

## Türkiye's Tourism Success During and Post COVID-19

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### Abstract

The number of tourists and tourism revenues announced every year is very important for countries whose economy depends on tourism. Within the scope of this study, Türkiye's tourism success during and post-COVID-19 has been revealed in the light of the data published by the UNWTO. Qualitative research method was used in this study. In this context, secondary data were examined using the document analysis method and inferences were made in the light of UNWTO's tourism statistics. The main research question of this study is “What might a country have done to achieve what they have achieved in the field of tourism?” In this study, Butler's (2022) tourism success model was used and the positive and negative actions of Türkiye during the year were evaluated. Policies, prohibitions, incentives, discounts, that is, various areas that can affect the success of tourism have been researched. Tourism success model consists of 4 main titles. In this study, Türkiye's tourism and planning are examined under the titles of Politics, Environment, Economics, and Social/Cultural. The top ten countries which hosted the most tourists were included in the study's purview. The most striking result of the study is that while the effects of the pandemic decrease and the world heal its wounds, Turkey ranks first in hosting tourists with an increase of 88 percent.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Success, Türkiye, UNWTO Statistics, COVID-19.

**JEL Kodu/Code:** L83.

### Türkiye'nin COVID-19 Sırasında ve Sonrasındaki Turizm Başarısı

#### Özet

Ekonomisi turizme dayalı olan ülkeler için her yıl açıklanan turist sayısı ve turizm gelirleri oldukça önemlidir. Bu çalışma kapsamında Türkiye'nin COVID-19 döneminde ve sonrasındaki turizm başarısı UNWTO'nun yayınladığı veriler ışığında ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu kapsamda ikincil veriler doküman analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiş ve UNWTO'nun turizm istatistikleri ışığında çıkarımlarda bulunulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın temel araştırma problemi “Bir ülke turizm alanında elde ettiği başarıya ulaşmak için neler yapmış olabilir?” sorusudur. Bu çalışmada Butler'in (2022) turizm başarı modeli kullanılmış ve Türkiye'nin yıl içindeki olumlu ve olumsuz eylemleri değerlendirilmiştir. Politikalar, yasaklar, teşvikler, indirimler yani turizmin başarısını etkileyebilecek çeşitli alanlar araştırılmıştır. Turizm başarı modeli 4 ana başlıktan oluşmaktadır. Bu çalışmada Türkiye'nin turizm ve planlaması Politika, Çevre, Ekonomi ve Sosyal/Kültürel başlıkları altında incelenmektedir. Araştırmanın kapsamına en çok turist ağırlayan ilk 10 ülke dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmanın en dikkat çekici sonucu ise salgının etkileri azalıp dünya yaralarını sararken, Türkiye'nin yüzde 88 artışla turist ağırlamada ilk sırada yer almasıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Turizm, Başarı, Türkiye, UNWTO İstatistikleri, COVID-19.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Undoubtedly, each country creates different strategies to develop tourism. The measurement of success in tourism, which is an activity where countries exchange culture, generate income and share their natural beauties with different civilizations, is a concept that may vary depending on the perspective of the researcher. Although tourism has numerous positive aspects, it is quite fragile due to terrorist attacks, political events and pandemics (Acar, 2020). All countries have gone through very difficult times due to the pandemic in the years covered by the study. The issue of healing the economic wounds caused by the increase in the size of the crisis can also be reconciled with the return to tourism. Tourism is one of the most important weapons after the normalization process for countries that want to quickly heal the wounds of the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world. Countries achieve economic prosperity by maintaining their import and export balances or, if possible, by making a positive contribution in this regard by tourism revenues. The case of widening the gap in this regard is called the current account deficit in the economy and the current account deficit issue is of vital importance, especially for developing countries (Lorde et al., 2013). For this reason, studies have been focusing only on the financial aspect of tourism for many years in order to measure success. Nowadays, measuring tourism success only economically is harshly criticized. It would not be wrong to say that tourism has undergone a transformation in itself, both because of the increased demand for nature after the health crisis and because people now prefer open areas instead of crowded environments. Researchers who think that different variables, as well as economic factors, have an impact on the success of tourism checked sustainability with all dimensions like residents satisfaction, percentage of companies which have sustainable applications, carbon footprint and the disturbance of overnight stays during seasons to measure tourism success (Costa et al., 2022), and to receive mature and valuable customers rather than having more tourists by quantity (Araujo, 2021). Although it is possible to list many examples like this, the main lines of success can be examined through Butler's model. The reason for choosing this specific model is because it checks the economic issues like former researchers and evaluates the sustainable practices that the destinations apply. The model is not only about these two dimensions, it also measures the social, cultural and politic improvement that a country has made.

