



VISITOR COMMENTS ABOUT BOTANIC PARKS AND GARDENS IN THE CONTEXT OF BOTANICAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

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Botanical parks and gardens present different natural beauties together and allow the recognition of flora varieties. Within the scope of botanical tourism, botanical parks and gardens constitute one of the important visiting points of tourists. In this study, visitor comments on botanical parks / gardens are analyzed. Qualitative research method was used in the study. The study data consists of visitor comments on TripAdvisor website for "Ankara Botanical Park", "Atatürk Botanical Park", "Gaziantep Botanical Park", "Karaca Botanical Garden" and "Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden" in Turkey between May 2014 and November 2020. In the study, when the visitor's comments were evaluated, it was concluded that the comments on the botanical parks and gardens consisted of panoramic, peaceful / relaxing, lush place, nostalgic, natural wonder, tree museum codes. In addition to these, it was concluded that activities such as walking and sports, picnics, photographing, viewing the scenery, resting, and obtaining information about flora can be done by visitors in these parks and gardens.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature because there is no research available on this subject. Qualitative research method was used in this study. In this study, the data were subjected to content analysis with the Nvivo 11 program. The primary contribution of the article is to reveal that the botanical parks and gardens are perceived by the visitors as a panoramic, peaceful/relaxing, lush green space, nostalgic, natural wonder and tree museum.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important components of sustainable development, which is based on the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, is biodiversity (Eminagaoglu & Akyıldırım Like, 2015). While the tourism sector makes an economic contribution, it has some negative effects on nature. In order to find a solution to this situation and raise awareness, the United Nations declared 2002 as the "*International Year of Eco-Tourism*". In this direction, with the development of sensitivity to nature, tourism branches that are more compatible with the environment have come to the fore (Cevirgen, 2004). Botanical tourism is a sub-branch of tourism types such as alternative tourism and ecotourism, which emerge in parallel with the protection and development of biological diversity with the increasing interest in biological diversity (Irmak & Yilmaz, 2011). Botanical tourism (plant watching) has become one of the most common outdoor recreation activities that do not harm nature. Especially in the last fifty years there has been a rapid increase in the number of plant watchers. Plant watching is experienced differently by each plant watchers as the motivations and expectations and it drives them to observe in different

ways. The definition of plant observation can be made as "*the activity of observing and identifying plants in their geographical habitat*" ([Sayan, 2008](#)).

Botanical gardens, which are encountered in many countries of the world within the scope of botanical tourism, are of great importance. Botanical gardens, which offer people the opportunity to meet live plants, are gardens where live plant samples are exhibited and can also contain dried plant samples in herbarium centers ([Müminoğlu, Türkyılmaz, & Aslan, 2018](#)). Botanical gardens are commercial recreation enterprises the economic benefits of which cannot be denied in terms of tourism today and in the future ([Başarangil & Tokath, 2016](#)).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that researches have been made on the botanical tourism potential of Artvin ([Eminagaoglu & Akyıldırım Like, 2015](#)), Güzelyurt ([Ozturk, 2016](#)), Erzurum Palandöken Mountains ([Yilmaz & Karahan, 2003](#)); environmental awareness, interests and motives ([Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2008](#)); relationship of botanical gardens and tourism ([Carbuga & Pekersen, 2017](#)); conservation area with sustainable ecotourism potential ([Indrawardani, Maryunani, & Irawanto, 2019](#)); benefits of botanical garden visitation ([Christopher, Goldenberg, & Soule, 2015](#)); sustainable management principles of botanical gardens ([Başarangil & Tokath, 2016](#)); the role of botanical gardens in university education ([Bennett, 2014](#)); botanical gardens, public areas ([Colburn, 2012](#)); establishability of the botanical garden ([Ozgenç & Mesci, 2020](#)), introduction of botanical garden ([Ozçelik et al., 2006](#)); scientific, visual and recreational contributions to urban life; botanical gardens ([Müminoğlu et al., 2018](#)). No research has been found on botanical park visits within the scope of botanical tourism. In order to contribute to the literature, the visitor comments about the botanical parks were examined in the study. In the study, when the visitor's comments were evaluated, it was concluded that the comments on the botanical parks and gardens consisted of panoramic, peaceful / relaxing, lush place, nostalgic, natural wonder, tree museum codes. In addition to these, it was concluded that activities such as walking and sports, picnics, photographing, viewing the scenery, resting, and obtaining information about flora can be done by visitors in these parks and gardens.

