



Research Article

**CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS IN PACKAGE TOURS AND COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT OF
TOUR GUIDES****

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Abstract

Tour guides are one of the most important service providers in tourism industry, where human relations have a significant place. The tour guides deal with and simultaneously witness all satisfactions/complaints of the tourists. Meeting the expectations and satisfying the customers bring about customer loyalty, and they directly influence their tendencies to attend in future touristic activities. Failing to satisfy the customers' expectations may lead to dissatisfaction and complaints. The tour guide's capability to successfully manage and solve all complaints throughout the tour will have an influence on customer's preferences and chose the same travel agency and tour guide, and also on protecting the image and reputation of the destination. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out the complaints that the tour guides face during a package tour, and to reveal the process of managing these complaints. A phenomenological approach was adopted, and the experiences of tour guides were used in this study. Within this context, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 active tour guides, who work in various parts of Turkey. It was observed that the customer complaints were mainly about the tour schedule, means of transport, hotels or restaurants, and the services rendered by the tour guide. No studies were found about the up close and personal complaints encountered by the tour guides. Therefore, it is believed that this study will significantly contribute to the literature. In this study, theoretical implications were made for tour guiding literature, and practical implications were made for tour guiding profession.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Complaint management, Package tour, Tour guide, Tour guiding, Guided Tours

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Introduction

Tourism has been expanding and diversifying, becoming one of the largest and most rapidly growing financial industries worldwide. Along with rapid urbanization in emerging economies, economical travel opportunities, conveniences in visa proceedings, technological advancements, and new business models contribute to this growth. As a result, for many economies worldwide, tourism constitutes a considerable part of the gross domestic product (www.e-unwto.org).

Providing services to humans lies at the root of tourism. Service production and consumption co-occur; they cannot be experienced and stocked beforehand. Customer satisfaction is extremely hard to achieve because of such characteristics of service (Hsi & Wu, 2007). Service is a very complex concept; it is the sum of interactions between the service employees and customers, transformation, and performance (Bitner et al., 1990). Tour guides are frontline employees in the tourism industry who play an important role in shaping tourists' experience in a destination (Huang, Hsu, & Chan, 2010; Ay & Yetgin, 2020). According to Leclerc & Martin (2004), tour guides are some sort of cultural ambassadors and act as catalysts between the local communities and the tourists.

Tourism services, called "service encounters," involve countless human interactions, and it is highly likely to have complaints about the emergence of some problems (Bitner et al., 1990). Tourist complaints are leading indicators of structural failures and deficiencies in internal mechanisms in each travel industry sector and in the intersectoral regulations that have been institutionalized over time. These are significant indicators for that reason (Hannigan, 1980). When service-related complaints are discussed within the frame of package tours, the prime addressees of all complaints that emerge during a tour would be the tour guides. This study aims to determine the most common complaints encountered by tour guides during tours and reveal the complaint management processes of the tour guides. When the previous studies were reviewed, it was observed that complaints about package tours (Fu et al., 2021, Tanrısever, 2018; Lee et al., 2011; Unur et al., 2010a; Unur et al., 2010b) and complaints about tour leaders (Monto & Raikkonen, 2010; Rääkkönen & Monto, 2010), complaints about tour guides (Çakmak & Kurnaz, 2020) were discussed. However, no studies were found about the up close and personal complaints encountered by the tour guides. Therefore, it is believed that this study will significantly contribute to the literature. When the aim of this study and the previous studies were considered, the main research questions were determined as follows:

RQ1: What kind of complaints do the tour guides encounter during tours?

RQ2: Which tourists (nationality, age average, gender, etc.) complain more during tours?

RQ3: What do the tour guides do to solve these complaints during tours?

Literature

Complaint and complaint management

The verbal expression of unmet expectations is considered "the concept of complaint" (Barlow & Moller, 2009). The first examples of scientific studies on complaints date back to the 1970s. Among these, Hirschman's (1970) study set forth a significant model in the literature. Hirschman suggests that unsatisfied customers exhibit behaviours in three different ways (exit, voice, loyalty). "Exit" represents disengagement of the customer, "voice" represents the submission of complaints to the company, and "loyalty" occurs when the customer silently waits and expects for the problem to be solved.

