

Choosing the Right International Hospital

A Medical Tourism Company Perspective

August 2008



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This guidebook covers some of the key elements to keep in mind when selecting a clinic or hospital at an international destination. It also outlines what to look for if such a medical facility is required en route. In addition, it defines what a [medical tourism](#) company can and cannot do to assist someone who is on the lookout for affordable medical treatment abroad.



Why you may need medical care abroad ...?

- The first reason might be that an emergency arises while overseas.
- Secondly, you may need follow-up care for an existing condition when you are abroad.
- Thirdly, it might be for routine checkups like an annual physical or periodic dental screening and cleaning (especially in the event of a long-term overseas stay).
- Lastly, it might be that the primary purpose of your trip to a foreign country is for medical treatment or surgery (Medical Tourism).

Whatever the reason, it's important to have a good understanding of international quality medical care and know the course of action for handling medical needs that may arise when overseas.



Before your trip, it's a good idea to invest in medical travel insurance. Check whether your existing health insurance plan covers your overseas trip and stay before looking elsewhere. If you're not already covered, purchasing a good travel and health insurance plan is recommended.

Before deciding on a plan, know the insurance terms and conditions in detail. Good international travel insurance will have the added benefit of covering travel interruptions and delays, lost baggage, and travel documents. You can find inexpensive international travel insurance that simultaneously covers all these important aspects without leaving you broke.

If the trip is for a major medical procedure, follow-up care in the home country should be planned and arranged in advance. This may be arranged with the assistance of your local family physician, overseas doctor, or the medical tourism company you are working with.

For those of you whose homeland has publicly funded healthcare (like Canada or the UK) or whose health insurance is typically employer-provided (like the USA), you may not be used to paying directly in advance to the doctor or the hospital.

However in most countries, **you have to pay for your medical care before you are treated.** Hence, it's a good idea to find out from the hospital what the procedure is for your specific case. In such cases, carrying an internationally recognized credit card can come in handy. Also, confirm with the hospital in advance whether they accept the type of credit card you have or if some other means of payment is acceptable.



Following are ten important points to consider when deciding on a Medical Tourism Hospital.

1. The first thing to keep in mind about selecting an overseas hospital is the **international accreditations and certifications** the hospital has. An excellent choice would be a JCI ([Joint Commission International](#)) -accredited hospital. JCI is a not-for-profit organization that accredits hospitals worldwide based on their quality and safety of patient care. A hospital must go through rigorous quality compliance and audits to be granted such an accreditation. Other certifications like ISO (International Organization for Standardization) are also good indicators of the high quality of an overseas hospital. Affiliation of the hospital with other prestigious medical institutes (like Harvard Medical, Johns Hopkins) is another indicator that it might be a good choice.

2. Make sure the hospital's **doctors are board certified**, either in their own country or some other country with reputable medical care. If you plan to include medical care (treatment or checkup) as part of your trip, you can always request in advance the resume of the doctors who will treat you.

If a pre-existing condition requires a specialized checkup, test, or monitoring, it's important for you to make sure in advance that your international specialist is well qualified and fully aware of your case. It is quite customary for international doctors to talk to each other about a patient over the phone. You can even arrange a teleconference between the three of you, if you so choose. Your local doctor can help you select the right international follow-up care for your specific situation. The international physician should also be willing to work with your local physician in terms of both communication and medical records transfer. This co-operation is necessary for your continued care once you are back in your country. Hospitals that have dealt with international patients in the past should be able to address this area easily. Also, physicians working at such facilities are more acquainted with international patient care.

3. Select a **fully-integrated hospital over a clinic** whenever possible. A clinic usually has a limited array of services or caters to a particular medical specialty. An integrated hospital is one that offers all major specialties and medical procedures/facilities like ICU, blood bank, ER, MRI, X-ray, pathology, laboratory, pharmacy, doctors' offices, and more in the same place.

There are many advantages to this type of a hospital. To name a few: 1) Integrated hospitals usually offer a higher quality of service and physician quality is also consistently high as most good hospitals have stringent requirements for a doctor to meet before they can practice there; 2) You can avoid trips to multiple medical facilities while in a foreign land; 3) In the event of an emergency, you have everything available to you in one place, thus saving you critical time; 4) You deal with a single entity; and 5) For large hospitals, their reputation with foreigners is important. So, you are liable to receive preferential treatment.

Taking matters one step further, if the hospital has an International Patients department, a concierge service, a cafeteria, and accommodations for a patient with an accompanying guest, it would be even better.

