

India: The Medical And Health Tourism Destination

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Abstract: Medical tourism is a grooming service sector in India. Medical tourism market is growing at the rate of 30% yearly, because Indian health service companies are providing world level medical services at very reasonable cost. Affordable quality healthcare facilities are being provided and promoted in India in comparison to America, Europe or neighbour countries. Henceforth, not only local tourists but foreign tourists are also being attracted as well. For the treatment of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, knee transplantation, naturopathy, artificial foot, etc. Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmadabad, Kerala, Jaipur are the most preferred medical destinations in India respectively. Medical tourism is increasing vastly in comparison to other service sectors due to the availability of medical visa facilities to SAARC countries on Electronic Travel Authority (ETA). As far as SAARC countries are concerned, many patients of Bangladesh particularly are coming to Kolkata every year for the treatment of their various diseases. There is a need to establish a separate legal body to promote and regulate the medical tourism more.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, ETA, SAARC, Medical Visa.

INTRODUCTION

Medical and health tourism, which is growing in popularity, is an emerging trend that combines two important service industries healthcare and tourism. It is a developing concept whereby people from world over visit countries outside their homelands for their medical and relaxation needs.

Medical tourism is a term used to describe the rapidly growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. It is also well known as medical travel, health tourism or global health care.

Services usually required by travelers include elective procedures as well as complex specialized medical treatment such as joint replacement (knee/ hip), surgeries mainly involve cardiac, dental, and cosmetic. However, virtually every type of healthcare, including psychiatry, alternative treatments, and convalescent care available in India.

The important motivators for travel and tourism may be cultural, social, interpersonal, physical, religious, and now the healthcare. It is one of the fastest growing service industries.[1]

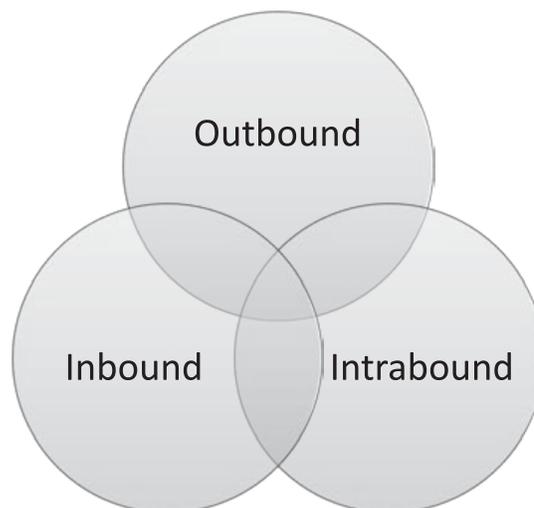
It is basically a method of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. This process

is being facilitated by the corporate sector involved in medical care as well as the tourism industry - both private and public. Medical tourism is an old concept dating back to ancient Greece. In many developing countries like India, it is being actively promoted by the government. A large draw to medical and health tourism is the expediency in comparison to that of other countries. Some countries that operate from a public health-care system are so taxed that it can take a considerable amount of time, sometimes even years, to get needed medical care.[2] India 's new generation witnessed an exponential growth of 25 to 35 percent annually in this field. This emerging sector is also contributing up to 5 percent in the GDP of the economy.

Medical and health tourism sector is perceptible as one of the fastest growing segments. With the fact that this area has so far been relatively unexplored, in India 'today' not only the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, but also the various state tourism boards and even the private sector consisting of travel agents, tour operators, hotel companies and other accommodation providers are all eyeing medical and health tourism as a segment with tremendous potential for future growth.[3]

Types Of Medical And Health Tourism

The medical and health tourism can be classified as follows:



Outbound: Patients traveling from home country to other countries to receive medical and healthcare.

Inbound: Patients from other countries traveling to home country to receive medical and healthcare.

Intrabound: Patients traveling within home country to receive medical and healthcare outside their geographic area, typically to a Center of Excellence in another state/region.

