Artículos de investigación

TURISMO DIGITAL, INTELIGENCIA ARTICIAL Y NÓMADAS DIGITALES

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R E V I S T A
TURISMO y SOCIEDAD

CAN RIZE ATTRACT DIGITAL NOMADS? A DESTINATION ANALYSIS

¿PUEDE RIZE ATRAER A LOS NÓMADAS DIGITALES? UN ANÁLISIS DEL DESTINO

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Abstract

Technological advancements have expanded remote work opportunities, leading to the emergence of the "digital nomad" tourist profile and a new tourism market. This study aims to evaluate Rize, Turkey, as a potential destination for this profile. Using a qualitative case study design, Turkish digital nomads interested in nature-based destinations were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews and participant observation during a six-day visit to Rize in June 2024, where participants continued their regular work routines. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. Findings indicate that Rize holds strong potential for digital nomad tourism. The study also contributes to the conceptual definition of the digital nomad tourist profile. Based on the findings, destination-planning strategies to attract this kind of tourist are recommended.

Keywords: sustainable tourism product, global digital nomads, digital nomad tourism, digital nomad tourist, Rize

Resumen

Los avances tecnológicos han ampliado las oportunidades de trabajo remoto, lo que ha dado lugar al surgimiento del perfil turístico de los "nómadas digitales" y a un nuevo mercado turístico. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar la ciudad de Rize, Turquía, como un destino potencial para dicho perfil. Utilizando un diseño de estudio de caso cualitativo, mediante un

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muestreo intencional se seleccionaron nómadas digitales turcos interesados en destinos basados en la naturaleza. Los datos se recopilaron por medio de entrevistas presenciales y observación participante durante una visita de seis días a Rize en junio de 2024, en la que los participantes continuaron con sus rutinas laborales habituales. Los datos fueron examinados mediante técnicas de análisis descriptivo. Los resultados indican que Rize posee un gran potencial para el turismo de nómadas digitales. Además, el estudio contribuye a la definición conceptual del perfil del turista nómada digital. Sobre la base de los hallazgos, se recomiendan estrategias de planificación del destino orientadas a atraer a este tipo de turistas.

Palabras clave: producto turístico sostenible, nómadas digitales globales, turismo de nómadas digitales, turista nómada digital, Rize

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology offers various sectors extensive opportunities to benefit from digital capabilities. This shift has positioned the 21st century as a period of significant transformations in work models, particularly toward remote work (Ünal & Temiz, 2022). Studies indicating that off-office work enhances productivity (Houghton et al., 2018; Kazekami, 2018) have contributed to its increasing popularity. An advanced form of off-office work, known as location-independent work, has emerged as an innovative model. The advantages it offers to stakeholders further drive its adoption, as it allows individuals to both travel and maintain their productivity (Deniz, 2019). These opportunities have led to the emergence of the 'digital nomad' concept.

Digital nomads, primarily younger individuals, include location-independent managers, employees, and entrepreneurs (Reichenberger, 2018). By leveraging portable computing technologies and the internet, they can work from anywhere, using this flexibility to travel and explore the world (Floričić & Pavia, 2021; Mancinelli, 2020). From this perspective, digital nomadism is inherently intertwined with tourism (Arslan, 2024). As these individuals work while traveling, they actively participate in tourism activities (Prayana & Darma, 2023). This has led to the emergence of 'digital nomad tourism,' an innovative and rapidly expanding travel model that differs from traditional tourism and represents a high-potential market (Hannonen, 2020; Jiwasiddi et al., 2024).

In numerical terms, 18% of Americans identify as digital nomads, marking a 4.7% increase from the previous year and a 147% rise since 2019. As their numbers grow, their distinct tourism segment has prompted tour operators and governments to develop strategies to attract them. Given their long stays, over 60 countries have introduced digital nomad visas to facilitate their residency (MBO Partners, 2024). Accommodation preferences indicate that 41.6% opt for hotels and hostels (Flatio, 2023), leading popular digital nomad destinations to adapt hotel services to their needs. Fast internet, affordable lodging, and co-working spaces enhance a destination's appeal, prompting global hotel chains such as Hyatt, Radisson, and Marriott to introduce 'hotel office' concepts tailored to digital nomads (Floričić & Pavia, 2021).

Digital nomad tourists typically prefer coastal destinations to maintain their work-life balance while continuing their professional activities. The top three coastal countries favored by digital nomads are Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Singapore (Turizm Stratejisi ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2023). Additionally, they seek destinations with natural beauty and preserved local lifestyles (Pecsek, 2018). Key factors influencing destination choice include climate, nature, culture, safety, low cost of living, efficient public transportation, and visa accessibility (Garcez et al., 2022).

Türkiye meets all the criteria, making it an ideal destination for digital nomads, offering affordability, remote work infrastructure, and visa accessibility. Popular digital nomad hubs in Türkiye include Bursa, Bodrum, Alanya, Gaziantep, Antalya, Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and Konya. While exact numbers are unavailable, Istanbul was the most preferred city in 2022, with 6650 digital nomads. Türkiye also boasts a strong remote work infrastructure, with widespread co-working spaces, numerous cafés and restaurants, and above-average internet connectivity. Additionally, its relatively easy visa policies enhance its appeal to digital nomads (Nomadlist, 2024; Turizm Stratejisi ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2023; Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency [TGA], 2024).

While most digital nomads tend to gravitate toward major cities and coastal regions of Türkiye, lesser-known destinations within the country may also offer equally viable alternatives. Located in the northeastern Black Sea region, Rize stands out with its rich natural environment, cultural authenticity, and developing digital infrastructure. The rationale for selecting Rize in this study is not only to present it as an alternative to popular destinations but also to explore its potential to meet different expectations compared to well-known digital nomad hubs. With its tranquil atmosphere, low cost of living, and immersive natural setting, Rize offers unique opportunities for digital nomads seeking productivity, focus, creativity, and a work experience integrated with nature. In this regard, Rize is positioned as a distinctive destination that may bring a fresh perspective to the discourse on digital nomad tourism.

This study explores the emerging tourism niche of digital nomadism by evaluating the potential of Rize, Turkey, as a destination for remote workers. Drawing on qualitative data collected through researcher's observation and interviews with Turkish digital nomads that experienced during a six-day field study, the research highlights Rize's strengths in nature-based offerings and infrastructure adaptability. Most previous research has concentrated on widely recognized digital nomad hotspots such as Chiang Mai (Lhakard, 2022), Bali (Prabawa & Pertiwi 2020), and Portugal (Abreu & Sampaio, 2025) often emphasizing their developed infrastructure and international appeal. However, this study shifts the focus to underrepresented yet potentially suitable destinations such as Rize, which remain largely absent in the digital nomadism discourse.

2. The Conceptual Framework

The term 'digital nomad' was first introduced in *Digital Nomad*, a book by Makimoto and Manners (1997). In this book, the authors argued that the combination of internet technology with the human desire to travel would enable employees to benefit from complete flexibility, fundamentally transforming the workforce (Kundrotaite, 2021; Müller, 2016).

Approximately two decades after its publication, rapid technological advancements turned digital nomadism into a social phenomenon (Schlagwein, 2018). The concept refers to individuals working online via various information systems, allowing them to embrace a nomadic lifestyle (Herman, 2020). Increasingly, professions such as graphic design, online marketing, and software development no longer require workers to be physically tied to a single location (Thompson, 2019).

