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Ressort: Reise & Tourismus

Health, wellness and medical tourism

Rome, 31.12.2018 [ENA]

In line with the continuous development of world tourism, an increasing number of people is travelling for health purposes. Health, wellness and medical tourism have raised in recent years becoming progressively important in many destinations. Health tourism is an emerging, global, multifaceted and fast changing segment that needs a better perception by cities willing to leverage opportunities and better address

challenges.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the most important international organization with a central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, with the European Travel Commission (ETC) launched recently a new report on health tourism. Part of their joint research program, the study is the first challenge to set an articulate image of health tourism and define the motivations behind travelers looking for health-related services.

Transfers have been facilitated by low-cost, accessible travel and quickly available information over the Internet.

Due to incomplete and often unreliable data, as well as varying definitions of health tourism and its components, it is difficult to calculate approximately the size and growth of health tourism as a market. Some estimates by industry bodies point to USD 45.5 billion to USD 72 billion market size of medical tourism (Patients Beyond Borders) or USD 100 billion (Medical Tourism Association). Depending on the source estimates of the value of the medical tourism market diverge significantly.

Most countries are concerned in delivering care to medical tourists in order to increase the level of foreign exchange earnings coming into their country and to improve their balance of payments position.

'Exploring Health Tourism' proposes a complete labelling with a consistent terminology to define and describe the sophisticated system of travelling for health purposes and provides a practical toolkit for National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) wanting to develop health tourism.

As defined in the report, health tourism comprises those types of tourism which have as a primary motivation the support to physical, mental and/or spiritual health through medical and wellness-based activities.

The report presents the factors shaping health tourism such as technological developments, personal health,

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data protection and urbanization. It also explores the market, the demand and the supply of health tourism and provides examples of marketing management. In conclusion, the study proposes a set of recommendations extending from improved data collection and more accurate measurement to more accessible and sustainable health tourism calling for further partnerships. The supply of health tourism is very wide from hotels with spas facilities, to wellness hotels and thermal baths to dedicated hospitals and clinics.

There are several types of facilities that can offer services in many areas of health tourism. Operators in the health tourism supply can range from providers, brokers or hotels to certification, accreditation and insurance companies. Since a globally accepted typology of service providers is not available, the size and capacity of the actual supply (probably apart from hotels and hospitals) is not well seized.

The hospitality industry attached importance to the growing demand and interest in health or wellbeing, and an increasing number of operators either have reshaped their services or launched new brands adapted to the new demand trend (e.g., in the form of healthy options). Sustainability and responsibility have become key criteria in health tourism, which often relies on natural resources and assets.

Bericht online lesen:

https://scpress.en-a.de/reise_tourismus/health_wellness_and_medical_tourism_-73124/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Carlo Marino

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