Complaints emerge as a result of mistakes. Unless these mistakes are corrected, customer dissatisfaction will increase, leading to customer turnover (Mısırlı, 2013). The data collection and processing process, which is used to find the cases that lead to customer dissatisfaction and their reasons, is called complaint management. When these complaints reach the companies, they are included within the business processes of the companies. In such cases, the executives make changes in company policies not only for existing complaints but also for all potential customer dissatisfactions (Gilly et al., 1991). Although it is perceived as a negative concept, complaints are very valuable for companies. Complaints should be considered an indicator of corporate performance assessment since they signal problems and inadequacies within internal processes (Filip, 2013). Complaints are also significant opportunities for companies because they enable them to reconnect with their customers (Barlow & Moller, 2009). The negative impressions of the customers, whose complaints are resolved, turn into positive impressions. These positive impressions ensure customer loyalty and trust (Krishna, Dangayach & Sharma, 2014). In addition, the customers, who receive satisfactory responses to their complaints, attach more to the company

Companies learn new things about their goods or services thanks to these customer complaints and may use these as marketing strategies. Establishing long-term relationships with their customers is a priority for the companies. A value obtained from a long-term relationship with a customer is higher than the value obtained from a sale that the customer had some complaints (Fornell & Westbrook, 1984). However, receiving complaints is usually considered a negative scene in companies. In contrast, companies should encourage customers to inform them about their complaints (Maurer & Schaich, 2011). According to Plymire (1991), most customers avoid conveying many of their complaints. In his study, Plymire found that only 4% of dissatisfied customers share their complaints with the companies. He also found that most unsatisfied customers usually tend to switch companies/service providers or establish negative word-of-mouth communication. According to Gilly et al. (1991), traditional complaint management encompasses dealing with unsatisfied customers who exhibit complaint behaviour and eliminating this situation. However, the complaint management process should include investigating the reasons for dissatisfaction and informing the customers to turn things around. In addition, complaints are valuable data sources for companies. In order to make the best of this, the executives should regard complaints as survey data that indicate the things that should be improved (Barlow & Moller, 2009).

Tour guides in complaint management

Tour guides can cause a tour to succeed or fail and can also affect company reputation, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Wong & Wang, 2009) Tour guides are those who spend the most time with tourists, share the same environment with them, and interact naturally with the most (Kalyoncu & Yuksek, 2017).

Tour guides are effective cultural ambassadors in promoting their countries (Benligiray & Yetgin, 2021). The mistakes that occur during service provision are critical for companies. Since service cannot be tested beforehand, and it is produced and consumed simultaneously, mistakes and complaints become inevitable. Along with trying to prevent these unavoidable mistakes, companies should also learn how to make up for these mistakes. Customer dissatisfaction affects not only repurchasing decisions but also the company's reputation. A clear understanding of customer expectations is critical for customer satisfaction and complaint management. This can only be achieved by having in-depth knowledge. Functional complaint management systems provide necessary information for the company (Bosch & Enriquez, 2005). The individuals whose complaints were resolved through an effective complaint management method develop behavioural and attitudinal loyalty behaviours, such as rechoosing, recommending the company to others, revisiting the destination, etc. (Barlow & Moller, 1996).

Tour guides are the faces of tour operators at destinations. The tour employees on the front lines are responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction regarding tour services (Ap & Wong, 2001). Cohen (1985) described tour guides as "informants and mentors." Scherle and Kung (2010) described tour guides as the most critical intercultural mediators of the tourism industry. Weiler and Black (2015) revealed that tour guides mediate the guests in four different cases. These may be listed as follows:

- Ensuring physical access of the guests to the places,
- During guests' interactions with local communities, other tour participants, tourism facilities, and employees,
- In understanding and comprehending the area through the knowledge and narrative skills of the guides,
- Rather than physical access to the places or presentation of information about those places, making sure that the visitors identify themselves with those places and feel them profoundly.

