



Cosmetic tourism

The lure of cheap cosmetic surgery with a holiday in an exotic destination thrown in for less than the price of comparable surgery at home is often too much of a temptation to resist. But, like many temptations, it is one that needs to be carefully considered. Cosmetic and plastic surgeon Dr Craig Layt explains the need to stop and ask a few questions before packing your bags.

Travelling overseas for elective and cosmetic surgery is rapidly becoming a multi-million dollar industry. It is largely unregulated and has caused concern in medical circles throughout the developed world. It is an industry in Australia run by entrepreneurs and travel agents with little knowledge of the procedures they are selling.

The sad fact is most people travelling overseas for surgery spend more time researching the purchase of their washing machine than their surgeon.

Keep in mind that it is your body and your life – you only have one.

Cosmetic surgery is real surgery with real risks. It is not a holiday. Think carefully and do your research before putting your body and life at risk.

Some questions you should ask yourself before deciding on overseas surgery:

What is your level of confidence that the education and training of the overseas surgeon and anaesthetist is of the same standard as fully qualified surgeons in Australia?

This includes not only their technical ability, but also such things as their ability to understand what you are telling them. Most patients having surgery in Australia



would see more than one surgeon and choose the one they feel most comfortable with.

Is the procedure safe and appropriate for your particular circumstances?

This can only be assessed by careful history and physical examination. As an example, you may want breast enlargement when the appropriate operation is a breast lift/tightening procedure or request liposuction when a tummy tuck is more appropriate.

Are you feeling rushed into a quick decision?

Many patients report they agreed to a procedure without even seeing the operating surgeon or perhaps seeing them for the first time just before the surgery. In these circumstances there is no real time for reflecting on the decision made or for informed consent.

Is the surgeon aware of the cultural standards of attractiveness in your home country?

For example, cultural differences may lead to a different interpretation of what is attractive or desirable and therefore results you may not have anticipated. A particular nose will look good on certain ethnic groups compared to others. Australian women are often more statuesque than their Asian counterparts and therefore require larger breast implants to achieve a desirable result.

Is the quality and safety of the technology used up to the same standard as Australia?

For example is the anaesthetic and medication approved by Australian standards? Is the sterilising and



resuscitation equipment appropriate and maintained to Australian standards? Even the quality of any implants used can sometimes be called into question.

Is there appropriate after-care in place?

After-care is more than just a few days after the surgery. Complications can occur weeks after the surgery. If appropriately treated these can be minor but can become major if not treated well. What specialist after care is organised for when you return home?

Does the company supplying the service guarantee the result and do they have insurance in case there is a problem?

**What if you need any revision surgery?
What if you are unhappy with the**

outcome of the surgery?

While insurance is compulsory for Australian doctors, this is not the case in all countries. In the event of an adverse situation you may be left with no recourse and find yourself with significant unexpected expenses.

For more information on cosmetic surgery overseas, visit the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons on www.plasticsurgery.org.au or phone 1300 367 446.

As a minimum if you are planning overseas surgery make sure you can tick off this simple checklist:

- Is your surgeon a member of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS)? This at least means they have some form of recognised qualification. Visit www.isaps.org to find out.
- Have you got the right information and had enough time to give informed consent?

- Are the medical standards of care and the strict testing and quality control requirements at least as good as those in Australia?
- Have you got a plan for what you will do in the case of post-operative problems?
- Check out the person promoting the surgery. Are they medically trained? Do they accept any liability or provide any help if problems arise or are they simply a 'travel agent' or 'broker'?

As a Specialist Plastic Surgeon, Dr Craig Layt is required to have completed a Medical Degree; obtain more than ten years' experience in surgical training; liaise with other Specialists in his field; hold a Fellowship with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (FRACS); and be actively involved in continuing his professional development and surgical techniques. Dr Layt is highly credentialed in all areas of plastic, reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. He was also born in Queensland and is married with three children.

