

**An Examination of Bangladeshi Patients' Loyalty towards a  
Private Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand**

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**Abstract**

The study aims to understand what influence medical tourists, more precisely, Bangladeshi medical tourists' loyalty towards a private hospital. By considering four variables, which are: satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and destination image, this study conducts a survey-based research with 356 Bangladeshi patients who came to the hospital for medical treatment. The questionnaire, containing 42 items, covered the essence of four variables and the loyalty of the patient towards the hospital. The questionnaires were distributed from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2013. The results of the questionnaires were analyzed and interpreted in detail using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. Descriptive analysis section applies mean score, frequency, and percent to summarize data. To prove the hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to find the relationship among satisfaction, perceived value, trust, destination image, and loyalty toward medical tourism in the private hospital. The result shows that medical tourists' satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and destination image, all have a significant influence on tourists' loyalty towards medical tourism at this private hospital. The findings from this study should help all parties concerned not only in realizing the ongoing trends of medical tourism but also it will help them to plan their future to acquire the best outcome. Recommendation has been proposed for the hospital management, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), medical tourism sector for further action.

**Keywords:** *medical tourists, satisfaction, perceived value, trust, destination image*

**Introduction**

Tourism has long been perceived to be for recreational purposes and pleasure. Recently, many visitors have found traveling for medical or health purposes a part of tourism. Thus, the term medical tourism comes to existence with an increasing number of patients with their accompanying relatives or partners, traveling far and wide to destination where they find medication and health improvement packages satisfactory. Unlike tourism in general, medical tourism barely brings happy moments. However, those who travel far to seek better medical treatment in another country would certainly find such destination the better—if not the best—resort for their health improvement. Despite communication barriers, expenses, cross-cultural problems, traveling for medication or medical tourism has continued to prosper especially among countries in Southeast Asia. Traveling overseas in search of increased health has become a phenomenon. There is an increasing number of

patients from industrialized countries who travel to developing countries in search of better healthcare. One of the definitions of medical tourism is where patients travel overseas to get the treatment or services they cannot find in their own countries (Dayasiri, M. B. K. C., 2010) due to high cost of treatment, long waiting time, or sometimes the treatment itself is not available in their respective countries. The Thai Ministry of Public Health developed a strategic plan centered on medical services, healthcare services, and Thai herbal products. Health care services include spas, traditional massage and long-stay healthcare products and services.

The Government of Thailand and the health care providers such as the hospitals are certain to meet international standards. It is a very serious commitment and they work side by side to fulfill all requirements. "More recently, hospitals in Thailand have opted to also apply for Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation, which is the international accreditation arm of the U.S. Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)", says Mr. Denis Meseroll of Asset Management Systems (Thailand), a company that provides healthcare management services.

Table 1  
*Thai Ministry of Public Health five-year plan 2004-2008 revenue forecast*

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
	(in '000,000 Baht)					
Medical Services	19,635	23,100	27,433	32,898	39,833	142,899
Health Services (Spa & Thai Massage)	4,996	6,753	9,185	12,492	16,989	50,416
Herbal Products	1,550	2,000	3,000	4,000	7,000	17,550
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,181</b>	<b>31,853</b>	<b>39,618</b>	<b>49,390</b>	<b>63,822</b>	<b>210,865</b>

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand *tatnews.org*

Table 2  
*Thai Ministry of Public Health five-year plan 2008-2012 revenue forecast*

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
	(in '000,000 Baht)					
Medical Services	39,833	45,553	56,880	63,436	70,880	276,582
Health Services (Spa & Thai Massage)	16,989	21,178	24,678	29,763	35,178	127,786
Herbal Products	7,000	10,000	13,000	17,000	20,000	67,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>63,822</b>	<b>76,731</b>	<b>94,558</b>	<b>110,199</b>	<b>126,058</b>	<b>471,368</b>

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand *tatnews.org*

### **Statistics of Bangladeshi Patients in Thailand**

The Bangladesh government has funded its health care industry with about \$500 million each year but the increase in demand results in a poor quality of service in the public sector. The supply of doctors, technicians, medicines, etc. cannot meet the constantly increasing demand in this sector. Bangladesh is in the second position from the bottom in

the world's ranking of countries facing deficiency of health care providers (World Bank 2003). The Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka estimates that the Bangladeshis spend approximately \$300 million each year on foreign healthcare services. This is supported by the President of the Bangladesh Medical Association (World Bank 2003). Therefore, Bangladeshi patients fly abroad to seek medical tourism because they cannot avail of the necessary health services from the medical institutes in Bangladesh.

