CERN Tech Geneva Setup Complete Guide

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“We wish you have as much fun as we had here.”

This Document is aimed for COMMITED Techs, focusing on life general and preparation before coming to CERN and Geneva.

For Information regarding the job, please see the file New CIS Techs - Intro to Job.

You’ll meet all kinds of people and half of them will randomly leave at the end of summer, or some random month. It’s the sad truth of CERN and Geneva, so be ready to say goodbye a lot. But new people keep coming as well!

You will also meet people from literally everywhere in the world!

**After you commit:**

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Get your Checklist items done ASAP. Some information, as this one, is only accessible to you once you get your UChicago twiki account, then the CERN account.

Those following things from the checklist need to be top priority:

1. Get UofC HEP computer account for work on ATLAS from Mary Heintz
2. Register to become an ATLAS member
3. VISA!! (You need an invitation letter from ATLAS, therefore register with them first!)
4. Look for your Initial Stay at Geneva.

**Special Instructions for VISA:**

Please check off this link [Visas for entry and stays in the Host States | Admin e-guide (cern.ch)](https://admin-eguide.web.cern.ch/en/procedure/visas-entry-and-stays-host-states) provided by CERN first. Then, move on to [Where to apply for a national visa? (admin.ch)](https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/usa/en/home/visa/entry-ch/more-90-days/where-to-apply-national.html) to find the visa desk you want to send your files to, where you will also find all the required documents to send [Which documents should I submit with a national visa application? (admin.ch)](https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/usa/en/home/visa/entry-ch/more-90-days/documents-national.html).

The complete document list needed are:

- Original passport/travel document

- Copy of valid passport or travel document (photo, data and signature pages only)

- For non US citizens: notarized copy of proof of residency in the USA, e.g. a valid permanent resident card (green card), H1B visa, F1 visa (plus copy of I-20), etc.

- completed and signed visa application D [form](https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/einreise/visumantragsformulare/visumantrag-visumd-en-de.pdf). Please also indicate your e-mail address and phone number.

- Two recent identical passport photos. Digital files and photocopies will not be accepted.

- The letter from CERN, confirming the exact dates of your stay in Switzerland

- Curriculum vitae (CV) with references

- Copies of your previous diplomas (university level only)

- Short explanation of your research project

- Financial guarantees (sponsor letters, bank statements, etc.)

- Visa fee: exempt from paying visa fees

- Prepaid and self-addressed return envelope with tracking, to return the passport (USPS, FedEx or UPS). Please indicate your name and address as both sender and recipient.

We recommend you apply through the Swiss visa desk in Washington/New York, as we have found it relatively quick - you are expected to get your visa back in 2 weeks.

Do not worry about insurance at this stage - you will need to get your own insurance once you arrive in Swiss. The Maroon Plan does not have great international coverage.

**Initial Stay on Arrival at Geneva:**

1. CERN Hotel:<https://hostel.cern.ch/>

B38 - Located right next to where you work, in CERN campus.

Maximum stay is up to 90 consecutive days. (You can check-out and then check-in with one day in gap to avoid this, but…)

Make sure to book early, a lot of summer student are coming.

1. CERN Hostel St. Genis: Same website above, choose carefully.

Located in France, with 15’ transportation time by bus.

The bus comes every hour, and there are few shuttles from CERN, at shift changing time.

1. Other Hostels you find:

Initial stay is covered by the team. Transportation from France is not recommended.

The IBIS hotel chain is generally recommended by Mark (cheap, comfortable, convenient)

**When you arrive in Geneva:**

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You will want to set up your phone and transportation ASAP, in order to make the rest of the transition less stressful.

**TRANSPORTATION:**

In Switzerland, you should buy a ticket before getting on public transit. You do not need to present it or validate it once you get on the bus/train, but simply hold onto it \*in case\* the ticket checkers come by. (The fines are 100 CHF if you are caught without a ticket. Rare chances to encounter a ticket checker though, for a year, I only ran into twice.)

We advise get a 1-year tpg (geneva public transit) subscription and the Swiss half-pass, which gives you 50% off all SBB (swiss national rail) trains for the year. You can get these by going to the SBB office in Gare Cornavin. Take your passport and an ID photo with you. If you want to travel in France, I would suggest you get the SNCF Carte Jeune, which operates similarly to the half-pass but with a smaller discount.

Chicago Group has a CERN van that can be used for a lot of daily activities. It is manual, and you need to submit Mission Order (can be a long term one for traveling occasionally to nearby places) through EDH.

