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## **WHAT DO TOURISTS WONDER ABOUT TURKEY'S CULTURAL HERITAGE? A STUDY TO DETERMINE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS TO TOUR GUIDES**

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### **Abstract**

Tour guides are obliged to interpret for tourists in tours. During a tour, cultural heritage of a destination composes a remarkable part in tour guides' interpretations. So, having a good command of cultural heritage, tour guides can enhance the experience of tourists and provide them with satisfaction in tours. Tour guides can also contribute to appreciation and conservation of cultural heritage by raising awareness towards it. Hence, tour guides are supposed to know what tourists are curious about regarding cultural heritage in a destination. Therefore, questions of tourists should be a decent source to figure out what tourists are curious about and interested in. This study aims to determine the questions tourists ask their tour guides regarding cultural heritage in Turkey. In this study, cultural heritage refers to a concept rather than the official listed cultural heritage of Turkey by UNESCO. Using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with tour guides, the questions asked to tour guides were extracted. A content analysis was implemented to explore the categories and the themes. Determining the frequently asked questions and the subjects that tourists are curious about regarding cultural heritage, tour guides will be able to revise their interpretations based upon the results of this study. Tour guiding education programs can be reviewed and the efficiency of tour guides in terms of information and interpretation on cultural heritage can be enhanced. Consequently, this study aims to contribute to the appreciation and conservation of cultural heritage by enhancing the information and interpretation skills of tour guides. Ultimately, all the efforts to improve tour guides' informing and interpreting skills will enhance the quality of tour guiding service and tourist satisfaction.

Key words: Cultural Heritage, Tour Guides, Tourists, Interpretation, Tourist's Questions

### **Introduction**

Traveling with a tour guide is one of the reasons why people participate in tours instead of traveling alone (Chan et al., 2015: 23). Even though tour guides have always had a supporting role in tour operations, in time, the number of their roles has increased. In our day, for tourism industry, tour guides are considered as mediators, interpreters, and mentors (Weiler and Black, 2014: 42). Tour guiding requires interpretation skills, entertaining people, a good command of language and expression. Tour guides can expose their proficiencies by interpreting and providing information for tourists. (Ap and Wong, 2001: 551). Providing information for tourists is substantial to determine the service quality of a tour guide. Tour guides provide information for tourists via their interpretations during tours. Hence, tour guides enhances the service quality and the satisfaction perceived by tourists by means of their interpretations. On the other hand, complaints about a tour guide's service quality reduces satisfaction of tourists. One of the major complaints about tour guides is their lack of knowledge and incompetence in terms of interpretation. In order to prevent complaints about knowledge and interpretation, tour guides must be aware of the expectations of tourists (Chen et al.,

2006). Because tour guides can revise their knowledge and interpretations by learning the expectations and the interests of tourists. Improvement in knowledge and interpretation will bring on improvement in service quality and tourist satisfaction.

Cultural heritage composes an essential part of interpretations for tour guides. Tour guides can contribute to appreciation and conservation of cultural heritage by interpreting to tourists. Because tourists' awareness of cultural heritage also raises via the interpretations of tour guides. The awareness of tourists enhances their comprehension of cultural heritage in tourist. In this context, this study aims to determine the questions tourists ask their tour guides about the cultural heritage of Turkey. In literature review, no evidence was found on what tourists are curious about and interested in Turkey's cultural heritage. Moreover, this study is expected to contribute to service quality of tour guides besides the satisfaction perceived from tour guides. Tour guides can revise their interpretations based on the results of this study and improve their service quality. On the grounds of this study's findings, tour guiding certification programs can be revised as well. This study is considered to contribute to the current literature in the above-mentioned aspects.

### **Tour Guides' Roles in Informing and Interpreting Cultural Heritage**

Tour guiding is a crucial component of tourism industry and affects the quality of tourist experience and the length of stay. The interaction between tour guides and tourists is more intense than any other interaction in tourism industry (Howard, 1997). Tour guides help tourists experience another culture and encourage tourists to smell, taste or feel it (Urry, 1990). Tourists visiting a new destination are willing to explore new things and it sets the motivation for traveling (Mancini, 1990: 63). Tour guides have a determinative role in tourists' decision to join a tour (Chan et al., 2015: 23). Because tour guides are the foremost source to gather information about the destination visited (Nettekoven, 1979: 142). Tour guides tell tourists even where to look, why to look and when to look and they explain to tourists how to conduct themselves in tourist destinations (Reisinger and Steiner, 2008: 482).