Most Bangladeshis seek medical treatment in three particular countries, namely: India, Singapore, and Thailand. Thailand is a well-known country for its healthcare industry and trusted is by loyal Bangladeshi patients who prefer the Thai private hospitals. Surprisingly, Bangladeshi patients are the largest in 'health tourists' geographic segments in Bamrungrad Hospital. There were a number of 63, 417 (2011) and 77, 813 (2012) Bangladeshi patients in the two major private hospitals, Bangkok Hospital and Bamrungrad Hospital. Up to March 2013, a total of 35,195 Bangladeshi patients had visited these two private hospitals.

### **Research Objective**

This research aimed to investigate the viewpoints of Bangladeshi patients in availing the medical services of the private hospital. It also aimed to identify the factors that influence Bangladeshi patients' loyalty towards the private hospital's medical services in relation with satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and destination image.

### **Review of Literature**

The International Tourists' Service Quality Perception and Behavioral Loyalty toward Medical Tourism in Bangkok Metropolitan Area (Lertwannawit, A, 2011) which aimed at understanding the attitudes and behaviors of medical tourists and support the relationships between government agencies and stakeholders in order to formulate appropriate tourism policies. The key finding shows that service quality has a positive relationship with value, brand trust, and satisfaction which in turn directly impact on medical tourists' loyalty.

An Examination of Tourists' Loyalty towards Medical Tourism in Pattaya, Thailand (Mechinda, P., Serirat, S., Anuwichanont, J., & Guild, N., 2010) compared a sample of 520 hospital tourists in clinic tourists in Pattaya, Thailand. The key finding revealed that satisfaction, trust, perceived value, destination familiarity, and destination image were the key factors that drive attitudinal loyalty towards medical tourism in Pattaya, Thailand

The study of Tangcharoensathien, V., Bennett, S., Khongswatt, S., & Supacutikul, A., (1999) on The Patient Satisfaction in Bangkok: The Impact of Hospital Ownership and Patient

Payment Status of public and private hospitals in Thailand involved 1200 medical tourist patients and the key finding shows that non-profit hospitals were highly rated for both in-patient and outpatient care.

The study "A Predictive Model of Satisfaction of Bangladeshi Patients in Two Selected Private Hospitals in Thailand" sought to how the adequate attention to the service

quality dimensions would increase the satisfaction of 381 Bangladeshi patients. The key finding revealed that Bangladeshi patients were satisfied with process features such as willingness of the admission staff to be of help, readiness to provide information, and the service of the interpreters (Nafis, A., 2007).

### Conceptual Framework

This research used the medical tourists' loyalty towards the private hospital in Thailand as the dependent variable while satisfaction, perceived value, trust and medical image as the independent variables. The study is based on the medical tourists of the private hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, their experience of medical treatment, and how they perceived the medical destination image of the private hospital (Figure1)

