

**A STUDY ON AYURVEDIC MEDICAL TOURISM IN KERALA****N. Venugopal<sup>1</sup> and M. Somasundaram<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Commerce, Annamalai University, Tamilnadu<sup>1</sup>venugopalneenu@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

*Ayurveda is a comprehensive system of massages and body treatments that provide relief from a wide range of illnesses, from migraine to sinus and arthritis to paralysis, by detoxifying and cleaning the body through controlled emesis, purgation, and making the individual sweat; and this makes the body receptive to further treatment. Because of the state's practically year-round humid atmosphere, these medicines are more successful in Kerala. The objective of the study is to find out the factors that drive ayurvedic medical tourism in Kerala and to identify the problems faced by medical tourists in Kerala. For the study four well known ayurvedic medical centres were considered. The data were analysed using the convenient sampling method. Percentage and Mean Deviation are used to analyse the collected data. The findings of the study was that the majority of the foreign tourists are satisfied with the services provided by the ayurvedic medical centres. But still have some areas where improvement is needed to make the medical tourism more efficient and thereby earn more foreign investment and earnings.*

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, Medical Tourism, Level of Satisfaction, Ayurvedic Centres

**Introduction**

Kerala - This captivating state in India's south has geological traits that are both distinctive and rich. This state is also the only area in India where Ayurveda is practiced in its purest form. Ayurveda is a historic Indian medical system that has delivered real health, happiness, and well-being to millions of people throughout the millennia. This ancient healing skill has been practiced for over 5000 years and was also the primary medication in ancient times. It is the only medical discipline in the world that is beneficial even when one is not unwell, derived from its ancient Sanskrit origins – "ayus" (life) and "ved" (knowledge) – and offers a rich, complete view on a healthy existence. Ayurveda is a complete health science that is applicable at all stages of life, beginning with birth, neonates, infants, childhood, youth, old age, and even life before and after death. Many people associate Ayurveda with the use of herbal remedies and a traditional method of treatment. In truth, Ayurveda is a considerably more serious medical discipline that places a significant emphasis on illness diagnosis, examination, analysis, food, therapeutic characteristics, dosage, frequency of administration, and medium of administration. In Ayurveda, Medicare is divided into two parts: health maintenance and illness prevention, and diseases and their treatment. Ayurveda uses a completely different approach to disease

treatment known as "Panchakarma," which literally means "Five Therapies," which are subtly harmonising purification procedures that dissolve metabolic waste products and toxins generated by environmental ill effects from the tissues and eliminate them from the body in a gentle and effective manner. This therapy is recommended for both the sick and the healthy. Kerala, the state nearly usually associated with the term "Ayurveda," is now poised to reap the benefits of Ayurveda through health tourism. This is because Ayurvedic therapies are popular, and Kerala markets Ayurveda in medical tourism. Ayurveda was first promoted in health tourism in 1994, and the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) established Ayurvedic health centres at its luxury properties such as Hotel Samudra in Kovalam about the same time. KTDC has partnered with the most reputable Ayurvedic treatment providers, ensuring that the physicians' authority and the quality of the medications utilised are not compromised. While all hotels and resorts in Kerala have begun to include Ayurveda in their offerings, there are certain resorts that are solely dedicated to Ayurvedic treatments.

**The benefits of Ayurveda are many:**

- Ayurvedic approach to sickness is comprehensive, a person's physical, mental, and psychic ailments will improve following an Ayurvedic therapy.

- The substances used in Ayurvedic medicines are generally sourced from herbs, plants, flowers, fruits, and so on, making it a natural therapy.
- Ayurvedic medication has virtually no negative effects.
- Ayurveda has been shown to be a successful treatment for a variety of chronic conditions.
- An Ayurvedic therapy can bring about wellbeing throughout the body and will last longer than Allopathic treatment.
- Ayurveda not only aids in the treatment of ailments, but also in their prevention.
- Ayurveda provides suggestions for illness prevention via easy dietary and lifestyle changes.
- Ayurvedic medicines are also good to healthy people since they are rejuvenating in nature and aid in the nourishment of the body as well as the enhancement of mental capacity.
- Ayurvedic therapy and drugs are less expensive than other medical systems.
- For mild disorders, Ayurveda advises widely available herbs and spices.
- Ayurvedic remedies can provide stress alleviation and physical rejuvenation.

