

Chapter 14

The Destination Preferences of Foreign Tourists During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Attitudes Towards: Marmaris, Turkey

Funda Varnacı Uzun

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4915-9894>

Aksaray University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This chapter aimed to determine the factors affecting the destination preferences of foreign tourists visiting Marmaris while COVID-19 pandemic continues, their reasons for selecting Marmaris, and their attitudes and thoughts related to the pandemic. In this chapter, a conceptual framework was presented. Within the context of the conceptual framework, the relationship between COVID-19 and tourism was discussed. Then, the factors affecting the destination preferences of tourists and the changes in these factors as a result of the pandemic was mentioned. Within the context of the theoretical framework, tourists' security perceptions during the pandemic and the effects of the pandemic on the participation of tourists in tourism and tourist behaviours was discussed. In the present study, qualitative research method was employed. The data collected from the tourists were analyzed by using content analysis, one of the qualitative analysis techniques.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the Wuhan City of Hubei State in China in December 2019 and has rapidly spread across the globe through human-to-human transmission. Wuhan is a major transportation hub in China. Despite the rapid increase in the number of cases in Wuhan, the Chinese government implemented the first isolation measure to prevent the pandemic by banning the Spring Festival

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in Wuhan, which was one of the important cultural events in China. Despite all the isolation measures implemented in China, COVID-19 rapidly spread to other countries. Currently, China seems to have taken the pandemic under control; however, the pandemic continues at full speed especially in Europe and America despite the vaccinations (Wen, Kozak, Yang, & Liu, 2020).

Many infectious diseases including HIV, Ebola, H1N1 and H5N1 emerged throughout the human history. As a result of tourism activities, diseases that emerged in a certain region were transmitted worldwide, leading to pandemics. This is caused by the transmission of the infectious diseases to various parts of the world through the interaction of tourists traveling between countries with the infected individuals (Altınay Özdemir, 2020). Health disasters, which involve both communicable and noncommunicable diseases, have global health impacts, and they cause a wide range of socioeconomic disruptions and losses (Ahmad, Haroon, Baig, & Hui, 2020).

Many countries have taken specific measures to prevent the spread of the disease, such as suspending visa policies on arrival and imposing strict travel bans (Wen, Kozak, Yang, & Liu, 2020). According to the UNWTO report, travel restrictions have been implemented in almost all destinations of the world as of 20 April 2020 (Zoğal & Emekli, 2020). Travel restrictions imposed by 209 countries were implemented in four different methods. These methods included closing borders completely, closing a specific destination within the country, banning flights completely, or implementing quarantine, medical certificate or isolation measures to visitors from outside the country (Özçoban, 2020). As countries closed their borders, international tourism started to shrink. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that global international tourist arrivals could decline between 20% and 30% in 2020, resulting in a reduction in the international tourism revenues by 300-450 Billion US Dollars (Li, Zhang, Xinyu, Kozak, & Wen, 2020); (Wen, Kozak, Yang, & Liu, 2020). Nonetheless, the situation was clearly much worse at the end of 2020, compared to the estimations of UNWTO. In 2020, the number of international tourists decreased by approximately 1 billion individuals compared to the previous year, and there was a 74% decrease. International tourism revenues also decreased by approximately 1.3 trillion US Dollars. Around 100-120 million jobs related to tourism are also at risk (UNWTO, 2021). According to the data of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Turkey hosted 51,747,199 tourists in 2019, and has been listed among the countries that were highly affected by the pandemic (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021). Due to restrictions and measures taken in conjunction with the spread of the pandemic worldwide, there was a 64.73% decline in March, when the first positive case of COVID-19 was identified in Turkey (Özçoban, 2020). There was a decrease by 69.15% in the number of tourists visiting Turkey in 2020, declining to 15.9 million individuals. Tourism revenues also decreased to 12.1 billion US Dollars, with a 65.1% decrease compared to the values of 2019 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021).

BACKGROUND

Tourism demand is elastic and trust-oriented. It is classified as a luxury consumption. Tourism demand is a fragile need, which can easily be abandoned. The situations involving fear and panic, where there is a lack of trust environment, always affect tourism demand primarily (Yenişehirlioğlu & Salha, 2020). Tourism crisis has been defined as the events that threaten the usual course of tourism activities, cause tourists to have negative thoughts, and prevent tourism businesses from continuing their activities (Kiper, Saraç, Çolak, & Batman, 2020). In the past, various crises have been experienced in global tourism. Major devastating events and global crises experienced between 2000 and 2015 include the terrorist

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