A guide's job requires diverse skills, involves complex tasks, and possesses autonomy (Cheng et al., 2016). To increase tour members' satisfaction during their tour, tour guides frequently seek new ideas about how to service their clients (Tsaur et al., 2011) and display different tour guiding styles (Yen et al, 2018; Tsaur & Teng, 2017). Tour guides become face to face with tourists with all sorts of problems. Tour guides and tour participants are in up close and personal communication during tours. Therefore, tour guides should be able to take care of unexpected problems, solve customer complaints (Wong & Wang, 2009), and make sure that all participants are satisfied in cases of complaints and that all services are provided as promised. Tour guides should have a positive impact on the impression within the minds of the tourists while providing emotional support to the tourists in challenging situations (Adib & Guerrier, 2001). Tour guides are responsible for all services provided during a tour. Tour guides become responsible when the travel agency fails to plan the tour properly or when the tour does not go as planned. The tour guides, who act under the generally accepted saying "the customer is always right," deal with the customers' problems while also advocating for the tour operator

and doing everything they can to ensure an environment of tolerance. Even though tour operators give the tour guides every chance to reach them at any time, the guides do not always prefer to initially call the tour operators to solve the problems (Pond, 1993). A successful tour guide should be able to resolve misunderstandings and should be able to overcome any complaints or difficulties (Mitchell, 1996). In addition, it should be noted that the tour guide's performance is a significant determining factor in the tour's success (Geva & Goldman, 1991).

Like in any other business, customer complaints are critical for travel agencies. The complaints, which are adverse events for companies, should be evaluated and turned into an advantage for future services (Ceylan & Karaman, 2017). Pond (1993) emphasized that the tour guides should ask the following questions themselves for a proper complaint management process:

- The guides should have a clear understanding of the complaint. Many complaints can even be solved when the tourists feel they are being heard.
- The guide should clearly analyse whether the complaint is a real complaint. It is observed that some tourists complain about things which are not actual problems. It is impossible to resolve a complaint resulting from a problem that does not actually exist.
- The guide should assess if the problem can easily be solved. While many complaints can be solved with a minor touch by the tour guide, some issues require getting in touch with the service provider company or the travel agency.

Method

The qualitative research method is a research method that enables the researchers to analyse how the individuals experience a particular case in detail (Creswell, 2016); thus, the qualitative research method was adopted, and the data were collected through the interview method. Within this context, semi-structured interviews were conducted between January 2019 and March 2019 with 24 active tour guides working in various regions of Turkey. Since the data of the study was collected in 2019, an ethics committee report was not received. The interview questions were prepared considering the hypotheses in the literature and the purpose of this study. The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured interview form, which was completed after receiving the experts' opinions. The interview forms were sent to the tour guides, who could not attend the interviews, through e-mail, and these tour guides were included in this research. The data obtained through these interviews were coded, grouped, and divided into themes by the researchers.

The interview method is considered necessary to know how individuals make sense of life around them, the world, and the events they encounter, and learn about behaviours and emotions that are not easily observed (Merriam, 2018: 86).

These themes were presented to the experts in their fields, and a consensus was achieved. Thus, the reliability and validity of the research were ensured (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants whose insights would be relevant to the issues being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). There is no minimum or maximum number of participants. The researchers could end the interview at any time when they feel like the information obtained from the interviews begins to repeat itself (Patton, 2002: 244).

In the phenomenological approach, obtaining detailed information from each participant is crucial. In order to reach this in-depth information, an empathetic and fiduciary relationship should be established between the researcher and the participant. At this point, the researcher's role in data collection is inevitable. Therefore, the researchers should have good communication skills, and their knowledge related to the subject would facilitate the establishment of an empathetic and fiduciary relationship between the researchers and the participants. Furthermore, in phenomenological studies, the study group is goal-oriented, and the participants are selected because of their previous experiences. Within this context, in phenomenological studies, the participants should be selected among individuals who have already experienced this phenomenon (Toker, 2022).

In-depth interviews are used to learn about a particular group's common understanding. The sample group involving the interviewed individuals should be as homogeneous as possible and share critical similarities with the research question (McCracken, 1988). The tour guides were called before the interviews, informed about the interview technique (recording, average time, etc.), and appointments were made. A voluntary interview form was prepared, which included a passage about reassuring the participants about the confidentiality of

their identities and comments, and the participants read and signed this form. Since the interviewing authors are tour guides/academicians, it became easier to understand the interviewees during interviews. During these interviews, the criteria that increase the quality of the interview process developed by Kvale (1996) were taken into consideration. The researchers ensured that the answers were fit-for-purpose, and the interviews were recorded on a volunteer basis to prevent any data loss. The researchers sought detailed answers and did not interfere with the participants' narrations. Although the interview times varied depending on the answers given by the participants, the average interview time was between 40 minutes and 1 hour. All interviews were recorded and conducted and transcribed in Turkish. According to Maxwell (2008: 105), listening and taking notes on interviews are necessary before the transcription process. Therefore, the interview records were listened to, notes were taken, and the records were transcribed separately.

