As 2010 is coming to an end, the time for the annual round-up has come. This is also the time for the next year forecasts.

At first glance, 2010 was a difficult year as world economies were still struggling through the financial crisis, therefore one would naturally expect pessimistic moods, with regards to the industry’s growth potential, to prevail.

However, as with everything else human, people remain hopeful and optimistic when asked to predict the development of the industry in the next year.

Just scanning through the current headlines of the articles in the Internet gives an impression that the industry is about to hit stardom: “India’s medical tourism market is growing by 25 per cent annually and is expected to become a $2 billion-a-year business opportunity by 2012.” “Global medical tourism market to hit $100 billion by 2012.” There are many others that vary only in numbers of future growth.

Of course, not only India receives its portion of optimistic predictions. South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan among others claim to be steadily advancing on their paths towards capitalising in health tourism business revenues. The medical tourism industry is popularly predicted to substantially aid local economies and increase GDP size of the host countries.

So, things are not that bad, or better say – things are going pretty well.

2011 FORECASTS

The people that MWT spoke to also displayed a unanimous optimism in their forecasts for 2011, and even better ones for 2012.

Thus, business development manager, Kairali – The Ayurvedic Healing Village, Vishal Verma said: “Medical tourism has a tremendous growth potential of almost 20 per cent in the next fiscal year.”

“Medical tourism has a tremendous growth potential of almost 20 per cent in the next fiscal year.

The global market is predicted to double in size to $40 billion a year by 2010, and it is estimated that the Asian market will generate in excess of $4.4 billion by 2012,” claimed senior consultant, Asia Pacific Healthcare, Frost & Sullivan, Sohini Mitra.

“I believe that there will be an increase in the industry. Both the numbers of international patients and medical tourism facilitators will increase,” said CEO, Gusib Health Tourism Consultancy, Levent Bas.

Moreover, industry manager, Health IT & Healthcare Delivery Practice, South Asia and Middle East, Frost & Sullivan, Anurag Dubey, is convinced that medical tourism is projected to contribute revenue of $1.15 billion to $2.28 billion by 2012.

ASIA IS BOOMING

Particularly positive outlooks for the year 2011 are coming from Asia. Spa manager, Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Vietnam, Christina Rieken said: “This aspect (health travel) of the tourism industry has grown, and we are proud to be a part of it. This will grow to be far more than a trend and will dominate a

Continued on page 2
big part of the tourism industry.”

“The medical and wellness tourism industry in India should grow at impressive rates given its inherent strengths such as cost competitiveness and a large pool of skilled manpower. Coupled with long waiting periods and spiralling costs in the Western world - the key originating markets for medical tourism, the future of the industry looks promising,” said director, Kerala Tourism, M Sivasankar explained.

“Based on the studies of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, I personally expect the world's medical tourism and Asia's medical tourism to grow by 20 - 28 per cent respectively,” said business development manager, S Medical Spa, Nuttapol Naksusook.

With regards to India's perspectives, president, International Wellness & Healthcare Travel Association (IWHTA), Naresh Jadeja outlined: “Next year we will see many actual partnerships happening between health ministries and hospitals which will create value for each other and ultimately help international patients. More and more efforts will be started by hospitals to attract regional medical tourists and results will be seen instantly.”

Summing up the future tendencies identified by our respondents, those are integration of conventional and alternative medicines in holistic health and wellness offerings, emergence of ‘hybrid’ healthcare institutions, increase in the number of medical tourism agencies, promotion of preventative healthcare, augmentation of strategic alliances and joint ventures between overseas healthcare counterparts, and spread of customised packages offered by insurance providers.

EVENTS FLASHBACK

2010 saw a number of important events that signified that the industry is growing with more people getting involved. Such events as World Medical Tourism Conference in Los Angeles, European Medical Travel Conference (EMTC) in Italy, GLOW - Asia Medical Tourism and Wellness Congress in Malaysia, Global Healthcare & Medical Tourism Conference in Los Angeles, is growing with more people getting involved. The industry is moving forward for discussion. The document stipulates “the right of EU Citizens to universal access to healthcare as provided in their own countries and in countries of the European Union as well as the freedom of choice of institutional or individual healthcare provider is regarded as being in accordance with the human rights and shall be demanded as a standard.”

Apart from the right to travel for healthcare, the declaration also suggested that there was a need for an improved synergy between healthcare and tourism. Investment into an integrated model of these two industries will increase quality, safety and customer flows. It was also underlined that the issue of patients’ safety requires immediate attention and only the introduction of a systematic set of international regulations will make it possible to rein current chaotic approaches to individuals’ health

The Medical Tourism Congress in Los Angeles was a huge event with up to 2,000 attendees from over 85 countries, 100 speakers, and up to 20,000 pre-scheduled networking meetings – all displaying the scope of the industry.

It seems that the health industry is also receptive to peoples’ desires and needs. In a recent survey by the Government of India, it was found that nearly 70% of respondents were interested in visiting a health spa for an improved quality of life.

New Year's resolutions

Continued from front page
Promotional initiatives

JCI accredited Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur (PHKL) is on a strategic mission to expand its presence within the healthcare tourism market in the Asia Pacific region.

Moreover, it is the first medical centre in Malaysia to have opened a facility, the International Ward and Lounge, exclusively dedicated to the treatment of foreign patients and expatriates.

According to senior manager, customer service and public relations, PHKL, Carol Pelly: “The international lounge provides patients as well as their friends and family with exclusive admission and discharge counters, meeting rooms, private telephone kiosks, Internet kiosks with Wi-Fi coverage and a refreshment counter.”

The international ward offers all the amenities and services featured in a five-star hotel. The facility comprises a range of in-hospital accommodation, including rooms that sleep up to four people as well as executive suites which are designed to provide added comfort and convenience to international patients.

Foreign patients are assisted by the Pantai International call centre, which offers a variety of services such as enquiry and appointment assistance, arrangements for travel and accommodation, currency exchange, transfers from airport and hotel, visa extensions, interpreter services, tour of the facility and other patient-related assistance.

PUBLIC VISIBILITY

In an attempt to increase its international presence, PHKL actively participates in and supports road shows organised by the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council.

“We promote positive and stable growth of our facilities, providing an unbiased source of information for patients. We also continue to recruit agents for patients’ referrals, thus actively showcasing our on-line presence to further enhance our credibility for future patients,” Pelly told MWT.

“We are also looking to promote PHKL as a one-stop medical centre that offers a comprehensive and complete range of health services. We also stress public education by offering speaking engagements for employer groups, consulting firms, insurance agents and brokers, as well as governmental organisations,” continued Pelly.

TEAMWORK

PHKL has been co-operating with a host of independent referral agents, third party administrators and insurance companies, in terms of establishing relationships with international providers. “We always make sure PHKL and our consultants are accredited and safe to work with, and the medical tourism trip to our hospital is a smooth one.

“Our international patients come from diverse backgrounds, therefore getting in touch with these patients can sometimes be challenging, and this is why collaborating with medical tourism facilitators has made it easier for us and for the patients. It is also convenient for the transfer of medical information of patients, as most medical tourism facilitators have a mechanism in place for the quick transference of medical records, including large files such as CT’s and MRIs,” said Pelly.

FUTURE PLANS

Pelly informed MWT that PHKL currently generates a small amount of its total revenue from medical and wellness tourism. However, the hospital is actively developing its operations in various fields such as general health screening, oncology, treatment and orthopaedics.

“Also, in 2011 the Heart Centre will be opened, and it will be a key discipline in the growth for the domestic and international market. With these specialised areas, we hope to see an increase in revenue secured,” she said.

PHKL is now the only private hospital in Malaysia to have received four awards and certificates in 2009: Joint Commission International (JCI), Malaysian Society for Quality in Health (MSQH), International Standard Organisation (ISO) and Baby Friendly Hospital.

Facilitating reputation

Director, Vivex Tours, Gordana Arnaut talked to MWT about how, being a tour operator, the company promotes Serbian healthcare in the world.

Vivex Tours promotes Serbia as a medical tourism destination

Vivex Tours is both attracting foreign patients in Serbian medical facilities and sending Serbian medics abroad to advertise the local health tourism market.

For medical and wellness visitors we offer dental services ranging from very mundane services like fillings to making implants and reconstructive surgery, wellness and spa centres with a variety of healing mineral waters, and other world-class medical treatments and wellness programmes at five to ten times less the price as compared to some developed countries in Europe.

In order to be able to offer a full-spectrum of services, we co-operate with medical specialists, owners of apartments in the city, hotels, spa centres and car rental agencies. Soon, we will start a co-operation with the magazine Fitness Management International. We organise dental services for some clients from Australia, Denmark and Germany, combined with excellent pedicure services as well as leisure activities in Belgrade.

Our clients are one of the biggest companies in the pharmaceutical industry. We organise hotels and flights for them when they are visiting international exhibitions such as ExpoPharm and Medica.

We believe that Serbia will develop its reputation as a qualitative and versatile medical tourism destination in the nearest future. We think that what is required now is to get the message across and strengthen a private-public partnership model in healthcare tourism.

Waving at the world

One of the biggest Lodz-based dental clinics, Neo Dentica, Poland as a dental tourism destination will be further growing as long as we maintain high quality of services and our medical tourists and capitalise on its current five per cent income resulting from the dental tourism business.

“We started from placing our advertisements in in-flight magazines and foreign websites, reaching out as far as Ireland,” said manager, Neo Dentica Dental Clinic, Poland, Marta Kochanowska. “The fact that in a couple of years we have received patients from the UK, Ireland, France and Holland demonstrates that our efforts were successful.”

The clinic boasts of its experienced team of dentists who offer complex dental treatments using high-end medical equipment.

As to the main success factor of the clinic entering the dental tourism market, Kochalowska said: “We offer the highest level of dental treatment for reasonable prices. And the interest in Poland as a dental tourism destination will be further growing as long as we maintain high quality of services and our prices remain realistic and lower than in the countries of the patients that come to us.”

Neo Dentica Dental Clinic additionally advises its patients on a selection of hotels to stay at and on touristic and cultural attractions worth attending while recuperating in the city.
Expanding offerings

In spite of medical tourism still being in its relative infancy, new medical tourism facilitators are emerging onto the scene almost on a daily basis, with companies offering international patients the opportunities to combine all their transportation, accommodation, medical and tourism needs – in a sense, putting all their eggs in one basket.

With a wealth of facilitators to choose from, finding the right one can prove difficult, however; CEO, Salveo Travel, Habil Kantur told MWT that those who are able to develop good business relationships with their fellow collaborators will be the ones who will attract the most patients: “Since health tourism is still very much unknown amongst the majority of people, it is still quite difficult to find patients. Those patients that actively search for options abroad can find anything because there are lots of websites related to medical tourism. The industry must do a better job in showing that medical tourism is not only secure but fun as well,” he said.

“This is not something a single company can do on its own; the entire business and its related associations must make an effort here. Teaching patients and informing them about medical tourism prior to them needing it is key for business growth and success, I believe.”

In order to increase his chances of generating more business, Kantur has developed not one but two businesses focussing on separate areas within the industry. Lask Abroad focuses primarily on offering group trips in Istanbul, Turkey where leisure weekends are combined with laser eye surgery and guided tours visiting many tourist attractions within the city.

Salveo Travel is a much broader service, offering tourism packages which include treatments such as cosmetic surgery, internal surgery, dental care, wellness breaks and weight loss camps, to name a few.

“We try not to have too many options for our customers like many other medical tourism websites where you can find tens of thousands of doctors and clinics,” Kantur stated.

“We do not want our partners to compete with all other hospitals on the planet, so you can say that we offer a more exclusive way for our partners to present themselves to potential patients. This way, we also keep a higher level of quality on our partners and the patients can feel more secure.”

Impressive entrance to the industry

Associate for tourism, Afeja, Marijan Dimitrijevic spoke to MWT about the current standing of Serbia as a health tourism destination.

MWT: What makes Serbia competitive on the medical and wellness tourism market?

Located on the crossroads of central and southeast Europe, Serbia is slowly becoming a more popular medical tourism destination. It has 300 water springs, 39 spas and 25 rehabilitation centres, which enhances its potential in wellness tourism. Therefore, it is not unusual that it pays off for westerners to go to Serbia in search of health, relaxation and beauty.

Our medical facilities are making pioneer steps in attracting foreigners. However, we understand that our ‘expert’ potential in health services is extremely high. Concerning prices, we are definitely cheaper than western countries. All these elements taken together give a great chance for Serbia.

MWT: What medical or wellness services does Serbia offer to medical travellers?

Whether you are looking for general, cosmetic, plastic or dental surgery, wellness treatments, eye laser treatments, Botox, IVF treatments, dental services, sports medicine, autism or treatment of other developmental disorders, Serbia can do it all.

Our strongest points lie within our human potential, such as the qualifications of medical staff, high-quality private health facilities with modern medical equipment, competitive prices, safety of the tourist destination and all-year-round possibility to sustain medical tourism.

MWT: What have you done to promote Serbian medical and wellness potential in the world?

After a comparative analysis of the cost of healthcare services in relation to other countries and Serbia’s natural and cultural potential, the management of Afeja started with the development of health tourism as a product, which for the first time was defined by the Serbian Law on Tourism in 2009 and nominated as one of the tourist priorities for the country.

