

MEDICAL TOURISM IN TURKEY DAMAGED



Turkey's medical tourism industry isn't remotely what it used to be, due to the social, political and civil unrest that plagues the country and damages its image internationally. Medical tourism in Turkey, as well as tourism at large, have in fact suffered from a notable decline in arrivals as of late.

The country's medical tourism used to show great promise, with numbers improving meteorically each year. However, given the unstable situation in the region, which has seen **the country plagued by terrorism, civil war and waves of refugees passing through, among other unsightly events, the industry is now struggling to stay afloat.**

The industry itself hasn't changed - Turkey still has good health facilities and accommodation with equally inviting prices, but while a lot of damage control has been done by authorities and marketing officials to hide it, it is estimated that the number of arrivals has taken a considerable hit. The factors responsible for this decline are diverse, and they should be looked at separately but also as a whole.

The Lack of Russian Tourists

Russians, who are known to hold grudges, are now staying away from Turkey, after a Russian aircraft was shot down in Syria. That is, however, not all that's keeping Russians from travelling to Turkey.

Political relations have also turned sour between the two countries, and their mutual visa agreement has been ceased, making it harder to travel to and from Turkey. Adding in the prohibition of chartered flights between the two countries and further economic sanctions, the losses to Turkey's economy are as heavy as \$20bn, 3% of Turkey's GDP. Russian bookings in 2016 decreased by over 80%.

Violent Conflicts

The Kurdish conflict and the infringement of human rights perpetrated by the local government in order to consolidate power and weaken the opposition are not only morally questionable, but also give a feeling of unrest to the world. Similar effect comes with the involvement of Turkey in the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts, which causes fear of string retaliation, which in turn could put civilians at risk.

Another related factor is the increased likelihood of a terrorist attack, perpetrated by national or international groups, which is scaring foreigners away from travelling to the country and potential patients from seeking the services of medical tourism in Turkey. German bookings, in particular, have dropped by a staggering 40%, causing a heavy blow to the industry.

Relations with the EU

Finally, Turkey's strong arming of the EU in order to gain membership, as well as special treatment for its citizens and other advantages doesn't bode very well. In fact, the country not only expects the EU to turn a blind eye on human rights infringement, but also to pay millions of euros to have the country handle the refugee crisis that both parties have been having to deal with.

Faced with an increased vulnerability both to violent attacks by the opposition as well as from international terrorist organizations, Turkey is an undesirable candidate for EU membership as well as travel destination for EU citizens.

Burdened with the iron fist of Erdogan's government, tourism officials prefer not to comment on the unfavorable situation the industry faces. They are said, however, to be confident that a turn to new markets like Iran and the Middle East could be the saving grace of the medical tourism in Turkey, even if its star doesn't shine bright anymore.

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