

The history of the St. Moritz Heilbad

St. Moritz's reputation as a spa and holiday resort rests on the mineral springs which have bubbled away there for thousands of years.

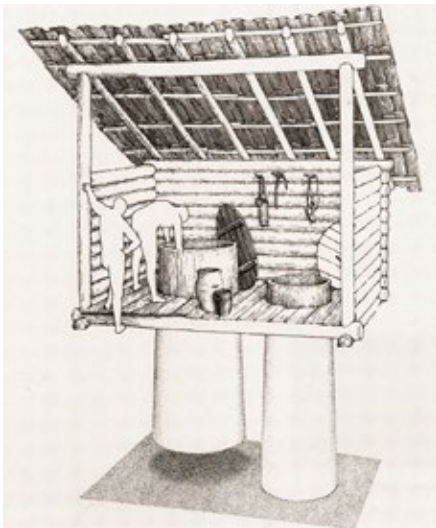


Image 1:
Reconstruction (C. Badrutt) of the first
spring tapping, as it might have looked
in 1411 BC.



Image 2:
The prehistoric larch trunks of the Saint
Maurice spring tapping at St. Moritz.
It is the oldest surviving spring tapping
in Europe.

The first spring tapping at St. Moritz

In 1411 BC, almost three and a half thousand years ago, the Celts first tapped the springs, using two hollowed-out larch-trees to capture and hold the naturally carbonated mineral waters.

Paracelsus makes the springs world-famous

In 1519, Medici Pope Leo X decreed a pilgrimage to the Holy Church of Saint Maurice. Even in the Middle Ages, numerous spa physicians praised the healing powers of the mineral springs.

After his visit to St. Moritz in 1535, the famous physician Paracelsus extolled the acidulous mineral water as the best in Europe, bringing it worldwide fame. However, St. Moritz continued to neglect its valuable springs. Then, in the 16th century they were buried by floods and earthquakes and sank into obscurity.

The first well house

In the 17th century, noblemen and foreign scholars drew attention to the special healing powers of the springs, improved the tapping and called attention to the wretched conditions in the surrounding area. As a result, the local St. Moritz council cleaned up the marshy area between 1668 and 1670, and built a simple shelter in 1671.

Slowly, the local population began to take an interest. In 1680, the tree trunks tapping the springs were repaired, and then, in 1696, the springs were leased to well-known St. Moritz families for an annual rent of 90 florins. This marked the start of marketing activities, with a successful, European-wide promotion.

The golden age of the spa

During the Belle Époque, from the 17th to the 19th centuries, spas became cultural centres and meeting places for the upper classes. After a long period of inactivity, St. Moritz finally joined this boom at the end of the 17th and into the 18th century. Dukes and princes with their entourages came from across Europe to take the cures in summer. The Italian aristocracy in particular came to pay their respects to the naturally iron-rich springs. Gentlemen made the difficult journey over the Maloja Pass on horseback while the ladies travelled in litters.

Nevertheless, St. Moritz continued to ignore its mineral springs. Although prominent guests tried to draw attention to problems, the conservative town elders avoided the issue.



Image 3:
Watercolour by Hans Conrad Escher von der Linth, the front of the well house around 1770; in the background the small farmer's village of St. Moritz.



Image 4:
The first (old) Kurhaus, built in 1832 by master builder Johannes Badrutt, was still unable to accommodate overnight guests.



Image 5:
The (new) impressive Kurhaus, built in 1856 with 50 beds.



Image 6:
The Versailles of the Alps, with bath and spa buildings, a new Kurhaus and extensive parks.

Historian Johann Ulrich von Salis gave a serious address to the town leaders, saying "The whole spring house is about to collapse". He criticized their ill will, greed and arrogance: "The inhabitants even seem to take a certain pride in their inexplicable indolence, saying 'Let the visitors decide whether they want to come here or stay away'..."

In 1815, some of the younger citizens of St. Moritz took advantage of the absence of their conservative elders, who were at a cattle market in Tirano, to pass a resolution to correct the Inn riverbed and drain the area around the springs as well as to build a new road from the village (Dorf) to the spring (Bad). This turning point marked the first flowering of St. Moritz. In 1832, the first Kurhaus was built. In 1856 an impressive new spa complex with a Kurhaus and large baths followed, while in 1864 a magnificent spa hotel, the Grand Hôtel des Bains, complete with 300 guest rooms, was constructed. This wonderful spa complex was known as the Versailles of the Alps.

In 1914, the outbreak of World War I marked the end of the golden age of spas, including in St. Moritz. After the war, tourism made a very slow recovery. With the development and progress of modern medicine, spa resorts lost their importance.

Diseases of modern society

The great success in the fight against infectious diseases and the mastery of surgical and medical emergencies meant that life expectancy increased, and this, in turn, led to new illnesses. These diseases of modern society have pushed modern medicine to the limit. The multi-factorial diseases are partly caused by a distorted relationship between man and the environment, faulty lifestyle and behavioural habits, overeating, lack of exercise or excess stress, but also partly by the natural ageing process.

Medicinal or surgical procedures alone cannot satisfactorily combat such diseases. They require versatile preventive approaches and therapies. In contrast, spa resorts with their health centres offer a wide range of preventive and healing therapies. People feel comfortable and are able to recover in this environment. Tried and tested natural spa treatments are offered in modern form, complemented by highly qualified physiotherapy, medical wellness and paramedical services, as well as consultations to promote a healthy lifestyle and behaviour.

