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Review Article

Medical Tourism: An Insight into Past Knowledge and Future Prospects

Ragni Kumari¹, Archana², Md. Javed Karim^{3,*} and Basit Fazal^{1,*}

¹Department of Pharmacy, Nibha Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Affiliated to Bihar University of Health Science, Rajgir, India

²Department of Pharmacy, MGM College of Pharmacy, Affiliated to Bihar University of Health Science, Patna, India

³School of Pharmacy, Bhabha University, Bhopal, India.

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*Corresponding author:

Md. Javed Karim, School of Pharmacy,
Bhabha University, Bhopal, India and
Basit Fazal, Department of Pharmacy,
Nibha Institute of Pharmaceutical
Sciences, Affiliated to Bihar University of
Health Science, Rajgir, India.

ABSTRACT

Medical tourism involves traveling to a different location primarily for the purpose of receiving healthcare services. This can include procedures that are not easily accessible or affordable in one's home country or seeking specialized or advanced treatments. Factors driving medical tourism include cost savings, faster access to care, and the availability of specific treatments, medical tourism is defined as travel for the primary purpose of receiving healthcare reasons for engaging in medical tourism include lower costs, shorter wait times, access to specialized treatments, and the desire to visit a specific destination, medical tourism encompasses a wide range of procedures, including surgeries, dental work, and other medical treatment medical tourism is a growing industry, with increasing number of patient traveling internationally for healthcare medical tourism can provide economic benefits to destination countries and offer patients access to potentially better or more affordable care, low- cost advantage, Hospitality and infrastructure, potential for growth, specific medical services.

Keywords: Medical tourism; Healthcare; Market outlook; Patient experience; Destinations for medical tourism.

Introduction

It is a modern era of globalized medicine, today international travel and access and online health information are readily accessible, medical tourism is an very important issue as patient in countries around the all world are exercising increasing degrees of autonomy over their health care choices by boating information from sources other than their regular health care providers and, in some cases, by electing to pursue care providers and, in some case, by electing to seeking care alternatives outside their home medical system. Medical tourism is a broad and inclusive term that refers to a wide range of divers of the activities [1].

It is defined as “the practice of travelling to another country for the purpose of obtaining health care (elective surgery dental treatment, reproductive treatment, and organ transplantation, medical checkups, etc.),” and is usually distinguished from both care sought for unplanned medical emergencies occurring abroad and from formal bi-lateral medical trade agreements. Individual motivations for engaging in medical tourism vary widely and may include imperatives such as avoiding wait times, reducing costs, improving quality, and accessing treatment that is not available or legal in the domestic jurisdiction or for which the individual is not eligible [2].

Medical Tourism

India is an important global tourist destination. Notably, the number of inbound tourists increased fivefold in 2017, while two decades ago about 2.4 million tourists from different part of the world visited India annually, the world travel and tourism council has projected that in the coming decade, India will be the fourth largest travel and tourism economy after China, us, and Germany. On the other hand, India is now one of the second fastest growing outbound tourism markets in the world, only surpassed by China.

As a result, the united nation world tourism organization (UNWTO) estimates that India will have about 50 million outbound tourists by 2020. As a result, the travel and tourism market in India is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 7.23% during 2016-2021 in addition, Indians are increasingly using technology to plan their trips and rich their destination. In 2017, 97% of travellers used technology for this purpose, which is the highest regionally and globally. In addition, India currently ranks A in the world in terms of the number of Smartphone users. In recent the number of Smartphone user in India has increased by 50% it is expected to reach 530 million users by the end of 2018, surpassing the United States with 229 million users. Since mobile data in India is cheaper than many develop and developing countries, the new generation tourists fill comfortable to use Smartphone while planning for their travel [3].

