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## **ADULT-ONLY VS CHILD-FRIENDLY: A RESEARCH ABOUT ADULT-ONLY HOTELS WITH THE CASE OF MARMARIS**

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### **Abstract**

Many tourism businesses have begun to serve child-focused products, services and activities with the widespreading of family tourism. On the contrary, the existence of tourists who do not have any children or do not want or stand the child-focused activities has caused some family issues in tourism sector. This situation has led some tourism businesses to differentiation and diversify their tourism products. In this context, adult-only concept has emerged as a new tourism product in line with these developments. Starting from this, the aim of this study is determined as to gain information about the accommodation businesses serving in the adult-only concept and to show how the adult-only concept was applied by these businesses. This study was prepared with qualitative method and interview technique was used as data collection tool from executive managers. The area of the study is Marmaris where is a tourism town in Muğla province. Findings were subjected to content analysis. Research results show that the concept of adult-only hotel emerges with the aim of specialization, product differentiation, inadequate physical conditions, providing quality service, reducing costs.

Key Words: Adult-Only Concept, Family Issues, Tourism Product, Tourism Product Diversification.

### **Introduction**

The decision not to have children represents one of the most remarkable changes in the modern family: during the last few decades the number of couples has drastically increased around the world, becoming an important issue for socio-economic structure. At the present time, the number of couples without children and single person are becoming more common especially among Western society families (Agrillo

and Nelini, 2008: 347). It seems tempting to regard this development as a distinctly new and “post-modern” phenomenon (Kreyenfeld and Konietzka, 2016:4). In addition to changes experienced in the social structure over the years, the age of marriage and becoming parents is gradually increasing not only in urban areas but also in rural areas due to having children being seen as a burden, a desire to take maximum benefit from resources, freedom, financial problems, and a desire to have a career. Upon these developments, offering a touristic product aimed at families without children has become inevitable.

The touristic product "constitutes the whole of the experiences and purchases of goods and services from the time the tourist leaves their place of residence to the time they return to it" (Usta, 2001: 105). Olali and Timur (1988: 421) define the touristic product as "a mixture of goods, services or goods and services, or a package of both, capable of meeting the tourist's travel and temporary accommodation needs" (Demir ve Demir, 2004: 94). According to Hacıoğlu (2000), in tourism products appear in two forms. The first is "a tourism product created by all natural, historical and tourist resources that a country or region has." The second is "all the services that allow consumers to change location and vacation, that is, the type of tourist services that make up a package tour".

In order to make the most of opportunities in different areas and increase the consumer groups they serve, businesses are diversifying products by developing their products, services and areas of activity. Tourist product diversification simply means increasing the variety of tourist products offered to the tourism industry (İslamoğlu, 2008). Touristic product diversification providing the necessary infrastructure and superstructure and presenting the natural, historical, cultural, social etc. tourist attractions in a tourism center to tourists in the form of a product (Okumuş and Topaloğlu, 2004). According to another definition; touristic product diversification can be defined as a touristic country, region or area to maintain the status quo or to gain a better position in an increasing competitive environment and constantly changing consumer preferences, to gain more income, to add innovations to existing tourist products in order to gain advantages against their competitors, by adding new products to their existing touristic products and developing new products. (Sarkim, 2007: 157).

As a result of the economic and social developments experienced in world tourism, the increasing population and the increasing development of world views and changing tourist expectations, the countries who wish to have more of a share in tourism and spread their market share all year are in a new search. As a result of this search, the traditional holiday concept is gradually changing, tourism products are being diversified and new tourism types and concepts are emerging (Hacıoğlu and Avcıkurt, 2008). The adult-only concept is a concept emerging in line with changing consumer preferences. However, no study on the adult-only hotel concept has been found in accessible literature.

In this context, the aim of the study is to gather information about the accommodation enterprises serving the adult-only hotel concept and to show how the concept is implemented by the enterprises. In this respect, it is thought that the study will contribute to literature and lead to studies related to the adult-only hotel concept.

### **The Concept of the Adult Only Hotel**

Adult hotel concept is predicted to grow over the next years, because of the birth rates, fertility rates, changes in demography and social structures. Birth rates and fertility rates have declined sharply across developed countries generally (OECD, 2011:14). Researching the family issue in tourism must it be considered within the context of changing family structures, values, trends and life style (Schanzel and

Yeoman, 2015:25) With this change in family structures, tourists are now travelling alone or prefer hotels without children to relax, explore, experience the moment and enjoy silence. The visitor who wants to get away from the loud and crowded city life avoids noisy environments with the sound of children.

