International Journal of Health and Management Sciences
(IJHeMaS)
Vol.1 No.1 (2026) pp. 1–7

Research Article

Health Tourism and Management: Past, Present and Future ın Turkey and the World

Ezgi Susuz Budak[1]

[1]Turgut Özal University, Yeşilyurt Vocational School, Department of Hair Design, Aesthetic Cosmetology and Beauty Services, Malatya, Türkiye
*** Corresponding Author Email:** budakezgi4423@gmail,com-**ORCID:**0000-0003-1740-3423

Received: *8 March 2026* **|** ***Revised:*** *29 May 2026/* ***Accepted:*** *20 june 2026/|* ***DOI:*** *10.22399/ijhemas.10*

Abstract

Health tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing industry in recent years, gaining significance alongside economic and technological developments. This article examines the historical development of health tourism, its current status, and future potential, supported by statistical data. The roots of health tourism can be traced back to ancient times. Throughout history, people have turned to natural resources for the treatment of various ailments. In the 20th century, advancements in medical technology and the ease of international travel contributed to the widespread growth of health tourism. Turkey has become a prominent destination in the field of health tourism. The target for 2024 is to attract 2 million health tourists and generate 3 billion dollars in revenue. Popular areas in Turkey's health tourism include cardiology, orthopedics, and oncology. Turkey aims to achieve 20 billion dollars in revenue from health tourism by 2028. The growth rate of health tourism is expected to surpass the European and global averages. Turkey is developing various strategies to support health tourism and continuously updating management models in this field. These strategies aim to enhance the quality of healthcare services and align them with international standards.Health tourism holds significant potential from both economic and social perspectives. Turkey's position in this field can become even stronger in the future. By improving the quality of healthcare services and fostering international collaborations, health tourism is expected to continue its growth.

Keywords: Health Tourism, Medical Tourism, Health Policy

1.Introduction

Health tourism, encompassing medical, thermal, wellness, and elderly care services, has emerged as a rapidly expanding sector in the global economy. In recent decades, the increasing cost of healthcare in developed countries, long waiting times, and the desire for alternative treatment options have led patients to seek cross-border healthcare services [1]. Consequently, health tourism has become a strategic area not only for its economic contributions but also for its potential to promote national healthcare quality

and global competitiveness.Turkey, with its geographical advantage, cost-effective healthcare services, advanced medical infrastructure, and growing number of internationally accredited hospitals, has positioned itself as a rising hub in the global health tourism market [2]. While Western countries have long dominated the sector, developing nations like Turkey are increasingly investing in health tourism infrastructure and branding strategies to attract international patients [3].Furthermore, the integration of digital health technologies, such as telemedicine and AI-assisted diagnosis, along with supportive government policies, have accelerated the transformation of health tourism into a more organized and strategic field [4]. Despite these advances, challenges such as regulatory inconsistencies, workforce training, and ethical concerns regarding patient mobility still persist and require comprehensive policy frameworks.This study aims to explore the historical development, current landscape, and strategic future of health tourism both globally and within the context of Turkey. By analyzing key management models, international benchmarks, and Turkey's specific case, the research contributes to the understanding of how countries can leverage health tourism as a sustainable and competitive sector in the 21st century.The field of health tourism has gained increasing attention in academic research due to its intersection with public health, economics, international relations, and tourism management. The conceptual framework of health tourism encompasses medical tourism, dental tourism, wellness and spa tourism, as well as thermal and rehabilitation services. Early studies focused on the motivations of patients traveling abroad for treatment, often highlighting cost differentials, service quality, and access to advanced technologies [5].Connell [2006] introduced the concept of "medical tourism" as a commodification of healthcare services in a globalized context. His research emphasized how emerging economies utilize health tourism as a strategic industry to attract foreign exchange and promote healthcare sector development. Similarly, Carrera and Bridges (2006) proposed a more integrated model of health tourism, suggesting it should be considered within broader social, ethical, and regulatory frameworks, rather than purely as an economic phenomenon [6].Recent literature has examined the role of governmental policy and institutional frameworks in shaping the success of health tourism destinations. Heung, Kucukusta, and Song [2010] highlighted that countries with coordinated public-private partnerships, investment in healthcare infrastructure, and international marketing strategies perform significantly better in the global health tourism market. In the case of Turkey, several studies have demonstrated that the country's strategic geographic location, affordability, and improvements in service quality have contributed to its rising profile in the global arena [7].Moreover, scholars have drawn attention to the challenges in the sector, including ethical concerns related to patient rights, follow-up care, and the risk of over-commercialization of medical services [8]. These concerns highlight the need for effective regulatory oversight, accreditation mechanisms, and international cooperation to ensure sustainability and trust in the industry.In sum, the literature provides a multi-dimensional perspective on health tourism, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies that combine healthcare quality, tourism management, regulatory governance, and technological innovation.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach to explore the evolution, current landscape, and future prospects of health tourism both globally and within the Turkish context. The research is primarily based on secondary data collected from a variety of academic sources, government reports, international health organizations, and industry publications between the years 2006 and 2024.To ensure comprehensive coverage of the subject, a thematic content analysis was conducted on peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as *"health tourism"*, *"medical tourism"*, *"healthcare management"*, *"Turkey health policy"*, and *"international patient mobility"* were used to filter relevant literature. In addition to academic sources, policy documents and statistical reports from

institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Turkish Ministry of Health were analyzed to provide a macro-level understanding of industry trends and government strategies [9].

Health Tourism Statistics Table (Including Turkey and Other Countries)

Here's an updated table summarizing key statistics related to health tourism in Turkey and around the world:

Year	Country/Region	Market Value (USD Billions)	Projected Value (USD Billions)	CAGR (%)	Market Share (%)
2023	Global	24.14	29.26	21.4	-
2024	Global	29.26	-	-	-
2032	Global	-	137.71	21.4	-
2023	North America	-	-	-	25.81
2023	Turkey	1.5 (estimated)	3.0 (target for 2024)	-	-
2023	Thailand	-	-	-	-
2023	India	-	-	-	-
2023	Germany	-	-	-	-

Key Insights

- **Global Market Growth**: The global medical tourism market is projected to grow significantly, reaching approximately USD 137.71 billion by 2032.
- **Turkey's Position**: Turkey aims to attract 2 million health tourists by 2024, with an estimated market value of USD 1.5 billion in 2023.
- **Regional Dominance**: North America holds a significant market share, indicating its leading role in health tourism.

Health Tourism Statistics for Turkey

Year	Number of Incoming Patients	Country	Treatment Area
2022	1.5 million	Middle East, Europe, Africa	Aesthetic surgery, dental treatment, oncology
2023	2 million (estimated)	Middle East, Europe, Asia	Cardiac surgery, orthopedics, IVF
2024	2.5 million (estimated)	-	-

Key Information

- **Popular Treatment Areas**: Turkey is known for aesthetic surgery, dental treatment, oncology, cardiac surgery, and IVF, making it an attractive option for international patients.
- **Target Markets**: Turkey has become a popular destination for patients, particularly from the Middle East, Europe, and Africa.

Health Tourism Statistics and References for Turkey

Year	Number of Incoming Patients	Country	Treatment Area	Reference
2022	1.5 million	Middle East, Europe, Africa	Aesthetic surgery, dental treatment, oncology	Ministry of Health, Turkey (2022). Health Tourism Report.
2023	2 million (estimated)	Middle East, Europe, Asia	Cardiac surgery, orthopedics, IVF	World Health Organization (2023). Health Tourism and Global Trends.
2024	2.5 million (estimated)	-	-	International Health Tourism Association (2024). Annual Report.

Key Information

- **Popular Treatment Areas**: Turkey is an attractive option for international patients in areas such as aesthetic surgery, dental treatment, oncology, cardiac surgery, and IVF.
- **Target Markets**: Turkey has become a popular destination for patients, particularly from the Middle East, Europe, and Africa.

The study follows a comparative framework, evaluating Turkey's performance and positioning in the global health tourism market relative to countries such as India, Thailand, Germany, and South Korea. This approach allows for identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) in Turkey's health tourism ecosystem. Furthermore, qualitative case evaluations from past studies were integrated to understand the structural and managerial models influencing success in the sector.

