

MEDICAL TOURISM: INDIA IS THE FAVORABLE DESTINATION IN THE WORLD

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Abstract

India is a huge magnet for attracting foreign patients for medical treatments. Medical tourism, more broadly health and wellness tourism, refers to the industry in which people from across the globe travel to other countries to get medical, dental and surgical care, and at the same time, visit the local attractions of that country. The high-end healthcare system in India is as good as the best in the world. Indian corporate hospitals have a large pool of doctors, nurses, and support staff ensuring individualized care. India has positioned itself as an inexpensive destination for medical treatment compared with the US and Europe. Quality of care is what attracts people. India has a good number (22) of JCI (Joint Commission International) accredited hospitals, National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) and compares well with other countries in Asia. Quick and immediate attention for surgeries and all interventions are assured in India. For greater understanding between patients and healthcare personnel, the warmth and hospitality of Indian hospitals is a big factor in choosing India as a healthcare destination. As healthcare turns costlier in developed countries, India's medical tourism market is expected to more than double in size from USD 3 billion at present to around USD 8 billion by 2020. Tourists come to India for economic reasons and market attractiveness. Clearly, there are economic advantages for choosing English-speaking India for certain procedures.

Keywords : Healthcare, hospitals, doctors, destination, JCI, NABH.

Introduction

India is a huge magnet for attracting foreign patients for medical treatments. With general tourism on the rise, it is estimated that the volume of medical tourists worldwide could reach up to 5 million by 2016, attracting additional visitors to the country. Medical tourism, more broadly health and wellness tourism, refers to the industry in which people from across the globe travel to other countries to get medical, dental and surgical care, and at the same time, visit the local attractions of that country. The world population is aging and becoming more affluent at rates that surpass the availability of quality healthcare resources. In addition, out-of-pocket medical costs of critical and elective procedures continue to rise, while nations offering universal care are faced with ever-increasing resource burdens. These drivers are forcing patients to pursue cross-border healthcare options either to save money or to avoid long waits for treatment.

Over the years, India has grown to become a top-notch destination for medical value travel because it scores high over a range of factors that determines the overall quality of care. Imagine a complex surgical procedure being done in a world class global hospital by acclaimed medical specialists at a fifth to tenth of what it normally takes! That's India. From quality of therapy, range of procedural and treatment options, infrastructure and skilled manpower to perform any medical procedure with zero waiting time, the list of benefits of travelling for medical treatment in India are many.

Reason to Choose India for Medical Tourism

India is a leading player in the medical tourist/healthcare Facilitation industry. It is increasingly emerging as the destination of choice for a wide range of medical procedures. There are numerous advantages of coming to India for treatment. Some of the advantages of coming to India for medical treatment are:

Advantages of coming to India for Medical Treatment

- Internationally accredited medical facilities using the latest technologies
- Highly qualified Physicians/Surgeons and hospital support staff
- Significant cost savings compared to domestic private healthcare
- Medical treatment costs in India are lower by at least 60-80% when compared to similar procedures in North America and the UK
- No Wait Lists
- Fluent English speaking staff
- Options for private room, translator, private chef, dedicated staff during your stay and many other tailor-made services
- Can easily be combined with a holiday / business trip

Indian Corporate Hospitals

Indian corporate hospitals have a large pool of doctors, nurses, and support staff ensuring individualized care.

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The highly skilled personnel, with wide experience and international exposure excel in Cardiology and Cardiothoracic surgery, Orthopedic surgery, Bariatric or Obesity surgery, Gastroenterology, Ophthalmology, Dentistry, and Urology, to name a few.

The Indian medical tourism industry is expected to reach \$6 billion (around Rs 36,000 crore) by 2018, with the number of people arriving in the country for medical treatment set to double over the next two years, a report by industry lobby Punjab Haryana Delhi (PHD) Chamber of Commerce and Industry said. Currently, the size of the medical tourism industry in India in value terms is estimated at a little over \$3 billion, with tourist arrivals estimated at 230,000.

