

# GENEVA CONVENTIONS

BY KEITH MC

You may think it odd to choose Switzerland for a gay holiday, and in particular the French bit, or more to the point, Geneva...

GRAN CANARIA, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Madrid – I've done the lot and you pretty much know what you're letting yourself in for, but Geneva? Exactly. The fact that Geneva is one of the most expensive cities in Christendom means that you can't do it with tight purse strings. You've got to flex the plastic, even to buy an ice cream out there (a Mr Whippy is the same cost as a three bedroom house in Sunderland), but that has its advantages all the same. There's no riff-raff out there and you certainly won't come across lots of screaming queens in tight tank tops pissed out of their heads on Windolene. Indeed not. We're talking sophistication and glamour and there's nowt wrong with that every now and again.

Unlike other cities, there's not a 'gay area' as such so the first thing you need to pick up, apart from one of many cute Swiss boys, is the gay map of Geneva. Being ever so dizzy we didn't realise t h e r e

was such a thing until our second day out, so we took a chance and sat in a park waiting for something to happen... but it never did. Such is life. So as soon as you arrive go to Dialogai (11 Rue de la Navigation), which is a kind of gay library and resource centre. Failing that, head to a gay bar and pick one up from there.

By the end of the weekend, our gay map looked as though it had been through several cycles in the washing machine – that's how useful it is. It could also have ended up in tatters because we're simply very messy. We were immediately drawn to the extensive list of cruising areas, with one being virtually next door to our hotel, and despite the fact that it was pitch black, we thought we'd investigate. Bad move. Not only did I nearly fall over and break my neck, but the so-called cruising area was populated with hippy kids smoking spliffs. Two scary bears followed us but we managed to lose them, so sighs of relief all round.

By day the jetty is awash with gorgeous boys who, whilst straight, certainly provided enough eye candy to sink a ship. Very nice. Other cruising grounds worth checking out are Parc Betrand, Parc du Lac and Parc du



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Vengeron – but what time of the day they're supposed to become a hotbed of raunch I cannot say. Take a picnic and sit there all day or, if you prefer, get your tackle out and see what bites.

It goes without saying that if you really want to cop off then head to the bars. By far the best gay watering hole in the city is Nathan's Bar (Rue Baudit 6). It's a kind of cross between Covent Garden's The Box and Soho's The Edge, and even on Sunday night was full of some exceptionally cute men. Was it easy to find? No. Not even with the map that I was turning every which way saying "It has to be here – it has to fucking be here" could we find it. At this point I started tearing the map to shreds with my teeth like a rabid dog, it was doing my head in. Maybe that's why the map ended up like that. Eventually, in tears, we found it. So, if you're planning on going this is how you find it – I really wouldn't want anyone to go through the angst that we did.

Pass Notre Dame (Paris don't have the exclusivity on that one) on your right, go under the railway bridge and you start climbing a hill, which is called Rue de la Servette. There's a cinema on the right with lots of pics of film stars. Go on a bit further and there's a blue neon sign on a corner. Turn right and hey presto Nathan's Bar is on the left – opposite a building that glows orange. I kid you not. Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot say whether we met Nathan, but he's done a sterling job on the place. Like any sensible country they don't measure out the vodka – hurrah! If you want to feel pretty, check out Le Concorde or Twins if you must. Unbelievable. Danny La Rue is alive and well, and serving behind the bar.

We attempted to go to the one and only gay club Le Pretexte, but after waiting around for hours, we weren't sure whether it was open or not – I did warn you that if it's hedonism you're after Geneva is not the best bet. But if you want a lazy weekend break away

from it all, there are few cities that can match Geneva. The scenery is stunning (mountains and things), and the big fountain out in the lake is amazing. You can even stand under it, which isn't safe but the Swiss don't seem to care – it would make a great enema for an elephant, I thought, but my mind works in strange ways as it is. Since Easyjet came on the scene it's never been easier, or cheaper to get there. We flew British Airways as nobody's making me run to a plane and scrum for a seat. Swiss Airlines fly too, so the choice is yours. As for accommodation, here's the rub – we stayed in absolute luxury at the five star Hotel d'Angleterre where rooms start at £200 a night (yes – a night) and go up to £1250 a night. But if you want to rough it, there are cheaper hotels. The choice is yours. So if you're feeling flush, next time you're planning a weekend away, you should really think about giving Geneva a whirl. They all speak French as well, so if you do – you're laughing.



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