



## A TUCKED AWAY PARADISE

The Rhone-Alpes region is perfectly positioned to enjoy the genteel charm of Geneva in Switzerland as well as the quiet sophistication of France including the charming commune of Evian-les-Bains.

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What could be better than a two-for-the-price-of-one offer? Especially for the Indian traveller who loves a bargain! Well, this deal wasn't really about the moolah, rather it was about being sandwiched between France and Switzerland with one foot in each country and the thrill of being able to hop from one to the other indiscriminately.

**RUNNING AROUND RHONE**  
After a pleasurable weekend in Geneva, my wanderlust got the better of me and I realised that the venerable vistas, dramatic valleys, and glazed mountain peaks of the Rhone-Alpes region were within sprinting distance, which coincidentally lie on the border of the two countries.

This spread: An aerial view of Evian-les-Bains.



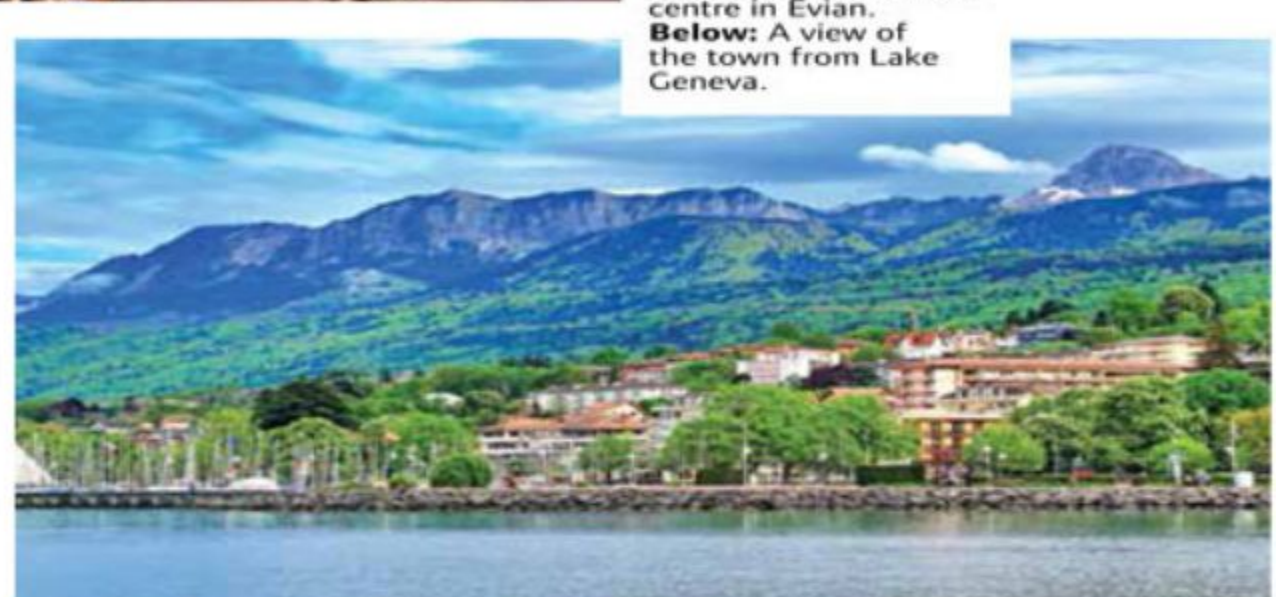
**Left:** The beautiful Palais Lumière is a convention centre and cultural exhibition centre in Evian.  
**Below:** A view of the town from Lake Geneva.

It wasn't hard to decide where to drop anchor. Perched a few hundred metres above the majesty of Lake Geneva and Lausanne, Evian-les-Bains offers access to some of the most picturesque ski resorts in the French Alps besides being mighty famous in its own right.

One of the first things we noticed was the pace of life in this well-heeled town; if it were any slower here, I might have thought time would come to grinding halt. But slower doesn't necessarily mean boring and although it is often overshadowed by Geneva with its famous lake and other attractions, Evian manages to hold its own in a very understated chic way.

The movie set Riviera-meets-Gstaad atmosphere sets the tone for our stay and the quaint, pedestrianised, well-maintained streets are dotted with a number of food specialty shops and cafes which offer tourists a sybaritic treat. We stop at one for some *chocolat chaud* (hot chocolate) and a delectable *tarte citron* (lemon tart) before heading to the lake. Evian-les-Bains is the kind of town that exudes a quiet, laid-back sensibility. Luckily it is off the radar of most tour operators so there are no big tourist buses and camera-toting tourists. But the tour operators' loss is the discerning traveller's gain and I can guarantee its quiet, understated ways will compel you to linger for just another night or more. Particularly if you are holidaying in Geneva, like we were, and want to explore some of the quaint towns around the lake. It's also a short ferry ride from Lausanne and Montreux.

We were relieved to find no museums and monuments that had to be seen which often creates a FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) holiday psychosis. Meanwhile, on the pristine waterfront there's more action. The southern shore also offers tons of water activities but not the modern adrenaline versions that I despise! Ah, the serene pleasure of paddle boating or catching an old-fashioned steamer across the lake to Geneva for the day.



