



## Medical Tourism In India: Special Reference To Punjab

### KEYWORDS

Medical, Tourism, India, Punjab, Medical facilities, Tourist destinations

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**ABSTRACT** India is a recent entrant into medical tourism because of reduced costs, availability of latest medical technologies, and a growing compliance on international quality standards. Punjab Government would promote medical tourism in the state as this sector has a great potential to boost the state's economy. It is catering to thousands of NRIs and other foreigner patients every year because of their state of the art facilities in hospitals and cheaper medical treatments here as compared to countries like, US, UK and Canada. Medical tourism has not only brought hefty money for the doctors, but even hotel industry of the state has also received a great response from NRIs visiting to get treatment. Even the state government has come forward to develop medical tourism in the area. No doubt, the state government is working hard to promote the medical tourism but there is still much to be done.

### INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism is a term initially coined to describe the rapidly-growing practice of travelling to another country to obtain health care. Such services typically include elective procedures as well as complex specialized surgeries such as joint replacement, cardiac surgery, dental surgery, and cosmetic surgeries. In the 21st century, relatively low-cost jet travel has taken the industry beyond the wealthy and desperate. In this century, however, medical tourism expanded to a much larger scale.

Asia also has a history of medical tourism. India was one of the world's great centres of alternative medicine and remains popular today. Thailand, followed by India, Puerto-Rico, Argentina, Cuba and others quickly became the most popular destinations for medical tourists. Medical tourism appeared in Europe in the 16th century as the elite rediscovered the ancient Roman baths. In the 18th century, England saw a boom of dedicated spa towns and sanatoriums catering to those who could afford to make the trip. These places were almost always centred around natural hot springs, as the mineral waters were believed to treat all kinds of disease, from gout to bronchitis (<http://www.discovermedicaltourism.com/history/>, retrieved on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

Medical tourism derives its importance in the factor like air fare, hotels, travel insurance, car rentals, shopping, and dining, at many medical vacations are substantially more affordable than domestic health care is. For example, a heart valve operation that might require \$100,000 in the States could cost well under \$10,000 in a country like India where lower labour costs help drive down the price considerably. The same is true in popular medical tourism destinations like Thailand, Argentina, Singapore, and Hungary.

Internationally, health tourism is an industry sustained by 617million individuals with an annual growth of 3.9% annually and worth US \$ 513 billion (Carrera and Bridges, 2014). World tourism Indicators suggest that in 2002, number of International tourists reached the 700 million mark with 18.7% arrivals to Asia and the Pacific. Europe saw highest number of tourists. At that time, India did not figure in the top 10 international tourist destinations because India's share in Asia & Pacific region stands at a mere 1.8% (Kaur et al., 2007).

### STATUS OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

India is a recent entrant into medical tourism. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30% which made it a \$2 billion industry by 2015 (Hamid and Zubeda, 2012; The Economic Times, posted on IndianHealthCare.in). An estimated 150,000 of these travel to India for low-priced healthcare procedures every year. The Indian government predicts that India's \$17-billion-a-year health-care industry could grow 13 per cent in each of the next six years, boosted by medical tourism, which industry watchers say, is growing at 30 per cent annually.



**Fig1. Why India a preferable Medical Tourist place (Courtesy [www.google.co.in](http://www.google.co.in))**

The government has removed visa restrictions on tourist visas that required a two-month gap between consecutive visits for people from Gulf countries which is likely to boost medical tourism (Times of India Report, 2012). According to Bureau of Immigration reports (2012-12-05), a visa-on-arrival scheme for tourists from select countries has been instituted which allows foreign nationals to stay in In-

dia for 30 days for medical reasons. A number of hospitals have hired language translators to make patients from other countries feel more comfortable while at the same time helping in the facilitation of their treatment.

