A Snapshot of Luxembourg City

ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST WELL-KEPT SECRETS, IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

By Mohammed Reza Amirinia

CATEGORY: TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



VILLE BASSE
Along the River Alzette

PLACE GUILLAUME II
The City's Largest Square

GRAND DUCAL PALACE
A Fairytale Edifice

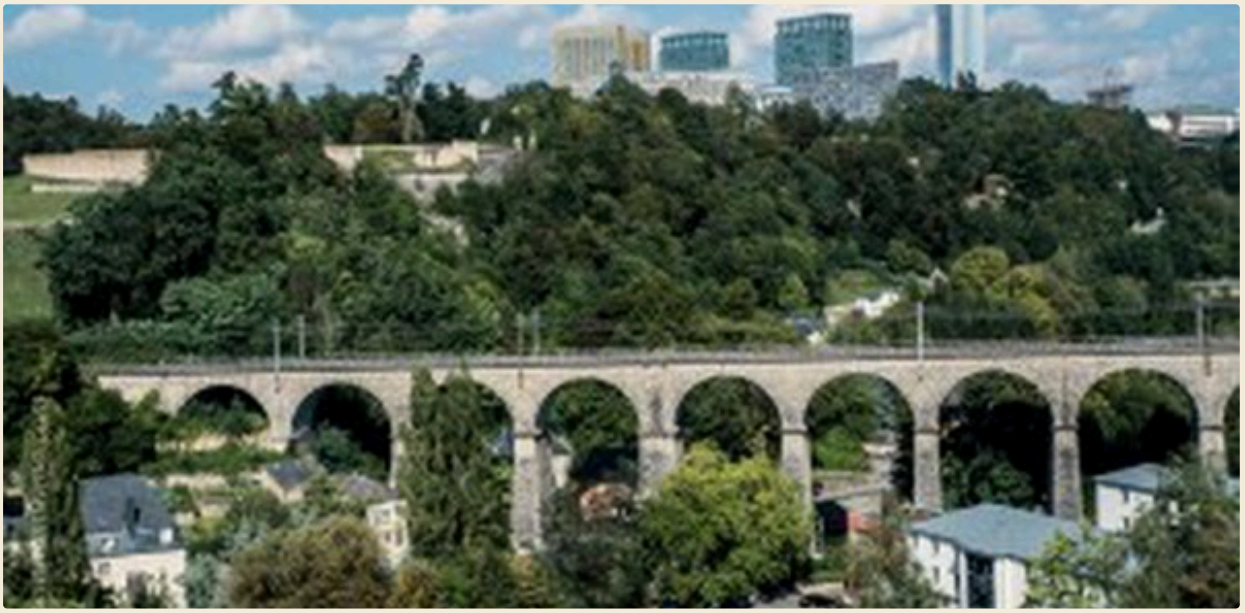
BOCK CASEMATES
A Maze of 14-Mile Tunnels

IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

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The old and the new of Luxembourg City

I had arrived in Luxembourg City, the capital of one of the smallest countries, also confusingly called Luxemourg. This tiny country is one of the world's most well-kept secrets and is little known to tourists despite its rich history and heritage.

Luxembourg, situated in the heart of Europe and surrounded by Germany, France and Belgium used to be called the Gibraltar of the North because of its strategic significance. It is a microscopic country compared to the Malta, for example, both in size and population but, in contrast, is surrounded by beautiful green countryside in natural settings. Its topographical position has made it an attractive target to its neighbours and the great European powers throughout history and theyhey always had their eyes on Luxembourg to grab its outstanding lands.

II



Ville Basse along with the river

The history of Luxembourg city goes back to the Romans, where a fortified tower guarded a Roman road; the town expanded around it and the first fortification was built in the 10th century. The last reinforced fortification around the city stood until the 19th century. It is unfortunate that one of the biggest fortresses in modern Europe was dismantled after the 1867 Treaty of London and, today, there is only about 10% of it left. It was a big price that Luxembourg had to pay for its independence.

