



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEDICAL TOURISM AND RURAL KARNATAKA – AN ETHNIC MEDICINAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There are many major forms of tourism activities are prevailing in India. These are cultural tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, religious or pilgrimage tourism, beach tourism, MICE tourism etc. However, India could able to leave its footprint in one of the most specialized form of tourism, i. e. Medical Tourism. It is form of tourism commonly referring to the travel of people to another country for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment in that country. Today, India is one of the fastest growing medical tourism destinations in the world. Medical tourism in the 21st century has grown rapidly and became one of the most astonishing niches tourism markets in the world. The objective of the paper is to identify analyze major the healthcare centres or facilities available in Karnataka and their potentials to grow as famous medical tourism destination. The article covers various medicinal practices prevailing in Karnataka along with their ethnicity. The paper also brings out the perceived benefits to the indigenous community and to the area from the medical tourism growth in the region. The careful observations, consensus and discussion with the academicians and employees of few of the service providers revealed the realistic state of affairs in terms of ecotourism business. Medical tourism occurs when consumers elect to travel across international borders with the intention to receiving some form of medical treatments. However, the varieties of medical treatments available in rural areas of the state such as yoga and meditation, naturopathy, ayurveda etc are not visited regularly by the foreign tourists. Thus, it becomes difficult to consider such destinations under medical tourism. It required hard niche marketing approach towards promoting these ethnic medicinal treatments.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the dawn of civilization on the earth man is trying to unfold the Gordian Knot of Mother Nature. At the outset, the prime purpose of man is to satiate Physiological needs that are necessary for sustaining i.e., Food, Water, Shelter, Sleep and Clothing. From the dawn to dusk his primary endeavour is to search for these basic needs. Nature is always an enigma to man. Even though he has achieved success to some extent there is much more to discern. In pursuit of this immediate goal, man has constantly changed places and during this itinerary he has moved from area to area for not only satisfying his biological needs but also to ameliorate his comforts. Hence, travelling is as old as humankind. Tourism in India has received a major boost in the past decade since the Indian

Government realized the great potential of tourism of India during vacations. Tourism of India during vacations has grown by leaps and bounds with a great influx of tourists from throughout the world who have been irresistibly attractive to the travellers. India has the right tourism potential and attractions to captivate all types of tourists whether it is adventurous tour, cultural exploration, pilgrimages, visit to the beautiful beaches or to the scenic mountain resorts, Tourism of India has it all. Travel through Indian states and cities bring to light, the cultural and the geographical richness of India. As per the UNWTO report of 2014, "The top headlines of 2014 painted a challenging landscape. From sluggish economic growth and geopolitical conflicts to the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa – to all appearances, such circumstances were hardly favourable for tourism. Yet in spite of the many challenges the world faced 2014, international tourism continued to propel ahead. At the year's close, the number of tourists travelling internationally grew by 4.4% reaching a new

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milestone of 1,135 million and capping with five-year consecutive increase since the global economic crisis of 2009. Once again, these results have surpassed UNWTO's long term projection of 3.8% growth for the period 2010-20, well on track to reach the projected 1.8 billion international tourists by the year 2030. With over 1.1 billion tourists taking and international trip every year, tourism continues to be an unstoppable force and a key driver to the global economic recovery. Yet tourism's record growth is not merely absolute numbers. Tourism's continued progress and expansion represents an effective solution for many of the world's greatest challenges. Indeed, few sectors are as strategically positioned and multicultural peace and understanding." Tourism is a very complex industry because of its multi-faceted activities which together produce the 'tourist product'. It is also complex because of its various sub-sectors that are in themselves complete industries, if considered independently (lodging, transport, etc.). Its complexity, furthermore, lies in the fact that tourism promotion in its various forms has to be directed at large numbers of people in various lands of different socio-economic structures, having different needs, tastes, attitudes, expectations and behaviour patterns. It is only efficient marketing strategy that will help understand people's tastes and preferences for travel. And hence need for marketing in tourism. (A. K. Bhatia, 2001)¹.

