

ST GILES VANCOUVER HOMESTAY GUIDE

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General Information

We have arranged for you to stay in homestay accommodation, and we hope you will be happy there.

Many people in Vancouver enjoy having a guest from a different country in their home, sharing part of their daily life with them. We like to place our students with people who will talk to them and welcome them as members of the household. Remember that you are staying in someone's home and their way of life may be different from what you are accustomed to in your country, so please discuss what is expected of you. If you have any difficulties or problems with your accommodation, first talk to your host. This often solves any problems. **If your host cannot help, please talk to our Accommodation Coordinator.** We are here to help and support you.

There are five guiding rules for getting the most out of your homestay time:

- Many things you take for granted will be challenged in Canada.
- Relax and enjoy the differences.
- Be open about your feelings. Share them with your friends, your homestay family and your accommodation coordinator.
- Seek new experiences. You will make the most of your time by embracing your new culture and family. Be willing to try new things – particularly food – and to go to new places.
- Keep a strong sense of your own values and beliefs.

Overview

What is included?

- 2 meals per day (breakfast and dinner) unless you have booked the bed and breakfast only option
- Private bedroom with desk, lamp, bed, window, closet, WiFi
- Some interaction with host family

What is NOT included?

- Snacks, lunches, between meal food and drinks
- Excessive quantities of food or drink

Rights and responsibilities

As a homestay student, you will have certain rights and responsibilities within your family. Some will be stated clearly. Others maybe more informal, but no less important. Here are some of them:

Rights

- You have the right to be treated with a warm welcome and respectful attention.
- You have the right to expect decent food and a clean room, with comfortable furniture, a window that opens and adequate lighting to study. You will probably share a bathroom with the rest of the family unless you have requested a private bathroom.
- You have the right to receive assistance and guidance to help you get around, tell you where to shop, places to go, etc.

- You have the right to privacy. Others should not enter your room when the door is closed. They should knock first and await your permission before entering. When you are away from the house, nobody should be in your room.
- You have **no** right to smoke or to play loud music, unless your host permits it.
- If something makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to talk it over with your host family or the Accommodation Coordinator.
- You have the right not to be sexually harassed or to be subject to racism.
- You have the right to reasonable use of the laundry facilities. That usually means doing your laundry once per week.
- You have the right to expect breakfast and dinner prepared for you every day.
- You have the right to change host family if you are unhappy. But, this should only be after talking to your host family and the Accommodation Coordinator and trying to solve the problems in the host family.

Responsibilities

- You should keep your room tidy and not eat in your room.
- You should be on time for dinner and advise your host **in advance** if you are not going to be there or are going to be late.
- You should treat the family's property with respect.
- You should follow the pattern of the family. Don't expect to watch TV at 3am or take a shower whenever you like.
- You should offer to help in the kitchen and with other daily household tasks like a member of the family would.
- Your homestay is not a hotel. Clean up after yourself, and don't leave personal belongings all over the house.
- You should ask permission in advance to bring a friend home.
- You should make sure that your host family know where you are.
- You should respect the family's privacy.
- You should be friendly, respectful and polite.
- You should respect the house rules.

Note: If you only study for 20 Lessons per week (mornings only), your host can ask you not to return to your homestay until after 3.30pm. If you only study for 20 lessons per week (afternoons only) your host can ask you to still leave your homestay at 9am. This is because our homestay agreement does not cover security and care during the day on weekdays. You are welcome to study at the school, or in the library or just to explore Vancouver.

Homestay accommodation

Homestay accommodation does not always mean that you will find two parents with children, as they are often too busy to host students. Your host family may be a single person, or two people whose children are away at school or have grown up, who have time to spend with their students.

You can expect to learn English more quickly if you live in an English-speaking home and practice English there. However, Canada is a multicultural country and not all hosts were born in Canada. All are fluent

speakers of English and speak English in their homes and in their daily lives, and it is helpful to become accustomed to hearing English spoken in different accents.

Expectations

It helps to have clear expectations before leaving and to evaluate whether they are realistic. What does homestay mean for you? What do you expect and want from the experience – and from your host family? How much nurturing do you need? It is important to consider what you can do for your host and not just think about what the host can do for you.

