

# HOW SALUBRIOUS IS INCLUSION OF TOURISM PRACTICES IN YOGA THERAPY? – A THEORETICAL APPROACH

## Abstract

Amidst the global tide of chronic and acute diseases, an ancient yoga practices has become an essential part of life and considered one of the most legitimate practices or therapy in both conventional and complementary/alternative medical and wellness treatment. The salubrious effects of yoga practices have contributed in recent increase in popularity of yoga tourism, wellness tourism and medical tourism. Being the birthplace of yoga and with high specialized medical facilities, infrastructure, India has emerged as one of the most preferred and prominent medical and wellness tourism destination. The synergy of yoga practices and travel in the form of yoga tourism practices share a common objective of utilizing yoga as a therapeutic tool for medical or wellness purpose, but there are some differences in the context, application, focus and settings. Combining yoga practices with tourism elements (hospitality and natural attraction) enhance the health benefits. The aim of this paper is to understand the difference between yoga practices and yoga tourism practices and investigate its effectiveness in prevention or treatment of medical conditions in both medical and wellness field. This qualitative study presents a general framework for understanding the effectiveness of yoga practices intervention at different phases/level of medical treatment by using a comprehensive literature review and online focus group discussion method. Furthermore, this paper concludes the effectiveness of yoga tourism practices is more prevalent among treatment of medical condition.

**Keywords:** yoga practices, yoga tourism practices, wellness and medical tourism, alternative treatment.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Traveling for health and treatment is not new rather has a long history. Ancient health travel was associated with mineral thermal springs and temple baths. Health spas, resorts and town thrived around hot mineral springs where people flocked to cure skin, digestion and muscles-joint related illness. Many European, American, and Asian countries have their own long history of medical tourism. These ancient medical systems and destinations were evolved with technological advancement and development over a period of centuries. Although, advanced medical system with modern medicine (conventional), multi speciality hospitals with high quality health care infrastructure and affordable services are available at great ease, traditional medicine and alternative therapies have experienced a great interest and relevance in medical treatment and daily life, globally.

Modern days diverse travel intention, motivation and purpose are some of the main reason behind its categorization as wellness and medical travel under the huge umbrella of health tourism. As World Health Organization (WHO) defines “Health “as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, “Traveling to any destination with the purpose of maintaining good health is termed as health tourism”. Nowadays health tourists expect a mix of health treatments, such as conventional medical treatments and alternative health treatments and tourist attractions, as part of wellness and medical tourism to improve their health and well-being (Majeed and Kim, 2022).

As a response to this growing demand, countries, medical providers, and hospitality and tourism organizations are adapting to offer a broader set of medical, health, and wellness tourism experiences (Zhong, et al., 2021). Tapping the growing global demand and interest for alternative medical treatment Government of Indian and Ministry of Tourism has taken several initiatives (visa, insurance, fund etc.) to facilitate the promotion of yoga and ayurveda in medical tourism. The collaborative efforts of ministries (such as health and family welfare, tourism, Ayush, National Accreditation Board for Hospital and Healthcare providers) and public-private healthcare providers have made it possible to develop inclusive healthcare system. India’s traditional healthcare therapies combined with allopathic treatment provide holistic wellness. According to S.S. Begum (2013) “India, naturally endowed with a rich cultural heritage, tourism potential and reputation for age-old medicines and therapies such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Unani, Naturopathy and Yoga, is a haven for wellness tourism”.

In last few decades India has emerged as a fastest growing medical and wellness tourism hub. With its one of the most ancient alternative medical treatment system and highly advanced healthcare facilities, India has caught up the limelight among other exotic wellness destinations (such as China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore) of Asia Pacific. According to Matus and Martovic (2017) “India is most favorite medical tourism destination for Americans among Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey, Costa Rica, Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Brasilia”. India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) revealed that “the Medical Tourism sector is expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.1% from 2020-2027. India is ranked 10th out of the top 46 countries, 12th out of the world’s top 20 wellness tourism markets and 5th out of 10 wellness tourism destinations in Asia-Pacific”. In fact, wellness and medical system as such has become a unique selling point of Indian tourism (magazine.medicaltourism.com’2022).

