

HOT, HOTTER, HOTTEST

**IF YOU THOUGHT CHICAGO SUMMERS
COULDN'T POSSIBLY GET ANY SWEATIER...YOU
HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE TURKISH BATHHOUSE**

By Catherine Wargo

Division Street marches west, farther from the city, in a hip and funky fashion. When you think you've seen enough trendy boutiques and cafés to turn around and head back to the Gold Coast, a bastion of Mediterranean tradition springs as if from nowhere: the Division Street Turkish Bath and the European Spa and Turkish Bath, sitting side by side in the 1900 block of West Division.

But the baths have been there for close to 14 years, according to the spa's proprietor, Janel DeJesus. She manages the women's side of the baths with her husband, owner Jose Lopez. It's a family business — the receptionist, DeJesus's daughter Vanessa Hernandez, can remember coming there with her family for years. "Every Sunday after church," Ms. Hernandez recounts, "we would be here, the whole family, for as long as I can remember."

The space has gone through changes over the years, but the traditional steam room and oven sauna have stayed the same. As have the family days, where the men's bath next door and the European Spa and Turkish Bath are joined to accommodate families and couples who want to spend time relaxing together (bathing suits are required, though the baths in Turkey tend to be clothing optional). "This is a place for people to come and relax on their own, or with the people they love," says DeJesus.

Walking into the steam room can be daunting initially, since even seeing your own hand in front of your face — or, for that matter, anyone else — is practically impossible. Still, the white tiles, the hiss of steam and the drip of water on porcelain is mesmerizing. Sweat comes from places you didn't know had sweat glands, and soon your skin takes on a healthy, shiny glow. Then it's time for the sauna. In one corner of the traditional redwood-covered room stands the old-fashioned oven, where the gigantic iron door pulls open and water is thrown on the hot coals inside. Women sit around in various stages of repose, chatting, or not; just enjoying themselves, away from the outside world, everything on pause for a moment.

So you may ask yourself, why get out of the Chicago summer heat and into the...Turkish...heat?

Well, then. What would you give for having everything on pause for a moment? ☞

Find the baths at 1914 W. Division; call 773/384-9671 for more info

