

POTENTIAL OF HEALTH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL: LITERATURE REVIEW AND  
FUTURE VIEW

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**Abstract:** Traveling for health and wellness is one of the most important tourist patterns of economic returns generated by the tourism industry, tourist destinations, and the health sector. The paper studies the potential of health tourism development in Nepal. Health tourism in Nepal especially based on natural healing resources that are mostly combined with the medical, preventive and wellness programs. They are not being used well enough, even though they are the key factor in positioning Nepal as a recognizable health tourism destination, which can generate economic growth and income. On the other hand, the trends in the world tourism predict further growth of health tourism, mostly due to the changes in people's lifestyle. Although health tourism, a burgeoning and lucrative tourism market, has gained, increased attention in recent years, particularly in developing countries, only a few academic studies of the sector have been published. Given the scarcity of academic literature in this area, the aim of the present study is to offer a comprehensive theoretical framework for future research. Yoga, Ayurveda, meditation, and natural healing-based tourism are a new form of niche tourism, which has been rapidly growing in recent years.

**Keywords:** Health Tourism, Wellness, Tourism Development, Potential, Nepal

### Introduction

The history of healthcare tourism in the Indian subcontinent is very old. With the popularity of Meditation, Yoga, and Ayurveda, around 5000 years ago constant streams of medical travellers and spiritual students flocked to Indian subcontinent countries to seek the benefits of the alternative healing methods. In many countries, the way of seeking wellness varies with the prevalence of varieties of wellness therapies. These therapies include physical practices (Yoga, Panchakarma) along with the use of natural/herbal products (Ayurveda, Spas). Most of the western and European countries (Brazil, Spain,) focus on the Spa's while the eastern countries (Nepal, Srilanka, India, and China) lay emphasis on the various practices like traditional Medicine, Meditation, Yoga, and Ayurveda.

Health tourism is a specific branch of tourism that includes professional and controlled use of natural healing factors and physical therapy in order to maintain and improve the health and quality of life. Today there is substantial growth in demand for health tourism, which is generated by the crisis in health care systems in the developed countries, high prices of health services, long waiting lists, and the aging of the population. The trends in the world tourism markets forecast a further growth of health tourism, mainly due to changes in people's lifestyle. The aim of this paper is to study the potential that Nepal has in health tourism and point out the potential of development of health tourism in Nepal.

Nepal has a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. Traditional healthcare providers in Nepal can be divided into medical providers and faith healers. Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine is based on the Tridosha Theory of disease. Ayurvedic medicine is inherent to Nepal and was strongly encouraged in the medieval period of her history. Ayurvedic hospitals, dispensaries, and medicine manufacturing units were established (Shankar, Paudel and Giri, 2006). Today, Ayurveda is a popular form of treatment for many people around the world. Its use is widespread in Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka. The value of many Ayurvedic herbs and

therapies is now becoming recognized and clinically validated, and there is increasing interest in Ayurvedic systems of healing in the western world. This is because it is a holistic, natural, and effective healing system. It recognizes the individual as unique, as more than only a physical body, and with an inherent healing capacity. Health tourism in Nepal has emerged as the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry, despite the full support from the government of Nepal. Busy and stressful working lifestyle in developed countries, particularly the USA, Canada, UK, and Russia, have been forcing patients from such regions to look for alternative and natural based healing destinations to get their mentally and physically treatment done. The Nepalese health tourism industry is presently at a nascent stage but has an enormous potential for future growth. The main reason for the growing importance of health tourism in Nepal is the uniqueness and originality of its services and healing techniques than offered by any other developed countries. Other competitive countries health tourism is based on the sea and Nepal is only that country whose health tourism is based on mountains. In addition, the mountains are the best sources for medicinal herbs.

### Research Objectives

Health tourism based on healing factors is the oldest type of health tourism. This type of tourism focuses on the revitalization of the psychophysical abilities and is being performed in different climates, mountains and healing destination using by Ayurveda, Yoga, Meditation, and other traditional healing systems. The followings are the objective of this research:

1. To find the present condition of health tourism in Nepal
2. To find the potential of health tourism development in Nepal

### Research Methodology

A qualitative research method was adopted to collect data from representatives of private and public health providers, government bodies, and tourism providers. The research methodology included direct interviews with stakeholders, review of currently available papers on health tourism and books, which formed the theoretical bases of this paper. We have conducted some in-depth interviews with stakeholders in Nepal between December 10, 2017, to December 27, 2017. We interviewed 38 people from different government agencies, health tourism providers, tourism providers, and other stakeholders.