People have travelled in search of healing since ancient times. There are places around the world that are considered healing sites, where there are aspects of the natural, built, symbolic, and social environment that people associate with healing, many historic sites, such as Lindens in France, continue to attract pilgrims. In modern times, there has been a lot of interest in creating therapeutic spaces. Florence nightingale introduced early concepts such as facilitating healing through the provision of fresh air, adequate light and good accommodation for staff. In 1984 science magazine published a study by roger Ulrich showing that patients staying in hospital rooms that overlook the natural world recover more quickly. Architects have also worked with medical researchers to design buildings, such as hospitals and wellness spas, to facilitate healing travellers who visit places in search of healthcare are called medical tourists. Medical tourists include people who travel to: hospitals to clinics for traditional medicine, invasive treatment's not available in their country of residence wellness centres and spas that combine complementary therapies and traditional natural provide preventive therapy destination spas that offer treatment for the body and mind with therapeutic knowledge and treatments such as hydrotherapy tubs, steam baths, and therapeutic massage this chapter will focus on the first group: individuals who travel internationally for medical treatment at hospitals or clinics [4].

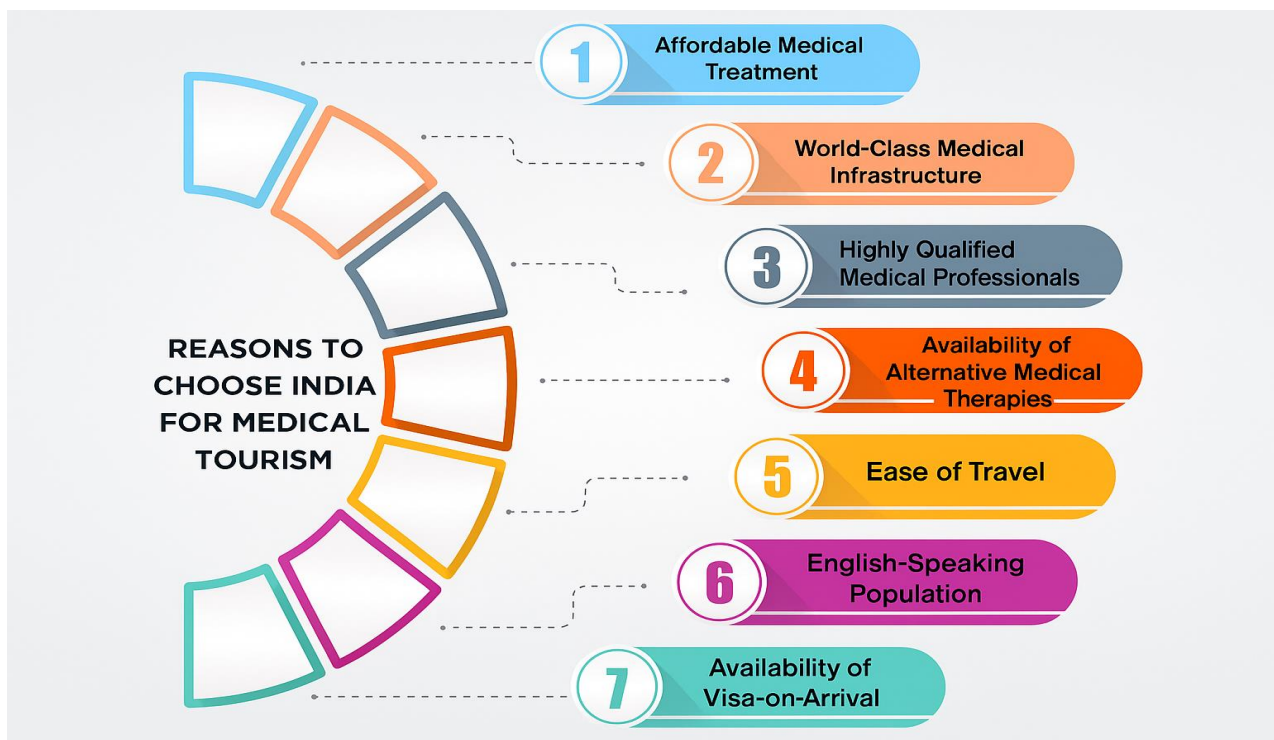


Figure 1: Reasons to choose India for medical tourism [4].

