

The Trend and Pattern of Medical Tourism in Kerala

1. Mrs. Mercy Toni

Research Scholar, Research & Development Centre,
Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore, India,

2. Dr. Cyriac Joseph

Research Guide, Research & Development Centre
Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore, India.

Abstract

Medical Tourism is travelling across international borders to make use of medical treatment and facilities in another country, along with enjoying tourism facilities there. Medical Tourism is a key factor boosting Kerala's economic growth. The paper focuses mainly on why people from other countries choose Kerala as their favorite medical tourism destination. The reasons vary from country to country and person to person. Secondly, the paper is an enquiry in to the significance of medical tourism and the reasons for the dominance of Kerala in medical tourism. Thirdly the study aims to look in to the relevance, advantages and trends of medical tourism in Kerala. There has been a tremendous growth in the flow of medical tourists in Kerala in the last two decades and there has been a conscious effort from public and private sector to sap this opportunity for their economic growth.

Key words: Medical tourism, economic growth, tourist, health care, medical facilities.

Introduction

Tourists are individuals or group of people travelling to destinations away from their routine setup for a period of time for relaxation, exploration and recreation. Tourism has secured a very high position in the leisure activity people choose around the world. Medical Tourism is travelling to another country to avail medical care along with enjoying the recreational and relaxation facilities available. Presently, medical tourism, has been securing upmost acceptance among international community. Today millions of people travel across the international borders to receive medical care due to a number of factors that trigger the flow of international medical tourists.

Medical tourism extends a number of benefits to the international tourists. First of all, medical tourists can obtain competitive, cost effective medical treatment and medical service packages in top class hospitals with most modern equipment and facilities, where highly qualified and well trained doctors and medical staff are at service. Secondly, various departments are available under one roof and a personalized attention is given to each patient. Another added advantage of medical tourism in Kerala is easy access to this piece of land with moderate weather and natural beauty with friendly and compassionate local people is easy access to the destination with four international airports. Again, the medical tourists are at an added advantage with a well-established tourism industry and the educated local people with whom communication is easy.

Objective of the study

The study aims primarily to analyze the trend and pattern of Tourism in general and medical tourism in particular with special reference to Kerala. Also the study looks into why Kerala has emerged as a prominent destination for medical tourism. The present work aimed at identifying the significance and relevance of medical tourism in Kerala.

Research Methodology

The present study was based on secondary data gathered from various research journals, newspaper, articles, government reports and websites.

Literature Review

In the tourism map of the world, Kerala has secured very distinctive place attributed to the very pristine natural attractions customs and traditions. Along with its outstanding natural beauty, Kerala has an exclusive chance in the field of Medical Tourism. Kerala's own traditional ways of natural medical treatment, for example, Ayurveda, attract large number of people who seek cure to their illness to this beautiful piece of land. Modern medical facilities, which offer low cost medical solutions when compared to advanced westerns countries and Middle East countries, are of high significance in the field of medical tourism in Kerala. Unaffordable expense for treatments related to heart diseases, brain and spine problems, dental problems and organ transplant in their native land have forced people from western countries and middle east to consider India, especially Kerala as a preferred alternative. Well-equipped modern, state of the art hospitals with highly qualified doctors and medical staff, provide professional solutions for complicated health issues.

Santhanam (2002) analyzed the progress of tourism industry in Kerala and its relevance to the Ayurveda sector. In her opinion it is time of growth explosion for tourism industry in Kerala. Thousands of tourists from around the globe are attracted to tiny state. Rejuvenating Ayurveda is considered as an added advantage to the tourists. Tourism sector in Kerala witnessed a surprising growth in the last few years as a result of the change in the mindset of the tourists around the globe and the tempting Ayurveda.

Baxi (2004) and Pankaj Monchi (2013), were of the opinion that the role of India in medical care sector is on the rise steadily. As per the study conducted on this matter, the international health care business is reaching to \$ 3 trillion. It is the result of India's competence in developing the top- class infrastructure and imparting health care of global standards. When compared with the medical facilities of other countries, India, is second to none. The competence and proficiency of the Indian doctors are acknowledging everywhere. Another factor that attract medical tourists to India are the world- class hospitals with latest equipment. Also, the popularity of the large number of Indian doctors who work in the countries around the world. Again, the people all over the world cherish the motherly caring approach of the Indian nurses.

Kumar (2008), the author of 'Medical Tourism in India, Management and Promotion' pointed at medical tourism as a rapidly growing industry and emphasizes India's immense chances in this sector with its low cost, extremely high-grade health care facilities and English-speaking medical staff. In his opinion, the players or participants in this industry are private business organizations and there is no place for the misconception that foreign medical tourists or rich native patients will receive medical care at the cost of ordinary Indian citizens.

Bindu V.T, Chitramani.P and Babu. P. George (2009), described what they had found from surveying medical tourists visiting Kerala. They have focused mainly on matter regarding tourist satisfaction such as the satisfaction on the plan prior to the visit, the actual visit and after the visit. Their research distinguishes the fundamental motivational variables and from where the health tourists had obtained the information. They also have focused their study on the proportion of tourists liking and choice of location.

Jyothis T and V.K. Janardhanan (2009), opined that by generating a separate segment in tourism as health tourism, the latest trend in medical tourism can, to a larger extent, be utilized by the service providers. Furnishing high standards in services which make the customer happy can establish a fine picture of the medical tourism destinations and thereby attract larger number of medical tourists. How satisfied is the health tourist depends on what their presumption and picture of the services imparted by the supplier. In the study, he, tries to find the quality grade of the service received by the medical tourists who paid a visit to the service providers in Kerala.

Simon Hudson and Xiang Li (2012), did a research on the literature on global medical tourism. Persons travel across the borders in search of the best medical care available. They also point out that, it is not just an international phenomenon, but a large number of domestic medical care seekers travel across their own country in search of proper medical care.

Vinay Raj.R(2013), emphasizes the significance of health tourism in Kerala, where it is witnessing a steady growth. In the research, he has made an effort to analyze the degree of satisfaction and the contrasting destinations in the actual reality. In the end, the study points out the need for a long-lasting, balance progress in the health tourism sector based on satisfaction evaluation and responses from the visitors.

Mishra.S (2014), studied about different procedures to foster the medical tourism sector in order that India could be pictured first as a destination for medical tourism. The writer has also focused her attention to diverse efforts made by health centers and hospitals to establish extensive, modern medical diagnostic centers and blood banks, keeping apart area in the hospitals for foreign medical tourists, conducting global seminars on unique facilities and specialties, displays Indian expertise in diverse medical fields by exchanging visits with the center parts in other countries, keep research and go on as a continuous process and upgrade amenities and services.

Kumar G.S and Raj R. K (2015), made survey of the present situation, progress and effect of medical tourism in promoting hotel business sector in India. It was observed by them that a 30% growth in medical tourism was recorded in 2015.

Dhinesh Kallungal (2018), opined that it is quite evident that there is an ever increasing passion for medical tourism as the number of benefactors is seeing a hike year after year. As per the information available with the Central Ministry of Tourism, about 184 thousand foreign nationals travelled to India for medical treatment in 2014. The number increased 233 thousand in 2015 and 427 thousand in 2016.

The tourism department of Kerala, stimulated by the up rise in the number of medical tourist arrivals to Kerala has ventured into the task of making a survey of the medical tourism industry in the state of Kerala. As stated by the department, 6.3 percent of the total foreign tourists who visited to Kerala were medical and wellness tourists.

Yuthika Bhargava (2018), in his article explored why India continues to be the preferred destination for medical tourism by foreigners' year after year. In his opinion state of the art, modern facilities, along with proficient doctors and low cost of medical care have brought India up as a well-liked destination for multitude of foreign nationals who seek medical treatment. As stated by K. J Alphones the then Minister of state for tourism, 495 thousand foreign nationals visited India in 2017 for medical treatment. He added that the number of such visitors was 234 thousand in 2015 and 427 thousand in 2016. The largest number of medical tourists came from Bangladesh and Afghanistan. It is estimated that about 221 thousand medical tourists from Bangladesh visited India in 2017 against 120 thousand in 2015 and 210 thousand in 2016. Other countries that top the list of medical tourists who chose India as their favorite destination for medical treatment are Oman, Maldives, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Uzbekistan. As per the report, India hold 18% of the world's medical tourism market and it is a leading source for foreign exchange earnings.

Why Medical Tourism?