What makes tourism marketing all more difficult? The principal products that recreation and tourism businesses provide are recreational experiences and hospitality. The factors that create a quality recreational experience often differ among people. A quality experience for one tourist might include an uncrowded, natural location, while for another it might be a crowded place and a chance to socialize. Many tourism businesses and communities fail to recognize their role in improving travel to and from their areas. They focus, instead, on servicing the customer once they arrive at the site/community. This is important because a bad experience in getting to or leaving a site can adversely affect a person's overall travel experience. Most of the times, this is not in the hands of tourist operators and other service providers. Some people may not want to pay much for a service or may prefer to go to a place that is less crowded. This encourages off-season and non-peak-period sales. (Devashish Dasgupta, 2011)². India is recognized as one of the most renowned destinations in the world because of wide variety of tourism potentials. It may be the natural resources like Western Ghats and its various components, man-made wonders like TajMahal in Agra (Uttar Pradesh), GolGumbaz in Bijapur (Karnataka), JantarMantar in Jaipur (Rajasthan), etc., events like Puskar Fair, KumbhaMela, etc., long Coastal line connecting Arabian Sea in the west and Bay of Bengal in the East, and many more geographical, biological, political, cultural, social features. Thus, there are many major forms of tourism activities are prevailing in India. These are cultural tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, religious or pilgrimage tourism, beach tourism, MICE tourism etc. However, India could be able to leave its footprint in one of the most specialized form of tourism, i. e. Medical Tourism. It is form of tourism commonly referring to the travel of people to another country for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment in that country.

Today, India is one of the fastest growing medical tourism destinations in the world. As per the report by Medical Value in India by KPMG and Ficci, India is placed among the top three medical tourism destinations in Asia, mainly due to the low cost of treatment, quality healthcare infrastructure and availability of highly-skilled doctors. Within Asia, India, Thailand and Singapore are the three countries that receive maximum medical tourists owing to low cost treatment, quality healthcare infrastructure, and availability of highly-skilled doctors. These three countries together accounted for about 60 per cent of the total Asian revenue in 2012. India is known mostly for its cost-effective medical treatments along with high standards in cardiology, orthopaedics, nephrology and oncology and neuro surgery. The country is also known for its alternative treatment options such as yoga and Ayurveda. (The Time of India, Report, September 1, 2014)³.

Why Medical Tourists Come India?

There are many factors which attract foreign medical tourists to seek treatment in India. The cost-effective treatment in India is one of the major reasons compared to other developed countries is a major force attracting foreign medical tourists to India. Hasan (2003), remarks that, foreign medical tourists, driven out of their own systems by high costs and crowded conditions, look for cheaper and better options for medical care. India has proved itself to be a major destination for health tourism, healthcare outsourcing and medical back office support (Jain, 2005). In addition to this quality of service provided, availability easy accessibility to doctors, English speaking populace along with exquisite locations are the key factors in fuelling the phenomenal growth witnessed in the Indian medical tourism industry.

Growth of Medical Tourism in India

In India, the rate of growth of Medical Tourism is tremendous compared to other Asian countries. A combination of three vital factors, quality, availability and cost have been instrumental in kindling the unimaginable growth of this sector in our country (Shankari, 2007). According to a study conducted by Confederation of Indian Industry and McKinsey in 2004, some 150,000 foreigners visited India for treatment, with the number rising by 15 % a year (RNCOS, 2003). According to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India in 2008, the size of the industry was estimated at Rs. 1,500 crore and it would grow to a Rs. 9,500 crore business by 2015, with an annual growth rate of 30 %. About 1.8 lakh foreigners visited India for treatment in the first eight and half months of 2008 – 09 and their number would increase by 22 % to 25 % in the coming years (Assocham, 2008). The Indian government predicts that India's \$ 17 billion year healthcare industry could grow 13% in each of the next four years, boosted by medical tourism. The development of medical tourism is due to the cost effectiveness and world class facilities available (Bichile, 2005). In India, the rate of growth in this industry is tremendous compared to other Asian countries. Airport pick-up, a suite, interpreter service, home cuisine, home cable channels, a visit to the tourist places are the add-on services available to a foreign medical tourist. Even the Indian hospitality industry going out of its way to attract the foreign tourists. According to a study by McKinsey and the

¹ A. K. Bhatia, International Tourism Management, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi – 110020, 2001, P. 156.

