

Annual Review

2024



GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe



unesco

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



GREAT SPA TOWNS *of Europe*

CONTENTS

Welcome	p.04
1. Credibility	p. 08
2. Conservation	p. 12
3. Capacity Building	p. 20
4. Communications	p. 23
5. Communities	p. 25
6. Resources	p. 38
7. Tourism	p. 43
8. Annexe	p. 51

THE GREAT SPA TOWNS OF EUROPE ASSOCIATION

Registered Office
Stadtgemeinde Baden,
Hauptplatz 1,
A-2500 Baden bei Wien
Austria

Registration Number (ZVR-Zahl): 1042405618
Date of Registration: 30th August, 2022

Email: comms@greatspatownsofeurope.eu
Web: www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stefan Szirucsek
Chiara Ronchini
Mayors, Lord Mayors and Site Managers of
The Great Spa Towns of Europe

Unless otherwise stated, photographs have been taken by the The Great Spa Towns of Europe team or provided by members. All image credits are noted on p.55.

A woman wearing a black hat and sunglasses is smiling and holding a sign and a flag. The sign is white with blue text. The flag is blue and white. There are white decorative lines at the bottom of the image.

GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe

An Exciting Year in Review

The Great Spa Towns of Europe had an exciting and productive year in 2024, taking significant steps to fulfill more of the aims in its World Heritage Management Plan.

The Secretary General had several opportunities to share best practice of our serial transnational site with others, including a presentation at the World Heritage Committee in Delhi in July.

The GSTE's Site Managers were also busy improving their skills and knowledge with the Urban Planning workshops.

By far, the biggest project and highlight of the year was INTERSPACE, mainly funded by the European Union. One hundred young people travelled from Czechia, France and Germany to attend the General

Assembly in Baden bei Wien, Austria.

We were thrilled that the young people took part in the project with such enthusiasm and confidence, sharing their thoughts and experiences of living in one of The Great Spa Towns of Europe with Mayors and Site Managers alike. Their ideas and perspectives on World Heritage Sites informed a group presentation, delivered at the General Assembly, and online with their social media takeover. We are looking forward to seeing them again in Mariánské Lázně in the spring of 2025!

We hope you enjoy this report of our activities in 2024.





Eleven towns. Seven countries. *One World Heritage Site.*

The Great Spa Towns of Europe is a serial transnational World Heritage Site, comprised of eleven component sites across seven countries. These sites are either complete spa towns or spa quarters of famous historic thermal spa towns and cities. Together, they comprise one 'property'.

The site 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.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe developed around natural mineral springs, which were the catalyst for innovative spa towns. Unique spa architecture and urban topography developed in accordance with these natural mineral springs, in a style with no earlier parallel. The spa towns were nestled in therapeutic and recreational landscapes, used for 'taking the cure' as well as for social functions. These fashionable resorts of health, leisure and sociability were early pioneers of modern tourism.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe 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.

While the structural and spatial layouts of each town vary with local geographical conditions and constraints, the towns share common elements:

- Mineral springs and sources of curative mineral water
- Spa urban typology
- Spa infrastructure
- Spa architecture
- Therapeutic Spa Landscape
- Intangible values, such as internationalism, cultural coexistence and the interchange of ideas and innovations
- Continuing spa function

The eleven towns not only represent the heyday of the 'European spa phenomenon' of the 18th and 19th centuries, but keep this rich cultural tradition alive.

Who We Are

LEADERSHIP

Stefan Szirucsek

Chair of the Board
Elected June 2022

Mayor of Baden bei Wien

Chiara Ronchini

Secretary General
Since February 2023

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE (IGC)

The Intergovernmental Committee draws its membership from all seven States Parties of The Great Spa Towns of Europe. It acts as an advisory panel and meets once per year at the Autumn General Assembly, with some members in person and some online. Since March 2023, the group has been chaired by the State Representative for Austria, Ruth Pröckl.

The IGC consists of: Ingrid Boxus, Lada Pekárková, Gilles Soubigou, Friederike Hansell, Adele Cesi, Alexandra Warr, Nadine Hoffman, Dr. Denise Beilharz and Francesca Gottardo.

BOARD AND EXECUTIVE BOARD

The elected representatives of the eleven towns comprise the Board, also known as the General Assembly. The four Executive Board Members are: Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová, Mayor of Karlovy Vary, Dr. Dirk Vogel, Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen, Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien, Sophie Delettire, Mayor of Spa.

Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien, chairs the Board and the Executive Board. After many years, Sophie Delettire left the group at the end of 2024, as she did not run for office in Spa's autumn elections.

SITE MANAGERS GROUP

The Site Managers Group meets online regularly to discuss site management issues, monitoring, preservation and best practice. Ondřej Míka, Site Manager in Františkovy Lázně, took over the chairmanship from Lucie Vodenková in April 2024. The group welcomed Jan Charvát, the new Site Manager for Karlovy Vary, in 2024, and said farewell to Lisa Poetschi and Smriti Pant in Baden-Baden.

The group now consists of: Alexandra Harrer, Rafaela Verdicchio, Peter Weidisch, Hans Hornyik, Anne Pirard, Ondřej Míka, Jan Charvát, Zuzana Stejskalová, Anke Matthys, Julia Palotas, Anna Maria Boll, Ginevra Gentili and Tony Crouch.



Property Management Plan

The Action Plan, within the Property Management Plan, was developed in 2016 and delivered to UNESCO as part of the nomination process. A great deal has changed since then, including the inscription of the site. As a result, the Secretariat, the Board, the Site Managers and the Tourism Officers Group have worked on updating the Property Management Plan to take The Great Spa Towns of Europe towards 2030.

The original framework was built to allow the overarching objectives to inform actions. However, during 2023, The GSTE shifted to an outcome-based' framework, asking the question 'What is the change we want to make?'

This leads to a guiding framework of aims, outcomes, Actions and core pillars; key principles which underpin all the work of The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association. Following the comprehensive review of the Action Plan, further actions have included developing a traffic light system for a progress tracker, refreshing the framework for prioritisation and action implementation.

KARLOVY VARY
Czechia





1. Credibility

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNĚ
Czechia



1.1. Presentations

I.1.1. ITB BERLIN

The GSTE was represented at ITB Berlin in March 2024 in the Medical and Health Pavilion. The GSTE was one of the partners of the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) and exhibited, alongside Baden bei Wien and other EHTTA members.

The combined stand had plenty to offer, including a 'spa cinema', mud treatments and refreshing mineral waters. Stefan Szirucsek, the Chair of the Board, Chiara Ronchini, the Secretary General of The GSTE, and Klaus Lorenz, Chair of the Tourism Officers Group, gave several presentations on several different stages across ITB, promoting The Great Spa Towns of Europe.

I.1.2. ASSOCIATION DE GÉOGRAPHES FRANÇAIS AT SORBONNE UNIVERSITY

On 7th December, the Site Manager of Spa, Anne Pirard gave a talk in Paris, for a presentation at the meeting of the Association de Géographes Français at Sorbonne University. The presentation was titled 'Europe's "Great Water Cities": heritage at the heart of their city plans. The example of Spa.'

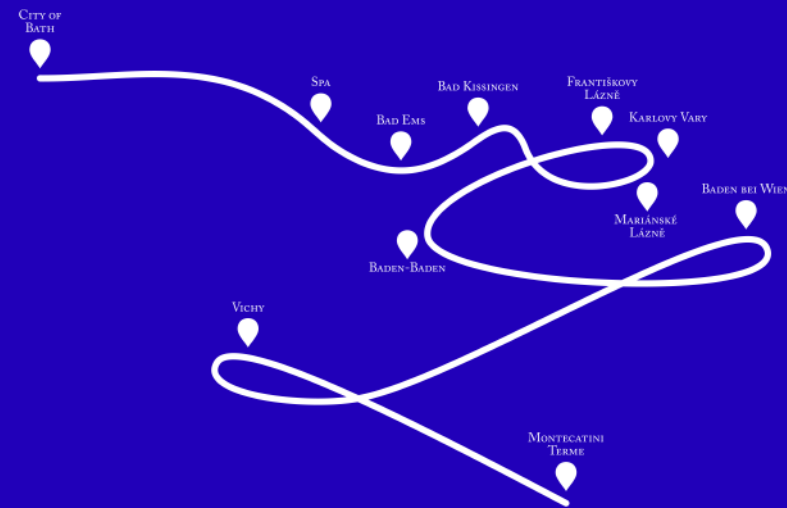
I.1.3. PRESENTING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Secretary General gave an online talk for 'Impact assessment in the context of World Heritage – process and practice', a webinar in partnership with l'Association des Biens Français du Patrimoine Mondial and ICCROM.

Chiara talked about The GSTE's work on impact assessments and establishing an early warning mechanism for The GSTE to a francophone audience.

I.1.4. CAPACITY-BUILDING WITH INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

In May 2024, the Secretary General was invited to Rome to participate in the ICCROM-IUCN World Heritage Leadership programme's international training of trainers' workshop on Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context. Held at ICCROM Headquarters from 6th-9th May, this workshop brought together seventeen heritage professionals from fifteen countries to enhance their skills in impact assessment for World Heritage sites. The valuable knowledge gained at the workshop was used to conduct impact assessment workshops for all The GSTE Site Managers.



I.I.5. 46TH ICCROM INDIA

Secretary General Chiara Ronchini attended the 46th World Heritage Committee in Delhi in July, where she was present to hear the Committee's approval of minor changes to The GSTE's boundaries.

Chiara was also invited by ICCROM to present the new GSTE shared monitoring system at an event organised by the ICCROM World Heritage Leadership Programme Team. Chiara demonstrated how the 'Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0 (EoH 2.0)' had been used to set up a joint monitoring system. While still a work in progress, it was well-received and may serve as a model for other serial transnational sites.

I.I.6. SHARING BEST PRACTICE IN SIENA

In October, the Secretary General took part in a conference in Siena about 'Reinventing the (In)visible Cities' as part of a special session by the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP). The session covered the issues of overtourism in World Heritage Sites. The aim of the congress was to "explore how smart planning can create cities that work for all communities, leaving no one behind".

