

# MAISON TAVEL VISITOR GUIDE

## TOUR ITINERARY

The tour of the house begins on the third-floor attic with the large relief model of Geneva in 1850. It continues down the outside stairs to the lower floors. The second floor re-creates an 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois interior and may be viewed in any order.

The itinerary is themed from the first floor to the vaulted cellars and offers a glimpse of Geneva in the Middle Ages, throughout the Reformation and at the time of the Escalade\*. It also depicts the economic, political and urban development problems faced during Geneva's history.

In the second basement, there are temporary exhibitions on themes related to the history of Geneva and its inhabitants.

## AUDIO GUIDES

1. Go straight to on the website [izi.travel](http://izi.travel) and select *Maison Tavel* page
2. Pick up the audio guide and the language of your choice

\*L'Escalade, or Fête de l'Escalade is an annual festival held in December in Geneva, celebrating the defeat of the surprise attack by troops sent by Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy during the night of 11–12 December 1602. The celebrations and other commemorative activities are usually held on 12 December or the closest weekend.

The *Maison Tavel* (Tavel House) is the oldest private residence in Geneva. This remarkable example of Swiss civil architecture bears the name of the family who owned it from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Destroyed by a fire in 1334, which spared only the cellars, the house was rebuilt with both the character of a fortified dwelling with turrets, but also that of a city palace with a façade embellished with carved heads. Over the centuries numerous architectural transformations were undertaken, especially by the Calandrini family in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 1963, the City of Geneva acquired the *Maison Tavel* and carried out an exemplary restoration. Archaeological digs begun in 1979 by the Canton's Archaeological Services, especially in the garden, brought to light vestiges of an 11<sup>th</sup> century tower and a 17<sup>th</sup> century cistern to collect rainwater.

Since 1986, this historical building has been home to the *Musée d'histoire urbaine et de la vie quotidienne* (Museum of Urban History and Daily Life). The engravings, paintings, maps, models, furniture and miscellaneous objects presented come from Geneva's public collections and evoke Geneva's past and its inhabitants from the Middle Ages through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# TEN EXCEPTIONAL OBJECTS

This itinerary showcases a selection of highlights from the *Maison Tavel*. These ten remarkable objects merit a visit in themselves.

**A** Weathervane representing the eagle of the Tavel family crest, ca. 1334.



This weathervane was found in a Medieval tower unearthed during an archaeological dig. Modelled after the Tavel family crest, the eaglet with wings displayed is believed to date back to the time when the tower was rebuilt in the wake of the 1334 fire that destroyed part of the city.

**B** *The Escalade\* of Geneva in 1602, View with speech scrolls*, ca. 1620.



This panoramic view shows Geneva's people joining to take up arms on the city's walls and the Savoy army attempting to scale the walls with ladders. The Reformed Republic's motto, *Post tenebras lux*, appears alongside scrolls stretched across the sky by angels and inscribed with verses of the Bible.

**C** Guillotine of Geneva, 1799.



Formerly kept in the old diocesan prison, this guillotine was set up on the Place de Neuve for every execution. During the French annexation of Geneva (1798-1813), thirty-six prisoners were executed. After the Republic was restored, in 1813, the guillotine was only used six more times. In a pioneer move, Geneva abolished the death penalty in 1871.

**D** Mitre in painted cardboard, 16<sup>th</sup> century.



This mitre depicts a man surrounded by two women in lascivious poses. Prior to the Reform, prostitution was legal and regulated in Geneva. In 1536, Reformers took legal steps to enact a ban. Offenders were whipped and forced to wear these mitres showing their offence.

E



### The Magnin Relief Model, 1896.

This relief model, created by the architect Auguste Magnin (1842-1903), shows a reduced-scale overview of Geneva circa 1850, at a time when the city was still fortified. In 1849, the Radical regime established by James Fazy decided to have them demolished to accommodate the city's economic development and growing population.

