



A GUIDE TO A HOST FAMILIES



WHAT IS A HOST FAMILY?

TOTAL IMMERSION: Staying with a host family abroad provides a total immersion experience that offers students the chance to improve their language outside of the classroom. During their stay with the host family, students will have the opportunity to practise their spoken language skills whilst sharing their meals with the family. It is also a fantastic way to discover more about the local way of life and culture.

The host(s) will usually be the best place to find out what you need to know about the local area; bus stops, good places to visit, nice cafes/restaurants etc.

CAREFULLY SELECTED: The host families are carefully selected by a designated/specialist accommodation officer to ensure that each student's stay is a successful linguistic and cultural experience.

EXPERIENCED: Most host families have been hosting students for many years and are very experienced. They all meet the various criteria of selection, including a sense of openness and hospitality; a warm, clean and welcoming home; and a good location with easy access.

TYPES OF FAMILIES

VARIETY: Host families come in all shapes and sizes; single women, couples, with and without children (occasionally single men who host older boys only). A lot of the host families are mothers whose children have grown up and left home, which means that they have rooms and time available to host international students.

BENEFITS OF HOSTS WITH OR WITHOUT CHILDREN: Staying in a host family with children could potentially mean that they share similar interests and things to talk about and the students could end up making friends for life. On the other hand staying in a host family without children is likely to mean that the hosts will have more time available to dedicate to their guests.

HOST FAMILY SELECTION

PROCEDURES: We follow the recommended guidelines set out by the **School Travel Forum** on host family selection when deciding whether to work with a language school partner. We ensure that the language schools we work with follow the following procedures:

1. All host families are carefully selected, paid, and advised by the language school or host accommodation agent on how to accommodate international students.
2. Language schools have a full-time accommodation officer whose role is to visit and select host families, using their experience to place students with the correct family, obtain

feedback from students on their accommodation and deal with any issues that might arise.

3. Students will be placed in singles, pairs (or occasionally threes). There are advantages to each; a single occupancy host placement gives greater immersion because there is no one else with whom to speak English. Being in a pair or three can give more comfort and support though, and give someone with whom to travel to the language school or work placement. It is a personal preference. We will ask at the point of booking whether students would like to share or be on their own and do our best to accommodate students' preferences.
4. Rooms are usually single or twin rooms.
5. Students sometimes have en-suite or access to their own bathroom but, where shared with the host, they will always be afforded time and privacy to use the facilities.
6. You will receive the details of each host family selected for your group before you travel (approx. two weeks before departure).
7. All allergies and dietary requirements are taken into account (occasionally there is a small charge for particular diets if special food is required). We also ask whether you are happy to share a house with pets. If allergies are severe, please provide extra details.
8. On occasion, hosts have multiple students visiting at the same time. Where this is the case, we insist that students have their own room, they are of the same gender as our student, under 18 (if our student is under 18), and of a different nationality such that students are encouraged to speak the host's language. Other students sharing the same host can often enhance a visit enriching the cultural experience.

DBS EQUIVALENT: DBS checks cannot be applied in countries outside of the UK. However, police checks are carried out before hosts are accepted by the language schools. In Spain this is 'Certificado de Penales', and in France it is 'extrait de casier judiciaire'.

RISK ASSESSMENT: Blue Stamp Travel is ABTA and ATOL bonded; and has a strong Safety Management System (SMS) in place. This means that you can use our Safety Management System as part of your risk assessment. Our SMS is available on the Blue Stamp Travel website.

GETTING TO / FROM THE LANGUAGE SCHOOL / WORK PLACEMENT (If applicable)

EASY ACCESS: The host families usually live within a 30-minute radius of the language school when travelling to/from the school on foot or public transport.

ARRIVAL: Some host families will meet and greet the students at the airport / train station / coach on the arrival day. Other times, transfers from the airport / train station are arranged with third party transport. In some locations public transport is the best option and easy to navigate so students simply travel to the host independently. Various options are available and students need or prefer the different options, please enquire for detail.

At some language schools' hosts will accompany students to the school on the first morning of lessons to ensure that they are happy with the route. Others will support by highlighting the appropriate bus routes or journey.

For the rest of the week the students will be expected to travel independently or with other students at the same host or students staying nearby.

ROUTE MAPS: For students travelling as part of our 'set departure' work experience trips abroad, maps are provided showing walking our public transport routes from host accommodation to work placements. Work and Study students will be supported by the hosts who are familiar with the language schools and the quickest, most convenient routes.

THINGS TO NOTE BEFORE THE TRIP

PROFILES: The host's details will be available approximately 2 weeks before travel. At the minimum this will be the name and address with a phone number and email (where available). You will usually receive a short profile for each host. It is a good idea to send an email or phone hosts before the trip to introduce yourself, in order to 'break the ice' and provide the often-needed reassurance.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS AND ALLERGIES: This information is required in advance and at least 2 months before travel. The host families are given these details and many are chosen to host particular students due to their ability to cater for particular requirements.

SMOKING: There may be a member of the host family who smokes. We always try to avoid this where possible however, if not possible, we ensure that the hosts only smoke outside and away from the students so that the students are therefore still accommodated in a non-smoking environment.

If you are a smoker it is courteous not to smoke in or around the host family to avoid embarrassment, please be considerate to the host.

THINGS TO NOTE WHILST ON THE TRIP

MEALS WITH HOST: Breakfast and evening meals are provided by the hosts. This offers a great opportunity for students to speak to their hosts in the target language and to discuss their day. Please note that in Spain the main meal of the day normally takes place at midday.

PROBLEMS: In the unlikely event of an issue with a host family please contact the language school housing officer if you have booked a Language Course or Work and Study programme. For mixed school Work Experience trips please speak with your Group Leader. You will have a 24/7 emergency number. If for any reason any concerns are not sufficiently rectified please contact the office who will be able to assist you.

COURTESY AND RULES OF HOST ACCOMMODATION

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER: Hosts are of all ages and appearances. Be open-minded and bear in mind that some of the best host experiences of past students have surpassed initial expectations upon meeting the hosts.

DIETARY NEEDS: Double check with your host if you have any particular needs. If you have informed us in advance, we will have informed the host family of your requirements but it can't hurt to politely check - particularly for students with stringent dietary needs for faith reasons or allergies.

MEALS WITH HOST: If you are not intending to eat with the family on a particular night, for example, if there is an event at the language school, then please advise hosts with as much notice as possible. Food can appear different abroad. Try things and be open to new things – it is all part of the experience!

EATING AND DRINKING: Do not take food and drink to your room unless you are invited to by your host.

VISITORS: It is not common to take visitors back to the host accommodation but if you do you should seek express permission first. Visitors should not be in the bedroom.

ALCOHOL: You should check with your host first if they allow alcohol in the home and whether you are permitted to drink legally. You should certainly not return to the host accommodation having drunk to excess. You may be invited to enjoy a drink with a meal with the family; there will never be an expectation for you to drink if you prefer not to for any reason.

BATHROOMS: If you are sharing a bathroom then consider vacating it in good time. Don't hog the hot water or time if others need the facilities. Leave the room tidy and clean. If you have access to your own bathroom then make sure you leave it respectable and clean at the end of the week.

KEYS: You must return keys at the end of the week if you are loaned them. They are expensive to replace. Similarly, if you have borrowed anything else, make sure it is returned in the condition you are given it.

CURFEW: Unless permission is given in advance, all students will be expected to stay with the host families once they arrive home for their evening meal.