

# How I spent my summer vacation

It was a tough job, but somebody had to do it — research Budapest, Hungary, the “City of Spas,” where Buda and Pest are divided by the picturesque Danube River. The thought of getting up each morning and dragging myself to a different spa was a horror that not many of you could endure ... NOT!

Curiosity and the search for something new that is old was what brought me across the “big pond” to

*The panoramic of Budapest and the Danube River*



*Entrance to Gellert Spa*



## MIND, BODY & SPIRIT

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Budapest. My interest was twofold — wellness and dentistry abroad. While searching for wellness that uses alternative therapies, I looked for different beliefs and techniques that make people more comfortable in uncomfortable environments. The shattered plaster and bullet spray ruins of WWII did not ruin my mood, and made me grateful to live in America.

I limited my visit in the City of Spas to three very different type of spas, all of them world-renowned.

I began with the Gellert Medicinal Baths, lido, and swimming pools

from the 15th century bathing place established during the Turkish period, where the mineral waters are hotter and come from a more powerful source than springs. They are also called “muddy baths” because of the fine natural mud precipitate that is lifted to the surface by the force of the water.

The many spas that I have been to in the United States have a level of luxury that was not exhibited in the public Gellert Spa. The magnificence and eeriness of the art nouveau Gothic architecture and the history behind the many healing waters and medicinal

cures are quite unique. One may be intimidated by the size of the thermal baths. The crowd being catered to was certainly a geriatric one, understandably so due to the healing miracles attributed to the baths. Visitors may purchase use of the indoor and outdoor pools, the thermal baths, a Thai massage, or a 30-minute massage.

### **Ancient massage**

The problem many of us have after many years of clinical dental hygiene practice is our body’s aches and pains. I asked the spa hostess which service would be best for me as a dental hygienist, and she suggested the Thai massage, termed “ancient massage.” She called it “the lazy man’s yoga.”

Ancient massage works on



*Gellert Spa indoor pool*

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the major meridians, also called energy lines or *Nadis*, which run throughout the body. It aims to harmonize the body, loosen blocks, and recoup deficiencies along the energy lines. In contrast to traditional Chinese medicine, which uses acupuncture to manipulate the pressure points, ancient massage stimulates these points with healing touch. The points suffer less stress, and life energy, called *Prana*, can freely circulate.

Along with influencing the energetic side, ancient massage works on the physical body. Starting at the feet and progressing up to the head, the body is moved, loosened, and stretched. Ancient massage combines techniques usually used separately in the western physiotherapies such as trigger point treatments, myofacial techniques, and manual therapy.

Ancient massage is a floor massage. The fully dressed client lies on a pad or light mattress. An outfit, which resembles a set of cotton scrubs, is provided. An ingenious system of movements allows the therapist to manipulate the client with very little effort. Every movement is designed to support the client and therapist. The massage is given in silence to allow the therapist to understand the client and to give the client a chance to focus and learn about him/herself without

distraction. To give and to experience ancient massage is a meditative practice.

Ancient massage is a good way to prevent sickness. It helps dissolve blocks before they manifest psychologically or physically, and it improves flexibility. Injured athletes, as well as people suffering from handicaps or stress, are target groups for this type of massage. Essentially, anyone can benefit from this powerful technique. The combination of energetic and physical aspects is unique to ancient massage, and so are its effects. Ancient massage is a gift for the body, mind, and heart.

For me, it was like a yoga class without the effort. Imagine stretching and getting into the many different and difficult poses without the effort of balancing yourself. I strongly recommend this type of massage to any dental hygienist or team member.

There is a famous medical facility at the Gellert Spa where you can get services such as medicines and herbs on a prescription basis. I wanted a mud bath treatment, but did not realize it was by prescription only. I went downstairs to a cold, scary, institutionalized-looking area with a male and female attendant, and paid them the equivalent of \$12 for this service.

Lying in my birthday suit on a bed

of cloths not knowing what was going to walk in the door, in came a woman with a bucket of dark, green, warm mud. She slopped it all over my body, wrapped me in cloths, and left me there for about 30 minutes. She came back to wipe off all of the large clumps and told me to "douche." I asked, "Douche what?" She led me to a shower where I rinsed off the goeey mud. I must say, my tingling skin felt alive and refreshed, but I was still weirded out by the stark environment.

The next phase was the thermal baths that pour healing minerals out of a sculptured lion's mouth onto a person's neck and shoulders. This is not for those who are shy about their bodies. Nakedness is the norm. One of the most insightful observations I made is what our bodies will look like as we age. It isn't pretty. No matter how much we attempt to stay in shape, the aging process continues. There were plastic surgery patients at the baths who had clearly visited before. Their many visible healing scars made the television show "Extreme Makeover" seem like a cartoon.

