



Indian Health Tourism: A Mirror View from The Past

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Abstract

In this writing, aim to provide an overview of Indian health tourism though historical data from various authors and reliable texts. Also, the main thing to discussing here is that the gravity of the Indian medical system has its own pros and cons. However, above all, the medical sector is evolving rapidly, and a large number of medical tourists come to India not only for treatment but also to heal within. Yes, the term I am using is not treatment, because in India, healing comes from the inside. Previously, kings and religious places were used for healing and medical treatments were practiced. Moreover, from there, we are giving the world a good health treatment at a lower cost. Also, the causes we want to see how we can adjust the cost. From this perspective, the pros and cons of government rules and institutions, and how they are helping, are evident in government schemes and various institutions that are changing medical treatment in rural areas. The mortality rate is decreasing, and people's life spans are increasing. The Indian healthcare sector has successfully transitioned from a regional service provider to a global architectural influence in modern-day healthcare delivery. With historical expertise in reconstructive surgery and internal medicine and its 21st-century digital health infrastructure, India offers a scalable alternative to traditional Western healthcare.

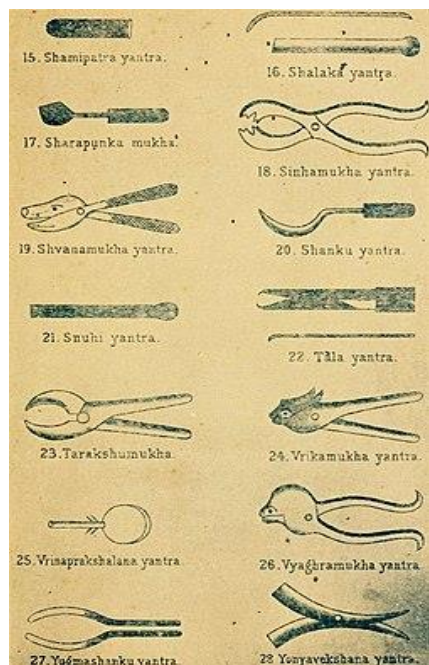
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Introduction:

The Indian health tourism market is currently valued at approximately 12.3 billion, and it is growing rapidly. An estimate suggests it will reach 22.11 billion by 2031, based on 2026 data (Mordor Intelligence Report online). India has become a global hub for a large market. One reason for affordable, adequate treatment is government assistance and the use of Indian medicine. The system combines ancient traditional healing art techniques with modern advanced technologies. At present, the Government of India has available management systems, such as Ayush Visa (For Traditional Indian Treatment).¹ For example, the encouragement of foreign citizens to choose India as a suitable country compared to other countries of the world, and the provision of a Skilled workforce, have also been provided—affordability and world-class clinical expertise Indian in India. Emerging causes have helped a range of health systems worldwide— (First-world quality at third-world rates).²

Medical tourism's past glories:

What are the reasons behind India's sudden move towards such a health system? To find the answer, we need to present the traditions of ancient medical systems and modern treatment to everyone. From ancient times, the Indian system of treatment was unprecedented in its combination of advanced techniques and Ayurvedic treatments, such as Unani and Siddha. Ancient medical texts are an important resource for doctors today, for discussion and practice, at a Residential university where the role of a superspecialty hospital was played. So was the university. Taxila was an early fifth-century centre for medical tourists from Greece, Persia, and China. We have enough Proof from the works of various writers(Fa-hien). The famous Acharya Charak, who is called "The Father of Indian medicine", taught here. Besides, a Description of free medical care at Nalanda University by the fifth-century Chinese traveller Fa-hien. He also wrote that thousands of scholars used to come here to study the science of healing. (Like Charaka) Kashi Varanasi was the site of Sushruta's surgery. Rhinoplasty, i.e. Nose Reconstruction and Cataract Surgery (He used the head of an ant to sew).³ Also, 120 to 125 surgical units for operations such as needle heads and knives are currently used for suturing, we find various Proof of use of the instruments,⁴ as well as vaccination against smallpox, panchakarma in Ayurvedic style (deep detoxification), yoga (to align mind and body), and dietetics (i.e., food as medicine in the body), was provided. The reason for this is to control the body's condition and balance the kafa and pitta ratio. From Greece, they used to come to our holy land (India)to learn how to treat snake bites. After the use of medicine and the treatment from the naked philosophers (gymnosophists), they were impressed by their knowledge. Also, we find in the writings of Fahien and Itsieng that they described Shulk Maktu Hospital as Punyshala, located in Patna.



