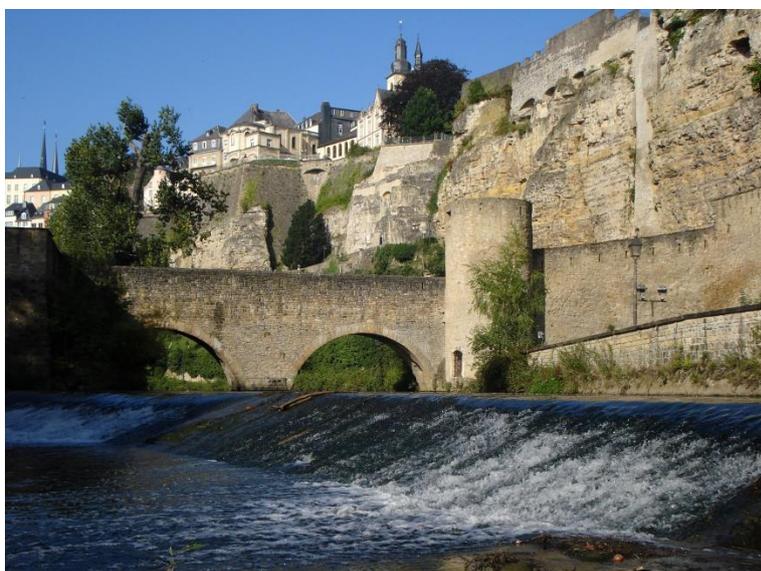


From a fortress town to a European capital

This year will mark Luxembourg's 150 year anniversary as an open city: a place where very many languages are spoken on the streets, in conference centres, and in business meetings. This multicultural attitude is alive throughout the day and night, creating a pleasant, open atmosphere for residents and visitors alike.



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The capital of the Grand Duchy is the safest in the world according to the consultants Mercer. Expat Insider ranks the quality of life to be in the top 20 globally. Until 1867 Luxembourg was a fortress town, with the vestiges of that past now on UNESCO's world heritage list.

Luxembourg's fortress was one of the most impregnable places in Europe. It was only taken by force three times, after which it emerged stronger and more impressive. For example, the Spanish added numerous extra layers and innovations to the defensive system. Then, after having masterminded the town's capture, French engineer Vauban designed unique elements taking the city's complicated topography into account. Even today, it is many of these remnants that impress the most.

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Subsequently, the Austrians dug a total of 23km military passageways under the town, and these “casemates” have been a major attraction for over a century. Such was the sophistication of these defences, that the city became known as the “Gibraltar of the North”. Prussia garrisoned the fortress after the Napoleonic wars, with their military adding further innovations.

In the end, it wasn't force of arms that destroyed the fortress, but the will of Europe's leaders. The 1867 Treaty of London declared Luxembourg to be neutral, with Prussian soldiers ordered to leave the city, and the military defences dismantled. What remains is a place rich in the spirit of the Romantic movement, with the picturesque town now featuring evocative ruins that add to the city's beauty. The result is breath taking views from the city's Corniche over the lower town and towards the Kirchberg European and business centre.

Equally attractive are the urban parks and way-marked walks which too are dripping in memories of times passed. For example, the Wenceslas trail promises “1000 years of history in 100 minutes”: a walk that has received international recognition, including from the Council of Europe. As well, recently excavated sites have uncovered more precious evidence of past endeavours.

Visitors understand that the current built environment is largely a creation of the 19th century. Guided tours of the Musée d'Histoire de la Ville, the Musée Dräi Eechelen, and around the City by the Luxembourg City Tourist Office explain how this military zone was converted into a vibrant urban space. Luxembourg has been one of the capitals of the European Union from the beginning, with the headquarters of the European Coal and Steel Community based here from 1952. This important heritage is recognised and protected by UNESCO.

Nowhere in the world is more multicultural. There are more than 160 nationalities resident in the capital, with 70% of the population being Luxembourgish. Well over half of employees in the country's internationally-focused economy are non-nationals, with European civil servants accounting for a further 8% of the country's workforce.

Respect for heritage goes together with a city that is full of life. Shops offer everything from designer labels to popular chain stores, while the varied and extensive gastronomic offering reflects the city's multicultural make-up. That five restaurants have been listed in the 1,000 best in the world confirms

the high quality of life. This is also an open-air architectural gallery, with innovative contemporary constructions side-by-side with historic gems. Few other places have such a concentration of winners of the Pritzker and other architectural prizes.

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