

In Istanbul, tourists seek their dream moustache

January 30 2013, by Philippe Alfroy

Already known the world over for its baths, coffee and sweet Turkish delights, Turkey is on the road to adding another item to its roster of specialities: the moustache.

Lip [whiskers](#) remain a highly sought-after mark of manliness in Turkey and the Middle East to the point that the naturally less hairy are increasingly seeking out moustache transplants at the hands of Turkish cosmetic surgeons.

Among them is Selahattin Tulunay, head of a thriving private practice that once specialised in hair transplants but has been adapted to cater to the increasing demand for moustaches.

"I've been doing moustache implants for around three years now," he said.

"A lot of men have come to see me saying 'I'm 40 years old, I'm the head of a large company and no one takes me seriously abroad. I want people to see that I have hair'," he added.

Only 30 years old, Engin Koc had long despaired of his clean-shaven face before he opted to go under the knife seven months ago and get the upper lip of his dreams.

"I wanted to look like ancient Turks, like the Ottomans, and since I'm a nostalgic soul with an admiration for that era, I got the implants," he

said, calling the moustache "a symbol of Turkish virility".

Moustaches have long been considered a serious matter in Turkey, with a popular saying stating that "a man without a moustache is like a house without a balcony". The shape of the specimen even holds political meaning.

"The bushy style, like Stalin's, is more the prerogative of the left or of Kurds," said [anthropologist](#) Benoit Fliche from the French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul.

"When neater, like that of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, it becomes religious and conservative."

"And when it shoots down on both sides of the mouth like [fangs](#), it's a mark of the extreme right," he added.

Although the bewhiskered look is winning over fewer Turks from the big cities—who are drawn more towards Western fashion—a moustache and beard remain a must for men from Arab countries or the Turkic republics of Central Asia, who journey over to Istanbul to satisfy their need for hair.

"The Turkish television series broadcast in the Arab world wield a great influence," said Tulunay, adding that "it's upon seeing our actors that these patients called on us for the same beard or the same moustache".

These clients constitute the core of the new market for facial hair. In Istanbul alone, around 250 clinics or private practices are locked in fierce competition to sell their services, with promotions galore.

The majority are linked to travel agencies and offer package deals that include the operation, a hotel stay and airport pick-up.

The most competitive offer package deals starting at 2,000 euros (\$2,700) that come with much more bang for the buck than their European or US counterparts.

Hair tourism is thus in full swing, fuelled by a constant uptick in the number of foreigners visiting Turkey, with estimates suggesting more than 35 million people flocked there last year.

"Every week, we welcome 50 to 60 patients for a hair transplant and five to six for a moustache transplant, Istanbul Hair Centre surgeon Meral Tala said.

"And as our results are now much better than before, we expect a large rise in demand."

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Citation: In Istanbul, tourists seek their dream moustache (2013, January 30) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-01-istanbul-tourists-moustache.html>

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