

sports, fitness, and wellness: staying active on the aelo swiss academy campus

The first thing that surprised me about AELO Swiss Academy had nothing to do with lectures. It was the shoes. Walking across campus on my first morning as a visiting lecturer, I counted more trainers than dress shoes, more water bottles than coffee cups, and a small queue at the gym door before the building next door had even unlocked. I had come to talk about professional writing. I left thinking about how a place can quietly make movement the default.



Campus life has a way of turning intentions into routines, and here that pull runs toward being active. Not in an aggressive, no-pain-no-gain sort of way. More like the Swiss attitude to punctuality: it is simply what people around you do, so you end up doing it too.

I have been back several times since, in every season, and I have watched students arrive in September with elaborate gym plans that last a fortnight, then stumble into their real rhythm by November. What follows is what I have learned about how sport, fitness, and wellness actually work on this campus, including the honest trade-offs nobody puts in the brochure.

Why movement happens almost by accident

The campus is compact. Everything you need sits within a few minutes' walk, which sounds like a small thing until you realize it removes every excuse. There is no bus to catch, no car to warm up, no parking spot to hunt for. You wake up, and the shortest path to breakfast involves legs.

The gaps in the timetable help too. A 90-minute break between morning and afternoon sessions is exactly long enough for a run, a shower, and a sandwich. Students learn quickly that this window is precious, and by October the loop behind the sports hall has its own informal traffic system: runners going clockwise, walkers going the other way, everyone nodding.

Then there is the terrain. Switzerland does not really do flat, and the paths around campus climb more than most people expect. My calves ached for the first ten days of my first visit, and I have watched the same thing happen to every new cohort. The upside is that the hill is free training. You burn the same energy walking to the station that a friend in a flat city would burn on a treadmill, and you get views as a bonus.

One trade-off deserves a mention. What goes up must come down, and steep descents are harder on your knees than the climbs. New students often proudly power uphill all week and then wonder why their thighs scream on Sunday. The fix is boring and effective: shorten your stride on the way down and let your shoes do some of the braking.

There is also a cultural layer you absorb without noticing. On Swiss Sundays, families hike. Pensioners with walking poles pass you on steep paths at a pace that humbles 20-year-olds. Once that becomes your normal background, a weekend on the sofa starts to feel like the strange choice.

The gym, the hall, and the spaces in between

The campus gym is compact rather than flashy. There is a free-weight area, a workable rack or two, some cables, and a modest row of cardio machines. If you are used to a big commercial gym with mirrors on every wall, adjust your expectations. What you gain is a queue for the squat rack that essentially disappears before 8am, and regulars who notice if you vanish for three weeks.

The small size forces creativity, which I have come to see as a feature. With limited stations, you learn to superset, to use dumbbells for things you would normally do on machines, and to train around people instead of waiting for them to finish. Students who arrive believing they need a specific machine for every muscle usually leave knowing that a pair of dumbbells and a floor can carry you a long way.

The sports hall is the social heart of the whole setup. Badminton owns the evening slots in my experience, with volleyball close behind, and pickup basketball appears whenever the weather kills someone's outdoor plans. Booking systems vary by term and by who is organizing, so the practical advice is simple: find the person who manages the hall schedule in your first week and be friendly to them. That one relationship will pay for itself all year.

If your sport needs something the campus cannot offer, the nearest town usually fills the gap, whether that is a climbing wall, a proper 25-metre pool, or a tennis club. Two honest warnings from watching students do this. First, Switzerland is expensive, and club memberships plus equipment add up faster than most budgets expect. Second, travel time kills consistency. A pool 30 minutes away sounds reasonable until exam season, when every extra minute of commute becomes a reason to skip.

A word on etiquette

Shared training spaces survive on unwritten rules, so here is the local common sense. Rerack your weights. Wipe down what you sweated on. If someone is mid-set, wait rather than hover. Ask to work in rather than standing around. And keep the 7am crowd's quiet in mind: plenty of people train before class precisely because it is calm, and loud speakerphone calls at that hour win you no friends.