With that in mind, we have created the sites www.zdravstveniturizam.com, www.medicaltourism-serbia.com, www.healthtourismserbia.com and formed Afeja Club where we have linked medical institutions and private capital, some offices and clinics in private practice, travel agents and two law firms on the contractual basis. The aim of the club is to provide quality health and tourism services with adequate legal security for patients and clients through joint performance in the domestic and foreign markets.

Information about our activities appears in a number of national and international newspapers and tourism fairs in Europe, and we co-operate with medical tourism associations and tourist agencies in other European countries. Also, we established contacts with foreign embassies, where we were asked to make presentations of this programme, not to mention the personal contacts we have had abroad.

MWT: What are your future development plans and strategic targets?

Afeja association pays much attention to so-called ‘baby-boomers’ or people born between 1945 and 1965, whose number will significantly increase by 2020 and the number of these tourists will be coming from the US, the UK, Canada, the EU and the Middle East.

These people would face many health issues which are typical for their age such as orthopaedic surgeries, weight-related issues, diabetes, haemodialysis, hypertension, heart disease and cancer. They could soon witness the inability of their national health systems to attend to their health issues mainly due to the large numbers of this group of patients.

The moment when private insurance companies realise the significance of their clients travelling to other countries in search for cheaper healthcare, the true development of this type of tourism will really start.

Afeja took this health-risk group very seriously and came up with the programmes which will provide them with pre-care as well as treatment of such diseases as cancer, diabetes, anti-age diagnostics, aesthetic, plastic and reconstructive surgery, mental health and anti-stress programmes.

The international healthcare becomes a synonym for vacation to a vast number of people who travel for vacation to a vast number of people who travel for treatment, wellness vacation and, above all, significant saving in comparison to their countries.
Executive Health and Travel Medicine Program

The American University of Beirut Medical Center

Over the past 140 years, the medical center has distinguished itself in the delivery of state-of-the-art medical care in the region.

The Executive Health Program was established particularly to provide personalized health checkups for busy individuals and executives. The packages are custom tailored to each individual based on age, gender, potential risk factors, and past medical and family history.

The program emphasizes wellness and healthy living by focusing on identifying lifestyle and hereditary factors, and applying preventive interventions for early detection of serious conditions such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. This is achieved through a comprehensive prescheduled medical examination carried out by qualified physicians over a 1 or 2 day stay in our comfortable exclusive suite, in which most of the laboratory tests and consultations are conveniently performed.

Prior to discharge, the attending physician discusses the preliminary results with the individual, which will be later supplemented with a detailed report that includes copies of test results, recommendations, and relevant instructions.

For our international visitors, travel assistance is offered, including airline and hotel reservations, required airport and local transportation to and from the medical center, as well as information on leisure and touristic activities in Lebanon.

To receive our brochure, and/or for further information and appointments kindly contact:

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German medical partnership

A medical travel consultant, Premier Healthcare Germany, managing medical travel to Germany for the patients in need of expert medical treatment, has entered into co-operation with Asklepios Hospitals, the country’s largest private hospital group.

According to director of marketing and clinical affairs, Premier Healthcare Germany, Olaf Haase: “This cooperation is part of our plan to provide a network of service providers that will add value to health tourism in terms of having a one-stop shop for medical traveller’s planning to go to Germany for healthcare. We will combine both companies’ strengths for the benefit of international patients.”

The international patient consultant Premier Healthcare Germany, based in Hamburg, assists patients from around the world in selecting and obtaining high-quality medical treatment in Germany, which is internationally renowned for its focus on quality, scientific research, and evidence-based medicine, while still maintaining affordable costs for treatment.

Premier Healthcare offers professional services specifically designed to tackle the complexity of organising a medical trip. For example, if a diagnosis has not already been established, our company and the Asklepios Hospital Group can provide a diagnosis upon arrival and then tailor an appropriate treatment to an individual patient.

In June 2010, Premier Healthcare took their first step towards improving medical travel to Germany by entering into co-operation with Lufthansa and in such a way taking care of medical travel logistics.

The Asklepios Hospital Group is a leader in healthcare provision, with over 100 modern medical facilities across Germany, comprising 22,000 hospital beds and 36,000 medical professionals, providing both acute medical care and medical rehabilitation. The Asklepios range of hospitals includes tertiary university teaching hospitals, general hospitals, and rehabilitation facilities, thus providing healthcare delivery to patients across the full continuum of care.

According to Haase, Asklepios provides a spectrum of treatment options for almost all medical conditions with internationally renowned experts, building the backbone of their medical portfolio. Meanwhile, Premier Healthcare is also an expert in managing medical travel logistics, such as scheduling appointments, controlling fair prices and ensuring that a medical trip is almost as easy as visiting a local doctor.

Both companies share a vision that medical treatment in Germany should be accessible to everyone – immediately, comprehensively, and at fair prices, no matter what country the patient is from.

“Premier Healthcare Germany offers professional services specifically designed to tackle the complexity of organising a medical trip. For example, if a diagnosis has not already been established, our company and the Asklepios Hospital Group can provide a diagnosis upon arrival and then tailor an appropriate treatment to an individual patient.

“If a patient provides a diagnosis, medical reports and other diagnostic data, Premier Healthcare Germany seeks and finds the right experts in Germany, organises travel, manages local case agent support, talks to embassies about medical visas, tries to get health insurance reimbursement where possible, and ensures adequate follow-up back at home,” explained Haase.

“This co-operation is another milestone in setting up an adequate infrastructure for the international medical travellers to Germany,” said director of business development, Premier Healthcare Germany, Michael G. Meurs. “Having access to competent medical treatment quickly is fundamental to any medical travel. With this co-operation, we can offer travel solutions that go far beyond simply facilitating a patient to any hospital, we are now part of the treatment plan.”

Premier Healthcare will be instrumental in further developing our offerings to the international patients,” said director of business development, Asklepios, Dr. Raoul Hecker. “Their service concept allows focusing on what we are best at: delivering highest quality medical treatment, while Premier focuses on the special requirements of the internationally travelling patient and their families.
Aqua therapy at S Medical Spa cures a number of ailments

A Bangkok-based S Medical Spa is ready to greet the New Year with an array of novelties that it wishes to offer health tourists around the globe. In order to respond to the changing customer needs and technological advancements, the spa clinic added several new treatments to its menu.

“Having worked closely with hospital doctors, we currently offer various physical rehabilitation and vitality enhancement programmes for post-operation patients to recuperate faster holistically,” business development manager, S Medical Spa, Nuttapol Naksusook told MWT.

The following treatments are now available to medical and wellness visitors in Bangkok:

ULTIMATE LIFT: A non-surgical face lift, which precisely delivers acoustic sound waves deep into the skin to thermally initiate the body's own rejuvenation mechanisms, countering the effects of aging on the skin and promises to set a new standard in the aesthetics industry.

GENETIC SCREENING: This 45-genes-test analyzes an individual's imprint which is able to determine and quantify the risks of cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, cholesterol metabolism, Alzheimer's disease, inflammation, metabolic diseases, breast/ovarian/prostate cancer, diabetes, and predisposing obesity. The analysis also determines the usage of hormone therapy as well as drug metabolism.

PRECIOUS STONE THERAPY: An alternative medicine technique for spiritual, emotional, and physical healing using various forms of natural crystals, each of which contains its own specific therapeutic properties. S Medical Spa combines this healing technique with the advanced “Aura Imaging” technology to analyze individual types of Aura energy.

BIO REJUVENATION PROGRAMME: Specifically designed and created by S Medical Spa's doctoral team. It is a total body and mind rejuvenation programme which aims to delay aging, improve and boost energy levels, and slow down de-generative changes.

“We have also opened a chronic pain clinic to help treat people with chronic pain such as osteoporosis, myofascial syndrome, joint problems, arthritis, osteo-arthritis, people recovering from strokes, paralysed, etc. Equipped with well-trained staff and chronic pain specialists, S Medical Spa's facilities, such as the aqua therapeutic pool to provide thermal stimulation, ultrasound, and physiotherapy, and the ultrasound and ultrasound, and physiotherapy, and the ultrasound and ultrasound and therapies, are available to medical and wellness visitors in the clinic now has a state-of-the-art praxis laboratory with special techniques, which enables Dr Varadi to offer individual services for those having a wellness holiday.

“We are co-operating with most tourism service providers, self-serviced apartments, hotels, travel agencies, as well as wellness providers. In addition to our dental treatments, we provide all-inclusive tourism services to our clients,” said Dr Varadi.

In the future, according to Dr Varadi, the quality will increasingly come to the front in dental tourism, and the overall prospects of medical and wellness tourism in Hungary are very good.

In Bangkok:

Jaynoj Akhleed, president, RSU Healthcare, said: “The new blood testing will incorporate physician's screening for medical history and other risk factors including smoking, lifestyle, environmental factors, occupational risk factors which would contribute to the occurrence of various types of cancer.

“In the future, RSU Healthcare plans to open a medical and wellness resort for customers who wish to receive a more focused treatment, incorporating oriental medicine with medical attention and supervision.

“This resort will be located in a secluded area close to nature and large resort cities on the east coast of Thailand. Our customers will receive treatments in a relaxed atmosphere and luxurious ambiance. The wellness resort will focus on new technologies for customers whether they want to lose weight, reduce cholesterol, manage diabetes or simply wish to cleanse their bodies in a systematic manner. All the treatments will be under direct supervision of doctors to ensure optimum treatment and results,” said Ourairat.

RSU Healthcare aims at expanding into other markets such as Eastern Europe, Russia and Africa, and increasing the numbers of medical tourists to 1,000 cases next year yielding approximately 25-30 million Baht ($836,000 - $1 million) in revenue. “We would eventually be able to meet the growing demand and help patients from all over the world, creating a comprehensive network of medical tourism facilitators to achieve our goals,” he concluded.

All-inclusive dental offer

Owner, VáradiDent, Hungary, Peter Varadi, who is mostly working with dental tourists from Germany, Austria and some countries of Northern Europe, is proud to announce that besides a modern dental practice and dental surgery, the clinic now has a state-of-the-art praxis laboratory with special techniques, which enables Dr Varadi to offer individual services for those having a wellness holiday.

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Innovative aspirations

With the fourth year in operation, RSU Healthcare in Thailand is expanding their scope of services to include specialised personal genetic testing.

This new innovation is set to unlock DNA codes with the purpose of early detection for various types of cancer by analysing Plasma DNA. The technology focuses on DNA gene mutation which would lead to various types of cancer such as lung, breast, ovarian, liver, brain, urinary cancer, etc.

“Our collaboration with our new partner, Heart Genetics Co., Ltd. places special emphasis on our philosophy of ‘Prevention is better than treatment’. Our focus on preventive measures will enhance our ability to help our customers improve lives and well-being,” managing director, RSU Healthcare, Apiwat Ourairat told MWT.

The new blood testing will incorporate physician's screening for medical history and other risk factors including smoking, lifestyle, environmental factors, occupational risk factors which would contribute to the occurrence of various types of cancer.

“In the future, RSU Healthcare plans to open a medical and wellness resort for customers who wish to receive a more focused treatment, incorporating oriental medicine with medical attention and supervision.

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Experience meets demand

BNH Hospital in Bangkok has over a hundred years’ history of treating foreign patients. MWT talked to assistant vice president, Bangkok Dusit Medical Services, Vithaya Sinharapantorn, who explained why BNH hospital maintains one of the leading positions in the medical tourism sector in Thailand.

Medical tourism constitutes about 15 per cent of our international business. We focus on strengthening our position as the number one spine and orthopaedic centre in Asia, with over 600 cases of complex spine surgery, and 90 per cent success rate. Some 50 per cent of our patients are international patients. In 2009 we had received 11,911 patients from the US, 11,026 from the UK, 9,025 from France, 5,532 from Australia and 5,438 from Japan.

In terms of treatments, medical travellers at the hospital can mainly be divided into three groups: 1) travellers who had accidents during their stay, as our emergency service offers 24-hour specialist help in paediatric, dental, cardiac and sport injuries, 2) leisure travellers that usually are on wellness tours that include check-ups, dental treatments and various beauty procedures, and 3) overseas fly-in patients, mostly come to us for specialty treatments, especially spine and orthopaedic.

BNH Hospital offers airport pick-ups upon request. For post-operative care, a doctor will give patients advice through e-mails, telephone or on-line meetings.

Apart from offering modern and comfortable patient rooms, currently we are co-operating with most of the hotels and self-serviced residences located in Silom-Sathorn area near the hospital.

Our customer service team will assist patients by recommending a proper accommodation which fits their budget. Tour, travel agents and air ticket booking service are available upon request.

BNH Hospital boasts of an impressive accreditation and certification history. In 2003, the hospital received the Prime Minister’s Export Award, in 2004, and the Hospital Management Asia Award. In 2007 it became the best services company at the Australian Chamber Business Award. In 2008, the hospital received Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce for Best Professional Services - Export Services Award, as well as Hospital Accreditation and JCI accreditation.

Respectable neighbours

Cyprus Sun Med Connections, a medical tourism facilitator which bases its headquarters in the southern coastal city of Limassol, is actively seeking to attract more patients from the Arab World.

Director, Cyprus Sun Med Connections, Helen Lambrou stated to MWT that due to the island’s close proximity with its Arab neighbours such an opportunity must not be overlooked.