Folks around the world opt for medical tourism for several reasons. One of the main reasons that compel people to opt for medical tourism is the ever-increasing medical care costs in their home country. The cost efficiency enables one to save more than fifty percent of money they are likely to spend in their home country. Another reason for people to opt for medical tourism is the quick access to efficient treatment facilities. Persons with critical health problems choose to avail readily accessible medical care abroad. Yet another important reason why people choose to go abroad for medical care is the better quality. Most of the institutions dedicated to medical tourism offer their clients top quality medical care and world class facilities. Next, people prefer medical tourism as it enables them to get longer attention from medical professionals as they can stay in hospital for a longer period of time. Also, many people or families choose to go abroad for treatment as they view tempting opportunity to visit attractive tourist destinations.

Significance and Relevance of Medical Tourism in Kerala

Kerala, one of the smallest states in India has been a favorite destination for medical tourists for quite some time. Kerala is preferred as a premier location for health tourism or Medical Tourism for its pristine natural

beauty, top class hospitals with highly qualified and dedicated doctors and medical staff, educated and friendly local community and the four international airports. The failure of many developed and developing countries to handle the ever-increasing need for immediate professional health care has given a thrust to the flow of medical tourists to Kerala. If well tapped, Kerala has a golden opportunity to use medical tourism (health tourism) for the all-round economic development of Kerala.

Kerala is known for its natural beauty and the moderate weather. People around the world long to visit this small southern state known as ‘the God’s own Country’. Tourism is contributing significantly to the growth of service industry in the state. (State planning board Thiruvanthapuram, Kerala, India 2017). The total wealth created from tourism industry in the year 2015 through direct and indirect means was estimated to be 2669 million rupees which was 7.25% more than the previous year. According to Economic Review published by the State Planning Board of Kerala, the previous decade, showed an aggregate annual growth rate of 11.33 in the total income from tourism industry. (Economic Review – 2016 State Planning Board Feb 19, 2017).

Kerala’s rise as a favorite destination for Medical Tourism was not much a result of conscious effort. Kerala is one of the pioneer states to introduce medical tourism in India. The world-famous Ayurveda system of Indian medicine has been attracting a huge number of medical tourists from countries around the world to Kerala. The Ayurveda sector has made conscious efforts to establish Kerala a synonym of Ayurveda Treatment. Presently, the Tourism Ministry, private tour operators and hospitality industry are all considering medical tourism as a sector with unlimited chances for progress. There has been an immense growth in the number of medical tourists to Kerala especially for Ayurvedic treatment in the last decade. A considerable number of high-class Ayurveda hospitals and centers have come up in various parts of Kerala. There has also been a tremendous increase in the world class hospitals with highly qualified doctors and para medicals in various parts of Kerala which has boosted the flow of medical tourists to Kerala.

Kerala’s Dominance in Medical Tourism

The foremost factor that attracts medical tourists to Kerala is the availability of low cost- or cost-effective medical care in the state. In developed and developing countries, many a times people have to face with high cost for specialized medical treatment. Low cost for treatment for a number of major medical conditions like heart diseases, knee – cap replacements, bone-marrow transplant encourage them to choose Kerala. Another important factor that attract foreign nationals to choose to go to Kerala for medical care is the short waiting time. Due to a number of factors patients with serious ailments have to wait for quite a long time to avail medical treatment in their home countries. Back in Kerala, they can undergo the treatment very shortly after their arrival. Another factor that draws a large number of people with diseases that need immediate attention is the absence of enough medical facilities in their home countries, especially in our neighboring nations. Kerala is equipped with a number of super specialty hospitals with high class hotels nearby. Also the reputation that Kerala has a popular tourist destination along with all the above mentioned factors act as a driving force for foreign nationals to go to Kerala

for medical tourism. The large number of NRI's who are spread out in the middle east, Europe and America play the role as the Ambassadors of Kerala. This is another driving force for citizens of those places to choose Kerala for medical tourism.

Trends of Medical Tourism

Kerala is flourishing as an International hotspot for Medical Tourism. It is growing at a very fast pace with huge investments made in both traditional and modern health care. The ministry of tourism, travel agencies, tour operators and others involved in hospitality and service industries are all viewing medical tourism as a sector with promising future. Kerala, well known as God's own country, is blessed with natural beauty and abundant availability of herbs, and is the most ideal place for Ayurvedic treatment, rejuvenating therapies, Yoga and Meditation. Although Kerala has primarily focused on Ayurvedic treatment, the state is well equipped with state of the art super specialty hospitals where medical tourists pour in from various parts of the world.

