

MEDICAL TOURISM GENERATED \$437 MILLION IN COSTA RICA IN 2017



According to the latest data on medical tourism, the industry in Costa Rica maintained its growth during the last year. Most visitors are interested in procedures such as dental treatments, plastic surgeries, and surgeries for older patients.

Foreign visitors arriving to Costa Rica to undergo medical procedures generated an income of \$437 million over 2017, according to preliminary data issued by the Central Bank of Costa Rica (BCCR).

This figure represents a growth of 33%, compared to the \$328 million income registered in 2013.

Roberto Herrera, Vice President of the Costa Rican Chamber of Health (PROMED), explained that local medical tourism has largely benefited from the international reputation that precedes Costa Rican professionals, as well as by the security conditions and the availability of bilingual staff.

He also highlights the opening of medical services and facilities in a large part of the national territory, and the ease of access to the country through various routes, such as the Juan Santamaría International Airport, in Alajuela, and the Daniel Oduber International Airport, in Liberia.

These favorable conditions are attractive, mostly, to US citizens, who represent 83% of foreign arrivals for medical purposes. The remaining percentage is comprised by Canadian visitors and travelers from other nearby countries, according to a study released by the Chamber of Health in 2015.

Europeans have a less noticeable presence in these statistics despite the fact that in the last two years, the number of airlines with air routes connecting the country directly to the Old Continent went from one to nine.

“The European health systems are quite different from the North American ones and, besides, the way Europeans treat their bodies, in terms of plastic surgery or beautification, is far more conservative,” points out the expert.

The fact is that 45% of those who decide to visit the country for medical tourism purposes undergo dental procedures (including cosmetic or reconstructive surgeries), while the rest do so to undergo plastic surgery, for procedures related to aging (such as orthopedic surgeries), or even obesity treatment.

Visits for dental treatments, aging or obesity have been steadily increasing over the past years, since Costa Rica has given ground to other countries such as Mexico and Colombia in the lucrative field of plastic surgeries. “It’s a challenge for the country. The same way we are recognized as pioneers in many areas, the reality is that when we compare ourselves to other Latin American countries, our operating costs are different,” said Herrera.

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