

# Experience of the tourists visiting the National Park “Accursed Mountains” in the Republic of Kosovo

YLBER KRASNIQI \* [ylber.krasniqi@kolegibiznesi.com]

BURIM MORINA \*\* [burim.morina2022@gmail.com]

**Abstract** | The Accursed Mountains, a national park in the Republic of Kosovo, are emerging as a key tourist destination in the country and beyond. This research paper analyzes the experience of tourists who have visited the national park. The research was conducted in the Rugova Valley, one of the most interesting mountain regions near the city of Peja, renowned for its extraordinary natural and tourist values. An on-site interview was conducted with 52 respondents (tourists) using a previously designed self-administered questionnaire from late May to the first decade of June 2021. A qualitative approach was employed as a more pragmatic method in this case to better understand the experiences gained by tourists during their visit and/or stay in NP Accursed Mountains. The results confirmed that visitors had a great experience and were very satisfied, with a high likelihood of returning to the park. This research has clear theoretical implications and represents the first study of its kind in Kosovo. The results of this research expand our understanding of the visitors' experience in Kosovo, indicating that visitors or tourists must be dealt with using excellent organizational criteria to meet their needs and demands, providing them with an excellent experience and a solid basis for revisiting the destination.

**Keywords** | Tourists, experience, resources, Accursed Mountains, Kosovo

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\* **Doctor** in Tourism, *Full Professor* in College “BIZNESI” Prishtina, Faculty of Economics, department of Management and Economics, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo

\*\* **Doctor** in Economics, **Assistant Professor** in College “BIZNESI” Prishtina, Faculty of Economics, department of Management and Economics, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo

## 1. Introduction

Since the 60s of the twentieth century, the focus and attention in tourism research have been on the tourists' experiences, especially the nature of the tourist experience, thus evolving in a more progressive, but also complicated way. The early 80s of the twentieth century marked again a turning point in the research on tourist experiences because Cohen was focused on understanding the motives, attitudes, and behaviors of tourists, also helping the sociological aspect of a tourist's experience (Femenia-Serra & Neuhofer, 2018).

The entire experience process in a destination is very complex because there are many stakeholders involved in delivering that experience. Understanding a tourist's or a visitor's satisfaction level, conversely, experience in a destination is a very important factor to advance or improve the products/services in effectively promoting targeted markets to new tourists (Mendes et al., 2010).

According to Miller et al. (2019), each experience of a certain tourist or visitor can be understood as a concept that is built by that tourist/visitor himself, and that concept is also helped by the mutual relationship of sociological, ecological and managerial elements, which exist in parks and protected areas. Whenever researching the tourist experience in a tourist destination, it should be taken into account that the tourist experience is holistic, accompanied by many different attributes (Anastassova, 2017).

Today's tourists are not very interested in traditional and mass vacations for sea, sun, and sand, because today they are looking for other different experiences, which will be unforgettable and quite attractive (Kempiak et al., 2017). According to Kline (2001), there is a new advocacy in tourism, which promotes a new concept, such as nature-based tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and other forms of tourism, promoted as environmentally safe for rural communities. Thus, natural resources can generate income for the community.

This is particularly for developing countries (destinations), as they possess and provide pristine natural elements.

A developing destination is the Republic of Kosovo, characterized by a rich natural heritage and biodiversity. Currently, about 11.02% of the territory of Kosovo is under legal protection, both national parks "Accursed Mountains" and "Sharri Mountains" (Government of Kosovo, MESPI 2013). The national park (further in the paper as NP) of the "Accursed Mountains" in the native Albanian language is known as "Bjeshkët e Nemuna", and is also known as the "Albanian Alps", because of the similarity with the "original" Alps.

NP "Accursed Mountains" is a region of rare beauty, a wealth of landscape elements such as high mountains covered with snow on the peaks, impressive forests with different types of trees dominated by tall pines, valleys, and stunning deep gorges, pastures, and meadows of flowers of all colors, numerous springs and streams that form streams and rivers, beautiful caves and fabulous lakes in highlands (Institute for Spatial Planning, Kosovo 2020).

