

BANYA

A RUSSIAN TRADITION

# HISTORY

- **A mention of the banya is found in the Radzivill Chronicle in the story of Princess Olga's revenge for the murder of her husband, Prince Igor, by the Slavic tribe of Drevlians in 945 AD. The leader of the Drevlians had hopes of marrying the widow Olga and sent messengers to discuss the idea. "When the Drevlians arrived, Olga commanded that a bath should be made ready for them and said, 'Wash yourselves and come to me.' The bath-house was heated and the unsuspecting Drevlians entered and began to wash themselves.**
- **An early description of the banya comes from the East Slavic Primary Chronicle of 1113. According to the Chronicle, or as it was called by its authors, The Tale of Bygone Years, the Apostle Andrew visited the territories that were later to become Russia and Ukraine during his visit to the Greek colonies on the Black Sea. The belief was held that Andrew crossed through East Slavic lands from the mouth of the Dnieper River, past the hills on which Kiev would later be founded, and went as far north as the ancient city of Novgorod.**
- **The original bathhouses were detached, low-lying wooden structures dependent on a fire lit inside to provide heat. A stove in a corner is made of large round stones that, when heated, are lifted with iron rods and placed in a wooden tub. Once the fire is built, the bather then removes the fire and flushes out the smoke before beginning the bath. Hence the soot and the term "black bathhouses" (chernaia bania).**

# CONSTRUCTION

Banya buildings can be quite large with a number of different bathing areas or simple wooden cabins like the traditional Finnish cottage saunas. Russian banyas usually have three rooms: a steam room, a washing room and an entrance room. The entrance room, called a *predbannik* or pre-bath, has pegs to hang clothing upon and benches to rest on. The washing room has a hot water tap, which uses water heated by the steam room stove and a vessel or tap for cold water to mix water of a comfortable temperature for washing. The heater has three compartments: a fire box that is fed from the entrance room, the rock chamber, which has a small hole to throw the water into and a water tank at the top



# TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN BATHS ARE DIVIDED INTO:

In a "black banya", the smoke escapes through a hole in the ceiling, while in "white banyas" there are exhaust pipes to vent the smoke. In the former, the escaping smoke darkens the banya's interior wood. Both styles are characterized by boulder stones, clay balls and large cauldrons for the hot water as well as stone stoves with a tank to heat the water. The firewood is usually birch. A black banya is more rudimentary than a white banya.





# BATHING RITUAL

Banya temperatures often will exceed 93 degrees Celsius (199 °F) and special felt hats are typically worn to protect the head from this intense heat. Some clients prefer to sit on a small mat brought into the banya to protect bare skin from the dry, hot wood of the interior benches. In Russia, special felt hats are commonly sold in sets with felt mitts, along with aromatherapy extracts for inclusion into the steam water. People often hit (massage) themselves or others with bunches of dried branches and leaves from white birch, oak or eucalyptus in order to improve the circulation.





*"That's all Folks!"*

□ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banya\\_\(sauna\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banya_(sauna))

