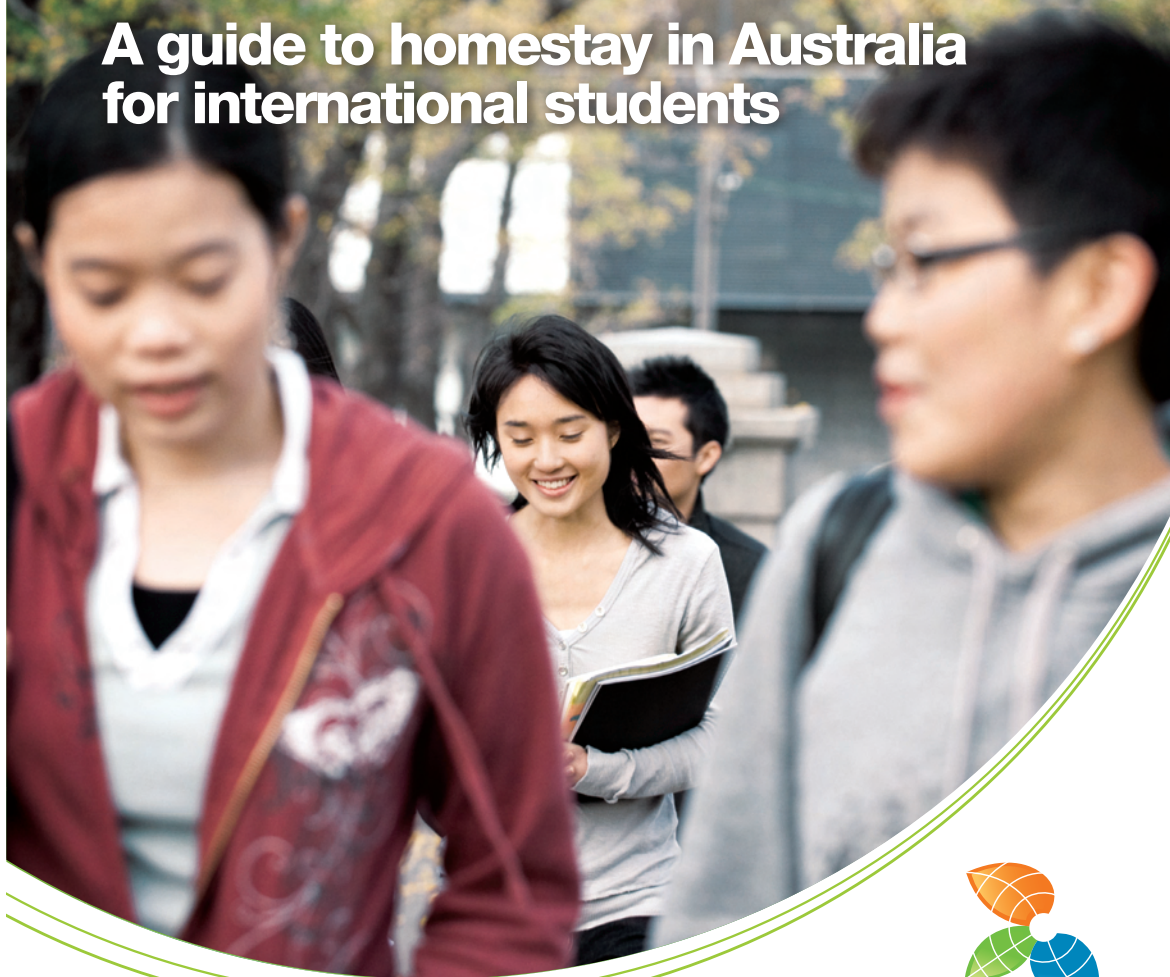


# Say G'Day to Homestay

**A guide to homestay in Australia  
for international students**



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## **Say G'Day to Homestay**

This book is designed to help international students understand what to expect of their homestay experience.

## **Acknowledgements**

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ISBN 0 86403 050 9

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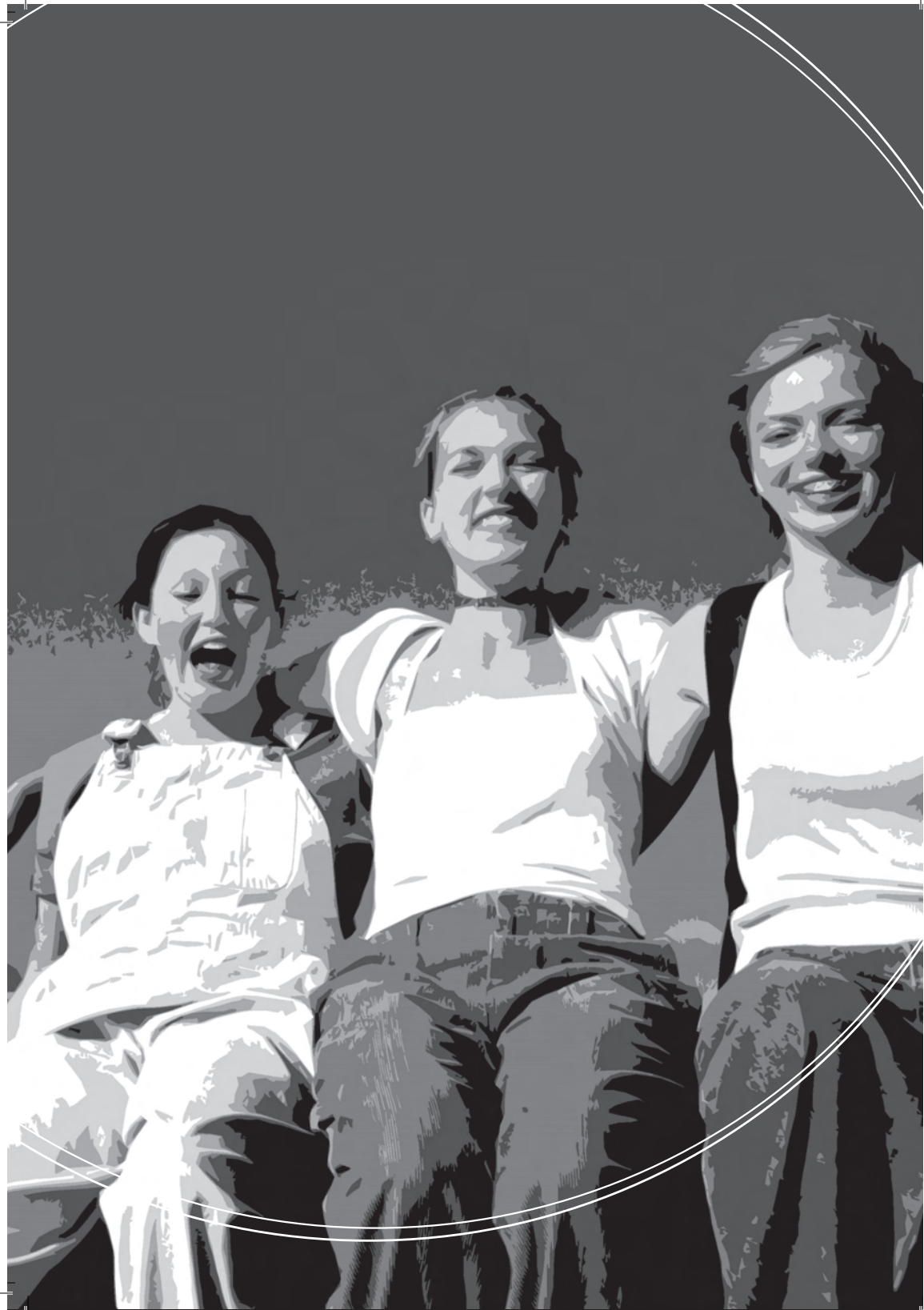
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## The homestay experience

### Welcome to Australia

You have decided to stay in an Australian home and the aim of this book is to help you make your stay happy and successful. You'll need to learn about Australian families and household customs, and you'll need to approach homestay life with a positive, open mind. Say G'Day to Homestay will help you meet these challenges by providing practical and easy-to-follow advice. Your homestay hosts will be making the effort to understand and appreciate you, too. A homestay is a two-way exchange in which both guests and hosts get to know and appreciate each other — and in the process have a good time.