Remote work is not merely about being away from traditional offices; it enables individuals to work anytime and anywhere, provided that sufficient technological infrastructure is in place (Thompson, 2018). In this context, factors such as lifestyle transformation, freedom of choice, and the opportunity to focus on personal needs and interests in pursuit of one's best self are key drivers of international mobility (Hannonen, 2020). This lifestyle blurs the boundaries between work and leisure (Reichenberger, 2018) and offers individuals spatial independence. Digital nomads typically have flexible working hours and fulfill their professional responsibilities while traveling. According to Mancinelli (2020), digital nomads are individuals who leverage portable information technologies and widespread internet access to work remotely from anywhere, using this freedom to explore the world. Another definition describes digital nomads as individuals who can work remotely through digital technologies, travel while working, and possess autonomy over their location choices and frequency of movement (Cook, 2020).

This mobile and technology-driven lifestyle positions digital nomads not only as a form of labor but also as tourism actors who engage with destinations through accommodation, leisure, and experiential consumption. At this point, it becomes essential to assess the extent to which digital nomads align with—or diverge from—existing definitions of tourists. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (United Nations, 2010) tourists are defined as individuals who travel and stay in destinations outside their usual place of residence for no longer than one consecutive year. However, digital nomads do not fit neatly into this traditional definition, as they often do not have a fixed place of residence and tend to travel continuously while engaging in both work and leisure activities in the destinations they visit (Hannonen, 2025; Orel, 2019). In the literature, digital nomads have been conceptualized in diverse ways: as individuals primarily seeking leisure experiences (Reichenberger, 2018); as participants in a new cultural and economic phenomenon (Wang et al., 2018); or as a new class of location-independent workers (Orel, 2019). More recent perspectives describe them as long-term visitors who form deeper connections with destinations through extended stays and regular use of local services and infrastructure (Hannonen, 2025).

When traveling, digital nomads seek not only functional workspaces but also environments conducive to both professional and personal well-being. In addition to reliable remote work infrastructure, they place importance on access to social interaction, community engagement, and lifestyle-compatible amenities. Accordingly, they constitute a distinct visitor segment with specific needs such as extended accommodation, co-working facilities, and leisure opportunities. Although they diverge from traditional tourists in various ways, they share certain expectations, warranting their recognition as a separate category within the tourism market (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Cook, 2020; Hannonen,

2025; Orel, 2020). In this context, digital nomad tourism can be defined as a new form of tourism where work and travel are deeply intertwined (Arslan, 2024).

Digital nomads predominantly originate from developed countries like the U.S., U.K., and Canada, with higher purchasing power than residents, and 64% are under 40 years old (MBO Partners, 2024; Vagena, 2021). Beyond economic contributions, they enrich the social and cultural landscape of host destinations. In selecting destinations, they prioritize both leisure activities and opportunities to connect with other digital nomads (Hall et al., 2019). Typically staying at least a month, they often extend their stay if they find the destination appealing (Taşdelen, 2023).

The conceptual foundation of this research is based on defining the digital nomad tourist concept and evaluating the potential of Rize as a destination within the framework of touristic product components, using insights from the experiences of the study group that meets the defining criteria of digital nomadism. Accordingly, Rize was evaluated based on the core components of the touristic product, including its touristic attractions, technological infrastructure, general infrastructure and superstructure facilities, characteristics of tourism enterprises, events, accessibility, and image-related factors.

Participants of the study, who are members of the Digital Nomad Türkiye platform, have traveled at least once as digital nomads. Therefore, they can compare and assess Rize's potential as a digital nomad destination. Rather than relying on a conceptual or theoretical framework, it is built upon the observation of real experiences and data collected through in-depth interviews. Digital nomads' experience of a destination within the context of their daily routines provides valuable user-based insights for the development of a digital nomad tourism product specific to the Rize destination. On a global scale, this research provides significant insights into the identification of new and alternative destinations for digital nomads, the formulation of sustainable tourism policies, and the diversification of regional tourism supply. By offering empirical data on digital nomads' preferences, the study contributes not only to academic literature but also to destination management and tourism planning processes.

The primary aim of this study is to assess the potential of Rize as a digital nomad destination based on the direct experiences of digital nomad tourists. To achieve this objective, the research systematically analyzes Rize's strengths and weaknesses within the framework of key tourism product components, including touristic attractions, technological infrastructure, infrastructure and superstructure facilities, events and experience opportunities, accessibility, and image factors. The study seeks to identify Rize's competitive advantages and areas for improvement within the digital nomad tourism market. Subsequently, it aims to integrate this emerging tourism model into Rize's tourism supply as a new and sustainable tourism product.

The primary research question and sub-questions are as follows:

– What is the potential of Rize as a tourism destination in the digital nomad market in terms of elements comprising the tourism product?

Sub-questions:

1. How is the digital nomad tourist defined?

2. How is the digital nomad tourism experience in Rize evaluated by digital nomad tourists?

3. What are Rize's attractions from the perspective of digital nomads?

4. How adequate is the working environment in Rize for digital nomads?

5. What are the benefits offered by Rize to digital nomads?

6. Are digital nomads inclined to revisit Rize?

7. Would digital nomads recommend Rize to other digital nomads?

8. What suggestions do digital nomads have for enhancing this tourism product in Rize?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study aims to determine whether Rize is a preferable destination for digital nomads. To this end, a qualitative research approach was adopted, employing a case study design. The main reason for choosing qualitative research is to gain in-depth insights into the thoughts and experiences of participants regarding the potential of Rize as a digital nomad destination. Case study research is a methodological approach aimed at gaining comprehensive insights into the functioning of a specific system. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of a bounded system by utilizing multiple data collection methods to thoroughly examine the dynamics of that system (Chmiliar, 2010). Accordingly, the study aims to examine the factors related to processes, individuals, settings, and events holistically.

3.2 Study Area

The selection of Rize as the research site is grounded in its distinctive geographic, cultural, and environmental attributes, which offer strong push and pull dynamics attractive to digital nomads. Push factors refer to the personal and socio-psychological motivations driving digital nomads to travel, such as escaping daily routines, seeking immersion in nature, and preferring lower-cost living environments (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Rize offers a cost-effective and nature-rich setting, aligning well with these push motivations. On the other hand, pull factors represent the destination's appealing features. Like popular digital nomad hubs such as Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, and Bodrum, Rize stands out with its strong internet infrastructure, remote work-friendly spaces, and high-quality natural and cultural environment. Considering Türkiye's overall affordability and visa accessibility for digital nomads, Rize's combination of natural beauty and a tranquil lifestyle

further strengthens its appeal as an alternative digital nomad destination. Additionally, Rize shares key similarities with highly preferred digital nomad destinations like Chiang Mai (Thailand) and Tbilisi (Georgia), known for their low living costs, natural beauty, and work-friendly environments. Similarly, Rize offers a balance between seclusion from major urban centers and accessibility, making it a viable and sustainable work and living environment for digital nomads. Ultimately, Rize aligns with digital nomad motivations in terms of both push and pull factors, positioning itself as a strong alternative to Türkiye's existing digital nomad destinations.

Located in northern Türkiye, in the eastern Black Sea region, Rize has a long history dating back to the early 2nd millennium BC when agricultural and pastoral communities inhabited the area (Figure 1). Written records indicate that its historical development began in the 7th century BC with expeditions by Milesian sailors (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024). The region is characterized by mountainous and rugged terrain, with a narrow coastal strip along the Black Sea (Rize Belediyesi, 2019). Rize has a mild climate with cool summers and rainy conditions throughout the year (Rize Belediyesi, 2010).

Figure 1. Location of Rize province on the map of Türkiye

As one of the primary economic activities, tea cultivation plays a crucial role in the province of Rize. With the recent rise of social media, the region's distinctive characteristics have gained recognition, fueling a rapid increase in tourism (Acuner & Aydın, 2022). Tourism-related activities and locations in Rize are concentrated in the province's rural areas, including highlands, waterfalls, and forests (Çorbacı et al., 2022). The highlands at the foothills of the Kaçkar Mountains are noted for their traditional architecture, offering a unique experience of "life above the clouds" (Bilici & Işık, 2018). Rize's natural and cultural richness makes it an ideal destination for a variety of tourism types (Erkılıç, 2019).

