



## THE BUSINESS OF HEALING: MARKETING MEDICAL TOURISM IN MAHARASHTRA

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### Abstract

*Medical tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing industry, with countries competing to attract international patients. Effective marketing strategies are crucial to promote medical services and destinations. This study explores the marketing of medical tourism, including digital marketing, partnerships, and word-of-mouth marketing. It highlights the challenges and benefits of medical tourism marketing, including regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and cultural sensitivity. The study provides insights into the development of successful marketing strategies for medical tourism destinations and providers.*

*Keywords-Medical tourism, marketing strategies, digital marketing, partnerships, word-of-mouth marketing.*

### Introduction

Patients who travel both domestically and abroad for surgery or other procedures are said to be engaging in medical tourism. Depending on the patient's demands, they travel for better quality, more affordable procedures, and operations that are only offered in specific countries. Medical tourism is getting more and more popular worldwide, thus it is important to understand it. In the sphere of medical tourism, Global Healthcare Resources is the leading consulting organization. Our area of expertise is helping organizations grow their medical tourism businesses and their foreign patient programs. We encourage you to visit our special page at Global Healthcare Resources Medical Tourism Consulting for thorough support and direction. The market for medical tourism is centered on luring in overseas patients, and as the sector gets more competitive, the major players will be identified by their capacity to draw in international medical tourists.

The key to success in the health tourism sector is marketing, and the top hospitals and nations with the highest volume of medical tourists are those that have effective marketing plans that cater to the needs of these patients.

Thailand, India, Mexico, South Korea, Malaysia, and other top medical tourism destinations combine cost-effective and high-quality treatment with the availability of picturesque scenery to provide patients with a tranquil environment while they heal. According to the 2016 Medical Tourism Index Report, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Poland are progressively becoming as popular medical tourism destinations in Europe.

Meeting the demands of the average international medical traveler is at the heart of successful brand-building initiatives in the medical tourism industry, and the majority of these plans call for close public-private cooperation.

## **Quality of Healthcare and Accreditation**

The standard of medical care is one of the factors that motivate medical tourism. Players in the health travel market have implemented a variety of tactics to boost their service value and quality in an effort to set themselves apart from rivals as the market gets more competitive.

Having access to cutting-edge medical facilities, increasing education and experience in particular fields, forming solid partnerships with top hospitals and healthcare organizations, and making investments in technology and precision medicine are a few of these tactics.

Hospitals like Asklepios Clinic Barmbek are now at the forefront of Europe's health travel business thanks to their ability to specialize in a particular area. The hospital was recognized with an award for providing high-quality medical care, particularly in the fields of surgical oncology and breast cancer surgery.

Medical tourists from other regions of Europe who need highly specialized surgical operations have been drawn to the area by its specialized Breast Center and Intestine and Pancreas Center. A center for cancer patients throughout Europe, Asklepios Clinic Barmbek is also a premier cancer therapy facility, offering state-of-the-art surgical oncology procedures in addition to chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Accreditation, which validates the quality of healthcare service provided in an institution, is another factor which determines the trend of the medical tourism market. Hospitals which have received a stamp of quality service by international accreditors such as the Joint Commission International (JCI) tend to attract more medical tourists.

These accreditors evaluate healthcare services provided in healthcare facilities, as well as the quality and competence of healthcare professionals in these facilities, and compare it with pre-established performance standards.

## **Medical Travel Accreditation**

Hospitals must not undervalue the significance of the patient experience in medical travel and how it will affect marketing and competitiveness, even while providing high-quality healthcare services is essential to any branding or marketing plan. As the first and only independent accrediting organization dedicated to improving the Medical Travel Care Continuum (all touchpoints, including pre- and post-treatment), the Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA) Program was founded in 2016.

By linking healthcare providers with consumers, boosting company performance, and improving the patient experience, GHA accreditation helps healthcare providers become more visible and competitive.

Everyone understands the importance of accreditation, including patients, providers, and buyers. Top-performing institutions from all over the world, such as Cleveland Clinic in the United States, Bumrungrad International Hospital in Thailand, and St. Catherine Specialty Hospital in Croatia, have received accreditation from GHA in the past six months.