The main objective of this study is to highlight the successes and failures of tourism in each country and to reveal what breakthroughs have been made in this regard. In this context, answers to the research problem will be sought with the innovations, activities, economic and sustainable measures and statistical data made by the countries. This study will be examined within the scope of the model in question, and firstly, information will be given about the pandemic period from which the data of the study was taken, then the model will be explained in detail and what Turkey has done for tourism success will be examined under 4 headings (Politics, Environment, Economics, Social/Cultural).

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. COVID-19 and Its Effects on Tourism**

It is thought that the COVID-19 pandemic, which was announced in December 2019 and the first case was known to have occurred in Wuhan, China, was also seen in October-November 2019, according to recent studies (Stanway, 2021). In the official statement made in March 2020, it was declared that this was a pandemic, stating that the cases and deaths had increased excessively and that it would spread to more countries in the future and become more serious (WHO, 2020). This being the case, many countries have decided to take various precautions and close their borders to visitors from outside. Acar (2020) emphasized that the continuation of tourism activity after the COVID-19 pandemic will give wings to the disease and cause it to spread to many more countries, and that the

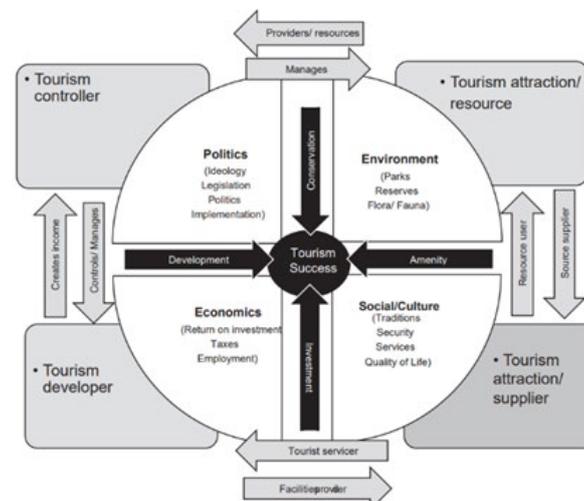
administrations took the following measures, taking into account the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO):

- Increased border security and bans on entering and exiting countries
- Quarantines applied in regions where the pandemic was detected
- Disinfection practices in public spaces to prevent the spread of the pandemic
- National and international sports and art events that have been canceled or are in question to be canceled
- Curfews
- Travel restrictions
- Applications for interruption of education

Following these restrictions, large fluctuations were observed in the number of tourists for that year and in the following years. Some countries went through this pandemic period with little economic damage, while others experienced serious economic crises. With the closure and reopening of the borders, tourism activity increased and the wounds began to heal. One of the countries that took the right steps in this period was Türkiye. Within the scope of this study, it was planned to reveal what was done correctly regarding the number of visitors and their expenditures, which reflected positively in the statistics. In this context, Butler's (2022) Tourism Success model was used to examine it in detail.

## 2.2. Tourism Success Model

There are many studies in the literature to measure the tourism success of destinations. In these studies, different subheadings of tourism and alternative tourism types are generally evaluated. Some of those are; in the field of rural tourism (Fotaiadis et al., 2016), in the field of hospitality (Sheresheva & Kopiski, 2016), in the field of community-based tourism (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009), in the field of economics (Perles-Ribes et al., 2016), in the field of sustainability (Aydin & Ekmeksiz, 2018) and some are in the field of wine tourism, which is a more niche field (Getz et al., 1999). It is possible to increase these examples, but in this study, a more comprehensive model was preferred instead of examining success in specific areas. In the model put forward by Butler (2022), a country's success in tourism was measured in terms of economy, socio-cultural aspects, environmental and political issues. The mentioned tourism success model is as shown in Figure 1 with its details.



**Figure 1: Tourism Success Model**

**Source: Butler, 2022.**

While integrating this model into this study, various statistics of all countries were given, but only the practices of Turkey, which is thought to have gained great momentum, were examined within the scope of the model. The most basic feature that distinguishes this model from others is that it was prepared taking into account the COVID-19 period. Considering the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically revealed how important tourism is for many countries, it is essential to reconsider the criteria for success. Real success will mean not only the satisfaction of tourists and destination residents, but also environmental well-being, sustainability of the economic sector and a sense of satisfaction of political stakeholders. Their detection will also be very effective in increasing the sustainability of tourism (Butler, 2022).

### **3. METHOD**

In this study, document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The reason for choosing the document analysis method is that measuring tourism success with surveys and interview forms may lead to misleading results and the need to explain it through clear data. In addition, Bowen (2009) listed the beneficial aspects of document analysis as follows.

