

ORSOLYA HORVÁTH

## TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT IN A MATURE DESTINATION – HÉVÍZ (HUNGARY)

Hévíz (Hungary) is a well-known health tourism destination with an international reputation. Although the destination has a well-developed infrastructure and a wide range of tourism attractions and services, the city develops its offer from time to time. In the framework of the Off to Spas project, the destination plays a cutting edge role in sharing know-how regarding health tourism product development. Thanks to its wide professional network, the project's outcomes can be valuable also for other mature health tourism places. In the case of Hévíz, the main focus of the new health tourism product development is to enrich and rejuvenate the already available offer, the innovation means to target new segments (senior travellers from Northern Europe) by providing new and tailor-made experiences.

*Keywords:* health tourism, product development, mature destination, Hévíz

### Introduction

Hévíz is one of the most important curative and touristic centre of Transdanubia (Hungary). It celebrated its 200th anniversary of its existence in 1995. During this 200 years it became not only in Europe but also in the whole world famous. Raw of generations has been working to raise the lake belonging to the border of Keszthely from the anonymity. By virtue of contemporary documents the sometime owner of the bath, György Festetics created the facility in 1795 that next to the thermal lake also known by the Romans the guest get accommodation and medical service. The turf-bottomed lake is the biggest thermal lake of the world, its area is 4.4 ha. Its fountain located in a funnel-like 37 m pit gives 86 million litres of water a day. Its temperature is 33–36C° in summer, it cools down on the big free surfaces only to 23–25C°. The curative effect of the lake of Hévíz is unique in the world, thanks to its composition is capable of treatment of rheumatic locomotic and some gynaecological diseases. Beyond the traditional cure methods, such as weight bath, mud pack and massage, several modern physical and balneotherapeutic processes, vital and wellness programs can be taken in advantage. The medical treatment is not only good for rehabilitation but for prevention, relaxation and recreation. One curiosity of the bath is the bath house built on bollards which is maybe a little similar to Venice. After the continuous renewals these buildings have been standing since the beginning of the last decade, defining the architectural style typical for Hévíz. Hévíz (5000 inhabitants) is one of the most important pleasure resorts in Hungary where 'sorrow dies', where everyone is welcomed.

### Tourism attractions

The Hévíz Lake is a geological curiosity, Europe's largest thermal lake – a warm water lake situated in a peat-bed. The 4.4 ha water-surface lake is surrounded by a 60.5 ha nature conservation area. Springs of different temperatures diffuse in a narrow cave, and became a constant (38.5°C) temperature stream when entering the lake. Beautiful water lilies, brought to Hungary at the end of the 19th century, dot the lake, supporting the eco-life, with leaves slowing down evaporation, and creepers protecting the medicinal mud on the bottom of the lake.

The lake and its medical services/treatments has been awarded as a Hungaricum in 2015. The settlement is part of the UNESCO World Heritage applicant region of the Lake Balaton and its surroundings.

#### THE 'TRADITIONAL HÉVÍZ CURE'

*The basic elements of the therapy*, according to the individual treatment plan, may include:

- bathing in qualified thermal water,
- medicinal mud wrap or mud bath of Hévíz,
- weight bath – based on a rheumatologist of Hévíz, Dr Moll Károly's invention.

*Additional elements of the therapy*, according to the individual treatment plan, may include:

- consuming medicinal water of Hévíz from a drinking-fountain,
- therapeutic massage,
- movement therapy individually and/or in a group,
- physiotherapeutic treatments (electro-magnetic-mechano-light, etc.),
- hydrotherapy: CO<sub>2</sub> bath tub, underwater jet massage, galvanic bath.

Source: [www.heviz.hu](http://www.heviz.hu)

Main tourism attractions in Hévíz:

#### *Lake Hévíz – Thermal lake*

The thermal lake of Hévíz is the world's largest biologically active, natural thermal lake, which refreshes both body and soul. A spring containing sulfur, radium and minerals supports the 4.4 hectares sized and 38 m deep lake. 410 litres of water comes to the surface per second, due to which the water is completely changed in 72 hours. The 40°C water is a mix of seven types of spring water: two of them are hot and five of them are cold springs.

