

3. STATUS OF DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN THAILAND

3.1 Overall Development of Medical Tourism in Thailand

Medical tourism is a type of high-consumption tourism. It is a policy made by the government to develop medical tourism in order to make the country a medical hub in Asia. In the past decade, that is, between 2005 and 2015, medical tourism in Asia, including Thailand, has kept on a sustainable development.

From the existing research data on medical tourism, it can be concluded that medical tourism in Asia has a huge market, mainly consisting of the increasing elderly citizens from developed countries. Meanwhile, some insurance companies have also entered the medical tourism industry. Medical tourism in Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia and some other Asian countries is rapidly developing. These countries are capable to provide services for those who are in need of medical tourism services.

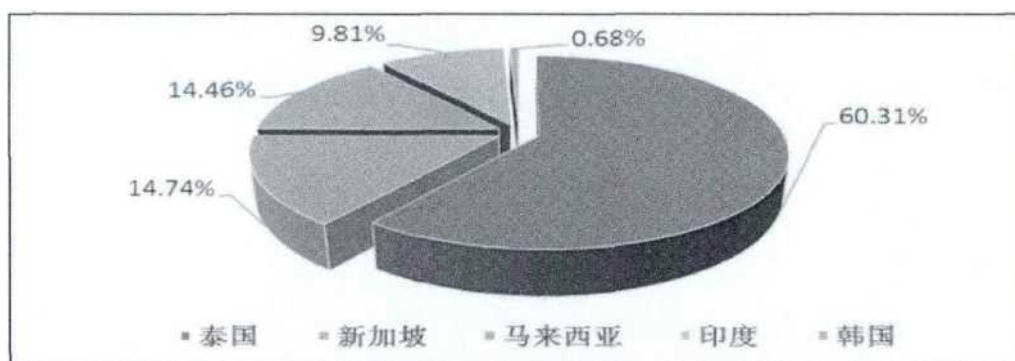


Figure 3.1 Types of Services in Medical Tourism Market

Thailand's medical tourism is supported by the government, which has promoted the development of medical tourism and has formulated policies to develop it into a Medical Hub of Asia as well as policies to promote the development of the health care industry. The medical hub policy consists of three parts, namely, the hospital treatment service business, the health care business, and the Thailand Health care Herbal Product business. The Department of Tourism investment. The Study of Medical Tourism Investment (2008-2009). Bangkok: Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2009.

The hospital treatment service business is the most important business, with 218' private hospitals as the main body. Some of these hospitals also have some proficient doctors with high medical skills and overseas learning backgrounds.

Figure 3-1, the types of services in the medical tourism market in Asia shows that Thailand's medical tourism services accounted for 60.31% in the medical tourism market, ranking first; Singapore's medical tourism services accounted for 14.74%, ranking second; followed by Malaysia, India and South Korea. In addition, from various sources in different countries, it can be learned that the diversity in Thai medical services makes many foreign

tourists to select Thailand as their medical tourism destination. For example, as is stated in the report made by Bloomberg.com on June 25, 2013 (JordanRobertson, <http://www.bloomberg.com>, 2013), Thailand has the largest number of medical tourism tourists in the world. However, in terms of medical tourism revenue (Figure 3-2), it can be seen that Singapore has a market share of 47.55%, much higher than Thailand's 30.23%, followed by India, Malaysia, and South Korea.

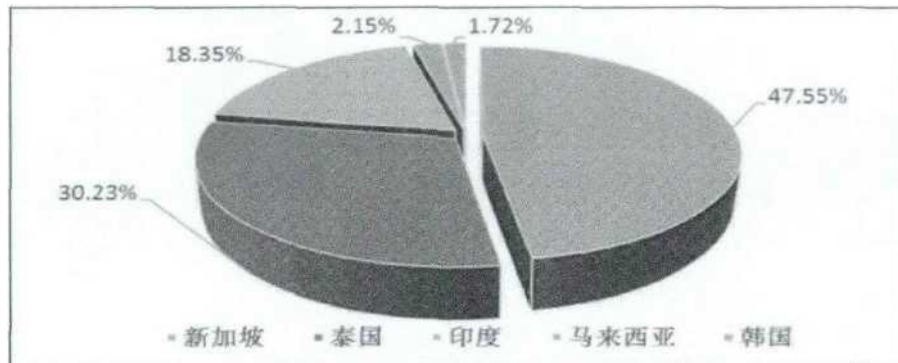


Figure 3.2 Income distribution in the medical tourism market

The growth rate of Thai medical tourism tourists is much higher than that of medical tourism. According to the statistical data of foreign patients who came to Thailand for medical tourism, the number of visitors increased from 1.37 million to 25.3 million from 2007 to 2012, with a growth rate of 16.93% per year. However, the growth rate of medical tourism income was only 2.81% per year, rising from 106.64 billion baht to 1216.58 billion baht. It can be predicted that in the next five years, Thailand's medical tourism income and the number of foreign patients (between 2013 and 2017) will continue to grow, as shown in Figure 3-3 and Figure 3-4.

