



Who should consider becoming a **medical tourist**?

Everyone qualifies. Whether you're insured or uninsured, you can realize the savings of overseas healthcare. As we move into the future, we'll need to be more financially responsible for our healthcare expenditures, even if we are fully insured. Soon, many corporations will not be able to afford the option of offering healthcare benefits to their employees.

We need to begin now to reduce the costs of healthcare to better ensure the availability of major medical coverage to working Americans.

Many options exist for the **medical tourism patient** - from purely elective procedures such as face lift, rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, liposuction, tummy tuck, breast augmentation, dental and LASIK, to more serious procedures such as knee replacement, hip replacement, spinal disc replacement, hysterectomy and cardiac bypass surgery.

The \$6000 Rule

Medical tourists can now obtain essentially any type of medical or surgical procedure within reason. However, there is a simple rule we follow to determine if it makes financial sense to travel abroad. We call it the "\$6000 Rule." If your procedure would cost \$6000 in the U.S., you may not realize any financial savings. Although the surgery would only cost about \$1500 abroad, by the time you add the airfare, post-op hotel accommodations, ground transportation, and the other essentials of overseas travel, you may only realize a break-even scenario. This being said, many people still choose to travel abroad to achieve complete privacy and anonymity, peaceful recuperation, and the avoidance of daily hometown distractions.

How to identify the best "value" when researching your medical tourism options

As you research your medical treatment options outside of North America, it is very important that you identify the "total value" of your medical tourism experience.

The first step is to realize that you are not planning a simple vacation. You are seeking a serious medical procedure in a foreign country that you may know very little about and is possibly thousands of miles away from everything that is familiar to you. There is no need to be alarmed, as people have been traveling great distances to receive medical treatment since the beginning of time. However, in our contemporary global economy, with all the options that you will identify in your search, it's important that you consider all of the factors that will play a significant role in the total value of your experience.

Through the Internet today, you will find hundreds of healthcare providers from all over the world selling their medical tourism services.

It's easy to get lost in this vast maze of information when all you are trying to do is find the best doctor you can afford outside of North America. If you search long enough, you will most likely find an extremely low price for your medical procedure abroad. However, when seeking surgery in a foreign land that you know very little about, it would not be prudent to make your selection based solely upon the lowest price. Beyond price, there are other very important factors that you should consider in order to really uncover the best value. We hope the following will give you at the very least, a good place to begin.

Four considerations to best guarantee a successful medical retreat:

1) Doctor – It goes without saying that the most important factor when considering the total value of medical treatment abroad is the quality and experience of the surgeon. The selection of your surgeon can be a very confusing and stressful process, as you may feel overwhelmed by the sheer choice in the global marketplace of healthcare. Who

can you trust and how can you verify their true credentials? This is where your selection of a medical tourism agency brings immediate value.

The truly reputable American agencies have taken this guesswork out of the equation by partnering with the most reputable hospitals in their respective countries. These agencies have personally met these doctors to insure that they are as they claim themselves to be. Not only will your medical tourism agent supply you with a comprehensive resume of the surgeon, but they should also be able to put you in touch with past clients who have first hand experience with the surgeon.

2) Hospital – The hospital should also be a significant factor in your decision making process. You will want to feel assured that you will be having your procedure in a modern, state-of-the-art facility, with the highest accreditation and standards. Your chosen hospital should have a medical travel process with a high level of commitment and reputation for serving international patients.

In every medical tourism destination, there are dozens of public and private hospitals serving their own domestic population. Many hospitals around the world have opted to jump on the bandwagon of the emerging medical tourism trend by promoting their facilities to medical tourists, resulting in fragmentation and confusion. However, it is important to know that in every medical tourism destination there are at least three to five elite hospitals that serve the most important citizens, dignitaries and government officials in their respective countries. And, these hospitals are on par with international medical standards.

If you work with a reputable medical tourism agent, they will have already conducted detailed site inspections of their hospitals to ensure international standards are met. More importantly, if your agent has sent many patients to a specific hospital, they will have a very close relationship with the doctors and administrators resulting in priority communication status. Beyond this, the ultimate leverage that you will have in terms of ensuring the successful outcome of your procedure is the reputation and financial growth of the hospital. The last thing that any of these elite healthcare providers would ever want is for you to have a complication resulting from their error, which could end up on CNN Headline News the next day and negatively impact their future in this industry.

3) Facilitation Provider - The medical tourism service agency you chose to work with is very important part of the process and should never be taken lightly. It is imperative to know that all agencies are not the same. You must decide if you want to work with an agency that will basically arrange your flight, hotel stay, and surgery date, or if you want to work with an agency that is there with you every step of the way to ensure that you have a very successful and stress-free experience from beginning until you return home and beyond. In other words, if a problem arises during your medical retreat, will your agent be there to assist you, even if it is 3:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning, or will you have to solve your problem on your own? It is essential that you select a medical tourism service provider that you feel very comfortable with and trust to guide you through this cumbersome process.

