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Growing up in Canada, education in Switzerland

The Swiss Abroad Cyril Dittli talks about his "try-out" days and subsequent apprenticeship in a Swiss specialist bicycle shop.

"My name is Cyril Dittli and I come from St-Isidore, a village near Ottawa, Canada. I grew up on a farm there and successfully completed high school. My parents emigrated from Lucerne to Canada 35 years ago for a new adventure. At that time, many Swiss emigrants moved to this region. So, I always had contact with other Swiss families and my parents only spoke to me in German, while I spoke English and French at school. Every Saturday, I went to the German language school. At the time, I didn't like having to go to school on Saturdays, but now I'm grateful.

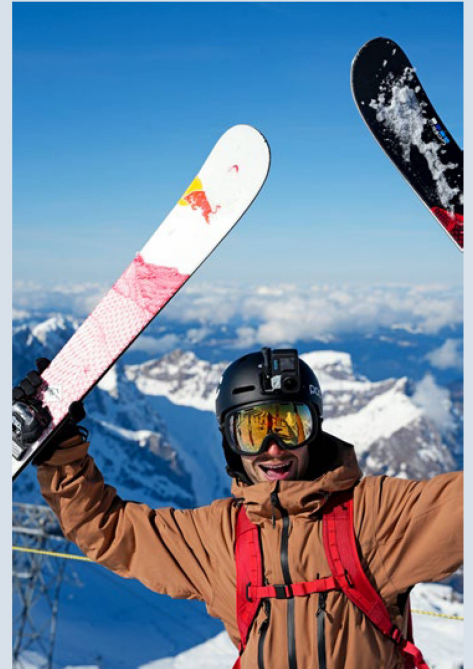
Every summer I was able to spend my holidays at my grandparents' home in Switzerland and in the tenth grade I attended the Kanti Sursee for six months as an exchange student. During this exchange semester, I had the opportunity to do a 'try-out' week in a specialist bike and bicycle shop. So later, when I applied by phone from Canada for an apprenticeship as a bicycle mechanic, the company took me on as an apprentice with

open arms. A month later, I packed my bags and moved to Meggen, Lucerne. It's the perfect location. I can cycle to the shop in ten minutes or to school in 20 minutes. That would be unimaginable in Canada!

It wasn't that difficult to get used to vocational school here in Switzerland. Life in Switzerland is certainly different from Canada, but I find it interesting to get to know the Swiss culture better. Everything is very close in Switzerland.

The hardest thing for me was not being able to see my friends from high school so often. But we managed to keep in touch and some of them even came to Switzerland to visit me on holiday. What I like most is how independent I have become. After I finish my apprenticeship, I will continue to work here because I appreciate the discipline and the joy of good work.

As the high cost of living in Switzerland is not a myth, I would never have been able to start an apprenticeship in Switzerland without the financial support of my home



Cyril Dittli loves winter and summer sports. Photo provided



Cyril Dittli: "It's so brilliant that you can go skiing here in the morning and in the afternoon, you can blast down the trails on your bike in a T-shirt, almost like in summer." Photo provided

canton of Uri. I would also like to thank *educationsuisse* and its staff, who supported me with my scholarship application and helped me with any questions I had. I was able to have lunch with my grandparents every day and my parents helped me with administrative tasks and often gave me emotional support over the phone. It wasn't always easy living alone and so far away from home for the first time. A big thank you also goes to my training company, which gave me the opportunity to do an apprenticeship in Switzerland."



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Democracy in action: improving the CSA election process

The 2025 elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad will see fundamental changes to the way votes are cast around the world. Two delegates currently serving on the Council talked about these developments.

INTERVIEW: ANDREAS FELLER

In 2025, the Swiss Abroad will elect the people to represent them on the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the de facto “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, for another four-year mandate. Once they are elected, CSA delegates will represent the interests of the Swiss expatriate community vis-à-vis the Swiss authorities. As we explained in the last edition of “Swiss Review”, a working group has been entrusted with the job of making the CSA elections more transparent and democratic. It believes that the introduction of direct elections, focusing particularly on a reliable e-voting system, is the way forward. Provided they are registered with their local embassy or consulate, any Swiss citizen aged 18 or over will be entitled to

vote in the direct elections due to take place next year in 13 electoral constituencies (countries or groups of countries). In addition to voting, people can stand for election to the CSA within these 13 electoral constituencies.

Modernising the election system to boost voter participation is nothing less than democracy in action. What has the reaction been in the electoral constituencies participating in this process? We asked Stephan Frei, CSA delegate from Germany, and Rolf Blaser, the Sri Lanka-based CSA delegate for the Central, West and South Asia electoral constituency, for some feedback.

How were elections to the CSA conducted in your constituency before the introduction of direct voting?