### *The drinking-fountain*

Hévíz's largest public drinking-fountain is located by the entrance of the Town Library. The sulphurous water can't only be used for treating joint and skin diseases, but also for mitigating stomach disorders as a drinking cure

### *Dr. Schulhof Vilmos Promenade*

Dr. Vilmos Schulhof was a balneology expert, who together with his brother Dr. Ödön Schulhof and a Hévízer doctor Dr. Károly Moll used first the lake's medicinal factors for healing. On one side of the promenade there is the lake and on the other side there are the historical buildings of the Saint Andrew's Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases built in the 1870s. The House Rákóczi, the House Deák, the House Franz Joseph are all telling interesting stories. The mediterranean microclimate surrounding the lake is most noticeable under the promenade's 110-year-old Sycamore trees.

### *'The Fairy of the Lake' and the Cherubs*

'The Fairy of the Lake' sculpture is located opposite the main entrance of the lake. The female figure's right hand rests on Hévíz's coat of arms, on the left side of the fairy is the symbolical figure of a Cherub, who protects the lake from evil spirits. The main entrance of the lake is guarded by two Cherubs, which were made on the Festetics Family's behalf on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are Hévíz's official heraldic animals.

### *The protective forest*

The protective forest surrounding the lake is an important part of the lake's ecosystem. At the site of the protective forest there were reeds, swamp and marsh until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Festetics family began the first tree plantations with Black Alder, White Willow and Hackberry. The most special tree type of the protective forest is the Swamp Cypress, which unlike other arrow-plants is deciduous, so it dresses the road leading to the town in orange-bronze shades in the fall.

### *Dr. Moll Károly Square/Medical History Memorial Room*

Almost opposite the cinema, on a little square can be found Dr Moll Károly's full-length bronze statue. The world-famous doctor used first the weight bath as a new treatment method. The weight bath has become Hévíz's trademark since then. The Dr. Moll Károly Medical History Memorial Room decorated with personal articles can be seen in the building 'B' of the Saint Andrew's Hospital.

### *Holy Spirit Church*

The church consecrated in 1999 was built by architect Bocska János with the residents' and the town's active support. The specialty of the church is the seven towers, which symbolises the Holy Spirit's seven gifts. The Holy Spirit's imagery in mythology is a spread winged dove, which is not only shown by the shape of the building, but you can also admire this motif entering the church. The cross torso on the wall of the sanctuary is a 200-year-old art treasure, that was donated to the church. The stained glass windows were made from the donations of the town's residents.

### *Calvinist Church*

The church was built by Bálint Szeghalmi in 1998. Its interior and exterior design follows the Calvinist traditions, the woodworks are especially remarkable. In the park in front of it can be seen John Calvin's memorial column. Church services are held in Hungarian and German languages.

### *Heart of Jesus Church*

The former age-worn wooden belfry of Egregy village was replaced by a two-storey tower in 1905, and the church was expanded with a nave in 1995. The small bell was cast in honour of Mary Magdalene, names of the sixteen soldiers of Egregy who were killed in World War I. were cast into the big bell. By the church a memorial park with 70 named headstones was built in 2000 to commemorate those who were killed in World War I. and II.

### *Árpád-age church*

The Árpád-age church is one of the three intact Árpád-era churches in the Balaton Uplands, it is also mentioned as Hévíz's pearl. The Árpád-age church built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is located in Egregy, a part of Hévíz. The church was first mentioned in written records in 1341. The building was heavily damaged in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century, so it was renovated and redesigned in 1731, but its medieval form remained. Its tower is three-storey, its specialty is the tower covered with octagonal rhenish helm. Inside there is a fragment of a Roman baptismal font and a medieval consecrated cross.

### *Egregy vineyards*

The vineyard, which became famous as the 'grinzig of Egregy' in the 1980s, can be reached from Dombföldi Street after a heavy ascent. On the top of the ascent the hill gate designed by Zób Mihály and erected in 2003 leaps to the eye. On both sides of the road nicely renovated cellars invite the visitors to turn in. It is a pleasant pastime to taste some delicious wine and some traditional rustic food during listening to Gypsy music.

*Roman soldier's grave*

The Roman soldier's tomb or the Late Roman brick tomb is located at the beginning of Dombföldi Street. The grave was discovered in 1925 during digging, it was excavated in a completely intact state. The arched brick grave belongs to a still unexplored cemetery, the excavated artifacts (bronze belt buckle, dress hooks, iron knife, coins and a Roman soldier's skeleton) are from the era of Constantinus II. The art objects currently can be seen at the Balaton Museum, while the skeleton was left intact in the tomb.

