

# Victoria Trail



- 1 Railway Station
- 2 Avenue Victoria
- 3 Villa Victoria, 5 Av des Fleurs
- 4 Hôtel de l'Europe
- 5 Saint Swithun's Church
- 6 Rue de Genève
- 7 Casino Grand Cercle
- 8 Place du Revard
- 9 Avenue Charles de Gaulle

Produced by Claire Delorme-Pégaz and Josephine Fletcher,  
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*Villa Victoria south façade as seen from Avenue Charles de Gaulle*



# In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria

1885 ♦ 1887 ♦ 1890

A walk around Aix-les-Bains



*AC Aix-les-Bains*

Queen Victoria (born 1819 died 1901) held the record as the longest reigning British monarch until September 2015 (63 years and 216 days) when she was overtaken by her great-great grand-daughter Elizabeth II.

As Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and also Empress of India Victoria was sovereign over a quarter of the population of the globe. In 1885, at the time of her first visit to Aix-les-Bains the British Empire was the leading world power. The 'Victorian Age' is recognised as the high point of British wealth and influence.

Known as 'the Grandmother of Europe', Victoria married her cousin Prince Albert in 1840. Together they produced nine children and forty-two grandchildren. Today their many descendants include; Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh, King Harald V of Norway, Carl XVI Gustav of Sweden, Margrethe II of Denmark and Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain.

Queen Victoria made three holiday visits to Aix-les-Bains, each lasting three weeks, in 1885, 1887 and 1890. The second visit in 1887 was a time for her to prepare for the demands to be made on her that year, by the official ceremonies celebrating her Golden Jubilee (50 years on the throne).



**Follow in the footsteps of the Queen around the town of Aix-les-Bains.**

### 1 Railway Station

Queen Victoria arrived in Aix-les-Bains here at the station. She travelled in luxury, crossing the Channel in her Royal Yacht and then continued by rail in her own continental railway carriages. In order to avoid having to take part in official ceremonies, since she was on holiday, she used the pseudonym 'Countess of Balmoral'.

### 2 Avenue Victoria

Just two days after Queen Victoria's first arrival in 1885 the name of this street, which she took from the station to her hotel, was changed from Rue des Soupirs to Avenue Victoria.

Her arrival was greeted by enthusiastic crowds and her large retinue including Scottish and Indian servants in national dress made a colourful spectacle. In this street you will also find Cinema Victoria and Parking Victoria.

### 3 Villa Victoria

On all of her three visits to Aix-les-Bains Queen Victoria stayed in the building today known as 'Villa Victoria'. At the time it was the 'Maison Mottet', an annex of Hôtel de l'Europe. It was situated in extensive gardens, which were reserved for the Queen and her entourage. There were about sixty people in the party including members of her family, ladies in waiting, her doctor and her personal secretary.



In addition to the plaque by the main entrance the British royal coat of arms, can be seen high up on the pediment of the north

façade, serving as a reminder of these royal visits.

### 4 Hôtel de l'Europe

In the courtyard of this hotel you can find a plaque marked 'Béatrice'. This is in honour of Princess Beatrice, Queen Victoria's youngest daughter and constant companion. Beatrice was sent to Aix-les-Bains by her doctors in 1883 for treatment for rheumatism. It was her enthusiasm for the town and the surrounding countryside that encouraged the Queen to visit. Beatrice returned on each occasion with her mother. These visits coincided with Beatrice's birthday, which was celebrated by the town with concerts and firework displays. Like almost all of the former grand hotels the Hôtel de l'Europe has now been converted into private apartments.



Princess Béatrice  
AC Aix-les-Bains

### 5 St Swithun's Church

Queen Victoria worshiped regularly at this little Anglican church, situated conveniently close to the 'Villa Victoria'. It was opened in 1870 to serve the needs of English speaking visitors and the many British residents settled in the town.



The Queen made a donation of the altarpiece. There is also a full length portrait of the Queen, a gift from the Brachet family, to be found on the north interior wall of the church.

### 6 Rue de Genève

Standing outside Monoprix and looking up Rue de Genève you will see trompe l'oeil portraits on the façade of the building diagonally opposite. One of these is of Queen Victoria, although portrayed as much younger than she was at the times of her visits here.

In the street alongside this building were stables for the Queen's horses. A local story tells how the Queen, one day, came across a peasant with his donkey. She took an instant liking to the animal and bought him on the spot. He was harnessed to the donkey carriage that she used because she had difficulty walking. Baptised Jacquot he accompanied his august mistress on many of her travels, including to the Côte d'Azur and Italy and was a great favourite with her grandchildren.



### 7 Casino

*(You will need to show identity papers to enter the gaming hall)*

In 1885 the Queen visited the Casino to admire the mosaics by Salviati which had recently been installed. She knew this Venetian artist, as he had worked on the Albert Memorial Chapel in Windsor Castle.

You will also find one of the bars in the Casino named after Victoria.

### 8 Place du Revard

The commemorative bust seen here in honour of Queen Victoria was set up in 1924. It was paid for by the town with contributions from local hotelkeepers.



This bust was the focus for the celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday at the end of May, later known as Empire Day.

In 1985, to commemorate the centenary of the Queen's arrival in Aix-les-Bains, a bronze plaque detailing the exact dates of her visits was attached to the pedestal in the presence of the British Ambassador to Paris.

The May celebrations have recently been revived by Grapevine with the participation of local schoolchildren.

### 9 Avenue Charles de Gaulle

At the terrace of the restaurant in front of the Radisson Hotel, there was previously located an artificial grotto. It is here that the photograph in the town archives of Queen Victoria and members of her family was taken in 1890.



AC Aix-les-Bains

The Queen went out on excursions every day whilst on holiday and visited many places around the lake; Hautecombe, la Chambotte, Bonport, Tresserve as well as further afield; Annecy, Chambéry, la Grande Chartreuse.

**Queen Victoria, by her visits contributed greatly in making this little town of just 5000 inhabitants into a prized, international holiday destination for aristocratic, royal and imperial visitors.**