

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS FOR RECIPROCAL DUAL-DESTINATION TOURISM MARKETING: LINKING ROMANIA'S ADVENTURE NICHE AND TURKEY'S CULTURAL TREKS

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the potential for complementary strategic partnership in the intensive tourism corridor between Romania and Turkey. To go beyond current mass tourism, Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis (SCDA) has been used. The analysis shows that the two countries are highly complementary: Turkey's established coastal image contrasts with Romania's strength in adventure and nature-culture tourism in the Carpathian Mountains. Turkey, in turn, offers Romanians excellent Structured Cultural Ecotourism, such as Cappadocia and the Lycian Way. Facilitating measures such as the 2024 Identity Card travel policy could accelerate the adoption of niche travel packages. The proposed Complementary Destination Cooperation Model recommends joint promotion and product integration for higher tourism returns and sustainable development.*

**Key words:** *tourism, tourism corridor, heritage treks, Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis (SCDA)*

### INTRODUCTION

Destinations are being forced beyond generic mass-market offerings due to the globalisation of traveller preferences for speciality, high-yield experiences, specifically Nature, Adventure, and Cultural Ecotourism (NABET) [1]. There is huge potential to convert existing tourist flow into viable, variant, and sustainable niche markets from within the already busy travel corridor connecting Romania and Turkey [7]. This paper discusses a Strategic Framework for Reciprocal Dual-Destination Tourism Marketing, based on the concept of destination co-competition [14,15].

Considering that almost a million Romanian tourists go to Turkey every year, the volume of bilateral tourism is already high, yet such movements remain very traditional and often concentrated in mass-market segments [20,23]. What is basically missing is a strategy for cross-selling opposing niche strengths [26,27]. On the one hand, Romania's Transylvania region with Wilderness Adventure and Nature-Embedded Culture has served as an ideal contrast, untamed, to Turkey's well-known urban and coastal appeal: the Carpathian Mountains, high altitude trekking, and historic castles [6,8]. Turkish-structured, cultural ecotourism and heritage treks are available at reasonable prices, such as the Lycian Way and Cappadocia, for Romanian nature lovers eager to live history [30,31].

The framework will seek to capitalize on current political and economic facilitation-for instance, the 2024 ID card travel policy that Romania has with countries-and map these distinct niche portfolios using a Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis [5]. This becomes an actionable Complementary Destination Competition Model that provides managerial and policy recommendations related to cooperative digital promotion and product integration in increasing tourism traffic, diversification of markets, and ensuring long-term sustainable development for both Romania and Turkey [2,15]

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### ***1. Research Design: Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis (SCDA)***

The research employs a Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis (SCDA) model [5,14]. This methodology is designed for policy-oriented strategic planning, involving four primary stages: (1) Bilateral tourism flow quantification using official statistics (to establish market gravity); (2) Primary and niche product inventory mapping (to define contrasting strengths); (3) Target market motivation profiling (to confirm product-market fit); and (4) Strategic Alignment via the Complementary Advantage Matrix (CAM) [15,16].

This approach is justified because the objective is strategic policy recommendation [14]. Synthesizing existing, high-quality secondary data—which already validates market motivations, establishes traffic volumes, and describes product logistics—provides the robust analytical foundation necessary for expert-level analysis and the generation of new strategic hypotheses [6,7].

### ***2. Data Sources and Scope***

Data synthesis took place in three major categories of sources: market statistics-bilateral flow quantification, tourism receipts, and the impact of ID card policy 2024; destination product information pertaining to Carpathian activities and Lycian Way logistics; and peer-reviewed academic publications validating market motivations, the definition of ecotourism, and theoretical models like NABET, Coopetition, and MTEs [1].

A limitation of the study is its reliance on generalized market profiles derived from existing academic studies, such as the investigation into a survey of 137 experienced Romanian ecotourism visitors and studies of Turkish cultural tourism students [21]. This prevents the analysis from going into truly granular primary data with regard to the direct motivation of Turkish travelers to the Carpathian niche product [10]. In turn, predictive modeling has to be done based on verified interests in analogous market segments—for instance, high Turkish motivation for cultural and historical activities is used to predict interest in Romania's castles as a cultural anchor [29].

### ***3. Market Segmentation and Alignment Criteria***

The study identifies specific market segments in each country whose current needs are not fully met by their domestic market's dominant offering [14].

### ***4. Romanian Profile (Targeting Turkey)***

The core segment comprises nature travelers, closely followed by culture travelers [6]. International visitors motivated by cultural purposes tend to be an older demographic (over 50), highly educated, high-income earners, and often retired [17,22]. Their motivations center on knowledge-seeking, self-development, and a desire to experience other cultures and heritage offerings [33]. They desire physical activity but require a more structured, accessible experience than the deepest Romanian wilderness provides [14].

