



The tectonic plates, that hold our continents, float on a sea of molten earth. About a hundred million years ago, the African plate banged into the European plate. Billions of tons of rock were rammed together and the Swiss Alps were born.

The most mountainous region in Switzerland is called the Valais and it is the home of Switzerland's most famous mountain --- the Matterhorn. At the base of the mountain is the town of Zermatt and that is where my gastronomic tour began.

During the 1600s, a group of peasants who lived down in the valley purchased their freedom from the landowners and came up here to start their own community. The old part of Zermatt looks pretty much as it did when they built it 400 years ago.

The new part of town, however, is constantly changing. It has a street lined with excellent shops that puts new things out for sale each week. Their specialty is outdoor wear and as the weather and the seasons change, they offer the appropriate gear. There are also lots of restaurants and pubs.

From the center of Zermatt, I took the Gornergrat Railway which was Switzerland's first electric cogwheel railway and the highest outdoor cogwheel railway in Europe. It took me up to the top of the Riffelberg at 8,469 feet above sea level. It's the place to get a great view of the Matterhorn.



The Matterhorn itself reaches a height of 14,692 feet and it gets a little higher each year as the earth pushes it up. The first attempt to reach the top turned out to be a total failure. It was only in 1865 that a team of climbers were able to reach the peak. The Matterhorn holds a special place in the history of Swiss mountain climbing but it is also important to the history of Swiss gastronomy. Let me explain.

In 1908, Erik Baumann and his cousin Theodor Tobler, after hours of feverish experimentation, created a perfect fusion between nougat and milk chocolate, thereby giving us the first Toblerone.



Not only did they cross this previously unbreachable boundary between chocolate and nougat but they had the skill and the insight to create a mold that produced individual servings of the bar in the shape of the Matterhorn and to use a manufacturing process so unique that it was granted a patent.

But wait, there's more. The man working at the Swiss Federal Institute for Intellectual Property --- the organization that issued the patent for the Toblerone ---was none other than Albert Einstein.

And so the Matterhorn is not just a mountain, it is a gastronomic and scientific landmark.

As you come down from Zermatt and your sugar high, you enter the Valais where you will find the town of Sierre and the Chateau de Villa. The Chateau has been here since the early 1500s. Inside is a restaurant that specializes in the traditional foods of the region and it is one of my all time favorite spots. And each time I come here I have the same meal.

The first course is viande sechees --- beef that has been air dried and thinly sliced. You grind a little pepper on top and eat the slices with your fingers. There's a basket with two types of rye bread --- one is flavored with cumin seeds and the other with walnuts.

The Valais is one of the great cheese-producing regions of Switzerland and the main course is raclette. For me this is the ultimate melted cheese dish.

The restaurant has a room where they age their cheeses over several months, turning and brushing them with white wine and salt.

The chef takes a half wheel of Simplon Cheese and places it in front of a heat source. The heat can come from a fireplace or an electric raclette



maker. As the cheese melts, the chef scraps some of it off onto a plate. The cheese is served as a disc about

three inches in diameter and about a quarter inch thick. The chef works at the edge of the dining room and the raclette comes to your table as soon as the cheese is melted.

There's a wooden bucket on the table filled with boiled fingerling potatoes. You take out a potato, place it next to the cheese, cut off a small slice, cover it with warm, soft cheese and pop it into your mouth. Alongside the raclette is a bowl of gherkins and pickled onions.

The chef keeps an eye on each table and as you finish off the first dish, he starts melting your second, but this time he uses a different cheese. You can order from 3 to 12 rounds of raclette, each with a different cheese. And along with the raclette you drink a local wine.

The Chateau restaurant has 500 local wines on the menu and right next door is a wine tasting room with the same 500 wines available for sale. Each week they have a different selection available for tasting in both the restaurant and the tasting room, and all 500 are

## WHERE TO EAT

### CHATEAU DE VILLA

RUE SAINTE-CATHERINE 4  
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TEL. +41(0)27 456 24 29  
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[WWW.CHATEAUVILLA.CH](http://WWW.CHATEAUVILLA.CH)

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### WALDHOTEL FLETSCHHORN

CHEF MARKUS NEFF  
CH-3906 SAAS-FEE, SWITZERLAND  
TEL. +41 (0)27 957 21 31  
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INFO@FLETSCHHORN.CH  
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available for sale at the same price you would pay at the vineyard.