Factors Affecting Medical and Health Tourism

The making of a world-class medical and healthcare destination is complex. There are various factors for making of a world-class medical and healthcare destination as a whole. Following are the some important factors which really affect the destination, such as:[4]

- Government and private sector investment in healthcare infrastructure
- Demonstrable commitment towards international accreditation, quality assurance, and transparency of outcomes
- International flow of patient
- Potential for cost savings on medical procedures
- Political transparency and social stability
- Excellent tourism infrastructure
- Sustained reputation for clinical excellence
- History of healthcare innovation and success
- Unbeaten adoption of best practices and state-of-the-art medical technology
- Availability of internationally-trained, experienced medical staff

Medical and Health Tourism in India

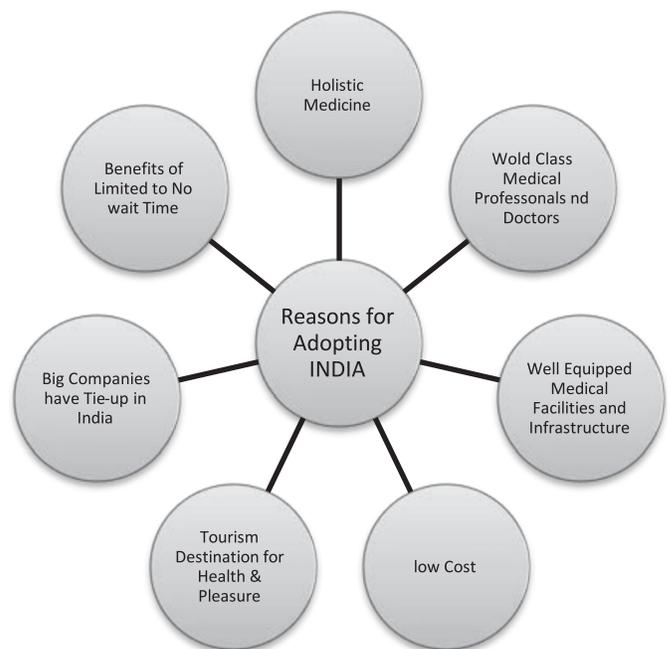
Tourism is one of the major mechanism of India's services and engines of growth, contributing around 6.11 percent of GDP and 10 percent of employment. This sector is estimated to create 78 jobs per million Indian rupees of investment compared to 45 jobs per million rupees in the manufacturing sector (Planning Commission, 2014). The annual growth of this sector is expected to be 8.1 percent during the last five years. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs), Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism (FEE), Domestic Tourists (DTs) and Foreign Tourist (FTs) visiting states and union territories of India and Outbound Tourists (OTs), witnessed significant growth in recent years.[5]

Among all the developing countries who actively promoting medical health tourism, India is considered a leader. Growing medical tourism is one of the major sources of earning foreign exchange for the country. From the ancient time India is famous for its traditional treatment therapies and has made a recognized place in the medical and health literature by providing yunani, aurvedic, allopathic, homeopathy and naturopathy advantage of medicine not only to the Indians but also to the foreigners.[6] History witnessed that millions of people have benefitted with

the medicinal wisdom of our skilled medical professionals. The ascendancy of India's medical tourism in recent years has encouraged a number of international pharmaceutical companies, NRI and foreign investors to invest in multi-specialty hospitals in the country. According to a report published by Punjab Haryana Delhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Indian Medical tourism Industry is expected to reach \$6 billion by 2018. In count the tourists visited India is estimated to rise to 4 lakh from the current 2.3 lakh.[7]

