

**A Case Study with respect to Development of North East India
as a Prospective International Ayurvedic Medical Treatment
Destination to Bridge Between North- East India & Association
of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

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Abstract :

In the present day tourism has become a significant economic force in creating varied avenues in the sectors like transport, communication, food and allied services etc to attract investment in this sector and world Tourism organization (WTO) has forecasted that by 2020 tourism will be the largest industry in the world .

North East India , comprising of eight states of the country includes people of different ethnic origin living together synthesising different ethnic and cultural entity for a tourist to cherish as a treasure. The rich natural beauty , exotic flora and fauna , serve as invaluable resources for the development of tourism in all the states of the region .

In this age of globalization , people have begun to travel to make use of a wide variety of alternatives that bring satisfaction and healthy living . Travelling is no longer confined only to leisure and recreational activities but people have started exploring new avenues for better medical care at an affordable rate .

Today Medical Tourism is a growing phenomenon and with increasing requirement for health care at effective cost this category has become one of the prime focus areas for many governments and countries . Medical Tourism refers to people travelling from one country to another to avail medical care in a cost effective method in comparison to what is available locally . This helps a country boost not just its health care sector but also its tourism sector .

Ayurveda the traditional Indian medicine , remains the most ancient yet living traditions and are also found mentioned even in the Vedas and other ancient scriptures.

In this paper we will discuss how medical tourism can be developed in North East India , with a special reference to development of Ayurvedic Treatment in North East India which can go on to help in overall development of the region .

Keywords : *Medical, Tourism , Development, North East, Ayurvedic , Healthcare .*

Introduction :

Tourism Industry :

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries

In the world with an enormous potential for further growth. Every year some 1.24 billion tourists i.e. about 4.6 percent of the world's population cross international frontiers . For many countries in the world , it is already the most important export oriented industry because of the earnings of foreign exchange . Growth of tourism bring benefits to an economy in anumber of ways like generation of income , expansion of employment opportunities , mobilization of foreign exchange , development of commerce and industry , creates national integration, fosters international understanding and cultural transformation . Tourism also contributes to the economy indirectly through its linkages with other sectors like horticulture , agriculture , poultry , fishery , dairy , handicrafts , handloom and construction etc.

Aspects of Tourism Industry :

The main aspect of tourism is that it is multidisciplinary , and attracts the attentions of geographers , historians , behavioural scientists .

The second aspect of tourism is that it contributes to the world peace , alongwith the benefits of mixing with the peoples and cultures .

Types of Tourism :

There are six broad types of tourism :

1.Recreational Tourism: These group of tourists mainly seek a change and rest .

2.Cultural Tourism : Here the main aim is to experience new cultural activities i.e. folklore , art , music , dance etc, along with the lifestyle of the people , the history of the people their arts and crafts , architecture etc.

3.Historical Tourism : This involves visit to heritage locations like museums , palaces, temples , churches .

4.Ethnic Tourism : This involves contact with unusual or quaint customs in remote areas , visiting the family's country of origin and relatives and friends .

5.Environmental Tourism : This groups generally belongs to higher income sector and are interested in visiting remote environments .

6. Adventure Tourism: This type of tourism promotes mountaineering , trekking and other adventure activities .

7. Business Tourism : This type is mainly for arranging business meetings , seminars , workshops in a remote or tourist place .

In addition to this there are innumerable types of tourism which are as follows : Agri tourism , Garden tourism, Geo tourism , Heritage tourism , Health tourism , Medical tourism , Nature tourism , Rural tourism , Archaeological tourism , Bookstore tourism, Disaster tourism , Drug tourism , Space tourism, Spiritual tourism, Sports Tourism, Sustainable tourism , Tea tourism , Water tourism, Traditional Wine tourism , etc .

Tourism Development in India :

In India tourism industry is one of the most important export oriented industries of the country as it yields a substantial amount of foreign exchange for the country . Segments such as hotels , motels , resorts , restaurants, travel agencies , tour operators , airlines , shipping , bus-taxi operators etc are significant contributors to this revenue and today the tourism industry is now the largest service industry with a contribution of 6.23 percent of the country's GDP and 8.7 percent of the total employment of the nation .