## **Cost**

The market for health tourism is increasingly being dominated by nations and medical facilities that provide excellent healthcare services at competitive, reasonably priced costs.

One of the most prevalent orthopaedic operations, hip replacement surgery, for instance, was quoted at \$40,364 in the United States as of 2016. In Thailand and India, patients may have the same hip replacement at the same quality for \$17,000 and \$7,000, respectively.

These disparities in cost have enticed patients, especially those from North America and Europe, to seek medical care in these nations in an effort to minimize costs without sacrificing the standard of service.

Thailand's Bumrungrad International Hospital has developed into a major destination for foreign patients in need of surgery for complicated illnesses. Bumrungrad International Hospital has grown to be a major player in the medical tourism industry, treating over 1 million patients annually, including over 500,000 foreign patients from more than 190 countries.

Being one of the few hospitals that publishes its price packages online, Bumrungrad provides clear and reasonable pricing packages in addition to the high caliber of its services. Patients can browse online price bundles for more than 70 operations the hospital performs through its REALCOST initiative.

Health tourism can also be encouraged with the help of the government. For instance, in an effort to increase the number of foreign patients, Turkish Airlines, the nation's flag airline, offers medical travelers discounted airfare.

## **Healthcare Professionals and Infrastructure**

Patients want to have faith in the skills and credentials of the medical staff at a hospital. The availability of state-of-the-art technology infrastructure in the selected location is another factor that motivates international medical tourism.

Therefore, raising the caliber of medical staff and facilities is a key marketing tactic in the health tourism industry. Malaysia serves as an example, as the country's health tourism industry has grown astronomically in the past ten years.

The Malaysian government spent \$5.2 billion (about 10% of its yearly budget) on healthcare in 2016, primarily to support the expansion of pharmaceuticals, medical technology, and healthcare services, according to a report by Global Risk Insights. The nation's shift from importing medical equipment and devices from overseas to setting up a cutting-edge medical equipment manufacturing facility in Penang, which eventually increased its potential as a medical tourism hub, is one of the main accomplishments.

Putting the quantity and credentials of their medical staff on their websites is another tactic used by top hospitals. For instance, Bumrungrad lists more than 1,200 doctors and surgeons, more than 220 of whom have board certification and US training. The number of medical

travelers, particularly those from western nations, has increased significantly as a result of this cause alone.

International partnerships may also facilitate professional mobility by encouraging the inflow of medical specialists from top-tier partner facilities.

### **International Medical Travel Department**

Medical tourists visit nations that offer nice accommodations in addition to high-quality, reasonably priced healthcare treatments. To draw in more foreign patients, hospitals must use measures that make the patient's stay less stressful.

The simplest way to connect with potential clients is through a hospital's foreign medical department. This department's services include giving potential medical tourists useful information about the treatments available and removing barriers to communication by having multilingual, trained staff on hand to facilitate patient contact.

Liaising with patients directly or via medical travel agents to arrange medical transportation into and within the destination country is one of the additional marketing methods employed by international travel departments. In order to provide a smooth experience for the patient, it is also becoming commonplace to offer online immigration services, one-on-one nursing care, Wi-Fi, hotel reservations, leisure and tour services while rehabilitation, and restaurant services.

Success in the medical tourism sector, like in any other, hinges on understanding and correctly implementing critical tactics that must be focused on the needs of potential customers. Collaborations between the public and commercial healthcare sectors are therefore necessary to develop a sustainable medical tourism economy.

### **TYPES OF PATIENTS:**

- Inbound- Patients traveling into a country from other countries in search of advanced technology and innovative research.
- Domestic- Patients traveling within their country to receive medical care outside their geographic area, typically to a center of excellence in another state or region.
- Outbound- Patients traveling to other countries for a better value or quality of service.

### **AN INFORMED PERSPECTIVE**

Bringing up medical tourism generally elicits a lot of inquiries and prejudice because it is frequently connected to traveling to another nation and experiencing a botched surgery. Some people find it frightening to try something new, and as this subject has not been covered extensively, most people just have vague knowledge to go on.

Patients and businesses may become more receptive to the idea after educating themselves and realizing it is a valid and occasionally superior option. It has been demonstrated that it is worthwhile to take the time to investigate alternative possibilities, despite the belief that the United States is the top country in the world for healthcare.

