

The Shifting Face of Beauty—Southeast Asia's Aesthetic Surge Amidst the Middle East Conflict

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In the rapidly evolving landscape of 2026, Southeast Asia (SEA) has strengthened its position as a global titan in aesthetic medicine. Driven by a unique confluence of cultural, demographic, and technological factors, the region is no longer just a destination for affordable procedures but a pioneer in innovation. However, as the industry reaches new heights, it faces an unexpected catalyst: the escalating conflict in the Middle East.

The boom of aesthetic medicine in SEA is fueled by internal factors such as an increase in the ageing population and growing clamor for rejuvenation, higher social media engagement especially among Gen Z, and much improved medical tourism hubs, especially in Thailand and Malaysia. Gen Z in Indonesia and Vietnam has normalised cosmetic enhancements on TikTok, particularly minimally invasive procedures like fillers, skin boosters, and neurotoxins.

In the first quarter of 2026, the intensifying conflict in the Middle East has sent profound ripples through the global medical landscape. While human life is the primary concern, the economic and logistical implications for aesthetic medicine are significant.

In recent years, some Middle Eastern countries, like Dubai, have been well recognised as a primary hub for Middle Eastern patients seeking high-end aesthetics. With regional air hubs like Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and Doha facing disruptions, patients may search for safer alternatives in SEA

with credible healthcare reputations. In addition, disrupted key maritime corridors like the Strait of Hormuz may have an impact on cold-chain logistics for injectables and increased freight costs. Clinics may face stockouts of high-demand consumables and specialised medical devices if these disruptions persist beyond the existing 3-month inventory buffer. Surging oil prices will most likely drive up the cost of biomedical research and development as well as hospital and clinic operations.

The convergence of SEA's aesthetic maturity and Middle Eastern instability creates a complex "new normal". While SEA may see a short-term influx of international patients, the long-term sustainability of the industry will depend on supply chain resilience, regulatory strengthening and ethical governance. The rise of "botched" procedures due to unlicensed providers remains a critical shadow over the industry's growth, necessitating more robust legal frameworks to protect both domestic and international patients.

As we move through 2026, Southeast Asia's vision to develop and maintain "excellence in aesthetics" will definitely be challenged and put to the test, but hopefully SEA countries will maintain the agility in navigating a volatile global stage. I, Johannes F. Dayrit, and the JAPA editorial board are hopeful that despite global conflict, we will continue to foster collaboration and share meaningful scientific information among colleagues within the SEA region.