



# Living in a Homestay

Homestay means that you live in a New Zealand home and are treated as one of the family. The host family will be friendly and helpful. If you are going to enjoy the experience, it is important that you are friendly and positive too.

Your host family will provide you with:

- \* Breakfast and dinner from Monday to Friday
- \* Breakfast, lunch and dinner on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays
- \* A room of your own
- \* Towels, bed linen and bed covers
- \* A key to your home if you are a mature student.

It is important that you understand that your homestay is not a hotel. You need to have a flexible attitude and be very adaptable. When you move into a family you have to accept the family's lifestyle and help with the chores. Your homestay mother is not your maid or your servant. You must respect her and help her. All homestays are different, and you should not compare your homestay with the homestays of other students.

Here is some information and advice which will help you to fit into the New Zealand way of life.

## New Zealand families

New Zealand families come in many different forms and sizes, and this is also true for RELA's host families. The RELA management team has carefully selected and visited all our wonderful homestay families. Some host families will have two parents living in the home while only one parent will be present in others. There may be young children, teenagers, no children at all, or children who are now grown and have moved out. New Zealanders also come from many different countries. A New Zealander can be European, Maori, Pacific Islander, Asian, European or a mix of two or more of these ethnicities.

Our host families mostly live in simple homes and neighbourhoods. What is important is that your host family has offered to open their home and is excited to share their lives with you. During your stay you will not only be considered a welcome guest in their home, but also a member of the host family. This day-to-day interaction creates a unique situation of closeness and strong bonds that can only come from sharing the special space of another family's home.

## Talk with your homestay hosts

Try to talk to your host family as much as possible, as this will help you to learn English faster. You will also learn more about our way of life. Don't always wait for them to speak first. Be friendly and start conversations yourself. Talk to your homestay if there is anything bothering you or worrying you. They are there to give you help and guidance.

## House Rules

Living with another family in a different culture is exciting but can be challenging sometimes. Just like your own family, each host family will have their special way of doing things. You have a responsibility to respect and follow the rules of the family, even if those rules are different from what you are used to. Remember, this is all part of experiencing a new culture and living with a host family. While you adjust to this new way of life, open communication is the key to making a smooth transition. Always try talking with your family first about questions you may have or talk to the RELA Homestay manager or your class teacher.

## Chores

As a member of your host family, you may be asked to help out with certain responsibilities to keep the house clean and well-kept. Households in New Zealand do not have maids. Instead, each member of the family is expected to clean up after themselves. Most children in the homes are also given daily or weekly chores such as cleaning the dishes after meals or helping with the laundry. Each household is different, and responsibilities may be different for each student, but you should expect to help your host family in some way during your stay. If you are unsure of what you should do or how you can help, just ask!

## Bathrooms

You are probably used to the Western-style toilets found in all bathrooms in New Zealand. One difference you will find is that some New Zealand bathrooms have wall-to-wall carpet covering the floor. Unlike tile or marble, it is not good for carpet to get wet.

Most New Zealanders shower rather than bath as it is less expensive and quicker. It is expensive to heat hot water for baths. Some showers will have a curtain separating the shower from the rest of the room. When you shower, please make sure the curtain is *inside* the bathtub, so the water falls inside the tub and not onto the floor outside! If you wish to have a bath, fill the bath only a third to a half full. If you use more water than this, there will be no hot water left for the rest of the family, and you won't be very popular.

Often your bathroom will be used by people other than yourself. For this reason, it is important not to spend too long in the bathroom. This is especially important in the mornings as many members of the family may need to use the bathroom in the morning. If you spend a long time in there you may make the whole family late and this is not good. Talk to your family about the best time for you to use the bathroom and how long you can spend in there. Many families have a schedule for times in the bathroom in the mornings and you will need to fit in with this. If you decide to shower in the evenings, please be considerate and do not take showers too late as you may keep family members awake.

Wipe up any water that splashes on mirrors, walls, or countertops. When you leave the bathroom leave the door open. It is usual to leave the toilet door open a little when you leave, to show it is now free. As always, don't be shy about asking your host family for help with any questions.

## Heating

New Zealand homes may well be colder than what you are used to especially if you are here in our winter. Most families will keep the living areas well heated but not the bedrooms. This is because we expect our families to spend time together in the evenings and not hide away in their own bedroom. However, you will need to do your homework in your bedroom and so you may need to use the heater to keep warm. This is okay but it is not okay to sleep with your heater on and you **MUST** make sure that you turn the heater off before you leave your room, especially when you leave for the day.

If you are cold, ask your host family for some extra blankets or a hot water bottle. Please also remember that if you feel cold put on more layers. This is the New Zealand way.

