



**Willow Stream Spa, Fairmont Dubai**

**Dr. KC Barker, *TheSpaReview.com***

Shocking, really. Willow Stream Spas and Fairmont Hotels are such prominent industry names. As a Canadian, I am proud of the initial Canadian development of the line and I'm particularly disappointed to see how they are manifested in Dubai. I was feeling frazzled at work. I thought to myself, "which new spa should I try?" I replied to myself – "don't get more frazzled trying to chose – you've been to the Willow Stream in Canada, so it will feel familiar and wonderful and you can de-frazzle." Wrong.

Best part first – the Rose Treatment was just fine. One of the Spa Packages, it included an aromatic rose body scrub, essence of Moroccan Rose moisturizing massage, and Rose Radiance facial. It lived up to the promise to be balancing and nourishing and soothing, and it should at a price of Dhs 890 for only 2.5 hours. I'm beginning to have a problem with spa packages of 2 or 3 treatments because there is no break between treatments and you can find yourself laying on one treatment bed for hours. Hint: always use the bathroom facilities **before** you go into a package treatment! On the good side, my therapist accommodated my request for a bit more massage pressure, and she apologized when I complained about having to schlep into the common shower room to wash off the salt exfoliant. In this huge spa, they appear to have only 2 women's treatment rooms with ensuite showers (something that is fairly standard, and especially important for body treatments that require washing off product), and both were empty, but we couldn't use them for some reason that eluded me... so I was relieved that there were no other spa guests to see me schlep down the hall and into the changing room to shower. But I smelled pretty nice when I eventually and thankfully left the spa.

Why thankfully? Well, my list of complaints included:

- A clothes hanger so wide it prevented the locker door from closing until I figured out the problem
- Hard plastic sandals that cut into my feet so I abandoned them by the Jacuzzi and went barefoot
- A Jacuzzi reeking of bleach, missing an obvious turn off switch, and roaring but empty
- A steam room with almost no steam and a thumping steam maker when it finally kicked in
- A spa lounge that doesn't serve even a glass of wine
- Children – noisy splashing children - in the associated pool area
- Lounge chairs in the relaxation room with straight backs and rock hard bolsters
- Proximity of the ladies relaxation lounge to the hotel pool – clear glass windows so others can see in and no door to get out and enjoy the pool.
- The dusty fake rose bouquet in the dressing room.
- Long straight hallways of some strange yellow tile and a few extinguished candles.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around who thought the plywood doors – routed with square designs and spray painted silver – was a good idea. There are an abundance of design flaws in this spa.

It seems that this spa has fallen into the dangerous Dubai trap that bigger is better – boasting 40,000 square feet! I was given a tour – which is really a good idea when the spa is positioned around a large open square of mysterious doors and associated services and pools – and I only had to share it with two other guests – one just leaving, and one who saved me. I got trapped in the ice shower when the door wouldn't open to let me out. I was doing the steam room to cold shower to steam room thing – so, no, I wasn't trapped in ice, but I was really, really cold and the shower door was stuck. I was wet so I couldn't get any traction to either push or pull. I think spas should be serenely silent places, but eventually I shouted "help" and the second spa guest materialized to release me. Amazing that she was there when I needed her because I never saw her or anyone else after that.

What ticked me off the most was that the spa manager cancelled our scheduled appointment to chat. It is my standard practice to make an appointment with the spa manager to go through the list of quality standards, to clarify when the answers aren't obvious to me, to share my experience with them and create a positive working relationship. I WANT to like their spa and to have others like it. Not only did the manager cancel but he did not call me to talk at my specific and repeated request because I was not happy when I left the spa and I thought the manager should hear it from me. What ticks me off is that I have to put this rant on paper when I would so much rather have been honest face to face. All in all, the Willow Stream is a disappointment and I can't recommend it when there are so many, many, many fine spas in Dubai.

**Willow Stream Spa at the Fairmont Dubai is rated by *TheSpaReview.com* as a 3 Crown Spa - the three Silver Crowns indicating that you can expect Almost Royal Treatment. Willow Stream Spa has to say:**



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