
Editorial: medical tourism needs competitive dynamism

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Medical tourism in conjunction with destination branding is growing fast in the developing countries. It has emerged as an outgrowth of ecological tourism with higher perceived values among consumers. Medical and health tourism allow people to understand organic ambience of health tourism destinations and performance of services. The competition among the medical tourism service providers was confined to niche in the past but as the conscience about green marketing is growing globally, many players have emerged in this segment of tourism marketing congesting the marketplace. However, performance of tourism services largely depends on the perceived use value generated among consumers. Marketing medical and health tourism services with unclear objectives often turn the core goals of tourism into a casual touring attitude without developing a brand image of destination and the tourism services. Medical tourism encourages travelling across international borders to seek healthcare while also spending on leisure activities in the destination. As such, medical tourism goes beyond the usual relaxation, exercise and visits to spas for health recovery process (Wang, 2012). A conspicuous shift of medical tourism in urban centres has appeared as spa market developed by the hotels and resorts. Spa tourism is a component of health tourism accommodating the provision of specific health facilities in tourism destinations.

Most medical tourism companies lack organisational framework for acquiring and retaining tourism customers by upholding their perceived use values. It has been observed that perceived value is a key predictor of customer intentions towards buying medical tourism services. As for benefits are concerned, perceived medical quality, service quality and enjoyment play critical role in significantly influencing the perception of value. Tourism companies should focus on value centric strategies to improve the image of medical and health tourism services. The marketing strategies should be woven around stimulating the overall judgement of a potential tourist who makes of value in the

pre-purchase stage and validates his perceptions upon experiencing critical determinant of medical tourism. The leisure and tourism industry has shown increasing interest in promoting the healthcare proficiency along with other tourist amenities to attract tourists. Medical tourists are thus offered with a variety of services options across cross-border destinations at low cost with premium quality to develop exotic destinations as 'wellness brands' (Rajagopal et al., 2013).

In emerging markets medical tourism is largely focused on the overall wellness of body and mind of the people. This segment of tourism sector has gained enormous public interest and has attracted governments of many countries to invest in this tourism segment. Some countries in the Southeast Asia and Latin America and Caribbean have sought to develop medical tourism on the postulation that such efforts can lift overall tourist numbers and revenue. The critical drivers of medical tourism include the patient demand, natural health management potential in the destination, unique selling propositions, and 4As comprising awareness, acceptance (personal and community), adaptability, and affordability (Rajagopal, 2012). However, the desire for privacy and the wish to connect conventional tourist attractions, hotels, climate, delicacies and cultural visits with medical procedures are critical factors that have contributed to the growing interest in medical tourism (Turner, 2007).

Health and medical tourism research focuses on a number of themes depending on the multidisciplinary and cultural context within which the research has taken place such as organisational design for medical tourism marketing and technology for offering medical and healthcare tourism services. In this issue of the journal there are four papers that address the issues of brand personality and consumer knowledge, operational efficiency of firms, consumer perception and value, and collective self-esteem and organisational design of leisure and tourism firms. All papers discuss consumer centric research propositions and attempt to establish the role of consumers in managing buying decisions in a competitive leisure and tourism marketplace. I hope the anthology of research papers appearing in this issue will enrich the existing literature on the topic and stimulate future research.

References

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