

REST & RELAXATION

Emily Rose Mawson takes a look at the healing powers of the West Bohemian Spa Triangle

KARLOVY VARY

Legend has it that Karlovy Vary, also known as Carlsbad, was founded after 14th-century Bohemian king Charles IV discovered a hot mineral spring in the locality while hunting deer. In the past, Karlovy Vary has enticed the likes of Mark Twain and composers Beethoven and Mozart, while more recently the glitterati have started descending for the town's annual film festival.

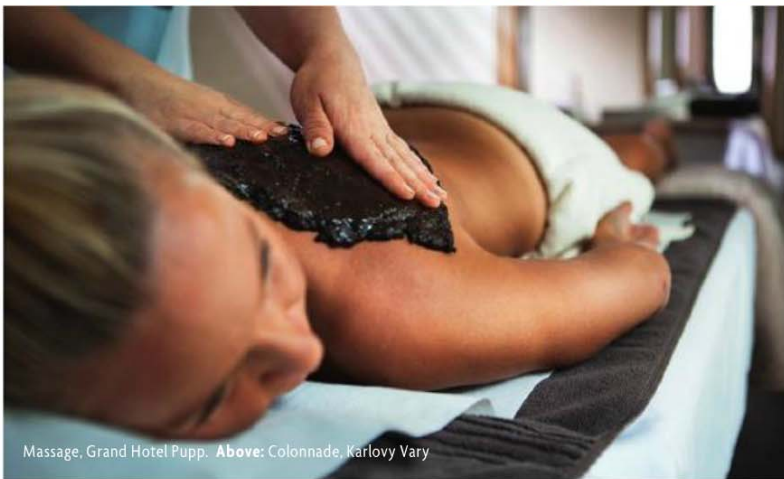
This colonnaded spa town, with 15 springs that reach temperatures up to 73C, is one corner of the West Bohemian Spa Triangle and the second most visited place in the Czech Republic. Its main attraction is the mineral-rich water, which is said to help treat problems including digestive issues, metabolic disorders and obesity.

Treatments include centuries-old thermal baths and drinking cures — visitors fill special 'spa cups' at the springs — as well as more modern spa techniques such as cryotherapy, floatation and laser therapy. They can be undertaken during a 'classic' spa stay, overseen by a doctor for a recommended three weeks, or a wellness break that you can plan at one of more than 100 hotels in the Karlovy Vary area.

One of the most renowned places to stay is the Grand Hotel Pupp, with its 1,300sq metre spa area. Meanwhile, a public spa boasts some 60 types of treatment, including a 'beery bath' of vitamin B, hops and different cereals.

A visit doesn't have to be all about treatments, though. Visitors can enjoy the beauty of the town's setting in the dramatic, steep-sided valley of the Tepla River, strolling along one of 24 designated 'spa walks' or going by funicular to the Diana Observation Tower for spectacular views. And make sure no visit ends without a taste of the famous local Becherovka herbal liqueur, sometimes dubbed the '16th spring'. ▶

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Massage, Grand Hotel Pupp. Above: Colonnade, Karlovy Vary

IMAGES: GRAND HOTEL PUPP; DAVID MARVAN; LADISLAV RENNER; CZECHTOURISM

CZECH REPUBLIC



MARIANSKE LAZNE

'I have seen the whole of India, Ceylon and all the spas of Europe, but have nowhere been so smitten with the poetry of beautiful nature like here in Marianske Lazne,' wrote King Edward VII in 1901. So smitten was he, in fact, that he visited nine times — and it's easy to understand why, with the surrounding Slavkovsky nature reserve plus the town's parks, woodland and 100 cold mineral springs creating a thoroughly attractive wellness destination.

People began using the springs here in cures as early as the 16th century, but it was local doctor Johann Josef Nehr in the late 18th century who supposedly proved their efficacy. Marianske Lazne (or Marienbad)

subsequently developed into the spa town it is today. Its springs, ranging in temperature from 7C-10C, contain high levels of mineral salts and carbon dioxide. Gas features prominently in treatments, with dry gas baths and gas injections (said to improve heart activity and blood flow) offered.

Unique to Marianske Lazne is the 'mineral bath with dry wrap': it involves forcing CO₂ into warm water, creating a relaxing and tickling bath. Another popular treatment takes place in the salt caves, where the air is saturated with minerals, creating a microclimate that's thought to help strengthen the immune system. After time cooped up in a cave, you'll be even more smitten with the view outside.



Clockwise from top left: Nove Lazne Spa Hotel, Marianske Lazne; Singing Fountain and Caroline Spring Colonnade, Marianske Lazne; Frantiskovy Lazne spa

FRANTISKOVY LAZNE

The smallest town and third corner of the West Bohemian Spa Triangle, Frantiskovy Lazne (Franzensbad) has a spa heritage dating from 1793 and the opening of the world's first peat pulp baths. Curative iron sulphate peat pulp was found in local moorland, and the beauty of the town's neoclassical colonnades and proximity to the picturesque hamlet of Cheb contributed to its popularity.

As well as Austrian Emperor Franz I, Frantiskovy Lazne has seduced a string of notable figures: Johann Strauss, Franz Kafka and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who described it as "heaven on earth".

The peat is still used in spa treatments, and features alongside the 21 health-giving cold springs found in the area. Between 9C and 11C, the springs are used to treat

issues including cardiovascular disease and infertility. Some are utilised for balneological purposes; others only in drinking cures. The most powerful of the latter is the Glauber IV, which has the world's highest content of Glauber's salt, a purgative good for curing sores, swelling and pain.

But it's not all about medical cures, as the sleepy town serves to improve well-being as a whole. Spa hotels and pavilions built over the springs neighbour a generous landscaped park, so walks are integral to treatments. Visitors should find the Little Frantisek statue (locals believe that if a woman touches it in a certain place, she will become pregnant) and seek out the Two Golden Lions house, where Beethoven stayed during his visits, as well as the beautiful architecture. They do say the best things come in small packages. ■

WHERE ELSE

Jachymov: The highest city in the Czech Republic, Jachymov became the world's first radon spa in the early 20th century. In small doses, radon can have positive effects on the body.

Janske Lazne: Located in the Krkonose Mountains, the carbonated thermal spring water here is used to treat a range of muscular and nervous conditions.

Karlova Studanka: Known for its clean air, this Jeseniky Mountains spa town has been providing cures for respiratory problems for more than two centuries.

IMAGES: NOVE LAZNE SPA HOTEL: LADISLAV RENNER; DAVID MARVAN; CZECHTOURISM