Getting outside: trails, lakes, and winter

The real gym starts at the edge of campus. Marked hiking paths run practically from the doorstep, and Switzerland maintains tens of thousands of kilometres of them nationwide, so you will not run out in a year. Students measure their running loops in landmarks rather than kilometres: to the chapel, around the field, back past the water fountain. It is less precise and much more motivating.

The Sunday hike is the institution within the institution. Someone posts a plan, usually on a kitchen whiteboard or a group chat, and a loose crew forms. Abilities vary wildly, and that is part of the charm. The stronger walkers go

ahead and wait at the top; everyone shares chocolate at the summit; nobody cares that you took four hours instead of three.

How people stay active shifts with the seasons, roughly like this:

| Season | What people gravitate toward | Worth knowing |

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| Spring | Trail runs, first proper hikes | Mud and lingering snow at altitude; start line dries out last |

| Summer | Lake swims, long evening hikes, cycling | Storms often build in the afternoon, so start early |

| Autumn | Hiking, running, ramping up indoors | The clearest air of the year, but days shorten fast |

| Winter | Snowshoeing, sledging, skating, gym sessions | Dark by late afternoon and ice on shaded paths |

Winter changes everything

December daylight is the thing that catches newcomers off guard. In much of Switzerland the sun can be down before 5pm, and if your plan was always to run after your last class, that plan quietly dies in week one. The students who stay consistent through winter either move their training earlier or make peace with a headlamp. Both work. Pretending the darkness is not coming does not.

Ice is the other reality check. Shaded paths stay slick for days after a freeze, and a twisted ankle in January will cost you more than the whole month's training. When paths turn to glass, the smart move is the indoor option or a walk with proper grip under your feet. Sledging deserves a mention too: it looks like goofing off, but hauling a sledge up a hill repeatedly is genuinely hard work, and it is the most fun cardio you will ever do.

Eating like someone who trains

None of the above works without fuel, and campus food culture has its own rhythm. Breakfast is the meal students most often skip and most regret skipping by 11am. The Swiss staples make this easy: muesli with yogurt and fruit, good bread, cheese, and something to drink that is not only coffee. It is not fancy, and it carries you through a morning lecture block far better than a pastry grabbed in a hurry.

The classic Swiss dishes deserve honest framing. Fondue and raclette are wonderful, and they https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ are weekend

celebrations, not Tuesday fuel. Students who treat them as regular dinners tend to feel it on the hill the next morning. Everything in its season, including cheese.

For anyone cooking in shared kitchens, batch cooking is the single highest-leverage habit I can suggest. Groceries in Switzerland cost more than most international students budget for at first, and cooking once for three days protects both your wallet and your training. A pot of something with rice, vegetables, and a protein source, eaten across several lunches, beats a vending machine more often than not.

Hydration gets underestimated constantly, especially in the first weeks. Between the hills, the indoor heating in winter, and simply being more active than before, most people need more water than their habits from home suggest. Keep a bottle with you and refill it without thinking; your afternoon focus will quietly thank you.

Recovery: the unglamorous half of wellness

Here is the part nobody posts about. Fitness gains happen when you recover, and campus life tests recovery hardest during deadline weeks. The typical failure pattern is predictable: sleep gets sacrificed first, training gets sacrificed second, and by the third week of that sequence everything feels harder than it is.



Sleep is the foundation, and seven to nine hours is the honest target for most people. I have watched students negotiate this well by treating their evening as a budget: if a deadline demands two extra hours, they come from screens, not from the gym or the pillow. A 20-minute nap after lunch, kept short enough not to grog you up, is another tool the successful ones use shamelessly.

Walking is the most underrated recovery tool on campus. An easy 30-minute walk the day after a hard session does more for sore legs than sitting still, and it doubles as thinking time. On the subject of soreness: descending steep trails will make your thighs ache in a way climbing never does, and gentle movement plus patience fixes it faster than a second hardcore session.

If you get access to a sauna at any point, in town or through a facility, take it. Swiss wellness culture takes heat and cold seriously, and even an occasional session seems to help people sleep and loosen up. Keep expectations modest, though. Recovery is a pile of small boring habits, not one magic ritual, and rest days are part of training rather than a betrayal of it.

Finding your people

Motivation is a fragile thing to carry alone