MARKET RESEARCH REPORT

Türkiye × Korea

Turning Affection into Travel: A Market Analysis

Personal analysis based on public data and field experience

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October 2026

The views expressed in this report are my own and do not represent the official position of the Korea Tourism Organization.

Introduction

This report looks at why Türkiye has become one of the most Korea-friendly markets in the world, and what it would take to turn that affection into more journeys. It draws on public statistics (Korea Tourism Organization, TÜİK), consumer and travel trade research conducted in the Turkish market, academic papers and media coverage, combined with my own observations from working with Turkish travel partners. Sources are cited for all key figures.

Chapter	Title	Key Question
Ch. 1	Country & Economic Overview	What kind of market is Türkiye?
Ch. 2	Outbound Market Structure	How do Turkish people travel abroad?
Ch. 3	Korea-Bound Demand	How large is demand for Korea, and what drives it?
Ch. 4	East Asia: A Growing Region	What can we learn from the rise of East Asian travel?
Ch. 5	Air & Entry Access	How easy is it to reach Korea from Türkiye?
Ch. 6	Travel Trade Perspectives	How does the Turkish trade see Korea?
Ch. 7	Opportunities Ahead	What is working in Korea's favor?
Ch. 8	Turning Affection into Travel	What could help the market grow?

✏️ Why I Wrote This

Working with Turkish travel partners, one thing has been consistent: Turkish people are genuinely curious about Korea, they like Korea, and they want to visit. I have always felt that this is a market where, with the right approach, far more people could make the trip.

The numbers support that feeling. Türkiye holds one of the most positive views of Korea in the world, and Turkish arrivals to Korea nearly doubled between 2019 and 2025, with growth accelerating again in 2026. At the same time, outbound travel from Türkiye to East Asia as a whole is booming — a sign of how much potential the region holds.

With 2027 marking the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Korea and Türkiye, this felt like the right moment to bring together what the data and the field are telling us: what drives Turkish interest in Korea, and what could help turn that interest into travel.

Chapter 1. Türkiye: Country & Economic Overview

1.1 Population & Urban Structure

Türkiye has a population of 86.09 million (end-2025) and a median age of 34.9 — older than Saudi Arabia (early 30s) but younger than major European countries. The urbanization rate is 93.6%, and 18.3% of the population lives in Istanbul (TÜİK, 2026).

86.09M
Total Population (end-2025)
+427K year-on-year

34.9
Median Age
Male 34.2 / Female 35.7

93.6%
Urban Population
Istanbul alone 18.3%

Major City	Population	Characteristics
Istanbul	15.75M	Economic and tourism hub; HQs of major agencies and OTAs; IST hub airport
Ankara	5.91M	Capital; public-sector and corporate travel demand
İzmir	4.50M	Largest commercial city in the west; open consumer culture
Bursa	3.26M	Manufacturing center; middle-class family demand
Antalya	2.78M	Inbound tourism center; limited outbound demand

Source: TÜİK (2026), as reported by CNBC-e

▶️ Key Takeaway

- The consumer sample was also drawn from Istanbul (49%), İzmir (26%) and Ankara (25%) (KTO Dubai consumer research, 2025). Real demand for Korea is concentrated among AB-class consumers in the three largest cities, so marketing and trade training are most efficient when centered on Istanbul, with Ankara and İzmir as secondary hubs.

1.2 Economic Structure & Key Indicators

In 2025 Türkiye's GDP was about USD 1.59 trillion, growth was 3.6%, and GDP per capita was USD 18,040 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2026). The key variables are high inflation and a weak lira. Consumer price inflation peaked at 71.6% in June 2024 and fell to 29.73% by September 2026, but remains around 30% (KTO Istanbul Office, 2024; A News, 2026).

Indicator	Value	Source
GDP growth	2025: 3.6% / 2026F: 2.9% / 2027F: 3.6%	TÜİK; IMF (2026)
CPI inflation	Jun 2024: 71.6% → Sep 2026: 29.73%	KTO Istanbul Office (2024); A News (2026)
Policy rate	37% (held for 4th consecutive meeting, Jul 2026)	FocusEconomics (2026)
Exchange rate (USD/TRY)	42.96 (1 Jan 2026) → 49.36 (13 Oct 2026); lira -13%	Pound Sterling Live (2026)

Indicator	Value	Source
Minimum wage	Net TRY 28,075/month (2026)	Eleman.net (2026)

A key point is the **real purchasing-power effect**. In 2026 the lira fell 13% against the dollar while prices rose about 30%. If wages partly keep pace with inflation, foreign travel becomes relatively cheaper in hard-currency terms for the upper-middle class. Against the yen, cumulative inflation of 78.4% over the past two years compares with only 38.3% lira depreciation — analyzed as a key driver of the surge in Turkish travel to Japan (Gürses, 2026).