F



### Goldsmith's sign, late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This sign hung outside the workshop of Étienne Terroux, a Huguenot goldsmith who took refuge in Geneva, bringing along with him his expertise of the craft and contributing to the rise of watchmaking, goldsmithing and jewellery, the leading industries of 18<sup>th</sup> century Geneva.

G



### Fragment of calico cloth, ca. 1790.

This fragment is one of the rare extant testaments of the flourishing textile printing industry in 18<sup>th</sup> century Geneva, which employed up to 20% of the active population. The aptly-named 'Indiennes' are printed textiles inspired by fabrics originally imported from India.

H



### *Les Eaux-Vives and Coligny seen from Les Tranchées*, Simon Malgo, 1778.

This painting shows a view of the lake as seen from the hills of Les Tranchées, which lay just beyond the city walls. It shows the city's fortified walls, overrun by vines, the Saint-Antoine bulwark and the Master Tower. On the right, the town of Les Eaux-Vives, named after the springs that flowed through it.

I



### Carved heads on the facade, ca. 1334.

These sculptures were originally decorative features on the facade of Maison Tavel. They are the only example of Medieval civilian sculpture in Geneva or around the lake. This series of carved heads tell a story that has remained enigmatic to this day, like the slight smile on the lips of its characters. The sculptures now displayed on the facade are replicas.

J



### Coat of arms from Porte Neuve, Cabane, 1740.

This coat of arms emblazoned with the city's designs once stood atop the Porte Neuve, built in 1564 along the city's fortified wall. One side displays the key for the Diocese of Geneva, the other bears the halved eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, to which the prince bishops swore allegiance.

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LIFT



CLOAKROOM



RESTROOM

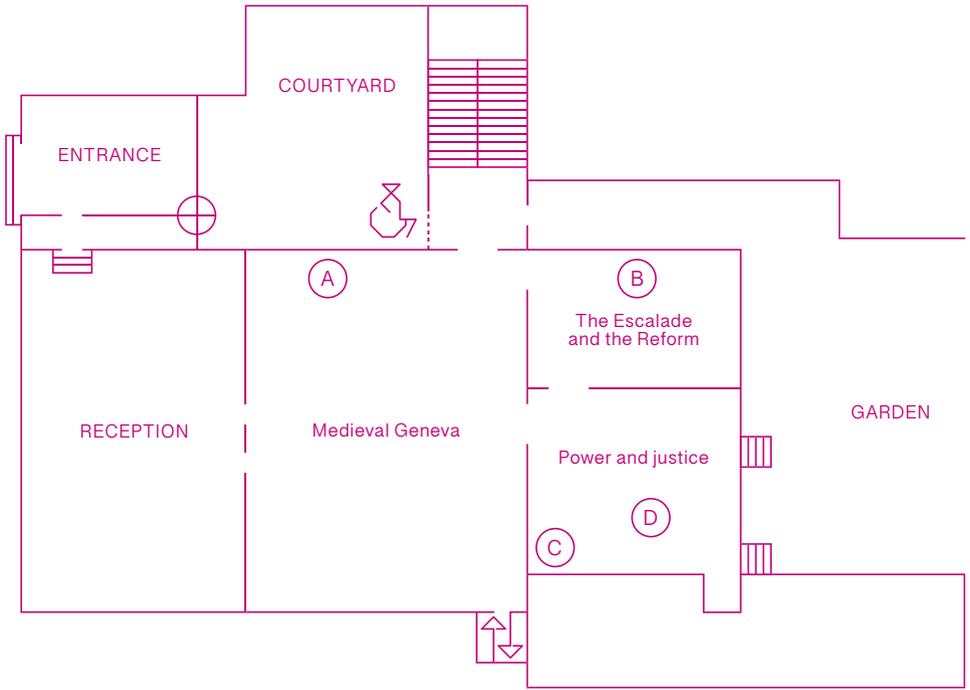
## 0 CISTERN AND GARDEN

Excavations carried out in the garden of the Maison Tavel in the 1980s brought to light a huge cistern (6.70 meters high and with a radius of 3 meters) in perfect condition.

