

## Hamмам

The Hammam is descended from the Roman Bath. It is the Moroccan version of the **Turkish Bath, hot but with less steam and lots of running water.**

The word "Hammam" means "Spreader of warmth" and historically it was much more than just a place to cleanse the skin. It was a normal part of everyday life, a place where people of all social classes, young and old, rich and poor, could meet freely. The Islamic hammam came directly from the Roman and Greek baths.

At first they were cold baths, and only men were permitted to use them. It wasn't until the prophet Mohammed learned that hot water could promote fertility that the heated hammam was inaugurated and its use opened up to women. The men and women however were separated and today in the public hammams, they may use the same entrance but have different sections inside. According to the Koran, washing is not only an important, but an essential part of Islam.

However, these marble temples helped create a social atmosphere, consisting of bathing, massage, discussing business, relaxing and chatting. Enjoying the company of friends and making business contacts were just as important as the religious and hygienic aspects were and this contributed greatly to the popularity of the hammams.

Their popularity also increased because the heat was thought to cure many types of disease and children were encouraged to accompany their parents. The price of entry was kept so low it allowed even the poorest to afford these rituals. Unlike the Romans' large open baths which were designed for socialising, hammams were mostly small, enclosed, and dimly lit by shafts of light from above. This helped to inspire piety and reflection.

Later, to show off their wealth and to demonstrate the strength of their devotion to Allah, the rich built large and much more ornate buildings. In time the hammams drew people to socialise, especially women, whose weekly visits became very important to them as this was the only time they were allowed to leave the confines of their homes.

The routine followed in the hammam can include a warm room in which to wash and prepare for the hot room where you sit or lie on the large heated marble stone for as long as you can bear, before cooling off with water from the basin alcoves around the room or buckets of water. There is a cold room that helps the body acclimatise to normal temperature and benches to sit on and chat before leaving. There are usually attendants available to provide a total body exfoliation, a cleansing wash and a massage.

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## **Hamam terminology**

**Hararet** is a hot room

**Sicaklik** hot area which includes the large hot marble slab surrounded by bathing basins and cubicles

**Gobek tasi** large heated marble platform

**Kurna** bathing basin

**Tas** metal bowl for pouring water over the body

**Halvet** private bathing cubicles

**Pestemal** a red and white check cotton wrap that you are given to wear as it is not acceptable to be naked in the hammam

**Nalin** wooden clogs

**Terlik** slippers

**Sabon beldi** an olive oil soap

**Kese** a rough mitt for massaging