Alternative tourism activities available in Rize include highland tourism, nature hiking (trekking/hiking), mountaineering, bird and wildlife observation, winter tourism, air sports (such as heliskiing), recreational fishing, river tourism (rafting and canoeing), horseback riding, cycling tourism, camping, botanical tourism, jeep safaris, photo safaris, and farm

tourism. With its unique geographic and cultural features and rich natural beauty (Acuner & Tayfun, 2016), Rize has registered 64 regional foods and dishes (Başaran, 2017). Significant traditional crafts in Rize include Rize cloth (feretiko), copper work, weaving, sock knitting, other types of knitting, embroidery, basket weaving, wickerwork, miniature naila (serender) making, and crafting of local musical instruments such as the kemenche and tulum, as well as woodworking and wooden ornamentation (Acuner & Acuner, 2016).

Additionally, tea tourism holds great promise as a developing tourism type for Rize (Acuner & Küçük, 2022). The findings of a study by Acuner and Keskin indicate that tea is the primary product reflecting the gastronomic identity of Rize (Acuner & Keskin, 2023). With its stunning landscapes, unique cultural values, and historical heritage, Rize offers substantial potential as a destination for digital detox tourism (Acuner & Turan, 2024). The accessibility provided by air transport integrates the region into the global economy socially, commercially, and in tourism (Küçük et al., 2022). In this context, the airport in Rize is critical for the destination's accessibility. These attributes collectively demonstrate Rize's potential as an important destination for digital nomad tourism.

3.3 Population and Sample

The research population consists of Turkish digital nomads. Since it is difficult to determine the exact number of digital nomads statistically, the study population was limited to individuals registered on the "Digital Nomad Türkiye" platform, which had approximately 3900 users as of 2024.
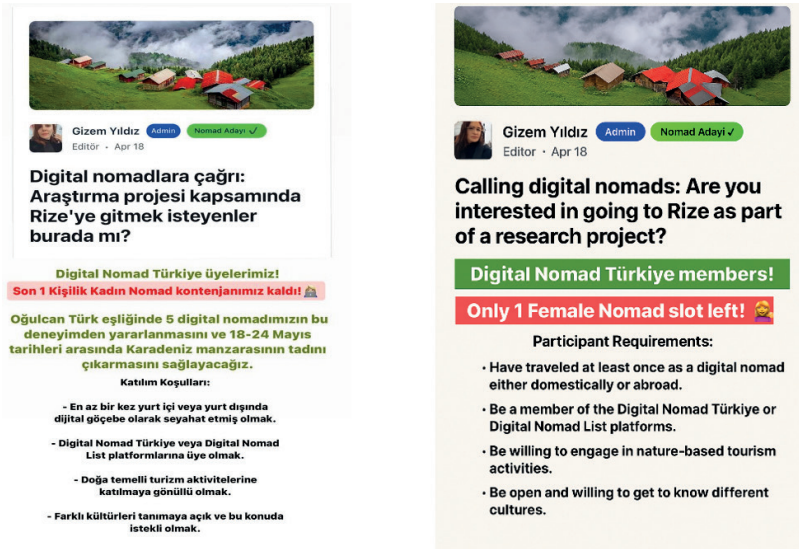
Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to select participants. Due to the limited direct access to the digital nomad community, some participants were reached through referrals from initial contacts (snowball sampling), while all participants were carefully selected based on predefined criteria (purposive sampling).

To initiate the recruitment process, an open call for participation was shared via the Digital Nomad Türkiye platform. This visual announcement served as the primary medium for reaching potential participants and reflects the first step of the sampling strategy (Figure 2). For clarity and accessibility, the original recruitment announcement shared on the Digital Nomad Türkiye platform has been translated into English and presented in visual format.

Accordingly, preliminary online interviews were conducted with 20 individuals contacted via the Digital Nomad Türkiye platform. During these interviews, participants were evaluated based on the following criteria:

– Identifying themselves as digital nomads.

– Having undertaken at least one previous digital nomad journey.

– Expressing willingness to travel to nature-based tourism destinations.

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Figure 2. The recruitment announcement shared on the Digital Nomad
Türkiye platform to invite participants to the study

Based on this assessment, 10 suitable participants were invited to take part in the field study, conducted in Rize between May 18–24, 2024. During the six-day period, participants continued their regular work routines while experiencing the city from a digital nomad perspective. They were observed by the researchers throughout the process and later took part in semi-structured interviews. Participation was entirely voluntary, and before the fieldwork began, each participant signed a written consent form indicating their agreement to be observed, remain in contact with the researchers, and participate in follow-up interviews.

This research is designed as a qualitative case study that requires intensive observation, interviews, and experience-based data collection. In line with this purpose, the sample size was intentionally limited to 10 participants to ensure in-depth data collection, which is a fundamental principle in qualitative research. In such studies, there is typically an inverse relationship between data richness and sample size (Vogt et al., 2012); thus, keeping the sample small supports the depth and quality of the findings (Creswell, 2007).

3.4 Data Collection

The data for this research were collected through interviews and observations, following qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interview questions were designed based on sources such as Wiranatha et al. (2020), Thompson (2021), Prabawa & Pertiwi (2020), Rakhmadi (2021), Vagena (2021), and Chevtaeva (2021), as well as a comprehensive review of related literature. During the preparation of the interview form, attention was paid to

ensure that the questions were detailed, encompassing, and created objectively. Diverse types of questions were incorporated to enrich the form, including probing questions intended to obtain more in-depth data. The questions were structured logically, progressing from concrete to abstract and from general to specific, to maintain a coherent flow. The form used in post-experience interviews consisted of eleven main interview questions, detailed follow-up questions, and closed-ended questions.

Interviews with participants were conducted online between May 30, 2024, and June 15, 2024, each lasting an average of 30-45 minutes. The interview form included a total of 13 questions aimed at understanding participants' experiences in Rize. These questions invited participants to reflect on and evaluate their overall experiences in the city, share their views on Rize's potential to attract digital nomads, and assess how suitable the city is as a destination for the digital nomad lifestyle. Additionally, an observation form, comprising twenty-four main questions, was utilized to evaluate the impact of the participants' experiences as digital nomad tourists in the Rize destination.

The observations covered a broad spectrum, from technical difficulties encountered in the work environment and participants' levels of focus and productivity, to their preferences for working alone or within a group. The form also aimed to obtain more in-depth social and cultural information on participants, such as their break habits, willingness to form social relationships, interest in local culture, and leisure-time preferences. Additionally, it assessed the effects of environmental conditions on motivation and satisfaction, capturing a range of physical and emotional aspects that enrich the research.

The interviews and observations were conducted by researchers with expertise in the subject area, ensuring an accurate data collection process. To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, participant confidentiality and anonymity were prioritized. This approach encouraged participants to respond openly and honestly. At the outset of the research, participants were carefully informed about the confidentiality of their personal information. To ensure anonymity, each participant was coded as P1, P2, P3... P10.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, ensuring validity and reliability is essential for establishing methodological rigor. This is achieved through sustained engagement with participants during and after the research process, thereby enhancing consistency and trustworthiness (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Employing multiple data collection methods, including interviews and observations, further diversifies the data and strengthens credibility. The interview process is meticulously designed to support validity and reliability. Pre-interview informal conversations help create a comfortable atmosphere, encouraging unbiased and detailed responses. Participants are provided with comprehensive information about the study's objectives and methods, which bolsters internal validity. To minimize potential biases or misinterpretations, member checking is utilized by verifying participants' responses at the conclusion of each interview (Maxwell, 2005).