Medical tourist chooses to come to Kerala primarily for the traditional Ayurveda treatment. But there has been a substantial increase in the flow of medical tourist's modern medical care, especially for heart surgery, knee replacement, spine and brain surgery, bone-marrow transplant, dental care and eye care. Kerala with its highly qualified and experienced doctors and medical staff and super specialty hospitals are able to meet all their needs under one roof. Easy to reach destinations with four international airports, and visa on arrival facilities also encourage medical tourists to choose Kerala as their favorite destination for medical tourism.

Table: 1

Number of Foreign Tourist Arrived in India for Medical Tourism: 2004 - 2017

Year	No. of Medical Tourists	Percentage Increase
2004	100000	-
2005	150000	50
2006	-	-
2007	243397	-
2008	-	-
2009	112689	-
2010	155944	38.38
2011	138803	-10.99
2012	171021	23.21
2013	236898	38.51
2014	184298	-22.20
2015	233918	26.92
2016	427014	82.54
2017	495056	15.93
AAG = 24.03		

Source: News, Bulletin of the World Health Organization /March2007,85(3)Extracted from India Tourism Statistics 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2014a) Ian Youngman (2009), "A RECENT REPORT ON THE INDUSTRY

MAKES SOME SERIOUS ERRORS, *International Medical Travel Journal The Indian Express*, retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2018/jan/20/medical-Hindu>, Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/medical-tourists-flocking-to-India/article24497896.ece>

Foreign Medical tourist arrived to India in 2017 was about 495056 against 427014 in the year 2016, which shows an increase of 15.93%. The Linear trend line is exhibited as: $Y = -41275402.46 + 20633.733X$

In this trend line, Y indicates the total number of Medical tourist arrived and the variable X = year. It is clear from the linear trend line that the foreign tourist arrived to India has increased every year from 2004 to 2017 except 2011 and 2014. The Coefficient of determination, (0.509), which is close to 1 reveals that the method is quite suitable for collecting data about foreign Medical tourist arrivals to India.



Fig: 1



Table: 2

Number of Foreign Tourist Arrived in Kerala: 2000 - 2017

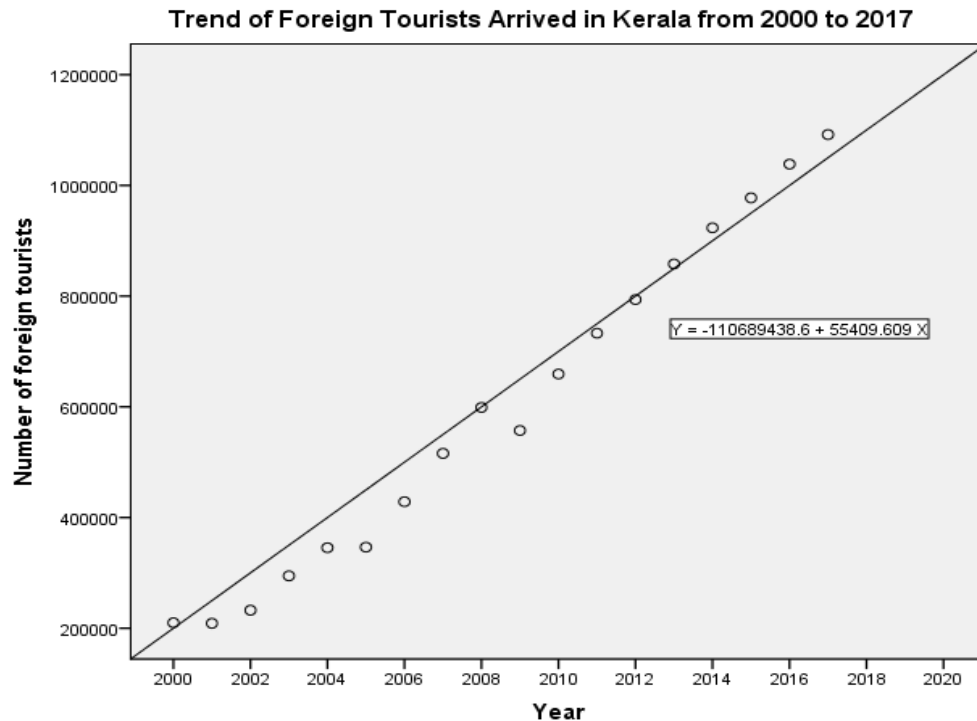
Year	No. of Foreign Tourists	Percentage Increase
2000	209,933	-
2001	208,830	-0.53
2002	232564	11.37
2003	294621	26.68
2004	345546	17.28
2005	346449	0.28
2006	428534	23.7
2007	515808	20.37
2008	598929	16.11
2009	557258	-6.96
2010	659265	18.31
2011	732985	11.18
2012	793696	8.28
2013	858143	8.12
2014	923366	7.6
2015	977479	5.86
2016	1038419	6.23
2017	1091870	5.15
		AAG =10.53

