



ISSN: 2651-2742  
2023 - Cilt: 6 Sayı: 2  
Sayfa: 61-71.

Dergi Web Sitesi: <http://sita.cumhuriyet.edu.tr/tr/>

Gönderilme Tarihi:12.10.2023

Düzeltilme Tarihi: 24.12.2021

Kabul Tarihi:26.12.2023

Arařtırma Makalesi (Research Article)

## AKDENİZ BÖLGESİNDEKİ ÇOCUK DOSTU OTELLERİN ÇOCUK BESLENMESİNE KATKISININ İNCELENMESİ

Investigating The Contribution Of Child-Friendly Hotels To Child Nutrition In The Mediterranean Region

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### ABSTRACT

It is seen that parents prefer child-friendly hotels in their hotel choices because of their facilities compared to other hotels. Based on this direction, the aim of this study is to determine the distinguishing features of child-friendly hotels from other hotels in child nutrition and to provide information for parents' hotel preferences. According to the tourism statistics reports of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for 2020, Manavgat, Alanya, Serik/Belek, Kemer and Fethiye districts were determined as the five coastal cities that attract the most tourists in the Mediterranean region. Four child-friendly hotels from each district were selected from the high-rated child-friendly hotels of a TÜRSAB-approved travel agency. In this context, a total of 20 child-friendly hotels were selected from five districts.

Within the scope of the qualitative research, the nutrition service of child-friendly hotels in 5 holiday resorts that attract the most tourists in the Mediterranean region was examined. By determining the distinctive features of child-friendly hotels in nutrition service, it was aimed to create a resource that offers families an idea in hotel preferences. Nowadays, it has been determined that the 5 star child friendly hotels selected in the Mediterranean region, in addition to serving as a children's buffet, have developed special menus for children with special food intolerance, increased tendency towards natural and fresh foods, and the use of

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Önerilen Atıf: Taşçı Ş., İlhan N. B. Ve Hastaoğlu E. (2023). Akdeniz Bölgesindeki Çocuk Dostu Otellerin Çocuk Beslenmesine Katkısının İncelenmesi, Sivas İnterdisipliner Turizm Arařtırmaları Dergisi, 6(2), 61-71.

natural products in their menus. In this context, it is recommended that kitchen chefs create new menus and introduce innovations in children's buffets to reduce the consumption of fast-food items in the dining services of child-friendly hotels.

**Key words:** Mediterranean region, child-friendly hotels, child tourism

## Öz

Ebeveynlerin otel seçimlerinde çocuk dostu otelleri diğer otellere göre imkanlarından dolayı tercih ettikleri görülmektedir. Bu doğrultudan yola çıkılarak yapılmış olduğumuz çalışmada, çocuk dostu otellerin çocuk beslenmesinde diğer otellerden ayırt edici özelliklerin belirlenmesi ve ebeveynlerin otel tercihleri için bilgi verici olması amaçlanmıştır. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı'nın 2020 yılı turizm istatistik raporlarına göre Akdeniz bölgesinin en çok turist çeken beş sahil kenti olarak Manavgat, Alanya, Serik/Belek, Kemer ve Fethiye ilçeleri belirlenmiştir. Belirlenen her ilçeden 4 çocuk dostu otel, TÜRSAB onaylı bir seyahat acentasının yüksek puanlı çocuk dostu otellerinden seçilmiştir. Bu kapsamda beş ilçeden toplam olarak 20 çocuk dostu otel seçilmiştir.

Nitel araştırma kapsamında Akdeniz bölgesinde en fazla turist çeken 5 tatil beldesindeki çocuk dostu otellerin beslenme hizmeti konusu incelenmiştir. Çocuk dostu otellerin beslenme hizmetinde ayırt edici özellikleri belirlenerek ailelere otel tercihlerinde fikir sunan nitelikte bir kaynak oluşturmak istenmiştir. Günümüzde Akdeniz bölgesinde seçilen 5 yıldızlı çocuk dostu oteller çocuk büfesi olarak hizmetin yanı sıra gelişim göstererek gıdaya karşı özel durumu bulunan çocuklara özel menüler, doğal ve taze gıdalara yönelimin arttığı bununla beraber menülerinde de doğal ürün kullanımına yer verdikleri saptanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda çocuk dostu otellerde beslenme hizmetinde sunulan fastfood içerikli gıdaların azaltılması için mutfak şefleri yeni menüler oluşturarak çocuk büfelerinde yeniliğe gidilmesi önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Akdeniz bölgesi, çocuk dostu oteller, çocuk turizmi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is known that tourism is an important sector for people. In order to attract the interest of individuals of all ages, it is first necessary to determine their wishes and expectations. In this direction, it is expected that deficiencies in the tourism sector will be eliminated and developed by making plans according to the wishes of the people.

