

# WALK THE REFORMATION

## WHAT IS THE REFORMATION?

The Reformation was a 16th-century revolution within Christianity, of which Geneva was one of the main centres. It saw individuals as free and responsible for their beliefs. People turned to the Bible for guidance rather than to church authorities. The Reformation was a crucial stage between the Renaissance and the modern era.

This walking tour will take you to 10 places of symbolic importance for the Reformation in Geneva, a period that left a deep mark on the city's architecture, economy and spirituality.

The Reformation began in Germany in 1517 with Martin Luther. Reformed ideas reached Geneva as early as 1525. It was another 10 years before Geneva officially adopted the new faith, between 1535 and 1536, thanks to the efforts of a French

preacher, Guillaume Farel. The movement really began to take off with the arrival of John Calvin, in July 1536.

During the 1540s, Geneva became a safe haven for Protestants from across Europe fleeing persecution. These men and women found in Geneva a home where they could freely live their faith.

The influx of refugees began in the mid-16th century and rose sharply following the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, an attempt to rid France of Protestants by order of the king. The mainly French, but also Italian, English and even Spanish, refugees brought their skills and know-how to Geneva. As pastors, teachers, lawyers, doctors, printers, watchmakers, goldsmiths or merchant bankers, they contributed greatly to the city's economic growth.

A second wave of refugees arrived in the 17th century, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). Geneva once again became a safe haven for Protestants from France. They boosted the industries that Geneva became famous for in the 18th century: watchmaking, banking and the manufacture of a type of printed or painted fabric called "indienne". They also consolidated the city's stature as a centre for art and science.

Following the adoption of the Reformation, the intellectual and spiritual influence of the "Protestant Rome", as Geneva was then called, grew substantially.

### Where to eat

Feeling hungry? **Café Papon, Les Armures, le Restaurant de l'Hôtel de Ville, Le Radar de Poche or Pâtisserie Hautlé** offer delicious local dishes to delight the most discerning of palates.



### International Museum of the Reformation

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#### Opening Hours

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Closed on Monday  
Closed 24, 25 and 31 December,  
and 1 January

Open on Easter Monday, Pentecost Monday and Jeune Fédéral (Monday following the third Sunday of September)

Musée international de la Réforme

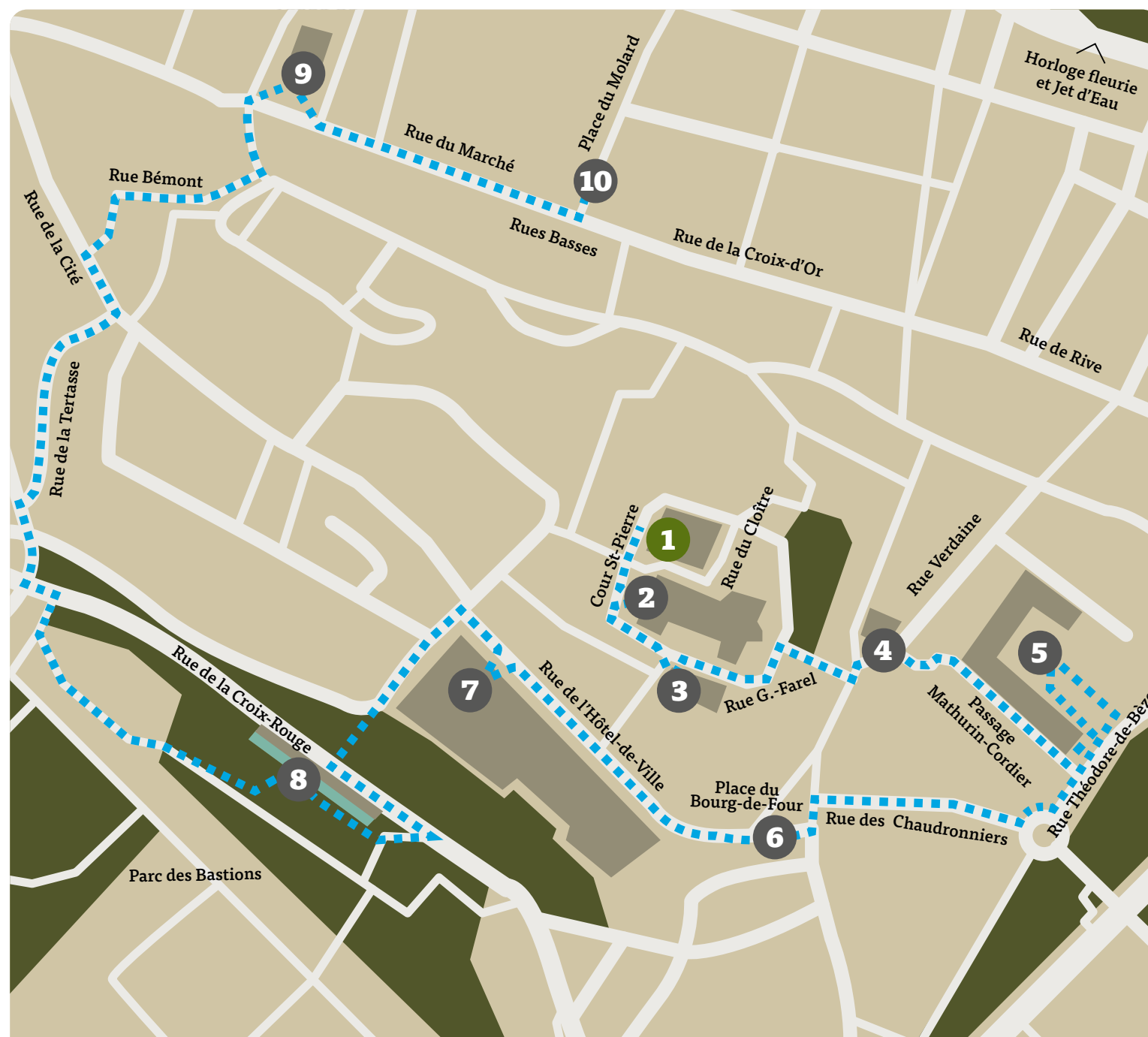
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Musée international de la Réforme

