

A traditional Russian painting depicting a scene in a banya (sauna). Several women are shown in traditional, patterned clothing. One woman in the foreground is seated, holding a wooden bucket. Other women are standing around, some holding buckets, suggesting a communal bathing or washing activity. The style is characteristic of Russian folk art or historical painting.

# WELCOME TO THE BATH HOUSE

RUSSIAN BANYA  
IN BELGRAVIA

THE  
**BATH HOUSE**

[RUSSIANBANYA.CO.UK](http://RUSSIANBANYA.CO.UK)

# WELCOME TO THE BATH HOUSE

## RUSSIAN BANYA IN BELGRAVIA

Here are some tips on how to get  
the most out of your visit

### WHAT TO DO AND WHEN?

CHECK IN AND GET CHANGED

FIND YOUR TABLE IN THE LOUNGE

- come and go from here as you choose

WARM UP IN THE PARILKA/STEAM ROOM

- don't forget the hat

TAKE YOUR TREATMENTS

- the benefits are amplified after steam

HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT AND DRINK

- you'll have an appetite by now

GET DRESSED AND GO UP TO RECEPTION

- С лёгким паром!

If you have a question at any time,  
please ask a member of staff

## CHECK IN AND CHANGE

**W**hen you arrive, you will be given a wrist band for a locker, a towel, a sheet and some slippers.

Leave your clothes in your locker, removing all jewellery and your watch.

You do not need to pay for anything until you leave, so no need to take your wallet.

On mixed days we ask that you wear trunks or bikini – on single-sex days you are free to be naked.



Most people wrap themselves in the sheet and use the towel for drying off at the end.

Ask a member of staff if you would like extra linen or a bathrobe.

## GO TO YOUR TABLE IN THE LOUNGE

**Y**ou will be given a table for the duration of your visit. Feel free to leave your phone there or hand it in at the bar.

You can order food and drink at any time, but it's not a good idea to drink before the banya.



## THE STEAM ROOM/PARILKA



**W**e recommend you wear a felt hat to prevent your head from overheating and protect your hair.

You can use one of the hats hanging up outside the steam room or buy one.

Enter the *parilka*, closing the door behind you and sit or lie on your sheet.

Stay in the *parilka* for as long as you feel comfortable. When you come out for the first time, take a room temperature shower.

If you want a more bracing temperature shock, use one or all of the tipping buckets or the plunge pool.

Keep hydrated by drinking water, tea or some of the home-made drinks on offer.



Feel free to return to the *parilka* for more steam as often and for as long as you like.

## TAKE YOUR TREATMENTS

**A**fter you have warmed up, you will be ready for your treatments.

We offer *parenie*, body scrubs, wraps, soap massage and conventional massage.

Your therapist will come and find you and show you to a treatment room.

We don't allocate specific times for your treatments.



### PARENIE

**S**mall bundles of leafy oak and birch branches are tied together to form a crude broom, soaked in water so they are aromatic and supple and used to drive the steam onto your body and to massage you. The *venik* is the instrument that brings together the three essential elements of the banya: wood, fire and water.

This is an intense experience and, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, you should let us know.

## FOOD AND DRINK

**W**e offer authentic Russian dishes like *pelmeni*, *blinchiki* and *varenniki* as well as classic soups and food to share.

*Salo* (salted pig fat) or *grenki* (spicy garlic bread) are a great accompaniment to a beer or shot of vodka.

Black and red caviar is also available.



## WHEN YOU ARE READY TO LEAVE

**W**hen you have had something to eat and drink and relaxed for a while, your session is almost over.

You can return to the changing rooms, leave any laundry in the baskets, get dressed and head up to reception.

With light steam!  
С лёгким паром!





## WHAT IS THE BANYA?

**T**he banya is somewhere to wash, to relax, to eat and drink, do business and to meet friends. Wherever there are Russians, you will find banyas. They come in all shapes and sizes, from basic rural shacks to vast palatial urban complexes, are simultaneously private and communal spaces and are popular among all classes, sexes and ages.

Before the arrival of Christianity in Russia, the banya was the spiritual centre of the community. The banya was somewhere that people gathered not only to wash, but also to feast, to worship, to mourn and to marry. Women would often give birth in the banya and the dead would be bathed and sent on their way to the afterlife with a *venik*.

*The Bath House is somewhere to purify both the body and the soul.*



## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BANYA

There has always been banya. It existed before the emergence of the early Russian state, survived the Mongol invasion, persisted as Moscow united the Russian lands, prospered under Peter the Great's campaign of Westernisation and gained renewed importance in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

**M**edieval Russia emerged on a crossroads between the Greek world to the south and Scandinavia to the north and absorbed influences from both. In the same way the banya is an amalgamation of different bathing traditions - the public baths of the Greek world and the wooden sweat lodges of the north.

In "The Primary Chronicle", a text compiled by Greek monks in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the writer visited a banya and wrote, *"They warm them to extreme heat, then undress, and after anointing themselves with tallow, take young reeds and lash their bodies... Then they drench themselves with cold water, and thus are revived... They make of the act not a mere washing but a veritable torment"*.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Sanduny, perhaps the most famous Russian bath house of all, was built in Moscow. Giliarovsky, the celebrated chronicler of late Tsarist Russia wrote that, *"Not a single Muscovite abstained from the banya. No one – not a master of trade, not an aristocrat, not a poor man..."*



**T**he Bolsheviks disdained Russia's tsarist past and strove to eradicate its influence, but they also understood the role the banya could play in society. Moreover, the aftermath of the revolution not only brought civil war and famine but also a public health crisis. Lenin declared that, *"Either socialism will defeat the louse or the louse will defeat socialism"*. Personal hygiene became a matter for the state.

The Soviet Union could be said to have ended in the banya. In 1991 hardliners from the Soviet elite gathered in the banya to plan the removal of Mikhail Gorbachev. The coup fell apart when public support coalesced around Boris Yeltsin and two months later Yeltsin met with his counterparts from Ukraine and Belorussia to agree the decentralisation of the USSR that the coup had been designed to prevent. Yeltsin celebrated in the banya.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought a resurgence of the banya as a positive symbol of Russianness. Putin claims to have rescued a treasured metal crucifix from the ashes of a country banya that had burnt down in the 1990's; the image the perfect alloy of his allegiance to country and church.

*For anyone interested in reading more about the history of the banya, we recommend "Without the Banya We Would Perish" by Ethan Pollock.*

*Copies are available to browse in the lounge and to buy at reception.*

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF THE BANYA

**W**illiam Took, a member of the Russian Emperor's Academy of Sciences, wrote in 1779 that *"quite often Russians use banya instead of medicine"*. Here are some of the benefits;

**Relaxation.** A visit to the banya with friends relaxes both the muscles and the mind, reducing both physical and mental stress.

**Circulation and Immune System.** Rapid changes in temperature strengthen the cardiovascular and immune systems and use of the banya has been linked to a reduced risk of heart disease.

**Muscles and Joints.** Heat alleviates pain in the joints and muscles, helps to remove lactic acid, salt and urea from the body and facilitates the absorption of oxygen. Many athletes use banya to promote recovery from injury.

**Detox.** Steam opens and clears the pores, normalises the functioning of the sweat glands and slows down signs of ageing. Regular banya visits combined with a balanced diet and regular exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight.

**Respiratory System.** Steam and the aroma of the venik unblock the sinuses and help you breathe more freely. Regular use of the banya helps combat common colds, viruses, laryngitis and asthma.

## THE BATH HOUSE

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## OPENING HOURS

Monday – Saturday: 10 am – 11pm

Sunday 10am – 10pm



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