**LATVIAN SAUNA RITUAL: 10 REASONS WHY YOU WILL WANT TO TRY THIS ANCIENT MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE**

Latvian sauna is a very special experience. Bathing culture is widespread among different nations and traditions in the world, and Latvians are not an exception.

Probably the best known for their deep passion for sauna are Finns. You will find saunas in almost every household there, and sauna traditions are very deep in Finland.

The word “sauna” itself also comes from the Finnish language.  [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauna) refers to the sauna as “a small room or building designed as a place to experience dry or wet heat sessions…The steam and high heat make the bathers perspire”. It is a true yet vague definition. Term “sauna” refers to the traditional Finish bath. This is how it is also mostly understood internationally. Yet, [Latvian sauna culture](http://www.latvia.travel/en/article/sauna-culture-latvia) is different.

## A place to clean your body and soul

Sauna is the place meant for cleaning your body and soul. This is its universal purpose regardless of the various traditions. It is a place of deep relaxation and returning to your real “self”. From all the sauna traditions know today, Latvian sauna is among the rare ones that have kept this its deepest original spiritual purpose. Therefore, Latvian Sauna Ritual is so special and different from others.

## Latvian sauna is unique

Latvian sauna is unique. We also have our own name for traditional Latvian bath. It is actually not the sauna but “pirts”. “Pirts” is similar to Russian’s bath called “banya”. I refer to the term “sauna” here only because this is a more widespread term in English and more understandable among non-Latvian speakers. Hence speaking about Latvian Sauna Ritual, I actually mean Latvian “pirts”. There is a big difference between going to an “ordinary” sauna (what Latvians also do) and immersing yourself in Latvian Sauna (“pirts”) Ritual.

Latvian Sauna Ritual is much more complex, deeper and usually longer tradition than simply going to wash and heat up in a sauna. Here is why it is so amazing.

## #1: Latvian Sauna Ritual is intimate

The real Latvian Sauna Ritual is usually held for one, two or most three people at once. It is a deeply personal experience that is usually shared with your closest people or you only and the sauna master, so you can fully relax and feel comfortable.

## #2: It is held by a professional

Latvian Sauna Ritual is held by a professional called “pirtnieks”. There are special licensed sauna schools in Latvia. You must study for one year and pass the exam before you become a certified “pirtnieks”. To become a sauna master, you must study extra one and a half year. For the sake of simplicity, I will call both these qualifications “sauna masters” in this post. Now, you see that Latvians take sauna very seriously.

Latvian sauna school is different from the Finnish one.

We sometimes say that your sauna master finds you when the right time comes. Each sauna master has his/her own special secrets how to conduct the sauna ritual.

One of my good old friends Laura has been deeply into Latvian sauna experience since I know her when we studied together. She has also always had more than a simple interest in wild plants (see #5 below on why it matters). Hence it was not surprising that Laura was a botanist during our study time in the Faculty of Biology. It was just a matter of time for her to become a certified sauna master.

I had tried original Latvian Sauna Ritual before and enjoyed it a lot. Now it was time to repeat it with Laura. Thus on a beautiful October’s day, we went to a not less beautiful place in Latvia called Vaidava in Gauja National Park.

## #3: Latvian Sauna Ritual keeps ancient wisdom

All Latvian traditions are closely related to nature. Latvian sauna is not an exception.

Latvians love nature. Hence Latvia is a very green country.

The purpose of Latvian sauna extends far beyond just washing the body. The bathing wisdom of our ancestors helps you to escape your daily cares and troubles, release the stress, and revive the spirit.

## #4: It is slow and relaxed

Latvian Sauna Ritual is normally longer than just going to an “ordinary” sauna. It is a complex yet calm and relaxed procedure that takes three to four hours.

The sauna master will explain the procedure for you. You will have time to prepare yourself before and to relax after this unique experience.

It is better to take Latvian sauna in the morning or during the day when you have more energy. Yet, it is also ok to take it in the evening. Whenever you choose to go to Latvian sauna avoid heavy meals before and after the ritual. Any alcoholic or other dizzying substances are out of question on a ritual day. Most likely, you will not want to consume them in the next couple of days either (and, who knows, maybe ever again). It just comes naturally.

Due to its intimacy, it is not that easy to find good pictures from a real Latvian Sauna Ritual. Hence my plan was to take some great shots before I surrender to Laura’s knowledge and immerse myself into deep relaxation.

We gave ourselves a full day to enjoy Latvian Sauna Ritual at its best.

## #5: Wild plants are important

Sauna masters use a lot of natural ingredients – mostly wild plants during the Latvian Sauna Ritual.

Before and during the ritual the sauna master will serve you the herbal tea that has mint, linden blossom, and other natural plant ingredients. It will help you to soak up the power of nature and to relax.

Latvian sauna includes swatting with switches that are made of the trees’ twigs. The most common are birch (it has a strong healing effect), hazel (a powerful cleaning effect), oak (for men), linden (for women), and sometimes juniper twig switches. Masters usually mix different trees and add a variety of plants to their swatting bunches. Various plants have different healing properties, aromas, and energy.

Swatting with switches has both massage and aromatherapy effect. It also helps you to get rid of the dead skin cells.