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has also named India alongwith China as one of the most fastest growing tourism industries for the next 10 to 15 years .

Tourism Development in the North East India :

It is seen that the region ' North East India' with its beautiful scenic beauty , with natural wonders like world's largest river island in Assam , Dzukou Valley in Nagaland , Living Root Bridge in Meghalaya , the flora and fauna and the colourful vibrant tribes of Arunachal Pradesh , Sangai Deer and floating lake in Manipur and the charming changu lake at an altitude of 12000 feet in Sikkim has tremendous potential for developing the tourism industry . The rich natural beauty , exotic flora and fauna serve as invaluable resources for the development of tourism in all the states of the region . The entire region is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each state has its own distinct features but the entire North – Eastern Region (except Sikkim) accounts for a mere 0.4 percent domestic tourist arrivals and less than 0.1 percent of foreign tourist arrivals .

To attract more and more tourists to this region , some measures have to be taken which are as follows :

1) Proper publicity has to be made , 2) Good Transport and Communication facilities has to be provided , 3) 24 hours power and water supply has to be arranged , 4) Varieties of food including popular local food , has to be arranged , 5) Prompt medical facilities has to be provided , 6) Efficient Services of tourist guides has to be arranged , 7) Various entertainment facilities like trekking , angling , boating , cycling , gliding , ballooning has to be arranged , 8) Organize traditional music and dances , games and sports , creating shopping facilities including selling and displaying of local products , local fruits and vegetables , handicrafts and handloom items , food items , easily accessible of telephone and internet facilities , encouraging tourist participation in various local festivals etc , have to be done.

Medical Tourism :

Medical Tourism is an amalgamation of two terms called medical and tourism and it refers to people travelling from one country to another to avail medical care which are advanced and cost effective compared to what is available locally . This helps a country boost not just its health care sector but also its tourism sector . A medical tourism destination focuses on its healthcare resources that gives wellness , care and tourism attractions that give peace of mind and relaxation . It basically focuses on people trying to avail affordable health care options packaged with tourism attractions . This also helped in developing alternative medicines . It has been a practice since over 2000 years where historical accounts of Indian's , Chinese and Egyption cultures shows such activities .

Some of the basic drivers for development of medical tourism are :

1) High Cost of treatment in home country compared to the health tourism destination , 2) Long waiting lists or shortage of proper facilities , 3) To make use of advanced technologies of treatments and low cost benefits , 4) To enjoy the benefits of Alternative forms of Medicines, 5) Availability of the services of highly skilled doctors and high standards of care .

The Global Medical Tourism Market is broadly segmented into different types of treatment which are :

1) Orthopaedic Treatment , 2) Cardiovascular Treatment , 3) Dental Treatment , 4) Fertility Treatment , 5) Cosmetic Treatment ,6) Neurological Treatment , 7) Cancer Treatment etc .

Thereafter the Global Medical Tourism Market is also segregated on the basis of geographical regions like North America , Europe , Asia Pacific , Latin America , Middle East and Africa .

Indian Perspective :

India has become a popular hub of Medical tourism . A total of 4.95 lakh foreign patients visited India in 2017. Bangladesh and Afghanistan continued to be the top countries from where maximum number of foreign tourists arrived . Some other countries from where large number of patients had come to India for Medical reasons are Iraq , Oman , Maldives , Yemen , Uzbekistan and Sudan .

The NITI Aayog has identified Medical Value Travel(MVT) as a major source of foreign exchange earnings and today India accounts for around 18% of the Global Medical Tourism Market .

Today India has become a preferred destination for Cardiology , Orthopaedics ,Transplants and Ophthalmology . India also enjoys high credibility in wellness , preventive and alternative medicine .

