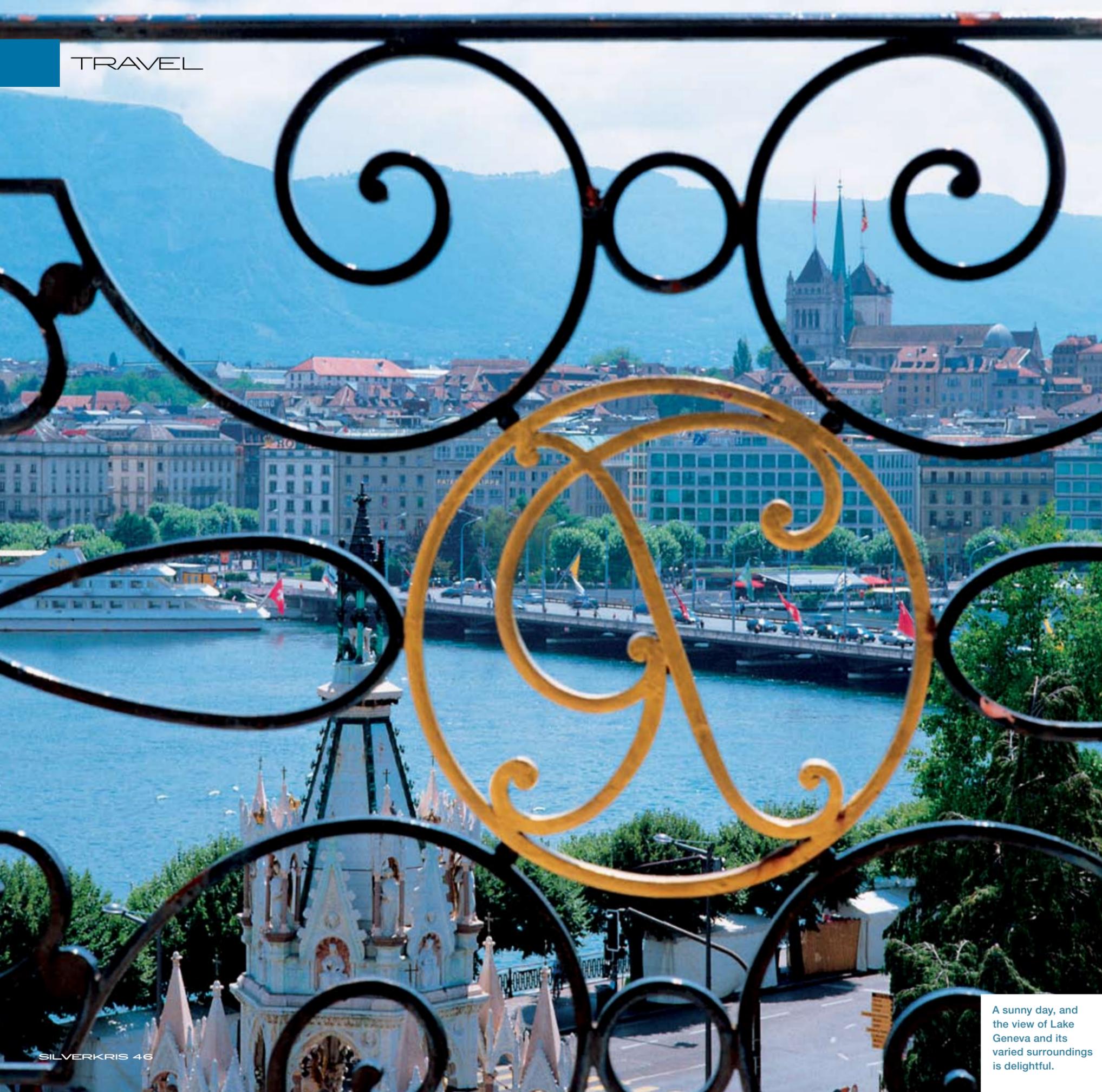


# SWISS SWISH

Geneva, known as the home of international aid organisations and financial institutions, is adding style to its list of attractions, says **FARHAD HEYDARI**.



