

A Brief Comparison of Health Tourism in Brazil and Turkey

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Abstract— Since ancient times, human beings have migrated from one region to another. One of the reasons for this migration is tourism. Health tourism is among the various types of tourism and represents an important activity for the economy of several countries. Brazil and Turkey are examples of countries that have gained prominence in the sector in recent years. This study aimed to compare health tourism in Brazil and Turkey. This is a descriptive and analytical study written by the authors as a master's dissertation. It is based on a large literature review about health tourism in Brazil and Turkey. Scientific articles and also documents prepared by the Brazilian and Turkish governments were used. The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis was performed to comprehensively assess the situation of health tourism in the two countries. Subsequently, a SWOT analysis matrix was established and recommendations were provided to empower health tourism in Brazil and Turkey. The two countries have many similar points regarding positive and negative factors that influence health tourism. Brazil and Turkey are famous for their natural beauty; summer, cultural, and historical tourism. Both countries have the potential to grow in the health tourism sector, but for that, it is necessary to solve obstacles related mainly to the lack of organization and coordination between the services involved in health tourism activities, in addition, attention must be paid to barriers that arise due to the lack of knowledge of foreign languages and the negative image of both countries abroad.

Keywords—Brazil, Health Facilities, Health Tourism, SWOT Analysis, Turkey.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, individuals have moved from one place to another for different reasons [1]; [2]. Many people come to different places for tourism. Tourism is a very old and important activity for the development of countries [3], both in cultural and social as well as economic aspects, as this millennial activity revitalizes the economy through the development of services such as communication and transport, increasing job opportunities and national income [4]. The development in the area of communication and transport, the emergence of new technologies, industrial progress, and the increase in people's free time and per capita income have made tourism gain new dimensions [2]; [5]. Tourism is the temporary movement of people to places other than where they live and work, the activities they undertake while staying in those places and the opportunities offered to meet their needs [2].

One of the greatest desires of human beings is to be healthy and live in a healthy environment [1]; [6]. Individuals have the right to live healthily from birth to death. Health is a person's most indispensable condition and need [1]; [7]. Health tourism emerges at the point where the health and tourism sectors overlap [6]. Despite being a very old activity, health tourism has started to gain great importance around the world in recent years [8]; [9]. Health tourism is therefore the act of traveling to protect or

restore health [8]; [10]. Health tourism can be done for a variety of medical reasons, in addition to spa-wellness, and specific care/treatment for the elderly and people with disabilities [11]. In other words, there are different types of health tourism, such as medical tourism, thermal tourism, care tourism for the elderly and disabled people, and spa-wellness tourism [2]. Health tourism is seen as an alternative for patients to receive health care that they do not have access to in their countries of origin [5]; [12]. The impossibility of accessing such services may be related to high prices, lack of infrastructure, shortage of specialists, and high demand [2]; [13]; [14]. In addition, immigrants can travel to their countries of origin for health tourism because they feel more secure in receiving care where they can communicate in their mother tongue [14]. Although Asian countries such as Thailand, India, Malaysia, and Singapore have conquered important places in the tourism market and are the first countries that come to mind when talking about health tourism; Brazil and Turkey are examples of countries that have gained prominence in the health tourism sector in recent years [9]. Brazil is the largest country in South America and the fifth largest country in the world [15]. Brazil's population is 211.8 million [16]. The country is known for its tropical climate and beautiful beaches, thus, most tourists visit Brazil for summer tourism [17]. Regarding the health system; care is provided by both private and public institutions. In 1990 the Unified Health System, a

government-funded system, was created [15]. In theory, the system should offer equal care to every citizen in the country, but despite having evolved a lot, the health system in Brazil is still unequal, and generally speaking, only those who can afford private health insurance receive quality care since the country's private hospitals are well equipped and have trained professionals [16]; [18]. Public hospitals also employ competent healthcare workers, but due to infrastructure, management, and financing problems, the care provided in such institutions does not meet the needs of the population [18].

Turkey is a country located between the European and Asian continents [19], with a population of almost 85 million inhabitants [20]. It attracts foreigners who come in search of natural, cultural, and historical tourism [19]. Regarding the health system; in 2003, the Health Transformation Program was created. This Health Program's lemma is to provide affordable, qualified, efficient, and equitable health care for all [21]. Health care is provided by both private and public institutions. Turkish healthcare institutions are well equipped and work with advanced technology, especially private hospitals, which offer quality care, but this assistance, as in Brazil, can be very expensive and not everyone has access to the services provided in private hospitals [19]; [21]. In addition, the shortage of health professionals is becoming an increasing problem in the country [19].

