

POLAND TURNING TO THE UAE FOR CONTINUED GROWTH



Tourism is on the rise in Poland with 5.7 billion made in revenue from hotels alone in 2013 and visitor numbers up 11%. As always, the biggest source markets are neighbouring countries like Germany, Czech Republic and other Eastern European nations and there is big interest from more distant countries like France and the UK; however, there is also a small group arriving from the Gulf.

Poland are now looking at these Gulf Cooperation Council members, especially the UAE, as the key target for future growth.

The UAE is just one country in a small market so why are Poland so keen to target it?

There are two key reasons behind the decision to pursue links with the Gulf and potential UAE visitors: business tourism and medical tourism. Medical tourism has really taken off in Poland in recent years; half a million medical and wellness tourists arrived in 2012, drawn to the nation because of relative low costs in orthopaedic, dental and cosmetic surgery procedures and it also has around 200 spa resorts to enjoy. Half of these medical tourists were British and a large number also came over from the US and western Europe; however, there was also a small percentage from the Gulf that cannot be overlooked.

There are many key markets to work with in this sub-sector but Polish officials are focusing on the countries with the biggest potential and many see the UAE as being one of those because of growing business links between the two nations, both in terms of Polish investments and increased business trips both ways. The Gulf market is there in the form of businessmen from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some from UAE, even if they only totalled 1740 visitors in 2013, and there are daily flights from Dubai-Warsaw to cater for them but Poland are looking at even greater expansion.

How does Poland expand upon this small, potentially beneficial market?

In order to build upon the business and medical tourism links that have already been established, Polish representatives are working to promote the country further and recently travelled to the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai to showcase their attractions and potential even further. This is a great start but there are still obstacles in the way and further actions that can be taken: the current budget set aside for 2015 is low and needs to be spent wisely, none of the current fourteen Polish Tourist Organisation offices in foreign nations are held in the Middle East, and it could take some time for UAE residents to be won over by the prospect of Polish trips or leisure holidays.

Poland is still a new destination to those in the UAE and this means that growth in interest and bookings is slow. UAE travellers are mostly sticking with the familiar, if they want to travel to Europe they will stick to places they know like the UK and Germany. Having said this, bookings are slowly rising with some Dubai tour operators as interested travellers start to see the appeal of the same European weather they have come to appreciate, the cultural heritage they can explore and the greater potential of more well-known cities like Warsaw and Krakow. The appeal is there and Poland could be right about choosing this market as their new focus, it just might take some time to see the results.

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