

# Elderly Patients and Booming Medical Tourism Industry



The evolution of the spa concept has, to a certain extent, contributed to the idea of travelling either domestically or abroad in search of medical treatment. It is worth noting, however, that there are many other factors behind medical tourism including the high costs of medical treatment and/or the lack of specialised labour in a home country. Those coupled with the change in demographics and the expansion of the elderly population in many regions of the world gave space to a booming medical tourism industry.

## Nations Healing Other Nations

Many countries now actively market themselves as health and wellness destinations. This further expansion of health and wellness tourism has positively impacted incoming tourist receipts by boosting average spend per visitor and reversed the general trend towards shorter, more frequent breaks. It has also provided an element of stability to the travel and tourism market, as activities are generally in-door thus avoiding the problems and fluctuations of seasonality.



## Western Europeans Go East for Medical Treatment

As Western baby boomers go to seed, Eastern European travel and healthcare providers prepare to reap a bumper harvest.

As the Western baby boom generation reaches retirement age, the market for both medical and health and wellness tourism is growing. With more cash and free time than ever before the over 50s are looking to enjoy themselves and look after their health. Medical and therapy healthcare provision is often very expensive or inadequate in major Western markets at home, so advanced but more economical facilities in Eastern European countries are moving to supply the need.

Previously, the state provision of healthcare in ex-communist countries was very good, and many healthcare professionals, sanatoriums and other facilities have been operating for many years.

The process of refurbishment to international standards goes on and many hospitals, clinics and dental surgeries are now doing a roaring trade with Western European health tourists heading east for treatment, lured by the lower surgical costs combined with cheap travel opportunities. Fortunately, for many of the Eastern European countries, this development underpins the rapid development of local tourism industries.



### **The Rise of India as a Medical Tourism Destination**

India became a major medical tourism destination over the last five years period. According to Euromonitor International, this is explained by the fact that the country has some of the best hospitals and treatment centres in the world. Additionally, the technology adopted corresponds to that in the US, the UK and Europe and medical treatments cost much less. The most common treatments are heart surgery, knee transplant, cosmetic surgery and dental care.

### **Americans Travel Abroad to Save Money on Healthcare Treatments**

As healthcare and insurance costs soar in the US, more people are opting for medical and dental

care treatment abroad, thousands of miles from home.

Medical tourism became increasingly popular in recent years fuelled by the internet, ease of travel, shorter wait times for appointments and greater international sharing of medical "best practices" outside the US. Additionally, it is also noteworthy that even companies, anxious to lower care costs, are driving the trend by urging people to be treated in one of a growing number of countries that cater to foreign patients.

## **Forecast**

**2008**

**2009**

**2010**

### **Health & wellness tourism**

**(Retail Value RSP - US\$ bn)**

Asia Pacific

26.8

27.3

27.7

Australasia

2.1

2.1

2.0

Eastern Europe

3.5

3.6

3.7

Latin America

3.4

3.4

3.6

Middle East and Africa

5.6

5.8

6.2

North America

5.0

5.1

5.2

Western Europe

19.1

19.2

19.5

Source: Euromonitor International, 2009

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