The Valais is the largest wine-producing area in Switzerland. There is a great diversity of soil types and microclimates and the mountains on both sides of the valley protect the vineyards. They grow over 40 different grape varieties.

After lunch, I visited the town of Sion, which is over 2,000 years old. On a hill at the center of Sion is a fortified church that was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It has protective walls, battlement towers, and internal walkways designed for military defense.

It also has the world's oldest playable organ. It was put together during the 1400s and there are regular concerts.



### THE LAKE GENEVA REGION

The next day, I continued heading west into the Lake Geneva Region. Switzerland is divided into 23 states called cantons. The Lake Geneva Region includes the canton of Vaud. Its Southern border is made up of



villages, small towns and a few mid-sized cities that spread out along the shore of Lake Geneva. Its western and northern frontiers run through farm communities and small villages in the Jura Mountains

that share a border with France. And much of its Eastern edge rises up into the Alps.

The first town I stopped at was Aigle which has been inhabited for over 4,000 years. The first vines were produced here by the ancient Romans and this has been an important area for wine production ever since. The castle at Aigle has a wine museum that will give you a good look at that history. My favorite exhibit illustrates the evolution of the wine bottle and

points out why it was impossible to do business without a uniform system of measurement.

If you were buying wine from a distant vineyard and you expected the big bottle, because that's what people used in your neighborhood, and instead you ended up with a little bottle, because that's what they used two valleys over, you had a problem.

In the late 1700s, France introduced the metric system, based on the meter, which is one ten millionth of a quarter of the world's equator. The French clearly understood how much more convenient one ten millionth of a quarter of the equator was instead of a foot.

The people of Vaud did not want to give up the foot and so they standardized it at three tenths of a ten millionth part of the equator. They also introduced the hand, which they standardized at four hundredth of a millionth part of the equator. Of course, at the time people were not totally convinced as to the proper length of the equator, and so often there was a 2.0115 correction one way or the other. Are you getting this down?

The unit of measurement for wine became the liter, which is a volume measurement based on the meter.

Attempts to understand this system led to an outburst of heavy drinking which in turn resulted in Aigle producing some of the finest wines in Switzerland.

The wines of Aigle have a light bouquet, a nice balance of fruit and acidity, and the more you drink the more you think you understand the metric system. The Chateau has a charming little restaurant called the Pint of Paradise, where you can have a pleasant lunch, drink the local wine and test your comprehension of metrics.

For centuries the best way to get around this area was to hop on one of the Lake Geneva sailboats. It was an informal service that was



already in existence when the ancient Romans arrived. But it took on serious structure when the Lake Geneva shipping company went into business in 1823. Their boats carried local residents from town to town along the lake shore. Even now they are used by commuters.

By the middle of the 1800s tourists began coming on board, and they still do. The boats make regular stops at most of the towns on the lake and you can get on and off wherever you like. Taking a ride on a lake steamer is the best way to see the beauty of the Lake Geneva shore, the small towns and the surrounding mountains. I used a lake steamer to continue my westward journey through the Lake Geneva Region; I got off at the town of Vevey.

Vevey is the cradle of the Swiss milk chocolate business and the corporate headquarters of Nestle, the world's largest food company and the largest company in Switzerland. Vevey is a popular resort that faces out on Lake Geneva and the Alps.

Charlie Chaplin moved here in the early 1950's. Chaplin was born in London in 1889. His family were vaudeville performers and he followed in their footsteps eventually becoming the superstar of the silent screen.

During a tour of the United States in 1912, the Keystone Film Company noticed Chaplin, gave him his first work in silent films and introduced him to film audiences around the world.

His most famous screen character, The Little Tramp, was so widely appreciated that Chaplin came to be regarded as the greatest comic artist of his time and one of the most important figures in the history of motion pictures.

When he passed away in 1977, Blaise Poyet, his favorite chocolate maker, called Chaplin's son and asked if he could honor Charlie's memory with a special chocolate. They worked together and developed a chocolate recipe that was a little bitter, a little sweet, and



always filled with surprises. Just like Charlie.

