



## MEDICAL TOURISM: TREATMENTS, MARKETS AND HEALTH SYSTEM IMPLICATIONS: A GEOGRAPHICAL APPRAISAL IN INDIA

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### Abstract

The global growth in the flow of patients and health professionals as well as medical technology, capital funding and regulatory regimes across national borders has given rise to new patterns of consumption and production of healthcare services over recent decades. India has a potential to come-up as a popular tourist destination. What is required is a proper planning to market the country. A branding of the nation needs to be done. In present scenario not just a hillock, a heritage site of a forest is the mode of attraction for the tourist. Whereas, there are several other things coming up with a tense speed. And in this race "Medical tourism" is emerging as a major area attracting tourist not just from different parts of the country but internationally as well. With the experience of so many years in rendering brilliant medical services, India started attracting more and more people from all around the world and is slowly growing into global medical centre. Medical tourism is quickly becoming a way out to mix leisure with healthcare. And the thing which is attracting tourists towards India is the low cost treatment as compared to many of the western countries. Many of the research shows the medical treatment cost is low by an average of 40 to 60%, when compared to western standards. This is the cost of full package which includes accommodation, cost of treatment and accessibility (international). As the popular slogan that goes around in the industry says, India offers "First World treatment at Third World prices." India produces almost 28,000 to 30,000 doctors and nurses each year and is known worldwide for its competent and qualified professionals in this field.

**Keywords:** *Medical Technology, Medical Tourism, Healthcare and Facilities*

### Outlook in Medical Tourism -India:

#### 1.1 Objective

This research paper aims to look out various methods to develop the medical tourism strategies in Maharashtra for tourism destination.

#### 1.2 Research Methodology

Secondary data is accumulated through different sources like internet, newspaper, reference materials, magazines etc.

### Introduction

Medical tourism can be generally defined as a combination of cost control and tourism for clients (patients) requiring surgical and all other types of treatment. Medical tourism is also perceived as an interval of holidaying, and it covers broad range of medical and health care services. It combines leisure, pleasure, recreation, fun and enjoyment together with medical and healthcare. The concept of the medical vacations is to provide the tourists an opportunity to move out of one daily routine and could relax into a soothing environment. Here one could get both the things at a time i.e. enjoying the beach and mountains as well as could improve certain health issues. It is like rebuilding and innovating process on spiritual, bodily and sentimental levels (Connecting India Group). Coordinated services are offered by the hospitality sector to diversify tourism products from the general travel and tourism arena. Coordinated services can also be termed as an

all-inclusive package offered by travel facilitators to the medical tourist who wants transportation, trans-

#### Healthcare Tourism in India

Indian medical tourism market is approximately around US \$334 million (in 2004), accounting for around 1, 50,000 patients from foreign nations and growing at the rate of more than 26% p.a. Presently there are more than 2100 hotels in the A Grade cities which could accommodate approximately 1, 02,000 rooms, and is very well equipped to fulfill the growing needs of said segment. There are three basic players of this segment i.e. Hospitals, Travel agencies or tour operators and Hotels/accommodation centres. For the development and success of medical tourism an association of these three players is very essential. Because this results is a safe and secure medical tour package for patients. As travel agents could liaise with travel and medical insurance companies and could ensure a smooth line of execution. Not only this, but travels agents also helps in explaining and solving the problems of patients visiting India (for e.g. - improper transport facility, lethargic behavior sometimes, unhygienic surrounding etc. (Apollo Gleneagles). Additionally, as the hospitals TRADE the health services, the hotels are trading India as a tourism product by using the tactic of selling. Price is the unique selling point. The expenditure of an open heart surgery

is around US\$ 150000 in USA or US\$ 70000 in UK, whereas the expenditure of the medical services in India could be as less as US\$ 3000. The inbound tourist for an extensive healthcare service range, from traditional medical tourism to modern medical tourism has made all concerned and interested stakeholders to tap the unknown and unexplored potential. Both Government and private industry are separately or jointly taking initiatives to display India as best and ideal medical destination. As defined by Goodrich and Goodrich Medical Tourism is “the attempt on the part of a tourist facility or destination to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its healthcare services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities.” Wellness tourism is a field of healthcare focused on improving everyday health and state of wellbeing, rather than treating a disease or curing illness (Table 1). Medical tourism - an integration of medical pathology and surgery as well as wellness services, is a relatively new segment with a market potential estimated at US\$ 200 billion with the scale of growing into a global market. (ims health intelligence applied). It is now very much clear that medical tourism is boom in various countries. And all of them are trying to utilize it as an attracting too for tourist in order to enhance their economic growth. India naturally is enriched with a rich cultural heritage, tourism potential and reputation for age-old medicines. Therapies such as ayurveda, homoeopathy, unani, naturopathy, and yoga are a haven for wellness tourism. However, in terms of market share the country enjoys only two percent of the global wellness market which evidently points at the under-utilization of the potential and wellness quotient that India treasures. Fortunately, with regard to medical tourism, India is quite

