

Medical Tourism and its Role in Improving the International Image of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article analyzes the essence of medical tourism, its development trends in countries worldwide, and the opportunities to enhance Uzbekistan's international image through the development of this sector. Based on the experiences of India, Turkey, Singapore, and other leading countries, the positive impact of medical tourism on a country's prestige is revealed. Additionally, the ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan, existing potential, and challenges are examined, and proposals and recommendations for the industry are presented. The article substantiates the possibility of increasing the country's international competitiveness and economic potential through the development of medical tourism.

Keywords: Medical tourism, international image, Uzbekistan, tourism potential, medical services, global competition, healthcare, economic development.

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Introduction

Today, in an era of rapid globalization and the development of information technologies, the tourism industry encompasses new directions. In particular, medical tourism - that is, people traveling to other countries to use medical services - is becoming one of the most widespread and high-potential destinations in the world. This type of tourism serves not only to restore people's health, but also to strengthen cooperation between countries, support the national economy, and enhance international image.

Medical tourism is a concept that combines people's access to highly qualified medical care with recreation outside their primary place of residence. Tourists can rest and recover their health on mountain slopes, in forests, around water bodies, and in natural settings, while simultaneously utilizing professional medical services. Medical tourism in natural environments can be organized around healing springs, radon waters, therapeutic mud, salt caves, and juniper mountain forests.

Materials and methods

In conducting this scientific research, various sources related to medical tourism and the formation of international image were utilized. The following were used as primary materials: State programs and legal-regulatory documents adopted for the development of medical tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), statistical information published in scientific and mass media publications, expert opinions, and results of conversations with specialists in the field.

Results and discussions

Article 5 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ZRU-549 "On Tourism" adopted on July 18, 2019, provides information on the forms and types of tourism, stating that "tourism can be divided into cultural-historical, pilgrimage, ecological, educational, ethnographic, gastronomic, business, social, sports, medical, youth tourism, agritourism, and other types of tourism, based on the specifics, theme, duration, methods of travel, and other characteristics of the organized tour"[1]

Creation of joint tourist routes with the countries of our region, expansion of transport and logistics opportunities in Central Asia, including: As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted "The creation of joint tourist routes with the countries of our region, the expansion of transport and logistics capacities in Central Asia, including the implementation of the "One Tour, Entire Region" program, are at the core of our focus.

In a word, we aim to create at least one million new jobs in the future through our work on developing medical, ecological, gastronomic, ethno, extreme and other types of tourism" [2].

That's fuelling an industry worth as much as \$40 billion, according to Patients Beyond Borders, a publisher of international medical travel guidebooks. Here are the top destinations for medical tourism fuelling an industry worth as much as \$40 billion, according to Patients Beyond Borders, a publisher of international medical travel guidebooks. Here are the top destinations for medical tourism" [3].

Countries such as India, Hungary, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, Brazil, South Korea, and Turkey have achieved great success in developing medical tourism in recent years. These countries have managed to attract patients globally by improving the quality of medical services, equipping facilities with modern diagnostic and treatment equipment, establishing clinics that meet international standards, as well as enhancing the qualifications of medical personnel.

For example, India and Thailand are renowned for their affordable medical procedures and highly skilled specialists, while Singapore and South Korea are known for their high-tech medical centers and quality service. Turkey, with its strategic geographical location connecting Europe and Asia and its abundance of modern clinics, has become an attractive destination for medical tourists.

Medical tourism has also been developing in Uzbekistan in recent years. The growing number of private medical institutions in the country, reforms aimed at improving the quality of medical services, and the establishment of modern medical centers are having a positive impact on the industry.

"Based on proposals from healthcare organizations in the Republic of Uzbekistan, a new "Medical Visa" has been introduced for foreign citizens, valid for a period of 3 months. The Republic of Uzbekistan also boasts recreation and health resorts, including the Charvak and Beldirsoy recreation centers, and more than 100 world-renowned sanatoriums such as "Mersian," "Botanika," "Turon," and "Zomin." Currently, over 150 private clinics and treatment centers in the country are providing medical services to the population" [4].

Today, medical tourism is one of the promising sectors of the republic's economy. In accordance with the Decree of the President of our country " On complex measures on the radical improvement of the health-care system of the Republic of Uzbekistan " dated December 7, 2018 "The integration of tourism and healthcare sectors and the establishment of unique, tailored connections between them have led to

significant advancements in both tourism and medicine. Most importantly, this has opened up opportunities for people to rest outside their primary residences while receiving high-quality medical care. It has allowed individuals to enjoy the beautiful landscapes of our country while simultaneously restoring their health. As a result, a new professional medical image has emerged in our country, offering novel opportunities and conveniences, and providing specialized medical services to visitors” [5]. That is, new developments and innovative technologies have begun to enter the field of medical tourism.

Today, in the development of medical tourism in Uzbekistan, attention is paid to the following issues. These are the introduction of a system of paid and free medical care at prestigious medical centers, the establishment of medical insurance, the use of not only state or private forms of ownership in the organization of medical services for the population, but also the creation of hospitals, preventoriums, sanatoriums, and health centers based on other forms of ownership, such as hospitals, cooperatives, joint-stock companies, based on joint ownership (for example, state and private, foreign), attracting foreign medical specialists engaged in the field of medical tourism, and stimulating the training and advanced training of domestic medical workers abroad. These include reducing the tax burden on expenses incurred in this area and constructing non-state medical tourism facilities [4].

The coordination of treatment and health improvement centers, resort and thermal tourism facilities, and hotels in organizing medical tourism is a pressing issue today. Currently, significant attention is being given to establishing medical centers that serve both the local population and visitors from foreign countries, equipping them with modern medical technology, as well as retraining and improving the qualifications of medical personnel.

The development of medical tourism in Uzbekistan is being implemented through ensuring the health of citizens, facilitating foreign tourists' travel to our country for health improvement purposes, strengthening cooperation with neighboring countries in the field of medical tourism, mapping medical tourism facilities between our country and neighboring states, and putting these tourist connections into practice. The efforts being carried out in the field of medical tourism development are directly contributing to the enhancement of Uzbekistan's image in the international arena.

Conclusion

Medical tourism has become one of the crucial sectors of the global economy today, playing a significant role in shaping and strengthening the international image of countries. The experience of countries such as India, Singapore, and Turkey demonstrates that strong integration between the medical and tourism sectors not only brings economic benefits to the country but also enhances its prestige on the international stage.

In recent years, the reforms implemented in the medical field in Uzbekistan, the establishment of modern clinics, and the effective utilization of therapeutic areas have been laying a solid foundation for the development of medical tourism. This, in turn, will enable the country to present itself as a competitive, attractive, and reliable center for medical services for tourists at the international level.

In this context, the development of medical tourism serves as one of the important tools for strengthening Uzbekistan's international image, increasing its investment attractiveness, and advancing the country into the ranks of sustainably developed nations.

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