Many states of India are now recognized as well known health care centre for providing particular segment of medical treatment. India hosts about 1.27 million tourists from countries such as Canada, UK and US in addition to this people from our neighboring countries like Bangladesg, Sri Lanka and China also come across India to get medical care and in enjoy the local attractions of our country.[8] States like Kerala and Karnataka has emerged as a hub for ayurvedic treatment, and being specialized in healing the patient with the virtue of natural herbs. Here health tourist not only gain the cure for his disease but also enjoy the benefits of scenic scenes, natural beauty, spas, and pleasant weather. Further Uttarakhand of India is gaining importance for healing the patient with yoga and meditation and natural medicines. Delhi has emerged as a prime destination for cardiac care, orthopedic care, mental trauma, and other kind of allopathic treatment, and serving millions of domestic and foreign patient at that cost which is comparatively very low than that of their own country. Chennai is known for quality eye care.[9]

Reasons for Adopting INDIA as a Medical and Health Tourism Destination



i. Holistic Medicine

India is exploring its niche method of treatment and has developed many holistic health care centers in different states of India such as Kerala, Hyderabad, Jaipur and many more. The government has also established AYUSH, the department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy under the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970.[10]

Now days a special category of medical therapy was also practiced in India for the treatment such as Aromatherapy- involving the fragrance of oils derived from various plants, fruit and flowers; Hydrotherapy- involving treatment with the use of water, hot, cold, steam or ice: and Reiki- involving a significant spiritual element.

ii. World Class Medical Professionals and Doctors

As a matter of fact, India produces more doctors and surgeons per person every year than most European countries. The doctors of India are well known for their expertise and knowledge. Even they are invited abroad for many surgeries and expert views.[11]

iii. Well Equipped Medical Facilities and Infrastructure

The health care industry in India is amongst some of the best in the world, equipped with the latest in Medical Technology. Equipments, Facilities & Infrastructure in India is at par with international Standards. India offers vast range of medical treatments - from simple dental procedures to the complex cardiac surgeries.

iv. Low Cost

India is known mostly for its cost-effective medical treatments along with high standards in cardiology, orthopedics, nephrology, oncology and neuro surgery. In comparison to many western countries the cost for medical surgery in India is very low. It provides an economic satisfaction to many person to undergo these medical treatment which actually suits to their pocket. A large segment of foreign medical and health tourists come to India for treatment as it is rightly positioned as —first world treatment with third world prices. Cost differentials, due to low labour cost in India are significant.[12]

v. Tourism Destination for Health & Pleasure

Travelling to India for travelling and business is a common and known fact. India is not just one of the world's oldest civilizations; it is the land of diversity. India's impressive variety of history and culture, from the ancient Gangetic Kingdoms to the present state, scenic sights, tastes and textures. From a bustling cosmopolitan city to the quiet countryside, hill station or a beach resort, India has destinations, which offer a backdrop of unmatched beauty for tourist destination with a unique amalgam of tradition & culture, beauty & nature, style & splendor, warmth, feelings & courtesies comfort & Convenience.[13] This is one land where the ancient and the modern co-exist. India has literally everything that a visitor wants to experience and offers people a complete holiday both physical and mental.

vi. Big Companies have Tie-up for Medical Facility to their Employees in India

In an effort to save on insurance fees, several companies have begun to promote foreign healthcare options. With rising and often unreasonable costs in the home country healthcare system foreigners are becoming more inclined to seek cheaper alternatives. In some cases, employees do not have to search for such alternatives on their own because their employers are offering them incentives to receive care from a foreign institution. Employees can go abroad to countries such as India, in order to receive medical services for prices that are at least half of what the procedure would cost in their home country. It fosters the market and demand of medical tourism in India.[14]

vii. Benefits of Limited to No Wait Times

Many patients in countries with national healthcare face long wait times for important surgeries. By undergoing medical tourism, patients can bypass long wait times.

