

ONE WAY AMERICA

Your Guide to Switzerland

TELEPHONE: Country code (+41). Switzerland does not use separate area codes in the same way as the United States; Swiss landline numbers generally have a two-digit regional code following the initial 0.

STANDARD TIME: Central European Time (CET), GMT +1 hour. During daylight saving time, Switzerland observes Central European Summer Time (CEST), GMT +2 hours.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES: Metric.

ELECTRICITY: 230v AC, 50Hz. Switzerland generally uses Type J electrical sockets. U.S. appliances designed only for 110–120v will require a suitable voltage converter or transformer as well as a plug adapter. Many modern electronic devices are dual voltage and should be checked before use.

INOCULATIONS/VACCINATIONS: No special vaccinations are generally required for travellers arriving from the United States. Travellers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date and check current health advice before departure. The U.S. Department of State currently states that no vaccinations are required for entry to Switzerland. U.S. Travel Information

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS: Switzerland has one nationwide statutory public holiday, Swiss National Day on 1 August. Other public holidays are determined largely at cantonal level and therefore vary considerably throughout the country. Common holidays include New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day, although their status and observance vary between cantons. Swiss National Day is celebrated on 1 August. About Switzerland

OFFICE HOURS: Traditionally Monday to Friday, approximately 8.00am to 5.00pm or 8.30am to 5.30pm, although working hours vary between employers and industries. Flexible and hybrid working arrangements are increasingly common.

BANK HOURS: Generally Monday to Friday, approximately 8.30am to 4.30pm or 5.00pm. Opening hours vary by bank and branch, and some branches in major cities may have extended opening hours.

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS: 112 – General emergency number. 117 – Police. 118 – Fire. 144 – Ambulance. 145 – Poison Control. U.S. Travel Information

U.S. EMBASSY IN SWITZERLAND

U.S. Embassy Bern
Sulgeneckstrasse 19

3007 Bern
Switzerland

Telephone: +41 31 357 70 11
Emergency after-hours: +41 31 357 70 11

The U.S. Embassy in Bern provides consular services and assistance to U.S. citizens living or travelling in Switzerland, including passports, emergencies and other citizen services.

The United States also maintains part-time Consular Agencies in Geneva and Zurich. U.S. Travel Information+1

For current U.S. government information and consular services, visit the [U.S. Embassy in Switzerland](#).

EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND IN THE UNITED STATES

Embassy of Switzerland
2900 Cathedral Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20008-3499
USA

Telephone: +1 202 745 7900

The Embassy of Switzerland in Washington, D.C. provides diplomatic and consular services and assistance to Swiss citizens in the United States.

Switzerland also maintains Consulates General in several major U.S. cities. FDFA

For current information, visit the [Embassy of Switzerland in the United States](#).

Part 1 – Background

Information on Switzerland

Background

Switzerland, officially the Swiss Confederation, is a landlocked country situated in the heart of Europe.

The country is well known for its political stability, neutrality, high standard of living, strong economy, efficient infrastructure and multilingual culture.

Switzerland consists of 26 cantons, each with considerable responsibility for areas such as education, taxation, healthcare administration and other local matters.

The Swiss Confederation developed from a collection of cantons and communities that gradually formed a closer political union. The modern federal state was established in 1848.

Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, although it maintains extensive economic and political relationships with the EU and is part of the Schengen Area.

Today, Switzerland is an important international centre for finance, pharmaceuticals, technology, manufacturing, research, tourism and international organisations.

Geography

Switzerland is located in central Europe and shares borders with France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy.

The country covers approximately 41,000 square kilometres.

The Alps occupy a large part of the country and contain some of Europe's most famous mountain landscapes.

The Swiss Plateau contains many of the country's largest towns and cities and is an important centre for population, agriculture and industry.

The Jura Mountains extend along the country's northwestern border with France.

Switzerland has numerous lakes, including Lake Geneva, Lake Zurich, Lake Lucerne and Lake Constance.

Major cities include Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Bern, Lausanne and Lucerne.

Bern is the federal city and seat of the Swiss government.

Population

Switzerland has a population of approximately 9 million people.

A significant proportion of the population consists of foreign nationals, contributing to Switzerland's highly international character.

The largest urban and employment centres include Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Lausanne, Bern and the surrounding metropolitan areas.

Living conditions and costs can vary considerably between cantons and cities.

Climate

Switzerland has four distinct seasons, although climate varies significantly according to altitude and location.

The Alps create substantial regional differences, with some valleys experiencing relatively mild conditions while higher mountain regions experience much colder temperatures.

Winters can be cold with snowfall, particularly in alpine areas.

Summers are generally mild to warm, although temperatures can become high during periods of hot weather.