Travel to such a destination promises activities and environments that cannot usually be found in the everyday living environment (Liberato, et al., 2021). For example, visiting those destinations is a type of tourism that is based on contact with the environment, considered by the World Tourism Organization as an important, dynamic, and attractive tourism segment combined with other types of tourism (Marques et al., 2021).

The research goal of this paper is to analyze and to better understand the experience of tourists while visiting and/or staying in one of the most interesting parts of the Republic of Kosovo. Therefore, the paper will focus on understanding:

- The main reasons for the visit to NP "Accursed Mountains",
- Where did the tourists find out about the

destination and could they communicate with the host?

- If they enjoyed breakfast/lunch in the restaurants nearby or were the tourists accompanied by a tourist guide?
- If they visited a village and if so, what was interesting about it?
- What did they like the most?
- If the environment in the park was clean and, if not, what was bothering them the most?
- If the tourists cared about the natural environment?
- How did they rate their experience during the visit and stay?
- If they will come back/repeat their visit?

To answer the questions stated in the questionnaire, a review of the literature was made possible on very interesting academic articles, but also on important government documents (strategies, plans reports, and statistics) of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo.

Researching the level of the tourist experience in NP "Accursed Mountains" can provide valuable insights into the needs and preferences of tourists visiting the region, and help identify potential areas for improvement in terms of tourism infrastructure and services. Moreover, the lack of research in this area highlights the need for more comprehensive studies to be conducted to better understand the potential of tourism as an economic sector for Kosovo. By shedding light on the tourist experience in the region, this research can help inform policy decisions and guide future development initiatives aimed at enhancing the overall tourism experience for visitors to Kosovo.

## 2. Theoretical framework

According to Hosany et al. (2022), tourism means experience, which is the substance of tourist travel. There are many definitions of tourism experience, by nature and by structure, for example, subjective evaluation of a person and participation in events related to tourism activities (before, during, and after travel).

Experience as a term is a key aspect of tourism in general. On the other hand, the process of configuring the term is quite difficult, because, for example, even in the English language this word is not so clear, it is very neutral and can summarize all kinds of things that a person has gone through, from a mental, emotional or to any other aspect (Aho, 2001).

Tourism as an activity is a market of experiences, the tourists are the people who provide the "mental places" where the experience takes place, and everything that tourists go through is an "experience." On the other hand, it's difficult to understand the dimensions of experience and structure them in a way. According to various authors, the tourist experience can be defined as a mix of more individual elements, coming together and affecting the consumer emotionally, physically, and intellectually (Fernandez & Cruz, 2016).

Some studies state the existence of a pre-experience, corresponding to previously created expectations. It is common for tourists to have pre-existing expectations about a destination or experience, and these expectations can impact their overall perception of their trip. Therefore, managing and meeting these expectations is an important aspect of the tourism industry (Liberato et al., 2021).

Mendes et al. (2010) argue that experiences are subjective and personal, and they result from interactions between the individual and the environment. These interactions can influence the emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of the individual, and can leave lasting impressions in their me-

mory. While tourism products and services may be tangible or intangible, it is the experience that the tourist has with them that ultimately determines their satisfaction and likelihood of returning in the future.

In a given tourist destination, the experience of tourists can influence the future behavior of those tourists because it can determine customer satisfaction and achieve a memorable experience. The attributes of the tourist destination are those elements that attract the tourist to participate in tourist activities, and those attributes are then part of the experience components, which create the tourist's experience (Mahdzar et al., 2015).

Essentially, tourism is experientially based and at the destination, on a tourist encounters reality (Goel & Pawaskar, 2016). Selecting a destination develops expectations for a holiday, and the tourists' satisfaction levels during and after their holiday period represent an important function to their expectations (Aksu et al., 2010). Thus, a tourist experience occurs when individuals play an interactive role and participate in creating, modeling, selecting, and reflecting on those experiences (Lopes et al., 2022).

To understand the quality of the tourist's experience it is necessary to have in mind a set of interactions between four variables: escapism, relaxation, fun, and involvement. The tourist experience is subjective, filled with interactions in a chosen tourist destination, and the tourist later evaluates if it was worth paying for and if that destination was worth it compared with the quality of the tourist experience (Sousa & Leite, 2022).