Source: *Tourism Statistics, Government of Kerala.*

Foreign tourist arrival to Kerala in 2017 was about 1091870 against 1038419 in the year 2016, which shows an increase of 5.15%. As the effect of World Trade Centre attack and the war in Afghanistan in 2001, there was a drop of 4.2 in tourist arrival to India, but there was only 0.53 % decrease in tourist arrivals to Kerala. As a result of the Global recession in 2008, the tourist flow to India dropped by 6.96.

The Linear trend line is exhibited as: $Y = -110689438.6 + 55409.609X$ In this trend line, Y indicates the total number of tourist arrived and the variable X = year It is clear from the linear trend line that the foreign tourist arrived to Kerala has increased every year from 2000 to 2017. The Coefficient of determination, (0.987), which is very near to 1 reveals that the method is quite suitable for collecting data about foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala.

Fig: 2



In 2017, about 14673520 domestic tourists arrived to Kerala, whereas the number of domestic tourists who visited to Kerala in 2016 was about 13172535, which shows a rise of 11.39%. An average growth in domestic tourist arrival was seen in the last ten years except in the year 2005. While there was a drop in foreign tourist arrival by 6.96 percent in 2009, the domestic tourist arrivals recorded a 4.25 percent growth. The main reason for the drop of foreign tourist arrival can be attributed to the Global recession in 2008. But it can be noticed that regarded less of all these adverse conditions, there was a moderate increase in the number of domestic tourists, (Table: 3).

Table: 3

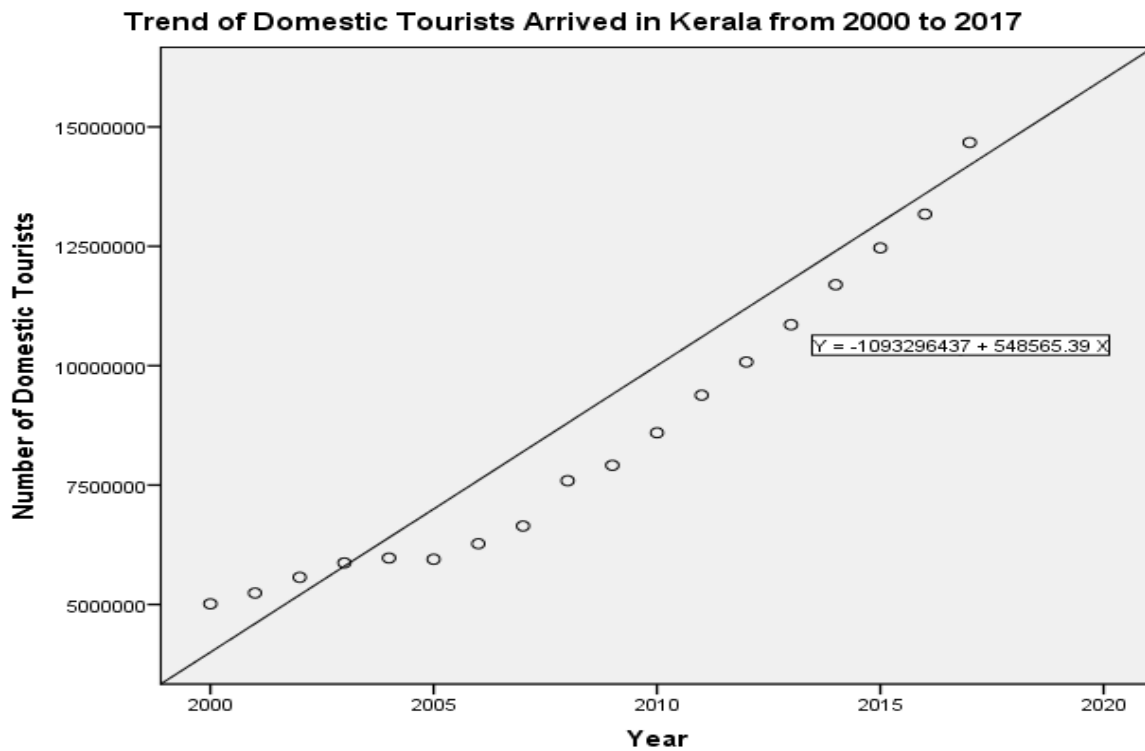
Number of Domestic Tourist Arrived in Kerala: 2000 - 2017

