



Liechtenstein

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Why Go?

If Liechtenstein didn't exist, someone would have invented it. A tiny mountain principality governed by an iron-willed monarch in the heart of 21st-century Europe, it certainly has novelty value. Only 25km long by 12km wide (at its broadest point) – just larger than Manhattan – Liechtenstein doesn't have an international airport, and access from Switzerland is by local bus. However, the country is a rich banking state and, we are told, the world's largest exporter of false teeth.

Most blaze through Liechtenstein en route to Switzerland, stopping only for snapshots of the castle and a souvenir passport stamp. That's a shame, as the country has an overwhelming amount of natural beauty for its size. Strike out into the Alpine wilderness beyond Vaduz and, suddenly, this landlocked sliver of a micro-nation no longer seems *quite* so small.

When to Go

Slow travel is the word at cycle-happy Slow Up Liechtenstein in May. The country strums to Guitar Days in July and celebrates National Day with fireworks on 15 August. Come in summer for high-alpine hiking and cycling along the Rhine. Downhill and cross-country skiers glide along Malbun's twinkling slopes in winter. Wildflowers bring a burst of spring colour, while golden autumn days are a fine time to sample new wine and game in Liechtenstein's top restaurants.



Liechtenstein Highlights

- 1 Hike up to perkily turreted **Schloss Vaduz** (p322) for postcard views of the Alps and Vaduz
- 2 Pedal along the sprightly Rhine and over to Switzerland and Austria on the **Drei Länder Tour** (p325)
- 3 Strap on walking boots or skis and head to the slopes of family-focused **Malbun** (p325)
- 4 Delve into the deeply rural world of the Walser community in **Triesenberg** (p324)
- 5 Play among the peaks on the vertiginous **Fürstensteig** (p325), Liechtenstein's flagship walk
- 6 Eat like a king (or at the very least a prince) at **Torkel** (p324) above the royal vineyards
- 7 Ponder the idiosyncrasies of this curious little land at **Liechtensteinisches Landesmuseum** (p322)

History

Austrian prince Johann Adam Von Liechtenstein purchased the counties of Schellenberg (1699) and Vaduz (1712) from impoverished German nobles and gave them his name. Long a principality under the Holy Roman Empire, Liechtenstein gained independence in 1866. In 1923, it formed a customs union with Switzerland.

Even then, none of the ruling Liechtensteins had bothered to leave their Viennese palace to see their acquisitions. It wasn't until 1938, in the wake of the Anschluss (Nazi Germany's takeover of Austria) that Prince Franz Josef II became the first monarch to live in the principality, when he and his much-loved wife, Gina, began transforming a poor rural nation into today's rich banking state. Their son, Prince Hans Adam II, ascended the throne on the prince's death in 1989.

The Liechtenstein clan lost considerable territories and possessions (including various castles and palaces) in Poland and the then Czechoslovakia after WWII, when the authorities of those countries seized them. The family has been trying, unsuccessfully, to recover these possessions in international courts ever since.

The country's use of the Swiss franc encourages people to see it as a mere extension of its neighbour, but Liechtenstein has very different foreign policies, having joined the UN and the European Economic Area (EEA) relatively early, in 1990 and 1995 respectively.

Known as a tax haven, the principality banned customers from banking money anonymously in 2000. However, it remains under pressure (mainly from the European Union) to introduce more reforms.

In 2003, Hans Adam won sweeping powers to dismiss the elected government, appoint judges and reject proposed laws. The following year, he handed the day-to-day running of the country to his son Alois.

i Information

For general information on the country, have a look at www.liechtenstein.li. For more tourism-related information, check out www.tourismus.li. Liechtenstein's international phone prefix is 423.

Prices are comparable with those found in Switzerland. Shops usually open 8am till noon and 1.30pm to 6.30pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 4pm Saturday, although souvenir shops also open on high-season Sundays. Banks open from 8am till noon and 1.30pm to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday. Swiss currency is used.