

A Systematic Review of the Determinants Shaping Healthcare Destination Choice in Medical Tourism

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to systematically review and synthesize existing literature on the determinants influencing medical tourists' choice of healthcare destinations. The review aims to consolidate fragmented findings related to healthcare quality, treatment costs, physician expertise, destination image, accessibility, cultural factors, and government support in order to better understand the determinants influencing medical tourism decisions.

Design/Methodology: This study adopts a systematic literature review approach by analyzing peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, theses, reports, and relevant academic sources published between the early 2000s and 2025. A structured search strategy was employed using academic databases and scholarly platforms including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ResearchGate, and Academia.

Findings: The review reveals that treatment cost, quality of healthcare services, physician expertise, hospital accreditation, destination reputation, accessibility, cultural compatibility, and tourism infrastructure significantly influence medical tourists' destination selection. The findings further indicate that digital healthcare marketing, online reviews, social media influence, and patient testimonials increasingly shape destination preferences and decision-making processes.

Originality/Value: This study contributes by integrating diverse theoretical and empirical findings into a comprehensive framework explaining healthcare destination choice among medical tourists. The review provides valuable insights for healthcare providers, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers seeking to enhance competitiveness in the medical tourism industry.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Healthcare Destination Choice, Healthcare Quality, Destination Image, Treatment Cost, Patient Decision-Making

1. Introduction

Medical tourism is the deliberate act of people traveling beyond their home country to seek healthcare services, involving travel and accommodation in another region where they stay for at least one day to receive medical treatment. (Ormond et al., 2014) ^[1]. Medical tourism is one of the fastest-growing areas within the worldwide healthcare and tourism industries. Transcontinental health care services have become a reality as the world's developing economies progress scientifically and technologically (Reddy

and Qadeer,2010)^[2]. These days, prospects in health care services are not limited to the native or regional level, but rather a worldwide phenomenon. Medical tourists travel to other nations to receive medical treatment owing to difficulties such as high costs, extensive waiting times, and limited access in their own healthcare systems (Bagga et al., 2020)^[3]. Countries such as India, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Turkey, and South Korea have emerged as preferred destinations for international patients seeking affordable and high-quality medical care. If we focus on India, the highly skilled medical community that speaks English well has been the primary force behind the growth of medical tourism. (Omisore et al.,2016)^[4].

Over the years, India has become known as the hub of medical tourism, which is the union of the travel and health sectors. (Shanker, 2019)^[5]. Affordable healthcare, the availability of doctors and physicians, and shorter wait times for medical care are some of the factors that motivate potential medical tourists to visit abroad. (Eissler & Casken, 2013)^[6]. According to the Government of India, states that "the list of factors that benefit medical tourists for traveling to India is accredited hospitals, frontier technology, finest specialist, financial saving, fast Track-Zero waiting policy, and warmth & hospitality." (GOI 2018)^[7]. The way patients receive information and evaluate locations was further changed by the growing influence of social media, online reviews, healthcare websites, and digital marketing (Cham et al. 2021)^[8]. For healthcare providers and politicians looking to improve their standing in the cutthroat global medical tourism market, it is essential to comprehend the factors influencing medical tourists' destination choices.

2. Objectives

1. To identify the major factors influencing medical tourists' choice of healthcare destinations.
2. To study the impact of healthcare quality, cost, accessibility, and destination-related attributes on medical tourists' decision-making processes.

3. Methodology

The most recent academic articles are reviewed as part of the process used for the literature review. Several databases, including Academia, Google Scholar, Research gate and Emerald, were searched to locate relevant academic articles, theses and conference proceedings. Including books and online resources that address medical tourist intentions towards opting for medical treatment in different countries, further strengthens the literature evaluation.

4. Related Research Work on Systematic Review of Literature

This systematic review synthesizes empirical and conceptual studies examining factors influencing medical tourists' destination choices. Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, and industry reports published between 2000 and 2025 were screened and selected based on predefined inclusion criteria focusing on determinates that influence the healthcare destination choice of the medical tourist. A structured and transparent search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature from established academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. The reviewed literature highlights the importance of healthcare quality, treatment affordability, physician reputation, accreditation, accessibility, cultural factors, destination image, and government support in shaping patient decisions. The selected studies collectively provide a chronological and thematic foundation for evaluating the impact of various determinates on medical tourist choice of selection in the healthcare setup.

