

History of the roman baths



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The Roman Baths

The Roman baths are immense and outstanding complex structures designed for bathing, relaxing, and socializing. The Romans believed the baths were essential to the Roman civilization and that they were an example of their superiority and power. The Roman baths were an important part of daily life in ancient Rome's architectural and social role, since it fulfilled Romans' concerns about health and cleanliness, as well as allowed all social classes to mix freely, relax, communicate, and bathe while being drivers of the evolution of architecture.

The Roman baths were centers of leisure, socialization, business, and gossip. They were originally built as a somewhat private gym in the households of wealthy Romans. The baths also existed in early Egyptian palaces. The Romans took the idea of a hipbath from the Greeks and expanded it into a high degree of sophistication. The baths were usually located near the forum, which is a marketplace or Public Square of an ancient Roman city, the center of legal and business affairs and a place of assembly for the people. At an excavation site in Pompeii, where the first and earliest entry fee box was discovered, that the cost of entry at the Roman baths was simple one "quadrans" – the smallest coin currency in Rome, thus the Roman baths became a daily regime for people of all classes. On holidays, the entrance fee was free, and during Diocletian's reign the fee cost two denarii, which was more expensive than usual. The wealthy Romans had *balnae* in their villas, which were smaller, private bathhouses. The Roman baths, which are <https://assignbuster.com/history-of-the-roman-baths/>

called *thermae*, were immensely large bathhouses built for a state and it typically took several blocks. Mixed bathing was unacceptable by most citizens, so there were times for both men and women at the Roman baths. Roman men would work around the afternoon and finish by 2PM or 3PM. At 2PM, the baths were open for mainly men to sport, bathe, and communicate until the baths close. On the other hand, Women had less time, they went in the morning while the men were at work to bathe, gossip, exercise if they were athletes, and meet friends until 2PM. Republican bathhouses had separate bathing facilities for men and women instead of having times for both men and women. As the Roman baths' popularity grew, men began to use the baths daily, even the Emperor Commodus— who ruled from 180 BC to 192 BC as well as ruling as co-emperor with his father, Marcus Aurelius, from 177 BC— liked bathing so much he says he visited as much as eight times a day. From the beginning of 2nd Century BC, the Roman Baths grew in popularity and size since each Emperor tried to outshine the last Emperor by building more improved bathhouses for the citizens of Rome. By 5th Century AD, the Roman baths became a fundamental part of ancient Roman culture and could be found all over the Roman Empire – there were over nine hundred in Rome alone. Some amazing examples of the Roman baths are the baths of Caracalla, which covered more than thirty-two acres and could hold sixteen hundred bathers at once. It is among the most magnificent bathhouses of the entire Imperial era, but Diocletian's baths outdid that since they have held up to three thousand people.

Some Roman bathhouses were built on natural hot springs, which were known for their healing properties. According to writings and the ritual

offerings found in excavations that the water, usually as hot as forty-six degrees Centigrade, that the healing was thought to be the work of the gods. Some ancient Roman bathhouses had temples built either on the site or very close to it, thus they became sacred places. For example, Sulis was the Celtic goddess of the spring, and when the Romans arrived, they worshipped her too. They recognized her with their own goddess of healing, Minerva. On the hot spring, the baths were built, and next to it, a temple to Sulis-Minerva in a walled enclosure. There were no services in the temple, but priests sacrificed animals, and after that, people went in for private prayers. They prayed standing in front of the statue with their hands out, palms up, and when they finished they kissed the statue's feet. Most ancient Roman baths were places of entertainment rather than worship.

