

## Travel behaviour of Medical Tourists in Kerala

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### Abstract

*Travel behaviour refers to the way in which tourists behave according to their attitudes before, during and after travelling. Knowledge regarding travel behaviour can assist in marketing, product planning and development which can increase the number of medical value travellers. The purpose of this study was to determine the travel behaviour and, more specifically, the travel motivations and factors influencing travel decision making of medical value travellers preferring treatments in the hospitals of Kerala. The result shows that the motivational factor of travel varies with the type of treatment. It is therefore clear from the results that medical tourism marketers are required to do research on a continuous basis to determine medical tourists' travel behaviour to different medical tourism products. The results can be used as a focusing point of the marketing strategies.*

**Keywords: travel behaviour, medical value travellers.**

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the economic sectors to be developed in order to bring the nations into prosperity. Within tourism, the health sub-sector is singled out as the most promising and lucrative area for the development of the industry in the country (Dewi, 2003; Ormond, 2011).

Medical Tourism (Medical value travel) is the term that has been chosen to refer to the practice or trend of patients seeking healthcare beyond borders. The operative word here being 'value' since a patient seeks value when they choose to undertake travel for healthcare.

Ormond (2011) pointed out that health tourist destinations develop for two main reasons. From the pull-factor perspective, it is developed as a result of the provision of world-class medical facilities and services in the destination region. On the other hand, from the push-factor perspective, tourists' movement is motivated by the failure of their health system to fulfil the needs of prospective patients in the tourist-generating region.

Medical tourism is becoming more and more popular in India especially in Kerala. This is becoming a trend not only in India but also for the rest of the world because of the existence of price gradients along which the flow of patients follows from places with higher price to lower price. Consequently, a question arises as to what makes the hospitals in Asia stand out as medical tourism destinations? The sustainable competitive advantage of medical centres in India seems to be price. The cost of different medical treatments, as well as surgical operations and other malignant diseases are significantly lower than, sometimes as low as one tenth, compared to that of the hospitals in more developed western countries, where people may be required to have pricy health insurance packages in order to survive the expensive costs of healthcare. However, the reasons behind people seeking medical care can be different, varying from country to country, as well as many other diverse factors, including socio-demographic factors, which influence the decision processes of individuals in choosing different hospitals.

At this point, another question arises as to what these hospitals can and will do to meet the varying needs of their customers who come from different demographic and ethnic categories as well as of varying economic and geographic distributions. The answer to this question is

that there should be a change in the practice of healthcare providers towards the value-based competition based on results so as to go beyond the customer expectation in order to forge a long-lasting and interdependent relationship between the healthcare providers and the healthcare seekers, which will benefit both. In order to forge such a fruitful relationship, healthcare providers should try to discover ways and means to understand consumer behaviour and characteristics in order to provide custom-made services to meet and exceed customer expectations.

**Objectives of the study**

The objective of the study is to examine the factors that motivate the patient’s behaviour with respect to medical value travel in general and with respect to Modern Medicine and Ayurveda

**Hypothesis**

The rank preferences are not significant in the hospital selection by the medical value travellers

**Research Methodology**

For analysing the Medical value travellers travel behaviour, 50 medical tourists were selected from various hospitals in Kerala using stratified random method and the data were collected using a structured interview schedule

**Table 1**

**Distribution of patients type of treatment by Nationality**

nationality * type of hospital/resort Cross tabulation					
			TREATMENT CATEGORY		Total
			Modern medicine	Ayurveda	
Nationality	Asian	Count	19	6	25
		% of Total	38.0%	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
	Europe	Count	4	1	5
		% of Total	8.0%	2.0%	10.0%
	US	Count	5	1	6
		% of Total	10.0%	2.0%	12.0%
	African	Count	10	3	13
		% of Total	20.0%	6.0%	<b>26.0%</b>
	Australian	Count	0	1	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.0%	2.0%
	Total	Count	38	12	50
		% of Total	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%

As per table 1, it is observed that Major part of the medical value travellers are from Asian and African countries, ie, 50% and 26 % respectively. And 76% people are preferring Modern Medicine, and Ayurveda is preferred by 24% of the selected patients

**Table:2**

**Distribution of Information Source about the hospital by treatment category**

Information source * type of hospital/Resort Cross tabulation					
			TREATMENT CATEGORY		Total
			Modern Medicine	Ayurveda	
information source	website of the hospital	Count	4	3	7
		% of Total	8.0%	6.0%	14.0%
	friends and family	Count	17	8	25
		% of Total	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	50.0%
	social media	Count	9	1	10
		% of Total	18.0%	2.0%	20.0%
	Fairs and Exhibitions	Count	8	0	8
		% of Total	16.0%	0.0%	16.0%
	Total	Count	38	12	50
		% of Total	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%

From table 2, it is clear that 34 % of the patients who prefer modern medicine and 16% patients prefer Ayurvedic treatment got information about the hospital from friends and family.18% of the information from social media in case of modern medicine and 6% from website of the hospitals in case of Ayurveda.

**Table 3**

**Mean Ranks of the preference for motivation to select the hospitals**

	In general	Modern Medicine	Ayurveda
Accredited Hospital	3.76	4.01	5.75
Cost Advantage	<b>3.71</b>	<b>2.97</b>	3.00
Tourist Attraction	5.31	5.50	4.58
Climatic condition	4.60	4.62	4.58
Quality of services	4.28	4.68	<b>2.92</b>
English speaking staff	5.56	5.68	5.25
High tech technology equipments and service	6.40	6.22	6.83
Brand Image	6.14	6.08	6.58
Top Notch professionally certified Doctors and Nurses	5.24	5.24	5.50

As per Tables 3, it is observed that the rank preference of the selected patients about the factors of motivation to select the hospitals varies significantly over the type of treatments. Here the most valid preference is the factor having the least mean, as the rank 1 should have the least mean in the rank order of preferences. Therefore, according to the mean rank preferences, patients of Modern medicine are motivated by cost effectiveness of the hospitals, and Ayurveda are motivated by the quality of services. And in general medical value travellers are attracted by the cost effectiveness of the hospitals.

**Freidman Test for the preference of motivation to select hospitals**

Test Statistics		Modern Medicine	Ayurveda
N	50	38	12
Chi-Square	50.764	43.195	24.689
Df	8	8	8
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.002
a. Friedman Test			

Further, the variation in the rank preferences of customers is tested by using Freidman test and it is found that the value of the Freidman Chi-square is statistically significant at 5 per cent level of significance (**Value of Friedman Chi-square is significant in all cases,  $p < 0.05$** ). So, it may be concluded that the factors affecting the motivation to select the hospitals by the patients are different as per the type of treatment seeking.

**Findings and Conclusion**

The study reveals that majority of the Medical Value Travellers are from Asia and Africa. Out of that 76% prefer modern medicine and 26 % are seeking Ayurvedic Treatment. And 36% of modern medicine patients and 16% Ayurvedic patients got information reference from reference from their friends and family.

The study reveals that the most favourable motivational factor of the medical value travellers are cost effectiveness and the quality of services in case of Modern medicine and Ayurveda respectively. This is further validated by using Friedman test, which shows the result that rank preferences are significant in the motivation to travel Hence it is advisable to the various multi speciality hospitals and Ayurvedic hospitals to provide better cost effective quality services and go beyond the customer expectation in order to build a long-lasting and interdependent relationship between the healthcare providers and the healthcare seekers.

**Reference**

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