

Tips for Host & Friendship Families

Remember that your Japanese student would like to stay with a host/friendship family to learn about America's wonderful and diverse culture. You need not worry about recreating their country's environment! The visitor is here to learn about American family life and culture. Plan to include him/her in your daily life – grocery shopping, family outings, community events and meetings, outdoor activities, church, etc.



1. **Communication** - is very important to a successful hosting experience for both your guest and your family! Frequent and consistent interaction will help prevent confusion and minor misunderstandings from happening. If any conflicts arise, no matter how minor it may seem, it is better to address it and/or ask the JASG to mediate than let it linger.
 - a) **Expression** - When you first meet your guest, greet him/her with a big smile and a warm Atlanta welcome! They may be shy and exhausted after a long flight. Host families may find that their Japanese guest does not express any emotions or feelings verbally or physically. This may be partially due to the different communication styles for expressing feelings in the two cultures. In Japan, to express one's feelings is not encouraged by society. In fact, it is considered mature and polite not to show your feelings. Host families should expect some reservations on the part of the Japanese guests.
 - b) **Being clear** - When you introduce your family, clarify what the guest should call each person. Adults in Japan do not use first names unless they are very close - but they may expect our more casual American forms of address.
 - c) **Letting them know that it's okay to voice a problem** - There have been instances in the past when Japanese students didn't come forward with easily fixable issues because they "didn't want to be trouble." In one host family situation, a student was hesitant about telling the hosts that the dog had an accident on the bed. In a friendship family situation, students hesitated to let anyone know they needed kitchenware or other essentials.
 - d) **Body language, personal space, gestures**
 - Be aware that most Japanese are not used to physical contact. No bear hugs or cheek/air kisses, at least initially. An American handshake is best. Expect that the responding handshake may be limp and the guest may bow at the same time. Once students are more comfortable, show them what is customary in the U.S.
 - They may or may not make much eye contact. A lowered gaze, especially from a younger person to an elder, is considered respectful in Japan.
 - Not very many Japanese gestures are confusing, but there are some. For example, the Japanese beckon with a waving motion with the palm down and the hand flapping up and down at the wrist. Westerners may confuse this with a wave and not realize they are being beckoned. Although this gesture (*temaneki*) is used by both men and women and all age groups, it is considered impolite to beckon a superior this way.
 - e) **Language** - Take time to talk with your guest. Don't worry about language barriers!
 - Students speak some English, some not very well and others will speak it very well. Almost all will bring an electronic translator or a dictionary for occasional help. You may also want to keep a dictionary handy.
 - Confusing expressions: Avoid using negative questions ("Aren't you coming?", "Won't you join us?") and time terms like "a quarter past."
 - Speak slowly and clearly, but not louder or too slow. Use simple, short sentences and avoid slang or idioms. Be ready to repeat words or sentences, or to rephrase an idea using alternate words.
 - You can communicate by gestures, written words, and spoken language. Students reading and writing skills in English will probably be better than their listening comprehension or conversational skills. Nonverbal language and a friendly face go a long way!

2. Household

- a) **General tour of the house and neighborhood** - Give your guest a “house tour” upon arrival in your home. Include sleeping arrangements, bathrooms, where to hang and put away clothes, instructions for dirty laundry, where the light switches are, and where things are in the house. Please also give your student a tour of the neighborhood, and explain directions transportation to/from home, bus stop, MARTA station, and school, and other important places. Share a map of the neighborhood, city, and etc. if necessary.
- b) **Household items/appliances** - Explain how things work in your home. If you have a fancy guest bed with lots of decorative pillows, please show the guest where to put them when ready for sleep. Show your guest how to use the shower. Show them where their towels and washcloths are located. Bathing in Japan is quite different from what we are used. Make sure your guest understands that the shower curtain must be inside the tub and that water should not go on the bathroom floor. Also inform him/her if there is a limited hot water supply. In Japan, bath time can also be relaxation time so students may occupy the bathroom for a long time, taking time to bathe on a daily basis. Please be clear about your expectations for bathroom use, as well as how long of a shower he/she can take daily, and how often, if at all, whether they can take baths.

Introduce your household appliances (such as the TV, microwave, stove, oven, washing machine, dryer, thermostat etc.), explaining or demonstrating how they work and any safety precautions. Be specific when explaining about how to do laundry and how often you'd like students to wash clothes. In Japan, dryers may be rare with most people hanging their clothes out on a line to dry. Therefore, laundry may be a daily routine. However, in the U.S., with the large capacity washing machines and dryers, laundry is typically a weekly routine. Ask students to turnoff lights when not in use and other things you may think is common sense.



- c) **Home stay rules** - Explain your house rules and any curfews to your guest. Students are expected to be part of the family but clearly discuss what other expectations you may have for them. Japanese people are told that Westerners do not take shoes off inside the house. If your household does not wear shoes inside the house, you should mention it. Many Japanese are unfamiliar with Americans going barefoot or in socks inside the house. Your guest may choose to wear slippers inside. Let them know what is okay in your household.