The inclusion of both open-ended and closed-ended questions ensures a balanced approach to data collection. Additionally, audio recordings, taken with participants' consent,

safeguard against data loss and ensure precise transcription, collectively enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

3.6 Data Analysis

After transcription, the data were analyzed using the MAXQDA 20 software. For data analysis, a deductive approach—specifically, the descriptive analysis technique—was used. In descriptive analysis, interviews were coded according to predetermined themes based on the literature, and findings were identified and interpreted (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Themes and codes were derived from the literature but were also shaped by the thoughts and experiences of the participants. To prevent meaning shifts, texts were read repeatedly during the coding process, and codes and themes were meticulously developed. Furthermore, to increase validity, direct quotations from participants' statements were included in the findings.

4. Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics and other information of the participants. Among those who participated in the experience, eight were male, with an average age of twenty-eight, and nine participants had a medium income level.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants
and other information about the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Income level	Occupation	Place of residence	Travel destination	Number of travels in a year
P1	Female	27	Single	Bachelor's	Average	Media-Advertising	İstanbul	Abroad focused	Twenty times
P2	Male	28	Single	Bachelor's	Average	Digital marketing specialist	Ardahan	Domestic	3-4 trip
P3	Male	23	Single	Bachelor's	Average	Digital content creation	İzmir	Abroad	The entire year
P4	Male	25	Single	High school	Average	Digital marketing specialist	Antalya	Abroad	The entire year
P5	Male	26	Single	Associate degree	Average	Video editing	Manisa	Domestic-Abroad	Two times
P6	Male	22	Single	Bachelor's	Average	Software engineering	İstanbul	Domestic-Abroad	Three times
P7	Male	33	Married	Bachelor's	Average	E-commerce	İstanbul	Domestic-Abroad	The entire year
P8	Female	33	Married	Bachelor's	Average	Digital design	İstanbul	Abroad focused	The entire year

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Income level	Occupation	Place of residence	Travel destination	Number of travels in a year
P9	Male	31	Single	Bachelor's	Average	E-commerce	Adana	Domestic-Abroad	Abroad 1-2 times, Domestic 3-4 times
P10	Male	30	Single	Bachelor's	High	Software developer	Ordu	Domestic focused	3-4 trip

Note. Own construction.

Eight participants were single and held a bachelor's degree. When examining the travel destinations of participants who journeyed as digital nomads, it was observed that international travel was predominant. Additionally, in terms of the frequency of travel as digital nomads, four participants traveled year-round, while another four traveled three to four times per year.

The first sub-research question of the study is phrased as, "How is a digital nomad tourist defined?" This question is considered one of the primary anticipated outcomes of the study. Below, Figure 3 displays a word cloud created from participants' responses. Based on participants' answers and an extensive literature review, the researchers defined "digital nomad tourist" as follows:

It is a new generation of tourist profile that, thanks to location-independent work opportunities, determines their lifestyle and location according to their personal characteristics and preferences, and benefits from touristic events and opportunities that enrich their life experiences by exploring diverse cultures while utilizing digital technologies to pursue their career goals without interruption.
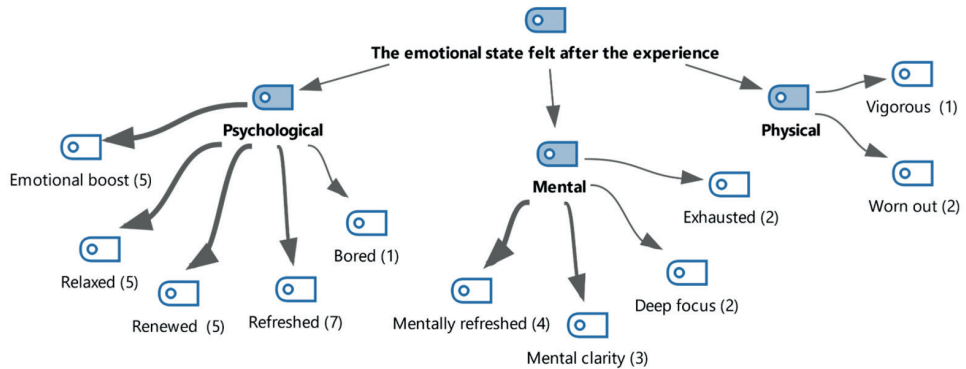
Figure 3. Digital nomad tourist definition word cloud

Note. Own construction.

The sub-research question, "How do digital nomad tourists evaluate the digital nomad tourism experience in Rize?" yielded predominantly positive responses (Figure 4). Participants reported emotional boost ($f = 5$), relaxation ($f = 5$), renewal ($f = 5$), and refreshment ($f = 7$) following their experiences, highlighting the mental benefits provided by Rize's natural environment. Additionally, participants felt mentally refreshed ($f = 4$), experienced mental clarity ($f = 3$), and achieved deep focus at work ($f = 2$), indicating the calming and concentration-enhancing effects of working in a tranquil, natural setting.

Figure 4. The emotional state of digital nomads after their Rize experience

Note. Own construction.

However, it was also observed that some participants felt tired and worn out ($f = 2$) after the experience. P6 shared thoughts on feeling both relaxed and fatigued, saying:

> Before going to Rize, I had not left Istanbul for about six months. So, being surrounded by trees and rivers in Rize really helped me relax, but spending an entire week with the same digital nomads in the same environment left me feeling tired.

This statement highlights that intense social interaction may lead to a sense of fatigue for some participants. P9, who reported feeling mentally refreshed, shared this perspective: "Waking up in that greenery, especially starting the day with fresh air at 6:30 a.m., was a wonderful experience. We went to bed early and woke up early, and this routine allowed my mind to rest significantly."

The digital nomad experience in Rize positively influenced participants' psychological and mental well-being, despite some reporting physical fatigue due to social interactions rather than the environment itself. Observational data aligned with interview findings, showing participants starting their days early with a refreshed and energized demeanor. Informal discussions revealed that Rize's natural setting boosted motivation and supported creativity. Over time, participants appeared relaxed, calm, and well-rested. Their active involvement in activities and positive engagement with collaborative tasks further substantiated these observations (Table 2). Participants' immersion in local life was evident during the

observation process. Notably, they voluntarily participated in traditional tea-picking and local tea production activities, which offered them an opportunity to engage with Rize's cultural heritage. These moments were documented with photographs to visually support the observational data (Figure 5).

Table 2. The participants' evaluations of their experiences in Rize

Category	Theme	Code	Fr.	%	Theme	Code	Fr.	%
Evaluation of experience in Rize	Accessibility to the destination	Easy transportation	7	70	In-destination transportation	Lack of transportation alternatives	4	40
		Connecting flight	2	20		Poor condition of roads	2	20
		Limited flights	1	10		Restricted access within the city	2	20
	Travel duration	1 week	5	50		Traveling with dependence on travel agencies	2	20
		Longer than 1 week	4	40	Quality of service	Above average	7	70
		Shorter than 1 week	1	10		Average	3	30
	Interaction	Friendly	10	50	Price	Low cost of living	5	50
		Cheerful	2	10		Average	3	30
		Hospitable	8	40		Above average	2	20

Note. Own construction.

Figure 5. Participants engaging in traditional tea-picking
and artisanal tea production activities in Rize

Note. The pictures used in Figure 5 were taken by the research team during the fieldwork in Rize, with the participants' consent. These images are original and generated by the authors.

When evaluating the experience in Rize from the perspective of digital nomads, participants noted that overall accessibility to the destination was accessible ($f = 7$), with some options for connecting flights ($f = 2$) and limited flight options ($f = 1$). Regarding access to local experiences and activities, some participants noted a lack of alternative transportation options ($f = 4$). As P7 observed:

From what I noticed in Rize, exploring the area without a tour package could be challenging. Since not everyone can rent a vehicle, visitors tend to operate on a more structured schedule. The absence of varied transportation types can limit tourists, which could be considered one of the main obstacles in the tourism experience here.

