

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF MEDICAL TOURISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article provides an overview of the medical tourism industry in Uzbekistan. Topics which are taken into consideration are demographics of tourists, citizens preferences for the internal and external medical treatment visits, current level of the medical tourism industry and development level of medical tourism in Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *medical tourism, health care, medical services, annual tourists flow, tourism for the medical treatment, tourism preferences.*

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research paper is to demonstrate the current trends of medical tourism, explore its development level and implications in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Presenting how government is supporting this sphere, privatization affects, citizens and specialists' opinions' about its current development level and mainly what factors are mostly affecting medical tourism in Uzbekistan to become more demandable or flowing down in the nearest future.

Healthcare in Uzbekistan. In addition to being Uzbekistan well-known for its historical buildings, beautiful natural surroundings, and fascinating culture, however it is also known for its extensive array of facilities for health development. There is currently no health insurance in Uzbekistan, and all services provided to residents of the country at public medical establishments are free of charge. Uzbekistan has quite a long history of being renowned as one of the most important clinical retreats in Central Asia due to its distinctive landscape and weather. There are health related complexes and establishments for recreational healthcare in each location. The fact that the majority of Uzbekistan's medical facilities are situated mostly in exurban and mountainous regions that benefits quality of healthcare (The National PR-centre, 2018).

Current medical services. For years, people have traveled to Uzbekistan for dentistry and prostheses. In addition to an excellent basic dental school, its experts receive their training in the biggest foreign hospitals in Europe and America. Particularly in Tashkent, there have been many dentistry and prosthodontic facilities with the latest up-to-date technology and crew members who speak multiple languages. Although having old roots, Uzbek traditional healthcare is still commonly

practiced nowadays and was developed from Avicenna's principles. Acupressure, leech treatment, cupping acupuncture, mud therapy, water treatments, climatherapy, and numerous spa services include some of the most well-liked therapies (The National PR-centre, 2018).

Medical tourism statistics and implications in 2019. Through 2019, there have been 37,168 outgoing visitors who traveled to certain other international healthcare centers, and 55,490 foreigners came to the region for healthcare. In the other hand, regardless of how expensive, more Uzbek clients are choosing to stay home than traveling overseas over time. This finding suggests that there is insufficient sustained supervision in the acute medical processes and various initiatives. That may be a warning sign for the Uzbek healthcare domain as it declines viability and continuously expends foreign cash. Due to the fact that it is crucial to consider the requirements of the patient when making a decision about health tourism overseas and to make suggestions for elements for effective concerns for the healthcare regulatory changes (Choi et al., 2021).

Attention which is not enough for the development of the industry. Data transmission is significantly very crucial when individuals decide to receive medical care abroad rather than locally considering health care includes several groups and agencies. In order for international practitioners to acquire acquainted to the healthcare venues and its amenities, effective data exchange through all currently used methods, including the intertubes, news releases, and infectious interactions with everyone. According to Tai, the exchange of data has a significant impact on the development of positive working collaborations and is beneficial for retaining customers (Tai, 2011). Numerous investigations have shown the usefulness of healthcare facilitators share data at all phases of the delivery of healthcare services, so the value is often considerable for performance expectancy or contentment (Hadwich et al., 2010).

Methodology. A survey was operated by using Microsoft Forms, with three general and six main questions, that covers most important themes as the citizens and specialists opinions about how medical tourism industry is it now, the structures and categories that are mostly affecting the field, preferences of them about internal and external services, their markings of the current level of development of the industry, criteria with which they purchase the medical services and additionally their private opinions that can be implemented in the future to develop the industry.

Sample population. The besiegement to whom this survey was addressed consists of current university students in Hospitality sphere as Kokand University, KIMYO International University, PROFU University, Tashkent State University of Economics, Tashkent University of Information Technologies named after Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, Tashkent State University of Law, University of Vistula, Greenwich University, Swiss Hotel Management School and Cesar Ritz Colleges Switzerland, experts in fields of hotel and restaurant operations as Rixos Khadisha Shymkent,

tourism services, insurance and healthcare organizations as Kafolat Insurance Company and several government structures. The audience is focused on developing the industry because it is the part of the strategic sphere which affects the economic growth in Uzbekistan. Overall the survey was completed by 28 respondents who are the students, specialists, employers and non – directly connected personnel to tourism industry from the companies that are mentioned before.

Data limitations. The number of the limitations that were discovered during this primary research regarding the answers and respondents. The data received may not have been the most desirable, because the most respondents did not try medical tourism services before, also more less the English language proficiency of amount of respondents is not in good level or the questions were not prepared in high quality, even though they were created in understandable to everyone way. Besides, some responses were not as expected to achieve the objective of the research, especially in the fourth and seventh questions.