### Good luck!

### An "Inside view" of Australia

Homestay gives you the opportunity to learn about Australian culture "from the inside". Ordinary tourists who stay in hotels won't learn as much as you will about the Australian way of life.

Homestay life is also a journey in self-discovery: as you live in close contact with Australians, observing their different way of life, your understanding of yourself and your own cultural values becomes clearer and deeper.

Homestay is an opportunity to make new and lasting friendships. Some students correspond with their hosts after they have returned home, and host families sometimes even visit them in their own country.

Homestay gives you constant practice in English in everyday situations. This complements your formal classroom training and is just as important for your English development.

Homestay saves you the trouble and expense involved in renting your own flat, at the very time you most need to concentrate on adjusting to Australian academic life. You'll be moving into a fully furnished room in a secure house with most expenses included in the weekly rate. If you were renting or sharing a flat you would need to buy and transport furniture, install or connect a phone, and pay electricity bills.

### To make your homestay a success, you need:

- ▲ an understanding of what is expected of homestay guests;
- ▲ realistic expectations about living in a private home in a foreign country;
- ▲ willingness to share your culture with others;
- ▲ flexibility, tolerance, an open mind and a positive attitude.

### **But it's not always easy**

Homestay life will sometimes seem hard. You are going to be confronted with values and customs different to your own, and you will have to come to terms with them at the same time that you are missing the support of your own family, friends and culture. Ordinary tourists don't have to go through this character-building exercise! They usually travel for a short time, with friends or family, so they don't experience loneliness and homesickness. They can chat to each other in their own language. They also stay in hotels or apartments and not usually with local families. In a hotel you can just be yourself, but in a homestay you have to be sensitive to the people and customs around you, all the time.

### **The experience will prepare you for a successful future**

Homestay life involves living with others in a new and challenging environment. It gives you an opportunity to develop personal qualities which will be useful all your life. These include tolerance and flexibility, sensitivity to others, and the ability to deal constructively with difficulties. Such qualities can't be measured in a test. But they can be the ultimate measure of a person's success in life. When you go out into the workforce you will be dealing with other people, and how well you can do this is at least as important as your formal qualifications.





## Who will I live with?

*"I want a typical Australian family with a dad, mum and two children. They will be white Anglo-Saxons living in a large house with a big backyard. Dad is head of the household and will be out at work during the day while Mum will be looking after the house, the children and me."*

Will your Australian family be like this? It might be. But this kind of family was more common 30 years ago than today. And even back then, not all Australians were of Anglo-Saxon origin and many women worked outside the home. This image of the Australian family is a stereotype and doesn't reflect the diversity of Australian society in the 21st century. It's like an Australian going to Africa and expecting to see everyone living in tribal villages, when, in fact, millions of Africans live in big, modern cities and have email. There are bound to be some surprises for all of us when we visit a foreign country. The truth is always more complicated than our expectations!

### Some facts about modern Australian society and family structure

- In the past 60 years, more than six million immigrants from almost 200 countries have made Australia their home. Four out of 10 Australians are migrants or children of migrants, and half of these come from non-English speaking backgrounds. The original inhabitants, the Aborigines, have been in Australia for thousands of years. So it's inappropriate to regard as "Australian" only those people who descended from the British and Irish people who first came to Australia in the late 18th century. Any person with Australian citizenship, whether they were born here, in China, Lebanon, Indonesia or Finland, is an Australian.

"You see so many Asians who you think are Asian and then they open their mouth and they're Australian!"

**Shalini, Singaporean student**

"Many international students and their relatives have imagined that there are only white people in Australia. We didn't expect it to be as multicultural as it is. In fact, there are very few locals who match the Aussie stereotype of Crocodile Dundee. Many Aussies don't even have a typical Australian accent, instead they might have an Italian or Lebanese or South African background and a slight accent."

**Natalia, Indonesian student**

## SAY G'DAY TO HOMESTAY

"I have really enjoyed living in homestay since I came here. Currently, I am living with a family who is originally from New Zealand. Before that I lived with another Australian family for two months. My host family are my friends and they help me adapt to the Australian lifestyle more easily. I think it's more fun living with Australians than living by myself. I have been here for around nine months now but I never feel homesick. My Aussie friends make me a nice warm Aussie meal everyday. We talk about school, friends, their jobs, TV, current affairs and boyfriends. On the weekends we go to the movies, go on a picnic, take Bart (their dog) for a walk. My English has also improved. Actually, I have put on weight. But it shows that I'm enjoying my Aussie lifestyle, don't you think? If you want a short-cut to the Aussie lifestyle, I strongly recommend giving homestay a chance and making friends with the host family."

**Yoko, homestay student**

- Australians are now delaying marriage, having fewer (or no) children, the population is ageing, a third of marriages end in divorce, and unmarried couples who live together have equal status to married couples. Consequently, many households may consist of a divorced parent and children, a single man, a single woman, an unmarried couple or an elderly couple.
- Husbands and wives are equal in law in Australia, and most women work outside the home. Women regard themselves, and are regarded by their husbands, as joint heads of the family. Housework is often shared between husband, wife and other household members. No member of the family is considered more important than another.
- Australian law forbids discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, religion, marital status or sex. Therefore accommodation officers cannot favour stereotypical Aussie families over other types of families. So don't be too surprised if you get allocated to an Italian-born homestay mother married to a Sri Lankan born homestay father, to a divorced mum or to an unmarried couple.

Remember that families and individuals in any country – yours included – are all different. In Australia some families live in big houses, others live in small flats, some are wealthy while others are not, some are sports-mad while others like the theatre. Some families will be able to do more for their students than others. However, what homestay families should all have in common are the most important things: good English, and the desire to provide a safe and friendly home for you.

### Why do homestays hosts take students in?

Homestay is a two-way exchange which means that your hosts also benefit from the experience. Your hosts will be friendly people who have an interest in young people from other cultures and a desire for cultural exchange. They will want to share the Australian culture with you, while learning about yours.

Generally, homestay hosts must pass screening procedures such as detailed interviews, home visits and a police clearance before being allowed to take students in. This means that they have committed time to becoming a homestay host and are eager to help you make the most of your stay here.



## Understanding your position in the homestay

### **What does it mean to be a “member of the family”?**

In a homestay you are welcomed into a private home and accepted as a member of an Australian family. Your host family should help you settle in and make sure you are comfortable, serve you nutritious meals (if included in your board), involve you in family activities, take time to talk to you and generally make you feel “at home”. Ideally, both student and host family members should care about, and respect, each other.

All members of an Australian family – including you – also have a responsibility to help ensure the smooth running of the household. This simply means meeting the household rules and participating in keeping the house neat and clean. Along with other members of the household, you may be asked to help out with light tasks such as washing up, washing your own clothes or setting the table. All students will be required to keep their room tidy and leave common areas of the house clean and tidy after using them. This applies to male and female students equally, and to all students regardless of their family background. Your hosts will expect this – and probably more – of their own sons and daughters. Use the opportunity to your advantage: participating in the household is the best way to get to know your family, build a good relationship with them and practise your conversational English.

### **How should I treat my host parent/s?**

Treat your hosts as you would treat your own parents – with respect. They see themselves as your equal even though you pay them money, and naturally they are “boss” in their own home. Homestay is not a business like a hotel. In a hotel the customer is king. Customers can order room service, leave the bathroom in a mess or stay out at night without informing the management. Management doesn't mind because guests pay highly for these “privileges”, not including meals.

