

# Medical Tourism: Blessing in Disguise for India

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Medical Tourism is the growing practice of travelling across international borders to get health care. It mixes leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and healthcare. Within Asia, India, Thailand and Singapore are the three countries that receive maximum medical tourist owing to low cost of treatment, quality healthcare infrastructure, and availability of highly skilled doctors. The study identifies the strengths of India's medical tourism service providers and points at a number of problems that may reduce the growth opportunity of this industry. India is probably the only country that offers various categories of tourism. Medical tourism is a budding trade. The Government hopes to encourage this budding trade, medical tourism, selling foreigners the idea of traveling to India for low-cost but world-class medical treatment. Customer satisfaction is the ultimate result of meeting a consumer's expectation from the performance of products. Most satisfied customers normally have the intention to re-purchase the products if product performance meets his or her expectation. It is also an imperative for sustainability of the tourism industry itself because the support of the local communities are crucial, especially on account of the fact that tourism products are spatially fixed and that could act as both **blessing and disguise**, depending how the very approach to development is defined. This is both the essence and spirit of 'Make in India' initiative and tourism fits very well in to this framework, complementing both ways and also for the progression of the sustainable development of destination and communities to truly imbibe the spirit of

“Vasudaiva Kutumbakam” – the world is one family”.

**Keywords:** - Medical Tourism, Industry Structure, Various categories of Tourism, Tourism Opportunities, Customer Satisfaction, Make in India Concept.

## Introduction

Medical Tourism is the growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. It mixes leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and healthcare. Within Asia, India, Thailand and Singapore are the three countries that receive maximum medical tourists owing to low cost of treatment, quality healthcare infrastructure, and availability of highly skilled doctors. Medical Tourism in India has been growing at a faster pace & many private hospitals are doing their best to exploit this opportunity **Bhangale(2014)**, stated that this paper is an attempt to explore the opportunities for Medical Tourism in India & identify the challenges faced by patients & doctors.

“Medical tourism is becoming a popular option for tourists across the globe. It encompasses primarily and predominantly biomedical procedures, combined with travel and to urism. The term medical tourism has been coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the rapidly growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain hi-tech medical care. Various countries like Thailand, Malaysia, India, etc are promoting medical tourism aggressively. The key competitive advantages of India in medical tourism stem from the following: low cost advantage, strong reputation in the advanced healthcare segment (cardiovascular surgery, organ transplants, eye surgery etc.) and the diversity of tourist destinations available in the country.

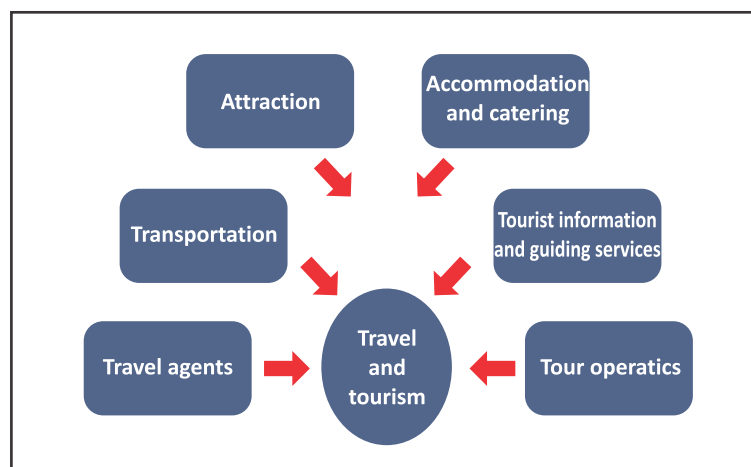
According to **Dawn, Pal (2011)**, the key concerns facing the industry include: absence of government initiative, lack of a coordinated effort to promote the industry, no accreditation mechanism for hospitals, and the lack of uniform pricing policies and standards across hospitals. Medical tourism or health care tourism is fast growing multibillion-dollar industry around the world. It is an economic activity that entails trade in services and represents the mixing of two of the largest world industries: medicine and tourism. The study identifies the strengths of India's medical tourism

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service providers and points at a number of problems that may reduce the growth opportunity of this industry. Finally, this research analyses and concludes the main reasons why the developing country like India attracts foreign tourists for the medical treatment”.

