

School Science Partnerships

Taking a group to CERN



making physics matter

These notes are intended for guidance only, based on the experience that I have had taking two groups of Ogden alumni to CERN and also of organising a staff visit there. The groups I took comprised mainly undergraduates and sixth-form school-leavers plus an occasional post-graduate or early stage career alumnus; the significant thing being that they were all over 18. That was entirely deliberate, of course, so, although I did consider issues of safety and well-being for the people in my group, and did set an expected standard of behaviour, given that the participants were there under The Ogden's Trust's name (and subsidy), they were, ultimately, responsible for themselves, entitled to go where they wanted during their free time and were not supervised.

I have also included in these notes, advice that I have gathered from other sources which, although has not been relevant to me so far, might be useful to others organising a school trip.

Links to relevant websites are included in the document.



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How do you book a visit?

It is actually fairly straight forward; just do it through [CERN's outreach pages](#) on its website. There's an enquiry form to complete on which you can state a couple of alternative dates. Group visits are for a minimum of eight people and I have deliberately kept my visits to under 24 people so that I can make use of CERN bus transport within the facility. If you take more than 24 people, you have to provide your own coach. I don't have any experience of that but I'm sure the CERN visits people can advise you. Visits to CERN are free!

The only thing I find surprising on the enquiry form is that it asks if you want to make use of the CERN restaurant. The large on-site cafeteria has been a highlight of many visits there but I was told (in September 2012) that, owing to security concerns they have decided not to allow visiting groups to use the cafeteria¹; as an alternative, they are opening a smaller, visitors' café near the reception area. If you are expecting to eat there, it would be worth checking, therefore, where that will be and whether you are expected at a particular time. Assuming it serves the same kind of food as the main cafeteria, lunch will cost about 10-15 CHF.

¹ November 2012: This decision has been overturned – the main cafeteria will remain open to group visitors, although there is also a sandwich kiosk near reception by the tram stop

What happens at CERN

Standard visits of three hours' duration (either morning or afternoon) include an introductory talk, a short film and then visits (by bus) to two experimental areas. Whether these are above or below ground depends on various things, such as whether the LHC is running, what other groups are there that day and the area of expertise of the guide you have been assigned.



In addition, you can extend your visit by visiting the two exhibition areas: *Microcosm*, which is a traditional-style permanent exhibition and *Universe of Particles* (aka the Globe), which is a state-of-the-art museum experience! The latter has a short film, with commentary, which is shown all over the ceiling – the English version of this is every hour on the quarter of the hour. There is also a small shop selling books, T-shirts, stationery and other miscellaneous souvenirs.

If you have links to a university department through your Ogden School Science Partnership, it is worth asking your contact there if they can arrange anything extra for you at CERN. It may be as simple as seeing if any of the research scientists from that university who are based at CERN at the time of your visit will meet your pupils for a “life-of-a-scientist” chat over a cup of tea in the cafeteria (this is often a useful way of showing pupils that scientists are normal people) or they might be able to arrange an additional lecture or activity for you on the day of your visit.

Getting there

I have flown to Geneva from Heathrow each time I've been there, twice on Swiss Air and once on easyJet. I opted for Swiss Air for the alumni trips because the people in my groups were from all over the country and so the numbers a little bit less under my control than they might have been if they all came from the same place. A group booking on a Swiss Air flight does not require the names of the passengers to begin with and the number in the party can be changed for no fee within certain limits for a certain amount of time. I think British Airways group bookings operate in much the same way. Of course, it costs considerably more than easyJet (£175 return compared to potentially about £60 depending on when you are able to book and your departure point) but provides greater flexibility.

Booking with easyJet is cheaper but you need to have the passport details of each passenger when you do it and I suspect that, if anyone drops out, the money is lost (although it may be possible to transfer the flight to another passenger for a fee). My easyJet booking was a staff visit for only six people so was easily managed.

