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Exploring the Nexus between Healthcare Tourism Services and Tourists' Behavioural Intentions in Penang: A Comprehensive Analysis

Nuraini Syakirah Shaharuddin¹, *Siti Aisah Abas², Zaharah Mohamed Rani³ & Norhazliza Abd Halim⁴

¹Tourism Selangor Sdn Bhd
5th Floor Bangunan Darul Ehsan, Section 14, 40000
Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

²Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Sabah Branch, Kota Kinabalu Campus 88997
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

³Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang Branch, Permatang Pauh Campus 13500
Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

⁴Centre for Innovative Planning and Development
Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 Johor Bahru, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email: sitiaisah@uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism has emerged as a focal point in the realm of global healthcare, generating heightened interest and competitive advantage within the medical industry worldwide. This trend aligns with the increasing focus on tourism development. Within this paradigm, the current qualitative study investigated the relationship between medical tour services and the behavioural intentions exhibited by tourists in Penang. Through semi-structured interviews with five tourists who sought medical tour services in Penang, this study uncovered a multifaceted landscape. The combination of factors from the fields of medical and tourism services shapes tourists' inclinations. The key factors include the affordability of pricing, the quality of medical services, and the promptness of service provision. Also, tourism service factors, including the attractiveness of tourist attractions, the suitability of accommodations to meet tourist needs, and the provision of well-being programmes, contributed to the increase in medical tourism in Penang. This study has significant implications for improving the service delivery of medical tourism and serves as a reference for future researchers. In conclusion, the study provides a perspective on the relationship between

medical tour services and tourists' behavioural intentions, inviting further exploration into medical tourism in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Medical Tourism, Tourist Behavior, Behavioural Intention, Medical Service Quality*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary globalisation landscape, medical tourism has become a significant force that contributes to the socio-economic fabric of nations beyond the realms of conventional tourism (Seow, Choong, Moorthy, & Chan, 2017). This evolution in healthcare dynamics seamlessly intertwines medical services and tourism packages that align with the medical sector (Wendt, 2012). Medical tourism refers to a trend of individuals travelling to foreign lands for medical care, constituting a transformative facet known within the healthcare industry (Seow et al., 2017). In contrast to conventional tourism, medical tourism combines medical treatments and respite, providing an avenue where tourists enjoy the pleasurable orientation of medical tour services (Seow et al., 2017). The contours of medical tourism extend beyond conventional medical care, ushering in a novel paradigm where the healthcare and tourism sectors converge, synergistically offering cost-effective medical services coupled with a vacation experience (Sharma, Sharma, & Padroo, 2016). This trend encompasses not only elective procedures like cosmetic and dental surgeries but also encompasses intricate, technology-driven interventions (Heung, Kucukusta, & Song, 2011). Even though Seow et al. (2017) postulate that the allure of cost-effectiveness serves as a compelling magnet, luring individuals away from their native confines to seek superior and more economical medical care through medical tourism, a recent study by Smith et al. (2023) revealed that patients are increasingly drawn to medical tourism not just for cost-effectiveness but for the promise of personalised care in a global context. Personal interaction and care provided by humans distinguish medical tourism. Patients seek an experience that resonates with empathy, compassion, and understanding, calling for a human-centric approach to medical tourism that reevaluates industry practices. This necessitates not just medical excellence but also the emotional well-being of patients, which requires spaces where patients feel seen, heard, and cared for.

Accordingly, several nations have adroitly adapted their strategies to foster a legal and constructive framework aimed at capitalising on the growing medical tourism market (Lajevardi, 2016). In Asia, Malaysia is widely regarded as a prime example and a leading destination for medical tourism. Malaysia's remarkable ascent as a medical tourism hub over the years draws attention to its ability to offer a combination of high-quality medical services and a vibrant tourism experience. Penang emerges as a compelling case study, manifesting a rich tapestry that weaves medical tourism into the fabric of its tourism landscape. Its strategic position within the realm of healthcare tourism is poised to harness its attraction as a globally recognised medical tourism destination. In accordance with that, the present study aimed to explore the intricate relationship between medical tour services and tourists' behavioural intentions in Penang. The study encompassed multifaceted dimensions, from the affordability of pricing and the quality of medical services to the appeal of tourism attractions and the suitability of accommodation. As Penang's allure as a medical tourism destination continues to ascend, the study sheds light on the evolving dynamics that underpin this captivating relationship that has implications for industry refinement and future research efforts.

