

A Study on Changing Landscapes of Medical Tourism in India for the past four years (Pre & post Pandemic)

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Abstract: This study examines the evolving landscape of clinical tourism in India over the past 4 years, focusing on the intervals earlier than and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the huge growth in clinical tourism pushed by using value-effective treatments, advanced scientific facilities, and specialized clinical understanding. During the pandemic, the arena confronted a downturn because of journey regulations and a shift in healthcare priorities. However, post-pandemic, India has visible a resurgence in scientific tourism, attributed to the United States' dealing with the virus, strong healthcare infrastructure, and the integration of traditional and contemporary medical practices. The study also identifies regions for improvement to sustain this boom, such as higher global promotion, more advantageous marketing of health facility centers, and more potent public-private partnerships.

Key words: Medical tourism, India, COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare infrastructure, traditional medicine, public-private partnership, international promotion, post-pandemic recovery, medical facilities, cost-effective treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Medical Tourism basically means the act of traveling beyond one's home country borders to access medical services. This practice has gained significant traction in recent years, reflecting the growing trend of individuals seeking healthcare solutions abroad. Typically, individuals embark on medical tourism journeys to receive a variety of treatments, ranging from therapeutic procedures to surgical interventions and dental care.

The motivations behind medical tourism are multifaceted. One of the primary drivers is affordability. Many countries offer medical services at lower costs compared to individuals' home countries, making it an attractive option for those seeking high-quality care at a more reasonable price point.

Additionally, individuals may opt for medical tourism to access treatments that are not readily available or accessible in their home countries, thereby seeking better quality care or specialized expertise. This pursuit of originality plays a role in medical tourism. Some individuals may opt to travel internationally to undergo procedures or receive treatments that are considered innovative or cutting-edge, potentially offering better outcomes or novel approaches to addressing their healthcare needs.

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF MEDICAL TOURISM:

The global medical tourism market has experienced significant growth in recent years, with a surge in demand for healthcare services across borders. The market size, share, and revenue have witnessed substantial expansion, driven by various factors such as cost-effective treatments, advanced medical facilities, and a desire for a wider range of treatment options. In this article, we will delve into the current trends, market players, and growth prospects of the medical tourism industry. As of the latest available data, the medical tourism market is estimated to be valued at USD 44.68 billion in 2022, with a projected CAGR of 19.8% from 2022 to 2028. The market's robust growth can be attributed to the increasing number of patients seeking cost-effective treatments, particularly in emerging economies with advanced medical facilities.

Medical Tourism Market Trends

Several notable trends are shaping the medical tourism industry. Telemedicine and virtual consultations have become integral parts of pre and post-treatment phases, enhancing patient experience and reducing the need for physical travel. Additionally, personalized healthcare packages, including accommodation and

travel arrangements, are being offered by medical tourism facilitators to attract international patients.

Another emerging trend is the focus on niche medical tourism segments, such as wellness tourism and fertility treatments. Countries like Thailand, India, and Mexico are becoming sought-after destinations for medical tourists due to their comprehensive healthcare offerings and well-established medical infrastructure.

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

• Medical tourism in India has experienced significant growth in recent years, with the country emerging as a leading destination for individuals seeking high-quality healthcare services at affordable prices. Several factors contribute to India's popularity as a medical tourism hub:

- **Cost-effective treatment:** Medical procedures in India are often more affordable compared to Western countries, making it an attractive option for individuals seeking cost-effective healthcare solutions.
- **Quality of care:** India boasts a large number of hospitals and healthcare facilities that adhere to international standards of quality and safety. Many hospitals are accredited by international organizations, ensuring that patients receive high-quality care.
- **Specialized medical expertise:** India is home to highly skilled medical professionals who specialize in various fields, including cardiology, orthopedics, oncology, and cosmetic surgery, among others. Patients have access to expert care and advanced treatments.

- **Advanced medical technology:** Indian hospitals are equipped with state-of-the-art medical technology and infrastructure, allowing for the delivery of advanced healthcare services and treatments.

- **No language barriers:** English is widely spoken in India, eliminating language barriers for international patients and ensuring effective communication with healthcare providers.

- **Cultural and tourist attractions:** India's rich cultural heritage and diverse tourist attractions make it an appealing destination for medical tourists looking to combine healthcare with leisure travel.

- **Common treatments sought by medical tourists in India** include cardiac surgeries, orthopedic procedures, cosmetic surgeries, and infertility treatments, among others. However, it is essential for individuals considering medical tourism to India to thoroughly research their options, understand the risks and benefits, and ensure they choose a reputable healthcare provider to meet their specific needs.

WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE INDIA FOR TREATMENT

People usually come to India for medical treatments as study shows that the cost of medical procedures in India is significantly lower than in the United States or ant other countries. This cost difference has made India a popular destination for medical treatment, especially for people seeing affordable yet high quality medical care. The following are some of the treatments for which people come to India for medical treatments:

