

# Eastern PLEASURES

FINDING AN AUTHENTIC THAI SPA IN DELHI IS LIKE LOOKING FOR A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK. BUT WE'VE DONE THE HARD WORK FOR YOU



A few years ago, when Vibha Khanna Rastogi decided to set up a plush spa in Delhi that would spoil her customers silly, she also wanted to offer the real deal. And that's how a little slice of Thailand came to life in a sleepy commercial complex in South Delhi's Vasant Kunj neighbourhood.

The Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa is a sprawling 5,000 sq ft affair, making it possibly the biggest standalone spa in Delhi. Enter through the appropriately grand entrance, and you'll find yourself in a calm, soothingly lit space. Treatment rooms are upstairs, comprising five singles and two for couples. Each room is equipped with its own steam and shower facilities, while each of the couple rooms boasts its own jacuzzi as well.

If you're lucky, Vibha herself will be there to greet you. She has made a mark for herself working tirelessly for the education of underprivileged kids, and it's her gentle, healing spirit that emanates through this space. Even if she's not around, you'll still be in the good hands of her well-trained staff. And that's where Sawadhee really stands out from the crowd. The whole staff has been trained by therapists from Thailand; some of the therapists are from that hallowed land too.

As you walk up the stairs to your treatment room, you could be somewhere in that blessed land of massages. Subtle design elements and carefully chosen props emphasise the Thainess of the sanctuary-like setting.

On their recommendation, I opted for the two-hour Thai Oil Therapy, a dry Thai massage followed by an oil treatment. I could not have chosen better.

Although prosaically named, it was utterly indulgent, and my therapist, Annie from Bangkok, clearly a master of the form.

Thai massages focus on stretching the muscles and stimulating the natural flow of 'sen sib' or the 10 energy lines of the Thai healing system. There should be no pain or discomfort, and you should end up feeling deeply relaxed. Some even call it assisted yoga. I can assure you that the massage was bone-crackingly authentic. This was followed by a deep tissue oil massage (my choice; you can choose an aromatherapy oil massage for the second hour instead). The oil massage came as a welcome counterpoint to the dry Thai massage, and I'd recommend you add on an oil-based relaxing ritual to any Thai massage you may be trying. Needless to say, I emerged renewed, ready to take on the travails of a travel writer's life.

Sawadhee has everything from face treatments (including a gold facial) to hardy scrubs and luxurious wraps on offer. More luxurious therapies come with names like 'A Fine Romance' and 'Pamper Yourself'. Apart from Thai, there's Swedish and Javanese too. Proximity to the airport means it's not unusual to see customers trundling in with their strolleys. Of these they are promptly divested before they head upstairs for an hour or two of bliss.

■ AMIT DIXIT

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