1.1 Problem Statement

Medical tourism is gaining traction among academics and practitioners worldwide for various reasons. In general, medical tourism is frequently associated with the search for better treatment outcomes than those supplied in the place of origin, and it frequently relates to movements from more productive contexts to impoverished countries in exchange for a higher quality of the difficult ones. The literature mostly associates with surgical activities, tourism, and several facets of wellness. For example, scholars studied the increased waiting lists in developed countries, international exchange rates, low-cost services in developing countries, technology, and modern equipment compatible with new health services (Campra, Riva, Orrichio & Brescia, 2022).

Malaysia is competitive in medical tourism through a constellation of internationally accredited hospitals and exceptional healthcare services (Mun, Peramarajan, Arshad, and Nuraina, 2014). The country is widely recognised as a top medical destination because of its impeccable treatment quality, seamless tourism accessibility, and competitive medical costs. These three attributes position Malaysia at the forefront of medical tourism destinations, beckoning patients seeking healthcare solutions. As a result, the escalating prominence of medical tourism is undeniable, epitomised by the substantial rise in medical tourist revenue

from MYR1.5 billion in 2018 to a projected MYR1.8 billion in 2019 (MHTC, 2019). The data proves that medical tourism has ignited a competitive fervour among healthcare providers, fueling a marketing-driven quest to attract new medical tourists and foster repeat business through astute service strategies (Han & Hyun, 2015). Thus, the nexus between the purchase decision-making processes of medical tourists and their nuanced perceptions assumes paramount significance, as the foundation of the medical tourism industry rests upon this fundamental aspect. Among the pivotal queries is on the strategic course of medical tourism and enhancing the experience of medical tourists by establishing trust and confidence. This highlights the intricate relationship between the quality of product/service, consumer trust, and the holistic experience.

Central to this narrative is the multifaceted medical factors of price affordability, service quality, and service swiftness. These pivotal determinants extend beyond mere attributes; they emerge as guiding principles influencing tourists' decision-making and charting a course that navigates the intricate seascape of medical tourism choices (Hallem & Barth, 2015). The intricacies of tourist behaviour are uniquely intertwined with these pillars, dictating the tenor of choices made. Existing research provides some insights into the intricacies of customer buying behaviours. However, there is a noticeable gap in knowledge regarding the effects of medical tour services, especially when it comes to understanding the relationship between medical factors, tourist behavioural intentions, and tourists' medical decision-making processes. This study aimed to investigate the complex dynamics involved in the journey of medical tourists in Penang in order to provide detailed knowledge of the relationships which had influenced their experiences.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Medical Tourism

Medical tourism has emerged as a transformative phenomenon between medicine and tourism. This dynamic fusion has witnessed a steady rise, reshaping the traditional landscape of healthcare services (Connell, 2006). As healthcare globalisation intertwines with the attraction of tourism, medical tourism transcends geographical boundaries to offer a unique blend of treatment and travel experiences. Thus, the current study delved into the multifaceted dimensions of this trend, exploring its motivations, implications, and implications. Moreover, a significant factor contributing to increased medical tourism is the need for high-quality medical treatments, frequently at affordable prices (Lajevardi, 2016). The combination of high quality and affordability has introduced a trend where people travel across continents to obtain specialised medical treatments that meet various requirements. The current study delved into how the healthcare industry transforms into a global marketplace, providing various solutions that attract those seeking better health worldwide.

The rise of medical tourism has rippled across various corners of the world, with Asia emerging as a powerhouse in this arena. Malaysia, particularly Penang, has been a prominent player, boasting a constellation of internationally accredited hospitals and a gamut of treatment offerings (Mun et al., 2014). Malaysia's position as a beacon within the medical tourism galaxy draws tourists seeking medical respite and a touch of wanderlust. Amidst this transformative tide, the relationship between medical factors and medical tourists' decision-making is a critical terrain for exploration. Elements such as affordability, medical quality, and service quality collectively orchestrate patients' choices (Hallem & Barth, 2015). The intricate relationship between these variables shapes the patient journey, propelling them towards destinations that align with their healthcare needs and aspirations. However, limited studies have delved into the intricacies of healthcare service quality. The confluence of medical expertise and hospitality services forms the cornerstone of medical tourism experiences (Seow et al., 2017). This convergence could underscore the pivotal role of service quality in shaping patients' perceptions, satisfaction levels, and, ultimately, their intention to revisit or recommend the destination.

