

**Investigating the Relationship between Medical Tourism and Healthcare Quality in India:  
A Comparative Study**

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**Abstract**

Medical tourism in India has emerged as a significant sector, attracting patients from around the world with its affordable and high-quality healthcare services. Despite its potential, the industry faces several challenges, including infrastructure deficiencies, regulatory issues, and concerns about quality and safety. This paper explores the challenges and scope of medical tourism in India, highlighting opportunities for growth and development. It discusses the current state of medical tourism in India, identifies key challenges, and proposes strategies for improvement. The study aims to contribute to the existing literature on medical tourism in India and provide insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, healthcare providers, and patients.

**Keywords:** Medical Tourism, Infrastructure Deficiencies, Regulatory Issues, Growth and Development, Healthcare Services

**Introduction**

Medical tourism (MT) entails flying to a high-tech hospital in another country to receive necessary medical/surgical care at a considerably reduced cost, with the savings often being used to plan and enjoy a vacation while recovering. This is especially true in the case of ambulatory/elective therapies. Costa Rica, Cuba, Israel, Hungary, Lithuania, Jordan, South Africa, Singapore, Belgium, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, India, & South Korea are among of the most popular places for MT around the world. Medical tourism is not a new concept, but its marketing is, as it involves a partnership between a health care provider and the lodging industry. A strong economy has influential implications for very aspects of human development, including health. This is especially accurate for developing nations, such as India. Tourism has been a vehicle for social,

cultural, religious, and economic phenomena all across the world since ancient times. People moving from one destination to another for vacation, trade, commerce, education or for Health reasons have been made easier thanks to advancements in travel, stay, and information and communication technology.

For more than a decade, India has been a popular health tourism destination, with thousands of individuals flocking to the country each year for treatment. The majority of those that come are from Asian and African countries. A tiny percentage of visitors come from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, which are known as "bubble countries. " According to figures given by the Indian government's Department of Tourism, approximately 697, 453 foreign visitors visited India for medical treatment in 2019. As per Mr. Amit Sharma, Founder and CEO of E-Expedise, India is rated 6th place in the Health tourism market and the quality of its health services needs substantially strengthened its reputation as an advanced country. India is well-known for its high-quality healthcare and associated environment. and world-class medical treatment, in addition to its rich culture, mesmerising beauty, and interesting variety. India has been a popular and enticing location for travelers seeking world-class therapeutic treatment, recharging, and refreshment throughout time. Medical Tourism (it is also referred to as Health Value Travel, Health Tourism or Wellness Tourism) remains a fast rising trend of seeking healthcare treatments in other countries. . In India, healthcare sector and related services are divided into 3 primary groups:- Medical Treatment: This includes cardiac care, organ• transplantation, orthopaedics, neurosciences, oncology, and bariatric surgery, among other things. Wellness and Rejuvenation: Cosmetic surgery, stress• alleviation, spa treatments, and other services aimed at rejuvenation or aesthetic purposes. Alternative Medicine: it is also known as conventional• treatments like Ayurveda, Yoge, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, & Homeopathy (AYUSH) therapies are available. Health tourists from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Maldives, Oman, Nigeria, Kenya and Iraq are the most common visitors in these categories. Hospitals and diagnostic facilities in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Chandigarh & Jaipur are most popular medical tourist destinations in India.

### **Statement of the Problem**

India is rapidly becoming the world's most popular tourism destination because to its rich cultural heritage, numerous attractions, and stunning scenery. The travel, tourist, and healthcare business,

which is expected to contribute \$512 billion to India's GDP by 2029, is a key component of the Make in India programme. These industries are quickly becoming one of the most important drivers of growth in the services industry. Medical tourism also contributes significantly to our country's economic prosperity. The Objective of this study is to learn about existing medical tourism trends and their future prospects in the Indian economy.

