

VERDANT VAUD

Along the lakeside from Geneva sits a little-known Swiss gem, the Canton of Vaud. Green and lush, this stretch of the Swiss Riviera offers a variety of interesting vacation spots.

BY LAURA BROWN



“The flower-bordered lakeside promenade along the shore offers natural beauty, modern sculpture, ancient castles and Belle Epoque buildings.”

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Shortly after leaving the Cointrin Airport, Geneva’s private and commercial jet centre, the first mountain views appear, forming a cinematic backdrop to the wide waters of Lac Léman – or Lake Geneva as it known to most visitors.

The lake, a hub of activity during the summer, sparkles brightly as the rays of sun turn the spray from the Jet D’Eau into a moving rainbow against the clear blue sky.

The nearby Canton of Vaud sits on the northern side of the picturesque lake. Spread across three hills, trendy Lausanne, known as the San Francisco of Switzerland, is the capital of the canton. This university town shines with historic tales, from the earliest discoveries of menhirs from 3,000 BC to the push by the local bourgeoisie for Vaudois emancipation in 1791, inspired by the neighbouring French Revolution.

By the 1960s its green hills and stunning views had attracted a selection of the famous, the rich and the beautiful. The actress Audrey Hepburn spent the last 30 years of her life in the village of Tolochenaz near Lausanne and is buried there. A simple bust and a few plaques are the dignified recognition of her residence.

Lausanne also became the favourite spot and last resting place of Coco Chanel, who enjoyed many years of Swiss elegance in the Lausanne Palace. This most luxurious of hotels even has a Coco Chanel Suite, where couture fans can relax and relive those heady times in style. Chanel’s beloved pooch passed away while she was staying at the hotel and is buried at Lausanne Palace’s backyard. Chanel herself is buried in the Cemetery Bois-de-Vaux in Lausanne, in a suitably elegant, but understated tomb.

Not far from the Palace, in the heart of Lausanne, the Swiss watchmaking family Junod has created the first watchmaking museum, in an attic above the city’s oldest watch shop. A space dedicated to the art of watchmaking and its history across the centuries, the museum is a living tribute to the long road travelled by the talented Swiss watch makers and retailers.

SMALLER TOWNS

Nearby Vevey is a quieter town, but with two claims to fame: it is the birthplace of milk chocolate and the place Charlie Chaplin called home. Chaplin’s genius is celebrated here in his former residence ▶



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Swiss secrets: Vevey’s quiet streets hide two claims to international fame. Lively Lausanne, below, is the capital of the canton, and a favourite of the rich and famous.





