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How to Successfully Connect with Your Swiss Heritage if You Are Not Directly from Switzerland

When people think of their heritage, they normally think of their family traditions and treasures handed down through previous generations. However, what if your cultural background feels a little distant? This is how I originally felt about my connection to my Swiss heritage. My connection to Swiss culture is through my grandparents who were born and raised in Switzerland; thus, I personally never had a serious connection to the country. Staying in touch with a culture you are not born into takes more effort and time, but it is possible. In order to get more immersed in your heritage, it is necessary to weave that culture into your everyday life. Through doing this, I was able to help make what was once a distant connection become more real.

Discovering History and Traditions

One of the first things I did to feel closer to Switzerland was dive into its history. It is such a fascinating place: four national languages, a strong tradition of neutrality, and a direct democracy that encourages everyone to participate in decision-making. Understanding these details helped me see why the Swiss care so deeply about things like precision, order, and looking out for the community.

One way that I began to connect with my Swiss heritage more was through exploring my family's connection to Switzerland and the country's history. Learning more about its four national languages and strong dedication to staying neutral helped me understand more about my culture and heritage. On top of that, learning about and participating in Swiss traditions deepened my connection as well. Whether it is celebrating Swiss holidays such as National Swiss Day or keeping up with Swiss news, every bit I learn makes me feel more at home with my heritage.

Language and Food: Everyday Connections

For me, growing up around my family members speaking Swiss languages was a direct connection into my heritage. While I was unable to become fluent in any of the four Swiss national languages, every time I greet my family members I say "Guten Tag" instead of "hello." It

is a small gesture but makes a meaningful impact. These little gestures help create a sense of connection with my heritage that goes beyond just the word.

On top of language, cooking classic Swiss dishes such as fondue and raclette helps foster that sense of connection to my heritage as well. Having a family dinner consisting of raclette becomes a cozy gathering and a way of giving which feels very Swiss to me. Even a simple Swiss chocolate such as Toblerone can invoke a sense of pride and belonging within me as well.

Finding Community: My Experience with YPSA

Out of all the methods of staying connected with my heritage, joining the Youth Parliament of Swiss Abroad (YPSA) has helped me stay connected the most. YPSA has become my direct connection with my Swiss heritage as it enables me to connect with other Swiss youth while living in the United States. What makes being a member of this community special is that it enables me to connect with other Swiss youth who are trying to connect with their heritage as well.

With YPSA, I have been able to help connect other Swiss youth living abroad with their family roots as well as celebrate numerous Swiss traditions. While in this group we have been able to help shape what it means to be Swiss youth living abroad through events, workshops, and creating a global community. Being able to see my Swiss identity as something dynamic—something I can nurture and evolve—makes it feel alive in my day-to-day life, rather than just a distant memory or a story in a book.

Visiting Switzerland: Bringing Culture to Life

Overall, there is really nothing that compares with actually traveling to your home country. I feel as if actually visiting the country where you are from makes everything concrete, especially when I have already been practicing the traditions of this country. Visiting the country and seeing all the sites of Switzerland, combined with knowing that this is where your family is from, creates a special connection to have.

Reflecting on What It Means

Staying close to Swiss heritage when you have not lived there is not always simple, but it is so rewarding. It means looking past the surface and instead embracing history, language, food, community, travel, and values. For me, YPSA made all the difference, showing me that heritage is about action, not just ancestry. No matter how far away Switzerland might be on the map, it is still a huge part of who I am today.