When you are in Canada, as you encounter problems you can return to your expectations and consider their part in any disappointments. Maybe your expectations were unreasonable. Maybe you have not been focused on your goals.

Some misconceptions that are common:

- The family will dote on you, with the host spending much of their day making your life easier. *In fact, family members will enjoy their time with you but they have their own lives to lead.*
- The homestay will be like a hotel. *In fact, you will have your own room but you will probably be sharing the other facilities.*
- Meals will be like in a restaurant. You will have a large breakfast with convenient choice; several options for lunch; and a full course dinner with soup and dessert. *In fact, meals tend to be hurried and quite casual.*
- You will be the only homestay student in the household. *In fact, often more than one student will be living with the family. This is an advantage for you, as you have someone else to share experiences with and someone else to practice English with.*

By keeping your expectations reasonable and clear, you will better enjoy the homestay experience.

Before you leave home

- If you have a special diet, make sure that the Accommodation Coordinator knows right away so that they can find you an appropriate home.
- Similarly, if you are allergic to or afraid of animals, please advise the Accommodation Coordinator before you arrive as many Canadian homes have pets.
- If you are not comfortable being in a family with children, advise the Accommodation Coordinator in advance.
- Make a list of any food allergies (or other allergies) to hand to the homestay family on arrival.
- Bring your own medicine for common ailments, such as colds or an upset stomach. It is better for minor ailments to take the medicine that you are used to.
- Bring slippers. Canadian homes can be quite cold and often do not have carpets.
- Bring sweaters and warm winter clothes (or be prepared to buy them when you get here). Vancouver can be cold.
- Bring (or buy on arrival) a good quality umbrella. Vancouver is also known as 'Raincouver'!

Arrival

On arrival, you will probably be jet lagged. You may be homesick. At the same time, you will be excited, keen to explore Vancouver and enter your new life. Your homestay family and your school might have a lot planned for you.

Be kind to yourself during this period. It is normal to have irregular sleep patterns. Also, don't expect everything to be wonderful from day 1. You are settling into a new family and that can take a little time.

If you are feeling homesick, concentrate on what you like about this new situation. Remember why you came to Vancouver and what your goals are.

Your study bedroom

You should make your bed every day and keep your room tidy so that your host can clean it. Check with the host on which day they are going to clean your bedroom. Your bed linen will be changed every week. Some hosts will do this for you; some hosts expect you to do it yourself.

Your host will give you a key to the house. In your room, you may expect privacy. If you wish to change the arrangement of the furniture in your room, talk to your host first. You should also not fix your own photographs, pictures, etc. to the walls without asking permission first.

Meals and meal times

- Your host will give you breakfast and an evening meal every day, but all between meal snacks and lunches are the responsibility of the guest. Do purchase any additional extras and ask your host family if there is somewhere you can store them, or whether you can use the refrigerator. Please do not help yourself to food you haven't purchased yourself.
- Breakfasts typically consist of toast, cereal, fruit, coffee or tea, and milk or juice. During the school/work week, breakfast is typically very informal, as everyone is eating and then leaving quickly.
- Most hosts try to make the weekend breakfast a little more flexible, however they do like to have their kitchen clean and closed by 12 noon. If you are planning on sleeping in and having a late breakfast, please let your host family know.
- Dinner is usually served between 6 and 7 pm and on most nights, you can expect it to be a 'sit down' meal with other guests and family. Dinners are the size of one restaurant meal portion, are designed to meet your nutritional needs, and should always include meat, fish, poultry or another protein.
- Guests are asked to notify their host family by 4pm if they are going to be late for dinner, or if they have made other arrangements to eat elsewhere. The earlier you can let your host know that you will be absent for a meal, the better. The kitchen should be clean and closed by 8pm so if you arrive home later than that, they will assume you have made other plans and your meal may not necessarily be saved for you.
- Most hosts try to make weekly dinners a little more informal as guests are often on excursions and they may have their own weekend plans. As schedules differ, you may find yourself eating on your own or with others.
- Please do not eat or drink (with the exception of water) in your bedroom.

