

# PATIENTS WITHOUT BORDERS

IN SEARCH OF ASIA'S TOP MEDICAL-TOURISM DESTINATIONS, **DIANA HUBBELL** MAPS OUT SOME ITINERARIES THAT ADD FUN AND RELAXATION TO THE EQUATION. **PLUS** THE REGION'S FINEST FACILITIES, WEIRDEST PROCEDURES, BEST RECOVERY RETREATS AND MORE.

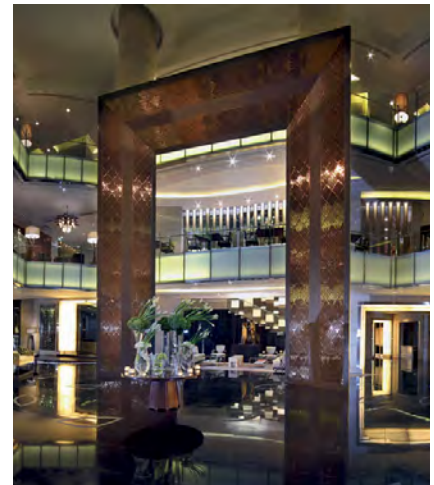
ILLUSTRATIONS BY WASINEE CHANTAKORN



Medical tourism has morphed into a booming industry with an estimated worth of more than US\$38 billion, according to Patients Beyond Borders. Some of Asia's most visit-worthy cities are also bastions of top-flight healthcare. That means accessible, private hospitals with the latest technology, armies of world-class doctors and even discounted rates compared to the West. Our prescription for converting those healthcare savings into great vacations? Five getaways centered around checking in—or just getting a check up at—six of Medical Travel Quality Alliance's top 10 hospitals for medical tourism. So get ready to recover in style. With your doctor's blessing first.



*extreme makeover*



From top: Bumrungrad recently completed a sparkling renovation; a facial at the Six Senses Spa; Luxe lobby at Sofitel Sukhumvit.

**THAILAND** With 36 internationally accredited hospitals, more than any other country in Southeast Asia, Thailand remains the leader of the pack. About 1.2 million international visitors went to Thai hospitals in 2012 and, with an estimated 50 to 75 percent savings compared to the United States, it's clear why. Many of the doctors, both at hospitals and upscale private clinics, are trained and certified abroad, though Thailand has solid medical training programs of its own.

**GO TO**

Bangkok's visitors are spoiled for choice. Although facilities such as Yanhee International Hospital, which specializes in plastic surgery, and Samitivej's assorted branches draw big numbers, the city's most famous is **Bumrungrad International Hospital**, which recently completed a sparkling US\$12 million renovation of its patient rooms and sports standout technologies such as futuristic image-guided radiotherapy for cancer patients. Out of the 1 million patients who check in annually to see its 1,200 physicians, more than 520,000 are international visitors. It was Asia's first internationally approved hospital and remains one of its most prestigious. [bumrungrad.com](http://bumrungrad.com).

**STAY**

With the sheer number of hotels in town, it's easy to get overwhelmed. The **Sofitel Sukhumvit Bangkok**'s central location near Bumrungrad and serene interior position it as a tranquil choice for patients looking for a little post-op R&R without having to battle the city's notorious traffic jams. 189 Sukhumvit Rd.; 66-2/126-9999; [sofitel-bangkok-sukhumvit.com](http://sofitel-bangkok-sukhumvit.com); doubles from Bt6,474.

**EAT + DRINK**

If you're here to heal, head to **Rasayana Raw Food Café** where nothing is cooked over 43 degrees Celsius in order to preserve all that natural goodness. Entrees include vegetarian sushi and Thai noodles made of shaved young coconut, which is then dressed with a spicy

tamarind-ginger sauce. Bonus: they deliver. [rasayanaretreat.com](http://rasayanaretreat.com); dinner for two Bt800.

**SPA**

There's no better way to unwind after a hospital treatment than with a three-plus-hour, five-part Detox Journey at the **Six Senses Spa Pacific City Club**. Did we mention it's right up the street from Bumrungrad and has a spectacular 30th-story city view? [pacificcityclub.com](http://pacificcityclub.com); Detox Journey from Bt5,200.

