



Eastern European Initiative Briefing Paper 2017

What is the aim of your initiative?

The aim is to gather with official ministry representatives, entrepreneurs, and practitioners to share best practices that are rooted in ancient wisdom, yet transformed into modern services and models that promote a wellness culture today both locally and with a global appeal.

What or who are the current “newsmakers” or trends in the initiative’s industry/sector?

1. The reinvention of spa cities (over 100-year-old spa destinations), with examples of initiating public and private collaboration in order to create infrastructure, investment opportunities, redevelopment and modernization of traditional health resorts. Poland has shared the most forward-looking examples, making wellness a priority on a governmental level. The spa city concept is interesting both from the perspective of wellness tourism, as these traditional spa destinations are so ripe to be discovered by a wider global audience, as well as through the perspective of wellness communities and understanding how cities are redeveloped with health as a central element in all decision-making processes.
2. Reincarnation of research institutes, set up in the Soviet Union, to study and improve methodologies when it come to natural medicine. The scientific heritage is being re-interpreted in modern form to reestablish evidence-based practices and health programs that have withstood the test of time and have proven to be effective for cure.
3. Authentic treatments and innovation, whether it implies exploring Unesco heritage protected treatments such as the Smoke sauna in the Baltics or the natural carbon dioxide cure, called Mofettas, to treat heart disease in Romania.

Name some (high level) challenges facing your industry/sector?

One of the greatest challenges is lack of funding for research and development to create evidence-based practices based on the scientific heritage available in the region. Second, the ignorance of this region endured since the Soviet era, as it was largely closed to foreign visitors, is still a challenge when it comes to perception of the health culture despite the fact

that there are wellness traditions that rank alongside systems such as Ayurveda or traditional Chinese medicine in terms of curing disease.

Where do you see the opportunities for this industry/sector?

Counting hundreds of spa destinations from the Baltic to the Black Sea that are ready to welcome a wider audience, this region has already proven to be a leader in numbers when it comes to wellness tourism and will continue to grow, educating travelers about the power of nature. Look out for new wellness travel routes, an increase in wellness tourism figures, great investment opportunities that are off the beaten track and have a century-long history of natural medicine. Updating scientific journals and long-standing heritage of natural medicine from the region will open doors to new technologies and innovations when it comes to health and wellness.

Are there any “heroes” (either companies or individuals) who stand out in your industry/sector?

There are many examples of forward-looking companies and individuals in the region: The Kemeru wellness community, an ambitious redevelopment of a historic spa resort amidst a 760-hectare national park in Latvia; Eda Veeroja, the smoke sauna specialist from Estonia, who managed to protect the ritual under the UNESCO heritage program; Spa Vilnius in Lithuania, collaborating with experts such as Petras Degilis, associate professor, who’s researching the role of amber and neurological stimulation; and the Danubius Group as the largest hotel group in the region.

Name any key accomplishments (milestones) made by your initiative?

Since the beginning of the Eastern European initiative in May 2016, our growing team has accomplished:

1. A research survey on the understanding of wellness in the region, exploring opportunities and challenges, published in October 2016.
2. A roundtable exploring wellness in the Baltic, hosted in March 2017.
3. Work in progress completing the Eastern European Handbook, a brief overview of the region aimed to be published before the end of this year.

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