Medical tourism is integrally interconnected with the wider framework of tourism. In addition to medical factors, tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programmes exert their influence (Jang, Bai, & Hu, 2017; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). These aspects harmoniously combine, resulting in a comprehensive experience that goes beyond medical treatment to include a revitalising and immersive adventure. The combination of various aspects forms a distinct and harmonious composition. The field of medical tourism has a range of opportunities and challenges that can greatly impact healthcare systems, economies, and patient experiences. As scholars delve into this evolving, intricate system, a more profound understanding emerges, shedding light on the intricate interrelationships between healthcare, tourism, and the human pursuit of well-being.

2.2 Medical Tourism in Penang

Penang is a dynamic destination where healthcare and tourism intersect, making it an attractive location within the field of medical tourism where medical treatment and exploration coalesce harmoniously. The medical tourism industry in Penang has attracted local and foreign medical tourists looking for high-quality medical treatments combined with captivating travel experiences. Its progress within the medical tourism spectrum has been exceptionally rapid as it has gained recognition worldwide due to its several globally approved hospitals and wide range of medical services (Mun et al., 2014). In addition, Penang provides impeccable medical quality, as well as treatment accessibility and affordability. Nonetheless, Penang's appeal expands beyond healthcare facilities to include a variety of tourist attractions, cultural experiences, and culinary delights that provide a comprehensive tapestry of experiences (Seow et al., 2017).

The quality of medical treatments and cost considerations create an irresistible pull for health-seekers worldwide (Lajevardi, 2016). Currently, the focus of medical tourism has transitioned into tourist behavioural intention. The combination of medical service factors and tourism attributes orchestrates the decisions made by medical tourists. Elements such as medical quality, affordability, and service swiftness resonate in tandem with tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programmes (Hallem & Barth, 2015; Jang, Bai, & Hu, 2017). Penang emerges as a pivotal player in medical tourism, offering a canvas where medical factors intertwine with tourism attributes to sculpt the contours of tourist intentions. The confluence of these dimensions forms the quintessential essence of Penang's medical tourism narrative, a captivating tapestry woven with threads of well-being, discovery, and healing.

2.3 Tourist Behavioural Intention

Medical tourism is expanding and influencing the intentions of tourists. The concept of tourist behavioural intention encompasses the desires, motivations, and decisions of medical tourists. The convergence of medical elements such as quality, price, and service speed with the appeal of tourism attractiveness, suitable accommodation, and well-being programs creates a comprehensive experience that goes beyond the limits of conventional travel (Hallem & Barth, 2015). Thus, incorporating travel experiences into healthcare treatments enhances the complexity of the overall travelling purpose (Seow et al., 2017).

Tourist behavioural intention has prompted researchers to explore its depths, shedding light on the factors that shape tourists' behavioural intentions. The essence of many investigations revolves around the interaction between concrete and abstract aspects. The attractiveness of tourist attractions, the suitability of accommodations, and the appeal of destination experiences all contribute to the captivating force of tourist destinations (Jang, Bai, & Hu, 2017). These highly intertwined factors shape how medical tourists perceive things and determine their intention to explore. In the context of medical tourism, trust emerges as a foundational pillar. The intricate dance between patients and medical practitioners' hinges upon a delicate fabric of trust, deeply intertwined with medical service quality (Seow et al., 2017). This element finds resonance in the broader tourism landscape, where trust in accommodations, services, and destination safety weaves a sense of confidence that shapes tourists' intentions (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000).

However, the relationship between expectations and reality often introduces a nuanced layer of complexity (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Tourist behavioural intention examines the relationship between desires and actual experiences and explores the process of transforming intention into fulfilment. Tourist behavioural intention reveals the dynamic interplay of factors that shape the desire to travel among tourists, including the attractiveness of tourist attractions, the suitability of accommodations to meet tourist needs, and the provision of well-being programs.

2.4 Medical Factors

The interplay of medical factors guides the choices and decisions of medical tourists, besides pricing, medical quality, and service swiftness. These elements form the essence of patients' experiences, drawing them towards medical destinations. First, price affordability is significant in medical tourism (Hallem & Barth, 2015). For many individuals, the prospect of accessing medical treatments at a fraction of the cost in their home countries beckons as an opportunity. The availability of high-quality medical procedures underscores this financial calculus without bearing the burden of exorbitant expenses. Therefore, the interplay between medical tourism and the affordability of price unfurls as a potent catalyst, igniting journeys of healing and exploration.

