



Sauna culture & traditions

A GUIDE BY SAUNA SOCIETY SINGAPORE

Where the craft comes from, and what makes each tradition distinct. If a word on a Singapore sauna menu ever puzzled you — löyly, Aufguss, parenie — this guide is for you.

The sauna & banya lineage

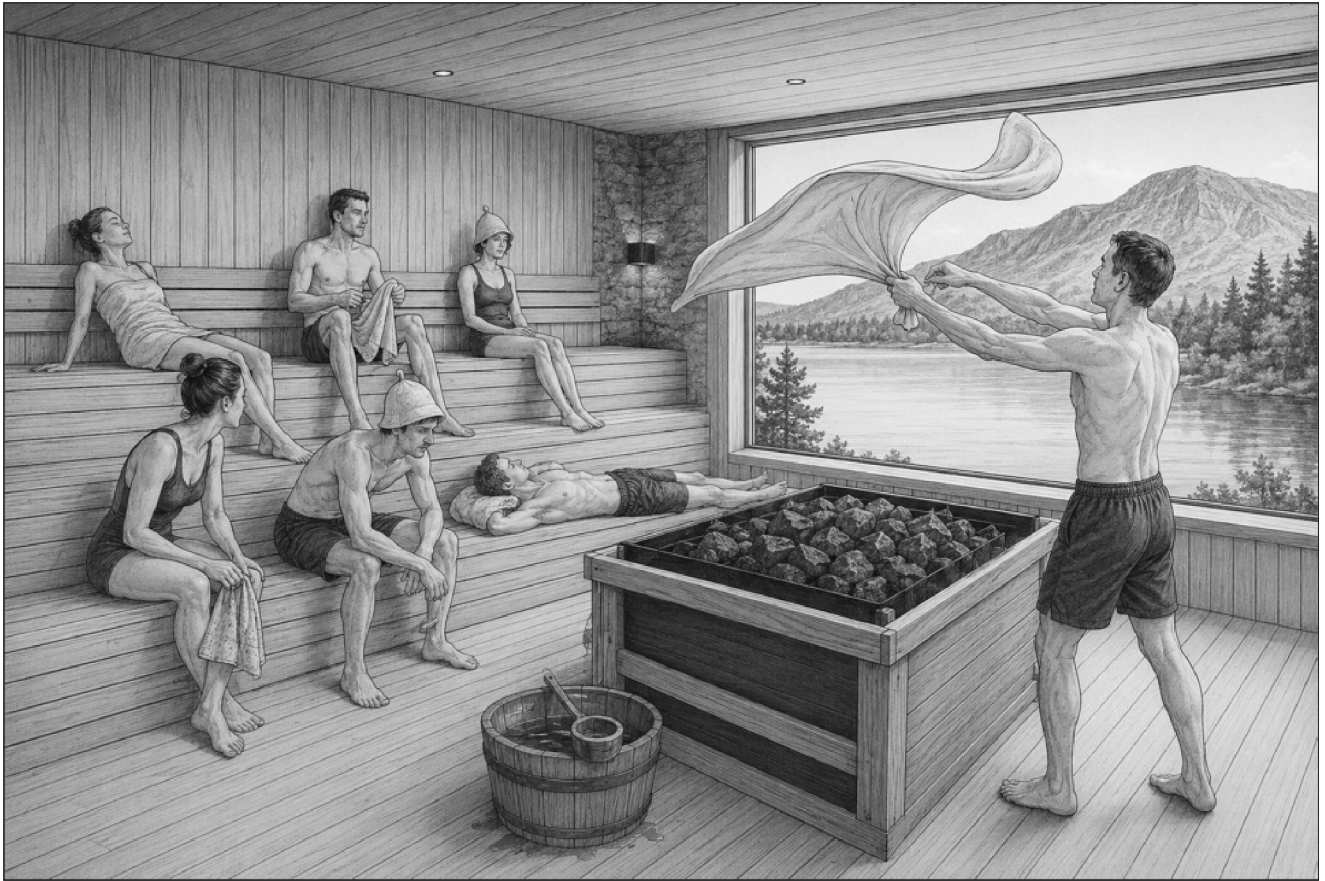
The hot-room traditions we practise arrived here from Europe: the Finnish sauna, the Russian banya, the German Aufguss culture, and their cousins across Scandinavia, the CIS and the Baltics. Each grew up in a cold climate, which is why they work so well in a hot one — the point was never the heat outside, but what heat, cold and rest do together.

Löyly

Say it “LOY-loo” — the Finnish word for the steam that rises when water meets hot stones, and for the whole feel of a room's heat. Good löyly is soft and even; it wraps rather than bites. It is the first thing our assessors feel for when they walk into a hot room, and the quickest way to tell a well-run sauna from a hot wooden box.

