

Who's afraid of the casemates?



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The casemates are a 17km (11 mile) maze of underground passages carved into the capital's rocky foundations. They were created hundreds of years ago as part of the city's military defences, linking fortresses and other key positions. The fortress was dismantled in 1867 and nowadays a part of the casemates are accessible to all. This unique feature contributed to the city's successful application to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. They attract around 130,000 visitors each year, including on magical nocturnal visits.

The unique labyrinthine subterranean passages bear witness to the fortress' glorious, legendary past. Whole regiments could be stationed there, and they were also a place for civilian shelter and a store for provisions in case of siege. The city has a rich history. From the 15th to 18th centuries it was variously part of the Burgundian, Spanish and Austrian Netherlands, as well as having been taken by France. It was also part of the German Confederation from 1815 to 1867.

Each regime modernised and added fortifications to create one of the most impregnable strongholds in the world, hence the nickname "Gibraltar of the North". In particular, Louis XIV's celebrated military engineer Vauban left his mark. The city's defences were based on three fortified rings, featuring a total of 24 forts and 16 major constructions, much of which was linked by the casemates. At its peak this network was fully 23km (14 miles) long, dug at different levels, reaching a depth of 40m (130ft).

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Luxembourg for Tourism

The Bock casemates were built by the Austrians in 1745/46, and have no less than 1,100m² (12,000 sq ft) of space. This is sufficient to garrison 1,200 soldiers and their equipment, including four dozen canons. The fortress was abandoned on 11th May 1867 (150 years ago) and was subsequently dismantled, with a quarter of the casemates destroyed.

In the summer months (until 30th September), the Bock casemates are open from 10am until 8.30pm. Guided tours in English, French and German are organised daily at 11am, 4pm and 6pm. Exploring these underground passageways after nightfall is particularly impressive.

Access is free of charge to visitors with the Luxembourg Card. This tourist pass, also available as a mobile app, gives free access to around 60 attractions across the country, including guided tours in town and 14 museums.

Thus the casemates are just one of a series of highlights for the inquisitive visitor. To gain a deeper understanding of the old fortresses' history, why not following the Wenzel walk, taking you through 1,000 years of history in 100 minutes. As well as old stories, the circuit offers stunning views over the atmospheric old town.

<http://www.visitluxembourg.com/en/place/castle/bock-casemates-luxembourg>

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