

The Homestay Experience!

Preparation for Your Student's Arrival



Dear Homestay Family,

Homestay is one of the most important experiences for an overseas student and is the basis on which students will remember their time in Australia. Each year, Russo's Homestay families open up their homes to our international students and provide a happy and exciting experience for our students while they are studying with us.

To prepare you for your student's arrival, we have prepared some information to assist you with your Homestay experience.

We encourage you to read these details and retain this as useful reference.

BECOMING A HOST FAMILY

The First Step

As of the 1st of May 2002 the Commission for Children and Young People require those who are working with children, such as homestay families, to apply for a 'Working with Children Check'. Successful applicants are then issued with a Suitability Card (also known as a Blue Card), which is valid for 2 years.

To assist families in applying for suitability checks, application forms for the 'Working with Children Check' can be supplied by Sarina Russo Schools | Australia at the time of your home inspection. The application is free for families that only wish to host one or two students at a time.

If you prefer not to apply for a Suitability Card, you must purchase a "Police Certificate" (Australia-wide Criminal History). Please apply at any police station in Queensland. The cost is \$37.30 per certificate.

All members of your household over the age of eighteen (18) must apply for either a Suitability Card or a criminal history check. If you have already completed this process, the original documents must be available during the time of your home inspection.

Preparation

Once you have been issued with a Suitability Card and informed Russo of your registration number and expiry date, it's time to start preparing for your students' arrival.

Perhaps the most important pre-requisite for any successful homestay experience is the willingness of the family to accept students as a family member. Please welcome them into your home with open arms and give them the same care and attention as you would your own children.

Try to imagine the difficulties of living in a foreign country and moving in with an unknown family. Please treat our students as you would like to be treated.

A set weekly fee is charged to the student to cover general living expenses including meals, use of all household facilities, board and utilities. If the student is over 18 years of age, Russo will reimburse the homestay family \$180 per week. If the student is under 18 years of age and therefore requires Guardian homestay, the family will be reimbursed \$220 per week. The first payment is made on the Wednesday after the students arrival. Further payments are made fortnightly.

The Student's Arrival

You will be informed of your student's profile and the date and time of arrival. Please be sure to give them a warm welcome as they are in an unfamiliar country and this will help them to settle in and feel comfortable.

Arrival Day

Arrangements may vary, but with most students, the College Limousine will greet students at the airport and escort them directly to your home.

With 'tour students' (short term students), they will be transported by coach to Sarina Russo School | Australia (SRSA) at The Sarina Russo Centre, 82 Ann Street, Brisbane (next door to the Carlton Crest Hotel). A letter confirming the homestay agreement will notify families of the date and time they are required to present themselves at the school.

Upon meeting your student, familiarise yourself with the level of his/her English language and general state of mind. Some may be shy and anxious, while others positive and optimistic. Whichever the case, your enthusiasm will be the key to a great two-way learning experience. Keep in mind that they may be very tired from travelling at this first meeting.

Arriving Home

Of course the students will be unfamiliar with your home, so show them around. Take time to explain the use of facilities, your routine, meal times, use of the telephone and other house rules.

Some explanation of nearby shopping facilities, shopping hours, banking, currency, fares for bus or train and other information will be of great help. This will also be reinforced in their English classes.

Facilities & Requirements

Students must be provided with a bedroom and study area, access to a clean bath/shower/toilet and made welcome to join the family for television and daily activities.

BEDROOM

A basic, single room should include:

- comfortable, full-size bed (not a futon, temporary or camp bed)
- study desk, chair and lamp
- wardrobe and dressing table
- adequate lighting

It is a good idea to point out our Australian sleeping arrangements as some Asian students have been discovered spending uncomfortable winter nights on top of the covers! So please fold back the covers to show that in Australia it is usual practice to sleep between the sheets.

BATHROOM & TOILET

The bathroom should be clean with sufficient hot water. Please do not be embarrassed to explain the use of the facilities. It is best if you inform the student sooner rather than later as to how much time they can spend in the shower, as they won't be familiar with your water heating system.

Australian toilets tend to be very different from other countries. Please ask your student if they use this type of toilet at home. If not, please explain how to use your facilities. Female students should be informed of the arrangements for the disposal of sanitary items, as they are often too shy or lacking in vocabulary to ask. They may also need some advice or assistance in purchasing sanitary items.

Heating & Cooling

International students tend to react to our climate a little differently from us. Please ensure you have a heater and fan available if requested by the student. Don't forget to advise the student of safe operating instructions.

Laundry

We ask that "tour" students have their washing done by the homestay family as they are here for such a short period of time. Many female students however, are embarrassed at the thought of others seeing or handling their underwear. The use of a small laundry bag (generally used for stockings), may be a simple way of eliminating this embarrassment. The students may then wish to hang the underwear themselves.

With long term students, washing arrangements can be negotiated.

House Keys

Please ensure that 'long term students' have his/her own set of keys to allow greater freedom and convenience. It is also very important that you clearly explain security procedures for your home.

Damage to Premises

Wear and tear in the normal course of use should not be charged to the student. However, students are expected to pay for any undue damage caused during their stay. It is also a good idea to check your insurance policy to see if you are covered for water and fire damage should this result from the action of a student.

Holidays

Please keep your holiday arrangements in mind when you are thinking of accepting students.

Our long term students may decide to return to their home country for a holiday, or go away with friends during holiday breaks. If the student wishes to return to your home after their holiday, we suggest that you charge 50% of the normal homestay fee as the student won't be using food, electricity, water etc during this time. However this is totally up to the host family and can be negotiated with the student if needed.

