

# A Life-changing Trip

Combining cosmetic surgery with a holiday in the sun seems to make sense as the recovery period can be spent relaxing by the pool, shopping or dining out. **Heba Hashem** reports on the rise of medical tourism.

**T**HE CLOCK IS TICKING slower than usual, or that's how it feels for Jumana, who is waiting for her final consultation before the 'big day'. She will be undergoing liposuction on the abdominal area followed by a tummy tuck. Jumana is visiting Dubai from Kuwait and is excited about her plans for the recovery period. All signs of fear fade away as thoughts

of shopping, dining and relaxing by the beach fill her head. For a few moments the surgery seems to be the least of her worries. She continues to visualise her holiday but now she can also see herself clearly in the picture: she looks different – with a shapelier figure and a perfect smile.

This is the latest medical trend to hit Dubai. In fact, it is a worldwide trend. South America and Mexico have

long been known for affordable plastic surgery, attracting many North American neighbours. "Travelling patients or medical tourism as it is called, is not something new. Patients often travel abroad for treatments that could not be performed in their own countries," says Dr. Ioannis Salviras, plastic surgeon at the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Hospital, a seven-star boutique



A deluxe room in the Al Janaen suite at the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Hospital (AACSH).

hospital. Operating from Dubai Healthcare City, the AACSH takes plastic surgery to another level. The hospital is not only known for its non-invasive anti-ageing and reconstructive surgical procedures, but also for the royalty and presidential suites that can only be accessed by private elevators.

With the continuous sunshine, shopping malls, serene beaches and award-winning restaurants, Dubai has come to represent for many, the ideal 'cosmetic vacation'.

**MORE IMPORTANTLY**, Dubai's tax-free status attracts high qualified plastic surgeons from around the world, with facilities that are high in quality and lower in price compared to the UK and European countries. Dubai particularly appeals to residents of GCC countries, Europe and Africa. Interestingly, expatriates working in Afghanistan are also encouraged by the advanced dental treatments in this nearby city.

Most surgeons agree that the main reason plastic surgery is constantly in demand is the promised rewards of social acceptance and occupational success. "A patient will usually seek cosmetic surgery or dentistry to boost their self-confidence and to improve or change their appearance", says Dr. Mario Trelles – President of the European Laser Association and Specialist plastic surgeon at Vilafortuny. Yet the rewards are more than just better looks. "Beautiful people usually have better chances of obtaining a job and succeeding in their career," adds Dr. Trelles.

Vilafortuny is Dubai's first laser centre for dentistry and cosmetic surgery. The surgeons at this state-of-the-art clinic put emphasis on laser technology. "Laser cosmetic surgery and dentistry is less traumatic than the standard procedures. This means that sometimes it doesn't require stitches, leaving less noticeable scars and swelling after the procedure," explains Dr. Marwan Al Zarouni, Sweden-trained plastic surgeon at Vilafortuny.



The grandiose anti-aging reception at the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Hospital.

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The first laser centre in Dubai, Vilafortuny offers cutting edge laser technology for use in cosmetic surgery and dentistry.



Dr. Salviras, plastic surgeon at the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Hospital

Other advantages of laser surgery are the rapid and comfortable recovery, which can be 48 hours compared to several days with standard procedures.

“A few years ago we could not even imagine the possibility of changing

our image for good. Now we have revolutionary methods to achieve goals safely and easily with predictable results and minimum recovery downtime,” explains Dr. Salviras. The AACSH surgeon believes that the main motivation is desire for beauty and lasting youth, although it could also go back to seeking acceptance by the community and sometimes to stand out amongst others. The possibility of a better future and job, and even a better life companion, are other driving factors.

**IN THE** Middle East demand is highest for facial procedures such as face-lifts, botox treatments, facial fillers and rhinoplasties (nose jobs). On the other hand, liposuction, a procedure that only takes a few hours, is also a very popular fat removal technique. Relying on an aspiration machine that could be laser, ultrasound or vibration-assisted, liposuction targets ‘stubborn’ fat cells that

are resistant to other ways of elimination, such as diet or exercise, due to hormonal insensibility. Do we have limits regarding the amount of tissue that can be removed? The answer is yes, according to Dr. Salviras. “Based on worldwide health regulations and for safety reasons, we cannot remove more than seven per cent of a patient’s weight in fat. If there is a need for more fat removal, another session is scheduled six months later”.

Liposuction is for body contouring and reshaping only. It cannot substitute nutritional guidance and exercise. Although the tendency to put on weight is often influenced by the environmental and genetic composition, in most cases it is the sedentary lifestyle that seems to be playing the major role in weight gain.

