



STUDENT GUIDE

A compilation of useful information to survive during your first weeks in Geneva for and by PhD students



Visit lifesciencesphd.unige.ch for more details



WELCOME!

Welcome to the University of Geneva. This Welcome Guide for PhD students at the University of Geneva was created by the PhD Student Association of the University of Geneva. This guide will provide you with information and guidance on:

- Preparing for your arrival in Geneva
- Living in Switzerland
- Student life at the University
- PhD program at the University of Geneva

It also includes important contact details and websites for both University services and external and internal organizations.

We recommend that you read through the guide as you start to plan for your journey to Geneva.












We hope the guide answers many of your questions and gives you a good start on your studies with us. We look forward to meeting you!

Reach out to us to your closer association, if you have any questions or if you need any help!



CHECKLISTS

Before you leave your home country

	<p>Be excited to move to Geneva!</p>	<p>You are about to move to one of the most international cities in the world!</p>	
	<p>Visa application</p>	<p>The visa application will be handled through the university, nevertheless, you will need to fill out the forms and provide the required documents, therefore, make sure you have them. Additionally, the visa application costs 65 CHF.</p>	
	<p>Finances for the first month</p>	<p>Make sure you bring enough money to pay your accommodation costs and living expenses for the first month, as you will only receive your first salary at the end of the first month.</p>	
	<p>Enrollment fee</p>	<p>If you are requested to pay any tuition fee before arriving, be aware that, as an Assistant-PhD student, you are only required to pay the enrollment fee of 65 CHF. If you are asked to pay more (up to 500 CHF), you may be able to ask for a refund after signing your Assistant contract.</p>	
	<p>Accommodation</p>	<p>Start looking for a studio/room before you leave your country. Rents are starting around 800-1200 CHF and in a further section, we will tell you more about the documents required when renting.</p>	
	<p>Health Insurance</p>	<p>Find out about compulsory health insurance (“assurance maladie”) – it costs around 270-350 CHF, or more depending on the options. Another alternative for student exist starting at 64 CHF per month (Scorestudies)</p>	
	<p>Enrolment/ recruitment process</p>	<p>Your enrolment will start before you arrive; check the section “Immigration and Recruitment Process”.</p>	
	<p>Personal Documents</p>	<p>Make digital and paper of any of your important documents (passport, ID card, diplomas, etc.) in case you lose the originals.</p>	
	<p>Diplomas</p>	<p>Bring the ORIGINALS of your bachelor’s and master’s diplomas. If you don’t have your master diploma yet, bring an official document that attest of your master’s degree</p>	
	<p>Travel to your accommodation</p>	<p>Plan your trip from the airport or the train station to your accommodation and/or to the university. Note that both the train station and airport are very well connected to the rest of the city.</p>	



On your arrival

Contact your family and friends so that they know you arrived safely!



Search for the local supermarkets near your accommodation (Migros, Coop, Denner, Lidl, Aligro, etc.).



Test your house appliances and make sure you have all the essentials (kitchen equipment, bedding, etc.).



During the first month

Open a bank account so that you can receive your salary! (e.g., UBS, BCG, etc.).



Finish your enrollment and sign your contract! If you hold a driving license, you have one year to exchange it to a Swiss driving license, check the link: [How to change your driving license?](#)



Find a proper internet company, to stay in touch with your family and your new friends in Geneva



YOUPI

THE UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA

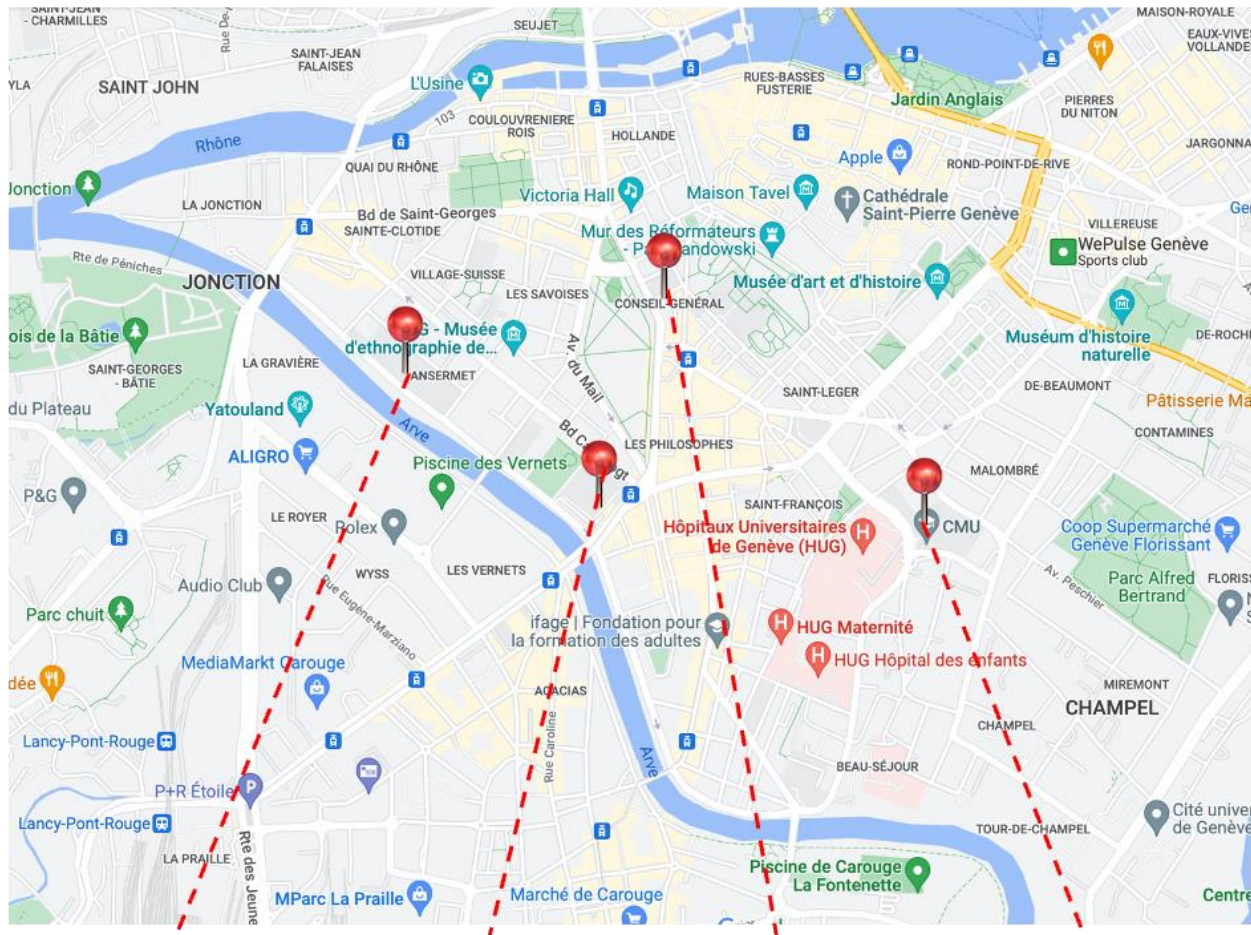
Founded in 1559, the University of Geneva enjoys worldwide recognition and ranks amongst the top 100 best universities in the world. A polyvalent institution, it fosters the emergence of inter- and multidisciplinary fields in both research and teaching.