Table 1: Factors Shaping Medical Tourists' Choice of Healthcare Destinations

No	Focus/Area of research	Year	References	Contribution
1.	The antecedents and outcomes of the medical tourism supply chain and destination competitiveness.	2015	Lee, H. K. et al., ^[9]	This paper illustrates how medical tourists' choice of location is influenced by healthcare quality, supply chain efficacy, and destination competitiveness. It highlights cooperation between governments, hospitals, and travel agencies.
2.	Impact of online WOM on destination trust and intention to travel: A medical tourism perspective.	2016	Abubakar et al., ^[10]	According to this study, medical tourists' travel choices are heavily influenced by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and destination trust. It emphasizes how crucial internet reputation is when choosing a destination.
3.	Medical tourism destination image formation process.	2016	Khan et al., ^[11]	This study suggests that patients' desire to choose a healthcare location is heavily influenced by destination image. It names tourism destinations and the standard of healthcare as important aspects of the image.
4.	Factors affecting medical tourism destination selection	2016	Kumar et al., ^[12]	The study shows that patient level of satisfaction and destination choice are strongly influenced by geographic location and healthcare services. It offers proof from medical tourists that come to foreign country.
5.	Medical tourists' future destination choice.	2018	Hassan et al., ^[13]	According to this study, medical tourists who have a positive opinion of a site are more likely to return and promote it. It emphasizes the significance of tourist and medical attractions while choosing a site.
6.	A special niche market and factors influencing selection of medical tourism destinations.	2018	Zarei et al., ^[14]	According to the survey, the primary variables of destination choice are accessibility, cultural acceptability, medical competence, cost, and quality of treatment. It illustrates how these factors change for specific medical treatments.
7.	Determinants of medical tourism destination selection process.	2018	Zolfagharian et al., ^[15]	According to this study, treatment costs, privacy, medical challenges, destination appeal, and service quality all influence the choice of destination. It offers a thorough

				decision-making framework for medical travel.
8.	Factors affecting destination choice in medical tourism.	2020	Çapar et al., [16]	The study identifies accessibility, safety, healthcare quality, hygiene, cost savings, and tourism opportunities as the most important factors influencing destination choice.
9	Identifying the themes of the medical tourism business in Iran.	2022	Badrabadi et al., [17]	This study identifies competitive pricing, safety, ICT infrastructure, skilled workforce, and government support as major determinants of destination attractiveness.
10	Determinants of health tourism destination attractiveness	2024	Mandagi et al., [18]	This review concludes that economic factors, healthcare quality, destination image, culture, infrastructure, and marketing are the major determinants of healthcare destination choice.
11	The emergence of medical tourism, where traditional “sea, sun, and sand” tourism is combined with travelling abroad for surgical and medical treatments.	2006	Connell, J. [19]	The study contributed to the establishment of medical tourism as a significant field of tourism research. It also emphasized the advantages and difficulties of integrating foreign travel with healthcare.
12	A review of destination choice factors on why do medical tourists’ travel.	2014	Hanefeld et al., [20]	The study explains medical tourists are heavily influenced by factors such as perceived quality, treatment availability, price, and shorter wait periods. It highlights patient safety and confidence in medical professionals.
13	Medical tourism destination competitiveness.	2010	Heung et al., [21]	The study demonstrates that international certification, government backing, tourism infrastructure, and healthcare quality all affect a destination's ability to compete. These elements boost patients' self-assurance while selecting a location.
14	Medical tourism: Health care in the global economy.	2007	Horowitz et al., [22]	This study explains that medical tourism is mainly driven by factors such as lower treatment costs, shorter waiting times, and access to procedures not easily available in patients' home countries.

