

Medical Tourism in India with Special Reference to Kerala's Traditional Medicine in Ayurveda

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Abstract- Medical tourism is a significant and growing industry in India, with Kerala emerging as a prominent destination. Kerala attracts medical tourists due to its high-quality healthcare, affordability, and integration of traditional and modern medicine, particularly Ayurveda. The state's mild climate, beautiful scenery, and friendly locals further enhance the appeal for international patients. Kerala is a hub for Ayurveda and other traditional medical systems, drawing patients seeking holistic wellness. Kerala's robust public health infrastructure, emphasis on primary care, and community-based initiatives has contributed to its strong health indicators, including low infant mortality and high life expectancy. Kerala's rich tradition of Ayurveda and other AYUSH practices can be further leveraged to attract patients seeking holistic and alternative therapies. This paper is an attempt to reveal the Medical tourism in India and Kerala traditional Ayurveda medicine.

Key Words: Medical Tourism in India, Ayurveda, Kerala tradition, Development and Promotional strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Medical Tourism is synonymous to Health care or Medical Travel in India. It stands for the practice of travelling across international borders to obtain healthcare. Pleasure trips associated with healthcare are in vogue nowadays in most countries. The concept of Medical Tourism is not a new one. The first recorded instance of Medical Tourism dates back to the period when Greek pilgrims travelled from all over the Mediterranean countries to the small territory in

the Saronic Gulf called Epidauria, thousands of years ago. Epidauria became the original travel destination for Medical Tourism. Kerala is ideally suited for medical tourism because of its moderate weather throughout the year, advanced hospitals with world class facilities, renowned doctors specialized in major disciplines, trained Para medical staff and technicians, and international connectivity. Besides, Kerala also enjoys definite advantages such as the high standard of hygiene that is maintained, the already well developed tourism industry with its high quality resorts and hotels, competitive costs for packages of medical treatment, and ideal locations for a relaxing holiday. The industry offers attractive medical tourism packages at reasonable rates. They are marketed efficiently and are brought to the customers by the tourism industry through tour operators who sell them as holiday packages according to the convenience of the patients. The tourism department has played a pioneering role in promoting Kerala as a major destination in medical tourism in the international market.

Medical Tourism in India

For a long time, India was a noted destination for tourists. Their attraction was India's scenic beauty, natural wonders and cultural heritage. Presently the attention is turned to Medical Tourism for the reason that there exists a qualitative but low cost medical treatment on par with that of Thailand and Singapore. The present day foreign tourists are attracted by the

diverse cultural and scenic beauties of India. India has all sorts of tourist spots in mountains and beaches and also old temples scattered throughout the country. In short, the dual advantage makes India the epitome in the world tourism map. India is considered to be an ideal place for Medical Tourism especially for treatment in open heart surgery, hip re-surfacing, knee cap surgery, bone marrow transplantation, dental, eye and cosmetic surgery and many other areas of advanced medicine both in Allopathy and Ayurveda.

The government and private group hospitals are committed to the goal of making India a leader in the Medical Tourism industry. The main appeal of Indian Medical Tourism industry is its low cost treatment. The treatment expenses in India fall around a tenth of the cost of similar treatment in America or Britain. So India is becoming the destination of choice for US citizens seeking complicated, high- end medical procedures. India has another advantage in promoting medical tourism, and that is the use of English language as the medium of communication both by Doctors and Nurses. Indian Medical and Para-medical staff are highly educated and dedicated to their duties. The lower cost of treatment, stay and travel make a foreign medical tourist prefer India as their tourist destination. During the most recent period Medical Tourism has been spreading its roots in private enterprises in developing countries. Globalization gives way for consumerist culture and exporting and importing items include goods as well as services. It is in this context that medical services to foreign nationals can be treated as a selling product which earns foreign money. So the corporate-run medical institutions extended their field of activity to foreign tourists. From limited domestic services they concentrated on broader foreign travellers who visit India with dual purposes. The private and public sectors came forward to avail this opportunity, and a Medical Tourism industry has become evolved.

Kerala's supremacy in Medical Tourism

The foremost factor that attracts medical tourists to Kerala is the availability of low cost- or cost-effective medical care in the state. In developed and developing countries, many a times people have to face with high cost for specialized medical treatment. Low cost for treatment for a number of major medical conditions

like heart diseases, knee – cap replacements, bone-marrow transplant encourage them to choose Kerala. Another important factor that attract foreign nationals to choose to go to Kerala for medical care is the short waiting time. Due to a number of factors patients with serious ailments have to wait for quite a long time to avail medical treatment in their home countries. Back in Kerala, they can undergo the treatment very shortly after their arrival. Another factor that draws a large number of people with diseases that need immediate attention is the absence of enough medical facilities in their home countries, especially in our neighbouring nations. Kerala is equipped with a number of super specialty hospitals with high class hotels nearby. Also the reputation that Kerala has a popular tourist destination along with all the above mentioned factors act as a driving force for foreign nationals to go to Kerala for medical tourism. The large number of NRI's who are spread out in the middle east, Europe and America play the role as the Ambassadors of Kerala. This is another driving force for citizens of those places to choose Kerala for medical tourism.

