

Exploring the Wellness Shift: Tourists' Awareness of Medicinal Tourism in the Nilgiris

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Introduction

Tourism has expanded beyond leisure to include health-related forms such as medicinal tourism, which involves the travel for traditional medicine, herbal treatments, and wellness therapies. With increasing interest in the holistic health and alternative systems of medicine, medicinal tourism has become an important segment of the tourism industry.

India occupies one of the significant positions in medicinal tourism due to its rich heritage of indigenous systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Yoga, and Naturopathy. These systems focus on natural healing and long-term wellness, attracting both domestic and international tourists. The Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, with its pleasant climate, rich biodiversity, and tradition of medicinal plant cultivation, has strong potential as the medicinal tourism destination.

However, the development of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris depends largely on the level of awareness among tourists regarding available services and their benefits. Tourists' awareness is influenced by demographic factors such as age, education, and income, as well as by sources of information. At present, there is limited research examining tourists' awareness of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris, particularly with respect to demographic characteristics and information sources.

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the demographic profile of tourists visiting the Nilgiris, assess their level of awareness about medicinal tourism, identify the major sources of information influencing awareness, and suggest suitable measures for promoting medicinal tourism in the region.

Statement of the problem

Medical tourism has become an important part of the tourism industry, as it combines medical treatment with travel. India has emerged as a popular destination for medical tourism due to its affordable healthcare services, skilled medical professionals, and availability of wellness treatments. The Nilgiris district, with its pleasant climate and peaceful natural environment, has good potential to develop as a medical tourism destination.

However, the growth of medical tourism depends largely on how far tourists are aware of the medical and wellness services available at the destination. Tourists' awareness may differ based on their demographic characteristics such as age, education, and income, as well as the sources from which they receive information. At present, there are only limited studies that examine the level of awareness about medical tourism among tourists visiting the Nilgiris.

Further, the role of information sources such as media, healthcare providers, travel agencies, and digital platforms in creating awareness has not been sufficiently studied in the Nilgiris region. Due to this lack

of research, it becomes difficult for tourism planners and authorities to promote medical tourism effectively.

Therefore, the present study focuses on analyzing the demographic profile of the tourists visiting the Nilgiris, assessing their level of awareness about medical tourism, identifying the major sources of information influencing awareness, and providing suitable suggestions for improving awareness and promoting medical tourism in the district.

Review of literature

The study “*The Growth of Foreign Medical Tourism in Pakistan*” (2024) examined awareness and behavioural intentions of the medical tourists using the Knowledge–Attitude–Behaviour model. Based on data from 339 tourists, the study found that higher health literacy and trustworthy information sources reduced perceived risk and increased willingness to participate in medical tourism. The findings focused on the importance of reliable information and safety communication in enhancing awareness.

The study “*Awareness and Knowledge of Medical Tourism Among Medical Practitioners in Tertiary Hospitals in Nigeria*” (2025) assessed awareness levels amidst healthcare professionals using a cross-sectional survey of 160 practitioners. While general awareness was high, detailed knowledge was moderate, with professional interactions being the main source of information. The study pointed out the need for structured training to improve knowledge and indirectly enhance public awareness.

The article “*Understanding Medical Tourists: Word-of-Mouth and Viral Marketing as Potent Marketing Tools*” (2013) analyzed the demographic profile of medical tourists and sources of awareness in Malaysia. The findings revealed that middle-aged tourists were the major group and that word-of-mouth from friends, relatives, and healthcare professionals was the most influential source of information. The study settled that patient satisfaction plays a key role in promoting awareness.

The study “*Medical Tourists’ Perception in Selecting their Destination: A Global Perspective*” (2012) explored how awareness and perception influence destination choice using secondary data. It recognized the treatment cost, quality of healthcare, availability of services, and marketing communication as major factors shaping awareness. Demographic characteristics were also found to influence tourists’ perceptions of destinations.

An integrative review on medical tourism awareness and patient experiences (2020) examined global studies on information sources influencing awareness. The review noticed the internet, social media, hospital websites, and patient testimonials as major sources, while also noting concerns about information credibility. It concluded that transparent and standardized information systems are essential to improve awareness and informed decision-making.

Research Gap

Most previous studies focus on medical tourism, while empirical research on tourists’ awareness of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris is limited. In particular, studies examining demographic characteristics and sources of information influencing awareness in this region are scarce.

