

World's biggest gamblers & ecstasy users flocking to Thailand for offshore rehabilitation

Groundswell in Aussies attending private Thai rehab facility over past five years

"Rehab tourism" is on the rise, with new figures revealing a more than doubling of Aussie patrons to a leading five-star drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility in Thailand over the past five years.¹

Between 2010 to 2015, Australian visitors to *DARA Drug and Alcohol Rehab Asia, Thailand*, presented largely with alcohol and methamphetamine ("Ice") addictions. Most came from Perth, followed closely by Melbourne; were male (63 per cent male versus 37 per cent female); aged in their late 30s to early 40s; and spent an average of 35 days in rehabilitation.¹

According to Dr Phil Townshend, Clinical Psychologist, DARA Treatment Director and former head of Gamblers Help Services at the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne, Australians are flocking in record numbers to Thailand in a quest to beat their addictions offshore.

"Australians, who represent 31 per cent of our DARA Thailand clientele,¹ are unceremoniously renowned for being the world's biggest gamblers and users of ecstasy, the second highest abusers of prescription opioid treatments, the world's third highest users of methamphetamines, the fourth highest users of cocaine, and the seventh highest users of marijuana.²

"We've witnessed a groundswell in Aussie visitors to DARA over the past five years, from 14.5 per cent in 2010 to 31 per cent in 2015,¹ most of whom presented with an alcohol addiction, followed by a methamphetamine addiction, although many used a mix of multiple substances, with alcohol almost always in the picture,"¹ said Dr Townshend.

"We treated more Australian men than women during the same period,¹ and in fact, witnessed a 16 per cent increase in the number of men visiting our facility.¹

"This surge in clientele may be largely attributed to the long waiting lists of Australian public rehabilitation clinics, the high cost of private clinics, and their location in an environment with which the addicted individual is familiar, and therefore, easily able to feed their addiction," Dr Townshend said.

Dr Townshend, who oversees a 16-strong team of internationally certified, English speaking, medical and allied health professionals at DARA's Koh Chang (Elephant Island) and rural Chantaburi (City of the Moon) facilities, argues anyone can develop an addiction in "the right situation, and given the right drug."

"We know people living with an addiction are more likely to have a personality that is high on novelty-seeking, low on harm-avoidance, and impulsive.

"There are three pathways into addiction, none of which are mutually exclusive, including genetic vulnerability, childhood abuse or neglect, and exposure to drugs," said Dr Townshend.

"Almost all of our clients would be able to identify with one or more of these pathways."

With a client retention rate of 92 per cent,¹ DARA is considered a successful, and cost-effective, five-star rehabilitation facility. The private facility is one of only a handful of treatment centres in Thailand to employ both Australian and other international staff. DARA's unrivalled team of addiction specialists, including psychologists, academics, counsellors (some, but not all of whom are in recovery, unlike many similar facilities), personal trainers and other allied health personnel, work hand-in-hand, to provide exceptional, tailored care.

"Our treatment program focuses on 'the mind, body and soul,'" Dr Townshend said.

"In addition to holistic and evidence-based treatments, offshore rehabilitation centres, such as DARA, focus on the removal of an individual from their 'ecological trap' or familiar environment, back home.

"Understanding and removing the ecological trap, together with standard treatment options, is likely to lead to more successful outcomes than current practices of rehabilitation," said Dr Townshend.

"If we can help people change their personal environment, reduce access to their addictive agent or behaviour, and make ecological intervention an equal priority to other treatment options, we may see heightened success with addiction treatment programs."

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In a bid to make luxurious, offshore drug, alcohol and gambling rehabilitation accessible to all, not just the privileged, DARA's founder chose to subsidise up to 60 per cent of the treatment costs at his two rehabilitation facilities in July last year.

"Importantly, our founder, and many of our counsellors, possess first-hand experience with addiction, and a genuine commitment to our clientele achieving a sustained and enjoyable recovery," Dr Townshend said.

"We offer our clientele from more than 50 countries worldwide, an all-inclusive, four week program starting at around AUD \$7,000.

"This is vastly cheaper than comparable Australian private rehabilitation clinics, which charge between AUD\$15,000 and \$135,000 a month," said Dr Townshend.

"By offering a treatment subsidy, we can treat people from all walks of life, who may elect to stay in a shared or private room, a sea view or poolside villa, or an executive suite."

Mother-of-two, Clinical Support Officer and recovering addict, Nicole, 36, Tweed Heads, NSW, completed her first treatment program for drug addiction at DARA in February, 2015.

Nicole began smoking marijuana at 13 years of age, drinking alcohol a year later, and dabbling with amphetamines at 18 years of age – an addiction which soon catapulted into week-long use. Yet, despite her consistent drug use, Nicole continued to work full-time, only ceasing her drug use when falling pregnant or post- birth, when breast feeding.

"Most women when pregnant, crave certain foods or chocolate. All that I wanted was a line of speed, a cigarette and a glass of wine," Nicole said.

Over time, the mother-of-two grew cognisant of her spiralling drug use, and in 2013, after separating from the father of her children, relocated to Tweed Heads to start afresh. Yet, she soon fell in with the wrong crowd, and once again, became enmeshed in a downward spiral of drug addiction.

In desperate need of help, Nicole eventually reached out to DARA Thailand, and on December 28, 2014, boarded a plane bound for Thailand, in a bid to address her devastating addiction.

"The counselors at DARA, most of whom were recovering addicts, were so good at reading us. They were completely on-the-ball, able to identify my weaknesses, and to push me about them. They understood my struggle," said Nicole.

"DARA saved my life. It was an unbelievable experience.

"I had originally booked in for the four-week treatment course, but I extended it to six-weeks when I was there, and I can honestly say, the life skills I learned in those six-weeks were more beneficial than anything I ever learned in school," said Nicole.

Dr Townshend does however, caution that recovery is an ongoing process that requires continuing work, and that some drugs are harder to stop than others.

"Although Ice, for example, is not the hardest drug addiction to treat, it can alter the brain and its function for possibly up to nine months, so recovery from some drugs takes much longer than for others."

About DARA Thailand

DARA drug and alcohol rehabilitation, Thailand, is Asia's premier destination for addiction treatment. DARA provides rehabilitation to clients from more than 50 countries worldwide. The facility uses a mix of proven methods to treat a plethora of addictions (including drugs, alcohol and gambling) for four, eight and 12 weeks respectively, at its two facilities located on the tropical island of Koh Chang and Chantaburi, and has a 92 per cent client retention rate.

If you, or someone you know and/or love, is battling an addiction and requires help or more information, contact DARA Thailand 24/7 on +66 87 140 7788, email info@dararehab.com or visit <http://dararehab.com/>
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Download full media kit @ <http://dararehab.com/blog/>

For more information, or to co-ordinate an interview with Dr Townshend, Nicole or other individuals in recovery, please contact:

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References

1. DARA Drug and Alcohol Rehab Asia, Thailand. 2016. Data on file.
2. United Nations (UN), 2014. World Drug Report 2014, Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/World_Drug_Report_2014_web.pdf [last accessed January 25, 2016].