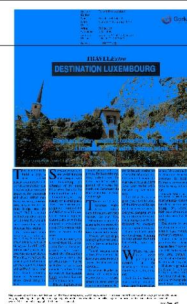


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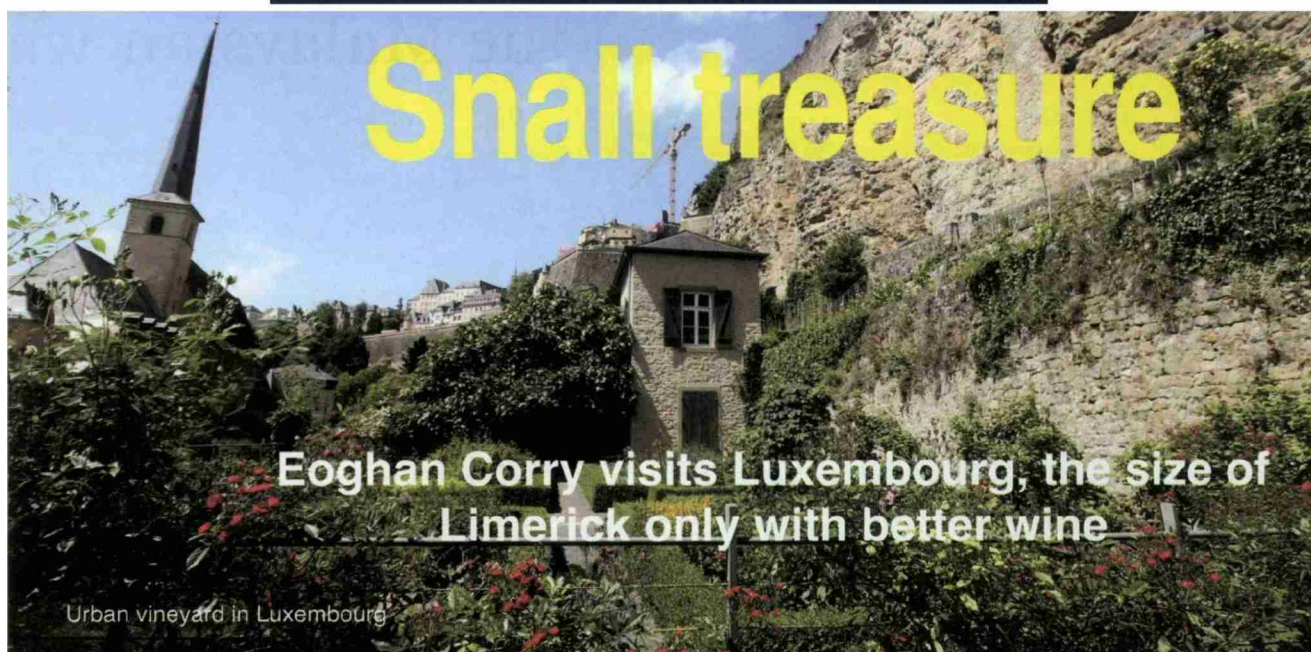
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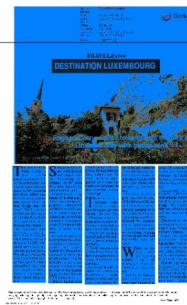
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## TRAVEL*Extra*

### DESTINATION LUXEMBOURG





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This an odd place to build a city, a sheer cliffed plateau over a rocky valley with a small river running through, a borrowed landscape for shepherds and sheep rather than Bourgers eating burgers, criss crossed by the ancient bridge and the "new" 1966 bridge that enabled a modern city to be built atop the next hillside, shining back at the chocolate box original.

In Luxembourg each crevice has a little surprise. They have urban vineyards here, real ones sitting on the cliff wall, not the back garden pretend ones in other places. When they examined the cemetery of the Neumunster they found the monks had suffered from gout they found cemetery down at Neumunster abbey. Good living indeed.

Sometimes you cannot avoid thinking that people who call Luxemburg the Gibraltar of the north have never been in the Gibraltar of the south.