### Components of Tourism Industry



Sources: [https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel\\_Tourism/Indian\\_Travel\\_and\\_Tourism\\_Industry.asp](https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel_Tourism/Indian_Travel_and_Tourism_Industry.asp)

**Uma (2011)**, stated that “According to World Tourism Organization (WTO), the word “Tourism” comprises of “The activities of persons traveling to and staying in place outside their usual environment for leisure, business and other purposes.” Considering the above definition, the following can be observed: When a person travels across the border and outside their usual environment, to seek medical service, the travel portion of the trip travel is called “Medical Travel”, and upon arrival, such person is called “Medical Tourist”, and such activities which includes utilization of medical services by the medical tourist, be it direct or indirect -hospitality, cultural exposure or site-seeing, is called “Medical Tourism”.

**Nasim, Momaya (2008)**, 'Medical Tourism' refers to patients going to a different country for an either urgent or elective medical procedure is fast becoming a worldwide, multibillion-dollar industry. Global medical tourism is \$20 billion and is expected to double by 2010 (Woodman, 2007). In India 'medical tourism' is growing at the rate of 30% a year and is expected to generate revenues of Rs.100 billion by 2012 as per the study conducted by CII and McKinsey (CBC News, 2004)

With number of medical tourists growing at the rate of 15% annually (Oxford Analytical), India is currently a hot medical tourism hub. State of the art equipment, technological advances, qualified medical professionals, personalized patient care and a blend of modern and traditional medicine has put India on the global medical tourism map.

Trends indicate that, due to sky rocketing health care costs and insurance premiums which is beyond the reach of low and middle class income people in the advanced countries, patients from the western world have started seeking life saving treatment/surgeries in low wage countries especially India. New England Journal of medicine calls this new breed of growing patients as '*Medical Refugees*'. They use low cost destinations like India for life saving surgeries. (Milstein & Smith, 2006) Thus, with established edge in surgical treatments, India is poised to play an important role in one of the world's fastest growing industry of 'Medical Tourism'.

## Industry Structure

“Artifacts and life styles embedded with fairs and festivals that India is a huge market for tourism, both outbound and inbound. **Alvi, Dikkatwar (2008)**, stated that apart from this India has a sizable domestic tourism industry which caters to around 37 crore internal travelers. The tourism industry is classified into outbound, inbound & domestic opinions about the size of the industry”.

### 1.2 : Position of Indian Travel and Tourism Industry in the World

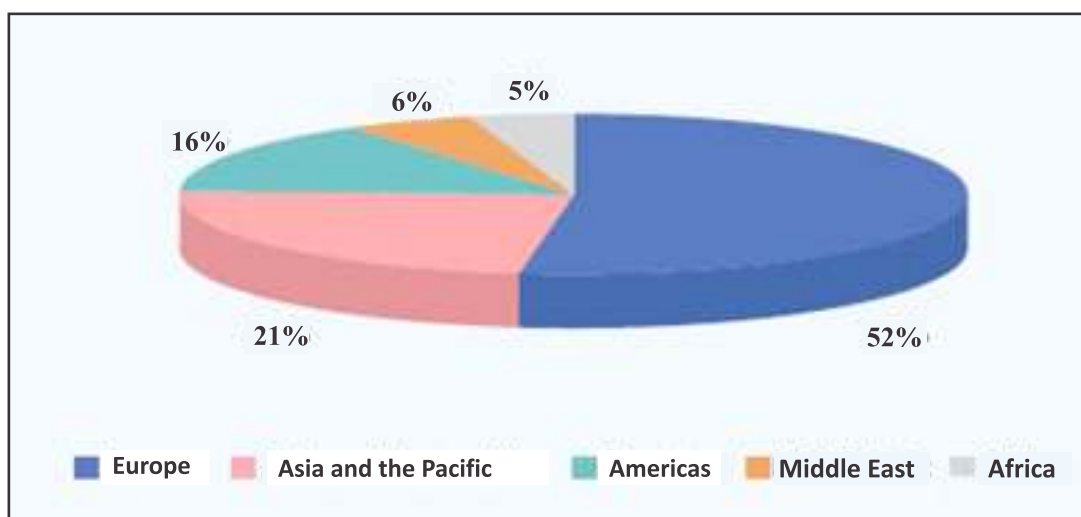
Share of India in international tourist arrivals	0.58%
India's rank in world tourist arrivals	41
Share of India in international tourism receipts (using the FEE estimates of RBI)	1.24%
India's rank in world tourism receipts	22

