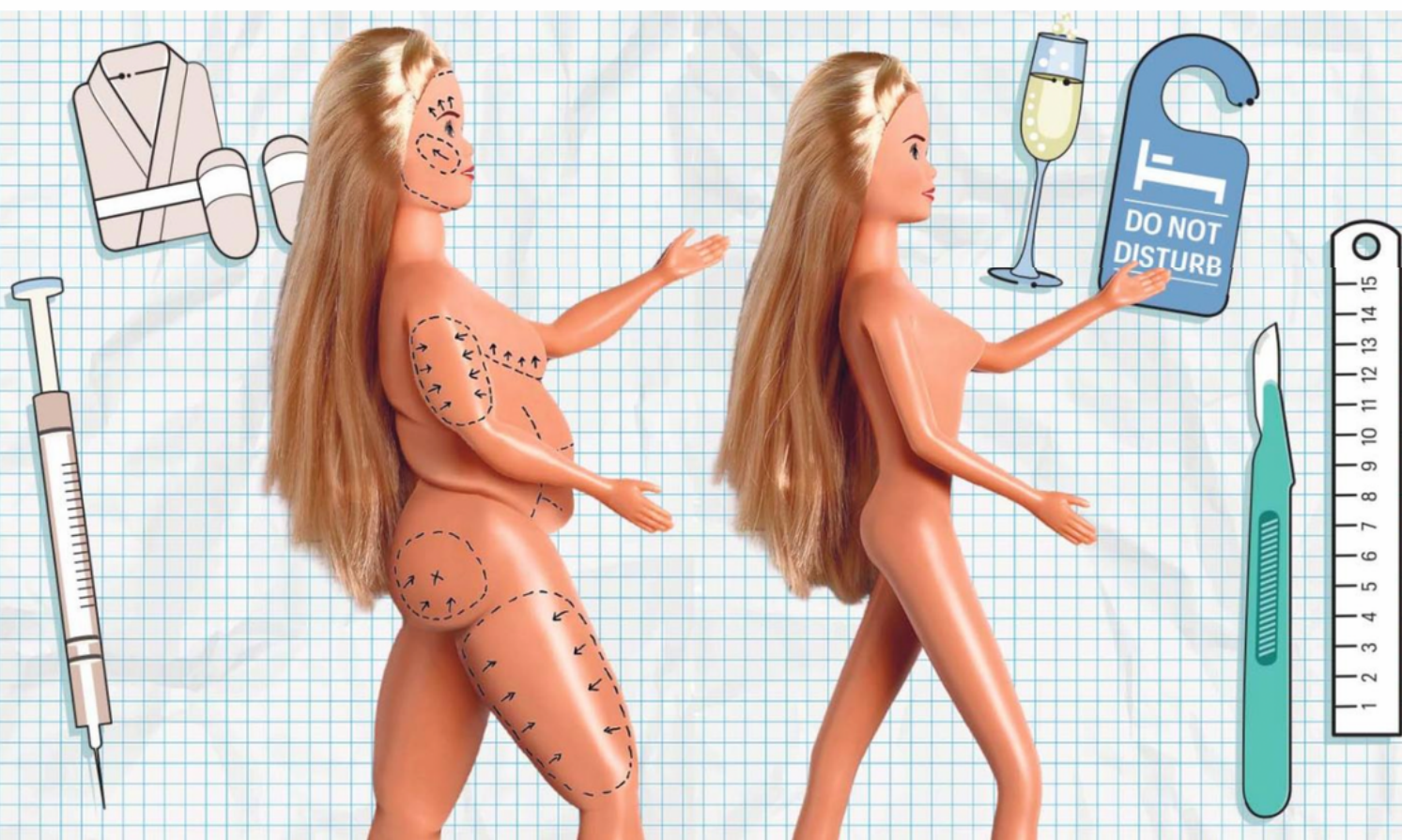


# Secret face lifts and luxury hotel stays for Ireland's private plastic surgery patients

The cost of private cosmetic surgery in Ireland can be prohibitive, but those who can afford it get five-star service. Aisling Keenan goes behind the surgical drapes



Plastic surgery for aesthetic reasons alone is something that needs careful consideration, doing research on your surgeon is essential

GETTY IMAGES/ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLARE COLLINS

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There's something very *Real Housewives* about imagining a group of women gathered over dinner at a top hotel restaurant, bandaged and bruised from recent facelifts, chatting about their aches and post-recovery plans. It all seems painfully LA — but the reality may be closer to home than you'd think.

For a single, private aesthetic procedure conducted in Ireland, prices can range from €5,000 to €15,000, and that's before combination treatments come into it, which can stretch up into the €20,000 or €30,000 mark. But still, it seems, our plastic surgeons are being kept busy. While cosmetic tourism has certainly become more popular in recent years, with searches for plastic surgery terms along with the words "Turkey" and "Lithuania" increasing by 5,000 per cent, Irish patients with deep pockets are able to stick around — and in style too.

John Curran, a cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgeon who operates from aNuMe clinic in Cork ([@anume medical clinic](#)), even features a list of high-end

hotels on his website, including Aghadoe Heights, the Europe and more, so that those discerning guests can plan their surgery staycations.

In a smart west of Ireland hotel, a source who deals with customers told me that guests recovering from surgery would “often” book week-long stays in order to hide their procedures from friends, relatives and even their partners. A guest relations manager in another top Irish resort said that they “couldn’t possibly comment” on the exact amount of bandage-wearing post-op lodgers who stay at their location, but did say that it’s not unheard of.

