



## **GENERAL TIPS**

### **Basics**

"It's not right, it's not wrong - it's just different". Keep an open mind. Don't look at everything as being either right or wrong; black or white, but try to look at things from all sides. Don't be afraid to try new things. Be curious. Smile a lot!

### **What to Pack**

Pack light, and remember whatever you take with you, will mean that you have less room to take things back. A good rule is that if you haven't worn it in the last year, chances are you won't in the next one either.

Check (and double) check with your airline to see how much weight you can take on board with you. Airlines can charge a lot for going over their weight restrictions. Remember too that you will have to carry your own bags, so try to get ones with wheels! As for carry-on's most airlines allow a carry-on and a purse, so use whatever you are allowed! Pack your carry-on with things you can't live without...if for some reason you make it there before your luggage!

### **Must Have's:**

passport; dictionary; journal; camera; address book; gifts for host families and host Rotary Club; small picture album of family and friends; comfortable shoes; at least one dress outfit; Rotary Blazer; Rotary pins and flags; prescription medications (at least 3 months' worth); and anything else you really couldn't live without for a year.

### **Language**

Make every effort to learn the language of your host country. Actually, learn as much as you can before you even go. This is an important part of the experience, and the only option if you really want to get to know the host country. People will probably also find you more interesting and treat you with more respect.

### **Talk to people**

The best way to learn a new language and make friends is definitely to talk to people. Even if you're a little shy, and maybe not so good at the new language, you should try to talk to people as often as you can.



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### **Come prepared**

Be sure of what you're getting yourself into. It's ok to have doubts now and then but make sure you're looking forward to going. Learn as much of the new language as you can before going. It'll be worth it! Read about the host country; learn some of its history and culture. Find a good map, and take a look at the place and country you're going to. Don't have high expectations and dreams of what it'll be like. You'll only get disappointed. And if things get tough, hold on, and think positive. It's not a dance on roses; you will have to make sacrifices as well. Find someone who has been an exchange student (preferably to the country where you're going) and ask them about their experience and other questions you might have.

### **When in Rome do as the Romans do, but...**

Remember your origin and that you're just a guest. You're different and that's your charm! That's what makes you special and interesting!

### **Remember names**

Try to remember the names and faces of the people you meet. This is usually very difficult especially in the beginning. But do your best. They probably will remember yours! If you forget a person's name, don't be afraid to ask.

### **Culture shock**

Coming to a totally new environment can cause you to suffer from what is called a culture shock. It passes after only a few days or weeks, but it can give you feelings of depression and anger, make you tired, irritated, and cause you to eat a lot. You're afraid to take risks. Minor problems can easily grow out of proportion. It's a common and normal reaction when you are in a new unfamiliar place.

### **Making friends...**

with other exchange students. Other exchange students are usually quite easy to make friends with since they're obviously in the same position as you are. There is nothing wrong with that, but try also to make friends with people who are native to the country you're visiting. It probably will not be as easy as you're used to from back home, but don't give up! It'll probably take more effort and time, but it will be worth it. Getting to know people is an important part of the experience. Remember it's not the places you see but the people you meet.



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### **Food**

Most exchange students gain weight while they're abroad. Not necessarily because the food is more unhealthy, but rather because you eat more. Usually you will lose most of the weight you gained after you've returned home.

### **Politeness**

Remember to always be polite. It pays off. You will find people friendlier. A simple thank you or other sign of appreciation is inexpensive and might make people think better of you. You represent: you, your family, your Rotary Club, and the U.S.A.

### **Activities**

Get involved in as many student activities as possible. It's a great way to meet people and usually a lot of fun. Team sports or "team activities" are especially good. Find out what's available and get involved as soon as possible.

### **Criticizing your host country**

Don't. At least not in presence of someone who might get offended. Remember that your own home country might not always be perfect either. You tend to see what is worse and not what is better. You look at the good things in your own country and compare these in the new country. Be diplomatic. No one wants to hear a foreigner tell how bad his or her country is.

