

# Liechtenstein



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 6km wide – just larger than Manhattan – Liechtenstein doesn't have an international airport, and access from Switzerland is by local bus. However, the country proves to be a rich banking state and the world's largest exporter of false teeth.

Liechtensteiners sing different German lyrics to the tune of God Save the Queen in their national anthem, but they sure hope the Lord preserves theirs. For while head of state Prince Hans Adam II and his son, Prince Alois, have constitutional powers unprecedented in Europe, the royal presence helps give this theme-park micro-nation its tourist appeal.

Most come to Liechtenstein just to say they've been, and tour buses regularly disgorge day-trippers in search of souvenir passport stamps. But, if you're going to make the effort to come this way, it's pointless not to venture further, however briefly. With friendly locals and magnificent views, the place comes into its own away from soulless modern Vaduz.

In fact, the more you read about Fürstentum Liechtenstein (FL) the easier it is to see it as the model for Ruritania – the mythical kingdom conjured up in fiction as diverse as *The Prisoner of Zenda* and Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*.

Someone would have invented it? Oh, they did.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting a souvenir passport stamp and sending a postcard
- Climbing the short trail up to **Schloss Vaduz** (p308) for wonderful views
- Journeying uphill to **Triesenberg** (p310) to learn about the Walser community
- Taking the family to **Malbun** (p310) for undemanding hiking and skiing
- Indulging in some extreme hiking along the legendary **Fürstensteig trail** (p310)



■ POPULATION: 34,294

■ AREA: 160 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: GERMAN



## History

The country's history started when an Austrian prince, Johann Adam Von Liechtenstein, purchased the counties of Schellenberg (1699) and Vaduz (1712) from impoverished German nobles. Soon afterwards, the territory acquired his name and became a principality under the Holy

Roman Empire. It gained independence in 1866, and in 1923 formed a customs union with Switzerland.

Even then, none of the ruling Liechtensteins had bothered to leave their Viennese palace to see the country. It wasn't until 1938 that Prince Franz Josef II became the first monarch to live in the principality, when he and his much-loved wife, Gina, began dramatically 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 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, after allegations of money laundering. 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 didn't get his way, and the population – possibly worried about 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!

- 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.
- Low business taxes means 75,000 companies are registered here – twice the number of people.
- Worth UK£3.3 billion, the royal family is richer than any other in Europe, including the English monarchy.
- The surname of national football coach Ralf Loose is pronounced 'loser', which kind of suits his struggling team.
- Until 2005, Liechtenstein's cows were fed hemp – related to cannabis – to keep them chilled and producing 'better' milk. The practice was only stopped after worries about the active drug THC reaching the human food chain.

## Orientation

Liechtenstein is slightly larger than Manhattan but feels much smaller, because two-thirds is mountainous. A thin plain – the basin of the River Rhine separating Liechtenstein from Switzerland – runs down the country's western edge. The main north-south thoroughfare follows this.

The plain is wider and lower in the north, which is called the Unterland (lowland), while the south is described as the Oberland (highland).

Entering the country from Buchs, you first reach Schaan, which virtually merges into Vaduz and then Triesen further south. Further south still is Balzers. Entering from Sargans you do the journey in reverse.

From Triesen, you can take the steep, winding road west up to Triesenberg and Malbun (1600m).

North of Schaan are quiet villages like Planken and Schellenberg.

## Information

Tourist information abroad is distributed by Switzerland Tourism ([www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)). Prices here are comparable to those in Switzerland. Shops usually open 8am to 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 the same weekday hours, except they shut around 4.30pm. The country now runs its own postal and phone systems, but continues to use Swiss currency.

Devoutly Catholic, Liechtenstein takes off all the main religious feast days, plus Labour Day (1 May) and National Day (August 15), totalling a healthy 22 public holidays annually.

The official language is German, though most speak an Alemannic dialect. The Austrian 'Grüß Gott' is as common as the Swiss 'Grüezi'. English is widely spoken.

