

# Determinants of Medical Tourist Destination Selection – A study on Medical Tourism in India

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Medical tourism is a broader term used to denote the phenomena of travelers crossing international boundaries for quality treatment at an affordable price. Medical Tourism has grown immensely in the past years, and it has been a significant financial generator for nations in the current competitive industrial world. India passed through a transition stage with enormous development in the health sector. Highly skilled and internationally trained healthcare professionals and hospitals with competing infrastructure and services are attractive factors for medical travelers to visit India. It is essential to improve the post-care services after treatment, hygiene and special care should be taken after the surgery. Improvements in Visa regulations can also attract medical travellers from other regions of the world not explored presently. The Government can focus more on promotional activities through social media campaigns, websites, marketing overseas, and conducting annual medical fairs, exhibitions conferences globally. The main objective of this conceptual study is to analyze the significant determinants of medical tourists' intention to select India as a preferred destination for treatment.

**Keyterms:** Medical Tourism, Medical Value Travel, Medical Visa, Health Tourism, Preferred Destination, Medical Cost, Healthcare Professional

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and advancement in information technology and communication made the world more connected with people, and traveling from one continent to another become easier. From the ancient period onwards, people were traveling from one country to another to seek health-related treatments. A history marked that Europeans and Asians were the first to travel for health and wellness. When consumers travel to across the world to receive some form of medical treatment, it's termed medical tourism. This treatment has a wide range of medical services, including dental care, cosmetic, elective, and fertility treatment

Advances in information and communication technology made people well informed about the medical services available around the globe, which will help them choose the best available services. As per the report published by the medical tourism index, it is estimated that global medical travel will reach about 3 USD trillion in 2025 with a growth rate of 25% per year. The significant factors contributing to medical traveller's desire to visit a foreign country for treatment are well qualified and experienced practitioners, a wide variety of treatments, low expense, favourable exchange rate, connectivity, cheaper airfare, and a long waiting list in the home country.

International medical tourism is a multi-billion industry and one of the fastest-growing sectors adding economic benefits to the nation promoting medical tourism globally. To benefit from this sector, several countries, particularly in Asia, started to develop their marketing strategies to attract patients. The main specialties a medical traveller chosen in another country are cosmetic surgery, dentistry, cancer, reproductive, weight loss, orthopedics, cardiovascular, etc. Canada, Singapore, Japan, Spain, UK, Cost Arica, Israel, Abu Dhabi and India is the leading medical tourism destination globally as per the world medical tourism index in 2021.

Following Singapore and Japan, India ranks Third in the Asian region and plays a major medical tourism destination globally. This study analyses the major factors influencing a medical traveler selecting India as a preferred destination for treatment in the global medical tourism market will be chosen based on technical merit, interest, applicability, and how well they fit a coherent and balanced technical program.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Government of India officially recognized the economic potentialities of medical tourism in 2002 and decided to strengthen India's position as a global destination for medical tourism with highly expertise

services at low cost. Majority of the patients visiting India for medical treatments are from Bangladesh, the Middle East, the UK, the US, Canada and Africa (Medhekar, 2014). The healthcare expenses in India are lower than compared to western countries and the Middle East; this was also the reason to attract patients to India. The government of India promoting India as a premium healthcare destination and made traveling policies easier for the passengers visiting India for medical purposes (Vinaytosh&Mohita, 2021)

Creating a safe environment is also essential for the competing medical tourism market to attract patients. Any nation positioned as a medical tourism destination should preserve public safety, availability of health care, and excellent service (Radovic& Nola 2018). Particular attention should provide the culturally sensitive patients. They feel empathetic towards services in the foreign country regarding the benefits received, which will create more confidence in their health visiting that country. So the patients will share their positive experiences with friends and relatives will make a positive image of the country to attract foreign patients (Moghadam, MasoudiAsl& Hessam, 2020)

Availability of highly -qualified and internationally trained medical practitioner, international accreditation is the prime reason for customers to choose a destination for their treatment (Koggalage, Gunawardena& Amal,2017). Hospital prestige is one of the major factors for creating a country's image as a medical tourism destination. When a medical tourist feels a hospital possesses a prestigious status that will make a better image for a country as a medical tourism destination (Davoud Nikbin, 2019).