Objectives

1. To know the socio economic profile of the tourists
2. To study the level of awareness about medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris.
3. To identify sources of information influencing awareness.
4. To provide suggestions based on the findings of the study.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents ($N = 150$)

| Demographic Variables | Category | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 72 | 48.0 |
| | Female | 68 | 45.3 |
| | Others | 10 | 6.7 |
| Age Group | Below 25 | 28 | 18.7 |
| | 25–35 | 42 | 28.0 |
| | 36–45 | 36 | 24.0 |
| | 46–55 | 26 | 17.3 |
| | Above 55 | 18 | 12.0 |
| | Educational Qualification | School Level | 22 |
| | Undergraduate | 38 | 25.3 |
| | Postgraduate | 46 | 30.7 |
| | Professional | 30 | 20.0 |
| | Others | 14 | 9.3 |
| Occupation | Student | 34 | 22.7 |
| | Employed | 44 | 29.3 |
| | Business | 26 | 17.3 |
| | Professional | 28 | 18.7 |
| | Retired | 12 | 8.0 |
| | Others | 6 | 4.0 |
| | Place of Residence | Local (Nilgiris) | 32 |
| | Other District (TN) | 46 | 30.7 |
| | Other State | 52 | 34.7 |
| | Foreign Tourist | 20 | 13.3 |
| Monthly Income Level | Up to ₹25,000 | 36 | 24.0 |
| | ₹25,001 – ₹50,000 | 48 | 32.0 |
| | ₹50,001 – ₹75,000 | 38 | 25.3 |
| | Above ₹75,000 | 28 | 18.7 |
| Total | | 150 | 100.0 |

The demographic analysis reveals that 48% of the respondents are male and 45.3% are female, indicating the balanced gender representation. A majority of the respondents (28%) belong to the 25–35 age group, followed by those aged 36–45 years (24%), suggesting that the medicinal tourism largely attracts the working-age population.

With regard to the education, postgraduates (30.7%) and undergraduates (25.3%) form the major share, indicating a well-educated respondent base capable of informed perception and evaluation of medicinal

tourism services. Occupationally, employed respondents (29.3%) and students (22.7%) constitute a significant proportion, reflecting both economic capability and health-awareness orientation.

In terms of residence, tourists from other states (34.7%) and other districts of Tamil Nadu (30.7%) dominate the sample, confirming the tourism-driven nature of the study. Income-wise, the majority fall within the ₹25,001–₹50,000 range (32%), followed by ₹50,001–₹75,000 (25.3%), indicating a moderate to high income group, which is conducive to medicinal tourism participation.

Overall, the demographic profile suggests that the respondents are economically stable, educated, and it is tourism-oriented, making them suitable for assessing awareness and perception of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris.

Awareness of Medicinal Tourism in the Nilgiris

Table 2: Awareness of the Concept of Medicinal Tourism (*N* = 150)

| | Awareness No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 108 | 72 |
| No | 42 | 28 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

The table indicates that a majority of the respondents (72%) are aware of the concept of medicinal tourism, while 28% are not aware of it. This shows that medicinal tourism is fully familiar among the respondents, though a considerable proportion still lacks awareness, indicating scope for further awareness creation.

Table 3: Awareness of the Nilgiris as a Medicinal Tourism Destination (*N* = 150)

| Level of Awareness | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Fully aware | 46 | 30.7 |
| Partially aware | 62 | 41.3 |
| Not aware | 42 | 28.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

Interpretation

The table reveals that 41.3% of the respondents are partially aware that the Nilgiris is a destination for medicinal tourism, while 30.7% are fully aware. However, 28% of the respondents are not aware of this fact. This suggests that although the Nilgiris possesses medicinal tourism potential, its identification as a medicinal tourism destination needs stronger promotional efforts.

Table 4: Awareness of Medicinal Practices Available in the Nilgiris (*Multiple Responses – N* = 150)

| Medicinal Practices | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Ayurveda | 92 | 61.3 |
| Siddha | 68 | 45.3 |
| Homeopathy | 54 | 36.0 |
| Yoga & Naturopathy | 88 | 58.7 |

| Medicinal Practices | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Tribal / Herbal Medicine | 46 | 30.7 |
| Not aware of any | 32 | 21.3 |

The table shows that Ayurveda (61.3%) and Yoga & Naturopathy (58.7%) are the most widely recognized medicinal practices among respondents. Awareness of Siddha (45.3%) and Homeopathy (36%) is moderate, while awareness of tribal and herbal medicine (30.7%) is comparatively low. This indicates the need for promoting indigenous and tribal medicinal systems are more effective.

Table 5: Overall Level of Awareness about Medicinal Tourism in the Nilgiris (N = 150)

| Level of Awareness | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Very High | 24 | 16.0 |
| High | 38 | 25.3 |
| Moderate | 46 | 30.7 |
| Low | 28 | 18.7 |
| Very Low | 14 | 9.3 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The table indicates that the majority of respondents have a moderate level of awareness (30.7%), followed by high awareness (25.3%). However, 28% of the respondents fall under low and very low awareness categories. This highlights that while awareness exists, it is not uniformly high, and systematic promotional strategies are required to enhance awareness levels.

