



GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe



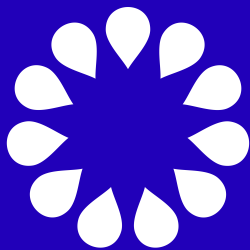
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The Great Spa Towns of Europe
Inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 2021

Annual Review

2025





GREAT SPA TOWNS *of Europe*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stefan Sziruczek, Chair from June 2022 until May 2025
Oliver Krügel, Chair from May 2025
Chiara Ronchini, Andrea Polak and Naomi O'Toole
Mayors, Lord Mayors and Site Managers of
The Great Spa Towns of Europe

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An Expansive Year in Review

2025 was a successful year of growth, collaboration and new projects for The Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTE).

Adapting to the growing threats of **climate change** has formed a large part of our work this year. The GSTE has joined **Preserving Legacies** (a three-year climate adaptation programme), and applied the first **Climate Vulnerability Index** methodology. We have been strengthening our monitoring system and prioritising responsible tourism, focusing on protecting both our spa towns and local communities.

The GSTE **Youth Forum** took full form this year. The next generation are now firmly integrated into the management of the property and a budget has been set aside to implement their ideas each year.

Our two **General Assemblies** were opportunities to continue shaping our work and values. In Spring, we gathered in the Czech town Mariánské Lázně, where our Youth Forum took to the stage to share what they want their homes to look like in the future. In the same intergenerational spirit, we marked **80 years of UNESCO** with a 'Planting Trees for Peace' ceremony.

In Autumn, we met again in the German town Bad Ems, the town of our new Chair. We had great **interest from the local press** during this event and delegates saw a fantastic example of a conservation project that has restored a historic building in the town. Alongside our usual activities, we ran a **visioning exercise** to lay the foundations for our Property Management Plan and our future work.

Throughout the year, we have been thankful for many opportunities to share our voice at international conferences and forums, build networks, collaborate on projects and connect with peers across the world.

"Our work is gaining global recognition and I'm immensely proud of what we're achieving together. From our climate adaptation programme to governance frameworks, every collaboration and shared challenge brings us closer to our mission: safeguarding The Great Spa Towns of Europe for generations to come."

~ Chiara Ronchini, Secretary General of the GSTE







A Serial, Transnational World Heritage Site

The Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTe) is a serial transnational World Heritage Site, comprising eleven historic spa towns from seven countries across Europe. Together, they comprise one Property.

From the hundreds of spa towns across the continent, these eleven represent the '*European spa phenomenon*' with the most authenticity and integrity. This cultural phenomenon, among other things, drove the creation of a new form of urban design, a new architectural typology, spurred innovations across the arts, politics, medicine and society, alongside pioneering modern health and wellness tourism.

The GSTe developed around natural springs of mineral and thermal waters, which had been used for centuries for their curative effects. Some date back to the Roman period, and earlier civilisations, whose ruins and archaeological treasures sit as a rich historical layer beside the spa traditions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

This period witnessed the spa towns blossoming into grand health resorts, attracting guests from across the world. They became hubs for international exchange and fashionable resorts for leisure and sociability. Nestled in therapeutic and recreational landscapes, the towns were used for the medical practice of '*taking the cure*' as well as social functions.

The GSTe is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List with Outstanding Universal Value, based on the following criteria:

Criterion (ii) Influence on Modern European Towns.

Criterion (iii) Taking the Cure; human health and mineral springs.

The property was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee meeting in Fuzhou, China, on 24th July 2021.

We now look ahead to our fifth anniversary in 2026.

- 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*



Who We Are

LEADERSHIP & SECRETARIAT

Stefan Sziruczek

Chair of the Board
June 2022–May 2025
Mayor of Baden bei Wien

Oliver Krügel

Chair of the Board
May 2025–Present
Mayor of Bad Ems

Chiara Ronchini

Secretary General

Andrea Polak

Administrator

Naomi O'Toole

Communications Coordinator

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Political representatives from each of the 11 spa towns within our World Heritage Site are key members of our Association. The elected Representatives on our General Assembly are: Carmen Jeitler-Cincelli (Mayor of Baden bei Wien); Nicolas Tefnin (Mayor of Spa); Lenka Průšová (Mayor of Františkovy Lázně); Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová (Mayor of Karlovy Vary); Martin Hurajčík (Mayor of Mariánské Lázně); Frédéric Aguilera (Mayor of Vichy); Yves-Jean Bignon (Deputy Mayor of Vichy); Oliver Krügel (Mayor of Bad Ems); Dietmar Späth (Mayor of Baden-Baden); Dirk Vogel (Mayor of Bad Kissingen); Claudio del Rosso (Mayor of Montecatini Terme); Beatrice Chelli (Deputy Mayor of Montecatini Terme); Ruth Malloy (Councillor from the City of Bath).

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Four new Executive Board Members were elected in May 2025; Yves-Jean Bignon, Lenka Průšová, Ruth Malloy and Oliver Krügel.



SITE MANAGERS' GROUP

The Site Managers' Group meets online regularly to discuss site management issues, monitoring, preservation and best practice.

In May, the Chair position was handed over from Ondřej Míka (Site Manager of Františkovy Lázně) to Anke Matthys (Site Manager of Vichy). The group welcomed Eva Zimmermann (the new Site Manager of Baden-Baden) and said farewell to Jan Charvát (the former Site Manager of Karlovy Vary).

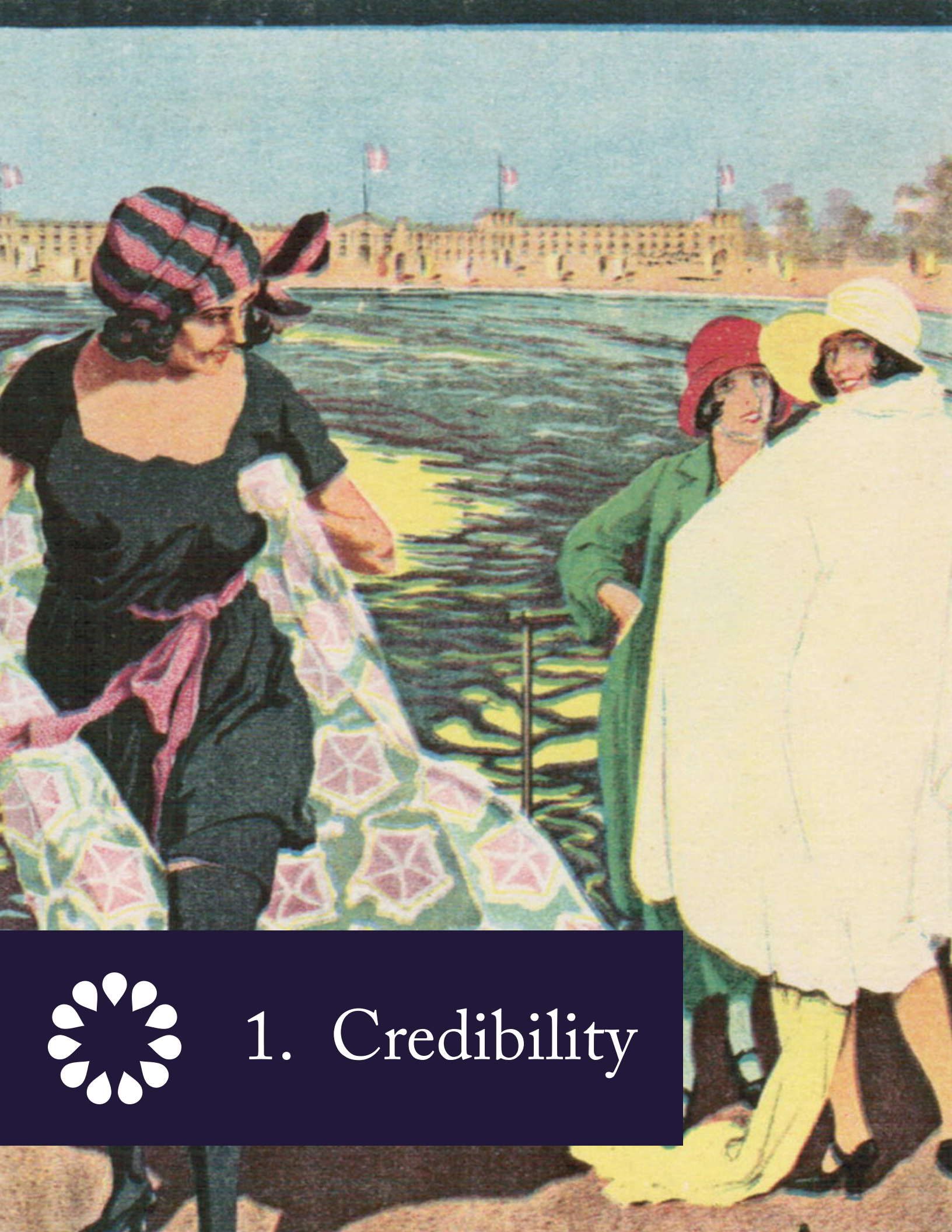
The group now consists of Alexandra Harrer (Baden bei Wien), Anne Pirard (Spa), Ondřej Míka (Františkovy Lázně), Zuzana Stejskalová (Mariánské Lázně), Anke Matthys (Vichy), Julia Palotas (Bad Ems), Eva Zimmermann (Baden-Baden), Anna Maria Boll (Bad Kissingen), Rafaela Verdicchio (Montecatini Terme), Ginevra Gentili as collaborator (Montecatini Terme) and Tony Crouch (City of Bath).

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE (IGC)

The Intergovernmental Committee draws its membership from all seven States Parties of The GSTE. It acts as an advisory panel and meets at least once per year at the Autumn General Assembly. In July, the former Chair, the State Representative for Austria, Ruth Pröckl, handed over the role to Ingrid Boxus, Focal Point Heritage, at the Walloon Heritage Agency (AWaP). For the next two years, Belgium will assume this presidential position.

The IGC consists of Ruth Pröckl (Austria), Ingrid Boxus (Belgium), Lada Pekárková (Czechia), Gilles Soubigou (France), Friederike Hansell (Germany), Denise Beilharz (Germany/Baden-Württemberg), Nadine Hoffmann (Germany/Rhineland-Palatinate), Katharina Arnold (Germany/Bavaria), Magdalena Steinbacher (Germany/Bavaria), Adele Cesi (Italy), Francesca Gottardo (Italy) and Alexandra Warr (United Kingdom).





1. Credibility

1.1. Presentations

Representatives have given presentations and taken part in panel events throughout the year, all across the world. We are thankful to have these opportunities to showcase our expertise and expand our knowledge by learning from our peers.

1.1.1. THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON THERMAL TOURISM

The GSTE attended the International Congress on Thermal Tourism in June, hosted by Budapest Spas, VisitHungary and the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) with the participation of UN Tourism and supported by Ensana Hotels. Our Secretary General, Chiara Ronchini, moderated a panel discussion entitled *'More Reality! Heritage As Constraints vs Critical Foundation for Return'*. Anke Matthys, Site Manager for Vichy and Chair of the Site Managers Group, spoke on the same panel to share urban transformation projects in Vichy, alongside Barbara Van der Wee and Tamás Fejérdy, who are experts and long-time friends of the GSTE. The panel explored how heritage can serve as a powerful catalyst for positive transformation.

1.1.2. THE YOUTH FORUM

It was a highlight to see our new Youth Forum join the congress with their own presentation. They joined a panel talk titled *'The Future of Health, The Future of Thermalism'*. Three students (Karolína Weiszdornová, Daniel Matějček and Viktoria Benova) spoke to an audience of nearly 100 people from across the world. The selected young people were not involved in the presentations at the General Assembly in May, meaning more of our young citizens had the chance to share their ideas. As well as creating a chance to continue engaging with the young custodians, this allowed us to share the INTERSPACE Project with a B2B audience of professionals and leaders in the spa industry.

1.1.3. HERITAGE FORUM

Mariánské Lázně organised a Heritage Forum immediately after the spring General Assembly in May. The GSTE participated in two panels in English; one on youth participation in heritage, which included the INTERSPACE Project, and another on monitoring the state of conservation.



1.1.4. 47TH WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

In July, our Secretary General attended the 47th World Heritage Committee meeting in Paris. UNESCO brings together countries and passionate professionals from across the globe to discuss, conserve and protect the world's most treasured places, inscribe new World Heritage Sites and monitor existing inscriptions.

1.1.5. EXHIBITION AT THE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS DELEGATION

The GSTE was fortunate to have an exhibition during the 47th World Heritage Committee. A series of informative panels were displayed at the Wallonia-Brussels delegation in Paris, organised by the delegation, Agence wallonne du Patrimoine and Ville de Spa. This was an impactful moment to share our World Heritage Site and its unique serial, transnational structure.

