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Living in Liechtenstein

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Introduction

Nestled in the heart of the Alps and flanked by Switzerland and Austria, Liechtenstein is one of Europe's smallest yet wealthiest countries. Despite its tiny size—covering just 160 square kilometers—Liechtenstein offers a unique proposition to expatriates: an exceptional quality of life, an economically stable environment, and breathtaking natural surroundings. For expats, considering a move to this principality means balancing the allure of security and affluence against the realities of strict immigration policies and a high cost of living.

Liechtenstein is renowned for its political stability, strong economy, and forward-thinking approach to innovation. The principality boasts some of the highest salaries and standards of living in Europe, and its efficient public services—from healthcare to infrastructure—are consistently praised. The country is also known for its beautiful Alpine landscapes, making it a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy hiking, skiing, and cycling all within close proximity to their homes.

However, the process of relocating to Liechtenstein is notably challenging. Prospective residents must navigate a restrictive residency regime, particularly stringent for non-EU/EEA citizens, and competitive housing and job markets. Despite these challenges, Liechtenstein remains an appealing destination for those able to secure the necessary permits. Its thriving financial, technological, and industrial sectors present attractive employment opportunities for specialized professionals, while its central location in Europe facilitates easy travel to neighboring countries.

Life in Liechtenstein is shaped equally by tradition and modernity. The principality retains a close-knit, conservative community ethos; integration relies heavily on participating in local customs, events, and clubs. Yet the influence of global business and a significant expat population have infused its society with openness and sophistication. Navigating these cultural nuances is key for expats seeking to make the most of their time in the country.

This book, "Living in Liechtenstein: A Guide for Expats," is designed as a comprehensive resource to inform, prepare, and empower those planning a move to this remarkable land. From understanding residency requirements and finding a place to live, to thriving in its job market and adapting to daily life, the chapters that follow will offer practical guidance and insider tips. Whether you are a seasoned global citizen or embarking on your first adventure abroad, this guide aims to make your transition to Liechtenstein as smooth and successful as possible.

CHAPTER ONE: The Land and History of Liechtenstein

Liechtenstein, officially the Principality of Liechtenstein, is a name that evokes images of Alpine serenity and financial prowess. Tucked away in the heart of the European Alps, this microstate is a geographical marvel, one of only two doubly landlocked countries in the world. Its modest size, approximately 160 square kilometers (about 62 square miles), places it among the smallest nations globally, yet it holds a disproportionately significant role in the European landscape.

The principality is bordered by Switzerland to the west and south, and Austria to the east and north. This strategic location has shaped its history, culture, and even its climate. The western border is defined by the majestic Rhine River, a vital waterway that flows from south to north, creating a natural boundary with Switzerland. This river valley forms the most populous and arable part of the country, offering a contrast to the rugged mountainous terrain that dominates the eastern two-thirds of Liechtenstein.

The topography of Liechtenstein is predominantly mountainous, characterized by the Rhaetian Alps, which are part of the larger Central Eastern Alps. The landscape ranges from lush valleys to snow-capped peaks, with the highest point being Grauspitz, soaring to an impressive 2,599 meters (8,527 feet) above sea level. Despite its Alpine location, Liechtenstein benefits from a comparatively mild climate, heavily influenced by the "föhn," a warm and dry southerly wind that descends from the mountains. This phenomenon helps to extend the vegetation period in spring and autumn, allowing for the cultivation of grapes and corn, which is quite unusual for a mountainous region.

Winters in Liechtenstein are cold and cloudy, with frequent rain and snowfall, yet temperatures rarely drop below -15°C (5°F) at higher elevations. Summers are generally cool to moderately warm, cloudy, and humid, with average daily maximum temperatures ranging between 20°C and 28°C (68°F and 82°F). The average annual precipitation typically falls between 900 and 1,200 millimeters (35 to 47 inches), although some alpine areas can receive significantly more. The blend of these climatic factors contributes to a remarkable variety of vegetation throughout the principality.

Beyond the Rhine, other important waterways traverse Liechtenstein. The Samina River, for instance, originates within the principality's mountains and flows eastward, eventually joining the Ill River in Austria, which then feeds into the Rhine. The only natural lake in Liechtenstein, the Gampriner Seele, was formed by a major flood from the Rhine in 1927, adding another picturesque element to the landscape. The

country's small land area means that while there are climatic differences, they are primarily vertical, with distinct variations based on altitude.

Liechtenstein's history stretches back to ancient times, with the territory continually inhabited by farming communities since the Later Stone Age. By 15 BC, the area was incorporated into the Roman province of Raetia, and Roman artifacts discovered in Liechtenstein attest to this influence. Following the decline of the Roman Empire, the region became part of Charlemagne's Frankish empire and later the Holy Roman Empire.

The modern Principality of Liechtenstein has its roots in the acquisition of the counties of Vaduz and Schellenberg by the Liechtenstein dynasty. Prince Johann Adam Andreas of Liechtenstein purchased Schellenberg in 1699 and Vaduz in 1712. These two lordships, previously independent territories within the Holy Roman Empire, were united in 1719 by Emperor Charles VI, who elevated them to the status of an Imperial Principality named Liechtenstein. This act granted the Liechtenstein family imperial princely rank and a seat at the Imperial Diet, significantly enhancing their standing and power.

Despite the principality bearing their name, the Princes of Liechtenstein primarily resided in Austria and Moravia, with no ruling prince setting foot in Liechtenstein until 1842. In the early 19th century, during the Napoleonic Wars, Liechtenstein was briefly occupied by French troops. It joined the Confederation of the Rhine in 1806, which it considered the start of its independent status. After Napoleon's defeat, Liechtenstein became a member of the German Confederation in 1815.

Liechtenstein gained full independence upon the dissolution of the German Confederation in 1866. A significant decision followed in 1868 when the Liechtenstein Army was abolished for financial reasons, and the country declared its permanent neutrality. This neutrality was upheld during both World War I and World War II, allowing Liechtenstein to remain largely unaffected by the major European conflicts.

The 20th century brought significant transformation. In 1919, Liechtenstein entrusted its external relations to neutral Switzerland, forging a close administrative and economic partnership that continues to this day. This bond was further solidified in 1923 with a customs treaty and the adoption of the Swiss franc as Liechtenstein's official currency. Economically, these steps proved highly beneficial, contributing to Liechtenstein's remarkable post-World War II industrialization.

Prince Franz Joseph II, who reigned from 1938 to 1989, became the first reigning prince to reside in Vaduz Castle, the princely seat and capital of the principality. Under his leadership, Liechtenstein transitioned from a predominantly agrarian society to a highly industrialized nation with a strong financial sector. His son, Prince Hans Adam II, who ascended to the throne in 1989, continued this modernization. Under his reign,

Liechtenstein joined the United Nations in 1990, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1991, the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1995, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

The country has also faced challenges, particularly concerning its reputation as a tax haven. However, Liechtenstein has made significant efforts to enhance transparency and reform its banking sector, leading to its removal from the OECD's "black list" of tax havens in 2009. In 2011, Liechtenstein further integrated into Europe by acceding to the Schengen Agreement, allowing for passport-free travel within the Schengen area. Today, Liechtenstein stands as a stable constitutional monarchy, balancing its rich historical heritage with a modern, diversified economy and a high standard of living.

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