

Discover perfect view of Liechtenstein



Rick Steves

Two centuries ago, there were dozens of independent states in the part of Europe that was German-speaking. Today, there are only four: Germany, Austria, Switzerland... and Liechtenstein.

I like the way tiny countries are defined so clearly by geography. Liechtenstein is a bowl in the mountains — high ridges on the east, milky baby Rhine River still giddy from its tumble out of the Alps running south to north on its west, and the stout and classic Gutenberg Castle guarding the entry to the valley on the south. About the size of Manhattan, Liechtenstein is truly landlocked: no seaport, no airport, not even a train station.

Rather than wandering past quaint half-timbered old buildings, you'll walk in the shadow of shiny bank buildings and office parks. Europe's tiny countries have historically offered special tax and accounting incentives to businesses. For a place with such a small population (40,000), Liechtenstein hosts a lot of businesses.

And that's how the prince of Liechtenstein, whose 13th-century castle is perched fairy-tale style above his domain, likes it. The billionaire prince, who looks down on his 4-by-15-mile country, doesn't open his castle to the public. When I knocked on the door, the guard looked at me like I was nuts. But anyone can enjoy his views. And, for a price, you can enjoy a glass of local wine in his wine cellar.

The prince's private equity-level wealth comes from exactly that. Before taking over the throne from



In Liechtenstein's towns, it's common to see quaint churches bumping up against modern business buildings. **RICK STEVES**

his father, he transformed the family bank from a small business to a global financing group. Now, he's one of Europe's wealthiest heads of state and arguably wields more real authority than any other royal in Europe. (But, ruling a country that has the population of Yankee Stadium on a slow day, he can't do a lot with that power.)

Liechtenstein is made up of 11 villages. The village of Triesenberg, perched above the valley, gathers around its onion-domed church, which recalls the settlers who arrived here centuries ago from the western part of Switzerland.

The town of Vaduz sits on the valley floor. While it has only 6,000 people, it's the country's capital. Its pedestrianized main drag is lined with modern art

and hotels, and it borders a district of slick office buildings. There's so little of interest to tourists in Liechtenstein that souvenir shops stock as many books and postcards on Switzerland as they do on Liechtenstein.

The pint-sized national museum tells the story of the prince and his tiny country. Their family crest dates to the Middle Ages, when the House of Liechtenstein was close friends with the Habsburg family, who ruled the Holy Roman Empire. The House of Liechtenstein purchased this piece of real estate from the Holy Roman Emperor.

In 1719, the domain was granted principality status — answering only to the emperor. The Liechtenstein princes — who lived

near Vienna — saw their new country merely as a status symbol and didn't even bother to visit for decades. In fact, it wasn't until the 20th century that the first Liechtenstein prince actually lived in Liechtenstein. Because of this, the most exciting sight associated with that family, the art-packed Liechtenstein City Palace, isn't even in the country — it's in Vienna.

In 1806, during the age of Napoleon, Liechtenstein's obligations to the Habsburg emperor disappeared and it was granted true independence. After World War I, tough times forced the principality to enter an economic union with Switzerland. To this day, Swiss francs are the coin of the realm, most public transportation is on Swiss

postal buses, and Liechtenstein enjoys a close working relationship with its Swiss neighbors.

Like Switzerland, a big part of the principality's modern economy is tourism and sports — hosting visitors who enjoy its dramatic natural beauty. Ski lifts, busy in winter and in summer, take nature-lovers to the dizzying ridge that serves as the border with Austria. To get here, take Liechtenstein's longest road until it peters out in Malbun, a tiny mountain resort. Hop on a chair lift and you'll soon be whisked up to a vantage point that makes you feel like the highest person in the land ... because you just might be.

At the end of the day, I like to go west toward Switzerland, cross the

Rhine and snoop around to find the perfect vantage point from which to photograph a wide shot showing the entire country. All of little, little Liechtenstein faces west, so everything is in shade well into the morning — and bathed in fading light at the end of the day. From up here, I enjoy the rare experience of watching the sun set over a country I can tour quite thoroughly in a single day.

Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. Visit his website at ricksteves.com, email him at rick@ricksteves.com or follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Freeman seeks out jujitsu in his travels

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
Tribune Content Agency

After growing up in the college town of Champaign, Illinois, “Reasonable Doubt” actor McKinley Freeman, who plays Lewis on the Hulu series, didn't get homesick when he attended college. He chose to study finance at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

“Growing up in Champaign was cool,” said the actor, who's now based out of Los Angeles. “I still keep in touch with a lot of folks who I've known from there for a very long time. (I enjoyed) being able to experience both parts of Champaign — the school and the town.”

