

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY KERRY DIMMER

LUMINOUS
LOVELY,
LUXEMBOURG



A CONVENIENT TURN OF EVENTS SAW KERRY DIMMER ARRIVE IN LUXEMBOURG, THE DAY FESTIVAL LAST YEAR AND SHE RECOMMENDS YOU FIND THE SAME GOOD WINE, BUTTERFLIES AND SONG IN A COUNTRY THAT SOME DESCRIBE AS THE MOST

Gate crashing the Grand Duke of Luxembourg's annual June birthday party doesn't mean you're cocky. Firstly it's not really his birthday and secondly no invitation is required to imbibe some of his country's finest sparkling wine, on a warm June night, facing two days of festivities. The trick is, of course, not to overdo it that first night, but when thousands of people are flocking towards the Old Quarter of the country's capital and you are magnetically pulled along like a lemming, the idea of self-control is like a bug on a windscreen.

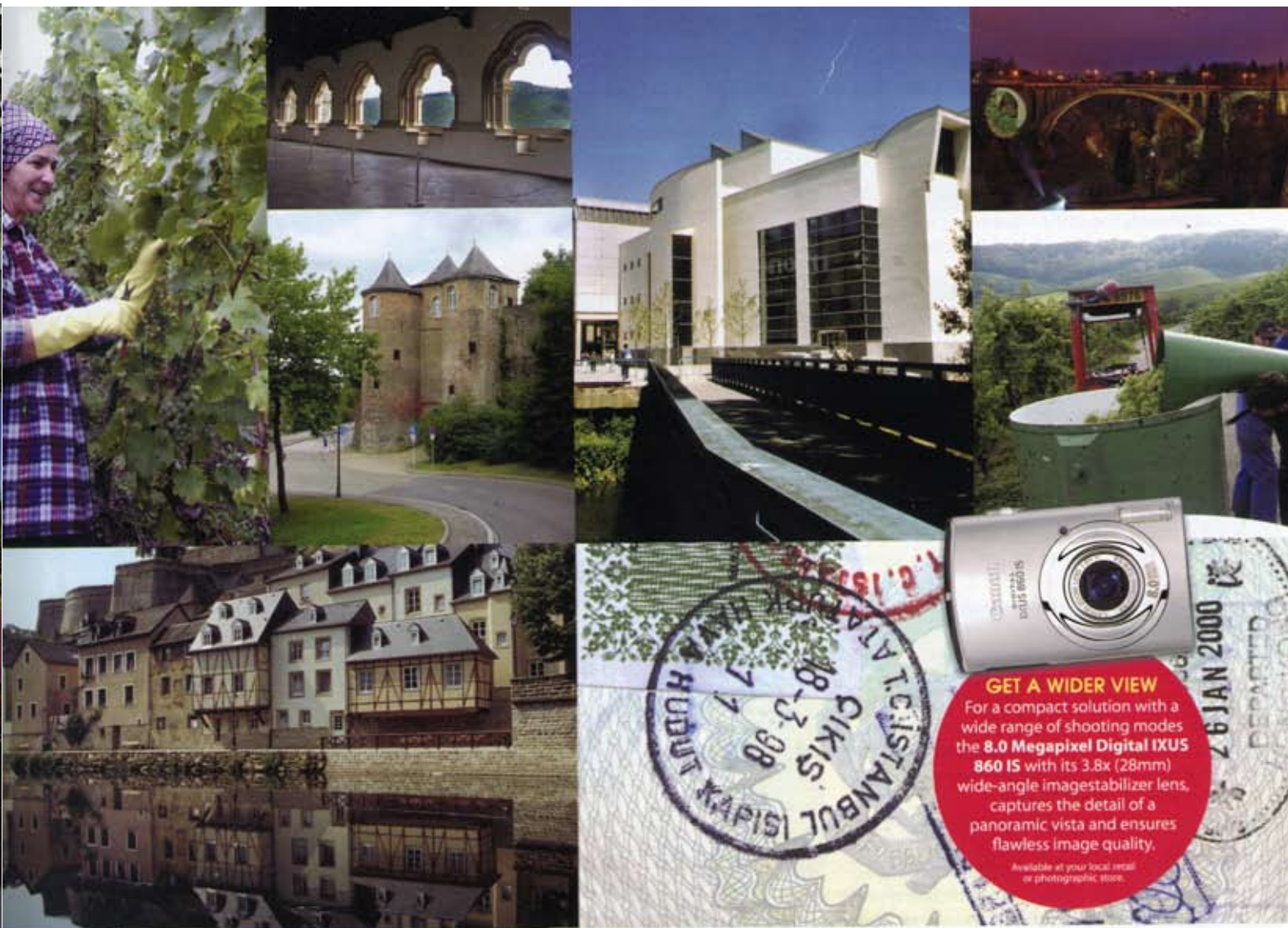
Crossing over the Alzette Valley, amid the buzz of the German, French and Luxembourgish tongues, I was captured by the rich parklands below, lit up like a romantic table setting. A cacophony of house music thudded along every street as club DJ's spilled onto the pavements to compete against one another. Ant-like people, holding onto beer glasses bigger than vases, were funkily hip-hopping deeper towards their particular fascination of the night, be it big band grandstand diva drama, or Dire Straits cover band rockers.

