From one museum to the next, the walk immerses visitors in the splendour of a district that still evokes the grandeur of times past. Impressive mansions, century-old trees and evidence of the growth of International Geneva line the trail. In the background, you can hear the voices of those who built the monuments included on the tour and those of famous people, like the Empress Josephine or Casanova, who graced them with their presence.

This Cultural Trail offers a selection of places of interest in the Nations district and its surroundings.

Walking the trail should take 1h, not including museum visits. We suggest an itinerary, but you can join the trail at any stage.

You can access the audio files of this Cultural Trail on: geneve.ch/cultural-trails or by downloading the Sentiers Culturels app for free on AppStore or GooglePlay
The creation of the Avenue de la Paix in 1936 by reorganising the Ariana Estate’s access to the lake and which linked the two key Geneva institutions dedicated to peace: the League of Nations on the higher ground and the International Labour Organization by the lakeside in the Centre William Rappard.

Geneva, the birthplace of the Red Cross, is home to the only museum dedicated to humanitarian work. Located opposite the Palais des Nations, it was inaugurated in 1988 and was completely transformed for its reopening in 2013. In a break with the traditional concept of museology, the IRCM’s is an adventure that initiates visitors to contemporary humanitarian action. First experienced and then described, it allows visitors to absorb and remember certain powerful messages.

The new permanent exhibition is structured into three thematic spaces designed by internationally-renowned architects from different cultural horizons: “Defending Human Dignity” by Gringo Cardia from Brazil, “Reconstructing the Family” link by Diébédo Francis Kéré from Burkina Faso and “Refusing Fatality” by Shigeru Ban from Japan). Temporary exhibitions, which change three times a year, offer visitors an opportunity to reflect on humanitarian actions. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum is located below the seat of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a building constructed in 1873-1876 by Charles Boissonnas.

Formerly home to the Thudicum boarding school, it was the headquarters of the ILO from 1920 to 1926, prior to housing the Carlton Hotel until 1939 and subsequently the ICRC.
Continuing down Avenue de la Paix, you find yourself in the haven of greenery which surrounds the Ariana Museum. When the estate was the property of Gustave Revilliod (1817-1890) it extended right down to the lake. He bequeathed the land, together with the Ariana Museum, to the City of Geneva. In his will, he stipulated that the grounds should become a public park. With the construction of the headquarters of the League of Nations (now the Palais des Nations) and subsequent urban developments, this requirement had to be waived. The main entrance of the Ariana Museum was moved from the lake to the Jura side and a large area of land was ceded to the League of Nations.

Gustave Revilliod, a wealthy scholar, art lover and eminent collector, built the Ariana Museum between 1877 and 1887 to house his collections and to make them accessible to a wider public. He named his museum Ariana in memory of his mother, Ariane, née De la Rive. For its construction, he commissioned a young, inexperienced architect, Émile Grosbely, who struggled to complete the task. Jacques-Élysée Goss, already well-known, notably for Geneva’s Grand Théâtre (1875-1879) and the Hôtel National (1875-1876, now the Palais Wilson), took over, allowing the Ariana Museum to open in 1884.

The building, eclectic in style with its dominant neoclassical and neo-baroque features, is a free reinterpretation of Italian palatial architecture. Its elliptical main hall is also exceptional. The interior decoration follows a complex allegorical schema which aims to assimilate the construction to Parnassus and its founder, Apollo. The Ariana Museum was the second purpose-built museum in Geneva, after the Rath Museum, constructed in 1826. At the time – proof of its prestige – it was top of the list of places to visit in Geneva!

The Ariana Museum, the Swiss Museum of Ceramics and Glass, is the only one of its kind today in Switzerland and one of the most important in Europe in its field. With almost 28,000 objects, its collections document seven centuries of creation in ceramics and glass in Switzerland and throughout the world. Permanent displays and temporary exhibitions illustrate the history of the fire arts from medieval times to the present day. Objects are displayed in an aesthetic and didactic approach that underlines the technical, historical and artistic contexts of their creation. Particular emphasis is placed on the constant interaction that links the history of Western ceramics with the Near and Far East.