Transportation method near CERN:

Geneva Daily - Tram and Bus. They run frequent and much to everywhere you want to go. Recommend to get the Annual Card for 400 CHF from Cornavin. This can be covered by the relocation allowance.

France - Bus only. Less frequent, in non-working hours only 1 per hour.

Train Traveling - Cornavin. Recommend the half-fare card for 120 CHF/year. You will get all your traveling in Switzerland for 50%. The SBB app from app-store will be very helpful.

Flight Traveling - Airport. Small airport, usually get there 90 minutes before flight is enough. No direct connection from CERN to airport. Easyjet (a budget airline) is often a good choice.

**PHONE:**

You will probably want to get a Swiss sim card and phone plan once you arrive. The major carriers are Swisscom or Salt (also consider UPC, unlimited in europe for ~45 chf/mo). You could also get a prepaid plan from Lebara, which is probably cheaper. In any case, take your phone, passport, and Swiss card (if u have it) to the store of your desired provider, and they can help you from here.

Swiss phone plans are more expensive than French ones, but they have better signals (which can be important when working in the pit). We recommend getting a phone plan that which extends your data to (Western) Europe, since you may want to travel.

Note that two-year contracts can be cancelled early given our residency status. You are not forced to buy a 1-year contract. We recommend the following providers:

Swiss: [Swisscom](https://www.swisscom.ch/de/privatkunden/mobile/handy-abo.html/?campID=SEA_SE_R1GR1921_58700007907719078_p74276814952&gad=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwu-KiBhCsARIsAPztUF0fMkeK4KbxODeYrYs7B0-iRb6FPck1uPvGLNTZzFuTJGPicnLBI5UaAv85EALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds)

French: Orange, Lebara

You can get a CERN number as well, but it is difficult and complicated to manage.

<https://cernphone.docs.cern.ch/install_cp/#2-installing-cernphone-mobile>

**HOUSING:**

Now you need to look for Long-Term Residency.

Geneva - Expensive, but more convenient.Studio ~1100 CHF to 2200 CHF depending on location.

France - Better living cost, but transportation is less convenient. You can basically get a 1b1b for the same (and less) amount money as a studio in Geneva.1b1b in St. Genis is ~ 900 to 1300 EUR.

Most CERN people, and Chicago Grads live in France for better living cost.

But traditionally, CERN Techs have lived in Geneva - we are only here for a year, don’t miss out the city. (Going to airport in the morning for a weekend trip is much easier in Geneva than in France)

Alexia Leyval (Alexia.Leyval@cern.ch) is the ATLAS relocation coordinator for US/Canada. She is a good point of contact for verifying or inquiring about housing options.

To find a housing:

Don’t pay anyone without first seeing the accommodation yourself!

Make sure it suits your needs – you’ll be living there for a year!

1. Take a pass down from previous tech…
2. CERN Marketplace: <https://marketplace.web.cern.ch/login>
3. Young At CERN: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/young.at.cern/>
4. Geneva Interns Association: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/299512343395074/>
5. General Geneva Housing groups:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2147801725467259/> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1152250291545078/> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1008325196003055/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/327007357342406>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/543638386002642>

The first two source is highly recommended.

**INSURANCE:**

Contact: Lesya Horyn ([horyn@uchicago.edu](mailto:horyn@uchicago.edu)). [Document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LuQpDHtqo6TAZFg3-GGCvPv_t7U0y-PpMSDezG7hshs/edit) with UChicago health coverage.

You are not titled to CERN *employee* insurance, but there is a CERN *user* insurance program that can be paid for out-of-pocket. Check the details [here](https://www.allianzcare.com/en/group-hub/cernmpa.html). It’s roughly 300 EUR/month.

UC insurance does not do a good job covering you abroad.

CIGNA is fine, a little expensive (but relatively better than a lot other insurance, like Swisscare). Full coverage is ~1700 USD, but you don’t have to worry a thing afterwords. If you travel a lot, it would be better to get the one which covers outside Swiss in West Europe.

For your dental and other needs, it’s better to check with the insurance company.

**HOSPITALS:**

There’s no hospital in CERN.

The hospital nearest CERN is: Hôpital de La Tour

The better hospital is: Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève (HUG)

Have your insurance card ready, and just go to emergency. Otherwise, you make appointment with phone.

**In emergency, you can always call CERN Fire Brigade**, as their number is at the back of your CERN card. 0041 22 767 4444.

**Or 112**, which is the 911 in Europe.

Medicine is easy to get in Swiss, pharmacies are everywhere - you do need prescription for a lot of drugs though. Pharmacies may honor a US prescription when you arrive (ask).

