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By Jonathan Marshall

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Cosmetic Surgery Getaways



Photo / Dough Sherring

27 year-old Amanda Cocker wants to be able to shop for 'clothes that a 27 year-old would buy'.

Amanda Cocker lies awake at night, worrying herself sick that her 4-year-old daughter will be teased at school next year because, as Cocker puts it, Mummy is fat.

Weighing in at 122kg, Cocker is frustrated with the help she has received from the Auckland District Health Board, and the endless waiting lists.

Despite under- going an abdominoplasty in 2005, there are parts of her body that the 27-year-old desperately wants reduced - arms, legs, neck, stomach.

So on Thursday last week the solo mum met Dr Witoon Wisuthseriwong, Director of the Aesthetic Centre at Bangkok Hospital Phuket, Thailand. Wisuthseriwong was visiting Auckland to give people 15-minute consultations and quotes to Kiwis who want changes - some radical - to their bodies, at a fraction of what it would cost to have the procedures done in NZ.

Medical tourism is nothing new, but Kiwis have been slow to catch on.

The NZ representatives for Bangkok Hospital, Restored Beauty Getaways, have been running a marketing drive and running a seminar at a plush waterfront eatery in Auckland's Mission Bay, where videos depicting Thailand's attractions as a tourist destination were beamed on a projector.

Also here last week was Kongkiat Kespechara, the hospital's Director. *"We talked to tourism professionals back home about how to get people to come to Phuket after the tsunami and how to get people to stay for longer,"* he said.

"The average tourist stays for four days but with medical tourism we can keep them here for two weeks." Attracting Kiwis patients to the disaster-struck area was a "great way to stabilise Phuket".

The idea of heading abroad for discounted surgery was catching on with Kiwis,



Photo / Dough Sherring

Packaging broker Maria Bore, 46, takes her kids overseas each year, so during next month's school holidays, the teenagers are off to Thailand - where mum will have breast lift and implants. It's estimated the procedures would cost up to \$25,000 in NZ but at a free consultation with Bangkok Hospital's people last week, she was told she could pay \$6,700 for the same work in Phuket.

The Asian doctor was very nice and funny and told me the brand of the implants and said the knife was very sharp, but the Remuera doctor made me feel like a real patient and explained the procedure in great detail," Bore said. "Any operation is quite scary but I have had plastic surgery before and I know it's worth it."

Meanwhile Cocker, who wants her body to be in shape by the time her daughter goes to school, will be lodging an application with a finance company so she can afford the surgery. "I can't go to The Warehouse and buy clothes that a 27-year-old would buy, and I want to."

It all adds up for a better figure

* Amanda Cocker, 27, will get a loan to have liposuction. The procedure at Bangkok Hospital will cost \$5718 for a breast lift, \$6127 for a tummy tuck, and \$5200 each for a thigh lift and an arm lift. In New Zealand she would pay \$66,000-\$112,000.

* Maria Bore, 46, will take her two teenagers on holiday to Thailand next month. While there, she will have a breast lift and implants at Bangkok Hospital. It will cost \$6770 - a Remuera surgeon has quoted her \$25,500 for the same operation.