

**An overview of the impact of the COVID-19 on health tourism in  
Iran and Northern Cyprus**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to review several standard parameters to consider the impact of new technologies after the corona and during the corona in the medical tourism industry which is one of the most affected industries. This issue has been severely affected by the epidemic, in which during the first seven months of the corona outbreak, large expense has been spent. The results of our survey showed that modern software and technologies have been able to provide more comfortable conditions for medical tourism in the COVID time. The industry activists are now looking to develop travel plans during the post-crisis and post-corona period.

**Keywords: New technologies, Post-corona, Tourism, Tourism Hospitality.**

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## **1. Introduction**

The damages that have been recently created by the coronavirus (COVID19) to the tourism industry in the world are several times more than the damage that the tourism industry suffered during the entire economic crisis of last decades. In the current situation, despite all the strengths and weaknesses in the management and control of the COVID19 crisis, statistically, many countries are in the upper ranks of the world tables. In these conditions of overcoming the crisis of the corona virus and the gradual normalization of society's affairs, perhaps the market of medical services can be attractive for regional and extra-regional countries in terms of price and expertise (Bilsland et al., 2020). However, these activities can be directly affected by the diplomatic and political conditions of the countries. In such a way that we can hopefully think about increasing the capacities of many countries' health tourism after the Corona era. The adoption of future-making decisions by the government trustees and the private sector of world health tourism is strongly affected. Different regions of the many countries with different natural attractions and quick and easy access to the sea, forest, desert, diverse weather of four seasons, low cost and high quality of medical services, excellent doctors, up-to-date technology, natural treatment areas can be the most important pole (Khaksarshahmirzadi et al., 2020). Tourism and the tourism industry in the Asia region should be transformed (Ezdi et al., 1991). Along with global parameters such as tourism industry attractions, welfare freedoms, advertisements attracting travelers, the way each country manages the COVID19 crisis is also one of the most important indicators (Pappas et al., 2021). Foreign nations and patients are placed to choose tourism and wellness destinations in the coming years. The health tourism industry suffers from challenges such as inconsistency between the organizations in charge of the health tourism industry and inappropriate planning, and the structure of this industry in the country needs to be reformed and designed a suitable model so that the expected value of domestic and foreign tourists can be realized, especially in the field of the industry (Samarathunga et al., 2020). Shibata et al. described the categorization of domestic trips based on the type of tourism and tourist and considers the lack of proper infrastructure as one of the most important obstacles to its implementation (Shibata et al., 2020, Bilsland et al., 2020). Sofa et al.

introduced an establishing communication between Thailand and Malaysia through health tourism which point to the role of facilities in health tourism and believe that health tourism and facilities have two-way relationships so that development and improvement may leads to another promotion, so they believe that health tourism may also increase the facilities of the region.

## **2. Literature review**

Health tourism or therapeutic tourism have been considered for evaluating the effect of respiratory disease on health tourism in Asian countries. The World Tourism Organization (WHO) defines health tourism as the use of services that improve health and leads to an increase in the individual's morale and defines it in a place outside the individual's residence. Health tourism has existed since the time of an ancient time of Greece and Rome, and many European countries. While the health tourism industry plays an important role in earning foreign currency in many countries, and every year billions of dollars in foreign exchange income are earned through this industry in European and American countries, but in Asian countries like Iran has not regained its position in this industry (Pillai et al., 2021). Even the neighboring countries have seized this opportunity and invested in it, so that some neighboring countries of Iran have several million dollars of foreign currency income from the health tourism industry every year (Sakhdari et al., 1991). Iran shows that although the health tourism industry in Iran has long attracted the attention of foreign tourists and patients, the establishment of a platform for it has begun, but currently this industry has not regained its position and in the first stages of its development it encounters many challenges. Among the top five countries on the list of tourist destinations, Spain has suffered the most from Corona according to the international tourist's society. Thailand, Jamaica, and Croatia have the highest unemployment rates in the tourism industry. The corona outbreak led to an 11% and 9% drop in Jamaica and Thailand's tourism industry, respectively. The damage that the COVID19 did to the tourism industry in 2020 is several times more than the damage that the tourism industry suffered during the entire economic crisis of 2009. The age of traveling European tourists to Iran has been decreased recently, and many young European tourists have been traveled to Iran with their families. Until

