

# Thailand's Medical Tourism Developing Fast

Medical tourism is quickly gaining ground the world over and Thailand is no exception. Tourists from all over the globe are coming to Thailand seeking affordable medical treatment that they cannot get at home.

## History

One of the first medical tourist centers to open in Thailand was the Bumrungrad Hospital. This hospital took advantage of the Asian economic crisis of 1997. The crisis meant that affluent Asians could no longer afford the luxury of seeking treatment in American run hospitals. Bumrungrad Hospital marketed itself as a less costly yet suitable alternative. Its second largest foreign market is Myanmar.



The hospital won the hearts and minds of Asia's affluent class that still need medical care. This hospital was accredited in 2002 becoming the first ever institution to be accredited by the Joint Commission International which accredits and periodically reviews hospitals in the US. Bumrungrad Hospital was an exception. Today, Thailand has over thirty hospitals accredited by the institution.

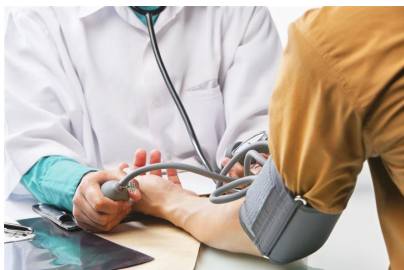
As mentioned earlier, Thailand is a top-notch destination for medical tourists. For instance in 2012 alone, more than 2.4 million medical tourists visited Thailand. This overwhelming figure is only set to rise. The figure is now expected to balloon to about three million medical tourists in the next three years.

## Reasons Why People Choose Thailand

There are numerous reasons why Thailand has been such a success story in medical tourism. These reasons include state of the art facilities, cheap prices and quality services. For example, the Thailand Tourism Authority conducted research surveys that indicated medical tourists from Europe, the Middle East, Australia and US were keen on advanced technologies, high quality facilities and experienced doctors.

Another survey by the same organization revealed that medical tourists from China and Switzerland were looking for cell treatments and anti-ageing formulas. The Thailand Tourism Authority also noted that medical tourists from China showed great interest in fertility treatments. The Russian market is excessively preoccupied with losing weight.

The Thailand Tourism Authority also found that many of the people who come to Thailand for medical tourism mostly come from the Middle East. This is because they consider Thailand a better alternative to the other Asian markets because of its reputation for fun and adventure. Thailand's medical tourism also seems to benefit from its proximity to emerging Asian economies such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos.



Thailand's medical tourism has come as serious means of earning revenue for both the people and its government. In 2012, the Thailand Tourism Ministry announced that medical tourism had brought in more than USD 466 million.

### **Problems of the Medical Tourism**

The main problem in Thailand's medical tourism is its focus on volumes sales at low profits. This business approach does not lead to the maximization of profit. The country can make more if it focuses on high-end medical tourism as opposed to cost effective medical tourism. In this new approach, increases in profits per sale will overtake any shortfalls in sales volumes.

This current business approach is a serious threat to Thailand's potential in medical tourism. The country's doctors and medical personnel run the risk of being complacent. They are in danger of not seeing farther ahead when the current sales volumes seem overwhelming. It is time that these hospitals and agents sort out profit instead of sales volumes.

The medical industry will have to redesign itself and conform to the laid down international standards of medical service delivery. It is only through its standards to meet international ones that the industry will bear fruits in terms of an increased high-end clientele base.



### **The Outlook**

The Thailand Tourism Authority feels that the full potential of medical tourism in Thailand is underutilized. The Authority believes that certain sectors in this industry such as fertility, cell therapy,

cosmetic surgery and anti-ageing are poorly developed. It is these sectors that attract high-end clientele from countries such as the China, the Middle East, Australia, the US and Russia.

The authority is also shifting its focus from traditional markets to its Eastern neighbors. Russia and China contributed more than 1.3 and 2.7 million medical tourists respectively. The authority must therefore lay great emphasis on these two emerging markets.

Date: 2013-06-24

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-thailand-local-medical-tourism-developing-fast-article2150>