



Is the craze for dental tourism going to leave our generation in dentures by 50?

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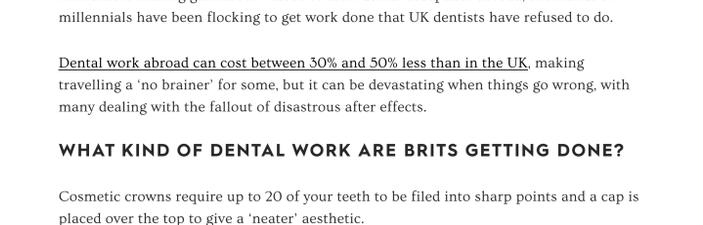
We all want the perfect teeth but at what price? Writer Elizabeth McCafferty has been exploring the dark side of dental tourism.

Content note: this article contains descriptions of medical malpractice and an instance of suicidal ideation.

For years, perfect teeth and dazzling smiles were associated mainly with celebs strutting down red carpets, featuring on big screens and in the pages of glossy magazines. But in recent times, having a 'Hollywood smile' has become more attainable than ever.

With a few thousand pounds and a holiday abroad, you could have your very own set of perfectly curated pearly whites - but at what long-term cost?

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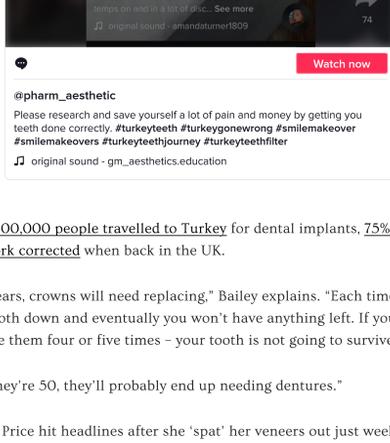
Since 2019, 20 British nationals have died due to medical tourism in Turkey alone. In 2020, the first Brit died due to dental tourism in Turkey with his two friends left on life support. The hashtag #DentalTourism has 7.8 million views on TikTok and #TurkeyTeeth has 88 million. Inspired by Love Islanders flashing their flawless gnashers and streams of influencers making glamorous videos of their dental escapades abroad, thousands of millennials have been flocking to get work done that UK dentists have refused to do.

Dental work abroad can cost between 30% and 50% less than in the UK, making travelling a 'no brainer' for some, but it can be devastating when things go wrong, with many dealing with the fallout of disastrous after effects.

WHAT KIND OF DENTAL WORK ARE BRITS GETTING DONE?
Cosmetic crowns require up to 20 of your teeth to be filed into sharp points and a cap is placed over the top to give a 'neater' aesthetic.

"I think it speaks volumes that UK dentists would not do this treatment on patients. I think if they did, they would probably be de-registered as a dentist for overtreatment. One of the main problems is lack of education and people not understanding the difference between crowns and veneers," explains Laura Bailey, a dental therapist based in London.

"Crowns are created by drilling away a lot of the tooth in order to place a cap all the way around. Your enamel is removed in this process, so you'll be extremely close to the nerve and only left with a little bit of the inside which is called dentin. There is quite a high chance of potentially having to do a root canal later and cutting your teeth. Veneers are where they only cover the front of the tooth, it's like a shellac nail that goes over, it's still not completely minimally invasive, but it's not to the same extent."



In 2018, over 300,000 people travelled to Turkey for dental implants, 75% of whom had to have the work corrected when back in the UK.

"Every 10-15 years, crowns will need replacing," Bailey explains. "Each time they're shaving the tooth down and eventually you won't have anything left. If you're 22, you will need to replace them four or five times - your tooth is not going to survive that

"By the time they're 50, they'll probably end up needing dentures."

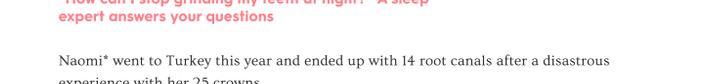
In 2020, Katie Price hit headlines after she 'spat' her veneers out just weeks after getting them done in Turkey, which required a second trip to fix. Sean, 23, from Ireland, can sympathise having had a similar experience. He chose to go back to Turkey after receiving a successful rhinoplasty there.

"I'd found a company via Instagram that I'd liked and flew over to Turkey for seven days. I thought I was getting veneers, but on the day I found out I was getting 20 crowns, which I wasn't expecting. After four months, I was eating and the crown on my front tooth fell out. It was awful - my confidence was instantly drained and I was too embarrassed to laugh or smile. I wore a mask most places so I didn't have to show my teeth."