S.No.	Organization	Status	Respondent No.
1	Nepal Ayurvedic Medical Council	Governmental Organization	1
2	Nepal Ayurvedic Research Centre	Governmental Organization	2
3	Health Ministry Ayurveda Department	Governmental Organization	2
4	Health Ministry Health Dept	Governmental Organization	2
5	Nepal Tourism Board	Governmental Organization	1
6	Tourism Ministry	Governmental Organization	1
7	Nepal Ayurvedic Doctor Assoc	Governmental Organization	2
8	Government Ayurvedic Hospital	Health Provider	2
9	Private Ayurvedic Hospital	Health Provider	10
10	Yoga and Naturopathy	Health Provider	6
11	SPA Centers	Health Provider	2
12	Tours and Travel Agencies	Tourism Provider	4
13	Hotels (Health Resorts)	Accommodation Provider	3

For this research, the methodology is partly exploratory, partly descriptive. For this study secondary data and information has been collected with the help of health providers and

government agencies. For primary data and information, we have conducted a face-to-face interview. In addition, interview data analysis, we used SWOT analysis methods.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Concept of Health Tourism**

Health tourism is becoming an upward trend in our globalized world. Health tourism can be simply defined as traveling of individuals to other countries for the purposes of improvement and/or maintenance of their health. While at the same time touring, vacationing, and fully experiencing the attractions of the countries that they are visiting. Actually people travel to avail of such facility because of cost, Quality, or those treatments such as Ayurveda or Yoga therapies, which are not available in one's own country. Many countries focus on the health tourism issue for the last decades, as it has become a remarkable service for export. Health tourism encompasses both medical tourism (based on western medicines) and wellness tourism (based on traditional therapies such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and SPA).

According to Magablih (2001), "health tourism is the movement of a patient, with the purpose of getting services that help in recovering his ailment, or at least in stabilizing his medical case, outside his own country for a period of time not less than 24 hours and up to 1 year, each time, and the patient has no intent to work or reside permanently." He also stated, "This is a direct and narrow concept of health tourism." The holistic concept includes those healthy people, who accompany the patient to help him during his stay outside his usual residence. Health tourism is defined as traveling to other countries for no less than a day and no more than a year to get the treatment they need to get better (Barca, Akdeve & Gedik, 2013).

There are a few studies, which discuss the differences between health tourism and medical tourism. The literature refers to medical tourism as the act of traveling to foreign countries to seek 'western-style' medical treatments and procedures (elective surgeries such as cosmetic, dental and plastic surgery as well as specialized surgeries such as knee/hip replacement, cardiac surgery, cancer treatments, fertility, orthopaedic therapy etc.). 'The phenomenon of people traveling from their usual country of residence to another country with the expressed purpose of accessing medical treatment' (Connell, 2013).

In the last two decades, medical tourism has been recognized as the new socioeconomic trend in the world, (Connell, 2006; Hancock, 2006; MacReady, 2007) that was initially associated with traveling to another country but only in relation to the treatment or procedure (Bookman & Bookman, 2007; Leahy, 2008). Medical tourism is often characterized as the phenomenon of the 21st century (Bookman & Bookman, 2007), a form of transnational health care (Botterill, Pennings & Mainil, 2013), kind of offshore medical service (Liberska, 2012) and one of the effects of globalization (Juszczak, 2012), industrialization and the development of mass culture (Connell, 2006).

Wellness tourism, on the other hand, refers to authentic or location-based experiences/therapies such as SPA, Meditation, Yoga, and Ayurveda, use of local medicines or herbs etc. According to Koncul (2012), In Asian countries, many spiritual activities such as yoga, meditation, and massages are considered important daily activities. The term 'wellness' refers to an alternative understanding of the traditional model of health. In the traditional model, health is simply defined as the absence of disease. This understanding has been criticized to neglect the individual as a whole and to overemphasize the role of diseases, instead of focusing on positive human functioning (Boruchovitch & Mednick, 2002; Shank & Coyle, 2002). Within the wellness paradigm, one is concerned with the questions of 'Why do people

stay healthy' or 'How do they become healthier' rather than 'why do people get sick', which would reflect the traditional health paradigm.

