

Perfect Sweat

7 x 30'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Finland

In Finland, it is estimated that there are 3.5 million saunas. They even exist in fast food restaurants. And no steam is left unexplored with guide Samuel Aarnio, who represents a younger generation that holds fast to the centuries-old sweat bathing tradition. Samuel and Mikkel start their sauna adventures in Helsinki and venture outward, island hopping by boat, visiting old friends for a traditional smoke sauna, and testing their limits in 60+ saunas at the Mobile Sauna Festival in Teuva. They even discover new ways of cooking meals by sauna, and indulge in the purity of a remote sauna village, deep in Finland's countryside.

2. Aufguss

In regions along the Italian-German border, a very unique tradition has grown. Guide Christine Rose shows Mikkel that a sauna is nothing without a show when it comes to the ritual of Aufguss, an art form that melds cultures and steam bathing traditions. Aufguss uses balls of ice, infused with essential oils upon sauna rocks, and integrates the act of towel waving to enhance the aromatics. But today, it's more exciting than ever before, with Aufguss Masters putting their own twist on the experience with music, drama, and lighting. Mikkel visits some of the most luxurious spas in the area, learns about ancient Roman bathing influences, and later witnesses some fierce competition for the World Aufguss championship - sweat entertainment at its finest.

3. Russia

An ancient Russian tradition that was widely established with public baths in city centers, the banya is experiencing a new wave of enthusiasm among young people. Banya blogger Anna Artemieva shows Mikkel how the next generation has embraced the banya as ritual, with friends and alone, to heal the mind and cleanse the soul. Since the days of the Soviet Union, when Mikkel was last in Russia, some banyas he visited may have closed, but the traditions are alive and well. Visiting luxurious urban spots like Banya Alekseeva to countryside retreats like B.O.R. Club, Mikkel finds his match in Anna as they encounter the best steam masters in town, from St. Petersburg to Moscow and beyond.

4. Japan

Over three thousand hot springs bubble to the surface on the Japanese archipelago, making steam and sweat important elements in the cleansing, healing, and spiritual traditions of Japan.

The arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century gave birth to a variety of sweat baths, like the Kama-buro, Mushi-buro, Fukashi-buro, and the Kara-furo. Today, the younger generation is building a new sweat bathing culture that includes the Finnish-style sauna. Mikkel is given a tour of both the ancient and the modern practices by his two guides, Miki Tokairin and Sho Ikushima. Together they visit a 700-year-old Kara-furo that is still in use today, experience an immersive exhibit that combines sweat bathing with taking in artwork, as well as join in on two tent sauna parties, where participants sweat, jump into a nearby lake, and enjoy nature.

5. Turkey

Ancient architecture and ancient bathing traditions are infused in the culture of modern-day Turkey. Starting in Istanbul, Mikkel visits stunning architectural wonders and learns about the rich history of textiles and other materials critical for enjoying the hamam bathing experience to the fullest. Guide Elizabet Kurumlu also gives Mikkel a crash course in the best of hamam cultural events: From pledge hamams, where people treat each other to a luxurious day of bathing in order to make wishes, to soldier hamams, where friends conduct a bubbly, relaxing send off for a soldier soon to be reporting for duty. Though hamams may have been more plentiful in the days of the Ottoman Empire, they remain a critical part of wellness and community for the Turkish people.

6. Norway

Thanks to his Norwegian roots, Mikkel's love for sweat bathing started with the badstue. From his father's home in Ulefoss, Mikkel begins a journey through Norway with guide Lasse Eriksen.

What was once a sleepy town when Mikkel visited over 40 years ago, Oslo is now home to numerous floating saunas and badstues that culturally and architecturally expand the meaning of sweat bathing. Next stop is Dalen, where a beautiful lakeside sauna based on a fairytale provides picturesque reflection. In Tromso, they board the Vulkana, a fishing boat-turned-spa, and finally, they end their quest at the remote resort of a legendary polar explorer, where nature is the ultimate companion.

7. Burning Man

The Playa is a harsh landscape, with high temperatures that make sweat bathing seem unthinkable. But Mikkel and his guides, Teresa Yung and Zack Robertson, explore the growing community of sweat bathing lovers who make the annual trek to Burning Man. They road trip from Mikkel's hometown of San Francisco, and establish their home base camp at Steam of Life. From there, they visit over 15 camps that include the Sauna Dome, Steam Bath Project, Art of Steam, and more. From learning the "John Payne method," to attending a class that teaches Wim Hof breathing methods and combines steam and ice-cold showers, to relaxing in a banya made in the shape of an amethyst geode, Mikkel and his guides leave no sweat behind. There is an explosion of steam bathing on the Playa that combines the best of human imagination, invention, and art – and is the perfect, quirky culmination of the inaugural Perfect Sweat season.