

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF YOGA TOURISM IN CAPPADOCIA: A SWOT-TOWS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the yoga tourism potential of the Cappadocia region through a SWOT-TOWS analysis and proposes sustainable development strategies. In-depth interviews were conducted with yoga instructors and hotel managers in the area as part of a qualitative research approach. The analysis has identified Cappadocia's mystical atmosphere, historical heritage, and well-developed tourism infrastructure as key strengths, while the shortage of instructors, seasonality, and insufficient promotion are noted as weaknesses. Opportunities include international festivals, yoga schools, and sustainable package programs, whereas threats consist of the dominance of balloon tourism and market competition. The strategies developed through the TOWS matrix involve instructor training, local government support, and eco-friendly infrastructure improvements. The study highlights that yoga tourism can contribute to regional diversification and sustainable revenue growth, emphasizing the critical role of stakeholder collaboration, promotion, and policy-making. As the first strategic analysis of yoga tourism in Cappadocia, this research significantly contributes to the literature.

Keywords: Cappadocia, SWOT-TOWS analysis, Yoga tourism



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A KAPPADÓKIAI JÓGATURIZMUS STRATÉGIAI ELEMZÉSE SWOT–TOWS-MEGKÖZELÍTÉSBEN

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ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány SWOT–TOWS-analízis segítségével értékeli a kappadókiai régió jogaturizmus-potenciálját, és fenntartható fejlődési stratégiákra tesz javaslatot. A kvalitatív kutatás részeként mélyinterjúk készültek a térség jogaoktatóival és szállodavezetőivel. Az elemzés Kappadókia misztikus hangulatát, történelmi örökségét és fejlett turisztikai infrastruktúráját azonosította fő erősségekként, míg gyengeségként az oktatók hiánya, a szezonális és az elégtelen promóció nevezhető meg. A lehetőségek közé tartoznak a nemzetközi fesztiválok, a jogaiskolák és a fenntartható turisztikai csomagprogramok, míg a veszélyként a hőlégballon-turizmus dominanciája és a piaci verseny jelentkezik. A TOWS- mátrixon keresztül kidolgozott stratégiák magukban foglalják az oktatók képzését, a helyi önkormányzatok támogatását és a környezetbarát infrastruktúra fejlesztését. A tanulmány kiemeli, hogy a jogaturizmus hozzájárulhat a regionális sokszínűséghez és a bevételek növekedésének fenntarthatóságához, hangsúlyozva a turisztikai szereplők együttes részvétele, promóciója és a politikaalkotás kiemelkedő szerepét. Kappadókia régió jogaturizmusa első stratégiai elemzéseként eredményeink jelentős mértékben járulnak hozzá a kutatási terület ismeretanyagának bővítéséhez.

Kulcsszavak: Kappadókia, SWOT–TOWS-elemzés, jogaturizmus

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1. Introduction

Yoga is a holistic discipline rooted in India's ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions. It serves as a guide encompassing ethical lifestyle recommendations, spiritual practices, physical activity, breathing exercises, and meditation (Iyengar, 1965). This discipline constitutes a comprehensive system aimed at achieving physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (Bryant, 2009). As a form of wellness and spiritual tourism, yoga tourism represents a niche segment involving individuals who travel to receive yoga education, participate in yoga practices, or experience a yogic lifestyle (Lehto, et al., 2006). In recent years, yoga tourism has gained prominence among alternative tourism forms, generating various positive impacts on local and regional economies. Recognizing its contribution to the national economy, the Government of India established the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH) to support and regulate this sector (Shrivastava et al., 2015).

The global yoga tourism market was valued at USD 154.11 billion in 2021 and is projected to reach USD 318.87 billion by 2032, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.8% (Grand View Research, 2022). Smith & Kelly (2006) highlight that yoga tourism revitalizes local economies by generating employment opportunities. Yoga tourists, in particular, prefer local products and services, thereby contributing to regional economic development (Voigt et al., 2011). Aggarwal et al. (2008) further assert that yoga tourists tend to stay longer than conventional tourists, resulting in greater economic benefits for local businesses. Additionally, yoga tourism plays a vital role in sustaining tourism revenue throughout the year by mitigating seasonal fluctuations (Malik, 2018).