Stephan Frei: Previously, delegates were elected by the presidents of the 40 or so Swiss associations that make up the German section of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

Rolf Blaser: At the last election, the Swiss Circle Sri Lanka was the only recognised Swiss association in our constituency consisting of 24 countries. The Swiss Circle Sri Lanka asked its members to submit their candidacies ahead of the general assembly – the meeting at which the election of CSA delegates for the 2021–25 legislative period subsequently took place.

What efforts are you making to engage with Swiss in your region ahead of the 2025 elections?

Stephan Frei: We have a website, an increasingly popular Instagram channel, a newsletter, and a new [swisscommunity.org](https://www.swisscommunity.org) group dedicated to Swiss living in Germany. We also rely on the regional editions of “Swiss



“This is democracy in its purest form and a true testament to Swiss culture and equality.”

Rolf Blaser, Sri Lanka. Photo provided

Review”, because these are circulated to most Swiss living in Germany.

Rolf Blaser: In Sri Lanka, we meet regularly in person ten to 12 times a year. These gatherings are a chance to interact as well as celebrate Swiss culture in different ways. We continually update our Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts in addition to our website. We also have an email newsletter containing details of future events. Furthermore, a regional newsletter with relevant information for the entire constituency is sent to all embassies and consulates for forwarding.

What do you hope the switch to direct elections will achieve?

Stephan Frei: We want the CSA to have greater legitimacy and to better reflect the



“We want the CSA to have greater legitimacy and to better reflect the diversity of the Swiss expatriate community.”

Stephan Frei, Germany. Photo provided

Are Swiss Abroad affected by ETIAS?

Question: I have heard that the new ETIAS rules will come into force in spring 2025, and I am now wondering what impact this will have on Swiss Abroad. Do the rules apply to us?

diversity of the Swiss expatriate community. This is possible if the majority of Swiss Abroad can elect their local delegates.

Rolf Blaser: Thanks to this change, all registered Swiss nationals can now stand for election as well as vote, regardless of whether or not they belong to a recognised Swiss association. This is democracy in its purest form and a true testament to Swiss culture and equality.

What you need to know

To cast your vote in the CSA elections, you will need to be registered under a valid email address at your local consulate or embassy by 31 January 2025 at the latest. This is because voters will receive voting instructions directly by email from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

Voting will be possible from Friday, 11 April 2025.

Anyone who not only wishes to vote but also wants to stand for election to the CSA should contact their local election coordinator without delay.

Application forms must be submitted by 15 February 2025.

The list of participating countries and the contact details of local election coordinators are available on the official election website:
www.swisscommunity.org/de/elections

Answer: In future, travellers will need to have an ETIAS travel authorisation to enter most European countries, including Switzerland (ETIAS stands for European Travel Information and Authorisation System). But in practice, this will only apply to nationals from visa-exempt countries who wish to travel to Europe for a short-term stay of up to 90 days. Travellers will be able to apply online for an ETIAS travel authorisation. ETIAS is linked to a traveller's passport and is valid for up to three years or until the passport expires, whichever comes first. According to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), ETIAS is expected to go live in May 2025 at the earliest.

No need to worry: if you are a Swiss Abroad with a Swiss passport, you will still be able to enter Switzerland – and most European countries for that matter – unconditionally. Article 24 of the Swiss Federal Constitution guarantees freedom of domicile to all Swiss in Switzerland.

ETIAS travel authorisation could, however, be of relevance to members of your

family. If they do not hold Swiss citizenship and are nationals of one of the visa-exempt countries, they will need an ETIAS travel authorisation to enter Switzerland in future.

It will be possible to fill out the ETIAS application form using either the official ETIAS website or the ETIAS mobile application. Applying for an ETIAS travel authorisation will cost 7 euros. Applications will normally be processed within minutes. However, it may take longer if you are requested to provide additional information or documentation to support your application. This is why you should apply for an ETIAS travel authorisation well in advance of your planned journey.

Please note that a valid ETIAS travel authorisation does not guarantee automatic right of entry. When you arrive at the border, a border guard will ask to see your passport and other documents and verify whether you meet all entry conditions.

STEPHANIE LEBER, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT



Travellers holding Swiss passports will be able to enter Switzerland without an ETIAS travel authorisation. Passport holders of other countries who do not require a visa to enter Switzerland will have to apply for ETIAS travel authorisation. Photo: Keystone

A summer full of great surprises

The 2025 FYSA summer camp schedule for children aged eight to 14

Winter is barely upon us, and we are already thinking of next summer. After all, we want to hit the ground running when our holiday camp summer season begins, ensuring that our young camp participants have the time of their lives. And we have a few choice surprises in store next year:

1. Children can now go on a "Swiss trip" even if they have been on one before.
2. All children from Swiss schools abroad can take part in our holiday camps.
3. The holiday camp starting in mid-July has been extended by one day, so that as many children as possible can celebrate Swiss National Day together.