- Efficiency (Less time consuming)
- Availability (Ability to access resources and references directly)
- Cost-effectiveness (Less costly than other methods)
- Lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity
- Stability (Researcher cannot present his/her own opinion)
- Exactness (The identity of the work taken is clear)
- Coverage (Gives the opportunity to cover the subject more broadly)

In this context, tourism statistics announced every year by UNWTO were examined and developing countries were identified. The reason why UNWTO data was included in the study is that it is an international institution that publishes the statistics of almost every country in the most transparent and objective way. The reason for incorporating UNWTO data into the study is due to its status as an international organization that publishes statistics for almost every country in the most transparent and objective manner. In addition, this development was examined with Butler's (2022) tourism success model and what was done for the country's tourism success was compiled from secondary sources. Within the scope of the study, national and international newspapers, articles and web pages published between 2020-2022 were examined. The main reason for this is to have the opportunity to compare data and information during COVID-19 and when the pandemic begins to ease.

### **4.FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. What Has Türkiye Done Recently to Develop Tourism?**

In order to increase Türkiye's tourism success by developing and promoting tangible and intangible heritages, and establishing short, medium, and long-term communication, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) was established on 15 July 2019 under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TGA, 2022a). Leaving aside the discussion of whether destination management organizations (DMOs) are useful (Dredge, 2016), and considering that the period when this organization was founded was the pandemic period, it would not be wrong to say that it was a very successful move. Safe tourism certificates and vaccination of tourism personnel have been the most prominent of the practices made in order to relieve the anxiety of the tourists who will travel to Türkiye and to take the least blow from the tourism sector in these extraordinary conditions (TGA,

2022b). In order to manage the process properly, this and many similar practices and restrictions have been put into effect. In this context, to demonstrate the success of tourism, the subject is examined under four main headings as in Butler's (2022) model. These are; Politics, Environment, Economics, and Social/Cultural.

#### **4.1.1. Politics**

It is obvious that one of the biggest conditions for success in tourism in recent years is to manage the current pandemic process in the best way. For this reason, each country has tried to provide the tourist flow in the best way at that moment and in the future by developing its own strategies. It has been attempted to anticipate the issues that the tourism sector will face from the beginning of the pandemic phase in Türkiye, and measures in this regard have been undertaken. In this context, measures such as assisting travel and accommodation businesses in taking precautions against COVID-19, disseminating and promoting the vaccine, and providing rapid testing at airports have been tried to mitigate the pandemic's negative impact on transportation and tourism sectors (Kılıç, 2022). Also, the Turkish government has produced some applications to control its large population. To mention the most important of these, the HES Code (Hayat Eve Sığar) tracking system comes to the fore. HES Code is a code that allows you to securely share whether you carry any risk in terms of COVID-19 disease with institutions and individuals in your transactions such as transportation or visiting within the scope of controlled social life. The HES codes you share can be queried through the application or through the services provided to the institutions (Hayat Eve Sığar, 2022). In this way, it is possible for the people participating in the tourism movement to feel safe from the first moment they enter the country, knowing whether the people or the staff around them are in the risky group or not. Perhaps the most important and groundbreaking innovation in terms of tourism has been the safe tourism certification. This certification will be discussed in detail under the social/cultural heading, as it allows tourists to meet their social demands.

In addition to health applications, a specific website has taken the place of fragmentary promotional applications with a significant breakthrough in this period. Prior to this, each city was carrying out promotional activities separately, and the person looking for information about the country could experience confusion. So, a website called “Go Türkiye” has been created in order to deal with the promotional activities of 81 provinces in tourism in Türkiye under a single title and to maintain regular promotional activities (UNWTO, 2021).

#### **4.1.2. Environment**

It is well known that being on vacation is not an environmentally friendly movement (Dolcinar, 2022) and the importance given to this problem is increasing significantly. Countries have started to turn to green and sustainable practices in order to prevent incredible damage to nature and to affect tourists who are more sensitive to the environment (Pekovic, 2021). With this awareness, Türkiye has focused on this area with the effective work of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in order to develop environmentally friendly practices such as the number of eco-hotels, the number of blue flags, and effective waste management.

