

COLONIAL HISTORY OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN THE CARIBBEAN
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Figure 1: Bath Hotel, Nevis. Photograph by Jose Anjo of Antigua.

There is a long history of travelling to foreign countries in order to receive healthcare, a number of countries around the world position themselves in order to attract visitors for specific specialisations that the region is often known for. Oftentimes these countries are able to offer more accessible, less expensive and a more luxurious experience. Several Caribbean nations, such as Cuba, Barbados, Jamaica and Puerto Rico have been a part of this growing form of tourism.

The outsourcing of medical procedures to a foreign country, is often seen due to the prohibitively expensive cost of healthcare in the US, a growing number of American patients are travelling abroad for healthcare in search of less expensive and often more luxurious health care. "While the United States has long been a destination for relatively affluent patients from other countries, more recently it has become an exporter of patients"¹

It is important to note that there is a difference between health and medical tourism. Medical tourism deemed by Cornell is described as "... specifically involves 'medical interventions', these medical interventions could include surgical procedures such as transplant, cosmetic surgery or dentistry"² An example is Pre Castro Cuba, which was a known to be a safer alternative location for American women who wanted abortions. In contrast, health tourism would include spa and wellness treatments, both of which do not involve invasive medical procedures. Both medical and health tourism both fall under healthcare, as they improve or maintain the health of a patient through prevention, diagnosis, treatment or by providing a cure to a person's physical or mental ailment. This medical industry has also created a market for ancillary services, often by providing a high end service, the patient is guided through a maze of choices while providing support at key moments of the process, like transportation or outpatient care.

A way that both forms of healthcare are being marketed and

sold in order to be more palatable towards foreigners outside of the Caribbean brings up the exoticism and natural beauty of the Caribbean region. This is a tactic that has been used in the past and is still in use today.

An unique existing example of the colonial past of healthcare tourism in the Caribbean exists in Nevis. In the late 1770s, a hot spring located in Bath, a small village on the island near the southern end of Gallows Bay, was discovered by the British. An aristocrat named John Huggings then built the first hotel ever built in the Caribbean³ adjacent to the natural spring in 1778. Due to its purported health benefits, the spring water was said to contain minerals of medicinal value and is known to have cured rheumatism and gout. At the time, Nevis was the most popular island in the Caribbean for white people and the hotel was seen to be a "fashionable health resort"⁴ As more people visited the springs the number of people who learned of the health benefits did as well. "In England he had learnt of several people having been 'cured of the Leprosy' and Harcourt added further evidence of the water's health-giving powers. He attested to one of his party saving his hand from a severe gunpowder burn by 'twice or thrice washing and bathing it' while it took only a day for other men to heal their swollen legs. As to his own experience, he was 'speedily cured' of 'an extreme cough' 'by bathing in the bath, and drinking from the water'⁵ Notable dignitaries were recorded to have visited the attraction, including Lord Nelson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Prince William Henry.

The Architect had built the hotel out of stone, a material commonly used in the home country and other colonial territories at the time. Due to its sturdy nature, it withstood earthquakes, hurricanes for centuries. The design of the hotel had stone corridors, with wide verandahs that would allow for the cool breeze to enter the interior rooms with lofty vaulted ceilings, allowing spacious rooms to feel airy. The verandahs frame the views of the sea, the town, and the whole length of St. Kitts, allowing the visitor to have unobstructed views of the luscious greenery that the island has to offer. The hotel continued to be a popular destination for tourists

3 Eickelmann, Christine. 2021. The Bath House Hotel, Charlestown. Ebook. University of Bristol. <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emcee/bathhousehistory.pdf>.
4 Aspinall, Algernon, and J. Sydney Dash. 1914. The Pocket Guide To The West Indies And British Guiana, British Honduras, Bermuda, The Spanish Main, Surinam, The Panama Canal. Chicago, New York: Rand, McNally & Company.
5 Eickelmann

