

Medical Tourism Consumer Preferences While Selecting India as Medical Tour Destination

Abstract

In present scenario tourism industry is gaining enormous economic benefits. It is not confined itself only to hotels, restaurants and viewing historical sight scenes, but has touched health sector as well. The present phase of modern medical travel is characterized by an industry approach whereby consumers from industrialized countries seek first-class quality at developing country prices, a trend commonly referred to as medical outsourcing. It induces zeal to find out the various reasons to select the particular country as medical tour destination in the view of consumers (medical tourists). This paper tries to provide the glimpses on medical tourism consumers, their perceptions, decision making process on medical tour, motivational factors, demand factors, preferences especially when they are selecting India as medical tour destination. For the above said objective the secondary data are collected from the recent reports on medical tourism, various online journals and scholarly articles.



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Introduction

Globalization has been absorbed as an indispensable factor for the economic growth of every nation. But service sectors have been intruded into the globalization concept for the recent decades only. Various service sectors are trying to get an attraction among the globe and seize the opportunities all over the world. Although the sectors like banking, insurance, hotels, and leisure services are giving much more importance to get globalize. But now 'MEDICAL TOURISM' is attracting the starring eyes of global seekers for high quality and cost effective healthcare. In present scenario tourism industry is gaining enormous economic benefits. It is not confined itself only to hotels, restaurants and viewing historical sight scenes, but has touched rural areas, health sector as well. The globalization of the health care sector and the massive demand for low cost-high quality treatment for health in recent times has caught the attention of many developing countries like India that have the adequate resources and potential to meet these demands. The developing concept of Medical tourism in India has gained tremendous popularity and is attracting people from all over the world for their medical and relaxation needs. It induces zeal to find out the various reasons to select the particular country as medical tour destination in the view of consumers (medical tourists)

Aim of the Study

1. To identify the importance of Indian perspective towards medical tourism
2. To reveal the various opportunities exist in Indian medical centers for the medical tourists

Consumers of Medical Tourism

It is hard to imagine stronger polarity between two areas of social life, than that between tourism and hospitalization. Two domains seem to be fundamentally incompatible. While tourism is associated with freedom and pleasure, hospital evokes images of constraints and sufferings. One does not visit a hospital unless one needs to. At the same time, the medical travel industry is increasingly grounded in tourism.

Erik Cohen (2010) suggests a typology of medical tourists based on the extent to which medical treatments play an important role in tourists' motivations for and conduct on the trips, relative to vacationing.

Mere Tourist

This is an individual who does not make any use of medical services while vacationing in the host country.

Medicated Tourist

Who receives medical treatment for health problems incidentally occurring while in host country?

Medical Tourist

Proper, the third type is an individual whose visit to the host country includes both tourism and medical treatment (for matters unrelated to the trip). Tourists travelling to the host country with the intention of receiving treatment while vacationing, as well as, those deciding on such treatment once in the country will fall within this category.

Vacationing Patient

An individual who visits the host country mainly to receive medical treatment, but makes incidental use of vacationing opportunities, especially during the convalescence period that follows the medical procedure. This is the fourth type.

Mere Patient

Who is the person only coming to receive the medical treatment and he is not having any motive of going for pleasure and vacation

Consumer perceptions on MT in India**“First World Treatment at Third World Costs”**

Because of the better quality, availability of variety of medical facilities and lowest cost of the medical treatments when compared to other countries which induces the tourists to think about India.

Expert Hospital Staff

Many of the Indian doctors and Para medical staff after having specialized and practiced in the Western countries have returned home to set up impressive state of the art facilities with the latest in equipment, technology and service levels particularly in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmadabad, Pune, Hyderabad and Chennai. The highly skilled doctors with wide experience and international exposure excel in Cardiology and Cardiothoracic surgery, orthopedic surgery, Obesity surgery, Gastroenterology, Ophthalmology, Dental, and Urology and Cosmetic/Plastic surgery departments.

Quality

Most of the Indian hospitals providing care are accredited by the JCI and (Joint Commission International) and NBA (national board of Accreditation, it is assured that they are following safety standards, and India preferred as safe destination for medical tourism

Personalized Services

In India, according to the famous words “Atithi Devo Bhava” refers tourists are treated as God. foreign patients are understood as guest for the country and they are given a place equal to that of god in Indian culture. It is this tradition that makes the Indian people to provide the personalized services. Foreign tourists coming for medical treatment in India are taken very much care.

Technology

The most popular treatments sought in India by medical tourists are alternative medicine, bone-marrow transplant, cardiac bypass surgery, eye surgery and orthopedic surgery. India is known in particular for heart surgery, hip resurfacing and other areas of advanced medicine. All medical examination and treatment are conducted using the latest technologically advanced and cutting edge diagnostic equipment. Stringent quality assurance exercises

consistently ensure reliable and high quality test results in a timely manner.

Language

Even though India has many different languages, English is widely spoken. All hospitals have excellent large pool of good English speaking doctors, nurses and other hospital staff and even guides. This makes it easier for foreigners to communicate well to Indian doctors if English is not their native language; they are also arranging translators in most major international languages to be with patients during their Indian tour.

