

January 2008 Bangkok Medical

January 13, 2008

Hi everyone,

I just returned from a week in Bangkok – it was a wonderful break and it was an amazing trip. I went there because I'd had an iffy mammogram in the US in May and finally the doctor decided I should get a biopsy. Well I didn't want to fly all the way back to the US for that and there is basically no health care in Africa (I had no idea where to go in Nairobi or South Africa) so I decided to go to Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok which has often been cited as the #1 hospital in the world. Let me tell you – it was an incredible experience – I felt like I was in a medical Super Stop and Shop. And of course I took photos.



Here I'm looking down into the lobby of the Bumrungrad from the Food Court. The photo on the right is the registration and large area where the "stations" are – my neurologist had her office at station 7, my breast surgeon at station 2 etc. And the third is the area where you pay – what an amazing and efficient system. I had emailed them two weeks before and said I wanted to see a neurologist, gynecologist, dermatologist and a breast surgeon (they replied within 24 hours with the appointments all set up for 2 days). Well – the neurologist (who agreed that everything is good with my MS) said I should see an orthopedist about my back so his nurse walked me down the hall to the office and I saw a doctor within 10 minutes who suggested I go to physical therapy and I got walked downstairs to that and was seen within 20 minutes. The breast surgeon took more mammograms and a sonogram and saw that the calcification had not grown at all in 8 months (and it's very tiny) so I'll come back in 6 months or a year to check the progress (that was very good news). I had a wonderful doctor who did a very thorough melanoma check and took care of a few things. The gynecologist was wonderful (I actually went back again the next day because I had more questions). I had two days of physical therapy and had my teeth cleaned in between (I'll be going back for some repair work). I decided to see a doctor about my constant stomach problems and was booked in for a colonoscopy the next morning (everything is fine). It was by far the most wonderful medical experience I have ever had. The staff and doctors were helpful not frightening and everyone was kind and patient. The doctors were mostly Thai and very knowledgeable and the equipment was completely state of the art. It was very cool that all the doctors could see on their computers which other doctors I had been to and the diagnoses and recommendations.



I was there for four days and at the end of each day I would take my various forms to the payment area (photo on left), give them to the woman at station #1, sit down and wait for my number to be called. I would pay the bill and then wait again (never more than 15 minutes) to be called to pick up any medicine that was ordered from the pharmacy. Now – with all of the doctors, teeth cleaning, tests, mammogram, sonogram and colonoscopy the entire bill came to \$1,220.00!!! Is that utterly amazing or what!!! Now – why isn't the US considering health care like this??? And it wasn't just for foreigners – there were lots of Thais there also. I felt like I spent 4 days sitting and watching an international fashion show – Muslim women from all over the Middle East, very wealthy Americans, Europeans and Asians from all over. It is such a relief to have gotten so much medical information in such a short time and to know that I'm healthy and can keep going full speed ahead. The photo on the right is a small food vendor near a friend's restaurant.



I stayed near the same area (Soi and Sukumvit) that I did last year so I felt comfortable knowing some of my surroundings. I took the Sky Train to the hospital every morning and walking down the street would often see these different statues, houses, offerings – I'm not sure what you call them. The flowers are put around the statues every morning, candles are lit and people would stop and wai (bow with their hands together) and light some incense. I hope to return to Bangkok and spend more time learning about the culture – I would love to understand more about the spirituality of the people.



I stayed in the Dream Hotel which was a little pricey but I was anxious about all the medical stuff so I decided to treat myself. The morning I checked out they were filming a commercial in the lobby – the actress was a beautiful Thai (as so many of them are) with a lovely Bentley in the background. JD told me that when he modeled they did a shoot at that hotel so that was fun being there. I missed JD completely this trip – he is now a deep sea diver working on oil rigs and he's in the Gulf of Thailand. I was sad to miss him but we did Skype a bit so at least I was able to talk to him. And I went to lots of meetings and met many of JD's friends – that was really wonderful for me. I visited with my friend John, who I had met last year in Bali (he's to my right at the table). We hung out with his friends Charles and Rudy and went to a local Thai place for dinner one night. It is so fascinating to be around other ex-pats – people who have decided to live

their lives in a foreign country. There are many of us around the world and it's good to know that we are a community wherever we go.

I was enthralled with Bangkok for a few reasons. First and foremost I got a 2 hour Thai massage every day for \$15 – now that is the way to live!! The food is of course beyond belief and I enjoyed every single bite. And I was in fashion heaven – the women are so beautiful and their dress is simple, elegant and understated and I loved it. I didn't have time to go shopping but next time I will make sure that I set aside a few days to buy sandals and skirts and all of the necessary black (big color here) clothing. In Bangkok people spend their time in malls and that's where the fancy food courts and restaurants are. It's kind of neat – they've taken the "mall culture" to the ultimate in efficiency. There are malls that you go to for very specific price ranges or for certain merchandise or food. I had a lot of fun and spent most of the time with my mouth agape at everything that was available!!!

But I am now back home in Zanzibar and couldn't be happier. I watched the sunset last night from my rooftop penthouse and did my yoga and meditation this morning on my upper roof with the sunrise. I have settled my new two year work permit with ZEDO (Zanzibar Enterprise Development Organization) and will be working specifically with small business (my specialty) and people living with HIV. My foundation Participate Now! is official and launched – I will be designing a website so that everyone can visit it. I have four wonderful Zanzibaris who are educated and skilled who will be implementing the projects that I will be managing through Participate Now!!! We are in the middle of training 9 women with our entrepreneur project and I will be sending out an email with photos in the next few weeks after I visit the womens' businesses to see how they are progressing.

My heart belongs in Zanzibar and I am most fortunate that I am able to live here and do my work and be effective. I am excited to know that I am physically healthy and I can now focus on my work here in Zanzibar for the next year.

Be well and relax and enjoy every day of this next year

Kathryn