Chiara's participation was an opportunity to platform The Great Spa Towns of Europe and share its approach to preventing overtourism, using examples of responsible tourism in the towns. It was also the perfect time to talk about The GSTE's participatory approach with local communities, as well as the INTERSPACE Project, bringing young people – the future custodians of The GSTE – into conversations about its governance.

I.I.7. ICCROM URBAN HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

The Secretary General also represented The GSTE at the UH4SD Workshop in October, an ICCROM initiative hosted by the World Heritage City of Urbino with support from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). Chiara shared insights on managing a complex serial transnational World Heritage site – particularly heritage preservation, monitoring and climate action.

The two-day workshop brought together representatives from urban heritage sites across Europe, along with scientists and researchers, to discuss critical challenges in terms of climate change adaptation and disaster risk preparedness.



1.2. Collaborations

1.2.1. EHTTA

The European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) continued to be an important partner for The Great Spa Towns of Europe in 2024.

In November 2023, EHTTA elected a new President, Riccardo Mortandello, Mayor of the Italian town of Montegrotto Terme, near Venice. The event at ITB Berlin in March was the perfect opportunity for The GSTE Chair, Stefan Szirucsek, to meet with Mr Mortandello. Through developing a formal Memorandum of Understanding, they are ensuring that the historic close co-operation between the two organisations continues in the future.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe was delighted to be invited to EHTTA's 15th anniversary celebrations at their Autumn General Assembly in Spa, Belgium.

Shortly afterwards, several of The GSTE's Members took part in EHTTA's landmark visit to Saratoga Springs, where they were part of the International Spa Heritage Festival and Conference. This included an exhibition, a B-2-B workshop promoting Europe's Thermal Spa Towns to the North America market and the launch of the Bathrobe Addicts in the USA.

1.2.2. TOURISM MANIFESTO

In 2024, The Great Spa Towns of Europe joined the Tourism Manifesto. This alliance of over 70 European public and private organisations encompasses the whole tourism value chain and beyond. The Tourism Alliance's main purpose is to call on the European Union for action on key policy priorities for the sector.





2. Conservation



2.1. State of Conservation Report: *A Key Milestone*

A major achievement was the submission of our State of Conservation Report as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

The report represents a significant milestone in demonstrating the consolidation and strengthening work we have undertaken to protect The Great Spa Towns of Europe since inscription. We look forward to the Advisory Bodies' review of our continued commitment to safeguarding this extraordinary World Heritage property, and to receiving the official response at the 2025 World Heritage Committee session in Paris.

This accomplishment would not have been possible

without the comprehensive information provided by each town, the compilation work by our Secretary General, the excellent coordination of the joint submission process by Ambassador Regina Figl and the IGC Chair Ruth Pröckl, and the prompt support from all States Parties delegations and IGC members.

Bad Ems



2.2. Conservation in Action

BADEN BEI WIEN

The completion of Baden's magnificent Undinebrunnen was celebrated with great fanfare on 21st September. Many guests joined the ceremony, where they were treated to the spectacle of the impressive revival of the water feature, while the orchestra played in the park.

The Undinebrunnen is Baden's third important historic monument to be restored, following the successful renovations of the Sommerarena and Musikpavilion.

KARLOVY VARY

Karlovy Vary launched a long-awaited revitalisation of the Charles IV Park, a green area near the recently restored Imperial Spa. The project includes the renewal of greenery, the planting of new trees, reconstruction of the path network, installation of new street furniture and modern lighting, as well as a new bus stop. The first phase of the renovation is expected to be completed by May 2025.

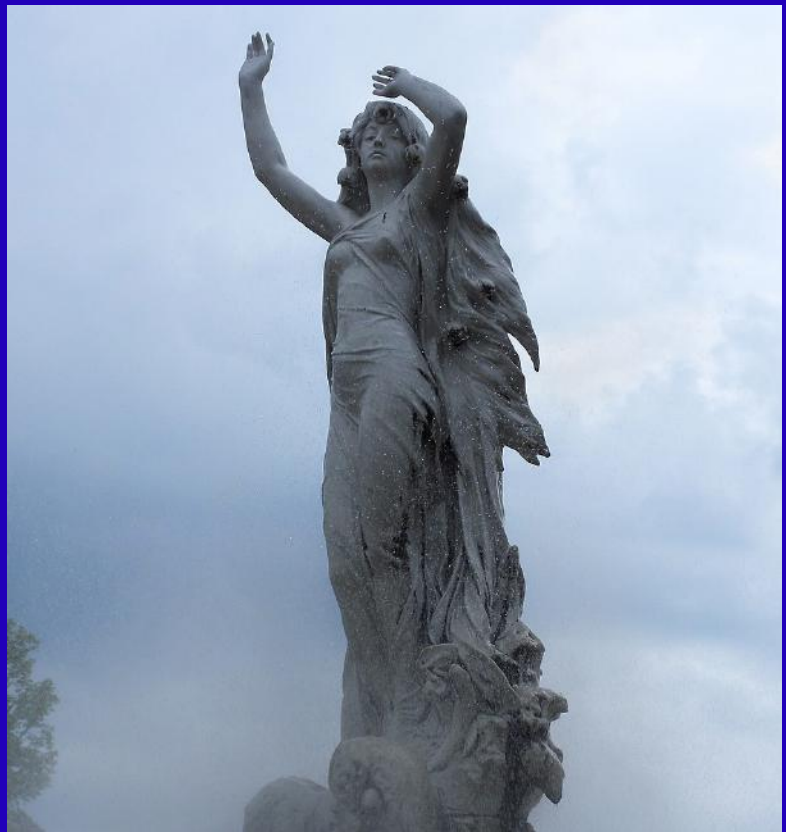
MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

The privately owned, heritage-listed Kavkaz (Wiemar spa house) received a new façade. Renovations also began at the Swissôtel Mariánské Lázně Resort & SPA. The town repaired several historic fountains and the meteorological column in the colonnade park.

VICHY

Eleven new fountains will soon grace the Palais des Congrès-Opéra forecourt, symbolising the connections between The Great Spa Towns of Europe. Stone-laying continues on the Simone Veil forecourt; open forecourt will allow the public to get up close and wander around the fountains.

The restoration of the Fer à Cheval galleries and central bandstand progresses, with repairs to the roof, joinery, painting, locks, parquet flooring and the lead stripped away. Completion is expected in March 2025, to welcome musicians and dancers once again.



VICHY

The 160-year old sculpture of the Goddess of the Waters, an iconic work by the sculptor Carrier-Belleuse, was taken down last spring for restoration. It has now found a new home, resting on the new building of the Samoa extension and will be further enhanced with illumination at night.

At Source de l'Hôpital, the pavilion's comprehensive refurbishment includes a new refreshment bar. The façade will regain its original two-tone colour scheme, alongside a new, innovative mirror visual effect.

Lead removal continues meticulously across the 700m of promenoir galleries — one of the architectural gems of the Parc des Sources — including the Auvent de la Source Mesdames, the Exèdre de la Source du Parc and the Grande Arche.

The renovation at the Parc des Sources continues its history of constantly evolving since 1630, breathing new life into the wildly romantic park, inherited from the Age of Enlightenment. The project is introducing climate-appropriate plant species and enhanced biodiversity, rediscovering the effects of a dense forest and evoking the arches, whilst maintaining the historic central axis between Hall des Sources and Palais des Congrès-Opéra.



BAD EMS

The spring tower on the Lahn in Bad Ems is dilapidated and is undergoing extensive renovation. Work began in summer 2024 to repair its structural problems and replace the roof truss. The spire was lifted off and the old water tanks were removed. The thermal water is intended to be used to generate energy in the future.

The restoration work on the listed spring tower in Bad Ems is scheduled for completion in autumn 2025.



BADEN-BADEN

The restoration and modernisation of Brenners Park-Hotel & Spa emphasised both architectural conservation and energy efficiency.

Key measures included the preservation of original masonry, the careful restoration of historic staircases and the implementation of an advanced heating system to reduce environmental impact. The hotel is set to reopen in June 2025.

A significant preservation effort was also completed at the Roman Bath Ruins, where a new climate-control glass partition was installed in December.

This specialised heated glass wall separates the exhibition area from the adjacent workspace, helping to maintain the necessary humidity levels for the ancient structures while preventing condensation damage.

BAD KISSINGEN

The historic Turniergebäude featured in an unusual fundraising campaign in 2024. A new product line with several unique gifts and decorations were on sale in the tourism information centre and museums to fund the restoration, which at the time of the launch needed one million Euros. Three exclusive items were on offer; a keychain with a silhouette of the building, a Lichtle (a foldable paper lantern) and a Christmas bauble. All profits went to fund the renovation, meaning customers could actively support the restoration of this important cultural monument in Bad Kissingen, as well as its preservation for future social and cultural events.

The products support the fundraising campaign of the German Foundation for Monument Protection and the city of Bad Kissingen, which has run since early 2024 to raise awareness and funds on a national scale. The Turniergebäude is due to reopen in April 2025.

CITY OF BATH

Several otter sightings have been made on the River Avon in Bath during 2024. Footage captured across Bath shows the creatures swimming through the waterways and exploring the river banks, just metres from some of the city's iconic sites.

Whilst the return of these animals is not the direct consequence of a specific re-introduction project, it is seen as a positive indication of the quality of both the water and fish — the otters' main food source.



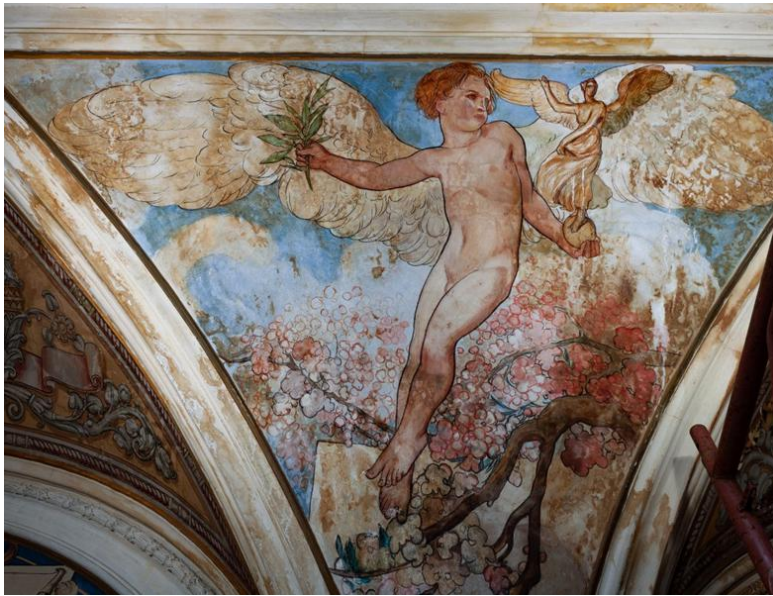
CITY OF BATH

The University of Bath and Bath and North East Somerset Council have collaborated on an 18-month pilot scheme to establish an Architect in Residence position, funded by a £60,000 private donation. Renowned architect Bob Allies was appointed in September 2024 to promote design excellence through new guidance, advice and discussion to help preserve and enhance the World Heritage Site.

As founding members of the City of Bath World Heritage Site Steering Group, the University demonstrates the direct role academic institutions can play in World Heritage conservation.

MONTECATINI TERME

Montecatini Terme continues to work on the restoration of the wall paintings and stucco in the central staircase of the Municipality building, which dates back to 1920. The restoration work has been assigned to students at the Palazzo Spinelli Institute for Art and Restoration, located in Florence.



2.3. Conservation Challenges

Conservation challenges in The Great Spa Towns of Europe include hazard events and climate-related risks, which have intensified due to ongoing climate change. Additional complexities arise from administrative frameworks, particularly the divergent planning systems specific to each national context.

From 2025 onwards, The Great Spa Towns of Europe will be prioritising disaster risk preparedness and reduction as a shared management priority, strengthening resilience across all component sites.

BADEN BEI WIEN

Baden bei Wien was flooded in mid-September as a result of huge floods which impacted central Europe at the end of the summer. The high waters overwhelmed the river which runs through the town, as pictured close to the Thermalstrandbad.



MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

Rudolf's Spring remains inaccessible, while numerous buildings remain vacant across the town. Mariánské Lázně introduced a higher property tax coefficient for long-term unused properties and undeveloped plots.



KARLOVY VARY

For the past three years, Karlovy Vary had neither a steering group nor a working group dedicated to the regeneration of its heritage reservation. As both are integral parts of the Local Management Plan, their absence made it difficult to coordinate efforts effectively.

The new steering group has improved communication and collaboration across stakeholders. Meanwhile, the working group focuses on creating a prioritised list of restoration projects and securing funding from the city, the Karlovy Vary Region and the Ministry of Culture.



BAD EMS

The Haus Vier Türme in Bad Ems caught ablaze in the early hours one morning in July 2024. One hundred and fifty firefighters were needed to extinguish the fire.

The building was undergoing renovation at the time, and was due to be reopened as a hotel, having been empty for many years. The baroque building dates back to the 17th century, and was formerly the unofficial summer residence of Russian Tsar Alexander II. The historic roof was completely destroyed in the blaze.



BADEN-BADEN

The Neues Schloss in Baden-Baden is one of the city's most significant yet challenging heritage sites. While restoration efforts have been slow, progress is still being made. Structural assessments have continued and initial maintenance measures, such as repairing drainage systems, have been completed. Discussions with the property owner are ongoing, with local authorities emphasising the need for long-term preservation. Planned work for 2025 includes improving access roads and stabilising the ramp leading to the castle.

Further conservation efforts are planned at the Roman Bath Ruins, particularly the restoration of the Hypocaust heating system, which has suffered both from past repair methods and the long-term effects of thermal water. Additionally, the outdated halogen lighting system needs to be replaced, as the heat generated by these lamps poses a risk to the delicate historic structures.



CITY OF BATH

The Cleveland Pools in Bath, which first opened in 1817, are believed to be the oldest public swimming pool in the UK. Many delegates visited during the General Assembly in Bath in March 2023. The Pools reopened to the public that year, following an extensive refurbishment project.

Although the site was known to flood and the complex was designed to withstand this, the frequency of consecutive flood events in 2023 and 2024 were greater than expected and caused the failure of key mechanical equipment. The pools remain closed whilst trustees continue to investigate sources of funding. Paul Simons, former Secretary General of The Great Spa Towns of Europe, has remained Chair of the Cleveland Pools Trust and is helping the trust find a path back to re-opening.





3. Capacity Building

BADEN BEI WIEN
Ästria



3.1. Building Capacity Through Practical Innovations

The State of Conservation Report highlighted several innovative initiatives that strengthen our management approach.

These initiatives are building essential capacity across our property and laying the groundwork for a more wide-ranging impact assessment workshop planned for 2025. Through these collaborative efforts, we are ensuring that our management systems evolve to meet the highest standards of World Heritage stewardship.

3.1.1. URBAN PLANNING WORKSHOP

The workshop 'World Heritage and pressures: Assessing Potential Impacts on our Property' took place in Bad Kissingen in April 2024. This helped define an early warning mechanism to identify issues through regular monitoring, preventing potential problems from escalating.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe's Site Managers were joined by their planning and urban design colleagues in the magnificent Rossini Saal in Bad Kissingen for this workshop in April — the fifth in an ongoing series of themed workshops. Issues of climate change, urban development and monitoring were among the subjects covered during several days of discussions and group working.

There were several site visits during the workshop, including an examination of Bad Kissingen's flood defence systems and the restoration and repurposing of the former Luitpold Baths.





3.1.2. DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED MONITORING SYSTEM

This shared monitoring system will establish an effective way to protect the state of conservation and identify emerging trends across the property. The Great Spa Towns of Europe's Secretary General presented this at the 46th World Heritage Committee session in Delhi, by invitation of ICCROM.

While still a work in progress, the iterative and participatory approach used to establish this joint, transnational monitoring system was well-received and may serve as a model for other serial transnational sites. The Site Managers and the Secretary General will test this in 2025.

3.1.3. IMPACT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

Delivered by the Secretary General to Site Managers, this training included practical exercises on Values and Attributes led by Alexandra Harrer (Baden bei Wien Site Manager) and methodology from Advisory Bodies; 'Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context (2022)'.

A particularly valuable contribution came from Anders Karlsson, Site Manager of the Vega Archipelago World Heritage Site, who shared their impact assessment journey.



4. Communications

Bad Kissingen
Germany



4.1. PRESS AND MEDIA

Press conferences are a regular feature of General Assemblies and result in good local coverage for The Great Spa Towns of Europe. The towns themselves also produce good local press and media coverage through their activities, particularly the formal celebrations of World Heritage in the summer months.

4.2. ITB BERLIN

The GSTE was represented at ITB Berlin 2024 as a partner on the EHTTA stand in the Medical and Health Pavilion, alongside Baden bei Wien and other EHTTA members.

The stand had plenty to offer, including a 'spa cinema', mud treatments and refreshing mineral waters.

The Chair and Secretary General also made several presentations at the show to promote The Great Spa Towns of Europe.

4.3. GLOBETROTTER TV

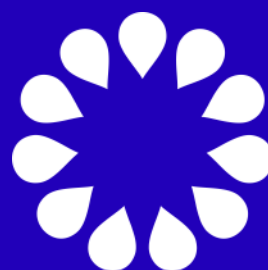
The second series of Globetrotter TV's 'Amazing Spa Towns of Europe' aired in the summer of 2024 and features Bad Kissingen.

Presenter Ellen Coughlan met Site Manager Anna Maria Boll at the salt graduation tower — a unique feature among The Great Spa Towns of Europe — which allows visitors to breathe salt air without visiting the seaside.

4.4. LOGO DEVELOPMENT

During 2024, The Great Spa Towns of Europe embraced a new logo and brand refresh, developed by Matthew Croft at WithUs Studio in Bath. The new logo device includes the original wordmark, as well as a circle of eleven versatile location pins or water drops, representing the 11 towns.

The branding refresh gives The GSTE a cleaner, more streamlined look, reflecting its status as a World Heritage Site. In September 2024, the logo received EU trademark protection.



**GREAT
SPA TOWNS**
of Europe



5. Communities

GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe

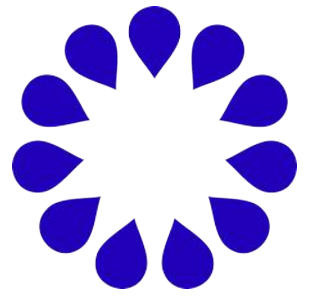
GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe



VICHY
France



5.1. Community Involvement in our World Heritage Site



Celebration of The Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Site can involve a variety of citizens, and takes place at different times of year in the different towns. Vichy celebrates the inscription anniversary every year in July, inviting different towns to celebrate with them. In 2024, they invited Baden-Baden to participate.

Bad Kissingen, and other German towns, celebrate World Heritage on the first weekend in June, while others take the ICOMOS International Day for Monuments and Sites on 18th April as the date for celebration and education.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe work together on many different levels, both formal and informal. 2024 was a unique year, as it saw a landmark new project, INTERSPACE – the first ever simultaneous exchange of young people from multiple towns.

This exciting new project, primarily funded by the European Union, aimed to bring young people directly into the governance of The Great Spa Towns of Europe. In 2024, this was a great success! We want to extend our sincere thanks to all the pupils, teachers, facilitators, funders, Site Managers and The Great Spa Towns of Europe colleagues, whose hard work and commitment helped make INTERSPACE such a success.



5.2. INTERSPACE

In November, The GSTE welcomed one hundred young people to Baden bei Wien to take part in the INTERSPACE Youth Exchange Project.

