

CHAPTER IV

THE REASONS OF THAILAND IN PROPOSING MEDICAL HUB POLICY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Thailand's tactical location makes it an investors' gateway to Asia. It is at the center of most ASEAN countries, including Myanmar on the west, Cambodia and Lao PDR on the east, and Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to the south. Being at the crossroads of ASEAN and other dynamic markets in Asia such as China and India allows Thailand access to a burgeoning consumer population overseas aside from its equally huge population of almost 68 million people.

Thailand offers investors world class infrastructure. Trade and business transactions are made easier through Thailand's extensive highway system, modern city-wide mass transit, international airports, deep sea ports, and international river ports. As the hub of ASEAN, Thailand advocates for free and fair trade. It is instrumental in the formulation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area and a signatory to several other free trade agreements. Business opportunities in Thailand are abundant across several industries which include automotive, alternative energy, food, electrical & electronics, logistics, printing, yacht building, rubber industry, medical services.

Thailand's position as a leading global hub of medical tourism will be strengthened when the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is formed in 2015 which will lead to a vast single market. Health care and tourism are two of the priority service sectors where all restrictions may be removed when AEC is formed.

Towards making this happen the countries are trying to work on Complete Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) which could ease movement of health care professionals like medical professionals, dentists, nursing personnel, engineers, architects, surveyors, and accountancy personal.

This opening should encourage more foreign investors to establish projects in Thailand and also allow Thai health care providers to expand operations throughout the AEC allowing it to open its services to 600 million consumers. Bumrungrad hospital chain is already extending its business operations overseas, including investments in the AEC's Philippines and Singapore, as well as in Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates. To bring in investments certain non-tax incentives such as land ownership rights for foreign investors, permission to bring in foreign experts and technicians, and work permit and visa facilitation for expatriate employees have been given.

Thailand is leading Asia as a medical tourism destination. Medical tourism in Thailand is booming as the number of medical tourists that come in Thailand has been steadily increasing since the early 2000's. This has resulted in the country taking its place on the top of the global medical tourism market.

A. Thailand competitiveness on medical treatment

Healthcare in Thailand is largely driven by private hospitals. Thailand healthcare has many advantages over its Asian neighbors when it comes to medical tourism. Interestingly Thailand has the largest private

hospital in Southeast Asia and also the first hospital in Asia to get a JCI accreditation and ISO 9001 certification.

The advantages of medical treatment in Thailand for the patients are the by following;

A.1. First-class quality at affordable prices

With over 1,000 public and 400 private hospitals operating in compliance with international standards and fully-equipped with internationally trained physicians, Thai medical service provides excellent health care at highly competitive prices. Additionally, the prevalence of physicians with overseas training and the hospitals' multilingual staff help bridge communication barriers.

Thai private hospitals work primarily with cutting edge medical equipment that meets international standards. For example, the availability of MRI (3 Telsa) has made diagnoses without the injection of contrast medium more accessible. Thailand's high-quality medical service offerings are well known throughout the globe: The Thai medical care industry attracts almost two million foreign medical tourists annually. As a result, many visitors choose to undergo surgery in the Kingdom as part of their vacation stay. Besides top-quality medical care, Thailand is renowned for its service-minded culture. That example demonstrates its commitment to service includes personal assistants who walk patients through hospital procedures to ensure smooth service delivery. As a result, patients are kept fully informed on policies and insurance reimbursement.

Thailand's medical services industry has grown significantly owing to its exceptional service quality at affordable prices. The Kingdom's value proposition has only become more attractive given shrinking coverage of foreign health care systems abroad. The most popular treatments that are enjoyed by foreign patients in Thailand include general check-ups, dental care, hip replacement, laser eye surgery, kidney transplants and heart surgeries. Expatriates, executives of international corporations and embassy staff is frequent healthcare service customers. The price range of surgery services in Thailand compared to the US can be up to 90% less expensive.