Treatment	Why people choose India for this treatment
Cardiac Surgery	Bypass surgery, angioplasty, and valve replacements are offered at lower costs. Skilled surgeons and advanced technology make India a prime destination for heart care.
Cosmetic Surgery	Renowned for rhinoplasty, liposuction, and breast augmentation at affordable rates. Skilled surgeons and advanced techniques ensure safe and effective results.
Dental Care	Comprehensive dental care, including implants, is offered at remarkably low costs. Modern facilities and skilled dentists make India an attractive option.
Cancer Treatment	Advanced options like chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgery available at lower costs. Specialized cancer hospitals and experienced oncologists attract patients seeking accessible care.
Fertility Treatments	In vitro fertilization (IVF) and fertility treatments are significantly cheaper. High success rates and the expertise of fertility specialists make India a preferred destination.
Ophthalmic Surgery	Cataract surgery, laser vision correction, and other eye procedures are widely performed. Advanced technology, skilled ophthalmologists, and affordable costs make it a popular choice.
Ayurveda and yoga	Traditional medicine options like Ayurveda and yoga gaining popularity. Focus on holistic wellness, preventive care, and natural healing.
Organ Transplants	Kidney transplants and other organ transplants are performed at lower costs. Specialized transplant centers and experienced surgeons attract patients seeking affordable options.
Preventive and wellness care	Rise in patients seeking preventive healthcare packages and wellness retreats. Combining medical check-ups, spa treatments, and lifestyle programs for proactive self-care.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- * To understand the experiences, satisfaction levels, and challenges faced by medical tourists throughout their journey, including pre-travel arrangements, treatment processes, and post-operative care.
- * To comprehend the evolving patterns, preferences, and behaviours of individuals seeking medical treatments abroad
- * To evaluate the socio-economic, cultural, and ethical implications of medical tourism on both the host and home countries.
- * To analyze the regulatory frameworks, government policies, and industry standards governing medical tourism.
- * This also seeks to forecast the future trajectory of medical tourism, considering factors such as advancements in healthcare technology, changing consumer preferences, geopolitical developments, and global health trends.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the project report on India's medical tourism has been collected from the secondary sources. Data has been collected from the articles, journals and reports, that has been put forward by the Ministry of Tourism of India.

DATA ANALYSIS:

The descriptive statistics were used to study the foreign tourist arrivals in India in the past 4 years. It shows the list of the top 10 countries from which India receives the most medical tourists. This study also shows the percentage of tourists received from the country in that particular year.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Richter (2013) poses an array of questions on the relations between international tourism and international relations: "Under what circumstance can tourism promote reconciliation among nations? Why is it so often the earliest component of a normalization process between two nations? To what extent does becoming a host nation improve national understanding of other societies? Under what conditions does tourism intensify hostility, friction,

and feelings of relative deprivation? How and by what process do travellers' views become politically important?"

International tourism has usually been assessed from the economic or commercial perspectives, with a primary focus on the economic impact it has on the national industry. However, by nature, international tourism is inseparable from the field of international relations. The extent of tourism between two nations reflects the political relations between them. Tourism is sometimes also used as a means of improving a nation's international political image. For example, Hall (1994) has shown how the regime of former President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos launched a vigorous tourism development program to maintain and justify the Marcos dictatorship with foreign governments and investors. The issue of interdependence in traditional international politics has implications on international tourism. Although flows of tourism between nations may encourage economic interdependence, there is criticism that the uneven flow of tourists from developed countries to Third World regions creates economic dependence.

An aspect of tourism in international relations that many find attractive is that tourism can function as a "force for peace," or, as the United Nations World Tourism Organization's 1967 slogan goes, as a "passport for peace". Based on this notion, the 1975 Helsinki Accord encouraged the development of tourism as a means of achieving security and cooperation in Europe. Therefore, scholars must consider the time that has passed since the 1975 Helsinki Accord. Since then, globalization has had an impact on international society and, as a result, international tourism has increased rapidly. According to the World Bank's "International tourism, number of arrivals" data, in 2019, around 2.4 billion tourists travelled internationally, a 42.0% increase compared to 2009 (1.69 billion). As such, international society has placed more emphasis on using tourism as a means of peace.

The increase in international tourism impacted by globalization may have negative effects on peace and the improvement of international relations. In *Tourism and Political Change*, Suntikul and Butler argue that the 2002 bombings of tourist nightlife venues in Bali, and the use of commercial jets to destroy New York's World Trade Center in 2001, are indicative of the

tourism industry’s attractiveness and vulnerability as a target for politically motivated terrorist attacks.

This paper focuses on the positive effects of tourism on current international relations. Although it is still contested whether it is “tourism—passport for peace” or “peace—passport for tourism,” tourism is essential in fostering a path for improving relationships and increasing cooperation between nations.

Medical tourism is primarily a late twentieth-century phenomenon, which is said to be rapidly expanding. Medical tourists are now travelling abroad to improve their health instead of relying solely on their nations’ medical service. Medical tourism has been generalized as something of an umbrella term associated with travellers in search of better health, which includes not only wellness therapies bundled with services for food and beverage, lodging, entertainment, and touring or exploring the attractions of a destination but also elective and necessary medical (surgical and nonsurgical) procedures.

According to an OECD ((Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) report “Medical Tourism: Treatments, Market and Health system Implications: A scoping review,” medical tourism is defined as consumers electing “to travel across international borders with the intention of receiving some form of medical treatment”. This treatment may span the full range. Similarly, Hall (2011) defines medical tourism as “the main motive of the tourism concept in tourism services that are related to health and medical tourism section”.

Numerous factors have influenced the spread of medical tourism. One basic factor is that people are now more interested in health than ever. The UN Millennium Poll of 2000, a global survey commissioned by the United Nations, consistently ranked health as people’s number one desire. Moreover, health and well-being are being recognized as an important basic human right. For example, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family. It is a fundamental human desire”.