Built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the then owners, the Calandrini family, this cistern offered a constant water supply for this small urban noble residence on the hill of the Old Town, where groundwater is unattainable and any wells quickly dried up.

Built of masonry covered with an impermeable coating, the cistern was filled by an ingenious rainwater filtration system consisting, among other things, of sand and of bronze inlet filters.

Its brick dome, covered with flat tiles and capped by a disc of limestone rock, is still visible in the house's garden.

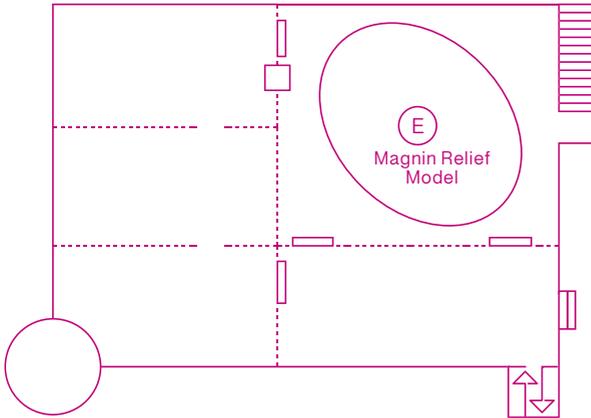


## 0 RECEPTION

In the Middle Ages, the ground floor was a service area. The great hall, which has preserved some of its 16<sup>th</sup> century tiles, comprises the kitchen, with its monumental fireplace originally surmounted by a stone mantelpiece. Today only a lintel remains, resting on an embedded column with a carved capital. The wall's plastering and medieval graffiti have been preserved, and furniture and tiles recall the style of the medieval interior.

The various objects on the ground floor evoke the influential powers in Medieval Geneva, such as the Counts of Geneva, the Counts of Savoy and the Bishop of Geneva.

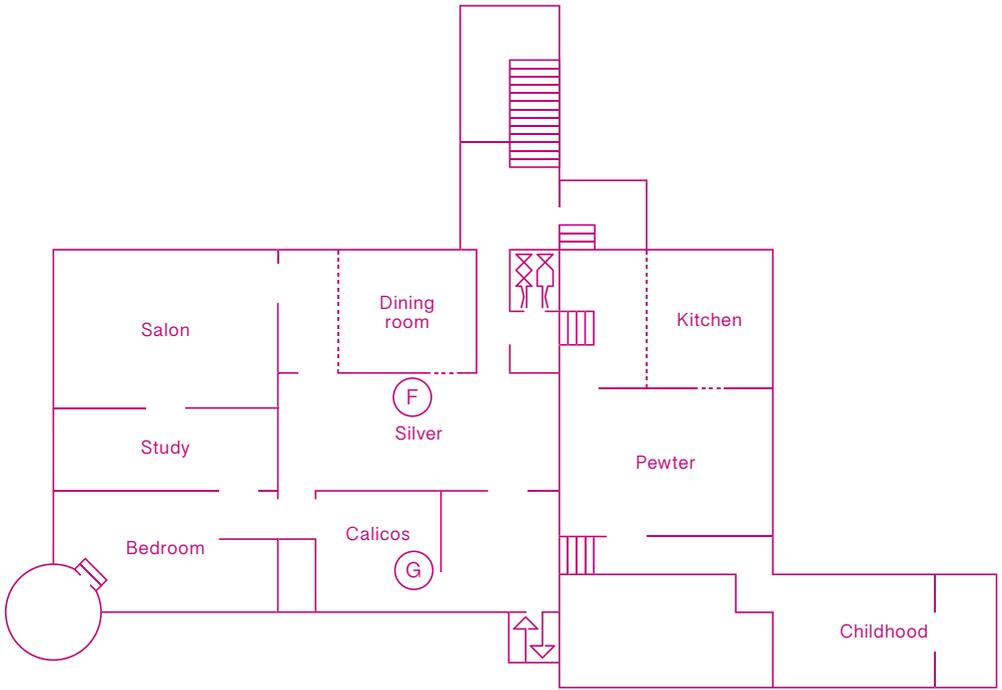
The rooms facing out onto the garden are devoted to the Reformation and the Escalade, as well as to the realms of power and justice, and illustrate key moments in the Republic's history.