“We want to attract Arab patients to our services even more especially as Cyprus is so strategically located. We want to ensure that these patients are informed about our facilities and services by providing information in the Arabic language also,” Lambrou stated.

“Arab patients who travel to other countries for treatment represent a significant and high value segment of the growing medical tourism market. We are now also featured on the Doctor Internet website which is aimed specifically at Arab patients actively researching a solution to their healthcare needs and the options for medical treatment or surgery outside their home country,” she continued.

Offering services to patients in cosmetic surgery, cosmetic dentistry, infertility treatments, dermatological laser treatments, orthopaedics, weight loss, ophthalmic surgery, and general surgery, the company specialises in co-ordinating all aspects required for patient surgery.

“We are with them from the word go;” outlined Lambrou. “From their initial enquiry, choosing their surgeon, consultations, treatment, aftercare, and beyond, we are available 24/7 and organise all those little extras that one does not think of when considering travelling overseas for medical purposes. We also provide a local mobile phone to use completely free-of-charge so patients can contact us at all times giving them total peace of mind in a foreign country.”

The company is also aiming to encourage medical travel, what seems to be a rarity within the industry, by trying to get past patients to discuss their experiences with prospective patients in an attempt to ease the fears often associated with life changing experiences in foreign countries.

“The CV’s of all our doctors and surgeons are available on request and we encourage patients to access testimonials from independent medical websites;” Lambrou told MWT.

Ukrainian facilitation

Oxana Lutsenko

Ukrainian health travel facilitator, MedVoyage.info, a website in the Russian language which publishes IS-20 medical tourism newsfeeds a week, is further aspiring to take over media space in the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet. The company also provides information to medical tourists seeking appropriate healthcare facilities in a number of countries, and consults medical institutions both in Ukraine and abroad.

“According to our analytical data, annual medical tourism market growth constitutes approximately 60 per cent. Thus, we plan to increase the number of sent enquiries up to 2,000 - 2,500 per year;” managing partner, MedVoyage Ltd, Oxana Lutsenko told MWT.

Lutsenko informed that priority countries for the customers of the MedVoyage are Israel, Germany, Switzerland, South Korea and Thailand. The most popular treatment areas are oncology, neurosurgery and spinal surgery, cardiac surgery, gynaecology and paediatrics.

“We send enquiries from Ukrainian patients to Europe and Asia as well as enquiries from patients living in other countries. Relocating patients coming to Ukraine seek infertility treatments, aesthetic, plastic surgery and stem-cell therapy,” said Lutsenko.

The clients of MedVoyage Ltd mostly come from all post-Soviet area countries (CIS+), with 1,100 enquiries for treatment from patients to hospitals per year.

“At the moment we work with 60 medical tourism representatives in Europe and Asia. Our co-operation is based on the commercial placement of information about medical facilities and providers on our portal www.medvoyage.info.

“In return, we promote those providers and facilities in the Russian-language Internet space, thus inciting interest and raising demand for them. Patients send us their enquiries about possibilities of treatments in clinics listed on our portal, our experts process the enquiries data and send to our partners who provide the treatment;” explained Lutsenko.
UK standards

MWT spoke to deputy director, CHKS, Russell Muddiman about the activities of CHKS - the UK provider of healthcare intelligence and quality improvement services - that offers, among other services, assurance and accreditation to medical facilities around the world.

CHKS maintains its profile by attendance and submissions at international conferences and with representation on the council of ISQua. Additionally, CHKS is proactive in seeking new areas to explore for healthcare improvement and subsequent standards for accreditation that competitors may not have considered. We work collaboratively with our existing clients to maintain and reinforce a strong working relationship and are responsive to their individual needs.

MWT: Being one of the most respectable leaders among international healthcare accrediting bodies, what do you do to keep up with the existing competition?

The decision to choose CHKS is purely a personal one, made by the client. However, some anecdotal evidence suggests that some countries or cultures prefer a UK-based approach and accreditation methodology.

MWT: Why should hospitals and clinics choose CHKS, and not JCI, for example?

Some organisations initially have some difficulties meeting some of the standards. However, the CHKS support, guidance and education provided as part of the programme facilitates this process.

MWT: How difficult is it for medical facilities to meet your standards?

The average time for an organisation commencing accreditation for the first time is 12 to 18 months.

MWT: How much does accreditation by CHKS cost?

The costs are very variable based upon the size of the facility, number of sites and services provided and these are determined on a purely individual basis.

MWT: How many healthcare facilities have you already accredited and in what countries?

The number of accredited organisations is over approximately 150. The countries that we do and have worked in are: the UK, Portugal, Denmark, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Gibraltar, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Germany.

MWT: Why is accreditation necessary in the medical tourism business?

Having been on several ‘outbound’ missions with the Department for Trade and Industry, there does appear to be interest in medical tourists going to another country but having the assurance that where they are going has been ‘checked’ by a UK company.

MWT: What will accreditation granted by CHKS give to a healthcare facility? How will healthcare providers facilitate from your accreditation?

Historically with independent healthcare providers there was a commercial advantage in having accreditation; however, organisations now seek internal assurance with external validation from receiving accreditation. Accreditation programmes have demonstrated that they can minimise clinical risks and maximise patient safety.

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CHKS is unique in that it focuses on patients, their experiences and outcomes. Our clinical teams were able to focus on the patient’s perspective, gain patient opinion and, where required, change the service to focus more on patient expectations.

Stuart Lonie, Governance Manager, County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
The right to medical travel

Head of product development, AllClear Treatment Abroad, Chris Blackman spoke to MWT about the need for medical travel insurance and what types of cover are available.

**MWT:** Why and how did the company decide to enter the medical tourism market?

AllClear Insurance Services believe that everyone deserves the right to travel. We believe the elderly, disabled, or those with pre-existing medical conditions should have the same opportunities as anyone else. This is why we provide comprehensive insurance products tailored to people’s specific needs.

Back in September 2008 we decided to set up AllClear Treatment Abroad. This is because we found that, although medical tourism is a growing industry in the UK, people are not really aware that they need specialist travel insurance. Most standard policies contain an exclusion clause which specifies that you are not covered if ‘travelling for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment’.

It means that when people make a claim which is not related to their treatment, such as baggage loss or airport delays, and the insurance company discovers the customer was travelling to have treatment, they may refuse to pay out on any claims. This often leaves people out of pocket when they have already paid out for their treatment.

AllClear Treatment Abroad provides a specialist insurance option for people travelling for treatment abroad, so they can travel with peace of mind, knowing they are fully covered and getting the treatment they need.

**MWT:** Tell us more about your insurance initiatives for medical tourists. What do you cover?

AllClear Treatment Abroad provides specialist travel insurance for people travelling to have medical treatment or surgery abroad.

We provide cover even for people travelling to have treatment for an existing condition, and in most cases there are no age limits.

Our travel insurance for treatment abroad includes:

- Dental treatment or surgery
- Cosmetic / plastic treatment or surgery
- Laser eye treatment or surgery
- Infertility treatment or surgery
- Hair transplant treatment or surgery
- Obesity treatment or surgery

We include cover for additional accommodation or travel expenses in the event that the traveller’s recovery from treatment extends past the anticipated date.

**MWT:** Most standard policies contain an exclusion clause which specifies that you are not covered if ‘travelling for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment’. How do you receive a lot of enquiries about medical tourism insurance schemes?

Since we developed the AllClear Treatment Abroad product, we have discovered, unfortunately, that many people are not aware that their standard travel insurance will not cover them if they are travelling for treatment abroad. So, a big part of what we do is educating people that their current travel insurance policy is void if they are travelling for treatment, rather than a holiday.

We have been working very hard to make people aware of the need for specialist travel insurance - we even have an entire category on our blog devoted to this topic – to make sure that they are fully covered.

**MWT:** How many medical tourism customers have you had so far?

It is not in the tens of thousands as we had hoped. This is why we are aiming to help consumers understand more about the specialist travel insurance that they need if they are travelling for treatment abroad or outside of the UK.

**MWT:** Do you co-operate with any medical tourism facilitators or providers?

At AllClear, we understand that our customers are very busy and so we have made our medical screening questions as streamlined as possible. In addition, we want to make it easier for customers to book their specialist travel insurance with us at the same time as they actually book their treatment with a medical provider or facilitator, and this is something that we will be looking at in the future.

That way, the customer would be able to get their treatment abroad travel insurance and find their medical tourism facilitator at the same time, through our mutually beneficial affiliate network. We invite guest bloggers from medical tourism providers to contribute to our blog and engage in the industry discussions as well.

**MWT:** Do you think that medical tourism is a potentially strong industry?

With the NHS cuts in the UK Government Spending Review in October, it is likely more than ever that people will be travelling for treatment abroad, to avoid long NHS waiting lists or expensive private treatment in the UK. Next year, we will be working even more with consumers to make sure they know they get the cover they need to travel for treatment abroad with complete peace of mind.
South Africa is a country which welcomes numerous tourists to its shores each year to experience its incredible natural beauty, but Mario Hajiloizis discovers that many more travellers are arriving for a whole new purpose.

South Africa is widely known the world over as being “the cradle of humanity” – a statement illustrating historical belief that the continent played host to the world’s early humans.

Such powerful words can surely do nothing but wonders for South Africa which is trying its utmost to lure in the world’s medical tourists.

With one billion residing in Africa, 50 million of which populate South Africa, the country’s local reach within the industry can have huge potential if managed correctly.

However, according to CEO, Surgeon & Safari, Lorraine Melvill such management is already in place as she holds the firm belief that South Africa is setting an example to follow for the entire continent.

“South Africa is the only country in Africa that has an established reputable highly skilled and well equipped private healthcare system which is in line with the first world so the country is the natural referral point within the region for critical healthcare,” she told MWT.

Echoing Melvill’s statement is chief medical officer, ER24, Dr. Robyn Holgate who further stated that there are many more characteristics the country entails which make it such a wonderful medical tourism destination to visit.

“South Africa is a beautiful country which has many attractive holiday destinations to suit everybody,” he told MWT.

“The sea, mountains, unforgettable bushveld sunsets, city life with world-class shopping centres coupled with medical services match the best available internationally, and are all available at affordable prices.

**PHYSICAL HAVEN**

Leading the way for private healthcare within the country is a battle between three private firms fighting for success with each claiming to be the biggest and most successful.

The Netcare Group currently has at its disposal 53 owned hospitals and four managed hospitals, three of which being public private partnerships whilst altogether there are 8,713 registered beds, 319 operating theatres and 87 retail and hospital pharmacies.

Also in operation under the company is Netcare 911 which claims to be the largest private emergency medical care service in the country.

The Primary Care Division within the company also operates medical and dental provider services through Medicross which currently has 46 family and dental centres throughout the country focusing on the low income market, thus extending healthcare to previously uninsured lives.

With 590 independent doctors and dentists providing healthcare to 3.5 million patients annually the group is certainly an attractive option for the world’s medical tourists.

Life Healthcare is yet another which is competing for this market as with 55 acute care facilities spread across seven South African provinces totaling 7,631 beds with 2,700 doctors they can also lay claim to be a suitable provider for an international patient’s needs.

**ALL DOTS CONNECTED**

The three of these private corporations have been offering international patient facilitation services through incorporating accommodation along with treatment, further highlighting the growing importance in combining sectors within the medical tourism industry.

One such company which combines all the relevant sectors is Surgeon & Safari, an independent facilitator which has been in operation for 12 years within the country.

“We are able to offer a total solution from the initial enquiry to evaluation, bookings, accommodation and medical concierges,” Melvill told MWT.

“We understand the needs of the patient as a consumer and value quality of service offered which we see as our greatest marketing tool.”

Melvill strongly disagrees with how many destinations are quite dimply looking to attract anyone from anywhere to increase medical tourism business. In order for any company within the industry to be successful there have to be specific relevant markets identified for promotion.

“We understand that the future growth is in the African markets so I am establishing alliances within the supply chain thus being able to have a greater reach within the continent,” Melvill tells MWT.

Supporting all hospitals, be it private or public, ER24 is also playing its part in bringing together different players within the industry. The company is a private, national, emergency medical care service which is committed to providing patients with efficient, effective emergency response along with pre-hospital care.

In addition, the company has branches in all major metropolitan areas and towns across the country also in constant dialogue with well-established ambulance providers in the outlying areas.

“Our affordable packages combined with medical service excellence make ER24 an attractive option to medical tourists,” Holgate told MWT.

“We have a team of healthcare practitioners that are available 24-hours a day to answer any queries and attend to patients’ needs. Our national company can also transport them anywhere within South Africa.”

**Medi-Clinic Southern Africa completes the trio as with more than 50 multidisciplinary hospitals this proves how competitive the local medical tourism industry is.”**

**South Africa is the only country in Africa that has an established reputable highly skilled and well equipped private healthcare system.”**
RELAXATION GETAWAY

With natural wonders known the world over found in abundance, such these iconic landmarks are only able to demonstrate what beauty South Africa holds making it an ideal wellness destination for health travellers.

“South Africa is rich in culture and diversity and has some of the world’s finest wellness and holistic retreats – that alone sets South Africa apart,” stated managing director, Camp Jabulani, Adine Roode to MWT.

“Some of the locations within South Africa are perfectly positioned to take full advantage of its magnificent all year round climate and all that the country has to offer from its picturesque resorts to its wellness getaways in the bush, which are ideal for and revivifying the mind and body.”

