

what to pack (and what to leave behind): a parent's guide to preparing your aelo swiss academy student

There's a particular scene that plays out in thousands of households every August. The bed disappears under a mountain of clothes. An empty suitcase sits on the floor like a dare. And somewhere in the middle of it all stands a parent, holding a fourth fleece and asking nobody in particular, "But what if it's cold?"

I've lived that scene. I've also stood in a school corridor nine months later watching the same suitcase come home, half of its contents still in the vacuum bags they left in, tags attached. Both moments taught me the same lesson, [redit post](#) and it's the one I now pass along to every family preparing to send a child to a Swiss boarding school: most kids arrive with twice what they need and half of what actually matters.

So before you buy another single thing, take a breath and read this through. Packing for AELO Swiss Academy, or any boarding school abroad, is less about equipment and more about restraint.

start with the school, not the suitcase

Your first resource isn't a luggage store. It's the school's own admissions team and welcome pack. Every Swiss boarding school sends incoming families a packing guide and a student handbook, and the details in those documents will save you more money and stress than any generic advice can. Read them before you shop, not after.

The handbook answers the questions that actually determine what goes in the bag. Is bedding provided, or does your child bring their own? How often does the laundry cycle run, and is it included in the fees? Is there a uniform or a dress code? What's prohibited? What does the school store for students between terms? These vary from school to school, so treat anything I say here as a general map and let the AELO Swiss Academy handbook be the territory.

Ask about the room, too. Boarding rooms in Switzerland tend toward the compact side: a wardrobe, a set of drawers, maybe a shelf. If the room can't physically hold it, no amount of clever packing changes the math.

let the swiss calendar make the decisions

Switzerland has four genuine seasons, and a full school year passes through every one of them. September can deliver t-shirt afternoons on a terrace. January can hand you minus ten on a school ski day. By May, students are back in shorts complaining about the heat in classrooms that don't have air conditioning. Packing for "Switzerland" as one climate is the first mistake. Packing for a year that swings across thirty degrees is the whole game.

There's a paradox worth knowing in advance: Swiss buildings are heated properly in winter, often to the point where students sit indoors in t-shirts while snow piles up outside. The kid who arrives with nothing but giant parkas will overheat in class. The kid who arrives with nothing but hoodies will freeze on the walk to the dining hall. Layers solve both problems, and I'll come back to how.

The other calendar that matters is the activity one. Many Swiss schools build hiking, skiing, and swimming into the regular program rather than treating them as occasional treats. Ask what the sports and outdoor program at AELO includes, because the gear requirements follow directly from it. If skiing is on the winter schedule, the

school will tell you whether equipment is rented locally or whether boots need to come from home. That single answer changes your winter packing entirely.

the clothing logic that actually works

Think in laundry cycles, not seasons. If the school laundry runs weekly, and most do, your child needs seven to ten days of the essentials: socks, underwear, t-shirts. That's it. Not fourteen sweaters, which is what my friend's daughter packed for her first year. She wore three of them. Three. The rest came home in June, folded exactly as they'd left.

A friend of mine who has sent two kids through boarding school abroad swears by the capsule approach: a small number of pieces that all work together, chosen for the Swiss year specifically. If I had to name the five pieces that consistently earn their space in the bag, they'd be these:

- A genuinely waterproof shell jacket with a hood, not "shower resistant," actually waterproof
- Two or three midlayers in fleece or merino wool that can stack under the shell
- Thermal base layers for the deep winter months, top and bottom
- Proper winter boots with real grip and waterproofing
- A pair of indoor shoes or slippers, because they'll be changing out of outdoor shoes constantly

Everything else is negotiable or buyable. Dark colors hide the wear that a weekly industrial laundry inflicts on clothes. Merino wool is worth the extra cost for socks and base layers because it resists odor in a way cotton never will, a fact your child's roommate will appreciate. Send two or three pairs of jeans, a week's worth of t-shirts and shirts, sportswear, swimwear, and one genuinely smart outfit. There will be concerts, award evenings, formal dinners, or a trip to a nice restaurant in town, and the one moment you don't want is your kid borrowing a blazer at the last minute.

The sleeper item nobody thinks about: rain trousers. Swiss rain is sideways and persistent, and a kid with waterproof trousers can walk to town in October without misery. They pack flat, they weigh almost nothing, and they will be used more than the third pair of sneakers will.

And label everything. Name tapes, a laundry marker, whatever works. Boarding school laundry systems are efficient but impersonal, and identical black socks from thirty teenagers have a way of finding each other.

the shoe situation deserves its own paragraph

The Swiss take clean indoor floors seriously, and many schools expect students to change out of outdoor shoes inside the building. That means slippers or a dedicated pair of indoor sneakers live at school and get worn more than anything else in the bag. Don't cheap out on these.



For outdoors, one pair of everyday shoes that can handle wet pavement, a pair of proper winter boots, and whatever sports shoes the program requires. One smart pair for formal occasions rounds it out. Five pairs sounds like a lot until you consider that wet shoes need a full day to dry, and your child still has to walk to breakfast tomorrow morning. The families who bring only one pair of everything learn this by November.

electronics and the plug problem

Switzerland uses Type J sockets at 230 volts. Phone and laptop chargers are almost always dual voltage these days, and you can confirm it in ten seconds by reading the fine print on the charger brick: if it says something like "100-240V," it works in Switzerland with just an adapter. Buy two or three adapters and label them, because adapters vanish in shared rooms faster than socks.



