

# Anatolian Landscape and Faith Tourism: Ancient Times to Present



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# The Role of Geographical Indications in Faith Tourism: The Case of the Route of the Seven Churches

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## Abstract

Geographical indications (GIs) are considered as a tool to preserve traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, to support rural development, and to contribute to tourism. However, there are certain limits to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits of GIs, such as low awareness, understanding and recognition of GIs in the tourism sector. This study, therefore, focuses on the role of geographically indicated food products in faith tourism routes such as the Seven Churches of Asia, which are all located in Anatolia; Ephesus, Smyrna, Laodicea ad Lycum, Sardis, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Thyatira. Determining the food products with geographical indications on the Seven Churches route (İzmir-Manisa-Denizli) and revealing the awareness of tour guides on these intangible assets may fill the research gaps about a possible combination of two alternative tourism experiences including faith and food tourism in terms of geographically indicated food products. A qualitative approach based on a content analysis of in-depth interviews with tour guides is conducted for the data collection. Results indicate that awareness of tour guides about geographical indications on faith routes is limited, and a targeted GI training would provide a necessary skill for improving tour guides' personal developments and qualifications.

**Keywords:** Geographical Indications, Faith Tourism, Seven Churches, Tour Guides, Awareness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s, a new form of tourism, so-called alternative tourism, emerged in response to mass tourism where sun, sea and coasts are considered resources. This new form covers different types of tourism, diversifying tourism activities in a sustainable manner, alleviating environmental destruction by preserving the original rural and cultural appeal of the destination, minimising social alienation by ensuring high participation of locals and prolonging the tourism season. (Egresi, 2016:274; Triarchi & Karamanis 2017). They appear to have different names and forms. Among them, faith and food tourism are both connected to religious and cultural heritage and potentially generate tremendous revenues. According to World Religious Travel Association statistics, over 300 million faith tourists have travelled to religious sites, contributing an estimated US\$18 billion of revenue to the industry (Gill, Packer, & Ballantyne, 2018; Uysal, 2019; Wright, 2007). On the other hand, the global food tourism market has valued at \$1,116.7 billion in 2019 and is forecasted to be \$1,796.5 billion by 2027 (Research and Markets, 2020).

Although there is an increasing number of studies on the relationship between geographical indications and tourism (Hawks & Kırgız, 2018; Ciani et al., 2019; Seal & Piramanayagam, 2018; Jaelani, 2020; Pamukçu et al., 2021), none has focused on an integrative approach to faith and food tourism, including geographical indication products. Furthermore, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to date, previous research has yet to address the question: How do tour guides enhance the faith tourism routes by

introducing geographically indicated products? In order to fill this gap in the literature, this study investigates the role of geographically indicated products in faith tourism, specifically in the Seven Churches Route.

Generally speaking, the aims of the study are: (1) to explore how the role of geographically indicated products in faith tourism routes such as the Seven Churches Route; (2) to understand the awareness of tour guides on these intangible assets; (3) to reveal an integrated form of two alternative tourism genres including faith and food tourism in terms of geographically indicated products.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1. Faith and Food Tourism***

Faith tourism is also known as spiritual, pilgrimage or religious tourism. The overlapping use of these terms appears to be utilised interchangeably in some research (Griffin, 2007). Faith travel is broadly defined as:

a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit (Margry, 2008, p. 17).

Also, it is the earliest type of tourism (Cohen, 2003; Jiang et al., 2018; Singh, 2005; Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016) and has a robust source of motivation for travel (Kunt & Uygur, 2019). More and more people are making tours to churches, temples, mosques, and other places of worship for a variety of reasons, including religious, educational, cultural (Hughes, Bond, & Ballantyne, 2013; Shackley, 2001), and sustainable ones (Kumar & Singh, 2014).

Faith travellers generate clear economic benefits owing to the number of tourists participating in faith and the diverse services offered by disciples along pilgrimage paths (Chang et al., 2020). Specifically, in some countries, faith tourism engenders a significant part of the tourism industry. According to Bollaram (2017), religious tourists constituted 44.5% of India's overall tourism revenue in the year 2009. That is, faith tourism represents a significant component of the entire tourism market. (Albayrak et al., 2018). Nonetheless, despite the popularity of faith tourism, the number of researches examining the experiences of faith tourists has received scant research attention (Albayrak et al., 2018; Kunt & Uygur, 2019).

Prior studies have indicated a link between faith travellers and route-based tourism, as the design of a faith itinerary is closely related to spiritual components (Chang et al., 2020). The Seven Churches route serves as a prime example of how the integration of a distinct cultural theme and a specific event may be utilised to expand a religious route, all while providing to a specialised segment of the tourism industry (Kunt & Uygur, 2019). The duration of the Seven Churches route ranges from a minimum of three days to a maximum of 14 days. When the itinerary of the Seven Churches route is augmented with additional historical, cultural, and natural attractions, the tour schedule gains flexibility. Inclusion of destinations such as Çanakkale, Tarsus, Istanbul, Konya, Cappadocia and Antalya in the itineraries of the Seven Churches tour routes represents an incorporation of locations that are not directly associated with the Seven Churches (Kunt & Uygur, 2019).

Geographical indications are considered to be Intellectual property (IP). The World Intellectual Property Organisation defines geographical indications as follows: "*A geographical indication is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.*" Designations that cover the name of a product linked to a defined geographical area are divided into two groups: "Protected designation of origin (PDO)" and "Protected geographical indication (PGI)".

Although they both protect the name of a product from a specific region, there are differences between these two. The distinction arises due to how strong the link between the quality/characteristics of the product and its original geographical place where it is produced (Belletti, Marescotti & Brazzini, 2017; EUIPN, 2022; WIPO, 2021).

