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North West

“In a few years’ time, people won’t be going to the beach on a sunny day in Liverpool - instead, they will be flocking to what we’ve built at Princes Dock”



By Daniel Zambartas

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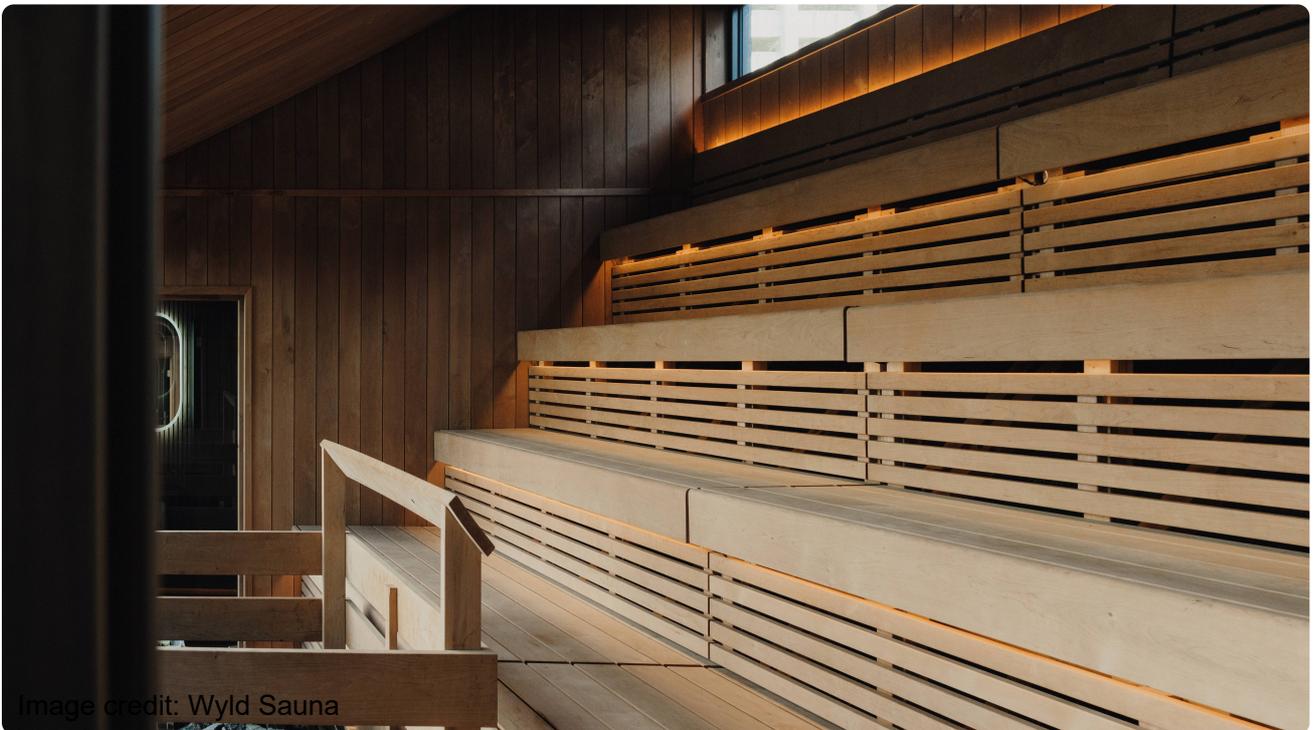


Image credit: Wyld Sauna

"Everyone pretends they like sand," the founder of Wyld Sauna tells *Insider*, highlighting how the UK sauna scene is growing fast with year-round outdoor facilities.

Jon Miller got the idea for Wyld Sauna from a Norwegian university friend and now co-founder Tom Berendsen, who designed floating saunas. While on holiday in Norway with Berendsen, they tried one and decided to bring the concept to the UK.

Liverpool stood out because of its water heritage and Princes Dock's swimmable, high-quality water near the city centre.

Before this, the founder worked as an architect and technical manager in construction, which has helped him navigate planning challenges. He quit his job and launched the sauna in November 2024.

Customers book online, get greeted by a lifeguard, and are shown around. They use small changing rooms before heating up in the sauna, then cool off by jumping into ice baths or the dock. Plans are in place to expand the facilities to include bigger changing rooms, showers, and a kiosk.

"The UK will have a boom of this," Miller told Insider.

"In ten years time, there will be more than 50 or 60 floating saunas in the UK. I can't see it stopping.

"In Copenhagen, you have a floating facility that is not just a sauna or wellness site. It's a public space with diving boards for people to jump off and into the water, provided by tenants locally or commercially paid for.

"It attracts so many people which is a massive win, especially for a city like Liverpool that has so much water.

"Imagine if you had a dock like Princes Dock, and in the middle was a pontoon with diving boards and a sunbathing area. People would not be going to the beach; they would be going there [the floating facility] on a sunny day. You would have tens of thousands of people flocking in.

"Everyone pretends they like sand, but you only like sand up to about eight years old, then it just gets annoying. If you activated a space with pontoons where you can swim out, jump off, it would go hell for leather."



Image credit: Wylid Sauna

While the sauna market may sound like a great investment because of its growth potential, Miller also outlined the difficulties that come with starting a sauna venture.

In most Scandinavian countries, liability laws around floating saunas are less strict. While the UK is not as litigious as the United States, the fact that docks and much of the waterfront are privately owned means there are complex legal and safety requirements. Operators must meet strict regulations and have numerous safeguards in place.

Some assume a floating sauna is simply a pontoon with a ready-made sauna placed on top. However, previous attempts by two or three others who took that approach have all failed and closed. A floating sauna must be specifically designed to withstand long-term water exposure, handle wear and tear, and comply with thorough risk and design assessments.

Meeting these challenges is a significant barrier to entry, but the co-founders' backgrounds in architecture gave them an advantage and they knew the right people to contact to make their facility ticked all the right boxes.

"Because of that barrier, the initial investment is a lot of money", Miller added. "You are talking half a million pounds for a small sauna. Most people starting a sauna business do not anticipate that much investment."

Wyld Sauna doesn't only appeal to people who want to enjoy the sunshine away from the sand - it offers clear health benefits beyond a typical sauna experience, and is especially popular with gym-goers.

Miller says the intense heat of the Finnish sauna followed by the shock of cold, whether from ice baths or jumping into the dock, boosts circulation, clears the mind, and builds resilience to stress.

He said: "People like a sauna in a gym, but they are just a hot box. This is different. You get outside. You get to swim. It's a different experience altogether, especially when you can do it in freezing cold or in the pouring rain.

"Weirdly enough, most saunas in the summer kind of die off a bit because it's hot, but by the water, some people enjoy being outside."

Wyld Sauna is expanding in Liverpool, with a new 18-person floating sauna set to open soon. Future sites are expected to launch bigger and better, as the team continues conversations with partners across the UK and even in other countries.

Some locations have agreed heads of terms, while others are moving through early-stage discussions and planning.

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