In recent years, many patients from different countries around the world have started to visit countries such as Turkey [5]; [12] and Brazil [22] in search of health care. However, it is observed that health tourism should be improved in Turkey [10] and Brazil [23] since these countries have great potential for growth in such activities. Different types of tourism are available in Brazil and Turkey; this important fact should be considered as an opportunity for the development of this sector by promoting health tourism among tourists who come from varied countries for different reasons [5]; [14]; [24]. According to the importance of the information exposed, the objective of this study was to compare health tourism in Brazil and Turkey.

The introduction of the study is presented in section I; Related works are discussed in section II; The methods are explained in section III; Results and discussion take place in section IV; Section V contains the conclusion and the future scope of the study.

II. RELATED WORK

Reference [23], a systematic review, emphasized the need to discuss health tourism in Latin American countries, especially in Brazil. Reference [14], a study that made considerations about health tourism in Latin America, pointed out that Brazil develops actions to attract tourists in search of medical treatment. A study conducted to investigate the phenomenon of the expansion of health tourism in the three main Brazilian cities emphasized that a

select group of medical centers has invested in expanding their services to attract health tourists [25]. Reference [24], research carried out to highlight the potential of health tourism practices in a city in Brazil, emphasized the tourist attractions and the quality of health institutions in the region, on the other hand, the study identified the need to pay attention to improvements in safety, cleanliness, and communication to attract more tourists to the health sector. Reference [26], a study that referred to another Brazilian city, addressed wellness tourism, indicating that there is a need to invest in this sector to attract tourists to the region. A study carried out to contribute to health tourism service providers emphasized that health services, rehabilitation services, and wellness services are among the ones with the greatest growth potential in Turkey [5]. Reference [27], research carried out in Turkey identified that patients who choose the country for health tourism are influenced by factors related to the quality of health facilities and services, in addition to environmental factors and affordable prices. According to reference [28], Turkey can make progress in health tourism with correct policies that combine natural and human resources. Reference [29] pointed out that Turkey needs to advance mainly in the areas of thermal tourism and health tourism for the elderly and disabled people to reach the planned goals for health tourism. Reference [7], a systematic review that sought to examine health tourism in the world and Turkey pointed out that some measures and practices are necessary for the development of health tourism in Turkey.

III. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive and analytical study written by the authors as a master's dissertation. It is based on a large literature review about health tourism in Brazil and Turkey. Scientific articles and also documents prepared by the Brazilian and Turkish governments were used for the elaboration of this study. In addition, a literature search about health tourism was conducted on the official websites of the governments of Brazil and Turkey. After that, the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis was used to comprehensively assess the situation of health tourism in the two countries. Subsequently, a SWOT analysis matrix was established and recommendations were provided to empower health tourism in Brazil and Turkey.

Descriptive studies are carried out to make careful and detailed observations and documentation about a topic of interest [30]. In analytical studies, critical thinking skills are used to evaluate facts and information regarding the researched subject aiming to improve future performance [31]. SWOT is an analysis tool formed by four areas divided into two dimensions. Strengths and weaknesses are part of the internal dimension of the analysis tool, while opportunities and threats are factors that integrate the external dimension [32]. The purpose of a SWOT analysis is to use knowledge about organizational and environmental factors to create strategies to improve the performance of organizations [32].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Health tourism in Brazil

Brazil entered the world health tourism route in 2003 [14], but it was in 2005 that the flow of foreign tourists began to increase [33]. Most tourists who visit Brazil for health tourism are looking for cosmetic surgery and the country is famous for the number of renowned plastic surgeons [2]; [14]; [23]. However, activities related to SPA wellness and alternative health care [23], in addition to dental, orthopedic, and cardiological treatments [34]; [35] also attract tourists to Brazil.

The city of São Paulo ensured that health institutions are located close to means of transport and tourist attractions. The city of Rio de Janeiro takes advantage of its visibility in the tourist sector to attract large financial and health companies [25]. Therefore, the best-equipped Brazilian cities and the ones that receive the most health tourists are São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro [14]; [25]. Brazil is among the countries that receive the most health tourists in the world [36]. About 1 million individuals visit Brazil for health tourism every year.

