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## Pattern and Demand on Medical Tourism in Asians

**Sutatip Chavanavesskul\***, **Kosum Chansiri\*\***

Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

[such2305@gmail.com](mailto:such2305@gmail.com)\*, [kchansiri@yahoo.com](mailto:kchansiri@yahoo.com)\*\*

### Abstract

*Medical tourism scheme has been developing in many countries, particularly in advanced medical technology countries. As a result, many countries are fiercely competing to be the hub of the medical tourism. In order to reach that level, the scheme need to be cooperated by both public sectors and private sectors, who are related in tourism industry such as public health centres, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These organisations have to understand in many factors that relate to the medical tourism scheme such as tourists' behavior, number of tourists, tourists' needs towards medical tourism. Thus, this study aims to explore the tourists behavior and their needs in order to develop Thai medical tourism as a hub of medical tourism in Asia. The 810 questionnaires are conducted by simple sampling method with foreign tourists, who come to visit Thailand in high season period (April to May 2013). Study areas consist of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Koh Samui at Surat Thani. The questionnaire survey is ministered in major tourist sightseeing places and provincial hospitals. The research found that major foreign tourists in Thailand come from the Europe continent (e.g. the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Austria, Scandinavian countries, and Belgium), the America continent (e.g. the United States, Mexico), and the Asia continent (e.g. China, Korea, Singapore). Purposes for travel in Thailand are leisure tourist, wellness tourist, and expatriate in Asia. The first time tourists in Thailand stay 1-2 weeks through the trip and spending around US\$ 500-1,500. Tourists choose Spa & Thai Traditional Massage, Dental Care, Thai Herb & Alternative Medicine, and Medical Care as the pattern of medical tourism in Thailand.*

Keywords: *medical tourism*

### 1. Introduction

The medical tourism has been expanding significantly since last decade. This kind of tourism is in fierce competition between high potential medical countries. In Asia, it has 5 countries;

Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and India; that compete in each other. This continent has 1.3 million tourists, who visit for medical tourism purpose, per year in average. An estimation of the amount of medical tourists in Thailand has growth rate at 29.96 per cent (the Royal Thai Embassy in Washington D.C., 2009). However, medical tourism in an international standard is quite new in Thailand. The country is still has a few places (e.g. public health centers and small and medium enterprises [SMEs]) that meet the standard. Thus, medical tourism in Thailand need to be developed in order to be the hub of medical tourism in Asia.

This research aims to study tourist's behavior and numbers of medical tourists as well as tourist's attitude towards medical tourism in order to develop public health centers and SMEs for the hub of medical tourism in Asia.

## 2. Research methodology

1. The-top-three-rank of number of tourists in Thailand has been selected as a study area. There are Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and KohSamui in SuratThani (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). Field work study was conducted from April to May 2013. The 810 respondents from the research were derived from KRejcie & Morgan method. Details can be seen from Table 1. A convenience sampling was applied for collecting questionnaire from the respondents in each area. The questionnaire involved with 3 topics. First, tourist's travel patterns; travel period, spending through the trip, travel purposes, using medical tourism services. Second, a suitable country for the hub of medical tourism in Asia is asked from the respondents. Third, pull factors of medical tourism that respondents concern for using the medical tourism service.

Table 1: Study area and number of respondents

Study area	Number of respondents
Bangkok	310
Chiang Mai	310
Koh Samui district, Surat Thani province	190
<b>Total</b>	<b>810</b>

2. Analysis of tourist's behavior pattern and tourist's demand towards medical tourism can be interpreted in percentage.

## 3. Results

The study can be discussed in 2 sections, tourists' characteristics and tourist's behavior and tourist's demand towards medical tourism.

