

UNFAMILIAR TO MANY AMERICANS, YOU CAN DISCOVER A SWISS PLAYGROUND FOR ALL SEASONS

SWISS SENSATIONS

The Swiss are best-known for their watches, banks and political neutrality. But 170 miles from the international financial hub of Zurich is a different Switzerland, unfamiliar to many Americans.

The Lake Geneva region, along the French border in the southwest corner of the country, boasts jaw-dropping scenery, rich culture and recreation.

Mother Nature smiles here during all four seasons. Whether you dream of hiking to alpine heights, skiing on a glacier in October or exploring cobblestone lakeside villages, the Lake Geneva region will captivate you.

While the city of Geneva is a worthwhile destination in itself, exploring the less-densely-populated areas around the rest of the 224-square-mile lake will help you fully appreciate the flavor of this region.

From Geneva, traveling along the north shore will bring you past sloping vineyards to Lausanne, the region's capital. History and natural beauty combine to make this city worth a visit.

A 12th-century cathedral rises majestically above town, and waterfront parks are popular gathering spots. Join locals in a picnic lunch of crusty bread and cheese from a nearby market, or pop into one of many cafes or bars for a meal.

For shoppers, the boutique-lined streets make the town center feel like one big gallery. Parking is tricky; be prepared to walk a bit. When you're ready to sit a spell, hop aboard one of the many lake cruises and enjoy the view of the city from the sparkling water.

Lausanne is home to the International Olympic

Committee. Sports fans will want to explore the Olympic Museum, one of more than 50 museums in this culture-rich region.

The Olympic Museum's permanent collection includes movies, interactive displays and athletes' memorabilia, including Jesse Owens' track shoes and gymnast Kerri Strug's leotard.

Heading east from Lausanne, the winding mountain roads open into breathtaking vistas around each curve.

While the views are spectacular, driving here isn't for the faint of heart (or those in a hurry). Hairpin turns, steep climbs and roaming livestock offer more on-road excitement than some drivers enjoy, and most rental cars have standard transmissions.

The best alternative? Railway lines criss-cross the region with panoramic trains, giving all aboard a chance to see the splendor. Tickets are

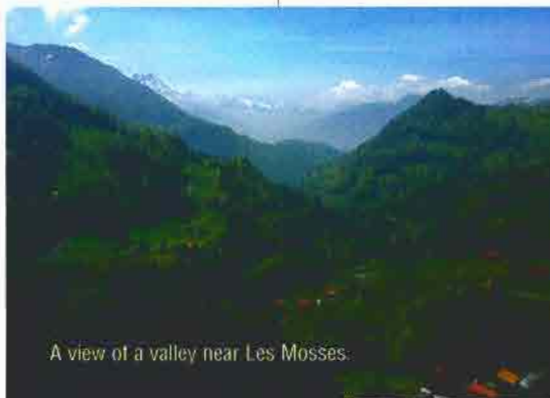
available from the TI, local tourist information centers found in almost every town.

East of Lausanne, the glittering town of Montreux attracts a jet-set crowd. Long a playground for the world's wealthiest people, its shores are lined with dramatic villas and opulent hotels offering knockout views of the lake and surrounding peaks.

Each July, the world-famous Montreux Jazz Festival draws music-lovers here from every corner of the globe.

During warm months, Montreux's open-air waterfront market offers a wonderful opportunity to wander. Vendors display everything from high-end leather goods to hand-made soaps. Music fans may want to pose with a

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A view of a valley near Les Mosses.

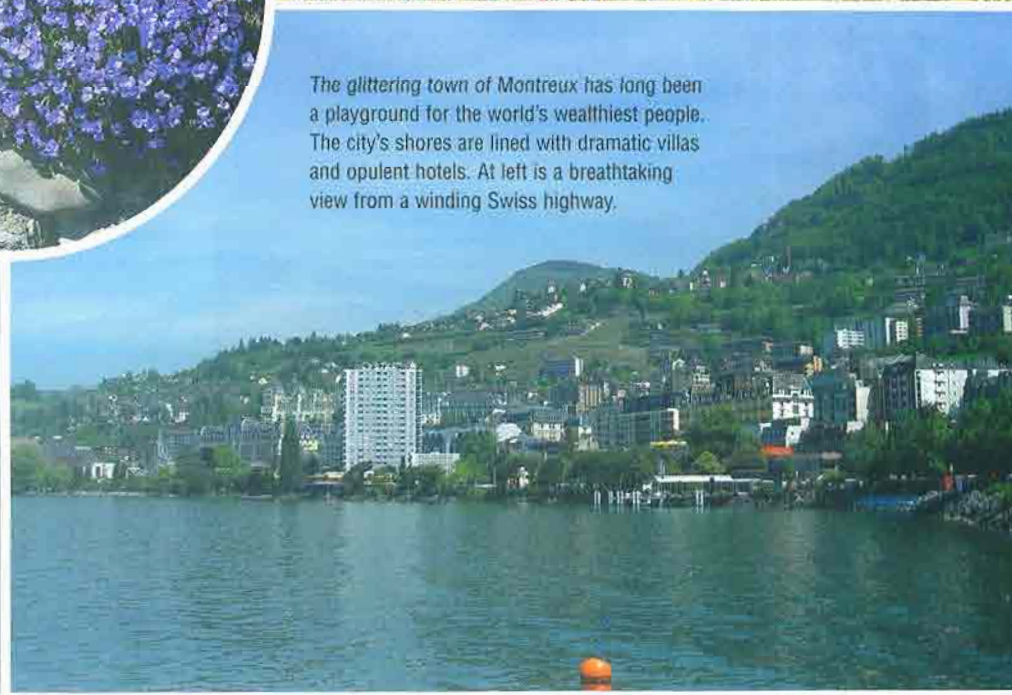
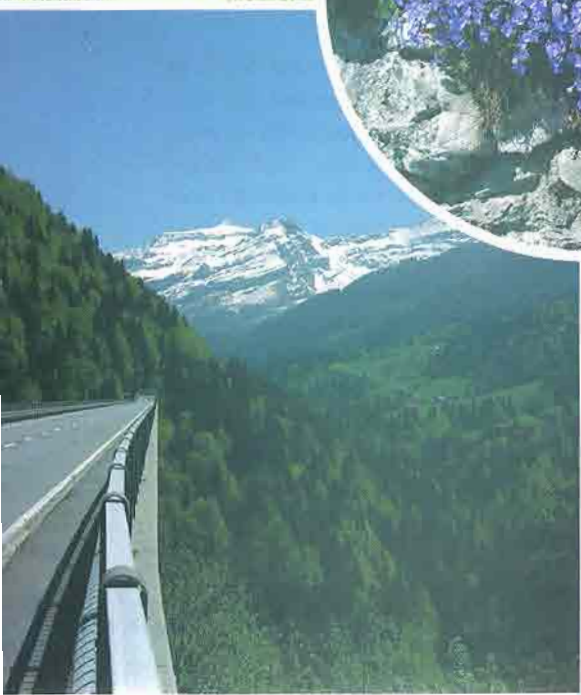
STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KRISTIN STANKEWICZ



