

The desire to look good and stay young at affordable rates has tourists from all over the globe backpacking to India, especially Bangalore, for cosmetic work, says **Asha Chowdary**

For \$10, look young forever

The age of the tourist, who came to India with only a suitcase and a slight seeing itinerary is far behind. Many of them now arrive with the intention of going in for medical treatment or for some cosmetic work. According to dermatologists across the country, the number of tourists who plan cosmetic procedures while on holiday has risen exponentially, mainly because of highly qualified doctors who offer treatments at unbelievably low prices and because of the well equipped hospitals that offer world class medical care.

"There could soon be promotions that tell tourists to 'Experience the Backwaters and the Beauty of Botox' or to 'Check out the Taj and get a tummy tuck too,'" says Dr Anil Abraham, Professor & Head, Dermatology, St. John's Medical College Hospital. "Many tourists now

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feel that, for the price of an Incredible India holiday they can manage some state-of-the-art procedures, too."

The desire to look good and stay young for as long as possible without becoming bankrupt has led to an influx of patients heading to India for aesthetic work.

Tourists from the Middle East, France, Germany, USA, UK and Japan come in for cosmetic procedures that could range from botox, laser hair removal, chemical peels to rejuvenation procedures. More and more Americans and Europeans have been arriving for these procedures due to the staggering costs and long waits in their own countries.

American national, Melinda Carey a 46-year-old flight attendant was not too worried about her age, until one day, when she realised that her facial asymmetry and the resultant laughter lines on her face had started impacting her life. As Carey grew older, the asymmetry became even more marked, and the



laugh lines on the right side of her face became a very deep furrow. "When I started getting passed up for flights, I thought my career was over," she reported. "Every doctor I consulted in the US suggested surgery for right cheek bone correction. Surgery was not an option for me financially and practically." Carey decided to contact an Indian doctor, Dr Debrinj Shome, and he performed a non-surgical procedure, which worked like a charm, and she's gone back to her country as a happy woman.

Says Dr Shome, Consultant Facial Plastic Surgeon & Head, Institute of Aesthetic Surgery, Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad, "The cost factor always attracts foreigners to India for aesthetic procedures. To understand how much the costs vary, we could look at it like this: If a surgery were to cost \$100 in the US, it would cost \$50 in Singapore, \$30 in Thailand

and only \$10 in India. The fact that patients can get aesthetic work done at one tenth of the cost, is very attractive to them. I have had many patients coming for complex procedures like facial palsy, or correcting a cleft palate but there are also many from the US, coming in for face lifts, rhinoplasty, fillers, Botox, chin implants and other such procedures."

According to Dr Abraham, the glycolic peel is most popular among foreign patients, followed by pigmentation correction procedures, lasers for scars and growths, acne procedures and hair transplants. "I think the days when we aspired to be merely on par with doctors abroad is a thing of the past," he says. "Affordable medical care in India is more than comparable with the best standards in the West. In several niche areas of cosmetology and trichology key opinion leaders are increasingly

emerging from India on the world map."

Dr Chytra V Anand, Medical Director, Kosmoderma, says there has been a 15% increase in foreign patients over the last two years. But according to her, the prices of procedures can vary. "The laser procedures here cost one fourth of the cost in other countries," she says.

"The surgical costs are 75% less and as for the injectables like Botox and fillers, the costs are at least 25% less than what they are in some countries. But another key point is all skin types are different and the treatments and results depend on the race of the person. Those looking for good deals will definitely shop around. There will be a greater growth in the number of patients coming in to India, provided we can maintain the standards and level of care with our doctors and establishments."

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