

TÌM HIỂU NHẬN THỨC CỦA DU KHÁCH VIỆT NAM VỀ DU LỊCH CHỮA BỆNH CỦA ĐÀI LOAN

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Tóm tắt

Sự kết hợp giữa điều trị y tế và du lịch dường như là một loại hình du lịch mới đầy hứa hẹn ở Đài Loan kể từ khi chính phủ thực hiện Chính sách Hướng Nam Mới. Lượng khách du lịch đến từ các nước Đông Nam Á trong đó có Việt Nam gần đây đã tăng lên đáng kinh ngạc. Nghiên cứu định tính này được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu nhận thức của du khách Việt Nam về du lịch chữa bệnh tại Đài Loan. Cuộc phỏng vấn được thực hiện với 25 du khách Việt Nam đã đến Đài Loan. Phương pháp phân tích nội dung được áp dụng để phân tích dữ liệu, xác định 324 vấn đề liên quan đến ba chủ đề chính là (1) nhận thức về hình ảnh điểm đến, (2) nhận thức về chất lượng y tế, và (3) lo lắng về du lịch chữa bệnh. Kết quả cho thấy hầu hết du khách Việt Nam nhận được hình ảnh tốt về sức hút du lịch của Đài Loan, con người thân thiện, văn hóa tương đồng, cơ sở hạ tầng tiên tiến, môi trường xanh và mua sắm thuận tiện. Mặc dù chưa sử dụng dịch vụ khám chữa bệnh ở Đài Loan nhưng nhiều du khách vẫn đánh giá tốt về chất lượng y tế ở Đài Loan với các bác sĩ / y tá lành nghề và môi trường bệnh viện sạch sẽ, thường so sánh với các bác sĩ / y tá ở Việt Nam. Họ cũng bày tỏ lo ngại về những khó khăn về ngôn ngữ và các vấn đề tài chính như chi phí y tế cao và chi phí thêm cho các chuyến bay, hoa hồng và chỗ ở. Nghiên cứu đề xuất chính phủ Đài Loan, các bệnh viện và các công ty du lịch nên cùng nhau có nhiều hoạt động tiếp thị hơn nữa để quảng bá hình ảnh của họ tới người Việt Nam tại Việt Nam và Đài Loan.

Từ khóa: Du lịch chữa bệnh, hình ảnh điểm đến, chất lượng y tế, cảm nhận của khách hàng nước ngoài, Đài Loan.

EXPLORING VIETNAMESE TOURISTS' PERCEPTION ON TAIWAN'S MEDICAL TOURISM

Abstracts

The combination of medical treatment and tourism seems to be a promising new type of niche tourism in Taiwan since their government has implemented New South Policy. The number of tourists from Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam has recently increased incredibly. This qualitative study was conducted to explore an understanding of Vietnamese visitors' perception on medical tourism in Taiwan. The interviews were conducted with 25 Vietnamese tourists who travelled to Taiwan. A content analysis method was applied for data analysis, which identified 324 incidents in three major themes of (1) perceived destination image, (2) perceptions on medical quality, and (3) worries on medical tourism. The results reveal that most of the Vietnamese visitors received good image on Taiwan's tourist attraction, friendly people, similar culture, advanced infrastructure, green environment and convenient shopping. Despite of not using medical treatment in Taiwan yet, many of the visitors still defined good medical quality in Taiwan with skillful doctors/nurses and clean hospital environment, often by comparing with those in their home country. They also expressed their concerns about language difficulties and financial issues of high medical fee and extra expense for flights, commission, and accommodation. The study suggests the Taiwan government, hospitals and travel agencies together have more marketing activities to promote their image on Vietnamese people in Vietnam and in Taiwan.

Keywords: Medical tourism, destination image, medical quality, foreign customers' perception, Taiwan.

JEL classification: I; I1; I13.