▶️ **Key Takeaway**

- Outbound demand should not be judged by inflation alone. For the upper-middle class, the hard-currency cost of travel abroad has actually fallen.
- However, a 6-night Korea package (TRY 102,000) equals 3.6 months of the minimum wage (about TRY 28,000/month). Realistic buyers are therefore limited to the upper-middle class (AB class) in major cities, and marketing should focus on this group.

1.3 Doing Business in Türkiye

⚠️ **Practical Considerations for Partnerships**

- Istanbul-centered decisions: major agencies and OTAs are headquartered in Istanbul, making face-to-face meetings efficient
- Preference for in-person relationships: in-person training is the preferred format for two-thirds of agencies surveyed
- Hard-currency pricing: packages are often priced in EUR/USD, and quotes have short validity due to lira volatility
- Credit-card installments are not permitted for overseas travel products (→ see 2.6)
- Bayram (religious holiday) breaks are the peak outbound season (→ see 2.4)

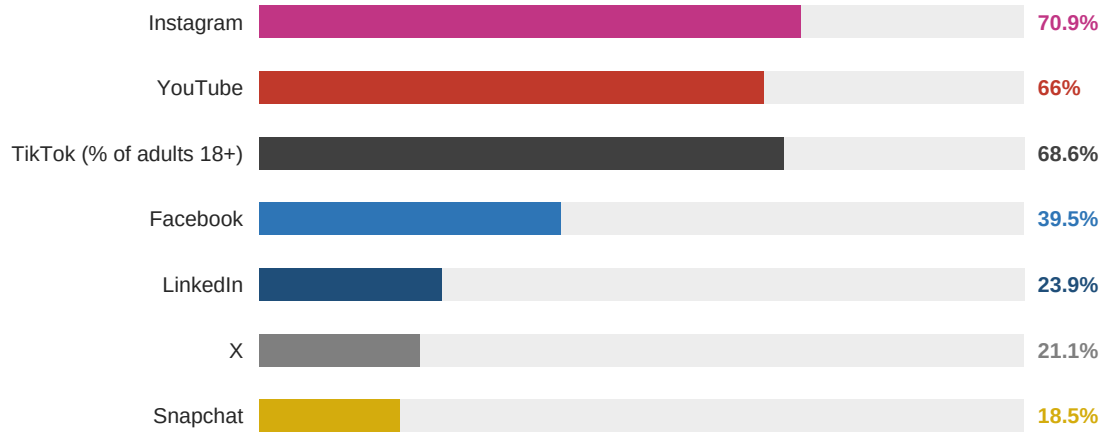
1.4 Aviation Infrastructure

Istanbul Airport (IST) is Turkish Airlines' (THY) global hub, and Sabiha Gökçen (SAW) is the low-cost base. In H1 2024 the two Istanbul airports handled 57.92 million passengers (+10.8%), of which 40.30 million were international (KTO Istanbul Office, 2024). THY has about 420 aircraft on order, targets a long-term fleet of around 800, and plans to expand Asia-Pacific frequencies by 15–20% (Aviation A2Z, 2026).

1.5 Social Media & Advertising Regulation

Internet penetration in Türkiye is 88.3%, and Instagram reaches 62.3 million people (70.9% of the population) — effectively a national platform (DataReportal, 2025). Unlike Saudi Arabia, where WhatsApp and Snapchat dominate, Türkiye is anchored by Instagram and YouTube. In the B2C survey, "a trip to Korea is worth sharing on social media" scored 93%, the highest of all items (KTO Dubai consumer research, 2025).

Social media ad reach (% of total population, DataReportal 2025)



⚠️ Influencer Advertising Rules (must check before campaigns)

- Under the Ministry of Trade Advertising Board guideline (2021), sponsored posts must carry a disclosure such as "#Reklam"
- Promoting products or services not actually experienced, or implying experience, is prohibited
- Promotion of doctors, hospitals and other health institutions is prohibited → medical tourism influencer campaigns are not possible
- Advertisers, agencies and influencers are each liable → campaign contracts should include a compliance clause

Source: T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı (2021)

Chapter 2. Turkish Outbound Market Structure

2.1 Outbound Volume & Trends

Outbound travel by Turkish citizens recovered quickly after the pandemic, reaching a record 11.9 million in 2025. In H1 2026 alone, 6.37 million citizens traveled abroad, up about 15% year-on-year (TÜİK, via Hürriyet Daily News 2026).

