

Medical Tourism in Thailand and Its Marketing Strategies

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Abstract

Thailand has emerged as a leading medical tourism destination in recent years. The increase in the number of international patients shows that Thailand has great potential for medical tourism and the improvement of its marketing strategies will further increase the image of Thailand as a medical tourism destination. In order to face off the challenges of growing competition from India, Singapore, Malaysia and other destinations, Thailand needs among other things to improve its marketing as a favourite medical tourism destination in the region. Therefore, this exploratory research was set to evaluate the current marketing strategies of healthcare providers and intermediaries through interviews with stakeholders and observation, and to propose effective marketing strategies for preserving and enhancing Thailand's position as a leading medical tourism destination. This qualitative research employed semi-structured interviews to examine the current marketing strategies of Thailand's healthcare service providers. Interviews took place with healthcare service providers (public hospitals, private hospitals, and clinics), medical travel agents and related parties, at several popular tourism destinations of Thailand: Bangkok, Phuket, and Pattaya. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling. In addition, observation of stakeholders' websites and online marketing of service providers of competitors (Singapore, India, and Malaysia) took place. The paper identifies the strengths of Thailand's healthcare service providers and points at a number of problems that may reduce the growth opportunity of this industry. These include lack of practical government policies with regard to medical tourism and of other supporting regulations, lack of organization as a cooperation centre aimed at promoting the medical tourism industry as a whole, remaining low awareness of the opportunities presented by the industry among potential foreign patients, and shortage of doctors and qualified medical staff. Measures for improvement are suggested.

Keywords: medical travel, medical tourism, Thailand, marketing strategies