

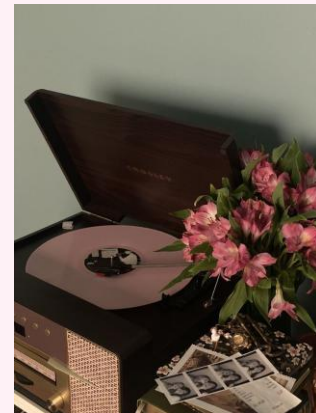
Switzerland for me 2026

The Journey That Helped Me Find Myself *

Sometimes we think that traveling is only an opportunity to discover new places, try different foods, or take beautiful pictures. However, there are journeys that change something much deeper: the way we see ourselves. My experience in Switzerland was exactly that. It was not a perfect path; it was filled with ups and downs, moments of immense happiness, and also days when I missed my home, my family, and my life in Panama. But today, with a heart full of gratitude, I can say that this exchange did not only take me to the other side of the world... it also led me to find myself.

**Click on the link
to watch the
video at the
airport**

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From fear and uncertainty to finding a second home in Switzerland

When I boarded the plane to Switzerland, I felt excitement, fear, and uncertainty all at the same time. It was the first time I had traveled so far on my own. I wondered what it would be like to live with people I did not know, whether I would be able to adapt, and whether I could face all the challenges that might appear along the way. There were days when I felt strong and brave, and others when tears came quietly because of homesickness. Yet every difficulty taught me something. I learned to be independent, to make decisions on my own, and to trust my abilities. I discovered that I am much stronger than I had ever imagined.

Little by little, Switzerland stopped feeling like a foreign place. I began to find myself in the small moments: in the walks, in the conversations, in the quiet moments, and in every new experience I lived. I learned to love myself more, to value who I am, and to feel proud of having the courage to step out of my comfort zone. Traveling alone to the other side of the world made me understand that I am capable of facing great challenges and creating my own path.

One of the most beautiful gifts this exchange gave me was the connection I created with Chiara, my host sister. Over time, we stopped being two people who barely knew each other and became true friends. We shared laughter, deep conversations, memories, and moments that I will carry in my heart forever. Because of her, the experience became warmer and more human. But I did not only find a friend; I found a family.



My favorite moment of the entire trip happened on the last day. That morning, they told me to get ready because they had a surprise for me. I had no idea what was waiting for me. We went to an Italian restaurant, and each of us ordered a personalized pizza. I ordered a Rivella, one of the most popular drinks in Switzerland. Between laughter, stories, and nostalgic conversations, we spent a beautiful afternoon together. We all knew that goodbye was getting closer, and that made every minute feel even more special.

After we finished eating, the mother took out a book called “Oh, wie schön ist Panama” (Oh, How Beautiful Panama Is). The story is about a little bear who dreams of going to Panama and, during his journey, meets many strangers and asks them for help. Over time, those strangers become friends and eventually family. While she was reading, I listened with a smile, never imagining how meaningful that story would become for me.

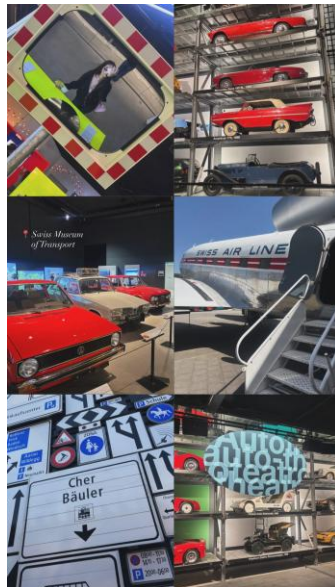
When she reached the last page, I saw that the book had been signed by the whole family. They had written a beautiful dedication, and at the end it said, "From your Swiss family." Then she began comparing each family member to one of the characters in the story: intelligent, kind, gentle, caring. Finally, she looked at me and said, "And you... you are the little bear, who came here without knowing us, and now you have a Swiss family." Then she took out a small Swarovski crystal bear.

I could not hold back my tears. Through hugs and emotions, I realized how attached I had become to them and how much I was going to miss them. It was a moment I will remember forever because I felt that this journey had become much more than a cultural exchange. I do not share blood with them, but God placed them in my path so that we could share something even greater: love.

We ended the evening eating caramel ice cream and taking one last walk together. Every step felt like an attempt to stop time. I looked around and thought about everything I had lived: the fears of the beginning, the lessons I learned, the laughter, the tears, and the love that had grown between us.

Thanks to this experience, I did not only discover a new culture; I discovered a new version of myself. I learned to be independent, to trust my own strength, and to value my own company. But above all, I found four wonderful people whom I love with all my heart and with whom I still keep in contact. They became my second family, a family that destiny placed in my life when I least expected it.

Today, when I think of Switzerland, I do not first think of the landscapes or the cities. I think of the hugs, the conversations, the little bear story, and the words "from your Swiss family." Because this journey taught me that sometimes we leave home to find ourselves, and along the way we also find people who become home. And even though distance separates us, I know that a part of my heart will always remain in Switzerland, with the family that welcomed me as a daughter and taught me that love does not need the same blood to be real.



Thank you, Muro Family, for helping me find myself and for giving me a second family. Thank you for becoming my home away from home. This was not goodbye, but see you again. ♥♥

Con mucho amor,

~Lily Heres



*The story of a girl who traveled alone
and returned with a second family*

View it online on Canva: <https://canva.link/7bo4uihzdzn18eo>