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Low-cost surgery bring UK scribe to city

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BANGALORE: Evan Douglas, a former journalist from the UK, has always had a special inclination towards India: he has read about the British Raj years ago, met Indian leaders like former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, heard about the Taj Mahal and has been an admirer of the beauty and grace of Indian women.

Little did think that his debilitating hip pain would bring him here.

A week after having his hip successfully replaced at the M S Ramaiah Memorial Hospital, Douglas reads Tolstoy's War and Peace and mulls over writing two more parts of the trilogy that he has planned.

"I'm just a patient here, not a tourist. But I have no regrets," says Douglas. "I was disabled with a bad hip and desperate for a cure. It was easy to get here.

After reading news reports on healthcare in India, I called the UK-based Taj Medical Group that sends people here for treatment. We zeroed in on M S Ramaiah's in Bangalore," he says.

The visa was processed within a month and travel arrangements finalised. The 70-year-old journalist touched down in Bangalore on November 8. Finding that he had an arthritic hip, doctors recommended a total hip replacement surgery.

Two days later, a team, headed by the hospital's Medical director Dr Naresh Shetty, performed the surgery. "I'm comfortable here.

I have a wonderful team of doctors and paramedical staff. Indian movies and the cricket telecasts kept me busy. I also have time to read and think about my next book," he says.

The medical facilities and the care at this hospital, according to Douglas, "are far superior compared to that of the National Health Scheme" (free treatment provided to UK citizens).

"I would have got this done free of cost but I was hesitant. I heard about the facilities and high infection rate at the NHS hospital.

Worse, I heard of first-hand experiences from three persons, one of whom even lost his wife. I decided to get myself treated elsewhere," he added.

The total cost of the surgery at a private hospital in the UK would have cost him 10 times that of the Bangalore package. But his passion for India, in addition to the competitive cost factor, was an additional attraction.

"He is cheerful and very cooperative," says Dr Shetty. "Hip replacements have become a common procedure these days and with our experience we did it with ease," he added.

Douglas will fly back to London on November 28 with a new hip, and, of course, fresh ideas to pen his next book