Then they formed the chocolate into miniature copies of the shoes that Chaplin wore in his films. The shoes are set into a box with their heels together and their toes apart, just the way Chaplin walked in his movies. The box itself is actually a movie film canister and it's tied with ribbons that are printed with a movie film pattern---a bittersweet memory of a man with an amazing talent.

I left Vevey on the wine train. It runs along the north shore of Lake Geneva which is one of the most important wine-growing regions in Switzerland. The grapes are grown on steep terraces that have been cut into the mountains. The hills face south and get lots of direct sunlight. The lake also acts like a giant mirror bouncing even more warmth into the vines.

I got off at the town of Chexbres and started walking the wine trail. It's made up of about 20 miles of road that winds through the vineyards. There's a guide book to the area that says the wine makers have an open door policy, but they also have an open bottle policy. When you see an open door, you can walk in, introduce yourself to the winemaker and receive a glass of the winemaker's work, along with the story of how he makes his wine, a brief history of his family and his candid opinion of the state of the world. And it's all free.

This part of Switzerland is known as the Lavaux region and it has been designated as a Unesco World Heritage site.

**GENEVA**  
Properly fortified with fermented grape juice, I continued my journey toward Geneva. Geneva is the most westerly canton in Switzerland. It's famous for its role in the Protestant Reformation, as a center for watch making, as a home for the United Nations, and for the many humanitarian organizations



that are headquartered here.

The first residents of the area, that we know about, were members of a migrating tribe that came over from Eastern Europe and settled on the high ground, which is now Geneva's Old City. Good spot. It was



just above the junction of the Rhone and Arve Rivers. And right in front were two islands that they used for the base of a bridge, which made it the only spot for hundreds

of miles where traders could cross the river on foot and stay dry. A century before the birth of Christ, Roman soldiers saw the strategic value of this site, and turned it into one of their most prosperous colonies. Even then, Geneva understood the importance of bridge financing.

By the middle of the 400s, Rome began to lose its power, and Geneva came under the control of the Dukes of Burgundy. The Dukes spent the next thousand years or so duking it out with assorted princes, until 1536, when Geneva declared itself an independent republic, under the protection of the Swiss states to the northeast.

The Swiss loved this. Geneva became independent but it also became a buffer between the Swiss and the Dukes. The Swiss not only offered the people of Geneva military protection, but they offered them the opportunity to become Protestant and join the Reformation.

The main street in the Old City is called Grand-Rue, and during the 1960's I lived here. This was my neighborhood. And it hasn't changed very much,

which makes perfectly good sense, it's been here for 1500 years. What did I think was going to change?

There's the old Arsenal. The



building was put up in the 1400s, and there are five original cannons. My kids used them to play blow up the Duke of Savoy.

Down the block is the Place du Bourg-de-Four, the oldest public square in Geneva. For the ancient Romans this was a center for the affairs of commerce. It's still a center of activity, but these days the affairs are mostly of the heart. A little bar down the street from my house is still here. The sweet yeasty smells of the bakery still drift into the street, and it's still



impossible to find a parking place. The only thing that seems to have disappeared is my youth.

In 1886, Geneva set-up a hydroelectric station to supply power to the craftsmen working in the city, but every evening when the workers would turn off their machines, there was a dangerous overcharge. Engineers would rush to the pumps to turn them off, but they never knew exactly when that surge was going to hit.

Eventually somebody had the bright idea to install a safety valve that released the excess water in the form of a jet, which eventually became the symbol of the city. It's called the jet d'eau and it's produced by an amazing piece of machinery.

Every minute two pumps suck eight thousand gallons of water out of the lake, mix it with air, and place it under tremendous pressure. The key design element is the nozzle, it sends up a column of water filled with millions of air bubbles, which gives the jet its white color. Without the air bubbles, it would be practically invisible from the shore.

The jet d'eau is an important symbol of Geneva but so is the Escalade.

Each year on December 12th, the city commemorates an event that took place in 1602. The Duke of Savoy, who controlled the land around Geneva, teamed up

with Philip II, the Catholic King of Spain, and decided to crush the Protestant Reformation that had taken place here.