Its domains of excellence in research include life sciences (molecular biology, bioinformatics), physics of elementary particles, and astrophysics. UNIGE is also host and co-host to seven National Centres of Competence in Research: Frontiers in Genetics, MaNEP, PlanetS, SwissMap, Chemical Biology, Synaptic Bases of Mental Diseases and LIVES-Overcoming vulnerabilities in a life course perspective.

Just like the city of Geneva itself, the University enjoys a strong international reputation, both for the quality of its research and the excellence of its education. This acclaim has been won in part due to its strong ties to many national and international Geneva-based organizations, such as the World Health Organization, the International Telecommunications Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

Our university is spread throughout the city! As a student at the PhD School of Life Sciences, you will probably be enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine or Science. Additionally, it might be useful to know about Uni Mail, where some great events are held, and Uni Dufour, where the administrative headquarters of the University of Geneva are located. See below.





Faculty of Sciences
30, Quai Ernest-
Ansermet

Uni Mail
40, Boulevard du
Pont-d'Arve

Uni Dufour
24 Rue Du General-
Dufour

**Faculty of Medicine
(CMU)**
1, Rue Michel-Servet,

Emergency numbers (free of charge):

- General emergencies: 112
- Police: 117
- Information service in German, French, Italian, and English: 1818
- Swiss Rescue: 1414



IMMIGRATION AND RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Once accepted, you will start the process to be contracted with a “CANDOC” (or PhD student) position at the University of Geneva. The person in charge of your process (normally the secretary of your department) will send you an email with all the instructions, required documents and your contract details. On this email you will be given a link to start your process via the online platform of the University, where you will have to upload a few documents, including:

- Curriculum vitae
- Scan of master’s degree (or letter of confirmation from your university, indicating that you passed your master’s exams + details of credits, etc...)
- Scan of your passport or ID card, depending on your nationality

The faster you provide the required information, the faster your visa (if applicable) and the contract are processed.

The work permit request will be submitted by the University and, for that to happen, you must provide the person in charge of your process with the following:

- Filled-in and signed form M ([available here](#))

While filling in this form, you must provide your current address and your address in Geneva. At this point, you probably won’t have one yet, thus you should discuss with your professor about this (they may give their own address in most cases), or an acquaintance that lives in Geneva and can provide an address. Later, when you find your permanent accommodation, you will have to update the address and so your work permit.

- To provide an address, the person on the house contract (“bail”) must fill and sign the form EL ([available here](#)). Note that the régie (entity managing the apartment) signature and stamp are not required.

Be aware of the documents that must accompany both forms M and EL, which are listed at the end of each form:

- 2 passport photos (not digital, so you must send them by normal mail),
- If you wish to live in France (EU citizens only), contact the person in charge of your process to get detailed information on how to proceed
- Proof of the payment of the application fee, which is 65 CHF

You will also have to fill in other forms that include:

- Tax at source form filled and signed
- Form requesting an AVS card (Swiss social security number or “AVS number” that you will keep for life)

Additionally, to enroll as a PhD student, you will need an “Attestation de direction these” or thesis supervision certificate. This certificate proves you are accepted by the PhD in Life Sciences program and by your faculty. It is emitted by the PhD School.

All the steps above can be done before arriving in Geneva, but it is important to remember that the processing of your employment contract is conditional on the prior approval of your work permit. The signing of your contract can only occur after your arrival and will be performed once all the administrative issues regarding your future position are completed.



MONEY MONEY MONEY

PLANNING YOUR FINANCES

Starting a PhD in Geneva requires a financial commitment to pay the living expenses (accommodation, food) and the tuition fee (semester fee) at least for the first month, before receiving the first salary. The University does not have any funding to help students upon their arrival. It is therefore essential that you secure funding to cover all your expenses prior to starting your PhD.

Below, we will help you with a list of potential living costs to help you calculate your annual budget to live in Geneva. Of course, this budget depends on your lifestyle but, no need to panic, your salary should be enough!

SALARY (Gross without deducting taxes)

Your salary will depend on the fund paying your contract; nevertheless, your gross salary should be approximately 47'000.00 CHF for the first year and then increase either at anniversary date, or on the 1st of august depending the source of the funding.

TAXES AND SOCIAL CHARGES

According to 2019 tax rates, the taxes to be deducted monthly from your salary should be around:

- Tax at the source of approximately 6.59% on 1st year gross salary for a single person,
- The "Caisse de Prevoyance" (CPEG) is taking away another 6.8% to constitute a personal fund called "2nd pilier",
- Social charges of approximately 7.20%,

Total: approximately 20% of the gross salary

TUITION FEES AS A PhD

Each semester, all PhD students must pay a tuition fee of 65 CHF, therefore, 130 CHF per year.

Once you are in the system, you can find payment information at the portal of the university ([here](#)), on the tab "Mon UNIGE". On the space "Espace RH" you can download the payment slips of your salary, as well as obtain information regarding your status.