If you have a pet, explain how he/she should handle it -- for example, no picking it up, no human food, is it allowed on furniture or not, etc. Since most Japanese keep dogs outside, they may not be aware of toxic or harmful substances to your pet around the house like chocolate or raisins. Explain your family's customs about snacking. If applicable, tell your guest that it is OK to open the refrigerator or pantry and have snacks. In Japan, it is considered extremely rude to open someone else's refrigerator or to help yourself to food from their kitchen. Initially, he/she may feel hungry in the middle of the night because of the 13-14 hour time difference.

You may find that repeating rules and expectations will be necessary as your student adjusts to living with you. To double-check comprehension, you can ask students to explain what he/she understood. It may also be effective to write down and give the rules to the student so that they can refer back and remind themselves.

3. General Advice

- a) **Exhaustion**: This is sometimes referred to as “**cultural fatigue**.” For the first month or two especially, students will be overwhelmed and easily exhausted. This is a natural part of the adjustment process, and comes from hearing and trying to understand English 24/7. Your student may also appear to have very low English language abilities but as students adjust to daily routines and gets acclimated to the speed, intonation, regional accent, and speech style of actual spoken English, this cultural fatigue and language barrier will dissipate.

- b) **Gifts** - Gift-giving plays an important part in Japanese life and you are likely to receive some kind of gift from your guest. It may be advisable to be prepared with a few small welcome or farewell gifts to return the favor (items should be easy to pack). However, hosts should not feel obliged to buy expensive gifts for your guests, even if they bring expensive gifts. It is the spirit of the gift that is important and not what you paid for it.
- c) **Food & Meals** - Many kinds of American foods are available in Japan. Your guest most likely will eat American food. Though a generalization, many Japanese have a much blander palate than Americans: they may find curry or chili too spicy or cake too sweet.

Home stay students will receive breakfast and dinner Monday through Friday. Breakfast items can include eggs, bacon, cereal, yogurt, danish, toast, etc. Include your students at family dinners each night (or provide groceries for them to cook on their own if you are not going to be present). Please also provide groceries for snacks. Students are responsible for their own lunch and weekend meals will be up to you and the student as students may go out with friends during freetime. Friendship family students have a similar set-up with the on-campus cafeteria/dining hall. Students can eat breakfast, lunch and dinner Monday through Thursday, breakfast and lunch on Friday and they are on their own on weekends and holidays. Please spend time with students during weekends and holidays (schedule permitting for both you and the student) – but please know that students are expected to pay for their own way unless you offer to pay for them.

It is less stressful for families and students to set expectations about when meal times are and when meals are “on your own” or eaten as a family. Due to the different cultural norms and customs with meals, it may take some time for the student to physically adjust to eating American food daily. Please be patient with them and not be alarmed if their appetite fluctuates during the first several weeks. Sometimes it is easy for the host family to take this dislike of American food personally. It is not personal; instead, the student is dealing with a type of culture shock where familiar ‘comfort foods’ are not available and they therefore reject all the unfamiliar food.

- d) **Personal time** - It is important for your guest to have some free time for personal needs, such as reading, relaxing or just being alone. At the same time, guests should be encouraged to spend time joining in the activities of the host family and friendship family not staying in their room all the time.
- e) **Activities (Friendship Families)** - Homestay families and Friendship Families will no doubt be spending time together. Please keep in mind that many of the students are friends and may want to invite a classmates along. While homestay students interact with their families daily, friendship families may experience periods in which your friendship student is busy with other plans. Please encourage them to use English as much as possible (they may have only Japanese roommates in their dorm) and remember you and your student both will get more out of the experience working together and communicating as much as possible. Remember, Friendship Family students are on their own for weekend meals and this would be a perfect opportunity to spend time together and not only go out for lunch/dinner but take part in a variety of activities including going to the movies, going to a ballgame, going to a museum, participating in a festival, spending time at your home, and etc.
- f) **Conflicts** - When sharing home life, it is only natural that conflicts arise. The best thing to do when you sense that there is conflict between your student and another member of your family is to sit down and talk about it. Many times, the conflict is simply based on a miscommunication or various assumptions made by different people. Talking will take care of it. It is normal for miscommunications to arise on occasion, since people from different cultures operate from different “common sense.” Talking about things openly and candidly can also be opportunities for everyone to get to know each other even more and create an even stronger bond.

If the topic is sensitive, or there are questions as to how to approach the talk, please contact us! We are happy to provide our insight from the cultural perspective, and suggest ways to resolve issues quickly and smoothly. Please do not feel that by letting us know there are problems, you are getting your teaching assistant into “trouble.” We understand the sensitivity of the relationships between host families and their teaching assistant. We do our best to approach all issues with respect for privacy. Our ultimate goal is to help.

- g) **MOST IMPORTANTLY, HAVE FUN AND ENJOY YOUR TIME TOGETHER WITH YOUR STUDENT. 4 MONTHS WILL GO BY FAST AND IT WILL BE TIME FOR YOUR STUDENT TO GO HOME BEFORE YOU KNOW IT. THIS WILL BE AN EXPERIENCE THAT BOTH YOU AND YOUR STUDENT WILL REMEMBER FOR A LIFETIME!**