Certainly responding loudly in agreement is managing director, Hotel Izulu, Grant Pringle, who informed MWT that the country’s ability to adapt itself to the natural environment so famously associated with the country is another factor propelling the nation as a leading global wellness retreat.

“South Africa has many advantages when marketing itself as a wellness destination. Very little time difference with Europe, the outdoor lifestyle culture which goes hand in hand with wellness treatments, world-class facilities and its synergy with flora and fauna all presented in some of the world’s most outstanding and sometimes remote locations offer natural serenity for one’s wellbeing,” outlined Pringle.

Imagine relaxing in an environment looking out on to ‘Big Five’ wildlife territory – that is unique and this is what we need to let people know about.

Camp Jabulani can most definitely cater to improving an individual’s wellbeing through its unique approach to wellness as they work in tandem with one of the world’s most admired mammals, the elephant. Roode told MWT, “We believe that we have many forms of value that the property’s wellness facilities, notably the spa but that many do visit to experience new holistic concepts provided by the ‘giant therapists’ working at the facility.

“Guests definitely combine the interaction with the elephants and endangered species to wellness in an extremely soul enriching way. The entire area is surrounded by pristine bushveld where absolutely no background music is required as nature provides its own soothing symphony. At Camp Jabulani, we bring the earthy tones and textures of the décor to the background music works and therefore we have gone to great lengths to ensure our therapists really take time to consult with guests to find out their particular needs.”

Located along the majestic Garden Route that extends along the Western Cape from Mosselbaai to Port Elizabeth, the 100-room Hyatt Regency Oubai Golf Resort & Spa which is spread across 316-acres has yet to be open for one full year but is still seeing many international visitors use its wellness facilities.

Speaking exclusively to MWT, director of sales and marketing, Hyatt Regency Oubai Golf Resort & Spa, Wayne Ward stated that the facilities available within the property enable guests to select the best service catering to whatever needs they should have.

“The Freesia Spa is custom-designed to embrace the local culture to provide an authentic indigenous experience. Also, the Garden Route is renowned for its beautiful flowers and, more specifically, Fynbos, where our spa makes use of its unique characteristics,” Ward told MWT.

Such usage of the nation’s natural resources and environment is a theme strongly evident throughout wellness providers spread across the country.

Looking ahead to the future of the industry within South Africa, spa manager, Saxon Boutique Hotel & Spa, Margarita Ioannou informed MWT that in order for wellness tourism to grow in the country, South Africa Tourism (SAT), the nation’s tourism authority needs to place more emphasis on it.

“There is no specific focus on wellness tourism outlined in the Marketing Tourism Strategy for South Africa 2011-2013. Growth markets such as wellness tourism should be targeted and supported by SAT as well as provincial tourism bodies and local tourism authorities.”

However, with such natural beauty at its disposal many would argue that the country markets itself despite the fact that further promotion through SAT would undoubtedly help an already successful industry grow even further.

“We believe that international visitors first think of South Africa and its amazing wildlife so from a wellness perspective there needs to be much more awareness created by emphasising our unique wellness experiences that a visitor cannot find anywhere else in the world,” Roode told MWT.

“There is a synergy of wellness and the outdoors and this is something that South Africa has plenty of. Imagine relaxing in an environment looking out on to ‘Big Five’ wildlife territory – that is unique and this is what we need to let people know about.”

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We provide the complete solution, from major international congresses for 10,000 attendees, through to smaller regional and national meetings. We make it all happen smoothly, efficiently and cost effectively.

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When we get into a relationship, we’re in it for the long haul. We work hard to create long term partnerships based on mutual trust, respect and integrity. Isn’t that how business is meant to be conducted?

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A gift for the world

Latin America is known the world over for being a regional tourism powerhouse for travellers seeking to experience colourful cultures mixed with picturesque beauty, however, Mario Hajiloizis discovers that there is more than meets the eye.

If you take Latin America in its full context looking at nations such as Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, to name but a few, one would automatically see how uniquely vibrant it is, bursting immense tourism potential. Millions upon millions coming from all over the world visit the region on an annual basis in regular numbers due to the simple fact that the country is oozing natural beauty throughout whilst also having the ability in catering to the endless needs associated with the many various traveller types.

Having said that, with many tourism niches catered consistently dominating professional debate as to which is the most positive way to improve or how to best go about its business. According to business development assistant, FlyClinic, Tatiana Lozano, who spoke exclusively with MWT, there are many different aspects available which ensure that the region is never limited in its offerings. "There are important characteristics that market the region as unique. On one hand, there is the high quality of care and affordability as well as the immediate care and accessibility provided to foreign private patients. On the other hand, the various exotic destinations offer an alternative for a vacation during their time of recovery. Many facilities in Latin American countries have obtained international accreditations that meet or exceed those available in a foreign patient’s home country.”

"In Central America, Costa Rica and Panama are currently leading the pack with state-of-the-art private hospitals and internationally trained medical staff,” marketing director, NatureGroup, Claire Saylor told MWT. "Hospitals like CIMA or Clínica Bíblica in Costa Rica and Punta Pacífica in Panama, come with bilingual or even trilingual staff and are leading the entire region in medical technology. South American countries like Brazil and Colombia also attract their fair share of medical tourists, often for plastic surgery procedures.”

Many facilities in Latin American countries have obtained international accreditations that meet or exceed those available in a foreign patient’s home country.

for within this iconic region a recent developing specific niche, medical tourism, has also emerged in flying colours, proving that Latin America has the ability to answer to whatever the tourism industry challenges it with.

QUALITY UNDETERRED

Certain challenging aspects can without question come into view via each destination’s healthcare industry, more particularly with medical infrastructure.

continued Saylor. "The beauty of their respective populations has turned into somewhat of an icon for plastic surgery patients, and the local demand helps the region maintain its status as experts in aesthetic surgery.”

Promoting an entire region to the world at such a huge size can be quite a challenging task considering each destinations differing laws on health travel. However, Mercury Healthcare have found no difficulty in doing this. CEO, Mercury Healthcare, Maria K Todd spoke to MWT stating that as many employers who work with the company have employees all over Latin America, expanding its operations throughout the region was a natural thing to do.

Commenting on Brazil’s capacity in being the regional leader for medical tourism, Todd said that she is slightly worried that too much success could damage them should they not manage it correctly. “From a pricing perspective they may have trouble going beyond a certain point if they cannot adjust certain positions, marketing laws, and internal power struggles within the sector. Brazil takes great pride in having a different culture than the rest, but that could backfire on them if they are perceived by the market as high handed or snobby.”

Arguably, Brazil’s biggest regional rival in luring in the world’s medical tourists is widely considered to be Argentina. Buenos Aires based Hospital Alemán welcomes more than 10 per cent foreign based patients annually predominate coming from Europe or the US according to secretary of the director of institutional relations, Hospital Alemán, María L. Landro. “We provide an interpreter service, offer advice on local accommodation for relatives whilst many general practitioners at our hospital can speak several different languages.” she told MWT.

Located further up north towards Central America, Costa Rica-based Med Spa Delicaté is an aesthetic medical spa clinic facilitating various surgical procedures throughout the country. When MWT spoke with physician, Med Spa Delicaté, Monica Alfaro Escalante, she stated that the country has many USPs in attracting international medical tourists. “Costa Rica is a very small peaceful country with high cultural and educational levels, as well as having a
secure environment and service oriented professionals who work in the medical tourism industry. Around 40 to 50 per cent of our patients are foreigners with the majority coming from the US. “The country also has the capability to offer more unique travel methods for medical tourists as Nature Air, which claims to be the world’s first carbon neutral airline, is currently providing various facilities for patients seeking specific travel needs. Situated in San José the company allows for recent surgery patients to fly 10 days after their treatment also providing wheelchair access. “For patients that need to fly directly after surgery we offer charter flights that are registered to serve as air ambulances,” Saylor told MWT. “Our King Air aircraft can be reserved with a paramedic or doctor onboard, stretcher kit, oxygen and even an ambulance on the ground waiting for the passenger. This is the ideal form of transportation for patients wishing to spend their days recovering at a spa or medical centre in one of the many tourist destinations outside of San José.”

Based in Medellín, Colombia the FlyClinic, which is an online medical tourism service provider, is also enjoying continued success within the industry as being based in such a country whilst also being located in close proximity to the US has provided all the necessary ingredients required to achieve positive results. “Colombia’s medical system is one of the best in Latin America,” Lozano tells MWT. “Many clinics and hospitals are accredited by US organisations such as JCI and physicians enjoy an excellent reputation in Colombia often specialising in medical centers based in the US. “Also, there are numerous direct flights from Los Angeles, Atlanta, Miami, Fort Lauderdale and New York to our main cities such as Bogotá and Medellín. “The World Health Report 2010 ranked Colombia 22nd in overall health system performance whereas the US came 37th. Procedural costs in Colombia are also between 30 to 90 per cent lower than in the US,” said Lozano to MWT.

Another facilitator in close proximity to Colombia, MedTravel Ecuador based in the Ecuadorian capital Quito, receives approximately 2,000 patients per year utilising its facilitation services throughout the country. “Ecuador may well be the most attractive, warm and cozy country in the region due to all the varieties that we can offer with our climate and location also having the ability to yield excellent results in the patient recovery period,” director, MedTravel Ecuador; Santiago Gómez told MWT. “Because we will handle every detail of their trip patients can trust us and be sure that we guarantee that their stay in Ecuador will be absolutely amazing not only with professional healthcare but for everything that this beautiful country can give them the opportu- nity to enjoy.”

LUXURIOUS TRANQUILITY

Latin America also has the capability to provide exquisite prosperity for those seeking a wellness retreat to recover from their arduous treatments or quite simply just to unwind. “When chief strategist, Alanto Resort & Spa; Dr. Hugo E. Ribadeneyra spoke to MWT, he said that the region, although with wonderful locations found in abundance, there is still much catching up to do with other global leaders: “If we compare what is available in Latin America against countries like India, Thailand, even Singapore, Latin America is in the early stages, while those countries are fully developed. However, the demand for medical or wellness tourism in the region will emanate mostly form the US and as such Latin America will develop what is needed to maintain an increase in its US market share.”

Ribadeneyra’s resort based in Costa Rica is one such facility aiming to lure in such prosperous opportunity from its powerful neighbour particularly through offering ancient local traditional therapies that he expects will prove to be a big hit with modern patients. “The Meso-American Healing Experience is a mystical adventure of the mind, body and spirit. It combines the rituals and wisdoms from ancient cultures of the America’s such as the Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, Malekus, as well as native North Americans which will cleanse and refresh the soul,” he told MWT.

We are tucked into the shore of a remote fiord, surrounded by lush rainfall forest and are accessible only by sea.

Such offerings are expected to increase in the current 2,000 – 4,000 annual international patients seeking such concepts at the facility especially when the new treatments are expected to come into the fray from December, 2010. Mexico is also another country in Latin America rich in history and beauty, especially with luxury wellness retreats found within it scattered all over the country. The Maroma Resort & Spa, based in Riviera Maya, certainly fits the bill especially with its Kinan Spa located within the property. Currently offering facilities such as a 360° roof top palapa with incredible views directed at Maroma’s dual ecosystems with Yoga classes also offered, this is demonstrating that more uniquely different wellness styles can be found throughout the region.

“We are always creating different programmes combining the beautiful atmosphere that we have at Maroma with the highest quality of service and keeping the essence of Mexico in every single detail, but also offer a variety of classes, techniques and organic spa treatments,” communications manager, Maroma Resort & Spa, Anel Romero told MWT.

Romero also stated that 40 per cent of international clientele are currently visiting the facility, arriving mainly from the US, UK and other Latin American countries. With the property located in Central America’s largest nation this is also another factor which Romero believes helps propel the facility to foreign markets. “Mexico has plenty to offer as a wellness destination and you can find the perfect atmosphere here such as our beautiful mountains, rivers, forest, beaches, and jungle to create specific customisable wellness programmes depending on specific needs.”

Another Latin American destination known the world over for its unique spine-like shape located along South America’s west coast, Chile is ranking itself high amidst high popularity stakes for the world’s health travellers. With around 700,000 tourists visiting the country for this specific niche annually the statistics certainly claim it is a destination for such concepts on the rise according to press representative for Europe, Turismo Chile, Catalina Huidobro who spoke exclusively with MWT. “The good thing about Chile is its diversity,” confirmed Huidobro. “You can relax in a hot spring in the middle of the forest or in the middle of the desert so you can have a great experience in contact with nature and that makes any trip to Chile a wonderful experience. Besides the hot springs we also have excellent relaxing destinations which fill the body with energy such as valleys in the Andes where many people go to meditate or rest,” Huidobro told MWT.

Another property most definitely aiding Chile’s quest in becoming a regional wellness power to be reckoned with is the Puyuhuapi Lodge & Spa located in one of the most remote corners of Patagonia. Utilising the unique springs found throughout the nation as Huidobro previously stated such natural facilities can only do wonders for wellness tourists seeking 100 per cent natural treatments which have been unhampered with by our technological reliant world. “We offer a holistic wellness experience without being disturbed by cell phones, internet or television;” marketing manager Europe, Puyuhuapi Lodge & Spa; Manuel Lebrecht said to MWT.