1.1.6. 'WE ARE SITE MANAGERS' SYMPOSIUM

In August, our ever-busy Secretary General went to Indonesia for the 'We Are Site Managers International Symposium', alongside other guardians of World Heritage from across the globe. As our World Heritage Sites are facing more and more challenges, this symposium is a place for Site Managers to share knowledge, best practices and solutions. Chiara also presented our INTERSPACE Project in a session on 'World Heritage Community and Ownership'.

1.1.7. ASSOCIATION DES BIENS FRANÇAIS PATRIMOINE MONDIAL

The annual gathering of the Association des Biens Français Patrimoine Mondial was held in Vichy this year, at the magnificent Palais des Congrès de Vichy. The GSTE was presented by Chiara Ronchini, Anke Matthys, Yves-Jean Bignon and Gilles Soubigou. Speaking to Site Managers and Ministry officials involved in the management of French World Heritage Sites, they covered the OUV, the contribution of Vichy to the series' OUV, our participatory governance, our shared challenges and joint projects.



1.1.8. SUSTAINABLE SPAS AT THE TAIHE FORUM

Tony Crouch, the Site Manager of the City of Bath, gave a keynote talk about 'Sustainable Spa Towns' in October. The Taihe Forum is an international collaborative platform dedicated to promoting exchange and cooperation in cultural heritage. 75 Sites from around the world were in attendance, all sharing invaluable expertise.

1.1.9. NETWORK OF PERU'S WORLD HERITAGE SITE MANAGERS

Our Secretary General recorded a presentation in Spanish for Peru's World Heritage Site Managers meeting in Lima in November 2025. Invited by Maya Ishizawa, she drew on the GSTE's experience at previous Site Managers forums to present the case study of our recent definition of the Site Manager's role. She detailed that it is a position which should be supported and enabled, not performed in isolation. The recording allowed us to share our work and best practice on a global scale.

1.1.10. CHINA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Our Secretary General went to Taipei for a climate adaptation workshop with Preserving Legacies. While she was there, she delivered a presentation about the GSTE at China University of Technology. Alongside outlining the structure of the Property, she covered the challenges we approach as a World Heritage Site and what we do to address them.

1.1.11. NIGERIAN DELEGATION VISITS BAD EMS

In June, a delegation from Nigeria visited Bad Ems as part of their 'Training of Trainers' study visit to Germany. They learned about the structures and handling of multi-stakeholder governance of our transnational World Heritage Site.





2. Conservation



2.1. State of Conservation Report

In 2025, we received some encouraging news following our State of Conservation Report!

The State of Conservation reporting process is how World Heritage properties demonstrate their stewardship to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, providing updates on conservation efforts and any threats to the site's OUV.

After submitting our State of Conservation Report in 2024, The World Heritage Committee adopted Decision 47 COM 7B.97, acknowledging the progress made across the GSTE. Importantly, the Committee did not require a full State of Conservation report for future decision-making. We are now only required to submit a joint updated report in December 2026 for review by the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies.

This outcome represents a significant vote of confidence in our management approach and recognises the strengthening conservation work undertaken across all component towns since inscription.

A milestone also came from the City of Bath this year, which has a dual UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription (1987 and 2021). Its new World Heritage Site Management Plan has been approved by the council – thought to be the first management plan combining two inscriptions in the world!

2.2. Monitoring the State of Conservation

Monitoring the OUV of the GSTE enables us to protect our shared heritage and identify emerging challenges early.

In 2025, we refined and tested our shared monitoring system collaboratively across all eleven component towns. The results revealed predominantly positive trends: mineral springs remain well-protected and stable; historic urban landscapes are effectively preserved with numerous restoration projects completed; and spa function remains vibrant with thriving cultural programming.

However, we identified areas requiring attention, including climate change impacts on therapeutic landscapes, specific buildings at risk, and minor water quality concerns in some components, which have been prioritised in the new Property Management Plan. This iterative, participatory approach is establishing an effective early-warning mechanism to safeguard our property's integrity for future generations.



2.3. Property Management System Review

Our Property Management system – the strategic framework guiding how we protect and manage the GSTE as a World Heritage property – is due for full review and republication by 2027. In 2025, we conducted a comprehensive scoping review following UNESCO best practice and the '*Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0*'.

Working with a Site Managers' working group, we assessed achievements since inscription: including establishing joint governance; management and monitoring systems; devising a Responsible Tourism strategy; and creating a young people-led Youth Forum. We also identified priorities: such as improving the Management Plan's structure to be attribute-focused and outcome-oriented; addressing gaps in climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and tourism carrying capacity; and completing the transition to participatory governance that actively involves communities and young people in decision-making.



2.4. Conservation Projects

2.4.1. COST ACTION's Go2CHANGE CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

In summer, the GSTE joined Go2CHANGE (Global Network on Culture Heritage Conservation Under Climate Change) by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

COST is an international research and innovation network of World Heritage Sites, research institutes, universities and advisory bodies; we're fortunate to be included in this network. For the next four years, Go2CHANGE will seek methodologies to assess climate risks, frameworks for climate change adaptation, climate change mitigation, community involvement and capacity building.

Notably, it will formalise strategies that align with local contexts and respect the authenticity of cultural heritage.

2.4.2. CLIMATE VULNERABILITY INDEX

In 2025, Baden bei Wien started conducting a scientifically sound analysis of climate stress factors with James Cook University, using the Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI). The CVI was developed by UNESCO Chair Professor Scott Heron and Professor Jon Day of James Cook University to enable the early identification of climate risks for UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

In the spirit of knowledge sharing and capacity building, the team in Baden bei Wien ran a three-day workshop called '*Climate Change Risk Analysis*'. This brought together 20 climate and heritage experts from Scotland, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany and Italy, both on-site and online, from across the GSTE. The final report on Baden bei Wien's research project is due to be published in spring 2026 and will create a basis for future urban development decisions.





2.5. Conservation in Action

BADEN BEI WIEN

Baden bei Wien hosted a week-long façade restoration workshop, focusing on professional training for conservation specialists. This was the first time that the City of Baden and the Austrian Federal Monuments Authority (Bundesdenkmalamt) hosted a workshop together. The week concluded with an 'Open Construction Site Day', where the public could learn about modern methods of heritage conservation. The event was well attended and visited by Christoph Bazil, President of the Austrian Federal Monuments Authority, underscoring its national relevance.

SPA

Spa worked on the restoration of spa infrastructure: one of the elements of reference of the Nomination Dossier. The town's tram shelter has been restored by municipal workers, including masonry and paintwork.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

In November, Františkovy Lázně's railway station opened after restoration. The building's striking light pink façade has been restored, based on the original colour scheme. During the renovation, workers uncovered historic half-timbered partitions and historic pavements on the platform. These discoveries called for consultation with conservation specialists and an adaptation of the design, such as refurbishing the large-format granite slabs for the pavements in front of the building. Works on the Sadová kavárna (Park Café) have also begun. The council consider this restoration the largest investment of 2025/2026. The structure will open in early autumn 2026 with a brand new café, a large hall for gatherings and more.

KARLOVY VARY

Conservation was a key topic in Karlovy Vary 'World Heritage Days' (Dny světového dědictví UNESCO), a week-long programme in April. The programme included guided tours of historic buildings and spa infrastructure, including sites not normally open to the public, helping visitors understand the importance of conservation.



MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

In a major step for heritage protection, the town took ownership of the colonnades at Rudolf's Spring, the Forest Spring and Ferdinand's Spring. Preparations are now underway for their future restoration, ensuring that these key elements of the spa infrastructure remain preserved as part of the OUV.

2025 saw many significant works of conservation in this town. Significantly, the iconic Singing Fountain underwent a comprehensive technical renovation after more than 40 years of operation. The flooring of the Main Spa Colonnade was restored, improving visitor safety and the architectural integrity, which is another of the most important spa structures in the town. This heritage space is heavily used, so the intervention enhanced its durability while respecting historic materials and design.

Additionally, specialist diagnostic and survey works were undertaken at Villa Lil, an important heritage structure with future plans for conservation and adaptive reuse. The investigations were a crucial first step towards safeguarding the building's future.

VICHY

On 21st June, the town officially opened the Parc des Sources. Two years of construction work included renovating the bandstand at the Source de l'Hôpital, the Opera House forecourt, the 11 fountains, the park's paths and flowerbeds and many more examples. The overall project is expected to be completed in early 2026 with the restoration of the Source de l'Hôpital and creation of the water basin, development around the Grand Café-Casino, restoration of the Rue du Parc gallery and the pedestrianisation of adjacent streets.

Pending the creation of a museum dedicated to the town's 2,000-year history within the former grand spa establishment, an immersive exhibition space is currently being created in and beneath the hospital's spring pavilion. Seven digital totems will be installed in the pavilion's lobby and a crypt is being created in the basement around the archaeological remains found during on-site excavations. The site is expected to open in September 2026.

The Thermes Callou reopened in March after 18 months of restoration, a project that prompted wider modernisation across Vichy's accommodation.



BAD EMS

An important milestone was reached in the development of the iconic Spring Tower with the installation of a new roof truss and tiling during the summer of 2025, after the tower's internal structural problems were solved. Using thermal water for heating adjacent buildings is an important topic in the project. Completion is planned for summer 2026.

Work has continued following the major fire at the Four Towers and Badhaus. The remains of the roof truss and parts of the towers that were in danger of collapsing were removed and demolition work was carried out inside. Plans for the new roof truss are underway for mid-2026. Renovation of the bathhouse is in its final stages, and the official opening of the restaurant is planned for January 2026.

On Open Monument Day 2025, the building and scaffolding were incorporated into a dance and singing performance to help public interpretation.



BADEN-BADEN

In 2025, major historic hotel buildings in Baden-Baden reopened following careful restoration and refurbishment works: The Brenners Park-Hotel & Spa and the Hotel Europäischer Hof. These projects combined conservation with contemporary requirements, illustrating how historic spa architecture can be preserved, while contributing to the authenticity of the town.



BAD KISSINGEN

The tournament building is an important part of spa town heritage, and it is now once again available for social and cultural purposes, such as concerts, equestrian tournaments and sports courses, holding up to 900 guests. This was the first collaborative project in Bad Kissingen with the German Foundation for Monument Protection.



MONTECATINI TERME

The long awaited restoration of the Palazzina Regia continued throughout 2025. The building stands as a testament to Montecatini's royal connections; it was built in 1782 as a summer residence for the Habsburg-Lorena family for their therapeutic visits to the thermal baths.

The project includes the transformation of the palace into a museum of the history of thermal waters. The last phase of the renovation is expected to be completed by December 2026.

CITY OF BATH

Three key Bath Georgian buildings underwent conservation work in 2025. The Assembly Rooms are to be opened by the National Trust as a new Georgian visitor experience, fully restored including accurately replaced replicas of some lost features. The building's ten original priceless Georgian chandeliers are also being restored.

In the city centre, the Victoria Art Gallery reopened its Upper Gallery in May, following extensive conservation work that focused on the roof and ceiling of the Grade II* listed building. The reopening marked the Gallery's 125th birthday, unveiling a refreshed gallery, a new learning and engagement studio and a new printmaking exhibition.

Finally, a £3.9 million refurbishment of Beckford's Tower was also undertaken. This 120-foot neoclassical tower was built in 1827 and is very exposed to the elements. The project aimed to repair building fabric, help futureproof it and improve both interpretation and accessibility. The project received numerous commendations, including the 2025 Georgian Group Architectural Award, 'Restoration of a Georgian Building in a Landscape', and Bronze in the Bath Bristol and Somerset Tourism Award 2025/2026 for 'Accessible and Inclusive Tourism'.



2.6. Conservation Challenges

SPA

The Management committee met this year to think about new actions and processes to implement. In August, the Minister of Heritage announced that Waux-Hall will be part of a pilot project for its reconversion and restoration. Spa is also part of the Preserving Legacies programme, a climate adaptation programme for natural and cultural heritage sites.