A surprising object awaits those who stroll through the grounds of the Ariana: a huge bell! Its history is the stuff of novels. Loaned by Japan for the World Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, it was subsequently stolen. Gustave Revilliod found it by chance at the Rüestchi foundries in the Canton of Aarau and installed it near the Ariana Museum. When the League of Nations was set up in 1919, some Japanese diplomats recognised it. Switzerland returned the bell in 1930, after negotiations between a Japanese diplomat of the League of Nations and the head priest of the bell’s original home, the Honsen-ji temple in Shinagawa outside Tokyo. Sixty years later, this act was rewarded: Junna Nakada, the son of the man who had negotiated the return of the original bell to Japan, offered a replica to Geneva. This copy of the Buddhist devotional bell has been hanging since 1991 in the gardens of the Ariana Museum, as a symbol of the bonds of friendship between Geneva and Shinagawa.
The Palais des Nations: in 1919, Geneva was chosen as the seat of the League of Nations (LN), the first intergovernmental organisation with a political agenda. The need to unite the different buildings occupied by the LN in Geneva, which had become the centre for world diplomacy, soon became evident. The international architectural competition launched in 1926, to which Le Corbusier notably contributed, was stormy, to say the least, with the jury being unable to decide between the 377 projects. In addition, the location of this “temple of world peace” originally planned for the Perle du Lac site, had to be moved to a larger area as a result of the donation by John D. Rockefeller for a modern library. The Ariana estate was selected, thus contravening a clause in the will of its former owner, Gustave Revilliod, which stipulated that the land should become a public park.

Following the restricted competition of 1928, the architects Carlo Broggi (Italy), Julien Flegenheimer (Switzerland), Camille Lefèvre and Henri-Paul Nénot (France) as well as Joseph Vago (Hungary), were commissioned to produce a joint project. The construction work, lasting from 1929 to 1937, the biggest project in Europe at the time, gave rise to an edifice as vast as the chateau of Versailles. Although the complex, made up of five buildings, is characterised by stark academic monumentalism on the outside, its interior decoration comprises remarkable works of art, reflecting at the same time the cultural diversity of many countries and the Art Deco movement. Two wings were added in 1952 and 1973. The League of Nations interrupted its activities with the onset of the Second World War. After its dissolution in 1946, the Palais des Nations became the European headquarters of the UN, then in 1966 the United Nations Office in Geneva. Today one of the largest diplomatic conference centres in the world with around 9,000 meetings and nearly 100,000 visitors per year, the Palais des Nations is an important symbol of multilateralism.

When the League of Nations was dissolved in 1946, the Palais des Nations and its other assets were transferred to the United Nations. In 1947, the League of Nations Museum was created to display most of its documents and artefacts.

In 2015, the museum was renamed as the UN Museum Geneva, which now presents the history of the League of Nations and the United Nations. It regularly holds exhibitions featuring documents, works of art, books and other artefacts from UN Geneva’s historical collections, as well as items borrowed from other institutions and private collections.

**United Nations Museum**

Guided tours  
Open Monday-Friday 9.00-17.00  
Contact: ask.unog.ch/museum  
Guided tours available for groups of at least 12 people (upon written request only).  
As the Museum is located in the Library building, which is closed in 2023-2024, please visit www.ungeneva.org/en/knowledge/museum for the most recent information.

Fresque de la Paix, “Ta panta rei / Everything flows”, Hans Erni, 2009 and 2012  
The two walls encircling the entrance to the Palais des Nations, and its majestic avenue of flags of the UN member countries, are decorated with the Fresque de la Paix (Fresco of Peace) by Swiss artist Hans Erni. This monumental work, commissioned from the artist by the City of Geneva, consists of three ceramic frescoes, each around 30 meters long and 2 meters high, composed of large stoneware tiles made by François Ruegg from the master’s original paintings. Peace, Love, Justice and Liberty have always been among Hans Erni’s favoured themes. In the fresco you can see familiar figures such as doves, as well as men and women walking.

Broken chair, Daniel Berset, 1997  
Broken Chair, a 12 metre-high monumental work by the sculptor Daniel Berset dominates the Place des Nations.  
It was created in 1997 at the request of Handicap International as an appeal to all nations to sign the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in Ottawa in December 1997. Ratified at the time by 40 countries, the Ottawa Treaty came into force on 1 March 1999, becoming an international legal instrument. Originally only meant to be exhibited for three months, Broken Chair was such a success that it is still in place today. Standing on three legs, the fourth being shattered halfway, it evokes the fate of anti-personnel mine victims and calls on States to commit themselves to banning cluster munitions.

