

# Host Families

Being a host family is a very special way you can share and connect with a person from another culture. Every year, the Heart of America Society seeks to find volunteer host families to host a young person from Japan for one or several days / nights. During that time, a host family will take care of the needs of the visitor. This means providing room, board and meals. Occasionally a visitor might bring expense money to offset the costs of meals and other provisions. However it is more common that they rely on the generosity of the host family to take care of them. This is why the role of the host family is so significant.

If you ask any of the students that have traveled to Japan and had the unique opportunity to stay with host families there, you'll find that they are so overwhelmed and thankful for the generosity and friendship they have received. Being a great host family here in the United States is the best way to give back and share the experience.

One thing you can almost always count on either being or staying with host families is that when it's time to depart it will be a sad moment to see them go.

## Tips for host families

- Be aware of any potential issues with pets or medical problems.
- Have fresh towels available and visible where the student's bedding will be.
- Read and use our list of [Useful Phrases](#)
- Buy a pair of slippers for the host student
- Get a mini dry erase board or notebook to use for communication. Sometimes drawing pictures is the best way.
- A lot of Japanese families tend to write out a daily agenda more than American families do. It might be nice to write at least a list of what you will do the next day, so the student is aware.
- Do you have a computer with internet? Perhaps the student might want to call home to let a parent or guardian know they are ok.
- Instruct the student during a tour of the house how water fixtures work. Be sure to point out where they can store toiletries.
- Label things like Body Soap, Shampoo, or Conditioner so they are aware since unfamiliar packaging can be confusing.
- Have a few welcome phrases to say in Japanese. This is always fun and even when mispronounced adds to your warm welcome.

## Communication recommendations

Mentioned above, if you have a computer, it's nice to allow students to send emails to their family if possible. As you can imagine, especially with a younger person, both them and the parents will be grateful and relieved to do it.

## Skype for internet voice and webcam chat with families.

We also recommend two ways to communicate that can be convenient and affordable. If you haven't

heard of [Skype](#), it is a very easy and free software program for Windows and Mac that allows for voice chat, even allowing webcam viewing with other skype users. It's an extremely popular service that is owned by Ebay Inc.



Skype might be best implemented if the family in Japan is also prepared to use it and you can coordinate times to chat that are convenient for all, despite the time zone differences. Once skype is downloaded, you will choose a username. The username is valuable because you can find other skype users and add them to your address book. That is the important part. Since skype requires that level of work, perhaps it's best to be used by those with longer homestay terms. A one or two day stay is almost too short to coordinate a Skype chat / connection with the other family. [The Skype website](#)  
[Skype Help and FAQ](#)

## **Onesuite for very cheap international calls**

Many telephone companies offer some kind of long distance services for US and International calls. If you don't already have something like that set up, but you would like a short term solution for affordable calls, [Onesuite](#) is an excellent choice. Onesuite works like a calling card, providing an 800 number, and a pin. The company buys long distance and international minutes in bulk and resells to individuals. At the time of this writing, prepaid call rates to Japan through Onesuite are 3.5 cents per minute.



To set up Onesuite, navigate to their website, [Onesuite.com](#).

Through the website, set up an account and you can use a credit card to prepay for minutes. There is a \$10 minimum, but it will give you a lot of minutes to use. There is no subscription fees or ongoing charges. The only drawback we could find is that if you don't use any minutes for 6 months, your account is temporarily suspended, no matter if you had leftover minutes or not. Adding another \$10 will activate your account and you can make calls. The previously unused minutes will come back.

Onesuite is an easy solution that requires only knowing your visitor's family's phone number. Set up is easier than Skype and allows you to use your home or mobile phone.

[Onesuite Website](#)

[Onesuite FAQ](#)