

INDIAN MEDICAL TOURISM - THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism in simple terms implies reasonably priced, private medical care that works in collaboration with the travel industry. Medical tourism is a therapeutic and healthy exercise for people from abroad traveling to India for healthcare and surgery. They even end up paying less in India compared to what they'd pay in their own country for the treatment. India is one of the most favorable tourist destinations in the world. Medical treatment combined with tourism has come into effect, from which the concept of Medical Tourism is derived. India excels in providing quality and cheap health care services to overseas tourists. The field has such lucrative potential that it can become a \$2.3 billion business by 2012, states a study by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). In 2004, some 150,000 foreigners visited India for treatment, and the numbers have been rising by 15 per cent each year. Medical Tourism in India is expected to bring revenue of over \$4 billion by 2018. The object is to capitalize the low cost advantage and to attract medical tourists by providing attractive packages. Indian tourism industry should work more in collaboration with the Government department in order to implement the concept- "*Atithidevo Bhavo*" (a guest is a form of God) as major marketing mantras.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is travel for recreational or leisure purposes. The World Tourism defines tourists as people who “travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”.

The UN also derived different categories of tourism by combining the 3 basic forms of tourism: Internal tourism, which comprises domestic tourism and inbound tourism; National tourism, which comprises domestic tourism and outbound tourism; and International tourism, which consists of inbound tourism and outbound tourism. Intrabound tourism is a term coined by the Korea Tourism Organization and widely accepted in Korea. Intrabound tourism differs from domestic tourism in that the former encompasses policymaking and implementation of national tourism policies.

Recently, the tourism industry has shifted from the promotion of inbound tourism to the promotion of intrabound tourism because many countries are experiencing tough competition for inbound tourists. Some national policymakers have shifted their priority to the promotion of intrabound tourism to contribute to the local economy. Examples of such campaigns include “See America” in the United States, “Malaysia Truly Asia” in Malaysia, “Get Going Canada” in Canada, “Wow Philippines” in the Philippines, “Uniquely Singapore” in Singapore, “100% Pure New Zealand” in New Zealand and “Incredible India” in India.

Indian tourism

The tourism industry in India is substantial and vibrant, and the country is fast becoming a major global destination. India's travel and tourism industry is one of the most profitable industries in the country, and also credited with contributing a substantial amount of foreign exchange. This is illustrated by the fact that during 2018, eighteen million tourists visited India and spent US \$19.4 billion.

The Indian tourism industry has recorded a 12 per cent growth in 2018, as far as foreign exchange is concerned. The inbound tourist flow has been increasing and is expected to increase at a rate of more than 15% in the coming four to five years. Though foreign tourists are the prime source of growth but complimentary sectors also make a good contribution to India's GDP. The health care sector that attracts foreigners on a large scale especially from developing countries can boost Indian contribution to global tourism, which is now less than 1%.

Several reasons are cited for the growth and prosperity of India's travel and tourism industry. Economic growth has added millions annually to the ranks of India's middle class, a group that is driving domestic tourism growth. Disposable income in India has grown by 10.11% annually from 2011-2018, and much of that is being spent on travel. The tourism industry of India is based on certain core nationalistic ideals and standards which are: Swaagat or welcome, cooperation, information, infrastructure, facilitation, cleanliness and defense of the tourist.

Medical tourism in India

Medical tourism in simple terms implies reasonably priced, private medical care that works in collaboration with the travel industry. Medical tourism is a therapeutic and healthy exercise for people from abroad traveling to India for healthcare and surgery. They even end up paying less in India compared to what they'd pay in their own country for the treatment.

India is one of the most favorable tourist destinations in the world. Medical treatment combined with tourism has come into effect, from which the concept of Medical Tourism is derived.

India offers a range of world quality Doctors, hospitals and treatments at a fraction of world costs with comparable success rates and service levels, the additional warmth and natural caring that comes with India's millennia heritage. Indian hospitals are becoming known internationally for standards of health care delivery, comparable to the best in the world. India has the technology and the skilled super specialists coupled with sound infrastructure and professional management, nurses and paramedical staff to take on international competition.

India excels in providing quality and cheap health care services to overseas tourists. The field has such lucrative potential that it can become a \$2.3 billion business by 2012, states a study by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). In 2004, some 150,000 foreigners visited India for treatment, and the numbers have been rising by 15 per cent each year.

