

Episode 2: Geneva

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about the city they currently live in: Geneva, Switzerland. They talk about the size of the city, how they get around the city, the things they like about living in Geneva and what they do on weekends.

Transcript

Nick: Last time we talked about where we come from, and this time we'd like to talk about where we live now, which is Geneva, Switzerland. And I guess the first thing to say about Geneva is that it's quite a famous city, it's the headquarters, uhh, of the International Red Cross, it's the European Headquarters of the United Nations and there are many other international organisations there, but Wendy it's really quite a small city.

Wendy: Yes, it is a very small city, it's only about 200,000 inhabitants. Umm, so it's actually even smaller than my home town of Mobile, Alabama, even though Mobile, Alabama is not world-famous and Geneva certainly is.

Nick: It's quite interesting that way because we have ... we often visit much larger cities. Umm, my brother lives in London and we often go to places like Madrid and Rome and then when we come back to Geneva it just seems really small.

Wendy: Yeah, but mostly in a good way I think. I often nowadays get overwhelmed¹ by really big cities like London for example, when you're travelling on the underground² and it always takes ages³ to get anywhere, and oftentimes the trains are really packed and there's just so many people around, uhh, and you don't have to deal with that in Geneva. It's very laid-back. I've never really seen a packed ... well, we don't have an underground at all, but we have trams and we have buses, and it's pretty rare that you can't get a seat or that, you know, it's going to be really crowded. Mostly it's not, and mostly we don't even need to take public transportation because we can just walk everywhere which is really nice.

¹ overwhelmed: Wendy means that the large cities are too much for her to handle.

² underground: the metro of London, also called the tube.

³ ages: a long time.

Nick: Yeah, because we live in the city centre, and so we both walk to work.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: And everything that we need - supermarkets and any kind of entertainment, restaurants, shops, are all within walking distance. So, yeah, that's one of the great things is that actually things like traffic or public transport ... we don't even deal with in our daily lives.

Wendy: No, no, and from what I understand, traffic can be really bad in Geneva, I do hear people complaining about it, people who have cars, uhh, but we don't own a car so we really just ... it's not a problem for us and we don't even ever have to think about it.

Nick: Yeah I think one of the problems with the traffic is that Geneva's on a very strategic location. It's right at the end of Lake Geneva and then the lake basically turns into⁴ a river and you have Geneva on either side of the river, the left bank and the right bank, but there's only bridge at that main part where the lake finishes and the river starts and so this creates a bottleneck⁵ of all of these cars all trying to cross this bridge at the same time in both directions.

Wendy: Right, yeah.

Nick: But, that's not something that we have to deal with. And so, we've been in Geneva for about six years, and what do you think about the experience that we've had?

Wendy: It's been a great experience overall. Umm, it really is a wonderful place to live. There's a very high standard of living⁶, uhh, it's perhaps not the most beautiful city in Europe but it definitely has really beautiful areas. The old city in particular is really lovely, there's some really old buildings there, and the cathedral, and then you have the lake that's also right in the middle of the city, so that's what I love most about it really, is that you're in the heart of the city, so you have all the benefits that that brings, you know, all the amenities⁷ of having everything close by that you need, and you can get into nature so easily. You know, we live just about a five-minute walk away from the lake so we can go down there for a picnic in the

⁴ turns into: to become, to change into something else (phrasal verb)

⁵ bottleneck: a situation where cars coming from different areas all come together in a smaller, narrower area to create the shape of a bottle (of wine, for example).

⁶ standard of living: a common term to describe the infrastructure and general living conditions of a particular place.

⁷ amenities: features that provide comfort or entertainment.

summer whenever we want, I often go jogging around there and, yeah, it's really wonderful.

Nick: Yeah, it's great. I mean, Switzerland obviously doesn't have any beaches, but they do have a lot of lakes, and so that's really great. And in the summer, the lake really is the heart of the city. People go swimming and sunbathing and people have picnics and there's some bars set up where you can have some drinks and ice cream and all sorts of things, so it's really ... it's really nice on a sunny day to go down to the lake and see all that activity that's happening there.

Wendy: Yeah, definitely, when it's good weather out then everyone is out there on the lake, and there's a big park that covers part of the shore of the lake as well, so you see all kinds of families and groups of people just out there relaxing and having fun, it's really nice.

Nick: And sailing is another big thing in Geneva so I did a bit of that for a while which was really nice. Umm, because of ... its perfect because you can just, you have several different places where boats can be moored⁸ or can be parked, umm, and you can just ... the lake is so large that you can sail for as long as you want, really. There are sometimes ... they have these all-day races going to the far end of the lake and it takes 12 hours or something depending on the wind to get all the way to Lausanne or to the far end.