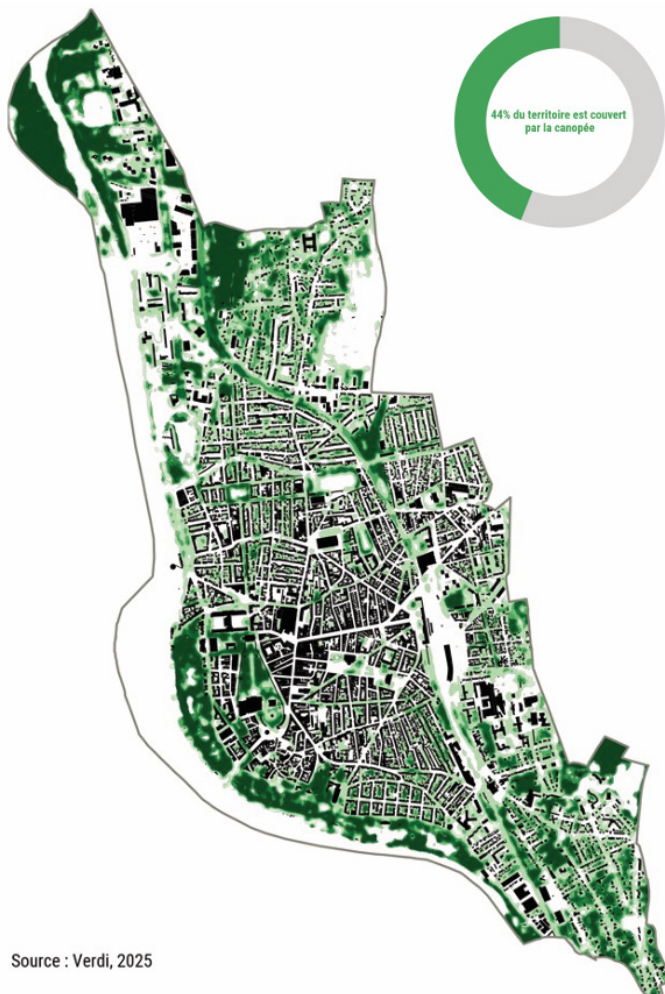
KARLOVY VARY

Managing and maintaining the historic spa architecture and urban fabric under UNESCO requirements remains a key challenge, requiring close cooperation with heritage authorities. The ageing technical infrastructure connected to the hot springs (such as mineral water distribution systems) similarly requires continuous maintenance to protect its function and authenticity.

VICHY

In autumn, Vichy launched a study to develop a landscape masterplan and a vegetation management plan to adapt its tree and plant heritage to climate change, so that the choices made by 2030 are strategic in three key areas:

- (1) the resilience of tree species
- (2) the integration of new plantings into the heritage and landscape
- (3) maximising the ecosystem services provided by green spaces, such as reducing heat islands and creating cooling islands.



Source : Verdi, 2025

BAD EMS

Renovation project on the platform hall, the smallest platform hall in Germany, and its railway tracks by Deutsche Bahn has been ongoing. The platform hall, built at the beginning of the 20th century, had structural defects in its metal construction, which will be extensively repaired by summer 2026.

BADEN-BADEN

At the Roman Bath Ruins, targeted climate monitoring and damage mapping are currently being carried out, with completion expected in summer 2026. The installation of a new climate separation wall has already improved environmental conditions. Further technical aspects, including lighting-related microclimatic effects and occasional water ingress, continue to be addressed through ongoing monitoring and coordination with technical partners and the site operator.

At the Neues Schloss, development and restoration proposals are currently in the planning phase, guided by a phased approach. Close coordination between the private owner, planning authorities and heritage experts supports the careful integration of proposed new uses and technical upgrades in line with heritage conservation requirements.

CITY OF BATH

The Cleveland Pools in Bath, which first opened in 1817, are believed to be the oldest public lido in the UK. The newly restored Pools were badly damaged in repeated river flooding events and remain closed whilst trustees continue to investigate sources of funding. The original restoration was achieved after a long public fund-raising campaign and the conservation challenge now is to find funders who will contribute to the repair of damaged modern equipment, such as pumps. Any new works will also need to withstand the potential challenge of increased flood frequency as the climate changes.





RESULTS: CITIZENS THAT COLLABORATE
WITH INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS WHO
IN PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITIONS AND



3. Capacity Building



3.1. Preserving Legacies

The GSTE joined the prestigious climate heritage programme, Preserving Legacies. Fully funded by the National Geographic Society and led by National Geographic explorer Victoria Herrmann, the organisation works to protect cultural and natural heritage sites across the world from the impacts of climate change.

It has a community-orientated approach, empowering locals and integrating different forms of knowledge systems, from scientific research to Indigenous ancestral practices, to develop a holistic framework of understanding.

Their climate impact programme recruits a cohort of 12 cultural heritage sites every year for a three-year programme. Four participants from the GSTE (Chiara Ronchini, Anne Pirard, Anke Matthys and Tony Crouch) have enrolled in their '*Climate Custodian Cohort Program*'.

For Preserving Legacies, it was a landmark moment to have the GSTE join, as it was the first time they worked with a serial, transnational property. It was a development in their scaling process, as the positive impacts can be amplified across our network.

For the GSTE, this is a valuable opportunity to join an international peer-to-peer network, remain at the forefront of the latest climate resilience practices and be supported in safeguarding cultural heritage.

Workshops have taken our participants around the world, to learn from other cultural heritage sites, with valuable on-the-ground experience (Chiara in Taiwan; Anne in Tunisia; Anke in Champagne; Tony in Brazil).

These have covered everything from values assessment to climate hazard identification and integrating local communities into building climate resilience. All this new knowledge is building towards next year's climate risk assessment for the GSTE and will feed directly into our new Property Management Plan.



3.2. Impact Assessment Workshop

Impact Assessments are critical preventative tools, enabling us to evaluate proposed changes before they affect our OUV.

During our General Assembly in Bad Ems in October, we held an Impact Assessment Workshop to strengthen capacity and understanding. Building on 2023 and 2024 initiatives, we delivered Workshop VI in October 2025 in Bad Ems, bringing together IGC members, Mayors, and Site Managers. International experts provided strategic insights: Maya Ishizawa (ICCROM-IUCN World Heritage Leadership programme) explained UNESCO requirements for assessing impacts across property boundaries, wider setting and beyond; Nadya König-Lehrmann (Upper Middle Rhine Valley) shared practical site management experiences; and Carlo Ossola (Swiss Federal Office for the Environment) demonstrated strategic impact assessment frameworks. The session, moderated by Secretary General Chiara Ronchini, enhanced understanding of impact assessment obligations and provided applicable knowledge for managing change collaboratively across our serial transnational property.



3.3. Collaborative and Interactive Visioning Exercises

Another General Assembly highlight was the Visioning Exercise, where IGC members, Mayors, Site Managers, and Youth Forum participants collectively envisioned our future.

Using the SOAR framework – a collaborative approach examining our Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and desired Results – stakeholders identified shared aspirations: strengthening the protection of the property's attributes through active stewardship and sustainable conservation methods; becoming a globally recognised model for sustainable heritage and international cooperation; reclaiming our role as centres promoting peace and cultural exchange; leading on climate action; and deeply engaging communities as active heritage custodians. These findings will inform the new Plan's drafting in 2026, with publication scheduled for late 2027.





4. Communications

A Travel Guide to The Great Spa Towns of Europe



Františkovy Lázně, Czechia. | © Municipality of Františkovy Lázně



Cossm Looch
Editorial Manager
11 November 2025

The crème de la crème of Europe's spa towns, [The Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site made up of eleven spa towns from seven countries across Europe: the [UK](#), [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), [France](#), [Italy](#), [Czech Republic](#) and [Austria](#). Here is the Culture Trip guide to inspiring destinations you need to visit for the ultimate relaxing escape.



Recommended by culturetrip



Magazine

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The Great Spa Towns of Europe

Reviewed by The Wellness Traveller

Europe

Steam curls into the early morning air as bathers slip quietly into mineral pools, the day beginning with intention. In [The Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) wellness is a rhythm of life shaped by water, landscape, and time. These destinations invite travellers to slow down, tune in and remember that rest can be both restorative and deeply cultural.

What defines a spa town is how an entire place has been shaped around it, not simply the presence of thermal or mineral water. Streets are designed for strolling rather than rushing. Parks and promenades encourage gentle movement. Buildings curve inward, enclosing bathhouses that feel protective. Many of Europe's most celebrated spa towns are now recognized as UNESCO's *Great Spa Towns of Europe*, not because they are frozen in time, but because they continue to practice wellness as a cultural tradition.



About Us Our Network Our Impact Projects



Home News

Measuring the Value of World Heritage: Lessons from The Great Spa Towns of Europe

November 3rd 2025, by Naomi O'Toole, [Great Spa Towns of Europe](#)

Last month, representatives from The Great Spa Towns of Europe gathered in the German spa town of Bad Ems for their General Assembly.



OLIVER KRÜGEL CDU
Stadtbürgermeister Bad Ems

Travel Destinations

How Europe's great spa towns are shoring themselves up against the threat of climate change



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Übersicht Baden-Württemberg Rheinland-Pfalz Wahlen Leichte Sprache



Bad Ems mit seinem Kurviertel ist Teil des transnationalen UNESCO Welterbes "Great Spa Towns of Europe" Foto: SWR, Bruno Nonninger

Krügel: Der Titel ist vor allem Verpflichtung

Der Titel sei aber vor allem auch Verpflichtung. "Man muss betonen, dass der Welterbetitel kein Tourismustitel ist, sondern eine Verpflichtung, noch mehr Denkmalschutz zu betreiben", so Krügel. Es gehe darum, zu realisieren, was man für ein großes Pfund an europäischer Bäderarchitektur in der Stadt habe.

Bad Ems sei auch eine Art Musterbad, das es in seiner Architektur und Kultur zu bewahren gelte, so Krügel. Die Stadt habe zusätzliche Denkmalschutz-Zonen bekommen, und auch städteplanerisch habe man sich seitdem für die Zukunft anders aufgestellt, um das Kulturerbe gut bewahren zu können.

4.1. PRESS AND MEDIA

Press coverage has spanned a wide range of topics, ensuring the news that is shared about The GSTE conveys all branches of its work, from the operations of the Association to promoting responsible tourism.

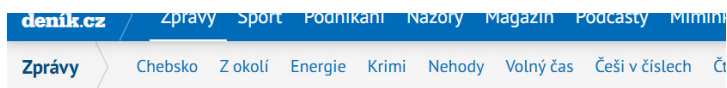
There have been numerous travel guides generated in digital outlets that specialise in travel, including prestigious titles like *Culture Trip*, tour operators *Ker & Downey* and topical travel media, like *The Wellness Traveller* and *Beau Monde Traveller*.

Similarly, our work with Preserving Legacies was covered in international news outlets like *Euronews*.

Press conferences were held at the General Assemblies to great success this year. By choosing a specific angle,

the press coverage reflected our activities. In Mariánské Lázně, the news reported on our work with the Youth Forum, with headlines such as 'Eleven cities, eleven views. Young people present their visions for the development of the spa industry' (Ildnes) and 'UNESCO Spa Towns Find a Path to the Future. Young People Propose Change' (Chebsky Deník). We also secured coverage on Česká televize, ČT — the national public service television broadcaster — and its streaming platform, *iVysílání*.

Our General Assembly in Bad Ems was the first time we held the conference in the town of our new Chair, Oliver Krügel. It was also the first time we held a Visioning Exercise. Consequently, the press release focused on the shaping of our future. The press paid particular attention to the value and responsibilities of a World Heritage inscription; 'How Bad Ems benefits from the World Heritage title "Great Spa Town Of Europe"' (SWR). Interviews and filming of our gathering was covered on SWR Aktuell, the regional broadcaster for Bad Ems.



Lázeňská města UNESCO hledají cestu k budoucnosti. Mladí lidé navrhuji změny



Petr Przccek
editor

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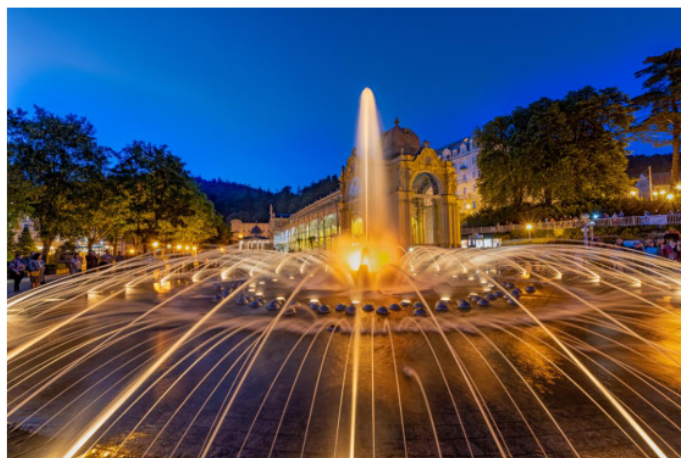


NEWS

Great Spa Towns of Europe tackle challenges and celebrate renewal in Mariánské Lázně, Czech Republic

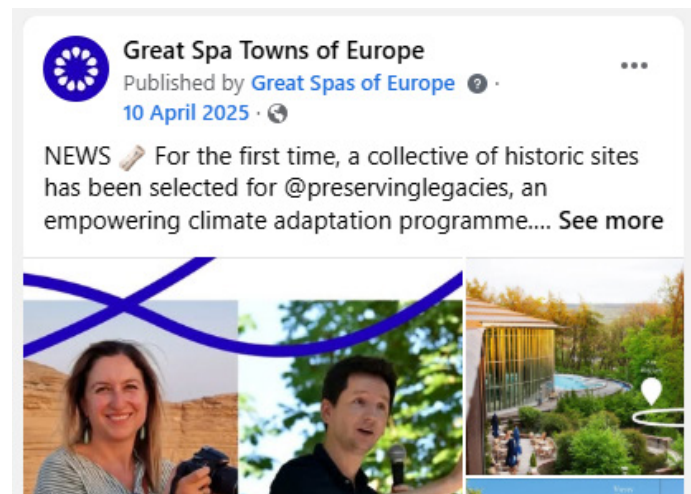
POSTED 09 MAY 2025 BY HELEN ANDREWS

SHARE



The Singing Fountain will be blessed at the start of the spa season Credit: Shutterstock/Jiri Vanicek

- The town's Singing Fountain will be blessed as part of the spa season opening ceremony
- Young people from the 11 spa towns will engage in talks about the future and ways they can contribute
- GSTE members will visit the WWII Infantry Fallen Memorial at the weekend to commemorate VE Day
- Panel discussions will focus on preserving cultural traditions and developing sustainably



4.2. PLATFORMS

2025 saw our new website launch at the start of the year. The new design has more accessible language and a greater focus on imagery and open space. The news page shares updates from across our towns and new web pages provide further detail about our projects, including the Youth Forum and Rail Europe.

