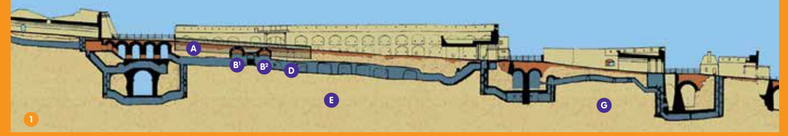
Bock Casemates: view through the loopholes

Bock Casemates: Melusine's well



1 Bock Casemates: side view

2 Bock Casemates: view from top

The Bock Casemates

Specifications
Year of construction: 1745
Clients: Austrian engineers
Surface area: 1,100 m²
Main casemate: 110 m long - 7 m wide
Renovation and securing: 2008-2009
Special features: superb views through the loopholes
Famous visitors to the Bock Casemates:
- Emperor Joseph II of Austria (1781)
- Napoleon I (1804)
- Prince Henry of the Netherlands (1868)
- Grand Duchess Charlotte (1936)
- Grand Duke Henry and Grand Duchess Maria Teresa (2000)

A The archaeological crypt, the antechamber to the Casemates, accommodates the cradle of Luxembourg. The archaeological searches carried out in 1993 show the vestiges of the first château comtal, or count's castle, erected in the 10th century on the promontory of the "Bock" by the city's founder, Count Sigefroy.
B1 After visiting the archaeological crypt, you enter the dungeon of the old Luxembouwrg castle. A beautiful view over the valley and the lower town awaits you. Cannons would be passed through the openings (now blocked up) in the upper vault, in order to avoid the stairs.
C The main gallery with its halls with cannons and loopholes which were enlarged during the dismantling of the fortress in 1867. The Bock Casemates could accommodate some 50 cannons and 1,200 soldiers.
D As you pass through the former prison of the castle in the belfry foundations, you have a magnificent view over Grand Duchess Charlotte Bridge, which links the city centre to the Kirchberg plateau and over the vestiges of Fort "Haut-Grünewald", and to your right, over the Bock rock and "Dent Creuse" (Hollow Tooth).
E In section E, the 47 metre deep well of the castle plunges you into the mythical Luxembourg: perhaps you will catch a glimpse of the lovely Melusine who will greet you with a mischievous wink and an elegant beating of her fish's tail...
F During the months of the 1794-95 siege, the Habsburg Marshal von Bender (1713-1798) occupied these spaces to shelter from the French attacks. Visit the bedroom, office and antechamber of this military genius who commanded the Austrian troops at the age of 82.
Through the loopholes, you can enjoy superb views over the Spanish ramparts (1632), the upper town, the Faubourg du Grund, the Neumünster Abbey cultural centre with the church of St John (17th century), the Rham plateau with the former Vauban barracks (1685), the viaduct as well as the semi-circular towers which form part of the vestiges of the third precincts of the city encompassing the "Wenzel" cultural and nature circuit.
G If you go to G, be aware that section G is a u-turn section. Gallery of mines destined to blow up part of the Bock in case of need. Thanks to the renovation works of 2008-2009, this gallery underwent an overhaul to reveal all the mysteries of this historic place. Go back to the main gallery and proceed to H.
H Through the iron gate, you enter the "Batterie du Grund" which had 4 loopholes for 8 cannons, firing alternately (3 shots an hour) to defend the lower town of the Grund and flank the ramparts of the Citadel. Now known as the Tun Deutsch room (1932-1977) in memory of the Luxembourg actor and director, the "Batterie du Grund" used to serve as a platform for the performances of the famous "Casemate Theatre". To exit the Casemates, you have two possibilities: either, descending the spiral staircase, or you go through section J.
I Descending the spiral staircase, you reach a passage specially designed in case the "Pont du Château" (Castle Bridge) was destroyed, which passes beneath the street. This underground passage is one of 5 possibilities of crossing this bridge, which constitutes an interesting architectural element of the fortress.
J You leave the underground galleries by the castle bridge, erected in 1735 by the Austrians, to return to Chemin de la Corniche, Europe's most beautiful balcony, and the old town.