The bathhouses were built to provide a regular ritual that Romans repeated every time they visited the Roman baths. When entering the baths, they would first go to the dressing room, or *apodyterium*, where there were cabinets to store their clothes and shoes which were guarded by slaves for a fee. The slave(s) would also escort the bathers while carrying the bather's gear. Sometimes the dressing room had multiple purposes, for example, in the Stabian Baths in Pompeii, the women's dressing room was also a *frigidarium*, a room with a small cold-water pool. There is no clear evidence that shows what the Romans wore when bathing, but they may also have worn some light covering in the baths. Within the baths, they may have worn special sandals with thick soles to protect their feet from the heated floors. In the baths, there was a large central courtyard, which was the exercise ground, or *palaestra*. A shady portico that led into the bathing rooms

surrounded it. The *palaestra* has a *natation*— a large outdoor pool such as one in the Stabian Baths. Since the Romans had no soap, they would use oil instead. After changing clothes and oiling their bodies, male bathers would usually begin their routine with exercise, by doing exercises such as wrestling, mild weight lifting, numerous types of ball playing, running, and swimming. After exercise, the bathers would have the dirt and oil scraped from their bodies with a curved metal tool called *astrigil*. A slave carried their towels, oil flasks, and *strigils*, while the bathers would start bathing through rooms of various temperatures. They may start in the warm room or *tepidarium*, which had heated walls and floors, but sometimes no pool, and then proceed to the hot bath, or *caldarium*, which was closest to the furnace. The *caldarium* had a large or small pool with very hot water and a waist-high fountain or *labrum* with cool water to splash on their face and neck. After this, the bather could spend some time in the *tepidarium* again before finishing in the cold room or *frigidarium*, a room with a cold pool. They would sometimes repeat the same progression of rooms but backwards. Other rooms provided moist steam such as *sudatoria*, dry heat like a sauna or *laconicum*, as well as massages with perfumed oils. After their baths, they could stroll in the other places the Roman baths offered. The bathers could watch performances of jugglers or acrobats, stroll in the gardens, visit the library, buy a snack from food vendors, or listen to a literary recital.

The baths seem to be a quiet, leisurely place, but the baths were noisy, as one philosopher—Seneca—complained when he lived near a bathhouse in Rome:

“ The sturdy man does his exercise with lead weights. When he is straining hard (or pretending to) I can hear him grunt; when he breathes out I hear him panting and his hoarse gasps. Or I might hear ... the blows of the massager’s hands slapping his shoulders. To all this, add ... the man who dives in with a lot of noise and splashing. And if a ball player comes along and begins to count his score out loud, I am definitely finished.”

The baths were made to be very attractive and striking places. Although most of the decorations have not survived, many writers commented on the luxury of the bathhouses, describing them with words such as, “ well-lighted, lovely mosaics, airy rooms with high vaulted ceilings, silver faucets and fittings, and paintings and colored marble panels.” There was also a large entrance or meeting area, where people could walk, talk, or sit on seats around two large fountains. Roman engineers invented a system of heating the baths called the hypocaust. Pillars and spaces were left inside the walls so that hot air from the furnace, or *praefurnium* , could circulate and flow through the space in the walls. Rooms that required the most heat were placed closest to the furnace and the heat could be increased by adding more wood to the furnace. Many heated rooms and pools were positioned to make the most of the heat of the sun. At the Baths of Caracalla, the hot room was an enormous hall that was one hundred and fifteen feet wide with a pool three feet deep. In order to heat it, approximately fifty large furnaces were needed as well as millions of fireproof terracotta bricks or special bricks called *tegulae mammatae* . Bathhouses also had large public latrines, usually with marble seats over channels whose continuous flow of water that established the first “ flush toilets.” These toilets were a vital part of the

plumbing system as well as another common area in which to sit and talk. There was a continuous water flow underneath the seats. A shallow water channel in front of the seats provided sponges attached to sticks for people to wipe themselves.

The Roman baths were among the most splendid and luxurious of all the outstanding works, and it allowed all, no matter what their social role was, to enjoy the magnificent baths. With their exquisite furnishings, high vaulted ceilings, paintings, brightly colored mosaics, marble panels, and silver faucets and fittings. As well as its organization and planning. The Roman baths were an important part of Rome's superiority, social role, and advancements in architecture and more.

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