Rainfall occurs throughout the year, with considerable regional variation.

The Swiss climate is influenced by its position between several European climatic zones, and the Alps act as an important climatic barrier. About Switzerland

Economy

Switzerland has a highly developed and diversified economy.

Major sectors include:

- Banking and financial services.
- Pharmaceuticals and biotechnology.
- Chemicals.
- Insurance.
- Precision engineering.
- Machinery and manufacturing.
- Watchmaking.
- Information technology.
- Research and innovation.
- Tourism.
- International trade and services.

Switzerland is home to many multinational companies and international organisations.

The country has a highly skilled workforce, strong infrastructure and a significant emphasis on research, development and innovation.

Switzerland's economy is closely integrated with European and global markets despite the country not being a member of the European Union. About Switzerland

Language

Switzerland has four national languages:

- German.
- French.

- Italian.
- Romansh.

German is the most widely spoken language, with Swiss German dialects commonly used in everyday conversation in German-speaking areas.

French is primarily spoken in western Switzerland, including Geneva and Lausanne.

Italian is concentrated mainly in Ticino and parts of Graubünden.

Romansh is spoken by a smaller population, principally in parts of Graubünden.

English is also widely used in international business and professional environments. About Switzerland

Religion

Switzerland is religiously diverse.

Christianity has historically been the predominant religious tradition, particularly Roman Catholicism and various Protestant denominations.

There are also Muslim, Jewish, Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other religious communities.

A growing proportion of the population identifies as having no religious affiliation.

Education

Education in Switzerland is primarily organised at cantonal level, so the structure and requirements can vary between cantons.

Compulsory schooling is generally provided free of charge by the public education system.

Public schools normally teach in the principal language of the canton or local region.

Switzerland also has numerous private and international schools.

International schools are particularly common around Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Lausanne and other areas with substantial expatriate communities.

Families relocating from the United States should investigate school availability, admissions, language requirements and catchment arrangements before choosing accommodation.

Healthcare

Switzerland has a high-quality healthcare system combining compulsory health insurance with private insurance providers and extensive public and private medical facilities.

Health insurance is compulsory for residents.

New residents generally have a limited period after arrival to obtain compulsory health insurance, and the insurance obligation applies to each member of the family. [ch.ch+1](#)

Unlike the U.S. system, Swiss compulsory health insurance is based on regulated private insurers rather than a government-run national health insurance service.

Healthcare costs can be significant, and residents are responsible for premiums, deductibles and other contributions depending on their insurance arrangements. [ch.ch](#)

U.S. citizens relocating to Switzerland should arrange appropriate international health coverage during the transition and establish Swiss health insurance within the applicable deadline.

Currency

The official currency is the Swiss franc (CHF).

The Swiss franc is divided into 100 centimes/rappen.

Banknotes are issued in denominations including CHF 10, CHF 20, CHF 50, CHF 100, CHF 200 and CHF 1,000.

Coins include 5, 10 and 20 centimes, ½ franc, 1 franc, 2 francs and 5 francs.

Credit and debit cards are widely accepted, although cash remains useful in smaller establishments.

Utilities

Switzerland uses a 230v, 50Hz electrical supply.

This differs from the 120v supply normally used in the United States.

U.S. appliances designed solely for 110–120v should not be plugged directly into a Swiss electrical outlet.

Dual-voltage equipment marked 100–240v, 50/60Hz can generally be used with an appropriate plug adapter.

Large U.S. appliances such as refrigerators, washing machines, dryers and kitchen equipment should be checked carefully before being included in a shipment.

Television and Electronics

U.S. television equipment may not work correctly with European broadcasting standards.

Modern computers, mobile phones, tablets, cameras and chargers are frequently dual voltage, but the manufacturer's specifications should always be checked.

Some older U.S. electrical equipment may require both a voltage converter and plug adapter.

Driving

Switzerland drives on the right-hand side of the road, as in the United States.

Distances and speed limits are measured in kilometres.

Road conditions are generally excellent, although alpine roads can be challenging during winter.

Winter tyres are strongly recommended in appropriate conditions, and certain mountain roads may require snow chains.

U.S. citizens intending to drive in Switzerland should check the current requirements concerning recognition of their U.S. driver's licence and whether an International Driving Permit is advisable or required.

Part 2 – Switzerland Import Customs Regulations

To the best of our knowledge, the following information applies to the importation of household goods and personal effects from the United States into Switzerland.

Switzerland has specific customs procedures for people transferring their residence to the country.

The Swiss Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS/BAZG) confirms that household effects can generally be imported duty-free when the conditions for a transfer of domicile are met. Bazg+1

Regulations may change and individual goods may be subject to additional restrictions, permits, taxes or inspections.

