



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 breathes.



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 2nd 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—may make you uncomfortable
- 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