Globalization is a major contributing element to the expansion of medical tourism. According to the McKinsey Report 2008, a typical phenomenon of medical tourism, the objective of global convergence in medical tourism, has generated the demand for the most advanced medical technology and better service. There are a variety of reasons why people prefer medical tourism over domestic medical services. Seeking the most advanced medical technology (40%) is the main motivator for medical tourists, followed by better essential medical treatment services (32%). Other reasons include quicker access to medical services (15%) and lower costs (9%). These diverse purposes of medical tourism are being analyzed by policymakers in order to strengthen competitiveness. As the medical tourism market is growing more profitable, governments are striving to secure a strong position for their medical sectors. For example, Singapore’s government has planned to become the medical hub of Asia and established “Singapore Medicine,” an institute that seeks to promote Singapore as a destination for medical tourism. Thailand has also launched the “Medical Hub of Asia Project” and has developed a variety of tourism packages. South Korea’s government has designated medical tourism as a new growth engine industry, and government-affiliated institutes such as the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI) are developing policies to promote medical tourism.

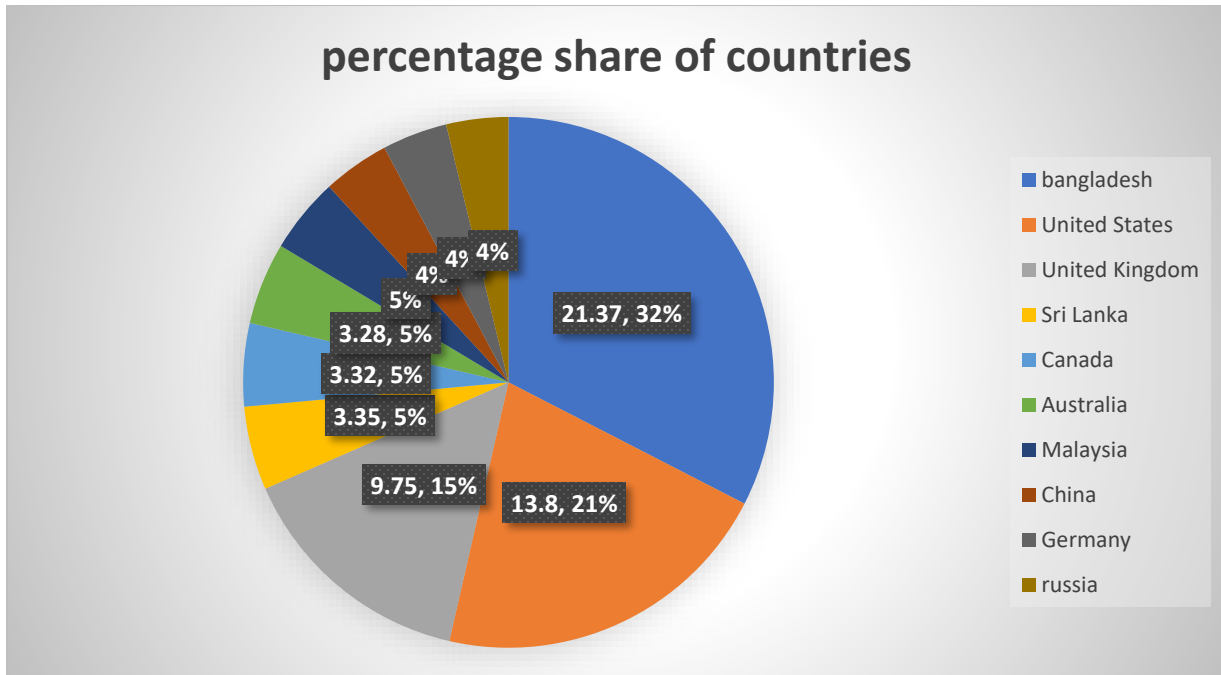
FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN INDIA (2019)

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India as compared to 2017 had increased by 2.2% (10.7 million) in 2019. The top 5 source markets for Foreign Tourist Arrivals were Bangladesh, 21.37%, United States (13.80%) & United Kingdom (9.75%), Sri Lanka (3.35%) & Canada (3.32%).

It can be observed that majority of the tourists that come from Bangladesh could be ton visit friends/ relatives, business and medical treatment than purely for tourism. The total foreign exchange value due to the tourism activities was expected to hit \$29billion dollars in the year 2019.