History of Medical Tourism

Indian civilization is more than 5000 years old and it is known for its culture and religious diversity as well as varied geographical sites. Traditional arts and crafts add to its charms to attract tourist, in India apart, from the existence of modern medicine, indigenous or traditional medical practitioners continue to practice throughout the country, popular indigenous healthcare system include Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH). All these traditional healthcare systems are attracting national and international patient and increasing the tourism inflow plastic surgery, dental care open transplant, cardio vascular surgery, eye treatment, hip replacement, in vitro fertilization, etc having originate in Greece and initially developed in Arab and Persian lands, the Unani system of medicine came to make its permanent home in India almost a millennium ago and see the zenith of its scientific development. Unani medicine is recognized as one of the Indian system of medicine in our national health police in the health care delivery organization of the country, today, India is the global leader in Unani medicine with a wide and very well organized and functional network of educational, healthcare research and pharmaceutical institution Indian systems of medicine including Unani medicine have certain beneficial features, such as their diversity and flexibility; accessibility; and affordability. These systems enjoy wide acceptance among a large section of people; comparatively low cost: the need for comparatively level of technical inputs and their increased economic value are positive attributes that make them providers of healthcare services that needed by a large section of our people [5].

Medical Tourism in India

Globalization has led to the emergence of tourism as one of the fastest growing service industries. Tourism when carried out for getting medical care is referred to as medical tourism. There is lot of potential in this sector, and it can possible be the next biggest foreign exchange eager for India medical tourism is growing business with many countries of the world fighting for a shear in the world medical tourists. Medical tourism indeed was not known to the world a few years ago and it was hard to think of these two different services to come together. Tourism and travel were associate with leisure activity free from constrains an obligation. On the other hand, hospital evokes sights of constraints and sufferings. A writer noted; “the dentist chair and antiseptic smells of a hospital waiting room are synonymous with pain and a sense of helplessness they just don’t blend with travel and vacations” however,

recently it has been observed that the medical tourism is fast gaining pace. Goodrich and Goodrich have defined medical tourism as “the attempt on the part of a tourist facility or destination to attract by deliberately promoting its healthcare services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities” medical tourism is primarily carried out for the cost advantage in the destination country or because of the quality treatment offered in the destination country in comparison like united kingdom, united states of America, Japan, Canada etc. where the medical cost are very expensive and have long waiting times for getting the medical treatment. These people travel to countries like Thailand, Singapore, India, Malaysia, South Korea, and Brazil, Belgium, hungry, and Jordon etc. which are providing treatments at less cost along with hot tourist destination since ancient times India has been the centre for traditional medical treatments like Yunani, Ayurveda, homeopathy and history has witnessed travellers coming to India to learn about these ancient practices. Today also some states have specialized in providing certain medical facilities. Kerala and Karnataka for ayurvedic treatment Uttarakhand for yogic practices and meditation, Delhi for cardiac care, orthopaedic care and other allopathic treatment and Chennai for eye care. Karnataka, Kerala and Uttarakhand also provide some of the India’s tourist destinations [6].

Impact of Medical Tourism on National Health Care System

At the most general level, existing national and sub national institution can mediate the impact on particular countries of international processes resulting from globalization this general remark also applies to global medical tourism which unlikely to affect all national healthcare systems equally simply put systems will react differently to external pressures, based in part on their own institutional characteristic institutional characteristics also from part of the policy matrix that shapes the optional available to decision makers, there are two main aspects to this story, first, we can look at how domestic healthcare institution are particularly affected by inbound medical tourism (i.e., the destination country receiving medical tourism). Research suggests that the way in which healthcare systems deal with foreign users and the impact that foreign users have on the system, will vary according to the institutional characteristics of that system for example, countries that attract many medical tourists may see price increases and diversion of services from their less-fortunate citizens also the institutional characteristics of national healthcare system may explain why some countries attract more medical tourists than others, the comparison between Canada and the us is particularly revealing here on the one

hand although some provinces have considered alternative approaches that would encourage inbound medical tourism as a source of revenue generation the limited scope of private healthcare in Canada currently

restricts the availability of medical tourism opportunities for wealthy foreigners seeking treatment [7].

