

## The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association: General Assembly in Bad Kissingen on World Heritage Day

Members of the **Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTE)** Association were in Bad Kissingen (Germany) this week for a series of meetings, and site visits, including their General Assembly, at the invitation of the Lord Mayor of Bad Kissingen, Dr. Dirk Vogel.

**Stefan Szirucsek**, Mayor of Baden bei Wien and Chair of the Great Spa Towns of Europe said:

“I am delighted to be in Bad Kissingen for our General Assembly, and would like to thank our host, the Lord Mayor, Dr. Dirk Vogel for his invitation and kind hospitality. The spring General Assembly is an important point in our calendar, where we look back at the successes of 2023 and plan our future work programme for 2024. The business of the General Assembly is of course essential to our work, but just as important is the opportunity to see in person the detailed elements of our host town which contribute to our whole World Heritage Site, and of course to meet and network with colleagues from our towns. Our organisation is still fairly young, but the friendships forged between towns and between individuals at these meetings allow our work to flourish.

Several of our Great Spa Towns have historically been oases of peace, of reconciliation and places where important alliances of European significance were forged. On the International Day for Monuments and Sites, when ICOMOS is celebrating the Venice Charter and looking at disasters and conflicts through the lens of the charter, it is important for us to remember the role our towns played in Europe’s history, partly through providing great leaders of the past with the means to relax, look after their health, think in the peace and quiet, and meet each other in neutral spaces.

Internationalism is one of our World Heritage attributes, and still today, even while our near neighbours are torn apart by war, and when we are all threatened by global and environmental pressures, including the climate emergency, our towns remain places of welcome and inclusion, sustainability, and peace.”

The General Assembly was held on April 18<sup>th</sup>, which is celebrated globally as **the International Day for Monuments and Sites** (organised by ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites), also known as **'World Heritage Day'**. This year's theme is "Disasters & Conflicts Through the Lens of the Venice Charter", a document which is being celebrated by ICOMOS this year, sixty years since it was written. The Venice charter says that "*The intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence*" (Article 3) while maintaining them on a "*permanent basis*" (Article 4). This charter has been the guiding principle at the core of ICOMOS' history and identity since it was founded, also in 1964.

**Chiara Ronchini**, Secretary General of the Great Spa Towns of Europe added:

"I am especially delighted that our General Assembly is taking place at this time. The theme of this year's International Day for Monuments and Sites is especially apt for the timing and location of our meeting. Our World Heritage Site was listed by UNESCO for its "Influence on Modern European Towns", and for "Taking the Cure; human health and mineral springs", and in Bad Kissingen we are surrounded by reminders of these two important criteria.

Our Urban Planning Workshop, earlier in the week, on "World Heritage and pressures: Assessing potential impacts on our property" dovetails very nicely with the ICOMOS theme for 2024, "Disasters & Conflicts Through the Lens of the Venice Charter", as external factors which could affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property have to be examined and planned for as much as possible. Our serial transnational World Heritage Site, with its complex nature, simply cannot exist in a vacuum, and on such a significant day, we made sure to recognise its connections with other sites, in Europe and the world, and with humanity."

The four-day programme included a special workshop for Site Managers of the eleven towns of the GSTE, and their planning and urban design colleagues in the municipalities, on the theme of "World Heritage and pressures: Assessing potential impacts on our property". This is the fifth workshop in a series of Urban Planning Workshops that started in 2022, for the officers and technicians who are responsible for protecting the outstanding value for humanity of the GSTE World Heritage Site at ground level.

Special study visits and guided walks allowed delegates to experience the Regentenbau ensemble, as well as other important buildings such as the Wandelhalle and the Brunnenhalle, where mineral water tasting was a key feature. Delegates also visited the Untere Saline complex, where salt was traditionally extracted from the water, and the Obere Saline museum.

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## Contact the Great Spa Towns of Europe:

Chiara Ronchini, Secretary General

Email: [chiara.ronchini@greatspatownsofeurope.eu](mailto:chiara.ronchini@greatspatownsofeurope.eu)

Catherine Lloyd, Marketing Co-ordinator

Email: [comms@greatspatownsofeurope.eu](mailto:comms@greatspatownsofeurope.eu)

Tel: +44 7875 275059

Web: [www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu](http://www.greatspatownsofeurope.eu)



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### Notes to Editors:

1. The [Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) is a serial transnational World Heritage Site, comprising 11 famous historic thermal spa towns and cities in seven countries. The site was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 44<sup>th</sup> World Heritage Committee meeting in on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2021.
2. The Great Spa Towns of Europe Association was formally registered in August 2022 in Baden bei Wien, Austria. Its members are the political representatives of the eleven towns which are listed as part of the serial transnational World Heritage Site, the Great Spa Towns of Europe.
3. **Outstanding Universal Value (OUV):** The Great Spa Towns of Europe “bear an exceptional testimony to the European spa phenomenon, which gained its highest expression from around 1700 to the 1930s”. The Great Spa Towns of Europe is inscribed on the World Heritage List with Outstanding Universal Value on the following criteria:
  - Criterion (ii) Influence on Modern European Towns.
  - Criterion (iii) Taking the Cure; human health and mineral springs.

The full statement of Outstanding Universal Value can be found here:

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1613/>

4. The [Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom represent a unique cultural phenomenon which reached its height in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as a particular urban type and form which deserves global recognition as a phenomenon which helped to shape Europe.
5. Inscription on the World Heritage List is the highest international recognition for global cultural and natural heritage sites. The List is managed by UNESCO (the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) on behalf of the United Nations from its headquarters in Paris.
6. There are over 400 working spa towns across Europe and the Great Spa Towns are the *crème de la crème* of Europe’s best. The eleven [Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) possess architectural ensembles, parks, gardens, and landscapes which are maintained to the highest standards. They also maintain a wide range of outstanding cultural activities, welcome an international clientele, and provide a continuing living tradition of leisure, health, and well-being.

7. All eleven of the [Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) are easily accessible, often by rail, and offer a wide range of quality accommodation. Cultural activities and heritage attractions complement the health and leisure treatments traditionally associated with spa towns. Local gastronomy and wine present a distinctive feature of each spa town along with more contemporary well-being programmes. Rural pursuits, walking, hiking, and cycling in the surrounding therapeutic spa landscape are available for all visitors.
  
8. Several different types of **responsible tourism** initiatives can be found in the Great Spa Towns:
  - Sustainable Tourism Products
  - Eco-Friendly Transport – including new mobility concepts
  - Preventing Mass Tourism
  - Environmentally-friendly public procedures
  - Re-use of thermal waters