Food is highly experiential when it is a part of the tourism activities, especially if it has a specific link to the geography where it is an emblem/marker of local identities (Bessièrè, 1998), as in the case of geographically indicated foods. Food is a mixture of sensuous and sensual enjoyment and also provides a tasty way to get a sense of the destination for the tourists to experience new cultures and countries (Hall & Mitchell, 2004; Quan & Wang 2004). In line with this, it can be suggested that food tourism embraces activities beyond the plate and acts as a representer of the destination's authentic regional identity and cultural heritage. Nowadays, an increasing number of tourists have been seeking more authentic and unforgettable holiday dining experiences as an option to making everything the same or McDonaldizing life (Bessièrè, 1998; Quan & Wang 2004; Ellis et al., 2018). Local food and cuisine convey authenticity to the tourists' experience, motivating them to visit the destination (Sims, 2009; Richards, 2021). The reflection of this can be traced in the share of food and beverage expenses of the tourists, demonstrating a growing trend and being reported to comprise approximately 30% of the tourist total expenditure (Klosse, 2019:32; UNWTO, 2012:16). This is consistent with the findings of Everett & Aitchison (2008), who reported that many visitors would be prepared to pay a premium for a product that can easily be associated with the destination. Additionally, research by Medeiros et al. (2017) indicates the positive attitudes of tourists towards buying GI products as souvenirs.

## ***2.2. Integrating Food tourism into Faith Tourism via Routes***

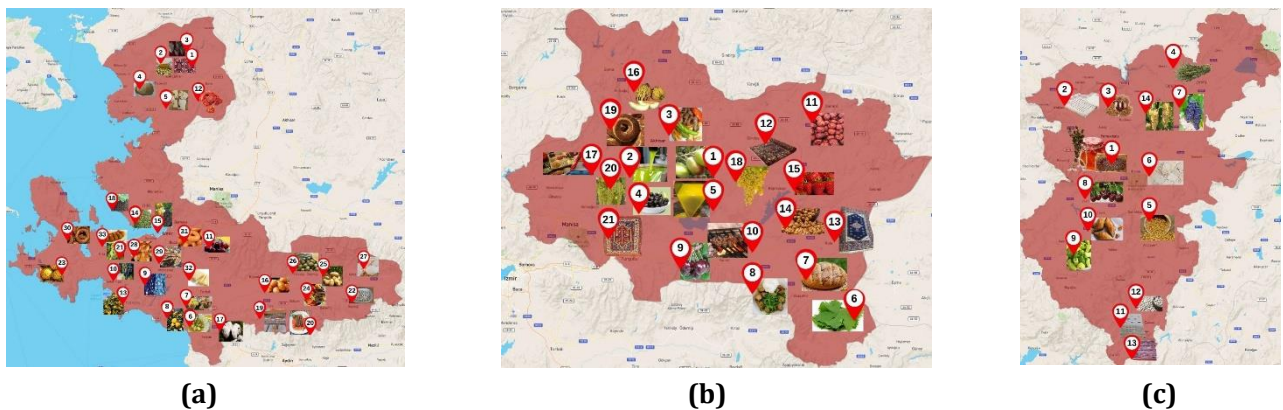
Both faith and food tourisms are classified as different forms of alternative tourism (Albayrak, 2013:49). They are one of the best matches when it comes to integrating different alternative tourism types. This can broadly be attributed to various reasons. For instance, consuming local foods is associated with a host of values related to sustainability, creating "feel-good" and "feel-responsible" notions in tourists' minds (Sims, 2009). Such feelings may also foster faith tourists' engagement and connection with the destination since faith tourists intrinsically care about the destination they visit, respecting its cultural and natural assets. Sopher (2007) further explains this phenomenon through moral satisfaction and states that by consuming local foods, tourists are morally satisfied as it is a more ethical form of consumption. Furthermore, Kim & Kim (2019) indicated that religious tourists' happiness and self-satisfaction are shaped by their experiences during the pilgrimage. In this vein, faith tourists' experiences generated through the consumption of local foods may act as antecedents of their overall satisfaction or self-fulfilment. Another reason for integrating food tourism into the faith tourism routes such as "seven churches" is faith tourists' quest for knowledge, an essential intellectual motivation, stimulating their interest in local food and traditions. Henderson (2009) stresses the prominent role of the food experience at a destination on tourists' decision-making and satisfaction. With this in mind, faith tourists' motivations range from partly or exclusively religious to secular reasons (Shackley, 2002; Idris, 2019). Thus, we can suggest that creating a tourist experience around the local food also influences faith tourists' decision-making and satisfaction.

Although there is a growing interest in experiencing locally produced food, tourists still tend to seek assurances related to the safety and authenticity of the food they eat. In this regard, Bessièrè (1998) and Van de Kop & Sautier (2006) posit that GI tags on food labels alleviate the geographical and cultural gap between tourists and the source of food. Such labelling with GI logos ensures a certain guarantee and helps build the trust and credibility in tourists by communicating information about the products' origin, identity and nature. In addition, as remarked by Sims (2009), the term "local" causes confusion among consumers, producers and policymakers due to its various interpretations. Moreover, a consensus has yet to be reached about the precise definition of local food in relation to the geographical proximity between its production and consumption (Chicoine et al., 2022). At this point, GI tags offer the solution since local products granted GI recognition are officially defined, categorised and certified

according to their proximity to a region, leading to a more consistent understanding of what constitutes the term local. As a result, not only do GI tags mitigate any confusion over the perceived interpretation conflicts of the term local, but they also enable consumers to identify and recognise such products on the market due to the GI logos on the labels.

In light of these, we take the view that integrating food tourism into faith tourism, will foster faith tourists' immersion in the sacred geography. In this regard, the authenticity of the local food with GIs acts as a cherry on the cake, driving a desire in tourists to interact with the geography as a whole. That is, the trip becomes more meaningful to faith tourists as they more deeply understand and appreciate the religious and cultural assets of the geography they visit. Such new experiences will make the trip remarkably rewarding for faith tourists. Ultimately, this may generate loyalty and help attract and retain more faith tourists to the area. In addition, word-of-mouth activities of the visitors will encourage and attract first-time faith visitors to the area, especially if any stories behind GI products are also included in the routes.

### Geographically indicated products on the Seven Churches Tour Route



**Figure 1.** Registered Geographically indicated products in İzmir (a), Manisa (b) and Denizli (c)

*Source: The Authors*

## 3. METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we seek to explore the role of registered geographically indicated products in Seven Churches of Asia route. Considering that this stream of study is an exploratory research into the less understood, a qualitative approach was adopted so as to ensure an in-depth understanding of the registered GI products and their roles on faith tourism routes such as the Seven Churches of Asia from the perspectives of tour guide (Hennink et al., 2011; Liu & Tsaur, 2014).