4.3. SOCIAL MEDIA

Our social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn) have been reshaped to take on the challenge of blending travel and destination, heritage and profiling the work of the Association (such as images of conferences) — while maintaining visual consistency. Content has included ‘infographics’ which explain what the GSTE is to new visitors. These are pinned as the first things users see.

4.4. BRANDING & ASSETS

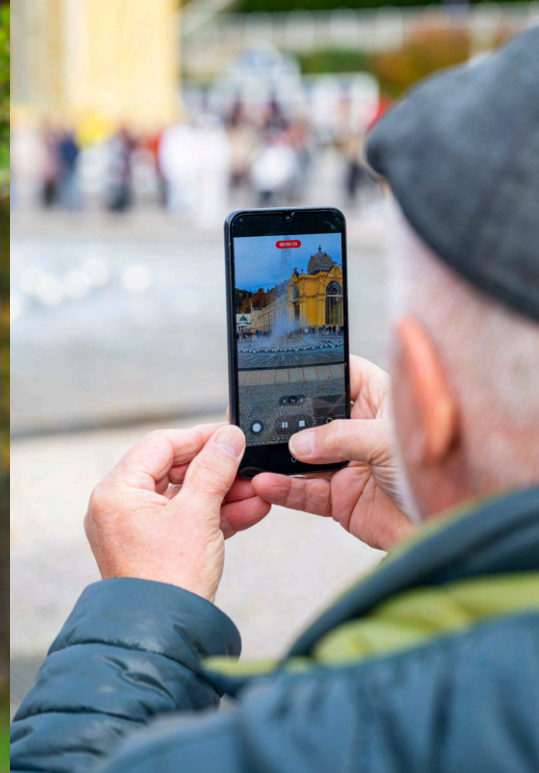
Communications work in 2025 included the careful monitoring of written material and language about the GSTE. Alongside proactive outreach to journalists and media outlets to correct or strengthen our branding, new guides have been created for easy use by all member towns, including; new media packs, new B2B materials, new communications, branding and messaging guidelines.

A Branding Committee was also formed in 2025, who produced new application forms and policies for the use of the GSTE and UNESCO logo in commercial and non-commercial products. This new process will ensure logos are used consistently and correctly across our member towns in the future.

At the end of the year, the GSTE Secretariat began producing new branded assets, merchandise and special logos. This activity is in anticipation of the 5th anniversary of our Site being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (24th July 2021).



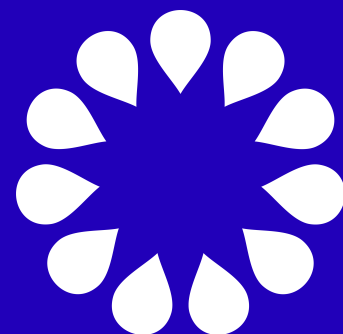

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4.5. PHOTOJOURNALISM PROJECT

We started a new photojournalism project with JRNY Magazine, a specialist publication in travel photography, to develop better photo and video assets of our spa towns. In October, we sent one of their photographers (the co-founder of the magazine) to the three Czech towns.

The result has been phenomenal and we now have strong, striking images of these spa towns, showing how residents and visitors alike engage with European spa heritage. Next summer, the photographer will complete the project with visits to the remaining eight towns. The project will conclude with a 12-page feature in their magazine.





5. Communities



5.1. Creating our Youth Forum

The next generation are not just the current residents of the GSTE, but also the future custodians of our shared European spa heritage.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, over 120 young people (aged 12–15 years) living across the GSTE took part in our INTERSPACE Project. Funded by the European Union through the CERV Town Twinning Programme, the project gathered young people from several spa towns to bring them into the management of the World Heritage Site. In the spirit of co-design, it gave the reins to the young people to shape a Youth Forum, a permanent part of our governance.

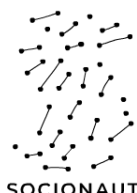
Online workshops and a major international exchange began in 2024, which laid the foundations for creating our Youth Forum. In 2025, they continued to develop ideas about how to manage the spa towns they called home.

In addition to engaging the young citizens with their spa heritage, INTERSPACE created an international network that allowed them to meet one another and form friendships. They took part in guided tours to ancient springs, visited bathhouses, tried spa facilities, went on scavenger hunts, listened to concerts, researched ancient spa rituals, made memes about spa history, sampled mineral water, had fun at disco nights and many more activities.

The young people had given an initial presentation in Baden bei Wien in Autumn 2024, where they laid out their ideas for how the Youth Forum would work. Building on this, and as a result of their additional workshops, a representative group from the young people gave inspiring presentations at our Spring General Assembly in Mariánské Lázně.



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Their final presentation spoke directly to the Executive Board, Delegates, Members and other stakeholders and decision-makers. The young people had started with a wide range of themes and ideas, which they refined to a top ten. Thereafter, they prioritised six call-to-actions; including lending unused or abandoned buildings to private companies or entrepreneurs for free, on the condition that they renovate the spaces and ensure public benefit; developing local youth parliaments; focus on creating more job opportunities; organising cleaning events; building universities; continue learning from each other.

The GSTE Association pledged an annual budget for implementing the changes suggested by the Youth Forum.

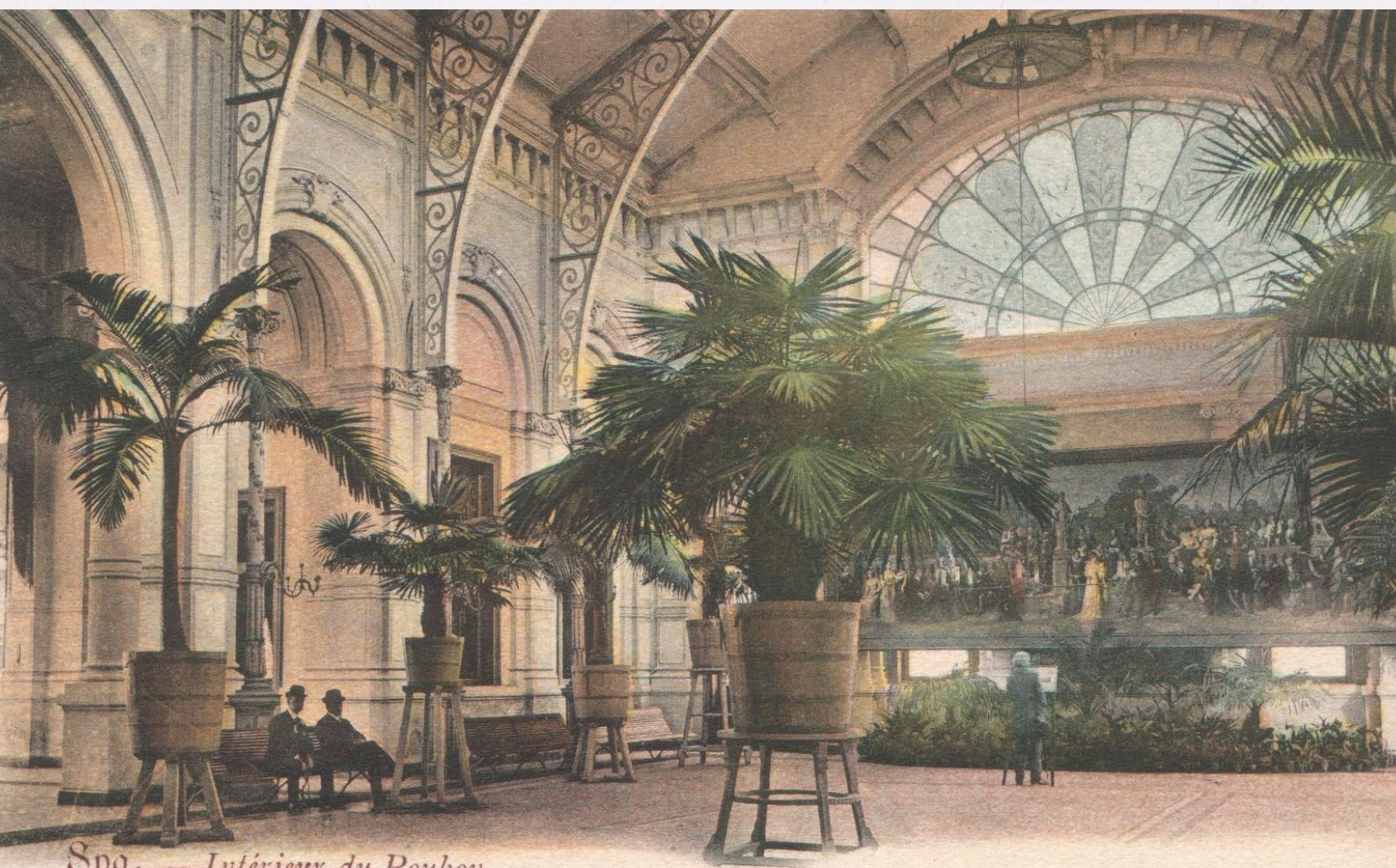
This unprecedented level of youth participation in World Heritage governance has been institutionally embedded within the GSTE's governance structures and political commitment. INTERSPACE led to capacity building for heritage professionals and transformed the site managers' approach to community engagement. It has also reiterated our shared commitment to preserving Europe's spa culture for future generations.

For the young citizens themselves, bringing them into decision-making shows them the value of their ideas and encourages them to use their voice to make a positive impact. They gained essential democratic participation skills, cross-cultural competencies and heritage stewardship knowledge. Additionally, the soft skills required for participating in workshops, presenting to political audiences and creating relationships with young people speaking in other languages are also beneficial to them outside INTERSPACE.

Our thanks go to the funders of this project and everyone who helped this come to life. The project was facilitated by Czech company Socionaut, and brought to life with the work of Site Managers, local administration and community engagement teams, schoolteachers and many others.



FRAUEN-
:: BAD ::
Kurort
BADEN
bei Wien



Spa. — Intérieur du Pouhon.

5.2. Celebrating World Heritage

BADEN BEI WIEN

Every other year, Baden bei Wien holds a Grand Ball Royale to honour another one of the GSTE towns. This year, the Ball Royale honoured Montecatini Terme, with their motto '*Bella Italia!*'. Artistic director Herbert Fischerauer and his team ensured an unforgettable evening at the Grand Casino Baden within its opulent halls and rich history, with more than 1,500 guests.

SPA

Spa organised an exhibition about the GSTE during the World Heritage Committee, held in the Delegation of Wallonia-Brussels in Paris. The Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Valérie Lescrenier, was present. This was an opportune moment to showcase our Site to heritage professionals around the world. Spa also featured in a national television programme streamed on RTBF TV, a French-language television station. Its presenter Patrick Weber visited Spa for a story about water, villas and the secrets of the spa town.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

In April, Františkovy Lázně celebrated a moment in women's activism in the town's history named '*The Women's Revolt*'. In the 18th century, local women made their livelihood selling the town's mineral water across Bohemia and Germany. When pavilions were built over the springs, essentially privatising them, the women saw this as an infringement on their right to draw water from the spring and revolted. Františkovy Lázně marked the anniversary with a festival. Drums, pottery and water-carrying devices were brought out for re-enactment, with games, competitions, water-carrying, a historical dress award, food stalls, drinks, ceramics sales and smashing and more.

