

Prime Relocation

Getting Along with the Swiss



Expats new to Switzerland pose a multitude of questions, but one of the most frequently asked questions is how to best approach the neighbours and what is the correct etiquette on introducing yourself and getting to know the locals? We have put together some settling-in tips.

Being Punctual

The Swiss are incredibly punctual and dislike coming late to anything, so it is advisable to try to reciprocate this punctuality and always arrive on time for meetings or parties. If you are going to be late, ring to let the hosts know that you have been held up, but are on your way.

Clinking Glasses

The etiquette surrounding drinking in company is fairly simple, but the rules must be adhered to: when served a glass of alcohol, you may not just start drinking, you should wait until everyone has been served and someone has raised their glass as a toast. You then clink with everyone in succession, saying their names and remember if you are on “du” or “sie” terms when doing so. The rule is to hold the glass by the stem, look into the person’s eyes and address the person you are clinking with by the appropriate name. Remembering everyone’s names can be difficult, but it makes the toasting a little more fun. The last person you should clink with is your partner, wife or husband – saving the best to last of course. It is also usual to thank the person holding the party for the invitation whilst clinking with them and saying their name – it may

seem complicated but with a little practice the ritual becomes easy.

Enjoying A Family Sunday

Sundays are generally a day dedicated to the family and a chance for everyone to spend quality time together, whether it be doing a hike, swimming, a bike ride, skiing or sledging. Sundays in Switzerland are for “togetherness”. This is easier in Switzerland as no shops are open and people find they have more time on their hands for common pursuits. Certain things are not permitted on Sundays however: mowing the lawn will be frowned upon by your neighbours, as will washing your car or doing lots of loud gardening work. Sundays are a day of complete rest.

Gifts

If you are invited to someone’s house for dinner or drinks, the usual etiquette is to take the host along a small gift like a bunch of flowers, a bottle of wine, or some chocolates. Alternatively, you can take a basket and fill it with seasonal goodies for something different. Home-baked products are also always well received.

Greeting the Neighbours – Have a House Warming Party

The easiest way to get to know your neighbours is to have them over for a house-warming apéro and offer a few home-baked goodies from your own country and a glass or two of fine wine. The Swiss will appreciate your efforts of trying to get to know them. An apéro

is an easy ice-breaker and a pleasant way of finding out more about your neighbours in an informal setting. In general, the Swiss are very private so by inviting them into your home, you are breaking down barriers and offering them an insight into your family and private life.

Hallways

If you live in a block of flats, try not to block hallways and staircases with buggies, kids bikes, heaps of shoes or plants. Usually the rules for your apartment, will be set out in the amendment to the tenancy agreement and should be noted. Bikes should be put away in their designated spot and buggies parked where they are allowed. Just try to be considerate of others at all times and nothing will stand in your way of friendship. If you are unsure, ask your neighbours for advice.

Learning the Language

Learning the native language of any country you relocate to is a great way of trying to assimilate yourself with the locals. Join a language school class and go along and meet other ambitious expats who all wish to blend in. Don't leave the language learning to your wife or partner, try it yourself and you will have a much better expat assignment. The Swiss greatly appreciate any effort to learn German even if it is just a few phrases or words and the ability to order your food in the local language. Start with High German and Swiss German will develop later. If you have kids, people will speak to you all the time and it is much more rewarding if you can at least reply a few words to the friendly face and make a friendly gesture back in the local language.

In fact we can't emphasise enough the importance of learning the local language as a way of understanding the locals best and taking an interest in the culture and etiquette of the country, as all of these components are contained within the boundaries of the language.

Greeting

When meeting a new Swiss person for the first time, introduce yourself by shaking hands and looking into the person's eyes. It is common to be formal and use the person's surname i.e. "Herr Iten" rather than expect to be on first name terms from the beginning. Having said that, expats are granted a newcomers bonus and as first name terms are common in the English language, if your native tongue is English, first name terms are generally accepted from the beginning and your informality will be allowed. The hand-shaking and eye contact is deeply ingrained into Swiss social codes and so instead of fighting against it, it is easiest to shake hands at all times, even if unsure. Hand-shaking is a sign of politeness, respect and friendship.

