

SWITZERLAND **GENEVA**

Location, location LOCATION

Home to the United Nations, the famous, the wealthy and the healthy, Geneva has a reputation for premium watches, walking trails, wines and even its tap water. **Ruby Boukabu** reports on the central Swiss city recently voted one of the world's "most liveable".

The mediaeval
Château de Chillon
on Lake Geneva

NESTLED BY LAKE Geneva, fed by the meeting of the rivers Rhône and Arve, and protectively surrounded by the Alps and Jura mountains, Geneva is enjoyed for its compact nature, freshness and refinement. With sublime mountain and water views, retail splendour, romantic architecture and relaxing parks – not to mention an admirably efficient public transport system – it boasts third placing in Mercer’s most-liveable city ranking (2010), behind Vienna and Zurich. Locals swear that its tap water is better than bottled, and the many health resorts and hiking trails pay testament to the healing qualities of the encircling mountains.

Settled by the Celts in 500BC, conquered by the Romans in 58BC and invaded regularly because of its central European location, Geneva declared itself a republic in 1536, breaking away from the Dukes of Savoy. Reformed by the conservative, austere John Calvin, the city became a refuge for persecuted Protestants from all over Europe. Invaded by Napoleon in 1798, Switzerland remained a loose confederation of cantons and city states, eventually becoming a federal state in the modern sense in 1848.

Stroll through the winding cobbled streets and soak up the history of the medieval Old Town, located up from the popular commercial strip on Rue de Confédération. Pass the traditional merry-go-round,

Geneva is a wholly cosmopolitan city, Francophile in outlook

peep into the 12th-century St-Pierre’s Cathedral and have a *réversé* (café latte) at La Clémence by the fountain in the Place du Bourg-de-Four. Next door, at Chocolaterie Arn, enjoy a classic Swiss endorphin boost with a homemade hot chocolate then stock up on Champagne chocolate truffles. Descend past the Old City walls to Place de Neuve, which sits between the majestic and columned Grand Theatre, Victoria Hall and the golden gates of Park Bastion, opening onto a cafe-restaurant with large outdoor chessboards.

The United Nations has its European headquarters in Geneva, which is also home to the Red Cross, the World Intellectual Property Organisation and CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. The city has been described as Europe’s third financial centre – after London and Zurich. All this adds up to a wholly cosmopolitan city, Francophile in outlook, where English is spoken widely.

Geneva’s housing crisis and proximity to France mean that many city workers live either across the border or in the new metropolitan areas of the larger Lake Geneva region: Vaud and Valais. While economic growth has been strong, building space is limited and further high-rise development is opposed by locals. Thonex, near the French border, has allowed some housing development and Swiss Federal Railways has responded with a CHF500m (\$560m) plan to renovate several train stations, including Geneva’s. CEVA is the name given to the projected 4.8km rail tunnel between the two existing stations linking Geneva-Cornavin and La Praille with Eaux-Vives, just north of the Swiss-French border, and Annemasse in France.



United Nations headquarters (left); Place du Bourg-de-Four city square in the Old Town (below)



A world watchmaking capital since the 16th century, Geneva’s time lords include Robert & Fils, Tiffany & Co, Baume & Mercier, Cartier, Vacheron Constantin and Rolex. The city hosts the respected industry events Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, organised by Richemont, and The Geneva Time Exhibition.

Literature lovers will want to visit Château de Chillon, popularised by Lord Byron in his poem *The Prisoner Of Chillon* (1816), or perhaps the grave of Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borgès in Cimetière des Rois (Cemetery of Kings). Borgès was schooled in Switzerland and spent his adult life commuting between Spain, Argentina and Geneva, where he died in 1986.

Geneva has a growing reputation for its contemporary art, which local artist Farah Camperio says is “on par with London or New York, just smaller”. Some of the best can be found in the Quartier des Bains and Plainpalais, including Mitterrand & Cramer Fine Art (52 Rue des Bains; www.mitterrand-cramer.com), Galerie Guy Bärtschi (43 Route des Jeunes; www.bartschi.ch); and Art and Public (37 Rue des Bains; www.artpublic.ch). For a coffee or bite between visits, pop into the Café des Bains (26 Rue des Bains; www.cafedesbains.com).