1. Introduction

An increasing number of individuals travel abroad for basic medical treatment, highly advanced operations, healthcare, beautification purposes, and other medical treatments (Guiry, Scott, & Vequist IV, 2013; Ormond et al., 2014; Reddy et al., 2010). Medical tourism has become one of the most rapidly growing phenomena in the tourism industry within the last few decades (Han & Hwang, 2013; Yu & Ko, 2012). These travellers are described as medical tourists or patient travellers. Particularly, medical tourists indicates 'patients who travel internationally for

non-urgent medical treatments like organ transplants, stem cell treatments, reproductive services, cosmetic surgery, and dental care, etc.' (Chuang, Liu, Lu, & Lee, 2014). Relatively high costs and long waiting times for treatments/services, unavailability of treatments, or insurance-related issues often cause these patient customers to travel abroad for medical cares (Guiry et al., 2013; Jun & Oh, 2015).

Taiwan has experienced gradual expansion in medical tourism in recent years. With advances in the treatment of cardiac diseases and orthopaedic conditions in the country, Taiwan is on the verge of

becoming a hub in these medical fields (taiwan-healthcare.org, 2018) and has one of the best healthcare systems in Asia. The country has high-tech medicine (in terms of both treatment machinery and laboratories) which, in combination with their clinical achievements, gives Taiwan a justifiably high international rating.

In the last decade, the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) has actively promoted Taiwan's overall medical services to other countries, via exhibitions, trade missions and showcasing several development projects. It sees medical travel and health tourism as an important revenue source for the country, and its target regions are Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Macau and other regions in Mainland China (Maria, 2019). Medical tourists from Hong Kong (including Macau) and mainland China to Taiwan reached a big rise year by year, but not well for other Asian countries. Vietnam is located in Southeast Asian and share similar culture with Taiwan. Besides, Vietnamese people in Taiwan form one of the island's largest communities of foreign residents, which can be a bridge to connect their homeland people to Taiwan for medical treatment. To enhance the process of targeting Southeast Asian medical tourists, especially Vietnamese, in Taiwan, it had better to understand their attitudes and other related factors to medical tourism. Based on this understanding, Taiwan government and medical treatment units would apply a suitable strategy to attract Vietnamese customers as well as provide a better service for their requirements. This study applied a qualitative method to explore Vietnamese visitors' perception on Taiwan medical tourism.

2. Literature Review

Medical Tourism in Healthcare Industry

Medical tourism is clearly an emerging, lucrative sector in many medical travel destinations throughout the world (Han & Hwang, 2013). This emerging type of tourism enables people to receive diverse quality treatments and healthcare through domestic or international travel (Han, 2013; Yu & Ko, 2012). And medical tourism has increased its important contribution in the emerging global healthcare industry. The overall medical tourism sector is significant and growing, with predictions that by 2027 it will reach USD 207.9 billion (Market Analysis Report, 2020). The 2016 Medical Tourism Index considers 41 destinations from the Middle East, Asia, Americas, Africa, and Europe. Asia includes China, India, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan.

The medical tourism sector in Asia-Pacific accounted yearly 15-17 billion euros in revenues. For instance, India attracted more than 4 million medical tourists. In Thailand, 3.5 million foreign patients spent more than 4 billion euros on health care. In Singapore, medical tourism accounted for almost 1.6 billion euros with close to 900,000 patients (Bart Van den Mooter, 2017). Taiwan also already welcomed 305,045 medical tourists in 2015, up 76 percent from 2012, generating record sector output of US\$491 million (just slow down since 2020 due to Covid 19). And the share represents 40-55 percent of the private hospitals' revenue in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and especially Thailand. In India, medical tourism accounts for 25 percent of revenue, and in the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan, it accounts for 10-15 percent of revenue. Covid pandemic cause decrease in demand, but Taiwan is still in Top 5 Asian destination (Figure 1).

