



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism over the years has cropped up to be the world's largest and fastest growing industry. It is a major phenomenon of the modern society. Medical tourism is the travel of people to a place other than where they normally reside for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment in that country. Traditionally, people would travel from less-developed countries to major medical centres in highly developed countries for medical treatment that was unavailable in their own communities. The recent trend is for people to travel from developed countries to third-world countries for medical treatments because of cost consideration, though the traditional pattern still continues. Tourism in reality is not an industry but an activity. It is defined as an activity that takes place when people move to some other place for leisure or for business and stay at least for 24 hours. Tourism in India is the largest service industry, with a contribution of 6.23% to the National GDP and 8.78% of the total employment in India. Health tourism is a wider term for travels that focus on medical treatments and the utilization of healthcare services. It spans a wide field of health-oriented tourism ranging from preventive and health-conducive to rehabilitation and curative forms of travel; the latter being commonly referred to as Medical tourism. India is a leading player in the medical tourist/healthcare Facilitation industry. It is increasingly emerging as the destination of choice for a wide range of medical procedures. This article examines the emerging of medical tourism in India and what challenges it's faced in the context of globalization. How these could be overcome by enhancing the facilities of medical tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

"Tourism is like a bridge. It connects our countries and it can connect people to each other". - Karen Che

Medical Tourism can be broadly defined as provision 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 (Sankaranarayanan, 2005). Tourism in reality is not an industry but an activity. Tourism over the years has cropped up to be the world's largest and fastest growing industry. It is a major phenomenon of the modern society. Tourism development is perceived by almost all countries of the world as a potent ingredient in the economic development strategies. It is considered as a quick and easy means to economic development. Medical tourism is a new concept where two important service industries are joining to attract people who seek healthcare services located beyond the geographical territory of their country. It provides state of the art private medical care in collaboration with tourism industry to patients from other countries.

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Price offered is highly competitive when compared to those prevalent in the western countries. The CII McKinsey Report mentions that the Medical Tourism market has been growing at the rate of 15% for past 5 years and by 2012, Rs. 10,000 crore will be added to revenue of the private players. Nowadays, a lot of factors draw people towards tourism. The important motivators for travel and tourism may be cultural, social, interpersonal, physical, religious, and now the healthcare. Tourism has much scope for development and it can develop certain localities, states and even countries. A planned and integrated development of tourism can act as a catalyst of the economic development of any country, more so, the developing country, like India. Karnataka is one of the fastest growing states in India. It is the home to some of the most high tech industries. Bangalore, in particular, has become the home to some of India's premier hospital establishments. It is booming in terms of IT, BT and now, MT, that is medical tourism. As Karnataka is endowed with a combination of high – tech super - specialty hospitals on the one hand, on the other, it has a number of natural beauty spots. Further, the air conditioned weather of Bangalore suits any foreign patient coming here for a treatment. The surgeries in high tech hospitals are followed by rejuvenation therapies in Ayurvedic spas or other Indian systems of medicine.

Concept of Medical Tourism

Medical Tourism refers to an increasing tendency among people from England, the U.S., and many other third world countries, where medical services are either very expensive or not available, to leave their countries in search of more affordable health options, often packaged with tourist attractions. Health and medical tourism is perceived as one of the fastest growing segments in marketing Destination India today. While this area has so far been relatively unexplored, we now find that 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 health and medical tourism as a segment with tremendous potential for future growth (Fernandes, 2003).

The service sector is playing an ever increasing role in the global economy. One of the most significant contributors to this growth has been tourism. It is linked with a host of ancillary services such as, travel and hospitality, good infrastructure in areas like, telecom, financial services, and entertainment. A host of organizations are involved in promoting tourism today. They are, -WTTC at a global level, regional associations such as PATA, national tourism promotion boards and state level tourism development corporations. An effective and successful development of medical tourism includes the development of four major sectors.

Tourism marketing is a specialized activity that requires professionalism. Long term planning, market research analysis, and a clear sense of direction in tourism marketing can step up tourist arrivals and increase the time and money spent by the tourists. Thus, the need of the hour is a sustainable tourism development. It is boom time for India's Tourism and Hospitality sector. Driven by a surge in business traveller arrivals and a soaring interest in the country, India has emerged as a leading tourist destination. The world's leading travel and tourism journal, Conde Nast Traveller, ranked India amongst top four preferred holiday destinations in the world. There has been a significant increase in the number of foreign tourist arrivals since 2006. Foreign tourist arrivals which were 3.92 million in 2005 rose to 4.43 million in 2006 showing an increase of 13 per cent. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism also showed a phenomenal growth from US\$ 5.73 billion in 2005 to US\$ 6.56 billion in 2006, achieving an increase of 14.6 per cent.