Luxe hotel Le Richemond serves up hospitality and a welcoming warmth against a backdrop of style.



A sunny day, and the view of Lake Geneva and its varied surroundings is delightful.

“**N**ow check out this crop of stylish Genevois,” bellows Andre as

we go barrelling up yet another of Geneva’s spotless cafe-peppered streets on a warm and sun-splashed day. “The society women here sometimes sip cappuccinos while wearing white gloves!” exclaims the would-be architect as we whirl by on his gleaming and equally en vogue Vespa. I catch fleeting glimpses of them doing just that.

Twenty-something Andre, an art college graduate, is a hyper-caffeinated polyglot whom I’d met the previous evening at Club 17, a high-octane discotheque with an arch-modern decor and a clientele of sophisticated 30-something creative types. Sporting monochromatic duds last night, this morning, Andre looks ready for a day in the sun in his pastel-coloured outfit, similar to the hues I see on the throngs of stylish locals occupying virtually every seat of every outdoor cafe in this city of 185,000 people.

We happen to be in the Old Town, whose steep hills present views over the ancient buildings that dot the landscape below, which is latticed by narrow cobbled byways leading to an olden square near Hotel de Ville. Up here, under century-old oaks, stylish habitués sip lattes, nibble on macaroons and flip through a glut of international digests in everything from short polos to summer dresses.

“Most people associate Geneva with NGOs (non-governmental organisations),” explains Andre over an espresso at a cafe in the shadow of the city’s iconic Cathedrale St.

Pierre, “but this city has much more to offer.” To prove his point, he asks that I join him atop the cathedral’s North Tower, accessible by climbing a 153-step spiralling staircase. From there, it’s easy to see why so many, including Andre who hails from Strasbourg, have been lured to the picture-postcard setting of Switzerland’s second largest city.

Situated astride the Rhone River and around the glistening Lake Geneva into which the Rhone flows, and with Mont Blanc, Europe’s highest peak off in the distance in France, multi-cultural Geneva is drop-dead gorgeous. And while its natural beauty has always been inviting, its primary reputation as a locale for cold finance (an estimated 30 per cent of the world’s offshore cash is parked here) has sometimes deterred non-conformity.

But now in Carouge, a distinctly Italianate quarter that’s lovingly referred to as the city’s ‘Greenwich Village’, all that is starting to change as the city is letting down its hair and sprucing itself up at the same time.

Here, far from the leafy campuses of the European seat of the United Nations, the headquarters of the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization, a glut of boho-glamorous artisans are imbuing the city. Seek out the ateliers chockful of their own creations, offering everything from unique handcrafted jewellery and one-off accessories to whimsical curios for the home.

Take an artisan like Chris Murner ([www.chrismurner.ch](http://www.chrismurner.ch)), the lauded local bag maker who proudly proclaims, “I’ve been apprenticing for 40 years.” Today at age 45, her designs are decidedly playful, with materials that range from canvas and plastic >>



ABOVE: As dusk falls, the shops in Geneva light up. BELOW, LEFT: An antique timepiece, one of the many to be admired there.



to turpentine and tweed and come in a myriad of shapes and sizes. A short distance away, Patricia Dana's ([www.patricia-d.com](http://www.patricia-d.com)) eponymous boutique is more whimsical as a storehouse brimming with printed, sequined and jewel-encrusted silk, cotton and linen

kaftans; supple pashminas; and chunky necklaces and earrings fashioned from aquamarine, garnet and turquoise that are an ode to India, from where the 35-year-old Patricia Dana sources all her materials. Beyond Carouge, where our Vespa passes dozens of other

alluring independent boutiques, chocolatiers, brasseries, patisseries and boulangeries that are a nod to the French influence that surrounds this tiny metropolitan area on three sides, there is the upscale one-kilometre-long Rue du Rhone, the city's most famous street, where

horophiles can have their pick of nearly every luxe nameplate in the world, including Cartier, Audemars Piguet, Rolex, Vacheron Constantin and Patek Philippe, to name just a few. The latter even boasts its own museum ([www.patekmuseum.com](http://www.patekmuseum.com)), which, with its collection of 2,000 rare

pieces spread across three floors, pays homage to haute horology. The collection dates back to the company's 1839 inception and is a must for those who appreciate the minutiae of technical wizardry as well as the beauty of handmade timepieces. But there is more to this quarter >>