Being the pioneer of Ayurveda and Yoga, India has always inspired various wellness fascinated people to attempt travel to practices and learn yoga and Ayurveda. Number of destinations such as Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Mysuru, Puducherry etc. have been developed as a truly authentic and place-based wellness and medical product and brands. Recent researches suggest that yoga practices are not only helpful in maintaining general health but it holds excellent potential for the treatment of chronic back & neck pain, psychological, menopausal, neuropsychiatric conditions and cancer related conditions (Cramer et al., 2019; Griera, 2017; Lehto et al., 2006). "It has a profound impact on the quality of life of people who are under stress, disease, and various illnesses, as well as causing social problems" (Rungsimanop et al., 2021; Sawangmek, 2015).

The utility of yoga in health and diseases intended the inclusion of clinical aspects of yoga in advanced medical treatment. The vague and overlapping theoretical framework urged further research on yoga practices (as clinical yoga or yoga therapy or yoga chikitsa) in medical and wellness context for better understanding. This study is to understand the effectiveness of yoga practices at all three phases of medical treatment (pre, during and post) and will explore the difference in yoga practices and yoga tourism practices both medical and wellness context.

## II. OBJECTIVES

Based on the prelude given above, the objectives set for the present study are:

- To understand the effectiveness of yoga practices in medical/wellness treatment,
- To highlight the differences in yoga practices and yoga tourism practices,
- To know how yoga tourism practices will be better than yoga practices within medical and wellness treatment, and
- To suggest a conceptual framework and models for better understanding.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is written with the objective of understanding yoga practices and yoga tourism practices in medical and wellness treatment. To make this study more worthwhile, data triangulation method was used (Lama and Rai, 2021) for collecting reliable and authentic data and information. This qualitative research was done in two parts. First, for secondary data and information various research papers, journals, articles, blogs, magazines, books, newspapers including specific topic such as yoga practices, yoga and medical treatment, medical and wellness tourism were consulted. The literature review examined the relationship of yoga with medical treatment in the broader context of wellness and medical tourism. In order to understand the clinical aspects of yoga in wellness and medical treatment, authors have suggested conceptual framework and model to connect yoga practices, tourism and medical treatment.

In second part of the research, in-depth interview and online focused group discussion method was used to collect in-depth, firsthand experienced and authentic information from well known and established yoga instructors, yoga practitioners, doctors and travel agent and tour operator. By using convenience sampling method total 19 people were selected from

different parts of the country for the discussion, but only 12 respondents were present at the time of discussion.

While in discussion with tourism, wellness, medical and yoga industry people, it has become very clear that there is a cautious and gradual change in trend of staying healthy and preference to the complementary and alternative method of treatment rather than solely relying on modern medical treatment.

#### IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

| Industry                            | No. of Respondent Approached | No. of Respondent Participated in Discussion |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Yoga Instructors</b>             | 5                            | 3  |
| <b>Yoga Practitioners</b>           | 5                            | 3  |
| <b>Doctors</b>                      | 4                            | 2  |
| <b>Travel Agents/Tour Operators</b> | 5                            | 4  |

In this era of globalization medical advancement and upsurge of new forms of diseases have been seen alongside. Fast paced life and competitive environment leading to adverse health condition because of acute or chronic stress. Not only serious or chronic disease but present-day stress, societal changes, and hectic life make the quest for mental and physical well-being (*Nair and Solanki, 2022*). People are increasingly looking forward to new ways of relaxation and re-energizing themselves (*Koncul, 2012*) and have become more interested in alternative methods for treatment instead of solely leaning on modern medication.

This shift in medical treatment’s choice involve different factors (such as, cost, travel policy, safety, security, infrastructure, service quality, availability of medical equipments, appointment time and side/post effects of medical treatment can be a major factor as well) which has a great impact on tourist’s decision-making while choosing destination and treatment type.