Legend of the beautiful Melusine
According to legend, Melusine was the wife of Sigefroy, 1st count of Luxembourg, living in his castle on the rocky promontory of the Bock. On their marriage, Melusine required her husband never to see her during a particular day and night of the week. One fine day, unable to resist his curiosity, Sigefroy spied her in her bath through the keyhole of her room's door and discovered her fish's tail. Melusine, noting that her husband was watching her, then vanished forever into the torrents of the Alzette river.

What does the term "casemate" mean?
Casemate is derived etymologically from the Greek "chasma(ta)" meaning "chasm". This is a "bomb-proof" vaulted room situated in the actual body of the works leading to one or more embrasures or intended to accommodate troops and equipment.

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THE CASEMATES

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE
FORTIFICATIONS AND OLD TOWN
GIBRALTAR OF THE NORTH

THE CASEMATES

Highlights

The longest casemates worldwide are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Bock Casemates

Start: Montée de Clausen, Luxembourg

Information about opening hours, entrance price and guided visits:
Luxembourg City Tourist Office, tel.: (+352) 222809 and on www.lcto.lu

The Pétrusse Casemates

Temporarily closed.

luxembourg
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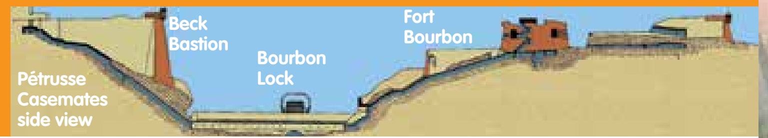

THE CASEMATES: UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

Luxembourg's casemates are full of mystery. If they could speak, they would tell gloomy stories of long ago when Luxembourg was one of the most envied fortresses in Europe. Intimately linked to the cradle of the city of Luxembourg, the casemates' immense underground military defence system came well after the foundation of the first stronghold, erected in the 10th century by Count Sigefroy. While Luxembourg's fortress stood for a veritable school of European military architecture, it has changed owners many times throughout its existence.
Italian, Spanish, Belgian, French, Austrian, Dutch and Prussian engineers took part in the gradual extension of the fortifications of this stronghold. The first casemates were built in 1644, under Spanish domination. The enlargement of the 23 km long underground galleries took place 40 years later, under the direction of the military engineer and fortifications builder Vauban, and later, in the 18th century, under that of the Austrians. The defence system extended over several storeys and comprised galleries carved out to a depth of 40 metres.
Due to these impressive bastions, the city of Luxembourg was deservedly called the "Gibraltar of the North". In 1867, the fortress was evacuated and had to be dismantled following the neutralisation of Luxembourg. The dismantling lasted 16 years and the casemates were reduced to 17 km. Because of its underground location in the city, the network could never be destroyed without damaging a large part of the urban fabric. More than 1,300 plans relating to this enormous defensive network were found in the archives.
During the two world wars, the Bock Casemates and those of the Pétrusse valley served as a shelter with the capacity to protect 35,000 people in the event of an alert or bombardment. Since 1933, the two casemates have been open to the public. The bastions as well as the old town, which is of no less historical interest, enjoy worldwide renown. In 1994, UNESCO inscribed them on the list of World Heritage Sites.

Today the extraordinary network of underground galleries is the city's prime attraction. Almost 100,000 visitors plunge annually into the dazzling history of the inevitable casemates, which could shelter not only thousands of defenders with their equipment and horses, but also artillery and weapons workshops, kitchens, bakeries, slaughterhouses and other infrastructures.