1.1. Botanical Tourism

Realizing the negative effects of tourism activities on natural and socio-cultural resources and that these effects endanger the future of tourism has brought tourism types such as sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, ecotourism, responsible tourism, green tourism, special interest tourism and nature tourism to the fore ([Erdogan, 2003](#)). In addition, there are some negative situations brought about by city life. These are the natural balance problems caused by the chemical problems caused by the industrial system. For this reason, people are more interested in clean air and natural life and tend to participate in botanical tourism, which is natural tourism ([Eminagaoglu & Akyıldırım Like, 2015](#)). Botanical tourism, as an alternative tourism, is a type of tourism that can be applied without harming the nature and can be realized by nature lovers who aim to protect nature ([Akkus & Akkus, 2016](#)). One of the most important features of botanical tourism is that it allows a certain region to be opened to tourism without the need for too much investment. This is because the touristic product of botanical tourism is the natural flora of the region, so too much investment is not required. Turning idle and unused regions with plants specific to a particular region into a touristic destination contributes to earning income ([Ozturk, 2016](#)).

Botanical tourism includes, but is not limited to, flora learning and sightseeing activities. [Hepcan and Ozkan \(2005\)](#) stated in their study that exhibitions, bicycle trips, concerts, festivals, walks, yoga and gymnastics programs, festivities, plant sales and plant watching activities were carried out in botanical tourism. [Cakir and Cakir \(2012\)](#) mentioned in their study that the activities that individuals can participate in botanical tourism activities are trekking, picnic and camping, nature photography, butterfly and plant observation, and bicycle tours. The main features of botanical tourism are listed below ([Ozgenç & Mesci, 2020](#)):

- Having environmentally conscious entrepreneurs.
- Being realized with expert guides.
- Having sufficient plant education.

- Being realized in small groups.
- To be carried out on determined routes.
- Having the support of the people of the region.
- Providing benefits to the people of the region.

Botanical tourism participants are mostly female tourists who are young, have middle income level, high education level, who work in the service sector, who are willing to explore various plants, who desire improving their skills for plant growing, who believe they will thus relax and who feel good when they realize it, who regard taking care of plants as a way of relaxing (Albayrak, 2013). In addition, flower collections in botanical gardens, existence of rare flower species, seeing trees and other natural beauties constitute an important source of motivation for botanic tourism participants. In summary, the common point of botanical tourism participants is their interest in nature (Utama, 2015).

1.2. Botanical Parks/Gardens

The word botanical means "plant science" according to the TLA dictionary (TLA (Turkish Language Association), 2020). Botanical gardens are defined as a place allocated for collecting, growing and studying various plants together in terms of educational, scientific, aesthetic and renewal targets (Bennett, 2014) and a recreational area (Colburn, 2012). Botanical gardens are landscape museums where natural history studies are made and philosophical ideas are developed (Ozçelik et al., 2006; Ozgenç & Mesci, 2020). In botanical gardens, there are different flowers, orchards, stone gardens, scented plants, vegetable and fruit species, succulents, trees, shrubs, geophytes, steppe plants, medicinal plants, spreading climbing plants and these gardens are areas used by local people, tourists (Başarangil & Tokathlı, 2016) and scientific audiences for recreation, exploration, conservation and education (Colburn, 2012). Wood (2002) stated that individuals visiting botanical gardens are sensitive to the environment.

Botanical gardens took place widely in cities during the Renaissance period (Botto, 2015). The first botanical garden was established in Padua, Italy in 1545 (Bramwell, 1987). Botanical tourism in modern terms started in England and Germany in the early 20th century (Thomas, Porteous, & Simmons, 1994). Examples of botanical gardens from around the world include Berlin Dahlem Botanical Garden, Brooklyn Botanical Garden, British Colombia University Botanical Garden, Chicago Botanical Garden, Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden (Miami), Belgian National Botanical Garden, Royal Botanical Garden (Canada), Royal Botanical Garden (Edinburgh) , Singapore Botanic Gardens, New York Botanical Garden (Hepcan & Ozkan, 2005). For the botanical gardens in Turkey, Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden (Ataşehir / İstanbul), Ata Botanical Garden (Yakutiye / Erzurum), Bursa Botanical Park (Osmangazi / Bursa), Karaca Arboretum (Center / Yalova), İstanbul University Faculty of Science Alfred Heilbronn Botanical Garden (Fatih / Istanbul) can be given as an example (Ozgenç & Mesci, 2020). Alfred Heilbronn Botanical Garden, has the distinction of being Turkey's first botanical garden.