Cormac Joyce, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon based in Dublin who specialises exclusively in aesthetic surgery, says that many of his patients are still secretive about their “work”, and will stay out of their homes for recovery.

“About 50 per cent of people who come [to me] for consultation do not tell their partner they are going to see a plastic surgeon and about 20 per cent of partners are not actually told about the surgery until afterwards – or they are told that it is a non-facelift procedure,” Joyce says.

“Surprisingly, 3 to 5 per cent of my patients never tell their partner about having had a facelift and these patients usually spend a week recuperating with a friend or family member post-surgery before returning home to their blissfully unaware partner,” he adds.

“In the past six months I have noticed that many facelift patients are looking for other facial procedures to be carried out at the same time as their facelift. The lip lift is a procedure that five years ago very few people were aware of, but it has soared in popularity and many patients are combining it with a facelift to harmonise the face. Other facial procedures they’re having at the same time include upper eyelid surgery, brow lifts, nanofat facial volumising [fat transfer to the face] and earlobe reduction. Buccal fat reduction [cheek fat removal] has definitely grown in popularity and it has been viral on TikTok and other platforms.”

### **Discretion, please**

When it comes to exclusivity in terms of privacy, the Irish plastic surgeons I spoke to agreed that practising cosmetic surgery would be next to impossible were it not for the most strict rules around discretion for patients. Dr Siún Murphy, a consultant plastic surgeon, says that her “whole practice is based on discretion, or it simply wouldn’t survive”.

“Particularly in a small country such as ours, and that includes both cosmetic and reconstructive aspects of my practice. Choosing to have aesthetic surgery is, for some people, a shared experience and they enjoy sharing the details with family and friends, but for others it is extremely private. I have no opinion on which is better as it is a personal journey, but I always like at least one person in their world to be involved – for support,” Murphy says.

Curran says his practice is, of course, GDPR compliant and sticks rigidly to all of the rules around patient data, but outside of that specific privacy requirements



can be accommodated.

“Our practice is exceptionally busy, so to say there would be absolutely no patient overlap wouldn’t be guaranteed. But if a prospective patient said up front that [privacy] is a major consideration for them and they need it 100 per cent guaranteed, we could definitely cater for that. We have more than one door in and out,” he says. “If I see an unfortunate conflict in the diary, we definitely have in the past let people leave discreetly via another door.”

### **Home and away**

It’s because of this exact level of strict discretion that finding a patient willing to openly talk about the “work” they’ve had done was a challenge. However, Jennifer Carroll ([@Jens\\_journey\\_ie](https://www.instagram.com/jens_journey_ie)) happily shared her experience. Having lost more than 76kg in weight (12st) and gaining almost 130,000 Instagram followers in the process, Carroll’s excess skin was causing her distress.

“My first surgery was a ‘fleur de lis’, which is basically an extended tummy tuck. The scar not only goes hip to hip to pull the excess skin down, it also goes vertically up to below the breast to pull the excess skin inwards too,” she explains.

“My stomach was personally my biggest problem area. I had lost 12 stone and unfortunately was left with quite a lot of excess skin. I trained five days a week and carrying the extra kilos of skin around was not only uncomfortable but often painful, and I was quite self-conscious of it physically.

“My second surgery was having the skin removed from my arms and a breast lift at the same time.”

Carroll chose to stay in Ireland to have her surgery, in spite of the potential cost differential of travelling abroad for it, because, “I really didn’t like the idea of flying so soon after major surgery and not having my surgeon close if I had concerns or during the follow-ups.

“I understand that it is a big difference financially to pay for it here compared to abroad, but I see so many horror stories, and my surgeon now spends quite a lot of his time doing correction surgery on botched jobs that have been done abroad.”

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Financially speaking, travelling for plastic surgery might initially appear to be better value than opting for a private clinic here but, as Murphy points out, the risks of complication can make it potentially very dangerous.

“Cosmetic tourism is appealing from a purely financial perspective and I do understand that as, up front, pricing can be considerably cheaper. But I think that spending the money to be safe and have a back-up team available close to where you live is a critical part of the decision-making process,” she says.

“I would not recommend getting on a plane a few days post-operatively. Blood clots are always a risk and this is considerably increased with air travel in the days post-surgery and may be life threatening.”

### **Safety first**

Recently a joint statement was issued by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons and the Turkish Society of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons, and Murphy says she anticipates an Irish statement won't be far behind. In it, a report was highlighted that concerns standards of patient care both in the UK and Turkey, and advice was given to people considering travelling for surgery in order to make it safer for all.

Each doctor interviewed was keen to point out that plastic surgery for aesthetic reasons alone is something that needs careful consideration, and that doing research on your surgeon is essential to make sure the correct qualifications are there.

“The term ‘cosmetic surgeon’ does not actually mean that the practitioner holds a surgical qualification,” Murphy explains.

Curran also stressed the point that the people he sees in the clinic are patients, as opposed to clients, because it is a medical setting. He says that deciding to have surgery, regardless of the reason, is nothing to be taken lightly. So too is the decision about who performs those procedures. The recommendation is to do thorough and complete research, on both the surgeon and the procedure itself, which includes checking the register of the Irish Association of Plastic Surgeons.