TRICKS TO LOWER YOUR BUDGET

Set a realistic budget! There are many tricks to keep up with your monthly expenses, including apps that display your expenses by category. Some banks already have apps like this available (e.g., BCGE, Postfinance)

- Always have your student card with you and take advantage of student discounts: Many restaurants, hairdressers, cinemas, bars, and travel agents in and around the city offer discounts for students.
- Bills: The rent usually includes charges, which comprise the water and heating system, but electricity, internet, and phone bills are paid separately.
- Transport: While biking and walking are more cost efficient, if you do use the bus or the tram frequently, it is worth investing in a monthly or annual travel pass (see the section "Travel"). Moreover, you can have a discount based on your age and/or a contribution from the university by filling out a form on the website: ([available here, in French only](#))

- Although buying your lunch in the cafeteria is super convenient, at the end of the month it's cheaper to bring your lunch from home.
- Entertainment: Despite the high prices in bars and clubs, students still have fun around here, thus speak with your peers to find the pearls of Geneva. Home gatherings are great, but be careful not to bother your neighbors, as Swiss people can be picky with the noise, especially during the week; make sure to respect your neighbors.

OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT

Opening a bank account is one of the first things you will do, as the department of Human Resources will need your Swiss IBAN to pay your salary.

Banks usually offer a free package for students (e.g., free credit card, free charges, etc.), which is also related to your age. Make a quick survey of the advantages and disadvantages of the available banks. The major banks in Switzerland are UBS, Bank



5 cent 50 cent 10 cent 20 cent



1 CHF 2 CHF 5 CHF

Migros, Credit Suisse, Postfinance, and BCG.

To open a bank account, you just need to visit the bank and it's done right away but it can take a week or a few more days to receive your card.

Always check with the bank about the required documents to open a bank account, but in general, they include:

Passport/ID card (depending on your nationality)

Copy of your employment contract

Copy of your residence permit, which can be provided at a later stage.

SWISS FRANC

Swiss Franc (CHF) is one of the most colorful currencies. As in most currencies, 1 franc is made of 100 cents and the highest and lowest coin values are 5 CHF and 5 cents, respectively.

As for the banknotes, you will be surprised as their value can go as high as 1'000 CHF!



**ONE-OFF COSTS**

Expense	Approximate cost
Bedding (duvet, pillows, sheets, pillowcase)	CHF 80
Gym membership	At the university - From CHF 60/semester + additional cost for classes Activ fitness – From CHF 53/month Non-stop gym – From CHF 50/month
Insurance (for private accommodation)	CHF 80-100/year
Kitchen equipment (plates, cutlery, pans)	CHF 60
Membership of a student society	Free
Television-Radio license (Serafe) Serafe website	CHF 335/year, vary annually

MONTHLY COSTS For a house in Geneva; for France or canton de Vaud it might be different

Expense	Approximate cost
University residences (standard room)	CHF 550 - 800
Private shared house or flat for four people	From CHF 700 for each person (bills not included)
Private house or flat for two people	From CHF 900 for each person (bills not included)
Private Studio	CHF 1000 - 1500
Health insurance	From CHF 270
Food/meals (cooking at home)	CHF 400
Electricity	CHF 15
Heating	From CHF 80 (you will be refunded if you used less)
Mobile phone plan	From CHF 20

BASIC GROCERIES Few examples of Swiss prices (average) for everyday items and services (based on Swiss supermarket brand prices).

Expense	Approximate cost	Expense	Approximate cost
Apples (1kg)	3.20 CHF	Basmati Rice (500g)	2.50 CHF
Bread (250g baguette)	1.80 CHF	Butter (250g)	2.80 CHF
Dried pasta (500g)	2.00 CHF	Eggs (6)	3.80 CHF
Emmental Cheese (100g)	1.90 CHF	Instant coffee (200g)	3.00 CHF
Milk (1L)	1.20 CHF	Orange juice (1L)	1.00 CHF
Pasta sauce	1.00 CHF	Potatoes (white, 1kg)	3.00 CHF
Tomatoes (400g)	1.20 CHF	Toothpaste	2.00 CHF
Shampoo	3.00 CHF	Shower gel	3.20 CHF
Washing liquid (2L)	2.50 CHF	Whole chicken (1kg)	9.50 CHF



CLOTHES

Expense	Approximate cost	Expense	Approximate cost
Hat	From 8 CHF	Jumper	From 20 CHF
Scarf	From 8 CHF	Trousers	From 25 CHF
Winter coat	From 60 CHF	Winter shoes	From 50 CHF

OTHER ITEMS

Expense	Approximate cost	Expense	Approximate cost
Batteries (size AA, four packs)	From 7.95 CHF	Cinema ticket (with student discount)	From 13 CHF
Haircut* (men)	From 20 CHF	Basic haircut* (women)	From 30 CHF

* In Geneva, students from hairdresser schools can cut your hairs at low prices, under the supervision of a professional hairdresser, of course! [More information](#)

HOW MUCH MONEY SHOULD I BRING WITH ME TO SWITZERLAND?

We don't recommend that you bring a lot of cash as the conversion can be costly. In case you want to exchange cash, there are different shops in the city center that do that (e.g., Change Migros). However, if you insist on bringing large amount of cash with you, you should know that above 10'000 francs or equivalent, customs will ask you to declare the origin of it. You can find more information regarding that here: [more information](#)

Instead, we advise you to prefer a multi-currency card, such as [revolut.com](#) or [wise.com](#), that have very competitive conversion fees and zero transaction fees.

The amount of money you must bring to cover the costs of the first month depends a lot on your choices for accommodation, as well as for health insurance.

- If you have already organized and made all the appropriate payments for your accommodation, 400 CHF should probably cover your initial expenses until you open a bank account.
- If you are looking for accommodation in the private sector, you will usually be required to pay a deposit of three months' rent in advance, or to pay an annual fee as caution.

Additionally, you need to pay the house insurance "Assurance RC ménage", which starts from 80 CHF (see Section about insurance).



ACCOMMODATION

To make yourself comfortable in Geneva, it is important to find the best accommodation that suits you. There is a variety of accommodation available. First, you must decide which accommodation you would like to live in, taking into account your own budget.

UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

To get into university accommodation you need to apply in advance, e.g., in April to have a room in September. It takes really a lot of time to receive an answer and it is good to look around in the meantime.

