

# The Candidate: Luhacovice Spa with Rare Vernacular Architecture

In 2001 a Czech spa resort at Luhacovice was inscribed on the UNESCO's tentative list of world heritage. It is an architecturally prominent and unique complex of buildings which, from the end of the 19th century throughout approximately the first three decades of the 20th century, gradually formed the base of the present spa town situated in the east part of Moravia, Czech Republic. The spa buildings in Luhacovice represent a unique specimen of modern spa architecture of the early 20th century, inspired by vernacular design. In this respect, Luhacovice is a locality that cannot be compared to any other item on the World Heritage List included.



For centuries Luhacovice had been a relatively unimportant village situated in a rather poorly accessible valley of the river Stavnice. From the 17th century it had had also a gentry residence and a manor farm. The therapeutic effects of the local mineral springs were first mentioned in written records already in the 1760s. Originally, the water was exported from the village in bottles, and when an expert analysis stating the qualities of the mineral waters was publicized, more and more patients became interested in undergoing treatment directly in the spa town.

The first spa buildings were built after 1792 and in 1809 the town designated first paths for spa guests. The oldest preserved building of the spa centre is the baroque Chapel of St. Elisabeth from 1795.

A decisive impulse for the creation of a spa complex that would be preserved until today the foundation of a joint stock company which bought the whole area of the health resort in 1902. Luhacovice thus became the only large spa resort in the territory of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy, that was owned by a Czech company. In an effort to raise national consciousness the Czech as well as generally Slavonic character of the spa was reflected in the work of the spa's architect Dusan Jurkovic. He designed several new spa buildings as well as external works which reshaped the existing spa area. His contribution to Luhacovice's image has remained dominant until now.

His project resulted in the construction of a series of unique buildings whose exterior combines the motifs of Slavonic folk architecture of the Carpathian region with the Art Nouveau decoration and the influences of English neo-vernacular architecture. This distinctive style is characterized by the dominant use of wooden and half-timbered constructions and by specific decorative motifs on the buildings.

The most important of Jurkovic's buildings in Luhacovice from the beginning of the 20th century include the Jestrabi lodging villa, the Institute of Hydrotherapy, the adjacent swimming pool and sun baths and, in particular, the central building of the spa, Januv dum (Jan's House) which emerged in 1901–1902 from the reconstruction of an older object and is now called Jurkovicuv dum (Jurkovic's House).



The central area of the spa is dominated by other architecturally prominent objects – the Art Nouveau spa hotel from 1910 built by the architect Emil Kralik and bearing the name of the world known Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, and the Community Centre, an important constructivist building from the 1933–1935 period by Frantisek Roith. A unique treatment facility of its time was the Inhalatorium, built between the years 1922 and 1923. The spa complex has also its own theatre, and its appearance is enhanced by a number of charming smaller architectural works – structures built above the mineral springs, an Art Nouveau pavilion next to tennis courts, music pavilion and a complex of bridges over the Stavnice, corresponding in their character to the wooden decorative motifs of the spa buildings.

The development of the spa complex was accompanied by the building of new lodging houses and villas, both in the immediate neighborhood of the central spa area and in separate quarters. Even today we can still see the preserved original character of the Prague Quarter with several architecturally valuable buildings from the first third of the 20th century, as well as the original appearance of the southern, so called White Quarter, situated in a lateral valley and consisting of more historic buildings, predominantly of a late Art Nouveau design and in particular a group of detached functionalist lodging houses built in the years 1926 and 1927. In the southern part of the spa, important hotel-type medical treatment houses – Palace, Morava and Alexandria – were built after World War 1. Beside these houses, this part of the spa area is dominated by the buildings of the Post Office and the Municipal Office (the object of a former bank, built in 1937). Between the years 1947 and 1950, the Great and the Small Colonnades were built along the eastern brim of the valley and joined by a hall raised above one of the mineral springs, thus delineating the central panorama of the spa.



Thanks to the exceptional quality of the Luhacovice mineral springs, natural conditions and the

longstanding tradition of successful medical care, the town is a locality unique also from the viewpoint of history and practice of the spa treatment itself. The services of the health resort include drinking cures, inhalation, balinotherapeutic procedures, massages, peat procedures and locomotor rehabilitation, and thus allow the treatment of the respiratory and digestive tracts, metabolism disorders as well as dysfunctions of the locomotor system.

A large majority of the spa activities and services take place in the preserved historical buildings whose charm, together with the character of their immediate environment, makes the stay at the health resort an unforgettable and unique experience. The spa area of the town preserved its specific atmosphere, enhanced by the large, regularly kept area of the nature park with designated footpaths. A valuable feature of the park is its preserved original dendrologic pattern, corresponding to that of the surrounding countryside.

Photos: Luhacovice Spa

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