Studying at BHMS Switzerland

FAQ for Orange Coast College students

BHMS Business & Hotel Management School · Lucerne, Switzerland · Draft, October 2026

Orange Coast College graduates in culinary arts, baking and pastry, and hospitality can finish a dual bachelor's degree at BHMS Business & Hotel Management School in Lucerne, Switzerland, in one year. OCC and BHMS signed this transfer partnership in 2026. Below, BHMS answers the questions OCC students ask most.

Fees are 2027 figures in Swiss francs (CHF), from the BHMS fee schedule and the Community College Direct Entry booklet (09.26). Dollar amounts are approximate, at about $1.21 per franc (October 2026).

Program overview and eligibility

What is the official name of the bachelor's degree program, and which institution awards the degree?

OCC culinary graduates join the **Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Culinary Arts**. With a baking and pastry degree, you can also choose the **BA in Culinary Arts & Patisserie**. Hospitality graduates join the **BA in Hotel & Hospitality Management**.

Each one is a dual degree, awarded by BHMS in Lucerne, Switzerland, and by Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland (UK).

How long does the program take to complete in Switzerland?

One year. Your associate degree counts as the first two years of our three-year bachelor's, so you go straight into the final year. That's one 20-week semester on campus in Lucerne, then a six-month paid internship in Switzerland or abroad: about twelve months after you arrive, you graduate.

What are the admission requirements for students transferring from a California community college or four-year college?

Under our agreement with OCC, the Advanced Culinary Arts AS or the Advanced Baking and Pastry AS takes you straight into the final year of the BA in Culinary Arts. The AS in Hotel Management or the AS in Travel Specialist takes you into the final year of the BA in Hotel & Hospitality Management.

Coming from another California community college or a four-year college? You're welcome too, and we review every transcript individually. If your studies so far are in an unrelated field, you may start one year earlier, in our Higher Diploma year.

To apply, ask us for the application form (contact below) and send it back with:

1. **The application form**, filled in
2. **Your CV**
3. **A motivation letter**
4. **Your associate degree and transcripts**
5. **A scan of your passport**

Everything goes in English. We then hold a short admission interview with you by video call and send you your letter of acceptance.

How many credits can students transfer from their current institution?

Your whole associate degree, usually 60 or more US credits, counts as years one and two of the BHMS bachelor's, so you don't lose any time. The final year you complete with us carries 120 Robert Gordon University credits (60 ECTS). Have credits but no finished associate degree? Send us your transcript and we'll tell you exactly where you fit in.

Are there prerequisites, minimum GPA requirements, or English-language requirements?

The prerequisite is a completed associate degree in a related field. Our agreement with OCC sets no minimum GPA: we look at your whole transcript and get to know you in the admission interview.

All classes are taught in English. Native speakers don't need a test; if English isn't your first language, you'll need IELTS 6.0 or equivalent (the Duolingo English Test is accepted). You also need a passport that's valid for the whole program.

What does a typical academic year look like, including semesters, holidays, and breaks?

Your 20 weeks of classes run as four terms of five weeks. You focus on four or five subjects at a time, with assessments at the end of each term. There's a break of one to two weeks between terms, including Christmas and New Year, and Swiss public holidays are days off too.

2027 intake	Orientation Day	Classes start
February	Friday, February 19	Monday, February 22
August	Friday, August 13	Monday, August 16
November	Friday, November 12	Monday, November 15

After the semester comes your six-month paid internship, where your days off follow your employment contract, like any employee's. If you graduate from OCC in the spring, the August or November intake is usually the natural fit.

Travel from California to Switzerland

Which airport should students fly into when traveling from Orange County to the school?

Fly into **Zurich Airport (ZRH)**, where we pick up new students. From Southern California, the easiest option is the nonstop SWISS flight from LAX to Zurich, about 11 hours. From John Wayne Airport (SNA), you connect through a US or European hub.

How far is the airport from the campus or student housing?

About an hour. Lucerne is 45 minutes to an hour from Zurich Airport by car or train, and both BHMS campuses are in the center of Lucerne, a few minutes' walk from the main train station.

