

A Consumer's Guide for  
Patient's Considering  
"Vacation" or "Holiday"  
**DENTISTRY**

*Especially* If You Need Dental  
Implants and Reconstructive or  
Cosmetic Dentistry



*By Dr. Irfan Atcha*

**A Consumer's Guide for Patient's Considering  
"Vacation" or "Holiday" Dentistry  
Especially If You Need Dental Implants and  
Reconstructive or Cosmetic Dentistry**

Dear Patient,

I've been asked by your dentist to prepare this guide on the benefits and risks of "vacation" dentistry. I hope you find it as enlightening and are just as surprised by what I found after performing research around the globe.

**Warning!** At times, I must be blunt with what you are going to read. Why? Because glossing over important dental health issues and sugar coating the human suffering that usually results when dentistry is done improperly would be an absolute failure of my professional duty. In fact, out of professional duty is exactly why your doctor requested this guide be developed for your benefit.

The patient stories interspersed throughout this guide are quite real and sadly, just the tip of the iceberg, of what's happening to most patients that take dental "holidays." These stories should be carefully read and studied by anyone considering a "dental vacation" because they show in real terms how easily what is being sold as a "holiday" can easily, and often does, become a long road to suffering, infection, and pain. Literally---a road to dental hell.

***Step Right Up and Get a Great Deal!***

As consumers, we all love a great "deal" right? But "great deals" sometimes seem too good to be true. In fact, there is an old saying when it comes to deals. 'If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.' This guide was put together so you can gain understanding about the hidden costs of what might appear superficially to be a great dental "deal" when in reality it will likely come with hidden surprises as time goes by.

***Long Term Health is Part of Your Dental Health***

Yes, much of what this guide is about is your long term dental health but it's also about your long term systemic (whole body) health since science continues to show, almost daily, that our oral health affects our entire body's health more than we previously imagined.

Chronic dental conditions can put you at higher risk for heart attack, Alzheimer's, pancreatic cancer, various issues with pregnancy and make it more difficult to manage issues like diabetes and heart disease. Not the kind of health problems to laugh at or thinking lightly about. Be aware that many of the patients whose stories are mentioned in this guide experienced an increase in the types of dental conditions and infections that are directly tied to these health issues.

***Hungary:*** A patient traveled from Dublin, Ireland to save 5,000 Euros (\$7500 US) on her dental treatment. The crowns broke within a few months and many of the crowned teeth required root canals due to pain and infection. To fix all the mistakes, the patient was forced to pay 11,000 Euros back in Ireland.

In the internet age, information is powerful but the complete truth is something that often times gets left out of the “deals too good to be true” that one easily finds on the internet.

Here’s a harsh truth: If you are considering complex types of dentistry where several teeth are being replaced or your entire mouth is being reconstructed with crowns, cosmetic dentistry, or dental implants a ‘too good to be true deal’ comes with a near guarantee of long term problems that few “vacation dentists” will be willing to discuss with you. Sadly, many of these dentists don’t even understand the long term consequences of the treatment they perform and the components of treatment they don’t understand and leave out.

***Thailand:*** A patient from New Mexico spent \$26,000 for 4 upper and 4 lower implants with removable implant dentures. Two of the upper implants were put into one of her sinus cavities. The other 2 upper implants punctured the bone under her nose causing severe pain. At a minimum, re-treatment will be over \$50,000.

### **There ARE Great Dentists Everywhere.....BUT There’s A Catch**

This guide isn’t meant as a “put down” to every dentist who lives in a country where one could travel to see a dentist because in truth there are great dentists in every country. Why? Because the best dentists, from around the world, train and educate themselves in many of the same institutions. But there is a catch.....

In the countries where one finds “vacation” dentistry predominantly advertised, the very best dentists (those who were educated in the best schools) will charge JUST as much and probably MORE than your qualified dentist where you live. The majority of these dentists would not be willing to see you for the fee that your local dentist would charge. The second catch is that these well trained dentists are just a tiny sliver of the dentist population—no more than 10% of all dentists.

In fact, in these same countries, the very best dentists are busy treating the wealthiest class of patients. They aren’t going to bother or think about setting up a clinic where “deals” or “vacations” are offered. They simply don’t need to. It is the remaining 90% of dentists in those locations who are not qualified to perform what they advertise to unsuspecting patients from Western Europe, North America, and Australia/New Zealand.

