

Health Tourism: Unlocking Creative Business Potential in Tourist Health Services

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Abstract

Because of its natural and cultural attractiveness, the developing country attracts more tourists in modern times. Poor resource management and tourism facilities increase the risk of health problems. With an increase of 3.38%, tourism Indonesia is one of the fastest growing developing countries in Southeast Asia. In the tourism industry, the availability of the environment and health services is essential to support the health behavior of tourists during travel. Comprehensive health care is needed in tourist destinations, as about 20–60% of tourists visiting developing countries suffer from acute diarrhea, according to WHO data. (2021). This has led to the development of health tourism and medical tourism. The research methodology adopts a qualitative approach that combines a broad review of literature and theory from various related sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem of global trends and their impact on the tourism and creative business sectors. The results of the research show that in Indonesia the development of health and medical tourism is not too dominant, while the country has a lot of potential to develop. There are a number of reasons why health and medical tourism in Indonesia is still hindered, namely the inequality of services and SDM resources available and the lack of use of international languages. The government has drawn up a health tourism policy development scheme in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministries of Tourism and Creative Economy. This effort is expected to enable Indonesia to compete with countries in Southeast Asia in the development of health tourism or medicine.

Keywords: Health Travel, Medical Travel, Tourism Business

Introduction

The tourism sector plays a pivotal role in national development by significantly boosting economic growth and generating foreign exchange. It encompasses a broad array of products and services, including hotels, transportation, entertainment, and tour management, as well as natural attractions like landscapes, beaches, and the hospitality of local communities (Chen, 2023). To sustain economic growth and achieve strategic goals such as increasing incomes, creating employment opportunities, promoting regional development, and optimizing natural resource use, governments must continuously enhance policies and resilience within the tourism industry. Among the various forms of tourism, health tourism emerges as a particularly vital sub-sector (Lehloenya, 2017).

Health tourism, which involves traveling for health improvement and medical services, covers a wide spectrum, including tourist health, public health, the health of tourism industry workers, environmental health of tourist areas, and food security (Arnone et al., 2020). Effective practices in health tourism can positively impact both the tourism industry and local communities, while poor practices can have detrimental effects. Thus, promoting environmentally friendly health tourism is crucial for increasing visitor numbers and ensuring sustainable development (Azhari et al., 2023).

Previous studies have examined various aspects of health tourism. For instance, (Raoofti et al., 2024) conducted a comparative analysis of medical tourism services in countries such as Turkey, the UAE, Costa Rica, Jordan, Singapore, and Iran. The study identified common challenges, including communication issues, lack of nursing staff, and adherence to international medical standards, with some countries excelling due to advanced medical technologies and better healthcare professional ratios. (Srirak & Sukjai,

2023) focused on Thailand's health system management to enhance medical tourism from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV), noting growing demand but also challenges in resource allocation and health expenses. (Aydin & Karamehmet, 2017) explored factors affecting health tourism and the choice of international healthcare facilities, emphasizing the importance of regulations, access, quality of care, credibility, costs, cultural distance, and political and economic stability.

Despite the extensive research on health tourism, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the preparedness of regions in developing health tourism and its impact on global tourism trends and local enterprises (Li et al., 2022). This study aims to address this gap by exploring how developing tourism trends influence the preparation of supporting means, particularly in the health sector, and identifying creative enterprises that can thrive in this context (Alam et al., 2022).

The research questions guiding this study are: How do developing tourism trends affect the preparation of supporting means in the health sector? What efforts are made to attract tourists to a region or country through health tourism? What creative enterprises can thrive alongside the development of health tourism, and what challenges do they face? The study's objectives are to describe how developing tourism trends influence the preparation of supporting means, including health services that can be marketed as separate enterprises, identify efforts to attract tourists through health tourism, and explore the potential for creative enterprises to develop in this sector, along with the challenges they may encounter.

The global tourism industry has experienced substantial growth, with the number of foreign tourists increasing by 4.7% (approximately 50 million) from 2013 to 2014, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, has seen rapid growth, with Indonesia's tourism sector rising by 8.31% in 2015 (Rahmiati et al., 2018). This growth is attributed to the region's natural and cultural attractions, although poor resource management and inadequate tourism facilities can heighten health risks. Comprehensive healthcare services are essential in tourist destinations, as a significant percentage of tourists visiting developing countries suffer from health issues such as acute diarrhea (Usman et al., 2022).