State policies clearly reveal the plans to enhance the image of the state as a major medical tourist destination which include not just the states like Delhi and Kerala but also the states like Goa and Punjab. India attracts more than a million tourists per year and Goa alone attracts about 2 lakh tourists every year. Therefore, it is an ideal situation for conversion of tourism into medical tourism. Goa has a large number of resorts and hotels, right from 5-star deluxe to the budget hotels which cater to different classes of foreign tourists. Apollo Victor Hospital at Margao is the first super specialty, multi-specialty, tertiary care hospital in the state. At any given point of time, 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the patients in the hospital are foreigners. To complement allopathic tourism, ayurveda treatments are also available in Goa. 'Deevaya Ayurveda Retreat' caters only to ayurvedic treatments. Goa is an ideal medical tourism destination taking into account its connectivity to many parts of Europe via convenient charger flights and several domestic flights every day from large cities of India ([http://medical-tourism-goa.blogspot.in/2008\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://medical-tourism-goa.blogspot.in/2008_08_01_archive.html), retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.).

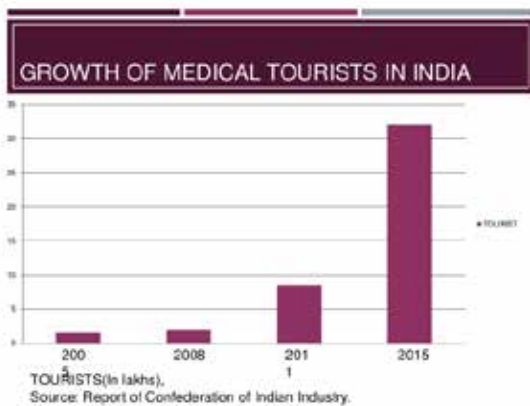


Fig. 2 Growth of Medical Tourists in India (Courtesy google.co.in)

**MEDICAL TOURISM IN PUNJAB**

Punjab has been in the forefront of the Green Revolution in the late sixties and the seventies, with a rich agricultural base. With industrial activity limited to a few industries like cotton textiles, food processing, dairy, light engineering, machine tools, hand tools, bicycles and bicycle components, automotive components, leather, and sports goods and hosiery, Punjab has not exploited its potential for medical tourism.

There is a quantum leap in the number of foreign tourist visiting Punjab. The land of five rivers has seen an incredible 4355.2% growth in foreign tourist; in 2004, only 7213 foreigners visited the state, and the number increased to 1,93,933 in 2006 (<http://cosmeticsurgeryinindia.com/medical-tourism.html> retrieved on January 18th, 2016). Punjab Government would promote medical tourism in the state as this sector has a great potential to boost the state's economy. Punjab is already equipped with superlative health sector infrastructure as compared with other states of India. As medical treatment is very costly in foreign

countries and with better medical facilities and infrastructure here, there was bright scope for medical tourism. NRIs have started coming to Punjab for medical treatment.

Punjab is emerging as a promising destination in eye care in India. The Advanced Eye Care Centre at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh offers a big hope to patients suffering from eye diseases. It works as a tertiary centre with special focus on prevention and control of blindness. Nearly, 160,000 patients visited the centre in a year's time, out of which 100,000 made use of the various sub-specialty services of the Department. A total of nearly 6,000 major and 12,000 minor procedures have been carried out. (Punjab emerging as a promising destination in eye care, posted on February 6, 2009 <http://silverscorpio.com/punjab-emerging-as-a-promising-destination-in-eye-care/>, retrieved on January 18th, 2016).

Jalandhar, another city of Punjab, known mainly for its sports goods and leather industry, is emerging as a medical tourism destination with more than 400 nursing homes equipped with ultra modern equipments. They give preference to the Non Resident Indians (NRI) patients and announce special packages for them for their holiday-cum-treatment. Jalandhar is known to have maximum hospitals in Asia. If England has a Fleet Street and New York Wall Street, Jalandhar has on Mahavir Marg "Medical Street" where in a stretch of three kilometres, as many as 60 hospitals of various sizes and tariffs are situated. Apart from hospitals, the numerous diagnostic infertility cure centres on the street are a one-stop-shop for all kinds of ailments.

