

Lorelei Reddin discovers Luxembourg, a hidden gem of a city which mixes the beautiful old with the vibrant new...



Luxembourg City. A scene taken from the city walls

HISTORY, culture and stunning scenery.
For a tiny country, Luxembourg certainly packs a whopping great big punch.

I was to enjoy a two-night whistle-stop tour of the highlights of the Grand Duchy, best known as a tax haven and centre for big business.

By the end of the weekend, I had lost my heart to the country and particularly a city which is possibly the most beautiful in Europe.

Arriving in the heart of Luxembourg city we checked into the luxurious Hotel Sofitel Luxembourg Europe, which is surrounded by European institutions, we headed to the old town.

Exploring the ancient streets and squares of the old town featured on UNESCO's world heritage list, we wandered past the Grand-Ducal Palace, the city residence of the Grand Duke and one of the most beautiful facades in the city, before venturing into the world's longest underground tunnel system.

There are two sets of Casemates, each with its own network of tunnels and look-out points. The Bock Casemates offer a great place to get lost along narrow stone corridors, while enjoying fabulous views across the Pétrusse river valley.

Re-emerging from the 23km long network of tunnels, our city tour

continued along the Wenzel cultural and nature trail towards the picturesque Grund area in the Alzette Valley and finished with a stroll through the shopping streets, filled with delicatessens and vintage shops.

Dinner was at Brasserie Guillaume, a delightful spot overlooking a city square with some of the most superb seafood I have ever tasted.

The following morning we ended a packed 24 hours in the city with a look around the Kirchberg area, home to a host of contemporary architecture and the Place de l'Europe, which celebrates the setting of the European Institutions in Luxembourg and the country's place as a founding member of the European Union.

The country's Philharmonic Orchestra were rehearsing as we visited the city's concert hall. This modernist building hosts opera, jazz and classical music for an audience of 1,500, as well as housing a smaller chamber orchestra theatre, seating 300.

Nearby is Mudam, the museum of modern art with a collection which includes photography, design, multi-media and fashion. The building itself – all stone and glass and light – is the greatest piece of art seen here, marrying the vestiges of the historical fort with a modern building.

With a population of just over 100,000, just over 32 per cent of city residents

are natives. Considered the very epitome of the European ideal, the other 68 per cent are made up of 150 different nationalities. Workers can be in Germany, France or Belgium in just 20 minutes.

It was now time to discover what the rest of the country had to offer, so we jumped into the car and headed for the Ardennes region, home to majestic landscapes. A real treat for nature lovers, the region enjoys superb hiking and cycling trails through forests, along rivers and towards picturesque villages.

Lunch was a feast of meats and cheeses at Hotel de la Sure, home to an incredible rock spa, carved into rock on three levels, and was followed by an amble around the nearby lake.

Our home for the night was stunning boutique and design hotel Le Clervaux, complete with swimming pool, spa and even a wine shop. It is set in the beautiful town of Clervaux, in a deep valley in the midst of the Ardennes and home to The Benedictine Abbey of St Maurice and St Maur.

Next door is The Family of Man exhibition by Edward Steichen, a remarkable collection of documentary art photography originally housed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

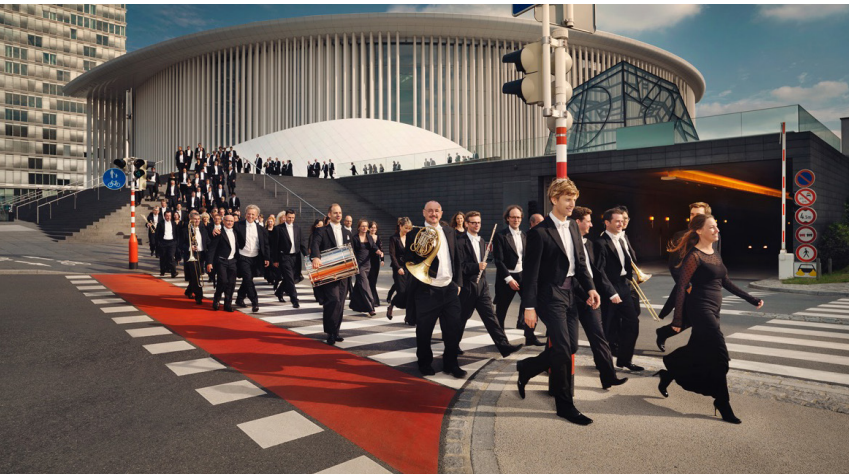
The town of Vianden, a picture postcard location with breathtaking scenery, was our first stop the following morning. A visit to Vianden Castle, one of the largest and most beautiful feudal residences of the Romanesque and Gothic periods in Europe, was a highlight of the weekend.

We popped into the Victor Hugo museum before departing for the National Military Museum in Diekirch. This fascinating look at the World War II conflict in the region known as the Battle of the Bulge was our final stop before returning to the airport for our homeward journey impressed at the diversity of such a small nation.

■ Lorelei flew to Luxembourg from London City Airport with LuxAir www.luxair.co.uk She was a guest of Luxembourg for Tourism www.visitluxembourg.com and stayed at the Hotel Sofitel Luxembourg Europe www.sofitel.com and Le Clervaux Boutique and Design Hotel www.le-clervaux.com



Above, the old streets of Luxembourg. Below, The Bock Casemates underground tunnels.



The Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra