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The Allure Of Medical Tourism

by Sean O'reilly And Carol Lamb
UPI Outside View Commentators
Washington DC (SPX) Jul 02, 2006

A "medical [vacation](#)" is a fantastic way to renew oneself in mind and body. When the body is relaxed and the mind is at ease, the quality of healing can be phenomenal. If you are one of those contemplating surgery in the near future, or know of someone who is at the crossroads of a medical decision, then you may want to investigate a medical vacation.



The advantages outweigh the disadvantages when you consider the cost, the service and the location.

Ten years ago, according to the authors of a new book, "Hospitality 2010: The Future of Hospitality and Travel" by DeMicco, Cetron and Davies, medical tourism was barely noticeable. Today, more than 250,000 patients a year visit Singapore alone -- nearly half of them from the Middle East.

For considerably less than the amount that is spent on cosmetic or remedial surgery in the United States, the venturesome patient can enjoy a renewed body and have a great vacation at the same time in Costa Rica, Cuba, India, Malaysia (pictured), Mexico, South Africa or Thailand.

In 2006, nearly a half million patients will visit India for medical care. The authors indicate that India expects medical tourism will bring in approximately \$2.2 billion per year by 2012.

For those of you shuddering at the thought of undergoing an advanced medical procedure in a foreign country, DeMicco, Cetron and Davies note that India's death rate among patients undergoing surgery is only half that of most major hospitals in the United States.

Additionally, many foreign hospitals provide hotel-like [amenities](#), include personal assistants for post-hospital recovery and sometimes add airfare incentives.

Medical costs for surgery in the United States are clearly beginning to drive the business of surgery overseas. Cost savings range from 25 to 80 percent less for many procedures. When you take into account that there are approximately 43 million people without health coverage and 120 million without dental coverage in the United States alone, then the economic pull of obtaining low-cost medical service with a vacation thrown in becomes obvious.

The long waiting periods for surgery in countries that practice socialized medicine such as Canada and England also add to the momentum of a burgeoning worldwide medical business.

If you were to price a range of surgeries here in the United States, you might suddenly have the urge to call up your insurance agent to go over your policy. Some patients have even resorted to living with their conditions rather than depleting family savings or dragging themselves through bankruptcy court.

The stress of contemplating the devastatingly high cost of heart surgery, for example, which can run as high as several hundred thousand dollars, can be overwhelming for the uninsured or the underinsured.

On the other hand, if you are someone who wants to look and feel your best and opt for elective surgery, then there is also the overseas option to consider.

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For considerably less than the amount that is spent on cosmetic or remedial surgery in the United States, the venturesome patient can enjoy a renewed body and have a great vacation at the same time in [Costa Rica](#), Cuba, India, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa or Thailand.

The latest entrant to the list of countries providing medical alternatives, Malaysia, is focused on providing a good value for the patient who comes prepared to take advantage of the high quality and reasonable price of health care. Elective surgery like rhinoplasty (a nose job) and liposuction cost about 25 percent less in Malaysia than in the United States.

Heart surgery for the uninsured or underinsured who might otherwise have to dip into life savings costs only a fraction of what it costs in the United States. Some heart procedures are as low as \$7,000 dollars as opposed to \$50,000 to \$125,000 dollars.

Those savings can easily translate, during a surgical recovery period, into airfare, gourmet meals and a nice hotel at the [beach](#) for a month with a lot of spending money left over for those willing to step outside of their comfort zones.

As with all medical issues, you should talk to your personal physician before engaging medical services abroad. But with a little research and care, you will more than likely thank yourself for taking your medical concerns overseas.

Many of the doctors performing these surgeries have been trained in the United States, Europe, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia. Local hospitals are conversant with the latest techniques and state-of-the-art medical technology.

Let's take Malaysia as an example. According to Malaysian Tourism, "Medical expertise in Malaysia ranks among the best in the world and most private hospitals in the country have internationally recognized quality standards. All private medical centers must be approved and licensed by the Ministry of Health."

The Malaysian economy is one of the strongest in [Southeast Asia](#) with growth rates in the range of 10 percent a year. Due to 2 years of visionary leadership under former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohammed, Malaysia has been able to take advantage of its strategic position in the heart of the Southeast Asia Triangle.

Under the new leadership of Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, Malaysia's economic goal to become a fully developed country by the year 2020 is being realized. If the pace of present development continues, they will achieve their goal well in advance of that date.

Malaysia is also blessed with an abundance of good beaches. Hotels and [resorts](#) can be found up and down the coastline in frequently visited areas or secluded lagoons. Most of them boast of luxurious spas and rejuvenating massages. What a wonderful way to ease your mind and relax your body.

The climate in Malaysia is warm year round and so are its people, who will go out of their way to make sure your experience in Malaysia is unforgettable. With excellent hotels, a superb highway system and streets that are safe and well policed, a medical vacation can be just what the doctor ordered.

What are you waiting for? Let the healing begin.

Sean O'Reilly is editor-at-large for [Travelers' Tales](#). He is a former seminarian, stockbroker, and prison instructor with a degree in Psychology. United Press International's "Outside View" commentaries are written by outside contributors who specialize in a variety of important issues. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of United Press International. In the interests of creating an open forum, original submissions are invited.

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Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (SPX) Jun 28, 2006

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compared with a poster that featured an image of flowers.



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