**Title: Meteoric rise of Medical Tourism Industry in India**

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**Abstract**

Today medical tourism is acknowledged as an industry as it offers tremendous potential for developing countries like India because of their low-cost and high hospitality advantage. The industry has the potential to show the same spectacular growth that the software and pharmaceutical industries have shown in the preceding decade. Medical tourism is likely to be the next major foreign exchange earner for India due to an increasing number of foreign patients coming to India because of the availability of high-quality health care services at an affordable rate. The main opportunity presented by medical tourism is its contribution to the growth of health economies. It is a major source for foreign exchange and stimulates economic growth in other sectors including tourism, transport, pharmaceuticals, hotels, food suppliers to hospitals and restaurants. Medical tourism and the competition on the global health market promote technological advances and improved medical infrastructure. In this study the researcher has tried to evaluate the growth drivers of Indian Medical Tourism sector in India.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Healthcare Tourism, Indian Economy, cost of treatment

**Introduction:**

Medical Tourism in the global context is at the rising trend in the third world because of affordability, cost, facility, and expertise of some countries from the first world and also from the third world countries too. Third world countries like Cuba, Argentine, Mexico, Hungary, South Africa, Thailand, Singapore, and India are the major players in the world. Developed world look for cost savings for treatment outside the country, developing countries are looking for expertise and the cost factors for considering a neighbouring country. Health tourism, in the Indian context, is at par with other industries in the domestic sector (Badwe, Giri, & Latti, 2012).

Although medical tourism is a recent phenomenon, this sector grows exponentially and emerges as a major force for the growth of services exports worldwide. Currently, it is a multi-billion dollar industry. Countries like Belgium, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dubai, Hungary, India, Israel, Jordan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, etc are actively involved in medical tourism (Sagar & Latha, 2014).

Soaring medical costs, high insurance premiums, increasing number of uninsured and under insured people in developed nations, long waiting period in the home country, availability of high quality health care services at affordable rate and internet/communication channels in developing countries, cheaper airfares, and tourism aspect are the driving forces of the outbound medical tourism (Shanmugam, 2013). Now more and more overseas patients travel abroad to get medical treatments, which include electric procedures as well as complex specialized surgical procedures such as joint replacements (hip/knee), cardiac surgeries, cosmetic surgery, and dental surgery.

India is one of the major players in medical tourism industry. India currently has around 18% of the global medical tourism market. Currently, The Indian government predicts that, India $17-billion-a-year healthcare industry could grow 13 per cent in each of the next six years, boosted by medical tourism, which industry watchers say is growing at 30 per cent annually (S.Josephin Arulmozhi, K. Praveenkumar, 2019). But it faces intense regional competitions from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It is projected to grow at a CAGR of 200% by 2020, hitting $9 billion by 2020 (Suri, 2019)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sr. No | Year | No. of medical tourist | Foreign exchange earned |
| 1 | 2017 | 4.95 lakh | 177874 Cr |
| 2 | 2016 | 4.27 lakh | 154146 Cr |
| 3 | 2015 | 2.34 lakh | 135193 Cr |

*Source: Government of India, Ministry of Tourism*

**Advantages of Medical Tourism in India**

India is fasted growing medical destination because of the following advantages to the other nation.

1. Best of the medical facilities and expertise are not available in the parent country of the tourist. This is mostly applicable to the developed and under developed countries.

2. The long waiting list for minor or major medical procedures is maintained in countries like USA, UK, etc.

3. Being a developing country India provides world-class medical treatment at low cost as compared to European country or United State of America.

4. Improvements in technology and standards of medical care are now available in other countries at a low cost.

5. Convenience and speedy availability of medical care as per patient’s choice.

6. Hurdles faced by the patient regarding medical insurance settlement etc. in western countries (Such as non-cover of orthopaedic surgery i.e. knee, hip replacement, restrictions on the choice of the facility, surgeon or prosthetics to be used).

7. The ease and affordability of international travel.

8. The efficiency of Indian doctors, supporting staff and personal attention in patient care.

9. Medical visa to visits India is an easy and hassle-free process and availability of medical visa quickly for health care as compared to the European country (Hazari, 2018).

10. India whether is excellent for some of the preventive and curative treatment which attract the foreigners. Besides that Indian hospitality is world-famous which attracts foreigners.

**Impact of Medical Tourism on Indian Economy**

1. **The inflow of foreign currency**: Medical tourism has a direct impact on the foreign currency reserve of the country; increasing medical tourism has a positive correlation with foreign currency. If the foreign medical tourists visit India they have to spend some money on the same. This will increase the foreign currency reserve of the India (Hazari, 2018).

