

Returning students give advice to those who are going

Argentina

“If you’re not sure, you should go! It is the most amazing experience. It’s wonderful to develop your language skills, eat new foods and make great friends.”

Japan

“Smile a lot. It takes a lot of courage for Japanese students to talk to a foreigner so you need to put them at ease. Take exams to show them that you’re the same as them. Don’t expect special treatment all the time. Become ordinary and life will be good. Develop a relationship with teachers as they can help you a lot.”

“Think of things as different, not wrong. Take every opportunity that comes your way as you won’t get them ever again. Express yourself and be who you are and slightly mould it to the everyday life in Japan. Say how you feel and talk, it’s the key to understanding...When you arrive, don’t be shy, talk to your host family. Try your hardest in class and even if you don’t understand, give it a go.”

“Make sure you don’t always hang out with people who speak English.”

“Make sure you get concession tickets quickly – travel is expensive. ..You do sometimes have to ‘bully’ people to let you pay for yourself. Be grateful when they do pay, they appreciate lots of thankyou’s.”

“Try everything that’s not illegal. Don’t ever be afraid to ask questions or make mistakes because they help you to improve.”

“Never hesitate to talk to your counselor and solve problems before it’s too late.”

“Be strong! There will be times when you feel alone in this world but whenever you feel like that, go out and have a little walk around. [You’re in an interesting place.]”

“Keep an open mind – always.”

“It’s a unique experience but you have to be prepared to face anything. You have to be kind, cautious and motivated and also believe that you can make a difference in your community. ...Grasp every moment and make every day special and memorable.”

“Try and budget to make your money last for the whole year, it runs out really fast.”

“Try absolutely everything. You’ll never know what you’ll hate and what you’ll like until you’ve tried it.”

“Ten months is truly not that long. While I was there, I was having heaps of fun and the months just flew by. In Japan you need to be able to smile at people even when

they annoy you. Patience and enthusiasm are keys to having a successful exchange. Clubs are great for making friends and learning the language.”

“Cellphones are really useful for organizing things, especially if you live a bit far away or miss train stops.

The host organisation was very helpful and I found their crash course in survival Japanese very helpful at orientation. The workbook they provided me with helped me throughout the trip.

I expected different host family placements from the ones I was given but then I figured they are the best host families an exchange student can have.

I liked the way people are so enthusiastic over an exchange student but I found it hard to keep up their enthusiasm, so every so often I had to come up with things to remind them that I’m still an exchange student. I guess this is one of the most difficult tasks for most exchange students. *(This student is very much a NZer but is ethnically Asian and she is not the first to have this kind of difficulty. NZ Asian students sometimes fit in almost too well because in appearance they do not seem so different from local students and they sometimes slot more quickly into Japanese customs.)*

Exchange is a unique experience but you have to be prepared to face anything. You have to be kind, cautious and motivated and believe that you can make a difference in your community.

(What I’ve learned) is if problems occur, just step back and relax, you’ll be laughing about it later.

I remember in my orientation when I first arrived in Japan, our organiser said that the most important thing in the trip was to keep yourself motivated. I didn’t understand that because I was already motivated enough. But after around three months in my journey, I started to find things very dull and boring, mostly because this is a different country you are living in and there are lots of restrictions in terms of your freedom. I found it hard to grasp time and make every day special and memorable. I do find it was the most difficult thing to do throughout the trip.

“Expect hard times and when they come, be prepared to work through them. It’s also important to ask for help if you need it, make the most of the support around you. Otherwise, just go for it! Try new things, get involved, work hard! The more you put in the more you get out.”

“Smile, if something is really frustrating you, just remember that they are probably just trying to help you and don’t let it become an issue. Be adaptable and take photos of the family, house, your town and everything before you go. Know NZ statistics inside out.”

“Stay for longer, take more photos, participate in as many things as possible, study Japanese very hard, study at school and enjoy leisure time. Follow ALL rules.”

“This was the best three months of my life! Three months seem like a long time but when I was there I was having so much fun that it felt like three weeks. My advice is to stay positive and learn and absorb anything and everything. Don’t be afraid to try new things. Try to be friends with everyone in the school. If you make lots of friends you have the best school life!”

“Prepare to be stared at 70% of your trip [very tall European Nzer]. You cannot get cash out from shops [on your ATM card]. If you return something, the refund goes into your bank account, you don’t get it in cash. Finding an ATM that works for your card can be difficult.”

