

'LOOKING FORWARD TO WELCOMING MORE INDIANS'

Located in the heart of Europe and famous for its multilingualism and hospitality, Luxembourg has seen a growing number of Indians visiting its fairy tale castles, thousand-year-old historical sites, museums, vineyards and beautiful nature reserves. In an exclusive interview with TnH, H.E. Mr. Jean Claude Kugener, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to India, speaks of a "highly promising trend" of an increasing number of Indians applying for a Schengen visa to visit Luxembourg, and his country's desire to welcome more Indian tourists in the years to come. Read on:

By Prem Kumar

1 IN RECENT YEARS, LUXEMBOURG HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE LEADING TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE WORLD. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS MOST EXTRAORDINARY ABOUT LUXEMBOURG AS A TOURIST DESTINATION?

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a cosmopolitan country ideally located in the heart of Europe with a thousand-year-old multicultural capital and different tourist regions each with its very own characteristics. The only remaining Grand Duchy in the world, Luxembourg offers a huge variety of touristic attractions.

Set in natural and green surroundings, Luxembourg City, the Capital of the Country, has been marked by centuries of history, even as remaining a capital shaped by tradition and modernity. The old city and its fortress around the Grand Ducal Palace have been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1994. The historical, medieval, classical and contemporary styles come together like nowhere else. The remains of the centuries-old fortifications are among the many tourist attractions in Europe, called the Casemates with 17 km of underground tunnels. The Corniche offers panoramic views of the historic sites and the surrounding valleys of this unique city, which is often referred to as the 'Gibraltar of the North'.

As one of the six founding members of the European Union, Luxembourg is one of three European cities to hold institutional seats of the EU. Over the centuries, Luxembourg City has expanded with the most recent addition being the Kirchberg district, which hosts many financial institutions. Luxembourg is the premier private banking centre in the Eurozone and the second largest fund centre of the world.

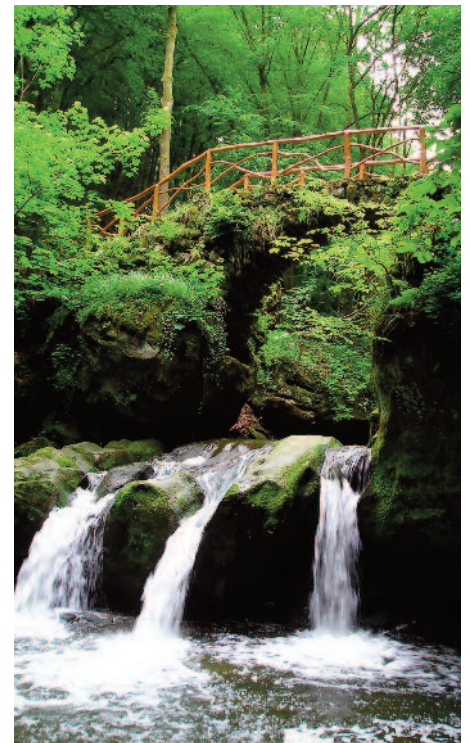
Kirchberg is also home to a Modern Art Museum designed by the Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei and the Draï Echelen Museum, which is housed in the Fortress and illustrates the history of the city and the country. In the Municipal Park, Indian visitors will find a bust of Mahatma Gandhi created by their own famous artist Amar Nath Sehgal, who left a remarkable heritage with numerous sculptures, paintings and draw-



Jean Claude Kugener
Ambassador of Luxembourg to India



Taking into consideration the tremendous increase in tourist and business visa applications in 2018, our Consulate in Delhi became the first Luxembourg Consulate in the world last year to deliver Schengen visas to travel to Luxembourg.



ings in private and public collections during the 24 years he lived in-between Luxembourg and India.

Due to its geological location, Luxembourg is home to an array of different landscapes, which include the dense woodlands and valleys of the Ardennes, the fascinating rock formations of the Mullerthal region and the region of the 'Red Earth' with its former mining landscapes as well as the vineyards of the Moselle region. Let me highlight some of the many tourist attractions, you will find the 'Valley of the Seven Castles' and the picturesque Castle-Palace of Vianden, which was built between the 11th and 14th Century on the foundations of a Roman castle. At the impressive Castle of Clervaux, you can visit the final integral version of the photographic exhibition 'The Family of Man' by Luxembourg born Edward Steichen, which was exhibited in over 150 museums worldwide before being permanently installed in the Castle in 1994. The exhibition is also inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World

Register since 2003.