Sources : [https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel\\_Tourism/Indian\\_Travel\\_and\\_Tourism\\_Industry.asp](https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel_Tourism/Indian_Travel_and_Tourism_Industry.asp)

## Inbound Tourism

“Inbound tourism is concentrated largely in the North and Rajasthan. According to Industry sources, South accounts for only about 25 percent of inbound tourism. "The first time traveler will invariably go to Agra and Rajasthan and not venture to other locales.", however, "With the thrust given by Kerala, it is an exotic option and Gujarat too is a destination of the future”.

### 1.3 : World Inbound Tourism-



Sources : [https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel\\_Tourism/Indian\\_Travel\\_and\\_Tourism\\_Industry.asp](https://www.dnb.co.in/Travel_Tourism/Indian_Travel_and_Tourism_Industry.asp)

## Tourism

“Domestic tourists are also fuelling the industry's revival. Many of them escape from the summer heat on the plains to resorts in the Himalayan Mountains. One of the major beneficiaries is Kashmir, where a cease-fire between India and Pakistan has reduced violence, if not completely, at least enough to help revive the state's sagging tourism industry”.

“Domestic tourism needs to be buoyed up. Domestic tourists are looking at a short 3-4 holidays in a year in India and the concept of booking through a hotel directly is fading away and customers are increasingly coming to travel and tour agencies” avers an industry insider. The most favored destination for the hill people is the distant place from where they normally live and work to places like Rajasthan and now with the marketing thrust, Kerala is the pleasure activity and largest destination for the people of West and South”.

## Various Categories Of Tourism In India

“Every country has something to offer to a tourist, it may be in the form of natural Products like scenic spots or manmade wonders like Disneyland in USA. Many of the Developing countries are blessed with such a vast amount of cultural heritage, material Artifacts and life styles embedded with fairs and festivals that tourism industry can serve as a great source of revenue generation. Despite the natures gift in abundance in India the Countries, tourist traffic has remained dismally low and the region receives a minute percentile of the global traffic.

India is probably the only country that offers various categories of tourism. Major attractions in India are the world's highest mountains, miles of coastline with excellent beaches, tropical "Forests and wildlife, desert safari, lagoon backwaters, ancient monuments, forts and palaces, adventure tourism and the Taj Mahal”. The tropical forests in Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Kerala, and Rajasthan can be developed into major tourist attractions. Among the most favored tourist destinations in India, Kerala for its scenic beauty, Agra for Taj Mahal, Khujraho for its sculptures and temples, Goa for its beaches and some pilgrimages are the most important. Indian tourism is one of the most diverse products on the global scene. These include **history tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism** (Ayurveda and other forms of Indian medications), **spiritual tourism, beach tourism** (India has the longest coastline in the East).

## Medical Tourism In India

“Uma (2011), stated that “people from world over visit India for their medical and relaxation needs. The reason India is a favorable destination is because of it's infrastructure and technology in which is in par with those in USA, UK and Europe. India has some of the best hospitals and treatment centers in the world with the best facilities. Since it is also one of the most favorable tourist destinations in the world, medication combines with tourism has come into effect, from which the concept of Medical Tourism is derived”. “Medical tourism is a budding trade. The Government hopes to encourage this budding trade, medical tourism, selling foreigners the idea of traveling to India for low-cost but world-class medical treatment”. “Merging medical expertise and tourism became government policy when finance minister Jaswant Singh, in his budget, called for India to become a "global health destination”.



