NEWS LESSON

Meeting Strangers in a Hot Wooden Room



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you try a sauna by the sea on a cold day?
2. What makes a place feel like somewhere people belong?
3. Would you rather relax in silence or with a friendly conversation?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**session**	☐	A	how hot or cold things are
2	**neighbours**	☐	B	loud or unpleasant sound
3	**community**	☐	C	a group of people who live in the same place
4	**temperatures**	☐	D	do something special on a happy day
5	**celebrate**	☐	E	a close, friendly link between two people
6	**suitable**	☐	F	people who live near you
7	**friendship**	☐	G	right or good for a person or purpose
8	**noise**	☐	H	a fixed period of time for an activity

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Beside the sea in Ireland, people book a short session in a sauna. Many arrive on their own and leave having talked to strangers.

1 On a cold winter morning in Ireland, a group of people sit together inside a small wooden room. Outside, the wind blows across the sea and the water looks freezing. Inside, it is very hot. They are not at a gym or a luxury hotel. They have come to a sauna near the beach, and some of them have never met before.

2 Saunas have become much more popular in Ireland in recent years. Some are beside the sea, while others are in town centres or at special events. Visitors usually book a short session and pay for it before they arrive. They sit in the heat, talk quietly and sometimes go outside for a quick swim in cold water. Plenty of people turn up on their own and join in anyway.

3 For a long time, the pub has been an important place in Irish social life. Friends meet there after work, families celebrate special occasions and neighbours catch up on local news. But a pub does not suit everybody. Some people do not drink alcohol, others find the noise tiring, and a few simply want a different way to spend time together.

4 A sauna offers something unusual: people can talk without loud music, televisions or phones. Everyone puts their phone away before going in. They might discuss work, the weather or nothing important at all. A person who arrives alone may leave having spoken to several strangers. That is one reason some people see saunas as a new kind of community space, a relaxed place where it is easy to get to know somebody.

5 Of course, a sauna cannot replace everything a pub does. It costs money, the high temperatures are not suitable for everybody, and it is not a place to spend an entire evening. There is also a big difference between enjoying a new activity and making a friendship that lasts for years.

6 Still, the popularity of seaside saunas suggests that many people want more welcoming places where they can relax and meet others. Ireland is not necessarily saying goodbye to the pub. It may simply be finding another way to bring people together.

Sources: RTÉ Lifestyle. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. People put their phones away before going into the sauna. T F NG
2. Most sauna visitors are under thirty. T F NG
3. In Ireland, you can find saunas in town centres. T F NG
4. A sauna can do everything a pub does. T F NG
5. Visitors usually pay for a session after it has finished. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

alcohol	crowded	freezing	luxury	noisy	replace	unusual

1. In January the water is so cold that it is almost _____ .
2. Some people do not drink _____ , so they avoid pubs.
3. A hotel with a spa is a _____ that not everyone can pay for.
4. Talking to strangers about your day is _____ in a big city, where most people look at their phones.
5. A video call can never fully _____ meeting a friend in person.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Saunas _____ much more popular in Ireland in recent years. (BECOME)
2. Last winter, I _____ to a sauna beside the sea for the first time. (GO)
3. A person who arrives alone may leave _____ to several strangers. (SPEAK)
4. Outside, the wind _____ across the sea. (BLOW)
5. Last week my friends and I _____ a short session online. (BOOK)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Linking words join ideas. Ask yourself: is the second idea a contrast, a reason, a result or a condition?

because **despite** **however** **if** **so** **unless** **while**

1. Some saunas are beside the sea, _____ others are in town centres.
2. Saunas are very popular. _____ , they are not suitable for everybody.
3. Many people like saunas _____ there is no loud music or television.
4. I do not drink alcohol, _____ I prefer the sauna to the pub.
5. _____ you arrive alone, you may still make new friends.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What could make a new social space welcoming to people who arrive alone?
2. Would a regular shared ritual make it easier to form friendships?
3. Could a place stay special once it became a popular tourist stop?

9 Role-play: sauna or pub?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the sauna fan

You want to meet your friend at a sauna by the sea on Saturday morning. Explain why you like it. Try to answer your friend's worries about the cost and the cold.

Student B · the pub fan

You usually meet friends at the pub on Saturday night. You are not sure about a sauna. Ask about the price, the heat and whether you can talk. Decide if you will go.

Useful phrases

I was hoping we could try something new.
I'm not sure it's really my thing.
It's quiet, so we can actually talk.
That's fair, but it's not cheap.
Why don't we do both?
I'll give it a go, if you buy the first coffee.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did you decide to meet, and who gave way?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 F · 3 C · 4 A · 5 D · 6 G · 7 E · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 NG · 3 T · 4 F · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 freezing · 2 alcohol · 3 luxury · 4 unusual · 5 replace

6 Verb forms

1 have become · 2 went · 3 having spoken · 4 blows · 5 booked

7 Language focus

1 while · 2 However · 3 because · 4 so · 5 If

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