

pre-arrival checklist: everything to sort out before joining aelo swiss academy

There's a particular kind of joy in reading an acceptance email, and there's a particular kind of quiet panic that sets in about three days later, when you realize the email is just the beginning. Between the moment you're admitted and the moment you drag your suitcase into a Swiss train station, there's a stretch of weeks that decides whether your first month feels like a glide or a scramble.

I've been on both sides of this. I moved to Switzerland myself, and I've since watched a steady stream of students arrive, some serene and some visibly regretting their improvisation. The difference between the two groups was almost never intelligence or effort. It was sequencing. Switzerland is a country that runs on rules, deadlines, and paperwork, and the system is slow but wonderfully predictable. If you feed it what it wants, in the right order, it works. If you guess, you pay fees and fill in the same form twice.

So here's the checklist I wish someone had handed me, roughly in the order things need to happen. Some of it applies to anyone moving to Switzerland, and some of it is specific to the rhythm of joining AELO Swiss Academy. Take what fits your situation, and where details vary by canton or program, treat my numbers as ballparks to verify rather than gospel.

Start with the paperwork that unlocks everything else

Your offer letter from AELO Swiss Academy is the keystone. Almost every other document you assemble, the visa application, the proof of funds, the housing applications, will reference it. So before anything else, read the welcome pack the admissions team sends you from top to bottom, including the parts that look like boilerplate. Note every deadline, and if something is unclear, ask early. Admissions staff are used to answering the same nervous questions every intake, and they'd rather explain a detail in July than untangle a problem in September.



Then comes the visa question, and the answer depends entirely on your nationality.

If you're a non-EU or non-EFTA national, you need a student visa before you travel, applied for at the Swiss embassy or consulate in your home country. Processing commonly takes anywhere from four to twelve weeks depending on the consulate and the season, which is why the single best piece of advice in this entire article is this: book your visa appointment the same week you're accepted, not the week before classes start. Bring your

offer letter, your passport, proof of financial means, and often proof of accommodation or at least an address. Some consulates want documents translated or certified, so check your country's specific requirements rather than assuming.



If you're an EU or EFTA national, you can skip the visa entirely and enter with a valid passport or ID card. Your obligation instead is to register with your local commune within fourteen days of arrival, which we'll come back to.

Either way, check your passport's expiry date now. A safe rule is at least six months of validity beyond your planned stay. Renewing a passport is dull, slow work, and doing it while juggling a relocation is worse.

One habit that saves enormous pain later: build a document folder, both physical and digital. Mine lives in a plastic sleeve that goes in my hand luggage, with scanned copies backed up in the cloud. Yours should include:

- your passport, plus visa if you need one
- the original offer letter from AELO Swiss Academy
- proof of financial means and your insurance confirmation
- your housing details and first address in Switzerland
- passport photos and photocopies of everything above

It sounds like overkill until the first time a clerk asks for a photocopy you don't have and a photo booth is closed.

Sorting out money before you fly

Cantons want to see that you can support yourself, and the figures vary, but a reasonable planning range is somewhere around CHF 1,800 to 2,200 per month. Bank statements from the last few months usually do the job, or a signed letter from a sponsor if a parent is supporting you. Ask the admissions team what their canton typically expects, because a statement they find sufficient in one canton might draw questions in another.

Here's the part that trips people up: you do not need a full Swiss bank account before you land. Traditional Swiss banks generally want to see a residence permit before they'll open an account, which creates a chicken-and-egg problem for newcomers. The practical solution is an app-based Swiss bank such as Neon, Yuh, or Zak, which can usually be opened quickly after arrival with just a passport. That handles your day-to-day spending while you wait for the permit card that unlocks the traditional banks, if you even end up wanting one.

For the first few weeks, carry money in a card that doesn't gouge you on foreign transaction fees, and withdraw Swiss francs from bank-affiliated ATMs rather than airport exchange counters. Keep a couple of hundred francs in cash. Switzerland is heavily card-based, but small shops, village bakeries, and the occasional vending machine still reward people holding notes.

As for budgeting, sketch it honestly before you arrive. A room in a shared flat runs roughly CHF 600 to 1,100 a month depending on the city and how lucky you get. Basic health insurance adds CHF 250 to 450 a month. Groceries for one person typically land around CHF 70 to 100 a week if you cook, and eating out is a treat, not a default, when a simple lunch costs CHF 15 to 25. Add transport, a phone plan, and the inevitable setup costs, and a buffer of CHF 500 to 1,000 in easily accessible money removes most arrival-month stress.