² Devashish Dasgupta, Tourism Marketing, Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., Pearson Education, P. 64.

³ The Times of India – Business, News Report, PTI/ September 1, 2014, 08.59 PM IST

Confederation of Indian Industries, medical tourism in India could become a \$1 billion business by 2012 (CII Mc Kinsey, 2003). The report predicts that by 2012, if medical tourism were to reach 25 % of revenues of private market players, up to Rs. 10,000 crore will be added to the revenues of these players. The Indian government predicts that India's \$ 17 billion a year healthcare industry could grow 13 % in each of the next six years, boosted by medical tourism, which industry watchers say is growing at 30% annually.

India has emerged as the second fastest growing (8.8%) tourism economy in the world over 2005-14 (World Travel & Tourism, 2004). There has been a growth of more than 13% in foreign tourist arrivals at 3.9 million during 2005, up from 3.4 million foreign tourists who visited India during previous year. Foreign exchange earnings from foreign tourists were up by more than 20% at \$5,730.86 million in 2005, up from \$ 4,769 million earned the previous year. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, deals with both the preventive and curative aspects of health in a most comprehensive way. Besides contributing to maintenance of health, it also has a wide range of therapeutic measures to cure various illnesses. Ayurveda in India offers a unique Medical tourism package for foreign medical tourists. There are common form of mixing leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and recuperation. Health holiday offers an opportunity to get away from daily routine and come to a different relaxing ambience after undergoing a treatment. Medical Tourism, is believed to become a major driver of economic growth in India, as first world patients, driven out of their own systems by higher costs and crowded conditions, look for cheaper and better options for medical care (Hasan, 2003). India has proved itself to be a major destination for health tourism, healthcare outsourcing and medical back office support. When baby Noor Fatima, a two-and-a-half- year old Pakistani girl, successfully underwent an open heart surgery in NarayanaHrudayalaya, she opened chapter on the potential of medical tourism and affordable cost-effective treatment in Karnataka. India offers world class medical facilities in world class hospitals and the doctors are comparable with any of the doctors in western countries. India also offers the most competitive prices. A CII-McKinsey study (2010) on healthcare says medical tourism alone can contribute Rs. 5,000-10,000 crore (Rs 50-100 billion) additional revenue for up-market tertiary hospitals by 2012, and will account for 3-5 per cent of the total healthcare service delivery. India has many world-class hospitals and medical facilities at its disposal. They have an advantage over others, as apart from the cost factor, most foreign nationals are used to getting treated by Indian nationals abroad. Indian medical professionals settled abroad are associated with high quality, expertise in surgery, and very good care of patients. Nearly seven per cent of patients at Apollo Hospitals today come from countries in the Middle East. They have now gone on to set up offices in various countries to channelize patients to their hospitals. With telemedicine, it has become easier for patients to keep in touch with them and facilitates their transfer to hospitals in India.

Major hospitals in Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, New Delhi and Bangalore have recorded a 12% patient flow from neighbouring and South East Asian countries. This is because people have realised that they can now have access to international quality medical care in India. This amounts to 10% of the international cost. Lesser cost of treatments is a motivating factor for foreign medical tourism to have their

medical treatment in India. According to K KAggarwal, executive vice-chairman of the Heart Care Foundation of India. "Compared to countries like the UK or the US, minor treatments like those for dental problems or major procedures like bypass surgery or angioplasty come at a fraction of the cost in India, even though the quality of doctors and medical equipment is comparable to the best in the world" (www.MedicalTourismIndia.com, 2006). The Indian Healthcare Federation, an association of the healthcare delivery sector that includes the Apollo Hospitals Group, Mumbai's Hinduja Hospital, MaxHealthcare, the Fortis Heart Institute among others, have also decided to project India as a healthcare destination with its affordable cost-effective treatment. Among private players, Apollo has been a forerunner in health tourism. It has been a choicest destination for patients/medical tourists from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The group has tied up with hospitals in Mauritius, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Yemen besides running a hospital in Sri Lanka, and managing a hospital in Dubai.

