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## **NEW EXPANSIONS IN TURKEY TOURISM: INDIAN WEDDINGS**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, the impact of globalization, the development of information and communication technology, increased cultural interaction, postmodern movements and trends are causing the search for different experiences by tourists leads to the emergence of new tourist attractions. One of the alternative tourism types by postmodern tourism consumers who are in new quests is "wedding tourism". Wedding tourism, whose purpose is to realize outside the countries, is defined as an activity that includes transportation, accommodation, refreshments and entertainment. India is one of the most preferred countries for wedding tourism in the world. The majority of weddings of rich families in India take place in outside the countries, such as Indonesia and especially Thailand. However, these countries have become tired destinations because Indian weddings have been realized for 30 years. Indian weddings have been around for about 30 years, these countries. Therefore, the Indians have sought an alternative destination. In recent years, Turkey has been one of the most popular country for Indian weddings in terms of an alternative destination. Indian families have focused on Turkey day by day thanks to its natural and cultural opportunities, diverse shopping facilities, the quality of the hotel, suitable climate and its rich histories as well as. In addition to this, another advantage of the Indian wedding tourism is that Turkey is located at the intersection of Asian and European cultures. The aim of this study, which is evaluated as a new approach of postmodern tourism, is to contribute to the tourism literature of our country as a current study issue. For this purpose, Indian Weddings will be evaluated in Turkey scale by performing literature review and benefiting from secondary data sources. Turkey's benefiting from this growing trend is very important for our country. On the other hand it is an important necessity to solve problems such as direct flights and presentation so that our country get more share from the market.

Key words: New Trends in Tourism, Postmodern Tourism, Wedding Tourism, Indian Weddings, Turkey

### **Introduction**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. With the end of the Second World War, factors such as the increase in industrialization and the increase in incomes played important roles in the development of tourism. In recent years, globalization, developments in information and

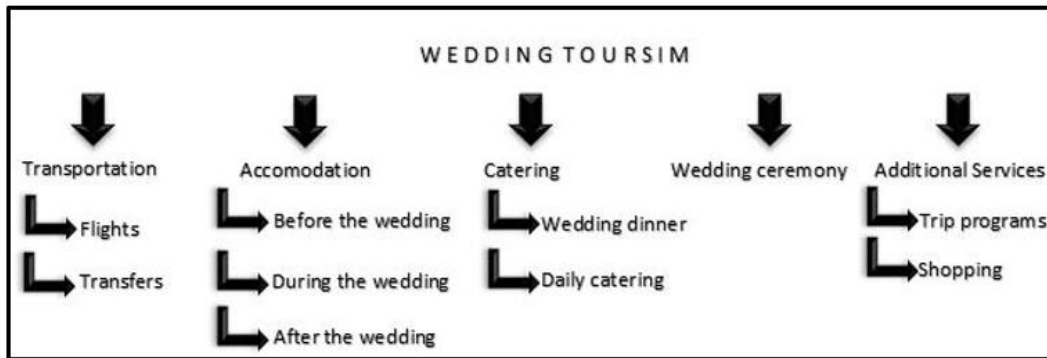
communication technology, increase in intercultural interaction, post-modern tourism movements and trends, tourists seeking different experiences also led to the emergence of new touristic expansions. One of the alternative tourism types that post-modern tourism consumers who have been looking for new pursuits have brought out is the "wedding tourism".

Before explaining wedding tourism, it will be beneficial to define the meaning of the word wedding, one of the most important time of people's lives, from the most primitive communities on earth to the most developed communities. Turkish Language Association refers to wedding as the big ceremony and entertainment done to celebrate events like marriage and circumcision (TDK, 2018). With its clothes, rituals, traditions, a wedding is one of the most special ceremonies in the life of a person all over the world. The wedding tourism whose main purpose is to carry out the wedding activities in various ways is defined in similar ways by different researchers in the international literature (wedding tourism, wedding based tourism, destination wedding):

Wedding tourism is defined as an activity involving transportation (flights and transfers of the couple and the guests attending the wedding), accommodation (couples and guests), and compliments and entertainment (De Witt, 2006). In their study, Daniels and Loveless (2013) define wedding tourism as the tourist flow involving the trip taken to the wedding ceremony made at a place different than the bride and the groom lives. In another study conducted on the subject, wedding tourism was described as international trips taken to marry or participate in a wedding ceremony (Major, McLeay & Waine, 2010). In another definition, wedding tourism refers to the tourist flows that occurs in order to participate in a destination wedding at a different place than where both the bride and groom live or at a different place than where one of the couple lives (Del Chiappa & Fortezza, 2013 cited in Vidauskaite, 2015).

