

An Overview of Medical Tourism in Malaysia: A Review on the Five A's of Tourist Destination Selection

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an overview of medical tourism in Malaysia, and the current trend of seeking treatment while having vacation. It is a critical review of news articles, journal articles, websites, published reports, and other secondary sources of medical tourism in Malaysia. Based on the reviews for medical tourism, it was found that the medical tourism in Klang Valley might not be as attractive as in Georgetown and other parts of Malaysia. As such the purpose of this study is to examine the five elements of tourism (accessibility, attractions, accommodation, amenities, and awareness) within medical tourism in Malaysia. Hence, this review is to highlight the need to conduct a research to further identify factors that attract medical tourist to seek treatment in Malaysia.

Keywords: medical, tourism, hospitals, Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism is gaining popularity among foreign tourist who are seeking cheaper treatment, while having a vacation with their family members (Aigbogun, Yassin, Shoukat, 2013). With this they can even save money on the trip and enjoy their holidays. They are taking the opportunity to do two things at once. Medical tourism as defined by Medical Tourism Association as to when people who live in other country travel to another country to receive medical, dental or surgical treatment while at the same time receiving care of equal to or even better than the care they would have in their own country. They are also traveling for medical care due to affordability, better access to care or a higher level of quality of care (Vequist and Valdez, 2009; Anvekar, 2012; Aigbogun, Yassin, and Shoukat, 2013). This implies that a person with enough money can seek medical treatment overseas. In a developing country, the medical tourists usually came from the developed countries who are seeking medical care or treatment. They may not belong to the highest social bracket or earning, however, they may have more purchasing power as compared to the people in the destination country (NaRanong and NaRanong, 2011).

In Malaysia, medical tourism is under the purview of Ministry of Health that resulted the establishment of the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) in 2009 to oversee the progress of medical tourism in Malaysia. This idea was anticipated during the formation of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) that aims to expand Malaysian medical tourism as one of the core business, which indirectly establishing Malaysia as a developed country by the year 2020.

Currently, the largest medical tourists were from Indonesia. This might be due to the lack of quality health care in their own country, low price on medical fees, and good comfort that they were experiencing than in their country. Another key source of business is from Singapore, this is due to the overcrowding of Singaporean hospitals and high medical costs there. Interestingly, more than half of Malaysia's medical tourists went to the state of Penang to seek for medical treatment. The state recorded a revenue of RM370 million in 2013, about 20% increase from the 2012 revenue (Nadaraj, 2014). In contrast, Klang Valley was not being one of the favorite place for medical tourist. As such, a study is highly needed to examine the five elements of medical tourism in Klang Valley in order to attract more medical tourist to this area, rather than them going to the overcrowding Georgetown for medical treatment.

According to Carrera and Bridges (2006), they have identified that medical tourism as a temporary migration from a country of origin to another destination of their choice for medical treatment, regular checkups or second opinions so as to up keep the individual health or wellness. Further, Mohamad, et al. (2012) points out that medical travel facilitators have a strong influence between medical tourist and medical tourism industry. Although patients can arrange their own destinations to seek for medical treatment, however with an act of intermediary as one stop service provider in coordinating between patients with hospitals, hotels and tourism industry will ease the process.

Little research knowledge has been obtained on cross-border migration for medical treatment. Lunt and Carrera (2010) show that there was a major gap in the evidence in supporting medical tourist research and tourist satisfaction arises from a patient's background, surgical procedures, surgeon and surgical facilities. Additionally, Crooks, Turner, Snyder, Johnston and Kingsbury (2011), study focus on the area of promotional material developed by destination facilities in India. Their findings showed that destination facilities and marketing material helped in decision making and persuading patients to seek care at hospitals in India. Hence, this study is timely to fill up the gap in Malaysia.

Based on the general observation on medical tourism, we found that medical tourism in Klang Valley might not be as attractive as compared to the one in Georgetown and other parts of Malaysia. This may be due to the location which is in the middle of the city and quite far from beaches or other type of recreation activities. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine the five elements of tourism (accessibility, attractions, accommodation, amenities, and awareness) related to medical tourism provider in Klang Valley, Malaysia. In addition, in the most recent report it showed that most of medical tourism activities are located in Georgetown (Nadaraj, 2014; Hunter, 2014) rather than in Klang Valley, Malaysia, hence this study is timely to increase the number of medical tourist to Klang Valley, Malaysia.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Medical Tourism in Malaysia-MHTC

There is an increasing trend of tourist seeking medical treatment while having a holiday in Malaysia. In Table 1, the analysis showed that in the year 2009; Malaysia is experiencing a slowdown in medical tourism activities for about -11%, and the highest flock of medical tourism activities increase in year 2011 by 33%, and then experiencing a steady increase by 13%. Actually, from the year 2007 to 2013 medical tourism activities has increased by more than 55% (MHTC, 2014). As such, there is a

need to specifically examine the supply, intermediaries and demand of medical tourism is crucial in order to ensure the sustainability of the industry in Malaysia.