The next spa, Szechenyi Medicinal Baths and Pool, were the first baths to be established on the Pest side of Budapest, and are now one of the largest bathing complexes in Europe. Their origin lies with the expertise of a 19th century mining engineer named Bilmost Zsigmondy. He succeeded in opening up some hot water springs, which generated the source for the somewhat makeshift, artesian baths that began operating in 1881.

The most recent refurbishment to the baths in 1999 brought new water circulation and filtration systems. The attractions of the "Fun Bath" include a whirling corridor, underwater effervescence, neck douche, and back massaging water jets concealed in the underwater benches. These services are for conditions such as rheumatology, respiratory problems, infectious tuberculosis, cardiac failure, and those who use home oxygen. Remember, in

*Szechenyi Medicinal Baths and Swimming Pool*





## *Operatory at The Vital Center in Budapest*

order to receive many of these services, a prescription is necessary. Medical doctors are on hand to provide the prescriptions.

Finally, the crème de la crème is the Thermal Bath Spa Hotel on Margitsziget Island in the middle of the Danube River. This is cosmetic heaven, and included cosmetic dentistry. It really is the place for an extreme makeover. This is a private refuge for the wealthy, although they claim it is affordable. The Vital Center provides the most elegant private dental clinics in Budapest, with four locations. The choice of location is mainly determined by the fact that a large number of patients come from abroad.

While treating these patients, it is imperative to provide speedy, versatile, world-class care, which is achieved through well-coordinated and well-planned services. The esthetic dentistry is often done under sedation. The prosthetic reconstructions are at the highest level of European standards and are processed in a surprisingly short time. They also specialize in gnathology, which is precisely measured positioning of prosthetics, whereby other symptoms can be cured or prevented, such as headaches, edema under the eyes, or numbness of the arms at night.

Implants are a routine demand of European modern dentistry, which offers the new Camlog implant system. The center offers a three-year warranty on its prosthetics, crowns, bridges, and dentures. The majority of the procedures

are full-mouth veneers for a fraction of the cost paid in the United States. The state-of-the-art equipment and materials are comparable to those in the United States, and would put many of our offices to shame.

This is your true dental and medical spa. The "beautiful people" have their surgery and therapeutic services that include every type

of massage imaginable, and visit the healing mineral waters, which accelerate tissue healing from the inside out and outside in. A large barrel with many spigots allows visitors to help themselves to the sulfuric mineral waters to heal inside. I had to hold my breath and quickly shoot it down my throat. I did not like the rotten egg smell.

At the spa for the privileged I met a new friend who was fascinated by the work of dental hygienists and the extent of our education and concern for the welfare of our patients. She had no idea what our level of involvement was in the dental practice. I asked her what she did for a living, and she said she felt comfortable sharing her profession with me ... Professional International Dominatrix. I tried not to move a muscle, including any facial expression or jaw dropping. I did not want to show shock or ignorance of what her profession entailed. I then realized that I was not breathing and needed to remind myself to take slow, deep breaths. And she was fascinated with what we do?!

On my last day, I had an appointment with a doctor in the top periodontal group in Hungary, Dr. Istvan Urban. Dr. Urban had just redecorated his office in a soothing contemporary style with his obvious passion of fine art on the walls and wine magazines on the table. His specialty was bone regeneration and implants. He was a student at UCLA and Loma Linda University in California. Dr.

Urban did all of the maintenance visits himself until he hired his hygienist. Yes, hygienists are licensed in Hungary and yes, Dr. Urban places extreme value on his hygienist's services. What a relief! The hygienist's operatory looked exactly like one in the United States.

What I learned about dentistry in Europe is that it is more universal than it was when I entered dental hygiene 31 years ago. Some of us think European dentistry is behind, but that's not true.

*Dr. Istvan Urban*

The equipment is state-of-the-art, and the dental companies have done a marvelous job of expanding themselves to an international market. The resources and education are there, and it is up to each dentist, American or not, to seek information and implement it into their offices.

I asked Dr. Urban if there were dental spas in his country, and he was not familiar with them, except for his friend in California who did pedicures in his office. I shared the idea of dental spas in America with him, and he was fascinated and thought it was a good concept, especially living in the City of Spas himself.

I encourage all dental hygienists to receive some sort of massage therapy once a month to help preserve your body, especially if you are in this profession for the long haul. Massages increase circulation and energy flow, and open up the lymphatic system that gets blocked through daily stress. **RDH**