A night-time illumination of the sculpture was added when Broken Chair was renovated in 2016.
The Conservatory and Botanical Gardens (CJBG) cover an area of 28 hectares and contain a collection of some 16,000 species from around the world. They offer a range of approaches to the plant world and are divided into different sections: the arboretum, the rockeries and collection of protected plants; the Ethno-botanical Gardens; the greenhouses; the horticultural plants; the Garden of Smell and Touch and an animal park for conservation. Don’t be surprised if you happen to meet a peacock on your way!

The CJBG as we know them today, are very different in appearance from when they were first created. Founded in 1817 by Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle in what is now the Parc des Bastions, the Botanical Gardens were transferred to the Console site (192 rue de Lausanne) in 1904, constructed by the Genevan architect Henri Juvet in 1902-1904 specifically to house the Delessert herbarium held at Bastions. The collections grew in 1911-12 with the gift of the Emile Burnat herbarium, and again in 1923-1924 with the posthumous donation of the De Candolle herbarium. With nearly 6 million plant samples, the CJBG herbarium now ranks as one of the five most important in the world. The gardens themselves were designed by Jules Allemand.

The Botanical Garden’s greenhouses initially remained at the Bastions site for financial reasons. In 1910-1911, the architect Henri Juvet built a winter garden along the former Chemin de Varembé, which was moved to its present location along the railway lines following the construction of the Palais des Nations and various associated urban developments. The elegant glass and iron structure is in line with constructions of this type in fashion in the second half of the 19th century. It originally comprised two adjacent but separate sections: the Winter Garden and a greenhouse, creating an asymmetrical effect. A symmetrical wing was added to the first in 1935. The greenhouses at Bastions were removed to make way for the Wall of the Reformers.

A symbolic location at the heart of the international organisations district, the Place des Nations was created in 2007. This large square, known as the Esplanade des Nations, is constructed from 4m wide sections of granite from UN member producing countries – the “international” land – alternating with slabs of grey concrete traditionally used for pavements in the City of Geneva – the “neutral” land. A fountain of 84 water jets representing all the international organisations present in the area that shoot up randomly from the ground animates the esplanade and can be turned off to provide a platform for public assemblies.
Les Floralies, Dolores Blasco, 1968
The sculptures that are waiting to be discovered amidst the luxuriant vegetation of the gardens belong for the most part to the Contemporary Art Fund of the City of Geneva. Decorating the access to the play area, we find Les Floralies, a piece by Dolores Blasco sculpted in 1968 and commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens of Geneva. Its style borders on abstraction, but the piece’s forms coil and uncoil with apparently natural fluidity, evoking a flower, a tulip perhaps, or possibly a rosebud.

L’effort humain, James Vibert, 1935
Standing among remarkable trees – cedars of Lebanon, Arizona blue cypresses and English oaks – is L’effort humain (Human Effort), a large-scale sculpture created by the Genevan artist James Vibert in 1935. This artist’s oeuvre is marked by the Symbolist movement and the influence of Rodin can be felt in his group compositions. The contours are smooth, the contrasts heightened and one can sense the crushing of the material bordering on distortion. Vibert’s work emphasises its material as a basis to attain the symbolic and exploits all its possibilities to produce his sculpture.

Christine Z II, 1982 (mold); 1987 (cast)
Collection Fonds d’art contemporain de la Ville de Genève, Botanical Garden
Behind the Villa Le Chêne, a young, slender, naked woman stands out against the background of a maple tree: Christine Z II. Swiss sculptor Heinz Schwartz was fascinated by adolescence. Geneva has two examples of his elongated figures, as distant from each other as they are attractive: Clémentine in the Place du Bourg-de-Four and Christine Z II in the Botanical Gardens. Although the artist took his inspiration from models, he reworks his sculptures in order to draw attention away from their personality and heighten an ideal beauty. Those strolling along the Quai Wilson cannot fail to notice – if they are not already familiar with it – The Child and the Horse, by the same sculptor.

One of the gates of the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens of Geneva (next to the animal park) leads to the Chemin de l’Impératrice. The Empress Josephine, after Napoleon divorced her, came to Geneva in 1810, staying at the famous Hôtel d’Angleterre which, from 1777 until it closed in 1842, hosted the poets and royalty of Europe. There she entertained Geneva’s high society, attended balls and a memorable Festival of the Lake in a boat drawn by two swans. In 1811, she acquired the Château de Prégny-La-Tour (currently at 10, chemin de l’Impératrice), refurbished it and lived there with her daughter Hortense, before returning to la Malmaison, where she died in 1814. The street only received its current name of “Empress’ Way” in 1976.

