

Altinkale as a New Thermal Water Tourism Destination in Sivas, Turkey

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Abstract— One of the most valuable gifts that nature offers to humanity is thermal waters. The most important feature of thermal waters is that they reflect the physicochemical structure and characteristics of the underground environment to the earth. Today, the phenomenon of tourism has changed rapidly and new touristic phenomena have emerged. It is only possible for developing countries such as Turkey to increase their share in the tourism market by diversifying their tourism services and products. Turkey is a very rich destination in terms of alternative tourism opportunities. One of the alternative tourism resources that needs to be developed in Turkey is thermal waters. The city of Sivas is at the forefront of Turkey with its thermal water resources. Among the thermal tourism destinations of the city of Sivas, Altinkale is the newest one with important touristic attractions. The interesting feature of Altinkale is that it consists of golden colored water travertines. The hot and healing thermal waters in Altinkale paint the travertines golden color. Altinkale has an important touristic attraction in Sivas city with its destination, healing, nature and color. In this study, Altinkale, which is a candidate to be a new center of attraction in thermal water tourism, is discussed.

Keywords— Altinkale, Destination, Thermal water, Tourism, Sivas, Turkey.

I. INTRODUCTION

Health tourism has become an important type of tourism in recent years. With the development and ease of travel opportunities, the number of people who want to benefit from health services is increasing. One of the oldest types of health tourism is thermal tourism. People have been benefiting from the therapeutic and relaxing properties of thermal waters since ancient times. Thermal tourism is defined as the use of mineral-rich geothermal waters warmer than 18-20 degrees Celsius for treatment, entertainment, relaxation and purification purposes [1]. Usta and Zaman [2] reported that thermal waters are one of the most important renewable and sustainable energy sources in earth.

The economic, cultural and social development of cities has caused destination marketing to gain great importance in creating an attraction center in terms of tourism. Cities that comprehend and implement this development are trying to make a difference by using their attractiveness in the right sense [3]. The concept of destination, which is

also expressed as a visit area outside the area where the person resides, is also defined as a physical area that the visitor benefits from and uses for a while [4]. Developments and new trends in world tourism have brought tourism marketing from country to destination and designed new touristic products [5]. Turkey is rich in thermal resources due to its deep fracture lines, active earthquake zones and a structural feature with rich and different mineral deposits due to its geographical location in the world [6]. Turkey is one of the first seven countries in the world in terms of thermal resource richness. It ranks first among European countries [7]. Thermal waters in Turkey have an important potential in terms of health tourism.

Thanks to the great advantages of its geographical location, the city of Sivas came under the domination of many different civilizations (Hittites, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks and Ottomans) and became the capital of some of them. Therefore, it has a historical and cultural heritage with a density and richness that is not seen in many cities.

When these universally important values are combined with the natural values originating from its geography, the city of Sivas can have a real tourism potential [8]. Sivas, which is among the leading cities of the world with its historical riches and natural beauties, comes to the fore with important thermal water tourism destinations with strong attractive aspects [9]. Among the thermal water tourism destinations of the city of Sivas, Altinkale is the newest one with important touristic attractions. Altinkale destination has an important touristic attraction in Sivas city with its healing, nature and color. In this study, Altinkale, which is located in Sivas city of Turkey and is a candidate to be a new center of attraction in thermal water tourism, is discussed.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sivas is a city located in the Central Anatolia Region, where the historical Silk Road routes in Anatolia intersect. It has important touristic attractions with its historical riches, natural beauties and thermal waters. Altinkale is located in the Hot Spa thermal field, 25 kilometers from Sivas city center in Turkey (Figure 1). It is approximately 30 kilometers from Sivas Nuri Demirağ Airport. There are daily flights to Sivas Nuri Demirağ Airport. Altinkale is very close to the Sivas-Ankara highway. In addition, there is easy access to all parts of Turkey by road and railway. In addition to these, with the completion of the high-speed train line, Sivas will have a stronger transportation network.



Fig. 1: Altinkale Destination

In this study, the thermal water tourism-related features of Altinkale are included. The aim of the research is to reveal the current situation of Altinkale in thermal water tourism on a destination basis. Altinkale constitutes the material of the research. When the literature on thermal tourism is examined, the lack of a study on Altinkale is the most important reason for doing this study. In this respect, this study is an exploratory research type according to its purpose. The study method consists of literature research, interview, data collection, observation and evaluation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Altinkale, which is located in the Hot Spa thermal area in the city of Sivas, is arranged in the form of step pools and takes its name from the yellow sediments formed by the sulfur in the water, was put into service in November 2020. Altinkale, which was built under the auspices of the Sivas Governorship, added an important thermal water tourism value to the city of Sivas in Turkey. By making use of the limonite and hematite-containing waters in the Hot Spa thermal area, gold colored travertines were made in the region, as in Pamukkale of Denizli city. Hot Spa thermal water, which heals many diseases, offers a visual feast in Altinkale with its average temperature of 48 degrees Celsius, limonite and hematite contents. Altinkale travertines highlight the rich texture of Hot Spa water and reveal the geological and geomorphological structure. Special morphological structures and tectonic elements in the area have made it almost an open-air geology museum. Altinkale consists of golden travertines formed by the flowing water in the thermal area and a recreation area. There are 21 thousand square meters of travertine and 19 thousand square meters of recreation area in and around Altinkale, which consists of an area of 40 thousand square meters [10]. Altinkale, which was completed in 1.5 years on an area of approximately 40 thousand square meters, increases the thermal water tourism potential and diversity of the city of Sivas. Visitors to Altinkale can enter the pools and benefit from the natural warmth and healing of the water.

