

Liechtenstein is different ...

In New York Central Station, a young girl helped us to buy tickets and during the journey to Stamford she started talking. Yes, she knew Liechtenstein. The little town – now what was it called – Vaduz, yes Vaduz, she liked Vaduz very much. The castle with the beautiful courtyard (I started), the narrow streets with the pretty little antique houses ... No, that couldn't be Vaduz. Heidelberg, that's right, Heidelberg! That's the name of the town. Everything in Europe is so close together that it is very easy to get two places mixed up. But this young lady really had been in Vaduz. Now it all came back to her: She had had coffee there, somewhat expensive, that she could remember; and there's a castle there too.

Vaduz castle, coffee, post cards, a few stamps: what other impressions does a traveller – a tourist – take home with him? Every year during the season when the big busses fill the parking lots and the camera-clad passengers crowd the streets and taverns, these are for many the only memories of Liechtenstein; because Liechtenstein is staged in Vaduz, between the town hall and the parish church. If one has been there, one has seen all there is to see and can head for the next destination.

But the real Liechtenstein is different. Even if tourism is a branch of the small principality's economy, which is not to be underestimated, the country itself has very little to do with tourism. The real state begins only a few steps away from the centre of tourism, not a dream land, where it is always Sunday, but a modern state with democratic administration, an elected parliament with 25 members of parliament, a government and a head of state, the sovereign, who along with the people, has a strong position in this constitutional hereditary monarchy. Article 2 of the Constitution dated 1921 states "The supreme power is embodied in the sovereign and in the people" and Liechtenstein has always fared well with this division of supreme power.

Thanks to astute politics, especially after the Second World War, it was possible to bring industry into the country. The positive attitude of the nation towards purchase and property

resulting from the Alemanni character creates the basis for a favourable economic climate. Prosperity and wealth are largely regarded as the fruits of hard work and ability. In this respect industry and trade have become the supporting pillars of today's high standard of living and not the stamps and tourism. In spite of the "Post Box Companies", which have now and again been subject to a somewhat dubious reputation, the citizens of Liechtenstein do pay their taxes, even though they may not be as high as in other countries. Since the country has had no military force since 1868, the relevant costs do not occur, and even if high costs do occur in other areas – e.g. for the construction and maintenance of mountain roads, for education etc., Liechtenstein is amongst those states without a national debt, and can usually place finances in reserve at the end of the financial year.

Then is Liechtenstein really a kind of "fairy tale" land? For those who travel through the country with their eyes open, the great number of industrial and service sector businesses tell another story. There is a combination of native efficiency and foreign capital, and many more than one large business have their origins in the pioneering spirit of Liechtenstein.

However, there is another Liechtenstein, the Liechtenstein which holds the native population as well as the guests spellbound. Even though the country itself does only have little to offer along the lines of historical locations and notable buildings, and although some of these rarities fell victim to the post-war building boom, it is the varied landscape, which, irrespective of the season, has the power to inspire again and again.

The Rhine valley plain takes up approximately one third of the whole state, the rest is mountainous territory. This is generally regarded as being the recreational area, although the valley does have its own beauty to show. The Schellenberg, officially known as Eschnerberg, located in the North, can be rambled on well-kept and well-signposted routes. This network of walks and rambling routes is called the "Historical Mountain Route". At some special locations, boards provide

information concerning geology, flora and fauna and the history of the site in question. The lowlands of Liechtenstein, the main area of which is formed by the Schellenberg, is the Liechtenstein connoisseurs' secret tip. In spite of an altitude of over 650 metres, the area is regarded as part of the valley. As opposed to the real mountains in the country, the area is seen in the eyes of the population as being a mere range of low hills.

The real mountains are situated in the East: The Three Sister Chain, which divides the highly populated Rhine valley from the mountain valleys of the Liechtenstein Alps, as well as the transverse valley of the Lawenabach, in which rock peaks of up to 3000 metres and the massifs of the true alpine region, previously only used in summer for agricultural purposes, can be found. The town of Steg, with its ancient settlement form consisting of two housing quadrants, and above all the alpine valley basin of Malbun, have been made accessible for tourist traffic since the building of the tunnel in 1947 and the construction of the roadway from Vaduz via Triesenberg. Whilst Steg, with its idyllic chapel has remained largely untouched by tourism, much has changed in Malbun. Where once a modest spa-hotel received its few summer guests and the farmers of Triesenberg stored their alpine hay in primitive wooden huts for the winter, one now finds tourists crowding in the summer and novice and expert skiers on the particularly suitable ski-slopes in the winter.

But even here the other face of Liechtenstein can be found. To be able to find it, one needs to be a persistent hiker and to have a good pair of shoes. Since the whole of the Liechtenstein alpine region has been declared a floral sanctuary, one doesn't have to be a botanist to be able to enjoy the multitude of flowers. With a little luck one may even discover a chamois or a family of marmots or maybe even a golden eagle circling high overhead.

There are various ways of conquering this mountain world on foot. There are paths, which can be walked without risk, even with children; other routes demand surefootedness and a