1976 – the new spa

In 1976, St. Moritz recognised this potential and built a new St. Moritz Heilbad. Even today, the St. Moritz Heilbad facilities are primarily focused on traditional spa treatments, such as carbonated mineral water baths for the treatment of cardiovascular diseases and the use of alpine moor mud for treating the widespread diseases of the musculoskeletal system. Thanks to the long-lasting, positive effects on patient health and well-being, guests who try these treatments return to them again and again. Nevertheless, the St. Moritz Heilbad is outdated and urgently needs to be renovated as a modern health centre.

Although the St. Moritz authorities were aware of the problems, they were concerned that expanding the spa complex, made up of the Parkhotel Kurhaus, indoor swimming pool and spa, would be too much of a financial burden for St. Moritz. The Parkhotel Kurhaus, with its increasingly urgent need for reconstruction and renovations, the outdated swimming pool and,



Image 7:
The new spa in 1976.



Images 8 and 9:
Traditional balneological spa treatments
at the St. Moritz Heilbad: carbonated
mineral bath and mud pack.

to a lesser extent, the spa, all required substantial and ever-increasing investments. It was hoped that the solution lay in partial privatisation, which was backed by a local referendum in 1995. In 2001, an agreement was drawn up with the real estate company, SüBA. This property development contract obliged SüBA to expand the spa into a modern, medical health and spa centre, which would incorporate local spa treatments. The contract also entailed renovation of the indoor swimming pool, expanding it to include a modern wellness and fitness complex, as well as refurbishment of the hotel, which would also be enhanced with new hotel residences.

Yet, from this initially promised master plan, little was realized. Only the hotel and the residences, which promised a return on investment, were expanded and then leased out to the Kempinski Hotels SA group for a period of twenty years. In the wake of the failed agreement and under public pressure, St. Moritz took back responsibility for the indoor swimming pool, which was then rebuilt at a cost of around CHF 70 million. To date, only small, insignificant changes have been made to the spa. SüBA set up St. Moritz Bäder AG to manage and run the spa complex. Unfortunately, they were unable to operate the spa profitably and sought to close it after just one year, with agreement of the St. Moritz representatives.

It was then that I, Robert Eberhard, M.D. as the spa physician, used all possible resources to put up a fight against their non-compliance with their contractual obligations. I wanted to preserve the ancient spa tradition, a primary source of St. Moritz's fascinating history, for the sake of both the numerous spa guests and the local population.

As a condition for continuing to operate the spa, St. Moritz Bäder AG demanded that I manage it at my own financial risk. As a result, chief physiotherapist Britta Ahlden and I founded the medical therapy centre (MTZ), which we have continued to operate at our own risk and with an idealistic commitment.

For support and renewal, we founded the MTZ Heilbad St. Moritz AG and the Paracelsus Foundation, which are both supported by numerous local residents and grateful spa guests. In March 2013, then owner Immofinanz Group sold St. Moritz Bäder AG, and with it the spa operations, to Russian investors – another case of property speculation. Since then, the spa's future has been uncertain. The new owners had St. Moritz Bäder AG inform the MTZ Heilbad St. Moritz that its previous lease would be terminated when it expires at the end of May, 2017. It is unclear whether a new agreement can be reached. The current owner's intentions are unknown. Since St. Moritz Bäder AG failed in its initial attempt to manage the spa, it seems unlikely that a new attempt would be successful.

It would be tragic and irresponsible for St. Moritz to lose its spa tradition and with it the origins of its modern-day tourism industry.

The following two publications (in German) provide detailed information about the spa and its history:

Heini Hofmann



Das Heilbad darf nicht sterben!

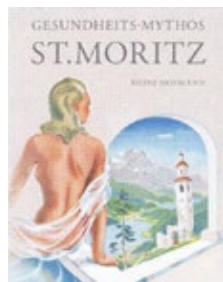
Publisher: Paracelsus Foundation St. Moritz

Self-publishing: MTZ Heilbad St. Moritz, 2014

ISBN 978-3-033-04575-0

CHF 25.– / **EUR** 22.–

Heini Hofmann



Gesundheits-Mythos St. Moritz

Publisher: Dr Oscar Bernhard Foundation

Publishing house: Montabella Verlag, St. Moritz

ISBN 978-3-907067-40-6

CHF 98.– / **EUR** 89.–

First edition 2011, **2nd revised edition** 2014

Credits

Image 1: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Mythos St. Moritz. Sauerwasser, Gebirgssonne, Höhenklima. 2nd edition. St. Moritz. P. 64.

Image 2: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Mythos St. Moritz. Sauerwasser, Gebirgssonne, Höhenklima. 2nd edition. St. Moritz. P. 65.

Image 3: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Das Heilbad darf nicht sterben! St. Moritz vor einer schicksalhaften Entscheidung. St. Moritz. P. 17.

Image 4: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Das Heilbad darf nicht sterben! St. Moritz vor einer schicksalhaften Entscheidung. St. Moritz. P. 22.

Image 5: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Das Heilbad darf nicht sterben! St. Moritz vor einer schicksalhaften Entscheidung. St. Moritz. P. 27.

Image 6: Hofmann, Heini (2014): Das Heilbad darf nicht sterben! St. Moritz vor einer schicksalhaften Entscheidung. St. Moritz. P. 30.

Image 7: Ursula Hersperger; Ameno, Meilen.

Image 8: MTZ Heilbad St. Moritz (non-copyrighted image).

Image 9: MTZ Heilbad St. Moritz (non-copyrighted image).

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