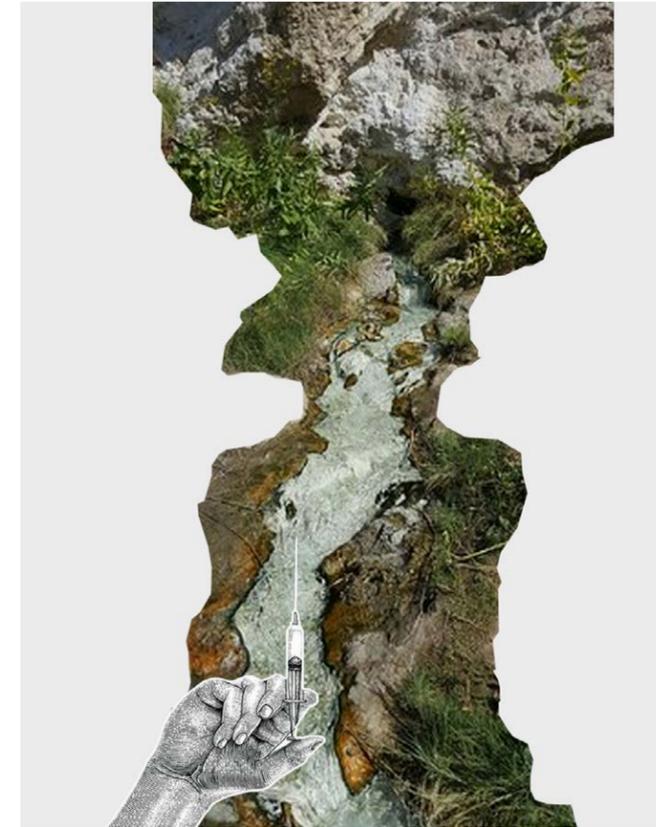


Figure 2: Medical Tourism Collage done by Joyce Zhou

for 60 years after opening, until it closed down. It reopened in 1912 and was shut down again in the 1940s. Today it is used as a

In the present, there are a number of examples of how the natural environment is being exploited for medical tourism. In Cuba, one of the earliest adopters of medical tourism in the Caribbean⁶ Due to the embargo trade that the Americans had put in, Cuba had positioned itself to attract medical tourists from Europe and Latin America. Which in turn had strengthened its political links to many countries. Since Cuba's socialist revolution in 1959, the government has made it a priority to bolster their health services by decentralizing it. By investing a large amount of resources to its health infrastructure and implementing an aggressive public health campaign Cuba's health infrastructure has impressive health indicators, the country has a comparable or better public healthcare system than many industrialised countries.⁷ While there was some concern of potential misappropriation of resources away from the Cuban population, the extensive public health infrastructure that was put in place prior to the marketing of medical tourism initiative minimizes these risks. As the revenue from foreign patients go directly to the Ministry of Health in order to be reinvested in the national system⁸ The perception of Cuba having a responsible social healthcare network is an additional benefit to selling Cuba as a healthcare treatment destination. Providing a quality of care that is accountable to a larger government body can assuage any worries Americans or other foreigners

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7 Cooper, Richard S, Joan F Kennelly, and Pedro Orduñez-García. 2006. "Health In Cuba". International Journal Of Epidemiology 35 (4): 817-824. doi:10.1093/ije/dyl175.
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may have about getting foreign treatment. For it should be noted that "potential medical tourists perceive and evaluate countries not only through their medical facilities and services but also through their economic and political stability, safety and security, and technological advancement"⁹ Top-quality medical centers, experienced medical staff, reasonably priced treatment packages, scenic natural attractions, and good weather are the major drivers of medical tourism to Cuba¹⁰ These are depicted in the marketing images of its health centres. La Pradera International Health Center's website, it touts that the hospital is "situated in a lush, tropical setting in a very peaceful neighbourhood"¹¹ The photos that depict the medical centre¹² resembles more closely to a resort than what we are used to seeing medical facilities to be, with its luscious palm trees shading parts of the clear blue pool that is overlooked by the rooms of the centre.

