

Waters Continue To Flow In Elegant Baden Baden

By Patricia Arrigoni

BADEN BADEN, West Germany – Nineteenth century Baden Baden, “the summer capital of Europe,” was where members of the aristocracy and crowned heads of state came to “take the waters” and to gamble in the famous casino.

Today, both residents and tourists frequent the palatial spa, Friedrichsbad, and the modern Augustabad, for water treatments that date back 2,000 years to 117 A.D. War-weary Roman legionnaires used to come to “Aqua Aurelea” to bathe in the hot healing waters. The emperor Caracalla (186-217 A.D.) wounded in a battle against the Alemennic tribes, was carried here to recover, and he built a marble temple in thanksgiving. The fascinating ruins are still visible below the Friedrichsbad.

The city of Baden Baden has 22 springs that pour out 800,000 liters daily of water containing sodium and chloride ions. One source is radioactive.

Remodeled in 1980-81, the Friedrichsbad contains marbles, columns, and a huge ornate dome above the communal pool. The latter is called “communal” because men and women swim together in the nude as part of the treatment.

What is called the “Roman-Irish” bath program (the “Irish” part is supposed to be the dry heat) combines a lot of showering with intervals of dry heat chambers, a violent sudsing and scrubbing with a “steel-like brush” (this treatments ends with the “traditional slap on the bottom”), a steam room where the customer is laid out on a white marble slab, a thermal steam bath, two warm thermal pools, the grand communal pool, a plunge and total submersion into an icy pool (the customer is given a “good-natured push” if he should hesitate), and finally a drying and resting period wrapped in sheets.

Those who survive are supposed to be helped with arthritis and rheumatism, nervous tension, cardiovascular complaints, sports-injured bones and muscles, etc.

Other treatments include underwater jet massage, carbonic acid gas baths, nose and throat inhalations, mud baths, electric hot air treatments, and a program of drinking different waters.

After a day at the baths, hotel guests may want to stroll to the nearby casino. While the Casino Baden Baden claims to be more than 200 years old, the building at its present location was only opened in 1824, but predates the inauguration of the casino in Monte Carlo by 42 years. They are equally magnificent.

Since the last remodeling (1975), the Baden Baden casino has nine gaming rooms with 35 gaming tables and 200 croupiers. It is open from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. and offers roulette, American roulette, baccarat and blackjack.

The most exquisite part of the casino consists of the Benazet Halls, built by Edouard Benazet between 1848 and 1867, and designed by Charles Sechan, a French stage designer. These include the “Winter Garden Hall,” a replica of a Versailles theater under Louis XVI, the Red Hall, Salon Pompadour, and Green Hall.

Klaus Busch, one of the managers, said that the Casino Baden Baden is the largest in Europe and takes in three times more money than the best casino in France.

It is interesting to note that residents of Baden Baden may not enter the casino except with written permission from their mayor. Visitors must register, show passports and, if required, sign documents attesting their financial ability.

The grand hotel in Baden Baden is the Brenner’s Park Hotel, synonymous with 19th century pomp and circumstance. Brenner’s itself was a former residence of Napoleon III which had been turned into the Hotel Stephanie-les-Bain (named for Napoleon’s stepdaughter). It was purchased in 1872 by Anton Brenner, the town tailor. Anton’s son, Camille, married the local innkeeper’s daughter, who had royal connections, and the hotel became the social center of Europe.

This famous spa hotel is situated in a lush private park along the little Oos River which winds its way beside the Lichtentalee Allee, a famous promenade that leads to the city’s center. A flowered footbridge spans the Oos, providing access to the two wings of the Brenner Park Hotel from the promenade.

We arrived at this grand-dame of hotels by taxi from the nearby train station. The intimate lobby was decorated with Oriental rugs covering marble floors and antique furniture.

Our room on the third floor turned out to have a lovely balcony and a view of the Oos River and the park beyond. The sitting room was furnished with an antique desk and chair, three overstuffed chairs, a gold-colored love seat, two tables, and assorted lamps and paintings.