### Review of Literature

The goal of this study, according to Cham et al. (2020), is to look at the characteristics that influence Malaysia as a medical tourism destination among Chinese medical tourists. To test the hypothesis correlations, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 600 respondents. The data was examined using AMOS and SPSS and a structural equation modelling technique.

Medhekar et al. (2019) focused on the demand-side factors that influence the decision of inbound medical tourists (MTs) to travel overseas for medical treatment or surgery. The researchers used thematic analysis to extract themes from in-depth interviews with 24 foreign MTs in India, identify factors, and suggest a model with hypotheses for a future quantitative survey. Patients ranked less waiting time for surgery, healthcare quality and accreditation, staff/surgeon expertise, healthcare information, hospital facilities and

services, patient safety, travel risk, surgical costs, and holiday opportunity as important factors that influence the decision to travel abroad for medical treatment/surgery in ascending order, according to the findings.

Ahmed, G., et al. 2018 study the global trends in medical tourism as a fast-moving trade. In order to collect the primary data for this study a structured questionnaire was used. The target population for the study was the medical customers who have visited outside UAE for any medical service or treatment. The statistical tools deployed are, chi-square, ANOVA, regression and factor analysis for a view of 'association of variables and strengths' of the 15 determinant factors in medical tourism decision making. Our final analyses show the relative affluence of the Emiratis which makes the people take a medical journey to other nations guided by cost, quality and time factors. The study, also, shows that quality of services, quality of care, qualified and experienced doctors/specialist, advanced technology, and world class facilities were considered the most while making the decision for travelling overseas for medical services.

Ajmera. P (2017) made an effort to prioritize the strategies for the Indian medical tourism sector so that the policy makers can practice this ranking for their strategic decision-making process and can apportion their resources in the best possible manner. In this research, five managers of the international wings of three hospitals of Delhi NCR were invited to review the strategies. There were 35 evaluation criteria in this research framework that include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Indian medical tourism sector. The managers of the hospitals where the study was conducted confirmed that the internal and external factors are covered appropriately by the proposed framework, and the strategies based on these factors, accurately represented the environment influencing the Indian medical tourism sector.

### Objectives of the study

- To find out the factors that drive Medical Tourism in Kerala
- Identify the problems faced by Medical Tourists in Kerala.

**Methodology**

The study is done by using both primary and secondary data. Primary data was acquired using a well-structured questionnaire from 160 tourists from chosen medical tourism healthcentres in four tourist destinations in Kerala: Kovalam, Palakkad, Kollam and Kottayam. Secondary information was gathered from journals, magazines, books, and government official websites., etc. The sample was chosen using the convenient sampling

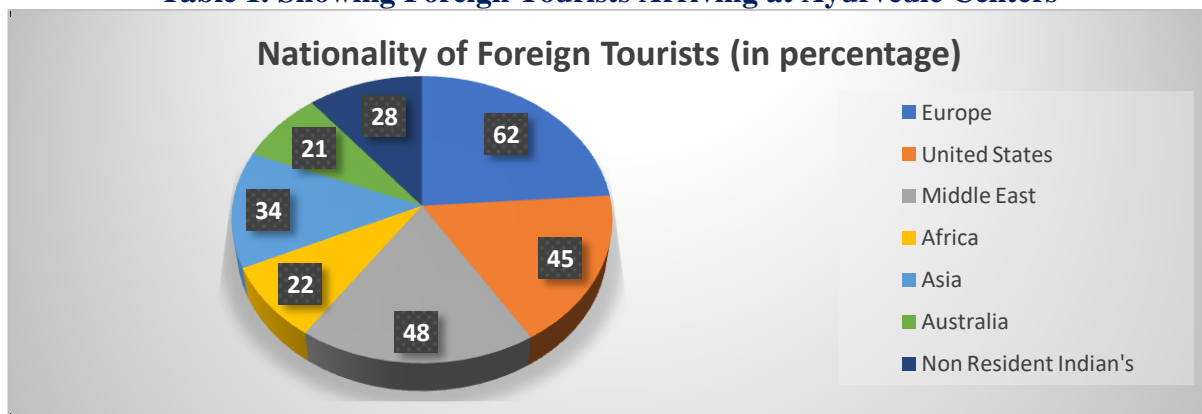
method. Percentage and Mean Deviation are used to analyse the collected data.