In terms of affordability, participants described the region as a low cost of living ($f = 5$). From a digital nomad's perspective, P1 stated:

Compared to Istanbul and other areas, I think Rize is more affordable, particularly in comparison with the Aegean region. Plus, you get to enjoy more flavorful meals. Even the coffee prices in cafes are generally reasonable—there is no excessive expense.
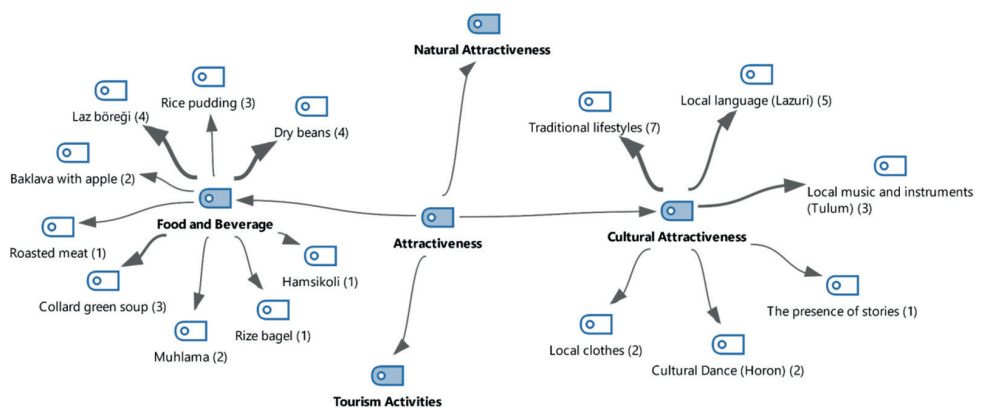
When assessing the duration of the experience, participants commonly felt that one week was an ideal timeframe ($f = 5$); however, some suggested that a stay longer than one week ($f = 4$) would be preferable. P7 shared their thoughts on the matter: "You could easily stay longer in Rize because the nature here truly brings peace. One week is insufficient to fully experience these natural wonders. I believe at least 10 to 15 days would be appropriate."

Participants' evaluations of the quality of services during their experience indicated that service quality was generally above average ($f = 7$). P8 expressed their view on the service, stating:

On a scale of 1 to 10, I would give it a ten in terms of service quality—I encountered no issues. Compared with services in other cities or countries, everything was offered with friendliness and punctuality; there was no noticeable difference.

The participants' interactions with the local community were also viewed very positively. The local people were found to be sincere, warm, friendly, and hospitable by participants. P5 shared how their preconceived notions of people from the Black Sea region were challenged: "I met individuals from the village and the staff at our hotel—all were kind and wonderful. Contrary to my expectations, the people I encountered left a highly positive impression."

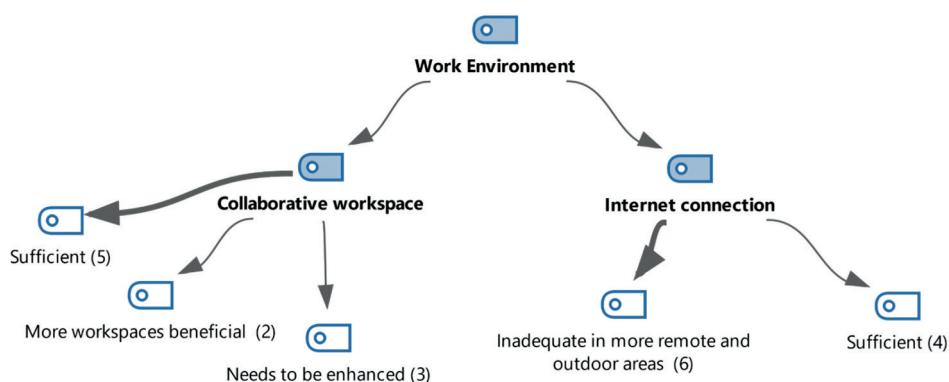Figure 6. Rize's touristic attractions according to digital nomad tourists

Note. Own construction.

Another sub-question of the research focuses on "How attractive Rize is as a destination for digital nomad tourists." Findings indicate that, according to digital nomad tourists, Rize possesses significant potential in terms of touristic attractions, with participant evaluations generally reflecting positive feedback on these attractions (Figure 6). Participants found the natural allure of Rize to be immense, captivating, and compelling. P8 emphasized Rize's natural and cultural attributes, stating: "Everything is rooted in traditional cultural life, and preserved elements are present. Also, the abundance of green areas is very similar to Bali. For me, its natural beauty is a perfect ten out of ten." Similarly, P1 highlighted the area's natural appeal, saying: "There are enchanting natural attractions here. After returning from there, I often found myself wanting to revisit. That region truly has a distinct culture and a unique language." Participants explored Rize's local cuisine, enjoying dishes like collard green soup, dry beans, Laz pastry, and rice pudding, highlighting the region's appeal through its nature and gastronomy.

When examining the adequacy of Rize's coworking spaces and internet connectivity for digital nomad tourists, participants noted that while existing coworking spaces are generally sufficient ($f = 5$), there was also for more workspaces beneficial ($f = 2$) and needs to be enhanced ($f = 2$) the number of such spaces (Figure 7). P10 commented on the coworking spaces, saying: "If I were on my own, I would probably continue working at a restaurant or other venue. If that were not feasible, I would prefer to work in my room or in one of the alternative cafes nearby. Ultimately, I would not have difficulty finding a suitable workspace for myself," highlighting the adequacy of the available workspaces.

Figure 7. The adequacy of Rize in terms of working environment according to digital nomad tourists

Note. Own construction.

Internet connectivity, however, received mixed reviews from participants. Some reported that the internet was sufficient in accommodation areas and central regions ($f = 4$), yet inadequate in more remote and outdoor areas, such as highland regions ($f = 6$). P8 expressed this, saying: "Apart from the accommodation area, I did not really need internet elsewhere. However, I noticed that cafes had internet. Given that we could work in cafes, I do not foresee any issues," while P1 evaluated the situation more broadly, stating: "I would really

prefer a fast and smooth internet service. This is actually a general issue in Türkiye, not exclusive to Rize. So, it would not be accurate to say the situation was terrible; however, I did expect slightly better internet quality during a digital nomad trip." These assessments suggest that Rize offers certain advantages for digital nomad tourists, though improvements are needed in terms of internet access and coworking spaces.

When analyzing responses to the fifth sub-question, "what are the benefits that Rize offer to digital nomad tourists?" findings revealed positive impacts on both their professional and personal lives (Table 3). Examining the professional benefits, participants most frequently noted the formation of new collaboration opportunities ($f = 10$), chances for idea exchange ($f = 6$), increased motivation ($f = 5$), and emergence of new business ideas ($f = 4$). P1 remarked: "Everyone works in a different field, which was extremely beneficial for me from a networking perspective," emphasizing the importance of meeting professionals from various sectors. Evaluating the work environment, P6 commented: "Everyone is fully focused on their work. This motivated me in terms of productivity, and I worked very efficiently," underscoring how shared workspaces enhanced productivity. These observations indicate that gathering digital nomads together provides notable benefits in terms of collaboration, innovative idea development, and individual motivation.