Accommodation

Bearing in mind my role at The Ogden Trust, I am not required to keep costs to an absolute minimum; I'm supposed to be providing our alumni with an otherwise unlikely opportunity and something that strengthens their relationship with the Trust, so I did not go for the cheapest thing I could find. The people I took were required to share an ensuite twin bedroom (with a stranger, as they did not know each other before we set off) and I opted for the [Hotel de Genève](#), a small, city centre 2* hotel a short walk from the main station and with easy access to CERN and the other places we were visiting. Continental breakfast (cereals, eggs, cheese and ham as well as bread and pastries) is included. This turned out to be perfect for our requirements for the following reasons:

- free internet access on the (one) computer in the hotel lobby (paid WiFi access available in the bedrooms)
- tea and coffee available in the lobby all day and into the evening
- the second floor of the hotel has a communal area with seating and a snack vending machine on the landing; on my second visit, I requested all our rooms to be on this floor (and we filled it) so that the people in the group had somewhere to congregate in the evening without disturbing other guests
- the tram to CERN leaves from the road at the back of the hotel
- the main train station (to the airport and the main tram stops, e.g. to the UN building) is 5 minutes' walk away
- there are places to eat about 5 minutes' walk away
- the lake and the old town are 15 minutes' walk away

I would suggest this hotel is more suitable to groups of older students, and in numbers up to about 16. It could get a bit noisy for other guests otherwise. Breakfast is taken at tables in the lobby area and there is limited space. Given that your group will all be trying to have breakfast at approximately the same time, this could be tricky if the group is any bigger than 16, especially if there are other guests at the hotel.

If you do stay here, email the hotel to arrange to pre-allocate the rooms and find out what details you need from each person in the group to check in. The space in reception is too small for a party to hang around in while you try to get them to fill in their addresses and passport numbers on arrival. The second time I went, the hotel sent me a registration sheet which I filled in before I arrived so they just handed us the keys when we got there; the first time, it took an hour to register and we all felt rather hot and fractious by the end of it.



Alternative accommodation

I know of a sixth-form college that has taken several large parties to CERN in the past and who have stayed at the [Hotel Central](#) and reports that they are good at catering for groups. Other schools have stayed at either the [Geneva Youth Hostel](#) or the [City Hostel](#). Another option is to stay in France, where accommodation is generally cheaper, and cross the border for your visit to CERN. This may also depend on whether or not you want to visit other places of interest in Geneva while you are there.

Bonds, Guarantees and Insurance

I chose to book (the Swiss Air) flights and accommodation via an independent travel agent (although I had already pre-selected the hotel I wanted to stay in). This, of course, added to my costs slightly but gave me travel industry protection in case the trip had to be abandoned for some reason because the travel agent was a member of IATA, ATOL and ABTA. I arranged group travel insurance policies via AA Travel Insurance, but I imagine schools and local authorities have their own procedures for insuring school trips.

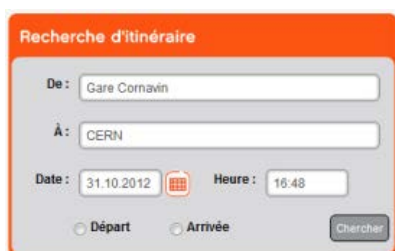
Travel within Geneva

If you fly into Geneva airport (sometimes known as Coitrin airport) and are staying in a Geneva hotel or hostel, then your transfer to the hotel on public transport is free. There are machines at the exit of the baggage reclaim hall where you get a transport ticket. There is a time limit on it (about 90 minutes) which is plenty of time if you travel to your accommodation straight away. You should advise your students to keep their boarding cards with them in case proof of arrival date is required by a ticket inspector.

The main railway station (Gare Cornavin) is about a 10 minute journey away and there are [frequent departures](#) from within the airport terminal.

Visitors to Geneva staying at a hotel or hostel are entitled to a free transport card for trains buses and trams within the Geneva boundary. I'm not entirely sure where the Geneva boundary is but it definitely goes as far as CERN! These are issued to you at your accommodation.

Swiss public transport is always on time! In Geneva it is run by [tpg](#) and timetables are available online usually about two months in advance. Tram number 14 goes from the centre of Geneva directly to CERN.



The image shows a search form titled "Recherche d'itinéraire" on the tpg website. The form has a white background with an orange border. It contains the following fields and elements:

- De:** Gare Cornavin
- À:** CERN
- Date:** 31.10.2012
- Heure:** 16:48
- Radio buttons for **Départ** and **Arrivée**, with **Départ** selected.
- A **Chercher** button.