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### **Why don't Australians have servants?**

Australia is an egalitarian society which means all members of society are considered equal with equal rights regardless of their income, education or family background. For this reason, Australians are uncomfortable with the idea of servants. Live in "home help", as it is called, is rare. While people might be employed to carry out servant type duties, ranging from lawn-mowing to looking after children and house-cleaning, these people would not refer to themselves as "servants". Nor would their employers refer to them as servants nor treat them as such. They may even earn as much as their employers and mix with them socially. They would certainly consider themselves to be their employer's equal.

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Homestay hosts do not make a lot of money from what you pay. Often, they do it for the experience and the enjoyment of having international visitors, and the money is secondary. So it's important to ask nicely if you would like them to do something for you, and to fit in with the house rules and let them know in advance if you plan to be out or away.

### **Australians value independence**

While your homestay parents will often include you in activities, some students feel that they don't give them the same support and attention as they receive in their own family. There are cultural and practical reasons for this which have nothing to do with you personally. Don't be offended if your hosts do not devote most of their time to you, do not drive you everywhere, or ask you lots of questions about your life. Firstly, Australians value privacy and individual independence. Young people are expected to be self sufficient, to make their own entertainment, and to make their own decisions about their lives. Australians do not always do things together as a family. Secondly, Australians often work long hours and may not have much spare time. So try to develop your own interests and do not rely solely on your hosts to entertain you or do things with you. They will respect your efforts to be independent. And you'll gain a lot from the experience too.



## Tips for arrival day

The big day has finally arrived! If you are arriving by plane and have booked an airport pickup service, your pickup officer will be waiting for you in the Arrival Hall (you will enter the Arrival Hall after clearing Customs). Please be patient if you can't see this person immediately. Airports can be very busy and it may take time to find each other. The pickup officer will usually be holding a sign with your name on it. Don't disappear with relatives or friends who have come to meet you if you have booked the airport pickup service. The officer will be worried and will still be looking for you long after everyone else from your flight has left the airport (also, friends and relatives should not expect to accompany you in the pickup vehicle unless they have booked and paid for places in advance).

If your flight is late or if you are delayed at customs, don't worry. These things happen quite often. The airport pickup officer will wait. If you are making your own way to the homestay, you should always go straight there as your hosts may have taken time off work to be at home to meet you at a certain time.

- Greet your hosts with a smile: smiling is recognised internationally as an expression of goodwill. If you smile, you'll create a good impression and help everyone relax. Do not be afraid of using your English: it's probably a lot better than you think.
- If you are over 17 years old you will probably be expected to call your hosts and other members of the family by their given name. Australians are informal about modes of address. They definitely won't be offended if you address them by the wrong title at first. They'll just laugh and tell you what they would like to be called. However, some older people may prefer to be addressed by their title and surname, eg "Mr and Mrs Jones."
- Your hosts will show you around the house and may at the same time discuss the house rules with you. These rules might be written down and left in your room. If not, you might find it difficult to remember everything the first time round. Your mind will be overloaded with new information and your hosts' English might be a bit difficult to comprehend. Don't worry too much at this stage. The family knows you need time to settle in. Ask about any rules you are not sure of, at any time in your stay.

## SAY G'DAY TO HOMESTAY

### Questions to ask during your first two days.

- ▲ What time do you leave for work in the morning?
- ▲ Can you show me how to lock up the house?
- ▲ What time is dinner?
- ▲ How long can I spend in the shower?
- ▲ Would it be convenient if I used the shower at 8am?
- ▲ Will I be doing all my own washing?
- ▲ Where should I store my suitcases?

- You might be tired after dinner. If you just want to go to bed, say: "Thank you very much for dinner. I'm very tired. I'd like to go to bed now. We can talk more later". The family will understand.
- It is not necessary to give your new family a gift when you arrive. Australians don't expect this. However, it's a nice gesture and it will be appreciated. If you would like to give something, just make sure it is small and inexpensive. In Australia, it is not customary to give expensive gifts to people outside your immediate family.



You might be tired after dinner. If you just want to go to bed, say: "Thank you very much for dinner. I'm very tired. I'd like to go to bed now. We can talk more later". The family will understand.

## When your relatives want to come too

Homestay hosts will usually be happy to meet your parents if they come to Australia and accompany you to your homestay on your first day, as long as they are informed well in advance (in Australia it is rare for people to “drop in” without phoning first to see if it is convenient). They understand that your parents want to be reassured you’re going to a safe and friendly home.

You and your hosts need time alone to get to know each other. Relatives should not stay long or expect to look over the house, nor should they attempt to bargain with hosts over any aspect of the board. Remember, it’s a private home not a hotel. If a friend wants to help you move in, they can bring your bags to the door and perhaps say “hello” to your new homestay parents. They shouldn’t come inside at this time, unless invited by your homestay parents, although they may visit once you settle in.

If your parents or relatives want to stay with you for the first week, this must be arranged in advance and agreed to by your homestay hosts. There often won’t be any room for any extra people. If your hosts do have room and agree to relatives staying, the relatives will be required to pay for their accommodation.

### Exercise on the way to campus

Try to see any walking you have to do to your school or campus as a chance to keep fit and healthy. Many Australians incorporate a walk into their journey to work for this reason. You will be able to study and concentrate much better if you do a 20-minute walk each day.

“When I first came here, I made a lot of mistakes. Firstly, I experienced language problems. Even though Australian people explained things, I was afraid of going out alone and I felt anxious. The second issue was transportation – the Australian train system was complicated. The third thing was food. I like traditional Korean food very much but my homestay host cooked Western food. At first, it was very hard for me. I have been in Australia for over a year and now I am accustomed to the Australian lifestyle. I can speak English and I can understand train announcements. There are lots of overseas foods I like eating. I like it here very much because everyone is kind and tolerant.”

**Dong Ho, Korean student**

"Most Australians are very kind. I noticed it the first time with the bus drivers. Every morning, I had to catch a bus to the Language Centre to learn English. The driver always said cheerful words of greeting like: 'Good morning, how are you?' and 'Have a good day' when I got off. It gave me a fresh feeling and also great energy to start my hard work at school."

**Hien Giang,**  
Vietnamese student

## How do I get to my school or campus?

You will be expected to get to your school or campus by public transport. It is rare to live within walking distance of your school or college because Australian towns and cities are spread out. In larger cities, it may take an hour to reach your campus and may involve some walking combined with a train trip or two bus rides. Your hosts will show you how to get to the bus stop or train station, and tell you which bus or train to catch. Some might even take you to campus on your first day.

Australian buses, trains, trams, and ferries run according to strict timetables. In some areas transport to and from your campus may be infrequent outside peak hours (7.30 to 9am and 4 to 6pm). You will need to learn public transport timetables and arrange to be at the stop or station five minutes early so as not to miss your transport. Your hosts will tell you where to get the timetables for your area, or in some cases might have them at home. Getting to campus may be a frustrating experience in your first week but everything will soon fall into place and you'll be an expert before you know it!



**Getting to campus may be a frustrating experience in your first week but everything will soon fall into place and you'll be an expert before you know it!**



## Good manners in Australia

### Knowing your aussie etiquette

To interact well with the people of a foreign country, visitors need to be aware of that country's etiquette, or code of polite behaviour. Even the nicest visitors can give offence without realising it, simply because they have not learnt the polite things to say and do at the right times. Those who take the time to learn about customs in a foreign culture will be liked and respected by the local people. Luckily, Australian etiquette is fairly simple and relaxed. Many students will find that aspects of it are not much different from what is expected in their own culture.

- Australians say "please" when asking for something and "thank you" (with a smile) when receiving something, or if someone is helpful to them. This is considered extremely important. You should also say "I'm sorry" if you make a mistake, and "Excuse me" if you wish to walk past someone or need to interrupt their conversation or activity.
- Exchanging verbal greetings and goodbyes daily is a part of good manners in Australia. Family members usually greet each other with a friendly "hello" when they come out of their room in the morning, and say "goodbye", or "I'm leaving now, see you tonight," when departing for work or college. When coming home at night, it is polite to greet everyone with a "hello" or "hi" and a smile, perhaps asking them how their day was.
- If an Australian feels happy, he or she will normally show it by smiling. A person who wears a serious expression all the time may be perceived as unfriendly or sad.
- It is polite for any guests, including homestay students, to ask before using household equipment such as stereos, computers and the TV and to be aware of the needs of others.
- To an Australian, a guest's offer to help out with light household tasks, such as setting the table, washing up, bringing in the washing or watering the garden, shows consideration and will be appreciated.



