



Spas in Antiquity

Discover the ancient
beginnings of wellbeing



The Origins of Thermalism



Ourense



Baden-Baden



Caldes de Montbui



Chaves-Verín

Although the use of hot mineral springs for health purposes is probably as old as humanity itself, History usually marks the beginning of hydrotherapy and thermalism with the Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.

The abundance of warm and hot springs greatly influenced the life of Ancient Greece. By the 5th century BCE this civilization already knew about the healing properties of these waters, and bathing was a widespread therapy, carried out at the first public bathhouses.

While Greeks developed sacred rituals around the waters, being the domain of gods and heroes – which would explain their “magical” effects – they also were the first ones to observe and study them from a scientific perspective. It was here that balneology was born as a science.

The Romans continued many of the Greek bathing practices and ex-panded them through the continent. While building their Empire, they brought their thermal culture with them, seeking out springs on their way and erecting magnificent buildings to harness them, *thermae* and *balnea* which became centres of social life and the best symbol for their urban culture.

Many of the spa towns in Europe have been built upon the remains of these Roman settlements, famous for their healing waters. Their names, some of which survive in the place names to this day, evoke the qualities of the waters, or are named after local tribes, gods or even Roman generals and emperors. Look out for Vichy (*Aquis Calidis*), Baden-Baden (*Aquae Aureliae*), Wiesbaden (*Aquae Mattiacorum*), Bath (*Aquae Sulis*), Ourense (*Aquis Auriensis*), Chaves-Verín (*Aquae Flaviae*), and many more.

Cultural Route of the Council of Europe

EHTTA is responsible for managing the European Route of Historic Thermal Towns, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe since 2010. Launched by the Council of Europe in 1987, “the Cultural Routes demonstrate by means of a journey through space and time how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared and living cultural heritage”.

www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-route

★ THERMAL KNOWLEDGE ★

Roman baths across the Empire varied in size and complexity, but all of them were designed to accommodate the bathing ritual: moving through a number of rooms with increasing temperatures to end with a cold plunge. Most contained an apodyterium, which may refer to a changing room, the frigidarium (cold room), the tepidarium (warm room) and the caldarium (hot room) along with the open pool for swimming, the natation.

Don't miss these highlights

★ Acqui Terme (Italy)

„Aquae Statiellae“ (the waters of the Statiellae tribe) was founded between the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE. Today the archaeological site of the Corso Bagni Roman Bath is a most impressive thermal site. In the Bagni district, by the Bormida river, the impressive remains of Roman aqueduct arches show how water was transported to the town. It is the best preserved of all the monuments of this type still in existence in present-day Piedmont.

Aquae Sulis, and built a magnificent thermal complex around the springs that can still be visited today. The Roman Baths collection contains thousands of archaeological finds from pre-Roman and Roman Britain, and visitors can step back into ancient life through imaginative interpretations in this extensive complex.

★ Baden-Baden (Germany)

The Roman ruins in Baden-Baden are one of Germany's oldest and best-kept examples of Roman baths. They were used by the Roman garrison at Strasbourg and date back to the reign of the Emperor Caracalla who visited to find relief from his arthritis. Today echoes of the past are found in the modern Caracalla baths and the seventeen-step ritual combining Roman and Irish bathing traditions in the palace-like Friedrichsbad, built in 1877 over the Roman foundations.

**GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe**

★ Bath (UK)

Founded in 863 BCE by Prince Bladud, after he noticed that the thermal waters cured his pigs of leprosy, Bath was dedicated to Celtic goddess Sul. When Romans arrived in the first century CE, they identified Sul with Minerva, named the place

★ Bursa (Turkey)

