

# Medical Tourism in Spain Has a Great Potential

The rise of health tourism in Spain over the past year has given the Spanish tourism industry a wakeup call to start making active efforts to capitalize on a sector that is all set to be the future of tourism in Spain.

Spain has become the new popular destination for medical tourism and 2012 was a particularly good year, with 21,868 international tourists having visited the country for reasons of health and wellness alone. According to the country's tourist board, Turespaña, these international tourists spent a total of €12.1 million in 2012 on their medical holidays there. That is quite an impressive figure.



## Spanish Tourism Authorities Open Up to Medical Tourism

The Secretary of State for Tourism, Isabel Borrego, said at a recent conference that it is not just international tourists but even domestic tourists that are increasing the number of thermal spa holidays or health-related trips they take within Spain.

The huge revenue generated in medical tourism has had the Spanish authorities rethink their attitude towards tourists visiting the country for medical treatment and recuperative holidays. In the past, the local authorities had complained that these tourists were putting a strain on the nation's resources by setting up temporary homes in the country. That is not the case now.

The 2012 National Conference on Health Tourism held at Archena saw a discussion of how local tourism could capitalize on this growing sector, and by the end of the event, 5 leading healthcare providers in Spain had signed a deal to promote health tourism in the country.

The welcoming of a new face of tourism will open up plenty of opportunities to tourism industry professionals and allied businesses.

According to Ms. Borrego, medical tourists have higher average expenditures as compared to regular tourists and they spend more time in the country. Over 9 million Europeans travel for health reasons in a year, and it is estimated that by 2020 this number will increase by as much as 90%. In addition, these trips are not confined to the peak season, so out-of-season services will also generate better revenues.



Ms. Borrego stated that this can help to diversify and improve the quality of Spanish spas and the wellness industry, suggesting that those in the tourism industry take advantage of this 'golden opportunity'.

### **What Draws Medical Tourists to Spain**

The many benefits of the Spanish healthcare system are far more attractive to international tourists than those in their respective countries, especially for tourists from the UK and Germany, making these markets very interesting for Spanish tourism industry and marketing.

Spain has been attracting tourists from the UK, Germany and elsewhere largely because of its healthcare system. WHO ranked Spain's healthcare system as 7th in the world in 2013, while that of Great Britain was on the eighteenth place. Waiting times are significantly shorter in Spain as compared to the UK, and high standards of medical treatment are available in the country at lower cost.

Spain's life expectancy, cuisine and lifestyle are noteworthy. Tourists can also combine their medical trip to Spain with holiday in their favorite destination in Europe. In addition, accommodation and budget flights make the entire holiday quite affordable.



Medical tourism and wellness holidays centered around thermal spas in Spain have different demands that tourism professionals should be aware of though. Spain's spa and wellness tourism sector draws visitors who are looking to spend some time away from home to rejuvenate and relax, improve their physical and mental well-being, and look for preventive therapies at spas, wellness resorts and hotels. These holidays are usually booked as a package.

The medical tourism sector has different demands. It draws visitors who travel to Spain from abroad to seek medical treatments for illnesses or for cosmetic surgery. Such tourists are seeking more affordable or better quality of healthcare than they can expect at home. A company involved in the health tourism industry will usually employ licensed medical practitioners and only registered medical facilities

participate in this segment. Professionals in these and allied tourism facilities including accommodation rentals will benefit from the growth of the segment.

Date: 2013-12-30

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-spain-medical-tourism-has-a-great-potential-article2282>