2**. Enhancement of Health Care Facility**: Medical tourism enhances the Indian medical facility at par with the international level. And because of the world-class health care facility, India has become the health care hub in the Asia (Mishra, 2012).

3. **Enhancement of Research and Development in Health Care**: Increasing demand for health care will boost the R&D in health care in India, because of the costly technology of medical care from the abroad (“Healthcare Industry in India,” 2019).

4. **Growth and development of Local Business**: Medical tourism will enhance the local business of the destination place for the medical health care. This leads to the growth and development of local business and has a direct impact on the economy (Dr. Prem Jagyasi, 2014).

5. **Enhance Tourism**: Medical tourism is basically meant for tourism cum medical purpose, but it will boost the other local tourist places in the destination palaces because the tourism is secondary purpose (Hazari, 2018).

6. **Increase Employment Opportunity**: Increasing medical tourism will increase the level of employment in healthcare industry, local business, tourism business, hospitality business and increase other related employment opportunities (Jessie Huang, 2019).

**The USPs that have made India one of the preferred medical tourism destination are:**

* **Lower cost of treatment**

With the cost of medical treatment in the developed Western world remaining high, the Indian medical tourism sector has an edge because of cost-effective medical care. Studies have shown that healthcare in India saves 65-90 percent money compared to similar services in the United States (Vinod Zutshi, 2019).

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Treatment | Procedure Cost (US$) | |
|  | United States | India |
| Heart Bypass | $144,000 | $5,200 |
| Angioplasty | $57,000 | $3,300 |
| Heart Valve Replacement | $170,000 | $5,500 |
| Hip Replacement | $50,000 | $7,000 |
| Knee Replacement | $50,000 | $6,200 |
| Spinal Fusion | $100,000 | $6,500 |
| Dental Implant | $2,800 | $1,000 |
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*Source: http://www.indiaprofile.com/medical-tourism/cost-comparison.html*

* **World-class services and care**

Indian doctors are recognized as among the best at the international level. Medical technology, equipment, facilities and infrastructure in India are at par with international standards. India has around 33 JCI (Joint Commission International)-accredited and 400 NABH-accredited hospitals, at present.

* **Less wait time**

The wait time for surgery and medical treatment in India is non-existent compared to Western nations, where patients have to wait for weeks or even months for life-saving treatments.

* **Ease of getting a medical visa**

The introduction of e-Medical Visa and e-Medical Attendant Visa for travellers has been a game-changer for India. Medical travellers from 166 countries can arrive in India through 26 designated airports and five designated seaports with e-Medical Visa. Unlike other categories of e-visa, a traveller can enter the country up to three times with an e-Medical Visa. There is also a provision of issuing e-Medical Attendant Visa to two adult attendants for each patient.

* **Alternative treatments like Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Yoga**

India has an unmatched heritage represented by its ancient traditional treatment methods such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) which are now widely accepted as alternative treatment procedures in the entire world (Shrivastava, S. R., Shrivastava, P. S., & Ramasamy, J. 2015)

* **Attraction of ‘Incredible India’**

India, with its ancient and modern heritage, diversities of culture and exotic destinations is always an attraction to international travellers. Medical travel offers a mix of pleasure, luxury and quality healthcare for medical patients coming to India.

* **Governmental assistance**

Realising the immense potential that the medical tourism market offers, it is now one of the priority areas of facilitation by the government. The vision and intention of the Union Government to promote and develop India as a medical tourism hub can be gauged from the fact that presently four ministries namely Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of AYUSH along with SEPC and NABH are proactively involved. Department of Commerce and Services Export Promotion Council has launched a Healthcare Portal www.indiahealthcaretourism.com, as a single-source platform providing comprehensive information of medical travellers on the top healthcare institutions in the country in various languages. To provide dedicated institutional framework to take forward medical tourism, a ‘National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board’ has been constituted which works as an umbrella organization that promotes this segment of tourism in an organized manner (Issa, 2019).

* **Language**

Despite India's diversity of languages, English is an official language and is widely spoken by most people and almost universally by medical professionals (Narayan, 2013).

**Conclusion:**

A rare combination of advanced facilities, skilled doctors, and low cost of treatment have made India a popular hub of medical tourism, attracting a large number of foreign patients every year. India is having a large pool of trained medical practitioners, good hospital facilities at lower cost affordability with highly skilled personnel. Medical practioners are having good competence in their profession as compared with their foreign counterparts. As long as differences in medical techniques and costs exist among countries, medical tourism should continue to develop and evolve India as sought after destination. Government of India, ministry of tourism has set up a section called Marketing development assistance (MDA) and Medical Visa (M-visa) for promoting the patient arriving for Medical Tourism. Tourism ministry of India conducts road shows among potential countries to uphold India as Global Medical Tourism destination.

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