

India's medical tourism industry faces Iran war challenge as arrivals drop

India ranks 10th among medical tourism destinations, according to 2025 Medical Tourism Index

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

India's affordable, high-quality healthcare has attracted foreign patients for decades, but its medical tourism industry is now slowing, with the US-Israeli war on Iran preventing many, particularly those in the Gulf, from reaching Indian hospitals for treatment.

India ranks 10th globally, among 46 medical-tourism destinations according to the 2025 Medical Tourism Index, but airspace restrictions, flight rerouting, and rising travel costs over the past five months have directly decreased global patient mobility.

According to Dr. Raajiv Singhal, CEO of Marengo Asia Hospitals, who also chairs the Medical Value Travel Committee of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's \$13 billion medical tourism sector is facing "severe" operational challenges.

"We're seeing a 40-60 percent decline in medical value travel numbers from conflict-affected regions, with airspace closures, flight suspensions, and increased airfares of 15-25 percent creating major barriers for international patients," he said.

"Conflict-affected regions, which were a source of a large pool of patients, have been particularly hit, with medical travel dropping sharply due to travel disruptions. With the current scenario, people from these areas are taking precautionary measures and deferring non-urgent trips."



Clinics offering elective and wellness-related services are the ones seeing the biggest drop in clients, while hospitals specializing in complex, lifesaving procedures such as advanced cardiac, renal, and oncology treatments may see more resilient patient flows, Singhal said, as "critical cases cannot be deferred despite geopolitical tensions."

But even in more complex cases, there has been a decline in arrivals as well, with people worried they could get stranded and postponing their trips as much as possible.

At Max Healthcare hospitals, which specialize in complex care including cancer, cardiac, neurology, transplant, joint replacement and robotic surgery,

File photo shows a medic during a round of the patients at a hospital in Kolkata on Aug. 17, 2024. AFP/File

patient numbers from other regions are now much higher than those from the Middle East.

Among the hospital group's 32,000 foreign patients last year, 5,000 arrived from the Middle East. Similar numbers are unlikely to be recorded in 2026.

"We have witnessed a decline in patient arrivals from several Middle Eastern countries, especially Iraq, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the UAE," said Anas Abdul Wajid, the group's director and chief sales and marketing officer.

"The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has had a significant

impact on medical value travel to India, particularly from the Gulf and West Asian markets. The disruption has primarily been driven by airspace restrictions, flight cancellations, travel uncertainty and the postponement of non-urgent medical journeys."

A similar trend has been observed at Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital in Noida, which is famous for its advanced technology that allows doctors to image and treat tumors during the same procedure.

"Our foreign patients are hesitating to travel because of the war. If their country is not affected by the war, travel routes are now longer, prices are high, etc.," said Dr. Upasna Arora, the hospital's promoter.