15	Medical tourism destination image and its relationship with the intention to revisit	2021	Cham et al., [23]	This study demonstrates that patient satisfaction depends on service quality, physician competence, and hospital facilities. Satisfied patients are more likely to revisit and recommend the destination.
16	The growth and development of medical tourism in developing countries and its role in attracting international patients.	2007	Bookman et al., [24]	This study explains the factors that make developing countries popular destinations for medical tourism. It also highlights the economic benefits, challenges, and future opportunities of the medical tourism industry.
17	Exploring the factors that affect the choice of destination for medical tourism	2011	Gill et al., [25]	This study examines the factors that influence U.S. travelers' interest in medical tourism. It finds that competent doctors, high-quality medical facilities, and timely treatment are the most important factors in choosing a medical tourism destination.
18	Revisiting the intention to travel framework in the perspective of medical tourism: The role of eWord-of-Mouth and destination image.	2022	Rahman et al., [26]	The study reports that hospital accreditation, physician reputation, treatment success rates, and affordability significantly influence patients' destination selection. Trust in healthcare providers is also a key determinant.
19	The factors that influence the attractiveness of a destination for medical tourism.	2014	Sultana et al., [27]	This study identifies the key factors that make India an attractive medical tourism destination, with service quality and treatment cost being the most important. It also shows that destination competitiveness influences patients' choice, while tourist attitude has a relatively smaller impact.
20	The influence of destination image on medical tourists' intention for future destination choice.	2014	Sultana et al., [28]	This study demonstrates how a favorable perception of a site affects medical tourists' future travel decisions, including their propensity to return and refer others to the location. It also emphasizes how a nation's reputation as a medical tourism destination is shaped by both tourist attractions and healthcare services.
21	Medical tourist's perception in selecting their destination.	2012	Sarwar et al., [29]	The study found that destination image, perceived service quality, and trust significantly influence medical tourists' intention to choose a destination. It emphasizes the importance of building a

				positive healthcare destination image.
22	Salient factors influencing medical tourism destination choice.	2010	Jotikasthira, N. ^[30]	The paper explains how tourists search for information and evaluate different medical tourism destinations before making their decisions. Investigated factors such as healthcare quality, physician expertise, safety, and travel convenience affecting destination selection.
23	Healthcare facilities and medical tourism across the world.	2024	Latief et al., ^[31]	The review shows that modern healthcare infrastructure, internationally accredited hospitals, and government support are major factors attracting medical tourists. It compares healthcare destination competitiveness across different countries.
24	Factors that influence the choice of medical tourism destinations.	2024	Huyen et al., ^[32]	The study finds that the quality of medical services is the strongest determinant of destination choice, followed by advertising and communication, and treatment cost. It recommends improving service quality and promotional activities to strengthen destination competitiveness.
25	Decoding the key drivers of medical tourism: The mediating role of promotion strategies and motivation factors in shaping destination choice.	2025	D'Souza et al., ^[33]	This study demonstrates that healthcare infrastructure, quality of care, hospital facilities, and medical treatment significantly influence destination choice. It also shows that patient motivation mediates these relationships.
26	Medical tourism motivations: An integrated framework encompassing source and destination characteristics.	2024	Biswas et al., ^[34]	The paper proposes an integrated framework combining push and pull factors affecting destination selection. It identifies healthcare quality, affordability, regulations, proximity, and cultural familiarity as key determinants.
27	The factors that influence why medical tourists choose Turkey as their preferred medical tourism destination.	2019	Sag et al., ^[35]	The study identifies the key factors that attract medical tourists to Turkey, such as healthcare quality, affordability, and destination image. It provides useful insights for policymakers and healthcare providers to improve Turkey's competitiveness in the medical tourism

				industry.
28	Global outsourcing of healthcare: A medical tourism decision model	2007	Smith et al., [36]	This study proposes an integrated framework to understand medical tourism from both the demand and supply perspectives. It provides a useful model for future research and helps practitioners better understand and develop the medical tourism industry.
29	Perception of medical tourism image from the perspective of healthcare professionals.	2024	Dağ et al., [37]	This study shows that service quality, safety, cost, hygiene, tourism opportunities, and accessibility are essential components of a country's medical tourism image. It highlights the importance of healthcare professionals in shaping destination competitiveness.
30	Medical tourism research: Trends, themes, and future directions through bibliometric analysis.	2025	Mo et al., [38]	This review summarizes recent medical tourism research and identifies healthcare quality, destination competitiveness, patient satisfaction, trust, and destination image as the most frequently studied destination-selection factors. It also recommends future research on sustainability, digital health, and patient decision-making.

