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REVIEW ARTICLE

DENTAL TOURISM IN INDIA- AN UPDATE

Dr. Pranjan Mitra¹, Dr. Roshani Chawla²

1. Institutional affiliations- Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Institute of Dental Education and Advance Studies, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India.
2. Institutional affiliations- Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Vidarbha Youth Welfare Society's Dental College and Hospital, Amravati, Maharashtra, India.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Pranjan Mitra.

Abstract

Dental tourism is a new form of tourism, where the dental treatments are clubbed with tours, and several medical travel agencies provide specialized services in this regard. It has surely found its place in India with majority of the foreigners coming to India for dental procedures as well as cosmetic surgery. Every year millions of people fly from all over the globe to India to get dental treatment done and have a splendid holiday at the same time. A growing number of tourists are flocking in large numbers because of the best dental care, equipments and facilities that India offers.

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Introduction:-

Tourism is one of the most important engines of economic growth in most parts of the world. It is the key area which can yield large benefits for society.¹ Travel is not a journey anymore, it is more about experience and memories.

The rising cost of dental procedures along with month's long wait to for a dentist has made impossible to get world-class treatment at an affordable price. Patients receiving dental treatment at some of the much acclaimed dental hospitals abroad have now become a long lost trend. However the evolving concept of dental tourism that has made quality dental treatment possible at a nominal cost.²

Recent studies proclaim that every year a good number of tourists cum patients pack their travel bags to some of the exotic dental tourism destinations in the world, hoping for an enchanting holiday coupled with the desirable dental treatment.²

Dental Tourism is a budding concept for a planned vacation along with standardized, customized and an effective dental treatment.³ It is a new form of tourism, where the dental treatments are clubbed with tours, and several medical travel agencies providing specialized services.¹ Dental tourism has surely found its place in India with the arrival of many foreign tourists for dental procedures as well as cosmetic surgery.⁴

India has a wide range of multi-specialty hospitals offering treatment at a cost substantially lower than in developed countries. Many hospitals in India are becoming well known internationally for standards of health care delivery comparable to the best in the world. Advanced technology, skilled super-specialists coupled with sound infrastructure and professional management, nurses and paramedical staff, have made the Indian health care sector comparable to international standards. Nowadays foreign tourists to India are increasingly seeking Ayurveda, Dentistry and Allopathic systems of medicine, hoping to cure themselves at a nominal and affordable rate compared to their own countries.⁵

Dental Tourism in India:-

Dental treatment in India is becoming very popular with foreign tourists.⁵ Dental Tourism is enabling international patients to cut down on their dental expenses while exploring India. Dental Implants in India are big fascination with foreign tourists as they are far less expensive here. Dental tourism forms 10 percent of the total Indian medical tourist which is projected to grow at 30 percent by 2015.⁶

Why India Is A Hub For Dental Tourism?

India offers dental treatments of the highest standards with latest technology and modern facilities. The country is home to many international dental clinics. Many of the specialized clinics have served tourists from the US, the UK and other European countries for more than 20 years. India, which is already known for being a yoga and meditation hub, is now catering to tourists' smiles. The most preferred dental treatments include root canals, veneers, fillings, crowns, dental implants and tooth whitening.⁶

In some countries dental treatment is expensive and often not reimbursed by the national health schemes. As a result, they come to India and get their teeth corrected at a very low cost when compared to their own country. A dentist can charge US \$ 300 to 400 for a filling. It costs only US \$ 20 in India. A root canal is US Dollars 3,000 in the West but only US \$ 70 to 100 in India. Dentures can cost US Dollars 1000 overseas but only US \$ 200 in India.⁵

Apart from spending just a fraction of the amount one would spend in the US, one gets to holiday in exotic locales of the East. Dentists in India are highly qualified and vastly experienced. Tourists who have been treated in India are highly satisfied with the dental treatments they have received. Earlier, there was an inflow of patients from neighboring countries and West Asia. Recently, there has been a significant increase in patients from UK, US and Europe. Cheaper treatment is a huge attraction and, during recession, the cost factor plays a huge role. Cost is not the only driving force. Indian clinical and paramedical talent is globally renowned and internationally accredited. Third party involvement through health tourism has also given a good impetus.⁷

