



Factsheet Switzerland for Inbounds and partner districts

General information about Switzerland

Switzerland is situated in the heart of Europe, surrounded by Germany in the north, France in the west, Italy in the south and Liechtenstein and Austria in the east.



With its area of about 41'300 square kilometers, Switzerland is one of the smallest countries in Europe. 60% of its surface is covered by Alps and glaciers. From north to south it measures about 220 km, from east to west about 350 km.

The population of Switzerland is a bit more than 8,7 million in 2021. About 25% of the people living in Switzerland do not hold the Swiss passport.

Switzerland is a federal directorial republic with elements of direct democracy. The federal state is divided into 26 cantons and about 2600 communities.

The country code „CH“ has its origin in the Latin expression “Confoederatio Helvetica” (= Swiss Confederation).

Berne has been the capital of Switzerland since the state was founded in 1848. The Swiss franc (CHF) is our currency.



Climate

Switzerland has a mixed climate with four seasons. In July and August, the average temperatures range from 18°C to 28°C during the day, in January and February they figure around -2°C to +7°C, however, they can easily fall to -10°C in winter. Therefore, warm clothing is important for a stay in Switzerland from autumn to spring.

Public Transport



Switzerland has a very well developed, well functioning and safe public transport system. Almost every place in Switzerland can be reached by train or bus. Already children learn to use public transport. In Switzerland there are several types of tickets or season tickets. From the steepest funicular in the world, a cable car that rotates, and so on, it will be fun to discover Switzerland with public transport.

Language

Four languages are spoken in Switzerland: German 63.7%, French 20.4%, Italian 6.5%, Romansh 0.5%. About 8.9% of the population speak another mother tongue.

Exchange students are mainly placed in the German or the French part.

In the German part of Switzerland, no standard German (also called High German) is spoken in everyday life, but various regional dialects such as "Bernese German", "Zurich German", etc. Some of these dialects are very different from the High German spoken in Germany. This is a challenge for exchange students. However, most exchange students learn to understand these dialects by the end of their exchange year. It is important that exchange students continually ask their Swiss friends and families to speak High German with them. - At school, the teachers use High German in class.

A specialty of the German language are the "umlaute" ä, ö, ü.

When we work with these letters and with translation programs, there are often funny hyroglyphs. In Switzerland, however, we do not use double S as in Germany.

Culture

Culturally, Switzerland has much more to offer than just mountains, cheese, chocolate and watches. Hornussen, Schwingen and Fahnenschwingen are located between customs and sports and these are cultivated at numerous federal festivals. There are wine festivals in French-speaking Switzerland, carnivals in German-speaking Switzerland, traditional markets, music and yodeling events, theaters, museums, castles and ancient ruins. We have agriculture and industry and the banking world and a lot of science. The diversity of languages is another distinctive feature of Swiss culture. Precision and punctuality are also part of the cultural heritage.



Schools

Switzerland has a unique school system. The reason for this is that the individual cantons bear the responsibility for education. Each canton has its individual school system up to the secondary school level II.

Pupils attend kindergarten from 4 – 6 years of age, then start primary school. After 5-6 years of primary school they move on to different levels of secondary school level I. Having completed the mandatory schooling at the age of 14 – 16, about 20% of the students change to a (college-type) "gymnasium" or "cantonal school" (secondary school level II) which they complete after another 4-5 years with a diploma allowing them to attend university. About 70% of the Swiss students, however, opt for a vocational training after the mandatory school years. Such an apprenticeship includes working as well as attending school.

A typical class on the secondary school level II has 20 – 30 students. Each subject is taught by a different teacher and students change classrooms for every subject. The class mainly stays together. The main subjects are math, German, French, English and/or Italian, Spanish, Sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, then history and geography, economics and law, music, arts and general sports.

In Swiss schools, it is not common for exchange students to receive grades. In most subjects, exams are taken for practice purposes, but these are not graded. Consequently, no credits are awarded.

Following the lessons in German is already a big challenge and the main purpose of this exchange.

