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THE MELLOW MOLAR

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If you can put your money where your mouth is, the Bangkok Dental Spa Clinic will soothe a smile out of you

We've all been to the dentist, and we know the drill. But puns don't help. For a complete change, we might take our tingling teeth to the Bangkok Dental Spa Clinic, where herbal scents, soothing music, indirect lighting and cushy chairs persuade us we're in for indulgence, not brutality.

"No, you're actually in a dental clinic," says dentist Watchareewon Porncharoen, who's known to her patients as Dr Lily.

"We try to bring comfort to both the patients and the dentists, and ultimately to achieve the best results. The dentists can do their best work and the patients are more relieved after the long treatment."

Dr Lily's tooth spa offers advanced dentistry services, including cosmetics, implant surgery and full-mouth rehabilitation. She came up the idea of adding the spa ambience to her clinic a year ago, and three months ago opened its doors to a public that was actually smiling.

"I've worked as a full-time dentist for more than 15 years and you can only imagine what I've faced," she says. "So I decided to bring in something to let me enjoy my job more, and spas are my favourite thing."

Dr Lily has shifted from her original clinic in the Ramkhamhaeng area to the second floor of the Methawattana building on Sukhumvit Soi 19. Her new Bt25-million operation accommodates mostly Europeans and Australians, who know how expensive dental treatment can be.

"I find it very affordable compared to England's dental clinics, where there are more customers and they're always very busy and quite expensive," says 27-year-old Scott Shaw, who's in Dr Lily's office for the second time despite the fact that he's on vacation.

"It's a very good idea that Dr Lily has brought in the spa approach. I'm happy with the customer service, and I'll recommend it to my friends."

Regular customer Gary Holland, another Brit, admits he was no different from most when it comes to disliking dentists – until he found Dr Lily.

The former football coach actually managed to fall asleep while his teeth were being drilled thanks to the soft music, soothing aromas – and the fact that his feet were being massaged at the same time.

"It was fantastic," he says. "I didn't smell any antiseptic like you usually have in dentists' offices. It only has the pleasant smell of herbs."

Clients are welcomed in the reception area with a massage. Depending on their ache of the

moment, they can get a neck rub or some foot reflexology before, during or after the dentist has been in their mouth. Most of the time, they ask the therapist to work on their muscles both before and after.

"The massage gives patients relief from stress and fear," says Dr Lily. "When they feel comfortable, it's easy for us to do any hard dental work. It's a kind of trust the patients give us."

However, before you're lulled into a snooze reading this, keep in mind that luxury ain't cheap. While the average dental clinic charges Bt200 to scrape the scales off your teeth, here you pay Bt1,000 – but you are being massaged at the same time of course.

You can have your teeth whitened with a laser beam for Bt15,000, given a porcelain veneer for Bt10,000 or replaced with dental implants for Bt35,000.

So the dentistry spa is far from free – despite having originated in America, the home of the free. Dr Lynn Watanabe had an immediate hit on her hands when she opened one in Los Angeles in May 2002.

Having discovered that the more relaxed the patient is, the less they suffer and the more effective the treatment is, dental spa clinics have since spread across the globe.

It's a place to get manicures and facials while your mouth's open, in a dim-lit chamber filled with aural pleasure.

Dr Lily focuses on "dental wellness" so she can "do the difficult work like implant surgery and full-mouth rehabilitation in a spa ambience".

Business must be doing well: she's planning to open a dental implant centre in Phuket next year.

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