

From Visa to Enrollment: Post-Admission Steps for International Students at AELO Swiss Academy

The admission email arrives at 3:40 in the morning, because of course it does. Time zones have a sense of humor. You read it twice, screenshot it, send it to the family group chat, and lie awake composing a celebratory post you will regret by breakfast. Then a quieter thought creeps in: what exactly am I supposed to do now?

Plenty, as it turns out. The gap between "Congratulations on your admission" and "Welcome to your first class" is a corridor of forms, stamps, translations, deadlines, and one appointment where a stranger photographs you looking like you have not slept in a decade. Having watched a lot of students walk this corridor over the years, some gliding and some tripping over their own bank statements, I can tell you the tripping is optional. Here is the walk, with the potholes marked.

Read the Letter Like It Owes You Money

Your admission letter from AELO Swiss Academy is not a greeting card. It is a legal document that the Swiss visa authorities will want to see, in original or certified form, and it usually carries more fine print than students expect. Somewhere in that letter or in the attachments around it you will find the real payload: the deadline to confirm your enrollment, the amount of any deposit or first tuition installment, the payment reference you must use, and the exact name of the program you were admitted to.

Read it slowly. Print it. The Swiss appreciate paper more than most nations appreciate anything, and the visa office will share that affection.

The confirmation step matters more than it looks. A signed acceptance form plus the deposit is what turns an admitted student into an enrolled one, and until that happens, your seat is a suggestion rather than a fact. Pay attention to the payment reference. I have seen transfers arrive clean and I have seen them arrive as mystery money, floating in the academy's bank account with no name attached, which triggers a small detective operation on the finance side and a delay on yours. When you transfer, choose the option where the sender covers the fees, so the full amount actually lands. And save the receipt. You will need proof of payment at least twice more before this journey ends.

Start the Visa Before You Feel Ready

Here is the single most common mistake I see: students wait until they feel "prepared" to begin the visa process. Preparedness is a mood, not a strategy. Swiss student visa files commonly take around eight to twelve weeks to process, and I have seen some clear in six while others crawl well past sixteen, depending on nationality, season, and how many other files are stacked on the same desk in the cantonal migration office. If your program starts in September, June is already late. May is better. April is not paranoid.

The mechanics work like this. You apply for a national visa, the type D, at the Swiss embassy or consulate covering your place of residence. The embassy checks the file, forwards it to the migration authority of the canton where the school is located, and the canton decides. This means a person you will never meet, sitting in an office you will never visit, holds your plans in their hands. Treat them kindly through the quality of your paperwork.

Before anything else, call or email the embassy and ask for the current document list for your nationality. Requirements vary, websites lag, and the officer at the counter has no obligation to accept a file assembled from an outdated PDF. That said, a few items show up in nearly every Swiss student visa file:

- A passport valid well beyond your planned stay, with blank pages to spare
- The original admission letter plus your enrollment confirmation and proof of any deposit paid
- Evidence of sufficient financial means, in the format the canton prefers
- A CV and a motivation letter, coherent and honest
- Diplomas, transcripts, and language certificates, with certified translations where originals are not in a language the office accepts

Notice what is missing: excuses. The cantonal office does not care that your bank prefers PDFs or that your uncle "can send the money later." They want documents that stand on their own.

On the money question, most cantons work from a figure in the region of CHF 1,700 to 2,000 per month of planned stay, which lands somewhere near 21,000 francs for a year, though the exact number is set by the cantonal authority and can shift. Bank statements should be recent, official, and ideally stamped by the bank. Screenshots of a banking app are the fastest way to make a visa officer sigh audibly. Some students use scholarship letters, some use a formal declaration of support from a sponsor, sometimes with notarization. Ask the embassy which flavor your canton prefers rather than guessing.

If there is an interview, keep your answers short and true. When they ask why you chose AELO Swiss Academy, have an answer that sounds like a person wrote it rather than a thesaurus. "The program fits my goals and the international environment suits me" beats a recited paragraph about excellence and innovation. Visa officers read several of these a day. They can smell filler.

One more thing: do not book non-refundable flights before the visa is approved. Every year, someone does. Every year, that someone learns about airline fine print at the worst possible moment.

Translations, Apostilles, and Other Slow Magic

While the visa clock ticks, chase the slow documents in parallel. Birth certificates, police clearance certificates where required, and prior diplomas often need certified translations and, depending on your country, an apostille, which sounds like a spell from a fantasy novel but is actually a certificate confirming that a stamp is a legitimate stamp. The apostille comes from a designated authority in your home country. The translation must usually be done by a sworn or certified translator, and the whole chain, apostille plus translation, can take two to four weeks if everything goes well and considerably longer if it does not. This is the part of the process where students from countries with efficient document offices quietly celebrate, and everyone else develops patience.

Do these early. This is the paperwork equivalent of packing the night before a flight rather than the morning of.