Some areas of focus to accelerate the growth of Medical Value Tourism in India :

- 1) Position India as a Tourist friendly destination
- 2) Implement best business practices related to medical facilitation , pricing of procedures , clinical outcomes etc ,
- 3) Develop state of the art hospital infrastructure to provide world class experience
- 4) Faster Redressal of patient grievances
- 5) Better Post Operative Care
- 6) Efficient Visa processing
- 7) Solving the problems of food and language barriers
- 8) Better Transport Infrastructure .

Thereafter we see that in order to strengthen its position as a Medical Service Provider of the world against current popular destinations like Thailand , Singapore , Malaysia , India needs to focus on the dual objectives of “tourism friendliness and patient centricity “ alongwith coordinated efforts of all the stakeholders .

Promoting Medical Tourism in North East India:

India’s North East is one of the biodiversity hotspots in the world . The region have abundant forest and natural resources . Apart from beautiful natural flora and fauna the region is also endowed with rich medicinal plants . The Ayurveda system of Medicines is long practiced in almost every household of the region , but such knowledge and

practices has remained confined only as traditional practices . The region being a tourist hotspot and being located strategically in the South East Asian Region alongwith the changing dynamics of the ACT East Policy of the Government of India it seems to bring a never before opportunity to the untapped medical tourism sector of the region .

The recent initiatives launched by the Government of India as well as the Government of Assam and others also seek to promote the region as a hub of research in Community medicines .

Medical tourism has become one of the major components in services trade in India . In last quarter century India has grown as a prominent exporter of speciality health services in the world and today India is known globally for its low cost and high quality medical services . It offers a wide variety of procedures at about one-tenth the cost of similar procedures in the United States . Post-operation treatment and follow up are provided through innovative video consultation , which bring confidence to the patients in the system .

In the BBIN sub-region , Bangladesh , Bhutan and Nepal depend on India for speciality health services and a large number of patients from Nepal , Bhutan and Bangladesh come to India for health treatment . In 2013, a total of 56129 people came to India on Medical visas of which 9482 were from Afghanistan , 17814 from Bangladesh 1090 from Pakistan(Data Source – Ministry of Tourism , Government of India) and most of these patients have been treated in hospitals located in Kolkata , Chennai , Mumbai and Delhi .

In recent years , Guwahati has become a new destination of health services . Guwahati has advantages of language over other parts of India as well as adjacency with the growing market of Bangladesh , Bhutan , Myanmar and some parts of Nepal . Its weather along with tourism helped the region to become an important medical tourism destination .

Healthcare facilities in Guwahati have improved tremendously in the past few years with several prominent hospital chains like Narayana Super – Speciality Hospital , Apollo Hospitals , Ayursundra Hospital , Sri Sankar Nethralaya , Fortis etc have either opened branches in Guwahati or are planning to set up same and today Guwahati has already started getting patients from Bangladesh , Bhutan and Nepal . Then we have Shija Hospitals and Research Institute in Imphal which has been treating patients from Myanmar .

Ayurvedic Treatment :

The ancient Indian Medical System , also known as Ayurveda is based on ancient writings that rely on a 'natural' and 'holistic' approach to physical and mental health.

The word 'Ayurveda' has been derived out of fusion of two separate words 'Ayur' i.e. life and 'Veda' i.e knowledge . Thus in literal meaning Ayurveda is the science of life and combines products (mainly derived from plants but may also include animal , metal and mineral) , diet , exercise and lifestyle .

The knowledge of Ayurveda was first comprehensively documented in the compendia like 'Brahma Samhita', 'Agnivesha Tantra', 'Bhela Samhita' etc and according to Ayurveda , health is considered as a basic pre-requisite for achieving the goals of life i.e. Dharma (duties) , Arth (finance), Kama (materialistic desires) and Moksha (salvation) .

Ayurveda holds the strength to treat diseases from a holistic angle in accordance with the body-mind constitution and other physico - psychological attributes of the patients and as such is proven to be effective in the treatment of chronic , metabolic and life style diseases for which satisfactory solutions are not available in conventional allopathy medicine .

In order to develop Ayurvedic treatment in India the Ministry of Ayush of Government of India has set up some institutions which are as follows :

1) The National Medicinal Plants Board(NMPB) of Ministry of AYUSH has been set up for coordination of all matters relating to all matters of medicinal plants and its implementation .

