

Opportunities of Medical Tourism in Kerala

Theertha Joy

Assistant Professor

Department of Commerce

SNM College Maliankara

Email: theerthajoy20@gmail.com

Dr. Rajani B Bhat

Assistant Professor & Research Guide

P G & Research Department of Commerce

The Cochin College, Kochi -2

Email: rajaniabbhat@thecochincollege.edu.in

Dr. Muhammed Anas .B

Secretary

KSCTDC & Post Doc Fellow, Srinivas university

Mukka , Surtahkal, Mangalore, India

Email: m.muhdanas1986@gmail.com

Abstract

Kerala offers opportunities for medical tourism by offering high-quality, reasonably priced treatments in both modern medicine and Ayurveda. By utilizing its highly qualified staff and facilities for a range of services such as orthopaedic, cosmetic, cardiac, and reproductive operations medical tourism expands. These potentials are further enhanced by the state's natural beauty, temperate climate, English-speaking populace, well-established tourism infrastructure, and government initiatives to promote the industry, which enable integrated wellness and recovery experiences. Kerala is well-known for its complementary and alternative medicine practices, like Ayurveda, which aid in body renewal. Many visitors have now learned that Kerala boasts a large number of highly qualified medical professionals, including doctors and nurses, as well as a first-rate hospital system that provides treatments of international caliber at very reasonable costs.

Keywords: *Medical tourism, Government, wellness and illness tourism*

1. Introduction

The practice of traveling to another nation for medical treatment is known as medical tourism, and it is frequently driven by the desire for cheaper prices, access to treatments that are not available domestically, or shorter procedure wait times. This phenomenon benefits a wide range of patients, including those in developed nations looking for more affordable options and those in countries with less developed healthcare systems seeking better care. Traveling across international borders expressly to obtain medical services, such as elective procedures, intricate surgeries, dental work, fertility treatments, or even alternative therapies, is referred to as medical tourism. Historically, people have travelled for medical purposes, whether to world-renowned hospitals, spa towns, or temples. However, as a result of globalization and advancements in medical technology, the scope and accessibility of international medical travel have grown significantly. Patients are less likely to encounter a language barrier in India because of the following factors: low costs, the availability of the newest medical technologies, international quality standards, well-trained doctors, and English-speaking individuals. The main benefit is that the best ophthalmology, dental, and fertility hospitals in India will offer cutting-edge treatments at reasonable prices.

II. Objectives and Methodology of the study

1. To understand the growth of medical tourism in Kerala
2. To understand the role of Government in supporting medical tourism in Kerala

The paper is based on secondary data obtained from various literary sources, including various research papers, news articles and websites.

III. Review of Literature

Ayurveda, one of Kerala's traditional natural medical practices, draws many visitors to this stunning region in search of a cure for their ailments. When compared to developed western nations, modern medical facilities provide affordable medical solutions. Middle Eastern nations are very important to Kerala's medical tourism industry. People from western and Middle Eastern nations are now forced to consider India, particularly Kerala, as a preferred alternative due to the unaffordable cost of treatments for heart diseases, brain and spine issues, dental issues, and organ transplants in their home countries. Modern, well-equipped hospitals with highly skilled medical personnel and doctors offer expert solutions for challenging medical problems.

Lt. Seena V.(2022) in their paper titled Medical tourism prospects in Kerala states that India's healthcare systems are now globally renowned for safety, trust, compassion and excellence. The country attracts foreign patients, especially for surgical treatments, offering high-quality care at low prices and without long waiting times. Among the Indian states, Kerala is the most popular destination for medical tourists. This popularity is bolstered by several factors: recognized multispecialty hospitals, expert doctors and nurses, technologically advanced treatment facilities, affordable high-quality medical care, recognized international or national accreditations, affordable air travel, hassle free visa processing, internet technology, cultural and diasporic familiarity. Kerala has a significant opportunity to build on its established reputation as a wellness destination and make a strong entry into the global medical tourism market. By leveraging existing strengths and addressing certain strategic areas, Kerala can position itself as a leading medical tourism destination.

