

# Information for arriving AFSers

Please read these pages carefully to learn about what is ahead. You will find important information about AFS and you! These pages have been written to help you prepare.



## AFS and You!

Although you are headed for quite an adventure, you are not going to be lost in a foreign country. Your Swiss family as well as the AFS returnees in your region, and we at the AFS office, are all anxiously awaiting your arrival.

## What is AFS Switzerland?

In Switzerland, AFS is incorporated as an association and has a Board of Directors responsible for all operations. The Board is elected yearly by the General Assembly. On the regional and local level there are hundreds of active AFS volunteers who help us achieve our goals.

Currently the national office employs 17 staff members who are responsible for administering the programs throughout the country. Not an easy task if you imagine that AFS Switzerland is hosting and sending a total of 600 students a year. Here our address and phone numbers:

AFS Intercultural Programs  
Kernstrasse 57  
8004 Zürich

Tel: 044 218 19 19  
Fax: 044 218 19 00

## Your AFS support



The national office will appoint a local counselor for the year program students. In most cases it will be a former AFS participant or host family, who has been asked to assist you and your host family throughout the year. Your counselor usually lives nearby, has a long AFS experience and is ready to help and advise you.

## The AFS chapter

On the local level there are more than 30 local chapters in Switzerland. The members are mostly young returnees but also former host families. Throughout the year most of the chapter members will become your friends. Besides leisure activities they will organise fundraising drives to raise money to help pay for some of your school related expenses. Your local chapter has already done and will be doing a lot for you during your stay. The members of a chapter are volunteers, and they are not paid for their work. They do it because they enjoy and believe in what AFS does. Please show them your appreciation and be willing to help out when they need you.

## AFS activities during your year



On **arrival**, you will be met by AFS staff and by your host family. You will go directly to the house of your host family. If distances prevent your host family from coming to the airport you will join them by train upon your arrival.

For students with less than two years of German, French or Italian we organize special intensive **language courses** right at the beginning. For those who live in remote areas tutor lessons will be organized (once or twice a week during 3 months).

For students with more than two years of German, French or Italian school might start right after arrival.

After you have been in Switzerland for 2 weeks you will get together regionally for an **orientation weekend**. By now you will be well advanced in your language training courses, you will have got first impressions of Swiss life and now it will be appropriate to talk about those first experiences.

Ultimately 6 weeks before departure you will be prepared for your return back home. An **evaluation weekend** will allow you to evaluate what you have learned during your stay in Switzerland and gear your thoughts to your returning home.

## Getting started – first things first

Write to or call your host family as soon as possible. Don't be shy. They are waiting anxiously to hear from you. Have your parents write too. A letter from them saying „Thank you“ and „We trust you to take care of our son/daughter“ will mean a great deal.

### Things to bring

#### Clothing

Keep in mind that weather in Switzerland is unpredictable. Summers can be hot and dry or rainy and cold, and winters can be severe or mild. The following is a short guideline of what you might want to bring. In Switzerland, people wear the same type of clothes as in other countries of the western world. **However, it is only a guideline and for more specific information we suggest that you ask your host family.**

Summer:



Do not forget to bring a pair of warmer pants and a light and heavier sweater, in addition to the same kind of things you wear at home, cotton dresses, jeans, T-shirts, sweat-shirts, etc. We suggest you take along a raincoat/-jacket and a swimsuit.



Warm winter clothes are an absolute must. Bring along a heavy coat or ski jacket, warm boots, warm pants, heavy sweaters, woolen socks, etc. If such items are unavailable in your country please make sure to be able to buy them here in Switzerland. If you have a ski outfit already, check with your host family whether you should bring it along.