Health tourism in Turkey

In Turkey, health tourism started to gain importance around the 1990s and has developed especially in the last 10 years [37]. The cities of Bursa, Denizli, and Afyon are renowned for their natural beauty and hot springs. Istanbul has modern and well-equipped healthcare facilities, in addition to being a historic center. Thus, thermal tourism is more developed in cities like Bursa and Afyon, and medical tourism attracts more people to Turkey’s biggest cities like Istanbul and Ankara. In addition, the city of Antalya offers services for the elderly, and Izmir is recognized for spa and wellness tourism [36]. In other words, Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, and Izmir are among the cities that most receive tourists seeking health services [27].

Obstetrics, internal medicine, ophthalmology, medical biochemistry, general surgery, dentistry, orthopedics and traumatology, infectious diseases, and otorhinolaryngology are the clinical branches most preferred by international patients who visit Turkey for medical tourism [38], in addition, in recent years, cosmetic surgery and hair transplant has begun to gain a large place in health tourism in the country [36]. In 2021 almost 670,000 tourists visited Turkey for health tourism [38].

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Health Tourism in Brazil – Internal Origin

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A wide variety of tourism types (cultural, nature, summer, and historical tourism among others). •Good transport network, especially by air. •Tropical weather. •Geographic location. •Potential in terms of hydrotherapy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underdeveloped and not fully organized health tourism. • Lack of structure and legal basis for health tourism. • Lack of effective government support for

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Advanced healthcare technology. •Several medical specialists and scientists. •Varied types of beauty treatments. •Excellence in plastic surgery. •Many JCI-accredited institutions. •The largest and most famous hospital in Latin America is located in the city of São Paulo. •Quality medical treatments at low prices. • Health managers and health professionals are open to development. •Travel agencies integrated with health tourism, some of them associated with large hospitals. •Visa facilitation for health tourism purposes. • Absence of terrorism and natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes. •Easy communication. Brazilians, whose mother tongue is Portuguese, can easily communicate with Spanish and Italian speakers. •Brazil is home to diverse cultures. •Brazilians are communicative, helpful, and friendly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> health tourism. • Lack of adequate integration, communication, and promotion of health tourism. • Substandard public health services. • Basic infrastructure problems (water, electricity, etc.) in some cities. • Some films released abroad show the entire country as too dangerous and poor. • There are security problems (use of weapons, robbery, extortion, and theft, among others) in some regions. • Health tourism is almost limited to plastic surgery. • SPA is seen as an attachment to hotels, not an independent activity. • Lack of enough statistics on health tourism. • Shortages of healthcare workers.
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Table 2: SWOT Analysis of Health Tourism in Brazil – External Origin

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number of Brazilians living abroad. • Famous people visit Brazil for plastic surgery • Ease of disseminating information through the Internet. • High prices of health care in neighboring countries such as the United States. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive health tourism advertisements and promotions in neighboring countries. • Lack of foreign languages teaching in health science faculties. • Health care is cheaper in Asian countries. • Great economic crisis. •Dissemination of incorrect information about Brazil in foreign countries. • Covid-19 pandemic. • Traffic jams in big cities.

Table 3: SWOT Analysis of Health Tourism in Turkey – Internal Origin

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many tourists visit Turkey every year. • Quality tourist facilities. • Offering other types of tourism associated with health tourism. • Experience in the tourism sector. • Geothermal resources. • Variety of opportunities for tourism (religious, nature, and cultural tourism, among others). • Good transport network (by air, land, water). • Ease of visa for health tourism. • Legal regulation and government support concerning health tourism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health tourism is not fully organized. • Insufficient integration between health, tourism, marketing, logistics, transport, and insurance. • Few institutions work actively in health tourism. • Managers and health professionals are not open to development. • Managers and healthcare professionals with little knowledge of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic location. • Temperate weather. • Young and dynamic health workforce. • Qualified doctors. • Advanced technology in the healthcare sector. • Many JCI-accredited healthcare facilities. • Affordable healthcare services. • Minimum waiting time for surgeries. • Turks are communicative, helpful, and friendly people. 	<p>foreign healthcare legislation and patients' rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few health professionals who know foreign languages. • Lack of documentation on patients who come to the country for health tourism. • Shortages of healthcare workers.
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Table 4:SWOT Analysis of Health Tourism in Turkey – External Origin