Table 3. The benefits of experience for digital nomads

Category	Theme	Code	Fr.	%	Theme	Code	Fr.	%
Achieved benefit	*Career life*	New collaboration opportunities	10	37.04	*Personal benefit*	Meeting new people	7	41.18
		Idea exchange	6	22.22		Exposure to different cultures	3	17.65
		Increased motivation	5	18.52		A sense of happiness and safety	3	17.65
		Emergence of new business ideas	4	14.81		Chance to discover new places	2	11.76
		Increased creativity	2	7.41		Being together with diverse digital nomads	1	5.88
						Having time for oneself	1	5.88

Note. Own construction.

In terms of personal benefits, participants most commonly mentioned opportunities to meet new people ($f = 7$), exposure to different cultures ($f = 3$), a sense of happiness ($f = 3$), and the chance to discover new places ($f = 2$) among the top advantages they gained. In this context, P9 emphasized the personal and professional development facilitated by participation, stating: "I feel more accomplished and believe I have progressed further in terms of networking. We met people from different disciplines, interacted with individuals from diverse regions, and thus gained a variety of experiences." These statements highlight that the digital nomad experience broadened participants' social connections and offered enriching cultural interactions.

When asked about their intention to revisit Rize as digital nomads, all participants expressed that they would consider returning. P5 shared a plan, stating:

> I'm thinking of coming here with a group of friends or a close friend, staying for a week, spending some time in seclusion, and having a good time. I'd also like to explore other cities in the Black Sea region.

Similarly, P10 stated, "I'm considering crossing over to Georgia. I plan to start in Rize, revisit some of the places we went to, and then continue on my way." Participants expressed satisfaction with their experience in Rize and showed interest in returning. They suggested that combining Rize with nearby regions could enhance the travel experience. Key motivations for revisiting included its natural environment, lack of pollution and traffic, tea cultivation activities, and unique culture. Reflecting on what makes Rize distinctive, P8 explained:

> What sets Rize apart from other places is its nature. While places like Thailand or Bali also have beautiful landscapes, I have not seen any that stand out with highlands and clean streams like those in Rize. It has clean air and no traffic issues. For instance, while places like Bali or Istanbul have traffic problems, there is no such problem in Rize, making it a much more relaxed environment.

When participants were asked about recommending their experience in Rize to other digital nomads, it was noted that all participants were inclined to share their positive impressions. P10 expressed this intention, saying: "I shared this experience with people I spoke to one-on-one and with groups I am part of, emphasizing how beautiful the area is and how suitable it is for digital nomads." P9, reaching out to a broader audience, stated: "I started recommending it not only to digital nomads but to everyone." P3 added advice, saying: "Clear your head a bit, maybe step away from the computer. Enjoy being surrounded by nature. Rize has beautiful landscapes and delicious food. There may be challenges with transportation, but there are ways to overcome them." Lastly, P8 highlighted Rize's potential, stating: "With its nature, must-see places, and emerging workshops, it is becoming even more attractive. I would detail all of these aspects and strongly recommend it." These statements demonstrate that participants found the Rize experience to be appealing and emphasized the opportunities the region offers, creating a positive impression for digital nomads.

In examining Rize's potential to attract digital nomad tourists, participants with national and international experience indicated that Rize could be an attractive destination for digital nomads. However, certain areas for improvement were also highlighted. Participants offered various suggestions to address these deficiencies (Figure 8). Focusing on digital marketing strategies, P4 stated:
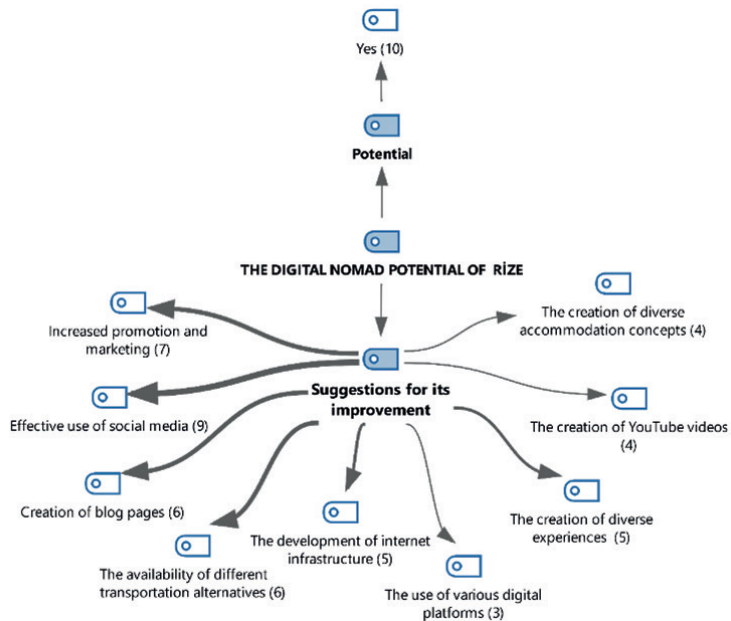
> If there are blogs producing content about Rize on YouTube, it's important to advertise these. Specifically, articles like 'Best Places in Türkiye for Digital Nomads' could be prepared. Blog posts could be shared on platforms such as YouTube and Reddit. Additionally, a Facebook group called 'Digital Nomad Rize' could be created and promoted. More information should be provided about the area's nature and activities to attract digital nomads in Istanbul to Rize.

P6 emphasized Rize's natural attractions and venues, stating:

> A café by the river made me feel as if I were in Bali. Being in a beautifully designed café within nature was truly special. Such places could attract digital nomads. However, effective marketing strategies are necessary to realize this potential.

These suggestions underscore the need to promote Rize's natural beauty and available amenities to a wider audience.

Figure 8. The potential of Rize to attract digital nomads and suggestions for its improvement

Note. Own construction.

P3 emphasized the power of social media, suggesting: "Creating engaging content through social media is crucial for reaching broad audiences. Influencer marketing can be utilized; if especially foreign content creators visit the region and produce content, Rize's international recognition will increase." Likewise, P6 highlighted the need for comprehensive content, stating: "Creating content on topics such as things to do in Rize, the best workspaces, activities, and practical tips is important. Shares from those who have experienced these activities can be very influential for potential visitors." P10 addressed transportation, stating:

> If public transportation options are adequate and information is easily accessible, both local and foreign tourists, particularly families, can become more aware of these aspects. Dolmuş (shared minibus) services should be reviewed to ensure they are sufficient, and alternative transportation options should be developed if necessary.

Regarding accommodation, P4 added:

> Abroad, there are lodging options suitable for different income levels. There are budget options such as hostels, Couchsurfing, Airbnb, and Work packers, as well as luxury hotels. However, accommodation in Rize remains relatively expensive compared to other countries, which could be an issue for digital nomads. To address this, accommodation concepts that cater to various income levels should be developed.

P8 underscored the importance of experiences for digital nomads, explaining: "Experiences are very important for digital nomads. Some even save on accommodation abroad to spend more on experiences. While highlands are well-known places to visit in Rize, other activities should also be brought more to the forefront."

These comments suggest that Rize has potential in the field of digital nomad tourism, yet improvements in areas such as accommodation, transportation, and marketing strategies could help better realize this potential.

Additionally, these recommendations underscore the importance of steps to make Rize a more attractive destination for digital nomads and provide a roadmap for enhancing the experiences of digital nomads in the area.

Participants evaluated Rize based on criteria valued by digital nomads, such as those on Nomad List. While some aspects were rated positively, several shortcomings were identified (Table 4). Key issues included low proficiency in foreign languages among locals (2.4), creating communication challenges for international tourists. Beaches (2.3) and co-working spaces (2.5) were also rated poorly, indicating limited options for sea tourism and essential workspaces for digital nomads. Additionally, the scarcity of entertainment venues (2.3) may reduce the region's appeal for younger, dynamic visitors.