**“Can I have another glass of orange juice, please?”** Australians say “please” when asking for something and “thank you” (with a smile) when receiving something, or if someone is helpful to them.

- Australians have a strong sense of privacy. It is not polite for guests to go into other bedrooms in the house unless invited. Students should always knock on closed doors and wait for a reply before entering, and never open private desk drawers or bedroom cupboards unless invited to do so.
- Australians clear their nose into a tissue when they have a cold. This is called “blowing your nose” and it’s perfectly acceptable to make a noise doing so. It’s considered bad manners not to use a tissue and to make a loud sniffing noise instead. The tissue should be put in the bin and not left lying around. It is considered rude to spit anywhere.

### **Being careful with personal comments and questions**

Australians are generally open and will appreciate directness in their homestay guests. However, some types of questions are unsuitable to ask of Australians you don’t know very well. These questions and comments usually relate to income, personal appearance and marital status. In some cultures these might be among the first things you would discuss with a person – but in Australia they may only be discussed if you know the person extremely well, and even then, sometimes they are not discussed at all.

Still, it's possible to learn personal information without offending Australians by asking indirect questions (see the examples below). You'll rarely get a short or boring answer to an indirect question.

Inappropriate questions	More acceptable alternatives
Why aren't you married?	Is it good being single?
Why don't your children live with you?	So where do your children live?
How much money do you earn?	What do you do for a living?
How much did your car cost?	Is that an expensive kind of car?
What's that lump on your neck?	No acceptable alternative

Asking a person their age can be impolite if the person is significantly older than you. Some Australians are shy about revealing their age, especially women. It is usually okay to ask this question of people nearer to your own age.

## How to make conversation

Your hosts will appreciate it if you chat to them, ask them about their day, tell them about your day or just start a conversation. It's polite to do this in Australia, even if you're only 18 years old and your hosts are much older than you. Your hosts will find something of interest in whatever you say, so never worry about being boring. Luckily for students of English, Australians like to talk about everyday things such as the weather and what they did during the day. This makes starting a conversation relatively easy.

Still, like you, your hosts won't want to make conversation all the time. There will be times when they won't feel like talking. Avoid trying to get their attention when they're busy with household tasks, when they've just walked in the door after a busy day at work, or when they're watching a television program. Save all those questions until you're all having dinner, when you're helping with the dishes, or when everyone is relaxing in the lounge room.

It's fine to make a comment about another person's appearance, clothing or character, as long as what you say is complimentary. Australians enjoy compliments. Avoid saying, "You're so hairy" to your homestay father or "You're quite fat, aren't you?" to your homestay mother just because these things are true. Tact is often more important than the truth when dealing with certain Australian sensitivities.

**How “small talk” can lead to a proper conversation**

**Student**

I hope it will be a nice day today.  
Do you think it will rain?

**Host**

Actually, the forecast was for  
a few showers.

**Student**

Well, I hope it clears up by Saturday.  
I was thinking of taking a trip into the  
mountains with my friend James.

**Host**

Really? What are you going  
to do up there?

**Student**

Well, we thought we might do a  
three-hour bushwalk, but I'm not sure  
that James is fit enough – he's trying  
to save money, so he doesn't eat and  
he's really weak and skinny.

**Host**

Poor James. How come he's here in  
Australia without much money? Are  
his parents worried about him? Does  
he need to see a doctor?

## Your bedroom

This is your space. You may be allowed to put posters up or to put your own ornaments around the room. Ask first if you want to put posters up: your host will recommend a method that won't damage the walls or the paintwork. Remember to leave furniture and room fittings in the same position as you find them as there may be a good reason why things are arranged a certain way.

It is rare to have locks on bedroom doors in Australian homes so don't expect this. However, you are entitled to your privacy. Other members of the household should always knock before entering and your hosts should make your room “off limits” to young children and pets. It is your responsibility to keep your room clean and tidy. Your hosts might come in to vacuum and they will need the floor to be uncluttered. Most families won't mind if you want to buy a small TV and small stereo for your room, but keep the volume down and turn these appliances off before you go to sleep.

Homestay hosts ask that students observe the following rules in their bedrooms.

- No smoking. Smoking will make the room smell. Smoking in bed is considered dangerous. If you are a smoker, ask where you may smoke (often this will be outside).
- No storing and eating food. This will attract mice and cockroaches. Even with the best intentions, it is easy to spill food in the bed or on the floor.
- No wet clothes. In Australia clothes are normally dried outside on a clothesline. They are not dried in the bedroom because the wetness causes mould to grow and damages furniture. Nor are they draped over heaters to dry because they could easily catch alight and start a fire.

## What will I eat?

### Homestay with meals

"Homestay with meals" means breakfast and dinner is provided seven days a week, with lunch provided only on weekends (however, some homestay programs may not offer lunch at all).

Treat mealtimes as an adventure: be open-minded and try new foods. You might find it surprisingly easy to adapt to homestay cooking. Most Australians cook a variety of cuisines, drawing from the foods of the country's 180-plus different ethnic groups. In many Western homestays, hosts cook Asian-style dishes and most serve rice. It is also becoming increasingly common for hosts to provide chilli sauce, soy sauce and other special sauces to add to the food on the table. Tell your hosts if there is any food you do not like or cannot eat because of religious or health reasons. They will appreciate this and will try to accommodate for you.

If you crave your own food, you can offer to cook your hosts a meal from your own country occasionally. They'll enjoy the treat and you'll get to eat your favourite food.

### Breakfast

An Australian-style breakfast consists of cereal and milk, toast and vegemite or jam, tea/coffee/juice and perhaps fruit and yoghurt. Some hosts may occasionally cook you a fried breakfast (bacon, egg, toast, tomato and sausage). If you request it, many will provide you with noodles or other foods you are accustomed to eating. Breakfast is an informal meal in Australia. Family members often have their breakfast at different times and, in most households, each person over the age of 13 helps themselves. You will probably be expected to help yourself, too. Your host will show you where the breakfast foods are kept. If you are the last person to eat breakfast, put the cereals and bread back into the kitchen cupboard, and milk, butter or margarine back into the fridge after you have finished.

"My friend's father told me that it was impossible to get Asian food in Australia. However, this was not the case at all."

**Judy, Taiwanese student**



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### Soft drinks in the fridge

Fizzy soft drinks like Coke, Fanta and Sprite tend to be bought as special treats. They are usually not kept for everyday consumption. If you like to drink soft drinks daily, it's a good idea to buy your own supplies.

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### Lunch

Lunch in Australia usually consists of a sandwich, a piece of fruit or cake, and a drink. It is eaten between 12.30pm and 2pm. If lunch is included in your board your hosts might make you a "packed lunch" to take with you if you are going for the day, or just leave you something that you can have at any time that suits you. A large proportion of homestay hosts will expect students to prepare their own packed lunch, simply because this is what they expect of their own children. If lunch is not included in your board, avoid taking food which is meant for your dinner.

### Dinner

Dinner is served between 6pm and 8pm. Everyone is expected to sit down together to eat dinner. Most dinners consist of a main course and a dessert. Some families like to accompany their meal with beer or a bottle of wine. You will be offered some. If you don't drink alcohol, it is perfectly okay to say no. Your hosts will understand and will not offer it again. If you like to have alcohol, it would be appreciated if you bought some alcohol yourself occasionally because alcohol is not included in your board.

