



## Body Beautiful - the rise of 'Medical Tourism'

"In the future tourists will be bringing back a greater sense of wellbeing, a major lifeshift, a new look and maybe even some new body parts".

This is the view of a UK travel agent on a new kind of tourism where people are seeking a change from the 'fly and flop' holiday packages of the past. In 2006, over 200,000 UK tourists chose holidays that included surgery, dental work, or de-tox programmes on health farms or spas. This is collectively known as "medical tourism".



Thailand's private hospitals have been quick to take advantage of the growth of 'medical tourism' thanks to their facilities and internationally trained doctors and nurses. Each year 430,000 'medical tourists' arrive in Thailand from 190 different countries. Here,

they can receive the treatment from heart surgery to dental crowns. Others come for cosmetic surgery like rhinoplasty (a 'nose job') or breast implants. In some ways it is better to have this kind of an operation away from home anyway so that friends and family won't see you during their recovery period.

	Patients from the UK treated in Thai hospitals	Total of overseas patients treated in Thai hospitals (including expatriates living in Thailand)
2001	36,778	550,161
2002	41,599	630,000
2003	78,856	973,532
2004	95,941	1,103,095
2005	108,156	1,249,984



Part of the appeal of having this kind of holiday in Thailand is the cost and waiting time for treatment back home. Medical costs in Thailand are about a quarter of those in Europe, and about a tenth of the costs in the USA.



The facilities are world class too. Appointments for treatment at the Bumrungrad hospital, downtown Bangkok can be booked online anywhere in the world. Wards and rooms at the hospital look more like a five star hotel, and the Bumrungrad has its own hotel just for recovering patients and their families. Patients can even apply for extensions online from their bedside if they need to stay longer.

**Languages spoken by at least one member of the hospital staff at Bangkok Hospital**

Arabic	Dutch	Italian	Norwegian	Tagalog (Filipino)
Bangla	English	Japanese	Russian	Thai
Bengali	French	Khmer (Cambodian)	Spanish	Urdu
Cantonese	German	Korean	Swahili	Vietnamese
Danish	Hindi	Mandarin	Swedish	

During a game of football in neighbouring country, Laos, Peter Crawford from Liverpool broke his leg in several places. He was airlifted to Bumrungrad hospital in Bangkok where surgeons took two hours to patch up his leg. Peter is left with small scars but said, "I feel as comfortable here as in any hospital in the UK. The level of care is fantastic". A few months before, Peter's Dad was suffering from crushed discs in his spine. He was in a lot of pain, but he had to wait seven months before he received any treatment. "There's nothing like that here", Peter said. "I came in and the surgeons saw me almost immediately".

With the boom in 'medical tourism' and a massive building programme, Bumrungrad hospital plans to increase its number of patients from one million to four million by the end of 2008.