Health Tourism

Lecture 5
An international and regional analysis of medical and wellness tourism
(geographical, cultural endowments, traditions, and traditional services)

Western Europe

• According to ESPA (2007) in Europe there are more than 1,200 spas and health resorts, which are medically respected health centres.
• Many of these are located in historic towns which have traditionally served health and wellness tourists as far back as Roman times. This is true of
  – Vichy (Vicus Caldius) in France,
  – Baden Baden (Aqua Aureliae) in Germany,
  – Bath (Aqua Sulis) in the United Kingdom, and
  – Spa in Belgium amongst others.
• France has approximately 100 active spas and some 40 thalasso centres. Mainly traditional forms of health tourism (e.g. thalassotherapy, hydrotherapy, climatotherapies) are available in France.
• Although there are fears that the industry in German speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) is becoming somewhat saturated, the supply and quality of products has been prodigious in recent years.
• There are approximately 400 officially recognized spas and health resorts between the North Sea and the Alps:
  – Over 300 modern health centres,
  – more than 50 climatic health resorts,
  – 48 seaside health resorts,
  – 62 Kneipp hydrotherapy resorts and
  – over 160 mineral spas and mud spas and
  – a whole range of hotels and specialist wellness centres.
Central and Eastern Europe

- **Some governments** (e.g. Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia) have recently **invested large sums** in the development and upgrade of traditional medical resorts.
- Both the **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia** have similar resources in health tourism, that is mineral and thermal waters and medical mud (plus in Slovakia we can find climatic resorts, too).
- **Poland** enjoys a similarly long history of health tourism, destinations have been attracting health tourists since the 13th century. There are altogether 43 health resorts, most of which are ‘sanatoria’ type facilities.
- **Romania** has approximately 3,000 thermal springs and 70 medical destinations, many of which (e.g. Baile Felix, Baile Herculane, or Sovat) are quite famous in the region.
- **Bulgaria’s** over 800 thermal springs were already popular during Ancient Times.
- **Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia** share similar resources, that is thermal water and healing climate. The most developed of the three is Slovenia (with 87 thermal springs and several other natural assets, such as 2 peat sites).
- The vast country of **Russia** is very rich (e.g. over 5,000 medical destinations!) in natural healing resources and traditions (e.g. banya).

HUNGARY

- Hungary has declared in its National Tourism Development Strategy that it wants to be the most important health tourism destination in Europe.
- The resources are quite significant from **thermal waters, through medical caves to a mofetta** (CO$_2$ bath).
  - Historic spas (especially in Budapest),
  - a natural thermal lake (Hévíz) or
  - a unique natural cave bath (Miskolc-tapolca), plus
  - recent investments in spas and hotel infrastructure
- are all supporting the achievement of this goal.
Nordic and Scandinavian Countries

- In Northern Europe, because of the lack of natural healing assets and tradition, people do not tend to believe in or trust the beneficial impacts of medical waters.
- In Nordic countries, the sauna often represents an integral part of everyday life (especially in Finland) rather than being a luxury that is associated with wellness programmes (there are three forms of saunas: smoke, wood and electricity heated).
- There are some interesting new developments in Finland which are based on natural resources, for example, the concept of ‘Lake Wellness’.
- People in Iceland recognize the benefits of hydrotherapy in hot water. The average Reykjaviker goes to a thermal pool about 15 times a year, enjoying not only the health benefits but also the social and psychological ones.
Southern Europe

- There are also a number of traditional historic spas in Southern Europe, for example
  - Abano or Montecatini Therme in Italy, and well as
  - in Spain, Portugal and Greece (e.g. Loutraki – The City of Waters).
- In Italy alone, approximately 200 destinations and 450 spas offer various services to guests, who can combine their stay with cultural and gastronomic delights.
- The Turkish bath or hammam is world famous and the concept has been exported everywhere. As well as being part of the Islamic ritual of purification, it was also a place to socialize or do business (an extension of the Roman tradition).
- Many yoga and holistic centres are located in Southern Europe (for example,
  - Skyros and Yoga Plus in Greece, and
  - Cortijo Romero in Spain).
- The province around Granada in Spain has Arabic baths, the remains of thermal baths dating from the Roman period, water cisterns, fountains, natural swimming pools, and irrigation channels, all of which are evidence of the great importance that water had for the area.
- The Canary Islands have an all-year-round climate which is ideal for certain medical conditions and healing.

Middle East and North Africa

- Special hammam hotels exist in countries like Morocco.
- Thalassotherapy is also offered in several hotels in Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.
- The Dead Sea is sometimes described as the world’s largest ‘Natural Spa’. It is located between the West Bank and Israel to the west, and Jordan to the east. It has
  - year-round hot weather,
  - an enriched oxygen atmosphere,
  - therapeutic UVB solar radiation,
  - a mineral-rich salt sea,
  - mineral-rich mud,
  - theromoineral hot springs and
  - luxurious spas.
Africa

- Although luxury spas exist in Africa, this is largely in South Africa and on some of the islands, for example in the **Seychelles or Mauritius**.
- Kenya offers opportunities to combine safaris and spas, as well as centres like **Wildfitness**, where visitors can get fitter using natural habitats (e.g. sprinting in sand dunes, swimming in creeks, jogging through jungles).
- **Medical tourism in Africa** is also a growing phenomenon, especially in South Africa where **surgical and cosmetic** tourism has a good reputation.

Asia

- Spa and wellness are gaining **unprecedented growth** and popularity across Asia.
- Most of the Asia spas, even if they are located in chain hotels, include local signature treatments which can be very special and luxurious (e.g. Balinese coffee-peeling ritual).
- In **Japan, onsens** (ritual bathing establishments that can be individual facilities or as part of a Ryokan, i.e. inn) are representative of tradition and heritage.
- In Asia, the traditional health approaches and techniques (e.g. Thai massage, Chinese medicine, yoga, Ayurveda) have become globally exportable.
Australasia and the South Pacific

- Spa tourism in Australia is very much in line with the North American approach, where speciality spas are dominant.

Structure of the Australian Spa Industry.

- Several hotels in the region already have spa facilities which are combined with other packages (e.g. beach tourism, business tourism, honeymoons, and weddings).

Americas and the Caribbean

- In the United States and Canada there are large numbers of day-spas catering for mainly urban dwellers, who are looking for relaxation, pampering and stress relief.
- ISPA estimates that there are about 2100 spas in Canada, with 75% of them categorized as day spas.
- Many indigenous traditions are derived from the Americas and are being exported to spas all over the world.
- One the best known is Lomi Lomi massage from Hawaii, which is usually offered as a 2 hour treatment in European spas and is a gentle wave-like or rocking technique.
The following table gives a summary of how health and wellness tourism looks in the discussed regions.

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Key: the number of ‘/’ refers to the weight of the given market and indicates the most prominent approaches.

Source: Smith and Pollard.