The winter playground of Leysin, which includes two sports complexes, and the region's only revolving restaurant, Kuklos. Inset photo: Colorful wildflowers can be seen all across the area.



The glittering town of Montreux has long been a playground for the world's wealthiest people. The city's shores are lined with dramatic villas and opulent hotels. At left is a breathtaking view from a winding Swiss highway.



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statue of rock singer Freddie Mercury, who adopted celebrity-friendly Montreux as his home.

Southeast of Montreux is the winter playground of Leysin. Considered by many to be the snowboarding capital of Switzerland, Leysin also has two sports complexes with skating, curling, ice-karting, tennis, rock climbing and more. A nearby tobogganing park offers hair-on-fire tube rides down banked packed-snow runs.

Leysin is home to the only revolving restaurant in the region, Kuklos. Its 90-minute rotation won't exactly make you dizzy, but you'll get a 360-degree look at the indescribable views from the summit of La Berneuse (6,719 feet).

Further east from Leysin is the year-round alpine mecca known as Glacier 3000. Gondolas carry visitors up to the glacier, where a multitude of recreational opportunities await you at nearly 10,000 feet elevation.

On the glacier, skiers and snowboarders can challenge gravity starting in October. The region has 200 lifts accessing over 250 miles of ski slopes, catering to all abilities.

Well-marked hiking, snowshoe and cross-country ski trails allow you to explore the glacier at your own pace in any season. Less experienced hikers should look for the "via ferrata," easy hiking routes appropriate for all skill levels.

When it's time to refuel your body, the futuristic Restaurant Glacier 3000 offers knockout views and gourmet food.

The nearby towns of Les Mosses and Les Diableret are

A RICH POOL OF HISTORY

- ▼ **Where:** Lake Geneva region, southwest corner Switzerland.
- ▼ **Getting there:** Geneva International Airport is a short flight from major cities like Paris, Frankfurt and Milan; major railways and roads also crisscross the region.
- ▼ **Language:** French, although some hospitality workers speak English.
- ▼ **Currency:** Swiss franc (1 CHF = approx. \$0.78 U.S.)
- ▼ **More information (in English):** www.myswitzerland.com and www.lake-geneva-region.ch/
- ▼ **Money tip:** Not all credit cards work at all European locations.

peaceful Swiss villages with just enough modern conveniences to please travelers.

In summer, flowers drip from the balconies of wide-eaved chalets. Nearby rivers and streams beg you to grab a fishing pole, and hiking trails for all skill levels wind their way out of town. In winter, Les Mosses boasts 26 miles of cross-country ski trails and a 930-yard floodlit ski track.

Les Diablerets offers unspoiled nature at the very foot of the glacier. The most popular summer activities are hiking and biking (the region has over 1,500 miles of bike paths), while skiing and sledding reign in winter.

Near the southeast end of the lake lies the vineyard town of Aigle, where a castle houses the Wine, Viticulture and Wine Labels Museum. For family fun, the nearby Mike Horn park offers "treetop gymnastics," a human maze and water games.

Opportunities to enhance your well-being in the Lake Geneva region are plentiful, and luxurious. The internationally-famous Yverdon-les-Bains and Lavey-les-Bains thermal spas will calm frazzled urban nerves.

If you're a fondue fan, local versions abound. The namesake town of Gruyere cheese, a popular fondue ingredient, is just a few miles northeast.

Other tiny towns worthy of exploration dot the Lake Geneva region, if you want to grab a map and get "lost." Local open-air markets give you the opportunity to enjoy fresh produce, wine, meats, cheeses and honey. Remember to make their delicious taste a sensory souvenir, since you can't take most agricultural products back to the U.S. with you.

Whether you choose action or relaxation during your Lake Geneva visit, the carefree pace and peaceful mood here is contagious. Months after you return to urban reality, you can call on your memories (and photographs) to restore the sense of harmony you felt here.

—KRISTIN STANKEWICZ IS AN APPLETON-BASED FREELANCE WRITER

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