

# Branding in Health Tourism and Bursa's Potential to Become a Brand City in Health Tourism

Sanem BERKÜN<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*With this study, the potential of Bursa to become a brand city in health tourism has been evaluated and suggestions have been developed to increase success in this process. Health tourism, which has become increasingly important in recent years due to reasons such as unplanned urbanization, increasing environmental problems, and aging of the population, refers to travel between cities or countries for treatment and holiday purposes. Health tourism can be performed in three different ways: medical tourism, thermal springs tourism or elderly and disabled care tourism. Increasing of the health tourism revenues direct countries to develop by investing in this field. Various cities with suitable potential add health tourism to their branding strategies. Prominent countries within this field are India, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa and Türkiye. Türkiye stands out with its geopolitical location, natural beauties, rich underground and surface resources as well as its capacity to provide quality and cheap healthcare services. In terms of health tourism, Bursa is among the prominent cities of Türkiye with its diversity of medical facilities, healing water resources and transportation opportunities. In the study, phenomenology method which is utilized in literature review and qualitative research is used and in-depth interviews with local tourists who came to Bursa for health tourism have been conducted to find out how Bursa is received in terms of health tourism. In the study using qualitative research method, the findings obtained through in-depth interviews showed that Bursa is a preferred city in terms of health tourism. Particularly service quality and diversity, low cost, ease of transportation and the abundance of things to do in Bursa are effective in the satisfaction of visitors who come to Bursa for health tourism. On the other hand; the fact that there are too many foreign tourists in hotels, the fewer number of package tours to Bursa, that Bursa is crowded and the lack of railway transportation to Bursa are the disliked aspects of Bursa regarding health tourism.*

**Keywords:** Health Tourism, Brand City, Türkiye, Bursa.

## Introduction

Technological advances in the field of medicine and the increase in the level of education have created an environment for people to act more consciously about healthy living. People pay more attention to check-ups, regular exercise and healthy eating. On the other hand, many factors such as environmental pollution, unplanned urbanization, stress, and aging of the population cause people to experience health problems. This environment puts health tourism forward within the tourism sector, and many countries aim at increasing their income by meeting health tourism demands (Yılmaz, et al., 2020: 74-75). The Medical Tourism Market size is estimated to be 84.92 billion US dollars in 2024 (Medical Tourism Market Report 2024-2029). This state directs healthcare providers to provide quality, adequate standards and reliable service in order to gain a competitive advantage (Çetinkaya & Bostan, 2023: 98).

### *Theoretical Framework*

Journeys between cities or countries for treatment and holiday purposes are called health tourism. Health tourism is an alternative type of tourism that attracts increasing demand from people with impaired health and who are sensitive to protecting their health (Özkan, 2019: 51). In health tourism, people travel and purchase services to improve and protect their health (Sarman ve Sarman, 2021). Health tourism is carried out for a certain period of time. During this time, people go to a touristic facility based on natural resources for health cures, accommodation, and meeting their nutritional and entertainment needs (Aydın, 2012: 92). Health care services received based on professional knowledge can also be in the form of relaxation and mental training (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Tourists recover and protect their health with the health tourism. Negation is seen in the relationships that arise in the tourist health dimension and can cause

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University, Bilecik, Turkey, Email: [sanem.berkun@bilecik.edu.tr](mailto:sanem.berkun@bilecik.edu.tr), Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9254-1669>

significant damage in tourism, as seen by the SARS disease that occurred in Far Eastern countries in 2002 (Özsarı & Karatana, 2013: 137). This case draws attention to the importance of the dimension expressed by the concept of health tourism, which shows the health effect of the environment on the tourist visits and stays in.

This situation draws attention to the importance of the dimension expressed by the concept of tourism health, which shows the effect of the tourist on the environment visited and the effect of the environment on the tourist considering health (Aydın & Şeker, 2011: 6).

The services aimed at improving health, services aimed at treatment, rehabilitation services and disabled and elderly care services are provided within the scope of health tourism (Çimen, 2018: 104). Health tourism is generally divided into three subcategories. These can be listed as elderly and disabled tourism, thermal health tourism, spa-wellness and medical tourism (Yılmaz et al., 2020: 77).

*Elderly and Disabled Tourism:* This term refers to the trips of people aged 50 and over and disabled people apart from the places where they reside and meet their needs. Within the concept of elderly and disabled tourism, sightseeing tours and activity therapies, entertainment, treatment, care and rehabilitation services are offered to elderly and disabled people under proper circumstances (Çimen, 2018: 104). Services are provided in places such as hotels, holiday villages, recreation areas and nursing homes (Yıldırım, 1997, 77; Yılmaz et al., 2020: 77). Many factors such as the desire to be healthy, seeking physical exercise opportunities, the disappearance of time constraints problems, income level, interest in social and cultural activities, desire for rest and relaxation, desire to escape, search for novelty, social interaction and nostalgia motivate disabled and elderly individuals to travel can motivate the elderly and disabled individuals to travel (Kılıçlar et al., 2017, 88; Sert, 2019, 203). The success of elderly and disabled tourism is possible in facilities that comply with universal design standards and in which people can receive services independently and in accordance with the principle of equality (Michopoulou et al., 2015: 181).