Asia | Overall MTI score

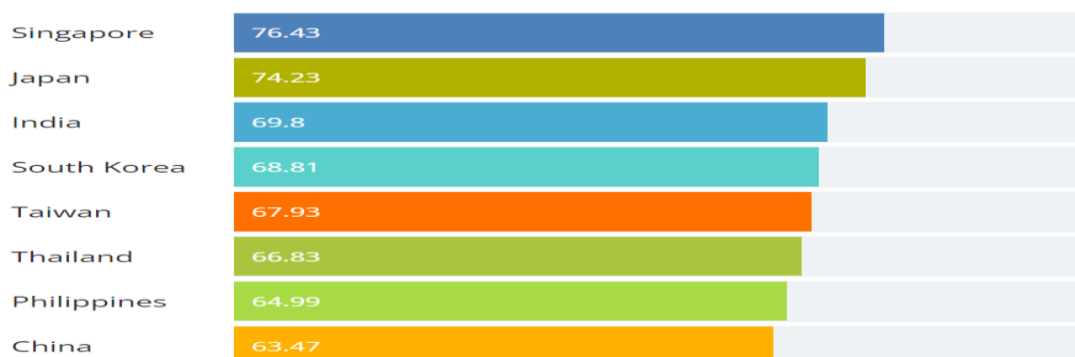


Figure 1. Overall Medical Tourism Index Score 2020-2021

Source: <https://www.medicaltourism.com>

Facing Taiwan in Asia market, the real competitors of medicinal tourism have their strengths. For example, Thailand ended up known

as a goal for therapeutic tourism since it had some expertise in sex change activities, and later moved into corrective medical procedure. With relatively

low health care costs, modern medical technology, and highly trained doctors, Singapore's private hospitals offer exceptional health care services. Taiwan is also renowned for its leading-edge technology in aesthetic medicine, cardiovascular treatment, dental implants, health checks and joint replacements. These affordable services are proving increasingly popular with patients in overseas markets. Taiwan's world-class physicians, nurses and treatment facilities are the major reason for this healthy state of affairs (Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2017).

Eissler and Casken (2013) observed that organisations can fight competition by offering low cost, high quality of product service, provision of specialised treatment and other benefits. Interestingly, although medical tourism industry is gradually growing worldwide, meanwhile the problem of brokerage is a serious hindrance for the hospitals (Medical Tourism Association, 2017). There comes the role of marketing whereby healthcare providers can reach their preferred audience through an effective strategy (Azimi et al., 2017), in which customers' data is collected and analysed by tedious market research processes.

Customer Perception and Decision-Making Process

Consumer's perception and their decision making process is significant for a company's development. The main reasons for medical tourists to select a destination includes treatment quality, treatment cost, destination and recreation opportunity, which play a significant role in consumer decision making (Wilson, 2018). Eyeing considerable profitability, companies today compete by differentiating between the quality, cost, specialised service care and benefits of hospitality (Han and Hyun, 2015).

Moreover, information access also help medical tourists decide their country and hospitals/clinics. According to Medical Tourism Association (2017), 54% of consumer's sources of information come through medical tourism facilitator/insurance companies or government makes the recommendation or selection, 16% from physicians' referrals, 12% from word of mouth, 10% from internet research and 8% from other sources. And in this era, digital marketing plays a crucial role in identifying customer needs and providing patients with options according to their income level in finalising best medical institutions and destinations (Azimi et al., 2017).

Otherwise, for the medical tourism industry to flourish, the worldwide advancement of its administrations is vital. Promoting materials, for

example, sites and handouts, advise potential patients about tourism openings, treatment alternatives, and other key snippets of data (Azimi, 2017). Restorative tourism facilitators/intermediaries regularly solely have some expertise in medicinal tourism and help intrigued patients with choosing healing facilities abroad, visa applications and other printed material, making travel and tourism courses of action, and now and again likewise with sorting out follow-up mind at home. Government bolster for medicinal tourism incorporates sponsorship of public expos and other limited time occasions held abroad that are intended to draw in patients and market 'world class' restorative offices (Chuang et al., 2014).

3. Methodology

A qualitative research method was conducted, in which the participants were recruited via a convenient sampling method, the data were collected by semi-structured interviews. The Vietnamese participants were on a tourism trip in Taiwan. The authors research them at hotels and tourism sites in three main cities of Taiwan (Taipei, Tainan and Kaoshiung) to invite them in the study. The study objectives were fully explained and the informed consents forms were signed before each interview. A total of twenty five participants agreed to take part in the research. Each 30-50 minute interview was conducted in Vietnamese language.

