



Phuket's the cut-price cosmetic capital

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CHARMAINE Hobbs and Lauren Fuller did not bust the bank for recent breast surgeries and say they would happily revisit Thailand for more cut-price cosmetic procedures.

The Cairns pair is part of a growing trend, with more Cairns women travelling to developing countries for budget surgeries than those from the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane combined.

Ms Hobbs, 53, and Ms Fuller, 27, recently returned from Phuket after undergoing breast augmentation surgery. They both said the experience was "five-star" and about half the cost of a similar operation in Australia.

"I was a bit hesitant at first but I just thought 'why not' and the hotel we stayed at was brilliant," Ms Fuller said. "My breast augmentation procedure was quoted at \$11,800 in Australia. In Phuket, I spent \$4055."

Both women want to go back for stomach tucks and dental work and are part of a growing number of women travelling abroad for surgery. Cairns notched 31 patient visits to Phuket in 2009 for cosmetic surgery, up from seven in 2008.

Medical tourism company **Restored Beauty Getaways** organises accommodation, flights, hospital bookings and recovery sessions for clients.

The company also organises group visits to Phuket for operations and put Ms Hobbs and Ms Fuller on the same flight and in the same accommodation for their visit.

Company owner Claire Licciardo said medical tourism was booming because it allowed patients to sneak in a holiday with the money saved on the procedure.

"It's a huge growth industry, there's first-class level of surgery with Third World prices," she said.

However, experts warn "medical tourism" is not always the safest option. Cairns plastic surgeon Dr Mark Vucak said he had recently seen three women enter his clinic with holes in their breast where the implant had fallen out after an overseas procedure.



Looking good: Charmaine Hobbs went to Phuket for her recent breast surgery.