

[[Home](#)] [[Sauna History](#)] [[Planning your sauna](#)] [[Sauna care](#)] [[Sauna building questions](#)] [[Sauna heaters](#)] [[Sauna doors](#)]
 [[Sauna Accessories](#)] [[Site Map](#)]

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A brief history of saunas...

[Home](#)

[Sauna History & Use](#)

[Planning your sauna](#)

[Sauna Care](#)

[FAQs about building](#)

[Sauna Heaters](#)

[Sauna Doors](#)

[Sauna Accessories](#)

The traditional Finnish sauna is actually an ancient form of bath. The sauna has witnessed all the joys and tribulations of the hardy ancient Finnish settlers. Women delivered their babies in the sauna. Any feast day usually meant a sauna the evening before.

For the modern Finn, the sauna isn't just an old tradition. The ways of using the sauna have changed over the centuries, but a sauna still is an essential part of the Finnish daily life. Maybe the most important benefit of the Finnish Sauna is the complete relaxation of mind and body and the feeling of well-being that you get from the sauna. It works as an antidote against against the pressures of today's hectic lifestyle.

A suitable sauna temperature is between 60°C and 100°C. You can choose the sauna temperature you enjoy most. The humidity of the sauna air is regulated by good fresh air and throwing water on the hot stones: the water changes into smooth invisible steam and increases the humidity. This is called the "löyly".

Note: a sauna is NOT a steam bath. Saunas in North America achieve 194 degrees Fahrenheit (90 C) with a fairly low humidity. Even adding water onto the sauna rocks will rarely raise the relative humidity (RH) over 20%. Most homes have a normal humidity level of 40-60%, or even higher. Steam rooms operate at a maximum temperature of around 154 F, and humidity up to 80%. Remember both saunas and steam rooms operate on the same principle; heating an enclosed space so the occupant not only sweats but breathes in moist air which benefits the respiratory system. The sauna allows the temperature and humidity to be controlled by the user. These benefits are not available when using infra-red heaters. See the [sauna heater page](#) for more information on the different types of heaters.

There are as many opinions about bathing rituals as there are people. There really isn't any one and only proper sauna routine but everybody should take their sauna as they like it.

The general procedure for using a sauna is:

After undressing and having a shower, you go into the sauna room and sit on the benches, on the level you feel comfortable. For people accustomed to using a sauna, the top bench is usually the "bench of choice". After a few minutes you usually start perspiring. You will be sitting, or lying down if you wish, for as long as you feel like it. Then you might throw some water on the stones. After a while you may start beating yourself with a bundle of birch twigs called "vihta", gently all over. When you feel you've had enough you get out of the sauna room and cool down with a cool shower or a dip into a pool. You may re-enter the sauna room for as many times as you feel comfortable. Finally comes the cooling-off period, when you can really enjoy the sensation of well-being and total relaxation.

NOTE: it's considered bad "sauna etiquette" not to use a towel when sitting or laying on the sauna benches. Remember the next person using the sauna may not enjoy your sweat as much as you do.

Modern saunas can have multiple lights that can be individually dimmed, and wall-mounted speakers connected to stereo systems so soothing music can be enjoyed in the sauna. Also, aromatherapy is becoming popular with sauna users. Scent oils can be mixed in with the water in a bucket, then applied to the sauna rocks by using a ladle.

More and more people are making a sauna part of each day's routine, enjoying quality, relaxing time to relieve the stress that is found in our modern, work-a-day world.

HOW TO ENJOY THE BEST IN SAUNAS... THE FINNISH WAY

Every sauna enthusiast will develop their own style once fully acquainted and confident with the sauna process. There are no fixed rules to follow for enjoying the sauna, -everyone should be free to experiment to get the maximum enjoyment out of their sauna.

This also applies to sauna "regulars". There are nights when you just can't take it as hot, as well as days when you wonder how you found all of your extra energy. The sauna can be relaxing or invigorating - depending on you.

One should never take more heat than is comfortable and enjoyable and never, ever push the limits of endurance.