This interview with Freeman has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Many fans view you as a role model for African American men. Did the lack of positive representation in the media affect you when you were growing up?

A: There was no version of media that could convince me or my sisters differently about the value of who we were, as defined by the examples we were blessed to see in our parents, grandparents and cousins. Having the courage to tell truthful points of view is important in storytelling, but having the courage to know and be who you are (is just as important).

Q: Is “Reasonable Doubt” filmed on set or on location?

A: A combination of both, which is cool.

Q: Do you have a



Actor McKinley Freeman says trying the food is something he looks forward to at each of his destinations. **DISNEY**

preference of working on one or the other?

A: Working is the point for myself and countless other performers in the entertainment industry. I'm happy to have a job that creatively inspires me. Where I have to be for it doesn't matter to me.

Q: But if you could pick a location to film a project at, where would it be?

A: Hawaii would be cool, but sincerely anywhere.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?

A: Champaign and Hawaii. I really love Hawaii, especially the North Shore. I'd love to explore the other islands in time.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?

A: We are all doing different versions of the same thing everywhere, and that no human being likes traffic or cold French fries. (Laughs)

Q: If you could only pick one place to eat, would you prefer a food truck or fine dining?

A: Food truck 100/100. I'd rather be outside. Food truck, meteor shower, live music. Come on ...

Q: Do you have a knack

for picking up new languages?

A: I'm working on it. I took Spanish ages ago and have been focused on speaking more daily. Even during the course of “Reasonable Doubt” with the number of Spanish-speaking cast and crew, it was an awesome way to connect with someone conversationally in their native language.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to?

A: Several countries in Africa, Japan, Colombia, Brazil and China.

Q: What is your guilty pleasure when you're on the road?

A: I always look up the best food in whatever city and I'll go try it. (Laughs) If it sucks, I toss it and keep it moving. If it's great, I'll be back!

Q: What kind of research do you do before you go away on a trip?

A: Because the jujitsu community is so big, I always try to sort a path to possibly training wherever I go. That, and to find a good place for an acai bowl or juice place and a farmers market.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

FedEx charges \$1,237 to ship luggage that wasn't delivered

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

My wife and I shipped two suitcases from Iowa to Norway for a cruise using FedEx (via Luggage To Ship). The luggage arrived on time but was sent back to Oslo, Norway, for customs verification. Despite daily calls to FedEx, agents provided conflicting updates and blamed Norwegian customs. For four days, FedEx offered no information on how I could get my luggage out of customs.

Finally, FedEx claimed that it couldn't deliver the luggage until after our cruise departed, forcing us to pay \$1,237 for the shipment of luggage that we didn't receive when we needed it. We contacted FedEx executives using your site's contacts but received no response. We also sent a letter. We've kept all emails and call transcripts.

Why did FedEx fail to communicate clearly or resolve this? Are we entitled to a full refund?

— *Todd Janus, Des Moines, Iowa*

A: FedEx should have handled your customs clearance and provided accurate tracking updates. Its International Priority service guarantees a timely delivery, contingent on proper documentation — which you had.

You used a third party called Luggage To Ship, which promises “simple, reliable and affordable” luggage shipping, according to its site. But a closer look at the Luggage To Ship terms reveals that it is not responsible for shipment delays because of, among other things, “customs delay, customs or carrier inspection.”

This let Luggage To Ship off the hook. It would be able to send your luggage to Norway, have it sit in a warehouse, and return it without giving you a refund (at least, according to its terms).

But FedEx is another story. It promises “dependable service,” and at the time of your cruise, it

offered a money-back guarantee. (At the time I'm writing this, this guarantee has since been revoked.)

In fairness, it looks like FedEx was responsive to you when you asked about the status of your bags, but then failed to update you regularly when your luggage got stuck in customs.

I'm used to writing about the perils of checking luggage, so this is a new twist. Next time you cruise somewhere, it might make sense to just pack a small carry-on to avoid the hassle of transporting lots of luggage.

I think taking this up with FedEx was the right idea. You paid to have your luggage shipped to your cruise, and it never got there. What's more is that you shouldn't have had any customs trouble since you were sending clothes and toiletries to your ship.

I'm not sure why the FedEx executive contacts on my consumer advocacy

site, Elliott.org, did not respond to you. I publish the names of the executives as a service to you and them. For you, it's an opportunity to get your case resolved; for them, it's a chance to avoid an embarrassing story. Unfortunately, it's a chance that they missed by ignoring your email.

I contacted FedEx on your behalf. A representative responded that it would resolve the case with you “directly,” apparently hoping to keep me from writing a story about this. But as I said, FedEx already had its chance. FedEx refunded your \$1,237.

And the story? Well, here it is.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.