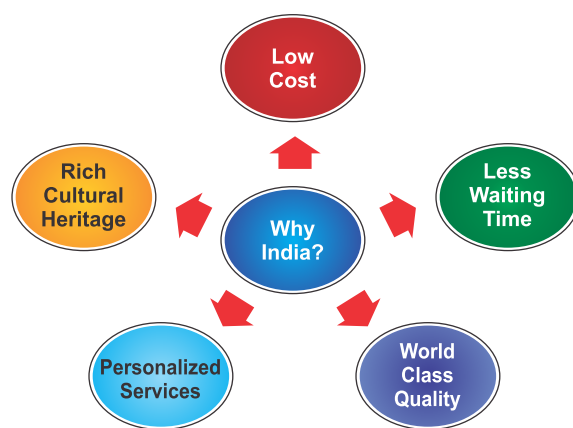
Sources:-[http : //www.anantagroup.com/subservices/tours-operator/Medical-Tourism](http://www.anantagroup.com/subservices/tours-operator/Medical-Tourism)



“As healthcare costs skyrocket, patients in the developed world are looking overseas for medical treatment. India is capitalizing on its low costs and highly trained doctors to appeal to these “medical tourists.” Even with airfare, the cost of going to India for surgery can be markedly cheaper, and the quality of services is often better than that found in the United States and UK. Indeed, many patients are pleased at the prospect of combining their tummy tucks with a trip to the Taj Mahal. Medical tourism is said to be the second most popular industry now-a-days. The increase in the number of medical tourists each year denotes that the medical tourism industry will soon be on the boom”.

“In India medical treatment is not only fast but also costs a fraction of what it costs in USA or Europe. Even tele-consultancy is available for expert opinion and transmission facilities. Some of the states have already established themselves as destinations for health care and medical tourism. The growing need is for high level specialized treatments like transplantation of vital organs, cancer treatment, neuro-surgery, cardiac surgery and many more”.

“As per the new market research Report (Sep 2009) “Booming Medical Tourism in India”, India's share in the global medical tourism industry will climb to around 2.4% by the end of 2012. Moreover, the medical tourism is expected to generate revenue of US\$2.4 Billion by 2012, growing at a CAGR of over 27% during 2009–2012. The number of medical tourists is anticipated to grow at a CAGR of over 19% in the forecast period to reach 1.1 Million by 2012. In a Paper brought out by the ASSOCHAM on ‘Opportunity for Ayurvedic & Medical Tourism during CWG, it has been predicted that ayurvedic industry would alone earn a business of Rs. 500 crore and revenue prospects for medical tourism are predicted for estimated amount of Rs. 300 crore. The job opportunities that would arise for professionals of these two promising industries are projected for 40,000 people”.



**Sources:-**[http://blog.inlead.in/2013\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](http://blog.inlead.in/2013_04_01_archive.html)

“So, regardless of the overall gloom, medical tourism in India is on the upswing despite the recession in the West. But to expect that this could offset the fall in overall tourist arrivals would be overly optimistic, since the overall number of medical tourists is still relatively small. But for those into this niche, the slowdown may just put them on the fast track”.

### Medical Tourism- Opportunities

According to **Upadhyay 2011**, “Preliminary research of this subject area revealed significant material related to “health-care tourism” and “wellness tourism” both of which aren't mutually exclusive to the scope of medical tourism. However to set delimitations for this study, we advocate that “wellness tourism” refers to spa & relaxation treatments and similarly related retreats where surgery is not involved. Whereas “health-care tourism” encompasses all treatments that enhance a state of well being, both internally and externally, from spa and relaxation treatments, cosmetic surgery to elective surgery and essential surgery which include essential procedures such as heart transplant or hip implants to remedy an injury or treat an illness. According to **Connell (2006)** the term “medical tourism” involves specific medical intervention. As a result to set further delimitations health tourism is the overall governing spectrum that includes both wellness tourism and medical tourism.