Table 1: Statistics on the Increase of Medical Tourism Travelers to Malaysia

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of Tourist | 341,288 | 374,063 | 336,225 | 392,956 | 583,296 | 671,727 | 770,134 |
| Percentage of Change | | 9% | -11% | 14% | 33% | 13% | 13% |

(Source: MHTC, 2014)

2.2 Medical Tourism Providers in Malaysia

Only six locations are listed as popular medical tourism provider in Malaysia which are Georgetown (Loh Guan Lye Specialists Centre, Optimax Eye Specialist Hospital, Hospital Lam Wah Ee, Island Hospital), Ipoh (KPJ Ipoh Specialist Hospital, Pantai Hospital Ipoh, Hospital Fatimah), Klang (Sri Kota Specialist Medical Centre, Pantai Hospital Klang, Vista Eye Specialist), Kuala Lumpur (Beverly Wilshire Medical Centre, Gleneagles Hospital, HSC Medical Center, ANOC Neuroscience and Orthopaedic Centre, Telaga Bunga Spa), Melaka (Putra Specialist Hospital, Pantai Hospital Ayer Keroh, Mahkota Medical Centre), and Petaling Jaya (Sunway Medical Centre, KPJ Damansara Specialist Hospital, Tropicana Medical Centre, Beacon International Specialist Centre, Assunta Hospital) as appeared in MHTC website. Interestingly, most medical tourism providers are located in Klang Valley such as in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya and Klang.

2.3 Five A's of Tourism

Below are brief analysis of the five elements of tourism (Connell, 2013) (accessibility, attractions, accommodation, amenities, and awareness) against medical tourism in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

2.3.1 Attractions

Table 2, shows the medical cost amongst six countries including Malaysia. Basically, the Malaysian medical cost can be said to be the lowest for different types of treatment as compared to the other countries charges. Further, with the current drop in Malaysian Ringgit (RM), the medical treatments will be more attractive for medical tourists to seek medical treatment in Malaysia. Loh Guan Lye Hospital in Penang which is a non-profitable organization was established in 1970's and also was the first private health care provider. The majority of her patients came from Sumatera, Indonesia (Medan, Padang and Ache). The next group of patients was the Japanese expatriate and tourist market, while Australia is also contributed to the expatriate market. The expatriate market is not something new in Malaysia because there are many multi-national companies which are established by foreigners in Malaysia and they usually seek for the best medical treatment for their well beings.

Table 2: Medical Tourism Procedure Cost Comparison

| Types of Treatment | Malaysia | USA | India | Thailand | Singapore | Korea |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Heart Bypass | \$12,000 | \$130,000 | \$9,300 | \$11,000 | \$16,500 | \$34,150 |
| Heart Valve Replacement | \$15,000 | \$160,000 | \$9,000 | \$10,000 | \$12,500 | \$29,500 |
| Angioplasty | \$8,000 | \$57,000 | \$7,500 | \$13,000 | \$11,200 | \$19,600 |
| Hip Replacement | \$10,000 | \$43,000 | \$7,100 | \$12,000 | \$9,200 | \$11,400 |
| Hysterectomy | \$4,000 | \$20,000 | \$6,000 | \$4,500 | \$6,000 | \$12,700 |
| Knee Replacement | \$8,000 | \$40,000 | \$8,500 | \$10,000 | \$11,100 | \$24,100 |

Source: <http://www.wellnessvisit.com/procedures.php>

Further, Selangor has introduced Country Heights Health Tourism (CHHT) where one of medical services included a health screening program. This program can be acquired through the arrangement between the hotels and the hospitals. For this program, patients and their family members are offered some health and relaxation treatments such as spa, reflexology or even traditional massages. As proposed by Kelly (2010) accommodation with spa or wellness program are gaining interest among tourist. By providing this program or packages more medical tourist or health travelers will be attracted to seek treatment in Malaysia, besides hospitals at Kuala Lumpur and Malacca are strategically located and close to business centers and beach areas so that it can ease the family to enjoy their holidays at the same time.

2.3.2 Access

Easy access and availability of required medication or near place of residents will makes the destination more attractive for medical tourists. The health condition of medical tourist who needs regular pre and post medical treatments will also demand for regular visits and travelling. Penang is seen to be easily accessible via road with good road facilities and highway connections. One can rent a car and drive to this island without hesitation since there is a highway connecting the island with the peninsular Malaysia or Province Wellesly.

According to Aigbogun, Yassin, and Shoukat (2013), most medical tourists were attracted to seek medical treatments in the Asia region due to the availability of cheap airlines. The air operators in Malaysia such as Airasia, Fireflies or Malindo Air are consistently offering discount flight fares which has created a situation that now everyone can fly, in turn might attract more medical tourist to Malaysia. Also, medical tourist can easily fly into Penang since it has an international airport. This reflect that Penang is easily accessible by flights and by roads.