now, Iran has been the only destination for old and adventurous European and American tourists (Benny et al., 2020). The Europeans usually show the fastest reaction to political and social developments in tourism destinations. Not only the Chinese tourism suffered from Corona itself, but also it suffered the most damages to destinations with 150 million Chinese tourists. Kish Island in Iran and North Cyprus were popular destinations during this period of COVID19 pandemic (Shirani et al., 2020). The amusements of the Northern provinces sometimes led to the confusion of the officials who guarded the entrances to prevent passengers. Many flights took advantage of the ticket price increase, as several seats, were vacant and sold all the seats. Official tour guides were the most empty-handed part of the corona tourism industry. Many of official tour guides tried to move to temporary jobs such as driving internet taxis and turning to online classes in cyberspace. The government has approved banking facilities to prevent adjustments, but they are not large enough to guarantee job security for all involved. Statistics show that in the best-case scenario, 40% of the capacity of Kish Island and Mazandaran hotels was filled with Iranian travelers. Statistics have shown that the corona has lost thousand billion dolar to the Iranian tourism industry by the end of the last summer, an industry referred to as an alternative to oil. Many people were talked about virtual tourism when COVID19 made travelers stay at home and left travel agencies, hotels, and ecotourism without travel. Some of the world's famous museums have turned to multidimensional films so that tourists can visit the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museums at home. Going to virtual tourism and visiting 3D museums were temporary accommodations that lost their charm in the first few months.

#### *2-1. Tourism mechanism*

The protocol for visiting museums was developed. However, it did not lead to the growth and visitation of tourists in museums. Creating jobs for those involved in the tourism industry, so that they can introduce tourist attractions to travelers without an office and reach them to their destination in the shortest time. Many people believe that the corona may drastically change the post-corona tourism industry and open the way for robots to host or transport cargo on planes and airports to the industry. The post-corona is a promising keyword that says that the corona, like

many crises in human societies may end and tourists may again wear scarves, hats and travel. But there is no exact date for the start of the post-corona .

### *2-2. The procedure of the evaluation*

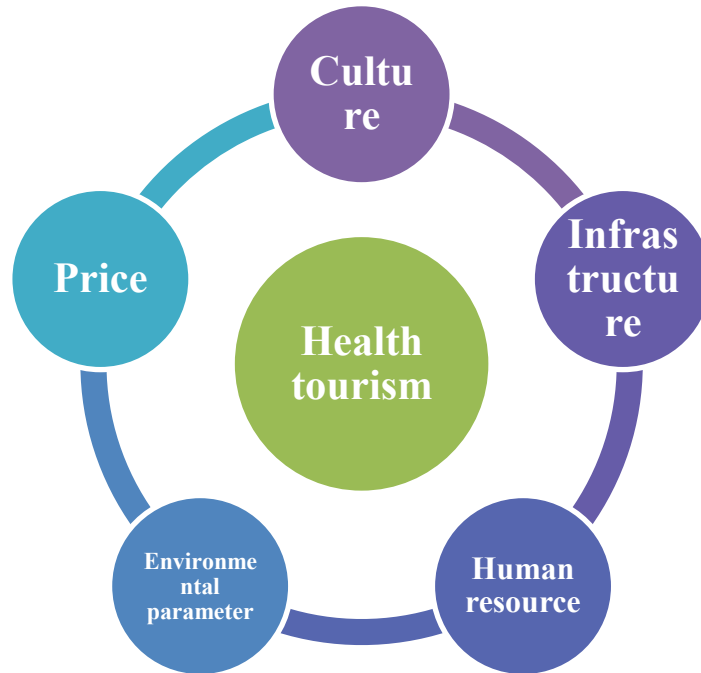
The current research examines the presentation of a health tourism business model for Asian country, taking into account competitive advantages in the post-Corona period. The world tourism industry is experiencing an unprecedented recession. Most tourist facilities and travel service offices are closed, transportation systems and airlines are sluggish, hotels and eco-tours are empty of passengers, and travel guides are unemployed and homeless .