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in life expectancy in European countries. • Due to Islamophobia wealthy Muslims prefer to receive healthcare in Islamic countries. • Existence of many Turks living in Europe who may prefer to receive healthcare in Turkey. • 50% tax exemption on income obtained through the treatment of foreigners. • Health tourism is included in the Ministry of Health's strategic action plan. • Ease of dissemination of information abroad due to the Internet. • Creation of the Health Tourism Coordination Council. • Educational programs that provide health tourism certificates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the cost of health services. • Incorrect pricing policies. • Constant changes in health laws and regulations • Necessary importance is not given to patient rights and wrong medical practices. • Lack of standards in the area of health tourism. • Increasing emigration of doctors and other health professionals. • Other countries doing more quality and attractive promotions and advertisements about health tourism. • Negativity caused by news about terrorism in the country. • Negative effects of problems experienced in neighboring countries (wars, terrorism). • Natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. • Traffic jams in big cities. • Most people cannot communicate in a language other than Turkish. • Covid-19 pandemic. • Economic crisis.

Considerations on Health tourism in Brazil and Turkey

Both Brazil [4]; [39] and Turkey [40] attract many tourists as they offer a wide variety of tourist activities; both countries are recognized for their summer, historical, and cultural tourism. A good air transport network is also a feature common to both countries since Turkey [19]; [41] and Brazil [39] have privileged geographic locations. Brazil borders practically all South American countries and is close to Central and North America [42]. Turkey is located between the European and Asian continents, being also close to the African continent [19]; [41]. However, locomotion within Brazil can be hampered by traffic jams and the distance between airports and touristic centers [35]. The transit of the Turkish metropolises can also be pointed out as a negative point for the country [43]. Like Turkey [41], Brazil has potential in terms of hydrotherapy resources, but this type of tourism is little developed in the country [44]; [45], where health tourism is practically

limited to plastic surgeries, which in turn are very famous around the world [2]; [14]; [23].

Brazil [35]; [44] and Turkey [19] have great hospitals in which advanced technology is used by specialized health professionals. However, both countries face serious problems regarding the shortage of healthcare workers [46]. Mainly in Turkey, due to professional devaluation and acts of violence against health professionals, many doctors and other healthcare workers are emigrating especially to European countries in search of better working conditions [19]; [47]. The medical services provided in both countries are qualified and affordable when compared to health treatments performed in European countries and the United States [4]; [19]. However, the quality of health services provided in most Brazilian public health facilities is below average [15]. There are 63 JCI-certified healthcare institutions in Brazil [48] and 50 in Turkey [19]. The best hospital in Latin America is located in Brazil [49].

Brazil does not require a tourist visa for citizens of Mercosur countries; Mercosur is an intergovernmental organization composed of South American countries [50], also citizens of several European, Asian, and African countries can enter the country without a tourist visa. In addition, Brazil offers the possibility of issuing special visas for health treatment in the country [34]. Turkey until the year 2021 did not require a tourist visa for 62 countries [19]; [41], in order to attract tourists to the country this number has increased in 2022, as Turkey is currently facing a serious economic crisis [51].

Although there are no terrorist acts in Brazil, the lack of security is one of the main threats to health tourism in the country, as Brazil faces problems related to the use and sale of illicit drugs, robberies, and murders, mainly, but not in a limited, in its main metropolises [35]. Turkey is safer than Brazil, although it faces problems related to terrorism in the south and southeast regions, in addition to being constantly threatened by political and economic instabilities, conflicts and wars in neighboring countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, among others [19]; [41]; [52].

Both Brazilians and Turks are sociable, communicative, and helpful people. However, in both countries it is difficult to find individuals who communicate fluently in a foreign language [19]; [35]; [41]; [44]. Regarding foreign languages, Brazil has an advantage over Turkey, as Portuguese is similar to Spanish, thus facilitating communication with people of Hispanic origin. Brazil is home to several cultures [24]; [39] and both the population of Brazil [39] and Turkey [53] are friendly when interacting with people from other cultures.

In Brazil, health tourism is not well organized, there are gaps in laws that regulate health tourism activities, and in addition, some regions of the country suffer from infrastructure problems [39]. Although in Turkey, health

tourism is not fully organized, the activity is better structured than in Brazil. In Turkey, in recent years several actions have been taken to attract health tourists to the country, such as the creation of the Health Tourism Coordination Council and the development of educational programs on health tourism provided in Turkish hospitals [19]. In addition, more attention has been paid to teaching foreign languages, particularly English, to Turkish healthcare professionals. However, there is still a lack of knowledge about international laws and foreign consumer rights [19].