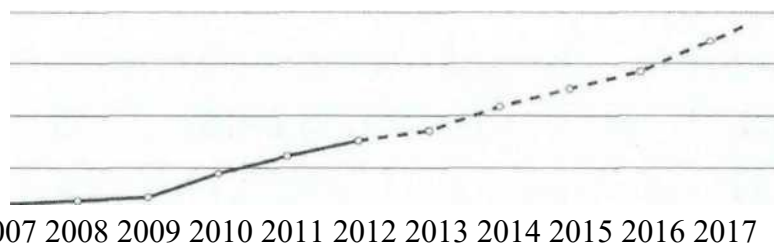


Figure 3.3 Number of foreign patients coming to Thailand for medical tourism

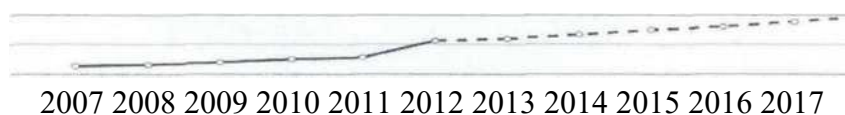


Figure 3.4 Income from Medical Tourism in Thailand

Statistics show that most of the foreign tourists in Thailand are Americans, Japanese, Middle Easterners and Canadians. Due to the development of medical tourism and the involvement of the government and investors in the medical tourism market, Mangow has become a medical tourism hub and has been widely praised in medical services, including:

cosmetic plastic surgery, cardiac surgery and general physical examination. The main factors affecting foreign tourists or foreign patients to receive medical services in Thailand are: lack of medical experts in the native country, long treatment time, high treatment costs, and lack of good treatment facilities in some countries, especially underdeveloped countries. In addition, the Thai people's unique characteristics, gentle character, and manners of courtesy and friendliness all attract foreign tourists to Thailand for treatment or return to Thailand for medical services.

3.1.1. The origin and development of Thailand's medical tourism

Thailand formally started to provide medical tourism services probably in 1997. After Thailand went through the economic crisis, private hospitals started investing to expand their businesses. Some hospitals even expanded their business before the economic crisis, which successfully solved the problem of drastic reduction in the use of hospital beds. Private hospitals provided some beds for high-end customers. Influenced by the sluggish development of Thailand after the economic crisis, people's income has dramatically declined. Most people go to less expensive government hospitals, resulting in the deduction of the number of patients receiving treatment at private hospitals with relatively expensive expenses. Therefore, these private hospitals need to self-adjust to increase the number of foreign patients. By relatively low medical costs in Thailand, these private hospitals attracted patients from the countries with high level of consumption such as Japan, Europe and the Middle East. Some hospitals also introduced management teams and medical care personnel that can take care of foreign patients from abroad. Through these measures, the hospitals in Thailand went through the difficult time of the financial crisis. With the adjustment of these hospitals, Thai medical tourism began to emerge.

In addition, since 2004, the Thai government has also promoted a national development policy to allow the country to develop into a Center of Excellent Health Care of Asia within five years. The first phase (2004-2008) focuses on three aspects: hospital medical service business, health care business service, and health herb product business. The successful implementation of the above business made foreign tourists pay more attention to medical tourism in Thailand, and at the same time earned profits for this industry and related industries. Then, the second-phase development plan was made out by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Commission and the Ministry of Health to promote the sustainable development of health care services. The plan is known as the Thailand International Health Center Development Plan (2010-2014), focusing on making Thailand become World Class Health care Destination and Academic Medical Hub of Asia. At the current stage, the development plan for Thailand Hub of Wellness and Medical Services (2016-2025) was established.

At this stage, the Thai government will focus on medical technology and medical academic research, and vigorously promote the development of Thai traditional medicine and health care products. The above-mentioned policies aim to strengthen the competitiveness of Thailand in health services and enhance the level of Thailand's health service to the

international height. At the same time, the government will promote the joint development of government hospitals and private hospitals, and make the services of private hospitals more distinctive without affecting the country's major health care system.

So far, great achievement has been made in Thailand's medical tourism in terms of the number of tourists and medical tourism revenue. Doctors are proficient in medical skills and act in a friendly manner; Medical devices are sophisticated and relatively advanced; The introduction of advanced treatment technologies and modern medical devices enable patients and their relatives to receive good treatment and care; Treatment costs and examination fees are far lower than that of developed countries; Thailand's operative successful rate is the same as that of developed countries, making Thailand the “leader” of medical tourism in Asia and the world. For the above reasons, many patients from developed countries go to Thailand to receive high-quality medical tourism services at low costs. According to a report from the Health and Wellness Tourism Thailand, the Thai government has established an international standard for medical services to promote the development of medical tourism in Thailand. In terms of tourist sources, according to the data from the Export Promotion Department and the Ministry of Commerce, most of the foreign patients coming to Thailand for medical tourism in 2012 came from the Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and the North America. And the foreign tourists mainly are Japanese, Americans, Britishmen, Arabins and Italians.