Because the tourist experience is very subjective, it can only be interpreted by focusing on the people involved and the particular conditions in which experiences occur. Most of these meanings apply to the experience at the destination (Jennings et al., 2009). Dependent on their motivation, tourists often see trips as a way of enhancing the perceived quality of the on-site experience (Varvaressos, 2018).

According to Mendes et al. (2010), the tourist experience starts before arriving at the destination and ends after the visit, with memories and plans. It means that the entire process of planning, travel, and experience all contribute to the overall tourist experience, remembered and used to inform future travel decisions.

It is understood that expectations play a vital role in determining satisfaction, loyalty, and other post-purchase behaviors (Goel & Pawaskar, 2016). A tourist visits a destination with a bundle of expectations hoping to be fulfilled most satisfyingly. In this stage, he or she receives realistic access to all the activities and services when gathering the information in the first stage. This happens when the tourist begins to compare expectations with the experience (Goel and Pawaskar, 2016).

On the other hand, the experience gained in a tourism event always begins before travel plans are made and before the preparatory stages. This process continues even when tourists return to the memory of the event and the communication of the event (Hung et al., 2021).

Every traveler (tourist/visitor) expects to realize a unique, enjoyable, and different tourist experience when going on a trip. However, when it comes to marketing, especially that which deals with tourist destinations, we must emphasize that this type of marketing is still focused on the supply of quality services by tourist facilities, but ignores the increased demands for unique and unforgettable experiences (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). In a very successful destination marketing, due to the effects on tourists' destination selection, it is very important to understand the consumption of goods and services and make the decision to revisit, and the expectations of tourists (Vinh, 2013).

When visiting Kosovo as a tourist destination, many tourists are interested in visiting natural sites: mountains, lakes and rivers, natural landscapes, etc. The Accursed Mountains are a popular destination in Kosovo; thus, we tend to analyze or assess the tourists' experience while staying and vi-

siting the destination. In this sense, natural spaces have been gaining a growing relevance and reorganized as important recreational and experiential areas with enormous creative potential (Lopes et al., 2022).

Accordingly, countries like Kosovo must invest significant resources into marketing their tourism industry to attract visitors. However, customers' decisions to choose a destination are not based only on marketing efforts. Many factors influence tourists' decision-making process, including their attitudes, values, lifestyle, and motivations for travel. Tourists are influenced by the pull factors of a destination: natural attractions, cultural heritage, and entertainment offerings. The nature of the intended trip, including factors such as distance, time, and duration, can also impact tourists' decision-making (Sampaio et al., 2021).

### 3. Methods

The research was conducted in the region of the "Accursed Mountains" National Park in the Republic of Kosovo. The Accursed Mountains are a significant destination for the development of mountain and rural tourism in Kosovo (Krasniqi, 2019). This national park includes several municipalities: Peja, Deçan, Istog, Junik, and Gjakova. The administrative center of this region is Peja, and the mountain massif covers a vast area and represents a significant part of the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo (Institute for Spatial Planning, Kosovo 2020).

Regarding the main tourism products and services in the "Accursed Mountains" National Park, it should be mentioned that a region is a place for mountain and rural tourism, as well as a complementary asset (and vice versa) to the historical and cultural heritage of the urban core located below the mountain range and valley. The national park has emerged as a strong and growing tourist desti-

nation within Kosovo, due to its attractive values.

For this research, the authors chose the "Rugova Valley," a mountainous region located northwest of the city of Peja, because of its natural and touristic values, especially those suitable for hiking, skiing, mountaineering, paragliding, outdoor activities, hunting, fishing, village tourism, wellness, alpinism, speleology, camping, daily and weekend picnics, and excursions (Institute for Spatial Planning, Kosovo 2020).

In addition, in April 2013, the Municipality of Peja in the Republic of Kosovo was honored with the Destination Stewardship award at the "Tourism for Tomorrow" ceremony for the "Peaks of the Balkans" project, which includes a part of the whole mountain trail (Kosovo-Montenegro-Albania) passing through the Rugova region. This event took place at the Global Summit in Abu Dhabi during the 13th Annual World Travel and Tourism Council.