On our way to the sauna place, Laura picked up many plants that were still green in the extraordinary warm October. We stopped on a gravel road in the middle of a dense forest. “You have free time now!” said Laura and disappeared in the forest for a half an hour or so. She returned with a bunch of different plants, including hazel and juniper twigs and other plants that were still green in October. There were lots of them. “We would actually need more,” said Laura and smiled.

We packed our car with all this aromatic greenery and continued our way.

You may ask what happens during the winter when there are no green plants. Well, sauna masters use dried plants that they collect and prepare during the summer. Dried wild plants have an amazing smell and even stronger effect of aromatherapy.

## #6: Latvian sauna is a unique Latvian SPA

### Temperature and humidity

Latvian sauna is a so-called wet sauna. The water is poured over the hot stones to produce vapor and make the air humid. The perfect temperature is 86 degrees Celsius (187 degrees F). Yet the beginners usually start at lower temperatures.

### The process

The essential parts of Latvian Sauna Ritual are all the same. You will go to sauna three to four times.

The first entry is just heating up and relaxation. Second is your treatment with different natural scrubs. Each sauna master has its own personal receipt of scrubs. The third entry is the main one. Sauna master will treat you with switches made of the twigs (see #5 above). This will be the longest and hardest time in the sauna, after which you will cool down in a cold pond. The sudden contrast between the hot and cold stimulates the blood vessels, strengthens the body and improves skin’s elasticity.

While in the pond the sauna master may hold you and will help you to lay down and float on the water’s surface. As I am about twice bigger than Laura, she did not do this part with me for obvious reasons. Yet she watched carefully if I am ok while in the pond. This part leads to full relaxation and it is not rare that people experience an expansion of consciousness when they are floating in the water.

### Relaxation

After the cold pond, it is the best to lay down on the bare ground in the grass and get covered with a warm blanket. This is how you can spend some time being fully relaxed, connected with the Earth and outside of any perception of time. I enjoyed this part immensely, and I swear I had probably never felt so relaxed, warm and comfortable all at the same time.

The fourth time in the sauna is optional. It includes easy warm-up and skin post-treatment with honey, clay and/or other nurturing elements prepared by the sauna master.

You have time to relax and be with yourself in between each entry into the sauna.

### You go there naked

People usually in the Latvian sauna naked, as this amazing experience is not compatible with wearing synthetic swimming suites. You may use a towel though if you want or feel uncomfortable.

## #7: It is spiritual

The whole process of Latvian Sauna Ritual is not only physical. Deep relaxation, herbal aromatherapy and sudden contrasts between hot and cold environment may expand your consciousness and even blow you into another reality for a while.

Whatever is your experience it is deeply personal, and it is not possible to put that all in words.

I felt pleasantly relaxed yet totally cleaned after the sauna. For two days there was an immense lightness as if I had got rid of all the unnecessary old attachments and garbage in my life.

Each Latvian sauna experience is different and not repeatable. Hence you must try it to know how deep and beautiful it really is for you.

## #8: The place is important

Some may say that the place, where the Latvian Sauna Ritual is held is not that important as far as the ritual itself is as it should be. That would not be me. I see Latvian sauna as something that is meant to bring beauty into your life. Hence all its elements should be in harmony with nature, including the sauna place and sauna room. When the place is beautiful in beautiful natural surroundings the experience is so much more appealing end effective.

The guesthouse “Leimaņi” was a place exactly like this. The guest house is in gorgeous Vaidava surroundings in Gauja National Park. The sauna itself and its host Ilona were nothing less but amazing. Ilona welcomed us warmly and I felt really involved in preparation for our joint sauna ritual (even if I really did not do anything except for taking the pictures).

It is important that the sauna place has the right spirit. Hence public saunas are often not very suitable for Latvian Sauna Ritual.

The sauna master decorates the bathhouse with different plants like ferns and twigs of various trees before you lay down there. This way he/she brings natural beauty into the sauna. Besides, the heat makes plants to evaporate and you get all the amazing aromatherapy effects.

## #9: You should approach it with respect

You cannot go to Latvian Sauna Ritual too often. It is a deep cleaning experience and you need the energy to enjoy it. Once or a few times a year is enough. You should also treat this ancient tradition with respect. It is very powerful.

It is not that Latvians go to sauna only once or a couple of times a year (it might be so too though). We also like going to an “ordinary” sauna from time to time. It is not the same as taking the full Latvian Sauna Ritual though.

You should also take care of your health. Latvian Sauna Ritual is not for those who cannot handle heat or who have heart problems or choric heart and/or blood vessels’ diseases.

## #10: Enjoy more of pristine Latvian nature

Latvia is a place to enjoy pristine Nordic nature. This includes wonderful secluded sandy beaches, dense forests, vast bog-lands, lakes, and rivers. Hence, I recommend you not to stick to Latvian Sauna Ritual alone, and to combine it with great activities outdoors.

Don’t miss the opportunity and go for some of the [best coastal hikes](http://www.escaperies.com/2018/10/10/hiking-trails-latvia-coastal-hiking/) in Europe, spend some time on [Latvian rivers and lakes while kayaking or canoeing](http://www.escaperies.com/2018/10/15/kayaking-near-me-latvia/) and visit amazing Latvian bogs. You can do any of these activities the same day before the sauna ritual, next day or on any other day, of course. Besides, any of these activities can be tailored to your needs. You can choose to go for short and relaxed or more challenging hiking and/or kayaking trips.

Nature heals and energizes in many different ways, both relaxed and active. Why not combine them and get the utmost from your experience?