

Medical tourism in India: An Overview

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Abstract

India is emerging as a new medical tourism destination for people all over the world. Medical tourists from around the world who are looking for cutting-edge and cost-effective medical care favour India. It is the fact that treatment costs are greater in many developed and developing countries. The healthcare sector in India is collaborating with the tourism business to provide improved treatment to individuals all over the world and create a better atmosphere for them to recover quickly. The progress of India's software industry has resulted in a massive transformation in the health-care sector. This study is presenting an overview of medical tourism in India to develop the framework and a relevant healthcare delivery model in the field of medical tourism considering the patient preference.

Introduction

People are increasingly travelling from rich countries to third-world countries for medical care, despite the fact that the conventional pattern still exists (*Muthyam, 2017*). Medical tourism is growing as a result of a variety of factors, and poor countries are increasingly attempting to benefit on these flows by combining medical care with actual tourist activities. This business relationship between healthcare and tourism is a quickly increasing and profitable industry that has piqued the interest of health researchers (*Behrmann & Smith, 2010*).

India has established itself as a leading destination for medical tourism, healthcare outsourcing, and back-office assistance. India, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia are popular medical destinations for patients from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other European countries. In the medical tourism/healthcare facilitation market, India is a major player (*Muthyam, 2017*). Health-care demand is on the rise all across the world, and it's tied to economic progress, which leads to higher income and education (*Pocock & Phua, 2011*). The expense of treatment in developed countries is quite costly, and patients must also wait an extremely long time for treatment or surgery. As a result, people are looking for other viable options (*Khan, 2015*).

Literature Review

Medical tourism refers to persons travelling to a nation other than their usual residence in order to receive medical treatment there. People from less-developed countries used to travel to major medical centres in developed countries seeking care that was not available in their own areas (*Muthyam, 2017*). The quality of services has a direct impact on medical tourists' perceived value, and what medical tourists perceive has a direct impact on client satisfaction, which affects patients' attitudes and behaviour. It has a positive correlation with medical tourists' loyalty and return (*Heydari et al., 2019*). It will be difficult to gain a competent empirical understanding of the nature of this industry. Any new medical tourism research should situate its questions and analyses within the larger context of global health sector transformation, which has been characterised by

declining public or non-profit care provision and rising private sector involvement for several decades (Hopkins et al., 2010).

The balance between the commercial and public sectors in mixed healthcare systems, such as those found in Malaysia and Singapore, has a significant impact on the social security role of healthcare for the population(Leng, 2010).Medical tourists' satisfaction is determined by a variety of factors, one of which is satisfaction with the supply of services. The low cost of treatment, pleasant environment, well-developed infrastructure, wide selection of medical packages, and high level of skill have all contributed to India's status as one of the world's most prominent medical tourism destinations (Muthyam, 2017).

Medical tourism in India

The medical tourism business in India has a great deal of potential, owing to the inexpensive cost of high-quality treatment (Khan, 2015). From the perspective of tourists, the most essential factors are those linked to the process of providing services, the technique of providing services, and the behaviour of medical employees(Heydari et al., 2019).

There are numerous elements that contribute to India's status as a medical tourism hub and desirable destination. India has a highly qualified English-speaking workforce, which offers it an advantage in this market. With all of this in mind, India is quickly becoming one of the most popular health-treatment destinations, offering lower costs and shorter wait times(Khan, 2015). There are several points has been discussed below are listed regarding medical tourism in India:

a. Domestic and foreign tourist visits to states and union territories

Table 1 presents the data of domestic and foreign tourist visits to various states and union territories during the year 2013 to 2017. There has been a continuous increase in domestic and foreign tourist visit. The year 2017 registered a growth of 2.3% and 8.8% in domestic and foreign tourist visit over the year 2016.

Table: 1
Domestic and foreign tourist visits to states and UTs during 2013 to 2017

Year	Tourist Visits		Annual growth rate	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
2013	1142529465	19951026	9.33 %	9.24 %
2014	1282801629	22334031	12.88 %	11.94 %
2015	1431973794	23326163	11.63 %	4.44 %
2016	1615388619	24714503	12.81 %	5.95 %
2017 (P)	1652485357	26886638	2.30 %	8.79 %

Source: Author compilation from Indian tourism statistics, 2018

b. Foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) from tourism India

For the FEE’s, tourism is the most important sector in the country. As per the monthly estimates prepared by Ministry of Tourism, FEEs from tourism in India in 2017 in ₹ terms were 177874 crore as compared to 154146 crore in 2016 registering a growth of 15.4 % in 2017 over 2016. In US \$ terms, FEEs from

tourism in 2017 were US\$ 27.310 billion as compared to US\$ 22.923 billion in 2016 with a growth rate of 19.1%. The FEEs from tourism in India, in terms and US\$ terms, during 2013-2017 are given in Table 2.