In the literature about the concepts of wellness and medical tourism are lacking and their definitions and understanding vary extensively. The terms wellness tourism (Nahrstedt, 2004; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), health tourism (Douglas, 2001; Hall, 2003) health care tourism (Goodrich & Goodrich, 1991; Henderson, 2003), well-being tourism (Inside Story, 2007), holistic tourism (Smith, 2003; Smith & Kelly, 2006), medical tourism (Connell, 2006) and spa tourism (Puczkó & Bacharov, 2006) are sometimes used interchangeably but often describe different concepts.

### **Health Tourism Development Factors**

The global health tourism industry has undergone significant growth in the past years, attracting health tourists from all over the world to health providers located in every global region (Connell, 2011; Hopkins et. al. 2010; Johnston et. al. 2010). Facilities in these regions are being built, renovated, and staffed with a full spectrum of health human resources in attempts to attract these patients, often competing with one-another for health tourists (Pocock & Phua, 2011; Turner, 2007; Crooks et. al. 2011).

As stated in recent studies(Connell, 2006; Laing & Weiler, 2008; Deloitte, 2009; Eissler & Cohen 2012), the development of health tourism is driven by various factors, some of them are Low cost and others are quality of Health Care Service, Shorter waiting periods, Originality of Service and easier access to health care, more affordable international travel, Communication improvement through the internet and growth of Health facilitators and Unavailability of quality health care in home country of health tourist.

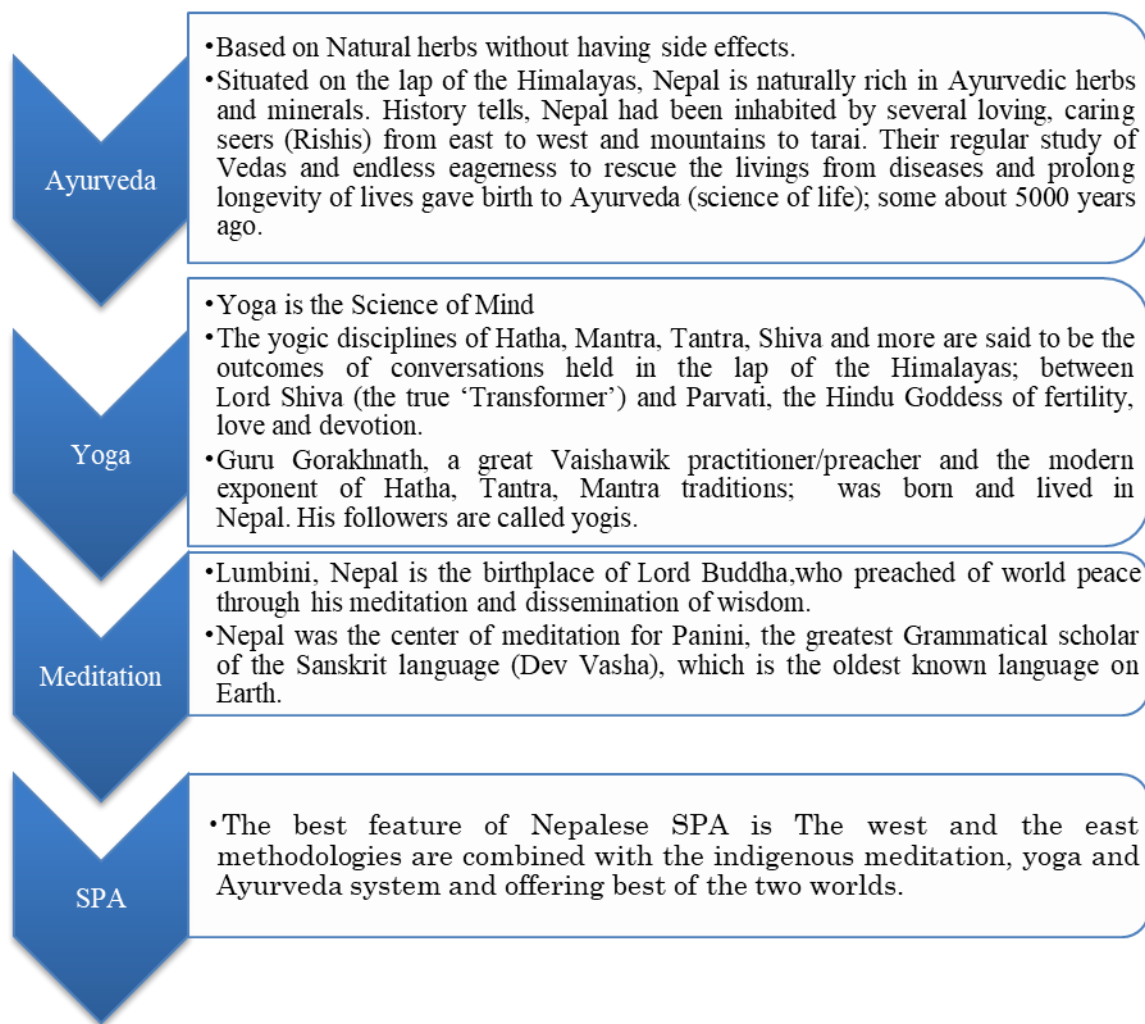
Many European and Asian countries encourage the development of health tourism, but there is a lack of serious research on the subject. However, the conclusions of some statistical reports suggest there is a growing demand for those services, and investments in the health sector confirm that there is a need for the improvement of the current health offer.

