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TRENDSPOTTING

Taking the plunge

Floating saunas are bobbing up on Australian waterways, bringing with them a wealth of wellness benefits.

Words **CLAIRE ISAAC**

Photography **ANJIE BLAIR**

Saunas are – ahem – hotter than ever right now. From boutique gyms to backyard builds, the ancient heat ritual has become one of the biggest trends in wellness. As well as helping muscles to relax and the body unwind, regular sessions are linked to reduced stress, improved cardiovascular health and better recovery after exercise. The latest twist? Getting all that on the water.

In Nordic countries such as Finland, where there are more than three million saunas for a population of 5.5 million, the steamy practice is embedded in daily culture. Many are built beside lakes or the sea so bathers can heat up, plunge into cold water, rest and repeat. Floating saunas take that tradition one step further – building the sauna on a boat or pontoon allows bathers to step directly from the heat into a lake, river or ocean – and now they're quietly appearing across Australia, from Tasmania's waterways to Sydney Harbour.

Take the Kuuma Nature Sauna in Barretta, Tasmania. Enthusiasts enjoy a cruise on a specially adapted boat featuring a wood-fired sauna, where they can get a true Finnish experience before diving into

clear Tasman waters to cool off. "Many of our guests speak about the mental benefits," say Kuuma's owners Chloe and Nathan Gore. "Taking time to slow down, disconnect and be present on the water. It is a simple but powerful way to reset."

Kuuma isn't the only one providing that reset – there are now three floating saunas in Tasmania (Lake Derby is pictured left), Gippsland now has its own, and even Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin has one bobbing about, just off Yarralumla Beach East. In Sydney, Wellness Afloat launched in 2025, offering a Scandinavian-style floating sauna experience on picturesque Sydney Harbour.

Part wellness ritual, part social outing and undeniably photogenic, floating saunas tap into the growing appetite for experiences that help people slow down and switch off. As Chloe and Nathan put it: "Sauna experiences offer something quite different from everyday routines: time offline, a sense of ritual, and a shared experience. Being on the water adds another layer, creating a space where people can slow down and enjoy something that feels both grounding and memorable."