



Open World Leadership Program 2010

Home Hosting—Q & A

Homestays are a valuable and rewarding aspect of the Open World Leadership Program for both delegates and hosts. For the delegates, the immersion into a host's home and family life for a week is the most authentic way to experience America. Hosts also found that this is the best way to make personal connections and find commonalities with the foreign guests.

What are the Open World Program visitors like?

Open World participants come from different parts of Eurasia and may represent a variety of ethnic groups and political parties, as well as cultural and religious backgrounds. Visitors may hold government positions, both elected and appointed, usually on the regional and local level, or work for businesses, not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions, or the media. Women make up about 40% of the participants. Age of the participants varies from mid-20s to mid-40s.

How long do they stay?

The program visits to local communities typically last eight days. The first and the last days are 'travel days' on which the participants arrive to and depart from your community. The program during their stay is usually quite intense and may include evening activities, such as cultural events, hospitality dinners, and sightseeing. Depending on your schedule, you may volunteer to get involved in some of these activities.

What do I need to provide for the guests?

Program visitors require a separate bedroom, a clean bed and necessary supplies, such as towels and toiletries. As a host, you will also provide breakfast and sometimes dinners when there is no scheduled dinner for the group.

How much will I know about my guests before they arrive?

You will receive a biographical profile for your participant from the local hosting organization. Profiles include participant's name and contact information, brief biographical information, including educational background, present and most recent employment positions, participant's areas of interest, and special needs (vegetarian, smoker, health restrictions).

How much English do the guests speak?

The program participants are not required to speak English, but some of them know at least some English. Each group has one English-speaking facilitator accompanying them. Facilitators are young nationals of the same country as the delegates. They have significant travel or study-abroad experience. The role of facilitators is to serve as cultural bridges and help those who need the most language help. Local organizers may try to place participants with no knowledge of English either in the same home with the facilitator or make arrangements for the facilitator to assist.





How do I get through the language barrier?

Many home hosts have used phrasebooks and electronic translators (including those available online) for basic needs, such as to greet their guests, explain things about the house, call them to dinner, etc. Some have practiced the guests' native language or other languages they may know (many Open World delegates have taken French or German instead of English in high school and college). Facilitators will translate at home hospitality events or other activities for which participants and home hosts get together as a group.

How much money should I expect the guest to have?

Do not expect your guest to have pocket money or to cover any of your hosting expenses, unless the guest volunteers to do so. Money is a very sensitive issue. Some participants, especially those from the big cities, will be well off even by U.S. standards. Others might be living below the poverty line. However, most Open World delegates save money and tend to spend quite a lot while on trips, especially on items that are hard to find or overly expensive in their home countries because they are imported (i.e. clothing, electronics). Participants are told that housing and meals will be provided. The local organizer has a limited budget for cultural events to cover tickets, admission fees, etc.

What do I do in case of emergency?

Contact the local coordinator, as s/he will have full information on how to handle the situation. Your guest is provided with health and accident insurance and a personalized insurance card.

What cultural differences should I expect?

The best advice here will be to keep your eyes and ears open and not to be afraid of asking questions or explaining basic things "just in case." Remember that your guest may not be like others from his or her country you met or previously hosted. A sense of humor always helps!

How much should I expect the visitors to know about my country?

Some visitors are more knowledgeable about America than others, depending on their occupation and interests. Since American movies and TV shows are easily accessible and popular in their part of the world, most Open World delegates come to this country with preconceived notions, based on what they saw on TV. Be prepared to explain why things in this country may be different from how Hollywood presents them.

Who are the people who host Open World visitors?

Open World Leadership Program home hosts are common American people (families) who volunteer to open their houses to international visitors. Some, but not all of them, have traveled extensively or have special interest in other parts of the world. Those who start hosting often come to like the experience so much that they never want to stop!





What is the most enjoyable part of hosting?

In the words of one of our hosts:

“Hosting is fun. You get to meet people, and in many cases, you keep in touch with them after they leave. I’ve been hosting international visitors, especially those from Russia, for 25 years now. I keep a map in my house with pushpins on places I had visitors from.”

Joseph Corso, Open World homestay host, Syracuse, New York

