

A place to stay

1

Whether you are thinking about taking a gap year before starting university, taking time out from a job for a few months, or studying as part of a university or college course – it's important to think about where you are going to stay. For longer stays, some people decide to rent a flat, while some opt for hotel or student accommodation. With flats and student digs, you're likely to have to share your space with flatmates or room-mates – which is more economical and means you get to meet people too. Another option is to choose a local homestay. This means staying in a family home, and eating your meals with the family. This option can work well for people staying in a different country for a longer period of time, although it's possible to arrange a homestay for a week or so – or even just a couple of days.

2

For a longer trip, there are obvious advantages to a homestay – being around a host family means you are practising the language all the time, even if you don't always feel like it! You also get to learn about the local culture, the local food at mealtimes, and the host family's lifestyle. If you're lucky, your host family may help you meet people – for example, being invited to family outings and other events. A homestay also provides a support network if things don't go to plan; if you are ill, homesick, or just need some advice, you shouldn't have to fend for yourself entirely. Share your problems with your host family; after all, they don't want a stressed-out foreign guest on their hands! It's likely they'll be more than happy to help out if they can.

3

It's important to think about what you hope to achieve during your stay, and specifically what you imagine you will get out of the experience. It's best not to have very high expectations, since you may be disappointed, for example if your homestay family are very busy and spend a lot of time out of the house, (although it would be weird if they didn't spend any time at all with you, helping you to settle in!) Be prepared to make your own friends so you don't end up housebound. You might, for example, get to know other students on your course, or through local networks like sports clubs, or through groups such as a reading or walking group.

4

Think about what you can offer your homestay family; it's nice if you can add an element of exchange to your visit. You should take some small gifts for them (nothing too spectacular!) which represent your hometown. You might, for example, take T-shirts or caps with your town or country printed on them, or a coffee table book with nice pictures. You could also choose some gifts for the children of the house – chocolates, colouring pens, or age-appropriate books. During your stay, you might offer to help around the house, or show off what a fabulous cook you are and prepare the family dinner; choosing to prepare a local dish from your own country would be appreciated. Taking a photo album with pictures of your family, friends, and even your pets, would also make a good talking point.

5

Every family will be different, and some things you experience during your homestay will be good, while others might be bad. Try to make the best of things, and don't hesitate to discuss any concerns with the family. Some problems can be solved simply by saying something – your host 'mum' or 'dad' isn't a mind-reader – but once you let them know what's on your mind, there's most likely a simple way to take things forward. For example, if you really don't like the food, you might offer to help with the grocery shopping so that you can choose some things you like to eat. If talking to the family doesn't solve a particular problem – for example if you know the family are not going to lend you a sympathetic ear, and you feel strongly about something – then you should talk to one of the homestay programme directors. If the worst comes to the worst, you can always change homestays.

1. Read the article. Match the headings (A–G) with the paragraphs. There are two headings you do not need to use.

A. Benefits of a homestay	D. Communicate with your host family	F. Be prepared to help yourself
B. Sharing your own culture	E. Planning a schedule	G. Some families are pretty weird
C. Where should I live?		

2. Read the article again. Are the following sentences true, false, or not stated?

- a. It's important to take a gap year before starting university.
- b. Host families are all very busy, so don't expect much from them.
- c. During your stay, it's a good idea to help out around the house.
- d. Most problems arise from differences in eating habits.