Museum Admission 13 / 8 / 6 CHF  
- Free with Geneva Pass!

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International Museum of the Reformation



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## International Museum of the Reformation

The MIR (International Museum of the Reformation) is situated on Cour Saint-Pierre, in the magnificent Maison Mallet, a mansion built in the 18th century on the former site of the Cathedral cloister.

The design of the mansion had to accommodate the Mallets' large family, while satisfying a desire on the part of the city fathers to beautify the Cour St-Pierre, as well as complying with local regulations. A tall order indeed! Completed in 1723 according to plans drawn up by the Parisian architect Jean-François Blondel, the mansion caused a stir among those in favour of strictly enforcing Geneva's sumptuary laws, rules designed to restrict and regulate luxury spending.

# 1



The Museum of the Reformation brings to life the history and legacy of this major movement within Christianity through a unique collection of objects, paintings, books and manuscripts. Founded in 2005, the museum was completely renovated and transformed in 2023.

## Saint-Pierre Cathedral

Built between 1160 and 1230, St. Pierre Cathedral has been restored and rebuilt several times over the centuries, often following damage by fire.

After the Reformation was adopted in the mid-16th century, the cathedral was stripped of all its interior decorations and ornaments, and the painted decor was whitewashed. Only the stained-glass windows survived.

It was here that John Calvin preached to hundreds of parishioners twice on Sundays and once on weekdays every other week.

# 2



The stunning 360° views of the city and lake from the top of the towers are well worth the long climb - 157 steps in all! The Archaeological Site under the Cathedral contains treasures dating back to Roman times. Admission is free with the Geneva Pass or Espace St-Pierre combined ticket.

## Calvin Auditory

Built in the 15th century in the Gothic style, this small auditorium with a simple façade stands right next to St Pierre Cathedral.

In the mid-16th century, English, Scottish, Dutch and Italian Protestants gathered here to worship in their native tongue. The reformer John Knox preached at the Auditoire after he came to Geneva as a refugee. It was here, too, that he and a group of fellow-countrymen decided to translate the Bible into English. Completed between 1556 and 1559, their famous translation is known as the "Geneva Bible".

The Auditoire is still a Protestant place of worship today.

# 3



The quickest way to the next stop is through a quirky little passageway called Passage des Degrés-de-Poules, so named probably because its steep steps resemble those of a henhouse!

## Lutheran Church

Built between 1762 and 1766, this building was a gift from the city of Geneva to the German-speaking Lutheran community. Although they share the same faith, Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists differ slightly on points of doctrine and in the way they worship. To allow Lutherans to worship according to their custom, the Republic of Geneva in 1760 gave them permission to build a church - on the condition that it not be identifiable as such from the outside!

The building was therefore designed to look like a traditional three-storey dwelling rather than a Protestant church. The sanctuary occupies the building's ground and first floors.

Today, the Lutheran Church serves a large and diverse community of believers with services in English, German, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Finnish.

# 4



Walk to the next stop through the charming Passage Mathurin-Cordier, named after a famous theologian, teacher, humanist and Reformer.

