Across Mexico, throughout the Caribbean, and into South America, patients are opting for makeover vacations. In Brazil you can get a breast augmentation followed by tango lessons, adventurous safaris before a face lift in South Africa, and a tummy tuck while you enjoy your recovery in a lavish resort in Thailand.

Recuperating from your surgery away from public scrutiny might be one tempting aspect. But, while the allure of convalescing in paradise after an operation might seem conspicuously candid, most people considering plastic surgery tourism are after one thing: affordability. Outside the States, cosmetic surgery costs a fraction of the price it does in this country. For example, a facelift normally costing around $10,000 in the United States would cost a meager $4,500 in South Africa. In Costa Rica, a tummy tuck costing $6,000 in the U.S. costs only $2,000. A breast augmentation in the Dominican Republic will only set you back $2,000 compared to the $7,000 it would cost in the United States.

For most Americans, an extreme makeover is a dream that is financially impractical. Cosmetic surgery vacations offer hope that surgical dreams can come true within budget. Because of this financial temptation for leaving the states, the Dominican Republic has developed into the Caribbean Mecca of “lipotourism.” Upwards of 1,000 Americans (and that number is growing) are reserving their surgery there every year. The enticement is so immensely alluring financially that people are neglecting to research their surgeon, the surgeon’s track record and training, and the surgical venue. Instead, they’re basing their decision wholly by word of mouth and sometimes climate. While many have had success, these cheap makeovers may come with life-threatening costs.

Dr. Linda Huang M.D., a Denver plastic surgeon who has been in practice for 18 years, explains, “There are two types of plastic surgery vacations: some doctors have trained in the United States and are certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery; others don’t have the proper training and experience.”

Americans’ attitudes towards plastic surgery haven’t always been the greatest. John Kerry’s consistent denial of Botox injections, Michael Jackson’s nose and Pamela Anderson’s larger than life breasts have reinforced this sentiment. But thanks to high profiles like Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi coming out of the plastic surgery closet, shows like Nip/Tuck, Extreme Makeover, The Swan, and Plastic Surgery: Before and After, we have entered a new paradigm. Today there is a wider acceptance and a larger aspiration for cosmetic surgery among mainstream Americans. With demand for cosmetic surgery increasing, cosmetic surgery vacations have come of age.

WHILE SURGICAL PROCEDURES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD ARE LURING AMERICANS TO COMBINE SUNSHINE AND STITCHES, MILEAGE PLUS EXPERIENCE CAN BE FOUND CLOSER TO HOME.

By L. Rustin Higbee

COSMETIC SURGERY VACATIONS: BEWARE
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In order to become board-certified in plastic surgery, a medical doctor must have graduated from an accredited medical school, completed a three-year residency in general surgery, completed a two-year residency in plastic surgery, completed comprehensive written and oral board examinations, and hold valid medical licenses in the state they are actively practicing.

A BOARD-CERTIFIED plastic surgeon is a good indication of his or her ability to provide you with experienced and safe cosmetic surgery. "With something as serious as surgery on your face or body" insists Dr. Grossman, “you might want to consider hearkening your decision on more than just price. A botched procedure can have serious implications and irreparable consequences."

Indeed, Plastic surgery has real risks. Among them you could recover from cancer, infectious loss of blood, excessive bleeding, problems with pain medications, blood clot, and even an aneurysm, which could potentially take your life. If your doctor is not prepared to deal with some of these potential problems properly, you could die.

"You don’t have to go abroad to get botched procedures," shares Dr. Grossman. "There are plenty of under qualified surgeons with fake accreditations and certifications right here in the States." Dr. Grossman had a patient in his office not too long ago who went to California to receive buttocks, chin, and brow implants. The patient chose a poorly qualified surgeon. He was expecting only a week of recovery time and ended up spending one month in the hospital.

For the following four months he traveled back and forth from Denver to California trying to fix his imperfect scars and implants. Frustrated with his surgeon and the lack of positive results, the man consulted with Dr. Grossman. The patient had to have his buttock implants removed so that new ones could be inserted properly. The total time and money spent tripled what it would have cost had the man chosen a qualified surgeon to begin with.

THERE ARE PINE PLASTIC SURGEONS
worldwide. South America and Great Britain have some of the finest surgeons in the world, according to Dr. Grossman. Presumably the surgeons have industries that supply the surgeons—appointments that can help to avoid further complications especially if an infection has developed.

Dr. Huang encourages all her patients to seek out a qualified local surgeon in their own state. Accordingly, she encourages patients from states away who seek her expertise to reconsider the value of the follow-up appointments with any surgeon—appointments that can help to avoid further complications especially if an infection has developed.

"Sometimes the biggest problem about going overseas is the language barrier," reports Dr. Huang. "Communication is important between patient and surgeon because the patient has to be able to explain what their goals are and the surgeon has to be able to clarify what is a realistic:
**What to ask your potential Surgeon?**

- **How long have you been practicing? How often do you perform?**
  
  You need to uncover the frequency of your surgeon’s performance with the particular surgery you’re inquiring about. Obviously, the more frequent your surgeon does this particular surgery the better performance you can expect.

- **Are you certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?**
  
  If your surgeon claims that he or she is Board certified, ascertain whether or not they are telling the truth. Visit www.abplasurg.org to verify physician certification through the American Board of Medical Specialties.

- **What are the common complications of this surgery? What are the risks involved?**
  
  Your surgeon’s honesty with this question should help determine your level of comfort, while increasing your trust in his or her ability to handle the problem.

- **Where will you perform my surgery? Is the facility accredited?**
  
  Some surgeons are performing their operations in their offices because they don’t have the proper credentials to do so in a hospital.

- **How capable are you at treating an emergency?**

  You need to know what their resuscitative capacity is. Do they have the proper equipment and training to deal with an emergency or will they be admitting you to a hospital.

- **What kind of anesthesia will be used? Who will be administering the anesthesia?**

  A nurse anesthetist is a good substitute, but most professional surgeons should have an anesthesiologist on their team during your surgery.
Patients should know that I am not in the business of selling surgery. During a consultation we will sit down and establish what your goals are and how we can achieve them, but I will never try to sell you a procedure I feel is unnecessary," he says. His services, however, sell themselves.

With a reputation for being Colorado’s most well-known plastic surgeon, Dr. Grossman, who has offices in both Denver, Colorado and Beverly Hills, California, has worked on some of Hollywood’s most famous faces. A true industry veteran, he has been devoted to helping his patients realize their true beauty and attain their desired goals for the past thirty years.

Dr. Grossman offers patient services ranging from body contouring to facial rejuvenation to breast enhancement. Certified by both the American Board of Plastic Surgery and the American Board of Surgery, Dr. Grossman has the credentials to back up his status. He is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) and has been spotlighted nationally as a guest speaker on CNN, NBC, CBS and ABC television. He also currently serves as an expert medical source for ABC News.

As for the future of cosmetic enhancement, this industry leader believes that all procedures are on the rise, but body contouring seems to be especially popular. “There will be explosive growth in the number of post-bariatric procedures performed,” Dr. Grossman states. “This means an increase in the amount of body contouring we will see as a result of the sagging skin that accompanies dramatic weight loss,” he continues.

From the minute you walk through his doors, you’ll know that you are in the right place. And although he is renowned and praised in the country’s hotbeds for cosmetic enhancement, Dr. Grossman is completely in tune with Colorado patients.

“Colorado is not quite as extreme or faddish as L.A. or Miami, but patients throughout the state still like to look good. The key is to deliver a natural looking result that still makes a difference.”