Mariam Saleh, nutrition manager at the American Hospital in Dubai, explains. “Putting on weight seems to be easier after the age of 18 in females and after the age of 21 in males. As a result, crash diets have become very popular as they are seen as a quick fix to a weight problem. However, what people don’t take into consideration is that this method is only temporary and damages the body and mind. We are not fans of slimming pills or liquid diets. It is not the natural way to lose weight. We only

**“The myth that claims plastic surgery is for women only is long gone. Nowadays men also have the right and necessity to be good-looking in a society that always demands perfection.”**



State-of-the-art dental procedures have slashed recovery times. Treatments can be done in a matter of hours with less than two days to recover.

“The common problems of large spaces, overlapping or protruding teeth can be resolved with new developments in using veneers rather than crowns.”

use such methods in extreme situations with very high levels of obesity and where the patient has a failed weight loss history.”

**DESPITE THE** growing trend for medical tourism, nearly all doctors are quick to issue some warnings. It’s one thing to admire Angelina Jolie’s smile, Jennifer Lopez’s curves or Naomi Campbell’s legs, but to have surgery to emulate such features needs to be considered carefully. Dr Salviras advises that patients, “Always get to know your surgeon and hospital’s profile before proceeding. Fancy ‘Hollywood type’ websites are appealing but usually misleading and deceiving. Never, ever let the cost be the main influencing factor for your choice.”

“Practice makes perfect”, says Dr.



Cosmesurge has conducted over 17,000 operations and has an all female surgical team available.

Sawaf, CEO of Cosmesurge. The clinic, which is part of Emirates Hospital, runs a comprehensive programme to turn back the clock on both external aging and internal aging. With six branches in the UAE alone and more than 17,000 successful operations, Cosmesurge strongly believes in teamwork and practice. “No one surgeon – no matter how good he or she is – can be a true master of 62 different cosmetic procedures”, says Dr. Sawaf. “The right surgeon for you will be the one who has done the procedure you want numerous times on people with features similar to yours. It does not matter what degree he

or she attained 20 years ago.” Taking into consideration the privacy required by female patients in this region, Cosmesurge has ensured the availability of an all-female surgical team, including nurses and aesthetic surgeons.

The advice applies very much to men also as contrary to general perceptions, men secretly desire cosmetic surgery as well, especially facial procedures and liposuction for persistent bulges.

“Surprisingly, over the last few years, we have noticed an increased demand for cosmetic procedures amongst men. Both invasive and non-invasive,” says Dr. Salviras. “The myth that claims plastic



World-renowned dental pioneer Dr. Michael Apa will be making visits to Dubai to offer expert cosmetic smile enhancements.

surgery is for women only is long gone. Nowadays men also have the right and necessity to be good-looking in a society that always demands perfection.” Although cosmetic surgery appeals to more women

than men, surveys indicate that cosmetic dentistry appeals to both genders equally.

**LASER DENTISTRY** is the ideal approach to dental problems. Dr. Lene Holm Nielsen, who has worked for more than 15 years in Dubai and now operates from Vilafortuny, specialises in laser treatments for gum disease. “When applied, laser dentistry minimises bleeding because the high energy beams help in the clotting of exposed blood vessels, thus inhibiting blood loss. Those beams also sterilise the area being worked on, which minimises bacterial infections.” The list of benefits continues: wounds heal faster, tissue can be regenerated and the use of dental lasers in fillings eliminates the need for traditional techniques such as local anaesthetic injection.

One of the first dentists to operate in

Dubai was Dr. Nicolas, who began his practice in 1991. Years later his clinic expanded and he re-opened, this time with husband and wife team, Dr. Sven and Joan Asp: two prominent Swedish dentists. The common problems of large spaces, overlapping or protruding teeth can be resolved with new developments in using veneers rather than crowns.

Dr. Nicolas explains that: “Veneers are very thin and rigid shells made of ceramic material and they are uniquely constructed in the laboratory after taking an impression of the teeth. Once these veneers are bonded to the teeth, the result is an improved and very natural look.”

The number of medical tourists coming to Dubai for a ‘smile makeover’ is on the up. The highly respected and long established dentist Dr. Michael Formenius has also seen a marked increase in patients

opting for cosmetic smile enhancements, with many of the patients travelling to his clinics from overseas. The trend looks set to continue with the arrival of the world-renowned New York dentist, Dr. Michael Apa – a pioneer in cosmetic dentistry and widely known for treating the Hollywood A-list and royalty – who is now offering treatment at Dr. Formenius’ dental clinics.

Beauty seems to matter more and more in the modern world and infuses society in ever more pervasive ways. For an increasing number of people it is not a vain endeavour to seek plastic surgery and a nicer smile. There are clear psychological benefits as people feel more confident and better about themselves. So although leading a healthy lifestyle is the best medicine, when it comes to our perceptions of beauty, there are available routes and the desired look is not out of reach. ■