

Opportunities for Medical Tourism in India and Challenges Ahead

Vikas Dangi

Master in Tourism Management (MTM)

V. & PO. Madina, District: Rohtak (HR)

Abstract: The fact is that medical tourism is a new way of growing tourism industry throughout the world. Therefore, India is one of the important destinations in this regard and there are so many opportunities for the growth of medical tourism industry in India. Today some of the Indian states and cities are emerging as a hub of medical tourism business. Now the fact has been realized regarding the cheaper and lower cost medical facilities in India. In the recent days, experts are viewing some of the best emerging medical tourism destination such as Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata, Kerala and Maharashtra. There is also better scope in medical tourism in the coming years in the key sectors of medical tourism such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Allopathic, Meditation and Yoga. According to the healthcare data total expenditure in India was about 5.2 percent of GDP which reached to 8 percent in the year 2013. Today super specialty hospitals are playing key role to boost the medical tourism business by attracting the foreigner tourists who visit for the health purpose in India. It is said that healthcare has become one of India's largest sectors both in terms of revenue and employment and during 2008-22, the healthcare market is expected to record a CAGR of 16.28 per cent whereas the total healthcare industry size is expected to touch US\$ 160 billion by 2017 and US\$ 372 billion by 2022. Therefore, India has so many opportunities for the growth of medical tourism but there are so many challenges ahead.

Keywords: Tourism Sector, Medical Tourism, Healthcare Facilities, Global Health Tourism Market, GDP, Medical Tourism Destinations, Driving Factors.

Introduction: Today, tourism sector is one of the fastest growing sectors of Indian economy and it is significantly contributing in the growth of GDP of India. In the wake of globalization in the decade of ninety, the people started to travel globally so as to make use of a wide variety of alternatives that bring them personal satisfaction and which promote healthy living. Consequently, a boost in healthcare sector was observed in developing countries like India. Therefore, currently millions of people are travelling to tourist destinations seeking healthcare facilities in India. Here it is noteworthy to say that healthcare/ medical tourists are those people who cross international borders for the exclusive purpose of obtaining healthcare services in India. Moreover, medical tourism has increased in India because of rising health-care costs in developed countries, cross-border medical training and widespread air travel. That is why; healthcare and medical tourism industry has been growing in

developing countries like India, Singapore and Thailand and these three Asian countries, comprise about 90 percent of the Healthcare tourism market share in Asia in the current scenario at the global level.

Research objectives:The present research paper is based on the following objectives:

- To define the term medical tourism/healthcare tourism.
- To highlight the scenario of medical tourism in India.
- To point out opportunities for the growth of medical tourism in India.

Research Methodology:The present research work is exploratory in nature and based on the secondary source of data collection. The researcher has collected the secondary data from the reputed books, journals and official websites of the tourism department and department and tourism boards of different states as well as of tourism ministry of India. To pace the study, the researcher has also used some observational facts.

The Concept of Healthcare/ Medical Tourism:This concept is also known as Health Tourism and this Industry has developed in India with the help of corporate/private hospitals and Government hospitals.

In the context of India medical tourism is an act where people from all around the world are traveling to India to obtain medical, dental, and surgical care. Actually the foreigner tourists visit India to avail of such facility because of much cheaper rates or those treatments such as Ayurveda or Yoga therapies which are not available in one's own country. Therefore, health/medical tourism is a fast growing multibillion-dollar industry around the world. India has lot of opportunities to develop healthcare tourism and to capture a big share of industry. But on the other hand there are lots of challenges.

Medical and healthcare tourism is the synergy between hospitals and the tourism industry. Therefore, it 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.

According to the K. Weiermair & C. Mathies: "Health Tourism means traveling across international borders to obtain health care services". Likewise, according to P. Jagyasi: "Healthcare Tourism is often interchanged with the terms Medical Travel, Medical Tourism Health Travel and Global Healthcare". Although each term has a specific meaning in the modern medical science.