**Results and Discussions**

**1. Nationality of Foreign Tourists Staying at Ayurvedic Centers**

Consumers of Ayurveda tourism are diversified, and the number of international visitors visiting Kerala grows year after year. Tourists are mostly attracted towards the state's rapidly dwindling herbal resources and its healing way.

**Table 1. Showing Foreign Tourists Arriving at Ayurvedic Centers**



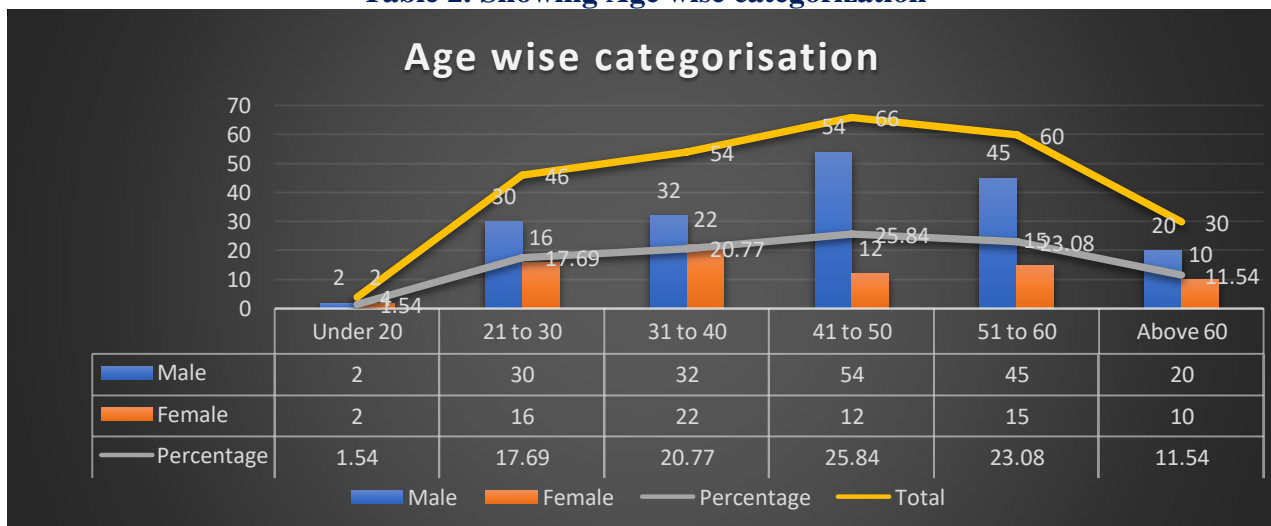
Source: Primary data

**Inference:** From the table it is found that 62 percent of tourists are coming from Europe followed by Middle East 48 percent and United States 45 percent. 34 percent tourists are coming from Asia and 28 percent from Non Resident Indians. Only 22 and 21 percent tourists are coming from Africa and Australia.

**2. Age distribution**

While considering the tourists' age, the entire age category are coming for the medical treatments. Apart from the curing of illness ayurveda is the only medical treatment which rejuvenating the mind and body of the human beings.