All in, it was the greatest party I have ever not been invited to, a bonus being that for one night only, the champagne was half price -

which equated to one glass costing the same as a single bottle of SA's more elite varieties!

Luxembourg is so clean; you could eat off the tarmac. Even the morning after the party, it seemed as though the pixies had worked their magic. Litter is, quite simply, extinct. The buildings too, are washed regularly to rid them of the mud-coloured streaks that countries like Belgium have seemingly chosen to ignore. Perhaps this cleanliness is affordable because Luxembourg has the highest income per capita of any country, or maybe with only 460 000 residents in its 2586 km footprint, it is easy to take care of. However I suspect rainfall can take much of the credit ... I used an umbrella more frequently in Luxembourg than anywhere else I have been.

Quite by accident we were again caught up in the mysteries of the city, when, intrigued by the barricading that was being erected around the Mittal Steel headquarters in Avenue de la Liberté, we found ourselves entertained by a parade of every branch of Luxembourg military and otherwise regimental group for the benefit of (deep breath required here) his Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri Albert Gabriel Félix Marie Guillaume and his wife Maria Teresa Mestre, and of course the residents and tourists. The FBI-types were there too, but



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CITY THAT SHARES THE SAME NAME AS ITS COUNTRY, ON THE FIRST OF ITS THREE-FORTUNE... BE REGALED BY VAMPIRES, DRAGONS AND ALL THINGS MEDIEVAL, BEAUTIFUL IN EUROPE.

we weren't worried, the only shooting to be heard was the clicking of automatic umbrella's as they were propelled in and out every alternating 10 minutes. It was, however, a most pompous occasion, worthy of its princely colours and resplendent smart energy.

Luxembourg City sits above several levels of underground fortifications dating back to 1644, known as the Bock Casements. Above the confluence of the Alzette and Petrusse Rivers, (if you are not claustrophobic) you can mole your way through a maze of roughly-hewn stone passages which sheltered some 30 000 people from air-raids during WWII. It is not for nothing that the casements are known as the Gibraltar of the North!

The hop-on/hop-off bus was worth a round trip, touring through the city and the newer, arty Kirchberg plateau which houses a couple of hundred banks and financial institutions. But there is a better time to be had back in the main square of the old quarter, where we discovered, the cost of a glass of champagne had soared overnight to about the price of a case of SA cabernet!

The Luxembourg Card is a must-buy. For E10 a day, you can travel on innumerable buses and trains and gain discounted access into some of Luxembourg's most famed attractions. One such town,

Viaden, in the northeast, is famous for its castle and chairlift, making for a wonderful day trip.

Viaden Castle nestles into the breasts of the rolling Ardennes hills. It has the appearance of a Disney miniature when viewed from its quaint, cobbled town. After a puffing climb (I swear it was 90 degrees uphill) you expect to be greeted at the medieval gate by St George, wielding his sword at the ghost of a dragon, or perhaps an elderly hump-backed John Malkovich-type welcoming you as dinner for his vampire-like creation. Viaden Castle, in point of fact, was the location for films such as *George and the Dragon* (2004), *The Musketeer* (2000) and *Shadow of the Vampire* (1999) to name a few and it's easy to see why. With its light and dark stones and majestic arches, Viaden is a superbly restored medieval fortress housing an awesome cache of antique weaponry and armour, furniture and tapestries.