Table No -2 To study the impact of healthcare quality, cost, accessibility, and destination-related attributes on medical tourists' decision-making processes.

No	Focus/Area of research	Year	References	Contribution
1	Meta-analysis of determinants of medical tourism choice.	2019	Cho, S. C. [39]	The study conducted a meta-analysis showing cost, quality, accessibility, and destination image as dominant determinants. It also provides a comprehensive understanding of these determinants and supports future research and decision-making in medical tourism.

2	Validating the Medical Tourism Index to measure how healthcare quality, cost, accessibility, and destination-related attributes influence medical tourists' choice of destination.	2016	Fetscherin et al., ^[40]	The study developed and validated a reliable Medical Tourism Index for evaluating the factors that influence medical tourists' decision-making processes. It helps compare medical tourism destinations based on healthcare quality, cost, accessibility, and destination-related attributes
3	Healthcare quality and tourism infrastructure contribute to destination competitiveness.	2010	Naidoo, P. ^[41]	The study explains how healthcare quality, cost, accessibility, and destination-related attributes influence the competitiveness of medical tourism destinations. It also highlights the importance of these factors in improving the competitiveness of medical tourism destinations.
4	An integrative review of patients' experience in the medical tourism.	2020	Xu et al., ^[42]	This review found that healthcare quality, affordability, waiting time, and procedure availability are the major reasons patients seek treatment abroad. It also highlights the importance of reliable information during decision-making.
5	An assessment of competitiveness of medical tourism industry in India.	2022	Malhotra et al., ^[43]	The study found that quality healthcare services, skilled physicians, accreditation, infrastructure, and government support influence medical tourists' decisions. It recommends strengthening healthcare ecosystems to improve competitiveness.
6	Determining destination competitiveness in medical tourism: A study based on AHP-QFD framework.	2023	Yılmaz et al., ^[44]	This study found that competent doctors, treatment quality, and accredited hospitals are the most influential factors in destination choice. It also recommends improving destination competitiveness through healthcare quality enhancement.
7	Analyzed travel behavior among inbound medical tourists and found treatment quality and destination accessibility significantly affect travel decisions.	2012	Musa et al., ^[45]	The study provides empirical evidence on the key pull factors and unique destination attributes that attract international medical tourists. It contributes to understanding how healthcare services, economic value, and destination-related factors shape medical tourists' travel motivations, healthcare consumption, and expenditure behavior.

8	Understanding about the patient's experience of medical tourism.	2010	Crooks et al., ^[46]	The study provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge on patients' experiences throughout the medical tourism process, including decision-making, travel, treatment, and follow-up care. It also identifies important gaps in empirical research and highlights the need for greater attention to healthcare quality, risks.
9	The impact on medical tourists' travel.	2015	Hanefeld et al., ^[47]	The study identifies the key motivations that drive patients to travel internationally for medical treatment, highlighting the combined influence of healthcare-related and destination-related factors.
10	Health tourism: A global perspective on the barriers and facilitators.	2025	Jalali et al., ^[48]	This review concludes that treatment cost, accessibility, healthcare quality, and physician reputation remain the most influential determinants of medical tourists' decision-making. It also discusses how travel convenience and destination infrastructure affect destination preference.
11	Medical tourism: Treatments, markets and health system implications.	2011	Lunt et al., ^[49]	The study provides a comprehensive scoping review of the global medical tourism industry by synthesizing evidence on patient motivations, healthcare quality, cost advantages, destination competitiveness, and health system implications. It contributes to understanding and identifying research gaps and policy implications for governments and healthcare providers.
12	Tourists' satisfaction and loyalty intention at private hospitals.	2018	Rahman et al., ^[50]	The study highlights that delivering high-quality healthcare services is essential for strengthening patient satisfaction and encouraging favorable behavioral intentions among medical tourists.
13	Cross-Cultural perceptions of Medical Tourism examining how cultural differences influence healthcare quality.	2012	Yu et al., ^[51]	It contributes to understanding how cultural differences shape the importance of healthcare quality, affordability, accessibility, and destination attractiveness in medical tourists' decision-making processes.