### 3.1. Research philosophy and Data collection

Accordingly, it was conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from May to August 2022. Two travel agencies were approached through personal networks and recommendations from some respondents to suggest fifteen tour guides for in-depth interviews. All the 15 tour guides were licensed and had been active in conducting Seven Churches tours. We conducted 15 in-depth interviews with tour guides recommended by travel agencies and tour guides. Profiles of tour guides are presented in Table 1. As to the number of interviewees, according to Patton (2002, p. 244), there are no rules for a sample size in a qualitative inquiry. The data saturation had been reached. The number of interviewees in this study is similar to those in past qualitative research on tour guides, which is between 10 and 15 persons (Mak et al., 2011; Wong & Lee, 2012; Wong & Wang, 2009). The researchers used purposive

sampling to select participants whose perspectives were deemed significant to the research enquiries (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.2. Participant Characteristics

Fifteen tour guides with an average experience of 15 years participated. Respondents included four females and eleven males. Tour guide ages ranged between 33 and 82, with an average age of 43.

**Table 1.** Profiles of tour guides

Respondents Code	Interview & interview duration	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Years of Experience	Language(s)	Speciality
TG1	face-to-face 60 min	M	82	Post-Graduate	36	English & Japanese	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG2	phone 45 min	M	38	Bachelor's Degree	10	English, Indonesian, Portuguese, & Spanish	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG3	phone 40 min	M	34	Bachelor's Degree	11	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG4	face-to-face 40 min	F	37	Bachelor's Degree	14	English	Cultural, Religious, Rural & Gastronomic Tours
TG5	face-to-face 30 min	F	38	Bachelor's Degree	14	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG6	face-to-face 45 min	M	38	Bachelor's Degree	12	English & Italian	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG7	phone 40 min	F	38	Bachelor's Degree	10	English	Cultural, Religious, & Gastronomic Tours
TG8	face-to-face 55 min	F	45	Associate Degree	16	Italian	Cultural, Religious & Gastronomic Tours
TG9	phone 60 min	M	35	Bachelor's Degree	8	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG10	phone 60 min	M	37	Bachelor's Degree	11	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG11	phone 60 min	M	35	Post-Graduate	12	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG12	phone 35 min	M	33	Bachelor's Degree	7	English & Spanish	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG13	phone 60 min	M	36	Bachelor's Degree	8	English	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG14	phone 40 min	M	52	Bachelor's Degree	31	German	Cultural & Religious Tours
TG15	phone 60 min	M	62	Bachelor's Degree	33	English, German, & Dutch	Cultural & Religious Tours

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What do you understand from the statement "registered geographically indicated products"?
2. Do you know the concepts of "Protected Designation of Origin" and "Protected Geographical Indications"?
3. Have you ever seen the registered GIs' logos on the packaging of the products?

4. Did you convey information to the tourists about the registered GI products that you know that are linked to regions on the Seven Churches tour route? If you have given information, could you please specify for which products?
5. What are your views on adding registered GI products to the seven churches tour routes?
6. What are your views on the contribution of registered GI products to seven churches tour routes?
7. Do registered GI products contribute to the authentic experience on seven churches tours? As a tourist guide, what kind of authentic activities do you offer to your groups on your seven churches tours, which involve GI products?
8. Can registered GI products be used as touristic products on the Seven Churches tour?
9. What are the barriers that prevented registered GIs from being included on tours?

The interviews were carried out in a comfortable setting, utilising both face-to-face and phone communication methods. The average duration of in-depth interviews was found to be 49 minutes, during which the conversations were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Participants were asked for a phone number so that a validity check could be done to make sure that the transcript accurately reflected their experiences. Verbatim transcripts were proven accurate by the responses. All interviews were carried out in the native Turkish language of the respondents. The duration of each interview averaged 49 minutes, and all interviews were recorded in audio format and subsequently transcribed verbatim in the Turkish language. A final quantity of 120 pages of data transcribed was acquired.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

#### **3.3.1. Qualitative research procedure: In-depth interviews and thematic content analysis**

A qualitative approach of in-depth interviews is regarded as an appropriate method for collecting respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and belief perspectives (Finn, Elliot-White, & Walton, 2000).

Content analysis is a method of data analysis that involves the quantitative classification of information in order to draw accurate conclusions from textual data (Krippendorff, 1980; Neuendorf, 2002). A thematic content analysis is a methodological approach that enables the identification, analysis, and description of themes present within a given dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research aims to identify the role of geographically indicated products in Seven Churches of Asia route; thematic content analysis is utilised to attain specific patterns in the data. To acquire a classification scheme of the role of geographically indicated products in Seven Churches of Asia route, two judges fulfilled pilot coding. Both first judge, a licenced tour guide, and second judge have research experience with the tourism and gastronomy industry.

They independently read, reread, sorted, and re-sorted a set of randomly selected data into 110 units. Pilot coding had an inter-judge reliability of 85%. To be considered reliable, the percent agreement to the total number of coding choices must be higher than 80%. (Kassarjian, 1977).

Trustworthiness; in qualitative studies, researchers utilise terms like "credibility" and "dependability" to define varying degrees of trustworthiness. (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Methods like member checking and objective peer review can be used to increase a qualitative analysis's credibility and dependability (Mhyre, 2010).

In addition, the researchers invited two specialized tour guides to read every text and try to discover any neglected units of analysis as well as offer opinions on the data analysis.

## **4. FINDINGS**

The findings derived from the thematic content analysis reveal four categories of the role of registered geographically indicated products in Seven Churches route. Table 2 summarizes the categorical structure of Seven Churches Route.

**Table 2.** Summary of coding results

Categories	Subcategories
1. Awareness of the “Registered GI Products”	1.1. Knowledge of the: 1.1.1. Statement “registered GI products” 1.1.2. Different types “registered GI products” 1.1.3. GI logos
2. Attitude towards “Registered GI Products”	2.1. Indication of “registered GI products” 2.2. Assumption of regional products as “registered GI products”
3. Advantages of including “Registered GI Products”	3.1. Contribution of the “registered GI products” to Seven churches route <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authentic experience</li> <li>• Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economical</li> <li>• Cultural</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4. Barriers to using “Registered GI Products”	4.1. Lack of awareness of travel agencies and tour guides 4.2. Limited tour time 4.3. Lack of sale points of “registered GI products” 4.4. Travel agencies’ conflict of interest due to financial challenges

#### **4.1. “Awareness of the “Registered GI Products”**

The awareness question about the registered GI products was evaluated based on tour guides’ knowledge of the statement “registered GI”, the different types of registered GIs and GI logos. Among the tour guides interviewed, 87% reported that they are familiar with the term geographical indications and the rest (%13) have never heard of it. These results can further be argued in another dimension as we had noticed during the interviews that the tour guides held some misconceptions about the registered GIs and the local products of a territory. Although the tour guides know some local products identified with a specific region, it is obvious that some of them are not aware of the registration process of these local products. Therefore, the term "registered geographical indications" does not make sense to them. We can clearly see this in TG 11's response when asked about the meaning of the term "registered geographical indications". TG 11 confuses the term "registered geographical indications" with the brown road signs used for tourist information.

