

Health Tourism and Grey Tourism: A Virgin Opportunity for Economical growth of Nepal

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Key words: Grey tourism; Health tourism; Medical tourism; Wellness tourism

INTRODUCTION

Health tourism has emerged as a growing fashion worldwide in last few decades. It is driven by the longing to travel to other countries to improve/maintain their health while experiencing the indigenous, cultural and tourist attractions of destinations.

Health tourism can be defined as traveling to foreign countries for no less than a day and no more than a year to get the treatment they need to get better [1]. According to Magablih (2001), health tourism is the movement of a patient, with the purpose of getting services that help in recovering his ailment, or at least in stabilizing his medical case, outside his own country for a period of time not less than 24 hours and up to 1 year, each time, and the patient has no intent to work or reside permanently [2].

Available Literatures¹⁻⁴ shows two major branches of Health tourism viz. medical tourism and wellness tourism. Medical tourism involves traveling to foreign countries to seek modern medical treatments and procedures, including elective surgeries, dental treatments, cosmetic

surgeries, transplant and specialized surgeries like cardiac surgery and orthopedic therapy [3].

Wellness tourism, on the other hand, focuses on holistic health practices such as yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, and the use of local herbs. This branch emphasizes positive human functioning and preventive care rather than treating illness [2-4]. Nepal is doing well in wellness tourism but has lot of possibilities in health and grey tourism [3-4].

Potential and need for medical tourism in Nepal

The global health tourism market is expected to reach USD 207.9 billion by 2028, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.1% from 2021 to 2028, highlighting the significant opportunity for destinations like Nepal to capture a portion of this market [5]. Nepal can develop its remote but natural and panoramic places through medical tourism [6].

The escalating cost of healthcare in developed countries, coupled with long waiting periods for medical treatments and the increasing availability of high-quality healthcare services at competitive prices in developing nations, are major factors driving this industry [7].

Nepal's climate and natural beauty along with proper human resource is very suitable for attracting such business. But we have to work on infrastructure and we have to have political stability too.

Nepal as an economical treatment destination: For the amount that patient from first world countries like Japan or Europe spends in their home country, it can be more cost-effective for them to travel here with their entire family. People can come Nepal for treatment in order to save cost. Here, medical checkup, diagnosis, lab facilities, indoor service, surgery and follow up is possible in very low cost compared to developed countries. However, we need to establish the proper infrastructure to support this. It's a promising concept, and India, Malaysia, Thailand has established themselves as destination country and even Bangladesh has begun to take advantage of it. It's a high time we have to work on it.

Naturopathy: Nepal is also famous for natural method of treatment. Naturopathy means natural method for treating diseases. Natural method includes exercise, yoga, reiki, Meditation, physiotherapy and different other methods and activities. Medicines have no or minor role in naturopathy. Since chances of side effect and reoccurring is very less it is believed as long lasting and safe cure and is being popular. So, day by day this method users are increasing rapidly in Nepal. Well qualified doctors, assistances, technicians and equipped hospitals, arogya ashrams and care centers are available in Nepal.

Service from Qualified Health workers: Qualified doctors who have completed their master & doctorate degrees from reputed universities in Nepal, India, China, Korea, Japan, Russia, UK, USA, etc with several Years working successful experiences are available in Nepal for no waiting in queue, qualified and experienced technicians, nurses assist the doctors. Treatment for all age groups and climate inhabitant is possible. Attentive nursing care with regular visit of doctors is done in indoor. Medical personnel

are capable of well counseling to the patients. Hospital environment is neat, clean & cozy.

No language problem: Helpful and attentive medical professionals with good command in English language are available who can provide excellent service and care.

Other services: For people as a tourist who stay in Nepal, Nepal government is well concerned and aware for safety and the country is very safe for the tourists. Visa extension facility is very easy and prompt by related Embassy in Nepal. Transportation, hygienic lodging, fooding is well available in every place. Still lots has to be done.

Brain drain of medical professionals can be minimized. Due to less employment opportunities for doctors and paramedics, differences in salary, fewer opportunities for professional development, political instability, corruption, fear of placement in remote areas, lack of workplace security Brain drain of medical professionals is increasing day by day [8]. Through Health and wellness tourism, next big employment opportunities can be created and brain drain of medical/paramedical professionals can be minimized.

GREY TOURISM

When medical tourism and wellness tourism is for old aged people, we can call it Grey tourism. World tourism has transformed from traditional tourism towards sustainable tourism which gives rights to all regardless physical condition and age to travel. Grey tourism is the term used to refer to the senior market [4].

NEPAL CAN BE HUB FOR GREY TOURISM

Nepalese are widely recognized for their hospitality and care for their guest. They believe in 'Atithi Devo bhava'. Guests are Gods, so they treat their guests like god and make them happy with all their efforts.

Nepalese Sanskar (cultural heritage) for treating elders and old people is very unique. They treat any elderly people as their parents with lots of love, care and respects. So any visitors who

had visited Nepal once in their life would like to spend their old age in Nepal with Nepalese people, especially in rural area and semi urban area. All these facts along with the low cost of living in any parts of Nepal especially in rural and semi-urban area is enough for the development of Grey tourism in Nepal. If Ministry of Health along with tourism Board Work together in a strategic way, definitely Nepal can be hub for Grey tourism.

The tourism ministry of Nepal launched the tourism strategy 2016-2025 and includes health tourism to attract foreign tourists by promoting meditation, yoga Ayurveda and medical treatment [2,9]. And many private health tourism providers offering their services to foreign health tourist with-out any government policy and government involvement.

Nepal tourism board control and regulate the demand and supply and handle the development and promotion activities globally, but there is no regulating body for health tourism. Both the health and tourism ministry should address the strategic initiatives required to overcome challenges in infrastructure development, marketing strategies, and quality assurance for the development of health and Grey tourism.

Further research is essential to identify the specific strategies and investments required to enhance healthcare facilities and transportation networks, as well as to develop effective marketing campaigns for both Health and Grey tourism aimed at international tourists. Additionally, maintaining consistent quality and safety standards in both traditional and modern healthcare services is vital for fostering trust among health tourists. By addressing these gaps, we can provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners looking to leverage health tourism for economic development.

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