With the development of Asian economies and the growing importance of Medical tourism, several Asian countries have developed systems for the growth of the medical tourism sector. India is one of the most preferred destinations in Asia for medical tourism and holds 5th position among 41 medical tourism destinations in the year 2016. The most demanding treatments preferred by foreign patients in India are cosmetic surgery, Bariatric surgery, Knee cap Replacement, Liver transplantation, and cancer treatments. Most of the leading hospitals in India promoting health tourism globally. To focus for the development of medical tourism, Govt. of India introduced Medical visa to every foreign patient visiting India for medical treatment and this can be extended over an year. The medical visa enables the patient to visit three times in an year and can accompanied by a friend or relative during the visit to India (Jugal, 2017)

Medical tourism is a term that denotes traveling worldwide for medical treatment, including dental care, elective surgical care, cosmetic procedures, fertility

treatments, etc. (Kelley, 2013). Medical tourism is the largest growing sector in the healthcare business. The main motive behind selecting a foreign nation for treatment is long waiting time at home country, easy accessibility, high-quality service with safe patient care at the lowest cost. Government prioritizes the medical tourism industry to generate more significant economic benefits (Sandberg, 2017).

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is undertaken with the following objectives.

They are:

1. To study the concept of Medical Tourism and its importance in global health sector.
2. To examine the different determinants of a customers' selecting India as preferred Medical Tourism destinations.
3. To analyze the features for positioning India as a medical tourism hub globally.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

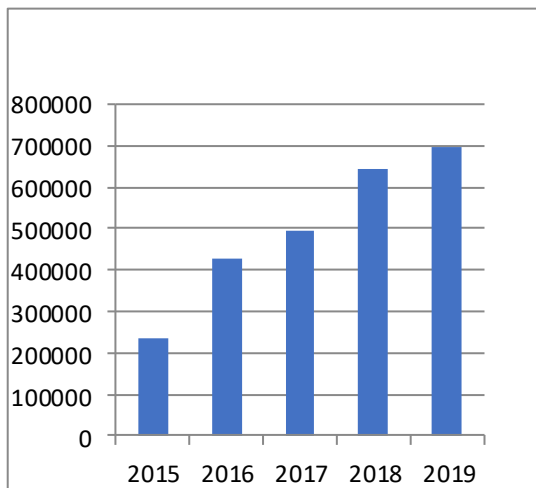
The paper has adopted a conceptual research framework based on a literature review to identify the determinants of medical tourist selection of India as their preferred destination for treatment. Articles in the peer reviewed journals are referred for this study using the search engine Google scholar. The researcher collected the required data through secondary sources and they were analysed and explained appropriately.

### V. DATA COLLECTION

The data for the research were collected through secondary data. The secondary data were collected from journals, books, and websites of hospitals, organizations involved in medical tourism, and the department of tourism, the government of India. Articles in the referred journals were taken for this study using the search engine Google scholar.

### VI. MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

India ranks second position in the receipt of medical tourist in Asia, with its attractive features, quality service in affordable price with less waiting time. India is viewed as one of the most preferred destinations for medical tourism and holds 10 th position among 46 major medical tourism destinations as per Medical Tourism Index Overall ranking, 2020-21. The major destination cities in India are Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata. A total of 27% of medical travellers' visit Maharashtra out of which about 80% visits Mumbai, Chennai attracts 15% while Kerala handles around 5%.