2) National Institute of Ayurveda (NIA) , Jaipur . The National Institute of Ayurveda , is an apex institute of the Ministry of AYUSH , Government of India for promoting the growth and development of Ayurveda .

3) Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth (RAV), New Delhi . The Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth , New Delhi , is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of AYUSH Government of India and works as a nodal agency to the Ministry of AYUSH , India , in implementing Central Sector Schemes of Continuing Medical Education(CME) in AYUSH systems .

4) Institute of Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (IPGT and RA) , Jamnagar (GUJRAT). This is the oldest Research Institute of Ayurveda established and being funded by Government of India .

Literature Review :

A lot has been written about the development of tourism industry but the concept of developing Ayurvedic treatment is slowly coming up and not much research has been done in this area .

- Varpal L. Singh in his Project Report on Medical Tourism with Reference to India :Origin and Evolution of Medical Tourism , stated that Medical Tourism is actually thousands of years old and now-a-days we have reached the era where hospitals are more like Spas and Spas are more like hospitals .
- Karthikeyan P. and Muralidhar S : In their report Ayurvedic Tourism in India : Practices and Policies , stated that national as well as international acceptance of Ayurvedic healing has definitely widened up the bounds and prospects of Ayurvedic Tourism .
- De Prabir in his report Making North East Medical Tourism hub for the region stated that today India is known globally for its low cost and high quality medical services and offers a wide variety of procedures at about one-tenth the cost of similar procedures in the United States and also post operation treatment and follow up are provided through innovative video consultation which brings confidence in patients regarding the system .

Objectives of the study :

The main objectives of the study will be to identify the challenges and prospects of developing the North East India as a Prospective International Ayurvedic Medical Treatment Destination to bridge between North East India and Association of South East Asian Nations(ASEAN) and develop the entire North East India .

It takes into Account the Customers (Patients) and their relatives point of view to identify the factors which can go on to help in formulating strategies to promote North East India as a International Medical Hub .

The main parameters that the study tried to deal with are as follows :

1) Experience of the Doctors 2) Availability of Testing facilities 3) Counselling Services 4) Availability of Medicines and Medical Equipments 5) Nursing Care and facilities 6) Overall Health Care facilities 7) After Hospitalisation Services , 8) Proximity of Accommodation facilities to Hospitals 9) Availability of quality and Hygienic Food nearby Hospital 10) Customer Care support , 11) Cost Effectiveness .

Research Methodology :

The present study has been exploratory , casual and empirical in nature and the data needed for such research work has been collected through both direct and indirect methods of collection of primary and secondary data .

Population :- Patients from five hospitals of Kolkata and Guwahati were taken .

Direct Method :

Primary data has been collected from 100 customers (patients) by two stage Sampling technique , during field visit of some of the chosen hospitals of Kolkata and Guwahati by personal interview through a structural questionnaire among randomly selected respondents belonging to various states and countries .

Indirect Method :

A number of books , newspapers , magazines, journals and websites and hospitals were also consulted to gather informations related to our study .

The primary and the secondary data are examined and analysed thoroughly and the results of the analysis are presented below :

Findings of the Study :

North East India is always blessed by nature in having rich cultural heritage , exotic presence of flora and fauna alongwith spectacular biodiversity , wildlife , snowcapped Himalayas , tropical forests , shrines of diverse religions and prominent archaeological sites to provide North East India an immense opportunity for medical tourism .

Northeast India is the only place in the world where health and tea tourism can be blended to mix well and Tea gardens in Assam and Darjeeling are magnificent places not only for natural lovers but also for health and wellness yoga and naturopathy etc .

Some of the positive aspects like Doctor's experience, availability of medicines , good quality nursing care , diagnostic services alongwith a good weather conditions in comparison to the rest of the country , can go on to help

North East India as a International Medical tourism destination .

