

PROMOTING HEALTH AND MEDICAL TOURISM

¹ Dr. M.Kumaravelu

¹ Associate Professor & Head,

¹ PG & Research Department of Economics, Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Namakkal – 02

Abstract: A large number of international tourists visit India for a truly refreshing and rejuvenating holiday. Health Tourism, in India is a developing concept whereby people from world over visit India for their medical and relaxation needs. Even domestic tourists from metros and big cities who are jaded, tired of their hectic routine and yearning for a break, a bit of rejuvenation prefer this form of tourism. Health tourism has become a common form of vacationing today, and covers a broad spectrum of medical services. It mixes leisure, fun, and relaxation together with wellness and health care. It is a new and profitable segment in tourism marketing and it is perceived as one of the fastest growing segments in marketing 'Destination India' today. Both government and the private are eyeing health and medical tourism as a segment with tremendous potential for future growth. Through effective marketing of health tourism, India can create a niche in the international market. India should tactfully make use all its attractions to market it across the globe.

In this back ground the present papers focus on the concept of 'Health and Medical Tourism'.

Keyword: Health, Marketing, Tourism

Introduction

Tourism is an ancient phenomenon. From the historical time, traveling was a fascination for man. In ancient times, pilgrims, few scholars, and adventurers used to travel in order to satisfy their respective urges. However, due to many constraints and complexities involved in traveling, tourism was restricted to the limited people and the concept of 'traveling for a pleasure' was missing. Today, traveling motives are changed significantly than that of in the historical time with the focus on 'travel for pleasure' and 'travel for health' purpose. Tourism has become the world's largest industry, generating wealth and employment. Worldwide the industry currently employs around 200 million people. It has become a backbone of many economies in the world as it largely contributes in earning valuable foreign exchange for many countries. Indian tradition regards 'Atithi' Or a traveler as a god sent. Religious approach apart, tourism today has acquired wide social and economic dimensions in India. It has acquired a status of modern industry. Both government and private sectors have identified tourism as an essential component of their economies. Many other industries, especially service sectors like Hotels and Hospitality, Banks, Insurance, Hospitals, Cultural Centers, Artist, Handicrafts, etc. are flourishing with growing tourism industry. India is the tourists' attraction from the historical time for a variety of reasons.

Background

Undoubtedly tourism in India is at a growth path. It is considered as a 'sunrise sector' with tremendous growth potential in future. Despite several strengths and a vast tourism potential, India so far has only a marginal share in the world tourism 45 movement. Inadequate and ineffective marketing is the main culprit. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of coordinated efforts, lack of comprehensive database, deficient Promotional efforts are the primary factors limiting the growth of Indian tourism industry. Marketing of any tourism destination involves multiple tasks amongst which promotion is a key issue. There are many ways to promote Indian tourism. India offers a large variety of tourism destinations. India can satisfy tourists with different traveling motives. Marketers need to identify the taste preferences of actual and potential tourists to offer them a right tourism product.

Background of Medical Tourism

Medical and Health Tourism is a new and profitable segment in tourism marketing and it is perceived as one of the fastest growing segments in marketing 'Destination India' today. While this area has so far been relatively unexplored, now not only the ministry of tourism, government of India, but also the various state tourism boards and even the private sector consisting of travel agents, tour operators, hotel companies and other accommodation providers are all eyeing health and medical tourism as a segment with tremendous potential for future growth. The health care sector in India has witnessed an enormous growth in infrastructure in the private and voluntary sector. It is estimated that 75-80% of health care services and investments in India are now provided by the private sector. What's called medical tourism where patients go to a different country for either urgent or elective medical Procedures is fast becoming a worldwide, multibillion-dollar industry.

What is Medical and Health Tourism?

It mixes leisure, fun, and relaxation together with wellness and healthcare. Medical tourism can be broadly defined as provision of 'cost effective' 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. The idea of the health holiday is to offer the tourists an opportunity to get away from hectic daily routine and come into a different relaxing surrounding. Tourists can enjoy being close to the nature. At the same time they can receive an orientation that will help them improve life in terms of their health and general well being. It is like rejuvenation and cleansing up process on all levels - physical, mental, and emotional. Medical Tourism is also known as Health Tourism, in India is a developing concept whereby people from world over visit India for their medical and relaxation needs. Even domestic tourists from metros and big cities who are jaded, tired of their hectic routine and pollution in their home cities and yearning for a break, a bit of rejuvenation prefer this form of tourism.