14	The impact of globalization, healthcare costs and bioethical issues influence has on the growth of medical tourism.	2007	Turner, L. [52]	The study explains how globalization has accelerated the growth of medical tourism by making high-quality healthcare available at significantly lower costs in developing countries. It also explains how globalization, lower treatment costs, and access to advanced medical technologies motivate patients to seek healthcare abroad.
15	The influence of Globalization and understanding medical tourism.	2006	Carrera et al., [53]	The study provides one of the earliest conceptual frameworks explaining the emergence and growth of health and medical tourism in the context of globalization. It contributes to the literature by identifying healthcare quality, affordability, availability of services, and destination attractiveness.
16	The impact of quality, satisfaction, trust, and price reasonableness for customer retention in the medical tourism industry.	2015	Han et al., [54]	This research found that destination image and healthcare quality positively influence patient loyalty and revisit intention. Patient satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and behavioral intention.
17	Brand image as the competitive edge for hospitals in medical tourism.	2021	Ham et al., [55]	The study positive perceptions of healthcare quality, hospital reputation, tourism attractions, and overall destination image increase patients' satisfaction and strengthen their behavioral intentions, including revisiting and recommending the destination to others.
18	Travel for treatment: Students' perspective on medical tourism.	2010	Reddy et al., [56]	The study examines university students' perceptions of medical tourism and identifies the key factors influencing their intention to seek treatment abroad. It highlights that healthcare quality, affordability, accessibility, and destination image significantly influence their decision-making.
19	Identifying the Perceptions of the risks of medical tourism.	2011	Snyder et al., [57]	The study examines patients' perceptions of the potential risks associated with medical tourism, including concerns about healthcare quality, continuity of care, and patient safety. It also highlights that perceived risks and benefits play a significant role in shaping medical tourists' destination choices and treatment decisions.

20	Medical tourism: The ethics, regulation and marketing of health mobility. practices affect destination credibility and patient trust.	2012	Hall, ^[58]	The study provides a comprehensive overview of the ethical, regulatory, and marketing dimensions of medical tourism, explaining how these factors affect the growth and competitiveness of healthcare destinations.
21	Developing a Medical Tourist Typology based on based on travel motivations, treatment needs, and destination preferences	2013	Wongkit et al., ^[59]	The study develops a typology of medical tourists by classifying them according to their primary motivations and travel characteristics for seeking healthcare abroad. It contributes to the literature by demonstrating that medical tourists are not a homogeneous group and that differences in motivations, healthcare needs.
22	Medical tourists' satisfaction and decision-making factors with a focus on the Czech Republic.	2022	Hilšerová, M. ^[60]	This study identified communication, service quality, healthcare staff behaviour, and patient satisfaction as major determinants of destination choice. It emphasizes improving patient experience to encourage repeat visits and positive recommendations.
23	International Patient Participation involvement in medical tourism, identifying the key motivation	2012	Johnston et al., ^[61]	The study reviews existing evidence on Canadian involvement in medical tourism, identifying the key motivations, preferred destinations, and challenges associated with seeking healthcare abroad.
24	Exploring medical tourism competitiveness in Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore: The Indonesian tourists' perspectives	2023	Zain et al., ^[62]	The research compares three leading Asian destinations and finds that affordability, healthcare quality, advanced medical technology, and destination reputation strongly influence medical tourists' decisions. It also highlights the role of destination-specific competitive advantages.
25	Evaluation and selection of medical tourism sites: A rough AHP based MABAC approach	2016	Roy et al., ^[63]	The study proposes a Rough AHP–MABAC framework to rank medical tourism destinations. It contributes to the literature by providing a systematic decision-making framework that helps policymakers and healthcare providers identify the most important factors influencing medical tourists' destination selection.

