



MALAYSIA, WHERE DREAMS (FOR BABY) COME TRUE

TRAVELLING TO MALAYSIA FOR FERTILITY TREATMENT

“Malaysia is a multi-racial country known for our hospitality, sumptuous food and rich culture. With excellent doctors, state of the art facilities and a quality health care system, couples are making Malaysia a destination to make their dreams of building a family come true.”

Dr Navdeep Singh Pannu - Medical Director, TMC Fertility

A compelling conviction

I often say, “Nobody is infertile”. I don’t say this boastfully, I say this because I know there is a chance. I have been a Fertility Specialist for more than a decade and I have seen the medical advancements in the field grow exponentially.

In Malaysia, our capabilities are evident from the number of healthcare awards Malaysia has and continues to win in the field of fertility treatment. Our government is invested, as is the private health sector, and we have seen a strength-to-strength growth in the number of couples who come to our shores and return home with happy news.

We are on the cusps of achieving great things in fertility treatment and I am encouraged to speak about why Malaysia is a place where dreams for a baby could come true.

Beating the Odds

One in four couples, one in six couples – the ratios may vary by country, but I know for a fact that infertility is a real and present predicament for affected couples across the globe. A New York Times headline expressed it aptly, “Even when it ends with a healthy baby, a long struggle to conceive may exact a brutal toll”.

The emotional baggage of infertility draws a parallel only to the paramount but less-discussed effects the condition has on human rights. Every person has the right to attain the highest standard of physical and mental health; a right ascribed for by The World Health Organisation (WHO), and with this, the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of their offspring.

As a practitioner, I attest to the roller coaster and heartbreak moments that couples endure. The mental breakdowns and relationship breakups the malady unleashes, situations for which WHO recognises the importance of high-quality services for reproductive health. Such impetus has and continues to pave the way for great strides to be made in the field of fertility treatment.

On July 25, 1978, the birth of Louise Brown in the United Kingdom via the In vitro Fertilisation (IVF) procedure changed the landscape of fertility treatment forever. More than 8 million IVF babies and counting later, this Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) technique continues to achieve tremendous advancements.

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Travelling for Hope

With the passage of time, fertility treatment broke new arena. New methods have been developed bringing smiles to couples, but with this came long waiting lines and trumped-up costs of treatment. The unavailability of treatment facilities in some countries, or legal requirements that did not support artificially aided conception, necessitated the migration for fertility treatment to more hopeful pastures.

With time being a precious if not crucial consideration for trying couples, where chances significantly diminish with a woman's age, many are willing to cross continents, a reason for the rise in 'Fertility Tourism'.

Over the decade, the travel boon to countries that offered fertility treatment as well as a holiday came to be known as 'Fertility Vacations'. While the sun, sea and sand are a bonus, the focus is still to leave pregnant, and this is where Malaysia is making our mark.

The Malaysian Mark

Malaysia's health care system has undergone considerable transformation since our Independence from the British in 1957. Malaysians enjoy the synergistic and robust relationship that exist between our public and private medical sectors, a result of the government's relentless commitment to public health.

The 2019 International Living Annual Global Retirement Index ranked Malaysia first in the 'Best Healthcare in the World' category for our world-class healthcare services and sophisticated infrastructure, making special mention of the well-trained doctors and flawless communication in English.

In 2020 and for the fourth consecutive year, the Medical Travel Awards awarded Malaysia the 'Health and Medical Tourism: Destination of the Year' title. In the same year, Malaysian healthcare received 26 'Global Health Asia Pacific Awards', including the 'Stellar Covid-19 Achievement of the Year' category. These are just the latest from a string of awards Malaysia has achieved in the last ten years.

In receiving the Destination of the Year award, and adding to his gratitude towards all frontliners, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba reiterated Malaysia's "capability and philosophy of unity which has kept the nation thriving during these uncertain times", which is deeply reflective of our stable and peaceful environment.