The health tourism industry in 2019 was in the third place in the world ranking of profitability and was predicted to be rose to the top of the oil, petrochemical, and telecommunications industries by 2025. However, in the first days of 2021, has had an average reduction of 72% of tourist arrivals. Many people around the world are still unable to travel to their preferred areas because of Corona, either due to quarantine or other restrictions. Travel sensitivities and restrictions still exist in many countries like Iran and Cyprus. In addition to the support, exemption, incentive, restrictive, and controlling packages in the past few months, strategic decisions about vaccine purchase and general vaccination plans had been directly related to the lifting of tourism restrictions and beginning of travels and revival of the tourism industry. Undoubtedly, in the post-Corona time, trips are purposeful and based on the initial study, research, and consultations are based on experienced guides. The destination of the trip is based on research on issues such as the prevalence of corona during the epidemic, the persistence of the virus, the condition and health facilities, infection statistics, and even fluctuations in disease peak during different epidemics. These issues confirm that tourism in post-corona may face smart, sensitive, and program-oriented applicants. The concept of safety and security in travel in post-corona may have a more precise and in-depth definition of traffic rules on the roads, caution, and safety on the shores of rivers and seas. Travel in Corona time may have a conceptual model of controlled compliance and safe and secure health guidelines; Rural planning is done because it feels that health in the rural environment is more guaranteed than in crowded

and industrial cities. Ecotourism is facing more applicants and its statistics are peaking in post corona (Traskevich et al., 2021). It should be noted that traveling to a rural area is not just a holiday pastime, but an acquaintance with the art of living of people with their livelihood style have turned into a large museum of traditional arts and crafts. Therefore, in this study we try to present a new model of using new technologies to improve the health tourism in Asian countries especially in Iran and Cyprus. Therefore, all important aspect which influence on health tourism was presented and finally the major five important issues were discussed in detail.

### **3. Results**

Evaluation of the parameters which influence on the health tourism, one can say that during traveling to villages and small towns, tourists may encounter attractions that have never experienced. The travelers who choose to travel to the village, firstly become acquainted with the simple rural life, silence, tranquility away from the hustle and bustle of urban life, simplicity in social relations, rural occupations such as agriculture, and animal husbandry. Such experiences and motivations have turned Iran into a large workshop of traditional arts with a magnificent museum with the size of the whole country in front of tourists. A professional tourist chooses a village that is known for its historical culture, or special handicrafts and traditional arts in which an amateur tourist who always chooses a recurring destination has a different story. Such a traveler travels without a plan, chooses the simplest and usually the most expensive vehicle, provides accommodation preferably from his family and relatives, or chooses a permanent hotel. Although following the post-corona health guidelines, masking, and maintaining social distance as a public tradition and culture may remain an unavoidable social necessity, it may not necessarily be a criterion for a professional tourist.



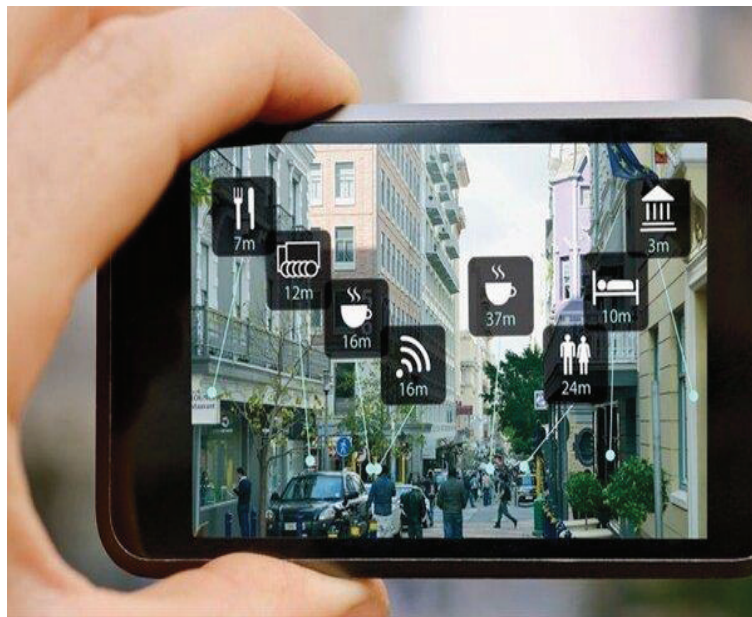
**Figure 1. The model of competitive advantages of the health tourism business in the post-corona period**

Figure 1 shows the image of the health tourism business model in previous researches includes the five main dimensions of culture, infrastructure, environmental factors, price and expert staff. If travel restrictions are an emphasis on health protocols, advertising a "do not travel" program with a focus on protecting people's health should be persuasive and informative in the future. Today, incentive policies to control the desire and motivation of travel can be planned by granting an incentive package with the recommendation of "Travel after Corona".

