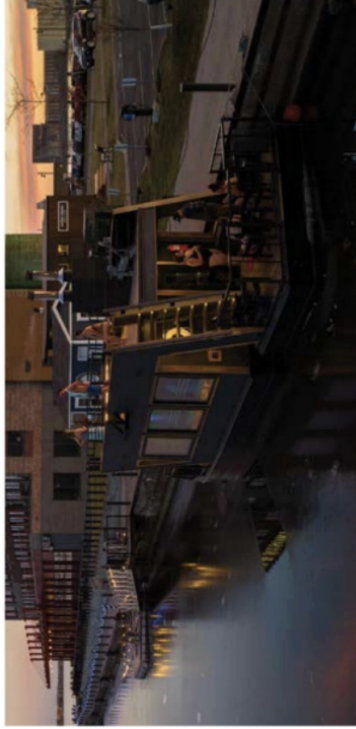


SHORELEAVE

By Kathi Ustitalo

Cedar + Stone Nordic Sauna

A floating sauna is a hot new addition to Duluth's waterfront.



ALL PHOTOS CEDAR + STONE

Beginning in the late 19th century, thousands of immigrants from Finland found their way to Duluth, Minnesota, which was called "Little Helsinki" for the number of Finns who settled there. They brought with them their tradition of sauna — the heat and steam method of bathing that has been a part of Finnish culture for thousands of years.

Duluth's "Finn Town," in the area now known as Canal Park, was once home to about 10 community saunas. Over the decades they disappeared, but today, authentic sauna has returned to the waterfront district thanks to Justin Juntunen, founder and CEO of Cedar + Stone Nordic Sauna. His ancestors were among the early Finnish immigrants to the area, and he grew up in Esko, a farming community about 20 minutes south of Duluth and the Lake Superior shore. At home and at the family cabin, says Juntunen, "Sauna is a cultural tradition. It's a way of life."

After living and working elsewhere, Juntunen and his wife decided to settle in Duluth, but first made a trip to Finland. They experienced sauna in the country where there are about 3.3 million saunas for a population of 5.6 million — where it is so revered that "Sauna Culture in Finland" made it to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Most memorable of their experiences was a sauna on a raft floating in the Baltic Sea. That sparked an idea that evolved into Cedar + Stone, a company that would be both a builder of sleek, "heirloom quality" custom

saunas, and the creator of authentic, traditional, wood-fired public saunas, including one floating on Juntunen's beloved freshwater sea, Lake Superior.

A stress-relief company

"Not many people understand sauna," says the man on a mission to establish Duluth as Sauna Capital of North America. His approach to increasing appreciation of sauna — what he calls the cultural gift of sauna — is through education; sharing its many health benefits and social aspects; getting as many people as possible to experience authentic sauna; and making it relatable. Believing that everyone wants less stress in their lives, he calls Cedar + Stone a stress-relief company.

"When I begin to talk about stress and anxiety, people begin to care — then they become interested." Once most people experience real sauna, Juntunen says, they are usually hooked. "We destroy stress and anxiety all the time."

Hot, cold, rest, rehydrate, repeat

For most Americans the word sauna conjures up images of a quick trip to a lukewarm gym or hotel facility that may be best described as a poor imitation of the true experience. Genuine sauna is a leisurely and mindful ritual that requires sitting in a small room heated to a high temperature with steam created by tossing water onto rocks piled on the stove (preferably wood-fired, but electric will



WHAT TO EXPECT

- Each Cedar + Stone 75- or 90-minute sauna session comes with a guide who lights the stove, introduces the process and talks about the history and benefits of sauna. The visit includes towels and tea and water for relaxation and hydration. All ages are welcome, and the guide offers information for families about accommodating children. Guests are required to wear bathing suits and water shoes for the cold plunge. CEDARANDSTONE.COM

- Duluth's location on Lake Superior makes it an ideal base for exploring the big water, which Justin Juntunen calls a "fickle mistress." He suggests touring the harbor, cruising under the lift-bridge and following the North Shore to Two Harbors and the iconic Split Rock Lighthouse. Or, see the waterway from Vista Fleet Sightseeing Cruises. VISTAFLEET.COM

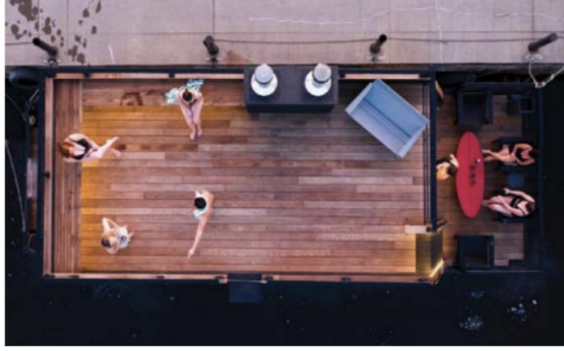
- Pier B Resort Hotel has its own boat slips for guests. PIERBRESORT.COM
- Duluth travel info: VISITDULUTH.COM



The entire sauna complex is open year-round, and the barge has a bubbler to combat ice in the harbor.

"When the weather gets bad, it's often better sauna weather and a good time to go sauna," Juntunen says. "It's safe harbored there. It's sturdy, resilient and full of siss," referencing the Finnish word for strength and determination.

"The barge took 12 years of my life to make a reality, and now people are enjoying it," he says. "It's such a magical opportunity. It's difficult to find floating saunas in North America. It's novel and unique and beautiful. People really want that experience." ♦



do). After a short session in the heat, there's a blast of cold — either under a shower, a plunge into cold water, or even a roll in the snow — followed by rest and a refreshing beverage. For full effect, the cycle is repeated a few times.

This is the sauna practice that Juntunen introduced when he launched his business in 2020, starting with two land-based saunas. Just six weeks later, COVID-19 forced their shutdown. The pandemic was good for the custom-build side, however, as more people wanted to bring sauna into their homes. Eventually, Cedar + Stone was able to reopen the public facilities, which are located next to the Pier B Resort Hotel at Duluth's harbor.

The original compound consisted of a five-person private sauna, a public sauna for 10, a platform for taking a plunge into Lake Superior's chilly water, a changing cabin and a deck for post-sauna relaxation. In December 2023, Juntunen fulfilled his long-time dream of a floating sauna and opened a handsome structure atop a 36-foot workhorse barge. Moored alongside Cedar + Stone's other facilities, the craft's sauna accommodates 10 people and has a rooftop deck and platform for making the cold water plunge between hot sessions. Juntunen is working to achieve certification to be able to add excursions for the fully operational vessel.

"Believe it or not, the Coast Guard has no regulations for a floating sauna," he says with a laugh.