[University website - Cité Universitaire](#)

HOMESTAY ACCOMMODATION

In Geneva, you can find some families willing to host you. Usually, it is easier to find homestay accommodations if you already know the family or someone already living with them. The cost for homestay accommodation is variable and probably changes based on the location and the number of rooms. [Roomlala platform](#)

FOYERS

There are different ones in Geneva and some of them accept only men or women.

[Geneva information website](#)

PRIVATE RENTED ACCOMMODATION

Private apartments or studios, shared or not, are normally unfurnished, which adds some costs. You can buy furniture directly in shops such as Ikea or Conforama. To save money, buy secondhand furniture from people that are leaving the flat, or through websites (e.g., [Anibis](#), Marketplace, [Emmaüs](#)). In a shared flat, the kitchen is shared, and probably the bathroom as well. The studio usually is a single room with a small kitchenette and a

bathroom. The cost of a room/studio or an entire flat will vary according to the size, location, and condition of the property. Usually, the bills for the water and heating are included in the rent and are called “charges”.

The average rent for a room in a shared flat is approximately 750-900 CHF per month including the utilities (except the electricity and internet) plus a deposit (usually three months’ rent) paid before moving into the accommodation. The average price for a studio is about 950 CHF, “charges” included and excluding electricity and internet.

Although the electricity is not expensive, the price changes based on its use. On average, in a 4-bedroom shared house or apartment it can be approximately 20 CHF per month per person.

In most cases, private rental agencies called “Régies” take care of renting out accommodation. The monthly paid “charges” are flat rates, meaning that you will receive back what you didn’t spend. In some cases, you need to ask the “Régie” for a reimbursement, thus discuss this matter upon renting.

When you apply for accommodation at “Régies”, you might have a monetary penalty if you give up on the apartment after it was given to you. Never transfer any money before visiting the flat.

Be careful especially when owners offer their flat/room for a low price compared to the city average, or when they are not currently living in Switzerland. Again, never give any money in advance or before signing the contract.



Your HEALTH In Geneva

Health insurance is compulsory and an important part of the student's budget.

Switzerland's healthcare system is among the best in the world, ranking 13th according to the Statista health index score. However, the Swiss health system is one of the most expensive in the world. Unlike many other European countries, healthcare in Switzerland is not charged via social security payments but is administered by local health authorities in each canton. Switzerland has a universal healthcare system, but the government requires all individuals to have insurance.

There are over 60 government-approved non-profit insurance providers that offer the basic mandatory coverage set by the government. Insurance price vary by provider, type, and depend on the policy holder's place of residence. In Switzerland, there are many social insurance schemes that protect individuals. Health insurance is compulsory for anyone living in Switzerland, even temporarily. After getting your permit you will need to take care of the health insurance which you will pay each month starting on the 1st day of your contract. The Swiss government mandates that every individual intending to reside in the country be covered by health insurance within 3 months of their arrival in the country. If you miss the three-month deadline to sign up for health insurance, the government will assign you a plan, which might charge higher price than you would like to pay. By law, Swiss health insurance companies must accept your application regardless of age or health risks and without stipulating any conditions or a waiting period. You are free to choose your own insurer and can change the company once a year if you give notice. You should apply for insurance directly with the

company of your choice. All applications for basic coverage will be accepted, but providers have discretion over the cost of private supplementary plans.

TWO VARIANTS

There are two variants of the health insurance: the compulsory basic insurance (LAMal) and the voluntary supplemental insurance, which covers what basic insurance does not cover (dental care, private hospitalization, alternative medicines, some unrecognized treatments, etc.). Unlike basic insurance, supplementary insurance has the right to refuse customers or to issue reservations (e.g. people with chronic costly diseases).

The choice of the health fund is free. The benefits are the same in each health fund although some variations in prices are, as expected, observed. The Federal Office of Public Health provides a full list of health insurers in Switzerland, that you can find here : [Website](#)

TO SIGN UP

To sign up, you need to register at your local cantonal authority. [Official website for more information](#). Following this, you have 3 months from your arrival to join a Swiss health insurance plan. You can choose the insurance company online or by visiting their office. They will send you an application form to complete by post or email. In most of the cases, you will need to provide:

- Valid ID card or passport
- Visa or resident permit

Once you are enrolled, you must pay a monthly price to the insurance company, which will vary depending on your company



and canton; low-income residents might get a reduction.

THE HEALTH CARD

Each health insurance provider should supply you with a health insurance card. It will be sent to you by post as soon as you're approved for a plan. You should bring this card with you on all of your medical visits. The health insurance card displays visual data and contains data stored on a chip. Service providers can use this information for billing purposes. On the back, you can find the European Health Insurance Card, useful to cover your treatment abroad (in EU only).

COVER BY BASIC HEALTH INSURANCE

Basic health insurance covers 80–90% of medical costs (excluding the franchise value you chose of annual treatment costs and daily fees for hospital stays). Always check what is included in your coverage, but generally it should include:

- **Accidents:**
You will be covered by your employer, UNIGE, for the duration of your contract; no need to include.
- **Alternative therapy:**
Covers some treatments (including acupuncture, pharmacotherapy, and homeopathy) if done by an accredited specialist.
- **Cancer screenings:**
Covers mammograms and colon cancer screenings for those aged over 50.
- **Dental care:**
Covers only emergency treatment relating to serious mouth or jaw disorders or diseases.
- **Doctors and medical specialists:**
General check-ups and treatments are covered, including physiotherapy. Some specialist treatments are excluded and price is higher for those with high-risk profiles.
- **Eye care:**
Covers children aged up to 18 for prescriptions of glasses and contact



lenses up to CHF 180 a year. Also covers adults with serious visual conditions.

- **Hospital visits:**
Covers inpatient, outpatient, and emergency treatment.
- **Maternity care:**
Antenatal classes, childbirth expenses, and abortions are covered.
- **Medical devices:**
Claims are possible for items such as bandages, inhalers, or incontinence devices.
- **Medical transport:**
Covers half of the costs.
- **Medication:**
Covers either 80% or 90% of prescriptions.
- **Mental healthcare:**
Covers some services, including psychotherapy. Alternative or rehabilitative programs might not be covered.
- **Rehabilitation:**
Covers care provided after an operation or serious illness.
- **Sexual health:**
Covers gynecological screenings.
- **Treatment abroad:**
Coverage in EU/EFTA countries through the European Health Card at the back of your health card. Covers some costs in non-EU countries during short trips, although you may need additional travel insurance.
- **Vaccinations:**
Covers the Swiss Vaccination plan guidelines.