The Festival of the Lake attended by the Empress Josephine in 1810 is described in great detail by Georgette Ducrest, a member of the Empress’ intimate circle: “The inhabitants of the houses, on the enchanting banks of the lake, sent out their boats richly ornamented, and rowed by men dressed in white, with coloured girdles round their waists. Many of the boats were filled with musicians and, in the midst of this little flotilla, the great city barge advanced majestically, rowed by the National Guard whose band played appropriate airs. In the evening, a magnificent display of fireworks was given from the bridge, and thousands of rockets, fired from the boats, mingled with the shouts of the immense crowd which lined the shore. No description can convey an idea of the magnificence of the illuminated lake, or the aspect of Mount Blanc, rearing its head majestically amidst the glare of the fireworks.” Extract from Memoirs on the Empress Josephine, 1828

To reach the History of Science Museum, you can go back through the Botanical Gardens of Geneva – a constant source of splendour – and take the passage under the Rue de Lava- sanne and so enjoy the sensorial space Le Botanicum and admire the completely refurbished Console, which formerly housed the herbaria of the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens of Geneva (CJBG). It houses most of the CJBG’s cryptogamic collections, that is, principally mosses, mushrooms, lichens and algae, as well as providing space for researchers studying these precious scientific collections.

Having gone past the Console, you come to the back of the Centre William Rappard. This was the first building in Geneva specifically designed to house an international organization, after the creation of the League of Nations in 1919. Constructed between 1923 and 1926 from plans by the architect Georges Épitaux, winner of the national competition of 1923, this neoclassical, Florentine style “palace” has rather austere façades, constructed between 1923 and 1926 from plans by the architect Georges Épitaux, winner of the national competition of 1923, this neoclassical, Florentine style “palace” has rather austere façades, providing space for researchers studying these precious scientific collections.

Untitled, Paola Junqueira, 1993 – 1994
Below the Villa Lammermoor, a pinkish-orange building which today houses the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, rises the tall vertical sculpture by Paola Junqueira. Designed for the “Climats 93” exhibition and purchased by the City of Geneva in the same year, it is dedicated to children. The artist’s intention was, in her own words, for “each child to have a ‘tree’ in his or her life, in order to reinforce the dialogue between people and nature.”
Continuing along the Quai Wilson, the History of Science Museum suddenly appears around a bend in the path. Discovering this building from a low angle viewpoint certainly does most justice to this Italianate structure of harmonious proportions, with the remarkable play of light on its façade and front bays. Constructed around 1830 by the French architect Callet at the request of François Bartholoni, a Genevan banker living in Paris, this residence falls outside the mainstream architectural trends of the time in Geneva.

The beauty of the house and its exceptional setting caused Hans Wilsdorf (the founder of Rolex) to exclaim “This is really the Pearl of the Lake” – thus giving the name “La Perle du Lac” to the whole estate. Remaining in the Bartholoni family until 1924, it was host to illustrious guests throughout the 19th century. It then became the property of the Wilsdorf family before being sold to the League of Nations and then being acquired by the City of Geneva in 1930.

The History of Science Museum opened its doors in 1964, following an initiative launched by Raymond de Saussure and supported by the City Executive. Unique in Switzerland, it houses a collection of historic scientific instruments from the studies of Genevan scholars from the 17th to the 19th century. These objects help us put today’s science into perspective and gain a better understanding of the evolution of certain disciplines – astronomy, microscopy, gnomonics, electricity and meteorology.

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**Femme agenouillée (Kneeling woman),** Henri Pâquet, 1953 (plaster), 1954 (stone), 1985 (bronze)

This kneeling woman sculpture can be found in Geneva’s Mon Repos (My Rest) park. With its play on volumes, curves and counter-curves, it has a distinct feel of strength and focus. The woman’s gaze is turned towards the Orangerie and seems to invite you to come and discover her environment, to openly explore the relationship between the work of art and its context. Originally sculpted in a stone that had little resistance to harsh climatic conditions, the work went on to be cast in bronze.