Household Goods

Household effects imported in connection with a transfer of residence can generally enter Switzerland free of customs duty and taxes if the applicable conditions are met.

The principal requirements include:

- The importer must be transferring their domicile to Switzerland.
- The goods must generally have been personally owned and used by the importer for at least six months before the move.
- The goods must continue to be used personally in Switzerland.
- The goods should be imported in connection with the transfer of domicile.

These conditions apply to household furniture and personal possessions and can also cover certain vehicles, collections and other property. Bazg

Customs Documentation

The Swiss customs authorities require an import declaration for household effects.

Form 18.44, "Customs clearance of household effects", is used for the declaration of removal goods.

The importer should be prepared to provide:

- Completed Form 18.44.
- Passport or identification.
- Evidence of the transfer of domicile where required.
- Detailed inventory.
- Bill of Lading or Air Waybill.
- Residence documentation where applicable.
- Purchase receipts for newer goods where relevant.
- Vehicle documentation if a vehicle is included.

Swiss Customs states that the inventory can be prepared on a normal sheet of paper, but larger items, valuable goods and restricted items should be individually and clearly described. Bazg

Inventory

The inventory should be detailed and accurate.

Examples of suitable descriptions include:

- 2 x sofas.
- 1 x dining table.
- 6 x dining chairs.
- 3 x cartons books.
- 5 x cartons clothing.
- 1 x television – make/model.
- 1 x refrigerator – make/model/serial number.

Valuable items and goods that may be subject to restrictions should be described individually.

Goods that do not meet the six-month ownership/use requirement should be clearly identified because they may be subject to taxation. Bazg

New and Recently Purchased Goods

Goods purchased or acquired less than six months before the transfer of residence may not qualify for the household-effects exemption.

Such goods should be separately identified on the inventory.

Swiss Customs recommends providing purchase receipts where available to facilitate the assessment of goods that may be subject to taxation. Bazg

Subsequent Shipments

Household effects do not necessarily have to arrive in one shipment.

However, subsequent consignments should be declared when the initial household shipment is imported.

Swiss Customs states that subsequent consignments can generally be imported within a period of up to two years, provided the applicable conditions are met and the goods were personally used for at least six months before the transfer of domicile. Bazg

Students

Special rules apply to students.

Swiss Customs states that household goods, personal effects and educational materials belonging to students can be imported duty-free even where the student does not transfer their domicile to Switzerland. Bazg

Students should confirm the applicable documentation and conditions before shipping.

Holiday and Second Homes

Separate rules apply where a person purchases or rents a second home in Switzerland without transferring their legal domicile.

In principle, used household goods can qualify for duty-free importation where they have been personally used for at least six months and will continue to be used by the owner.

The importation should take place close to the purchase or rental of the property and Form 18.44 must be submitted. Bazg

Personal Effects

Personal effects such as clothing, toiletries, sports equipment, cameras, mobile phones, laptops and musical instruments can generally qualify for duty-free treatment under the applicable personal-effects rules.

Swiss Customs confirms that personal effects can be imported tax and duty-free in qualifying circumstances. Bazg

Food

Switzerland permits the importation of certain foodstuffs for private use, but specific limits and rules apply to sensitive agricultural products.

For example, duty-free allowances can apply to certain quantities of meat and meat products, while quantities above the allowance may attract customs duties. Bazg

Food should therefore not be packed in large quantities with household goods without checking the applicable requirements.

Commercial quantities are subject to different regulations.

Alcohol

Alcohol can be imported into Switzerland for private use, but duty-free allowances and customs duties apply.

Household removal shipments are subject to specific rules.

Swiss Customs' household-effects provisions specify that household provisions and alcohol can be included within the applicable removal-goods framework, subject to stated quantity limits and conditions. The official customs form and current regulations should be consulted before shipment. Bazg

Large quantities should not be included without prior confirmation.

Tobacco

Tobacco products are subject to specific Swiss customs allowances and regulations.

Large quantities should not be included in a household shipment without confirming the current requirements.

Plants and Seeds

Plants, seeds, soil and other agricultural materials may be subject to phytosanitary and plant-health requirements.

Certain plants and plant products may require certificates or may be prohibited.

Do not include plants, seeds or soil in a household shipment without first confirming that they are permitted.

Motor Vehicles

Vehicles can potentially be imported as part of a transfer of residence.

Swiss Customs states that the general household-effects provisions apply to road vehicles, watercraft and aircraft in the context of relocation. Bazz

However, vehicle importation involves additional requirements concerning:

- Customs declaration.
- Vehicle registration.
- Technical standards.
- Roadworthiness.
- Insurance.
- Swiss vehicle taxes and fees.
- Emissions requirements.
- Possible modifications to meet Swiss standards.

