

Liechtenstein

It's true, Liechtenstein makes a fabulous wine-and-cheese-hour trivia subject – *Did you know it was the sixth smallest country?... It's still governed by an iron-willed monarch who lives in a Gothic castle on a hill... Yes, it really is the world's largest producer of dentures...* But if you're visiting this pocket-sized principality solely for the cocktail-party bragging rights, keep the operation covert. This theme-park micronation takes its independence seriously and would shudder at the thought of being considered for novelty value alone. Liechtenstein would rather be remembered for its stunning natural beauty. Measuring just 25km in length and 6km in width, the country is barely larger than Manhattan. And though it might not look like much on a map, up close it's filled with numerous hiking and cycling trails offering spectacular views of craggy cliffs, quaint villages, friendly locals and lush green forests.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 150 sq km
- **Capital** Vaduz
- **Currency** Swiss franc (Sfr); A\$1 = Sfr0.95; €1 = Sfr1.58; ¥100 = Sfr1.07; NZ\$1 = Sfr0.75; UK£1 = Sfr2.34; US\$1 = Sfr1.23
- **Famous for** sending postcards stamped by the country's postal service, dentures
- **Official Language** German
- **Phrases** *gruezi* (hello, good day), *merci vielmal* (thank you very much), *adieu* (goodbye), *sprechen sie Englisch?* (do you speak English?)
- **Population** 32,860
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 423; international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Snap a picture of the royal castle with its stunning mountain backdrop in **Vaduz** (opposite).
- Get a souvenir **passport stamp** (opposite) and send a postcard home.
- Hit the slopes at **Malbun** (p827) to brag you've skied the Liechtenstein Alps.
- Test yourself with extreme hiking along the legendary **Fürstensteig trail** (p827).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Visit Liechtenstein from December to April for skiing, and May to October for sightseeing and hiking. Alpine resorts all but close down in late April, May and November.

HISTORY

A merger of the domain of Schellenberg and the county of Vaduz in 1712 by the powerful Liechtenstein family created the country. A principality under the Holy Roman Empire from the period 1719 to 1806, Liechtenstein finally achieved its full sovereign independence in 1866. A modern constitution was drawn up back in 1921, but even today the prince retains the power to dissolve parliament and must approve every act before it becomes law. Prince Franz Josef II was the first ruler to live in the castle above the capital city of Vaduz. He died in 1989 and was succeeded by his son, Prince Hans-Adam II.

HOW MUCH?

- **Hotel bed** Sfr40-60
- **Postage stamp** Sfr1.80
- **Souvenir passport stamp** Sfr2
- **Local phone call** Sfr0.60
- **Cup of coffee** Sfr3.60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** Sfr1.75
- **1L water** Sfr2
- **500mL beer** Sfr4
- **Souvenir T-shirt** Sfr20
- **Kebab** Sfr8

Liechtenstein has no military service and its minuscule army (80 men!) was disbanded in 1868. It is best known for wine production, postage stamps, dentures (an important export) and its status as a tax haven. In 2000, Liechtenstein's financial and political institutions were rocked by allegations that money laundering was rife in the country. In response to international outrage, banks agreed to stop allowing customers to bank money anonymously. However, it remains under pressure to introduce more reforms.

In 2003 Hans-Adam demanded sweeping powers to dismiss the elected government, appoint judges and reject proposed laws. Opponents warned of dictatorship, but the prince threatened to stomp off back to Austria if he did not get his way, and the population – possibly worried what an empty Schloss Vaduz would do to tourism – backed him in a referendum. The following year Hans-Adam handed the day-to-day running of the country to his son Alois, although he remains head of state.



IT'S LIECHTENSTEIN TRIVIA TIME

- If you ever meet the prince in the pub, make sure he buys a round. The royal family is estimated to be worth UK£3.3 billion.
- There are 8000 companies registered in the principality – that's nearly double the population of Vaduz.
- Liechtenstein bites into a large chunk of the false teeth market – it's the world's largest exporter of the product.
- Liechtenstein is the only country in the world named after the people who purchased it.
- In its last military engagement in 1866, none of its 80 soldiers was killed. In fact, 81 returned, including a new Italian 'friend'. The army was disbanded soon afterwards.
- Until 2005, when worries came to a head about the drug TCH, Liechtenstein's cows were fed hemp to keep them chilled and producing 'better' milk.