11.9M
Citizens Traveling Abroad (2025)
+4.4% YoY (TÜİK)

USD 9.6B
Outbound Tourism Spending (2025)
+24% YoY (Ekonomist, 2026)

USD 807
Spending per Traveler (2025)
Q2 2026: USD 863

Year	Citizens Abroad	Change	Outbound Spending	Per Capita
2022	c. 7.27M (est.)	–	–	USD 589
2023	11.07M	+52.3%	USD 7.07B	USD 639
2024	c. 11.40M (est.)	+3%	c. USD 7.7B	–
2025	11.90M	+4.4%	USD 9.60B	USD 807
H1 2026	6.37M	c. +15%	–	USD 863 (Q2)

Source: TÜRSAB (2024); Ekonomist (2026); Hürriyet Daily News (2026); CNBC-e (2026). 2022 and 2024 back-calculated from growth rates

▶️ Key Takeaway

- While traveler numbers grew 4.4%, spending grew 24%. The market is shifting toward higher spend per trip, leaving room for value-led rather than price-led Korea products.

2.2 Spending Structure: 77% Independent / 23% Package

Of the USD 9.6 billion spent abroad in 2025, USD 7.37 billion was individual spending and USD 2.23 billion was package tours, a 23.3% package share (Ekonomist, 2026). The overall market is FIT-led, but packages weigh far more for long-haul destinations: 48% of B2C respondents wanting a multi-city trip preferred packages, rising to 60% among 40–50-year-olds (KTO Dubai consumer research, 2025). For Korea, agency packages are the core sales channel.

2.3 Destination Landscape: From Europe to Visa-Free Asia

Turkish agencies sell mainly Europe (60.9%), the Balkans (40.4%), the Middle East (28.6%), the Far East (17.8%) and Southeast Asia (9.9%) (KTO Dubai trade research, 2026). Schengen visa barriers are reshaping choices: in 2025 Türkiye was the second-largest Schengen applicant (about 1.3 million applications), the refusal rate rose from 4.4% in 2016 to 14.6%, and application costs reach about EUR 1,000 (24 Saat, 2026). As a result, visa-free

destinations made up 60% of sales in 2026, with Japan sales up 70% and Korea demand up 50% (Hürriyet Daily News, 2026). The industry also cites the US–Israel–Iran conflict as shifting demand toward the Balkans and the Far East.

> ▶️ **Key Takeaway**
>
> - "Visa fatigue" is a structural tailwind for Far East demand, and Korea benefits — and so does the wider East Asia region (→ see Ch. 4).

2.4 Seasonality & Holiday Calendar

69% of B2C respondents named spring (cherry blossom season) as their preferred time (summer 14%, autumn 13%, winter 5%), but arrival data show that Bayram (religious holiday) breaks create the monthly peaks (→ see 3.3). The holiday calendar is therefore the key reference for campaign timing.

Period (2026–2027)	Holiday	Length	Korea Product Opportunity
16–20 Nov 2026	First-term school break	5 days + weekend	Short family trips, late autumn foliage
25 Jan–5 Feb 2027	Winter school break	12 days	Winter products (ski, snow festivals), students
8–12 Mar 2027	School break + Ramadan Bayram (9–11 Mar)	Up to 9 days	Overlaps 70th anniversary (8 Mar); early spring
Early Apr 2027	–	–	Cherry blossom peak (the busiest regional season)
15–19 May 2027	Kurban Bayram + 19 May holiday	Up to 9 days	Late spring; Busan & Jeju products
From 25 Jun 2027	Summer school holiday	c. 11 weeks	Family demand, K-pop concerts
29 Oct (annual)	Republic Day	1.5 days	Autumn foliage products

Source: Harbiye Hukuk (2026); 24 Saat (2026, Ministry of National Education calendar)

> ▶️ **Key Takeaway**
>
> - The second week of March 2027 — the 70th anniversary (8 Mar), Ramadan Bayram and school break combined — is a key opportunity.
> - Early April cherry blossoms mean the busiest regional season; the May Kurban Bayram and autumn (Sep–Oct) are seasons where Korea can differentiate.