The implementation of green star facilities put into effect by Türkiye within the scope of sustainable tourism has aroused great repercussions. In order to obtain the Green Star certificate, hotels have to fulfil practices such as reducing the consumption of energy, water, environmentally harmful substances and the amount of waste, increasing energy efficiency, encouraging the use of renewable energy sources, planning accommodation enterprises in an environmentally friendly manner from the investment stage and providing training on environmental awareness (Giritöglü & Güzel, 2015). According to the statistics, which were last updated on 05.08.2021, it is seen that 456 enterprises were

entitled to receive a green star and the trend in this regard increased rapidly (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021). In addition, the blue flag issue has never been left behind in this direction. As of February 2022, the number of blue flag marinas has increased to 22, the number of blue flag yachts to 6, the number of blue flag tourism boats to 10 and the number of blue flagged beaches have increased to 519 (Mavi Bayrak Türkiye, 2022). The orientation to such practices has become a necessity at the inevitable point reached in environmental pollution. Türkiye ratified the Paris Agreement on October 7, 2021, with a Presidential Decision (MFA, 2022). In this direction, Türkiye makes plans not only for today but also for the future and adds to its green practices every day. Minister Ersoy highlighted in his 2021 closing statement that Türkiye has made one more step toward meeting the Paris Agreement's requirements by inaugurating a system that would handle Antalya's wastewater problem for the next 50 years, as well as renewable electricity generation (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021). The importance given by the country administration to sustainability also affects the country's preference by tourists, and with the year 2021, it is obvious that the outcomes correspond to the effort put forth.

#### **4.1.3. Economics**

An explosion was expected after 2019, which was one of the most important years in the number of tourists and income for Türkiye, but inevitable decreases were experienced due to the global crisis. In the first months of 2020, limited traces of the virus, which were seen only in one region, had not yet affected the number of tourists in Türkiye, but in the following months, borders had to be closed and curfews had to be imposed (Çiftçi & Acet, 2021). For this reason, states had to declare some rules and economic incentives in order to protect their citizens and country. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) published the measures which were taken by Türkiye in

this period as follows:

**Table 1. Economic Measures Taken by Türkiye**

◆ An economic relief package of 15.4 billion dollars was announced to alleviate the effects of the crisis (March 2020).
◆ The Credit Guarantee Fund was doubled to reach 50 billion TL.
◆ The minimum pension increased to 1500 TL
◆ Citizens were encouraged to purchase loans for social purposes.
◆ The value-added tax (VAT) rate for domestic flights has been reduced to 1% for domestic flights.
◆ Municipalities provided food and cash support.
◆ The monthly amount transferred to social assistance associations was increased from 135 million TL to 180 million TL.
◆ As of January, the entire discretionary financial support amounted to 646 billion TL. Credit guarantees, credit deferrals, tax deferrals, VAT reductions on some goods (eg food and accommodation services) until May 2021 are among the main material measures taken.

**Source: UNWTO, 2021.**

Although these regulations gave the public a little breather, the effects of the pandemic were reaching levels that no one could predict. The situation is of course even more difficult for countries like Türkiye, where a considerable part of their income comes from tourism. It is unavoidable that the economic problems that have accumulated over the years have also triggered this situation. While the economic problems experienced in 2018-2019 caused the current account deficit to increase, the pandemic that followed made the situation even more difficult. Even though the Central Bank of Türkiye applied a high-interest policy in order to suppress the foreign currency at the beginning, it switched to a different strategy in 2021 and could not prevent the Turkish Lira from melting against

foreign currencies with the incessant interest rate cuts (Güngen, 2021). To look at the glass from the half-full side, the Turkish tourism market was seen as an opportunity for foreign tourists who saw their own currency increase against the Turkish Lira, and this showed itself in the statistics of the number of tourists entering the country.

While Türkiye has had a good place in the world ranking in terms of tourist numbers for years, the same success was not reached with regard to income. With the year 2021, it is seen that Türkiye started to get the results of its hard work and started to see the levels it targeted. Amid all these economic difficulties mentioned in the previous lines, achieving these successes is also admirable.

#### **4.1.4. Social/Cultural**

Recently, many projects have been carried out in Türkiye regarding social life and cultural values, as in other fields. In this context, to increase cultural awareness, 2019 was declared the year of Göbeklitepe, 2020 the year of Patara, and 2021 the year of Yunus Emre. When it comes to 2021 success, it is impossible to think about what has been done in the last period without COVID-19 measures. In this context, Türkiye has started the safe tourism certification system, which is an example to the world (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism). As of 01.01.2021, this certificate is compulsory for accommodation facilities with 30 or more rooms, optional in other accommodation facilities, food and beverage facilities, tour and transfer vehicles, congress and art facilities, theme parks, mechanical lines, and sea tourism. Also, for the tourists visiting the country to feel comfortable while receiving services and to continue their social life with peace of mind, the program of vaccination of tourism personnel has also been put into effect. In Türkiye, which stands out with its advanced health system, 11 more hospitals with a 14 thousand-bed capacity were added with the latest technologies in 2020 alone. In addition to this, more than 1 million 250 thousand tests have been carried out so far in Türkiye. Also, the overall daily test capacity was 50 thousand and it was mentioned that it can increase if deemed necessary (TGA, 2022b). In this critical period, the practices carried out in the country were not limited to the field of health. In this difficult period, many cultural practices were implemented. These cultural events and developments are as follows:

#### **Table 2. Cultural Developments**

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- ◆The Aeneas Route became the first archaeological route of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes program by being entitled to receive the Council of Europe Cultural Route certificate, thus increasing the number of registered routes passing through Türkiye to 7.

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  - ◆By the end of 2021, the number of cultural centres put into operation by the Ministry increased to 122.

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  - ◆2.5 years after the foundation of the Istanbul Atatürk Cultural Center was laid, it was put into service in record time.

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  - ◆The number of excavation and research works, which was 502 in 2020, was increased to 602 as of October 2021 with the support given.

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  - ◆Türkiye's first national archaeology institute, the "Turkish Archeology and Cultural Heritage Institute," began to be established.

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  - ◆Within the scope of the fight against cultural smuggling, 525 historical artifacts were brought from abroad, reaching the highest number in the last ten years.

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  - ◆The number of destinations on the UNESCO World Heritage List increased to 19 with the addition of the Malatya Arslantepe Archaeological Site.

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  - ◆Galata Tower, which has been turned into a museum, broke the daily visitor record of all time with 3,754 visitors on October 29, 2021.

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  - ◆Türkiye took its place among the top 5 countries on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity with its 20 registered cultural values.

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  - ◆6 museums were opened in 2021, and the organizing and landscaping of 9 more museums and 2 ruins continue.

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  - ◆While the number of private museums operating under the supervision of the Ministry was 291 in 2020, it reached 316 as of November 2021.

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  - ◆25 thousand 641 new works were brought to the museums and the total number of works in the museums increased to 3 million 278 thousand 114.
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- ◆The wrecks of the Dardanelles War were brought into diving tourism, making it one of the most important diving centres in the world.
- ◆More churches in Cappadocia are being restored, and illegal structures are also being demolished.
- ◆Library buildings that are vulnerable to earthquakes are being demolished and new ones are being built, and local governments are being supported for the construction of these libraries.
- ◆About 130 concerts were given as part of the "2021 Summer Concerts" project.
- ◆In the last three years, a total of 80 million 967 thousand lira support has been provided to private theatres by the government.
- ◆A total of 280 million TL support was provided to approximately 40 thousand musicians and industry workers within the scope of the "Don't Let the Music Keep Quiet" support program.
- ◆With the Beyoğlu Culture Road Festival, a feast was held in which many historical and cultural areas were brought to the fore and a total of 381 events were held.
- ◆In order to draw attention to the historical and cultural values of Ankara on an international scale, the Capital Cultural Road Festival was held with 560 events attended by 5971 artists and 179 academics.
- ◆In 2019, Afyonkarahisar was included in the Unesco Gastronomy Cities, and Bursa entered the Unesco Creative Cities list in 2021 in the field of Crafts and Folk Arts.
- ◆The presence of the Turkish world in cinema was brought to the silver screen with the "Korkut Ata Turkish World Film Festival".

**Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021.**

#### **4.2. 2020-2021 World Tourism Statistics**

As in other dynamics in the world in the world, nothing has been the same in tourism since 2019. While the countries that adapted quickly to the requirements of the new normal have become advantageous in hosting tourists, some major powers in tourism have experienced serious problems. Although each crisis has its own characteristics, regardless of the type of crisis, tourism organizations can accelerate the recovery period by taking measures to mitigate its effects (Scott et al., 2008). In 2020, academic studies in the field predicted that the loss in tourism would remain between 20 and 30 percent with the pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020), but unfortunately, that wasn't the case. Also, it can be assumed that countries were slow to take measures on the assumption that the situation would get better. It should not be said that this situation is the same for every country. In Table 3, the number of tourists in 2020 and 2021 and the percentage of increase in tourists are given.

**Table 3. International Tourist Arrivals**

	Country	2020	2021	Rate of Increase/Decrease
1	Türkiye	15,89	29,93	88%
2	Spain	18,93	31,18	65%
3	Mexico	24,28	31,86	31%
4	France	41,7	48,4	16%
5	USA	19,21	22,1	15%
6	Denmark	16,07	18,41	15%
7	Italy	25,19	26,89	7%
8	United Kingdom	11,1	-	Not in the top 10 in 2021.
9	Germany	10,89	-	Not in the top 10 in 2021.
10	Austria	9,57	-	Not in the top 10 in 2021.
11	Greece	-	14,7	Not in the top 10 in 2020.
12	Arab Emirates	-	11,48	Not in the top 10 in 2020.
13	Croatia	-	10,64	Not in the top 10 in 2020.

