

# Sustainability of Medical Value Tourism by Governmental Initiatives in India

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**Abstract:** The world is going through unprecedented changes. The pandemic has left its mark, signaling the need for changes in business operations. In an era when people understand the value of health, new ideas about its accessibility and sustainability are being celebrated. Good health and well-being, also known as SDG 3, is a fundamental goal that can impact many other SDGs. This is where Medical Value Tourism (MVT) could become the new normal. MVT, a fusion of the health and tourism industries, provides numerous opportunities to address the global health crisis and provide affordable healthcare to the poor. India is emerging as a leader in the medical value tourism sector. India is positioned for success due to centuries of traditional wisdom and medicine, outstanding medical staff and physicians, world-class technology, cost comparability, and landscapes. Beyond just a profitable service business, this burgeoning industry's new demands include ensuring sustainability in management and practices. Sustainable development is currently at the forefront, and the government's 'Heal in India' initiative, among many others, has the potential to double efforts and capacity towards these goals. This paper attempts to comprehend the double-edged role that medical value tourism plays in helping India achieve its SDG goals. Because of the sector's growing popularity and impact on sustainability, this paper examines government initiatives and their implications over the last 18 years. The study reveals the sector's critical role in achieving the SDGs and the Indian government's growing interest in a private sector-dominated business model. The paper focuses on the vital role that the government and MVT stakeholders play in promoting the Indian brand worldwide. Medical Value Tourism has the potential to provide a sustainable solution to the daunting question of global health. The findings can help the government and MVT stakeholders plan and implement future sustainable strategies. Findings can help the government and MVT stakeholders plan and implement future strategies that focus on sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Medical Value Tourism (MVT), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Government Strategies, SDG 3, Global Healthcare, Health System, and Tourism.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Medical value tourism (MVT) is one of the fastest-growing sectors, and India has established itself as a leading player in the fusion industry of medical value tourism. This lucrative by-product of the tourism and healthcare industries is rapidly expanding, thanks to the country's infrastructure for human resources, cost efficiency, and quality care. The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda prioritizes equitable health access for all, making MVT an opportunity for long-term development. Although private players dominate the sector, government counterparts have contributed significantly to increased patient footfall. The growing credibility of the sector and the visualization of opportunities for SDG achievement has increased government intervention in the country, both at the state and national levels. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Tourism, and various other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as other players, collaborate to create a thriving MVT ecosystem. Over the years, the Indian government has implemented numerous schemes and drives at the international, national, and state levels to capitalize on the 'business of services'. The recent 'Heal by India' and 'Heal in India' campaigns launched by the PM Samagra Swasthya Yojwera aimed to bolster the growing demand for equitable, accessible, and affordable healthcare for all. The new programme will provide seamless travel, transport, boarding, and other services. In this context, governments can be facilitators with a vision to achieve economic prosperity through the trickle-down effect, or regulators, setting standards and policies, or finally, providers of services to patients of foreign governments (Ormond, 2015). Social determinants of health (SDH), such as poverty, education, hunger, and sanitation, form an impact network, and thus Medical Value Tourism must be addressed not only as a profitable business but also as a means to achieve the SDG Agenda 2030.

The analysis of India's position in the global medical value tourism (MVT) sector reveals that the country is a prominent leader in both value and volume. Initiatives like 'Incredible India', the Global Ayurveda Institutes of International Standards (GAIIS), and the World Health Organization Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO GCTM) have successfully attracted global attention and foreign direct investment, bolstered entrepreneurial growth and fostered a coordinated start-up ecosystem within MVT. The Medical Development Agency (MDA) along with various subsidies, financial incentives, and the creation of special zones, have further catalyzed the sector's development. Bibliographical impact analysis indicates a robust growth rate over time and underscores the positive effects of MVT on the nation's healthcare system. Government involvement through stringent regulations and standards ensures equitable access to healthcare for all citizens

## LITERATURE

Host country governments see medical tourism as an ideal economic growth accelerator and participate in various flagship programs; however, source country governments avoid facilitating out-bond patients because it may jeopardize their health system and increase the risk of bringing back foreign infections or long-term liabilities to the native countries. According to Ormond, M., and Mainil, T. (2015), government regulators require oversight rather than micromanagement. The

government's role as a provider has resulted in patient referral agreements and reimbursement for treatment costs.

