

# *Frequently asked Homestay questions*

## **1. What is Homestay?**

Homestay is a cultural exchange between a local individual or family (called a Host) and a visiting international student/participant. The student/participant lives as a guest in the home.

The benefits go beyond the safety and convenience of home living to include lasting friendships with Costa Ricans. The benefits for Spanish language development and Costa Rican cultural exposure are excellent. Serious students and scholars benefit from the comfort of home while living in an atmosphere well suited for learning

## **2. How does it work?**

As a student/participant you should expect to be provided with your basic needs including your own room, food, laundry service and space to study. It includes a fully furnished private bedroom with linens (bed sheets and blankets); a shared bathroom; access to laundry facilities and Spanish immersion. Over the period of your time together the host will assist you in becoming familiar with the local area and customs in a relaxed and friendly household setting.

You should also share information about your home country and culture with your host. This will help you to feel comfortable and will help your host to understand you a little better.

## **3. What support do I get from MVI (Monteverde Institute)?**

During your stay, you will be in contact with a Homestay Coordinator at all times. You will have its telephone number 24/7 in case of emergencies.

## **4. How are host families chosen?**

All hosts are chosen for their warm hospitality, gracious, simple and safe homes, and proximity to the Monteverde Institute (MVI). Each host must submit an application showing interest and commitment towards becoming a homestay family and are interviewed in their home before they can be accepted as such

Each host is different. Some homestays include a husband, a wife, and children; some are single parents; and some are retired couples. Each host brings their own unique approach to welcoming students into their home lives.

## **5. May I choose my own host family?**

No. We take care to know each host very well, so we are best suited to make placement decisions. Based on the information you provide on your application and the availability and special requirements of individual hosts, you will be placed with the best possible host.

We base our selection from the information you submit in our five “Participant Information Forms” and the information we have from our Hosts. We encourage students/participants to list personal preferences on their application but may not guarantee all will be fulfilled.

#### **6. How can I sign up for a homestay?**

Due to the popularity of the homestay program, it is important to apply as early as possible (minimum 2 months prior to your arrival). Please contact us! Our Homestay Coordinator will match you to a host and will take you to them once you arrive (it is then that you will hear details of your future homestay family).

#### **7. What should I bring?**

A small gift is recommended but not required. Feel free to be creative- making chocolate chip cookies for the family can very well be a gift!

You must bring your personal toiletries (a towel, shampoo, body soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, etc.). Your homestay will provide bed sheets and blankets.

A detailed list of things we recommend you to bring can be provided. Please simply ask us!

#### **8. I’ve heard about a Homestay Orientation, what is it?**

It is a session where you will meet the Homestay Coordinator, hear details about daily living and cultural habits as well as ask any questions you might have. We will do all of this prior to taking you to your new home. If you come with a group, you will receive not only a placement map but everyone’s contact information as well.

#### **9. What is the homestay cost?**

Currently it is \$23 per night.

#### **10. What is the cancellation period?**

You should pay as soon as you have gotten our notice of confirmation dates and our invoice. Also, please send a copy of your flight information to confirm your arrival.

#### **11. How long can I stay? What if I want to stay longer?**

The minimum stay is 1 week (7 nights). You are guaranteed a Homestay for the period you have requested and paid for. Many students want to stay with the family after the designated time requested and most families are happy for you to do this, but this is at the family’s discretion. If you wish to stay on with your family, please tell them at least 2 weeks before the date you are expected to leave. You must arrange with them a cover charge prior to lengthening your stay and you should pay beforehand

#### **12. What if I want to change my homestay?**

Thankfully, this almost never happens. Also, please note that it cannot be done based on false expectations. If there are unresolved conflicts between a student and host, the Homestay Coordinator must be included to

help reach a mutually acceptable agreement. If the student or host has willfully ignored the Homestay Agreement to which they consented, the Homestay Coordinator must be informed in order to follow MVI's protocol.

**13. When will I know my Host information?**

You will get detailed information when you arrive at the Monteverde Institute (MVI).

**14. Will there be other international students in my homestay?**

No. If there are, please inform the Homestay Coordinator.

**15. What about transportation?**

You will have the schedule of the local public bus (the "periférica"). Whether you decide to use vehicular transportation or walk, you should travel at all times with at least another friend (note: you are not allowed to ride or drive a motorcycle or four-wheeler). Your host is not responsible for providing transportation for you.

**16. What is expected of me in a homestay?**

It is important to understand that homestays are meant to be a cultural exchange experience. You are expected to interact with your host family and spend time with them. Your homestay should NOT be treated as just a place to stay while you are getting set up in Monteverde. If you are not interested in cultural exchange and are just looking for a place to stay, we are happy to look at other housing options with you.

**17. What do I call my Host?**

Ask your host what they prefer you to call them. "Don" before first name (for an adult man) or "Doña" after first name (for adult woman) is frequently used to show respect. However, at times homestay parents don't mind you calling them "mamá" or "papá".

