

Welcome to Paracelsus Recovery, the world's most expensive rehab clinic

Marta Ra runs the £65,000-a-week rehab hotel. It follows her clients wherever they want — to a hotel room or their home



Paracelsus Recovery offers a round-the-clock team of doctors and therapists

GETTY IMAGES (POSED BY MODEL)

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What do you do when you're royalty, a head of state, a Hollywood star or a member of the super-rich and you have an eating disorder or a drink, drugs or mental health problem? You need to check into rehab, but however upmarket that establishment may be, you'll be forced to mix with other patients and news of your presence will rapidly spread.

Even in the swankiest set-ups the fact remains that your therapy sessions, meals and health checks are designed around the clinic's timetable. Which, if you're a Grammy winner, a politician or a chief executive used to minions jumping every time you snap your fingers, is intolerable.

Time to book into Paracelsus Recovery, the world's most expensive rehab centre, based in London and Zurich, and costing £65,000 a week. Hosting just one client at a time in "seven-star" luxurious surroundings, Paracelsus offers an on-tap, round-the-clock team of doctors and therapists, not to mention staff such as chefs, butlers, chauffeurs, nutritionists and concierges.



Marta Ra of Paracelsus Recovery: "During the pandemic, people had to face their demons. Some used the time positively"

So if at 4am you want a counsellor and a cheese and truffle toastie, both will instantly appear? “Of course,” beams Marta Ra, Paracelsus’s chief executive.

Croatian-born, Austrian-bred Ra, 39, is a former banker whose charm, vivacity and patience — all palpable even over Zoom — must be invaluable when it comes to dealing with Paracelsus’s sometimes, ahem, challenging clients. Coming from all over the world, notably the UK, Russia, the Middle East and the US, 150 people, aged from 25 to 65, have so far been treated in Paracelsus’s private surroundings tailored to each individual’s tastes.

“Some clients want to be treated in their homes; we have moved our whole team into a palace,” Ra says. “Sometimes we rent an entire dedicated corner of a hotel. But it’s very important to realise we’re not spoiling these people. If you are used to living in a castle, then what seems like luxury to you or me to them seems everyday.

“It’s the same when people demand things instantly. If, say, you’re royalty, you live in a world where everything must be focused around you. It’s very important when these people come to our clinic, they should not be ripped out of their usual lifestyle and have a cultural shock. They need to be somewhere they feel comfortable so they can focus on the reason why they’re there, rather than thinking, ‘Oh my God, I’m a completely different world.’ ”

So why are the famous and rich so desperate for help? “Many of our clients’ jobs are all about numbers. If you don’t reach targets you’re not worth anything. Their self-worth isn’t based on anything else,” Ra explains.

Paracelsus was founded by the psychiatrist Werner Gerber after a patient, a chief executive, moved into his house for discreet treatment. “If it had become known he was having problems the entire company would have collapsed with a terrible impact on stock prices, so the Gerbers took him in,” Ra says. Realising that there

was an untapped market for such services, Gerber opened his Swiss branch eight years ago, with London following in 2018.

Last year Ra was appointed chief executive, after working for Deutsche Bank, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley and Credit Suisse, where she managed Switzerland's largest pension fund. It was an apparently glittering career that left her deeply disillusioned. "I say banking is a shark tank; sharks don't work in groups. There's no humanity in the way people treat each other and I missed the human touch. I was tired of the boys' club and I was also a victim of Me Too; I was touched up in every institution I worked in. I was just sick and tired of that and of being better qualified than my male colleagues, but still having to work twice as hard to prove myself," she says.

Grim as it was, Ra's experience made her uniquely qualified to understand the psyche of the 1 per cent. "Many are totally unable to socialise or communicate normally with people outside their world, so their relationships are very shallow. To them everything should function the way they are in the office and when it doesn't they can't adapt. It means most of them are very lonely."

A handful enjoy a happy family life. "They're the ones that switch off when they come home and say, 'Thank God my family isn't like my colleagues.' But I remember other colleagues who'd tell their wives, 'I told you dinner must be on the table at nine; if you're five minutes late I'm not eating it.' "

For the famous, the isolation can be even more shattering. "Actors and singers are always surrounded with tons of people who apparently are their friends, but they end up feeling they cannot trust anybody, that everybody around them just wants their money or to benefit from them. They can sit in a room full of people having a party and feel completely alone. There's always pressure on them about having to look and behave the right way. They can never just be themselves. They're always

being told, ‘You must make this movie or record this song,’ so they end up feeling like a puppet being pushed around.”

