



Living together in Switzerland

Every country has its own customs. In Switzerland there are several unwritten rules which should be observed. These can vary depending on the situation.

Different Cultures

Switzerland is a culturally diverse country due in particular to the four language regions. It is not surprising that regional mentalities vary. The customs of German-speaking Switzerland need not apply to French-speaking Switzerland. Differences between urban and rural regions may also be vast. And yet, some commonalities do apply.

Greetings

A Swiss greeting involves shaking hands and eye-contact. This also applies to greetings between men and women. The common greeting in Canton Bern is "Grüessech" in Bernese German and "Bonjour" in French (friends use different greetings, such as "hallo" or "Tschou" in German or "Salut" in French). In some regions there are also other forms of greeting. If you are not sure, it is best to say "Grüessech" or "Bonjour". In rural regions it is common to greet passersby even when one doesn't know them. Saying "thank-you" and "please" is very important: For example, saying "thank-you" and "please" multiple times in shops or restaurants is almost a ritual.

Punctuality

The famous Swiss punctuality is not just a cliché. If one is more than 5 minutes late one should telephone. In the professional world punctuality is particularly important. Even 5 minutes is considered a delay. If you are late, you must inform your superiors or co-workers in advance. Private meetings are generally planned ahead of time. Unannounced social visits are not common either.



Communication

Understanding each other correctly is not always easy, especially if you do not (yet) have a common language. Communication habits also vary from person to person in Switzerland. However, one can generally say that a lot of value is placed on politeness. There are people who express themselves very directly and explicitly, but there are also others who tend to avoid direct conversation. They often express criticism in a hidden way.

Nonetheless they will sometimes expect the criticism to be taken seriously. This is not easy and cause misunderstandings. Listening well to the other person, repeating what you have heard and asking if you do not understand something can help. This also applies to written communication. Direct confrontation is sometimes avoided when conflicts do arise. For example, an irritated neighbor, might write a letter rather than seek a direct conversation. If a situation is unclear it is better to ask again, even in this situation, than not to be sure.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/good-to-know/living-together-in-switzerland