

MedjetAssist

By Leah Ingram

Imagine the peace of mind having an emergency medical evacuation plan while traveling could bring. Read on to learn about a company prepared to provide just that.

Even if you haven't been injured or fallen seriously ill while traveling, you're sure to have experienced anxiety over the possibility of such a thing happening. Who could you rely on to race to your rescue and, if necessary, transport you to the specialized medical assistance you would require?

One option would be to join MedjetAssist, which has a very simple mission: to provide medical evacuation and repatriation services, including evacuation via air ambulance, to its members who are hospitalized more than 150 miles away from home. When a member falls ill, the company reviews their condition with the attending medical staff at the facility where the person has been admitted, along with the member's own physicians back home. If evacuation is deemed necessary, Medjet provides medical evacuation to fly the member, at no additional cost, to the hospital of his or her choice—whether that be back home, or to another city nearby.

For as little as \$95 per person to cover a seven-day trip, membership with MedjetAssist—which was founded in 1991 to mirror the evacuation programs the Swiss pioneered and is based in Birmingham, Alabama—can save travelers tens of thousands of dollars or more in medical transportation costs (*see sidebar*).

"Medical transports domestically can cost upwards of \$25,000, whereas bringing someone back from Europe can cost \$75,000, and Africa or Asia as much as \$100,000," according to John Gobbels, vice president and COO. "If people had to pay for this out of pocket, it could be financially devastating."

Gobbels points out that saving people money in an emergency isn't all that MedjetAssist offers. What sets the company apart from travel insurance policies or other travel emergency programs is its repatriation program, which means that Medjet will get its members back home in an emergency.

With travel insurance you can expect to be reimbursed for any financial loss due to a trip cancellation. Some travel insurance policies include medical evacuations such as those MedjetAssist offers. But with these policies, that evacuation often is only to the nearest appropriate medical facility as the insurance company deems it, not the patients themselves. "If I'm hospitalized in Africa, I don't want to go to a hospital in Nairobi because that's what the insurance company considers appropri-

ate," says Gobbels, a former critical-care nurse. "I want to go to a hospital back home." Getting that person back on home soil—or repatriated, in other words—is one of the most important factors in the Medjet equation.

An interesting element of the company's membership program is that, for anyone under the age of 75, there are no pre-existing conditions that would prevent them from joining the membership program; even members who are traveling in a wheelchair. "From a medical and operational standpoint, there is no difference between our members who are in

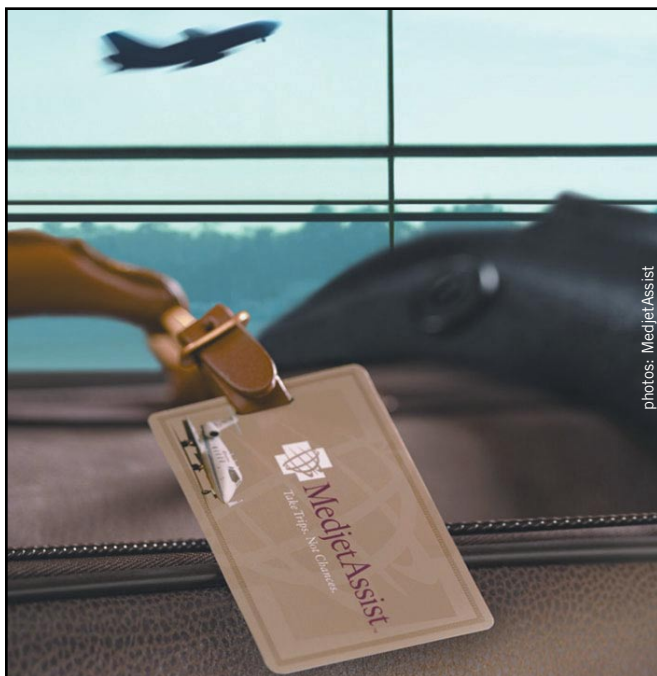


wheelchairs or those who are not,” Gobbels adds. “If they have sustained injuries or an illness that requires hospitalization and meets our criteria, then our job is to get them where they need to be.”

Just as would be the case in an ambulance or other medical transport, Medjet passengers who are evacuated are transported on a stretcher from hospital, to plane, and to the next hospital. “They’re not in a wheelchair at that point,” Gobbels explains. “We would bring them back just as we would any other patient.” He goes on to add that Medjet will even coordinate helping the member ship their wheelchair home if the medical jet is unable to carry it.

As for the aircraft, he explains that Medjet utilizes both domestic and international affiliates that have dedicated air ambulances. Still, some members who qualify for medical transport are well enough to fly commercially, so if the patient’s condition isn’t serious “we arrange to have a nurse bring that individual back, on oxygen if necessary, on a commercial aircraft.” In these instances members travel first-class only.

While MedjetAssist works with more than 50 affiliates and has access to more than 200 aircraft worldwide that are ready to go with a phone call, there are some places where it simply cannot provide evacua-



photos: MedjetAssist

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Medjet Membership

MedjetAssist offers different levels of membership to its 120,000 members worldwide. These include:

Short-term membership: available for seven, 14, 21, or 30 days, ranging from \$95 for a single person to \$335 for a family.

Annual membership: fees start at \$250 per person, or \$385 for a family of up to seven members, including a spouse or domestic partner, and children.

Diamond membership: available to those between the ages of 75 and 85. Offered annually only, and starting at \$430.

Plus membership: an add-on program to regular membership status, it includes free international cell phone rental and a \$50,000 cash advance, if necessary, to help pay for hospital costs. It costs \$119 annually, in addition to the regular membership fees.

tion services. “That would be anyplace in the world that restricts private aircraft movement,” Gobbels says. “If the U.S. government says we can’t fly into Iraq, for instance, then we’re unable to go there.”

Even so, members are never left to fend for themselves. “We might not be able to send a plane for them, but we can help members get the medical attention they need.” This is where the company’s 24-hour medical concierge program comes in. “They can speak to an attending-level physician at any time, and we have global medical databases, including translators.”

It’s no wonder, then, that corporations in the banking, finance, shipping, and oil industries contract with MedjetAssist, as well as individuals who simply want to feel safe while enjoying their travels. “In all instances these are people who find themselves in places where the level of health care to which they are accustomed is not assured,” Gobbels says, “so we can give them the peace of mind they need to make the most of their travels, whether it’s for work or pleasure.”

To learn more call (800) 5-ASSIST or go to www.medjet.com. 