**Table 2. Showing Age wise categorization**



Source: Primary data

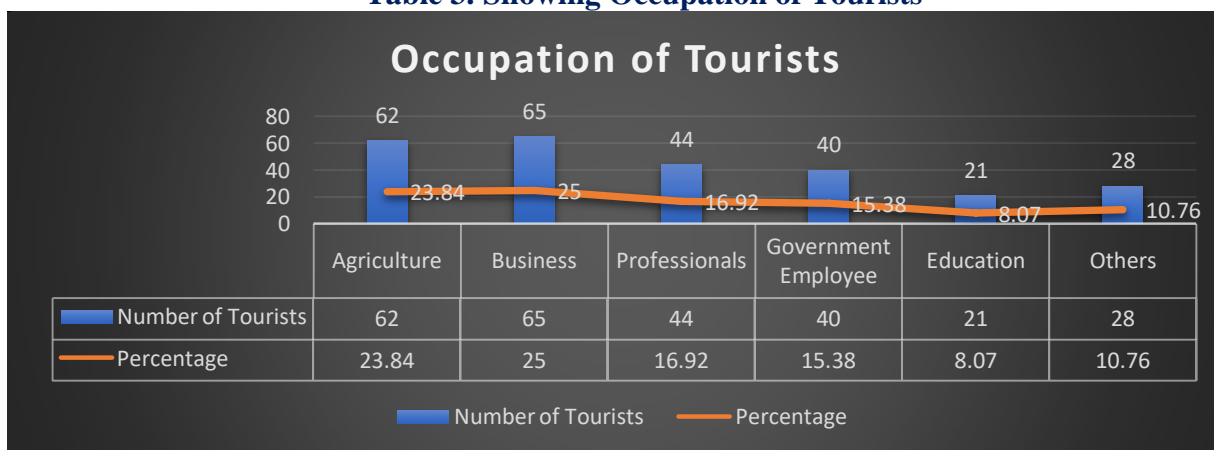
**Inference:** From the tabale it is showing that all categories of the tourists coming for the Ayurvedic treatment in Kerala.And from that the majority coming ranging in between the age group of fourty one to fiftyand fifty to sixty.In the female gender category majority are coming for ayurvedic treatment of the age group thirty one to fourty and twenty one to thirty. 26 percentage of tourist are of the age group between fifty one to fifty following 23 percent of the age group between fifty one to

sixty. Only 2 percent of tourists are coming in the age group below twenty.

**3. Occupation of the tourists**

Ayurvedic therapies are quite inexpensive as compared to other medical treatments, hence a large number of visitors from various occupations visit. The tourists from different categories of occupation are considered for the study. The result are as follows:

**Table 3. Showing Occupation of Tourists**



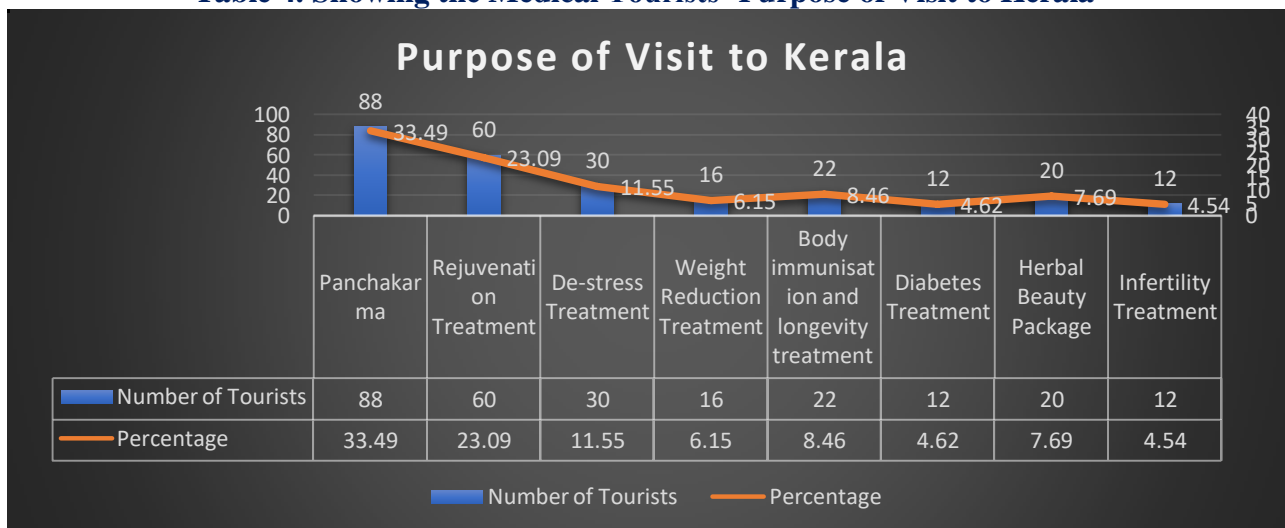
Source: Primary data

**Inference:** From the table it is found that the 25 percent of tourists arrived in ayurvediccentre were doing business and 24 percent were from agriculture job. 17 percent were from the professional category and 15 percent from government employment. 8 percent from educational field and 10 percent from other category.