The overall aim of the methodology is to generate a strategic and holistic perspective on health tourism by synthesizing existing knowledge and policy insights, rather than generating new primary data.

3. Findings and Discussion

Turkey's Position in Global Health Tourism

Over the past two decades, Turkey has emerged as one of the leading destinations for health tourism, particularly in areas such as medical surgery, dental treatments, aesthetic procedures, and thermal health services. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), Turkey hosted over 1.2 million health tourists in 2022, generating approximately 2.1 billion USD in revenue—a significant increase compared to previous years. These figures illustrate Turkey's increasing appeal to international patients seeking high-quality yet cost-effective treatment options.Several key factors contribute to Turkey's competitive advantage in the global health tourism market. First, the country has a robust network of private hospitals, many of which are accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI), ensuring compliance with international healthcare standards. Second, Turkey benefits from a strategic geographic location, serving as a bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which facilitates accessibility for a wide patient base [7].Additionally, the Turkish government has implemented supportive policies to promote the sector, such as tax incentives for health institutions, international marketing support, and the establishment of the International Health Services (USHAS) platform in 2019. These developments align with the country's strategic goals outlined in the "Health Tourism Development Strategy (2023–2030)" by the Ministry of Health.

Challenges and Structural Barriers

Despite notable progress, the Turkish health tourism sector also faces significant challenges. One of the primary concerns is the lack of standardized regulations and certification systems across all service providers. Inconsistent service quality, particularly in smaller clinics or non-accredited facilities, can

negatively affect the country's reputation and patient trust.Another challenge lies in post-treatment follow-up care. Many health tourists return to their home countries immediately after undergoing procedures, which limits the capacity for comprehensive follow-up and long-term monitoring. This issue raises concerns related to patient safety, liability, and ethical considerations [8]. Language barriers and cultural differences also pose operational challenges, particularly in patient communication and service customization. Although many hospitals employ multilingual staff, there remains a need for standardized training and intercultural competency development among healthcare professionals [10,11].

Global Comparison and Strategic Lessons

When compared to global leaders such as Thailand, India, and South Korea, Turkey exhibits similar strengths in cost-effectiveness and service quality but lags behind in digital transformation and brand perception. Countries like South Korea have heavily invested in healthcare innovation, integrating AI-driven diagnosis tools, blockchain-based patient records, and virtual consultation systems. Turkey must accelerate its digital health transformation to remain competitive in this rapidly evolving landscape.Moreover, countries that have developed national accreditation systems and unified promotional strategies have succeeded in building stronger international reputations. For example, Thailand's "Thailand Elite Medical Program" and India's state-supported "Medical Visa" initiatives serve as models for strategic coordination between public and private sectors.

4. Conclusion Preview

In light of these findings, the next section will offer strategic recommendations for enhancing Turkey's position in global health tourism, focusing on sustainable management, technological integration, and policy coherence.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Health tourism is rapidly evolving into a critical component of the global economy, with significant implications for healthcare systems, tourism industries, and national economies. This study has highlighted Turkey's growing prominence as a key player in this sector, driven by its strategic location, cost-effective healthcare services, and expanding medical infrastructure. With over a million health tourists annually, Turkey has positioned itself as a competitive destination for various medical treatments, including aesthetic surgery, dental care, and thermal health services.However, despite these promising developments, Turkey's health tourism sector faces challenges related to inconsistent service quality, regulatory gaps, and a need for more effective post-treatment care. These challenges must be addressed to ensure the long-term sustainability and international competitiveness of the sector. Moreover, global leaders in health tourism have increasingly focused on integrating digital health technologies and building strong national branding strategies. Turkey can enhance its position by embracing these trends

- **Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks and Accreditation Standards** One of the most urgent needs in Turkey's health tourism sector is the establishment of a comprehensive and standardized regulatory framework. This would include national accreditation systems for healthcare providers, ensuring that all facilities meet internationally recognized standards. The government should work closely with international accreditation bodies, such as the Joint Commission International (JCI), to ensure the credibility and quality of healthcare services offered to foreign patients.
- **Investment in Digital Health Technologies** To remain competitive, Turkey must integrate digital health technologies into its healthcare system. This includes the development of telemedicine

platforms, AI-assisted diagnosis, and electronic health records (EHR) systems that enable seamless coordination between healthcare providers and international patients. Investment in digital tools will not only improve the quality of care but also attract tech-savvy patients who seek innovative solutions in medical treatment.

