

## Importance of Development of Medical and Wellness Tourism in India in today's Borderless World

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**Abstract:** Tourism is one of the service industries in India which has showed tremendous growth since last few years. In the year 2014 the total contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP is 6.8%. Having advantage of low cost many people from other countries are getting attracted to India as the best destination for medical treatment and relaxation. Many medical tourist had visited India since last few year, it is expected that the number will increase to around 320 million by 2015. According to the study conducted by SRI International, India is expected to have 20% gains annually by 2017 in wellness tourism. As world is seeing India as one of the favorite destination of medical and wellness tourism it is very important to make development in the medical and tourism industry as this sector has the tremendous potential to make huge financial contribution to the Indian economy.

**Key word:** medical tourism, wellness tourism, challenges, advantages.

### 1. Introduction:

Medical and wellness tourism is one of the growing sectors in India. It is the health care industry that has developed tremendously since last few years. Medical and wellness tourism is one of the types of the tourism product offered by Ministry of tourism of India. Medical and wellness tourism is usually considered as similar meaning as it is related to health, but in actual it differs from each other. Medical tourism means people travelling from one country to another for obtaining medical treatment. Wellness tourism means people traveling not because they are sick but for the purpose of promoting health well-being through physical, psychological spiritual activities.

Increase in population, and development in technology has led to competition, stress and hence there has been an increase in the various health problems physical as well as mental, such as heart attack, cancer, stress full life etc. Earlier it was a trend that people from less developed country move to the developed country for health treatment. But today the scenario has changed, people from the developed country tends to travel to the third world country like India, Thailand, Cost Rica, Malaysia etc. for health treatment and the reasons behind the trend is the cost consideration. The medical cost in the countries like U.S and U.K is more as compared to the treatment in other third world country.

India being a land of culture, spirituality, growing new technology and having medical experts professional, has a great scope of development in the medical and wellness tourism sector and hence the researcher has selected the topic 'Importance of Development of Medical and

*Wellness Tourism in India in today's Borderless World'*

### 2. History of Medical and Wellness tourism:

Medical and Wellness tourism has a long history worldwide. Medical care can be dated back to 1500BC where Greek laid the foundation stone in a temple in honor of their 'God of Medicine' It evolves early as 4200BC where the Sumerians recovered their health by bathing in thermal springs and fountains located in temples. In 18<sup>th</sup> century spa and sanitariums were considered as a form of wellness tourism.

India known for its rich culture has 5000 years long history of medical and wellness tourism. During this period there was a constant stream of medical travelers and spiritual students visited India to seek the benefits of their alternative healing methods.

### 3. Objective

1. To study the importance of medical and wellness tourism in India.
2. To find out the factors that help medical and wellness tourism develop in India
3. To study the initiative taken by ministry of tourism of India in order to promote medical and wellness tourism.
4. To suggest various measures to be taken for the development of medical and wellness tourism

### 4. Research Methodology:

This research is based on the secondary data. Secondary data is collected from various sources like research journal, articles, internet, and newspaper.

## 5. Medical and Wellness Tourism in India:

India has more than 5000 year old civilization, history, culture and religious diversity. India has made a growth in tourism sector and from the various categories of tourism, medical and wellness tourism had become very popular in recent time worldwide.

The World Tourism Organisation defines tourist as 'people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place of visit'.

As stated earlier medical and wellness tourism has an ancient history, India has been promoting medical and wellness tourism earlier through Yoga, Ayurveda healing, Spa etc. People all over the world used to visit India for treatment through this method. Thereafter homeopathy, allopathy was introduced which was an addition to the health treatment process.

India has become one of the popular destinations of medical and wellness tourism. Currently there are 25 hospitals that are on the list of Joint Commission International (JCI). Early USA, UK and other European country was considered as place for healing various major diseases. These countries were known special destination for surgeries like heart, hip replacement, spinal fusion, plastic surgery etc. But the treatment cost was very high in these countries hence the patients from developed country shifted to third world country like India, Malaysia, Thailand etc. for medical treatment.

### Reasons why foreigners visit developing country as medical and wellness tourist:

- a. **Higher medical cost:** Cost was the major problem for the patient in the developed country. India is one of the famous medical holiday destinations of the world because medical treatment and operations here are cheaper than US and other European countries. The medical cost in India is 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the western country. For Example the cost heart surgery cost \$30000 in US were as in India it cost \$6000. Where else bone marrow transplant cost \$250000 in US in India it cost \$26000.
- b. **Inadequate insurance coverage:** According to Deloitte report (2008) there were 47 million Americans who were not having health insurance. This number has improved over a period of time after Affordable Care Act came into effect at the start of 2014 and hence currently there is 14.7% of American who remain uninsured. Those who insured even in that some medical procedures are not covered. Many of the availed medical services like cosmetic, fertility and dental treatment are not covered by insurance and hence people has to pay out of the pocket. This was the reason that people travel to other third world countries for medical treatment.