**Table 1**

<b>Tourist Motivation</b>	<b>Typical Activity/Location</b>
Medical/cosmetic	Hospitals, clinics
Physical Spas,	spas , yoga
Relaxation	Beaches, spas, mountains
Experiential	Festival spaces
Psychological	Holistic centres focused on self-development and philosophical contemplation
Community oriented	Voluntary work, charity treks
Spiritual	Pilgrimage, new age events, yoga retreats

#### **Prospects in Medical and Wellness Tourism in India**

Of late the Indian medical sector has been witnessing remarkable growth. Based on surveys conducted by The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India and National Sample Survey Organization, the market size is

successful to a large extent in positioning itself as a viable destination for cost-effective and qualitative advanced healthcare (International Science Congress Association).

However, we should not forget the keenness and speed with which countries such as South Africa, China, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia are increasing and marketing their medical facilities to garner larger market shares and revenues. Therefore, it is important for India to rethink the marketing plans on medical and wellness tourism in terms of the services offered in the country. What is also very crucial is how the country is positioned to the world as a unique destination.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDICAL TOURISM**

Medical care can be dated back to 1500 BC with the Greeks laying a foundation stone in a temple in honour of their God of Medicine. Ever since, history has evidence of man travelling out of his country to avail himself of suitable medical treatment. Currently more than 50 countries are engaged in medical tourism with developing nations from Asia, Latin America and South Africa capturing a major segment in this field (MedVarsity). The reasons behind the growth in medical tourism evolve from the following: One, high levels of uninsured population (as in the case of USA); two, lack of private participation and high waiting times (as in UK); three, pressures of aging population and over-hospital stay (as in Japan); four, dearth of sufficient and cost-effective healthcare facilities across various parts of the world; five, elective surgery with privacy (such as Botox treatment, rhino plastic, liposuction, etc); and six, inefficient healthcare systems in developing and underdeveloped world (Indushealth).

likely to double from Rs 4500 crore in 2011 to Rs 10,500 crore (US\$ 2 billion) by 2015; the inflow of medical tourists which stood at 3 lakhs in 2009 rose to 8.5 lakhs in 2011 and is likely to touch 32 lakhs by 2015. India is attracting numerous tourist which is increasing regularly and mainly from the Middle East, Europe and

USA. States which are emerging as India's best medical tourism centres are majorly southern part of the nation (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra) and New Delhi. Health and wellness services in India that attract foreign tourist mainly include dental and eye treatment, cardiac, orthopedics, urology, plastic and cosmetic surgery, neurosurgery, laparoscopic surgery, kidney transplant and knee/hip surgeries.

### **Industry Initiatives**

Healthcare centres are establishing world-class infrastructure (both medical as well as patient-handling infrastructure) in order to attract foreign patients. The hospitals are also continuously improving technology by acquiring state-of-the-art equipment. The players are setting up comprehensive diagnostic centres, imaging centres and world-class blood banks. Some hospitals have established special wards for international patients as also special desks to handle international patients. Such special desk will have officials to handle transformation, travel needs and food and beverages needs. Some hospitals are also tying up with travel/tour operators to offer healthcare tourism as a single service package. Some hospitals project themselves operating in specialty fields, such as cardiology, ophthalmology, dentistry. Some of them have even set up specialty centres focusing on areas such as transplantation surgery. Few hospitals are organizing international conferences in such specialties, and invite medical fraternities from various countries with the objective of showcasing Indian skills in various healthcare segments. Such conferences also facilitate interactions with specialists and help enhance knowledge transfers.