(Figure 3-5)

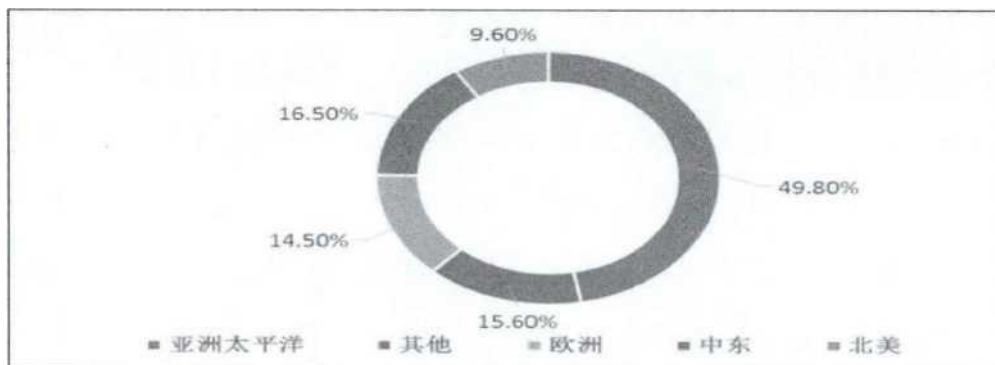


Figure 3.5 Percentage of foreign patients travelling to Thailand for medical tourism in 2012

In terms of the number of tourists, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia have taken the lead in the medical tourism market. The Thai-Chinese Farmers Research Center expects that the number of foreign tourists in Thailand will be approximately 3.2 million in 2016, of which about 2.6 million will be medical tourists, accounting for about 80% of the total number of tourists.

In terms of medical projects, the following five types are most popular with tourists: medical examination, cosmetic surgery, dental treatment, orthopedic surgery, and cardiac surgery (see Figure 3-6).

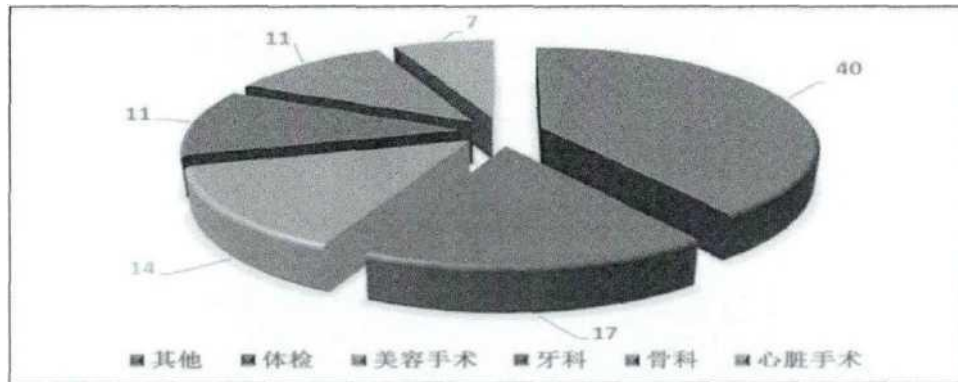


Figure 3.6 Medical Tourists' Favorite Treatment

3.1.2 The purpose of medical tourists for visiting Thailand

Thailand's medical tourism has risen since 1997. In 2004, the number of foreign tourists increased from 500,000 in 2001 to 1.1 million, and then to 1.4 million in 2007. In 2008, Corben created billions of dollars in revenue for the Thailand. This shows the great trust of foreigners in Thai medical tourism services. At the same time, Ruben Toral, the top executive of Medeguide Consultancy, also stated that Thailand has been affecting the Asian medical tourism market since 2001-2006.

In despite of a large medical team of about 21,051 people including dentists, Thailand is still in lack of doctors. All health care costs account for about 35% of the GDP of Thailand. 63% of the health care costs lie in public health and 37% in private institutions. Thailand ranks 174th in terms of medical expenses and 47th in terms of medical quality in the rankings of the World Health Organization.

By a good combination of low prices and high quality, Thailand surpasses many strong competitors. According to the quote from Medical Tourism Publication in Thailand, Thailand is the favorite place for Americans. In the respect of the service objects, the main target markets of Thailand are: the United States, Japan, Australia, Middle East, and Europe and Southeast Asian countries. Because of the increasing medical fees and the excessive use of medical instruments, domestic patients decide to go to other countries for better quality medical services at lower prices. Even if they will need to pay more for travel expenses, the total expenses are still lower than the treatment costs in their own country. Bumrungrad Hospital is the leader of Thailand's medical tourism service, and the medical expenses are almost one-eighth that of U.S. hospitals, and Thailand's treatment costs are also lower than that of Asian countries at the same level.