*TG11: Perhaps, road signs? I know the brown signs, showing you the way and directing you to the places of interest, such as heritage sites.*

TG4 believes in the potential of GIs and criticised tour guides who do not include GIs on their tours and attributes it to the lack of awareness of GIs:

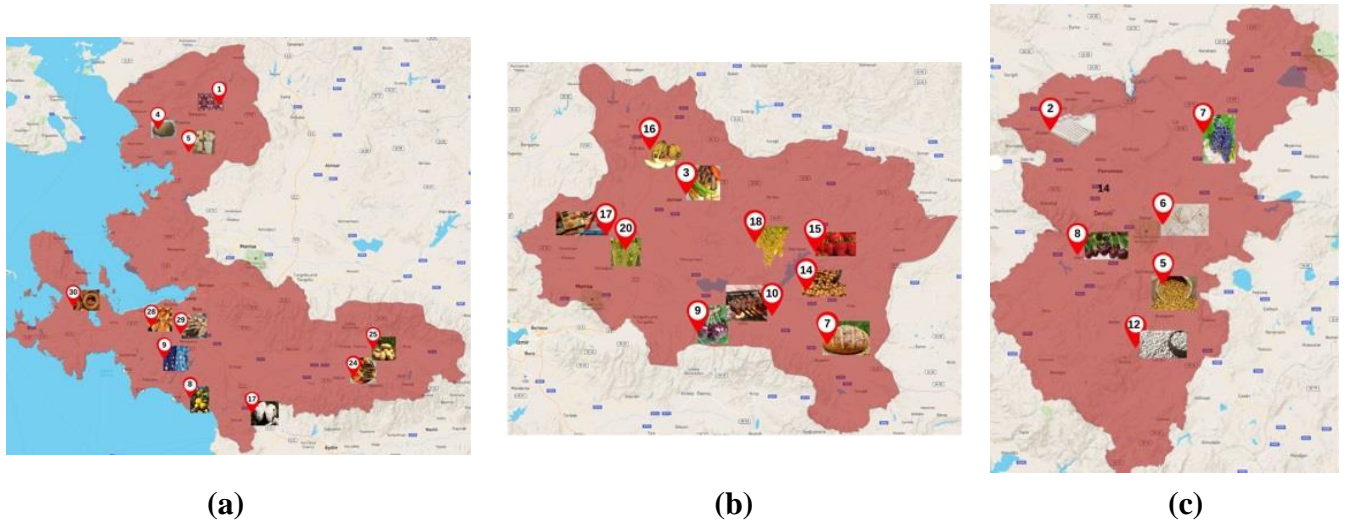
*TG4:GIs are a very useful tool to promote a region. I guess it is an alarming lack of GI awareness among tour guides that they do not integrate GIs into their tour programmes. Today’s tourists are curious. They expect to know and interact with the products linked to the territory they visit. Tourist Guide Chambers may organise such tour routes to raise awareness on this topic.*

However, some tour guides’ awareness of the registered geographical indications is by no means unambiguous, as the following statements indicate:

*TG2 and TG12: Such products are traditional and unique to the place of origin. Therefore, they are registered. Besides, non-food items such as textiles and handicrafts can also be registered as GIs.*

*TG10: Sultani grapes are the best I've ever eaten, whether in dried or fresh form. They only grow in Sardis, located in the Salihli district of Manisa. And indeed, it is not just food items; others, such as rugs, Bergama rugs, can also be registered as GIs.*

GIs known by the tour guides and linked to regions on Seven Churches Tour Route are given in Fig.2.



**Figure 2.** Registered Geographically indicated products in İzmir (a), Manisa (b) and Denizli (c) known by the tour guides

*Source: The Authors*

In its broad sense, the term "geographical indications" comprises Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). There is a significant lack of knowledge of different types of GIs among tour guides. Only one respondent, TG8, could correctly express the distinction between PDO and PGI.

*TG8: While PDO "is basically about where it originates from and belongs to, PGI is the source of supply.*

A relevant GI logo (PDO or PGI) must be used on the product to mark a registered GI. The logos certify that the product is locally produced in that territory. Respondents were asked whether they recognised/noticed GI logos before. 20 % of the respondents replied that they did see the GI logos on some food item packages, while the rest of the respondents (80%) were not familiar with GI logos at all. Furthermore, those respondents who claimed to notice GI logos highlighted that they saw the GI logos on the products linked to different territories from the seven churches route.

*TG5: I saw the GI logo on the packaging of the product "Uşak tarhana".*

*TG7: I have seen it very recently. It was on the packaging of Fiskobirlik's Giresun Hazelnut.*

#### **4.2. Attitudes towards "Registered GI Products"**

We explore if participants' knowledge of GIs relates to their attitudes while carrying out their seven churches tour; in other words, if the tour guides mention any of the GIs on the route of the seven

churches tour. There are 68 GI products linked to the various regions on the seven churches tour route. Accordingly, 67% of the tour guides use examples of relevant GIs on the seven churches route, and 33% said that they do not provide any examples of the GIs. İzmir boyozu (a kind of pastry) was one of the most used GI examples on the seven churches tour route by the interviewed tour guides. It is followed by İzmir Kumrusu (a kind of sandwich), Sultani seedless white grapes from Manisa and roasted chickpeas from Denizli.