FOOD & DRINK

Liechtenstein's cuisine borrows from its larger neighbours, and it is generally good quality but expensive. Basic restaurants provide simple but well-cooked food, although budget travellers may want to live out of the supermarket fridge. Soups are popular and usually very filling, and cheeses form an important part of the diet, as do *Rösti* (fried shredded potatoes) and Wurst.

VADUZ

pop 4930

Vaduz is the kind of capital city where the butcher knows the baker – with tidy, quiet streets, lively patio cafés and a big Gothic-looking castle on a hill, it feels more like a village than anything else. It's also all most visitors to Liechtenstein see and at times it can feel like its soul has been sold to cater to the whims of tourist hordes alighting for 17 minutes on guided bus tours. Souvenir shops, tax-free luxury goods stores and cube-shaped concrete buildings dominate the small, somewhat bland town centre enclosed by Äulestrasse and the pedestrian-only Städtle.

INFORMATION

Liechtenstein Tourism (☎ 239 63 00; www.tourism.us.li; Städtle 37; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm daily May-Oct, 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) Offers souvenir passport stamps for Sfr2, plus all the usual assistance.
Main post office (Äulestrasse 38; ☎ 7.45am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat)

Telecom FL Shop (☎ 237 74 00; Austrasse 77; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Free Internet access.

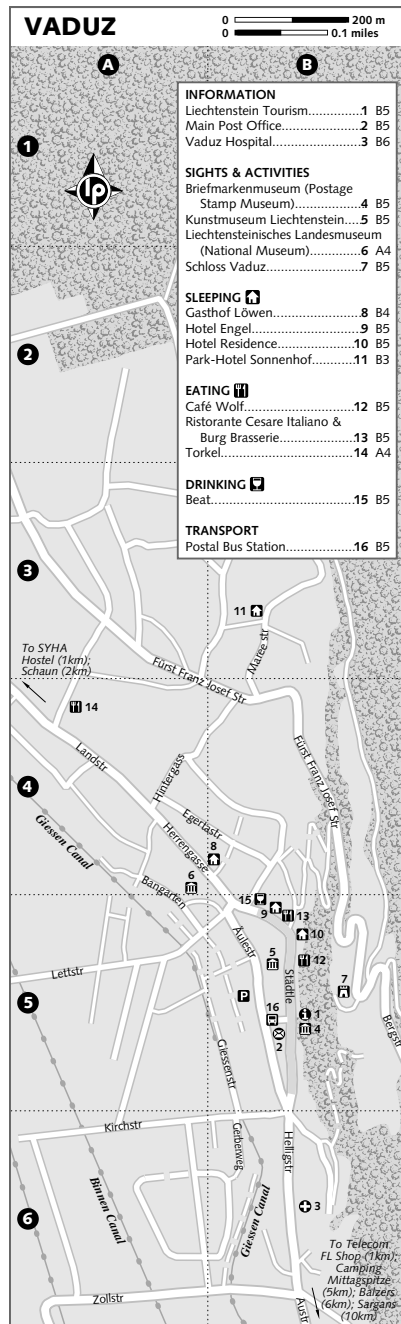
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Although the **Schloss Vaduz** (Vaduz Castle) is not open to the public, the exterior graces many a photograph and it is worth climbing up the hill for a closer look. At the top, there's a magnificent vista of Vaduz with a spectacular backdrop of the mountains. There's also a network of marked walking trails along the ridge. For a peek inside the castle grounds, arrive on 15 August (Liechtenstein's national day), when there are magnificent fireworks and the prince invites all 32,860 Liechtensteiners over to his place for a glass of wine or beer.

