

MEDICAL AND RURAL TOURISM BECOMES HIT IN THE BALTIC



Latvian tourism industry faces considerable drop in tourist numbers. Still the country remains highly popular for two groups of travelers - medical tourists and adventurers.

Latvia is a small Baltic state that has entered the EU in 2004. The admission has certainly improved Latvian economy and local tourism industry also witnessed a rapid growth after the country joined the Union. The number of tourism arrivals increased by 24 per cent between 2004 and 2005. The following year (2006) showed a 32 per cent growth. Latvia was even one of the fastest growing economies in the EU but the global crisis has changed everything.

The change has come in 2007. Nowadays Latvia finds itself in the grasp of crisis. **Europeans did not stop to travel altogether, but these days they prefer cheaper destinations or domestic tourism.** Many of them spend less time and money on their trips. Latvian offer, however, is relatively expensive, which scares many visitors off. There has also been some bad publicity, describing Latvia as "land of scam artists." All those factors combined with diminishing tourists' spending power cause troubles to Latvian tourism sector.

On the other hand, some tourism products still remain interesting for customers despite the crisis - e.g. medical tourism. **Latvia is a luring destination for medical tourists as it offers quality health care at reasonable prices.** All kinds of treatments are available in the Baltic state and thus patients come here for blood work, dental care, x-rays, EKG, plastic surgery and much more. Another popular way of spending holiday in Latvia is rural tourism when many visitors come to enjoy destinations off the beaten track. They hike in the local rural areas and stay at traditional guesthouses. The promotion of Latvian cottages considerably increased over the last months, since their owners want to capitalize on the popularity of simple yet adventurous stays.

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