India views medical tourism as an economic activity, and it provides world-class treatments and facilities to its foreign patients, resulting in a prominent position in the global rankings. On the other hand, there is a growing disparity in equitable healthcare access for millions of domestic poor people. Licensing and regulations may limit free market interactions, whereas appropriate intervention may increase accountability and transparency in the industry. Government initiatives such as visa facilitation, cost reduction, and international campaigns have increased patient attendance.

Labonte et al. (2018) investigates the regulatory gap caused by the Guatemalan government's lack of interest in medical tourism. The purpose of regulation is to serve stakeholders. International trade regimes can enact legislation that will help national governments achieve higher standards in healthcare regulation. Tourism has a significant impact on the SDG agenda. Tourism should be viewed through a well-being lens because its fulfilment stems from the foundations of well-being, supplemented by its ability to achieve goals. The 'Better Life' framework includes measures beyond the standard indicators for evaluating tourism impact.

The literature reveals a scarcity of studies on the Indian perspective of government initiatives and sustainability in the medical value tourism sector. Understanding the potential for MVT growth and its implications for the SDGs can lead to increased sustainable cooperation and constraint minimization. With India aiming to become a global hub for medical tourism, the various government strategies in the sector and the consequences of these strategies must be investigated. The FICCI defines medical tourism as "activities related to travel and hosting a foreign tourist who stays at least one night in the destination region to maintain, improve, or retain health through medical intervention. The recent shift from medical tourism to 'Medical Value Tourism' could be attributed to the circular flow of value, which results in a patient's travel behaviour seeking medical value and economic value to the host country.

Scholars and practitioners agree on the economic benefits that medical tourism could provide to the country. The twin factors of foreign exchange and employment opportunities necessitate the implementation of schemes to seize opportunities (Singh, 2016). International travel has made medical aid more accessible and affordable, which helps to reduce economic disparities between regions of the world (Kapoor, S., 2021). According to Kapoor, India's culture, heritage, traditional knowledge, scenic beauty, and aesthetic pleasures combine to make it an ideal destination for medical tourism. Cost, human resources, and technology are all areas for improvement. Cleanliness, hygiene infrastructure, and even sustainability practices may influence travellers' destination preferences.

Darwazeh, Clarke, and Wilson (2021) discovered that sustainability is critical and that management of sustainable practices is essential in understanding the factors that drive patients to choose destinations or facilities. Sustainability is a complex concept that encompasses many different aspects. While most facilities focus on sustainable practices, the term gets lost in the shuffle, and environmental considerations are overlooked. Their research also highlights the advantages of stakeholder collaboration in leveraging sustainability from all angles.

Despite the glories of the bright side, the dark side of medical value tourism seems to co-exist. Healthcare access to the local poor has seen a decline in regions where MVT is growing, and though a contributing factor to GDP, poor quality of healthcare for local citizens sets a deep dent in the motives of the SDGs. Joseph, S. (2018) highlights several elements, including increased brain drain, commercialization of services, and environmental taxation.

Medical tourism has three broad impacts: social, environmental, and economic. On the social front, the medical tourism ecosystem has many stakeholders. The general public is one such stakeholder, and medical tourism is expected to improve healthcare access, but studies show that this is not always the case. The disparities in affordable healthcare access must be addressed. The economic impact is to generate foreign exchange and revenue, which are then distributed throughout society via a trickle-down effect. Proper financial and resource management is required to benefit society as a whole. Finally, environmental impact acknowledges that medical tourism exploits natural resources, which can lead to depletion using sustainability needs to be a priority.

The impact of tourism development on the SDGs will be examined on a broader scale. The framework presented includes tourism's contribution to SDGs, followed by its contribution to well-being. Focusing on one goal can have many unintended consequences for other goals, including reduced well-being. Direct government intervention in medical tourism policies and regulations can help achieve equitable access to healthcare (SDG 3) for both foreign and domestic tourists. However, previous research has shown that enhanced medical tourism does not benefit residents. Thus, strategies initiated to alleviate one aspect, healthcare infrastructure and medical tourism, can adversely impact another aspect of the standard of living and rural development. In a utopian sense, MVT can promote economic development by increasing job creation and foreign exchange earnings, but it raises the issue of trade-offs in goal achievement. This is the essence of sustainable development, encompassing current and future well-being (OECD, 2020).