Health insurance, the Swiss way

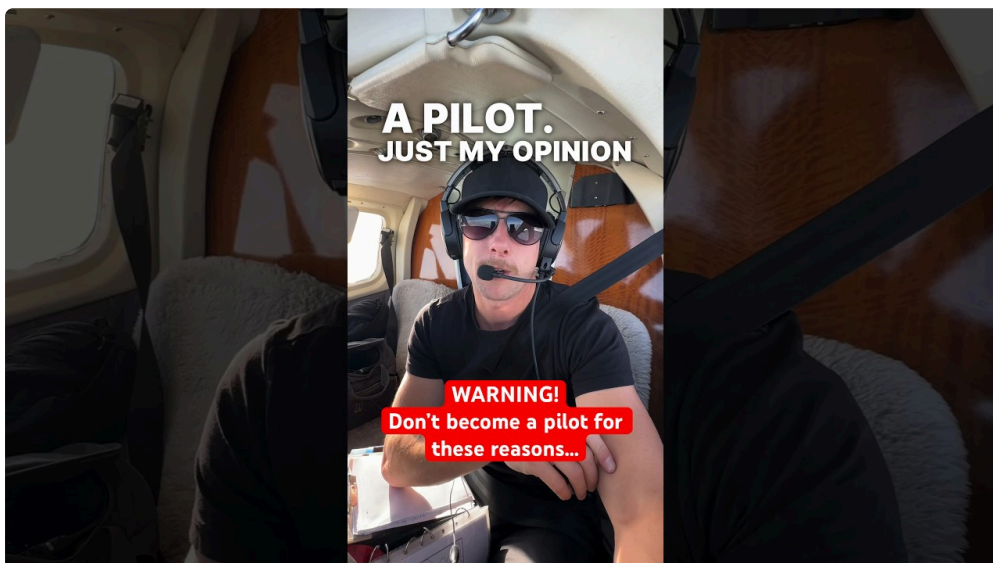
Switzerland makes basic health insurance compulsory for anyone living there, and this is the one deadline people most often underestimate. You must have coverage in place within three months of registering your residence, and the coverage applies retroactively to your arrival date. People who delay get hit with a stack of premiums for months they thought they'd skipped. The system is patient but not forgiving.

Don't wait the three months. Arrange a policy before you leave, or in your first days after landing. Premiums differ noticeably between cantons and between insurance models, so use the federal premium comparison tool or a comparison site to see real numbers. Choosing a managed model, where you see a family doctor or call a telemedicine line first, is noticeably cheaper than an open-choice model, and for a healthy student it's usually a sensible trade. Your deductible, called the franchise, starts at CHF 300 for adults; raising it lowers your monthly premium, which only makes sense if you genuinely rarely see a doctor.

One nuance worth knowing: EU students with equivalent home-country coverage can sometimes apply for an exemption from Swiss insurance through their canton, but the decision sits with the authorities and approval is never guaranteed. If you're considering that route, look into it before arrival, not after a medical bill appears. It's also simply worth asking AELO Swiss Academy whether they offer guidance or group arrangements on insurance, because schools that host many international students usually have a shortcut for exactly this problem.

Finding a roof before you find your feet

If there's a single hardest item on this list for most people, it's housing. Rooms in shared flats, known as WGs, move fast in Swiss cities, and landlords can afford to be choosy. Start looking early, even if it feels premature.



The usual hunting grounds are WGZimmer for flatshare rooms, Homegate and Flatfox for broader listings, and Ronorp for a mix that skews local. Book temporary lodging for your first two to four weeks anyway, a hostel, a sublet, a serviced room, because viewing a flat in person dramatically improves your odds, and remote applications without a viewing rarely win.

A warning that deserves its own sentence: never, under any circumstances, wire a deposit for a flat you haven't seen or verified, especially if the "landlord" pressures you to decide within hours. The classic scam involves an attractive room, an excuse for why viewing is impossible, and a Western Union request. Real Swiss landlords expect viewings and paperwork. If a listing feels off, walk away without regret.

Once you do sign, expect a deposit of up to three months' rent, paid into a special blocked bank account or covered by a deposit insurance scheme. Read the contract before signing, particularly the notice period, which is commonly three months, and what the rent includes. And it's genuinely worth asking AELO Swiss Academy whether they maintain a housing list or partner with student residences, because an institution's own network often surfaces rooms that never reach the public platforms.

The first 72 hours after you land

Swiss law gives you fourteen days to register at your commune after moving in. My advice is to ignore the outer limit and do it in your first days, while motivation is high and jet lag hasn't fully metabolized into procrastination. You'll visit the communal resident registration office with your passport, your visa or entry documentation if applicable, confirmation of your housing, and a passport photo or two. You'll pay a permit fee, usually somewhere between CHF 80 and 150 depending on the canton, have your biometrics taken, and then wait for the residence permit card, which arrives by post a few weeks later. The wait is normal. Nobody is ignoring you.

While you're in your first days, knock out the small infrastructure. A prepaid SIM from https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ any telecom shop gets your phone working immediately, with your passport as identification. Download the SBB app for trains and MeteoSwiss for weather, the two apps you'll genuinely open daily. Find your nearest Migros or Coop for basics, Denner or Aldi or Lidl when you want the cheaper version of the same groceries, and get your CHF from an ATM rather than an exchange desk.

Packing for a country that runs on precision

Swiss wall sockets are Type J, the three-pin round variety. Here's the practical detail: most of your two-pin Europlug chargers will fit fine, but anything with a grounded Schuko-style plug won't. Rather than buying a pile of adapters at the airport at tourist prices, buy one or two at a normal Swiss shop for a few francs, then slowly replace what you need. The voltage is 230V, so laptop and phone chargers from almost anywhere in the world handle it without trouble.

On clothing, think layers rather than one heroic winter coat. Swiss winters are properly cold, but buildings are heated like furnaces, so you spend your life peeling and re-adding layers. Bring a waterproof jacket, an umbrella, and shoes you can walk in for an hour, because this is a walking country whether or not it advertises itself as one. Resist shipping bulky things like duvets and kitchen gear. Second-hand platforms like Tutti and Ronorp, plus the inevitable IKEA trip, will outfit you for less than the cost of excess baggage.

Getting around without draining your wallet

Swiss trains are punctual to a degree that feels almost theatrical, and the network reaches nearly everywhere. The Half-Fare card, the Halbtax, costs roughly CHF 185 a year, with a discounted rate if you're under 26, and it halves most rail and bus fares. If you travel