Therefore, consider this exchange year as an incentive to get to know the language, the country, and the people and not to continue or even increase your school career in your home country at the same

time. Double stresses with simultaneously following school in your home country can lead to early returns if integration suffers.

Laptops are now essential and mandatory for studying at Swiss high schools. Timetables and information run online.

Don't worry about the plugs. You can easily get them here in Switzerland. Your host family can help you with this.

Sports at Swiss schools cannot be compared with sports at high schools in the U.S. or Canada. See also "Spare time / Leisure" below.

Spare Time / Leisure

In Switzerland, spare time activities such as sports and music are offered in the evening or on weekends by privately organised teams and clubs, not through schools as it is the case in many other countries. In almost every Swiss community there are music orchestras and a variety of sports teams (soccer, tennis, volleyball, etc.). We suggest that exchange students continue to play their instrument or play their favorite sport on such a local team. Or start a new sport in Switzerland. Host parents and Rotary clubs help to establish the necessary contacts. Such activities help to make friends and integrate. - However, a club fee must be paid in most places.

Going out: Young Swiss people go out on Friday and/or Saturday evenings to spend time in clubs, discos, cinemas, etc. The entry to most clubs is restricted to people over 18 years of age because of the alcoholic drinks sold there. In Switzerland, young people can buy and consume „soft alcohol“ like beer and wine from the age of 16, stronger alcohol is prohibited until the age of 18. The consumption of drugs (including smoking cannabis) is illegal in Switzerland.

In any case, **Inbounds have to respect the 6 D's**. Consumption of alcoholic drinks or drugs will immediately lead to an "early return". We recommend therefore that our Inbound exchange students select their new friends carefully.

Host family life

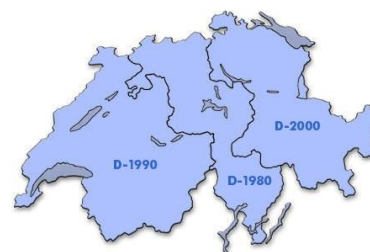
Most Swiss students who attend a cantonal school (upper secondary level) spend their lunch break at school. They buy something to eat in the school cafeteria or bring food from home. The fact that a student goes home for lunch is rather the exception.

This makes it even more important for most families to eat together at the "family table" in the evening. It is the time to talk about the day and make plans. These conversations within the family are important and form the basis for a harmonious family life. The exchange student is part of his host family and should participate in these family meetings.

Many Swiss families plan weekend activities for the whole family. We ask the exchange student to actively participate in all family events.

Rotary Switzerland

Rotary Switzerland is divided into the three Rotary districts 1980, 1990 and 2000. All 3 districts together have about 220 Rotary clubs. The association of Rotary Youth Exchange Switzerland / Liechtenstein organises the youth exchange programmes for all 3 districts.



ROTEX Switzerland / Liechtenstein

More than 20 years ago, ROTEX was founded (association of former Rotary youth exchange students). Rotex organises weekends and daytrips for Inbounds and helps them with minor problems. Rotex Switzerland / Liechtenstein is very well organised. The work and contribution of these former exchange students is well appreciated by Rotary Youth Exchange Switzerland / Liechtenstein.

Information about the exchange year in Switzerland / Requirements

Age

15 – 18 of age at time of arrival, ideally 16 - 17.

Duration

For **August Inbounds**: Beginning of August to beginning / middle of July of the following year. No return home before 30 of June, no later return home than 15 of July of the following year.

For **January Inbounds**: beginning of beginning or middle January to middle January of the following year. No return home before 02 January, no later return home than middle of January the following year.

Exact arrival and return dates are to be discussed with host family and host club prior to any flight booking.

Language

Minimal knowledge of German or French (level A1) is required. Rotary Youth Exchange Switzerland offers all inbounds free use of the Rosetta Stone online language course. Participants are asked to complete Levels 1 and 2 prior to arrival. Approximately 60 hours of language training are required.

After arrival, all August inbounds attend a language camp. At the end of this camp, the students will pass an internal test to show how far they got regarding the language knowledge.

For January inbounds, the best solution is sought, since the start of school has already begun and an early integration is desired.