Many articles has mentioned that Thailand is a medical center in Asia. For example, Woodman said that Thailand has more than one million medical tourists each year, and as the only hospital that accepts patients from hundreds of countries, Bumrungrad Hospital will receive more than 1,500 patients each day. Patients from the Middle East have changed their destinations for medical services from the United States and Britain to Thailand, especially

after the September 11 incident when the disputes between countries have intensified.

In addition, Woodman also introduced special medical services in Thailand, such as: cardiac and coronary surgery, cosmetic surgery, oral care, transsexual surgery, neurology, cancer treatment, eye disease treatment, musculoskeletal surgery and bariatric surgery. From the Corben, the medical projects favored by tourists are: dental treatment, transsexual surgery and cosmetic surgery.

Many hospital leaders in Thailand have set up service centers to contact with patients in various countries. Bumrungrad Hospital and Bangkok Hospital also set up their own offices.

3.1.3 Thailand's medical tourism products

Within the payment capacity of medical tourists, Thailand provides first-rate medical services and personalized services for medical tourists. Cosmetic surgery has made remarkable achievements in Thailand's medical tourism industry, creating a lot of income for Thailand. Thailand Medical tourism agencies provide a list of medical service projects, as shown in Table 3.1.3.

	Breast augmentation surgery/
Cosmetic / or plastic surgery (Plastic surgery)	Breast lift surgery + (Eyelid surgery)
Dentistry	Tummy Tuck Laser whitening teeth Dental implant
Orthopedic surgery	Hip replacement/Resurfacing Knee Replacement Shoulder arthroscopy Ankle arthroscopy Acupuncture
Holistic/Anti-aging	Detoxification Stem cell treatment rejuvenation Birthmark removal
Dermatology	Mole removal Cellulite treatment Lasik eye surgery
^#l(Other services)	medical -up Sex reassignment surgery

Table 3.1.3 Favorite Treatment Projects of Medical tourists

3.1.4 The Characteristics of Thai Medical Tourists

Foreign patients who receive medical services in private hospitals in Thailand are divided into the following three categories.

The first category: Residential expatriates that are living in Thailand or Thailand's neighboring countries account for approximately 70-80% of all patients, of which

approximately 70-75% are expatriates working in Thailand, another 5% are long-stay foreigners living in Thailand. When deciding to receive medical services, these patients mainly obtain information through the Medical Consulting Company, hospital websites, and friends and acquaintances. According to the characteristics of patients, these patients can be divided into two sub-categories:

Expatriates working in Thailand include foreign embassy officials in Thailand, foreign employees working in foreign companies in Thailand, and people working in neighboring countries with underdeveloped medical technology such as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar. These people will be assisted by insurance companies, Medical Assistance Company recommended by the government or medical institutions selected by their companies.

Long-stay foreigners in Thailand. Most of them are retired old people in foreign countries. Since the living costs in Thailand are lower than that of their own countries, most of foreign tourists decide to stay in Thailand for a long time, especially the Japanese. Generally, this group of people consults friends or relatives when choosing a hospital, or searches information from web pages based on conditions such as hospital location, nursing level, medical expenses, and whether insurance provided by the insurance company can be applied or other conditions.

The second category: General tourists who suffer accidents or sudden illnesses while travelling in Thailand. These tourists are usually foreigners and will receive some medical services in hospitals under the supervision of insurance companies. It is stated by Cohen that such tourists are called Medicated tourists. The hospitals where they get treatment are mainly famous tourist cities in Thailand, such as Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Phuket, Koh Samui and other major tourist attractions. Most of these tourists have suffered digestive diseases such as diarrhea, food poisoning, etc., or were injured in accidents. They will be sent to Bangkok for treatment if they are in severely bad conditions. These patients account for about 10%-15% of all foreign patients.

The third category: Medical tourists. Such tourists visit Thailand to receive medical services. Medical services may be the only activities they conduct during the trip, and they will not perform any other travel activities. • Medical services may also be part of their travels and they will also perform other travel activities. Through various channels such as Medical Tourism Facilitator, hospitals' websites, hospitals' roadshows, and recommendations from friends and relatives, these tourists learned about the relevant information about Thailand's tourism and select the hospital where they want to get the medical services. These patients account for approximately 5% - 10% of all foreign patients. And this category of foreign patients can also be divided into 3 subcategories, as follows:

The foreign patients who directly receive medical treatment at the hospital and do not carry out any other travel activities during the stay in Thailand. According to Cohen, this type of tourist is called a Mere patient.

