

HOST FAMILY INFORMATION

..... Family :

..... student :



Thank you for accepting to host one of the students participating in this years' program. It is with your generous support that this program is able to provide wonderful learning opportunities for the students from Japan and for the students of

It is hoped that you will find the experience a rewarding and positive one. Your student will feel part of the family, if they are treated as such. Being a guest; on one's very best behaviour for eight days, can be rather exhausting, so please include your student in the daily running of your home.

The following notes provide some information into aspects of Japanese culture, which will hopefully offer some insight into what to expect.

Japanese people do not wear shoes inside the home and feel relaxed in slippers. Providing a pair of scuffs/slippers may be a thoughtful welcome gift.



Communication

The students have learnt English at school for a number of years and will probably have a good understanding of grammar and vocabulary BUT may not be confident about speaking. Whilst oral communication is gaining in importance, it has not been a traditional part of Japanese school English Language programs.

For successful communication:

Speak slowly in a relaxed, quiet voice. It's obvious that your student will not be able to understand you if you use the same speech mode that you would use on your children or friends. A calm, quiet voice helps a lot.

Keep an unstressed, happy facial expression, but *not one you would use on a 2-year old*. As with the voice, a friendly, natural expression will show your willingness to make communication work.

Act as though you have all the time in the world. Good communication takes time and patience, especially at first.

Repeat as often as necessary, still composed, slightly slower than before. As strange as it may seem, some people speak louder whenever they're asked to repeat something. If you seem irritable when asked to repeat, the student probably won't ask for repeats anymore, finishing out the homestay period just pretending to understand. Rephrasing the question/ statement into a more basic style may also help. Avoid the use of slang and colloquial expressions.

Have a pen and paper handy to write down words or phrases when necessary. Ask your student to keep their dictionary handy, and use it when necessary. As mentioned already, the Japanese tend to be much better at understanding written English than spoken. By taking the time to write things down, using simple sentence structures, and using the student's English-Japanese/Japanese-English dictionary, there should be nothing you cannot discuss — it just may take awhile. It is also handy to jot down important details for the student to check up on later.

Have the student repeat important points to verify her understanding. During the homestay period there are some things that cannot be left to chance. Meeting times, places, and changes in the family's regular schedule are the most common. Sometimes, when a student is tired or lazy, he/she will nod and say "yes" to everything you say. If it is really important, it's good to check by making them repeat it. For example, asking "What time is Bob going to pick you up at school today?" is a good way to find out exactly whether or not the student knows when Bob will pick them up.

Keep sentences simple. Using the question in the above paragraph as an example, let's see how confusing English can get. Someone could ask, "Now, what time is Bob . . .?" or "Now, do you know what time Bob is . . .?" etc. Japanese students won't know what the "now" means (they only know the "right now, this instant" *now*), so that strange "now" at the beginning of the sentence will throw them. Native English speakers unconsciously weed out these unnecessary insertions when listening to others, but students hear them and think they're an important part of what's being said. It may be very hard, but it will really help to clean up your speech, keeping it as clear of unnecessary words as much as possible. Avoid asking negative questions such as 'Don't you eat cereal in Japan?' The responses you are likely to receive are 'Yes, (I don't eat cereal)' or 'No, (I do eat cereal.)' which can be quite confusing for all.

Refrain from joking and "kidding around" for the first few days. The Japanese joke and kid around, too, but not nearly as often as some Australians do, and only after a common bond of friendship or "trust" has been formed. Australian humour can sometimes be quite sarcastic whereas Japanese humor is often more slapstick in nature. If you do kid, smile and laugh a lot, and don't play the part too seriously. Wait until you feel you know each other pretty well. Also, don't use the word "bad" when referring to people. To the Japanese mind it has a serious meaning, and may not be understood in a kidding context.

Vagueness in Answering The Japanese are quite good at bottling up their feelings and keeping their opinions to themselves, especially when they're outside of their own territory. Due to this, most homestay students will try to get along with their host family and not "make any waves."

When asked a question like "What would you like to drink?" the student will be wondering *How do I say "anything will be fine" in English?* A much more successful approach would be to name or show an assortment of drinks, then have them choose. If asked, "*Do you want to go see a movie this Saturday?*" the student will wonder what will make the asker happy, and feel a sense of responsibility regarding the final outcome of the decision. However, if asked, "*We're going to go see the movie, 'Pirates of the Caribbean' this Saturday, okay?*" the student feels that since everyone's mind is already made up, there is no real responsibility connected with the decision. This kind of question will be much easier on the student's mind.

When asking yes/no questions, try to give the student enough information to make it as easy as possible. As they gain experience with the English language and the foreign culture, these kinds of questions will eventually be handled with more confidence.