Joining a Club

One of the best ways of getting to know the locals is to take part in local life. Joining a local club or social group is the easiest way to be assimilated – be it the local choir, athletics club or nordic walking group – ask your local council office for details of clubs and you will be surprised of the choice on offer and the endless opportunities that await you to get to know local people.

Kissing

If you meet someone you know in the street it is usual to shake their hands or kiss three times starting with the **left** cheek!

Making Friends

It is common to invite people over for brunch, lunch or dinner – a raclette, fondue or barbecue. It is all about making an effort, the more effort you make, the better the rewards.

Parties

It isn't common in Switzerland to have a party at your own home – some people have a birthday brunch or open-house day, but if you want to have a full blown party with loud music, you will be best off hiring one of the barns or party rooms available for rent.

Recycling

The recycling on offer in Switzerland is some of the best in the world – the recycling depots all over offer a variety of recycling opportunities, so if you have never really felt "green" before, now is your chance to give it a go. It is advisable to make a recycling system and then go once a week or fortnight to the recycling depot. Everything from clothes, cardboard, pet bottles to tins, bottles, oil, coffee capsules and plastic can be recycled. Every council has their own range depending on size of the depot, so it pays to go along and see what can be recycled in your local depot. It will also save you a bit of money and mean that your rubbish bags are no longer as full as before and you also feel good about contributing something to the environment. Before long, throwing bottles into the normal rubbish bags will be a thing of the past. Once you have a system in place, going to the recycling depot can be an enjoyable experience and not a chore at all.

Saying Hello

The Swiss may well continue on quite formal terms with you for a long time before they offer that you can say their Christian names to them. For the very old-fashioned the correct way to make "Dutzies" (du form or familiar form) is over a glass of wine. The rule is that the older person has the right to offer the younger person the first name and not the other way round. It is disrespectful to just say "du" or "Peter" to an older Swiss person, who hasn't offered you their

first name informal terms. You just have to wait. Foreigners are allowed to make mistakes, but it is good to know the social rules!

social etiquette a little better now after reading this article.

Snow Clearing

It is considerate to buy a snow shovel and get stuck in. Snow clearing is great fitness and kids generally love to help. Show willing, offer to clear paths, driveways, and common parking areas and your neighbours will greatly appreciate your efforts. It also provides an opportunity to chat to the neighbours at the same time.

Spontaneous Visits

It is not considered polite to just drop in to see someone unannounced. Call first and let them know you're coming.

Telephone

When you answer the telephone, use your surname – for example “Piper” – as the Swiss all want to know who they are talking to – and wait for the person to say their name. Names are very important here and it is advisable to learn how to spell your name in German – ask a German speaker to help you here. It isn't common to answer the phone and just say “hello” – this is not the Swiss culture and if you want to fit in, adapting is advisable and will save any confusion.

Tipping

It is usual to round up the amount when you order a round of drinks – so say your coffee costs 4.40 – you can round up to 5.00 if you're feeling generous – generally you don't have to always tip – if the service was particularly good or friendly then let them know that you liked it with a small tip, but don't overdo it! When you go out for a meal, you can tip at your discretion – between 10 to 15% is about normal, but again if the service was bad, don't feel obliged to.

Washing

There are certain rules associated to washing and again it is advisable to keep them in mind to avoid getting into any trouble with your neighbours. Common washing rooms usually have a sign-in system and you can reserve the whole day to wash your clothes. It is important not to wash longer than your allocated time and, moreover, to leave the washing machine and tumble dryer clean after use. Wipe out the washing machine door and remove any fluff from the dryer – this is courteous and again expected by the next user. Be sure to hang your clothes in the correct drying room. If washing isn't permitted after 10pm then also try to stick to the rules and you won't have any problems.

Like any assignment abroad, the more you put into it, the more you will ultimately get out of it. We hope our tips are useful. Whether you try to get to know the locals is up to you, but we hope you understand the