Eco-medical tourism: can it be sustainable?

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of medical tourism in Costa Rica, a country that is better known as a premier ecotourism destination.
My interest in this topic

medicina de la tos
Health Care Costs

• Health Care Costs are a $2 Trillion a year industry in America and predicted to double in the next decade.
• As Americans (and others) seek become more health conscious, cost becomes a necessary decision in one’s health.

Source: The Economist, 2007
Background

The roots of medical tourism may be found in the Neolithic and Bronze Age with visits to mineral springs around the Mediterranean.

Current medical tourism is more likely linked to seeking less expensive alternatives for medical procedures in foreign countries in eastern Europe, southeast Asia and Latin America.
America’s Place in Medical Tourism
Saratoga Spa State Park: Birthplace of NERR

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is defined as the responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. (TIES, 1990)
Medical tourism is defined as the practice of patients seeking lower cost health care procedures abroad - often packaged with travel and sightseeing excursions. (Senator Gordon Smith, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging)
Eco-Medical Tourism

Defined as the responsible travel of patients seeking lower cost health care procedures abroad to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.
Sustainability Concerns

• What happens to the local population when tourists displace them in hospital beds?

• Medical waste is hazardous!
The Certification in Sustainable Tourism Program (CST) is a program sponsored by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT) to differentiate the tourism businesses based on the compliance of a sustainable model of natural, cultural and social resource management.
Accreditation

The medical equivalence to this accreditation is the Joint Commission International (JCI).
Case Study: Costa Rica
A quick Google ...
San Jose?

- Has had a long history of providing excellent health care in the fields of dentistry and cosmetic surgeries.
- “Medical care in San Jose is adequate, but is limited in areas outside of San Jose. Most prescription and over-the-counter medications are available throughout Costa Rica.” (US State Dept.)
Facilities

The temperature reads 1800 degrees. Numbers that sear. Warm and pink, charred and rare...juice and flavor-rich to turn taste buds...and heads. It’s called USDA prime-aged steak for a reason. Come taste for yourself...

Steak House Restaurant
WITH A VIEW - ESCAZÚ

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Bar open 11am - Till...
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For WOMEN: Estrogen & Human Growth Hormone Replacement.

Weight Loss & Fitness Counseling
Laser Hair Removal
Botox
& Teosyal Filler Therapy
Cosmetic Surgery

Full Spa Services:
Manicure
Pedicure
Facials
Massage

Escazu, 600 mts. South of the Cemetery de San Antonio de Escazú
Hospital Clinica Biblica has become the First hospital in Central America to become accredited by the Joint Commission International. Others are seeking accreditation.
## Access to Doctors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>PPP$US</th>
<th>Population (Millions)</th>
<th>Percent GDP</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>326</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
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<td><strong>Costa Rica</strong></td>
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<td>Guyana</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.worldmapper.org/](http://www.worldmapper.org/)
Medical Waste

The red biohazard bags are misused as regular trash bags, which encourages scavengers to open them to find soda cans and paper. Then they empty the sturdy bags to carry what they find. So the dangerous contents are left at the dump site.

http://www.amcostarica.com/060707.htm
Future Research

• Explore the human dimensions on health care opportunities for the local citizens;
• Identify chief ecotourist attractions in Costa Rica that eco-medical tourists may visit, and;
• Assess the relative importance of these attractions in the recovery stage of the medical procedure.