According to Vidauskaite (2015), wedding tourism refers to domestic or international travels done to get married or to celebrate marriage (honeymoon) since wedding tourism includes also the honeymoon. Newly-wed couples going to different countries as tourists for their honeymoons, a part of the wedding tourism, is an activity that has been going on for a long time. Touristic activities for honeymoon are known to have continued since ancient Greek times (Vidauskaite, 2015). However, it is quite a new activity for couples to spend their wedding activities in different countries. In addition to the wedding tourism being a new concept compared to the honeymoon concept (Vidauskaite,

2015), a group of 250-300 people participate in the wedding tourism compared to only the couples participating in the honeymoon.



**Figure 1.** Wedding Tourism

In the light of the definitions given in the literature, wedding tourism in a broad sense is a touristic activity or a trip done in order to carry out the wedding activity in a place other than the resident city (it may be in another country, or it may be a different place in the same country) involving the trips and transportation during the trips of the bride and groom, the wedding hosts and the guests, accommodation, eating and drinking, visits, shopping or a touristic activity or a trip done in order to celebrate the wedding activity honeymoon. (Figure 1)

Although wedding tourism is referred to with concepts such as marriage tourism and destination wedding in the literature, wedding tourism is the most fitting one amongst them on this subject because while the wedding expresses the activity performed on that day, marriage generally refers to a period that lasts for many years. Since weddings are planned events, it is also possible to consider wedding tourism a part of event tourism (Vidauskaite, 2015).

With the development in communication and information technologies and increase in socio-economic change, tourists have developed new perspectives by recognizing new and different cultures (Zoğal & Emekli, 2017). Defined above, the wedding tourism is a touristic product that was put forth by these new perspectives. A product of the post-modern paradigm, wedding tourism has many important characteristics. Wedding tourism contributes to all the stakeholders in the tourism sector and to the tourism's sub-sectors, as well as providing a number of economic benefits to the destinations due to the couples' and guests' travels.

Wedding tourism can be carried out in many ways. However, the first two most common ones are destination weddings and exotic weddings. In destination weddings, while selected destinations are of great importance, activities in this type of wedding tourism are carried out according to the couple's own traditions. In exotic wedding activities, the soon-to-wed couples are in an effort to make the wedding more romantic or adventurous rather than making the wedding according to traditional wedding rituals. Getting married under water, on a balloon or while doing bungee jumping can be given as examples to this type of wedding tourism.

Demand for wedding tourism around the world is increasing day by day. According to a survey conducted by the Conde Nast Bridal group, who have been conducting studies on the subject, wedding tourism increased by 400% in the last decade (Suklabaidya, 2008). Behind this increase in wedding tourism are factors such as globalization, the development of transportation and communication technologies, and curiosity about other cultures. On the other hand, the desire of a guaranteed

beautiful weather, the desire to have an unforgettable wedding in a unique place and the conveniences offered by the wedding packages at the destinations also lead the couples towards wedding tourism (Major, et al., 2010 cited in Unur et al., 2017). With the increase in its popularity in recent years, 15 % of the world's weddings in 2014 were made in various destinations under wedding tourism (BrideBox Wedding Albums, 2014 cited in Khodzhaeva, 2016). Today, wedding tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry (Major, Mcleay & Waine, 2010; Seebaluck, et al., 2015 cited in Vidauskaite, 2015).

A large percentage of wedding tourists comes from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France and Scandinavia. The most popular destinations for wedding tourism are Las Vegas, Hawaii, the Caribbean, Mexico, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, Dubai, Cyprus and Italy (Poon, 2009). Despite the variety of destinations, the common characteristics for almost all of them is them being suitable for sea-sand-sun tourism. On the other hand, one of the communities that recently got the upper hand in wedding tourism are the Indians. Turkey's awareness as a destination has been rising day by day. In this study, the developments in this context will be put forth.

