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Malaysia
HEALTHCARE
Quality care for your peace of mind

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THE LAND OF SMILES

The travel brochures say it all – Malaysia is where you find friendly, smiling people. **Chan Li Jin** discovers what they don't tell you: they can also create gorgeous smiles!

We don't need a dentist to tell us that the path to good teeth begins with good oral hygiene. That includes brushing twice a day and flossing at least once a day.

Yet, despite all the effort we put in, good teeth often seem God sent. Some people are simply born with naturally beautiful teeth, while others battle gum and tooth problems all their lives.

The problem is made worse because many people still have a fear of visiting dentists. It is not uncommon to find people with severely damaged teeth, simply because they are too afraid to seek dental treatment!

"We see that all the time," says Dato' Dr. How Kim Chuan, a Dental Implant and Reconstructive Consultant and President of the Malaysian Dental Association. "Most people don't realise that dentistry has advanced so much. It's no longer like the horror stories we used to hear."

That's just the tip of the iceberg. What people don't realise is that Malaysian dentists are amongst the best experts in dentistry worldwide. Coupled with world-class equipment and dental technology, Malaysia has everything it takes to become Asia's Dental Hub.

WHY MALAYSIA?

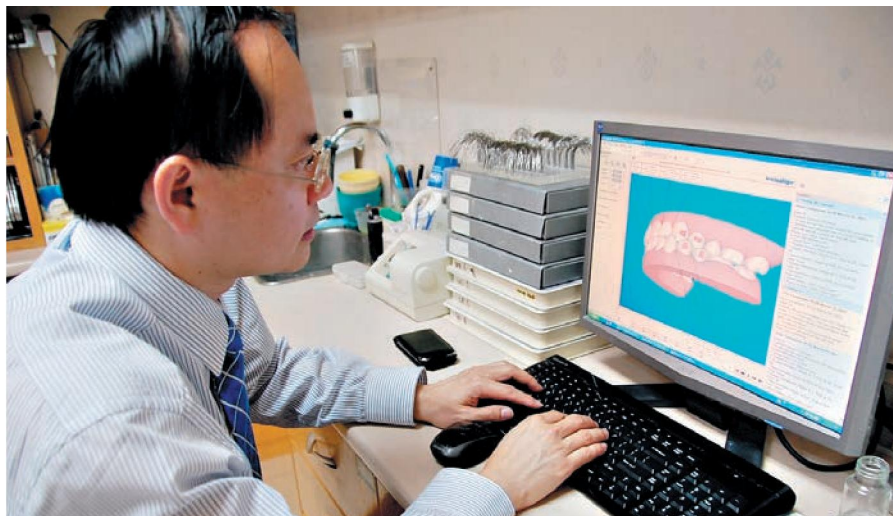
Most dental procedures are non-invasive, hence tourists who seek minor dental treatment can just walk in to any dental clinic without the need to present their previous dental records or any form of referral. Treatments such as whitening, implants, fillings or wisdom tooth extraction are among the most common that foreign visitors request.

"With nature spots, beaches, culture, shopping malls, a good range of hotels and great food, we are already the perfect holiday destination," says Dr. How. "Knowing you can get your teeth done while on holiday is an added bonus. You can go back 'wearing' a brand new smile!"

According to Dr. Foo Chi Chean, founder of the Malaysian Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and Principal of mydentist™ at Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, the dental technology available in Malaysia is on par, if not better, than most in the region. Author of 'The Winning Smile' and a cosmetic dental surgeon with over 30 years of experience, Dr. Foo is a well-known figure among local celebrities and VIPs in Malaysia and beyond.

"I've been seeing a rapid increase in foreign patients in the last few years, from as far off as the United States, Norway, Morocco, Maldives, Australia and Canada," says Dr. Foo. The best part is that they arrived at his clinic based on word-of-mouth recommendations.

He recalls a case where a Caucasian



Dr. How planning treatment for a patient on his computer.

woman in her 50s came to do a full mouth reconstruction at his clinic. "After she returned to Switzerland, her home country, we received an unexpected call from her local dentist. He was very impressed, and maybe even a little surprised that dentists in Malaysia could produce such a 'perfect job!' In fact, he asked for our contact details for future referrals."