Table 4. Participants' general evaluation of Rize after the experience

Expressions	Average	Expressions	Average
Natural attractions	5	Diversity of restaurants/cafes	3.4
Local culture	4.6	Low cost of living	3.4
Day trip options	4.4	Shopping opportunities	3.4
Social media-friendly locations	4.8	Internet	3.2
Safety	4.3	The destination's capacity to host international guests	3.4
Accessibility to the destination	4.2	Diversity of urban transportation options	3
Leisure activities	4.1	Co-working spaces	**2.5**
Climate	4.1	Foreign language proficiency of the local population	**2.4**
Networking opportunities	3.6	Beach	**2.3**

Expressions	Average	Expressions	Average
Interaction with other tourists	3.4	Entertainment places	**2.3**

Note. Own construction.

Rize's strengths are highlighted by high ratings in several areas (Table 4). Natural attractions (5) received the highest score, emphasizing the region's appeal. Scenic locations for social media sharing (4.8) suggest strong potential for popularity growth via social platforms. Local culture (4.6) was praised for its richness, enhancing tourist interaction. Day trip options (4.4) and leisure activities (4.1) were also highly rated, along with accessibility (4.2), contributing to overall satisfaction. These results position Rize as a compelling destination for digital nomads, though improvements in infrastructure and services are needed to fully meet their expectations.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Digital nomadism has become a significant phenomenon transforming both work and lifestyle. Digital nomad tourists contribute directly to local economies while promoting destinations and supporting sustainable tourism through cultural interaction. In this context, this study was conducted based on the hypothesis that Rize could serve as a new destination for digital nomad tourists. Participants who had previously traveled as digital nomads were selected and given the opportunity to experience Rize from a digital nomad perspective. To address the main research question, eight sub-research questions were formulated, and based on the responses, the definition of a digital nomad tourist and Rize's potential for digital nomad tourism are discussed below.

Table 5. Tourism potential assessment: Strengths and weaknesses

Theoretical Core Elements	Strengths	Weaknesses
Touristic Attractions	– Natural beauties – Cultural heritage elements – Preserved authentic culture (clothing, music, dance, etc.) – Culinary culture – Calm, inspiring, and peaceful atmosphere – Suitable climate conditions – Motivating and creativity-enhancing natural environment – Warm, friendly, and hospitable local people – Low cost of living – Social media-friendly locations	– Low global recognition – Limited foreign language proficiency of local people – Beach facilities are limited

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Theoretical Core Elements	Strengths	Weaknesses
Technological Infrastructure	– Strong and uninterrupted internet infrastructure in city center	– Insufficient internet access in highlands and remote areas
Infrastructure and Superstructure Facilities	– Shared working spaces in accommodation enterprises and some cafes – Alternative accommodation options	– Limited number of private working spaces and co-working venues – Limited shared accommodation options
Events and Experience Opportunities	– Nature and sports activities (Heliski, snowboard, trekking, rafting, etc.) – Local culinary experience – Cultural festivals – Experience-oriented alternative activities like tea tourism – Day trip options	– Limited nightlife entertainment – Lack of promotion for alternative activities
Accessibility	– Easy access via air and road transport	– Limited urban transportation options
Image Factors	– Safe, natural, and culturally rich	– Insufficient destination promotion in the international market

Note. Own construction.

Based on observations conducted throughout the research, interviews with participants, and findings obtained from a literature review, a definition of the "digital nomad tourist" has been proposed. All participants emphasized remote work, internet and digital technologies, a free and independent lifestyle, and the integration of work and travel in their definitions of digital nomad tourism. The literature review further supports this perspective, defining a digital nomad tourist as an individual who adopts a location-independent, technology-supported work model, embraces a flexible and experience-oriented lifestyle, possesses a strong desire for exploration and travel, and maintains financial and time management independence. Synthesizing all this information, the researchers define the digital nomad tourist as:

> It is a new generation of tourist profile that, thanks to location-independent work opportunities, determines their lifestyle and location according to their personal characteristics and preferences, and benefits from touristic events and opportunities that enrich their life experiences by exploring diverse cultures while utilizing digital technologies to pursue their career goals without interruption.

In line with another objective of the study, the research findings have been categorized under specific headings to identify Rize's strengths and weaknesses in terms of digital nomad tourism, assess its potential, and determine areas for improvement. This evaluation, based on the key components of a tourism product—touristic attractions, technological infrastructure, infrastructure and superstructure facilities, events and experience

opportunities, accessibility, and image factors—systematically highlights Rize's competitive advantages and aspects that require enhancement. The table below summarizes the key findings of the study, providing a comprehensive overview of Rize's potential as a digital nomad destination.

Participants evaluated their digital nomad experience in Rize as highly positive in psychological, mental, and physical aspects. With its stunning natural beauty, tranquil atmosphere, and unique cultural elements, Rize provided participants with renewal, relaxation, and enhanced concentration, making it an ideal work environment, particularly for individuals engaged in creative and focus-intensive tasks. Its quiet and isolated setting facilitated mental refreshment, reduced stress, and boosted productivity and creativity. Rize stands out not only as a travel destination but also as an inspiring living space. Offering a perfect balance between work, rest, and exploration, the destination provides digital nomads with a secure and comfortable experience through its accessibility, service quality, affordable cost of living, and hospitable local community. As a result, Rize has been recognized as a destination that opens new professional and personal opportunities for digital nomads.

During the experience, participants primarily spent time together, with some reporting fatigue afterward. This highlights the need for designated isolated work and relaxation areas for digital nomads. Rize's natural landscape offers significant potential for those seeking solitude and immersion in nature. However, these opportunities must be systematically structured and presented to digital nomads. Similarly, studies by Ji et al. (2024) and Zhang et al. (2024) have found that work environments integrated with nature positively influence destination preferences.

Participants found Rize's touristic attractions highly impressive. Its breathtaking natural beauty, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and rich culinary traditions stand out as the destination's strongest assets. These findings align with postmodern tourism dynamics, emphasizing sustainability, authenticity, and alternative experience opportunities. Lacárcel et al. (2024) highlight the significance of cultural and gastronomic elements in digital nomads' destination choices. For digital nomads, features that enhance both work performance and personal well-being are crucial (Sztuk, 2023). Rize's natural beauty, tranquil work environment, cultural richness, experience-driven activities, mild climate, affordable living costs, safety, accessibility, and strong internet infrastructure make it an attractive destination for digital nomads.

Participants reported that Rize's infrastructure sufficiently met their work environment needs. Studies show that co-working spaces are vital for digital nomads, offering benefits such as networking, socialization, well-being, and self-discipline (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Cook, 2020; Ingvarsson, 2023; Jackson, 2017; Orel, 2019; Orel, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Thompson, 2019). While Rize provides co-working opportunities in accommodations and boutique food and beverage establishments, the availability of private, isolated workspaces remains a critical need. Therefore, local businesses should develop more structured alternatives for remote workers. One of the most essential requirements for digital nomads is a strong technological infrastructure and high-speed internet. Although connectivity is not an issue in residential areas, remote locations such

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as highlands and forests lack reliable internet access. As a result, this limitation should be transparently communicated in promotional materials targeting the digital nomad market.

Participants evaluated their experience in Rize in terms of both professional and personal benefits. Professionally, interactions in co-working spaces were found to enhance collaboration, knowledge exchange, motivation, and creativity. Personally, engaging with different individuals was perceived as a significant advantage. Other studies support these findings, emphasizing benefits such as experiencing diverse cultures, developing professional collaborations, and achieving work-life balance (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Hannonen, 2020; Verma, 2023). Participants also highlighted that Rize's preserved local culture and opportunities for interaction with residents enriched their experience. Additionally, Rize's natural environment provided both social and solitary opportunities, fostering creativity and productivity while reducing stress.