2.5 Travel Behavior (B2C Survey)

Item	Result
Desired length of stay	Average 9.3 days (1 week 31%, 8–10 days 27%)
Travel companions	Partner/spouse 61%, friends 42%, children 26%, group tour 18%, solo 18%
Budget (excl. airfare)	Average TRY 33,464; 58% above TRY 35,000 (Aug 2025)

Item	Result
Preferred airlines	THY 90%, Korean Air 26%, Emirates 20%, Asiana 10%, Qatar 8%
Flight choice factors (top-2-box)	Reliability 96%, flexible cancellation 90%, ease of purchase 89%, in-flight service 88%, price 86%, direct flight 85%
Trip style	As many cities as possible 62%, 2–3 cities 32%, one city 3%
Decision-making	Plans and decides personally 61%; decides, plans jointly 39%

Source: KTO Dubai consumer research (2025), n=302

▶️ Key Takeaway

- Turkish travelers value reliability and flexibility over price. The standard demand model is "a 9-day multi-city couples' trip" — Seoul alone cannot satisfy it.

2.6 Payment Environment: No Installments for Overseas Travel

Turkish consumers rely heavily on installment (taksit) payments. However, under a 31 July 2023 decision by the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK), credit-card installments are prohibited for overseas flights, accommodation and packages, and this remains in force in 2026 (Indigo Dergisi, 2023; HesapKurdu, 2026). Domestic travel can be paid in up to 18 installments, but overseas packages must be paid in full even when bought from a Turkish agency.

▶️ Key Takeaway

- Paying the full package price upfront is a barrier for long-haul products. Destinations and agencies could jointly explore ways to ease payment, such as early-booking discounts, fixed lira pricing and split deposits.

2.7 Core Consumer Segments

📱 Women in their 20s–30s (Hallyu)

K-drama, beauty and food interest

Prefer Busan and Jeju; want to share on social media

Female share of arrivals exceeded 50% (2024)

→ Instagram/YouTube, drive FIT

💑 Couples & families in their 30s–40s (AB)

Multi-city trips of around 9 days

Prefer packages (60% among 40–50s)

Travel with spouse 61%, value reliability

→ Agency packages: Seoul+Busan+Gyeongju

💎 High-income shopping & tech

Motivated by shopping 46.7%, technology 40.0%

Like beauty, nature and unique experiences

Luxury sales potential 80.4%

→ Premium luxury & shopping products

Source: KTO Dubai consumer & trade research (2025, 2026); KTO Istanbul Office (2024)

Chapter 3. Korea-Bound Demand

3.1 Turkish Arrivals to Korea

60,202
Arrivals in 2025
Record high

+92%
2025 vs 2019
31,293 → 60,202

+40%
Jan–Aug 2026, year on year
55,819 arrivals

Year	Turkish Arrivals	Change	Note
2019	31,293	–	Pre-pandemic baseline
2022	18,051	–	Recovery begins
2023	31,748	+76%	Back to 2019 level
2024	46,027	+45.0%	Record high
2025	60,202	+30.8%	Record high
2026 (Jan–Aug)	55,819	+39.7% (same period)	Already 93% of the 2025 total

Source: Korea Tourism Organization, monthly tourism statistics

In 2021 the KTO Istanbul Office set a goal of "60,000 Turkish visitors after the pandemic" (Daily Sabah, 2021). That goal was reached in 2025, and growth accelerated again in 2026.

3.2 A Changing Visitor Profile: Female- and Leisure-Led

Item	2019	2023 (Jan–Nov)	2024 (Jan–Jul)	2024 Monthly Peak
Female share	33.7%	43.2%	47.9%	Apr 52.8% / Jun 51.3%
Aged 20–40	–	–	56.0%	–

Source: KTO Istanbul Office (2023, 2024), Türkiye Tourism Market Trends (KTO DATA LAB)

In 2019 two-thirds of Turkish visitors were men, in a largely business-oriented market. From 2024, months with a female share above 50% became common, marking a clear shift toward leisure travel. Off-season months show more independent travelers in their teens and 20s, while peak seasons bring more families and package travelers aged 30+ (KTO Istanbul Office, 2024).

3.3 Seasonality: Holidays Shape Travel

Arrivals to Korea consistently peak in months with a **Bayram holiday** — Ramadan Bayram and Kurban Bayram — and travel jumps sharply when these holidays are extended into longer breaks, as happened with the 9-day Kurban Bayram break in May 2026. Spring is the most desired season among consumers (69%), but arrivals also remain steady through September and October, pointing to autumn as an under-promoted season.

★ Timing matters as much as messaging

- Bayram breaks are the windows when Turkish families and couples can take long-haul trips.
- Autumn offers a season with less regional crowding and strong demand that is rarely highlighted in promotion.

