

## Medical Tourism in Thailand: *My Check-up at Bumrungrad*

By Blake Schlaich

If I described a towering building equipped with a pool, day spa, fitness center, 24-hour concierge service, 5-star living accommodations, and fine dining you'd probably think I was referring to a luxury hotel. Maybe a lavish resort? Wrong and wrong again. In fact, I'm talking about a hospital. Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok to be exact. When it comes to the trendy concept *medical tourism* Bumrungrad is number one.

The medical tourism industry has been rapidly flourishing over the past decade and a half. More and more patients from western countries like America, England, and Australia, where medical treatments can be insanely expensive, are opting to get their surgeries or procedures by traveling to countries in South America or South East Asia. Facilities like Bumrungrad offer first-class medical care at a fraction of the cost of western countries.

What draws patients/customers in even more are the exotic locales of the hospitals, like Costa Rica or Thailand. For what they save on the medical treatment (sometimes thousands and thousands of dollars), they can also finance a their airfare and a nice vacation before or after the procedure. Hospitals like Bumrungrad actually market their services to fill this niche. And why not?

On my recent visit back to the States I had wanted to get a standard check-up at my doctor's office while I was there. Unfortunately, two weeks flew by faster than I thought it would and I never scheduled an appointment. Not to mention that I no longer have health insurance in America, so my previous primary care center may not even have taken me in the first place. And if they did, who knows how much I would've had to pay without any help from insurance.

I had read a few articles about Thailand's medical tourism reputation and even known some people who have taken advantage of it. Brian from Super English had lasik surgery in Bangkok just last year and another friend of mine had wrist surgery done after an auto accident. Everything I heard seemed to confirm the rumors of top-notch care at a low price, so I thought why not try it out firsthand?

I was due to arrive in BKK in two days so I looked up the only reputable hospital there that I knew off the top of my head... Bumrungrad. Their website, <http://www.bumrungrad.com/thailandhospital>, was easy to navigate and highly informative. There's an extensive list of their many departments and the procedures that they offer and even a price estimator. I thought that perhaps they only performed major procedures worth flying overseas to get done. However, to my surprise they offered everything from hip replacements to bypasses to, yep, even general health check-ups.

I followed the directions on the website to get an appointment by filling out a simple form with what I wanted done and when. I opted for the basic check-up and physical for 3,000 baht (less than \$100 USD). They offered more extensive packages that went up to 15,000 baht and took two days to complete, but the basic seemed ample enough for me. I sent the email and waited.

24-hours later I received an appoint confirmation email with directions to the hospital, details on what I was having done, who my doctor would be, what I needed to bring, what time I should arrive and how long it would take (they told me three to six hours), and even offered airport pickup.

Two days later I left my Bangkok hotel on Sukhumvit and took a 4-minute taxi ride to Bumrungrad, following my email directions to proceed to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor for check-in. I walked through the hospital lobby and rode the see-through elevator up ten floors. It didn't look, smell, or feel like a hospital. There were high ceilings, beautiful plants, comfortable furniture, bookstores, and Starbuck's. People of all different nationalities and ethnicities lounged and explored as they waited for whatever procedure they were having done. I got off the elevator and was greeted by some sort of hospital staff member that told where to go to fill out my paperwork and check in.



Unlike the usual check-in system in American doctor's offices where you wait next to sneezing sick people for an hour, another concierge-like staff brought me to a private desk where she filled out my forms for me on a computer and then printed out a photo I.D. and nametag for me to wear. She then ushered me up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor where for my check-up.



This first-class service continued for the duration of my time at Bumrungrad. On the 11<sup>th</sup> floor I began the gauntlet. I had to go through six stations before finally seeing the doctor for physical. The staff was plentiful and more than helpful and they helped me move through the stations like a well-oiled machine. First, diagnostics, then this, then blood work, then that, and don't forget the chest x-rays. For a basic check-up, it turned out to be quite comprehensive. I only had to wait once and the waiting room was full of coffee, tea, juice, water, cereal, bread, and yogurt. It had a huge LCD TV and rack full of magazines and newspapers in English. I didn't even get to sit down with my coffee again before I was pushed on to the final station.



Here my doctor finished out the physical and explained the results of the blood work and all of the other tests I'd went through over the past hour (healthy as a horse, thanks!), all of which had already been entered into the system so that he could pull up the numbers and charts right there on his office computer. He told me he'd have a copy of my results and a full report sent to the e-mail address that I'd previously left with the check-in desk. And with that my visit to Bumrungrad was complete.

All in all, the whole thing took about two hours and was the best medical experience I've had. Everyone was pleasant and accommodating. The doctor's and nurses were efficient and careful. For such a basic process like a general check-up, I was more than impressed with their professional patient care. For anyone visiting or living in Thailand that need or wants to get anything done medically, *anything*, I would highly recommend checking out Bumrungrad. Maybe when I'm older and I need a hip replacement I'll be able to check out the luxury accommodations that they offer with the more extensive procedures!



Peter's notes:

Like Blake, I also recently did a medical check-up at Bumrungrad Hospital. I had an identical experience so Blake's story isn't something unusual. It's standard procedure there. Incidentally, they have a McDonald's there, which I ate at after my check-up just because I could. I've also had a dental check-up at Bumrungrad, which wasn't wholly unpleasant. I'm not a fan of dentists so that's as nice a thing as I can say.

A few years ago, I had lasik surgery done at PRMC center. All the doctors there are western trained, I think. Getting lasik done wasn't fun (it's not as painless as they tell you) but it's glorious to not have to wear glasses or contacts anymore. If you decide to get lasik done, make sure you take a friend with you because they'll need to help you afterwards. You won't be able to see anything and your eyes will hurt.

I've also gone to Samitivej (which sounds like "sa-mu-tee-vay") hospital for various things over the years. It's just as swanky as Bumrungrad. I actually prefer Samitivej because it's a little bit smaller and less crowded.

Compared with the 5 star hospital-hotels in Bangkok our own little Thaksin hospital here in Surat might seem inadequate, but it is actually considered one of the best hospitals in the south, if not the best. You might find a better hospital in Hat Yai, but most of the people who go all the way to Hat Yai do so for Chinese medical treatments. Thaksin may not look like the above pictures (not at all) but they'll still take good care of you.