carried out from the questionnaire of the tourist satisfaction on the ecotourism infrastructures in Golestan national park by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). These research outcomes are derived and would provide the information for recommendation and future research.

Chapter five concludes the results and findings. Additionally, it consists of the formulation of recommendations from the study of the relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourism infrastructures,

which led to sustainable tourism development and their intention to visit and pay more for the facilities in Golestan national park.

## **1.9 Summary**

Overall in this chapter, the information and indicators needed to help to achieve the research objectives is constructed and specified. This chapter is vital to give a brief overview of the whole study from the beginning to the end of this study. Problem statement and objectives of this study had been emphasized throughout this chapter; hence a research framework was transformed as a guide for the researcher to conduct his study. Thus, the next chapter will explain more on the understanding of theories related to the study. Furthermore, the study's significance, as mentioned earlier, is essential to all tourism stakeholders, especially government and tourism operators, to identify the critical issues regarding the tourism infrastructure issues towards the satisfaction of tourists, especially Golestan national park.

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