## **METHOD**

Kerala, with its 37,000 sq.km of diverse attractions, faced significant negative impacts due to the increased number of visitors. Environmental degradation, such as beach erosion, waste management issues, and pressure on local water resources, became more pronounced. The social and cultural dimensions also saw notable effects, with tourism-induced changes impacting traditional ways of life. Social tensions arose, particularly concerning land disputes between local communities and developers seeking to capitalize on tourism opportunities. Traditional villages experienced shifts in customs and lifestyles, highlighting the broader social impacts of tourism. These issues underscore the need for sustainable tourism practices that balance economic benefits with preserving Kerala's social and cultural fabric. Focusing on sustainable development and careful management of tourism growth will be crucial to ensuring that the sector continues to benefit the region and its stakeholders while mitigating adverse effects. The combination of health and tourism opens up vast opportunities for achieving the SDGs. The study can help assess the role of MVT in the UN SDG 2030 Agenda and provide insight into various Indian government initiatives and their impact. The study's goals include renewed cooperation and collaboration between public and private parties and a new perspective on the health system and tourism in light of the SDGs. The paper can assist MVT facilitators, other industry stakeholders, and government bodies in understanding the current impacts of policies and future policy-making opportunities. The present


study explores the role of medical value tourism in India in relation to sustainable development goals. It investigates the Government of India's initiatives and strategies for promoting medical value tourism. This study employs a descriptive research approach, drawing on secondary data from government and non-governmental reports, as well as various websites, articles, and magazines, to understand the sector's impact on the SDGs, government initiatives, and the MVT sector.

### ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION


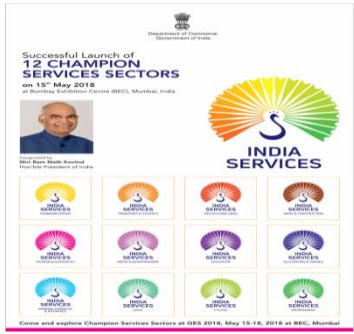
The analysis is based on observation and compilation of data from secondary sources over 18 years. The data are presented in pictorial notation, and press release images from the government and other sources are presented for comprehension.

Scheme Wise Analysis: H0: There is a practical approach to developing new initiatives for developing medical value tourism over time.

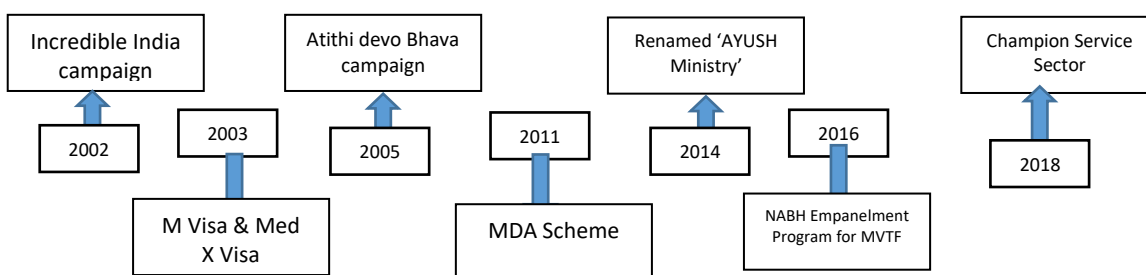
### Government Initiatives and Strategies Supporting the Medical Value Tourism Sector

YEAR	INITIATIVE/PROGRAMME	FEATURES
2002 - till date	Incredible India Campaign (Ministry of Tourism)  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign by GOI to promote tourism in the country.</li> <li>• Yoga, Ayurveda, and wellness are heavily promoted through the "Incredible India Campaign.".</li> <li>• The CII published a guide for select Indian hospitals for medical tourism, promoting them on the Tourism Ministry's website (<a href="http://www.incredibleindia.org">www.incredibleindia.org</a>).</li> <li>• To meet the needs of the modern era, the 'Incredible India Mobile App' was launched in 2018, and wellness is a prominent feature.</li> </ul>
2003	<b>M Visa</b> or Indian Visa and e-Visa for patients  <b>Med X Visa or Indian e-Visa for medical attendants.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-Medical Visas were introduced for 166 countries</li> <li>• Triple entry visa with a one-year validity period. Priority ailments include heart problems, neurosurgery, organ transplants, renal disorders, and so on.</li> <li>• Registration with FRRO/FRRO within 14 days of arrival.</li> <li>• Nurses, family members, and assistants can accompany travelling patients with a Med X Visa.</li> <li>• Valid for up to 60 days. There is a maximum of two attendees.</li> </ul>
2005	“Atithidevo Bhava” Campaign (Guests are like God)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim to raise awareness among the local population about the</li> </ul>

