

# Geneva, Switzerland: A Multi-Cultural Center

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Geneva is somewhere that many of you have probably heard of. It's so well known internationally that it's a common misconception that it's actually the capital of Switzerland. Before we go any further, I'll set the record straight on that one. The capital is actually Bern, although it's understandable that many people give the accolade to Geneva, as it is definitely better known.

One of the main reasons for that is the multi-cultural feel to the city. It's home to a multitude of international organizations, more than 200 in fact, with many national government organizations choosing to base themselves in the city. It's perhaps best known for international diplomacy, with the European headquarters of the United Nations (UN) based there.

The Palais des Nations was originally built in the 1930s and it started life as the headquarters of the League of Nations. That was dissolved a few years later and then the complex became the European base of the UN. It's something that is immediately obvious as you pass it, with its rows of flags of member countries and a striking sculpture outside of a chair with one leg missing. Sensibly enough called Broken Chair, it's a protest against land mines.

Just a little further up the road is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, which is inside the headquarters of the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#). But most of the major attractions in Geneva are to be found in the city itself. We were on a road trip around Switzerland when we visited, so we had the benefit of a car to get into the centre, although that did prove to be an issue at times, with traffic jams at peak times, as you get in every city around the world. Then, of course, there is the thorny issue of finding somewhere to park.

As far as parking went though, we lucked out every time we wanted to see one of Geneva's biggest attractions. The Jet d'Eau, or jet of water in English, is essentially a fountain, but it's unlike any you've ever seen before, with the water jetting nearly 500 feet into the air. You can approach in along a stone pier, but the closer you get, the more you feel the force of the water on you. We made it as close as we could, but even then, we were probably a good 20 feet from where the water issues forth at more than 100 miles an hour. It's a sight you can see from everywhere around the waterfront of Lake Geneva and, during the busy summer season, you can also enjoy it at night, with illuminations

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ensuring it can be seen until late into the evening.

Travel further round the waterfront, so that you're directly in front of the city centre and you'll come across another iconic symbol of Geneva. The Jardin Anglais (English Garden) is a perfect spot in the summer to look out over the lake and the Jet d'Eau in front of you, but throughout the year, the flowering clock is a sight that most visitors stop to see. The clock was originally put in place in 1955 in tribute to the Swiss tradition of watch making, has eight intersecting wheels, and is planted out with more than 6,000 flowers.

Head into Geneva city centre and you can instantly see that it's a thriving shopping centre, packed with both designer and high street names. It's a flourishing place during the week and is happily still home to many one-off niche shops, which make it a pleasure for souvenir shopping.

The heart of Geneva is its Old Town and we made the mistake of parking at the bottom of the hill that leads up to it, not a mistake we'll make again in a hurry. The centerpoint here is the Place du Bourg-de-Four, a central square that was used as a market place hundreds of years ago. Today it's home to chairs out across the square, waiting for people to sit and enjoy a light snack or a drink. The square is surrounded by some beautiful buildings, including amongst them the Palais du Justice (Justice Palace) and the Hotel de Ville, Geneva's original town hall.

Only a few minutes' walk away, is the Cathedral St. Pierre that was completed in the 13th century. It's an imposing building and, unlike many churches, it reflects a lot of different architectural styles. Of course there are the spires that you often find, but head around to the main entrance and your instant thought is that this could have come from Roman remains, with all of its columns.

From there, almost any direction you take will see you walking through more enchanting streets, packed with historic buildings. We happily wandered, taking in the sights and seeing the Maison Tavel on the way, which is home to a museum devoted to life in the city from the 14th to the 19th centuries. Nearby you'll find the birthplace of famous philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Almost every building you past no doubt has its own fascinating history and, as you walk along the narrow cobbled streets, you can't help but wonder what life was like a few hundred years ago and how much these streets have changed since then.

We quickly discovered that a road trip is a bit like a cruise, in that often

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you don't have adequate time to do your destinations justice. That was certainly true of Geneva. It's a truly multi-cultural place and I'd love to return one day to see more of everything it has to offer to visitors. And of course, there's always the lure of coming back to see the famous Jet d'Eau all illuminated on a summer's night. One day, I'm sure...

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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