*Thermal Health Tourism and Spa-wellness:* This is one of the oldest treatment methods and dates back to 1700 BC (Karademir et al., 2019: 642). Within the scope of thermal tourism, thermo mineral waters which are found to be beneficial for human health with the healing effect of their chemical and physical composition and methods such as hot springs, mud and drinking cures or inhalation can be used on some illnesses. Besides, supportive treatments such as climate cure, physical therapy, rehabilitation, mechanotherapy, exercise, psychotherapy and diet are also used (Erdoğan & Aklanoğlu, 2008: 84, Doğanay, 2001: 258). With the services provided, the effects of diseases and many factors that have negative effects are avoided, the climate and natural characteristics of the region are benefited from, daily life is regulated with diet, exercise, sleep and rest programs, and treatment or healthy life programs are created for the future (Şendikici & Karakaya, 2021: 118). The concept of Wellness, expressed as a philosophy of life that aims to balance and increase physical, mental and spiritual health, originates in the United States. From a holistic perspective, all kinds of treatment, supportive or rehabilitative practices offered by healthcare personnel and other authorized personnel are considered within the scope of thermal health tourism and spa-wellness (Yardan et al., 2014: 32). With the development of this type of tourism, many new concepts have begun to be used. Some of these can be listed as climatism (benefiting from the healing effect of fresh and clean air), uvalism (use of fruits and vegetables in treatment), thermalism, balneotherapy (use of mineral thermal waters in treatment), thalassotherapy (use of sea water and sun in treatment), hydrotherapy (treatment with fresh water), speleotherapy, (treatment using caves), peloidotherapy (mud treatment) and heliotherapy (treatment with sunlight) (Şengül & Bulut, 2019: 59).

*Medical Tourism:* In this type of tourism, which has been increasing in recent years, people travel for treatment purposes because treatment is not possible or expensive in the places they reside. Moreover, sometimes they have to wait for a long time to receive treatment in the places they reside, and their health conditions make this waiting impossible. For this reason, people have to travel to another city or country for treatment. Treatments such as in vitro fertilization treatment, gender reassignment surgeries, eye treatment, dental treatment, plastic surgery, hair transplantation operations are among the examples that can be given within the scope of medical tourism. Increasing health expenditures, healthy life expectancy, cost differences, service quality, long waiting times, situations requiring legal permission, international

agreements and intermediary institutions affect the development of medical tourism (Tokü, 2017: 11-13; Çimen, 2018: 108; Çetinkaya & Bostan 2023,: 100). Medical tourism requires qualified workforce and technical equipment. The personnel providing services must have common foreign language knowledge. In medical tourism, services should be provided in accordance with international standards and developments regarding these standards should be followed. Different types of tourism should be developed for patients and their companions, and introduction and marketing activities should be carried out in different languages for the target market (Özsarı & Karatana, 2013: 140).

Türkiye is among the countries with health tourism potential. There are about 1000 geothermal sources in Türkiye and 78% of this potential is in West Anatolia, 9% in Central Anatolia and 7% is in Marmara Region (Şengül & Bulut 2019: 57). These are also the most developed regions of Türkiye in terms of transportation and socioeconomics. With the Decree Law No. 663 published in 2011, health free zones can be established in Türkiye with the medical, thermal or disabled and elderly concept (Doğan, 2020: 300-306). In the 2013-2017 Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Health, it was aimed to strengthen health tourism in Turkey and studies in this context were focused in the following periods. In the 11th Development Plan covering the years 2019-2023, attention was drawn to the importance of healthy and active aging in overcoming the problems caused by demographic change (TC Presidency Strategy and Budget Directorate 2019, 95-154). However, Turkey's data in the field of health tourism is inadequate (Öztürk & Özcan, 2022: 3). A total of 1,398,504 people travelled to Turkey for health tourism purposes in 2023. The revenue is 2,307,130 thousand US dollars. The preferred clinical branches in medical tourism are gynaecology, internal medicine, ophthalmology, medical biochemistry, general surgery, dentistry, orthopaedics and traumatology, infectious diseases and ear-nose-throat respectively (USHAŞ, 2023). Among the reasons why Turkey is preferred in terms of health tourism can be listed as having centrally located health tourism facilities, accessibility, service quality, high satisfaction with the service, level of interest, opportunity to gain a rich cultural experience and have a holiday, meeting needs without any problems, and the opportunity to receive treatment from qualified personnel. People mostly come to Turkey for health tourism from Germany, Libya, Iraq, Russia and England respectively. Although health tourism is intensified in the Mediterranean Region during the summer months, it is directed to big cities, especially Istanbul, in other periods (Health Growth Hub, 2024).