Therefore, tourism businesses meet the physiological, psychological and social needs of the targeted consumer group and reveal the hotel preferences of customers by taking into account these needs as well as economic, cultural and environmental factors (Pettersson & Fjellström, 2007; Albayrak, 2014).

The level of consciousness and interests of today's individuals have an impact on the features they look for in hotel businesses. In line with the preferences of individuals, it is seen that one of the factors that hotel establishments take into account is the family structure with children. It is known that children's ability to make food and beverage preferences directly affects the choice of hotel establishment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Aşık, 2019). Therefore, it is seen that hotel businesses whose target audience is aimed at children are experiencing development and change in the special food and game sector for children (Aşık, 2019). In this direction, the increasing interest of consumers in the functional properties of foods due to the increase in the level of awareness of consumers causes changes in the kitchens of hotel businesses and new

products are offered. It is seen that the demand for fruits and vegetables with good agricultural practices, healthy seeds, foods with reduced sugar and salt content, gluten-free foods, and foods suitable for lactose intolerance has increased (Riezzo et al., 2005). Due to these demands, hotel establishments include changes in their buffets and menus (Çelik Şeker & Keleş, 2019). Changes in menus and meals specially prepared for children are an effective factor in families' hotel business preferences (Pettersson and Fjellström, 2007). One of the expectations of families is that foods specially prepared for children are not harmful in terms of health. For these reasons, hotel establishments should plan according to the wishes of children and families during menu planning (Aşık, 2019; Emir & Pekiyan, 2010).

Although children are often involved in choices such as family activities and holidays, they are less involved in the selection of large, durable objects in the home (Swinyard and Sim, 1987). This study also suggests that parents, regardless of their age, should consider their children's interests first and foremost when choosing a holiday destination. Hotel choice may vary according to consumer demographic characteristics and preferences. Families with children are especially keen to choose hotels that appeal to them and their children. These hotels are expected to meet the basic needs of parents and children, be safe for children and entertain children with hotel facilities (Akkan & Bozyiğit, 2020).

In child-friendly hotel establishments, turning foods such as hamburgers, nuggets, sausages, sausages, colourful cake varieties, and carbonated drinks into healthy foods suitable for children and explaining the ingredients in them causes families to trust and prefer them (Keskin, Sezen, & Yorgancı, 2021).

This study was conducted to determine the services offered by child-friendly hotels in accordance with child nutrition and to contribute to the field of child-friendly tourism. In this direction, it has been determined that child nutrition is of great importance for families in child-friendly hotels. When we look at the importance of this study, it is to facilitate families in their choices by providing detailed information about the child-specific services of the identified child-friendly hotels and to contribute to the changes of these hotels by seeing their deficiencies. In this study, it is aimed to determine the distinguishing features of child-friendly hotels from other hotels in child nutrition, to be a resource for parents and to contribute to hotel preferences. It is also intended to serve as an example for researchers working on nutrition in child-friendly hotels. In line with the tourism statistics reports of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for 2020, the five coastal cities of the Mediterranean region that attract the most tourists were determined. The 5 coastal cities determined from the Mediterranean region were Manavgat, Alanya, Serik, Kemer and Fethiye districts. Child-friendly hotels were identified in these districts and their services for child nutrition were investigated.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Children and Tourism**

Child-friendly tourism is a tourism approach that aims to create a touristic area where children can learn while having fun by protecting the rights of all children without discrimination in touristic environments and activities in which children are involved and ensuring that they can be healthy and safe away from all kinds of violence (Child-Friendly Tourism, 2021). In other words, it is the implementation of positive discrimination for children in all tourism activities (travel, excursions, accommodation, etc.) (Ahipaşaoğlu, 2018). The primary objective of the Child-Friendly Tourism approach is to adopt a sustainable approach that is related to

children's rights with the institutions and organizations involved in the sector in Turkey (Child-Friendly Tourism, 2021). In this context, tourism businesses;

- Take precautions for children's health, hygiene and safety in their facilities,
- Provide activities that do not affect children's health development,
- Tourism must protect children from all forms of violence and sexual abuse,
- Inform employees and customers about child-friendly tourism,
- Increase child-oriented social awareness (Child-Friendly Tourism, 2021).