During the first five months of 2007, the number of foreign tourist arrivals was 2.02 million, representing a growth rate of 12 per cent over the corresponding period last year. Foreign exchange earnings showed a growth rate of 17.4 per cent over the same period, earning US\$ 3.07 billion as against US\$ 2.61 billion last year. Due to an increase in the number of foreign tourists, India's share in world arrivals which was just 0.37 per cent in 2001 rose to be 0.53 per cent in 2006. The importance of tourism for the Indian economy is evident from the fact that it contributed to 5.9 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product and provided employment to 41.8 million people. The medical tourism industry in India is expected to grow blissfully in the coming years and expected to grow at 27% during 2009-2012 (RNCOS, 2010).

Significance of Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is an industry which combines healthcare services attached with tourist services for the foreign medical tourists. Patients from one country travel to some other country seeking specialized health services. Their travel is often combined with leisure and tourism. One of the major impacts of the New Economic Policy of 1991 on the Indian economy has been the globalization of healthcare services. Since 1995 many foreign nationals are travelling to India to seek quality healthcare facilities at low costs. Hence, India has become the destination for medical tourism not only for medical tourists from neighbouring countries, but also for patients from Europe, USA, Australia, Africa and Arab countries. According to CII McKinsey Report, by 2012, medical tourism will add Rs.10,000 crores of revenue to the private players. This industry has been growing at the rate of 15% and is expected to reach 30%.

Health Tourism, also known as Medical Tourism, is believed to become a major driver of economic growth in India, as first world patients, driven out of their own systems by high costs and crowded conditions, look for cheaper and better options for medical care (Hasan, 2003). India has proved itself to be a major destination for health tourism, healthcare outsourcing and medical back office support. Main medical destinations for patients from the US, UK, Canada and other European countries are India, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. India is a leading player in the medical tourist/healthcare Facilitation industry. It is increasingly emerging as the destination of choice for a wide range of medical procedures. There are numerous advantages of going to India for treatment. Some of the advantages of going to India for medical treatment are:

Advantages of going to India for Medical Treatment

- Internationally accredited medical facilities using the latest technologies
- Highly qualified Physicians/Surgeons and hospital support staff
- Significant cost savings compared to domestic private healthcare
- Medical treatment costs in India are lower by at least 60-80% when compared to similar procedures in North America and the UK
- No Wait Lists
- Fluent English speaking staff
- Options for private room, translator, private chef, dedicated staff during your stay and many other tailor-made services
- Can easily be combined with a holiday/business trip.

Major Treatments attracting foreign medical tourists to India

- Bone marrow transplant
- Cosmetic Surgery
- Dialysis and Kidney Transplant
- Gynaecology & Obstetrics
- Joint Replacement Surgery
- Neurosurgery & Trauma Surgery

- Osteoporosis
- Preventive Health Care
- Refractive Surgery
- Vascular Surgery
- Cardiac Care
- Nuclear Medicine
- Urology

Medical tourism in India holds great promise as an industry for the near future. Its contribution to the revenues of private healthcare organizations and G.D.P. is increasing steadily. However, a focused strategic framework needs to be put in place in order to tap foreign medical tourists. Medical tourism services – a term used to define the influx of foreign patients for health and medical care packaged with tourism; are gaining momentum across countries such as Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Cuba, Argentina, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

Growth of Medical Tourism in India

In India, the rate of growth of Medical Tourism is tremendous compared to other Asian countries. A combination of three vital factors, quality, availability and cost has been instrumental in kindling the unimaginable growth of this sector in our country (Shankari, 2007). According to a study conducted by Confederation of Indian Industry and McKinsey in 2004, some 150,000 foreigners visited India for treatment, with the number rising by 15 % a year (RNCOS, 2003). India has emerged as the second fastest growing (8.8%) tourism economy in the world over 2005-14 (World Travel & Tourism, 2004). There has been a growth of more than 13% in foreign tourist arrivals at 3.9 million during 2005, up from 3.4 million foreign tourists who visited India during previous year. Foreign exchange earnings from foreign tourists were up by more than 20% at \$5,730.86 million in 2005, up from \$ 4,769 million earned the previous year.

Conclusion

Many foreign medical tourists visit the hospitals like, Narayana Hrudayalaya, Apollo, Wockhardt, Columbia Asia, Hosmat, Ramaiah Memorial, and Sagar for curative treatments. They are cardiac, knee replacement, hip surgeries, rhinoplasty, etc. Some hospitals are also known for cosmetic treatments. On the other hand, there are spas providing holistic, and Ayurvedic treatments like, Ayurvedagram, Jindal centre of Naturopathy, Golden Palms Resort, and Soukya Spa which offer variety of Ayurvedic, siddha, and naturopathy treatments. Number of foreign medical tourists to India has been continuously increasing from 2000. The literature survey conducted and the primary data collected through various hospital visits reveal that the most important contributing factors for the growth of medical tourism are, the availability of world class medical facilities in Indian healthcare organizations, success rate of various operations, lesser cost of the treatments, and availability of Ayurvedic treatments. Medical tourism as a phenomenon is just over a decade old in India. Yet, with the help of the above discussed marketing strategies, it can become a very important medical tourism destination, attracting foreign patients from all over the world.

The cost of treatment, excellent climate, infrastructure, range of medical packages and levels of expertise have all helped to make India one of the most important medical tourism destinations in the world.

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