

04. CHECK INTO THE CABIN CHIANG MAI FOR A WHOLESOME REFORMATION



After opening just four years ago, The Cabin Chiang Mai has swiftly ascended in reputation to become one of Asia's leading rehab centres thanks to its dynamic, twenty-first-century approach to both chemical (narcotics and alcohol) and process (sex, gambling, gaming) addictions, attracting growing numbers of both Eastern and Western customers.

The Cabin's diverse team of psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors have offered the 750-odd clients to so far pass through its doors a faster, more holistic model of recovery. The sun-up-till-sun-down programme combines Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) methodology with a secularized, more culturally resilient adaptation of the Twelve Steps technique, interspersing it with physical and meditative exercises, which together, gives clients the tools to instinctively adopt an addiction-free, healthier lifestyle.

Upon visiting one of The Cabin's primary care centres, a five-star resort-like complex fitted with luxury bungalows located alongside the Ping River on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, it becomes apparent that addiction doesn't discriminate against age, nationality or social status. I wasn't met with stereotypical imagery of the poor

and feeble, but rather an international body of individuals ranging from fifteen to sixty year olds. All were from well-to-do backgrounds (doctors, hedge fund managers, artists) yet afflicted with the common burden of addiction.

The innovator behind The Cabin, director Alastair Mordey, is quick to correct outdated ideas about the nature of addiction, illuminating in his English accent, with a cadence and fluidity similar to Russell Brand, that addiction is now being understood as a disease, one that is caused by low dopamine levels in the mid-brain, which addicts try to compensate for via substance abuse and harmful behaviour. Clients are taught how to cope with this life-long affliction, which, according to Alastair (who speaks from first-hand experience) is never fully cured. 'I am a *recovering* addict,' he insists.

I pay a visit to the facility where the second phase of treatment occurs: three conjoined private residential properties called 'The Sober House', a co-op where clients are free to integrate themselves within the local community as part of their sobriety process. While at first the intimate group of seven doesn't exactly seem comfortable divulging the gritty details of their addiction to a journalist,





after a democratic poll of hands they agree to let me enter their lives for an afternoon group therapy session.

Counting Alastair and myself, we are a tight group of eight. Some of the clients' details are divulged forthright, and I get the sense that, for some, it has become a rap after myriad meetings and self-introductions in front of strangers. Yet other details are harder, and you get a feeling of silent labour through the impregnable silences.

After no more than fifteen minutes it becomes quite clear that the levels of the twelve-step process are very real for these people: tangible phases of life to enter and hopefully exit before moving on to the next one. 'Each of these steps are real, with their own colours that can be felt,' one tattoo-adorned client thoughtfully affirms. I sit and spectate as Alastair listens before actively picking at the underlying nature of his clients' comments and the emotional implications of their wording. He examines people's statements aloud with the rest of the group, who weigh in with their past experiences.

When tension rises, Alastair is quick to make a wry witticism, revealing his toothy grin and easing over any would-be catastrophe. His demeanor is not expressive of a man who thinks himself a messiah, but one who's gone down the rabbit hole and been lucky enough to emerge with a story to tell.

On my final day with the group, I join them on their weekly Sunday afternoon excursion, this time to visit children at a school in a nearby village. After English lessons with the children, today's activity consists of a mini obstacle course, at the end of which lies a plate of powdery flour that the participants must bury their face in to find a balloon. During the ebullient fervor of good-natured competition, one client chuckles to herself and murmurs, 'This is definitely putting me in a position near my "triggers".'

I couldn't help but think back to a comment made by a young man during our Sober House session. Speaking aloud as if to himself, he shared with the rest of the group that, 'addiction is just one aspect of me; I'm also a son, a brother and a human.' It felt like he was coming to initial grips with something basic but pure, trying to let it sink in ostensibly for the first time. —D.A.