All students **MUST** take an A2-test by the end of October; by the end of April for the January Inbounds. If they fail, they get a warning and they must attend another intensive language course at their own expense. If the next test will not be passed either, there will be a conversation about the reasons of the bad language knowledge and a general consideration of the whole exchange will be necessary.

All students who passed the A2-Test can attend additional language courses completed with an internationally recognized certificate (TELC). These courses are optional and must be paid extra.

Insurance

All Inbounds must buy insurance from Rotary Youth Exchange Switzerland.

Excluded from this rule are inbounds from Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

European students must have a valid EHIC card and a copy of the policy. Health insurance is mandatory in Switzerland, the easiest way to get exemption from Swiss health insurance is with EHIC cards. The municipality of residence will verify this equivalence. (Insurances as: Allianz care Scorestudies, AcademicCare Groupe Mutuell, Swisscare/Europe Travel Insurance are well accepted.)

If desired, Europeans can also join our insurance.

School

Inbounds attend the „Kantonsschule“ or „Gymnasium“ (secondary school level II).

The general course level is quite high and demanding for all students. Swiss students have at least 36 lessons per week. Inbounds are expected to attend about 30 lessons per week. The lessons take place 5 days a week and are spread throughout the day from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. In addition,

students have homework to do. At the beginning, this schedule is very demanding and tiring for Inbounds but they soon get used to it.

Graduation is not possible for Inbounds. The school year in Switzerland does not substitute for or correspond to a school year at a high school in the home country. Inbounds cannot earn credits.

At the time of arrival in Switzerland, Inbounds should not have finished high school at home yet. Increasingly, Swiss schools turn down students who have already graduated. In the past, such students did not participate in their school lessons and they skipped classes, their only interest being to have a “fun year”.

Too many unexcused absences can result in school dismissal and lead to an “early return”.

Before the start of the exchange, the only contact with the schools will be through the Rotary Club or our office.

Travelling

The exchange year is not a travel year. Many Inbounds are under the wrong impression that they will get to know all of Europe during their exchange year in Switzerland. Distances may indeed seem short but travelling to neighbouring countries will not be allowed. There are exceptions only for trips with the host family or Rotary club. Switzerland is a tiny country, but it still offers enough for a whole year.

Our official travel rules inform about the terms and conditions for travel within the Swiss country borders (equal to the area of the multidistrict) and for trips abroad.

The Rotary Club pays for the school route and for trips to Rotarian meetings. It therefore issues the best season ticket for these needs to the students. Travel during free time must be covered by the student. In most cases, the RC organizes a half-fare card.

Transport

All Inbounds must travel to Switzerland with an open return ticket allowing them to change the return date for free or at a minimal fee. The final return date must be discussed with the Swiss host club prior to being fixed (after arrival) and should be booked by the end of December for August Inbounds, by the end of June for January Inbounds.

Most Inbounds go to school by train and/or bus. The host club will pay the respective transport costs.

Bank-account

It is not possible for all young people from all nations to get their own bank account in Switzerland. The local RC will organize the best way to transfer the monthly allowance.

Mandatory Events

Welcome Meeting or language camp / language school

Ticino/Tessin Weekend: May or June (Farewell for August Inbounds)

District conference / flag parade: June

Matterhorn weekend: November (Farewell for January Inbounds)

Optional Events

ROTEX-Weekends: Spring weekend / Fall weekend (dates will follow after arrival)

Europe Tour in June: 17 days - Info will follow after arrival.

Costs

We are aware that Switzerland is a rather expensive country. Therefore, we try to keep all costs as low as possible.

You will receive payment instructions at the given time and they are binding.

Language training up to A2 level: about CHF 800 – Incl. camp or course / online-lessons

Insurance about CHF 1600 (health, accident, liability)

(or Australian/New Zealand District Insurance for Australian/New Zealand Inbounds / or European Insurance for Europe Inbounds /)

Extra: Europe-Tour (optional): about EUR 2700 for the full tour / Prices are adjusted to the situation and the travel program. On this tour you can get to know a lot of Europe in a safe and fun way.

Lenzburg, October 2022

