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Costa Rica: Note On Growth Of "medical Tourism"

by Deborah Tyroler

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Over the past several years, the tourist industry in Costa Rica has expanded at a rapid pace, accounting for nearly 20% of all foreign exchange earnings in 1992. In large measure, growth in the industry has come from Costa Rica's ability to take advantage of the international boom in ecotourism. Now, the country appears poised for rapid expansion in another emerging sub-sector: "medical tourism." According to figures released recently by government tourism officials, 15% of all foreign tourists visiting Costa Rica come in search of medical care, particularly plastic surgery. Local industry analysts say Costa Rica is earning a solid reputation as a preferred site for plastic surgery, given the low costs and high quality in comparison to Europe and the US. According to one US tourist cited by daily newspaper La Nacion, "Here in Costa Rica, the cost of facial surgery for removing wrinkles is between US\$2,000 and US\$3,000 while in the US the same operation can cost between US\$15,000 and 25,000." Surgery for nose reconstruction costs between US\$2,000 and US\$2,500, fat reduction operations between US\$800 and US\$1,500, and abdominal plastic surgery between US\$2,000 and US\$3,000. Increasingly, local clinics which provide plastic surgery services are offering package deals which include a complete post-operation phase with lodging in mountain resort hotels, excursions to major tourist attractions, a special diet tailored to the needs of the patient, and follow-up appointments with a specialist. Currently, at least five clinics have been set up to cater to the needs of medical tourists. In addition to plastic surgery, some have begun to offer dental services including oral surgery and installation of dentures. (Source: Notimex, 01/25/93)

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