

safety in switzerland: reassurance for parents sending students to aelo swiss academy

Every September I watch the same small drama unfold outside the arrivals hall in Zurich. A parent hugs a teenager, straightens the teenager's backpack straps for the fourth time, then leans in close and asks the question they have been rehearsing for weeks. "Is it really safe over there?"

I have worked in Swiss boarding schools for a long time now, the past several years with AELO Swiss Academy, and I still have never found a short answer that satisfies a worried parent at an airport. So this is the long answer. It comes with statistics, a few confessions, one table, and at least one joke about cows.

Here is the short version anyway, free of charge: yes. It is safe over there. Your child is about to live in one of the most stable, well-organised, quietly boring countries on the planet, and I mean "boring" as the highest possible compliment. The most dangerous thing likely to happen in their first term is that they develop strong opinions about fondue.



The numbers, for the spreadsheet-minded

Some parents want feelings, some want facts, and most want both. So let us do facts first.

Switzerland has spent years sitting in the top ten of the Global Peace Index, which measures things like levels of violent crime, political instability, and the likelihood of your street becoming a news item for the wrong reasons. The homicide rate hovers well under one per 100,000 people, a figure that makes most large countries look nervously over their shoulders. Violent street crime is rare enough that when it happens, it genuinely makes the news, and the national debate that follows has the tone of a village scandal rather than a statistic.

Political stability is its own kind of safety. No protests shutting down cities, no currency drama, no elections that require emotional support groups. The Swiss political system changes at the speed of a glacier, which residents grumble about and parents of teenagers should find deeply soothing.

None of this means the country is a plastic bubble. Pickpockets exist, mostly around the biggest train stations and crowded festivals. Bicycles get stolen. A laptop left on a café table in Zurich is a gamble, just a much better

gamble than almost anywhere else. I will be honest about the edges later, because a reassurance without honesty is just marketing.

What safety feels like at street level

Statistics tell you nothing about texture, and texture is what parents actually want to know. So here is daily life.

Unaccompanied twelve-year-olds take the train to school. Not because their parents are careless, but because the trains run on time, the stations are lit, the staff are helpful, and everyone on board will happily tell a lost child which stop comes next, whether or not they were asked. Lost property is practically a national service. One of our students left a jacket on an intercity train in October and had it posted back to campus within the week, cleaned of all dignity and holding a small SBB form apologising for the delay.

Wallets get returned. Phones get handed in. Village fountains spray water clean enough to drink, and people do drink from them, casually, mid-hike, without a second thought. At night, teenagers walk home through town without their parents forming a search party. The first time an AELO Swiss Academy student tells their mother this on a video call, the mother usually asks to speak to a staff member to confirm the child has not been swapped.

| Parent worry | Alpine reality |

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| Pickpockets | Occasionally, near major stations and festivals. A zipped pocket beats a café table. |

| Stranger danger | The stranger is more likely to return your child's dropped glove than take anything. |

| Getting lost | Difficult. Trail signage in Switzerland is so thorough it borders on showing off. |

| Something in the water | The water is alpine, tested, and better than what most of us drink at home. |

Where AELO Swiss Academy takes over

A safe country is the foundation. A well-run https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ school is the house built on it, and this is where I shift from defending Switzerland to explaining our own choreography.

Supervision at AELO Swiss Academy follows a simple principle: scaffold the independence instead of replacing it. Younger students have closer supervision and earlier curfews; older students earn wider sign-out privileges, with named check-ins and staff who know where the good Wi-Fi cafés are because they have quietly tested them all. Nobody signs out on a whim. Somebody always knows where a student is supposed to be, and somebody notices when they are not.

The staff side matters just as much. House parents live in the residences, which means the person enforcing lights-out also knows which student went quiet at dinner and why. Staff go through background checks and safeguarding training as a matter of course, not as a box-ticking exercise, and first aid certification is standard for anyone who might end up holding a rucksack on a mountain. Fire drills happen with the cheerful regularity the Swiss reserve for referendums and cheese deliveries.

There is a duty phone that never sleeps. I have answered it at 2 a.m. for a homesick fourteen-year-old and at 7 a.m. for a parent who saw one news headline about a train delay and panicked. Both calls ended with tea. This is the job.

Mountains: respect them, don't fear them

Parents hear "boarding school in the Alps" and briefly picture their child wrestling a mountain. Let me restore proportion.

The real alpine risks for teenagers are sunburn at altitude, twisted ankles on descents, and forgetting to drink water because the air is crisp and nobody feels thirsty. Altitude sickness is essentially a non-issue at the elevations where schools and villages sit. Avalanches make dramatic footage, but Swiss villages below ski areas are managed with obsessive thoroughness: slopes are monitored, controlled, and closed long before anyone is allowed near them. The local avalanche commission has more meetings than most companies.