The Grand Duchy has one of the densest certified hiking networks in Europe, all laid out in breath-taking settings. For example, the Mullerthal Trail and the Es-capardenne Eisleck Trail, acknowledged among the 'Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe', offer breath-taking views over very panoramic landscapes. Strong local traditions and centuries of foreign influences have fostered a unique blend and rich offer of national and international gastronomy. The mild climate and the spectacular beauty of the hilly vineyards make the wines, and crémants of the Moselle region very popular. Among them is also the small wine-producing town of Schengen in the Southeastern part of Luxembourg in the Three-Border-Region, where Luxembourg, Germany and France meet, becoming synonymous with open borders and free movement since the signature of the Schengen Agreement in 1985.

TOP: (L) Casemates, Luxembourg City, (R) Echternach, the capital of the Mullerthal region, Luxembourg

BELOW: Luxembourg City view on the Grund



2 HOW IS LUXEMBOURG GROWING IN THE INDIAN TRAVEL MARKET?

We are profoundly satisfied with the 36% increase in tourist and business visa applications from Indians in 2018 as compared to 2017. We see this as a highly promising trend. We are also buoyant with the 22% increase in the size of the Indian community living and working in Luxembourg during the same period. We look forward to welcoming more Indian tourists.

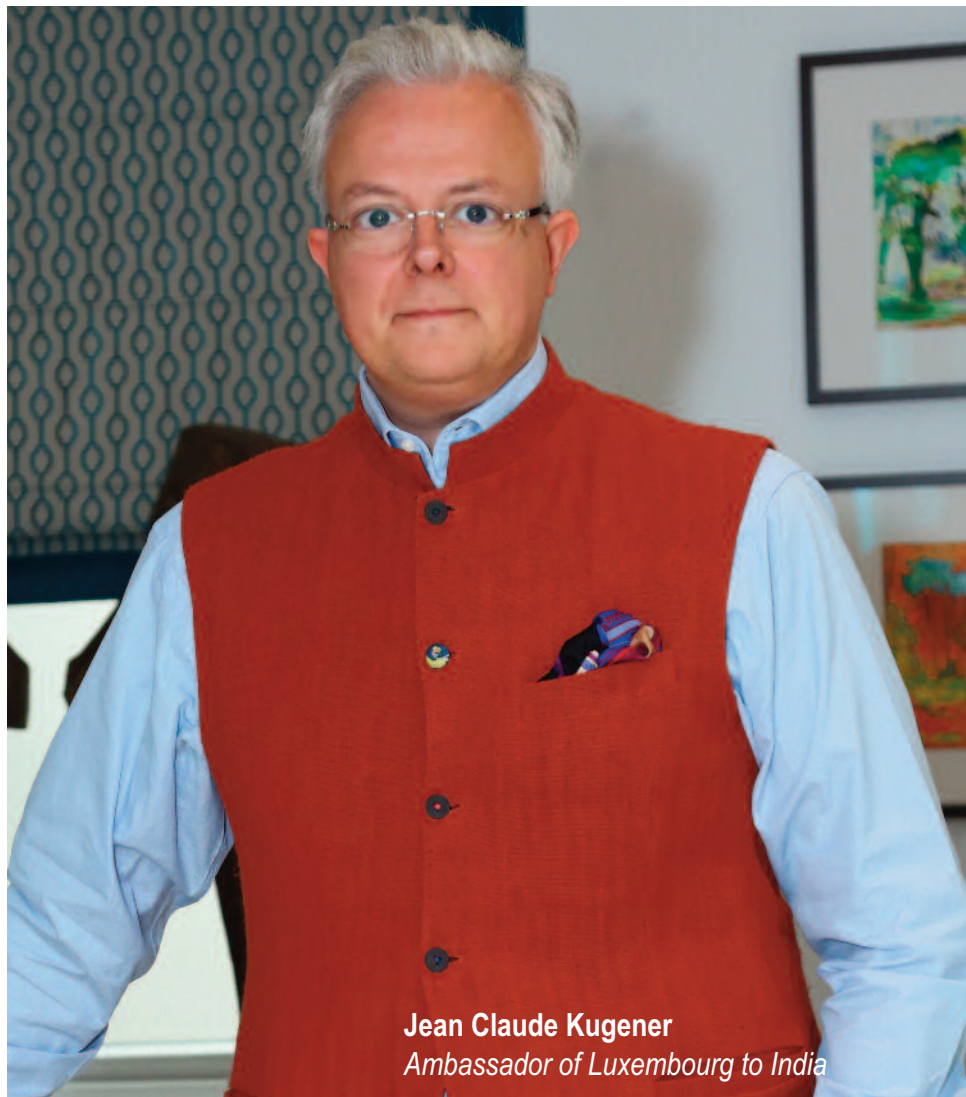
3 WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE DESTINATIONS IN LUXEMBOURG YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECOMMEND TO INDIAN TOURISTS?