**MONEY/CURRENCY:**

You will be paid in USD, to a US bank account. You can manage this in your Workday.

Any issue with this part should be communicated to UChicago Payroll, at <https://uchicago.service-now.com/services?id=services_sc_cat_item&sys_id=a9982dbd1ba5d410b2b80f6cdc4bcbff>

Note that, if you are an international student, you don’t pay taxes! Make sure you ask payroll not to withhold your money for taxes!

You can choose to pay Swiss/French taxes, but not required. Pay tax just confirms you have stayed here for a year, which counts towards your immigration meter if you want to become a permanent resident in those countries. (E.g. if you pay 10 year of tax in Swiss, meaning you have stayed here for 10 years, you can become a permanent resident in Swiss. However, detailed info should be consulted through their webpages.)

You will spend CHF in Switzerland, and EUR in France and other place of Europe.

They normally prefer the local currency, but it is possible to spend EUR in Swiss, and CHF in nearby French towns (but not elsewhere, like Paris). They discount your money if you spend it in the wrong place. MasterCard and VISA card are accepted, but not much else.

A money transfer card is highly recommended - you can get it through your bank or consider the following services. they circumvent international transaction fees and ATM fees.

1. WISE: <https://wise.com/>
2. Revolt: <https://www.revolut.com/>

Make sure to set up your Wise/Revolut BEFORE arriving in Switzerland. They will send the physical card to your home address. Without it, you may not be able to take out cash without a large fee

**Language:**

[Peter, please feel free to add your perspective here as well.]

French people are very proud of their language, therefore sometimes they refuse to talk in English. Therefore, it is better to greet people using “bonjour”. (The German speaking population, on the other hand, is much nicer in this regard.)

Old notes from Dawit:

You absolutely don’t have to learn French, I didn’t and survived, but if you’re determined, here are a few places you can check out:

DuoLingo : It’s really not helpful in the beginning, but gradually helps with grammar Duolingo cards

Memrise **:** I found this one more helpful at first

SoundCloud: Learn French by Podcast **:** The Beginners lessons are actually really good, just randomly listen to them when you’re in a tram etc

Benjamin Houy: <https://frenchtogether.com/learn-french-songs/?utm_source=FT&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Beginner+French+Journey&utm_content=64+songs+to+learn+French+with+music>

Extra French : Old TV Show on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaNqp4FXh-s&t=2s>

More old notes from Ellie:

I studied French on my own before/during my time in Geneva. I think that learning some basics (asking for stuff, reading signs and notices etc.) made my life much easier and was definitely worth the effort. I was able to achieve an intermediate level on my own within just a few months. This is how I did it:

I started using the app Pimsleur for the first ~3 months. The lessons are audio-based, which was super helpful because I developed my listening skills very quickly.

After completing the first 2 - 3 levels of Pimsleur, you will have a reasonable grasp on the basics, and can start trying to grow your vocabulary. I used memrise for this. By this point, I could already understand some french youtube videos and podcasts and used them for additional listening practice. VERY HELPFUL: innerFrench youtube channel by Hugo Cotton, and his intermediate french podcast. Some additional shows/podcasts/youtube channels I would recommend: A Service de La France, Programme B, Maintenant Vous Savez, Les Pieds Sur Terre, Cyrus North.

If you’re feeling particularly motivated to learn grammar, get the book “Grammaire Progressive du Francais” and start doing the exercises. I do not recommend starting this step too early, as I think it’s more useful to grasp the basics of conversation first in order to get around Geneva.

**Cheap** **Groceries:** Cheap asian grocery stores in Annemasse and Paquis, go to Lidl or Denner for other cheap groceries. **Lidl** is good for vegetables and fruit. **Aldi** is a good cheap option as well.

Migros and Coop are otherwise the “standard” options, but slightly more expensive. To give you a sense, a week’s worth of groceries for one may run you around 50 CHF. Also, if it’s sunday and you are in desperate need of some groceries worry not you have options. The Migros at the train station (Cornavin) and the Airport are open on Sundays. For Andrew there's a Promar in Augustins that is open all days of the week 7 to 9pm. There are also plenty of smaller bodegas open late and on sundays around town - they’re more expensive and have less options but hey it’s a Sunday.

Big shopping mall at Balexert.

If you live in or near France on the CERN side, **Carrefour** is also a great choice for groceries, as it is much larger than those you might find in Switzerland and more resembles an American grocery store. The prices are also generally cheaper. The 68 bus stops right in front at the **Saint-Genis-Porte de France** stop.