Back in the valley town of fortified towers and gothic churches, I considered another 450 metre trip up the hills, but gladly this time, using the Viaden chairlift. This is a 25-minute (return) journey that passes over the river Our and up onto a superb patio, serving champagne among other beverages, with views across the verdant landscape of the Ardennes.

LUXEMBOURG

History was brought to mind as we sat gazing out towards the castle - however it might also have been the champagne bubbles tickling the senses!

The Moselle area is renowned for its wineries, so another day trip to 'wine city' Grevenmacher was an imperative - if only to savour the Bernard Massaud sparkling wine we had been quaffing the past few days. First though a visit to the Butterfly Garden was warmly welcomed on a cool summer day. The humidity inside was stifling at 85% but to the thousands of butterflies and exotic plants, it is a haven. Butterflies the size of your hand abound and they are quite comfortable settling on your head or arm as you tiptoe around.

The cellar visit to Bernard Massaud is an hour-long craving. The dankness of wine fermenting permeates the taste buds and we raced our guide through the last five minutes of the tour. Finally, up on the balcony we were able to spend a rain-free hour sampling Luxembourg's finest 'methode traditionnelle' sparkling wines that have enjoyed a good reputation for over 85 years.

Since that visit I have felt a yearning to return to Luxembourg, if only to the city, to sit once again in its central squares, to listen to the pomp emanating from a bandstand, where the lilt of French and the gruff of Luxembourgish cocoon you, to drink champagne and slumber in the afternoon sun. Ah, like a wonderful summer romance, I will always remember Luxembourg as one of the great loves of my life.

REQUIREMENTS

LUXEMBOURG NEED TO KNOW:

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS: Valid Passport & Schengen visa

CURRENCY: Euro

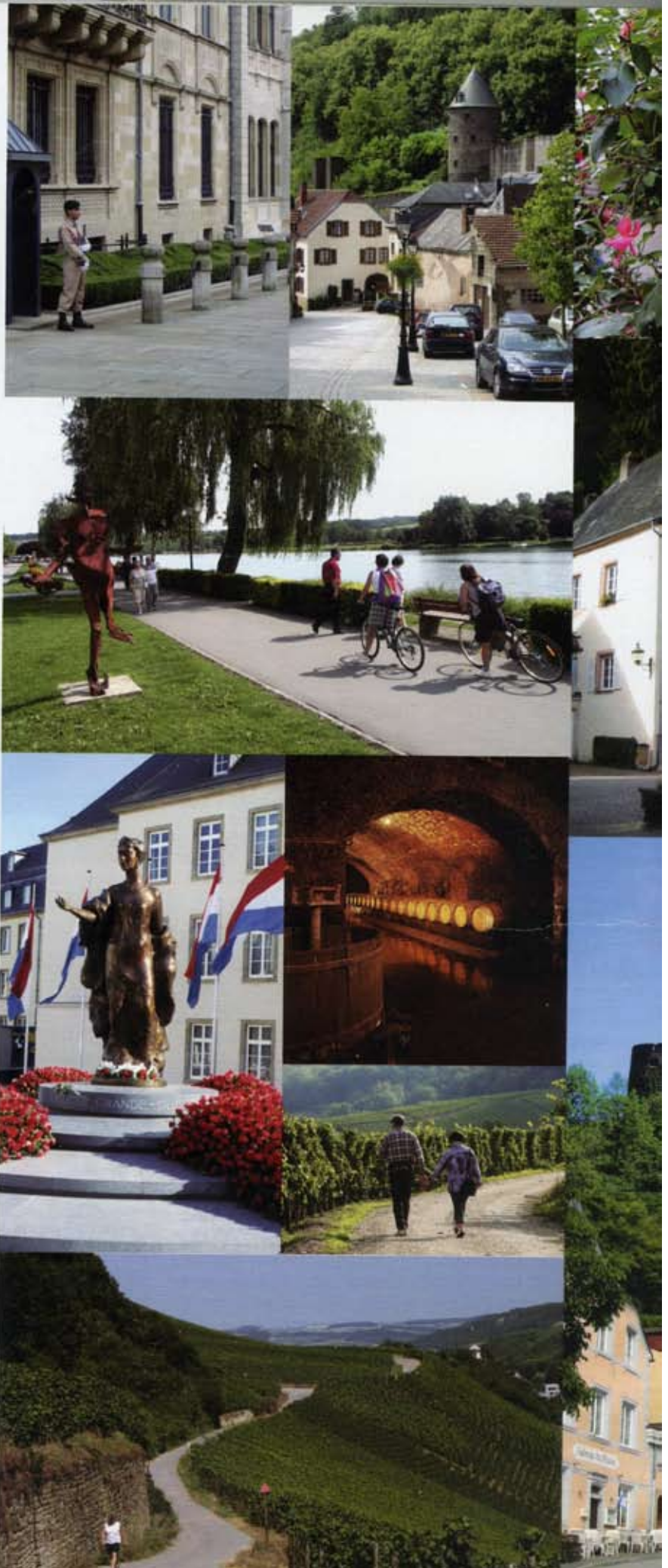
TIME: GMT +1 (same time zone as SA)