- Remember to volunteer to clean up after mealtimes. It is a great opportunity to practice your English.
- Your hosts should provide you with a space to store your food for lunches. You should not expect to use the kitchen facilities for cooking big meals. However, some hosts will allow you to do some light cooking under their supervision. If you use the kitchen to prepare your lunch (e.g. a sandwich or salad), you should do that at a time that is best for your host family and be sure to clean up after yourself.

Showers

- You are permitted one shower per day, which should last no longer than 10 minutes. Hot water in Canada is very expensive and there are other household members who will be using the shower.
- Bathroom floors don't have drains, so make sure the shower curtain is placed inside the bath before showering.
- Showers should not be taken late at night when people are asleep as the noise can wake up the family members.
- Remove all loose hair from the bottom of the sink or shower before leaving the bathroom and put it in the wastebasket.

Laundry

You are expected to look after your own clothes. Some hosts will do your laundry, others prefer it if the student does their own.

If you are doing your own laundry, ask the host which day of the week is best for them and ask for instructions on how to use the machines. Generally speaking, you should not be doing more than one load of laundry per week.

Heating and lighting

Homes in Vancouver are not always as warm as you might expect them to be. If you are cold in your room, please ask your homestay for more blankets. It is usual to put more clothes on in winter than it is to turn up the heating.

Please also turn off all lights when you leave a room.

Absences

You must tell your host family if you are going to return home later than normal or be away overnight. If you are unexpectedly absent, they may feel it necessary to contact the school or the police. Please remember that even if you are an adult, your host family takes parental responsibility for you as a stranger in a new country – they worry about you as a parent would.

Guests

If you want to invite your friends to your host's home, you should ask your host beforehand. Ask what time they should arrive and leave, and where you can entertain them. If your host provides food or

drink, you should offer to pay for this. Try to be sure that your friends are reasonably quiet and do not disturb the rest of the household, especially late at night.

Boyfriends and girlfriends

If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, be very respectful of the time your partner spends in your host's home. Your host family agreed to host you, not you plus one other.

Always ask in advance about having a friend over. Try to give good notice if it involves dinner as not enough food might have been planned. Don't ever sneak the person into the house.

Expect your host to act as a substitute parent and to be concerned about the relationship. Few hosts will allow your boyfriend or girlfriend to stay overnight and many will not want the two of you alone in your room with the door shut.

Financial arrangements

Sometimes a host family might decide to go out for a casual dinner, in which case, it is reasonable to expect them to treat you to the meal as you are part of the family. You should, however, offer to pay, and not assume it is the family's treat until they say it is. If it is a special meal (for example for someone's birthday at an expensive restaurant) you should also offer to pay.

If a host family invites you for an activity, e.g. bowling, then you should not expect them to pay (although they often will).

Weekend trips can be awkward. The best advice is to ask how much it will cost. If the family says it's their treat, then you know that. If the family gives a cost, you can decide whether you wish to go or not.

If it is the family's treat however, still show your appreciation. You might pay for something – an ice cream or a meal.

In repaying any kindness, don't feel you have to spend an amount equal to what the family spent on you. A bunch of flowers or a bottle of wine is sufficient.

Damage and breakages

Always tell your host family if you accidentally break or damage anything in the home. You should also offer to pay for any such damage. Accidents happen and host families are usually very understanding.

Smoking and Alcohol

You must be 19 years of age to purchase/use cigarettes or alcohol in British Columbia. Whilst the use of marijuana is legal in British Columbia, use of marijuana near your home or the school is not permitted. If you smell of marijuana at school or at your home, you will be asked to leave.

Noise at nighttime

There are some districts in Metro Vancouver where noise after 10.30pm is considered a disturbance. Please be mindful of this, and please be mindful of your host if you are video-calling friends and family at night.