Medical tourists traverse borders in search of medical quality. The quality of medical services emerges as another anchor that grounds the decisions of medical tourists. The pursuit of top-tier medical expertise, often coupled with internationally accredited facilities, echoes through medical tourism corridors (Mun et al., 2014). The quest for high-quality medical knowledge, frequently combined with internationally recognised facilities, resonates across the medical tourism industry. This nexus of medical quality and patient intent encapsulates the core of medical tourism, epitomising the quest for well-being and rejuvenation. Moreover, service swiftness influences the decision of medical tourists. Swift and seamless medical procedures resonate with medical tourists, embodying a promise of timely relief and recovery (Seow et al., 2017) and contributing to their emotional well-being by seeking solace from ailments.

In general, affordability, medical quality, and service swiftness form a trinity that underpins the foundation of medical tourism. These factors guide the journeys of medical tourists, transcending borders that resonate with their aspirations of well-being.

2.5 Tourism Factors

Tourism factors enrich the experiences of medical tourists through three distinct dimensions: tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programmes. First, tourism attractiveness draws medical tourists toward their chosen havens (Jang, Bai, & Hu, 2017). The landscapes, culture, and experiences of a destination motivate medical tourists to explore beyond the confines of medical treatments. As a result, the attractiveness of a destination with the pursuit of well-being emphasises the decision to transcend the realm of healthcare.

In addition, the appropriateness of accommodations emerges as an essential factor. The combination of comfort, convenience, and ambience within lodging options nurtures medical tourists' physical and emotional well-being (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Nonetheless, the appropriateness of accommodations extends beyond mere comfort as it is pivotal in enhancing patients' healing experiences. Well-being programmes also resonate with the aspirations of medical tourists (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). These programmes reflect the fundamental nature of medical tourism, suggesting medical treatments that heal and rejuvenate and go beyond the boundaries of physical treatment. They encompass a spectrum of experiences, from therapeutic spas to holistic wellness retreats designed to restore mind, body, and spirit equilibrium.

In general, medical tourists consider both medical and tourism factors when making their decision. This includes evaluating the appeal of tourist attractions, the suitability of accommodations to meet their needs, and the availability of well-being programmes.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to investigate the complex aspects of medical tourism in Penang, focusing on the behaviour and intentions of tourists. The qualitative approach was used to explore the factors influencing the relationship between medical tourism services and the intentions of individuals seeking healthcare.

3.1 Qualitative Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to depict a comprehensive and intricate comprehension of the subject matter. This approach thoroughly examined the complex aspects of medical tourism in Penang, allowing for a deep analysis of the interconnected elements that constitute the whole experience. The qualitative research approach served as a means of shedding light on individual perspectives, beliefs, and behaviours, thereby creating a detailed and nuanced understanding of many findings (Jameel, Shaheen, & Majid, 2018). The approach involved meaningful dialogue with participants in witnessing their relationships and understanding individuals in a contextual setting. The current research transcended the surface, delving into emotions, perceptions, and experiences, unravelling the intricate relationship between medical tour service and tourist behavioural intention.

The current study employed face-to-face interactions and virtual encounters, embodying the flexibility and adaptability of qualitative design. Embracing the power of technology, telephone interviews served as a conduit for meaningful dialogues, ensuring privacy, comfort, and depth of responses (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Sweet, 2002; Stephens, 2007; Lechuga, 2012). Also, telephonic interviews possess methodological advantages that enhance the authenticity of responses and promote an honest exchange of opinions.

3.2 Narrative Research Approach

The data collection process involved two main strategies, driven by the combined efforts of many

agencies and the extensive reach of social media platforms. The Medical Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) facilitated the connections with medical tourists seeking medical treatment by offering valuable insights and approaches. The MHTC served as the channel through which the investigation into the domain of medical tourism in Penang materialises, revealing the significant experiences of those seeking healthcare.

Considering that the digital world presents an opportunity to interact with medical tourists, social media serves as a prominent platform that encourages individuals to share their experiences and enables a wide variety of perspectives and stories. This comprehensive strategy corresponds to the complex aspects of qualitative research, providing a complete depiction of medical tourism and its influence on tourist behavioural intention.

