



An Introduction to Medical Tourism

Sun, Sand and Wellness

One in a Series of Marketing Guides

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Introduction to Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is not a new concept: people have been travelling for medical treatment for many years. However, in the past few years the world has seen a boom in medical tourism, both in practice and in the press. With the expansion on our global community, it is easier than ever to travel to other countries for both medical and wellness treatments.

Long wait times, differences in healthcare regulations and the quality of care are some of the key influencers of travelling for treatment. With strong economic benefits for host countries, many areas of the world are focusing on how exactly to attract medical tourists.

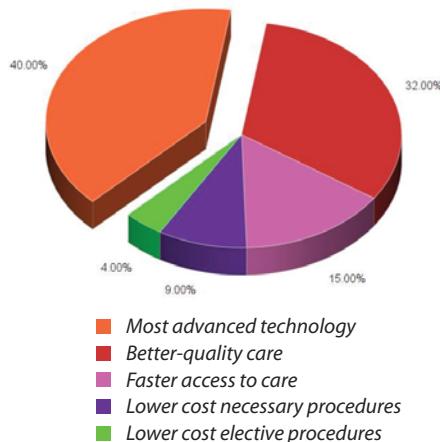
In this guide, we provide a broad overview to the subject including:

- 1.** What is medical tourism?
- 2.** What are the main motivators?
- 3.** Where do people go?
- 4.** What are the main procedures?
- 5.** What is the economic advantage to the destination country?



The global medical tourism market was valued at USD 10.5 billion in 2012 and is expected to grow to reach an estimated value of USD 32.5 billion in 2019.

Key Motivators for Medical Tourism



1. So, What Exactly Is Medical Tourism?

Medical tourism refers to travelling for the explicit purpose of obtaining medical treatment in a foreign country. This can include anything from specific medical treatments, such as dentistry and cosmetic operations, to wellness travel, which includes overall healing activity such as spas, yoga or counselling.

The entire industry is booming, with great potential for further growth. It is estimated that as of 2014, more than 50,000 Canadians and 750,000 Americans travel for medical treatment each year. Why? For affordability, accessibility and quality of care.

2. What Are the Key Motivators for Medical Tourism?

There are many key influencers when deciding whether or not to travel abroad for medical care. Many Canadian residents choose to head abroad in search of shorter wait times — as of November 2016, the median wait time in Canada between receiving a referral from a general practitioner and receipt of treatment from a specialist is 20 weeks, and as high as nearly 40 weeks in some provinces.

Patients also look to healthcare abroad for cost savings and quality care for procedures that may not be available in their home countries.

There are also differences in healthcare regulations per country, meaning that one can receive drug and treatment options unavailable at home. For example, Mexico offers experimental cancer treatments not yet available in Canada.

Travelling for treatment also offers a level of anonymity not available in one's home country, as well as a relaxing recovery, complete with the opportunity to enjoy luxurious accommodations and to bring friends and family along for the trip.



3. Where Do Medical Tourists Go?

When choosing countries for their medical procedures, there are a number of factors that determine where patients will ultimately go. According to a report that highlights a "Model of Destination Attractiveness," by *International Medical Tourism Journal*, there are seven key determinants:

- Geographical proximity, travel time, ease and barriers in reaching the destination. Patients are not willing to take long, indirect flights from/to deserted airports, nor are they willingly going through complicated visa procedures.
- Cultural proximity including language, religion, cuisine, customs and practices. Medical tourism seems to be influenced by familiarity and cultural similarity, for example former colonial connections (India–UK) and diaspora populations (coming back for treatment to a country people emigrated from).
- Destination image, reputation of country and stereotypes, which are hard or even impossible to reverse. They influence patients' perceptions of a particular treatment facility.
- Destination infrastructure on country and treatment level.
- Destination environment climate, tourism attractions and facilities compose factors that make the destination more attractive to a patient.
- Risk and reward. Medical tourists need to balance treatment outcomes against potential risks, considering safety, treatment guarantee, track records or particular medical services in destination countries, etc.
- Price. Not only treatment cost counts but also travel, accommodations and insurance expenses.

All these factors considered, in 2013, the most popular destinations for medical tourism were:

1. Thailand
2. Mexico (and Latin America)
3. United States
4. Singapore
5. India



4. What Are the Main Procedures?

Although a number of procedures are covered by insurance companies in people's home countries, patients often find themselves in coverage loopholes that leave them paying out of pocket and/or suffering through long waiting periods.

Because of this, the most typical procedures sought after abroad are:

- Orthopedic Surgery (incl. knee and hip)
- Dental Implants and Surgeries
- Cardiology
- Cosmetic Surgery
- Experimental and/or Holistic Treatments

Many more medical tourists are travelling for retreats, yoga, detoxes and other preventative practices that promote overall wellness.

5. Economic Benefits for the Host Country

There are great economic impacts for the medical tourism host countries. Generally, the flow of medical tourists is from high-income countries seeking treatment in less developed nations. Medical tourists tend to have 30% longer stays, travel with larger groups and spend more per capita than traditional tourists, causing ripple effects throughout the entire economy.

Medical tourism also requires a higher quality of jobs such as doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists and more. These positions require higher education and specialized training and, therefore, demand higher wages. All of this contributes to the economic growth of a country. In general, the more successful countries in medical tourism seem to be those where the national government has taken an active role in supporting these sectors and actively promotes this form of tourism.



Future of Medical Tourism

According to the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, the number of patients travelling abroad for healthcare will rise almost 3 million in the next two years. India's government predicts a growth of \$144 billion USD just from medical tourism between 2016 and 2020.

These numbers are typical all over the world as more Western countries search for alternatives to the healthcare provided at home.

At this point, approximately 875,000 Canadians are waiting for surgery or some other medical procedure. With a doctor shortage of almost 25,000 and an aging population, over 300,000 Canadians are travelling abroad for medical procedures. This number is only expected to rise.

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Contact us today at (416) 365-6884 or by emailing us at hello@waginc.ca to learn more about how your healthcare brand can tap into the growing potential of medical tourism.