### **Purpose and Method**

In this study, it was aimed to put forth why Turkey is one of the prominent destinations in the Indian wedding tourism in recent years. In this regard, the answers to the following questions guiding the study were sought:

**Q1.** What are the sources of motivation that push Indians to get married in Turkey?

**Q2.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of Turkey in Turkey's Indian wedding tourism?

Another purpose of the study is to evaluate this subject that is considered as a new expansion in post-modern tourism from the perspective of tourism geography by discussing spatial creativity with human-space interaction. Contributing to the tourism literature of our country with this new research subject is another purpose of this current study. For this purpose, after conducting a literature review, Indian weddings were discussed within the scope of Turkey by using data from secondary sources (organization firms, travel agencies, etc.), and Turkey's strengths and weaknesses were put forth.

### **Findings**

#### *Indian Culture and Wedding*

With its population of 1.3 billion (17.5 % of the world's population) and with its area of 3.2 km<sup>2</sup> (the seventh largest country in the world), India is a country with a very heterogeneous structure. Considerable number of Muslims live in the country where the majority of the population is Hindus. The country in which twenty-one different languages are spoken and tens of different religions are believed in has great cultural richness. According to this Indian culture with such rich characteristics, a wedding is the most sacred and important event from birth to death. Indian weddings are events including many ethnic and religious traditions. These events vary from region to region in India, just like every other place in the world. The main reason for this is that each region has its own culture but the common characteristic in almost all of them is them being ostentatious.

One of the most influential communities behind the emergence of wedding tourism is considered to be Indians since India is the leading country in wedding tourism around the world. Among its 1.3 billion

population, 18 million of them have the capacity to spend at the level of Europeans and are looking for a destination for wedding tourism ([www.kulturturizm.gov.tr](http://www.kulturturizm.gov.tr)) (29.08.2018). By 2018, the Indian wedding tourism revenue has reached 60 billion dollars. In this context, India's rich families have been holding weddings in certain destinations for 30 years, especially in Indonesia and Thailand. However, since Indian weddings have been held in these destinations for about 30 years, these countries have become tired destinations. Therefore, Indians began to seek an alternative destination. In this regard, as an alternative destination in recent years, Turkey has become one of the most popular countries for Indian weddings.

Here, it is important to draw the attention to a certain issue. The main reason why Indians hold their weddings outside their country is not because opportunities in India are limited or because they are reacting towards the traditional weddings in their country. On the contrary, India is an important wedding destination for those looking for exotic and adventurous (with its beaches, Himalayas, under water weddings, etc.) weddings. However, due to various motivational sources to be discussed in the next sections, holding weddings outside their country became an increasing event.

### **A New Destination in Indian Weddings: Turkey**

Tourism has a dynamic structure due to its nature. As a result of this characteristics, tourism is subject to constant development and change. This aforementioned change and development comes true multi-dimensionally (destination, tourist, touristic product, etc.). On the other hand, it is not possible to limit tourism to specific areas since the perception of tourism changed with the world changing along with the post-modern paradigm. In today's world where the demand for different types of tourism have risen due to tourism's dynamic structure, the necessity for Turkey to expand and diversify its touristic product pool should not be ignored. Along this junction, new approaches, perspectives and vision are needed in Turkish tourism.

The growth of the network society, the increasing importance of the network and the rise of network organizations directly affect tourism (Zoğal & Emekli, 2017). Because of this effect, Indians who come from about nine thousand kilometers away hold their weddings at destinations in Turkey. Thus, this provides a new expansion and alternative tourism diversity to our country's tourism. The new trends that emerge in this context offer new opportunities for countries. For Turkey, one of these expansions is the Indian wedding tourism (Unur et al., 2017). Indian wedding tourism is a kind of creative tourism that is focused on demand and high in expectation.

Wedding tourism is a new and alternative kind of tourism for Turkey. Indian wedding tourism in our country has become one of the latest expansions in Turkish tourism by developing day by day. In Turkey, where approximately 650 thousand couples marry every year, the wedding cake is growing continuously. Wedding organizations that feed about 20 lines of business from the pastry cook to the wedding dress maker, from the printer to the organization firms have become an industry in itself now. In an interview, Meltem Tepeler, the founding president of the Creative Activities Planning and Implementation Association (YEPUD), stated that Istanbul is the city where the highest number of weddings are being held in the world after Las Vegas. Each year more than 350 international weddings take place in Turkey.