Make sure that you do your research to ascertain that you are working with a reputable agency that has been around to facilitate enough satisfied clients to have developed a positive track record. One clever way to do this is to search in the "news" or "about us" section of their website to see how many news stories that they have been featured in. Make sure to skim the articles, as many companies post multiple medical tourism articles on their websites that mention nothing about their specific company or past clients.

4) Destination Country – After the doctor, hospital, and medical tourism service agency, the destination country is of significant importance in terms of the total value of your medical treatment experience abroad. If you are new to the medical tourism concept, there are many factors relating to the destination country that should be taken into serious consideration that could mean the difference between a truly wonderful experience and a horribly frustrating adventure. Remember, you are not going on a simple vacation where you can easily manage typical travel inconveniences. Most likely, you will be recuperating from a serious operation, which will greatly hinder your ability to move or adjust to drastic changes as you normally would.

If you are working with a reputable medical tourism service agency, they will likely have a Destination Program Manager (DPM) in your chosen destination that will be there to help assist you. However, your DPM may not be able to be with you 24/7, which means that you will have to navigate some of your post-op functions on you own. With this in mind, here are some of the most important factors that you should really consider about the destination country that you ultimately select.

Infrastructure – Many regions of the world where healthcare expenses are a fraction of what they are in the US happen to be in emerging economies. As such, their infrastructure is decades behind what we are used to in North America. Therefore, you could end up selecting a destination where the hospital in which you will be staying is literally next to a large slum. Not only are the sights in such areas deplorable, but the smells and sounds could be very disturbing as well. You may be in a great modern hospital with great doctors, but could you have selected a destination with an equivalent hospital and doctor in better surroundings, and at the same price? Talk to your medical

tourism agent about this. THINK TOTAL VALUE.

Hotel - Once you are released from the hospital, you will most likely proceed to a hotel to continue your recuperation before flying home. On average, the typical length of time spent in a hotel post-op is between 7 to 14 days, of course depending on the procedure performed. The price, amenities, comfort, security and proximity to the hospitals vary substantially in all the different medical tourism destinations. If you are working with a reputable medical tourism agency, they have hand selected the hotels that they offer for the purposes of recuperation. Check with your agent to insure that the hotels that they are offering meet all the criteria that are important to you, and even better, check to see if that have personally stayed there. Chances are, if your agent has been in business long enough to have developed a good reputation, they have had many clients that have stayed in their hotel affiliates, meaning that they have more bargaining power to insure that any dissatisfaction that you encounter will be dealt with immediately. Keep in mind that the majority of your stay will be in the hotel, so you don't want to overlook this important factor. THINK TOTAL VALUE.

Navigation - How easy will it be for you to get out and about, especially after you are recuperating from a surgical procedure? Will you be in a huge mega-city that is busting at the seams on every sidewalk, or will you be in a pleasant, laid-back destination where you can take a leisurely stroll through the local markets, as you are feeling better. If you decide to take a taxi to another area of town, will you spend two hours in crippling traffic, or will you hop in a taxi and be in any area of town in 15 minutes? THINK TOTAL VALUE.

Communications - There are many medical tourism destinations where English is not widely spoken. Imagine how it would feel to be somewhat dazed from the effects of medication after your operation, and you walk to the local 7/11 to purchase a Coke and not be able to communicate with the merchant. There are several destinations where English is the second language and you would feel completely at ease speaking with everybody? Talk to your medical tourism agent about this. THINK TOTAL VALUE.

Culture - Along with the ability to communicate effectively with the people in your medical tourism destination, is their culture warm, hospitable, and inviting, or distant and uninviting? There are many medical tourism destinations where the doctors, nurses, hotel staff, and local merchants treat you like family every step of the way. You guessed it, THINK TOTAL VALUE.

Weather - When it comes to weather, be prepared for hot and humid climate, as the vast majority of the medical tourism destinations today are located on or near the equator. Whether you are considering South East Asia, South America or Central America, you will not easily escape this temperate zone. This being said, most hospitals and hotels have air-conditioning. Be sure to confirm this with your medical tourism agent.

Pay attention to the details

Hopefully, you can now see that there are many very important factors to consider when embarking on a medical retreat abroad. Overlooking what might seem like a very small detail could mean the difference between a successful, life-changing journey and a very frustrating, depressing experience.

Let experience be your guide

At MedRetreat, we have gained tremendous experience through facilitating thousands of clients over the past four years. We would like to be your experienced guide through this maze of complexity. Over the years, we have learned about the importance of planning for all aspects of our client's needs. Even though most patient's initial concerns are of a physical nature, we know the importance of addressing the emotional and psychological needs of an international patient as well...which results in a totally "patient-centric" model of facilitation. With this knowledge and understanding, we look forward to providing you with total, end-to-end value.