Such cases are not uncommon, as Dr. How can testify. "The kind of technology we have today was unheard of just 10 years ago, so treatments now are much more comfortable. What seemed like complicated dental treatments back then are as common as a simple tooth extraction today," he says.

EMERGING TRENDS IN DENTISTRY

Over the last 10 years, dentistry has moved forward at such dizzying speeds that even dental practitioners are having trouble catching up. One of the latest treatment options is Invisalign, the invisible braces (See article entitled *Invisible 'Braces'* in this magazine).

When Invisalign was first launched 10 years ago, the founders themselves were conservative on how far they could go with their technology. Today, they are increasingly sophisticated, providing 3D images of teeth and roots so as to aid dentists and orthodontists in treatment plans based on the tooth formation.



Dr. How Kim Chuan says that, because of technology, procedures that were once considered complicated are now very common.



Dr. Foo Chi Chean says that IT has changed the dentistry a great deal.

"Information technology has changed the way dentistry works," explains Dr. Foo. Today, dental experts from all over the world can share data and information, discuss difficult cases online and explore different ways to do something better and faster.

"After [my patient] returned to Switzerland, her home country, we received an unexpected call from her local dentist. He was very impressed, and maybe even a little surprised that dentists in Malaysia could produce such a 'perfect job!'..."
— Dr. Foo Chi Chean, founder of the Malaysian Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and Principal of mydentist™.

There is also more focus on material science, the research and technology that goes into the making of dental materials such as crowns and veneers. Dr. Foo cites the work of award-winning Professor Eric Reynolds from the Melbourne Dental School (University of Melbourne), who developed dental fillings from the casein protein in milk that prevents the formation of caries, as an example.

As patients become more discerning, dental technicians are also improving their skills in producing dental products. For instance, crowns used to be entirely white, which made them look unnatural in the mouth, although they functioned well.

"It's no longer good enough to have tooth replacements that can bite and chew well. They ought to give patients the confidence to smile and laugh too," stresses Dr. Foo, explaining that natural teeth are more opaque at the base and get more translucent at the tips.

He foresees a day in the near future when there will be a dental material that can replace tooth enamel – the hard and strong layer on the surface of our teeth. "Fillings and crowns these days are so close to natural teeth that we can't tell the difference between them. This is what I call 'Smile Technology', looking into the tiniest details to produce a winning smile," says Dr. Foo.

CONQUERING THE FEAR

Coming back to the fear of dentists: dental clinics today are nothing like those of yore. Dr. Foo's mydentist™ is one example – once you're inside, you might even think you've stepped into a spa!

"It's normal for people to feel anxious



Dr. Foo Chi Chean's mydentist clinic is like a spa and has a water feature.

about visiting a dentist, so we try to help them relax while awaiting their turn," he explains. Wooden panels and high-ceiling grey scale walls are complemented further with water features, "because water sounds are very soothing for the nerves," he says.

Mydentist™ also invests in air filters and air conditioning systems that help in odour control, while deodorisers help to manage the clinical scent which many people find disturbing.

Another example is Pristine Dental Centre (Jalan Gasing), which is a bungalow-turned-dental clinic in the heart of Petaling Jaya. Amidst lush greenery and the sound of chirping birds, it is easy to feel your anxieties slipping away.

DOLLARS AND DENTISTRY

Dollar for dollar, dental treatment in Malaysia is comparable with Singapore, although having your holidays here are definitely more value-for-money considering the lower currency exchange and wide range of tourist attractions.

It also helps that Malaysia is the hub of Airasia, Asia's top low-cost airlines, which makes it possible for patients in neighbouring countries to fly in over the weekend just to seek dental treatment.

Cosmetic dental surgeon Dr. Suresh Nair from Pristine Dental Centre once had an Australian patient who flew to Malaysia on Airasia X to do a full-mouth reconstruction. While waiting for her crowns to be made, she flew to London, also on Airasia X, and spent two weeks there visiting friends before returning to Malaysia for some sightseeing and to install her new teeth.