Turkey, with its natural and cultural characteristics as well as its rich historical heritage, various shopping opportunities, the quality of hotels and its suitable weather, has been attracting Indian families more day by day. Also, Turkey being at the intersection of Asian and European cultures is another advantage for Indian wedding tourism. Indian wedding tourism is significant in terms of

creating diversity and alternative for Turkey. Particularly, weddings confirmed to be held outside the sea-sand-sun season provide vitality for the resort hotels whose occupancy rates are well below their capacity during the off season. (Figure 2)

Nature, landscape (Kim & Agrusa, 2005), price, fashion and culture are important factors affecting the decision making process of couples during their destination selection. For this reason, Indian weddings in our country are held along the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts where the sea-sand-sun tourism is intense. Among these regions, especially Antalya and Bodrum destinations are in the forefront. In these aforementioned destinations, the wedding events take place in 5-star resort hotels. As state above, the 3S factor plays a decisive role in the Indian wedding tourism. Beside the mentioned destinations, there are also many wedding events held in Istanbul. The biggest factor behind Indians preferring Istanbul is the Turkish TV series. The Turkish series, which are shown in India, are high in demand. Since the Bosphorus view is frequently used in many of the above-mentioned series, Indians want to hold their wedding events in the unique scenery provided by the geography. Another advantage of Istanbul is that it has direct flights from India. Indeed, as will be stated later, one of the biggest obstacles in front of the development of Indian wedding tourism in our country is the lack of direct flights.



**Figure 2.** Photographs from Indian Wedding in Turkey

According to the information obtained from the organization firms in our country during the study period, security, accessibility, high quality service, beautiful landscape, beautiful weather, shopping facilities, eating and drinking facilities, nightlife, and natural, cultural and historical attractions play important roles in the destination selection of Indians.

As mentioned before, many factors play roles in the destination selection of wedding tourism. However, the common feature of almost every destination is that it is convenient in terms of the sea-

sand-sun tourism. In this respect, Turkey is a suitable destination for Indian wedding tourism thanks to its many features.

While considering the Indian wedding tourism in Turkey, it is necessary to evaluate the factors that push Indians to have their weddings in Turkey and also the factors that attract Indian weddings to our country. While the motives of Indians holding their wedding events in our country are generally based on invisible sources of motivation, they consider Turkey’s physical features as the attractive factors for destination section. In this context, it is possible to discuss Indians desire to have their weddings outside the country as the driving factor and the attractive factors as the factors that play a role in the selection of the destination. (Table 1).

Driving factors	Attractive Factors
Prestige and status	Sea-sans-sun
Social interaction	Warm weather
Resting and relaxation	High quality resorts and hotels
The other destinations being tired ones	Recreational facilities
The desire to have different experiences	Historical and cultural heritage
	Natural environment
	Accommodation and eating-drinking service
	Service quality and diversity
	Geographic location

**Table 1.** The driving and attractive factors of the Indian wedding held in Turkey

When the number of Indian weddings that has increased particularly in the last two years and the number of guests are taken into consideration together, big figures do not come into play. Since there is no official authority to keep current data in this area, no definitive statements could not be made. However, when the number of events and the number of people participating in the events are calculated in general, there have been nearly 30 Indian weddings were held in our country, and approximately six thousand Indian tourists have been hosted. Considering that the minimum budget capacity required for Indian wedding events in our country is 750 thousand dollars, even though the number of people participating in Indian wedding tourism in our country is not very high, the high budget of these organizations are important for our country’s tourism. Therefore, Indian wedding tourism is a tourist product that should be considered significant for our country since its economic input to our country is high. As of 2018, ten weddings have been confirmed in our country and the number of weddings aimed to be held by the end of the year is 20. The total cost of the wedding held in Bodrum, one of the confirmed weddings for the month of April, was five million dollars. The total cost of another wedding held in Antalya last year exceeded two million Euros Indian weddings held in Turkey generally lasts four or five days, and their budgets exceed couple of million dollars. It is very important to fully meet the demands of the Indians during these wedding events organized because

details are very important in this kind of events where many people participate and where the budget is very high. For this purpose, the planning of Indian weddings starts a year ago. It is very important for the wedding owners to visit the premises before the wedding so that the wedding goes smooth and perfect. Various organization firms in our country prepare package programs by getting in touch with the Indian travel agencies and organization firms. The organization firms in Turkey are professional planners (Inventum Global, A45 Organizasyon, etc.). Since these organization firms ensure the communication (demands, expectations and hotels' answers), they have a key position in Indian weddings. In this context, the organizations are considered a kind of a wedding host. The main duties of organization companies are: To learn the demands of the wedding hosts by meeting with them,

- To determine the budget,
- To organize events,
- To search venues,
- To prepare the participant list,
- To ensure the smooth operation of service,
- To prepare the decorations,
- To coordinate,
- To prepare an emergency action plan,
- To prepare the legal procedure when necessary,
- To help the tourists with the provision of passports and insurance documents.