Pétrusse Casemates: Austrian staircase

Pétrusse Casemates: cannon from 1834

The Pétrusse Casemates

Specifications
Year of construction: 1644
Clients: Spanish engineers
Dimensions: 450 steps will be climbed during a guided tour of the Pétrusse Casemates including an "Austrian staircase" dating back to 1746: 132 steps (only accessible as part of a guided tour).
Special features: The only cannon in the Pétrusse Casemates is an original dating back to the Prussian era. Cast in Karlsruhe in 1834, the cannon is numbered 31.
They originated at a time when the Spanish were modernising mediaeval works and building large bastions, such as that of the Beck, whose platform is occupied by the present Place de la Constitution (Constitution Square). But at its inception, this structure was not the height it is today. The platform was situated at the same height as the neighbouring second rampart on the right (the terrace which used to be reached by the grand staircase). For defence purposes, this platform was surmounted by a cavalier, a tall masonry structure which served as a place for a few cannons and whose parapet was at the level of the present Boulevard Roosevelt.
In 1673, the Spanish raised the Ravelin (an old term denoting a half-moon) of the Pâté, intended to reinforce the Beck Bastion.

These works are one of the few Luxembourg fortifications to have been mainly preserved. Marshal Vauban gave the Pétrusse works their present form. In 1728-29, the Austrians built the "grand staircase" with the Bourbon Lock and in 1746 the casemates called the "Pétrusse battery".

After the fortress was dismantled in 1867, the loopholes were simply bricked up and most of the entrances closed, but one last tribute had to be paid to the old ramparts. The Arquebusiers Society, the former Brotherhood of Saint Sebastian, founded in the 14th century, was installed on the second rampart to the right and used to shoot from here into the trenches of the Fort Bourbon. At the same time, a clever gardener made use of the galleries and batteries of the Ravelin of the Pâté to grow mushrooms. After the departure of the arquebusiers in 1903, the Pétrusse Casemates were completely closed. Since 1933 they have been made accessible to the general public.

"Don't forget the sand!"
These words on small square constructions used as toilets at the time of the Second World War – the casemates were used as shelters against air attacks – are a reminder that there has never been running water in these underground galleries.

1 mile
7 museums

Joseph Kutter (1894-1941), *Clown à l'accordéon*, vers 1938 (extrait), Gouache sur papier, Collection du Musée national d'histoire et d'art, Legs Catherine Meyer-Kutter, © Photo : MNHA / Tom Lucas

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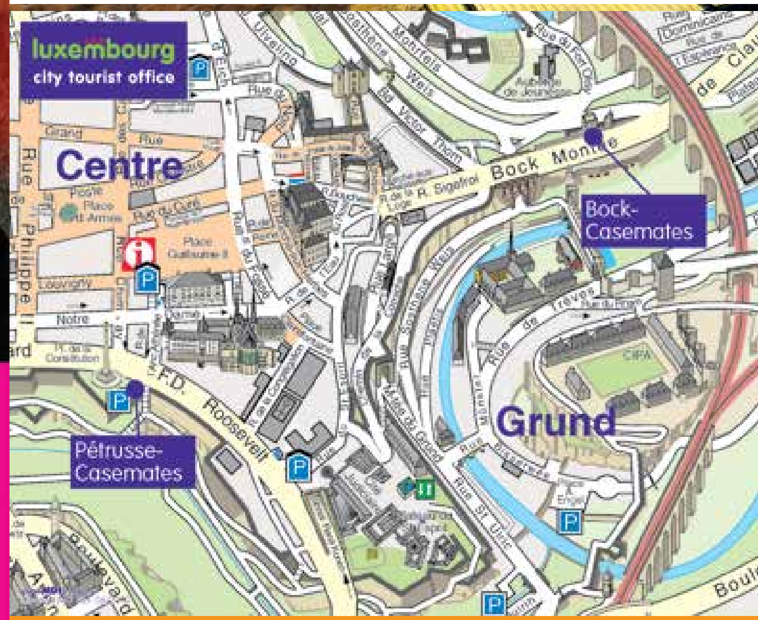

Impressum
Editor: Luxembourg City Tourist Office a.s.b.l.
VAT no.: LU15621823 – R.C.S. Luxembourg F 754
Design: binsfeld
Photos: Cathy Giorgetti, Christof Weber, Marcel Schroeder, Robert Boberian
Print: WePrint, FSC, 3.000×, 03/2016