Many of the research is focused on health tourism behaviour factors and interest, health tourism branding, health tourism services. There is a lack of health tourism development factors research like human resources, medical resources, government policy, and promotion factors.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

#### **The base of Nepalese Health Tourism**

The health system in Nepal, which started 122 years before, based on the primary health care approach. Large differences in diseases are observed among plain area, southern area, and northern high mountain area. Health services are provided both by the government and non-government (profit and nonprofit) bodies. Tibetan medicines, Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, SPA, faith healing, naturopathy, homeopathic and western medical systems are mostly used in medical practices in Nepal. Health tourism in Nepal is mostly based on natural healing factors that combine different kinds of medical treatment, preventive and wellness programs adapted to the needs of specific tourist groups.



**Figure 1.** The base of Nepalese Health Tourism. Compiled from various sources.

Figure 1 shows most of the health tourists in Nepal using Ayurveda, Yoga, Meditation and SPA services in Nepal. In addition, we find most of private health provider company focus these services to the foreign health tourists and public health providers are not involved in health tourism. Public health providers mainly focusing their services to domestic patients. Here are some factors for driving health tourism in Nepal:

1. Many of skilled Ayurvedic doctors and specialists, with Nepal and international experience.
2. Strong value proposition on cost, quality of treatment and services.
3. Diverse geography with numerous tourism destinations to suit the health tourist’s schedule and health.
4. The originality of the treatment, use of alternative medicines, wellness, and rejuvenation programs for complete healing.

### **Nepal Present Scenario**

Foreign health tourists in increasing numbers are now coming to Nepal for their private health care using Yoga, Meditation, SPA, and Ayurvedic treatment. They come from the US, Canada, UK, Germany, Russia, and many other countries for lifestyle disease treatment procedures that are not available in their home countries.

Factors	Private Health Provider	Public Health Provider
Human resources	Nepalese doctors/therapist Indian doctors/therapist	Only Nepalese doctors/therapist
Skill/Education	Ayurvedic medical education with basic allopathic courses	Ayurvedic medical education with basic allopathic courses
Health Tourists	Primary: International tourists with less-high WTP Secondary: Nepalese Citizen with high WTP	Primary: Nepalese citizen Secondary: International tourists with less WTP
Location	Mainly based in big cities, Like; Kathmandu, Pokhara, Biratnagar, Bhairawa, Banepa etc.	All Cities
Cost of service	Relatively high	Relatively low
International insurance	Accepted in the case by case	Not accepted
Basic Infrastructure	Relatively good	Very poor
Overall infrastructure	Very poor	
Medical resources	Medicinal Plants mainly export to India & China and produced medicines imports from India	
Promotion	Web-based only e.g. Company web site and TripAdvisor	Not at all
Interested Ministry	Tourism Ministry	Health Ministry

**Table 1:** Present Scenario of Health Tourism in Nepal. Compiled from Various sources and stakeholder interviews.

Table 1 shows the Nepal present scenario of health tourism. The private health providers in Nepal have made some impressive practice in the health tourism industry. They have a skilled workforce and good infrastructure compare with public health providers. Due to the lack of a skilled workforce in the health tourism industry in Nepal, some private health providers hire Indian doctors. Moreover, they are also promoting their services through their company website and using TripAdvisor. However, most of the public health providers only concern domestic patients. Basic infrastructures are relatively good in private health provider, compared with the public health provider. Both private and public providers have skilled human resources in terms of medical skill, but they have a lack of hospitality management skills.

It should be noted that, for the first time, health tourism is clearly defined in the national tourism strategy 2016-2025 documents. However, there is not any clear vision and strategy for development, the health tourism industry in Nepal. Health tourism providers failed to provide services in such a way as to meet the expectations of health tourists who want to get quality in treatment, equipment, employees' look planned organization of cultural and heritage programs, co-operation, friendliness and translator's services, patient safety and airport pick up services including road safety measures and the quality of roads offered to them to reach their destination.

### Nepal's Competitiveness of Health Tourism

Nepalese health tourism offers Ayurveda, naturopathy, yoga, meditation, SPA, and many other treatments that are beneficial for health rejuvenation. People from more than 120 countries visit various Ayurveda centres, meditation centres, yoga centres, and SPA hotels & resorts spread across the country as a part of their health tourism in Nepal.

The following Table 2 compiled through various sources highlights the Nepal competitive position with its competitors in health tourism:

Factors	Wellness	Integrative Medicine System	Medical Tourism	
			Cosmetic Surgery	Advance Life Saving Health Care
Service Offered	Meditation, Yoga, SPA, Stress relief	Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Tibetan Amchi	Plastic surgery, Breast enhancement, Dental Care, Skin Treatment Etc.	Hip & Knee Replacement, Open Heart Surgery, Cardiovascular Surgery, IVF, etc.
Key Competitors	Thailand, India, Philippines	India, Srilanka	Thailand, S. Korea, Singapore	Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia
Nepal Strength	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
Economic Contribution to the Community	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>

**Table 2:** Nepal's competitiveness of Health Tourism. Compiled from Various Sources.

Primary competitors to Nepal in terms of development stage and the quality of health tourism promotion are India, Srilanka, and Thailand. We can say that due to the vicinity and the Nepal outbound market, India is the most significant competition in Nepal.

It becomes evident from the above table that the area of cosmetic medical tourism and life-saving medical tourism in Nepal is not competitive, while in wellness-based health tourism and integrative medicine-based health tourism, Nepal stands before the international community with high competitiveness. Not only the competitiveness is high, but also this tourism gives a high economic contribution to the community.

### **Medicinal Herbs in Nepal**

As per WHO estimates, traditional, complementary, alternative or non-conventional medicines are used by 70-95% of the global population, particularly in developing countries for their healthcare (WHO 2011). Traditional medicines vastly depend on the usages of plants, compared to other natural resources.

Nepal has significantly diverse ecosystems (Chaudhary, 1998; Subedi, 2000, 2004), producing a wide range of unique and valuable medicinal plant resources. Representing only 0.01% of earth's land area, Nepal is gifted by nature with 2.6% of all flowering plants, 9.3% birds, and 4.5% of mammals of the world. Out of the estimated 9,000 species found in the eastern Himalaya as a whole, 39% are endemic to this mountain range (Myers 1988; Myers 1990; Bajracharya et al. 1998; IUCN 2000). "Nearly 7,000 species of higher plants are found in Nepal, of which 5% are endemic to Nepal and 10% are medicinal and aromatic plants. 75 vegetation types ranging from dense tropical forests to alpine vegetation that covers over 50% of the total geographical area of the country forms the land resource base for the provision of medicinal and aromatic plants" (Subedi, 2010).

"Traditional medicine in Nepal has a strong cultural and religious background; indigenous and local communities have been using traditional and indigenous knowledge for centuries under local laws, customs, and traditions" (Koirala & Khaniya 2008). WHO (2002), defines traditional medicines as "including diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plant, animal, and/or mineral based medicines applied singularly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose or prevent illness".

Medicinal plants play a substantial role in the life support systems of local communities of Far-west Nepal. With increasing acceptance and use of medicinal plants in traditional therapies, and with increasing commercial demands over the years, the consumption and collection of medicinal plants are accelerating and thus endangering the extant populations. However, most of the medical plants are exported to the Indian and Chinese markets now- a- days, then import produced medicines from India.