When researching this, many people wonder about the quality of care. Many of the doctors who work overseas have received U.S. Board Certification and received their training in the United States. Some nations or states have equivalent or better facilities and equipment, as well as a lower patient to nurse ratio. Additional investigation into medical tourism will also reveal that certain insurance providers have included the option to travel for medical treatment.

Studies conducted by the Medical Tourism Association TM have shown that companies can save up to 90% in some cases by the patient choosing to have a procedure done in another country. Some companies that have offered this as an option have also offered cash incentives or covered travel expenses for the patient and companion; even covering those expenses and the procedure it is still a huge savings.

### **THE MARKET FOR MEDICAL TOURISM**

While some insurance companies have jumped on board with medical tourism the uninsured is still a major market for this. According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are more than 50 million Americans that do not have health insurance; this number is said to rise with the increasing cost of health insurance.

This is a large number of patients that could choose to leave the U.S. for healthcare and when savings and quality prove to be significant; it's an option many will take. The under-insured makes up a part of this market as well. While they do have insurance; it isn't always enough to cover their needs in full. Dental insurance typically covers the basic preventative dental care such as cleanings and treatment of cavities; those that seek more major dental care such as implants will not be covered.

In 2000 The U.S. Administration on Aging found that there were 35 million 65 year olds; and that number has and will continue to increase; making the need for dental implants and surgery a booming industry. Back to the insured; ethnic employees are an untapped market for this industry.

The thought of going to another country for a surgery can be scary to some people; language barriers, cleanliness, safety etc, but for ethnic Americans it can be preferable. They already speak the language, they don't have to overcome fears of safety and cleanliness and it would be an opportunity for them to visit extended family and recover in their home country.

In 2008 Deloitte Centers for Health Solutions conducted a survey Medical Tourism: Consumers in Search of Value; this survey showed that in 2007 an estimated 750,000 Americans traveled abroad for medical care. They estimated that this number would increase to six million by 2010.

### **A GROWING INDUSTRY**

People have been traveling for medical care for years, it's just in the past few years it's becoming a more and more well known option. Some high profile patients have been featured in the news drawing more attention to the industry.

Actress, Farrah Fawcett had a very public struggle with cancer and traveled to Germany to receive treatments not available in the U.S., this was covered in a two hour televised cancer journal. More recently, the L.A.

Lakers super star Kobe Bryant traveled to Germany to get platelet-rich plasma therapy in hopes of repairing his injured knee, reported the L.A. Times. According to the Orthohealing Center PRP therapy offers a possible solution to accelerate healing of tendon injuries and osteoarthritis naturally.

This therapy will merge cutting edge technology with the body's natural ability to heal itself. Blood is made of red and white blood cells, plasma, and platelets. A small amount of blood is drawn and spun in a centrifuge to isolate platelets then are guided by an ultrasound and injected into the injured area to try to stimulate the tissue repair.

Beings this is a relatively new procedure, more studies need to be conducted to prove its effectiveness. Golfer, Tiger Woods and tennis pro Rafael Nadal are among other athletes that have tried this therapy. Medical tourism is already a huge industry and it hasn't even hit every home in America or abroad, yet. Some countries are developing healthcare clusters made up of hospitals, governments and tourism boards and are really starting to market their country as a destination for healthcare.

This has also become a new market for travel agents. Given the state of the economy research has shown that people are not leisurely traveling as much as they use to, traveling for medical care combined with tourism is a new option for them to promote.

Instead of planning just a trip for fun, organizing the hospital and aftercare would be the extra things to consider. Leaving home for medical treatment is not for everyone, being educated on the details of this industry is the first step in considering it.

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### **Defining Medical Tourism**

Medical tourism, often referred to as medical travel, surgical tourism, health tourism, medical value travel, health care abroad, medical overseas, overseas medical, medical outsourcing, and offshore medical, can be defined in a variety of ways. "Offering cost-effective private medical care collaboration with tourism industry for people needing surgery and other forms of specialized treatment" is a broad definition of medical tourism. Simply put, medical tourism is the practice of going overseas to receive top-notch medical, dental, and cosmetic care from highly qualified surgeons at some of the world's most cutting-edge medical facilities, where the cost of treatment is significantly less than in their home country.

