



BY NEIL MACDONALD

LUMPED in with the European Lowlands, Luxembourg's landscape must be completely flat – wrong!

Indeed, this common misconception (or mine, at least) is shattered upon arrival in the capital, also called Luxembourg. Here, just a five-minute walk from the pristine centre, stands the Casemates, a labyrinth of tunnels snaking through walled ramparts, with portholes gouged

A COUNTRY FULL OF SURPRISES

LUXEMBOURG IS FAR FROM FLAT



STUNNING SCENERY: Schiesstentumpel waterfall on the Mullerthal Trail.

out of the sheer rock face giving way to staggering views of the valley below. This impressive structure in the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site for more than two decades, is such a surprising sight – and one you can admire for hours, from many different angles – but it sets the tone for the rest of the trip, evoking the message that you should expect the unexpected in Luxembourg. The old blends in nicely with the new and nowhere is this more apparent than the Museum of Contemporary Art (MUDAM), where architect Leoh Ming

Pei realised his ambitious, modern vision smack-bang in the middle of an ancient fortress.

This juxtaposition sums up the capital succinctly: there is something for everyone, from the high-end shopping streets of Grand-Rue or Rue Philippe II and the burgeoning bar and club scene just uphill from the Old Town, to the almost space-age Philharmonie Concert Hall and sprawl of EU buildings. It is also a beautiful city to simply

wander around without a care in the world, thanks to wide open green spaces, clean air and well-kept streets, aspects that many more congested cities lack desperately.

Inhabitants are rightly proud of the striking Philharmonie, and the entire Kirchberg area which houses all these buildings is well worth a recce. This glimpse of the modern is enhanced by the amount of construction work going on. One of the major bridges is currently

being widened as part of a tram project to galvanise links with the airport and city landmarks, while Kirchberg is continually expanding as interest in Luxembourg deepens.

The city is certainly going places but the nation is furnished with much more than just a dynamic capital. Mullerthal region, colloquially called Luxembourg's Little Switzerland, has earned this moniker thanks to the outdoor activities it provides and, again, you'll find the unexpected

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MORE NOW TAKING THE PLUNGE ON CRUISE BREAK

BY SARAH MARSHALL

THERE was a time I vowed never to take a cruise holiday: too restrictive, too pedestrian and far, far too dull. Yet, in the last 12 months alone, I've been on four seafaring holidays and I already have a couple more planned. Spending 14 days on a 'floating shopping precinct full of bored retirees' is still not my idea of a holiday, but the reality is this type of cruise holiday is, well, quite far from reality. With new ships, new itineraries and a new-found willingness for tourists to set sail, such clichés about the cruise industry are rapidly disappearing. New research commissioned by ABTA shows that cruising is growing in popularity; in the last 12 months, one in 10 (10%) of British holidaymakers took a cruise – an increase from 7% in 2014. So what's changed? Part of the growth is down to returning passengers: 80% of people who have been on a cruise said they'd like to go again. Proof that once they've dipped their toes in the water, most tourists appreciate the variety of possibilities for ocean or river-based breaks.



"In recent years, the cruise market has expanded outside the traditional Mediterranean and Caribbean destinations and now offers an incredible variety of voyages, including Scandinavian cruises, Arctic cruises and European river cruises," says ABTA chief executive Mark Tanzer. "The industry has also responded to customer demand for ships of varying size and scale, catering for every budget and taste." For my own part, it's the accessibility of hard-to-reach locations that's brought me into the cruising fold. How else would I get to see elephant seals battling on the beaches of South Georgia, or polar bears struggling to eke out a living on the rapidly declining sea ice around Svalbard? The extended choice of cruise holidays has also attracted new markets. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of passengers are aged over 65 (13% of that age group surveyed by ABTA took a cruise in the last 12 months), but they're closely followed by 25-34 year olds (12% of this demographic had taken a cruise last year). The majority of travellers (77%) are attracted to cruise holidays because they value the opportunity to visit multiple destinations. Of course, there is still the option to travel on 6,000-passenger palaces, such as Oasis of the Seas, but the experience is hardly the garish nightmare imagined. Slick West End shows, restaurants guided by gourmet chefs and spas souped up beyond five-star standards, make these voyages a delight for many.



VIEWS: The picturesque Old Town in Luxembourg city.



HISTORIC ATTRACTIONS: Left, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MUDAM) in Kirchberg, and the renaissance Beaufort Castle.

ere. The Aquatower in Berdorf is a
tanic structure surrounded by rolling
ountryside with villages dotted around,
veloped by thick forest.
n a clear day you can see for miles in

all directions. For the more active, the
real gem is the Mullerthal Trail, a
network of hiking paths cocooned
within a bizarre landscape of rock
formation, trees and foliage. You

choose from a range of routes with
varying degrees of difficulty and
distance, flanked all the way by
imposing towers of moss-covered stone
formed by centuries of erosion to create
a mind-blowing atmosphere.
There's no chance of getting lost either,
courtesy of an amazingly efficient,
award-winning series of accurate
signposts – you really can't go wrong.
For the more adventurous ramblers, the
rocks form tight little crevasses, some of
which are navigated virtually by
crawling and require a torch (or in our
case, mobile phone), but even for the
claustrophobic it's worth a bash – there's
always light at the end of the tunnel!
Nearby is the Moulin de Heringen, a
17th-century flour mill painstakingly
restored with a modest museum, and
here you can also 'hire' hiking gear
completely free of charge if you've
omitted such garb from your suitcase.
The country's oldest town, Echternach,
is unexpectedly rich in history as its
architecture affirms, and should be
explored, likewise the renaissance
Beaufort Castle.
And the food and drink served
everywhere is of tremendously high
quality. So, in terms of both topography
and vibrancy, Luxembourg is far from flat
and I left feeling like I'd merely scratched
the surface, with much more to unearth.
The country is replete with diversity, is
so easy to get around and could well be
on the brink of a tourist explosion.
You'd do well to get in there first and
visit now – it isn't called the Grand
Duchy of Luxembourg for nothing.

TRAVEL FACTS

Neil Macdonald flew with KLM
to Luxembourg Findel Airport, from
Birmingham International Airport via
Amsterdam Schiphol and returned
with LuxAir/Air France via Paris
Charles de Gaulle.
Return flights from £250.
Hotel Simoncini, Rue
Notre-Dame, Luxembourg city.
www.hotelsimoncini.lu
Hotel-Restaurant Dimmer,
Lanzwee, Wallendorf-Pont (just
one minute from the border, you
can walk across the bridge into
neighbouring Germany).
www.hoteldimmer.com
Brasserie Guillaume, Luxembourg
city. www.brasserieguillaume.lu
Chocolate House, Rue Marche-aux-
Herbes, Luxembourg city.
Hotel Le Bon Repos Restaurant Le
Grill, Route d'Echternach,
Echternach. www.lebonrepos.lu
Hotel-Restaurant Le Cigalon, Rue
de l'Ernz Noire, Mullerthal.
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EXPLORING: Some of the rock formations on the Mullerthal Trail.