




A  
GUIDE  
FOR AN  
EXCHANGE  
STUDENT



Rotary International





You have been accepted by the sponsors of your local Rotary Youth Exchange program to go abroad on an exchange. Congratulations!

An important part of your exchange is understanding the organization which is sponsoring you. What is Rotary? **Rotary clubs** are service organizations which strive to improve the quality of life in their communities, promote high ethical standards in business, and foster international understanding and goodwill throughout the world. Membership represents a cross-section of local business and professional leaders. Clubs carry out a variety of service activities, one of which is Youth Exchange. For administrative purposes, clubs are grouped into geographical areas called **Rotary Districts**. The administration of a Rotary Youth Exchange program is carried out entirely at the club and district levels. **Rotary International (RI)** is the association of Rotary clubs throughout the world. While RI encourages clubs and districts to undertake Youth Exchange activities and offers support through publications and suggested guidelines, Rotary clubs and districts run their Youth Exchange programs independently of RI. Rotary International has created this primer to assist you in preparing for your exchange.

You are in for an experience that will color the rest of your life — an experience in giving and receiving. Your exchange will encompass different phases that will give you opportunities to grow in new ways: pre-departure preparation, living in the new culture, and your return home at the end of the exchange. Although your sponsoring and hosting clubs and districts will be helping you along, the following points will get you started thinking about your upcoming adventure.

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## **Pre-Departure Preparation**

### **Travel Documents and Arrangements**

The pre-departure phase is an exciting time of preparation. The Youth Exchange program will require you to obtain all necessary travel documents, including a passport, visas, as well as vaccinations or inoculation certificates. You should check with consulates or travel agencies as to the specific requirements of your country and the country you are going to visit. Your sponsoring Rotary club or district Youth Exchange officer can help, but the primary responsibility is yours. A tip: allow plenty of time.

You are also responsible for procuring your airline tickets. A reputable travel agency is an excellent source of travel information, especially if your itinerary will call for the use of more than one airline, or lengthy layovers at airports. Since you have agreed to return directly home after the exchange, you are advised to purchase a round trip ticket. Please note that some Youth Exchange programs have an official travel agent that makes arrangements for all of that

program's students; substantial savings often result if you travel with a group. Please check with your sponsoring club or district about this possibility.

### **Medical Considerations**

Your sponsoring club or district will likely require you to have a thorough pre-exchange medical examination. Although local Rotary clubs and districts do not require or provide for them, you may wish to obtain an identification card including your name, blood type, and medications you take or to which you are allergic; you should carry this card on your person at all times while on the exchange. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take along an extra pair and a copy of your prescription.

### **Packing for Your Exchange**

It is advisable to travel as light as you can. Obviously, an extended stay abroad calls for more personal belongings than a simple weekend getaway. However, regardless of the time involved, you do not need to carry your entire library, music collection, or other such paraphernalia, no matter how precious. On the other hand, photos to introduce your family, house, school, etc.,



require little luggage space, and will be greatly appreciated by your host families and new friends.

### **Research about Your Destination**

The pre-departure phase is a good time to study your country of destination; learning more about where you're going will help you to build confidence. Libraries, bookstores and consulates are good sources of reference materials that can supplement the pre-departure orientation program your sending club or district may arrange for you. You should know

something of the history, literature and arts, and principal struggles of your host country. You are by no means expected to become an expert, but you will benefit from acquiring a foundation on which to build your first-hand experience of the host country.

Some Rotary clubs and districts encourage students to take language courses prior to departure if an unfamiliar language is spoken in the hosting country. You may also wish to establish contact with host country nationals who reside in your area; they will enable you to practice new language skills, as well as gain

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a deeper understanding of your destination's culture.

## **Living in the New Culture**

Arriving in, and adjusting to the new culture will be one of the more memorable phases of your exchange experience. What follow are some suggestions that can ease this transition.

### **Youth Exchange Program Rules**

Because Rotary districts and clubs run their programs independently of Rotary International, each club or district program will have its own specific rules for you to follow. Just as you signed an agreement to abide by the Youth Exchange program rules of your sending club or district, you will be expected to follow the rules set forth by the Youth Exchange program in your hosting club or district. Although some of the program rules may seem strict (e.g., no automobile driving), the local Youth Exchange program adopted them as the result of experience, and disregarding them can lead to your being sent home. You should discuss the rules with your Rotarian counselor and host family shortly after your arrival so that they are clear to all.

