

Middle East Benefits Greatly from the Popularity of Wellness

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the fastest growing wellness tourism market in the world. Wellness tourism is defined as all travel associated with enhancing an individual's personal well-being. A recent data reported at the Global Wellness Tourism Congress (GWTC) shows that, the tourism market in the Middle East/North Africa region is growing at 16% annually. According to Susie Ellis, the President and CEO of the Global Spa and Wellness Summit as well as the President of SpaFinder Wellness, the wellness tourism market was at \$439 billion USD at the end of the year 2012. But this is expected to grow to \$678.5 billion USD by the year 2017.



As per the forecast, the MENA market will be three times more than the current number by 2017. Sub-Saharan Africa is also expected to experience 12.6% growth and the UAE will be a leader in the region.

The Middle East and North African wellness tourism market both domestic and international combined, is worth 5.3 billion US dollars annually. This is according to the report by the GWTC. On the other hand the Sub-Saharan African market expenditure amounts to 2 billion US dollars annually. When combined they amount to 7.3 billion US dollars. The entire Middle East and North African region generates 4.8 million wellness-focused trips both inbound and domestic trips annually. While the Sub-Saharan region drives 2.2 million which amounts to a total of 7 million trips.

One of the major drivers for the growth in wellness tourism in MENA is the increase in the luxury/spa hotel building throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council nations as well as the revival of pragmatic and indigenous wellness practices for example the historic hammams and baths.

It is important to point out that wellness tourism is responsible for creating over 200,000 jobs in the Middle East and North Africa. This sector has an approximated impact of 13.4 billion US dollars on MENA regional economy. Morocco being among the MENA countries is a global leader as far as wellness tourism is concerned. In fact it is ranked top 10 among all nations since 2012-2017.



According to Susie Ellis, Morocco has one of the greatest opportunities for spa and wellness tourism. This is made possible by the climate history and the general commitment by the Kingdom to develop the sector. On top of that, the process of acquiring a visa to enter Morocco has been made easier and the increased number of tourists seeking rest and relaxation has made it possible for Morocco to develop the wellness services.

Susie Elis points out that tourism is a barometer of a country's image. This simply means that tourism is of a great importance to the image of a country. Bali and Thailand are known for wellness and spa tourism. This therefore means that if a country has the capacity and resources to set up and develop wellness tourism, it should go ahead as this can change the country's tourism image in the global market.

The sole reason why people visit spas is to relax their bodies and mind. Therefore, spa tourism refers to all travel activities associated with bettering an individual's well-being. However, there is a difference between primary wellness tourists and secondary wellness travelers. For the primary tourists, their sole purpose for the trip is relax and de-stress. However, for the secondary wellness tourists, wellness and relaxation is just part of the trip and not the core reason for the trip.



Most people visiting the Middle East and North Africa are secondary wellness tourists. This therefore is a wakeup call to develop domestic tourism as well. Local tourists should take the opportunity and visit the spas and also visit the unique places in the region. However, this can be done only by breaking the stereotype that wellness and spa tourism is only meant for the rich in the society. This can be encouraged by setting up of affordable spa and wellness facilities that offer basic massage services that make wellness experiences accessible to many.

Date: 2014-09-29

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-middle-east-wellness-and-spa-growing-in-popularity-article2482>