

MALAYSIA AIMS TO RECEIVE MORE MEDICAL TOURISTS



Between March 5th and 6th 2014, the International Medical Travel Exhibition in Dubai offered leading experts the chance to talk on current issues and present awards to high-performing institutions: one of the key players was the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC). At the conference, MHTC officials spoke about the opportunities for growth and expansion for medical tourism in the country and their desire to attract more UAE patients, stating that they are “positioning Malaysia as a preferred healthcare destination”.

It makes sense for the MHTC to be promoting this projected growth to a UAE audience, particularly when their citizens make up between 15 and 20% of the total number of medical tourists and numbers are expected to rise to 20,000 by 2016; however, this is but one of many countries providing large numbers of medical tourists for Malaysia. Around 768,000 visited in total in 2013, a 15% raise on 2012, and the top three nations are currently Indonesia, China and India - with Indonesia definitely leading the pack in 2012 with 375,499 visitors against India's 22,350 - but there is also plenty of business from British, American, Libyan and Australian patients among many others.

The question that these high numbers pose is why Malaysia? Why is this nation emerging as a hot favourite?

Essentially, there are three key reasons behind the desire for medical treatment in this country that show why so many first-world English-speaking nations are on the list. Malaysia is also an English-speaking country, so foreigners have no worries about communicating with doctors and clinics about their needs; there are numerous treatment options available in the country, from cosmetic surgeries and dental treatments to complicated eye and heart surgeries, orthopaedic work and gynaecology; and they offer a great balance between high-end care and low costs, both in the medical facilities and the accommodation at the hotel. Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka have 65 top-quality, MHTC registered hospitals between them.

This level of quality in Malaysia was reflected in the awards given out at the Dubai conference, with Gleneagles in Kuala Lumpur being named International Hospital of the Year, Prince Court Medical Centre getting the honour of International Infertility Clinic and Imperial Dental Specialist Centre getting the dentistry award. This recognition highlights the range of specialities available in the country while also helping to act as an advertisement to curious medical tourists in nations beyond the UAE, Indonesia and India.

Will Malaysia continue to be a top destination for medical tourists in the future?

The speech at the conference shows positivity about future growth from the UAE and much further beyond, the awards will certainly attract plenty of new custom from across the world and there is plenty of building work being planned to accommodate these potential increasing numbers. Some American experts have questioned the long-term effects if Malaysia fails to find the professionals required to staff these new facilities but, with eleven new hospitals already being built and many others being expanded to meet demand, it is clear that the MHTC are only looking forward. In 2013 they forecast revenue of RM688 million, which was up on 2012's figure of RM594 million, the

predictions for 2014 much be just as promising.

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