No Waiting Period

When compare to Other countries like USA, Canada and Britain India provides the no waiting time for minor surgeries (eye surgeries- Aravind eye hospitals) and limited waiting period for major surgeries (Apollo hospitals and Fortis hospitals)

.Compare Cost

Indian medical tourism is being promoted as First World Treatment at Third World Costs. India is now being put up on international map as a heaven for those seeking quality and affordable healthcare. This lower cost is especially important for a patient who does not have health insurance and for whom a procedure may be financially crippling in the home country.

Motivational Factors

1. Low Cost of medical facilities
2. Shortest Waiting Lists and Availability of care in the fixed period
3. Non disclosures of information protect the Privacy and Confidentiality of patients
4. Lower travel costs and the lure of a vacation when compare to other destinations
5. Easy Access to information through the web and easy communication with the medical providers
6. Travel intermediaries like medical tourism agents those who are arranging for M- Visa (medical visa) and providing proper information to the patients
7. India is tagged as good Destination Country Profile to get the medical treatments
8. Hospital / Treatment facility accreditation and reputation
9. Some of the personal factors like respect, polite care by the hospital staff also considered by the tourists

Demand Factors Leading To Inbound Medical Tourism Availability of Specialized Medical Treatment

Indian is a well known place for Ayurvedic and natural system of cure. The availability of specialized medical treatment is the initial reason for the emergence of medical tourism. Ancient Greek patients could travel from all over the Mediterranean to health spas which treated some conditions that could not be effectively treated at home. It is no different in modern societies. To treat certain diseases, people will spend money and time traveling to other places. In the last century, with their advanced medical technologies, the United States and Europe became the center of the healthcare world. Persons came to the United States for higher quality treatment than they could receive in their home country.

Income and Wealth

The inbound demand for specialized medical treatment, which is normally quite expensive, is primarily from international patients, who are in the upper strata of income and wealth. For these patients, the cost of treatment is much less significant than the availability of the requisite medical procedure. Health insurance is not a factor for this group. They often come to the India despite having a national health insurance program

Macroeconomic Conditions

Since income and wealth are significant demand variables, the state of the global economy is an important factor. In the face of the current slow global recovery from the recent recession, there has been a decline in inbound medical tourism. On the other hand, a poor economy can be a stimulus to outbound medical travel as patients who lose their jobs or health insurance seek lower costs.

The Quality of Treatment

The inbound demand is largely for services provided in world class health facilities that can

provide the full array of services needed by the patient. Especially for surgical procedures, both pre-operative and post-operative care is of very high quality.

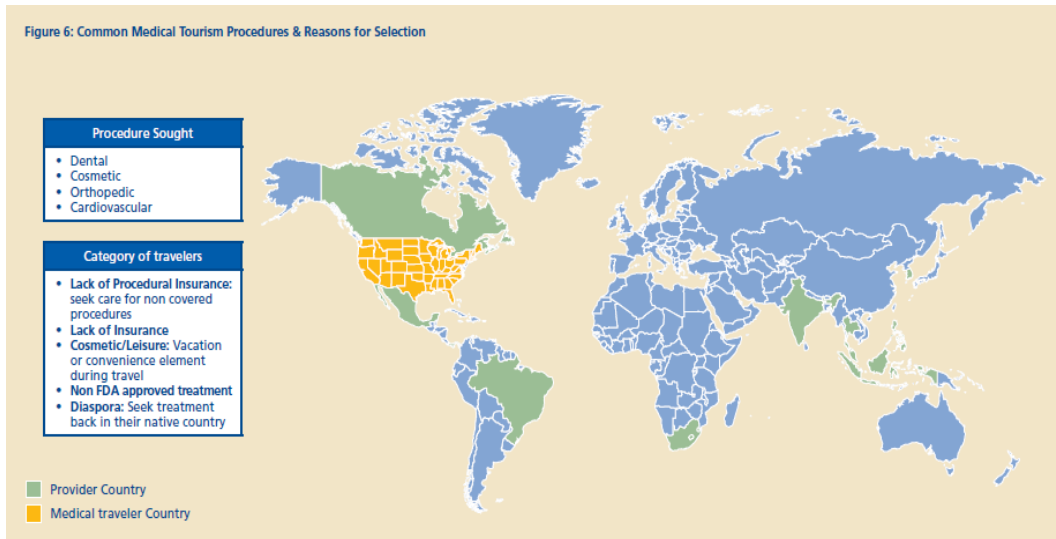
Shortest Time Period

The medical services delivery systems in many developed countries are overburdened and patients have to wait a long time to see a doctor or specialist, even longer ones for general surgeries, orthopedics, or cardiology.

The Health Insurance Factor

The lower cost of these surgical procedures is very attractive to those who are uninsured. In the U.S., there are an estimated 47 million persons without health insurance and 120 million without dental coverage. The use of medical tourism programs can save money when compared to U.S costs. The impact of the recent health care reform legislation must be monitored as to its effect on outbound demand.

India is Preferred Destination –why?