ABOVE: The streets of Geneva are peppered with cafes. RIGHT: Sit back and relax with a latte.

than retail therapy. At the city's chief arts repository, Musee d'Art et d'Histoire ([mah.ville-ge.ch](http://mah.ville-ge.ch)), whose stunning neo-classical exterior was the work of Swiss architect Marc Camoletti, visitors will find some 500,000 items to peruse – everything from extraordinary archaeological finds to pieces by Renoir, Monet, Cezanne and Van Gogh.

Like other parts of the city, the city-centre has also been enlivened by refurbishments, notably across its luxe hotelscape. The latest to undergo a

makeover is Le Richemond ([www.lerichemond.com](http://www.lerichemond.com)), the waterside icon dating back to the mid-18th century, which is operated by Rocco Forte Hotels. Re-opened last September after an 18-month renovation under the chic imprimatur of the group's design director, Olga Polizzi, the 109 rooms and suites represent a stylish departure from the period pomp and pantomime of the past — each one is done up in a warm >>



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ABOVE: For excellent food and atmosphere, Auberge du Lion d'Or is the place. RIGHT: Youngsters out to make a splash at Lake Geneva.

blend of earth tones that trade heavily in sleek woods and swish leathers.

The same up-to-date ethos permeates the Grand Hotel Kempinski ([www.kempinski-geneva.com](http://www.kempinski-geneva.com)), located on the shore of Lake Geneva. After a multi-million Euro refurbishment at the hands of Tjca Architects, which dissolved the boundaries between the building and the lake, the waterside hotel is a picture of elegance with rooms overlooking the city's other notable landmark, the Jet d'Eau, a fountain springing Alpine water 140m into the sky.

Le Richemond and the Kempinski are just a pair of the city's 15 five-star hotels and boldly complement the other notable figure for a city of this size: Geneva boasts eight restaurants with Michelin stars, including Auberge du Lion d'Or ([www.liondor.ch](http://www.liondor.ch)) in the petite hillside commune of Cologny, five minutes from the city-centre. In a minimalist dining room done up in earth tones and creamy furnishings and with views over Lake Geneva, Frenchman Gilles Dupont and Ireland's Thomas >>



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Byrne whip up haute delicacies that are as lauded as they are delicious.

Following a decadent dinner of escalopes of foie gras with dense sesame juice and hibiscus, I join Andre and his girlfriend, along with the city's chic arbiters of taste, first at Coolheure Cafe (1-3 rue Chantepoulet), a cosy, dimly-lit basement level bolthole that's a chic refuge for clued-on, post-work urbanites, and then at Platinum Glam ([www.platinum-club.ch](http://www.platinum-club.ch)), a stylish lounge-cum-club where throngs of rollicking, high-heeled and blissed-out jetsetters are kicking up their heels.

Over the heady mix of deep house and trance music, I raise a toast to Geneva and Andre, for having become my de facto guide, and now friend. "See, I told you, Geneva has a lot to offer."

It does, indeed, Andre. ☑

## FAST FACTS

► **CURRENCY**  
Swiss Franc (CHF)  
US\$1 = 0.99 CHF

► **VISA**  
Requirements vary. Log on to <http://www.swiss.org.tw/tourism/index.htm> for details.

► **BEST TIME TO VISIT**  
July and August have the best weather but they are also the most crowded months. Early spring and late autumn, the city is quieter. For skiers, ski season at the nearby ski resorts runs from November to April.

► **HOW TO GET THERE**  
Geneva is easily accessible from Zurich to which Singapore Airlines flies twice daily from Singapore.

► **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)



Round up a day in Geneva by hobnobbing with hip urbanites at Platinum Glam, a lounge-cum-club.

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