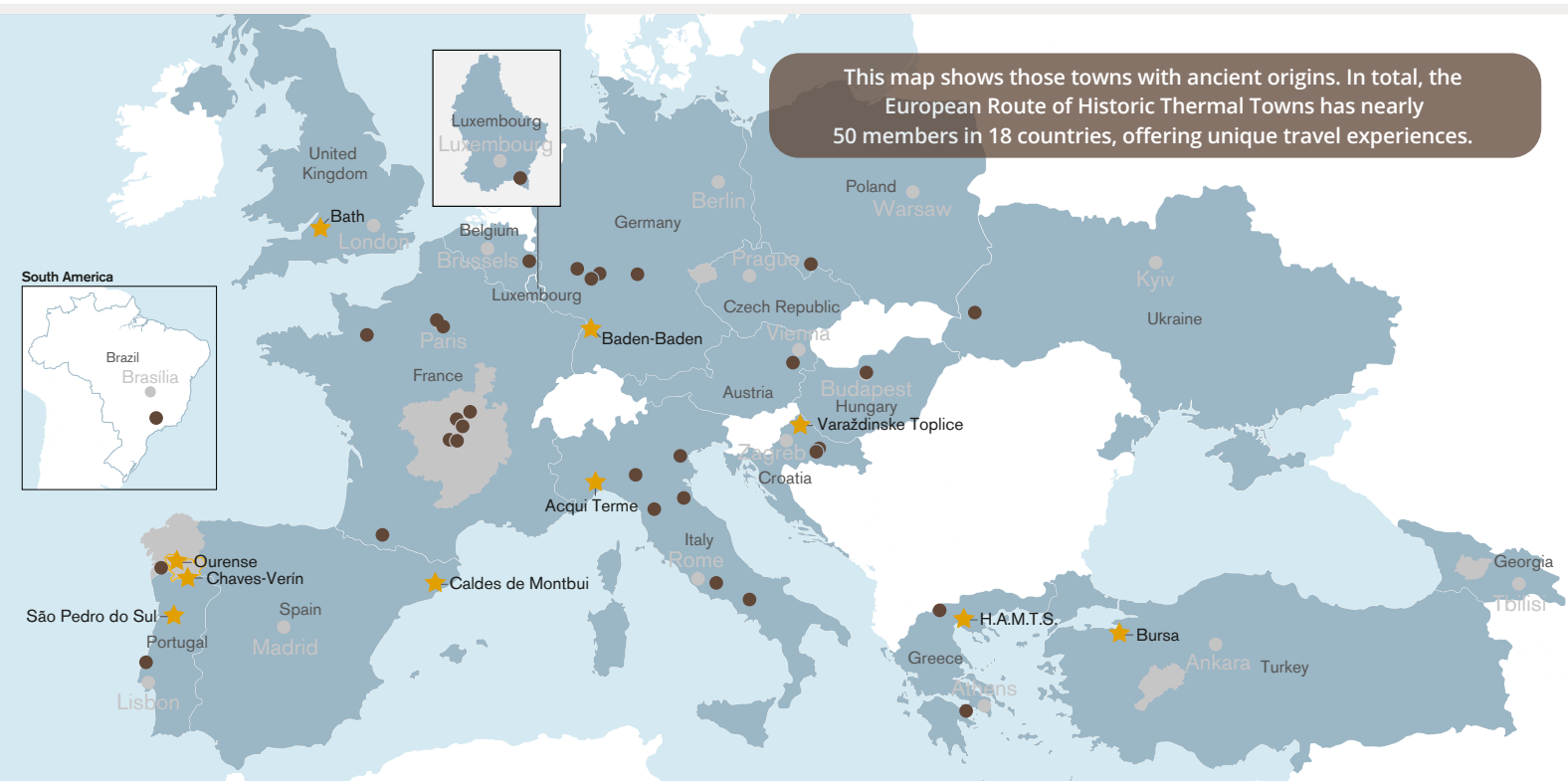
Bursa takes its name from King Prissias the 1st – the town was dedicated to him by Hanibal on its foundation in 185 BCE. Part of the Roman Empire, then the Byzantine and later the Ottoman Empires, Bursa became the capital of the Ottoman State and is the resting place for the first six Ottoman Sultans. At the start of the Silk Road too, it is an important cultural tourism destination. The water sources of the ancient baths in Bursa come from Mount Olympus, and the area has connections to many legendary people.

★ Caldes de Montbui (Spain)

Impressive ruins of a 2nd century medicinal thermal bath complex can be seen in the centre of the town near the thermal source. The complex features a large pool made of “opus signium” (broken compacted tiles, used in Roman times), covered by a vaulted ceiling. Traditional Catalan giants

**GREAT
SPA TOWNS
of Europe**

This map shows those towns with ancient origins. In total, the European Route of Historic Thermal Towns has nearly 50 members in 18 countries, offering unique travel experiences.



representing the first thermal bath users dance in celebrations in the town square, where the outlines of additional pools are marked in the paving.

★ Chaves-Verín (Portugal/Spain)

The Museum of Roman Baths in Eurocity Chaves-Verín is dedicated to the remains of the largest Roman baths on the Iberian Peninsula. The 2,000-year-old complex was discovered in 2006 during construction work for an underground car park. Excavations have revealed a large main pool, a secondary pool, and a complex system of pipes for transporting the waters and for drainage. Chaves was founded by the Romans as „Aquae Flaviae“ in 78 CE, and the 140 metre-long Ponte Trajano (Trajan Bridge) dates from the reign of Emperor Trajan in the early second century.

★ Hellenic Association of Municipalities with Thermal Springs (Greece)

Many of Greece's thermal towns date back to the earliest civilisations, to the Byzantines and even earlier. Look out for the mud baths at Krinides Kavala near the Archaeological site of Ancient Philippi, and the Syllas baths in Edispos, one of Greece's most famous thermal resorts.

★ Ourense (Spain)

The hot springs of As Burgas have been used since ancient times, but it was not until the arrival of the Romans in the 1st century CE that the first health spa was built. Several altars devoted to the indigenous god Revve Anabaraego were found around the original sanctuary-pool. The Romans also built another bath house for social purposes that would be

used until the Middle Ages, and whose hypocaustum is still preserved. Today the history of this spa can be discovered in the As Burgas archaeological area and its Interpretation Centre. You can also check the quality and temperature of the hot spring at its sources, or have a bath in a modern thermal pool in the city centre.