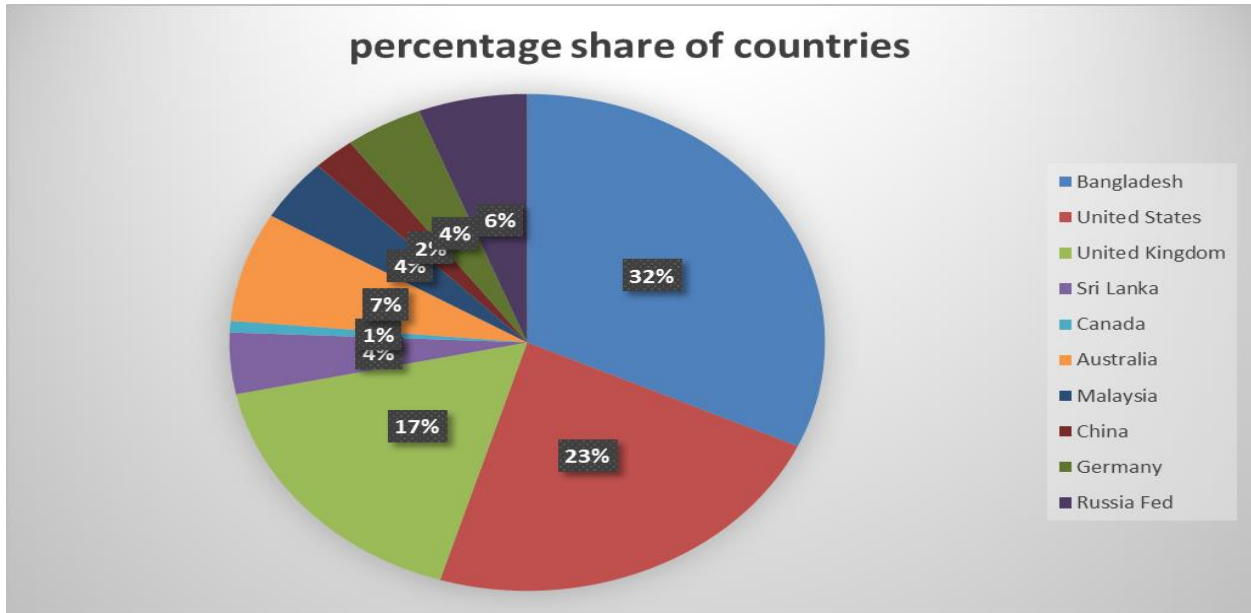
Sl. No.	Source Country	FTAs	Percentage share
1	Bangladesh	2256675	21.37
2	United States	1456678	13.80
3	United Kingdom	1029758	9.75
4	Sri Lanka	353684	3.35
5	Canada	351040	3.32

6	Australia	346486	3.28
7	Malaysia	319172	3.02
8	China	281768	2.67
9	Germany	274087	2.60
10	Russia Fed	262309	2.48
Total top 10 countries		6931657	65.65
Others		3626272	34.35
G. Total		10557929	100.00



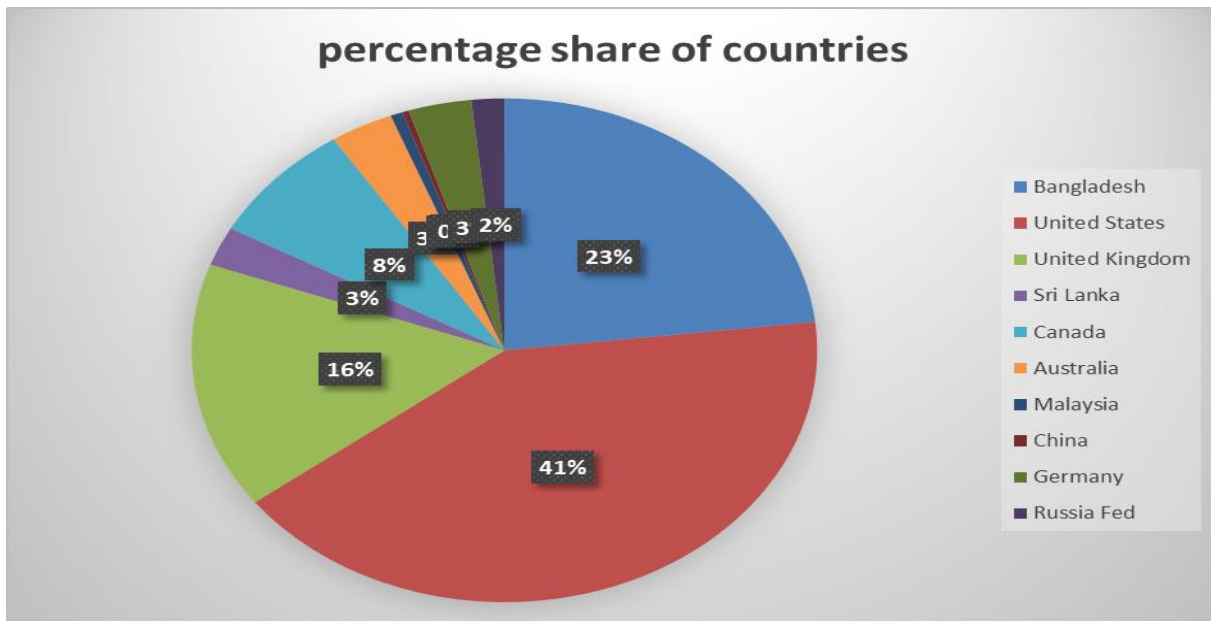
FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN INDIA (2020)

Sl. No	Source Country	FTAs	Percentage share
1	Bangladesh	549273	20.01
2	United States	394092	14.36
3	United Kingdom	291874	10.63
4	Sri Lanka	68646	2.50
5	Canada	12779	0.47
6	Australia	122868	4.48
7	Malaysia	69897	2.55
8	China	39586	1.44
9	Germany	72558	2.64
10	Russia Fed	102166	3.72
Top 10 Countries		1229393	62.84
Others		105047	37.16