There’s a wonderful Asian supermarket in Thoiry which opened recently. “Mo & More Market”. If you are into Asain cook style, do check that out. Thoiry has a commercial center which is good for a lot of things.

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[The rest are some life suggestions, for fun.]

[Check them out when you have free time.]

<To Peter: I have gathered many stuff from different perspective… but no guarantee. – Jacky >

**Summer:**

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This city truly blossoms during summer. People are out and about, there are tables & chairs everywhere, festivals of all kinds pop up like wild mushrooms.

So, there is a [TON of stuff going on over the summer](https://www.localguidesconnect.com/t5/Travel-and-Advice/Things-to-do-in-Geneva-Switzerland-Summer-2018/m-p/780665#M35623)!

Go swimming in summer to **Bains des Paquis** and **Geneve Plage.** You can swim in Jonction as well but in the river. A very common Geneva experience is jumping from the bridge across from Ethnobar into the river. Many people will also do [float trips](https://mybiggeneva.com/en/geneva-local-tips-float-down-the-river-rhone/) down the Rhone starting from **Jonction** and ending at Vernier-Parfumerie, just before the last motorway bridge.

Hiking in **Saleve** is a fun experience! It takes about 1-2 hours. **Chamonix** is great for skiing but you can apparently go during summer time for hiking as well. There are also many outdoor activities to do in **Valais**, from skiing in the winter to mountain biking or hiking in the summer. Generally, there is no shortage of incredible vistas and breathtaking hikes around Switzerland.

I recommend finding routes on **SWISS mobility**, just google it and you will see.

During July go to the **‘Lake Parade’.**

In August **‘Fetes des Geneve’** happens and it is really really fun, absolutely don’t miss it. (you can’t really miss it anyway, it’s everywhere around the lake) **Plainpalais** literally always has stuff going on.

The UN also owns a [private beach](https://unport.org/) near Jardin Botaniques that is free to CERN employees (just tell them you are an intern or they may still charge you a 5 CHF entry fee). There is a restaurant, and beach bar, lawn chairs for sunbathing, and a paddle board rental service.

Also there are a ton of boat parties Reggaeton, 2000s … Definitely check them out!

Additionally, Halles de Ille has Salsa on Wednesdays.

**Winter:**

Go skiing! Ask Doug about it. Check out some of the indoor bars like Dynastie or the hidden bar. Also eat chestnuts. The school year will start so many students that were away will be back in town. ESN events on Wednesdays, if they don’t change the time, also start.

Added by Ellie - I ~highly~ recommend joining the ski club international de geneve (website: scig.ch). They organize outings every weekend for the entire winter. They have classes for people of all levels at each outing, so if you are a beginner like me it’s easy to find an instructor and learn how to ski. Rent your skis from Univers-Sports SA in Servette, as they have a great selection for rentals and have good prices.

Recommend to go to Zermatt, to see the matterhorn and ski.

**Socializing through organizations:**

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Become a member of **Young at CERN.** Sadly it's not used for social stuff that much but every now and then they throw some fun parties.

Going to R1 on Thursday and Friday evenings is a very common CERN experience.

If you want to meet people outside of CERN, checking out the facebook pages / websites of the groups below, they organize events.

**ESN: Erasmus Student Network**. They have pubnights and more if you want to meet some (mostly) European college students.

**GIA: Geneva Interns Association**, tends to be dominated by UN interns. They also have pubnights and more. People here are generally older than ESN people. GIA and ESN often organize events together.

**Glocals:** They have several groups. Hiking, reading clubs, movie screenings etc. Usually older people.

**EA: Effective Altruism Geneva**. There are some nice people in this group, but they can be a little ‘cult’-ish.

**Mundo Lingo:** Every Tuesday at Ethnobar, there is a language exchange event. Usually it is full of people that speak all kinds of languages from all levels! You get these flag stickers and put them on you so in order to let people know which languages you speak etc. However it might get flooded by creepy guys :/

**BlaBla Language Exchange:** Sort of another Mundo Lingo, but this time the bar changes.

**Restaurants:**

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**Nyala Barka** → Ethiopian food <3 Vegetarian & vegan friendly! Service takes long :/

**Ali Haydar Kebap** → My favorite kebab place in Geneva, but I might be biased since the staff is entirely Turkish/Kurdish. You can go here and spend hours drinking wine/beer and eating.