The primary task of a tour guide is to provide true information in tours (Cohen, 1985) and the relationship between tour guides and tourists involves exploration of information (McDonnell, 2001: 2). Hence, the information interpreted needs to be necessary and current in tour guiding profession (Ap and Wong, 2001: 555). Interpretation is also essential for a tour guide for becoming impressive (Pond, 1993) and tourists expect their guide to be knowledgeable and to interpret his/her knowledge in an interesting way (Holloway, 1981: 391). In addition to interpreting interestingly, tour guides should make comprehensible explanations to reduce the gap between the information they are providing and the knowledge of tourists (Reisinger and Steiner, 2008: 487). Because an effective interpretation helps tourists discriminate between their past experiences and the information they receive from their tour guide (Moscardo et al., 2004: 13). On the other hand, tourist groups are heterogeneous from various nations and cultures and the interpretations of tour guides can be perceived differently by individuals. Additionally, tour guides need to ideate their interpretations carefully so that tourists' attention will be attracted during a tour (Pizam and Sussman, 1995; Pizam and Jeong, 1996). Despite the scientific and historical content, interpreting is an art (Hu and Wall, 2012: 84) and is not an easy task (Zerva and Nijkamp, 2016: 43).

Tour guides are expected to have knowledge about geography, history, culture, and architecture and interpret their knowledge so that the attractions and uniqueness of a destination can be appreciated by visitors (Cohen et al., 2002). Information is transferred to the audience via interpretations and reveals the hidden meaning behind the objects (Bidder et al., 2016: 634). The interpretations conduce to an inner bond between tourists and destinations (Weiler and Ham, 2001; Christie and Mason, 2003: 3). This bond even ensures the sustainability of tourism development since the interpretations of tour guides have an instructional content (Chen et al., 2006) and help tourists explore the destination and

the culture they have visited (Gelbman and Maoz, 2012: 117). Exploring a place or an object helps tourists enjoy their experience (Reisinger and Steiner, 2008: 482). Interpretations are the means for this kind of exploration process because interpretations help a place or an object to be discovered, identified and protected (Moscardo, 1999). Tour guides' choices of what to interpret are essential for cultural interaction and determine to what extent tourists will explore the destination (Wong, 2013: 917).

Tourists are motivated to explore and experience the culture in cultural heritage sites (du Cros, 2001: 165) and tour guiding service becomes more essential in tours within the context of cultural heritage (Dahles, 2002: 783). Because interpretation is an influential means to link between the past and the present in terms of cultural heritage (Nuryanti, 1996: 252) and tour guides can provide it through interpretations. Moreover, tour guides are supposed to contribute to the conservation of heritage sites so that future generations can have access to non-renewable sources (du Cros, 2001: 166). Hence, preservation should be emphasized in cultural heritage sites and the significance of preservation can be conveyed to tourists via interpretations. Furthermore, tour guides' interpretations compose an integral part of marketing, managing, and planning of heritage tourism (Herbert, 1989). Learning interests of tourists with regards to cultural heritage will enable tour guides to fulfill their interpreting roles effectively so that cultural heritage of a destination can be appreciated and conserved in a sustainable way.

According to UNESCO, cultural heritage is divided into tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artifacts, etc., which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These include objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts<sup>2</sup> and called intangible cultural heritage. In Tangible Cultural Heritage List, there are 17 sites from Turkey including Goreme National Park and Cappadocia, Troya, Mount Nemrut, Ephesus.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, there are 14 from Turkey in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage including Mevlevi Sema Ceremony, Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition, Ebru-Turkish Art of Marbling, Traditional Craftsmanship of Çini-making.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there are more attractions from Turkey in the tentative list of Cultural Heritage of UNESCO. Additionally, public administrations in Turkey work to increase Turkey's part in the list. However, more tangible objects, monuments, buildings, sites and intangible traditions, rituals, events and knowledge from Turkey have been anticipating to be evaluated by UNESCO.

