

Southampton SPA

Delaware Valley's Only Russian and Turkish Bath Opens in Southampton

European-style steam rooms and therapeutic saunas give new meaning to the phrase "working up a sweat"

SOUTHAMPTON, Pa. – If you're expecting fruit-scented facials and New Age music you're in the wrong place. This is a spa for the more...well...*rugged* among us.

Opened in January, Southampton Spa is the region's only authentic Russian and Turkish Bath. The Spa's main attraction is the selection of exotic steam rooms, therapeutic saunas, cold "plunge" pool and showers. It's not a place for the sweat-shy or heat-sensitive.

"There's nothing like this in Philadelphia," says Steven Nayflesh who, together with his brother Russell, owns and operates the Spa. "It's not something most Americans have experienced, but many of those who do try it get addicted."

Baths such as this originated in Eastern Europe and have long been popular in major cities such as New York or Chicago, where they are called banyas or schvitzes – the Yiddish word for steam bath.

The heart and soul of Southampton Spa is the Russian and Turkish baths, specially built rooms that are heated to more than 200 degrees Fahrenheit. The higher you sit in these antiperspirant graveyards the hotter the air. The heat comes from a half-ton of rocks that are hidden behind a brick wall and heated over a gas flame every night for six hours. The rocks then radiate heat into the sauna throughout the following day.

Visitors roast here for as long as possible, periodically draining buckets of ice water over their heads. Some bathers pay extra to be worked over with "platzas" – leafy bundles of oak or birch twigs softened in tubs of hot, soapy water and then used to gently beat and massage the body. Using the platzas is said to open the pores and rid the skin of toxins.

Many visitors step immediately from the Russian bath into ice-cold showers. There is also a "cold plunge" pool (45 degree water) in which visitors can submerge themselves. The dramatic shift from hot to cold is said to increase circulation and send oxygen shooting through the body.

Visitors usually pause five to 10 minutes to cool down and rejuvenate following this experience, then reenter the rooms to begin the whole process again. This is usually done up to six times during a typical visit.

"For centuries, there have been many health benefits associated with baths such as these," says Steven. "It is believed by many that heavy sweating helps to remove toxins from the body."

"I like to tell people that a Russian spa is like sushi – you'll either love it or hate it but give it three times before you decide," says Russell.

In addition to the Russian and Turkish baths, Southampton Spa also offers a traditional Redwood sauna, a steam room, Jacuzzis, a swimming pool, facials, massages and more. Visitors can also enjoy an onsite juice bar and restaurant.

Entrance fee for the day is \$30. The Spa is located at 141 2nd Street Pike in Southampton, Pa., and is open seven days a week. Check the Spa out on the web at www.southamptonspa.com or call 215-942-4646.

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