The importance of botanical gardens can be summarized as follows (Müminoglu et al., 2018);

- Scientifically; They are laboratories, museums, bringing researchers together.
- In terms of protection; When natural and cultural assets were destroyed, the need for protection arose.
- In terms of prestige; They are included in the city promotion brochures in developed countries, they instill the love of nature, inform and direct to protection.
- In terms of landscape architecture studies; they are important because of living and non-living equipment.
- In terms of recreational tourism; They are important because they are included in tour programs.
- Importance as urban exterior space; they are important as there are lots of plant materials and open spaces.
- In financial terms; the money deposited can be recovered through various activities.
- They are important in terms of the opportunity to see various plants together.

- Importance as a green area; they are important in terms of positive effect on the oxygen amount and softening the climate.

The goal of most botanical gardens is to bring local people, especially children, closer to nature. Unlike university gardens, these are mostly considered for the public, besides many plants, there are aviaries, aquariums and small zoos, playgrounds for children, cafes and garden restaurants ([Müminoğlu et al., 2018](#); [Sarkowicz, 2003](#)).

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a method that adopts an interpretative approach to examine the research problem based on an interdisciplinary holistic perspective. It is possible to define qualitative research as "a research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in the natural environment" ([Yıldırım & Simşek, 2008](#)).

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the visitor's comments on botanical gardens. In the study, 211 visitor comments were analyzed through Nvivo 11 qualitative data analysis program. The Nvivo program was preferred because of its simple coding process and its easy and understandable plotting of the results. The Nvivo program has been developed to increase the efficiency and productivity of researchers who perform qualitative data analysis, to enable them to notice the missed points when they handle the data without the use of software, and to offer ways to view the data from different aspects ([Bazeley & Jackson, 2015](#)).

In the study, 200 comments made on TripAdvisor website between May 2014-November 2020 for botanical theme gardens in Turkey were coded in accordance with the themes of Panoramic, Peaceful / Relaxing, A Lush Space, Remainder of the Old, Wonder of Nature, Tree Museum between 07.12.2020/07.01.2021. These themes were created by researchers in line with the relevant literature. In addition, the comments in the study were examined with content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. In total, 211 comments were obtained from 5 botanical parks.

As a result of the research, themes related to visitor comments were collected in 6 main categories and activities that can be done in botanical parks and gardens in 6 codes. The data were coded by three different researchers and the reliability coefficient of the research was determined as 0,87 according to Kappa analysis. According to [Miles \(1994\)](#), the coefficient should be at least 0.80 depending on the complexity of the data. Accordingly, it can be said that the reliability level of the study is high.

3. FINDINGS

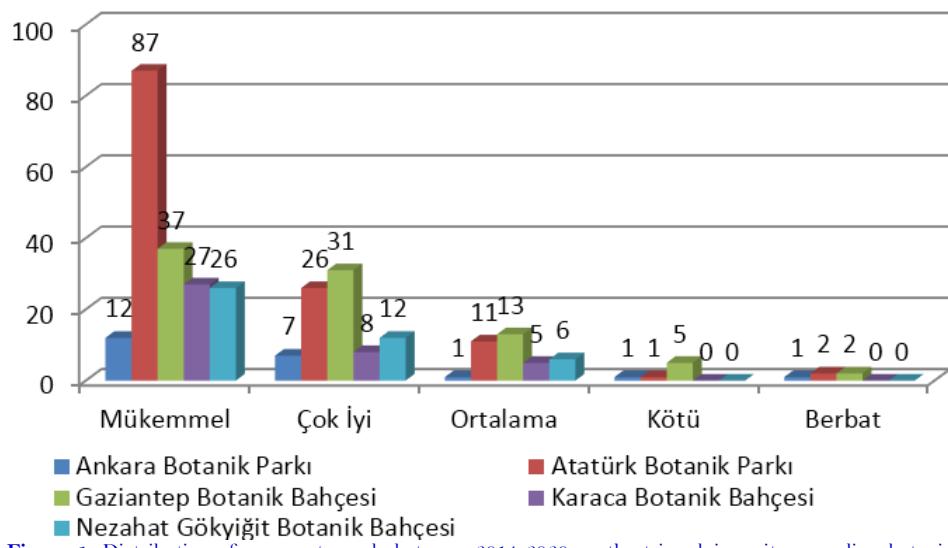
In the study, visitor comments on the TripAdvisor site for botanical parks are explained through main themes and tables and figures on these main themes. The related parks and the number of comments taken into consideration in the study are given in [Table 1](#).