AVERAGE COST

Health insurance price can be high and companies can increase their prices yearly by a small percentage. The cost will vary depending on a lot of parameters. It's possible to get a monthly price of about 330 CHF. Check the cost calculator to have updated values for your preferred insurance.

[Insurance Premium Calculator](#)



SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH INSURANCE

Although the basic Swiss health insurance package is good, many people choose a supplementary package to access a wider and better range of services and treatments. Supplementary Swiss health insurance is popular with expats, who can benefit from global plans offered by international companies. It's also worth considering for those with chronic conditions or those who think they may need or want to access specialist treatments not available through basic packages. These include dental treatment, specialist treatments, and complementary treatments such as osteopathy, private healthcare services, and benefits during hospital stays (private room, free choice of doctor, etc.). However, risk factors such as age, lifestyle, and health condition can determine premiums, thus it can be costly for some. Also, while companies cannot refuse coverage for basic insurance, they are not obliged to offer a supplementary package to someone they view to be of too high risk. Be aware that any supplementary insurance contract binds you for 5 years to the company. The only exception is if you are leaving the country.

CHANGING YOUR HEALTH INSURER

If you consider your basic health insurance to be unsuitable, you can change it for free at the end of the year with one month's notice. Every autumn the Federal Office of Public Health approves the premiums for the coming year. Your health insurance company will write to you by the end of October and inform you of your new premium. You then have time to terminate your policy by no later than 30 November. NB: the health insurer must receive your resignation letter by this date.

Supplementary insurance and basic insurance are independent of each other, so you can have a different insurer for each. This means, for example, that you can

change your basic insurance provider but keep your supplementary insurance policy with your old company.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

If you have a medical emergency, the Hospital of Geneva (HUG) is not far away. Basic health insurance covers emergency treatment and you can consult with any doctor or hospital directly in an emergency, even if you have restricted choice. They may ask you for your health insurance details, even in an emergency, so keep these with you at all times.

The university also offers psychological support for advantageous price (25 CHF) through the university via the *Pôle Cité FPSE*, which is available from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday to Friday (free and confidential) and the hotline number is 022 37 99 200 ([Pole Cité, in French only](#)).

Additionally, in case of emergency, if you need to talk to someone, you can find help by calling the Psyline, a free and anonymous service. As most of the respondents are from the faculty of Psychology, you can find people speaking different languages most of the times ([Psyline website](#)).

TRICKS TO LOWER YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUM

- Choosing a policy with a restricted choice of doctor or health maintenance organization (HMO)
- Taking out a Telmed policy, where you first have to call a telephone service and get a referral to a doctor or hospital.
- Increase your franchise (i.e., the amount you pay, before the insurance takes over) to a maximum of 2500 CHF a year.
- Paying a lump amount of fees upfront (you can get a discount of about 2% for annual upfront payments).



FAMILIES

You may be considering bringing your partner and/or dependent children with you to Geneva. Depending on your family's situation, you may feel that they would benefit from the experience of living in a different country.

If you decide to bring your family with you, it is very important that you make sure you have enough money to support them, as the PhD salary won't be enough. As you are enrolled in an education program, you may only bring your spouse and dependent children under the family reunification program. Your relatives should bring the necessary documents (e.g., a valid ID card or passport) and they should have a certificate issued by the authorities in the country of origin confirming that the person is related to you and another certificate mentioning that you will pay for their living expenses. Students from outside the EEA should check if the Swiss immigration regulations allow them to bring dependents to Switzerland. You may contact the Student Support Services at Uni Dufour if you are unsure.

However, keep in mind that the cost of living in Switzerland is very high, and it is often not possible to afford a large apartment in Switzerland. Secondly, childcare is very expensive in Switzerland. On this [official website](#) you will find information on the requirements that must be met to bring family members to Switzerland. You will also find information on the services available to help your children enter the Swiss school system. Furthermore, your apartment must be large enough – by Swiss standards – to accommodate the entire family.

Dual-career couples may get help with job search for their partner through a UNIGE partner organization, [Carriere2 website](#).

HEALTHCARE FOR YOUR DEPENDANTS

Your dependents should be registered like you in the canton of Geneva and should have basic health insurance.

SCHOOLS AND NURSERIES

If you are to search for schools or childcare provision for your children in Switzerland, we recommend that you secure your accommodation in Geneva first as the schools in Switzerland are allocated according to the area you are living in.



Studying at UNIGE

PHD SCHOOL OF LIFE SCIENCES (PSLS)

On July 1, 2018, the University of Geneva opened a new Doctoral School in Life Sciences shared between the Faculties of Medicine and Sciences, which will jointly award a Doctorate in Life Sciences. This innovative doctoral training meets international criteria of excellence, reflecting the recognized scientific level of the University of Geneva.

The duration of the PhD is approximately 4 years (from 6 to 10 semesters according to the regulations).

Current and future doctoral students will:

- Follow scientifically demanding, experimental, and theoretical training, corresponding to 20 ECTS, except Pharmaceutical Sciences program which requires 30 ECTS.
- Benefit from a fair assessment of the progress of their thesis project by a competent and rigorous committee that evaluates the scientific and interpersonal conditions in which the project develops (TAC meeting).
- Acquire the necessary professional interpersonal skills.
- Get involved in the life of the doctoral school, as a member of the PhD Student Association, PhD Retreat committee, and Podcast or career insights teams.
- Be part of a dynamic and stimulating school that promotes the acquisition of substantial scientific knowledge, as well as curiosity and a spirit of discovery.