Besides its reputation for its excellent medical care services for patients from around the globe, Thailand has gained increasing recognition as a research and development center for clinical trials of advanced medicine and stem cell treatments. The Thai health care industry sees its long-term growth prospects solidify on the back of both local and international demand. The Thai tourist authority recently segmented itself and regrouped its core national tourism products into seven distinct sections, one of which is themed "Health and Wellness: Land of healthy smiles" and emphasizes the country's commitment to preventive and curative therapies.

Thailand is not the only Asian country experiencing a major surge in what has recently become known as "medical tourism." Singapore, Malaysia, and India are also rapidly adjusting to the new phenomena, albeit at a much slower rate than Thailand. One reason why Thailand is so far ahead of many other countries in the world, and some experts would rightly name the nation as the pioneer in the field

in regards to the medical tourism industry is the fact that Thai hospitals and medical facilities are able to reduce their prices to levels much lower than those in other nations without sacrificing the high standards of quality and care that their patients receive. Other Asian nations, primarily India, can offer treatments and surgeries at much lower costs than those that can be found in Thailand. However, the quality of care and standard of treatment in these nations are affected because of the extremely low costs. Doctors and hospitals in India are suffering because of these institutions' desire to obtain a larger market share of the medical tourism industry.

A typical price comparison, in terms of the costs of various operations, in the USA, Singapore, Thailand, and India would look like this:

Procedure	USA	Singapore	Thailand	India
Heart Bypass	130,000	18,500	11,000	10,000
Heart Valve Replacement	160,000	12,500	10,000	9,000
Angioplasty	57,000	13,000	13,000	11,000
Hip Replacement	43,000	12,000	12,000	9,000

Hysterectomy	20,000	6,000	4,500	3,000
Knee Replacement	40,000	13,000	10,000	8,500
Spinal Fusion	62,000	9,000	7,000	5,500

Table 4.1 Global medical procedures cost comparison USA, Singapore, Thailand and India

Source: Global health and travel, Jul-Aug2013, page56

The above figures are average costs for the listed medical procedures in these countries. It is important to be aware that in each country these procedures can cost approximately depending on where you go for your treatments. In Thailand, however, the listed costs are much closer to the actual costs of each procedure than in any of the other Asian nations.

Looking at the associated costs, you will instantly see that the USA is the most expensive place to receive treatment by a large margin and that India is the country with the lowest cost associated with medical procedures and operations. Sometimes, India can offer surgical procedures at less than 8% of the cost in the USA. However, due to a distinct lack of funding, inexperienced staff, low quality medical and health care facilities, and many patients, India cannot offer medical tourists the quality treatment that they deserve.

Thailand, on the other hand, while slightly more expensive than India, has become the world famous for the high levels of care, professional and experienced staff, and quality treatment that it can offer to all patients in its hospitals, whether they are Thai citizens or foreign nationals. Often the costs associated with Thai hospitals are equal to, or slightly more than the costs at Indian medical facilities and health care centers. However, the extra level of service and dedication to patients means that when you receive treatment in Thailand, you are able to trust the Thai medical professionals and health care providers the same way that you would in your home country.

This is the reason that the Thai healthcare industry has seen the large amount of development and investment that it is experiencing. Over the last four years, the entire health care sector has seen about 54% growth, with a further 21% development expected by 2008. This means that the medical industry, and more specifically the health care facilities and hospitals in Thailand, are outpacing the entire Thai stock market earnings by 110% to 120%. The huge growth saw in this industry is mainly due to the almost two million overseas patients that annually visit the kingdom for the express purpose of receiving medical care and treatment of the total visitors nearly 18.5% are Japanese, 7.8% are from the Middle East, and the rest is from several miscellaneous countries, including the USA and Great Britain. People from all over the world is recognizing that Thailand can offer them the care and service that they can receive in their home countries at a price that they cannot afford. However, this does not mean that treatment in Thailand is not expensive.

Treatments such as a knee Replacement can cost USD\$13,000 and upwards and it is rare for an average person to have that much money in disposable assets.

