# The bathhouse is back... but not as you know it



In New York, a long-standing gay tradition is experiencing something of a resurgence: the bathhouse. Historically rooted in providing hygiene solutions to the newly arrived and lower-income populations, bathhouses now cater to a diverse and eclectic clientele. This shift is palpable across several notable locations in New York City, offering a mix of cultural heritage, modern luxury, and communal, ahem, relaxation. Though this time, the emphasis seems to be on health and pampering rather than what went on back in the days of The Continental Baths, where clients would take a break from the entertainment provided by Bette Midler and Barry Manilow to go and explore their options in just towels.

In the heart of Manhattan's Flatiron District stands Bathhouse, a sleek, expansive facility that recently opened to the public. Spread over 35,000 square feet, this modern establishment embraces the ancient tradition of communal bathing, while updating it with state-of-the-art amenities. Visitors find themselves descending into a dimly lit, warm oasis carved from the very bedrock of Manhattan. Among the offerings are a large body-temperature pool, two hot tubs, a steam room, a dry sauna, and an infrared sauna. Central to the experience is the banya, a traditional Russian sauna powered by a large brick oven, complemented by cold plunge pools kept at a bracing 7 to 10 degrees Celsius.

Across the East River in Brooklyn, World Spa presents an opulent and intercontinental array of experiences under its roof. Situated under an elevated train track, it claims to host the largest banya in America. Here, a wide demographic — from Orthodox Jews to tattooed hipsters — gathers to enjoy its three floors of exotic rooms, including a Moroccan-style hammam and an infrared sauna that appears inspired by futuristic design. The unique setting allows patrons to feel like they are navigating between a dacha in Russia and a modern wellness retreat.

Long-standing establishments continue to hold their own amidst this new wave, with the Russian & Turkish Baths in the East Village being a prime example. This 130-year-old institution remains split due to the historical feud between its original owners, resulting in guests choosing between Boris and David weeks. This bathhouse, once frequented by cultural icons like Frank Sinatra and John Belushi, maintains its traditional banyas and offers the unique platza treatment where guests are invigorated with oak leaves.

Aire Ancient Baths in Tribeca provides a more intimate experience, limiting entry to just 20 patrons at any time. Within its candlelit, grotto-like environment, visitors can luxuriate in various temperature pools and indulge in spa treatments ranging from body scrubs to massages. It offers an escape from the city’s hustle and bustle, nestled quietly within a former textile factory.

In Coney Island's Mermaid Spa, the tradition leans heavily towards its Slavic roots. Situated in the Seagate area, the spa is known for having some of the hottest sauna rooms in the city, resonating with the multicultural fabric of its neighbourhood. It features a large backyard patio, a traditional Russian restaurant, one of New York’s largest Jacuzzis, and a dry-heat banya renowned for reaching extreme temperatures.

These bathhouses not only offer refreshing experiences but also showcase New York’s commitment to blending old traditions with contemporary demands. Whether in search of relaxation, cultural immersion, or simply a warm refuge from the city’s fast pace, New York's bathhouses are a testament to the city's vibrant and ever-evolving cultural landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://ritualnordicspa.com/trend-urban-bathhouses-heating-up/> - Corroborates the trend of urban bathhouses as social wellness clubs and their resurgence in urban landscapes, including the impact of COVID-19 and the need for communal relaxation.
* <https://interiordesign.net/projects/see-the-latest-bathhouse-locale-by-rockwell-group/> - Describes the modern Bathhouse in Manhattan's Flatiron District, its design by Rockwell Group, and the amenities it offers, such as pools, saunas, and treatment rooms.
* <https://www.curationist.org/editorial-features/article/histories-of-the-public-bathhouse> - Provides historical context on public bathhouses in New York City, their architectural design, and the social dynamics they embodied, particularly in the early 20th century.
* <https://thebeautybackpacker.co.uk/blog/2018/9/29/the-russian-baths-new-yorks-ultimate-beauty-experience> - Details the Russian & Turkish Baths in the East Village, its traditional banyas, and the cultural significance it holds, including its historical clientele and unique treatments.
* <https://www.globalwellnesssummit.com/trendium/trend-urban-bathhouses-heating-up/> - Supports the trend of urban bathhouses as part of a broader wellness movement, highlighting their historical roots, modern updates, and the growth in wellness tourism and thermal/mineral springs sectors.
* <https://interiordesign.net/projects/see-the-latest-bathhouse-locale-by-rockwell-group/> - Further details the design and amenities of the Bathhouse in Manhattan, including its subterranean layout and the use of various materials and lighting to create a unique experience.
* <https://ritualnordicspa.com/trend-urban-bathhouses-heating-up/> - Explains the factors driving the interest in urban bathhouses, such as the desire for social activities, changing views on fun nights out, and the need for affordable wellness options.
* <https://thebeautybackpacker.co.uk/blog/2018/9/29/the-russian-baths-new-yorks-ultimate-beauty-experience> - Describes the Wall Street Bath and Spa, its traditional Russian banya, and the cultural significance it holds within New York's Russian community.
* <https://www.curationist.org/editorial-features/article/histories-of-the-public-bathhouse> - Discusses the historical and architectural aspects of public bathhouses, including their role in early 20th-century public health campaigns and their neoclassical design.
* <https://www.globalwellnesssummit.com/trendium/trend-urban-bathhouses-heating-up/> - Highlights the community support for saving historical bathhouses and the resurgence of interest in traditional bathing practices as part of modern wellness trends.