KARLOVY VARY

In April, Karlovy Vary organised public events for World Heritage Days, offering guided heritage walks, lectures, exhibitions, artistic programmes and educational activities. Selected historic buildings, such as the Císařské lázně (Imperial Spa), were opened to the public, alongside guided tours of historic buildings and spa infrastructure. Additional World Heritage celebrations took place during the St. Wenceslas festivities in September. Concerts, events and cultural programmes highlighted the town's identity and the significance of the UNESCO World Heritage status.



MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

Mariánské Lázně hosted our Spring General Assembly in 2025 and organised a Heritage Forum alongside, bringing together experts, local stakeholders and international partners. The town also organised a 'Planting Trees for Peace' ceremony to mark UNESCO's 80th anniversary, with the INTERSPACE participants and the British Chargé d'Affaires, Kate Davenport OBE.

2025 was the first year of the 'Café Europe' lecture series, a programme of eight public lectures held at Chopin House. These addressed topics such as spa heritage, architecture, landscape, sustainability and the European cultural context of the town. Lectures were delivered by specialists from heritage conservation, environmental management and related fields. Events were open to the public at a modest admission fee and free for students.



VICHY

Vichy celebrated an important anniversary — 200 years of the Vichy pastille! Since its creation in 1825 by chemist Jean-Pierre-Joseph d'Arcet, the Vichy pastille has remained an essential symbol of Vichy for centuries. A programme of cabaret, exhibitions, guided tours and conferences were organised for the public.

Artists from across our 11 towns were commissioned to create a giant pastille inspired by their own spa town. These pastilles are now positioned in the Parc des Sources for visitors to explore on a discovery trail. Each pastille has a description and a QR code to learn more about the artwork, each town and the pastille.

Every July, Vichy celebrates the anniversary of the GSTE being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List with an event in honour of another of the GSTE towns. In 2025, they honoured Karlovy Vary with a range of festivities to celebrate Czech culture and the shared traditions between the spa towns. The bandstand was the centre of the festivities, hosting music, dancing and stalls with Czech culinary specialties and porcelain. A festive parade is another tradition at these birthday celebrations as the crowd winds its way through the town from the Town Hall to the bandstand.



BAD EMS

This year's Open Monument Day was titled 'A Sunday in World Heritage'. More than 200 participants, including nine regional choirs of all ages, brought various monuments in the World Heritage area to life. Bad Ems resounded and moved with concerts, performances and other activities at important monuments, culminating in a benefit concert at the Kurtheater.



BADEN-BADEN

In June, Baden-Baden marked World Heritage Day with public communication and interpretation activities centred on the Trinkhalle. The exhibition 'Perspective World Heritage' offered new visual perspectives on Baden-Baden's spa architecture and urban heritage. Through contemporary photography by Torben Beeg, the exhibition invited residents and visitors to rediscover familiar landmarks from fresh viewpoints, supporting wider awareness of World Heritage values.

BAD KISSINGEN

The UNESCO World Heritage Day celebrations were combined with the traditional Museum Festival at the Obere Saline Museum. The motto was 'Communicate, connect, inspire – 20 years of UNESCO World Heritage Day'. The festivities were opened with the special exhibition 'Young Hands for Old Walls', which focused on youth workshops. The GSTE Youth Forum also gave a presentation. Other events included free guided bicycle tours through the town, special tours of the Upper Saltworks Museum, storytelling sessions, face painting, an art studio for children, puppet shows, a World Heritage quiz and information booths from the World Heritage Coordination Office and German Foundation for Monument Protection.

MONTECATINI TERME

During the final week of July, Montecatini Terme celebrated the anniversary of the town's inclusion in the World Heritage List as a member of the GSTE. A concert by the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Band, with Zubin Mehta as the orchestra director, was organised and opened for the public to enjoy.

CITY OF BATH

Bath celebrated World Heritage Day with a free day of activities across the World Heritage Centre, Bath Abbey and Bath Medical Museum. This year's theme was 'Water is Best', which explored the hot springs that have shaped Bath's history for over two millennia. Heritage organisations including the Roman Baths, Bath Preservation Trust and the National Trust took part. In September, Heritage Open Days (England's largest festival of history and culture) offered guided tours, exhibitions, talks and family activities in over 20 venues across 10 days. The Bathscape Walking Festival also took place, focusing on Bath as a landscape city. 250 years of Jane Austen celebrated the author all year with a programme of events expanding beyond the usual length of the Jane Austen Festival. An estimated 2,000 people in period costume paraded through Bath in September. The festival attracts world-wide attendees and is a significant tourism boost, with the 'stage set' of the World Heritage city being an essential element.



5.3. Communicating Locally

BADEN BEI WIEN

Baden bei Wien released a new brochure titled '*11 Questions about UNESCO World Heritage*'. It provides clear explanations about the heritage of the spa town with a focus on simplicity. There are two versions; one with detail and one for those in a hurry, offering a compact overview using only images. Both aim to engage people with World Heritage in a convenient and accessible way.

In September, a World Heritage guided tour was designed and conducted by Alexandra Harrer for participants of Lebenshilfe Lower Austria, a non-profit organisation supporting people with intellectual disabilities. The tour used inclusive storytelling and adapted communication to make Baden's spa heritage accessible to all participants. The initiative reflects the GSTE's commitment to accessibility, inclusion and equal participation in cultural heritage. The participants' enthusiastic response and personal artistic gift highlighted the social impact of inclusive heritage mediation.

SPA

The Art Centre of Spa organised special training open for any member of the public related to heritage. After an introduction on UNESCO World Heritage recognition, various topics were explored, including promenades and parks, villas, the casino and the role of leisure in the spa town.

Spa also created new materials to help communicate World Heritage. A brand new brochure was edited by the Heritage Walloon Agency to present Spa as one of the GSTE, a mythical city and historical capital of thermalism. Similarly, a book was edited by the Heritage Walloon Agency to present all the UNESCO World Heritage Properties in the Walloon Region, titled '*World Heritage Treasures in Wallonia*'.

KARLOVY VARY

The city and Tourist Information Centre actively promote the UNESCO World Heritage status of the GSTE through the official city website, printed materials, guided tours and the SmartGuide app. Special heritage-themed events, walks and exhibitions were communicated widely via local media, city channels and cultural calendars throughout the year.





VICHY

The 22nd Annual Meeting of the Association of French World Heritage Sites (ABFPM) took place in Vichy in October. Hosting this meeting is of great significance for Vichy and all the French sites inscribed on the World Heritage List. Over the course of three days, the meeting featured a presentation on the GSTE by Chiara Ronchini, an extended Board of Directors meeting, workshops, a project review and guided tours of the city of Vichy.



BADEN-BADEN

As part of European Heritage Days, the town opened numerous historic sites to residents and visitors. The privately owned Villa Dikte attracted particular attention, with guided tours and craft demonstrations that showed ongoing restoration work.

In September, the town inaugurated its first 'WahreWunderBänke' ('Witty Wonder Benches') on the Market Square. These are permanent benches with information, provided by the State of Baden-Württemberg to enhance the visibility of World Heritage in public space. The benches encourage both residents and visitors to engage with Baden-Baden's role within the UNESCO World Heritage family of Baden-Württemberg.

In December, an illustrated book titled '*Die Trinkhalle und ihr Erbauer*' ('*The Trinkhalle and Its Builder*') was published. Written by Ermengard Hlawitschka-Roth and illustrated by Uwe Meyer, the book presents Baden-Baden's spa architecture in an accessible way.

Planning for a new World Heritage Information Centre also advanced. A public participation event ran in the City Hall, allowing the community to have a say. The SoundLab Baden-Baden was completed as a first key module, highlighting the town's musical heritage and its role as a meeting place of European culture.

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

A special first edition of a heritage-themed newspaper, titled the 'Great Spa Times', was published in both Czech and English this year. The publication helped communicate the meaning of World Heritage status, OUV and the shared identity of the GSTE to residents and visitors alike, broadening awareness.



BAD EMS

Bad Ems organised a City2City Exchange programme between Bad Ems and Františkovy Lázně. The exchange took place in the summer of 2025, funded by the European University Institute. It enabled various local stakeholders from the two spa towns (as well as the third participating city of Cheb) to discuss the topic of urban development, get to know their twin city and the work of their Czech and German colleagues better. This was a wonderful opportunity to bring local stakeholders closer together and to strengthen the great connection between two GSTE towns through their UNESCO World Heritage status.

Guided tours were organised through the Kurpark, collaboratively arranged by the World Heritage Site Management team, the historical society 'Verein für Geschichte, Denkmal und Landschaftspflege Bad Ems' and the Staatsbad Bad Ems Company to teach citizens about the history of the town's therapeutic landscape and the future, particularly with climate change.





BAD KISSINGEN

To mark Open Monument Day in September, guided tours of the city's historic observation towers and monuments were organised by the city's department of Cultural Affairs Office in collaboration with the German Foundation for Monument Protection.

A film about World Heritage, titled '*The Ox Cathedral*', is now available to stream on YouTube. This is an example of citizen participation in heritage, as eyewitnesses tell the story of their slaughterhouse, as well as education.

Bad Kissingen ran three study seminars with the Technical University of Darmstadt, covering the topics of urban design, developing vacant properties and post-war spa architecture. There was also an excursion with the University of Bamberg with a guided tour and lecture by the World Heritage Coordinator.

MONTECATINI TERME

A new website has been created to focus attention on town's heritage elements. The platform includes a map of the property and the buffer zone, projects, activities with the GSTE, key elements of OUV and many other topics.

A new book titled '*Montecatini and UNESCO European Spa Towns*' was published by Montecatini Terme's UNESCO Office. Written in English and Italian, it aims to explain the origin and development of the Tuscan town as well as the ten other spa towns in the property.

In Spring, Montecatini celebrated World Water Day with a conference in the town hall, highlighting the importance of fresh water in our lives, the inextricable links between climate change and the benefits of thermal water. The conference was held by Professor Patrizia Tommei from University of Florence, meteorologist Dr Bernardo Gozzini and the health director of the Terme Spa, Dr. Marcotulli.

CITY OF BATH

A consultation campaign called '*The Van with a Plan*' used an historic ice cream van to tour the district promoting awareness of the new Local (development) Plan. The van stopped at more than 50 locations to raise awareness of the council's consultation and to give everyone a chance to have their say. The approach was an innovative and eye-catching way of attracting local attention. This campaign resulted in the highest ever level of public engagement ever recorded by Bath and North East Somerset Council.

The Council also piloted free entry to the historic Parade Gardens. Removing the entrance fee helped attract more than 29,000 visitors to the park.



5.4. Engaging with Young People



BADEN BEI WIEN

Baden bei Wien organised a special tour for primary school students from the Uetzgasse and Pfarrgasse schools to mark World Heritage Day in April. The tour was all about using all five senses to discover the spa town, such as using flashlights to examine the sulphur water emerging from the Ursprungsquelle and touching the lukewarm spring water. Secondary school students from Pelzgasse were also involved by producing a radio podcast called 'Radiolgel'.

In autumn 2025, Baden introduced the 'Jahreskarte+', a subsidised educational programme combining guided museum visits with a thematic city walk around the town's sulphur springs. It enables primary school students to explore the city's spa heritage both in the museum and directly within the historic urban landscape.

Alexandra Harrer held a public reading at the Baden City Library from the city's illustrated children's book '*Badespaß & Kurstadtkipferl*' (2024). Through age-appropriate storytelling, the book introduces young audiences to Baden's spa culture, translating complex heritage values into vivid, relatable stories.

SPA

Spa arranged a Youth and Heritage week. Some schools had the opportunity to take half a day to discover the spa town and play a game to understand the questions: What is heritage? What is a UNESCO World Heritage property?; and, what is the DNA of The Great Spa Towns of Europe?

A teacher has also engaged her class throughout the year to adopt a monument and present the result of their research and work at the end of the year.

KARLOVY VARY

Part of the World Heritage celebrations included creative and educational workshops aimed at children and young people, with arts and crafts to facilitate World Heritage interpretation in a creative way. Students from local art and secondary schools were involved in exhibitions and performances linked to UNESCO World Heritage and the spa heritage, helping to engage younger generations.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

Pupils from the Česká elementary school were involved in World Heritage learning activities in Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Žatec. At the end of the year, a new group of students got together to establish the first Františkovy Lázně Youth Forum.



VICHY

'The Keepers of Memory' project was launched to coincide with the European Heritage Days in September, with the support of the Vichy Heritage Fund. A group of pupils from the Collège des Célestins worked on the unique history of the Hôtel des Célestins as part of a discovery workshop. This was opened to the public with a tour of the building, screening of archive photographs and showcasing items from the Art Deco collection. The workshop is continuing with a view to further historical research into the building, conducting interviews with former pupils to gather first-hand accounts of the building's use during the Trente Glorieuses and staging these findings.