	(by Ministry of Tourism)	<p>importance of preserving Indian culture, heritage, and hospitality and instill a sense of responsibility towards tourists.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflected on international patient treatment and accommodation in niche segments ( medical tourism)</li> </ul>
2011	Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The Tourism Ministry offers Market Development Assistance (MDA) to wellness service providers.</b></li> <li>Financial assistance to authorized tourism service providers. This includes providing support for workshops, events, promotional shows, using the Incredible India logo, and training programs to improve human resources.</li> <li>The scheme aims to increase tourist traffic from overseas markets by motivating stakeholders to boost the Incredible India brand and thus augment tourist arrivals.</li> </ul>
2014	Renamed 'AYUSH' Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department of Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy, established in 1995, was renamed the Department of AYUSH in 2003 and then the AYUSH Ministry in 2014.</li> <li>The goal is to revive ancient knowledge of traditional medicines and provide AYUSH-related healthcare services. Encourages start-up culture and established the All India Institute of Ayurveda.</li> </ul>
2016	National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulated and held the first meeting in 2016</li> <li>The board's efforts range from "illness to wellness."</li> <li>Develop strategies addressing quality accreditation, medical insurance, and marketing.</li> <li>collaboration among stakeholders</li> </ul>
2016	The NABH Empanelment Programme for MVT Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NABH is a constituent board of the Quality Council of India that accredits hospitals and other clinical institutions.</li> <li>A certificate of approval or</li> </ul>

		assurance for the quality of services a health institute provides.
2018	<p>Champion Service Sector (CSSS) Scheme.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The government allocated Rs. 5000 crores to 12 Champion Service Sectors, including Medical Value Tourism.</li> <li>The goals are to promote growth by emphasising gross value addition (GVA) in the sectors.</li> <li>Increased job and export opportunities around the world.</li> </ul>

**Timeline of Government Initiative In the Medical Value Tourism Sector**



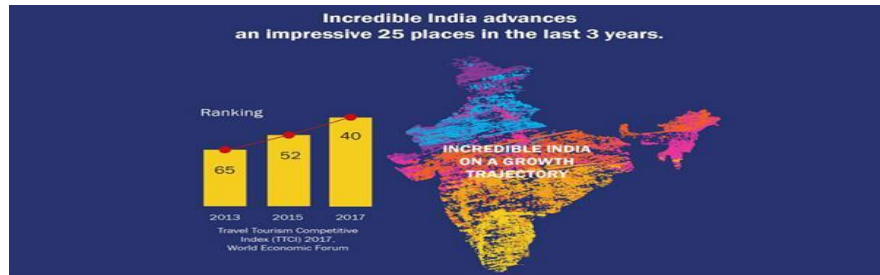
*Pictorial representation of the 'timeline' of the different strategies introduced by the government in medical value tourism over the years. (Source: Study of Investigator)*

**Bibliographical Analysis:** H0: There have been positive Impacts in Medical Value Tourism in the last Twenty years based on Government of India Initiatives

**Incredible India campaign**

Rishi, B. et al. (2013) conducted a study titled "Multi-attribute Attitude Measurement of Incredible India Campaign," in which foreign attitudes towards medical tourism were rated 3.70, and traditional medicine, Ayurveda, Yoga, and others rated 4.07. The campaign was a huge success, with a 16% increase in tourist flow. India currently ranks tenth in terms of MTI. The country's TTCI ranking has improved dramatically, thanks to the 'Incredible India campaign'. According to the World Economic Forum, India is now ranked 54th, down from 46th in 2019, but remains a top performer in South Asia. The Incredible India Mobile App, created in collaboration with Tech Mahindra, opens new avenues for travel comfort and a tech-driven tourism experience. The user-friendly app displays information on approved tour or transportation operators, regional guides, and more. The "mother brand," created nearly 18 years ago, successfully emphasized India's diverse

strengths. The first year saw a 16% increase in traveller traffic to the country, followed by a 200% increase in 2014.

