

The rising costs of medical treatments in developed countries like the US and the UK led patients to seek treatments overseas. Many have set their sights on developing Asian countries like Thailand, which offers some of the cheapest healthcare procedures in the world.

Medical tourism, which is a term used to describe traveling to another country for a medical procedure, is [booming](#) in Thailand. Increased government spending on healthcare, competitively-priced treatments, an increasing number of internationally accredited hospitals, and high healthcare standards made Thailand a [prime destination](#) for complex and specialized medical treatments.

Some of the most popular medical procedures in Thailand are:

- Cosmetic surgery
- Orthopedic surgery
- Cardiac surgery
- Cancer treatments
- IVF treatments
- Organ transplants

Over 700,000 patients [travel](#) to Thailand to seek medical treatment. As of 2022, medical tourism in Thailand is [valued](#) at \$5,687 million. About 0.4% of Thailand's GDP is [generated](#) from medical tourism.

## **Health and Safety Concerns in Medical Tourism**

While healthcare standards are high in Thailand, there are certain risks and safety concerns associated with traveling to a different country to receive any medical treatment. These safety concerns are something that you should keep in mind if you are planning to fly to Thailand and take advantage of affordable medical treatments.

### **Limited Insurance Options**

Some countries do not provide extensive coverage or time-sensitive insurance policies for certain treatments. Even if medical treatment is cheaper in another country, the limited insurance options or minimal coverage can add to the overall cost of the treatment. If a foreign patient suffers from a serious injury post-treatment or death, the patient might receive little to no insurance coverage. This can lead to a longer, more expensive stay at a hospital once the patient returns to their home country.

### **Potential Medical Risks**

Unwell patients traveling thousands of miles away from their home countries are vulnerable to health issues during the trip. Infections and cross-contamination are higher when a sick person travels overseas. Some patients can be exposed to infections they might not otherwise

encounter in their home countries. Patients returning home from medical treatment can pose a public health risk as well.

While some developing countries are fast becoming popular medical tourist destinations, some medical facilities do not adhere to the same healthcare standards as elite hospitals. This increases the risk of hospital-acquired infections and unsafe practices. Reusing needles between patients and other unsafe practices can lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Organ transplant is a common procedure in medical tourism destinations because these treatments are cheaper. However, such treatment increases the possibility of tissue rejection, severe to critical infectious complications, and blood transfusion risks. Some countries use blood from paid donors and may not be screened thoroughly. This increases the risk of blood infections.

Flying miles away from home after a medical procedure can pose certain risks. Pulmonary embolism or deep vein thrombosis is possible for traveling long distances. However, these can be avoided by drinking water, taking short walks every 2 to 3 hours, and wearing medical compression stockings during a long plane ride. If prescribed by your doctor, you can also take anti-clotting meds.

### **Post-Operation Injuries**

The body is fragile after going through a major operation. Flying back home after a procedure can be risky because it exposes the patient to injuries and accidents. Post-operation injuries are possible during and after treatment. Miscommunication due to a language barrier can potentially lead to an injury, such as getting the wrong medication, misunderstanding the instructions, or dose of a foreign medication.

In some cases, negligence and malpractice can happen, and it will be harder to file a complaint or a lawsuit because you are in a foreign country, and the process can be different from your home country. Again, blood from paid donors might not be screened as stringently as in some countries, and this can introduce infections or complications to the patients.

### **Poor Outcomes**

While many medical tourism destinations boast a high mortality rate and success rate, grave medical incidents can happen, and this can lead to poor outcomes.

For instance, elderly or high-risk patients who are already vulnerable to infections and health complications may not be good candidates for a medical procedure because the risk of death and poor outcomes are high. To avoid this, create a detailed medical history with your physician and include documents such as medical records, diagnostic tests, and medical reports. These documents will help foreign doctors accurately assess a potential patient's health condition and medical needs.

We also suggest calling prospective hospitals and asking the right questions regarding their guidelines and assessments for accepting medical tourists. Give a summary of your medical history for a more accurate assessment.

Sometimes a simple call is not enough to determine whether you're a good candidate for a particular procedure. You can request additional information from your attending physical or current hospital/clinic about medications and previous illnesses you had in the past. Such information is critical for patients requiring organ transplants, cardiac surgery, and complex weight loss procedures.