Many Brazilians [54] and Turks [19] live abroad, which can be considered an opportunity for the development of the health tourism sector in both countries since individuals prefer to be attended in their mother tongue and by people with similar cultural backgrounds [14]. Also, it is important to point out that the Islamophobia that unfortunately grows in the world [55], can be considered an opportunity for Turkey, which, being a country with an Islamic majority, can attract health tourists who have the same religion. It would be interesting, therefore, for the country to develop actions associating religious tourism with health tourism [56].

The Internet provides many opportunities for countries to disseminate information on health tourism [19]; [35], thus, Brazil and Turkey should pay more attention to the dissemination of information about the health tourism activities they develop, as Asian countries mainly invest heavily in promoting and publicizing their activities in the related field. This fact is evidenced by the fact that, despite offering services similar to those of Asian countries, Turkey receives fewer health tourists than Singapore, Thailand, and India [56].

It is important to mention the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on various sectors in many countries [57]. The disease remains a threat to health tourism in Turkey and Brazil. On July 28, 2022, 1,236,381 new cases of covid-19 were registered in Brazil and 709,051 in Turkey, showing that the disease is still not fully controlled in both countries [58]. Another problem generated by covid-19 is the serious economic crisis that Brazil [59] and Turkey are currently experiencing [51]. In Brazil, the covid-19 accentuated the economic crisis that has threatened the country for years; Unemployment rates and the number of people surviving below the poverty level increased with the emergence of the pandemic [59]. Covid-19 harmed the economic growth of several countries due to the impacts it had on foreign trade; Turkey was seriously hit since the country was already facing economic problems before the pandemic. Therefore, the importance of developing and implementing new policies to strengthen the country's economy is highlighted [51].

Through the present study, it is possible to understand the varied strengths and weaknesses of health tourism in Brazil and Turkey, as well as identify the opportunities and threats for the development of such activities in these two

countries. Brazil and Turkey should better exploit their natural wealth and health services, through the development of coordinated activities between health institutions, travel agencies, and insurance companies to attract more health tourists. Health institutions that develop activities related to medical tourism should establish quality standards to better compete with Asian countries. In addition, the improvement of services provided in public hospitals in both countries will make Brazil and Turkey more attractive to tourists in search of health treatments.

The image of both countries must be better promoted abroad, and especially Brazil must resolve the various security-related problems that exist in the country. Congresses, symposiums, and conferences should be organized to publicize the health tourism activities developed in Brazil and Turkey. Administrators of Brazilian and Turkish educational and health institutions must develop actions so that health professionals learn foreign languages and can communicate fluently with patients coming from abroad. Another important point to be considered is the establishment of specific laws that regulate health tourism and education on the subject, so that health professionals and other hospital employees acquire knowledge about the rights of international patients. Both countries should be developing in diverse areas of health tourism such as SPA, wellness, and tourism for the elderly and disabled. More scientific research on health tourism should be carried out, especially in Brazil, where quality literature on the subject is scarce. Brazil and Turkey have opportunities to become major global health tourism hubs, as long as they address the weaknesses and threats that prevent more tourists from visiting these two countries in search of health services.

The lack of detailed information on health tourism in both countries and especially the scarcity of scientific literature on health tourism in Brazil can be pointed out as the limitations of the present study.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This study aimed to compare health tourism in Brazil and Turkey. It was observed that Brazil and Turkey have many similar points regarding positive and negative factors that influence health tourism. Brazil [4]; [39] and Turkey [40] are famous for their natural beauty; summer, cultural, and historical tourism. Both countries have the potential to grow in the health tourism sector [2]; [9], but for that, it is necessary to solve obstacles related mainly to the lack of organization and coordination among the services involved in health tourism activities, in addition, attention must be paid to the removal of barriers that arise due to the lack of knowledge of foreign languages and the negative image of both countries abroad.

Brazil [58] and Turkey [51] face a serious economic crisis caused mainly by the covid-19 pandemic. Both countries should take advantage of the strengths and opportunities related to health tourism to attract tourists and

consequently strengthen economically. Further research should be carried out using different methodological designs to better explore health tourism in Brazil and Turkey.

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