Compile that with the fact that many of the best hospitals in Thailand will require all overseas patients to have some form of medical protection and it becomes evident that, even though the costs are much lower than elsewhere in the world, a quality medical insurance plan is necessary as the worldwide medical and health care industry is experiencing rapid inflation. Basically, this means that the costs associated with health care are rising at the fastest rate ever in every single country around the world. This means that, even in countries such as Thailand, costs are still likely to be too high for the average individual to afford out of pocket.

Bearing the burden of costly medical expenses can be hard. With the cost of treatment rising all the time, out of pocket payment can put a major strain on your finances. A high quality international medical insurance policy will protect you from the high costs associated with the healthcare industry, no matter where in the world you may be located. By providing you with this protection, you can truly experience your time overseas as an expatriate in the modern age should.

International medical insurance plans are comprehensive, portable, and guaranteed renewable for life. This means that should you ever suffer from a serious chronic condition or decide to relocate away from the country in which you are currently residing, the plan will continue to provide you with the care and treatment that you deserve with no risk to yourself of being denied continuing coverage. Additionally, international medical insurance premiums are calculated based on the

age of the policyholder and their geographic area of coverage rather than on their claims history. This means that, no matter how much medical treatment you claim for, you will always pay the same premium as everyone else in your age group. For many people, the key aspect of an international medical insurance plan is the fact that the policies are globally portable. This means that if, for instance, you have relocated to Thailand and decide to receive treatment in the USA, then you are able to do so; or if you are in India and would like to go to hospital in Thailand then this is a very realistic option.

The Thai healthcare industry has proven in recent years that it has the ability to compete with already established medical markets by providing quality service, high standards of treatment, and experienced staff and resources. Coupled with the much-lower costs associated with healthcare in Thailand, the country has seen its healthcare industry grow and thrive in an increasingly overcrowded industry.

The key issue is that even though the costs of treatment in Thailand are currently much lower than in many other countries, those costs are still relatively high for the average individual to bear on their own. It is also important to remember that due to the worldwide phenomenon of medical inflation, global treatment costs may see an even more dramatic rise in the years to come.²⁷

²⁷ Medical, Don's Life In Thailand, <http://donslifeinthailand.com/Medical.html>

A. 2. World Class and International Accredited Medical facilities

Many private hospitals in Thailand are Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited. On the last count, there were 46 of these (as of September 2015). Much more are ISO certified and are in the process of getting a JCI accreditation. Over 350 hospitals have a hospital accreditation from the Ministry of Public Health. All the latest technologies and facilities are available in the largest private hospitals.

Thailand has a pool of highly trained doctors many of whom have studied/practiced abroad. With this international experience, they are able to offer the latest and safest medical procedures. They will perform a wide range of surgeries like plastic surgeries, cardiothoracic surgeries, pediatric surgery, neurological surgery, dental implants, LASIK, etc. Nearly all the doctors and most of the nurses speak English. Translator services are also available should you require them.

Thailand is famous for its hospitable treatment of visitors. The people are friendly and hospitable service to guests is engrained in the culture. You will be surprised to see how far the Thais will go to make their guests comfortable.

There are many medical spas and wellness centers in Thailand offering alternative treatments like Thai massages, Thai foot massages, aromatherapy massages, and Thai therapeutic massages. Many of these therapies are exclusively found only in Thailand. Apart from this, Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is also widely known and can be easily found in Thailand.

Patients going to other Asian countries mostly focus on specialized treatments. But the major Thailand hospitals offer full-fledged services under one roof. One major private hospital in Thailand treats 1.2 million patients annually and offers more than 34 specialties.

Thailand offers a range of services that even the most demanding foreign medical tourist will find comforting. The vast number of patients that the doctors work on has ensured that they have the vast experience, the hospitals are better equipped and the prices are kept low due to economies of scale.