## 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;

### THE INSIDE READ

While Liechtenstein sounds quite wacky, in reality it has the reassuring familiarity of a small village where everyone knows everyone else's business. Liechtensteiners are warm-hearted folk who know what's important in life, as you soon realise reading Charlie Connelly's amusing *Stamping Grounds: Liechtenstein's Quest for the World Cup*. We don't mean it as a back-handed compliment when we say that football fan Connelly has managed to write possibly the longest and most engrossing book about Liechtenstein there's ever been.

you sometimes have to change at Schaan to reach Vaduz.

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

By road, route 16 from Switzerland passes through Liechtenstein via Schaan and ends at Feldkirch. The N13 follows the Rhine along the border; minor roads cross into Liechtenstein at each motorway exit.

## Getting Around

Buses traverse the country. Single fares are Sfr2.40/3.60 for two/three zones, while a weekly bus pass costs Sfr10/5 per adult/child. The latter is available from post offices and tourist offices. Swiss travel passes are valid on all main routes. Timetables are posted at stops. Check when the last bus leaves, as some services finish early.

For bicycle hire, try the Swiss train stations in Buchs or Sargans, or **Sigi's Velo Shop** (☎ 384 27 50; [www.sigis-veloshop.li](http://www.sigis-veloshop.li); Balzers; per day from Sfr30).

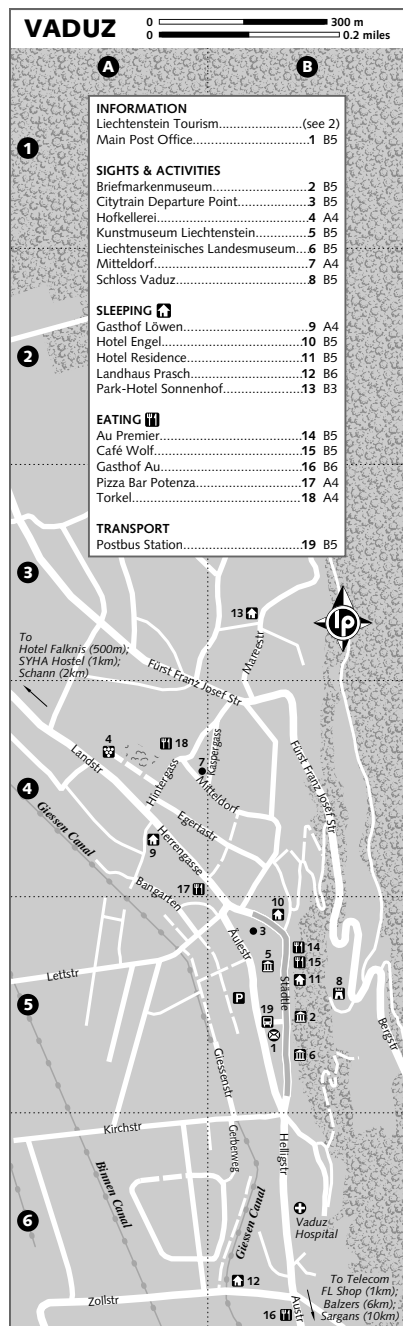
For a taxi, try calling ☎ 233 35 35 or ☎ 232 18 66.

## VADUZ

pop 5005 / elevation 455m

Poor Vaduz. It's all that most visitors to Liechtenstein see, and it feels like its soul has been sold to cater to the whims of its banks and the hordes of whirlwind tourists who alight for 17 minutes on guided bus tours. Souvenir shops, tax-free luxury-goods stores and cube-shaped concrete buildings dominate the antiseptic small pedestrian centre beneath the steep castle hill.

But don't be disheartened. Traces of the quaint village that existed just 50 years ago



still exist, and there are a couple of good museums. Plus, there is the rest of the country to see...