**Figure 1: Number of Medical Travelers Visited India**

Compiled by Author (Source Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India)

The above graph depicts the number of foreign tourist arrivals (ftas) on medical visa in india in the past years and the data have been compiled by the author.. it shows an average growth rate of

55% and is expected to be maintained in the coming years. the major determinants contributing medical tourist selection for india as a preferred destination for visit is explained in the following paragraphs:

#### (i) Cost Effectiveness

Among many determinants, cost is not only an important factor but also an attractive factor for a medical tourist opting for India for their treatment, Cost in Medical tourism means the total expenses paid for the treatment by a medical tourist; they will compare the prices offered by different destinations and select the best one providing quality services at a reasonable price. The medical procedure cost in most competing destination countries is presented in the table below

The table 1 clearly portrays the treatment of cost charged in different countries. It is quite evident that compared to other medical tourism destinations, India offers the lowest cost for most of the treatment given in the table 1 for the preferred medical treatments. It implies that India plays a dominant role in global medical tourism destinations in terms of cost-effective.

**TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF TREATMENT COST IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES**

Nature of treatment	US (\$)	Costa Rica (\$)	India (\$)	Korea (\$)	Mexico (\$)	Thailand (\$)	Malaysia (\$)
Heart Bypass	\$144,000	\$25,000	\$5,200	\$28,900	\$27,000	\$15,121	\$11,430
Angioplasty	\$57,000	\$13,000	\$3,300	\$15,200	\$12,500	\$3,788	\$5,430
Heart Valve Replacement	\$170,000	\$30,000	\$5,500	\$43,500	\$18,000	\$21,212	\$10,580
Hip Replacement	\$50,000	\$12,500	\$7,000	\$14,120	\$13,000	\$7,879	\$7,500
Hip Resurfacing	\$50,000	\$12,500	\$7,000	\$15,600	\$15,000	\$15,152	\$12,350
Knee Replacement	\$50,000	\$11,500	\$6,200	\$19,800	\$12,000	\$12,297	\$7,000
Spinal Fusion	\$100,000	\$11,500	\$6,500	\$15,400	\$12,000	\$9,091	\$6,000
Dental Implant	\$2,800	\$900	\$1,000	\$4,200	\$1,800	\$3,636	\$345
IVF Treatment	N/A	\$2,800	\$3,250	\$2,180	\$3,950	\$9,091	\$3,819

(Source: Medical Tourism Index 2019)

Foreign patients strongly perceive that traveling to India for medical treatment could save substantial amount in the range of 30 %--60 % when compared to the cost charged by other countries. The total cost for medical treatment in India for foreign patients is around 2-3 times lower than other destinations; such discounted cost with quality

treatment is the primary reason that attracts many foreigners to prefer India as a destination.

## Global recognition through International Accreditation

Reputed healthcare Institutes are accredited based on an international system of worldwide recognition and so they promote the health sector globally. Accreditation systems always generate confidence among patients about the quality of service in the host country. A global accreditation system is an indicator of quality that ensures enhanced personalized service, with adequate infrastructure and safety facilities.

Presently, two accreditation systems are followed in India, providing recognition to the health care system, JCI (the Joint Commission International) and NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and healthcare providers).

**Table 2: Country wise JCI Approved Hospitals and Cost comparison with US Market**

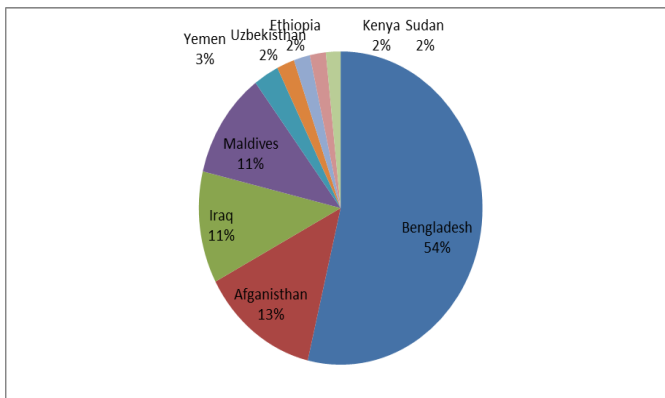
Country	Region	No. of JCI Approved Hospitals	Savings Compared to USA
Brazil	America	62	20-30%
Costarica	America	2	45-65%
India	Asia	38	65-90%
Malaysia	Asia	13	65-80%
Mexico	America	8	40-65%
Singapore	Asia	21	25-40%
South Korea	Asia	24	30-45%
Taiwan	Asia	13	40-55%
Turkey	Middle East	43	50-65%
Thailand	Asia	67	50-75%

(Source FCCI Report 2019)

### (iii) Connectivity

Connectivity plays an important role in destination selection. Distance between the home country and destination directly influences medical tourists' destination selection to ensure the travel is comfortable.