Foreign patients who receive medical services during their travel to Thailand. According to Cohen, this type of tourist is called a Vacationing patient.

Foreign tourists who decided to receive medical services in Thailand before they visit Thailand. In addition, they will carry out other tourism activities during their stay in Thailand. According to Cohen, this type of tourist is called a Medical tourist proper.

3.1.5 Development of Medical Tourism in Thailand

Nowadays, the medical tourism market in Thailand has been paid much attention. Although Thailand has a lower medical costs than that in Western countries, the medical technology and medical quality of Thai hospitals are not worse than that in any country. In addition, the use of modern medical tools and medical devices that are in accordance with international standards, Thai-friendly services, and the name of "one of world's first tourist destinations," have made Thailand attractive to patients in many Asian countries including Singapore, Japan, and South Korea and become their ultimate choice for medical tourism destinations.

In general, the significant positive impact of the development of medical tourism is to make revenues for the country, increase income for medical personnel, and promote employment for the tourism industry, trade, and other service industries; Apart from these, Thailand's strength in health care has been promoted which attracts foreign businessmen to come to Thailand for related investments; at the same time, medical personnel are motivated to study medical technology abroad to further improve themselves, and the development of hospital medical quality has been promoted.

3.2 Main reasons for the development of Thailand's medical tourism

Tourists are willing to go abroad for medical tourism mainly because the countries of destination are different from their own country in terms of medical prices, medical technology, and medical services. The image of medical tourism countries, the proficiency of doctors, the quality of medical services, and whether the famous tourist attractions can provide medical services and other factors directly affect the choice of medical tourists. The development of Thailand's medical tourism is mainly contributed by the following reasons:

3.2.1 International Medical Certification (JCI) Passed by Thailand Hospital

Each year, Thailand will provide safe medical services for about one million people. High-level hospitals or hospitals that even reach international standards may be the choice of patients who come from distant areas. Such as, hospitals that have passed the International Standard (JCI) certification by the U.S. International Joint Commission. Many private hospitals in Thailand have passed international medical certifications such as ISO9002, ISO 900: 2000, ISO14001. Because of the safer and more guaranteed treatments provided by

the private hospitals in Thailand, a large number of patients will always take delight in talking about the delicious food, the proficiency of doctors, and the high quality medical services in the hospitals after they return home.

3.2.2 Low medical tourism costs

The medical costs in Thailand are much lower than those in the United States. Since Singapore's medical expenses are similar to the medical expenses in Thailand, it becomes a very strong competitor for Thailand in this region. India has made a rapid development in medical tourism. Although India's medical costs are lower than those in Thailand, the public facilities provided to tourists are worse than those in Thailand.

3.2.3 Rich tourism resources

In Thailand, there are many tourist attractions in each of the provinces. Some of these attractions are world-famous. With the uniqueness, these attractions rank among the best in the list of all kinds of tourist attractions in the world. Thailand is featured by these rich and beautiful tourism resources which are conducive to promoting the development of Thailand's medical tourism.

3.2.4 Convenient transportation

Bangkok International Airport is the center of connection between Thailand and other countries. The aircraft from more than 80 international airlines will take off and land at Bangkok International Airport, making it convenient for flights of various countries to come to Thailand. In addition, the low-price air tickets reduce travel costs for tourists and attract tourists to Thailand.

3.2.5 Rich medical projects

There is a variety of medical services in Thailand. Foreign tourists can choose the services according to their needs. Modern medicine, Thai ancient medicine, Thai traditional medicine, Chinese traditional medicine and other health promotion services, as well as the services provided by the Integrative Wellness Center are available for foreigners, such as the Destination Spa Medical spa, Thai massage, Thai health care activities, health rehabilitation activities, elderly rehabilitation activities, long-stay health care activities, dietary therapy and other medical projects. At the same time, under the supervision of relevant departments, doctors must be licensed to provide medical services, which to a certain extent guarantees the safety of tourists.

3.3 SWOT Analysis of Thailand's Medical Tourism

In order to formulate a correct development strategy to enable Thailand to compete with other medical tourism countries in the region and become the "leader" in the region, it is

necessary to analyze the situation of Thailand's medical tourism, including the strengths weakness, medical tourism opportunities and obstacles. The SWOT analysis of Thailand's medical tourism is as follows:

3.3.1 Strengths

It is analyzed that the strengths of Thailand's medical tourism is the highlights that should be protected and developed in order to enhance the competitiveness. The strengths of Thailand are as follows:

(a) High proficiency of doctors

A large number of proficient doctors with overseas learning backgrounds is a major highlight of Thai medical tourism. These professionally trained doctors have made the patients more trust in the hospital's treatment, and their foreign language skills have also helped them to better serve patients. Focusing on the development of medical personnel, hospitals in Thailand encourage and support medical personnel to keep learning, in order to enhance their professional knowledge, master advanced technology, and enrich their treatment experience.