Why India is favorite destination for Medical and Health Tourism? Apart from a rich cultural heritage, today India is also known for its advanced still reasonable medical treatments. India is the origin of a number of healing traditions- yoga, ayurveda, aromatherapy, hydrotherapy and more- most of them focusing not just on physical healing, but also on the holistic cleansing of mind, body and spirit. Of the many forms of alternative medicine currently in vogue in India, yoga, and ayurveda are on the top priority. Both, date back to over 5,000 years ago, and have a long history of carefully researched and highly scientific reasoning to back them up. No wonder the foreign tourists especially Europeans visit India to rejuvenate 46 themselves and seek holistic healing experience which does not cause any harmful side effects. A huge number of ayurvedic resorts and spas are mushrooming all across India, and all of them offer a tempting range of packages to choose from. Some are specifically geared towards curing certain minor ailments, although most offer a short-term but highly intensive 'ayurveda package' which runs the gamut from oil massages and herbal steam baths to special diets and the pouring of medicinal oils on the forehead of the individual. Along with the traditional medical treatments, India has a pretty good number of high-tech hospitals offering various medical services. Indian corporate hospitals excel in cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery, joint replacement, orthopedic surgery, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, transplants and urology to name a few. Most common treatments are heart surgery, knee transplant, cosmetic surgery and dental care, etc.

The reason India is a favorable destination is because of its infrastructure and technology in which is in par with those in USA, UK and Europe. India has some of the best hospitals and treatment centers in the world with the best facilities. The diagnostic facilities offered in India are comprehensive to include Laboratory services, Imaging, Cardiology, Neurology, and Pulmonology. All medical investigations are conducted on the latest, technologically advanced diagnostic equipment. Stringent quality assurance exercises ensure reliable and high quality test results. Indian corporate hospitals are on par, if not better than the best hospitals in Thailand, Singapore, etc. Many people from neighboring countries, especially from gulf prefer India to UK or US for their medical treatment. A few rich Arabs regularly visit Mumbai for their routine medical check-up. They stay in the bigger, hi-tech hospitals for months that provide all five star amenities at the cost, which is very small to them. Many gulf patients prefer India as it has become difficult to get American visa after 9/ 11 disaster. In addition to the increasingly top class medical care, a big draw for foreign patients is also the very minimal, or hardly any waitlist as is common in European or American hospitals.

India has a large number of bigger hospitals having expert doctors and health facilities of international standards. Waiting list for some complicated operations and treatments in these hospitals is short compared to that in US & UK where cost of treatment is very high. Patients have to wait for the months. In India, patients get quick and quality medical treatments at reasonable cost. In fact, priority treatment is provided in Indian hospitals. Private sector is geared up to grab this opportunity. Many big hospitals like Apollo Group, Escort Group, etc have opened the hi-tech hospitals in Indian metros that provide world-class treatments. Apollo group alone so far has catered more than one lakh foreigners in its hospitals at various places. Indian doctors are among the best in the world and given the right atmosphere and environment, they can enhance the image of Incredible India as a health and tourism destination. Hence, India must aggressively market this aspect and gain competitive advantage. Promoting Health Tourism: The health care sector in India has witnessed an enormous growth in infrastructure.

Health and medical tourism is perceived as one of the fastest growing segments in marketing 'Destination India' today. India is promoting the "high-tech healing" of its private healthcare sector as a tourist attraction. The government hopes to encourage budding trade in medical tourism, selling foreigners the idea of traveling to India for low-cost but world-class medical treatment. 47 Naresh Trehan, executive director of Escorts Heart Institute and Research Center, a leading private healthcare provider, says India has established world-class expertise in practices such as cardiac care, cosmetic surgery, joint replacements, and dentistry. Merging medical expertise and tourism became government policy when finance minister Jaswant Singh, in this year's budget, called for India to become a "global health destination". Hon'ble Renuka Choudhary, minister for tourism has also insisted on promoting health tourism. Ayurveda and yoga could be the winning brands in promoting Indian health tourism globally. A huge number of ayurvedic resorts and spas are mushrooming all across India to cater the increasing preference even from the domestic tourists. Some places in Himalaya, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Goa and of course Kerala are the favorite destinations. The promotional efforts made by some states are discussed below.

Medical tourism in some of Indian state

Well established chambers of commerce are also now seriously looking at medical tourism and in fact, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Western Region Council (FICCI-WRC) has taken the lead by setting up a task force for the promotion of health and medical tourism in Maharashtra. This task force has representatives from the Maharashtra government, the medical educational institutions, the drugs department, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), pharmaceutical companies, travel agents, and tour companies. Wing Commander Anil M. Gadkari, Director, FICCI-WRC explained, "This is our dream project and we hope to get the support of all service providers of the industry. This project will indeed give a major boost to the tourism and hospitality of Maharashtra. We have received a positive response from MTDC who will work with us on this promotion." Maharashtra as a gateway to India, offers tremendous potential to develop medical tourism. The latest addition in Mumbai is the Asian Heart Institute at Bandra-Kurla Complex, which offers state-of-the-art facilities for all types of heart complications and even offers preventive cardiological treatment to avoid heart ailments and to keep under control a host of heart problems. This institute which is in collaboration with the Cleveland Institute, USA, offers 'five-star' services at reasonable prices. There are even provisions for financial assistance which is offered through various trusts associated with the institute. Maharashtra has a wide range of hospitals, which help to promote medical tourism in the state. Lilavati, Jaslok, Hinduja, Bombay Hospital, Wockhardt Hospital, and Apollo NUSI Wellness Retreat are to name a few. International hotels like Hyatt Regency, JW Marriott, Renaissance and Resort, also offer extensive spa facilities aimed at rejuvenating both the domestic and international tourists.