A U.S.-specification vehicle should be assessed before shipping because U.S. compliance does not automatically mean that the vehicle satisfies Swiss technical and registration requirements.

Firearms and Weapons

Firearms, ammunition and weapons are subject to strict Swiss regulations.

They should not be included in household goods unless the importer has confirmed eligibility and obtained any required licences or permits before shipment.

Certain knives, weapons and other articles may also be restricted.

Swiss Customs specifically identifies weapons among goods that can be subject to restrictions or bans. Bazg

Prescription Medicines

Medicines may be subject to Swiss import regulations.

Particular care should be taken with controlled drugs, narcotics, psychotropic medicines and large quantities of prescription medication.

Medicines should remain in their original packaging and travellers should carry appropriate prescriptions or medical documentation.

Anyone dependent on specialist or controlled medication should check the Swiss requirements before travelling or shipping medicines.

Pets

Dogs, cats and other animals can be imported into Switzerland subject to animal-health, identification and veterinary requirements.

Requirements vary according to the animal, country of origin and circumstances of importation.

Pet owners should check the current Swiss requirements well before moving and should ensure that microchip, vaccination, veterinary certification and other applicable requirements are completed before travel.

Professional pet relocation assistance is recommended for international moves where several veterinary and transport requirements apply.

Endangered Species and CITES

Switzerland regulates the importation of protected animals, plants and products made from endangered species under CITES and Swiss legislation.

Potentially restricted goods include:

- Ivory.
- Certain animal skins.
- Coral.
- Tortoiseshell.
- Protected woods.
- Animal trophies.
- Certain feathers.
- Other products derived from protected species.

Old pianos and antiques should be checked carefully because some older items may contain ivory.

Cultural Property and Antiques

Switzerland has specific rules concerning cultural property.

Antiques, archaeological objects and culturally significant items may require documentation concerning ownership, origin and export from the country of origin.

Valuable antiques and works of art should therefore be documented carefully before shipment.

Currency

There is generally no maximum amount of currency that can be carried into or out of Switzerland.

However, Swiss authorities can require information concerning cash or equivalent financial instruments when significant amounts are involved.

The U.S. Department of State notes that authorities may question travellers carrying more than CHF 10,000. [U.S. Travel Information](#)

U.S. citizens should also consider U.S. reporting requirements when carrying substantial amounts of cash or monetary instruments internationally.

Electronics and Communications Equipment

Ordinary personal electronics such as laptops, mobile phones, tablets and cameras can generally be included in household goods.

Specialist radio transmitters, communications equipment and other regulated devices may require approval.

Check the requirements before shipping specialist telecommunications or radio equipment.

Prohibited and Restricted Items

Items that may be prohibited, restricted or require additional documentation include:

- Firearms and ammunition.
- Certain weapons.
- Narcotic and controlled drugs.
- Certain medicines.

- Protected wildlife.
- CITES products.
- Certain plants and seeds.
- Agricultural products.
- Cultural property.
- Counterfeit goods.
- Hazardous materials.
- Certain vehicles and machinery.
- Commercial quantities of goods.

Swiss Customs specifically advises that weapons, drugs, narcotics, cultural goods, counterfeit goods, medicines, animals and plants can be subject to restrictions or bans. Bazg

Customs Inspection and Clearance

Household shipments must be declared to Swiss Customs at an appropriate customs office.

Unlike ordinary passenger baggage, household removals are handled through customs offices responsible for commercial goods.

Swiss Customs states that household-effect clearance generally takes place Monday to Friday during the relevant customs-office opening hours, with some larger offices also open on Saturday mornings. Bazg

The customs office may request additional documentation or inspect the shipment.

A clear and accurate inventory can help minimise delays.

Disclaimer

Although every care is taken to ensure that all information in this Relocation Guide is accurate and up to date, One Way America cannot accept liability for any inaccuracies, omissions or changes in Swiss, U.S. or international regulations.

Customs, immigration, taxation, health, vehicle, pet and import requirements can change without notice.

The information contained in this guide is intended as general relocation information only and should not be treated as legal, immigration, tax or customs advice.

Anyone relocating from the United States to Switzerland should confirm the current requirements with the Swiss Federal Office for Customs and Border Security, the relevant cantonal authorities, the Swiss Embassy or Consulate and the U.S. Embassy in Switzerland before shipping household goods.

For current Swiss Customs information, consult the [Swiss Federal Office for Customs and Border Security](#).

For current U.S. citizen information and consular assistance, consult the [U.S. Embassy in Switzerland](#).

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More info on our website: <https://onewayamerica.com>.