

OUT WITH THE OLD

MAKEOVER: Papamoa woman Della Bay felt she was a young person trapped in an old woman's body. **Ellen Irvine** speaks to her about her journey to Malaysia for a plastic surgery makeover.



NEW LOOK: Della Bay feels like a new woman after having extensive plastic surgery in Malaysia.

PICTURE / JOHN BORREN 020310JB05BOP

WHILE some people wanting a boost would buy a new wardrobe, change their hair or join the gym, Della Bay decided cosmetic surgery was the answer.

And she didn't just get a quick nip and tuck — the 41-year-old underwent a whopping 17.5 hours of surgery in two sessions, changing her body from her head to her knees.

And she travelled to the Malaysian city of Kuala Lumpur to do it, in a new trend towards "operation vacations".

She went from a size 16 to a size 12, and lost about 6kg of fat and skin — and gained about 1kg in breast implants.

She had been thinking of travelling overseas for plastic surgery for several years, but in October decided to "go for it", and booked with Gorgeous Getaways.

Della stayed in Malaysia for four weeks, and spent about \$37,000 in total — almost \$32,000 on surgery, and \$5000 on flights, accommodation and spending money.

She estimates the same surgery in New Zealand would have cost up to \$150,000.

While most people get "one or two" procedures done, Della decided to go the whole hog.

"Other people are not as extreme as

me. I do everything extreme, whatever I do in life. That's how I am."

Her surgery came after a lifetime of insecurity about her looks.

"I've always looked very old in my body and face for my age.

"When I was 15, I looked 20, and it went on like that, which was good when I was young. At this age, it's not so good.

"I'm still such a young person in the things I do, but my body and face didn't reflect that. I looked like an old lady." Della, who works in IPL hair removal and pigmentation treatment, asked her clients to make an honest guess of her age.

Like an episode of the TV show *10 Years Younger*, the results were devastating.

"The answer would range from 46 to 53, and I'm 41.

"Nobody ever guessed that I was the age I was.

"I used to hate it. No one wants to be older than they are."

Della is thrilled with her new appearance. Despite still being swollen, she can't believe the results.

She's ecstatic to see the back of her "really big bat-wings", her name for the wobbly fat on her upper arms.

"It's a life-changing experience.

"It's better than the gym, better than a 12-week challenge. I had a four-week challenge.

"The physical part is one thing. I didn't realise how much I didn't like my body until now.

"It's not a bikini body, it's not beautiful, but it's tidier.

"It's hard to explain how different I feel because of it."

The plastic surgery experience, Della said, was like a holiday.

The entire trip was organised by Gorgeous Getaways, an Australian-based company that has a New Zealand office.

She was picked up from the airport and taken to her hotel, and had a consultation with the surgeon the night before her surgery, meeting her surgeon for the first time.

Della wasn't nervous or scared about her impending surgery, "just excited".

She spent four nights in hospital after her first surgery, returning to her hotel for three nights before her second surgery. Again, she spent four nights in the hospital, which she said was like nothing she'd seen in New Zealand.

"The hospital was like a five-star hotel.

"Apart from the hydraulic bed, you would have sworn it was a hotel.

"The food was presented like a five-star restaurant, with pretty bits on the plate. It wasn't like a normal hospital.

"During the day, there were probably two nurses to every patient, and at night it was probably a ratio of one to one.

"You just have care coming out your ears."

The only drawback, Della said, was the language barrier, which made it difficult to communicate.

"English is their second language. If you have to try to communicate something beyond the everyday experience, [it's difficult].

"After my second surgery, I had really extreme pain, and they couldn't understand my level of pain. That was frustrating."

After two weeks, Della could enjoy shopping and activities, although she had to stay in Kuala Lumpur in case of complications.

She coped with the 10½-hour flight back to New Zealand by taking a sleeping pill.

While many people who get cosmetic surgery are secretive about it, Della believes it should be out in the open.

"It is happening more than people know," Della said.

"I would love to see it when cosmetic surgery is not so taboo.

"Whatever you need to feel good about yourself, should be okay.

"Believe me, I feel good about myself."

One woman she met in Malaysia told her friends and family she was on holiday, but kept it secret she was having cosmetic surgery.

She changed her hair colour so people would think that was the change, rather than the full facelift she had had.

"Everyone knows there's something different about her. They think she must have met a nice man over there," Della said.

The reaction from Della's family and friends has been overwhelmingly positive.

Since she returned from Malaysia, two women she knows were so impressed with the results, they've booked their own trips.

"Most people say it is amazing, they are astounded.

"I ran into an ex-neighbour who didn't know about the surgery. They said 'you look great', but couldn't say what it was.

"Most people assume you've been to the gym.

"It's always a positive. I've got a smile on my face now."

Her partner Bernard is "blown away" with the new Della.

"He was happy with the old me, but he really likes the new me."