### *3.1. E-tourism; Cheap Itinerary and Home Business*

Today, information and communication technology as a new development strategy and a sign of development is one of the most important strategic tools that affect various economic, cultural, and social aspects of human life, especially in the tourism industry (Shahmirazadi et al., 2020). E-tourism is the skill of integrating information technology, e-business processes, and benefiting from new methods and tools to

provide and support tourism services to meet the needs of travelers with lower costs and higher quality. With this skill, all services provided by traditional tourism tools are available for tourists electronically and through the Internet as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The gadget used for controlling the corona virus and using technology**

The tourists can be directed and managed about the volume of travels, presence in tourist areas, and visiting historical-cultural, and recreational sites. While people stay at home, they are also educated, and persuasively the desire to travel to the post-Corona times is postponed. Implementing this program can turn the Corona threat into a golden opportunity to raise awareness and become more familiar with Iran.

Mobile health empowers people and gives them the ability to manage their health as activists with remote control solutions and satellite navigation technologies. Additionally, they may have a more independent life using mobile devices, self-assessment, and Self-diagnosis (European Commission, 2014, 2015). Mobile technologies can also facilitate various factors in the health science industry by orienting the patient-centered model toward community-based and integration and



real-life simulation and creating a demand-driven environment (Deloitte Center, 2012, citing Ameli, 2017).

*Justice in providing health services:* Nowadays, a significant number of people have access to health information and services through mobile phones. Mobile health has provided access to health services, skills, and information related to life support even in the most remote parts of less developed or developing countries having limited access to health information. It also has played an important role in developing the values of solidarity and equality (European Commission, 2015).

*Promoting a healthy lifestyle:* One of the benefits of mobile health is access to health-promoting services. In other words, mobile health promotes positive change for healthy behaviors (WHO, 2018). A professional tourist goes beyond the health rules and standards, safety in public vehicles such as passenger seat spacing and air conditioning, sanitary facilities in accommodation and modern catering restaurants (Khaksarshahmirzadi et al., 2017). Relying on abilities and potentials such as climate and nature, cultural and historical attractions, famous doctors, equipment, facilities, and advanced methods can help the prosperity of healthy tourism in Iran. Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting health tourism in Iran and Cyprus and to provide some solutions for its development using the new models, the results show that Iran has the potential of containing health tourism and provide unique opportunities. In any case, the corona and sanctions may end and societies cope with this disease.

*More efficient health care:* Mobile health can provide a more efficient and effective way to provide health care through better planning, timely communication, the reduction of unnecessary advice, and more qualified professionals. In addition, analysis of the metadata produced by mobile health can improve the effectiveness of health care and disease prevention (European Commission, 2014).

*Increase life expectancy:* Mobile health self-assessment and remote diagnostic tools are important in diagnosing health issues and provide data to health care providers so that they can intervene effectively promptly. Such an approach has the potential to improve the quality of life and even increase life expectancy (European Commission, 2014).

*Reducing public health costs:* The results of the WHO study in 2011 showed that mobile health in high-income countries goes to eliminates

mobile health care costs, but in developing countries, it is primarily for access provided for primary care (European Commission, 2014).

*Creating large databases:* Mobile health facilitates analysis of large volumes of health data. This data can be stored in large databases and can enhance healthcare research and innovation. E-tourism is an efficient tool that a travel enthusiast can use to travel to a specific place in a short time, at an optimal cost, and with a purposeful and guided program. This is the first step in creating taste and it is a pleasure to travel. Reports show that despite the deep damage to the tourism industry and its related industries, ICT companies have been very profitable (Khaksarshahmirzadi et al., 2017). However, the level of attention paid to the tourism sector in this field and the provision of economic and operational solutions can be examined and knowledge-based and beginner companies in the country can invest in this field. Iran ranks tenth in ancient and historical attractions and fifth in the world in terms of natural attractions.