Indian wedding tourism has four legs: transportation, catering, accommodation, additional services (sightseeing, shopping, etc.). Among these four legs, Turkey has the disadvantage of only about transportation since there are no direct flights from India to the Indian wedding destinations in Turkey (except Istanbul). The biggest obstacle in front of the development of Indian wedding tourism in Turkey is the lack of direct flights between the two countries. Especially for the Indians who prefer the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts as their destinations, it takes a long time to get to their destination over Istanbul. On the other hand, even direct flights from India to Istanbul last nearly six hours. (Figure 3)



Those who travel such long distance for the wedding events do not want to waste more time with transit flights.



Figure 3. Flight time from India to Turkey

Thanks to our diverse cuisine culture, our country is very advantageous in terms of catering. Also, since cuisine culture is also very important for Indians, about 30 cooks from India are brought with their Indian spices for every wedding.

The accommodation capacity and facilities of our country are one of the main factors attracting Indian weddings to our country. In this regard, there are many resort hotels where events can be held, especially on the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts. For most of the events, the hotels are closed or a large section of them is reserved for the use of Indian tourists.

In the post-wedding activities, Indian tourists get the opportunity to see various places of our country and also get the opportunity to do shopping.

It is possible to evaluate the Indian weddings held in our country within the scope of destination weddings because in this type of wedding tourism destinations have great importance. The wedding activities are carried out according to their own traditions. For the creativity of the venue, the hotel is prepared according to selected concepts and the preparations start days before the event. Additional staff to the existing staff of the hotels are brought in from various parts of Turkey.

Held in accordance with Indian traditions, the wedding ceremony lasts for 4-5 days. In addition to traditional activities, various Bollywood artists perform at the wedding. Furthermore, concepts such as the Turkish nights, harem, folklore and janissary music are preferred. As it can be seen, Indian weddings are held in accordance with traditional rituals from catering to decorations and clothes to be worn. Therefore, Indian weddings include the touches of modern life without compromising from tradition.

Participants in Indian wedding tourism continue to behave like ordinary tourists after the wedding event by continuing to use their accommodation, eat, shop and visit different places. When discussed from these aspects, the significance of Indian wedding tourism in our country's tourism industry becomes apparent. Another issue to pay attention here is that since the financiers of those who participate in Indian wedding tourism are the wedding owners, it is seen that wedding owners pay the

guests' every activity other than their private shopping. In some cases, the wedding owners even pay the guests' private shopping.

**Result**

Wedding tourism is a rapidly expanding new and alternative tourism type of the recent years. It is particularly a new type of tourism seen in Turkey. New types of tourists come to our country through wedding tourism. With its every kind of infrastructure services, Turkey has an important potential in Indian wedding tourism. (Table 2) Indian wedding tourism's contribution to Turkey's tourism economy is very significant, especially for Antalya and Bodrum since the staff working in the organization are brought from various part of Turkey in addition to a large part of the service activities being provided from the destination region. Furthermore, Indian wedding tourism is important for our country since it is an alternative type of tourism in addition to it bringing economic revenue.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Friendly local communities	Extended transportation time
Rich packages with better prices	Lack of promotion
High quality resort hotels	Not giving the necessary importance
Unique flora and fauna	Not being a brand
Historical and cultural heritage	Turkey entering the market late
Natural environment	Security problems in neighboring countries
Traditional Turkish hospitality	Lack of qualified staff in tourism
Turkish brand	Being attached to organization firms
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
The other destinations being tired ones	Increase in costs
Turkey's geopolitical diversity	Services provided by rival destinations
Increase in the wedding tourism market	Global stagnation and rivalry
Increase in the young population in India	Under the counter firms
Professional organization firms	The risk of not reaching the target population
Opening to new markets in wedding tourism	The easiness of getting copied

**Table 2.** SWOT Analysis of the Indian wedding tourism in Turkey

Another characteristic of Indian wedding tourism is that, due to the uniqueness of the place where the wedding ceremonies are held, people come back to the same destinations again for their wedding anniversaries or future vacations. Thus, it is possible that the wedding tourism will have a positive effect on the tourism movements in the following years.

