

Medical Tourism in Central-Eastern Europe and Russian Federation: Tendencies, Problems, Comparison

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Abstract

This work is devoted to consideration of medical tourism. The analysis of the basic characteristics, tendencies and problems of medical tourism is limited to the countries of Central-Eastern Europe. Basic potential of natural resources, which can be used as medical, is located on territory of these countries and that means the global research with the purposes of most rational using. A great attention in this clause is given to the characteristic of medical tourism in Russia and it's comparison with the countries of Central-Eastern Europe. The scientific novelty of the work consists that the market of medical tourism is for the first time analyzed in a context of the changed political and economic situation in investigated region. One of the purposes of the work is an attempt to attract attention of the state government on importance of a considered problem and to promote the further development of medical tourism.

Keywords: medical tourism, Central-eastern Europe, Russian Federation

The fundamental role in resorts formation and development of medical tourism plays a geographical position of the country and natural conditions, which are characterised for it. In this connection, practically all types of resorts can be found on the territory of Central-Eastern Europe. In territories of Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia and in the west of Poland about 85 % of all resorts of the given region are concentrated. About 40 % of them are balneologic and peloid resorts, 30 % - climatic, and the other part made up with mixed resorts.

The given region is characterized by different types of a climate. It is one of the most important characteristics of natural resources, which can be used as medical. In the countries of the Baltic Sea mountain resorts are characterized by a climate with the lowered atmospheric pressure, abundance of ultra-violet beams. Such type of climate improves activity of respiratory system, structure of blood, metabolism.

Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, the countries which have an exit to the Black Sea and the Adriatic, in coastal areas take influence of the Mediterranean climate, that also has an effect upon development of medical tourism. The climate in seaside areas is characterized by presence of high atmospheric pressure, intensity of solar beams, high humidity of winds (if the sea is not protected by mountains and forests). The treatment on the seaside is especially effective for blood diseases and lymphatic glands.

The coast of the Black Sea in Romania is 245 kms long. Along the territory the resorts are located on a small distance from each other. The greatest value for the international tourism have: Mangalia, Mamaia, Eforie-Nord and Constanca. All these resorts have been working actively in the market of medical tourism during a long time, and now they have the status of high-quality.

The coasts of Croatia and Bulgaria are

also characterized by presence of significant number of resorts. The ecological situation on the Croatian resorts is favourable for improvement of the people's health greater, than on Bulgarian and Romanian resorts. In Croatia region the water pollution in the Adriatic is minimal (the measurements of pollution are much less than near Italian coasts), that has a favorable effect on tourist flows in the country. The treatment on the famous resort Dubrovnik is organized since 1937, and annually quantity of tourists here is much more, than on the other seaside resorts of this country.

Since 1991 Montenegro is proclaimed ecologically pure territory. The most attended resorts are Igalo (where sea is the cleanest and a medical sea dirt is very high-quality), Herceg Novi, Tivat. The most effective treatment here is for respiratory and cordial-vascular systems.

Though 40 km of the Adriatic coast belong to Slovenia, this country does not specialize on development of medical tourism on the seaside climatic resorts. A number of comfortable resorts are located here, for example, Portorozh, which is very popular among Italians (because of a closeness of these countries). But the main part of resorts, which have an international value is situated in the east of the country.

The presence of seaside climatic resorts attracts a great quantity of tourists, as a big part of them prefers to combine a treatment with a rest, that is a most expedient on a such type of resorts. The infrastructure of the coasts is developed very intensively, and it is directed on the tourists attraction.

The most known seaside resorts of the Baltic Sea countries are: Stone-Pomorski, Hustka and Kolobrzeg in Poland; Palanga, Piarnu, Jurmala, Baltiesers, Sigulda in other countries. On the one hand, the inflow of the tourists here is supplied by those who need the sea air without heat of the sun (for example, such features of a climate are very effective at the hypertherios treatment). But, on the other hand, the sea is too cold to attract mass flows of the tourists, as it occurs in Bulgaria, Romania or in Croatia.

The mountain climatic resorts are located on a practically whole territory of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe. A huge quantity of them belongs to Poland, being, actually, a subject of specialization of this country in medical tour-

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ism. The most known resorts, which are located in Sudetic, are Sveraduv-Zdrui, Edlina-Zdrui, Shavna-Zdrui etc. In other countries, despite of presence of resorts of the given type, the mountainous tourism is not the branch of specialization in medical tourism.

The most of all mineral sources in the world belongs to the countries of the region of Central-Eastern Europe. The numerous deposits of natural dirts and stocks of thermal waters are available for development here of a various types of balneologic resorts. The most effective mineral and thermal sources are located in Czech Republic. The group of resorts (Karlovi Vary – Marianske Lasne – Frantiskovi Lasne) is specialised on a balneologic treatment. The medical base here excels the analogues in other countries. For this reason Czechia makes an emphasis on it at development of medical tourism, though it has a potential in climatic resources.

