

# Eleven European Spa Towns inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site

- Eleven European Spa Towns, including the City of Bath (UK), Spa (Belgium) and Vichy (France), jointly inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- The City of Bath now has a rare double World Heritage Site listing, ranking alongside cities such as Bruges and Barcelona
- The decision to inscribe the site was made today (24 July 2021) at the 44th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Fuzhou (China)

Eleven spa towns across Europe, including Baden-Baden (Germany), Spa (Belgium) and Bath (UK), have been jointly inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe is a ‘transnational serial’ UNESCO World Heritage Site formed of eleven famous historical thermal spa towns and cities across seven countries. Together, they represent the grandest and most significant spa towns that changed the culture of Europe between 1700 and 1930.

Spa towns used natural mineral waters to treat pain and disease in the days before modern medication. Treatments included ‘taking the waters’, applying mineral and thermal water, drinking cures, bathing, irrigations, hydrotherapy and mud treatments. Each Spa Town shares unique urban layouts and significant architectural buildings, including notable spa buildings and visitor facilities such as spa houses, colonnades, churches, theatres, casino houses, and dedicated hotels and boarding houses.

While the Bader Lexicon of 1854 lists 652 major European spas, only a handful of the grandest spas now survive in their original form. The eleven Spa towns jointly inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites represent the most authentic and best examples of this European phenomenon. The eleven towns are:

1. Baden bei Wien (Austria)
2. Spa (Belgium)
3. Františkovy Lázně (Czechia)
4. Karlovy Vary (Czechia)
5. Mariánské Lázně (Czechia)
6. Vichy (France)
7. Bad Ems (Germany)
8. Baden-Baden (Germany)
9. Bad Kissingen (Germany)
10. Montecatini Terme (Italy)
11. City of Bath (United Kingdom)

Today, these eleven spa towns continue to fulfil many of their roles, with people able to bathe in or drink the waters in traditional and modern facilities. Visitors can enjoy walking, hiking and other activities in the “therapeutic landscape” of parks and gardens and the wider countryside

surrounding the town. Historic buildings with high-quality interpretation are available for the historically curious, with other activities such as theatres, concert halls, opera houses and restaurants still in use today.

Recognised as part of the nomination is the City of Bath in the United Kingdom, held to be one of the earliest and most profoundly influential 'Great Spas'. From a medieval walled city around its central cluster of hot springs, the grand 'Georgian Spa' was created during the eighteenth century when Royalty and high aristocracy visited frequently. The doctors of Bath pioneered diagnostic medicine based on its mineral waters, and the surrounding landscape was managed as part of 'the cure'. Distinguished by iconic spa buildings, exceptional Georgian town planning, Palladian architectural ensembles, crescents and squares, Bath has managed its hot springs for 2000 years. Today, it is sustained as a living spa, enhanced by the refurbishment of its original features and more recent additions. The inscription also means that the City of Bath now has a rare double World Heritage Site listing, ranking alongside Bruges and Barcelona.

The Great Spas of Europe becomes the 33rd UNESCO World Heritage Inscription in the UK and joins prestigious sites such as Machu Picchu, the Great Wall of China, and the Taj Mahal. The nomination was prepared jointly by Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Czech Republic, which managed and coordinated the entire project.

## **Notes to Editors**

### **Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister of State for Digital and Culture, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:**

*"This listing is testament to the role Bath has played in our history. For thousands of years, people have flocked to the city to experience its healing waters and I'm delighted that this inscription will protect this historic location for future generations."*

### **Duncan Wilson, Chief Executive of Historic England, said:**

*"Beautiful Bath thoroughly deserves this rare double World Heritage Site listing. From its Roman remains to its stunning Georgian architecture, Bath is a city which has captivated residents and visitors for centuries. Being inscribed, along with ten other European Spa Towns, as a joint World Heritage Site demonstrates Bath's importance as one of the earliest and most significant "Great Spas" and we are delighted to have worked alongside international colleagues to make this joint inscription a reality."*

### **Kate Pugh OBE, UK National Commission for UNESCO, said:**

*"This successful inscription is a triumphant example of the international co-operation which is at the heart of UNESCO'S World Heritage Convention. The Spas themselves are architectural jewels inspired by a new wave of health consciousness. On top of that, practical and strategic expertise from the UK has been fundamental in setting up the international structure necessary to safeguard not one but eleven participating properties in this serial transnational nomination."*

*Bath's leadership in ensuring an ongoing management system at national and local government level as well as bringing together the site managers and tourism officers is an exemplary achievement that should also be celebrated."*

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## **About the Towns**

The eleven towns are:

### **Baden bei Wien, Austria**

Baden bei Wien is one of the most important sulphur spas in Europe. The local thermal springs have been used for healing purposes ever since the ancient Romans, who called this locality Aquae Pannoniae. Baden began to develop as a spa town toward the end of the 15th century. Following a major fire in 1812, the town and its spa facilities had to be completely rebuilt and a great number of its Classicist townhouses and Biedermeier villas date back to that time. The appearance of the town, as we know it today, is owed to a leading architect of that era, Joseph Kornhäusel.