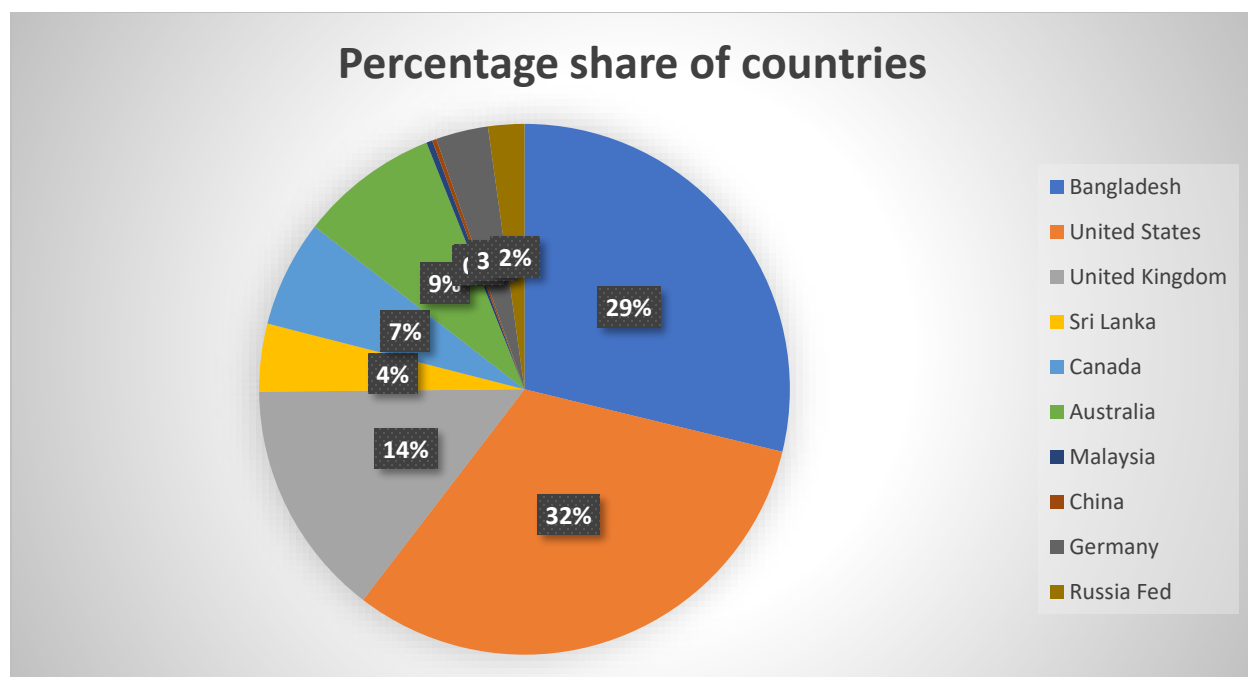
FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN INDIA (2021)

Sl. No.	Source Country	FTAs	Percentage share
1	Bangladesh	240554	15.75
2	United States	429860	28.15
3	United Kingdom	164143	10.75
4	Sri Lanka	25989	1.70
5	Canada	80437	5.27
6	Australia	33864	2.22
7	Malaysia	6628	0.43
8	China	3502	0.23
9	Germany	33772	2.21
10	Russia Fed	17567	1.15
Top 10 countries		1036316	67.86
Others		868962	32.14



FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN INDIA (2022)

Sl. No.	Source Country	FTAs	Percentage share
1	Bangladesh	1277557	19.85
2	United States	1403399	21.80
3	United Kingdom	641051	9.96
4	Sri Lanka	183459	2.85
5	Canada	289259	4.49
6	Australia	376898	5.85
7	Malaysia	15963	0.25
8	China	11762	0.18
9	Germany	141425	2.20
10	Russia Fed	97911	1.52
Top 10 countries		234483	68.95
Others		52456	31.05



The following is the percentage representation of the number of foreign tourists that visited India in the last few years:

Year	Year wise percentage for medical tourism in India
2019	70%
2020	18%
2021	30%
2022	48%
2023	61%

Despite India being an attractive destination for people undertaking medical tourism from many countries, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, West Asia, Maldives and Africa among others, this segment was severely impacted by the Covid pandemic.

Hence, in this study, after taking the foreign tourist arrival data from 2019-2023. We can see that the Covid-19 pandemic presented unpredictable challenges to the Medical Tourism Industry in India. International travel restrictions, quarantine measures, and concerns about healthcare safety led to a temporary decline in medical tourism. That is visually seen from 2020 to almost 2022.

The main reasons for this decline was:

* Travel Restrictions: Stringent travel restrictions, including border closures, flight cancellations, and quarantine measures imposed by both source and destination countries, have severely limited international travel, making it difficult for medical tourists to access healthcare services in India.

* **Fear of Infection:** The fear of contracting COVID-19 has deterred many potential medical tourists from traveling abroad for treatment. Concerns about infection transmission during travel, hospital stays, and interactions with healthcare providers have contributed to hesitancy among patients.

* **Healthcare Prioritization:** Many countries have redirected healthcare resources, including medical personnel, hospital beds, and equipment, towards combating the COVID-19 pandemic. This reallocation has reduced the capacity of hospitals and healthcare facilities in India to accommodate medical tourists for elective procedures.

* **Financial Constraints:** Economic downturns and job losses resulting from the pandemic have led to financial constraints for individuals and businesses, reducing disposable income and travel budgets. Medical treatments abroad, including travel costs, treatment expenses, and accommodation, may no longer be affordable for many prospective medical tourists.

* **Insurance Limitations:** Travel insurance policies may not cover medical expenses related to COVID-19 or elective procedures performed abroad during a pandemic. This lack of coverage creates additional financial risks and uncertainties for medical tourists considering treatment in India.

* **Uncertainty and Instability:** The evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the emergence of new variants and fluctuations in infection rates, has created uncertainty and instability in travel and healthcare systems worldwide. Medical tourists may be hesitant to commit to travel plans amidst such uncertainty.

* **Telemedicine Adoption:** The widespread adoption of telemedicine and remote healthcare services during the pandemic has provided an alternative to in-person consultations and treatments. Patients may opt for virtual consultations with local healthcare providers rather than travelling abroad for medical care.

