

AN OVERVIEW OF HEALTH TOURISM WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the general overview of medical tourism that allows Uzbekistan to take a strong position in the international market of medical services, competing in the world community. The global trends in the development of tourism services and the possibilities of Uzbekistan to integrate into upward trends are being studied. The advantages of the natural potential of the country, the success of the medical industry in the implementation of state programs to attract medical tourists and encourage foreign investment are analyzed. The importance of using the experience of countries with developed medical tourism is emphasized.

Keywords: *medical tourism, tourism strategy, medical technologies, marketing, insurance.*

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается общий обзор медицинского туризма, позволяющий Узбекистану занимать прочные позиции на международном рынке медицинских услуг, конкурируя в мировом сообществе. Изучаются мировые тенденции развития туристических услуг и возможности Узбекистана интегрироваться в восходящие тенденции. Анализируются преимущества природного потенциала страны, успехи медицинской отрасли в реализации государственных программ по привлечению медицинских туристов и привлечению иностранных инвестиций. Подчеркивается важность использования опыта стран с развитым медицинским туризмом.

Ключевые слова: *медицинский туризм, туристическая стратегия, медицинские технологии, маркетинг, страхование.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays tourism has become one of the leading sectors of the global economy. In this regard, Uzbekistan pays special attention to the modernization of the tourism industry, the development and improvement of the regulatory framework for the sustainable development of the industry, and the organization of services for

foreign guests in accordance with international standards. During the years of independence, Uzbekistan has made a significant breakthrough in this area, along with the preservation and enhancement of the historical and cultural heritage of the people, the revival of national traditions and customs, the restoration and arrangement of the sights of the republic.

An important milestone in the annals of domestic tourism was the entry of the republic in 1993 into the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). In cooperation with it, in 1994, 19 countries adopted the Samarkand Declaration on Tourism along the Silk Road. In 1999, the Khiva Declaration on Tourism and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage was adopted, supported by UNWTO, UNESCO and the Council of Europe¹. In 2002, the Bukhara Declaration on Tourism along the Silk Road, which emphasizes the benefits of sustainable tourism and identifies concrete steps to stimulate cultural and ecological tourism in this direction. Moreover, in recognition of the special place of the republic in the world tourism industry, the UNWTO regional office was opened in 2004 in Samarkand to coordinate the development of tourism on the Silk Road. It should be noted that such an office exists in only two countries - in Japan and Uzbekistan. Its main function is to identify areas in the development of not only regional, but also international tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Uzbekistan's medical tourism overview is being measured with data collected from medical tourists in Bukhara, Tashkent and Djizzakh. The hospitals were contacted to get approval for data collection. Once the permission was granted, the researcher went in to conduct the study. The survey was conducted with the medical tourists over a period of 4 months using a convenient sampling method. The medical tourists were approached to participate in the study. The sample size is 105 with a response rate of 65%.

An official Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures for the further development of the tourism sector" was adopted in order to increase the effectiveness of ongoing reforms in the field of tourism and increase dramatically the number of foreign citizens entering the country by solving the existing problems of tourism infrastructure, improving the quality of services and promoting actively the national tourism product in world markets, strengthening the human resources of the tourism industry, as well as in accordance with the main areas of the Concept of

Kodirova D.S. Strategy of Tourism Development in Uzbekistan. «Социальная и экономическая география»2019.р

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development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2019–2025 on August 12, 2019.²

RESULTS

The current study is an exploratory study in the sense that there are no other previous researches that actually determine the whole image of medical tourism in the country. Having said this the study intends to develop the factors or index which have influences in the provisions of medical tourism treatment to the tourist. The study began by considering the most essential characteristics of theoretically and practically sounding useful factors in the provision of medical tourism services. We have established that there are four main motivating factors of medical tourism: low cost of services, advanced technologies, high qualification of doctors and the time factor (long waiting for treatment in their country).

Table 1. Value for money

Excellent value for money in	Percentage	Ranking
Medical treatment	57.5	1
Meals	55.0	2
Accommodation	52.5	3
Transportation	52.0	4
Tourism packages	35.0	5
Tourism activities	34.4	6

Source: Yuhanis A.A., Zaiton S., Khairil W. Developing an Index for Medical Tourism. International Business Management 9/Medwell Journals, 2015

Table 1 reported the ranking in terms of value for money for several factors during the medical treatment in Uzbekistan. As illustrated in Table 1, it was found that the cost of medical treatment ranked the highest in terms of value for money amongst the other factors. Meals are reported to be the second important factors for value for money. This is followed by the accommodation or lodging where the respondents ranked accommodation in third ranking for value for money. Transportation ranked the fourth in the hierarchy and followed by tourism packages and finally tourism activities.

