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Friendships around the world

Each year, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad gives around 350 Swiss children abroad the opportunity to get to know their homeland better and to establish a strong bond with it. Lucas Maissen has been running camps for Swiss children from around the world for ten years. Here he shares his vast experience with us in an interview conducted by Viviane Aerni.

“SWISS REVIEW”: *You’ve been a camp leader for the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad for ten years now. How did this come about?*

LUCAS MAISSEN: I was involved with the Scouts for many years where I gained a lot of leadership experience. When a friend told me about the FYSA camps ten years ago, they appealed to me straightaway. I saw the multicultural and multilingual environment of the camps as an interesting challenge.

What does this practically voluntary position mean to you?

Firstly, I really enjoy working with children and young people. Bringing children from so many different backgrounds together in one place is a unique concept. I see it as a way of overcoming national mentalities. We have a truly global community at the camps. There is no distinction between rich and poor. Children are open-minded and without prejudice. They could teach us adults a lesson or two.

What experiences do the camps offer the children and what can they take away with them?

The children have lots of fun. There is so much to do and experience. They get to know their homeland better as well as other cultures. We give the children the chance to enjoy nature; we build fires and sometimes camp out overnight in tents. We allow the children to escape the routine of everyday life. Here, the opportunities for them are plentiful, while the demands on them are small. They often have a choice between different programmes.

We organise exciting, energetic activities for the children by, for example, turning a hike into a secret treasure hunt.

The most lasting experiences for the children are the global friendships they form at the camps, which often stay strong for many years and span great distances.

Is a particular image of Switzerland conveyed to the children taking part? To what extent do you shape their view of their original homeland?

Much of this comes automatically from everyday camp life. They see how hygienic

hold a Swiss passport. They are able to clearly distinguish between their Swiss identity and that of the country in which they live.

Do you sense that the children have a special relationship with one another because they all have the same roots?

It does provide a common denominator and a natural foundation which creates a connection and fosters openness. However, I think it is the unforgettable experiences they share that contribute most to the long-term friendships they form.

What influence do the different language backgrounds have on the FYSA camps?

Language is overestimated by adults as a means of communication. Children develop their own language. They communicate through gestures, facial expressions and drawings. Children are open, they approach one another and always find a way to communicate even if they don't speak the same language.

Have you noticed any effects from an increasingly globalised world on Swiss children abroad?

It has become easier to maintain friendships around the world thanks to advances in information technology. We have also noticed that the children are better informed about Switzerland thanks to the Internet, and fewer clichés exist as a result. There are also disadvantages associated with the new technology: children keep in contact with their lives back home while at the camps by mobile phone, which can mean they become less involved in the camp community.

What has been your best camp experience?

There have been so many. But it is the small things that leave the biggest impression on me, like when children are astonished because they can collect herbs in the forest or gaze in amazement at the stars in the night sky for the first time. You need so little to be happy. The worldwide friendships formed at every camp also provide me with the motivation to carry on.



Play-fighting with the camp leader, Lucas Maissen.

Switzerland is in that, for example, we happily drink water straight from the tap. We convey values such as sustainability to the children by using local produce for meals and by separating our rubbish.

Swiss children abroad often have an idealised perception of their homeland. They see it as a land of milk and honey. So, we aim to help them take a more critical and differentiated look at Switzerland as well. Folklore is important, but we want to show them that Switzerland is about more than just chocolate and cheese. Values such as our culture of dialogue and compromise should also be part of their personal image of Switzerland.

How strong do you think the bond is that Swiss children abroad have with Switzerland?

That mainly depends on their parents. Many children know a great deal about Switzerland and regularly speak one of the national languages. Swiss children abroad are proud of their heritage and proud to

Offers for young Swiss abroad aged 15 and over

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) offers expertise on matters concerning young Swiss people abroad. OSA brings young people together and aims to create a strong bond with Switzerland. OSA provides young people with information and advice, represents their interests and provides them with attractive holiday and educational offers in Switzerland.

Swiss camps

Young Swiss people from all over the world enjoy OSA's camps. Switzerland as a holiday destination offers lots of opportunities for sport. The team leaders of the Swiss camps are trained in teaching young people sport and provide high-quality coaching. Participants also learn about topical and important aspects of culture, geography, history, politics and society in Switzerland at OSA's camps. A highly enjoyable fringe programme ensures there is a relaxed atmosphere at the camp accommodation. Cross-border friendships are formed at OSA's youth camps.

This summer, OSA will welcome around 120 young people to the two camps in Leukerbad. The entire camp will visit the majestic mountains of Valais. The young people will participate in group sporting activities such as hiking, mountain biking, ball sports, climbing and water sports. Workshops, museum visits and a lively camp party are also part of the programme. The camp dates are:

Summer camp Leukerbad I: 19 to 31.7.2009

Summer camp Leukerbad II: 2 to 14.8.2009

OSA looks forward to welcoming a few new faces to the multi-sport summer camps.

Educational offers

Switzerland is a small country, but there is plenty to discover for those eager to learn. OSA aims to encourage young Swiss citizens abroad to become better acquainted with the country of their forefathers.