BEFORE YOU START

1. Be prepared to give the sauna plenty of time to do its work - a leisurely sauna is far more beneficial. One to 2 1/2 hours of time is ideal for total relaxation.

A number of sessions can be spent in the sauna with short, cooling-off and rest periods in between. A longer drying off and rest period is very relaxing once the sauna is finished.

2. Always wait at least one hour after eating a large meal before using the sauna. Some people find that a sauna first thing in the morning is very invigorating and a great way to start the day. Another ideal time is in the evening - it beats any sedative.

3. Preheat the sauna to a temperature of your liking by setting the thermostat. Most regular sauna users enjoy the heat around 180_F (82_C) although the popular temperature range is from 170_ to 190_F (77_ to 88_C).

4. Bathers not accustomed to sauna heat should start at a lower temperature around 160_F (70_C) and allow their capacity for enjoying hotter temperatures to develop. Take as much heat as you find comfortable.

5. Wear as little as possible - preferably nothing. A loose towel can be used if necessary. Remove watches, pendants, bracelets, earrings, jewelry and glasses that would become uncomfortably hot in the sauna.

6. CAUTION - If you have any medical condition or disorder, you should consult your doctor before using the sauna if you are not accustomed to it.

THE SAUNA WAY

7. Many bathers start with a brief warm shower to wash off body oils and dirt.

8. Enter the sauna and relax on the top level for 10 to 15 minutes (or the lower level if you prefer moderate heat). Many bathers spend about half of their total time lying down. A large towel placed under you will preserve the cedar appearance and absorb sweat. The dry heat will increase the blood circulation and will eventually bring the body to the perspiration point. Otherwise, do not expect to perspire heavily in the dry heat of the first session.

Do not stay longer than 30 minutes - the sauna is not a test of toughness. Any exposure beyond that time can become hazardous as well as beyond all levels of comfort and enjoyment.

The feet should be raised above head level by using permanent foot rests installed on the wall or by placing a portable foot rest under the ankles. Portable back and head rests are ideal for greater levels of personal comfort and enjoyment and are available from sauna companies.

9. Shower again, or take a cool refreshing swim (hardy types may take an icy dip or a roll in fresh snow). Sudden temperature changes can be bracing and invigorating. Any extreme cold must be followed by sauna heat to avoid catching a chill.

10. Rest for 10 to 15 minutes to allow your body to cool down slowly and then repeat the cycle of heat, shower and rest.

11. When returning to the sauna, throw on several scoops of water with the sauna ladle to increase the humidity in the room. Bringing the humidity level from a low 5 to 8% to a more comfortable 15% will allow your skin to remain completely wet with perspiration. You should develop a heat and humidity combination that will bring you the most enjoyment. Some bathers will like it super-dry and some will like it quite humid.

12. The birch wisk or "vihta" can now be used to stimulate the blood circulation on the skin. Whisking the entire body will also induce very heavy perspiration (as a result of the heat and the exertion).

13. Once the body is warm, the pores of the skin will be completely open. This is the time to vigorously scrub the entire body clean. Don't forget to offer to wash your companion's back.

14. Experienced sauna users know that the final cleansing of the skin and pores happens during the heat of the sauna session that follows a vigorous wash.

15. The last shower should be a warm one followed by a cooler shower to close the pores of your skin without chilling the body. Avoid extreme coolness or drafts until the body has returned to normal temperature.

AFTER THE SAUNA

16. Your body should be allowed to dry without hard towelling. Give yourself at least 20 minutes to relax and cool down before getting dressed. If you are at home, you will be able to climb right into bed for a very deep and refreshing sleep.

17. A light snack is often served after the sauna. Small salty sausages or crackers are delicious with a refreshing cool beverage. The body will need to replace the water and salts that were lost during the sauna.

18. Lighting in and around the sauna should be subdued to develop greater levels of relaxation. Soft background music is also ideal.

19. The sauna is recommended for those suffering from tension, adolescent skin problems, tiredness or those having trouble sleeping soundly. Arthritis and rheumatism sufferers as well as those with sore muscles and joints from physical over exertion, will find the sauna heat very relaxing.

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