## **Literature Review**

In the literature review, some research findings on tour guides' informing and interpreting roles were noticed. Steward et al., (1998), enounced after visiting a destination, how much tourists recall the information they received in tours is essential and the effectiveness of tour guides' interpretation contributes the extent of internalised information. Ap and Wong (2001) declared that the quality of the interpretation in one of the five components of professionalism in tour guiding occupation. In

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/culture/tangible-cultural-heritage> (10.09.2018)

<sup>2</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003> (10.09.2018)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unesco.org.tr/Pages/125/122/UNESCO-D%C3%BCnya-Miras%C4%B1-Listesi> (10.09.2018)

<sup>4</sup> <https://hometurkey.com/en/attractions/unesco-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-turkey> (10.09.2018)

McDonnell's study (2001), it was determined that tourists attach more importance to cultural and historical interpretation than any other information about shopping and activities in a destination. According to Chen et al. (2006), the reliability of tour guides' knowledge is the most remarkable feature of all the interpretation services. Io and Hallo (2012) indicates that information interpreted by tour guides should evoke tourists' thoughts and feelings besides teaching them. Hence, tourists' experience enhances and the desire to visit other destinations is aroused. A number of studies conducted on the interpreting roles of tour guides reveal that guides' interpretations raise the quality of tours (Moscardo, 1996; Ham and Weiler, 2003; Weiler and Black; 2014). On the other hand, Ormsby and Mannle (2006), Kohl (2007), Jensen (2010), Hu and Wall (2012) have indicated that interpretations also avail the stakeholders and destinations in tourism industry. Moreover, studies focusing on interpretations' level of importance were conducted (Weiler, 1999; Haig and McIntyre, 2002) as well as studies determining the role of interpretations on eco-tourism (Gurung vd., 1996; Randall and Rollins, 2009) and the impact of interpretations' on tourist satisfaction (Wang et al., 2002; Chang, 2006).

Reviewing the literature, no finding of studies related to the interpretation of tour guides on cultural heritage was noticed. Interpretations of tour guides are formed by the interests and questions of tourists. Therefore, this paper aims to determine what questions tour guides receive from tourists in terms of cultural heritage in Turkey. Cultural heritage mentioned in this study does not refer to only the officially listed cultural heritage of Turkey but handles it as a concept. Because there are 17 tangible sites and 14 intangible attractions from Turkey in the official list. However, this study reveals that restricting the inquiry to the official list of UNESCO would cause limited results. Moreover, there are more sites and attractions in Turkey waiting to be on the list. Therefore, in this study, "cultural heritage" refers to not only the officially listed cultural heritage of Turkey but also potential sites and attractions in terms of cultural heritage. Determining the questions tourists ask their tour guides will reveal what subjects tourists are interested in. Since no finding of an empirical study was found on the interpretation of tour guides on cultural heritage and the questions asked to tour guides, this study is considered to contribute to the current literature. Additionally, the results of the study are expected to offer practical hints for tour guides in Turkey to improve their knowledge and interpretation qualities, particularly in cultural heritage.

## **Method**

In this study, it is aimed to determine the questions that tourists ask their tour guides regarding cultural heritage in Turkey. Stages taken regarding the method of the study is explained as follows:

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

Questions tour guides receive in tours may differ depending on the nations of the tourists and destinations visited. Therefore, six tour guides who provided data for this study were selected of those who have various characteristics (age and experience). Personal networks and recommendations were determinative in reaching the sample. Based on ethical considerations, the names of the participants were put into codes as TG(1), TG(2), TG(3)... The sample of the interviewed tour guides is demonstrated in Table 1. To collect data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in the study. In order to determine the questions to ask the tour guides a number of studies were referred (Moscardo, 1999; Randall and Rollins, 2009; Gelbman and Maoz, 2012). Afterwards, an academician studying topics in tourism examined the questions and recommended revisions in two questions. Revising these questions, the questionnaire was sent to an experienced tour guide to review and the questionnaire was finalized. Interviews were executed in Eskişehir and Nevşehir (Cappadocia) between June 19-24, 2018.

**Table 1.** The Sample of the Interviewed Tour Guides

<b>TG</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Guiding Experience (Year)</b>	<b>Type of Occupation</b>
TG(1)	37	15	Freelance
TG(2)	49	30	Freelance
TG(3)	38	18	Freelance
TG(4)	33	11	Freelance
TG(5)	33	6	Freelance
TG(6)	50	27	Freelance

Before the interview questions were asked, the interviewer had a talk with each participant for about 20 minutes which would enable the interview process to become more comfortable. In the meantime, the participants were informed of the study's purpose and its content and they were assured that their names would remain confidential. Before addressing the questions, participants were enquired about their age, experience, type of occupation etc. Since tour guides were observed to be uncomfortable with tape-recording, the interviews were hand-written. Only one of the tour guides stated that he would be fine with tape-recording. A set of open-ended questions used in the interviews read as follows:

1. What do you interpret for your guests? Can you define the interpretation subjects you attach importance to?
2. What nationalities ask questions the most? Who are the most interested and uninterested in terms of nationalities?
3. Do the questions tourists ask vary regarding their nationalities? What questions do you receive?
4. Do tourists ever ask you to explain a subject in details? If so, what are those?
5. What subjects are the tourists the most curious about in terms of culture, history, historical sites, architecture, art, geography, and traditions?
6. How do you interpret the topics tourists ask you about?
7. Are there any questions you couldn't answer?
8. What do you do if you don't know the answer to a question?
9. How do the tourists react to you when you can't answer their questions?
10. How do the tourists react to you when you answer their questions?

### *Content Analysis*

For the qualitative data, content analysis was chosen as a tool for the data analysis since it is regarded as a research method for subjectively interpreting the content of a text via a classification process of coding that generates themes and patterns (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Moreover, content analysis as a common method, which is used to analyze text data, enables the researchers to obtain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon (Tsaur and Lin, 2014: 31). Additionally, content analysis is useful to determine specific patterns in data collected, since the purpose of the study is to identify the performance competencies of tour guides. Since, researchers are advised to be assisted by other experts related to the context of the study in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014: 203), the data was examined and coded by the researcher and an experienced tour guide. As a result of the content analysis, eleven subjects related to cultural heritage were determined in four categories and two themes as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Themes and Categories Extracted via Content Analysis

Themes	Categories	Codes
Tangible Cultural Heritage	Places of worship	Mosques
		Frescoes in churches
	Places of residence	Ancient cities
		Traditional Ottoman Houses
		Rock caves in Cappadocia
Intangible Cultural Heritage	Food and cuisine	Eating habits
		Turkish cuisine
	Traditions	Marriage customs
		Wedding customs
		Tradition of circumcision

### *Trustworthiness*

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is composed of credibility and dependability. Creswell (2013) stated that researchers are supposed to describe every single step they take during the research and it enhances the trustworthiness of a qualitative research. Moreover, some practical methods such as diversification in data sources, pre-interaction with the interviewees and member checking can enhance the credibility and dependability of a qualitative study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this context, (i) to provide diversification in data sources, the interviewees were elected from various attributes (age, experience and the nationalities of tourists guided). Therefore, the variation of data with the different characteristics of the tour guides was ensured. (ii) the interviewer had a random talk with tour guides to ensure pre-interaction with the interviewees so that they would feel more comfortable. (iii) At the end of the interviews, the interviewer summarized the answers given by the participants via the notes taken during the interviews in order to provide member checking and confirm the data collected is accurate.

### **Findings**

According to the results of the study, there are two themes: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. There are two categories under each theme and these categories are composed of respectively two, four, two and three subjects.

### **Tangible Cultural Heritage**

This theme includes the questions of tourists regarding tangible cultural heritage in Turkey. “places of worship” and “places of residence” are related to this theme.

#### *Places of Worship*

Interviewed tour guides indicated that tourists ask questions about the places where people worship and pray. Tourists visiting Turkey are curious about the mosques, Islamic practices performed in mosques and the frescoes in cave churches. Questions that tour guides receive in tours range from the numbers of the minarets (towers in mosques) to the reasons why the frescoes were scratched.

“I receive questions about mosques. “We see one or two minarets in some of the mosques. But in some mosques, for example, Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet Mosques), there are six minarets and there are four minarets in Manavgat... Questions never come to an end after

getting into the mosque. “Why do people pray towards this direction? Why Mecca? What is the minber (minbar) for? What does imam do? Why do you pray with body movements while people just sit in the churches?” TG(1)

### *Places of Residence*

Civilizations have lived in various living spaces in Anatolia during history. Interviewed tour guides declared that tourists were curious about these spaces as well. Some of these spaces such as traditional Ottoman houses are still used in our day, while people no more live in the ancient cities in Anatolia. Tourists were also noted to be curious about the rock caves and underground cities where people once lived in history.

“Tourists ask why people live in caves in Cappadocia and how the caves can be heated in cold weather”TG(4)

“They ask questions about the underground cities. ‘Any flood in underground cities?’, ‘How do they heat the underground cities in winter?’... ‘These people have lived in the underground cities all the time, how could they even farm?’. Tourists think those people would spend all of their time underground”TG(6)

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, knowledge, and skills on traditional crafts related to Turkey’s cultural heritage compose this theme. Two categories: “food and cuisine”, and “traditions” are the categories related to this theme.