- c. **Long waiting:** Health care in developed countries is plagued with long queues of waiting list of patient for different surgeries and treatment. The reasons may be shortage of donated body organs that are necessary for operation or simply due to high demand from aging baby boomer population. Faster and cheaper alternatives with the same level of quality are increasingly found in developing countries.

- d. **Some treatment may not be legal:** Some people travel to another country because they are some treatments which may not be legal in their country like fertility procedure.

- e. **No treatment of rare genetic disorder:** People who have rare genetic disorder travel to another country where treatment of these conditions are better understood

- f. **Increase in competition and stress:** Growing competition and hence increase in stress level of the people abroad has increase the number people traveling to India as wellness tourist.

According to CII report it is expected that medical tourism industry will grow worth US \$ 4 billion by 2017 were else study conducted by SRI International projected that India will be number one country globally for growth in Wellness Tourism over next five year, clocking over 20% gain annually through 2017. CII reported that 150000 medical tourist came to India in 2005. The number grew to 200000 by 2008. A study conducted by ASSOCHAM reported that the year 2011 saw 850000 medical tourists visiting India and predicted that this number would rise to 3200000.

Public and private sector hospital had made a remarkable contribution in the development of medical and wellness tourism. In the early stage private sector was at the modest stage but has become one of the flourishing industry. It is estimated that 75% to 80% of the health care services and investment in India are now provided by private sector. The private sector hospitals in India like Apollo Hospital, B.M. Birla, Escorts - Heart Surgery and Cardiac Surgery, Fortis Leelavati Hospital, have made a significant investment in setting up modern and well equipped hospital in major cities. Indian corporate hospital is getting certified by international accreditation schemes. The hospital like Apollo Hospital, Wockhandt Hospital Group are working through agencies like IndUS health, Planet Hospital and the medical tourism Company in Brittan to build business across the west. Many of them have designed special packages for patients including Visa assistance, boarding and lodging. The public sector hospital like AIIMS has been receiving patients for over 16 countries which include European nations. AIIMS have special international healthcare service team which takes care of patient's right from their arrival to departure till all their medical treatment is completed. (Gupta, 2008)

India is now focusing on the development of cord blood bank facilities as cord blood promises to become a critical input for many surgical treatments. Cord blood is the blood that remains in the umbilical cord after a baby is born and is a rich source of stem cells. The development of cord blood banks is expected to be a major boost for India's medical tourism

#### **6. Support provided by Government of India for the development of Medical and Wellness Tourism:**

Government of India had realized the importance of Medical and Wellness tourism and hence there has been strong support from ministry of tourism for these two products of tourism. Since 2006 government of India had started issuing 'M (medical) visa to the patients who visit India for medical treatment and also issues MX Visa to the person who accompanies the patient. In order to avoid the question of quality care in developing country, Indian corporate hospitals are getting certified by International accreditation schemes.

The Ministry of tourism is has also drafted some guidelines for the wellness tourism. These guidelines address issues regarding making available quality publicity material, training and capacity building for the service provider, participation in international and domestic wellness related events. The guidelines for accreditation of wellness centers have been developed by National Board for Accreditation of Hospitals and Healthcare Services (NABH) in consultation with AYUSH. The Ministry of Tourism has also extended its Market Development Assistance (MDA) Schemes to wellness tourism service providers including accredited wellness centers. Recently the wellness centers accredited by State Tourism Departments are also eligible for the MDA. (Joseph, 2013)

In the year 2014 Government of India had granted E-visa for 43 nation which has turned as boast for tourism in India. This will be fruitful for those who travel for shorter duration like medical treatment, leisure or short business visit of 30 days. Recently on 27 the September 2015 the Ministry of Tourism announced the constitution of the Medical and Wellness tourism Promotion Board to tap the potential and advantages that India has in the field of medical and wellness tourism.

#### **7. Advantages of medical and wellness tourism in India:**

- a. Reduction in cost of treatment:** Medical treatment in the developed country is much higher than that in the developing country. India is the country which is one of the famous destinations for medical and wellness tourism. If the treatment for spinal fusion cost somewhere \$62000 in US the same treatment cost \$5500 in India.
- b. Availability of latest medical technology:** More tourists are attracted towards India as

destination of medical treatment because of the availability of latest technology. Various hospitals have installed various machinery for the treatment