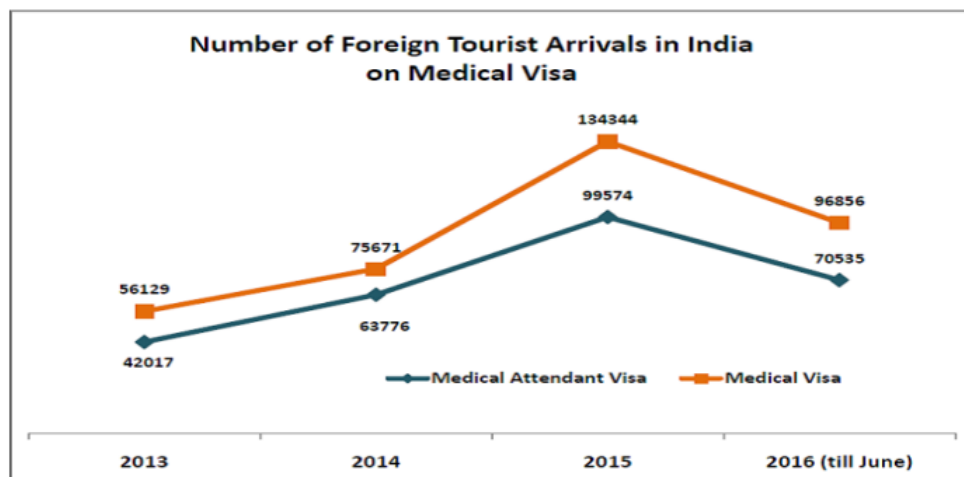


(Source: <https://www.mbarendezvous.com>)

The above image is based on the World Economic Forum's Travel Tourism Competition Index, which shows India's rising rank over time. India was ranked 65th in 2013 and moved up to 40th in 2017.

### Medical visa and Med X Visa

Since the issuance of medical visas, there has been a significant increase in medical tourist arrivals, rising from 1.22 lakhs in 2015 to nearly 1.78 lakhs in 2016. The Indian consulates in foreign countries report increased inquiries about the M Visa, indicating its growing popularity. The regulations still make it difficult for some travellers who would instead visit on a regular visa. This is yet another issue to be addressed.



According to Factly data, the FTA on medical visas has increased by 140%, with Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Nigeria accounting for two-thirds of all tourists. (source: factly.in)

### The 'Athithi Devo Bhava' campaign

The campaign aimed to change stakeholders' or the host community's attitudes towards tourists. The impact can make or break the overall visitor experience, recall, and loyalty. Using media and various communication programs, the campaign emphasized the importance of cordiality. Government reports measuring the effectiveness of the programme were conducted on three bases.

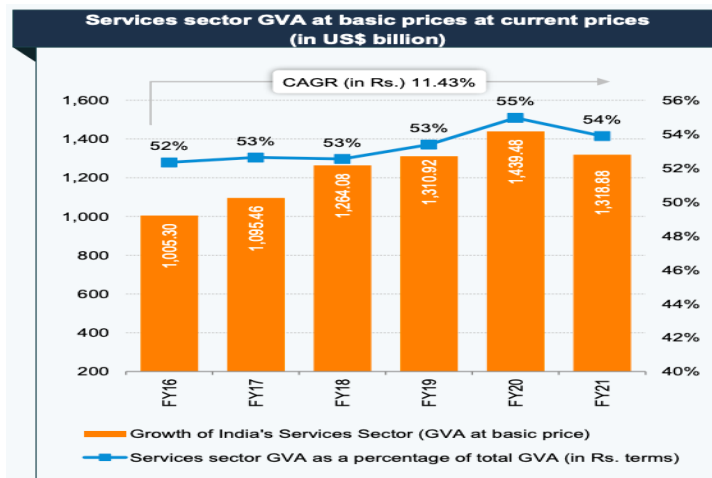
Items	Percentage of respondents
Awareness about issue before the campaign	77.6%
Persuaded to think deeper about issue	73.9%
Invoked interest to discuss the issue with others	55.4%

(Source: IITM report, 2011)

According to the report, there was a greater need to think deeply in regions with no prior exposure to the issue. Tourism service providers were most interested in discussing the issue with others. The study shows that the campaign positively impacted 89.2% of respondents, and 92.4% of tourism service providers said they would educate others. Other positive effects included



empowerment to stop harassment (48.7%) or report it to authorities (28%). Other study findings revealed that stakeholders have a better attitude towards tourism and are more aware of tourist mistreatment. The overall impact was described as satisfactory in the northern regions.



(Source: Evaluation of social awareness campaign for good behaviour towards tourists, IITM, submitted to MoT)

### Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme

The assistance scheme was designed to provide financial relief to accredited tourism providers at JCI or NABH-accredited hospitals. In 2018, the guidelines were revised to allow for greater inclusion and support. The revised guidelines include: Publicity and promotional materials are funded at 50%. Financial assistance is needed to organize workshops/seminars/events promoting wellness and medical tourism, with half of the participants being non-Indian. Assistance for exhibits, including suppliers and buyers of wellness and medical tourism, with 75 or more non-Indian participants. Training and certified skill development courses in medical tourism.

