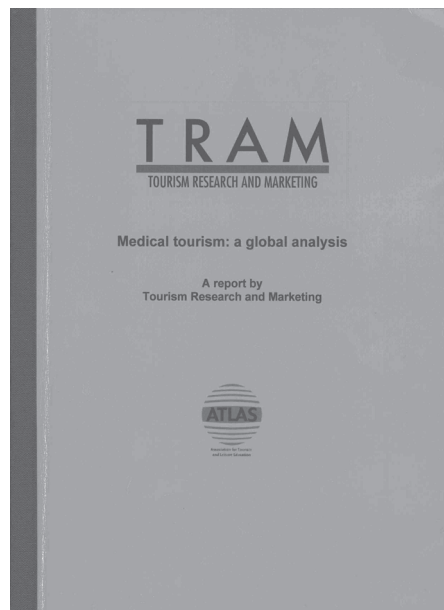


# book review

## Medical tourism: A global analysis

Renowned British TRAM (TOURISM RESEARCH AND MARKETING) seated in London, last year published an interesting report, consisting of about one hundred larger-format pages, entitled MEDICAL TOURISM – A GLOBAL ANALYSIS.

The report reviews the current state and problems of this particular tourism segment, claiming that it is one of the most rapidly growing modern markets. Already the introduction stresses the fast privatization of healthcare systems worldwide, as well as the increasing demand for cheaper, better and more accessible medical services. There are a growing number of medical institutions offering such services, while the governments of several countries are taking part in resolving accumulated problems of the healthcare economy.



The report includes healthcare tourism, wellness tourism, spa tourism, and fertility tourism as the main sectors of medical tourism. In the attempt to cover all these sectors on a global level, the report draws information from more than fifty countries. All these countries are intensifying their efforts to participate in this profitable market by developing their own medical and personnel infrastructure.

However, as it was difficult to come by suitable information in the field, the authors stress that most of it was accessed from web sources, and other available literature. In dealing with the subject matter, the report elaborates on the development factors of this form of tourism, primarily from the aspect of the price, quality, availability, and timeliness of the services.

It also analyzes, and later synthesizes, the approximate volume and financial effects of medical tourism on a global scale.

The market is broken down to its basics – supply and demand – of actually the main medical destination, concentrating on the role of travel agencies and marketing, respectively the country as the key authority in the normal functioning of the healthcare system.

The report also covers the ethical aspects of this sensitive matter, at the centre of which is the patient, i.e. the user of these most diverse medical and similar services, not neglecting the financial component.

The report offers an interesting breakdown of medical tourism into sub-sectors, such as:

- “Surgical”, which includes: Medical examinations, dental surgery, joint and heart surgery, cancer treatment, neurosurgery, organ transplants, and similar;
- “Wellness” includes: Acupuncture, aromatherapy, various types of massages, spa treatment, yoga, etc.;
- “Cosmetic” includes: Cosmetic surgery, face-lifting, liposuction, etc.
- “Reproductive” includes fertility treatment and treatment during childbirth (which is even called “birth tourism”!).

At this point, we should only focus on the *key conclusions* of this extensive research, with the aim to observe a few important facts of the conditions for its development in Croatia, which unfortunately was not included in this report.

- First of all, the definition of medical tourism is yet to be accepted. Today, it is generally considered as a casual service for foreigners visiting a country as tourists. It is argued, therefore, that this form of tourism be termed as precisely as possible, in the sense of its wide range of services and its future users.
- The report tells of the global growth of this market, which comprises approximately 19 million trips a year (or 2.5% of all international arrivals worldwide, according to the UNWTO forecast for the year 2004), and is expected to grow to 40 million over the next five years.
- The financial effect is estimated at €16.4 billion, with average expenditures per trip of as much as €860, which is much higher than such expenditures in international tourism in 2004 of €650.
- The complex medical offer intended for this form of tourism exceeds the demand, while its quality and quantity is constantly

improving. Raising medical standards would contribute to better healthcare services for the national population, which would be an extra benefit, especially in poorer countries.

- With the growing sales of medical packages, the role of the travel agency is expected to further strengthen. For now, verbal promotion plays the major part, while the destination is increasingly being chosen from the Internet, newspaper reviews, and other journals.
- At present, healthcare authorities in most countries are reluctant to refer their patients to treatment abroad. However, this will also gradually change with the conclusion of suitable bilateral agreements.
- Indeed, the expected growth of medical tourism will be recorded primarily thanks to private patients or tourists seeking such services abroad, facilitated by cheaper transport, especially air transport.
- Finally, the ethical concerns mentioned earlier will also play a certain role, which is why they are mentioned separately, such as: limited healthcare for domestic patients in favour of foreign patients, profitable trading of human organs for rich, foreign individuals, etc.

The appendices offer ample information on medical tourism destination countries, including some associated events, such as exhibitions, fairs, and other gatherings.

The report was published by ATLAS (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education) seated in the Netherlands.

TRAM  
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