### 3 THE MAGNIN RELIEF MODEL EXHIBITION

The Magnin Relief Model takes up the greater part of the Maison Tavel attic. Architect Auguste Magnin spent 18 years creating this imposing relief model giving visitors an overview of Geneva before the destruction of its fortifications in 1850 and its subsequent transformation. This historically important relief model – the largest in Switzerland – was created entirely in metal. The houses and fortifications are in zinc, and the roofs in copper. Composed of 86 sections set together, it covers a surface area of 32m<sup>2</sup>. The Magnin Relief Model was presented for the first time at the 1896 National Exhibition in Geneva.

A twenty-minute audiovisual feature about the model in French is available on request from the museum staff.

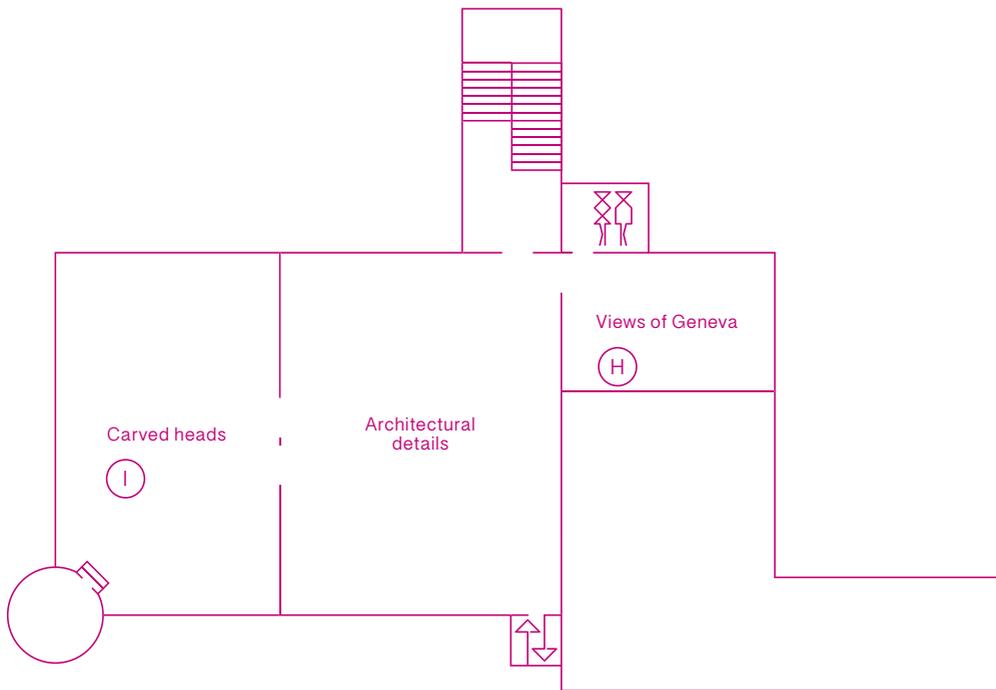


## 2 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY APARTMENT

The twelve rooms on the second floor are laid out as the apartment was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with its salon, study, bedchamber, turret and kitchen. The wallpaper was re-created using early printing plates. Display cases exhibit objects such as furniture, wallpapers, calicos (printed fabrics), silver and pewter dishes, and kitchen utensils from Geneva's daily life in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

These re-created living areas powerfully evoke the periods represented. The kitchen still has its sink, whetstone and fireplace, and the stove comes from a house in rue Calvin. The tour continues by heading down a corridor to a small bedchamber dedicated to childhood.

The view from the bedchamber turret looks onto the lake, the water fountain and the cathedral's spire.



