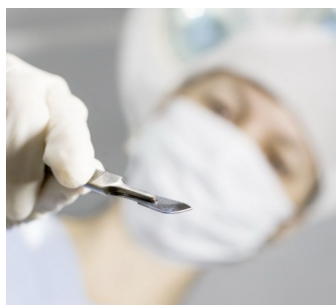


Medical Tourists from the UAE



Medical tourism, a growing sector within the travel industry, usually involves patients from developed western countries traveling to places such as India or Thailand for treatment. Not only is the price much lower, but also the healthcare is usually of a high standard and the newest equipment is available.

Now it seems that this kind of medical tourism is no longer the exclusive domain of westerners. A growing number of citizens of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are travelling to clinics in Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore for treatment.

Shaikh Rahmatullah, Middle East Representative of the Tourism Authority of Thailand claims that "We see an increasing volume of Middle East tourists who combine their leisure trips with medical check-ups." According to this representative, in the first half of last year there have been some 62,000 UAE patients in Thailand's hospitals looking for various medical treatments. As Shaikh Rahmatullah explained, Thailand has been involved in medical tourism since 1980, but it has only been during last few years that they have witnessed a dramatic rise in medical tourists coming to the country.

Malaysia on the other hand is relatively new to the medical tourism market. Nevertheless this segment of tourism has become very important for the country. Syed Muhadzir Jamallulil Malaysia's Tourism director for United Arab Emirates (UAE), Gulf and Iran says "We have been promoting our healthcare facilities since 1998 but only at a domestic and regional level. It was only during the past two years that we have been aggressive in our campaigns in the UAE and other countries."

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