### **Literature Reviews**

**Lydie Ehouman et al (2002):** The Road to Being India's Most Powerful State Natural resources abound in Tamil Nadu. and it has the potential to become one of India's-and even the region's-most popular place for tourist. In addition, ICT/biotech development and direct foreign asset can be used to develop ICT-based solutions for tourist administration and marketing challenges, as well as a funding source for high-level travelers.

**The Hindu News (2007):** States that, Top Indian hospitals are courting Canadian medical tourists. India has started a massive campaign to entice Canadians to visit the country for medical tourism, promoting the country's high-end but far less expensive healthcare industry. Many Canadians are already travelling to India for medical care due to the lengthy wait times in Canada. . . even an MRI can take three to four months. The Indian medical tourism industry is the next big thing after the IT industry.

**Richard Smith et al (2011):** Medical tourism: A review of the research and analysis of a role for bi-lateral commerce is one of their projects. In both individual countries and the international system, data collecting must be prioritised. Without numbers, it will be hard to quantify the impact of expanding health-care trade on importing and exporting nations. Furthermore, governments must examine trade aspects in the context of wider bi-lateral operations, taking into account the possible advantages and risks of participating in distinct trade relationships with other nations.

**Rose Mary (2014) Medical India's Tourism:** Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Infrastructure development in medical facilities, medical sciences, national income, and job possibilities and urbanisation are all aided by the growth of medical tourism in India. According to the findings, a suitable legislative framework can help to mitigate or diminish the negative consequences of medical tourism.

**Lakhvinder Singh (2014):** An assessment of India's medical tourism Medical tourism providers should endeavor to preserve service quality while aggressively pursuing India's goal of becoming the world leader in medical tourism, which it is unquestionably on.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives were framed for the study based on the Review of literature;

1. To identify the various elements inducing the attractiveness of India as a most preferred Health tourism destination.
2. To analyse the contemporary status of medical tourism in India.
3. To make a few positive recommendations to policymakers.

### **Research Methodology**

The current analysis is totally based on secondary data sources. To make this research paper effective, many national and international journals, research articles, newspaper information, relevant healthcare organisation websites, and PhD thesis were consulted. The purpose of this study is to identify the elements that influence India's attractiveness as a health tourism destination, to analyse the current state of medical tourism in India, and to recommend a few governmental solutions to improve medical tourism in India.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **Factors that have contributed to the rapid growth of medical tourism in India**

Medical tourists' from South African Country, Oman, Maldives, Nigeria, Kenya and Iraq frequently visit India. Health care Units & diagnostic centres in the Tier 1 & Tier 2 cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Chandigarh, Kerala and others are popular medical tourism destinations in India. Several underlying elements contribute to India's popularity as a Health tourism destination. Below are some of the factors responsible for growth of medical tourism in India.

**Infrastructure and Digital Enablement:** Starting from Eye, Heart, and renal ailments to organ transplantation orthopaedics and also cancer treatment therapy, Indian Hospital care network is offering top-notch care and cure at lesser prices (nearly 20% lesser price for major clinical treatments as paralleled to those of advanced equipped and internationally approved amenities).

currently 37 Joint commission international (JCI) & 513 National Accreditation Board for Facilities & Healthcare Providers (NABH) accredited Healthcare

Units in India that provide care that meets or surpasses international quality standards & yardsticks. India has few of the world's greatest well-known super speciality healthcare units & services, which delivers patients with cutting-edge treatment options like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR) & Robotics aimed at increased precision and general well-being.

**Proficient Human Resource:** Our country India is a home to various medical amenities, but also some of the world's best known and proficient doctors who are pioneers in their specialised fields and clinical skill. The nation boasts the prevalent group of doctors and paramedical professionals. About 1.2 million Allopathic doctors, 0.17 million dental surgeons, 2 million nurses and midwives and 0.8 million professionally educated Ayurvedic Doctors. Most of the Indian doctors have skilled and worked at some of the world's greatest prominent medical facilities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other developed countries, making them highly qualified and capable of caring for patients from all over the world.

