



## Interview

ALL PYRENEES



## Claire Bourg

Accounting and communication director of Balnéa Center

«Everyone can find something to do here in every season»

IRINA Rybalchenko

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Long before the first ski resorts opened, the Pyrenees were well known for their thermal waters. Thermoludism still remains a priority for many visitors to the Pyrenees. One excellent example is the Balnéa Center. Located on the edge of Lac de Génos-Loudenvielle, Balnéa has naturally warm water between 30 and 33 degrees, thanks to two boreholes situated above the Bains de Saoussas at 170 and 600 meters deep. The center is suited for a wide public who like combining the art of living with fitness, healthy

eating, and staying in shape; it gets about 165,000 visitors annually.

Curiously, the age of the youngest visitor is only 9 months.

Claire Bourg, accounting and communication director, who has been working at the center since its setting up, explained why Balnéa is so good for tourists - adults and children.

**–Could you tell us the story of the center? How did it appear? Who is its owner?**

–The initiator of the project is Michel Pélieu, who was originally the mayor of Loudenvielle. Previously, the water was used only for the old small thermal baths. Thanks to the discovery of sulphurous waters in the region, the question arose: why not make a thermal complex? After

a visit to Caldea (Andorra), the idea of building a complex has matured. Marc Pepi (Eurothermes) also participated in this project.

Balnea has existed for 23 years: it was opened on July 15, 2000. At first, Balnea had only indoor baths (Roman ones with a large lagoon, cold and hot baths, and a hammam). After opening, Balnéa had only 5 employees. We saw the interest of visitors immediately. Already during the first year, we had about 30,000 visits. In 2004, Amerindian baths were opened, and in 2011, the space expanded with Japanese baths.

In April 2015, Balnéa completed its offer with the Inca Baths, an outdoor relaxation area for families. In 2019, Balnéa opened Maya outdoor baths, also designed for families. This year sees the arrival

of a covered swimming pool. Today Balnea consists of six places with a total area of 5450 m<sup>2</sup>.

The design of the Amerindian baths is really impressive: tall wooden columns with carvings make the complex unique!

**–Who is the designer of this project?**

–For the Amerindian space and for the wooden totems, it is Jean-Jacques Durancet who is passionate about sculpture. He is an architect from Tarbes.

**–What is the composition of thermal waters? Are there specific indications for their use?**

–All the thermal baths of Balnéa are with sulphurous water, so this is the particularity of Balnéa. Sulphurous water is very good for

health, especially for skin diseases, rheumatism, etc. It is naturally warm water (28 degrees).

Each session has a limit of two hours because going from bath to bath and sulphurous water tires the body.

**–Are there any contradictions?**

–Not really. Going from a 37-degree bath to an 18-degree bath is not very healthy for people who have problems with varicose veins. But, for the rest, there is no contradiction.

**–Do you have any plans to develop the interior and exterior of the center?**

–Yes, we are moving towards a more sporty side: we have opened the Valgora multi-sport area with a rugby field and a modern gym. Teams such as Stade Toulousain, Mont de Marsan,





and Bayonne, as well as students of sports universities (STAPS), come to us to train. Often, we employ students who have a swimming certificate.

**-Do you cooperate with ski resorts?**

-Yes, we offer a double pass, valid for the ski resort of Peyragudes and Val de Louron.

**-Do you have cosmetic services?**

-We have "personalized treatments" (more than 30 different treatments). They vary between 20 min and 2 h.

**-Could you give me the turnover figures?**

-This year, we are going to do 7,500,000 €. We have more and more people because we are expanding our spaces, in particular, thanks to the opening of Skyfall. The Valéen lift

allows you to go down in less than 10 minutes from Peyragudes to Balnea. We have a lot of tourists out of high season because we are located less than 2 hours from Toulouse and not far from Spain.

**-How would you answer the question about the competitive advantages of Balnea compared to other spas in the Pyrenees or even in the Alps?**

-We are located next to a scenic lake and two ski resorts that offer activities not only in winter but also in summer. In July, for example, the French hang-gliding championship took place here, which was clearly visible from Balnea. We host the Enduro World Series (EWS) in early September. Therefore, everyone can find something to do here in every season!≡



► Some pictures and details of Balnea Center.

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