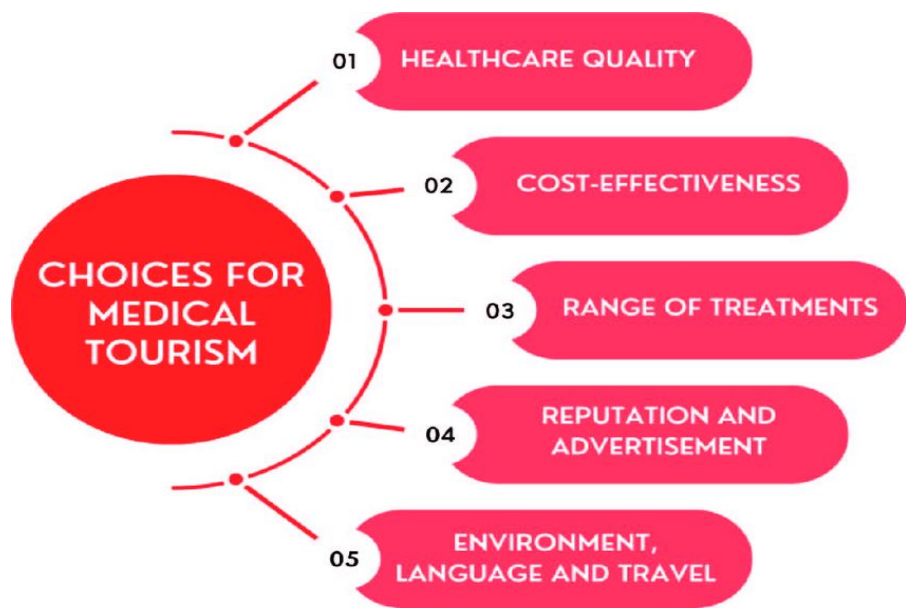


Figure 2: Choices for Medical Tourism.

Market Outlook 2025-2035

India’s medical tourism industry is poised for substantial growth, with projections indicating an increase from an estimated USD 18.2 billion in 2025 to USD 58.2 billion by 2035, at a CAGR of 12.3% during

the forecast period, this surge in growth is driven by India’s reputation for high-quality healthcare services at a fraction of the cost compared to western countries, along with the availability of cutting-edge technology and internationally trained medical professionals [8].