* **Reputation Management:** India's reputation as a medical tourism destination may have been impacted by negative perceptions surrounding its handling of the COVID-19 crisis, including concerns about healthcare infrastructure, safety protocols, and disease control measures.

PRE AND POST COVID SCENARIO OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

The pandemic of Covid 19 had a significant impact on the healthcare sector specially in the medical tourism. The economy noticed a severe downfall in the industry after and during the pandemic era. Prior to the Covid 'disease' as we call it, medical tourism was a significantly growing and emerging sector in many developed as well as developing economies. India being one of those developing economies has also been a medical tourism destination for over a Decade. If the corona virus pandemic wasn't there to disrupt the economies, then the medical tourism was predicted to grow up to 9 billion dollars.

PRE-COVID SCENE OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Many countries are dependent on Medical Value Travel which is one of the fastest growing industries. Medical tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry worldwide which is expected to grow significantly in the next decade. India ranked 3rd in 2015 and 10th in 2020-21 out of the top 46 countries in the world by medical tourism association in medical tourism index.

□ There is around 38 JCI accredited and over 350 NABH accredited hospitals in India. India is further focusing on increasing the number of JCI accredited hospitals across the major cities of the country. India doesn't only have international quality healthcare services but it also has robust allied sectors which make the healthcare system complete. The recent initiative of ministry of tourism in this sector towards attaining the objective of AATM NIRBAHR BHARAT is to formulate and strengthening the system, developing medical tourism as a brand. For this purpose, state governments are actively enhancing the Infrastructure and industry associates are also engaged in promoting India as a medical tourism brand. There is a need of an organized sector by way of registration and accreditation of healthcare providers and allied sectors. This would provide a mechanism for mutual co- ordination among them.

The increased involvement and promotion of medical tourism by government authorities. In 2015, India ranked as the third most popular destination for medical tourism, when the industry was worth three billion dollars. The number of foreign tourists coming

into the country on medical visas sat at nearly 234,000 that year. Asia-Pacific accounted for 21.4% of the global wellness and medical tourism expenditure and 31% of all wellness tourism trips in 2017. □ According to Dainik Bhaskar report, our country is at number five in medical tourism, every year around 500000 foreigners come here for treatment, according to the government, the number of foreigners coming to India for treatment in 2018 was more than 350% compared to 2014.

According to the FICCI report, the treatment in our country is up to 50% cheaper than in America and Europe and the motility rate is also less than America. Before the arrival of Corona virus, the market for medical tourism in the country was estimated to reach \$ 9 billion i.e.

Rs 68,400 crore, whereas in 2015 the same market was worth three billion dollars, but Corona eclipsed it. In 2016 the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry i.e. FICCI was given in a study that India's share in the world's medical tourism market was 18%, which was expected to increase to 20% by 2020. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism, in 2014, more than 1.40 lakh patients had come to our country for treatment; their number had reached about 6 points to 400000 in 2018, the same people coming from abroad for treatment in 2018 as compared to 2014.

POST COVID SCENE OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

This virus has affected the most parts of the world and is still continuing to grow every day. However, the symptoms of infection can be controlled by medication and early detection can be helpful in recovery. But there is no proven medication has developed to kill the virus till yet.

Even though healthcare services did not after declaration of lockdown. The wards of hospitals are full and treating COVID. Many challenges faced by hospitals and corona warriors but the fulfilled their responsibilities for humanity. During the coronavirus pandemic, there has been good growth in the health care sector, Pharma City, tomorrow companies should be able to turn this disaster into an opportunity. But people consulted the doctor and took the help of medicines, along with medicines, health supplements, face masks, sanitizers, immunity-enhancing

medicines, there was a very good demand for hygiene-related products in the market, during this time online medicines were also supplied by lab and testing.

Due to this epidemic, the tourism sector around the world, including India, was most affected, including airlines, hotels, tour operators, tourism destinations, restaurants, tourists, transportation, tourist guides, and the entire tourism value chain. Recently, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the pandemic has affected the global economy. In the first 5 months of the financial year, the tourism industry has lost exports of \$32000 million; 120 million jobs are in danger. There should be employment in India too, the contribution of tourism sector in revenue is close to 12 to 13 percent.

China, India, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines are some of the major destinations for wellness and medical tourism. Health and wellness tourism trips to Asia work forecast to reach 128.3 million by 2022 according to global Data before the pandemic struck. The global medical tourism market size was valued at \$ 44.8 billion in 2019 and is expected to witness a CAGR of 21.1% by 2027.

In a survey conducted to assess the time taken for the medical tourism industry to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels, a majority 52% said it would take 1 to 3 years for the industry to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels.

The medical tourism industry was thriving until the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entire travel and tourism industry. According to e Global Wellness Institute, destinations that implement established policies to address the challenges posed by the pandemic will be able to recover more quickly.

With the lifting of the lockdown and travel restrictions across borders globally, Indian medical tourism is now reopening for serious cases and transplants. 21 Myanmar patients recently sent at Apollo Hospitals for organ transplant.

According to the India Tourism Development Corporation, the country is one of the biggest beneficiaries of medical tourism due to its renewed credibility and recognition as a reliable and competent medical destination, but for this to happen, the ITDC says that the sector has to must be well organized and regulated.

As of 19 November 2021, more than 115 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered across the country.