“Most important is the location offering not only natural hot spring water but also ice cold melting and fresh sea water. We are tucked into the shore of a remote fiord, surrounded by lush rainfall forest and are accessible only by sea,” said Lebrecht. “Under these conditions unplugging from busy daily routines is child’s play with our guests invited to find their own connection to a much more natural world. Getting away from it all and experiencing Patagonia should open their minds for the pureness of life itself.”

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Superior assistance

Considered throughout the country to be amongst the leading Argentine-based medical tourism organisations, Xetica Argentina which has been in operation for over 20 years is pioneering the regional cosmetic surgery industry. Patientcare co-ordinators representing the company facilitate patient-doctor communication and scheduling with staff also able to speak in either English or Spanish whilst being able to further offer highly qualified surgeons to perform necessary procedures.

Speaking exclusively with MWT commercial director, Xetica Argentina, Carlos Traseira outlined that three facilities on offer through the company are working on obtaining JCI accreditation.

Commenting on the country’s ability overall in competing with other globally recognised destinations Traseira told MWT that many factors weigh in the nation’s favour to positively promote it as a leading destination for this niche.

“Argentina is one of the most important destinations for medical tourism. It is the place where you will find well-known healthcare professionals, state-of-the-art technology, personalised patient care, comfort and unique tourist attractions known the world over,” outlined Traseira.

“There are also luxury boutique hotels and other globally recognised international hotel brands whilst the food is also superb and there are many different entertainment options on offer.”

Technological connection

Colombia’s FlyClinic, an exclusively online medical tourism facilitator is utilising its e-home to maximum capacity as it aims to spread its message in quick time around the world.

That message being its capacity to offer top quality services for international medical tourists when choosing Colombia as their number one destination for treatment abroad.

“FlyClinic’s philosophy is based on transparency, honesty, and trust,” CEO, FlyClinic, Thomas Treutler told MWT.

“Our approach is to give patients complete freedom of choice when selecting their own physician and hospital.

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“FlyClinic is present in the most important social networks, and aims in the future to strengthen its position there and increase its group members through vast information support to them. Besides, it is FlyClinic’s goal to increase its presence on further social media sites, and to get link partnerships and participate in associates programmes with strategically related actors in the medical tourism and health travel sector.”

Only the best will do

Dental Destinations, a medical tourism facilitator focusing specifically on providing dental treatment for US patients in Costa Rica, Mexico or Panama is actively seeking to work only with dentists who meet their strict quality standards.

“In order to continuously ensure this is the case the company created a quality assurance programme which is designed to thoroughly screen dentists wishing to partner with the company. The programme also provides the opportunity for the company to assist their clients in selecting the dentist who is best suited to their specific needs.

“We are the only company servicing the Central American region providing such a programme,” president, Dental Destinations, Michael Hardenbrook told MWT.

“We use a US board certified periodontist and former dental inspector who sat on the board at the American Dental Association and was president of state evaluations and accreditation boards for ten US states. He personally inspects all offices for sterilisation protocols, but he assesses old cases for quality of work. We have inspected over 50 offices and approved a select few in each location.”

Mexican elegance

Rosewood Mayakobá, located in the beautifully scenic Riviera Maya, Mexico has been included in the Condé Nast Traveller Annual Hot List, which ranks the best luxury spas in the world.

The list aims to identify exceptional spas that debuted around the world over the past year.

Rosewood Mayakobá was the first property in the portfolio to open Sense, a Rosewood Spa in early 2008 with it being located in the heart of the resort. The spa is also ensconced on its own island, melding water and earth to reflect the nurturing soul of the Riviera Maya ideal for wellness travellers after an unforgettable relaxation experience.

Ancient Mayan treatments are also on offer within the facility ensuring that the nation’s historical roots will never be forgotten within the property for its guests.

“Rosewood Hotels & Resorts has always been recognised for its outstanding service, luxury accommodations and one-of-a-kind guest experiences,” said chief operating officer, Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, Bob Bouligne.

“We are so glad Condé Nast Traveller has acknowledged our new spa brand Sense, a Rosewood Spa in the same light.”

The spa facility has been designed in such a way so it enhances guests’ experiences by reflecting the local culture and environment.

Dental Destinations works only with top dental service providers

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Turkey – Beyond the three S’s

Senior research analyst, Frost & Sullivan, Beulah Devadason told MWT exclusively about the peculiarities and potential of the health tourism market in Turkey.

Turkish Tourism in 2009:

- 27.3 million international arrivals
- $21.2 billion of tourism receipts
- 48 airports with annual 50 million-passenger capacity
- 16 airports open to international flights
- 34 thermal tourism centres in 17 provinces

Since accreditation is a key criterion in the choice of destination for medical care, the number of organisations within Turkey accredited by the Joint Commission International is said to be the highest as compared to other European destinations. In addition, several of Turkey’s leading hospital groups are affiliated to international organisations such as John Hopkins and Harvard Medical.

Wellness Tourism

For health tourists, the thermal spas of Turkey are marketed as a choice destination with various treatment options such as balneotherapy and thalassotherapy. Anatolia is located on a major geothermal belt and has several thermal baths and spas.

The Turkish government, in an effort to market Turkey as a year-round travel destination, co-operated with private agents to increase infrastructure and facilities within the country.

Medical Tourism

Rising healthcare costs in industrialised countries and an increased availability of high quality healthcare at lower prices in developing nations at the same time have contributed to the expansion of the medical tourism industry.

The Turkish government has been actively involved in promoting the country as a medical tourism destination. Five of Turkey’s 12 major hospital groups were founded between 2000 and 2006.

Some of the key criteria aiding the growth of the medical tourism sector are the provision of state-of-the-art healthcare quality at low costs, health insurance, and accreditation.

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Health Tourism in 2011

The destinations of choice within Turkey include Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Istanbul, Izmir and Kayseri. Apart from the thermal spas, medical procedures such as IVF, eye, dental and cosmetic surgeries are also gaining popularity among the patient community.

The geographical location, US Dollar exchange rates and added tourist attractions make Turkey a medical tourism destination with great potential in the coming years. The global economic crisis has also contributed to the patient population looking at low-cost alternatives to established global centres of medical tourism. The number of medical tourists is expected to increase by over 15 per cent in 2011 and usher the growth of medical tourism in Turkey.
Deserved reputation

*MWT* spoke to chairman, Gusib, **Levent Bas** about what makes Turkey a champion destination in medical tourism.

**CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS**

Turkey is the country which has the highest number of Joint Commission International accredited providers, therefore possessing the necessary medical infrastructure for medical tourists that are welcomed from all around the world.

Turkey provides excellent treatment opportunities by providing services in the medical and wellness sector with high-quality, successful and efficient care which satisfies economical expectations of various budget types of travellers.

Providers are donated with international qualified, English speaking surgeons and specialists.

At the crossroads between East and West, Turkey is on its way to becoming the next centre for medical tourism market. Located in the very centre of Europe and the Middle East, Turkey is the medical centre of excellence in the region.

Turkey’s geographical advantage as well as its unique cultural richness are important factors in securing a solid place in the global medical tourism industry.

One of the world’s fastest growing carriers, Turkish Airlines is flying to 154 destinations, including 36 domestic and 118 international destinations today.

**MOTIVATION TO TRAVEL**

Medical tourists from 65 countries come to Turkey these days, and the number is increasing every year. Only in 2009 Turkey received more than 200,000 international patients. We believe that Turkey is also a great destination due to its numerous tourist attractions.

**TANGIBLE OFFER**

Our company, Gusib, has been bringing patients to Turkey from 25 countries since 2002, offering eye surgery, IVF, aesthetic and plastic surgery, dentistry, hair transplants, dialysis and hepatitis treatments, as well as general check-ups and other surgeries.

Now we are expanding the number of countries that we work with. We have partner offices in New York, Vienna, Kiev and one in Ethiopia coming soon. At the moment, the most attractive markets for us are Iraq, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Libya, Syria, Kuwait and Africa.

We also enlarge the number of our contracted hospitals, reaching out as far as Germany and Israel.

Our clients come mostly from Europe, especially the Turkish people living in European countries, as well as the UK, Scandinavia, Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia are the other countries. Also we have patients from Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Iraq.

Apart from the medical services, we also arrange all auxiliary services such as tickets, airport-hotel transfers, three-, four-, or five-star hotel choices, guides, city tours, translation services, insurance, 24-hours information service, concierge and VIP services.

**Big player hopefuls**

**ByzAlliance** is a medical consulting and travel service company which was established in 1992, and for eight years has been facilitating people seeking healthcare in Turkey.

“We want to be one of the big players in this business,” founder and general director, ByzAlliance, Dr Dilek Uzer told *MWT*. “We now have offices in Istanbul, London, Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo, coming to Dusseldorf, Essen and Cologne in Germany.”

Dr Uzer claimed that ByzAlliance partnered with hospitals whose physicians were trained outside Turkey and are US-board certified.

The company arranges travel and accommodation for the patients, who are coming from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Germany and the UK, serving eight to ten patients every month.

“We first think of our clients as patients, and only then as tourists, and therefore a direct contact is necessary. First, our clients reach us via the Internet or they find us through referrals. Then, we communicate face-to-face with patients in many countries at our offices. The patients fill in forms on the general state of their health, and send us some diagnostic tests.

“According to their requests, we are offering them at least three alternative hospitals,” explained Dr Uzer.

In general, Dr Uzer thinks that the role of a medical travel facilitator is a very important one, as it helps the patients not to get lost in a foreign country, manages their medical records and assists them in every step of their medical journey.
In search of brand identity

Director of business development, Transmed Hair and Cosmetic Surgery Clinic, Melis Abacioglu talked to MWT about Turkey’s tourism potential, since the health travel industry heavily depends on a destination’s capability to offer touristic attractions.

_MWT_: What major tourism developments are you aware of in Turkey at the moment?

We are seeing that tourism investments are being made in a much more sophisticated fashion these days. Instead of saying ‘OK, every foreigner knows Antalya, let’s build a hotel there!’, the investors are moving into areas that are not yet explored but have the potential to become so over the years. This, we think, will stop the over-development in most tourism destinations within Turkey.

Another aspect that we find interesting is that people in the tourism business are taking more advantage of the synergies that they can get out of their cross-vocational connections. For example, most tour operators are very interested to work with Transmed these days because they realised that a tourist that they bring over to Turkey might actually become interested in a treatment. They know that this add-on service only enhanced the quality of the work that they do.

_MWT_: How will these projects contribute to the overall development of the tourism industry in Turkey?

We believe that these changes will make Turkey a favourite destination to be visited over and over again for many different purposes.

_MWT_: What image is Turkey aspiring to create for itself as a tourist destination and how is your company contributing to this image?

We believe the motto is somewhere along the lines of ‘Not Oriental, not European: it’s Turkey’. We are trying to underline this image and message by being the pioneer in many different treatments as well as across departments.

_MWT_: What does Turkey need to do to further improve its tourism industry and increase the number of incoming visitors?

When you think of Greece, the Ancient times come to mind, then culture, then the arts, then the ruins that they preserved so well. When you think of Monaco, you think of high living, and then F1, then luxury cars, then the casinos. When you think of Italy, you think of Made in Italy, and then Italian wine, Italian food, Italian everything. So it seems that most of the countries, that are doing pretty well in terms of tourism, made themselves into respectable brands.

What is Turkey’s brand? What is it that comes first to mind when you think about Turkey? Is it the Ottoman Empire? Is it the food? Is it Istanbul? What is it? Unfortunately, we do not have that answer yet. However, we are on the right track to finding the theme that will carry us to the ‘brand’ level.

_MWT_: What is the latest news and upcoming plans from Transmed Hair Surgery Clinic and what do you hope to achieve from these developments?

It would not be bold to say that Transmed is currently undergoing a revolution. Since 1994 we never worked so hard and never implemented so many projects at once.

To summarize, our research and development department is doing a stellar job and was invited to present on three different topics at the annual meeting of the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgeons. A medical supplies company approached the team with the offer of a sponsorship well over $40,000. We are expecting some real growth in this department especially after this funding.
Could you please outline the main activities of India in promoting and developing health tourism? Why is it important for India?

The major activities of India in promoting and developing health tourism are:

- Development of quality standards for service delivery and accreditation boards.
- Encouraging hospitals to get quality standards accreditation.
- Promoting alternative medicine and therapies like Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy – to attract wellness tourists.
- Collaborating with governments of other countries, such as the African region, to send patients for treatment at lower costs.
- Adoption of advanced technology for treatment of various medical conditions in order to be on par with the facilities provided in western countries.
- Providing high quality care equal to western countries at very affordable cost.
- Reducing taxes and import duties on healthcare.
- Delivering related consumables and equipments to encourage healthcare providers to buy best products.

All the above is important for India in order to establish itself globally as a key healthcare tourism destination and also leverage upon the traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda and Unani to attract patients with chronic problems.

This helps the tourism industry, improves quality of services, increases the number of facilities, and attracts government contribution towards basic infrastructure developments, education and training of medical students and local pool development.

Has the global economic crisis affected the development of health tourism in India?

The global economic crisis did not have any major effect on the development of health tourism in India. The pace of development of facilities and infrastructure just slowed down a bit, and only the number of patients coming in for aesthetic and cosmetic treatments reduced to a certain extent. Otherwise patients’ flow for chronic treatments did not see any major change.

