

Ancient charm

ANDREW FOLEY travels through one of Europe's smallest countries... and finds it surprisingly full of things to do and see

Small but perfectly formed, Luxembourg is tucked away in the heart of Europe as one of the continent's best-kept secrets.

The Grand Duchy, to give the country its proper title, shares borders with France, Belgium and Germany. Yet it is distinctly different from all three.

Amsterdam, Paris and Brussels are within comfortable reach by train, making Luxembourg an ideal addition for a longer visit to one of its bigger neighbours.

Luxembourg City, the capital, personifies continental chic. Classical architecture sits alongside cutting-edge buildings, emphasising a bold approach to town planning. The greenery of leafy boulevards and parks softens the lines and light.

Centre of attention is Place Guillaume II. Surrounded by cafes, it is perfect for the greatest of all travel pastimes... simply watching the world go by.

Radiating off the square are ancient streets and alleyways full of character. So much so, the old town features on UNESCO's world heritage list. Chocolate shops and coffee houses come at regular intervals, so stop and watch the world go by some more.

The Kirchberg district is home to centres of business, politics and judiciary. But also Place de l'Europe and the remarkable Philharmonic Concert Hall. The latter is as stunning on the inside as on the outside, as light floods curved walkways that surround the main auditorium.

Nearby, Mudam is the country's Museum of Contemporary Art, designed by the architect responsible for the Louvre in Paris. Exhibitions are edgy and chance-taking, just as they should be.

If the capital's architecture creates fascination, the geology presents an equal sense of wonder. A deep gorge divides the urban landscape, with bridges and viaducts drawing the eye to ancient walls surrounding the city. In the valley bottom, the river Alzette winds past the delicate hues of picture-postcard buildings along its banks.

Carved into the rock cliffs, the Casemates are a labyrinth of tunnels and caves that



Hiking in the Mullerthal region

present a mysterious journey for 1.5 million visitors a year. They are the capital's top tourist attraction and present remarkable vistas from viewing points etched into the steep rock faces.

The Mullerthal region is known as 'Little Switzerland' and it is easy to see why. This is hiking territory, with pine and spruce adding flavour to crystal-clear air.

Berdorf personifies the dramatic landscape, with sharp cliffs and narrow walkways, as though the stone had been split by a giant axe. The canopy of trees creates an eerie magic, as enchanting waterfalls tumble from moss-covered heights. The BBC thought so too, using the area as setting for a production of Peter Pan.

Nearby, Beaufort Renaissance Castle continues the fairytale theme, being part ancient ruin, part stately home. It is also renowned for the traditional fruity liqueur Cassis de Beaufort.

Moulin de Heringen is a restored 17th-century watermill, where bread-baking still goes on in a stone oven, the delicious small wafting through the countryside.



Overlooking the river Alzette, Luxembourg City

For sweeping views of this region, Berdorf Aquatower is functional and educational, its lofty viewing platform offering spectacular access to the rolling countryside of farmers' fields and isolated hamlets.

I spent the night at a hotel full of character in Wallendorf Pont, a tiny settlement with a pair of bridges over a babbling river. Stroll over one after dinner and you are in Germany. Stroll back over the other and you return to Luxembourg. Two bridges, two countries, 20 minutes.

Journey's end was Echternach, Luxembourg's oldest town and regional capital. It is compact, full of character; European yet distinctly different. Just like its mother country.

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Mudam Museum of Contemporary Art



The Casemates attract 1.5 million visitors a year



Beaufort Renaissance Castle



Berdorf Aquatower