The research data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources of information are an important part in providing a backbone to the research by highlighting past research findings and contributing new value to the research's purpose. The data was assembled from books, articles, newsletters, websites, and research papers (Goel & Pawaskar, 2016).

For this research, a questionnaire survey (interview) is involved as a primary source of collecting data. The authors gathered the needed information from the participants in the survey using a questionnaire to help fulfill the interview schedule, a technique that is very used when conducting tourism research (Veal, 2018). The authors used an on-site survey technique, conducted at a known location where tourists meet in the Rugova region, in this case, in the Tourist Info Centre (TIC) when leaving the Rugova Canyon and where tourists get information, such as maps, brochures, souvenirs, and bicycles rentals to visit the Accursed Mountains as a whole.

The questionnaire used for the survey was

paper-based and included questions about the participants' demographic data, their previous experiences, and their post-experience behavior. The survey was self-administered and conducted on randomly selected tourists in front of the TIC. The authors asked the potential participants if they wanted to voluntarily participate in the research and answer the questionnaire on the spot.

Out of the attempted 64 participants, 52 responded and provided useful data for the research. Unfortunately, 12 potential respondents declined to participate, resulting in a reaction rate of 81.25%. The respondents in the research were tourists who visited the Rugova region in the NP Accursed Mountains between May 25th and June 10th, 2021. Of the 52 participants, 15 were domestic tourists, and 37 were foreign tourists. The authors conducted the interviews in Albanian for domestic tourists and in English for foreign tourists.

The authors of the research chose to take a qualitative approach to collect and analyze data. According to Veal (2018), the qualitative model is ideal for gathering detailed information from a relatively small number of cases or subjects. This approach involves obtaining in-depth insights and understanding from the participants, as opposed to focusing on a large number of respondents and limited information, which is characteristic of quantitative research. By adopting a qualitative approach, the authors aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of tourists visiting the Rugova region in the NP "Accursed Mountains".

The authors of this research chose a qualitative approach because it is more pragmatic in situations where quantitative research is unnecessary or impossible. In the case of tourism research, the personal experiences and feelings of individuals can be best described and explained in their own words. Qualitative research allows participants to speak freely without being limited by a research framework or influenced by the research-

er. As a result, the information obtained is more accurate and reflective of their personal experiences and perspectives (Veal, 2018).

The authors of the research used a semi-structured interview format to elicit a wide range of opinions and perspectives from the respondents and to clarify any questions that may have been unclear or confusing.

In addition to gathering demographic information, the questionnaire consisted of 23 questions divided into four sections, which focused on the tourists' experience during their stay in NP Accursed Mountains, their level of information about the destination, and their likelihood of revisiting. The questionnaire took approximately 35-45 minutes to complete and utilized a five-point Likert scale for response options (ranging from 1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree, 1=totally irrelevant to 5=extremely important, and 1=very unsatisfied to 5=very satisfied).

#### 4. Results

The demographic profiles of the survey participants are presented in Table 1. The survey received 52 usable responses, although the authors aimed to increase participation to 64. As a result, the response rate for this questionnaire was 81.25%.

According to the demographic statistics provided in the aforementioned table, 44.2% of the respondents were male and 55.8% were female. A majority of the respondents (53.9%) fell in the 19-29 age group, while just over 19% belonged to the 40-49 age group, and over 15% were in the 30-39 age group. Nearly 10% of the participants were aged between 50 and 59, and only one respondent was aged 60 or above.

In terms of education, only two respondents had a primary school level of education, while almost 8% had a high school diploma. Over 69%

**Table 1** | Demographic profiles of the participants (Part One of the questionnaire)

Demographics		Frequency - f	Percentage - %
Total participants: 52		52	100.0
Gender:	Male	23	44.2
	Female	29	55.8
Age (years old):	18-29	28	53.9
	30-39	8	15.4
	40-49	10	19.2
	50-59	5	9.6
	60 and above	1	1.9
Educational level:	Primary school	2	3.8
	Secondary school	4	7.7
	Graduate	36	69.2
	Postgraduate	10	19.3
Occupation:	Student	9	17.3
	Employed	35	67.3
	Retired	1	1.9
	Other	7	13.5
Marital status:	Married	16	30.8
	Not married	11	21.1
	Decline to answer	25	48.1
Monthly income (USD):	Under 1000	5	9.6
	1001-5000	10	19.2
	Over 5000	0	0.0
	Decline to answer	37	71.2

Source: Authors' calculation

of the respondents had graduated from their respective countries, and 19.2% held a postgraduate diploma.

