



PROGRAM COUNTRY: SWITZERLAND



STS – more than 50 years of experience in student exchange programs all over the world



Located in Central Europe and one of the Alpine countries, Switzerland is world famous for breath taking sceneries, wonderful chocolate and excellent cheese. Bordering Germany, France, Italy,

Austria, and the Principality

of Liechtenstein, Switzerland is a mix of different cultures and backgrounds. Switzerland has four official languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh. In the German-speaking part, people speak Swiss German with each other. However, the Swiss are known as being multilingual, therefore you can hear many different languages when meeting people.

COUNTRY INFORMATION

The capital is Bern, which figures on the list of World Cultural Heritage sites. Switzerland is one of the oldest democracies in the world. Nowhere in the world do people take such a close and active part in their government as in Switzerland. It was in 1291 when three “cantons” (Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden) joined together and vowed to protect each other and their borders against aggression from others; this laid the cornerstone for the country. This historical episode was the focus of Schiller’s drama “William Tell”. The Constitution of Switzerland in its current form was established in 1848. The Confederacy consists of 26 cantons, of which three are further divided into half cantons. The newest is the canton of Jura, which was separated from Bern following a referendum in 1978.

Switzerland is the country where everything runs like clockwork. This does not mean, that Swiss people don’t have any time, it is just normal that people are hard-working and expect things to be done on time. Being punctual and reliable are typical Swiss characteristics.

The country is well-known for its fantastic Alpine scenery, majestic hotels, and its neat and nice towns, villages and hamlets. It has clean air, wide meadows, serene beautiful lakes, impressive waterfalls and lots of rivers. There are a lot of interesting shops and cafés, which you can find in Switzerland too. Distances are short, which means that you can make a day trip from your host family to anywhere in Switzerland by using the public transportation system, which is among the best in the world.

The four different language areas also have different cultures. In the French- and Italian-speaking parts, the mentality of the inhabitants might be more lively and communicative than in the central part of Switzerland. Overall, the Swiss have become cosmopolitan and open, trading with the whole world. Most people like to travel and have seen many parts of the world.

The language spoken in a certain canton or area is also the first and main language at school. However, children at the age of 10 or younger, start to learn other languages. People in the German-speaking part speak Swiss German with each other (there are hundreds of different dialects), but they also speak German, which is the language used for writing. There are some cities and areas which are bilingual, where German and French are both official languages (like Fribourg/Freiburg, Neuchâtel/Neuenburg, Bienne/Biel). Most people are also fluent in English. Switzerland is a multi-cultural country hosting people from all over the world, most of whom came for work, as immigrants or refugees.

The Swiss are very aware of nature and its beauty, and take efforts in conserving the natural resources. Environmental issues have always been of great concern to them. Switzerland is known as one of the cleanest countries in the world, and that is thanks to its tidy, environment conscious inhabitants.

On weekends train stations are filled with people departing for a day trip or to take part in sports. In the winter you will meet lots of people carrying their skis or snowboard. Other popular sports are soccer, ball games in general, ice-hockey, swimming, biking, jogging, walking, and tennis. The climate is rather mild and continental in the north, whereas in the south it is rather Mediterranean. It is a country with four seasons; the temperatures vary depending on the region, but in general the winters are cold with either snow (in higher areas) or rain, and the summers are warm and sometimes even hot.

We recommend exchange students who would like to spend a year in Switzerland to subscribe to either a monthly or a yearly ticket for the public transportation system. There are several options: one for the local area, which covers your transportation to an



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from school and another which includes the whole country and allows you to hop on any train, bus, boat, or ship all over the country (with some exceptions of mountain railways, that charge additional rates). This enables you to travel around with your host family or school, visiting places of interest or taking part in activities such as skiing.

SCHOOL LIFE

After six years of primary school, Swiss students can apply to a variety of schools. One choice is the "Gymnasium", also called Kantons- or Mittelschule, for six years, which leads to the "Matura" and allows entrance into university. Swiss students can also choose between various types of secondary schools, with programs that last from three-four years. These eventually lead to a diploma and mark the end of the mandatory schooling. The Gymnasium students weekly have 32 to 40 lessons from Monday through Friday, plus homework. The system is rather demanding, and if a student cannot achieve the average, he/she must repeat the year.

Exchange students are usually placed at a Gymnasium or Mittelschule. Aside from the mandatory subjects, such as German, English, math, history, biology, chemistry, geography, physical education, arts and philosophy, students are offered the option to take other languages as well, like French, Italian, Spanish, Greek or Latin.

Sports are not widely practiced at regular schools. There is hardly more than two hours of sports per week on the schedule. However, many different kinds of sports are offered on a local level, through village clubs or town sport centres, and students are encouraged to participate in sports or other clubs in their free time.

Schools are closed for one or two weeks in the fall. There is also a break over Christmas/New Year, and in spring for one or two weeks. In February, there is a two-week winter sports holiday. Some schools organize ski camps during this time. Then it is time for the summer break, and this lasts from approximately the beginning of July until the middle of August. In the holidays the Swiss people like to be active. Teenagers spend their free time going to the cinema, meeting friends, going shopping or sightseeing.

Students in the primary school either walk to school or ride a bike. Gymnasium students usually travel to the next larger town or city, using the public transportation system.

HOST FAMILY LIFE

Lots of families live in rented apartments or houses. In many families the mother is a housewife and/or works part-time. Families usually consist of two parents and one or two children. However, there are also lots of patchwork or single parent families.

The main meal is taken in the middle of the day, either together or at school. In the evening, dinner is served around 6 or 7 pm. Typically Swiss meals include potatoes, pasta, vegetable, salad, cheese and meat, but international cuisine such as Italian, Asian

and American food is also very popular along with the traditional Fondue and Raclette! The meals are family gatherings during which every member has the possibility to share the events of the day.

Swiss teenagers generally enjoy a lot of freedom; they are independent and decide for themselves what to do after school. They love being outside. In summer, the cafés, restaurants and parks are filled with teenagers. However, it is expected that their parents know where they are and that they observe their curfews. The same is expected of exchange students. Respect on both sides is the norm. Kids help out with household chores. Most Swiss teenagers are used to organizing their spare time on their own. As an exchange student you are expected to show initiative and be active and make new friends with whom you will spend most of your free time. However, your host family, teachers and other people are very helpful if you need help and support.

Some families are religious and practice regularly. Most of the young people do not practice, and therefore it is rarely expected of teenagers to go to church, unless they themselves wish to do so.

If families who host a student go on vacation, the exchange student is usually offered to join the family, though generally expected to pay their own way.

PROGRAM EXTRAS

European Tour

In the end of June, STS offers an amazing three-week bus tour around Europe. You get to visit 10 countries together with students from all over the world. The price includes accommodation, half board, sightseeing, most entrances and activities, Disneyland in Paris etc. Please see separate sheet for more detailed information regarding the tour.



All information is subject to change.