In order to have a deeper insight into the data, the researcher(s) wholly and repetitively read all transcriptions of the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the concepts, similarities, and differences can be found through a holistic view during these repetitive readings. Tour guide/academician specialist authors conducted pilot coding processes. All data were reviewed during initial coding, and the conceptual meanings of these data were clearly understood. Then these concepts were evaluated according to their definitions, similarities, and differences, and placed into more explanatory categories representing these concepts. According to Creswell (2016), categories are broad units of information consisting of a series of codes bunched together to form a common idea. The tour guides participating in this study were enumerated as P1, P2, P3, and coded between P1 and P24.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) stated that persuasiveness, transferability, dependability, and approvability concepts should be used instead of validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Persuasiveness, the qualitative equivalent of the internal validity concept in quantitative research, means the highest possible incidence of correspondence between the authenticity revealed in the research results and the participants' experiences (Toker, 2022: 72). the recommended methods for ensuring persuasiveness are continuous observation, taking experts' opinions, participants' approval, reference adequacy, long-term participation, variation of negative case analysis, and member control (Arslan, 2022: 398).

This study used prolonged involvement, member checking, and peer review for persuasiveness. Direct quotations from data sources were made for transferability; the researcher(s) reported the results in a transparent, fair, and systematic way for reliability. Interview notes were taken for approvability, and the analyses and findings were performed carefully through dual coding.

Findings

Findings about Demographics

Table 1 shows the demographics and professional experiences of the participants. The participants include 11 female and 13 male tour guides. 6 of them were aged between 20 and 30, 13 were aged between 31 and 40, and 5 were aged between 41 and 50. 7 participants had 1-5 years of experience, 5 participants had 6-10 years of experience, 5 participants had 11-15 years of experience, and 1 participant had 15+ years of experience.

Table 1. Demographics and professional experiences of the participants

		n
Gender	Male	13
	Female	11
Total		24
Age	20-30	6
	31-40	13
	41-50	5
Total		24
Experience	1-5	7
	6-10	11
	11-15	5
	15+	1
Total		24

Findings regarding the Complaints Encountered during Tours

Within the scope of this research, the tour guides were asked questions about the complaints they encountered during tours. The findings regarding the themes that were determined according to the results were analysed below.

Tablo 2. Themes and Subthemes regarding the Complaints Encountered during Tours

Theme	Subtheme	Participants	n
ACCOMMODATION	Bad hotels	P1, P4, P6, P17, P9, P21, P22, P23	10
	Bad location hotel	P11, P13	
FOOD AND BEVERAGE	Bad service at restaurants	P2, P3, P10, P12, P17, P19, P20, P23	23
	Bad food at restaurants	P4, P6, P10, P13, P18, P19, P21	
	Bad set menu	P2, P5, P11	
	No different restaurant options	P3, P11, P24	
	High prices of restaurants	P19, P24	
TRANSPORTATION	Underequipped vehicles	P4, P17, P20, P21, P22, P23	13
	Spending more time on the bus	P1, P2, P11	
	The seating plan on the bus	P7, P20, P21	
	Bus drivers' misbehaviour	P2	
TOUR ITINERARY	Time arrangements for free time	P7, P23	22
	Not to follow itinerary and tour schedule	P1, P7, P11, P12, P14, P18	
	Early departure	P2, P22	
	Non-flexible tour itinerary	P3, P5, P16, P23	
	Mandatory shopping in the tour itinerary (stopping at stores)	P3, P11, P15	
OTHER GUESTS	Exhausting tour itinerary	P5, P6, P11, P14, P24	8
	Other guests who are arriving late	P2, P4, P3, P11, P13, P18,	
OTHER	Being on the same bus with guests speaking different languages	P4, P8	6
	Long waiting periods in front of the museum	P5, P18, P20, P21	
	Dirty toilets in service areas	P10, P13	

The data obtained through the interviews with the tour guides were assessed via content analysis, and the complaints encountered by the tour guides during tours were grouped under six themes. It was found that the most common complaints received by the tour guides were about food and beverage services (n=23), tour itinerary (n=22), transportation (n=13), and accommodation (n=10). On the other hand, it was observed that there were fewer complaints about other guests (n=8) and other issues (n=6).

