



Industry Briefing Papers 2016

EUROPE: LATVIA

1. What is currently making news in your country when it comes to spa, wellness, wellness travel or well-being?

The “awakening” and recognition of one of the oldest Latvian traditions, the pirts-Latvian bathing ritual. It is a holistic and complete wellness experience in itself. This living heritage is continuously being embraced by new generations and visiting guests.

Wellness travel is the second largest segment after MICE in tourism, and developing this industry is a priority for the Latvian government, building on the rise of popularity of medical and wellness tourism, more so, the country is very well positioned to offer an effective blue-print for what so many people are looking for, to cope well in today’s world; heritage, rich natural healing sources, expertise and service.

The traditional kemberi spa resort, established in the beginning of 19th century, located in a national park, rich in bogs, peats and mineral waters, stagnant for the past 20 years, is being redeveloped to the first wellness community in the Baltics, setting a new destination on the map for wellness travelers.

2. Please provide one sentence that describes what you think is the most important development in your country for each of the following wellness sectors:

Spas:

An expanding market, gone mainstream with dozens of local day spa openings, residential spa’s becoming a “must-have” for luxury segment developers and additionally Riga welcomes international operators, with new openings in 2016, Pullman by Accor Group (opened in June) and Kempinski (planning to open autumn/winter).

Beauty:

The topic of this years “Baltic Beauty” conference held in November is “complementary therapy and profylaxis” reflecting the readiness amongst beauty therapists, and demand from consumers, to embrace alternative practises and naturopathy when it comes to beauty.

Fitness:

Functional training, outdoor activities, fitness and well-being retreats are in highest demand, driven by consumers seeking a holistic approach, and practice physical activities for health not merely for sporting a beautiful body.

Nutrition:

Watch for the expansion of the Nordic cuisine and the establishment of the Baltic diet, as an alternative to the Mediterranean diet, dictated by the vast natural innocence, whereby 40% is still untouched forests, rich in wild life and harvest and where a natural way of organic, farm to platter culture prevails.

Wellness Tourism:

Today there is still vast international ignorance on strong health giving credentials of Latvia, however, this is about to change, as wellness tourism is becoming a priority and a strategy aligned with the ministry of tourism.

Wellness Communities or Real Estate:

In the leading Baltic real estate and development forum, held in September, organized by FIABCI, for the first time an award for the best “wellness residence” concept will be nominated, and “wellness communities as a trend in development” will be presented as a keynote.

3. Our theme this year is “Back to the Future.” What do you feel is your country’s most significant contribution to what is now a global wellness economy?

The advancement of Balneology and natural medicine in the past, the advancement of wellness medicine in the future.

In 1838 one of the largest balneology center was established in Kemeris and quickly grew from a fisherman's village to a fashionable retreat, local residents and visitors from Germany, Russia and Scandinavia, blended interest in mud, mineral waters and sea air with exposure to ground-breaking natural treatments of the time. Later a research institute was set up to produce research in real time, alongside the operations of the balneology center and health resort, dedicated to the study of natural medicine and the effects of the natural sources, their use in holistic programs and the development of new methodologies. The institute produced scientific journals and a book has been published summarizing the results of the 30 yearlong studies including climate therapy, mineral waters and peat mud. A modern research institute is set up to continue the tradition of researching ground-breaking technology for understanding and reversing health conditions. The vision is to legitimize in a modern sense, the natural healing sources, creating evidence-based treatments and programs, that will provide effective lifestyle changes.

4. What do you feel is the biggest challenge in your country when it comes to growing the wellness economy?

To modernize the deep rooted heritage and application of natural medicine in such political and economic environment of instability and insecurity, that directly affects the travel market, access to European and structural funds that will dictate the success of the advancement of the wellness economy. Vast investment is needed to the development of the infrastructure, technologies and evidence based methodologies, this can only materialized in collaboration between private companies and state departments.

5. While no answers are right or wrong, we would like to know what you feel is the difference - if any - between the terms/concepts of “wellness” and “well-being” in your country.

Wellbeing- Refers to a state whereby one is experiencing total balance physically, mentally, spiritually, financially and socially.

Wellness- Refers to a continuous process of reaching an ultimate state of well-being, yet there is no exact word for wellness in Latvian. Wellness is often mistaken for “pampering”, spa or beauty treatments in the general public.

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