

THE ROLE OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. *In this article, medical tourism and its importance, types, medical tourism developed countries, the share of medical tourism in the national economy and its contribution to the country's development are discussed.*

Keywords: *medical tourism, transplantation tourism, epidemic of drug, medical tourist.*

Medical tourism significantly contributes to the enhancement of the tourism sector by creating a synergistic relationship between healthcare services and travel experiences. This symbiosis results in various positive outcomes for both the destination and the industry as a whole.

Medical tourism is a recent example of niche tourism, with the rapid rise of international travel in search of cosmetic surgery and solutions to various medical conditions, benefiting healthcare providers, local economies and the tourism industry. While medical tourism may be a new niche in the industry, tourism has always been associated with improved health and well-being, perhaps more usually perceived as occurring through entertainment, rest and relaxation rather than by substantial bodily changes. Indeed, travelling for improved health is the most durable niche in the history of tourism.

A long history of spa tourism dates back to antiquity, and in more recent centuries variants of a more general health tourism have included phenomena ranging from naturism and hiking/bushwalking to meditation and detoxification. In some respects, medical tourism has evolved from all of these and taken on its own diversity, prompting Bookman and Bookman (2007: 42) to come up with such subcategories as pregnancy tourism, tooth ache tourism and detox tourism. There are many others. When and where the term “medical tourism” itself originated is unknown.

It has become important for many reasons: 1)disappointments with medical treatments at home; 2) lack of access to health care at reasonable cost, in reasonable time or in a sympathetic context; 3) inadequate insurance and income to pay for local health care; 4) the rise of high quality medical care in ‘developing’ countries; 5) uneven legal and ethical responses to complex health issues; 6) greater mobility; and 7) perhaps, above all, a growing demand for cosmetic surgery that ties many other factors together.

Sometimes, rather less positively, it has grown because of the impossibility of undertaking various procedures at home, and their availability overseas, which in the case of abortion, some forms of organ transplantation (“transplant tourism”) and stem cell therapy, even contraception and ultimately “death tourism”, have raised ethical issues. Diasporic medical tourism has taken patients back to their homelands, while “transnational retirement” migration, as global populations age, has provided yet one more component of medical tourism.

In countries such as Malaysia, Mexico, Spain and the Philippines retirement provides a potential basis for a more comprehensive medical tourism. In other words medical tourism has grown as the outcome of changes in the institutional context of medical care, a more global

economics of access to health (with “developing” countries undercutting the price structures of rich-world countries) and new attitudes to personal identity and medical care, enabled by developments in international communication, transport and tourism. Medical tourism is thus underpinned by diverse political, economic, social and cultural influences.

Very popular with Americans are low cost dental procedures in the border towns. Clinics estimate that 40 percent of their patients are foreigners during the tourist high season that spans the months from October to March. Figures would be higher if the epidemic of drug and gang related violence in some border towns could be eradicated. (International Medical Travel Journal, With a combined market share approaching 90%, Thailand, India and Singapore are fueling the double-digit growth rate of medical travel to Asia and making it the fastest growing industry in Asia today. Thailand is the clear industry leader. (The Research Staff, 2009: 42)

Economic Stimulus: The economic impact of medical tourism cannot be understated. The revenue generated by medical tourists has a cascading effect on local economies, fostering growth in sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. This economic stimulus contributes to the overall prosperity of the destination. The first half of 2023 has witnessed a significant influx of foreign citizens seeking medical treatment in Uzbekistan, State Statistics Committee reported on August 17. This surge in medical tourism highlights the country's emerging reputation as a destination for not only leisure travel. In the span of six months, Uzbekistan has seen a remarkable influx of 32,200 foreign citizens who traveled to the country specifically for medical treatment. This number underscores the growing prominence of Uzbekistan as a healthcare destination, drawing in individuals from various corners of the world seeking specialized medical services.

Diversification of Tourist Offerings: The integration of medical facilities into tourist destinations leads to a diverse range of attractions. This diversification caters to the interests of both healthcare seekers and traditional tourists, creating a holistic experience that extends beyond medical treatments.

Global Reputation Building: A destination's excellence in providing healthcare services elevates its global reputation. Positive experiences from medical tourists act as testimonials, enhancing the destination's standing and attracting a wider audience of travelers seeking a combination of medical expertise and cultural exploration.

Collaboration for Innovation: The convergence of healthcare and tourism industries fosters collaboration. This collaboration, in turn, results in innovative packages that blend medical treatments with wellness activities. Such offerings contribute to the destination's appeal, attracting a diverse range of tourists.

Infrastructure Development; The influx of medical tourists often necessitates improvements in infrastructure. This includes enhancements in healthcare facilities, transportation, and accommodation options. These improvements not only cater to the specific needs of medical tourists but also raise the overall attractiveness of the destination for all types of visitors.

In conclusion, the role of medical tourism is multi-faceted, impacting the economic, cultural, and infrastructural aspects of a destination. The interplay between healthcare and tourism creates a dynamic environment that fosters growth, innovation, and a positive global perception of the destination.

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