### Table manners and customs

- It is polite to help set the table before the meal, and offer to help clear away the dishes afterwards. Many Australian parents actually write kitchen rosters to get their children involved in mealtime tasks, and they may include homestay students in this roster.
- In Australia it is considered good manners to eat with the mouth closed and to eat quietly. Most Australians find noisy eating or slurping of food impolite.
- Family members are not served in any particular order. For instance, the eldest is no more likely to be served first than the youngest. It is okay to start eating as soon as everyone has been served. Note that there is generally no expectation that younger members of the family will wait on the elder ones, nor that the women will wait on the men.





**In Australia it is considered good manners to eat with the mouth closed and to eat quietly. Most Australians find noisy eating or slurping of food impolite.**

### **If you are not going to be present for a meal**

Let your hosts know as early as possible (preferably in the morning) if you will not be present for a meal. Australians cook the right amount of food for each person and if you don't turn up, the food will be wasted (there will also be no reduction in your board for missed meals). If you let your host know you want dinner, but will be late, your meal will be left for you to heat up when you come in. Arrange to be home in time to eat with the family most nights as mealtimes are an important part of the homestay experience as it will help you get to know your hosts and practise your English.

- Australians value conversation at mealtimes and feel awkward and embarrassed if no-one is talking. So feel free to ask questions and practise your conversational English – your hosts will be delighted with your efforts.
- It is customary to say “thank you” when someone serves you food or drink. If you want more, you might say, “could you pass the potatoes please”, or “could I have some more icecream please”.
- In Australia, “yes” means yes, and “no” means no. If you are asked if you want more food and you say “no” to be polite, you probably won't be asked a second time. So say “yes, please” straight away if you want more food.
- Complimenting or praising the food is regarded as good manners in Australia. If the food is really good, say, “this smells great” or “that tastes delicious”. You will give your hosts a lot of pleasure by doing so.
- Australians place their knife and fork together on their plate when they have finished their main course and don't want any more.
- If someone needs to leave the table before the others have finished, they can excuse themselves by saying, “excuse me, I have to meet a friend now” or “excuse me, I have to study now”.

### **Australians like advance notice**

Australians like to be informed well in advance of new plans, or changes to old plans. They don't always cope well with the unexpected. So they prefer to know in the morning if you won't be at dinner that night. They like to know two weeks in advance if you'll be moving out, and they like to have at least five days notice if you want to bring a friend to dinner or have a friend stay overnight.

### **Can I take food from the kitchen or the fridge?**

Some hosts will encourage you to help yourself to food when you feel hungry outside of mealtimes. Usually this means you can help yourself from a bowl of fruit or to snacks or biscuits. However, it is a good idea to ask or to wait to be offered first.

### **Homestay without meals**

If you have chosen homestay without meals (not all colleges offer this option), you will be given access to the kitchen to prepare your food, and cupboard and fridge space to store it in.

Kitchen usage guidelines:

- Regularly inspect your cupboard and the fridge for foods that have passed their expiry date. Throw food in the bin if it is old or out of date.
- Leave the kitchen clean and tidy after cooking. Wash and wipe your own dishes, be careful to wipe the stove down, and wipe away any food or oil that has splashed on the wall or floor.
- Some Australians may be worried by the unusual smell (for them) or look of some food that their students like to eat. For instance, Korean kimchi has a strong smell and can affect the rest of the food in the fridge. You can reduce odours by keeping foods in sealed containers. Offer your host some if you can see they are worried by the smell, or tell them what the ingredients are. Once they know something about your cooking, or try it, they won't be so concerned.
- Avoid cooking big dinners late at night (after 9pm) unless your hosts tell you that they don't mind.

- A common problem in a shared kitchen occurs when one person uses some of another person's food. The person taking the food usually intends to replace it but sometimes the other person notices the missing food first and gets annoyed. It's best if both host and student don't touch or use each other's food at all, unless they have discussed and agreed to sharing.

## The bathroom

### A tour of the bathroom

Most Australian bathrooms have a shower, either over the bath or separate to it, and toilet (some are in a separate room). There will be a shower curtain or screen which is used to keep the water inside the shower bay. The handbasin is used by family members for cleaning their teeth or for washing their face, not for washing their bodies. The bathmat, which looks like a small towel and is hung over a rail, is used to stand on after stepping out of the bath or shower to avoid getting the floor wet. The handtowel, usually on a rail near the handbasin, is for drying your hands after washing them. If there is a ceiling fan, switch it on while you have your shower. Some homes will have a ceiling heater, which is used in cold weather. Rubbish is placed in the rubbish basket. Used toilet paper is put straight in the toilet bowl and flushed. For hygiene reasons students should buy their own soap, toothpaste and shampoo to use in the homestay.

### Australian bathroom culture

In most homes you will use the same bathroom as other members of the family. Australians usually shower once or twice a day, before or after work, and don't have baths very often. Bathing doesn't have ritual importance for most Australians. They use the bathroom to get clean as quickly as possible while using a minimum of resources. Most people have a shower of between two and five minutes, then dry their hair, get dressed and apply any makeup back in their bedroom. They will expect this of their homestay students too, especially in busy households where up to five family members may be getting ready for school and work in the morning.

"The beginning of every new thing is difficult. When you travel to a different country, you are not at home and you are without your family and friends, probably not knowing English very well. The first time is frightening. But you will meet a lot of people who will become your new friends. These friends have different cultures and habits. This can make you confused about how to start a conversation. If you say a simple 'hi', from this moment, the beginning, the worst is over."

**Debbie, Brazilian student**

There are some other reasons why most Australians do not have long showers or baths:

- Hot water is usually stored in a tank, and one 25-minute hot shower can mean the rest of the family will have a cold shower.
- Australians are conscious of the cost of power – and lots of long showers mean big heating bills.
- Australia is a dry country and water is a precious commodity (it is metered in some areas). Australians are encouraged from a young age not to waste it. Some people who have grown up with drought in country areas may be particularly concerned about excessive water use.

### Bathroom tips

- Australian bathrooms are not built for splashing water around. Some are even carpeted. Australians wash inside the bath. They do not stand outside the bath to splash water over themselves. They use the shower curtain or screen to keep the water inside the shower.
- Family members are expected to leave the bathroom tidy, clean and reasonably dry after using it, preferably wiping the bath, handbasin and bathroom mirror with a sponge or cloth to get rid of excess water, hair or bits of soap. Those with long hair may lose some in the shower: it should be picked up and put in the rubbish bin otherwise it might cause a blockage in the drains.
- Wet towels are usually hung on a rail in the bathroom after use so that they can dry. This is because Australians use the same towel for up to five days in a row.
- Female household members are expected to wrap tampons and sanitary pads in a paper bag and place the bag in the rubbish bin. These items don't go in the toilet as there is a high chance they will cause a blockage, which may lead to considerable embarrassment.
- Male household members are expected to lift the toilet seat when going to the toilet. The seat should be returned to the original position afterwards.

- Students who come from countries with squat toilets may be tempted to stand on the toilet seat. This is not a good idea. Australian toilets are built for sitting and might collapse under your full weight, possibly leaving you with injuries.

## Laundry and washing

Some families will wash and change your bed linen each week and some will even wash your clothes. Others will want you to wash your clothes and bed linen yourself. You will always be expected to do your own ironing. Your hosts will explain their system to you when you move in.

If your host does all your washing for you, leave your dirty clothes in the basket provided so that they can take it anytime. It is still polite to offer to hang the clothes on the line or to bring them in when they are dry. This will be appreciated.

Your hosts will understand if you want to handwash your own underwear, but ask where you can do this. Most hosts do not like underwear to be washed in the bathroom handbasin and prefer you do it in the laundry.

If your host does not do your washing for you, they will allow you to use the washing machine and will show you how to use it. Australians use the washing machine once or twice a week when they have reasonable quantities of washing. One cup full of powder or liquid is enough to clean a full load of washing. If you put too much in, you will damage your clothes. You will be expected to wash your bed linen about once a week or every 10 days, even if you shower or have a bath just before you go to bed each night.