## Collège Calvin

Protestants believed that the faithful should be able to read the Bible in order to form their own opinion. Education was therefore a central priority. As a result, Protestant Genevans had a much higher literacy rate than their Catholic neighbours.

When the people of Geneva adopted the Reformation, on 21 May 1536, they also decided to build a school, which all children would be required to attend. The plan eventuated only in 1559, however, with the founding of the Collège and Académie (the ancestor of the University of Geneva). The original building is still in use today as a high school, appropriately named Collège Calvin since 1969.

In the 16th century, the Collège welcomed boys from the age of 7. The curriculum was essentially literary: subjects included Latin - and later Greek - grammar, logic and rhetoric, followed by the classical authors and Calvin's catechism. With ten hours of lessons a day, six days a week, pupils did not have it easy!

# 5



Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross movement and the famous Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges attended Collège Calvin. Today, the high school has more than 800 students.

## Place du Bourg-de-Four

Welcome to Geneva's oldest square!

The Place du Bourg-de-Four is the true heart of the Old Town, the point where all roads to Geneva meet. As such, it became an important marketplace from the 11th century onwards.

Notice how some of the houses bordering the square were raised by a storey, in order to create additional housing. For a long time, this was only justified by the need to house the Protestant refugees who arrived from all over Europe from the 16th century onwards. Recent historical studies have shown that most of the extensions built in Geneva at that time were in fact motivated by economic considerations.

# 6



The lively sidewalk café La Clémence is the perfect place to stop and sample a Calvinus, a delicious local craft beer!

## Hôtel de Ville

The Hôtel de Ville, or City Hall, has been the political heart of the city for over 500 years.

Its construction spanned almost three centuries and it underwent many changes before reaching its present state.

In 1526, a new political institution was founded: the Conseil des Deux-Cents, the ancestor of today's Grand Conseil, or cantonal parliament. In 1535, the new body banned the Catholic Mass in the city, thus heralding Geneva's transition to the Reformation.

Notice Geneva's coat of arms above the large door to entrance number 2. It combines a crowned eagle, symbol of the Holy Roman Empire, which Geneva belonged to in the 11th century, and a gold key, symbol of the bishop who in 1387 awarded freedoms and franchises to his subjects.

# 7



Walk all the way up the beautiful 16th-century paved ramp in the courtyard, designed to enable visitors to reach all three floors of the building without dismounting from their horse or sedan chair!

## Reformation Wall

Built between 1909 and 1917, this monument occupies a highly symbolic spot at the foot of the former city walls, directly below the Hôtel de Ville and facing the University of Geneva.

The ten statues that make up the wall stand under the motto of Geneva, Post Tenebras Lux (Light After Darkness).

The four largest, in the middle, portray the leading figures of the Genevan Reformation: Guillaume Farel, John Calvin, Théodore de Bèze and John Knox. The six medium-sized statues and the eight stone reliefs depict the main figures and events that marked the spread of the Reformation from Geneva across Europe and onwards to America. On either side of the wide steps, two stones engraved with the names of Luther and Zwingli pay tribute to the Reformers who spearheaded the 16th-century Reformation in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, a generation before Calvin. Marie Dentière, one of the first female theologians, is also commemorated here.

# 8



The Reformation Wall is the work of sculptor Paul Landowski, who also designed the famous *Christ the Redeemer* statue in Rio.

## Temple de la Fusterie

Temple de la Fusterie was the first new place of worship established after the Reformation. Built between 1713 and 1715, it was originally called "Temple Neuf", or "New Church".

Before then, Protestant services were held at St Pierre Cathedral and in the former Catholic churches of St Gervais and La Madeleine, which were reconfigured to meet the needs of the Protestant service. It became necessary to build a fourth church following an influx of new refugees after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685.

# 9



The Temple de la Fusterie was built by the architect Jean Vennes, himself a Huguenot refugee. In the 18th century, he was also very active in the construction of the former Hôpital général, which houses today, near Bourg-de-Four, the Palais de Justice.

## Rues Basses and place du Molard

In the past, the lower part of the city was a hub of commercial activity, with a bustling port and several covered and outdoors markets. The first markets were organised as early as the mid-13th century, and their importance boosted the development of this part of the town.

The Place du Molard was for many centuries the centre of Geneva's political and economic life. It was in here, on 1 January 1533, that Antoine Froment, a disciple of Guillaume Farel, first preached the Reformed ideas in a public sermon.

# 10



Did you know that between the basalt cobblestones of the Place du Molard are 1857 luminous paving stones? They are a symbolic reminder of the presence of water in this ancient port, and send greetings to both locals and tourists in the 6 official languages of the United Nations.