Official language: Letzeburgesch, a German/French dialect. French and German are commonly used. English is widely spoken.

CLIMATE: Temperate but warmest from May to October. Snow in winter.

HOW TO GET THERE: No direct flights from SA, go via Europe.

For more detail on Luxembourg visit www.harveyworld.com



THAT'S MY CAR JACK!

We are a defensive nation. This is not by choice but by necessity - a way to sustain and protect ourselves. Anyone who travels on our roads, as a passenger or driver, is aware to some degree of the possibility of being hijacked. You need to be alert of danger every time you go near a vehicle. *Kerry Dimmer* recommends some simple precautions to minimise your chance of being targeted

- Carjackers are most successful within a 5km radius of the target's home as this is the comfort zone of the victim. Be aware of anything that is unusual along your usual routes: new construction sites, parked vehicles, different vendors. Take notice, be prepared.
- Consider changing your routines regularly; the time you leave the house, the routes you use and your shopping times. The same applies to shopping at night or filling up at your local petrol station in the late afternoon or evening.
- Many attacks occur in residential driveways. Instead of turning into your driveway to wait for the remote gate or garage doors to open, rather wait in the street so you can easily drive away if need be.
- Be ultra-alert at intersections; watch street vendors carefully, don't leave valuables on view. Keep your cell phone on your lap or in a convenient pocket.
- When approaching an intersection or traffic light it's better to slow down from a little distance than coming to a dead stop.
- In high crime areas, leave windows open at least 5mm - in the case of spark plug smashings, the window is less likely to shatter.
- Keep a cell phone with you. If you are hijacked and abandoned, you can then make an emergency call.
- Avoid talking on the cell phone when driving as it reduces your awareness or outside activities.
- Before getting into your vehicle take a walk around the car. Check your number plates are still attached and check tyres. Remove any advertising flyers from the front and back windscreens as they could block your view.
- Always lock all car doors.

REMEMBER, BEING VIGILANT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE.

TRACKING... DO WE NEED IT?

Let's face it, most people fit tracking devices for the simple reason that they'll save on short term insurance policy costs. But, with hijacking being one of the favoured ways of stealing a vehicle, personal safety is an issue that should also be "tracked". Advancements in tracking systems and devices have enabled sophisticated techniques which don't only look out for the security of the vehicle but the security of the motorist as well.

- GPS satellite based facilities are superior thanks to their accuracy and immediacy.
- Keep track of your spouse and children by presetting the area parameters for their vehicles - the tracking system will alert you by sms when one of your vehicles ventures out of its permitted area and the tracking company will call you to check on the situation.
- Crash alert - if your car is in an accident, a sensor in the car will alert the call centre and they will send assistance.
- C-track offers Bodyguard - in the event of a breakdown or even a flat tyre, simply phone the call centre and a body guard will be despatched to guard you and your car until you are safely on your way.
- Various tracking companies are looking to offer the whole roadside assistance package - if you have any problem, simply phone the call centre, and they will send assistance.

Always fit tracking products from recognised companies; it allows you to choose the level of protection depending on your needs and offers you greater peace of mind.

The adage, "better to be safe than sorry" is never more apt than right now.