“Be sociable. Talk to anyone at school! Sometimes they’re shy but sometimes they’re so excited to talk to you. Be prepared to become a real family member for the host family. It’s up to you to make this exchange exciting! In the holidays hop on a train and travel to different places [always with permission]. The train system may seem hard but station staff are very helpful and it’s super fun to travel!”

“Make it clear what conditions you can and cannot live in. Also, at school make as many friends as you can and always try to hang out with them. They will be your best support while you’re away and the best souvenir you will ever receive from your exchange. Join a club to give you time away from your host family but also this will keep you busy and socialising. Keep an open mind in every situation. If you have problems, share them with your friends – they will always have useful advice to help and will help you to laugh about it. But be prepared for difficulties and differences as the people you will meet belong to a different culture and have different ideas so life may not always be great. Make the most of your time away – at first it will seem long but it honestly will fly past. Enjoy each day. No sooner will you get there [than] it will be all over and you will be left with great memories and a stronger view on life.”

“Don’t bring much and make sure you don’t take too much home (i.e. post stuff before you leave) unless you don’t mind the extra cost. Smile and wave to everyone and try everything. Don’t sit there feeling sorry for yourself. It’s what you make it, people aren’t going to do everything for you.”

“Once you’ve decided to do something, stick with it. You’ve made a really big decision in going on exchange which means you’ve chosen to separate yourself from family and friends and expose yourself to an entirely unfamiliar lifestyle. You could choose to really enjoy yourself and accept the new ways of living with an open mind or you could mope around and think “home is better”. How much you get from your exchange depends on your way of thinking. The initial three months IS hard but focus on what you are here for, then once you’re settled, you’ll have a blast!!”

“Remember every moment counts. You are not going to be away forever and in the grand scheme of things, not going to be gone for long either. Everything happens for a reason, so just take one day at a time and go with the flow. It will be the experience of a lifetime.”

“Say yes to everything you have an opportunity to do, even if you don’t want to do it very much. Just go and give it a try. If things aren’t working out with your host family

and you have honestly done EVERYTHING you can to make it work, don't just wait it out or worry that things won't get better a new family – get onto changing.”

“Buy things when you see them because you might not get another chance. Don't be too afraid that you will offend your host family as this will make you more nervous. Don't be afraid of not being popular at school. Be prepared to be treated as though you are younger than you are – partly because being able to speak only ‘baby’ Japanese.”

Spain

“Smile, be yourself, try to talk heaps, make the most of it. Know your family and friends are still there on earth and nothing will change when you're home.”

“Try your best, study as hard as you can. Socialise as much as possible to practice your language skills.”

“First impressions are everything and its really hard to break habits once you have made them so make sure to start oiff being polite, talkative, etc. It's easy to be misunderstood when there's a language barrier so always do your best to be understood because it can lead to confusion later! Learn as much of the language as possible before you go, it really helps. It's hard to understand all the (fast language) especially at first....”

“Be 100% honest when applying and writing about yourself and filling out questionnaires. Don't be afraid to specify what type of host family you would like. Try not to have too many expectations of your exchange based on what others have told you about their experiences. Every exchange is different depending on your host family, where you get placed and many other factors which a lot of the time are out of your control. Don't take misunderstandings seriously. No doubt everybody makes mistakes, just learn from them and don't dwell on it. Forget about ‘what you would do in NZ in this situation’s. You're in a different culture so trust your instincts, don't worry about feeling silly, be spontaneous but at the same time be respectful to people. Politeness goes a long way.”

“Learn, learn, learn the local language before you leave. Know basic conversational phrases as they will help you immensely for the first month or so. Also know what you're getting yourself into. Different language and culture is a lot harder to get used to than some people think, so make sure you really think about it. But remember to be proud of your country and talk, talk, talk as it's the only way to learn and have a fantastic time. The more you talk the more you will enjoy yourself. Life will be tough for the first few months but there will be light at the end of the tunnel so stick in there, hang on, because trust me, you will have the best year of your life.”

Italy

“Learn a base of language before you go – it was much harder than I expected and DON’T SPEAK ENGLISH. Watch your money, you tear through it without realizing.”

“Speak Italian from day one! Do not give in to peer pressure. Say no if you don’t like something. They may still try, but you’re foreign, you can be different.”

“Always ask your host family how you can help, they will love you for it. Say Thanks. Try their foods and any other opportunities they give you. Learn when to hold your tongue so you don’t seem like you’re always disagreeing with their culture. You will probably hear some things that sound weird but don’t always say it’s better in NZ.”

