Squiz the World goes to... Luxembourg

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a tiny country where many people speak at least four languages, you can drive across the entire nation in about an hour, and public transport is completely free for everyone - even tourists!

Can you guess? Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Luxembourg.

JUST THE FACTS

Luxembourg might be one of Europe's smallest countries, but don't let its size fool you, it's so strategically placed that it's become one of Europe's most important little nations! This tiny country is wedged between France, Germany and Belgium, and depending on where you live, it's perfectly normal to pop over the border for lunch or a quick shopping trip.

And how's this??? Greater Sydney is nearly five times bigger than the entire country of Luxembourg. You could drive from one end to the other in about an hour.

But here's where it gets really interesting. Luxembourg has the highest proportion of foreigners living there of any country in Europe - nearly half the population! But, during the day, the population swells from 680,000 to 900,000 people because 220,000 cross-border workers commute in from neighbouring countries. It's like the entire population of the city of Hobart, comes to work in Luxembourg every single day!

The capital, Luxembourg City, sits in a dramatic gorge with ancient bridges connecting different parts of the city - making it look like something straight out of a fairy tale. Which is pretty fitting, because Luxembourg has over 100 real castles scattered throughout the countryside!

But here's where this little country really punches above its weight - it's home to some of Europe's most important institutions. The European Court of Justice is based there, which is basically the highest court for all the European Union countries. Plus, Luxembourg was one of the founding members of both NATO and the European Union, helping to build the Europe we know today. Not bad for a country you can drive across in an hour!

Whenever you travel, it's important to know a bit about the place you're visiting. So...

LET'S GET CULTURAL

The name "Luxembourg" comes from an old Latin word which means "little fortress." Back in 963 CE - that's over 1,000 years ago - Count Siegfried spotted this rocky cliff and thought, "Perfect spot for a castle!" And that's exactly what he built.

Here's something really special about Luxembourg - it's the world's only Grand Duchy. That means instead of having a king or queen, they have a Grand Duke. The current Grand Duke is Henri, who's been ruling since 2000. Imagine being the only person in the world with that job title!

If you're thinking of going to Luxembourg, late August is a great time to visit because, Luxembourg City hosts the Schueberfouer - a massive funfair that's been running since 1340. That's nearly 700 years! Picture your state's Royal Show like the Royal Easter Show or the Ekka, with rides, games, fairy floss and show bags (but without the animals)- and this one's been going since before Shakespeare was even born!

And remember those 100-plus castles I mentioned? Many of them, like the fairy-tale perfect Vianden Castle, host medieval festivals and Christmas markets. Imagine living in a country where actual castle adventures are just a short drive away! Amazing!

Whenever you travel, it's important to learn a few words in that country's language. It's a great way to show respect. So, let's....

LEARN THE LINGO

Most people who went to school in Luxembourg can speak four languages fluently: The three official languages - Luxembourgish, German, French and also English.

And, Luxembourgish people are masters of mixing languages mid-conversation. Picture this: you're talking to a stranger and you literally cycle through Luxembourgish, German, French and English until you figure out what language works best for both of you.

And here's a language fact that'll make you go "huh?" - in Luxembourgish, there's no word for "love." When people want to tell someone they love them, the words they say literally mean "I like you." So if someone from Luxembourg says they like you, they might actually mean they love you!

We are so lucky to have with us 6-year-old Squiz Kid Ben, who lives in Sydney and speaks Luxembourgish. Take it away, Ben.

My name is Ben: Hi, my name is Ben and I am six years old. I speak Luxembourgish because both my parents are from Luxembourg

Ben, how would I say hello and how are you?

"This is how you say 'hello': Moien

This is how you say 'how are you': Wéi geet et?"

"Go on, you give it a try! Moien Wéi geet et?

People are always really grateful when you just try to speak their language.

Ben, can you finish up by saying good bye in Luxembourgish?"

This is how you say 'good bye': Eddi

Eddi! Now, that' we've learned a bit of the local lingo I think it might be:

TIME FOR SCHOOL

Speaking of languages, going to school in Luxembourg is like being enrolled in a language boot camp - but in the best possible way! Here's how it works: lots of Primary school is taught in German, then when you hit late secondary school, things switch to French. Luxembourgish is used in the early years, and English is taught as the fourth language. It's like your brain becomes a super-powered translator! And kids whose families are from other countries often speak a fifth language at home. Imagine casually switching between four different languages during your school day!

School runs from September to July, which is pretty much the opposite of Australia's February to November school year! And with nearly half the population being from other countries, Luxembourg schools are like mini United Nations where kids from dozens of different cultures learn together.

Something else that's pretty different to Australia is that when kids turn 12, they and their parents choose between an academic track or a vocational track. That's like deciding in Year 7 whether you want to focus on university preparation or hands-on job training. The good news is that class sizes are tiny - only 15 to 20 students, so teachers can give everyone heaps of individual attention.

All this school chat has made me hungry. I think it must be....

DINNER TIME

When it comes to food, Luxembourg is like a delicious meeting point where German, French and Belgian cuisines shake hands and create something unique! The national dish is called Judd mat Gaardebounen (YUD- MAT- GARD DE BONE-EN) - which is smoked pork collar with broad beans. It sounds fancy, but it's basically comfort food that's been warming Luxembourg bellies for centuries.

But here's my personal favourite - Gromperekichelcher (GROMP-PRAYER-KISH-EL-SHER)! These are crispy potato pancakes that are especially popular at Christmas markets. Imagine if hash browns decided to become pancakes and got really, really good at it. They're golden, crispy on the outside, fluffy on the inside, and absolutely perfect for dunking in apple sauce. I've stuck a link to a delicious recipe in the episode notes.

You can find authentic food from dozens of countries because of all those expat families living there. Portuguese, Italian, French, German, Belgian... it's like having a world food festival in your backyard!

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 What is the title of Henri who rules the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg? Grand Duke

"Question 2 How long has Luxembourg's Schueberfouer funfair been running?""

a) Nearly 70 years

b) Nearly 700 years

c) Nearly 7,000 years

b) Nearly 700 years"

Question 3 What are the three official languages of Luxembourg? German, French and Luxembourgish

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Luxembourg.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.