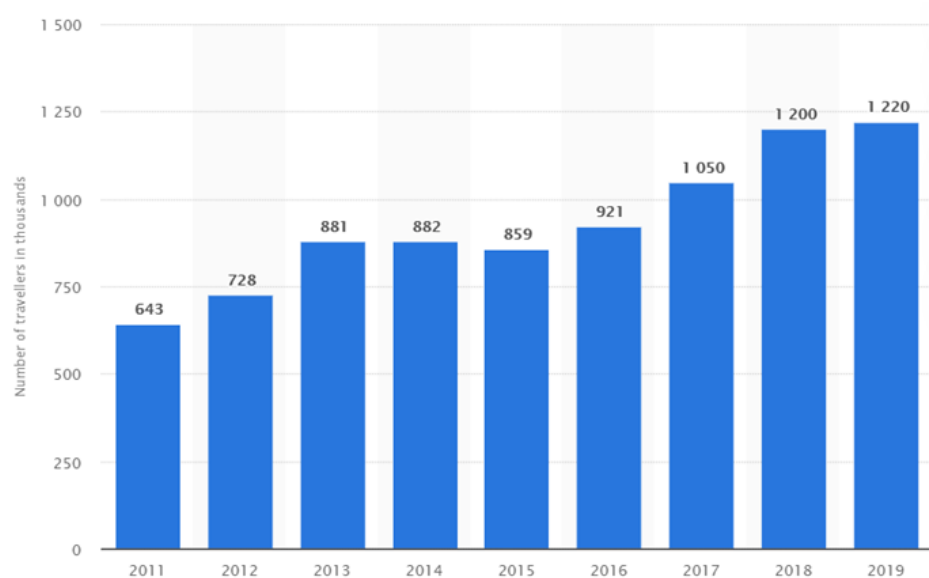


Chart 1: Number of people who travelled to Malaysia for healthcare from 2011 to 2019 (in 1,000s)
Source: Statista. (2021). Number of medical tourists to Malaysia 2011-2019.

While Malaysian hospitality augurs well for couples, it is my opinion, that the crux of the matter lies with our high success rates. Statistics from the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) support this, as figures show that clinical pregnancy is successful in one in two fertility patients (Source: Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council, 2020) in Malaysia.

Fertility centres in Malaysia offer a variety of fertility treatments, sperm and embryo cryopreservation, egg and sperm donation, all legal, safe and with favourable success rates.

Malaysia is also a recognised global halal hub since 1971, which I feel may be reason for why we are a preferred destination for Muslim patients. Our hospitals serve only halal menus and porcine-free medical products such as sutures and vaccines are available.

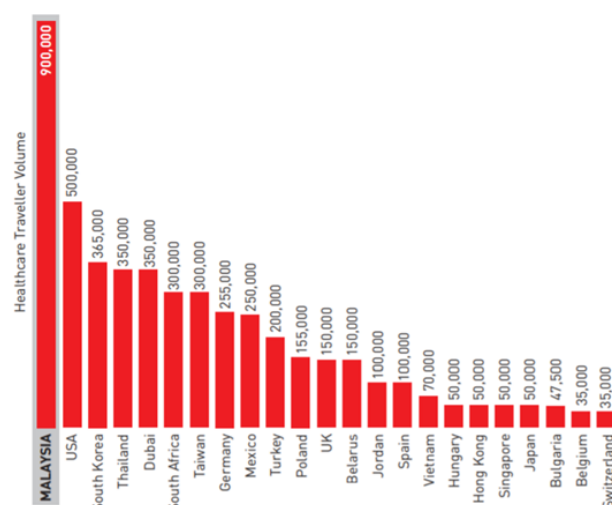
Malaysia's fertility treatment services are well governed by the Ministry of Health (MOH) which closely monitors the Assisted Reproduction Technologies (ART) development and specialists accreditation.

To ensure quality, MOH has implemented Standards for Assisted Reproductive Technology which require all medical centres that provide fertility treatments to have the qualified personnel, modern technical base and laboratory equipment, quality assurance of examination procedures, and report the results directly to the Ministry and special institutions.

I am confident though that what is really making the difference are the many ART advancements employed to obtain the best results. One treatment is Pre-implantation Genetic Testing (PGT) to determine which are the best embryos to be transferred. Another is Endometrial Receptivity Analysis that determines the best time frame for implantation of the embryos in women. Studies have shown the combination of these two procedures can potentially increase conception rates by up to 80%.

Fertility Tourism/ Travel to Malaysia

In 2009, 35 medical tourists arrived in Malaysia. In 2018, this number grew to 1.8million arrivals. Among these were a fast-growing number of arrivals for fertility treatment. The fertility treatment segment of the medical tourism market is projected to grow the fastest over the forecast period of 2021-2026 and expected to record a CAGR of 9.7%, as it attracts couples from neighbouring countries, especially those within a 6-hour plane ride.