"All that, plus costs for her treatment, hotel, food and flight back to Australia – it was still cheaper than if she had done the same procedure in Australia!" relates Dr. Suresh.

Invisalign, for instance, costs approximately RM16,000 (US\$5,200) in Malaysia, which is a steal compared to US\$8,500 in Korea and Hong Kong, US\$7,000 in Singapore and US\$10,000 in Australia.

What matters most is knowing that the patient is already a happy patient from Day 1, says Dr. How. "Modern imaging technology allows us to show patients what their treatment is like and how they will look after their treatment. Dentistry has never been this exciting!"

TOP THREE DENTAL TREATMENTS:

1) WHITENING:

A one-off session that leaves you with gorgeous white teeth in a jiffy.



PLUS POINT: Whitening in Malaysia costs a fraction of what it costs in developed countries.

2) FULL-MOUTH REHABILITATION:

Includes more complicated dental procedures such as dental implants, crowns, bridges and veneers. May take between two to six visits over a year to complete treatment.



PLUS POINT: Incredibly good results at prices that will blow you away!

3) RESTORATION:

Includes simple dental procedures such as fillings, dentures or extractions to restore function. Most require just one visit.



PLUS POINT: Competitively priced and procedures done by well-trained dentists amidst advanced dental technology.

Cosmetic dental surgeon Dr. Suresh Nair from Pristine Dental Centre once had an Australian patient who flew to Malaysia on Airasia X to do a full-mouth reconstruction. While waiting for her crowns to be made, she flew to London, also on Airasia X, and spent two weeks there visiting friends before returning to Malaysia for some sightseeing and to install her new teeth.

"I FOUND MY SMILE IN MALAYSIA!"

Christine Dickenson, an Australian travel operator residing in Darwin, shares her experience of having dental treatment in Malaysia with **Chan Li Jin**.



Christine before and after extensive dental treatment in Malaysia by Dr. How Kim Chuan.

"For many years, I suffered from an advanced periodontitis problem, with some loose teeth and deep sub-gingival calculus. I had to wear a splint at all times to stabilise my teeth as well as my bite.

I had a serious overbite, which loosened my bottom teeth, causing constant gum infections and bad breath. The way my teeth and gums were positioned affected the shape of my lips, and people couldn't really tell if I was smiling or not.

I spent a lot of time and money seeking dental advice and treatment in my home country, including getting setting braces and a

broken jaw.

After going through it all, I was told it had not worked and that I needed to remove all my bottom teeth and have them replaced by a permanent plate, which did not appeal to me at all. In Australia, this would be very expensive as it would involve several specialists.

Apart from the costs, I was sceptical because it meant I would be losing all my natural teeth. Having a permanent plate in my mouth also sounded like a lifetime of discomfort and inconvenience.

I first heard about Malaysia from our accountant in Darwin,

who is Malaysian. When he returned from his holidays, he mentioned that he had undergone a medical procedure and was very happy with the outcome, the professionalism and the price. That got me thinking, so I decided to pursue a second opinion in Kuala Lumpur in December 2008.

I found Dr. How Kim Chuan through a Kuala Lumpur contact. My husband and I spent a whole month in Malaysia, planning my consultations to fit our holidays. We planned to visit wonderful destinations such as Cameron Highlands, Penang and Pangkor Island.



Dato Dr. How Kim Chuan who treated Christine.

LOTS TO SEE, EAT AND DO IN MALAYSIA

The first time we landed in Kuala Lumpur, we were very impressed at how clean and modern it is, its high-rise hotels and air-conditioned shopping malls alongside the charm and history

of China Town and little India.