Promotion of Medical and Health Tourism in India

The medical and health tourism activity is mainly driven by the private sector. The Ministry of Tourism has only the role of facilitator in terms of marketing this concept and promoting this in the key markets. The Ministry of Tourism has taken several steps to promote India as a medical and health tourism destination, which are as follows:

- i. Brochure, CDs, and other publicity materials to promote medical and health tourism have been produced by The Ministry of Tourism and have been widely distributed and circulated for publicity in target markets.
- ii. Medical and health tourism have been specifically promoted at various international platforms such as World Travel Mart, London, ITB, Berlin, Arabian Travel Mart, etc.
- iii. Medical visa' has been introduced, which can be given for specific purpose to foreign tourists coming to India for medical and health treatment. Up to two attendants who are blood relatives are allowed to accompany the applicant under separate Medical Attendant visas.
- iv. An international road show on medical and health tourism was organized in Nairobi, Kenya & Dar-E-Salaam, Tanzania, in association with FICCI in August-September, 2012.
- v. An international exhibition road show on medical tourism India Medical Tourism Destination 2013 (Nigeria) was organized at Abuja on September 23rd and at Lagos on 25th & 26th September, by FICCI in association with The Ministry of Tourism.
- vi. The Ministry of Tourism also supported the National Conference-Health Tourism in India, organized by PHD Chamber of Commerce, held at New Delhi on 26th July, 2013.
- vii. Further, efforts have been made to improve the basic infrastructure including aviation sector to ensure smooth arrival and departure of health tourists. Government is inviting and attracting foreign and private investors to

invest in the infrastructure, aviation, and pharmaceuticals sectors to provide best quality of services to their customers.

viii. The Union Ministry of Tourism has also included Medical Tourism under the Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme. The Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance under MDA to the following approved Medical Tourism Service Providers:

- Representatives of Hospitals accredited by Joint Commission International (JCI) and the National Accreditation Board of Hospitals and Healthcare Services (NABH).
- Medical Tourism facilitators (travel agents/tour operators) approved by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Challenges and Issues involves in Medical Tourism in India

The various challenges and issues facing by medical tourism industry in India are as follows:

- i. No/ Weak support from Government or major initiative taken by them.
- ii. Lack of required coordination between various intermediaries/ players in the industry. It includes hospitals, airline operators ,hotels and authorized agents.
- iii. Lack of uniform pricing policies of hospitals across India.
- iv. The pessimistic perceptions about India with regards to hygiene, sanitation, pollution and standardization.
- v. Strong competition among various players of other countries.
- vi. Lack of insurance policies in this sector.
- vii. No proper awareness and education with regards to this sector.
- viii. No proper authorization and regulation system for hospitals and hotels.
- ix. Lack of authorized government agents and help centers for the proper assistance to the medical guests.
- x. Deficiency in the domestic & FDI investment in health infrastructure.
- xi. Inequalities in healthcare access between private and public systems may increase.
- xii. Health care challenges in booming India. Every year near about 29000 doctors graduates in our country but in realities most of them want to work in cities and in result millions of general people walk miles to see physician.
- xiii. This may induce domestic brain drain from public to private sector.
- xiv. In comparison to other countries availability of hotel rooms in India is considered to be most difficult task. In addition, the cost of lodging is another encumbrance to the medical tourists from middle-level international travelers.
- xv. Public-Private Partnership is required to provide quality

services to attract potential healthcare seekers from various countries.

Concluding Remark

India is a key player in this industry as it has many advantages over other countries. Its cost is the lowest in the world. It has many internationally recognized hospitals. Most of its doctors and medical staff have world class exposure. The rich cultural heritage and has innumerable tourist attractions makes India a favorable destination of medical fitness and inner peace. In addition to this wide variety of alternative medicines serves a advantageous role in this field.

But also there is a need to establish a separate legal body to promote and regulate the medical tourism more. The government should take steps in the role of a regulator and also as a facilitator of private investment in healthcare. Mechanisms need to be evolved to enable quicker visa grants to foreign tourists for medical purposes where patients can contact the Immigration Department at any point of entry for quick clearance. The various issues discussed earlier like brain drain and PPP, coordination between various players would also be resolved by taking necessary corrective action by the government.

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