**Source: UNWTO, 2023.**

\* The nations in this table are those whose statistics were made public and which also occurred to be among the ten most visited nations in 2020 and 2021. This list is ordered according to the percentage increase in the number of tourists.

An important limitation in the table is that countries such as China, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Russia, which host a significant amount of tourists, including France, the leader in the number of tourists in 2019, did not share all their data at the beginning of this study. However, since the data from some countries were entered into the system while the research was being conducted, the study was revised again, and the missing countries were taken into account. While China cannot find a place in the list due to the bans it has implemented, the United Kingdom happened to publish their data for 2020 but they have not been able to find a place in the list with their low statistics in 2021. France, which is also a major tourist destination among the countries whose data were uploaded later, was ranked 4th by looking at its percentage increase rate.

In this context, the data is quite remarkable in terms of understanding the situation of the countries and the trends they are in. According to Dodds and Butler (2019) and many researchers who rightly defend this idea, reaching the number of tourists above capacity is a very risky situation and they explain this situation as over tourism with a new word for an old problem. While we fully agree with this, the increase in tourist numbers has a lot to do with increasing tourist demand, which in turn has a lot to do with a country doing some things right. The fact that Türkiye, which ranks first on the list, has surpassed the United States, which had lagged behind in previous years, is a serious and undeniable success. In addition, with the recovery from the pandemic between 2020 and 2021, it is seen that countries have started to host more tourists. From this point of view, while some countries are slightly improving or even declining, it is admirable that Türkiye's increase is 88%. Nevertheless, it should not be ignored that the number of tourists is not the only determinant in the success of tourism, which is often on the agenda, and even the fact that it drags the countries to a dead end in terms of sustainability. In other words, countries that want to develop tourism must fulfill their responsibilities in many respects, as we mentioned in the research model. Then, if we leave aside which country hosts more tourists in tourism and take a look at the revenues, the situation becomes even more interesting. The rankings of the seven countries that host the most visitors are listed in Table 4 according to the expenditures made by tourists per capita.

**Table 4. International Tourism Receipts**

	Country	2020	2021	Rate of Increase/Decrease
1	Türkiye	839\$	890\$	6%
2	Spain	977\$	1048\$	7%
3	Mexico	453\$	620\$	37%
4	France	781\$	843\$	8%
5	USA	3773\$	3177\$	-16%
6	Denmark	247\$	245\$	-1%
7	Italy	786\$	935\$	19%

**Source: UNWTO, 2023.**

*\* This table shows the per capita tourist expenditure data of the top 10 countries in terms of visitor numbers in both 2020 and 2021. This list is ordered according to the percentage increase in the number of tourists.*

It is clear that some countries do not share their tourist expenditure or arrival numbers with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Although there may be various reasons for this, it is not within the scope of our research. Rather than producing conspiracy theories, it is useful to examine the situation through the clear data disclosed. It is noteworthy that Mexico has shown a major increase in tourist revenues as well as in the number of tourists. But what did they compromise in doing so? Was it really worth it? Perhaps these are the questions to ask. Mexico has decided not to impose restrictions on its citizens during the pandemic because the country's people had suffered under authoritarian regimes in the past. They argued that people had had very bad experiences and that the people and the law enforcement officers should not come face to face once again. This idea

was carried to the headlines of the Washington Post with the following statements: "No police. No curfews. No fines. No regrets." (Sheridan, 2021).

Another important result seen in the light of the statistics is the negative divergence between Türkiye and the USA once again. As for the number of tourists, Türkiye has shown an increase in the expenditure of tourists per capita. On the other hand, the USA experienced a 15% decrease. Of course, it must be said that the gap is still very large, but progress is also of great importance. In 2019, when Türkiye had a historic peak in the number of tourists, its per capita income from tourists was only 670 dollars. The success of tourist expenditure of 890 dollars in 2021 was only approached in 2003 (850 dollars) in the last 20 years (TÜRSAB, 2022). The following years will show the sustainability of the success of Türkiye, which is one of the countries that best met the extraordinary conditions in 2021.