**FUN FACT**

As part of its campaign to boost medical tourism, the Tourism Authority of Thailand launched a contest this spring in which three women won a free cosmetic facial surgery, cash and a vacation within Thailand.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF HIT AND MRS; COURTESY OF SPA VILLAGE KL; COURTESY OF MANDARIN ORIENTAL

**GO TO**

Ranked No. 1 on the Medical Travel Quality Alliance's global list, **Prince Court Medical Centre** in Kuala Lumpur can hold its own against just about any Western medical facilities. The surgery and screening options here are excellent, and patient comfort is a high priority. The hospital's overnight rooms, some with views of the famed Petronas Towers, sport luxury hotel type furnishings. *princecourt.com*.

**STAY**

If the idea of staying in a hospital room, no matter how tricked out it might be, doesn't appeal, hop a short cab ride to the stately **Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur** for a reprieve from the city's famously busy streets, where you can keep

your fitness levels up with a round of indoor golf or do a few laps in the mammoth free-form pool with views out over the skyline. *mandarinoriental.com*; *doubles from RM569*.

**EAT + DRINK**

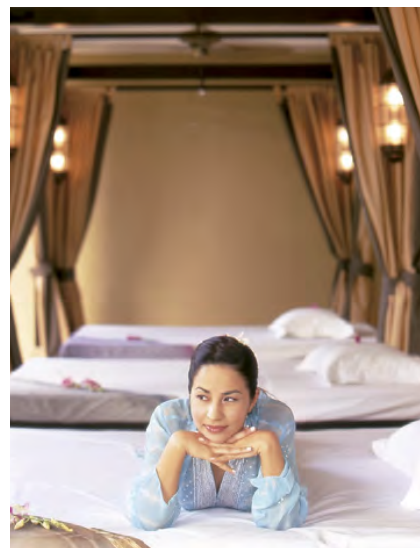
KL's culinary melting pot makes Malaysia a fantastic place to eat, but creamy *laksa* and greasy *char kway teow* don't exactly fit the bill for a healthful recovery. For a practically perfect post-op weekend brunch, head to **Hit & Mrs**, where you can either stick to wholesome options like a truffled mushroom salad with walnuts, grains, greens and pumpkin, or go the more decadent route with custardy brioche French toast. *thebiggroup.co/hitandmrs*; *brunch for two RM100*.

**SPA**

For specially tailored, local experiences for either singles or couples, head to **Spa Village Kuala Lumpur**. Though conveniently close to the major hospitals, this place feels worlds away. *spavillage.com/kualalumpur*; *three-hour Trade Winds treatment RM850*.

**FUN FACT**

According to *Scientific American*, more than 80 percent of Malaysian doctors are already performing laparoscopic surgery. These minimally invasive techniques usually only involve a tiny incision and as little as two days' recovery. This new technology allows doctors to get a clearer picture of what's going on inside through magnification and X-rays.



From top: Wholesome fare at Hit and Mrs; Spa Village Kuala Lumpur; Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur.



**MALAYSIA** Boasting the biggest bang for your buck in Southeast Asia, Malaysia now rivals India and Thailand as a medical destination of choice. The 30 to 50 percent savings over its neighboring competitor Singapore are so substantial that the country drew roughly 600,000 medical tourists in 2012.





**GO TO**  
When Parkway Holdings, a medical behemoth in Asia, acquired a local hospital in 1987, they poured in at least S\$150 million and turned it into a multi-disciplinary, state-of-the-art medical facility. Today, **Gleneagles Hospital** has more than 300 on-site specialists in a sprawling complex. It also has a proud record of medical achievements to its credit—it was the first hospital in Southeast Asia to perform a living donor liver transplant and to successfully use robotic surgiscope for delicate neurosurgeries. To make things even easier for the modern medical traveler, they have a whole fleet of

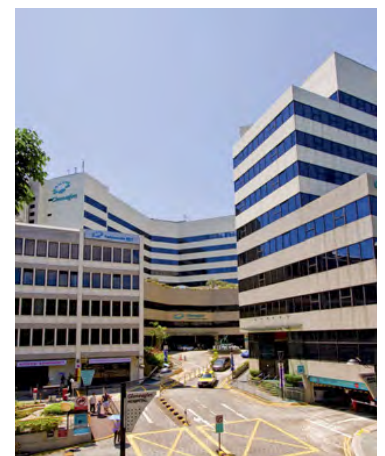
interpreters available to ensure absolutely nothing is lost in translation. [gleneagles.com.sg](http://gleneagles.com.sg).