According to government reports, the success of MDA is yet to be determined, but the growing sector demonstrates its positive impact. In states such as Uttarakhand and Kerala, national-level MDA has played a significant role in the exponential growth of service sectors, particularly MVT.

### NABH Accreditation for Hospitals and Clinical Establishments

The findings established a standard for hospitals and similar facilities, assisting patients in ensuring safety and accountability. CEOs have reported increased awareness of statutory compliance, improved staff response to emergencies, enhanced facility management, and improved overall patient care quality (Thomas, A. et al., 2017). The prospect of receiving financial assistance from Medicare, reputation, and even legal compulsions have pushed hospitals nationwide to obtain NABH accreditation. Hospitals in the country are NABH Accredited, and 39 JCI accredited.

### Champion Service Sector Scheme (CSSS)

Medical Value Tourism was named one of the 12 leading service sectors, alongside IT, IT, communication, transportation, and others. The respective ministries are responsible for development over specific periods and regulating growth with the funds granted. The government was forced to look into the labour-intensive service sector due to the shortfall in the manufacturing sector's ability to keep up. CSSS's expanded global partnerships and technological interventions increased human resource presence in the value chain network at higher skill levels. This raises the

need for vocational training and access to technical skill development, which could lead to increased exports and the breakdown of stringent regulations.

The Ministry of Tourism spent ₹38.14 crores in 2021, while the Ministry of AYUSH earned ₹10.59 crores through sectoral schemes. Plans are being made to build AYUSH hospitals and education and skill development programs. Key service sectors include tourism, IT-BPM, port and shipping, and space. The tourism industry saw increased earnings and job creation. Visa relaxations increased tourist footfall by 21 % year over year.

## RESULT

The analysis reveals that India has established itself as a global leader in medical value tourism (MVT) in terms of value and volume. Government initiatives like 'Incredible India', GAIIS, and WHO GCTM have significantly contributed to attracting global attention and foreign direct investment. These projects have promoted entrepreneurial growth and fostered a coordinated start-up ecosystem within the MVT sector. The development of special zones, financial incentives, and subsidies further support the growth of this sector, making it an integral part of India's healthcare and tourism industries. The bibliographical impact analysis indicates a steady growth rate over time, emphasizing the positive effect of MVT on the country's healthcare system by improving standards, accessibility, and infrastructure.

Government intervention has been pivotal in ensuring equitable access to healthcare through stringent regulations, litigation, and standards. The collaborative efforts of various ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of AYUSH, alongside private stakeholders, hospitals, and other ecosystem players, aim to create a sustainable MVT sector. This collective approach ensures that the sector benefits not only current stakeholders but also future generations. The anticipated growth, with projections indicating a revenue generation of \$13 billion by 2026, underscores the sector's potential to contribute significantly to India's economy. Technological advancements, growing patient needs, and an ageing population are key drivers that will continue to shape the industry's future.

Moreover, the pandemic has heightened health consciousness globally, positioning India as a preferred destination for medical solutions. The sector's expansive nature, encompassing not just hospitals and clinics but also facilitators like travel agents, insurance providers, and hospitality services, highlights its capacity for widespread job creation and rural development through a trickle-down effect. Concentrated strategies, continuous follow-up, and enhanced opportunities for entrepreneurship and financial support will be crucial in ensuring the sector's growth. Sustainable hospital practices, traditional affordable medical care, and education and training initiatives are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Finance Ministry's recent acknowledgement of India's transformation from a 'pharma hub' to a 'medical tourism hub' underscores the sector's evolving significance and potential to sustain economic and social advancements.

## CONCLUSION

India's medical value tourism market is expected to reach \$13 billion by 2026. The industry's prospects are bright due to increased job creation, revenue, and forex inflow. After the pandemic, India benefits from a vantage point as the world turns to the East for health and wellness needs. The country has evolved from a pharmaceutical hub to a central medical hub. India has an advantage in cost, human resources, technology, research and development, culture, and linguistics. In terms of sustainability, medical tourism is a game changer. MVT necessitates a robust healthcare system that can benefit the general public and foreign patients; numerous PPPs serve as evidence. This helps the country achieve other goals such as education, infrastructure, and patient satisfaction. However, stakeholders should not be so naive as to ignore its negative impact on the local community and environment. More studies that take a well-being perspective must be conducted, with regular government intervention. PPP and stakeholder collaboration have the potential to create new opportunities in this sector. Crystal gazing into the future, medical value Tourism has the potential to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. The future lies in the global recognition and achievement of SDG goals. MVT is a stepping stone to this reality.

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