### 4.3. 2022 World Tourism Statistics and 2023 Scenarios

It was very important whether Türkiye's 6% increase in tourism revenues for the year 2020-2021 mentioned in the study would continue in the following years, and if so, what kind of trend it would enter. In the provisional 2022 data, we see that Türkiye is in the first place by making a big difference compared to the other countries whose data are announced, compared to the year 2019 before the pandemic, which is one of the years when tourism picked up in the world. While the most dramatic decrease was in the United States with -34%, Turkey showed an increase of +40% in this period. Romania follows Turkey with 25% and Portugal with 15%. It is also remarkable that European countries are at the top of the percentage increase. These statistics are shown in Figure 2.

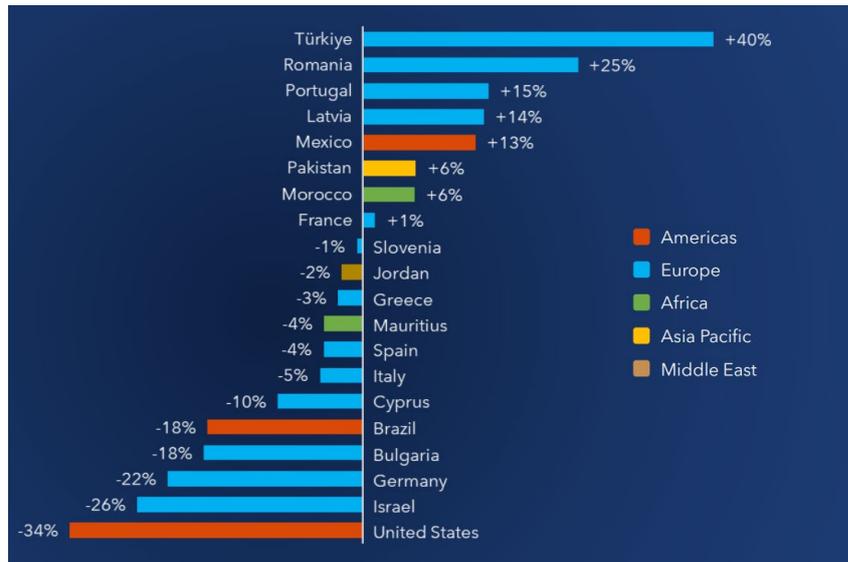


Figure 2. International Tourism Receipts 2022 (% change vs. 2019)<sup>4</sup>  
Source: UNWTO, 2023.

As stated before, the data for the year 2022, which was not published at the beginning of the study as a result of the continuous updating of the data, were shared with the public at the last stage of the study, and the opportunity to evaluate the finalized table was found. The table of UNWTO's 2022 number of tourists and tourism revenues are as follows, in order.

It should be noted that France's data is excluded because it cannot be viewed without paying a 35 euro fee. While this data has been provided free of charge all over the world for years, it is confusing that this is the case in only one country. Although the reason is beyond the scope of our research, it is open to criticism. After emphasizing this limit, the success of Spain, which found itself in first

<sup>4</sup> These are provisional data for 2022.

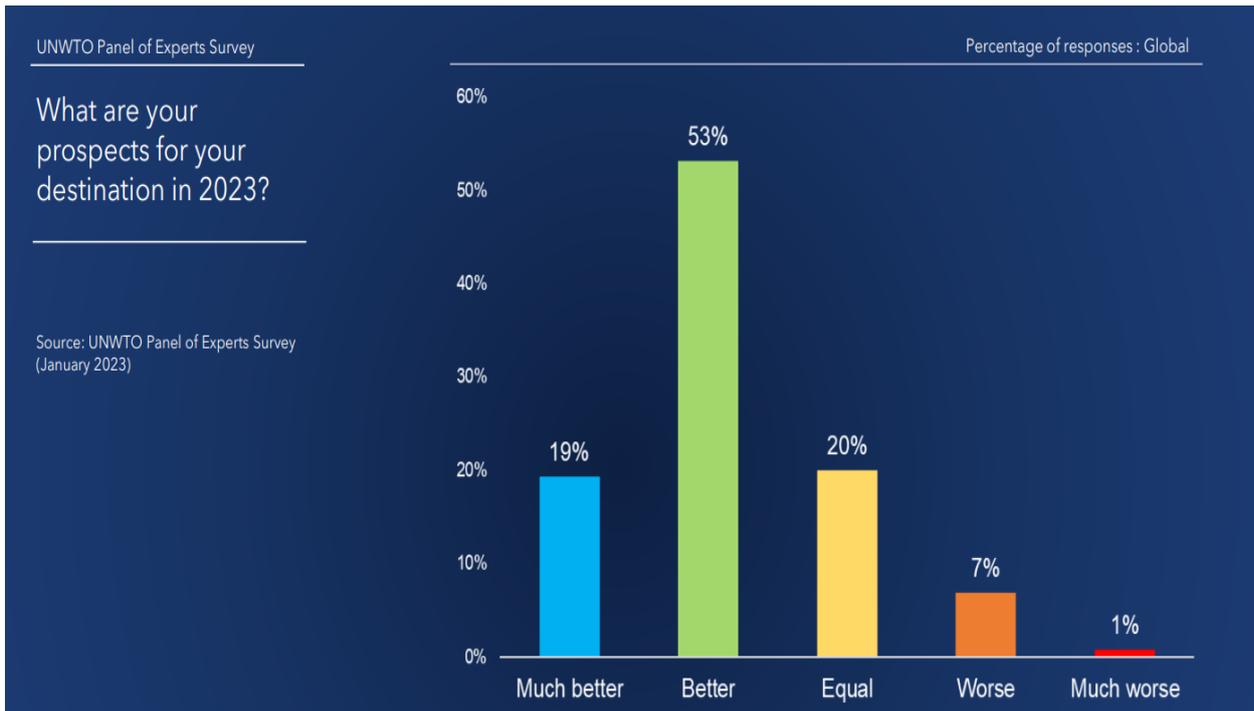
place in the list and gradually increased its momentum, should not be overlooked. After 2021 which is the year when Türkiye surpassed Italy and the United States in the number of arrivals, it was a huge question if this was a coincidence. It is seen that Türkiye passed Italy once again and hosted 50 million tourists just as the states have done.

