



A Female Plastic Surgeon in the Middle East- An Experience of a Lifetime

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Editorial

After years in practice, I, like many, fell into a routine. Trained in microvascular breast surgery, my idea of an adventurous day was doing a facial plastics case. A young adulthood of travel and experiencing other cultures seemed far behind me. But, as I listened impatiently to the recruiter discuss the need for board-certified female plastic surgeons in the Middle East, I suddenly felt a spark of intrigue. Without even missing a day of work, I could learn about a culture I knew mainly from CNN- and in a way that allowed me insight into the people and culture rarely achieved as a tourist. Since then, I have been traveling to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) every six weeks. I am part of a group of private plastic surgeons from the US and Europe who perform surgery for a period of one week at a time. We perform surgery, see each other's post-operative patients, and handle any complications and new consultations. Many patients do not have access to plastic surgeons in their own countries, let alone a female surgeon. Since Islam does not allow a man other than their husband to view a woman's naked body, unless an emergency, religious Muslim women must be operated only on by a female plastic surgeon for body rejuvenation procedures. These women are limited in obtaining routine plastic surgery procedures by their male physicians they encounter, and are grateful for the opportunity to obtain cosmetic procedures while adhering to their faith. I see many different age groups in my practice, as we all do, each wanting a certain look or procedure. My female patients in their early to mid 20's typically want fillers, Botox, and plasma rich platelet therapy. Since many women in the UAE who are religious, wear a Shayla and an Abaya. The Shalya, or head scarf, hides the hair, can be worn loosely or tightly depending on the individual. The Abaya is the long black robe which goes over conventional clothing. The face becomes a focal point to these women, therefore lip and cheek enhancement is exceedingly popular. Women in their late 20's early 30's are looking for more surgical procedures to address their bodies after pregnancy. Breast augmentation is still a favorite amongst many women who have finished breast feeding. I offer several different approaches to place silicone implants however the sub-pectoral and infra-mammary approach seems to be the most popular. Liposuction is the second most common surgical procedure I perform. Exercising can be a challenge to anyone but the norms regarding dress complicate it further. Observant women can only exercise in all women's gyms or the privacy of their homes, and a spur of a moment jog outside in shorts and a running top is unheard of. Therefore, liposuction becomes a very desirable option in lieu of exercise. The abdomen and flanks are the most popular followed by outer thigh, back, inner thighs and finally arms. Women in their late 30's early 40's may combine all the procedures above, but the abdominoplasty is still the most sought after procedure after giving birth to multiple children. Many of my patients have had five children or more resulting in extra weight gain and skin redundancy exempting them from liposuction procedures alone. These women are extremely vocal at their dissatisfaction regarding how their clothes fit, what they look like in the mirror, or simply their lack of self-esteem after aging, weight gain, and pregnancy. The male population can be considered just as specific regarding an image they wish to capture from plastic surgery. The men in the UAE wear a Kandora, a long white robe with a head covering but unlike the women, wear western clothing in public as well. The most popular procedure men request in my practice is liposuction, especially trying to obtain the "six-pack" look. While many of my patients are overweight, liposuction does truly make a difference to this population. Many people ask me how popular is plastic surgery in the Middle East? I answer with the advent of the internet including social media, Middle Eastern women are no different than women here in the United States. Even the men, are becoming increasingly interested in obtaining plastic surgery procedures. They stay current with American plastic surgery trends and I find myself at times, learning from them what is presently popular. At the end of the day, regardless how one is "covered," plastic surgery procedures enable women and men to achieve a look or a feeling which ultimately improves

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their well-being. From the comfort of my New York apartment, the middle east seems worlds apart, both physically and culturally. But speaking with my patients in the UAE, hearing how their appearance and body impacts their self-esteem, and discussing their goals of

treatment, I could easily be in my office back home. For those of us in reconstruction and aesthetics, the two worlds are far closer than I could have ever imagined.