Among other traditional medicine and therapies (such as, acupuncture, naturopathy, tai chi, yoga, ayurveda, meditation, massage therapy and treatments), yoga has been proven to heal almost all kinds of ailments, which makes it a modern miracle and considered one of the most legitimate practices (*Griera, 2017; Fischer-White and Gill Taylor, 2013*) in both conventional and alternative medical and wellness treatment.

Assessing the role or effectiveness of yoga in medical treatment, require a clear understanding of the terms such as, *medical and wellness tourism, treatment and yoga practices* and their interrelationship as well. Based on extensive literature review and focus group discussion, authors have attempted to represent a conceptual framework model (Fig.1) connecting different phases of medical treatment, treatment type and different forms of health tourism.

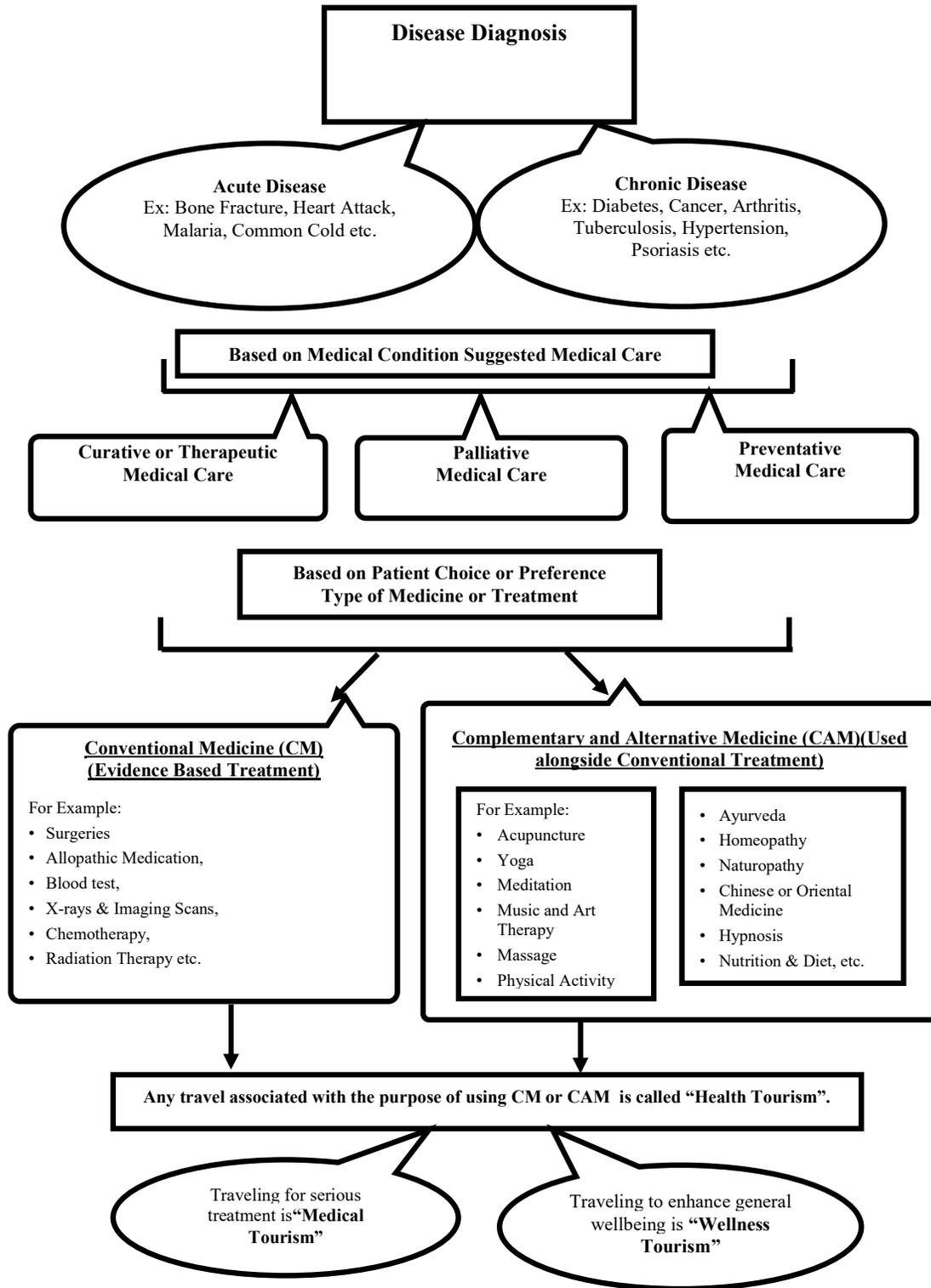
Wellness and Medical tourism is a subset of health tourism (**Muller and Kaufmann, 2001; Koncul, 2012**) and is relatively a new trend that gained popularity in recent decades. *The Global Wellness Institute (GWI)* defines wellness tourism “as travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one’s personal wellbeing”. Both medical and wellness form of tourism can be easily understood by definition given by *United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)* “Wellness tourism is a type of tourism activity which aims to improve and balance all of the main domains of human life including physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual and spiritual.