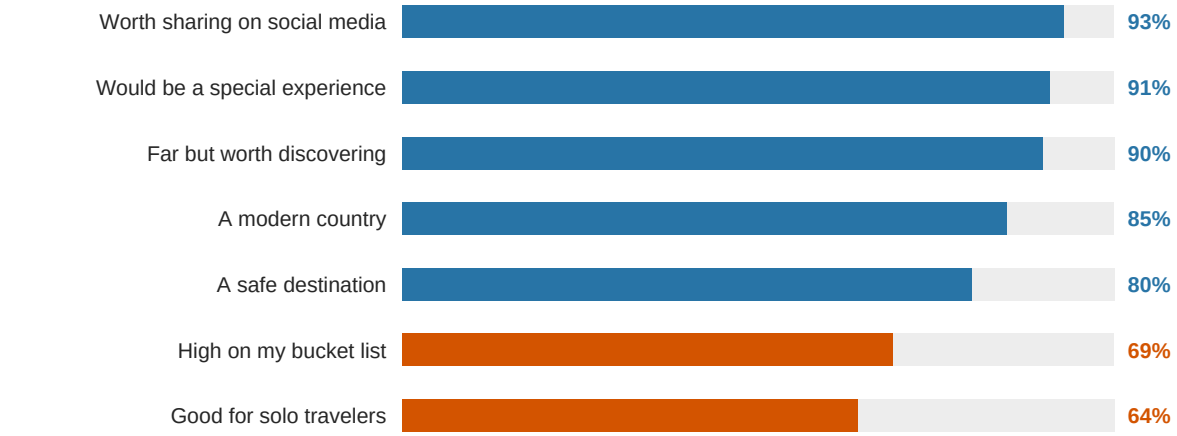
3.4 How Turks See Korea

Türkiye is one of the countries with the most favorable view of Korea in the world. In an October 2025 survey of 26 countries, 90.2% of Turkish respondents held a positive image of Korea, ranking 4th (Korea.net, 2026). Academic work traces Hallyu's warm reception to the "brother nation" (kardeş ülke) sentiment rooted in the Korean War and to the cultural proximity of family-centered dramas (Oh & Chae, 2013).

What comes to mind with "Korea"	Share	Profile
Korean food	26%	Higher among women
K-dramas	25%	Women 32%
Seoul / K-pop	14% each	Higher among 18–28
Technology / tech products	13%	Men 19%
Skincare / cosmetics	9%	Higher among women

Source: KTO Dubai consumer research (2025), unaided awareness (n=302)

Perceptions of Korea (top-2-box on a 5-point scale)



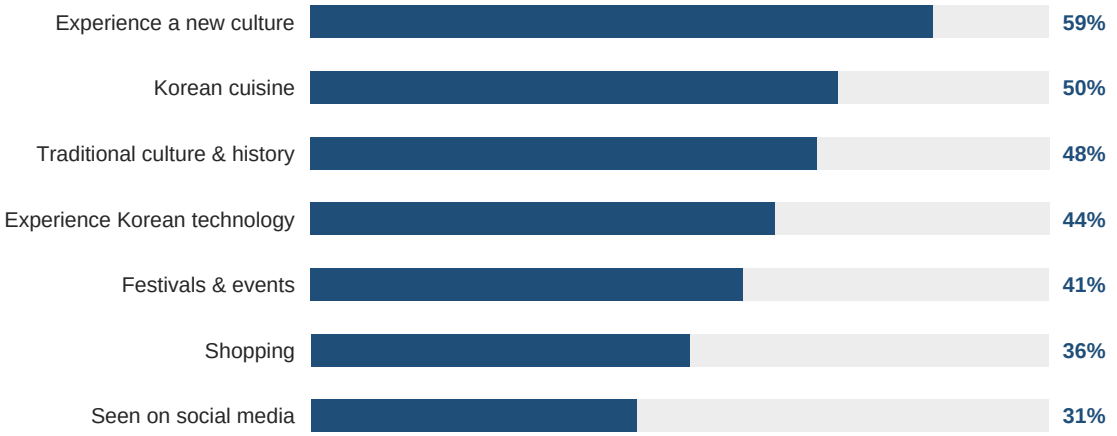
Source: KTO Dubai consumer research (2025)

▶️ Key Takeaway

- The image is highly favorable, but "high on my bucket list" sits at 69%. Helping affinity become a concrete travel plan is the next step.
- Women relate to Korea through content and lifestyle, men through technology and brands — messaging can reflect both.