Some customs

- Canadians often leave for work and school early. They tend to have dinner earlier than in other countries, generally around 6pm, and go to bed around 10 or 11 pm. Dinner is not any time when you get home - it's at a scheduled time. On weekends, everything may happen a little later.
- People in Canada go to their own bedrooms when they are tired or want to be alone. Don't feel like you have to stay with the family in the general living area until the family goes to bed.
- It is customary to leave the bathroom door open when nobody is inside.
- Shoes are generally taken off when entering the home.
- It is considered polite to say "Good morning" when you see family members in the morning, and to say 'Good night', when you are going to bed. Don't just get up and leave.
- Unless you know people very well you shouldn't ask about the person's age, financial status, cost of clothes or personal belongings, religious beliefs or sex life.
- In Canada, typically, men do not hold door open for women. If it is a heavy or a swinging door, people hold doors for people.
- If you are preparing tea or coffee, ask others if they would like some as well.

Communication styles

- Normally, Canadians are quite direct and get to the point quickly. They don't look to other people to solve their problems but generally try to work them out themselves.
- Generally, people stand two to three feet apart from each other when conversing. They use many physical gestures.
- Canadians maintain eye contact when speaking, but the contact should not be too intense. The pattern is to make eye contact and then periodically look aside before returning to contact.
- Smiling and giggling will convey happiness or amusement, not confusion or embarrassment as might be the case in your own culture. This can be difficult in a homestay as you may quite often not understand what is being said and may smile or giggle. Your host won't know that this means you don't understand so the best approach is to tell that that you are having trouble.
- In some cultures, people show appreciation for food by making lots of noises. In Canada, that is considered rude. If you like the food, tell the cook.

The cycle of adaptation

You will be experiencing a lot of changes, from language to food, and this will likely cause culture shock at some point during your stay. This is a period of disorientation and anxiety as the two cultures clash within you. This is a very common phenomenon for people who travel from one culture to another and here we will look at the stages in a little more detail as it is useful to be prepared for the various stages and understand what is happening to you.

Stage 1: Arrival

On arrival, you are happy and excited and everything feels wonderful. As you settle in, however, the differences start to become annoying. Yes, this is fun, but everything is different. The water tastes

different, your support system from home has disappeared, you are struggling in a new language, unable to express yourself clearly.

Stage 2: Culture Shock

All these differences can be quite overwhelming and can lead to culture shock. You are starting to get used to the new culture and you are seeing your own culture differently. You will be feeling anxious and helpless, and you may become very tired and irritable. At this point, you might question what you are doing and why you are here. Culture shock often occurs within about one month of your stay and can last for up to three months.

How to deal with culture shock

There are some things you can do to help yourself in this stage:

- Remind yourself that this happens to most people.
- Remember this isn't your fault. It is a result of being in an unfamiliar environment.
- You may feel others are learning English more easily. In fact, they probably aren't. Everyone goes through these uncertainties and yet in the end, they do learn English.
- Try to be flexible and open-minded.
- Remember that you don't have to give up your own culture to experience another one.
- Make friends with other students and talk about these problems. Everyone is going through or has gone through the same thing.
- Get some exercise and remember to eat regularly.

Stage 3: Adjustment phase

Over time, you will finally settle in. The culture clash will reduce and you will fully fit in.

Stage 4: Pre-departure

The next problem period will come before departure, as you will probably have mixed feelings. You will be sad to be leaving and yet delighted to be returning home. Don't avoid these feelings as they are natural. Talk about them openly with people and accept the feelings of loss.

Stage 5: Return and readjustment

Returning home can be the toughest stage, next to the culture shock itself. You will be happy to be home, but you may arrive feeling a little like a stranger. So much has happened to you while you've been away and there is so much you want to tell your friends and family. However, they may not be particularly interested in listening, as they are expecting you to be the person you were before you left.

You will also be grieving again, for the culture you briefly adopted and the new friends that you made. Eventually, however, things will get back to normal and you will be home, at last.

Conclusion

Staying in a homestay can be one of the most rewarding experiences in the world! Some hosts are still in close contact with students they hosted decades ago and the relationship you have with your host family or other homestay students in your family may last for the rest of your life. Staying in a homestay helps you to improve your English more quickly, and to settle into Canada more easily. We hope you enjoy your time here and make the most of this wonderful opportunity.