



An unexpected journey

“I knew one thing for sure: I was never going to work at a massage salon.”

Ms. Jintana Hankla (aka Pu) has now worked as a masseur for over 10 years, and is the proud owner of her own salon, Mata Massage & Hälsa.

Read on to find out why she changed her mind.



Mata Massage & Hälsa is located in Hyllie.



Mata Massage & Hälsa has been certified by Nuad Thai Nordic (ThaiWISE - Hela Människan i Malmö).

It all started in a restaurant in Pattaya

Pu was working at a vegetarian restaurant in the popular tourist destination, Pattaya, when she met a young Danish man who lived in Sweden.

“Cupid shot us with his arrow! We started dating long-distance and the relationship gradually became more and more serious.”

With financial support from her boyfriend, Pu was able to fulfil her dream of opening her own vegetarian restaurant.

Although Pu was happy running a restaurant, the couple wanted to be together, and she decided to move to Sweden to live with her husband.



Pu with inspectors from the Environmental Department, Malmö Municipality, and a member of the ThaiWISE team.

A new path

October 2010 marked the beginning of a new life in Sweden for Pu. "I had only ever worked as a chef and was planning to open a Thai restaurant in Sweden.

However, it wasn't as easy as I thought. I didn't know what I should do, but God brought Thai massage to my attention. I had always had very negative thoughts about massage, but my friend Ae introduced me to the positive aspects of massage. She runs her own salon, Ae Massage, and she showed me that massage is about freeing people from pain.

It can be seen as a spiritual path, a way to really help others. Ae convinced me to try massage.



Pu at the beginning of her career in massage.

I was offered a job at a salon and was promised that the salon was a respectable business. I knew that some massage salons offer "happy endings", and I did not want to work at that sort of business.

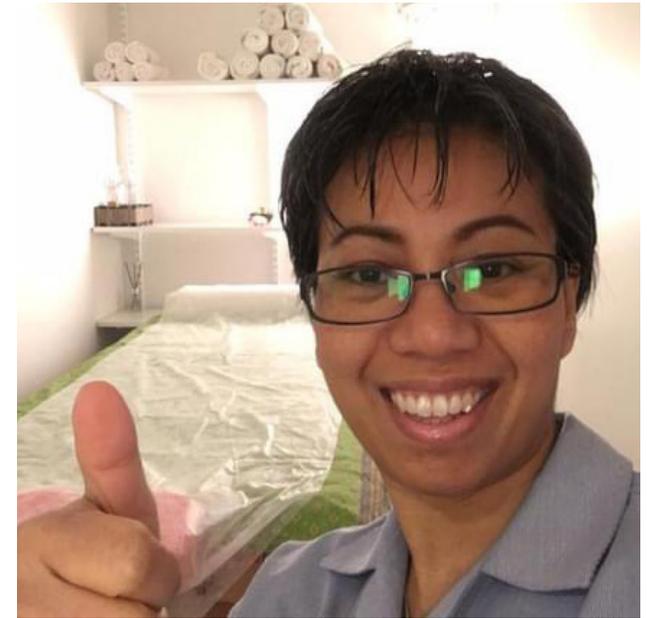
"That first period of time as a masseur was a time of self-exploration and personal development. My interest in massage increased rapidly, and I was amazed at the extent of my passion for my new work. Working at that salon not only ignited my love for massage but also taught me that a massage salon can be fair and well-managed."

Pu enjoyed her work, but she struggled with the Swedish language, and when the flow of customers decreased during the summer, she made an important decision.

"I decided to open my own salon, and to do that I knew I needed to improve my skills. I flew to Thailand and took an in-depth course in Nuad Thai (Thai massage). I also studied Swedish through a SFI course. I was very focused on opening my own salon."

First attempt

In 2014, back in Sweden, Pu started her own business and rented a room in a beauty salon. At first, the business went well, but there were problems with the location. The beauty salon was noisy and smelt of chemicals, and Pu found the salon owner difficult to work with. After three months Pu canceled her lease.



Happy at work!

Pu found employment at a different massage salon, but the working conditions were less than ideal. The salon's clientele mostly consisted of one-time visitors instead of recurring clients, hindering Pu's ability to establish lasting connections. Moreover, being the only staff member amplified feelings of vulnerability. This situation took a toll on Pu's mental health and she developed a high level of anxiety. Eventually, she made the decision to resign for the sake of her mental health.

Next steps

Luckily, one of the few customers she had connected with offered her a way forward.



A harmonious environment is important.

"She asked me if I would like to give massages at her workplace. I signed a one-year contract and worked there every Wednesday. It was very popular: I was always fully booked!"

Pu had not forgotten her dream of starting her own salon and kept hunting for the right location. After trying an inappropriate location in Limhamn, she found her current location in Hyllie in 2020.

"It is a pleasant place. My customers say it is nice and cosy."

Overcoming difficulties

Pu found it tough to start a massage salon in Sweden. She faced challenges in communicating with customers in Swedish, especially when explaining specific terms or procedures. To bridge this gap, Pu initially wrote down Thai terms and translated them word by word using a dictionary. She attended a Sunday course at Hyllie Park Folkhögskola SFI Malmö, organized in collaboration with ThaiWISE - Hela Människan i Malmö, which significantly improved her Swedish language skills.

Despite the break-out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pu found that it was not difficult to establish her business.

"I had a lot of drop-in customers despite COVID. My salon is clean and has a professional look, and I think that helped win people's trust.

Pu now has two employees and a salon manager. Customers tend to become attached to a specific masseur, so Pu had to encourage her customers to try the other masseurs at the salon.

"I told them that if they were dissatisfied, they would not have to pay. Nobody ever complained, but some still prefer to be massaged by me. We know each other and I understand what they need."

Pu strives to be a good employer. Her massage therapists are paid hourly, earning around 15,000 kroner after taxes. Recently, her salon manager received a salary increase, now earning over 20,000 kroner after taxes. Pu ensures her employees and customers understand that the salon operates ethically, avoiding any illegal activities like black market work or inappropriate services. She emphasizes professionalism and transparency, creating a salon they can take pride in.

Success!

Pu stands tall as a dedicated advocate for Nuad Thai, the traditional massage of Thailand, which she cherishes as a precious heritage deserving preservation for generations to come.

"Nuad Thai offers comfort and pain-relief for our customers, but it has a profound impact on the masseur as well. Throughout my decade-long journey in massage, my mental focus has sharpened and my capacity for empathy and love has increased. As I focus on the pain of the customer in front of me, I feel my heart expanding."

Pu is justifiably proud of her achievements. She has mastered the art of Nuad Thai and started a success business that enables her to employ other Thai women and support her family in Thailand.



Pu adapted to cope with the pandemic, and her business thrived.



Pu and her employees.

Massage course for professional massage therapists

ThaiWISE runs courses in Nuad Thai (traditional Thai massage) at the Nuad Thai Nordic - Training & Certification Center in Malmö.

Participants of these courses will receive a certificate from the Union of Thai Traditional Medicine Society, the official certifying body for massage in Thailand.

All courses are delivered in Thai.

Interested in learning Nuad Thai?

Contact us to find out about our upcoming courses, or to request training at a date that suits you.



This is just the beginning!

ThaiWISE will continue to raise the standards of the Thai massage industry in Sweden and beyond.



Contact us:

+ 46 76 035 32 78

Facebook: ThaiWISEMalmö
: NuadThaiNordic

LINE: ThaiWISE

Level 2, Mobilia shopping center,
Per Albin Hanssons väg 32A, 214
32 Malmö



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Thank you for supporting the empowerment of Thai women in Sweden!