### *3.2. Health tourism or medical tourism*

Medical tourism and the tourism industry in the world have long been considered a money-making industry. In fact, in the past, tourism was more active in the field of history and entertainment (Singh et al 2014). Tourists came to the country to see historical monuments or places of interest. However, this industry has undergone extensive changes and we are witnessing the existence of different types of tourism, including sports tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism, health tourism, and so on. Meanwhile, the industry that has been able to generate large foreign exchange earnings for leading countries in the medical industry, especially developing countries, is health tourism. During the Corona era, those agencies did not fire an employee, they would have taken out a loan, and otherwise, they had to close the company (Khaksarshahmirzadi et al., 2017). One of the consequences of the spread of the corona virus is the impact on economic activities. According to economic experts, the risk of the corona virus is so great that it can be considered the beginning of a recession in the world economy. The impact of the spread of the corona virus on Iranian businesses was investigated by surveying some economic activists. The results clearly show that due to the spread of this virus and the implementation of some strategies to control its spread, especially in the early months, some economic activities operated with

less capacity and some were forced to close. However, this trend has decreased with the reduction of restrictions in the following months. Also, the amount of sales, production, cash flow and the employment status of economic businesses underwent negative changes due to the spread of the Corona virus, so that the amount of sales, production and cash flow decreased in all three economic sectors, and some of the human resources of these businesses were either retrenched, were placed or experienced remote work and temporary absence, which indicates a negative impact on employment (Khaksarshahmirzadi et al., 2017).

### *3.3. Handicrafts and tourism complement*

The country's decision-makers must use the country's tourism and handicraft capacities and believe that they must forget about dependence on oil revenues. Handicrafts and traditional arts are the heritage of a country's culture and tourism. In another word, it should be noted that handicrafts and traditional arts artists are the creators of cultural heritage all over the world. This approach and action can be both a source of income for the country, and bring many attractions for job creation, entrepreneurship, and presence. In late 2019, with the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the emergence of Covid disease, travel restrictions were imposed on people by order of the WHO and subsequently governments. The leading countries in medical health tourism development immediately tried to help the business owners and employees of this sector by forming a fund and developing support programs. (Li et al., 2021). The complex conditions of the Covid epidemic have had devastating effects on the economy and a deep recession in the world tourism industry. According to global estimates, hotel occupancy rates have fallen sharply. About 120 million jobs in the tourism and travel sectors have been eliminated or maybe lost soon. External radiation therapy is irradiated to the target tissue from outside the body using advanced technological devices which can be performed using medical health tourism (Koshle et al., 2018). The radiation therapy device moves around the body without direct contact with the body. This procedure does not cause pain, so patient may not feel anything during the treatment. This treatment method, which is also called External Beam Radiation Therapy (EBRT), does not make person radioactive. Despite the negative effects of the spread of the corona virus, some problems in

businesses are inevitable. The problems related to the payment of service compensation, loan repayment and rent in a situation where production and sales have decreased are the consequences of the spread of this virus and affecting economic businesses, including receiving loans from commercial banks and microfinance companies. Or real people seems to be a suitable solution to deal with this situation (Abdellahi et al., 2018). It is also predicted that the international travel revenue reduces by about \$ 400 billion and the number of tourists worldwide decreases by 60 to 80%. In addition, the tourism industry may lose \$910 billion to \$1,200 billion by the end of 2020.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This research was conducted with the aim of presenting a model of competitive advantages of health tourism business in the post-Corona period. The research findings shows that the analysis of previous research results, interviews and surveys conducted with experts that the country's culture is prone to attracting health tourists. Because the native culture of hospitality, historical and cultural monuments and seasonal festivals held in this region can convey a good and cheerful feeling to the health tourism. The inherent attractions and capacities of tourism in Iran are the most important reason that we should not be disappointed with the future and revival of tourism. The importance of dual space health and medicine in the monitoring, diagnosis, and treatment of chronic diseases, the risks of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, and infectious diseases such as the new Coronavirus is clear. This capacity is an important opportunity to provide public cooperation for public self-care, skills services in the form of telemedicine, teleconsultation, inclusive treatment, and all categories related to smart virtual space.

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