Millions of people every year fly from USA, and Europe to tourist places in India for a grand holiday and dental treatment.⁵ Dentists collaborate with various travel companies. Travelers contact these travel agencies who help to make appointments with the dentists and also arrange for post treatment trips. Travelers can visit some of the beautiful cities in India. The key hubs include Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Kerala and Goa. These clinics offer well trained dental specialists with latest dental technology and world class facilities.¹

Advantages of Dental Treatment in India:-

1. Affordable dental treatments: In India, dental treatments are affordable and quality is at par with international standards. There is a huge cost difference between Western Countries and India.¹

The cost comparison of dental treatment between USA and India⁸

Dental procedure	Cost in USA (\$)		Cost in India (\$)
	General Dentist	Top End Dentist	Top End Dentist
Smile designing	-	8,000	1,000*
Metal Free Bridge	-	5,500	500*
Dental Implants	-	3,500	800*
Porcelain Metal Bridge	1,800	3,000	300*
Porcelain Metal Crown	600	1,000	80*
Tooth impactions	500	2,000	100*
Root canal Treatment	600	1,000	100*
Tooth whitening	350	800	110*
Tooth colored composite fillings	200	500	25*
Tooth cleaning	100	300	75*

2. Dental Specialists:-

There are over one lakh dentists nationwide, with nearly 20,000 dentists in the metro cities and over 10,000 dental specialists. The specialists includes orthodontists, periodontists, endodontists, prosthodontists, oral and maxillofacial surgeons, pedodontists and implantologists.⁶

3. Insurance plans in India cover treatments that are not covered in insurance packages outside of India:-

Dental treatment is generally not reimbursed by the National Health Schemes in many countries and hence often not affordable for average citizens.⁶

In USA, dentistry is an exuberant industry with highly qualified dentists, but frightfully expensive. In US, only 50% of the total population has dental insurance. Moreover, individuals with comprehensive medical packages do not have dental coverage. The cost of the dental treatments is also extremely high even if the person has a proper dental insurance. Many dental procedures are not covered by the policy. Majority of the tourists come for dental treatments like implants, rehabilitation procedures and cosmetic dentistry services (which are most of the times not covered by their insurance policy in their country).¹

4. English speaking doctors/ dentists:-

Doctors as well as staff in India are well versed in English. They can communicate effectively with the clients from around the globe. Moreover, the highly skilled dental surgeons receive international exposure which teaches them great interpersonal and communication skills.⁶

5. Large Indian population living outside India choose to come here for treatments:-

Non-resident Indians (NRIs) prefer to get treated by their known dentists back home since they visit often enough to meet the dentist. They play an important role in returning to India for both regular and cosmetic dental procedures.⁶

6. Travelers combine alternative health care with dental treatments:-

The health care industry in India has revolutionized itself and many tourists combine holistic therapy with dental treatments to make complete use of their vacation.⁶

7. Relaxation Centers:-

There are many health spas, relaxation and meditation centers. These offer therapeutic healing to the body, mind and soul so that the tourists can relax, rejuvenate and replenish themselves.⁶

8. Excellent connectivity via air, road and railways:-

In India, over the past decade public transport like the roadways, railways and airways have been highly enhanced and upgraded. This has led to a boom in the inter-state and international transport.⁶

9. Key hubs for dental clinics:-

These include Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Kerala and Goa. ⁶ These places are well connected by all modes of transport including airports. This makes it very comfortable for foreigners

10. No waiting period:-

The main reason for people choosing dental insurances (especially outside their own country) is to cover themselves from any risk to dental health. There is no waiting time involved in India, whereas the waiting period in many countries is so long that it can be annoying to most tolerant people.⁶