Beyond economic benefits, yoga tourism can preserve and revitalize local cultural heritage (De Mello, 2018). Maddox (2015) notes that yoga tourists are typically environmentally conscious and support sustainable tourism practices. Similarly, Chakrabarty & Das (2023) emphasize that yoga tourists contribute to the protection of natural resources and cultural heritage due to their heightened environmental awareness. Furthermore, yoga tourism fosters meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities. Cheer et al. (2017) argue that yoga tourism facilitates the preservation and revitalization of cultural values and traditions within host communities. These studies collectively underscore the significance of yoga tourism as a crucial component of local and regional development strategies.

In Turkey, yoga and meditation retreats in Fethiye, Antalya, and Cappadocia offer both local and international tourists the opportunity for spiritual renewal in natural settings (Bozkurt & Tekeoğlu, 2024). Cappadocia, renowned for its unique geological formations and mystical ambiance, has emerged as an attractive destination for yoga tourism. The region's historical monasteries, scenic valleys, and tranquil environment provide an ideal setting for yoga tourists seeking spiritual and physical serenity. Various yoga camps, retreat programs, and outdoor yoga sessions are organized by individuals and tour operators alike (Argos in Cappadocia, 2024; Bi'Yoga, 2024; TripAdvisor, 2024; Workshopix, 2024; YogaSala, 2024). Additionally, yoga and meditation activities are incorporated into festivals held in

Cappadocia, leveraging the region's mystical character to enhance participants' experiences (Cappadox, 2024). These events offer diverse opportunities for individuals seeking to practice yoga amidst Cappadocia's captivating landscape.

The academic literature contains numerous studies analyzing yoga tourism from strategic perspectives across various countries (Ali, 2022; Ambili, 2016; Kamthe et al., 2022; Khanal & Shimizu, 2019; Maddox, 2015; Ranjan et al., 2022; Telej & Gamble, 2019). Within Turkish academia, research has primarily focused on regional potential in health tourism (Albayrak & Güclü, 2020; Devravut, 2019; Dinçer et al., 2020; Sevim, 2019; Yorulmaz & Söyler, 2020). However, there is a notable absence of studies specifically addressing the strategic analysis of yoga tourism, particularly concerning the Cappadocia region. This study, therefore, fills the gap with its strategic analysis of yoga tourism in Cappadocia, a region with significant tourism potential in Turkey.

To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach was employed. SWOT-TOWS analysis was utilized as the primary analytical framework. This method is widely applied in assessing the success potential of regions or businesses and guiding strategic planning processes (Valentin, 2001). Furthermore, SWOT-TOWS analysis facilitates the development of concrete action plans by linking strengths and weaknesses with opportunities and threats, thereby offering a comprehensive strategic perspective (Weihrich, 1982).

Cappadocia possesses substantial potential for yoga tourism, as it integrates elements of both natural and cultural tourism. However, maximizing this potential requires identifying the region's strengths and weaknesses while strategically responding to opportunities and threats. Through this analysis, the strategic steps necessary for enhancing yoga tourism in Cappadocia can be determined. Moreover, fostering yoga tourism in the region may contribute to the revitalization of wellness services and bolster the local economy. Additionally, the expansion of yoga tourism in Cappadocia could mitigate seasonal fluctuations, ensuring a more stable flow of tourism revenue. While Cappadocia's unique geological formations, historical monasteries, and mystical atmosphere create an optimal environment for yoga tourism, the structured development of this niche segment could further promote the sustainable use of the region's natural and cultural resources.

2. Conceptual framework

The origins of yoga date back to India, approximately 5,000 years ago. Initially developed as a meditation practice and a means of spiritual purification, yoga has evolved into a system of physical exercises (Alter, 2004). The introduction of yoga to the Western world began towards the end of the 19th century and became widespread in the 20th century with the influence of yoga teachers coming from India. The first important representative of yoga in the West was Swami Vivekananda, whose speech at the Chicago World Parliament in 1893 ensured that yoga and Hinduism gained more attention in the West (Singleton, 2010).

