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Conclusion

It is generally believed that a person who travels from one region (or a country) to another for the purpose of undergoing treatment is a healthcare tourist. However, this definition excludes people who travel to another region (or a country) to explore, enjoy and rejuvenate, either the body or the mind, as both even without availing medical treatment. Such flow of tourism is greater in absolute number and volume of business generated all over the world.

Estimates put the world market for medical tourism to be at US \$ 40 billion in 2000, and assuming that the industry has grown at a rate of 20%, the market size could have crossed US \$ 150 billion by now. The market size could be much higher if healthcare tourism is viewed in a broader perspective.

Many countries did not think of healthcare as something that could be traded internationally. However, now it is being increasingly offered across the borders through two modes:

- ❖ Purchase of healthcare services by undertaking travel to host countries; and
- ❖ Trade in healthcare services across the borders without the physical movement of either the provider or the user. This type of cross-border trade in healthcare services happens with the advancement in communication technologies.

Many countries are leveraging the attractiveness of tourism locations and culture to attract healthcare tourists. Some countries are leveraging their capabilities to offer traditional wellness systems, while in other countries, the joint initiatives of tourism of healthcare industries help in attracting international tourists.

Healthcare Tourism: Opportunities for India

Improvement in healthcare occurs through promotion of healthy behaviour, through a range of activities / living standards that would suit various sections of society – children, youth and elders. In this perspective, Indian traditional healthcare systems such as Ayurveda and Yoga, as also spiritual healings are popular amongst both domestic and international tourists. In addition, India has many tourist attractions that have healing abilities and are capable of providing rewarding experiences of life.

Several other features have positioned India as an ideal healthcare destination in the world. These include: low cost healthcare solutions; availability of skilled healthcare professionals – both in traditional and modern systems; reputation of treatment in advanced healthcare systems; increasing popularity of India's traditional healthcare systems; and India's strengths in information technology. Estimates show that about 500,000 international healthcare tourists (including NRIs) have visited India in 2006. Estimated revenue generation out of healthcare tourism is about Rs. 2400 crores or over US \$ 600 million in 2006. However, this is far below the potential.

The case studies analysed in the report provide an opportunity to understand the trends and the practices adopted by select healthcare service providers in India. Majority of the players have also contributed to the healthcare development of the society in general, either through their own set-ups in remote areas or through tele-medicine. Few players have also been concentrating on skill development and continuous education. Tie-ups with tourism / travel facilitators and hotels are other strategies adopted by some of the players. Many healthcare service providers have established a separate department to cater to the requirements of international travellers.

Trends in healthcare services and delivery across the world are in favour of India and would position the country as an ideal healthcare destination. However, there are also challenges, especially with regard to the negative perceptions and quality of in-country healthcare. Adoption of appropriate strategies, including leveraging the potential of traditional wellness systems and tourism advantages of India, would position India as an ideal healthcare destination in the world.