## Pets

Many New Zealand families have pets in their homes that they treat with much love and respect. In fact, pet-owners wouldn't consider their family complete unless they had an animal companion. Because these animals are treated so well, they are very different from wild animals – pets in New Zealand are well fed, kept very clean and are very gentle.

## Weekends

Saturday and Sunday in New Zealand are the weekend. Families use this time away from work to spend time with friends and family, relax at home, take short trips or attend religious services. You will not have classes on these days. You can spend your weekends joining your host family in their routine. Be sure to communicate with your host family if you do decide to meet up with any of your friends at the weekend.

## Meals

One advantage of living with a host family is experiencing home-cooked meals. Your host family will be excited to share their favourite meals or special family foods with you. It is considered polite to try small portions of what is offered to you, even if it looks different from the food you are used to. You might not like some foods, or you might discover your new favourite meal – you never know unless you try! If you are home while the food is being prepared, it is considered polite to offer to help. Likewise, it is polite to help your host family clean up after each meal.

If there are some foods that you prefer not to eat or can't eat, please tell your host family so everyone knows.

Normally, all meals except for weekday lunches will be provided by the host family.

Your presence will be expected every evening for dinner with your host family. If for some reason you cannot make it, please make sure you call your host family at least two hours beforehand and let them know. It is very bad manners to allow your family to cook for you and then not arrive to eat it.

Start eating when the host parents start eating, not before. Wait until everyone has finished eating before leaving the table. It is polite to thank the cook or to compliment them on the meal. Say "Excuse me" if you must leave the table during a meal. Make sure your mobile phone is turned off at the dinner table.

Since many New Zealand families are very busy with work and other activities, not all meals are eaten together or at home. Breakfasts, especially, are often not eaten together as a family. In these cases, your family may encourage you to "help yourself", which means that you can choose your own food. Your family will show you where to find options in the kitchen and will explain how to prepare simple foods.

Please remember that "help yourself" does not mean eat the whole loaf of bread or drink all the milk. If you want to eat a lot of one thing, it is a good idea to go to the supermarket and buy the food yourself. Also remember to clean up after yourself if you prepare your own food.

## New Zealand Manners

You may think at times that some New Zealanders are not very polite, but usually we are just trying to be relaxed and friendly with you. We are sometimes thought to be too casual, but this is because we dislike being too stiff and formal. Our sense of humour and our jokes will be hard to understand at first. We always say "please" when asking for something and "thank you" when something is handed to us or done for us. You will find yourself saying "please" and "thank you" a lot!

## Alcohol

It is the law in New Zealand that no-one under the age of 18 can be served alcohol in licensed premises, such as a hotel bar, unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

## Smoking/Vaping

Many New Zealanders are strongly opposed to smoking/vaping. It is illegal for cigarettes/vapes to be sold to anyone under the age of 18. If you wish to smoke, please go outside, even in winter. Smoking/Vaping in your bedroom is strictly forbidden. No student under the age of 18 is allowed to smoke/vape at RELA or in their homestay. If you do not follow this rule, you may be asked to leave the school.

Those of you who are over 18 and choose to smoke must make sure you pick your cigarette butts up and not throw them on the ground. This is considered very bad manners.

## All RELA Students under 18

At all times you must tell your homestay parents or caregiver where you are, who you are with and how you are getting home.

You must take your mobile phone with you, and have it switched on and always answer it unless you are in a place where mobile phones are not allowed, such as the cinema. Your phone must have the number of your homestay parents and the school number saved to contacts.

Failure to follow this rule may result in your parents being told and you may be asked to leave the school.

## Students aged over 18

As a courtesy, you should let your homestay know where you are and what time you expect to be home. You must phone if you are not going to be home for any meals. If you come home after your family has gone to bed, please make sure that you turn out all the lights and lock the door behind you.

## Overnight Stays

If you wish to stay overnight or for a weekend with a friend, ask your homestay parent first. In case of an emergency, your homestay parent will need the name, address and telephone number where you can be contacted. We suggest you ask your homestay to ring RELA and advise us that you are staying at a friend's house for the evening with their address and telephone number.

## Problems

If you have any problems, no matter how small, please discuss them with the Homestay Manager or a member of our staff. We will always listen to you and try to help if we can. If the problem is a serious one and can't be resolved after talking to you and the homestay hosts, we may place you in another home.

## Leaving your Homestay

If you decide to leave your homestay before the arranged date you must give them and the school one week's notice. Talk about this with the School or Homestay Manager.

## Transport

Homestay families do not transport you to and from school. You need to take the bus, walk or bike. Make sure that you leave home in plenty of time to get to school before classes start at 8.30am.

The last bus leaves the city centre at 6pm Monday to Saturday and 4pm on a Sunday. If you miss this bus, you can't expect your homestay to come and get you. If you decide you want to go to town and that you will not be ready to go home until 5pm, make sure you ask your host family if this is okay.