Transport

We ask that you familiarise 'long term students' with transportation to and from college. An explanation of bus or train routes, the cost and the timetables will be most helpful. It would also be appreciated if a member of your family could escort the student to SRSA on their first day.

It is expected that 'tour students' will be dropped off and picked up from an arranged point (generally outside the entrance to Carlton Crest Hotel) by private transport. Where public transport is used, the cost is borne by the homestay provider, not the student.

DURING THE STUDENT'S STAY

Communication

As you may be aware, English language proficiency levels among the students vary, so the use of signals and guessing games is common! A bilingual dictionary is most helpful and you will find that students usually have one with them. While pointing out mistakes can be helpful, this needs to be balanced with positive encouragement. Praise your student on hi/her progress!

Please bear in mind that the students are from different cultures, so try not to automatically misinterpret certain behaviour as impolite. Also, some aspects of Australian etiquette may seem very strange, so please exercise patience when discussing these rules.

We encourage you to request common courtesy and cooperation from your students. Arrangements for entertaining friends, noise levels and meal times should always be discussed. Many potential problems can be avoided through developing mutual respect for each other's wishes.

Food

The standard arrangement for 'long term students' includes your usual breakfast and cooked evening meal. Some students will prefer to purchase lunch here in the city, however please ensure you provide the student with sufficient ingredients to prepare their own lunch if they prefer. 'Tour students' will require a packed lunch most days, which will be indicated on the itinerary. Some days a salad or sweets, such as cake, may be requested as an alternative to a packed lunch.

For dinner, we ask you to encourage your students to have the same meals as you do and to eat together, as this is a perfect time for conversation. Alternative arrangements should be made if the student has special dietary needs due to medical or religious reasons. If the family chooses to eat out at a restaurant during the course of the student's stay, then the family will be expected to bear the cost.

When out shopping, please encourage students to explore and become familiar with what can be purchased for their personal needs.

Safety

This is particularly important for families with young children. Please inform students of the need to keep medication, cleaning fluids and breakables out of children's reach. The use of heaters and other electrical appliances should be explained carefully. Fire precautions should also be mentioned.

Study

Study is an important component of both the tour and regular programs. As students are expected to complete daily homework, please ensure that they have a quiet and comfortable place in their room, or elsewhere in the home, to do so. We also encourage you to assist students with their English as well. However, be careful of speaking “You Tarzan, me Jane” type of English. Just use normal English of simple sentence structure and speak slowly to allow processing of information.

Telephone & Internet

Naturally parents will be anxious to hear from students on their safe arrival here in Brisbane. We would ask that you allow students to call home ‘reverse charges’ at their request on arrival. Students staying long term in Australia will need to make provision for calling overseas, such as the purchasing of a telephone “calling card” which operates by credit. These cards are prepaid and can be used on any phone, usually for just the cost of a local call. Should you experience any difficulty communicating this idea please refer this student to Student Services on level 8 at SRSA.

All SRSA students have access to the Internet at school. If you agree to the student using your computer, please ensure they understand your Internet Access Provider’s terms and conditions. If you have time or download limits on your account please ensure you explain this to the student and set limits if necessary.

If you don’t like to receive phone calls late at night it is a good idea to explain to the student that there are specific times when it is unacceptable to receive calls on the home phone line. Many international students keep late hours and may expect to use the phone late at night. Some homestay families have been prepared to allow the student to install their own telephone line. This way the student is directly responsible for all costs including the installation. This can be a great option for long term students.

Rules & Helping Around the House

You can expect reasonable cooperation from your students, as they are encouraged to involve themselves with some of the family chores. Students are expected to tidy their own room and assist in cleaning up after meals (this may be a new experience particularly for some male students from Asian countries).

Please advise students of any particular house rules that you would like them to observe within the first couple of days of their arrival. Common examples are locking doors, turning off lights when leaving the room, phoning if not coming home for dinner, visiting time for friends etc.

Leisure

Most students appreciate the chance to experience activities with a difference. Getting them involved in your family outings to sporting events, local attractions and social events such as BBQs and parties will provide memorable experiences.

Culture Shock – What is it?

It is a feeling of disorientation and of being overwhelmed by an unfamiliar culture. This can cause both psychological and physical discomfort.

Some of your students may face extreme difficulty becoming accustomed to our Australian culture. This is called “culture shock”.

It does not come from one single event but is usually a combination of unfamiliarity with language, nonverbal behaviour, values and ways of reasoning that causes frustration and tiredness. As the problem builds up slowly, from a series of small events, it is not easy to know why students are not happy and why they are reluctant to speak the local language.

Help the student understand the “culture shock” they are experiencing. Help them to identify the cultural differences and take part in the activities being offered to them. With positive encouragement students will overcome their fear and start to feel comfortable in their new surroundings.

How Will the Student Overcome Culture Shock?

Remember that culture shock is a normal part of students’ adjustment and assimilation to their new environment, and that they will feel emotional and perhaps irrational. You can help your students by being more patient during this time and being supportive of them while they work their way through it.

Help them analyse objectively the differences between their home culture and our culture. Explain why things are done differently here. Help them to set some goals to redevelop their sense of control over their own lives. If they do not feel like leaving their room, encourage them to join in some recreational activities, even if it is only a shopping trip. If they have language difficulties, small goals of learning a few new words a day or watching a television program will help. Each successful encounter that they have will encourage self-confidence.

If your student is displaying typical signs of culture shock, please take some positive steps in helping them to cope with their new environment. If you are particularly concerned and feel you need extra assistance, please contact us immediately.

Remember that we are always here to help and advise you on any matters relating to your homestay experience.

You can contact the Accommodation Coordinator on 07 3221 5100.

We hope you enjoy your Homestay experience and that your student will become an international friend for life!