Simply put, wellness tourism and medical tourism are both subsets of health tourism of which the latter is the focus of this study. Thus advancements within the research of medical tourism will contribute to health tourism research in totality. Before we proceed with the medical tourism market description it is important to identify the formal definition of medical tourism used to guide the research of this study and the main destinations referred to during our research”.

**Kale, Sathe (2013)**, “A study of problems and challenges faced by medical tourists visiting India” in 2011, says that there are five important concerns of medical tourists visiting India at the pre-procedure stage. These are the quality of treatment, connectivity, the cost of treatment, the ease of access and the ease of purchase. Quality of treatment and ease of access were relatively more important. Except for connectivity, there was a significant difference in what the medical tourists expected and what they experienced. India should increasingly make use of this factor to promote its medical tourism products to its targeted segments. Gap was largest in case of facilitation and care followed by behaviour of staff and Professionalism in management of hospital. Thirdly the respondents expect hassle free post procedure period. The other reason that seems to be more relevant of emerging Pune as the hub for medical tourism is its connectivity with national and International destinations. With this there are some well known hospitals which have established the repute at national and international fora. To name few hospitals like Aditya Birla Memorial Hospital, Ruby Hall Clinic, Apollo Hospitals etc, are such hospitals which are well equipped with latest medical technology and provide medical facilities at cost effective prices”.

### **Reasons for Medical Travel**

**Prakash, Tyagi, Devrath (2011)**, “There are several reasons for the increase in medical travel. First, the demographics of the developed nations are causing a significant increase in demand for health care. In Japan, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and many other European nations, the proportion of the population older than 60 years, in relation to the total population, is increasing rapidly. Similar trends are being seen in many countries across the world. At the same time, life expectancy in most countries has also increased steadily over the years; the combined result is significant strain on national health-care systems. The inability of many health-care systems to deal with the increase in demand does, in many cases, lead to compromised levels of service and decreased access through long waiting lists and high costs. This drives many individuals to seek alternatives to domestic health care. Such alternatives can be found in the economically stratified global health-care marketplace (Turner, 2007), which offers everything from cutting-edge surgical procedures such as organ transplants to cosmetic procedures and wellness packages at a wide range of prices. As is the case in many economic sectors, outsourcing to more affordable health service provision abroad is increasing. Private health-care facilities in countries such as India, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are utilizing the prevailing cost differentials, relative to countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to attract international customers who have the financial means to access medical care abroad. International accreditation and name recognition linked to quality care provision are laying to rest many of the concerns individuals may have, regarding professional competence, patient safety, and quality in low-cost health care abroad. Combined with inexpensive air travel, low-cost telecommunications, digitized patient records, widespread access to information through the internet, and an increasingly sophisticated medical travel industry to manage all these processes on the patient's behalf, travelling abroad for medical treatment is an appealing alternative for uninsured or underinsured individuals. The alternatives available through medical travel are not only within the reach of individuals in developed countries but also to the people from developing and least developed countries who have the financial means to find sophisticated and affordable medical care in neighboring countries (**UNESCAP, 2009**).

Improving patient safety, medication, infection prevention and control, quality performance, and improvement and the environment of care is a primary concern for hospitals and medical facilities involved in medical tourism voluntarily seek JCI accreditation. In India Quality Council of India (QCI), an organization of Government of India has set up National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH). In a NABH accredited hospital, there is strong focus on patient rights and benefits, patient safety, control and prevention of infections in hospitals and practicing good patient care protocols like special care for vulnerable groups, critically ill patients and better and controlled clinical outcome. There

are 16 JCI accredited and 63 NABH accredited healthcare providers in India. Advantages for medical tourists coming to India include reduced costs, the availability of latest medical technologies, and a growing compliance on international quality standards, as well as the fact that foreigners are less likely to

Face language barriers in India. The Indian government is taking steps to address infrastructure issues that hinder the country's growth in medical tourism. Most estimates claim treatment costs in India start at around a tenth of the price of comparable treatment in America or Britain. The most popular treatments sought in India by medical tourists are alternative medicine, bone- marrow transplant, cardiac bypass, eye surgery, and hip replacement. India is known in particular for heart surgery, hip resurfacing and other areas of advanced medicine”.