A.3. Healthcare System and Quality in Thailand

Thailand is a much sought after healthcare destination. More than a million healthcare tourists visit Thailand every year to avail healthcare services owing to its excellent medical and health care quality. Healthcare in Thailand is provided by government hospitals, private hospitals, non-governmental organizations and private practitioners.

A World Bank featured story titled, 'Thailand: Sustaining health Protection for All' says 99.5 % of the Thai people have access to healthcare under schemes promoted by the government. The budget allocation to healthcare is high and it is increasing steadily. Citizens are covered under schemes such as the Universal Coverage Scheme, Civil Servant Medical Benefit Scheme, Voluntary Healthcare Card Scheme, etc.

The Ministry of Public Health controls most of the hospitals in Thailand. There are more than a thousand government hospitals in the country. Government

hospitals in Thailand are of three types, there are regional hospitals in the provinces with at least 500 beds, general hospitals in major districts or province capitals with a capacity for 200 to 500 beds, and community hospitals in the districts that can admit 10 to 30 patients. The community hospitals provide basic medical care and refer the more advanced cases to the general hospitals or the regional hospitals.

The quality of healthcare in the government hospitals are generally good; however, as the hospitals cater to many people, you can expect a long wait. Foreigners have to pay normal charges and the benefit of the government schemes are not available to them. The advantage is government hospitals offer low-cost health care compared to costs levied by private hospitals. Likely, you will be admitted to a general ward unless you are willing to pay extra for a room.

The private hospitals are the best equipped and of these there are more than 300 in various parts of Thailand. You will find many of them in Bangkok and popular tourist destinations, while other major provinces will have at least one private hospital. Specialist clinics such as dermatology clinics, cosmetic plastic surgery clinics as well as medical and wellness spas are widely available throughout the country

A.4. Hospitals and Doctors Standards in Thailand

Hospitals and medical facilities in Thailand pride themselves on their high standards, and many have subjected their premises and systems to the most rigorous classification by applying for international accreditation and certification. Thailand

was the first country in Asia to achieve JCI accreditation in 2002, and 35 hospitals are now accredited.

Many more healthcare providers are ISO 14000 and ISO 9000 certified. Though the ISO certification is not a hospital accreditation, these standards of general management and environmental management is a sign of quality assurance in healthcare that shows the hospital's commitment to deliver sustainable, high-quality facilities and services. Additionally, more than 350 Thai hospitals have acquired Hospital Accreditation (HA), awarded by the Ministry of Public Health.

International patients in Thailand will find that English-speaking general practitioners, dentists, and surgeons are generally available in private hospitals and specialist clinics. Moreover, many hospitals offer translator services in most languages from Russian and Arabic to Dutch and Japanese.²⁸

A.4.1. Bumrungrad Hospital

Bumrungrad International Hospital is a multiple-specialty medical center located in Bangkok, Thailand with 563 beds and 200 US-certified doctors. It is accredited by JCI and has an HA accreditation. The hospital offers many services such as visa extension services in hospital, interpreters, liaison with embassy, airport transport, in-house accommodation, EMR services, prayer room, air ticket

²⁸ Tejasvi Vasudevan (2014) A CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND THE FACTORS THAT PROMOTE AND FACILITATE MEDICAL TOURISM IN THAILAND WITH REGARD TO SERVICES PROVIDED BY HOSPITALS, This Independent Study Manuscript Presented to The Graduate School of Bangkok University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Business Administration,p52 (Access on 25-1-16)

and hotel reservation, provide 7 doctors and 17 nurses to coordinate scheduling of procedures, and have the international referral offices in 24 countries. They also take care of the patient's family and help in logistics during treatment and follow-up care, and also offer payment options like cash, wire transfer, credit card and debit card.

A.4.2. Samitivej Hospital

Samitivej Hospitals were founded in 1979, and their main hospital in Sukhumvit soi 49 has 270 beds and about 400 specialists. The hospital is accredited by JCI and the Hospital Accreditation Board of Thailand. The hospital offers a comprehensive range of medical technology, complemented by a team of highly qualified specialists and experienced caregivers, a multilingual workforce and international services such as interpreters, EMR services, immigration services and payment options like Cash, personal check, bank transfer, AMEX, VISA, Master card, JCB.

