

Vineyards to Valleys

Far from the beaten path, **Kavitakanan Chandra** discovers a different Europe in Luxembourg



From left: Luxembourg City is a layered capital where medieval fortifications, sleek EU buildings, and street-level skateboarding coexist in harmony; Luxembourg's public transport is completely free in standard class, letting locals and visitors alike travel by bus, train, or tram without a ticket.

TO EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS in Luxembourg is to discover a country that punches well above its weight—lush landscapes, a deep-rooted culture of outdoor sports, and a commitment to accessibility for all. One afternoon, I found myself enjoying the antics of a flock of ducks at a pond, feeling relaxed, surrounded by stout trees. Around me, people were walking, running, playing, and picnicking. I was at Kockelscheuer, an urban forest just a 20-minute bus ride from the train station of **Luxembourg City** (luxembourg.public.lu), the capital. The cities here abound in public parks, urban forests, and swathes of greenery. The countryside offers nature trails, including comfort hiking trails with benches and wheelchair-accessible paths that make outdoor activities available to all.

At the heart of it lies the **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg** (visitluxembourg.com), often overlooked by tourists visiting the continent. Known more for its high GDP per capita, robust finance and banking sector, and European Union institutions than as a tourist destination, it was a revelation to me. Its six visitor regions—**Luxembourg City, Moselle, Minett, Müllerthal, Eislek, and Guttland**—offer a spectrum of outdoor experiences.

The country boasts one of Europe's densest networks of hiking and cycling trails, eco-friendly watersports, and well-kept campsites set in pristine natural settings. Add to that its rich history, elegant architecture, and a culinary scene that includes eleven Michelin-starred restaurants, and Luxembourg begins to feel like Europe's best-kept secret. What's more, I travelled across Luxembourg without buying a ticket. Standard-class public transport—bus, tram, and train—is free for all.

SHUTTERSTOCK. (INSET) KAVITAKANAN CHANDRA



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF OFFICE RÉGIONAL DU TOURISME RÉGION MULLERTHAL; GUIDO KRÖGER

Into the Wilderness

The sun filtered gently across the light canopy of the narrow trail leading to green meadows and orchards, winding uphill along a wild ravine forest. The warm embrace of the woods was rejuvenating. I was in the Manternacher Fiels natural forest reserve, walking an 11.5-kilometre **CFL** (*cfl.lu*) hiking trail from Manternach to Wasserbillig train stations.

The path passed moss-covered rocks, pale green ferns, ancient sycamores, and a meandering stream. Insects crawled on decaying wood, fungi sprouted from damp bark—nature quietly reclaiming itself. As Manternach forest officer Luc Roeder had rightly said, not a single tree had been felled here in over fifty years. The hike eventually followed the River Syre past shell-limestone boulders and up to a plateau with splendid views.

For a more relaxed walk, the sunlit slopes of the Moselle region offer a treat. Vineyards stretch along the riverbanks, producing signature whites like Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Auxerrois. The broad, winding Moselle River also draws water-sports lovers—wakeboarding, rowing, and waterskiing are common pastimes in this tranquil valley.

Through The Heritage City

Luxembourg City is dynamic, cosmopolitan, and full of contrasts. More than a hundred nationalities live here, and the outdoors-loving spirit of the country is alive in its capital.

The **Adolphe Bridge** and **Chemin de la Corniche**—nicknamed “Europe’s most beautiful balcony”—offer panoramic views of this layered city. The Kirchberg

plateau’s financial district looms above; below are the medieval Bock casemates, subterranean tunnels built into rocky outcrops, and the 16th-century fortified **Old City** at the confluence of the Alzette and Pétrusse rivers.

The iconic **Gëlle Fra** war memorial led me to Ville Haute (Upper City), the cultural core, with historic landmarks, charming cafés, and high-end shops. In front of the **Cathedral**

▲ Above: Berdorf, nestled in the heart of the Müllerthal region, offers a variety of cycling experiences. Below: FatBetty.Run is a weekly running crew that blends fitness and sightseeing, fuelled by music, madness, and the occasional beer.



KAVITAKANAN CHANDRA (2)



Notre-Dame of Luxembourg, skateboarders showed off tricks, embodying the city’s unique blend of heritage and youthful energy. Skating is everywhere: in the Peitruss Skatepark, along medieval cobbled lanes, and across the plaza in front of the Philharmonie.

