



## Archaeological tourist complex Aqua Calidae

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*Type of best practice*

VR/AR & Technologies, inc. Gamification & Immersive performances

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*The ancient baths of Aquae calidae have reached a new stage in its development as a combination of digital technologies to bring back the glorious past and the new spa center with the famous healing water. The archaeological complex allows citizens and guests of Burgas to visit the fully renovated bathroom of Suleiman the Magnificent. Upon restoration, the original vision is strictly adhered, lined with marble and typical oriental ceramics. The authenticity is complemented by natural and artistic lightning that performs the act of a functioning museum where visitors can watch a movie based on 3D mapping. It leads the tourists to a virtual walk from the Thracian times and the Sacred Spring of the Three nymphs-healers through the Roman period, the Crusades – until the time of Suleiman the Magnificent.*

**Organisation in charge of best practice**

Burgas Municipality

**Location**

Burgas, Bulgaria

**Dates**

January 2019 - October 2022

**Description**

The Municipality of Burgas has been continuously investing in the development of the Aquae calidae archaeological complex for more than ten years. As most large archaeological sites it requires complex approach in order to present the cultural heritage to the wide public and in the same time to preserve it.

The requirements of the younger generations of tourists have changed with the digital era. Bringing technologies to experience the digital world in the same time with physical activities, has been the core idea of the project.





A new museum exposition and an active replica of a Roman bath have been built in line with the archaeological structures. The exhibition areas in the building include a training museum, a museum exposition and stock rooms. The museum exposition will exhibit archaeological finds and artifacts found during excavations in the field, now from the collection of the Regional Historical Museum - Burgas. In the training museum, visitors will have the opportunity to get acquainted with the way of life of the Romans, to soak in the baths, play games, to put on their everyday clothes or their military equipment.

The exposition areas have a mixed purpose and can be used for recreational activities. The second layer is virtual and gives the opportunity to the visitors to time travel and see how the place looked like through the 20 centuries of its existence by entering a special room with 360°3D mapping. VR glasses will let the tourists enjoy the view of the old baths, learn more about the locals' culture, while getting physically massaged.

The place will continue to increase its tourist attractiveness, while preserving and promoting its cultural heritage as the technologies provide huge amount of opportunities to quick and safe extension of the services with increased added value of visitor experience.











## Links

<http://www.aquae-calidae.com/bg>

## Resources needed

"Aqua calidae", part of the project "The Power of Water", funded by the Operational Program "Growing Regions" 2014-2020, Budget 4 255 757euro. Own staff with additional qualification to support the new implemented technologies.

## Challenges encountered

Implementing digital technologies is not an easy task, it requires highly specialized experts and staff that needs new skills. The representation and transfer of cultural heritage to digital means takes time, the collaboration of experts from very different fields and expensive high end equipment.

## Evidence of success

The construction of archaeological tourist complex Aquae Calidae attracted additional interest in the tourist destination as about 45 200 people have visited the place since its opening. Reaching and attracting new public that so far was not interested. Increasing interest of visitors to the site and the surrounding area. This project received a special prize in the ECTN Awards 'Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism 2019', in the



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category 'Innovation and Digitalisation', by a joint jury with Europa Nostra and European Travel Commission.

### **Potential for transfer**

To implement digital technologies such as VR and other type of visualization to transfer through time is not a new concept, but to combine them with direct physical experience, is not so common practice as of yet. Using it to extend the visitors experience is possible for most museums and tourist attractions, however it will require additional resources and funding.

### **Further Information**

Exposition and demonstration center "Mineral waters of Aquae Calidae" was built in the tourist complex of the same name near Burgas. It includes a new museum with thermal SPA that is a replica of a Roman bath. Future plans for development of the complex include the establishment of archaeological living lab and campus for archeological studies of all historical layers and époques found on the territory of this historical cultural heritage of national importance.