BRITISH DENTISTS OFTEN AREN'T WILLING TO CORRECT POOR DENTAL WORK DONE ABROAD
One of the most worrying problems with dental tourism is the difficulty in finding UK dentists that are willing or able to correct issues.

"It took me about four or five months to get my tooth fixed," Sean recalls. "I thought I had a warranty from [the dentist in] Turkey, but they told me I didn't. I'd paid €3,100 (£2,627) originally, but they said I had to pay over €1,417 (£1,200) for the one crown to be fixed (not including flying out and hotels). It was extremely difficult to find a dentist who would work on my mouth in the UK after going abroad.

"My advice would be to make sure you're 100% ready for the unexpected and be ready to be turned down by dentists in the UK after if needed."



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Naomi* went to Turkey this year and ended up with 14 root canals after a disastrous experience with her 25 crowns.

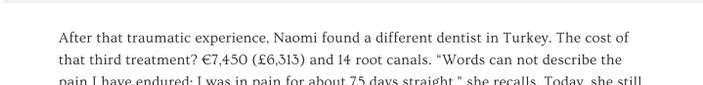
"Initially my husband and I were very impressed by the attention to detail in how professional their dental office looked. I paid €7,117 (£6,030), which he'd only accept in cash, and this included a free stay in a hotel for the week - but things were too good to be true.

"The hotel wasn't up to our standards at all so we had to pay for a new one ourselves. He also didn't ask for any medical history. He started freezing around my mouth to start work, and over a four-hour period, he carved down my teeth into points. He was extremely aggressive and I was scared to move. When I looked at my carved teeth in the mirror, I was absolutely horrified, but I knew there was no going back."

A week after the full procedure, Naomi started to experience excruciating pain, despite the clinic telling her that she'd only need to take painkillers for a few days.

"Eventually, I needed to get reassessed and had to have one root canal, but there were more problems. The pain escalated so much that I wanted to kill myself. I was advised to take out the 25 Emax crowns and replace them with Zirconium crowns, as the dentist thought that I may be allergic to the glue that he had used. The removal was the worst experience imaginable; it felt like a jackhammer."

"When I looked at my carved teeth in the mirror, I was absolutely horrified, but I knew there was no going back"



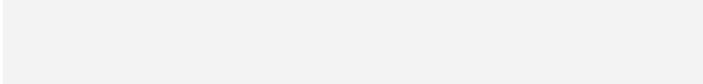
After that traumatic experience, Naomi found a different dentist in Turkey. The cost of that third treatment? €7,450 (£6,313) and 14 root canals. "Words can not describe the pain I have endured; I was in pain for about 75 days straight," she recalls. Today, she still struggles with eating as she can feel the remaining crowns "wiggling around".

WHO'S TO BLAME FOR DODGY DENTISTRY?

So, what can be done here to prevent more people from falling for these potentially life-changing procedures?

Bailey believes that unless something is done, the NHS will be left to pick up the pieces. "In 20 years, there's going to be a huge number of people draining NHS resources because they need issues fixed. In the industry, once you treat it, you 'own it', which is why so many dentists are reluctant to treat patients who chose to go abroad for their teeth."

Care assistant Lisa Martin has been using TikTok as a way to spread awareness of the dangers of dental tourism. She bravely explains the complications caused by her decision to travel from Ireland and pay €3,500 (£2,966) to get 26 teeth treated in Turkey. Like Sean, Lisa believed she was getting veneers, and it was only after the procedure that she discovered a mouth full of crowns that would go on to require numerous antibiotics due to infection.



"My mouth was sore right away; the whole treatment seemed so rushed. I came home after a week in Turkey and my mouth was still painful, but I put that down to a 'settling in period'. It didn't get any better, and I got an abscess that needed root canal treatment. This is all at a financial cost to myself.

"I was sold the dream of a perfect smile but I'm now living an absolute nightmare. The options available are to replace all the crowns or have dentures or implants, but I haven't found a dentist willing to take on the work," she explains.

WHERE TO GO FOR A 'HOLLYWOOD SMILE'

Bailey says: "A UK dentist would be more likely to suggest composite bonding or porcelain veneers. For a lot of people, all they need is Invisalign or their teeth whitened. I think educating people about these options really is the best solution. People might have to be a bit more patient, but not everything has a quick fix.

It's easy to be drawn into the dazzling white smiles of influencers and reality TV stars, but for some, reality has quickly become a nightmare. Do your research, speak to your dentist and prepare to be a little more patient to avoid the potential of a lifetime of problems.

*Names have been changed for privacy

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