The emergence of yoga tourism gained momentum after the 1960s. During this period, yoga became a popular health and lifestyle activity in the West, and types of travel such as yoga retreats and wellness holidays sprang up (Beaman & Sikka, 2016). The association of yoga with retreats held in India increased the interest of tourists from the West and made India an important destination in terms of yoga tourism (Alter, 2004). In the 1990s and 2000s, yoga tourism became popular in Asian countries such as Bali and Thailand, and with the growth of health and wellness tourism worldwide, yoga tourism has become a global trend (Tripathi & Ben Said, 2023).

Yoga tourism is a type of travel that includes yoga practices to improve physical, mental, and spiritual health and is generally considered a subcategory of wellness tourism (Garcia & Peris-Ortiz, 2015). This type of tourism not only provides yoga practice but also allows participants to learn about yoga culture and philosophy, interact with local people, and have a variety of social and cultural experiences (Nautiyal et al., 2025). In recent years, yoga tourism has become an increasing trend on a global scale, developing in parallel with the spread of yoga worldwide and the popularization of wellness-oriented travel (Alter, 2004). Yoga retreats and wellness holidays contribute to personal development processes by providing participants with mental and spiritual healing opportunities as well as physical recovery. Participants improve both their physical and mental health with practices such as stress management, meditation, and mindfulness, while contributing to their personal transformation processes (Cohen et al., 2017).

The increase in global demand has led to the proliferation of yoga retreats, wellness hotels, and yoga festivals, along with the widespread understanding of healthy living, personal development, and sustainable travel (Beaman & Sikka, 2016). Yoga tourism is particularly concentrated in destinations such as India, Thailand, and Bali, which have become natural attractions for tourists because they are based on the historical and cultural roots of yoga (Lehto et al., 2006). With the rise of wellness tourism, yoga tourism has begun to appeal to a wider audience, and many destinations have turned to sustainable tourism practices by combining yoga with healthy living. As a result, yoga tourism, combined with environmentally friendly practices, has become an important part of sustainable tourism (Bowers & Cheer, 2017).

The yoga tourism market is growing with increasing wellness awareness, demand for stress reduction, and desire for cultural exploration, and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.8% through 2032. Sustainability, eco-friendly practices, and experiences that align with local culture have become an important part of the market. Yoga tourism is a rapidly growing market driven by the increasing awareness of wellness and the search for cultural discovery and is shaped by sustainability and cultural integration. This supports the long-term growth of the yoga tourism market, to the benefit of both tourists and destinations (Custom Market Insights, 2024).

The increasing popularity of wellness tourism in recent years has made yoga tourism an important activity for individuals seeking both physical and mental relaxation. Turkey stands out as an important destination in this field with its geographical location and

historical riches. Different regions of Turkey host various yoga tourism venues such as thermal hotels, spa centers, and nature retreats, offering tourists an experience intertwined with nature while reinforcing the requirements of a healthy life (Ince & Keskin, 2023). The Cappadocia region, in particular, presents an ideal environment for yoga tourism with its unique geological formations, rock-carved churches, and peaceful natural environment. Boutique hotels and retreat centers in Cappadocia offer special programs for spiritual and physical renewal, such as yoga and meditation, allowing visitors to renew themselves in nature (Polat & Öztürk, 2021). In addition to the existence of hotels (Karlık Evi Boutique Hotel, Kistar Cave Hotel, Hu of Cappadocia Hotel) that host guests and provide services in this field, there are also hotels such as the Alden Hotel that position themselves directly as a yoga hotel and offer special services for this concept. Also, every year, the Embassy of India in Ankara organizes a regular event in Cappadocia on the occasion of International Yoga Day (Anadolu Agency, 2024). However, in order to fully benefit from the potential of yoga tourism, it is necessary to develop regional policies and protect natural and cultural heritage. While integrating yoga tourism into regions such as Cappadocia, it is of great importance to adopt sustainable tourism practices. Although Turkey has significant opportunities for yoga tourism, this potential can be taken even further with the right strategies (Öznlbant & Alvarez, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the potential of yoga tourism, which is developing as an alternative tourism type in Cappadocia, and to examine how this potential can be transformed into concrete action. Accordingly, the main objective of the study is to report a preliminary SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis that evaluated the alternative tourism potential of Cappadocia in terms of yoga tourism and to reach strategic implications applicable to destination management.