The rivalry caused by globalisation has effected the cities as well and the cities aiming at attracting more entrepreneurs, pecuniary resources, labour force and tourists focused on branding and creating a good image. Branding in health can be in the form of destination branding as well as product, service, institution and person branding (Güdük, 2023: 165). Brand city covers all activities carried out to transform the city from an ordinary settlement in the minds of those who want to be attracted to the city into attractive living centers where they will want to continue their lives, work and invest, receive education and visit (Avçılar & Kara, 2015: 77; Kaypak, 2013: 343). In this context, in the analysis of the city; elements such as natural or artificial attractions, accessibility (ease of transportation), facilities, activities and services become prominent (Torlak, 2015: 60). The findings of the study published in 2018 based on internet analysis on cities in Turkey being brand cities show that 54 of the cities in Turkey have at least one news on the internet about being brand cities. The number of provinces that claim that the city will be a brand city in the future is 24 (Uyar, 2018: 470-471). Cities that want to brand themselves in health tourism also use their superiority and potential in terms of natural beauties, climate, accessibility, facilities and services as their marketing strategies. While Ankara, Afyonkarahisar, Eskişehir, Uşak and Kütahya, located in the Phrygia Thermal Tourism region in Turkey are branding in thermal health tourism, Istanbul carries on its branding efforts in medical tourism successfully with its vision of being a health capital (Güdük, 2023: 165).

## Methodology

In this study, the phenomenology method that is used in literature review and qualitative research was used. In addition to academic studies, previous research findings were also used in the literature review. In the phenomenology method, which is also a philosophical movement, the researcher works to clarify a phenomenon by benefiting from the experiences of the participants (Gill, 2014; Creswell, 2007). In this context, qualitative data collection techniques such as document analysis, observation and interview can be used. Strategies are followed to reveal perception, events and experiences holistically and realistically

(Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). The reason for choosing this method is that phenomenology can provide extremely rich and useful information about the definition and dimensions of the phenomenon. Strategies aimed at exhibiting perception, events and experiences holistically and realistically are followed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). The reason for choosing this method is that phenomenology can provide extremely rich and useful information about the definition and dimensions of the phenomenon. In the phenomenology method, the content the participants experience, feel and create regarding the phenomenon can be determined and a theory can be developed based on all these (Özmen and Karamustafaoğlu, 2019). Since this study aims to learn how visitors who come to Bursa for health tourism perceive Bursa in terms of health tourism, it was decided that the phenomenological method was appropriate.

Bursa is one of the developed provinces of Turkey, located in the Marmara Region, with a population of 3 million 194 thousand 720, according to the 2023 Address Based Population Registration System data. Bursa, with its geographical location, fertile plains, natural beauties and strong industry, continues to develop and receive immigration. On the other hand, it stands out as an important tourist city due to its natural beauties and climatic characteristics as well as its historical values. Bursa and its surroundings host very valuable Turkish-Islamic architectural works as it contains the ruins of ancient civilizations and is one of the Ottoman capitals. With its proximity to the mountains and the sea, its hot springs and its suitability for winter sports, it is a place of visit for many local and foreign tourists. Burgaz, Kumla and Kurşunlu are preferred by local tourists with their beaches, particularly in the summer months. Iznik and Ulubat lakes are used for water sports. Many products manufactured in Bursa are promoted through festivals and fairs. An important reason why many local and foreign tourists travel to Bursa is the ease of land, air and sea transportation (Demirbey, 1992: 109-113).

In the field of medical tourism, which is a sub-branch of health tourism, Bursa is one of the cities that stands out after Istanbul with its ease of transportation and low cost. According to the data from Bursa Provincial Health Directorate, in Bursa, a total of 40 hospitals, 20 of which are private, 3 integrated district hospitals, 2 oral and dental health centers, 4 community health centers, public health laboratories, health life centers, cancer early diagnosis and screening centers, tuberculosis dispensaries, immigrant health centers, malaria dispensary, family health centres, health houses, independent institutions, independent laboratories, hyper baric oxygen treatment centres, home care centres, genetic diagnosis centres, in vitro fertilization centres, polyclinics, dialysis centres, medical centres, private oral and dental health centres, private dental prosthesis laboratories, psychotechnics evaluation centers, dentist offices, hearing aid centers, orthosis device centers and private doctor's offices (Bursa Provincial Health Directorate). According to 2021 Provincial Health Directorate data, 52.6% of the physicians working in Bursa are specialist physicians, 20.3% are assistant physicians and 27.1% are general practitioners. Current data regarding the distribution of physicians could not be accessed (Güllü, 2022: 15). Within the scope of the Health Tourism workshop held in 2014, the following are listed among Bursa's strengths in terms of health tourism. The presence of health institutions with JCI accreditation in Bursa, a strong and determined cooperation between the public, private sector and NGOs in the development of health tourism, the presence of well-known hospitals and hotels, the infrastructure of health institutions being good and their capacities being high, medical investments made, preferability of Uludağ and Mudanya due to the presence of qualified doctors known abroad, the capacity to establish a health free zone, the air quality and camping opportunities especially for chest diseases, the presence of hot springs that are useful in physical therapy, proximity to Istanbul, ease of transportation, adequate accommodation facilities. and being able to receive health services at affordable prices makes it possible for Bursa to become a brand in health tourism (BEBKA, 2015: 109).

