

# **Wellness meets hospitality: India's \$10B medical tourism boom**

As travelers increasingly seek experiences that align with physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, India is fast emerging as a global leader in wellness tourism. The sector is growing at a pace surpassing global tourism trends, positioning India among the top ten wellness tourism markets worldwide and the top five in the Asia-Pacific region.

India's medical tourism industry—estimated at \$5–6 billion in mid-2020—has now surged past \$10 billion, reflecting growing international trust in the country's healthcare excellence and holistic wellness offerings.

## **India for Global Health**

India offers a compelling proposition: world-class doctors, advanced medical infrastructure, English-speaking professionals, and affordable treatment costs—often two to three times cheaper than in Western countries. Internationally accredited hospitals and a robust travel and visa framework further support this appeal.

Crucially, India is also the birthplace of Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy—systems of healing rooted in centuries-old wisdom. These traditional therapies, combined with modern medicine, offer integrated health solutions unmatched elsewhere.

The theme of this year's World Health Assembly, 'One World for Health,' echoes India's vision. The government's 'Heal in India' and 'Heal by India' initiatives promote both inbound medical tourism and the global mobility of Indian healthcare professionals.

## **Wellness for All**

The government has identified Medical Value Travel (MVT) and wellness tourism as strategic sectors under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant

India) initiative. The Ministry of Tourism has formulated a comprehensive national strategy, focusing on:

- Institutional frameworks
- Quality assurance
- Ecosystem enhancement
- Brand-building for India as a global wellness destination

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon stakeholders across healthcare, hospitality, and travel to invest in building India's global reputation in health tourism.

India issued 5.97 lakh medical visas in 2023, up from 3.75 lakh in 2019, even issuing 1.52 lakh visas during the COVID-19 pandemic. While a temporary dip was recorded in 2024 due to political unrest and trade tensions in Bangladesh—India's largest source market for medical tourists—other regions such as Nepal (visa-free) continue to contribute significantly.

### Bridging the Gaps: Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its strengths, India faces critical challenges that need to be addressed to unlock the sector's full potential:

- Lack of integration among hospitals, wellness resorts, travel services, and government agencies leads to a fragmented experience for tourists—driving many to Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand, where seamless offerings attract global visitors.
- The proliferation of unregulated wellness centres has raised concerns over quality and safety. To address this, the National Accreditation Board, in collaboration with the Ministry of AYUSH, has issued formal accreditation guidelines.
- The Ministry of Tourism is also focusing on training, capacity building, quality assurance, and participation in international wellness events to elevate standards.

At a recent medical tourism conference in Mumbai, experts highlighted the urgent need for private sector investment and public-private partnerships. A strong marketing strategy, backed by an integrated digital platform and smooth visa facilitation, is vital.

### The Road Ahead: India's Moment to Lead

India has the potential to become the world's foremost medical and wellness tourism powerhouse. Realizing this vision requires:

- A robust national policy
- World-class infrastructure
- Unified digital health and travel platforms
- Aggressive global marketing
- Seamless visa and travel support

If executed with precision and intent, these efforts will not only bolster the Indian economy but also provide millions of global citizens access to holistic healthcare—anchored in the Indian ethos of balance between body, mind, and spirit.

India stands ready to heal the world.