Even though Indian wedding tourism is a new expansion in Turkey, it has the traces of both modern and post-modern tourism paradigms. While the effects of the modern period can be seen with the all-inclusive concepts, and outrageous and excessive consumption, the effects of the post-modern paradigm can be seen with individualized concepts and with its feature to live different cultures.

In order to develop the Indian wedding tourism in our country, there a number of events were organized. Nearly 250 Indian travel agencies were invited to Muğla in October 2017, and various workshops were organized. Such initiatives are important steps for the development of Indian wedding tourism.

One of the most important functions of tourism is communication between countries. Indian wedding tourism contributes to long-term relationship with the tourists participating in the organization. In addition to showing our cultural and natural richness to the tourists coming to our country through Indian wedding tourism, we can also imprint ourselves into their minds with our hospitable behaviors. Promotion and marketing, one of the most important elements of tourism, undoubtedly cannot be realized more effectively. Particularly in the post-wedding activities, they should get out the package program and experience the place with the locals. Thus, the foreign tourists who participate in these events will see the beauties of Turkey and will choose Turkey as a holiday destination in the coming years. In this regard, the destination image should be improved, and the diversity of the destinations should be increased with the addition of different destinations such as Alanya, Fethiye and Marmaris.

Indian wedding tourism does not take place as a mass tourism movement but takes place individually with the participation of the wedding owners and their relatives and close friends. However, since its added value is high as mentioned earlier, it is very important for our country's tourism economy. In today's conditions, closing down the resort hotels where the cost of a single room per night can cost between 3000 and 5000 Turkish Liras requires very high budgets.

On the other hand, Indian wedding tourism sector includes various suppliers such as accommodation, food and beverage, photographers, hairdressers, event organizers and travel agencies. While Indian wedding tourism supports many sectors related to the weddings, it also contributes to many other sectors that are not directly related to the weddings but can be found in the destination area. In order to increase this contribution, it is necessary to further increase the relationship between the tourists and the locals.

For Indians, gold and jewelry are as important as their weddings. As a matter of fact, there are Indian-style bracelets and jewelry sets which have spread to the world and are also widely used in our country. In this respect, in order to increase the revenue from the Indian wedding tourism, our country's local jewelry (Adana-style bracelet, Maraş belt, Trabzon set, etc.) should be introduced and sold to the wedding participants. Undoubtedly, a society that loves gold and jewelry this much will also be very interested in our country's local jewelry.

The difference between the Indian wedding tourism and the other wedding tourism events around the world is that while the others are preferred due to their low costs, the Indian wedding tourism budgets are quite high as mentioned earlier.

As is known airline transportation is one of the key points of tourism development. Participants in Indian wedding tourism also demand a comfortable trip. The biggest obstacle to the development of the Indian wedding tourism in Turkey is the fact that there are no direct flights. Presently, those

participating in the Indian wedding tourism travel either with transit flights or rented aircrafts. This situation increases the cost of the activities as well as reduces the demand.

While the lack of direct flights is Turkey's biggest disadvantage, the lack of promotion is also Turkey's another problem. Despite the increasing trend in recent years, Turkey cannot even get 1% share of the Indian wedding tourism. In order for the increasing trend to continue and get more share from the Indian wedding market, Turkey should solve its direct flight and promotion problems, and should provide more convenience in visa applications and customs.

In addition, coordination among stakeholders should be ensured, a specific standard should be determined, a brand for this standard should be created, and more weddings should be confirmed by presenting packages that have various advantages. At this point, not only private institutions but also the public institutions should embark on enterprises encouraging this type of tourism.

Undoubtedly, before developing a new touristic product, evaluating the destination potential of the product in question could provide significant advantages. For this reason, it is important to conduct related studies first. When this is evaluated in terms of wedding tourism, it is seen that tourism researchers in Turkey has not shown in this area yet. The only study on the subject in Turkish literature is the one conducted by Unur et al. (2017) on the wedding tourism literature. An untouched sector with such high budgets should also be supported by academic studies. As mentioned before, this study is conducted within the scope of the stated purpose and contains only theoretical information. Not doing works such as field surveys and other applications is a limitation of the study. In the future, it is essential to carry out more comprehensive studies after completing the shortcomings of the subject with various studies.

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