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Gaining life experience in Switzerland

What to do after finishing compulsory education or high school? Often the best answer is to take a year out. There is a plethora of gap year opportunities to choose from in Switzerland.

Go to university? Do vocational training? Or look for a job? Many young people ponder these questions once they have left school. Making the right choice is not always easy, which is why gap years are a popular option in Switzerland.

Bridge-year courses

Bridge-year courses, of which there are many, used to be referred to as the “tenth school year”. They are run by the cantons and can vary considerably in nature. On average, a bridge-year programme will last six to 12 months. Many help to fill gaps in schooling or provide guidance on choosing a profession. This will often include helping people to find apprenticeships.

Voluntary work

In return for doing voluntary work, you will receive free board/lodging and possibly a small amount of pocket money. Many volunteers like to work on farms. Agriviva is a body that organises agricultural placements for some 1,500 young volunteers from around the world each year. Swiss Abroad also take advantage of these opportunities. For example, Yaycia Robinson from Australia spent this summer working at a family farm in the canton of Solothurn. “I definitely want to be working with animals in future,” says Robinson, who developed a particular affection for the cows.

Internship

Internships provide an in-depth insight into the world of work. From hospitality and healthcare, to media and construction – almost all professions offer work placements. Most of these are advertised on various online platforms. When applying for an internship, you must provide a CV, cover letter and references – just like you would if you were applying for a permanent job. Interns are treated as employees and usually receive a small wage. To gain admission to a university of applied sciences, you normally need to have been on a work placement for several months.

Movetia offers a language assistantship programme that allows students from abroad to gain initial work experience by helping out for a year as a language assistant at an upper secondary school or vocational school.

Young Australian Yaycia Robinson (left) with her “Agriviva parents” Stefan and Maria Marti, alongside “Fuba” the cow. (Photo: Julia Spahr, “Schweizer Bauer”).



Au pair

Working as an au pair for a family with children can be an interesting experience for young men and women alike. Although the remuneration is nothing to write home about, you not only receive free board and lodging but are also given enough spare time to attend language courses and get to know Switzerland better.

Language courses

Intensive language courses allow you to immerse yourself in the language of your choice. Numerous private schools in Switzerland offer language courses for every level. We recommend that you aim for a course that earns you a recognised language certificate.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Information sheets on the relevant options are available to order free of charge from education-suisse by email (info@educationsuisse.ch). Education-suisse also has a Facebook page, which now also includes a closed group for all young Swiss Abroad who are currently furthering their education in Switzerland.

educationsuisse, Education in Switzerland, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland
Tel.: +41 31 356 61 04, info@educationsuisse.ch, www.educationsuisse.ch.

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Once the water fight starts, hardly anyone stays dry.

Youth Service 2020 summer schedule

Next summer, the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is running language and holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 or over. More information about the camps will be available from 6 January 2020 at www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers.

Our schedule at a glance:

11.7.–24.7.2020 Sports camp 1 and Swiss Challenge

25.7.–07.8.2020 Sports camp 2

08.8.–23.8.2020 Language, sports and holiday camp

We will also be happy to post you our information brochure including the schedule of events on request. The registration deadline is 15 March 2020.

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Youth Service, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland; tel.: +41 31 356 61 24; fax: +41 31 356 61 01; email: youth@aso.ch / www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers

“I remember so many great times that I could not possibly say which was best”

This is how one summer camp participant responded when asked about the highlight. Many others gave similar answers.

Every summer, Swiss children and young people from around the world meet to explore their second home country and make friends from around the world while taking part in hikes and excursions, and playing sports and games.

The camps of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) and the Youth Service of the OSA connect young Swiss people with one another and with Switzerland. In the company of motivated camp leaders they have an opportunity to broaden their horizons, learn about Swiss traditions and history, participate in sports and make friends. As a result, Switzerland starts to mean more to the participants than family ties and citizenship.

Paddling down the Aare between Thun and Bern



Summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

From the end of June to the end of August 2020, Swiss children living abroad can have a fantastic time with around 40 other children from all over the world while also discovering Switzerland and its culture at summer camps lasting two weeks. Registration for the summer camps will begin on 6 January 2020. The summer camps 2020 will take place on the following dates:

Sat. 27.6.–Fri. 10.7.2020

Sat. 11.7.–Fri. 24.7.2020

Sat. 25.7.–Fri. 07.8.2020

Sat. 08.8.–Fri. 21.8.2020

The exact details of the various offers (locations, age groups, etc.) will be available from the middle of December 2019 at: www.sjas.ch/en. We would also be pleased to send you our information brochure with an overview of the offers available by post on request. The registration deadline is 15 March 2020. Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland Tel. +41 31 356 61 16, Fax +41 31 356 61 01, Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch



Toboggan fun in French-speaking Switzerland



Dinner in Lugano

It becomes a real part of their identity, their personal story and their circle of friends.

Our camps are diverse and intensive: overnight stays in self-constructed tent camps, hikes, sport competitions, games days, outdoor games, swimming and orienteering are a major part of the sporting programme. The learning-based programme consists of museum visits, excursions to nature reserves and installations from the Second World War, as well as camp debates. The overall focus is on having fun and being together. This ensures a wealth of unforgettable moments for everyone.

