



## LOCAL LIVING: HOMESTAY & INTEGRATION

*"When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable."*

—Clifton Fadiman

Two of the biggest regrets for many students who want to immerse into a new culture and language, is not taking advantage of the homestay family option and/or making more of an effort to meet locals. Inhale the air around you deeply. Locals can help you take the first few deep breaths.



### The Perks of Homestay

- Traditional meals and comfort of a home
- Sense of family and safety
- Cultural immersion and deeper ties to the community and city
- Get the local tips to understand the community—it's like having a guidebook all the time
- Language practice
- Less responsibility than living on your own—you can really focus on the language and culture

### Homestay isn't for you, if...

- You aren't interested in spending much time at home
- You aren't family oriented, or enjoy interacting with elderly folks. You only want to be around university aged students—you will need to be open to older and younger people (*you may have a widow as your host mother*)
- You are a picky eater or have a lot of food allergies
- You want things done in a specific way
- You are not comfortable stepping outside your comfort zone or modifying your lifestyle

### Advice

- Ask host family to teach you the "dos" & "don'ts"
- You should ask the following questions on the first or 2<sup>nd</sup> day:
  - How much information do they need about your whereabouts?
  - Can I bring friends over? Should I inform you before they come over?
  - Which doors/windows need to be locked?
  - What is their routine and schedule (particularly for meals and quiet hours)? Is there a curfew?
  - What are their expectations for how neat the house needs to be?

## Do

- Ask a lot of questions—if you don't understand something, ask what to do and how to do it
- Get out of your comfort zone & practice the language (*butcher it if you must*)
- Get out of U.S. habits and spend as much time as possible with your family and locals
- Go with the flow and celebrate differences
- Be an anthropologist, focusing on learning all that you can about the host culture & people
- Anticipate having to allow someone to do a lot of tasks for you, (*i.e. laundry*)
- Recognize that gender roles and socioeconomic differences are tied to culture
- Accept the love, support and attention of host family—throw yourself into it
- If you have a housekeeper, try to get to know them
- Be willing to adapt and get out of comfort zone
- Stay in touch when you come back home

## Don't

- Get locked into social media all day/every day, limit your time
- Bring party behavior into the house—always be respectful when you come home late
- Bring home guests and visitors without first running it by your family
- Be demanding
- Focus on what's not going right
- Be flaky (*If you say you'll be there, BE THERE*)

## Getting Adjusted

- Expect a different meal schedule
- You will need to adjust to the family's culture, rules, routine and schedule
- You may have less privacy than you are used to (*little brothers & sisters, maids, etc.*)
- Your family may live far from campus
- You may have humble or extravagant accommodations—this may make you uncomfortable at first
- Food will likely be different from what you are used to (*spicy or not, portions, beverages, etc.*)
- Your mantra should be:  
**"IT'S NOT BAD—IT'S JUST DIFFERENT."**

## Gifts

- Something typical from hometown or Chico (sweets & food items, photo book)
- Think of something YOU would appreciate if you were receiving a gift from abroad
- It can be something small (no need to break the bank)
- A thank you card or letter from your parents

## Showing Respect to Hosts

- Show up for meals, events, holidays
- Let your family know if you're going to be late, they worry about you
- They may not feel comfortable telling you when they're offended
- Be careful when communicating about foods you don't like, be polite
- Abide by the host family's rules—this is their home and you are a visitor
- Inquire about having guests

## Challenges You May Face

- Gender roles
- Your expectations and feelings relating to being "served" by hired help
- Expectations—try to approach this with zero expectations. The goal is to adjust to the way they do things
- Language barrier—allow yourself to open up, fail, and struggle with language. The family is your safe space
- Working with challenging personalities is an opportunity for growth
- Your host family may have different values and way of life, try to respect it

## Ideas for Making Friends Abroad

- Make dinners
- Have conversation partners
- Hang out at the local spots
- Play games (*i.e. UNO, Nertz, other board games*)
- Volunteer locally
- Join a local sports team, dance class, church, etc.
- Bring your musical instrument
- Couchsurfing.com