As world travel continues to grow, new trends in tourism are emerging. It is commonly known that the fundamental element of marketing is consumer-based thinking with the emphasis on consumer needs (Niemczyk, 2015). In this context, adult only conceptual hotels have emerged in order to get a share from this market as well as to meet the needs of consumers. It is possible to define adult only hotels, which are a thematic work of the tourism sector, as childless hotels, in which children are not included in the accommodation. As with family trips, for individual or couple planned trips, accommodation preferences also vary. This type of accommodation caters for those seeking a peaceful and relaxing holiday after a busy work period, leaving behind all the chaos of the city. Comfortable rooms, and a flexible, individualized and high quality service concept is adopted.

Holidays with young children bring additional responsibilities and limitations. Therefore, parents and families without children who are disturbed by children's noise, crying and the problems they create, seek hotels without children from time to time. Although generally known as hotels that serve those over 18 years of age, adult hotels that serve as over 16 or 14 years of age have emerged as an attempt to increase the market share.

Since the 1960s, Club Med has offered special holidays for adults on certain dates and at certain facilities. According to a report in 2016, there are 250 such hotels in the world on the network of TUI, and a hotel chain called Sensimar was built on this concept. There are also businesses offering adult only hotel concepts in Mexico, the Caribbean, Majorca and Greece. For the first time in Turkey, the concept of '+18 hotels' was applied in Antalya/Side in 2012 and attracted great interest. Later on, new concepts such as '+16' and '+13' have appeared in the region. Turkey's first '+18 hotel', Commodore Elite Suits & Spa Side is open 12 months of the year. The adult only hotel concept is mostly preferred by countries like Germany, England, Holland, Belgium and Russia.

It is a fact that the enterprises operating in the tourism field in the future will be shaped by the changing demographic and technological structure. It is estimated that in the next 20 years there will be a decline in the number of families without children, especially in most OECD countries (OECD, 2011). For this reason, it would be beneficial for enterprises offering touristic products to go to product differentiation instead of putting all their eggs in the same basket when considering these changes. Rolf Jensen, predicting the future of the tourism industry, said that "the distinction between work and leisure time will disappear in the future" and from this statement, we can say that the gap between leisure time and work concept will be eliminated and this will increase the rates of those who prefer hotels that are quiet, peaceful and inspiring. In time, the individual with children will also be able to choose adult only hotels to conduct their work. When all this was taken into consideration, no studies were found on the adult only hotel concept, an important tourism product, in either national or international literature. Therefore, this study is also important in this respect.

## **Method**

The aim of the study is to gather information about the accommodation enterprises serving the adult-only hotel concept and to show how the concept is implemented by the enterprises. Marmaris, which is one of the most important tourism centres of Turkey located in Muğla province has created the universe of the study. The study was prepared using a qualitative research method and interview was used as a data

collection tool. A semi-structured interview form was prepared before the interviews and expert opinions were used during the preparation. In the semi-structured interview form, questions for the interviewer, such as the business age, the concept of adult-only service year, whether or not the phrase adult is present in the name, demographic information, industry experience, adult-only hotel sector experience, years working at the hotel in question, whether or not they are a decision maker in the transition to adult-only service were asked. Following these, interviewers were asked questions to give in-depth information of the implementation at the enterprise, such as about what they understand from the adult-only concept, the services they offer in this area, their aim in starting this concept, the returns for the enterprise of this concept, guest feedback.

In the process of data collection, the hotels to be interviewed were determined by using the snowball sampling method it was determined that there are 10 hotels that provide services in the adult-only concepts, and with 2 hotel managers refusing to be interviewed, a total of 8 hotel managers were interviewed. In May-June 2018, the senior managers of 8 hotels operating in Marmaris were interviewed. All the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' offices and personal notes and sound recordings were kept with their consent. The average duration of the interviews was 30 minutes. The data transferred to the Microsoft Word program was analyzed and evaluated by content analysis.