Three intense and productive days saw the cohort taking part in a variety of activities, facilitated by co-design specialists, Socionaut, as well as their teachers and The GSTE Site Managers.

The pupils, aged 12-14 years, travelled from Františkovy Lázně, Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně, Vichy and Bad Kissingen to join local school children in Baden bei Wien.

The INTERSPACE project revolutionises youth participation in World Heritage management by directly engaging young people in shaping the future of their heritage. Innovative co-design workshops connect them to heritage and create meaningful dialogue between young citizens and decision-makers.

The project's impact extends beyond traditional heritage education; participants actively contributed to

The Great Spa Towns of Europe's General Assembly, took over its social media channels and developed proposals for a permanent Youth Forum.

This unprecedented level of youth participation in World Heritage governance has transformed both the young people's understanding of their heritage and the Site Managers' approach to community engagement.

Before the event, pairs of schools had the opportunity to meet online, where pupils took part in fun activities to discover how they view their home towns and how they understand the concept of World Heritage.



DAY ONE

All the students from INTERSPACE gathered at the BG/BRG Biondegasse school, where principal Birgitta Stieglitz-Hofer extended a warm welcome.

The students used QR codes on their mobile devices to participate in quizzes and interactive sessions. They learned about Baden bei Wien and its cultural heritage through brief presentations by Alexandra Harrer, the World Heritage Site Manager of the town, and Chiara Ronchini, the Secretary General of The GSTE.

The opening remarks shed light on the renowned spa guest Ludwig van Beethoven, who was a frequent visitor to Baden bei Wien. Councillor Hans Hornyk provided an overview of the eminent composer and shared the information that Beethoven composed a significant portion of his renowned 9th Symphony in Baden bei Wien exactly 200 years ago, including the 'Ode to Joy'.

The school orchestra delivered a performance of this celebrated melody, then the pupils were taken to a historic villa to enjoy a concert by the renowned father-son duo, Wolfgang Capek and Municipal

Council Member Michael Capek.

The group then embarked on a scavenger hunt around the town, unravelling clues and exploring the spa town. Later that evening, at the youth center, all participants received a certificate. This provided an opportunity for the pupils to unwind, socialise, and build informal connections while sharing activities such as playing pool and having dinner.

The INTERSPACE initiative posed several challenges, notably the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the young participants, who collectively spoke at least four different languages. The initial socialisation time on the first day fostered familiarity among the students before they commenced collaborative work.



DAY TWO

The second day of the INTERSPACE project proved to be the most demanding, yet it was effectively guided by the co-design experts Socionaut.

All the students collaborated on generating content and posts for a social media takeover of The Great Spa Towns of Europe's accounts.

Additionally, the group prepared their presentation for the upcoming General Assembly. During this time, the Mayor of Baden bei Wien and Chair of The Great Spa Towns of Europe, Stefan Szirucsek, paid a visit to the group, extending a warm welcome to the town and encouraging the young participants in their work.

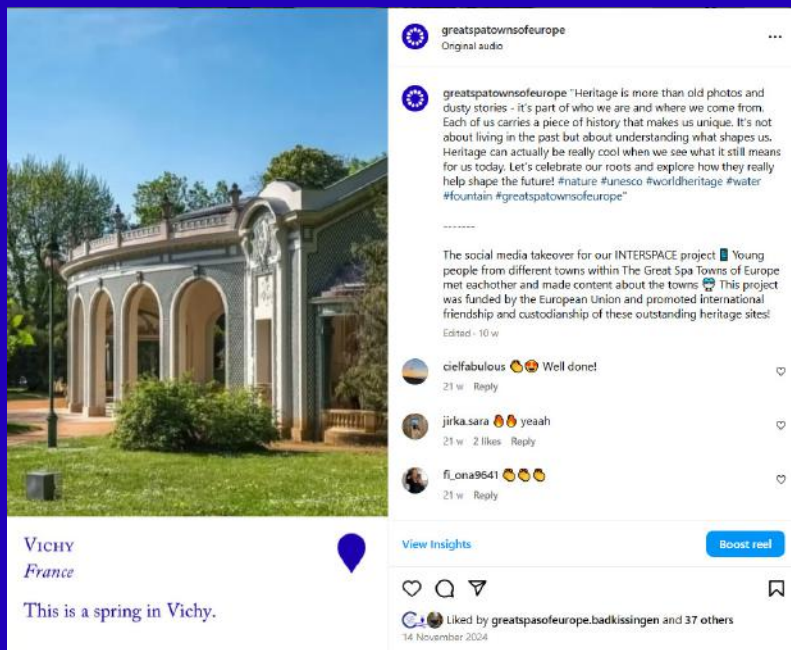


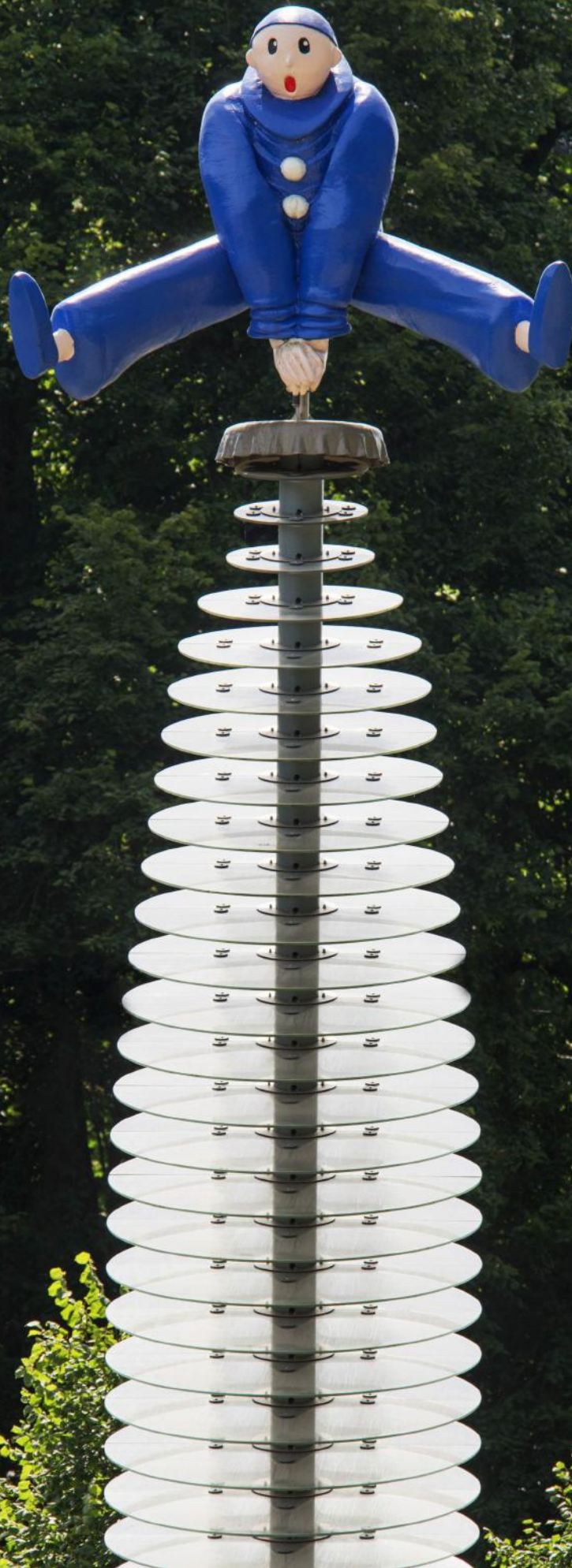
DAY THREE

The final day saw a smaller group from the student cohort, called the Youth Forum Committee, give an impressive presentation at the General Assembly. Representing all the INTERSPACE students, the Youth Forum Committee shared their ideas for getting young people involved in the future governance of The Great Spa Towns of Europe.

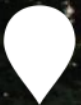
Mayors, Site Managers and representatives of States Parties in the room were extremely impressed with their work. In the spirit of co-design, their ideas will be included in the management of the World Heritage Site, ensuring it is run for its youngest citizens and stakeholders — the future custodians of heritage sites.

Simultaneously, another representative group took over The Great Spa Towns of Europe's social media, publishing content that they had worked on together the previous day. The group used their own images and ideas about World Heritage to make reels and posts.





SPA
Belgium



5.3. Celebrating World Heritage

BADEN BEI WIEN

Every 1st May, Baden bei Wien kicks off the summer with a traditional festival. Marking World Heritage Day on 18th April, the celebrations were dedicated to The Great Spa Towns of Europe. Guests were able to rediscover the spa town through guided World Heritage walks and the original spring was opened for public access under expert guidance. For families and children, a World Heritage scavenger hunt sent the participants on a discovery tour across the town, with the chance to win a sweet surprise.

Sports enthusiasts were able to experience what fitness felt like in the past with a sports scientist on the terrain cure trails. Musical performances were also held in the casino and the Kurpark.

SPA

During three afternoons in autumn, the Walloon Region Agency (Direction de la Formation aux Métiers du Patrimoine) came to Spa to run training sessions for the general public. These sessions were designed specifically for the town of Spa and had several objectives for the participants:

- Recognising the construction periods of old buildings
- Learning more about traditional building materials, their qualities and defects
- Making the right choices when it comes to restoring old buildings and improving their energy performance

The modules were a resounding success, thanks to a trainer who was able to engage his audience using a variety of approaches — historical and technical presentations, practical experiments, discussions and field visits.

KARLOVY VARY

In April 2024, Karlovy Vary celebrated World Heritage Day through a series of events from 12th - 15th April.

As part of the celebrations, the public were invited to discover the city's UNESCO World Heritage. The programme featured workshops and guided tours alongside cultural performances, such as street theatre and concerts. Highlights included a glassblowing demonstration at Moser and a fashion show by students from the local art school. The event also offered opportunities to engage with the restoration of the Dvořák's park and participate in Nordic walking tours through the therapeutic landscape.



FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

Františkovy Lázně celebrated the inscription anniversary in July in style, with an event showing the town's pride in being part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Following a warm welcome from Mayor Lenka Průšová, walks, talks, activities and spa treatments using the town's special peat were on offer to visitors.

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

On 24th July, the fourth anniversary of the town's inscription was marked by an "inverse flashmob" – Beethoven's Ode to Joy was performed simultaneously by West-Bohemian Symphony Orchestra players dispersed across Skalník Park.

Later in the year, in September, Villa LIL opened to the public via a site-specific theatre event during European Heritage Days.

VICHY

The sun was shining for the anniversary of Vichy's third inscription on 21st July. Vichy honoured its German partner Baden-Baden with these celebrations, as well as its own spa heritage.

The events, inspired by Baden-Baden's culture and traditions, took over the whole town with a rich variety of concerts, balls, games, costumed parades, demonstrations and official celebrations. Visitors and residents took part in the celebrations, alongside a special delegation of VIPs from Baden-Baden.

BAD EMS

On 14th January 1324, King Ludwig IV granted Bad Ems its town charter, so the town celebrated its 700th anniversary from 5th - 7th July 2024.

A wide range of activities were lined up, including a performance by 'The Wild Bobbin Baboons' on the casino stage. On Saturday, the 'Day of Clubs' saw Bad Ems clubs present themselves with a colourful supporting programme. The festival weekend concluded with a variety of concerts and shows in the heart of the World Heritage Site.

Later in the year, Bad Ems marked Monument Day in September, with tours and 'behind the scenes' insights to the Marble Hall and Kurtheatre – 'True Signs, Witnesses of History'.



BADEN-BADEN

On 2nd June, as part of the World Heritage Day celebrations, the city hosted a festive gathering on the Reinhard-Fieser-Brücke, featuring an open-air exhibition showcasing the seven World Heritage sites in Baden-Württemberg. This event honoured the dedication of local citizens who were instrumental in achieving this recognition.

On 8th September, the German Open Monument Day provided residents and visitors with unique opportunities to explore Baden-Baden's rich heritage. The day's programme included guided tours of the historic Casino, the Hasensprung World Heritage Trail and the Thermal Spring Quarter, along with special exhibitions and family-friendly activities. The famous Kurhaus, which celebrated its bicentenary in 2024, welcomed over 900 people through its doors on Sunday.

The Kurhaus also featured in a special exhibition at the town museum entitled 'The place to be: 200 years of the Baden-Baden Kurhaus. 1824-2024'.



BAD KISSINGEN

In June, Bad Kissingen's World Heritage celebrations included a programme of tours and visits allowing residents and visitors to explore World Heritage in depth. Participants were able to examine progress on current projects such as the restoration of the Turniergebäude – even arriving in style in a horse-drawn carriage.

The Saline Museum and its surrounding landscape also featured heavily in the programme, with music, food, guided tours and a free Salzweg, demonstrating the importance of salt, salt production and brine in Bad Kissingen.

Finally, the former abattoir was used to screen Christian Beyer's film about this unusual building – 'Die Ochsenkathedrale'.



MONTECATINI TERME

During the final week of July, Montecatini Terme celebrated the third anniversary of the town's inclusion in the World Heritage List, as a member of The Great Spa Towns of Europe.

There were free guided tours and a concert by the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Brass Band was organised for the public.



5.4. Communicating Locally

SPA

A session with the Youth City Council was organised, wherein the Site Manager offered a game to the Councillor. The game aimed to discover all the attributes of Spa as one of The Great Spa Towns of Europe, taking a recreational approach to awareness-raising.



FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

Františkovy Lázně's Tourism Information Centre re-opened after a short period of refurbishment. Their World Heritage Status, and that of the other Czech towns in The Great Spa Towns of Europe, took pride of place.



In October, the site manager, Ondřej Míka, organised a public tour of the town's heritage reservation, showcasing successful grant-funded investments in the historical spa core. This walkthrough highlighted key projects, providing transparency and fostering community connection by directly linking local heritage conservation with the benefits of targeted financial support. In September, the site manager also gave an extensive presentation on World Heritage, its core ideas and benefits accompanied with a guided tour to the Association of Historic Towns of Czechia (SHSCMS).

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

A new website was created for property owners in the conservation areas of the three Czech towns. This encourages property owners to find out more about looking after their properties and their town's heritage.



An informative, interactive exhibition called 'Rendezvous at the Fountain' was held during the renovation of the Singing Fountain. It highlighted eleven famous male and female composers who stayed and composed in The Great Spa Towns of Europe, sharing musical heritage.

BAD KISSINGEN

Bad Kissingen opened its World Heritage Discovery Tour in March. The route takes visitors through the spa district, where they can learn about a wide range of aspects of the European spa town phenomenon: balneology, internationalism, the typical spa villa and the spa landscape. The 15 stops between the spa garden, the former Kurhausbad and the train station enable visitors to experience the history, tradition, urban structure and architecture of the town. At every stop, there are short videos which can be accessed via a QR code. New banners were also put up at the railway station and in the spa garden to communicate World Heritage and promote all 11 towns.

BAD EMS

The small, dedicated team 'Die Entdeckerprofis' have developed a web app that makes Bad Ems virtually accessible, along with many other discovery trails. Bad Ems has also been brought to life with eighteen stations on the website under the theme 'Discover. Understand. Appreciate.' — www.stadt-land-erleben.de.



BADEN-BADEN

Planning for a new World Heritage Information Centre advanced in Baden-Baden. The centre will serve as a hub for visitors and the local community, providing insight into the town's UNESCO-listed heritage. It will feature an immersive experience with interactive exhibits, guiding visitors through the city's history from ancient thermal springs to its golden age in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Lectures, workshops and educational programmes for local schools are also planned. The opening is scheduled for late 2025.



MONTECATINI TERME

In February, a conference entitled 'Balsamo che toltò vien di sotterra e s'apre al chiaro giorno' took place, presenting the results of the University of Florence's PhD studies in 'Earth Sciences'. These were led by the municipality geologist Marco de Martin Mazzalon alongside Professor Enrico Pandeli. This research was financed by the Italian Law 77|2006 for UNESCO World Heritage Sites as part of the project entitled 'geological-structural and geochemical -isotopic investigation of the Montecatini Terme thermal system'.

CITY OF BATH

A new chair was appointed in May 2024 to lead the City of Bath World Heritage Site Advisory Board. Professor Marion Harney from University of Bath will serve a 3-year term.

Professor Harney is an expert in building and landscape heritage, is a resident of Bath and is a highly experienced member of the Advisory Board. The Board was established in 2001 and has since been adapted to accommodate the inscription of The Great Spa Towns of Europe. This long-established forum has 28 members from 19 local and national organisations.

The UNESCO World Heritage status provides non-political objectives which key stakeholders can agree upon. This participative approach ensures the preservation of Outstanding Universal Value is a community goal. Whilst Bath and North East Somerset Council act as chief steward of the World Heritage agenda, the role of Advisory Board Chair is an independent and voluntary position. New terms of reference were also put in place for the Board in 2024.



5.5. Engaging with Younger People

BADEN BEI WIEN

A new book, titled 'Badespaß und Kurstadtkipferl', aims to explain Baden bei Wien's World Heritage in a fun and entertaining way. Tailored for young people, it delves into aspects of spa town life, including the waters, renowned guests and unique local traditions, like the spa croissant!

The book was developed by Baden bei Wien's World Heritage department in collaboration with the Austrian UNESCO Commission, local stakeholders and educators. Exciting campaigns and events followed the publication, and a free copy of the book was given to every student of third and fourth grade elementary school in Baden as a present of the municipality. An official book presentation was held on 22nd October 2024 at the Hotel Herzoghof.

The Pädagogische Hochschule Niederösterreich also used the book to design a special course that steered the interest of future primary school teachers and develop teaching material on World Heritage in Baden bei Wien.

The town's World Heritage Management department also pioneered a short design course with the Vienna University of Technology. Students were involved in developing fresh concepts for some of Baden's historic bathhouses, and their projects were presented in an exhibition titled 'r e f e r e n c e s: Architectural Designs Without Borders', held at the former 'Ferdinandsbad' and 'Johannesbad'.

BADEN BEI WIEN AND MONTECATINI TERME

Over a few days in March, 88 pupils from the Galileo Chini school in Montecatini Terme visited Baden bei Wien as part of a special school exchange. Together, with 20 students from the local BRG Biondegasse school, they took part in a scavenger hunt around the centre of Baden and the Kurpark, discovering its World Heritage. After enjoying a traditional Baden Kurkipferl from the Annamühle bakery, they were welcomed by Mayor Stefan Szirucsek. The students, aged 12-14, were able to communicate in several languages, supported by AI translation tools. They had dinner together and relaxed in the sulphur waters of the Römertherme spa.

This was part of the project 'VIRTUAL AND REAL: THE ENHANCEMENT OF A UNESCO HERITAGE SITE', financially supported through the Italian Law 77|2006, approved by the Italian Ministry of Culture. In addition to the school exchange, the Montecatini Terme students took part in thematic local visits in their own town.



KARLOVY VARY

15 students from a local grammar school visited Baden bei Wien for the INTERSPACE project. Generously funded by the Karlovy Vary Region, this allowed the students to explore the cultural and historical treasures of another UNESCO-listed spa town. The experience not only fostered cross-border learning but also deepened the students' understanding of heritage preservation.

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

Mariánské Lázně, like many of the INTERSPACE towns, met with the young people taking part in the exchange before they travelled to Baden bei Wien. This introduced the young people to some of their own local heritage and prepared them for the INTERSPACE activities ahead.

BAD KISSINGEN

Bad Kissingen used World Water Day to communicate the challenges of climate change and the importance of water as a resource. The travelling exhibition 'AKTION GROUNDWATER PROTECTION' ran for 4 weeks in the Wandelhalle Grand Foyer, with guided tours for elementary schools conducted by the Site Management team and experts from the Regional State Office for Water Management.