Hair tools are where families get caught out. A straightener or hair dryer built for North American voltage often isn't dual voltage, and even with a converter it's a nuisance. Swiss pharmacies and department stores sell perfectly good hair dryers, and many schools have them available anyway. Leave the hot tools at home unless the label says they'll survive 230 volts.

On the bigger question of tech: send what the school requires for academics, usually a laptop, and resist everything beyond that. A gaming setup sounds harmless in the living room in July and becomes a different thing entirely in a shared room in September, where it takes up space, generates conflict, and pulls your child's

attention away from the exact social window that matters most. The first month of boarding school is when friendships form, and those friendships form in person.

Headphones, by contrast, are essential. Not for isolation, but for privacy in a shared room. A kid who can listen to music or call home without filling the whole room will settle in faster.

the quiet essentials: medicine, documents, money

If your child takes any prescribed medication, sort this out weeks before departure, not at the airport. You'll need enough supply for a sensible period or a clear arrangement for continuing the prescription in Switzerland, plus a doctor's letter and everything in original packaging. School nurses take this seriously, and so do customs officers. For over-the-counter basics, pack small: painkillers, plasters, something for colds. Swiss pharmacies are excellent and everywhere, so you're covering the first weeks, not the year. If your child wears glasses, send a spare pair. Losing your only pair on a mountain hike is a story nobody enjoys living.

Documents go in a folder that never leaves the carry-on: passport, visa or residence permit if one's needed, health insurance card and proof of coverage, vaccination records, and the school's address and emergency contact printed on actual paper. Photograph everything and store copies in the cloud too. On money, ask the school how pocket money is typically handled, since many run student accounts or have recommended arrangements. A small amount of Swiss francs in cash for the first days, plus a card that works internationally, covers the gap until systems kick in.



what to leave behind

Now the half of the title I promised. Leaving things behind is harder than packing them, because every object in the pile carries a "what if." Here are the five categories that reliably turn out to be "what ifs" that never happen:

- Bedding and towels, unless the school explicitly says otherwise, because nearly every Swiss boarding school provides them
- A year's supply of toiletries, since Migros and Coop exist precisely for this and are a short walk from most campuses
- Irreplaceable valuables, anything sentimental or expensive that would break your child's heart to lose in a shared living space

- Meat products and fresh food from home, because Swiss customs is genuinely strict about meat imports and will confiscate without ceremony
- The duplicate of everything packed "just in case," which is the single biggest cause of overweight bags

That last one deserves a sentence more. The "just in case" instinct is how a suitcase that should weigh 18 kilograms ends up at 31 on the airport floor while a teenager repacks in front of a check-in queue. If it helps, reframe it: every duplicate is a small vote of no confidence in a country that has shops, and in a child who will figure out the Swiss version of whatever you're doubling up on.

the emotional cargo

One framed photo. One small comfort item, a particular pillow, a stuffed animal if it matters, a favorite mug. Not the whole bedroom wall. I know a boy whose single framed photo of his family became the anchor of his room: people gathered around it, asked about the dog in the corner of the picture, and he made his first close friend in that conversation. The object mattered less than what it invited.

An empty-ish wall is actually a gift. Kids who decorate gradually, with posters bought on a weekend trip and photos printed in town, build a room that tells the story of their year. A room that arrives finished tells the story of their parents' anxiety.

One addition that pays for itself socially: pack a small box of something from home to share. Chocolates or sweets from your country, sealed and customs-friendly, offered to roommates and hallmates in the first week. It's the cheapest social currency in existence and it works every single time.

the carry-on rule

Whatever happens to the checked bag, the essentials fly with your child. The carry-on holds the document folder, all medications, one full change of clothes, chargers and adapters, the comfort item, and the printed school contact details. Lost luggage is rare, but it's not mythical, and the difference between a rough first day and a smooth one is whether the passport and the medication were in the overhead locker. Add a water bottle emptied for security, some snacks, and something for the nerves. The flight itself, for many kids, is the first long stretch of doing this on their own.

the last 48 hours

Weigh the bag before you leave the house. Most airlines allow 23 kilograms in checked luggage on economy fares, and families hit that ceiling without trying. Then do the test lift, and better yet, have your child do it. At some point in the school year, that bag will be hauled across a train platform in Basel or Geneva by your child alone, possibly up a flight of stairs, possibly in the rain. A 13-year-old and a 23-kilogram hard shell plus a stuffed backpack is a comedy sketch waiting to happen. Two manageable bags beat one monster every time.

Take a photo of the packed contents before you close it. It sounds fussy until November, when you're assembling a care package and can't remember whether the rain trousers made it into the original bag.

packing light is a message

Here's the thing I wish someone had told me the first time around. Every item you cram into that suitcase carries a subtext. Pack for every contingency and the subtext reads: I don't trust this place to look after you, and I don't trust you to manage. Pack sensibly, leave the duplicates, and the subtext changes: you've got this.

Switzerland has shops. The school has systems, staff, and decades of experience with teenagers who forgot things. Your child has more resourcefulness than either of you has yet discovered. Send them with warm layers, labeled socks, a folder of documents in the carry-on, one photo for the wall, and chocolates for the hallway. The rest, they'll figure out. And in June, when the bag comes home light enough for them to lift alone, you'll know they did.