### Orientation

Two streets, Städtle and Aulestrasse, diverge and then rejoin, enclosing the centre of town. Everything of practical importance is near this small area, including the bus station and open-air car parking. Städtle is pedestrian only.

### Information

**Liechtenstein Tourism** (☎ 239 63 00; www.tourismus.li; Briefmarkenmuseum, 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 usual assistance.

**Main post office** (Aulestrasse 38; ☎ 7.45am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am 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

**Schloss Vaduz** (Vaduz Castle) looms over the capital from the hill above and although it's closed to the public, it's worth making the climb for the magnificent vistas. Take the path beside Hotel Engel and follow the signs; there's also a network of 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 34,294 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.

The mainstay of the **Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein** (☎ 235 030 00; www.kunstmuseum.li; Städtle 32; adult/concession Sfr8/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Thu) is temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, not the prince's collection of old masters, which was relocated to the Liechtenstein Museum in Vienna. There are some 20th-century classics on the ground floor.

The **Briefmarkenmuseum** (Postage Stamp Museum; ☎ 236 61 05; Städtle 37; admission free; ☎ 10am-

noon & 1.30-5pm), above the tourist office, is only mildly diverting. Liechtenstein once made a packet producing souvenir stamps for enthusiasts, but that market has been hit by the rise of email. Here you'll find all national stamps issued since 1912, and the post office has an adjoining **philatelic section** (☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) for collectors.

To see how Vaduz once looked, head northeast from the pedestrian zone to **Mitteldorf**. This and the surrounding streets form a charming quarter of traditional houses and verdant gardens. Nearby lies the prince's wine cellar, the **Hofkellerei** (☎ 232 10 18; www.hofkellerei.li; Feldstrasse 4). It is possible to sample the wines here only in a large group and if you have booked.

Every afternoon from May to October at 4.30pm, a touristic **Citytrain** (☎ 777 34 90; www.citytrain.li; adult/child Sfr9/5) makes a 35-minute circuit of Vaduz.

### Sleeping

Vaduz is the most convenient base, but other towns are more charming for longer stays, so ask the tourist office.

**Hotel Engel** (☎ 236 17 17; www.hotelengel.li; Städtle 13; s/d from Sfr110/165; ☎ ☎ ☎ P) Renovated Hotel Engel has modern but soulless rooms. There's an Asian restaurant (Thai and Chinese) wafting tempting aromas through the hallways, but the bonus for laptop-owners is free Internet in all the rooms.

**Gasthof Löwen** (☎ 232 00 66; www.hotel-loewen.li; Herrengasse 35; s Sfr210-255, d Sfr265-335; P) Historic and creakily elegant, this 600-year old guesthouse has eight spacious rooms with antique furniture and modern bathrooms. There's a cosy bar, fine-dining restaurant and a rear outdoor terrace overlooking grapevines and with views up at the castle.

**Hotel Residence** (☎ 239 20 20; www.residence.li; Städtle 23; s/d from Sfr195/260; ☎ ☎ P) Vaduz's newest hotel is a modern designer number with lots of seagrass and muted colour schemes.

**Park-Hotel Sonnenhof** (☎ 239 02 02; www.sonnenhof.li; Mareestrasse 29; s Sfr250-320, d Sfr300-490, s/d from Sfr360/460; ☎ closed Christmas/New Year; ☎ ☎ P) The staff's pride in this small luxury establishment is palpable. The rooms keep FIFA executives and business tycoons more than happy, while the hillside views, solarium, ornate restaurant, cobbled courtyards, tin-

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Torkel** (☎ 232 44 10; Hintergasse 9; dishes Sfr40-60; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Just above the prince's vineyards sits His Majesty's ivy-clad restaurant, where Hans Adam II likes to take business colleagues. The garden terrace enjoys a wonderful perspective of the castle above, while the ancient, wood-lined interior is cosy in winter. Food mixes classic with modern and has a couple of unusual veggie options (eg Quorn steak with white-truffle jus).

kling fountains and manicured gardens all create a privileged atmosphere. Check out the sci-fi robot lawnmower, too!