Major Treatments and Healthcare Services Attracting Foreigners towards India:

- Bone marrow transplant
- Cosmetic Surgery
- Dialysis and Kidney Transplant
- Gynecology and Obstetrics
- Joint Replacement Surgery
- Neurosurgery and Trauma Surgery
- Osteoporosis
- Preventive Healthcare
- Refractive Surgery
- Vascular Surgery
- Cardiac Care
- Nuclear Medicine
- Urology

Growth of Medical Tourism in Karnataka

Karnataka is one of the fastest growing states in India. It is the home to some of the most high tech industries in India. Bangalore, in particular, has become the home to some of India's premier hospital establishments. It is booming in terms of IT, BT and now, MT, that is medical tourism. Karnataka is endowed with a combination of high – tech super - speciality hospitals on the one hand, and, it has a number of natural beauty spots and ayurvedic spas. The coastal districts of South Canara, Udupi, NorthCanara, Malnad districts of Shimoga, Chickmagalore, Coorg, and Hassan can provide something unique to the tourists. The state of Karnataka has nine world class medical colleges along with institutions for homeopathy, ayurveda, unani, siddha and yoga and also the best of hospitals and institutes for both modern and holistic medicine. It has the potential to be the health destination of the world (Mathai, 2006). It is of course the air conditioned weather of Bangalore which suits any foreign patient coming here for a treatment. The surgeries in high tech hospitals are followed by rejuvenation therapies in ayurvedic spas or other Indian systems of medicine. The Department of Tourism, Karnataka, terms, Karnataka as —The Garden of Lifel, as it has the distinction of having the largest number of systems of medicine approved by the World Health Organization in a single country (Karnataka Tourism, 2008).It is the only destination in India that combines world – class talent,

infrastructure and an environment that is best suited for healing. It offers a wide range of healthcare options – ultra – modern allopathy, time tested ayurveda, holistic naturopathy, spa- based rejuvenation which other competitors in the field cannot offer (Karnataka Tourism, 2008). The world is increasingly looking at Bangalore as the place for holistic healing. From the NHS in Britain to the largest insurance companies in the US, patients are increasingly referred to Karnataka for treatment. Some of the specialities include:

- Cardiac care
- Neurology
- Cancer care
- Orthopaedics
- Sports medicine
- Nephrology
- Dentistry
- Pediatrics and neo – natal care
- Ayurvedic therapy
- Holistic healing
- Naturopathy

Is silicon city turning to medical city is the question frequently asked about the boom of medical tourism in Bangalore. The city's healthcare industry has been expanding and as many as five private hospitals in Bangalore have expanded their services at a cost of several crores (Narayan, 2006). Medical tourism has become a major industry in Bangalore. Along with being the —Silicon Valley of India Bangalore has emerged as the hotbed for medical tourism in the country. Bangalore is the fifth largest city in India. It is a city of striking contrasts - a perfect blend of natural beauty and man-made marvels of architecture and technology. Located 1,000 metres above sea level, it is described as one of the most —happening places in India. The city has many beautiful parks, tree-lined avenues, along with an excellent climate. According to Karnataka Tourism Department, healthcare in Bangalore came into the limelight when Noor Fatima from Pakistan came to NarayanaHrudayalaya in July 2003, and was operated on by Dr Devi Shetty. After that, there was no looking back for the city. Her surgery was a landmark because not only did it help in thawing the hostility between the two neighbouring countries, but also drastically reversed the table in the medical scenario of the city for the better (Department of Tourism, 2007). After the success of IT industry, Bangalore is all geared up to experience another new trend - medical tourism, also known as health tourism. Medical tourists from all over the globe have been flocking to Bangalore like never before. The sudden boom of medical tourism in the city is regarded by medical gurus as a —goldmine just waiting to be explored. NarayanaHrudayalaya, headed by Dr. Devi Shetty, Wockhardt Hospital and Heart Care Institute, Manipal Hospital, Apollo Hospital, SagarHospital, M S Ramaiah Memorial Hospital, have been highly successful in attracting thousands of foreign medical tourists (Narayan, 2006). Many doctors based in Karnataka travel abroad regularly to conduct complex surgeries. Some of the foreign doctors are trained in Bangalore. Institutions like the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences also attract a large number of foreign students. Not only this, the nurses in India are preferred in the US and Europe for their dedication, involvement and aptitude for providing personalized care (Department Of Tourism, 2007). Bangalore is slowly emerging from the shadows of and cosmopolitan flavor has resulted in the influx of patients from

