

A scenic landscape and young friendly people are some of the advantages to studying in the Lake Geneva region of Switzerland. BETHAN NORRIS discovers a dynamic cosmopolitan destination.



# Lake Geneva

The Lake Geneva region in Switzerland is not well known for its language teaching industry, although Douglas Crawford, Director General at ASC International House Geneva – which launched its first French language teaching programme in May this year – thinks this could change in the future. “When thinking of learning French, people often forget about Geneva because it lies in Switzerland [but this is a] big mistake!” he says. “[Geneva is a] stunningly beautiful city, surrounded by lakes and snow covered mountains – overshadowed by Mont Blanc – and with a wonderful infrastructure such as an airport, buses, trams and trains.”

Geneva is Switzerland’s second most populous city after Zurich and is situated on the edge of the picturesque Lake Geneva close to the border with France. The region is predominantly French speaking, although Switzerland’s other national languages of German and Italian are also commonly heard; along with English, the language of the city’s large international business hub. It is this international atmosphere that gives the city a unique appeal for language students.

Andrea Onori from Supercomm Langues & Communication in Geneva, relates, “More than 60 per cent of the population [in Geneva] has foreign origins.

This should be enough to prove how this town is ready to welcome people from abroad.”

Geneva also hosts the headquarters of many international organisations, such as the Red Cross, which adds to the cosmopolitan experience, according to Francis Man, Marketing Director at the Geneva Business Institute. “Geneva being one of the most international cities in the world [makes it] the ideal place to be exposed to global culture and experience,” he says. “[It is the] home of European or world headquarters of international companies and top banks. Local people are friendly towards students from all over the world and a majority of the local people speak English.”

The prevalence of universities and colleges in the region also means that the area has a lot of young people and has a young friendly vibe.

Victor Dauman, School Director at Berlitz in Lausanne, on the opposite side of the lake to Geneva, says that the locals are “amazing people”. “We have two universities in the city so it is a very young crowd,” he observes. “They are very open to international people and we have a very strong nightlife [scene] here because of all the students. A popular venue for our students is the Café d’Hotel de Ville, which is a typical restaurant and has local bands playing in the cellar.”

When it comes to free-time activities, Lake Geneva, or Lac Léman to give it its local name, is a focal point for locals and visitors in the region. Dauman says that swimming in the lake and barbecues on its shores are popular activities with students. He adds, “The city is



**Chillon Castle**  
Château de Chillon is located on Lake Geneva, near Montreux. One of Europe’s mightiest medieval strongholds, parts of the castle date back to the 12th century. This is Switzerland’s most visited monument



# region

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on four levels – up to the mountains and down to the lake. You can rollerblade or swim at the lake or hang out in the cafés.” Crawford also points out a favourite pastime for his students in Geneva. “Lakeside walks in the shadow of the giant fountain are adored by all visitors,” he says. The Jet d’Eau water fountain is Geneva’s landmark - a 137-metre high jet water fountain that dominates the lakeside quays.

International House Geneva arranges trips to show students the beauty of the local landscape. An afternoon cruise on the lake provides views of the French Alps on one side and the Jura mountains on the other, while a cable car excursion up to the Aiguilles du Midi, a rocky peak 4,000-metres high which faces Mont Blanc, affords stunning views of the whole region.

François Zarro, Director of Ecole de Langue Française et d’Informatique in Geneva, says that “visits to the old town, the fountain, the museums or going to ski in the mountains nearby” are all popular activities with students, and adds, “There are also two great events in Geneva: the Fête de l’Escalade in December and the Fêtes de Genève in August.” The Fête de l’Escalade commemorates the Genovese resistance to an attack by a rival Duke in 1602. During the original attack, a Genovese lady poured a cauldron of boiling soup from above the city gate, killing one of the >>







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## Agent viewpoint

"Cosmolingua is situated in Bern and Zurich in Switzerland. In this area we speak German. We have been sending students to Lausanne and other French parts of Switzerland for many years. Some younger students prefer to stay within Switzerland because they feel safe and can get home easily. The students normally spend time with colleagues near the lake or in a coffee shop. Some students join the judo club as there is one of the best Swiss judo clubs in Lausanne. Our students enjoy staying in the French part of Switzerland. Although it is Switzer-

land, the students have opportunity to learn the Swiss French mentality."

**Mamiko Tagutschi, Cosmolingua, Switzerland**

"My students go to study in the Lake Geneva region because it is the nicest country in the whole of Europe and has a natural beauty like Nepal. Switzerland has different natural attractions than France or anywhere else in Europe. In their free time, students like to take part in sports or go clubbing in the evenings. Nepalese students also like the warm hospitality of the local people."

**Id Rajbhandari, Hariyali Travels & Tours, Nepal**

"Although Geneva is not a big city, there many interesting places. Students can go for a drive on a yacht in good weather, to nightclubs and cosy small restaurants. Our students adore the numerous parks of Geneva where they go after classes and enjoy themselves. People think that Switzerland is a small and silent country; the country of banks and chocolate. And it is. But we consider Switzerland as a perfect place for serious students who can go there for language courses during their vocation and have a good time."

**Alexandra Klyuchnikova, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia**

invaders. This is commemorated each year in the manufacture of a chocolate cauldron, filled with marzipan sweets and smashed by the eldest and youngest child in a household.

The Fêtes de Genève (Geneva Fair) takes place in various open-air locations and features wide-ranging entertainment from club nights to opera concerts, attracting two million visitors each year.

Further round the lake from Lausanne is the Lavaux region – famous for its vineyards – and the city of Montreux, deemed the heart of the Swiss Riviera. Daumann says that students enjoy visiting the wine region. "You can visit the cellars of the wine growers and drink the local wine and eat local food," he says. Montreux has long been famous with international writers and musicians, including Tchaikovski, Stravinski, Byron, Tolstoy, Dostoyevski and Nabokov, who all lived in the picturesque town at some point in their lives. A lakefront path from the town leads to the Château de Chillon, which was immortalised in Byron's poem, The Prisoner of Chillon.

Encouraging students to discover the history and culture of a region is something Onori believes is important. She says, "We have created an entire programme which provides a deep knowledge of Geneva's history, culture and landscape," and notes that their French for newcomers programme offers exactly what foreign people are looking for in terms of extra-curricular activity. "Mostly people like to practise sports – skiing, hiking and boat cruising on the lake – and to discover the gastronomic treasures of the [region]."

### Lavaux

Owing to its picturesque surroundings, the terraced wine-growing region of Lavaux has been named a World Heritage site. Many of the vineyards are perched on hillsides overlooking Lake Geneva



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