Table-1. Botanical parks and gardens evaluated in the study.

Name of Park/ Garden	Province	Number of Comment
Ankara Botanical Park	Ankara	22
Atatürk Botanical Park	İstanbul	36
Gaziantep Botanical Park	Gaziantep	77
Karaca Botanical Garden	Yalova	38
Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden	İstanbul	38
Total		211

Among the botanical parks examined in the study, the highest number of comments were made for Gaziantep Botanical Park (77 comments). Second, the highest number of comments were made for the Karaca and Nezahat

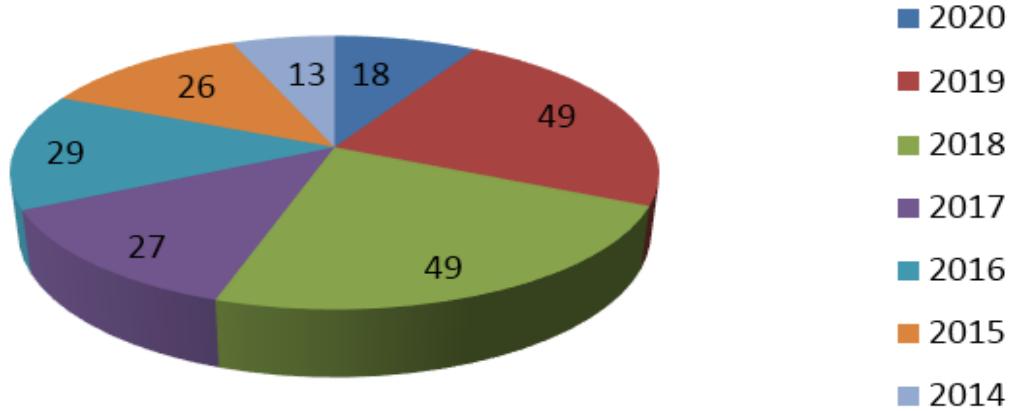
Gökyiğit Botanical Gardens (38 comments). Among the museums examined, the least number of comments were made for the Ankara Botanical Park (22 comments). The distribution of comments about Botanical Parks according to satisfaction status is given in [Figure 1](#).



[Figure-1.](#) Distribution of comments made between 2014-2020 on the trip advisor site regarding botanical parks and gardens by satisfaction status.

According to [Figure 1](#), it can be said that visits to botanical parks and gardens are highly rated as "Excellent". The number of visitors who negatively evaluate these parks and gardens as "Bad" and "Terrible" is quite low. According to the [Figure 1](#), the satisfaction rates of the visitors are high.

Number of Comment



[Figure-2.](#) Distribution of comments made on the TripAdvisor site regarding botanical parks and gardens by years.

In [Figure 2](#), distribution of comments made on the TripAdvisor site regarding botanical parks and gardens is given by years. Accordingly, visitors made 18 comments on botanical parks and gardens in 2020, 49 comments in 2019 and 2018, 27 comments in 2017, 29 comments in 2016, 26 comments in 2015, and 13 comments in 2014. While the most comments were from 2018 and 2019, it can be said that the least number of comments were made in 2014.