The Maison de l'Architecture Auvergne ran a series of after-school workshops on discovering spa heritage. The sessions featured a tour of Vichy's springs and buildings and the children made a scale model.

Young people were also involved in the bicentenary celebrations of the Vichy Pastille; the 'Pastilles Street Art' activity. There were treasure hunts for primary school classes in the town with 250 pupils taking part and the Allier Natural Sciences Association gave presentations about water and the water cycle.

BAD KISSINGEN

Engaging the next generation was a particular focus of the aforementioned World Heritage Day Celebrations in June. The special exhibition 'Young Hands for Old Walls' was dedicated to the youth building workshops of the German Foundation for Monument Protection. Former volunteers shared their experiences, their work and the importance of monument preservation. The audience in the well-filled Orangery was enthusiastic about the youth building workshop. In addition, students from the Jack Steinberger Gymnasium presented the GSTE Youth Forum, sharing the perspective of young people and giving the next generation a voice in decision-making.

MONTECATINI TERME

Two educational projects were held to engage the next generation, both financially supported through the Italian law 77/2006 and approved by the Italian Ministry of Culture.

One of these projects includes twinning trips between the GSTE towns. Approximately 100 young students, aged around 13 years, are taken on a special school trip to another one of the spa towns within our UNESCO World Heritage Site. In March 2025, students from Montecatini Terme visited Vichy. They met the Vice Mayor, who explained the importance of the UNESCO World Heritage inscription and how Montecatini and Vichy share some interesting common elements. The delegation tasted the thermal water and the iconic Vichy pastille.

The other project targets students aged 8-10 years, who are involved in a thematic, comic film, alongside local visits in Montecatini Terme to learn more about the town's key heritage values.

BAD EMS

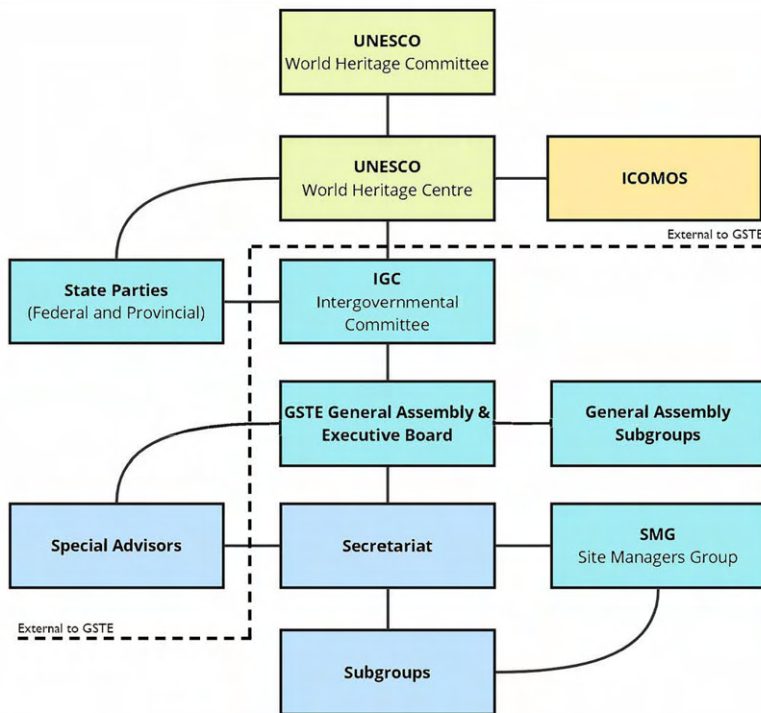
Bad Ems ran an intriguing art project — creating postcards with young people. The UNESCO World Heritage Site was the focus of the children's festival at Balmoral Castle, and many young visitors gave free rein to their creativity by designing their own version of Bad Ems using historical postcards, paint and paper. The children were also able to add a greeting from Bad Ems to their loved ones on reproduced historical postcards, which were then posted.

Additionally, Bad Ems invited families to take part in an exciting rally for a World Heritage Discovery Tour, with several stations within walking distance of the historic town centre and villa district. Children and parents discovered interesting places together while completing small tasks around the town. Along the way, there were quizzes, puzzles and activities. It was an entertaining day for the whole family, bringing history to life and allowing Bad Ems to be experienced with all the senses.



6. Resources

6.1. The GSTE Structure



The current organisational structure was developed in 2022, and has continued to function well. The GSTEA has five levels of governance, as follows:

Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) of the seven State Party World Heritage Focal Points, or a similar heritage representative.

GSTE General Assembly, the management board of eleven Mayors, or other political representative, of the eleven component sites.

GSTE Executive Board, comprised of four Mayors, the Chair, two Vice-Chairs, one Finance Director and the Secretary General is co-opted.

GSTE Site Managers Group (SMG), who are responsible for the implementation of the Property Management Plan.

The Secretariat, who are responsible for supporting the whole system, coordinating the Property Management Plan and implementing the Action Plan.

6.2. Redefining Roles

A major achievement this year was refreshing the description of the generic Site Manager's role and responsibilities. As well as emphasising the need for the role to not be performed in isolation, specific fundamental points were clarified, such as the manner in which the Site Manager is included in decision-making processes about the component and any issues that could affect OUV. This was a collective endeavour and was approved at the Autumn General Assembly in Bad Ems.

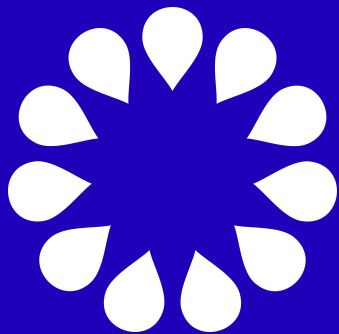
In early 2025, Baden-Baden completed the consolidation of its World Heritage Site Management team. With all key roles in place, the site management structure now provides a stable basis for coordinated work in conservation, monitoring, communication and community engagement.

6.3. Day-to-Day Systems and Processes

The Secretariat has continued to strengthen internal systems and processes, ensuring essential operations and responsibilities are covered within limited resources. These efforts resulted in savings of over €51,000 in 2025, which will be carried forward to the next financial year.

Quarterly newsletters have been sent out to a mailing list of internal and external contacts, alongside an *'INTERSPACE special'*. The Secretariat continues to meet weekly, as well as engaging with external organisations, from the European Historic Thermal Towns Association to spa towns exploring their heritage, such as Harrogate.

To support members across the continent, online resources are managed as a shared resource. The Secretariat has continually developed the Microsoft SharePoint systems for groups within the GSTE, including our image library, Site Managers' Group, Tourism Officers' Group and another for General Assemblies.



6.4. The Great Spa Towns of Europe's Meetings in 2025

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE

9th October (Bad Ems)

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS (ONLINE)

#14: 10th January

#15: 21st March

#16: 26th June

#17: 11th September

#18: 12th November

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

#6: 8th May (Mariánské Lázně)

#7: 9th October (Bad Ems)

SITE MANAGERS GROUP MEETINGS

SMG 37: 21st January (Joint SM and TOG meeting online)

SMG 38: 17th June (Joint SM and TOG meeting online)

TOURISM OFFICERS GROUP MEETINGS

18th March (online)

WORKING GROUPS AND SUB-GROUPS ACTIVE IN 2025 (ONLINE)

Urban Planning Working Group: 19th March

INTERSPACE Working Group: 1st April, 29th April (for teachers), 18th June

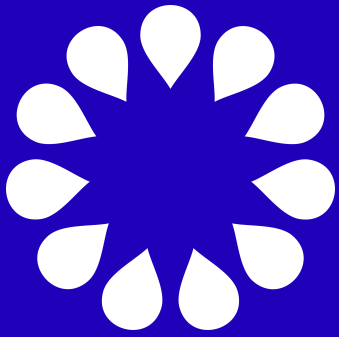
Monitoring Working Group: 7th April

Preserving Legacies Participants: monthly check ins and training modules every two months

Property Management Plan Review Subgroup: 16th June

Branding Committee: set up via email correspondence

Geology and Hydrology Research Network: established in 2025 with first meeting scheduled in 2026



6.5. Finances and Budgets

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP IN 2025

The GSTEA managed a central budget of approximately €195,062 in 2025, plus an additional €50,745 of European CERV funding for the INTERSPACE project.

Each of our 11 member towns contributes an annual fee calculated proportionally to their population, ensuring fair representation. All budgets undergo rigorous approval by both the Executive Board and General Assembly, with transparent tracking by the Baden-Baden Finance Team, the Secretary General, a Finance Controller and the Finance Director.

INVESTING IN SHARED EXCELLENCE

Our budget supports a rich diversity of collaborative initiatives, from the photojournalism project to our joint campaign with the European Historic Thermal Towns Association. These investments, alongside core operational funding for essential consultancy services, demonstrate our commitment to strengthening our collective heritage management.

LOCAL INVESTMENT: SHARED VISION

Complementing central expenditure, each spa town maintains direct local investment in:

- Site Manager staffing and professional officer support
- Capital project match funding
- Educational programmes
- Strategic promotion and marketing
- World Heritage visitor centre development

VALUE-DRIVEN PROCUREMENT

As a not-for-profit association managing public funds, we implement transparent, fair and competitive procurement processes. This approach has delivered significant savings in 2025, all of which have been reinvested to enhance our shared projects and increase resource capacity across the GSTEA.



7. Responsible Tourism

7.1. Tourism as Outstanding Universal Value

Tourism is an integral part of the GSTE; not just because our Great Spa Towns operate as tourist destinations today, but because their role as international health resorts became the setting for the cultural phenomenon of *'taking the cure'*.

In the 18th century, the GSTE towns became *'vectors of a transnational culture'*; nodes in an international network of health and leisure. As a result, visiting spas became a significant part of the origins of modern tourism and formed the concept of *'villeggiatura'*: a leisure holiday in the countryside.

Consequently, there has been an enduring relationship between our component spa towns, akin to a global network. Spa guests often moved from one spa to another (from emperors and royalty, to composers, artists and poets), with each spa town sharing functional linkages. These range from a dynamic interchange of ideas (for example architects and spa physicians moving between the most innovative and successful spas) to special rail itineraries for spa tourism.

Tourism, therefore, forms an integral part of the *'European spa phenomenon'*, contributing to the OUV of the GSTE World Heritage Site as recognised under Criteria (ii) and (iii) of the UNESCO inscription decision (44 COM 8B.16, 2021). Safeguarding these historic aspects of tourism through a contemporary, sustainable form of tourism is of paramount importance, reflecting UNESCO's own recognition that managing tourism sustainably is a central challenge for the property.

Our established Responsible Tourism strategy considers how the benefits of tourism are distributed across local communities, and how they may impact the environment. In the context of World Heritage, responsible tourism does not focus on attractions solely, but experiencing the uniqueness of the destination in terms of heritage values. A quality visitor experience reflects the spa town way of life, including visiting local art and cultural events, experiencing nature and the surrounding landscape, taking spa and wellness therapies, finding leisure time and engaging with everyday activities, as residents do.



30 VICHY. — Le Salon de Repos et le Square de l'Hopital. — ND Phot.

Posted by
Helen Schenck

26 August 2025



Soak up the "Original Hot Spots" of Europe by rail

For thousands of years, people across Europe have been drawn to thermal and mineral springs — the healing waters at the heart of the continent's spa towns.

With their distinctive urban form and long tradition of hospitality, these places have served as centres of health, well-being and tourism for centuries, shaping a spa culture that remains a unique part of Europe's heritage.



The story of the historic thermal towns of Europe is deeply woven into the story of the continent and its people. It forms part of Europe's shared memory, culture and traditions, and as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, this cultural heritage is both recognised and celebrated.

7.2. Promoting Rail Travel

We started a global marketing campaign with the European Historic Thermal Towns Association to promote rail travel. The project ran with Rail Europe, a globally leading distributor of European train tickets and rail passes.

The campaign included paid advertising, organic social media posts and a written article on Rail Europe's website, which featured on their homepage for three weeks.

This was a pan-European, awareness-building campaign. The tagline was *'The Original Hotspot'*, which aimed to promote spa towns as a theme for travelling through Europe. By partnering with another organisation that protects historic spa towns, we cross-promoted to our respective audiences and supported one another.

7.3. Sustainable Tourism Products

Many GSTE towns offer sustainable tourism products, such as cycling routes and walking tours. They pursue certification for ecological excellence, such as the GreenSign Hotel (the top sustainability certification for the hotel industry in Europe, held by Maison Messmer in Baden-Baden) or the Austrian Ecolabel, which has been awarded to major tourist companies in Baden bei Wien, namely the Congress Center Baden, the Bühne Baden (theatre) and the Arnulf Rainer Museum.

Similarly, spa events are programmed to be as environmentally-friendly as possible. For instance, in Baden bei Wien, the Photo Festival La-Gacilly is delivered in a carbon-neutral standard with sustainability as the recurring theme.