In 1999, Samitivej was awarded the prestigious recognition as a Mother and Baby Friendly Hospital by WHO and UNICEF. Other recognitions include the Prime Minister Award for the Most Recognized Service in 2004.

A.4.3. Phyathai Hospital

The Phyathai Hospitals Group is a hospital group based in Bangkok, Thailand, and was founded in 1976 and has 1220 beds amongst themselves. The Phyathai group of hospitals and their staffs are not accredited by any international healthcare accreditation, whether from the USA (JCI), the UK (Trent Accreditation

Scheme) or Australia (ACHSI). The group consists of Phyathai 1 Hospital, Phayathai 2 Hospital, and Phyathai 3 Hospital. Phyathai 1 and Phyathai 2 hospitals are located in the city center of Bangkok, and Phyathai 3 hospital is based in Thonburi area.

The hospital is equipped with medical equipment and technology by the European provider Philips and offers service for international patients, like Interpretation services in 17 languages, international awards, 24 hours free consultation and medical advice over the internet, housekeeping, services and announcement via internet, free snacks and food in patient rooms, free internet services, insurance services, embassy services, transfer of medical documents for further treatment in home country, business center, transportation service, visa extension, air transfer from home country if needed, choice of catering to western, Muslim, Japanese clients, hybrid operating rooms and payment option like cash, personal check, bank transfer, AMEX, VISA, Master card, JCB.

A.4.4. Vejthani Hospital

Vejthani International Hospital is a private hospital in Bangkok, Thailand established in 1994 with 500 beds. The hospital has JCI (2010), HA, ISO 9001 accreditations has an overseas office in five nations. The hospital provides several services ranging from Arabic Customer Services Counter, multilingual interpreters in English, Japanese, Arabic, German, Bengali, airport transfers, e-mail correspondence, international insurance coordination, international food menu including halal food, prayer room, In-house serviced apartment, EMR services, hotel and travel arrangements, payment options like cash (Thai Baht or US Dollar)

or through major credit cards including VISA, MASTER, AMEX. If language assistance in a language not provided by them it is required they find an interpreter for the patient.

A.4.5. Piyavate Hospital

Piyavate International Hospital is a 27 story publicly-owned health care services facility in Thailand operating since 1993, with 300 beds, and range of specialized services. They have ISO 9001:2008 certified by the International Standards Organization since 2001 and is licensed by the Royal Thai Government's Ministry of Public Health.

The hospital provides several services ranging from Transportation arrangements including airport pick-up, Ground ambulance / Air ambulance, insurance process claims, prepare/Issue medical Documents, Medical Certificate, medical Report, medical Summary, a whole floor for Arabic patients, visas and flight preparation services, in-house accommodation, payment option likes cash (Thai Baht or US Dollar) or through major credit cards including VISA, MASTER, and AMEX.

The hospital provides modern medical technologies and training in the latest, hi-tech medical procedures & medicine to its doctors and staff while still offering services to patients at competitive prices to encourage the trend of medical tourism to Thailand. The doctors at the hospital are both American Board and Thai Board certified physicians in every area of medical specialization. They are supported by highly-qualified and experienced registered nurses as well as technicians who maintain our high-tech medical equipment and sophisticated computerized Medical

Information System. Our team is completed by warm, caring and diligent administrative personal.

A.4.6. Praram 9 Hospital

Praram 9 Hospital first opened on 19 July 1992, and has about 300 professional physicians, 300 beds and is accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI).

The hospital provides several services ranging Airport pick up, visa extension, short and long term lodging for family, shuttle bus service to station, 24 hour interpreter service, family sightseeing service, diet food and other cuisines like western, Japanese, Chinese, liaison with embassies, air ticket and hotel booking and also offers payment options like Cash, personal cheque, Amex, VISA Card, JCB, bank transfer. The hospital has installed the most modern, state-of-the-art medical equipment's to provide patients with the very best medical services always.