**Mexico:** 2 sisters in their early thirties went to Mexico for a dental vacation and had all their “smile” teeth (the front 10 teeth) crowned for \$300 per tooth. Supposedly, the dentist was trained in the US and said that lower labor costs was why he could give them such a great “deal.” They came back and the color of the teeth wasn’t right and their gums were puffy because of the poor design. The younger sister’s jaw was locked into an overbite causing her to have joint (TMJ) pain. She required treatment to heal her jaw joints and all of her crowns had to be redone for over \$1,000 per tooth. The older sister needed many root canals because of damage to the teeth during her “vacation.” She also wound up having 18 of the 20 “vacation” crowns re-done.

*But what if you need only 1 or 2 teeth treated?*

If you really need just 1 or 2 crowns or fillings, and your mouth is in perfect dental health in every way besides those 1 or 2 teeth, by all means, have fun on vacation and get your dentistry done.

That type of simple dentistry can be performed well but many more dentists—even some of those advertising “vacation” dentistry.

The only caution is to perform due diligence related to the sterilization of instruments and how the local clinic is testing and ensuring that its sterilizer meets the standards of your home country. Why? The primary reason is that there is very little (if any) government requirements on how these clinics operate or how well they sterilize their instruments.

**Hungary:** A patient from the UK travels to have implants put in and decided he’ll have the teeth built back in the UK. His local dentist finds that only ½ of the number of implants normally needed for the situation were actually used and could not complete the dentistry as the patient had expected due to the under-engineered support.

**“Fast and Cheap Oftentimes Means Quick and Dirty—Dirty Instruments that Is....”**

Why be concerned about sterile dental instruments, after all, the mouth’s a dirty place, right? Well, here’s why. Unsterile dental instruments have been shown to have the ability to transmit diseases between patients. While, the thing that immediately comes to mind might be HIV or AIDS, in reality that isn’t the main risk with “dirty” instruments in the vacation dentistry clinic. The real issue is hepatitis (jaundice)--a disease that routinely destroys one’s liver. Roughly 10% of the entire world’s population has a form of hepatitis and **the majority don’t even know it.....**

Unclean dental instruments, easily spread the virus that causes hepatitis. Because it takes a significant amount of time before a patient discovers that their liver is failing, it is

doubtful that patients who become infected with hepatitis in the “vacation” dental clinic will ever link their liver problems back to the dental treatment.

***Bulgaria:*** *An Israeli patient travels to Bulgaria for new upper teeth (non-removable) on 4 implants and a lower bridge reconstruction for \$2,000. The patient, a plumber, complained of pain while working at a local Israeli dentist’s house. After examining and x-raying him, the dentist finds that the upper implants were placed improperly in the jaw bone and are literally falling out. The lower bridge also needed to be removed since it had been built on teeth that were in no condition for supporting the bridgework. The dental worked looked pleasing from the outside, but the foundation under the dentistry was a disaster. The re-treatment cost will be \$30,000.*

**A Universal Truth with Dentistry—especially Dentistry that includes 3 or more Teeth**

Complex dentistry such as replacing missing teeth with implants, reconstructing your entire mouth, or almost any surgical dental procedure, comes with the short term (a few weeks to a few months) risks with treatment for things like infection, poor healing, and other unplanned discoveries that can happen during actual procedures. The short term risks have an increased chance of happening when the instruments are unsterile and dirty.

For those that don’t enjoy the thought of being in pain or getting an infection while on holiday hundreds or thousands of miles/kilometers from home, these short term risks are reason enough not to consider vacation dentistry as a viable option.

While those short term risks sound like a problem, the long term risks are actually a much greater issue.

***Mexico:*** *The patient had a new upper denture and had lower dental implants put in for supporting a lower implant denture. She began having pain and swelling. Her entire lower left jaw had become infected inside the bone structure. She had to undergo reconstructive grafting (bone from her hip) to the jaw structure. If that wasn’t enough, the upper denture was also ugly in appearance.*

The much greater (and expensive) issue is the long term risks with your dentistry—especially if complex types of dentistry are needed. This risk is due to a universal law that we all must live with. That law is: everything breaks and everything breaks down—our bodies, our mouths, and yours and my dentistry all must abide by this rule. How fast or how slow dental work breaks is all related to the engineering side of the dentistry.

Fundamentally Dentistry is: 1 part Biology, 1 part Art, and 2 parts Engineering. It is the 2 parts engineering that either gives your dentistry decades of success for comfortable chewing, a pleasing smile, and long term health or leads to early catastrophic failure.