**Unconventional Medicine and Therapeutic Treatments:** India has established itself as the epicentre of AYUSH, naturopathy, Vedanta, and meditation techniques, all of which have been curated and restored from the oldest of sciences and arts. India has a wide range of retreat, recharge, and rejuvenation options, from yoga ashrams to spas and wellness institutions that offer holistic therapy. The government's strong branding of AYUSH is attracting patients from all over the world to India. Several companies, like Apollo and the Manipal Group, are establishing wellness centres with traditional medical treatments.

**Superiority of patient care:** India has emerged as a pioneer in offering comprehensive, individualised, and compassionate care, really existing by the "Athithi Devo Bhava" philosophy (Guest is akin to God). Medical professionals in the country try to keep up the highest standards by prioritising patient's requirements and attending to them with empathy and also with care. The Indian government has made key measures and interventions to reduce waiting times and encourage hassle-free travel, housing, and treatment for medical patients and their attendants in order to establish India as a medical tourism powerhouse.

**E-Medical and Medical Attendant Visas:** E-tourist visa, it was introduced in the financial year 2014, has been overextended to include Health treatment visits & medical attendants visas in order to simplify, ease, and expedite the travel procedures and protocols for allowing Medical Tourists to enter multiple times and stay for long periods of time. Attached immigration counters & amenity counters have also been started at the major Indian airports to give end on assistances. Because of these amenities and logistical assistance systems, the number of Foreign Tourist arrivals on various kinds of medical visa to India has increased from 595056 in 2023 to 797000 in 2024

**The National Medical & Wellness Tourism Board:** In order to simplify, relax, and accelerate the travel processes and protocols for allowing Medical Tourists to enter several times and remain for lengthy periods of time, The E-Tourist Visa's, were established in the year 2014, this has been extended to include medical visits and medical attendant's visas. At the key Indian airports, separate immigration counters and facilitation desks have been constructed to provide end-to-end assistance. The number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) on medical visas in India has climbed to 697, 000 in 2024, up from 495, 056 in 2022. This is due to these amenities and logistical support systems.

**Digital Enablement:** In partnership with the Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC), the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has established a healthcare site for medical tourists from around the world that serves as a complete one-stop shop for hospital and travel-related information on India. There are 124 certified medical institutions listed on the website, including 93 Health centres, 30 Ayurvedic and wellness institutes, and also one special category facility.

**Fiscal Support & Non-Fiscal Initiatives:** The Ministry of Tourism's Marketing Development Assistance Scheme intends to give financial assistance to recognised wellness tourism service providers & Medical Tourism Service Providers in order to promote medical tourism in the country (MDA). Furthermore, the government has taken initiatives to promote traditional medicine and associated therapeutic approaches. The Union Budget has allotted Rs. 2, 970 Crore to the Ministry of AYUSH for the financial year 2021-22, compared to INR 2, 122 crore in the Union Budget for FY 2020-21, allowing country to explore millennia of spiritual wisdom that is unparalleled. Additionally, the Ministry of Tourism has setup a Wellness and Medical Tourism Promotion Committee with comprehensive guiding principles in order to encourage Wellness & Medical

Tourism as a niche tourism service sector among international tourists & to brand India a holistic tourism place offering a variety of Health services & techniques around the clock and year.

### **Medical Treatment Cost Comparisons in India and Other Countries**

Because of the drastically reduced treatment costs, people are thinking of travelling overseas to obtain the best medical facilities for a segment of the cost they would pay in their own countries. Nations like India can manage to pay for world-class medical treatment at radically reduced pricing due to cheap infrastructure costs and an ever-lower doctorpatient ratio. A knee replacement operation in the United States will cost \$40, 000, \$10, 000 in Thailand, \$13, 000 in Singapore, but \$8500 in India, according to the American Medical Association's cost comparison research. A bone marrow transplant costs over \$400, 000 in the United States, \$150, 000 in the United Kingdom, but only \$30, 000 in India. Patients will save 70 to 75 % of the entire treatment cost, which includes health treatments, wellness travel , housing, & meal amenities, regardless of therapy the patients choose. Below is a cost comparison chart:

Table 1: Country wise Cost Comparison for Medical Treatment Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Treatment Cost Comparison							
Procedures	US (\$)	Costa Rica (\$)	India (\$)	Korea (\$)	Mexico (\$)	Thailand (\$)	Malaysia (\$)
Heart Bypass	\$144,000	\$25,000	<b>\$5,200</b>	\$28,900	\$27,000	\$15,121	\$11,430
Angioplasty	\$57,000	\$13,000	<b>\$3,300</b>	\$15,200	\$12,500	\$3,788	\$5,430
Heart Valve Replacement	\$170,000	\$30,000	<b>\$5,500</b>	\$43,500	\$18,000	\$21,212	\$10,580
Hip Replacement	\$50,000	\$12,500	<b>\$7,000</b>	\$14,120	\$13,000	\$7,879	\$7,500
Hip Resurfacing	\$50,000	\$12,500	<b>\$7,000</b>	\$15,600	\$15,000	\$15,152	\$12,350
Knee Replacement	\$50,000	\$11,500	<b>\$6,200</b>	\$19,800	\$12,000	\$12,297	\$7,000
Spinal Fusion	\$100,000	\$11,500	<b>\$6,500</b>	\$15,400	\$12,000	\$9,091	\$6,000
Dental Implant	\$2,800	\$900	<b>\$1,000</b>	\$4,200	\$1,800	\$3,636	\$345
Lap Band	\$30,000	\$8,500	<b>\$3,000</b>	N/A	\$6,500	\$11,515	N/A
Breast Implants	\$10,000	\$3,800	<b>\$3,500</b>	\$12,500	\$3,500	\$2,727	N/A
Rhinoplasty	\$8,000	\$4,500	<b>\$4,000</b>	\$5,000	\$3,500	\$3,901	\$1,293
Face Lift	\$15,000	\$6,000	<b>\$4,000</b>	\$15,300	\$4,900	\$3,697	\$3,440
Hysterectomy	\$15,000	\$5,700	<b>\$2,500</b>	\$11,000	\$5,800	\$2,727	\$5,250
Gastric Sleeve	\$28,700	\$10,500	<b>\$5,000</b>	N/A	\$9,995	\$13,636	N/A
Gastric Bypass	\$32,972	\$12,500	<b>\$5,000</b>	N/A	\$10,950	\$16,667	\$9,450
Liposuction	\$9,000	\$3,900	<b>\$2,800</b>	N/A	\$2,800	\$2,303	\$2,299
Tummy Tuck	\$9,750	\$5,300	<b>\$3,000</b>	N/A	\$4,025	\$5,000	N/A
Lasik (both eyes)	\$4,400	\$1,800	<b>\$500</b>	\$6,000	\$1,995	\$1,818	\$477
Cornea (both eyes)	N/A	\$4,200	N/A	\$7,000	N/A	\$1,800	N/A
Retina	N/A	\$4,500	<b>\$850</b>	\$10,200	\$3,500	\$4,242	\$3,000
IVF Treatment	N/A	\$2,800	<b>\$3,250</b>	\$2,180	\$3,950	\$9,091	\$3,819

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

### Number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals for medical purpose has shown an increase over last 3 years

The recent trend in the medical tourism sector shows a propelling growth in this industry. Below Table 2 depicts the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India for Health treatment from the Year 2015 to 2017. It is clear that the tourist's arrivals for medical treatment in India increased over the year. As per information provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in the year 2019, the particulars of foreign tourist arrivals in India during the three years for medical purpose are mentioned below:



Year	Number of Foreign Tourist arrivals for medical purpose
2015	2,33,918
2016	4,27,014
2017	4,95,056

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

### **Initiation by the Indian Government to promote Medical Tourism**

The private sector is the primary driver of medical tourism in India. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) facilitates the advertising and promotion of medical tourism in important international markets in order to promote the industry. Various efforts are made by the Ministry of Tourism on a timely basis to market India as a Best Medical Tourism Destination. Below are some of the measures taken by the Ministry of Tourism to endorse India as a Medical & Health Tourism Destination?

