

Geneva in Gear

With great workouts and natural wonders, the Swiss can't miss



HIT ANY GYM IN GENEVA AND ODDS are the person doing curls next to you is a foreigner just like you. Sure, the Swiss have a passion for health, but they are an outdoorsy lot, and for good reason. You'd be hard pressed to name an outdoor sport that Geneva doesn't offer or to find a better backdrop for it. Hiking and biking along rolling vineyards, farmland, forests; and sailing, canoeing, and swimming in one squeaky-clean lake; rafting on two rivers; and skiing or paragliding down majestic mountain peaks. The fitness buffet is almost too much to stomach.

Judith Mandelbaum-Schmid, a fitness enthusiast and an officer at the World Health Organization, based in Geneva, suggests hashing. The exercise tradition harks back to the British colonials who, inspired by fox and rabbit hunts,

substituted the animals with runners. The hare starts first and sets the trail for the pack, or hounds. "It's like a treasure hunt," says Mandelbaum-Schmid. "You have to follow a trail made with flour."

Hashing offers an insider's look at Geneva's best trails and paths. There are about 1,700 groups around the world. A local chapter of the Hash House Harriers (genevahhh.com) organizes two outings per week that begin at established meeting points.

Outings cost about \$4 and accommodate all fitness levels, and they're riotous fun, ending at a restaurant or a runner's house where hounds and hares replenish themselves with laughter, food, and beer. "It's a great way to meet people — expats and locals from all walks of life, all cultural backgrounds, and all ages," says

Alexandra Lang, two-year hashing veteran and part of the hashers' welcoming committee. "The most beautiful time is in the summer when the hash runs all over the French and Swiss countryside."

If spring is still in the air, Geneva's residents head for the lake, where the water is so clean you can drink it. "They are very proud that you can eat the fish out of the lake," says Lauren Ptito, a Geneva resident. In fact, Ptito points out, the fish are a specialty, *filets de perche du Lemman*.

But the lake can be cold in the spring, so many people satiate their swimming needs elsewhere. "There are quite a few pools around," says Ptito. "They are so popular because the Genevois are so focused on the lake, and they are keen to take advantage of [the pools'] accessibility and cleanliness."

As a result, Geneva's pools rival the lake for their natural beauty and purity. At the city's most popular beach at Port-Noir (geneve-plage.ch), the scenic pool at Genève-Plage offers a multitude of options. The Jura Mountains are a stunning backdrop to the immaculate green lawns and flowerbeds. The facility has a heated Olympic-size pool, a waterslide, basketball and volleyball courts, a giant chessboard, and a landing stage for water skiing and windsurfing.

For a drier time, you can walk along the lake or rent a paddle boat or canoe to view the Jet d' Eau, a fountain that shoots a 459-foot plume into the air. For rough-water action, there's Rafting Geneve (rafting.ch), across the Acacias Bridge from downtown. The company runs daily canoeing, rafting, and hydrospeed trips, as well as paragliding off Mount Salève.

"Hiking up the Salève, the chain of hills that skirts Geneva in France, is an absolute must," says Mandelbaum-Schmid. Riding a cable car is another way to sample the mountain's incredible views of Geneva, the French Alps, and the lake. Take a bus or ask your hotel for assistance. Geneva, the last canton to join the Swiss Confederation, is bordered on every side by France,

so you'll likely get the chance to see more than just Switzerland from such heights.

"What's special about Geneva is that it's flat and yet ringed by mountains," Mandelbaum-Schmid says. "And the thing about Switzerland is you can literally walk across the country." So not all excursions have to be vertical; a simple walk leads to notable destinations. Tourist offices offer Walkman-guided journeys and "Geneva on Foot" brochures, which steer you through parks, neighborhoods, and cobbled Old Town, the home of one of Geneva's most famous citizens, the celebrated free-thinker Rousseau.

Leaflets for two- and three-hour countryside walks guide you through Switzerland's forests and countryside, where, true to form, the helpful Swiss vigilantly post small yellow signs that detail estimated times and alternate routes for hikers, bikers, and walkers.

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Getting There: Continental provides nonstop service between Geneva and its hub in New York/Newark.

Fit and Flavorful

In Switzerland, grocery stores devote an entire aisle to chocolate, a heart-healthy treat and a necessary companion on fitness outings. Before a hike or run, pick up a bar of dark chocolate, which contains flavonoids, an antioxidant that keeps cholesterol from building up in blood vessels and reduces the risk of blood clots. You'll also find a variety of trail mixes in easy-to-carry cones in the section marked "student food." Perfect for backpacks or briefcases.

— M.C.

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