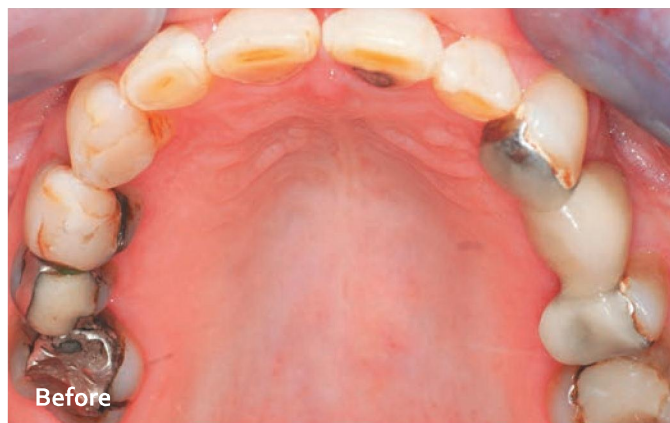
We loved the wonderful mix of cuisines – the chilli crab, Peking duck, fabulous vegetable dishes, *roti canai* and too many others to mention. The transport system is easy to access and the shopping was great.

It turned out to be the first of my many trips to Malaysia. We are very impressed with Malaysia, the diversity it offers, the professionalism and the rich cultural heritage and friendly people and not forgetting the countryside, mountains, beaches, islands and heritage sites. We still have lots more to explore.


BEGINNING TREATMENT

I will always remember the first time we met Dr. How. His clinic is not elaborate and flashy but functional, so I could tell that he was a practical man. He was incredibly thorough – they took far more X-rays and photographs of my mouth than I had ever taken at home.

He came across as very confident about his capabilities and was very matter-of-fact. He advised me that he could prepare a plan of what he thought needed to be done and how much it



Before and After: Inside Christine's mouth.



"I could ascertain he integrated cutting-edge technology and techniques far more advanced than what I had been offered at home, so I decided to go ahead." – happy dental patient Christine Dickenson

would cost, and then we could decide if I wanted to proceed.

Dr. How also spoke to my husband to ensure he also fully understood what was involved regarding time, pain and finances. I noted that he had trained in the United Kingdom and had undergone implant training in Germany and a Masters course in Bern, Switzerland. This was all very reassuring.

When he presented my treatment plan, I was surprised but delighted that he quoted me in *Ringgit*, which meant that there were no different prices for locals and foreigners. He offered me the opportunity to keep and rehabilitate my own teeth, including my top teeth.

This would involve braces for a period of time, followed by implants and a smile to die for. All in all, it would be a full-mouth rehabilitation plus an orthodontic implant programme.

Dr. How also advised me that there would be no gain without pain and that I would need to make four or five trips back to Malaysia throughout the procedure.

It was a big gamble but there was something about Dr. How that instilled trust and confidence. I could ascertain he integrated cutting-edge technology and techniques far more advanced than what I had been offered at home, so I decided to go ahead.

A HAPPY EXPERIENCE, A HAPPY SMILE

Fortunately, with budget airlines these days, it was cheaper to get to Kuala Lumpur than it was to fly to another capital city in Australia from Darwin. I felt incredibly lucky that Dr. How found time to fit in my appointment, considering how busy he is.

We first visited Cameron Highlands and Penang to indulge in all the culinary delights that Penang is famed for. I had my first set of braces fitted upon returning to Kuala Lumpur.

It was challenging having a mouthful of metal when we went to Pulau Pangkor, but I survived on soups. The fabulous sun, sea and sand made up for the rest of the discomfort!

My entire treatment took 12 months and there were times I wondered why I had decided to proceed. But my doubts never lasted very long because the end result outweighed any pain or discomfort that I went through.

After the initial consultation and month-long holiday, I came alone as I felt safe being in Kuala Lumpur by myself. I used my reward points and stayed mostly at the Mutiara Crowne Plaza Hotel as it was central and I could walk to the shopping malls, Kuala Lumpur City Centre and Petronas Twin Towers.

Dr. How has changed my whole appearance and now I have my smile back. I also look younger and no longer have constant gum infections and bad breath. I feel more confident and happy with myself. I cannot thank him enough!"

CHRISTINE'S TRAVEL TIP:

Malaysia is so easy to travel around! We hired a car to the Cameron Highlands, then caught the local train to Penang and flew back to Kuala Lumpur. Then we caught a bus to Pulau Pangkor and back. Everything was very convenient!