Geneva Cultural Trails
Museum to Museum

Conservatory and Botanical Gardens
Les Floralies, Dolores Blasco, 1968
Collection of the Contemporary Art
Fund of the City of Geneva
Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

Christine Z II, 1982 (moule); 1987 (fonte)
Collection of the Contemporary Art
Fund of the City of Geneva
Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

Bell Honsen-ji
Park of the Ariana Museum

Fresque de la Paix,
Hans Erni, 2009 et 2012
Place des Nations

L’effort humain, James Vibert, 1935
William Rappard Park

Sans titre, Paola Junqueira, 1993 - 1994
Collection of the Contemporary Art
Fund of the City of Geneva
Barton Park

Figures enlacées,
Laurent-Dominique Fontana, 1985
Collection of the Contemporary Art
Fund of the City of Geneva
Perle-du-Lac Park

Les Quatre Races, Paul Landowski, 1937
Place Albert-Thomas

Website and audio-guided tour
The trail in Geneva

Museums
City of Geneva Museum

Bicycle parking
Car park

Proposed itinerary
Dedicated cycle paths
Mixed-use cycle paths
Audio-guided tour

Walking time excluding museum visits

WiFi
WC
Restaurant
Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

The Conservatory and Botanical Gardens (CJB) 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: arboretum, rockeries and collection of protected plants, medicinal and utilitarian plants, greenhouses, horticultural plants, the Garden of Smell and Touch, the Botanicum and an animal park devoted to safeguarding. Don’t be surprised if you happen to meet a peacock on your way!

The CJB 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, then again in 1923-1924 with the posthumous donation of the de Candolle herbarium. With nearly 6 million plant samples, the CJB 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. Then, in 1910-1911, the architect Henri Juvet built a Winter Garden along the former Chemin de Varembé, which was moved to its present location close to the railway lines following the construction of the Palais des Nations and the various associated urban redevelopments that took place. 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.
On leaving the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens by the gate next to the animal park, you come to the Chemin de l’Impératrice, that you then follow up to the estate of the Chateau de Penthès. The Empress Josephine, repudiated by Napoleon, came to Geneva in 1810, staying at the famous Hotel d’Angleterre which, from 1777 until its closure in 1842, was host to the great writers and crowned heads of Europe. There, she received Geneva high society, attended balls and a memorable Festival of the Lake in a boat drawn by two swans. In 1811, she acquired the Chateau of Pregny-la-Tour, located at 10 Chemin de l’Impératrice, refurbished it and lived there with her daughter, Hortense, before returning to Malmaison, where she died in 1814. It was only in 1976 that this street was named after her.

The Festival of the Lake attended by the Empress Josephine in 1810 is described in great detail by Georgette Ducrest, a member of the intimate circle of the Empress: “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 by musicians and, in the midst of this little flotilla, the grand city barge advanced majestically, rowed by the national guards, the band playing appropriate airs. In the evening, a magnificent display of fireworks was exhibited on 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 his head majestically amidst the glare of the fireworks.” Extract from Memoirs of the Empress Josephine, 1828

The Museum of Swiss People in the World occupies the Chateau of Penthès, ideally situated in the Estate of Penthès which extends up to the top of the Chemin de l’Impératrice, offering a superb view of the lake and the Alps and whose tree-filled parkland provides a haven of peace away from any traffic.

The history of the Estate of Penthès dates back to the 14th century. Over the decades, a succession of noble families lived in the chateau. At the time, the building was a quadrilateral 19 m long and 9 m wide, with circular towers at the four corners. The estate was given its present name in 1650, when it was the fiefdom of the Seigneur de Penthaz. In 1870, Maurice Sarasin rebuilt the part of the chateau facing the lake. In 1950, the Sarasin family yielded the domain to the son of the founder of the Hispano-Suiza company, Louis Birkigt, who carried out major restoration work, giving the chateau the form it has today. The Republic and Canton of Geneva purchased the Estate of Penthès in 1972, handing it over for the use of the Foundation for the History of Swiss People in the World in 1978, enabling the latter to set up its Research and Documentation Centre there as well as its museum, which was in its turn housed in the chateau.

The museum presents an alternative view of the history of Swiss people, through the destinies of men and women who, temporarily or permanently, left their homeland to leave their mark on the world. Through a collection of objects, portraits, uniforms, weapons, engravings, souvenirs, paintings and writings, illustrious figures emerge: Louis Chevrolet, the Piccard family and Maurice Koechlin, the engineer for the Eiffel Tower. Each room tells a different story: that of the history of Switzerland after 1291 and William Tell, right up to the present-day as well as that of the Swiss people who, over the course of time, have developed the vast global network that has earned the country its reputation. Exhibitions, lectures, films and inaugurations all enhance the displays.
From the Estate of Penthes, having passed the Route de Pregny, join the Avenue de la Paix, whose creation in 1936 resulted from the reorganisation of former roads between the lake and the Ariana museum in order to link the two key institutions dedicated to peace: the League of Nations on the higher ground and the ILO (International Labour Organization) by the lakeside in the Centre William Rappard. The constitution of the ILO begins in fact with the affirmation that "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice". Three museums are located within a few hundred metres of each other.

Geneva, the birthplace of the Red Cross, is home to the only museum dedicated to the work of Henry Dunant. Located opposite the Palais des Nations, it was inaugurated in 1988 and has been completely transformed for its reopening in 2013. Breaking with traditional museography, the new displays is an initiatory adventure into contemporary humanitarian action. First experienced and then described, its aim is to enable 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. The common spaces are the work of Atelier Oï from La Neuveville, Switzerland. In the On the Spot area, a large interactive globe will allow people to discover the latest news from the field.

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.