Clothes are usually dried outside on a clothesline in Australia – not inside. Australia does not have acid rain, the weather is mostly dry and sunny and not every homestay will have a tumble dryer. Even when they do, dryers are used sparingly. If it's wet outside and there is no dryer, ask your host what to do.

## Disposing of household waste

Until recently all Australians put their household waste – bottles, cans, food scraps, newspapers together in the one bin, and left it out every week for collection by the local council's garbage workers. This was easy for householders but it wasn't environmentally responsible as all the rubbish was buried. Nowadays a number of local councils recycle certain waste items. In these areas householders may be required to separate the rubbish into various categories, usually glass and plastic bottles (recyclable), newspapers and paper (recyclable) and food scraps, metals and some plastics (non-recyclable). Some hosts will put food waste on to the garden as compost. They will show you the different containers for different kinds of rubbish if theirs is a recycling household.

## Lights and Heating

### Lights

When a room is not in use, light bulbs are switched off to conserve energy. Australians also sleep with the light off and expect their students to as well.

### Heating

International students often find Australian homes cold. Especially in the winter. This is because many Australians do not have a central heating system and they are conscious of the costs of power. Australians generally think it sensible to put on more clothes or blankets before using a heater.

If you feel the cold, dress in warm clothes for a start. If you still feel cold, tell your host and see what they suggest. They will probably turn the heater on for a while, or give you a heater for your room. These room heaters are meant to be used for limited periods of time and should be turned off before you go to sleep.

In bed, sleep between the sheets and under the doona or blankets - not on top of them. If you are still cold, ask for more blankets or a hot water bottle. If there is an electric blanket on your bed, turn it on 20 minutes before you go to bed, then turn it off when you get into bed. It is dangerous to sleep with an electric blanket switched on.



It's important to remember that heaters are never left unattended in Australia, except for brief periods. This is because they can quite easily start a fire.

## Using the Telephone

You will be allowed to use the homestay phone, but you will be expected to pay for your calls. Different families have different rules about telephone use and will discuss their rules with you after you arrive. Some households will allow you to pay for your calls when the bill comes (usually once a month or every three months). Australian telephone bills are itemised, showing the actual phone numbers called and the cost of each call. However, most students will be expected to pay for calls as they go along. It's actually a good idea to get your family to ring you on a regular basis rather than ring your family frequently from the homestay phone (unless you use a phone card or make collect calls).

### **Paying for your telephone calls: some options**

#### **Phone cards**

You can now buy special cards which can be used from private home phones. These come in various brands and at various rates (eg a \$10 or \$20 phone card). Often you can put more money onto your card, rather than having to buy a new one each time. You enter your card's number on the telephone keypad, then dial the number you want. The cost of your call is debited from your card's account and your hosts don't get billed for it. You can buy your card from newsagents and some shops. Make sure you get the right type of card – some phone cards can only be used from public telephones.

#### **Reverse charge (collect call)**

When you make a collect call you are connected through an operator and the call charges (plus a connection fee) are billed automatically to the person you are calling. The connection fee can be very expensive. If you want to make a collect call, use the "Country Direct" service. This service connects you to the number you want through an operator in your own country, and in your own language.

To access this service, call the Australian operator on 1800 801 800 (free call), tell the operator you would like to make a Country Direct call and nominate the country. You will be given the Country Direct number for that country and can then speak to an operator in your own language.

### Mobile phones

Mobile phone shops can be found in most shopping centres. Australia has all of the major mobile phone brands. There are several networks in Australia and a wide range of plans to suit your usage. They generally start from about \$20 per month. Pre-paid mobile phone plans are also available.

### Phone etiquette

- Try to finish any call within 10 minutes as other family members may be expecting calls or waiting to use the phone.
- Ask your family and friends not to ring you before 7.30am (later on weekends) or after 9pm Australian time, as Australians or their children may be sleeping during these hours.



Avoid ringing friends or family late at night unless there is no alternative. Even if you are quiet, you will probably still disturb sleeping family members.

- Avoid ringing friends or family late at night unless there is no alternative. Even if you are quiet, you will probably still disturb sleeping family members.
- Expect to pay more than the local call rate if you ring a friend on a mobile phone. It's expensive to call mobile phones.
- If someone rings for a family member while they are out, offer to take a message. Write down the name and number of the caller and leave the message where your host can see it when they come in.

## Home Security

You will normally be given a house key. Look after it. In giving you a house key, your hosts are trusting you with their most treasured possessions. You will be expected to lock the door if you are the last person to leave the house. You should also make sure the window in your room is locked if you are going out. Unfortunately robberies do happen in Australia.

## Smoking

Many Australians do not smoke and the Government has actually banned smoking inside most workplaces because of health risks. Non-smoking people do not normally allow smoking inside their home. Even smokers rarely smoke inside their own home, but smoke outside. If you intend to smoke in Australia you should be honest about this when you apply for homestay accommodation. The homestay officer will place you with hosts who are accepting of smokers.

## Australian and their pets

The majority of Australian homes have a pet or pets, usually a dog or cat, sometimes birds or a rabbit. The family animal is often an important member of the household. Dogs will have personal names, they might have their own bed in the house and they might even get taken to the dog hairdresser for a haircut.

The accommodation officer at your campus will try to find you a homestay without pets if you want this, especially if you have religious or health reasons for your decision. But only request a household without a pet if you do have good reasons. You could be ruling out a lot of good homestays! When the homestay officer receives your application, she might think: "This student is coming in March, and Mrs Smith, our best homestay host who lives opposite the school, will have a vacancy then". When the officer sees the words "no pets please", she has to rule out Mrs Smith because she has a small dog. Instead, she'll have to place you with Mr Johnson who lives 40 minutes by bus from the school.

Many students who haven't had much contact with dogs or cats are surprised to find how much they end up liking the homestay pet.



**The accommodation officer at your campus will try to find you a homestay without pets if you want this, especially if you have religious or health reasons for your decision. But only request a household without a pet if you do have good reasons. You could be ruling out a lot of good homestays!**

## Having friends or visitors around

Your host will be happy for your friends to visit. But there should not be too many at one time, and they should not come (or stay on) when your hosts are in bed. Ask first before inviting a friend and don't invite anyone into the house in your hosts' absence, especially people your hosts have never met.

It should be okay for you to have a friend stay overnight once in a while if there is room (probably not more than once a month). Always ask your hosts at least four days in advance so they can arrange to accommodate for your friend. If this friend is of the opposite sex, your host will most likely feel uncomfortable with you sharing the same room. Generally, you should avoid entertaining a friend of the opposite sex in your bedroom.

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### **Early to bed, early to rise: the Australian way**

Most Australians get up in the morning between 6.30am and 8am, though they may lie in bed until later on weekends. They rarely go to bed later than 11pm, and sometimes go to bed quite a bit earlier. You may be used to sleeping later in the morning and going to bed much later at night. Try to adjust if you can. Your hosts might want to vacuum your room at 10am when you're still asleep, or they might be kept awake by your late night activities. If you really like to stay up late, do whatever you have to do quietly in your own room (except eating, of course).

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## Going out, staying out, and coming home at night

- If you are going to a party and expect to be home late, leave the name, address and telephone number of the person whose home you are going to. If you are going out into town, tell your hosts where you plan to go. In both cases give them an estimate of the time you expect to be home. If you are unexpectedly delayed, try to telephone your hosts to let them know. They might be worrying about your safety.
- Keep money aside for a taxi fare every time you go out, because you might miss the last bus or train home. It is not your hosts' duty to collect you if you miss your transport.

## Going out or away with your homestay family

Joining in on family activities is one of the most rewarding aspects of homestay life. Sometimes these activities cost money and you will probably be expected to pay for your share.

If your board includes meals and your hosts invite you out to a restaurant, you won't have to pay. If your board does not include meals, your hosts don't have to pay for you but probably will because they made the invitation. If they don't explain their intentions and you're worried because you don't have much money, say, "That'd be great, how much money should I bring?" You will then find out whether they want to pay for you or not. Of course, you will never be expected to pay for your hosts as well as yourself.