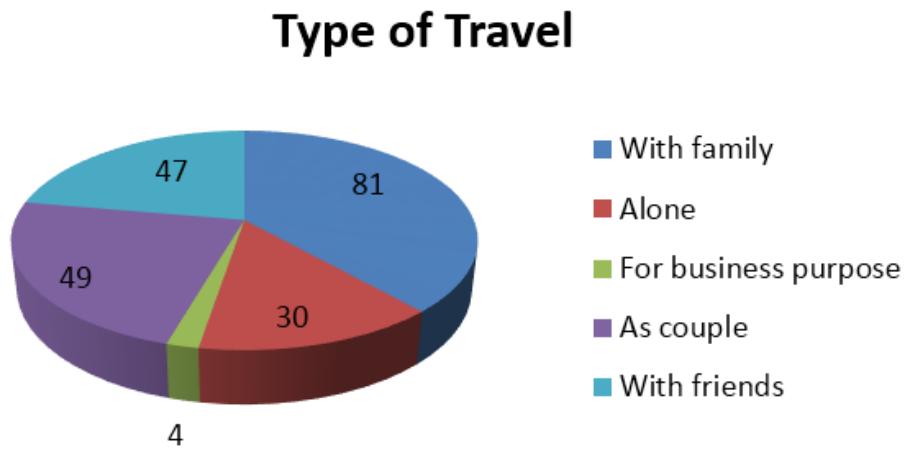


Figure-3. Distribution of travel types to botanical parks and gardens on the TripAdvisor site.

In **Figure 3**, distribution of travel types to botanical parks and gardens on the TripAdvisor site is given. Accordingly, the majority of the visitors (81 people) visited the botanical parks and gardens with their families. Following this number, 49 visitors stated that they visited as couple, 47 visitors visited with their friends, 30 visitors visited alone, and 4 visitors visited for business purposes.

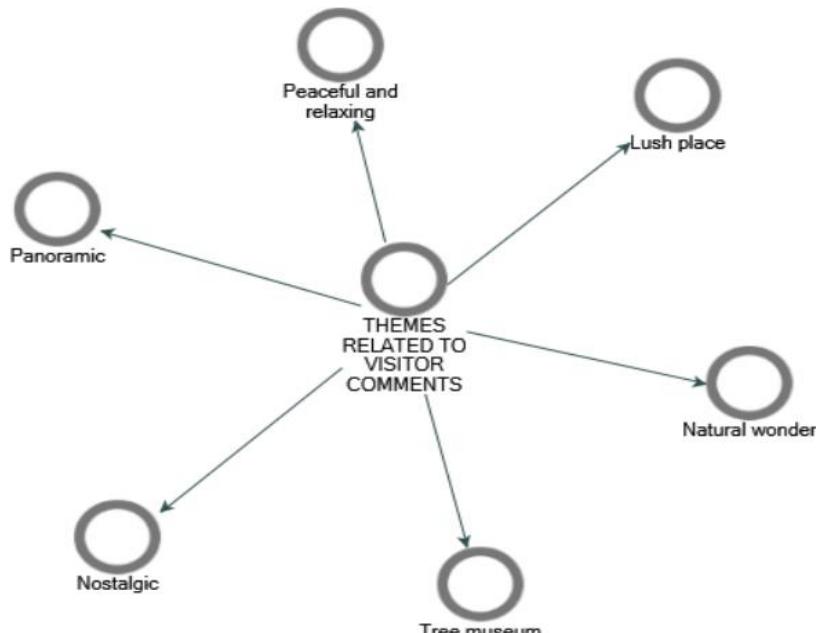


Figure-4. Themes related to visitor comments.

In **Figure 4**, themes related to visitor comments are given. Accordingly, 6 main themes were determined in line with the data obtained from visitor comments. These themes can be listed as panoramic, peaceful / relaxing, lush place, nostalgic, natural wonder, tree museum. Visitors' comments on these themes are provided below. Visitors are numbered consecutively and briefly expressed as Z-1, Z-2, Z-3....

3.1. Visitor Comments on the Panoramic Theme

This is a place in the forest of Istanbul University with a pond, tree, swan, flowers, walking area. Fresh air, breathe in plenty of oxygen. It becomes colorful in autumn. The reflection of leaves and trees in the water is magnificent. Visit it (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-6).

A corner of nature in the city where it is possible to get some oxygen for those who are bored with urbanization...An exhibition of the works of landscape architects, a stopping point for breathing for life,

a green cover, the point of integration of a historical city with nature wrapped in floral scents (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-34).

Imagine a colorful and chirpy landscape as if it was literally out of a painting. Immerse yourself in the warm embrace of nature (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-53).

Such a beauty, created out of nothing at a highway crossroad passing through the middle of the city, amazes you. Various trees, plants, flowers are a complete riot of colors. Hundreds of different species of plants, flowers and trees that we see in nature but do not actually notice or understand the importance. Dried plane leaves and oak leaves fall on the cyclamen. Spring flowers are blooming since March (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z-35).

3.2. Visitor Comments on the Peaceful/Relaxing Theme

It is a very beautiful structure that really separates us from the misty and stone city air of Ankara while walking on its small roads and brings us together with peace around the small pond. It is a place to visit to relax when we are really bored (Ankara Botanical Park, Z-16).

