

DENTAL VACATIONS: HEALTHCARE AND HOLIDAYS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In-vogue 21st century, the popular term globalization has definitely conjured a plethora of development, the economic surge, integrated corporate dental offices, and contemporary approaches to health-seeking behaviour. Transnational medical travel has gained attention recently as a strategy for patients to procure cost-effective care of superior quality relative to that provided within their home countries.

Dental tourism, a subset of medical tourism, involves individuals seeking dental care outside their local healthcare systems, coupled with a vacation. India has become a popular destination for foreign patients in recent times, particularly in dental care. India's accessibility and availability of quality assured and cost-effective dental treatment, amalgamated with its myriad hues of culture and heritage has exponentially assisted the bloom of India in dental tourism. Humongous costs, lack of health insurance and dental benefits are key factors pushing low-income westerners to obtain cross-country dental care.

Dental Tourism companies and corporate dental chains are advertising "all inclusive" travel packages that include dental procedures, hotel room reservations, side trips to tourist attractions, and airline tickets to attract international clients. With current governmental activities in full throttle, the tide of dental tourism promises to boost the economy of India manifold. The future is not near. It's here!

Keywords: Dental tourism, globalization, medical tourism, transnational medical tourism

INTRODUCTION

Travel has no longer remain a journey, it's all about the memories and experience. Tourism can be divided into various sectors such as adventure, wildlife, pilgrimage, cultural, eco, and medical tourism. In 2006, when medical journals began to showcase papers, as responsiveness of the phenomenon in both developing and industrial countries was increasing, medical tourism captured worldwide attention.[1] It became a developing trend, and its organization, volume, and economic impact grew.[2] According to Connell, a medical tourist is someone who in order to minimize his costs of health care decides to travel abroad and becomes a tourist.[3] This transnational medical travel, a diverse marvel, gained attention recently as an approach for the patients to obtain cost-effective maintenance of greater quality relative to that provided within their home nations.[4,5]

Dental tourism is an important sector of the growing health tourism industry.[2] Dental tourism is a subcategory of medical tourism where the chief goal of the individual is to seek dental treatment outside their local healthcare delivery system coupled with a vacation.[6]

The definition of dental tourism according to the American Dental Association - Act of traveling to another country for the purpose of obtaining dental treatment.[7] In other words "vacation for ones teeth"[8] and thus, does not require a tooth fairy to make big bills fade away.[9] Dental tourism is commonly called as dental vacations or dental holidays in Europe. Dental tourism is developing worldwide, as the world becomes ever more symbiotic and cut-throat, method, material, and hi-tech advances spread swiftly, enabling providers in "developing countries" to endow with dental care at substantial cost savings when compared with their nobles in the developed world. [6]

Western people have already started functioning dental tourism in their countries.

India is becoming the favored destination for dental tourism because of its advanced infrastructure and technology which is in par with the developed countries like USA.

India is also emerging as one of the most favored tourist destinations in the world.

India is now capitalizing on its low cost and well trained dentists to appeal to the Western countries.

The key hubs for dental tourism in India include cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Kerala and Goa.

Table 1: Worldwide market shares in dental tourism by countries

Country	Percentage
India	14
Thailand	14
Poland	13
Spain	3
Bulgaria	3
Turkey	6

WHY INDIA?

- The difference in professional fees of a dentist from the US to an Indian dentist is worth a thought.

Table 2: Price for three selected dental procedures (in USD)

Procedure	US	India	Thailand	Malaysia	Mexico
Crown	385	180	243	250	300
Bleaching	289	100	100	400	350
Implants	1188	1100	1429	2636	950

Source: Lunt *et al.* 2012, p. 12.

- India is a country where the east meets the west and a country offering geographic beauty with a rich history.
- There is no waiting period owing to the lakhs of dentists spread across the nation, catering to the needs of an individual.[10]
- Most of the dentists are well versed with English, which makes it easier for communication.[11]
- Stable and favorable political environment: “Make in India” policy – Slogan coined by our new prime minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, to attract business around the world to invest and manufacture in India.
- Medical services' quality and cost are among the main reasons for medical tourists to search for treatments abroad.(Zhang,Seo,&Lee, 2013)
- Zailani, Mohezar Ali, Iranmanesh, Moghavvemi, and Musa (2016) indicated that highly qualified doctors are the main factor which affects medical tourist satisfaction.