School hikes run with trained guides, route plans left at base, headcounts that would satisfy a Swiss railway conductor, and weather forecasts checked with the seriousness the forecasts deserve. Winter sports days happen with instructors, not vibes. Rega, the Swiss air rescue service, is famous for a reason, and while nobody plans to need a helicopter, it is oddly comforting to know the country's most beloved institution is a flying ambulance crewed by people who consider your child's sprained ankle a personal invitation.

The mountain does not need to be feared. It needs to be taken seriously, which is a lesson with a shelf life well beyond boarding school.

The ailments we actually treat

Here is a confession from the health office: the most common conditions we handle are not medical at all. Homesickness tops the list by a comfortable margin, followed by exhaustion in the first fortnight, followed by a mysterious epidemic of growth spurts that requires the school shop to restock trousers mid-term.

The medical infrastructure, meanwhile, is excellent. Swiss healthcare ranks among the best in Europe, hospitals are clean and efficient, and appointment systems run with the punctuality you would expect. Swiss law requires health coverage for residents, and schools like ours typically arrange student policies as part of the enrolment package. Read the details, ask what is covered, and ask who handles the paperwork when a knee meets a hiking trail. The answer should be "we do," and at AELO Swiss Academy, it is.

Medication is logged, dispensed, and documented. Students with allergies get kitchen briefings and staff briefings and, after one memorable incident involving a hazelnut and an overconfident sixteen-year-old, a laminated card. The tap water is genuinely lovely. The biggest dietary hazard is emotional: cheese is served more often than any one nation should be allowed.

Honest trade-offs, because you deserve them

No honest reassurance skips the edges. So here they are.

Swiss culture expects young people to manage themselves. Trains run in the evening, villages are walkable, and afternoons can be unstructured. Some parents read that as freedom; a few read it as insufficient surveillance. Our answer is the supervision model described above, but if you want a boarding school where a staff member shadows every step, Switzerland's whole approach will feel loose to you. We would rather teach judgement than confiscate it.

Petty theft exists in the big cities. Winter goes dark early, and by January the sun sets before dinner, which surprises students from sunnier latitudes more than any statistic ever could. The cost of living can make a soft drink at a mountain hut feel like a car payment. And the fondue coma is real. It is a chemical fact of cheese and bread that has claimed many an unfinished homework assignment.

None of these are safety problems. All of them are things a good school prepares students for, which is arguably the point of the whole exercise.

If something goes wrong

The protocol is boring, and boring is what you want. Anything urgent goes to the emergency services first and the duty phone second, in that order, and staff drill it. The school's doctor network is on call. Rega exists, as discussed. Parents are contacted quickly and honestly, with a firm internal rule I will summarise as "no surprises, no spin." A twisted ankle reported within the hour with a photo of an impressive bruise builds far more trust than a polished silence.

What we ask of parents in return is modest. Send documents in duplicate, keep the emergency contact list current, and resist the urge to phone the duty line because your child did not reply for ninety minutes. Ninety minutes of teenage silence is not a missing persons case. It is a Tuesday.

Five questions worth asking on your visit

Every school should welcome scrutiny, and the good ones answer these without flinching. Bring them on your visit day.

1. How are staff vetted, and what safeguarding training do they receive?
2. What does supervision look like after class, at weekends, and on sign-outs?
3. Who handles medical appointments, medication, and insurance paperwork?
4. How quickly and how honestly will I hear from you if something happens?
5. Who exactly is allowed to sign my child out, and how is that verified?

If a school hesitates on any of these, hesitate back.

Numbers worth saving before the flight

Give your child five numbers and a laminated sense of calm. Switzerland's emergency system is straightforward, and 112 works across the country even though it sounds European, because it is.

1. **112** for any emergency, the general European number that connects you to whoever you need
2. **117** for the police
3. **118** for the fire service
4. **144** for the ambulance
5. **1414** for Rega, the air rescue service, in case a mountain gets ambitious

Students at AELO Swiss Academy get these drilled early, along with the campus code and the duty number, which tends to live in their phone under something like "school (actual answer)."

The last thing I tell parents

After the bags are tagged and the goodbyes are done, I usually walk parents back toward the car park and offer one final observation. The risk here was never danger. The risk is that their child, in a country this safe and a school this attentive, will grow up faster than expected. They will navigate trains, plan hikes, argue with the

weather forecast and win, and one Sunday they will call and spend eleven minutes describing a fondue and not one second asking for rescue.

That is the trade. You send them somewhere safe, and they stop needing you quite so loudly. It is the best worst deal in parenting, and Switzerland, with its punctual trains and drinkable fountains and helicopter crews on permanent standby, is about as good a place as anywhere on earth to make it.