### **Family Life**

Your hosts are excited about your arrival, and will make every effort to welcome you into the family — but please remember that you are responsible for adapting to host family customs. Your flexibility is one of the personal qualities the selections committee at home considered in accepting you into the program, and you should be prepared to exercise it to the fullest.

Your flexibility will help you enjoy participation in household activities which you might not expect to do at home. You should be prepared to discuss the household rules with your host family. Some families do not expect much from exchange students, while others divide the tasks of bed-making, kitchen clean-up and house cleaning among various people. Your acceptance of whatever may be assigned to you will go a long way in smoothing the path to an enjoyable exchange experience for everyone involved.

### **Changing Families**

Most Rotary exchange students on a school year abroad program are required to live with more than one host family during the year. You will be informed of the

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requirements of your hosting club's program, and should be prepared to make this adjustment. Changing families offers you the opportunity to gain a more profound view of your host country's culture, while expanding your friendships and experiences.

### **Counseling**

Most hosting Rotary clubs appoint a Rotarian who is not a member of the host family as a counselor to the exchange student. You may wish to call upon your counselor when you need guidance concerning problems that you cannot discuss with your host mother or father. Schools also frequently have counselors for exchange students. The school counselor can help you with academic concerns and any other school adjustment problems you might have.

Talking out your problems will help you adapt to your new life. Keeping confusion and hurt feelings inside will make your transition more difficult, while bringing them out in the open with a counselor will make them much less intimidating. Remember, your local Rotary club and school counselors are there to help you.

There may be times when unresolvable problems arise during an exchange or when a student breaks the rules by which he or she agreed to abide. If this is the case, the hosting Rotary club may decide to send the student home early. While this is a difficult decision for a Rotary club to reach, it is usually in the best interest of the student and the exchange program. In these instances, it is vital that students and Rotarians cooperate and that the lines of communication are kept open. The hosting and sponsoring clubs/districts, the Rotarian counselor, the host family and the student's family back home should all be kept fully informed of the circumstances surrounding an early return. The hosting Rotary club and the student's family should establish a mutually agreed upon route for the student's return home.

### **Getting Involved**

As an exchange student, you should utilize every opportunity to become acquainted with your host community and nation through involvement in activities. For example, you will be invited to attend Rotary club meetings, and you may in time be asked to speak to the club about your life

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back home and about your experience as an exchange student. You may also wish to attend religious services of your faith and join in related activities. You are encouraged to participate in school activities as well, but remember that your studies come first.

Before leaving on your exchange, consider the activities you enjoy in your home community, paying special attention to those that make you feel good about yourself. These can include things like exercise and sports

activities, hobbies, and club affiliations, and they are the things that have helped you to be well-adjusted and succeed at home. Keep these creative outlets in mind as you move to the new culture, making sure that you search for comparable activities to meet your needs. While you should not hesitate to try new experiences, using the knowledge of activities that have made you happy in your everyday life at home will pave the way for a smooth transition.



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## **Your Return Home**

For most students, the Youth Exchange experience does not end the moment they return home. The personal growth that most exchange students experience remains with them, often affecting them for the rest of their lives. Although you will be busy readjusting to life back home, continued correspondence with your host families and new friends abroad will keep your new world view alive. Maintaining these important contacts will also help to ease your re-entry orientation during this last phase of your exchange.

### **Re-entry Orientation**

Your readjustment upon returning home is a crucial aspect of the exchange process. Just as you will have faced the challenge of adapting to the new culture, you may need help dealing with the feelings that accompany your return home. You will probably view your native culture, friends and school life in a different light. Many local Rotary clubs or districts will offer re-entry orientation as a part of the program, just as they provided you with pre-departure orientation.

## **Putting Your Exchange Experience to Use Back Home**

While the return home may be difficult at times, it will definitely offer you the opportunity to share memories of your exchange experiences with your family and friends. You can address Rotary clubs at home and groups of students interested in international exchange. By sharing your experiences with these groups, you will surely motivate others to follow in your footsteps and become exchange students themselves.

Additionally, many former Youth Exchange students are active in "ROTEX" groups composed of program alumni who want to remain in contact with one another. They serve as a social and support group for students involved in the Youth Exchange program, and members often get together to share their exchange experiences.

Congratulations once again on being selected as a Rotary Youth Exchange student. You are beginning an adventure that will broaden your life, as it has done for the thousands of Rotary exchange students before you.



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