

## An exploratory study on customer satisfaction of ayurvedic tourists: A special reference to ayurvedic centers in south Kerala

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### Abstract

Travel and tourism is an integral part of Indian tradition and culture. In the olden days, travel was primarily for the purpose of pilgrimage – as the holy places dotting the countryside attracted people from different parts of the vast sub-continent. People also traveled to participate in fairs and festivals in different parts of the country. Medical travel is often undertaken in combination with tourism services. However, it is estimated that the business of health tourism is very huge as US \$ 40 billion worldwide with an expected annual growth rate of 20 per cent. Health care is an area in which the tourism industry can take advantage as it is a thriving sector in the new globalization and liberalization. International travel for health purposes becomes a way of life for new age Western and Asian tourists. India is on the threshold of a health care revolution and the country is emerging as a global destination for medical tourists. Ayurveda plays a major role in Kerala's round the year tourism. The tourism season in Kerala is from October to March. But Ayurvedic treatments are mainly offered during monsoon months of June, July, and August. Moreover, ayurvedic treatments done in Kerala are more famous than other locations due to its equable climate. The climate in Kerala is tropical and the temperature varies from 18 degree centigrade to 35 degree centigrade which is most suitable for Ayurvedic treatments.

**Keywords:** Indian health tourism, medical tourism, ayurveda, customer satisfaction

### Introduction

Health and medical tourism are perceived as one of the fastest growing segments in India. With yoga, meditation, ayurveda, allopathy, and other systems of medicines, India now offers a unique basket of services to an individual. It is difficult to match by other countries. According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) India's healthcare industry is worth US \$ 23 billion roughly 4 per cent of GDP. The industry is expected to grow by around 13 per cent per year for the next four years. According to the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), India's health care industry could grow exponentially as software and pharmaceutical sector have grown over the past decade. Medical tourism focuses on treatment of acute illness and elective surgeries such as cardiology, cancer, organ transplantations etc.

Ayurveda dictates the social norms for an individual. This helps in maintaining spiritual health and elaborates on the daily routine and seasonal routine. Seasonal routines change according to the region of the habitat, and age of the person. Ayurveda believes that man is influenced to the great extent by his environment which affects his health status too. These routines include diets, habits, and a general attitude towards life. These are to be changed according to the age and sex of an individual, his living condition, and the environment. This helps the body to maintain its natural resistance to diseases.

Ayurveda like other systems of traditional medicine has its unique features. It lays emphasis on the promotion of positive health and prevention of diseases. In Ayurveda, the main emphasis is laid upon the "field" than the "seed". In the treatment prescribed, it does not aim at correcting the affected part alone. The treatment always aims at correcting the site of origin. Yoga and Tantra which are primarily meant for spiritual

attainments have also certain prescriptions for the prevention and care of psychic, somatic, and psychosomatic ailments. They have a rich tradition of the use of plants, minerals, and animal products having therapeutic utility.

### Importance of Ayurveda in Kerala Tourism

Kerala tourism; the major delight of Kerala is basically Ayurveda and backwaters. On enhancing the promotion of tourism in Kerala, it has been made a role model for other states in India and can encourage them to revive ancient knowledge systems of India to add value to their tourism aspirations. Kerala is not only a beautiful destination in Southern India known for its scenic beaches and scenic backwaters but also, of late, Kerala has gained international attention for medical tourism and is becoming a popular international medical tourism destination. Tourists have also identified that Kerala has a pool of trained doctors and nurses, and an excellent network of hospitals that offer international standards at very affordable prices. Previously Indians working abroad such as residents of Kerala working in the Persian Gulf countries would return to India for medical treatment. Now, other international travelers have also realized the advantages of travelling to Kerala and the medical tourism industry has begun to take off in big way in the state. Kerala is famous for its alternative medical therapies such as Ayurveda which helps to rejuvenate and revitalize the body.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To know various treatments available in Ayurvedic centers.
2. To assess the impact of rejuvenation treatments and the satisfaction level of customers.

3. To find out significance in satisfaction and the gender of the customers.
4. To trace out the problems faced by customer of Ayurvedic treatment.

### Principle of Ayurveda

Ayurveda briefly explains the knowledge of the dos and don'ts one should follow, which favors the well-being of everyone to lead a healthy, happy and comfortable life, both physically and mentally. It also emphasizes that prevention is better than cure. Ayurveda is also known as Ashatangaveda (the word literally means eight branches of knowledge). The eight specialized branches are:

1. Kaya Chikitsa – General Medicine
2. KaumaraChikitsa – Paediatrics
3. GrahaChikitsa – Psychiatry
4. Shalakyathantra – Diseases of ear, nose, throat, head and its surgery
5. Shallyathantra – General Surgery
6. Agantathantra – Toxicology
7. RasayanaChikitsa – Rejuvenation therapy
8. VajeeekaranaChikitsa – Aphrodisiac therapy

### Common types of Ayurvedic treatments are as follows; Pizhichil

This massage involves the pouring of warm oil from a *Kindi* (a special type of vessel) placed several inches above the body while a masseuse performs the massage. Since this massage works to balance out *Vata Dosha*, the medicated oil used depends on the patient's condition.