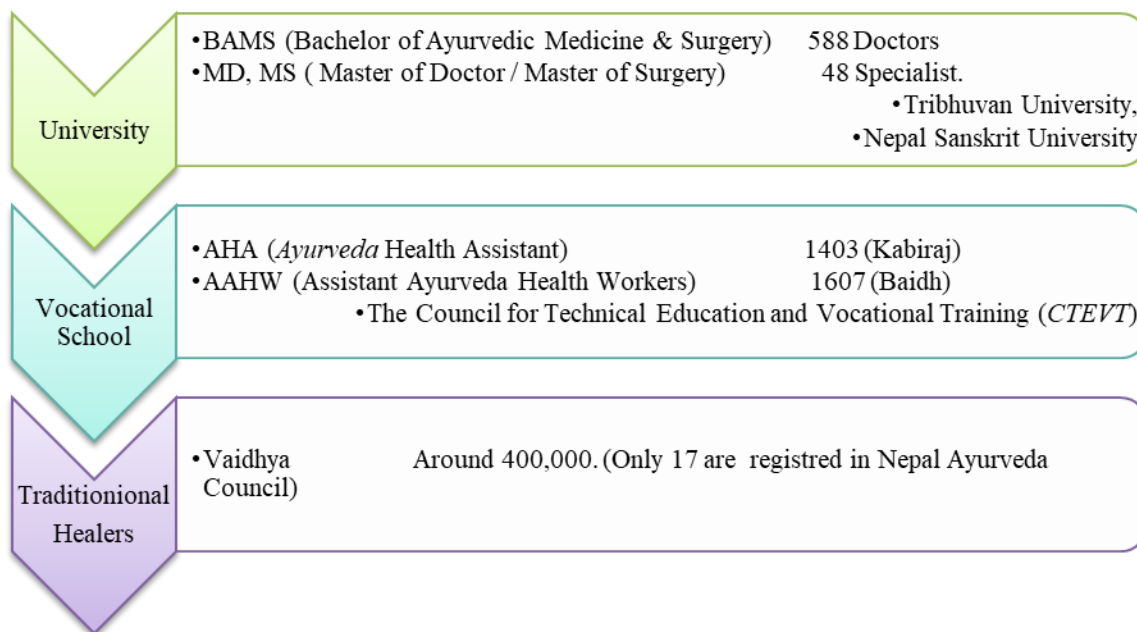
### **Human Resources for Health Tourism Industry**

"Ayurveda practitioners in Nepal can be divided into two categories" (Koirala & Khaniya 2008). First, Ayurveda based-traditional healers, who have been practicing it as a family profession for generations. Second, academic Ayurveda practitioners trained in educational institutions, training centres, colleges, and universities. The former is mostly concentrated in the informal sector, whereas the latter operate in the formal sector. The estimated number of traditional healers in Nepal is 400,000(Koirala & Khaniya 2008).



Figure 2 shows the Ayurveda education system in Nepal. It started about 75 years ago when the Nepal Rajakiya Ayurved Vidyalaya in 1933 was started in Kathmandu for the training of Ayurvedic health workers (Dixit, 2005). As per data available from Nepal Medical Council, formally trained Ayurveda practitioners number around 3646, including 636 Ayurveda Doctors (graduates/post-graduates), 1403 Ayurveda Health Assistants (with certificate-level or equivalent education), and 1607 Ayurveda Health Workers (with the training of at least 15 months).

At present, there are 293 government run Ayurvedic centers all over the country, and 13 Ayurvedic medical colleges under Tribhuvan University and Nepal Sanskrit University and also many vocational schools under CTEVT and a few regulating bodies established in the public sector. Many of these activities and institutions are run by private sectors.



**Figure 2.** Ayurveda Educational System in Nepal. Data received from Nepal Ayurveda Medical Council.

The first health service organization and medical institution established in Nepal were Ayurveda Hospital and Ayurveda College, respectively. Now the country has dozens of modern hospitals and teaching institutions related to medicine. The Nepal Ayurveda Medical Council was established (The *Ayurveda Medical Council Act 1988*) to provide and observe necessary standards of Ayurvedic education, service, and registration of practitioners. Ayurveda practitioner must be registered in Ayurveda Medical Council to hold him/herself as a practitioner. Recently above medical education, providers have provided following yearly quotas to produce medical human resource:

1. For Ayurvedic Doctors: 120 Quotas per Year.
2. For Ayurvedic MD: 2 from Nepalese University and 20 from Indian University.
3. Ayurvedic Health Assistance (AHA): 120 Per Year
4. Assistance Ayurvedic Health Workers (AHW): 440 Per Year

However, there are some important issues and concerns related to health tourism. One of the interesting facts is that there are more young professionals engaged in the health tourism sector, and there is increasing pressure in their skill-set due to fierce day-to-day competition.