It is also the 2 parts engineering portion of dentistry that becomes increasingly important **anytime** dentistry becomes complex. **(BTW: Complex dentistry is any treatment that deals with 3 or more teeth).**

Engineering sounds complicated, so, let's look at an example that everyone can understand.

### **How Under-Engineering Kills.....**

You're probably familiar with the term "dental bridge." We're not going to spend any time discussing dental bridges but we are going to spend a moment discussing real bridges. [By the way, dental bridges for the vast majority of situations are an out dated 19th century form of treatment that usually leads to more tooth loss because of the destructive nature of the device. Dentures and partial dentures, which also destroy teeth and bone structure, are even more dated having been born and essentially unchanged since the 18th century!]

*Mexico: The patient visited Mexico and had more than 20 new crowns made. The cosmetics were great but the fit of the crowns was far below any normal standard. In fact, there was so much food collecting, she complained of bad breath that she could smell all the time and complained of never being able to get her gums to stop bleeding following treatment. All of her new dentistry needs to be redone to solve the problem.*

A simply way to understand the critical engineering side of dentistry and what it means in regards to your dental work is not by thinking about "dental bridges" but about the kind of bridges that you and I drive or ride across in cars, buses, metros and trains.

Imagine a large and important local bridge somewhere near you. You, your friends, and your family all drive or ride across it quite frequently. In addition to the people you know who use the bridge, there are many business workers, tourists, and school children that also cross the bridge every day.

The odds are very good that it was constructed and reinforced in ways that allow it to bear the daily stress and strain of the weight of the traffic crossing over it for 50-100 years before it would need replacement or any type of serious repair. Furthermore, it was constructed in a way that the risk of a catastrophic collapse during use was essentially impossible. In fact, when was the last time you heard of a local bridge collapsing? Most likely your answer was never or rarely and there are reasons for such a thing not being a common occurrence.

So back to your local bridge: We'll pretend that over 60 years of cars, buses, trains, etc. have now used the bridge and it is now time for your local city or town to replace the bridge.

**Thailand:** *A patient needing \$15,000 in complex dentistry traveled from LA to Thailand. The clinic booked his first class airfare, hotel, and two weeks in Thailand for his dental care. The total cost was \$7,500 including the dentistry. The patient's bite (how the upper and lower teeth fit together for chewing) was so poorly designed that it began breaking his other dentistry into pieces. This same dentistry had been handling the daily stress of chewing without problems before he got the great "deal." The local dentist feeling sorry for the patient agreed to re-treat for a less than normal fee. Total fee to re-treat the problems was still \$21,000.*

Your local government obtains a number of cost estimates from bridge builders to make the new bridge. The bids come in and are reviewed. As it turns out, a new construction company from another country also submits a bid that is incredibly low compared to all the other bids. The local leaders are quite attracted to this bid because it is literally 90% less than the investment required to build the new bridge with any of the other local bridge builders.

Few of the citizens would probably think of the foreign country where this bridge builder is located as a place that is modern or up to 21st century standards by any measurement. However, the local leaders rationalize this by assuming that if the company calls itself a bridge building company surely they know what they are doing because how could there really be differences in companies that build bridges?

The foreign company in their proposal states that not only will they give the city a great 'deal' but they promise the "exact same" result that a local company would deliver. They go so far as to tell the leaders that with the cost savings the entire city council could take a "vacation" and still have left over money to spend on other local town needs.

**Hungary:** *A UK patient goes to have some upper bridgework performed replacing half of her upper teeth. Obvious problems in other areas of her mouth that doom the new dentistry were completely ignored. The new dentistry failed within a year and the original problem is far worse than it originally was*

During the discussion, the foreign construction company does forget to tell the town leaders a few important details about why the proposal was 90% less.

Here are the details left out of the proposal.....

Important detail #1 left out: Because we're from a country where there are no real standards for the construction of safe bridges, we don't feel the local rules and regulations regarding safe bridge construction are really necessary. In fact, we're going

to intentionally ignore the safety standards since we don't have to adhere to such things in our home country.

Important detail #2 left out: The "vacation" bridge builder fails to explain that when they say "the exact same thing," it only means that the new bridge will look the same in the visible areas (the part everyone can see). In all of the hidden areas, there will be big differences. In the important areas that actually keep the bridge from collapsing, they will use only 10% of the normal support structures for the bridge and they will use metals that aren't approved for use to build bridges with.

As it turns out, the real secret on how they could magically save the town money was by not building the normal number of footings, pilings, support columns, and arches under the bridge. By leaving those things out, they could cut costs dramatically.