Source:<https://medium.com/@vallabhujayanth/title-sushruta-pioneering-the-art-of-medicine-9524537ff737>

Shastras (Sharp Instruments) were invented by Acharya Sushruta.

In addition, the Arabic Abbasid Caliphs invited Indian chiropractors to their hospital in Baghdad in the 8th century. People who take responsibility and practice healing to treat people, for them, the caliphs translated Charak's Samhita into Arabic and named it Kitab-e-Sushruta.

Many books written in Indian languages, including Sanskrit, have been lost over time. Many of these books can be found here and there. So many stories exist about manuscript findings. Like, in 1890, British Army officer Hamilton Boyer bought a manuscript from Kashgar. He collected it for his personal collection. However, it turned out to be a work on Folk magic and medicine, written in Sanskrit in the fifth century.

Another account found in the Madras Gazette of 1794 describes the British surgeons James Frindlay and Thomas Cruso witnessing rhinoplasty performed on an Indian named Cowasjee, practising an ancient "Indian method" (based on Sushruta Samhita), who had his nose reconstructed using a forehead flap. He cut the skin of the forehead and placed it on the nose. This account not only describes the ancient traditions of Indian medicine, but also explains how they are practised today. It highlights the importance of these methods at present.



Source:<https://history.rcp.ac.uk/blog/singular-operation-history-indian-rhinoplastic-surgical-technique>

A 'Singular Operation': The History of an Indian Rhinoplastic Surgical Technique.

Also, like tuberculosis, a detailed description of the fatal disease is available in ancient texts like the Rig Veda and the Sushruta Samhita, and it is called balasa/yaksma. Today's world is easier to treat with modern technologies (such as radiological diagnosis), but the ancients also knew about diseases and how to treat them. That is impressive. It shows the advancement of the culture.

Kenneth g zysk, in his books, namely, "ASCETISM AND HEALING IN ANCIENT INDIA" and "FROM MAGICO RELIGIOUS TO EMPERICO RATIONAL", has beautifully explained ancient treatments. It discusses various mantras and rituals in great detail. i.e., ghee, butter, oil, honey. Used as an ointment. Practising various tantra mantras to please God or drive away demons, Kala Kaushal was written about. This tantra mantra, along with its detailed explanation, is given in this book. In Materia Medica, it contains details of plant and animal products used in treatment. We can also find the description of the residential hospitals. Buddhist texts, such as the Vinaya Pitaka, describe monasteries as residential hospitals.⁵

Facilities provided by the government: In today's world, government initiatives also play

an active role in promoting medical tourism in India. Government facilities and rural development schemes are helping to achieve the goals of people experiencing poverty, as well as becoming a key force for change in the medical field. Currently, MVT (Medical Value Travel) is used for health tourism under the "Heal in India" initiative,⁶ one of the Government of India's policies. Cardiology is one of the most important medical treatments (Bypass, Angioplasty), Oncology, ie, Bone marrow transplantation, Orthopedics (Hip Replacement), Organ transplant - For all these treatments, huge medical institutions like Apollo, Fortis, Medanta, Kokilaben Hospitals, Artemis, Gleneagle Global, Manipal Hospitals are the hospitals with great achievements and infrastructure established them in the 1st row. These organisations have gained significant recognition worldwide. However, Chennai currently offers world-class services at a low cost in India. Because of this, it is called Health Capital. Also, Mumbai is well known for its cancer care and transplant surgery.

WHICH ARE THE MOST POPULAR MEDICAL TREATMENTS IN INDIA?

India is one of the most popular destinations for getting affordable, high-quality treatments. Medical Tourism Association has ranked it 10th in Medical Tourism Index (MTI) for 2020-21 out of 46 destinations worldwide.

