

Dangerous Travel

What is dental tourism?

Dental tourism, or dental vacation, involves individuals seeking dental care outside of their local health care systems and outside of the country. The motivation usually is based on price considerations. Although this vacation trend is becoming more popular and might sound appealing, it can be dangerous and threaten a person's oral health.

Where are the dental services offered?

Popular destinations for dental tourism trips include India, Africa, Mexico, Thailand, Hungary, and Costa Rica; however, services also are offered in other locations.

Do foreign-based dentists comply with the same standards as dentists in the United States?

Not necessarily. Dentists in the United States must adhere to higher standards, thanks to state and federal laws that regulate their practice. Dental school accreditation and professional association review committees also set the bar higher for practicing dentists in the United States.

Are there dangers involved with dental tourism?

Dentists in foreign countries may use inferior quality materials for restorations and other dental procedures. The biggest danger, however, is that dental work completed in other countries cannot be guaranteed. Thus, patients who undergo dental procedures in foreign countries may have to pay much more to fix problems that occur when they return to the United States, and permanent damage may occur. There also are differences in the legal systems of foreign countries.



Patients who undergo dental procedures in foreign countries may have to pay much more to fix problems that may occur when they return to the United States, and permanent damage may occur.

In cases of gross negligence, patients may not be able to sue for compensation. Finally, government agencies regulate sterilization and infection control in the United States; regulation standards may be different in other countries.

What can I expect from a dental vacation?

A large amount of dental work can be done within a short time during a dental vacation. In the United States, dentists may plan to complete dental work over the span of several months. On a dental vacation, patients can get that same amount of work completed within a few weeks. However, there may be a language barrier. If a foreign dentist does not speak English, and the patient doesn't speak the dentist's

language, it may be difficult to discuss treatment plans and patient expectations, which could threaten the quality of care received.

Do insurers cover treatments performed on dental vacations?

Most insurance companies only pay benefits for services performed outside the country during emergency situations. But there are companies that will pay for services wherever they are received, with some stipulations. Some insurers have begun to offer referral services to help Americans locate English-speaking dentists in foreign countries. If a dental procedure was performed overseas and needs to be corrected, it is common for insurance not to cover the costs in the United States to repair the work.

Resources

www.agd.org

At the AGD's Web site, you can search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, find an AGD dentist, and more.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.