**4. Purpose of visit to Kerala.**

Previously, Ayurveda was thought to be a medical therapy used to cure diseases. However, the situation has changed, and Ayurveda today provides cures for illnesses, cosmetic treatments, and rejuvenation therapies, among other things.

**Table 4. Showing the Medical Tourists’ Purpose of Visit to Kerala**



Source: Primary data



**Inference:** from the table it shows that 33 percent of tourists came Kerala for Panchakarma treatment. 23 percent of tourist came for rejuvenation treatment and 11 percent for De-stress treatment. For body immunization and longevity 8 percent of tourist came to ayurvedic centres following near 8 percent for Herbal beauty package. 6

percent came for weight loss treatment and 5 percent for Infertility treatment.

### 5. Attractive factors of Ayurvedic tourism

International patients came to Kerala mostly seeking for medical services and treatment as Kerala having a well known image on their herbal healing ways and practitioners there. The mostly considered factors are taken for this study.

**Table 5. Showing Attractive Factors of Ayurvedic Tourism**

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank based on mean	Level of Satisfaction
Affordable medical treatment	4.22	0.79	III	Highly satisfied
Rich Culture and Heritage	3.10	1.73	IX	Satisfied
Ease of Travel and Medical visa	4.15	0.75	VI	Highly satisfied
No Side Effects	4.21	0.79	IV	Highly satisfied
Internationally recognised accreditations and certified Ayurvedic centres	4.20	0.76	V	Highly Satisfied
Professional expertise Physicians on diagnosis	4.32	0.75	I	Highly satisfied
No waiting time	3.13	1.71	VIII	Satisfied
Right quality of medicines and treatments	4.30	0.75	II	Highly satisfied
Warmth & Hospitality	3.14	1.76	VII	Satisfied

*Source: Primary data*

**Inference:** Based on mean score, it is found that Ayurveda health tourism in Kerala are better in the factor that 'professional expertise on diagnosis (4.32)' followed by 'right quality of medicines and treatments (4.30)' 'Affordable medical treatment(4.22)', 'No Side Effects (4.21)', 'Internationally recognized accreditations and certified Ayurvedic centres (4.20)', 'Ease of Travel and Medical visa (4.15)', 'Warmth & Hospitality' (3.14)', 'No waiting time(3.13)' and 'Rich Culture and Heritage (3.10)'.

### 6. Problems facing by Ayurvedic tourists

There are many problems facing by the foreign tourists for making their medical travel arrangements and after the medical treatment which influence them. After studying these factors also the study will be fruitful. The main problems are considered in the study for knowing the areas for making improvement for a better travel experience to the foreign tourists.

**Table 6. Showing Problems facing by Ayurvedic tourists**

Problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank based on mean	Level of Satisfaction
Commercialization of services	3.13	1.71	V	Dissatisfied
Follow up problems	3.18	1.74	IV	Dissatisfied
Lack of Translators for better communication	3.19	1.71	VI	Dissatisfied
Legal problems	4.18	0.77	II	Highly dissatisfied
Less promotions in their home country	4.20	0.73	I	Highly dissatisfied
Misleading fraud promoters	4.10	0.73	III	Highly dissatisfied

*Source: Primary data*

**Inference:** Based on mean score, it is found that tourists prefer for ayurvedic treatment in Kerala are facing the problems. They are 'Less promotions in their home country(4.20)' followed by 'Legal problems (4.18)', 'Misleading fraud promoters(4.18)', 'Lack of Translators for better communication (3.19)', 'Follow up problems(3.18)', and 'Commercialization of services (3.13)'.

