



13-14 November 2025

VISITOR SATISFACTION AND DESTINATION IMAGE: EVIDENCE FROM THE RETEZAT NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract: *This study examines how visitors' cognitive and affective images of Retezat National Park relate to overall satisfaction. Using a structured visitor survey, we assess satisfaction with scenery, trail conditions, environmental quality, and overall service touchpoints. Results highlight the primacy of natural attributes in shaping satisfaction, with supporting infrastructure and information quality reinforcing positive evaluations. The paper briefly discusses practical implications for protected area management, including experience design and communication priorities.*

• Introduction

Destination image—visitors' cognitive assessments of attributes and affective responses to place—strongly conditions satisfaction and future behavior in protected areas. This study examines how visitors' cognitive (trail conditions, cleanliness, access, information, staff) and affective (scenery) images of Retezat National Park relate to overall satisfaction and recommendation. The contribution is an evidence-based profile of salient attributes in a flagship Romanian park, with brief implications for experience design and communication.

• Material and method

We used a structured questionnaire administered in October 2025. The instrument recorded prior visitation, awareness source, intention to revisit, and agreement (5-point Likert: from Total disagreement to Total agreement) with statements on cleanliness, road access, trail safety, contribution of tourism to communities, staff courtesy/information, clarity of information panels, scenery, availability of rest/viewpoints, and weather communication. Analyses are descriptive, using visitor responses (rows with valid answers) to summarize distributions and to compare cognitive versus affective items in relation to overall satisfaction/recommendation.

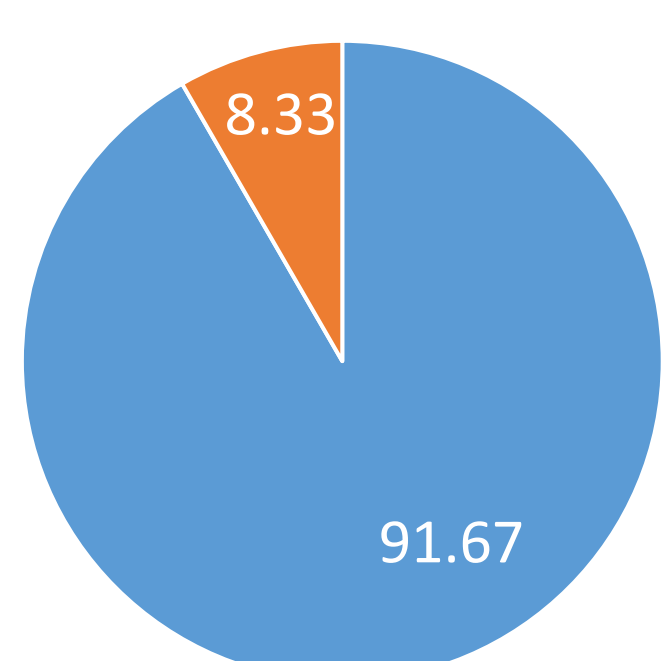


Figure 1:
Awareness
sources

■ Friends ■ Social networks

• Results and discussions

Awareness was dominated by word-of-mouth, with social media as a secondary channel. Intention to revisit and willingness to recommend were overwhelmingly positive. Affective image was especially strong: scenery was rated "spectacular" by almost all respondents and closely aligned with positive overall evaluations. Cognitive attributes were also favorable but displayed more dispersion. Cleanliness and road access skewed strongly positive; trail safety and availability of rest/viewpoints showed the widest spread, including some neutral and a small cluster of strongly negative evaluations. Information quality (clarity of panels, staff helpfulness) was generally positive, though variability suggests uneven delivery. A few respondents entered uniformly negative ratings across items; these outliers did not alter the dominant pattern of high satisfaction anchored in natural attributes.

• Conclusions

Visitor satisfaction in Retezat National Park is primarily driven by the affective image of outstanding scenery, with supporting infrastructure and information reinforcing positive judgments. Management priorities are to maintain scenic viewpoints and cleanliness; reduce variability in trail safety and rest/viewpoint provision; and ensure consistent information services (panels, staff, weather communication). For ongoing monitoring, a compact tracker can follow: scenery, trail conditions/safety, cleanliness, access, information quality (panels + staff), rest/viewpoints, and revisit/recommendation intentions.