The picturesque enchanting old town is situated at the convergence of the Alzette and Pétrusse Rivers on a natural fortification built of sheer rocky ridges. The city was built over stone cliffs pierced with underground caves and a long network of casemates.

III

The city can be divided into four main parts.. The core of the medieval town is called the High City (Ville Haute) whilst the Low City (Ville Basse) is located in the valley by the River Alzette. Ville Basse seems to possess most of the scenic areas. At the south of Ville Haute, a bridge cross the gorge takes you to the modern part of the city where the main train station and the shopping streets, restaurants and cafes are located. The magic of the city extends to a different world across the Red Bridge to the modern business district of Kirchberg, where the European Investment Bank and other important European Union institutions are located. There is also a multiplex cinema, a shopping mall and Philharmonie Luxembourg, one of the main concert halls in Europe.

I started my journey in the Place Guillaume II, the city's largest square. Here, the bronze statute was constructed in honour of King-Grand Duke William II, Prince of Orange.The Hotel De Ville located in this historic place turns into a flower and farmers market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, giving it a completely different feel. This charming square is also the main hub and connects to all the heritage attractions of the city, all of which are within walking distance of one another.



the markets in the grounds of the Hotel de Ville

IV



part of the underground city

As I walked in the winding streets of the old town on a sunny and bright day recently, I was pleased to experience the ingenuity of life in a city which was not overrun by tourists. I strolled down the town with a sense that I was stepping in the steep alleys of a sleepy village. In the Rue du Marché aux Herbes I stopped in front of the baroque, 16th century Grand Ducal Palace to appreciate the beauty of its architecture. The palace of Grand Duke is adjoined by Luxembourg's parliament, and is guarded by a sentinel who marches up and down by the main gate. There is a door between the two buildings, which the Grand Duke can use to enter into the House of Representatives. The palace looks like a fairytale edifice, but unlike many other European palaces – Buckingham Palace for example – which are surrounded by large gardens and fenced off, it is located in the heart of the city and among the people. I did not see any members of the royal family, but I was told that it is not unusual to see them in local stores.

From steep hills on Montree de Clausen you have a panoramic view over valleys by the river Alzette which encircle the city. The picture-postcard views of green valleys, a stone bridge, fortification ruins and the remaining towers across the landscape are breathtaking. I walked along the ruined rampart to view the gorges on both sides of Montree de Clausen. Beneath the rampart is actually Bock Casemates, a maze of 14-mile long tunnels that snake around the town, designed to survive the severest siege. The underground city was planned to sustain with all amenities for a long-term defense and intended to house thousands of people, soldiers and animals.

V

The dark corridors and pathways open to various connecting galleries. The stairways were very steep and lead down to rocky walls and it would be easy to be lost in the looped paths. We returned to the surface and, after a short distance, took a lift down the valley into Ville Basse walking through leafy alleys along the river Alzette.

On my way back to the hotel, I discovered Luxembourg's Notre Dame built in the 17th century and standing as an amazing work of art combining a blend of Gothic and Renaissance architecture. I felt the spirituality in the ambience of this modest and lively church.



chocolate spoons

In the afternoon I chose to spend more time in the old town and returned to the café at Chocolate House opposite the Grand Ducal Palace. You can either sit on the bench outside or enter into a warm hall on the first floor with a view of the palace. The café serves a variety of foods and snacks, but it is famous for its hot chocolate and cakes. It is very popular for tourists to try hot chocolate spoons with a variety of flavors. They are also good souvenirs to take home.

VI

I continued my stroll around the palace and through the narrow alleys, lost in a. dreamy exploration of the old city. I almost forgot that the city was only a small part of a major financial epicenter.

There is a lot to experience in Luxembourg. Across Alzette Valley, in complete contrast to the old historic city is a bustling new one with its high skyscrapers, glass buildings and contemporary architecture.

But that's for a return trip!

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