India is in the process of becoming the "Global Health Destination" owing to the following advantages:

- ✚ The cost of medical services in India is almost 30% lower to that in Western countries and the cheapest in South-east Asia. (see cost comparison of medical services in India and U.S in next section)

- ✚ Language is a major comfort factor that invites so many foreign tourists to visit India for medical and health tourism. India has a large populace of good English speaking doctors, guides and medical staff. This makes it easier for foreigners to relate well to Indian doctors,
- ✚ Indian hospitals excel in cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery, joint replacements, transplants, cosmetic treatments, dental care, Orthopaedic surgery and more.
- ✚ The medical services in India include full body pathology, comprehensive physical and gynecological examinations, audiometry, spirometry, Chest X-ray, 12 lead ECG, 2D echo Colour Doppler, gold standard DXA bone densitometry, body fat analysis, coronary risk markers, cancer risk markers, high strength MRI etc.
- ✚ All medical treatments and investigations are done using the latest, technologically advanced diagnostic equipments.
- ✚ The cost of Infertility treatments in India is almost 1/4th of that in developed nations. The availability of modern assisted reproductive techniques, such as IVF, and a full range of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) services have made India the first choice for infertility treatments.

Cost comparison of medical services in India and U.S (US\$):

	United States	India
Bone Marrow Transplant	250000.00	150000.00
Liver Transplant	3000000.00	2000000.00
Heart Surgery	400000.00	190000.00
Orthopedic Surgery	800000.00	400000.00

Dental Procedure	Cost in USA (\$) General Dentist	Cost in India (RS) Top End Dentist
Smile designing	-	20,000
Metal Free Bridge	-	10,500
Dental Implants	-	5000
Porcelain Metal Bridge	1,800	3,000
Porcelain Metal Crown	600	1500
Tooth impactions	500	2,500
Root canal Treatment	600	3,000
Tooth whitening	350	800
Tooth colored composite fillings	200	500
Tooth cleaning	100	300

	USA	Europe	India
Rhinoplasty	\$6,000	\$5,500	\$1,700
Face Lift	\$ \$15,000	\$12,500	\$4,500
Breast Augmentation	\$8,000	\$7,500	\$3,900
Breast Reduction	\$9,000	\$8,000	\$3,700
Complete Liposuction	\$13,500	\$11,000	\$4,800

Despite its limitations, the opportunities, now become an integral part of Indian service Industry. India's age old tradition provides a holistic health care by connecting mind, body and spirit with yoga, meditation, ayurvedic and other Indian systems of medicine. Such unique value proposition attracts a large number of foreign tourists which contributes 6.7 % of the GDP and which is estimated to reach 8.5% of GDP by 2018.

Recommendations

- ✚ As per a study, compared to Singapore and Thailand, we are far ahead with respect to technology and the skills required. The only aspect where we are lacking is marketing as there is lack of information about our strengths abroad.
- ✚ With regards to standardisation and accreditation, our hospitals are not at par with the global standards. So our hospitals have to gear up to meet the international standards particularly the private hospitals.
- ✚ Hospitals in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have standards set up by their respective governments. We should also have our own standards, which should be strictly implemented by all concerned. Once this is achieved, we can then later go for international accreditation.
- ✚ Lack of proper co-ordination between medical fraternity and travel industry is a prime impediment. The government should ensure speedy clearance, immigration and visa facilities. Also we should involve medico tour operators who are specialised in handling medical tourists from abroad so that they could focus on this category of tourists effectively.
- ✚ For international relations and health affairs at the health ministry, a special department has to be created within the ministry to focus solely on developing the medical tourism sector in India.

- ✚ To attract multi-linguistic people, the government, with cooperation of private sector, has to make the arrangements to develop multi-linguistic human resource in our country.

Conclusion

However, Medical tourism is the next best thing for India. According to the CII McKinsey report, Medical Tourism in India is expected to bring revenue of over \$4 billion by 2018. The object is to capitalize the low cost advantage and to attract medical tourist by providing attractive packages. Indian tourism Industry should work more in collaboration with the Government department in order to implement the concept- "*Atithidevo Bhavo*" (a guest is a form of God) as major marketing mantras.

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