The doctoral school proposes six subject-specific programs:

- Biomedical Sciences (BIOMED)
- Ecology and Evolution (ECOVO)
- Genomics and Digital Health (GESAN)

- Molecular Biosciences (BIOMO)
- Pharmaceutical Sciences (PHARM)
- Physics of Biology (PHYVI)

More information can be found on the [website of the PhD School](#)

COURSE PORTFOLIO AND COLLECTION OF CREDITS

Here we present a general outlook of ECTS collection, but this could change over time and depend on the specific program. We invite you to check the 'FAQs about credits' of the PhD School for updated information:

[PhD School FAQ](#)

The study plans for each specialization officially define the requirements for PhD students. Study plans and regulations can be accessed here: [PhD School Rules](#)

During the first three years, the student should acquire a total of 20 ECTS, with a set minimum of credits taken from the core training offered by the program the student is affiliated with, and the remaining credits either among the 6 programs or outside. There is no upper limit to the number of courses taken or the number of credits accumulated.

The student is responsible for keeping a record of all activities that may generate ECTS. An attendance certificate is mandatory for all courses and activities and it is advised that the student uploads them on their personal space as soon as the certificate is available.

To do so, you will have to fill out a form on the student website logging in with your credentials: [Your personal space](#). The program director will then evaluate your record and validate the ECTS.

General guidelines on the activities that give credits.



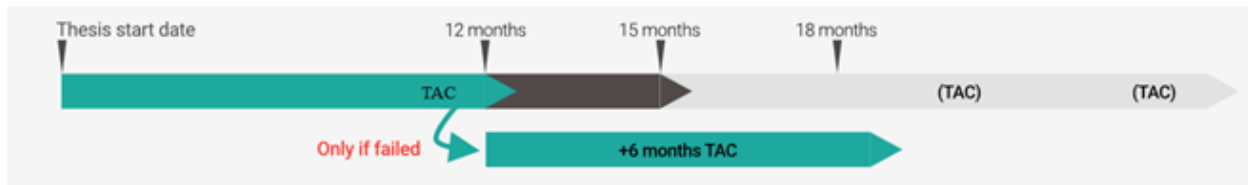
Program specific guidelines*:

- **BIOMO, ECOVO:** Core training gives 12 credits. You are completely free to pick activities for the remaining 8 credits; there are no caps on credits gained from specific activities except those indicated in the grid above.
- **BIOMED:** 10 credits must be obtained from the core training. You need to choose a minimum of 3 modules (each worth 1.5 to 2.5 ECTS) and 9 'Chapitres choisis' (0.5 ECTS each). Credits from conferences, from courses and workshops, from volunteering, and from attending PhD retreats are all capped at 3. There is no upper limit to credits obtained from core training.
- **PHARM:** See the credit validation grid [French version here](#) or [here in English](#).
- **PHYVI:** Core training gives 4 credits. You are completely free to pick activities for the remaining 16 credits; there are no caps on credits gained from specific activities.
- **GESAN:** 10 credits must be obtained from the core training.

*General guidelines for the 6 programs may change over time, for update information we invite you to visit the FAQs section of the PhD School:

lifesciencesphd.unige.ch/faq-students

THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)



The general timeline regarding the TAC exam is shown above.

The TAC (full information in FAQs for students, TAC section: [FAQ for students](#)) is an integral part of the PhD program that assesses a student's progress 12 months after starting the PhD. It is not only a good opportunity to present your work in front of a demanding audience, but the feedback you get from your committee could be extremely helpful to your project. Keep in mind however, that the TAC is not focused only on results produced during the first year, but more on the knowledge and understanding of the project.

The thesis start date (figuring on your 'attestation de direction de thèse'), not the contract start date, defines the deadline for your TAC exam.

Please allow sufficient time to:

- Write the report and prepare the presentation,
- Find a suitable date for all committee members,
- Have the report read by your committee members.

If for organizational reasons, it proves impossible to find a date before 12 months, you have until 15 months to pass the TAC. In this case, your PI should inform your program director and coordinator of the chosen date BEFORE the end of the 12 months, explaining the reasons for the delay.

DETAILS FOR REGISTRATION

BIOMO, PHYVI, ECOVO, and PHARM programs: the request is filled on the personal space: [Here](#).

The program coordinator will verify that your committee composition follows the regulations, (see Committee composition), and then accept your TAC exam request. This generates the TAC report form and the 'PV TAC' for the committee members.

BIOMED and **GESAN**: On your personal space, you have to select a slot from the ones proposed as the program directors have to take part in the committee. Make sure first that the external expert is available. The PhD school will also invite internal experts.

MEMBERS OF THE TAC COMMITTEE

Any full member of the 6 programs can be a member of a TAC committee.

In addition to two members of the PhD school, ideally, the program director or co-director may be present. If unavailable, they may designate a substitute among the committee members to report to them.

For the BIOMED program, the PI and the student should identify and invite an external expert that has to be either a professor or a Research and Teaching Associate ('MER') and should ideally come from outside the University of Geneva. Experts from UNIGE are exceptionally allowed but have to be from a different department.



FOR THE REPORT

Two weeks before the TAC meeting, a written report must be sent to the jury members (BIOMO, ECOVO, PHYVI, PHARM, GESAN) or to the following address phd-lifesciences-medicine@unige.ch (BIOMED).

Unless otherwise indicated by your Department or Section, the report should be a summary of 4-10 pages describing the progress of your thesis project and your work objectives. You are encouraged to include figures, tables, and references; they do not count towards the page limit. The written report should only include your own results and data.

The report can be inspired of the following structure:

- Project Summary
- Introduction/Background
- Hypotheses to be tested / Specific research aims and objectives
- Methods / Experimental approaches
- Preliminary Results
- Experimental plan / Perspectives
- Technical hurdles and alternatives ('contingency plan')
- Timeline

FOR THE PRESENTATION

Your presentation should be a PowerPoint or similar and should not exceed 30 minutes (count 20-25 slides maximum). The presentation is followed by a discussion with the committee members.

If for the understanding of your presentation, you need to include results or data generated by a collaborator or someone else in your lab, you should clearly indicate this on the slides.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SPORT AT UNIGE

If you are a new student and you want to make new friends and keep a healthy lifestyle, sport is what you are looking for.

Sport will reduce stress from your studies and give you a positive outlook! At UNIGE, you will find many sports clubs where you can enjoy your favorite sport with your friends. So, whether you want to play sports for fun or competition, or if you're more in the mood for dance or yoga classes, at UNIGE there will be something for you!

Just across the river, there is the Centre Sportif de la Queue-d'Arve, where you can get a pass for climbing, badminton, floor hockey and many other sports.