Government strategies for Medical Tourism

The Government has taken elaborate schemes to market Medical Tourism. This, in fact, results in a radical departure from India's traditional medical treatment. The campaign plans include marketing Brand India at the International Tourism Conferences. India offers special packages for vacation to westerners, and those packages attract good responses from them. As a health destination, India is attracting patients seeking expensive surgeries at a very low cost without undue waiting. There are many health resorts for post- operation period, with a variety of treatment plans on the beach sides which become centres for vacation tourists. The success of all these packages depend only on the maintenance of quality of care combined with safety, trust and excellence. India has introduced a medical visa, aimed at assisting overseas visitors to travel to the country to cut the charges of hospital treatment. An initial visa is available for a period up to one year and can be used for up to three visits during the twelve months period.

India offers the ancient knowledge of health as a holistic art as health encompasses the entire body and soul of a person. The marketing efforts include

promoting yoga, meditation and Ayurvedic treatment in order to offer the patients a comprehensive health destination that supersedes the competition. India is also keen to promote the more leisure based Health Tourism focusing on well-being, Spas and traditional therapies. The Indian system of medicine including Ayurveda, Pancakarma, Yoga and rejuvenation therapy are among the most ancient medical treatments in the world. Health tourism is already being promoted as a key selling point in Kerala where a number of hotels and Ayurveda centres; and it is a facility a lot of holiday makers are looking for. However, the perceptions of Medical Tourism are not always positive. On the face of success, Indian Medical Tourism poses some drawbacks which cannot be denied.

Health Tourism Potential in Kerala

Kerala, the God's own country, has a significant part in increasing India's Medical Tourism share in the world market. Kerala has made a concerted effort to promote Health Tourism in a big way, which has resulted in a substantial increase of tourists' arrival into the state. Though Kerala has state of the art facilities for modern Medical treatments, its main focus is on Ayurveda treatment. Located at the south western tip of India, with a tropical type of climate, this small state covers a total area of 38,863 square km. It is surrounded by the Western Ghats in the East and the Arabian Sea in the West and has a network of forty four rivers, lakes and estuaries popularly known as "the backwaters" that drains into the Arabian Sea. The state has a long line of sea shore with tranquil beaches which attract tourists from all across the globe. The state is famous for its age-old Ayurvedic treatment. Kerala's traditional Ayurvedic practices are indeed gaining momentum worldwide for its holistic effect on both the body and the mind. Nowadays, Kerala and Ayurveda have virtually become identical with each other; or to say in other words, Kerala health tourism is synonymous to Ayurvedic treatment. The equable climate and the natural abundance of forest with a large variety of herbs and medicinal plants make Kerala a wonder destination for medical tourists all over the world. Kerala's specially designed Ayurvedic tour packages are some of the most healing and restorative packages in India. The ideal time for Ayurvedic treatment is the monsoon season or the

months of June and July when the atmosphere remains dust free and cool. The Kerala Tourism Department participates in various trade-shows and expose to disseminate the advantage of Ayurvedic treatment and to explain the schemes and packages available in Kerala for medical tourists.

Growth and Development of Health Tourism in Kerala

Started as a State Hospitality department in 1950s the Department of Tourism came into being existence in 1960s. Its initial task was to take care of government guest houses and residential bungalows to accommodate Ministers and other VVIPs during their official journeys. There were not many hotels for the stay of tourists, but the said bungalows were arranged for selected foreign tourists. In 1960s, the traffic of tourists started to increase. The government began to think of the facilities for tourists who help to earn foreign currency, and so a separate department by name as Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) came into existence in the year 1966. The promotion of Ayurveda in health tourism started in 1994 and it is the work of the KTDC that started Ayurvedic health centres along with tourist hotels. Thus the premium health centre was started with Hotel Samudra in Kovalam. The KTDC maintained strict quality in its services. As a result the response has been encouraging. The KTDC has tie-up with the most reputed Ayurveda treatment providers and hence the authority of doctors and the quality of medicines used are not compromised. The KTDC further started Ayurvedic resorts at various places in Kerala from south to north. Everywhere it keeps expert doctors, and runs fully equipped hospitals without reducing the leisure element. The KTDC gives wide publicity for the promotion of Ayurveda to foreign countries by participating in the world trade fairs. It also organized road shows in various cities in India such as Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune. It uses print advertising and electronic media. The National Geographic Traveller has notified that Kerala is one of the ten "must-see destinations worldwide" which enables the state to attract patients from other countries. KTDC alone is not the player in the field of health tourism. It has tie-up with Cochin based Amrta Institute of Medical Science, Kerala Vaidyasda in Aluva and Vaidyaratnam Nursing Home which has over thousand branches all over India. Kerala has won

the Best State Award for tourism promotion in 2005 from the Government of India.