Following the premise that water conservation starts with knowledge — and that natural and cultural heritage are interconnected — the tours examined architectural heritage (Wandelhalle and pump room) alongside natural heritage (mineral springs). The interactive exhibition used 8 modules to explore a range of water-related topics. This was a collaboration between the Site Management (City of Bad Kissingen), Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH and the Regional State Office for Water Management Bad Kissingen.

BADEN-BADEN

Baden-Baden hosted the 'Painting World Heritage' competition, engaging 971 children, aged 8-12 years, from 17 local schools. Initiated by City Councillor Heinrich Liesen, and supported by both civic and public institutions, the project encouraged young participants to depict their city's UNESCO-listed heritage through art. 150 artworks were selected and displayed in the Trinkhalle from 24th January - 7th February, offering a fresh perspective on Baden-Baden's cultural legacy.

BAD EMS

The Junior Leadership Seminar, organised by the US Department of Defence's Education Department, visited Bad Ems in December. 154 students and 20 teachers took part — from 24 schools from 8 countries, including Bahrain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Turkey and the UK. One day of the international visit was dedicated to discovering Bad Ems, with an exciting scavenger hunt, a trip on the Kurwaldbahn funicular and a visit to the spa and city museum.



6.1. THE GSTE STRUCTURE

The current organisational structure was developed in 2022, and has continued to function well. The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association has five levels of governance, as follows:

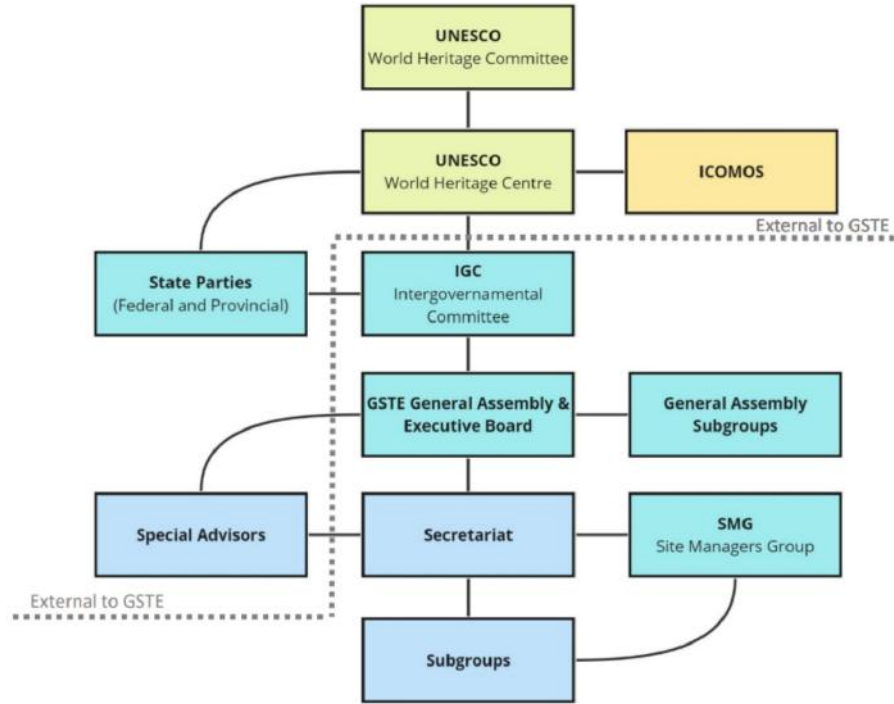
Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) of the 7 State Party World Heritage Focal Points, or a similar heritage representative.

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

GSTE Executive Board, comprised of 4 Mayors, the Chair, 2 Vice-Chairs, 1 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.

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



The GSTE Team in 2024

The Secretary General, the Administrator and the Communications Coordinator all work part time for The Great Spa Towns of Europe. Other roles are carried out in a voluntary capacity by Mayors, Site Managers and Tourism Officers, where required.

Chiara Ronchini, the Secretary General is based in the UK and works for The GSTE four days a week.

Andrea Polak is based in the World Heritage Department in Baden-Baden and works part time for The GSTE. Her focus is on

administration and supporting the Secretary General.

Catherine Lloyd, based in the UK, is responsible for The GSTE's internal and external communications. She finished her contract with The GSTE in December 2024. The team welcomed her successor, **Naomi Jennings - O'Toole**, also based in the UK, at the General Assembly in Baden bei Wien, before taking up her new role in January 2025.





6. Resources

KARLOVY VARY
Czechia





6.2. THE GREAT SPA TOWNS OF EUROPE'S MEETINGS IN 2024

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE

14th November (Baden bei Wien)

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS (ONLINE)

#10 - 17th January,
#11 - 8th March
#12 - 20th June
#13 - 13th September

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

#4 18th April (Bad Kissingen)
#5 14th November (Baden bei Wien)

SITE MANAGERS GROUP MEETINGS

SMG 32 - 20th February (online)
SMG 33 - 19th April (Bad Kissingen)
SMG 34 - 19th June (online)
SMG 35 - 24th September (online)
SMG 36 - 14th November (Baden bei Wien)

TOURISM OFFICERS GROUP MEETINGS

5th February (online)
25th June (online)
24th September (online, joint with Site Managers)

WORKING GROUPS AND SUB-GROUPS ACTIVE IN 2024

Urban Planning Working Group
INTERSPACE Working Group
Monitoring Working Group

6.3. FINANCES AND BUDGETS

Financial Stewardship in 2024

The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association (GSTEA) managed a central budget of approximately €181,787 in 2024. Each of our eleven member towns contributes an annual fee calculated proportionally to their population, ensuring fair representation. All budgets undergo rigorous approval by both the Executive and main Boards, with transparent tracking by the Baden-Baden Finance Team, the Secretary General, a Finance Controller, the Finance Director and the Chair of the Association.

Investing in Shared Excellence

Our budget supports a rich diversity of collaborative initiatives, from the comprehensive website refresh and European trademark registration of our new logo to specialist events like the urban planning workshop in Bad Kissingen. 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 2024, all of which have been reinvested to enhance our shared projects and increase resource capacity across the Association. Further details can be found in the auditor's reports for 2024 in Annexe 1.

6.4. DAY-TO-DAY SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

During 2024, the Secretary General has continued to refine systems and processes with the Executive Board and the support team. This ensures that essential operations and UNESCO obligations are covered within limited financial resources. This process has continued to be time consuming, but essential for the smooth running of the Association.

OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

- Continued development of Microsoft Sharepoint systems for groups within
- The Great Spa Towns of Europe — one for General Assemblies, another for the Tourism Officers Group, one for the Site Managers Group and a final one for Images and Publications
- Setting up of new policies: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Child Safeguarding Policy Statement; Terms and Conditions; GDPR; Anti-bribery and corruption
- Continuation of weekly team meetings
- Regular meetings with the European Historic Thermal Towns Association



FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

- Second audit of The GSTE Association carried out in February 2024 in Baden-Baden
- Continued refinement of the financial system - optimising invoice runs and streamlining the payment process
- Successful first application for funding from the European Union

COMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENTS

- Publication of the second Annual Review covering 2023, using some of the new branding elements
- Completion of a new logo and branding guidelines
- Successful trademarking of The GSTE logo
- Continuing redevelopment of The GSTE website



7. Tourism

CITY OF BATH
United Kingdom



7.1. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Following our established Responsible Tourism strategy, 2024 has focused on exploring practical implementation opportunities.

Tourism officers across our eleven towns have engaged in productive discussions to identify joint initiatives that honour our heritage and promote responsible tourism principles.

These initiatives prioritise the needs and wellbeing of local residents, advance environmentally-friendly travel options and create more sustainable offerings that benefit local communities - all while enhancing the authentic visitor experience.

A significant milestone was finalising a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA), which strengthens our existing partnership and enables us to join forces on responsible tourism initiatives.

We've concentrated on two promising areas for future development:

Railway Connections

Exploring targeted campaigns to promote rail travel between our towns, reflecting our historical railway connections whilst addressing modern environmental priorities.

Cycling Connections

Investigating opportunities to enhance cycling infrastructure both within towns and between them, with potential connections to the Eurovelo network that would allow visitors to experience our therapeutic landscapes sustainably.

These exploratory discussions are helping us translate our sustainability commitments into potential visitor experiences, with the aim of revitalising the tradition of multi-town spa journeys while minimising environmental impact.

Through this collaborative planning, we're laying the groundwork for responsible tourism innovations befitting our World Heritage status.





7.2. TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

As the popularity of The Great Spa Towns of Europe increases, the reopening of several major hotels will be a welcome development. These hotels, which have been closed for a variety of reasons in recent years, will make more beds available for visitors, while increasing the standard of accommodation.

New routes and lanes are also being developed, for walking, cycling and guided tours, which not only enhance the tourist's experience but disperse traffic and preserve the spa urban environment.



SPA

Spa created a new resource for tourists, which focused on elements of responsible tourism. An online tour was created to discover a mix of heritage and shopping, particularly local foods, products and craftsmanship.

In 2024, Spa also developed the public realm. New cycle lanes, secure pedestrian foot paths and crossings have been put into service, aligning with active mobility policy.

Additionally, a new, 5-star thermal spa hotel is being developed in Spa on the site of the old thermal baths.

BADEN-BADEN

In Baden-Baden, the completely refurbished Brenners Park Hotel is due to reopen in 2025. Baden-Baden also saw the modernisation and redevelopment of the Hotel Europäischer Hof and Hotel Badischer Hof, following the fire in 2021.

Baden-Baden reorganised coach traffic, relocating stops and parking areas outside the city centre to ease congestion. New designated stops ensure smoother arrivals, while preserving the historic urban landscape.

KARLOVY VARY

Support for guided walking tours, improved signage and educational campaigns have helped disperse tourist traffic more evenly across Karlovy Vary.

These efforts aim to protect sensitive areas while enhancing the overall visitor experience. Meanwhile, the town continues to place strong emphasis on responsible tourism. Recent initiatives focus on balancing visitor interest with the long-term sustainability of the spa town's unique urban and natural heritage.



