



my switzerland

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# Being in the Know With “Know-it-all”

This indispensable aid to living in Geneva and the surrounding area is about to go into its 7th edition.

A tool for sidestepping the language barrier and discovering Geneva, Vaud and neighbouring France, *Know-it-all Passport* is a resource of information that greatly ranges in scope. Made with the involvement of the English-speaking community, this book delivers anything from recommendations on good doctors and schools, to cultural hints, practical information and even advice on how to make a traditional fondue.

With all contributions coming from the community, *Know-it-all Passport* serves as a forum for the English speaking population. At the centre of this community network, collecting, filtering, compiling and distributing all the information is Lisa Ciriaco-Ohlman, the book's creator and indefatigable source of local knowledge. To put it simply, she is very much in the know.

## A brief history

Lisa moved to Geneva with her family in the early 1970s and has been here practically ever since. With ties in both the English and French-speaking communities, she was able to see what services were missing for expats and yet she understood the local way of doing things. Wanting to promote her area, she was often a voluntary 'cultural translator' for expat friends.

With her finger firmly on the region's pulse, word soon spread and Lisa was receiving phone calls from people asking for information on a range of topics. Seeing a real need for an intermediary service in the expat community, she decided to compile the collective local knowledge and special finds into a book. Previous experience in graphic design and in a publishing company made this all the more possible.

Lisa and her old school friend Lindsay Williamson began gathering information by sending out questionnaires to



Lisa Ciriaco-Ohlman

English-speaking associations in the region, asking their members to recommend their “first choices” in facilities, amenities and entertainment. The result was *Know-it-all Parents*. Published in 1999, the first edition contained 160 pages of ready-to-use information, written in an easy-going style that Lisa describes as if “one friend was talking to another”. With positive feedback from the targeted community, Lisa continued to work on her book and changed its name to *Know-it-all Passport*.

## A community service

As a community resource, *Know-it-all Passport* continues to be fine tuned by the public. Requests for new chapters, such as Jobs, Pets and Health have expanded the book in recent years. Slowly perfecting her book's content, Lisa believes “that people must be happy” with this service, as she has received very few requests for improvement over the last two editions. *Know-it-all Passport* has also been recognised by the State

of Geneva as a public good and accordingly receives a tax reduction. Furthermore, a portion of the book's profits is donated to the Alzheimer's Association.

For each new edition, Lisa and her team completely revise the book to ensure its information is still current. “It's a lot of work,” says Lisa, as each new publication involves six months of tireless organising, networking, promoting, researching, proofing and printing. She also monitors accuracy between editions – any corrections or updates that come about are posted on the website. The benefit of non-paid listings also allows Lisa to maintain the quality of its content as she can filter and remove entries as necessary.

The latest edition of *Know-it-all Passport* (7th edition) is due for release at the end of August 2010. In addition to around 40 chapters of information and over 650 pages of entries, the book also includes maps in which the listings are plotted, practical checklists on what needs to be done upon moving to or moving away from Geneva, even conversion charts!

## Become involved

“It's important to be part of my community,” explains Lisa. Her book aims to help other expats become involved in theirs.

Visit [www.knowitall.ch](http://www.knowitall.ch) for a listing of bookstores where *Know-it-all Passport* is available.



**Emma Johnson** comes from New Zealand. Currently based in Geneva, she is attempting to dedicate more time to her writing.