

Spa and Sauna

A British Naturism Briefing Paper – R. Marriott - July 2009

Sauna & steam rooms

Sauna and steam rooms are basically different types of hot bath; one uses dry heat and the other uses moist heat.

Main purpose

- To increase body and skin temperature.
- Sweat out toxins and other impurities.
- Boost circulation.
- Relax the mind and muscles.

Some basic safety advice

- Don't use the sauna if you are pregnant or under the influence of drugs, alcohol or medication.
- Seek advice first if you suffer from a medical condition.
- Drink plenty of water and rest between sessions.
- Don't stay in the sauna if feeling uncomfortable or tired.

Hygiene

All responsible spas will ask you to shower before using the facilities. This is to remove germs and bacteria, clean the skin to aid perspiration and to warm up the body. Shower naked whenever possible and use soap; a quick rinse over a costume will achieve very little and won't get rid of invisible faecal matter and bacteria.¹ These pathogens mix with sweat under swimwear and then seep onto the benches of the sauna or steam room.

General etiquette

- Shower before and after each session.
- Place a towel on the bench of the sauna.
- Close the door behind you and keep conversations low.

Dress codes

A significant number of venues in the UK display a 'costume mandatory' sign - especially for mixed sex sessions. One problem with this rule, however, is that swimwear traps sweat and causes the body to overheat. Wearing a towel instead is a better option, but the preferred way to use a sauna or steam bath is naked. This allows the body to breathe and sweat more efficiently.

Spas on the continent

Most other European countries enforce a 'no costume' rule at their spas, placing hygiene before prudery; it is taken for granted that everyone will use the facilities naked. Enter a

1 The pool water treatment advisory group (PWTAG) Information on hygiene in relation to correct showering to eliminate cryptosporidium.

sauna wearing swimwear in Germany, Austria or Holland for example, and you can expect some very disapproving looks and will probably be told to remove it.

UK modesty

Managers of UK spas will sometimes cite 'modesty' as the reason for a costume mandatory rule, fearing that nudity will cause offence to some of their customers and/or staff. The majority of people though are not offended at all by nudity,² and increasing numbers are taking part in naturist events and swimming sessions up and down the country. There is also growing media attention to the benefits of nudism; how it helps people with poor body image issues for example, and the general improvement it brings in health and wellbeing.

It can be difficult though, encouraging some people to use a spa naked if they haven't tried it before. But once this first step has been taken, they soon find wearing a costume again both illogical and uncomfortable.

Anyone who is a little unsure or embarrassed at being naked socially for the first time may, of course, choose to wear a towel until they feel confident enough to remove it.

A customer survey on what to wear

A simple customer survey can help managers/operators of spas to gauge opinion of what people actually prefer - given a choice of swim wear, towel or nothing. Adding a space for comments can be useful too.

The results should hopefully lead to an introduction of more costume optional sessions.

Once these CO sessions are up and running and word of them spreads, the spa might even enjoy a larger amount of trade. Potential clients may have stayed away because of the costume mandatory rule - knowing that it restricts maximum benefit, is less hygienic and less comfortable.

Wider issues

There is substantial evidence that censorious attitudes towards the naked human body result in widespread and in some cases serious harm.

Spas and saunas provide an excellent and appropriate opportunity to try social nudity and change these attitudes. Nudity should be encouraged at spas, as one of the many places where clothing is not only unnecessary but is also less healthy.

Please contact British Naturism for further information or visit our website

<http://www.british-naturism.org.uk>

2 NOP Poll. A 2001 poll by one of the major polling organisations.