It is worth noting that 88.5% of the total number of tourists, both foreign and domestic, had a very high level of education. This suggests that the majority of the respondents were well-educated and possessed a great deal of information when traveling to a destination.

Of the participants, 17.3% (9 respondents) reported being students, with 8 of them being foreign tourists. Only one respondent was a retired visitor to the park, and 13.5% indicated 'other' as their occupation. Notably, 67.3% of the participants reported being employed in various jobs. In terms of marital status, almost 31% of the respondents reported being married, 21.1% were not married, and 48.1% chose not to answer that question.

Over 71% of the participants declined to answer questions about their monthly income, likely because it is sensitive financial data.

More than 73% of the participants reported visiting the national park for the first time, while almost 27% had been there more than once.

None of the respondents reported using an aircraft as a mode of transportation to get to the national park. A few tourists used bikes, mo-

torbikes, and taxis to arrive at the destination, while over 21% used their cars, and 65.5% paid for a bus ticket to get to NP Accursed Mountains. Albanian-speaking tourists conversed in their native language, while the rest of the tourists communicated in English during their visit to the destination.

Only two tourists had arranged to stay for more than two overnights, and only three tourists planned to stay for one night at an accommodation facility within the destination's territory. Four tourists were planning a very short stay, and 43 tourists (82.7%) planned a daily excursion or picnic.

Almost 40% of the respondents who took the survey agreed that their main reason for visiting the destination was the extraordinary landscape and the clean environment, including air and water, 18% of them were interested in mountaineering, more than 17% wanted to relax and rehabilitate, and 10% of the participants were attracted by the local population's culture.

Only a small percentage of the respondents were interested in visiting cultural and historical places, or for other reasons, and even fewer were interested in scientific research goals. More than 81% of the participants had decided to visit the mountains, lakes, rivers, and caves in the desti-

nation, focusing on the natural beauty and geological features, rather than visiting nearby villages or cultural-historical monuments or other locations not mentioned elsewhere.

Table 2 | Experience of the tourists in NP Accursed Mountains (Part Two of the questionnaire)

Category	Sub-category	Frequency - f	Percentage - %
Total participants: 52		52	100.0
Visit:	Yes, this is my first visit	38	73.1
	I have been here more than once	14	26.9
Mode of transport:	Personal car	11	21.1
	Bus	34	65.5
	Bike	2	3.8
	Motorbike	2	3.8
	Taxi	3	5.8
	Aircrafts	0	0.0
	Another mode	0	0.0
Language:	I communicate in Albanian	15	28.8
	I communicate in English	37	71.2
Length of stay:	A very short stay	4	7.7
	Daily excursion/picnic	43	82.7
	One overnight	3	5.8
	More overnights	2	3.8
Reasons for visiting:	The extraordinary landscape	52	19.9
	The exceptional flora and fauna	19	7.3
	Clean air, clean water	52	19.9
	Rest and rehabilitation	45	17.2
	Mountaineering	47	18.0
	Scientific research goals	2	0.8
	The culture of the local population	26	10.0
	Cultural and historical places	11	4.2
	Other reasons	7	2.7
Places to visit:	Mountains	52	36.3
	Lakes and rivers	21	14.7
	Caves	43	30.1
	Cultural-historical monuments	11	7.7
	Villages	14	9.8
	Other	2	1.4
Restaurant services:	I visited a restaurant	39	75.0
	I didn't visit a restaurant	13	25.0
	I enjoyed the food/beverages	39	75.0
	I didn't enjoy the food/beverages	13	25.0
	The service was good	39	75.0
	The service wasn't good	13	25.0
	The price was affordable	39	75.0
	The price wasn't affordable	13	25.0
Environment:	Very unclean/very polluted	2	3.8
	Unclean/polluted	5	9.6
	Neutral	7	13.5
	Clean/not polluted	14	27.0
	Very clean	24	46.1
Overall satisfaction:	Very Unsatisfied	1	1.9
	Unsatisfied	1	1.9
	Neutral	4	7.7
	Satisfied	9	17.3
	Very satisfied	37	71.2