### Njavarkijhi

This is a special type of massage meant to increase perspiration in the body. This is generally a style practiced in Kerala whereby after applying the medicated oil, pressurized massage is given with the help of small cotton 'blouses' filled with a special type of cooked rice called Njavara.

### Shirodhara

This is a type of head massage whereby stimulation of the nerves in the scalp is done by pouring medicated or herbal oil on the head in a constant stream or 'dhara'. It relieves mental fatigue, increases focus and clarity and alleviates headaches.

### Ubtaan and Elakijhi

These involve the use of various herbal or animal centric materials to create a skin and beauty solution. This type of treatment vitalizes the skin, improves the skin texture, nourishes the body, improves circulation as well as improves upon the external beauty.

### Abhyangam

It is a full body hot oil massage with medicated herbal oil in the *dosha* according to the medical condition of the patient. Care is taken to ensure that a comfortably warm temperature is maintained in the room. With the help of motion, pressure points and ways of applying pressure, different energy centers are stimulated to assist the body in releasing deep seated toxins as well as improve the blood circulation in the body.

### Udvartana

The *Udvartana* massage is aimed to increase blood circulation

and release toxins from the body. It is a wonderful treatment for those who wish to control their cholesterol level, lose weight, improve their skin complexion or have an excess of *Kapha Dosha*.

### Garshana

The *Garshana* massage involves no oil or herbal powders. It is a process of stimulating the body using raw silk gloves only and without the application of any lubricant. Light and vigorous movements form a part of this massage which seeks to eliminate toxins from the body by stimulating the lymphatic system.

### USP of Ayurvedic Treatment

- **Boosting Immunity** – The immune system is the natural defense mechanism of the body that helps in fighting disease-causing bacteria and viruses. Ayurvedic medicine and Ayurvedic home remedies use a multitude of herbs and oils that are mixed together to create tonics that improves appetite and strengthen the body's defense system.
- **Complete Healing** – The herb preparations administered by the Ayurvedic practitioner help in healing diseases from the root along with its symptoms. The treatments also involve lifestyle changes and increase in physical activities.
- **Relieving Stress** – Stress is one of the major reasons of poor health and the tonics, therapies and massages involved in Ayurvedic treatment helps in relieving stress and enhancing physical well-being by balancing the mood and bringing about a harmony between the soul and the body.
- **Purifying the Body** – Purging the body of toxins and maintaining it at the proper balance is the basic aim of Ayurveda. The Ayurvedic medicines and tonics promote thorough cleansing from within in order to improve overall health. Panchakarma is the most effective cleansing Ayurvedic treatment.
- **Maintaining Overall Balance** – One of the greatest benefits of Ayurvedic treatment is that it helps achieving overall balance of energies in the body. The body is affected by the accumulation of toxins and Ayurveda helps in cleansing and removing these impurities.

### Statement of Problems

The diversity of India's natural and cultural richness provides the basis of a wide-range of tourist products and experiences which embrace business, leisure, culture, adventure, spirituality, ecotourism, health tourism, and many other pursuits. Apart from acknowledging the traditionally recognized advantages of developing tourism for the promotion of national integration, international understanding, earning of foreign exchange, and vast employment generation, it plays a major role in strengthening the socio-economic objectives of nation. As the medical tourism is service oriented industry and the satisfaction of the patients' are also the important factor to be considered off.

### Research Design

This is an exploratory and descriptive study; it gives insight to understand the customer satisfaction of patients of Ayurvedic centers in South Kerala.

### Sample Design

Sample size refers to the number of items to be selected from

the population to constitute a sample. A Sample of 70 had been taken used convenient sampling method for this study.

**Collection of data**

A well-structured questionnaire was prepared and distributed to the customer of Ayurvedic centers in south Kerala. The five point Likert scale is used for date collection. The secondary data has been collected by researcher through various books, journals, magazines and websites of Ayurvedic health centers.

**Data Processing**

After collected the primary data the researcher thoroughly verified the data, edited and coded them in master table then they were converted in table and percentage. The analysis part done through statistical tool such as percentages, Likert five-point scale, mean score, rank and t- test used for processing and drawing inferences.

