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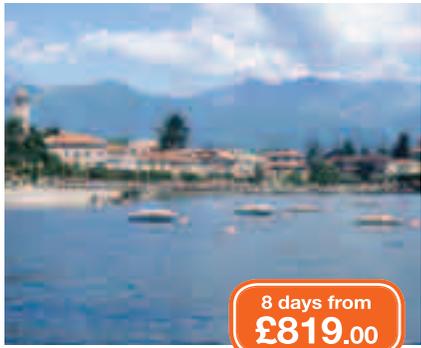
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Price includes

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Travel

Luxembourg

The picturesque town of Vianden



Germany's oldest city Trier



The ultimate tour: Buy one, get three free

by **Mary Graham**
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Avid teatime telly addicts will need no introduction to Channel 4's Coach Trip.

It's rather like It's a Knockout on a coach holiday, involving a jolly tour manager and a crowd of Brits who fall out with each other, get drunk and then vote fellow travellers off the show.

So my expectations of a holiday with people I'd never met and a six-hour journey through France and Belgium were mixed.

All was well – there was something disarmingly lovely about chugging through countryside and becoming best of – well-oiled – friends over a long weekend.

I knew it was going to be good when, still within sight of Dunkirk port's perimeter walls at lunchtime, mini bottles of wine and a quiz sheet for everyone were produced.

Luxembourg, a tiny country just 84km wide, was the destination.

Sandwiched between France, Germany and Belgium, the Grand Duchy is the ultimate supermarket deal – buy one – get three countries free.

Gradually, the flatlands of Belgium give way to forests

and hills. And Luxembourg reveals itself to be beautiful – all roaring rivers, grey rocks, forts and painted Swiss chalet-style homes.

Our base is Vianden, a medieval town in the Ardennes, with an 11th century castle looking down on everything.

If the town is quiet and serene on a Saturday evening, our group is anything but. We are guests of Bart and Wil Peverelli who run the Grand Hotel de Vianden and know how to keep large parties happy.

We're welcomed with pints of Diekirch, the local beer.

Dramatic

By midnight things have taken a surreal turn. We're mingling with another coach party from Leeds. Bart is holding court playing his entire catalogue of songs on his guitar and our group is belting the words out. Leeds wasn't impressed but entered into the spirit.

Fortunately, the next day was a gentle walking tour of Vianden. We end up at the castle which has a story almost as dramatic as it looks.

Happily hosting counts over the centuries, in the 1800s it was being sold off piecemeal. In 1977, and by now in ruins, it was transferred back into state ownership and rebuilt.

In the afternoon, we take advantage of that deal and

hop over to Trier in Germany. What follows is the world's best history lesson you never had at school, as a Roman amphitheatre and the Porta Nigra city gate are amazingly well preserved.

Day two and the coach takes us to Luxembourg City.

The city has evolved over steep valleys and hills, giving it a stunning appearance. If Bavaria was encased in a city, this would be it.

Modern shopping streets are just a stone's throw from the Grand Ducal palace, with its lone sentry parading all day.

Lunch at the exquisite Grand Hotel Cravat (think Ritz in grandeur) features Luxembourg's own Cremant sparkling wine. We got to experience more of that on the return journey through the Moselle Valley – an area known as Little Switzerland. The journey involved a tour at the Caves de Wormeldange, a vineyard and production centre on the Moselle river. A tasting was obligatory.

The return to England is a quiet affair as we recover from the 'socialising.' And instead of having a row, like Channel 4's finest, we're all sorry when its time to go our separate ways.

■ *Mary's trip was funded by the Coach Tourism Council. Coach travel was provided by Buzzlines in Lympe. The tour manager was Val Burgon.*



Historic Vianden as seen from the castle



Vianden Castle

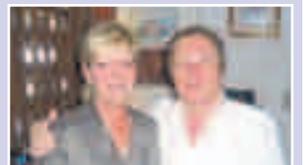


Wine being made in the Moselle Valley

FACTFILE

■ Luxembourg is becoming increasingly popular for tours with more companies featuring the destination. They can be found at www.findacoachholiday.com

■ Prices to the Grand Hotel de Vianden start from £200pp for four nights. All generally include half board, travel, excursions and Channel crossing.



Bart and Wil Peverelli at the Grand Hotel de Vianden

■ Leger Holidays (www.leger.co.uk) has a five-day tour during summer 2014 staying at the Grand. Prices start at £375pp and includes a walking tour of Vianden, visits to a vineyard, Luxembourg City, Little Switzerland and Trier.