

10 Tips For A Fun Home Stay

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05/25/08 Written by Tim Patterson



Feature Photo by [imagesbyk2 Photography](#). Photo above by [miramurphy](#)

As a tender 15 year old boy, I attended an all-girls high-school in Japan.

Those days in Japan were hands-down the single most empowering experience of my adolescent life, even though, sadly, at the time I had no idea how to talk to girls of any nationality.

What made my travel in Japan so empowering and memorable were the home-stay families who bid me welcome.

I'm now convinced that the single best way to gain an in-depth understanding of a local culture is to participate in a home-stay.

Whether you're a high-school student applying for a summer program, a college student studying abroad in Italy, or a retiree volunteering at an organic farm in Vermont, it's my sincere hope that these ten tips will help you get the most out of your home-stay.

1) Appreciate

Be sure to express your appreciation for your host family's hospitality at every opportunity.

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Sincere smiles and profuse thanks go a long way towards smoothing out early interactions, and the more you consciously and visibly appreciate what your host family does for you, the more they will be inclined to create and share fun experiences with you in the future.

Good times are contagious, and a positive outlook can go a long way.

2) Relax

Stress is also contagious, and the beginning of a home-stay will definitely be a high stress time for everyone involved.

Make a conscious effort to relax, smile and be at ease around your host family, and they will relax in turn.

3) Immerse

The most successful home stays, like the most effective language study programs, are fully immersive.

Although you might be tempted to hang out with people from your home country from time to time, make the effort to totally commit yourself to the local culture instead.

You might find that homesickness and culture shock pass quickly without a fellow traveller around to remind you of home.



Photo by [pfurlong](#)

4) Laugh

Don't take yourself too seriously!

No one will expect you to have mastered every cultural intricacy as soon as you arrive, so if you botch an introduction or mistakenly pour the salad dressing into your soup, just laugh about your mistake.

Nothing breaks down cultural barriers like a mutual gigglefest.

5) Respect

Maintain a respectful attitude, especially when interacting with older people.

Constantly give attention to how your actions and demeanour impact other members of the household, and strive to model culturally appropriate behaviour at all times.

6) Gift

Never arrive for a home-stay empty-handed, and make an effort to acknowledge host family milestones with a culturally appropriate gift.

The best gifts are those with a connection to your home culture, such as a local handicraft or regional delicacy.

For example, as a Vermonter, I always travel with maple sugar candies.

7) Ask

If you're unsure about something, just ask!

Even if you don't share a common language with your host family, a simple question like how to bathe will be easy for them to answer.

Be proactive and cheerful about your questions and needs.



Photo by [davetrainer](#)

8) Chill

Travel is often a high-energy activity, but home stays are different. Don't expect your host family to constantly entertain you.

Instead, take the opportunity to chill out and observe the daily rhythms of the household and community.

9) Risk

Take chances, and try things you might not attempt at home. Try cooking a meal for your host family, or sing a song at the local festival.

Even if you aren't a chef or a singer, making the effort to step outside your comfort zone and attempt something new is a great recipe for personal growth – and your host family will appreciate the effort.

10) Remember

Keep in touch with your host family after you return home. A thank you note is the bare minimum.

Share photos, exchange New Years cards and really make the effort to maintain your friendship.

A deep and enduring international friendship is one of the most valuable things in life. With luck, your home stay will be just the beginning of a warm and lasting relationship.