Table 1: A comparative account of costs (in US Dollars) of Medical Treatments in various countries

The real attraction is cost savings. Some comparative costs (in U.S.\$) include:

Procedure	U.S.	India	Costa Rica	Thailand
Knee replacement	55,000	9,150	11,000	11,400
Hip replacement	57,000	7,200	11,400	12,900
Heart bypass	144,000	7,000	25,000	22,000
Heart valve replacement	160,000	9,500	15,000	25,500
Full face lift	20,000	5,000	5,000	5,300
Breast augmentation	7,000	NA	2,800	NA
Gastic bypass	52,000	9,400	10,400	12,800

Source: Heal & Wheel ([info@heal.wheel.in](http://info@heal.wheel.in)), The Soundings Group research

As dentistry gets a new edge with the state-of-the-art equipment and sophisticated technology, a large number of NRIs, mostly hailing from Doaba region of the state, are thronging the city for specialised dental treatment at affordable costs. NRIs mostly club their travel with treatment. Patients from Middle East, Europe, US, Canada and Africa are visiting the city for various medical treatments, even though such medical facilities are available in the west. The root canal treatment in the US, Canada or the UK could cost a patient something around USD 4000 while the same procedure is being conducted here for a sum ranging from Rs 1000 to Rs 15000. It comes to about USD 300 to 400 for a dental filling in the USA and Europe as compared to only USD 20-40 here, a denture can cost 2000 USD overseas but dentists here charge only 200 USD. In countries like the UK, where people have to wait for months to get cosmetic dentistry done under the National Health Scheme (NHS), medical tourism has come as a boon (Reports of Economic Times, Oct. 9, 2005).

Located in the state of Punjab, Amritsar is one of the most important pilgrimage centres especially for the Sikhs in the country. Amritsar is also characterised by the hard working and warm-hearted people. Fortis hospital in Amritsar

is one of the best hospitals in Amritsar known for cardiac science, renal science, bone and joint and gastro science. Fortis Hospital, Amritsar, is a 154 bed multispecialty hospital with super speciality in Cardiac Sciences.

Dayananda Medical College, and Christian Medical College, Ludhiana are famous in the region. The Christian Medical College and Hospital, (CMCH) Ludhiana was the first medical school for women in Asia. Super speciality services like Oncology, Neonatology, Neurology, Nephrology, Plastic Surgery and Haematology are provided. Recently, over 10 bone marrow transplants were performed on patients ranging from 1 to 60 years of age. Centrally monitored, critical care units are well equipped with ventilators, central oxygen, air, suction lines, cardiac monitors, defibrillators, incubators and photo therapy units.

Ludhiana has emerged as a fast growing destination of medical tourism for NRIs from Punjab, who are visiting city hospitals for cheaper medical treatment as compared to the country they are living in. According to city doctors, they provide treatment of various diseases to patients using the same technologies as have been used abroad, but around eight times cheaper than the cost of treatment in countries like the US, the UK or Canada. On an average, three patients from abroad visit CMCH for heart surgery every month, but their numbers swell in winters especially. A heart surgery costs here around Rs. 1.5 lakh, while it costs around Rs. 20 lakh in the US. According to SPS Apollo Hospital, Ludhiana, around 25-30 patients from foreign countries visit to the hospital every month to take required treatment for various diseases (City emerging as medical tourism hub for NRIs from Punjab, posted on August 11, 2016, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/city-emerging-as-medical-tourismhub-for-nris-from-punjab/story-UIZHPBsmBdjtYPIhSHoBnK.html>, retrieved on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

#### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Medical tourism has not only brought hefty money for the doctors, but even hotel industry of the state also received a great response from NRIs visiting to get treatment. Even the state government has come forward to develop medical tourism in the area. No doubt, the state government is working hard to promote the medical tourism but there is still much to be done, there is a need to introduce innovative ideas like families of patients taken to cultural events and other festivals of the nearby places after the successful treatment of the patients. India will remain on top in medical tourism for at least a decade despite attempts from countries like China and Japan to tap into the flourishing business as Indian hospitals have English language and skilled manpower advantages.

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