

## Tourists Are Getting Hair Transplant Surgeries in Turkey Right Now



BY KATE SULLIVAN, CONTRIBUTOR, MARCH 10, 2015, 4:00:00 PM



Forget Brazilian butt lifts, the newest hot thing in medical tourism? Hair transplants in Turkey—not only for the head, but for lush facial hair. (Not every fella has a natural Selleck stash or Jon Hamm beard!) After getting a travel press release noting that 15,000 people come to Turkey for hair transplantation, we did some digging on this trend to find out if having cosmetic procedures while abroad is a safe option.

The men who are getting these procedures done (and it is mostly dudes) aren't American; they're from countries like Italy, Greece, and recently from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, says Celik Nuri, a plastic surgeon and the International Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery's National Secretary for Turkey. Facial hair transplants are the most popular amongst Arab patients: "Over the last 10 years, all of the male models in fashion magazines have become less feminized and have a ton of facial hair to be more masculine," he says. He personally is doing a lot more lipo-sculpting on Arab patients to mimic a muscular build. It's all a part of an overall boom in plastic surgery in Istanbul.

Initially, it was all personal referral: Turkish populations living in other countries would tell their friends about the relatively lower-cost, high-quality medical care in Istanbul, but now companies in European countries organize medical tours to the city. Because of more relaxed vacation policies, Arabic and European patients typically plan to be in Istanbul for a week. They have the surgery and then stay to enjoy the city and get any necessary immediate followups. "You see a lot of men at historic sites around the city who clearly have just had hair transplant surgery," says Nuri.

In Istanbul, it's common for foreign and local patients alike to use email and Whatsapp to make appointments and send photos of their progress to their doctors. "Almost 100 percent of my patients communicate with Whatsapp—it's so visual," says Nuri, a reconstructive specialist. "I ask for photos every week, and then every month. My hair transplant colleagues ask for weekly updates." If a patient, now at home, is unsatisfied, docs will tell them to hop on another plane to Istanbul, or if they're having complications, refer them to a local physician who can attend to them immediately.

Michael Edwards, president of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), says that Europeans and Middle Easterners visiting Turkey for plastic surgery is akin to a Canadian coming to the United States for a medical procedure, and he doesn't advise Americans to go all the way to Turkey or elsewhere for a hair transplant—or *any* procedure. "There are wonderfully talented, great doctors around the world, but if you have surgery abroad you're not going to have the same access to them as you would a closer doctor," says Edwards. "There are also equally as many, if not more, people that are out to try and capitalize on vanity—and whatever the hot trend in

surgery is at the moment. What's if there's an issue in wound healing? They're just going to tell you to go to a local ER."

If you do see a foreign medical professional who isn't actually that professional, your options for recourse are limited. Edwards, who practices in Las Vegas, says he sees reconstructive patients who "have gone South of the border for breast or tummy surgery" and now need it corrected. "There was no follow-up," he says. "They ran a credit card and said 'Adios' and 'Send me your friends.' It's important to do your homework on facilities and their practices."

Nuri heartily agrees. While he hasn't had any referrals made to him because of medical tourism gone wrong, there are patients going to under—or completely unqualified—practices. "The International Society [of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons] takes these clinics to court and shuts them down, but often the same people will just open a new clinic," he says. "It's the Society's responsibility to stop this, but it's also the patients' responsibility to see proper certification papers—not just a cheap price."