### THE SPA THAT LOVED ME

There is however one big attraction in this town that has to be experienced. It might sound rather strange considering it involves drinking water from a public tap! Indeed it's odd when you find dozens of people queuing up for water rather than vintage wine. So why all the fuss about Evian – one of the world's leading natural mineral water brands? Apparently, what makes the water special is the fact that it takes 15 years to reach us from the glacial zones! Although the thought of drinking 15-year-old water might sound unappealing, in this case it's precisely why this water is coveted – the slow and extreme filtration makes it pure and laden with minerals beneficial to health.

Whilst a bottle of Evian can retail for as much as ₹600 in a Mumbai supermarket, here one can drink as much as one wants from a tap at the source absolutely free! And it's this water that is packed with a cocktail of minerals which is supposedly brimming with rejuvenating



**Right:** The imposing facade of The Hôtel Royal – Evian Resort.  
**Below:** Go skiing on powdery soft ski slopes.

properties (said to cure kidney stones and other nephrological ailments, as well as urinary and skin-related issues) that makes people flock to this spa town from time immemorial.

I couldn't resist splurging on a signature spa therapy in the hope of competing with the très chic French women on the streets! I was guided to the best address in town, The Hôtel Royal – Evian Resort (Leading Hotels of The World). As the ornate gates swing open, the jaw drops at the sheer majesty and beauty of this belle époque property in its palatial splendour; home to guests such as the Aga Khan and the Maharaja of Kapurthala. At the hotel's Spa Evian Source, therapists are trained to re-energise, relax, and revitalise us jaded city slickers. We reach this 12,000 sq. ft haven via a private elevator, kitted in our bathrobes and slippers. Indoor and outdoor heated pools are filled with pure Evian water. Since I'm in France, I opt for a caviar facial and I'm not disappointed.

After 80 minutes of being slathered in caviar, I come out gleaming and taut, ready for a night out in the town at the city's Turkish-inspired domed casino.

### SKIING, ANYONE?

Due to its proximity to the Chablais mountain resorts, Evian is only a few

kilometres from the Bernex and Thollon-les-Mémises stations, where the ski options are impressive. From the hotel we are ferried to the ski slopes in less than thirty minutes.

Whether you are a beginner or an expert, there is a slope catering to every level here. Ski slopes tend to get crowded during weekends so check before signing up. "Bend ze knees," begs my instructor as I flounder on my skis and flop down countless times before deciding to opt for the easier snowshoe walking that requires far less skill and coordination and allows access to rare sites including the forested areas around.



### A DETOUR

On our last day we decide to go on an excursion to Yvoire, a medieval fishing village on the shores of Lake Geneva, just 30 minutes from Evian. Time stands still here in the form of traditional, original stone houses and cobbled streets laden with flowers that are straight out of an Impressionist painting. It's fascinating to see the town walls dating back to the 12th century and its famous maze, the Garden of Five Senses, a setting tailor-made for a picnic and quiet contemplation.

It's always nice to find a hidden jewel especially around big European cities that one tends to revisit time and again partly because 'you-know-where-to-eat-shop-and stay'.

With its 60's style waterfront promenade and casino fashioned with onion domes, to the sweeping views of Lake Geneva and Lausanne, Evian-les-Bains was my secret find! ■

**Above:** The picturesque medieval town of Yvoire.  
**Below:** A woman refills her bottle at the Source Cachat, the water source in Evian-les-Bains.



### THE STORY OF EVIAN WATER

In 1789, Count Jean Charles de Laizer, a well-heeled landowner, was suffering from kidney stones. He was livid that his only daughter had fallen in love with Cachat, a penniless gardener. The girl was forbidden from meeting Cachat until he guaranteed to allow the Count access to the magical water that flowed in the gardens where he worked. Obviously he agreed and the count consumed copious quantities of this spring water. After six weeks, the Count's stones dissolved, as did his anger; wedding bells tolled in Evian and news of the waters curative properties quickly established the town as the thermal spa capital of Europe.



**Jet Airways operates direct flights to Paris and Amsterdam. From here, connect to Geneva with our codeshare partners Air France and KLM respectively. Evian-les-Bains lies less than 59 km from Geneva and can be reached in an hour's time by road. Alternatively, you can take a train from Paris to Evian-les-Bains; the journey takes about 4.5 hours.**

### QUICK FACTS

**CURRENCY**  
1 Euro = 84.49 Indian rupees (approx.)

**UPCOMING EVENT**  
December 14 – January 6, 2019: The Fabulous Village or the Legend of the Christmas period. Based on a fairy tale, a unique atmosphere is created in the town centre with a village built in driftwood, monumental sculptures and goblins. The village opens its doors to young and old for stories, workshops, treats to share.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
Log on to [tourism.evian-tourisme.com](http://tourism.evian-tourisme.com), [www.france.fr](http://www.france.fr) and [www.atout-france.fr](http://www.atout-france.fr)