

Best Practices for International Homestays

Homestays provide an unparalleled way to learn about the culture of a host nation and/or learn a new language and 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 many 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.

- 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 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).
 - Contacting the project director in case of any concern.
- 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.

Advice for Students

- Understand that as the homestay guest, it is the student's responsibility to adapt.
 - Be attentive to the mealtimes 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 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 to which the student may be accustomed.
- 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, making their bed each morning, and looking 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.