

YOGA TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Yoga tourism is an act in which people from all around the world travel to other countries to obtain salvation & medical care while at the same time touring, vacationing, and fully experiencing the attractions of the countries in which they are visiting. Actually, people *travel to avail such facilities because these unique therapies are not available in one's own country*. Yoga is fast growing healthcare therapy towards which people are getting aware and start learning yoga to live fit and fine life. It has enormous prospective for generating employment and earning huge sum of foreign exchange. India is the origin place of yoga; it has lot of opportunity to develop yoga tourism and to capture a big share of tourism industry. But on the other hand, there are lots of challenges which Indian tourism industry has to face before developing yoga tourism in India. The present paper outlines an overview of yoga tourism in India and discuss about various opportunities and challenges of promoting it in India with some valuable suggestions to develop India as a global destination for those who are seeking to learn yoga or want healthy life by exercising it.

Keywords:- Yoga, Tourism, Medical tourism, Healthcare, India.

1.0 Introduction: Yoga is said to be as old as human race on earth, there is no physical evidence to support this claim. But in the ruins of the cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, excavators found depictions engraved on soapstone seals that strongly resemble yogi-like figures. These figures prove that it originated in India 5,000 or more years ago. Actually, yoga gets its birth in India but after its birth it passes through different periods from Vedic period to modern era through Pre-classical Yoga period, Classical period, Postclassical Yoga period. During these stages, Yoga went through many phases which helped it to grow more and more.

Yoga is a science which is being practiced for thousands of years. Earlier, yoga belonged to yogis only but in modern era it is for all. Yoga consists of old theories, observation & principles about the body, mind and soul which help to unite them. It was proved by modern scientist that it can be converted into therapy which could heal the body. It makes the body more flexible and helps you to be comfortable even in the midst of stress stricken environment. This is one of the foremost reasons that why people want to start Practicing Yoga - to feel fitter, be more energetic, and full of Gusto.

1.1 Why Yoga: Yoga aimed to unite the body, mind & soul. It helps to become more aware of our body's posture, alignment & patterns of movements which help in getting flexibility & calming the mind in the stress stricken environment. This is one of the main reasons, why people attract toward adopting yoga practice. Actually yoga consists of ancient theories, observations & principles about relationship of mind and body. Yoga can help up to prevent from diseases & help in curing from it. Some main benefits from yoga have discussed here:-

• Weight loss.	• Inner peace.	• Boost Immunity.
• Maintains your nervous system.	• Boost Sexual Performance.	• Keeps allergies and viruses away.
• Control blood sugar & blood pressure level.	• Benefits your relationships.	• Helps keep you drug free.
• Increases your blood flow.	• Helps you serve others.	• Relaxes you & helps you to sleep properly.
• Prevents cartilage and joint breakdown.	• Helps you in meditation.	• Improves your flexibility & posture.
• Beters your bone health.	• Massaging of ALL Organs of the Body.	• Complete Detoxification.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing lubrication of the joints, ligaments and tendons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps in healthy lifestyle & make you happier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps in All-round fitness & encourages self care.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ease Migraines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress relief. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perfect your posture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds muscle strength. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better intuition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boosts energy.

Table: 1

1.2 Tourism: Over the years, Tourism has evolved into a global industry contributing, approximately 9% to 10 % respectively to world’s GDP & employment. Number of international tourist arrivals are rising & expecting to touch 1.8 billion in 2030 from 1 billion in 2014. Worldwide countries are focusing on tourism as a developmental strategy. There are various factors which motivate people to involve in tourism activity. But interestingly, medical & wellness segment are booming. According to Goodrich & Goodrich (1987), medical tourism is an attempt to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its health-care services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities. People from across the border for healthcare facilities either due to non availability of these facilities or alternate treatment therapies like yoga, ayurveda, acupressure etc. in their own country or available at very high cost

1.3 Yoga tourism: Yoga tourism is a new form of a niche wellness tourism market which has been rapidly growing in recent years. The term “Yoga Tourism” is an act of traveling another destination with the motive to obtain healthcare treatment with the help of yoga or to learn yoga to live fit a fine life. In recent years, numbers of tourist’s arrival have increased who traveled with the motive to get yoga session while exploring the beauty of the country.