We also noticed some inaccurate use of the local products as registered GIs among the tour guides. Such examples include:

*TG4: ...yes, I provide examples of registered GIs linked to the seven churches tour route, such as Alaçatı's common golden thistle (Scolymus hispanicus), Denizli rooster, Bergama cheese, and Olive oil from Manisa.*

*TG6: Examples of GIs I provide during my seven churches tour are mussels from İzmir, Bergama cheese, and Fig from Denizli.*

Due to the geographical boundaries specified in the official registration documents, there were some inexact use of the names of GIs by tour guides:

*TG5: Denizli beans are among the registered GIs I highlight during my tours. TG6: Denizli grapes are good examples of registered GIs.*

*TG8: I think there is a strong link between GIs and their environments. For example, Manisa's olive oil is a registered GI and this feature is related to Manisa's environmental conditions.*

### **4.3. Advantages of including "Registered GI Products"**

The majority of the tour guides (87%) in this study were in favour of including registered GI products in faith routes such as the seven churches route. On the other hand, two tour guides (TG9 and TG10) were pessimistic about the possible benefits of registered GIs and, thus, frowned upon the idea of involving GIs in the faith routes. They explained their reasons as follows:

*TG10: I disagree with integrating GIs into seven churches tour route. There is not enough time or space for GIs in the faith tourism routes since the schedules of these tours are already heavily engaged with spiritual activities such as visiting sacred sites and travelling for worship. I believe adding GI-related items on routes will cause time constraints and additional costs. Besides, restaurants are also not supportive in this sense and neglect placing GI products on their menus.*

Another guide, TG9, sharing the same opinion as TG10, states:

- Generally speaking, the group leaders of the tours demand to visit churches during a 3-4-day seven churches route. This means we only have time to show the churches to the groups.
- Despite these two opposing views, the rest of the tour guides have endorsed the idea of involving regional registered GIs on the seven churches route owing to the potential benefits of GIs. Tour guides conveyed the following consolidated information:
- TG2, TG3, TG5, TG6, TG8, TG11, TG13, TG14, and TG15: With the help of GIs, seven churches tour route will gain novelty and a more appealing structure. And in return tourists will be more satisfied and tour guides will not get bored of doing the same ordinary tours.

**Authentic experience:** From dramatic narration to visiting orchards, tour guides use different approaches to provide authenticity during their seven churches tours. They specifically suggested

taking advantage of grapes and wine as authentic elements since the regions on the seven churches tour route are rich in these products. Accordingly, visiting wineries, paired with tasting other local GI delicacies and meeting locals offer memorable and authentic experiences to tourists. Tour guides' sources of inspiration for authenticity are provided as follows:

- *TG1, TG2, TG3, TG5, and TG6: For authenticity, I talk about grapes and wine with a particular emphasis on the sanctity of wine.*
- *TG2 and TG7: We meet locals in their homes in Şirince. We eat there with the locals. This is quite authentic for tourists to see the local culture closely. Tourists explore wine cellars, figs and cherry orchards. We convey information about weaving in Bergama and see textile workshops in Denizli.*
- *TG3 and TG7: In Salihli, vineyards are everywhere you look. Tourists have the opportunity to participate in wine-making and tasting at wine workshops. Salihli has a particular meatball variety of its own. That's why I include it in my seven churches tours.*
- *TG4, TG5, TG7, TG9, and TG11: We arrange visits to local points of interest. For example, we organise tours to olive oil producers in the region to discover the transformation of olives into exceptional olive oil. Engaging tourists with locals and learning different authentic recipes and techniques from a local chef are also on the list.*
- *TG7: Teaming up with locals to join in the grape harvest and hand-picking grapes offer tourists an unforgettable authentic experience.*
- *TG8: My dramatic narration makes tourists authentically relive the sacred moments. For instance, during my narration of St John the Baptist...*

*TG9: For an authentic experience, I definitely suggest tourists taste boyoz in central İzmir. We sit by the famous clock tower and enjoy our traditional boyoz with ayran.*

*TG10: Before introducing the registered Sultani Seedles grapes from Manisa to my group, I explain why the term Sultani is used in this product's name as it draws the group's clear attention. The name Sultani represents the city of Manisa, where the Ottoman princes were educated and raised to become future Sultans. So, the grapes' taste, aroma and texture fit for a king.*

- *TG11: For an additional authentic experience, I include non-religious activities in my seven churches tour route. Without a second thought, GIs are pretty efficient in this. For example, while passing through the Kırkağaç region, I buy melons from the local sellers on the road and offer tourists to taste the delicious Kırkağaç melon on the tour bus. Sometimes tourists demand such activities from us. For example, Asian tourists are interested in tasting Mesir paste in Manisa.*
- *TG12: Tour guides' role in promoting a region's GIs is undeniable. For instance, within the seven churches tour, we take tourists to discover Bergama parchment, Bergama rug and Denizli textiles as such products are these regions' authentic and cultural assets. On the other hand, visiting vineyards, sometimes becomes complicated, especially if we are out of time. In that case, I either cancel visiting the vineyard or just stay there for a few minutes to take pictures with the locals.*
- *TG13: Tight tour timeframes and prolonged darkness in the winter season cause visiting vineyards impossible. In the summer, we tour citrus gardens and vineyards and meet locals in rural villages. The folk there offer food to tourists.*

- *TG14: I take my group to the cherry orchard in Salihli. Tourists in my group join local villagers to pick cherries and taste them. Seeing Kula houses is another authentic activity of the tour.*
- *TG15: Tourists appreciate obtaining knowledge and experience on new things. For that reason, I take them to the vineyards in Alaşehir during the summer and to cotton fields in Denizli in autumn.*

**Sustainability:** Tour guides shared their thoughts and experiences by emphasizing advantages of adding GIs to tours in terms of sustainability. For example, TG6 and TG7 focused on the benefits of promoting and preserving culture:

*TG6 and TG7: In addition to being drawn into religious activities, faith tourists could experience the culture through GIs. Therefore, GI products must be added to the seven churches tour routes. It is a must! Why? First, GIs introduce, expose and connect our culture to other cultures. For example, in Switzerland, it is chocolate or watches. Secondly, GIs are vital for the sustainability of the local cultural heritage. Therefore, country and city promotional brochures and leaflets must include our GI products. This will prevent other countries from claiming rights about our GIs.*

Preserving culture for sustainability may take various forms on seven churches tour route. Some elaborated examples given by the tour guides are as follows:

*TG8: Faith tourists' motivation for travelling is not just for spiritual and religious needs. They also demand to experience the culture of the visiting destinations. And the food is the best way to convey culture. For example, during my Aegean tours, I draw specific attention to local GI products such as Şambali (a kind of dessert made with semolina). Other tour guides should also imply the same. Otherwise, such cultural heritage assets will disappear and be forgotten.*

Although TG9 and TG10 are opposed to including GIs in seven churches tour route, these tour guides acknowledge the importance of GIs in conserving the culture and state:

- *TG9: Sustaining the cultural heritage values that have become the symbol of a specific territory is crucial.*

TG14 put his worries into words regarding the prospects of hand weaving rugs of Manisa.

