



BURT WOLF

TRAVELS & TRADITIONS

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND



Geneva is the most westerly region in Switzerland. It is famous for its role in the Protestant Reformation, as a center for watchmaking, as a home for the United Nations, and for the many humanitarian organizations that are headquartered here. For thousands of years, it's been a major commercial center. But if there is one element that stands behind almost every aspect of Geneva's past as well as its present, it's the desire for its citizens to be free and independent, and to exercise their freedom on behalf of those less fortunate.



The first freedom seekers arrived in 500 B.C. They were a migrating tribe that came over from eastern Europe and settled on the high ground, which is now Geneva's Old City. It was just above the junction of the Rhône and Arve Rivers. Right in front were two islands that they used as the base for a bridge, which made it the only spot for hundreds of miles where traders could cross the river on foot and stay dry. A century before the birth of Christ, Roman soldiers saw the strategic value of this site, and turned it into one of their most prosperous colonies. Even then Geneva understood bridge financing.

By the middle of the 400s, Rome began to lose its power, and Geneva came under the control of the Dukes of Burgundy. The Dukes spent the next thousand years or so duking it out with assorted princes, until 1536, when Geneva declared itself an independent republic, under the protection of the Swiss states to the northeast.

The Swiss loved this. Geneva became independent but it also became a buffer between the Swiss and the Dukes. The Swiss not only offered the people of Geneva military



protection, they also offered them the opportunity to become Protestant and join the Reformation. The offer was made most dramatically by John Calvin, and it was an offer you couldn't refuse.

In 313, the Emperor Constantine proclaimed the Edict of Toleration, which allowed Christianity to spread throughout the Roman Empire. By 350 there was a place of worship and a baptistry on the hill of Geneva. Today

the Cathedral of Saint Peter stands on that hill. It's been around since the 1100s.

The Old City

The Cathedral of Saint Peter is at the center of Geneva's Old City. Its cobblestone streets wind down from the hill top and are lined with elegant shops.

The main street is called Grande Rue, and during the Sixties I lived here. This was my neighborhood. It hasn't changed very much, which makes good sense, it's been here for 1500 years. What did I think was going to change in 30?

Down the block is the Place du Bourg-de-Four, the oldest public square in Geneva. For the ancient Romans it was a center for the affairs of commerce. It's still a center of activity, but these days the affairs are mostly of the heart. A little bar down the street from my house is still here. The sweet yeasty smells of the bakery still drift into the road, and it's still impossible to find a parking place. The only thing that seems to have disappeared is my youth.



Lake Geneva



One of the things that has always attracted people to this area is the lake. Lake Geneva is the largest body of fresh water in Europe, 45 miles long, eight miles wide, and one of the cleanest. In 1986, Switzerland banned the use of phosphates in washing powder, which helped save many of the rare fish.

Since 1823, a local company has been sailing paddlewheel boats around Lake Geneva. They claim to have the largest fleet of classic old boats in western Europe, with the possible exception of Liechtenstein's Navy.

The boats dock on the Quai du Mont-Blanc, a street that runs along the lake from one side of the city to the other. It's one of the most fashionable streets for residential apartments and hotels.

Le Jet d'eau

In 1886, Geneva set up a hydroelectric station to supply power to the craftsmen working in the city, but every evening when the workers would turn off their machines, there was a dangerous overcharge. Engineers would rush to the pumps to turn them off, but they never knew exactly when that surge would end.

Eventually somebody had the bright idea to install a safety valve that released the excess water in the form of a jet, which eventually became the symbol of the city. Every minute two pumps suck eight thousand gallons of water out of the lake, mix it with air, and place it under tremendous pressure. The key design element is the nozzle, which sends up a column of water filled with millions of air bubbles, which give the jet its white color. Without the air bubbles, it would be practically invisible from the shore.



The Escalade Festival

The most important celebration in Geneva is the *Escalade*. Each year on December 11th, the city commemorates an event that took place in 1602. The Duke of Savoy, who controlled the land around Geneva, teamed up with Philip the Second, the Catholic King of Spain, and decided to crush the Protestant Reformation movement in Geneva.

The troops were in the middle of a sneak attack when a woman heard their approach. Stationing herself at her kitchen window, she poured a pot of hot soup down on the Savoyards. With their chances for a surprise attack seriously dampened, the Savoyards pulled back, giving the Guards of Geneva time to counter-attack and defeat the Duke's men, thereby saving Geneva's freedom to produce vegetable soup the way they want.

