

Medical Tourism Brings Hard Cash to Tunisia



Tunisia wants more money from tourism. It is popular because of sea, beaches and ancient ruins. But the country wants to gain more funds from medical tourism.

The tourism industry is the biggest foreign currency earner here and the biggest employer after the agricultural sector. There were 6.4 million holidaymakers last year, who spend 2.56 billion dinars (\$1.98 billion) in the country. A usual tourist spends some 300 or 400 euros during his stay. On the other hand a medical tourist spends 2,500 to 4,000 euros according to modest estimations.

According to Slim Ben Yeder, manager of the Soukra Clinic in Tunis, there are more and more Europeans coming to Tunisia for plastic surgery. He also says that the country could become a centre for medical tourism. The Tunisian health industry offers operations like breasts enlargement for 2,600 euros, which represents a half of price for the same procedure in France.

This is in a way a late start in this direction for the country. Many other developing countries have already started the medical tourism industry during the last 10 years. There is also a competition from former communist countries in Europe. They offer cheap cosmetic surgery and dentistry.

The medical sector of Tunisian tourist industry is still small. There were only some 500 foreign medical tourists in Tunisia last year. Most of the medical tourists were people from France. But Tunisians are planning to attract more medical tourists. They claim that the quality of services is high. Tunisian health infrastructure facilities are of high standards, while the staff is often educated in Europe or in the USA. However, it is said that there is a huge gap between private hospitals and the public ones.

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