Discover many sport area and the activity they offer: [Sport centers and stadia](#)
Water sports - [Tropical corner](#)
University Sports [UNIGE Sports](#)

PHD SKIING TRIPS

The University itself organizes ski camps in Zermatt, Crans-Montana and St. Moritz. The organization is convenient and the prices are cheaper for students.



TRAVELLING

BUS & TRAM

TPG (Transport Public Genevois) is a company operating public transportation in and around Geneva. Transports are efficient, on time and extensive. One ticket costs 3 CHF (full price) or 2 CHF ('demi-tarif' ticket, see later for more information, or if you just need to use 3 stops (Saut de puce)), and it is valid for 1h, on any bus, tram, boat, or train to the airport.

You can buy tickets at the machine at bus/tram stops.

You can also buy your ticket online; either through the CFF App, or by sending "tpg1" (full price ticket) or "tpg2" (demi-tarif ticket) to 788 (be careful of extra charges if you are not using a Swiss number). You will get a text back with your ticket. The cost will be charged by your phone company on your next bill.

You can also buy monthly or annual tickets, see <http://www.tpg.ch/> for all information.

On the TPG app ([Android](#) and [iOS](#)) you can check schedules, plan your trip, etc...

As students, you can be eligible for some help from the University on your TPG pass: [Form, in French only](#)

When taking a bus, make sure that you put your hand out/press the stop button to indicate to the driver that you wish them to stop, otherwise they may drive straight past your bus stop!

Lately, a lot of people started to evaluate the possibility of living across the French border (France voisine), especially in the towns of Annemasse or St Julien en Genevois. The latter is for now connected only through the Bus network, but Tramway lines will be extended there in the coming years. Annemasse and the surrounding towns, however, are more connected. Depending on where you are living and where you have to go, the Lemman Express train line or the Tramway 17 both have advantages, but they are more expensive than moving in Geneva only.

CYCLING

Cycling is a cheap, healthy, and effective way of getting around Geneva. There are numerous bike lanes, and the traffic is aware of cyclists, but always be careful! The tram tracks pose one of the greatest threats as it is easy to get your tire caught. Don't hesitate when going over them and always take them at an angle.

You can easily rent a bike: [Geneveroule](#)

If you want to buy your own bike, you have two main options. The university has two bike sales per year called Actionvelo ([Bourse aux vélos UNIGE](#)) but it is usually crowded with people, so get there early. You can also find second-hand bicycles in some shops or online (look on Facebook groups, [Anibis](#), [Bicyclette UNIGE](#)).

However the establishment of Geneva is Peclot13, it is a collective of bike lovers that offers help and bike maintenance at cheap price: [Peclot13](#)

You can find a big second hand bike shop in Geneva outskirts [Fourriere website](#)

Remember to keep your bike safe with a good quality lock whenever it is not being used. You must fit front and rear bicycle lights when cycling at night and we recommend you wear a helmet.



TRAIN

SBB is the national railway company of Switzerland, they are extensive but quite expensive. Ticket controllers check most trains so always buy one.

You can buy your ticket online: [CFF/SBB website](#), on the app, or directly at the train station.

You can buy several types of tickets:

- One ticket for a one-way trip, from one place to another at a specific hour
- One ticket for a return journey, to go somewhere and come back the same day.
- One ticket for a round trip, to do a small trip. Be careful; round-trip tickets bought to a destination under 115 km away need to be used the same day but over 115 km and you have 10 days for the return. Before it expires, you can take any train that goes between those points, though sometimes you must specify which city to route through if there are two options to take. It costs the same to buy two one-way tickets as it does for the equivalent round trip.
- Supersaver tickets are cheap tickets. If you are taking your ticket in advance (usually for a trip outside peak hours) you can buy some with a discount of up to 70%. NB: Supersaver tickets are for a specific day at a specific hour.
- If you want to travel all over Switzerland for a day, a 1-day travel pass can be very practical. For example, if you want to go far from Geneva, sometimes it is cheaper to take the 1-day travel pass than the ticket for a one-way trip. You can find very advantageous travel cards in Switzerland.

The half-fare card ('demi-tarif'), costing 185 CHF (120chf if <25yo), is an annual traveling card that you can buy at the Geneva Cornavin train station, in TPG agencies (you will need a passport photo for the card), or online, the renewal is 20chf less. With this

card, the price of all your train tickets will be cut by half and reduction for city public transport in Geneva and the other Swiss cities.

Another travel card (but very expensive, around 2500 CHF per year for 25-30 year old students) is the general abonnement (GA) card, giving you unlimited travel on any train, bus, tram, or boat in Switzerland for a year.

Connection Geneva-Annemasse (France Voisine), Lemman Express. It is a high-speed train that connects Annemasse (as well as other close towns in France) to Geneva in a few minutes.

Geneva is also conveniently connected to the French TGV network and other European cities via long-distance train routes. Useful sites to book train travel abroad: [Seat61 website](#) or the EPFL-endorsed site: [Routerank](#).

MAIN COACH STATION

The main coach station is located close to the train station. From there, you can take a bus to various cities in Europe, using e.g., Flixbus or Ouibus.

If you love skiing, during weekends in winter, buses are leaving from there to different ski resorts in France ([gare-routiere.com](#) or [HelveCie Skibus](#)). As you will cross the border, always take your ID with you.

TAXI

Taxis in Geneva are quite expensive, but you can use Uber. Prices can change depending on the time, location, and demands.

CAR

If you are planning to drive in Switzerland, be aware that rules may be different from those in your country.



- Driver's license: You can drive on your foreign driver's license in Switzerland for up to one year. Before that year is up, however, you must exchange it for a Swiss driver's license at the "Service cantonal des véhicules" ([Website](#)). After 1 year, it is considered that you are driving without a license. If you exchange your driver's license after the year is over, or if your driver's license is from a country other than those listed below, you must take a driving test, usually preceded by driving courses which can be thousands of francs. Nationals of EU countries, the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway), United States, Japan, Israel, and Canada do not need to take a driving test and can get the license exchanged directly for 150 CHF. Nationals of other countries may have other requirements (a theoretical and/or practical driving test). You will also need a color passport photograph (35 x 45 mm), a certificate from an ophthalmologist or optician from the approved optician's list ([Approved opticians](#)), a valid (not expired) foreign driver's license, and an ID card.