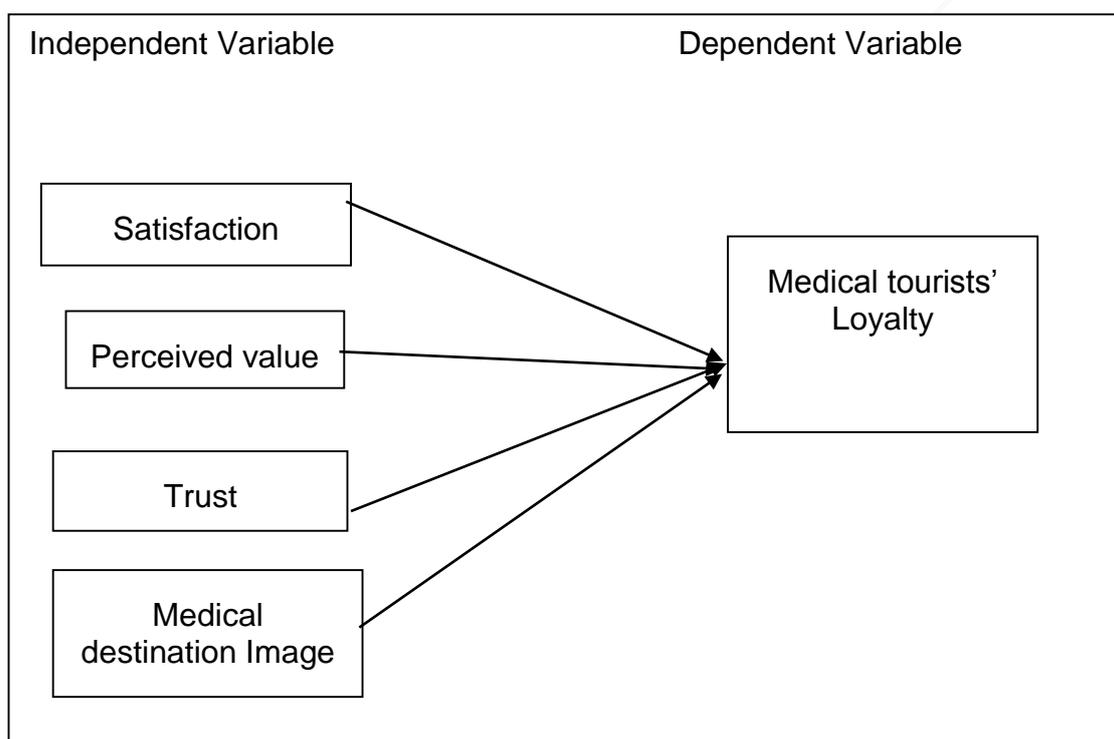


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research study

### Research Hypotheses

H1o: Medical tourist's satisfaction is not significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H1a: Medical tourist's satisfaction is significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H2o: Medical tourist's perceived value is not significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H2a: Medical tourist's perceived value is significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H3o: Medical tourist's trust is not significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H3a: Medical tourist's trust is significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H4o: Medical tourist's destination image is not significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

H4a: Medical tourist's destination image is significantly related to tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism.

### **Research Method**

The research method using survey questionnaires and descriptive statistics was designed to investigate Bangladeshi medical tourists' loyalty towards the private hospital in Bangkok. A Random sampling of Bangladeshi patients was used in the study.

The questionnaire was conducted on 356 Bangladeshi patients who came to the private hospital for medical treatment. The questionnaire sought to identify the satisfaction levels of these patients, their expectations from the hospital; and their eagerness to return and seek needed medical attention in the future.

The structured questionnaire contained a list of 42 questions with pre-specified answer choices. The main advantage of this kind of questionnaire is that it can be collected within a short period of time. The questionnaire had two parts:

Part 1: Consisted of 7 questions which determined the respondent's demographic data and the kind of treatment they availed from the hospital.

Part 2: Consisted of 35 questions which determined the respondents' views about the hospital, the treatment offered, and the service of the staff and the doctors. These 35 questions provided the data that enabled the researcher to rank the private hospital as a medical destination image for medical tourism.

The data collection was held from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2013. The researcher met each respondent to collect information and distribute survey questionnaire and spent 10 to 15 minutes with some medical tourists if they need any assistance on the survey.

The researcher also gathered information to support the research from various sources such as documentary tourism research of journals, books on tourism, nursing journals and books, newspaper articles, e-news, e-journals, on-line research, statistics from the private hospital, Tourism Authority of Thailand and related websites.

### **Data Analysis**

Table 3 shows the summary of hypotheses results that all null hypotheses are rejected. There are significant relationships among those four independent variables (satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and destination image) and medical tourists' loyalty at 5% significant level. When explained by level of correlation, destination image has the strongest relationship with medical tourists' loyalty ( $*r = .780$ ), and then following by trust ( $r = .690$ ), satisfaction ( $r = .678$ ), and only perceived value has moderate relationship toward medical tourists' loyalty ( $r = .576$ ), respectively.