## **2.2. Child-Friendly Hotels**

Child-friendly hotel was defined as a hotel with child-friendly awareness that offers qualified services to children and their parents with all their employees and facilities such as recreation services, babysitters, doctors, and entertainment areas for children in the facility, where children of all ages groups can stay safely with their parents (Çakmak Sel & Mazman İtik, 2020).

Aslan et al. (2019) stated that child-friendly hotels can be considered establishments that are generally designed to appeal to the young market and parent density, with different playgrounds and recreational activities according to the interests and skills of each age group, special pools for children, special menus, as well as baby and child care facilities. Accordingly, the criteria child-friendly hotels should have easy access to the hotel, children having an individual bed or a connecting parent's room, babysitting, recreation and animation services, appropriate design of the children's swimming pool and the presence of a lifeguard, children's playgrounds are in a safe place and surrounded by barriers, no smoking areas in the dining halls, child-friendly chairs, high chairs, food service sets and menus in dining rooms, has trained employees who can provide good communication with children (Tuna, Özyurt, & Kurt, 2019).

## **2.3. Child-Friendlyndly Hotels and Nutrition Services**

With the advances in the field of gastronomy every day, the menus and buffets available in food and beverage services in hotel establishments are developed and enriched in line with changing demands. When the nutrition service units in hotels are examined, it is seen that there are allergic food buffets, special nutrition buffets, diet buffets and children's buffets in addition to the main restaurants in line with the improving service quality and demand (Çelik Şeker & Keleş, 2019). The menus of children's buffets in accommodation facilities are among the factors that parents pay attention to when choosing accommodation facilities. One of the main features that parents expect from nutrition services is that the health of children is not jeopardized by using natural or organic foods in food and beverages (Keskin, Sezen, & Yorgancı, 2021). When children's menus are analyzed, it is seen that most of the menus contain sugary and salty foods that may pose a danger to children's health at later developmental stages.

Sugary and salty foods on children's menus cause many health problems and obesity in children. Therefore, it is thought that including the nutritional values of foods in children's menus can be an effective factor for creating awareness of healthy nutrition in children's nutrition and consuming preferred foods with the awareness of their nutritional values (Keskin, Sezen, & Yorgancı, 2021).

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In children's menus, many foods that are offered for the consumption of children and adolescents, but which are a mystery in terms of health, are as follows (Çelik Şeker & Keleş, 2019);

- Pizza varieties,
- Crispy potato tenderloin,
- Nuggets and schnitzels,
- Hamburgers,
- Sandwiches made with processed products,
- Cakes and desserts prepared with additives,
- Donuts,
- Bubble ice cream,
- Assortment of chips,
- Ready-made milk desserts,
- Variety of carbonated drinks.

Accommodation establishments choose food and beverage raw materials from economical products as much as possible due to economic and competitive conditions in the preparation of children's menus. Due to product costs, businesses prefer products that have a long shelf life and can be reused in the selection of raw materials. Raw material choices made by businesses to avoid costs can negatively affect the development of children. As a result of parents' awareness of this situation, they pay attention to whether the children's buffets in the nutrition service carry the hygiene and food safety conditions of the foods offered for consumption while choosing the tourism activities and accommodation facilities they will participate in. One of the issues that parents pay attention to in children's buffets is whether ready-to-eat foods are available in the buffet. Food additives present in ready-to-eat foods frequently used in children's buffets in accommodation establishments are classified as colourants, preservatives, antioxidants, sweeteners and fragrances. When the health effects of some preservatives and antioxidant additives are examined;

- Nitrite and nitrate present in processed meat products such as sausage, salami, sausage, ham, etc. form nitrosamines that cause cancer,
- Sodium metabisulphite in products such as biscuits, wafers, cakes, cookies and potato chips trigger asthma attacks in asthmatic patients and cause mutations in bacteria,
- Sodium guanylate and sodium inosinate in meat products, broth tablets, soy products and instant soups exacerbate gout,
- Benzoic acid found in margarine, olive paste, fruit juices, jams, jellies, jelly, cake creams, sauces and ketchup has been reported to cause asthma, allergic skin diseases and migraine (Çelik Şeker & Keleş, 2019).

### 3. METHOD

This study aims to evaluate the child-friendly implementations in food and beverage services of resort hotels in the child-friendly hotel concept, examine their contributions to child nutrition and reveal the differences between hotels and districts.