SWOT and TOWS analyses play an important role in strategic planning in destination management as well as in businesses. SWOT analysis evaluates a destination's current tourism infrastructure by identifying its strengths and weaknesses and offers the opportunity to shape future tourism developments through opportunities and threats. While SWOT analysis only provides a situation assessment, TOWS analysis helps to create more effective strategic plans by transforming this data into action. Within the scope of TOWS analysis, it aims to draw on strengths to make the best use of tourism opportunities (SO strategies), to activate strengths to minimize threats to the tourism sector (ST strategies), to gain competitive advantage for the destination by developing weaknesses through opportunities (WO strategies), and to take necessary measures to prevent weaknesses from becoming a risk factor against threats (WT strategies). In terms of destination management, TOWS analysis provides a guiding strategic framework for sustainable tourism development, infrastructure improvements, strengthening the image of the destination, and providing a competitive advantage.

We adopted a qualitative research approach using both primary and secondary data sources. To collect primary data, in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview forms with open-ended questions. The development of the interview questions was informed by a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and ensuring alignment with the research objectives (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This approach sought to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights in detail.

An effort was made to contact all the experts involved in yoga tourism in the Cappadocia region. Given that this form of tourism is relatively new to the area, the number of individuals engaged in it remains limited. Accordingly, purposive snowball sampling was preferred, and qualitative interviews were conducted with ten people in February 2025, lasting between 30 and 50 minutes. The participants included yoga instructors and hotel managers who organize and host yoga camps in the region.

As in quantitative research, validity and reliability are expected in qualitative research. To ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability are important (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The fact that the findings obtained as a result of the research are meaningful and consistent, the findings are compatible with the conceptual framework, and the generalizations made based on the research findings are compatible with the data means that internal validity (credibility) is ensured. To ensure credibility, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants, and the natural flow of the interviews was allowed. Interview questions were kept open-ended, allowing participants to freely express their own experiences and meanings. In addition, the generalizability of the research results means that external validity (transferability) is high, and it is possible to generalize indirectly in the research. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, the methodology is discussed in detail, and the findings are reported free from assumptions and prejudices. Consistency refers to the reproducibility and consistency of the results obtained at each stage of the research process. The interview transcripts were coded by two researchers to ensure consistency. What also contributed to the internal reliability (consistency) and external reliability (confirmability) of the study was the fact that the results are compatible with the data, detailed data have been obtained, and no unrealistic data are included.

4. Findings

The data from the qualitative interviews was analyzed, and a SWOT analysis table developed to assess the potential of yoga tourism as an emerging form of alternative tourism in the Cappadocia region (*Table 1*). This SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive assessment of the region's strengths and weaknesses in facilitating yoga tourism, as well as opportunities and threats originating from external factors. The table emphasizes key elements such as the region's unique natural and cultural assets, existing infrastructure, market demand, and potential challenges that may have an impact on the sustainable development of yoga tourism in Cappadocia.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of yoga tourism potential in Cappadocia