How can India compete with other medical tourism destinations?

The cost is the most important factor and now the healthcare facilities are also being developed with high-quality standards to compete with other Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand and many others. The other special attractions are the talent pool and facilities providing alternative therapy treatments (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy) for curing chronic ailments and for wellness.

Which kinds of medical services are mostly successful here and why?

Alternative therapies – Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy, Siddha, Yoga – as the treatments involve herbal and traditional medicines which do not have side-effects as compared to allopathic drugs. Also, these therapies provide cure from the root cause of the disease and are highly effective. They do no need surgical intervention, and costs are very low.

Cosmetic surgeries – as costs in India are significantly lower, at approximately 30 per cent of a surgery cost in the US and Europe. Some of the local medical talents are world renowned for their experience and services. Latest technologies are being used for treatments.

Cardiac care procedures – due to highly skilled and experienced consultants available in India along with high-quality facilities.

In addition, there are orthopaedic and trichology procedures as well as wellness services.

How do you promote medical tourism in India? What marketing tools do you use?

Large healthcare providers, such as Fortis and Apollo, are setting up facilities in other countries in African region, South East Asian region and other areas to showcase their quality of services and refer patients for high-end surgeries to India for treatment at low costs.

Hospitals tie-up with different medical tourism companies which promote their services in various countries and manage patient visits.

Various social media and networking sites are utilised in promoting their services like YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

What is your view of the need of independent accreditation for medical facilities?

It is highly required in order to verify and improve the quality of services provided by various hospitals. The demand and competition will drive more hospitals to go for accreditation.
Adaptation to modern times

India is a country which is widely considered by the international community as a medical tourism superpower.

Atracting numerous medical tourists year-on-year, lured in with the assurance that they will be receiving top quality care whilst also enjoying India’s boundless tourism scene is undoubtedly its USP.

However, leading the ever booming Indian medical tourism industry is its ‘ground level’ medical providers who provide the backbone of India’s medical tourism industry.

One such medical provider is cosmetic surgeon, Divine Cosmetic Surgery, Dr Amit Gupta who after completing his medical studies in Brazil recognised the potential within the industry upon his return to India.

“The world knows about what India can offer as a medical tourism destination. We get so many clients wanting to visit places such as the Taj Mahal, Delhi, Kerala, Goa amongst others. With its special blend of safety, culture, low costs and wonderful hospitality we can offer something unique,” said Gupta.

Specialising in hair transplantation, liposuction, breast enlargement, VASER, face lift, nose surgery, BOTOX, breast reduction and many more Gupta’s skills have ensured him to be a modern marvel in his profession winning a variety of awards.

“Goa amongst others. With its special blend of safety, culture, low costs and wonderful hospitality we can offer something unique,” said Gupta.

Helping him achieve such rave reviews was his focus on patients’ confidentiality which is a well discussed issue spreading across the entire medical industry. Recognising the importance of this Gupta told MWT it as arguably the most important aspect of his job: “We are extremely careful about client information. The operative team has no contact with any personal information relating to the patient, with the exception of the anaesthetist and the surgeon assistant,” outlined Gupta.

“All records are securely kept so that there is no access to these except with the permission of the chief surgeon. No photographs are shown to potential patients without prior consent of the client. A number of patients come to us since they feel doing the procedure back home would allow news to spread like wildfire,” continued Gupta.

With patients coming from the UAE, Canada, the UK, Australia and the US along with non-resident Indians living in various countries, Gupta’s reputation as a modern multi-skilled cosmetic surgeon is spreading globally.

Facilitating such global interest is a matter which should unquestionably be constantly monitored and maintained with the sole focus being on the patient, especially with the industry pulling various different segments together.

The medical tourism industry is in such a unique position as it pulls together different organisations with different motives to fundamentally put aside this agenda and focus all their attention on the patient at hand.

“We work with various different medical concierges, hotels, travel agents, tour operators and other facilitators. There is a team which will receive the client at the airport and transfer them to the hospital guest house, where a client manager is present to handle all immediate concerns and to make the client comfortable.”

“We co-ordinate with all paramedical services and inter specialties to ensure patient comfort, such as with lab services, the physician and anaesthetist. We also have a travel agency on board, to co-ordinate any tourism activities that the client my desire,” outlined Gupta.

Nevertheless, ensuring trustworthiness and the never-enduring pursuit in providing quality services is an issue which all potential patients seriously consider when making their decision on where to go for their medical tourism issues.

“Regular training and constant updating of clinical skills and knowledge is the prime factor in ensuring that the chief surgeon is abreast with the latest in the field,” Gupta told MWT when addressing this issue.

“Responding to patients’ feedback and the strict adherence to procedure protocols ensure enduring quality which we feel are the key to success. We ensure that protocols are not modified without the permission of the chief surgeon and we even try to liaise with local physicians in the clients’ native country in order to give continuing care even when the client is back home,” he explained.

The notion of ‘caring’ for the patient is one which can quite easily be associated simply with the medical procedures but it is much more than that. Ultimately, as mentioned previously with different segments within the industry having to put aside their individual interests to focus solely on the patient is something which Gupta feels already forms the foundation in India.

“As a culture, India is famous for its hospitality and warmth. Patients are treated not as guests, but as family. The lower costs of procedures in India, which are not due to any lowering of medical standards, but due to a lower price index, are the biggest incentive for patients.

“Finally, it is no hidden fact, that Indian doctors are the finest in the world. With globalisation, we are traveling to all parts of the world wanting to learn about the newest technology and medical procedures,” concluded Gupta.

Ayurvedic message to the world

One of the pioneers of Ayurvedic resorts in India, Kairali – The Ayurvedic Healing Village, is on a mission of spreading the message of wellness around the world and creating awareness among people that the majority of ailments can be cured by resorting to Ayurveda, explained business development manager, Kairali – The Ayurvedic Healing Village, Vishal Verma.

“We offer a free on-line consultation, and are just an email away for the people seeking wellness information across the globe. We provide treatments to those who really seek proper care and medication. Kairali also locally manufactures all Ayurvedic products which assures quality products for the services it offers,” said Verma.

The health resort mainly welcomes European and South-Asian wellness travellers, offering 30 villas set in curative and restorative herbal surroundings.

“Kairali offers health visitors an invigorating pollution-free environment where vegetarian food and abstinence from alcohol and smoking is propagated. This place is a healing touch of Ayurvedic and fitness programmes for weight loss, arthritis, spondylitis, sinuista, migraine, post-pregnancy health, rejuvenation therapy to restore vigour and vitality and to remove stress and strain, beauty care and eye care, sexual disorder; and many others,” continued Verma.

All auxiliary services that are required for international clients, such as airport transfers or free doctor consultations, are provided at the resort.
Kerala state enters the industry

*MWT*: Is medical and wellness tourism on the list of tourism businesses that Kerala offers?

Currently, Kerala is positioned as a strong leisure and holiday destination and it is only recently that medical tourism has emerged as a strong product in Kerala’s portfolio of tourism offerings. As such the share of medical tourism is not very significant, but Kerala has a strong potential in this segment with its distinct cost advantage, world class facilities and qualified manpower.

*MWT*: What can Kerala offer medical and wellness visitors?

Our hospitals offer a range of services from highly specialised coronary-bypass surgery to dental treatments at nearly one-tenth of the international costs. The facilities and services often include bilingual personal assistants, pre-travel consultations with the doctor, surgical procedures, post-surgery consultations with the doctor, post-treatment recovery, convalescent stays, full-service travel arrangements including transfers and hotels. Besides these services, Kerala’s tropical climate, it’s clean and evergreen environment, warm and friendly people, as well as the availability of the most advanced healthcare technology have contributed to making it an ideal destination for medical and wellness visitors.

*MWT*: What countries do your health tourists visiting Kerala come from?

The cost factor, together with a wide range of treatments to choose from, has resulted in tourists coming from all over the world. Our leading medical institutions attract clients from the US, Europe, Middle East, South Asia and even from South Africa. We also receive quite a lot of medical tourists from the rest of India.

*MWT*: How important is co-operation in promoting medical tourism in Kerala?

The Tourism Department of Kerala works closely with speciality hospitals, dental clinics, tour operators and other service providers to facilitate the development of medical tourism in the state. We also work closely with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for the development of this industry.

*MWT*: What development plans do you have in attracting more medical and wellness tourism business?

We would like to restrict our role to that of a facilitator and catalyst for the development of the medical tourism industry. The government has constituted a Medical Tourism Committee consisting of leading multi-speciality hospitals and other stakeholders to prepare a roadmap for the development of the medical tourism industry in Kerala.

We are also exploring an accreditation system for hospitals in association with the CII, Kerala to make the packages compliant with medical insurance.

We have jointly organised conferences and conventions on medical tourism to highlight the top-of-the-line facilities in Kerala.

On the part of the private sector, the hospitals have chipped in with most modern equipments and world-class healthcare facilities. Specialty healthcare institutions in Kerala have developed and maintained a high level of excellence in medical care, procedures, treatments and technology, which is equal to western standards with up to 20 specialty and super speciality departments offering services of hundreds of physicians within each institution.
Options in abundance

The wellness tourism industry is more than just receiving pampering treatments at luxurious spas located at elegant hotel properties, as within it there are many different, more alternative offerings in place which can yield similar if not more rewarding results.

Taking a look at massage therapies which are predominately provided at health spas, they can differ in their treatments as popular techniques can include hot stone massage, deep tissue massage, Shiatsu, or reflexology, to name a few. Similarly, many alternative wellness treatments can also include within them many different disciplines which ultimately follow the same goal but differ in their approach and techniques.

Yoga is one form of alternative wellness which is known the world over as being one of the most popular techniques to help people find peace within themselves through its differing relaxation methods.

Numerous techniques are available such as Hatha which encompasses many physical routines which are generally slow-paced with its main aim to gently introduce people into the art form. Vinyasa, which translates to “breath-synchronised movement”, is a more vigorous style which bases performance on a series of poses called Sun Salutations, where movement is matched to breath.

Ashtanga, alternatively known as “eight limbs” in Sanskrit, is a fast-paced, more intense style which allows for a set series of poses to be performed continuously in the same order where as Iyengar, which is based on the teachings from the world famous Yoga teacher B.K.S Iyengar is more concerned with bodily alignment.

Kundalini looks at how breath can work in conjunction with physical movement, with the ultimate purpose to free energy in the lower body which in turn allows it to move upwards.

Bikram, which was created by Yoga guru Bikram Choudhury, can also be referred to as Hot Yoga which has to be practiced in a 95° to 100° room, which allows for tight muscles to be loosened and seemingly never ending sweating which is thought to be cleansing.

Tai Chi, an ancient Chinese martial art is also widely used around the world as another popular alternative form of wellness which can offer many different techniques. Illustrating its popularity a recent study compiled by researchers at the University of North Carolina stated that Tai Chi can help alleviate problems associated with arthritis.

Chen is the oldest method from which all other styles are derived from. It is known for its lower stances, silk reeling, jumps and stamps. Yang style Tai Chi is amongst the most popular as it is widely sponsored by the Chinese government. It is also recognised for large and relatively simplified movements.

Sun style Tai Chi is known for its small high postures with flowing movements forwards and backwards which are accompanied by connected arm movements, whilst the Guang Ping style incorporates the sold differentiation between yin and yang, along with a number of silk drawing movements.

Fish therapy is another unique wellness phenomenon which has seen a sudden surge in popularity recently. It mainly uses Garra Rufa fish, a form of carp, which gently removes dead skin. The fish have no teeth and use a sucking motion to remove dead skin without damaging new health cells underneath, leaving participants with a pleasant tingling sensation similar to a light massage.

Philosophical discipline

Mario Hajiloizis speaks exclusively with press officer, Brahmani Yoga Centre, Inna Costanini about what the facility is doing in an attempt to lure the world’s wellness travellers whilst also getting her views on how the ancient practice can survive in today’s modern world.

MWT: What exactly is the Brahmani Yoga Centre and what is its purpose?

Brahmani Yoga is an internationally renowned yoga centre, offering drop-in classes, workshops with experienced teachers as well as Yoga Alliance certified teacher training courses. The aim is to offer students a wide range of classes to suit all levels and abilities, whilst maintaining a variety and flexibility in the approach. The classes are on a ‘drop-in’ basis, which means students may come when they want and take the classes they wish to try, and are not limited to one style or teacher.

MWT: Statistically speaking, how many international tourists visit Brahmani Yoga Centre annually and which countries are they coming from?

Our students come from all over the world. We host many European students who are mostly British, Swedish or Dutch but on a general level, nationalities vary hugely. As Brahmani Yoga is a drop-in centre, some travellers who pass through Goa briefly also choose to come for just a few classes, which means we get students from every single continent. Throughout the season (November-April), around 1,000 students come by to practice with us.

MWT: What is Brahmani Yoga Centre doing to attract more international tourists to use your facilities?

We have flyers and cards which we distribute in studios all over the world via travelling teachers and students. We also partner up with other studios and websites for promotion. Our founder, Julie Martin also tours the world in the summer, teaching workshops and retreats, and she was recently featured in the Incredible India campaign which appeared in magazines across the world.

MWT: You offer many package deals working alongside hotels for example, what is the reasoning behind these and how do you select which hotel to work with?