OSA's two-week language courses are aimed at young people with little or no knowledge of a national language. The courses focus on conversational skills. They aim to produce an initial sense of



Happy participants of "Action 72 hours"

achievement and encourage more in-depth learning of the foreign language. Participants attend lessons in the mornings. Two or three afternoons a week, OSA organises joint excursions and activities. The dates of the language courses are:

French course in Fribourg: 22.6. to 3.7.2009

German course in Zurich: 6.7. to 17.7.2009

French course in Neuchâtel: 6.7. to 17.7.2009

German course in Lucerne: 3.8. to 14.8.2009

OSA looks forward to chatting with the young Swiss visitors in German or French.

Prior to the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne on the issue of "The Swiss abroad – a great asset for our country?", OSA is offering young people the chance to take part in a seminar where participants will take a close look at the issue of what Swiss people abroad can do to help convey a positive image of Switzerland to the world.

The young visitors will also, of course, get to see Lucerne and central Switzerland, receive information on the Swiss education system and actively take part in the congress. The seminar will take place in Lucerne from 2 to 9.8.2009.

OSA is pleased that young people will have the opportunity to express their views at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad.

Host families

OSA has a large network of accommodating Swiss families who host young people for two to four weeks. These host families enjoy meeting people from other parts of the world and provide food and accommodation for young people. A stay with a host family is usually combined with an educational offer. Though, there is still plenty of time to get to know the host family and form new friendships.

ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

Our services:

- Legal Department
- Youth Service
- Association for the Promotion of Education for Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS)
- Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad (CSSA)
- Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)

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87TH CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD – LUCERNE, FROM 7 TO 9 AUGUST 2009

“The Swiss abroad – a great asset for our country?”

Does having almost 10% of its population living abroad represent an asset for Switzerland? Do Swiss citizens abroad provide our nation with added value in terms of image, reputation and global networking opportunities? Do they see themselves as ambassadors for Switzerland and Swiss values? The 87th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will explore all these issues. With “The Swiss abroad – a great asset for our country?” as its theme, it will take place between 7 and 9 August 2009 at the new congress centre of the Museum of Transport in Lucerne.

In a globalised world where people, their economic activities and political systems are increasingly interdependent, the Swiss abroad are without question a great asset for our country.

Prominent speakers will look at the myths and reality surrounding the contribution of the Swiss abroad to the nation in short talks and a round table debate. Claude Beglé, who has worked for CICR, Nestlé and Philip Morris and is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Swiss Post Office, spent 30 years as a Swiss citizen abroad working for Swiss companies. He will share his experiences of this with us at the opening presentation of the congress. We will also welcome the Head of Switzerland Tourism, Jürg Schmid, and the Federal Chancellor of Switzerland, Corina Casanova, among others.

The 87th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in the charming setting of Lucerne will have plenty to offer the heart, mind and taste buds. A visit to the Swiss Museum of Transport will allow congress participants to discover various accomplishments achieved thanks to Swiss people spending time abroad. Finally, on the Sunday, there will be an opportunity to visit the city of Lucerne and its surrounding area. Participants can choose either to go sight-seeing in the beautiful city of Lucerne or to take a boat trip on Lake Lucerne followed by lunch on the Rigi. The 87th congress promises to be an exceptional event.

Further information on the congress is available on our website at: www.aso.ch/en/offers

Raise Switzerland's profile where you are

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and Switzerland Tourism have teamed up and are working together to ensure that Swiss people abroad maintain strong links with their homeland. As part of this partnership, Switzerland Tourism is looking for committed Swiss people abroad who enjoy talking about their country and often have the opportunity to do so. A “Switzerland Promotion Kit” containing images, presentations, films, brochures and other interesting information about Switzerland will be sent free of charge to the members of “Network Switzerland”. These members will also receive regular information and news on Switzerland as well as exclusive special offers.

To become a member of “Network Switzerland”, visit the following website and complete the form in the “Network Switzerland” section: www.MySwitzerland.com/aso

Re-election of the CSA for the 2009–2013 term of office

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) is the representative body for Swiss people living abroad. It represents the interests of all Swiss expatriates in political circles in Switzerland.

The CSA therefore plays a key role in protecting the interests of the 700,000 Swiss citizens abroad.

The delegates of the CSA are to be newly elected for the 2009 to 2013 term of office. An international appeal is being made to any Swiss abroad who would like to sit as a delegate on the CSA.

Further information is available at www.aso.ch/en/politics

87TH CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD FROM 7 TO 9 AUGUST 2009 AT THE SWISS MUSEUM OF TRANSPORT IN LUCERNE

☐ I am interested in attending the next Congress of the Swiss Abroad. **Please send me the registration documents** for the 87th Congress of the Swiss Abroad (7 to 9 August 2009 in Lucerne) to the following address:

First name / Surname: _____

Address: _____

Country / Postcode / Town: _____

E-mail: _____

Please write clearly in block capitals and send the completed form to: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Communications Department, Congress Organisation, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3006 Berne

To save time and postage, you can also contact us directly by e-mail: communication@aso.ch

The Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held **in German and French only** (with simultaneous interpretation) for organisational and financial reasons.

The latest information on the forthcoming congress will also be updated regularly at www.aso.ch/en/offers. It is well worth visiting our website from time to time!