



# Relaxation Hot Spot

The Middle Eastern hammam is the latest spa trend to prove what's old is new again.

BY JENNY QUILL

You may have heard the term before, but what exactly is a hammam? It's an ancient Turkish bathhouse that remains popular in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and

North Africa. From the Arabic word for heat, a hammam traditionally consisted of a hot room, a warm intermediate room and a cool room, and were gathering places for socialization and relaxation.

Today, hammams are being introduced at some of the country's most luxurious spas, where they've combined traditional elements with such modern details as full-body massage, mood-enhancing

crystals and sleek interpretations of Moorish architecture. So what can you expect when you go? The treatment features a six-step process to bliss.

**1 YOU'RE GETTING WARM**  
First, you'll wrap yourself in a peshtemal, a traditional Moroccan towel-size blanket, and then proceed to relax in a warm room, which opens your pores and sweat glands in preparation for the ritual. Some spas have separate warming rooms for this (as is the tradition), while others have sitting areas within the hammam.

**2 SCRUBBING IN**  
A full-body scrub is the cornerstone of this ritual. Once inside the hammam, you'll lie on a large table (they're often heated and made of marble) while your treatment provider performs a full-body scrub using a coarse, loofah-like cloth. To stimulate circulation, the therapist will begin exfoliating at your feet and work toward your heart, being sure to concentrate on dry-skin-prone spots, such as heels, knees and elbows.

**3 BUBBLE, BUBBLE**  
After the scrub comes the bubbly soaping, during which an olive oil-based soap is whipped into a fizzy foam and drizzled across your body. "You have this magical feeling of bubbles dripping down your body," says Jennifer Lynn, the spa director at The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas.

**4 WATER WORLD**  
To rinse away the soap, water is gently poured over your body with either buckets or Moroccan pans. Some spas use warm water, while others alternate warm and cold water for an invigorating rinse.

**5 CIRCUIT TRAINING**  
Many spas will have you complete a hammam circuit, moving between warm and cold rooms in order to stimulate the body, increasing circulation and detoxification. "You go out of the hammam room and to the steam room, and after the steam room, we have the cold deluge," says Sabrina Cormack, the spa director of Joya Spa at the InterContinental Montelucia Resort in Paradise Valley, Ariz. "You go in the cold deluge, pull a lever and five gallons of very brisk water pours on you—we hear a lot of screams—and, if you like, you can then go to the whirlpool. It's very invigorating."

**DEPENDING ON HOW LONG YOU LIKE TO LINGER, A HAMMAM RITUAL CAN LAST UPWARDS OF TWO HOURS.**

**6 RUB-A-DUB-DUB**  
While not part of the traditional hammam experience, many spas are adding full-body massages. "I always recommend the hammam before a massage," Lynn says. "You become like butter. You start out tense and solid, and before you know it, your muscles are relaxed and everything is loose and liquidy." •

## Taking It Home

While you may not be able to build a hammam in your home, you can re-create the experience with these products.

### L'OCCITANE OLIVE GOLDEN BRANCH SOAP

This gentle soap leaves a faint glimmer on the skin. \$7, [usa.loccitane.com](http://usa.loccitane.com)



### CRABTREE & EVELYN ROSEWATER EAU FRAICHE

At the conclusion of a hammam ritual, your body is often spritzed with rosewater. This body spray smells like a lush, spring garden. \$35, [crabtree-evelyn.com](http://crabtree-evelyn.com)



### BAMBOO NATURALS BATH MITT

Give yourself a proper head-to-toe exfoliation with this bamboo-and-loofah mitt. \$6, [ulta.com](http://ulta.com)



### HAND OF FATIMA

The therapists at Joya Spa place this sign on the outside of treatment rooms when a session is in progress. It is believed to ward off negative energy and protect its occupant. \$98, [joyaspa.com](http://joyaspa.com)