Aufguss

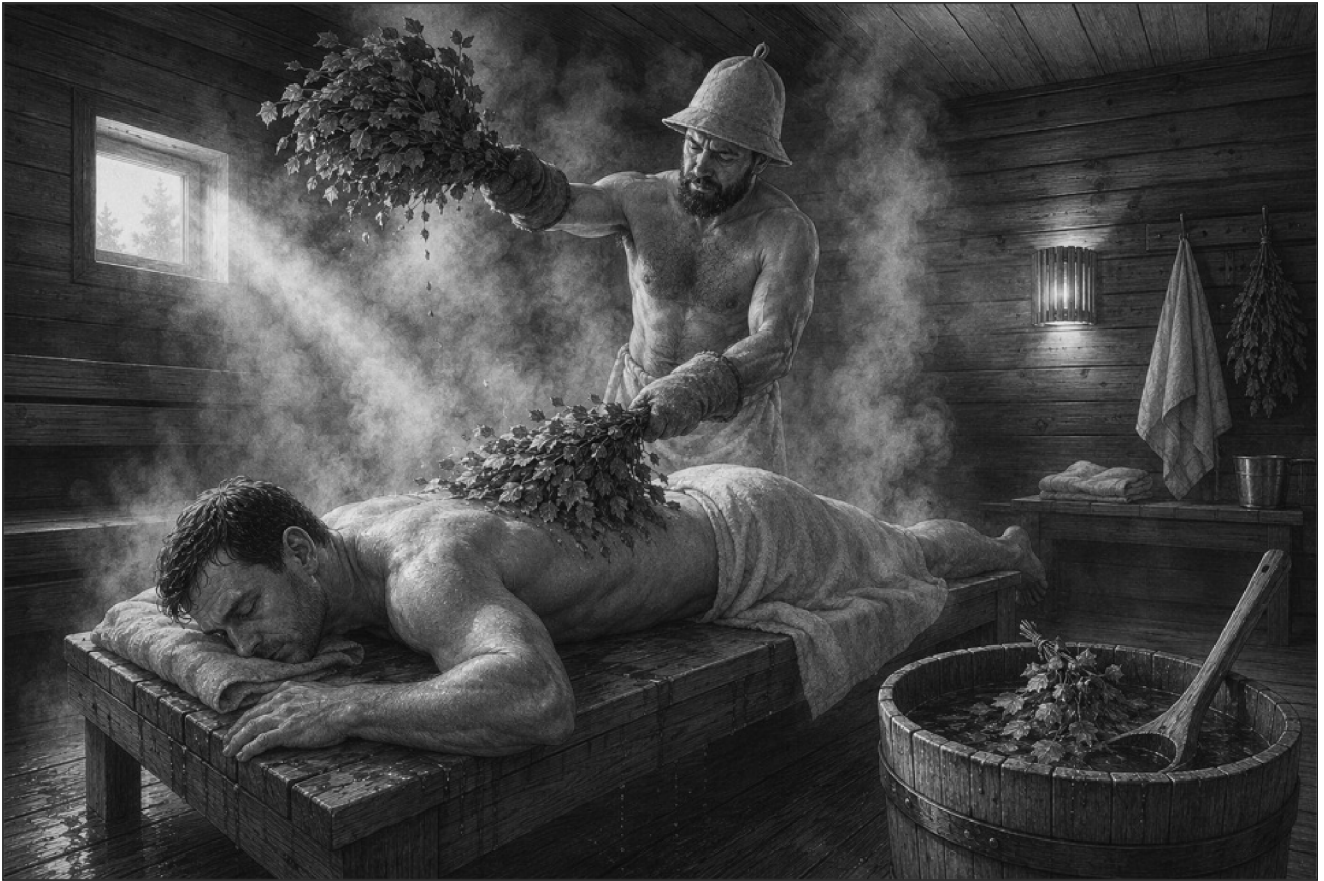
German for “infusion”: a guided session where a sauna master pours scented water on the stones and moves the heat through the room with a towel, in timed rounds, often to music. At its best it is equal parts craft, hospitality and performance — there are international championships for it, and the guided session has begun to appear in Singapore. If a session is billed as an Aufguss, someone should be guiding it from start to finish.



An Aufguss in progress — the towel moves the heat, the master runs the room.

Banya

The banya craft: bundles of leafy branches — birch, oak, eucalyptus — soaked and worked over the body in steam, pressing and fanning heat into the muscles. A good parenie is rhythmic and unhurried; the venik carries the heat, never the force. It is usually done one-to-one by a trained parenie master.



Parenie — the venik carries the heat, never the force.

Contrast therapy

Heat, then cold, then rest — and again. Singapore's ice-bath wave is the newest chapter of the oldest bathing pattern there is. The alternation is the point: finish a proper hot round before a hard plunge, and give yourself real rest between cycles.

Heritage

In December 2020, UNESCO inscribed “Sauna culture in Finland” on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity — Finland's first inscription on the list. What was recognised is exactly what we champion here: sauna as a living tradition carried by people, not a spa product.

Want the deeper reference — assessment areas, research databases, the regional standard? See the Sauna Society Asia knowledge base at saunasociety.asia/knowledge/, and the Standard at saunasociety.asia/standards/.