Medical Tourism in India: Medical/healthcare tourism is a very old concept that has gained popularity in the recent times in the wake of globalization in 1991. The history of medical/healthcare tourism in India begins with the popularity of Yoga and Ayurveda, around 5000 years ago constant streams of medical travelers and spiritual students flocked to India to seek the benefits of the alternative healing methods. Likewise, in the current scenario

so many foreigners visit/travel great distances to exotic locations for health care facilities in faraway countries, in search of medical treatment and health care. In this regard, they find India a favorable healthcare tourism destination due to various reasons. Therefore, India is a huge magnet for attracting foreign patients for medical treatment and India hosts a large number of of foreigner tourists from countries like US, UK & Canada and from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, China etc. Based on surveys conducted by Assobcham (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization), the market size is likely to more than double from Rs 4500 crore in 2011 to Rs 10,500 crore (US\$2billion) by 2015; the inflow of medical tourists which stood at 3 lakhs in 2009 rose to 8.5 lakhs in 2011 and is likely to touch 32 lakhs by 2020.

Now the question arises why foreigner medical tourists are favorable to Indian medical/healthcare tourism? The simple answer is that the indigenous or traditional health care practices like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Naturopathy, and Yoga provide uniqueness and modern medical facilities of ayurvedic science attracts patients from all over the world. Moreover, some of the reasons to attract medical tourists towards India are:

- Lower and cheaper cost of treatment comparable to any other country.
- Availability of hospitals and medical facilities with International accreditations.
- Well trained English speaking doctors and other staff in hospitals.
- Flight connectivity is good and easily approachable for patients.
- Facility of on line diagnosis especially for post care and future consultations.
- Large pool of doctors, nurses & paramedics including well skilled experts with good communication skills.
- The establishment of a strong pharmacy sector and gaining worldwide recognition.
- Availability of Naturopathy, Yoga & Ayurveda as alternative treatments.
- Availability of major tourist destinations like Delhi, Goa, Agra, Jaipur, Kerala etc.

Opportunities: Moreover, India has taken some positive steps for the development of medical sector by opening the door of medical facilities for foreign direct investment (FDI) in this sector. Consequently, FDI/Private partnership has helped to develop the long term infrastructure and import the foreign medical and healthcare technology. The Government of India has also developed with industry through special provision in the budget, last year government announced the establishment of AIIMS in different major cities which helped to develop and research in this sector. The Indian health industry is estimated to double in value by 2012 and more than by 2018. Moreover, this would generate income levels the country and would also generate infrastructure for the growth of health care facilities in India. Therefore, some of the better opportunities for the growth of medical tourism sector in India are:

- The reduced cost of international travel and tourism in India has attracted foreigner tourists and there are a growing number of convenient, inexpensive non-stop or one-stop flights to India. Consequently,

cheaper and lower cost of tour packages to India has directly attracted the foreigner medical tourists throughout the world.

- Availability of alternatives healthcare practices such as Yoga, Meditation, Ayurveda, Allopathy, and other systems of medicines are increasingly becoming popular among foreign patients as non-surgical treatment for various ailments. Kerala for Ayurveda and Kairali Massage, Uttarakhand for yoga and meditation, Goa for holistic living, Rajasthan for spas and heritage living, are some of the world-renowned places in India for alternative medicine. Consequently a large number of foreigner tourists are coming in India to get the benefits of naturopathy and ayurveda medical facilities.
- Today, India has emerged as the hub of some of the unique alternative healthcare practices like yoga, Ayurveda, homoeopathy, naturopathy etc. these alternative provide motivation to foreigner to visit India.
- India is the cheapest of any of the world healthcare tourism destinations, while being equal or better than other major destinations in terms of quality of staff, equipment and healthcare procedures. Foreigners are increasingly flocking to India because it offers quality treatment at a fifth of the cost abroad. That is why medical tourism has become very popular in UK, US, Canada etc. countries.
- The process of globalization has changed the scenario of medical tourism sector and in recent years increased participation of private sector has resulted that Indian hospitals invested heavily in infrastructure, equipments to make it globally competitive for the medical tourists.
- Today, with the involvement of private sector and tourism industry now it is easy for patients to visit foreign countries for the treatment, because now they can get package deals for the treatment which includes flights, transfer, hotels, treatments & leisure etc.
- India is the country which is well known for its rich and diversified culture, history, heritage, people & lifestyle, fairs and festivals, food, wildlife, deserts, beaches as well as snow covered peaks of Himalayas. That is why; a large number of foreigner tourists visit India for the double benefit as tour and treatment.

