

## EHTTA President's Speech to the Press Conference

São Pedro do Sul, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Welcome to the historic Roman Baths here in **São Pedro do Sul**.

Our thermal towns are special places, with thermal water at their heart, and since the Romans and before, there have been buildings and settlements dedicated to sharing the beneficial healing effects of these waters. You will learn later in the Café of Europe that our thermal towns were so important that they were featured on the Tabula Peutingeriana map – some of the only places to be illustrated on this incredible historic document, lending weight to Pliny the Elder's observation: "Aquae urbesque condunt", meaning that "Waters give rise to towns".

Thermal towns were important two thousand years ago, and they are important and relevant NOW, as we emerge slowly from the pandemic.

- We know that people want to travel again;
- We know that they are looking for places that are less crowded than the big cities;
- We know that people want to boost their immunity in different ways;
- We know that people want fresh air, peace and quiet, and time to heal,
- We know that as part of a more relaxed pace of life, they also want good local food;

- We know that people want to broaden their minds again, learning about culture and history, and to take part in the festivals and events that have been a hallmark of spa town life for so long;
- We know that that people want to invest time and money in their health and their wellness, and that future holidays will include exercise, relaxing treatments, and medical therapies which can help them to recover from the many challenges of the last 14 months.
- We know that our thermal towns can offer all this and so much more, and it is all here ready to be rediscovered.

I can be a salesman for our towns, and by launching our “rediscover” campaign today, we are inviting tourists to revisit places like São Pedro do Sul for holidays that will really do them good. But leaving aside the sales pitch, I also have a message to deliver as a politician, because I think that some of my colleagues in other places have forgotten about the spa towns in their territories and how important they are not only in terms of the economy but for the health of their own people. We know that in several countries in our network, thermal establishments were some of the first places to close and after months and months of lockdown, in many places they are not permitted to open, despite the benefits that reopening would bring.

So today, I invite European leaders to rediscover the importance and potential of their own thermal towns and territories and remember that thermal towns can give us all strength and the power to recover. We are standing on the threshold of a new era of development of thermalism projects, and we welcome the economic benefits that they will bring to our towns. For example,

- COVID has taught us all that we need to improve our immune systems. Thermal towns can help with this and we are likely to see innovation in this field
- In my very own office building in Ourense, we have seized the opportunity of making a new grand spa hotel for our town – even if I do have to find a new office!

- Also in Ourense, which we call the “thermal capital”, we are developing a new “World Thermal Observatory” to promote knowledge transfer and cooperation in thermal tourism intelligence between continents.
- Our Association can also fulfil the mission of promoting European thermal culture to the rest of the world. We celebrate the heritage, culture and scientific legacy of the historic thermal towns based on sustainability criteria that have helped our destinations survive for centuries.

Our Association is a member of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme, and proud to have been certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe since 2010. We are also pleased to support the careful opening up of the tourism industry across Europe. For this reason we have been very pleased to work with the European Tourism Manifesto Alliance and the European Tourism Commission and others who are working so hard to allow people to come back to our towns and to reconnect to the waters and everything else we have to offer. We also support the development of Green Certificates, which will allow people to move freely within the EU and to rediscover our towns more easily.

Finally I am delighted to launch our new “**Rediscover**” campaign.

I have believed ever since the start of the pandemic that thermal towns will and should be an essential part of our recovery in Europe. We are experienced in welcoming and looking after people from all walks of life. People are drawn to our towns, for the waters and for their healthy lifestyle that feeds body, mind and spirit. We all need that thermal lifestyle more than ever, to help us recover, and to strengthen our ability to cope with any new challenges that come along.

We believe that thermal towns can provide a solution that people are searching for, and we invite those people to reassess what they think they know about our towns, and to rediscover their charm, their historic roots, their stunning thermal architecture and the health-giving thermal waters.

So we invite you to rediscover Europe's Historic Thermal Towns and to come and visit us again soon!