Luxembourg has a big history for a small place. It was once a bastion, impregnable, unmoveable and full of its self importance. French engineer Carnot came up with the comparison with Gibraltar in 1795 when it withstood a seven month siege.

For seventy more years it stood there like a war on the face of the super-

powers, and almost started the Franco-German early in 1866. The reverberations of that crisis led to two world wars in the last century. So it is no wonder that Luxembourg has been keeping its head down since.

This is a big burden for a small place, and so it proved for Luxembourg. They pulled down the fortress and left us a playground of caverns beneath, the Casemates du Bock where tourists trundle through.

There are 23km of casemate walkways, of which three kilometres are open visitors. At one time 1.200 soldiers manned 25 cannons in two rows, firing three cannon shots an hour to avoid suffocation.

Towers are for flags, conveying how one country's history is better than another's.

Tunnels are gunpowder history. Down here in the dark such certainties are subject to shadows and subtleties.

In recent decades an artefact of another war has rivalled it as a tourist attraction. Americans go to see where George Patton is buried, victim not of war, but of an automobile accident when the war was over. In all 5,075 Americans are buried in the well kept war cemetery.

This little Duchy is a good place to take stock of the history of Europe in its successive waves,

everyone ganging up on Spain followed by everyone ganging up on France followed by everyone ganging up on Germany.

There, that will saved us a lot of time listening to tour guides recviting battlefields, wars and dates.

Where the history comes peeping through in the streetscape, abbey and churches, it is little history.

And in its festivals. The country's most famous saint Willibrord has strong Irish connections. A Dancing Procession continues be held in Echternach every year on Whit Tuesday in his honour.

Outside Steiler bar and restaurant it proclaims in four languages that this is the oldest pub in Luxembourg, 1691 when the Irish were about to come with the brigades. How timely.

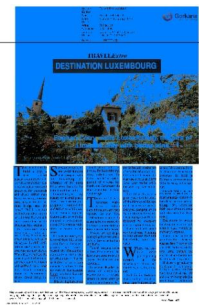
Everything is within touching distance in such a small place, even Luxembourg's royalty.

There used to be 16 grand duchies. Tuscany was the first. Now there is one left. Soldiers of his tiny army change the guard outside the Palace. No grand displays here.

If there is grandeur to be found it is Luxembourg's proud modern city, founder of the EU and one of its capitals (the small town of Schengen

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■ Eoghan Corry travelled to Luxembourg as a guest of Luxair and Luxembourg National Tourist Office. [www.visitluxembourg.com](http://www.visitluxembourg.com)  
■ The Luxembourg card touristic passport costs €11  
■ Luxair flies daily from Dublin to Luxembourg, with prices from €100 return.  
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is celebrating two decades of being associated with a forward-looking visa policy). You get the impression this place is living small and thinking big, outside what would be called the box in a powerpoint presentation.

When you live in a country that is the size of county Limerick, you need to think outside the border line, if not the box.

Luxembourg has a surprising number of stylish places to stay among its 6,000 tourist beds and more Michelin stars per head than any other European country, "When you come from a small place," tour guide Elke Begas told us, "you are condemned to focus on quality rather than quantity."

It has the highest proportion of foreign residents (70pc) and places of all grades and mannerisms to eat and party.

There are three languages including the Moselle Frankonian dialect of Luxembourgish. French is the language of law, German the language of media.

People say Portuguese is the fourth language, and everyone speaks English. So that makes five.

In addition 170,000 commute into Luxembourg each day, half of them from France, a quarter from Belgium and a quarter from Germany.

Even in the heart of the city you are ten minutes to France, 20 minutes to Belgium and 25 minutes to Germany.

The highway in the north has just opening shortening those short distances to everywhere.

When the office workers go home, the city tends its night scene as proudly as a vineyard.

We ended up in Wilma, a karaoke bar where Wonderwall was filleted by a tuneless Irish travel writer.

Was that the sound Willibrord laughing at Wonderwall?