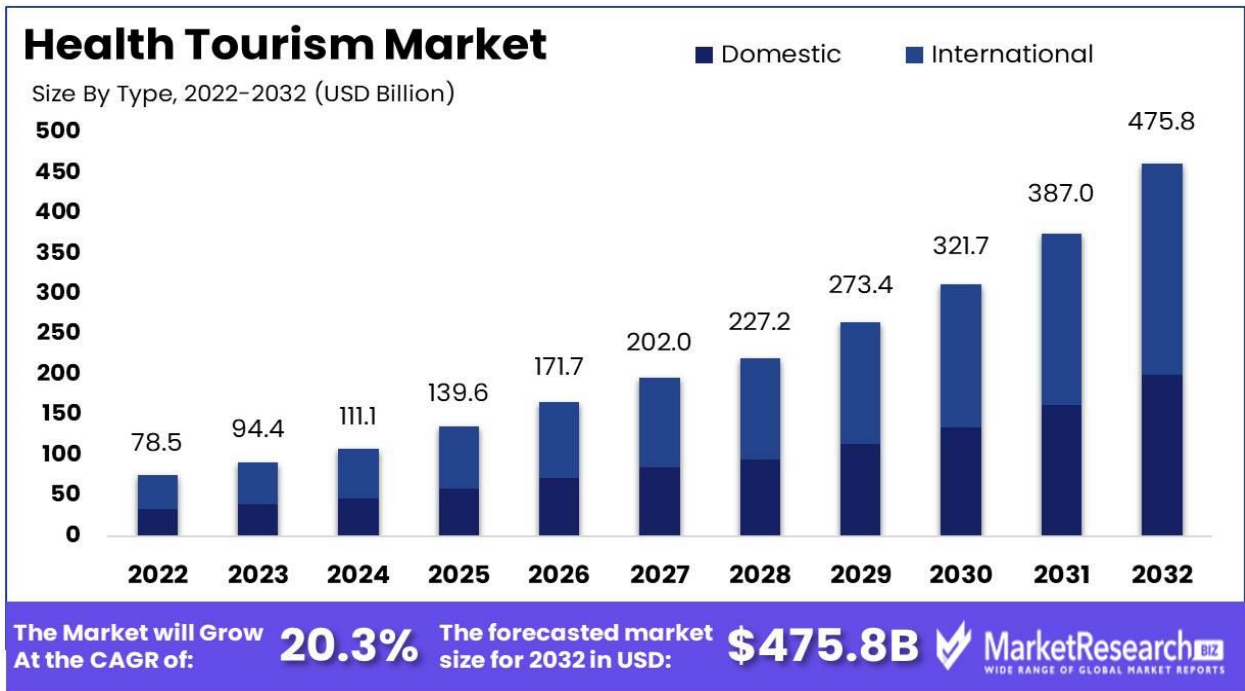


Figure 3: Medical tourism graph [9].

Impact of Medical Tourism in Destination and Departure Countries

Medical tourism involves patients leaving their country of residence, outside the established cross-border care system, with the aim of receiving medical care, often surgery; abroad medical tourists travel abroad people are motivated by healthcare issues such as high cost, long wait times, and lack of access care popular descriptions of medical tourism have emphasized its accessibility and novelty, reflecting depictions of recovering from surgery for, example, a Canadian who traveled to Costa Rica for multiple cosmetic surgeries as a medical tourist said that “it was the best experience I’ve ever had” which can happen to anyone because when you’re recovering, you’re in the sun it’s absolutely incredible a medical tourist from the united kingdom who travelled to south Africa for cosmetic surgery reported that I went back to the guests house and relaxed [after the surgery]. I didn’t have to lift a finger it was bliss description such as these contribute to the ‘exoticism’ of medical tourism, and in many ways distract from the seriousness of having a surgical intervention abroad. Hospitals that have established themselves as leading medical tourism destination are largely found in low-and middle-income countries where favorable exchange rates have given them a competitive advantage in attracting price-conscious international patients this development is a departure from earlier patterns of trade in medical services, in which private facilities in high-income countries sold expensive healthcare service to a global elite furthermore trade in medical tourism currently takes place outside any regulatory framework, this has led some to view it as a manifestation of profit-driven, co modified private care, and invited criticisms that is a threat to profit-driven, in kind personal care it has been criticized as a manifestation of the disease and has been termed a threat to the equitable delivery of health care worldwide these criticisms are supported by a recent world health organization report on health equity, demands universally available, primary care-oriented healthcare systems in particular, medical tourism requires significant investment in private, profit-orientated tertiary care infrastructure. Medical tourism hospitals in LMICs have worked hard to overcome the negative images and stereotypes associated with the ‘third world’ often held by residents of high-income countries this includes changing the prescription that goods and services produced in LMICs are of poor quality the rise of the internet has been integral to this shift, as it has allowed destination hospitals to distribute details about facilities, staff and services to a previously unimaginable wide audience, while maintaining tight control over the presentation of information, for

example, websites prominently display the credentials of physicians, many of whom have trained at prestigious institutions in high-income countries in addition, hospitals have also acquired international safety accreditations to increase the confidence of potential clients among other things, the promotion of medical tourism through the internet and other means aims to allay the doubts international patients. Might have regarding going abroad for surgery, mean-while numerous risks are inherent in the practice of medical tourism. The possibility of developing embolism due to long flights, especially after surgery description of continuity of care for patients and the lack of adequate malpractice laws in many destination countries are all risky prospects for medical tourists these risks have not prevented the steady growth of the industry [10].