Why India?

- Affordable, high-quality treatments
- Presence of top medical technology and doctors
- Cultural affinity and availability of various cuisines
- Easy availability of affordable ancillary services
- Large English-speaking population

Popular Treatment Categories

- Cardiology
- Neurology
- Oncology
- Bariatric Surgery
- Orthopedics

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(Source) <https://gomedii.com/blogs/english/tag/neurology/>

A Cost Comparison between India, USA, Thailand (Approximate figures in US Dollars) –

Procedure	US	India	Thailand
1. Heart bypass	130000	10000	11000
2. Heart valve replacement	160000	9000	10000
3. Angioplasty	57000	11000	13000
4. Hip replacement	43000	9000	12000
5. Spinal fusion	62000	5500	7000

Source: Accessed: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/12163631/MEDICAL-TOURISM/> 36.7 Approximate retail costs. US figures based on Healthcare Cost and Utilisation Project data. International figures based on hospital quotes in named countries.

Another important initiative of the Government of India is the NRHM (National Rural Health Mission).⁸ The 21st century is marked by a paradigm shift in health in India, with a more aggressive, mission-mode approach adopted. In the field of health, two important things happened in the year 2000.1st time, the government of India announced the national population policy known as NPP. From then onwards, India became one of the 191 member countries to commit to the Millennium Development Goals and may be called the forerunner of NRHM. Some of the key developments and improvements are-

1. health insurance for people with low incomes,
2. Appointment of an accredited social health activist (ASHA) in each village,
3. The involvement of the non-profit sector in the underserved regions.
4. Overall improvement has been seen in improving the infant mortality rate (IMR)
5. Maternal mortality rate (MMR).

The policy was further extended till 2017. Jaswant Singh announced this policy merging medical expenditure and tourism in 2003. In his annual budget speech, he called for India to become a global destination for medical tourism.⁹ Ancient medical tests are studied today, and there are Buddhist and Jain influences in Ayurveda, as well as in the Charaka Samhita and the writings of the ancients. The Ashtanga heart is very important among the practitioners. Ashtanga Heart, written by Bhagavata, in the 6th century. The authored book has become so important that it has been approved by the Government of India for Ayurvedic Students in 2026 (BAMS). considered as one of the primary books in their syllabus. Eight important chapters of medicine are enshrined in this Ashtanga heart:

1. (Kaya) Internal Medicine,
2. Paediatrics,
3. Psychiatry,
4. Ophthalmology/ENT
5. (Shlya) General Surgery,
6. Toxicology,
7. Geriatrics,
8. Reproductive Health.

Looking at the 17th to 20th centuries, we can see many changes in the medical fraternity. Many acts were passed, and various institutions were established. Some figures, such as Sir William Jones (from 1783 to 1794), were highly relevant during this time. His research on medicinal plants (such as spikenard) is very important for natural science students. In 1784, the Asiatic Society of Calcutta was established.

S.N. Sen, in 1972, published scientific works in Sanskrit, translated into foreign languages and vice versa, in the 18th and 19th centuries, which provides sufficient evidence that Indian physicians were visiting the Arab world in the 19th century.¹⁰ Some prominent modern-day Indian medical doctors are specialists like cardiologist Dr Devi Shetty, pulmonologist Dr Randeep Guleria, and haematologist Dr Rahul Bhargava. Other pioneers were Dr Anandibai Joshi and Dr S.I. Padmavati. Prominent Indian Ayurveda practitioners include modern experts like Dr Vasant Lad (internationally renowned educator), Acharya Balkrishna (co-founder of Patanjali), and Vaidya Balendu Prakash (Padma Shri recipient). Their names are important. Some important Ayurvedic institutions include the All-India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal, Institute for Post Graduate Teaching & Research in Ayurveda (ITRA), J.B. Roy State Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Patanjali Research Foundation, and SDM College of Ayurveda & Hospital.