(b) Reasonable medical tourism costs

Price is an important factor that influences the patient's choice of destination for medical tourism. The rise in medical costs in developed countries has increased the demand for medical tourism services in developing countries. In order to enable medical tourists to find medical tourism services at the right price, Medical Tonris.com provides price comparison tables for medical tourism projects in selected countries. India, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore have more obvious price advantages. As shown in the following table 3.3.1

Medical procedure	The THAILA						
	United States	Costa Rica	india	Korea	ND	Malaysia	Singapore
Heart Bypass (Heart Bypass)	\$123,000	\$27,000	\$7,900	\$26,000	\$15,000	\$12,100	\$17,200
Angioplasty	\$28,200	\$13,800	\$5,700	\$17,700	\$4,200	\$8,000	\$13,400
Heart Valve	\$170,000	\$30,000	\$9,500	\$39,900	\$17,200	\$13,500	\$16,900
Hip	\$40,364	\$13,600	\$7,200	\$21,000	\$17,000	\$8,000	\$13,900
Knee	\$35,000	\$12,500	\$6,600	\$17,500	\$14,000	\$7,700	\$16,000
Spinal Fusion	\$110,000	\$15,700	\$10,300	\$16,900	\$9,500	\$6,000	\$12,800
Dental Implant	\$2,500	\$800	\$900	\$1,350	\$1,720	\$1,500	\$2,700
Milk (Breast)	\$6,400	\$3,500	\$3,000	\$3,800	\$3,500	\$3,800	\$8,400
Rhinoplasty	\$6,500	\$3,800	\$2,400	\$3,980	\$3,300	\$2,200	\$2,200
Face Lift	\$11,000	\$4,500	\$3,500	\$6,000	\$3,950	\$3,550	\$440

Liposuction	\$5,500	\$2,800	\$2,800	\$2,900	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,900
Tummy Tuck	\$8,000	\$5,000	\$3,500	\$5,000	\$5,3	\$3,900	\$4,650
Lasik both eye	\$4,000	\$2,400	\$1,000	\$1,700	\$2,310	\$3,450	\$3,800
Cornea per eye	\$17,500	\$9,800	\$2,800	N/A	\$3,600	N/A	\$9,000
IVF Treatment	\$12,400	N/A	\$2,500	\$7,900	\$4,100	\$6,900	\$14,900

Table 3.3.1 Price Comparison of Medical Procedures in Various Countries in 2016

According to the statistics of the relevant departments and evaluations of patients from overseas, most of the patients were satisfied with Thailand's medical expenses and hospital's medical quality. The average medical costs in Thailand are 65%-90% that in India, 65%-80% in Malaysia, 50%-75% in the United States, 45%-65% in Costa Rica, 30% in South Korea, 25 %-40% in Singapore . Thailand's advanced medical technology and reasonable treatment costs are enough for Thailand to compete with its competitors.

(c) High-end medical technology and medical equipment

With modern medical devices, hospitals in Thailand can better diagnose conditions, reduce infections, reduce operative wounds, shorten recovery time, ensure medical quality, meet patient needs, improve patient satisfaction, and attract more Patients from developed countries to travel to Thailand for treatments.

(d) High standard, high quality medical care

Thailand has advanced technologies and higher qualities in medical treatment services, such as cardiac coronary therapy, cosmetic surgery, oral care, transsexual surgery, general surgery, neurology, orthopedic surgery, and physical examination. These medical projects not only meets the needs of the patients but also become a major highlight of Thai hospitals. In order to attract patients and potential medical tourists, these professional medical services can found at tourist attractions outside the hospital.

(e) Famous health services

The development of Thai traditional medicine services is encouraged by the Thai government. Foreign tourists are attracted by those health care services with Thai characteristics such as Thai traditional herbal medicine therapy, Thai massage treatments, and spa treatments.

(f) Friendly service attitude

The hospitality of the Thai people is one of the treasures of Thailand. Doctors, nurses, and other staff who provided services impress the patient a lot with a big smile on the face which attracts more patients invisibly.

(g) Famous tourist destinations

Thailand is one of the countries with a relatively developed tourism industry in the world.

A lot of beautiful tourist attractions, many natural scenery, culture and arts, delicious food and entertainment items are available for tourists. According to the list of the world's best tourism cities in 2011 published by the famous travel magazine "Travel & Leisure" in the United States, Bangkok is at the top of the list. The results of this list is obtained through the magazine's online voting survey. The voters are required to evaluate and rank the cities according to six questions, namely, the beauty of the tourist attractions, the charm of culture and arts, the charm of food and drink, the affinity of cultural customs, the attractiveness of shopping, and the cost-effectiveness of shopping. Among them, shopping, cultural affinity, roadside food are the focus of the evaluation. The city of Bangkok gets up to 90.48% of votes in this evaluation.