Year	No. of Domestic Tourists	Percentage Increase
2000	5013221	-
2001	5239692	4.5
2002	5568256	6.3
2003	5871228	5.4
2004	5972182	1.7
2005	5946423	-4.3
2006	6271724	5.47
2007	6642941	5.92
2008	7591250	14.25
2009	7913537	4.25
2010	8595075	8.61
2011	9381456	9.15
2012	10076854	7.41
2013	10857811	7.75
2014	11695411	7.71
2015	12465571	6.59
2016	13172535	5.67
2017	14673520	11.39
		AAG = 6.13

Source: Tourism Statistics, Government of Kerala.

The Linear trend line is exhibited as: $Y = -1093296437 + 548565.39X$, In this trend line, Y indicates the total number of tourist arrived and the variable X = year It is clear from the linear trend line that the domestic tourist arrivals to Kerala has increased every year from 2000 to 2017. The Coefficient of determination is 0.938, it is very near to 1. The result reveals that the method is quite suitable for collecting data about domestic tourist arrivals to Kerala.

Fig: 3



In the year 2000 only about 5223154 tourists, including both domestic and international tourists arrived to Kerala. The number rose to 15765390 in the year 2017. There had been an average growth of 6.5 percent between the year 2000 to 2017. It is observed that there was a small drop of 0.39 in the year 2005 which is attributed to the tsunami. A continuous rise was seen thereafter except in the year 2009. As the after effect of the terrible tsunami that affected Indonesia, Maldives, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Eastern coast of India which took place at the end of 2004, the following year wasn't a pleasant one for the Kerala tourism industry. This deficit was overcome by the end of the year and the number of tourists to Kerala has seen a constant growth except in the year 2009, (Table: 4).

Table: 4

Total Number Tourists Arrived in Kerala between: 2000 – 2017

Year	Total No.of Tourists	Percentage Increase
2000	5223154	2.61
2001	5448522	4.31
2002	5800820	6.47
2003	6165849	6.29
2004	6317728	2.46
2005	6292872	-0.39
2006	6700258	6.47
2007	7158749	6.84
2008	8190179	14.41
2009	8470795	3.43
2010	9254340	9.25
2011	10114441	9.29
2012	10870550	7.48
2013	11715954	7.78
2014	12618777	7.71
2015	13443050	6.53
2016	14210954	5.71
2017	15765390	10.94
AAGR		= 6.5