WHERE SLOW IS
THE POINT
MORE THAN A SPA BREAK

TAKE A TRAIN TO PLACES WHERE
THE PACE IS PART OF THE CURE.

SPA, BELGIUM

7.4. Tourism Infrastructure

BADEN BEI WIEN

An outstanding mobility concept was established in Baden bei Wien a few years ago and has since been considered a gamechanger in sustainable quality tourism. Called 'Baden Mobil', it allows residents and tourists to book an eco-friendly vehicle using an app. Recent developments have brought the numbers of vehicles to 90+ e-scooters, 47 e-city bikes, 28 e-mountain and trekking bikes and six e-cars, all available from parking stations spread across the town.

SPA

A network of cycle nodes has been in place for several years, but the city has been improving both pedestrian and cycling networks. Following the success of the RAVeL extension to Rue du Waux-Hall in 2024, Spa launched further projects. The section of the Sources Cycle Route within Spa was completed and new infrastructure for bicycles was installed on the Albin Body street. After an extensive ten-year renovation, Les Bains de Spa reopened in spring 2025. The site now features a 97-room five-star hotel, a restaurant, a bar and a spa, combining heritage and modernity.

KARLOVY VARY

Karlovy Vary has invested in improving its cycling infrastructure. Repairs were made to the footbridge on the Ohře Cycle Path under the town bridge in Rybáry, replacing wood with steel to extend its service life. This will contribute to the development of cycling in the town.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

Františkovy Lázně offers bike rental services at two main hotels in the town, with classic bikes, electric bikes, children's bikes and electric scooters. The service is not just for hotel guests, but for all visitors. The Information Centre rents bicycles, scooters, Nordic walking sticks and other equipment. The renovation of the train station was completed and Czech Railways offered discounts for train fares for any visitors with a stay of 14 nights or more for bookings in 2026. Restoration works on the Lázeňská poliklinika / Stáčírna minerálních vod (the old bottling facility) have continued. With an expected open date in 2027, the building will be used for exhibitions, as the GSTE visitor centre, community space and restroom.



MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

The town completed a major renewal of Mírové náměstí (Peace Square), including extensive landscaping and improvements to the public space. This strengthened the connectivity between the spa town's historic urban fabric and its therapeutic green infrastructure, enhancing both heritage values and liveability.

Further tourism facilities were developed with the restoration of a historic building block on Třebízského Street, now adapted for use as a Swissôtel. The architectural character of the late 19th century town was preserved, while introducing modern standards.



VICHY

After three years of studies, consultations and designs, new tourist and heritage signage has been installed in Vichy. The strategy was based on the principle that the Parc des Sources, a fully restored historic monument, should once again become the epicentre of the town. This choice makes sense from a geographical, urban planning and historical perspective. User experience was at the forefront of the project, rather than relying on a systematic network of directional signs. Priority was given to natural wayfinding, for instance, helping visitors visualise their surroundings using 'natural' landmarks (rivers, notable buildings, parks, squares and so on) to allow for more freedom of movement and more intuitive navigation while avoiding a circuit-based approach. Orientation tables to help people read and locate the city as a whole, alongside directional markers and bilingual (FR/EN) heritage plaques.



BAD EMS

Multiple charging stations for e-bikes have been constructed in Bad Ems and a bike rental service is available in the city, often used for the Lahn Cycle Path. Repair work took place on this popular route following damage to the road surface, numerous fallen trees and landslides. Cyclists were able to use the renovated section from April.



BADEN-BADEN

The municipal utilities and the Karlsruhe Transport Association (KVV) jointly launched a bike-sharing system to offer an affordable and flexible alternative to buses, trains or car sharing. 30 bicycles are available for public use in the town. Baden-Baden also co-operated with Stadtmobil CarSharing GmbH & Co. KG to create a renting service for electric cars.



BAD KISSINGEN

Construction began for a new 4-star superior hotel, Sonnenhof Bad Kissingen. The plans and the facade design were coordinated with ICOMOS monitors and the Bavarian State Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments. The hotel will accommodate 104 rooms, 16 suites and is expected to open in spring 2028.

Another milestone for Bad Kissingen's tourism was a major expansion of The Grand Hotel Kaiserhof Victoria by acquiring two neighbouring properties (still ongoing construction work). This allows the hotel to increase its rooms to 200 and create a further wellness area. The Kaiserhof Victoria is one of the city's largest hotels with a nearly 200-year history, yet it frequently reaches its capacity limits. It currently records around 80,000 overnight stays and the goal is to increase this to 102,000. The expansion is a clear signal for its future.

MONTECATINI TERME

Montecatini Terme has invested in accessibility, training and data analysis as part of the 'Culture Call' project, with the Centre for Tourism Studies of Florence and Cristoforo. This has achieved 15 accessible guided tours with a 100% satisfaction rate, a tactile guide and a video in Italian Sign Language dedicated to the city's main monuments, five online training meetings for local tourism operators, two strategic reports on tourist flows and online reputation, based on over 163,000 reviews from TripAdvisor, Booking and Google.

CITY OF BATH

A public space called 'Broad Street Place' has been enhanced as an attractive space where residents and visitors can relax. New street furniture, colourful public art and festoon lighting are among the transformative improvements, as well as elements that make the space nature-friendly, including new plants, bird boxes and innovative ground surfacing.

Local businesses have been supported with targeted investment. The Bath Local Centres High Street Improvement Scheme, supported by the Community Infrastructure Levy, makes improvements such as reusing vacant shops, new street furniture, planting, events, additional shopfront improvements, public art, signage and support to community organisations. In September, two new businesses benefitted from shopfront improvements, injecting new life into the public space.



7.5. Ecology

Across the GSTE, responsible tourism and ecology go hand-in-hand. The mineral springs, therapeutic spa landscapes, green settings and rich natural ecosystems that surround and define our towns are integral to the spa town experience – and their stewardship is central to how we manage and share our World Heritage.

BADEN BEI WIEN

A sustainability festival called '*Planet Care*' ran in June in the Kurpark with upcycling workshops, repair sessions, expert talks and guided tours, including a special night-time tour in the Vienna Woods. The town introduced a ban for coaches in the town centre and moved the bus entry and exit point further away. Large-scale photovoltaic systems were installed at the Thermalstrandbad Baden, the Park & Ride at the train station and the Zentrum Süd parking deck. Major tourist companies have been certified with the Austrian EcoLabel, including At the Park-Hotel and the Arnulf Rainer Museum.

SPA

Concrete actions were carried out to strengthen biodiversity and revegetation in Spa: a pond was created in Parc du Père Antoine, nine wildflower meadows were planted across the municipality, 30 trees were replanted and a 650-metre-long hedge was planted. Alongside, free trees and shrubs were distributed as part of the '*Week of the Tree*' in November, with approximately 2,500 plants distributed.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

A tree planting tradition has been drawing more attention of the locals. Two events called '*Zasad' se za Frantovky*' were organised by the municipality in 2025. Hundreds of trees were planted by the local community, especially in areas previously damaged by bark beetles. The tradition symbolically follows the efforts of the Okrášlovací spolek, who planted tens of thousands of trees during the 19th century.

KARLOVY VARY

Since 2019, Karlovy Vary has been creating interactive elements and landmarks for the public as part of their '*Smoke-Free City*' project to cultivate public space and promote a healthy lifestyle. These include the popular '*I (love) VARY*' photo points, the '*Window to Karlovy Vary*' photo frame and relaxation zones with flower planting.

In October 2025, a new feature was unveiled at the Svatý Linhart Forest Centre – a life-size sculpture of a deer. The deer will become a new symbol of the place, which is a popular destination for residents and visitors to the city.



MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

New nature walks were added to the town's SmartGuide tours, which enable visitors to explore the Mariánské Lázně through an app on their phone. The nature walks explain the town's status as a climatic spa. The app is available in Czech, German and English and is easy to use, encouraging visitors to travel by foot and experience the natural landscape.

BAD EMS

The energy demand of the spa hotel and the thermal baths is completely covered by solar panels and by energy derived from the thermal water itself. Bad Ems also plans to use thermal water to heat buildings.

BAD KISSINGEN

The 'We're Making it Greener' initiative continued from 2024, with further contributions to ecological urban development. Planting climate-resilient trees and creating perennial beds were some of the actions resulting from the scheme. In spring 2025, over 113 trees were planted in the whole municipality, and additional street trees were planted in autumn.

MONTECATINI TERME

To reduce pollution, traffic restrictions were introduced at the end of the year, limiting certain vehicles during set hours (diesel cars, buses and trucks, mopeds and motorcycles).

VICHY

As part of Vichy's commitment to the '350,000 trees for the Bourbonnais' operation to combat climate change, a large citizen planting action was organised in February. Residents and visitors were invited to join Vichy's gardeners to plant 850 plants of various species spread over designated areas in the Omnisports Park.

CITY OF BATH

A new report revealed that carbon emissions per person have halved over the last 20 years and continue to reduce steadily. Measures have ranged from promoting the use of public transport to supporting the owners of listed buildings to save energy by retrofitting. Bath council also ran drop-in events across the city and encouraged residents, businesses and visitors to contribute to the planning of Bath's public transport.

7.6. The Added Value of the World Heritage Inscription

The value of the inscription across our component towns is not always easy to measure consistently, as it varies according to local conditions. There are variations in the process of collecting tourism data and World Heritage Visitor Centres operate differently. However, the UNESCO World Heritage inscription brings assured benefits in both practicality and reputation.

As part of The GSTE, our spa towns benefit from joint international promotion and shared visibility. The prestige of the UNESCO World Heritage Site tagline is frequently used by local businesses and tourism providers, through spa-themed products, cultural packages and destination marketing. For example, Karlovy Vary has a permanent exhibition about The GSTE in the Castle Tower. Bad Kissingen offers four different day packages, each exploring a different aspect of intangible heritage. By combining history with living traditions, these packages improve accessibility and particularly target day visitors. Larger tourism boards, such as VisitCzechia, also make use of this promotional aspect.

#VisitCzechia

DESTINATIONS | THINGS TO DO | INSPIRATION | TRAVEL INFO | BLOG | B2B

Discover the Famous Spa Towns!!

The highest concentration of healing hot springs in the world, the oldest radon spa on the planet, and the unique [West Bohemian Spa Triangle](#), which together with eight other European spa towns is listed as a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) – all of this can be found in the Karlovy Vary Region!



World Heritage-related festivals and events bring additional visitors. Annual celebrations include the anniversary of our inscription in July and World Heritage Days in September. These increase opportunities for public engagement, extend the tourist season and strengthen the international image of each town. Towns often celebrate each other with themed events, from Baden bei Wien's 'Ball Royale' to Vichy's annual birthday celebrations.

In 2025, the UK National Commission for UNESCO published an article written by the Communications Coordinator, detailing the news articles about the added value of a World Heritage Inscription. This amplified the press coverage we received during the General Assembly in Bad Ems, wherein local media focused on the additional tourism and conservation work generated by the inscription. The regional German news outlet SWR Aktuell reported on increased tourism in Bad Ems, stating the World Heritage inscription "isn't just a prestige gain for the town – since receiving the title, the number of overnight guests in the spa town on the Lahn River has increased by almost ten per cent." Continuing with "The title not only enhanced the city's reputation and image, but also boosted tourism."

Another positive impact of the inscription is the additional monument protection zones which help reinforce the protection mechanisms in each town while preserving the Property's OUV overall. The broader effect of this, at a local level, is the benefit of the backdrop of the heritage city to tourism, reputation and economy.



8. Audit

Great Spa Towns of Europe Association

Financial Audit 2026 – Report

11th February 2026, Baden-Baden

Auditors: Zuzana Stejskalová, Mariánské Lázně & Julia Palotas, Bad Ems

Present: Chiara Ronchini, Eva Zimmermann, Simone Bruck & Andrea Polak (in person); Ruth Malloy, GSTEА Financial Director (online)

I Circumstances

Baden-Baden is responsible for the bookkeeping of the Great Spa Towns of Europe Association (GSTEA).

Account balance on 31st December 2025:

Current account: EUR **46,679.23** (Sparkasse Baden-Baden Gaggenau)

Current account: EUR **2,946.48** (Erste Sparkasse, Austria)

Unused funds totalling from 2024 to the 2025 budget were EUR **14,802.12**

The carry-forward figure to the 2026 budget is EUR **51,549.61**

(The difference of EUR 1,923.90 between the current account balance and the carry-forward figure relates to two payments received from Karlovy Vary and Františkovy Lázně which were recorded in the 2025 accounts but cleared the bank account in January 2026).