Finding out the social status of respondents. Finding out the social status of respondents is the first question with which survey starts. Knowing who is filling the survey gives big result to summarize and analyze the quality of answers that we got. The biggest audience with 46% of all responses were created by current students of tourism and hospitality industry. The next biggest amount of responses collected from specialists and people that are non – directly connected to the industry in amount of 21% both. Employers are also attended survey and they brought the 7% of all responses from survey. More less only 4% of all respondents are independent researchers in tourism and hospitality industry.



Figure 1. Social status of the respondents

Fields from which respondents come from. With being only a general question in survey, analyzing the fields from which respondents come from, created the opportunity to understand how they are connected to the medicine and medical tourism industries. With nearly the same amount of 7 and 6 responses education sphere employees and current students show that the survey had to be send more to the healthcare sector. In average of 4 hotel management personnel also attended the survey and from the nearest restaurant management industry there is only one respondent who filled the survey. From banking and finance, tourism operations, insurance and counterparty services industries attended the equal amount of 2 respondents. More less there is also 1 response from freelancer. By the way, with only

1 respondent from medicine, it shows again that survey needed to be sent to the right auditory.

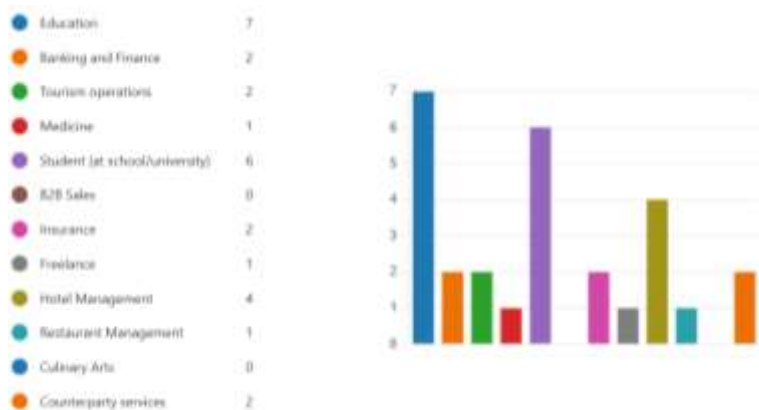


Figure 2. Fields that suite the current status of respondents

Medical tourism consumption. According to the survey, we can understand that the huge amount of participants gave their feedbacks without trying medical tourism services ever before. Only 18% of all respondents have consumed medical tourism services and opposite side 82% of participants never face medical tourism services before.



Figure 3. How many of respondents have tried medical tourism services before?

Development of medical tourism in Uzbekistan. With looking to the responses we can see the exact conflict of opinions on graph. Equally 42,86% of attendants think that this sphere is well developed or already in high level and on the other hand next 42,86% of audience think that the industry is poor developed or passively developing. Only 14,86% of participants did not give the exact opinion and preferred to stay neutral as they were not sure with the exact answer.

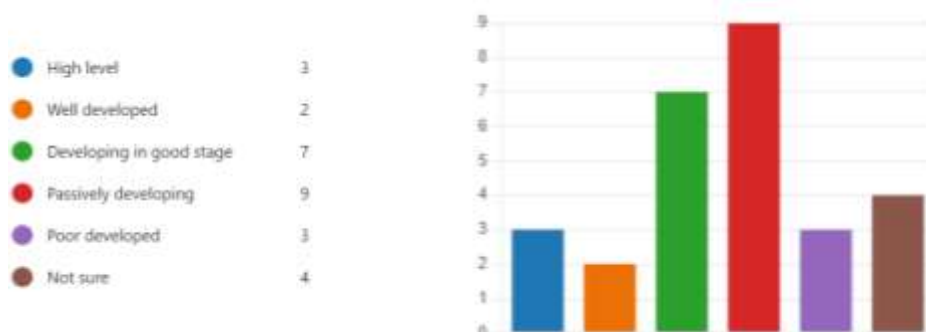


Figure 4. Development level of the industry in Uzbekistan

Factors that are affecting the development of industry. During filling this question, respondents are asked to put all points with the importance level in their opinion. With nearly same results on first three positions attendants have mentioned

level of medicine, government attention and marketing of medical tourism in Uzbekistan as the mostly affecting factors. Besides that, prices for medical services, private sector and implementing new technologies are also mentioned as secondary affecting questions. Attendants considered that demand of the sphere, access to the healthcare resources, employment rate of the industry and providing centralized services are less affecting the development of Medical Tourism in Uzbekistan.

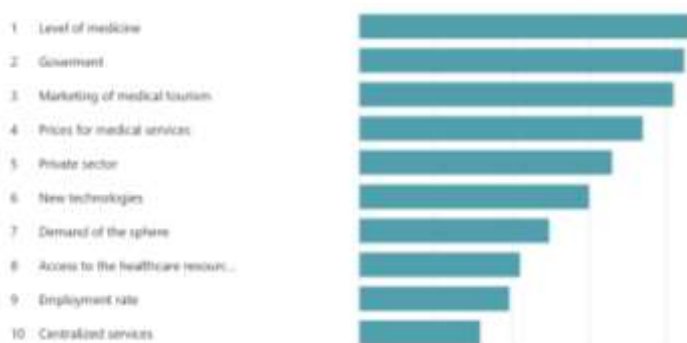


Figure 5. What is affecting the development of industry?