Runners are equally at home. On Thursdays, the Independent Café in Ville Haute hosts **FatBetty.Run** (*fatbetty.run*), a running crew inspired by the motto “One little spark of madness”. Their 10 kilometre “sight running” blends fitness with fun. “It’s free—everyone’s welcome,” said co-founder Guido Kröger. During the ING Night Marathon Luxembourg, they cheer runners with music, drinks—and beer.

Cyclists weave through the city too, from the heritage-rich lanes of Ville Haute to the sleek Kirchberg plateau. The elegant Pfaffenthal panoramic lift connects the Alzette valley to the upper city in minutes, making vertical travel as easy as a city stroll.

Land of Red Rocks

The next day, we explored Luxembourg’s industrial past in the Minett region, also known as the Land of the Red Rocks for its rich iron ore deposits. The steel industry once brought immense prosperity and immigration to the area. The bold red youth hostel and futuristic steel bridge in Esch-sur-Alzette are reminders of this heritage.

At Belval, I climbed the weathered blast furnace for a view over restored industrial buildings beside contemporary glass-and-steel structures. Today, Minett is a UNESCO biosphere reserve, where clean air and rewilded landscapes offer a refreshing contrast.

The **Minett Trail** (*minetttrail.lu*) traverses disused railways, industrial relics, and dense woodland. But the real action unfolds in the former open-cast mining zones. There are 167 kilometres of biking trails, attracting mountain bikers year-round. The Red Rock Challenge—a festival of running, biking, and duathlon—is a key highlight.

▲ The Adolphe Bridge spans the Pétrusse Valley, offering sweeping views and serving as a proud symbol of national identity

▼ Manternach is a small village serving as the starting point for forest hikes in the Manternacher Fiels reserve.



Müllerthal, ‘Little Switzerland’

Nicknamed “Little Switzerland,” Müllerthal is a landscape of sandstone cliffs, narrow gorges, bubbling brooks, and rolling meadows. The region’s strange rock formations—like Devil’s Island and Den of Thieves—are steeped in folklore. One highlight is the Alkummer, a narrow passage through wind-sculpted stone that invites hikers to squeeze through ancient corridors.



◀ For road cycling enthusiasts, several trails start or pass through Berdorf.



▶ At Echternach Lake, families picnic, cyclists pause, and the water lies still under soft afternoon light.



The 112-kilometre **Müllerthal Trail** (mullerthal-trail.lu) is a certified “Leading Quality Trail—Best of Europe”, offering challenging routes and vast panoramic views that draw hikers from across the continent.

Cyclists can choose from five mountain bike trails and sixteen racing bike tours, all maintained by the local cycling club—over 350 kilometres of well-marked routes.

GETTING THERE

To reach Luxembourg, fly to Munich or directly to Luxembourg from major Indian cities. Airlines like **Air India** (airindia.com), **Emirates** (emirates.com), and **Lufthansa** (lufthansa.com) operate frequent flights from Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad. From Munich, Luxembourg is a short onward flight or scenic train ride away. Luxair (luxair.lu) connects Munich and other major European hubs to Luxembourg with regular services.

STAY

Grand Hotel Cravat is a heritage hotel within walking distance of key historic sites. *Doubles from ₹28,300; hotelcravat.lu.*

Youth Hostels Luxembourg offer budget-friendly options with bed and breakfast. *Doubles from ₹8,000; youthhostels.lu.*

For outdoor lovers, there are campsites with options ranging from tent pitches and campervan spots to tipis, pods, cosy chalets, and farm stays. Details and bookings at camping.lu.

Camping and Castles

Waking up to birdsong beside still waters is part of the charm in **Eislek** (visit-eislek.lu/stausei), Luxembourg’s northern region.

The Upper Sûre reservoir winds through a narrow valley lined with forests and rocky outcrops. It’s a paradise for watersports—kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, swimming, diving, and windsurfing.

In the west lies **Guttland** (visitguttland.lu), the valley of the seven castles, each shrouded in legend. Culture and cuisine lovers can savour both in this serene region—touring medieval castles and indulging in Luxembourgish dishes and gourmet dining along the way. 🌐