Sauna instructions

Sauna facilities and procedure

The sauna consists of a “löyly” = steam room, where the temperature is usually between 80-110 °C. A “kiuas” = stove is positioned in the center and water is thrown on the stoves to produce steam and to give a sensation of increased heat. A shower room is located next to the steam room. There is also a dressing room, where clothes are changed. Women and men go to sauna separately.

The bathing procedure is usually as follows:

1. Shower before entering the steam room
2. Steam room ~5-15 minutes
3. Shower & refreshments (and snow bathing…)
4. Steps 2. and 3. are repeated if desired

Preparations for sauna

Clothing:
- No clothes are worn in a Finnish sauna. A towel can be used if desired to cover sensitive parts of the body against heat. The towels are provided by the sauna club.

Personal showering equipment:
- Shampoos & soap are provided by the sauna club. However, personal needs (sensitive skin etc) may need you to bring personal cosmetics. Shower caps are good if you do not wish to wet your hair but a hairdryer is also available at the club.
- The sauna will refresh you both inside and outside; clean clothing is recommended after the sauna to give a longer lasting effect!

!!!! Although the sauna has been shown to have therapeutic effect on some diseases the sauna is NOT recommended if

- You have any cardio related diseases
- You have a neurological disease like epilepsy

Perspiration is a sign of autonomic responses trying to cool the body. Users are advised that at any time it feels unbearably hot, or they feel faint or ill, to go straight outside and sit in the cool, have a cool drink of water, when able have a mild shower to cool down.

It is strongly recommended to drink plenty of water during the sauna procedure as well as afterwards.

Sauna may provide some relief to patients with asthma and chronic bronchitis, and may also alleviate pain and improve joint mobility in patients with rheumatic disease. The sauna does not cause drying of the skin, and may even benefit patients with psoriasis, although sweating may increase itching in patients with atopic dermatitis
History of sauna in Finland

The word sauna is an ancient Finnish word referring to the traditional Finnish bath as well as to the bathhouse itself. The proto-Finnic reconstruction is *savänä. There are etymological equivalents in the Baltic-Finnic languages such as the Ingrian and Votic word sauna, Estonian saun and Livonian sõna. The word šuovndjii in Sámi means a pit dug out of the snow, such as a hole for a willow grouse. In Baltic-Finnish, sauna does not necessarily mean a building or space built for bathing. It can also mean a small cabin or cottage, such as a cabin for a fisherman.

The oldest known saunas were pits dug in a slope in the ground and primarily used as dwellings in winter. The sauna featured a fireplace where stones were heated to a high temperature. Water was thrown over the hot stones to produce steam and to give a sensation of increased heat. This would raise the apparent temperature so high that people could take off their clothes. The first Finnish saunas were what nowadays are called savusaunas, or smoke saunas. These differed from present-day saunas in that they were heated by heating a pile of rocks called kiuas by burning large amounts of wood about 6 to 8 hours, and then letting the smoke out before enjoying the löyly, or sauna heat. A properly heated "savusauna" gives heat up to 12 hours. These are still used in present-day Finland by some enthusiasts, but usually only on special occasions such as Christmas, New Year's, Easter, and juhannus (Midsummer).

As a result of the industrial revolution, the sauna evolved to use a metal woodstove, or kiuas [kiu.əs], with a chimney. Air temperatures averaged around 70–80 degrees Celsius (160–180 degrees Fahrenheit) but sometimes exceeded 90°C (200°F) in a traditional Finnish sauna. Steam vapor, also called löyly [löyly], was created by splashing water on the heated rocks.

The steam and high heat caused bathers to perspire. The Finns also used a vihta [vihta] (Western dialect, or vasta [vasta] in Eastern dialect), which is a bundle of birch twigs with fresh leaves, to gently slap the skin and create further stimulation of the pores and cells.

In Finland, the sauna was thought of as a healing refreshment. The old saying goes: "Jos ei viina, terva tai sauna auta, tauti on kuolemaksi." ("If booze, tar, or the sauna won't help, the illness is fatal.") The Finnish sauna is not thought as an easy way to get physical exercise, and it is not intended for weight loss; in fact, it predates these modern ideas.

Finnish sauna tradition

In Finland swimsuits, towels, or any other garments are rarely worn in the sauna. Families often go to the sauna together, which is not considered eccentric since family saunas are an old tradition. In these private saunas swimsuits or towels are never worn. In public saunas it is more common that men and women go to the sauna separately, although people of both sexes may sometimes bathe together, for example in student clubs. Still, saunas are not associated with sex and sexuality. Quite the contrary, historically saunas have been the most sacred places after the church, and most houses which could afford to build a sauna had one. In older times women also used to give birth in the sauna because it was a warm and sterile environment. Children were occasionally born in saunas still in the beginning of the 20th century. Ancient Finns even believed saunas were inhabited by spirits.

The lighting in a sauna is shady, and some Finns prefer to sit in the sauna in silence, relaxing. The temperature is usually between 80°C (176°F) and 110°C (230°F). Sometimes people make a vasta (or vihta); they tie together small fresh birch branches (with leaves on) and swat themselves and their fellow sauna bathers with it. One can even buy vihtas from a shop and store them into the freezer for later (winter) use. Using a vasta improves blood circulation, and its birch odour is considered pleasing.
A steam sauna can take 30 minutes to heat up when first started. Some users prefer taking a warm shower beforehand to speed up perspiration in the sauna. When in the sauna users often sit on a towel for hygiene and put a towel over the head if the face feels too hot but the body feels comfortable.

It is cooler on the lower benches, and away from the heater elements, as the heat rises it will be hotter higher up. Provided the sauna is not crowded, lying on a bench is considered preferable as it gives more even temperature over the body. Users increase duration and the heat gradually over time as they adapt to sauna. As the person’s body is often the coolest object in a sauna room, steam will condense into water on the skin; this can be confused with perspiration.

Cooling down is part of the sauna cycle and is as important as the heating. Among users it is considered good practice to take a few moments after exiting a sauna before entering a cold plunge, and to enter a plunge pool by stepping into it gradually, rather than immediately immersing fully. Until used to having a full cold shower, warm ones are used gradually make it colder so that the shock is not so great. After a shower, feeling cold or shivering indicates it is enough, the shiver is a sign of the autonomic responses, trying to warm the body. This is considered a signal for the sauna again. If however illness is felt later or during that day, a less hot sauna and warmer longer cool down is tried then the next day. In summer any after effects like headache or nausea can come from insufficient cool down after the sauna, or from dehydration, failure to drink enough fluids. Sleep disturbances can also occur if not cooled down properly, even though not feeling hot, the heat in the core of the body may disrupt sleep as the body tries to cool at night. In summer a session is often started with a cold shower.