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Natural and mystical atmosphere: Cappadocia's unique natural landscapes and mystical atmosphere offer an ideal environment for practicing yoga. Especially yoga sessions in the valleys provide an experience of being in touch with nature. 2. History and culture: The historic caves, ancient Christian settlements, and mystical structures in the region create a deep sense of connection and energy when practicing yoga. This makes it an important feature that sets it apart from other yoga destinations. 3. Tourist infrastructure: Cappadocia has developed a tourist infrastructure. Hotels, restaurants, transportation facilities, and other accommodation options offer convenient services for yoga tourists. 4. Interest in various types of yoga: There is interest in different types of yoga, especially Hatha Yoga, Vinyasa, and Ashtanga. Tourists especially prefer yoga types that are more relaxing and include breathing exercises. 5. Tendency for long stay: Yoga tourists stay in the region for 3-5 days on average and contribute positively to the occupancy rates of hotels. 6. Sustainable tourism potential: Yoga tourists tend to be individuals who respect nature, are conscious, and support sustainable tourism. This offers the potential to increase tourism income without harming the environment. 7. Yoga and sunrise/dusk activities: Yoga tourists prefer to practice yoga at sunrise and sunset, which highlights the natural beauties of the region. 8. Interest of guides and tour operators: Guides and tour operators in the region have realized the potential of yoga tourism and are willing to provide services in this field.	1. Lack of trainers and attendance problems: It is difficult to find qualified yoga instructors in the region. The seasonal work of instructors and lack of a continuous yoga community negatively affect the sustainability of the activities. 2. Lack of advertising and promotion: There is not enough advertising and promotion for yoga tourism. Hotels and agencies are reluctant to support yoga tourism, and individual efforts are insufficient. 3. Seasonality problem: Yoga tourism is generally concentrated between May and October, and activities are greatly reduced in the winter months due to weather conditions. 4. Permit and legal problems: Permission from the municipality is required to practice yoga in the valleys. The complexity of the permit processes and the uncertainty of the regulations lead to organizational difficulties. 5. Insufficient vegetarian/vegan nutrition options: Although a significant portion of yoga tourists demand vegetarian or vegan diets, there are not enough restaurants and food options in the region to meet this need. 6. Lack of cooperation among yoga instructors: There is a lack of communication among yoga instructors. For this reason, the yoga community cannot develop, and joint activities cannot be organized. 7. Overlap with touristic activities: Tourists who want to practice yoga in the morning may experience conflicts with balloon tours; those who want to practice yoga in the evening may experience conflicts with all-terrain vehicle and horse tours.
Opportunities	Threats
1. Alternative tourism model: Yoga tourism can be an alternative tourism source to balloon tourism in Cappadocia. In this way, the tourism diversity of the region can be increased. 2. Establishment of yoga schools and centers: Yoga schools or centers can be opened in Cappadocia to serve both tourists and local people. These centers can create a sustainable yoga ecosystem. 3. International promotion and marketing: Cappadocia can organize international promotional campaigns for yoga tourism, specifically targeting tourists from Europe and America. Global promotion can be achieved through social media and influencer support. 4. Integration of yoga and nature activities: Yoga tourism can be integrated with nature walks, meditation, flora trips, and cultural activities to make it more attractive. 5. Yoga training for guides: Tourist guides in the region can be provided with basic yoga knowledge, and special guidance services can be provided for yoga tourists. 6. Opening yoga centers in quiet areas of Cappadocia: Instead of busy areas such as Göreme, yoga retreat centers can be established in quieter locations such as İbrahimpaşa, Mustafapaşa, or Uçhisar. 7. Support from local authorities: Municipalities and local governments can help position the region as a yoga tourism center by allocating special areas for yoga events.	1. Dominance of balloon tourism: Cappadocia's tourism is largely focused on balloon tours. Inadequate promotion of yoga tourism may cause this area to remain in the background. 2. Price increases: High hotel and service prices in the region may direct yoga tourists to more affordable destinations. 3. Competition with other yoga destinations: In Turkey, regions such as Fethiye, Olympos, and Antalya are also popular for yoga tourism. Differentiation strategies should be developed for Cappadocia to compete with these regions. 4. Natural disasters and security concerns: Natural disasters such as earthquakes or regional security concerns may reduce the interest of yoga tourists in the region. 5. Cultural misunderstanding of yoga tourism: Yoga may be perceived by some as a religious or spiritual ritual, which may lead to misunderstandings among locals.

Source: own editing.

The findings from the SWOT analysis are further explored through a TOWS analysis to develop strategic suggestions for the growth of yoga tourism in the Cappadocia region (Table 2).