Maharashtra can make use of its large coastline to promote Ayurvedic treatment packages and other traditional health treatments on the same lines of Kerala. Karnataka: The department of tourism, government of Karnataka, has ambitious plans for the state. According to D B Inamdar, minister for tourism, "The idea is to make Karnataka a top health tourism destination, not only in India but internationally. We want to lure foreigners to Karnataka to avail of our sophisticated facilities and subsequently induce them to enjoy our multiple tourism offerings. This endeavor will have a positive impact on the entire economy of the state." Karnataka government is planning to set up a Bangalore International Health City Corporation, which will cater to patients for a wide variety of health care products and treatments. The state also boasts of having the unique property, Golden Palms Spa & Resort, which is the one and only resort in the country where a guest can have a complete range of pathological tests, dental treatment, electro-cardiograms, 48 stress tests, X-rays, and even sonography tests. To crown it all, there is even a mini-operation theatre for cosmetic surgery performed by world-renowned surgeons in the field. The recent operations of children from Pakistan, who have sought medical treatment in Bangalore, have not only helped to boost the state economy but also more importantly, helped in fostering goodwill, peace, and harmony between India and Pakistan.

Kerala, or God's Own Country as its corporate slogan goes, has pioneered health and medical tourism in India. Spellbound natural beauty and Ayurveda are the winning brands of Kerala. It has made the rigorous efforts to promote health tourism in a big way, which has resulted in a substantial increase of tourists into the state. Kerala and Ayurveda have virtually become synonymous with each other. The health tourism focus has seen Kerala participate in various trade shows and expos wherein the advantages of this traditional form of medicine are showcased. In order to attract the domestic tourists, Kerala Tourism Development Corporation has recently appointed some famous television stars such as 'Smruti Irani' or 'Tulsi' from a popular TV soap 'Sans bhi kabhi bahu thi' as a brand endorser. These celebrities claim that Kerala is the ideal place for relaxation and getting relief from the hectic schedules and tensions of shooting. It positively influences the audience and it is observed that tourist traffic in Kerala is increased because of the celebrity endorsements.

Recommendations:

Health tourism is flourishing in India. Through effective marketing of health tourism, India can create a niche in international market. India should tactfully make use all its attractions to market it across the globe.

Some recommendations to promote health tourism are:

1. Considering foreigners' inclination towards health tourism, government jointly with the private sector should deliberately develop more such destinations. Such health spas should be managed professionally. Excellent service should be provided and quality should be maintained.
2. Airline services are widened and improved in India due to entry of many private players. However, airline companies should reschedule and increase the connecting flights from Indian international airports to small tourist places as tourists can save a lot time and spend more time at actual destination.
3. Creative, attractive, informative websites on Indian tourism destinations can create wonders in attracting large international tourist traffic. Updated website can be a key to success in promoting health tourism worldwide.

4. The concept of Tourist Information Center or Help Desk is almost absent in India. Government as well as private organizations should set up more number of information centers at the tourism destinations and it should strengthen the network of professional tour operators. Customer care centers, toll free numbers, twenty-four hours tourists help lines, etc. could be introduced by the tourism ministry and private travel organizations.

5. International tourists especially from America and Europe prefer to travel independently where they largely rely on the itinerary. Hence, comprehensive and updated itineraries should be always made available to the tourists online as well as at airports, bus and railway stations, and tourist information cells, helpdesks at actual destinations and through travel agents.

6. India should participate as well as organize tourism conferences to promote health tourism. India with effective Public Relations policy can make use of such conferences as an ideal platform to market its health and medical tourism products and services.

Conclusion

Tourism has become the world largest industry. It employes more than 200 million people. Medical tourism is growing sunrise sector in India. In many state like Maharastra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala the medical tourism is become a prominent sector, which provide income and employment to many people. But the sector is suffering from basic bundle. If these obstacles well removed. India occupys no one in position in the world in the medical tourism sector.

References:

1. Tourism Marketing - By Dr. S.M.Jha, Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai
2. Marketing Management - Philip Kotler, 10th Edition, Pretice Hall, India
3. Positioning Toirism Destinations - Marketing Mastermind, October 2003
4. Fe Traveller : Special supplements by Indian Express
5. Financial Express 2/7/2003
6. Website of Department of Tourism (dot), ITDC, Kerala & Goa Tourism Ministry, etc.