A.4.7. Thainakarin Hospital

Thainakarin Hospital Public Company Limited was founded in 1993 with 260 beds and accredited by hospital accreditation (HA) standards. ThaiNakarin Hospital offers medical transportation services for an accident emergency. They also offer the following services to patients which include medical records transfer, rehabilitation, translation services, interpreter services, airport pickup, local transportation booking, hotel booking, free Wi-Fi, phone in the room, family accommodation, nursery / nanny services, beauty salon, laundry, dry cleaning, 24 hours a day mini mart, and payment options like personal cheque, bank transfers, AMEX ,VISA, Master Card, cash transfer and JCB

A.4.8. Vibhavadi Hospital

Vibhavadi Hospital is located in Chatuchak district in Bangkok, Thailand and has 350 beds and 70 examination rooms 50 full-time physicians, 250 consulting physicians and important medical equipment the hospital is accredited by ISO 9001. The hospital provides translators for four different languages, has in-house accommodation for family, pick up from an airport, internet facility in rooms, provides alternative medical treatment and offers payment option only by cash.

A.4.9. Synphaet Hospital

Synphaet is a Bangkok-based business engaged in hospital and other medical services. It is one of Thailand's leading firms in the healthcare services Synphaet Hospital is accredited by HA, JCI, ISO 9001 and ISO 9002 and has services in Thai, English, Chinese.

A.4.10. Yanhee Hospital

Yanhee International Hospital is a 15-story multi-service general hospital in Bangkok with a 400- bed capacity, 150 full-time doctors, 120 part-time health professionals, and 800 nurses, established in 1984. The hospital has HA, and JCI accreditation the hospital offers interpreter/translator services without extra fees, English-speaking personal at every counter and department, affordable and transparent rates.

A.4.11. Sikarin Hospital

Established on March 15, 1979, under the name of Samsung Karnphat Co., Ltd., The hospital has 215 beds and has HA, ISO 14001, ISO 9001 and JCI accreditation. The hospital offers translation services to patients who are not able

to speak and understand Thai. Translators available are English, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, Khmer and Filipino. AMC nurses are also on standby to help. They also provide EMR, worldwide insurance assistance, repatriation , hotel reservation, embassy liaison and emigration Services, advance appointment booking, pick up at airport and drop of at hotel of choice, general inquiries by email and/or telephone, multilingual staff to help with registration procedures and accompany the patient to the appropriate department and specialists, private room for your hospitalization with international staff, variety of mode of payment ranging from cash, bank transfer, AMEX, Visa, Master Card.

A.4.12. Paolo memorial Bangkok Hospital

Paolo Memorial hospital is a 240 beds private hospital founded in 1972. The hospital has HA, ISO 14001, ISO 9001 and JCI accreditation. Their International Service Center provides supports to overseas patients with professional staffs who can speak several languages, providing necessary information such as insurances services, currency exchange, visa extension, translating and interpreting service, insurance services, patient transport services. They offer different modes of payment ranges from cash, personal cheque, bank transfer, AMEX, Visa, Master Card, and JCB.

A.4.13. Bangkok Nursing Home

The Bangkok Nursing Home Hospital is a modern 225-bed hospital to international standards. The hospital provides service in both inpatient and outpatient departments with physicians in every field of medicine available on a 24 hours basis. The hospital has HA, and JCI accreditation and 225 beds. The

hospital's international center caters well for visitors from abroad, offering translators in most of the major European and Asian languages. Every patient is assigned a personal assistant who will visit every day and will offer all the services needed, including embassy contact, keeping in touch with the patient's own doctor, arranging insurance, medevac and contacting relatives for emergency treatment and a library with full internet access. Modes of payment offered by the hospital include cash, personal cheque. AMEX, VISA, Master Card, JCB and bank transfer.

