

## **Evaluation of Thalassotherapy Potential in Turkey's Health Tourism**

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**Abstract:** *Thalassotherapy is a developing part of health tourism all around the World that are near the ocean and sea countries. Turkey is in the middle of Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and Aegean Sea and have a great chance of thalassotherapy potential. In this study, Turkey's thalassotherapy potential was evaluated by SWOT analysis. Turkey have hundreds of hotels near the sea but few of them have thalassotherapy investments. These hotels are commonly working seasonal. Thalassotherapy investments such as pools, bath etc. bring them 12 months work because of the tourists that want to swim in winter or need thalassotherapy for their health.*

**Keywords:** *Thalassotherapy, Health Tourism, Turkey, Tourism.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Thalassotherapy is one of the most important products of thermal tourism. Especially it is getting more and more important for the countries which are near the sea or ocean. Turkey is a rich country in thermal baths and spas and also well known brand both in domestic and international market. This potential needs extra products such as thalassotherapy. Mediterranean sea, black sea and Aegean sea can be the most suitable regions for thalassotherapy.

In tourism sector today there is an increasing demand for health tourism. This demand also wants special investments and high quality services. Turkey has enough quality both hotel investments, high quality services and qualified tourism personnel. If required thalassotherapy investments added to these hotels, Turkey will get extra market share from tourism. Turkey is also begin to compete with their rivals such as India, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Germany etc.

Thermal and thalassotherapy cures approximately requires 2 or 3 weeks. For that reason the patients or tourist want personalization of treatments, different and exotic experience, personalized and special services. For all of them the hotels need qualified personnel and specialized staff.

### **2. TURKEY'S HEALTH TOURISM**

The replacement of patients from their home countries to different countries because of their treatment is called "Health Tourism" [1]. This kind of destinations offers to their patients better quality and low prices. Patients also yet expect best service with minimum prices. For that reasons tourists prefer developed or developing countries for health tourism. The tourists move is also changed by this way to developed countries to developing countries [2].

*Cohen [11] categorised the health tourism movements in 3 categories:*

- Medical tourism for services that are illegal in both the patient's home and destination country (such as organ purchase)
- Medical tourism for services that are illegal or unapproved in the patients' home country but legal in the destination country

- Medical tourism for services legal in both the home and destination country.
- In USA, 900 thousand tourists were travelled for health tourism to other countries in 2013 [4]. India, Thailand, Singapore, USA, Malaysia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Brazil and Costa Rica are the countries that are important for health tourism.

*These first 10 countries common features worldwide is:*

- ❖ High quality standards of health, care and wellness services,
- ❖ The accessibility of destinations
- ❖ Technology, infrastructure and expertise indicators are well designed[5].

Turkey is working very hard for health tourism recent years. Especially the number of hospitals and hotels that have high quality services are increased all around Turkey. This high quality services are also cheaper than Europe and USA. New investments and high quality services provide Turkey to take a strong position in the health tourism market[6]. In 2014, 400 thousand people come to Turkey for health tourism. Turkey's income from health tourism in 2013 is 2,5 billion \$. Today 32 thousand bed building in hospitals and many of them will complete in 2015. The expectations of Turkey's income in 2017-2018 is 9-10 billion \$, in 2023 20-25 billion \$ [7].

### **3. THALASSOTHERAPY**

Thalassotherapy is a treatment system that combination of materials such as maritime climate, sand, weed etc. obtained from the sea. This treatment system is implemented under medical supervision and control. This is also used for prevention and treatment of patients health[8].

The use of heated seawater therapy is based on the ancient times. The natural evolution of thermalism that continued centuries occurred thalassotherapy. Thalassotherapy gets his power from the seas and for that reason thalassotherapy centers are settled up near the seas. The thalassotherapy rich body and facial care programs provides the patients body and mind regeneration, flourish and positive energy with the maritime climate and plenty of sunshine[9].

Thalassotherapy provides the patients accelerate the metabolism and intake intense mineral. This is the main difference between the SPA treatments. By this way patients throw the toxins away from their body. After the toxins throw from the body, the body facilitates the fat burning and accelerates blood circulation by secreting endorphins [3].