**International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum**

17 Avenue de la Paix

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**mail** musee@redcrossmuseum.ch  
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Open Tuesday – Sunday; 1 April to 31 October 10.00 – 18.00, 1 November to 31 March 10.00 – 17.00

**Entrance fee:** adults 15 CHF; young people (12-22 years) and over 65s (on presentation of an identity document), unemployed (on presentation of proof), people with disabilities, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent 7 CHF; under 12s free; families 25% reduction on entrance fees for 1 – 2 adults accompanied by 4 children maximum; first Saturday of the month "Pay-what-you-wish" voluntary donation.

**Guided tours on request**
Continuing down the 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 redevelopments, 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 provide access to them for 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 Grobéty, 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, enabling 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 main elliptical hall is also exceptional. The interior decoration follows a complex allegorical schema which aims to assimilate the construction to Parnassus and to 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 over 25,000 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 bell! Its history is the stuff of novels. Loaned by the Japanese for the World Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, it was subsequently stolen. Gustave Revilliod, a Swiss patron of the arts, found it by chance at the Rüetschi foundries in the Canton of Aarau and installed it near to the Ariana Museum. When the League of Nations was set up in 1919, some diplomats recognised it: cast in 1657, it had disappeared towards the end of 1867, after the fire at the Honsen-ji temple in Shinagawa, in the outskirts of Tokyo. Switzerland returned the bell in 1930, but 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 is the one that has been hanging since 1991 in the gardens of the Ariana Museum.
Palais des Nations
Entrance at the Pregny gate, opposite the ICRC

The League of Nations Museum

At a time when the importance of the international and transnational history of the inter-war period is now well established, the League of Nations Museum exhibits and questions its unique and original archives, inscribed on the Memory of the World Register of UNESCO. The comprehensive display “From the League of Nations to the United Nations” takes visitors through key moments in the history of the first major inter-governmental political organization from 1919 to 1946, as well as evoking the people who brought it into being. It presents the hopes and difficulties of a pioneering organization, offering a deeper understanding that is vital to face present-day challenges. Films, a chronological history and a temporary exhibition complete the visit.

The trail, heading down the Avenue de la Paix, brings you to a number of interesting sights, the highlight of which is the Palais des Nations. Some background information for you... 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.

Fresque de la Paix, 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 Hans Erni. This monumental work, commissioned from the artist by the City of Geneva, consists of three ceramic frescoes, each around 30 m long and 2 m 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, the wind, curves, water and the sky.

A symbolic location at the heart of the international organisation district, the Place des Nations was created in 2007. This large square, known as the Esplanade des Nations, is constructed from 4 m 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 erratically from the ground animates the esplanade and can be turned off to provide a platform for public assemblies.

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. Then ratified 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 there 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 guided thematic tour on the “History of the Palais des Nations, including the Museum (duration: 1 1/2 hours) is offered by the Visitor’s Service of the United Nations Office at Geneva: reservations: 022 917 48 96 or at: visit-gva@unog.ch

Fees for guided tours:

- adults 12 CHF;
- senior citizens, students, people with reduced mobility 10 CHF;
- school children 7 CHF (one accompanying person free per group of 20 children);
- Children under 6 admission free;
- Groups (minimum 20 adults) 10 CHF;
- Private visit (up to 14 people) 180 CHF
To reach the History of Science Museum, you can go back through the Botanical Gardens – a constant source of splendour – and take the passage under the Rue de Lausanne and so enjoy the sensorial space Le Botanicum and admire the ivy-covered Console, which formerly housed the herbaria of the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens (CJB). Thanks to a generous donation by Roger and François Varenne from Geneva, this building is being completely renovated and upgraded to comply with current safety standards. It will then house most of the CJB’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, with lines of windows set close together, between which are found decorative medallions illustrating various trades, sculpted by Léon Perrin. Proving rapidly too small, several wings were added to the edifice. Over the years, donations of art works and decorative elements from member countries of the League of Nations, associations and institutions have come to enrich the Centre, thus concretizing the spirit of international cooperation. The building has been host to the International Labour Organization, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the library of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the predecessor of the World Trade Organization. Since 1995, it has been the seat of the World Trade Organization.

**History of Science Museum**

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 Wildorf (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 Administrative Council. 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 enable us to put today’s science into perspective and to gain a better understanding of the evolution of certain disciplines – astronomy, microscopy, gnomonics, electricity and meteorology.
Figures enlacées, Laurent-Dominique Fontana, 1985
This walk would not be complete without a look down at the sculpture by Laurent-Dominique Fontana, a stone’s throw away from the History of Science Museum. By the former Perle du Lac landing stage, the Figures enlacés (Entwined Figures) by Laurent-Dominique Fontana, sculpted primitively 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 television, the French-speaking Swiss television company, the European Broadcasting Union and then, since 1974, the Henry Dunant Institute. However, before all of this, the villa was host to prestigious guests, including the famous Casanova in 1762. According to his writings, the great seducer spent a licentious evening there in the company of two brazen women from Geneva.

For the return journey, a stroll through the wood of Sequoias in the Parc Barton is not to be missed. In the mid-19th century, the giant Sequoia trees from California were very fashionable and were to be found in gardens everywhere. In 1858, Sir Robert Peel purchased what is now the Parc Barton, constructed a villa there (Villa Lammermoor) and had the Sequoia trees planted. These form a veritable wood through which winds a narrow path, plunging the walker into a very special atmosphere. Sir Peel’s daughter, Alexandra Barton Peel, bequeathed the property to the Swiss Confederation in 1935, on condition that it should never be divided up and that the trees should prosper and not be cut down.

Les Quatre Races, Paul Landowski, 1937
Before regaining your starting point, the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, take a look at 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 bears extracts from speeches by Albert Thomas summarizing 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.

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