Qualitative approach using the critical incident technique (CIT) employing content analysis methods was employed in order to explore the detail of customers' positive and/or negative incidents in destination's factors that they perceive as significant. Just note that incidents are direct observations of human behaviour that have critical significance and meet methodically defined criteria. A software of Nvivo was used for data management and analysis. To select the incidents of responses, two judges independently analysed the data exclusively and exhaustively at first, producing 362 incidents. After that, a third judge conducted a final sorting on the categories, 324 of which were selected by all three coders. Thus, the degree of inter-coder agreement was around 95 percent, and the reliability was 98 percent, which showed very satisfactory inter-judge reliability in this study.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic data of the participants

Most of the Vietnamese tourists in this study were married (68%). The male overnumbers the female. They are, on average, thirty five years of

age, with 40% ranging 30-39 years old, similar number of those below 29 and over 40 to 49 years old. Only 8% reached over 50 years old. And most of them achieved income in range of 500 USD and 1000 USD, 20% get over 1000 USD per month, and 32% only received less than 500 USD for their monthly income (note that the basic level of salary regulated by Vietnam government is

about 150 USD - 200 USD per month which depends on regions they work).

4.2. Classification data

Three themes emerged from the data: perceived destination image, perception on medical quality, worries on medical tourism. Table 3 shows the classification scheme for the 324 critical incidents as distributed into three themes, including 10 subthemes

Table 1: Summary of Categories, and Subcategories

Category	Number of Incidents	Percentage	Positive
Perceived Destination Image	188	100	
Tourism attractions	28 (T)	14.9	90
People	30 (G)	16.0	100
Culture	32 (G)	17.0	100
Infrastructure	38 (G)	20.2	100
Environment	42 (G)	22.3	100
Shopping	18 (V)	9.6	85
Perception on Medical quality	55	100	
Doctor/nurse	26 (T)	47	80
Hospital environment	29 (G)	53	90
Worries on medical tourism	81	100	
Language	15 (V)	18.5	20
Financial concerns	66 (G)	81.5	30
Total	324		

Note: We identified a category and subcategory as G (General) if it applied to over 15 cases, T (Typical) if it applied to 10-14 cases, and V (Variant) if it applied to 5-9 cases.

Perceived destination image

At the time of interview, all the participants were having their first visit to Taiwan. It's why they expressed a lot their perception on Taiwan which covers their tourist attractions, local people and culture, infrastructure, environment and shopping.

At first, the environment category includes all the critical incidents of tourists' perception on a clean environment, comfortable conditions, service or product facilities, ease of use and convenience conditions. The environment was the largest category with over 22 percent of incidents, and all the study participants mentioned it positively in their perception. For example:

"Taiwan is very clean on all streets, corners, bus and trains, buildings and also tourism places." (Visitor 2)

"I was so impressed by Taiwanese people to keep their environment clean, they classify and separate the garbage into many types." (Visitor 1)

Infrastructure is commonly understood as the fundamental facilities and systems serving a country, city, or other area, including the services

and facilities necessary for its economy to function, such as transportation, communication, sewage, water and electric systems, etc. The study participants also have all positive comments on Taiwan's infrastructure.

"Transportation here is very convenient and comfortable. I don't see the traffic jam here even many scooters as in my country." (Visitor 3)

"I am really impressed by high technological application here. All are connected with smart technology." (Visitor 1)

Culture is the third factor with 17% incidents of destination image that all the participants express their positive attitudes to. In fact, there is some similarity between Vietnam and Taiwan's culture, then many participants take their home country to compare. For example:

"I realize Taiwan has many similar culture with China and Vietnam" (Visitor 5)

"I feel not really strange here, except I cannot understand what they are talking or writing, but I have closed feeling as in my home country." (Visitor 22)

Many study participants also had good perceptions on Taiwanese people in spite of the first visit.