Bursa is advantageous in thermal health tourism field as well. Thermal water in Bursa extends from Northern parts of Uludağ to Ulubat Lake. A great number of superior quality thermal and healing waters in Türkiye are found in Bursa city centre and districts (Erdi, 2019: 85). The healing waters in Bursa are divided into two groups as Foundation Garden and Bademli Garden Waters. The thermal springs in Bursa city can be listed as Yeni Kaplıca (New Thermal spring), Kükürtlü, Kaynarca, Eski Kaplıca (Old Thermal spring), Kara Mustafa Thermal Spring and hotels. Thermal Springs in Bursa district are İnegöl Oylat Thermal spring, Mustafa Kemal Paşa Tümbüldek Thermal springs and Gemlik Armutlu Thermal spring. Moreover, Orhaneli Ağaçisar Thermal and Mud, Mustafa Kemal Paşa Keleşpınar Mineral Water, Mustafa

Kemal Paşa Menevir Mineral Water, Mustafa Kemal Paşa Ekşisu, İnegöl Terce, Bakmaca and Çitli Mineral Waters are among the precious underground waters. Bursa stands out with its baths and bath culture. Thermal springs and healing waters in Bursa are beneficial particularly for rheumatism and neuralgia, polyneuritis, rheumatoid, arthritis, sciatic, arthrosis, fatigue, gout, non-healing bone fractures, eczema, asthma, some allergic diseases, gynaecological diseases, bends, neuralgia, infertility, otorhinolaryngology diseases, dermatologic disorders and adiposity. On the other hand, thermal springs and healing waters are not applicable for heart rheumatism and other heart diseases, inflammatory diseases, tuberculosis and pneumonopathy. Bursa thermal springs can be categorized as facilities operated as thermal springs and places that work as units of the hospitals. When a facility is built, the accessibility, infrastructure and superstructure features, whether it is suitable for development or not, being near the production or industrial areas, whether or not it has natural beauties. Bursa Armutlu and Oylat Thermal springs are very advantageous considering these criteria (Demirbey, 1992: 113-121). Within the scope of Health Tourism workshop that was organised in 2014, Bursa being historically thermal city, the existence and quality of thermal sources, the existence of incentives in health system and that there are tourist travelling there visa-free were counted as the strengths of Bursa considering thermal tourism (BEBKA, 2015: 109).

Bursa is one of the prominent cities in Türkiye regarding elderly and disabled tourism. The reason for this is that elderly and disabled tourists head for places which are compatible with their physical characteristics and which will not force them physically. On the other hand, touristic places with natural, historical and cultural features are preferred primarily by the elderly and disabled tourists (Arıcı, 2019: 132). The climate characteristics of the region, the quantity and quality of health institutions in the region, ease of transportation, accessibility and costs are other determinants in elderly and disabled (Özkan, 2014: 30). Bursa has been home to cultural inheritance that belongs to various cultures throughout history. As an Ottoman capital, Bursa is the city where the first hospital, the first mint, the first university, the first double bath and the first bazaar were built. The first diplomatic victory was won in Bursa, moreover, the first sericulture school, the first animal hospital and the first forest museum were opened in Bursa. The first theatre in Anatolia was in Bursa. Bursa is also the city where the first intercity transportation started (Erer, 2004: 189; Kuter, 1998: 1). Bursa is home to traces and important architectural works from the Byzantine, Ottoman and Republican periods. Ulu Mosque, Emir Sultan Mosque and Tomb, Yıldırım Social Complex, Orhangazi Tomb, Green Madrasa, Green Tomb, Historical Inns, Muradiye Social Complex, Bursa Castle, Osmangazi Tomb, Cumalıkızık Village, Irgandı Bridge, Bursa Geruş Synagogue, Hüdavendigâr Tomb, Hüdavendigâr Mosque are among the prominent the examples (Çetinkaya, 2010: 52). Due to its geographical location, Bursa has many natural beauties. In addition to having Uludağ, Bursa Plain, İznik Lake and Uluabat (Apoloynt) Lake, it also has a coast to the Marmara Sea. The climatic diversity in Bursa is also reflected in the agricultural products grown. Bursa is also known for its handmade knives, silk, towels, tiles and purses. Local soap and aromatic care products also attract attention. In Bursa, where intercity transportation is provided by road, sea and air, there are bus, subway, tram, minibus and taxi options within the city. Besides the quality hotels that have met international standards, there are also boutique or economical hotels in Bursa. There are many public and private hospitals and health institutions in Bursa, which is among the developed cities of Turkey in terms of health tourism. Bursa also has a rich cuisine in terms of gastronomy tourism. Bursa İskender kebab, İnegöl meatballs and chestnut candy are known throughout the country. Tahini flat bread, Turkish delight with walnut, cantik, meatballs with pita, fermented grape juice and Kemalpaşa dessert are other tastes from Bursa (Berkün, 2023: 2900-2901).

Among the weaknesses of Bursa in terms of health tourism within the scope of the Health Tourism workshop held in 2014; insufficiency of thermal facilities and hospitals, insufficiency of bed capacity and professional management in hospitals, deficiencies in accreditation, ineffective use of thermal resources, deficiencies in hygiene, regulation and planning in tourist areas, insufficiency of facilities and attraction centers for the disabled and the elderly, failure to establish a link between medical and thermal tourism and lack of a tourism master plan in Bursa were emphasized (BEBKA, 2015: 111).