Table 2. TOWS analysis of yoga tourism in Cappadocia (Strategies for yoga tourism development)

SO strategies (strengths + opportunities)	WO strategies (weaknesses + opportunities)
1. International yoga festivals can be organized using the mystical atmosphere and touristic infrastructure of Cappadocia. Through these festivals, Cappadocia can become a globally recognized yoga tourism destination. - Existing yoga camps and occasional events can be staged more regularly, and comprehensive festival programs can be created. - Global awareness can be raised by organizing special events for International Yoga Day. - Thematic yoga festivals (e.g., Sunrise Yoga Festival, Ancient Wisdom and Meditation Festival) can be organized to ensure a continuous flow of tourists to the region. - Cappadocia's historical and cultural heritage can be introduced through “Yoga and Culture Meetings” for festival participants. 2. Integrated packages can be created with yoga, meditation, hiking, and nature activities in the valleys. Yoga tourism can be combined with nature sports and cultural trips to offer a different experience. 3. Special accommodation options can be developed for yoga tourists who tend to stay longer. - Boutique hotels and stone mansions in the region can create special programs for retreat camps. - Accommodation in traditional stone hotels and retreat centers in harmony with nature can be arranged. 4. International awareness of yoga tourism can be increased through social media and influencer marketing. - World-renowned yoga instructors can be invited, and Cappadocia can be promoted as a yoga destination through social media. 5. Regular yoga events can be planned in hotels by building a bridge between yoga instructors and the tourism sector. - Hotels can increase weekday and off-season occupancy rates by offering weekend retreats and short-term yoga programs. 6. Yoga tourism can be promoted as a sustainable and nature-friendly tourism alternative. - Environmentally friendly tourism policies can be developed by protecting the natural beauties of the region.	1. To overcome the shortage of yoga instructors, training programs can be initiated in Cappadocia. - Yoga instructor certification programs can be opened for local people and those working in the tourism sector. - Certified training and workshops can be organized in Cappadocia with the participation of international trainers. 2. Joint promotional campaigns can be organized by local administrations and tourism agencies to overcome the lack of publicity for yoga tourism. - Yoga festivals to be organized in the region can be promoted in international tourism fairs and reach large masses. 3. Indoor yoga areas can be created to overcome the seasonality problem. - Winter tourism can be supported by developing indoor yoga halls and heated areas in hotels. 4. Special areas can be allocated for yoga activities in the valleys, and wooden yoga platforms can be installed with the support of the municipality. - These platforms should be removable and compatible with the natural environment. - Suggested locations: Kızılçukur Valley, Aşk Valley, Zemi Valley, Uçisar surroundings, Göreme open spaces. 5. Restaurant and café options for vegetarian/vegan dietary demand can be increased. - A “Yoga Friendly Menu” program can be created for hotels and local restaurants. 6. A communication network among yoga instructors can be established, and regular meetings and events can be organized. - A Cappadocia Yoga Community can be established, and cooperation between instructors, organizers, and operators can be ensured.
ST strategies (strengths + threats)	WT strategies (weaknesses + threats)
1. Yoga tourism can be promoted as a sustainable and quiet alternative to offset the dominance of balloon tourism. 2. Retreats can be developed in boutique hotels to encourage longer stays, and other activities in the region can be incorporated into yoga programs. 3. Presenting yoga events in a festival concept can increase the competitiveness of the region and become an alternative to destinations such as Fethiye and Olympos. 4. Security and insurance services for tourists can be developed to reduce threats such as natural disasters and security concerns. 5. By identifying special touristic areas for yoga activities, the encounter of groups engaged in other recreational activities in the valley (horse riding tour, ATV tour, bicycle tour, etc.) can be minimized. 6. Wooden and portable yoga platforms can provide a controlled space for yoga tourism by reducing the pressure of touristic construction.	1. Long-term strategic plans can be prepared to ensure the sustainability of yoga tourism. 2. Government support and special funds can be provided to encourage hotels to invest in yoga tourism. 3. Permission processes can be simplified when organizing yoga events in valleys. 4. By allocating fixed areas in certain valleys for yoga tourism, organizations can be carried out in a more planned and sustainable manner. 5. By developing programs that combine yoga and nature activities, the duration of tourists' stay in the region can be increased. 6. The capacity of the region in this field can be increased by cooperating with local businesses and educational institutions for the development of yoga tourism.

Source: own editing.

This inquiry integrates the determined strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to articulate strategic actions that can enhance the region's potential as a yoga tourism destination. The TOWS matrix presents a structured approach to leveraging strengths to endorse opportunities, addressing weaknesses to mitigate threats, and identifying sustainable development strategies aligned with the region's unique characteristics and market dynamics.

