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## **Dental tourists escape Aussie fees**

Mark Dodd | April 12, 2007

**DENTISTS have conceded costs in Australia are contributing to an exodus to Thailand and other countries offering dental treatment at half the price.**

The Australian Dental Association yesterday warned "buyer beware" in the wake of the dental tourism trend. But the ADA said that, apart from anecdotal tales of botched surgery overseas, there was insufficient evidence to advise Australians not to go.

Thailand has long enjoyed a reputation as a cheap holiday destination. It now attracts thousands of Australians who combine a holiday with a cheap trip to the dentist.

More than 1.8million foreigners visited Thailand in 2005 for medical treatment ranging from sex changes to minor cosmetic surgery. The influx, up from 630,000 in 2002, has generated a multi-million-dollar industry.

Bangkok Dental Spa is one of a growing number of specialist dental centres in the Thai capital catering mostly to foreigners.

Patients pay \$400 to \$500 for a new crown, compared with \$1500 in Australia. Implant work ranges from \$2800 for surgery and a titanium prosthetic, compared with \$4000 locally.

Bangkok Dental Spa chief executive Lily Porncharoen said she treated hundreds of Australians each year. Treatment in Thailand was cheap with high clinical and professional standards, she said..

"Australia is a very good market for us," Dr Porncharoen said. "It's not too far and they know Thailand well.

"What we (Thai dentists) need is our Government to promote us to Australian people so they understand better our standards. I think more and more Australians will come."

With only anecdotal evidence of pitfalls, the ADA's John Matthews said it was hard to challenge Dr Porncharoen's claims.

"I don't think we (ADA) have enough evidence to say: don't do it," he said.

Thai dentists were cheaper than Australian counterparts because of lower salaries, lower laboratory costs and a "less regulated" environment, he said.

Labor health spokeswoman Nicola Roxon said dental costs under the Howard Government had soared and more than 650,000 people were on public waiting lists for treatment.

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