### **Marketing Medical Tourism in Maharashtra**

#### **FINDINGS**

Maharashtra is one of the progressive states & second largest state in the country. Important demographic indicators of the state are as below:

**HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN MAHARASHTRA** Maharashtra has been in the forefront of healthcare development in the country. It was among the first states to decentralize primary healthcare administration through Zilla Parishads as early as 1961. Further, under the Minimum Needs Program Maharashtra was again one of the first states to achieve the norms mandated for primary health centers, subcentres and Rural Hospitals. The state also has the largest private health sector in India whose reach is quite extensive. Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Healthcare service No. of Primary Health Care Services is 1816 including Tribal and Non Tribal. No. of Sub Centre is 10579 including Tribal and Non Tribal The Tertiary healthcare service in Maharashtra has witnessed an enormous growth in infrastructure in the private and voluntary sector. The private sector which was very modest in the early stages has now become a flourishing industry equipped with most modern state-of-art technology at its disposal. It is estimated that 75- 80% of healthcare services and investment in Maharashtra are now provided by the private sector such as the Tatas, Fortis, Max, Wockhardt, Primal, Apollo and the Escorts group. Some of the hospitals in Maharashtra accredited by the national and international accreditation body like NABH, QCI, ISO, JCI Maharashtra has top-notch centre for knee replacement surgery, hip replacement surgery openheart surgery, cosmetic surgery and cancer therapy, and virtually all of clinics are equipped with the latest electronic and medical diagnostic equipment. The various facilities in Maharashtra include full body pathology, comprehensive physical and Gynecological examinations, dental check-up, eye check-up, diet consultation, audiometric, spirometry, stress & lifestyle management, digital X-Ray, 2D echo, color Doppler, CT scan high strength MRI. Local medics have treated number of international patients the clinical outcome was at par with world's best centers, for Maharashtra has internationally qualified and experienced specialists, super specialists. Surgeons had also presented research paper at several international seminars and undergone fellowship at foreign universities. Moreover there is an assurance that patients will get personalized care and hospitality. Doctors in Maharashtra are proficient in English most even provide interpreters to cut across language barriers while the patient stays at hospitals; they take care to see that the visit becomes a pleasant experience.

Effective Marketing Strategies

### **Digital Marketing**

1. Website optimization: Create a user-friendly website with clear information on medical services, treatments, and facilities.
2. Search engine optimization (SEO): Optimize website content for search engines to improve visibility.
3. Social media marketing: Utilize social media platforms to engage with potential patients, share success stories, and promote services.
4. Online advertising: Use targeted online advertising to reach potential patients.

**Partnerships**

1. Hospital partnerships: Collaborate with hospitals and healthcare providers to offer comprehensive medical services.
2. Tourism board partnerships: Partner with tourism boards to promote medical tourism packages and destinations.
3. Travel agency partnerships: Work with travel agencies to offer convenient travel arrangements.

**Word-of-Mouth**

1. Patient testimonials: Encourage satisfied patients to share their experiences.
2. Referral programs: Implement referral programs to incentivize patients to refer others.
3. Online reviews: Encourage patients to leave online reviews to build credibility.

By leveraging these effective marketing strategies, medical tourism destinations and providers can attract more patients and build a strong reputation.

**Table 1: The expectation and the experience of the tourists based on Brand image**

Brand image	Expectation	Experience
Moderate	68(22.7)	68(22.7)
Favourable	96(32.0)	94(31.3)
Highly Favourable	136(45.3)	138(46.0)

From Table 5.16, 136/300 (45,3%) tourists expect the Brand image to be highly favourable before their visit. It was highly favourable for 32.0% and moderate for 22.7%. Thus before & visit 77.3% tourists expect Brand image to be highly favourable or favourable. But after the visit no change is observed (773%) in their experience about the Brand image as highly favourable or favourable.