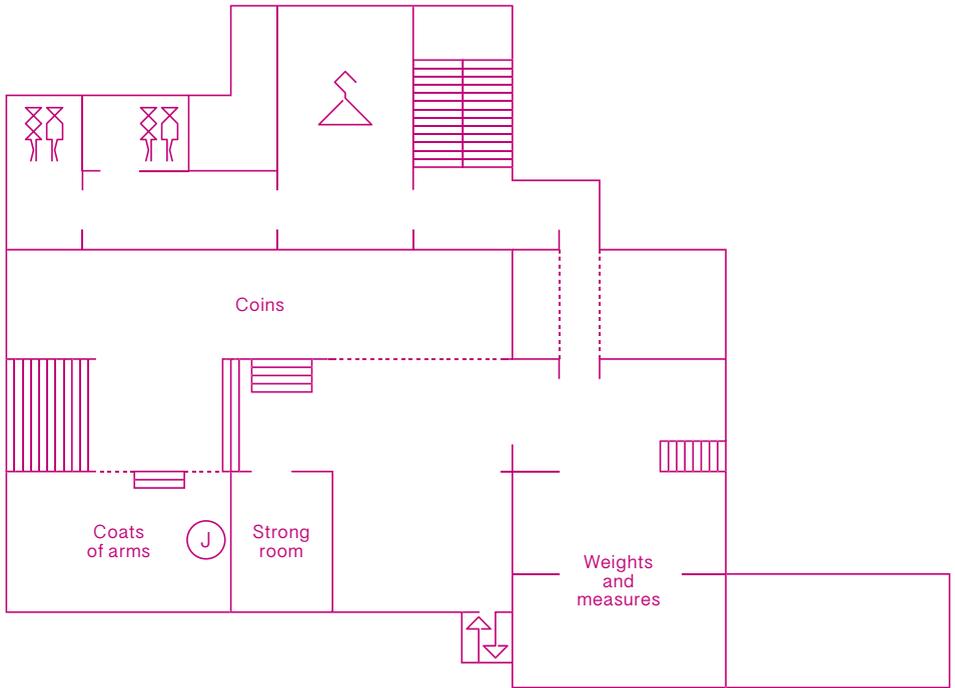
# 1 VIEWS OF GENEVA

The exhibition is centred on urban development, ranging from iconography of the City of Geneva to decorative architectural details.

The large room presents doors and inn signs, among other things, vestiges of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings today vanished from the city's landscape.

In the little room to the left are four 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings representing views of Geneva. There is also a small model of Geneva in 1813, making it possible to easily imagine the city of the time standing behind its Vauban-inspired fortifications.

The ten carved stone heads adorning the Tavel's House Gothic facade are exhibited on the side facing the street, and are kept here to better preserve and restore them. The copies replacing the originals and the full facade are visible from the turret windows.



## -1 VAULTED CELLARS

The vaulted Roman cellars date from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. The arches rest on columns surmounted with carved capitals, their frugal style recalling constructions in Cistercian monasteries.

In the Middle Ages, the cellars were used for trade, opening directly onto the street and isolated from the rest of the residence. A strong room built into the walls and originally closed with a door, served to protect valuables.

The different levels here result from the later constructions of the lower cellars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They most likely served to store merchandise.

The old weight and measure systems exhibited here, as well as the coat of arms and coinage recall trade.

## -2 TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

In 1988, a room was carefully built under the garden to leave the archaeological remains of the Roman tower, visible from the upper windows, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century cistern at the far end (closed to the public) undisturbed.

This area is devoted to temporary exhibitions with paid admission.

## POINT OF SALE

Exhibition catalogues and other items are on sale at the museum admissions desk. The area is accessible during the opening hours.

## TICKETING & BOOKING

[billetterie.mahmah.ch](http://billetterie.mahmah.ch)

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Bus 36 (Hôtel-de-Ville stop)

Parking: Saint-Antoine

Disabled access: partial, lift at your disposal

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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