Thalassotherapy centers should be settled up to near the sea or 1000 meters from the coast. Most suitable is to use the sea water directly. If utilized by transporting, sea water should not be kept longer than 48 hours. Sea water also should not be heated above 50 ° C.[10].

In thalassotherapy, for both free way and under doctor control, there should be at least 1 gram up to 260 grams of mineral-salt in 1 liter of seawater. For the best cure application, there should be optimal seawater is 34-36 grams of mineral-salt.

*The cure applications that are useful for the patients are below: [9].*

- Free sea bath
- Sea water drinking cures
- Sea mud treatments
- Respiratory cure
- Sea climate cures

### **4. SWOT ANALYSIS OF TURKEY'S THALASSOTHERAPY POTENTIAL**

#### **4.1. Strengths**

- Turkey is surrounded by 3 seas,
- Coastal sea temperature of 3 seas show diversity,
- Chemical content of 3 seas show diversity,
- Hundreds of hotels near coast need only thalassotherapy investments,

- Government support the thalassotherapy investments for the hotels,
- Especially Mediterranean sea coasts and hotels have the potential both sea features and hotel numbers,
- We can see thermal hotels all around Turkey,
- Inbound tourists are seeking to find new forms of tourism such as thalassotherapy different from mass productions.
- Climate, natural resources and unspoiled environment are suitable for thalassotherapy.

### 4.2. Weaknesses

- Turkey has not have enough thalassotherapy investments in hotels,
- There are not enough investments in coastal areas at the moment,
- There is not enough qualified personnel about thalassotherapy,
- Especially city hotels don't have enough area for investments,
- Lack of international pressure on special group activities,
- Heavy traffic and noise.
- Coastside hotel are generally working seasonal.

### 4.3. Opportunities

- Turkey is near by the Europe and Asia,
- Health prices are lower than Europe and USA,
- Turkey have 3 different seas which are show diversity
- Antalya and Istanbul are suitable for the thalassotherapy investments. Both of them has all infrastructure all around the city,
- Increase of tourist arrivals to Turkey,
- Tourism policy supporting niche markets in tourism.
- Turkey is a rich country for special groups (thermal, eco-tourism, golf, thalasso etc.)

### 4.4. Threats

- Asia countries have lower health care prices on health tourism,
  - Turkey's economic fluctuations may effect the tourism sektör,
- Turkey has not enough investment for thalassotherapy at the moment and not ready for the competition with other countries,
- Pollution at the coastal areas and degradation of eco-systems,

## 5. CONCLUSION

Turkey is in the middle of Asia and Europe. This transition point effects the number of tourists coming to Turkey. In 2014,36.837.900 tourists come to Turkey. Many of them come to Turkey for the purpose of sea, sand and sun to Antalya and cultural tourism to Istanbul. Turkey has planning to increase the number of tourist till 2023. For this target thermal and medical tourism are the most important products for tourism sector and for the government.

Thalassotherapy is still a niche market for many countries which are near the sea or ocean. There will be competition between the countries near future and the countries that complete their investments will get much of the income from thalassotherapy.

Antalya has enough hotel numbers and investments at the moment. Many of the hotel areas are available for the thalassotherapy investments such as thalasso pool etc. Istanbul is also available for thalassotherapy but there is a big traffic and noise problem. Patients or tourist that want to rest could not be happy with this problems. The main purpose of thalassotherapy is healing and relaxing. For this 2 purpose Istanbul may not be brand destination near future but Antalya will be.

Thalassotherapy is a special product in thermal tourism. Turkey is also very rich in thermal and medical tourism. Thalassotherapy targets will not be so hard for these reasons. The only need is to accelerate the investments and to raise awareness of the hotel managers.

Thalassotherapy target is also need qualified personnel and specialized staff. This can be made quickly by special training organized by government or universities. Special courses can be open by organizations. If Turkey want to be a brand in near future, specialized staff need will be the most important problem for the hotels.

Finally, thalassotherapy investments provide the seasonal hotels to work 12 months. This will also provide more tourists and patients. Turkey get much more income with these investments. Special interest groups and health tourism groups are the main target of developing countries. Turkey should take place in competition with new destinations and products with the countries in the market.

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