

## Steam Bath, Banya — Maqiwik

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### MAQIWIQ UQNAARLLIA. – THE BANYA WAS HOT.

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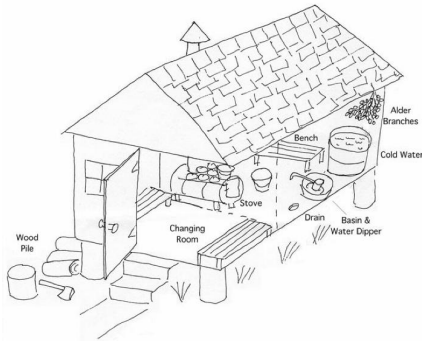


Image: Diagram of an Alutiiq steam bath or banya.

Alutiiq sod houses had a small side chamber designed specifically for steam bathing. This room had a low ceiling and a narrow, covered doorway that trapped steam. People carried hot rocks into the steam bath with special wooden tongs and piled them into a corner where they would not block the doorway. Bathers splashed these rocks with water stored in wooden tubs to produce sweat-inducing steam. Bundles of roots were used for scrubbing and angelica leaves perfumed the air, providing relief from sore muscles. Steam bathing was also a spiritual practice. Babies born in seclusion huts were washed in the steam bath as part of their introduction to the family household, and warriors would bathe the night before a raid.

Although many people believe that Russian colonists introduced steam bathing, archaeological data illustrate that the tradition is ancient. Alutiiq villages more than three thousand years old contain quantities of rock reddened and cracked by fire. This rubble shows that this type of bathing has been an integral part of Alutiiq social and spiritual life for millennia. Known today by the Russian term *banya*, steam bathing remains a popular social activity.