The temperature of Hot Spa thermal water coming to Altinkale varies between 46-50 degrees Celsius. The pH value is 6.81. The chemical characteristic of the Hot Spa thermal water is a rich mineral water containing fluoride, calcium, magnesium-sodium, sulfate, hydro-carbonate and carbonate chloride [9]. The thermal water is good for rheumatism, nervous system, respiratory tract, digestive system, metabolism disorders, blood circulation, muscle pain, gynecological diseases, kidney and urinary tract [11]. The thermal water used in Altinkale has “curative” properties for many diseases or ailments.

First of all, the Hot Spa thermal area, where the people of Sivas have been seeking healing for years, continues to develop with Altinkale, which was built in 2020. This sulphurous water, which heals many diseases, serves the city of Sivas and Turkey. There are many thermal hotels and facilities in the region. There is also a Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Center affiliated with Sivas Cumhuriyet University in the region. Altinkale revitalizes thermal tourism [12]. The healing, naturalness and color of Altinkale are the most important attractions of Altinkale. Altinkale continues to host its visitors. Altinkale attracts visitors with its natural water and golden yellow color.

Visitors who come here take off their shoes and walk in the water. On the other hand, children can have fun by swimming in the pools. Everyone can benefit from these features and beauties of Altinkale. In this context, Altinkale, located in the city of Sivas, which has the opportunity to reach all parts of Turkey with the highway and railway network, constitutes an important opportunity for the development of thermal tourism since it is on the transition area in Turkey's geography.

All elements of tourism are important in terms of activating tourism and sustainability. However, the main strength in tourism is attractiveness. The existence of commercial activities and the economic contribution provided by the businesses depend on the attraction power of the destination to attract tourists [8]. Altinkale, which has a serious attraction power in this sense, has contributed significantly to the development of the thermal water tourism market in Sivas and especially to the increase in the number of daily local visitors. It has been observed that many people visit Altinkale on weekends, especially in the summer season. In addition, Altinkale draws attention with its feature of hosting hot and cold together in winter months. On days when the air temperature drops below zero, hot water at average 48 degrees Celsius spreads over the travertines in Altinkale, producing steam and creating an interesting view. Altinkale has become one of the important places and frequented places of Sivas in a short time.

Fascinating its visitors with its appearance, Altinkale awaits its domestic and foreign visitors within the borders of Sivas province. A destination aims to attract more tourists and get a larger share from tourism by offering products, goods and services. Tourists are affected by a wide variety of factors while determining their destination. These elements are the attraction factors of the destination as well as the demographic variables of the tourists [13]. Many factors, including economic, social, cultural and demographic characteristics, play a role in the destination selection of tourists in the tourism sector. In order for the destinations to be marketed effectively, better promotion is needed and it is necessary to determine which factors affect the tourists in the destination selection [5]. It is observed that those who prefer Altinkale are generally local visitors. It is a fact that Altinkale has not been able to fully benefit from foreign tourism movements. It has been determined that Altinkale does not have many visitors from abroad and it works for the domestic market. In this context, it is necessary to increase the advertisement and promotion of Altinkale destination. With the necessary advertisements and promotions, Altinkale will become even more attractive and recognizable for domestic and foreign visitors.

Sustainability has emerged as an approach that aims to eliminate or reduce the negative interaction between the environment and economic growth and development, against the economic understanding that consumes natural resources excessively and unconsciously [14]. In addition to being a touristic destination, Altinkale has its own unique visual, natural, geographical, social, cultural and economic characteristics. This situation makes Altinkale both very attractive and sensitive and fragile. In particular, developing tourism in Altinkale, which has become a thermal tourism-oriented touristic destination, may have negative environmental, social, economic and cultural consequences by creating serious pressures on the destination. For this reason, there is a need for concrete plans and models that will keep the negative effects and destruction of resources at a minimum level while ensuring visitor satisfaction in Altinkale. Thus, Altinkale can be managed as a sustainable destination.

IV. CONCLUSION

As a result, Altinkale has the potential to be an important destination for the development of sustainable thermal water tourism and its applications. In this context, the existing problems in front of sustainable thermal water tourism, including the perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders towards Altinkale, should be determined. Solution proposals should be created for these problems. In addition, the healing and natural beauties of Altinkale destination can be reached to wider potential tourist masses by advertising and promoting at tourism fairs, television, radio, newspapers, magazines and social media sites. Thus, Altinkale will make more significant contributions to the country's economy and thermal water tourism.

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