These left out details meant that all the things that keep a bridge safe for use were not included with the bid to build the bridge nor would they be included in the final product.

***Mexico:** A patient had lower implants done to replace her missing back molars. The implants were put into the wrong locations and as a result she still had to wear a partial denture. More implants were placed and a highly technical "work around" performed to get her out of the partial denture but it cost her 2X the original fee to fix the mistakes.*

Their bridge proposal turns out to be closer to what one would expect for building a fake Hollywood movie set. While things appear quite normal on the camera side, everyone knows in reality that there's nothing behind the set. We also know that movie sets are only good for making movies not actually for use in the real world.

The town leaders foolishly decide that the "deal" is too good to pass up and approve the foreign company to start building the city's new bridge as soon as possible. Bridge building commences and astonishingly enough, the bridge is finished in record time since it takes far less time to construct bridges missing most of the support structures!

Upon completion, the leaders walk across the bridge thinking of all the money saved and admiring that the road over the bridge appears to be the same as when the old bridge had been new the very first time. They congratulate themselves for saving so much money and they follow the bridge builder's advice and take vacations with the saved funds as a reward for their astute business sense.

The "vacation" company heads back to their country and the public gradually goes about their daily routines and begin to use the bridge.

***Hungary:** A patient went to have lower implants to replace several lower missing front teeth and several upper missing teeth. As part of the treatment, the Hungarian dentist 'ground down' many healthy natural teeth on each side of her implants [the reason to have*

*implants in the first place—so the natural teeth aren't ground down!]. The lower implants failed within a couple of years leaving a huge area of damage in the jaw bone. She couldn't afford to fix the damage and had to get a regular dental bridge which will eventually lead to more teeth being lost. With her upper implants, the dental work had to re-done because there was no way to clean the dentistry to keep it healthy.*

Time passes.....and the new bridge is being used just as often and by as many travelers as before. Things are okay for a year and half. Then tragically, one morning during a normal rush hour, without warning or sign of problem, the bridge ruptures in the middle creating a gap in the structure nearly 150 meters (50 yards) in length. Dozens of cars, a school bus, and a street car fall into the massive hole leading to over twenty deaths and several hundred being severely injured.

The missing support structures left out during construction by the foreign company, that would normally keep such a bridge safe, had condemned the bridge to the failure. In reality, with proper construction, it should have been safe for at least 50 years of daily use of normal traffic. Accusations are made and investigations undertaken. The local leaders complain to the provincial rule makers and regulators but quickly find they have no way to deal with the “vacation” company who is now long gone by the time of the collapse and deaths. The leaders also learn that because the “vacation” company is headquartered outside their country, they have no legal means to force the company to do anything about their faulty construction and engineering.

Realizing that there is nothing can be done to the foreign company that performed the shoddy construction, the local leaders call one of the original local bridge building companies that couldn't match the “deal” submitted by the “vacation” company to get a new estimate for once again replacing the bridge.

After examining the failed bridge, the local company reports back that because of the type of ‘corner-cutting’ construction used by the foreign company that much of the earth on each side of the bridge has been so severely damaged that the new reconstruction of the bridge is now far more complex than the original replacement ever would have been.

Because of the new level of complexity, they report that in order to build a safe bridge, the cost will now be at least double and perhaps even quadruple the original estimate. Furthermore, due to all of the new issues, it will take twice as long as if the bridge had been built correctly the first time.

***Portugal:*** *One of Portugal's most skilled dentists reports that the majority of the dentists in her country are not capable of delivering 'dental-holiday' treatment of low cost and good quality. She*

*routinely treats patients who had mistakes made and winds up charging more than the regular cost would have taken back in their home country to fix the mistakes.*

### **The Same Thing Applies to Your Mouth, Your Teeth, and Complex Dentistry**

This scenario of missing engineering and failure to adhere to standards that prevent catastrophic collapse under normal daily use is EXACTLY what you must be concerned about when it comes to the engineering side of your dental work. Like it or not, as the dentist and as the patient, it is this factor which makes for long term success and decades of use with the dentistry.

***Hungary:*** *A patient traveled to Hungary to have all of her teeth crowned. Within 3 months of her return, she had multiple infections throughout her jaw. The crowns had to be removed and the nerve/root structures treated again to rid her of the infections*

“Corner-cutting” dental treatment is happening worldwide in countries where patients are being promised unbelievable “deals.” The “deal” is a side effect of the under-engineering.