Does the school provide airport pickup or an organized arrival service?

Yes, for the bachelor's semester: the pickup is included in your degree program fees. On your first arrival, we meet you at Zurich Airport and drive you to campus in Lucerne; before you travel, you send us your flight details. The pickup isn't part of the Swiss Summer Abroad (see the last question), so summer students make their own way to Lucerne.

After passport control and baggage claim, go to **Arrival 1 / Airport Center** and look for the **BHMS sign**. We track your flight, so a short delay is no problem.

If airport pickup is not available, what is the safest and easiest way to reach campus?

Take the train. Zurich Airport has its own station right below the terminal, and trains to Lucerne (Luzern) run all day, direct or with one easy change at Zurich main station. The trip takes about an hour and costs around CHF 35 (about $40) one way, and from Lucerne station, campus is a short walk or taxi ride.

Are students advised to arrive several days before orientation?

Yes. You arrive between Monday and Thursday of orientation week; Orientation Day is the Friday, and classes start the next Monday. For the February 2027 intake, for example, that means arriving February 15–18.

Arriving early in the week gives you time to get over jet lag, since Switzerland is nine hours ahead of California. Please don't come before your arrival window, though: your room won't be ready, and we can't pick you up.

When a student arrives, where do they check in? Are there particular hours that the check-in happens?

With our airport pickup, we bring you straight to campus, where you check in, get your room key and settle in. Traveling on your own? Tell us your arrival time in advance so someone is there to welcome you. Before you leave home, we send you everything you need for arrival day.

Passport, visa, and immigration requirements

What immigration authorization do U.S. citizens typically need to study in Switzerland for the duration of this program?

U.S. citizens don't need a visa for a short visit. To study here for a semester and then do your internship, though, you need a Swiss student residence permit, the **B permit**. You apply for it from the US before you travel, once you've been accepted and paid your application fee, and we guide you through each step and let you know as soon as it's confirmed.

We advise you to apply for your student permit **at least four months before your course starts**, and earlier if you can. You'll need a passport valid for the whole program and proof that you can cover your fees and living costs, usually recent bank statements from you or whoever is paying. The permit fees are already included in your BHMS fees.

Coming for the Swiss Summer Abroad only? Then you don't need a permit: as a U.S. citizen you enter Switzerland as a visitor with just your passport.

Does the student need to arrange housing or health insurance before applying?

No. Your room, your meals and your Swiss health insurance are all part of your BHMS fees, so there's nothing to organize before you apply.

Are students permitted to work part-time while studying, and what restrictions apply to international students?

Students from outside the EU, U.S. citizens included, can't work part-time while they study at BHMS. The work is built into the program instead: after your 20 weeks on campus, you start a full-time, six-month paid internship on a trainee's salary of CHF 2,390 (about $2,900) a month gross.

Our career services team helps you find your placement. Under Swiss immigration rules, non-EU students do their Swiss internship in the hospitality industry, which is exactly where culinary and hospitality students want to be.

Can I stay and work in Switzerland after I graduate?

Yes, there's a real option for U.S. citizens. Switzerland and the USA have a **young professionals (trainee) exchange agreement**: if you're 18 to 35 and have finished your degree, you can work in Switzerland in the field you trained in for up to **18 months**. You're paid a regular salary, the going rate for a job starter in your region and sector, not a trainee wage.

You need a job offer with a written contract first, and our career services team helps you look. The application is made from the US, through Cultural Vistas in New York, and takes about 8 to 12 weeks; you can't stay in Switzerland while it's being processed. The job has to be full-time, under the rules of the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration.

Housing and daily living

Does the school arrange housing, recommend approved providers, or require students to find their own accommodation?

We arrange it, and a room is included in your fees: a shared two-bed apartment at our Lakeside Campus, inside the historic Union Hotel in the center of Lucerne. You can upgrade for a surcharge.

