

Bariatric Tourism Is Safe and Effective When Performed in a High-Volume Center (19,801 Patients) Following ASMBS Guidelines

Educational summary of a published ASMBS scientific meeting abstract. Prepared for patient education by BariatricCenterRankings.com.

Study Snapshot

Patients analyzed	19,801
Study period	April 2000 – October 2021 (20 years)
Average age	42.2 years (range 13–78)
Average BMI	42.3 (range 25.22–76)
Procedure mix	53.1% sleeve gastrectomy, 38.2% adjustable gastric band, 8.7% gastric bypass
Revisional cases	9.7%
Average length of stay	22.4 hours
Average EWL at 2 years	76.18%
30-day morbidity rate	1.2%
Mortalities	None reported

Background

Bariatric tourism has risen significantly since the turn of the century, allowing patients to address barriers such as cost and insurance coverage. Questions have remained about its safety and efficacy. This review analyzed the safety and effectiveness of a high-volume bariatric tourism program in Tijuana that follows ASMBS/ACS guidelines and regulations.

Methods

A retrospective review identified bariatric tourism operations performed at a Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited center. Patients followed a standardized protocol including an online bariatric education program, nutritionist-guided pre-operative weight loss, and pre-operative internal medicine and psychological evaluation. All patients underwent a barium swallow 72 hours post-operatively. Demographic and post-operative data were collected.

Results

19,801 patients were identified over a 20-year period (04/2000–10/2021). The average age was 42.2 years and average BMI was 42.3. The total 30-day morbidity rate was 1.2%, including intra-abdominal bleed (0.001%), acute incarcerated hiatal hernia (0.001%), gastric outlet obstruction (0.001%), venous thrombosis (0.0006%), intra-abdominal infection (0.0002%), pulmonary embolism (0.0002%), and acute gastric leak (0.00005%). There were no mortalities. The average excess weight loss (EWL) at 2 years was 76.18%.

Conclusion

The authors concluded that bariatric tourism, when performed in an accredited center, can be both safe and effective. Keys to success included a standardized, regimented program ensuring patient compliance and quality provider care.

Citation & Verification

Source: ASMBS Scientific Meeting abstract — "Bariatric Tourism Is Safe and Effective When Performed in a High-Volume Center (19,801 Patients) Following ASMBS Guidelines." Authors affiliated with Obesity Control Center and UC San Diego. Patient cohort: 19,801.

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