### *Food and Cuisine*

During the inquiry, interviewed tour guides stated the curiosity of tourists on Turkish cuisine. Tourists experience not only the historical sites, buildings, and monuments but also the food during their trips. Therefore, tourists visiting Turkey have asked their tour guides questions about eating habits of Turkish people as well as the peculiarities of Turkish cuisine. What kind of food Turkish people eat, the reason why people eat on the ground instead of on table, what ingredients are in Turkish meals were noticed as some of the objects of curiosity.

“They (tourists) are very interested in our food culture. In the restaurant or after the restaurant they ask me how meals are cooked, what ingredients are used. In some of the tours, we visit the kitchen of the restaurants.”TG(1)

### *Traditions*

Since traditions attract tourists in a destination, tour guides received questions about marriage customs, wedding customs in Turkey. Moreover, circumcision was a subject of interest for tourists. The ways girls and boys flirt, arranged marriages and how they end up, how married couples meet each other, if wedding ceremonies can be held in mosques and what circumcision is compose majority of the interest.

“Tourists wonder if wedding ceremonies are held in mosques. Because we interpret about the Islamic wedlock implemented by the imam. So, tourists suppose that couples go to the mosque, but on the contrary, the imam goes to the home of the couple.”TG(2)

“Guests ask if couples marry based on love or an arrangement by the family” TG(5)

“They (tourists) don’t know that even though Turkey is a Muslim country, it is secular and people can be married to one person at a time. They ask “how many women can you get married to?” TG(6)

## **Results**

Cultural heritage has been a subject for academic studies. Studies have focused on sustainability of cultural heritage, institutional and organisational environments, visitors’ experience etc. However, no findings of studies related to the interpretation of tour guides on cultural heritage was noticed. Tour guides are the interpreters in tourism industry and their interpreting roles can enhance the appreciation, conservation and sustainability of cultural heritage. On the other hand, interpretations of tour guides are formed by the interests and questions of tourists. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the questions tourists ask their tour guides regarding cultural heritage in Turkey. In this context, this study is also considered to contribute to the current literature on tour guides’ interpretations, their interpreting roles, questions tour guides receive and the cultural heritage. A qualitative method was implemented during the research. Content analysis was used as a means to process the collected data. Results of the research reveal that in Turkey, tourists ask their tour guides questions on cultural heritage and these questions are divided into the same categories as in the distinction of UNESCO: tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

In terms of tangible heritage, in Turkey tour guides receive questions on the “places of worship” such as mosques and churches as well as the “places of residence” such as ancient cities, traditional Ottoman houses, rock caves in Cappadocia, and underground cities. Intangible cultural heritage was noted as a subject of interest as well. Tourists ask questions about “food and cuisine” which include eating habits and The Turkish cuisine and “traditions” including marriage customs, wedding customs, and the tradition of circumcision. Tour guides should have a decent command of the mentioned cultural heritage so that they can answer the questions of tourists and assure tourist satisfaction. Tour guides’ knowledge and interpreting skills do not only assure tourist satisfaction but also help the cultural heritage’s appreciation, conservation and sustainability. Based on the results of this study, tour guides can review their knowledge and the content of their interpretations. Tour guides can revise their interpretations and build them around the above-mentioned interests of tourists. Tour guiding programs of universities and The Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkey can be revised and above-stated content can be attached to these training and certification programs. All these efforts based on this study are expected to contribute to the officially listed and the potential cultural heritage of Turkey, tour guiding profession and tourist satisfaction besides the contribution to the current literature.

There are some limitations in this study. Due to the lack of time, only six tour guides were involved in this study, the number of the participants should be increased to supply various data in future research. Another limitation is related to the cities where the data was collected. The data for this study was collected from tour guides who live in Eskisehir and Nevsehir. Even though interviewed tour guides guide in tours all around Turkey, in future research, tour guides from different regions might be included to vary the data sources. In this study, “the cultural heritage” was approached as a concept rather than the official list of UNESCO about Turkey. So, analyzing the data, expressions concerning cultural heritage definition were assessed. For future research, only the 31 official cultural heritage assets of Turkey might be inquired specifically. Besides collecting data from the tour guides, tourists can compose the sample of the future studies and enhance the extent of the study.



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