The FYSA and the OSA aim to enable all Swiss children living abroad to

take part in at least one camp. This is made possible through donations to both organisations by readers of the “Review”. Your donations help financially disadvantaged families to pay the camp and travel costs. If you would like to make a donation, please contact youth@aso.ch (for the OSA youth camp) or info@sjas.ch (for the FYSA children’s camp).

Our camps simply could not happen without the help of our many volunteers. Around 160 camp leaders and 30 guest families take part every year. Our camp leaders are well prepared for the camps thanks to our annual training courses, and they organise the camps according to the Youth + Sport guidelines of the Federal Office of Sport.

Various target groups

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) is an independent organisation recognised by the ZEW foundation. The FYSA’s target group are children aged eight to 14. The Youth Service is a department of the OSA which organises leisure, educational and political activities for young people aged 15 and over. Both organisations work independently of one another, have their own websites and registration procedures, but they cooperate closely.

This summer, the FYSA organised nine children’s holiday camps for a total of 340 children from more than 70 countries. The Youth Service organised four youth camps, three language courses and several host family stays. In all, 200 young people from more than 60 countries took advantage of these offers.

Bivouac in the forest near Thun



Visiting the Olympic Museum in Lausanne



Am I entitled to unemployment benefit after returning to Switzerland from a non-EU/EFTA country?

“I am a Swiss expatriate who has been living in a non-EU/EFTA country for the last two years. What would be my rights with regard to unemployment benefit if I returned to Switzerland?”

People who have most recently been working in a non-EU/EFTA country can register at a regional employment centre (RAV) in their home municipality after returning to Switzerland.

They will be entitled to unemployment benefit (for up to 90 days) provided they can prove (with salary statements) that they have been in paid employment in a non-EU/EFTA country for at least 12 of the previous 24 months. In addition, they need to prove that they have worked for at least six months in Switzerland during that time. This is because, as of 2018, this standard two-year time frame must also comprise a six-month contribution period in Switzerland. In other words: in the 24 months preceding the date on which you apply for unemployment benefit, you need to have been in gainful employment in Switzerland in order to qualify.

Anyone who has worked for a Swiss-domiciled company and consequently made Swiss unemployment insurance contributions during their time abroad will be treated the same as anyone who works in Switzerland. (US)

Further information: www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch

The OSA's Legal Service provides general legal information on Swiss law, particularly in areas which concern the Swiss Abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law or intervene in disputes between private parties.

Money transfers to Cuba?

The OSA has been looking into the matter

PostFinance discontinued all payments to Cuba on 1 September 2019. What does this mean for Swiss Abroad who live in Cuba and receive a Swiss pension? The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) contacted the Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) to ask what the impact will be and whether any measures are being taken to help pensioners living in Cuba. The SCO assured the OSA that it is following the geopolitical situation and associated impact on payment transactions closely. Fortunately, payments from the SCO to Cuba are subject to an exemption, hence old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) will continue to be transferred in euros to Cuba.

At the political level, member of the Council of States and OSA Vice-President Filippo Lombardi (CVP, canton of Ticino) has filed a parliamentary interpellation. Lombardi is asking whether the Federal Council intends to take action to ensure that PostFinance executes payments to Cuba – especially in regard to Swiss pensioners who live in the country. If no action is planned, Lombardi wants to know what alternatives the Federal Council has in mind to ensure that Swiss expatriates in Cuba receive their pension benefits. The interpellation has still to be considered. (MS)

SWISS ABROAD COMMUNITY



A Swiss receives permission to restore holy Buddha statue

Alfred Soland from Basel settled in Thailand after living in Hollywood and Las Vegas. According to the local media, he is the first foreign artist to receive permission to restore a Buddha statue.

His music: Since he was young, Alfred Soland has been passionate about music. “I played bass in a group called Sidi Brahim. In 1981, we received an award for being the best jazz rock band in Switzerland,” he recalls. He later studied sculpture and painting and founded an advertising agency.

His American experience: He suffered a midlife crisis at 32. In California, he qualified as a composer and musical arranger for orchestras. He then made it into the film business. However, after six years Soland decided to completely change direction: he moved to Las Vegas, where he spent five years as a professional poker player.

His awakening: The loss of a good friend stirred something within him: “I wanted to see as much of the world as possible while I still could.” He travelled to Thailand and started meditating. “Meditation enabled me to start over.” His body gradually changed as the years went by and he now looks younger. “People don't believe me when I say I'm nearly 60.”

His Buddha: Soland made the acquaintance of a monk through his Thai girlfriend. The monk needed an artist to restore a four-metre-high statue of Buddha in his temple. His work has not gone unnoticed: “The journalists were almost lost for words. They said that no foreigner had ever been granted that particular privilege.”

The full article is available at swissinfo.ch, the online service of the Swiss radio and TV company (SRG SSR) published in ten languages. Do you also live abroad? Mark your pictures on Instagram with [#WeAreSwissAbroad](https://www.instagram.com/WeAreSwissAbroad).