

Talise Spa at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai

Dr. KC Barker, *TheSpaReview.com*

Madinat Jumeirah is easily Dubai's finest resort – a collection of super-luxurious hotels design in the traditional Arabian style - studded with amazing restaurants, gilded statues, and exotic shops; edged with white beaches, swaying palms and ocean breezes; and punctuated by the iconic Burj Al Arab. Talise Spa is set at the edge of the resort where it is accessible from the freeway (which, sadly, you can hear) but it is linked to the resort by the canal that runs between the villas and café terraces. It is stunning -- and stunningly expensive. So I saved up for Talise Spa. It is priced far above the average, but I expected that it would give me a far above average spa day. Sigh.... This is one of the toughest reviews I've had to write.



I knew that Talise was attached to the Al Qasr boutique hotel, so I foolishly expected valet parking. That was the first inconvenience in a day of, well... frustrations - which continued when I was presented with 2 entrances, and found the first one – labelled ladies entrance – loosely locked. Starting again... through the no-name second entrance, I found myself in a large room with large desks – vacant and corporate feeling. No spa smell. No spa music. Am I in the right place, I ask? (I actually had to

ask!) I was rescued by a charming young man who, although he admitted he wasn't sure about how to use the computer system, graciously checked me in, the receptionist being somewhere else (?). He being – well, male, I was waved in the direction of the women's area of the sprawling spa facility, and behind the first imposing door, found a maze of closed doors and dead-end alcoves and dim alleys leading to shockingly bright storage closets. I was lost for some time. Again, I was rescued and my spa day continued.

Talise Spa comprises a large reception building and a series of smaller treatment villas. Because I've selected 3 treatments, I will be escorted back and forth on dusty concrete walkways, up and down staircases (pretty challenging when I'm without my glasses) between villas and the relaxation room. I

never saw another guest on those treks (I'm not totally blind, just near-sighted!) and worked to push aside the looming feeling of being a spa exile. How can it happen that I put those two words together?? The reiki chamber is a tiled and sculpted temple to hedonism – a treatment cot positioned under the deep-blue dome - or was I going to be sacrificed there? I kept my eyes open. The other treatment rooms were simple but elegant, with the important feature of a private deck and shower stall in the Dubai desert sunshine - but I was never offered the opportunity to use either feature. At the end of each treatment, I was taken back to the relaxation room and offered a cup of ginger tea. Maybe other refreshments – a simple snack or cool water – were there somewhere, but I never found them. Maybe the staff assumed that I knew the layout of the spa – usually guests get a quick orientation to the entire spa facilities. I still don't know all that Talise has to offer - and I did say I was coming from a spa review agency. Hmmmm.....

I'm trying hard not to be grumpy here. But I spent hours at Talise and I had the distinct feeling of being abandoned. Yes, the staff were pleasant when they attended to me but they all seemed to disappear regularly. Yes, I go to the spa to have quiet time to myself but I want to feel cocooned and coddled and that didn't happen for me at Talise. Yes, the treatments were fine but nothing really special. Yes, I was given a delightful beaded Talise friendship bracelet, but I feel guilty when I wear it. Yes, it has a signature restaurant, but it only opens in the evening for dinner – really fine vegetarian gourmet fare complemented with crystal-enhanced waters. I had to wait around for the restaurant to open so I enjoyed a canal boat ride, and I'm not sure what I would have done if that hadn't been an option. Sigh...

It is my review practice to interview the spa manager – Talise has many of them. Those that I did manage to talk with were leaving the spa for employment elsewhere. The Spa Director did not return my 3 calls. So, all I can hope is that there are plans to improve this spa – to bring a soul to the sumptuous Talise in the Madinat Jumeirah.

I have to say something nice, so... well, the website is good. Much better than the average spa website. And the signature magazine is well done – like so many beautiful magazines in the Gulf.

What is the problem, then? I'm going to speculate, first, bigger is not better. The size of Talise Spa may be just too large and the clientele of the spa may be too small, so there is a disproportionately small number of staff – giving the empty exiled feeling. Second, a concept spa from one part of the world may not be successfully transposed on a different part of the world – not only is the climate and geography of Bali radically different than that of Dubai, but the special climate and geography of Dubai are not adequately accommodated. Finally, there seems to be a missing element to the staff training – the respect for client satisfaction as paramount in a service industry.

Talise Spa at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai is rated by TheSpaReview.com as a 4 Crown Spa - the four Silver Crowns indicating that you can expect Royal Treatment. Talise Spa can say:

We are a

Spa rated in 2008 by

TheSpaReview.com

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