

Hazel Curry

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[Article history](#)

Today's spas stem from the Arabian hammam (or "hot bath"), but in essence many are nothing like it. Instead of a hideaway, the hammam is a place to mingle, "the main social event of the week for Arabic women", according to Naima El-Alaoui at Bayan Loutra hammam in London.

The drill is this: cook in the steam (the heat is relaxing and detoxifying), explore the different rooms (of varying temperature), succumb to skin-softening exfoliation and soap massage from a therapist, natter, sprawl over the cool marble slabs, steam some more and, finally, chill with mint tea in the cool room. Nowadays, most hammams also offer treatments such as facials. During Victorian times, hammams abounded in the UK, and became known as Turkish baths. Their popularity waned, but that's all changing as a crop of new and refurbished baths open in the UK and Ireland.

Bayan Loutra, London

When it opens next month, this four-storey building in Kensington will offer customary treatments using black seed (an oil that makes skin glow) as well as more unusual ones, such as Sudanese body smoking (a pre-wedding ritual that involves sitting in detoxifying dilka smoke). Complete with tea room and creche, the hammam hogs an entire floor and costs £100 for one person, £180 for two and £260 for three (the prices include a black soap exfoliation treatment). Contact: 0845 130 2929.