However there remain a number of challenges in the proper utilization of the huge untapped potentialities in the region and making it one of the most sought after medical tourism hotspot in the entire South East Asia and they are as follows : a) better after hospitalization services , b) better customer care support , C) better counseling services ,d) lack of qualified or skilled workers , e) lack of generally speaking language ,f) Infrequent air connectivity with other countries .

Suggestions :

Some measures to transform this region as a International medical tourism hotspot .

It is seen that barriers to health services trade are innumerable and more complicated and removing some of the trade barriers would lead to generate economic welfare , strengthen the medical networks and deepen the regional integration centering Northeast India .

1) Financial transactions particularly payment of fees from origin countries to India is a major barrier, and so BBIN countries may take steps to facilitate region wise e-transaction for medical payment purpose and at the same time , strengthen the banking networks between the countries which would ease the burdens on patients aiming to get treated in India but still today Guwahati is yet to have branches of banks of Bangladesh , Bhutan and Nepal and Vice Versa.

2) To allow the health tourism to grow fast , Guwahati and Imphal should be linked with Dhaka , Kathmandu , Thimpu (Paro) and Yangon and other cities of ASEAN countries by direct air . Bus Services between Dhaka – Shillong – Guwahati , between central and western Bhutan and Guwahati and between Imphal and Yangon or any other cities of Myanmar should be considered . Patients arriving at Assam- Bangladesh (Dawki/Tamabil) border from Bangladesh or any other border from any other ASEAN countries for Health treatment may be given on arrival visa with biometric pass to the patient and the accompanying persons for some certain days . Thereafter air , river, rail and road access to Northeast India shall be expanded and enhanced to develop tourism among BBIN and ASEAN countries and with more hospital chains coming up in Guwahati and Imphal they should host more conference and seminars of health services .

3) Shortage of skill is one of the biggest barrier to promote medical tourism in North East India as except Assam ,

Manipur and Meghalaya the rest of the North Eastern States do not have a single credible Medical College . Therefore to sustain the medical tourism in Northeast India , States should give more focus in medical education .

4) Consular Services would help facilitate the health tourism , opening of consulates of Bangladesh , Bhutan and other ASEAN countries in Guwahati , Assam will go on to help the health sector reforms in the entire North East India .

5) An integrated agency to streamline the medical tourism and handle all aspects of foreign patients availing of health services in India is needed .

6) It is also suggested that BBIN and ASEAN countries may consider signing MOUS to jointly promote health tourism in the sub region as well as to adopt as action plan to remove the barriers to trade in health services . In fact a Medical Tourism Forum(BMTF) for both BBIN and ASEAN countries may be constituted to assist various countries to achieve the objectives of promoting Medical tourism in North East India and one of its main job would be to provide certifications of medical tourism facilitators who would be involved in the co-ordination of patient care for patients travelling from one country to another in BBIN sub- region .

Conclusion :

At the end we see that under the ACT East Policy , Northeast India is gaining attraction of both the foreign and domestic investors where Medical tourism has the potential to bring huge investment in Northeast India and generate jobs and on the other hand factors like increasing private hospitals & diagnostic centres , Medical Colleges , Nursing Institutes etc and increasing no of patients from BBIN and ASEAN can be some of the important factors in facilitating the growth of North East India as one of the International Medical Tourism Hub of the entire South East Asia as well .

Therefore we see that both the Central Government of India and the respective State Governments can play a vital role in assisting North Eastern India to become a health destination for patients from not only the **neighbouring states** but also from other **BBIN , ASEAN, Middle East , Africa , Europe and American** countries and become a major revenue generator for the country while on the other hand we see that growth in this sector will also go on to boost in developing a market for the locally available herbs to be used for medicinal purposes .

Thereafter the following areas have to be taken care to develop the North East India as a Medical Tourism Hub :

- More Medical Practitioners , Nurses , Technicians , Lab Assistants, Pharmacists , Therapists , Physios etc .
- More Private and Government College and Hospitals , More Pharma manufacturing facilities and More National and International flight frequency etc .

In the end we can say that joint effort by the organizations involved in this sector alongwith both the Central and State Governments of the Region to overcome the problems of the industry , can place North East India as an important International Medical Tourism Hub .

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