**STAY**  
Because Singapore is so small and its hospitals are so numerous, patients don't have to look hard for a plush place to recuperate. The **Shangri-La Singapore's** ([shangri-la.com](http://shangri-la.com); *doubles from S\$375*) central location means easy access to the hospitals, while the health club and Mediterranean-inspired cuisine encourage a fit stay. Meanwhile **Oasia Hotel Singapore** ([stayfareast.com](http://stayfareast.com); *doubles from S\$280*) periodically offers discounts at medical or dental facilities.

**EAT + DRINK**  
Despite the name, the dishes at **Original Sin** are far from decadent. Thankfully, offerings like peppers stuffed with quinoa, chickpeas and pickled grapes, or tandoori-grilled vegetables are more savory than sanctimonious, and the place is worth checking out even if you aren't on a health kick. [originalsin.com.sg](http://originalsin.com.sg); *dinner for two S\$100*.

**SPA**  
**Verita** is a comprehensive wellness center offering everything from Pilates to an Aroma Bar where you can mix essential oils based on your physiological state of mind. With specialized treatments such as pre- or post-natal massages and a full-spectrum infrared sauna, this place goes way beyond yoga classes (though they have those, too), and boasts a café serving up healthy food you'll actually want to eat—think sourdough bruschetta with avocado and poached egg for breakfast and calamari with Asian slaw for dinner. [verita.com.sg](http://verita.com.sg).

**FUN FACT**  
Singaporeans have the highest life expectancy and lowest infant mortality rate of any Southeast Asian nation, due in part to their excellent health coverage.



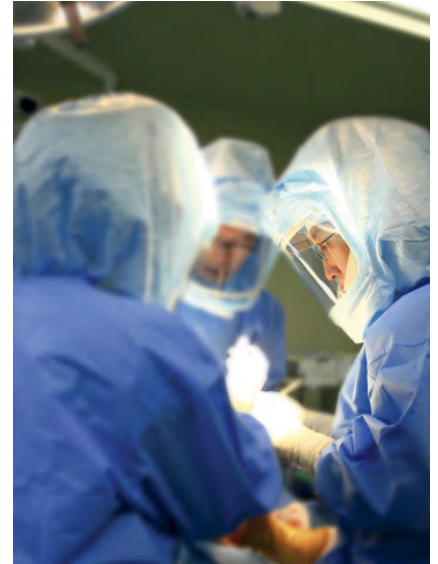
From left: Lush massage at Shangri-La Singapore; the groundbreaking Gleneagles Hospital.

**SINGAPORE** The Lion City draws more than 550,000 patients to its 12 private and eight government hospitals. The tiny nation has always enjoyed a stellar medical reputation—in the World Health Organization's famous, if slightly dated, listings, it ranked best in Asia—and boasts more than a dozen accredited facilities. It may not be the best bargain, but it shines when it comes to quality.





From left: A peaceful suite at Banyan Tree Seoul; joint surgery at Wooridul Spine Hospital; organic muffins, Alien's Day Out Bake Shop.



**SOUTH KOREA** Out of all of its top-tier medical offerings, plastic surgery draws the most attention. Some procedures are so drastic that South Korean hospitals have to issue plastic surgery certificates to ensure that their now-unrecognizable clients can get through immigration at the airport. Still, K-Pop makeovers aside, there are plenty of other reasons more than 300,000 international visitors came to the country's hospitals last year. The medical facilities offer top-notch everything, from MRIs and preventive care to spinal surgery.



**GO TO**  
Take advantage of Seoul's super technology at **Wooridul Spine Hospital**, a world leader in minimally invasive surgery with more than 1,100 neurospine specialists and medical professionals. To make everything extra easy for medical tourists, the hospital provides airport pick-up and drop-off services, as well as visa assistance, interpreters and tourism advice.

**STAY**  
**Banyan Tree Seoul** is set just slightly apart from a main city street, making it easily accessible from all major hospitals and mercifully peaceful. Continue your health kick with a stop at their

oh-so-virtuous Juice Bar, conveniently located next to the fitness facilities. [banyantreeclub.com](http://banyantreeclub.com); doubles from W690,000.