For this purpose, coastal resort hotels operating in the Mediterranean Region, Turkey were identified. Manavgat, Alanya, Serik/Belek, Kemer and Fethiye, which are the 5 districts with the highest number of tourist accommodations in the Mediterranean Region in the tourism report published by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2020), constitute the universe of this study. A total of 20 hotels in these 5 districts, which declare that they are child-friendly hotels on their websites, are included in the website of a TÜRSAB-approved travel agency and volunteered to participate in this study, were selected and constituted the sample of this study.

The semi-structured interview method, which is one of the qualitative research techniques, was used in the selected hotels to examine the nutrition services of child-friendly hotels which have been declared to be child-friendly hotels.

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the study. Qualitative research can be defined as "research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in a natural environment" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data obtained at the end of the research process are subjected to descriptive analysis and content analysis, which are two different analysis methods. While descriptive analysis is used to process data that do not require detailed analysis, content analysis refers to a more in-depth approach and aims to examine the data obtained more closely and to reach concepts and themes that explain these data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The findings introducing the interviewees are analysed through both descriptive analysis and content analysis. While trying to define the data, similar or related data are grouped around certain concepts and themes and interpreted. Content analysis aims to define the contents of the participants' opinions in a systematic way (Altunışık et al., 2010).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and the completed forms were applied to executive chefs in the child-friendly hotels. The interviews were recorded by voice recorder and varied between 20 minutes and 30 minutes and lasted 25 minutes on average. After interview some photos were taken about the interviews. The semi-structured interview form includes questions to determine the nutrition service offered by the hotels to children. For this purpose, 10 questions were created by reviewing the literature in the fields of nutrition, hospitality and tourism management. The questions obtained were reduced to 6 by asking the opinions of hotel managers and nutritionists.

Executive chefs were asked;

1. What is the factor for you to designate it as a child-friendly hotel?
2. What facilities or services do you offer for children in the food and beverage section of your hotel?
3. What products are different from other hotels in your children's buffet?
4. Do you use additives or natural products in your food in the children's buffet? If you use natural products, can you give examples of the products you use?

5. What is included in the special menu for children?

6. Do you have food and beverage service for children with special conditions (lactose intolerance, gluten)?

#### 4. FINDINGS

Today, with the increasing awareness of children's tourism in line with the developing tourism approaches, parents pay attention to the nutrition services they offer in addition to the criteria that child-friendly hotels should have. Based on this direction, the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the relevant persons of child-friendly hotels in 5-holiday resorts that attract the most tourists in the Mediterranean region about the special nutrition service for children are analyzed. Observations were indicated below from district to district.

##### **Data obtained from interviews with executive chefs in child-friendly hotels in Manavgat;**

- For children and adolescents, self-produced ice creams, fresh and dry cake varieties and natural fruit juices (tomato, carrot, orange, etc.) are offered throughout the day, while hotdogs, hamburgers and kumpir varieties are served by the pool between 12:00-15:30.
- There are 3 buffets for main meals: hot, cold and patisserie. It has been determined that the buffets and dining halls prepared for children are designed in a way suitable for children (Figure 1).
- It has been determined that spices such as vegetable condiments are not used in the buffet meals offered in the nutrition service and natural and fresh products are used.
- For children with special conditions (lactose intolerance, gluten sensitivity, etc.) and adolescent guests, the hotel is informed in advance and a special menu is prepared.
- In the baby corner, powdered baby food, fruit purees, rice food, milk, hot water, and bottle warmer are available.



**Figure 1.** Buffet Design of a Child-Friendly Hotel

- The most important factor that distinguishes a hotel from other hotels in the Manavgat district is the information that there is a children's chef. It is known that the children's chef cooks meals suitable for children due to the difference in the food that each child will eat.

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- While the children's buffet serves until 21.00 in the evening, it was observed that they serve 24 hours a day in the baby corner.

### Data obtained from interviews with executive chefs in child-friendly hotels in Alanya;



**Figure 2. Table Design of a Child-Friendly Hotel**

- Fresh fruit juices and fruit varieties are served, as child guests need to start the day with healthy foods. Parents with babies are offered the opportunity to prepare baby food according to their wishes. In addition, there are biscuits of various brands, powdered formula, and puree varieties in the baby corner.
- In another selected hotel, there is a children's buffet and a fast-food restaurant designed for children (Figure 2).
- In another hotel, there is an ice cream corner for children and they create and serve ice cream varieties according to children's requests.



