9 European 'enclaves' – the continent's quirkiest corners

Alphorn blowing, a popular pastime in Samnaun – a snippet of Switzerland in the Austrian Alps Credit: getty

What's an enclave? It is a part of one sovereign country that's totally surrounded and landlocked by another sovereign country. Like a pocket of Germany in the middle of Switzerland, for example. The culture of these regions often combines the characteristics of two or more destinations – making them some of Europe's most eccentric destinations. Read on to discover nine of our favourites…

By Vitali Vitaliev, author of _Passport to Enclavia - Travels in Search of a European Identity;_ out now.

1. Baarle

A unique town located in the North Brabant province in the southern Netherlands that contains a Dutch (Baarle-Nassau) and a Belgian municipality (Baarle-Hertog). A cluster of 22 Belgian and eight Dutch enclaves with a border that zigzags all over the place; it is so confusing that houses on the same street (and even next door to each other) can be in different countries. Each house is marked with a Dutch or Belgian flag.

Many of the restaurants, pubs and shops straddle the international border. The locals don't really consider themselves Dutch or Belgian they are 'Baarlenaars.' The town, which has a population of approximately 9000, is the ultimate example of cross-border co-operation.

> Baarle Nassau - You can cross the border between Belgium and Netherlands in literally a second! #FactOfTheDay 😮 pic.twitter.com/BWjF6EAlN2
>
> — SolihullScoop (@SolihullScoop) May 12, 2016

  A postcard from the world's most bizarre border

2. Busingen

This one-street, picture-postcard German village stretches for over a mile along the right bank of the Rhine and is fully surrounded by Switzerland. Restaurant Waldheim is right on the border so you can order your drinks and food in Germany and consume them outside at one of the tables that are in Switzerland. The walking trail near Restaurant Waldheim will take you across the border too.

The village is 7.62 kilometres square with a population of approximately 1400 and in reality is a suburb of Schaffhausen the Swiss canton that surrounds it. Economically Swiss, it is not part of the EU.

3. Campione d'Italia

An Italian municipality in the Lombardy region, which nestles on the banks of Lake Lugano. The lake and the surrounding mountains separate this comune from the rest of Italy. Despite being Italian, it isn't in the EU and the currency is the Swiss Franc. Campione is exempt from EU VAT and the municipality takes advantage of this by operating Europe's largest casino: the Casinò di Campione.

Attributes of both Swiss and Italian culture sit side by side everywhere in this 1.6 kilometre square municipality. The church of S. Maria dei Ghirli boasts 14th century frescoes and the ancient St. Zenonechurch is now a municipal museum and home to Campione's art gallery.

> Casino Municipale in Campione d'Italia. Architecture by Mario Botta. #cehabe https://t.co/QRPnl3oXTk pic.twitter.com/eK7hGBhbot
>
> — Christian Bossert ✨ (@Chris_Bossert) July 29, 2016

4. Jungholz

A town in the Austrian state of Tyrol that's lost in the Bavarian Alps. Jungholz is actually a pene-enclave as although fully surrounded by (and only accessible from) Germany it is connected to Austria at one point: the 1636 metre high Sorgschrofen mountain peak.

The ski resort town is Europe's wealthiest spot, having three big banks (hence the world's highest concentration of capital). Kleinwalsertal, another Austrian pene-enclave in Germany, lies less than 50km away.

5. Llivia

A small Spanish (actually Catalan) cobbled-street town in the Pyrenees, which is surrounded and landlocked by France. This is the oldest enclave in Europe and was founded by the ancient Romans.

The present-day Llivia, which lies within the French département of Pyrénées-Orientales, is actually the result of a little historical blunder. Llivia remains fully Spanish in its law, taxes, justice and economy, and fiercely Catalan in its politics, language and ethnicity. Out of all the remaining European enclaves, it has assimilated the least traits of its host country. It allegedly has the highest number of sunshine days in Europe.

6. Samnaun

Formerly a smugglers' haven, Samnaun became a tiny 'duty-free' Swiss semi-enclave of a village lost in the Austrian Alps. In the Swiss canton of Graubünden, it was previously only accessible from Austria. However, a way was discovered to reach Samnaun by road from Switzerland without entering Austria so technically it is no longer a semi-enclave, but its tax-free status remains.

In recent times, this municipality of just over 800 inhabitants has developed into a holiday resort that attracts hikers and mountain bike riders. The ski resort Silvretta Arena Ischgl-Samnaun straddles the Swiss/Austrian border and is one of the best in Austria.

> Der frühere Bundesminister Norbert Röttger hält eine Festrede in Samnaun.https://t.co/Zj3Y7gG91Z pic.twitter.com/YG0R7DYpqs
>
> — eventdienstleister (@events24_ch) August 3, 2016

7. Kleinwalsertal Valley

An Austrian pene-enclave in Germany, Kleinwalsertal Valley is situated in the Vorarlberg state of Austria. Unlike Jungholz, it is connected to Germany not at one, but at three points – all high up in the mountains and accessible only to well-trained mountaineers. There is no direct road connection with Austria.

The oblong and narrow valley (forty-five kilometres square) contains three villages: Riezlern, Hirschegg and Mittelberg. All three villages are popular skiing areas, and indeed the valley is well known in Central Europe as both a ski and hiking resort.

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>
> — eventdienstleister (@events24_ch) August 3, 2016

8. Vennbahn

This is a former Belgian railway, which cuts into German territory south of Aachen (in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia). It formed a Belgium corridor: either side of it was Germany.

The railway closed and after many years in the wilderness, it is now The Vennbahn Cycle Route - one of Europe's longest converted railway embankment bike tracks. The 125km route takes users through Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg with plenty of beautiful countryside, villages and woodland to take in on the way. Step off the path and you step outside Belgium.

> Oben warten die Liegestühle und wartet das Bett im Gatterhof #kleinwalsertal #ferienwohnung #ifen #riezlern pic.twitter.com/B5t8q4qeIb
>
> — Gatterhof - Riezlern (@Gatterhof) March 18, 2016

9. Verenahof

A small patch of German farmland inside Switzerland, Verenahofwas the last European enclave to lose its status when the Swiss happily absorbed it in 1964.

Previously part of the German commune Wiechs am Randen, five hundred yards away from the German border, it is now part of the Swiss village of Buttenhardt in the canton of Schaffhausen. Verenahof now just exists as a street name.