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## A break in Switzerland for expatriate children

Every year, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) offers over 300 young Swiss expatriates the chance to visit Switzerland in the summertime and make friends with children of the same age from around the world. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, we will continue to try our best to offer you a varied selection of holiday camps this year. We have had to downsize our range of camps a little, but we remain as motivated as ever to showcase Switzerland to as many Swiss expatriate children as possible. Organising the camps poses particular challenges to the FYSA this year, while parents are naturally also asking questions. For that reason we have produced a document called "Holiday Camp Covid Information 2021", available on our website, which contains useful information that will help parents to plan ahead. We have already received many bookings for this year's summer season. Late bookers who would like to know which camps still have free spots should visit our website: <https://sjas.ch/en/>. This year, the FYSA is again offering discounts on travel and/or camp costs to families who would otherwise find it hard to



afford sending their children to our camps. We urge such families to apply for these discounts when making bookings. Our donors will be pleased to know that the discounts they help fund have given children the gift of a carefree couple of weeks in Switzerland, even in difficult times. If you wish to make a donation yourself, visit <https://sjas.ch/en/about-us/donations/>.

LOIC ROTH



## What challenges does our democracy face?

This year, the Annual Congress of the Swiss Abroad will focus on key questions for the future. It will be held in the Mediterranean atmosphere of the southern town of Lugano.

Pandemics like the one that we have been experiencing for over a year – or immigration, data protection, digital challenges, and exercising our political rights: how is the Swiss democratic system meeting today's challenges? Where does it need to change? How can we guarantee respect for the basic democratic rights in Switzerland, unique in the world, in a time of increasing autocracy? Should Swiss political rights be granted to second generation immigrants or to young people from the age of 16?

These are just some of the questions that speakers at the 2021 Congress will be asked to answer or debate. If you are interested in these topical issues and keen to discover (or rediscover) the incredibly varied Ticino landscapes and architectural heritage that is unique in Switzerland, reserve the weekend of 20–22 August 2021 and join us in Lugano, an Italian Swiss town with a Mediterranean atmosphere. (JF)

## New offers 2021: online language courses

Alongside other young Swiss Abroad, participants will have the chance to study one of the Swiss national languages from their own home, thereby maintaining a connection with their country of origin, even from the other side of the world.

This new offer from SwissCommunity enables young people aged 15 to 25 to follow two weeks of intensive lessons in French or German. The online lessons will give participants the chance to learn or improve their linguistic knowledge along with other young Swiss people from around the world. While learning you will also have fun and share some unforgettable experiences. The language lessons will be based around the central theme of

"Switzerland" and will be delivered by qualified and enthusiastic teachers.

For further information and the registration form, go to our website: [www.SwissCommunity.org](http://www.SwissCommunity.org) > Youth offers.

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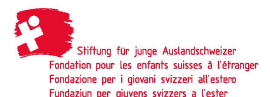
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## Voluntary OASI made easier

If you live abroad and make voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) payments, you now have more time to submit documents.

Good news for all Swiss Abroad who make voluntary OASI payments. An updated version of the Federal Ordinance on Voluntary Old-Age, Survivors and Invalidity Insurance (VOASIO) came into force on 1 January 2021. Its new terms include an extension to the deadline for submitting documents. The documents required for determining contributions can now be submitted until 31 March. Previously, the deadline was 31 January.

This deadline extension takes account of specific circumstances abroad. Considerable distances, difficulties in procuring documents, and limited, slow postal deliveries – these are some of the factors that caused the deadline to be changed. The deadline for submitting tax statements has also been extended as a consequence – to 31 August.

### Voluntary OASI now also possible in the UK

Brexit – the United Kingdom leaving the European Union – also has implications regarding pension provision for Swiss Abroad. Anyone who emigrates from Switzerland to the UK can now join the voluntary OASI scheme as well. The conditions for joining are the same as those that apply to other non-EU countries. There are no changes for people who were already living in the UK before 1 January 2021.

STEFANIE MATHIS-ZERFASS

## “Be open to new experiences and ideas”

Swiss Abroad Angela Meraviglia on the opportunities and challenges of studying in Switzerland.

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

### Angela Meraviglia you are Swiss and grew up in Australia. Why did you decide to study in Switzerland?

In Australia, I completed my training as a florist but I always knew I wanted to study. I just never found the right subject. During a holiday stay in Switzerland, I discovered the study programme in Design Management at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Initially, it was just an exciting idea that I had and not a firm plan. However, I applied. Thanks to my application dossier including my work, my high school diploma and my professional experience, I was accepted. Only when I received the official confirmation did I realise that my life would change completely within a few months.

### Tell us more specifically about your Design Management degree programme at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

The degree programme is entirely in English. I am now in my third and final Bachelor's year. I particularly love the breadth of the field of study. It is not just about creating physical things or designing them, but it is always about the whole mind-set. That helps to understand complex problems, to communicate with people and to create solutions that are better for people and our environment.

### What language do you speak when you are not in class? And how have you settled in in Switzerland?

I speak a mixture of English and Swiss German with my university friends and Swiss German, which I learned at home, with my relatives. Now I also want to attend a German course at university. Building up a good group of friends in Switzerland was



Angela Meraviglia grew up in Australia, but is now studying in Switzerland.  
Photo donated

more difficult than I thought. However, a small job in the hospitality industry helped me to get to know the local way of life and to make new friends.

### Was the “small job” alongside your studies enough to cover the high Swiss cost of living?

I have always worked alongside my studies, in hospitality and now at a design agency in Zurich. However, the intensive studies do not allow me to work enough to be financially independent. I have been fortunate to receive a scholarship from my home canton of Zurich, which makes my life a lot easier. I also benefit from a reduced health insurance premium. Switzerland is expensive, but it also has quite a fair social support system.

### How is the Corona pandemic affecting your studies?

I studied online for most of last year and it will probably stay that way for my last semester. Studying online works relatively well, but it has significantly changed my university experience. There are both ad-

vantages and disadvantages. For example, I can follow lectures from up in the mountains and save travel time. However, a lot of social interaction gets lost. Furthermore, a full day of lectures in front of a laptop feels twice as long as one in a classroom. Physical teaching and learning cannot be translated one-to-one into online learning. I believe it is even more important to actively engage students in the online format so that concentration remains constant.

#### What are your plans for the future?

At this stage I am not planning too far into the future, because the world is so uncertain at the moment. In the next few months I will focus on my Bachelor thesis and afterwards look for a job in the design field here in Switzerland.

#### What tips would you give to young Swiss people abroad who want to study in Switzerland?

I encourage them all to inform themselves about financial support. And to live in a shared apartment, as this is not only a more

affordable way of living but also a great way to get more in touch with Swiss culture. If your studies allow it, you should also look for a part-time job. I also advise spending as much free time as possible exploring this incredibly diverse country. Stay curious, be humble, be open to new experiences and ideas, actively pursue your goal and give yourself time to integrate and ask for support when you need it.

Educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad specific counselling around the theme of "education in Switzerland".

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## Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at [www.admin.ch/votes](http://www.admin.ch/votes) or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

## Popular initiatives

The following federal popular initiative had already been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- Federal Popular Initiative "For freedom and physical integrity" (01.06.2022)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at

[www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch)

- > Politische Rechte
- > Volksinitiativen
- > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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