

TRAVEL

ONE Monday, January 27, 1992

Old Town of Geneva



Photos courtesy of Swiss National Tourist Office

In the Old Town of Geneva, the historic Librairie building provides a cozy setting for an outdoor cafe

Gateway to Olympics

Games turn off-season on in this Swiss city

By Paul Hofmann
New York Times Syndicate

Ordinarily, half of Geneva's hotel rooms are empty in February, the off-season for this cosmopolitan city's thriving tourist business. Not so this year.

The Winter Olympic Games in Albertville and 12 other venues in France, Feb. 8 to Feb. 23, will cast the Swiss city in the role of a major gateway to the international snow circus and as a center for logistical support and after-ski recreation.

Geneva's efficient Cointin Airport is indeed only 52 miles by road, a 90-minute drive, from Albertville, the nearest French airport. Lyon Satolas, is 83 miles away.

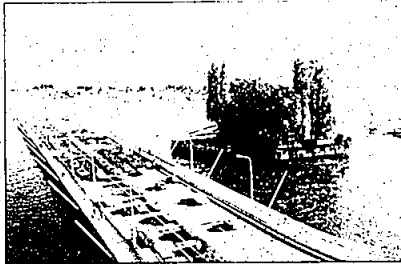
Two thirds of Geneva's 13,000 hotel beds are in deluxe or first-class houses, awarded five or four stars respectively by the Swiss hotel association.

Visitors wanting to stay in less-expensive places ought to reserve fast. Count on \$90 to \$130 for a double room with private bath and breakfast in a three-star (good second-class) establishment. The conversion rate is 1.40 Swiss francs to \$1.

International and Swiss travel organizations offer package deals including transportation from Geneva to Albertville or other Olympic sites, along with tickets to events.

Travel agencies in Geneva also operate bus services to Albertville, the one-way fare is around \$55.

You can board the regular bus to Albertville, leaving from the Coach Terminal (Gare Routiere) in the Place Doreiere near the Quai du Mont-Blanc on Lake Geneva's north shore, at 9:45 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 5:10 p.m. daily. The fare is \$36 one way, \$64 round trip. During the Winter Olympics the bus also will pick up passengers at the Cointin Airport and extra runs may be added. For more information call 7320220.



The Mont Blanc Bridge connects Geneva's Old Town with its more modern section. To the side, Rousseau Island, named after philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, is surrounded by Lake Geneva.

ENTERTAINMENT:

If you have watched enough winter sports live or on television, Geneva's attractions will whittle away the long, chilly nights.

The Grand Theatre, at Place Neuve, presents a new production of Berlioz's opera "Benvenuto Cellini," conducted by John Nelson, with Thomas Moser in the title part. It may be hard to get tickets to the subscription performances on Feb. 10, 13, 16, 22 and 25 but easier for the non-subscription evening, Feb. 19.

On Feb. 11, Margaret Price will be heard in a recital at the Grand Theatre, with Graham Johnson at the piano. The theater's production of Mozart's "Così fan tutte," conducted by Friedemann Layer, with Hanne Fleming and Jennifer Larpore in the female leads, will be reprised on March 13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 26 and 29. Ticket prices at the Grand Theatre range from \$13.60 in the top gallery to \$146 in the dress circle on some nights. For more information call 212318.

The Grand Casino, at 19 Quai du Mont-Blanc, is the setting for frequent jazz, pop-music and dance shows as well as theatrical sketches. Highlights: Ballet de Mexico of Amalia Hernandez with its mariachi orchestra, Feb. 1; National Ballet of South Korea, Feb. 29. For more information call 7320600.

MUSEUMS:

Visits to important public collections are free as of early January, but this is bound to change soon. The city government plans to begin charging admission to its museums and may offer a ticket valid for three different

institutions. Details are still to be announced.

Not to be missed: Museum of Art and History, at 2 Rue Charles-Galland, a five-minute walk from the cathedral; near the 12th-century old Russian Church with its six golden domes. The huge collection contains half a million objects from prehistoric artifacts to French Impressionist and early 20th-century paintings. It is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday. For more information call 290011.

Maison Travel, at 6 Rue de Puits-St-Pierre, near the cathedral, is a restored medieval dwelling of wealthy families, said to be the city's oldest residential building. It contains period furniture, a completely equipped ancient kitchen, painted business signs and an 18th-century model of Geneva, housed by house, in an attic hall. It is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday. For more information call 282900.

OLD CITY TOUR:

A stroll around the slumping, sheltered streets of the Vieille Ville (Old Town) is rewarding despite the breeze, Geneva's redoubtable cold north wind—there are enough cafes and taverns for rest stops.

The main artery of the historic quarter is the narrow Grand-Rue, which is lined with art galleries and old book shops, and leads up to the massive 15th-century city hall.

The Cathedral of St. Peter (St. Pierre) is a Gothic edifice that goes back to the 12th century and was built over early Christian sanctuaries. Impressive remains of the ancient altitudes can be

seen in the archaeological site below the cathedral.

