



Being an Effective Host Family

Upon Arrival: The GSE coordination team will put together a small welcoming group to meet the team at the airport and transport them to a hotel. The welcoming group may include some of the host families from the first club/community that is being visited. The team will be staying in a hotel for the first night or two, allowing them time to recover from jet lag. They may do some low-key touring of the area. Some outdoor activity should be built in to counteract jet lag. If at all possible, they will not be expected to make a club appearance or participate in vocational activity for the first couple of days. The members of the coordination team will meet with the team on the first day after their arrival to provide an orientation to the upcoming month.

Share home and lifestyle. You will be asked to house the guest for 3-5 days. While the team members are living in local homes, there should be as little disruption of the daily routine as possible. Host families are encouraged to share their daily life and culture as it normally exists. This does not mean elaborate parties and entertainment, but allowing the guest to participate in daily family activities, religious pursuits, community involvements, etc. Team members should never be pressured to attend religious activities with you. If the coordinators have information on special interests of the team members, it is beneficial to do some matching of interests. If you have been provided with e-mail addresses before the exchange, feel free to contact the team members to offer a special welcome.

Icebreaking activities. In the evening with your guest, ask to see some pictures of his/her family, home and community. Be prepared with pictures of your own, especially if your children are no longer at home, and/or you have grandchildren. You may also wish to talk about work, hobbies and other interests. Generally speaking, discussions about politics and religion should be avoided or approached with care.

Food and drink. The host family is expected to provide breakfast and an evening meal unless you are otherwise directed. Lunch is usually taken out of the home on vocational days. Team members are asked to inform us of any dietary restrictions. Part of the experience of the exchange is for them to partake of our typical foods, so serve what is normal fare for you. Be sure that the guests have access to plenty of drinking water, as this helps to overcome jet lag. If you are living at a higher altitude than what the team came from be especially conscientious about having the team member hydrate well. Should you notice that the guest is not eating well, try visiting the local grocery store and let them choose some food. A visit to such a store is usually a very interesting cultural experience.

Allow for free time and rest. The team's itinerary should provide at least a half day free in the middle of each week and one full free day on each weekend for the team member to rest, write letters, shop, sightsee, or spend time with the host family. If an evening "at home" is planned, your visitor might enjoy meeting small groups of the family's friends (not necessarily Rotarians). Team members should not be obligated to participate in family activities when rest time has been scheduled. Ask your guest what (s)he would like to do. Often very little time has been scheduled for physical activity, so some may wish to go to a recreation center to work out or swim, or to simply take a hike or walk. Do encourage the guest to go to bed at an early hour. Activities tend to start early and are quite exhausting. Be sensitive to altered sleep patterns of teams who have crossed many time zones.

Telephone and internet access. Unless you have inexpensive long distance service, beware of giving permission for the guest to use your phone.. The guest might be encouraged to purchase a phone card at a drug or grocery store. Many team members are perfectly happy to communicate with home via the internet.

Be aware of language factors. Most of teams make some effort to learn the language of the country that they are visiting. If you know ahead of time that this is not the case, you will want to do the best you can using a dictionary and gestures. If you are having difficulty communicating with your guest speak very slowly and pronounce each word distinctly, separate individual words, and avoid using colloquialisms or slang . Colloquialisms. Speaking loudly does not help. They are not deaf. While it is usually preferable to have team members assigned one to a household, there may be times when the coordinators will arrange for a non-English speaker to be paired with a team member who has a better command of the language.

Laundry. Keep in mind that team members will be away from home for four or five weeks and that doing laundry will be necessary. When the guest arrives, ask if there is any laundry to be done. They may need help with the machines.

Gifts. At the conclusion of the guest's stay the host family may exchange small but meaningful gifts or souvenirs. Gifts should be small and lightweight. Something indicative of the region or country would be appropriate. Consider having a friend take pictures of the guest and the host family in their home or garden and provide copies to the team member before he or she departs.

Departure. Most likely host families from the last club/community will be asked to provide transportation to the airport and to be part of a send-off group.

You should know that GSE teams consistently report that the experience of staying with a host family is the most meaningful part of the exchange experience. Having the opportunity to see how people in another country live is extremely meaningful and memorable and "builds goodwill and friendships".

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