*Roman Ruin Garden*

The remains of one of the most important Roman settlements are hidden inside the ground around the Roman ruin garden and the Roman monument of almost 1000 square meter. In the course of the excavations the archaeologists found the traces of a log building period and three stone periods. They found that the buildings of the villa farm were rebuilt several times during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century. The bath, which had pools with cold, lukewarm and warm water, was built during the first stone period. In the following period the shrine of Mithras (eastern god of light) was erected in the building.

*Museum of Egregy*

The Museum is located next to the Roman Ruin Garden, and it presents the history of the town with modern equipment from 6000 BC to the Middle Ages. In the permanent exhibition called 'Millennia of Hévíz', in addition to the restored mosaics and artefacts, even a real witch skeleton can be viewed. In front of the museum, a spice garden, shaded benches and dry Kneipp tread await those who would like to take a rest.

**General and tourism infrastructure**

The city of Hévíz is one of the important settlement in the Western Transdanubian region. Hévíz (city since 1992) is located only 6km away from the Lake Balaton, and it is quite close also to the Western boarder (Austria, Slovenia).

The destination can be accessed by car (via – not directly – the highway M7). Motorway 84 connects Hévíz with Vienna, and motorway 76 with Graz. Organised (timetable) coaches commute between Hévíz and Austria (Graz, Vienna), Switzerland and Germany. The city has no railway station.

The Hévíz – Balaton Airport (located in Sármellék, 15 km away from the city) is one of the most significant airports outside of Budapest. Air connection is with Germany, Switzerland, UK and Ireland, so a lot of European destinations can be reached by maximum one stop from Hévíz. The number of air passenger was 50 000 in 2008, the destination main goal is to reach 150 000 air passengers in a few years' time.

Hévíz has a well-developed tourism infrastructure. Because tourism has a significant role in the city's economy, hospitality has a long tradition. The number of accommodation bedplaces is among the highest in the country. Most of the tourism facilities are involved in the local destination management organisation (DMO) (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Tourism service providers in Hévíz (Source: Tourism Non-profit Ltf. of Hévíz)

Type	Private accommodation	Commercial Accommodation	Accommodation total	Catering facilities	Tourism attractions
Number	470	37	510	134	75
Bedplaces	3,000	7,500	10,500	n.a.	n.a.
Involvement in the local DMO	46%	78%	62%	10%	77%

Tourism product development in Hévíz is led by the refreshment/renovation of available tourism services, furthermore by the introduction of new services, facilities. The tourism portfolio has segmented offers, like families travelling with kids, guests travelling without kids, pensioners. Motivation can be split by relaxation, prevention, rehabilitation, MICE and sport tourism. Among the special segments we should highlight accessible tourism, furthermore special experiences (e.g. Hévíz Anno 1975, Romanian times, Arpad Era, religious sites, natural treasures).

### Characteristics of the tourism demand in Hévíz

In the period after the change of regime, in the 90's the clientele mainly consisted of German and Austrian guests. At that time private accommodation facilities were very popular, they had a lot of regular guests, but there were also many new visitors who were curious about Hungary as an interesting destination which was quite closed until that period. Nowadays demand for campsites is completely disappeared in the region. From the years of 2000s proportion of Hungarian guests increased (the share of domestic guest nights is app. 36%). In that period medical tourism became more important, wellness and health tourism reached wider parts of society because of the introduction of different travel support programs. The big bath developments happened this time, too. The crisis after 2008 induced several setbacks in tourism, concerning income and the number of guests.

Due to the uniqueness of the spa town, it has not been affected by the recession. However, the tourism of Hévíz has to adapt to global changes, since remarkable

transformations have happened recently regarding its clientele. The number of Russian and Ukrainian guest is constantly increasing, which has significant economic, social and cultural impacts on the life of the town. The number of Chinese tourists also grew significantly in the last few years, but it is true for them that they like to travel all over the country or visit more countries during a journey so they spend only a few time in spas, mostly 1 night and after that they travel away.

Northern European clientele is in the focus of the marketing activities on a short and on a middle term, meaning a sustainable and stable segment for Hévíz tourism supply.

Currently, Hévíz is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular Hungarian town (after Budapest) concerning various guest traffic data (e.g. the number of foreign/total guest nights in public accommodations, the average lengths of stay of domestic guests), but the town is the on the 1<sup>st</sup> place regarding foreign visitors and the total average lengths of stay. Usually, Hévíz drops back in the ratings concerning domestic guest traffic.

Hévíz is first of all a health tourism destination with a 50+ years' clientele with rheumatic disases. App. 70% of the guests participate in a cure, the high season for them is the March-November period (with the exception of the hot Summer months). During the Summer months, Hévíz attracts younger and more active visitors (taking a 'holiday'). So, 30% of the guests is motivated by wellness, conference or other holiday experience (Tab. 2).