Other Points :

- Whilst you may be interested to know all about their home life, family, school, hometown etc, please try not to ask too many questions in the one sitting, as it can be quite exhausting for the student. You may receive only vague answers to questions about parents' occupations (eg Dad is a company employee). That is all the information that would be normally conveyed in Japan.
- Sharing photos is a pleasant activity and helps break the ice.
- Encourage your student's attempts at speaking English. Try to be sensitive when correcting mistakes – merely re-stating the sentence correctly, can be helpful.
- The students have various homework tasks to complete and a daily diary to write in English. They will need some time in the evenings to do this.
- Sometimes, you may feel exhausted trying to encourage conversation whilst receiving only 'Yes/No' answers. Don't be discouraged but don't be surprised if the student does not initiate conversation. As the student relaxes and builds confidence, conversation may become easier. However, you do not need to feel obliged to continually make conversation.
- Students may be unaccustomed to saying 'Thankyou' for things they would assume to be someone else's normal responsibility. In most situations in Japan you don't thank someone for a kindness. Rather, you apologize for putting the person out. That is why some host parents will get a "sorry" out of a student when they expected a "thank you." Depending on the situation, a humble nod in Japan can be acceptably used in place of the "thank you" we may anticipate. Learning about customs in Australia is all part of their experience and manners expected in your family situation can be gently explained, if you wish.
- Since household work or responsibilities are mostly unknown to Japanese students, volunteering to help someone is unknown as well. If your student doesn't volunteer, it isn't because they are lazy; it's simply a lack of training. Once again, here's where the cultural experience can be a valuable one. You, as host families, are good examples of 'volunteerism'. Hopefully, the students will realise this and appreciate your spirit of giving enough to learn from your example.

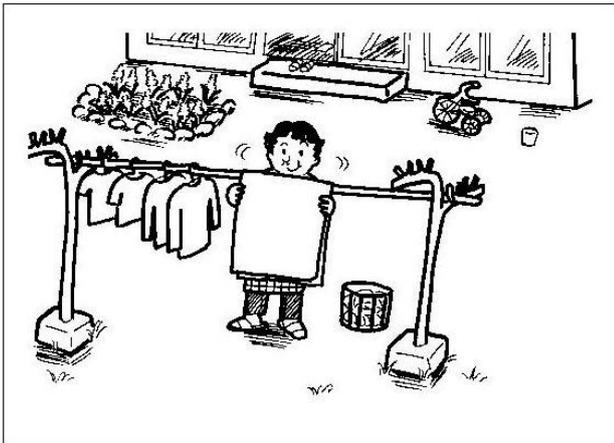
Bathing and Laundry



Japanese people tend to bathe in the evening, in deep, hot baths. The purpose is for relaxation, and all family members use the same bath water. This means that people wash themselves thoroughly BEFORE getting into the bath. The whole bathing process can be time consuming.

- Please explain how *your* bathroom is to be used.
- If you offer the use of the bath tub, your student may take a shower first, putting a strain on the hot water supply!
- Japanese people tend to use fresh towels every time they bathe (the towels are smaller and lighter weight than ours). Explain how/where your student may access bath towels, and what to do with them, once used. They may also be unaccustomed to using a bath mat – so please explain this too.
- Please ask when your student would like to shower OR suggest a time that would suit your family's routine. Providing a time limit may be handy – water restrictions are very rare in Japan!

- Some girls may be concerned there is no lock on the bathroom door. Please assure them they will not be disturbed when the door is shut!



The rotary clothesline is not to be seen in Japan! Many people hang washing on poles, in the garden, if they have one, or on balconies and verandas.

- Please explain the clothes washing routines in your household –eg. When? Where dirty clothes are to be placed etc.
- Sometimes girls are shy about placing underwear into the general wash – offering a zipped wash bag is handy for smalls.

Bed and sleeping



Many school students in Japan go to bed late at night – midnight, or later is not uncommon. They may often leave home early in the morning to catch buses and trains to school. Most students have club activities after school each day before travelling home for dinner, homework, bath and bed. How do they manage? Students may fall asleep during class, as a result.

Japanese people often seem very good at power napping. It is quite amazing watching people board the train, sit down, nod off quickly, but wake up just in time to get off at their station. Likewise, many Japanese people readily fall asleep, during car trips. This may be disappointing, if the purpose of the trip is sightseeing – keeping the student involved in conversation may help keep them awake. Otherwise, let them sleep and be pleased to show them around the destination.

Whilst the students are in Australia, most will find speaking in English all day, quite tiring. It would be advisable to encourage them to go to bed at a reasonable time, and check they have an alarm set to wake them up in the morning. In the morning, it may also not hurt to call out a 'Good Morning!' to check they are up and moving.

However, if they still stay up late in their rooms at night, as they are used to doing at home in Japan, there is little you can do. It is a problem, though, if your student tends to run straight to their bedroom after dinner, avoiding contact or communication with the family. If this should occur repeatedly, please talk with your student and try to include them in family discussions/activities.

Traditionally, Japanese people slept on futon on the floor. These days, most young people sleep in beds. Please show your student how their bed is made – eg. Will they sleep between two sheets with blanket/doona on top? Will they sleep on a sheet with just a doona on top? etc. Supplying an extra blanket, in case they feel the cold, is thoughtful. Please also show them how you would like the bed made in the morning.

In the student's room, a desk to work at, with a lamp, and a waste paper bin, would be handy. Some hanging space in a wardrobe would also be appreciated. Storage of their suitcase needs to be considered.