Some tourists also want the option of a package holiday, with the convenience, comfort and ease of travel so we offer the option of organising their stay in a carefully selected hotel or guesthouse, with transfers and an unlimited number of yoga classes for the entirety of their holiday package with us. This is an ideal option for a hassle free, relaxing holiday in India.

Continued on page 24
WELLNESS & ALTERNATIVE

Continued from page 23

**MWT:** India is the birth place of Yoga and in today’s modern world, it is internationally practiced. Why is it important that those offering such concepts always remember its roots and traditional routines?

India is indeed the birthplace of yoga and other spiritual practices, so it is key to remember these roots and traditions. Very often practitioners forget where yoga comes from, and the fact that it is more than merely physical routines, which the modern world has so readily embraced. This is also why many yoga practitioners choose to travel to India to delve deeper and practice in that very environment which gave birth to Yoga.

**MWT:** How do you select your teachers and what criteria do they have to meet in order to work for Brahmani Yoga Centre?

All teachers at the Brahmani Yoga Centre are widely and deeply experienced, and you can trust them to take you safely through your practice. All of our teachers have been trained directly at the centre and by Julie Martin.

**MWT:** You also offer classes for children, what exactly does this include?

The classes for children (6-9 year olds) are a brand new addition to our schedule for the season. They offer a creative, fun-filled approach using games, colour, child friendly yoga poses, themes and stories. Certified Yoga teacher Nobieh Kyaniford will take the children on an exciting journey to help build confidence, trust, teamwork, focus as well as a sense of calm and relaxation.

**MWT:** Brahmani Yoga Centre has received both RYS 200 and RYS 500 certifications, why do you strive to achieve such registration?

The RYS certification sets the standards for our teacher training qualifications and ensures that students coming to train with us will be certified to teach at the international Yoga Alliance standards. We pride ourselves to offer high quality teaching and being a RYS member confirms we are a training centre of excellence.

**MWT:** What future developments are expected at Brahmani Yoga Centre?

We always like to grow and explore different areas of practice. The Vinyasa Flow classes have proved to be immensely popular with students and Julie Martin’s teaching style has attracted students from all over the world. So this year we are offering more Vinyasa Flow classes for both beginners and intermediate level guests and will be looking at building on this in the coming years. Looking ahead, we are determined to continue providing a high standard of teaching in a facility that is friendly and non-competitive.

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**Friendly allegiance**

An astonishingly new wellness concept using Garra Rufa fish has recently arrived in London via Asia which is proving to shake up the entire health tourism industry in the UK, as Mario Hajiloizis finds out.

A unique relationship seeing Garra Rufa fish pampering humans is fast gaining popularity within the wellness tourism industry.

The fish are widely believed to be able to secrete an enzyme known as diathanol that can improve skin regeneration promoting the recent opening of London’s first ever fish therapy concept spa, Aqua Sheko.

An extremely popular beauty treatment in Asia, fish therapy is a relaxing way to remove dead skin from feet as the tiny fish gently suck and nibble away the dead skin, leaving the feet to feel smooth and revitalised.

“Demand for natural therapies in the wellness market is growing and Aqua Sheko offers clients the only luxury fish pedicure in London.”

“The décor within the facility certainly caters to this unique feel within the property as it is sleek and dark with ambient lighting along with black furniture catering to the mysterious feel.”

“Eight state-of-the-art tanks are filtered and fed by a constant oxygen supply which ensures clean water and a healthy environment for the fish. In addition, the tanks are also sterilised using ultra-violet lights to minimise bacteria growth.”

“Strict hygiene standards have also been thoroughly considered as clients are provided with disposable slippers, and are required to wash their feet and remove any chemicals within lotions and creams prior to submersion. Sore and broken skin is not permitted within the pools as well.”

“Success within the facility has been huge already forcing Ho to open up yet another property in London which will see the treatment menu expand to include two new treatments.”

“This is an exciting step for Aqua Sheko and for spa lovers in London who can now experience the benefits of fish therapy beyond their feet.”

“In addition, Aqua Sheko recently partnered with iconic department store Selfridges to create a bespoke pop up spa in their London store. The pop up spa was so successful, that we are now launching one in Selfridges Birmingham which will be the first Aqua Sheko spa outside London.”

“Our long term vision is to continue to be innovative in the services we offer our clients and to be leaders in the industry.”

“...”

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Extremely confident

The Aphrodite Hills Resort, which is located along the Cypriot coast in Paphos, has been welcoming large numbers of wellness seekers coming mainly from the UK. That is according to director, George Tavelis, who told MWT that such a market is key for the property’s continuing success.

“Around 70 per cent of our guests are from the UK but we also get many Russian wellness visitors using our spa facilities as well. We received around 8,000 visitors in 2010 so far with the majority being British. Extensive PR and good marketing strategies in the UK are proving very popular,” outlined Hayden.

However, despite such successful popularity there are other destinations which are proving to be stiff competition in attracting the world’s wellness tourists to France.

“Morroco, Portugal and Spain are less expensive and more flexible in terms of man-power enables more competitive and attractive pricing. Also, climatically these locations offer more possibility to integrate outdoor holistic activities and recreation into the experience,” concluded West.

Promotional push

With marketing initiatives proving to be imperative in determining how successful a property can become in the wellness tourism industry one particular spa facility in Barcelona is upping its efforts to lure in the world’s health tourists.

The Six Senses Spa at Hotel Arts Barcelona has been promoting itself in a variety of ways ensuring that its marketing initiatives target suitable international clientele.

“We organise specific wellness activities ranging from yoga to nutrition,” stated spa director; Six Senses Spa at Hotel Arts Barcelona, Montse Escobedo to MWT.

“Sometimes we also do small conferences in the gym with nutritionists or specialists, and we also have a very good relationship with practitioners that come to our spa to treat our guests.”

International competition

France’s first ever Six Senses urban well-being sanctuary based at Six Senses rue de Castiglione is fast becoming extremely popular curing guests hectic, stressful lifestyles according to holistic advisor; Six Senses rue de Castiglione, Clare West.

The facility which is located close to the heavily popular touristic Place Vendôme and Jardin des Tuileries is enjoying continuous business due to this fact alone.

“France is renowned internationally as a centre of excellence in beauty and the beauty product industry,” West told MWT.

“France is gastronomically sophisticated and definitely the place to experience organic spa cuisine at its best.”

The spa which was designed by renowned French architect Pierre David aims to perfectly integrate into its surroundings with the design drawn on elements such as the Parisian skyline. Approximately 5,000 guests visit the spa each year coming predominately from France, the UK, Japan, Spain, the US, Middle East and Latin America, according to West.

However, despite such successful popularity there are other destinations which are proving to be stiff competition in attracting the world’s wellness tourists to France.

“Morroco, Portugal and Spain are less expensive and more flexible in terms of man-power enables more competitive and attractive pricing. Also, climatically these locations offer more possibility to integrate outdoor holistic activities and recreation into the experience,” concluded West.

Authentic Irish luxury

Ireland is known the world over as the Emerald Isle due to its lush green scenery, a factor which certainly appeals to those seeking a destination littered with beautifully scenic locations, ideal for pure wellness.

“Ireland is a fabulous location with picturesque surroundings, rural scenery, mountains, sea side towns and green countryside which is conducive to relaxion,” spa manager, ESPA at The Ritz-Carlton, Powerscourt, Kellie Ann Hayden told MWT.

“With over 12,000 spa guests visiting the facility for treatments on an annual basis, and with this figure rising each year, according to Hayden, the property is certainly making the most out of its natural environment.

“We have also recently launched the Warming Peat Ritual treatment which has proved very popular,” outlined Hayden.

“The concept was to introduce a treatment that is 100 per cent authentically Irish, natural and works with the location of the spa which is perfect for winter months.”

Global expansion strategy

The Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, located in Killenard, a village surrounded by unspoilt Irish countryside is aiming to attract more European and Middle East health tourists. This comes after successfully promoting the wellness facilities to the domestic market, according to sales and marketing manager; The Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Grainne O’Malley.

In their attempts to conquer new markets, O’Malley told MWT that with the 3,000m² all-encompassing thermal suite allowing guests to relax in the Irish countryside no matter what the weather this will prove to be a big hit with international tourists.

Further enhancing the Irish appeal around the world lies in the fact that the facility is set to offer unique Irish products.

“By the end of 2010 we will also include both retail and treatments from Voya,” said O’Malley.

“These spa products are 100 per cent Irish with the base being seaweed from the west coast of Ireland.”
Revolutionary relaxation

With Hilton Hotels & Resorts having recently unveiled eforea: spa at Hilton, which is set to become amongst the world’s fastest growing spa brands, Mario Hajiloizis speaks exclusively with global head, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Dave Horton about the new concept.

MWT: What was the reasoning behind creating eforea: spa at Hilton?

Hilton is a global brand that has a proud legacy of innovation. We are constantly listening to our guests, evaluating global trends and evolving our products to provide relevant and authentic experiences. Today, Hilton Hotels & Resorts is one of the largest spa providers in the world, with more than 123 spas in operation across our portfolio. We leveraged our global reach and expertise to create a new standard in the spa experience for travellers.

Our global pipeline is stronger than ever and includes rapid growth across Asia and other areas where spa is a key component of the guest experience. We also recognise the growing importance of spa in both business and leisure purchase decisions.

MWT: Why do you expect eforea: spa at Hilton will be a big hit with wellness guests?

We are already receiving incredibly positive feedback from guests visiting the eforea: spa at Hilton Short Hills in New Jersey and expect that eforea will be very popular with wellness guests worldwide. We conducted extensive global research in developing eforea to ensure that the treatment offerings were relevant and meaningful to our guests around the world.

eforea delivers consistent standards while also enabling our hotels to allow for regional and cultural touches and influence. Guests will find this concept to be highly relevant.

The eforea brand promise is to help our guests emerge brighter, which aligns well with the needs of our wellness-conscious guests. Now more than ever, today’s business and leisure travellers are looking for ways to relax and relieve stress. With eforea: spa at Hilton, guests can expect to “emerge brighter” from their travel experience.

MWT: With Hilton Hotels & Resorts being such a global brand, which regions do you feel embrace wellness concepts more so than others?

Spa and wellness concepts know no borders and are increasingly important to today’s savvy global traveller. We pulled the best elements and practices from Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa and the Americas to create a unique concept that is both authentic and relevant across world cultures.

MWT: What exactly will eforea: spa at Hilton be offering wellness guests?

eforea: spa at Hilton meets the needs of global travellers by providing three customisable spa journeys:

✔ Essentials Journey is composed of powerful, technologically advanced treatments. Signature treatments include: Signature Correcting Facial featuring Microneedling technology, Jet Lag Body Remedy, After-Sun Rescue, Slimming Detox Body Wrap, Firming Facial and Antioxidant Facial, along with innovative add-ons such as Pro 30 Multi Acid Peel, Express Eyes and Ageless Hands.

✔ Escape Journey is a set of holistic experiences that integrate nourishing organic plant ingredients and traditional healing practices. Signature treatments include: Radiance Facial, Melt Away Tension Facial, Invigorate & Revive Body Scrub, Rest & Restore Body Wrap, Nurturing Massage and Meditation Massage.

✔ Men’s Journey is a collection of problem-solving, re-energising experiences designed specifically for men. Signature treatments include: De-Stress Face Treatment, Signature Body Repair, All-Over Detox, Total Body Overhaul and Realigning Sports Massage.

Guests can expect thoughtfully conceived treatments with well-trained staff. Acute understanding of our guests’ needs and exceptional service is of utmost importance for us at Hilton. In addition, eforea features innovative design that takes spa-going experiences to the next level. Signature design elements include a cocoon-like Vichy Shower Room and an integrated music speaker and aroma diffusing system.

We have paired stylish, purposeful design, a therapeutic approach and a transformative journey of the senses.

MWT: What future developments are expected at Hilton Hotels & Resorts with regards to its wellness offerings?

Following the October 21st, 2010 opening of the first eforea: spa at Hilton at our Hilton Short Hills New Jersey property, we are proud to say that there are currently more than 80 Hilton Hotels & Resorts properties around the world that are anticipated to feature eforea: spa at Hilton.

Guests can count on Hilton to continue to lead the industry by providing products, services and amenities that are both innovative and relevant to what our guests need and expect. This includes the sleeping environment, restaurants, fitness centres and other areas.

BY NUMBERS

* 123 spas currently operating at Hilton Hotels & Resorts properties around the world.
* 80-plus Hilton Hotels & Resorts properties in development that are committed to including a spa and anticipated to feature eforea.
* 27 countries represented by more than 80 Hilton Hotels & Resorts properties committed to including a spa.
* 3 brands in the Hilton Worldwide portfolio that will make eforea available for their owners and developers: Hilton Hotels & Resorts, DoubleTree by Hilton and Embassy Suites Hotels.
* 3 eforea product vendors engaged to implement customised spa journeys for eforea guests: Kerstin Florian, LI’TYA and VitaMan.