Before the findings, some information about participants and businesses has been given. This is important for revealing who and what the findings are about. Table 1 below provides information about the participants, and Table 2 provides some information about the enterprises.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Time In The Sector</b>	<b>Adult only business experience</b>	<b>Time In The business</b>	<b>Adult hotel decision maker</b>
1	MALE	35	POST GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	19	5	15	YES
2	MALE	54	GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	32	4	4	YES
3	MALE	47	POST GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	25	4	20	YES
4	MALE	42	GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	22	5	7	YES
5	FEMALE	39	GRADUATE	SALES MARK. MANAGER	21	10	3	NO
6	MALE	58	GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	33	5	1	YES
7	FEMALE	64	GRADUATE	GENERAL MANAGER	32	8	32	NO
8	FEMALE	46	GRADUATE	SALES MARK. MANAGER	28	3	3	YES

It was determined that 6 of the participants were general managers and 2 of them were department managers; all of the men were found to be general managers, and women were department managers except one. All of the participants also have at least graduate degrees. When reviewing the working periods in the sector, it is seen that the participant with the least sector experience has been working in tourism for 19 years. The duration of working in the enterprise in question varies between 1-32 years. Adult-only concept hotel experience is between 3 and 10 years. The vast majority of participants are decision-makers in the transition period to the adult-only concept. One of the non-decision makers is due to the fact that they were not present during the transition, and the other due to the fact that the decision comes from top management because of the fact that the enterprise is an international chain.

Table 2. Information on Enterprises Where Participants Work

Participant	Board type of enterprise	Period of time serving as adult only	The term Adult included in name
1	AI	5	NONE
2	UAI	4	NONE
3	AI	4	NONE
4	BB/HB/FB/AI	5	YES (online)
5	AI	10	NONE
6	AI	1	NONE
7	AI	8	NONE
8	AI	6	NONE

Almost all of the enterprises offer their guests All-Inclusive (AI) service. One of the enterprises has just transitioned to the adult-only concept, while the others have been using this concept for 4-10 years. Finally, it has been determined that seven of the hotels do not have a term adult-only in the name, and only one states it on their website.

## Findings

### Age Restriction

The term adult having the meaning of being an adult was given in the conceptual framework of previous literature. In Turkey, the term adult refers to persons above the age of 18. This age limit can be seen to decrease to 16 overseas.

When the adult-only concept hotels in Marmaris were examined in line with the purpose of the study, it was found that they all operate at +16. Factors in the formation of this condition are given firstly as to the physical characteristics of the hotels, not wishing to include children's activities, to avoid a drop in income, considering a 16 year old not as a child but as a young person, and being sure they will not make noise. The 3rd interviewee summarized the subject as follows: *"...We made such a decision because the common areas, position of the rooms are not suitable for children's facilities. The rooms are not very spacious, they cannot take a third person..."* The 7th interviewee added: *"... we can say that adults over the age of 16 are not making much noise. So 16 and up. We can also call 16 young adults, in terms of sales for us also ..."*

Only the 5th interviewee stated that they started to work with age 16 or over at the onset and then dropped it to 14. He expressed this situation as follows: *"... Normally, our minimum age was 16. We accepted 16 as adult. But when we opened in 2015 and the continuation of the negative situation and bad*

*sales in tourism in 2016, we wanted to increase the sales by dropping the 16 limit to 14 and getting more share of this market. The reason it is 14 is that, our hotel, in terms of position, area, physical space, we do not have a physical structure that we can cater to children from age 0 to 13, to provide entertainment for children..."* As a result, even if they reduce the age limit to increase the size of their slice of the pie, they support the reasons for not accepting children of other enterprises.

### **Childless Hotel = Quiet, Calm**

Children experience their desires, fun, stubbornness, displeasure in a more intense manner than adults. Some see this as cheer, others as noise. When managers of adult-only hotels are asked what the adult-only concept means to them, a child-free hotel has been said to be quiet and calm. The first interviewee expressed his thoughts in the following way: *"... I think of a hotel where there is not a group of children making noise. I think of a holiday where children's animation, children's discos, and all the events that develop due to them do not exist, where it is calm, more mature, where I can more easily access what I want, where I can rest better...."*

### **Insufficient Area**

In an enterprise that caters to everyone, everything from activities to common areas, from the variety of menu to the square meter of rooms should be considered. The child-accepting enterprises must have free space in the room where they can place additional beds, children's and infant menus and high chairs, children's pools, playgrounds, children's animators, etc.