Few hospitals have established international collaborations—both with developed and developing countries. Such collaborations are with hospitals, healthcare institutions, Government departments of health and family welfare, which would facilitate participation in healthcare delivery, treatment of their patients, and training of their medical/paramedical professionals. Such tie-ups have facilitated flow of patients from select countries to Indian hospitals, the treatment of which would be covered under the respective country's national health programmes. Few hospitals are in the process of continuous innovation of products, services and facilities in order to give better value to the customers as also to stand ahead in the competition. While doing so, some hospitals

are focusing on cost-effective-customer oriented technology. Quality, standardization and accreditation are associated strategies followed by some Indian players. Indian healthcare institutions are increasingly going for international accreditation of hospitals and clinical laboratories. Indian healthcare establishments are also adopting marketing and promotional strategies. These are through participation in international trade fairs/exhibitions, international medical symposia/conferences (Table 2). Internet is being used as an effective media of communication with international healthcare travellers. The concept of telemedicine is also being promoted by Indian corporate while providing healthcare services. Some hospitals use the concept of telemedicine to undertake their social obligations of supporting Rural Health Mission of the Government, and some of them use the concept to provide distance consulting and treatment advice to the patients abroad.

### **Government Initiatives**

The Ministries of Health and Family Welfare, and Tourism, Government of India are evolving an approach to give a strategic push to open the Indian healthcare sector to foreign tourists. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has set up a National Accreditation Board for Hospitals, under the Quality Council of India for accreditation of hospitals. The policies adopted by other countries for accreditation of their hospitals are also being examined to gain from their experiences in taking this forward in India. At the national as well as state level, Governments are participating in healthcare tourism expos abroad (Table 2).

Such performance is being utilized as a platform to meet international experts from the medical fraternity and brief them about the competence of Indian healthcare industry in general, and the healthcare sector in the state, in particular. Further, at the state level, several initiatives are taken by the industry in association with the state governments. In Karnataka, the state is in the process of setting up of a Bangalore International Health City Corporation, which would render patients a broad range of health care products and treatments. The Government of Karnataka is also in the process of leveraging the state's IT prowess to tap business in the healthcare outsourcing services. Leveraging IT skills would help enhance Karnataka's position in associated services to the growing healthcare sector such as medical bill, disease code, forms

dispensation and claims settlement. Karnataka is also bidding high on Telemedicine, a concept by which patients can be treated even when the doctor is geographically placed in another area. In Maharashtra, the Infrastructure Development and Support Act (MIDAS) of Maharashtra has granted the tourism activity with an industry status, with the objective of granting all the benefits and incentives that are given to other industries. This Act would also empower the Maharashtra Tourism Development Council (MTDC) as a Special Planning Authority, to procure and provide land available at various tourism estates without needing approval from the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). In Maharashtra, the

industry in association with the State Government has set up Medical Tourism Council of Maharashtra. Gujarat is India is among one of those few states who declared a separate policy for medical tourism, with the objective of creating integrated medical tourism circuits based on the location of specialty hospitals, heritage and culture. In addition, Gujarat is in the process of setting up a Healthcare Tourism Council in association with the healthcare and tourism industry. Goa, which has been for long attracting tourists for its beaches and exotic cuisine, has fine-tuned the hospitality skills into an art, and is now attracting healthcare tourists with focus on cosmetic treatments.

**Table 2:** List of Medical Tourism Fairs / Events Covered Under rMDA in Year 2011

Sr.No	Name of Medical Tourism Fairs and Event	Date	Places	Remark
1	Arab Health	24-27 Jan, 2011	Dubai	Middle East
2	ATM	2-5 May, 2011	Dubai	Middle East
3	Moscow, Medical and Health Tourism	16-19 March 2011	Moscow	CIS
4	Health Destination	15-16 April, 2011	London	UK
5	Africa	15-16 October, 2011	Ethiopia	Africa
6	World Travel amrt 2009	7-10 Nov, 2011	London, Africa	Europe
7	ITB Berlin	9-13 March 2011	Berlin, Jarmany	Europe
9	European Medical Travel Conference	27-29 April, 2011	Baarcelona, Spain	Europe

### Conclusion:

In order for marketing India as a unique destination for medical and health tourism, mainly it is important to make out the macro and micro issues facing the industry. It is essential for the Central and State Tourism Boards to coordinate and collaborate on a set of international standards. Enhancement of physical infrastructure in the country seemed to be another unanimous recommendation made by all the respondents from Hyderabad and Bangalore to connect the potentiality with the demand. Thus, the authorities are required to chalk out an effective marketing exercise in branding the country as well as executing marketing strategies in expanding the medical and wellness tourism market in the country. A nationwide promotion operation about 'Brand India' and its national standards could also be advertised both domestically and internationally.

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