

# 3

# Thermal and Mineral Springs

*Louise Buxton*

## Introduction

Water and spa are ubiquitous geographically and culturally, but the relationship between that water and bathing rituals has led directly and indirectly to the organic growth of many of today's spa products. The aim of this chapter is to explore the use of thermal and mineral waters for bathing, and it begins with a review of the origins, cultural and religious associations of bathing rituals. The current industry suggests that the approaches to hot spring bathing are broadly defined by three main categories:

- Relaxation and connection with the environment, as seen in Asian cultures;
- Health based and spiritual treatments, largely seen in European cultures;
- Religious connections, evident in Indian and indigenous cultures.

This categorisation creates a debate within the industry as to whether globalisation fosters a blurring of these distinctions. Questions that result from this are:

- Is connection to the environment evident in cultures other than Asia?
- Where else are spiritual treatments seen other than in Europe?
- Do religious connections exist outside of indigenous cultures?

The chapter also provides a historical illustration, drawing on examples of thermal and mineral spas from different continents, from the ancient Greek and Roman baths, the glamorous European spa resorts, to the onsen of Japan and hot springs of North America. The context is exemplified in size and shape where Davidson (cited in Global Spa and Wellness Summit, 2013) and the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) (2014) concur in estimating that the global market is now worth over fifty billion US dollars. Furthermore, this market

growth is driven by new manifestations, such as the rejuvenation of the Eastern European industry based around emerging tourism destinations. For example the Hungarian resort of Heviz, developments such as the Crescent Hotel in Buxton, England and in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. The efficacy of bathing in thermal and mineral waters is then discussed as is the relationship to the notion of 'existential authenticity'.

## Nomenclature

Opinion varies on where the word 'spa' originates from. Interpretations include: that it may be derived from the Walloon word 'espa' meaning fountain, that it comes from the Belgian town named Spa where a thermal spring was discovered in the 14th century, from the Latin word 'spagere' meaning to scatter or sprinkle or that it is an acronym of the Latin phrase 'sanitas per aquas' healing through water (van Tubergen and van der Linden, 2002; Uherek-Bradecka and Bradeki, 2012). These myths and legends of spa feed the industry's mystification and allude that its longevity is a reason to trust its brands and products.

Lack of clarity also emanates from the many terms used to describe bathing in water and associated modalities; complicated further by the engagement of different fields in their use, namely the spa and wellness sector and the medical profession. For over a decade proposals have been made which call for a consensus on worldwide definitions of terms such as health resort medicine, balneology and climatology. A consensus statement confirming a common understanding had been achieved, for the requirement to develop definitions of terms was put forward in 2005 by the International Society of Medical Hydrology and Climatology (ISMH), Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Board of Medical Specialists European Union (UEMS), World Organization of Thermalism (OMTH), World Federation of Hydrotherapy and Climatotherapy (FEMTEC), International Society of Hydrothermal Techniques (SITH) and Medical Committee of European Spa Association (ESPA) (European Spa Association, 2016a). Subsequently, Gutenbrunner *et al.* (2010), representing the medical profession, called for an agreement on worldwide definitions of: health resort medicine, balneology, medical hydrology and climatology. The rationale provided for the need for this agreement stems from the lack of international recognition for these modalities as independent medical specialities. Concurring, with Gutenbrunner *et al.* (2010), Varga (2010) emphasises the urgency of the task, noting that the lack of universally recognised terms inhibits the preparation of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. More complexity is added to this debate as, interestingly for the spa and wellness sector, one barrier Gutenbrunner *et al.* (2010) note to establishing worldwide recognition, is the trend to use balneotherapy interventions for wellness concepts, in hotels, health clubs and spas, suggesting that this type of promotion draws attention away from the medical use of such treatments.

The use of different terms is likewise complicated by the emergence of English as the principal scientific language, juxtaposed to the main development of areas such as balneotherapy in Roman, German speaking or Eastern European countries. Furthermore, Latin speaking countries often use the term crenotherapy instead of balneotherapy (Varga, 2010). This plethora of terms suggest the complex nature of bathing in thermal or mineral waters. An attempt to confirm basic definitions of these terms is provided below in Table 3.1.

Term	Definition
Taking the waters	Bathing in water for therapeutic purposes
Balneotherapy	Treatment employing bathing in thermal or minerals waters, gases or peloids, drinking water or inhaling gases or water
Balneology	The scientific field dealing with balneotherapy
Thalassotherapy	Treatment employing bathing in sea water or sea products
Hydrotherapy	Treatment immersing a part of or the whole body in plain water, often employing exercises, or the application of water jets
Pelotherapy	Application of peloids (mud or clay) for therapeutic purposes
Climatotherapy	Application of climatic factors for the prevention or treatment of disease or for rehabilitation

**Table 3.1:** Terms related to the use of thermal and mineral water and associated modalities (Adapted from Gutenbrunner *et al.*, 2010; Routh *et al.*, 1996; van Tubergen and van der Linden, 2002)

## Origins, religion and culture

Water is fundamental to preserving and promoting health and wellbeing, and as such is the most valuable resource for life (FEMTEC, 2015). People have been bathing in mineral and thermal waters for millennia and its popularity continues today. Nevertheless, as an essential part of human existence, much of the knowledge of the cultural, historical and religious use of water has been integrated into everyday routine; as such, it has become tacit and little is formally documented.

Water forms part of purification rituals in many of the major religions (Routh *et al.*, 1996). The river Ganges is the Mother Goddess of Hinduism and the water with its life-giving capacities is worshiped as a divinity (Darian, 1978; Eck, 1983; Feldhaus, 1995). In Hinduism, bathing in the river Ganges and the natural springs of Vishnu, Ujjyan, Sitakundu, Puskar, Kumbha and Gangasagar frees a Hindu of their sins and brings wellness and peace, furthermore, immersing a dying person in water with the aim of curing their disease is well known (Routh *et al.*, 1996). In Judaism, Talmudic law emphasises the importance of using water to achieve cleanliness, and the healing aspects of the Dead Sea were well known (Routh *et al.*,