**Cafe du Soleil** → Cute place, traditional Swiss fondue and malakoff (???)

**Bains des Paquis →** The restaurant has great fondue!

**Ingleside** → famous burger place, there’s often a line so be ready

**Holy Cow** → Not as good burger chain that you will somehow end up in

**Sunset Restaurant** → ‘vegetarian’ place that serves fish, pleasant

**Sen →** Vietnamese place, written as ‘Cho lon’ in gmaps.

That steak place Kaan took me to → They only have steak but they’re super famous so go if that’s what you’re into

**Hamburger Foundation →** The one in Paquis is nice.

**Les Armures** → French onion soup is really good! Raclette isn’t that good, fondue is alright but Soleil has better ones

**Luigia** → Upscale but good Italian place.

**Parfums de Beyruth** → Cheap and delicious kebab/shawarma/falafel shop that is open very late. Its proximity to Gare Cornavin and late hours make it an excellent way to end a night out.

**Cafes:**

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**Les Recyclables** → a library-cafe, kinda pricey and service could take a while, but it is such a pleasant place… They have live music sometimes + serve food!

**Livresse** → library-cafe, open until midnight. “Lesbian” cafe - 1am other than Sundays

**Boreal Coffee Shop Stand** → sort of a coffee chain, but the one in Stand is big and you can do work in there, many expats frequent the place

**Coutume Coffee** → Pricey but I like going there sometimes.

**Karoma Royal** → best coffee in Geneva, really cute Italian place. They bring coffee from Naples. They have cheap cocktails on Thursdays + Fridays, also the staff is super friendly. Seriously meet the staff and tell them I say hi :P

**Starbucks** → On Sundays when things are closed these are open until 9 so you might need them :/ They’re super expensive tho!

**Ill Rousseau** → You’ll end up in this island thing for sure, there’s a pub / cafe in the middle.

**Pubs:**

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**La Barje** → Open bar, definitely go several times during the summer. Try their ‘ambree’ beer

**Kraken** → very popular with students

**L’elephant canette or whatever** → Has awful cocktails but good beer, you’ll run into the randomest people here. Open on Sundays

**Calamar**

**Riverside →** Cocktail bar next to the river. Really good cocktails! Try Hugo.

**Le Terreau →** It is an event space that basically looks like a high school’s dining hall in a basement. Follow their events though, they do a lot of different things so you might run into stuff you like.

**Junction pub (don’t know its name to this day)**

**Dynastie →** amazing cocktails, indoors, fun bartenders

**Lady Godiva**

That cute one in Courage (has trivia on monday nights)

**Ethnobar**

**Pickwicks (also has trivia night)**

**Scandale** → The go to afterwork place. It has some pretty bizarre decoration including a piano in their bathroom. They have a basement that hosts swing dances etc.

**Nathans** → gay bar with dance floor and some awesome bartenders

**Le Phare** → gay bar that hosts some cool events

**Coyote** → Cheap beer and in general a fun place, I really like it

**Cafe Cuba**

**Cafe Arts** → Not the best drinks but very cute place and comfy couches.

**Clubhouse** → They host several events throughout the year, I don’t like them much

**Au coin mousse** → The nice bar with the lots of beer options to try

**Hidden Fridge Bar →** experience it for yourself, inside restaurant Bleu Nuit. Closed all summer

**Bongo Joe →** This record store / cafe/ pub is right where Andrew lives , they have a cool selection of records and good beer

**La Petite Reine →** Right behind Gare Cornavin, this lively bar has cheap drinks and interesting patrons. There is also a cool artistic/creative vibe if you are into that sort of thing and there is often plenty of seating both outdoors and indoors. This remains my favorite bar in Geneva - Jake

**Café La Clémence →** Nice bar situated in the old city with a great atmosphere, especially if it’s warm enough to sit outside.

**Clubs:**

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**Bypass Geneva** → kinda trash, but you won’t die. Don’t go unless there’s a cool event

**Village du Soir** → far away but cool! Several dance floors, open middle area with food trucks (yum!)

**Audio Club** → I like this place a lot, the staff is awesome. Smaller than Village but still has two rooms

**Monte Cristo** → a little better than Bypass but I am not a big fan

**La Graviere →** It’s okay

**Motel Campo** → Ugh I really dislike this place, but many people like it. It is usually techno/electronic music and people do & sell drugs

**L’usine** → ah <3 but also definitely a frat party vibe. Outside there’s lots of drug selling

**Baroque** → very upscale, not really my thing, you actually need to dress up

**Halles** → I really like it there. also functions as a bar + restaurant. You’ll probably end up there several times

**Baby Bao**