Getting around Geneva

Europe’s giant of finance and politics, Geneva is an interesting and must-visit city. This city of mixed culture and peoples, worldwide organisations and beauty sits proudly on the western edge of Leman Lake, giving it a perfect balance of the man-made and the natural. Visiting this immaculate city is a thrill for those who love to shop, eat, sightsee and visit museums and galleries as Geneva has some of the best attractions and things to do in Switzerland, and its international community means it is a diverse and unique place to visit.

Getting there

There is one airport serving Geneva, which is located just to the north of the city and also serves France, as it is on the border between France and Switzerland. The airport, called Geneva International Airport (code GVA), has daily flights throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, and sees more than 10 million passengers per year.

There are a number of direct flights from the UK to Geneva Airport, including from London (City, Heathrow, Stansted, Luton and Gatwick), Birmingham, East Midlands, Bristol, Cardiff, Belfast, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Newcastle and Exeter.

Travelling to Geneva from within Switzerland or France is easy as Geneva Airport Railway Station has regular trains from other Swiss cities with Swiss Rail, and there are also regular trains to and from such French cities as Paris and Marseille.

Climate

Geneva’s climate is warmer than other areas of Switzerland due to its location next to a lake; winters usually drop one or two degrees below 0°C. Autumn is the wettest time of the year, while spring and summer are the driest, and temperatures in the summer can reach up to 25°C; not too hot but not cool either – great for sightseeing and visiting the lake.

Culture

The culture of Switzerland is a mixture of German and French cultures which have come together over many years to form the Swiss culture of today. There are also some Italian influences as the country borders with Italy.

Geneva, being so close to France, is mostly influenced by French culture, and you will find many French restaurants and foods here though there are also many international people living here due to the presence of international organisations, which have influenced the modern culture a lot.

Geneva has its own festivals and customs which it celebrates including Jeune Genevois, which started off as a religious fast in the 16th century but now is a public holiday which sees festivities and plum pie eaten by many throughout the city.

Eating out

Eating out in Geneva is a great way to experience the culture of this modern and diverse city. Many of the city’s restaurants serve French-style food, from the affordable bakeries and cafés which serve delicious
breakfasts and light lunches, to the more expensive evening restaurants which serve gourmet dishes; these are an absolute must as the food is of high quality, fresh and superbly cooked.

Away from the typically Swiss and French restaurants you will find plenty of international restaurants which cater to the large international community. You will find an eclectic mix of Italian, German, British and Spanish restaurants serving the favourite dishes of each country, as well as Greek and Turkish restaurants, and such Asian restaurants as Chinese, Thai and Indian.

If you just want to grab something on the go during a day of sightseeing or before you head to the airport, you can find plenty of fast food outlets, as well as bakeries and patisseries where you can grab a snack or a light lunch.

**Sightseeing**

Geneva is a great place for sightseeing, and all of the city's buildings look especially pretty with the backdrop of the lake or the nearby mountains. The lake is one of the most famous parts of the city along with the Palace of Nations, which is home to the European branch of the United Nations.

Some of the best sights to see are the majestic buildings of the international organisations, such as the Red Cross headquarters and the World Intellectual Property Organisation building. The international organisations' buildings are great examples of old and new architecture and are well worth seeing.

There are also such historical sights as St Pierre Cathedral, the Reformation Monument and Place Neuve, which is one of the city's most important squares filled with monuments of important people of the city.

**Attractions**

**Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art**

Geneva’s Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (often shortened to MAMCO) is located in Rue des Vieux-Grenadiers and is an ever-changing museum. It is housed inside an old warehouse and there are permanent exhibits from some of the most prominent artists from the 1960s onwards, as well as regular temporary exhibits to keep the museum up to date with the modern art world. It is one of the best art museums in Switzerland. The three-floored gallery costs 8 Swiss francs admission and children can visit for free.

**Palace of Nations**

The Palace of Nations (Palais des Nations) is the home to the European branch of the United Nations. It was built in the 1920s and ’30s and has the distinctive style of that time. It is possible to visit the Palace of Nations and take tours of the council rooms and other important rooms where decisions that affect the whole world are made. You will also learn more about the work that the United Nations does across the world and get to see special exhibits inside the palace. It is situated on the Avenue de la Paix and costs 10 Swiss francs to visit, or 5 Swiss francs for children.

**St Pierre’s Cathedral**

The 12th century St Pierre’s Cathedral is one of the most important churches of the city, both religiously and historically. The cathedral is a beautiful place to visit, and its spire (which is now green) towers above the buildings surrounding it. Enter the cathedral (which is free to enter) for a lovely hour or so admiring the pipe organs, the interior decoration and the stained glass windows. If you wish to explore further, you can climb to the top of the tower for city views, or visit the St Pierre archaeological site which is underneath the church and learn about past churches on the site and the amazing history of St Pierre Cathedral. A ticket to both the tower and the archaeological site costs 16 Swiss francs for adults, 8 Swiss francs for children, or if you just want to climb the tower, it costs 8 Swiss francs for adults, 4 Swiss francs for children.
Leman Lake

Leman Lake, also known as Lake Geneva, is the largest lake in Switzerland and the eastern part of the city lies on its shores. It is a great place to visit for a relaxing day away from the bustling city centre and you can enjoy spectacular Alpine views from its shores. The city area of the lake has some lovely restaurants and shops close to the lake shore for you to enjoy, and the iconic Jet d’Eau. If you travel farther to the east you can visit the mountains surrounding the lake for skiing, wineries and boating.

Excursions

Mont Blanc

Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in the Alps, located just one hour’s drive south of Geneva in France’s Haute-Savoie region. If you are up for an adventure then head to Mont Blanc for a wonderful day’s skiing during the winter, or a day of hiking and walking in the summer. The views from the mountain top are absolutely spectacular, and even just taking a drive through the Alps to Mont Blanc is a great way to spend a day, admiring the scenery and stopping off at Alpine lakes.

Lausanne

The city of Lausanne is on the banks of Leman Lake (Lake Geneva), around 35 miles to the northeast of Geneva. It is a beautiful city and much calmer than Geneva. The city’s cathedral is an icon of the city and the key sight to see when visiting. Lausanne is well known for its festivals, especially its annual dance festival, and for its lively, diverse and always changing nightlife, which is a main draw for many. Visiting Lausanne can easily be done with organised tours, on a train from Geneva or by driving yourself in a rental car.

Chateau de Chillon

Chateau de Chillon is a stunning medieval castle on the shores of Lake Geneva near the town of Montreux. This castle is the most famous historical site of Switzerland and is often very busy with visitors. This beautiful castle is enhanced by its location between the lake and mountains. Inside the castle you can visit the various rooms, each with their own style and their own story to tell. Learn the history of the country and the area in the castle and enjoy such artefacts as weaponry and paintings. Entrance to the museum costs 12 Swiss francs per adult and 6 Swiss francs for children.