3.3.2 Weaknesses

It analyzes the current deficiencies in medical tourism to provide some reference for the future improvement and development of medical tourism. There are several problems in Thailand's medical tourism:

(1) High sales tax and medical equipment prices

Most medical devices, especially modern and advanced medical devices, are introduced from the countries with high tax rates. As higher taxes are imposed on relevant medical facilities and equipment imported from abroad, part of the taxes have been paid by the patients from the treatment costs. The increase in medical expenses has prevented Thailand from attracting more medical tourism tourists to some extent.

(2) Lack of doctors and related personnel

The most important problem in Thai health care services is the lack of a high-level medical team, which is particularly prominent in northern Thailand. At the same time, the development of Thailand's health care tourism has also caused a shortage of medical teams in the country, especially in northern Thailand, leading to heavy workload and great work pressure for the existing medical team and related staff, which will damage the staff's Confidence and patience, and reduce work effectiveness.

(3) Lack of regulations related to medical services

No specific laws and regulations have been formulated for medical negligence or medical crimes, so that patients' rights and interests can not be protected. Great risks have to be assumed by patients, thus seriously affecting the patient's confidence in treatment. At the same time, it is also not conducive to guaranteeing medical quality and the long-term development of the medical tourism industry.

(4) Overstrict restrictions on entry

Many restrictions have to be conformed and complicated procedures have to be completed before entering Thailand, especially in terms of VISA for Thailand. For tourists who visit Thailand to receive health care services, this process is cumbersome. In contrast, it is more convenient for the application of visas for countries such as Singapore and India.

Multiple visas are available as long as tourists hold a doctor's certificate.

(5) No relevant functional department promoting corporate publicity

At present, there are no relevant organizations to promote cooperation between hospitals. Each hospital or clinic has to look for resources, information, and summing up experience by itself. Due to the lack of cooperation between hospitals, the information about each hospital is limited and varied. The prices offered to tourists who come from another country are very different, which has caused confusion for tourists and is not conducive to the development of hospitals.

(6) Language and culture obstacles

Due to the differences in Language and culture, it is hard for the staff of the hospital and the medical tourists to communicate with each other. In addition to the tourists who speak the international language-English, there are also some tourists that speak other languages, such as: Chinese, Japanese, Russian and German. Good communication can not be realized between the hospital and these tourists, which also negatively impacts the quality of medical services.

3.3.3. Opportunities

The beneficial external factors are analyzed in order to make full use of them to promote the development of Thai medical tourism.

(a) Increased freedom of trade

The reduction of trade rules has made it easier for countries to import and export products and services, which is conducive to the supply of doctors in Thailand and to the import of medical equipment and devices. In addition, the rapid development of the logistics industry has made cargo transportation faster.

(b) Low-cost airlines

The decrease in international ticket prices has led to a sharp increase in the number of people traveling both at home and abroad. A large number of foreign tourists are attracted to travel to Thailand by Thailand's high-quality, low-cost air services.

(c) The limitations of treatment in some countries

Influenced by religious beliefs and values, there are some restrictions in treatment categories of some countries. However, there are no such restrictions in Thailand, making a large market occupation for Thailand in some countries. For example, Thailand is well-known for its stem cell therapies, through which some diseases that are difficult to cure can be treated. Some hospitals in Western countries are not allowed to conduct related treatment in the country. Patients then come to Thailand for related services and get the expected results, and accordingly, the influence of Thailand has been expanded in the world medical market.

(d) Elderly Tourism Market

As the world's aging population continues to increase, citizens born during the Baby Boomer era, that is, citizens born after the Second World War are currently the generation with the most consumption. This group of people often chooses beauty treatment in medical tourism. According to investigations and studies, the number of American citizens born in the Baby Boomer is approximately 77 million, of which approximately 12% did not purchase medical insurance. Thus these elderly patients are not able to receive treatment at a very low price in the country. Then the lower cost medical tourism and fake tourism will become a good choice for older citizens born in the Baby Boomer era.

(e) Medical Health Service System

In the UK and Canada and many other countries, public health services are extremely inefficient, and these countries are slow to provide services. It is still a problem in many western countries that patients have to wait for quite a long time to get treatment. For example, patients in the United States who are undergoing surgical treatment have to wait for an average of three weeks. In Canada, these kind of people will spend as long as eight weeks in waiting. For hip and knee replacement surgery, patients have to wait for 200 days. However, emergency surgery in Thailand only takes 2-3 days.

(f) Beauty Services

In Western countries, the demand for beauty services is not only from the elderly. Face lift by the use of botulinum toxin is becoming popular with the young generation. The demand for cosmetic surgery is increasing day by day, and is gradually well-received by every age group. However, there is no systematic guarantee for such cosmetic surgery because it is excluded from the national medical benefits. In order to receive the cosmetic surgery that is not available in the domestic country at a lower cost, more and more people are beginning to choose medical tourism and travel to other countries to receive the cosmetic surgery they need.

