



Best Practices for International Homestays¹

Homestays provide an unparalleled way to learn about the culture of a host nation and/or learn a new language. Homestays often result in life-long friendships. However, as is the case with international travel in general, pre-planning is necessary to ensure that homestays are positive and safe experiences for the students and their host families. Host families should meet certain requirements, and the expectations of students and host families should be clear from the onset.

This is a Best Practices document, so the following guidelines serve as recommendations to promote the best possible homestay experience for University of Denver (DU) students. For the purposes of this document, the “provider” refers to the party that vets and runs the homestay program. In most cases, this is a third party working with DU.

Vetting Homestays

Homestay families must be vetted by the provider well in advance of the experience. The provider should explain how the families were selected – e.g., based on prior experience, references, background checks, etc. Providers should visit homestay families ahead of time. During longer stays, the provider should visit the family during the student’s stay.

- The provider should ensure that homestay families meet the following criteria:
 - Must be a healthy household environment (i.e., no alcohol or drug problems, no history of abuse or legal offenses)
 - The family should be “established” and stable
 - There should be someone (parent or older child) at home during mealtimes and preferably at all times that the student is in the house
 - Women should not be placed in homes that lack a homestay sister of a similar age if teenage boys or men are present in the household
 - Must have clean and sanitary accommodations
 - Be willing to accommodate medically necessary dietary needs
 - There should be at least one person in the household who can at least understand some English if the student does not speak the local language at all
 - Must have telephone access for emergencies (even if the phone is in a neighboring home)
 - Must be able to provide an environment free of sexual harassment
 - Must be able to provide students with their own bed. If the student will be sharing a room with another person, the other person must be of the same age group and gender as the student.
 - If the student does not have a private room, the family must be able to provide facilities conducive to studying (if coursework is part of the international experience) – e.g., desk or table with lamp, in an area where the student can study without disturbing the family or being disturbed.

¹Adapted from University of Georgia document “Homestays and the Study Abroad Experience”

- Be willing to provide students with house keys, and to facilitate laundry if necessary
- Wherever possible, find families that are willing to accommodate dietary choices, such as vegetarian
- The provider or program should provide cell phone to the student if available
- The provider should instruct the homestay family in:
 - Emergency procedures – what to do, whom to contact
 - What is expected of them in terms of food, privacy, and a non-threatening environment
 - Any particular health need or medically necessary diet (e.g., account for food allergies)
 - Ensure that the homestay family understands that they can contact the project director in case of any concern
 - Ensure the homestay family has the necessary information to contact the project director
- Finally, the provider should be able to provide the students with the following information at least 2 weeks prior to departure:
 - Names and contact information for their homestay families
 - Names and ages of the children, and/or any other information that would help them prepare for their departure from their home country or get acquainted ahead of time

It is expected that the provider will use appropriate questionnaires or other instruments to properly evaluate the families and to match them with students.

What to Expect from Host Families

- Understand they are providing a cultural experience, not serving as a bed-and-breakfast service
- Share time and interact with student, include student in family and/or community events
- All students must have their own bed. They may share a room with another student or household member of the same gender and general age, but must always have their own bed.
- Provide adequate, healthy food. If the homestay is in a developing country, students should not eat salads or uncooked fruit and vegetables that cannot be peeled first. Cooked food should be served very hot, or be kept in a pot with a lid after cooking
- Provide clean, sanitary living conditions
- Wash clothes: If the homestay family will be responsible for laundry, ensure the frequency and amount of laundry is specified
- Provide student with keys to the house
- Speak/practice the native language with student. If the student is trying to learn the local language and there is an English speaker in the house, avoid speaking English unless (1) absolutely necessary, or (2) during specified times to help that person learn English
- Provide a place to study (desk or table, adequate light, with minimal distractions) if coursework is part of the international experience

- Do not negotiate with student regarding money or payment for homestay. Do not offer to sell the student any additional service or product. Do not get involved with students in any commercial transaction.
- Provide advice for the student and his/her homestay siblings regarding entertainment, going out at night, etc. Students in general and women in particular should be discouraged from going off alone or with men from the community.
 - Although the directors are to have counseled students on safety and proper behavior, the head of the homestay family should let the director know if the student engages in reckless or inappropriate behavior, or has any type of concern about the student
- Note: DU highly recommends that homestay families should not receive students or volunteers from other institutions/organizations while hosting DU students. This is to ensure that DU students have ample quality time with their host families.

What to Expect from Providers

- Ensure that homestay families are properly selected and that the expectations are clear
- Ensure that the students are thoroughly prepared for a homestay. Provide students with country specific information on customs, etc.
- Help make arrangements for students to store items that they may not want to take to a homestay
- Plan for how students will get to their homestays, particularly if there is a daily commute
- Provide additional assistance at the beginning and end when there is luggage
- Ensure that the host families and the students have your contact information at all times
- ***Reassure the students that they can discuss any concerns about their homestays with the provider at any time***
- Be prepared to terminate a homestay or make alternate arrangements if legitimate concerns are present. This should be communicated to students and families.
- For longer stays, the director or the in-country staff should visit the family at least once
- Plan on visiting any family where there are indications of trouble
- Have a contingency budget available, should a student need to be relocated

Advice for Students

- Understand that as the homestay guest, it is the student's responsibility to adapt
 - Be attentive to the meal times and other routines within the family
 - Respect the family's preference of TV shows (where available) and kinds of music
 - Treat any pets appropriately
 - Receive visitors with respect and discretion
 - Be attentive to what the family likes and does not like to talk about
- Students should wash their own clothes (if arrangements have not been made for the family to do the laundry) and take showers according to family schedules
- Be willing to interact with their host family, both in the home and in family and/or community events, while understanding that there are many aspects of the intimate and personal lives of the family in which the student should not expect to share
- Be aware that the family may not be able to provide voluntary dietary choices

- Be aware that the family may not be able to provide as much privacy or comfort as the student is accustomed to
- Understand that household phones are usually for emergencies, not for convenience, and certainly not for un-reimbursed long distance calls
- Students should plan on keeping their possessions in a neat and tidy manner, to make their bed each morning, and to look after their own basic housekeeping
- Students should help out, when possible, with routine household chores, as do other members of their household
- Students should communicate their plans clearly – what meals they will be away for, when they expect to be home – and they should keep to those plans as much as possible
- Students should understand that homestay families are
 - Not sources of pocket money, loans or financial responsibility of any kind
 - Not there for counseling or therapeutic attention
 - Not there to provide unusual services or treatment such as special diets that have not been pre-arranged by the provider, telephone time, maid service, clothing, recreation facilities, excursions, etc.
- Students should consume resources (electricity, hot water) sparingly – they are not cheap or abundant in most countries. Do not shower at hours that will disturb the household.
- Students will be financially responsible for any damage that they cause to the homestay property
- Students will be expected to behave as a respectful and responsible adult member of the household. Be sensitive and aware of how their presence can contribute something to the household, through an active interest in the family and participation in family activities. Ultimately, students are goodwill ambassadors whose behavior must reflect positively on themselves, their university and their country.