

# MEDICAL TOURISM BRANDS



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## Medical Tourism Industry

Medical tourism is one of the most dynamically growing segments of the tourism industry. Patients Beyond Borders organization defines "a medical traveler as anyone who travels across international borders for the purpose of receiving medical care, with the exception of in-country expatriates." The term is broadly defined in the academic literature and typically refers to as a trip for the maintenance, enhancement, or restoration of an individual's wellbeing in mind and in body.

The most popular treatments patients travel abroad for are associated with cancer, cardiovascular diseases, orthopedic, dentistry, and cosmetic surgeries. Other medical services include reproductive treatments, weight loss programs, and health screening. According to a 2016 study by VISA, about 11 million individuals travel internationally each year for medical services, and the industry is valued at \$439 billion including medically-related costs, cross-border and local transport, inpatient stay and accommodations (Brooke, 2016).

## Medical Tourism Destinations

As the emerging economies increase their investments in technological advances and quality services, the global medical tourism market is expected to continue growing up to 25% annually for the next ten years, according to some estimates. The most prominent medical tourism centers are currently located in Costa Rica, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, and the United States.

Despite the increasing number of international medical tourism travelers, very few academic studies addressed the key drivers for medical tourism and how countries are perceived as medical tourism destinations. *Quality of medical services like medical professionalism, quality, and reputation of the clinics and hospitals appear to be the most important motivational factors to choose a country as a medical tourism destination.* A recent study of medical tourists in eleven countries concluded that logistic issues such as the cost of the procedure, specialty, access, travel cost to the destination and availability of facility in the medical destination are the key drivers to choose a medical tourism destination. The study stressed that the destination's tourist attractions and facilities were not powerful drivers in determining the medical destination.

The Medical Tourism Index (MTI) developed by Fetscherin and Stephano (2016). The Index is a country-based performance measure to assess the attractiveness of a country as a medical tourist destination. The multidimensional construct is composed of four dimensions: the country's environment, tourism destination, medical tourism costs, and medical facility and services.

The index allows measuring meaningful differences between countries and provides a useful tool for the various stakeholders to measure and manage their medical tourism destination brand. The 2016 destination ranking includes 41 countries. The most recent top five countries with the highest MTI were: Canada, United Kingdom, Israel, Singapore, and India. The MTI index is a useful tool not only for prospective medical tourism travelers but also for investors seeking new international ventures.



## Branding of Medical Tourism Destinations

Today, the majority of medical tourism marketing campaigns take place on the Internet, speeding up the internationalization of the medical services industry. International hospitals around the world are seeking new marketing strategies for their services to capture greater market segments. Medical tourism destinations around the world adopt different marketing approaches to international patients. For example, Singapore, Sweden, and the

U.S. adopted marketing orientation with greater emphasis on superior service quality of health care (Borg and Ljungbo, 2018).

Over 100 countries entered the medical tourism market, but only a handful of them have paid critical attention to building a medical tourism destination brand identity. Many hospitals and other medical facilities are seeking to create unique brands which reflect their reputation, uniqueness of its product and services, customer ratings, values, price, skilled staff, customer care, and service outcomes.



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Medical tourism destinations communicate clear and distinct brand personalities in their ads, with competence and sincerity being portrayed most frequently. For example, a recent study found that South Korea's medical tourism destination personality comprised of three dimensions: sincerity, competence, and ruggedness that positively influence patients' willingness to travel to South Korea for medical care. Personal values, in particular excitement, self-respect, sense of belonging, and feeling well-respected, were positive predictors of South Korea's medical tourism destination personality (Quiry and Vequist, 2015).

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