Source: Authors' calculation

During their visit to the destination, 75% of the participants visited a restaurant and enjoyed a meal, and agreed that the service was good and the prices were affordable for the products and services. The rest of the tourists didn't visit any restaurants, resulting in no consumption of food or other products, no service, and no price to pay.

More than 73% of the respondents agreed that

the environment was considerably clean and not polluted, while more than 13% considered that the environment was polluted and it was not clean. The rest of the respondents were neutral on this matter.

It is important to note that during their visit to the destination, one participant was very unsatisfied, one participant was unsatisfied, and almost



8% of them were neutral, more than 17% were satisfied, and over 71% were very much satisfied with their visit.

These results represent important factors for further work and engagement to improve the tourist experience in the destination.

**Table 3 |** Tourist information in NP Accursed Mountains (Part Three of the questionnaire)

Category	Sub-category	Frequency - f	Percentage - %
Total participants: 52		52	100.0
Information gathering	Internet browser	52	25.7
	Social media	52	25.7
	Radio and Television	5	2.5
	Newspapers	5	2.5
	Brochures	14	6.9
	Family and relatives	39	19.3
	Friends and colleagues	18	9.0
	Previous visit	14	6.9
	Other sources of information	3	1.5
Guides	A tourist guide is needed	42	80.8
	A tourist guide isn't needed	10	19.2
Tourist info signs	There are tourist info signs	19	36.5
	There aren't any tourist info signs	33	63.5

Source: Authors' calculation

When the respondents were asked how they found out about NP Accursed Mountains, over 51% responded that they found out about it from browsing the internet and social media, as well as from family and relatives (19.3%) and friends/colleagues, resulting in almost 80% by combining those four sources of information. Only a small percentage found out about it from sources such as radio and television, brochures, newspapers, or other sources of tourist information.

A tourist guide was needed by 80.8% of all respondents, presumably because it is an unfamiliar terrain and the participants may have wan-

ted to hear the tourist information directly. The remaining 19.2% didn't need tourist guide services, perhaps because they already had information about the destination.

More than a third of the participants reported that they saw tourist information signs, and the rest of the participants replied negatively, indicating that they did not see or encounter any tourist information signs. The authors believe that tourist information signs are important for informing tourists about the park, including warning signs for areas with special protection.

**Table 4 |** A revisit to the NP Accursed Mountains (Part Four of the questionnaire)

Category	Sub-category	Frequency - f	Percentage - %
Total participants: 52		52	100.0
Enjoyment	Didn't enjoy it at all	0	0.0
	Didn't enjoy	0	0.0
	Neutral	4	7.7
	Enjoyed	12	23.1
	Enjoyed a lot	36	69.2
Worth of visit	It wasn't worth it	0	0.0
	It was worth it	40	76.9
	Decline to answer	12	23.1
Recommendation	I will not recommend it	0	0.0
	I will recommend it	40	76.9
	Decline to answer	12	23.1
Revisit	I will not revisit it	12	23.1
	I will revisit it	28	53.8
	Decline to answer	12	23.1

Source: Authors' calculation

None of the participants answered that they didn't enjoy visiting the destination. Only four were neutral, and over 23% enjoyed their visit. The most important finding of the survey is that over 69% of the tourists enjoyed their stay in the destination a lot.

Almost 77% of the participants responded that it was worth it to visit the destination. None of them answered negatively, and over 23% declined to answer. The situation is similar when the participants responded if they would recommend the destination; almost 77% would recommend it to others, and the rest of the respondents declined to answer.

When the respondents were asked if they would revisit the destination, the authors likely received more honest answers. Almost 54% of the respondents said they would return to the destination, over 23% said they would not, and over 23% declined to answer the question.