The entrance is at the right of the portico that became the main entrance to the church in the 18th century. Access to the excavations is permitted from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday. Admission is \$3.00, children \$2.15. Admission is free to the cathedral from 9 a.m. to noon and 2-5 p.m. (6 p.m. from March 1), but no sightseeing is allowed during services, beginning 10 a.m. on Sundays.

The French Protestant reformer Calvin preached in the cathedral, 1536 to 1564, and virtually ruled Geneva as a theocracy. The Gothic interior of the church is sober, the large organ in its rear modern.

A side chapel on the right, in flamboyant Gothic style and with stained-glass windows, is a graceful contrast to the austerity of the main nave. In clear weather an ascent of the north tower permits a panoramic view of the city, the lake and the snow-covered Alps.

Tower visits are permitted from 9-11 a.m. and 2-4:30 p.m. Monday to Saturday. Admission is \$1.00, children 70 cents.

The colossal Reformation Movement, with the 20-foot-high statues of Calvin, the Scottish divine John Knox and other Protestant leaders, erected 1909 to 1917 by an international committee, occupies 320 feet of a rampart at the foot of the Old City's southern slope (Place des Bâtiards).

GETTING AROUND:

Trains from Cointin Airport to the Cornavin Terminal near the city center run at intervals of 10 minutes to 15 minutes, the trip taking just six minutes. The fare is \$2.60.

Fares on Geneva's mass-transit network of trams, trolley cars and buses are about to go up, probably to \$1.10 for short trips (up to three stops); \$1.45 for longer trips. Tickets must be bought at the vending machines at the stops.

All-day network passes, \$4.30 at the time of writing, are also expected to become more expensive, they are bought at the Transports Publics Genevois windows in the underground mall close to the rail terminal.

(Paul Hofmann, former Rome bureau chief of The Times, visits Switzerland frequently.)

Tracing roots by happy accident

Serendipity: an aptitude for making desirable discoveries by accident. If you are one of the thousands who travel to trace your family roots, you depend on happy accidents.

I thought of that this week when I got mailings about "homecoming" events in both Ireland and Finland. I've been trying for 10 years without success to trace the roots of the McNamee family to some specific place in Northern Ireland, and my best clue so far came by happy accident.

Ireland is a large island off the coast of England. Singapore is a tiny island half a world away at the southern tip of southeast Asia. It had not occurred to me to do any genealogy there.

My Serendipity occurred among the food stalls of Newton Circus. Until recent years, the food vendors of Singapore sold their goodies on the street, but they are now officially gathered in food courts around this beautiful modern city.

I had stayed in hotels and ridden subways that put our hotels and transportation systems to shame, but on that particular evening I was eating my way through fresh prawns and other delicacies at the Newton Circus food stalls.

When I was barely able to waddle, I wandered around the court waiting for the bus that would take me "home" and found myself talking to a couple of traveling Americans. I don't remember where they were from, but I remember the moment that they waved toward an adjoining table and introduced me to a couple from Northern Ireland.

"I've been there several times, trying to trace my ancestors," I said. "Do you happen to know any McNamees?"

"I know two of them," the man replied.

McNamees are not exactly a multitude, like many Irish clans. There were only 12 of them in the entire Northern Ireland telephone book, and most of them are Catholic. Any genealogist will tell you to follow your religious line first in Ireland and my McNamees were Presbyterians.

"Are they Protestant?" I said.

"Yes."

Two Protestant McNamees constituted a windfall. At that very moment, of course, Mickey came running across the court to say the bus was leaving without me.

I grabbed a business card from



crossroads

Iris Jones

Serendipity is not just a happy accident, it's an aptitude for happy accidents, which is a very useful mindset in both genealogy and travel.

my new-found Irish friend and ran a year later, after a business trip to England. I had a chance to spend a few days in Belfast. The business card led me to a McNamee who may very well be one of my family.

Nothing is as interesting as one's own family tree or as boring as somebody else's family tree, but there is a moral to that story. Serendipity is not just a happy accident, it's an aptitude for happy accidents, which is a very useful mindset in both genealogy and travel.

If you'd like a little serendipity of your own, explore these events:

The Irish Heritage Association, 162A Kingsway, Dunmurry, Belfast BT17 9AD, Northern Ireland is sponsoring the International Gathering of the Clan Maguire Sept. 4, 5 and 6 in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh and the International Heritage Jamboree Sept. 25, 26 and 27 in County Down.

You'll also find clan gatherings in the Republic through the Irish Tourist Board, 757 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Finland celebrates its 75th anniversary of independence in 1992 as Homecoming Year and has developed a program to invite Finnish descendants from around the world to a year-long celebration. Michigan boasts the largest concentration of people of Finnish ancestry in the U.S. — 100,000 of the 600,000 Finnish Americans — so many of you may go.

Other nationalities are also warming up to homecoming ideas. Contact the U.S. travel office of the country in question for more information about tracing your roots. An aptitude for discovering desirable accidents will further your cause.

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