

STAGNATING TURKISH TOURISM LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVE SOURCE MARKETS



Turkish tourism has been stagnating for the past months. The industry has been suffering for many reasons. Safety concerns, political instability and terrorism are some of the issues connected to the fall of the once top summer destination. However, all may not be lost just yet, as Turkey aims to revive its main source markets like Russia, as well as concentrate on new regions.

According to the data from the Turkish statistical office, revenues from tourism last year amounted to almost 22 billion euros. **This represents a decline of almost 30 percent compared to the year before.** Turkey plans to improve this fall in various aspects.

Tensions with Germany Could Be Costly

“For the summer holidays 2017, Turkey is hardly in demand at the moment,” says Norbert Fiebig, President of the German Travel Association. In the early booking phase between November and January, his association registered a decrease of 58 percent compared to the year before.

One of the reasons for this current massive fall in numbers is the political tension between Germany and Turkey. The provocative Nazi-comparison from Turkish President Erdogan, will likely lessen the German appetite for a visit to the Black Sea. Not to mention imprisonments of critical journalists, such as Turkish-German journalist Deniz Yücel.

Last year’s decrease ended a period of steady growth of Turkish tourism. In 2013, 5.1 million Germans visited Turkey. The following year it rose to 5.2 million and reached a peak 5.6 million in 2015. It is estimated that this year it is likely to decrease sharply to only around 4 million. The boycott is painful for Turkish hoteliers, also considering that Germans are not the only nation staying away from the country.

Fiebig hopes that the fall in demand “will not be representative of the whole season”. “This is what I expect this year. We all have an interest in the Turkish tourism market to get back to its old strength,” he said. It remains to be seen whether the hope of the President of the Association is fulfilled, but it is uncertain. After all, last year’s decline was partly caused by security fears, which were particularly pronounced shortly after the failed military coup in July.

Turkey Expecting Millions of Russians

Russian and Turkish relations have seen many ups and downs since November 2015, when Turkish military forces shot down a Russian jet. As of now, however, the relations are stable. Charter flights to Turkey from Russia are back on and this year is set to be a year of improvement and revival.

According to the Russian Association of Tour Operators, in January 2017 Turkey was visited by over 40 thousand Russians. This is an increase of 81.5 percent compared to the same period last year. This made Russia the fifth largest source market for Turkey in January.

Experts are still not sure about the exact number of Russian tourist arrivals in 2017, but the figure is expected to be between 2 and 5 million people. According to the head of the Association of

Professional Hoteliers of Turkey, Hakan Duran, 7.5-8 million tourists will visit Turkey, including 2-2.5 million Russians.

Davut Cetin, the Head of the Chamber of Commerce of Antalya, is more optimistic. "There is an increasing number of early bookings. If nothing unforeseen happens, the number of Russian tourists in Turkey will exceed three million this year," the official said.

The Russian side is also cautiously optimistic regarding summer prospects. "If we compare the current numbers with 2015, then already now four to five times more sales have been carried out. This is a very large figure that shows that Russians missed Turkey," Neshet Kochkar, CEO of Anex Tour, said.

Turkey Seeking Different Source Markets

While German and Russian inflow to Turkey has decreased, various nations have shown some increase. Bahrain accounted for 28 percent more holidaymakers, Jordan saw a 25 percent increase, while 17 percent more Saudi Arabians boosted Turkish tourism.

Middle Eastern citizens are attracted mainly by the original region of the Black Sea. There are plenty of beaches and only few bars with alcoholic drinks. The region benefits from its attractiveness to Arab tourists. On the coast, at least four major tourism projects are underway aimed at visitors from the Gulf region and other Arab countries.

According to a developer from Fats, most of his customers are from the Gulf or other Middle Eastern countries. **In the nearby town of Ayvacik in the province of Samsun a hillside with lake view is reserved for a planned Arab holiday settlement.** Many hotels and resorts for Arab guests in the region are already built, according to the local Tourist Association.

"Arabs want (also during holidays) the same traditions as at home. This can be found here at the Black Sea," Ahmed Saed Omar Marta, tourism consultant and travel agency owner, said.

2017 will be a year of hope for Turkey and its tourism. It remains to be seen how the world and its main source markets will respond to the countries' efforts and outbursts, but supposedly the situation can only improve compared to last year.

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