Mercy Toni & Dr. Cyriac Joseph (2019) in their paper titled “The Trend and Pattern of Medical Tourism in Kerala states that Medical Tourism is a rapidly growing industry in the state of Kerala. Kerala is a favorite medical tourist destination to a large number of people in Europe and Middle East. Availability of treatment at a much cheaper cost in top class hospitals with highly professional medical staff and modern equipment’s and facilities is what attract medical tourists to Kerala. The natural beauty and moderate climate also are added advantages. The role of medical tourism in the economic growth of the state is very significant. The state government and the public as well as private agencies affiliated with medical tourism should make use of the opportunity to tap its benefits to the full by providing the best possible facilities to the honoured guests to the state.

S. Josephin Arulmozhi, K. Praveenkumar &G. Vinayagamoorthis (2019) in their paper titled “Medical Tourism in India, studied about examining the foreign exchange earning option through medical tourism and analysis of annual growth of foreign tourist in India. It proves that the annual growth an efficiency of handling capacity of Indian medical the medical industry.

Deep Shikha and Vidisha Vallabh(2022) stated that Transnational medical travel, widely quoted as medical combines health care with leisure travel. Asia-Pacific is the leading contributor to the global market revenue in medical tourism and the global turnover is expected cross over USD 31.21 billion by 2026. With protracted and expensive visa and medical services patients seek sophisticated but inexpensive healthcare unavailable in their country.

In Kerala medical tourism, the Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala serves as a virtual entity. The primary reason Kerala has a lot of potential in the medical tourism sector is due to its inherent cost and quality advantages. Kerala's healthcare system is becoming more appealing and reasonably priced, but the state still faces some obstacles before it can become a popular travel destination with a strong healthcare sector. Kerala is home to numerous hospitals that offer medical tourism services. After examining the current state of the industry, the government of Kerala can implement appropriate measures to encourage medical tourism. Providers of tourism may donate a portion of their earnings to the public health care fund.

IV. Results & Discussion

A. Kerala as a Medical Tourism destination

Kerala, One of the smallest states in India, has long been a well-liked destination for medical tourists. Kerala is renowned for its temperate climate and scenic beauty. Known as "the God's own Country," this small southern state is a popular destination for tourists from all over the world. (State planning board Thiruvanthapuram, Kerala, India 2017). The availability of affordable or cost-effective medical care in Kerala is the main draw for medical tourists visiting the state. People frequently have to pay exorbitant prices for specialized medical care in both developed and developing nations. Low-cost care for several serious illnesses, such as heart diseases, bone marrow transplants, and knee-cap replacements all influence their decision to go to Kerala. The short wait time is another significant element that draws international patients to Kerala for medical treatment. Patients with severe illnesses must wait a long time to receive medical care in their home countries for a variety of reasons. Soon after their arrival, they can receive the treatment back in Kerala. The lack of adequate medical facilities in their home countries, particularly in our neighbouring countries, is another factor that attracts a lot of people with illnesses that require immediate attention. Kerala has a variety of upscale hotels close to super specialty hospitals. In addition, Kerala's standing as a well-liked travel destination and all of the previously listed elements encourage foreigners to travel there for medical tourism.

Kerala as an Ayurvedic hub

Kerala, which is widely regarded as the center of Ayurveda, has drawn a lot of interest as a popular medically beneficial travel destination in India. Kerala is one of South Asia's most cutting-edge medical destinations. According to National Geographic's Traveler magazine, Kerala is one of the "top 10 paradises in the world" and one of the "50 must-see destinations of a lifetime." The majority of tourists define Kerala based on its unique setting, pleasant climate, and well-educated and cultured population. English unites every place in the state, even though regional languages predominate in most areas. Flight connectivity between nations is a crucial component of medical value travel. Kerala's advantageous location on the Indian map allows for easy access to the Middle East and Far East. Visitors can fly to any location in Kerala in less than three hours to the international airports in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode. Kerala has the highest life expectancy and the lowest infant mortality rates in India. Kerala is the only Indian state with macro health indicators comparable to those of OECD nations, and it boasts the highest Physical Quality of Life Index in the country with a 100% literacy rate. Kerala's Ayurvedic and wellness offerings initially draw tourists, but medical tourism is becoming more and more popular. Kerala has taken the lead and focused on efforts to offer both Indian and foreign patients' high-quality medical facilities and affordable treatments. Kerala's job growth is being aided by the construction of prestigious multispecialty hospitals and the rise of highly qualified medical professionals. Most public and private hospitals have received designations from the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) and the National Accreditation Board for Hospital and Healthcare Providers. When compared to other Indian destinations, Kerala offers top-notch healthcare at reasonable prices, often with a 15% discount. By establishing healthcare expertise along with a sustainable model for infrastructure and education development, the state has effectively transitioned from leisure to medical tourism.