Wine lovers will enjoy local drops, such as a crisp Chasselas, Gamay (one of the world’s oldest grape varieties) or Garanoir, developed specifically to grow in Switzerland. This should be done while enjoying the views from a lakeside terrace and perhaps indulging in a bit of abstract speculation, much like those famous *Genevois* Voltaire and Rousseau once did. There is something in that mountain air. ➤

PLACE DU BOURG-DE-FOUR PHOTOGRAPHY: LONELYPLANETIMAGES.COM; UNITED NATIONS: GETTY IMAGES



Hotel de la Paix on Lake Geneva; Grand Hotel Kempinski cocktail bar, FloorTwo (above)



SHOP

Rue de la Confédération

This famous retail strip is just a 10-minute walk downhill from Cornavin railway station and marks Geneva as a major European shopping destination. As trams glide by, locals and tourists window-shop, hopping between the boutiques here and those on the parallel Rue du Rhône. For watches, visit Patek Philippe, Franck Muller, Omega or Piaget. The huge Globus Department Store is at Molard tram stop. Other boutiques include Bally, for upmarket shoes, handbags and dresses, and there is a large, shiny Apple Store.

Sounds Records

8 Avenue de Mai. (22) 328 1411. www.soundsrecords.ch

The Plainpalais area is the place to go for retro and vintage and this independent music store is the perfect post-flea market visit. Local groups worth noting include jazz trio Phat Jazz, Mama Rosin (two-step/roots), Pol (electro) and Imperial Tiger Orchestra (experimental jazz/Afro-fusion). Its employees are a good bet to advise on music venues and upcoming concerts. For live jazz, check out Scots-born Ernie Odoom. This vocalist/saxophonist and band leader is at the centre of the local jazz scene (www.ppa-plus.com).

Manor

6 Rue Cornavin. (08) 4880 2804. www.manor.ch

Manor is a large national department store close to Cornavin station with fresh food, fashion, local and international brands (Morgan, Diesel, Pepe Jeans), watches, perfumes, cosmetics, skincare, hi-fi and sports gear. The ground floor has a supermarket, bakery, chocolates, sushi and oven-baked gourmet pizzas for lunch on the go. The rooftop restaurant has panoramic views of the city.



STAY

La Reserve

301 Route de Lausanne, Bellevue. (22) 959 5959. www.lareserve.ch

Elegant, distinguished and classic, located a couple of kilometres from the centre of the city on the shores of Lake Geneva in Bellevue, La Reserve is the most stylish hotel around. Its lush interiors are the work of Parisian design star Jacques Garcia, and most rooms have soothing views of the Alps and the lake. The hotel's Le Loti restaurant is known for its French cuisine. Try the freshly caught Dover sole in front of the open fireplace. The five-star hotel includes a spa with reflexology, acupuncture, yoga, osteopath and algotherapy (seaweed and mud wraps), tennis courts and windsurfing facilities. From CHF500 (\$562).

Hotel de la Paix

11 Quai du Mont-Blanc. (22) 909 6000. www.hoteldelapaix.ch Facing Lake Geneva and a few minutes' stroll from Cornavin station, the Hotel de la Paix, built in 1865, is luxurious and classic. Its five-star boutique design includes a jewelled chandelier

above the foyer and black-and-white, *Alice In Wonderland*-esque tiled floors. The Mediterranean-flavoured dishes of its Vertig'O restaurant (one Michelin star) include rack of veal and roast lobster. All of its fish dishes are specialties of chef Jérôme Manificier, this year awarded 16/20 in the influential French restaurant guide, *Gault Et Millau*. From CHF420 (\$472).

