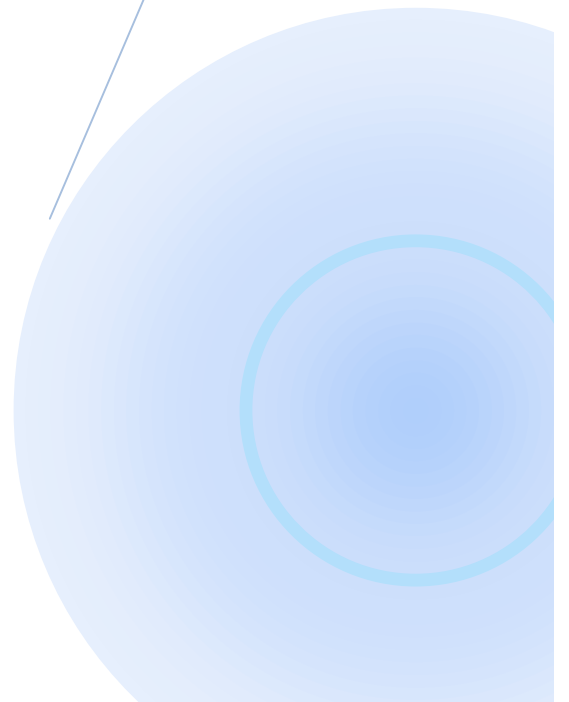




Medical Tourism Planning Guide



Medical tourism is no longer a rare experience – it has become a fully accepted mainstream element in the global delivery of world-class health care. Popular elective medical services include IVF, knee or hip joint replacements, cardiac surgery, cosmetic surgery and dental surgery. Patients in need of emergency procedures may be dismayed by the waiting lists in their own countries, and may opt to have the procedure performed immediately in another country. Here are some ideas to help you plan your trip.

Focus on your health

The truth is, you're not really going on a holiday, you're travelling to receive properly-priced medical care. Your primary focus should be on the medical institution, the procedure, and your smooth recovery.

Don't be Too Exotic

Medical tourists face fewer risks in European countries than they might in other parts of the world. Notwithstanding the excellence of foreign medical institutions in exotic locations, there is a real risk of acquiring infectious diseases in countries like Thailand, India, Malaysia, Cuba or Costa Rica, diseases that are quite different from those found in Europe. This risk is exacerbated by the fact that a patient who is still weak after surgery will very likely have no natural immunity to foreign diseases. Medical tourists who stick closer to home are very likely to face fewer such risks. Talk with your doctor before considering a truly exotic destination.

Find the Right Clinic

The simple truth is that it's not always easy to find the right doctor, or the right clinic, even in one's own country. It is even more challenging having to research a foreign medical clinic or hospital. It can be difficult to check the qualifications of the doctors, anaesthesiologists and other specialised staff at medical facilities which are privately-owned and operated. This is particularly true with cosmetic surgeons, who almost always have their own privately-run clinics. Even with dental clinics, patients want more than a competent dental surgeon – they want to know in advance that they will be treated with friendliness and respect, something hard to learn from scanning the Internet. That is why it is so important to work with a professional team who actively monitor the clinics they work with.

Calculate your finances

If you are planning to cover the costs of your own medical trip abroad, you need to carefully consider, compare, and calculate the various costs that will arise in your medical travel. In addition to the cost of your health care procedures, these costs may include:

- Travel: Flights, airport pick-up, travel to-and-from medical provider
- Accommodation
- Food and drink
- Telephone calls and other communication with family at home
- Medications or medical supplies (crutches, etc.) for use during post-procedure recovery time.

During your negotiations with your provider or agency, be sure to establish the means of payment ahead of time. Also, be sure to establish the timing of payment in advance and explore a range of possible payment plans, including payments by instalments.

Give Yourself Time

Wherever possible, give yourself as much advance time as you can between booking the procedure and actually starting your trip. Two to three months is a good plan. Present one or more possible dates for travel to the health care provider or agency you have decided to work with. Keep several factors in mind as you plan and arrange your travel and health care services:

- Peak travel dates to-and-from the country you will be visiting. The price for airline tickets and accommodation can vary dramatically.
- Weather conditions in your destination and how they might play into your post-op recovery and comfort.
- Treatment and recovery-time requirements.

It's one thing to fly in and then immediately out of a foreign city after routine dental treatment, but patients should be cautious in traveling long distances immediately after surgery, which might well increase the risk of complications. Long air flights increase the chance of swelling, blood clots and infection. Don't rely on minimum time guidelines. If you can afford a few extra days for rest and relaxation, they will constitute a great investment in your health and sense of wellbeing.

Discuss matters with a companion early on

Any medical procedure creates a natural sense of anxiety. Sharing the trip with a companion is probably one of the smartest things you can do – and it's essential if major surgery is undertaken. A companion also makes the sightseeing and other tourist elements of the trip much more rewarding. Start the conversation early – it only makes sense to give your companion as much advance notice as possible, and joint planning can itself be a pleasant exercise.

Prepare medical records and paperwork

Plan for how you are going to transfer or carry your medical records to your overseas medical provider, as well as for bringing records of your procedure home with you. In particular, you will need to decide whether to carry paper versions of your records with you or have them digitised and transferred electronically.

Plan for post-procedure recovery and assistance

Some things to consider: How much recovery time will your procedure involve? If you are going to be hospitalised, for how long? In terms of your post-op recovery and taking medications, how

soon afterwards will you be able to travel? What are your contingency plans in case of complications during the procedure or recovery times?

Who is your emergency contact? Do they have information about your location and procedure schedule, as well as detailed information for how to contact your provider? Whether you are working directly with a provider or through an agency be sure to address all of these questions and concerns beforehand, and to get a firm estimate/assessment of costs and scheduling.

Take a few home items with you

If you're in a foreign hotel room recovering from a medical procedure, a small framed picture of loved ones, or an old book of favourite poems or quotations can mean a lot. To the extent you reasonably can, pamper yourself – it's the smartest way to recover smoothly.

Arrange for regular contacts from home

Let close friends know in advance that an email from them, or even an occasional telephone call, would mean a lot to you. Make your friends aware of any time zone differences. We're all unique individuals, so only you will know what works for you. Decide in advance how to balance the need for support with the need for complete peace and quiet.

Rest, rest and rest

Your first task is to have the procedure and then recover. A night at the ballet may be just what you need, but try not to be too ambitious in pre-planning itineraries. Go with the flow. If you find you're just not up to much, treat yourself to an early night in bed with a good book or your favourite music.