*The primary motivation for the wellness tourist is to engage in preventive, proactive, lifestyle enhancing activities such as fitness, healthy eating, relaxation, pampering and healing treatments” and “Medical tourism is a type of tourism activity which involves the use of evidence-based medical healing resources and services (both invasive and non-invasive) which may include diagnosis, treatment, cure, prevention and rehabilitation” (www.e-unwto.org, 2023, July).*

Therefore, any holiday travel linked with the purpose of visiting hospitals and wellness centers for disease diagnosis or diagnostic testing, treatment procedure, recovery/post-treatment, medical consultation and counseling etc. may be known as Medical or Wellness travel. Other important factors associated with the choice of health tourism (i.e. Wellness or Medical) are preexisting medical condition or illness and type of medical care or treatment (Conventional or Complementary and Alternative Medicine). “*Conventional medical treatments refer to allopathic medical treatments or western medical treatments, such as surgeries and drugs, typically performed at hospitals and clinics by qualified medical doctors and other healthcare professionals, such as nurses, pharmacists and therapists*”(Majeed and Kim, 2022; Majeed et al.,2017).

Whereas Complementary and Alternative treatment include traditional method of treatment such as, acupuncture, yoga, ayurveda, meditation, naturopathy, massage therapy, physical fitness in addition with modern medicine.

The extant literature reveals that yoga is not replacement for conventional medical treatment but because of its potential to complement and support various aspects of healthcare, it has been used as complementary and alternative therapy to enhance overall well-being and aid in the management of certain medical conditions. **Avinash Patwardhan (2016)** has established a relationship among health tourism and yoga and stated “*Health benefits of tourism, such as relief from stress or anxiety, better quality of sleep, improvement in relationships, and satisfaction with life are well documented. Similarly, it is also established that yoga offers benefits in health promotion and disease mitigation*”.



**Figure.1: Conceptual framework of "Medical and Wellness Tourism" based on literature review extraction.**

## V. YOGA PRACTICES IN MEDICAL AND WELLNESS TREATMENT

Yoga practices have always been the soul of wellness sector and eventually become an important part of medical sector too. The active pursuits of this old age yoga contributes to balance mind-body-spirit and has been considered a best alternative wellness activity or means to achieve physical, emotional and mental well-being (*Wadekar, 2020; Nair and Solanki, 2022; Ambili, 2016; Ponder and Holladay, 2013; Dillette et al., 2019*) and also considered as a therapy to cure illness and disease mitigation.

***“The treatment of the part shouldn’t be attempted without a treatment of the entirety. The treatment of the body without treating the mind and soul is a useless waste of time” - Plato (428 – 348 BC)(Bhavanani, 2020, p-19)***

As regular yoga practices have a transformational power in all aspects of human life, it has been found that yoga practices(asana, pranayama and relaxation techniques with dietary control) play a crucial role in all stages of medical treatment too. Based on data and literature extraction author has attempted to create a model in Fig. 2 for clear understanding of ‘*Role Or Effectiveness Of Yoga In Medical Treatment*’.

