

bringing back the tourists

Aussies lured by cut-price procedures

By Lana Willocks

PHUKET International Hospital is about to enter the second phase of an aggressive marketing campaign aimed at bringing more Australians to the island for cosmetic surgery.

The hospital has joined forces with Australian specialist travel agent, Destiny Meditravel, to create travel and treatment packages which dozens of Australians have signed up for since the first phase of the program was launched early last year.

Peter Davison, the hospital's manager of international services, and plastic surgeon Dr Rushapol Sdawat from the hospital's Phuket International Aesthetic Centre, will tour Australia next month to promote the hospital's services at seminars and mini-conferences.

Despite what Mr Davison describes as 'sensationalist' reports in the Australian media about botched surgeries in Thailand, more Australians are coming to Phuket to have cosmetic surgery.

"There are significant cost savings in having surgery performed in Phuket," said Mr Davison.

"And they get a two-week holiday here as a bonus."

A breast augmentation package at the hospital costs \$AUD5200, which includes the hospital treatment, 14 days in a hotel, airfares, transfers and a daily breakfast.

In Australia, the same procedure would cost almost \$AUD10,500.

Mr Davison said about 120 Aussies used the service last year.

"As well as promoting the hospital's services, the tour will also promote Phuket as a holiday destination and introduce our resorts to potential holiday-makers," he said.

Clients coming for surgery will be offered packages with a choice of three, four or five-star hotels.

Mr Davison said the hospital had thoroughly vetted the three partner hotels which would be featured in the package deal.

"We check on their capacity to respond to client needs, their standards of hygiene, food, cleanliness and services," he said.

"We will be putting a lot of people in rooms during the low season, so the hotels are keen to be part of the program," he said.

"Last year, we filled 1000 rooms, and this year we expect a lot more because we are advertising, we have full-time surgeons and we have developed these package deals."

Mr Davison hopes to attract



more than 30 patients a month.

One press release has already generated 70 bookings.

Destiny Meditravel spokeswoman, Melanie Bawden said bookings were already averaging about 25 clients per month.

"We launched a marketing campaign in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Queensland, and we had a fantastic response," she said.

"We will launch a new campaign later this month.

"Feedback from clients has all been positive and many have talked their friends and family members

into having their cosmetic surgery done in Phuket.

"A number of former clients are returning for other procedures, and they are bringing their friends with them," she said.

Ms Bawden said Destiny Meditravel had a lot of confidence in Phuket International Hospital.

"Having Mr Davison, who is Australian, there to help clients is a real bonus," she said.

She said clients were screened before they traveled to Thailand to ensure they didn't have unrealistic expectations, or medical problems

which would make surgery unsuitable.

Dr Rushapol, said about 80 per cent of people coming to Phuket for cosmetic surgery were women who came for 'mommy makeovers' such as breast augmentations, tummy tucks, face lifts, body contouring and nose jobs.

Most of the men came for liposuction or hair transplants.

Mr Davison scoffed at the suggestion that surgery in Thailand was unsafe or below accepted standards.

"The Australian medical community is worried that we are taking away their business, and they are looking out for their vested interests," he said.

He said surgical procedures offered in the latest packages were completely healed by the time patients left Phuket and aftercare was not needed.

"But even so, the hospital keeps in contact with all its patients to check on their condition after they return home."

He said the hospital would fly patients back to Phuket free of charge if there were any problems.

"We provide a quality product," he said.

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