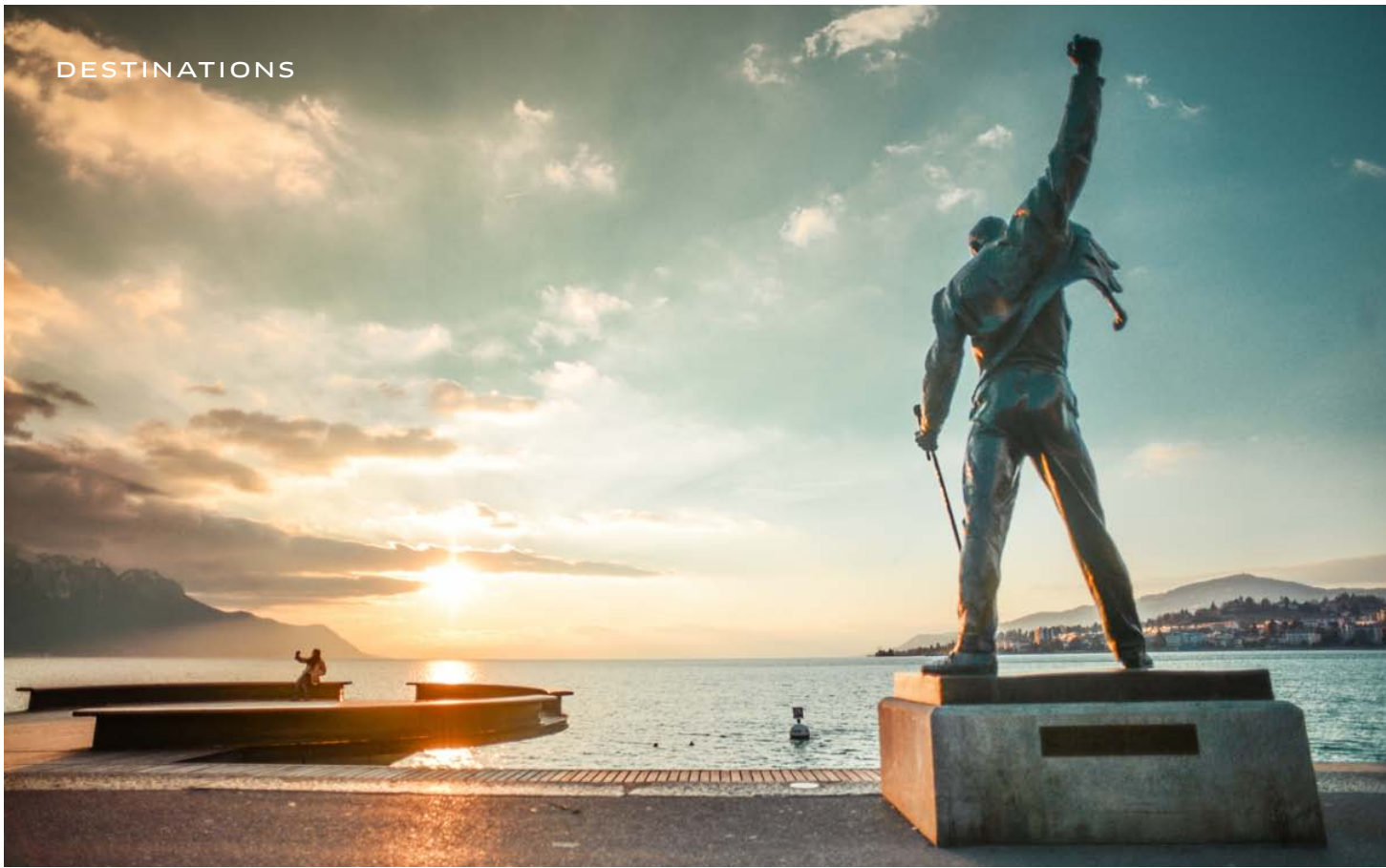
“Immortalised by Lord Byron, the Gothic Château de Chillon seems to float on the surface of Lac Léman, disturbed only by the Belle Époque steamboats.”

► set in a 10-acre park in the foothills on the edge of town, where his private and public life are on show. The manoir is filled with the furnishings and personal belongings of Chaplin, his wife Oona and their family. Alongside is a Hollywood-style studio, where visitors can immerse themselves in the world of silent film and enjoy plenty of unseen and raw material among the collection of cinematic work from the Little Tramp and others of the era.

From Vevey, follow the long, flower-bordered lakeside promenade to Montreux, a classic resort town, famed for its annual jazz festival and its exceptionally warm microclimate. Passing modern

sculptures, Mediterranean trees and plants and Belle Époque buildings, you reach the landmark of the Château de Chillon, the most visited historical building in Switzerland. Immortalised by Lord Byron, this Gothic medieval castle seems to float on the serene surface of Lac Léman, disturbed only by the beautiful Belle Époque steamboats - an elegant fleet of side-wheel paddleboats built in the earlier part of the 19th century, which offer slow travel at its finest. Visitors can spend an afternoon surrounded by polished wood, brass and by-gone glamour, enjoying a five-course meal and watching the beauty of Vaud’s coastline slip past sailing from one side of the lake to the other.

In contrast, further along the quay, is a striking modern bronze statue of Freddie Mercury, a long time resident. Rock fans flock to the resort to visit Queen: The Studio Experience, at the Montreux Mountain Studios, where the band created large portions of their most acclaimed albums. There is a great selection of Queen memorabilia, set around the exhibition’s centerpiece, the original sound studio, where lead singer Mercury recorded his last songs. ►



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More than jazz: music fans flock to Montreux, not just for the famous festival, but to the Montreux Mountain Studios, now a museum for the rock band Queen.

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► One of the prettiest parts of the Swiss Riviera is the route from Montreux to Lausanne, where the lakeshore is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site for one special reason, its vineyard. Known as Lavaux, and dating back to the 11th century, every possible square inch supports cascading walled terraces of 10,000 vines, covering nearly 2,000 acres. Local Vaudois say that there are three suns in Lavaux: the one shining in the sky, the one reflected in the lake and, during the evening and night, the warmth coming from the heat accumulated by the miles and miles of high stone walls during hot summer days.

From historic to modern, festivals to natural beauty, there are so many reasons to visit Vaud and the Swiss Riviera. So close to Geneva, and yet a world away. 🌍