Meals

- You will receive information regarding any special dietary considerations of your student, including known allergies.
- Breakfast is often quite substantial in Japan. Some families eat a traditional breakfast, consisting of rice, soup, grilled fish etc.

Other families have a more western style, with eggs, bacon/ham, salad, toast/muffins, yoghurt, fruit etc. Cereal is less commonly eaten. Let your student know your breakfast routines – What time? Does everyone eat together? Does ‘Mum’ prepare the meal or does each person help themselves? What choices are available? Where are the cereal, bread, toaster, jam, margarine, milk, juice etc. kept? Where are bowls, glasses, and cutlery?

- School lunches also need to be discussed. Do you require the student to make their own? If so, please show them where everything is kept. It is unlikely they have done this before.
- Your student will need a lunchbox to take their lunch to school.
- Most Japanese do not eat apples whole; rather, they are peeled, quartered and placed in a serving bowl, with toothpicks for people to pick up individual segments. It may be a novel experience for your student to be offered one whole.
- Assure them that the skin on apples, when washed, is safe to eat (not full of chemicals!). Mandarins are often a popular fruit.
- A visit to the green grocer/supermarket/butcher may be of interest and a useful way to select lunchbox items.

The students will most likely be quite keen to sample ‘Australian’ food and will enjoy the dinners provided for them.

- It is uncommon in Japan for the meal to be served onto single dinner plates, and then placed on the dining table, so this will be a new experience for many.
- To the Japanese way of thinking, disturbing the person sitting next to you at the dinner table is rude, so rather than asking for something to be passed, it is more likely the person will just reach over and get it themselves.
- There is no need to try to frequently cook Japanese meals, although occasionally, steamed white rice as part of the meal, would probably be appreciated. (medium-grain Calrose rice is similar to Japanese rice).
- Most people use chopsticks, so if your student is not so adept at using a knife and fork, please be understanding.
- Also, if table manners vary from what you expect, please understand the student is not being rude, expectations are different in Japan. (For example, it is OK to slurp soup and noodles) You can help them learn your ways, if you wish.
- An occasional take-away meal may also be appreciated.
- Supermarkets often stock various Asian foods. Japanese soy sauce (made by KIKKOMAN) is available. Also dried seaweed (NORI), green horseradish (WASABI) etc can be found, if you or your student wishes to do some Japanese cooking.

Displaying affection

Traditionally in Japanese culture, public displays of affection or emotion were most uncommon. Women would often place their hand in front of their mouth to cover a smile, for example. Times are changing, however, the students arriving may feel quite embarrassed and overwhelmed if hugged, by their well-meaning host family members, on meeting them. Shaking hands may be a compromise position between a hug and bowing.

Gift Giving

Gift giving plays an important role in Japanese society, with two gift giving 'seasons' designated during the year. Wrapping can be quite elaborate.

When visiting, it is customary for Japanese people to give gifts on arrival, to thank in anticipation. The students will not be expecting this gesture to be reciprocal.

Mum? Dad?

Please consider how you would like your student to address you.

(Mum, Mrs Smith or Betty are all options).

Check that they are comfortable with this too.

Illness

If your student becomes unwell, they may have their own medications to take. These can be often quite strong and best kept out of reach of young host family members.

The students may be reluctant to take unfamiliar Australian medications.

If you are concerned please contact the host family company and they can speak to your student directly.

The students will have medical insurance if a trip to the doctor is required. Please contact the homestay company to help sort this out.

The excitement and anxiety of travelling overseas can often alter menstrual cycles. A kindly word of reassurance may help.

Please explain how sanitary products are to be disposed of.

Internet and email

- Your student may like to contact their home and friends via the internet. If you have this facility at home, please explain how and when it would be appropriate for the student to use it.

Souvenirs

In Japan, when someone goes on a trip, he or she brings back gifts for family members, friends, and neighbors. If a younger member of the family goes, parents, grandparents, uncles, and other relatives will often give money and say, "Here, buy something for yourself." However, the traditional rule of *omiyage* (souvenirs) states that about half of the money received has to be used for a gift to take back to the giver. If a student has several relatives living nearby it is not uncommon for her to be given several hundred dollars just for this purpose. She then *must* buy something for herself with half of the money to show appreciation for the gift. The other half of the money will be converted into soft toys, chocolates etc to take back to the giver(s). Again, this is the traditional spirit of *omiyage*.

Misunderstandings

Despite the best intentions of students and hosts, misunderstandings are inevitable, given the cultural differences involved. It is how such misunderstandings are dealt with, that may affect the ultimate success of the program

Thank you very much for welcoming these students into your home. I hope that this is an enjoyable and rewarding experience for you all.

Kind regards,

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SUMMARY CHECKLIST

Points of discussion with your student on the first night:

- Bathing – When? How long? Use of towels and bath mat, shampoo, soap
- Bed – How it is made, extra blankets, use of wardrobes, drawers etc
- Laundry – Dirty clothes where? How often?
- Breakfast – Time? What choices? Who makes? Dirty dishes?
- Lunch – Lunchbox- What choices? Who makes?
- Computer – When? How long? How to log on? Wi-Fi password?
- School travel – How? Time to leave home? How to return home?