Table 3  
*Hypotheses Summary*

Hypothesis	Statement	Medical tourists' loyalty			
		Sig.	Result	Correlation	level of relationship
H <sub>1a</sub>	Medical tourist's satisfaction is significantly related on tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism	.001	Reject H <sub>o</sub>	.678	high
H <sub>2a</sub>	Medical tourist's perceived value is significantly related on tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism	.001	Reject H <sub>o</sub>	.576	moderate
H <sub>3a</sub>	Medical tourist's trust is significantly related on tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism	.001	Reject H <sub>o</sub>	.690	high
H <sub>4a</sub>	Medical tourist's destination image is significantly related on tourist's loyalty towards medical tourism	.001	Reject H <sub>o</sub>	.780	high

\*r = Value in Pearson correlation is coefficient

### Findings and Discussion

The study identified the relationship between the independent variables (satisfaction, perceived value, trust, medical destination image) and dependent variables (medical tourists' loyalty). It found the influences of the independent variables to the medical tourists' loyalty. The private hospital gained the Bangladeshi patients' loyalty when these customers were satisfied with the treatment. Perceived value plays a significant role to increase loyalty of the Bangladeshi patients. Trust is one of the key factors that favorably influences the loyalty of medical tourists in the private hospital. Destination image, as an independent variable influences the Bangladeshi patients in a way that they spread positive judgment about the hospital to others by word of mouth.

The result shows that there is a positive image in Bangladeshi patients' for the treatment as well as for the private hospital itself. The Bangladeshi patients feel confident in the diagnoses and treatment provided by the private hospital. Furthermore, the

Bangladeshi patients believe that the treatment experienced is superior to that of hospitals in Bangladesh. The medicines also are of better quality.

The research study shows that medical tourists' perceived value is significantly influential whilst tourists' loyalty towards medical tourism has a moderate relationship. The treatment they acquire from the private hospital is valued precisely in the context of money. Some of the patients said that the private hospital is slightly expensive but they are providing good quality treatment, therefore they get value for money. The moderate relationship means that the private hospital needs to work to improve this issue.

The destination image, which ranks the highest among all the variables (.780) influences the Bangladeshi patients with a positive image of the hospital. Thailand is one of the top ten countries in Asia for medical treatment and is an established medical tourism destination. The, courteous and hygienic environment pleases the Bangladeshi patients as well.

### **Conclusion**

This study finds that Bangladeshi patients are highly loyal to the private hospital. They like to come to the private hospital to acquire medical treatment because they are satisfied with the doctors, the treatment, and the hospitality of the private hospital.

The research shows that satisfaction, trust, and medical image have a high level of relationship with the medical tourists' loyalty towards the private hospital. The perceived value achieved a moderate relationship. Therefore, management of the private hospital has a opportunity to improve in this sector to attract more Bangladeshi patients. Although satisfaction, trust and medical image has high relationship. Thailand is highly competitive in the medical tourism sector and the management of the private hospital needs to also carefully consider this factor as an area of improvement.

This research will also help the management of the private hospital as well as Tourism Authority of Thailand to improve and build their marketing strategy to create a whole level of customers. The hospital management could plan their strategies and their health care to attract new customer and offer new products.

### **Recommendation**

The Management of the private hospital should give special attention to the fast growing market of Bangladeshi patients. This study shows that there is a positive influence on Bangladeshi patients and that is why they keep returning to the private hospital for treatment. To inspire Bangladeshi patients to be more interested to visit the private hospital and acquire medical treatment, the management of the private hospital should take action on the following items, such as providing special packages to attract Bangladeshi patients. These may be in the form of loyalty membership cards which will offer special discounts and promotions to the loyal patients and long-term patients. The private hospital may plan to focus on the relatives also as they are quite a large number accompanying the patient. The relatives can get health checkup while accompanying the sick relatives

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