over 30 countries today, including the US, UK, Middle East, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Australia, Pakistan, Mauritius and Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and many African countries.

The City's state-of-the-art healthcare infrastructure along with its salubrious climate, availability of high-end clinical talent and the people-sensitive population of Bangalore are also important factors in creating healthcare delivery systems. According to Dr. Devi Shetty, Chairman of Narayana Hrudayalaya, —Bangalore is already the hub for complex heart related procedures. With the IT revolution giving Bangalore the indelible stamp of a knowledge city globally, it won't be long before we see an influx of people from all over the world coming to Bangalore for heart and brain surgeries. (www.NarayanaHrudayalaya.com, 2006). Karnataka has the right ecosystem to emerge as a major healthcare hub in a few years. With 31 medical colleges, 800 nursing schools and innumerable pharmacy and physiotherapy colleges, Karnataka has the largest number of technical education programs in the country. NarayanaHrudayalaya caught the attention of the whole world for the first time by operating baby Noor, a Pakistani girl. She flew all the way from Lahore to Bengaluru to get operated by Dr. Devi Shetty and his colleagues. By then, NH had already received thousands of international medical tourists. But, this incident stood as the hallmark in the history of NH exemplifying world class facilities for cardiac care which had no geographic boundaries. Since then, the foreign medical tourist inflows to Narayana Hrudayalaya has been steadily increasing. Foreign medical tourists from 30 different countries visit NarayanaHrudayalaya and they account for 10 per cent of patients in the hospital. Number of foreign medical tourists from UAE, Saudi Arabia and Africa has also been steadily increasing here. The Karnataka government has been extremely proactive and was the first state to privatize engineering and medical education in the country. Karnataka has various healthcare organizations which provide unique treatments. For example, Soukya holistic wellness centre offers Naturopathy/Ayurvedic rejuvenation treatment, Angsana Spa with its Thai massage therapy, PrashanthiKuteeram provides yoga therapy and jindal Centre provides Naturopathy. At Narayana Hrudayalaya, 24 cardiac surgeries are performed a day and 20 per cent of their patients are foreigners. Although majority of them come from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Middle East and Africa, they have treated patients from 22 different countries so far.

According to R. Basil, —Manipal's flagship hospital on Airport Road, Bangalore received close to 3,000 patients from 29 foreign countries every year. An entire floor called the 'International Patient Care Centre' complete with a European ambience and equivalent services is fully operational to cater to their needs (medical tourism Karnataka.org, 2008). Manipal Hospital in Bangalore is India's first multi-specialty, tertiary care hospital to be ISO 9001:2000 certified by TUV Rheinland for clinical protocols, nursing care, administration, support and allied services. With state-of-the-art technology and 650-bed strength, the hospital provides sophisticated and specialised quality medical services at affordable costs in 43 specialities. It won the Golden Peacock National Quality Award this year for excellence in the service category. Bangalore is emerging as the healthcare destination of choice. Hospitals here receive patients from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Mauritius, Nepal, Pakistan, Dubai, the Middle East and SAARC countries. There is an increasing trend of patients from North America and European countries as well. The Ministry of

Tourism, Government of Karnataka has aptly referred to Bangalore as the 'Garden of Life'. Bangalore has now become the Mecca for healthcare, (R Basil 2007). An entire general ward caters to patients from Tanzania and Mauritius, as the Manipal Group has tie-ups with the governments of Tanzania and Mauritius. Bangalore has the potential to overtake Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi to become the healthcare hub in 4-5 years' time. According to Vishal Bali, CEO of Wockhardt Hospitals Ltd., in 2009, out of the 3.5 lakh patients treated by Wockhardt, 890 were foreigners primarily from the US and UK and the number has grown up to 1,100 the next year. —Bangalore is poised to be India's healthcare hub in the next five years and Wockhardt super-specialty hospitals will be one of the catalysts. More important, in addition to Indraprastha Apollo, New Delhi, Wockhardt Hospital is the only other hospital to be accredited by the Joint Commission International.