3.5 What Motivates a Trip to Korea

Motivations to visit Korea (multiple answers, n=296)



K-factors as motivation (top-2-box)



Source: KTO Dubai consumer research (2025)

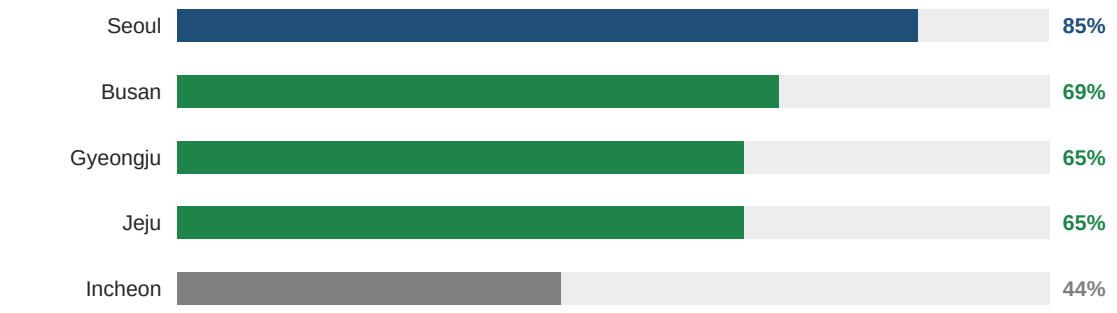
Academic research points the same way: interest in and empathy for actors drive drama tourism (Kim et al., 2007), and Turkish studies show Korean dramas and K-pop shape viewers' emotions, daily lives and shopping habits, with Gen Z as the core audience (Bozyer, 2023; Çağıl, 2023).

▶️ Key Takeaway

- Food and beauty are at least as powerful as K-pop in motivating travel.
- Beauty and wellness experiences are a more natural fit than medical tourism, since Türkiye is itself a major medical tourism destination.

3.6 Beyond Seoul

Cities respondents want to visit (multiple answers)



Source: KTO Dubai consumer research (2025)

62% of respondents want to visit as many cities as possible; women in particular show strong interest in Busan and Jeju.

★ Busan: A Friendship You Can Visit

- In the Korean War, 741 Turkish soldiers were killed; 462 of them rest at the UN Memorial Cemetery in Busan (KEI, 2017).
- Busan is where the "brother nation" story becomes a place travelers can actually visit — a natural anchor for itineraries beyond Seoul.

3.7 Hallyu & K-Consumption in Türkiye

Area	Status	Source
K-beauty retail	Drugstore chain Gratis expanded Korean brands from 4 (c. 100 SKUs) to 13 (180+ SKUs) Premium department store Beymen added K-beauty zones Korean lifestyle brands such as Yoyoso expanding store networks	Ekonomist (2025)
K-beauty salons	Korean-style skincare salons spreading in Istanbul; growing male clientele	Para Dergi (2026)
K-food	Major F&B group Doğuş launched Korean concept "Seoul Kitchen"	Ekonomist (2025)
Trade	Imports from Korea USD 9.2B; exports to Korea USD 0.97B (2024)	Ekonomist (2025)

▶️ Key Takeaway

- Experiencing K-beauty in Korea is a natural extension of a habit already formed in Türkiye. Consumer interest at home can become a reason to travel.

Chapter 4. East Asia: A Growing Region

4.1 East Asia Is the New Travel Trend in Türkiye

Turkish travel to East Asia is growing quickly across the region. As Schengen visas become harder to obtain, visa-free destinations accounted for 60% of 2026 sales at a major Turkish operator, with demand for Japan up 70% and for Korea up 50% (Hürriyet Daily News, 2026). Japan and Korea are both benefiting from this shift.

Year	Turkish arrivals to Korea	Turkish arrivals to Japan
2023	31,748	c. 31,200
2024	46,027 (+45%)	62,100 (+99%)
2025	60,202 (+31%)	107,800 (+74%)

Source: Korea Tourism Organization (2026); JNTO via Turizm Aktüel (2025) and FTN News (2026)

B2C research shows the two destinations often appear in the same consideration set: Japan is the most frequently named alternative to Korea among Turkish travelers (KTO Dubai consumer research, 2025). Rather than a zero-sum contest, this points to a **region that Turkish travelers are discovering together** — and the strong growth of both destinations shows how deep that demand runs.

4.2 Lessons from Japan's Rise

Japan's remarkable growth in the Turkish market offers useful lessons for the whole region.