In the qualitative research dimension, in-depth interviews were conducted within the scope of the phenomenology method. The study group was determined by using purposeful sampling method. Domestic tourists who come to Bursa for health tourism constitute the population. The sample was selected

from the research population using the purposeful sampling method between July 2023 and January 2024. It was aimed for the participants to accurately represent the sub-branches of health tourism, and equal representation of those visiting Bursa for medical, thermal, elderly and disabled tourism purposes was ensured in the sample. Interviews were held with 15 local tourists on a voluntary basis. Interview duration varied between 25 and 40 minutes. A semi-structured interview form was used in the face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher. Demographic information was processed in the information form by the researcher before the interviews. The questions in the semi-structured interview form are as follows;

What is your purpose of visit to Bursa?

Could you give us information about the reasons for you to prefer Bursa?

For how long did you come to Bursa and where are you staying at?

How do you spend a day in Bursa?

What are your positive thoughts on your visit to Bursa?

What are your negative thoughts on your visit to Bursa?

What are your suggestions for the development of tourism in Bursa?

During the data analysis process, MAXQDA 2020 package program was used. After the analysis, categories and themes came up and the data were evaluated.

## Results and Discussions

Firstly, demographic information was obtained and shared as a result of the research. Moreover, the reasons why Bursa is preferred in terms of health tourism, the participants' opinions about health tourism in Bursa, the positive and negative aspects of Bursa in health tourism, and the findings about what can be done to develop health tourism in Bursa were determined as categories and shared.

### *Demographic Findings*

**Tablo 1. Demographic Information of The Participants**

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Duration of Stay in Bursa</i>	<i>The Purpose of stay in Bursa</i>	<i>Place of accommodation</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>Medical Tourism</i>	<i>Hospital</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	<i>Thermal Spring Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>4 days</i>	<i>Medical Tourism</i>	<i>Home</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>3 days</i>	<i>Disabled Tourism</i>	<i>Hospital</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>Elderly Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>10 days</i>	<i>Thermal Spring Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>7</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	<i>Elderly Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>8</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>5 days</i>	<i>Elderly Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>9</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>5 days</i>	<i>Thermal Springs Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>10</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>4 days</i>	<i>Thermal Springs Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>11</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>3 weeks</i>	<i>Medical Tourism</i>	<i>Hospital</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>Medical Tourism</i>	<i>Home</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>6 days</i>	<i>Thermal Springs Tourism</i>	<i>Hospital</i>
<i>14</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>Elderly Tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
<i>15</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>20 days</i>	<i>Medical tourism</i>	<i>Hotel</i>

#### *The Reasons Why Bursa is Preferred in terms of Health Tourism*

Regarding the research findings, we can collect the reasons why Bursa is preferred in terms of health tourism under the headings of service quality and diversity, low cost and accessibility.

Service quality and diversity: “meeting all needs”, “close attention”, “professional service”,

Participants stated that they were satisfied with the service quality and service diversity in health tourism in Bursa. Besides, in terms of cost, Bursa is described as a more economical city with regards to health tourism services. Accessibility makes Bursa a preferred city in health tourism.

P11: ‘I have COPD. I have heard that there are good treatments for this in Bursa. They are really very interested. They also took my diabetes under control. My family can come and visit me easily. They meet all my needs. "Many doctors are trying to cure me."’

P9: I go to many places for hot springs with package tours. Bursa hotels provide very professional service. They are closely interested. For this reason, I can state that Bursa is my favourite city to travel to.”

Low cost: ‘It is very cheap compared to İstanbul’, ‘more economical’

P15: I need hospital treatment frequently due to this disease. I feel that I get more attention in Bursa and Bursa is very cheap compared to Istanbul. So, in this day and age, one has to choose the optimal one. Bursa seems more economical and reliable'

Accessibility: 'I can become self-sufficient without getting any help', 'transportation is easier'

P4: 'I can be self-sufficient in Bursa without getting any help. I came to the hospital on my own. Transportation is very easy for me in here.'

#### *Participants' thoughts on Health Tourism in Bursa*

Participants stated that they are pleased to have preferred Bursa for health tourism. The fact that there are so many things to do in Bursa is especially a determiner for them to have positive perspectives about Bursa.

P6: "We came to Bursa for ten days as it is necessary to stay at least a week to benefit from the thermal spring. We thought that if we got bored at the hotel, we would travel around. There are so many mosques and tombs worth seeing in here that we are glad we came for ten days. We went to a different place every day after the thermal spring. Even though it's our 8th day, there are still places we haven't visited. Transportation within the city is also easy. We used to take a taxi before but now we started using public transportation. It is the same for the bazaar and the food as well. Time passes really nice."

P14: 'We, two friends, came on a week-long tour. We liked Bursa very much. We went to the market ourselves, separate from the tour. We did shopping. Koza Han is very beautiful. Bursa has numerous natural beauties. There are so many places to visit. The food is great. The prices seemed very reasonable. Istanbul is much more expensive and complicated. I would like to come again'

P9: 'There are so many things to do here during the time after the thermal spring.'