The troops were in the middle of a sneak attack when a woman heard their approach. Stationing herself at her kitchen window, she poured a pot of hot soup down on the Savoyards. With their chances for a surprise attack seriously dampened, they pulled back, giving the Guards of Geneva time to counter-attack and defeat the Duke's men, thereby saving Geneva's freedom to produce vegetable soup any way they wanted.

Not to be left out of the celebration, each year the chocolate makers of Geneva produce chocolate soup pots filled with vegetables made of marzipan. They also shape chocolate into other forms, each designed to mark an event. At The Du Rhône Chocolate Shop, a two-foot high beehive, with bees, signals the beginning of spring. An antique car announces the opening of the annual Auto Show, and the perfect pocketbook celebrates a particularly successful bit of shopping.



And shopping is definitely a part of what Geneva is all about. For over a thousand years, Geneva has been an important commercial center, but for the past 300 years its most famous commercial product has been the watch. Protestant reformers, as part of their desire to simplify life, limited the use of gold and precious stones in jewelry --- so many of the jewelry makers started making watches and clocks. Throughout the city there are public displays of the craft.



In 1955, a flower clock was constructed in a small park at the edge of the lake. It's about five yards wide, has the largest second hand in the world, and over six thousand plants are used to produce its face.

About a block away in the center of a covered

shopping street, is the clock of the Passage-de-Malbuisson. Built in the twentieth century, it marks each hour with 16 bells, a parade of 13 chariots, and 42 bronze figures.

The biggest impetus to watch-making in Geneva came in 1685, when King Louis the XIV of France decided to kill off all the French Protestants. French Protestants were known as Huguenots and thousands of them fled to Geneva. They were master craftsmen and many were great watchmakers. They made an immediate and valuable financial contribution to the city, and what was France's loss became Geneva's gain.

Calvin was the leading Protestant theologian in Geneva and he demanded an almost monk-like asceticism in the city, which made watch-making a perfect occupation. The monk's cell was replaced by the watchmaker's cabinet, and Geneva became one of the most productive and creative cities in the world. There is no other country where so many watches are made and sold.

Geneva is also the European home of the United Nations which gives the city an international atmosphere and hundreds of interesting restaurants. Last time I checked the numbers, Geneva had more restaurants per person than any other city in Europe.



Here are a few that turn out excellent examples of some of Geneva's most traditional dishes.

The Grande Theatre is Geneva's opera, and right across the street is Le Lyrique. On one side, it's a simple brasserie, and on the other side, a formal restaurant. It opened in 1981, but the decor is late nineteenth century.

The Café de Soleil, which means the Cafe of the Sun, was the first restaurant to be built outside the city walls. It went into business in 1680, and for a while it was a cabaret. At the time Geneva was a very conservative city, which may explain why it opened up outside the city walls. Today it's a down

home neighborhood brasserie that's famous for its cheese fondue.

The Café de Soleil makes their fondue using only gruyere cheese. Swiss have been making gruyere since the 1100s, and for over 500 years, chefs have considered it one of the great cheeses for cooking. A wheel of gruyere weighs between 77 and 88 pounds, has a diameter of 20 inches, and has been aged for at least a year. It has a slightly nutty flavor that's perfect for fondue.



Swiss fondue eating etiquette requires that all diners prevent their bread from dropping into the cheese, and if you fail, there are severe penalties. You may be required to: A.) buy wine for everybody at the table, B.) kiss everybody at the table, and C.)



keep a slice of hard boiled egg in your wallet throughout the month of July.

One place I keep coming back to is The Bistro du Boeuf Rouge. The walls are covered with hats, beer mugs, old posters, cloudy glass,

and undistinguished prints, and none of the plates match, which makes me feel very much at home. Thought of as a steakhouse, they also make great fried fish, in this case, filet of lake perch, which is a specialty of the town.

I have spent a number of years living and filming in Switzerland and I am always impressed with the quality of their restaurants. I like good cooking in a relaxed atmosphere at a fair price and that's the major tradition in The



Valais, The Lake Geneva Region and Geneva.

And chocolate---they have great chocolate. My cardiologist told me to have an ounce of dark chocolate everyday. I take it after my baby aspirin and my cholesterol-lowering pill but before my red wine.

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