

HVS Monday Musings: Medical Tourism in India

📅 April 11, 2021 / 👤 By Mandeep S Lamba , Dipti Mohan



In the last decade, India has emerged as one of the leading medical tourism destinations globally. The presence of several high-quality, well-equipped healthcare facilities along with a strong base of highly skilled and specialized English-speaking medical professionals, offering world-class treatments at much more affordable costs compared to developed nations are some of the reasons for the growth of this segment in India. Reports indicate that medical treatments and travel in India cost up to 50% less than that in developed western countries.

India has also been successful at attracting medical tourists from other developing nations, mainly from Asia and Africa, looking for specialized treatments that may not be easily available in their home countries.

Looking at the potential in this segment, the government introduced e-medical visa in 2014, which along with the other competitive advantages mentioned earlier have provided a significant boost to this segment. The government also set up facilitation counters at major airports for medical travelers and launched a portal to provide comprehensive information on the healthcare facilities in the country. As a result, foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) on medical visas to India have grown at a notable CAGR of over 30% during 2014-19 and accounted for 6.4% of the total FTAs in the country in 2019. The medical tourism segment was expected to reach US\$9 bn in 2020 as per a report by **FICCI**, however, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions became temporary roadblocks in its growth story. The segment has been witnessing green shoots in the last few months with easing travel restrictions and the creation of air bubbles, with a number of medical travelers, especially those coming in for critical treatments, gradually picking up.



The current pandemic is an inflection point for the medical tourism segment in India, giving the country an opportunity to become a global medical tourism hub as soon as international travel restrictions are eased considerably. During the last year, India has been lauded for handling the COVID crisis in a much better way compared to other countries, especially due to the lower COVID-mortality rate in the country. India has also been one of the few countries to manufacture its own COVID vaccination, which is being used to inoculate not only Indians but also people in other countries, clearly showcasing the country's scientific prowess and capabilities. The government is also increasing its spending on healthcare to improve the healthcare infrastructure in the country. These initiatives will help increase the credibility of the Indian healthcare sector in the eyes of medical travelers going forward. Moreover, India continues to be one of the most affordable

Summary

COVID-19 is an inflection point for medical tourism in India. Initiatives taken by the government in the last one year, coupled with the country's reputation of being one of the most affordable medical tourism destinations globally, will go a long way in making India a global medical tourism hub going forward.

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destinations for medical treatments globally, which will continue to be an advantage in the post-COVID world.

India competes with other Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia that offer similar advantages to medical travelers. It is, therefore, imperative to develop effective marketing campaigns to create awareness and communicate the COVID safety measures being implemented at various facilities. This will showcase the country as a 'safe' global medical tourism destination and help rebuild traveler confidence. The campaigns should not only highlight the various healthcare facilities & services offered at a much more reasonable cost but also promote India's strength in alternate medicine and practices such as Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Yoga which can help patients recuperate after their treatment. India has 37 JCI and 767 NABH accredited hospitals and it is important to ensure that all these facilities meet the required quality standards. Public-private partnerships to improve the healthcare infrastructure in the country can go a long way in leveraging the full potential of medical tourism in the country.

About **Mandeep S Lamba**



Mandeep S. Lamba, President – South Asia, oversees the HVS global hospitality practice for South Asia. He has spent over 30 years in the hospitality industry of which the last 19 have been in CEO positions. Having worked with leading International and domestic Hotel Companies such as IHG, Radisson & ITC Hotels, he also set up joint venture companies with Dawnay Day Group UK and Onyx Hospitality, Thailand to own and operate hotels in India giving him a broader exposure to the hospitality business.

An established industry leader, Mandeep has won several awards and recognitions in India and abroad for his accomplishments and contribution to the hospitality industry. He is a Certified Hospitality Administrator from the American Hotels Association (CHA), a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, UK (MRICS) and a member of the Tourism Council of CII (Northern India). His views are often solicited for television and print media as a spokesperson for the hospitality & tourism sector.

Prior to joining HVS in 2018, Mandeep was the Managing Director, Hotels & Hospitality Group for JLL.

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