First, tourists' characteristics from Table 2 show that male respondents are about same rate to female respondents. Half of respondents have age range at 21-30 years old. Almost of three-fourth of respondents come from European countries (e.g. The United Kingdom, Germany,

France, Austria, Scandinavian countries, and Belgium). The second-rank of tourists come from the America (e.g. USA and Mexico) at 15.3 percent. The third-rank of tourists come from Asia (e.g. China, South Korea, and Singapore). More than half of respondents spent more than US\$ 1,500 for the whole trip and almost a one-third of respondents spent about US\$ 500-1,500.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Details		Persons	%
Gender			
	Male	404	49.9
	Female	406	50.1
Age			
	Under 20	68	8.4
	21-30	424	52.3
	31-40	182	22.5
	41-50	62	7.7
	51-60	54	6.7
	Over 60	20	2.5

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Details		Persons	%
Nationality by continent			
	Asia	70	8.6
	Europe	598	73.8
	The America	124	15.3
	Oceania	8	1.1
	Africa	10	1.2
Whole trip spending(US Dollar)			
	Less than 500	92	11.4
	500-1,500	256	31.6
	1,500-2,500	216	26.7
	More than 2,500	246	30.3

Second, tourist's behavior and tourist's demand towards medical tourism. From Table 3 shows that about 80 percent of respondents visit Thailand for leisure purpose. The other purposes are wellness tourism and expatriate in Asia. Most of respondents (85.7 percent) come to travel Thailand alone or with family members or friends. About 58 percent of respondents have never been Thailand before. It seems respondents come to visit Thailand as a long trip. As we can see, A half of respondents travel in Thailand more than 3 weeks, whereas about 40 percent of respondents spend their time in Thailand about 1-2 weeks. About one-third of respondents,

who involve with medical tourism in Thailand, use spa and Thai traditional massage services. The other activities are dental care, Thai herb & alternative medicine, and medical care.

Table 3: Tourist's behavior and tourist's demand towards medical tourism

Details	Persons	%
Travel purposes in Thailand		
Leisure tourism	646	79.8
Wellness tourism	70	8.6
Expatriate in a non-Asian country	26	3.2
Expatriate in Asia	52	6.4
Medical tourism	8	2.0
With whom do they go traveling?		
Alone or with family members/friends	694	85.7
With a tour group	116	14.3

Details	Persons	%
How many times do they visit Thailand?		
No	470	58.0
1 time	148	18.3
2-5 times	94	11.6
More than 5 times	98	12.1
How long do they plan to stay in Thailand?		
Less than 1 week	64	7.9
1-2 week(s)	314	38.8
3-4 weeks	254	31.4
More than 1 month	178	21.9
How can you describe your current involvement with medical tourism in Thailand?		
Spa & Thai Traditional Massage	280	34.6
Thai Herb & Alternative Medicine	26	3.2
Cosmetic Surgery	10	1.2
Health Checkup	2	0.3
Primary Health Care	6	0.7
Optometric Care	8	0.9
Women's Health	8	0.9
Dental Care	38	4.8
Medical Care	18	2.2
Surgical Care	2	0.3
No	412	50.9

#### 4. Discussion

From Table 4 shows that due to warm climate throughout the year in Thailand, many tourists from European and America continents come to visit the country. In addition, Thailand provides a lot of tourism resources and tourism activities that can support holistic tourism in the country.

In addition, it found from the research that respondents share attitudes towards the hub of medical tourism in Asia to 3 ranks. They are Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, respectively.

Table 4: Pull factors towards medical tourism attraction in Thailand.

Strength	Moderate	Weakness
1. Hospitality country with service-minded people	1. Low rate of treatment failure	1. Cleanliness and hygienic environment
2. Reasonable cost of accommodation for accompanies	2. Superior hospital service	2. Language barrier (e.g. communication in English)
3. Warm climate throughout the year	3. Popular destination for medical care	
4. Interesting of tourist attractions	4. Wide variety of medical, surgical and dental and other medical services	
5. Variety of foods	5. Ease of immigration clearance	
	6. Political stable and safe	
	7. Goods transportation and infrastructure for tourists	

#### 5. Conclusions

In order to be a hub of medical tourism in Asia, Thailand needs to maintain the strength factors that are the advantage pull factors for medical tourism aspect. In the same time, weakness factors need to be paid more attention and improve them by integrated corporations between public sectors, private sectors, educational institutions, and public participations.

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