Accordingly inbound medical tourism involves the arrival of foreign citizens in the country for treatment and recreation. The formation of medical tourism as a budget-forming sector of the national economy with a consistent increase in its contribution to the gross domestic product of the

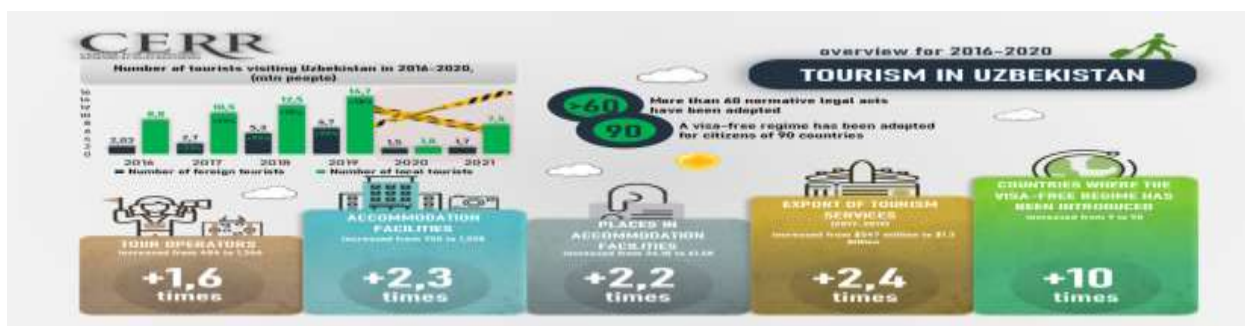
² Commentary on the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On creating additional conditions for the further development of private medical organizations” // Website of the National Information Agency of Uzbekistan (UzA). URL: www.uza.uz

country is defined as the strategic goal of introducing an innovative model of healthcare management in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 19.06.2020 №4755, the first tranche of the Anti-Crisis Fund under the Ministry of Finance of the Safe Tourism Fund in the amount of 20 billion soums, as well as "Uzbekistan. Safe travel" is formed at the expense of payment of twice the basic calculation fee for voluntary certification, introduced under the system "guaranteed". Accordingly, in 2019, the number of foreigners visiting Uzbekistan for medical purposes exceeded 50,000. In fact, this number could be several times higher, as determining the number of tourists visiting private medical clinics is still a perfect task.³

DISCUSSION

In Uzbekistan, a new non – electronic type of visa – “Medical visa” - was introduced for foreign citizens. The state agency for the Development of tourism is creating a single medical tourism portal, which includes lists of treatment-profilactic institutions, therapeutic medical personnel, travel agencies operating in the field of medical tourism.⁴



Source: <https://review.uz/uz/post/razvitie-turizma-v-uzbekistane>

CONCLUSION

This study shows and provides evidence that medical treatment is a factor that has the most excellent value for money. This piece of interesting information suggests that destination marketers would be well advised to formulate a strategy to motivate the tourists and use this information to target the respective segments. Furthermore, the marketers can use this information and communicate it effectively in their promotional mix tools.

³ <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/65841880/diplomatic-world-uzbekistan>

⁴ Appendix 1 to the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 5 January PF-5611 “The concept of development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2019-2025”, Retrieved from www.uza.uz.

Limitations. Today, a specially created department under the Ministry of Health of the Republic has been instructed to deal with the issues of medical tourism in Uzbekistan. The dynamics of the growing popularity of domestic sanatoriums and other medical institutions of Uzbekistan among foreign citizens is as follows:

- in 2013, about 4 thousand foreign citizens from 26 countries of the world visited Uzbekistan to receive medical services;

- in 2014 - more than 8 thousand people from 40 countries;

- in 2015 - more than 12 thousand from 49 countries.

For the further development of medical tourism in Uzbekistan and the achievement of success in this direction, the Ministry of Health considers it necessary to create a system of interrelationships between the Ministry of Health, the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions, the Uzbektourism National Company on the issues of medical and health tourism, as well as medical rehabilitation. International accreditation of leading medical institutions is needed, which will increase their attractiveness for foreign patients, since it provides serious prospects for the influx of foreign patients. There is no such system in Uzbekistan at this stage.

The issues of insurance for persons receiving medical services both within our republic and abroad need to be resolved, taking into account all the risks that may arise during and after treatment. Travel agencies that send medical tourists cannot provide guarantees about the quality of service for selected foreign medical institutions; insurance companies, taking into account the existing risks, cannot provide the appropriate services.

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