*TG14: Manisa is famous for its hand-weaving rugs. However, very few people left, knowing the weaving techniques as machine-made rugs are cheaper and, therefore, more popular at the moment. Besides, the quality of hand-weaving rugs used to be higher compared to the current ones as there is a shortage of goats nowadays. That is, the goat's hair rates of the current rugs are much lower than the previous rugs. GI registration indeed protects and saves Manisa's rugs for future generations.*

- Most tour guides addressed the liturgical food of bread and wine, which can be linked to GIs, as these occupy a peculiar place in the seven churches tour. They also emphasized that tour guides should convey information about GI products closely related to Christianity, such as olives, olive oil, figs, cotton and parchment (TG2, TG3, TG4, TG5, TG6, TG9, TG10, TG11, TG13, TG12, TG14, and TG15).
- *TG4: Sacred foods of Christianity are found in the regions along the seven churches tour route. This is an excellent opportunity for us, tour guides, to include GIs in our narratives as we can explain such products by connecting them with the Bible.*

*TG10 and TG11: Faith tourists seek authentic religious experiences. Since the bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus, we offer faith tourists Alaşehir bread and Sultani grapes at St John's church located in Alaşehir district of Denizli. These grapes represent the Jesus's blood once they turned into wine.*

TG12 indicated the challenge of a 92-year-old men to prevent parchment paper from disappearing and further stated:

*TG12: He teaches the traditional techniques and skills to younger generation and sell the paper to faith tourists. That's why I take my groups to his workshops.*

TG11, TG12, TG13, and TG14 addressed the link between Jesus's letters to the church at Laodicea and the GI products.

*TG11, TG12, TG13, and TG14: I narrate Jesus's letter that reveals his warning to the church in Laodicea. In this letter, Jesus uses a couple of religious metaphors. For example, Jesus calls the church in Laodicea naked, even though the city is famous for its textile and clothing industry. But according to Jesus, the people of this city are materialistic. So, he advises them to wear white garments because white symbolizes purity. Aegean cotton is a well-known local GI, and it is white, so I associate Aegean cotton with white garments while narrating this story to tourists. In the same letter, Jesus compared Laodicea's water supply to the church of Laodicea's lukewarmness, neither cold nor hot. At this point, tour guides, in their narratives, can perhaps connect thermal water sources such as Pamukkale travertines with this verse. Such connections will combine spiritual and cultural values and attract more faith tourists.*

Tour guides mentioned the GIs potential in supporting the economic diversification of a region sustainably.

*TG8: ... France markets its regional products, such as wine and grapes, to foreign tourists during tours. We should also apply the same. For example, we can distribute a GI product from the region to the faith tourist groups. This could be a small package of dried grapes. We can support local producers/people to generate income by doing that.*

*TG13: Tourist will be pleased if GIs are included in the tours. So, GIs contribute the region's economy and its promotion.*

*TG14: GIs support the local producers and economy as tourists seek for authentic regional products like GIs.*

The following tour guides noted the impact of GIs on employment in the tourism sector and, thus, on the regional economy. They attribute this effect to the increased reputation of the region:

*TG1, TG2, TG3, TG6, TG8, TG10, TG11, TG14, TG15: GIs will definitely contribute to promoting activities by enhancing the region's reputation. This then creates more jobs, especially for the tourism sector.*

Tour guides postulate souvenirs as key components of a tourist's experience and therefore may lead to the regional economic development. That is, a geographically indicated product can be considered a souvenir since GIs enable tourists to reminisce and recall all the pleasant memories and experiences of their holiday once they return.

All tour guides who participated in the interview stated that GIs could be used as souvenirs. The results revealed that 47% of the tour guides of this research chose the Bergama rug as the most popular souvenir among the GIs linked to regions on the seven churches tour route. Buldan textile (33%) and dried GI raisins (33%) follow the Bergama rug. Bergama parchment is the third most popular souvenir selected by tour guides (20%). Local products such as wine, dried figs and magnets, which are not among the registered GIs of the regions on the seven churches tour route, have also been recommended by the tour guides as souvenirs. Tour guides also draw attention to GIs' packaging and recommend producers select a suitable, small, easy-to-carry, non-breakable package for GI souvenirs.

#### **4.4. Barriers to using “Registered GI Products”**

We asked the tour guides to shed light on the underlying barriers that prevented registered GIs from being included on tours. According to their responses, four items were determined: lack of awareness of tourist agencies and tour guides, limited tour time, lack of sale points of registered GI products and travel agencies’ conflict of interest due to financial challenges.

##### **4.4.1. Lack of awareness of travel agencies and tour guides**

Travel agencies' and tour guides' lack of awareness are explained by the statements below:

*TG2 and TG6: Travel agencies' lack of vision and awareness is one of the main reasons behind this problem. They resist renewing and updating the tour itineraries according to the needs of tourists.*

*TG13: Travel agents neglect including GIs in the tour plan due to their lack of knowledge and awareness.*

*TG15: Lack of awareness and knowledge of GIs; we do not protect our own values.*

*TG1: Lack of awareness. Tourist guides are not aware of such specific knowledge. Apart from bits of superficial information, there is almost not much known about the registered GIs. However, it is necessary to be equipped with adequate background about the registered GIs to use GIs in the region's promotion. I think a leaflet covering registered GI products can be prepared specifically for tour guides.*

TG14 also criticized tour guides for failing to connect unique cultural heritage assets such as registered GIs with the related spiritual elements due to their lack of awareness and knowledge about GIs and stated:

*TG14: Some tour guides do not care, and they have no interest in new regions outside of their own. Because they are not explorers and therefore they cannot reconcile various information with their knowledge.*

**Limited tour time:** Some tour guides complained about the tightness of the tour itineraries and were disappointed when they had to skip visiting particular sites such as wineries and vineyards due to a lack of time.