Health Insurance: Not a Suggestion

Switzerland runs on mandatory basic health insurance, and it does not check whether you feel young and immortal. After arrival, you generally have three months to arrange coverage, and insurers can backdate the policy to your arrival date, which is a detail worth knowing so you do not spend those months feeling clever and uninsured. Premiums for a student land at a few hundred francs a month, varying by canton, insurer, and the deductible, which the Swiss call the franchise, a friendlier word for the amount you pay out of pocket before

insurance kicks in. It ranges from roughly CHF 300 to 2,500 per year, and choosing the maximum lowers your monthly premium while raising your gamble.

There is an escape hatch for some students. If you come from a country whose coverage is recognized as equivalent, or you hold certain European health insurance cards, you can apply for an exemption at your local commune. Apply. Do not simply ignore the letters, because Switzerland does not forget, it just waits. The bill arrives eventually, with an expression that says "we discussed this."

Housing, or the Reason People Start Early

The Swiss rental market is polite, functional, and brutally tight in the bigger cities. Flat shares, known locally as WGs, are the student standard, and listings move fast, meaning an inquiry sent on Tuesday is ancient history by Friday. If the academy points you toward housing resources or partner residences, use them; if you hunt alone, expect to write many messages and receive several polite rejections before something clicks.

Two rules will protect you. The security deposit, capped by law at three months' rent, goes into a special blocked account or equivalent arrangement, never handed to the landlord in cash. And never wire money for an apartment you have not seen, at least through a video call with the person actually inside it. Rental scams target international students precisely because they are far away, in a hurry, and trusting. Do not be all three at once.

Landing: The First Fortnight

You land, jetlagged, clutching a folder of documents you were wise enough to keep in your hand luggage rather than the checked bag, because luggage gets lost and folders of apostilled paperwork do not grow on trees. The first legal obligation comes fast: within fourteen days of arrival, you must register your address at the commune office, the Einwohnerkontrolle in German-speaking cantons, the contrôle des habitants in French ones. Bring your passport, your visa, proof of address, and your enrollment confirmation. The clerk will process you with the neutral efficiency the Swiss have refined into an art form, and from there you apply for your residence permit, the student B permit, renewable each year with proof that you are still enrolled and, in many cases, making satisfactory progress.

Keep two things in mind. First, the letter that accompanies your visa usually tells you whether you must also announce your arrival to the cantonal migration office separately, sometimes within days. Read it. Second, your school confirms enrollment to the authorities, which means quietly dropping out or disappearing from classes is not a Swiss move. Attendance and progress can matter for your permit renewal, so treat your first semester like the paperwork that preceded it: show up.

Enrollment Day at AELO Swiss Academy

Enrollment day is the moment the corridor ends and the campus begins. There will be forms to sign, a student card to receive, an IT account to activate, and a schedule that suddenly makes everything real. If your program involves language components, expect a placement assessment rather than a formality. Bring the following and you will glide through while others sprint back to their rooms:

- Passport and visa, the originals, not photos of them
- Your residence permit, or the receipt showing you have applied
- Original diplomas and transcripts, with certified translations
- Proof of tuition or deposit payment

- A few passport photos, because someone always asks

The student card photo will be taken on a day when you look exactly like someone who has spent a week fighting bureaucracy in a foreign country. Everyone's does. It becomes a fond memory by winter.

Ask the staff two questions while you are there. Ask what the attendance expectations are, because they can affect your standing and your permit. And ask who your point of contact is for immigration questions, because at some point you will have one, and knowing the right inbox saves you a week of anxious Googling at 2 a.m.

Money, Phones, and Small Victories

A Swiss bank account usually wants your permit or the attestation from the commune, plus your passport and proof of address, and student accounts are often free of fees, which is a small mercy. Once the account exists, you can join [REDDIT](#) the local payment apps, and you will discover that quite a lot of Swiss life runs through them, including splitting a restaurant bill with classmates in a way that involves zero awkward math.

For transport, look at the Half Fare Card, which costs roughly 190 francs a year at the time of writing and pays for itself quickly if you travel on weekends, and check current prices before buying. The trains run on time with an almost theatrical commitment, so being late is a choice, and the Swiss will assume you made it deliberately.

Budget honestly. A casual lunch out runs 15 to 25 francs, groceries from the big chains or the discounters are far kinder, and the difference over a semester is a plane ticket home. Students who cook eat better and fly more.



Pack for Four Seasons in One Day

The weather in Switzerland can perform spring, summer, autumn, and a light rehearsal of winter within a single afternoon. Bring layers, one genuinely serious coat for November through March, comfortable waterproof shoes, and a plug adapter for the Swiss Type J sockets. If you take medication, bring the prescription and a doctor's letter, because customs officers have opinions about unlabeled pills, and those opinions are not favorable.

One Last Thing Before You Fly

The corridor of paperwork feels endless from the inside and, in retrospect, takes about one season of your life. Start the visa early, chase the slow documents in parallel, register within the fortnight, insure yourself properly, and show up on enrollment day with originals and a sense of humor. Do that, and one gray morning you will step

off a train on time, student card in your pocket, and realize the forms were never the point. The lake was the point. The mountains were the point. The classmates from eleven countries arguing about coffee in the break room were the point. The paperwork was just the toll booth, and now you have paid it.