Health tourism, which includes medical, wellness, and fitness tourism, has emerged to address these needs. According to (Majeed et al., 2018) Health tourism encompasses various categories:

1. Medical Tourism: Traveling primarily for medical services, including disease treatment, dental procedures, and fertility services .
2. Wellness & Herbal Tourism: Aimed at improving physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being through fitness activities and natural therapies .
3. Sport Health Tourism: Combining sports with health improvement.
4. Scientific Tourism Activities: Including participation in international symposiums and conferences related to health and tourism.

The distinction between health tourism and medical tourism lies in their primary purposes and activities. Health tourism broadly refers to travel for general health improvement, while medical tourism specifically targets medical treatments and procedures. Both forms of tourism have developed significantly, driven by lifestyle changes, increasing stress levels, and rising demand for accessible healthcare services (Sishi & Hongsan, 2020). This study will explore how developing tourism trends affect the preparation and development of health tourism, aiming to provide insights into the necessary support systems and innovative enterprises that can enhance this sector.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the impact of developing tourism trends on the preparedness and development of health tourism. By combining quantitative data collection with qualitative insights, the research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how tourism trends influence the health sector and to identify potential creative enterprises that could thrive in this context (Barusman et al., 2021). To assess the influence of developing tourism trends on health tourism, a structured survey will be administered to a broad sample of stakeholders in the health and tourism sectors. This includes health tourism providers, regional tourism authorities, and local businesses involved in health-related services. The survey will be distributed online using platforms such as Google Forms to ensure widespread accessibility and efficient data collection. The survey will gather data on several key aspects: the current state of health tourism, efforts to attract tourists through health services, and the preparedness of supporting infrastructure. Questions will be designed to capture quantitative measures related to these topics, including the availability and quality of health services, promotional strategies, and the readiness of local enterprises to support health tourism. Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to summarize survey responses and inferential statistics to identify patterns and relationships. Techniques such as regression analysis will be employed to understand how developing tourism trends impact the preparedness and development of health tourism.

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative insights will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. These interviews will include health tourism providers, regional development officials, and entrepreneurs involved in health-related creative enterprises. The interviews will aim to capture in-depth perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with health tourism. The interview questions will be designed to explore themes such as the effectiveness of current health tourism practices, strategies for attracting tourists, and the role of creative enterprises in supporting the health tourism sector. The qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns that provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing health tourism. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings will be crucial for providing a comprehensive overview of the health tourism sector (Roman et al., 2023). This process will involve comparing and contrasting results from both data sources to validate findings and draw meaningful conclusions (Lee & Li, 2019). By contextualizing the quantitative results with qualitative insights, the integrated approach will offer a richer understanding of the dynamics at play (Whitley et al., 2020).

The objectives of the study are to describe how developing tourism trends influence the preparation of supporting means in the health sector, identify efforts to attract tourists through health tourism, explore the potential for creative enterprises in health tourism, and examine the challenges and opportunities for these enterprises. By utilizing this mixed-methods approach, the study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, tourism developers, and health sector professionals, contributing to the strategic development of health tourism and enhancing the sector's overall effectiveness and sustainability.

Results and Discussion

The development of health and medical tourism in Indonesia, while holding substantial potential, remains relatively underdeveloped. This sector faces several challenges, including disparities in service quality, uneven distribution of skilled human resources, and limited use of international languages, which are crucial for attracting foreign tourists. Despite these obstacles, Indonesia's wellness tourism sector has shown promising growth. According to data from the Asia-Pacific wellness tourism

market, the sector experienced a 10.9% growth between 2015 and 2017, with a market value of USD 136.7 billion. Indonesia ranked seventh in the Top Ten Wellness Tourism Markets in the Asia-Pacific in 2017, with a market capitalization of USD 6.9 billion (Yuwono & Astuti, 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) projected that wellness tourism in Indonesia would grow by 7.5% in 2022, reflecting an increased public awareness of a comprehensive healthy lifestyle, which has positively influenced the recovery of the tourism industry, particularly in wellness tourism related to health.