There are of course other new things that you can read about in our 2024 annual report, which is available on our website. We are already looking forward to next year, when we hope to see many new and familiar faces. Here is our summer schedule (please visit our website for further details):

Offer	Date	Age group
Adelboden (canton of Berne)	21 June – 4 July 2025	10–14
Swiss trip 1	25 June – 4 July 2025	12–14
Sedrun (canton of Grisons)	4–18 July 2025	12–14
Bellevue (canton of Vaud)	9–18 July 2025	8–11
Swiss trip 2	9–18 July 2025	12–14
Uster (canton of Zurich)	19 July – 2 August 2025	12–14
Bellevue (canton of Vaud)	19 July – 2 August 2025	8–11
Swiss trip 3	23 July – 2 August 2025	12–14
Fieschertal (canton of Valais)	2–15 August 2025	10–14
Swiss trip 4	6–15 August 2025	12–14

You can sign up for the camps from 00:00 (CET) on Tuesday, 14 January 2025. To get you in the mood, the online version of this article includes three short videos with footage from our holiday camps in 2024: www.revuelink/clip

DAVID REICHMUTH / ISABELLE STEBLER, FYSA

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Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)
Alpenstrasse 24, 3006 Berne, Switzerland
Email: info@sjas.ch
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The OSA Youth Service summer camp schedule for young people aged 15 to 18

Attending a holiday camp in Switzerland means experiencing the majestic Alps, making friends with fellow young Swiss Abroad from around the world, and discovering Swiss culture. From hiking, to swimming in crystal-clear lakes, to spending evenings around the campfire – every day is a unique adventure.

Conceived and organised by the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), our camps offer young people the opportunity to connect with their Swiss roots and enjoy a formative, unforgettable time. A summer in Switzerland is the perfect opportunity to have fun and make memories for life. Here is an overview of our holiday camps in 2025, which are geared to young people aged 15 and older:

Offer	Date
Swiss Challenge, throughout Switzerland	5–18 July 2025
Sport and leisure camp, including Swiss National Day celebrations, in Sainte-Croix (canton of Vaud)	19 July–2 August 2025
Sport and leisure camp in Sainte-Croix (canton of Vaud)	2–15 August 2025

In addition to our holiday camps in 2025, webinars addressing the issues at stake in upcoming federal popular votes will also be available throughout the year. These webinars are aimed specifically, but not exclusively, at young Swiss Abroad.

Further information on all Youth Service offers is available on the www.swisscommunity.org website. Direct link to youth offers: www.revuelink/youthoffers

You can sign up online for the holiday camps, from 14 January 2025, 14:00 (Swiss time) to 15 March 2025. For additional details, please do not hesitate to contact the Youth Service.

MARIE BLOCH, OSA YOUTH SERVICE

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Discussion

Our intrepid reporter cycled through Jura in the last edition of “Swiss Review”, inspiring many readers in the process. Some of them now intend to explore Switzerland’s youngest canton by bike themselves. Just one note of caution: the Jura region is anything but flat; you cycle either uphill or downhill. And some of the gradients are stiff, to put it mildly. So, enjoy the ride but take your time.



The freedom to be different – Jura, Switzerland’s youngest canton

PERNETTE ZUMTHOR, ARLES, FRANCE

Thank you for this detailed and very well-researched article. I also enjoyed reading it because it has given me a few great ideas for cycling around Jura myself.

MARKUS LÜTTIN, SPAIN

I used to live in Jura during those pre-referendum years covered in your article. Aged 12, I remember helping out at a family farm near Delémont. The adults at the dinner table would often talk about the pros and cons of establishing the canton of Jura. The grievances were certainly real, because Berne’s cantonal government made life more difficult for many people in Jura. This sowed the seed of political self-determination – a goal that became more and more imperative. And in hindsight we can say that establishing the new canton was evidently the right

decision. Otherwise, Moutier would not have voted to join Jura too. Things have indeed calmed down since then, so the solution to the Jura puzzle could not have been more Swiss.

BARBARA SURBER, LIMA, PERU

Many thanks for keeping people like me up to speed with events in Switzerland – and for covering themes like the one dealt with in this article.

CORRECTION

We like to be accurate, which is why we need to correct the date of the all-important 1974 popular vote that we gave in our article about the canton of Jura in “Swiss Review” 5/2024. The plebiscite in Berne-administered Jura, which led to the eventual creation of the new canton, did in fact take place on 23 June 1974, and not on 23 March 1974.

THE “SWISS REVIEW” EDITORIAL TEAM

Switzerland’s contentious motorway expansion plan

WILL MOWAT, UK

I invite everyone to look up the terms “induced demand” and “generated demand” in connection with transport planning. One soon sees that providing ever more traffic capacity is completely unsustainable. Act in haste, repent at leisure.

Thank you! Your donations helped us to keep going

Donations, big and small, from our readers were of huge support to our magazine in 2024. Despite growing cost pressures, they helped us to continue producing the quality journalism that our editorial team strives for. They also reinforced the sense that readers in the “Fifth Switzerland” regard “Swiss Review” as **their** magazine. We very much hope to count on your support again in 2025 and are grateful for your contribution, because every little helps.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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