Source: Medical Tourism Facts and Figures 2018, International Medical Travel Journal ("IMTJ")

Chart 2: Medical Tourists Arrivals in Malaysia in comparison to selected countries

Source: Medical Tourism Facts and Figures 2018, International Medical Travel Journal ("IMTJ")

We also use the Time-lapse Incubator to observe embryos at regular intervals to determine the best time for transfer, as a staple treatment offered to couples, to increase the chance of implantation of the embryo to the womb. High-Resolution Next Generation Sequencing for genetic screening is also readily available.

Ovarian Rejuvenation is a treatment available for women below the age of 40 who suffer from Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI), to attempt to increase the number of eggs that they have.

Couples are also able to undergo surgery for corrective procedures and be assured of the professional consultation they will receive from specialists who are up to date with global advancements.

We are in this together

Malaysia has aggressively built our expertise in fertility treatment to help Malaysians achieve their aspirations of building a family. In doing so, we are able to share this hope with the rest of the world and we do so at very affordable prices, often at no surcharges to foreign patients.

	US Cost	Costa Rica	India	Malaysia	Mexico	Singapore	South Korea	Taiwan	Thailand
IVF cycle, excluding medication	\$12,500	NA	\$3,300	\$4,200	\$5,800	\$9,450	\$7,500	\$4,600	\$4,000

Table 1: Cost of Fertility Treatment in Malaysia in comparison to selected destinations.
Source: Malaysia Healthcare Chronicles 2009 - 2019: A 10 year journey of Malaysia's healthcare travel industry

For more help and information, contact Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) who will guide you through the necessary processes and procedures. Alternatively, you could also contact the health care providers directly.

In many cases, consultations could happen over the phone or online before your arrival in Malaysia. Your stay could take anywhere between two weeks to a month, and thereafter, you can return home to continue your pregnancy under the care of your doctor.

Malaysia is a beautiful country, in every sense of the word. We hope that alongside your fond memories will be that 'positive' result you have been waiting for to make that little bundle of joy come true.

On the national front, the Malaysian government's conviction off and commitment to fertility treatment has paved the way for immense growth both socially and economically. I look forward to the ministerial foresight, executive stewardship and international collaborations that will forge Malaysia as an international Fertility hub.

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About the author

Dr Navdeep Singh Pannu is a Fertility Specialist whose effervescent personality and positive attitude continue to be a source of comfort to couples on their quest to build a family. He is the Medical Director of TMC Fertility and Women's Specialist Centre.

As a practitioner, Dr Navdeep shares his thoughts and industry insights through various speaking platforms, as he does writing on fertility matters. He is deeply passionate about making people realise that infertility is a societal concern, and that its solutions are incumbent on an entire global community.

In this article, he shares about a national agenda to address infertility that has been successful in assisting thousands of couples build their family; and one that is now bringing much hope to couples beyond Malaysian shores through a commitment to Fertility Travel/ Tourism.



Information Box

Why Malaysia?

Malaysia is fast on its way to become a world leader in medical tourism and here are the reasons why.

- Malaysian healthcare is regulated by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and treatments are reliable, safe and effective; and complemented by a comfortable and peaceful environment with ease of access.
- Malaysia offers excellent healthcare services at competitive prices due to government subsidies, favourable exchange rates and affordable costs of living.
- Malaysia offers medicines at affordable rates, access to advanced technology services and medical practitioners who are proficient in English and Mandarin.
- Malaysia is also known for its high-quality recuperation services, and providers offer patients a one-stop destination that takes care of pre-operative consultations to post-operative rehabilitative treatments and therapies.
- Malaysia is a global 'halal hub' and offers health treatments that cater to the needs of Muslim patients.

Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320646448_Medical_Tourism_Why_Malaysia_is_a_PREFERRED_Destination

Options to use:

TMC Fertility (TMCF), Malaysia is a well-recognised innovation driver with a network of centres, resident fertility specialists, highly qualified scientists and a team of experienced nurses and support staff nationwide.

Established in January 1994, TMCF has received various international awards, the latest being the International Fertility Clinic of The Year Award awarded by International Medical Travel Journal (IMTJ) which it has won for four consecutive years (2016- 2019). During the same period, the centre was also recognised by Global Health & Travel as Fertility Service Provider of the Year 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

In 2020, TMCF was awarded the Malaysia Fertility Company of the Year by Frost and Sullivan Best Practices Awards. The centre recently, in April 2021, won the Innovative Technology Award in the Healthcare Sector for Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Solutions awarded by the International Business Review Asean Awards 2020.

For more information and assistance, call 03-80699333 (TMC Fertility & Women's Specialist Centre, Puchong) or 03-62871209 (Thomson Hospital, Kota Damansara).

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