*TG3 and TG10: The seven churches tours are time-compressed tours, so unfortunately it is quite challenging to keep up with the tour programme. As tours get hectic sometimes, we hardly have enough time to taste wines at the wineries.*

**Lack of sale points of “Registered GI Products”:** TG5, TG10 and TG13 asserted the lack of sale points of registered GIs such as restaurants on the faith routes as an important barrier.

*TG13: The size of the local restaurants offering GI products is insufficient to meet the number of faith tourists. There are also problems in the supply of GI products to the local stores.*

*TG10: Sometimes, we cannot find restaurants to take our groups to. So, the infrastructure for the efficient use of GIs seems very challenging.*

Despite the above tour guides' claims that GI dishes are not served at restaurants along the seven churches tour routes, TR9 alleged that such restaurants offer GI dishes on their menus:

*TG9: ...sometimes we see such GI dishes on the luxury high-class restaurants on the seven churches tour route.*

- TG10 and TG11, on the other hand, argued that the existence of GI dishes on the menus might be related to the size of the region where the restaurant is located and further stated:
- *Since you are in a small village with your group, tourists will have to eat what is available anyway. For example, artichokes in Urla and meatballs in Akhisar do exist on the menus of restaurants in these places.*
- TG8 asserted that alternative solutions could be produced when GIs are not found on restaurant menus and further explained:

*TG8: There should be an alternative to restaurants because there is no such thing as all kinds of food have to be found on the menu. In fact, some GI products are popular with tourists and can therefore be considered street food. For this reason, tour guides need to introduce such products on the spot. For example, let's assume we take a break in Kemeralti in İzmir; we, tour guides, should present examples of our intangible cultural heritage, such as kumru (a kind of sandwich), boyoz (a type of savoury pastry), gevrek (a kind of savoury bagel), the street delicacies of İzmir, to the tourists. We need to prompt tourists to taste and experience these GI foods.*

**Travel agencies' conflict of interest due to financial challenges:** Like other businesses, travel agencies are also driven by the profit motive. Therefore, they make their tour plans according to the cost of the itineraries. Most tour guides consider that travel agencies are one of the challenging barriers in front of the registered GIs. Tour guides (TG2, TG3, TG6, TG7, TG10, TG11, TG12, and TG13) attributed this challenge to travel agencies' preference for cheap and low-class restaurants.

Below are tour guides' explanations behind this financial challenge:

*TG3, TG6, TG7, TG10, TG11, TG12, and TG13: Now, suppose we assume that a portion of meatball at a restaurant is about 100 TL. In that case, a registered GI meatball, say Akhisar meatballs, will be more expensive, 200TL. That is, registered GIs are more expensive than their counterparts. In this case, travel agencies prefer restaurants offering cheaper products.*

*TG3: Due to the high costs, travel agencies do not work with restaurants offering GI products. But I think when it comes to GIs, festivals matter more than restaurant menus. For example, I found out about the GI status of Gümüldür Mandarin at the Gümüldür festival.*

*TG4: Unfortunately, travel agencies and restaurants agree on the dishes to be served to the tourist groups in advance. Mostly standard dishes are served. Therefore, GI dishes are not offered to the tourist groups even though the GIs are included on the menu. But tourists can order the GI dish and pay for it.*

*TG5: Since the number of faith tourists is relatively low, dishes with GIs are not included on restaurant menus. However, seven churches tours can be designed in a more attractive manner by the help of GIs.*

*TG7: On the way to Laodicea, I take my group to an open buffet to eat. It is too awful and low-level, but that's how it works. I have to follow the agreed plan prepared by the travel agency. But, indeed, travel agencies should include restaurants serving GI dishes in the tour itineraries.*

*TG12: ...but the travel agencies schedule these routes only taking into account the cost. Visiting vineyards, for instance, will not be on their list because of the cost issue. These routes are designed to minimize their loss in profit.*

- *TG15: Since restaurants aim at profiting in the short term, they prefer menu items that are easier and quicker to prepare. Besides, tourists also expect to finish eating quickly. And the timing of the tour programmes is definitely not abundant. Unfortunately, we cannot find a restaurant offering GIs. If*

*chambers of tour guides organize seminars on GI products for restaurants in Akhisar and Alaşehir and motivate these restaurants, in the long run, everyone will earn more.*

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study examines tour guides' awareness of the geographical indications on faith routes, how this awareness is reflected in their attitudes and behaviour while performing the tours, and their thoughts on the advantages and barriers of integrating geographical indications into faith routes.

From the interviews with the tour guides, we noticed that tour guides present information about various examples of local products to tourists as if they were registered GIs. It demonstrates that although the tour guides know the local products, they are unaware that the registration process protects this localness. Examples given by the tour guides include grapes from Salihli (TG3); Akhisar wine, grapes and wine from Şirince, Alaçatı's common golden thistle (*Scolymus hispanicus*), Denizli rooster, Bergama cheese, Olive oil from Manisa (TR4); mussels from İzmir, Bergama cheese, Fig from Denizli (TG6); Bergama cheese (TG8), Denizli beans (TG5). The problem with these examples is two-fold. First, some of the local products (i.e. so-called registered GI products) mentioned by the tour guides, such as Alaçatı's common golden thistle (*Scolymus hispanicus*), Akhisar wine, grapes and wine from Şirince, mussels from İzmir, Denizli rooster, Fig from Denizli have not been registered by the Turkish Patent Institution at the point of writing. That is, none of these products is registered GIs. Secondly, some of the products expressed by the tour guides are famous for the relevant specific region, yet they are not registered under the name given by the tour guides. For example, TR4 should have said Akhisar Domat Olive Oil instead of Olive Oil from Manisa, as the correct form of registered GI is Akhisar Domat Olive Oil.

Similarly, there is no cheese registered as GI under the name of Bergama cheese. However, İzmir Tulum Cheese's geographical boundaries also include the district of Bergama, according to the official registration document prepared by the Turkish Patent Institution. Nevertheless, this does not qualify the cheese to be deemed Bergama cheese.