In 2021, the Deputy Health Minister of Indonesia reported that the country lost IDR 100 trillion in foreign exchange revenue due to Indonesians seeking medical treatment abroad. This significant loss highlights the urgent need for Indonesia to develop its health tourism sector to capture and benefit from this market. The Indonesian government recognizes the importance of enhancing health and medical tourism to increase national income and foreign exchange earnings. To achieve this, the government has identified four key dimensions that require development: attractions, facilities, transportation, and hospitality.

Attractions, including natural, cultural, and ethnic resources, are integral to health tourism. When combined with wellness tourism, these attractions become a significant factor for tourists in choosing a destination (Chen, 2023). The availability of adequate facilities, such as accommodation, restaurants, and support services, is essential in ensuring a positive tourist experience. Furthermore, transportation must be easy, affordable, and safe, as it plays a crucial role in tourists' decision-making process (Azhari et al., 2023). Lastly, the hospitality of the local population, characterized by warmth and excellent service, is a key consideration for tourists, particularly those seeking medical treatment or health-related services.

To capitalize on the potential of health tourism, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Health, has implemented several initiatives. These include increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia for health-related purposes, preventing domestic tourists from seeking medical care abroad, extending the length of stay of national tourists, and boosting tourist expenditure on health-themed travel. These efforts are expected to create a multiplier effect, attracting investment in the health tourism sector, which in turn will contribute significantly to national development by improving the quality of health services and enhancing community well-being.

However, the development of health tourism in Indonesia is not without challenges. Issues such as costs and accessibility, quality and safety standards, cross-border travel legality, commercial exploitation, gaps in access to healthcare, impact on local resources, public policy and regulation, and ethical concerns must be addressed. The cost of travel and medical treatment abroad can be prohibitive for some, and there is often insufficient information available about medical tourism options. Concerns about the quality and safety standards of health services in destination countries, particularly those with lax regulations, can increase risks for tourists. Moreover, the complexity of cross-border travel, including medical visas, insurance, and immigration regulations, poses additional challenges (Raofi et al., 2024).

The rise of medical tourism also raises ethical issues, including patient privacy, the use of controversial medical technologies, and the moral responsibilities of healthcare providers and the tourism industry (Sishi & Hongsen, 2020). The development of health tourism could also exacerbate inequalities in access to healthcare, with wealthier individuals able to travel for higher quality care, while those with fewer resources remain limited to local services. Furthermore, the growing demand for medical resources and health infrastructure driven by medical tourism could lead to competition with local population needs, potentially increasing the cost of healthcare services for residents.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of developing a robust health tourism sector in Indonesia are significant. The country could generate substantial revenue from various supporting sectors and creative enterprises that could be developed alongside the health tourism industry. For instance, the creation of health booking and information platforms, specialized medical and wellness tours, health support services, and local health and beauty products could enhance the overall tourist experience. Additionally, online health consulting services, health events and workshops, and the use of social media and educational content to promote health and wellness topics could further support the growth of this sector.

In conclusion, while Indonesia's health tourism sector is still in its nascent stages, there is considerable potential for growth. By addressing the existing challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities within the wellness and health tourism markets, Indonesia can position itself as a leading destination for health tourism, thereby contributing to national development and improving the overall quality of life for its citizens.

Conclusion

Health tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry that has been benefited by international tourists with a wider spectrum that covers travel and tourism, the commercial sector, government relations and the international accreditation sector, while on the other hand, has a positive and negative impact on global health and host countries. Due to the growth of technology, economics, and other global links, health tourism plays an important role in shaping the future of medical care globally, while at the same time being integrated into the hospitality industry, medical travel facilitators and travel agents to find reliable providers and ensure trouble-free travel arrangements. To a competitive advantage, marketers use different techniques such as low-cost advantage, the use of new technologies and more to secure a high market share in this growing industry. There has been a shift of more tourists from developed countries who travel to developing countries for access to health care. The shift is largely driven by the relatively low cost of health care despite having full facilities in developing nations compared to developed nations. The main impact of health tourism is, of course, that it contributes directly to the country's currency income. Secondly, the growth of health & medical tourism in a country will provide many jobs and business opportunities to local communities. It will also improve the quality of hospital health services in the state. Therefore, the accompaniment by the government and stakeholders in realizing tourism/health tourism in Indonesia is very possible to be realized with good cooperation and good policies that have an impact on the well-being of the nation.

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