Kerala is thriving as a medical tourism destination worldwide. Due to significant investments in both traditional and modern healthcare, it is expanding extremely quickly. Medical tourism is being viewed as a sector by the ministry of tourism, travel agencies, tour operators, and other businesses in the hospitality and service sectors. The most perfect location for Ayurvedic treatment, restorative therapies, yoga, and meditation is Kerala, which is renowned as God's own country and is endowed with abundant natural beauty and herbs. Kerala is well-equipped with state-of-the-art super specialty hospitals, which attract medical tourists from all over the world, despite the state's primary focus on Ayurvedic treatment. Medical tourists looking for traditional Ayurvedic treatments frequently travel to Kerala. However, the flow of modern medical care for medical tourists has greatly increased, especially for knee replacements, bone marrow transplants, heart surgeries, brain and spine surgeries, dental care, and eye care. Kerala, with its incredibly Super specialty hospitals, medical staff, and highly qualified and knowledgeable medical professionals can all meet their needs under one roof. Kerala's four international airports, accessibility, and visa-on-arrival services make it a popular destination for medical tourists.

B. Steps taken by Kerala Government in enhancing Medical Tourism

The Kerala Government encourages medical tourism by establishing medical hubs, investing in high-quality healthcare infrastructure, and establishing cooperative frameworks with hospitals, travel agencies, and wellness facilities. Recent efforts include utilizing the nationwide "Heal in India" campaign to expedite visa procedures and draw in international patients, as well as implementing a medical insurance policy for non-resident Keralites to provide cashless services within the state. To make Kerala a world-class healthcare destination, the state also prioritizes public-private partnerships, hospitality skill development, and integrated tourism and healthcare planning.

Here is a breakdown of the steps taken by the Kerala Government:

Medical Hubs: The government is establishing medical hubs at government medical colleges to attract foreign patients and improve the state's economic growth.

- **Quality Healthcare Packages:** The state is focusing on developing quality healthcare packages and ensuring hygienic conditions in healthcare facilities.
- **Affordable Rates:** Initiatives aim to offer affordable rates for medical treatments to appeal to medical tourists.

Policy & Initiatives

- **Expatriate Medical Insurance:** Kerala is launching an exclusive medical insurance policy for non-resident Keralites, providing cashless services for up to ₹5 lakh in partner hospitals, thereby boosting medical tourism within the state.
- **"Heal in India" Initiative:** The state is actively participating in the national "Heal in India" program to promote medical tourism, including capacity building and relaxed visa norms.
- **Streamlined Visas:** Efforts are underway to simplify and streamline visa processing for international medical tourists, reducing bureaucratic hurdles.

Collaboration & Integration

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** The government fosters collaboration with hospitals, wellness centers, the tourism sector, and other agencies to leverage Kerala's healthcare and tourism resources effectively.
- **Tourism Ecosystem Integration:** The state is working to integrate its world-class healthcare infrastructure with its tourism ecosystem, creating a comprehensive medical value travel experience.

Planning & Vision

- **Strategic Planning:** The state is developing strategies for high-quality destination management, creating unique tourism products, and establishing robust data management mechanisms for the sector.
- **Long-Term Vision:** The state government has a long-term vision to transform Kerala into a world-class healthcare hub, capitalizing on its existing strengths in healthcare and its natural beauty.