It is a must-see place for those who want to get fresh air in a clean, peaceful environment, in the middle of the forest, in the middle of the greenery, in Istanbul but far from the noise of Istanbul (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-12).

A heaven of peace in Istanbul. A beautiful tree museum, with the names of each tree written. In this way, we learned the names of the trees we see frequently, and there are very rare species. Even the trees are peaceful. Each season should be a different beauty (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-29).

Every season is a different beauty. Now is the time for hyacinths. The garden smells like hyacinths. It's peaceful. The tulip season is also magnificent, we know from past years. But do not miss the beauty and smells of these hyacinths (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-32).

A quiet and peaceful environment in the city, free of the city. It is especially good to go during the tulip and rose season (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-64).

3.3. Visitor Comments on the Lush Place Theme

If you need to see different shades of green and fill your lungs with fresh air, if you like walking, this is the place for you. Do not leave Istanbul without seeing this place (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-5).

Both the plants inside the park that you cannot see elsewhere and the green area behind it are priceless. Use the green area (forest) behind for walking in spring and autumn and the botanical park for breathing (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-38).

In this botanical park on the highway side of the Anatolian side, with the spring season, the plants are overflowing and everywhere is like a sea of green flowers (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z-18).

In the middle of the metropolis, it turns out that there was a 'green lung' in a garden that managed to hide itself by being connected to each other with maze-like junctions, bridges and underpasses! So much so that Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden is the world's first and only botanical garden which is established at the crossroads of the highway. In the botanical garden, which is spread over a very large area, I will discover that plant, sometimes this plant, among the diverse and colorful, fragrant, interesting plants, flowers, insects. (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z-32).

In Ataşehir, right next to the newly built financial center, wedged between the concrete, a green oasis, a research and maintaining a center for Turkey's endemic plants, the garden also has a number of areas suitable for picnic and a variety of outdoor activities, a must-see (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z- 34).

3.4. Visitor Comments on the Nostalgic Theme

It is one of the oldest parks. Walking path, playground, benches remind people of their youth (Ankara Botanical Park, Z-3).

It is one of Ankara's oldest and most beautiful parks. A quiet park where you can read a book and relax (Ankara Botanical Park, Z-5).

We used to come a lot in my childhood. I visited again years later. The entrance fee is a very reasonable price. Beautiful walking areas, a great area where you can get information about various trees. (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-4).

3.5. Visitor Comments on the Wonder of Nature Theme

It is like poetry in spring and autumn. Picturesque colors, fragrant plants. Plenty of oxygen. (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-8).

A paradise in the middle of the city, I think one of the must-see places in Gaziantep. A beautiful landscape is made with various plants and flowers (Gaziantep Botanical Garden, Z-16).

Paradise created by Hayrettin Karaca, the founder of Tema Foundation. One of the very few arboreta in the world that has been awarded. One does not want to leave at all (Karaca Botanical Garden, Z-34).

It is an idyllic place with its small pond and different trees, I recommend it (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z-2).

A hidden paradise among skyscrapers. You can see a variety of trees, plants and flowers, have a picnic, walk, take photos it is a wonderfully relaxing place (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Z-15).

3.6. Visitor Comments on the Tree Museum Theme

It is a huge area with a thousand kinds of trees. There are forest areas and lakes in it. There are no toilets inside except the entrance. Smoking, picnics, food and beverage are prohibited. You can visit natural beauties like visiting a museum (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-9).

Atatürk Arboretum, located in a large area in the Belgrad Forest, is a place worth seeing. There are 2000 kinds of trees and plants here, we can call it a living tree museum. A rare place for nature lovers and photographers (Atatürk Botanical Park, Z-15).

Yalova's uniquely beautiful arboretum. Various plants, trees, almost a tree museum (Karaca Botanical Garden, Z-19).