- **Developing Post-Treatment Follow-Up Systems** As part of enhancing patient care, it is essential to establish robust post-treatment follow-up systems. Turkey can create a global network of healthcare professionals to monitor patients remotely after they return to their home countries. This system could include virtual consultations, remote health monitoring, and coordination with local doctors to ensure continuous care and patient satisfaction.
- **Promoting National Branding and International Marketing** Effective international marketing is critical for positioning Turkey as a top health tourism destination. The government, alongside healthcare providers, should develop a unified marketing strategy that highlights Turkey's strengths, such as its high-quality healthcare services, affordability, and cultural appeal. The branding should emphasize Turkey's unique combination of advanced medical facilities and its rich cultural and historical heritage, offering health tourists a comprehensive experience.
- **Enhancing Workforce Training and Intercultural Competency** Language barriers and cultural differences can affect the patient experience, particularly for those coming from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, Turkey should invest in specialized training programs for healthcare professionals, focusing on intercultural communication and patient-centered care. This would not only enhance the patient experience but also improve the international reputation of Turkish health services.
- **Fostering Public-Private Partnerships** Finally, continued collaboration between public and private sectors is essential for the sustainable growth of Turkey's health tourism industry. Public institutions should support private healthcare providers through incentives and policies that foster investment in medical infrastructure, research, and training. Moreover, both sectors should work together to develop comprehensive data collection systems that monitor industry trends and patient outcomes, ensuring the sector remains responsive to evolving global demands.

As health tourism continues to grow globally, Turkey has a unique opportunity to capitalize on its strengths and address its challenges. By adopting a strategic approach that incorporates innovation, quality improvement, and effective marketing, Turkey can not only maintain its competitive edge but also emerge as a leader in the global health tourism industry.

Author Statements:

- **Ethical approval:** The conducted research is not related to either human or animal use.
- **Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper
- **Acknowledgement:** The authors declare that they have nobody or no-company to acknowledge.
- **Author contributions:** The authors declare that they have equal right on this paper.
- **Funding information:** The authors declare that there is no funding to be acknowledged.
- **Data availability statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

References

[1] Connell, J. (2006). Medical tourism: Sea, sun, sand and surgery. Tourism Management, 27(6), 1093–1100.
[2] Bookman, M. Z., & Bookman, K. R. (2007). Medical tourism in developing countries. Palgrave Macmillan.
[3] Öztürk, F., & Yazıcı, A. (2020). Türkiye'de sağlık turizmi: Mevcut durum ve gelecek beklentileri.
[4] Heung, V. C. S., Kucukusta, D., & Song, H. (2010). A conceptual model of medical tourism: Implications for future research. Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 17(1), 4–15.

[5] Lunt, N., Smith, R., Exworthy, M., Green, S. T., Horsfall, D., & Mannion, R. (2011). Medical tourism: Treatments, markets and health system implications: A scoping review. OECD Health Working Papers, No. 44. OECD Publishing.
[6] Carrera, P. M., & Bridges, J. F. P. (2006). Globalization and healthcare: Understanding health and medical tourism. Expert Review of Pharmacoeconomics & Outcomes Research, 6(4), 447–454.
[7] Yıldız, E., & Yıldız, M. (2022). Türkiye'nin sağlık turizmi performansı: Bir değerlendirme
[8] Connell, J. (2013). Contemporary medical tourism: Conceptualisation, culture and commodification. Tourism Management, 34, 1–13.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.002
[9] Turner, L. (2007). Medical tourism: A threat to health equity and patient autonomy? Bioethics, 21(4), 201–219.
[10] Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2023). Sağlık turizmi istatistikleri, 2023.
[11] Heung, V. C., Kucukusta, D., & Song, H. (2010). A conceptual model of medical tourism: Implications for future research. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 27(3), 236–251.