"I felt the Taiwanese are friendly and enthusiasm." (Visitor 18)

"I think they are careful and organized people, look at all what they create and design here, really wonderful." (Visitor 20)

Tourist attraction is the reason why the study participants arrived at Taiwan. Most of them provided their positive expression on Taiwan's tourism places in term of clean, fresh, natural and good design by human. For example:

"I am really impressed with cleanness and beautiful design in all tourism places I visited." (Visitor 12)

"Some places I visited, I think, it's nothing special, but Taiwanese people designed and make it interesting to visit. I love it." (Visitor 15)

However, few of them compared with other places I visited, and had some negative perception:

"It's different from places I visited, but it's not really highlighted." (Visitor 25)

"I like places I visited here, but it's small, I think I nearly visited all wonderful places in one week, I don't know what I should visit if I return here". (Visitor 21)

Every tourists likes shopping. And Vietnamese tourists also feel interesting in shopping in Taiwan. They prefer to buy Taiwan local traditional products. But they also had some concerns:

"It's hard for us to buy electric products in Taiwan then take it back to Vietnam due to different 220V in Vietnam." (Visitor 8)

"It's good to buy some Taiwanese traditional gifts in places we visited, but for international well-known brands, the price is sometimes higher than in Western countries." (Visitor 9)

Perception on Medical quality

All the study participants did not use medical service in Taiwan, they also described their opinion on Taiwan's medical quality based on their experience and information they had. Their expressions concentrated service employee behavior (doctor/nurse) and hospital environment. The numbers of incidents are not so different, 47% and 53% respectively. Most of the participants had positive opinion on the doctor's and nurses' responsiveness, care and politeness. For example:

"I think the doctor and nurses here will be very careful and responsible as their characteristics are." (Visitor 10)

But some of them think that, like China, Taiwan doctors may be only good at traditional medicine only. And in modern medical treatment, Taiwan cannot compete with other countries.

"I don't think they are better in treatment than China because they are the one." (Visitor 11)

Despite of some negative thinking on doctor/nurse skills, most of the study participants still think "good" on hospital environment due to positive perception on Taiwan infrastructure and environment. They also think hospital environment is all clean and high technological. But few also think it's impossible for Taiwan to have a comparative healthcare system.

"Compared to developed nations such as Singapore, Japan, Europe, Canada, USA, Taiwan's hospitals cannot compete." (Visitor 2)

"The tour guide took us to tourism places, no pass by any hospital, I have no idea about their hospital, so I think it's like China or abit better than my country." (Visitor 1)

Worries on medical tourism

The data shows that most of worries on medical tourism if the participants take it focus on language difficulty and financial concern. They are afraid they cannot understand Chinese and will not utilize all the healthcare treatment. Moreover, they often think the expense for abroad medical treatment should be high due to cost for travel agency, language translation, high price, etc.

"I am totally dumb in Chinese, and I don't know how hard for me if I have treatment in a hospital in Taiwan." (Visitor 19)

"I can support for my abroad healthcare treatment, but if it's too expensive, I may refer other country where the medical quality is good and cheaper." (Visitor 16)

In contrast, some of the participants expressed no worries on medical tourism. They think that they can do it easily when they have much money.

"I will select a country with high quality for my health treatment, I will pay the agency to let them prepare everything for me. It's like a travel time too." (Visitor 24)

Based on the above results, three propositions are developed as following:

P1. Vietnamese tourists prefer the economic and social infrastructure to evaluate the Taiwan's image.

P2. Vietnamese tourists currently express both positive and negative opinion.

P3. Two common worries for Vietnamese customers about Taiwan's medical tourism are related to language barrier and expenses for the total healthcare treatment.

4.3. Discussion

Tourists' perception and destination image

This study aims to identify and develop dimensions of Vietnamese tourists' perceptions on the medical tourism in Taiwan. As stated in P1, six dimensions related to economic and social infrastructure – including tourism attraction, local people, culture, infrastructure, environment, and shopping – were classified as the main descriptions expressed by the Vietnamese tourists regarding their perceived destination image of Taiwan. The results also disclose some factors in the service quality. In detail, the environment dimension in the tourists' perception could be the 'tangibles' scale when they can also experience through the infrastructure and design of the medical treatment location. Impressive culture and people with good characteristics play an important role in the tourists' good perception. Thus, the authors also agree with Lin, Nguyen and Lin (2013) that individuals' evaluations of services are often reflected in their satisfaction ratings of the service experience, which continues to reflect their reaction to such a service (word of mouth, loyalty, switching).

