

# World Wise Wellness – Global Options in a Mobile Society...

Medical Tourism is one of the fastest growing international industries, with growth anticipated to be \$100 billion by the year 2012. More and more countries around the world are emerging into Medical Tourism destinations, from Asian countries like India and Thailand to North Americas Cuba and to European countries like Hungary. With most of the world experiencing a healthcare crisis, patients and wellness consumers are traveling abroad to seek the best quality care and alternative options available.



**Health Tourism is also one of the fastest growing segments of the Medical Tourism industry and typically refers to alternative medicine and spa treatments.** Health and wellness consumers are traveling worldwide and engaging in health tourism by visiting health spas, medical spas, wellness retreats and destination/day spas. In addition to the general health and wellness focus, the anti-aging trend fueled by baby boomers around the world are finding medical and health spas an appealing option in slowing down aging degenerative effects whether they be cosmetic or cellular. In the case of cosmetic surgery alone, its cost in countries such as India, Thailand or South Africa can be one tenth of how much it costs in the United States or Western Europe.

## **Navigating Culture Codes ...**

The bright side of the health crisis is the global attention preventative, integrated and holistic care is receiving. Wellness Culture is now taking center stage and consumers are increasingly exploring global options and practices. The wellness phenomenon and preventative approach has been under way in recent years for the American spa market and for centuries in Europe and Asia.

With diverse cultural drivers and motivators, people around the globe are now embracing Medical Tourism and reaching outside of their borders for treatment and therapies. Medical Spas, Health Spas and Wellness Centers exist all over the world and operate uniquely in accordance with their focus and local culture. International associations such as IMSA and DSA are defining guidelines comprehensively yet cultural codes and standards still vary from country to country. The distinct differences in cultural standards may very well be the marketing appeal of medical tourism and the destination spa experience. Having access to complimentary treatments and modalities that may not be available to you at home or

your country is one of the benefits of traveling across international borders.



### **Defining the World of Wellness...**

The Spa experience is about enhancing overall well being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit. The psychographics of the spa goer and wellness consumer is diverse and there is a broad range of business entities marketing wellness lifestyle. **The difference between a Health Spa and a Medical Wellness Spa is the latter specifically integrates spa AND medical services. Medical Spas are designed for guests seeking to maintain good health, as well as for dealing with serious medical concerns.** In the United States, The Pritkin Longevity Center & Spa in Florida and The Cooper Wellness Program in Texas are renowned for their carefully structured and fully supervised programs monitored by a team of physicians and wellness experts. Wellness Programs follow a scientific approach to health and fitness and combine traditional medical services with preventative measures. Like many industries, the Medical Spa channel has several sub-sets of business models. Today you can find Dental Spas, Fertility Spas and even medical spas specifically serving menopausal women.

The International Medical Spa Association has defined the following guidelines for identifying Medical Spas:

**Beauty/Skin:** A facility that is owned by an individual or corporate entity with an office/treatment area of a licensed health care professional or medically trained aesthetician and therapists.

**Therapeutic:** A facility that is owned by an individual or corporate entity with an office/treatment area of a licensed health care professional located on the premises offering services that include therapeutic modalities focused on specific medical issues such as cardiovascular disease and bariatric.

**Medical Centers/Hospital Based:** Facilities that offer an advanced level of diagnostics services employing conventional and complementary therapies delivered in a specially designed healing environment.

**Wellness Centers:** Owned by physicians or entrepreneurs and encompass many of the same services as medical/hospitals facilities if physician owned. If privately owned, facilities will often have a licensed healthcare professional as Medical Director.



### **A Healing Sense of Place and Milieu...**

In Europe (where the spa experience originated) you can find Medical Spas run by physicians and integrative practitioners who may combine holistic and alternative therapies to address everything from chronic health conditions to anti-aging prevention. The essential framework of the European spa industry is mainly based on the curative use of natural resources and healthy climate with contribution from medical and therapeutic care.

Budapest already renowned as the “City of Spas” presents Medical Spas offering the healing benefits of mineral hot springs treating chronic musculoskeletal problems. Often the spa physicians have a specialty in Rheumatology or Internal Medicine as well as Physiotherapy (series of cures using electrotherapy, ultrasound therapy light therapy etc), Homeopathy (a system of therapeutics using natural substances such as plants, herbs and minerals), or Botanical medicine. You will also find treatments such as Climatherapy (focus on air purity for treatment of respiratory conditions), Balinotherapy (a general term for water based treatments treating circulatory, musculoskeletal and immune sensitive illnesses) and Crenotherapy (treatment carried out with mineral water, mud or vapor). The attention to “place” and natural healing properties are paramount to the European wellness culture.

### **“Bon Voyage” Takes on New Meaning...**

Voltaire, the French philosopher and writer of the Enlightenment wrote “**The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease**”. This philosophy is still relevant today and is the essence of a European or Asian wellness inspired vacation. Medical and Health tourism is no longer a novelty and is quickly becoming a lucrative global trend. As wellness culture spreads around the world, expect to discover a cultural cocktail of treatments and services. Crossing borders allows the wellness consumer to enjoy the affordable cost of various healing options often much higher priced in their own home region. The opportunity to experience a new culture in an exotic locale while healing, recuperating or revitalizing is a seductive proposition many wellness consumers will explore in the coming years. Bon Voyage has truly taken on new meaning and international travel could be considered a life saving and enhancing experience.

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