

Exchange Panama Switzerland 2025

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I remember in sixth grade, when I was around twelve years old, my brother came home and told us that the school was offering an exchange program to Panama. I was surprised when he said he didn't want to go. Why wouldn't he take this chance?

When I was fourteen, I heard the news at school. Nobody in my class seemed interested in going, but I was. Some time later, I had a meeting with others who wanted to go. We were only two, which was fewer than in previous years. We had different tasks to complete before knowing if we could go. We had to write long essays about ourselves and explain why we wanted to go. We also had meetings to take an English test, and others to get to know us better and find a good match for us.

All this writing and meeting was exhausting for me. I honestly thought about giving up. Doing schoolwork and writing applications felt like too much. But then I remembered why I was doing it and kept pushing forward. Going to Panama was a big opportunity I couldn't miss.

Soon, everything was over, and we learned who our host siblings would be. My host sister was a girl named Camila, who was a year older than me. After sending each other self-descriptions and exchanging phone numbers, we were supposed to text a few times a month. We did, but not as often as I would have liked. Sometimes, I wish I had texted her more.

Time passed, and I got more excited to go to Panama, meet Camila, her classmates, and her family. My family and classmates were also excited to meet her. We would have a new person in the house. We'd be five instead of four. In class, there would be someone from a different culture and language.

Then the day came. Our flight was early in the morning. Since André and I were both underage and couldn't travel alone, a flight attendant took us everywhere we needed to go. We were allowed to board the plane first and had to leave last. The first flight, from Switzerland to Paris, took about an hour. The second, from Paris to Panama City, was much longer—almost ten hours. We arrived tired.

When I arrived in Panama, I saw my host family for the first time. I hadn't talked much to them, and I didn't really know them, but something about them made me feel comfortable. Before we went home, we stopped and ate something. When we arrived home, they showed me to my room.

The next day, I went to school. There, I met my new classmates and teachers. For me, the school was very different from the one back home. With some teachers, students could use their phones and eat during class. With others, it was mostly quiet. They also wore uniforms, which wasn't really a problem for me. Everyone at school was nice to me, but it wasn't in an "I want to be your friend" way. Some didn't talk to me at all. I was honestly pretty quiet myself and didn't try too hard to make friends. We often went out to places like the beach, the mall, or other fun spots. I really liked it there; the places were beautiful, and it was so different from Switzerland.

One thing I didn't like was the heat. Every day it was 30 degrees Celsius or more. I had the air conditioner on day and night. At night, I was often cold because of it, but if I turned it off, I would have melted. I really prefer the cold over the heat. In class, I was often bored because I didn't have much to do.

I honestly have to say that I didn't talk to Camila as much as I had in Switzerland. We got much closer after we returned to Switzerland. The three weeks I spent in Panama passed quickly, and before I knew it, we were on the plane back to Switzerland. We arrived on a Saturday, so we had a free day. On Monday, we started school.

Since I speak fluent Spanish, it was easy to talk to people in Panama. But in Switzerland, German was a new language for Camila. My teacher prohibited me from speaking Spanish to Camila during class. She said it wouldn't teach either of us anything. During class, I only spoke English with her. I must admit that my English improved a lot during that time.

Camila got along with everyone in my class and with my close friends. I was glad that she could fit in so well. Just like the three weeks in Panama, the weeks in Switzerland flew by. As quickly as she arrived, she had to leave. It was strange to be alone after living together for so long.

I have to say that all the writing and talking was really worth it. The exchange showed me a new culture, new people, and a new country. If anyone reading this gets the chance to do an exchange like this, don't let it slip away. Opportunities like this aren't around every corner.