**Analysis and Inferences**

**Table 1:** Socio – Demographic Profile of the Health Tourists

Demographic distribution		Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	38.00	54.29
	Female	32.00	45.71
Total		70.00	100.00
Age	Less than 25 years	8.00	11.43
	26 – 35 years	18.00	25.71
	36 – 45 years	14.00	20.00
	45 – 60 years	20.00	28.57
	Above 60 years	10.00	14.29
Total		70.00	100.00
Marital status	Single	52.00	74.29
	Married	18.00	25.71
Total		70.00	100.00
Occupation	Employee	24.00	34.29
	Professionals	10.00	14.29
	Businessmen	22.00	31.43
	Retired	14.00	20.00
Total		70.00	100.00
Income Category	Rs.60,000 – Rs.1,00,000	12.00	17.14
	Rs.1,00,000 – Rs.3,00,000	24.00	34.29
	Rs.3,00,000 – Rs.5,00,000	16.00	22.86
	Rs.5,00,000 and above	18.00	25.71
Total		70.00	100.00
Educational qualification	School	10.00	14.29
	Intermediate	26.00	37.14
	Higher secondary	8.00	11.43
	Graduation	10.00	14.29
	Post graduation	10.00	14.29
	Technically qualified	6.00	8.57
Total		70.00	100.00

**Table 2**

Distribution of travel profile		Number of Respondents	Percentage
Visit to Kerala	First Visit	32.00	45.71
	Second Visit	20.00	28.57
	Repeated Visit	18.00	25.71
Total		70.00	100.00
Length of Stay	1 - 3 Days	10.00	14.29
	3 - 5 days	16.00	22.86
	One week	30.00	42.86
	More than one week	14.00	20.00
Total		70.00	100.00
Motivation Factor	Nature	6.00	8.57
	Culture	8.00	11.43
	Personal Leisure	18.00	25.71
	Health	34.00	48.57
	Education/ Special Interest	4.00	5.71
Total		70.00	100.00

Average spend on vacation	Less than Rs. 50000	4.00	5.71
	Rs. 50000 - Rs.100000	24.00	34.29
	Rs. 100000 - Rs.200000	26.00	37.14
	Rs. 200000 - Rs.300000	10.00	14.29
	More than Rs. 500000	6.00	8.57
Total		70.00	100.00
Companionship	On your own	4.00	5.71
	With family	44.00	62.86
	With friends	22.00	31.43
Total		70.00	100.00
Sources of awareness about this place	Media	14.00	20.00
	Internet	18.00	25.71
	Friends	8.00	11.43
	Intermediaries	30.00	42.86
Total		70.00	100.00
Reasons for selecting Ayurvedic health care	Preventive	12.00	17.14
	Rejuvenative	38.00	54.29
	Natural and herbal based	8.00	11.43
	Health	12.00	17.14
Total		70.00	100.00

**Table 3:** Relationship between services offered and satisfaction level

Statement	Mean Score	Rank
Attitude of the Medical Personnel	3.08	4
Hygienic condition	3.01	5
Accommodation facility	2.60	11
Transport facilities by Hospital	3.18	3
Language interpreter service	1.98	13
Post treatment medication	2.98	6
Quality of Nursing care	2.77	8
Medical equipment standard	3.45	1
Keeping medical records of patients	2.33	12
Timely and prioritized scheduling of consultation	3.28	2
External referral facility in case of emergency	2.70	9
Quality of Medicine	2.67	10
Individual Attention	2.87	7

The result obtained from 70 respondents had been thoroughly analyzed and the output of the result had been clearly explained in this section with regards to satisfaction level of customers in Ayurvedic centers.

As far as satisfaction of level of customers ‘Medical equipment standard and Timely and prioritized scheduling of consultation are the most satisfying factors. The least customer satisfying factors are Language interpreter service and the Keeping of medical records of patients.

**Table 4:** Analysis between gender and satisfaction level

Satisfaction level factors	Male	Female
Customer friendly treatments	78	22
Regular updation of information about treatment	56	44
Prompt nursing care	37	63
Advance technological infrastructure	27	73
Consistency in follow up care	58	42
Efficient treatment process	34	66
Cost of treatment	45	55
Proper time framed treatment	24	76

**Hypothesis**

**Ho** – There is no significant difference between the satisfaction

level of male and female.

**H1-** There is significant difference between the satisfaction level of male and female.

$N=8 \quad DF= 7$

Significance level= 0.05

$t \text{ value} = -1.12391 \quad p \text{ value} = .279959$

the result is not significant at  $p < .05$

**Interpretation**

As per the analysis hypothesis was not confirmed as there is no significant difference between male and female satisfaction level.

**Suggestion**

The Researcher suggest that there no such significance in regards to the gender and satisfaction level. In India health care services are covered under Consumer Protection Act 1986, so the consumers have all the right to get the services offered by the health care institutions. Also, there is no yardstick to measure the Ayurveda treatment and there should be one appellate authority to evaluate and ensure the satisfaction of patients.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the findings of the study provide valuable insights regarding the significance of Ayurveda sector in medical tourism. India in general and Kerala in particular is in an advantageous position to avail the opportunities in Ayurveda to project the medical tourism sector. It is vital for the local government institutions and communities should concentrate on patient satisfaction to ensure the better service in regards to the medical tourism and to strengthen the opportunities of Ayurveda in medical tourism. The local government can provide an ideal platform and infrastructure facilities, policy and planning procedures to maximize the benefit of Ayurveda for the local communities and to ensure the satisfaction level in regards to the treatment services offered. The integration of Ayurveda centric medical tourism promotion activities with the local economy along with public-private-local government partnerships can push the growth of medical tourism sector in a big way.

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