Swiss Chocolate

Not to be left out of the celebration, each year the chocolate makers of Geneva produce chocolate soup pots filled with vegetables made of marzipan. They also shape chocolate in other forms, each designed to mark an event. At the Du Rhône chocolate shop, two foot-high beehives—with bees—signal the beginning of spring. An antique car announces the opening of the annual Auto Show, and the perfect pocketbook celebrates a par-



THINGS TO DO

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3, RUE DE LA CONFÉDÉRATION
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CH-1211 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 311 56 14
FAX: +41 (0) 22 781 47 55

LA CATHÉDRALE ST-PIERRE

24, PLACE DU BOURG-DE-FOUR
CH-1204 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

MUSÉE DE L'HORLOGERIE

15, ROUTE DE MALAGNOU
CH-1208 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 418 64 70
FAX: +41 (0) 22 418 64 71

MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

(THE RED CROSS MUSEUM)
17, AVENUE DE LA PAIX
CH-1202 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 748 95 11
FAX: +41 (0) 22 748 95 28

WWW.MICR.ORG

THE UNITED NATIONS GENEVA

PALAIS DES NATIONS
CH-1211 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
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WWW.UNOG.CH

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LAKE GENEVA SHIPPING COMPANY (CGN)

17, AV. DE RHODANIE
CH-1000 LAUSANNE 6, SWITZERLAND
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WWW.CGN.CH

WHERE TO EAT

Geneva's long history as a convention and business city, coupled with its love of good food, has turned it into a town with more restaurants per person than any other city in Europe. Here are a few that turn out excellent examples of some of Geneva's most traditional dishes:

LE LYRIQUE

12, BOULEVARD DU THÉÂTRE
CH-1204 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 328 00 95

The Grande Theatre is Geneva's opera, and right across the street is Le Lyrique. On one side, it's a simple brasserie, and on the other a formal restaurant. It opened in 1981, but the decor is late nineteenth century.

CAFÉ DU SOLEIL

PLACE DU PETIT-SACONNEX
CH-1209 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 733 34 17

The Café du Soleil, which means the Cafe of the Sun, was the first restaurant to be built outside the city walls. It went into business in 1680, and for a while it was a cabaret. At the time Geneva was a very conservative city, which may explain why it opened up outside the city walls. Today it's a neighborhood brasserie that's famous for its cheese fondue.

BISTROT DU BOEUF ROUGE

17, RUE ALFRED-VINCENT
CH-1201 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
TEL: +41 (0) 22 732 75 37
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One place I kept coming back to was The Bistrot du Boeuf Rouge. The walls are covered with hats, beer mugs, old posters, cloudy glass, and undistinguished prints, and none of the plates match, which makes me feel very much at home. Thought of as a steakhouse, they also make great fried fish, including fillet of lake perch, which is a specialty of the town.

ticularly successful bit of shopping—and shopping is definitely a major part of what Geneva is all about.

Swiss Watches

For over a thousand years, Geneva has been an important commercial center, and for the past three hundred years its most famous commercial product has been the watch.

Calvin, as part of his desire to simplify life, limited the use of gold and precious stones in jewelry. Many of the jewelry makers turned to make watches and clocks. Throughout the city there are public displays of the craft.

In 1955, a flower clock was constructed in a small park at the edge of the lake. It's about five yards wide, has the largest second hand in the world, and over six thousand plants are used to produce its face.

About a block away in the center of a covered shopping street, is the clock of the Passage de Malbuisson. Built in the 20th century, it marks each hour with 16 bells, a parade of 13 chariots, and 42 bronze figures.

The biggest impetus to watch making in Geneva came in 1685, when King Louis the XIV of France decided to kill off all the French Protestants. French Protestants were known as Huguenots and thousands of them fled to Geneva. They were master craftsmen and many were great watchmakers. They made an immediate and valuable financial contribution to the city, and what was France's loss became Geneva's gain.



Calvin demanded an almost monk-like asceticism in the city, which made watchmaking a perfect occupation. The watchmaker's cabinet replaced the monk's cell and Geneva became one of the most productive and creative cities in the world. In no other country were so many watches made and sold. Today the watchmakers' craft is commemorated in Geneva's Clock and Watch Museum.

The watchmaking industry was a source of income, but it was also a source of conflict. It brought in lots of money, but it clearly violated the city's sumptuary laws, that said that no jewelry was to be worn, with the exception of a wedding ring and a watch, and the watch was to be worn in a way that was not ostentatious.

The International Red Cross

In the summer of 1859, Jean-Henri Dunant, a Geneva businessman, arrived in Italy during the Battle of Solferino, and saw 40 thousand men dying because, after the battle ended, there was no form of medical attention. When he got back to Geneva, he pleaded for the formation of a permanent relief society.

His idea led to the formation of the International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded, which eventually

WHERE TO STAY

While I was in Geneva, I stayed at the Beau-Rivage. It's where I lived when I first arrived here in 1968 and started looking for an apartment. I thought it would be nice to come back after all these years and see what it was like now that I'm old enough to appreciate it.

The Beau-Rivage is the oldest building in Geneva that is still privately owned and the only five-star hotel that has remained in the family of its original owners. It was built as a hotel in 1865 by Jean-Jacques Mayer and his wife Albertine. It passed to their son Charles, and then to their grandson, Fred. Today it's owned by their great-grandson, Jacques Mayer.