**Table 2 - To enquire into the marketing strategies developed for attracting the tourists**

Attribute	Expectation before the visit	Experience after the visit	P
<b>Quality of product and services</b>	4.15±0.77	4.18±0.81	0.607 NS

<b>Consumerism</b>	4.13±0.80	4.28±0.77	0.019*
<b>Brand image</b>	4.22±0.79	4.23±0.80	0.855 NS
<b>Product features</b>	4.13±0.82	4.19±0.80	0.376 NS
<b>Positioning</b>	4.12±0.80	4.11±0.80	0.862 NS
<b>Marketing Strategies</b>	4.15±0.35	4.20±0.33	0.665NS

\*Significant; p<0.05: NS significant; p>0.05

From Table 5.19, Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed that there does not exist any statistically significant difference in the variable quality of products and services (i.e.,  $p > 0.05$ ). The quality of products and services is expected to be favourable to highly favourable (4.15±0.77) by the tourists before the visit and their experience was also favourable to Highly favourable (4.1S±0.81) after the visit. But there is statistically significant difference in the tourist's expectation of consumerism (i.e.,  $p < 0.05$ ). The tourists\*s expectation about consumerism was favourable to highly favourable (4.13±0.80) before their visit and their experience was also favourable to highly favourable (4.28±0.77) after the visit There does not exist any significant difference in the expectation of the tourists about the brand image before their visit to Maharashtra and their experience after visiting Maharashtra (i.e.,  $p > 0.05$ ). The tourist's expectation about the brand image was favourable to Highly favourable (422±0.79) before their visit and their experience is also favourable to Highly favourable (4.23^0.80) after the visit.

Similarly, there is no statistical difference in the expectation of the product features and positioning (i.e.,  $p > 0.05$ ). The Tourists' expectation about the product features was favourable to highly favourable (4.13±0.82) before their visit and their experience was also favourable to highly favourable (4.19±0.80) after the visit. Again, the tourists' expectation about positioning was favourable to highly favourable (4.12±0.80) before their visit and their experience was also favourable to highly favourable (4.11±0.80) after the visit. There does not exist any significant difference in the expectation of the tourists about marketing system and marketing strategies before their visit and their experience after visiting Maharashtra (i.e.,  $p > 0.05$ ). The tourists' expectation about the marketing strategies was favourable to Highly favourable (4.15±0.35) before their visit and their experience was also favourable to Highly favourable (4.20±0.33) after the visit.

**Table 3 : The expectation and the experience of the tourists based on Positioning**

Positioning	Expectation	Experience
Moderate	79(26.3)	83(27.7)

favourable	106(35.3)	101(33.7)
Highly favourable	115(38.3)	116(38.7)

From Table 5.18, 115/300 (38.3%) tourists expect Positioning to be highly favourable before their visit. It was highly favourable for 35.3% and moderate for 26.3%. Thus, before the visit 73.6% tourists expect positioning to be highly favourable or favourable. But after the visit a small decrease is observed (72.4%) in their experience about Positioning as highly favourable or favourable. The data reveals that positioning of the medical tourism product in the minds of the consumers has been favourable for the industry. The fame of Koala as a medical tourism destination is slowly reaching the destinations other than its traditional source markets.

**Table 4 : The expectation and the experience of tourists based on Product features**

Product features	Expectation	Experience
Moderate	82(27.3)	71(23.7)
Attractive	96(32.0)	99(33.0)
Highly Attractive	122(40.7)	130(43.3)

From Table 5.17, 122/300 (40.7%) tourists expect the Product features to be highly attractive before their visit. It was attractive for 32.0% and was moderate for 27.3%. Thus, before the visit 72.7% tourists expect the Product features to be highly attractive or attractive. But after the visit a small increase is observed (76.3%) in their experience about the Product features as highly attractive or attractive.

### Conclusion

The medical tourism industry in Maharashtra has immense potential for growth, driven by the state's high-quality medical infrastructure, skilled healthcare professionals, and rich cultural heritage. Effective marketing strategies, including digital marketing, partnerships, and word-of-mouth marketing, can help promote Maharashtra as a preferred destination for medical tourism. By prioritizing quality care, patient experience, and marketing ethics, stakeholders can capitalize on the growing demand for medical tourism and contribute to the state's economic development. As the industry continues to evolve, it is essential for stakeholders to stay focused on delivering exceptional patient experiences and promoting Maharashtra's unique strengths in medical tourism.

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