

Medical tourism explained!

*Why be limited to your own country,
when you can have the best of the rest of the world?*



YourSurgeryAbroad's 10 points for understanding medical tourism

1. What is medical tourism?

Also referred to as health travel or global healthcare, medical tourism is a term used to describe the act of travelling across international borders to obtain healthcare. This can be for virtually any type of healthcare, but often includes elective procedures, or those requiring complex specialisation not available in one's home country. While the name is new, the concept of medical tourism has been around since the ancient Greek pilgrims travelled to the Saronic Gulf for healing, and the 18th Century English travelled from afar to visit mineral water spas for their healing properties. Now more than 50 countries identify medical tourism as a national industry, with more and more people from the USA, Canada, UK, Europe and Australia actively participating in travel for healthcare as the cost of private healthcare rises and waiting periods get longer.

2. Who travels overseas for healthcare?

Well, anyone and everyone really, but the key departing tourist markets are the USA and UK, followed by Canada, Australia, Japan and mainland Europe. Tourists from the USA and Canada often travel to Asia and areas in Central and South America, while many UK residents are fond of travelling to Eastern Europe and 99% of Australian medical tourists travel to Asia.

3. Why do people travel overseas?

Trying to get the most of your money, uninsured, underinsured, seeking a specialisation perfected in another country, or just like the idea of recovering whilst relaxing in an exotic destination: there are numerous reasons why people choose to have medical treatment abroad. The skyrocketing costs, long wait times and increased risk of MRSA in particular are causing more and more people to consider healthcare overseas. The greatest benefits of medical tourism are that it is generally substantially cheaper to have treatment abroad, which comes in handy particularly as most elective surgeries (i.e. not life-threatening) are generally not covered by insurance; there are no waiting periods; and specialists from other countries sometimes offer new technology, or even offer procedures that are unavailable in your home country.

4. Is this a compromise on quality?

Put simply, no. Many developing countries base their healthcare systems on US or British models and actively encourage surgeons to seek training or experience in Western countries. Some specialists not available in your home country may in fact offer a greater level of care or new technologies unavailable at home. So, not only are medical tourism destinations offering cost-effective, quality healthcare, but also a tropical, cultural or simply relaxing holiday destination.

5. Are health standards the same overseas?

International, national and local medical standard boards have been established worldwide to help patients decipher the long list of medical suppliers and make the best judgement on which to choose. Those patients who are highly concerned about guaranteeing the highest of standards should seek out providers who are JCI Accredited. However, the selection process is up to you, so use YourSurgeryAbroad's comprehensive listing and shop around. YourSurgeryAbroad has made a considerable effort to only list medical tourism providers that are ISO Certified or accredited establishments.

6. Can I save money?

In most cases there are substantial savings to be found. Often it is cheaper to book flights, accommodation and pay for your medical costs overseas than to have the same procedure in your home country. The increased ease and affordability of international travel is also helping to keep the costs down.

7. What procedures are offered?

Some of the more popular procedures offered are elective procedures not covered by insurers, dentistry, cosmetic surgery, orthopaedics, cardiology, obesity and fertility treatments and eye LASIK, just to name a few. Also, treatments such as stem cell therapy, abortion, some forms of IVF and gender change are often unavailable in a patient's home country, thus travelling overseas may be the only option.

8. Where can I go?

Traditional destinations are Southeast Asia, India, Hungary, Mexico and Costa Rica. But the increasing ease of international travel and higher global medical standards mean more and more countries are realising the possibilities of medical tourism.

9. Pros of confidentiality

A bonus of flying overseas for treatment is confidentiality. You could be on a "business trip", leaving friends and family none the wiser. Cosmetic and dental procedures are relatively quick and non-invasive, and after some vacation time you can be back home with a new smile or... well, anything really.

10. What's the catch?

There isn't one. As long as you plan and do your homework then not only can you get treated quicker, but make massive savings at the same time. If you have done your research and are confident you expect to receive a similar level of treatment as in your own country, relax... you have done enough. You have just made an informed choice about your own healthcare.