



EXCHANGE VISITOR GUIDE





YOUR VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Congratulations on being selected to participate in the Lions Youth Exchange Program!

The Lions volunteering to make your exchange possible are proud of their commitment to fostering international good will. We hope you feel as we do that exchanges between countries can be a major step toward greater understanding among the peoples of the world.

Your Lions sponsors and hosts will do everything they can to make your stay enjoyable and rewarding. Your willingness to make the most of your trip, however, will determine your success as an exchange visitor.

From the vantage point of a different country, you will see your native way of life from a distance. It may be an uncomfortable distance, at least at first, but if you use the opportunity wisely, you will learn a great deal about yourself and the world in which we live.

Your likes and dislikes, values and beliefs, customs and expectations will affect your understanding of a new culture. Be aware of your cultural biases before you leave home, and you will better appreciate the cultural differences you encounter when you arrive in the host country.

BEFORE DEPARTURE

After you have thought about yourself and your country, take some time to study the country you will be visiting. Gather some facts about your host country's:

- political leaders, national heroes, and major sports and entertainment figures
- capital, major cities, geographical features, and bordering countries
- monetary system, business hours, and units of measurement
- principal religions, educational system, and national holidays

To obtain this information, consult your local library or look through newspapers and magazines for articles dealing with the country. If you have the chance, talk with someone who has lived or traveled there, including former exchange visitors. The orientation provided by your Lions sponsors will also give you useful knowledge to make your visit a success.

Language

Most of us do not realize how much we rely on language to communicate until we find ourselves in a country where a different language is spoken. Those who have studied one or more different languages in school will likely have a much easier time feeling comfortable in a new culture. Although fluency in the host country's language is not required for acceptance in the Lions Youth Exchange Program, participants are expected to have some language ability. Phrase books and pocket dictionaries are inexpensive and can help you with simple communication.

The more familiar you are with the language, the easier communication will be between you and your hosts. Knowing even a little can impress your new family and show them you are truly interested in their culture. Even if the language they speak is the same as yours, be aware of differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and usage.

Correspondence With Host Family

You will have included a letter of introduction to your prospective host family in your application. However, once you know their name and address, write to them again directly. Tell about your hobbies, ambitions, and home life. The more your host family knows about you before you arrive, the better they will be able to prepare for your stay.

Health

For travel to most parts of the world, vaccinations are no longer needed. Still, you should check with your sponsoring Lions Club to determine if there are any special requirements. See your dentist before you depart. If you wear glasses, carry along an extra pair or have your doctor write out your prescription. If you are taking prescription drugs, carry them in clearly marked bottles and bring the prescription with you in case a customs officer asks to see it.

If you have any special medical needs, be sure to tell your sponsoring Lions Club about them. As a precaution for an emergency, carry an identification card with you, stating medical conditions, special medications you may need, allergies, and blood type.

Insurance

When traveling abroad, never underestimate the importance of insurance. Before you leave home you should purchase adequate medical, life, personal property, and liability insurance to cover the entire duration of the exchange visit. You should check to make sure that the insurance you have is recognized and accepted in the host country. You may be required by the host Lions to purchase additional insurance if, to provide adequate coverage in the host country, they feel it is advisable.

Passports and Visas

To enter into and return from the country you will be visiting, you will probably need a passport. As processing a passport will take time, be sure to make an application well in advance of your departure date. To apply for a passport you will need proof of citizenship, several recent identical photographs of yourself, identification, and possibly other documents. When traveling, always

carry your passport with you and keep it in a safe place. Loss of a passport is a serious matter and should be reported immediately.

In addition to a passport, you may need a visa — official permission to visit a country granted by the government of that country. Visa requirements vary considerably, so check with the country's embassy or consulate. Since photos are usually required for visas, you should order extras when getting your passport pictures. Some countries may require a tourist card to enter. The country's embassy or consulate can tell you if it does.

Clothing

The adage, "Bring half the clothes and twice the money," usually holds true when deciding what you will bring on your trip. Nevertheless, find out the climate you will be entering and pack accordingly. Your sponsoring Lions may require you to wear an official jacket or blazer.

Photographs

Photographs and slides of your family, house, school, and community can tell your host family a great deal about your home culture. Slides especially may come in handy should you be invited by the host Lions Club to give a presentation about your country.

Money

The best way to carry money when abroad is in the form of traveler's checks. You should obtain them from a company that is recognized and has branch offices in the host country. Before converting your money to the host country's currency, be sure to shop around for rates. Not only do rates fluctuate, but hotels and restaurants

usually have less favorable rates than banks, for example. In some countries, you may find exchange shops which offer better rates than even banks. Do not exchange more money than you need, since you pay a commission each time you exchange. When you exchange money, be sure to keep a copy of the receipt recording the transaction, as you may need it to convert back any local currency you may have left over at the end of your trip.



