

WELLNESS TOURISM TRENDS - SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA GROWING THE MOST



With a net worth of USD 494 billion, wellness tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world according to the last Sri report for Global Wellness Institute. The European market, with 216 million travels in 2013, is in the front of the wellness industry. Stepping into this rich economic niche requires understanding the trends and the evolution the market is currently going through. A good hint comes from the 2015 Trend Report by Spafinder, which foresees the evolution of the market and the customers' requests and expectations for this and the upcoming years.

2015 will be the year of 'Forest Bathing,' a trend coming straight from Japan. It is about rediscovering the benefits of walking in the wild, more specifically in forests, something that - besides reducing the level of stress - appears to give good results in terms of the individual's general health. Many wellness centers offer this kind of service. The European leader for this type of wellness trip is Finland.

Another important trend are spas combining the concept of wellness with an old but newly used product: cannabis. After its liberalization in many North American states, new high-end tours with luxury experiences are coming out.

Jumping half a world away, in Africa and the Middle East, many spas begin enhancing wellness treatments with the Islamic cures. It is not only a matter of hammams, but also rediscovering the benefits of mud-baths, dust-baths and, in general, ingredients, factors and experiences tied to local wellness culture.

But the trend that, more than others, is increasingly influencing wellness related trips is the concept of 'Social Fitness.' Engaging in fitness is turning more and more into a broadened concept of socialization and sense of belonging to a community. These groups attend big fitness happenings but also reach venues as traditional spas offer special packages with 'gurus.' This trend witnesses exponential growth of specialized tour operators for this kind of trips.

The other side of the coin is the luxury trend in wellness. The most exclusive venues do not invest in 'stars' but in experiences. New luxury means both exotic and local, 'less is more,' solitude and lots of space as a plus.

Last but not least 2015 shows a new ritual in travels: spa in airports. Air carriers are currently offering wellness services in their lounges and on arrival, as a courtesy service for passengers to recover their strengths from jet lag.

While Europe and North America are leading the wellness tourism market, the Sri International study for Global Spa and Wellness Monitor emphasizes that the biggest percentage growth of the last year belongs to sub-Saharan Africa. The study covered South Africa, Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius and other countries. In 2013, this region witnessed 4.2 million wellness trips, with a yearly increment of 90% and USD 3.2 billion spent for wellness, 575 million more than in 2012. This wellness push is partly due to the economic growth of countries like South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria, all of which increased the demand (and therefore the presence) for wellness players.

The second fastest growing area is the Middle East and North Africa. Though richer than sub-Saharan Africa, it grows less in percentage, with seven million wellness trips with a yearly increment

of 48% and a 7.3 billion revenue (+ 39%.)

As far as 'mature markets' are concerned, Europe and North America are still leading. The old world totals 216 million trips and USD 178 billion revenue while USA recorded 172 million trips and USD 195 billion spent. Asia ranks third with 152 million trips and USD 84 billion spent on wellness.

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