Preferences for medical tourism consumption. With analyzing this question we can see that 14,3% of attendants are not interested in trying medical tourism in Uzbekistan. The leading amount of respondents with 42,9% have given the neutral position maybe because of they are not informed about the industry before or the other factors which we have seen in previous question. Purchasing the internal Medical Tourism packages is interesting for the 42,8% of the auditory. If we compare the statistics of Figure 5, we can see the same amount of followers of the industry in Uzbekistan. Besides that, 10,7% of auditory is also not interested in purchasing the services even abroad. Nearly the same amount of neutrals we can see also here with 32,1% of all responses. Looking to the followers of external medical tourism we can see the 57,2% responses and in comparison with Figure 5, it is showing the nearly same result. By the way, the medical services in Uzbekistan are still marked as the one of the bests in the region and in 2022, 70 thousand and on January 2023, 5 thousand foreigners have visited the country for medical tourism services (Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023) which is slightly increased than 55 490 visitors in 2019 (Choi et al., 2021).



Figure 6. Attendants preferences to consume medical tourism services

Current level of medical tourism. Even equal amount of attendants mentioned the development level of medical tourism good or poor, here we can see that the 64,29% of all respondents think that the current level of Medical Tourism in Uzbekistan is very poor. Only 10,71% of respondents have mentioned that the current level of sphere is

good enough. On the other hand, 25% of attendants marked it passively that means they are not totally sure with marking the exact current situation. Even though the experts of industry receive their training in the biggest foreign hospitals in Europe and America as its mentioned by The National PR-centre (The National PR-centre, 2018), the biggest amount of participants think that its current level is very poor now.



Figure 7. Current level of Medical Tourism in Uzbekistan

Main important factors for attendants to purchase medical tourism services. Participants think that the most important factors for their purchases of Medical Tourism packages are good price and as much as possible included services constantly with 25% and 21,43%. People that think that the most important detail is destination reaches to the average of 17,86%. Time period and providing centralized services got the same amount of responses totally in amount of 14,29% for both. For the 21,42% of respondents it is important to have all these six factors to purchase the medical tourism services.

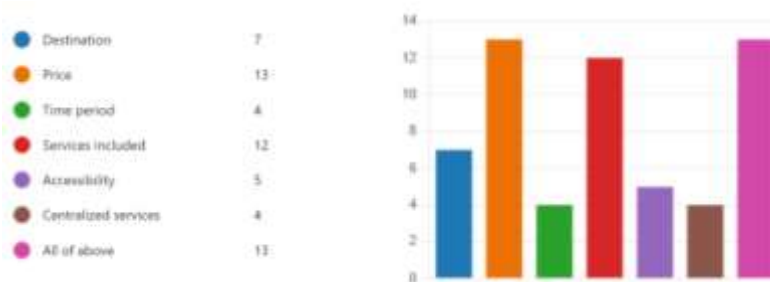


Figure 8. Important factors for purchasing medical tourism packages

Conclusion. One of the specialists in education sphere Mukhiddin Najmiddinov argues that he is agree that Uzbeks are not entirely satisfied with the local medical services and therefore they are looking for salvation in foreign countries, in particular from India. Government needs to find ways to develop this tourism industry. Besides them, special clinics should be opened and medical services should be advertised only for visitors especially in embassies and places where tourists will be the first to come to Uzbekistan. Because it is difficult to re-educate those who do not fully trust their meditation and medical colleagues, as well as those who are not accustomed to strange strangers who, in their opinion, eat something that belongs to them. Also, in their opinion, foreigners and visitors are not well-mannered, as they consider and for this it is necessary to teach the local people from early childhood how they are used to teach to give way in transports and respect older generation (Najmiddinov, 2023).

Besides that, specialist in Hospitality Management and alumni of Cezar Ritz Colleges Switzerland Mirziyo Sodikov thinks that government should use medical tourism globally and find a place like sanatoriums or spas, as we know medical

tourism is divided into medical tourism proper and resort tourism. Also it is needed to invest more into the industry and for more external and internal resources for promotion reasons (Sodikov, 2023).

Overall for the development of the sphere in Uzbekistan its needed to implement the full government attention and support with developing first of all given services and after promoting them for internal and external market. Inviting the international specialists is also good to know solution for improvement of this structure. Additionally, experience exchange through the worldwide partners is also needed. Improving horizons, accessibility of the provided services and proposing affordable prices for services needed to be improved first of all to develop this industry.

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