

AGD:FACTSHEET

Compiled for you by the Academy of General Dentistry



DENTAL TOURISM

What is dental tourism?

Dental tourism, or dental vacation, is a concept in which an individual seeks dental care in another country (e.g., India, Canada, or Mexico) because of the low cost of care in that locale. Tour packages are available to accommodate Americans who are looking for good dental care at third-world costs. This vacation trend is becoming more popular.

Why do people travel outside of the United States for dental care?

Some Americans' health insurance plans do not include dental coverage. Other people may not have any insurance and may not be able to afford dental care. Dental work can be completed for less money in other countries—sometimes at less than a tenth of U.S. prices.

Where are dental services offered?

Popular destinations for dental tourism trips include India, Africa, Mexico, Thailand, Hungary, and Costa Rica.

What can I expect from a dental vacation?

A large amount of dental work can be done within a short time frame during a dental vacation. In the United States, dentists may plan to complete dental work over a number of months. On a dental vacation, patients will get months of work completed within a few weeks. However, there may be a language barrier. If a foreign dentist does not speak English, and you don't speak his or her language, it may be difficult to discuss treatment plans and patient expectations.

Do insurers cover treatments performed on dental vacations?

Most insurance companies only pay benefits for services rendered outside the country during emergency situations. But there are companies that will pay for services wherever they are rendered with some stipulations. Some insurers have begun to offer referral services to help Americans locate English-speaking dentists in foreign countries.

Do foreign-based dentists comply with the same standards as U.S. dentists?

Not necessarily. Dentists in the United States must adhere to higher standards, as well as the state and federal laws that regulate their practice. Dental school accreditation and professional association review committees set the bar higher for dentists practicing in the United States. In addition, dentists in foreign countries may use lower quality materials for restorations and other dental procedures.

Are there any dangers involved with dental tourism?

The biggest danger involved is that dental work completed overseas cannot be guaranteed. 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. Also, there are differences in the legal systems of foreign countries. 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 overseas.

Does AGD offer any resources for my family and me?

Yes! Check out AGD's Web site, www.agd.org, to search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, or find an AGD dentist. Or, call 1.877.2X.A.YEAR (1.877.292.9327) to be put in touch with an operator who will provide the names, addresses, and phone numbers of AGD members.