Table: 2
Foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) from tourism India (2013 to 2017)

Year	FEE in ₹ terms		FEE in US\$ terms	
	₹ crore	% change over previous year	US\$ Million	% change over previous year
2013	107563	12.5 %	18397	2.4 %
2014	120367	11.9 %	19700	7.1 %
2015	134844	12.0 %	21013	6.7 %
2016 ^{#1}	154146	14.3 %	22923	9.1 %
2017 ^{#1}	177874	15.4 %	27310	19.1 %

Source: Author compilation from Indian tourism statistics

^{#1}Provisionally revised estimates (based on final FTA received from BOI).

India healthcare spending (2013-2018)

Date	Per Capita (US \$)	% of GDP
31-12-2013	56.1184	3.7494
31-12-2014	57.0743	3.6196
31-12-2015	58.9169	3.5957
31-12-2016	60.6026	3.511
31-12-2017	69.3201	3.535
31-12-2018	72.8345	3.5442

Source: www.macrotrends.net

c. Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India according to purpose of visit

Ministry of Tourism is publishing data of Visa type by nationality instead of purpose of visit data. Accordingly, information on percentage distribution of the FTAs by the Visa Type has been compiled year-wise and presented below in Table 3.

TABLE: 3
FTAs in India according to purpose of visit (2009-2013)

Year	Business & professional	Leisure, holiday & recreation	Visiting friends and relatives	Medical treatment	Education	Others
2009	15.10%	57.50%	17.60%	2.20%	-	7.60%
2010	18.60%	24%	27.50%	2.70%	-	27.20%
2011	22.50%	26%	24.90%	2.20%	-	24.30%
2012	22.50%	27.10%	27.20%	2.60%	-	20.60%
2013	20.90%	30.30%	25.90%	3.40%	1.90%	17.60%

Source: Bureau of Immigration, India, cited by Indian tourism statistics

Year	Tourist Visa	OCI@	Business Visa	Medical Visa*	Student Visa#	Others
2014	58.30%	16.70%	14.90%	2.40%	1.20%	6.50%

Source: Bureau of Immigration, India, cited by Indian tourism statistics

*: Includes Medical Attendant

#: Includes Research or training Visa, Research Visa, Student Visa Transfer

OCI @ : Overseas citizen of India

Years	Business & professional	Leisure, holiday & recreation	Indian Diaspora	Medical	Others
2016	15.58%	61.48%	14.54%	4.85%	3.55%
2017	8.36%	38.05%	51.03%	0.33%	2.22%

Source: Bureau of Immigration, India, cited by Indian tourism statistics

d. Average duration of stay of foreign tourist arrivals in India

Tourism is one of the largest foreign exchange earners. The importance of tourism as an instrument for economic development and employment generation has been recognised in the world. The benefits of tourism can be enhanced either by increasing the number of tourist or by increasing the duration of stay of tourist in the country. The nationality of data on duration of stay is very important and useful in targeted promotion of tourism in the source markets. The average duration of foreign tourist in India (21 Days reported by Indian tourism statistics,2018)is significantly high and hence there is scope of exploring the availability of variety of tourism products, culture, cuisine, etc.

TABLE: 4

Average duration of stay of foreign tourist arrivals in India

S.No.	Area	Average duration of stay (in Days)
1.	North America	31.0 Days
2.	Central and South America	20.5 Days
3.	Western Europe	21.0 Days
4.	Eastern Europe	18.5 Days
5.	Africa	28.8 Days
6.	West Asia	18.9 Days
7.	South Asia	15.7 Days
8.	South East Asia	15.9 Days
9.	East Asia	18.2 Days
10.	Australasia	27.8 Days
11.	Not classified elsewhere	34.8 Days
12.	All source countries	21.1 Days

Source: Bureau of Immigration, India, cited by Indian tourism statistics

India is the world's most popular medical tourism destination (Khan, 2015).Because of its high-quality medical services, low costs, and simplicity and affordability of travel, India has recently become a popular destination for medical tourists (Sajjad, 2015). The Indian hospital business is currently a growing industry with a 20% annual growth rate and fierce competition to stay competitive and recruit patients from other nations. The hospital industry needs to shift its perspective and adopt a more customer-centric

approach(Chakraborty & Poddar, 2018). Ayurveda, yoga, and homoeopathic treatments are available in India in addition to allopathic treatments. Many Indian states, such as Kerala, Uttarakhand, Goa, and Udaipur, are well-known for these types of treatments (Khan, 2015).

The findings of the investigations revealed 137 effective elements that influence medical tourist satisfaction. Services, people, information, expenses, physical conditions, and health equipment were all divided into six categories. The service domain had the majority of the influencing elements among these categories (Heydari et al., 2019). India was one of the first emerging countries to see a drain of health personnel, and in the 1970s, it was the largest source country for doctors, with many of them stayed in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States(Sajjad, 2015). Author proposes a medical tourist typology based on the extent to which medical treatments play a significant role in visitors' motivations for and behaviour while on vacation. Author classified the tourist in five category i.e., a mere tourists, a medicated tourist, medical tourist proper, a vacationing patient and a mere patient (Cohen, 2010).