### ***5. Turkish Profile (Targeting Romania)***

This target segment is teased out from the substantial volume of Turkish tourists who currently prefer urban/coastal holidays but who have a strong underlying interest in cultural heritage and history [22]. Often considered as mass tourists, this age group includes younger people (under 50) and students who demonstrate high motivation for cultural tourism, focused on heritage assets like castles and museums [37]. The substantial volume of business and transit travelers indicates an important, affluent demographic in search of recreational contrast to their usual travel patterns. They want a raw, high-altitude, wild environment, contrasting with the arid or coastal landscapes which dominate central and southern Turkey [10,23].

Under the strategic alignment criteria, the promoted products should clearly fill a gap in the portfolio of the partner country [14]. For Romania to fill the need for Raw Wilderness and Altitude Contrast, and for Turkey, this should be for Structured Heritage Trekking and Coastal Culture [8]. Also, the target segments based on already processed data are described in the Figure 1 and Table 1.

**Table 1.**

**Target Market Segment Profiles**

Market Segment	Socio-Demographics (Profile)	Primary Motivation/Push Factor	Targeted Product (Pull Factor)
Romanian Culture/Trekker	Over 50, High Income, Highly Educated, Retired, International Visitor	Knowledge-seeking, self-development, experience new cultures	Turkey: Structured, culturally rich, comfortable trekking (Lycian Way, Cappadocia)
Turkish Adventure/Contrast	Under 50, Low/Middle Income (general), Student/Leisure, High cultural interest	Seeking contrast to urban/beach offerings, desire for physical activity & wilderness immersion	Romania: Raw Carpathian adventure (hiking, wildlife), Culture-embedded-in-Nature (Castles/Mountains)

Source: Author's Research



**Figure 1. Profiling the 'Cultured Adventurer'**

Source: Author's Research

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

**1. Product Profile A: Romania—Wildlife and Castle Pass Carpathian Adventure Ecosystem**

The basic comparative advantage of Romania is in its comprehensive and diverse adventure tourism products in the Carpathians that meet experienced tourists' demand for challenging physical activity with deep immersion in nature [10]. In detail, the product includes high-altitude hiking in the Făgăraș Mountains, challenging trails in Retezat National Park, and organized wildlife activities such as bear watching. Moreover, a monumental 1,400-kilometer hiking route called Via Transilvanica is another opportunity for long-distance enthusiasts. Ecotourism products, such as farm life volunteer tourism, support a yield segment at a high level [7].

**2. The Role of Cultural Centres (Bran and Peleş)**

Famous cultural symbols, such as Bran Castle (the legend of Dracula) and Peleş Castle, are marketed in direct relation with the Carpathian mountain environment. These castles are the first agents of general tourism based on cultural attractions. For markets like Turkey, where cultural tourism motivation is high, these castles act as an important gateway due to recognisable brand assets. The crucial strategic opportunity here is to combine these cultural visits with entry-level adventure experiences. For example, tours combine Bran Castle exploration with a hike in Piatra Craiului National Park or a visit to

the Libearty Bear Sanctuary. This integration of products maximizes the average length of stay and overall tourist revenues by turning what could be short-term cultural day trips into several-day-long immersion experiences in nature [7,27,14].

**3. Product Profile B: Turkey—Structured Cultural Ecotourism: The Lycian Way and Coastal Heritage**

The cultural ecotourism of Turkey is extremely structured, particularly for niche tourism, into the Lycian Way [22]. This 500-540-kilometre-long-distance walking route along the Turquoise Coast is considered one of the most beautiful routes in the world [30]. The route neatly integrates coastal walking paths, exploration of ancient Lycian and Roman ruins such as Patara and Olympos, with traditional village hospitality. Its strategic advantage over the Romanian Carpathians relates to ease of access and comfort [15]. While challenging, the hiking difficulty is generally graded as moderate. A critical feature of the Lycian Way is its highly organized infrastructure; established accommodation options, luggage transfers, and the option to use local guides are available within a day's walking distance.

The actual structure of the Lycian Way makes it an ideal destination for such a high-income, educated, and older Romanian cultural traveller, looking to combine physical activity with comfort, luxury, and a rich historical context [31].

**4. Cappadocia's Geo-Cultural Immersion**

Next to the coast walking routes, the Central Anatolia region of Cappadocia offers a unique geo-cultural experience. Characterized by fantastic rock formations, fairy chimneys, underground cities, and churches cut out of rock, Cappadocia forms a strong natural contrast with the temperate European forests of Romania. This destination fits the motivation profile of Romanian nature lovers who are motivated by non-European, unique geological wonders and high cultural content and history, unique architecture [30].