- The Ministry of Tourism has said that the country will continue to be the safest, cheapest and most preferred destination for medical tourism during and after menstruation, even as the picture bears the brunt of the coronavirus and the subsequent lockdown.
- In general, there are three areas where India needs to improve to promote medical tourism in post-pandemic situation:
- Educating the different countries about medical tourism by Indian High Commission to earn potential revenue and goodwill.
- Better advertisement about facilities in major hospitals.
- Establishing public private partnership between hospitals providing medical treatment as there are many government hospitals where the quality is at par with the private hospitals.

IN THE POST PANDEMIC ERA:

Owing to the life-threatening coronavirus, the inflow of medical tourists into the country had dipped in 2020, but is slowly starting to pick up pace yet again. With removal of lockdown and travel restrictions, Indian medical tourism seeks progress in a number of critical cases like organ transplants. Experts are of the opinion that medical tourism in India will see a positive growth in a post COVID 19 era, owing to the manner in which the country handled the virus. During the current pandemic, the doctors, hospitals, and paramedical staff performed their duties diligently, thereby controlling the ratio of the total number of cases to the deceased cases to less than 1.5%. In addition, a large number of health workers are fully vaccinated. Moreover, one of the major reasons why India is becoming a popular hub for medical tourism is because it offers the perfect blend of both modern, alternative and traditional forms of medicine such as Ayurveda which is effective in various chronic diseases. Some other key factors that act as an advantage to attract medical tourists to India include infrastructural facilities and digital engagement. India has some of the best super-speciality hospitals that provide patients with the most advanced treatment using AI and robotics for greater accuracy and well-being. Further, trained manpower, alternative medicine and therapeutic treatment and quality of care

also attract medical tourists from all over the world. In short, India is perfectly poised to cater to a large number of medical tourists in the post pandemic world.

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CHALLENGES FACED BY THE INDIAN MEDICAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

Despite having several initiatives in place, the Medical Tourism industry of the country still faces some serious challenges. The potential of medical tourism in India and making India a hub is still at the budding stage. The stakeholders and the government have only

been able to scratch the tip of the iceberg. One of the major challenges that India is facing is promoting and creating awareness about the state-of-the art facilities in India. India is witnessing strong competition from destinations like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, South Korea with low-cost options. In India, there is a lack of cohesiveness amongst the major players in the industry to come together and represent India on a world platform to acquire newer geographies. Apart from these, inconsistent fee structure and lack of transparency in billing to foreign patients and absurdly high margins to trade to refer patients are some of the challenges. Most Indian hospitals are also facing the lack of trust from the foreign patients. The hospitals have observed poor hygiene awareness in medical attendants, unhygienic food handling, and lack of proper hospitality services, heterogeneous pricing of services and industry standards. The government can play a vital part to upgrade the medical tourism sector. But the industry is facing the following problems which are caused by the governments.

They are:

- (a) no regulations,
- (ii) Taxation anomalies,
- (c) Bureaucratic roadblocks,
- (d) No works on land reforms,
- (e) Lack of long-term investor friendly policies and
- (f) Instability with respect to terrorism and communal tensions.

The medical tourism industry in India is also facing some key bottlenecks.

They are:

- (a) Inadequate insurance cover,
- (b) Underdeveloped insurance market in India,
- (c) Insurance frauds and
- (d) Overseas companies refusing reimbursement.

The pandemic has always had a significant social and economic impact on humanity over the centuries and travel and tourism sector has been the worst affected in terms of severity as well as a long recovery period which will also have an impact on medical tourism to a large extent.

A patient in need of treatment cannot wait. Medical tourism will be affected mostly due to travel restrictions between different countries as well as a possible increase in airfares due to limited availability of seats to maintain social distancing. The growth drivers and interventions undertaken by the

government stand as a testimony to India's status as the healthcare destination of the world and indeed invite the world to “Hill in India.”

COST COMPARISON OF MEDICAL TREATMENTS: India vs. the world

India has no parallels in healthcare when it comes to cost effective treatments in comparison with other countries. Significant cost differences exist among US, UK and South Asian countries. Adding to it, the waiting time is almost nil in case of India. After all, one’s health cannot be put at stake due to long waiting lists. The American Medical Association has made a cost comparison study of healthcare in different countries.

According to the statistics released by AMA, a knee replacement surgery would cost \$40,000 in US, \$10,000 in Thailand and \$13,000 in Singapore, while the same surgery would cost the person \$8500 in India. That gives India a certain edge when it comes to reasonable medical treatments. In addition, Indian doctors are renowned all over the world for their prowess and skills. A heart valve replacement surgery would cost the patients \$200,000 in the US and \$90,000 in Britain while it would cost \$12,500 in

Singapore and \$10,000 in Thailand. The same procedure in India would cost only \$8,000. While a bone marrow transplant would cost \$30,000 in India, in US it would cost anywhere between \$250,000-\$400,000 while in UK the cost would be of the order of \$150,000. Doctors in Thailand would charge \$3,500 for cosmetic surgery while those in US and UK would charge \$20,000 and \$10,000, respectively. But in India, it costs only \$2000. No matter what procedure you undergo, you are sure to save 75% to 95% of healthcare costs.

Besides, India is a great place to explore with rich heritage, architecture and culture. So you can always combine your treatment with a holiday. Although costs in European countries such as Germany and Belgium may be less than that in the United States, but Europe is still more expensive than India. In fact, the data of AMA shows that India is the least expensive when compared to European as well as other Asian countries. Apart from the cost benefit, you will have the same sophistication in healthcare in India as available in any western country. Tour operators like Indian Holiday provide medical tourism packages at competitive prices and offer you a hassle free recovery from your ailments and a great holiday too.