In the centre, the well-designed **Liechtensteinisches Landesmuseum** (National Museum; ☎ 239 68 20; www.landmuseum.li; Städtle 43; adult/concession Sfr8/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Wed) provides a surprisingly interesting romp through the principality's history, from medieval witch-trials and burnings to the manufacture of false teeth.

Keen philatelists will lick their lips in anticipation of the **Briefmarkenmuseum** (Postage Stamp Museum; ☎ 236 61 05; Städtle 37; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm), where national stamps issued since 1912 are on display.

The national art collection is housed in a sleek modern building at the **Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein** (☎ 235 030 00; Städtle 32; www.kunstmuseum.li; adult/student & child Sfr8/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Thu). Sixteenth- to 18th-century works from the prince's private collection are among the highlights.



SLEEPING

Ask the tourist office for a list of private rooms and chalets outside Vaduz.

Camping Mittagspitze (☎ 392 36 77, 392 23 11; camp sites per adult/child/car Sfr8.50/4.50/4, tent Sfr8; 🚰) A well-equipped camping ground in a leafy spot with a restaurant, TV lounge, playground and kiosk. It's outside Vaduz, just south of Triesen.

SYHA hostel (☎ 232 50 22; www.youthhostel.ch /schaan; Untere Rütigasse 6; dm/d Sfr30.50/82; 🚰) mid-Mar–Oct, 🚰 reception closed 10am–5pm) Renovated a few years ago, this hostel caters particularly to cyclists and families. Halfway between Schaan and Vaduz, it's within easy walking distance of either.

Hotel Engel (☎ 236 17 17; www.hotelengel.li; Städtle 13; s/d from Sfr110/165; 📺 🚰 🚰 🚰) Rooms are modern but feel soulless at this remodelled hotel. There's an Asian restaurant (Thai and Chinese) wafting tempting aromas through the hallways, and the bonus for laptop owners is free Internet in all the rooms.

Hotel Residence (☎ 239 20 20; www.residence.li; Städtle 23; s/d from Sfr195/260; 📺 🚰 🚰 🚰) It's cool to see a four-star hotel doubling as a local art gallery, which is exactly what Vaduz's newest hotel does (everything on the walls is for sale). Rooms are modern, made up with lots of seagrass and muted colour schemes.

Gasthof Löwen (☎ 232 00 66; www.hotel-loewen.li; Herrengasse 35; s/d from Sfr210/265; 📺) Antique furniture lends added appeal to the eight elegant and spacious rooms inside this 600-year-old guesthouse. A cosy bar, fine-dining restaurant and rear outdoor terrace, overlooking grapevines and up at the castle, are extra perks.

Park-Hotel Sonnenhof (☎ 239 02 02; www.sonnenhof.li; Mareestrasse 29; s/d from Sfr250/320; 🚰) closed Christmas–New Year; 📺 🚰 🚰 🚰) The rooms at this small luxury hotel are tip top, while the hillside views, solarium, ornate restaurant, cobbled courtyards, tinkling fountains and manicured gardens all create a privileged atmosphere.

EATING & DRINKING

Pedestrian-only Städtle street has a clutch of footpath restaurants and cafés.

Beat (☎ 236 84 84; Städtle 3; mains Sfr10–35) This spot has linen tablecloths, with a candlelit restaurant in front and a slick bar with a lounge feel and flat-screen TVs in the

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Café Wolf (☎ 232 43 21; Städtle 29; takeaway Sfr4–8, 2-course meal Sfr20) Locals flock here for the set two-course dinners. The menu changes daily, but always includes a veggie option. The horseshoe bar, with orchids and low lighting, is a perfect place to unwind. There is live music some evenings. Shoestring travellers will appreciate the cheap takeaway, including pasta and bratwursts.

back. DJs spin at night. The menu is loaded with soups, salads, pasta and plenty of Swiss-German fare.

Ristorante Cesare Italiano & Burg Brasserie (☎ 232 23 83; Städtle 15; mains Sfr15–30) Chow on pizza, burgers and salads at the downstairs café with a Parisian vibe, complete with red walls and brass fixtures. Upstairs there's a fancier Italian menu. With loads of ice-cream sundaes it's a good spot for the kids.