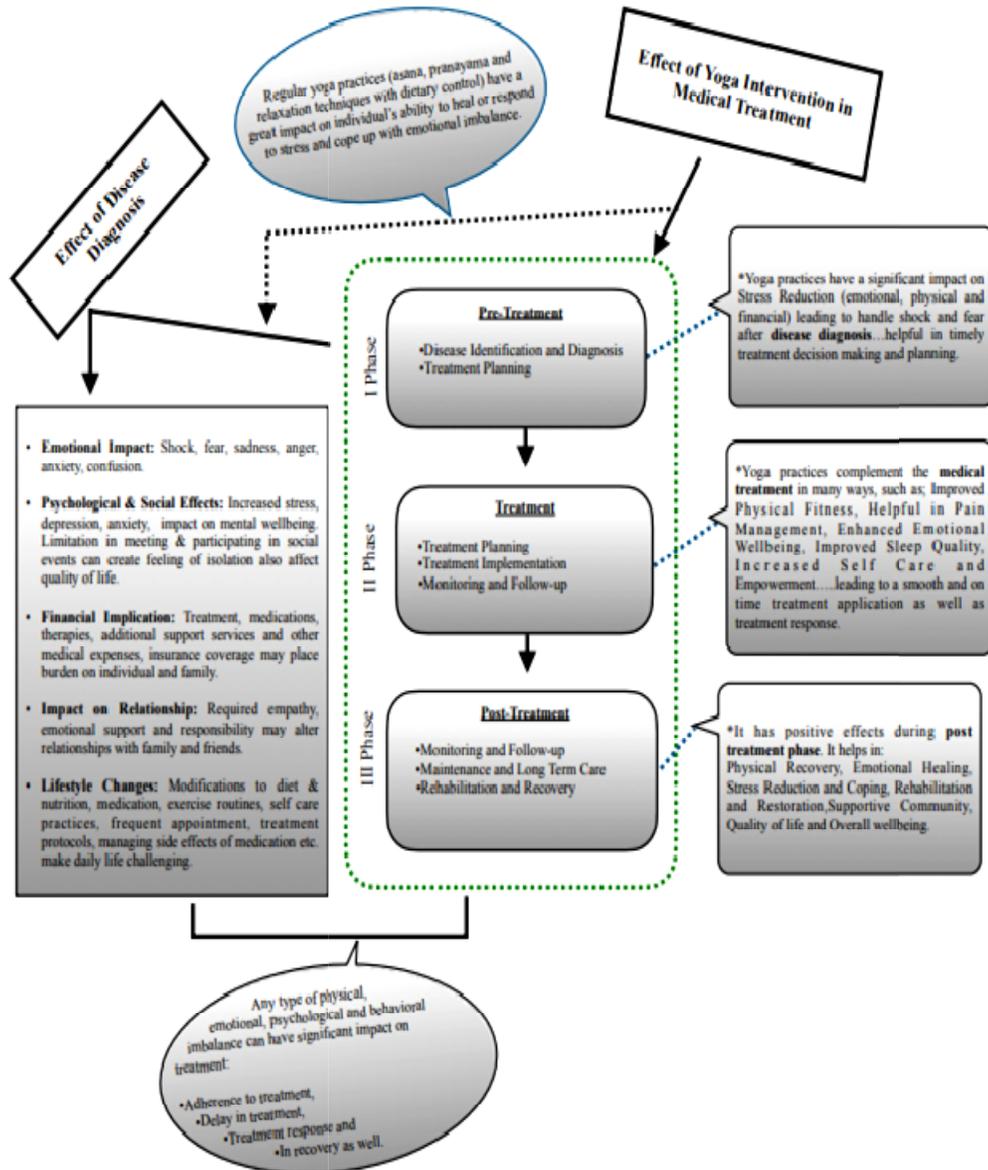
Diagnosis of disease and illness can have various effect on individual’s life such as *Emotional Impact* (shock, fear, sadness, anger, anxiety, confusion), *Psychological & Social Effects*(increased stress, depression, anxiety, impact on mental wellbeing. Limitation in meeting & participating in social events can create feeling of isolation also affect quality of life), *Financial Implication*(treatment, medications, therapies, additional support services and other medical expenses, insurance coverage may place burden on individual and family), *Impact on Relationship*(required empathy, emotional support and responsibility may alter relationships with family and friends) and *Lifestyle Changes* (modifications to diet & nutrition, medication, exercise routines, self care practices, frequent appointment, treatment protocols, managing side effects of medication etc. make daily life challenging). Any type of physical, emotional, psychological and behavioral imbalance can have significant impact on treatment such as, adherence to treatment; delay in treatment, treatment response and in recovery process.