In Barbados, the country has achieved some success in positioning itself as a more affordable destination for infertility treatments, especially vitro fertilization (IVF) from the United States as well as the United Kingdom . The country itself does not have a large enough of a population to support such highly specialised care, the intention of the Barbados Fertility Center, and many others, always sought to market its services to those abroad. To date, the treatments are targeted at women or couples who cannot afford it in their home countries, or to those who lack access to such services due to long waiting times, age restriction or lack of insurance coverage. It is common for IVF centres to offer IVF holiday packages, this would include transportation, hotel accommodations, clinical testing and treatments, all costing often only a third of what UK and US clinics would charge. The language of the marketing of such institutions resemble what we have already seen, the marketing literature often cites the skill of the medical team as well as the "turquoise sea, dazzling white sandy beaches and exquisite weather, which create an ideal environment for stress free IVF"¹³ In this instance they use the natural tropical environment as a form of holistic treatment to sell to potential customers. The success rate of successful IVF treatments are due to the skilled doctors and healthcare professionals in addition to the country's tropical environment.

Looking at the other side of medical tourism in the Caribbean, many American and Canadian students are the target recruits for Caribbean medical schools. Interestingly, a similar demographic to the tourism industry that the region serves. Some major benefits to completing your medical school training in the Caribbean include a higher acceptance rate compared to American and Canadian medical schools and less of a financial strain. Another very visible pull factor that recruits will use is the geographic location and environmental benefits. The touristic discourse and images of these 'offshore' medical school websites are often used to highlight the beauty of the Caribbean region. These

9 Pappu, Ravi, Pascale G Quester, and Ray W Cooksey. 2007. "Country Image And Consumer-Based Brand Equity: Relationships And Implications For International Marketing". Journal Of International Business Studies 38 (5): 726-745. doi:10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400293.
10 Chaulagain, Suja, Melissa Farboudi Jahromi, and Xiaoxiao Fu. 2021. "Americans' Intention To Visit Cuba As A Medical Tourism Destination: A Destination And Country Image Perspective". Tourism Management Perspectives 40: 100900. doi:10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100900.
11 "La Pradera International Health Center | Cuba Medical Tourism". 2021. Cuba Medical Tourism | Information On Medical Tourism Services In Cuba. <https://www.cubamedicaltourism.org/la-pradera-international-health-center/>.
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Figure 3. Photo showing the back of La Pradera, a health care centre, La Pradera. 1857. Trip Advisor.

websites will have a photo gallery of white sandy beaches and sunsets, alongside classrooms and laboratories in order to convey and situate the ‘caribbean aesthetic’ in a healthcare setting.¹⁴As the American University of Antigua College of Medicine put it: “Location is surprisingly a lot more important than you think. When you’re studying medicine in Connecticut, you’re probably not thinking about brutal winters or having to dig your car out of the snow. At a Caribbean medical school, you’ll be studying in a tropical paradise and that means no worries about crazy weather fluctuations. Seriously, winter is the worst.” Incredibly, in addition to creating the image of a tropical paradise the school continues to then sell the typical amenities that are targeted towards tourists by highlighting the proximity the school was to touristic amenities and attractions.

As the previous cases suggests, medical tourism whether it be targeted towards potential clients or to future healthcare workers, is clearly targeted towards a specific non local demographic. This could have potential negative impacts on the Caribbean people. The fear of having financial and medical resources be diverted to

foreigners who have the ability to pay a large amount of money. Cuba has been an example of having a resilient existing public healthcare service, where public services have not been hindered by increase of medical tourism. Other Caribbean islands however, could face a different reality. Without national systems that are able to guarantee access to a certain level of care for their own population, the increased foreign investments in medical tourism can risk a distortion of care. However as the industry is still in its infancy, the full effects are yet to be seen.

As time goes on, these offshore healthcare facilities continue to grow in popularity and attract those who are looking for more accessible, cheaper or more luxurious medical procedures. We must identify the issues that medical tourism could bring up. Both the stakeholders and consumers must look beyond the marketing images of sandy beaches, crystal blue waters and open verandahs that promote a holistic approach of medical care and delve more deeply in the conversations about the healthcare system that allows for such care to exist.

¹⁴ Morgan, Jeffrey, Valorie A. Crooks, Carla Jackie Sampson, and Jeremy Snyder. 2017. “Location is Surprisingly a Lot More Important than You Think”: A Critical Thematic Analysis of Push and Pull Factor Messaging used on Caribbean Offshore Medical School Websites.” BMC Medical Education 17. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12909-017-0936-x>.

