

## PRE AND POST COVID-19 SCENARIO OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on every sector of the economy. During this time, we were all like a bird in a cage which has wings but cannot fly. One of the industries impacted by the disease is the 'medical tourism' industries. Prior to the coronavirus, medical tourism was a significant growth industry in many emerging economies. India has been a medical tourism destination for over a decade. If the coronavirus pandemic wasn't there to disrupt the economies, then the medical tourism was predicted to grow up to 9 billion dollars. Now as a lot of people come to India every year for medical treatment. The inflow of medical tourists comprises nearly 7% of the total international tourists who visited India in the year 2019, but it was put on hold in March 2020. Now international travel is steadily returning to the new normal, so the demand for medical tourism is also growing, as government is removing travel restrictions all over the world. In the POST-COVID era, things are now supposed to change for good in terms of medical tourism for India. India has 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. One of the aspects is that large numbers of healthcare workers and staffs are vaccinated. This means that doctors and healthcare staffs are now safe and they will not be spreading the infection. India is well known for its Ayurveda and wellness practices. Our oldest system of medicine, herbal cures and wellness methods are now accepted as very effective to cure coronavirus infection. After COVID, medical tourism in India is expected to grow, but it will take some time to achieve pre-pandemic level. The study examines the data provided by the Indian government as well as from non-government sources available in the public domain reflecting the impact of covid-19 on medical tourism with suggestions.*

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**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic, Medical Tourism, Impact.

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### Introduction

The covid-19 is recently diagnosed infection which was firstly reported in Wuhan-China in October 2019. It was declared as a Pandemic and most countries undertook different measures to restrict movement of people and imposed lockdown to control the transmission of this infection. It reached India in middle of the march 2020 due to international travels of people to India. This pandemic not only affected the industry of travel and tourism but also it has a significant impact on other sectors of the economy. The growth rate of both developed as well as developing countries is reported negative.

Many patients travel overseas to avail healthcare facilities which may or may not be available in their country. Every individual who is seeking for healthcare services always analyse different factors to take decisions related to medical care abroad. The key factors include cost, technology, affordability to travel, comfort, transparency and many other. There is a major demand for wellness and ayurvedic treatment of India. The high cost of treatments and long waiting periods have made India medical tourism destination. The countries having inadequate medical facilities are also looking up to India for cost effective medical care and services. The cost of medical care and treatment in India is about 50% less as

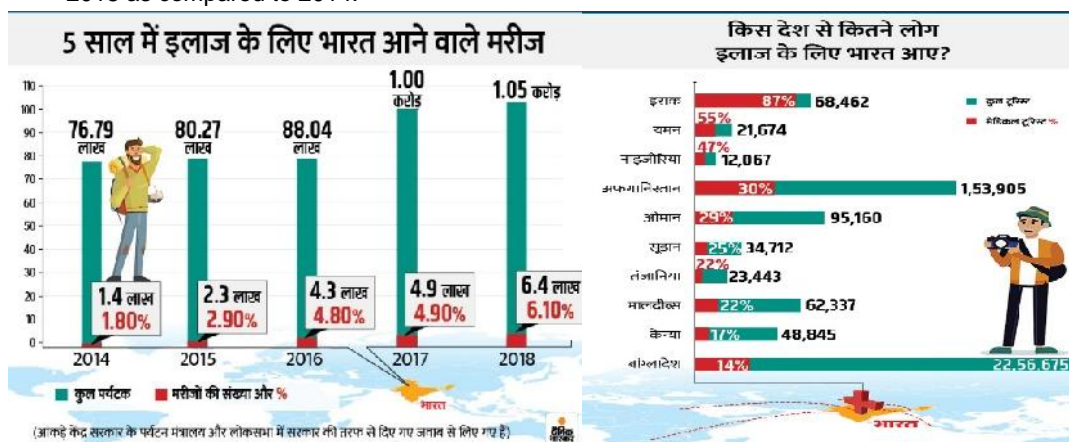
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compared to Europe, not only this, there is a savings of 65 to 90% on treatment here compared to America. We have the highest number of doctors, surgeons and medical staff in the South Asian country, we have more than 1200000 allopathic doctors, 1.5 lakh dental surgeons and more than 20 lakh nursing staff, the recovery of patients coming to our country from abroad for treatment also cries early. After a major operation or surgery, the mortality rate here is around 1.4%, while in the US it is 1.9%.

### 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 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2015 and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 AATMNIRBAHR 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 organised 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 dollar. 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 mortality rate is also less than America. Before the arrival of Coronavirus, 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 they 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 the 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 Mayannmar 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 of treatment is at par with private hospitals.

### Conclusion

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."

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