Driver	What happened	Source
Air connectivity	Turkish Airlines expanded to 24 weekly flights to Tokyo (Narita, Haneda) and Osaka, and ANA launched Haneda–Istanbul in 2025, with load factors above 85%	Rus Tourism News (2025); Istanbul Airport (2025); Hürriyet Bigpara (2025)
Ease of entry	Visa-free entry with no pre-travel authorization	GoAsia (2026)
Anniversary year	2024 centenary of diplomatic relations combined with Expo 2025 Osaka and a new air route	Japan Foundation (2024); FTN News (2026)
Trade & consumer engagement	Trade seminars in Ankara and Istanbul, mall-based consumer fairs, and an "All Japan" partnership with airline and diplomatic missions	Turizm Proje Dergisi (2024); Turizm Günlüğü (2024)
Long-standing cultural interest	Decades of interest in Japanese technology, anime and culture now turning into travel	Akkemik (2026); Basaran & Sunnetcioglu (2021)
Favorable exchange rates	A weaker yen made Japan more affordable for Turkish travelers	Gürses (2026)

▶️ Key Takeaway

- Japan's experience shows that connectivity, ease of travel, a well-timed anniversary year and close work with the travel trade can unlock latent demand quickly. These are lessons that apply across East Asia.

4.3 What Korea Uniquely Offers

Turkish travel professionals see Korea as particularly strong in several areas (KTO Dubai trade research, 2026):

Share of Turkish travel professionals rating Korea strongest



Source: KTO Dubai trade research (2026), attribute comparison of Korea and Japan

Closer	Varied	Personal
Direct flights of around 10 hours from Istanbul	Modern cities, history, food and beauty in a single trip	A "brother nation" story rooted in shared history
Easy multi-city travel by high-speed rail	Seoul, Busan, Gyeongju and Jeju each offer something different	A friendship that can be visited in Busan

4.4 Combined East Asia Journeys

Multi-country itineraries combining Korea and Japan are popular with Turkish operators. These journeys are good for both destinations: they introduce Turkish travelers to the region and encourage repeat visits. For Korea, the opportunity is to make the Korean leg of these journeys richer — adding destinations beyond Seoul such as Busan, which connects easily to Fukuoka and Osaka, so that travelers leave wanting to come back for a longer stay.

4.5 Other Asian Destinations

Destination	6-night package from	Notes
Thailand (Bangkok)	TRY 48,000	Entry-level Asia, price-competitive
Sri Lanka	TRY 70,000	Rising interest in 2026
Korea	TRY 102,000	Mid-range long-haul
Japan	TRY 130,000	Strong demand growth

Source: Hürriyet Daily News (2026)

Southeast Asia often serves as an entry point to Asia for Turkish travelers. Those who gain experience there are natural prospects for a next trip further east.

Chapter 5. Air & Entry Access

5.1 Direct Flights

Airline	Flight	Weekly	Aircraft (seats)
Turkish Airlines	TK90	7 (daily)	B777-300ER (364)
Turkish Airlines	TK20	4	B777-300ER (364)
Korean Air	KE956	4	B787-9 (273)
Asiana Airlines	OZ552	3 (up to 5 in peak)	B777-200ER (301)
Total	–	18	c. 6,000 one-way seats/week

Source: Flightsfrom (2026); AeroRoutes (2025). Seats estimated from schedules

Istanbul–Seoul is served by around 18 direct flights a week with a flight time of roughly 10 hours. Turkish travelers strongly value airline reliability (96%) and direct flights (85%), and 90% name Turkish Airlines as their preferred carrier (KTO Dubai consumer research, 2025).

5.2 A Two-Way Route

Direction	2025
Korean visitors to Türkiye	226,000 (+9.4%)
Turkish visitors to Korea	60,202 (+30.8%)

Source: Turizm Ekonomi (2026, Turkish Ministry of Culture & Tourism); Korea Tourism Organization (2026)

Korea is one of Türkiye's fast-growing source markets, and Turkish travel to Korea is growing even faster. A stronger flow in both directions supports the route as a whole and deepens people-to-people ties.

5.3 Connecting Routes & Entry

Many travelers also connect via Gulf and Central Asian hubs, although Gulf capacity was reduced during the 2026 regional conflict (KTO Dubai Office, 2026). Turkish citizens can visit Korea visa-free for up to 90 days with a K-ETA (Korea Electronic Travel Authorization), which now supports group applications, Turkish-language guidance and a three-year validity (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2022; CNBC-e, 2025).

Chapter 6. Travel Trade Perspectives

6.1 The Turkish Travel Trade

Türkiye has more than 15,000 travel agencies (15,299 at end-2023), growing by around 500 a year (Turizm Gazetesi, 2024). Membership of the industry association TÜRSAB is mandatory. Major operators include Jolly Tur, Etstur, Tatilbudur, Tatilsepeti, Setur, Prontotour and Coral Travel, and the online travel market is worth USD 8.1 billion (2025) with 9.1% annual growth forecast (IMARC, 2026).