Room	Surcharge
Shared Standard, Lakeside Campus (2 beds, no kitchen)	Included
Shared Superior, City Campus (3–4 beds, with kitchen)	CHF 1,200 (about $1,450)
Studio Standard, Lakeside Campus	CHF 4,900 (about $5,900)
Studio Superior, City Campus	CHF 7,900 (about $9,600)

Our newly renovated rooms carry a refundable deposit of CHF 1,500 (about $1,800); the other rooms need no deposit.

What is included in the rent, such as utilities, internet, furniture, laundry, or kitchen access?

There's no separate rent. Your room comes furnished, with utilities and Wi-Fi, and bed linen and towels are provided and laundered every week. Culinary students also get their chef's whites laundered at no extra cost.

Meals are included too: three a day on weekdays at the City Campus restaurant, and brunch and dinner at the Lakeside Campus on weekends and holidays, with dietary needs covered. The standard Lakeside apartments have no kitchen, so if you'd like to cook for yourself, choose the City Campus shared apartment. Your room stays yours during the breaks between terms.

Are students typically placed with other international students, Swiss students, or a mix?

A mix, and a very international one: BHMS students come from more than 90 countries. Your roommate may be from Asia, Latin America or another part of Europe, which is one of the best parts of the experience and great training for a career in hospitality.

How far is student housing from campus, grocery stores, and public transportation?

Your housing is on campus, and both campuses are in the center of Lucerne. The old town, the lake and the main train station are a few minutes' walk away, with supermarkets, cafés and bus stops all around.

Are there options for students who prefer to live alone or need specific accommodations?

Yes: you can book a studio at the Lakeside or the City Campus (see the table above). Studios and single rooms aren't guaranteed and can sell out for busy intakes, so ask early.

If you have a medical condition, a disability or another specific need, tell us when you apply. We'll work out the right arrangement with you before you arrive.

Cost of living and budgeting

What are the average monthly costs for housing, groceries, transportation, phone service, and personal expenses?

Your room, meals, health insurance and Wi-Fi are already in your fees, so day-to-day spending is lower than you might expect for Switzerland. Plan on roughly CHF 500 (about $600) a month for personal laundry, your phone plan and local travel, plus extra if you want to explore Europe on weekends. A Swiss prepaid SIM or eSIM is easy to set up when you arrive.

During your internship, you earn CHF 2,390 (about $2,900) a month gross. After room, board and taxes, interns keep CHF 1,000–1,400 (about $1,200–1,700) a month on average.

Are there additional school fees beyond tuition, such as registration, materials, student services, or activities?

No: our fee is all-inclusive, and it covers the whole final year.

Final year, 2027	CHF	About USD
Tuition	31,800	38,500
Operating expense: health insurance, student permit and local tax, internship placement, Wi-Fi and e-campus, airport pickup	2,750	3,300
Application fee	1,000	1,200
Accommodation (shared standard room)	3,800	4,600
Meals	2,350	2,800
Total, BA Hotel & Hospitality Management	**41,700**	**50,500**
Uniforms and knife set (culinary only)	500	600
Total, BA Culinary Arts or Culinary Arts & Patisserie	**42,200**	**51,100**

As an OCC graduate transferring under our partnership, you also receive a **15% scholarship on tuition**: about CHF 4,770 (about $5,800) off the final year's CHF 31,800 tuition.

Not included: your flights, a room upgrade if you choose one, the refundable CHF 1,500 (about $1,800) deposit for a newly renovated room, and your personal spending.

Are tuition and housing payments due in installments, or must they be paid in advance?

You pay in two steps. Once you're accepted, the CHF 1,000 (about $1,200) application fee secures your place. The balance is due once your Swiss student permit is confirmed, before the semester starts; housing and meals are on the same invoice, so there's no rent to pay along the way.

Can students use U.S. federal financial aid or other forms of American student assistance? If so, what eligibility rules apply?

BHMS isn't eligible for U.S. federal student aid (FAFSA), so federal loans and Pell Grants can't be used. Students usually combine family support, savings, private education loans and scholarships from their own college or community.

Two things on our side help a lot: as an OCC transfer student you get the 15% partnership scholarship on tuition (see the fees above), and six months on a paid trainee's salary goes a long way toward your costs.