The audit of the trust account 'Great Spa Towns of Europe' was performed on 11th February 2026. For the control of the trust account all the bookkeeping, including the bank statements as of the reporting date 11th February 2026, were at the disposal of the auditors. The control was performed on the basis of all the receipts and invoices of the payment transactions. The factual and arithmetical correctness of the receipts and invoices was checked by drawing samples.

All the requests for additional clarification from the auditors, including items and transactions, were provided for review and additional questions were answered. There were no reasons for complaints as to the accuracy and quality of the information provided.

Based on the audit performed, it can be stated that the bookkeeping of the GSTEA Association for the financial year 2025 is clear, complete and without any significant deficiencies.

The total income for the 2025 financial year was EUR 245,807.03 and the total expenditure was EUR 209,059.54.

In the year 2025 all 11 participating Great Spa Towns paid their yearly contributions, as agreed. Total: EUR 195,062.00.

The keeping of a fiscal surveillance list was continued.

The division of the cost for fees and travel/accommodation expenses was continued.

The account management by Secretary General Chiara Ronchini is clear, well-structured and transparent.

Simone Bruck, Eva Zimmermann, Andrea Polak and Chiara Ronchini were available to auditors and answered pertinent questions immediately and completely.

II Remarks

In 2025 it has been possible to open a GSTEA bank account with debit card facilities at the "Erste Sparkasse", Austria. In particular, the Secretary General's ongoing travel expenses can be settled in this way. This minimises transaction costs for foreign transfers. Debit card holder is Chiara Ronchini.

The amount of money on the card must be decided by the Executive Board. The minimum amount at which the card is recharged via the Sparkasse Gaggenau account must also be determined. The Executive Board must also approve the maximum amount for a single transaction.

During the audit, the issue of the absence of a tax identification number (Tax ID) for the Association was discussed. A tax ID has not been assigned to the GSTE by the Austrian tax authority; nevertheless, one has not yet been required. It is recommended to further assess this matter with regard to the legal and tax implications of the Association's activities.

We looked at areas of the budget which were overspent in 2025, as well at areas which were significantly underspent and the probable reasons for this.

There were no significant parts of overspending. The budget of "Marketing: graphics & logo designs" were overspent with EUR 1,985.47. This relates to the development of the GSTE trademark and brand guidelines by WithUs, the cost of which was spread across the 2024 and 2025 financial years – reducing the impact on both budgets.

Another cost code declared as overspending in its balance is the "Contingency" area with EUR 32,951.88. The background to this is the Interspace project and the reimbursement of EUR 44,914.80. This payment is linked to the EU grant of EUR 50,745.00.

It is equally important to acknowledge areas where significant underspending was achieved. These were particularly in the categories of "EUOIPR brand registration", "Press/Comms/Social Media costs", "Website hosting & development" and "Travel, accommodation expenses" as well as "World Heritage Committee participation".

In the areas of "Independent experts, Property Management Plan and Urban Planning Workshop" the whole budget was unused and saved for the upcoming year(s).

III Recommendations

It is recommended to continuously monitor expenditure related to externally funded projects (in particular EU-funded projects) in order to minimise potential temporary pressure on the Association's cash-flow.

Note on the nature of the internal audit:

This internal audit was carried out in accordance with the rules of the Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTE) Association as part of its annual review process. The audit was conducted by elected representatives of the individual components of the Association (i.e. site managers), who do not hold professional qualifications in accounting or financial auditing. Accordingly, the audit results should be understood as an outcome of an internal organisational review, and not as a substitute for an audit performed by a qualified external entity in accordance with applicable legal and professional standards.

This report has been prepared on the basis of the documents and information available at the time of the audit.



Bad Ems, 07.05.2026

Julia Palotas



Mariánské Lázně,

Zuzana Stejskalová



IMAGE CREDITS

Cover page. Fer à cheval Gallery, Vichy. ©Cindy Michaud.

p.3. A father and son drink from a mineral fountain in Mariánské Lázně. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.4. The General Assembly in front of the Grand Haecker Hotel, Bad Ems. ©Thomas Heuchemer, courtesy of Stadt Bad Ems.

p.5. Funicular railway, Spa. ©Thermes de Spa.

p.6. Pump Room, Baden-Baden. ©Torben Beeg.

p.7. Brunnenfontäne hoch, Bad Kissingen. ©Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH. Photo by Julia Gerber.

Spa and Bath House at Royal Crescent Hotel, City of Bath. ©Visit West.

p.8. The GSTE Secretariat in Bad Ems (L-R) Andrea Polak, Chiara Ronchini, Naomi O'Toole. ©Thomas Heuchemer, Stadt Bad Ems.

The GSTE Executive Board (L-R) Yves-Jean Bignon, Oliver Krügel, Lenka Průšová, Ruth Malloy.

p.9. Handing over the baton for the Chair of the IGC. (L-R) Ingrid Boxus, Ruth Pröckl. World Heritage Committee, Paris. ©SPW-AWaP - V. Rocher.

p.10. Historic postcard of the Thermalstrandbad in Baden bei Wien, 1926. ©Stadtarchiv Baden.

p.11. Speakers at the International Congress on Thermal Tourism, Budapest. (L-R) Chiara Ronchini, Anke Matthys, Barbara Van der Wee, Tamás Fejérdy. ©Chiara Ronchini.

The GSTE Youth Forum's virtual presentation at the International Congress on Thermal Tourism, Budapest. ©Chiara Ronchini.

Chiara Ronchini speaking at the International Congress on Thermal Tourism, Budapest. ©Chiara Ronchini.

p.12. The 47th World Heritage Committee meeting, Paris. ©Chiara Ronchini. Panel speakers at the 'We Are Site Managers' Symposium, Indonesia.

Association des Biens Français Patrimoine Mondiale, Vichy. (L-R) Anke Matthys, Gilles Soubigou, Chiara Ronchini, Yves-Jean Bignon. ©ABFPM.

p.13. Tony Crouch speaking at The Taihe Forum, Beijing. Image courtesy of Tony Crouch.

Chiara Ronchini speaking at the China University of Technology, Taipei. ©Chiara Ronchini.

Nigerian delegation group photo in Bad Ems. Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

p.14. Conservation work in Baden bei Wien. ©Alexandra Harrer.

p.15. Terme Tettuccio, Montecatini Terme. Image courtesy of the Municipality of Montecatini Terme.

p.16. Allegorical statue on the Isabella Promenade, Františkovy Lázně.

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p.17. Bad Kissingen. ©Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH. Photo by Daniel Scheublein.

p.18. Climate Vulnerability Index workshop, Baden bei Wien. ©Alexandra Harrer.

p.19. Haus vier Turme, Bad Ems. Image courtesy of Stadt Bad Ems.

Pedestrians photograph the dancing fountains in the Parc des Sources, Vichy. ©Ville de Vichy.

p.20. Conservation work in Baden bei Wien. ©Alexandra Harrer.

Tram shelter, Spa. ©Geneviève Legay.

Exterior of the train station in Františkovy Lázně. Image courtesy of Ondřej Míka.

p.21. Conservation work on Villa Lil, Mariánské Lázně. Image courtesy of Zuzana Stejskalová.

Renderings of the future museum below the hospital spring pavilion, Vichy. Images courtesy of Anke Matthys.

p.22. New roof on the Springtower, Bad Ems. Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

Brenners Park Hotel, Baden-Baden. Image courtesy of Eva Zimmermann.

Tournament building, Bad Kissingen. ©Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH.

p.23. Restoration inside the Palazzina Regia. Image courtesy of the municipality of Montecatini Terme.

Beckford's Tower in the landscape surrounding the City of Bath. ©Casper Farrell. Image courtesy of Bath Preservation Trust.

p.24. Heritage Minister. Image courtesy of Anne Pirard.

Map of Vichy with landscape masterplan. Image courtesy of Anke Matthys.

p.25. Platform hall Sanierung. Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

Neues Schloss, Baden-Baden. Image courtesy of Eva Zimmermann.

Cleveland Pools, City of Bath. ©Bath North East Somerset Council.

p.26. Workshop during the General Assembly, Bad Ems. ©Thomas Heuchemer, courtesy of Stadt Bad Ems.

p.27. Open Monument Day, Bad Ems. Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

The Pump Room, City of Bath. ©Visit West.

p.28. Anne Pirard with a group for the Preserving Legacies programme, Tunisia. ©Anne Pirard.

Chiara Ronchini at a Preserving Legacies workshop, Taipei. ©Chiara Ronchini.

p.29. Visioning Exercises and Impact Assessment workshops during the General Assembly, Bad Ems. ©Thomas Heuchemer, courtesy of Stadt Bad Ems.

p.30. Zuzana Stejskalová being interviewed by a film crew at the General Assembly in Mariánské Lázně. ©Michael Illek.

p.31-p.32. A compilation of screenshots of news articles.

p.33. Screenshots of social media posts.

p.34. Františkovy Lázně. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.35. A compilation of images of Františkovy Lázně, Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.36. Communities engaging in World Heritage Day events, Baden-Baden. Image courtesy of Eva Zimmermann.

p.37. An artisan crafting in glass, Karlovy Vary. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.38-p.39. (Top) young people engaging with INTERSPACE activities, Baden bei Wien ©Alexandra Harrer. (Bottom) Further INTERSPACE activities, Mariánské Lázně. ©Michael Illek.

p.40. (top) Historic image of Frauenbad in 1910, Baden bei Wien. ©Stadtarchiv Baden.

(bottom) historic image of the Pouhon Pierre-le-Grand, jardin d'hiver, Spa. ©Musée de la Ville d'eaux - Spa.

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Exhibition on the GSTE during UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Paris. ©SPW-AWaP - V. Rocher.

Women's Revolt parade, Františkovy Lázně. ©Václava Simeonová.

p.42. Planting Trees for Peace ceremony, Mariánské Lázně. ©Michael Illek. Pastille celebrations, Vichy. ©Ville de Vichy.

Open monument day, Bad Ems. ©wlochopulos.

p.43. World Heritage Day in the Upper Saltworks, Bad Kissingen.

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Concert for anniversary, Montecatini Terme. Image courtesy of Rafaela Verdicchio.

People in Jane Austen costumes in The Roman Baths, City of Bath. ©Visit West.

p.44. Witty Wonder Benches, Baden-Baden. Images courtesy of Eva Zimmermann.

p.45. Great Spa Times newspaper, Mariánské Lázně. Image courtesy of Zuzana Stejskalová.

Group photo of the Annual Meeting of the Association of French World Heritage Sites, Vichy. Image courtesy of Anke Matthys.

p.46. City2City Exchange, Bad Ems. Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

Postcards and photos used at the Balmoral Children's Festival, Bad Ems.

Image courtesy of Julia Palotas.

p.47. Open Monument Day, Bad Kissingen. ©Konstantin Winter.

New book published, Montecatini Terme. Image courtesy of Rafaela Verdicchio.

The Van with a Plan campaign, City of Bath. Image courtesy of Tony Crouch.

p.48. Schoolchildren looking at spring for World Heritage Day, Baden bei Wien. ©kollerics.

p.49. Presentation by young people from the Regensburg Youth Heritage Workshop. ©Konstantin Winter.

p.50. Tamerici Garden, Montecatini Terme. Image courtesy of the Municipality of Montecatini Terme.

p.51. Illustration of the GSTE structure. Graphic courtesy of Chiara Ronchini.

p.54. A tourist looks at drinking cups in Karlovy Vary. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.55. Historic postcard, Vichy. ©Ville de Vichy.

p.56. (Top) screenshot of feature article on Rail Europe's website. (Bottom) screenshot of social media post from Rail Europe.

p.57. Tourists pose in front of geyser in Karlovy Vary. ©Jordan Banks, JRNY.

p.58. (Top) Mírové náměstí (Peace Square), Mariánské Lázně. Image courtesy of Zuzana Stejskalová.

(Bottom) New signage in Vichy. Images courtesy of Anke Matthys.

p.59. Funicular railway, Montecatini Terme. Image courtesy of the Municipality of Montecatini Terme.

p.60. Deer sculpture, Karlovy Vary. Image courtesy of the Municipality of Karlovy Vary.

p.62. (L-R) Screenshot of Visit Czechia website. Birthday celebrations to honour Karlovy Vary in July, Vichy. ©Ville de Vichy.

p.63. Frauenbad. Flora and Zephir. Baden bei Wien. Joseph Klieber 2014. ©Hornýik.

p.66. Villa Vénitienne, Vichy. ©Xavier Thomas.

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SPA

BAD KISSINGEN

FRANTIŠKOVY
LÁZNĚ

BAD EMS

KARLOVY VARY

BADEN BEI WIEN

MARIÁNSKÉ
LÁZNĚ

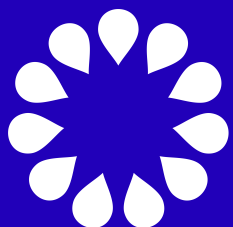
BADEN-BADEN

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