### **Risk of Cross-Border Infections**

The risk of acquiring serious infections such as dengue, influenza, malaria, and typhoid fever is higher among medical tourists visiting sub-tropical countries like Thailand and Malaysia. Costa Rica, India, and Malaysia, for example, have a higher risk of amoebic dysentery, hepatitis A and B, and tuberculosis compared to the United States and Europe.

Swine fever, yellow fever, bird flu, ebola, and Marburg hemorrhagic fevers are also more common in developing countries.

Traveler sickness caused by viral and bacterial infection is also common in tourist destinations because of the prevalence of norovirus, salmonella, and E. coli bacteria. COVID-19, measles, influenza, and other infectious lung diseases can be detrimental to foreign patients, particularly the elderly and the immuno-compromised.

There is also a greater risk of nosocomial infections when traveling overseas for treatments. These are infections linked with healthcare interventions and are common in hospitals such as:

- Urinary tract infections
- Respiratory pneumonia
- Surgical site wound infections
- Bacteremia, gastrointestinal infections
- Skin infections

Those with weak or compromised immune systems are the most vulnerable to nosocomial infections. Patients undergoing cancer treatments or suffering from diabetes and genetic immunodeficiency are also likely to contract these infections.

Thankfully, cross-border infections can be avoided through regular health checks, vaccination, and acquiring medical clearance or certificates. There are also medical travel programs that work with local infection disease control agencies to monitor patients and conduct containment plans to reduce the spread of infection.

Choosing a hospital that adheres to the strictest health and safety standards is also crucial in preventing cross-border infections. It's important to do a lot of research and call potential hospitals for inquiries related to infection control protocols these facilities have in place to avoid cross-border infections.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In-depth research is crucial to determine the ethical issues or [implications](#) that could possibly arise between your country and the destination chosen for a medical procedure.

A patient's overall health and well-being may be affected by the long travel. Time constraints, language barriers, long processing, and inadequate disclosure of risks can lead to miscommunication, which could cause the [failure](#) of the patient to achieve informed consent and autonomy. This can be prevented by obtaining as much information as possible, knowing the clinical outcomes well, and understanding the ethical concerns of receiving medical treatment in a specific country.

It's equally important to determine how your medical information is being used and stored. To maintain security, data usage should comply with domestic and international data protection [guidelines](#) for sensitive patient information. Choose a hospital with staff members that are fully aware of health information security and are complying with domestic and international data protection guidelines.

The destination country's legal system could also pose a significant concern because some countries lack malpractice insurance. There are countries where it's harder for foreign patients to conduct civil action. This can be prevented by understanding local laws pertaining to medical tourism and the dynamics of healthcare.

Medical travel packages in Thailand are offered to foreign patients, and patients must have a deep understanding of all the services covered by such products. Emergency insurance, medical complication insurance, and follow-up checkups may or may not be covered by these packages. That's why it pays to understand exactly what services you are paying for and develop a flexible financial plan to avoid any issues that may crop up during your stay.

## **Factors to Consider to Avoid Health and Safety Risks as a Medical Tourist**

While medical tourism has its risks, it's incredibly beneficial to foreign patients and medical providers alike. To minimize the risks, it's important to consider the following:

**Accreditation and certification:** Is the hospital recognized by international regulatory boards? is the surgeon board certified? Do they belong to an internationally recognized medical organization? Choose a competent medical provider to ensure a high success rate.

**Hospital accreditation:** Is the hospital equipped with the right tools and machines to conduct the treatment? Choose a hospital accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI) to ensure that the facility meets the highest safety and health standards. Thailand has over 60 JCI-accredited hospitals.

**Sanitation and cleanliness:** How do medical staff sterilize surgical tools? What equipment do they use to clean and disinfect the medical tools and hospital rooms in between patients? Choose a reputable hospital with a structured process in terms of cleanliness and sanitation to minimize the risk of post-op infections. It's best to choose a hospital that specializes in a specific procedure you plan to receive to increase the chances of success.

When it comes to medical tourism, it's important to check for expert evaluations and gain a deep understanding of a particular health facility's safety and quality standards instead of relying on internet reviews or hearsay. To make an informed decision and ensure the highest chances of success, focus on the reputation of the hospital and the medical staff, their safety practices, and the credentials of the health practitioners.