

By Zohreh Qanadi

Thailand, the Land of Smiles, is loved for its wonderful culture, hospitable people and breathtaking landscape. According to World Tourism Organization, the country receives around 26.5 million tourists each year, rising to a record of 35.38 million in 2017, equivalent to more than half the Thai population.

Thailand has been one of the most popular global destinations for holidaymakers. In recent years though, this tropical paradise has been attracting a new type of tourist, whose main reason for being in the country is health and wellness treatment.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is "a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the complete absence of disease or infirmity".

Health tourism, where patients travel both nationally and internationally to places and facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, spas, thermal, thalasso, wellness spas, fitness centers and wellness resorts, is a rapidly growing industry, estimated to be worth up to US\$40 billion per year.

Health tourism is generally broken down into two branches: Medical tourism and wellness tourism.

In either case, patients are traveling for healthcare, generally for cost savings, shorter waiting times, and expertise that

## Study Visit to 'Amazing Thailand' – a paradise for longevity

### Health & Wellness Tourism

they cannot receive at home.

According to estimates by the WHO, 12–14 million people go abroad to receive medical care each year.

This kind of tourism is a rapidly growing sector of today's thriving tourism industry, with a growing number of medical and spa destinations appearing across the globe.

Considering the total number of spas, Asia-Pacific is the leading region in the world (followed by Europe). Treatment in Asia-Pacific is significantly more affordable than other regions with Thailand being a key market in the Asia-Pacific and a hot destination for budget travelers within the region.



A view of skyscrapers in Bangkok

#### Thailand's medical centers

According to BCC Research's new report, with a collective market share of 45.2 percent, Thailand and Mexico dominated the medical tourism market in 2017, followed by India with a market share of 15.4 percent.

Thailand's medical centers are capable of offering the highest quality of clinical treatments to patients as well as providing first class customer service. I was very lucky to have the opportunity to travel to the country as part of a commercial delegation attending a "Study Visit to Thailand on Health and Wellness Tourism."

The six-day visit, organized by the Thai Embassy in Tehran and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), was aimed at presenting the special health and wellness packages offered by Thai hospitals and clinics to the Iranian delegation.

#### Apex Medical Center and La Vie Detox and Wellness Center

Apex Medical Center and La Vie Detox and Wellness Center were the first two medical and wellness centers that we visited in the Thai capital to gain knowledge about the special health and wellness services they provide.

Apex Medical Center provides the highest standard of treatment. The center performs the most up-to-date comprehensive range of state-of-the-art cosmetic procedures and services to help patients achieve and exceed their aesthetic goals.

Experts of the center gave a two-hour presentation on several medical and cosmetics sectors and also on its healthcare programs.

The center is the leading aesthetic medical service in South East Asia.

Among the laudable health and wellness packages, Whole Body Cryotherapy, or one of



the cabin they felt very energetic, cheerful and positive. "This is due to the release of endorphin and serotonin," a specialist said.

Whole Body Cryotherapy originated in Japan in the 70's, resulting from research into pain relief for rheumatoid arthritis. When cryotherapy turned out to be very effective, it was also increasingly used outside the medical world. Over the last few years Whole Body Cryotherapy has become more popular in sports, beauty and wellness.

At La Vie Detox and Wellness Center, a PowerPoint presentation was delivered by Dr. Siritira Srichantapong.

La Vie is an anti-aging and wellness center that takes an innovative and holistic approach in helping patients improve their current state of health, prevent age-related diseases and gain more enjoyment and fulfillment in life.

The center's services include detoxification, massage, IV (intravenous) therapy, ozone therapy and medical checkup. It has infrared saunas, consultation rooms as well as a VIP lounge.

To promote wellness and anti-aging, this Detox Center offers all treatments including Infrared Sauna, Colonic Hydrotherapy, Blood and Vein Detox to remove toxins and rejuvenate the body. All medical equipment is FDA approved and treatments are supervised by a certified team of physicians and nurses. Its detoxification treatments may resemble offerings found in a hospital but are set in a luxurious and spacious surrounding for the most comfortable way to detoxify the body.

#### Phyathai 2 Hospital

Phyathai 2 Hospital was the third medical center to which the group paid a visit, during which the

hospital's Marketing Director Jirana Boonprasatsuk delivered a welcome speech. At the Expert Meeting Room, the group was briefed on the hospital's medical services.

The center consists of the professional team which is dedicated to helping patients manage their

personal balance of nutrition, exercise and mental health. The center also develops a holistic program based on a comprehensive health evaluation and extensive lab analysis. All treatments are personalized using only pharmaceutical grade nutrients, hormones, cell therapies and skin-care products which are designed to slow down the aging process, reduce or prevent degenerative diseases and reverse age-related decline. At the hospital's Orthopedic Institute, we were lucky to get a bone density test.

On the third day of our Thailand tour, we left Bangkok for Hua Hin, an original beach resort, 195 kilometers from Bangkok. Hua Hin is a refreshing mix of city and sea with lively markets, golf courses, water parks, international cuisine and excellent accommodations.

As Hua Hin has grown as a tourist destination and the number of foreigners as well as Thai people living there has risen, so the medical facilities have started to improve.



A man is waiting for a horse ride on Hua Hin beach.



#### Bangkok Hospital Hua Hin



We paid a visit to Bangkok Hospital Hua Hin in the town to gain knowledge about its special health and medical packages.

As in the other medical centers, we were warmly greeted with smiles.

Assistant Hospital Director Pongsak Boonyalephun, MD delivered a PowerPoint presentation.

The hospital's wards include:

- Internal Medicine
- Surgery
- Orthopedic Clinic
- Children's Care (Pediatrics)
- Health Promotion
- Other specialized clinics

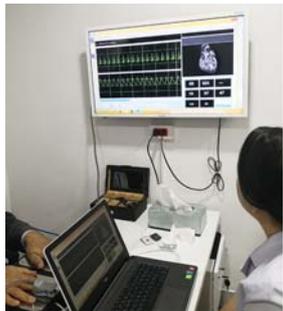
Bangkok Hospital Hua Hin is a network group hospital under the flagship of the Bangkok Hospital and is part

of the Bangkok Dusit Medical Services (BDMS) group that operates in all the major Thai centers.

The BDMS group, a Thai hospital operator's shares have surged so much this year that it is now the most valuable business in any emerging market. There are six different hospitals with 34 hospital branches in the group.

Bangkok Dusit's revenue from foreign patients accounted for almost one-third of sales after rising 10 percent in the first half of 2018 from a year ago, according to KT Zmico Securities Co.

One official at Bangkok Hospital Hua Hin said 50 percent of visitors are foreigners — expats or tourists.



the N-ice Treatments, drew our attention the most — Ice Lab, the cool way to lose weight.

Whole Body Cryotherapy is a cold treatment where you will stay in a cabin of -110° Celsius for three minutes. In response to the cold, processes are initiated throughout your body that provide more energy, better skin, faster metabolism and muscle recovery.

Three members of our seven-member group tried out the treatment.

First, they stayed in a room of -10° Celsius for 10 seconds, then they stayed in a room of -60° Celsius for 10 seconds, and finally they entered the room of -110° Celsius. Once they got out of