**Figure 3. Buffet Design of a Child-Friendly Hotel**

### Data obtained from interviews with executive chefs in child-friendly hotels in Serik,

- Among the 4 hotels in Serik district, there is a hotel specially designed for children and it is determined that there is a candy stand and there are lollipops, marshmallows, bonbons, chocolate dragees and jellybeans. At the same time, there is a bar for children in this hotel and drinks are prepared according to the child's request in this area; drinks such as hot chocolate, frozen, freshly squeezed fruit juices, and milkshakes are provided to have fun while playing games.
- There is a restaurant specially decorated for children and it is learned that there are chairs and tables suitable for children (Figure 3). This restaurant serves natural foods for children. In addition, hamburger buns and pizza dough are produced in-house.

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- In another hotel, unlike other hotels, it was stated that the activities organized for children and the kids club provide different experiences. There is a separate restaurant for children and the decor of this restaurant is designed according to the size of the child (Figure 4). It was found that children were made to make smoothies with chefs. It was also determined that cooking courses are organized for children with the chefs of the hotel. In the evening, healthy snacks are given to children. It was stated that popcorn is served to children on movie nights.



**Figure 4.** Decoration of Buffet in a Child-Friendly Hotel

- In another child-friendly hotel in the district, children are allowed to make their pizzas.
- In another hotel, children are allowed to eat the food they make while cooking as a children's club. In the Italian restaurant, natural-coloured pasta is produced by considering children's health. In snack restaurants, bread such as stuffed pizza is made to attract children's attention.

### **Data obtained from interviews with executive chefs in child-friendly hotels in Kemer;**

- It was found that local and healthy foods are consumed in a hotel in a holiday resort. These foods are purchased from places where local products are available and offered to customers.
- It was learned that gluten-free bread and pastry products are produced for children with gluten sensitivity.
- Healthy, natural foods that do not have plastic packaging in contact with food are used in children and baby buffets.
- Healthy drinks include ayran, milk, kefir, boza, lemonade, natural fruit and vegetable juices.
- Another important difference is that refined products containing trans fats are not used in frying products for children. A restaurant is created for child guests and it is reported that healthy snacks are prepared for them.
- In another hotel, products such as ravioli, pancakes, pancakes, fried dough, etc. are offered to the little guests as snack products.
- In another hotel, it is known that the children's buffet serves 3 times, namely in the morning, lunch and evening.

#### **Data obtained from interviews with executive chefs in child-friendly hotels in Fethiye;**

- Looking at the differences between the 4 child-friendly hotels selected from the Fethiye district of Muğla from the other child-friendly hotels in the district; it was seen that the same services are provided in the child-friendly hotels in the most tourist-attracting towns in Antalya province.
- However, as a difference, it was found that the foods used in children's buffets were obtained from local farmers and that these products were good agricultural products. It is also known that animal foods have quality certificates.
- Special menus are created for children and it was informed that lentil soup with rice is made as an example of a gluten-free meal.

#### **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

It can be said that the reason why the hotels participating in the research are stated as child-friendly hotels is generally due to the activities and animations organized specifically for children. For this reason, it can be said that the nutrition service offered to children by child-friendly hotels is in the background in some hotels and they only have a children's buffet and offer the same fast-food etc. content as other hotels. However, it can be said that some 5-star child-friendly hotels in the Mediterranean region have developed and, in addition to the consumption of fast-food products, the trend towards new foods, natural and fresh foods in their menus has increased and they offer special menus for children with special conditions against food. In child-friendly hotels where activity is at the forefront, it is seen that they combine nutrition service with activity and give children the opportunity to eat with fun. It is seen that the hotels selected in the region where the research was conducted provide food and equipment suitable for children of all ages.

Öztürk, Atasoy, and Arıkan (2018), in their study on the facilities provided to parents with children in child-friendly hotels, stated that hotels should create special menus for children and create buffets for children, while in this research, it is learned that these examples have now become standardized. It is now known that child-friendly hotels are not only limited to these features but also make meals for children with special conditions, design restaurants for children and have chefs who serve only children.

To reduce the number of fast-food foods offered in the nutrition service in child-friendly hotels, kitchen chefs can create new menus and make innovations in children's buffets. Appetizing colours (red, yellow, green, orange) can be preferred in the colour choices of restaurants designed for children in hotels. Natural sweeteners (maple syrup, coconut palm, honey, palm sugar) can be used in confectionery products.

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