

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUDAPEST HOSTS GLOBAL DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF THERMAL AND WELLNESS TOURISM

Successful Thermal Tourism Congress 2025 organised by European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) with support of UN Tourism

From June 4–6, the International Thermal Tourism Congress 2025 brought together leading voices from across Europe and beyond to explore how thermal destinations can evolve in a rapidly changing world.

Hosted by the **European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA)** and **Budapest Spas**, in partnership with **Ensana Health Spa Hotels** and with the support of **UN Tourism**, the congress was held at the iconic Thermal Margaret Island Health Spa Hotel.

Over the course of three days, **140 delegates from 30 countries**—including municipal leaders, tourism professionals, researchers, and wellness operators—convened in Budapest, a city where thermal culture seamlessly blends tradition and innovation. Together, they examined the key forces shaping the future of thermal tourism.

The program explored not only traditional pillars such as **sustainability, health, heritage, and investment**, but also **addressed emerging trends** influencing modern travelers. In today's fast-evolving travel landscape, discussions centered on how thermal towns can remain relevant to new generations. Sessions examined the **influence of digital platforms like TikTok, the importance of storytelling and local identity, and the need to create authentic, experience-based offers that resonate with younger audiences.**

Recent market insights underscored the congress themes. Tripadvisor's *Trendcast 2025* reported a 157% surge in bookings for thermal spas and hot spring destinations between 2022 and 2024. *Travel Predictions 2025* by Booking.com revealed that six in ten travelers now plan their journeys around well-being objectives.

"These trends confirm that thermal tourism has transitioned from a niche segment into a mainstream, year-round driver that supports local economies and benefits communities," said **Ion Vilcu, Director of Affiliate Members & Public-Private Collaboration Department at UN Tourism**. "Within this context, UN Tourism is giving increased priority to the topic of thermal tourism and to this important segment."

President: Riccardo Mortandello
Executive Director: Simone Zagrodnik

EHTTA is an International Non-profit Association (AISBL), Reg.No. 0823.039.357
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Several speakers underlined the **urgency of future-proofing the sector by striking a balance between innovation and tradition**. There was consensus that the next wave of growth will come from destinations able to combine historical value with smart communication, immersive wellness, and meaningful sustainability.

Riccardo Mortandello, EHTTA President remarked in his opening speech: “Our objective is to create an important coordination point and networking hub among thermal culture and heritage destinations, realities that have the unique characteristic of simultaneously caring for cultural tourism and health tourism, two dimensions that in our destinations merge into a unique and unrepeatable experience.” He also stressed that “European thermal systems are living systems that undoubtedly contribute to improving people's quality of life.”

Held in the spirit of cooperation and dialogue, the congress also included the **Mayor's Summit**, a platform for political leaders to exchange strategies for sustainable destination management, and a **B2B networking session** linking destinations with tour operators and buyers. A highlight was the **gala dinner at the historic Gellért Baths**, a symbol of Budapest's spa legacy and a fitting setting for celebrating the enduring appeal of thermal heritage.

The European Historic Thermal Towns Association is planning to organise the next Thermal Tourism Congress in early summer 2027.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

About The Thermal Tourism Congress



www.thethermalcongress.com

The International Thermal Tourism Congress is a global event that brings together experts, researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to explore the evolving potential of thermal tourism.

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This congress serves as a platform to discuss sustainability, heritage, innovation, and wellness in the context of thermal destinations.

About European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA)

European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) is a network of historic spa towns committed to promoting thermal heritage and sustainable tourism. EHTTA works to safeguard and promote the unique cultural, architectural, and therapeutic heritage of its member towns.

1. EHTTA is a membership organisation currently representing 51 members in 18 European countries and has two international partners in the USA and Brazil.
2. EHTTA was certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 2010 and is one of 48 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe which provide a wealth of leisure and educational activities for all citizens across Europe and beyond and are key resources for responsible tourism and sustainable development.
www.coe.int/routes
3. EHTTA was founded in 2009 with six Founding Members: Acqui Terme (Italy), Bath (UK), Ourense (Spain), Salsomaggiore Terme (Italy), Spa (Belgium) and Vichy (France).
4. Since 2019 the association has been an Affiliate Member of UN Tourism. In September 2022, EHTTA signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Change in Tourism and a Memorandum of Understanding on Thermal Tourism with UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO).
5. EHTTA's expert forum "European Thermal Heritage Day" has been recognized as an example of Best Practice by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in 2018.
6. In 2022 the European Route of Historic Thermal Towns was awarded the Best Practices Award of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes for its promotion campaign "Thermal Travels – Immerse Yourself in the Spa Culture of Europe" co-funded by the European Union and in collaboration with the European Travel Commission.

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