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Mandara Spa, The Monarch Dubai

Dr. KC Barker, *TheSpaReview.com*

Any day is a good day to spa, but some days, a spa is just a necessity! My body and mind were aching for a break after the extended, tedious hours of conference organizing. Maybe you, too, have experienced the point at which you simply need to put life aside and escape to the spa. Mandara Spa is just the place to leave work and worries behind. As Spa Director Sharon Barcock says: "We're not here to remedy you (because we can't!), we're here to help you relax and deal with your world. We want you to leave it behind for just one spa treatment hour or a whole spa day." I did.

Now this is a simple thing, but let's start where a spa day starts – parking! Like other hotel spas, Mandara benefits from a valet parking service – so... step out of your vehicle and hand over the keys. Not your problem any more! And then, when your spa day is done, your car just arrives. I'm beginning to think two things: first, a really fine spa will simply provide valet parking whether in a hotel or not, and secondly, a really, really fine spa will offer a car spa too – a good scrub, polish and sparkle for car and owner. Call me silly, but I love my Umbarak – my Toyota Prado with the name that the



Bedouin gave intrepid desert adventurer Wilfred Thesiger – and I'd happily lavish a spa day on my intrepid wadi-bashing, traffic-dodging Umbarak.

Lavish is a good word, too, to describe Mandara Spa – lavish space, clean lines and understated decorations that especially appeal, notes Sharon, to men.

It's an important consideration because this spa has a large male clientele – businessmen with knotted travel muscles and knotty business preoccupations. Not all spas would really attract male clients, maybe too feminine or fussy. Mandara Spa is reminiscent of an Arab palace with spaced columns marching down a wide and vaulted hallways. Just a minute, I think, where's the Bali in this?

In fact, this spa is a member of the Mandara Spa chain founded in Bali, Indonesia – “one of the pioneers of the tropical Asian spa style, based on natural products, tropical settings and open-air spa suites for couples” according to the spa media information. And its signature treatments offer Balinese specialties and Asian traditions and exotic techniques from the Orient. But the feel of the spa is distinctly not Balinese and I ask Sharon about that. She explains the interesting challenge that a spa chain has when it occupies a spa space in a new hotel that has been designed by the hotel chain and not the spa owners. It is not easy to bring the rattan and greenery and moist heat of Bali to the stark and sweeping design of The Monarch Dubai, but I am assured that, in time, Mandara will achieve the elusive effect of being a luscious urban retreat.



I am at Mandara for the Luscious and Luminous special – one of the Packaged Rituals that Mandara offers so that you don't have to think and choose and decide between facials and massages and skin treatment. Sometimes, the process of booking a spa day is exhausting! I always start with the spa website, hoping that the menu will be complete and current. This was, indeed, the case with Mandara's website, but the menu just wasn't readable – the download PDF printed the entire menu on one page in the tiniest font I've ever seen. After squinting and struggling to read the menu, I defaulted to a package of treatments, something I often do so that I don't have to work so hard to decide among compelling options. And I often ask for packaged treatments to be spaced so that I can relax in between and extend my spa day. Great spas always accommodate the request, and Mandara was no exception.

The spa menu promises that “exotically aromatic oils and essences deliver nourishment to thirsty skin and jades senses. Elemis Aroma Foot Ritual – Elemis Exotic Frangipani Body Nourish Wrap, including mini facial – Balinese Massage with Elemis Exotic oil.” My thirsty skin has always gulped down Elemis nourishment, and my jaded senses have always loved the word frangipani. During my rituals and wraps, I come to appreciate the Mandara spa innovation of “suite-centred services in which the therapist – rather than the client – moves from place to place.” It is an unusual but oh-so-wise way to relax clients – a special room with all the necessary services and no need to schlep down the hall and around the corner to the next treatment room. I could not help but leave feeling luscious and luminous and loopy – really unable to do anything but fall into the pillows of the chaise lounge in the relaxation room. If I'd had the energy or initiative, I could have done my workout in the superb hotel gym, and I could have done my breath work and meditation the color therapy room or taken a yoga class, and I could have tried out the cool rocking hammocks by the pristine pool. But I just laid there, curled into the foetal position. I was having a “Mandara moment” – the promised release from tension and tedium.

Mandara Spa – the global spa development and management company – asks you to “shed your world-weariness and rejoice in the pure pleasure of allowing us to take care of you.” Personal service is a mantra at The Monarch and at Mandara – an abundance of charming and helping staff attended me from the valet service, into the airy lobby, up the elevator to the spa. During my whole spa day I was in constant contact with someone eager to help me, fetch my robe, run my shower, refresh my tea, escort me up and down the marble steps in the Jacuzzi room. Now then, I wear glasses, and without them, I really need an escort in the mirrored and candlelit shadows of the spa. Practically speaking, I would never advise a spa designer to put stairs or steps in a spa – just an accident waiting to happen for people without their glasses or for people too blissed to notice. The absolute worst is marble steps – they are slippery and extremely unforgiving if you fall. I once shot across a marble bathroom in a luxury spa – the floor dewy with steam – and nicked the razor sharp corner of the marble counter. I’ve feared marble ever since.



Marble hazards aside, when you hear the Mandara call, let yourself be swept into a spa retreat where somebody else does the thinking and caring if only for a while. Imagine this... as you step in from the blazing city heat, a cool towel cools your brow and cool ginger tea cools your throat and cool hands

begin your welcoming five-minute massage.....Your Mandara moment has begun. From time to time, we all need what Mandara has to offer.



Mandara Spa at The Monarch Dubai is rated by *TheSpaReview.com* as a 5 Crown Spa - the five Silver Crowns indicating that you can expect Absolutely Royal Treatment. Mandara Spa can proudly say:

We are a

Spa rated in 2008 by


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