Around 1912 and 1917, several medical acts were enacted by medical councils in the various provinces of the country.¹¹ These acts helped create a Unified facility system. The Government of Madras established the first committee on indigenous systems of medicine in 1923. In 1971, the Central Council of Indian Medicine was set up to regulate the standards of education and control the practice of traditional systems. Since then,

Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, homeopathy, yoga, and neuropathy have received official support from the central government and state governments. The modern-day approach is quite visible to everybody. Regular clinical activities are active, while foreign travellers much more appreciate the traditional practice of medicine. Thanks to government policies supporting these modern traditional medical centers. Some of them are Isha Yoga Centre in Kumbatur, Art of Living International Centre in Bangalore, Osho International Meditation Centre in Pune, and Sivananda Ashram in Uttarakhand. They practice yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, and, in some cases, modern diagnostics. Popular among foreign tourists who want to explore a new culture. Actually, Goa is a popular destination too. Above all, promotional activities and tie-ups with hospitals, hostels, and tour operators are ready to make travelling to any destination easy. Medical tourism in Goa, Delhi, Chennai, and Mumbai is linked to the availability of direct international flights. Hyderabad and Bangalore have opened international airports and offer direct flights from abroad. Hospitals like 'Yashoda' in Hyderabad have an airport kiosk and are planning to use a helicopter on the terrace to airlift their patients.

The Medical Tourism Council of Maharashtra (MTMC), based in Mumbai, was established to facilitate smooth operations in the mt sector. The National Health Bill announced by the Indian government aims to provide free health care in both public and private hospitals. Medical exhibitions and conferences are organized by institutions like FCI (Hospital Federation of India), national-level bodies like NASSCOM(National Association of Software and Services Companies), AOH(Association of Hospitals), AHEI(associations of the hospitals of Eastern India), and TPAS, like companies managing the biomedical waste, investments, etc., which are running this sector more efficiently.¹²Government of India's initiatives for malaria and dengue prevention, such as the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2023-27), are reshaping the country. More initiatives like the PM National Dialysis Programmed, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, Ayushman Vay Vandana (2024), Ayushman Bharat - PMJAY (2018): World's largest government-funded health assurance scheme, covering secondary and tertiary hospitalization, are examples of some of the major health initiatives taken by the government.



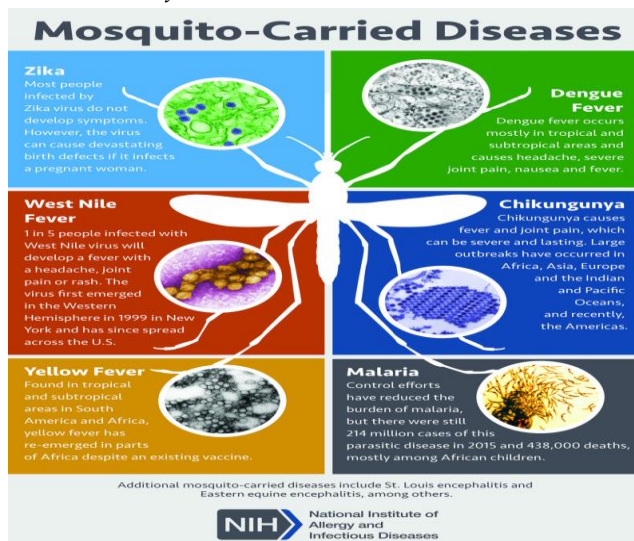
Yoga.

Source:<https://www.bebeautiful.in/wellbeing/fitness/importance-of-yoga-for-mind-body-and-wellbeing>

Some of the mosquito-carried diseases

(Source)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK555962/figure/article-27309.image.f2/>.



Conclusion: The Indian medical system developed under different circumstances. The past was full of glorious achievements, and medical professionals were highly technically advanced for their time. Like Charaka or Susruta, they are still relevant. Ayurveda is a big market thanks to them. Various multibillion-dollar companies and healing centres still carry out these practices. From Isha Yoga Centre to Ramdev Baba's Patanjali products, it has a large market for natural products and medicines. Today, we are practising yoga with the help of a phone to record or analyse, etc. This is the future, and the multibillion-dollar market.



Source: https://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review-g297675-d17605509-Reviews-Isha_Yoga_Center-Coimbatore_Coimbatore_District_Tamil_Nadu.html

Endnotes:

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