

INTO THE WILD

A new hilltop hotel in eastern Finland sports a sauna on stilts and pared-back cabins inspired by the local fauna

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Travel

Above, one of three saunas at the Lähde Forest Spa, which forms part of the new Panorama Landscape Hotel near Tahko, in Finland's eastern Lakeland region. The sauna is perched on stilts and offers views of the surrounding birch trees

Opposite, the hotel is located on a forested hilltop in eastern Finland. To maintain the qualities of the site, it has been designed as a series of small volumes placed between existing trees, with a larger building at the top housing the main restaurant and bar

There's a growing school of thought that our creature comforts might not be as comforting as they are made out to be; that actually what we need to lead happy lives is a certain level of discomfort. Not the underground-at-rush-hour kind of discomfort, but something outdoorsy and elemental, such as exposure to extreme temperatures or cold water swimming.

Finnish architect Sami Rintala knows this. His Norway-based studio Rintala Eggertsson has created buildings that are immersed in nature without destroying it, such as the Arctic Hideaway in Fleinvær and Safe House in Kalsholmen. And when he's not working, Rintala likes nothing more than skiing for miles to his sauna in the forest outside Bodø, building up a sweat and rolling in the snow.

One of his latest projects is the Panorama Landscape Hotel, which comprises ten cabins in the woods near the ski resort of Tahko in eastern Finland. Its Lähde Forest Spa encourages guests to take a tour on the wild side, its three saunas and five hot and cold pools offering views over Lake Syväri. The spa takes its cues from traditional bathing

cultures such as Japanese onsen and Russian banya, where elements of hot and cold have always been enjoyed together, while the pools are fed with water from a natural spring.

Each of the hotel's cabins sleeps two and has traditional shingle walls, a grass roof and spectacular views. An attentive guest can spot that their design is inspired by the bears, lynxes and wolves that roam in the woods, and owner Harri Jokela has made sure the offering is completed by a great restaurant, helmed by top Finnish chef Kim Mustonen.

Lähde Forest Spa is small, discreet and in harmony with the landscape. It has none of the gizmos, gadgets and crowds associated with large spas, which, says Rintala, is just the way it should be. 'We need alternatives to big spas,' he says. 'Those which are smaller and more fragmented and invite people to get closer to nature.' This spa breaks the formula. 'We are all suffering from a loss of contact with nature; modernity means being always acclimatised and protected. A roll in the snow is very good for us.' ★ panoramahotel.fi, ri-eg.com