



TEXT BY ZANE CELMA | PHOTOS BY KASPARS KRAFTS, F64

From Latvia with a smile

For almost 20 years, the Latvian Medical Company ARS has treated foreigners working in Latvia, as well as those wishing to receive medical assistance on working visits or during their holidays. Recently, an increasing number of customers has arrived in the country specifically for medical services. This is also true at ARS' dental clinic, where the number of foreign customers has grown by 20% during the past 12 months. According to clinic director Māris Andersons and dental department head Aiva Pastnieka, this number is expected increase even further.

www.arsdentalclinic.lv

For more information please call: +371 2544 1771

From which countries do most of ARS's dental customers come from?

Pastnieka: Currently, the greatest number of foreign customers comes from Norway, and this is connected with our agent's activity in that country. He arranges our clients' flights to Latvia, makes sure that they are met at the airport, and that besides getting their teeth fixed, they also get to see Riga. His work has been very fruitful, and therefore we plan to expand our network of representatives to other important markets.

Customers from abroad arrive here mainly to receive implants and dentures. However, prior to these procedures, the oral cavity is also usually prepared, with preliminary hygiene, tooth repairs and gum treatment.

Why do customers from other countries choose to come to Latvia?

Pastnieka: Firstly, dental care costs about half as much in Latvia, even if you include travel and accommodation costs. Secondly, our customers place

great emphasis on high quality work and modern technologies, both of which ARS can provide. Thirdly, customers have often thanked us for our considerate attitude—we tell them what we plan to do and why. Fourthly, practically all of the major medical services can be received here. All branches of dentistry are represented at our clinic, including endodontology and implantology, as well as piezosurgery, a new and modern form of bone surgery. Furthermore, our specialists can be contacted and visited very quickly, without long queues.

Andersons: We're also helped by the fact that *airBaltic* offers direct flights to five Norwegian cities. Norwegians are very open and are ready to come here to use our services, but we have also had customers at ARS from the most diverse countries, even though the medical tourism market in Europe has been largely divided up. For example, Germans and Austrians travel mainly to Hungary and the Czech Republic, while Finns go to Estonia. We get visitors from England, Ireland, Norway, as well as countries to the east.

Interesting facts:

International medical tourism is growing on average by 20 % per year. However, differences can be observed between countries. For example, in 2009, between 60 000 – 100 000 British residents are estimated to have travelled abroad to receive medical services. However, in Sweden this number is only a few hundred.

At ARS, the number of patients from other countries, for example, in dentistry, has grown at an annual rate of about 18–20% per year. The ARS dentistry clinic treats more than 15 000 customers per year, of which foreign patients constitute 5–7%.

ARS collaborates with a number of international insurance companies, including AXA, *International SOS*, *Europ Assistance*, *Delta Consulting Group*, *Global Voyager Assistance* and *AP Companies*.

Why do people increasingly choose treatment in countries like Latvia?

Andersons: To a large degree, it's a matter of cost. After the world financial crisis, everyone has become careful with their money. In countries where medical services are expensive, people are looking at options. If there's an opportunity to save some money and get high quality services while getting to see another country, then why not use that opportunity? In addition, dentistry is only one of the services that we offer. ARS is one of the



Aiva Pastnieka



Māris Andersons

largest private out-patient clinics in the country and people from overseas also seek magnetic resonance and multilayered computer tomography tests, for example, which we can execute at a high level – much quicker and cheaper than in other European countries.

In the future, insurance companies may also become interested in the development of medical tourism. We are already working with international insurers, who accept our invoices for payment. If insurance companies pay for services provided in their own countries, then they might consider reducing costs by encouraging their customers to choose services in other countries such as Latvia. If the quality is the same, but the costs are lower, then why not take advantage of this? **BO**



Cecilie (Tromsø, Norway, children's book writer):

Riga is a wonderful city with a responsive people, so whenever I'm here, I use the city's beauty treatments and medical services. I am impressed by the professionalism and high quality that is offered. At the ARS dental clinic, I can get an appointment within a week, so all I have to do is take a one-and-a-half-hour flight from Norway.

In the beginning, I used only dental hygienist services, but as I had an occlusion problem, Dr. Ilma Ose recommended dental braces. First I was a bit confused, as one has to see a dentist regularly when wearing braces, but the flight connections between Norway and Latvia are so good that I don't feel the difference.

In another aspect I do feel the difference, though. It's the price, which is comparatively low for the high quality of the work done. Many of my friends have used the services of the ARS dental clinic and I have heard only good feedback from them as well.

Medical Company ARS is a partner of BalticMiles. Earn 5 Points for 1 LVL spent.
