

Luxembourg offers an abundant nature and varied landscapes.

On trouve une nature abondante et des paysages variés au Grand-Duché.



Photo: Oliver Minaire (archives)

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

# Good things in unexpected places

A new take on promoting Luxembourg as a tourist destination is underway and will change the way the whole sector works here. Hopefully, it will also alter the way travellers see the Grand Duchy – or help them put it on the map.

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**F**irst-time visitors to Luxembourg are usually surprised. They either arrive without the slightest idea of what they'll discover or anticipating something different. But as the saying goes: the best things happen unexpectedly. The tourism industry has been drawing attention to the wonderful unpredictable sides and little known treasures of the Grand Duchy for some time, but is now ready to be more assertive in getting the message out. For starters, the not-for-profit National Tourist Office officially morphed into an economic interest group: the Luxembourg For Tourism (LFT) agency, in the beginning of 2016. "There was a lack of collaboration and synergies between the different actors in the sector and our National Tourist Office. One of the important changes brought on by the LFT is a more balanced and



Photo: Mike Zenari (archives)

Tourists appreciate the diversity, the multilingualism and the proximity in Luxembourg. Les touristes apprécient la diversité, le multilinguisme et la proximité au Luxembourg.

representative governance. We have especially focused on the private sector's greater involvement," explains secretary of state for the economy, Francine Closener, who has been adamant about setting changes in motion since she was appointed. "The new agency is composed of all stakeholders from the tourism sector. Not only the public instances and regional tourism bodies, but also the accommodation industry: Horesca, Campri-lux and youth hostels, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, Luxair, the National Railway Company (CFL) and the Automobile Club of

Luxembourg (ACL)." The increased presence of the private sector has also resulted in a hotel owner, Romain Weber, being elected president of the new LFT agency. "Everyone will have more advantages but also more responsibilities. I'm looking forward to seeing even more initiative from the private sector," points out Francine Closener. "Luxembourg has potential and all the assets needed to be a perfect tourist destination, but we need to find better ways to promote it. It's somewhat of a general problem in Luxembourg: we're still lagging behind when it comes to building our image, but we're working on changing that." The tourism sector in the Grand Duchy has also suffered from being considered as secondary for many years. "Even though 15,000-20,000 jobs depend on it and it's one of the only sectors where jobs, both skilled and unskilled, were still created during the crisis."

From now on, each commune and tourist board will be represented in the LFT agency via their Regional Tourist Office (ORT). There are currently four of these, acting for the Luxembourgish Ardennes, the Mullerthal-Little Switzerland, the Moselle and the South. A fifth Regional Tourist Office will open within the next few months, covering the central western part of the Grand Duchy. In addition to these, there is of course also the Luxembourg City Tourist Office (LCTO). "The capital, with its cosy and multicultural features, naturally remains a major attraction, but we have to show tourists that there are a lot of other sites to see too. That's why our Luxembourg Card includes more than 70 attractions and free public transport throughout the country and not just in the City," says Francine Closener. A new mobile app will also soon be available.

Among the themes developed by Luxembourg to attract visitors is, not surprisingly, its abundant nature and varied landscapes in which lays one of the densest pedestrian and hiking networks in Europe, but also over 600 km of cycling routes and biking tracks. With the highest density of Michelin-starred restaurants in the world, Luxembourg can also boast about gastronomy, not forgoing its wines of course. Remembrance tourism is quite popular too and historical sites, including the many castles, naturally get a fair share of visits. Rentals and camping – or rather its more sophisticated version, glamping – are increasingly popular. "We have a lot to offer but we also need to constantly innovate," states Francine Closener. "We must improve and diversify our packages, expand our range of indoor activities, increase our hotel capacity and include the cultural component in our offer. We also have to make sure that the three key values we've defined as approach to our nation branding – reliability, dynamism and openness – are actually perceived as such. That is something we will work on continuously."

"Once people have visited Luxembourg, they tend to come back," continues Francine Closener. "They're genuinely surprised and appreciate the diversity, the multilingualism and the proximity. The thing is to make them come here in the first place. Getting tour operators to include our country in their catalogues is something that will take time, but there are a lot of other paths to explore. In this respect, business tourism, which represents 58% of overnight stay in the Grand Duchy, is important because it can incite another type of visit later on. We also need to capture the travellers who pass through on their way to other destinations and those who come for events like the ING Marathon or Ironman. We need to find ways of keeping them with us for a while longer. The plans are ambitious but the possibilities are plentiful. Luxembourg still has a lot of people to surprise. ✨