



# Travails, Trips and Travels

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## A Respite in the Princely State of Liechtenstein

**K**ingdoms are sometimes realities. They do not remain as dreams of children. Kingdoms have castles and monarchs, beautiful landscapes, picturesque hills and mountains, peaceful and quite small to be manageable. Such a reality exists in the picture-perfect Principality of Liechtenstein.



Border with Switzerland

A drive further to the east of Switzerland is this small princely state of 35,000 Liechtensteiners. It is a landlocked country bounded to the east by Austria. With an area of 160 square kilometres it ranks 218 out of 249 countries and territories in terms of land area. That is a small feat to drive around. It's the mountains that make one's tour around longer because of winding roads. Sometimes you'll get lost too when you go to narrower and inner passages.

Well, I had a good driver—my French bestfriend Alexandre. With a map on hand, it was a pleasant drive around the country which we covered in half a day. We drove through most of the main roads from the south to the north. We ventured into the mountains towards the east which is part of the Alps and saw spectacular views of the countryside from the top. The hills full of pine trees are sights to marvel. The houses perched on the mountain slopes exude a scene of a pleasant and tranquil life in Liechtenstein—definitely a place to find solace from the hectic life of other European places. During wintertime, the country becomes a haven for winter sports enthusiasts.



Liechtenstein flag



Houses by the mountainside



Liechtenstein mountains



Winding river

Liechtenstein is divided into 11 communes—Balzers, Eschen, Gamprin, Mauren, Planken, Ruggell, Schaan, Schellenberg, Triesen, Triesenberg, and Vaduz, the capital. Vaduz will not be missed since it is in the centre of the country along the Rhine. Unfortunately, it is the only capital in Europe without an airport or railway station. (Thus, our reason to drive our own car.) The capital hosts many important state offices. Some of the buildings provide a glimpse of the history of the city including the Vaduz Castle, the Rathaus, and the Government Building. It is also the centre of culture with a number of museums to visit such as the Liechtenstein National Museum. With 75% of the country Roman Catholics, Vaduz is the seat of the Archdiocese with Vaduz Cathedral as the main church. It really feels

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like a fairytale kingdom.

How does the country survive with limited natural resources? Surprisingly, the country has the highest per capita in the world. Thanks to its vital financial services sector. It has grown into a prosperous, highly industrialized, free enterprise economy. There is a wide diversification of the economy with small businesses dominating. There is a low tax for businesses. Even enterprising Filipinos are able to put up an ice cream house right in the middle of the capital. It is a big surprise to see this small restaurant since it fronts all the important buildings of Vaduz. (I was able to eat Filipino food in Liechtenstein!) Agriculture contributes a small portion to the economy having only 25% of its land arable.



**Rathaus in Vaduz**

How is a small country managed? Well by a small group of people as well. Its unicameral parliament (Landtag) is composed of only 25 seats with members elected by popular vote under proportional representation. They have a hereditary prince who is the chief of state. Then they have a head of government, the Prime Minister, with a cabinet elected by the parliament and confirmed by the monarch. That doesn't make it complicated then given a small population to manage which includes only 30 Filipinas who are mostly married to locals.

I like the country as it is—not fully developed in terms of infrastructure, not too crowded, houses interspersed along verdant rolling hills and green mountains. Yet, behind this tranquil environment is a rich country and peaceful people. It was worth the visit even just for a short respite to this real kingdom.



**Filipinos at the Pinoy Ice Cream House**



**With Alex by a castle**



**Government building**