**5. Strategic Alignment: The Complementary Advantage Matrix (CAM)**

The product inventory confirms that Romania and Turkey possess complementary strengths [12]. This situation enables a strategic cross-promotion model based on contrasting value propositions [29]. This matrix (CAM) forms a basis for joint marketing efforts by converting individual product profiles into mutual market values [22]. By examining the table and figure below, the differences in strategies can be better understood (Table 2, Figure 2).

**Table 2.**

**Complementary Product Positioning: Romania vs. Turkey**

<b>Strategic Element</b>	<b>Romania's NABET Offer</b>	<b>Turkey's Ecotourism/Trek Offer</b>
Primary Theme	Wilderness Immersion & High-Mountain Adventure	Structured Cultural Trekking & Coastal Heritage
Dominant Landscape	Dense, temperate forests, high alpine peaks, wildlife reserves (Fagaras, Retezat)	Arid rock formations (Cappadocia) & Mediterranean Coastline (Lycian Way)
Cultural Link	Medieval/Gothic Castles (Dracula myth), Saxon Villages	Lycian/Roman Ruins, Ottoman Heritage, Traditional Village Life
Targeted Romanian Segment	(General tourism seeking contrast to coastal)	High-income, older Culture/Nature Travelers seeking structured heritage.
Targeted Turkish Segment	Urban/Coastal Tourists seeking wilderness, altitude contrast, and unique wildlife.	(General tourism seeking contrast to mountain)

*Source: Author's Research*



**Figure 2. Tourism Drivers Between Romania and Turkey**

Source: Author's Research

This matrix formalizes the rationale: promoting Romania's wild nature to Turkish tourists is effective precisely because it directly contrasts Turkey's established, structured beach image [25,26]. Conversely, Turkey's structured and accessible heritage trekking attracts Romanians who desire cultural immersion alongside moderate physical challenge, distinct from the familiar ruggedness of the Carpathians [17,30].

#### **6. Analysis of ID Card Policy as a Market Multiplier**

A significant strategic development is the policy change implemented on May 20, 2024, which allows Romanian citizens to travel to Turkey using only their national ID cards [18,23].

This policy dramatically lowers the friction cost and psychological barriers associated with international travel, specifically eliminating the requirement for passports or visas [21,37]. Given that nearly 1 million Romanian tourists already travel to Turkey annually, this ease of entry serves as a critical market multiplier [32]. This facilitation increases the propensity of Romanian travelers to choose extended, niche trips—such as a week on the Lycian Way—over standard, short-term resort packages [25,11]. The reduced travel friction makes booking a high-value, niche cultural ecotourism package a significantly more appealing alternative [26]. The relationship is clear: strong political relations support the ID card policy, which lowers travel friction, thereby increasing the probability of uptake for the promoted Turkish trekking adventures among the affluent Romanian culture-trekker segment [29,34].

#### **7. Discussion: Strategic Implementation and Competition Model**

##### **The Bilateral Competition Framework: Strategy and Tactics**

The overarching implementation strategy requires the formal establishment of a macro-level cooperation agreement between the relevant national DMOs and key regional bodies in Romania and Turkey [2,16]. The central strategic goal must be the mutual increase in the average tourist stay duration and the per-visitor expenditure within the niche NABET sectors of both countries. This inference has been organized and clearly presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

**Coopetition Model: Strategic Collaboration and Exchange**

Cooperation Dimension	Objective	Romania DMO Action	Turkey DMO Action
Marketing	Increase Digital Reach & Brand Awareness	Promote Turkish Lycian/Cappadocia routes via Carpathian hiking networks (e.g., Via Transilvanica DMO)	Promote Carpathian wilderness tours to Romanian tourists, leveraging ID card policy ease
Product Integration	Convert mass traffic into niche MTEs	Bundle Bran/Peleş tours with multi-day high-altitude nature guides/cabins	Promote historical treks combined with traditional hospitality and cultural immersion stops
Policy Leverage	Maximize benefits of bilateral agreements	Focus messaging on the unique contrast and ease of travel to Turkey.	Partner with Turkish Airlines/companies in Romania to target business travelers for leisure conversion

*Source: Author's Research*

Implementation strategies should focus on the use of shared resources and co-branded digital storytelling [4,13]. Video marketing is vital for promoting both coastal and mountain tourism and should be used to create co-branded campaigns under themes such as ‘From the Blue Coast of Marmara to the Emerald Peaks’[9,24]. From an operational perspective, Romanian tour operators specialising in the Carpathian Mountains should actively cross-market Lycian Way packages[12,26]. Similarly, Turkish trekking agencies should promote multi-day Romanian trekking routes [6,36]. Furthermore, utilising the high volume of Turkish business travel to Romania through corporate travel programmes provides a direct channel to reach the high-value segment for promoting organised adventure weekends in the Carpathians [38]. This is a critical opportunity for converting this high-yield visitor group [22,35].