**Figures enlacées,** Laurent-Dominique Fontana, 1985

The walk would not be complete without a peek at a curious water sculpture a stone’s throw away from the History of Science Museum. By the former Perle du Lac landing stage, *Figures enlacées* (Entwined Figures) by Laurent-Dominique Fontana, roughly sculpted from giallo dorato marble, lie in the water, still anchored to the block of stone from which they were extracted, united in a single mass. This artwork comes from the second artistic period of the sculptor, strongly marked by people and the fragility of the human condition, their solitude sometimes, or, as here, their love. Fontana likes to select surprising sites for his statues, transforming the way passers-by view an ordinary place, integrating the environment into the artwork. Moreover, the naked, entwined figures aroused a certain amount of controversy when first installed in 1985.
One last stop: the Villa Mon Repos (Plantamour). As well as being magnificently located on the shores of the lake and an interesting architectural example, due to the subtle play of projections and recesses of its facade, it also has a fascinating history. Constructed after 1856 by Philippe Plantamour on a piece of land purchased from Henri Hentsch, the Villa Mon-Repos was bequeathed to the City of Geneva in 1898. Throughout the 20th century, it has housed a succession of occupants: the Ethnographic Museum, the Académie Diplomatique Internationale, Geneva’s first television station and then the French-speaking Swiss television company, the European Broadcasting Union and, since 1974, the Henry Dunant Institute. However, before all of this, the villa hosted many prestigious guests, including the infamous Casanova in 1762. According to his writings, the great seducer spent a licentious evening there in the company of two naughty young ladies from Geneva.

For the return journey, a stroll through the Sequoia Grove in Parc Barton shouldn’t be missed. In the mid-19th century, the first Giant Sequoia seeds were arriving in Europe from the United States, causing quite a stir among scientists and a social phenomenon: everyone was planting them in their garden. In 1858, Sir Robert Peel purchased the estate that is now Parc Barton in which he reproduced a Californian redwood forest on a miniature scale. Although the trees, given the local climate and the soil’s relative lack of depth, cannot grow to the size they reach in the Pacific forest, they are still very much an attraction in Geneva and rank among the city’s most venerable trees.

Les Quatre Races, Paul Landowski, 1937
The trail ends in front of Les Quatre Races (The Four Races), the granite monument by Paul Landowski erected in 1937. Standing at the centre of the Place Albert-Thomas, it represents workers from different trades and continents and shows excerpts from speeches by Albert Thomas that summarize his thinking: “Le travail doit être placé au-dessus de toutes les luttes de concurrence, il n’est pas une marchandise.” (Labour must transcend all competitive struggles, it is not a commodity).
Albert Thomas (1878-1932) was a trade union activist, a Socialist Deputy close to Jaurès, Minister of Armament in 1916 and then the first Director of the International Labour Organization, at the time housed in the Centre William Rappard, from 1920 until his death. He can be seen on one of the bas-reliefs on the monument. It is to this French artist of Polish origin, Paul Landowski, that we owe the Wall of the Reformers (1909-1917, with Henri Bouchard) in the Parc des Bastions, as well as the famous statue of Christ the Redeemer (1931) on the Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro.
Practical Information

Finding the Trail

Public Transport
Regional train stop Sécheron; mouette shuttle boat M4 landing stage De-Châteaubriand; bus 5, 8, 11, 22, F, V and tram 15 stop Nations; bus 1, 11, 22, 25 stop Jardin botanique; bus 8, 20, 22, F stop Appia
Information correct as at October 2022
For further information: www.tpg.ch

Bicycle Parking
Parc de La Perle du Lac in front of the History of science Museum; Avenue de la Paix: near Place Albert Thomas by the main entrance to the Botanical Gardens, before the railway bridge; near the Ariana Museum opposite Avenue Appia, by the Hotel School.
Cycling is not permitted in the parks.
Cyclists are requested to leave their bicycles outside or to dismount.

Car Parks
Place des Nations; P+R Sécheron

People with Reduced Mobility
Full details of access to buildings on the trail can be found on the website: www.accessibilite.ch

On Site

Wi-Fi

Toilets
Botanical Gardens; Villa Mon Repos and in the museums.

Places to Eat (Selection)
La Perle du Lac Restaurant; Le Pyramus Restaurant at the Botanical Gardens; Ariana Museum Cafeteria; Red-Cross and Red-Crescent Museum Cafeteria.

Play Areas
Parc de la Perle du Lac; Botanical Gardens