COST COMPARISON OF SELECTED SURGERIES

Procedures	US\$	Thailand	Korea	Mexico	India	Malaysia
Heart Bypass	\$144,000	\$15,121	\$28,900	\$27,000	\$5,200	\$11,430
Angioplasty	\$57,000	\$3,788	\$15,200	\$12,500	\$3,300	\$5,430
Heart Valve Replacement	\$170,000	\$21,212	\$43,500	\$18,000	\$5,500	\$10,580
Hip Replacement	\$50,000	\$7,879	\$14,120	\$13,000	\$7,000	\$7,500
Knee Replacement	\$50,000	\$12,297	\$19,800	\$12,000	\$6,200	\$7,000
Dental Implants	\$2,800	\$3,636	\$4,200	\$1,800	\$1,000	\$345
Breast Implants	\$10000	\$2,727	\$12,500	\$3,500	\$3,500	N/A
Rhinoplasty	\$8,000	\$3,901	\$5,000	\$3,500	\$4,000	\$1,293
Gastric Sleeve	\$28,700	\$13,636	N/A	\$9,995	\$5,000	N/A
Lasik	\$4,400	\$1,818	\$6,000	\$1,995	\$500	\$477
IVF Treatment	N/A	\$9,091	\$2,180	\$3,950	\$3,250	\$3,819

The cost of treatment in India is much lower, almost three times less expensive in comparison to a number of western countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. Medical India Tourism have been offering excellent assistance to foreign patients who visit India to avail advanced surgery treatments at low cost operations. Lower cost does not mean any compromise in quality. India is dedicated in offering the most advanced treatments in the world at reasonable costs so that one can fulfill the dream of leading a healthy life.

Irrespective of exorbitantly lower costs, the quality of health care that we get here in India includes top-class medicines, state-of-art technology, internationally accredited doctors, experienced staff, and even excellent food service and world-class accommodation options. That is not all. You can even combine your medical procedure with a vacation or leisure activities such as Ayurveda/Spa services, beach or backwaters holiday, other beauty procedures, Yoga or spiritual vacation and so on. In India, you get the

best of medical, health care and Wellness Travel services and that too at absolutely affordable rates.

The cost of the insured patient is covered by the medical insurance in India in the case of accidents and sudden sickness. A number of benefits are there for individuals and employers to begin using medical tourism in India for several medical procedures. It is essential to be aware of all the insurance facilities and legal aspects of the medical treatments. Medical tourists should ensure that the insurance provider is covering that hospital where they are being treated in their insurance policy. The legal recourse in the case of unsatisfactory treatment is not clear till now. The government of India is offering medical visa for those patients who wish to get their medical procedures done in India.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the POST-COVID era, things changed for good in terms of medical tourism for India. India managed to manufacture medical equipment and other healthcare facilities as a global leader.
- India performed at its best level for both domestic as well as international needs. With removal of lockdown and travel restrictions, Indian medical tourism seeks progress in a number of critical cases like organ transplants.

Medical tourism in India saw a positive growth in the post COVID 19 era, owing to the manner in which the country handled the virus. During the pandemic, the doctors, hospitals, and paramedical staff performed their duties diligently, thereby controlling the ratio of the total number of cases to the deceased cases to less than 1.5%. In addition, a large number of health workers are fully vaccinated.

- Medical tourism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in various ways. However, with the appropriate measures and actions, the medical tourism industry was able to overcome the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities in the post-Covid era. Medical tourism can be a win-win situation for both the patients and the providers as long as it is done in a safe, ethical, and sustainable way.

CONCLUSION

After a two-year hiatus, medical tourism in India is flourishing again with patients coming in from

Bangladesh, Iraq, Uzbekistan and Kenya, according to a report by Times of India (TOI). Most of the patients coming to India are availing of cardiac surgery, liver transplants, and kidney and bone marrow transplants. With the return of international travel, the medical tourism sector was expected to grow by the end of 2022 at pre-pandemic rates as the demand restored. In anticipation of this rising demand, hospitals and investors across the Southeast Asia region are investing and reinvesting in health infrastructure in a bid to compete for both international and domestic medical tourists.

The healthcare sector in India is attractive to foreign patients because of the availability of quality services at relatively lower costs compared to countries in Western Europe or the U.S. As of 2012, Bangladesh (22 per cent) accounted for the highest number of medical FTAs (foreign tourist arrivals). And with the advancements in technology India has also seen an increase in the telemedicine and the development of domestic innovations and medical hubs, the healthcare tourism landscape is likely to prosper further as patients, insurers and providers turn to technology to save costs and increase margins. Medical Tourism saw a positive growth in the post Covid-19 era due to the manner in which the country handled the virus.

The virus had a significant social and economic impact on humanity over the last few years and travel and tourism has been impacted mainly because of the travel restrictions. After Covid, the medical tourism in India was expected to grow in a gradual way. It took some time to reach the pre-pandemic level. Medical tourism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in various ways. However, with the appropriate measures and actions, the medical tourism industry was able to overcome the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities in the post-Covid era.

The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak significantly impacted the India Medical Tourism Market, like the global healthcare industry. The pandemic led to widespread travel restrictions and lockdowns, severely limiting patients' ability to travel for medical treatment and resulting in a decline in medical tourism. The India Medical Tourism Market was also affected by decreased demand for non-essential medical procedures, as patients prioritized their safety and avoided unnecessary travel. Many medical facilities were also repurposed to treat Covid-19 patients,

limiting the availability of medical services for foreign patients.

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