

# TAIWAN WANTS TO LURE MORE MEDICAL TOURISTS



Taiwan, one of the territories administered by the Republic of China, wants to attract medical tourists to its hospitals. Tourism industry has created 3.9% of its GDP in 2005. The officials see the medical tourism industry as a good source of revenues to the economy. Taiwan plans to attract 100,000 Asian visitors to seek medical treatment here by 2015. The medical tourists are expected to create 50 billion Taiwan dollars (1.5 billion US dollars) in

revenue. The officials want to turn 10 hospitals into 'tourist hospitals' within three years and thus create 3,500 jobs. The Department of Health claims that Taiwan's medical science is among the world's best therefore it should not be a problem to attract medical tourists here. The Taiwan's five strongest medical specialties - liver transplantation, facial surgery, heart surgery, artificial insemination, and joint replacement - are matching the international standards and the prices are significantly lower than those in the U.S. The government plans for the medical tourism industry concern medical facilities, tourism establishments, overseas Chinese services, insurance firms, and visa agencies. The Department of Health expects that foreign medical tourists will also spend time by sightseeing and using other tourism related services. These activities will then boost the Taiwanese tourism industry in general. The Council for Economic Planning and Development (CEPD) contacts major international insurance companies to discuss providing medical care insurance to foreign nationals coming to Taiwan for medical treatment. Nowadays, it is possible to apply for a visa for "medical treatment" reasons. This 'medical' visa makes it possible for a foreign patient to stay in Taiwan as long as six months. However, there is a fierce competition in this kind of business. According to the CEPD Thailand, Singapore, and Korea have already started to develop services catering to 'medical tourism'. Nevertheless, Taiwan can succeed. The country has a well-developed health care system with a wide range of public and private full-service hospitals as well as smaller community clinics and therefore it has a good market position.

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