

# THE BOCK CASEMATES

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE  
FORTIFICATIONS AND OLD TOWN  
GIBRALTAR OF THE NORTH



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**Bock Casemates: view through the loopholes**

## The Bock Casemates

### Specifications

**Year of construction:** 1745

**Clients:** Austrian engineers

**Surface area:** 1,100 m<sup>2</sup>

**Main casemate:** 110 m long - 7 m wide

**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 10<sup>th</sup> century on the "Bock" promontory by the city's founder, Count Sigfried.

**B1 / B2** After visiting the archaeological crypt, you enter the dungeon of the old Luxembourg castle. A beautiful view over the valley and the lower town awaits you. Cannons would be passed through the openings (now



### Bock Casemates: Melusina's well

blocked up) in the upper vault, in order to avoid the stairs.

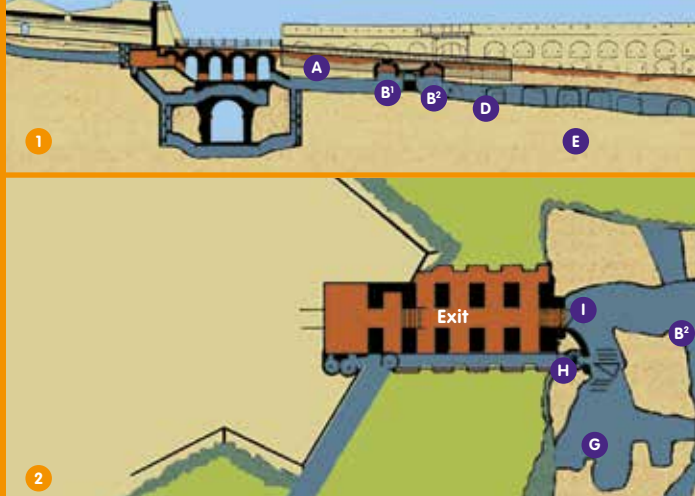
**C** The main gallery with its halls with cannons and loopholes which were enlarged during the dismantling of the fortress in 1867. The Bock Casemates could accommodate some 50 cannons and 1,200 soldiers.

**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-Grünwald", and to your right, over the Bock rock and "Huelen Zant" (Hollow Tooth).

**E** The 47 metre deep well of the castle plunges you into the mythical Luxembourg: perhaps you will catch a glimpse of the lovely Melusina who will greet you with a mischievous wink and an elegant beating of her fish's tail...

**F** During the 8 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 (17<sup>th</sup> 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



### 1 Bock Casemates: side view

the third precincts of the city encompassing the “Wenzel” cultural and nature circuit.

**G** 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”.

**H** 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.

**I** 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.



## 2 Bock Casemates: view from top

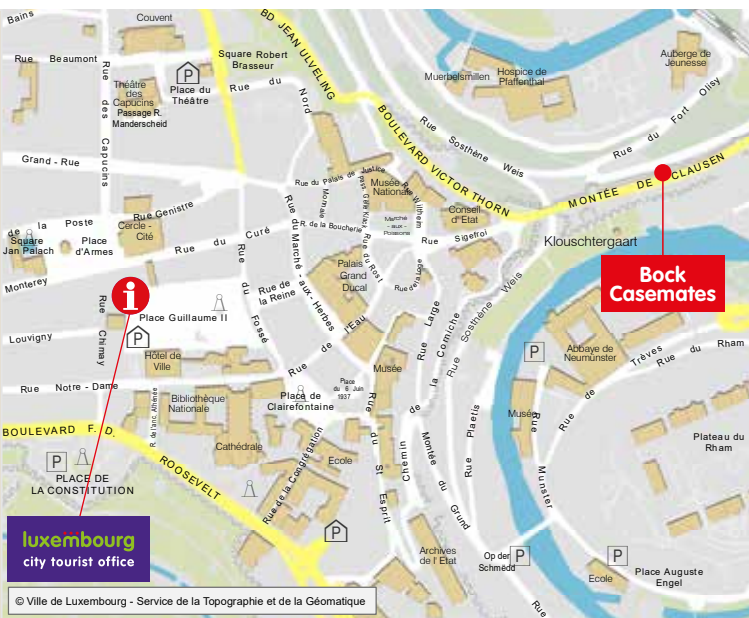
### Legend of the beautiful Melusina

According to legend, Melusina was the wife of Sigfried, 1<sup>st</sup> count of Luxembourg, living in his castle on the rocky Bock promontory. On their marriage, Melusina required her husband never to see her during a particular day and night of the week. One fine day, unable to resist his curiosity, Sigfried spied her in her bath through the keyhole of her room's door and discovered her fish's tail. Melusina, 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.





## Imprint

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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 10<sup>th</sup> century by Count Sigfried. 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 world-wide 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. Visitors plunge 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.



# luxembourg

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## THE CASEMATES



### Highlights

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

### The Bock Casemates

**Entrance:** Montée de Clausen, Luxembourg

### The Pétrusse Casemates

**Reopening in 2019**

**Information about opening hours, entrance prices and guided visits:**

Luxembourg City Tourist Office, tel.: (+352) 22 28 09 and on  
luxembourg-city.com

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