Food and Beverage

The complaints received by the tour guides were mainly grouped under the food and beverage main theme. The complaints under the "food and beverage" main theme were poor service at restaurants (n=8), poor food quality at restaurants (n=7), poor set menu quality (n=3), lack of alternative restaurants (n=3), and overcharging restaurants (n=2), respectively. The examples of complaints are as follows:

P2 They definitely complain when they are taken to crowded restaurants with poor service and food quality instead of restaurants that offer local foods.

P24 They complain when they think the restaurants arranged by the travel agencies overcharge them for food; they particularly complain to the tour guides when the restaurant is both expensive and offers poor quality food products.

Tour Itinerary

The complaints under the "tour itinerary" main theme were found as failure to follow itinerary and tour Schedule (n=7), non-flexible tour itinerary (n=6), exhausting tour itinerary (n=4), time arrangements for free time, and early departure (n=2) mandatory shopping in the tour itinerary (stopping at stores) (n=2), respectively. The examples of complaints made to tour guides about tour operations are as follows:

P11 Tour participants sometimes complain when they are not given sufficient free time because of busy tour schedules and when the shopping places prearranged by the travel agency are overpriced.

P14 I usually receive complaints about the travel agency employees and the operation. Unfortunately, we are always in a rush to complete the tour schedules, which are intentionally or unintentionally planned by the travel agencies. So, we always miss some places, and this leads to complaints.

Transportation

The complaints under the "transportation" main theme were found as underequipped vehicles (n=6), spending more time on the bus (n=3), the seating plan on the bus (n=3), and bus drivers' misbehaviour (n=1), respectively. The examples of complaints made to tour guides about transportation are as follows:

P2 I always receive complaints about the seating plan on the bus. On top of it, if the bus driver exhibits rude behaviours, unfortunately, these complaints continue throughout the tour.

P17 The complaints increase when the bus is underequipped, especially when there are problems with the air conditioning on hot summer days.

Accommodation

The complaints under the "accommodation" main theme were found as poor hotel quality (n=8) and poor hotel location (n=2), respectively. The examples of complaints made to tour guides about accommodation facilities are as follows:

P9 We often get complaints when the standards of hotel rooms are poor, i.e., in multi-destination tours, when one hotel is a 5-star hotel, and another is an average 2-star hotel, uncomfortable hotel rooms, poor breakfast quality, etc.

P13 We often get complaints about the poor location of the hotels arranged by travel agencies, particularly on overseas tours.

Other Guests

The complaints under the "other guests" main theme were found as other guests who are arriving late (n=6) and being on the same bus with guests speaking different languages (n=2). The examples of complaints made to tour guides about other guests are as follows:

P8 The guests usually complain when there are other guests on the tour bus from various nationalities speaking different languages.

P18 The guests usually complain when there are other guests, who are always late, and when I fail to find a solution for that problem.

Other

The complaints under the main theme "other issues" were found as long waiting periods in front of the museum (n=4) and dirty toilets in service areas (n=2). The examples of complaints made to tour guides about other issues are as follows:

P10 We have serious problems with unsanitary restrooms in service areas.

P20 People usually queue up and have to wait at the entrances of museums and archaeological sites. This happens all over the world, but the guests start to complain when they have to wait in line.

The Characteristics of Tourists, Who Complain the Most to The Tour Guides During Tours

The characteristics of tourists, who complain the most to the tour guides during tours, can be listed as follows:

- Gender: Female
- Age Range: Usually middle-aged and older (50 years and older)
- Nationality: Turkish, Arabic, and Russian
- Occupation: Teachers and the retired.
- Tour participation rates: The ones, who had never participated in tours, or who have recently begun to participate in tours

The distinguishable statements of tour guides were as follows:

"Guests with a higher age average and especially females, generally tend to complain more." (P1, P2, P4, P5, P9, P10, P12, P18, P19)

"The tour guides often receive complaints when the group mostly consists of Turkish or Arabic guests."