### **Emerging Tourism Scenario**

“As seen already, tourism industry in India has embarked on to a growth trajectory that is palpably tiding northward and offering a level of confidence to the planners and destination managers in the country. According to **Kulshreshtha. S. Gupta (2016)**, the decades of lull seem to be over especially when the vibrancy in the growth of domestic tourism, which accounts for about three-fourth of the tourism income, is factored in. In many ways, domestic tourists would be a game changer for tourism-specific 'Make in India' initiatives especially on account of its sheer volume and impacts. Globally, a dynamic tourism scenario can be seen prevailing for many decades and the tourism demand survived many adverse political (mainly security concerns and unrest) and economic conditions and hiccups those have resulted. In the New Millennium specifically, international tourist arrivals recorded an impressive average annual growth of 4.9% during 2000-14 and the numbers have increased from 674 million to 1133 million. Regionally, Asia and Pacific recorded the highest increase of 9.9% annually. This, according to UNWTO, underscores that tourism is a surprisingly resilient economic activity which increasingly contribute to the development in many countries around the world.

During the last 15 years, foreign tourist arrivals in India have increased from 2.48 million in 1999 to over 7.68 million in 2014, recording an average annual growth rate of nearly 14% per annum. During January- August 2015, the arrivals were 50.68 lakh against 48.51 lakh for the same period in 2014. Corresponding increase in foreign exchange earnings (FEE) in dollar terms during 1999-2014 were reportedly USD 3009 million and USD 20236 million respectively, against an annual average growth of 38.2%, which is substantial. During January-August 2015, FEE were US\$ 13.017 billion as against US\$ 13.190 billion in for same period in 2014”.

“In terms of India's share in global tourism pie, though it has not been in any noticeable levels, some improvements can be observed and that is a clear pointer towards an optimistic scenario particularly at the level of foreign exchange earnings. From 0.66% in 1997, India's share of total global earnings has increased to 1.58% in 2014 and also improved the global ranking to the 16 position. Similarly, share of India's position in terms of total FEE in Asia and the Pacific has also improved from 4.06% in 2000 to 5.22% in 2014. Correspondingly, improvement in the ranking in the regional scape was also evident in its rise from 10<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> during this period. In fact, domestic arrivals have been very impressive and grown consistently defying even the worst economic facet of 2008-09 period, thereby, revealing the segment's inherent resilience. As the table stands to witness, the arrival figures have increased seven fold to reach 1287.95 million in 2014. This accounted for an average annual growth of 41.28% during 1997-2014”.

“One of the greatest strengths of destination India is its socio-cultural and geographical diversity and its wide spread across the length and breadth of the country. The attractive beaches, mighty Himalayas and its snow-covered peaks, 32 World Heritage Sites and 25 bio-geographic zones are unparalleled in many ways. The medicinal systems such as Ayurveda and the holistic healing science of Yoga are its unique strengths and these have already been reckoned globally and thousands of people are visiting the country in search of it every year. In acknowledgement of these, the 12th Plan has evolved a strategy for focused promotion of a niche tourism portfolio comprising the cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism”.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

“Customer satisfaction is a critical issue in the success of any business system, traditional or innovative (Ho & Wu, 1999). Customer satisfaction, a business term, is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet



or surpass customer expectation. Customer satisfaction is the ultimate result of meeting a consumer's expectation from the performance of products. Most satisfied customers normally have the intention to re-purchase the products if product performance meets his or her expectation (Alam & Yasin, 2010). Customer satisfaction is an abstract concept and the actual manifestation of the state of satisfaction will vary from person to person and product/service to product/service. The state of satisfaction depends on a number of psychological and physical variables which correlate with satisfaction behaviours such as return and recommend rate. The level of satisfaction can also vary depending on other factors such as other products against which the customer can compare the organization's products.

