

## A Sauna and a Hut

The layer of snow carpeting the grass provides luminosity over Bothnian Bay. The water looks tranquil and silky. Although the sky is cloudy with smidgens of falling snowflakes, for some reason I feel as if I can reach out and touch the North Pole. And, it is quiet. So beautifully quiet.

It may be called a Seaside Hut, but in my opinion it is reminiscent to a teepee – something you'd find in pioneering nowhere. But Seaside Hut is not located in hinterland. Instead, it is plunked smack-dab on the front yard of Seaside Lodge on the shore of Bothnian Bay.

However, and this makes my reference to a teepee credible, being inside the conical hut, it can seem as if you are taking a womb-like break out yonder in Lapland's last frontier.

*Visit Kemi's Seaside Lodge* is a new dinner and relaxation venue. When I write 'relaxation' I mean: on a frosty winter night one can cozy up in front of the lodge's fireplace with a glass of bold red wine, warm the bones in a traditional Finnish sauna and loosen the muscles in the outdoor hot tub. A recipe for: sleeping like a baby.

My Finnish host and I meet Jarno outside Seaside Hut. He wears a fabric tunic and around his waist, a traditional fabric belt looped through a leather pouch holding his Sámi knife. On his feet he wears what looks like a pair of leather slippers. Without being gimmicky, Jarno's look is the real deal.

He embodies the Lappish spirit: a love of outdoors and a connection with nature. His free-spirited curiosity has taken him on many travels and oftentimes he feels at home anywhere nature and man are at one. And, he is a good cook too. His *spécialité*? – food sourced from nature cooked over an open fire.

Reminiscent of a not-so-long-ago era when a husband walked into his home after a long day at the office and proclaimed to his wife: "What's cooking good-looking?" – I can't help but think of this when my female host and I enter the hut. Jarno has prepared dinner for us.

We are immediately permeated with good old-fashioned fire smoke, the kind that lingers in your clothes for days. Hooked to the fire pit located in the middle of the hut is a cooking contraption Jarno used to slow-cook salmon. Small tables and chairs are set-up for dining.

There is a tranquil and welcoming ambience here in the hut and over the next hour, we dine on a divine meal that depicts the character of Lapland and talk as if we saw each other yesterday. But the thing is, I just met both of them today.

Later, my host and I take a sauna au naturel (I am in Finland y'know) and I realize there is a feeling of safeness with Finns. Perhaps it is because of their sauna culture: naked and exposed in what is essentially a large heated wooden box.