



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.71 (SJIF 2021)

Vaccine tourism - A ray of hope in Post COVID-19

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DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11278686/v1>

Abstract:

“Prevention is better than cure”. The year 2020 has proved it through the notable example of COVID-19. People are living with fear in their minds. The 2nd wave & the subsequent virus mutations of COVID-19 are expected to increase health hazards like white fungus, black fungus, delta virus. The vaccine thus proves to be a better option to prevent the problems. Tourism was the first industry to be affected by COVID-19 and is the last industry to recover in the present situation. Business can never be as usual and as earlier. Therefore it is important to understand the need for and the changes required for the sustainability of the industry and reinvent service industry in India at least by the end of 2025.

Vaccine tourism needs to be transformed as new travel trend where a tourist can combine a luxury holiday, leisure and get health care benefits. Countries like India and Thailand are common destinations for medical or cosmetic surgery, but the pandemic is responsible for the emergence of a new kind of tourism.

Keywords: COVID-19, Tourism, Vaccine tourism

Introduction:

“Prevention is better than cure”. The year 2020 has proved it through the notable example of Covid 19. People are living with fear in their minds. The 2nd wave & the subsequent virus mutations of COVID-19 are expected to increase health hazards like white fungus, black fungus, and delta virus. The vaccine thus proves to be a better option to prevent the problems.

The country has already faced the impact of COVID-19 in the form of economic slowdown, when it had faced the nationwide lockdown during 2020. India boosts with various types of tourism activities attracting people from all over the world throughout the year. Announcement of nationwide lockdown, restrictions on international flights have all affected the tourism industry and the subsidiary industries like hotel, travel agencies etc. Hence, as India going to attain its self-sufficiency

by the year 2022, Vaccine tourism could be a strategy to boost the declining, slowed down tourism services in India.

Tourism industry has faced a lot number of challenges due to COVID-19. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has estimated a fall of up to 78% in the tourist traffic around the world which is equal to the sluggish by a billion.

Tourism was the first industry to be affected by COVID-19 and is the last industry to recover in the present situation. Business can never be as usual and as earlier. Therefore it is important to understand the need for and the changes required for the sustainability of the industry and reinvent service industry in India at least by the end of 2025.

The government must help the industry people to survive in the field and also retain the jobs of the people. It should also focus on designing international travel restrictions which will create competition in the field of tourism industry. Tourism policies, plans and the consumer preferences should support the industry for its sustainability.

The so called restrictions on international tourists and travellers across the globe can be relaxed and be hopeful for a fearless mobility of tourists by strategizing Vaccine tourism as an Economic policy, to be approved by Indian Government.

The COVID-19 pandemic has badly hit the life of people and also the economy of the country. India which earned 5.06% of GDP from tourism in 2016-17 is facing a serious stage for recovery now after COVID-19. The restrictions put forth by the government, the lock down done country wide have all put the industry in a stand still position. The tourism industry employed 8.75 crore people to its sub industries like hotel, tour operators, home stays, travel agents and aviation industry. All of them are now facing a serious problem to recover from the pandemic situation, which needs to be addressed by the entire community of the policy makers of the country .

The business world on 29/9/2020 reports that:

- Tourism sector should be provided credit facilities like that of MSME's and it must be included in the priority sector lending.
- The central government should change some norms under tourism infrastructure development to develop healthy and safety travel for the tourists. Eg: PRASAD
- The government should come up with good plans and strategies to support the subsidiary industries and the stake-holders.

A model has to be framed keeping the insights and the evidence reported as per WHO – World Health Organisation, on evil effects of Covid-19 both on Social and Economical norms. An organised plan together with the government, providing accurate information and also safety and hygiene should be communicated to boost the tourism industry.

Sustainability of tourism sector needs support from diverse streams of the society, who are directly and indirectly associated with Tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic which has vanished the overall service industry excluding telecommunications which is different from the other types of challenges and competitions faced by it.

Hence, it is indeed the citizenship responsibility of all stake holders of the Tourism sector like tour operators, hospitality industry, transportation and logistics etc., to concentrate on domestic and international arrivals, their physical wellbeing & safety.

Being focussed on the policies of Atma Nirbhar Bharat and beyond, there is a ray of hope for the survival of the industry, which can find opportunities in the way of Vaccine Tourism exclusively for the international tourists. It can be a part of Medical or Health Care Tourism. People are now anxieted to visit places for relaxation after a long stay at home, work from home concept, work pressure. Health Care Tourism could be a better way to be optimistic to promote tourism services in India.

The launch of Vaccine in India on 16/01/2021 has thrown a ray of hope for the tourism industry. In days to come Government of India can think of some ideas to support Vaccine tourism which would really support the industry and also the economy of the country. A policy in this regard may be suggested to the Government of India to offer free vaccination for all the international travellers coming to India on Tourist Visa. The well-known tourist destinations in India needs to be equipped with trained doctors, nursing staff along with Health care infrastructure as, the two days post vaccination needs medical attention so that all tourist destinations are transformed as destinations for free vaccination.

Vaccine tourism needs to be transformed as new travel trend where a tourist can combine a luxury holiday, leisure and gethealth care benefits. Countries like India and Thailand are common destinations for medical or cosmetic surgery, but the pandemic is responsible for the emergence of a new kind of tourism.

Vaccine Tourism is different from Vaccine passport. The two terms are often confused with each other. A 'Vaccine Passport' is a record or health data certificate that would carry information about whether a person has been inoculated or has tested negative for Covid-19. The information would be accessible electromagnetically, on mobile apps, or as printed documents or cards.

There are only few countries like the US, Russia, France, Slovakia, Kazakhstan, Poland, Zimbabwe, Iceland, etc, which have adopted a universal coverage policy when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines. Still, most countries except for the US are facing a shortage of vaccines, including India.

The tiny Central European Republic of San Marino welcomed its first vaccine tourists – a group of four from Latvia, who drove 26 hours in a camper van to reach San Marino, where they became

the first visitors to take advantage of the Microstate's Sputnik V, Covid-19 vaccine holiday package. India could also set an example by designing vaccine holiday packages for international tourists so that “**Brand India**” is leveraged among the global community of Tourists.

The Pfizer vaccine was approved in the UK, travel agencies such as Zenith Holidays in Kolkata, Gem Tours & Travels in Mumbai and Chariot World Tours in Bengaluru reportedly have been working on vaccine tours to England.

The other candidates which are in different stages of trials in India to test safety and efficacy include:

- ZyCov-Di, being developed by Ahmedabad-based Zydus-Cadila
- A vaccine being developed by Hyderabad-based Biological E, the first Indian private vaccine-making company, in collaboration with US-based Dynavax and Baylor College of Medicine
- Hyderabad-based Biological E to produce the vaccine developed by US firm Johnson & Johnson
- HGCO19, India's first mRNA vaccine made by Pune-based Genova in collaboration with Seattle-based HDT Biotech Corporation, using bits of genetic code to cause an immune response
- A nasal vaccine by Bharat BioTech
- A second vaccine being developed by Serum Institute of India and American vaccine development company Novavax

When most of the tourism activities will take its own time for improving, the only ray of hope to India is to concentrate on Medical Tourism. Indian medicines are very popular and in demand all over the world. Vaccines made in India would solve many problems. Government of India should take quick decisions to vaccinate Indians at priority basis and give an opportunity for people from other countries to come to India on tour packages to get vaccinated.

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