11. Stable and favorable political environment favors tourists to visit India:-

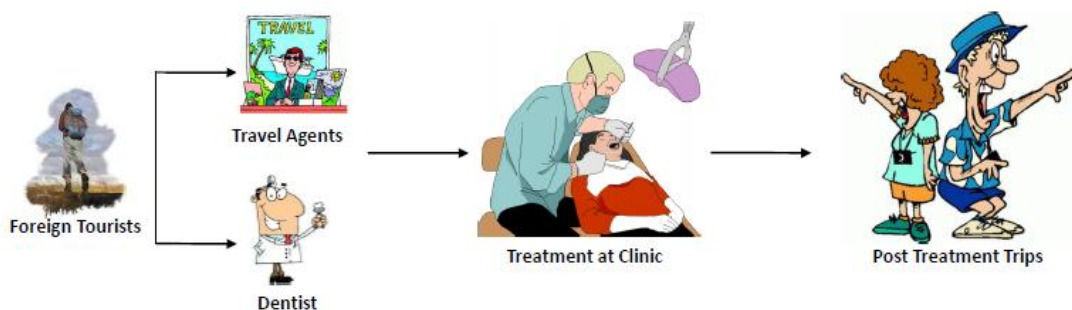
A stable government, suitable political environment and a flexible visa regime all contribute to this growth. The government has made sure there is a standardized education in dental institutions. This has resulted in curbing inferior quacks and creating experts in dentistry.⁶

Time Scale for various Dental Procedures:-

- 1. Implants: In India** two visits to the dentist is required. The first visit is for 10 days and after a span of roughly 4 -5 months. A second visit for 2 weeks duration is required.

2. **Teeth whitening:** The dental specialist will prepare a whitening compound tray which needs to be worn overnight for couple of nights for best results.
3. **Cosmetic filling:** It requires 20 -35 minutes of work and could be done on the spot as an outpatient basis. For the crown capping, a minimum of 1 week stay in India is required.
4. **Bridge work:** The dentist usually needs three visits of 30 to 45 minutes in duration. A minimum of 1 week stay in India is necessary.
5. **Veneers:** It requires a one week plan with a minimum of two visits to the Dentist in India. The first visit requires 1 hour and the second is of 15 -30 minutes duration.
6. **Root canal treatment:** Two visits to the Dentist comprising of 30 minutes each.¹⁰¹

Dental Tourism Process Flow Pictures:-



1. The traveler either contacts tour operators or surgeon directly. The queries are answered and a schedule is fixed.
2. All the documents are arranged by the tour operators. They also facilitate the trip for the travelers.
3. The traveler comes to India and undergoes the treatment.
4. After the treatment, the tour operators schedule the trip and provide all the facilities.
5. The traveler may be required to visit the doctor again as per treatment schedule.
6. The traveler leaves the country and remains in contact with the doctor.¹⁰¹

Dental Treatment and Travel Packages:-

Dental Surgeons directly get in touch with travelers who are looking for treatment in India. The dentist enters into back-to-back tie-up with travel company to provide all kinds of support like visa, tickets, accommodation and holiday packages. The dentist provides all the treatment, whereas all the tourism related services are operated by travel company.¹

Drawbacks of Dental Tourism:-

Dental Tourism involves a series of episodic treatment. Many procedures are compressed into an abbreviated appointments. If patients develop complications it is difficult to return to international clinics for further treatment. All local dentists will not be willing to treat problems and complications pertaining to dental care provided by dentists in another country.⁹

Secondly, the liability issues may discourage some dentists from rectifying substandard procedures. Legal redress approval in instances of negligent care is an important risk related to cross-border dental care. Most dental tourism companies make clients to sign waiver of liability forms. These documents protect dental tourism companies from legal action. The forms state that if the client wishes to take legal action he or she must turn to the courts of the country wherein the dental clinic is located. Some dental tourists are bound to find it costly, impractical or impossible to obtain legal and financial redress after suffering harm while receiving dental care in another country.⁹

Dental treatment is generally not reimbursed by the health schemes of many countries. Patients have to pay through their own pockets if they get treatment privately. Therefore, every year millions of people fly from all over the globe to India to get dental treatment done and have a splendid holiday at the same time.⁴ Dental Tourism in India comes

well within our pocket limits. It is not a new fact that dental treatment in India is found to be ten times cheaper when compared to the hospitals of the West. Moreover with the best skilled dentists at service, even the quality is well guaranteed.² Thus, a growing number of tourists are flocking in large numbers because of the best dental care, equipments and facilities that India offers. India is surely going to be the hub for dental tourism in the near future. Dental tourism in India sure gives a lot more than just great teeth indeed!

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