Challenges Ahead: However, India is emerging as a hub of medical tourism business, but there are some challenges ahead as under:

- Strong competition from countries Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines etc.
- Lack of international accreditation from agencies like JCI, ISO, NABH etc.
- Lack of institutional tie-ups between different players of industry like insurance companies and travel companies.
- Unavailability of proper safety & security facilities at the medical tourist destination.
- Poor infrastructure as well as information & communication facilities in comparison to developed countries like UK & US.

- Medical tourists' perception about India as an unhygienic country.
- Lack of uniform pricing policies in hospitals across India.
- Lack of funds and capital for investment in healthcare and tourism sector.
- Language related problems in case of Non-English speaking customers.
- Poor infrastructure i.e. roads, sewerage & sanitation, public utilities etc.
- Lack of proper insurance policies for this sector and refusing reimbursement.

Conclusion: Now it can be said that India is a health care hub for the neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afganistan, etc. In the ancient days India was very famous for ayurveda treatment and still some of the foreigner tourists give priority to ayurvedic treatment in India. After the introduction of globalization, a change in medical tourism sector was observed and a large number of foreigner medical tourists liked India as a favorable and favorite medical tourism destination. But there are some drawbacks in the system of medical centers and infrastructure quality is poor when compared to the developed countries. Therefore, the government should play a vital role to boost the medical tourism sector and regulate medical institutions and hospitals. However, India is emerging with full potentiality in healthcare practices like spa, ayurveda, yoga, meditation, naturopathy, etc. Nevertheless, we need to work out for the betterment of medical tourism business which would generate new job opportunities for the youth and boost the GDP of Indian economy. Moreover, medical tourism sector in India should be based on Public Private Partnership model and environmental friendly in the changing global scenario of medical tourism business.

References:

- S. Clift and S.J. Page,(ed.),**Health and the International Tourist**, Routledge,London, 1996.
- P.M. Carrera &J.F.P Bridges, “ Globalisation and Healthcare : Understanding Health and Medical tourism”, **Expert Review of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research** , Vol. 6(4), 2006.
- M. Bookman& K. Bookman, **Medical Tourism in Developing Countries**, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.
- S.K. Dawn, & S. Paul, “Medical Tourism in India: Issues, Opportunities and Designing Strategies for Growth and Development”, **International Journal of MultidisciplinaryResearch**, Vol.1 (3), 2011.
- S.S.Bhadu, “Opportunities & Challenges of Medical and Health Tourism- Creating A Brand of Alternative Tourism in India”, **International Journal of Management and Technology**, Vol. 19 (2), 2011.
- A. Sharma, “Medical Tourism: Emerging Challenges and Future Prospects”, **International Journal of Business and Management Invention**, Vol. 2 (1), 2013.
- S. Begum, “Medical and Wellness Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges”, **Research Journal of Management Sciences**, Vol. 2(1), 2013.

- L. Singh, “An Evaluation of Medical Tourism in India”, **African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure**, Vol. 3 (1), 2014.
- P. Priyambada et.al., “An Overview on Opportunity of Medical Tourism in India”, **Tropical Journal of Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences**, Vol.1 (1), 2014.
- Rajpal. K. Tayade, “The Growth and Impact of Medical Tourism in India”, **IJARIE**, Vol. 2 (3), 2017.
- P. Visakhi et.al., “Health Tourism Research: A Scientometric Assessment of Global Publications Output during 2007-16”, **International Journal of Medicine and Public Health**, Vol 7 (2), 2017.
- <http://www.medicaltourism.com/en/facts-statistics.html>
- <http://www.medicaltourismresourceguide.com/medical-tourism-in-2013>
- <http://www.indian-medical-tourism.com>
- <http://www.health-tourism-india.com/>
- www.indiahealthcaretourism.com/