Also available:

**Landhaus Prasch** (☎ 232 46 63; www.news.li/tourismus; Zollstrasse 16; s/d from Sfr100/120; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) Quaint place with a sauna and whirlpool.

**Hotel Falknis** (☎ 232 63 77; Landstrasse 15 with shared bathroom Sfr55/110; P) Basic rooms some 15 minutes on foot north of the centre – or take the bus.

### Eating

**Pizza Bar Potenza** (Herrengasse 9; Sfr12-20; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Sat) Delicious aromas waft from this deservedly popular deli-cum-pizzeria. There's not much seating, but most customers seem happy to stand at the benches, or take away.

**Café Wolf** (Städtle 29; mains Sfr16-36) This relaxed café and restaurant has pavement tables in summer and a menu that mixes Swiss and international cuisine.

**Gasthof Au** (☎ 232 11 17; Austrasse 2; mains Sfr15-32; ☎ Wed-Sun) Based on Charlie Connelly's humorous descriptions (see the boxed text *The Inside Read*, p307), we might not recommend staying at 'Griselda's', but the garden restaurant is known for its good local food.

**Au Premier** (☎ 232 22 22; Hotel Real, Städtle 21; menus Sfr95 & Sfr135) Hotel Real's historic rooms could do with freshening up, but its gourmet restaurant holds its own, with classic French and seasonal specialities artfully arranged on large white plates with the hotel crest. There are 20,000 bottles of wine in the cellar.

### AROUND VADUZ Sights

Away from the capital, one's impression of Liechtenstein swiftly improves, thanks to magnificent Alpine scenery.

**Triesenberg** (bus No 10 from Vaduz) is perched on a terrace above the Rhine Valley and has a **Heimatmuseum** (☎ 262 19 26; www.triesenberg.li; adult/concession Sfr2/1; 1.30-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 1.30-5pm Sat Sep-May; plus 2-5pm Sun Jun-Aug), which tells the intriguing story of the Walsers. This German-speaking 'tribe' from Valais emigrated across Europe in the 13th century and settled in many places, including Liechtenstein, where they still speak their own dialect.

**Hinterschellenberg** (bus No 50, 51 or 52 from Schaan Post) has a **monument** commemorating the night in 1945 when a band of 500 Russian soldiers crossed the border to escape slavery in the German army. There's a **restaurant** (☎ Fri-Tue) and you can usually walk across the Austrian border, and back, unimpeded.

In **Balzers** (bus No 1 from Vaduz) is the 13th-century **Burg Gutenberg**. Until recently, this castle belonged to a Liechtenstein woman and her Mexican film-producer husband who gave it an over-the-top interior. Now sold back to the state, it's only open for concerts, but cuts a striking figure on the horizon and boasts nice strolls in the vicinity.

## Hiking

There are 400km of hiking trails. The tourist office produces a booklet *Wanderungen für Familien und Geniesser* (Hikes for families and connoisseurs) and sells the *Liechtenstein Hiking Map* (Sfr15.50).

The country's most famous trail is the **Fürstensteig**, a rite of passage 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 No 30 from Triesenberg). Travel light and wear good shoes.

A steep two-hour climb from **Planken** (bus No 20 from Schaan Post) brings you to the panoramic **Gafadurahütte** (☎ 262 89 27; www.alpenverein.li). From here, over the **Three Sisters** mountain, you can meet up with the Fürstensteig.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Garni Säga** (☎ 392 43 77; www.saega.li; Alte Landstrasse 17; s/d Sfr95/160; ☎ P) This modern family-run pension, next door to the camp site, has very pleasant, sunny rooms.

**SYHA Hostel** (☎ 232 50 22; www.youthhostel.ch/schaan; Untere Rütigasse 6; dm Sfr30.50, d Sfr82; ☎) 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.