A good medical tourism hospital should have availability of good recuperation centers or hotels that have the expertise to cater to patients' needs.



4. Does the **hospital staff understand your language**? It's important that either the staff members know your language or they at least have an International Patient department that addresses this communication issue. Clear and quick communication of your requirements to the attending physician and, similarly, the physician's message for you is important. Additionally, the physician should be able to understand your language in written form so as to be able to review your homeland medical records. If you are going on a planned medical trip overseas, talking to the physician in advance will help address these concerns.

5. What is the **reputation of the hospital among locals**? A good hospital will have a reputable local name. If possible, ask your international contacts for the hospital's reputation among the local people.



6. There are some **quality indicators** that you can request of a hospital. These indicators can be compared to the benchmarks in your country or any country where medical care quality is high. Some of the common quality indicators are mortality rate, Staph (Staphylococcus) infection rate, and nurse-to-patient ratio. In some countries, the trend is for hospitals to publish this data on the web, but in other countries, you have to ask the hospital for these numbers. In still other countries, this information is not available at all. One thing to note about quality indicators is that they are usually not available for new hospitals. This tendency arises because not enough data (patients treated) has been accumulated to provide a statistically accurate number.

Also, important point to note is that comparing or interpreting the quality indicators between two hospitals can be tricky & sometimes misleading. For example, mortality rate in a hospital where cosmetic surgery is done could be very different from that of a hospital where majority of the medical is cardiac surgery,

7. What surprises many Westerners is the very low-cost service international hospitals outside the Western world can provide. Medical services in places like India, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Thailand are often priced 60 to 90% less than they would be in the USA. Sometimes these low prices can be offered in spite of the fact that many of these medical centers have physicians who are more experienced and trained than their counterparts in the West. Overall cost is attributable to a number of factors, the primary ones being a less bureaucratic medical administration, lower salary expenditures, less litigious laws, and more efficient management.

When looking for a hospital or clinic overseas, one should be careful **not to seek out the lowest price in the same area** or country. Usually, a location's lowest-priced medical facility equates to low quality. This tendency arises either because the clinic or hospital lack business or the quality of the infrastructure or staff is compromised.



8. Another factor to consider is the **geographic location** of the healthcare center compared to where you will be residing while in the international locale. Many popular tourist destinations don't have a good transport infrastructure. Distance-wise, the location of the medical facility might be nearby, but due to a lack of infrastructure, it may take a long time to get there and prove a tiring trip. Keep this potentiality in mind when deciding upon a hospital.

9. What is the **attitude and acceptance level of the local population** toward foreign tourists, especially in relation to Medical Tourism? Making a medical trip to a city or country that does not have a welcoming attitude toward foreigners should be avoided as there is a healthy choice of medical-tourist-friendly location options from which to choose.

10. What is the current **patient experience**? The answer to this question can come in the form of patient-satisfaction surveys or even [medical tourism patient testimonials](#). This information can be requested from the hospital or a medical tourism company might have it available.

Examples of some hospitals that meet the above discussed criteria are [Hospital Clinica Biblica in Costa Rica](#), [Hospital Angeles in Mexico](#), [Wockhardt Hospital India](#), and [Apollo Hospitals, India](#).

If you are planning an international trip for a medical necessity (surgery or a specific medical treatment), working with a Medical Tourism Company that can help you select the right hospital for your needs is a good idea. **The cost to patients is usually the same whether they use the services of a Medical Tourism Company or go directly to the hospital. However, engaging the services of a Medical Tourism Company has some notable benefits.**

A competent Medical Tourism company can be an excellent source of information about overseas hospitals and physicians. Such companies have readily available information that can help you compare different hospitals, physicians, and countries, without having to gather information on your own. In addition to saving you time, a medical tourism company can assist you in medical loan financing, discounted travel arrangements, and other concierge services to make your trip more convenient, satisfying and economical.



One point to note is that **a Medical Tourism Company is not a medical advisory service**. Rather, it is a facilitator of information, logistics, and communication. [Medical Tourism FAQ](#) should help clarify this common confusion. Medical advice or recommendations can be given only by your physician.

About the Author: *Deepak Datta is an entrepreneur and president of **Med Tourism Co., LLC** ([Medical Tourism Corporation](#)), a Plano, TX-based Medical Tourism company. Medical Tourism Corporation's Web address is <http://www.medicaltourismco.com/>. The mission of the company is to have satisfied and happy medical tourists.*