#### *Positive and Negative Aspects of Bursa in Terms of Health Tourism*

According to the research data, positive aspects of Bursa considering health tourism are more than its negative aspects. 'Low cost', 'quality and diversity of facilities' and that 'there are far too many activities and



far too many sights to see' positively affect the preference of Bursa in Health tourism. Particularly the elderly tourists prefer Bursa considering the gastronomy tourism potential and shopping opportunities.

P2: ' We have come to Bursa many times before. Thermal springs reduce our pain. There are budget-friendly quality hotels. We stayed at a different facility each time we came. They all have their own hallmarks. There are many places where we can buy souvenirs in Bursa. We buy towels, scrub mitts, and chestnut candies on our way back to our relatives. Not to mention the places we visited and food we ate.'

P13: I benefit from the thermal spring while I am receiving physical therapy at the hospital. They put me into a great variety of devices. The staff is very attentive. Besides, Bursa is much cheaper. The cost of physical therapy is very low.'

According to the research findings, the negative aspects of Bursa in terms of health tourism are indicated as "too many foreign tourists staying in hotels", "few package tours to Bursa", "Bursa being crowded" and "Lack of railway transportation to Bursa".

P12: 'Bursa became more crowded. It is nothing like the past times. There are too many Arabs coming to the city'

P5: I don't drive and that's why I travel by high-speed train or with the tours. The high-speed train never came to Bursa. There aren't many package tours to the city either. I've hear that they do it for the foreigners. Actually, I would come more often if there was a train."

#### *Things That Can Be Done to Improve Health Tourism in Bursa*

According to the research findings, the participants' suggestions for the development of Bursa in terms of health tourism are presented in items.

- Development of hotels with standards especially for thermal springs tourism in Bursa districts
- Increasing the number of physical therapy centers and thermal spring facilities contracted with the Ministry of Health.
- Having high Speed train in Bursa
- Increasing the number and variety of package tours aimed at Bursa
- Promoting Bursa more in terms of health tourism

- Taking additional measures to ensure that domestic tourists can benefit from the thermal springs as much as foreign tourists.
- Making plans to prevent crowds in areas where hotels are located and in touristic zones.

## Conclusion

Bursa is one of Turkey's favourite cities in terms of health tourism. In this case, the fact that Bursa has significant advantages in all three sub-branches of health tourism (medical, thermal and elderly and disabled tourism) has been determinant. Due to these advantages, the central administration, local governments, private sector and non-governmental organizations have intensified their efforts in cooperation and with greater care to support the development of health tourism in Bursa. In recent years, investments in the field of health tourism have increased in Bursa and medical and thermal facilities have multiplied. There has been a tendency towards relatively more professional promotion and marketing strategies. Local government-supported trips are organized so that elderly domestic tourists as well as foreign tourists can visit Bursa.

With this study, Bursa's potential to stand out as a brand city in the field of health tourism was evaluated and suggestions were presented to increase success. In this context, it was endeavoured to find out how Bursa is perceived in terms of health tourism in the minds of visitors who come to Bursa for health tourism. In the study using qualitative research method, the findings obtained through in-depth interviews showed that Bursa is a preferred city in terms of health tourism. Particularly service quality and diversity, low cost, ease of transportation and the abundance of things to do in Bursa are effective in the satisfaction of visitors who come to Bursa for health tourism. On the other hand; the fact that there are too many foreign tourists in hotels, the fewer number of package tours to Bursa, that Bursa is crowded and the lack of railway transportation to Bursa are the disliked aspects of Bursa regarding health tourism.

In the light of the literature review and research findings, the suggestions developed for the branding of Bursa in health tourism can be summarized as follows;

- Bursa districts being in the first place; facilities and attractions for disabled and elderly people, as well as thermal facilities and hospitals, need to be increased. Bed capacity in existing hospitals should be increased. Additional facilities to meet the accommodation needs of patient relatives should be established.
- It would be beneficial to make up the professional management and accreditation deficiencies of medical institutions and thermal facilities and to increase the knowledge and awareness levels of the personnel.
- Activities should be accelerated to achieve accessibility and universal design standards throughout Bursa
- For effective use of thermal resources, additional measures should be taken and knowledge and awareness on the subject should be increased.
- Hygiene and planning deficiencies in touristic zones should be eliminated
- Promotion and marketing activities for health tourism should be coordinated and diversified by the central administration, local governments, private sector and non-governmental organizations.
- Railway transportation infrastructure works to Bursa should be completed immediately.
- Expectations of local and foreign tourists regarding health tourism may differ. At this point, it would be beneficial to conduct more detailed research, determine suggestions and requests, and shape the services in line with expectations. In the light of the information obtained in this context, a public Bursa Health Tourism Database should be created.

## Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare no conflicts of interest".

## Funding

"This research did not receive any financial support".

