

Body Heat

Infrared saunas offer a new twist on a hot old favourite

By SARAH GIGNAC



Can you stand the heat? If so, check out Kevin Halsey's Far-Infrared saunas

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you heard of these saunas? For something that warms you up, they're really cool.

In a nutshell, these are saunas that use infrared heaters instead of the more traditional "wet heat" systems. Your body absorbs the heat while the surrounding air stays at a lower temperature (40-60°C). By comparison, traditional heaters and steam saunas can heat the air up to around 93°C and be hard on your skin, lungs, and generally uncomfortable to be in for extended periods of time. Bottom line? You can stay comfortably in an Far-Infrared sauna for much longer and enjoy its benefits without feeling like you're being overcooked.

While normal saunas only warm about two millimetres into your body's surface, Far-Infrared heat penetrates about 50 mm, stimulating a deep, cleansing sweat. This helps flush toxins out of your system, loosens up those stiff spots and joints, and helps alleviate pain caused by inflammation. Some

even claim it to be a great aide in weight loss—burning 600 calories in 30 minutes—but I have yet to see any direct proof of that. (Here's hoping!)

Far-Infrared saunas are a well-kept secret in Victoria. The technology has been around since the '70s, but we didn't have one available for public access until around seven years ago—for which we have Kevin Halsey to thank. "I was being treated for heavy metal toxicity, and my doctors recommended using an infrared sauna as part of a detoxification program," says Halsey. Unfortunately, the nearest sauna was in Nanaimo; as his treatment required several sessions a week, the two-hour drive was more than a burden. To help with his own treatment requirements and to offer the saunas to others, Halsey founded the Nature's Spectrum Far-Infrared Sauna Centre in June, 2000.

"I was impressed with the extensive evidence supporting the use of saunas for

detoxification and their effectiveness in treating numerous other conditions," Halsey explains. "I thought it was important to have infrared saunas available locally."

Nature's Spectrum offers both an in-house sauna area and saunas that you can take home and either build yourself or have installed. Their in-house Soft Heat Far-Infrared cedar unit is about six-by-four feet and six feet tall, with room for one person to lie down completely, or three people to sit comfortably together. Other options include a poplar unit made without the use of glue, plywood or any synthetic materials for people with chemical sensitivities, and a saunacore unit with ceramic emitters. Since the Center's opening almost seven years ago, other places have started offering similar services; some distributors sell them for your own home, and there are a few spas that offer Far-Infrared saunas as part of their many services. Esteem Treatments on Pandora has been offering them since last August, and already they are gaining popularity. "Once you try one, you're hooked," says spa owner Jeremy Cordle. "They feel like the sun is smiling on your body."

At Nature's Spectrum, you can also get in some gym time on an elliptical trainer or embrace your inner child while bouncing on one of those mini-trampolines—but the best part, of course, is relaxing in your own personal sauna. (You get the space to yourself for the duration of your session.) You can watch a movie, listen to music or just enjoy the peace and quiet as you sweat away your troubles, before finishing it all off with a warm shower. After one of these babies, I'm never sure if I want to save the world or take a nice long nap.

Far-Infrared saunas are great for people who are serious about detoxing, as well as for your recreational relaxer. And a sauna session doesn't cost an arm and a leg. Compared to all those spa treatments that can easily run you a few hundred bucks, \$20 for a 75-minute infrared session seems like a steal. **M**

For more information about Nature's Spectrum, check out www.infraredhealth.com or call 1-888-262-4477.