Our study shows that they have good knowledge and skills of the technical field of health services, but lack of skills and knowledge in hospitality management.

### SWOT Analysis

Many European and Asian countries encourage the development of health tourism, but there is a lack of serious research on the subject. However, the conclusions of some statistical reports suggest there is a growing demand for those services, and investments in the health sector confirm that there is a need for the improvement of the current health offer.

Strength	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nepal is the only country which health tourism services are based on mountains. Most of the herbs are coming from the mountainous area.</li> <li>2. BioDiversity in Nepal offers the possibility to explore original and high-value health tourism products.</li> <li>3. Nepal has good potential for medicinal herbs and medicinal plants.</li> <li>4. Ayurvedic doctors and therapist provide health services. In addition, Nepal has many colleges and universities who provide medical education for Ayurveda and other health professional.</li> <li>5. Ayurvedic doctors are trained both Ayurvedic Treatment with allopathic treatment.</li> <li>6. Many Famous tourist attractions and trekking routes are lies in Nepal.</li> </ol>
Weakness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of skilled workforce for health tourism.</li> <li>2. Lack of promotion globally or target markets.</li> <li>3. Lack of government support in terms of policy and regulation.</li> <li>4. Lack of R&amp;D activities in the field of Health tourism.</li> <li>5. Lack of public-private health provider partnership.</li> </ol>
Opportunity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasing Global demand for the health tourism industry.</li> <li>2. Increase awareness of Yoga and Ayurveda in developed countries like Japan, USA, Canada, and the UK.</li> <li>3. The cost of health service in developed western world remaining high, they compare western service providers with Nepali service providers and find Nepali health care cost most effective.</li> <li>4. Fast Paced lifestyle increases the demand for wellness tourism and alternative cures.</li> <li>5. Globalization and Internet technology, providing visibility to service providers.</li> </ol>
Threats	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Competition from India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.</li> <li>2. Facing some legal question from European countries for some Ayurvedic herbs and medicine.</li> <li>3. Lack of International accreditation – a major inhibitor.</li> <li>4. Low investment in health infrastructure and general infrastructure is not impressive.</li> </ol>

**Table 3:** SWOT Analysis of Health Tourism industry in Nepal.

Table 3 shows strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat of Nepalese health tourism industry. The entire intensive development of health tourism is not possible without permanent and target-oriented support of relevant institutions such as the relevant ministries and the other government institutions since they are responsible for removing barriers and encouraging investments. On the other hand, the operational support through professional management of health providers with the functions of market research, information, education, and promotion.

### Key Findings

Factors	Questions	Answers
Cost	Health tourism costs are high or Low	Low
Language and Communication	Foreign language can be a problem or not	Not
Investment Potential	Investment chances in Health Tourism Industry	High
Expertise/ Human Resources	Health Tourism requires expertise and specialization	Yes Lack of skilled HR
Promotion	Promotion of Health Tourism is sufficient or not	Not
Policy and Regulation	Related policy and regulation are sufficient or not	Not
Government Attitude	More governmental support is needed	Yes
Infrastructure	Is there sufficient infrastructure or not?	Not
Tourist Attractions	Is there a tourist attraction as a health tourism destination?	Yes
Quality Standards	Need to improve quality standards to meet international standards	Yes Need Accreditation

**Table 4:** Key findings of Research based on Stakeholder Interviews.

Health care facilities providing medical tourism services in Nepal are characterized by a lack of interest in health tourism, and most of them do not have international certification. The services are currently provided by a small number of specialized, internationally established doctors and private institutions. There are positive steps towards multidisciplinary associations combining health, catering industry, travel agents, and science in order to establish a destination value chain.

Here are some key findings of this study:

- I. Most of the health providers in Nepal dedicatedly are serving the health tourists with lifestyle caused disease, and are offering yoga, Ayurveda, SPA and meditation-based treatment.
- II. Various health providers and big hotels are coming forward to invest in the health tourism sector to build a good image of Nepal as a health tourism destination and to attract foreign health tourists.
- III. Every health provider of Nepal is now well occupied with English speaking staff and thus removing the problem of communication gap between health tourists and the health providers.
- IV. Affordable costs of health tourism services lower than the costs in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, make Nepal highly appeal to foreign tourist as a health tourism destination.
- V. Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Banepa, Pokhara, and Lumbini receive the maximum number of international health tourists, compared to other cities of Nepal because of their natural scenes, tourist attractions, yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic techniques of healing.
- VI. Lack of skilled workforce in terms of hospitality and management skills.
- VII. Lack of full support of the government in terms of policy, regulation, and promotion.