VICHY

The 'Vichy Accélération 2030' project, supported by France Thermes, promises to revolutionise the spa and tourism offer with 56 million euros of investment dedicated to the spa alone. This project aims to modernise the infrastructure while broadening its tourism offerings.

The Thermes Callou and des Dômes, as well as the Vichy Célestins Spa Hôtel, the Ibis Hotel and the Mercure, are all benefiting from a complete overhaul. The aim is to attract a more diversified clientele around three strategic areas: spa medicine, health prevention and luxury.

The Thermes Callou will offer a renewed treatment experience featuring Vichy thermal spring water. Treatment buildings and facilities are renovated while optimising energy use to reduce the establishment's carbon footprint.

The transformation has modernised Vichy's accommodation with the total renovation of the Ibis Hotel and the Callou and the Résidence Callou, offering the best possible service with modern, innovative facilities while respecting the architecture and history of the building.

BADEN BEI WIEN *Austria*

SPA *Belgium*

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNĚ *Czechia*

KARLOVY VARY *Czechia*

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ *Czechia*

♦ VICHY *France*

BAD EMS *Germany*

BADEN-BADEN *Germany*

BAD KISSINGEN *Germany*

MONTECATINI TERME *Italy*

CITY OF BATH *United Kingdom*



7.3. Visitor Numbers

It is estimated that, between them, the eleven towns with The Great Spa Towns of Europe welcome about 17 million visitors per annum (2023 Periodic Reporting). It is clear that visitor numbers are recovering after the pandemic.

Marketplace surveys show that the main international markets for visitors among the seven towns that responded are within Europe.

Only one town reported that its main international market was outside of Europe, in the USA.



BADEN BEI WIEN

The number of medical guests (clinics, spa hotels) has recovered significantly since the pandemic. 2019 figures are expected to be reached again in 2025. The year 2019 is used as the reference value, as the 2021 figures are irrelevant, due to the pandemic.

64,912 visitors (88,671 visitors in 2019)
379,123 overnight stays (445,607 in 2019)
4.96 was the average length of stay (4.9 in 2019).
20.21 was average length of stay for medical guests.

Due to the temporary closure of the largest hotel (164 accommodation units, totalling 328 beds), but the simultaneous opening of many small private room rentals (via platforms like AirBnB), the number of accommodation units has decreased by 147 (294 beds).

The total bed capacity has been reduced from 1,964 to 1,678 since the time of inscription.

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNE

Visitor numbers returned to 2019 levels. In the first two quarters of 2024, Mariánské Lázně welcomed

148,408 guests
573,373 overnight stays
4 nights was the average length of stay.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

In 2024, there were 151,671 unique visitors which stayed at least one night in a hotel or in accommodation in Františkovy Lázně.

The total amount of nights stayed is 828,290.

There is 1.5% YoY increase in the number of visitors and a 3.5% YoY increase in the number of nights stayed.

The largest increase is among Germans in spa hotels (+17.5% YoY), while the largest decrease is among Slovaks in spa hotels (-11.2% YoY).

BADEN-BADEN

Baden-Baden saw a continued increase in tourist arrivals in 2024, reaching 403,800.



BADEN-BADEN
Germany



7.4. Examples of the Added Value of World Heritage Tourism in 2024

There are some difficulties in gaining accurate data on tourists that visit exclusively and directly for the World Heritage Status. This is due to a variety of reasons, from a lack of data-collecting processes to the fact that not all tourists come through the tourist information centres. However, other indicators — such as World Heritage tours — can help give a picture of the impact of World Heritage status on tourism, and the resulting economic and social benefits of increased visitation.

BADEN BEI WIEN

In overnight tourism in Austria, there is no obligation to state the reason for travel in the registration forms. At the Baden Tourist Information Centre, visitors ask about the World Heritage Site about fifty times a year.

While this data is difficult to obtain through travel registration forms, a different picture emerges on Baden bei Wien's city tours, which were redesigned according to the criteria of our UNESCO World Heritage as The Great Spa Towns of Europe and renamed as 'World Heritage tours'. Approximately 1,500 participants join their World Heritage tours. In 2019 (pre-pandemic), there were around 20-30 people per tour, while in 2024 (January-February), there are 50-70 per tour.

As numbers have more than doubled, two guides must be booked for each tour. This indicates how the World Heritage Status is bringing more tourism and income to Baden bei Wien.

KARLOVY VARY

Karlovy Vary does not have any representative evidence, as there are not any specific organised tours. The World Heritage Visitor Centre has additional content on heritage, such as the on-site lookout tower and café, which may attract visitors for other reasons. Nonetheless, there have been an increase in paying visitors; rising from 2,180 between July and December 2022 to 4,600 across 2023.

FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNE

It is most likely only possible to prove only few hundred visitors per year that come for a World Heritage experience. Though, what is quantifiable and an interesting trend, is when we compare number of visitors from countries like USA, UK, Switzerland and France. Visitors from these countries have doubled from the years 2017-2019 and 2022-2024. This is supported by data from the Czech statistical office.

VICHY

It is difficult to accurately assess the percentage of people who come to Vichy expressly for the UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription.

62,000 people visited the tourist office in 2023, of whom 1,405 filled in a satisfaction questionnaire, in which only 2% said they had come for UNESCO. This figure is low but it is very partial, since not everyone goes through the tourist office, so it cannot reflect reality. In the absence of a museum or interpretation centre, it is hard to find any other figures that might indicate visitation as a direct result of the UNESCO World Heritage status.

Instead, the positive impact of the inscription is more apparent in the dynamic of investment in property and renovation projects, which have increased considerably, as well as in State subsidies.

MONTECATINI TERME

Numbers logged of guided tours are the closest data to any World Heritage visitors number, as Montecatini Terme does not log visitation for the express reason of UNESCO World Heritage listing.

These guided tours were set out in 2023 following the main thermal baths, municipality and Montecatini Alto areas:

- 250 participants in guided tours from May - July 2023
- 553 participants in UNESCO celebrations
- 389 participants in guided tours from August - December
- 787 participants in guided tours over Christmas.

BAD KISSINGEN

Bad Kissingen offers two official World Heritage tours; one created by the Bayerische Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH, called 'Ein Streifzug durch Bad Kissingen als UNESCO-Welterbe'; the other created by the Site Management to explain the European spa phenomenon, called 'Auf den Spuren des Europäischen Kurphänomens. Nordtour und Südtour'.

Since July 2021, 889 participants were counted for the former and 60 more for the latter (numbers as of April 2023).

Furthermore, 2023 visitor numbers demonstrate specific interest in World Heritage in Bad Kissingen:

- 15,686 visitors to the historic rooms of the spa ensemble
- Approximately 6,000 within a guided tour (and increase of 30% from 2022)
- Approximately 10,000 individual visits (an increase of 20% from 2022)
- 1,076 guided tours took place from December 2022 - November 2023, with 10,067 participants
- 118,000 visitors took advantage of the service of the tourist information

CITY OF BATH

In the first 7 months of operation, the new World Heritage Centre in the City of Bath received 48,130 visitors and in 2023, numbers exceeded the centre's own annual target of 100,000, with 127,051 visitors.

Visitor numbers to the Roman Baths Museum neared 1 million, reaching close to pre-pandemic levels. The Council itself commented that "in theory, without the Roman Baths, our council tax (a tax paid by local citizens) would need to increase by 10%".

Bath Christmas Market has developed to become one of the most popular in England, and brings significant footfall to the city during an otherwise quiet period. An estimated 444,000 people visited the market in 2024, generating a £41.5 million business turnover and an estimated contribution of approximately £60.4 million spend across the wider city. It was a record-breaking year for stallholders, giving local businesses a platform to expand their businesses and supporting around 500 jobs.

Much of the popularity of the market is due to the backdrop and atmosphere of the heritage city, demonstrating the key relationship between conservation of Outstanding Universal Value and economic vibrancy. The 2025 Bath Christmas Market will run from 27th November to 14th December.

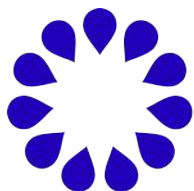




Annexes

BAD EMS
Germany





Annexe 1: The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association Audit

An extract of The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association Financial Audit 2024, prepared by internal auditors: Zuzana Stejskalova, Mariánské Lázně, and Julia Palotas, Bad Ems. This audit was approved at the General Assembly in Mariánské Lázně in May 2025.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association Financial Audit 2024 - Report

25th February 2025, Baden-Baden.

Auditors: Zuzana Stejskalova, Mariánské Lázně, and Julia Palotas, Bad Ems.

Present: Chiara Ronchini, Lisa Poetschki, Simone Bruck, Thomas Schwarz, Eva Zimmerman, Andrea Polack (in person), Peter Weidisch and Anna Maria Boll (online) on behalf of Dr. Dirk Vogel (GSTEA Financial Director).

CIRCUMSTANCES

Baden-Baden is responsible for the bookkeeping of The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association.

Account balance on 31st December 2024

Current account: EUR 16,973.57 (Sparkasse Baden-Baden, Gaggenau)

Unused funds totalling from 2023 to the 2024 budget: EUR 19,238.78

The carry-forward figure to the 2025 budget: EUR 14,802.12

The reason for the difference between the current account balance and the available 2025 budget are the outstanding liabilities from 2024 in the amount of EUR 2,171.45

The audit of the trust account 'Great Spa Towns of Europe' was performed on 25th February 2025. For the control of the trust account, all the bookkeeping, including the bank statements as of the reporting date 25th February 2025, were at the disposal of the auditors. The control was performed on the bases of all the bills and invoices of the payment transactions. The factual and arithmetical correctness of the bills 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.

The total income for the 2024 financial year was EUR 162,549.00 and the total expenditure was EUR 116,985.66.

In the year 2024, all the 11 participating towns in The Great Spa Towns of Europe paid their yearly contributions, as agreed. Total EUR 162,549.00.