**Table 5. International Tourism Arrivals and Receipts in 2022**

2022	Country	Arrivals	Receipts
1	Spain	71,66	1017\$
2	USA	50,87	2658\$
3	Türkiye	50,45	816\$
4	Italy	49,81	890\$
5	Mexico	38,33	731\$
6	United Kingdom	30,54	2232\$
7	Germany	28,46	1108\$
8	Greece	27,84	669\$
9	Austria	26,21	732\$
10	Arab Emirates	22,65	-

Source: UNWTO.

UNWTO has also set up an expert panel to predict the future tourism trends. In this panel, the participants were asked about their predictions regarding the year 2023. The experts, who were asked to share their expectations about the development in their own destinations, were asked to give one of these answers to the question "Much Worse, Worse, Equal, Better, Much Better". While the percentage of those who answered "Much Worse" remained at 1%, the answer "Worse" remained at 7%, and the option "Equal" remained at 20%. The pleasing part is that the expectations for the future are generally positive. "Better", the most marked option, received 53%, and "Much Better" received 19% at the Expert Panel.



**Figure 3. Expectations from 2023 (Expert Panel)**  
Source: UNWTO, 2023.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In 2019, the year tourism peaked in the world, many countries broke their own records, but with the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic, countries that set higher goals for the following years were literally disappointed.

In 2020, each country took its own measures according to its own tourism and health policies. While some countries completely closed their borders, others allowed tourism movement, albeit limited, with milder measures.

The fact that the period covering the study was a pandemic brought about some limits in the study. China, which has a very good position in tourism, closed its borders to foreign tourists, and some countries which haven't shared their data completely with the public could not find a place for themselves in this study. Since the data were constantly updated during this study, the study had to be prepared again several times. UNWTO emphasizes this situation on the database page where it publishes the data with the following words:

*“Please note that this rating by indicators does not always coincide with the official UNWTO rankings as it only ranks countries based on existing data for the selected year. As data will be updated regularly throughout the year the rankings therefore will change as well.”*

The most important result of the study is that Türkiye showed the highest increase of 88% among the countries that received the most visitors annually during the years 2020-2021. In addition, even though a record was broken in the number of tourists in 2019, the per capita expenditure for Türkiye remained at 670 dollars. This number has increased to \$839 in 2020 and \$890 in 2021. Türkiye is in the 4th place in per capita tourist expenditures in 2021 among the countries that meet these criteria and share their data with the public. When the number of visitors is ranked according to the percentage increase, the biggest increase in the world has been in Türkiye. After analyzing 2020-2021 and 2022 data it is obvious that Türkiye's 2023 data, which have entered an upward trend, are an issue that should be emphasized for future studies. Especially since it is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, it can be expected to make remarkable increases in light of 2023 targets and policies. In addition, for future studies, it is of great importance to go through a specific country, as in this article, and to reveal what is done right and wrong in order to ensure tourism success. The correct practices discussed in this study, which play a role in Turkey's success, can be applied in practice in countries that want to increase their tourism success through the benchmarking method. In this context, it is thought that the study can be a great guide for the tourism policies of countries.

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