

Switzerland

Why Switzerland? For many reasons!

- The rich heritage;
- The numerous different cultures living side by side in one very small country;
- Its four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh;
- The diversity of landscapes, topography and natural beauty;
- Its democratic structure and the strong involvement of its people with politics;
- Its challenging schools;
- Its many and varied opportunities for sports and other recreational activities;
- Its numerous museums, theatres and concerts in cities and smaller towns;
- The fact that YFU- Switzerland has many enthusiastic young volunteers who enjoy working with exchange students; and
- YFU- Switzerland's offer for all year students to attend an annual ski camp with experienced ski instructors.



Switzerland

Different cultures



The Swiss

Value hard work

Area: 41,300 km² (15,950 sq mi), about the same size as the U.S. state of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined, or of Costa Rica.

Switzerland is centrally located at what has been described as the crossroads of northern and southern Europe. The rugged and beautiful Alps cover three fifth's of Switzerland's land area.

Climate: The climate is particularly influenced by differences in altitude. Switzerland's winters - from December to March - and snowy mountains make it a world renowned winter vacation spot. Summers are mild.

Population: 6.9 million. 69% of the people are of German descent, 19% are French, 10% Italian, and 1% Romansh. The Swiss value hard work (including school work), thrift, reliability, respect for others, participation and independence. Most people are extremely environment conscious and in some places, pay a special tax for each garbage bag.

Religion: About 49% of the Swiss are Roman Catholic and about 48% are Protestant, but the number active in their faith is much smaller. Switzerland was the centre of the Zwingli and Calvinist Protestant reformations of the 16th century and has produced several important modern theologians including Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Swiss Protestant churches are locally controlled and democratic. Both Catholic and Protestant churches have generally worked toward greater ecumenical harmony. As elsewhere in Europe the inhabitants of rural areas show a greater commitment to religion than do their urban counterparts.

Government: Switzerland is a strongly decentralised federal state with most political power residing in the 20 cantons, 6 half-cantons, and in the local communities. Swiss citizenship, which for other than those born in the country is expensive and difficult to get, is essentially citizenship in a community. Constitutional amendments can be initiated by the “popular initiative” and virtually all important legislation is subject to a popular referendum. The government consists of a two-house Federal Assembly and a seven member Federal Council.

History: The Swiss take great pride in their history as one of the oldest democracies in the world. The Celtic tribes that occupied the area of present-day Switzerland were part of the Roman Empire for over five centuries. Later, Burgundian tribes settled in the west and Alemanians in the east. During most of the Middle Ages, Switzerland existed as part of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire.

The founding of the Swiss confederation took place on August 1, 1291 when the three Forest Cantons (Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden) rose in rebellion against Austian Habsburg control. Through a series of military victories, the Swiss soldiers were noted for their warlike prowess. Later, the confederation grew larger and more powerful. After withstanding the turmoil and war of the Reformation Age, Switzerland was recognised as an independent country in 1647.

In 1815, after a brief invasion by Napoleon, Switzerland became a permanent neutral country and in 1848 adopted a constitution making it a federal state. Later, in 1874, a distinctive feature of Swiss government direct democracy by the people was firmly established in the Constitution.



Great pride in their History



Gymnasium Secondary school

Education: One cannot really speak about “the Swiss education,” as the responsibility for educational programs is left to the various cantons and because of the diversity of facts resulting from four official languages. However, there are national standards and all cantons must meet those minimum standards.

Primary school in most cantons lasts for six years. Students then attend a lower secondary school for three years that completes the compulsory school time.

Most young people continue their education in one of the following upper secondary school types: 1) Gymnasium with five specialisation's: Greek and Latin, Latin and Modern languages, Math and Science, Modern Language.

Only about 18% of the total number of upper secondary students attend the highly academic and demanding Gymnasium. The school-leaving certificate is called matura/maturite/maturita and allows students to enter university. 2) Teacher Training Schools for various levels and subjects. Approximately 3% of total upper secondary students attend these schools. 3) Other Upper Secondary Schools (e.g. arts, hotel business, etc.) approximately 5% of total upper secondary students attend this type. 4) Vocational Upper Secondary Education vocational training/apprenticeships with approximately 2 days per week of academic classes. Almost every vocational occupation in Switzerland requires a Certificate of Proficiency.