Bring enough personal spending money with you. Any extra expenses you incur, including long distance telephone calls, gifts, and personal incidentals, will be your responsibility, not your hosts'.

Gifts

You should bring a small gift for your host family as an expression of appreciation for their hospitality. Something characteristic of your country is appropriate. Bring a gift for each family if you will be staying with more than one. For the host Lions Club, your sponsoring Lions Club may provide you with bannerettes or other small gifts. Whatever gifts you bring, they need not be expensive: It is the thought that counts, not the price tag.

If you have personalized stationery, take it with you. This way, you can mail acknowledgements for any gifts, entertainment, or other courtesies as you go along.

Emergencies

Once plans are made, you should adhere rigorously to them. Last minute changes can disrupt the schedules of many people. If you have an emergency that will affect your travel plans, you must inform your Lions Youth Exchange officer immediately.

BEING THERE

The philosophy of the Lions Youth Exchange Program is to give exchange visitors the opportunity to live in a new culture as members of a family. It is participation in family life that distinguishes a Lions exchange visitor from an ordinary tourist.

You will likely be hosted by more than one Lions-approved family during your exchange visit.

Family life in a new culture can be very different from what you may be accustomed to in your own home. You will undoubtedly find yourself in unfamiliar situations that will challenge your assumptions about things and put your adaptability to a test. As it would be unreasonable to expect your host family to adjust to your habits, it will be your responsibility to maintain a flexible attitude and an open mind. Although adjusting to new situations may seem difficult at first, in the long run it will provide you with a better appreciation and understanding of our richly diverse human heritage.

Standards of Conduct

The degree of formality within families varies greatly by culture. In some countries it may be the norm to address one's elders by first names or nicknames, be casual about punctuality and appointments, wear whatever clothes happen to be comfortable, and display affection openly. In others, however, these same modes of behavior may be regarded as taboo and consequently avoided.

Since accepted forms of conduct are so diverse from one culture to another, allow yourself a few days immediately after your arrival to take note of standard rules of social behavior, and be guided accordingly.

Food

One of the most difficult adjustments you will have to make as an exchange visitor may be dietary. Perhaps the best advice is to be adventurous and try everything that is offered to you. Your hosts will be delighted by your willingness to share their tastes, and you may even discover that some of the foods, which you might never have dreamed of eating, are actually quite good.



However, if you have legitimate dietary restrictions, whether for medical or religious reasons, you should make them known to your hosts.

Alcohol

Once in the host country you will be bound by its laws, which may include restrictions on the consumption of alcohol by minors. It may be acceptable in certain cultures for minors to drink alcoholic beverages with meals or socially; however, as a Lions exchange visitor you will be expected to abstain regardless of the position on alcohol in either your home country or the host country.

Romance

Romantic attachments are not the purpose of your exchange visit, and you should therefore avoid them.

Drugs

The illegal use of drugs is strictly prohibited.

Driving

You are not permitted to drive a motor vehicle during the exchange. This restriction includes any type of motor vehicle, whether it be a snowmobile, motorcycle, motorboat, go-cart, tractor, etc.

Travel

You may travel with your host parents or in connection with Lions-sponsored functions. Other travel must be approved by the host Lions District Youth Exchange Chairman, the host Lions Club, and your parents in writing. You will not be permitted to travel alone. If you wish to return home by an indirect route after the exchange, written consent from your parents will be required in advance; and you will no longer be considered a part of the Lions Youth Exchange Program after departure from your host family.

RETURNING HOME

All too soon it will be time for you to return home and resume your normal life. Before you leave, however, there are a few practical matters you will need to attend to:

- confirm your return flight, if you are traveling by air. In most cases you will need to do this at least 72 hours before departure or risk losing your reservation
- collect the documents you will need (passport, etc.) to go through immigration. Keep any tax-free items and receipts handy for customs inspection
- determine how much local currency you will have remaining. You may want to convert it or purchase duty-free items with it before you leave. Be aware of any currency restrictions your host country might have.

A Word of Thanks

As soon as possible write a note of thanks to your host family. Remember to do the same for all those who entertained you or extended courtesies. Think about how your hosts have volunteered to show you their country. If their hospitality has meant something to you, be sure to express your appreciation to them. You will leave them with a good impression and make them feel that hosting you has been a worthwhile experience.

Back Home

After you return to your community, your sponsoring Lions Club may invite you to one of their meetings to speak about your exchange. You may also be asked to complete an evaluation of your visit and perhaps assist with briefing and guiding other youth for future exchanges. In these ways you can help to spread international understanding and goodwill.

May your exchange be successful and rewarding! The Lions thank you for the important role you are playing in promoting friendly relations among the peoples of the world.





We Serve

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