★ São Pedro do Sul (Portugal)

The Roman Baths at São Pedro do Sul were built in the first century, as a riverside Balneum using the thermal water source just a few hundred metres away. Recently restored by architect João Mendes Ribeiro and landscape architect João Gomes da Silva, with minimal impact on the original structure, the complex, already a national monument, is now used as a cultural and educational centre. The restoration, highlighting the most striking features of the environment from the Roman period was based on scale, light and the presence of water.

★ Varaždinske Toplice (Croatia)

Already an important centre, Jasia, renamed Aquae lasae, „Waters of the Jasi“, was turned into a significant medical, cultural, and economic centre by the Romans. It boomed between the 1st and 4th centuries, and was an extensive town. Emperor Constantine restored the thermae in the early 4th century after it had been invaded by the Goths, but eventually it was abandoned and ruined. Archaeological investigations in the 1950s and 60s uncovered a well-preserved and extensive complex complete with pools, basilica and the Forum located close to the thermal sources. The most valuable find is a statue of the goddess Minerva once located at the entrance to the temple.

★ THERMAL KNOWLEDGE ★

The Great Spa Towns of Europe

Several of EHTTA's members are part of the Great Spa Towns of Europe, a group of eleven towns in seven countries which were inscribed by UNESCO as a transnational World Heritage Site in 2021.

This new site, with its world-famous towns developed around

mineral water springs provides exceptional testimony to a complex and unprecedented urban typology and cultural movement – the European spa town. The Great Spa Towns of Europe marks the greatest development of this phenomenon.

www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu

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- ‘WATER FOUNDS CITIES’.
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The Peutinger Map (or Tabula Peutingeriana) illustrated above is an ancient Roman road map in which thermal urban settlements (Aquae) are the only sites with a specific iconographic symbol. - see the example of Vichy or Aquis Calidis, left. The map is a 13th century parchment copy of a possible Roman original. It covers Europe (without the Iberian Peninsula and the British Isles), North Africa and parts of Asia, including the Middle East, Persia and India.

The Peutinger Map clearly shows the importance of thermal waters for the Romans.

In 2021, EHTTA held an event – the Café of Europe – at the Roman Baths in São Pedro do Sul. These baths, recently restored, were the perfect setting to explore the Roman origins of many Historic Thermal Towns, and how those Roman origins still draw visitors to places such as Bath, Vichy, Ourense, Acqui Terme and Caldes de Montbui today.

The title of the event, “Aquae urbesque condunt”, was taken from Pliny the Elder’s Natural History written in the 1st Century, and is roughly translated as “Water founds cities”.

The European Route of Historic Thermal Towns

European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA)

Member Towns Acqui Terme | Bad Ems | Bad Homburg | Bad Kissingen | Baden bei Wien | Baden-Baden | Bagnères-de-Bigorre | Bagnoles de l'Orne | Bath | Bursa Metropolitan Municipality | Caldas da Rainha | Caldes de Montbui | Castrocara Terme e Terra del Sole | Châtel-Guyon | Daruvar | Enghien-les-Bains | Fiuggi | La Bourboule | Łądek-Zdrój | Le Mont Dore | Lipik | Loutra Pozar | Loutraki-Perachora | Mondariz Balneario | Mondorf-les-Bains | Montecatini Terme | Montegrotto Terme | Ourense | Royat-Chamalières | Salsomaggiore Terme | São Pedro do Sul | Spa | Telese Terme | Truskavets | Vichy | Varaždinske Toplice | Wiesbaden

International Partner Poços de Caldas

Associate Members Governorship of Afyonkarahisar | Budapest Spas cPlc | Chaves-Verin Eurocity | Clermont Auvergne Metropole | Fédération Thermale et Climatique Française (F.T.C.F.) | Galicia Region | Hellenic Association of Municipalities with Thermal Springs (H.A.M.T.S) | Imereti Region | Karlovy Vary Region | Province of Ourense | Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif Central

Europe's Historic Thermal Towns, all based around healing mineral-water springs, have been centres of health, wellbeing, culture and tourism for centuries, and their development over the years has led to a rich and varied architectural heritage. Discover the stories, buildings, culture and festivals and of course the waters themselves in these incredible towns. You'll find plenty to choose from – big cities and tiny villages in the European Route of Historic Thermal Towns with its almost 50 thermal towns and regions in 18 countries.

Cover images: Acqui Terme (Italy), Bursa (Turkey), Bath (UK), S. Pedro do Sul (Portugal)

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Other pages: Municipality of Ourense , Hausner, Ajuntament Caldes de Montbui, Eurocity Chaves-Vérin

Non-religious terms, BCE (Before Current Era) and CE (Current Era) are used instead of BC and AD.

For more information:

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