Wendy: Right, and then you also have beautiful views of the mountains on the other side of the lake as well. You can see Mont Blanc, which is the largest mountain in Europe, uhh, so when it's a clear day you can see it really quite clearly. And that's another thing that I love about Geneva is that it's so easy to get up into the mountains and it's really very centrally located in Europe in general. So it's easy to get pretty much anywhere in Switzerland by train, uhh, and then by plane also is really convenient. Because it's a small city, the airport is really close to the centre of town. It's about a seven or eight-minute train ride, uhh, from the main train station to the airport, so that means that it's really practical to go away just for a weekend, which, uhh, we do quite a lot.

Nick: Yeah that's .. it is actually quite interesting to see how much that has, perhaps, impacted the number of times we do go away.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: It's very quick to get to the airport, it's a small airport, so it's very easy to get where we want to go. Umm, we arrive usually only one hour before our flight and then ... so it doesn't even feel like taking international flights because everything is so quick.

⁸ moored: parked, for a beat (infinitive: to moor)

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: But yeah, we ... we're really lucky that we have two different mountain ranges that surround the city, essentially, so we have the Alps on one side and the Jura on the other side, and so that's ... that gives quite a unique location, I think.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, there aren't many places like that.

Nick: And so you can ski in the summer, obviously in both sections. It's quite interesting that, I think some of the Swiss people are ... they're very spoilt⁹ with the mountains that they have, so they think the Jura, which is a smaller range, they think, you know, it's not good enough for skiing, and they would prefer to go to the Alps, but for people like us, who don't come from places where you can ski easily, umm, the Jura is just fine.

Wendy: Yeah, and that's where we learned to ski, or definitely where I learned to ski. You had done a little bit of skiing when you were very young, but I had never skied before we moved to Switzerland and it's great for that, because the slopes are gentler than the Alps, and so you have lots of very easy runs which are perfect for beginners, and perfect for kids too, so I think you see more families up in the Jura, uhh, whereas the Alps is, uhh, more for experienced skiers I would say.

Nick: Yeah, so overall I think we can say that we've really enjoyed our time in Geneva. I guess one of the problems is that there's a lot of ... because there's all of these international organisations, a lot of people come and go from the city. So people might stay for two years or three years or things like that. So we developed a nice group of friends and then essentially they all left, umm, before we did, and so that's a little bit of a shame that a lot of people, certainly in our circles, are only there for a short period of time.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah that is a challenge, is, uhh, maintaining a kind of, you know, social circle, circle of friends because people do come and go a lot as you said.

Nick: But, you know, I think we've felt like we haven't run out of things to do or, you know, we haven't become, uhh, too bored of the city in six years.

Wendy: No, umm, I mean the city itself I guess doesn't have that many different things to do in terms of, I don't know, museums and art exhibits and things like that. But because it's so easy to get out of the city, that's what we do mostly, really. In the winter we go skiing, in the summer we go hiking up in the mountains or we go, you

⁹ spoilt: a person who has everything, often used in a negative way to refer to rich children whose parents give them a lot of presents. The Swiss are spoilt because they have a lot of mountains.

know, visit different parts of Switzerland and that never gets old¹⁰. There are plenty of things to do.

Nick: Yeah, so all in all, it's been, uhh, a really good base for us to explore parts of Europe and to explore Switzerland and, uhh, just to settle down a little bit after the travel that we had done before.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: OK, so that's all for Geneva.

¹⁰ never gets old: you can continue to enjoy it, even after many years

Comprehension Questions

1. Does Wendy like or dislike the fact that Geneva is a small city? Why or why not?
2. What's Nick and Wendy's favourite natural feature of the city and why do they like it?
3. Which activities do Nick and Wendy do outside the city?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. The cheapest way to get from Heathrow Airport to the centre of London is by taking the _____.
2. Boats are only allowed to be _____ in designated places.
3. When she finally saw the pyramids of Egypt for the first time, she was _____.
4. There's only one entrance to the underground, so when people exit the stadium it creates a _____.
5. If you live in the countryside, you will have a quieter life but you will lack the _____ that a city provides.
6. Those kids always have the latest video games. They're so _____.
7. Even though I've lived near the beach all my life, hearing the sound of the waves _____.
8. If the traffic is bad, it can take _____ for people to get to work.
9. The _____ is generally higher in Europe than in Africa.
10. The holiday started off really badly, but it got much better and eventually it _____ a really great trip.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Geneva and if so, what did you think of it? If not, would you like to go?
2. Do you agree that Swiss people are spoiled by all the mountains they have access to? Are people spoiled by something where you're from?
3. Would you prefer to live in a small city like Geneva or a large city like London? Why?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Wendy likes the fact that Geneva is a small city because she can walk everywhere and everything she needs is close by.
2. They like Lake Geneva because they can have picnics there in summer and because there are always a lot of people out on a nice day having fun.
3. They ski or hike in the mountains near Geneva depending on the season, and they also take weekend trips by train or plane outside the city.

Exercises

1. underground
2. moored
3. overwhelmed
4. bottleneck
5. amenities
6. spoiled
7. never gets old
8. ages
9. standard of living
10. turned into (simple past)