## 7. Level of satisfaction

The clear picture of the satisfaction of foreign medical tourists will get only after studying the factors that influence the satisfaction level of tourists who seek the ayurvedic medical treatment in Kerala.

**Table 7. Showing Level of Satisfaction of Tourists**

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Satisfaction
Physical ambience and quality of treatment	4.78	0.866	Highly satisfied
Results after the treatment in health condition	4.92	.280	Highly satisfied
Hygienic treatment procedures adopted by the medical centre	4.83	.447	Highly satisfied
Skills and knowledge of the physicians	4.94	.232	Highly satisfied
Hospitality and prompt responses in ayurvediccentre	3.26	.345	Satisfied
Nature atmosphere and accommodation provided	3.25	.213	Satisfied
Arrangements and confirmation of appointments	3.21	.277	Satisfied
Personalized care	3.11	.229	Satisfied

**Source: Primary data**

**Inference:** Based on mean score, it is found that tourists are highly satisfied with the 'Skills and knowledge of the physicians(4.94)' followed by 'Results after the treatment in health condition (4.92)' 'Hygienic treatment procedures adopted by the medical centre(4.83)', 'Physical ambience and quality of treatment (4.78)', 'Hospitality and prompt responses in ayurvediccentre (3.26)', 'Nature atmosphere and accommodation provided (3.25)', 'Arrangements and confirmation of appointments (3.2)', and 'Personalized care(3.11)'.

### Findings

- It shows that the most important assurance factors provided by the Ayurveda health tourism in Kerala are their professional expertise physicians and and right quality of medicines and treatment.
- They also provide affordable medical treatment and there is very less side effects on the treatment.
- It shows that the most important problems by foreign tourists while coming for Ayurveda health tourism in Kerala are less promotions in their home country on the ayurvedic treatment provided by Kerala,

- The legal problems for arrangement of medical travel including insurance for that.
- Misleading fraud medical service promoters on ayurvedic medical treatment is another problem faced by the tourists followed by language barriers and follow up from the part of ayurvediccentres.
- The study shows that commercialization of ayurvedic medical tourism services is also a problem
- Kerala have a strong focus on Ayurvedic treatment by its wide range of treatments and medications.
- As per the study majority of the respondents are satisfied Skills and knowledge of the physicians followed by results after the treatment in health condition after the treatment, hygienic medical treatment procedures adopted by the ayurvedic medical centre, physical ambience and quality of treatment.
- The medical foreign tourists are also satisfied with the hospitality and prompt responses in ayurvediccentre, nature atmosphere and accommodation provided by the ayurvediccentres, services like arrangements and confirmation of appointments, and personalized care.

### Suggestions

From the study result the research are providing the following suggestions for the future path for India to attain leadership position in ayurvedic medical tourism. These suggestions are derived from the analysis of various factors affecting the growth of medical tourism.

1. The government of India must establish authority for the uniform grading and accreditation for ayurvedic medical centres to gain the trust and loyalty of tourists.
2. The government must develop a simplified systems of getting medical visas in order to make foreigners medical travel across borders smoother. Visas must have a extension option depending on the condition of the patients.
3. The government must set up national level bodies to promote the Ayurvedic Medical tourism as a Brand world wide to market India's specialized healthcare products.
4. The government must integrate various parties included in the tourism area like

airports, travel agencies by providing various added services offer like airport pickups, bank transactions, or tie-ups with airlines for tickets and medical visa.

### Conclusion

Ayurveda, the Indian medical system, has been practised in Kerala since time immemorial. Though Ayurveda is practised across India, Kerala may be the only state where this ancient science of medicine is still performed according to age-old customary regulations. Because of Kerala's unique geographical position, natural abundance, and rich culture, the Ayurvedic system practised here has acquired features distinct from those found elsewhere. Kerala offers an unrivalled abundance of plants and natural greenery. Promotional activities should be focused and goal-oriented, and they should make use of other marketing methods as well. Service providers and governments should both aggressively market the destination as a medical tourism centre.

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