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The AJAS team (r. Chantal Dünnenberger, head of service, l. AJAS assistant Fabienne Feuz) with Peruvian-Swiss student Claudia Josi.

"It's great to get to know my home country!"

They have two things in common: their youth and a Swiss passport. But they live in all corners of the globe. For young Swiss nationals resident abroad, there are many different ways of getting to know their home country. Every year, hundreds take advantage of these opportunities. One of them is Peruvian-Swiss Claudia Josi (24).

GABRIELLE KELLER

AT THE DINNER TABLE Claudia Josi's father sometimes relates tales of his native country, Switzerland. Brought up in Bolivia and Germany, Peruvian-Swiss Claudia spends most of her vacations in Switzerland. For the past year she has been studying law at Fribourg University. "It's great to get to know my home country!", she says. Even if the cultural mix is not always as colourful as in the case of the 24-year-old law student, there are hundreds of other young Swiss Abroad who visit our country for vacation or study purposes or out of sheer curiosity. And there's no lack of opportunities for them!

Learning the language
Sprechen Sie deutsch? Parlez-vous français? Parla italiano? Many Swiss who have grown

up abroad are unable to communicate in any of our national languages. Language courses are offered by a number of institutions and schools, including the OSA Youth Service. "Our language courses last two weeks," says Tom Morgenegg, head of the Youth Service. "Of course that's not enough to really learn a language. But it whets the appetite for more." Lots of young people attend these courses because they want to refresh their knowledge of a national language. The programme provides lessons in the mornings, while afternoons are reserved for excursions or free activities.

Life on the farm

One of the most popular ways of getting to know our country's customs is the land service, which offers young people a chance to spend a short time working on a farm. The not-for-profit organisation "Landdienst" is financially supported by the Federal Office for Culture (FOC), all the cantons, the Principality of Liechtenstein, as well as a number of agricultural associations and foundations. The main aim is to provide a bridge between town and country, between the various language regions and cultures, and between consumers and producers.

pro juventute also offers young people the opportunity to integrate with a family and acquire agricultural experience.

Switzerland for fun

Lots of institutions offer sport and holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad. In winter the OSA Youth Service runs three winter sports camps. "These are attracting more and more young people who have never seen snow before in their lives," says Tom Morgenegg, "and they are great fun." In summer the organisation runs two sports camps and a tour of Switzerland. In August young people attending the Switzerland mobile camp even have the chance of an unforgettable trip up a 4000-meter high mountain.

Get to know Switzerland's financial centre

The Youth Service plans to hold a seminar for 16 to 25 year olds ahead of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad. This year's topic is "Switzerland as a financial centre – accessible to young Swiss Abroad?". During the seminar (24 to 31 August), participants will have the opportunity to visit a major bank as well as globally active companies and Swiss

universities. Young people will also be able to take the podium at the actual congress in Crans Montana (VS). "Young people interested in attending don't necessarily need a knowledge of economics or business," says Tom Morgenegg. "It's the interaction between different cultural backgrounds that makes such a seminar so interesting, even for Swiss in Switzerland."

Another programme focuses on Switzerland as a centre of education and offers individual advice on studying, visits to educational institutions and universities, and contacts with student groups.

For those interested in politics

Up to 15 or so young people aged between 15 and 21 with a good knowledge of a Swiss national language and a basic interest in politics and social issues, are invited to take part in the Federal Youth Session (27 October to 2 November). Here they will gain an insight into the Swiss political landscape and have an opportunity to draw up petitions.

Holidays in a homely atmosphere

When Swiss residents abroad visit their home country, they should feel at home. For young people aged between 15 and 25 who take part in the OSA youth arrangements, "Swiss Ping Pong" offers a two to four week stay with a host family. This is an ideal way for Swiss Abroad and Swiss in Switzerland to learn something about each others' lives and countries at close quarters.

The rules are simple: "Swiss Ping Pong" offers three to eight days' holiday with one or two host families; board and lodging are free of charge; the cost of travel and expenses for excursions are borne by the guest. The exchange can be two-way i.e. Swiss residents abroad can also offer to act as host.

The programme is aimed at young people from age 18 as well as singles, couples and families. There is no upper age limit.

Specially for kids

By bringing together Swiss children from the five continents, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (SJAS) makes an important contribution to better understanding and solidarity across cultural and linguistic borders. For children aged 8 to 14, our two-week summer camp offers an opportunity to find out lots about Switzerland and the Swiss. The programme includes games and outdoor sports, sight-seeing, hiking and city

excursions. The children also have enough free time to get to know their new friends from other countries. Last year children from 52 different countries attended SJAS holiday camps.

Studying

When Claudia Josi decided to study in Switzerland, she took advantage of the services offered by the AJAS (Association for the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad, see interview on page 12). Her studies in Fribourg have allowed her to get to know her home country for the first time: "I am pleasantly surprised about the Swiss. I like their reliability best of all," she says. But she wouldn't like to stay here forever. "I think it would gradually become a little restrictive for me," says the law student. "After all, I'm a Latino at heart."

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