Yoga intervention at all stages of medical treatment can have a significant effect, such as

- Its regular practices enhance the individual’s ability to heal or respond to stress and cope up with emotional imbalance, leading to handle shock and fear after disease diagnosis that helps in treatment decision making, planning and application at great extent.
- Practicing asana, pranayama and relaxation techniques with dietary control can be very helpful in pain management, emotional wellbeing enhancement (*Bhavanani, 2016*), improved physical fitness, sleep quality, increased self care and empowerment leading to a smooth and on time treatment application as well as treatment response.
- While in post treatment phase, yoga practices has been very effective in physical recovery, emotional healing, stress reduction and coping, rehabilitation and restoration, supportive community, quality of life and overall wellbeing. *Dr. Brij B. Agarwal* from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, India has given a list of benefits of yoga and

also help in “Decreased antibiotic and analgesic requirements” in one of his presentation on “Yoga, its Application in Surgery” (<https://slideplayer.com/slide/12889712/>).

Though the motive of health travel (be it medical or wellness) is same i.e. maintaining good health and balanced lifestyle, treatment application, approaches and purposes of yoga practices are somehow different in both medical and wellness sector.



**Figure 2:** Effectiveness of Yoga Practices in Medical Treatment

## VI. YOGA PRACTICES IN MEDICAL AND WELLNESS SECTOR

In medical industry, yoga practices are used as a complementary therapy to support the specific medical treatment/condition or symptoms and promote healing and recovery. Considering the effectiveness and therapeutic benefits of yoga practices, it has been integrated with comprehensive treatment plan along with other medical interventions. Based on the diagnosed disease or illness yoga type or techniques are usually prescribed with medication under the guidance of well trained and certified healthcare professionals such as doctors, yoga instructors, physical therapists or psychologists in a formal and clinical settings. So, practicing yoga will be more individualized, focused, treatment oriented that takes place in different clinical and medical settings such as private sessions and rehabilitation centers in medical sector. Here yoga practices essentially focus on using different yoga postures, breathing exercise, techniques and meditation as a therapeutic intervention to support healing, manage particular symptoms and improve physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. With collaborative and coordinated efforts, healthcare professionals and yoga instructors tailor suitable packages for patient or customer which is evidence-based and clinically tested for its effectiveness and safety as well. **A.B. Bhavanani (2016)** has written about *the results of his work which provides preliminary evidence, that “Yoga when combined with standard medical care provides additional benefits in terms of improving clinical outcome, glycaemic control, resting cardiovascular parameters, cardiovagal modulation of heart and peripheral neurophysiologic derangements”*.

Yoga in wellness sector is generally practiced for general health, fitness and holistic wellbeing. It is both a community based or individual practices, where one can engage themselves in practicing different forms of yoga postures, techniques, breathing exercises and meditation to promote holistic (physical, mental and emotional) wellbeing. In wellness, yoga practices are more emphasized on personal experiences, self-improvement, fitness, flexibility, stress reduction, mindfulness and self-awareness, leading to a balanced lifestyle and holistic wellbeing. Though, it is a personal practice that one can integrate into their daily lives to maintain health conscious and balanced lifestyle, it can be performed or practiced in group (at yoga classes at local community centers, parks, yoga studios) and alone at home as well. In contrast to medical, yoga practices in wellness is more accessible and in general settings (preferably natural surrounding). Different forms, style and variations are used to satisfy individual's need. That may offered as a part of wellness package/program or as a session under the guidance of certified yoga instructor or teacher.