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Central Europe can widely be considered to be amongst the world’s hottest battlegrounds in attracting wellness visitors to use what they have to offer. Croatia is certainly one country in the heat of the battle as, when MWT spoke with product manager, MedAdria, Olivera Vugrinec, she stated that quality can be found in abundance within the nation. “The high quality offer of our spa and wellness centres as well as the professional staff is what makes them a true oasis for clients seeking a calming and renewing getaway. Those who decide to experience one of our numerous packages always come back for more.” The company places much emphasis on wellness packages as they hold the firm belief that Croatia has everything needed to tempt international visitors when contemplating where to go for rejuvenation purposes. “Our company pays plenty attention to its wellness offer,” Vugrinec told MWT. “During the sales of wellness products, our clients introduce to us their most unique wishes and demands, which is the best way if they want to get a tailor made wellness package. In cooperation with our partner hotels, we create the packages including either some of the simplest wellness treatments or some of the most complex ones. “MedAdria’s plans have always been to please the clients, and that is why our product management is always working on individualisation of wellness packages,” said Vugrinec.

Corporate approval

MWT asked general manager, Andrej Sprajc and marketing manager, Valentina Bozic from Sava Hotels & Resorts why the group places so much emphasis on wellness.

"Today, wellness, health and leisure tourism represent the main products at all our destinations and account for the biggest share of our income. With the current trends of consumers putting more emphasis on healthy lifestyles and disease prevention we still see big potential in this segment. Therefore, this will remain our focus in future. Slovenia has very rich natural and cultural heritage and if we manage to incorporate these elements into our wellness offer we believe we could gain competitive advantage against other companies in the region."

Andrej Sprajc

"Thanks to different healing properties of thermo-mineral waters used at our destinations, our wellness offer varies between destinations. Each of our resorts therefore offers in part unique wellness or medical programmes which are complemented by some generally available wellness treatments and services. Our aim is to develop themed wellness centres, each with a different story behind it. We believe that only segmentation and specialisation of our spa facilities can ensure successful operations and competitive market positions in the long run."

Valentina Bozic

Dedicated offerings

Despite only being open for 16 months, the Willow Stream Spa based at the Fairmont Monte Carlo has seen unprecedented success receiving numerous awards as it aims to become amongst the leading spas in Europe. Most recently coming its way, and certainly aiding in its quest for wellness supremacy was the recognition as being named “Best Spa in a hotel in Europe 2010” by Villegiature Awards. According to communications director, Fairmont Monte Carlo, Claudia Batthyany, such success has to be attributed to the owners of the property who invested $63 million in an ambitious renovation plan which included the spa facility. “In total 17 rooms have been taken from the entire allotment to have a final 900m² product. This is the best emphasis someone could place on wellness tourism. Nowadays, wellness facilities in a hotel have become a “must have”, and we personally notice that our guests do appreciate to have an all-round product under one roof,” she told MWT.

Further enhancing the property’s image is evident in its exceptional surroundings positioned on the Riviera as Batthyany stated: “The Willow Stream brand gives a personal soul to each spa through an authentically local touch. Its unique position on the Riviera and the ocean has inspired the company to create tailor-made offerings based on the exceptional advantages of this destination to help create an undeniably complete wellness experience.”

National improvement

The Unique Collection of Hotels & Resorts has recently established The Unique Health & Wellness Collection in order to meet the growing demand for wellness tourism in Thailand. With 80 per cent total business coming just from wellness seekers the company has every right to increase its operational structure catering to such high demands. “We are also planning to develop more wellness programmes catering to conditions such as anti-stress and anti-cellulite programmes which are problems most people are seeking relief from,” marketing and communications manager, The Unique Collection of Hotels & Resorts, Prinda Pettanagul told MWT. However, despite such popular success Pettanagul believes that on a national level more needs to be done to improve the wellness industry within the country. “It is a relatively new and young industry still trying to find its ground. There needs to be more support by the government to promote Thailand as a destination for wellness tourists” Pettanagul stated.
Industry guidance

Finding the right wellness facility can be quite a challenging thing to do considering that there are so many properties which offer such services, so Mario Hajiloizis spoke exclusively with group director sales and marketing, Great Hotels of the World, Carly Gotz, who explained exactly what to look for.

**MWT:** What exactly is Great Hotels of the World?

Great Hotels of the World provides global hotel reservation, sales and marketing services, for an exclusive portfolio of primarily independent properties. Each hotel is carefully selected for its dedication to excellence in hospitality and its exceptional facilities for both business and leisure travel. Great Hotels of the World represents hotels within a number of niche travel sectors:

- Honeymoon
- Romance
- Heritage
- Lakes/Mountains
- Gourmet
- Golf
- Art/Design
- Spa
- Weekend
- Meetings
- Incentives
- Corporate

Our hotels are also categorised into the following collections:

- Great Hotels of the World Luxury Collection – For the most luxurious hotels.
- Great Hotels of the World Premium Collection – For upscale superior hotels.
- Great Hotels of the World Classic Collection – For mid-range properties.

**MWT:** How do you assess each facility which includes wellness services and what is the process?

Prospective new member hotels are asked to complete an application form which is presented to our quality selection committee who will determine which category and collections are suitable for the property. Hotels joining our spa collection are required to offer substantial spa facilities and an extensive menu of spa treatments. If we are in any way unsure of the quality of a hotel, a member of our team will visit the hotel to ensure its suitability. We will also re-assess a hotel during its membership if we believe that its standards are slipping.

**MWT:** Which wellness destinations have emerged in your opinion as ahead of the rest?

Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and Indonesia have always been popular. Countries located in the Middle East and Eastern Europe are also gaining in popularity and many hotels in these regions have outstanding wellness facilities.

**MWT:** How important is it that wellness providers never reduce quality just to offer cheap prices?

It is so important that our spa hotels offer quality facilities and treatments to guests. Spa-goers are expecting quality and are expecting to be pampered and they are prepared to pay for this so it is important that their expectations are exceeded.

**MWT:** What is the criteria you look for in a person should they wish to become a Great Hotels of the World inspector?

Someone who loves to travel, has a keen eye for detail and has vision, as many hotels we meet are still in the planning stage.

**MWT:** Great Hotels of the World focuses exclusively on luxury five-star hotels which can include spas, why?

Following a recent brand consolidation, Great Hotels of the World now includes four- to five-star properties categorised into luxury and premium collections.

**MWT:** Do you believe wellness tourists specifically look for hotels with spas which have received positive reviews from your company, why?

Hotel reviews are so important, especially these days with social media being so popular; reviews can make or break a hotel. The majority of people would check out online reviews before making a hotel booking so it is important that hotels take this seriously. We do have a hotel review facility on our website which is frequently viewed by our customers and we will also be implementing video reviews allowing people to get a closer look at the hotel before visiting it.

"With so many hotels offering wellness facilities, hotels will need to differentiate their product to attract customers."

**MWT:** What are the latest developments at Great Hotels of the World and what should we be expecting in the future?

We have recently consolidated our hotel brands to create one global hotel brand – Great Hotels of the World. We made this big change following extensive research and consultation with our member hotels, clients and consumers. By bringing the brands together, we will convey a clear message to consumers and the travel trade to strengthen our brand and increase recognition.

Another exciting development is a series of changes to our sales and marketing strategy in the leisure sector based around the vision of developing a series of ‘niche content hubs’. We intend to leverage online and social media communities for various travel niches, including wellness, to build relationships with travellers and drive demand for member hotels.

**MWT:** How do you see the wellness tourism industry developing over the next five years?

I think going to a spa will become more than just having a facial or a manicure as people will have higher expectations and expect spas to offer more than these types of treatments. With so many hotels offering wellness facilities, hotels will need to differentiate their product to attract customers.

Medical spas offering treatments such as Botox, laser therapy and plastic surgery are increasing in popularity as well as retail branded and fashion spas such as Molton Brown, Versace or Missoni.
Responding to the aftermath of the recently held Spa & Wellness Tourism In Central Europe (SPA-CE) trade show held in Slovenia which took place from 7-10 October, 2010, organisers have stated that the event was a huge success.

Speaking exclusively with project director, SPA-CE, Jana Apih, MWT discovered that the event was extremely worthwhile for all those who attended.

“The success of the trade show is always measured by the satisfaction of both parties,” stated Apih.

“At SPA-CE 2010, exhibitors were satisfied with the selected buyers and the interest they showed. The buyers were satisfied with the offer they met at the show and now expect that they will be able to attract more customers.”

Creating the event in the first place was an idea which director, Slovenia Spa Association, Iztok Altbauer came up with as he identified new initiatives for his members.

“The idea came across my mind last year, when we were looking for new sales promotion activities for our members,” he told MWT.

“We could not just organise a local event with the Slovenian offer only, but that we had to look further into Central Europe, to gather more specialised offers attracting new potential buyers. We are already very happy with this year’s result, since we already received buyers from Kuwait, Egypt, Lebanon and India along with several leading specialised European tour operators.”

The event is expected to further add more international wellness seekers visiting the country especially as in 2009 the country received 655,000 guests as well as 2.78 million overnights.

However, despite such positive statistics much more needs to be done in order to cater to this growing demand, as Apih explained to MWT: “The wellness industry in Slovenia in recent years mostly invested in renovation, development and the building of new centres and hotels. The number of new beds raised as the offer of wellness programmes developed and health resorts improved their facilities. In order to fill the beds increased marketing actions are now in place. If we want to attract enough visitors we need to develop new and effective marketing tools.”

“That is why SPA-CE is important for the wellness industry since it offers all exhibitors concrete business opportunities.”

Foreign 2009 guest rankings according to Iztok Altbauer:

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<th>COUNTRY</th>
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<td>Italy</td>
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“no matter how long the winter, spring is sure to follow”
Hand Massage. It removes the stress from my body, massages myself. My favourite is our own Oasis Four service “the power of massage” and regularly have to encounter stress in the workplace. I believe in our own experience as a Spa owner is to see our customers treating themselves well – mind and body. My favourite activity they may want to try on a holiday. They are free to browse and compare many spas technology, customers are well informed.

MWT spoke to CEO, Oasis Spa Thailand, Toby Allen about living up to high standards of service and the pleasurable and challenging aspects of a spa manager's job.

MWT: Oasis Spa Thailand has received a number of impressive awards in recent years. Do you feel pressure to live up to the high standards bar that you raised? What do you do in order to maintain the desired level?

I am careful to take care of myself, as is quite normal to encounter stress in the workplace. I believe in our service “the power of massage” and regularly have massages myself. My favourite is our own Oasis Four Hand Massage. It removes the stress from my body and soothes and revives me.

MWT: Every day you work in an atmosphere of relaxation, beauty and tranquillity. Your job is to make sure people get rid of stress and experience a sense of elation. Does it make your work easier? Are you naturally getting more relaxed yourself?

MWT: Do you get to meet wellness seekers that come to your Spa? What sort of people are they? Do you notice any difference in them after they receive treatments?

I have the opportunity quite often to meet our customers, individuals as well as groups. They are people from around the world, some are on holidays enjoying maybe a once-in-a-life-time experience, and others are local Thai people who come regularly.

They all tend to be the type of people who believe in treating themselves well – mind and body. My favourite experience as a Spa owner is to see our customers immediately after a treatment. They are, almost without exception, extremely relaxed and have a smile of satisfaction. They are in a stress-free state that is hard to find in normal day-to-day life.

MWT: What qualities does a person need to possess in order to do your job?

For my job I need a “service mind” to be able to always anticipate what the customer wants. Having been pampered many times myself at Oasis Spa and in spas around the world, I use my own experience as a measure to compare our performance as a World Class Spa.

MWT: What is the most difficult aspect of your job?

Meeting customers’ raising expectations is one of the challenging aspects of my job. With current technology, customers are well informed. They are free to browse and compare many spas or even choose between a spa and another type of activity they may want to try on a holiday.

We have a customer-driven philosophy. We monitor customer comments as well as many other reports to keep up with what the clients want. Staying one step ahead of the next trend or latest treatment is quite a challenge.

As I mentioned earlier though, I love the challenge of striving for excellence and I find overcoming the difficult aspects very satisfying.

MWT: What do you naturally get more relaxed yourself?

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Events Guide

December 3-6, 2010 Istanbul, Turkey
Third International Health Tourism Convention
The convention, attended by key decision makers and government officials, aims at discussing practical steps towards improving the health tourism sector.
http://www.saglikturizmi2010.org/eng/HomePage

December 5-7, 2010 Abu Dhabi, UAE
The World Healthcare Congress Middle East
A prestigious healthcare event convening more than 500 global leaders and key decision-makers from all sectors of healthcare.
http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR10004/

January 24-27, 2011, Dubai, UAE
Arab Health
The largest healthcare exhibition in the Middle East, and the second largest in the world, providing a platform for the medical and scientific community in the Middle East and beyond.
www.arabhealthonline.com

March 3-5, 2011 Antalya, Turkey
Anfas HETEX 2011,
The third Health, Spa & Wellness, Thalasso, Thermal and Medical Tourism exhibition focusing on Turkey’s full service offering of medical and wellness tourism options.
www.anfashetex.com

March 16-19, 2011 Moscow, Russia
Moscow Medical and Health Tourism Congress
The second international medical travel trade show for inbound and outbound travel and tourism in Russia.

April 27-29, 2011 Barcelona
European Medical Travel Conference
The main medical tourism event in Europe attended by the most important industry participants.
www.emtc2010.com

May 18-20, 2011 Melaka, Malaysia
Malaysian International Health Tourism
One of the premier exhibitions of the healthcare tourism industry in Malaysia.

May 23-26, 2011 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Riyadh Travel Fair 2011
Exhibition focusing on all aspects of travel, including academic tourism and medical tourism.
www.riyadhtravel.net
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