The “vacation” dentist and dentistry being performed is outside the legal and regulatory boundaries of your country and the majority of doctors performing the dentistry are not meeting current engineering standards required for the long term success of the dentistry.

Just as in the non-dental example from the world of bridge construction, over the short term (6 months to maybe 18 months) things may seem fine with the dentistry but with the normal everyday use of eating and talking issues appear, deterioration is seen, and catastrophic collapses are very common. Pain and infection all come along for the ride. Under-engineering means the complex dentistry fails far sooner than if properly designed.

#### ***Mexico:***

*Grace, a 74 year old school teacher, had 2 dental implants placed in Nogales, MEX. She came back to the US to have a local doctor finish her treatment. The local doctor finds that the implants used are not longer manufactured and there are no parts to use to secure the new teeth.*

*Toni, a 68 year old accountant, had 2 dental implants placed in Tijuana, MEX. She started having problems with the new implants. Once again, no parts exist to fix or restore the implants.*

*Ray, a 73 year old ex-cowboy (bulls), one of my patients, lost his implant denture while staying a year with a friend. Ray went to a Mexican dentist for a new denture, who said he didn't know what to do*

*with the parts of the implant that attach to the teeth, the dentist ground off the tops of the implants and now they can't be used for securing his teeth. Ben, a 38 yr. old truck driver, paid \$6800.00 for upper implants to replace 10 teeth and crowns on all of his lower teeth. Severe infections around the implants destroyed much of his jaw bone. Half the implants were removed in hopes of using the remaining ones to downgrade his treatment to removable implant teeth. The cement used to secure his teeth to the implants was analyzed at the University of Indiana Dental Materials lab and found that it was hardware store epoxy.*

*The dentist reporting these cases asks, **"IF it's a country you wouldn't drink the water in why would you think of having a medical/dental procedure done there?"***

Fortunately, no one dies when dental work collapses. **However, it is a near 100% guarantee that following the collapse, the work necessary to reconstruct the dentistry correctly will be 2-4X what the original cost** to properly engineer your dentistry would have been by a dentist who understands these issues related to the engineering side of your dental work. In addition, it's not unusual for the cost to not only be far higher but the amount of time to re-treat the situation to be far longer than it would have taken originally.

***And.....Under-Engineering is only 75% of the Story.....***

Yes, there are the blatant lies of "it's the exact same thing for less money" which universally means under-engineered dentistry. If that wasn't enough question whether it's a good idea to go on "holiday" and get your dentistry done, here's more bad news.

Yes, there's even more to be concerned about.

You're probably familiar with a few of the following headlines:

**"Chinese Manufactured Pet Food Leads to Animal Deaths"**

**"Toxic Chinese Tooth Paste Leads to Death"**

**"Chinese Toys Recalled Due to Lead Paint"**

Joining those unsavory headlines, are.....

**"Dental Crowns from China Have 5X Allowable Lead Limit"**

**"Chinese Made Dental Prosthetics  
Contaminated with Dangerous Sewage Bacteria"**

## **“Bacteria that Cause Fatal Skin Infections Found on Chinese Dental Crown”**

Besides the dangers of the transmission of life threatening diseases from dirty instruments, the lies of “same thing for less,” two last details left out of the discussion is the high likelihood that dangerous materials, poisonous substances like lead, are being used in the dental prosthetics (the teeth) so that the cost can be offered more cheaply.

Additionally, prosthetics (crowns, replacement teeth, etc.) have been analyzed and found to have unusual amounts of contamination with high levels of bacteria associated with spoiled food, foul water sewage, and dangerous forms of Staphylococcus (bacteria that can cause deadly skin infections).

### **What to do next?**

Simply take a few minutes to think about the short term cost savings and the issues raised in this guide that allow the dentist in these countries to offer the dentistry so cheaply. If you are seriously considering travel for a dental “holiday” keep all of the things in mind discussed because there are nearly always long term consequences.

Outside the health risks of serious disease transmission, the creation of dental infections, and of course pain, the likelihood that your dental “vacation” will cost far more than expected in both real and mental costs is quite real and quite high.

Now that you are informed, you can take comfort in knowing that there are truly legitimate reasons that it’s more costly to have your dentistry done by a local expert **correctly the first time**. However, over a period of decades, that cost will be far less than if you had choose a “too good to be true” deal.

To your long term successful dental health,

Dr. Irfan Atcha

Clinician & Author

Director, The Center for Implants, Sedation, and Cosmetic Dentistry