3.3 Participant and Sampling Technique

The current study examined the correlation between international patients across diverse private medical centres in Penang to amplify the exploration of medical factors and tourist behavioural intention. Purposive sampling, a deliberate and purposeful method that selects willing participants eager to contribute their perspectives, was employed to select participants (Palys, 2008). Corbin (as referenced in Sim et al., 2018) recommended having five participants to achieve theoretical saturation and comprehensive knowledge. The five selected participants possess various profiles, including backgrounds, nationalities, ages, and treatment experiences, each adding a new element to the exploration endeavour.

This qualitative approach incorporated pre-testing to adjust and refine the study's interview questions (Hilton, 2015). The pre-test was conducted by experienced academics from the Department of Tourism Planning and Hospitality Management, who had experienced validating the clarity and resonance of the questions. This step refined the interview protocol, guaranteeing that it aligned with the study's objectives.

3.4 Qualitative Data Collection

To gather qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This approach encourages individuals to openly discuss their experiences, opinions, and feelings, resulting in an authentic and spontaneous collection of stories (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Semi-structured interviews effectively facilitate comprehension by allowing participants to provide open-ended responses and engage in spontaneous discussions (Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, & Brozovi, 2016). These interviews embody adaptability, guided by a theme structure that encourages a fluid conversation. The interview guide is a sophisticated tool that directs the conversation by employing a combination of open-ended, probing, and precise questions. It encourages participants to explore and share their experiences, opinions, and thoughts. Also, the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee presents a collaborative process that explores the effects of medical tourism on their behavioural intention.

The process of selecting participants utilised purposive sampling, creating a cohesive group of individuals who were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. The communication medium aligned with the current pace of technology, incorporating Instagram messages, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp calls, and chats. Every interview was a distinct progression within various backgrounds and treatment methods.

3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis plays a crucial role in organising and making sense of various narratives by identifying patterns, themes, and categories (Male, 2016). Open coding facilitates the transformation of raw data into conceptual categories, providing a comprehensive framework for analysis and discussion. The data analysis in this study was aligned with the study's aims, leading to a comprehensive analysis.

The study examined medical tourism behavioural intention and the interaction between medical factors and the appeal of tourism. This study exhibited a genuine, profound, and abundant quality, unfolding a complex relationship that underscores the connection between medical tourism and tourist behavioural intention.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Informants' Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the five participants are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Informants' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Informant 1	Informant 2	Informant 3	Informant 4	Informant 5
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Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
Age	40	37	25	65	56
Origin	Yemen	Indonesia	Thailand	Indonesia	Indonesia
Travel Companion	Family	Friend	Friends	Wife	Family
Day Spend	15	7	4	10	12

Objective 1: Tourist Behavioural Intention

To identify tourist behavioural intentions in Penang.

This section presents the results related to the behavioural intentions of medical tourists during and after receiving medical tour services in Penang. The findings were grouped into three themes: satisfaction, trust, and post-purchased behaviour.

Theme: Satisfaction

Participants' satisfaction with the medical tour service was highlighted. Their positive experiences, hospitable reception, valuable medical information, service delivery, repeat treatment, and status as a regular patient contributed to their overall satisfaction.

Table 2: Satisfaction Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Satisfaction I arrived at Penang	1	At first, when International Airport, all the staff overwhelm my presence with friendly service. From the first arrival, I had high expectations towards this medical tour service, and surprisingly everything went well, and no big problems happened during the treatment. So, I am delighted with the medical tour service.	provided beneficial information about my illness. I think that is a great thing! It gives satisfaction for me throughout my healthcare journey. Overall, I am satisfied with the medical screening service in Penang
	2	There are lots of things about medicine that I learned during the medical tour service. The staff from MHTC	

Theme: Trust

Participants expressed their trust in the medical treatment they received. Their trust was established based on the hospital’s reputation, encompassing the treatment procedures, medical personnel, and dedication of healthcare specialists, as well as recommendations from acquaintances.

