



Emmi Minkinen, 2017

SAUNA CULTURE IN FINLAND

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

THE SAUNA has been an inseparable part of Finnish life from the high points to the low, Finnish cultural heritage and the Finnish way of life for thousands of years. Finns love their saunas! Nearly 90% of Finns bathe in the sauna once a week, and 40% do it even more often.

In Finland, the sauna is an institution that cuts through the whole of society. On average, Finns have their first bath in a sauna before they turn six months old and will continue to bathe in the sauna roughly once every ten days throughout their lives. Bathing in the sauna brings families, friends, colleagues, sports teams and even new acquaintances together.

The popularity of saunas is reflected in their number: Finland has around 3.2 million saunas for a total population of 5.5 million. Most saunas can be found in private



homes, blocks of flats and on lakesides, but Finland also has thousands of public saunas in swimming halls, sports halls, hotels, care homes and student housing facilities.

SAUNA IS A PLACE FOR EQUALITY

Equality between people and the respect people have for each other is highlighted in the sauna; titles are left outside the sauna – along with the clothes. Bathing in a sauna with people is somewhat of a bonding process. Many important decisions are made in saunas. Most Finnish diplomatic missions abroad have their own saunas, and there is even a sauna at the Parliament House in Helsinki.

The Finnish sauna tradition is known all over the world, and 'sauna' is the only Finnish word to have spread around the globe. Saunas have existed in other cultures, but it is in Finland that they have been an integral part of everyday life and a key aspect of the national culture.



BATHING IN THE SAUNA CREATES WELL-BEING

Finns equate sauna with well-being. Taking time out from busy lives to bathe in the sauna is proven to reduce stress by improving sleep quality and promoting health holistically.



The sauna cleanses the body and the mind. It is a place to calm down, where a person feels at one with nature. Traditionally, the sauna has been considered a sacred place, a place where people were born and died. The first saunas were built in Finland in the Stone Age. Sauna traditions are also illustrated in songs, beliefs



Hannu Pakarinen / Suomen Saunaseura ry, 2018

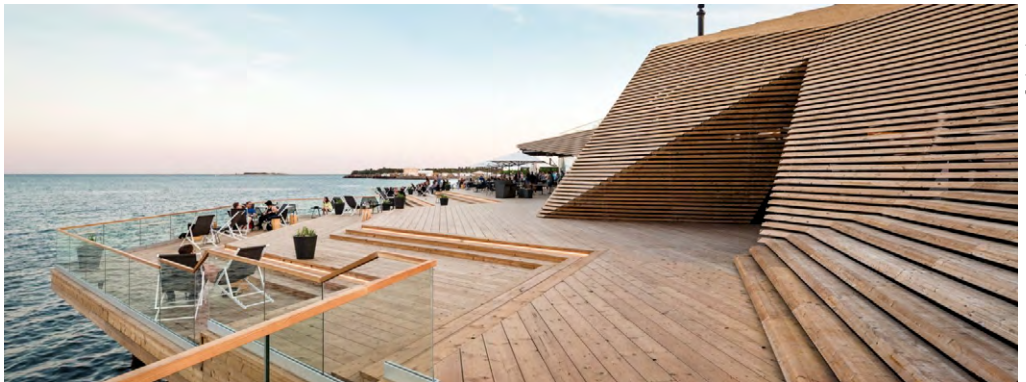
and the story tradition, such as the national epic of Finland, the Kalevala.

LIVING HERITAGE

There are many ways to cherish sauna culture – bathing in the sauna is naturally the best option. The tradition lives on, as millions of Finns bathe in the sauna. Dozens of sauna societies throughout Finland influence the communal development of the sauna tradition. Entrepreneurs develop sauna heaters and other sauna products with emphasis on sustainable



visitfinland.com



visitfinland.com



development. The many health benefits of bathing in the sauna are continually researched.

The objective of Finland's nomination is to foster the continuity of the unique sauna culture, strengthen its vitality and highlight the significance of sauna culture in Finland as part of customs, well-being and democracy. The nomination is supported by a large number of Finnish sauna societies and other communities promoting sauna culture.

The purpose of the UNESCO Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage is to raise awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and make cultural traditions visible. Intangible cultural heritage reaches all forms of human activity. It may manifest as e.g. oral tradition, performing art, practices of social life, rituals and ceremonies or knowledge, skills and practices related to nature and the universe. Sauna culture is Finland's first nomination to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO BATHE IN THE SAUNA!



Finnish Heritage Agency



Ministry of
Education
and Culture

Ministry for Foreign



Affairs of Finland

Finnish Heritage Agency
leena.marsio@museovirasto.fi

living
HERITAGE
●●●●●●●●

Permanent Delegation of Finland to UNESCO
dl.finland@unesco-delegations.org