

Tapping into medical tourism

Foreign spending on medical care in South Africa has increased from R582m to approximately R916m in 2015, as the number of tourists originating from Europe and those coming by air from other African countries has increased, according to research by SA Tourism.



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“Travellers coming to South Africa for medical treatments do so for cost savings. The infrastructure, medical technology, qualified and skilled doctors are at an international standard, and most advantageous is the fact that the English language is widely spoken in South Africa,” says Charnel Kara, tourism specialist at FNB Business.

Downstream impact

Globally, medical tourism is estimated to be worth between \$45bn and \$72bn, and will continue to show growth of between 15% and 25% each year. “A substantial portion of medical tourists to South Africa originate from our neighbouring countries. We are also seeing a growing number from Europe and countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, says Kara.”

She explains that the downstream impact of medical tourism acts as an important feed into the rest of the tourism industry.

“The average tourist stays in South Africa for an estimated six days. This means hospitality services, tour operators,

transport, retail, wildlife and seaside attractions, spas and wellness centers all have an opportunity to gain from a medical tourist visiting South Africa.”

“Businesses can tailor or enhance their product offering to cater to this growing demand. Offering products with pricing and services tailored to suit the needs and requirements of travellers that are going to have or have had medical procedures can diversify a business’s product offering and add to their revenue stream,” she adds.

Leveraging synergies

The success of medical tourism in SA will largely depend on the exchange rate, prices, quality and diversification of procedures, in tandem with medical care and hospitality services offered to potential medical tourists.

“For South Africa to become a leading and sought after medical tourism destination globally, it is imperative that businesses within the medical and tourism spheres leverage off synergies and work together to provide a seamless and holistic offering to this growing sub sector, we have all the moving pieces in place, now we just need to put them together to amplify it,” concludes Kara.

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