Della had thoroughly researched her options, and suggests anyone interested in overseas surgery does the same.

"There's a lot of different places offering different things.

"The reason I went with the one I did, is because they are Australian-based with an office in New Zealand, so I could

speak to a human being.

"They have years and years of experience.

"There's a lot of cheap and nasty [providers]. In the Asian countries there can be an element that is not so developed, and you've got to be really aware of where you are going and what you are doing."

Because of the difficulty in finding unbiased information, Della decided to write a book about her experiences.

"There was a lot of information where they were self-promoting, and everything is always amazing when you are self-promoting.

"I couldn't find people's personal accounts unless they were attached to the company they are promoting.

"Unless you know someone personally, you'll never know a personal account."

There were some things Della wished she'd known before surgery. Like, after a facelift you can't open your mouth, let alone eat a meal. And a facelift will leave you with ears so swollen you can't talk on the phone.

Della also wishes she had taken someone with her rather than tackling the surgery alone.

"I would never recommend going on your own. The biggest thing would be the emotional and physical support of having someone there."

The book is an open account of Della's experiences as they happened.

"There were times when I was feeling pretty emotional.

"I haven't tried to pretty it up, because it's meant to be a true account."

Despite her satisfaction with the surgery, Della admits at the time she was in extreme pain.

She describes the pain in the first 12 hours after her second surgery as a 9.5 out of 10.

"I breezed through the first surgery, but after the second surgery I just thought 'you stupid woman'.

"I'm a reasonably staunch person, and I cried. I don't think I've cried in pain since I was a kid.

"At the time, I would have never done it again. Five weeks down the track, I'd do it again."

Writing the book is also a personal goal for Della, who says she will self-publish if she has to.

But interest in her story is huge, with an appearance on TV One show *Breakfast* planned for later this month.

Anyone wanting information on Della's experience can contact Della on 574-5671 or dellabay@xtra.co.nz

DELLA'S SURGERY

- Removal of double chin
- Facelift
- Eye-lift
- brow-lift
- neck-lift
- Fat from inner thighs cut off
- Liposuction on outer thighs
- Tummy tuck
- "Bat-wings" — fat from inner arms — cut off
- Liposuction on her back
- Breast implants from a small B cup to a D cup

Risks far outweigh positives, say local surgeons

by Ellen Irvine

PLASTIC surgery patients seeking overseas treatment seemed to spend more time on choosing what fridge to buy than on choosing a plastic surgeon, a Bay plastic surgeon says.

Adam Bialostocki of Bay Plastic Surgery said he had seen patients with results that were "pretty poor", including tropical infections and bad scarring.

"I'm sure there are fantastic surgeons, but maybe we are not seeing these people afterwards. People are returning with results I would not accept in New Zealand. . . things you wouldn't get at our level of training.

"People aren't choosing their surgeons in the same way they might



SCARRED: Della Bay has been left with scarring on her arms, but she says it's preferable to the "bat-wings" she used to have. PICTURE / JOHN BORREN 020310JB06BOP

make a major life decision. They are using four operators and the internet, without meeting the person face to face."

Mr Bialostocki was not alone in his concerns. Surgeons spoken to by the *Bay of Plenty Times* all expressed concerns about "operation vacations".

Tauranga dermatologist Dr Paul Salmon said patients heading overseas for cosmetic surgery were taking a "huge risk".

"I think you have to be out of your mind to have cosmetic surgery in an overseas country."

Auckland plastic surgeon Tristan de Chalin, who does monthly consultations in Tauranga, is former president of the NZ Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery.

Mr de Chalin said the risks of overseas surgery were vast.

Travelling a long distance before or after surgery could increase the risk of blood clots, he said.

And it was difficult to develop a relationship with your surgeon when you were meeting them only the day before your surgery.

"We think it's important that you have a personal relationship with your surgeon, that you get to know him or her, discuss requirements.

"It's important that if there is a problem you know and trust the person to sort it out."

Mr de Chalin believed operation vacation destinations had a "cookie cutter approach" to surgery.

"When you are dealing with high volumes and seeing a lot of people, they inevitably have a one-size-fits-all cookie cutter approach. I don't think it's a recipe to provide great results."

Mr de Chalin was "delighted" that Papamoa woman Della Bay had a

positive experience and was happy with her results.

But he said he would not be happy about a patient embarking on a 10-hour flight so soon after what he described as a "huge amount of surgery".

He would have preferred a six week break between her surgeries, rather than the one week she experienced.

Mr de Chalin said he saw "lots" of people needing corrective surgery after botched plastic surgery overseas.

"If there is a problem or complication you actually have very little come-back."

Tauranga surgeon Brandon Hitchcock said the biggest issue with overseas surgery was follow-up.

"Even with the best surgeon, you need revision. No surgeon could claim to be 100 per cent. Things do go wrong."