



# Gaining a Family: Homestay Issues and Advising

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## Introduction

- Why do some students have positive experiences living with families while others have negative experiences?
- Is it possible to prepare students to have a positive experience in a homestay?
- If it is possible, how can we prepare students effectively?
- Overview of Session
  - Defining a Homestay
  - What We Already Know
  - Overview of Interview Study
  - Discussion of Themes
  - Guidelines



## Definition of Homestay

- A home stay is typically defined as a period of time in which a person resides with a family in a home located outside his or her country of residence (Gutel, 174).

## What do we know about homestays?

- Our own experiences
- What students tell us
- Very little research exists on homestays
  - Resources:
    - Association of Teachers of Japan. *Living with a Host Family*. September 21, 2009 from <http://www.aatj.org/atj/studyabroad/talk-homestay.html>.
    - Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
    - Gutel, H. (2008). *The Home Stay: A Gendered Perspective*. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, Volume XV, Fall/Winter 2007-2008, pp.174-188.
    - Paige, R.M., Cohen, A.D., Kappler, B., Chi, J.C., & Lassegard, J.P. (2002). *Maximizing Study Abroad: A Student's Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

## Why are homestays important?

- Opportunity for cultural understanding
- Language development
- Creating a social network
- Sharing of ideas and beliefs
- Interaction with locals
- Home away from home

## Interview Study

*In order to identify issues, we went to the source and initiated a group interview of past participants in homestays.*



- **Interview Information**
  - Four Students
    - 3 Female, 1 Male
  - Location of Study
    - 1 studied in Chile
    - 2 studied in Mexico
    - 1 studied in Great Britain
  - Interviewers asked a series of 6 open-ended questions in an informal setting

## Group Interview Questions

- Describe your living situation while you were abroad.
- Describe your relationship with your host family. Did you have different relationships with various members of the family?
- How could the Center for International Education have better prepared you to live with a host family, if at all?
- How could you have better prepared yourself, if at all?
- Were you surprised by anything about the experience?
- Do you feel differently now than you did during the homestay, or right after the experience?



## Advantages and Limitations of the Study

### Advantages

- Participants can report on past experiences
- Researcher has control over the questions
- Students can learn from other students' experiences
- Outlet for students to talk about experiences abroad

### Limitations

- Participants may experience bias on the part of the researcher and/or other participants
- Individuals are not equally "articulate and perceptive" (Creswell, 186).
- Perspective of the experience may change over time

## Identifying Issues

What issues can you identify in the participant responses?

In a group of two or three, please review the responses and discuss what issues you identify.



## Participant Responses

- Some families are in it for the money.
- It was a Bed and Breakfast-type mentality. There was no bonding.
- My family was my real family. They treated me like a daughter. I miss them a lot.
- They really were like my family. They took me to family parties and weddings. They even had a party on the first day I arrived from the States. I was not expecting to have a celebration after a long day of traveling.

## Participant Responses

- We were given false information at first. We were told there would be a man, woman, and their daughter, but we got there and there was no man. It was very awkward.
- It was awkward at first, but then I realized I just had to be myself and it clicked.
- It will be uncomfortable.

## Participant Responses

- I was definitely self-conscious and nervous. I know it was my fault that I didn't make more of an effort to get to know my family. I hated not being able to speak Spanish and not being able to express myself. I felt like I couldn't be myself.
- My friend never tried to befriend our host mom. She never put forth the effort.
- Some families are just different. You have to go out of your way to make an effort.
- You should go into it with an open mind and have the attitude that you just want to take it all in.
- Take advantage of your time there. Throw yourself out of your bubble.
- I don't think the language had anything to do with it. You just have to be willing to make mistakes.
- You have to be open to learn. I think so much of it is up to individual personality.

## Participant Responses

- I wish I'd gone by myself instead of with my best friend. I wish I'd been able to do things myself and do what I wanted to do. It was definitely cliquy among the Americans. They always did everything together and without locals.
- I felt tied down by my friend. I had to hold his hand, so I eventually had to sit down with him and talk to him about it. I don't think he was prepared mentally or emotionally.
- It would have been a better experience if I didn't live with English speakers.
- Think twice about living with a friend.
- My host cousin was my best friend. I just needed the one 'in' to make a Chilean friend group.
- It helps to create a tie in the country.

## Themes

- Families are different.
- The experience may be awkward or uncomfortable at first.
- Advisors should make every attempt to provide accurate information.
- The personality of the student affects the experience.
- Living with friends or other Americans tends to affect the experience in a negative way.

## Given the issues, how can we prepare students?

### 1. Advise Students to Create Ties in the Host Country

- Volunteering
- Sports
- Religious Organizations
- Participate in holiday celebrations
- Join a Student clubs/networks

*What would you add or change to these guidelines?*

### 2. Provide Realistic Information

It is OK to say, "Some families are in it for the money."  
Provide accurate information when possible

### 3. Facilitate Opportunities for Self-Awareness

- Cultural Awareness/Value Charts\*
  - Clear Goals\*
  - Willingness to Reduce Expectations\*
  - Understanding of your own cultural\*
  - Eagerness to Learn\*
- \* (Paige, 59-73.)



### 4. Discourage Students to Live with Friends

Ask students to think about how their friendships might change.  
Should a policy be made on discouraging this practice?

## Conclusion

- It is a challenge to prepare students for particular issues they may or may not face.
- Understanding what issues can arise is an important part of preparing students effectively.
- We can facilitate opportunities for students to be aware of the issues they may face and address those issues themselves.



Questions or comments?