## VII. YOGA TOURISM PRACTICES IN MEDICAL AND WELLNESS SECTOR

Traveling associated with the purpose of practicing and experiencing yoga at destination or place of own choice is known as yoga tourism (**Sukumar, 2018**). It is a combination of yoga activity and tourism éléments (such as accommodation, attraction, accessibility, amenities) which offers rejuvenating and immersive experience to the tourists.

Yoga tourism practices within the wellness sector are more associated with leisure, personal development and wellbeing. The purpose of practicing yoga may be more general (for relaxation, learning particular style and physical fitness) and not to treat serious medical related issues. Studies shows that in wellness, many yoga tourism practices emphasis the connection between nature and yoga. Tourists prefer nature based destination or place to

practices yoga along with visiting other destination or tourist attractions. Mostly yoga retreat, wellness resorts are found in the lap or in close proximity of nature, beautiful serene and natural environments (including natural park, forest, river, mountains, sun, beaches, sand, islands and water) offering participants to practices yoga amidst natural beauty. Based on previous researches, it is believed that practicing yoga in outdoor natural picturesque surrounding helps to connect or attain inner peace, self-awareness, spirituality, relaxation, rejuvenation which strengthen & support the healing process (*Mated and Kim, 2022; Coghlan, 2015; Majeed et al., 2019; Smith and Diekmann, 2017*).

On the contrary, yoga tourism practices in medical sector involve travel to practices yoga to cure and alleviate illness or symptoms. Where yoga is used as therapy to support medical treatment, promote healing and enhance wellbeing. The purpose of medical travel is to get specific treatment for all type of medical issues (such as curative, palliative and preventive), major/minor surgery, diagnosis, consultation/counseling and contraindication by specialized healthcare professionals and yoga the rapists. Yoga and medical facilities (such as, hospitals, yoga centers, rehabilitation centers, and integrative medical centers) are incorporated with hospitality and tourism elements (such as, hotel/resort/wellness retreat, transportation, tourist attractions etc.). Other wellness activities such as meditation, spa, nutrition counseling, massage therapies, educational seminar and workshops are integrated with yoga practices for specific medical treatment, where participants get opportunity to immerse in therapeutic environment while enjoying travel experiences.

Yoga tourism practices for medical purposes can be more individualized; treatment oriented and involves travel experiences offered in structured packages taking place in specialized retreat/hospital settings. Individuals will have access to yoga classes or training centers while having medical care with yoga as a complementary tool, technique or therapy for effective and efficient outcomes of medical treatment. Depending on the level of seriousness or medical condition and requirement, patient might not visit other destination or city but accompanying spouse or family member may do. *Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Mysore and Haridwar (Das, 2017)* are some of the major medical hub in India offering a comprehensive approach to healthcare with medical expertise and yoga practices. Tour operator/travel agent and yoga service providers have been selling both tailor-made and fixed packages to attract more yoga tourists globally.

#### **VIII. YOGA TOURISM PRACTICES ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN YOGA PRACTICES IN MEDICAL AND WELLNESS TREATMENT**

Although, both yoga practices and yoga tourism practices share a common objective of utilizing yoga as a therapeutic tool, both involves certified and experienced healthcare professionals and therapists for proper guidance to ensure effectiveness and safety. Both the approaches for maintaining good health have their own benefits depending on the individual's need, medical conditions and preferences.

Majority of the experts accepted that practicing yoga at home either with trainer or on own can be less interesting and may be less regular which impacts on its effectiveness and result. Whereas practicing yoga in group and in outdoor natural surrounding can have positive impact on its effectiveness and treatment outcome. In yoga, medical and wellness tourism people attempt traveling to different destinations, hotels and retreats with a specific

purpose of performing yoga and to obtain healthcare treatment. In India, almost all 5 star luxury hotels have yoga, spa, beauty treatment, massage therapy and other related facilities for the guest but destinations with picturesque natural-landscape and settings (such as, Haridwar, Rishikesh a renowned "Yoga Destination"), having cultural-religious attraction (such as, Varanasi and Vrindavan), offering authentic yoga and traditional ayurvedic treatments (such as Kerala "Land of Ayurveda") have sprung up among health tourists across the globe.