The Beau-Rivage has an authenticity and sense of belonging that is rarely found in a hotel. There are only 91 rooms and 6 suites, all of which were built around an internal atrium that runs up five floors to a glass roof. Just off the lobby is the Atrium Bar, which serves a light lunch at mid-day, English tea in the afternoon, and has live music during the evening. The hotel also has an excellent restaurant called the *Le Chat Botte*.



THE HOTEL BEAU-RIVAGE

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WWW.BEAU-RIVAGE.CH

became The International Red Cross. Headquartered in Geneva, where it was founded, it is the world's largest humanitarian organization with staff in 58 countries, and an annual budget of over 500 million dollars. A large portion of that budget comes from the Swiss government. The organization maintains a Museum in Geneva, which will give you an amazing insight into what The International Red Cross has done in the past, and what it is still doing. Engraved above the entrance hall of the building is their guiding principle: "Everyone is responsible to everyone for everything."



The tracing of the prisoners was the first real efficient work of The Red Cross during World War I, and the prisoners were registered in books which were sent to Geneva. Each prisoner was written on a file, and these files allowed the Committee to give information to the families of the prisoners. The Red Cross of course is independent, this is the only way it can work on both sides of a conflict.

The United Nations

When the First World War ended, President Woodrow Wilson proposed an international organization to maintain world peace. It was called The League of Nations. The organization was made up of 32 countries and 13 neutral states. The site for the League headquarters became a park at the edge of Geneva. The complex is known as the Palais des Nations, and in 1946 it became the European hub of the United Nations.

Today it is the busiest conference center in the world, over seven thousand meetings take place here each year.

It is home to 14 inter-governmental groups, and 108 non-governmental organizations, including the YMCA, and the Boy Scouts. There are year round guided tours of the buildings and the grounds. The largest and most famous room, the Assembly Hall, seats two thousand people. The Library occupies an entire wing of the building, and has a collection of original treaties and documents in its League of Nations Museum. Switzerland's history as an independent and neutral nation makes it an ideal location for this type of organization.

Geneva. A city that has spent the last 2500 years fighting for its freedom so it could try to lead the good life while trying to lead a good life.

TO LEARN MORE . . .

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TRAVELS & TRADITIONS
RECIPES FROM
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND



FONDUE CAFÉ DU SOLEIL
Makes 1 or more servings

7 ounces (200 grams) grated gruyère cheese per person
1 teaspoon of potato starch per person
½ cup Swiss white wine per person
2 tablespoons Cognac, or to taste
Garlic
A pinch of sodium bicarbonate

Rub the inside of the fondue pot with garlic.
Gently heat the wine and potato starch over low heat.
Add the cheese, a little at a time, stirring constantly.
When the cheese mixture thickens and starts to bubble,
stir in the 2 tablespoons Cognac.
Add a pinch of sodium bicarbonate just before serving.



FILLETS OF PERCH
Serves 2

4 perch fillets (about 1 pound)
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper
½ cup all-purpose flour
4 tablespoons butter

Marinate the fillets in the lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper to taste for 10 minutes.

In a large skillet over medium high heat, melt the butter. Meanwhile, drain the fillets and lightly dredge in the flour. Fry the fillets, skin side up first, until golden brown on both sides, about 2 minutes per side.

To serve, divide fillets between two dinner plates and pour pan juices over each.

TARTE TATIN
Makes 8 servings

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
10 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and set aside in water
1 egg
1/3 cup milk
1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Butter the bottom of an oven-proof 12-inch skillet with 1 tablespoon of the butter. Sprinkle the 2/3 cup sugar evenly onto the buttered skillet.

Dry 8 of the apples and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges. Arrange the wedges, overlapping them in a circular pattern, over the bottom of the skillet.

Chop the remaining apples into ¼-inch cubes and scatter them over the sliced apples. Sprinkle the remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar on top, and dot the remaining tablespoon of butter evenly over the apples.

In a small mixing bowl, beat the egg and whisk in the milk. Place the sheet of pastry over the top of the skillet. Pat down, seal, and trim the edges so that the pastry fits the skillet. Brush the pastry with the egg wash. Evenly pierce the pastry with a fork about 10 times.

Place the skillet in the oven and bake for 30 to 45 minutes, or until the pastry is golden brown.

Remove the skillet from the oven and put it on the stovetop over medium-high heat. Cook for 8 to 12 minutes, or until the bottom is caramelized. (You will be able to smell the sugar caramelizing on the apples; use your sense of smell to make sure that the sugar doesn't burn.)

Place a large plate over the top of the skillet. Quickly and carefully invert the two. Tap the bottom of the skillet to loosen the tart. Remove the skillet. Serve hot, at room temperature, or chilled.