The purpose of determining the concept of the adult-only hotel in hotels in Marmaris was determined to be mainly the physical deficiencies of the hotels. After making the necessary feasibility studies, it became necessary to implement a restriction and it was decided to apply the adult-only concept after exploring the various concepts. This 3rd interviewee explained the process as follows: *"...We began operating by maintaining the existing structure. When we looked, we saw that the rooms were very small. The public areas, front, there was a small pool on the front, we closed that because we did not have much space. We considered the concepts, we were going to be all-inclusive, but we saw that in terms of customer profile we couldn't place a third person in the rooms. In order to ensure high profitability and for our customers not to be disturbed, we decided not to accept children. So when we saw that the adult only concept was appropriate for us, we decided to go forward in that direction..."* The 1st interviewee also explained the situation in a similar way: *"... We did not have much space to do activities for children. Especially in this region, hotels are built on small areas, there are no large spaces. Since we do not have such physical areas as children's parks, water slides, children's clubs, children's playgrounds, we made this decision to differentiate our products and meet expectations as well as create a great product..."*

### **Calm Service**

As a result of the interviews, it became clear that adult-only concept hotels did not offer any special services. Enterprises, who have already defined adult-only as quiet and calm, have indicated that their services during the day are the same. In this regard the 3rd interviewee emphasized the calmness: *"... Calm is important to us. For example, we play soft music in all areas. The people here take their drinks in a minute, eat their meals, go to their rooms in a minute, there are 3000 channels in the rooms, air-conditioned luxury and comfortable rooms. No one thinks to get up early and save a lounge at the beach, we offer a boutique service in a calm, peaceful manner..."*

The 6th interviewee also stated that their services differed in the following ways: *"... So, an adult hotel is a couple hotel. 80% of guests come as couples. We are preparing physical places specific to this, like some corners, swings, corner groups, tables for two..."*

### **Pros vs. Cons**

Everything has certain pros and cons. The strongest aspect of this concept for enterprises is that it is usually easier to communicate with people who know what they want and are traveling in accordance with what they want. Having regarded this area as an area of specialization, the 1st Interviewee expressed the following: *"... Service is a very extensive area. People have a wide range of expectations. We are going to specialize in this area by narrowing the field to a certain extent by saying it is adult only. At least we have a demographic criteria. We have minimized our target audience. We can provide specific services in this area. Here, we do not work with children, so we can give more importance to other areas. We can spare time for this. On the other hand, strong tourists who know what they want who come here. This, honestly, is actually operationally a relief to the hotel ... "* Apart from this, it has been determined that another advantage is to be relieved of the excessive costs of the facilities to be provided for children. The 7th interviewee explained this situation by saying: *"... Young children are more risky. In terms of cost, small children are harder to serve."* The 4th interviewee, supporting this: *"The cleaning, the laundry of a room with children is more difficult. There has to be a mini club, a guide, additional beds, we have none of these. This reduces our operating costs. It's making a positive impact. "*

The weak point of specifying a special concept in this way is that it has been difficult in terms of sales. The 2nd interviewee stated: *"... Since families with children from Europe vacation mostly in July-August, families without children do not want to fly with children even on airplanes. So we have to move our summer market to Russia."* The 5th interviewee added: *"... In terms of sales, we are in the second plan in terms of sales of the hotel. Because of the number of people, families with children are the general demand. We can only take a small slice of a pie..."*

### **Guest Feedback**

In relation to the concept, enterprises do not receive any criticism from their guests. The enterprises associate this with the guests knowing what they want. The 7th interviewee expressed the situation as follows: *"... We love children but we do not want to see children. They do not want to see someone else's child elsewhere. So we do not get any criticism from them about this..."*

Interviewees stated that there were some guests that tried to sneak their children in by raising their age. In addition, there are also previous guests that are not accepted because they now have children who react to the policy. The 8th interviewee described the process as: *"...The facility was built in 1988. Previously, families with children were accepted. From 2012 it has been adult-only. Guests are very pleased. They comes as pregnant, comes as engaged, for example, then they have children and we can not accept them later. We do not accept babies, children. We have reactions from families with children, and we can't understand that."* The 2nd interviewee added: *"... We see guests arriving at the door without reservations, and they have children. We remind them of the policy. We have availability but we can not accept you because of the children. Then there are different reactions from guests from the domestic market. Do you not like children, why do you dislike children, why do not you accept them, a variety of reactions. What shall I do, shall I make the child sleep in the car etc..."*