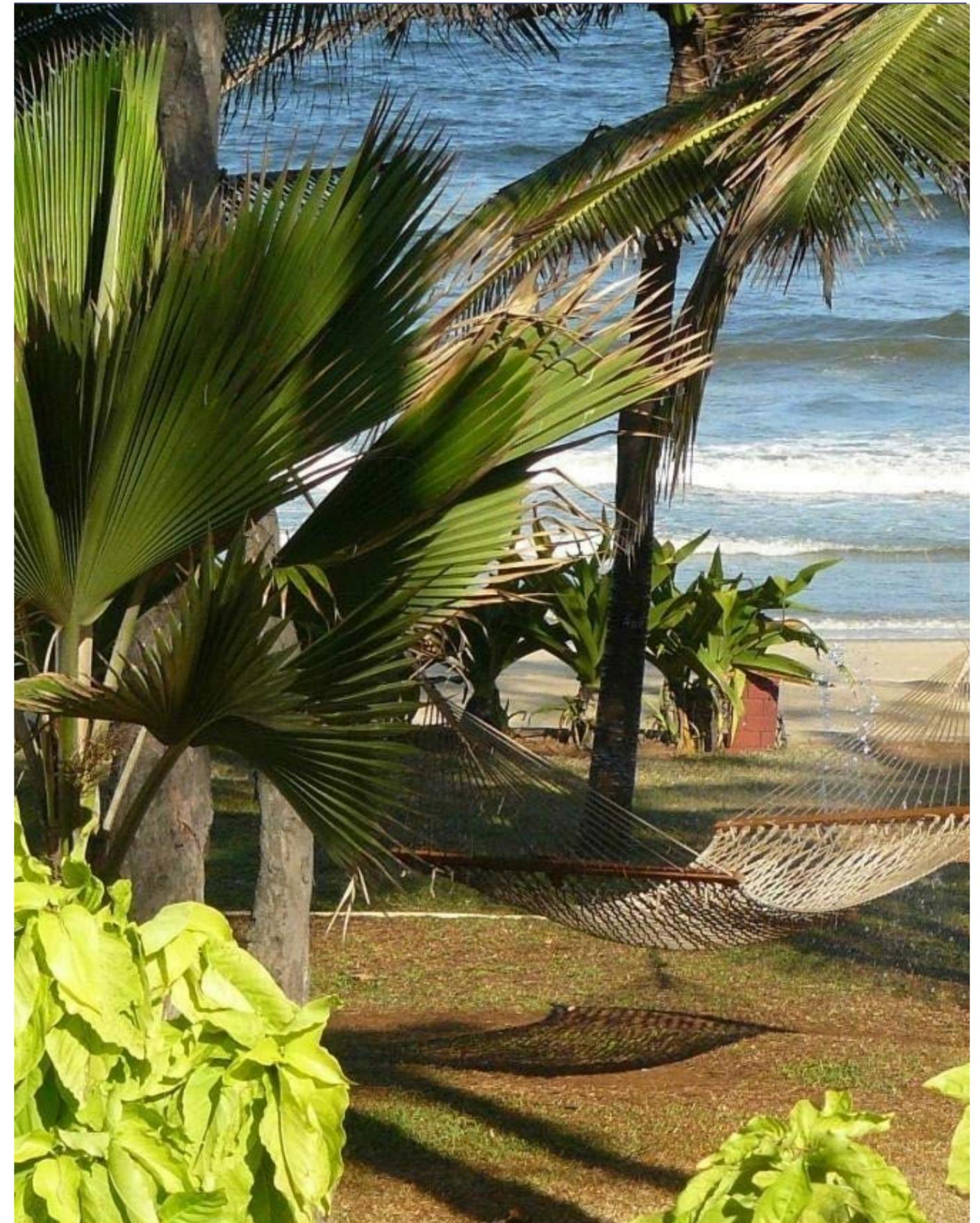


Figure 4: Picture of Beachside view from high end resort, depicting popularised image of medical tourism. <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1475-9276-9-24/figures/1>.