### **Spa, Belgium**

Although the name Spa comes from the Latin sparsa fontana (gushing fountain) and was already known in the first century AD, it was in the 18th century that Spa acquired its international reputation to the point where today its name is used as a generic description for fitness centres and baths. The reputation of its water is such that it has been exported since the end of the 16th century, but it was in the 18th century that medical prescriptions for the cure were combined with entertainment, relaxation and excursions. After Tsar Peter the Great took the cure in 1717, the town became the fashionable rendezvous for European aristocracy, increasingly drawn to it by the elitist entertainment that could be found there. It was at this time that Spa was nicknamed the "cafe of Europe".

### **Františkovy Lázně, Czechia**

Františkovy Lázně (Franzensbad) of the most significant and well preserved spa towns in Europe. The spa town was founded in 1793 in the proximity of a great number of acidulous springs and it was named in honour of Emperor Franz II of Austria.

Local healing springs have been known to exist here since the Middle Ages. Although the spa town was established similarly to Mariánské Lázně in the Classicist period, Františkovy Lázně represents a different concept of urban composition. The spa town centre is founded on a square ground plan with a parallel network of streets and is characterised by a high concentration of Classicist, Empire and Historicism houses.

### **Karlovy Vary, Czechia**

Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) is the biggest spa town in the Czech Republic with a high concentration of thermal springs. The concentration of architectural wealth makes it the largest spa complex in Europe. Karlovy Vary represents a spa town founded in the Middle Ages (and bears the name of Roman Emperor Charles IV), where the spa functions and activities connected with mineral springs dominated during its development.

### **Mariánské Lázně, Czechia**

Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad) ranks among one of the most spacious spa towns in Europe. The town was founded in the period of Classicism at the beginning of the 19th century. Its authors turned the surrounding unpleasant swampy valley into a charming town of parks with Classicist and Empire houses, glories, pavilions and colonnades. The core of the spa town is a central park with the Spa Colonnade in the wider part of the forested valley. Spa and living buildings encircle this central park as a ring, they rise to the hills and can also be found down in the valley.

### **Vichy, France**

Located in Bourbonnais, on the banks of the river Allier, the waters of Vichy have been in use since Antiquity. Experiencing success from the 16th to the 18th century, they were born, from the creation of the first park by Napoleon I and certainly during the Second French Empire, a thermal town that would serve as a model in terms of its urban organisation (roads radiating from the station towards the baths and parks) and its prestigious architecture. Napoleon III furthered its development as a holiday destination with the theatre and casino.

### **Bad Ems, Germany**

Thermal springs and a picturesque natural setting assured to this site, known by the Romans and placed on the Upper German-Raetian Limes, have a high profile throughout history. Bad Ems is characterised by its early heyday and socio-political, historical significance, but in particular and preserved to this day, by its consistent urban closeness, its integrity of classical spa structures and its visually undisturbed embedment into the surrounding landscape. The rise of Bad Ems to a prosperous spa town can be seen in individual, well preserved buildings from the end of the 17th century.

### **Baden-Baden, Germany**

Baden Baden, situated on the western outskirts of the Black Forest, is without any doubt one of the most important spa centres in Europe, whose name is a symbolic bearer of the subject matter of the series. Bathing in Baden-Baden is a tradition dating back to Roman Antiquity. It was founded in 80 AD by the Romans in the place of a former Celtic settlement and named Civitas Aurelia Aquensis.

### **Bad Kissingen, Germany**

Bad Kissingen is situated on banks of the Fränkische Saale, a river whose name makes reference

to salty water. Documented evidence of salt production at the site dates back to the year 823. Health spas using mineral spring water were first established in the Early Modern period, then reached an initial high point in the Baroque.

### **Montecatini Terme, Italy**

One of the most famous and sophisticated Italian spas is Montecatini Terme, is located in the Tuscany Region. The springs in this region had been known about since the Middle Ages, and were first owned by the Medicis and then the Habsburgs of Tuscany. In fact, it was the Archduke Leopold I of Tuscany (Pietro Leopoldo) who began to use the sulphuric springs more frequently during the late 18th century, thereby inciting the general development of the little town beneath the hill, as a new spa town. Officially, the origin of the spa dates back to 1773. But the spa still has the atmosphere of the beginning of the 20th century, i.e., the era of its greatest boom, when most of the buildings there were built – the baths, casinos, theatres, hotels, and private houses.

### **City of Bath United Kingdom**

Bath has been a place of healing for over two thousand years. The baths ensemble was managed for 350 years by the Romans and then for 800 years by a monastic administration. The relationship of the baths, Abbey, monastic infirmary and the medieval hospitals are testimony to Bath as a healing place through the Roman and medieval period.

### **About the UK National Commission for UNESCO**

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) is appointed by the UK Government to support the UK's contribution to UNESCO and bring the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. It is the hub for UNESCO-related matters in the UK. For information available at [www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)