Other similar inaccurate examples of GIs used by tour guides, TG5 and TG6, include Çameli beans and Çalkarası grapes as beans and grapes of Denizli. The geographical boundaries specified in the official registration documents of Çameli beans and Çalkarası grapes do not cover the entire Denizli region. However, they are limited only to Çameli and Çal districts, respectively. TG8's naming of Akhisar Domat olive oil as olive oil from Manisa is another example of the tour guides' inexact use of the names of GIs. This is due to the fact that the whole Manisa region is not specified as the geographical boundary of Akhisar Domat olive oil in the registration document. It is limited to six districts out of 17, namely, Akhisar, Gölarmara, Salihli, Turgutlu, Saruhanlı and Kırkağaç.

Although these seem controversial and negligible facts, the geographical boundaries specified in the official registration documents are the most influential factors in distinguishing the product from its counterparts. TG8 addressed this issue by highlighting the link between the product and its place of origin during his speech. As suggested by TG8 natural factors such as the biodiversity of the specific territory and the ecological components (e.g. climate, water, soil, wind) coupled with the human factors (cultural practices, farming methods, know-how, traditions) or a combination of both determine the specific link between the product and the territory (Lucini et al., 2020). As a result, using the names of registered GIs accurately is necessary but complicated because tour guides tend to designate local products as GIs regardless of their registration status. This leads them to use generic terms which may not function as geographical indications. To prevent such problems in the future, tailored GI orientation training should be designed for tour guides, and this training should be supported with leaflets or brochures covering GIs regionally.

The findings revealed a surprising point from the participants that they prefer not to provide information about cultural values, such as GIs if they cannot physically access them. However, we argue that tour guides should be encouraged to provide the necessary information regardless of the accessibility status of the product as tour guides build trust in tourists with their knowledge, and this will, in return, increase the tourists' awareness of the cultural assets of the region.

Our understanding from the interviews with the tour guides is that travel agencies' attitudes toward GI products act as a barrier to integrating GI products into faith routes. This is because travel agencies aim at profiting in the short term and thus design tour itineraries to minimize their loss in profit. Consequently, they generally do not include the restaurants serving GI dishes; instead, they mainly include open buffets and low-level restaurants in the tour itineraries. This is in line with the findings of the study by Su (2013), which demonstrated that travel agencies could achieve tourist satisfaction through improving food quality and menu diversity by communicating with the restaurants. Additionally, leaving the choice of restaurant to tour guides would allow tourists to experience more GI products, increasing their satisfaction and giving them a story to tell when they return to their country.

Tour guides noted that a three to four-day tour is not long for a complete religious experience, especially if the tourists are equipped culturally. Thus, they postulate that such tourists' expectations of experiential authenticity may be achieved by prolonging the duration of seven churches tours and combining them with other activities involving GI products unique to the region. As suggested by Karagöz et al. (2022), when the physical environment and atmosphere reflect the local culture through unique food preparation and presentation styles, as in the case of GI dishes, tourists' expectations are met.

According to the findings, tour guides agreed to include workshops on cooking or related activities (harvesting grapes or olives, wine making, olive production, making parchment paper, weaving rugs etc.) in the seven churches tour. They suggest that these activities may be further enhanced by cultural and social stories related to the product and its link with the territory for a memorable, authentic experience (Castelló, 2020). In this context, TG10 recommends that tour guides may articulate the story behind the names of the registered GIs to draw tourists' attention.

### **5.1. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions**

Despite the fact that this research has drawn out some insights into the role of registered geographically indicated products in Seven Churches of Asia route of tour guides, some limitations have to be recognized. In an attempt to opt for appropriate samples, the interviewees of this research were recruited through the researcher' personal networks and recommendations from the travel agencies and tour guides. Owing to resource and time constraints, this research focused primarily on tour guides, which limited the generalizability of the findings. Extending this study approach to other tourism stakeholder such as travel agencies can enhance the generalizability of these findings. Future research may go one step further and develop a measurement scale of the role of registered geographically indicated products in Seven Churches of Asia route.

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## Appendices: GIs in Figs 1 and 2

### GIs belong to İzmir

1. Bergama el halısı
2. Kuzey Ege zeytinyağı
3. Bergama graniti
4. Bergama kozak çam fıstığı
5. Bergama parşömeni
6. Güney Ege zeytinyağı
7. Ege inciri
8. Gümüldür mandalinası
9. Görece nazar boncuğu
10. Kavacık üzümü
11. Kemalpaşa kirazı
12. Kınık kuru domatesi
13. Seferihisar mandalinası
14. Bornova bamyası
15. Bornova misket üzümü
16. Bozdağ kestane şekeri
17. Ege pamuğu
18. Ege Sultani üzümü
19. Tire Beledi dokuması
20. Tire şiş köfte
21. Urla sakız enginarı
22. Çavuşdağı kuru fasülyesi
23. Çeşme kavunu
24. Ödemiş köftesi
25. Ödemiş patatesi
26. Ödemiş çekiçte zeytinyağı
27. Ödemiş ipeği
28. İzmir boyozu
29. İzmir kumrusu
30. İzmir gevreği
31. İzmir lokması
32. İzmir tulum peyniri
33. İzmir şambalı tatlısı

### GIs belong to Manisa

1. Akhisar domat zeytini
2. Akhisar domat zeytinyağı
3. Akhisar köfte
4. Akhisar uslu zeytin
5. Akhisar uslu zeytinyağı
6. Alaşehir asma yaprağı
7. Alaşehir ekmeği
8. Alaşehir kapaması
9. Salihli kirazı
10. Salihli odun köfte
11. Demirci Hünnabı
12. Gördes el halısı
13. Kula el halısı
14. Kula leblebisi
15. Köprübaşı çileği
16. Kırkağaç kavunu
17. Manisa mesir macunu
18. Manisa sultani çekirdeksiz üzüm
19. Manisa taban simidi
20. Manisa Saruhanlı çekirdeksiz beyaz üzüm
21. Yuntdağı el halısı

### GIs belong to Denizli

1. Babadağ kekik balı
2. Buldan bezi
3. Buldan kestanesi
4. Denizli kekiği
5. Denizli leblebisi
6. Denizli Travertenli
7. Denizli Çalkarası Üzümü
8. Honaz kirazı
9. Kale biberi
10. Tavas baklavası
11. Çameli elmalı bezi
12. Çameli fasülyesi
13. Çameli kilimi
14. İsabey çekirdeksiz üzümü