Factor impacting tourist customers' perception of medical tourism

When expressing their opinion on medical tourism in Taiwan, Vietnamese tourists mentioned both positively and negatively, as stated in P2. In general, the study shows that many participants were more likely to mention positive opinion about medical quality factors including employee skills and behavior (care, politeness, responsiveness). They had this perception thanks to their experience in travel tour in Taiwan. Regarding the employee behavior, Vietnamese tourists equate other local people characteristics with doctor/nurse behavior. It's easy to understand that people like in a small country as Taiwan shall surely share similar common values, norms.

One interesting point is when mentioning negative opinion. Some Vietnamese tourists often take China to compare with what they think in Taiwan and evaluate it. All negative incidents regarding doctors' skills and hospital came from those compared it with China. Therefore, Taiwan government and tourism agencies should have more marketing strategies to enhance Taiwan's image on Vietnamese people. Especially, Vietnamese immigrants including students, workers, and brides currently become the largest immigrant group in Taiwan. They should understand the current situation in Taiwan and transfer it to their relatives, friends in Vietnam, to

let them differentiate two images, which would be done by supports of Taiwan governmental offices.

In addition, since most of the participants are tourists who came for pleasure travel, they did not have chance for experiment in medical system in Taiwan. Taking advantage of tourism organization, the government and hospitals should work with travel agencies to provide information and 'healthcare visit' to tourists who shall become potential customers or do word of mouth for Taiwan's medical tourism.

Moreover, relating to decision making for medical tourism, most of Vietnamese customers concern about language barrier and total expenses in Taiwan. Noted that Vietnam is still a developing country with current fast growth speed. The average income in Vietnam is quite low with GDP per capita in 2020 of 2,785 USD. Only patients with abundant financial supports would reach broad medical treatments. Thus, they will much consider about price of treatment and related costs to select the healthcare destination. Vietnam ranks 4th in the world in terms of the growth of rich people in the period 2018-2023. Therefore, with slow transformation in medical system, Vietnam is providing a big number of potential customers to medical tourism in other countries including Taiwan.

Besides, accessing medical care abroad can also create an undue burden for those who find travelling difficult. Persons with physical impairments and those who have limited experience with foreign cultures and languages may find travelling abroad for medical care particularly onerous (Hall & James, 2011). Bookman & Bookman (2007) point out that language is important for another aspect of the trade in medical services. Recently, many national and private hospitals in Taiwan has provided language translators. English-speaking and other Asian languages (including Vietnamese) volunteers or staffs were recruited. Medical materials were also translated into other languages. The information of those good actions should marketed to the potential customers who will lessen their worries on some difficulties to visit Taiwan for better healthcare system.

5. Conclusion

The study explored out 324 critical incidents in three main categories (i.e. destination image, medical quality, and worries on medical tourism) as dimensions of customer perception by Vietnamese tourists' evaluation measurements of Taiwan medical tourism. They were likely to express positive sentiment regarding their experience, but a few still had a negative one.

The results of the multidimensional scaling analysis suggest that although many categories have been used to describe tourism services as well as medical tourism, these categories tend to fall into relatively perceived dimensions in the customers' mind at the first time they reach the information. Moreover, Vietnamese customers still have some misunderstanding about Taiwan due to lack of information. This requires travel agencies, hospitals to work well with the government to exploit all sources and enhance their right image on the potential customers.

The study also offers a conceptualization of cross-cultural applicability when international customers experience the local service. Thanks to globalization, it is easy for people to move or

cross country borders to live in other countries. However, the results also indicate that language and financial concern is feasible when it plays an important role in foreign customers' perception and choice of local services, especially for those who live in lower income move to higher income areas for better service.

Some limitations in this study need to be recognized in interpreting its findings. First, the amount of current data was numerically small, thus diminishing the possibility for generalization on a wider scale. Second, this study focuses on work with the CIT data for exploration research. More future research work needs to be conducted in theory development and empirical analysis.

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