All participants expressed their intention to revisit Rize, reinforcing the study's primary argument that Rize is a suitable destination for digital nomads. Their willingness to return confirms that Rize's natural, cultural, and infrastructural features align well with the preferences of digital nomads. Moreover, revisit and recommendation intentions are key indicators of a destination's sustainability and economic viability, suggesting that Rize has the potential to become a long-term hub for digital nomads.

Digital nomads reported high satisfaction with their visit, acknowledging Rize's potential as a digital nomad tourism destination. Their primary recommendation was to strengthen the destination's sustainable marketing through social media. As a critical tool for visibility and brand recognition, social media can facilitate long-term and personalized engagement with target markets, enhancing visitor loyalty. Additionally, Rize should focus on infrastructure development and improving service quality. Expanding accommodation options would increase its global competitiveness, while innovative activities could make the visitor experience more memorable.

The findings of the study, evaluated in terms of key tourism product components (attractiveness, activities, accessibility, tourism enterprises, and image), clearly demonstrate Rize's potential for digital nomad tourism. The city's unique culture, experience-oriented alternative tourism activities, accessibility, and safety are the primary factors contributing to its strong potential. For digital nomads who prefer long-term stays, Rize's affordability is an additional advantage. Furthermore, the region's natural beauty and tranquil atmosphere provide an inspiring and productive work environment, fostering creativity and efficiency. Beyond its natural assets, Rize's image is further strengthened by its rich culinary scene, traditional music, and the welcoming nature of its local population, making it particularly appealing to digital nomads who value cultural interaction. Enhancing accommodation options, expanding local transportation networks, and further developing internet infrastructure could significantly boost Rize's competitiveness in this market. The presence of these strong attributes, combined with the ease of improvement in specific areas, positions digital nomad tourism as a viable new tourism product for Rize. Based on the study results, digital nomad tourism in Rize can initially serve as a complementary product to the region's existing tourism offerings. However, with appropriate development

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strategies and infrastructure investments, it has the potential to evolve into one of Rize's primary tourism products in the future.

This research is one of the limited numbers of research efforts that examine digital nomad tourism at the destination level within the framework of tourism product components, demonstrating how individual experiences contribute to the tourism product development process. When existing studies are reviewed, it is observed that most of the research in the digital nomadism literature primarily focuses on widely recognized popular destinations such as Bali, Chiang Mai, and Lisbon. In contrast, this study aims to diversify the literature by evaluating an alternative destination like Rize, which presents a different profile that can also meet the needs of digital nomads. The evaluation of push and pull factors that influence digital nomads' destination preferences—through firsthand experiences in terms of touristic attractions, technological infrastructure, infrastructure and superstructure facilities, events and experience opportunities, accessibility, and image factors—positions this study as a significant contribution to theoretical discussions in the field.

In addition, this research contributes to the conceptual development of the digital nomad definition. Despite the increasing prevalence of digital nomadism as a lifestyle and work model, there is still no universally agreed-upon definition in the literature. Therefore, clarifying who digital nomads are, what motivates them to travel, and what kind of lifestyle they adopt is crucial for both academic research and industry practices.

Accordingly, this study redefines the digital nomad tourist by integrating observational and interview data derived from participants' experiences with existing definitions in the literature. The study's findings indicate that digital nomads are not merely individuals who engage in location-independent work; rather, they are characterized by flexibility, a strong desire for exploration, cultural engagement, and an experience-oriented lifestyle. The process of refining this definition is essential for better understanding digital nomads' travel behaviors, destination selection criteria, and their overall impact on the tourism industry. The definition established in this study contributes to the academic discourse while also serving as a valuable guide for destination management and marketing strategies aimed at attracting digital nomads.

5.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study reveal the necessary strategic improvements to enhance Rize's competitiveness as a destination for digital nomads. The key practical implications are summarized as follows:

5.1.1 Infrastructure Limitations

– Enhancing Internet Infrastructure: While the internet infrastructure in the city center is adequate, connectivity issues persist in the highland and rural areas. Improving internet access in these locations is essential to meet the remote working needs of digital nomads.

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– Increasing Quiet and Isolated Workspaces: Participants noted the lack of quiet and private working areas. Expanding private workspaces and co-working facilities would significantly enhance the destination's attractiveness for digital nomads.

5.1.2 Marketing and Visibility Challenges

– Promoting Alternative Activities in International Markets: Although Rize offers rich nature-based and cultural tourism experiences, these activities are not sufficiently promoted in international tourism markets.

– Improving the promotion of alternative activities: Although Rize offers a variety of nature-based and cultural tourism experiences, these activities are not sufficiently promoted in international markets.
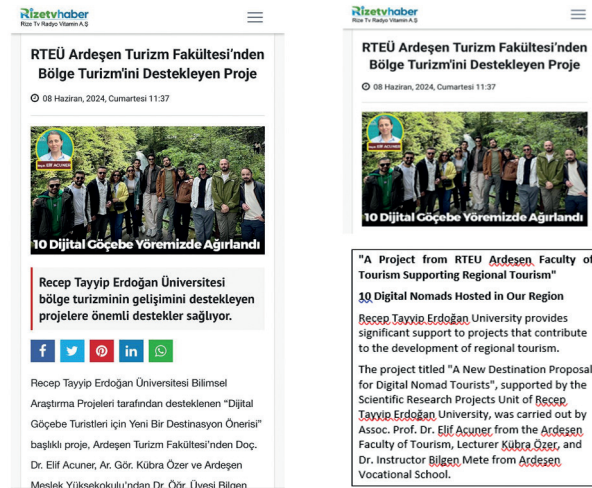
5.1.3 Accommodation and Transportation Deficiencies

– Developing Accommodation Options for Long-Term Stays: Given that digital nomads typically prefer extended stays, it is recommended to expand budget-friendly and shared accommodation options in the region.

– Improving Intra-City Transportation: To enhance mobility and flexibility for digital nomads, it is necessary to increase car and motorbike rental services, expand bicycle lanes, and improve the public transportation network.

In addition to these strategic recommendations, the project attracted attention at the local level and was featured in various regional news outlets. This media visibility not only enhanced public awareness of digital nomadism but also supported the integration of the concept into Rize's tourism planning agenda. The presence of local media coverage indicates growing community interest and opens opportunities for collaboration among local stakeholders. To ensure accessibility and clarity for an international audience, the original news reports were translated into English and presented visually in Figure 9.

Figure 9. News featured in local media about the project: "A project from RTEU Ardeşen Faculty of Tourism to support regional tourism".

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Note. This figure was obtained from two local news sources on Instagram: the accounts "rize_takip" and "rizetvhaber." Both images were taken from public posts on these platforms.

5.2 Limitations

The research was conducted with Turkish digital nomads. A study that includes the expectations and experiences of digital nomads from different countries on a global scale could help assess Rize's potential within a broader framework. The study was carried out within a specific period (May 18-24, 2024), and participants' experiences are limited to this timeframe. Additionally, a dedicated tourism infrastructure for digital nomads in Rize has not yet been fully established. The research findings are based on the current state of this infrastructure, and the destination's attractiveness may increase with future improvements. Furthermore, data collection tools included semi-structured interviews and a structured observation form; however, as these tools rely on qualitative data and focus on participants' subjective experiences, their capacity to generate generalizable results remains limited.

5.3 For Future Research

This study examines Rize as an alternative destination for digital nomad tourism. Future research may build upon its findings by adopting a broader perspective to explore various dimensions of digital nomad tourism. Comparative studies involving other destinations could provide valuable insights into Rize's competitive advantages. Depending on the research focus, future studies may use quantitative methods to examine factors influencing digital nomads' destination preferences or employ qualitative approaches to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences, work habits, and motivations of international digital nomads. Such investigations would help develop more effective strategies for destination management and policymaking within the context of global digital nomad mobility.

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6. Acknowledgments

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