**EAT + DRINK**  
For vegan goodies like chai-infused muffins with a cinnamon walnut streusel, pop by **Alien's Day Out Bake Shop**. Most of the ingredients are organic and there are also gluten-free options available. Just the thing to help you heal. [aliensbakeshop.com](http://aliensbakeshop.com); four muffins for W9,000.

**SPA**  
For the ultimate recovery spot, ditch the bustling streets of Seoul for the soothing waters of nearby hot springs. **Icheon Termeden**, a German-style

spa resort specializing in recovery and ailment prevention, offers indoor and outdoor pools filled entirely with mineral-rich, natural spring water, not to mention a traditional Korean sauna. [termeden.com](http://termeden.com); adult admission fees from W32,000 per day.

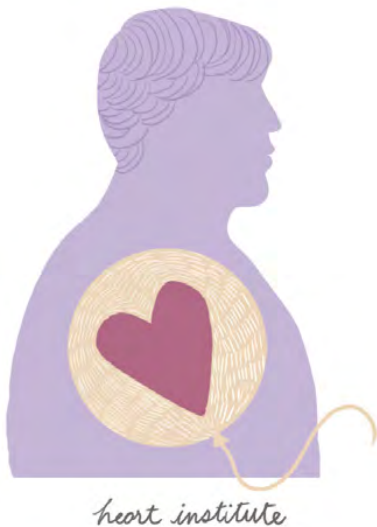
**FUN FACT**  
Male-to-female transgendered patients head to **Yeson Voice Center** ([yesonvc.net](http://yesonvc.net)) in swanky Gangnam to have their vocal chords shortened and voices "feminized." Other procedures at places such as **JK Plastic Surgery Clinic** ([jkplastic.com/en](http://jkplastic.com/en)) include breaking and reshaping the jaw and shaving down cheek bones to provide a more narrow face shape.



FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE; COURTESY OF WOORIDUL SPINE HOSPITAL; COURTESY OF ALIEN'S DAY OUT BAKE SHOP



From Top: Herbal compress at JIVA Spa; an energizing breakfast at Suzette; oak, ivory and glass in The Oberoi lobby.



**GO TO**  
Launched with the help of Harvard Medical, **Fortis Hospital, Bangalore** offers the best of the best when it comes to orthopedics, cardiovascular surgery and minimally invasive surgery. Just as elite and even more specialized is Mumbai's **Asian Heart Institute**, one of the only places in the world where doctors perform bypass surgeries on still-beating hearts. *fortishealthcare.com; asianheartinstitute.org.*

**STAY**  
The city's only 24-hour spa is just one of many reasons to stay at **The Oberoi, Mumbai** when you're in town to recover. Consistently one of T+L's top

picks in all of India, this luxe flagship property—decked out in oak, ivory and glass—pampers patients from the moment they walk in the door. *oberoihotels.com; doubles from Rs14,500.*

**EAT + DRINK**  
Head to Mumbai's ritzy Pali Hill neighborhood for wholegrain buckwheat *galettes* at trendy crêperie **Suzette**. Options range from the veg-friendly Alpille, with caramelized onions, goat cheese and zucchini, to the Estragon, with grilled chicken and mushrooms bound by a Dijon-yogurt sauce. *suzette.in; dinner for two Rs1,200.*

**SPA**  
For all-natural treatments drawing on ancient, local

roots, **JIVA Spa** at the Taj in Mumbai is the place to go. Let your body rejuvenate with a Vishuddi detoxifying treatment, where you'll be rubbed down with silk-gloved hands, then swaddled in an Indian herb wrap. *tajhotels.com; 70-minute Vishuddi detox treatment Rs3,500.*

**FUN FACT**  
In February 2014, the **Asian Heart Institute** pulled off a groundbreaking surgery that had never been completed successfully. A patient with an astounding 17 blockages in his heart required 12 bypass grafts, as opposed to the usual three or four. Though previously diagnosed as inoperable, the critical-condition patient survived.