India has positioned itself as an inexpensive destination for medical treatment compared with the US and Europe. Additionally, Indian private hospitals have a large pool of skilled doctors, nurses and supporting staff that attract medical tourists, especially from South-East Asia and the Middle East.

"The vast pool of medical professionals, expanding private health-care infrastructure, growing technical expertise, cheaper medical procedures, world class health-care infrastructure and government support are likely to boost the number of medical tourists arrivals in India to a projected level of 4 lakh by 2018," said Sharad Jaipuria, president, PHD Chamber.

The Basics for Successful Healthcare Solutions Facilities

The high-end healthcare system in India is as good as the best in the world. India maintains not only a robust accreditation system but also a large number of accredited facilities (about 275 such facilities that match any global infrastructure). India has a good number (22) of JCI (Joint Commission International) accredited hospitals, National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) and compares well with other countries in Asia. These set of approved hospitals in India can provide care at par or above global standards.

Frontier technologies

Cutting edge technology to support medical diagnostics and medical procedures are employed by specialists in medical facilities. All recognized hospitals have invested a lot in supportive technology and operative techniques. Complicated heart surgeries, cancer care and surgeries, neuro and even general surgeries require high-end technology to continually better outcomes, minimize complications, enable faster recovery and reduce length of hospital stay. The recent advancements in robotic surgeries, radiation surgery or radio therapies with

cyberknife stereotactic options, IMRT/IGRT, transplant support systems, advanced neuro and spinal options are all available in India. India's medical management and acclaimed specialists are quite comfortable in challenging themselves to new frontiers to provide solutions, always building on their expertise.

Finest doctors

India has not only hospitals with world-class facilities but skilled world-class doctors and medical personnel too. The country has the largest pool of doctors and paramedics in South Asia (1.2 million Allopathic doctors, 0.17 million dental surgeons, 2 million nurses). Many of them have established their credentials as leaders around the world. India's medical history spans thousands of years through Ayurvedic and alternate medicine forms. There are about 0.8 million formally trained Ayurvedic doctors. With a large number of doctors, there is a high level of competency and capability in adoption of newer technologies and innovation and fresh treatment methods. It is a wonderful example of higher quantity leading to higher quality and vice versa. Communicate, talk to the doctors in the accredited facilities prior to your visit and they will study your needs and customize the treatment for you!

Financial Savings

Quality of care is what attracts people. However, quality services should not be beyond the affordability of the patient who requires it. If quality comes at an affordable cost it is an unbeatable advantage. This confluence of highest quality and cost advantage is unique for India. The benefit is unimaginable when it comes to major treatments such as for leukemia where the difference in cost is 10 to 20 times. For other treatments, it could be anything from a fifth to a tenth when compared to Western countries and 80 to 90 per cent of what is charged in other South Asian medical destinations. The estimated 600,000 people who step into India from other countries do not do so for cheap healthcare but for quality healthcare at an affordable cost. They are not compromised at any level, but regain health at a fraction of the cost.

Fast Track – Zero Waiting Time

Quick and immediate attention for surgeries and all interventions are assured in India. Getting an appointment for bypass surgery or a planned angioplasty in certain countries takes almost 3-6 months. And there these treatments are very costly too. It's zero waiting time in India for any procedure, be it heart surgery, kidney care, cancer treatment, neuro-spinal procedure, knee/hip/joint replacements, dental, cosmetic surgeries, weight loss surgery etc.

Feeling the pulse

For greater understanding between patients and healthcare personnel, the warmth and hospitality of Indian hospitals is a big factor in choosing India as a healthcare destination. Among the top medical destinations of the world, India has the highest percentage of English language speaking people. Amidst the variety of culture and traditions, if there is one thing that is common in India, that is the English language. If other language options are essential, there are expert interpreters who will be arranged by the hospitals. All leading to reassuring hospitality and great after care.

