

MEDICAL TOURISM IN THAILAND STILL VERY ATTRACTIVE



According to estimates, the contribution of the Thai tourism industry to the country's GDP represents between 12% and 18% of the economy, employing approximately 6.2 million people directly and indirectly, or about 16% of the labor force. Hotels, restaurants, and shops are the main beneficiaries, but at the same time another form of travel is developing: medical tourism.

In full bloom, medical tourism in Thailand brings together tourists interested in both cosmetic surgery and therapeutic treatments. In 2015, this market was valued at approximately 852 million dollars.

A Very Lucrative Portion

Although medical tourism makes up less than 9% of all visitors to Thailand, it is still a very lucrative portion. **Travelers who come to the country for medical reasons tend to spend more money and stay longer.**

The Economic Intelligence Center estimates spending at about 4,200 dollars over two weeks for a tourist who has come to benefit from plastic surgery, in comparison to 1,300 dollars over 6 days for a cultural and leisure tourist.

There are two main reasons that make Thailand the preferred medical destination. First, because prices are more affordable compared to so-called "developed" countries, such as the United States, Germany, or Australia. For example, heart surgery in the United States costs about \$144,000 compared to \$26,000 in Thailand.

The costs of a hospital like the Bumrungrad in Bangkok would generally be 50% to 70% cheaper, compared to private medical centers in the United States and Europe. Thus, Thailand constitutes an interesting market, especially as the aging of the population tends to increase the demand for care.

Recently, Thailand also approved the introduction of a new 10-year visa for people over the age of 50 who can justify substantial resources and health insurance covering at least 10,000 dollars.

The Country of Less Expensive Smiles

Another type of procedure is cosmetic surgery which is about 50% less expensive in Thailand than in Europe. It is also possible to have considerable savings on dental care: the term "the country of smiles" takes on its full meaning here with prices ranging from 50% to 70% lower than in France.

The other reason that makes medical tourism in Thailand so attractive is the quality of the medical services offered and the fact that the patient can receive the care quickly. Thus, patients from the Emirates, other ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Burma) go to Thai establishments to benefit from the superior quality of service.

Thailand has more than 53 medical centers accredited by the JCI (Joint Commission International), which indicates that the institutions meet fairly strict international quality standards.

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