Trends in Kerala's Medical Tourism

Kerala is flourishing as an International hotspot for Medical Tourism. It is growing at a very fast pace with huge investments made in both traditional and modern health care. The ministry of tourism, travel agencies, tour operators and others involved in hospitality and service industries are all viewing medical tourism as a sector with promising future. Kerala, well known as God's own country, is blessed with natural beauty and abundant availability of herbs, and is the most ideal place for Ayurvedic treatment, rejuvenating therapies, Yoga and Meditation. Although Kerala has primarily focused on Ayurvedic treatment, the state is well equipped with state of the art super specialty hospitals where medical tourists pour in from various parts of the world. Medical tourist chooses to come to Kerala primarily for the traditional Ayurveda treatment. But there has been a substantial increase in the flow of medical tourist's modern medical care, especially for heart surgery, knee replacement, spine and brain surgery, bone-marrow transplant, dental care and eye care. Kerala with its highly qualified and experienced doctors and medical staff and super specialty hospitals are able to meet all their needs under one roof. Easy to reach destinations with four international airports, and visa on arrival facilities also encourage medical tourists to choose Kerala as their favorite destination for medical tourism.

Health Tourism package in Kerala

Kerala's Health Tourism package offers an opportunity to keep aloof from their routine life of stress and strain and to live in serene relaxing surroundings. The tourist can enjoy the beach or high-ranges. Tourist will be given orientation to improve health and general well-being of the body. Yoga and Ayurvedic massage help rejuvenation of mind and body. It is a rejuvenation and clean-up process on all levels such as physical, mental and emotional. There will be opportunities in the packages for those who seek treatments in surgeries and bodily organ transplantation - a mixture of allopathic and Ayurvedic treatment packages - for which there are Ayurvedic annexes with many A-class allopathic hospitals. Ayurvedic massage is a medical treatment which can

be applied to individuals of any age. However, the intensity of the massage varies from age to age. The massage therapy helps in relieving pain, improves blood circulation, relieves stress, helps sound sleep, provides flexibility to muscles and removes toxic materials that get accumulated in the joints and tissues. In short, massage therapy is a holistic treatment. From obesity to liver problems, skin care to hair loss; everything is believed to have an answer in Ayurvedic massage therapy. Several types of Ayurvedic therapies are practised in Kerala. The most important one include Abhyanga, Dhanydmla Dhadra, Ksiradhumam, Njavarakizhi, Sirdvasti, Snehapanam. There are many Ayurveda resorts on beach sides and on high ranges. The most fascinating aspect of Ayurveda is that it uses almost all methods of healing like life style regimen, yoga, aroma, meditation, gems, amulets, herbs, diet, jyothisi that is Astrology, surgery and so on in treating patients. It is the ideal method for rejuvenation of the whole body or bodily parts or rather a holistic improvement of body and mind. Kerala health tourism put forward a package of tour which lasts for one week, two weeks, or three weeks to suit the requirements of tourist patients. This package includes a variety of treatment methods which can be chosen by each individual as necessitated for their ailments. This package also includes the visit of many tourist spots and pilgrim destinations as and when advised by the doctors. The whole thing would save a lot of money and will get an opportunity to discover Kerala. It mixes leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and health care that is Medical treatment with restful holidays in Kerala.

Promotional Strategies

Kerala's Ayurvedic treatments are less expensive and are of very low costs. Medical treatments can be done in Kerala at a fraction of the cost at which it is done abroad - in Europe or America. The complete package will cost, lesser than what would have to pay for the medical charges alone in other European or Middle East or American countries. With so many unknown beach resorts in the stunning state of Kerala, the marketing of medical packages in India is becoming a priority. India is offering the ancient knowledge of health as a holistic art; health that encompasses the entire body and soul of a person. The marketing efforts include promoting Yoga, Meditation, and Ayurveda

healing in order to offer patients a comprehensive health destination that supersedes the competition. India offers a unique basket of services to an individual that is difficult to match by other countries. Kerala is deemed to be one of the most preferred tourism destinations in the country. Medical Tourism is the fastest growing segment in tourism worldwide. In Kerala, government have taken special efforts to promote this growing sector. Kerala has been the most preferred travel destination, particularly for those seeking Ayurvedic rejuvenation. The hospitals in Kerala are also setting up special divisions and support systems for their global clients.

CONCLUSION

Kerala is already being marketed as a popular health destination for its famous Ayurveda health packages. Medical tourism is marketed along with Ayurveda and other health packages. Major hospitals are joining hands with the government in promoting medical tourism. Health insurance companies are beginning to play a major role in medical tourism. Globalisation and economic liberalization have given a boost to the medical service sector, especially in Kerala. The medical treatment for various packages form part of recuperative leisure packages at world class tourist resorts. Airport pickups, hotel accommodation, transportation, food, are offered along with medical treatment at the best hospitals. Medical tourism as the addition to Kerala's tourism industry is fast growing attracting large number of people from different parts of the world. The State's immense resources both in terms of expertise and infrastructure are wooing patients even from countries like the USA, UK and Canada. And the client list of many hospitals in the State includes nationals of several Asian countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Mauritius. Kerala is famous for its alternative medical therapies such as Ayurveda, which help to rejuvenate and revitalize the body. Kerala is usually marketed as a health destination for its Medical tourism along with Allopathy, Ayurveda, Dental and other health packages.

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