

ADA WARNS AGAINST 'DENTAL HOLIDAYS'

Dental tourism is becoming a new boom industry and the Australian Dental Association (ADA) warns of the risks associated with the 'overseas dental holiday'.

A Google search on dental holidays will reveal approximately 170,000 results. Flashy websites show picture-postcard locations such as Thailand, the Philippines or India together with claims of 'safe, clean and very hygienic dental surgical procedures – just as you see in Australia, USA and UK' – at promises of 60% savings, in a 'top notch' international hospital.

"For a third of the price and a holiday at the same time it seems like an offer you can't ignore, too good to be true – but it isn't that good," said Dr John Matthews, Federal President of the ADA. "Most people go overseas because they want fairly complex dentistry done, and the more complex it is the more likelihood that something will go wrong – and when it fails it fails big time."

In the last few years, Dr Matthews has seen a disturbing increase in the number of Australians heading overseas for dental treatment. "Teeth are for life. Obtaining dental treatment overseas can be incredibly risky to both your dental health and general health. There is potential for substandard treatment which may require extensive and costly repair procedures on return to Australia."

Before contemplating or undertaking overseas dental treatment, Australians should be aware of the following:

- Many overseas dental practitioners who provide treatment to such patients are practitioners that would not be able to register as dentists in Australia. Dentists in Australia comply with high standards of practice and maintain high levels of professional competence.
- Infection control requirements for dentistry in Australia are of world best practice standards. Those of overseas countries, especially some Asian and Eastern European countries, are far less rigorous. Dental treatment requires stringent infection control as it often involves surgery.
- Equipment and materials used by dentists in Australia are subject to scrutiny and approval by the Therapeutic

Goods Administration, thus guaranteeing they comply with the highest international standards.

- Language and cultural differences may mean patients receiving treatment in a foreign country experience difficulty in having their needs understood.

- Dental treatment provided overseas is often fitted in around a holiday schedule. However, dental treatment often needs to be conducted over a longer period of time and requires regular visits. Provision of implants, for example, cannot be done properly over the week to 10 days of a holiday. Implants require treatment performed over a number of visits as the mouth needs to 'settle' between visits. Fitting such treatment within a holiday schedule, without allowing time for the mouth and gums to settle, risks failure.

- Patients treated in Australia have recourse if there are problems with dental treatment. They have easy access to the dentist to remedy problems and their rights are protected. Overseas treatment leaves no recourse if the treatment fails. Some patients must return overseas for possible rectification. The ADA sees cases of overseas dental treatment gone wrong. Often the treatment received has to be completely redone. If that happens patients will have paid for the overseas treatment and its rectification.

- Complications to health from elective dental treatment obtained overseas are not always covered by travel insurance and the treatments may not be covered by Australian health funds.

- Treatment overseas can be cheaper than that received in Australia but be careful that you know exactly what you are getting; that it is suitable for your situation and that it is of an appropriate standard. Dental patients in Australia receive the best treatment available.

The ADA warns 'buyer beware' in the wake of the dental tourism trend. Australians must ask themselves: Will the overseas treatment remedy dental problems long term? Will it be safe? Can patients be assured they will not be worse off? Are they fully aware of what treatment is actually being provided?



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