Attempting tourism itself is a way to relax, rejuvenate and escape from daily hectic and monotonous life. **UNWTO** defined tourism as "*Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes*" ([www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)). As tourism provides an opportunity to visit different places, environment, experience different cultures, interaction with different community, their background, conditions and more it can have a direct or indirect positive health impact on individual's life. Combining tourism with yoga practices will be helpful in many ways in medical treatment or wellness, such as:

- Medical or wellness tourism pave the way to explore and avail the best medical services at destination of one's choice. also enhance the scope of learning. educating and getting treatment with best yoga gurus and trained teachers/professionals around the world.
- Change in environment and interaction with likeminded or people having same conditions: provide empathy and moral support which is very helpful in dealing with the feeling of isolation.
- Visiting and exploring new attractions can evoke the feeling or interest in life and leads to the boost in willpower.
- Visiting and experiencing different culture. community. social interaction and building relationship can have positive impact on individual's life. as it broaden individual's perspective and foster a sense of connection and belonging as well as social support.
- Visiting picturesque geographical settings and practicing yoga amidst the natural surrounding (such as. forest. mountains. valley. natural parks and gardens. beaches etc) offer exposure to nature. fresh air and sunlight leading to peace and mindfulness and enhance the effectiveness of medication as well.
- Engaging with tourism activities (be it soft or hard. depending on condition) along with medication or practicing yoga. brings joy and a sense of adventure. It provides opportunity for self-reflection and self-expression that motivates individual to prioritize their well-being and take care of their overall health.

Above all are the factors that reinforce the overall well being and support good health. With the rise of studies and awareness about importance of nature and environment in human health and recovery, upcoming multi-specialty and super-specialty hospitals(such as Apollo, Fortis, Medanta, AIIMS, Max and others) are focusing on green infrastructure, in India.

Asia's biggest integrated medicine hospital HIIMS (Hospital & Institute Of Integrated Medical Sciences) will be a best example of integrating traditional alternative treatment with advanced modern medicine. Team of some renowned experts in diverse medical field (diet,

panchakarma, ayurveda etc.) have been developing ayurvedic and natural solutions for disease without surgery and side-effects and “believe that treatment using Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Naturopathy, yoga, meditation and modern technology are all credible and distinct approaches to curing health problems” (<https://hiims.in/about-us.php>). Here yoga, meditation, sun gazing and other physical exercises are conducted in open garden, planted with plants having health related benefits such as oxygen giving plants, medicinal herbs etc.

“Indian hospitals have now set their sights on green healthcare infrastructure in an effort to improve patient recovery while making use of natural resources in an efficient and environment-friendly manner” ([www.pharmabiz.com](http://www.pharmabiz.com)). There is no doubt that yoga tourism practices has always been used as a preventive method (Cramer et al., 2019), that provide a comprehensive approach to improve overall wellness and balanced lifestyle and yoga practices in medical treatment is integrated into a healthcare settings.

## IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study conflates the theoretical discussion of yoga practices, yoga tourism practices, medical and wellness treatment and articulates the linkage among them. Evidence shows that yoga intervention not only helpful in physical and mental health, rehabilitation and recovery, stress reduction and relaxation, but also beneficial in chronic disease management and contraindication in a medical context (Bhavanani, 2016; Agarwal, 2010; Lehto et al., 2006; Parker-Pope 2002).

While encompassing extant literature review and focus group discussion, it has been found that the effectiveness of yoga tourism practices are more prevalent among treatment of medical condition. Yoga practices in natural surrounding (Dillette et al., 2019) would give more satisfactory result in medical or wellness treatment. Vacations and traveling have been an enjoyable way to stay active, recharged, rejuvenated and incorporating yoga practices with tourism will be a significant and proactive step in health maintenance.

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