2.0 Dimensions of Yoga Tourism: people treat yoga tourism as only a type of wellness tourism in which people move to get treated from yoga. But Yoga tourism is much more than that, it has other dimensions also like people also travel to learn yoga by joining degree or diploma courses to make their carrier as a yoga instructor or to get salvation by meditating it.

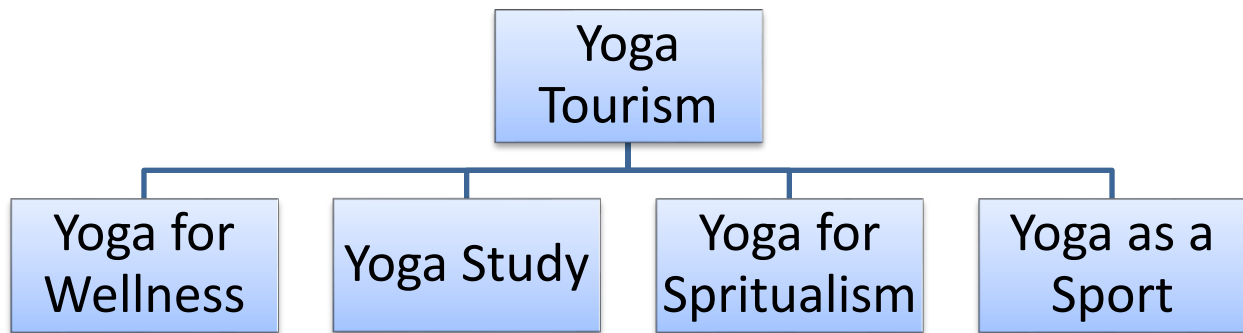


Figure: 1

3.0 Yoga Tourism in India: India offers a diverse basket of healthcare services and rejuvenation amenities to tourist(seeking medical treatment) at reasonable prices. Some of the different forms of healthcare tourism offered in the country includes yoga, meditation, ayurveda, allopathy, naturopathy, unani, etc. which make India the unique destination. People are increasingly realizing the value of such alternative forms of treatment that focus on naturally curing body. In India there is also a dedicated department to focus on the development of education and research in these unique therapies. Yoga is on the top among these and in recent years it is getting popularity at global level. Now people from outside India also started practicing Yoga to heal their body and mind with this powerful therapy. Realizing the potential to develop and promote Yoga Tourism as the niche tourism products among international tourists, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has also initiated to make proper plan and policies to promote Yoga as a main Tourism Product.

4.0 Opportunities for Yoga tourism in India: India is capable to promote yoga tourism by providing Medical & wellness facilities at international standard at comparatively low price & by starting new educational yoga courses. Some States of India have developed yoga tourism as one of the products for promoting tourism. Yoga tourism holds immense hope as it is among the most ancient systems of medical treatment of the world.

- Increased demand for wellness tourism and alternative cures:-** in this fast-paced era, people are anxious about their life so, therefore in developing countries, there is an huge increase in the demand of alternative

healthcare practices. India is the hub of some of the unique alternative healthcare practices like Yoga, Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Naturopathy etc. these alternative provide motivation to foreigner to visit India. Yoga is the main preference and need of present time in modern world..

