



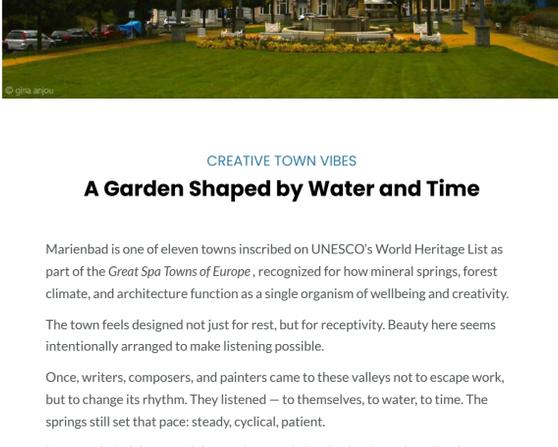
## Last Year at Marienbad 🍂

Hey there,

Visiting Marienbad last year, I was struck by how alive stillness can feel — mist drifting through colonnades, forest pressing close, springs breathing beneath the ground.

You might know the town's name from Resnais' surreal film *Last Year at Marienbad*, a place without coordinates, entered less by travel than by attention. The real Marienbad — Mariánské Lázně, in western Bohemia — tells a quieter story, shaped by a long dialogue between landscape, ritual, and imagination.

Walking here, I found myself moving within that conversation — from stone to leaf, from sound to silence. What emerged wasn't an escape from time, but a different way of keeping it.



### CREATIVE TOWN VIBES

## A Garden Shaped by Water and Time

Marienbad is one of eleven towns inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List as part of the *Great Spa Towns of Europe*, recognized for how mineral springs, forest climate, and architecture function as a single organism of wellbeing and creativity.

The town feels designed not just for rest, but for receptivity. Beauty here seems intentionally arranged to make listening possible.

Once, writers, composers, and painters came to these valleys not to escape work, but to change its rhythm. They listened — to themselves, to water, to time. The springs still set that pace: steady, cyclical, patient.

I was reminded that creativity needs not only inspiration, but mineralization — ideas shaped slowly through repetition and stillness. In Marienbad, nothing arrives fully formed. It reveals itself in small rituals, repeated and precise.

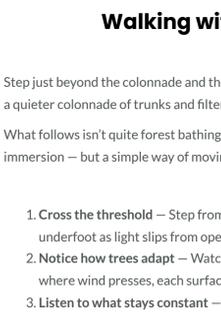
What that looks like, in practice, is surprisingly tangible. These are some of my favorites.

### SPRINGS, STONES & SWEETS

## The Town in Three Gestures

### 1. Cross Spring – The Mineral Heart

At the center of the colonnades lies the *Cross Spring (Křížový Pramen)*, the oldest of more than forty mineral springs. Its water tastes sharp, almost electric. Locals still sip it at dawn, cup in hand — the first ritual of the day, a quiet welcome to time itself.

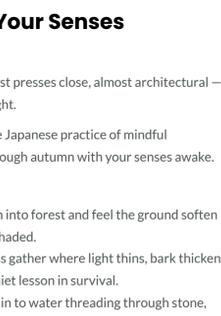


### 2. Geological Park – Walking Earth's Memory

Just beyond the spa façades, the forest opens into the *Geological Park* — a theatre of stones. Basalt, granite, limestone: each fragment carries deep time, tracing how this land was once sea, then fire, then forest. A reminder that healing, like geology itself, unfolds layer by layer.

### 3. Spa Wafers – The Taste of Return

Thin, embossed wafers filled with hazelnut or chocolate, baked here for over 160 years. At *Lázeňské Oplatky*, just steps from the Cross Spring Colonnade, tradition comes warm from the oven — a familiar sweetness to savor while wandering the town's autumnal paths.



### FROM TOWN TO FOREST

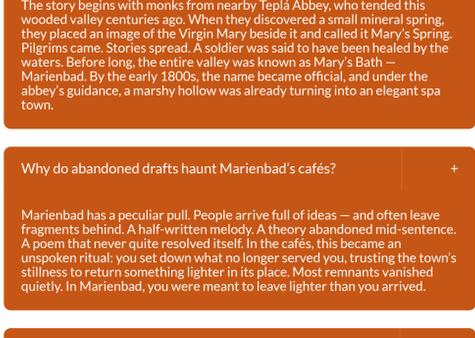
## Walking with Your Senses

Step just beyond the colonnade and the forest presses close, almost architectural — a quieter colonnade of trunks and filtered light.

What follows isn't quite forest bathing — the Japanese practice of mindful immersion — but a simple way of moving through autumn with your senses awake.