There are a lot of balneologic resorts in Slovakia. The mountainous tourism in Slovakia developed during a long time, but it was mainly of sports plan, therefore the medical tourism was not given of sufficient attention. But now the government let it function more actively. The most known resorts are Piestiany, Bardeev and Sliach.

A significant number of balneologic resorts is there in Romania. The Romanian coast of the Black sea is rich with mineral thermal waters, which are recommended for treatment of rheumatism and of nervous system. The most popular resorts are Mangalia, Beile-Herculane, Borsek.

The medical tourism in Slovenia and Macedonia is focused on thermal waters using. The significant number of this type of resorts is located in the eastern parts of countries. Almost all of them are resorts of the international value.

Hungary has significant number of thermal and mineral sources. The main one is Budapest, where people began to get cure over than hundred years ago. The Hungarian capital was and is a place of world conferences and congresses on balneology. There are very popular resorts in Hungary, which are located on a lake Balaton coasts. The main advantage of this lake and the secret of its popularity is that a swim- season here is open whole year round. It is possible cause the water in the lake gets warm very quickly, and temperature of water does not fall below 20°C.

In some countries of Central-Eastern Europe the lakes are used as a resorts (for example, three largest lakes in Macedonia – Prespa, Okhrid and Doi-

ran). But only Hungary with the unique lake Balaton specializes on it.

Thus, the countries of Central-Eastern Europe are characterized by presence of huge number of resorts of a various medical structure. The basic specialization of the majority of the countries is balneology with using of thermal and mineral sources. The second important medical factor is climate, which plays a great role in developing of seaside and mountain medical resorts.

Despite of a saturation of medical base in the countries of investigated region, there were not many tourist flows to the resorts with the purpose of treatment till the recent time. They were even much less than in aggregate on other regions of the world. The most attended country of region was Czechia (in 1994 more than 40 % of all arrived tourists have been coming with a treatment purposes, that exceeded the same parameter of Israel at the same year). Annually more than 17 mln of people treat on Czech resorts. During a long time Czech Republic was one of the leading states of medical tourism. Nowadays Czech Republic has outstripped Israel by a quantity of the accepted tourists, basically due to lower prices and more simple way to get a visa.

The oldest resort in Czech Republic is Karlovi Vari. About 85 Th tourists from 70 countries of the world come here for treatment annually. The basic quota of tourists make Germans (approximately 60% of all tourists having a rest in 1994 in Marianske-Lasne were Germans, about 20 % of the tourists were Russians and Chechs). (Pratzel, 1997)

The tourist flows to resorts are stable and also are constantly increased. After 1992, when there was a separation of Czechia and Slovakia, the intensity of a flows did not change except in 1993, that is explained by complexity of a political situation in the country cause of the mentioned separation. Though at the present moment the position of Czechia is rather stable, there are countries, trying to concur with it, and many of them are located in Central-Eastern Europe.

Nowadays the basic competitor of the Czech Republic is Hungary. The population of Hungary is hardly more than 10 mln. Annually about 30 mln of tourists attend the country. Hungary was on the 5-th position in Europe in incoming tourism. (Five stars, 1997). In general, the tourism in Hungary is the third clause on the incoming in budget after an industry and agriculture. In 1997 about 6,2 mln of tourists have visited Hungary with the medical purposes; among them 1,7 mln were Ger-

mans, 1,2 - Americans, 1,1 - Austriens, 0,6 - Slovaks, 410 Th - Russian (it was in 3 times more, than in 1995) (Ibid). The situation is improved by a very fast rates, the number of tourists grows monthly in several times. The increase of inflow for treatment in Hungary of West-European tourists is appreciable (especially from France, Italy and Switzerland). That, obviously, is connected to a significant difference in service prices. In general, the economic situation in Hungary is considerably improved. An infrastructure develops intensively, and the government announces about planned devaluation at a rate of 1,5 % per one month for support of export of tourist services. (Grove, 1986) It is interesting, that there are not 5*-hotels on medical resorts in Hungary. An inexpensive accommodation in the hotels of the lowest category with good services allows Hungary to develop incoming medical tourism successfully.

Rather intensively there is an increase of tourist flows with the purpose of treatment on resorts of Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania. These countries actively advance tourproduct with the help of well produced tactics of advertising, that allows to attract significant number of tourists. Slovakia gradually departs from the image of the country of skiing tourism, equipping thermal resorts through modern technologies. In a nearest future it can be dangerous competitor for Czechia, whose resorts lose their popularity, and it can entice the basic part of the tourists from Western Europe on a new places, especially in a view of a lower cost of treatment in the country (table 1).

Table 1.

The country	Cost of 1 week (including treatment) stay
Czechia	1600
Slovenia	1700
Estonia	750
Croatia	1400
Slovakia	1600
Poland	1300
Romania	1200
Bulgaria	1200
Latvia	700
Lithuania	700
Albania	there are no data
B & H	there are no data
Yugoslavia	1300
Macedonia	there are no data
Hungary	650 (without treatment)

Source: the Internet, [15].