If you are asked out to the movies, to a concert, to the zoo or other events which have an admission price, offer to pay for yourself each time. Your hosts will either accept your payment or tell you that they are paying for you. If you are worried about the costs of an event and think you can't afford it, just say: "I'm sorry, but I really have to save my money at the moment". Australians won't be offended if you decline an invitation, but if you don't have a good reason for this, make the effort to join in – it could be fun.

If your hosts ask you to go on a holiday with them, ask how much your expenses will be and pay them before the trip, not after.





## How do I hold my room if I go home or on holidays?

If you wish to go home or on a holiday for a period of time but then return to the same homestay, talk to your accommodation officer and hosts about your plans well in advance. If your hosts know you're leaving but don't know you intend to return, they might book in another student and you'll miss out (some bookings are taken three months in advance). In many cases, and especially for short absences of one to four weeks, you'll be expected to pay at least half-board to hold a homestay room. There will not be any reduction in your board for less than a week spent away.

## Paying rent or board

Most students will have paid for four weeks of board in advance through their agent or the college. If you wish to stay on in your homestay after the first four weeks, discuss your plans with your hosts well in advance, and then consult your accommodation officer or college about the preferred method of payment for the extra time.

Rent is calculated weekly, not by calendar month. A calendar month is usually 30 days or 31 days, whereas four weeks is always 28 days. For example, if you have paid for four weeks' board in advance and moved into your homestay on 13 June, your board period will expire on 11 July and not 13 July, because this is exactly four weeks.

If you take care of the payment of the homestay fees yourself, establish a payment system with your host and follow it. In Australia it is usually expected that homestay students will pay their fees two weeks in advance on a due date agreed to by both host and student. Ask for a receipt after each payment you make. This should show your name, the amount paid, date and period of board covered.

## Special notes for those aged under 18 years old

### **Your guardian**

If you are under 18 years of age, you are required to have an appropriate guardian, nominated or approved by your parents. The rules about guardians are slightly different in each State and Territory but generally, your guardian will have to be a suitable person who must sign a guardianship form and take responsibility for you.

Your guardian may be a relative or friend who lives in the city you are studying in, a responsible person appointed by your school, or your homestay parent. Your guardian will take an interest in your progress at school, perhaps attend parent-teacher interviews with you, provide advice to you if you need it and may be authorised to sign forms on your parents' behalf – for instance, if you need urgent medical treatment, or if you need a permission slip for a school excursion.

Your guardian should maintain regular contact with you during your time in Australia, especially during your settling in period. If you haven't met your guardian before, it's a good idea to make the effort to get to know them after your arrival, so that if any personal problems arise during your stay you will not feel awkward about contacting them for advice.



## Going out, staying out and coming home at night

During the school week, your homestay parents will probably want you to come home after school in time for dinner with the family. Most Australian parents expect their own children to come straight home after school – after all, there is usually homework to do. Most families like to have their evening meal together. Over the evening meal everyone shares news about the day's events, and for international students it provides a great opportunity to converse in English and to learn more about what's happening around you.

At weekends you will probably be able to stay out later than you do during the week, but your homestay parents will need to know where you are planning to go. Australian parents like to know exactly what their teenage children are doing at weekends, and they will be equally concerned about where you are going and who you will be with. You will be expected to leave a contact phone number and address whenever you go out. This is so that your homestay can contact you if, for example, your parents phone needing to speak to you. In general, you will only be allowed to stay out overnight if your parents or guardians have given permission beforehand.

## Travelling after dark

You shouldn't travel on public transport after dark – it can be scary and it's not always safe. If you are going to be late, it would be sensible to arrange to catch a taxi home. Let your homestay parents know in advance if you have something special to do after school (such as sports or music practice) or if you plan to be home late on Saturday night and then they won't worry about you.

## Drinking and smoking

In Australia the legal age for drinking is 18 years, and the legal age for smoking is 16 years; you are not allowed to buy cigarettes or alcohol under these ages. Smoking at or around school, or smoking in public places while in your school uniform, is regarded as a serious breach of school rules in Australia. You will not be allowed into a pub or hotel if you are under 18 years of age.



"When I arrived at my homestay, I never spoke because I was afraid I would make mistakes. I would just say 'yes' or 'no'. I'm so lucky my homestay mother is kind, so I started talking with her, I felt very happy. But then I started talking with her sons and daughter and this made me stop speaking. They spoke so fast that I couldn't understand them. But now it is better than before. There are some problems but I think I will solve them soon."

**Henry, Chinese student  
in Perth**

## How to solve problems

Most students have a happy time in their homestay, while some say the experience is among the best of their lives. Many of those who were less satisfied could have been happier if informed in advance about some of the common problems associated with homestay life, and given suggestions for how to resolve them. The good news about problems is that there is usually a solution. If you are prepared to take responsibility for improving your situation you will get results.

Remember that your homestay hosts are keen to make the experience work for you. They have been through a rigorous procedure to be allowed to take students into their home, so they are committed to solving problems with you.

Many schools and institutions do regular visits to homestay houses to ensure that you are settling in. You might like to use these visits as an opportunity to discuss any general issues that are worrying you. However, you should bring up any specific problems with your hosts as they happen.

### The trouble with keeping silent

*"Some of my friends who live in a homestay are too shy to speak to the homestay Mum, too shy to make requests, too shy to ask a question. But you just ask, and they'll give you the answer".*

*Iris – homestay student*

It's very important to speak out if you don't understand everything expected of you in the homestay, if you have genuine difficulties getting on with your hosts or if you have trouble adjusting to homestay life. Your hosts may not realise you are having difficulties until you start talking about it.

When you suffer in silence, little problems have a habit of growing into big problems. Then they start to rule your life.

Here's an example.

*"One really nice student I had stored up her dirty washing for three weeks and barely had anything clean to wear. I found out the reason why: I'd already shown her how to use the machine on the first day and she must have forgotten. Then she was too embarrassed to ask me to repeat the instructions. I felt really bad that she had to suffer all that time. I wouldn't have minded showing her how to use the machine 10 times. If only she'd asked!"*  
 Cathy – homestay host

Always remember that your hosts, accommodation officer and college want you to be happy in Australia. If you bring a problem to their attention, they will be grateful because you are giving them the chance to help you fix it. And often you'll find that the "problem" isn't a problem at all: it's just a misunderstanding and that the real problem is actually a failure of communication.

### Who do I talk to?

It is best to speak directly to your hosts if there is anything you don't understand about the household rules. And don't be afraid of asking again if you've forgotten some of the things you were told on your first day. You can't be expected to absorb all that information at once! It won't be easy to open a discussion with your hosts on something that's bothering you. But learning to deal with difficult situations is part of becoming a mature adult. Once you enter the workforce you will need to develop these skills very quickly. And it's a great confidence booster to know you can achieve positive changes without having to rely on other people.

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### The problem with making a complaint to your agent back home

Making a complaint to your agent back home about a homestay might seem the easiest way of approaching a problem, especially as your agent speaks your language. But this is not a good option as your agent isn't in Australia with you and does not understand the situation completely. Staff at your school or college are keen to help you and will be disappointed if you don't go to them first. Only ask your agent to liaise with college staff on your behalf if you have already taken other steps first.

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If you find that discussing a problem with your hosts doesn't resolve it, or if you find it too difficult or embarrassing to talk to them, then you must approach the accommodation officer or international student adviser at your school or college. These people are employed to help you so don't hesitate! They will help you understand why you are having the problem, will discuss possible solutions with you and will probably deal with the homestay host on your behalf. If you feel more at ease with a favourite teacher, tell this person instead and he or she will be happy to help you sort things out. Note that it is important for students to be honest if they make a complaint about their homestay and to avoid exaggerating their homestay's faults.