1. **Cross the threshold** — Step from town into forest and feel the ground soften underfoot as light slips from open to shaded.
2. **Notice how trees adapt** — Watch moss gather where light thins, bark thicken where wind presses, each surface a quiet lesson in survival.
3. **Listen to what stays constant** — Tune in to water threading through stone, and let the sound steady the pace of your thoughts.
4. **Scent the turning** — Lean toward a fallen log where mushrooms cluster and breathe in the deep, earthy note of the forest remaking itself.
5. **Taste the season** — Hold a single rosehip, autumn's bright ember, and steep it later as tea, letting the forest linger on your tongue.
6. **Touch deep time** — Run your fingers over smooth, cool stone and sense the geology beneath the season's change, shaped by patience rather than hours.

When you emerge back into town, the calm lingers. But Marienbad has another rhythm too — one of stories and confessions, threaded through its fountains and colonnades for centuries.



### FROM CURIOSITIES TO CONFESSIONS

## Spa Town Quiz Master

How did Marienbad get its name? +

The story begins with monks from nearby Teplá Abbey, who tended this wooded valley centuries ago. When they discovered a small mineral spring, they placed an image of the Virgin Mary beside it and called it Mary's Spring. Pilgrims came. Stories spread. A soldier was said to have been healed by the waters. Before long, the entire valley was known as Mary's Bath — Marienbad. By the early 1800s, the name became official, and under the abbey's guidance, a marshy hollow was already turning into an elegant spa town.

Why do abandoned drafts haunt Marienbad's cafés? +

Marienbad has a peculiar pull. People arrive full of ideas — and often leave fragments behind. A half-written melody. A theory abandoned mid-sentence. A poem that never quite resolved itself. In the cafés, this became an unspoken ritual: you set down what no longer served you, trusting the town's stillness to return something lighter in its place. Most remnants vanished quietly. In Marienbad, you were meant to leave lighter than you arrived.

Marienbad's cures: miracles, myth or measurable? +

For centuries, visitors spoke of relief from fatigue, digestive troubles, and stiff joints — claims that once sounded almost magical. Today, science confirms part of the secret. Carbon dioxide baths boost circulation. Mineral waters support digestion. Forest air — rich in ions released from soil and trees — gently lowers stress. Here, legend and evidence blend, and the most lasting cure may simply be what you absorb by moving slowly through the town's rhythms and elements.

The quizzes may tease, but Marienbad has always been a place where stories surface easily. The waters cured many things. Discretion was rarely among them.

### GOSSIP COLUMN

## The Curious Case of Marienbad's Love Potions

For a town devoted to discipline, routine, and restraint, Marienbad exerted a peculiar aphrodisiac pull — at least in the *famous-men-in-love-with-young-women* category. The pattern was hard to ignore: the waters healed the body, and for men, they seemed to awaken a reckless appetite for improbable love.



It all began with Goethe. Seventy-something, world-famous, and suddenly lovestruck, he arrived seeking health and fell for 17-year-old Ulrike von Levetzow. He wrote her poems that practically steamed off the page and even proposed marriage — only to be refused by her mother, now immortalized in a brass relief in the colonnade. At least, the episode gave us the haunting *Marienbad Elegy*.

Others too, found their composure disturbed by the mineral air:

- **Frédéric Chopin — Mooning in Miniature:** Wandering these same paths years later, he pined for his 16-year-old muse *Maria Wodzińska*, a romance that fizzled much like Goethe's, leaving only an unfinished melody in its wake.
- **King Edward VII — The Flirtatious Monarch on a Diet:** Charismatic and nearly permanent on the promenade, Edward charmed liberally while his doctors tried to slim him down. Locals whispered that when he tipped his hat, even the fountains blushed.
- **Johann Strauss Jr. — A Waltz Among the Waters:** The "Waltz King" reportedly drew inspiration not from salons but from women singing as they collected spring water at dawn, their voices drifting through the colonnade.
- **Emperor Franz Joseph I — The Disciplined Heart (Mostly):** Even he wasn't immune; a lingering conversation with a young Bohemian singer sparked gossip that imperial restraint softened in the mineral haze.



### Q4 OUTLOOK

## To the Edge of Light

In December, I'll travel north to Rovaniemi, Finland, a small town on the Arctic Circle. A place you don't simply arrive at, but cross into.

If Marienbad whispered through mist and mineral, Lapland speaks in stark, elemental tones: deep cold, sparse light, a landscape pared down to snow, breath, motion, and sound. What happens to attention when comfort is no longer ambient, but something you actively create?

Reindeer thread through forests like remembered stories. Huskies pull forward with fierce joy — all muscle and purpose — carving clean lines through white. Even myth feels structural here, a living agreement to protect wonder in the deepest dark.

What draws me north is curiosity. How people live when daylight is scarce. How ritual, design, and storytelling keep warmth circulating — emotionally as much as physically. How awareness shifts when survival once depended on reading snow, sky, and silence with precision.



From mineral water to polar night, the journey continues along the same quiet question:  
**How does a place change the way we notice — and what does it give back when we do?**

Join the journey. I'll catch you in the wild,

*Gina Anjou*  
Founder of the *Soulful Nature Shift Program*

