

FRIDAY JULY 18 (morning tour)

***GUIDED TOUR TO THE ARAB BATHS (HAMMAM) OF GRANADA
(ACCOMPANYING PERSONS)***



In the Middle Ages, when the Christian Spain was crossing a period of obscurantism, in which no type of hygiene was considered and still less the personal one, the Muslim Cordoba has more than 600 public Arab baths.

Heirs of **Roman baths**, some were humble and economical, others were a luxury for sybaritic people. Their walls were tiled and their rooms were separated by arches and columns, their ceilings were vaulted and they have skylights. They were not only a resting place but also a social and politics meeting place.

Some treaties from that period show the refinement of our "**Andalusi**" **ancestors**, describing in detail their hygiene habits and the style of their personal likes, such as the use of toothpaste, hair-removing cream, oils and aromatic lathers with musk, jasmine or violet essences.

Maybe without so much sophistication and regardless of whether the houses have or not comfortable baths, Moroccans still go with pleasure and periodically to the hammam. Not so much the most modernized ones.

The origin of that old and popular habit surely comes from the advices about hygiene and the prescribed ablutions that Islam knows how to instil, as a "hadith" from the Prophet says: "The hygiene is a faith sign".

So, cleaning and paying attention to the body, moreover than a pleasant activity is a generous expression of the created thing and a body and soul purifying element.

For the Islamic world, water is a divine gift, but it also means a deep wisdom and purity, the drink par excellence which quench souls thirsty.

Because of that, the hammam has become an obligatory passage for the great events in life: the birth, the circumcision and the marriage.

Moroccans are certain genies (yenun) like living where there is abundant water, and therefore, in hammams there are genies who take possession of people who disturb them insolently. So, when a newly-wed woman, a heavily pregnant woman or a newborn baby go to those public baths to comply with the ritual, they light candles and shout "yu-yus", invoking the approval from "yen".

In Morocco each quarter has its hammam, which generally shares fire with a bread furnace. There are days and times reserved only for women or only for men.

In some regions and among the most traditional families, the hammam, especially for women, is one of their favourite entertainments and a beauty and sensuality generating ritual which has its own rules.

Women generally are accompanied by their children, a relative or a friend and they take their own utensils. Men also are with somebody, but carrying fewer luggage. The hammam is an appropriate place for introducing children in sexual education and familiarizing them with their own body, without the taboos that generally exist in other religions.

The hammam is a place where disappears any social inequality.

The hammam is a place where all men are alike, whether they are servants or lords. The man rubs shoulders with people who aren't his friends and his enemy can be his companion.

In old "medinas" (cities), they still keep into operation some of those baths of traditional architecture, which are entirely covered by tiles ("zei-lig"), with a central fountain through which the water flows.

The modern ones are simpler, although some of them want to imitate the same craft characteristics. They consist of three main rooms that gradually immerse the bather into different temperatures environments, which are higher each time. In the last room, a little reservoir receives a boiling and a cold water stream that make to overflow the level of it.

The trick, if there is one, consists in pouring hot water on different parts of the body until the skin pores are dilated and, before applying any type of gel or soap, you must scrub yourself with a rough sponge or a pumice stone in order to eliminate dead toxins. Lots of beads slip and sometimes it is necessary a bit of cold water.

Hammam's users give massages and rub their backs to each other until they irritate their skin, competing in vigour, because Moroccans' dignity goes on it. Always in an environment of modest shame that not allow to show off beyond the discretion.

The staff also exists for helping bathers, if they want, rubbing or giving massages. There are "tayabastes" for women or "kiyassas" for men.

Moroccan women, in order to enhance their natural charms, used to plaster their bodies with strange potions and traditional remedies. The hammam is turned into a beauty salon where women can waxing, get the tangles out of their hair and comb it. For the hair washing they use soapy clay which is called "ghasul", dissolved in rose and orange blossom water. They use the traditional henna for dying and clearing their hair up, which they take away when they are in the hammam after being spread in their heads during hours even days.

Workers constantly pour water over the floor, which is easy to slip on, with the rest of ointment and soaps. Children rebel against their mothers' energetic clean with cries.

Customers seem not to be in a hurry for finishing, and they have a freedom feeling that, without a doubt, is produced by space and the lack of fear of splashing or getting the conventional bath dirty.

They use the personal hygiene as an excuse for giving themselves up on a true relaxing tensions pleasure.

Before coming out to the street, Moroccans, who are extremely apprehensive with draughts and temperature changes, take their time to grow cold inside the relaxation room. Women wrap their heads up in a scarf, men wrap their heads up in a towel, and they go home happily, giving a clean smell off which distinguish the appointment days in the hammam.

As a grand finale, a delicious tea that generally consists in cooked eggs, almonds, sweets, fruit juices and the irreplaceable mint tea.

Traditional women, back at home, wait attractive the arrival of their husbands, wearing their caftans, beads and perfumed.

The magic of beauty treatment and the ritual of the hammam is not only because if the feeling of being reborn but also for being themselves the agent of this revival.

Details of the visit

These Arab baths inspired in the **Nazarí decoration** offer to the visitant the opportunity to recover of their trips or the tiredness, enjoying with a relax bath and an **optional** massage.

All the atmosphere of the bath is created to contribute for a **well-being sensation**: traditional decoration, a **faint light**, the **absence of noise** inside, **Arab Sufi background music**, the **smell from the orange and cinnamon aromas** and the relax massages.

The **facilities of the baths** include: a **yard**, **dressing room**, **showers**, a **hot-water swimming pool** (39 degrees) and a **cold water swimming pool** (20 degrees).

At the reception, it is possible to **request a towel** and there are **lockers to keep their personal belongings**.

An **optional** massage service with aromatherapy is also possible.

Price: 49 Euros per person, **including** bus + accompanying guide in Spanish and/or English + Arab bath + Arab tea

Note: A minimum of 10 persons is needed in order to prepare the tour.