

POTENTIALS OF MEDICAL TOURISM INDUSTRY IN KERALA

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Abstract

Medical Tourism is the growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. It is an economic activity that entails trade in services and represents the mixing of two of the largest world industries: medicine and tourism. In India, medical tourism has been growing at a faster pace and many private hospitals are doing their best to exploit this opportunity. Now a days medical tourism is defined in many researches, as the act of traveling to other countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical care or it may include complementary and traditional medicine like spa, black mud & shore sand packing etc. It also includes medical services like knee & hip replacement, heart surgery, dental procedures and different cosmetic surgeries. The key competitive advantage of India in medical tourism are low cost, strong reputation in the advanced health care segment and the diversity of tourist destinations available in the country.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Health care, Traditional Medicine, Competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalization and culture of consumerism, people begin to travel to make use of wide variety of alternatives that bring satisfaction and healthy living. Now a day's people are more aware of the importance of health and they are conscious in maintaining a healthy body, mind and soul. The purpose of visiting a tourism destination may vary depending up on the nature and interest of tourists. In the present day, tourism does not confine itself only to hotels, restaurants and sea beaches, but has touched rural areas (Rural Tourism) health sector (Health Tourism) and environment (Eco Tourism) as well. The existing tourism policy, provides a frame work for development of tourism, with the objective of reaping its socio- economic benefit. People in rural areas by ensuring overall development of the country side, society and the nation altogether.

Medical tourism refers to people traveling to a country other than their own to obtain medical treatment. It denotes the increasing tendency among people to travel in search of more affordable health options often packaged with tourist attractions. In recent years people from developed countries travel to developing countries for lower priced medical treatments. Medical tourism most often for surgeries (cosmetic or other wise) or similar treatment, though people also travel for dental tourism or fertility tourism. Medical tourism is over powering all other segments of tourism industry all across the world. India offers a unique mix of systems such as Yoga, Ayurveda and meditation and modern medical system. The country is witnessing 22-25 per cent growth in medical tourism and health care providers expect the industry will double to \$6 billion dollars by 2018 from \$ 3 billion. Now medical tourism is a developing concept where by people from all over the world

visit India for their medical and relaxation needs. The treatment for which they regularly visit India are heart surgery, knee & hip transplant, cosmetic surgery and dental surgery. The new domestic and global campaigns focus on India as a destination for niche segments like medical tourism, cruise tourism and spiritual tourism. This aims to expand the range of tourism products in India, both for domestic and international market. In this connection, the government of India has introduced a new category of medical visa (M- Visa) which can be given for specific period to foreign tourists coming to India for medical treatment.

Medical Treatments In Kerala

- Ayurveda
- Dental care
- Fertility treatment
- Transplant surgery
- Ophthalmology
- General surgery
- Cardiac care
- Neurosurgery
- Orthopedic etc..

Health care Potentials in Kerala

- World class medical facilities
- Latest technology and procedure
- State of art equipment and technology
- Advanced and sophisticated hospitals of international standards located in Kerala
- Renowned doctors specialized in almost all major disciplines
- Trained paramedical staffs and technicians available in Kerala
- Higher hygienic standards
- Low cost of drug development in India with software support
- International standards in infection control measures

Opportunities

Health checkup with tourism packages

Increase in NRI investment

Link health tourism with other niche tourism and overall development of the tourism industry

Combining leisure tourism with Ayurvedic treatment

Stress management centers

Joint ventures of health insurance agencies, tour operators, hospitals and resorts.

Dangers of Medical Tourism

Infection hazards

Medication dangers

Blood supply issues

Communication issues

Travel concerns

Legal issues

Challenges

Lack of good language translators

Lack of concern for sustainability

Instability with respect to terrorism and communal tensions

No industry standards followed in hospitals

Commercialization of the profession

Poor power supply even to hospitals

Inequalities in the medical services

Increase in medical costs for local people

Conclusion

Tourism in India is emerging as a prime medical tourism destination in the world. India offers very low cost treatments not only to Indians but also to foreigners. Acknowledging the importance of medical tourism Government has granted several reductions, exemptions and tax incentives to the service providers. There is need to develop supporting infra structure such as transport, accommodation, communication and information channels to facilitate medical tourism. Kerala has enormous potential to emerge as one of the world's best health tourism destinations. It is capable of becoming a heaven for wellness tourists by highlighting holistic treatments such as ayurveda, spa, yoga, meditation, naturopathy etc. Health tourism is not a onetime business. Satisfied health tourist will rate and recommend Kerala as a health tourism destination to others. Governments, NGO's and all other agencies attached to health tourism industry must join their hands together to lift Kerala as world's most preferred health tourism destination.

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