



# The New Student's Guide to Zurich

The beginning of another academic year is closer and like every year, there will be a fresh platoon of new students starting their study at ETH. Among these, will also be loads of Indian students, freshly graduated or with some work experience already in the bag, looking to add a new dimension to their careers. If you are one of these, then you must have already started planning the next two years of your life in Zurich, the little big city of Switzerland. And plan you must. For your life is going to change a lot.

You are probably already bored of hearing that Zurich is expensive. But let me reiterate this: do not underestimate the cost of living in Zurich. As Indians, we find even the countries of Europe with a low cost of living expensive. And Switzerland is one of the most expensive countries! The expense estimated by ETH (CHF 2250 per month!) is scary for most. But most students are smart when it comes to saving money, and as Indians, *jugaad* is in our blood. If you find decently priced accommodation, you can also end up spending just CHF 1000 per month in most months.

## Accommodation

Finding a place to live though, is the most difficult task you will face here (believe me, it's difficult than getting accepted by ETH). And on-campus accommodation doesn't exist here. If you were lucky enough to be allotted a room by the Housing Office, you already have a place to live and you have delayed this nightmare by at least one semester, one year if you're lucky a second time. If not, read on. To be able to rent an apartment in Switzerland, you need to either have a salary which shows you can afford the rent or a resident of Switzerland with a sufficient salary willing to take on your liability. As someone coming from outside the Switzerland, it's not very likely that you know someone willing to take on your liability. But there are organisations who are willing to help you.

The most popular is WOKO. They rent out furnished rooms (in most cases) in apartment buildings built for students. The average rent for a room in a WOKO house varies from CHF 400-700 and the only condition to rent a room with WOKO is you have to be a registered

student in one of the universities in Zurich (yes there are many) and be under the age of 28. You share an apartment with other students and it's a fun way to live. It also kickstarts your social circle in a new city. Another popular choice is renting a room with JUWO. JUWO rents (mostly) unfurnished rooms to students and people under the age of 28 with a salary less than CHF 30,000 per year. The living conditions are very similar to WOKO apartments except that the apartment building is not necessarily meant only for students. Owing to the unfurnished nature of the rooms, the average rent might be a little less than a WOKO room.

These aren't the only two solutions. There are several smaller organisations or individuals willing to take on the liability of students and the ads for available rooms can be found on the website WG Zimmer. Most of the ads for WOKO and JUWO rooms are also on this website and it will be your best friend when you're looking for a house. But be prepared to send around 100 messages (I sent more like 150 during my room search) and expect very few replies (maybe 10-12) as they're literally flooded with responses. There are hundreds of students looking for a room in Zurich.



## Getting Around

So, you found a place to live. What next? How do you go from your home to ETH/ UZH and back? The good news: there exists a dense network of trams, buses and S-Bahns (suburban trains) that connect all parts of the city and also the surrounding villages and cities. The bad news: it's expensive (what here isn't?). One of the necessary expenses is a public transportation pass. The most cost-efficient way is to by an annual travel pass for the ZVV (Zürcher Verkehrsverbund – German for Zurich Transport Network). It costs CHF 570 (only if you're under 25) for the city zone while a single ticket for the same zone costs CHF 4.40. It's a small city and travelling around is easy. In addition, there's the half-fare travelcard, which allows you to travel all over Switzerland at half the actual ticket price. According to the new offer, you have to pay just CHF 100 (I had to pay a lot more!) for this card if you're under 25. Though not a necessary expense, it's a highly recommended one. There's a lot to see in Switzerland (do I really need to tell you that?) and all the cool places are accessible by train. Better to make the most out of it since you're already in the country.

As an alternative, you can always get a second-hand bicycle for CHF 150-300 and then use it go everywhere avoiding public transport altogether. A word of caution for those willing to take on this challenge: Zurich is full of roads that go up and down, so be prepared for a real challenge.



## Daily Necessities

Be prepared to find even basic foods like bread and milk 3 to 5 times more expensive than in India. So, it's important to know where to buy what in order to save. The (relatively) cheap supermarkets are Lidl and ALDI. Both are German supermarket chains and are popular for their low prices. Next comes Denner, the third largest supermarket chain in Switzerland and self-proclaimed "Robin Hood of retail" as they strive to keep prices low. It is also the go-to place for affordable alcohol. Migros, the largest supermarket in Switzerland, comes at the second-most expensive. But it offers a wide range of products and is the most popular with students. The most expensive and also the most famous is Coop. Students generally tend to avoid it.

Then there are several Turkish stores throughout the city where you can buy fresh fruits and vegetables for a really good price. Important for Indians, is finding a store selling Indian products. There are such stores in Oerlikon, Wiedikon and even near the city centre. These naturally tend to be expensive, but some things are simply necessary for us. An important point however is the quality of products you get is usually proportional to the price. Buying the cheapest stuff isn't always smart.

You can always go to Germany to buy cheaper groceries. Konstanz is just an hour train ride away is a popular shopping destination for students in Zurich. I know people who go there once every couple of months. But since you cross an international border and into the EU (Switzerland is not a part of the EU) you have some restrictions on what you can carry back into Switzerland. For example, you can bring back only 1kg of meat per person. And meat is really expensive here. Some of my friends have actually gone vegetarian after coming here!

**Tip:** Products marked M-Budget in Migros and Prix Garantie in Coop are always the cheapest across all supermarkets.



## Food

You know where to get your groceries and how to get them. Now you just have to cook. And cook you will. Unless you want spend a crazy amount of money on eating out. The cheapest meals you will get are in the university cafeterias (called Mensas). The University of Zurich Mensa costs a minimum of CHF 5.40 for

a meal while the ETH Mensa costs at least CHF 6.20. There are more expensive options in both the Mensas but they aren't very popular (obviously). If there's a day when you feel like going out for a meal, the most affordable is Holy Cow with outlets around the city. There you can get burgers in the range of CHF 12-18. A single Domino's pizza costs around CHF 18. Be prepared to shell out even more if you want to go to a better class of restaurants.

The best option, what most students do, is cooking yourself. There are enough microwaves spread all over the university buildings for you to be able to reheat your meals for lunch. All you have to do is bring along lots of containers in which you can store food. It's also a fun experience when your flatmates from different parts of the world are cooking their meals at the same time.

A blue horizontal banner with the text 'Enjoying Life' in white. To the left of the text are three white icons: a person doing a yoga pose, a person lifting weights, and a person hiking with a backpack. The hiking icon has the words 'Hike' and 'Switzerland' written on it.

Most important though, is enjoying your time here. There are a lot of activities that you can do in the city. Included in your semester fees, is membership of the ASVZ (Akademischer Sportsverband Zürich – German for academic sports association of Zurich). They offer various gyms and sports facilities throughout the city and these range from outdoor sports like Tennis and Kayaking to indoor activities like Yoga and Fencing. You can even take courses for free as a member for any sport you ever wanted to learn.

The city is full of hiking trails and lakes where you can swim (not recommended in the winter though). Being Switzerland's largest city, there's always something going on here. Be it food festivals or carnivals. You won't be bored here.

**Hope this helps and have fun!**