**8. Marketing Romania to the Turkish Market (Contrast Selling)**

Contrast sales is the ideal technique that should be used in strategic promotion for the Turkish market [23,34]. Romania needs to be portrayed as an 'unspoiled, wild European destination' as a deliberate alternative to standard seaside or city breaks. The messages need to concentrate on differential geographical features and so suggest: ‘Swap the Crowds for the Carpathians’ or the uniqueness given by high-altitude contrast [26,30]. The main product at the core of the offerings needs to be package tours, which creatively link cultural attractions to the experiences of immersion in wild nature [5,7]. Visiting Bran and Peleş Castles in this case would serve as a cultural entrance ticket for Turkish tourists with a keen interest in cultural heritage [27]. DMOs need to make sure these tours are always connected with multi-day activities, like trekking in Piatra Craiului National Park or bear watching in natural habitats [3,8]. The idea will turn into nature tourism in a higher-value-added proposition, which will appeal to Turkish tourists interested in authentic and uncrowded European destinations matching the world trend of appreciation for the environment [19].

**9. Marketing Turkey to the Romanian Market (Accessible Adventure)**

For a Romanian market already saturated with challenging domestic nature experiences, Turkey should be positioned as a ‘Highly Structured Cultural Walking Destination’ in this market [12,25]. The strategy of 'accessible adventure combined with historical depth' is key [17,26]. Emphasis will be placed on the Lycian Way and Cappadocia as multi-day products with an extremely structured, comfortable, guaranteed historical context [29,30]. Its promotional message would emphasize the unique comforts of the Turkish trails: guided tours, reliable luggage transfers, and accommodations in

scenic, quaint villages. This positioning speaks directly to the high-income, educated Romanian 'cultural traveller' looking for learning and heritage experiences with less logistical hassle than normally associated with demanding nature walks. With the given emphasis on the Lycian Way being a moderately difficult track and its seamless integration of hiking with coastal relaxation and ancient ruins, Turkey could play in the leisure tourism area with differentiation and quality, supplementary rather than competitive to the nature product of Romania [33,34,36].

#### **10. Sustainable Tourism Implications and Future Development**

Generally, strategic tourism diversification finds support in all sustainability principles [3,15]. Previous studies have identified difficulties in establishing a clear model of sustainable tourism for the Black Sea coastal region and noted that high numbers of visitors to Romania and Turkey could create negative environmental pressures [5,8]. This may be a critical mitigation strategy in proposing a focus on high-yield, low-impact ecotourism and organized cultural walks [7,10]. NABET supports sustainability through the natural limitation of visitor density and encouraging environmental responsibility and learning experiences among tourists. The preparation and development of routes like the Lycian Way and Via Transilvanica decrease the uncontrolled impact by directing tourism to regulated paths [25,26]. All joint promotional campaigns should be completely tuned to Responsible Tourism principles with a guarantee of long-term sustainability [19]. This can point out the benefits for local communities and conservation—for instance, small guesthouses along the Lycian Way and eco-luxury cabins in Romanian mountain communities [2,28].

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this study's strategic analysis is to enlarge the massive market potential for intense tourism course between Romania and Turkey beyond its high-volume existing situation (focused exclusively on a mass business segment). The analysis reveals that a substantial potential opportunity for an untapped market diversification exists in the high value niche target markets of NABET (Nature, Adventure and Cultural) groups, which both countries can materialize.

According to research using Strategic Comparative Destination Analysis (SCDA), the two locations are essentially complementary. Romania's unique competitive advantage is its "deep wilderness adventure," which includes the wild, high-altitude terrain provided by the Carpathian Mountains and famous medieval castles like Bran and Peleş. However, by highlighting the geo-cultural wonders of Cappadocia and the historical significance and easily accessible logistics of the Lycian Way, the "highly structured Cultural Ecotourism" sector gives Turkey a competitive edge.

The "Coopetition Model" is the most effective strategic framework because of this unique and non-competitive product differentiation. According to this theory, destination management organizations (DMOs) in both countries should work together to integrate their products and promote them jointly.

DMOs can then work together to promote each other's complementary skills. Turkey can target the market for "affluent Romanian senior" cultural walkers, who are generally well educated, over 50, and looking for "structured, accessible, and comfortable" historical and cultural pathways. Romania could, in exchange, target adventure/contrast-seeking Turkish tourists, mostly under 50, who prefer the city and coastline options in their own market to the "raw, high-altitude and wild" environment.

One of the geopolitical facilitators, like this 2024 identity card travel policy, which is tipping this strategic exchange into a great advantage. By reducing friction with psychological barriers, and in terms of travel, this approach is a “market multiplier” for specialized and multi-day packages. Practicing this philosophy helps mitigate the ill - effects of mass tourism and promote high value, low impact travel assuring long term sustainable development. And it widens the markets for both, while increasing tourism-related revenues.

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