**INDIA** The savings here—up to 85 percent compared with some Western nations—are staggering, especially when it comes to pricey heart and orthopedic surgeries. With roughly 250,000 medical tourists per year, India has some catching up to do with destinational titans such as Thailand. Still, the industry is growing and the government keeps improving its health care system; the number of Joint Commission International-certified hospitals has gone from two in 2005 to 21.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF TAJ HOTELS; © ANTONIA ACHACHE/COURTESY OF SUZETTE; COURTESY OF THE OBEROI HOTELS

## HEALTHFUL HAVENS

Sometimes a little old-fashioned R&R is just what the doctor ordered. You can fill that prescription at these five hot spots to naturally detox and unwind.

### INDIA

Whip those chakras back into alignment at **Shreyas Retreat, Bangalore** ([shreyasretreat.com](http://shreyasretreat.com); doubles from US\$380), which features all the hatha and ashtanga classes of a traditional ashram with all the comforts—and spa treatments—of an upscale resort.

### INDONESIA

Set near *Eat Pray Love's* Ubud, **Fivelements Bali** ([fivelements.org](http://fivelements.org); doubles from US\$575) offers sumptuous raw cuisine, Balinese-inspired healing rituals, and silent meditation or wellness retreats to inspire relaxation and reflection.

### MALDIVES

**One&Only Reethi Rah** ([reethirah.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://reethirah.oneandonlyresorts.com); doubles from US\$1,100) employs special lifestyle therapists to help put you on the right track; ayurvedic treatments to reset your internal rhythms; and produce from the garden to up your vitamin intake.

### THAILAND

One of Asia's most famous wellness resorts, celeb-fave **Kamalaya Koh Samui** ([kamalaya.com](http://kamalaya.com); all-inclusive three-day detox programs from Bt56,100 per person) offers a range of tailored programs designed to help you sleep better, lose weight

or just unwind. New kid in town **Parama Koh Chang** ([paramakohchang.com](http://paramakohchang.com); doubles from Bt2,378) has a killer location where you can enjoy free daily yoga classes, super-fresh seafood and all-inclusive spa treatments.

### THE PHILIPPINES

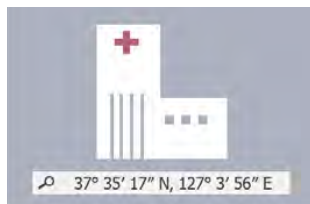
Get ready for an inside-out rejuvenation at **The Farm At San Benito** ([thefarmatsanbenito.com](http://thefarmatsanbenito.com); from P6,300). Raw dishes complement a full menu of holistic treatments from four licensed doctors, from the fringe (*reiki* and acupuncture) to the really out there (ozone therapy, intravenous vitamin infusion, and a gallbladder flush).



Getting steamy at Kamalaya Koh Samui.

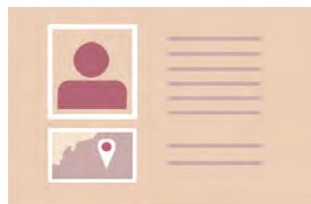
## SPEED DIAL

Download these four freebies to your smartphone to simplify—or maybe even save—your life.



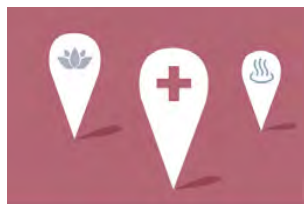
### TravelEmergency

The official app from Patients Beyond Borders covers most of Asia and allows you to search for internationally accredited hospitals, and track them down using GPS coordinates. For those struggling with the local lingo, the app translates many of your basic medical needs into Thai, Mandarin or Japanese. *iOS; Free.*



### MediApp Korea

A must for any medical tourists bound for Seoul, this app helps you search for hospitals by desired treatment. It lists detailed information including specific physicians and their specialties, as well as contact information for local agencies. It also offers a planner to keep track of medication and dosages. *iOS; Android; Free.*



### Thailand Medical Tourism

Released by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, this handy app includes comprehensive listings of hospitals, specialist clinics and holistic centers or spas. Think of it as your ultimate directory—it tells you what treatments and facilities are available at each location and provides the contact numbers of medical tourism agencies. *iOS; Android; Free.*



### The Clinic Finder

As the name implies, this is a straightforward app designed to help you find all sorts of medical facilities around the world. More interactive than most of its competition, The Clinic Finder allows patients to rate clinics and compare their findings. *iOS; Android; Free.*