

Medical Tourism in India

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Medical Tourism in India : Rising Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

Context

India has recently witnessed a significant rise in **foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) for medical purposes** between **January and April 2025**, signalling strong growth in the **medical tourism sector**. As per the **Ministry of Tourism**, this surge highlights India's emerging position as a preferred global destination for medical and healthcare services.

Introduction

Medical tourism refers to the practice of **travelling to another country** to obtain **medical, dental, or other healthcare services**. It has gained global prominence due to **cost advantages, high-quality healthcare, and ease of international travel**. India, with its robust healthcare ecosystem, has emerged as one of the **leading hubs** for medical tourism.

Status of Medical Tourism in India

- From **January to April 2025**, India recorded **1,31,856 FTAs** for medical purposes.
 - This accounts for **around 4.1% of the global total**.
 - The steady increase reflects India's growing competitiveness in the international medical tourism market.
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Reasons for India's Attractiveness in Medical Tourism

- **Cost-Effectiveness**

- Medical procedures are significantly cheaper than in Western countries.
- Example: **Heart bypass surgery** in India costs **5-10 times less** than in the US or UK.

- **High-Quality Healthcare**

- Strong healthcare infrastructure with **internationally accredited hospitals** and **skilled professionals**.
- Example: **Tamil Nadu** leads in medical tourism due to superior quality services.

- **Government Support**

- Introduction of **e-medical visa** and **e-medical attendant visa** for citizens of **171 countries**.
- Promotion of the '**Heal in India**' campaign to foster public-private partnerships, involving hospitals, facilitators, hotels, airlines, and regulatory agencies.

- **International Recognition**

- Many Indian hospitals have **certifications from reputed global institutions**.

- **State Government Initiatives**

- Example: **Gujarat** promotes medical tourism by:
 - Registering **wellness retreats** on official tourism platforms.
 - Organising **wellness-focused events** and exhibitions.
 - Hosting **familiarisation trips** for industry stakeholders.
 - Using **social media** to promote healthcare facilities.
 - Training **paramedical staff** to enhance service quality.
 - Showcasing healthcare infrastructure in **international events**.



Challenges Facing India's Medical Tourism Sector

- **Limited Promotion** of advanced healthcare capabilities.
- **Strong International Competition** from Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and South Korea.
- **Lack of Coordination** among industry players for unified global representation.
- **Inconsistent Fee Structures**, causing confusion among foreign patients.
- **Lack of Transparency** in billing for international clients.
- **Hygiene Concerns** in certain hospitals, including poor hygiene practices, unhygienic food handling, and substandard hospitality services.

Conclusion

India has the potential to become a **global leader in medical tourism** due to its **affordability, advanced infrastructure, and proactive government policies**. To fully realise this potential, it must focus on **improving global promotion, enhancing coordination, ensuring transparent pricing, maintaining hygiene standards, and strengthening service quality**. Addressing these areas will enable India to capture a larger share of the global medical tourism market.