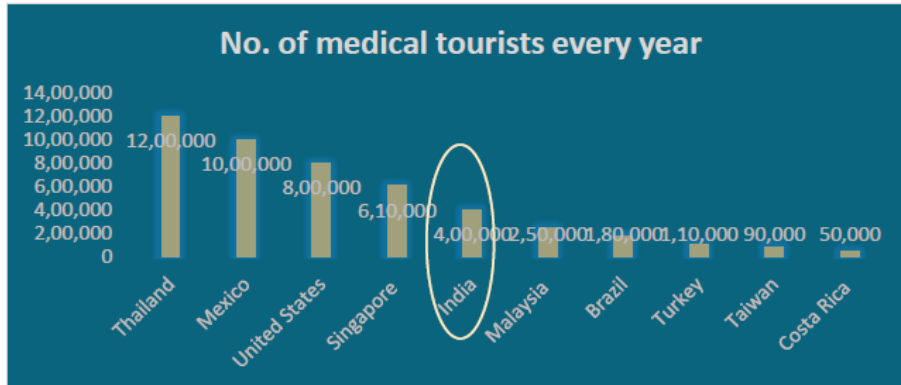
Reasons

1. Unavailability of quality healthcare in many countries across the world
2. Rise in disposable income and healthcare awareness, wellness
3. Enormous growth of tourism industry
4. People spend more on health care
5. Nearby countries are getting more advantages like Srilanka and eastern countries
6. Some of the prominent medical hubs in the country are Chennai , Bengaluru and New Delhi; concentration of better facilities in the south is an observable trend
7. Key parameters which are necessary to enable and promote medical value travel in India have been identified and assessed 25



India: A Preferred Destination

As the picture shows there are 13 accredited hospitals in India, and by the forthcoming years the number will increase



The picture shows that nearly 4 Lakh people are coming every year, and the figure will increase by the upcoming years

Figure 4: Foreign Medical Sites Identified by Patients Beyond Borders

Country	Medical institution
Mexico	• Christus Mugerza Alta Especialidad Hospital, Monterrey
Costa Rica	• Clinica Biblica Hospital, San Jose
Barbados	• Barbados Fertility Centre, Christ Church
Brazil	• Hospital do Coracao, Sao Paulo • Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein, Sao Paulo • Hospital Samaritano, Sao Paulo
India	• Asian Heart Institute, Bombay • Apollo Hospitals, Chennai • Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi • Shroff Eye Hospital and LASIK Center, Bombay • Wockhardt Hospital, Bangalore • Wockhardt Hospital, Bombay
Thailand	• Bangkok Hospital Medical Center, Bangkok • Bumrungrad International Hospital, Bangkok • Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital, Bangkok
Philippines	• St. Luke's Medical Center, Quezon City

(continued)

Areas for Improvement, to Make India a Global Healthcare Destination

Raise the quality standards

Hospitals in India should benchmark themselves up for international quality accreditation standards. Healthcare is a credence service wherein the customer cannot judge the service quality, because of which he looks for cues like the seals of approval of internationally recognized quality control agencies.

Improve infrastructure

Healthcare facilities need not only to be scaled up, but also to be upgraded. The number and competencies of the specialists and super-specialists and so also the para-medical staffs have to be increased. The sheer number of beds and physical healthcare infrastructure available in India as of now is abysmally low given the size of its population.

Simplify the procedures

Procedures that are being done manually can be simplified, standardized, and automated. Sometimes, it takes even hours for a patient to register himself and more so to complete the formalities before getting discharged. Then, of course, comes easing the travel formalities. The potential harm of easing international travel related procedures

for the medical tourist segment is relatively less and the government should take a proactive attitude in this regard.

Provide Quick Legal Remedies

The Indian legal infrastructure is not at all geared up to handle healthcare specific litigations in a speedy manner. Internationally, legal redresses is a routine affair, which, in India, is considered as against ethics. Though there exists a mechanism to deal with medical insurance related cases, the redressal is so much time consuming, often extending to a few years.

Conclusion

India offers world class treatment at very affordable prices in comparison to USA and UK. The Indian healthcare industry is growing at a very high pace and it is expected that the sector will touch US\$238.76 billion by 2020.

Experienced and talented professionals, comprised of doctors, nurses, technicians, attendants, clinical coordinators, and nutritionists are working together to serve the global medical tourists. Indian Government is investing a huge amount on promotional activities to increase the potential of medical tourism in India.

Although India stands number 3 in Asian countries and 5th all over the world in terms of medical tourism, it has its own hurdles to cross over. The initiatives

from the government may not be sufficient to increase traffic to India. Every hospital should aim at improving its infrastructure like transport, accommodation, and communication and information channels not only to improve tourism but also to cater to its local needs as well.

Only when a hospital is self-sufficient can it cater to the outside world. They should also make the transition from India back to their home country as smooth as possible so that future patients will get a good review from them. The government should set up special units to help foreign tourists in terms of security and accommodation so that tourists need not have the fear of being mugged or cheated. They should also make the visa process simpler and less cumbersome to aid the already ailing patients during their stay in the country. Though the economic recession has caused a temporary slowdown in the growth of medical tourism, the industry is still young in India.

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