- Owning a car: It isn't cheap to have your own car. There are 5 principal costs: insurance, taxes, gas, parking, and repairs. Basic insurance is around 600-800 CHF per year. Taxes depend on the size of the engine. A 2.4L is about 650 CHF per year, a bit cheaper for a smaller engine. Gas depends on the efficiency of your car obviously but expects around 2 CHF per liter. Outside parking in Geneva is 200 CHF per year, but certain neighborhoods have more cars than parking spots as they give the 'macaron' to anyone who legally lives there and asks for one. Private spots are 200-300 CHF per month.

In Switzerland, cars need a 'contrôle technique' (MOT) every 2-3 years. They are thorough and will ask you to repair things in the car. This can cost a lot of money. Getting a cheaper older car can be just as expensive



as a new car if it needs many repairs. If you are looking for a cheap older car, look for ones that have just passed the MOT, so you have a couple of years before it needs it again.

- Renting a car: while you can find the usual car rental companies in Geneva, there is an interesting option with [Mobility](#). These red cars can be rented for a flat rate of 50 CHF for 3 hours, from 10 CHF for each additional hour during the day, or 5 CHF for each additional hour at night for longer trips. There are tons of spots around town with these cars, many of which are in parking garages. The best way is not with the annual plan, but with Click & Drive. Transport vehicles are 70 CHF for 3 hours and are a good way to move your stuff across town. You apply for Click & Drive via the Mobility customer portal. Once in the customer portal, you make your reservation and pay for it using a credit card. You then collect your Mobility Card from a Swiss Federal Railways ticket counter. You're then ready to drive off and can use the card from then on. It's cool, you use the card to unlock the car from a spot on the windshield and drive off. There is a special card to buy free gas, and usually, a card to get out of the parking garage.

FLIGHTS

We are lucky that Zurich got all the expensive airlines and Geneva was left with EasyJet. There are tons of cheap flights out of Geneva. The best website to find tickets is SkyScanner. For example, put Geneva into 'From' and everywhere into 'To' and enter the days you are interested in, and you can get a list of the cheapest flights to all destinations. There is a monthly view under 'Depart' to find the cheapest days as well.

For conference travel, UNIGE strongly encourages green options and will not reimburse flights for journeys under 4h by train. More info: unige.ch/avions/en



PHAGE ASSOCIATIONS



PhAGE Medicine



PhAGE Sciences

YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

The PhD students' associations from the Faculty of Medicine and Science represent the interests of all PhD students from the University of Geneva. We work together to promote scientific exchange, social and academic activities. We aim to give the PhD students a voice while building a strong community. We want to guarantee that your PhD journey at UNIGE is a valuable experience at all levels.

Some of the activities that we organize are:

THANK GOD IT'S FRIDAY (TGIF)

TGIF is a social event organized to help students to get to know the PhD community in a relaxed and informal environment, while having 1,2,3,4 drinks and eat some snacks. TGIFs are held around twice per month on Fridays. The organization rotates between the Science and Medicine Faculties. You will see a flyer and receive an email or a WhatsApp message about it! Ask your colleagues PhD to be added on the TGIF WhatsApp group.

There are also some special events organized throughout the year such as a Halloween party, Carnival TGIF, Secret Santa, and more!

PHD RETREAT

The PhD retreat is a joint event between the Life Sciences PhD students of the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Medicine. You will have the opportunity to present your work via talks or posters and engage in discussions with your fellows and invited speakers. The conference brings together leading researchers, academics, and scientists to provide an intellectual platform to exchange state-of-the-art knowledge and foster learning, inspiration, and scientific discussions through lectures, forums, and workshops.

During the retreat there is also time for group activities such as hiking, skiing, or team games. The retreat committee is made up entirely of students who through the years have done an excellent job of finding beautiful locations and covering costs by finding corporate/university sponsors for donations.



PhAGE Medicine training platform

The scientific section of Phagemed PhD students' association leads the PhD training platform which is divided into presentation training platforms and training workshops. The presentation training platform allows PhD students to rehearse their presentations and get feedback from other students to promote scientific communication and exchange. In addition, we organize a series of workshops on Transferable Skills for the PhD students including academic writing, leadership and team management, project management, supervision and mentoring skills, and science communication, among others. You will hear about the platform by email monthly.

OTHER INDEPENDENT ACTIVITIES/PROJECTS:

1. **BioSounds Podcast:** sponsored by the PhageMed PhD association, the BioSounds podcast of the Life Sciences PhD School of Geneva was created in the context of a module of the BIOMED core training, and we are now a team of 9 PhD students who followed up on the idea. Our aim is to disseminate UNIGE Science with our voice, as young scientists, and the voice of senior researchers and leaders. The main goal of our Podcast is to share science with a diverse audience, both scientific and non-scientific, without any visual support by inviting UNIGE scientists for an interview of around 10 minutes. If you want to know more about this project listen to our podcast on Spotify: [Find it here](#). This project aims to develop scientific communication skills as well as audio editing and podcasting experience. You can send an email to phage-med@unige.ch if you are interested in being part of this project.
2. **Career insights:** Career insights is a group of PhD students who organize career seminars at UNIGE for PhD students. We invite speakers with a PhD background who transitioned to non-academic positions to talk about their experience and give some tips for our future. The events take place in both virtual and in-person formats. We have been active since the beginning of 2020 when 2 PhD students from the Faculty of Science came up with this brilliant idea of building the bridge between academia and industry. The Career insights team comprises students from both faculties who work together to bring the outside world of Biotech/Pharma/CROs etc. closer to PhD students who consider options outside academia after the PhD. Since then we have had the opportunity to welcome PhDs who transitioned to a variety of non-academic positions including venture capital, regulatory affairs, publishing, consulting, clinical trials, intergovernmental organizations, science communication, and project management. This project aims to develop event planning and communication skills while promoting a strong network. You can send an email to phage-med@unige.ch if you are interested in being part of this project.

We encourage you to be part of the Phage experience! If you have any questions, ideas to share or if you need any advice, we are here for you! Please do not hesitate to contact your closer association!

PhAGE Medicine: phage-med@unige.ch

PhAGE Sciences: phage-sciences@unige.ch