The frequency analysis reveals that the respondents generally possess a reasonable level of awareness about medicinal tourism and the Nilgiris as a medicinal tourism destination. However, awareness remains largely moderate, with limited understanding of unfamiliar medicinal practices such as tribal and herbal medicine. Strengthening awareness through digital platforms, healthcare promotion, and tourism campaigns can significantly enhance the visibility and growth of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris.

Sources of Information

Table 6 Main Source of Information about Medicinal Tourism in the Nilgiris (N = 150)

| Source of Information | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Social Media | 36 | 24.0 |
| Websites / Online Portals | 42 | 28.0 |
| Friends & Relatives | 30 | 20.0 |
| Travel Agencies | 14 | 9.3 |
| Doctors / Health Practitioners | 12 | 8.0 |
| Newspapers / Magazines | 10 | 6.7 |
| Television / Radio | 6 | 4.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The table shows that websites and online portals (28%) are the primary source of information regarding medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris, followed by social media (24%). Friends and relatives also play a significant role (20%). Traditional sources such as newspapers, television, and radio contribute

comparatively less. This shows the growing importance of digital media in disseminating information related to medicinal tourism.

Table 7 Digital Platform that Influenced the Respondents the Most (*N* = 150)

| Digital Platform | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| Google Search | 48 | 32.0 |
| YouTube | 32 | 21.3 |
| Instagram | 26 | 17.3 |
| Facebook | 18 | 12.0 |
| Travel Websites (MakeMyTrip, Trip Advisor, etc.) | 16 | 10.7 |
| Blogs / Influencers | 10 | 6.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The table reveals that Google Search (32%) is the most influential digital platform in creating awareness about medicinal tourism, followed by YouTube (21.3%) and Instagram (17.3%). Travel websites and blogs have a moderate influence, while influencers play a limited role. This highlights the dominance of search engines and video-based platforms in shaping tourist awareness and decision-making.

Table 8 Reliability of Information Sources (*N* = 150)

| Level of Reliability | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Highly Reliable | 34 | 22.7 |
| Reliable | 52 | 34.7 |
| Neutral | 38 | 25.3 |
| Unreliable | 18 | 12.0 |
| Highly Unreliable | 8 | 5.3 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The table indicates that a majority of respondents perceive the information sources as reliable. While 34.7% consider the sources reliable and 22.7% highly reliable, about 25.3% remain neutral. A smaller proportion of respondents view the sources as unreliable. This suggests that most information channels related to medicinal tourism are trusted, though improving credibility and accuracy can further enhance confidence among tourists.

The frequency analysis reveals that digital platforms, particularly websites, search engines, and social media, are the dominant sources of information influencing awareness of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris. The high level of perceived reliability further emphasizes the critical role of digital media in shaping tourists' awareness and decision-making. Strengthening online presence and ensuring accurate digital content can significantly enhance awareness and tourist engagement.

Chi-square test

It was applied to examine the association between educational qualification and awareness level, and between age group and awareness level of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris.

Educational Qualification and Awareness Level

Hypothesis Tested

- **H₀:** There is no significant association between educational qualification and awareness level.
- **H₁:** There is a significant association between educational qualification and awareness level.

Table 9 Chi-Square Tests

| Test | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 18.764 | 16 | .046 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 19.982 | 16 | .039 |
| N of Valid Cases | 150 | | |

The Pearson Chi-square value is 18.764 with 16 degrees of freedom, and the significance value ($p = .046$) is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that educational qualification has a significant association with the level of awareness of medicinal tourism in the Nilgiris. Higher educational attainment contributes to better awareness levels among tourists.

Age Group and Awareness Level

Table 10 Chi-Square Tests

| Test | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 21.436 | 16 | .033 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 22.891 | 16 | .028 |
| N of Valid Cases | 150 | | |

The Pearson Chi-square value is 21.436 with 16 degrees of freedom, and the significance value ($p = .033$) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that age group has a significant association with the level of awareness of medicinal tourism. Awareness varies significantly across different age categories, with working-age groups showing relatively higher awareness.

Conclusion

The study shows that tourists visiting the Nilgiris have a moderate level of awareness about medicinal tourism, but many are not fully aware of the Nilgiris as a medicinal tourism destination. Awareness differs among tourists based on age and educational qualification, with higher awareness seen among educated and working-age groups. Digital platforms play a major role in spreading information about medicinal tourism, while traditional sources have less influence. Although systems like Ayurveda and Yoga are well known, awareness of tribal and herbal medicine is comparatively low.

The study concludes that the Nilgiris has good potential for the growth of medicinal tourism. Improving digital promotion, providing reliable information, and creating awareness about lesser-known medicinal practices can help attract more tourists. Focused efforts by tourism authorities and healthcare providers will strengthen medicinal tourism and support sustainable tourism development in the Nilgiris.



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