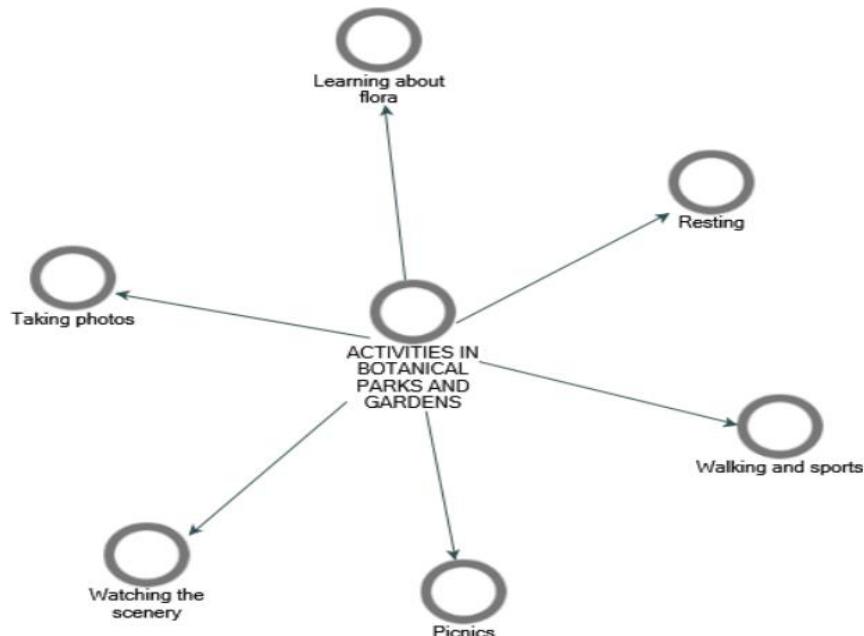


Figure-5. Activities in Botanical Parks and Gardens.

In [Figure 5](#), activities that can be done in botanical parks and gardens are coded in Nvivo 11 analysis program and it is concluded that 6 activities can be done in total. These activities are listed as walking and sports, picnics, taking photos, watching the scenery, resting, and learning about flora.

4. CONCLUSION

Countries diversify their tourism products in order to increase their share in the tourism market. This reduces the tourists' tendency towards traditional mass tourism, ie. sea, sand and sun. At the same time, this variety of products offers the opportunity to gain experiences in nature and cultural environments with special interests. In addition, aiming to protect nature with the principle of sustainability, it directs people to alternative tourism activities. These activities include a wide variety of tourism types such as nature, sports, camping-caravan, route, culture, history, mountain, hunting, agro, plateau, ecotourism, geo-tourism and botanical tourism ([Alkan, 2018](#)). Flora tourism is particularly important for a country like Turkey which has high plant diversity and a myriad of natural parts the natural resource value of which are plants. As a matter of fact, tourism activities to be carried out in the regions rich in vegetation with good planning have the potential to contribute to the local people and the regional economy ([Irmak & Yilmaz, 2011](#)).

The purpose of the study is to examine visitor comments on the botanical parks and gardens on TripAdvisor website. In the study, when a total of 211 visitor comments were evaluated, it was concluded that the comments on the botanical parks and gardens consisted of panoramic, peaceful / relaxing, lush place, nostalgic, natural wonder, tree museum codes. In addition to these, it was revealed that activities such as walking and sports, picnics, photographing, viewing the scenery, resting, and obtaining information about flora can be done by visitors in these parks and gardens. Among the botanical parks examined in the study, the highest number of comments were made for Gaziantep Botanical Park (77 comments). Second, the highest number of comments were made for the Karaca and Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Gardens (38 comments). Among the museums examined, the least number of comments were made for the Ankara Botanical Park (22 comments). The distribution of comments regarding botanical parks according to satisfaction level indicates that visits to botanical parks and gardens are highly rated as "Excellent". The number of visitors who negatively evaluate these parks and gardens as "Bad" and "Terrible" is quite low. According to this, the satisfaction rates of the visitors are high. The TripAdvisor site also provides a breakdown of travel types to botanical parks and gardens. According to visitor comments, the majority of the visitors (81 people) visited the botanical parks and gardens with their families. Following this number, 49 visitors stated that they visited as couple, 47 visitors visited with their friends, 30 visitors visited alone, and 4 visitors visited for business purposes. In this context, it is understood from the comments made that the botanical parks and gardens are very suitable places for family travels and they offer environments where families can spend time with their children. The beauty of the landscape and the richness of plant variety, which [Irmak and Yilmaz \(2011\)](#) stated in their study, are similar to the results of the study in terms of recreational activities.

Personality traits and motivation sources of those who visit botanical gardens can be determined in future academic studies. In addition, in order to encourage participation in botanical tourism, organizations for flora tourism can be organized by local administrations and ministries.

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