- The Council of European Dentists (2007) found that treatment quality, professionalism, and advanced technology are the top three important travel motivations.
- Dental tourists tend to choose India as their favored hub because of the key opportunities in Indian healthcare sector in the form of efficient infrastructures and technology.
- There have been improvements in dental care standards overseas including treatment convenience in which some patients were satisfied with the dental care quality received abroad and spread good reviews by word-of mouth to others. (Barrowman et al., 2010; Turner, 2008; Horowitz, Rosensweig, & Jones, 2007)
- Price/cost-savings are a highly important travel motivation and the key determinant in dental tourism.(Carmagnola et al., 2011;Kovacs & Szocska, 2013)

Functioning

The dental tourists get the details about the foreign dental tourism through websites, advertisements or other agencies, which all together constitute “dental tourism”.

Later he contacts his travel agent, who manages his visa/passport, travel plan within India, accommodation, air travel and other logistic support. The shortlisted dentist completes the treatment done on the patient, and the travel agent manages the vacation. In the simplest case, the patient contacts the dental clinic directly *via* internet or phone. In this model, the patient does not pay any commission to the middleman or agent for organizing the trip. Most of the dental clinics have collaborations with hotels if the patient is asking for help in accommodation. The hotel can help them in spending their free time sightseeing. Clinics following this model are the least successful in the international competition, compared to those which are located in well-known spa destinations. Especially elderly repeaters from Germany and Austria, who spend 2-3 weeks of the holiday there and during their stay, seek out the dental treatment. In this case, the dental visit is the secondary motivation of the patient. [2]



Expected outcome of dental tourism in India

1. Quality dental services resulting in bringing special identity to the nation in the global markets or world.
2. Overall growth in commerce and insurance industries which adds up to the country's economy.
3. Employment in tourism industry and health care sector.
4. Catalyses or promotes India to the club of global leaders.

How to promote dental tourism in India?

Quality dental care rendered at affordable costs is pivotal in promoting dental tourism in our country as it exposes the efficiency of our dental experts to the international community. Hence, extreme caution should be anticipated and undertaken in satisfying the foreign tourists. There should be an absolute co-ordination between Indian Dental Association (IDA), its local bodies and tourism promoting organizations in the country. The central ministry for foreign affairs should monitor and guide the dentistry regulating bodies (DCI) which in turn should co-ordinate with the various state tourism corporations or renowned private tour companies that should tie-up with only those local dental care providers who give a written assurance on delivery of quality care. A provision should be made in the law to prosecute or to initiate stringent action against those providers who do not follow the quality norms or protocol or standards established by the dental regulating bodies.

PREDICTED OUTCOME

- The UNWTO has forecast the travel and health tourism industry in India is likely to grow by 8% per annum between 2008 and 2016.
- Foreign exchange earnings from tourism are expected to show annualized escalation of 14% during the same period.
- The Indian Medical Tourism market is expected to grow from its current size of USD 3 billion to USD 7-8 billion by 2020,"according to Grant Thornton India's National Managing Partner Vishesh C. Chandiok.

The future:

India has the required manpower to cater to the dental needs of other countries and continents far and near leading to:

1. Enhanced dental job opportunities
2. Enhanced professional practices and interpersonal skills

3. Dental tourism contributing to the national GDP substantially
4. Fostering exciting international alliances.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, dental care tourism in India has an exciting and promising potential and is being formally developed and is now attracting tourists from neighboring countries and other distant regions too.

Quality dental care rendered at affordable cost is pivotal in promoting dental tourism in India as it exposes the efficiency of the Indian dental experts to the international community.

There should be a continuous effort to understand and provide adequate solutions to the expected ever-evolving dental tourists' needs in India and around the world.

Still in its infancy, dental and medical tourism as a whole can, along with a little help, guidance and regulation of the government, make India the next dental tourism capital in the world.

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