

Healing Hands

The Cabin offers Thai hospitality with a twist

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Alastair Mordey, programme director, counsels a client in the riverside garden.

Thailand has long been known among foreigners as a medical tourism hub where they can undergo plastic surgery, physical check-ups, spa treatments or get dental care while enjoying holiday. But now other visitors, including world-famous celebrities, foreign royals or billionaires, fly here for an entirely different yet lesser-known reason.

The Cabin, a rehabilitation centre in Chiang Mai, has increasingly been recognised as a destination for foreigners who come for addiction treatment.

And like many other rehab centres in Thailand that keep themselves hidden in quiet corners of tourist cities such as Phuket, Koh Chang or Samui, The Cabin ensures their visitors complete privacy.

Certified by the Thanyalak Institute on Drug Abuse Treatment, the Department of Medical Services, The Cabin is an inpatient addiction treatment centre located on the outskirts of Chiang Mai.

The centre provides treatment programmes for both chemical addictions, including drugs and alcohol, as well as process additions such as sex and gambling.

"We offer excellent Thai hospitality combined with western standard treatment," says Alastair Mordey, programme director. The recovery treatment focuses on primary care and secondary care, which involves psychological treatment, which teach the clients how to control their addiction and prevent them from a relapse once they return home.

Unlike many public rehabilitation centres that focus mainly on medical treatments and detoxification only, The Cabin offers comfortable rooms with facilities in a resort-like soothing environment. Clients have large private guestrooms equipped with amenities including cable TV, Wi-Fi access and DVD players, full board meals with a wide selection of beverages, pampering services and, more importantly, 24-hour nursing as well as in-house personalised medical care.

Besides Thai hospitality, the place boasts a highly-experienced team of UK, Australian and Canadian-trained psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors.

After a medical assessment upon arrival, clients' luggage will be checked for possibly harmful items. Those who need serious detoxification will be referred to a partner hospital for treatment. For simpler cases, detoxification and medical care will be handled by the in-house medical team.

During the stay, mobile phones will be taken away, except for those who need them for business communication.

Then, clients will be taken care of within the premises. After all-day sessions, they will be allowed to use the phone once a week for a certain period and two hours of internet each day.



There is an easy atmosphere in the restaurant

There is an easy atmosphere in the restaurant. While addicts might be labelled by some as people who fail to live normally, The Cabin has its own definition of addiction. Here addiction is identified as a brain disease and the centre therefore tries to raise awareness of the sickness.

Its unique treatment model is a combination of various addiction treatment methods and psychological techniques that have been modified to achieve recovery in a shorter time span compared to the traditional approach that requires three to six months. This is combined with daily exercise therapy, mind therapy, massages plus weekend excursions to get that naturally "high" feeling like normal people.

"Some addicts stick to the happiness hormone that their brain releases when using drugs and do not respond to natural happiness like others," Mordey notes.

"We keep the clients busy with a day-long programme, from 9am to 9pm, to slowly change their behaviour, their reactions and the way they think about problems they encounter." Around 96% of the addicts undergoing treatments are people who have jobs and normal lives. They include businessmen, teachers, sportsmen and celebrities, and most are over the age of 30.

Treatment for drug and alcohol addiction is common at The Cabin.

"When the addicts try to stop their former addictions, they usually substitute it with something else," explains Mordey.

"We see some addicts, who are trying to stop using drugs, drink 20 cans of Red Bull each day. The energy drink contains a high level of caffeine, so we have banned Red Bull. The clients are also not allowed to build romantic relationships with others at the centre."

However, smoking is allowed. After spending a certain amount of time being treated, recovering addicts who show an improvement are moved on to secondary care treatment. They are allowed to live in a halfway house, which helps rebuild their self confidence.

At The Cabin's halfway house, clients have to take care of themselves in terms of cooking, laundry and house cleaning, with some regulations and curfew.

Apart from that, they can live like others - going shopping, meeting people and doing social service. But the psychiatric team is always available to offer them advice.

"I like the way that a doctor explains about the brain and the consequences of drug use. Addiction is a kind of illness. This treatment has changed my life," says Mee, 31, a drug addict from Australia who spent three months at The Cabin.

"The treatment methods make me think and consider more carefully when doing something," comments Jason, 28, a client from Malaysia who also spent more than three months in the halfway house.

While some visitors are required to be in the halfway house for a few months, others might need a longer stay in some cases up to six months is required before they can finally move on.

After the foreign clients return to their home countries, they can still get counselling at three clinics in Singapore, Australia and the UK.



A resort-style pavilion set among the serene atmosphere of The Cabin in Chiang Mai. Each client has a private room with bathroom amenities, cable TV, a DVD player and limited internet access.