**Camping Mittagspitze** (☎ 392 36 77, 392 23 11; adult/child/car Sfr8.50/4.50/4, tent Sfr5-8, dm adult/child Sfr22/13; ☎) This well-equipped camp site in a leafy spot is excellent for families, with a playground and pool as well as a restaurant, TV lounge and kiosk. It's south of Triesen.

## MALBUN

pop 35 / elevation 1600m

At the end of the road from Vaduz, the 1600m-high resort of Malbun feels – in the nicest possible sense – like the edge of the earth. Craning your neck to glimpse the surrounding peaks, you reflect that this natural bowl high in the mountains could be perfect for holing up with a broken heart or living out an apocalypse.

It's not really as remote as it seems, and in high season Malbun does get mobbed. However, generally it's perfect for unwinding, especially with the family. The skiing is inexpensive, if not too extensive, while the hiking is relaxing and beautiful.

Between seasons, though, be warned that Malbun becomes a deserted cul-de-sac. As one local puts it, 'You can run naked down the main street in November and no-one will see you'. (Not an invitation to try...)

## Information

**Bancomat** ATM by the lower bus stop, accepting all major cards.

**Tourist office** (☎ 263 65 77; www.malbun.li; ☎) 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct & mid-Dec-mid-Apr) On the main street, not far from Hotel Walserhof.

## Activities

As you pass the nursery slopes on the way into Malbun, you realise this is a resort aimed at beginners, with a few intermediate and cross-country runs thrown in. Indeed, older British royals like Princes Charles learnt to ski here, before shifting their allegiance to Klosters.

There's still a ski, and now a snowboard, school. A general ski pass (including the Sareis chairlift) for a day/week costs Sfr37/169 for adults and Sfr25/110 for children. One

day's equipment rental from **Malbun Sport** (☎ 263 37 55; malbun\_sport@adon.li; ☎) 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, plus Sat & Sun in high season) costs Sfr50 including skis, shoes and poles.

Some hiking trails, including to **Sassfürkle**, stay open during the winter. During the summer, other treks include the **Furstin-Gina Path**, with views over Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. This walk starts at the top of the Sareis chairlift (Sfr7.50/12 single/return in summer) and returns to Malbun.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Alpenhotel Malbun** (☎ 263 11 81; www.alpenhotel.li; s/d from Sfr55/110, with bathroom Sfr65/130; ☎ P) Rooms in the sienna-coloured main chalet are as cute as pie, with doors painted in traditional farmhouse patterns, and polished golden wood. They're tiny, though, and the shared facilities quite basic. En suite rooms in the nearby annexe are larger and comfier but straight from the 1970s. Pop into the main building's restaurant to enjoy the kitschy Alpine décor, warm atmosphere and decent food.

**Hotel Gorfion-Malbun** (☎ 264 18 83; www.s-hotels.com; s Sfr100-210, d & f Sfr160-380; ☎ P) (P)

Malbun's most spacious and upmarket hotel is spread across two chalet-style buildings. Undergoing progressive renovation, it has a sleek modern lobby and pool, but a traditional lounge. It caters brilliantly for children and if you fancy one of its all-in packages, the huge buffets are full of healthy, tasty food.

For supplies, visit **Schädler** (☎ 263 40 55; ☎) 8am-6pm in high season, 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm rest of year). There's also a mountain restaurant atop the Sareis chairlift.

## Getting There & Around

Bus 10 travels hourly from Vaduz to Malbun between 7.20am and 6.20pm every day (Sfr3.60, Swiss Pass valid), returning between 8.20am and 7.20pm.

## AROUND MALBUN

Two kilometres before Malbun is the Våluna Valley, the main **cross-country skiing** area. The trail, illuminated in winter, starts at **Steg**. Nearby is the simple but charming **Berggasthaus Sücka** (☎ 263 25 79; www.suecka-erlebnis.li; dm Sfr34, d Sfr100; ☎ P), which also has a restaurant open from Tuesday to Sunday.

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