A.4.15. Ramkhahaeng Hospital

Ramkhamhaeng Hospital is a private hospital established on February 28, 1988, and has over 485 beds. Ramkhamhaeng Hospital is certified with HA, ISO 901 and JCI accreditation. The hospital provides airport pick up and transfers, has English speaking service staff, personnel escorts for appointments and procedures and EMR facilities. Language support offered is Thai and English.

A.4.16. Navamin nine Hospital

Navamin nine Hospital is a leading private hospital with 200 beds in the suburbs of Bangkok. Navamin9 Hospital has been certified as a standard hospital by the healthcare Accreditation Institute (Public Organization) and has past the standard accreditation of Joint Commission International (USA) in 2013. The hospital offers 24-hour emergency care services, has EMR facilities, hospital pick up and transfer, travel arrangements for family, visa services before arrival, flight and hotel booking, in-house accommodation for family, internet service in rooms, consultations at patient's home country through representatives before arrival. They

also provide bilingual and bi-cultural service and one can pay through cash, VISA, or Master Card.

Many Thai doctors and surgeons practicing in the private sectors today have won awards for efforts work and tries and many specialist doctors have earned international qualifications from western countries such as the US and UK. That is being said, more than 500 doctors practicing in Thai hospitals and clinics nowadays are American Board Certified.²⁹

B. Thailand has strategic position in connecting medical service in ASEAN

Thailand has reputation for graceful and attentive service. It is not hard to see why Bangkok has quickly become the medical tourism hub of Asia. Suvarnabhumi Airport is serviced by airlines from around the world, reasonably-priced hotel rooms abound, there is reliable public transportation and 30-day visas for many nationalities are easy to get on arrival, all which help to make a stay in a hotel or hospital easy. Forward thinking in many of its approaches, that has also recently partnered with state-owned Krungthai Bank, the national bank of Thailand, to offer tourists a debit card called the Miracle Thailand Card, which offers some medical and life insurance coverage if of an accident.

At the airport, Bangkok Hospital's Airport Service Center gives information and ground support services to inbound medical tourists. The hospital' lounge which has a business-class setting is mostly for patients who arrive from the Middle East

²⁹ *ibid*

and there is a 360-degree circle of support from the time a patient arrives till they leave.

One can find a variety of public transport options to choose from in Thailand, ranging from the 3-wheeled rickshaws, known as tuk-tuks, to the modern SkyTrain system in Bangkok. Other popular options are the buses (BTS), subway, ferries, and trains. Particularly, the city bus system is a convenient option while in Thailand.

Flights travel both to and around Thailand. While the major cities in the country have the international airports, several domestic flights are also available for travel among cities. Airport buses and metered taxis provide a convenient way to get to these airports.

Visa on arrival is typically 15-30 days (most visitors from Western countries receive 30 days) and visa extensions can be applied if necessary. Tourists can also apply for a non-immigrant visa for medical reasons, which gives them 90 days and requires proof that they are receiving treatment from a licensed medical facility. In addition, starting from early 2013, medical tourists from GCC countries including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and The United Arab Emirates can enter Thailand for 90 days without the visa.

The procedures in Thailand are less cumbersome than many other countries in Asia. Foreigners who travel to Thailand must have a passport that is valid for the next 6 months. Travelers from over 41 countries can stay in Thailand for up to 30 days without a visa. This is also called visa Exemption. If you are traveling into Thailand overland, you can get in for 15 days without a visa.

These include countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong and many others. Travelers from 21 other countries can apply for a visa on arrival.

Thailand tourism offers diverse attractions, great tourism infrastructure, delicious Thai food and friendly people. The country has many tourist places and is one top draw for tourists from all over the world. Thailand is a beautiful country and the tourist places contrast from hill resorts and sun-kissed beaches to exotic islands. Thailand is an aviation hub; all major international airlines run flights into Bangkok and elsewhere every day. You can choose from many first class hotels where accommodation and food boast international standards.

In fact, many tourists choose to come to Thailand so that they can club it with a short exotic Thailand holiday.