“Thankyou for convincing me to go on a three month rather than a six week exchange. I loved it so much I ended up staying for another month. Really, I wish I’d done a one year exchange....the only reason I came back was for school.”

“You’re there to adapt to their culture. It’s not that easy. Getting involved in out-of-school activities is where you meet friends and that’s where the fun starts.”

“Learn the language before you leave.”

“Keep track of your money by writing down what you bought, the date and how much it cost. Take lots of photos. Have around E100 for expenses [per week]. E-mail is good and free for contact with NZ friends and family.”

“Be aware that the communication between you and your coordinator isn’t always what you expect and you may have to sort through all of your questions and problems ... on your own. Italian schools are nowhere near as accommodating for exchange students as NZ schools and can be very boring!”

“Think about the real reasons you have for wanting to go and be prepared to face anything. You will learn so much and it’s important you always have an open mind. Put a smile on your face and be confident to talk to people! Make the most of what you’re given even if you haven’t learned to like your family or school or something. Always be positive. Remember everyone will be waiting for you back in NZ so there’s no need to think about them or worry about them while you are over there. Fully immerse yourself and try to learn the language before you go!”

France

“The first month of intensive language study in Paris was very beneficial and fun. I would definitely recommend it. Don’t see host family changes as a problem because most of the time it’s a change for the better.”

“Everyone’s exchange is different. I’d definitely say that the host family is most important so make a big effort there and also with making friends. Smile! Take every opportunity even if it doesn’t seem like your sort of thing at the time.”

“I don't know what will be helpful, so here is some stuff that I wasn't expecting. Hope it's relevant:

1. French kids think it is very cool to be able to speak foreign languages, especially English, so if he speaks English and German fluently he will have lots and lots of cool person points right there.
2. Don't expect cars to stop reliably at the crosswalks.
3. If he will go to school, and he gets the choice of Scientifique or Litteraire etc for subjects, don't assume that the language will be way too hard in the Litteraire option, I am doing that and it is very cool.
4. French people seem to like it when you express enthusiasm for watching TV in French rather than English, and also when you ask them what they're listening to if they are plugged into an iPod.
5. If he is into music, I suggest taking the music option if it is offered at the school. Because this is a new thing in the French school system, the classes are a lot easier than in New Zealand and it's a good way to meet people [who are] not in your main classes.”

“Don't be worried about pursuing your interests a bit. You don't have to do only what your host family do and joining clubs is very useful for meeting new people.”

“Do not take travellers cheques! You can only change them at the currency exchange places in big cities or in Paris on big streets like the Champs Elysees. My BNZ ATM card worked out OK – practically all ATMs would take it. There was a \$7.50 charge for each transaction though....”

“Always stay really positive and be as open as you can with everyone you meet. Get involved and try to meet everyone you can – especially at school. Stay as relaxed as possible. If something goes wrong just try to laugh it off – chances are everyone will forgive you because you're on an exchange.”

“If you're an older student, be realistic about being open-minded and tolerant.”

“Keep an open mind. Make the most of every opportunity. What you think you want might not actually be the best for you i.e. type of host family. Always be positive and don't get hung up on something that didn't go quite the way you planned. Be ready and willing to adapt to new and sometimes challenging situations. Don't let anything stop you from applying, it is an amazing experience!!”

“Buy an orange card (Carte d'Orange) for the metro as it saves an enormous amount of money and makes extra journeys easy. It covers all travel on the Metro for the time specified so you can go for any journey in Paris and not just in and out from your host family.”

“Use your French as much as possible and forget about making mistakes – it's going to happen but you always learn this way and it's actually not that bad! Ask heaps of questions about the language, the culture, traditions, be like a sponge! If you have any concerns just ask someone – talk to your host family. While the first couple of weeks might seem a bit strange (like you don't understand anybody and everything looks and feels so different) don't worry, this feeling isn't that bad and it gets better although it's your attitude that will determine this. I also think it's important to go

with the flow, to just watch and listen especially during the first week. Confidence comes really quickly after this. That's when you start understanding a lot more,"

"Make sure you have a lot of spare money as this makes travelling, shopping and any extra wants and needs possible. Because France is so different you want to try everything and experience it and this costs money! It's not fun all the time. Very tiring and school is so boring. Even though it was hard at the time I knew it would benefit me in the future. Maybe a working exchange would have been better for me. Think about if school is really where you want to go."