Indian medical tourism industry to touch \$8 billion by 2020: Grant Thornton

As healthcare turns costlier in developed countries, India's medical tourism market is expected to more than double in size from USD 3 billion at present to around USD 8 billion by 2020, a report says. According to a CII - Grant Thornton white paper, cost is a major driver for nearly 80 per cent of medical tourists across the globe. The cost-consciousness factor and availability of accredited facilities have led to emergence of several global medical tourism corridors - Singapore, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Taiwan, Mexico and Costa Rica.

"Amongst these corridors of health, India has the second largest number of accredited facilities (after Thailand). The Indian Medical Tourism market is expected to grow from its current size of USD 3 billion to USD 7-8 billion by 2020,"

Key Highlights of Medical Tourism in India

Medical tourism market is estimated to be valued at \$4 billion. Health care tourism has been a key growth sector for more than a decade. Growing insurance market, strong pharmaceutical industry, cheap international travel, and quality health care are increasingly making India a preferred tourist destination. India hosts about 1.27 million tourists from countries such as the US, UK, and Canada in addition to visitors from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and China.

This market includes secondary players from the tourism industry who greatly benefit from visitors to India. The government estimates that the growth of health-related services will be more than 5 percent for the next 10 years and that should further attract more such visitors. Major corporations such as Tata, Fortis, Max, Wockhard, and Apollo Hospitals have made significant investments in setting up modern hospitals and tourism-related services to cater to the new brand of visitors from abroad.

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procedures. For example, a heart bypass procedure costs roughly \$140,000 without any insurance in the US. The same procedure, however, costs only around \$7,000 or Rs 3 lakh at one of India's leading surgery centers. Procedures such as hip and knee replacement, face lift, and gastric bypass are far more affordable in India, including the cost of travel and accommodation, compared to the US. Moreover, these cosmetic procedures are not covered by most insurance providers in Western countries. India has many top-notch centres for open-heart surgery and pediatric heart surgeries which are equipped with the latest equipment that are on par with these Western countries. India is also acutely aware of the quality perceptions of its visitors: many Indian hospitals that cater to foreign tourists meet the requirements of US health standards like Food and Drug Administration and Joint Commission Accreditation for hospitals, hoping to fight this notion.

India is also home to a number of alternative medicine techniques such as Ayurveda, Sidha, Unani, Yoga, Acupuncture and Homeopathy which are very popular among foreigners. Such treatment opportunities give India the edge over its competitors like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and UAE.

Infrastructure and better health-related investments will decide the future. While all trends point towards an increasing demand for medical services in India, some key factors will determine whether medical tourism becomes India's next crown jewel, like our Information Technology industry. Here's a list of factors:

- **Infrastructure investment by the government:** The health industry as a whole has seen meager growth as far as infrastructure is concerned. This has been primarily due to investments coming from the private players in the market. The government needs to step in and provide basic infrastructure services which will improve basic access to high quality centers.
- **Reducing barriers for visiting India for medical purposes:** Currently, foreigners need the "M-Visa" to come to India for medical purposes. Obtaining the visa is a huge barrier for medical tourists wanting to come here. India should consider offering visa-on-arrival type of services and partner with medical and tourism providers to streamline administrative processes.
- **Raise quality standards to meet Western providers:** Such partnerships will give confidence to foreign tourists to choose India over competitors like Malaysia and Singapore.
- **Market health tourism in Western countries:** With the ever-growing need for cheaper health care and complex health insurance offerings in the US and UK, Indian hospitals could target the neglected

populations of those countries and draw them here to provide a cheaper alternative. This could be a boon for both the Western economies and India's.

Conclusion

India is in an advantageous position to tap the global opportunities in the medical tourism sector. The government's role is crucial to the development of medical tourism. The government should take steps in the role of a regulator and also as a facilitator of private investment in healthcare. Mechanisms need to be evolved to enable quicker visa grants to foreign tourists for medical purposes where patients can contact the Immigration Department at any point of entry for quick clearance. Tax incentives to the service providers, import duty reduction on medical equipment, committees to promote and foster medical tourism are some of the initiatives that can be undertaken. There is also a need

to develop supporting infrastructure such as transport services to facilitate tourism in India. The tourism, health, information and communication departments need to work in tandem for efficient patient care.

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