"The middle-aged teachers mostly complain about various things." (P3, P5)

"I usually observe that the individuals, who went out of town for the first time with a tour, or who participated in no more than a handful of tours, often complain about stuff." (P24)

Complaint Management of Tour Guides

The tour guides gave various answers to the following question: How do you solve any kind of problems during tours? It was found that the tour guides are usually solution-oriented regarding complaints about restaurants, and they try to solve the problem by discussing it with the restaurant's personnel. The following are some examples of the statements of tour guides regarding complaints about food and beverage services:

"The restaurant can easily serve five buses at the same time, and it has a certain hygiene and taste standard. It is the most reasonable place to eat to avoid wasting time in a tight tour schedule." (P11)

"It took me two years to find out I had to wait for people to feel hungry to make sure there was no problem. When people enter the restaurant after being as hungry as possible, then no one complains." (P8)

"I explain to them that we have some minor issues resulting from the busyness of the restaurant. Sometimes I tell them that I will speak to the manager in person and tell them about the problem." (P10)

It was found that the tour guides immediately responded to the problems regarding transportation services. The tour guides stated that they usually try to solve the problem by themselves without informing the travel agency in case of any complaints. It was also observed that the guests mostly complained about the seating plan or the vehicle's comfort regarding transportation services. Some examples of the statements of the tour guides regarding the management of the complaints about transportation services are given below:

"It is essential to be solution oriented. One time, I had a general complaint about the boat during a boat trip, and I managed to switch to another boat." (P3)

"When the vehicle is broken, it is crucial to find another vehicle that works and also have a network in the regions for emergencies." (P8)

The interviews showed that there might be complaints about the shopping places included within the tour schedule. The tour guides stated that they adopt a solution-oriented approach in such cases. It was observed that in such cases, the tour guides choose to skip those stores to manage these kinds of complaints, or they prefer to ask the guests' opinions to decide whether they should stop by and visit those shops. The statements of tour guides regarding the management of complaints about shopping places are as follows:

"To avoid such complaints, I try to solve the problems by asking tourists whether they want to visit those stores. I tell them that pottery is an important source of income for the region and reflects the region's characteristics in terms of handicrafts, and then tell them that if they wish, they will be able to watch how these artworks are made and purchase pottery products. If they want to do so, I will take them to these stores." (15)

"I explain to them, without going into details, the relationships between shops and travel agencies." (P11)

The interviews indicated that the tour guides would definitely inform the travel agencies in case of any complaints during tours, if not instantly, at the end of the tour. Some examples of tour guides' statements are given below:

If the complaint is about something that could be solved immediately, such as cold food, improper waitstaff behaviour, etc., I would contact the business owner; however, if there were more serious problems, I would inform the travel agency and try my best to solve the problem. I would also inform the customer about these informing and warning processes. (P2)

If the problem could be solved immediately, I would try to solve it as soon as possible before things get out of hand in places like hotels, restaurants, etc. I always take notes of such cases and inform my travel agency at the end of the tour (P12).

The participants stated that explaining the entire tour schedule to the guests by covering every detail at the beginning of the tour may prevent potential complaints. Some examples of the statements of the tour guides are as follows:

"Know the destination and tour itinerary and explain it to the guests in detail at the beginning." (P6, P7, P9, P17, P24)

Conclusion and Discussion

It is always likely to receive complaints at any event that involves service encounters. A package tour is a type of tourism activity that involves plenty of service encounters. It is well known that tour guides receive complaints since they are in close and personal communication with tourists. Cohen (1985) emphasizes the 'mediatory' role of the tour guides in potential customer complaints regarding the tour itinerary, travel agency, or other service providers during tours. According to Cohen, a tour guide should have good crisis management skills to prevent potential problems that may emerge during tours.