### **Being spontaneous - don't be afraid**

You don't have to plan every activity long before. Be spontaneous and don't turn down an offer to do go out and have fun just because you're afraid to leave the comfort of your room.

### **Missing home**

If you miss home - and you probably will once in a while - don't lock yourself up in your room. Instead do some activity or just talk to someone. Being alone feeling sorry for yourself won't help and is a waste of time. The solution to your problem is to make sure you're busy and find something to do immediately when you're bored or lonely. Engage in activities, go out and do something or call a friend and arrange a get together.



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### **Calling, E-mailing, FaceTime, Skype...**

A good rule of thumb is to set up a schedule where your family calls you once a month. This may seem like a hard thing, especially when you are new to the host country, and feeling very lonely, but it will help you adjust. Obviously birthdays and holidays can be the exception, but try to stick to one call a month on average. E-mail should be used sparingly as well, especially since it can be much more expensive in your host country than here in the U.S. Of course, e-mail is cheaper than a phone call, but if you are constantly running to the computer to check to see if you got e-mail from home, you will miss out on a lot in your new home. Plus, remember how easy it is to hit "send" on your computer...and how you may be feeling sad and homesick one moment, and then happy the next. The recipient of your e-mail doesn't know how things have improved, only that you are thousands of miles away from home and feeling all alone.

### **Maps**

Find a good map of the local area where you're going and try to remember the closest cities and other points of interest.

### **Rotary Business cards**

Bring them everywhere you go. Carry some for instance in your wallet and hand them out to people you meet. (And would like to meet again of course!)

### **See places**

If you get the chance, travel some in you host country. Take the chance to take a look around. It's a big world out there!

### **Living with a host family**

When you will stay in a host family you must remember that it is your responsibility to adjust to your host family's way of doing things, and not the other way around. Don't expect everything to be perfect, but look for the positive. Share yourself with your family, react and respond to what people say to you or do for you and volunteer to help. Be honest. Your host family needs to know how you feel in order to change things if there is need for it or help you. Be open minded and flexible. Remember that you're staying in family and not at a hotel. Remember that your host family has also longed and looked forward to this. They have expectations and hopes too.



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### **Making "mistakes"**

Not knowing the local customs and ways of doing things you will make "mistakes", especially in the beginning of your stay. Don't let this get to you though, no one could expect you to do everything right the first time in your new environment. Don't look at this as being mistakes but rather as a learning experience. Ask someone if you're unsure about the local traditions, and be positive.

### **Taking Pictures and Keeping a Journal**

Writing about your feelings and experiences is a great way to work through feelings that you are having, and also help you to remember your year abroad. Taking lots and lots of pictures is also a great way to remember your year. Take your camera and journal everywhere you go...you never know what is going to happen on exchange, so you should be prepared! Also, keep an address book nearby to get down your new friend's information while you are thinking about it. Some address books also have space for people to write notes, have your friends write notes to you to remember them by...kind of like a yearbook for your exchange year!

### **Enjoy your stay**

A year goes by really fast, it'll be over before you know it. Make sure you enjoy your stay as much as possible. Don't save everything you want to do till the last week - do it right away (if possible), you will have enough things to do at the end of your stay anyway.

### **Learning about yourself**

Remember, no matter how much advice you get before you go, nothing will fully prepare you for what you will experience, and what you will learn about yourself in the process. Don't worry though, you will most likely have a good time! Maybe the most prominent thing you will experience is learning about yourself.

### **Coming back home**

Even if the day you're going back might seem pretty far away, remember time flies! When you get back home you will have a new perspective on things, and probably appreciate your family and home country more. Hopefully you'll have increased your tolerance and understanding. You will be more mature. Also remember that everyone might not be interested and willing to listen to your long tales. Find someone who is interested and let it out! Coming home can be more difficult, in some ways, than going away in the first place. If you don't feel happy to be back, or feel like you are lost between two worlds, don't worry, that is normal too.