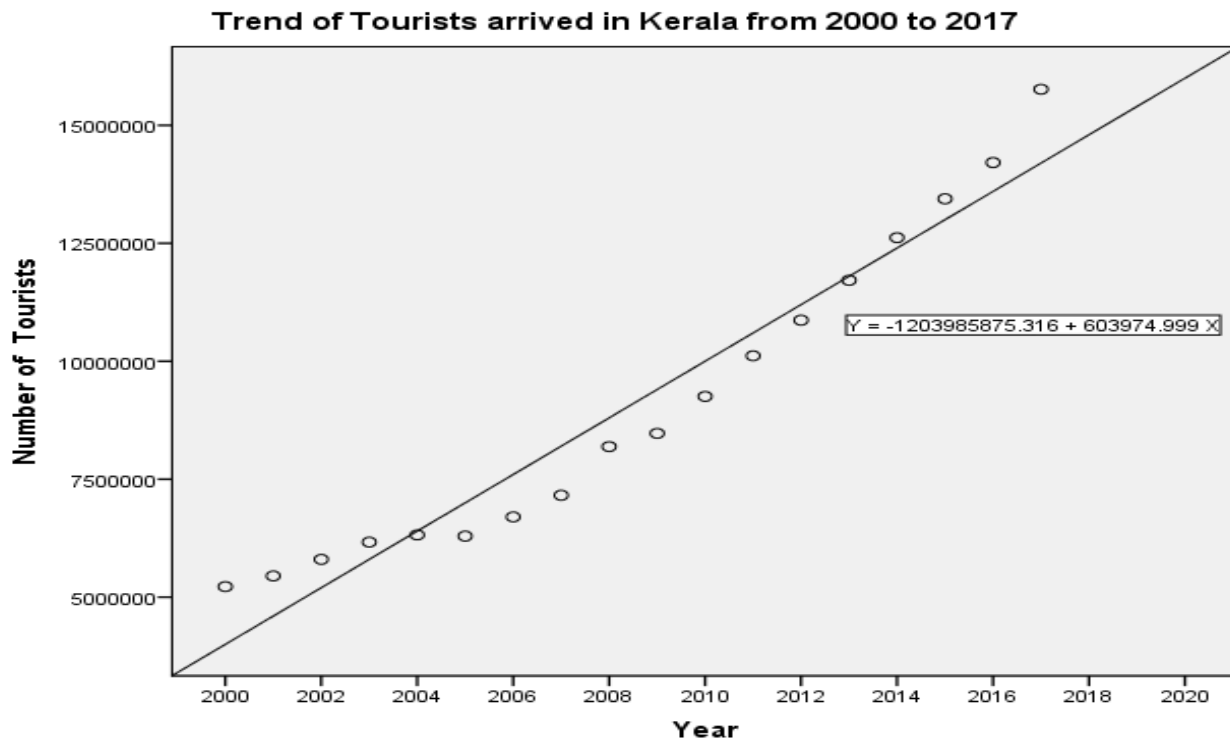
Source: Tourism Statistics, Government of Kerala.

The Linear trend line is exhibited as: $Y = -1203985875.316 + 603974.999X$

In this trend line, Y indicates the total number of tourist arrived and the variable X = year

It is clear from the linear trend line that the foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala has increased every year from 2000 to 2017. The Coefficient of determination is 0.945, it is very near to 1. The result reveals that the method is quite suitable for collecting data about tourist arrivals to Kerala.

Fig: 4



Observations and Suggestions

Kerala has established as a renowned tourist destination and is distinguished as the topmost location for health care solutions. Kerala is also equipped with a handsome number of super specialty hospitals with world class services which can be availed by those who seek modern medical care. Medical tourism in Kerala is mainly identified with the traditional Ayurvedic medical treatment. Many a person travel across the international borders to make use of the Ayurvedic massage, oil bath, steam bath and many other rejuvenating therapies. Ayurveda which has gained high popularity, offers an attractive medical solution and offers high quality service at a low cost and is showing a boom in the recent years. But doubts are raised about the authenticity of many of the massage parlors and other centers set up by people not qualified enough in the name of Ayurveda. Authorities should take immediate steps to prevent such fake practioners from spoiling the good name of Ayurveda. Also, steps should be taken to spread the cultivation of the scarce herbal plants to ensure the quality of the Ayurvedic medicines.

It is observed that the number of medical tourist visiting Kerala with M- visa wasn't readily available. Also noticed that many people choose to come for medical treatment on tourist visa to avoid inconvenient legal procedures. Another important sector that needs immediate attention to improve tourism in general, and medical tourism in particular is the enhancement of basic infrastructure. Government agencies need to pay immediate attention to the poor condition of the road network, unhygienic environment and the lack of clean comfort stations. The state needs to implement a standard for hygiene and cleanliness and establish a chain of basic amenities. There is also a need for improvement in the field of social environment. The state government and the

public need to ensure a feeling of safety and security to every tourist who travel a long way to spend their time either for medical tourism in particular or for tourism in general. The state government and other concerned agencies need to work hard to ease the complicated process to avail visa to persons to intent to travel to Kerala.

Conclusion

Medical Tourism is a rapidly growing industry in the state of Kerala. Kerala is a favorite medical tourist destination to a large number of people in Europe and Middle East. Availability of treatment at a much cheaper cost in top class hospitals with highly professional medical staff and modern equipment's and facilities is what attract medical tourists to Kerala. The natural beauty and moderate climate also are added advantages. The role of medical tourism in the economic growth of the state is very significant. The state government and the public as well as private agencies affiliated with medical tourism should make use of the opportunity to tap its benefits to the full by providing the best possible facilities to the honored guests to the state.

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