Of Paracelsus’s clients 70 per cent are male, with the female minority tending to be appendages to these A-types rather than the main players. “We see some women entrepreneurs, but we also see female royalty; wealthy daughters born into very famous, very wealthy families and wives whose CEO husbands are mistreating them,” Ra says.

You’d think the gazillions in their bank accounts might cushion these people’s pain. Ra vehemently shakes her head. “These people work all the time and don’t have time to spend their salaries. They’re always travelling, and in the early days it may seem fun staying in fancy hotels and flying business class, but after a while it’s, like, ‘If I can’t share this beautiful table with anybody, what’s the point?’ You have no fulfilment and you start to feel very empty. If they do spend their money, they spend it excessively.”

To fill that emptiness many turn to drugs. British clients, Ra says, are [particularly susceptible to alcohol](#), not least during lockdown, as last week’s Royal College of Psychiatrists report showed, revealing that the number of people drinking at “high risk” levels in Britain has doubled to almost 8.5 million since February. Some Americans love booze too. “I remember one saying, ‘And you drink too, no, Marta?’ Others are super-healthy, gluten-free, all-organic vegan yogis.” Many distract themselves with high-class escorts, while some succumb to eating disorders (Arab men, in whose culture gastric bands are common, are especially prone to these) and/or depression.

During lockdown, such behaviour escalated. The super-rich had cocaine dealers on speed-dial, not to mention carefully curated, temperature-controlled wine cellars and cupboards full of duty-free spirits picked up during their endless travels. Calls and referrals to Paracelsus — which remained open as a health provider — soared

fivefold as individuals who had virtually lived on private jets and in five-star hotels found themselves stuck at home with their families.

“About 10 to 20 per cent rediscovered their families and really enjoyed getting to know them better,” Ra says. “But the majority, who were used to people constantly bowing down to them, waiting for their next order, suddenly found themselves with their wives saying, ‘Now you change the diapers!’ ” Ra says. “He was thinking, ‘Whoa, who is this stranger I’ve married?’ She was thinking, ‘I loved him when he was only coming home from Friday to Sunday, but now he’s around all the time I’ve realised he’s a terrible person.’ Many of them had had kids in boarding schools and realised they didn’t know their children at all.

“People had to face their demons. Some used the time positively. They thought, ‘OK, finally I get to think about how I behaved in the last year and I don’t actually like this part of me.’ Others looked away and blamed coronavirus for all their problems. But then the virus went away and they found out nothing had been solved.”

In addition, as with all of us, there were financial worries. “I know it’s hard to feel sorry for a billionaire who loses 30 per cent of their money, but 30 per cent of £1 billion is a lot,” Ra says, adding that many — “to their credit” — also worried about making staff redundant.

Most of Paracelsus’s clients, many referred by the international network of psychiatrists it works with, stay between four and six weeks. Since the two centres host only one client at a time this means there’s always a waiting list; an alien concept for “I want it now” types. “Actually, our clients are very understanding of the issues of other clients,” Ra says. Such is demand that it’s looking to expand possibly into the US and the United Arab Emirates.

Even when a stint ends, the care continues, with a local psychiatrist or on Skype with Paracelsus's employees. "Often a therapist goes to live with the client. One stayed for six months."

Naturally, Ra is also always available, often lunching with clients to make sure everything is up to speed. All staff, from doctors to maids, are versed in the foibles of their demanding clientele.

"Our staff are people with big hearts; their client is like family to them," she says, smiling. "We can have difficult situations, but we also have clients later apologising, saying maybe they didn't communicate or behave in the right way. We say, 'It's OK, don't worry. We understand it's very difficult for you right now and we are there to support you. We love you unconditionally.' It's really important to build that connection because these people are used to being surrounded by people who want to steal from them or are only around them for their fame or wealth.

"I look at the people who come to us as people. I don't judge their bank account or their professional status. These are human beings, they are vulnerable, they need to be cared for."