Students must pass an examination to earn this certificate. It does not allow students to enter university. Approximately 75% of the Swiss upper secondary students choose this type. Most YFU students are recruited from the first three types, as it is difficult to interrupt the vocational training.

Economy: Switzerland has one of the strongest economies in the world, despite the lack of most natural resources. About seven percent of the people are employed in agriculture, mostly dairy farming. Industry is the most important part of the Swiss economy. Production of machinery, chemicals and precision instruments (clocks and watches) are important industries. There are also many textile mills. Swiss chocolate and cheeses are known worldwide. The tourist trade is also a very important part of the economy. Switzerland is known as the banking capital of the world.

Nevertheless, Switzerland is currently undergoing an economic recession, mainly affecting the French-speaking area, and its unemployment rate, one of the lowest in the past (0.2%), is at a record high of 6%.

Language: Languages in Switzerland correspond to the various ethnic backgrounds of the people. German, French, Italian and Romansh are all official languages. Emphasis upon foreign language competence, a commitment to the protection of language minorities, political decentralisation, and a sense of co-operation have kept the varying traditional Swiss groups together as a peaceful and prosperous country.

Apart from regional accents, there are also numerous Swiss-German dialects, classed under the general term Schwyzerdutsch, and used on formal occasions as well as socially. The written German language is almost exclusively High German (the same as spoken in and written in Germany).

In the native tongue (Swiss German*/French/Italian):



Economy

One of the strongest

Language

Tschou zame! / Salut / Ciao!.....	Hi / Hello
Gruessech mitenand / Bonjour / Buon giorno.....	Good morning
Wie geits? / Ca va? / Come sta?.....	How are you?
Wie schpat isch es? / Quelle heure est-il? / Che ore sono?.....	What's the time?
Danke (or merci) / Merci / Grazie.....	Thank you
Bitte / Je vouse en prie / Prego.....	You are welcome





Prosperous and Peaceful country

Family life: The Swiss attach great value to privacy as well as to cleanliness, neatness and orderliness. The average family size is small, 2.9 people. In rural areas, families are generally larger and more patriarchal.

Meals: Breakfast is light, consisting of bread, jam, cheese, or cornflakes/muesli, hot chocolate, milk or coffee. Traditionally, lunch is the main meal of the day, usually including meat, potatoes, rice or pasta, and vegetables and/or salad. Dinner is served around 6:30 or 7:00pm, and is light, often a cold meal. In the past few years, however, eating habits and lifestyles have changed, especially in urban areas dinner has become the main meal, and is taken together.

YFU Switzerland: Since the beginning of the 1960s there have been Swiss exchange students going to the U.S. In 1967, a Swiss YFU Committee was formed. Since 1975, YFU-Switzerland has been a registered association located in Thun, a town near the Swiss federal city, Bern. The Swiss National Office is staffed by a full time National Director and two part-time program co-ordinators. There is also a regional office for the French-speaking part of Switzerland in Geneva.

Switzerland is divided into eight YFU regions, each headed by a regional director, assisted by a number of volunteers. Most Swiss volunteers and regional directors are YFU returnees, and very young. Over 100 volunteers devote much of their free time to recruiting students, finding host families, preparing students to go abroad, and supporting students and their host families.

YFU Host Families: The Swiss committee usually places incoming students in families who have sent their children abroad. Additional families are recruited using host family application forms.

YFU Activities: For international year students there are two one-week (compulsory) activities that are organised on a national level. First, a Post-Arrival Orientation in October takes place in a dormitory-type house in the mountains.

The students cook for themselves. The content of the program is based on the latest findings in training and Cross-Cultural Communication Problem Solving, Adjusting to the Swiss Way of Life, and How to Be a Successful Exchange Student. Second, a Ski Camp, held in January. All students are provided with skiing equipment and spend a week in a youth hostel of a ski resort in the mountains. The group is supervised by YFU volunteers who are also able to give skiing instructions. Various activities such as monthly meetings are also organised on a regional level.

For summer students, one or two national events are organised, and various other activities take place in the regions. Host family members are encouraged to participate.



Over 100 YFU Volunteers