## References

- Arıcı, F. (2019), "Türkiye'de Üçüncü Yaş Turizm Potansiyeli ve Kaynak Kullanımı", *Doğu Coğrafya Dergisi*, 24(42), pp. 123-138.
- Avcılar, M. Y. & Kara, E. (2015), "Şehir Markası Kavramı ve Marka Şehir Yaratma Stratejilerine Yönelik Literatür İncelemesi", *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 34, pp. 76-94.
- Aydın, O. (2012), "Türkiye'de Alternatif Bir Turizm: Sağlık Turizmi", *KMÜ Sosyal ve Ekonomik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 14 (23) pp. 91-96.
- Aydın, D. & Şeker, S. (2011) Kamu Hastanelerinde Sağlık Turizmi ve Turistin Sağlığı Uygulama Rehberi, <http://dursunaydin.com/upload/saglik-turizmi-ve-turistin-sagligi-uygulama-rehberi.pdf> Erişim Tarihi: 26.04.2024.
- Berkün, S. (2023), "Üçüncü Yaş Turizmi Açısından Bursa ve Yerel Yönetimler Boyutunda Yapılabilecekler", *Üçüncü Sektör Sosyal Ekonomi Dergisi*, 58(4), pp.2895-2910.
- BEBKA, (2015), Bursa Sağlık Turizmi Master ve Eylem Planı, <https://www.kalkinmakutuphanesi.gov.tr/assets/upload/dosyalar/saglik-turizmi-master-plani-web.pdf> Erişim Tarihi: 26.04.2024.
- Bursa İl Sağlık Müdürlüğü, <https://bursaism.saglik.gov.tr/TR-15520/saglik-kurumlari.html> Erişim Tarihi: 26.04.2024.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, London: Sage Publishers.
- Çetinkaya, U. M. & Bostan, A. (2023), "Sağlık Turizmi Yetki Belgesine Sahip Sağlık Tesislerine Ait Web Sitelerinin Kalite Yönetimi ve Sağlık Turizmi Perspektifinde İncelenmesi: Aydın İli Örneği", *Aydın Adnan Menderes University Journal of Travel and Tourism Research* 22, pp. 96-115
- Çetinkaya, T. (2010), Sağlık Turizmi Açısından Bursa İlinin Pazarlanabilirliği Konusunda Sağlık Çalışanlarının Görüşlerinin Belirlenmesi Üzerine Bir Araştırma, Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Turizm İşletmeciliği Anabilim Dalı Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Sakarya.
- Çimen, H. (2018), "Türk Dünyasında Sağlık Turizmi", *Karadeniz Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergi*, 40 Winter, pp.101-110.
- Demirbey, Ş. (1992), Turizmde Termalizm ve Bursa Termal Turizmi, Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İktisat Anabilim Dalı Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Bursa.
- Doğan, T.G.B. – Doğan, S. & Baynal, B. (2020), "İleri Yaş ve Engelli Turizmi Hedef Kitlelerine Yönelik Bolu İli Sağlık Serbest Bölgesi Tasarımı", *Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi Dergisi*, 23(2), pp. 295-311.
- Doğanay, H. (2001) *Türkiye Turizm Coğrafyası*, Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi.
- Erdi, M. (2019), Bir Alternatif Turizm Türü Olarak Termal Turizmi: Bursa Tabakhaneler Bölgesinin İncelenmesi, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Mimarlık Anabilim Dalı Mimari Tasarım Programı Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi: İstanbul.
- Erdoğan E. & Aklanoğlu, F. (2008), "Termal Turizmi ve Afyon Gazlıgöl Örneği", *e-Journal of New World Sciences Academy*, 3(1), pp. 83-92.
- Erer, S. (2004), "Türkiye Klinikleri", *J Med Ethics Dergisi*, 12(3) pp. 189-195.
- Gill, M. J., (2014). "The Possibilities of Phenomenology for Organizational Research", *Organizational Research Methods*, 17(2), pp. 118-137.
- Güdük, Ö., (2023), Sağlık Turizminde Markalaşma", Ed: Karakuş, S., Sağlık Turizmi Yönetiminde Güncel Yaklaşımlar, Ankara: Akademişyen Kitabevi.
- Güllü, M. (2022), Bursa'da Sağlık Hizmeti, Bursa Tabip Odası Yayını <https://www.bto.org.tr/bursada-saglik-hizmeti/> Erişim Tarihi: 28.04.2024.
- Health Growth Hub, (2024), 2023 Türkiye'de Sağlık Turizmi İstatistikleri, <https://www.healthgrowthhub.com/2024-saglik-turizmi-beklentileri> Erişim Tarihi: 28.04.2024.
- Karademir, N., Sandal, E. K., Bilinir, Ş. (2019). Döngüle Kaplıcası (Kahramanmaraş)'nın Termal Turizm Potansiyeli ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Katkıları. *Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 16 (2), pp. 640-670.
- Kaypak, Ş. (2013), "Küreselleşme Sürecinde Kentlerin Markalaşması ve 'Marka Kentler'", *C.Ü. İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 14(1), pp. 335-355.
- Kılıçlar, A. – Aysen, A. & Küçükergin, F. (2017), "Demografik Değişimlerin Turizm Türleri Üzerindeki Belirleyici Etkisi: Üçüncü Yaş Turizmi", *Gazi Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2, pp.80-100.
- Kuter, M. (2008), Bursa'dan İlkler, Bursa, Kuter Yayıncılık.
- Michopoulou, E., Darcy, S., Ambrose, I. & Buhalis, D. (2015) "Accessible Tourism Futures: The World We Dream to Live in and The Opportunities We Hope To Have. *Journal of Tourism Futures*", 1(3), pp. 179-188