### **Alternative Hotel**

According to the interviewees, each operator has a minimum of 1 hotel that accepts children. It emerged that they did not experience major reactions because they are able to direct families with children to their other hotels. The 1st interviewee expressed his views on this situation as follows: *"... Yes, we have one, even two businesses which accept families with children. There are many activities especially for children. We have had a lot of guests without children move here from there..."* The 4th interviewee added: *"... We have a hotel where we accept families with children. Both are the same scenarios, depending on the purpose of the holiday. -I will definitely go here with my wife or alone, but if I go with my children I will have to go to the other one. This is also related to the reason for going on vacation, the preference of vacation..."*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study, seven themes have emerged as a result of interviews with managers for hospitality enterprises serving in the adult-only concept. These are; age restriction, childless hotel, inadequate space, calm service, pros and cons, guest feedback and alternative hotel themes.

In the survey, it is seen that adult-only concept enterprises in Marmaris serve ages of 16+. The most important reason for choosing the Adult-only concept is that tourists prefer a quiet environment away from the noise of children. In terms of enterprises, the inadequacy of their physical capabilities for child-focused activities and services is the most important factor. In an Adult-only concept hotel, it seems that the concept does not offer any extra service, but instead focuses on more relaxing and calm products and services. In this case, enterprises are able to provide guests with a more focused and professional service to those who know what they want. Because, an adult-only concept hotel focuses the performance of child products and services on adults. In addition, costs are reduced because there are no child-based expenditures. This concept also has some disadvantages. Although European tourists are the main target markets for these enterprises, in the July-August period, the European markets have declined considerably, with families with children wishing to go on holiday. This situation makes it a necessity for enterprises to re-think the sales department and to look for alternative markets.

All the feedback about the concept is positive for the visitors who receive service from the adult-only hotels. However, occasionally families with children arrive without knowing the concept, regular customers who were previously without children who now have children, the enterprises have hotels that are essentially sister hotels which accept children, and families with children are directed to them. Therefore, no negative reactions are received from the guests.

When the tourism literature is examined, tourism types (congress, thermal, halal, golf, etc.) are included according to their purposes. It is also seen that, in the name of diversification of tourism products, enterprises have gone on to become concept hotels. For example, thermal tourism-thermal, spa hotels, congress tourism-congress hotels, halal tourism-halal hotels, golf tourism-golf hotels, etc. As a result of the literature review carried out, it has been determined that the concept of adult-only has started to be applied in Turkey since 2012; however, there is no evidence that it has been associated with any type of tourism covering this concept in the last 6 years. According to the ages of the participants, tourism varieties are classified as youth, adult and third-age tourism (Kozak et al., 2017). The adult-only concept cannot be included in youth and third age tourism because of its age limitation, or adult because of the inclusion of



families with children. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of adult-only is in a gap of the varieties of tourism both in the literature and in the sector itself. In other words, this concept can not be associated with any kind of tourism. For this reason, it is considered that the concept of "childless tourism" is a suitable concept for literature.

It is possible to define the concept of childless tourism in accordance with the literature review, the study carried out and the themes determined in this study as follows: Tourism attended without children by those age 16 and above, desiring more intense calm and rest is called childless tourism.

Suggestions that can be made in accordance with the study are as follows:

- A standard should be set for age limitation. Since the target market is mostly Europe, this limit should be 16 years of age.
- Enterprises should specify their adult-only concept in their name. In this way, the reaction of families with children will be prevented in advance.
- Adult-only concept hotels should offer flexible, individualized products and services for adults.
- Enterprises should carry out promotional activities with the emphasis of being an adult hotel.
- Target markets should be expanded and enterprises should participate in international fairs in this context.
- Considering supply and demand, an increase in the number of adult-only concept hotels should be encouraged if necessary.

This study has some limitations. The primary limitation is that the study has been carried out in Marmaris only. In the future it may be carried out in other destinations in Turkey. The fact that it has been conducted by individual interviews is another limitation. Focus group interviews can be conducted. Another limitation is that it has been discussed with senior executives working in the enterprises. In the future, other hotel employees can be interviewed to obtain their views. In addition to this, in-depth information can be obtained directly from the first mouth by talking with adult-only concept hotel guests.

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