"Really get out there and talk. Talk to random people at your school and ask to learn colloquialisms. Talk lots with your host family too – talking about NZ is fun and it helps to have prompts like a scenic calendar, Maori carvings The differences between countries are great so hopefully a discussion of these will arise! Say 'Yes' to everything (within reason) so you don't miss out on experiences. And have fun being someone who is maybe completely different to the person you were in NZ."

Take all the opportunities while you're on your exchange as you never know when you'll be back or be able to get the chance again. Join in as much as you can with everything. Join in classes at school, don't just sit there."

"It sounds clichéd but don't be embarrassed, just have a go, everyone is very understanding. They know why you're there so they won't be rude/judge you if you say something wrong. They are in the same situation and are usually shy when it comes to speaking English so once again are only impressed by what you're doing. It can definitely be frustrating at times (especially if you're having a heated debate and you automatically lose because you can't express your point) but that's all part of the experience and will just help you to try harder and absorb more words."

"Don't expect to learn the language in 3 or 4 months. It took me 5-6 months to understand everything completely and 7-8 months to speak fluently. Also speak as much as you can in the first months – you will progress much faster and further overall."

"I am not a sporty person in NZ but I joined a volleyball team at the local recreation centre in my home town in France It was a social team and we had a lot of fun. I made all my best friends through this team and it was the best thing I did. Also, remember you're the new kid on the block. Everyone else has friends already so you may have to be politely persistent to edge your way in. Don't be afraid to say HI."

"Make a big effort with the language before you go. I had almost none on arrival and it made the first three months very difficult. I had a good grip on things at the end of the semester and wished I was staying longer."

"Don't expect this to be a holiday. Work hard to develop good relationships with your host family. Help out. Bring things to do at school to pass (the) time."

"Speak the language as often as possible. Ask your family for corrections. PARTICIPATE![This is] most important to make friends and get seriously better at your language."

“Keep smiling and be positive, your family will make the effort to talk to you but you must be the first to make (an approach). Everyone is friendly and are all dying to try their English skills.”

“Do not worry or be afraid of your trip/exchange. No-one I know of has regretted this experience.” (Two sisters went with NZIIU as well as about 15 others from her school in the last four years.)

“Don’t pack lots because then you have more room coming home.”

Brazil

“Put some money aside in case you want to travel.”

“Do NZ correspondence!!! [Instead of sitting doing nothing in class.] Be ready to stand up to Mario [coordinator]. Learn to catch buses as soon as possible. Go to Campinas, Flamboyant, Centro and get to know the city [Goiania]. Don’t buy anything in the first few weeks. Don’t buy stuff at the malls, they’re expensive. Go to the markets. Organised tours are very expensive. Travel with friends or family.”

“Take a course in Portuguese before you leave NZ so that you have the basics before you arrive. I also found it useful to have done a lot of research on Brazilian lifestyle, customs and dress before I left. It helped a lot with culture shock. Brazilian people are very warm and welcoming and have a very social lifestyle which is quite different from NZ and it takes a while to adapt.”

Netherlands

“Take any opportunity presented. Learn the language as fast as possible and do as the natives do!”

Germany

“Don’t be afraid to speak – you can’t improve your German if you don’t. Germans are friendly and helpful about it.”

“Do as much as you can! Try new things, join clubs – a way to experience new things, keep you busy and meet people.”

“Stay open-minded.”

“Spend plenty of time with your host family and friends.”

“Don’t be scared. If you’re shy, try not to be and put yourself out there and say hello to meet people. If you feel homesick, don’t give up.”

“THINK ABOUT IT BEFOREHAND. Do not expect to make friends immediately and try to realize what is important to you in your present life.”

“Think seriously before you go, it won’t always be fun and games, there are also bad times and difficult times and times when you feel you regret your decision.”

“Be open and talk to people. I was very shy in the beginning but I realised I’m not here for very long and that I need to use this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So you have to go and talk to people and if you want something, only you can make it happen. Also, before you go, sort out what you’re going to do when you get back, e.g. send in uni applications or [figure out] how you’re going to finish school etc.”

“Stay positive. Make the most of your time over there as it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. Be open. Approach and talk to other people instead of waiting for them to come to you. Consider other peoples’ opinions and not just your own.”

“Be sure to keep a clear record of your spending. Keep all receipts from the post (parcel got lost, very sad!). Get Skype. Take running shoes so you can enjoy the outdoors and get around independently (jogging is a great way to see things).”s