On the tpg website, you have to do your initial search in French but, once you've got a timetable up, there is an option to search again in English, so then you can easily find the intermediary stops (if, for example, Gare Cornavin is not your nearest stop).

What to wear/take

It is important that you take everyone's passport to CERN when you visit as it is part in Switzerland and part in France. If you cross the border when being taken to visit a particular building, you could technically, be asked to show the passports (though I never have and I crossed the border each time – better safe than sorry, though!). You should also advise everyone about their footwear – open-toed sandals, flip-flops and high-heeled shoes are not allowed for safety reasons. Also, remind everyone to bring their cameras. CERN has a completely open culture and visitors are allowed to take photos of anything.

What else is there to do in Geneva?

The longer trips that I have organised comprised a walking tour of the old town soon after arrival, followed by a traditional fondue, a day at CERN and a day of sightseeing, which featured a visit to the United Nations, some free time and a cruise on Lake Geneva.

The walking tour: this is offered by the [Geneva Tourist Office](#) and lasts about two hours. Inevitably, the success of this depends on the personality of your guide. My experience is mixed – the first guide was knowledgeable and funny and the group warmed to her; the second was quite dour in her delivery and interest certainly waned part-way through. It does, however, act as a good introduction to the city and enables people to get their bearings IF your students are going to have any time in the city and be let loose on their own! A word of advice, though, Geneva's history is heavily Calvinist and the guides talk about this all the time – it is quite likely that your students don't really know what this means so a bit of preparation probably wouldn't go amiss!



Alternatively, if your time is short, take the students down to the lake so they can see the Jet d'Eau, the stunning view of the Alps and Mont Blanc and the vista of city buildings while having an ice-cream or a coffee.

The fondue: the [Restaurant Edelweiss](#) does the full works – fondue and men in lederhosen playing cow horns and bells! You can email them for set menus and they will offer alternatives for vegetarians.

The United Nations: this has been a very popular part of the trip with the undergraduates; a tour lasts an hour and is very reasonably priced. You have to pay on the day, though. Groups need to arrive about half an hour before their allotted time to allow for airport-style security checks. We asked to eat at the UN cafeteria and were allowed to (about 10-15 CHF for lunch). There is a souvenir shop there so allow time for that.



The cruise: I booked the Cruise of the Mermaid with [Swiss Boat](#) – a fairly inexpensive 75-minute cruise, which gave a different perspective on the lake, mountains and city and was enjoyed by all. It's not a very big boat, though, so would not be suitable for party sizes larger than 20. You can email them and arrange a group booking in advance.



In their free time, most students have just liked to revisit the old town, go back to the lake or go in search of chocolate shops, although some have also visited the [Botanic Gardens](#) (near the UN).

If you want to include an excursion out of Geneva, I know of a school that visits [Gruyère](#), famous for its cheese and a real Swiss gem (I have been there myself in a personal capacity). It's a traffic free (except coaches, I think) medieval town complete with castle and mountain views. You can visit the cheese factory and also (apparently) combine it with a visit to the Cailler chocolate factory in Broc en route.

Or you could ski...

Practical stuff

- Geneva is one hour ahead of BST
- the principal language is French although, as a city of international diplomacy, many people speak English
- the currency is the Swiss Franc (CHF) although Euros are accepted in some places
- everyone should have a valid passport and a valid [European Health Insurance Card](#) (please note, the latter does have an expiry date!) – these are free from the nhs website (some websites charge to apply for you; there's no need, it's not a difficult process)
- Geneva is an expensive city and not ideal for student souvenir hunters, although the chocolate shops may provide good hunting ground for lower-priced gifts; the souvenir shops at CERN and the UN go for quality rather than cheap rubbish!
- as a guide, 'eating out' prices are in the region of 6-8 CHF for a McDonalds burger, 15-25 CHF for a pizza and from 20 CHF for a Chinese meal plus drinks.

Finally, I designed a trip booklet for the students which contained all the information they needed and short biographies of each of them (given that they had never met). If you want to do something similar, you can see an edited sample of the one I did in the Downloads section of the Trust's website. **Please note that you cannot use the cartoon on the front cover as you are not licensed to do so.** You can find funny cartoons online and purchase the copyright to use them if you want (it's not expensive – our restricted use licence for this one was about £12). Do enjoy your trip!