To support the domestic and foreign demand for healthcare, huge capital expenditure to the tune of Rs 800-1,000 crore has been planned in the next three years, by most of the hospitals in Bangalore. The investments are towards capacity expansion and upgradation of technology. The rich culture, hospitable and friendly people and the grandeur of Karnataka gives more reasons for people to come here and receive various health treatments. In so far as Indian climate is concerned, Bangalore's is fairly unique. The city is located in the southern centre of the subcontinent, on a geologic feature called the Deccan Plateau. The elevation is approximately 900m ASL. The City's state-of-the-art healthcare infrastructure along with its salubrious climate and cosmopolitan flavour has resulted in the influx of patients from over 30 countries today, including the US, UK, Middle East, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Mauritius and Tanzania among others. The availability of high-end clinical talent and the people-sensitive population of Bangalore are also important factors in creating healthcare delivery systems. Conducive ecosystem, cost of the treatment, excellent climate, infrastructure, range of medical packages and levels of expertise have all helped to make Bangalore one of the most important medical tourism destinations in the world.

"People coming from outside Bangalore do not face any language problem as the people here are well-versed with English. The other advantage is the system of full-time consultation as against multi-hospital visits, which is characteristic of the south. Seeing the same doctor in every visit also makes the patient comfortable. Hospitals and corporate establishments in the city have realised the potential of this niche market and have accordingly channelised their needs and facilities. Travel agents and hotels are structuring their packages and holiday schemes in accordance with the inflow of foreign patients coming into the city. Corporate hospitals like Apollo and NarayanaHrudayalaya have collaborated with travel agents to attract more foreign medical tourists to the city. It's not just the Indians and the NRIs from the neighbouring countries who are streaming into India for medical treatment. Apart from NRIs, foreign patients mainly come in from the Gulf, Europe (mainly UK) surprisingly from South East Asia and the US. They come to Bangalore with a dual strategy in mind to get their medical treatment at one-third the cost and to explore Bangalore. A spokesperson from Thomas Cook India informs, "International patients mainly go to Coorg, Mysore, Hampi, Kittur, Belgaum and Bagalkot." In the long run, they add to the foreign exchange of the country.

Dr Kishore Murthy, CEO, Hosmat Hospital explains that, Bangalore is a well-known brand in the world. It is a knowledge city, has the top hospitals and also offers pleasant weather for patients coming here for treatment. Hospitals in Bangalore have become the centre of attraction primarily because of the large number of top hospitals in the city and the innumerable medical institutes and colleges. According to Vittal Murthy, Secretary, Kannada Culture Information and Tourism, Bangalore has always been the hub for healthcare since the British era. Now, it has become the centre of attraction primarily because of the large number of top hospitals in the city and the innumerable medical institutes and colleges. Hence, the number of medical experts and professionals are also increasing by the day. Similarly, holistic health centres in the city also offer alternate systems of therapy like yoga, Art of Living courses and Ayurvedic therapies. The concept of telemedicine is being used on a large scale by hospitals such as Manipal and NarayanaHrudayalaya. Resumes of doctors are displayed online so that international patients can choose their doctors. Internationally-acclaimed doctors and specialists choose to venture out in this city. This is yet another feather in the cap for the city, which till date was only associated with IT. Further, hospitals are having tie ups with internationally acclaimed medical brands.