The keeping of a fiscal surveillance list was continued.

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

The account management by Secretary General Chiara Ronchini is clear and concise. Simone Bruch, Lisa Poetschki and Chiara Ronchini were available to the auditors and answered pertinent questions immediately and completely.

NOTES 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 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.

Bad Ems, April 13, 2025

Julia Palotas



Marianske Lazne, April 13, 2025

Zuzana Stejskalova





Spa
Belgium



IMAGE CREDITS

- Cover page, Mariánské Lázně, Main Colonnade. © KIS Mariánské Lázně.
- p.3. Vichy, Andrea Polak in costume at the parade in Vichy. © Ville de Vichy.
- p.4. (L-R) Chiara Ronchini, Secretary General. Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A.
- p.5. Bad Ems. © Dominik Ketz.
- p.6. InterGovernmental Committee. (L-R) Nadine Hoffmann (DE/Rheinland-Pfalz, Denise Beilharz (DE/Baden-Württemberg), Lada Pekárková (CZ), Ruth Pröckl, Chair (AU), Ingrid Boxus (BE), Chiara Ronchini (SG). Board and Executive Board (L-R): Dietmar Späth, Lord Mayor of Baden-Baden; Lenka Průšová, Mayor of Františkovy Lázně; Oliver Krügel, Mayor of Bad Ems; Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová, Mayor of Karlovy Vary; Dr. Dirk Vogel, Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen; Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien; Sophie Delettre, Mayor of Spa; Yves-Jean Bignon, Vice Mayor of Vichy; Cllr Ruth Malloy, City of Bath; Martin Hurajčík, Mayor of Mariánské Lázně.
- Site Managers Group (L-R): Peter Weidisch (BK), Anna Maria Boll (BK), Tony Crouch (City of Bath), Jan Charvát (KV), Chiara Ronchini (SG), Zuzana Stejskalová (ML), Ondřej Míka (FL), Rafaela Verdicchio (MT), Julia Palotas (BE), Alexandra Harrer (BBW), Anke Matthys (Vichy), Anne Pirard (Spa), Hans Hornyik (BBW), Ginevra Gentili (online, MT).
- p.7. Karlovy Vary, Hotel Imperial. © Kopie Souboru, 2023 Město Karlovy Vary.
- p.8. Františkovy Lázně, Music Pavilion. © Infocentrum Františkovy Lázně.
- p.9. Medical & Health Tourism Pavilion at ITB Berlin. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A. ICCROM-IUCM Training of Trainers workshop, Rome. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A.
- p.10. Chiara Ronchini presenting at ICCROM, Delhi. © ICCROM. Chiara Ronchini and other attendees at the ISOCARP session during a conference, Siena. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A.
- Chiara Ronchini and other attendees at the UH4SD Workshop, Urbino. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A.
- p.11. Riccardo Mortandello, Mayor of Montegrotto Terme, and Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien, pictured at ITB Berlin. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A. Attendees at EHTTA's 15th anniversary celebrations in Spa. Photo courtesy of EHTTA via Facebook.
- p.12. Montecatini Terme, Conservation work on the staircase on the Municipality building. Photo courtesy of Ginevra Gentili.
- p.13. Bad Ems, Historic photograph of the Kurhaus and promenading spa guests. Image courtesy of Touristik Bad Ems-Nassau e.V.
- p.14. Baden bei Wien, Undinebrunnen in Kurpark. © MIRAU_Rainer005. View of Karlovy Vary. © Karlovy Vary.
- Vichy, Construction work on central bandstand of the Fer à Cheval galleries. Photo courtesy of Anke Matthys.
- p.15. Vichy, Goddess of the Waters sculpture on the Samoa extension. Photo courtesy of Anke Matthys.
- Vichy, Lead removal work on the promenoir galleries. Photo courtesy of Anke Matthys.
- Bad Ems, Construction work on the spring tower on the River Lahn. © Touristik Bad Ems-Nassau e.V.
- p.16. Baden-Baden, Restoration on the Brenners Park-Hotel and Spa. © Andreas Stephany.
- Bad Kissingen, Bauble product in Turniergebäude fundraising project. © Bad Kissingen.
- City of Bath, Kennet and Avon Canal Path. © Visit West.
- p.17. City of Bath, Architect Bob Allies. © Allies and Morrison. Montecatini Terme, Restoration work on wall paintings and stucco. Photos courtesy of Ginevra Gentili.
- p.18. Baden bei Wien, Flooding in the town. Photo courtesy of Stefan Szirucsek. Mariánské Lázně, Rudolph's Spring. © KIS Mariánské Lázně. Karlovy Vary, Deer Jump Lookout. © Karlovy Vary.
- p.19. Bad Ems, Fire at the Haus Vier Türme. Photo courtesy of Stadt Bad Ems/Andrea Bröder
- Baden-Baden, Neues Schloss. © Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH. City of Bath, Cleveland Pools. © Visit West.
- p.20. Baden bei Wien, Undinebrunnen in Kurpark. © MIRAU_Rainer005.
- p.21. Bad Kissingen, Site Managers at the urban planning workshop. Photo by Marcel Pigl.
- p.22. (L-R) Anke Matthys and Chiara Ronchini with Site Managers at the urban planning workshop. Photo by Marcel Pigl.
- p.23. Bad Kissingen, Kurtheater. © Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH. Photo by Heji Shin.
- p.24. (L-R) Dr. Dirk Vogel, Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen; Chiara Ronchini, Secretary General; Stefan Szirucsek, Mayor of Baden bei Wien pictured at a press conference. © Julia Milberger.
- Stand at ITB Berlin. Photo courtesy of the GSTE A.
- (L-R) Presenter Ellen Coughlan; Anna-Maria Boll, Site Manager of Bad Kissingen pictured on Globetrotter TV. Screenshot courtesy of The GSTE A.
- p.25. Vichy, Heritage celebrations. © Ville de Vichy.
- p.26. City of Bath, Child at The Roman Baths. © Visit West.
- p.27. INTERSPACE, Martin Dolský and participating youth. © C. Kollerics.
- p.28. Baden bei Wien, INTERSPACE, Photocall with all participants at the General Assembly. © C. Kollerics.
- p.29. Baden bei Wien, INTERSPACE, (L-R) Martin Dolský and participating youth. © C. Kollerics; Screenshot of social media takeover post; Alexandra Harrer, UNESCO Local Site Manager of Baden bei Wien, Chiara Ronchini and participating youth; Stefan Szirucsek, Chiara Ronchini and participating youth at the General Assembly presentation. Photo courtesy of The GSTE A.
- p.30. Spa, Pierrot de Spa Monopole. © Guy Focant.
- p.31. Baden bei Wien, Guided tours. © Baden bei Wien. Spa, Guided tours. © Ville de Spa.
- p.32. Františkovy Lázně, (L-R) Ondřej Míka and Lenka Průšová, Mayor of Františkovy Lázně at heritage celebrations. © City of Františkovy Lázně. Vichy, Inscription anniversary celebrations. © Ville de Vichy. Bad Ems, 700th anniversary celebrations. © Stadt Bad Ems/Kerstin Fuchs.
- p.33. Baden-Baden, World Heritage Day celebrations. © Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH.
- Bad Kissingen, Anna-Maria Boll pictured at World Heritage celebrations. © Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH. Photo by Julia Milberger. Montecatini Terme, World Heritage Day celebrations. Photos courtesy of Ginevra Gentili.
- p.34. Spa, Image of playing cards for youth city council. © Ville de Spa. Františkovy Lázně, New Tourism Information Centre. © City of Františkovy Lázně.
- Bad Kissingen, Person using the new World Heritage Discovery Tour. © Bayer. Staatsbad Bad Kissingen GmbH. Photo credit Marcel Pigl.
- p.35. Baden-Baden, World Heritage information centre. © Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH.
- Montecatini Terme, Photo of 'Balsamo che tolto vien di sotterra e s'apre al chiaro giorno' conference. Image courtesy of Ginevra Gentili.
- City of Bath, Portrait of Professor Marion Harney. Image courtesy of Tony Crouch.
- p.36. Baden bei Wien, Children reading new book 'Badespaß und Kurstadtkipferl'. Photo courtesy of Claudia Dukek.
- Baden bei Wien, University project exhibition. Photo courtesy of Baden bei Wien.
- Baden bei Wien and Montecatini Terme. INTERSPACE group photo. Photo courtesy of The GSTE A.
- p.37. Mariánské Lázně, INTERSPACE group. © KIS Mariánské Lázně. Bad Kissingen, World Water Day exhibition. © Marcel Pigl.
- Baden-Baden, Painting World Heritage competition. Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH.
- Bad Ems, Junior Leadership Seminar group photo.
- p.38. Karlovy Vary, Mill Colonnade Spring.
- p.39. (L-R) Andrea Polak, Chiara Ronchini and Catherine Lloyd. © Julia Milberger. Alexandra Harrer, Naomi O'Toole and Klaus Lorenz at the General Assembly. © C. Kollerics.
- p.42. (L-R) Chiara Ronchini, Anne Pirard and Hans Hornyik. Photo courtesy of The GSTE A.
- p.43. City of Bath, Number 1 Royal Crescent. © Visit West.
- p.44. Baden bei Wien, couple cycling. © Wienerwald Tourismus, Raimo Rumpfer.
- p.45. Spa, cycle and pedestrian lanes. Images courtesy of Ville de Spa.
- p.46. Vichy, renderings of Vichy Acceleration Project. Images courtesy of Anke Matthys.
- p.48. Baden-Baden, Dahliengarten.
- p.50. City of Bath, Christmas market. © Visit West.
- p.51. Bad Ems, Artesan Spring. © DB_Robert-Kampe.
- p.54. Spa, Galerie Léopold II. © Anne Pirard.
- Back page, Bad Kissingen, group photo at the General Assembly. Photo courtesy of The GSTE A.



May 2025

www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu



**GREAT
SPA TOWNS**
of Europe



unesco

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