Should students open a Swiss bank account, or can they manage expenses with U.S. bank accounts and credit cards?

You can use your US credit cards: in Switzerland almost everything can be paid by card, contactless included. Pick a card without foreign transaction fees.

For your internship, you'll need a Swiss bank account, because your salary is paid in Swiss francs. BHMS has an agreement with **UBS**, and in your first week someone from the bank comes to campus to help you open an account. You're free to open one with any other bank in Switzerland, too.

Safety, health, and well-being

Switzerland is one of the safest places in the world to study, and your health cover is already part of your fees.

Is health insurance mandatory, and does the school help students understand the applicable requirements?

Yes. Health insurance is mandatory for everyone living in Switzerland, and it's included in your BHMS fees: health and medical insurance with cover of up to CHF 1,000,000 (about $1.2 million) per illness. You don't need to buy a policy or work out the rules yourself; we arrange it and explain how it works when you arrive.

Can students keep their existing U.S. health insurance, or do they need Swiss coverage or another qualifying policy?

You're welcome to keep your U.S. plan for when you're back home. In Switzerland, though, the cover that counts is the Swiss insurance included in your BHMS fees, so there's nothing extra to buy.

What happens if a student decides the program is not the right fit after arriving?

Talk to us first. The first weeks in a new country are a big adjustment for almost everyone, and our staff help with anything from homesickness to coursework.

If you still decide BHMS isn't right for you, we'll go through your options with you. Any refund of fees already paid follows the terms in your letter of acceptance, so read them before you pay.

Getting around Switzerland

Are there recommended apps or websites for navigating public transportation?

Download the **SBB Mobile** app from Swiss Federal Railways. It covers every train, bus and lake boat in the country, Lucerne's city buses included, with live times and tickets.

When you arrive, buy the **Half Fare Travelcard**: it cuts almost every train, bus and boat fare in half and makes weekend trips easy. From Lucerne, Zurich is about 45 minutes by train, Milan about three hours and Paris about five.

Language, culture, and adapting to Switzerland

Are classes taught entirely in English, or should students expect coursework or administrative matters in another language?

All your classes are taught in English, and the school runs its administration in English too. In your final year, you also take a beginner's module in German or French (A1/A2 level).

Lucerne is German-speaking, but most people you'll meet speak English. A little German makes daily life and your internship search easier, especially in German-speaking Switzerland.

Academic support and student services

Is there a dedicated international student office or program coordinator?

Our students come from more than 90 countries, so the whole school is set up for international students like you. Before you arrive, Martin Wyler, our contact for US community colleges, helps you with your application, your permit and your arrival. On campus, our student services and academic staff support you through the semester, and our career services team helps you find your internship.

Who is the primary contact for students before arrival and throughout their studies?

Martin Wyler, Regional Director (Europe and Americas), martin.wyler@bhms.ch. He's your contact from your first question until you arrive in Lucerne. On campus, your program leaders and the student services team are there for you day to day, and you can always write to Martin.

What orientation activities are provided to incoming international students?

Every new student starts with a mandatory Orientation Day on the Friday before classes. You collect your student card, timetable and welcome pack, meet your classmates and teachers, and get to know the campus.

Campus life starts right away: the student-run Lakeside Bar, cooking competitions and world-cuisine nights, ski and city excursions, and trips such as the Jungfraujoch and the BHMS vineyard experience.

Bonus: can I try BHMS before I commit to the degree?

Yes. Every summer we host community-college students in Lucerne for the **Swiss Summer Abroad**: ten days of hands-on culinary or hospitality workshops at BHMS, Swiss excursions and a certificate. In 2027 it runs **June 28 to July 7** and can earn you up to two US credits, subject to OCC's approval.

It costs CHF 3,300 (about $4,000), or CHF 2,900 (about $3,500) per student when ten or more come from the same college. Flights and the airport transfer aren’t included, and you don’t need a permit: U.S. citizens come as visitors with just their passport. If you later join the bachelor’s, what you paid for the summer is credited toward your tuition. Applications close March 31, 2027.