

# **Hola from Mexico! I got my teeth cleaned for only \$21.63 USD out of pocket!**

*by Annie Margarita Yang*

I drove to Ciudad Juarez in Mexico and back earlier this month, and I'm alive! I went there by myself and am glad I made it back in one piece. I was not prepared for how scared I would feel driving alone. Going through the Guadalupe Mountains, there were no gas stations for two hours. Realizing I had enough gas to get to the next city but not enough to get to a gas station, I panicked. I made a detour to a gas station in the middle of nowhere. When I couldn't get the gas to come out of the nozzle, I panicked even more! Someone helped me, but it was a close call.

Driving in Mexico itself is a whole other story—got lost at least three times every day! Many near accidents. Believe me, it's not a trip for everyone.

I went to Mexico because I needed time away from home to reflect on my life, but I figured I should make the most of my trip. I wrote in my book, *1001 Ways to Save Money*, to engage in medical/dental tourism but I never tried it myself before until now. I want to share my experience in this newsletter.

(Note: All prices have been converted to USD.)

## **Teeth Cleaning**

I found my dentist through Dental Departures. They specialize in finding dentists abroad. I loved the price transparency that it provided for all procedures. Prices were listed like a restaurant menu and reviews were sorted like Yelp. Something I don't like about dental care in the United States is how hidden the prices are. There should be a chart hanging on the wall displaying the out-of-pocket price. If this were a free market economy, I should have the freedom to shop around.

CostHelper says that standard teeth cleanings in the United States cost between \$75 and \$200. I chose DentalCare in Ciudad Juarez. Dental Departures listed the price for that clinic as \$28, but when I got there, the price was \$21.63. I felt thrilled to save even more money.

As for the cleaning itself, it's the best one I ever had. (My last two dentists caused a lot of pain.) The dentist finished in under ten minutes and it didn't hurt at all. I asked her if she cleaned under my gums because I didn't feel anything. She did, but she wasn't rough. Her English was great because she used to work in El Paso, TX. The clinic transferred her to Juarez because they needed an English speaker.

## **Hair**

Before going to Mexico, I highlighted my hair purple at home. The products cost around \$45. I did it myself because my local salon quoted me \$160.

In Mexico, I got a nice haircut for \$10. But this isn't about the haircut; this is about the highlights. When the hairdresser washed my hair, the purple dye washed off onto her hands. She pressed me on how much I paid. Assuming she thought my hair looked bad, I hesitantly told her \$45, leaving out the fact that it was DIY. She responded mucho caro (very expensive)!

What?! Expensive?! I thought it was cheap. Then she revealed that her salon charged only \$20.

By the way, funny story—I spilled purple hair dye all over my bathroom sink and the stain won't come off. I'm losing my security deposit, so this cost me more than \$45. I'm better off highlighting my hair in Mexico in the future.

## **Eyeglasses**

I got polarized glasses from Ópticas UV, which I found through Google and Facebook. The eye exam and lens came out to be around \$132. I have no idea whether this is cheaper than in the USA because, again, lack of price transparency. All I can say is that the turnaround time was fast: ready for pickup the next day. Every eyeglass store I've been to in the USA had a turnaround time between one and two weeks.

## **Living Expenses**

I had to pay for accommodation, food, gas, and auto insurance. My living expenses for five days totaled \$244, around \$48.80 per day. Not bad. I could have shortened my trip to three days and saved more, but I needed time to myself to reflect on my life.

I recently learned it's common among immigrants to travel back to their own country and do this. My friend Janani went back to India last month for a wedding. She got everything health-related done while she was there. Janani told me extractions for four wisdom teeth would cost around \$360. In the USA, expect between \$1,000 and \$2,600 for four out-of-pocket. With those prices, you might as well fly to India, get the procedure done, and have a nice vacation for less.

What do you think? Healthcare in the United States is not affordable, even with insurance. Would you ever travel to another country to get medical and dental procedures done? If you would never try this, what are your reservations? Hit reply.

*www.AnnieMargaritaYang.com*