“According to Beerli and Martin (2004), natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, culture, history and art, political and economic factors, natural environment, social environment and the atmosphere of the place play an important role. Lower cost, less waitingtime, infrastructure, skilled medical and nonmedical staff and facilities are thus very important.”

- Chakraborty & Poddar, 2018

Based on literature, medical tourist customers expect pickup service upon arrival, a quick admission process, attention to their needs, counselling at the hospital upon arrival, enthusiastic, proactive, and sensitive staff, assurance of confidentiality, coordination between departments, quick and responsive nursing care staff, and so on. Despite the above-mentioned medical tourist expectations, there are a few drawbacks to medical travel in India, including medical malpractice issues, travel costs, cultural and language barriers, insurance coverage, post-operative recovery, legal paperwork and permits that can be tedious and/or serve as a hindrance to patients, and so on.

Advantages of medical tourism

India is emerging as a new medical tourism destination for people all over the world. Medical tourists from around the world who are looking for cutting-edge and cost-effective medical care favour India. It is the fact that treatment costs are greater in many developed and developing countries. Major medical treatments that draw international medical tourists to India such as bone marrow transplant, cardiac care, gynaecology & obstetrics, dialysis and kidney transplant, neurosurgery & trauma surgery, preventive health care, nuclear medicine, cosmetic surgery, joint replacement surgery, refractive surgery, vascular surgery, urology, osteoporosis, etc. (Muthyam, 2017). Medical tourism refers to when a treatment is combined with a vacation. Due to the following factors emerges from literature, India has an advantage as a medical tourism destination:

- a. India has world-class educational and research institutions such as All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER, Chandigarh, Christian Medical College & Hospital (CMCH) Vellore, National Institute of Mental Health & Neuro Sciences, Bangalore, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences & Research, Kochi, Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, Vardhman Mahavir

Medical College & Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi, Maulana Azad Medical College, Delhi, etc. and they produce world-class doctors, surgeons, and nurses.

- b. One of the most important aspects that has made medical tourism a viable alternative for people from nations with high medical costs is cost savings. The costs of some difficult medical procedures, such as organ transplants and cardiac surgery, are exorbitant. In comparison to developed countries, India provides state-of-the-art equipment and highly advanced therapy at a fraction of the cost.
- c. Accessible medical care for life-threatening diseases such as tumours, cardiac surgery, cancer, organ transplants, etc.
- d. The majority of medical practitioners and surgeons working in Indian hospitals are highly qualified and trained and have enough ability to deal and communicate effectively with foreign patient.
- e. There are world-class pharmaceutical companies in India that provide best drugs at affordable price as compared to developed nation.
- f. Medical visas are issued on a priority basis by Indian embassies in many countries, that leads to a surge in medical tourism in India.
- g. In India, affordable accommodation is easily available along with advanced healthcare facilities.
- h. Medical tourism, often known as a medical vacation, allows patients to visit a new location and learn about a new culture. India has rich cultural diversity and companies working in medical tourism sector provides healthy vacation packages that allow medical tourists to explore tourist destinations while obtaining best medical facilities.
- i. Medical tourism allows people to receive immediate medical attention in India with little to no wait time. Medical tourism is a cost-effective timely solution for patients who want immediate medical assistance but are unable to receive it in their home country's facilities.

Practical implication

This study will aid policymakers and health professionals in destination nations in providing the facilities and environment required for medical tourism to thrive.

- a. **Policy makers:** Government can play a role of facilitator and ensure separate budget shall be created for medical tourism, insurance facility, and attract foreign direct investment through summit. Moreover, separate governance and policymaking at cluster level and state level and ensure the establishment of quality control board. Human resources are required at large scale, proper planning and efficient execution shall help in capturing the unexplored area.
- b. **Service provider:** Each service provider must target specific segments at the firm level. Competitive advantage could be gained through application of knowledge management with respect to markets, consumers, and competitor on consistent basis. Better servicing would be possible if customers and items demanded were more homogeneous.

Contribution of the study

This study is providing the details of domestic and foreign tourist visits to states and UTs, foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) from tourism India, foreign tourist arrivals in India according to purpose of visit, and average duration of stay of foreign tourist arrivals in India with comparative statement. This article is going to provide the basis to develop the framework and a relevant healthcare delivery model in the field of medical tourism considering the patient preference.

Conclusion

Today, health and medical tourism is regarded as one of the fastest expanding areas in Destination India marketing. Medical tourism in India has a lot of potential as a business in the near future. Its contribution to private healthcare organisation income and G.D.P. is gradually increasing. However, in order to tap foreign medical tourists, a defined strategy framework must be put in place (Muthyam, 2017). In the emerging medical tourism industry, governments are notably taking a prominent marketing and promotional role (Pocock & Phua, 2011). Tourism development that is planned and integrated can work as a catalyst for economic development in any country, particularly in developing countries like India (Muthyam, 2017).

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