- c. Removal of visa restriction for medical tourist:** The government has removed visa restrictions on tourist visas that required a two-month gap between consecutive visits for people from Gulf countries which is likely to boost medical tourism. A visa-on-arrival scheme for tourists from select countries has been instituted which allows foreign nationals to stay in India for 30 days for medical reasons.
- d. No language barrier:** All hospital in India has the staffs who speak fluent English and hence language is not the barrier in India. Some hospital has hired language translators for the patients who come from African countries to make them feel comfortable.
- e. Availability of trained and experienced doctors:** Most of the doctors have taken subspecialist training and working experience from overseas like US, Australia Germany and UK and there is an availability of well trained and experienced doctors in Indian hospitals.
- f. Medical treatment without waiting list:** India hospital provides immediate attention to the patient rather than asking them to wait for several months like in most western country.
- g. Treatment cum leisure destination:** India is recognized as a place for treatment cum leisure. Many foreign patients prefer to combine their leisure and relaxation visit to India with healthcare.
- h. Highly qualified hospital support staff:** The doctors in India are supported by a strong, comprehensive and well trained paramedical force comprising of nurses, technicians, attendants, clinical coordinators, and nutritionists.
- i. Availability of low cost generic medicines:** Generic medicines are defined as drugs which are sold to the consumers under its chemical name and are cheapest and affordable than the branded drugs manufactured which are sold at extremely high rates. As the generic medicines are available at cheapest the medicine cost becomes low and hence foreigner prefer taking treatment in India.
- j. Availability of traditional healthcare therapy:** India has the old history of traditional healthcare treatment like Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, and yoga which developing the medical and wellness tourism.

#### **8. Challenges for development of medical and wellness tourism:**

- a. Insurance coverage:** Medical insurance coverage varies for the type of medical treatment you take and hence in such a case understanding of insurance coverage is very important for the patients from abroad. Since

medical travelers are unaware of legal issues it may cause problem to them since countries like US and UK legal procedure are very transparent.

- b. Lack of infrastructure facilities:** Though India is one of the preferred destinations for medical treatment still it is facing the problem for infrastructure like poor water supply, electricity problem, lack of coordinating system.
- c. Lack of trust from the foreigner:** the biggest problem that the country is facing regarding foreigner tourist is there lack of trust. Foreigners find it unsafe to travel to the country because they feel unsafe. Place like Delhi where maximum tourist visit find it unsafe because of various cases happening like rape, robbery, terror attacks etc.
- d. Lack of budgetary support for marketing and promotion:** Lack of budgetary support for marketing and promotion is the major reason for India lagging behind in medical and wellness tourism. It is very important that India change its old marketing approach to more competitive and modern approach.
- e. Corporate style functioning:** Corporate style functioning in medical care has also introduced the need to maximize profit and expand coverage as in the case of commercial venture. Thus while neoliberal policies have opened the way for the penetration of private sectors it needs further avenues for its continued growth as the domestic market gets saturated

#### 9. Suggestion:

- a.** Government of India must take initiative to get all the top hospitals in India accredited in order to build faith and trust in the mind of the consumers.
- b.** Medical visa issue procedure must be made liberal for the patient and one of the relative of the patients. As the procedure of issuing visa, visa extension is time consuming it is important to simplify the procedure.
- c.** Marketing of medical and wellness tourism is very important in order to presented India as a brand overseas. A good marketing campaign through print, electronic media, road shows, and exhibitions should be developed.
- d.** India has the potential to increase the number of medical and wellness tourist. It is found that tourist is hesitant to travel for medical treatment in India due to lack of standardized service, unhygienic environment, hence hospital must see that they provide standardized services to the patient.
- e.** Orientation of the foreign tourist about medical and wellness tourism is important because tourist have some different perception about the India regarding hygiene, safety etc.

- f.** Indian hospital should have tie-up with the tourism agencies abroad so that there is an assured supply of medical and wellness tourist.
- g.** Hospitals in India should have tie up to tourism departments, tourism travel agencies hotels associations in order to provide proper service to the patient traveling for medical treatment.
- h.** As India is one of the famous wellness tourism destination for the foreigners who come for relaxation in India Well trained professionals in field of Yoga, Ayurveda, meditation should tie up with the hotels
- i.** India is a land of culture and rich heritage, having many tourist places right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Hence hospital should open their branch in these areas in order to develop medical and wellness tourism. Foreigners will get attracted to these places as they will get the benefits of both the treatment as well sightseeing.
- j.** Students in colleges should be oriented in order to take career in the field of medical and wellness tourism which will create employment opportunities for them in future.
- k.** State government in India should realize the importance of wellness tourism and should include it in their tourism plan.
- l.** In order to get more foreign tourist attracted to India, number of airport have to be increased.
- m.** Proper infrastructure facilities like roads, electricity, water should be provided by the government

#### 10. Conclusion:

India is looked upon as the most favorite destination of medical and wellness tourism. It provides medical treatment to the foreign patients at lower cost with quality services. The international accreditation of hospitals will surely boost the medical tourism and wellness tourism in India. Today India is in the right position to tap the global opportunity in medical and wellness tourism. Indian government has to play very important role in enhancing the benefits of medical and wellness tourism.

Growing economy has led to privatization in the field of health care which lead to setting up of world class hospitals. Low cost of treatment, highly qualified and specialized staff, English speaking manpower, highly advanced technology is boasting medical tourism in India Traditional medical therapy like Ayurveda, spa, music therapy, meditation and yoga are becoming popular in wellness tourism. As India economy is developing at the fastest rate and creating its mark worldwide it is very important that Government of India take necessary step to develop medical and wellness tourism in order to attract more foreign tourist in these coming years.

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