- Mueller, H. & Kaufmann, E. L. (2001). "Wellness Tourism: Market Analysis of A Special Health Tourism Segment and Implications for The Hotel Industry". *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 7(1), pp. 5-17.
- Medical Tourism Market Report 2024-2029, [https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/medical-tourism-market?gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw26KxBhBDEiwAu6KXt5JtPUA1VYGdmyDAIkqGDXrnt-CzDQOkpKvz1P6TEFLUy1Eorw7xoCKx8QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/medical-tourism-market?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw26KxBhBDEiwAu6KXt5JtPUA1VYGdmyDAIkqGDXrnt-CzDQOkpKvz1P6TEFLUy1Eorw7xoCKx8QAvD_BwE) Erişim Tarihi: 24.04.2024
- Özkan, M. E. (2019), "Sağlık Turizmi Kapsamında Türkiye'nin Medikal Turizm Potansiyeline Yönelik Bir Değerlendirme", *Turizm Ekonomi ve İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(1), pp. 50-64.
- Özkan, A. (2014), Bir Modern İşletme Yaklaşımı Olarak Dünya Sağlık ve Üçüncü Yaş Turizmi İşletmelerinde Müşteri Tatmininin Rolü: Bolu Karacasu Örneği. *Türk Hava Kurumu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İşletme Anabilim Dalı Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi*, Ankara.
- Özsarı, S. H. & Karatana Ö. (2013), "Sağlık Turizmi Açısından Türkiye'nin Durumu" *Kartal Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi Dergisi*, 24(2), pp. 136-144.
- Öztürk, Y. E. & Özcan, M. (2022), "Türkiye İçin Uluslararası Sağlık Turizmi Talebinin Kantitatif Çerçeve Değerlendirilmesi", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi*, 13(33), pp. 1-13.
- Sarman, A. & Sarman, E. (2021) "Covid-19 Pandemisinin Sağlık Turizmi Üzerindeki Etkisi". *Journal of Applied Tourism Research*, 2(2), pp.117-124.
- Sert, A. N. (2019), "Üçüncü Yaş Yerli Turistlerin Seyahat Kısıtları ve Motivasyonları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (42), pp. 200-211.
- Şendikici P. & Karakaya, E. (2021) "Bingöl İlinin Turizm Potansiyeli Kapsamında Kaplıca Örneği Turizmi ve Maceristan Karşılaştırması", *International Journal of Contemporary Tourism Research*, Özel Sayı, pp. 116-125.
- Şengül, H. & Bulut, A. (2019) "Sağlık Turizmi Çerçevesinde Türkiye'de Termal Turizmi: Bir Swot Analizi Çalışması", *ESTÜDAM Halk Sağlığı Dergisi*. 4(1), pp.55-70.
- TC Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, (2019), *On Birinci Kalkınma Planı (2019-2023)*, [https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/On\\_Birinci\\_Kalkinma\\_Planı-2019-2023.pdf](https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/On_Birinci_Kalkinma_Planı-2019-2023.pdf) , Erişim Tarihi: 05.08.2023.
- Tokü, Y.E. (217) *Turizm ve Türkiye'de Sağlık Turizmi: Bir Nitel Araştırma*, Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü Sağlık Yönetimi Anabilim Dalı Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi: İstanbul.
- Torlak, M. (2015), "Marka Şehir Oluşturma ve Bursa Şehrinin Markalaşması İçin Yol Haritası", *Tüketici ve Tüketim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(2), pp. 47-93.
- USHAŞ, (2023), Sağlık Hizmeti Verileri, <https://www.ushas.com.tr/saglik-turizmi-verileri/> Erişim Tarihi: 28.04.2024.
- Uyar, A. (2018), "Marka Şehir Kavramı ve Türkiye ile Dünyadaki Marka Şehir Çalışmaları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Uluslararası Yönetim Akademisi Dergisi*, 1(3), pp. 467-479.
- Yardan, E. D. – Dikmetaş, H. – Us, N. C. & Yabana, B. (2014), "Türkiye ve Dünyada Sağlık Turizmi", *Sağlıkta Performans ve Kalite Dergisi*", (8), pp. 27-42.
- Yıldırım, A. & Şimşek, H. (2006). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, Ankara: Seçkin Yayınevi.
- Yıldırım, S. (1997), "Üçüncü Yaş Turizmi ve Bunun Türkiye Açısından Değerlendirilmesi", *Anatolia: Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(1 – 2), pp. 77-81.
- Yılmaz, S. –Sarıaydın, İ. & Sönal, D. T. (2020), "İngiltere Özelinde Türkiye'nin Sağlık Turizmi Fırsatları", *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi (ASEAD)*, 7(1), pp. 74-85.