I would recommend all Indian tourists to visit the Land of the Red Rocks, which is located in the South of the country. It owes its name to the red ore, which was behind the success of the steel industry in Luxembourg during its golden years in the 20th Century and led to the creation of the world's largest steel producer through the merger of Arcelor with Mittal Steel, headquartered in Luxembourg City since 2006. Today, the former mining area of the Land of the Red Rocks has established a new identity by combining old and new technologies. Some of the old blast furnaces have been refurbished as a testimony to our past and now stand side by side to modern glass structures of the new University campus and the concert hall Rockhal among others.

For the younger travellers, the Red Rock Mountain Bike Trail guides cyclists on the traces of Luxembourg's industrial and historical past through former open iron ore mines in protected nature reserves. A guided tour of the National Mining Museum in Rumelange should



The Mullerthal Trail



Jean Claude Kugener
Ambassador of Luxembourg to India

The Grand Duchy has one of the densest certified hiking networks in Europe. For example, the Mullerthal Trail and the Escapardenne Eisleck Trail, acknowledged among the 'Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe', offer breathtaking views over very panoramic landscapes.

be every tourist's trip to this region.

Another recommendation is to visit the capital of the Mullerthal region, Echternach, which is the oldest city in Luxembourg. The famous dancing procession of Echternach, held every year on Whit Tuesday, was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010. It is the last traditional Roman Catholic dancing procession in Europe that honour Saint Willibrord, who established the Abbey of Echternach in the 7th Century.

4 WHAT TIPS CAN YOU OFFER TO INDIAN NATIONALS APPLYING FOR LUXEMBOURG VISAS?

The procedures to give visas to travel to Luxembourg are rather straightforward and in line with the rules and regulations applying to all 26 countries of Schengen. Taking into consideration the tremendous increase in tourist and business visa applications in 2018 compared to 2017,



© Fränk Weber / LFT

I would recommend Indian tourists to visit the Land of the Red Rocks located in the South of the country. It owes its name to the red ore, which was behind the success of the steel industry in Luxembourg during its golden years in the 20th century.

our Consulate in Delhi became the first Luxembourg Consulate in the world last year to deliver Schengen visas to travel to Luxembourg.

Just after my arrival in India six months ago, my visit to the VFS Global Visa Application Centre in Connaught Place was very high on my agenda and I was very impressed by their management set-up to allow a smooth process as much for every applicant as for the Consulate.

We have a small but highly professional and efficient Consulate and we are known for delivering visas on time. I highly recommend to any citizen who plans to travel for tourism or business to Luxembourg to add all required documents to his file to ensure timely delivery of their visa from any VFS Centre throughout India to and from Delhi. The Luxembourg Consulate works with the 17 VFS Centres in India (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Goa, Gurugram, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jalandhar, Kochi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, New Delhi, Puducherry, Pune, Thiruvananthapuram) and Kathmandu in Nepal.

5 HOW IS THE AIR CONNECTIVITY TO LUXEMBOURG? ANY NEW ROUTES BEING PLANNED?

The Grand Duchy can be reached with any major airline and is easily accessible from any European capital. Situated in the heart of Europe, any tourist

TOP: Contemporary Luxembourg Kirchberg

with a Schengen visa can easily travel within the Schengen zone by plane, train, car or coach to Luxembourg.

6 HOW WILL YOU DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES?

We are currently celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic relations, which were signed on 1 July 1948. We are also celebrating the upcoming 90th Anniversary of Luxembourg's first Vice-Consulate in Bombay established on 5th November 1929. We have become strong partners over the years, a relation that has further deepened after the inauguration of the resident Embassy in Delhi in 2002.

Luxembourg ranks as the 16th largest Foreign Direct Investor and has strong economic and commercial bilateral ties with India. The bilateral relations between both countries are developing fast. The ever-increasing political, economic, financial, cultural and people-to-people bonds give us a promising outlook for the next decades of friendship.

7 WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT INDIA?

Since my arrival in September, I have been traveling a lot and received a very warm welcome in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Agra, Bhubaneswar, Amritsar, Goa, Bengaluru and Jodhpur, to name but a few.

I am thrilled about all the opportunities to discover India's heritage, arts and crafts as well as the new trend of combining traditional and modern art, which you find in galleries in New Delhi, Mumbai and many other Indian cities. Until now, I have met many fascinating people from various backgrounds and have discovered the cultural and spiritual diversity of India, which is very inspiring. I also enjoy the delicious Indian cuisine, another quality Luxembourgers share with Indians, and I do recommend the reader to visit Luxembourg to enjoy our culinary delights.