

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Housing and Transportation in Switzerland / Geneva Lake Region

Q: How should I proceed with finding a residence during my stay in Switzerland?

A: Go through the “Housing and Transportation” document edited for GM DIR students by the local SIT staff in Switzerland. There are numerous resources listed along with the practical information including cost assessments and recommendations on various accommodation options.

Q: When should I start searching for an accommodation?

We suggest applying for accommodation as soon as possible, already in May for the program starting in September. The longer you wait, the fewer choices you will have, with higher costs. Therefore: The sooner, the better.

Q: What are the low budget options for student residences when living in the Geneva Lake Region?

A: The demand for affordable housing is very high, and these residences are limited both in the Canton of Geneva and the Canton of Vaud (where the SIT office in Nyon is located). Please consult the “Housing and Transportation” document, especially the university residences in the cities of Geneva and Lausanne. Although the priority is given to students enrolled in local Swiss public universities, many university residences have individual rooms or bachelor apartments for international students coming for a short period. You should apply to university residences as early as possible and to as many as possible, both in Geneva and Lausanne.

Q: Do you recommend living in the neighboring region of France and to commute daily to Geneva and Nyon?

A: Although the neighboring region of France is generally cheaper than Switzerland for accommodation and food, it will take you more time and cost for commuting to classes in Nyon and briefings in Geneva. If you are considering living in France, we strongly recommend choosing only the French towns of Annemasse or Ferney-Voltaire, as they are just on the border with Switzerland and are well served by public transportation to Geneva. Do not book accommodation on the French side of the Geneva Lake facing Nyon (eg. Yvoire, Thonon-les-Bains, Evian-les-Bains), nor Annecy or Lyon as public transportation may be very limited especially in the evening; there is no bridge or tunnel over or under the Geneva Lake to connect both shores. Generally, it is important that your accommodation is within walking distance of a bus stop or railway station.

Q: What is the feedback on accommodation from students from previous semesters?

A: The feedback we received depends on a student’s expectations, lifestyle, financial means, etc. Some students appreciated living on the shore of the Geneva Lake on the Swiss side between Vevey and Montreux but had to commute up to 1 hour or more by train for their classes in Nyon or briefings in Geneva. Some have appreciated residing in the Nyon Youth Hostel and walking 10 min to attend the class at the SIT office, 15 min to Nyon downtown or

the lakeside, or the nearby station to take a train to Geneva. Others preferred to live in neighboring France and enjoy the French lifestyle, lower prices on groceries and restaurants in Annemasse or Ferney-Voltaire; they would commute up to 1 hour when coming to the class in Nyon. Finally, we strongly recommend that students book accommodation for the entire duration in Switzerland prior to arrival. Based on student experience, we discourage booking for shorter periods and moving several times. The program is extremely intense and searching for an apartment is time consuming and expensive, it will take away your spare time and may impact your academic performance.

Q: I would like to stay with a local family during my semester in Switzerland, is this an option?

A: We do not offer the homestay option for GM DIR students. As the market is small and competitive in the Geneva Lake region, the homestays are reserved only for SIT undergraduate students for whom this is the only option when they come to Switzerland.

Q: What does public transportation look like in Switzerland?

A: Public transportation in Switzerland is smooth, punctual, and convenient. There are frequent trains, buses, streetcars, and boats that you can use to commute daily. Many Swiss residents use public transportation daily which is convenient and often faster than using a car. Considering the high prices of tickets, we strongly recommend using monthly passes, half-price or a full Swisspass, during your stay in Switzerland. For more details, please check the "Housing and Transportation" document.

Q: How much should I budget for the whole European portion of the GM DIR program?

A: Switzerland is an expensive country, and options for savings are limited. The most affordable accommodations are university residences, which have limited space available, and a long waiting list. Groceries are generally cheaper in France, but you will commute for the shopping in neighboring France if you live in Switzerland. Your expenses will depend on your lifestyle, and whether you intend to travel on your own in Switzerland or Europe during the semester. We estimate a budget of USD 10'000 for the whole duration of the European portion of the program, including the arrival in Switzerland and departure from Europe after the Vienna study trip (about 2 months). The estimated budget does not include travel to and from Europe back home, nor the individual independent travel within Switzerland and in Europe on the weekends during the semester.

Q: Is it possible to work and study in Switzerland during the semester?

A: SIT students enrolled in the GM DIR program who are on a tourist visa, or who have received a student permit for a short stay cannot work in Switzerland. Any paid employment requires a valid Swiss work permit. Working without a work permit violates the Swiss labor code and immigration rules. Students should have sufficient financial means when coming to study in Switzerland.

Q: I am not a US passport holder and would like to reside in neighboring France, is it possible?

A: Non-US students on a student visa for a short stay can only reside in the Canton of Vaud, where the SIT is registered as a school. You will go through Swiss immigration procedures in Lausanne to get your residence permit and cannot therefore legally reside in the Canton of Geneva or neighboring France.

Q: I have a potential conflict with my residence / landlord / Airbnb what assistance can SIT offer me?

A: We recommend that you discuss all issues with your potential landlords beforehand (eg. rent, house rules, common space, liability for damage). SIT staff does not act as intermediaries but can offer advice in a non-binding capacity. We recommend, with the agreement of the landlord, to take photos of the accommodation when you move in. Note that payment of a deposit of one- or two-months' rent guarantee is usual in Switzerland prior to your arrival.