Within the scope of this study, tour guides from various regions of Turkey were interviewed. The tour guides were asked questions about the most common complaints they encountered during tours and how they managed and dealt with these problems. The most commonly complained about issues during tours were listed as food and beverage, tour itinerary, transportation, accommodation, other guests, and other issues. This result shares similarities with the previous studies. The previous studies revealed that the guests mostly complain about food and beverage services (Chang et al., 2012), busy tour schedules (Arpacı & Akhisar, 2016), accommodation and transportation services (Çolakoğlu et al., 2009; Cortez Monto, & Rääkkönen, 2010; Rääkkönen & Cortez Monto, 2010), guiding and transportation services (Unur, Çakıcı & Taştan, 2010a), other guests (Efendi & Tandoğan, 2019), and shopping places and tour guides (Ap & Wong, 2001).

The most common complaints under these main themes were listed as follows: poor service and food quality at restaurants under the food and beverage services category, failure to follow itinerary and tour schedule and exhausting tour itinerary under the tour itinerary category, under-equipped vehicles and the seating plan on the bus, bad hotels and bus drivers' misbehaviour under the transportation category, bad hotels, bad location hotels under the accommodation category, other guests who are arriving late and being on the same bus with guests speaking different languages under the other guests category, and long waiting periods in front of the museums, and dirty toilets in service areas under other issues category.

The participants' opinions revealed a tourist profile who complains the most during tours. According to the interviewed tour guides, middle-aged and older women (50 years and older), generally the Turkish, Arabic, and Russian guests, teachers and the retired, and the ones, who had never participated in tours, or who have recently begun to participate in tours, complain the most. Previous studies revealed that complaint behaviours show intercultural differences (Şahin & Cesur, 2016; Güzel & Köroğlu, 2015; Kim et al., 2014; Liu & McClure, 2001; Pizam, 1999; Huang et al., 1996). However, Tarrisever (2018) emphasized that it is impossible to generalize about this matter based on previous studies.

It was found that the tour guides usually listen to the guests, try to understand their complaints, and have a solution-oriented approach. In their study, Rääkkönen and Cortez Monto (2010) emphasized the importance of being polite in cases of complaints, giving detailed explanations regarding the situation, and making the guests believe that they are doing their best to clear up the problem. The tour guides interviewed in this study emphasized that enlightening the guests with detailed and accurate information before the trip may prevent most of the complaints. This result favours the results of Tarrisever's (2018) study. Tarrisever (2018) found that misinforming the tourists before the trip may lead to dissatisfaction and, thus, complaints. Most

participants stressed the importance of accurate and proper guidance in complaint management. They stated that the leadership role of the tour guide is also a significant factor in leading the group. According to Cohen (1985), tour guides should lead and guide the tourists. He stressed that the complaints would be minimized if the tour guide made his guests believe he was the group's leader. Rääkkönen and Cortez Monto (2010) revealed how the behaviours of the tour guides influenced the guests and reported that the tour guides should act in such a way to solve the problems in cases of complaints during tours.

Some studies revealed that travel agencies choose to offer compensatory services in cases of unresolved complaints. For example, Kozak and Tasci (2006) stated that travel agencies sometimes offer tangible gifts, such as free package tours, in order to compensate for complaints. In addition, studies showed that apologising to customers is another way of compensation (Akdu & Cengiz, 2020; Wu et al., 2018).

It is well-known that some customers experience problems during tours and do not complain about it; however, they later talk and complaint about it through word-of-mouth communication (Li, 2010). Furthermore, with his study, Yakut Ayman (2011) revealed that potential customers are influenced by online complaints and recommendations and may purchase accordingly. Thus, the importance of complaints for companies transpires once again.

It is concluded that most of the complaints are about accommodation and food and beverage services in package tours. Accordingly, it may be concluded that the tours would eventually be more successful if travel agencies were more careful about their hotel and restaurant selections. In addition, it is found that there are complaints about the free time and tight tour schedules. Therefore, updating tour schedules according to the characteristics of the participants and the destination may be listed as a measure to reduce the number of complaints. An effective complaint management system is another significant component of flawless service. Çetinkaya and Öter (2016) revealed that the high level of education quality in the field of tour guiding will make a significant contribution to their professional life. Therefore, tour guides should be trained in order to deal with customer complaints properly. Keskin and Oğuzbalaban (2019) suggest that tour guides should undergo personal development training programmes on stress management and interpersonal communication for a better approach to problem-solving.

In this study, data were collected from 24 active tour guides working in Turkey through the interview method. For future studies, it may be recommended to work with more samples and to use additional research and analysis methods.

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