

## Steam — Arillaq

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### CAINIĖK ARILLARTUQ, KALLAQUTARTUQ. – THE KETTLE IS STEAMING, IT'S GOING TO BOIL.

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Photo: Mitch Simeonoff steaming crab legs in Akhiok.

The traditional Alutiiq steam bath, commonly known by its Russian name *banya* (a form of sauna), remains important for bathing, socializing, healing, and spiritual cleansing. In a low-roofed shed heated with a woodstove, bathers splash hot rocks to create surges of prickly steam. Benches elevate bathers into the hot rising mist. Today bathing is done in age and gender groups. Men wash first, followed by women, and then children, and there is often friendly competition to see who can withstand the hottest *banya*.

Many ailments are treated in the steam bath, where steam enhances the potency of herbal medicines. Steam opens the body's pores, improving the absorption of poultices and helping to shed toxins. Many medicinal treatments are preceded or followed by switching: swatting the body with leafy branches soaked in hot water. People commonly make switches from mountain alder, although birch branches, elderberry branches, beach ryegrass stems, angelica, yarrow, and even ferns may be used. Switching increases circulation, promotes greater sweating, and can relieve

common aches and pains.

Steam is also spiritually cleansing. In classical Alutiiq society, steam baths helped to purify the sick, prepare hunters for the chase, strengthen warriors for battle, and ready pregnant women for delivery. Today steam bathing is a favorite way to relax and rejuvenate both physically and mentally.