

exploring the Grand Duchy

Sarah Holt visited the small country that's big on group activities.

Pick an interest

Regional food

Eating certain dishes is a rite of passage in Luxembourg. You shouldn't go home without trying the following...

Kniddelen: These dumplings are made with flour, milk and eggs and served in a butter sauce with bacon. Accompaniments often include apple sauce.

Feierstengszalot: This cold beef salad is served with a mustard dressing and a hardboiled egg.

Judd mat gaardebounen: Luxembourg's national dish is a smoked collar of pork served with broad beans and potatoes.

Restaurants that are great for groups and serve local dishes like the above include Brasserie Koepchen in the countryside a short drive from Luxembourg city centre, An dr Turelle, near the Moselle river, Pavillon Desom, which belongs to the winery of the same name, and Um Dierfgen, in the centre of Luxembourg City.

Measuring just 51 miles in length and 35 miles in width, Luxembourg is one of the smallest countries in the world. In fact, there are only 15 others smaller than it. Don't be misled by its Lilliput stature, though, because the country is more Goliath than David when it comes to almost everything else.

Discounting the fact that Luxembourg is a business titan and one of the top five wealthiest countries in the world, it's also the only remaining Grand Duchy on Earth, and one of the top truly trilingual countries, too – residents swap and change effortlessly between French, German and Luxembourgish.

Then there's the tourist attractions. The country is split into five regions that each offer something in terms of tourism. There's Luxembourg City with its history, the Ardennes and Mullerthal with their castles and walking trails, The Land of the Red Rocks with its museums and industrial heritage, and the Moselle with its vineyards.

Photo credit: Carlo Rinnen ONT.



> The *MS Princesse Marie-Astrid* on the Moselle river.

Luxembourg City

The most obvious place for groups to start a trip is the capital city. Parties that want a guided tour can book one through the Luxembourg City Tourist Office. A typical two-and-a-half hour itinerary begins at the Bock promontory, where you can look out over the once-impregnable UNESCO city walls and into the valley beneath. From this point you can also see the bridges and viaducts that stream people in and out of the historic city centre every day.

From the Bock, tours can move on to take in the Palace of the Grand Dukes. Luxembourg's equivalent to Buckingham, the palace is the city residence of the monarchy, and a flag is raised whenever the Grand Duke is inside. Between July and August guided tours are available that take in the interior of the palace.



> The UNESCO city walls.

Also popular on a guided tour is the UNESCO-listed Old Town, a cat's cradle of lanes, half-hidden passageways, and – more recently – Michelin star restaurants.

The cathedral is another popular stop on a guided tour. The building fuses Gothic and Renaissance architecture, and it contains the tombs of former Arch Dukes in the crypt, where you can also take guided tours.

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And you can't go to Luxembourg without visiting the casemates. At the height of its defensive power Luxembourg was fortified by 24 forts. Beneath the ground of these forts was a 24-kilometre network of tunnels known as casemates, which sheltered thousands of soldiers, cannons, and even horses. You can take tours of these tunnels today; earth-worming through the rocks to get a feel for the former military might of the city.



> The casemates.

For groups that want to explore the wider Luxembourg city area, tours can be arranged that combine a guided walk with a coach or minibus trip. The latter take parties to the Kirchberg area, which is home to the European Court of Justice, Philharmonie Luxembourg concert hall and the Mudam Museum of Modern Art.

> Views across the Moselle Valley.





At the time of going to press the major exhibition on display at the Mudam was the provocative *Picasso et Moi* by Damien Deroubaix, which contrasts original pieces by Pablo Picasso with that of an artist who was originally inspired by *Guernica* and its themes of tragedy and the macabre.

However, from the perspective of a writer, one of the most moving current pieces on display in the gallery is *Many Spoken Words* by Su Mei Tse, which is a fountain of black ink designed to represent the flow of words in literature and their origins.



> Cremant at the Wine Museum.

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Wine country

Nudging up to Luxembourg City on the south eastern side is the Moselle region, which lends itself especially to group trips. This is wine country and the place where cremant – the Luxembourgish equivalent of Champagne – is made. If you've never heard of cremant before, this is the place to find out about it, as well as the Luxembourg speciality auxerrois wine.

The Moselle wine route runs for 42 kilometres and is home to more than 30 different wineries, which produce hundreds of different varietals of wine. Most of the vineyards offer guided tours and wine tasting, at some places tastings are free.

The best place to start your Luxembourgish wine education is the Wine Museum in Ehnen, roughly 15-minutes' drive from the city centre. Wine has been made on this site since the 18th century and groups can take a guided tour to see the vineyards, cellars, barrel making room, and distillery. Tours here can end with a tutored tasting, in which one group member can learn to open a bottle of cremant with a sabre.

Other wineries that welcome groups are Domaine Mathis Bastian, Domaine Viticole Laurent & Rita Kox, Caves Krier Freres, Caves St Martin, and Caves Desom.

Pick an interest

Castle country

Luxembourg is home to an estimated 130 castles and many of them can be found in the Ardennes and Mullerthal regions. Of particular note are Vianden, Larochette and the Beaufort castles.

Built between the 11th and 14th century Vianden Castle was once the home of the counts of Vianden. Now restored it's one of the largest feudal seats of the Romanesque and Gothic periods in Europe.



> Larochette Castle.

Larochette is actually the base of two castles, both of which were built in the 12th century. These buildings loom 150 metres above the town of Larochette below and legend has it are home to a dragon who appears every Good Friday.

The Beaufort Castles, meanwhile, are a pair of Brothers Grimm-style buildings that were built in the 11th century.

 www.visitluxembourg.com/en



> Outside the European Museum in Shengen.

■ Short Haul Focus: Luxembourg

And don't for a second think that when you've seen one winery, you've seen them all. The wine producers in the Moselle are as different to each other as the tropic of Cancer is from Capricorn. At the Domaine Viticole Laurent & Rita Kox the emphasis is on experimentation and innovation. It's the first winery in Luxembourg to experiment with new brands of red cremant for example. While at Caves St Martin there is a kilometre of underground cellars to explore.

If your group is really keen on its wine, you should time your visit to Luxembourg to coincide with the annual April Maacher Waimoart at the Cultural Centre in Grevenmacher. It's where all the wine growers meet up to let the public taste their fresh vintages for the first time. It costs just seven euros to enter and you can taste as many different wines as you want. ■

Live like a local

On the weekends Luxembourg locals can often be found inside Oberweis, a luxury chocolate shop and café. Cakes look more like sculpture here and chocolates are handled like status symbols rather than sweets.



> Cakes in Oberweis.