- **Reduced cost of international travel and tourism:-**India develops all the facilities in bulk which are required by the tourists. There are a growing number of convenient, low cost non-stop flights, luxury hotels & resorts, developed highways, natural and artificial attractions. All these results in inexpensive tour packages to India, which directly attract people from the world.
- **Privatization and FDI in Tourism and healthcare sector in India:-** In recent years India opened doors for FDI in healthcare sector. The participation of private sector resulted in advancement of infrastructure and equipment of Indian hospitals. The private sector also invested huge in developing Yoga centers and creating product for tourist, seeking treatment from Yoga. All these made India globally competitive, particularly eyeing Indian high class and foreign patients.
- **Availability of English speaking staff:-** India is the largest English spoken county of the world, it benefits that there is an availability of English speaking staff at Yoga centers. This is one of the main advantages because it attracts many English speaking patients from different countries. Whereas, countries like Thailand, China etc are lacking this quality.
- **India have Incredible attraction:-** India is the world's famous and exciting destination for tourism. This country has rich and diversified culture, oldest history & heritage, people with unique lifestyle, fairs and festivals, food, wildlife, deserts, beaches as well as highest snow covered peaks of Himalayas.
- **Foreign patients can get planned yoga packages deals:-** with the involvement of private sector in tourism industry, now it is easy for patients to visit India for Yoga, because now they can get package deals for the treatment which includes flights, transfer, hotels, treatments & leisure etc.

5.0 Challenges to Yoga tourism in India:

- **Strong competition from countries:-** in this global era many countries understand the value of developing healthcare tourism. Due to globalization Yoga therapy is now no more Indian property. Now many countries have developed Yoga centers and started promoting them as main yoga tourism products. No doubt, India has lots of opportunities to develop Yoga tourism but even then India has to face cut-throat competition from various countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines etc.) that actively promote Yoga tourism.
- **Lack of institutional tie-ups between different players of industry:-**lack of **coordination** and tie-ups between different players (yoga centers, insurance companies and travel companies) of industry is also one of the main problem for Indian healthcare tourism industry. This coordination is must for developing Yoga tourism in India.
- **Lack of proper safety & security facilities:-** when a person travel out of his familiar place he always expects proper safety and security measures at the destination. Whereas, Due to increase in terrorist activities India is lacking in providing proper safety and security to tourists. Providing safety to tourist is one of the biggest challenges for the Indian tourism industry.
- **Poor infrastructure as well as information:-**India is one of the fastest developing countries but till date its infrastructure is not up to the mark. It is far behind the developed countries.
- **No strong government support:-** the role of government is always vital in the development of any industry, so the case is with the development of Yoga Tourism. But the govt. is non serious about developing tourism industry in India, which results that now industry is facing the following problems. They are: (a) no regulations, (b) taxation anomalies, (c) bureaucratic roadblocks, (d) no works on land reforms, (e) lack of long-term investor friendly policies and (f) instability with respect to terrorism and communal tensions.
- **Image as an unhygienic country:-** . In foreign country India is known for unhygienic country. People of foreign countries have a bad image of India in their mind. New government of India started mission like SWACH BHARAT ABHIYAN to clean the country, but still the country is not coming across this problem.
- **Lack of uniform pricing policies in hospitals across India:** -Indian healthcare industry has a lack of proper pricing policies. There is lot of difference between the price of the same treatment or service in difference yoga centre & hospitals. Every service provider charges its own price for the treatment. The differences in pricing create confusion to patients.

- **Lack of funds and capital for investment in healthcare and tourism sector:-** there is a need of huge funds to develop Yoga tourism. Because it requires worthy infrastructure and manpower. But till date, private investors are not interested in investing in this area. Due to this, Indian tourism industry is seeking shortage of capital investment from government as well as private sector.
- **Language related problems:-** there is no doubt about that English is widely spoken language and understood in India, which is one of the main advantage because it attracts many English speaking patients from different countries. But still language is one of the barriers because there are many non-english speaking customers from different countries. And without the knowledge of their language, it is difficult to provide proper services to them.
- **Poor infrastructure i.e. roads, sewerage & sanitation, public utilities etc.:-** India is still lacking in proper infrastructure like roads, water system and sewage system and public utilities. Except few cities these facilities are in worse condition. It is one of the needs in which our country is lacking and requiring to develop.