Grand Hotel Kempinski

19 Quai du Mont-Blanc. (22) 908 9081.

www.kempinski-geneva.com

This contemporary upscale luxury hotel is opposite the lake and Geneva's popular artificial island-beach, Bains des Pâquis. Take advantage of the new plush spa with marbled floors, golden ceilings and heady scents of fresh flowers. Let yourself be wooed by the views from the jet-set cocktail bar FloorTwo. It's a place for either classic tastes, such as Champagne and strawberries, or inviting house cocktails – lychee caprioska anyone? If partying is on the cards, perhaps head downstairs to the Java nightclub. From CHF424 (\$477).



EAT & DRINK

Domaine de Châteauevieux

16 Peney-Dessus, Satigny. (02) 2753 1511. chateauevieux.ch Just out of the centre of Geneva in Satigny (and a 15-minute drive to the airport), celebrity chef Philippe Chevrier is at the helm of the double Michelin-starred Domaine de Châteauevieux. It offers rustic chic with convivial service amidst a vineyard. The extensive menu includes a Brittany lobster served on black truffle risotto and, for dessert, a remarkable passionfruit soufflé. The wine list includes Chevrier's >



Chocolaterie Arn; Domaine de Chateauvieux (below)



own label, the product of a collaboration with local winemaker Nicolas Bonnet. There's also a cellar, an *epicerie* perfect for gift shopping (chocolates, jams, terrines, spices, mustards) and a country-style, four-star boutique hotel with fine whiskies and a cigar bar.

La Brasserie des Halles de L'Île

1 Place de L'Île. (22) 311 0888. brasseriehallesdelile.ch

This restaurant, on an island in the middle of the Rhône, opened in 2009. Owned by Chinese-American jazz singer Helen Calle-Lin, it entertains a mixed crowd of businesspeople and locals. Open daily, the eclectic menu includes classic Swiss fondue, tapas and sushi. The musical program features jazz ensembles and electro house DJs such as Cyril de Swing. Weekend brunch (10.30am-2pm) has live jazz, tango, folk or classical music.

Bar & Tech

34 de Rue Caroline. (78) 821 3855. barandtech.com

Join a cocktail class with French-born, Sydney-raised barman Karl Berger (ex-Sydney's Loft). Taste tapas while meeting locals and getting tips on the best bars and restaurants. Classes last two hours and cost CHF85 (\$96).

SEE & DO MAMCO

10 Rue des Vieux-Grenadiers. (22) 320 6122. www.mamco.ch
Opened in 1994, the Musée d'art Moderne et Contemporain is the country's largest contemporary art museum. Housed in a 1950s factory, MAMCO exhibits diverse

works by Swiss art stars such as Sylvie Fleury and Thomas Huber.

Carouge

Take tram 13 from the station, or 12 from Rue de Confédération, across the river to 18th-century Carouge. The village is lined with boutiques, bistros and bars, most notable being the historic Café des Négociants (29 Rue de la Filature; www.negociants.ch) for fine wines, sumptuous Italian-style cuisine and a convivial ambience. Nightclub Chat Noir (13 Rue Vautier; www.chatnoir.ch) presents concerts from local and international acts. Don't miss the fruit and vegetable market on Saturday mornings.

After The Rain

4 Passage des Lions. (22) 819 0150. aftertherain.ch

The biggest day spa in Europe, with four levels of bamboo floors and treatment rooms. Signature treatments include a pearl and silk facial, a honey release body massage with orange juice, honey and grape seed oil followed by a water cascade and chocolate body wrap.

Chocolate

If you think being wrapped in it is a bit much, at least *taste* the intoxicatingly rich local chocolate at Chocolaterie Auer (4 Rue de Rive, www.chocolat-auer.ch), now in its fifth generation of family operation. Hotel d'Angleterre (17 Quai du Mont-Blanc; dangleterrehotel.com) serves its hot chocolate with your own pot of cream and sensational views. In the Old City, Chocolaterie Arn (12 Bourg-de-Four; www.swisschocolates.ch) also has a tea room.

✈ For airfares call Qantas on 13 13 13 or visit qantas.com
For holiday packages to Geneva call [Qantas Holidays on 13 14 15.](http://QantasHolidays.com)

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