## **Conclusion**

One of the latest trends in health tourism is the fact that has been a recent surge in the interest level amongst youth all over the world. In order to tap this growing interest in health tourism, it is crucial that steps should be undertaken to coordinate closely all the various aspects of health tourism under an institutional framework. This would pave the way to maximize the opportunity for growth and progress of this niche tourism product in the future.

Health tourism has not yet been researched very extensively in Nepal even though it is an important and growing sector. In recent years, health, wellness, and medical tourism have grown quickly. This includes visits to spa and wellness hotels & resorts, Ayurveda, Yoga and meditation, hospitals and clinics for surgery and medical procedures, as well as spiritual or holistic retreats. One of the most important challenges for health tourism in Nepal is the problem of registration and evidence of service providers in health tourism. Even there is not any health tourism department in the government sector.

Here are some other challenges such as poor cooperation and coordination between the health ministry and tourism ministry, lack of specialized human resources in the health tourism industry, lack of an information gathering system, the inefficiency of the public-private-partnership, lack of required infrastructure and legal frameworks for development in health tourism hamper development of Nepal's health tourism industry.

Most of the patients at the government-run Ayurveda hospital in Nepal are Nepali nationals. The inflow of foreign patients is negligible, though the exact numbers are not available. The few foreigner visitors are patients with jaundice and chronic diseases. Most of the foreign visitors at private health provider.

## Recommendations

The following suggestions laid down the future path for Nepal to attract health tourists. These suggestions largely draw from the discussions with various stakeholders as well as observing the other countries' health tourism practices.

### A: Role of the Private Sector

#### 1. Research and Development

Health tourism is one of the growing segments in the tourism industry. Research on health tourism and related topics should be done continually in order to obtain up-to-date information about the industry. In addition, research on health tourism should be conducted in the area of development of health tourism, products and services provided and organizations that control health tourism in each country.

#### 2. Health Tourism Products and Services

Because of the high competition in the health tourism market, health tourism provider should design the theme for products and services provided to make those products or services different from others. However, each product and service should be developed under the concept of health tourism.

#### 3. Public-Private Partnership:

The government, the health care providers, and the tourism industry have to work together for improved health tourism industry in Nepal.

#### 4. Promotion:

The health providers can encourage the tourists to recommend their health care centers to others as mouth-to-mouth information is effective and does not any money.

#### 5. Health Insurance:

The health providers should ensure that they cover all kinds of health insurance provided in different nations, and encourage health tourists to take up health insurance, as this will simplify the transaction process.

### B. Role of Government

#### 1. Policy, Rules, and Regulation:

The government needs to make related plans; policies, rules, and regulation improve the health tourism industry in Nepal. In addition, need to promote from the government side.

#### 2. Quality Control and Accreditation:

The government of Nepal must act as a regulator to institute a uniform grading and accreditation system for hospitals to build consumers' trust and improvement of the healthcare industry.

#### 3. Necessary Visas:

A simplified system of getting medical visas should be developed in order to make travel across borders smoother. Visas can be extended depending on the condition of the patients. The Nepal government can play a significant role in enhancing the benefits of health tourism. Health tourist should grant a quicker visa or visa on arrival.

#### 4. Human Resources:

Need human resources with good skills in hospitality and management. For short term, its fulfilled by regular training of existing workforce and for the long term, hospitality and management education include with their health education.

#### 5. Infrastructure:

There is also a need to develop supporting infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and communication and information channels to facilitate health tourism.

## 6. Country Branding and Promotion:

The government authorities are required to check out an effective marketing exercise in branding the country as well as executing marketing strategies in expanding the health and wellness tourism market in Nepal. The government and private sector need to work earnestly and with a commitment to develop Nepal, The most attractive health tourism destination.

## 7. Establish a National Health Tourism Department:

To promote health tourism and to regulate (Certificate, Licenses) as well as the implementation of international standards of quality and health certificates, the government needs to establish National Health Tourism Department partnership with the health ministry and tourism ministry.

## Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study; the most important are listed below:

- I. The complication of this research is mainly a health provider and the Governance side study (Supply and government side), therefore no experimental investigation was attempted or complied with the demand side.
- II. While the researcher tried to review all literature available on health tourism, some research may have been overlooked.

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