**18. Will I have to share a bedroom?**

No. You will have your own bedroom.

**19. What are my responsibilities?**

When you arrive in your homestay, your host will introduce you to the household members, show you the house, give you a house key, explain the household norms and start sharing family time and space.

You should understand and agree to house norms and be polite to your host at all times. Simply think of it as not only exchanging space and knowledge but also responsibilities (ex. washing dishes). You can expect politeness from your new family at all times.

**20. Can I go in to every room in my host's home? Are some rooms private?**

Some areas are private. You should not enter any other bedroom without being invited. If you are unsure about a specific area, ask, it really is ok and best to do so.

### **21. What can I do to help my homestay family?**

You can make your bed, keep your room tidy and leave the bathroom clean and tidy every time you use it. Also, offer to cook one day or help during cooking, set the table or sweep the floor. Families really appreciate and are thankful when you communicate often and about everything (daily schedule, feeling sick, food you like, presentations you have, etc.), so this is another great way you can help.

### **22. Can I put pictures and posters on the wall in my bedroom?**

Ask for approval from your host and ask them how to do it without leaving holes or marks on the wall after you leave.

### **23. Can I bring alcohol to my Homestay house?**

No. This is seen as something very disrespectful. Remember you cannot drink alcohol if you are under 21.

### **24. What if I smoke, is it a problem?**

You will need to advise the Monteverde Institute (MVI) if you smoke as we will need to ensure you are placed with a family that is okay with you smoking. Some host families do not host students who smoke. It is very important that you inform us if you are a smoker, even if it is only an occasional thing. Failure to tell us may result in you being asked to leave the home, incurring an extra Placement Fee.

If you are a smoker, smoking is never permitted inside your bedroom or house as it could cause a fire and will make the house smell. You can often smoke outside the house or on a veranda or balcony if the family is in agreement. Please be respectful of where you smoke and dispose of your butts thoughtfully.

### **25. Do I have to ask if I want to go out?**

It is polite and a cultural habit to say where you are going and what time you will be back. Make sure you know how to properly enter your house. Please call your host if you are going to be in later than you said. Going out during week days is not common but families will assume you will go out on some weekends (return home no later than 2am if you are an adult. If you are under 18, you must return home before 8:30pm).

### **26. Can I invite my friends around after school?**

You must have approval to invite friends in to your host's home. Please ask; it most likely will not be a problem.

### **27. What do I do with my dirty laundry? Where do I keep it until it is washed?**

Ask your host family, they will guide you. Ask where the laundry basket is if there is not one in your room. If you are unsure, ask again until you understand. It is ok.

### **28. Will there be pets in the home?**

About 90% of our families have at least one pet. Cats and dogs are the most common. Please specify if you are *seriously* allergic to cats or dogs on your application, and we will do our best to place you with a family

without pets. If you are not allergic to pets, we encourage you to be flexible. Pets will be kept out of your room unless you invite them!

**29. What will the food be like?**

Homestay guests eat their host's normal food. Simply state your needs on your Application and we will discuss it with your host when we assign you to that home. Remember to be open to trying new foods since it is fundamental in a Latin American country, however we do understand there are certain health situations that must be accommodated.

**30. I am a vegan, gluten free or vegetarian, will it be an issue?**

Most "Ticos" (Costa Ricans) are not vegetarian, but they are familiar with it. However, vegan and gluten free diets are something fairly unfamiliar to many families. Additionally most of these ingredients must be imported from abroad and are very expensive. As a result, we highly recommend you to bring packed goods you like from your home. Families will do their best to accommodate your dietary needs; however it takes constant effort and creativity from you and them.

**31. Is it ok to miss meals? Do I receive a reimbursement for missing any?**

Families expect you for every meal (if you need lunch to go you must inform them ahead of time). If you decide to miss a meal (and remember, you have informed the family), it is your choice. You will not be reimbursed.

**32. In my country I go to sleep when I get home from school and stay up into the night. My host wants me to go to bed when they go to bed and it is too early for me.**

Many international Homestay students have this problem. It is best to be as quiet as possible even though you may not be in bed. Remember most families wake up early to start their day, so please be respectful. Consider using a headlamp if you are up late, as overhead lights often affect more than one room.

**33. If a stranger comes to the door and I am alone at home should I open the door?**

No, go to the nearest window and see who it is before you open the door. Do not let any stranger into the home under any circumstances.

**34. If I lose my key what should I do?**

Tell your host immediately. You must pay for any costs incurred from losing the house key (making a new copy or replacing the house locks).

**References**

<http://www.homestaynetwork.org/public/student-faqs>

<https://www.rightathomehomestay.com/faq.html>

<http://www.ihpshomestays.com/1-faq.php>

<http://talkabouttours.com/homestays/frequently-asked-questions-by-students>

<http://www.andeo.org/homestay-faq.html>