(g) Advanced Information Technology (ICT)

Through the use of information technology, accurate market information can be obtained, and good communication can be made with the outside world in a timely manner. The development of information and communication technology has adjusted the service industry and added new revenue sources for the service industry. All in all, the application of advanced information technology in Thai medical tourism has made Thailand more competitive than its competitors.

(h) Increase the number of medical tourism service personnel from developed countries

The demand for health services of citizens in developed countries have gradually increased. However, treatment expenses are too high due to the long waiting time for treatment in domestic country, and the exclusion of some medical projects from state medical benefits. As a result, more and more people choose to travel abroad for medical treatment. Thailand should seize this opportunity and fully prepare itself to provide these citizens from developed countries with high-quality medical tourism service personnel and

provide them with high-quality medical services and reasonable medical expenses.

(i) Insurance companies cover medical tourism destinations

The insurance companies and practitioners in the insurance industry in the developed countries are very familiar with the development trend of medical tourism. They know that citizens often receive medical services in developing countries with short treatment time, low cost, high quality, and low risk. Therefore, in order to expand business volume and increase income, more and more insurance companies are beginning to provide tourists with insurance services in medical tourism, so that tourists can also be treated without worries in foreign countries.

3.3.4 Threats

The unfavorable influence factors are analyzed, and the negative influence of these factors should be avoided.

(a) Competitiveness

The growing demand for medical tourism services has intensified the competition in the medical tourism industry, and the number of Thailand's competitors have also continued to increase. For example: Singapore, Malaysia and India, are strong competitors for Thailand in medical tourism.

(b) Security issues

The instability of the country and the lack of peace in the three southern border provinces have caused great panic among tourists who travel to Thailand for treatment. Safety issues are much more emphasized by Medical tourists than any other type of tourists. Therefore, the instability of the country, not conducive to national security, makes patients more willing to travel to other countries for treatment.

(c) Increased oil prices

The rise in oil prices always bother the countries that provide medical tourism services. As is known to all, the rising oil prices will increase the costs of transportation and then increase the travel costs for tourists, which will prompt tourists to choose to receive treatment in neighboring countries with less travel costs, thus reducing the number of tourists from Western developed countries to visit Thailand for medical tourism.

(d) Thai baht exchange rate

The appreciation of the Thai baht has increased the travel costs and expenses of foreign tourists to visit Thailand, resulting in the decision change of destinations of some tourists and the profit loss in Thailand.

3.4 The Summary

At present, Thailand's medical tourism market is mainly composed of three types of

foreign patients. The first type of patients are foreigners living in Thailand with the market share of approximately 70%-80%. The second type of patients are foreign tourists suffering from illness while traveling in Thailand with the market share of approximately 10%-15%. The third type of patients are medical tourists, with a market share of about 5°-10%.According to the above data, foreigners living in Thailand are the largest group in Thailand's medical tourism market.

At present, Thailand has become a medical tourism hub in Asia, and private enterprises have greatly promoted the establishment of Thailand's position of medical tourism hub in the past decade. Thailand's medical tourism industry has occupied an important position in Asia. It is very popular in orthopaedic surgery, dental beauty, and health examinations and also well-known for cosmetic surgery and the treatment for complex diseases.

From the above data, it can be concluded that medical tourism has a tendency of continuous development. The number of tourists who decide to travel abroad and receive medical services in destination countries is gradually increasing. In particular, more and more tourists from developed countries began to receive medical services in developing countries. This is mainly because of the increasing number of elderly people in many developed countries, the increase in the country's medical service costs, and the lower cost of medical services in Asian countries; at the same time, the decline in the cost of international transportation and the development of low-cost airlines have also made some contributions to the development of the medical services. In Asia, the market share of Thailand's medical tourism is higher than that of other countries in the same region. Thailand's customer market is mainly in Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and North America. Most of the foreign tourists in Thailand are from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and Italy.

In order to formulate a strategy to guide Thailand's medical tourism, this paper analyzes the competitiveness of Thailand's medical tourism. The results show that the advantages of Thailand's medical tourism are mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, the price of medical tourism services is lower than that of competitors. Secondly, the hospitals have high medical levels, and the medical personnel are proficient to provide professional treatment for patients. Thirdly, the hospitals are equipped with advanced medical equipment and the medical personnel can provide warm and thoughtful services to patients. In addition, the fascinating scenery and world-famous tourist attractions in Thailand allow patients to enjoy a very comfortable trip. At the same time, with the increasing elderly population in the world and the improved quality of people's lives, people's demand for medical services is increasing which will help expand Thailand's medical tourism market.