Patients Experience in Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is becoming an increasingly popular option for patients who wish to access procedures that are not available to them in their home countries due to lack of affordability lack of availability, and long waiting lists, among other reasons in its broadest conception, medical tourism means “traveling for the explicit purpose of receiving healthcare services abroad” people seeking access to such procedures cardiac, orthopedic, dental and plastic surgery are moving to major destination countries known for caring for international patient for example, countries such as India, Singapore and Thailand have become global leaders in the industry, providing services to patient from around the world. Brochures, websites and other marketing materials promote the services of hospitals in these countries that wish to attract international patients facilitators/brokers specializing in medical tourism further promote this practice, and offer services such as making travel bookings, assisting in selecting hospitals and surgeons abroad and helping potential medical tourists complete paperwork, this practice of medical tourism does not exist without criticism, particularly when patients from developed countries travel to developing countries for procedures, it is believed to contribute to the commodification of health and healthcare by allowing those with financial means to purchase care that may not be available to other citizens this practice may lead to international patients receiving a higher level of care than residents of the country where it is being provided another criticism is that healthcare providers trained in countries with publicly funded education systems who treat international patients privately are misusing the public funds that contributed to their training however, it has been suggested that if the industry is properly regulated, medical tourism could provide a viable, means by which developing countries can gain access to essential revenue and developed countries can

reduce ‘bottlenecks’ in their healthcare systems the presence of medical tourism hospitals in developing countries is also believed to reduce the international brain drain of health human resources by providing access to healthcare to surgeons and others by providing access to the environment [11].

Barriers in the Development of Medical Tourism

Countries that want to gain a greater share from the international tourism market make significant investment in diversifying their tourism products in this context the current dynamics in the medical tourism sector and predictions about its future have made medical tourism an important sector in recent years medical tourism trips are mostly undertaken for infertility treatment, oenological disease, orthopaedics obesity dentistry cosmetic emphasis cardiovascular treatments an important parameter that enables us to see the size of the medical tourism sector is its economic volume which stood at around \$60 billion in 2008 around 50 million people travel for health purpose annually worldwide, each patient spends the equivalent \$3800 to \$6000 on each trip, however, according to 2019 data direct medical tourism expenditure has reached \$44.8 billion the market size of medical tourism was \$11.56 billion before the pandemic, \$13.98 billion in 2021 it is expected to reach \$39.57 billion in 2023, \$48.26 billion in 2024 and grow by 100% by 2025 and \$53.51 billion in 2028, \$243.74 billion by 2032, the size of medical tourism market, the presence of technological advances in the medical field, and lower treatment costs in developing countries are seen as the main driving forces driving the market growth. For this reason, millions of people around the world travel to countries where treatment is more accessible so that they can overcome restrictions such as difficulties in accessing the healthcare system in their countries and strict legal regulation on the healthcare system medical tourism were initially defined as the movement of a patient traveling from a less developed country to a medically developed countries to developing countries for medical purposes the most important reason for this situation is the rising prices of healthcare services in developed countries problems that may be encountered in medical tourism may be listed as follows, psychological, physical or mental distress due to traveling to a new destination post operation care, duration of stay and concerns regarding intercultural competition medical and political risks, problem related to government aid, price, capacity and local people’s need of health care as the above studies suggest, there are always some potential problems that medical tourism as a sector and medical tourists as individuals may encounter, the result of the literature review of barriers affecting the selection of medical tourism destinations there are

many factors limiting the development of medical tourism, the most common ones are physician quality, costs and difficulties in establishing communication in addition, treatments not covered by insurance, lack of accreditation, inadequate knowledge and skills of employees and lack of active promotion of countries can be side to be obstacles to the development of medical tourism [12].

Conclusion

Medical tourism involves traveling to another country specifically to receive medical care, often for procedures like surgery, dental work, or cosmetic treatments. It’s driven by factors like lower costs, access to treatments not available at home, or the desire to combine medical care with a vacation India has a long history of attracting individuals for medical treatment particularly for alternative therapies like Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy, Yoga and meditation since ancient times. Ancient civilization recognized the therapeutic benefits of natural springs and sacred temple bath yoga and Ayurvedic medicine gained popularity around 5000 years ago, attracting medical travelers and spiritual students seeking this healing method.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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