The Romanian and Bulgarian resorts are not short of tourist flows with the medical purposes. It is explained, basically, by the well-balanced system of treatment and rest combination, as the majority of resorts is located on a coast of the Black Sea.

Despite of a richness of natural resources, suitable for treatment, the countries of former Yugoslavia are short of foreign tourists inflow. First of all, it is connected with very complicated political-economic situation in the countries, especially because of the last events in Kosovo Province in Serbia. Slovenia and Croatia are only exceptions. There both political, and economic situations are much better, than in other republics.

Despite of the impressive sums brought by tourism in the country (about 5 mln US \$), the system of tourism is developed insufficiently. The essential problem for medical tourism in the countries of former Yugoslavia is also poor infrastructure, that plays a paramount role in tourism. So it'll take much time, before the countries of former Yugoslavia take a worthy niche in the market of medical tourism not only in the world, but also in investigated region.

The modern development of tourism in Russia is characterized by presence of the deep contradictions in its organizational structure. Russia has an unique natural potential for treatment. Among the natural resources of our country there are resort zones of the world value: the Caucasian Mineral Waters, Black Sea coast of Caucasus, suburbs of St.-Petersburg, the lake of Baikal etc. But this potential, according to the data of the ministry of Public Health Services of Russian Federation, is used less, than on 10 %. The main reason for it is the underestimation of importance of creation of the industry of medical tourism. So, from 1200 main resorts of Russian Federation only about 40 are suitable for foreign tourists, that is less than 3,5 % (Krivorutsko, Lebedeva, 1997).

Socio-economic crisis of 90 y. has struck all spheres of the Russian economy and was especially strongly showed in such specific branch of economy as a tourism. It suffered not only because it has lost the potential foreign tourists, but also because of significant recession of arrivals of Russians on resorts with the purpose of treatment.

In the last time in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe there is a significant

improvement of a situation in medical tourism. Its development is directed on the other way. The government of the majority of the countries of region allocate great financial assets in reconstruction of old, building of new resorts, purchase of the newest medical equipment, direct the investments to all spheres of resort business. The system of medical tourism is developed in Czechia, Hungary and Slovenia intensively, and actually does not concede to western. All hotels and boarding houses on resorts are equipped top-level, the attendants are very carefully picked up. Now there is only one 5* hotel in Russia (city - resort of Sochi), certainly, it is impossible now to speak about any increase of the international tourist flows.

The low prices at high quality of given services are the basic advantages of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe in medical tourism. The prices in Russia do not suit to services, that is why it loses foreign tourist flows and allows Russians to take out money from the country, that, certainly, effects on our tourist branch in whole.

The international tourist flows in Russia are also low because of an ecological level in the country, though here it is possible to make parallels with the countries of the Baltic Sea (where the sea is very strongly polluted). The level of cleanliness of the Adriatic near Croatia has decreased, however country struggles strongly with the accommodation of industrial objects on a territory of the coast.

Despite of the much greater variety of resort types in Russia (where practically all of them are submitted), the infrastructure of resort districts is developed worse, than in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe. Traditionally, the culture and the respect to tourism, to the people, in these countries is much higher, than in Russia. Russia now essentially lags behind a general level of development of the international medical tourism.

The basic problems in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe at present are the following. The insufficient amount of means for arrangement old and construction of new hotels and boarding houses on resorts distinguishes actually each country of region. The majority of the countries have no effective information market, the advertising of medical tours is not perfect. It creates the difficulties in attraction of the foreign tourists. Only Hungary and Czech Republic, whose resorts are traditionally in de-

mand in Europe, are still stable.

The countries of Central-Eastern Europe try to develop medical tourism and apply efforts to it, cause the incomes of it are really very high. Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia a bit later'll achieve the appreciable results in medical tourism, cause they have significant support of a government. The most perspective of these countries is Slovakia, which has greatest potential of medical resources except Czechia, and tourist flows'll reorient to this country. In comparison with a situation of medical tourism in Russia, the countries of Central-Eastern Europe have doubtless advantages. Though the medical base of regions is practically the same, an economic situation of Russia and another approach to medical tourism system yet do not allow Russia to apply for essential changes in this field.

The medical tourism is too expensive to become mass. Nevertheless the amount of people wishing to get a treatment abroad is increased annually almost twice. If the government of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe pay more attention to the development of medical tourism, it'll become one of most profitable kinds of tourism. That will allow region in a whole and each country separately to raise a standard of well-being and to get functioning of medical tourism on the top place in the world. The market of medical tourism is rather narrow than the other kinds of tourist activity, especially in the countries with unstable political and economic situations. Actually, it is still floating due to the tourists guessing prestigious to be engaged in common improvement (in the countries of investigated region, in particular). But, despite of complexities arising in the countries at different spheres, they do not turn off business, but also in every possible way promote development of medical tourism, cause they do realize, that the medical tourism is now an absolutely necessary part of our life.

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