To concretize the developed TOWS strategies and increase their applicability, a product-oriented recommendation table has been prepared. *Table 3* presents different yoga tourism products structured according to the target audience, recommended durations, and basic content headings, and aims to contribute to the sustainable tourism vision of the region.

Table 3. Segmented yoga tourism products

Product name	Target audience	Suggested duration	Main content highlights
Yoga and nature escape	Nature enthusiasts and eco-conscious travelers	3–4 nights	Sunrise yoga sessions in the valleys, guided nature walks, workshops with local producers, ecological accommodation in Mustafapaşa
Weekend meditation and renewal camp	Young professionals and urban individuals, domestic tourists	2 nights (weekend)	Mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, light hikes, boutique cave hotel stay in Göreme/Uçhisar
Cultural yoga retreat program	Foreign tourists seeking deep experiences	5–7 nights	Daily yoga sessions, visits to historical valleys and monasteries, cultural evening events, accommodation in stone mansions
Yoga and thermal therapy package	Middle-aged individuals and health-focused travelers	4–5 nights	Morning yoga, spa and thermal treatments, nutrition workshops, collaboration with thermal resorts
Family-friendly yoga camp	Families with children	3 nights	Yoga sessions for parents, concurrent workshops for children, nature walks, childcare-supported camp structure
Empowerment and serenity camp for women	Women's groups, women's solidarity communities	4 nights	Women-only yoga sessions, empowerment circles, storytelling nights, partnerships with local NGOs
Instructor training and community education program	Locals and individuals aspiring to become yoga instructors	Varies (certificate program)	Yoga training modules, workshops with international instructors, collaborations with tourism schools
Off-season wellness experience	Off-season tourists and domestic travelers	2–3 nights	Yoga in heated indoor spaces, thermal baths, vegan/vegetarian culinary workshops, indoor cultural events
One-time yoga activities	Domestic or foreign tourists	2–5 hours	Day hikes, workshops, sunrise or sunset yoga sessions with views of fairy chimneys or hot air balloons

Source: own editing.

The recommendation table prepared in this direction includes nine differentiated yoga tourism products in line with the destination's existing infrastructure and target markets.

The recommendations are shaped around various themes such as nature-integrated experiences, cultural depth, family-friendly activities, empowerment camps for women, and instructor training programs. Each product is structured in terms of target audience, recommended duration, and content headings, providing practical roadmaps for practitioners. The aim is to diversify sustainable tourism activities throughout the year, ensuring the effective use of the region's natural, cultural, and thermal resources. The table supports strategic diversification with flexible and innovative experience suggestions that will increase the attractiveness of the destination, especially during the off-season.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the potentials for the development of yoga tourism in Cappadocia via SWOT and TOWS analyses, revealing both the current advantages of the destination and the strategic orientations required for sustainable development. The analysis shows that Cappadocia's unique natural and mystical atmosphere can be a great attraction for yoga tourism. The region's historical heritage, natural valleys, and quiet retreats offer a unique experience for yoga tourists, while the existing tourist infrastructure has the capacity to support this process. However, factors such as the lack of awareness of the development potential that yoga tourism can create in the region, the lack of yoga instructors, the lack of sustainability of the activities, and the lack of promotional activities have been identified as important weaknesses that limit the development of this type of tourism.

Some studies suggest that increasing the promotion of yoga tourism will bring economic benefits to regions, contribute to sustainable tourism, reduce seasonality, promote cultural exchange, and contribute to health tourism (Bowers & Cheer, 2017; Ponder & Holladay, 2013; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). In line with the opportunities identified in the study, organizing yoga festivals in Cappadocia, making investments in yoga tourism by hotels and tourism enterprises, and integrating yoga activities with nature sports can increase the competitiveness of the region. In particular, the placement of portable wooden yoga platforms that are compatible with the natural environment in certain valleys will strengthen the infrastructure and the image of the region as a yoga destination. Inviting yoga influencers to the region and organizing yoga events there could transform the region into a yoga destination center in a short time. It is also recommended to increase the international promotion of yoga tourism as an alternative type of tourism to other tourist attractions in Cappadocia.