Table 2: Number of guests and guest nights in Hévíz  
(Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office) (2014)

Source market	Number of guests	Number of guest nights
Finland	159	582
Norway	436	2,752
Sweden	320	1,686
Foreign total	97,287	661,868
Total	186,971	982,760

### **Off to Spas – new health tourism product in Hévíz**

Hévíz is a well-known, mature health tourism destination. However, because of the distance and Budapest's outstanding role in the international market, there is a lack of image among Northern European seniors. Therefore it is very important to provide good and reliable information about the destination's assets, the natural healing assets etc. The tourism infrastructure in Hévíz and in its surroundings enables travellers to discover the destination by themselves, however a guide could be very useful and valuable in order to fill up the image/information gaps.

In the case of Hévíz, a one-week trip would be attractive for the target group. Transportation should be organized from home to the destination (flight + bus). The accommodation will be provided in a four-star facility. Based on the feedbacks of the study tour participants, there are more options to be chosen from. Half or full board will be offered, this is more convenient for seniors, in this case they also have the freedom to try good restaurants during the one-week stay.

From the health tourism services, wellness facilities will be the base – Hévíz has good quality services, including the thermal lake itself which is a real ‘experience’. Traditional treatments, rather focusing on wellness, beauty (e.g. face or hand treatment, using the natural healing assets) could be the most attractive for the target group (seniors in general, and seniors with rheumatic diseases). Once the information is available, booking could be done in advance, or after arrival to the destination. From the medical oriented services, dental treatments could be an extra, but motivating less travellers.

Among the non-health tourism attractions, Hévíz can take advantage of the closeness of the Lake Balaton. An excursion to the lake (walk, café, cultural sight) is a good option also during the off-season period. Furthermore, seniors are interested in entertainment (music, dance), wine and gastronomy. In the case of active tourism products, they can serve and an ‘experience’ (not the motivation itself), so not too sophisticated (e.g. golf for beginners).

The package price would be ideally about 850 euro, excluding transportation. Good flight connection and cheaper prices can be a competitive advantage.

Senior groups book their holidays 6 months in advance (next season). In the case a longer trip this should be taken into account, so packages for the next off-season period (Autumn 2016) could be marketed earlier. Individuals are more flexible, in this case we can talk about 2–3 months in advance. In both cases (individual and organized) travel agency support can be important (Tab. 3).

Table 3: Service package portfolio in Hévíz  
(Source: Off to Spas project)

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>
Season	Spring, Autumn	Spring, Autumn
Length of trip	1 week (7 nights)	1 week (7 nights)
Transportation	Air + Bus (stop included)	Air + Bus (stop included)
Accommodation	Hévíz only	Hévíz only
Meals	Half or full board	Half or full board
Health tourism services	Traditional, wellness (e.g. face, hand) – deciding on site or before	Diagnostics



Leisure services, visits	Lake Balaton (surroundings), entertainment/dance, wine cellar, other (golf for beginners)	Other leisure activities (2–3 days) Tihany, Sümeg, Keszthely, Herend 1 day Budapest excursion
Other	Guide, explanation/description (different kind of spas)	Guide, explanation/description (different kind of spas)
Price	8000 SEK (excluding flight)/850 EUR	8000 SEK (excluding flight)/850 EUR

### References

[www.hevizlake.com](http://www.hevizlake.com)

[www.offtospas.eu](http://www.offtospas.eu)



**Orsolya Horváth** is the managing director of Tourism Non-profit Ltf. of Hévíz. Her daily work covers the set-up and implementation of the annual business and workplan, the development and coordination of the tourism development and marketing strategy in Hévíz, cooperation with the representatives of civil, municipal and service sectors, furthermore the coordination of city marketing tasks.

*‘When I found this call for proposal in the COSME programme in 2014, I was very excited. The aims of the programme, like creating a tourism product network that takes into account the special needs of the older age group or increasing the turnover of low season, were exactly the aims of our company. I was sure we have a good chance to create a successful project, so the work has begun. This was our first try in the frame of COSME, so it was important to organize an experienced project team. Every member had his/her specialized knowledge and tasks in the team and we managed to work together efficiently during the 16-month long project period. I was responsible for communication and dissemination activities which suited perfectly my company profile. It was a challenge to work in a different system but the project has given us a new stimulus and we have learned a lot from each other.’*