Customer satisfaction is defined as result of cognitive and effective evaluation, where some comparison standard is compared to the actually perceived performance. If the perceived performance is less than expected, customers will be dissatisfied. On the other hand if the perceived performance exceeds expectations customer will be satisfied (Kang, 2006).

Work done by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991) delivered SERVQUAL- an instrument which provides the basis for the measurement of customer satisfaction with a service by using the gap between the customer's expectation of performance and their perceived experience of performance. This provides the researcher with a satisfaction "gap" which is semi-quantitative in nature. Cronin and Taylor extended the disconfirmation theory by combining the "gap" described by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry as two different measures (perception and expectation) into a single measurement of performance relative to expectation”.

## Conclusion

“India is in an advantageous position to tap the global opportunities in the medical tourism sector. The government's role is crucial to the development of medical tourism. According to **Dawn, Pal (2011)**, the government should take steps in the role of a regulator and also as a facilitator of private investment in healthcare. Mechanisms need to be evolved to enable quicker visa grants to foreign tourists for medical purposes where patients can contact the Immigration Department at any point of entry for quick clearance. Tax incentives to the service providers, import duty reduction on medical equipment, committees to promote and foster medical tourism are some of the initiatives that can be undertaken. There is also a need to develop supporting infrastructure such as transport services to facilitate tourism in India. The tourism, health, information and communication departments need to work in tandem for efficient patient care. This paper has recommended some of the medical tourism strategies for further promoting medical tourism in India. These include building and promoting the image of India as high quality medical tourism destination, creating and promoting new combination of medical tourism products, keeping up the high standard of quality treatments at a reasonable price, providing informative online and offline materials and make them available to the potential customers. Also attaining the accreditation/standard to reassure the quality of treatments as well as emphasizing on the needs and demands of the existing target markets must be incorporated”.



Sources:-<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEklew2JUzg>

**Alvi, Dikkatwar (2008)**, stated that “the uniqueness of tourism business lies in the fact that it is not single service, but involves a large variety of different, exclusive, which can be provided by different group catering to hospitality, transport and travel, unique, attractive site etc. There is thus, an additional task or business: that of integration of these services. Tourism is a booming industry and is one of the fast growing businesses world over. And India has the potential to the number one tourist destination in the world. **But for this to happen it is essential that, Government will have to industry.** If India wishes to negotiate and open Tourism sector further to benefit from the international tourism business, it has to think strategically and gear up internally to develop appropriate physical, human resource, and other organizational infrastructure in an **integrated manner**, which can meet the varied needs of international tourists”.



Sources:-<http://indiaopines.com/invitation-narendra-modi-make-in-india>

“By bringing tourism under the 'Make in India' initiative, the sector is going to get much awaited attention at the policy level and rightfully so in the development schemes. However, it is imperative to have a relook on the tourism policy again and integrate fresh approach and strategies so as to meet the renewed focus on tourism sector. According to **Kulshreshtha. S.Gupta (2016)**, the thrust must be on pro-poor, inclusive and sustainable tourism practices because tourism is one such sector that has the capability and potential to address this crucial development concern. It is also an imperative for sustainability of the tourism industry itself because the support of the local communities are crucial, especially on account of the fact that tourism products are spatially fixed and that could act as both **blessing and disguise**, depending how the very approach to development is defined. This is both the essence and spirit of 'Make in India' initiative and tourism fits very well in to this framework, complementing both ways and also for the progression of the sustainable development of destination and communities to truly imbibe the spirit of “Vasudaiva Kutumbakam” – the world is one family”.

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