Torkel (☎ 232 44 10; Hintergasse 9; mains Sfr40–60) Just above the prince's vineyards is his majesty's ivy-clad restaurant. The garden terrace enjoys a wonderful perspective of the castle above, while the ancient, wood-lined interior is cosy in winter. The chef mixes classic with modern and has a couple of unusual veggie options.

AROUND VADUZ

Outside Vaduz the air is crisp and clear with a pungent, sweet aroma of cow dung and flowers. The countryside, dotted with tranquil villages and enticing churches set to a craggy Alps backdrop, is about as idyllic and relaxing as it gets.

Triesenberg, on a terrace above Vaduz, commands excellent views over the Rhine valley. It has a pretty onion-domed church and the **Heimatmuseum** (☎ 262 19 26; adult/student Sfr2/1; 🚰 1.30–5.30pm Tue–Sat) devoted to the Walser community, whose members came from Switzerland's Valais to settle in the 13th century.

There are 400km of **hiking trails** through Liechtenstein, along with loads of well-marked **cycling routes** (look for signs with a biking symbol; distances and directions will also be included). The most famous hiking trail is the **Fürstensteig**, a rite of pas-

sage for nearly every Liechtensteiner. You must be fit and not suffer from vertigo, as in places the path is narrow, reinforced with rope handholds and/or falls away to a sheer drop. The hike, which takes up to four hours, begins at the **Berggasthaus Gaflei** (bus 30 from Triesenberg). Travel light and wear good shoes.

MALBUN

pop 100

Nestled amid the mountains in the southeast is tiny Malbun, Liechtenstein's one and only ski resort.

The road from Vaduz terminates at Malbun. There is an ATM by the lower bus stop. The **tourist office** (☎ 263 65 77; www.malbun.li; 🚰 9am–noon & 1.30–5pm Mon–Sat, closed mid-Apr–May & Nov–mid-Dec) is on the main street, not far from Hotel Walserhof.

Although rather limited in scope – the runs are mostly novice and intermediate – the skiing is inexpensive for this part of the world and it does offer some bragging rights.

The resort has ski and snowboard schools. A one-day/-week ski pass costs Sfr37/165 for adults and Sfr31/137 for students under 28. Skis, shoes and poles cost Sfr44 for a day, and can be hired from the **sports shop** (☎ 263 37 55) in town. A chairlift at the resort operates in the summer (one way/return Sfr8/12), so you can ride up and hike down.

Hotel Gorfion-Malbun (☎ 264 18 83; www.s-hotels.com; s/d from Sfr100/160; 📺 🚰 🚰 🚰) is Malbun's most spacious and upmarket hotel. It caters brilliantly to children.

LIECHTENSTEIN DIRECTORY

Liechtenstein and Switzerland share almost everything, so for more information about Liechtenstein basics check out p1088.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

The same emergency numbers apply as in Switzerland:

- Ambulance ☎ 144
- Fire ☎ 118
- Police ☎ 117

TRANSPORT IN LIECHTENSTEIN

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The nearest airports are Friedrichshafen (Germany) and Zürich, with train connections to the Swiss border towns of Buchs (via Romanshorn) and Sargans. From each of these towns, there are usually three buses to Vaduz (Sfr2.40/3.60 from Buchs/Sargans, Swiss Pass valid). Buses run every 30 minutes from the Austrian border town of Feldkirch; you might have to change at Schaan to reach Vaduz.

A few local Buchs–Feldkirch trains stop at Schaan (bus tickets are valid).

By road, Rte 16 from Switzerland passes through Liechtenstein via Schaan; it terminates at Feldkirch. The N13 follows the Rhine along the Swiss–Liechtenstein border.

GETTING AROUND

Postbus travel within Liechtenstein is cheap and reliable; all fares cost Sfr2.40 or Sfr3.60, with the higher rate for journeys exceeding 13km (such as Vaduz to Malbun). Grab a timetable from the Vaduz tourist office.

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