Table 3: Trust Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Trust	1	Gleneagles Hospital is known for its best obstetrics and gynaecology treatment in Penang, so I put my trust in that.	are committed to their job, especially when it comes to their politeness which makes people trust them
	2	I have many Malaysian friends. I based on their help to find me the best treatment in Penang.	
	3	There is no issue about the medical screening I have received, as everything went well.	
	4	The medical treatment that I received is valuable for me. It is a pleasure for me to obtain good treatment from skilful professional doctors. They are very trustful.	
	5	I really trust this medical treatment. All the medical staff	

Well-known hospital
Friend's
suggestion

Smooth process

Experienced medical staff

Work commitment

Theme: Post-purchased Behaviour

Participants discuss their post-purchase behaviour and intentions after receiving medical tour services. They express their desire to share positive reviews, speak well about the hospital, recommend the service to others, consider others' experiences, and promote medical tourism.

Table 4: Post-purchased Behavior Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Post- purchased Behavior	1	Yes, this medical tour service is absolutely amazing! I have done research about medical tour services in Penang, Malaysia and many good reviews I have gained. When I experienced it by myself, I found out that all comments from the review was real. So I am going to be one of the next reviewers who would agree and recommend the amazing medical tour service provided by the MHTC.	same. Many Indonesians practically have medical treatment in Malaysia.
	2	I will speak well and recommend this hospital to my friends and relatives who need treatment that is not available in our home country.	
	3	I would recommend this medical service to my other foreigner friend as it is reasonable and affordable and I speak well about it because the treatment is good.	
	4	Yes because I received good treatment as my wife does. She has experienced this medical tour service frequently.	
	5	I have done that! Some of my family and friends also experienced the	

Good review

Speak well

Other's
experiences

Recommendation

Other's
experiences

Objective 2: Medical Factors

To identify medical factors influencing tourist behavioural intention in Penang.

This section explores the medical factors influencing the decisions of medical tourists to seek medical treatment in Penang. The findings were divided into three themes: affordability of price, medical quality, and service swiftness.

Theme: Affordability of Price

Participants emphasised the affordability of medical treatment in Penang compared to their home countries. The lower cost, currency exchange rates, and affordability of treatment and goods contributed to their decision to seek medical care in Penang.

Table 5: Affordability of Price Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Affordability of Price	1	I can get the lowest price with high-quality treatment in Penang compared to my country because of the currency difference. Besides, I can have a holiday with my family and seek peace for my recovery.	Currency exchange Half price Worth price
	2	The same service I'm getting here in Penang is at least half the price in my hometown, Medan.	Low comparison Low comparison
	3	For me, the treatment price in Penang is affordable and worth the treatment served.	
	4	I chose Penang for the low-cost medical treatment compared to Medan and Jakarta.	
	5	The prices for my heart bypass treatment, and the facilities provided are much cheaper compared to Jakarta	

Theme: Medical Quality

Participants discussed the medical quality in Penang. The positive comments included effective treatments, good medical prescriptions, experienced doctors, efficient technology, clear consultation, and correct diagnoses.

Table 6: Medical Quality Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Medical Quality	1	There are many hospitals that offer this kind of treatment; however, I opted for Penang for my opinion as I have another intention to visit Penang. For me, such treatment is good as, with only a few medical visitations, I have recovered fully.	Recovery period
	2	The hip replacement that I had to go through was not a high-risk surgery; however, I still wanted a perfect procedure for this treatment. The hospital in Penang that gave me the treatment was the best; they made a hip implant without cutting any muscles or tendons.	Surgery alternatives
	3	I have a fast and smooth medical treatment which only took three days for results.	Efficient medical treatment
	4	The doctors are always friendly and always share the best solution with us. The	information was clear and direct to the point. They also are frank and share ways to save

money. Clear consultation

5 I had a bad experience in my hometown, Medan. The doctors had misdiagnosed me during the early stage of NSTEMI (Non-ST-elevation myocardial infarction), which resulted in serious damage to the heart muscle. Then, another doctor appointed a consultation with me to transfer to another hospital, and unfortunately, the hospital didn't have the needed facilities. So, I decided to do research and try a medical treatment in Penang, as most people recommended me with that alternative. Thank God that the doctor in the hospital (Penang) made a correct diagnosis and went through

some surgeries where it has improved my health until today.

Theme: Service Swiftness

Participants highlighted the efficiency and swiftness of medical services in Penang. Their favourable experience was enhanced by prompt responses, efficient procedures, rapid medical test outcomes, and minimal waiting periods.

