

PEOPLE . PLACES

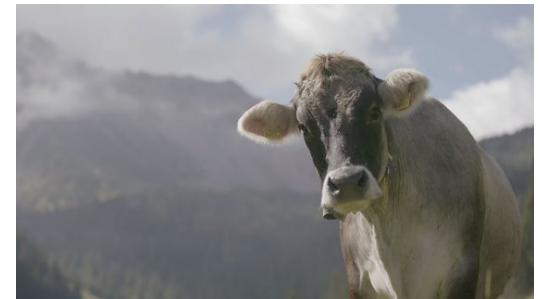
EUROPE'S MICROSTATES

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Europe's microstates are easy to miss but they have a lot to offer. We travel to them to witness their rich culture.

The countries of Andorra, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Malta, Monaco, and San Marino are all very easy to miss. They are squeezed in between some of Europe's largest countries. Nevertheless, the microstates have succeeded in preserving their own traditions and flora and fauna, which have now become rare to the rest of the world. The microstate's extraordinary locations are often in extreme mountainous or coastal regions which makes them a paradise for endangered species. However, the stability of their natural environment is threatened by environmental problems that need to be tackled. We travel to each of these microstates and tell the stories of their courageous efforts to preserve their natural characteristics and cultural autonomy.

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1. Andorra

As the largest of the European microstates in terms of area, Andorra is a unique and independent state since 1278. The principality is not part of the European Union, but is linked to it by bilateral treaties under international law. The Pyrenean country has not only two foreign dignitaries jointly holding the office of head of state. The microstate is also very active in protecting its nature. The protected areas are among the largest in the world in relation to the area of the state. Even in the smallest national park on the Ordino River, biologists can proudly point to a rich biodiversity with over 700 rare plant species.

2. Monaco

The Principatu de Múnegu, located on the French Mediterranean coast, is the second smallest state in the world. Nevertheless, it offers plenty of material for dreams - and nightmares: On an area of less than two square kilometers, the main focus is on building upwards to make room for the highest population density of any state in the world. The entire country is located on the edge of the Maritime Alps, with 4.1 kilometers of the total 5.5-kilometer-long national border falling on the coastline.

3. Malta

Malta consists of three main islands and some uninhabited micro islands. Most of the inhabitants live in the capital region of Valletta. From 1530, Malta was ruled by the Catholic Order of the Knights of St. John and has since been called the Order of Malta. In 1814 Great Britain made the archipelago a colony. Since 1964 Malta is an independent state and joined the European Community in 2004 as the smallest member state.

4. Liechtenstein

Some consider it a curiosity, others confuse it with Luxembourg, many see it as the small country with big money or eye it suspiciously as the land of financial scandals - but hardly anyone really knows the Principality of Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein may be small, but the different communities between the backdrop of the mountains and the financial world have their own peculiarities. One thing unites the Liechtensteiners all: the breathtaking nature. From the Rhine Valley with its wetlands, the lowlands with its towns and villages, to the vast mountain world, the dwarf state offers far more than many large nations.

5. San Marino

San Marino is the oldest republic in the world, but it does not want to rest on its history. Its sights are fixed on the future: it is committed to sustainability and promotes organic agriculture. Its goal is no less than to be the first state in the world to run exclusively on renewable resources, with a biological footprint that is no longer visible. Through their republican constitution, all citizens are involved in this mission. In order to preserve the natural beauty of their little patch of earth, all want to do what they can.

6. Luxembourg

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the southernmost and smallest of the three Benelux countries, offers unique natural treasures in a very small area - from the hilly forests and deep river valleys of the north to the vineyards and Mediterranean plants of the south. But population growth and environmental pollution threaten the country's natural treasures. As a result, more and more Luxembourgers are committing to the idea of living and producing sustainably - whether by reviving old traditions or by breaking entirely new ground.