**Figure 2: Country wise breakup of Medical Tourist Visited India in 2017**



(Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India 2017)

Travel formalities like visa regulations, transportation system, and availability of accommodation also will influence medical traveler's decision to travel to a foreign

nation. The selection of border nations will ease the travel regulations. Bangladesh is one of the top markets for India's medical tourism. India is well-connected with air in major cities of the world. Scheduled international services regularly operate from major cities in India to Europe, Asia, the USA, the UK, and the Middle East. Most of the super specialty hospitals in India are located in metro cities, will ease the travelers to access.

### (iv) Trained and Experienced Doctors and Medical Staff

Quality of healthcare delivery in pre- and post-surgery can be measured based on the quality of education, skill, and expertise of the overseas surgeons, nurses, and allied healthcare professionals. India has the maximum number of skilled and internationally trained doctors, especially super-specialists. One out of five doctors practicing in the US belongs to India, which has helped India build its credibility as a medical value travel hub. When non-medical staff, nursing attendants, interpreters, and paramedical staffs are highly experienced, automatically, foreign patients get satisfied with the enhanced services and this would create a good impression and positive mindset about the host community. These impressions, no doubt would market the destinations through the word of mouth and encourage the patients to revisit or refer to friends and family.

### (v) Language

India is a land of diverse languages, the majority of the Indians fluent in more than one language. English is widely used as a medium for official communication. All hospitals in India have many English-speaking doctors, nurses, other hospital staff, and even guides, making it easier for foreign medical travelers to communicate with their service providers. If the patients are not fluent in English, they will arrange translators on request.

### (vi) No waiting time

Patients in the USA, Britain, Canada and some other developed countries have to wait for the major surgery, and sometimes this waiting period is more than a few months. In this respect, India has almost zero waiting time or minimum waiting time for surgeries. This has attracted several foreign patients from Britain, the USA, and Canada to India for their medical treatment.

## VII SUGGESTIONS

(i) It is essential to improve the post-care services after treatment, hygiene and special care should be taken after the surgery. Improvements in Visa regulations can also attract medical travelers from other regions of the world not explored presently.

(ii) The Government can focus more on promotional



activities through social media campaigns, websites, marketing overseas, and conducting annual medical fairs, exhibitions conferences globally.

(iii) Presently significant players in India's medical tourism industry are vested in the hospitals from the private sector. Governments can encourage the plans to partner public hospitals with competing facilities in the model of Public, Private Partnership.

(iv) The aforesaid study also recommends creating a website featuring major super-specialty hospitals in India displaying the cost for various treatments and travel regulations to visit India

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study has made a sharp focus that India plays a dominant role in terms of services globally, with a rank of 10 among 46 competitive medical tourism destinations in the world. The increased cost of medical care in western and Middle East countries is a significant factor and hence foreign patients are attracted to the east. The essential determinants making India a preferred medical tourism destination are quality in the healthcare sector, international accredited hospitals, English language and availability of translators for varied language, minimum connecting time, and less waiting time for surgeries.

Foreign patients strongly perceive that traveling to India for medical treatment could save substantial amount in the range of 30 %--60 % when compared to the cost charged by other countries. The total cost for medical treatment in India for foreign patients is around 2-3 times lower than other destinations; such discounted cost with quality treatment is the primary reason that attracts many foreigners to prefer India as a destination. Indian hospitals hold the third position in terms number of hospitals accredited by JCI compared with competing markets based on the quality of standards maintained by hospitals in India. . To attract a new medical tourist and market is always the marketer's challenge due to the increasingly competitive characteristics of the medical tourism industry. Due to the most competitive nature of players in the Asian sector with quality treatment at an affordable cost, it is very significant for India to maintain its status as the most preferred destination in the world.

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