- Shoes:** In the summer, sandals, tennis shoes, and/or sneakers can be worn, but also bring along sturdy shoes for hiking. Any kind of footwear is allowed in schools. Be sure to bring along slippers, as many Swiss do not wear street shoes in the house. Also, do not forget a pair of nice shoes to be worn with dresses, resp. suits for special occasions.
- Underwear:** Bring along enough to last at least a week, as most Swiss families do the laundry only once a week. Depending on the season, light or flannel pyjamas (as rooms are not heated much). A robe could be helpful.
- Other:** For special occasions, girls should bring a good dress (not formal, however), and boys should bring along a pair of good pants with a jacket to match, a nice shirt and a tie or white turtle-neck.
- To school:** Basically casual and informal clothing

## Gifts



Bringing a gift to your host family is a very nice gesture. Bring things that will help you tell Swiss people about your home, country and culture:

- photographs of your home and family
- a map of your country
- recipes
- small household items
- typical food
- T-shirts
- picture books
- .....

## Other things you need to know



### Electricity

Switzerland is a completely "electrified" society. The voltage is 220 (in the US and UK it is 110-220), and the electrical outlets do not fit with US plugs. All American and British appliances brought to Switzerland must be equipped with built-in transformers and have adapters, which are very hard to get here.

### Postage

Within Switzerland a letter costs 85/110 cents, a letter within Europe costs 120/130 cents and an overseas letter costs 140/180cents. The postal system in Switzerland is very efficient and reliable.

## Telephone

Every local call as well as the long distance calls are charged here. It is expensive to call within Switzerland, and overseas calls are expensive too.

## Transportation

Most AFSers will be relying on their own feet for getting around, i.e. you will be doing a lot of walking and in many cases cycling. There is no organized school transportation, and thus some will cycle, and some will be taking city/regional buses or trains, or a combination of some or all of the above. Public transportation in Switzerland is efficient and dependable, and in almost all cases, they run very much on time.

## Travel

Please do not come to Switzerland hoping to travel all over Europe. During your stay here you will probably have a chance to see much of the country, but then again, do not take that for granted either. AFS Switzerland will offer you a half fare ticket for all train rides within Switzerland. This will cut your train fares in half during your entire AFS year (but compared with other countries even half price is quite expensive). The important part of being an AFS student however is the personal relationships and the opportunity to involve yourself in Swiss life. Concentrate on those things.

## Money

The cost of living in Switzerland are high. We suggest that you bring the equivalent of roughly US\$ 200 per month and keep your amount of money within the reasonable limit of US\$ 2500 for the whole year. In those instances where such an amount represents far too much money, please feel reassured that with the help of the host family, the AFS office and the local AFS volunteers we can find ways to reduce the costs. Upon arrival we recommend you to open a bank account. You can then transfer the extra money directly.

In Switzerland, you will need money for:

Postage – please see above

Soft drinks and snacks – coke and other soft drinks cost about Sfr. 1.50.- when bought by the can in a supermarket. They cost more when bought in a cafe or restaurant, i.e. approx. Sfr. 3.50.- – 5.00.-. A cup of coffee or tea in a cafe also costs around Sfr. 3.80.-. A sandwich bought in a supermarket costs between Sfr. 3.50 and 7.00.-.

Entertainment – a ticket to the movies costs between Sfr. 12.- and 18.- depending on the cinema and when the movie is seen (for some performances students get a discount). A ticket to a rock concert costs between Sfr. 35.- and Sfr. 85.- or more.

Gifts that you may want to give to your Swiss friends and family and to people at home.

If, in addition you want to buy clothing, take lessons, take a course that requires extra materials or participate in a sports or voluntary school camp, you will need to ensure that you have extra funds available.

## Your host family and you

In this package you also receive the papers of your future host family. Please read them carefully so you can start getting to them, before you will meet them personally.



### What are AFS host families like?

- AFS host families are like families everywhere. Each one is different.
- Your host family may have two parents or one parent.
- The parent(s) may be middle aged, young or over 60.
- The host parents may be adults living together but not married.
- Your host family may have no children, teenage children, very young children, adult children living away from home.
- Your host family may live in a city, a town, or in a village.

There are many, many possibilities of what your host family is like, but the following is true for all of them:

Your host family wants you to live with them. They want to learn about your country. They want to teach you about their way of life, and they hope you will like living with them.

Your host family wants you to be a true family member, which means you will share its work and responsibilities, follow family rules, and consider the family when you make plans.

Your host family wants to help you while you are in Switzerland.

And please always remember:

Your host family is not paid. They receive no money for having you in their home.