2.3.3 Accommodation

The uniqueness of a hospital are reflected in what they can offer like service apartments and hotels at the same time. Some of the rooms are furnished with VVIP suites and it offers all the facilities that will be required by a family or businessman. Hilmi and Ngo (2011), highlight the hotelier's decision to advertise in a travel magazine is one of the ways to attract potential medical tourists. The findings showed that they reached the target market and the contents of the magazine had helped the medical tourist to make decision. This implies that the hotels decision to advertise their extended services have positive impact amongst medical tourists. Hence, in order to enhance medical tourism, hoteliers should upgrade their services and

advertised accordingly. In addition, according to Kelly (2010), accommodation with wellness facilities such as spa is of interest to tourist, and plus the safety and certification of the wellness spa is becoming a huge concern for any tourist.

2.3.4 Amenities

The amenities in hospitals may include Wi-Fi connections, room services, cafeteria, gift shops, pharmacy retail shops, money changer and others. In previous studies they highlighted on the medical tourism amenities as one of the most important factors that might pull or push that medical tourist to seek medical treatments (Connell, 2013; Anvekar, 2012). As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, this information was compiled via observation, websites, and phone-conversation. Most of the hospitals websites only indicate the room services availability, and other amenities like shops, café, ATM machine or money changers were not being included in the website, especially for hospitals in Kuala Lumpur and surrounding areas. The lack of such information may be a factor that might lure away interest of medical tourist. However, the three hospitals listed on MHTC website are located in Georgetown. Their websites are quite detail on information related to services and amenities available in the hospital, either for visitors or patients. Hence, it is advisable for hospitals in Malaysia to be more informative and provide the kind of amenities available inside and nearby the hospital in their websites in order to attract more customers.

Table 3: Hospitals in Kuala Lumpur

| HOSPITALS | Wi-fi connections | Room Services | Cafe | Gift Shops | Pharmacy/ retail shops | ATM | Detail Website Info. |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------|------------|------------------------|-----|----------------------|
| IJN | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | Not all |
| HOSPITAL PUSRAWI | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| PRINCE COURT | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | Not all |
| GLENEAGLES | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| KPJ-AMPANG PUTRI | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Table 4: Hospitals in Georgetown, Penang

| HOSPITALS | Wi-fi connections | Room Services | Cafe | Gift Shops | Pharmacy/ retail shops | ATM | Detail Website Info. |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|------|------------|------------------------|-----|----------------------|
| LOH GUAN LYE SPECIALISTS CENTRE | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| HOSPITAL LAM WAH EE | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| ISLAND HOSPITAL | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

2.3.5 Awareness

To increase the awareness of overseas medical tourist, the Medical Health Tourism has held frequent road shows, conferences at local and overseas. While media is another way of creating medical treatment awareness. Private hospitals on the other hand, conducts their own roadshows by flying their delegates to respective countries. According to Yeoh, Othman and Ahmad (2013) those medical tourists who have visited Malaysia and experienced medical treatment in Malaysia might also bring new medical tourist to Malaysia. This showed that the awareness of medical facilities in Malaysia was promoted via “word-of-mouth” among medical travelers. This reflects that a good experience will lead to more medical tourist to come to the country again. Other than that MHTC website (Aigbogun, Yassin, and Shoukat, 2013), the hospital websites, and other intermediary’s websites also can help to promote medical tourism. This was supported by a previous study that was conducted in India, such that promotions is a must for medical tourism to be successful (Anvekar, 2012).

3.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the general observation for medical tourism, we found that medical tourism in Klang Valley might not be as attractive as in Georgetown and other parts of Malaysia especially in Klang Valley. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine the five elements of tourism (accessibility, attractions, accommodation, amenities, and awareness) against medical tourism in Malaysia. In the most recent report it showed that most of medical tourism activities are located in Georgetown (Nadaraj, 2014; Hunter, 2014) rather than in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Hence this review is to highlight the need to conduct a research to further identify factors that attract medical tourist to visit Malaysia especially Penang than any other destinations in Malaysia.

In view to attract more tourist to fly into Malaysia, there should be more aggressive new developments in medical tourism, eco-tourism, agro-tourism and adventure-tourism which will make it more competitive than Thailand. One good factors which inevitably is the political situation in Malaysia that is always stable and this provides more confidence for the traveler to seek medical treatments here. This study has allowed us to look into the gaps and limitations of medical tourism industry. It also reflects the importance that needs to be emphasized by the medical service providers in their plans for sustainability. As supported by Ibimilua (2009) to sustain the tourism industry natural and man-made for recreation and tourism should be enhanced and developed.

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