26	An integrative review of Health tourism: A global perspective on the barriers and facilitators.	2025	Jalali et al., ^[64]	The study conducts a global scoping review to identify the major barriers and facilitators affecting the development of health tourism, classifying them into key themes such as healthcare services, infrastructure, financial factors, marketing, human resources, legal frameworks, and international relations.
27	Medical tourism development: Adopted strategies across healthcare providers.	2021	Félix, V. S. M. ^[65]	This study concludes that healthcare providers influence patients' decisions through quality services, technological innovation, effective marketing, and collaboration with tourism stakeholders. It also identifies government support as a key factor in destination development.
28	Medical Tourism Decision Model Global outsourcing of healthcare: A medical tourism decision mode.	2007	Smith et al., ^[66]	The study develops a medical tourism decision model that explains the key internal and external factors influencing patients' choice of healthcare destinations. It contributes to the literature by identifying destination image, tourism infrastructure, and travel convenience as major determinants of medical tourists' decision-making processes.
29	Identified medical service quality, hospital accreditation, and accessibility as critical success factors	2024	Kim et al., ^[67]	The study highlights that delivering high-quality healthcare alongside accessible services and a positive destination image enhances the competitiveness of medical tourism destinations
30	Comparative Analysis of Medical Tourism Destinations. Medical tourism destination SWOT analysis: A case study of Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and India	2014	Wong et al., ^[68]	The study uses a SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of four leading Asian medical tourism destinations, highlighting the importance of healthcare quality, affordability, accessibility, and tourism infrastructure in attracting medical tourists.

4. Research Gap Identified

The majority of study has mainly focused on traditional standards of care including treatment cost, healthcare quality, physician skill, hospital accreditation, and destination image. Although these studies have made a substantial contribution to our knowledge of why patients seek medical care overseas, the results are still inconsistent across nations, healthcare systems, and medical specialties. It is challenging to have a thorough grasp of how many factors interact to impact healthcare destination choice because many studies only look at a small number of determinants or concentrate on a single location. Furthermore, limited comparative research has been conducted across emerging and established medical tourism

destinations, resulting in a lack of a unified framework that explains the overall decision-making process of medical tourists. Existing studies also pay limited attention to sustainable medical tourism practices, long-term patient satisfaction, follow-up care, and government policies that influence destination competitiveness. As the medical tourism industry continues to evolve with technological advancements and changing patient expectations, there is a need for a systematic review that integrates both traditional and emerging determinants into a single conceptual framework.

5. Limitation

This study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from published journal articles, conference proceedings, reports, dissertations, and other academic sources. As a result, the findings are dependent on the quality, reliability, and scope of the existing literature reviewed. Since no primary data were collected directly from medical tourists, the study may not fully capture current preferences, changing consumer behavior, or emerging trends in medical tourism. Additionally, some destination-specific characteristics and new developments that have surfaced since the publication of the chosen research may be overlooked by the review. Furthermore, the results may not be applicable to all medical tourism locations due to variations in healthcare systems, governmental regulations, and cultural contexts among nations.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, medical tourism continues to grow globally, making it important to understand the factors that influence healthcare destination choice. The reviewed studies show that treatment cost, healthcare quality, physician expertise, hospital accreditation, accessibility, destination image, and cultural compatibility are key determinants of medical tourists' decisions. Tourism infrastructure and the overall patient experience also contribute to destination preference. In recent years, digital marketing, social media, online reviews, and patient testimonials have become important sources of information for prospective medical tourists. Therefore, healthcare providers and policymakers should focus on improving service quality, strengthening accreditation standards, enhancing infrastructure, and increasing digital visibility to attract international patients. These efforts will help build trust, improve patient satisfaction, and enhance destination competitiveness. Future research should further examine the role of emerging technologies, patient experiences, and sustainable strategies in supporting the long-term growth of medical tourism.

7. References

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