



Travelling abroad can sometimes be overwhelming and daunting, but can still be a very worthwhile experience when seeking cutting edge fertility options and solutions.

Whether you need basic in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment in order to conceive, or the help of an egg donor and/or surrogate mother, these services are not just available, but are also successful. Whether you are a traditional couple, a gay couple, a single woman, or a single man, everyone is given a fair chance to achieve parenthood.

And by taking a more in depth look, the possibilities continue with state of the art treatment options, such as PGD (Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis), ICSI (Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection), and yes, even Gender Selection.

PGD represents the beginning of an end to many genetic diseases. A single cell from a developing embryo is removed and tested for a genetic abnormality, which gives the reproductive embryologist the possibility of implanting only healthy embryos. The result will be the significant reduction and possibly the eradication of a genetic disease from affected families with such history. PGD is also considered another way to prenatal diagnosis. Its main advantage is that it avoids selective pregnancy termination as the method makes it highly likely that the baby will be free of the disease under consideration. Furthermore, PGD with IVF is an important procedure to help achieve family balancing i.e. gender selection.

ICSI is most commonly used to overcome male infertility problems. ICSI is a very effective method to fertilise eggs in the IVF lab after they have been aspirated from the female. Under the microscope, a single sperm is injected and released into a mature egg. A special needle is carefully advanced through the outer shell of the egg and the egg membrane, and the sperm is injected into the inner part of the egg. After the procedure, the egg is placed

into a cell culture and checked on the following day for signs of fertilisation. This usually results in normal fertilisation in about 75-85% of eggs injected with sperm. Once the embryo is created it is then ready for implantation.

Gender selection is the attempt to control the sex of the offspring to achieve a desired sex and it does require the use of IVF. It has also been known as family balancing, and with the help of PGD can now be determined prior to implantation of the embryo. Once the fertilised egg has reached the 8 cell embryo stage (day 3), a single cell can be removed for testing. If a Y chromosome is present, this indicates that the gender of the embryo is male. This procedure has a 99% accuracy rate for gender selection, significantly higher than with sperm sorting.

There has been a rising trend in the past few years of more and more international couples and individuals coming to the States seeking fertility treatments. The two main reasons for driving people overseas are medical, mostly diagnosis methods which are directly correlated with higher rates of success and treatment options, and the other one is legal, especially when an egg donor and/or surrogate mother is needed.

Medically, by running a select battery of tests, composed of an ultrasound, select blood work, and often times a hysterosonogram, the reproductive endocrinologist may identify quite effortlessly what is causing the hardship in conceiving. Often times, women who have gone through several IVF cycles either in their country of residence or even abroad, come to the States only to achieve success.

Legally, when the help of a third person is needed, the US makes the baby equation become possible for many couples and individuals looking to achieve parenthood. Thanks to modern science egg donation and surrogacy are relatively new options. Still keeping the hush-hush factor acquired many years ago, it does not come as a surprise that many countries do not condone them. And especially to compensate for such a service, has raised a lot of eyebrows.

It is illegal to pay an egg donor and/or a surrogate mother in most parts of the world, which makes it very hard for someone to

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consider this as an option. The time spent on various waiting lists for an egg donor can be years, and even when someone finally becomes available, there is very little information offered to the recipients. No photos, or family history, age, and any pieces of the puzzle that should make this a successful and definitely more enjoyable experience.

Because compensation for egg donors is allowed in the USA, the pool of donors is rather large. To be clear, the donor is not compensated for the actual eggs, but for the pain and suffering she goes while the eggs are retrieved. While in the USA egg donation is also mostly anonymous the prospective parents »



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do have the possibility to view a full profile of the donor, containing a comprehensive bio, medical and family history, as well as a photo album. Most of the times the donor's physical characteristics are important, but some may want to feel some connection with the chosen candidate. By reading the family medical histories, likes, dislikes, hobbies, interests, and of course looking at the photo album, that feeling can be attained more easily.

Sometimes not only the help of an egg donor is needed to conceive but also a surrogate mother's assistance is required. Nowadays there are close to 800 births a year in the USA involving IVF or the help of a surrogate mother. With most countries in the world making compensated surrogacy illegal and sometimes even a criminal offense punishable with prison time, the States are an ideal and fairly safe destination to make dreams of parenthood come true. However all intended parents need to know that there are two major points to consider when embarking on a surrogacy journey: Where the surrogate mother is located, and subsequently where she delivers the baby, and having a contractually bound agreement between themselves and the surrogate mother.

Only California and five other states are liberal enough to legally allow couples and individuals to enter a surrogacy agreement, which will protect all parties involved because it is enforceable by state law. This will provide both sides with psychological evaluations, criminal and background investigations, financial obligations, commitments to the process, and requirements of each unique surrogacy journey. This exchange of information, formalised by

attorneys, is crucial to the roles both the parents and surrogate will play.

This is why it is very important that the surrogate mother delivers in a surrogate-friendly state. Surrogacy is already quite an emotional and financial process, and a legal nightmare, any sort of complications arising from it, is the last thing anyone would want to deal with, especially when away from home, in a foreign country.

Taking shortcuts to save money may seem appealing, especially in the current global economic environment, but ultimately, may lead to a very risky outcome and unwanted surprises.

In general surrogacy is an amazing process, and should be a smooth journey that includes the understanding of any and all potential negative outcomes of an arrangement and facilitating solutions on how to best handle them.

While there have been a lot of talk about the IVF business booming for the past decade in the United States, organisations have also been created to help and assist couples and individuals coming from abroad. For instance, Fertility Miracles, located in the heart of Los Angeles, lends concierge services including air travel, transport, hotel accommodation and a 24 hour a day personal travel concierge representative to mainly assist those who seek to fulfill their dreams of having a family, and need to travel to the States to make their dreams reality.

Whether in need of an egg donor and/or surrogate mother, there is full assistance offered to prospective parents on how to select their candidates. An extensive online database with profiles of available donors, as well as surrogates can be browsed from the safe and intimate environment of your own home. Not only do the prospective parents receive support throughout the selection process of their desired egg donor and/or surrogate mother, but also guidance in choosing an IVF facility with state of the art treatment options and great statistics, while offering support with the legal process and financial commitments to all third parties involved. Furthermore birth certificate and passport support is offered along with translation services if needed. The travel requirements are minimal and the process can be started in advance prior to coming to the States.

Travelling to the United States to achieve your dream of parenthood may seem unimaginable or even out of reach and it may take the input and assistance of many professionals to help you become a parent.

But when the day arrives, and you answer your phone to hear the words: "Hello... you're pregnant!" it is then that you know it was all worth it!

Surrogacy and egg donation are sometimes the only means to an end, which eventually is a life or lives that you have helped to create, and then become your own. Families are created many different ways. Your own personal happiness might just be a phone call or computer click away. **FR**

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