Government initiatives for improving Medical Tourism

Governments have a big say in the infrastructure, marketing plans, and policies that support this industry's expansion. Here's a thorough examination of the different ways that government action can promote the growth of medical tourism:



Fig. 1 - Government initiatives for improving Medical Tourism

Heal India initiative

The government's initiative, Heal in India, aims to encourage medical tourism in the nation. Its goal is to establish India as a top medical tourism destination. It facilitates visa applications, offers details on medical facilities, and combines medical care with travel experiences.

MDA Scheme

By giving financial support to tourism stakeholders for marketing and publicity in foreign markets, this MDA scheme aims to promote India as a travel destination abroad and boost foreign visitor arrivals.

Indian Healthcare Federation (IHF)

Supporting and advancing medical tourism in India is a major responsibility of the Indian Healthcare Federation (IHF). Together with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Union Ministry of Tourism established the Healthcare Federation as a non-governmental organization. For widespread exposure and legitimacy, they have created a database of medical tourism service providers across the nation, and their website link is posted on the Ministry of Tourism's official website (www.incredibleindia.org). Its primary goal is to offer reliable and easily accessible information about India's medical tourism options.

Medical Visa

Medical Visa: This type of visa is intended for visitors seeking medical care at an accredited hospital or treatment facility in India. Typically, the visa is granted for a maximum of one year or the duration of the treatment, whichever comes first. A letter of admission from an accredited Indian physician or hospital is required of applicants.

Medical Attendant Visa

This visa is intended for those traveling with a patient who has been issued a medical visa. Each patient may have up to two attendants. The patient's medical visa and the medical attendant visa are both valid for the same amount of time.

Heal India initiative

India's government-led initiative, Heal in India, aims to establish the country as a major international destination for wellness and medical travel. By highlighting India's reasonably priced, excellent healthcare and traditional medicine, it hopes to draw in patients from abroad. This is made possible by a digital portal, expedited visa procedures, facility accreditation, and collaborations with the public and private sectors.

Kerala Medical Value Travel Society

An organization called the Kerala Medical Value Travel Society (KMVTS) was established to advertise Kerala as a top medical and healthcare travel destination. It was founded in 2015 and serves as a coordinator and facilitator between hospitals, travel agencies, and medical providers to help the medical tourism industry by promoting the state's medical expertise to patients from outside and providing infrastructure.

V. Conclusion

Kerala has become one of the most well-liked medical tourism destinations in India, drawing primarily Middle Eastern and European patients. Its top-notch multispecialty hospitals, knowledgeable medical staff, cutting-edge technology, reasonably priced, excellent treatments, convenient travel options, and reliable healthcare standards are what make it so attractive. In addition to medical care, the state benefits from its moderate climate, wellness heritage, and natural beauty. Strong government initiatives, international accreditations, and rising demand all help Kerala's economy and present chances to further solidify its standing as a global leader in wellness and healthcare. In conclusion, Kerala's combination of advanced healthcare infrastructure, skilled professionals, affordability, and supportive government initiatives has positioned it as a leading hub for medical tourism in India. With its strong reputation for both medical excellence and holistic wellness, the state holds great potential to strengthen its role in the global medical tourism market while driving significant economic growth and international recognition.

VI. References

Deep Shikha and Vidisha Vallabh. (2022, February 22). Medical Tourism. *Journal of Bio medical research and Environmental sciences*.

Lt. Seena V., Dr., Lt. Reji G. D., Soumya Viswambharan. (2022). Medical Tourism: Prospects In Kerala. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, h889-h896.

Mercy Tony, Dr.Cyriac Joseph. (2019). The Trend and Pattern of Medical Tourism in Kerala. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, 967-981.

S. Josephin Arulmozhi, K. Praveenkumar, G. Vinayagamoorthi. (2019). Medical Tourism in India. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*, Volume-8(Issue-2S10), 695-698.

State Planning Board Kerala, I. (2017).

<https://tourism.gov.in>

<https://www.keralatourism.org>