

MATERNITY TOURISM CHALLENGES HONG KONG



The Chinese strict 'one-child' policy has resulted in a significant increase in maternity tourism in Hong Kong. However, alarm bells are being raised as figures show 45% of births in 2010 were non-resident children.

Most people are familiar with very strict 'one-child' policy in China. In an effort to bypass the restrictions, Chinese mothers have been traveling abroad to give birth and nearby **Hong Kong has in recent years gained a reputation of a very popular destination for Chinese mothers-to-be.** While initially the number of births presented no threat, recent years have recorded a very significant increase. In 2010, the figures showed 40,000 Chinese babies had been born there, accounting for an alarming 45% of all Hong Kong births, which is more than a 10% increase since 2005.

In 2007, a piece of legislation was introduced preventing women beyond 28th week of pregnancy to enter without a hospital booking; the government established a mandatory fee for any non-resident giving birth there. While the sum of USD 5,000 is high, for the Chinese who are fined USD 27,450 for a second baby, this seems like a reasonable alternative. **Private hospitals are profiting from maternity tourism** and can afford to lure doctors from public ones. The system suffers and the private hospital fees are out of control.

The Chinese have yet another motive for coming there; getting their children to a top school in mainland China is extremely difficult considering the competition. Having a foreign passport will enable them either to register their children as an international student, or simply send them for higher education to Hong Kong.

Local government needs to carefully consider how to better control the healthcare system and assure quality care for all. On the other hand, the population of Hong Kong is aging and by 2031, a quarter will be 65 and over therefore an open policy is likely to pay off in the long run.

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