For example, Wockhardt hospital has a tie up with Harvard Medical International (HMI), which has a reputation across the world for the quality services rendered to its patients. This will increase the inflow of foreign medical tourists to the hospital. Hospitals in Bangalore are now providing the services usually provided by a five-star hotel. Accommodation in hotels is provided both for the relatives as well as the patients. Hosmat Hospital even has a building within its campus to accommodate relatives of patients. Airport drops and pick-ups for patients and relatives are all rendered by the hospitality division of the hospital. Most of the hospitals have come up with a travel desk to cater to foreign patients and their relatives. Manipal Hospital, for instance, has an International Patient Care Centre. Hospitals which are into medical tourism have laid a lot of emphasis on the infrastructure of their hospital. It also has specially designed deluxe rooms, with posh décor and offers myriad facilities like pantry service and a wireless Internet connection. It is not just the hospitals which are grabbing the limelight. Travel agents and hotels are cashing in on the situation and are coming up with schemes and packages to attract foreign patients to the city. They are gradually realising that immense benefits can be reaped (Nayantara, 2007).

The Leela Palaces and Resorts, Bangalore, which purely caters to the corporate class, has tied up with Manipal Hospital after understanding the need for medical tourism in the city. Air Travel Enterprises (ATE) also offers a whole lot of packages to foreign patients. It offers packages for cardiac surgery, plastic surgery, dental surgery, Ayurveda and orthopedic surgeries. In addition to this, they first identify patients who want medical treatment in this part of the country. Later, recommend them to hospitals. Their arrival, departure and accommodation are all handled by them. The role of travel agents and hotels has to be strengthened in order to market medical tourism effectively. They play a major role in constructing an efficient medical tourism process. Most of the healthcare organizations in Karnataka which are into medical tourism have appointed international travel agents to promote their healthcare services abroad. Their reach to global clients results in an increase in

the number of foreign medical tourists visiting the hospital. Hospitals in Bangalore are very much cost effective when compared to developed countries like Europe, U.S.A, and Australia etc where patients are charged heavily for their treatment of various diseases. With this study we can conclude that Bangalore is a favourable destination for medical tourism. Karnataka government has revamped policies to attract more foreign medical tourists. Kerala has done it successfully with God's own country. Karnataka Department of Tourism can definitely do it with —one state, many worlds! tourism tagline. The government of Karnataka is equally keen to position Karnataka as an ideal health tourism destination with its best hospitals and tourism spots. According to the Department of Tourism, Karnataka, the state has an unusual offer of a mix of traditional systems like ayurveda and yoga and modern medical expertise. It can uniquely capture the health tourism market and compete with global competitors like, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. It has the highest number of approved health systems and alternative therapies.

The department has done limited promotion campaigns in the country and in the Gulf, Pakistan and the UK to highlight what it can offer. Therefore, focused promotion which can attract the target countries can lead to an increase in the flow of medical tourists to the state. For Bangalore to capitalize on the boom in medical tourism, it is imperative for the government to put together a blueprint for coordinating various industry players, which includes the policy makers, tour operators, hotels, transportation services, private hospitals, medical practitioners and private hospitals. Bangalore is finding a place in the global map for advanced spinal surgery due to the growing number of spinal surgeons in the Bangalore. Every month, Hosmat attends to 2-3 patients - mostly from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Africa. The state government has chalked out a plan to acquire around 500 acres of land near the Devanahalli International Airport for a super-speciality Health Park. With an increasing number of super-speciality hospitals, Karnataka in general and Bangalore in particular have become increasingly popular in the field of health tourism.

Conclusion

As of now the the article provided the complete representation of medical tourism options in Bangalore and other cities in Karnataka. However, the rural areas of Karnataka are also significant in offering some traditional treatments to the diseases like joint pains at Theerthahalli, treatment for cancer (of initial stage) available in Shivamogga, sugar, obstetrics, etc are available.

However, there no evidence of medical tourists (especially from foreign countries) seeking treatments from these rural healthcare centres. It requires hard selling and application of extreme promotional strategies. The major reason for this may be dependency of modern technology by the general public. Especially ayurvedic medical centres in rural Karnataka are more depended on the herbal and natural resources where modern trend has a lesser faith. But still there are treatments under naturopathy and ayurveda are effective enough to cure or control the diseases. These centres able to drag domestic patients in large and unable attract the foreigners. Thus, the proper implementation of niche marketing practices is the one reliable way to promote these healthcare centres. This might help the social and economic system in the long run.

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