Although the dominant position of balloon tourism in the region makes it difficult for yoga tourism to gain prominence, the government, local authorities, tourism businesses, and the yoga community need to act in cooperation. Many studies have analyzed the success factors of stakeholder collaboration in the tourism sector (Poudel & Nyaupane, 2013; Smith & Puczkó, 2014) and highlighted the critical importance of collaboration between public institutions, private sector and non-governmental organizations for the development of yoga tourism (Cheer et al., 2017; Khanal & Shimizu, 2019).

Yoga tourism largely overlaps with the principles of sustainability as it provides high individual benefits with low environmental impact. In this respect, yoga tourism is compatible with Turkey's alternative and sustainable tourism policies adopted in recent years. Turkey's eleventh development plan (TCSBB, 2019) aims to balance the geographical and seasonal distribution of tourism and ensure environmental sustainability by supporting alternative tourism types. Similarly, Turkey's *Tourism Strategy 2023* document (TCKTB, 2007), created by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, emphasizes diversification in areas such as health, nature, ecotourism, and rural tourism, making it possible to position yoga tourism within this strategic orientation. In addition, the Ministry of Trade's promotion, marketing, training, and event support in the field of health and sports tourism (TCTB, 2022) may enable yoga-based tourism initiatives to gain visibility on a national and international scale.

In Turkey, yoga tourism has not yet received a clear definition in tourism legislation. This situation creates uncertainty in sectoral data generation, incentive mechanisms, and planning processes. A strategic definition of yoga tourism would facilitate both the guidance of public policies and the incentivization of private sector investments. Yoga training courses and professional development seminars offered by the Turkish Sports for All Federation (TCGSB, 2024) are considered an important step in strengthening sectoral capacity. However, harmonizing these trainings with international standards, especially in the framework of the recognition of institutions such as the European Yoga Union (EYU), will make yoga tourism more competitive in the global market. In addition, systematic collection and monitoring of basic data on yoga tourism, such as visitor profiles, spending patterns, and environmental impacts, will pave the way for effective decision-making processes for both public authorities and the private sector. It is of great importance that local governments and regional development agencies play an active role in this process. For example, planning quiet natural areas, open-air yoga platforms, and hiking trails in regions such as Cappadocia will support the integrated nature of this type of tourism and improve the quality of experience. The *Cappadocia Region Tourism Sector Value Chain and SWOT Analysis* report prepared by Ahiler Development Agency (AKA, 2022) highlights the need to increase the region's tourism diversity and emphasizes that yoga and wellness-based activities can contribute to this diversity. In this context, collaborations with regional actors will enable not only spatial planning but also a holistic strategy for promotion, service quality, and training.

Yoga tourism should be considered a strategic type of tourism that combines Turkey's environmental sustainability goals with the pursuit of individual well-being and harmonized with sustainability policies determined at the national level in a more holistic and concrete framework. In this context, pilot applications to be initiated, especially in strong tourism destinations such as Cappadocia, and practical action plans to be developed on a local scale can be created. In this way, Turkey can become an environmentally sensitive, inclusive, and transformative yoga tourism destination. Infrastructure investments, promotional strategies, and the support of local stakeholders are critical for the full utilization of the

region's yoga tourism potential. In addition, yoga tourism should be considered as an alternative form of tourism that serves sustainable development by contributing to tourism diversity in Cappadocia, and a comprehensive strategic planning process should be carried out in this direction.

As many studies, this research, too, has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The main limitation is the small sample size due to the limited number of people involved in yoga in the region. Future studies may benefit from expanding the sample to include a wider range of stakeholders, such as local government representatives, tourism policy makers, and international yoga retreat organizers, for a more comprehensive understanding of yoga tourism. Another limitation stems from the nature of qualitative research methods, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could also adopt a mixed-methods approach by integrating quantitative surveys to ensure generalizability, complement qualitative findings, and provide statistical validation. Furthermore, longitudinal studies that follow the development of yoga tourism in the region over time can offer a more dynamic perspective on the growth of tourism, the challenges it faces, and the evolving market trends. The SWOT and TOWS analyses of yoga tourism in Cappadocia, along with the proposed recommendations, could serve as a reference point and offer strategic guidance for other destinations with similar tourism characteristics and appeal.

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