## 5. Conclusion

The research goal of this paper is to understand the experience of tourists while visiting NP Accursed Mountains one of the most interesting destinations within the Republic of Kosovo. The authors of the research tried to find out the most important reasons for visiting this destination, how got the tourists were informed about the destination, did the tourists enjoy restaurants services while staying and/or visiting, what they visited the most, was the environment clean, could they express their satisfaction, will the tourists recommend or suggest to others to visit the destination and the most important question: will they come back/repeat the visit?

This study is also based on the fact that any visitor travels to a destination to experience something else, more unique than the usual everyday living. On the other hand, the stakeholders of a

destination must try to fulfill the tourists' needs and expectations "by providing" a much more pleasant experience, and to "to encourage" them visit again.

According to the research results, more than 73% of the participants were first-time tourists, all of the respondents communicated easily in the Albanian language and English language. A significant part of the respondents (almost 40%) agreed that their main reason or reasons for visiting the destination were the extraordinary landscape and the clean environment, and 4/5 of the respondents had visited the mountains, lakes, rivers, and caves in the destination. A very important observation during the visit to the destination is that 75% of the respondents were very satisfied.

According to the authors of the research, this reflects a serious problem for directing the tourists. It also raises concerns about the protection of zones that are strictly forbidden to stay on. Another very important result from the survey is that over 69% of the tourists enjoyed a lot during their visit/stay in the destination, and almost 77% of the participants agreed that the visit to NP Accursed Mountains was worth it, they will recommend this destination.

The authors expected and hoped that much more of the respondents would choose to come back to the destination. The authors also express their opinion about what should be undertaken as activities, meaning in both practical and technical nature, in the direction of the development of tourism or certain types of tourism in the chosen destination.

Raising awareness about the value of nature, preventing harmful impacts on the environment and its heritage, and harvesting natural resources in a sustainable manner should be in harmony with the expectations of tourists. This is especially true when discussing the Accursed Mountains, which offer great opportunities for developing ecotourism.

Creating new tourism offerings at the destina-

tion and developing appropriate programs for different groups of tourists, including those interested in science, nature, recreation, and research, as well as fostering inter-municipal, cross-border, and international cooperation for the development, protection and preservation of nature will intrigue visitors and help to develop tourism in the entire region between Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro.

According to the authors of the research, tourists are drawn to the destination because of its beautiful mountains, lakes, rivers, and other geological formations, making it a popular and attractive place to visit. Therefore, the destruction of biodiversity means fewer incentives and attractions, fewer tourists, and stagnation of tourism in the region. On the other hand, preserving biodiversity can enhance the value of the destination, making it more attractive, enhancing the experience, and increasing satisfaction for tourists visiting the area.

During the survey and data collection, the authors of the research discovered another issue: a small number of tourists visited villages and cultural-historical monuments. This is contrary to the exceptional cultural heritage values represented by old houses, towers, archaeological sites, mosques and monasteries, traditional food and drinks, customs, beliefs, festivals, folk dances and songs, traditional clothing, old crafts, and more. Each of these values adds to the experience of tourists and enhances their satisfaction. Indeed, preserving, sustainably utilizing, promoting, and further developing these values represent a specific challenge for the future development of the NP Accursed Mountains.

During their field research, the authors of this study encountered several limitations. Although they attempted to increase the number of participants, a dozen of potential respondents refused to take part in the research, resulting in an incomplete response rate to the questionnaire. Additionally, there is a possibility that some respondents provided insincere or untrue answers to the questions. Hesitation in answering the questionnaire

also resulted in a delay in completing it, taking a few more days to fulfill the research objectives. Thus, additional support would be helpful to ensure a smoother research process.

The authors acknowledge that this exploratory and interpretive research provides ample opportunities to develop the theory and practical valuation of the destination. Future research could focus on improving access to the area by various modes of transportation, communicating in multiple languages, protecting nature and its values, segmenting visitors/tourists by place of a visit, promoting cultural-historical monuments, showcasing traditional ways of living, and enhancing tourist information and marketing/promotional activities.

As a tourist destination, the Republic of Kosovo must establish a competitive advantage by understanding the needs, demands, and perceptions of visitors and tourists, ensuring their satisfaction and enjoyment during their stay or visit.

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