6.0 Recent steps taken by Government to develop Yoga Tourism:

Sensing the yoga tourism potential, the government has offered yoga guru Ramdev the chance to develop such an island with a scenic island with a lighthouse and yoga on the beach. Some initiatives have been taken by government to develop yoga tourism are:-

DESTINATION LIGHTHOUSE	
<p>➤ 70 lighthouses and some islands, short listed for tourism development and promotion of yoga</p>	<p>➤ Facilities to include camping, ayurvedic resorts, convention centres, heritage trails and water sports</p>
<p>➤ Kanhoji Angre island near Mumbai port, Muttom near Kanyakumari, False Point near Paradip in Odisha and Minicoy to be developed as major tourism zones; some of them in less than 2 years</p>	<p>➤ 15 other sites to be developed in the long run, including Mahabalipuram, Rameswaram, Konark, Dwarka, Sunk Rock (Mumbai) and Dolphin's Nose (Visakhapatnam)</p>

Figure: 2

7.0 Suggestions:

Yoga is famous Worldwide and everybody is willing to learn it. Now, it is time is to make this as India's BRAND. The following suggestions are laid down for the future path of India in order to develop India as a unique destination to yoga tourism.

- **Role of Government:-** The role of Government for developing any industry is as important as blood to the body. So, there is a huge need of support from Indian government to develop India as a hot destination for tourist seeking yoga tourism. The government can play role by:
 - a) Making proper policy and plan for the success of yoga tourism.
 - b) Acting as a Facilitator for encouraging private investment in this sector.
- **Yoga Visas:** A simplified system of getting medical visas should be developed in order to make travel across borders easier. Visas can be extended depending on the condition of the patients. A visa on arrival

scheme for the tourists from selected countries should be instituted which allows foreign nationals to stay in India for healthcare reasons. There is a need to simplify and speed up these procedures to make India a more attractive healthcare tourism destination.

- **Making India as a Brand of Yoga Tourism:** Yoga is practiced in India since ages. If we market Yoga and its benefits worldwide, with various mediums like movies, internet and other social networking sites, then there are chances that people will be attracted towards India for seeking spirituality and wellness.
- **Making Yoga hubs and promoting organic food products:-** India should be develop as a hub of Yoga tourism by establishing yoga centers of international level with standardized services. There is also need to promote organic food products which will directly benefits to farmers and the tourism industry.
- **Developing standard Yoga and spiritual centers:** - there is need to establish yoga and spiritual centers and to develop already established centers. So that quality service of Yoga will be provided to the tourists. These centers should be certified by government authorized organisation.
- **Coordination with the world -wide Travel agencies:** - to face increasing competition in tourism sector, there is need to tie-up with foreign institutions & Travel agencies for assured supply of tourists.
- **Training and development:-** the government should start training and development programs at different levels for the overall growth of employees involved in yoga tourism.
- **Develop basic requirements of tourists:-** This includes all the basic things that every tourist place needs
 - Hygiene and basic sanitation for tourists in public places
 - Making Transportation and travel easy and hassle-free
 - Safety and security for the tourists from theft and other problems
- **Setting Up National Level Bodies:** the country should plan to set up a inter-national level body with the objective to market India's specialized yoga tourism products in the world.
- **Create an image of a clean and safe country:-** India have an image as unhygienic country in foreigners mind. Before promoting yoga tourism in India it is necessary to create an image as clean and safe country.
- **Motivate Public-Private Partnership:-** to accelerate the growth of yoga tourism in India there is need to motivate public – private partnership so that difference financial and policy related hurdles can be solved timely.

8.0 Conclusion: Yoga is unique therapies of treatment also helps in meditating. It is practiced in India since ages. At present, worldwide yoga is famous & everybody is willing to learn it. Yoga tourism hold immense hope for India & time is to make India's Brand. India is in advantageous position to tap this global opportunities in the Yoga tourism sector. The role of government is very crucial for making India as a Brand. Government should motivate private sector to invest in yoga tourism. There is also need to develop tourism supporting infrastructure like roads, transport, accommodation etc. For expanding market the high level authorities should plan out an effective marketing exercise in executing marketing strategies & branding the country. Ministry should identify some destination suitable for Yoga tourism like Rishikesh, Kerala, etc and then develop them as destination for yoga tourism by developing required infrastructure and then link them to tour operators.

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