1. Under Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme, monetary support for participation in the travelling fair, events & street displays permitted by the Ministry in abroad marketplaces.
2. Economic backing in the proportion of 50:50 ratio for the creation of marketing and advertising contents, up to an extreme of Rs.10,00,000.
3. Monetary support up to Rs.25 Lakh on a equal ration basis for arranging Wellness and Medical Tourism advancement shows.
4. The Indian Healthcare Federation, a non-governmental organisation affiliated with the Confederation of Indian Industry, has prepared a handbook on chosen Indian institutions for health tourism reasons, based on government recommendations. For more exposure, it has been uploaded on the Ministry of Tourism's website, [www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org).
5. The Ministry of Tourism has prepared promotional materials, CDs, and other advertising materials to promote Medical tourism, which must be widely distributed for publicity in target markets. fea

6. To promote rapid development of infrastructural facilities, the government has undertaken initiatives for the modernization of airports in Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Chennai, and Bengaluru on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis to facilitate smooth arrival and departure of medical tourists.
- A new sort of 'Medical Visa' has been established, which can be issued to international travelers visiting India for particular medical treatment.
- Guidelines for accrediting Ayurvedic and Panchakarma centres have been sent to all state governments for implementation. For additional exposure, these have been uploaded on the Ministry of Tourism's website, [www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org).
- For the past two years, the Ministry of Tourism has promoted yoga / ayurveda / wellness in print, electronic, internet, and outdoor media as part of "The Incredible India Campaign. "The Ministry of Health has published and widely distributed brochures and CDs on Body, Mind, and Soul, which include the traditional medical system.
- The Indian government's Ministry of Home Affairs has created a new type of visa called a "Medical Visa, " which can be provided for a specific cause to overseas tourists seeking medical treatment in India.
- The Government of India's Ministry of Tourism has included the Medical Tourism Campaign to its list of new projects. The Marketing Development
- Assistance Scheme (MDA) of the Ministry assists approved tourism service companies financially.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the data, the following recommendations are made to enhance medical tourism in the country post Covid era. India is only capable of a few things.

- Firstly, we need to do an enhanced job of publicizing the amenities available at some of our big healthcare units, which are on equally, if not superior than, those available in our targeted nations, and at a fraction of the cost of what they would be in Europe and the United States. As a result, more awareness is required.

- Second, we need medical tourism diplomacy, just as we have COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy, and we require to make high commissions in various nations more aware that medical tourism is not just a budding money generator, but also a potential brand generator.
- Third thing is, some form of public and private joint venture in healthcare sector for medical treatment could undoubtedly be beneficial. It is due to the fact that there are a number of government hospitals that provide treatment on par with private hospitals. Better coordination can be quite beneficial.
- Finally, medical tourism hospitals must prioritise direct and clear communication with patients, as well as plans to reduce cultural barriers to treatment in ICU and CCU care units, patient orientation to international services, and professional demeanour with the patient's family members. The patients' post-discharge results must be clearly stated.

## **Conclusion**

India is a growing health tourism destination, and the cash it generates has an impact on the country's social and economic development. This sector's growth produces jobs to numerous people, upsurges foreign currency revenues, & also consequently funds to our GDP. India's health providers are aiming for this expansion. The Indian health business is courting international patients with well-equipped institutions, trained caregivers, and experienced doctors. The government's involvement in fostering this growth is critical. In comparison to other countries, medical tourism in India is less expensive. Technological advancements have had a significant impact on the Indian health-care sector. Doctors in India were masters in performing complex procedures. Even if there are various benefits to medical tourism in India, there are some challenges that must be overcome and have an impact on economic development. India can become the top Asian country in medical tourism in the near future if policymakers keep an eye on the problems and focus on the potential.

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