### **Unrealistic expectations**

*"I think students should expect that it's not perfect. No-one is perfect, nothing is perfect in this world. I would say, 'look for the person's good points, don't only be concerned with the disadvantages'. If you think of the positives you will feel happier."*  
*Patrick, homestay student*

As we said at the beginning of this book, homestay life will seem hard at times. You will be experiencing a different culture away from the support of family and friends. As a result, your homestay may not seem as perfect in real life as it was in your imagination. But isn't life always like this? Patrick thinks so and that's why he encourages other homestay students to see the positives rather than the negatives. Sometimes the difference between being happy and being sad is all about adjusting your attitude.

If you feel disappointed with your homestay after arrival, don't take this feeling too seriously. Accommodation officers could tell lots of stories about students who decide they can't possibly put up with their allocated homestay, move out after two days into share accommodation with friends, then beg to be allowed to return once they discover that things weren't so bad there after all. Give your homestay a chance: you could be pleasantly surprised.

## Communicating in English

If you have come to Australia to study English, you will probably find communication in your homestay fairly difficult at first. Your hosts' English might not sound like English at all until you get used to it. And improvement in your English isn't automatic just because you're in Australia.

Becoming a better English speaker will take time, hard work and lots of mistakes. Some students find the effort too much and retreat to their own room in the evenings. This is a natural reaction, but it's important to try to avoid it. You might regret the wasted opportunity once you get back home. If you find expressing yourself in words difficult, try the dictionary, or try and write your thoughts down, even act them out or draw a picture. No-one will think you are silly. Your hosts want to know what you are thinking and will appreciate your efforts. Treat communication problems as an excuse for laughter.

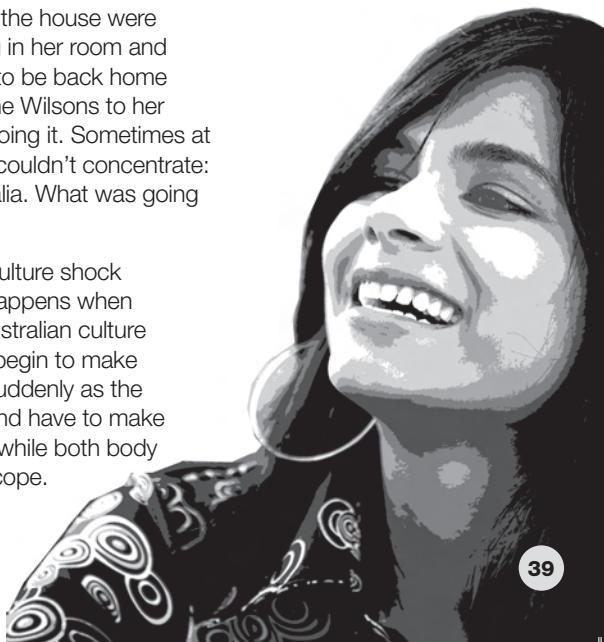
## Understanding culture shock and homesickness

In the first two weeks at her homestay, Su really enjoyed herself. She noticed some interesting differences between her culture and Australian culture. She and her new friends would discuss these differences and laugh about them. But gradually these differences – and new ones she hadn't noticed before – began to annoy and upset her. They weren't funny or interesting anymore. Like why did Mrs Wilson fuss about a bit of mess on Su's bedroom floor when all the windows in the house were covered with spiderwebs. Su felt like staying in her room and not speaking to the family. She just wanted to be back home with her own family. She started criticising the Wilsons to her friends, and then felt bad about herself for doing it. Sometimes at college, while she was doing her work, she couldn't concentrate: she just felt angry about everything in Australia. What was going wrong with her life?

Poor Su is suffering from a combination of culture shock and homesickness. Culture shock is what happens when the differences between your culture and Australian culture become too much for you to deal with and begin to make you feel uncomfortable. It doesn't happen suddenly as the term suggests. Every day your body and mind have to make adjustments to unfamiliar things and after a while both body and mind are exhausted and find it hard to cope.

"Living away from home and family always has its share of problems, no matter in which country you are living. I did feel a bit homesick for the first week or so, but then I got used to it. The information superhighway has made it possible for students to communicate with friends and family through the click of a button. I used the magic of voicechat to speak to my parents back in India and in the process saved myself a lot of valuable dollars. On the whole, I feel that I have learnt a lot about life in general and have grown as a person."

**Naren, Indian student**



Homesickness is what you feel when you're missing family, friends, familiar places and food. It can really make you ache inside, and stop you from wanting to settle into your new Australian life.

Students who don't understand the symptoms of culture shock and homesickness may believe their unhappiness is the fault of their homestay. But these feelings usually arise from the experience of the different and unfamiliar, and not from the experience of an individual homestay. They are normal and affect nearly everyone who lives for a time in a foreign country. Luckily though, culture shock and homesickness don't last forever and you can take action to reduce their effects.

### Symptoms

- Feelings of anger or annoyance towards the host family that don't go away.
- Comparing your homestay unfavourably to your own home.
- Feeling unhappy or depressed.
- Hiding in your room and brooding on problems when you should be concentrating on your schoolwork or social life.
- Losing your sense of humour and feeling irritable all the time.





## Try to...

- Stop making comparisons between your homestay and your own home and family. Inevitably your homestay will come off second best. Remember, neither is better than the other – they're just different.
- Be interested in your new family and try to take part in the household. It's okay to spend time in your room as long as you're not hiding there. Hiding in your room gives you the time and space to brood on your problems. And only when you fly back home will you realise that you wasted the opportunity of a lifetime.
- Keep in regular contact with your own family and friends. It helps you cope with new cultures when you feel secure in your own. Put up photos of your family and show them to your hosts and your classmates.
- Keep healthy: do regular exercise (try a team sport, or dancing), eat well and get plenty of rest. If you're physically fit and healthy it's hard to be depressed.
- Develop interests outside your homestay so your life is balanced. Meet new people, go out with friends, or go away on a trip for a weekend with other students from your country. There'll be plenty of social activities you can join in on at your campus. Finding a new interest or making a new friend can change your whole life in a week!
- Talk to your international student advisor or to other international students who have experienced homesickness and culture shock. Just talking about it to someone who understands can make you feel better and can help you begin to look at your problem objectively.

"This is the first time I have lived overseas on my own. I received a fine homestay. They were very friendly and warm. I have now moved in with friends but my homestay family still cares about me and sometimes they phone me."

**Lo Yue, Chinese student**

### It's time to say goodbye

The weeks have flown and now it's time to say goodbye. It's usual to give advance notice when you want to move out of your homestay (often two weeks). Your accommodation officer will tell you the period of notice required. If you plan to move out earlier than the period booked for, discuss your reasons with the accommodation officer.

If you really liked your time in your homestay and you want to express your gratitude, give your hosts a small gift as you leave, or send them a nice letter a couple of weeks later. Appreciative letters will be treasured. And don't forget to give them a forwarding address so they can send on any mail. You might also want to leave your address in your home country so they can write to you.



Enjoy your homestay experience  
in Australia.

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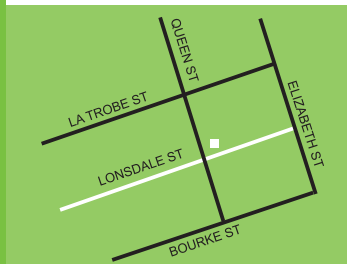
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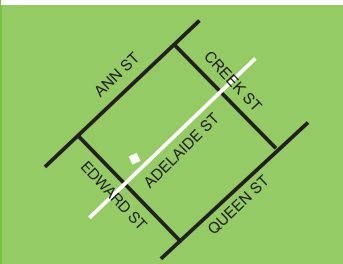
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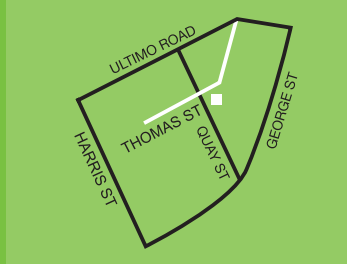
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