6.2 Products with the Most Potential

Trade research among 455 Turkish travel companies shows where professionals see Korea's strongest sales potential (KTO Dubai trade research, 2026).

Sales potential by product (high-rating share)



Source: KTO Dubai trade research (2026)

City combinations with most potential	Share
Seoul + Busan	31.8%
Seoul + Jeju	21.5%
Seoul + Busan + Jeju	18.7%
Seoul + Gyeongju	15.0%

Source: KTO Dubai trade research (2026)

▶️ Key Takeaway

- The trade sees Korea's potential well beyond popular culture: culture and history, luxury, beauty and wellness lead the list, and Seoul combined with a second city is the preferred itinerary model.

6.3 What Agencies Need

Training needs	Share	Support that would help most	Share
Destination knowledge	45.8%	Airline partnerships & group seats	20.6%
City & regional knowledge	37.4%	Visual & video content	17.8%
Thematic product development	21.5%	Social media content	17.8%
Tour product development	20.6%	FAM trips	15.0%
Gastronomy	17.8%	Turkish-language digital content	13.1%

Source: KTO Dubai trade research (2026)

Two-thirds of agencies (66.4%) prefer in-person training. Turkish-speaking guides (48.6%) and Turkish-language information (47.7%) were named as the top priorities for improving the visitor experience.

> ▶️ **Key Takeaway**
>
> - Turkish agencies are eager to sell Korea and are asking for practical tools: deeper destination knowledge, regional itineraries, Turkish-language content and first-hand experience through FAM trips.

Chapter 7. Opportunities Ahead

7.1 Tailwinds for Korea

✈️ Travel trends

Record outbound travel: 11.9M Turkish citizens abroad in 2025, +15% in H1 2026

Strong preference for visa-free destinations

East Asia emerging as a new long-haul favorite

🤝 Relationship

2027: 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations

Relations upgraded to strategic partnership in Nov 2025

A "brother nation" bond rooted in shared history

🛍️ Consumer culture

K-beauty expanding in Turkish retail

Korean food concepts entering the F&B scene

Women and young travelers driving leisure demand

Source: TÜİK; Hürriyet Daily News (2026); Korea Times (2025); Ekonomist (2025)

Even during the 2026 regional conflict, Turkish outbound travel kept growing (+16.5% in Q2 2026), with travelers shifting toward destinations perceived as safe and far from the conflict zone (CNBC-e, 2026; Hürriyet Daily News, 2026). Korea is well placed as a safe, high-quality long-haul destination.

Chapter 8. Turning Affection into Travel

The affection is already there. The opportunity is to make Korea easier to discover, plan and book. Five directions stand out from this analysis.

Direction	What it means	Why it matters
1. Work closely with the travel trade	In-person training, FAM trips and up-to-date Turkish-language sales tools for agencies	Agencies are the main channel for long-haul trips and are asking for these tools
2. Go beyond Seoul	Itineraries that pair Seoul with Busan, Gyeongju or Jeju	Travelers want to see several cities; the trade sees Seoul + a second city as the strongest model
3. Lead with food and beauty	Put Korean food and K-beauty experiences at the center of content, alongside K-culture	These are among the strongest motivations for Turkish travelers
4. Plan around holidays	Time campaigns and products to Bayram breaks and promote autumn	Holiday breaks are when Turks travel long-haul
5. Tell stories only Korea can tell	Use the 70th anniversary and the "brother nation" story, with Busan as its home	A personal connection no other destination offers

✏️ My Perspective

Working with Turkish partners, I have seen time and again how much Turks like Korea and want to visit. The data confirms it: a 90% positive image, arrivals nearly doubling since 2019, and another 40% growth in 2026 so far. The question is not whether there is interest, but how to turn that interest into more journeys.

Japan's recent success in Türkiye is encouraging for the whole region. It shows how quickly Turkish demand for East Asia responds when travel becomes easier and the trade is closely engaged. Korea has its own strengths to build on: a shorter flight, varied experiences in one trip, food and beauty that already resonate in Türkiye, and a friendship that can be visited in Busan.

2027, the 70th anniversary of Korea–Türkiye relations, is a natural moment to bring these together. With the right timing, richer itineraries and close work with travel partners, I believe many more Turkish travelers will make the trip to Korea in the years ahead.

The views expressed in this report are my own and do not represent the official position of the Korea Tourism Organization.

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