Table 7: Service Swiftness Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Service Swiftness	1	They quickly respond to me for any inquiries about the medical treatment that I am going to receive. I don't have to wait longer to travel to Penang. It only took two weeks for the process of making an appointment with the hospital by the MHTC facilitation.	doctor also gives a comprehensive explanation of the blood test result.
	2	I had to pursue a longer period of a blood test in my previous treatment at my hometown, but Pantai Hospital Penang did the test for only a day!	5 It does not take a much longer process for my overall treatment. However, there was some delay in making the third appointment due to the emergency leave of the person in charge. So, they need to reschedule the third appointment.
	3	As it is not a treatment for illness, I can have a super-fast health screening which only took three days to complete.	
	4	I have done a blood test in my home country; however, it took longer, and I need to wait for a long waiting list. At the Penang Adventist Hospital, I didn't have to wait much time to take the test and received the result immediately, which was only one day. Moreover, the	

Quick management

Fast medical test

Fast medical test

Fast medical test and clear
consultation

Appointment delay

Objective 3: Tourism Factors

To examine the tourism factors influencing tourist behavioural intention in Penang.

This section delves into the tourism-related factors that motivate medical tourists to seek medical treatment in Penang. The findings were grouped into three themes: tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programme.

Theme: Tourism Attractiveness

Participants emphasise the attractiveness of Penang as a tourist destination, citing its unique culture, beautiful beaches, shopping opportunities, and renowned foods. Combining medical treatment with a vacation enhances their overall experience.

Table 8: Tourism Attractiveness Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Tourism Attractiveness	1	Malaysia is different from my country in terms of climate, culture, and others. I have been attracted to visit Malaysia so I took this advantage to visit and obtain a medical treatment there as I need to treat my illness too. The most thing I like about Penang is the tropical climate where my family and I can enjoy the good weather and breezy beach at Batu Ferringhi	Climate differences and uniqueness of Penang
	2	Penang is also known as a popular tourist attraction in Malaysia. So I think it is an advantage for me to receive the best treatment while enjoying the attractiveness of tourist places in Penang such as the uniqueness of foods and beautiful city that I have never visited yet.	Uniqueness of Penang
	3	I went to Penang with my fellow friends because we wanted to have a vacation there while at the same time, I also required medical screening for my health purposes. I think Penang is much known as a tourist attraction, which was the reason I went there for a vacation and medical treatment.	Foods and beverages and shopping

	Overall, I love the food, shopping, and friendly people in Penang.	Sightseeing
4	We always went to Penang for my medical treatment while having a family vacation together to strengthen our family relationship and seek relaxation away from the stress of daily duty. Penang is the best destination for relaxation by sightseeing around the island while enjoying the natural resources	Sightseeing
5	I enjoy sightseeing around Penang Island while having treatment.	

Theme: Accommodation Appropriateness

Participants discussed the suitability of accommodations provided by the medical tour service. They mentioned advantages, including Muslim-friendly hotels, comfort, affordability, easy access, and proximity to tourist attractions.

Table 9: Accommodation Statements from the Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Accommodation Appropriateness	1	I love the accommodation provided as it is a Muslim-friendly hotel, and it is not far from	the hospital where I received the treatment. They assisted me with a private car as requested.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 2 | I really appreciate what MHTC gives throughout my treatment, from the accommodation provided. | Muslim friendly |
| 3 | The accommodation here is also easily available, and the price is reasonable. | Availability and affordability |
| 4 | It is easy to reach the hospital from the hotel where my family and I stayed. The hotel is also comfortable and saves costs. | Easy access |
| 5 | My family and I stayed in comfortable accommodations near the hospital and tourist attractions such as the Colonial Penang Museum and shopping centre. | Comfortable and near tourist attraction |
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Theme: Well-being Programme

Participants highlight the well-being programs offered as part of the medical tour service. These programmes include health awareness, physical therapy, relaxation, mental health exercises, healthy diet advice, and lifestyle practices.

Table 10: Well-being Statements from Interview

Variable	Informant	Statements	Theme
Well-being Programme	1	I have learned valuable things from the medical tour service. They provided a health awareness program that was available to join freely during travel.	Awareness program Physical therapy
	2	I had some activities related to my illness, such as physical therapy, which helped a lot in my recovery.	Sightseeing Relaxation activities: mental health
	3	I enjoyed relaxing activities with my friends by sightseeing around the Island as we managed this healthcare vacation ourselves.	and healthy diet Lifestyle practice
	4	There were relaxation activities that I enjoyed together with my wife, such as mental health and healthy diet exercises.	
	5	I have experienced good lifestyle practices throughout the hospital.	

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Behavioural Intention

The study revealed three key dimensions of tourist behavioural intention: satisfaction, trust, and post-purchase behaviour. These dimensions collectively contributed to assessing the experiences and subsequent actions of medical tourists. Positive experiences, hospitable reception, valuable medical information, service delivery, repeat treatment, and being a regular patient emerged as key satisfaction factors. The importance of satisfaction in predicting post-purchase behavioural intentions aligns with Ekanayake et al.'s (2016) assertion that customer satisfaction is a critical determinant of future behaviour. In addition, the establishment of trust emerged as another critical dimension. Alzahrani, Al-Karaghoul, and Weerakkody (2017) highlighted the significance of trust in consumer decision-making, particularly in unfamiliar

contexts. Accordingly, the participants' expressions of trust were rooted in factors such as reputation, suggestions from friends, experienced medical staff, and the commitment of healthcare professionals. Moreover, post-purchased behaviour, encompassing word of mouth, recommendations, and repurchase intentions, resonates with Aliman et al.'s (2016) framework. The positive post-purchase behaviours among participants indicated their intent to share their experiences, recommend the service, and potentially repeat customers. These behaviours were influenced by factors such as treatment quality, perceived value, and satisfaction.

5.2 Medical Factors

The medical factors influencing the decisions of medical tourists were categorised into price affordability, medical quality, and service swiftness. Price affordability emerged as the critical determinant, consistent with Kang et al.'s (2014) findings. The significantly lower costs of medical treatment in Penang, especially compared to participants' home countries, contributed to their decision to seek medical care abroad. Currency exchange rates also played a role in making the treatment more cost-effective.

Medical quality emerged as another significant factor, resonating with Han and Ryu's (2006) concept of perceived quality. Participants' positive experiences with effective treatments, experienced doctors, modern facilities, and clear consultations underscored the importance of medical quality. Trust in medical treatment is a risky investment for medical tourists, making it imperative for healthcare providers to instil confidence and ensure high-quality care.

Service swiftness, particularly quick responses, efficient processes, and short waiting times were also important. Kang et al. (2014) emphasise that service swiftness was evident in participants' feedback regarding prompt responses, fast medical test results, and short waiting lists. However, as reported by participants, occasional delays underscored the need for effective appointment management and contingency plans.

5.3 Tourism Factors

Tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programmes emerged as the key tourism-related factors influencing the decisions of medical tourists. Penang's unique culture, beautiful beaches, shopping opportunities, renowned foods, and cultural heritage highlighted its role in tourism. Integrating relaxation activities and tourism experiences within the medical tour service enhanced participants' overall satisfaction. In addition, accommodation appropriateness, especially for comfort, affordability, accessibility, and Muslim-friendly options, positively influenced the decisions of medical tourists. The suitability of accommodations to tourist attractions and medical facilities further enhanced the appeal of medical tourism in Penang. Moreover, well-being programmes, offering health awareness, physical therapy, relaxation activities, and lifestyle practices, contributed to participants' overall well-being and satisfaction. The availability of these programmes as incentives added value to the medical tour service, aligned with Kang et al.'s (2014) perspective on well-being programmes in medical tourism.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explored the factors influencing medical tourists' decisions to seek medical tour services in Penang. The findings highlighted the interconnectedness of tourist behavioural intention, medical, and tourism-related factors. The dimensions of satisfaction, trust, and post-purchased behaviour have collectively shaped the decisions of medical tourists. Price affordability, medical quality, and service swiftness are pivotal in influencing their choices. Furthermore, tourism attractiveness, accommodation appropriateness, and well-being programmes contribute to the holistic experience of medical tourists.

The insights gained from this study offer valuable implications for healthcare providers, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders. Enhancing service quality, instilling trust, ensuring affordability, and optimising the integration of tourism experiences can collectively enhance Penang's position as a preferred medical tourism destination. Moreover, the study sheds light on the significance of cultural, economic, and healthcare factors in influencing the choices of medical tourists.

Future research should delve into specific demographic groups and their preferences by conducting comparative studies with other medical tourism destinations and exploring the long-term impacts of medical tourism on patients' well-being. By continually refining and optimising medical tour services, Penang can capitalise on its strengths and further establish itself as a premier destination for medical tourists who are seeking quality medical treatment intertwined with enriching tourism experiences.

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