

HOSTING OVERSEAS STUDENTS *A family's experience*

For the past two summers, my family and I have been hosts to overseas students who have come to study at Lewis School of English in Palmerston Road. great company and support for each other, although Lewis School make sure that they don't share the same first language, so that they HAVE to practise their English!

When you contact Lewis School for the first time, an appointment is made for the accommodation officer to come and have a look at your home. This is a warm, informal occasion where your home is checked over for suitability for student hosting and when you can ask questions or state your preferences as to the age and sex of the students, and so on. Arrangements are made for police checks to be made on all adults who will be staying in the home whilst the students are with you.

"We've learned so much about other cultures"

We have had three absolutely lovely junior students staying in our home. You usually go down to North Front (next to Hoglands Park) for the pick-up, and the students arrive tired from their journey and tentatively climb off their coach. You already know a few details about your student, such as their name and age but it is still quite exciting waiting as Peter reels off his list and students get matched up with their hosts. Somehow, luggage gets offloaded from the coach and then shoe-horned into your car and off you go. I have always found that the students arrive not only hungry and tired but too busy looking at Southampton city centre to want to talk!

I have always chosen to have girls to stay as I have two teenage daughters of our own. They have all fitted in well and have been extremely polite. You can take two students at a time and they are

The students are out all day following their extensive program of study and activities. You are given a copy of their itinerary so that you always know where they are. They usually eat in town at lunchtime but come back to the house for the evening meal. They have a bus pass and you usually only have to go and collect them yourself about once a week, after their disco in the town centre, which finishes at about 10 o'clock. Most evenings they are occupied with activities back in the Lewis School: films, barbecues and so on. There is usually a coach trip on a Saturday and the students are free on Sunday and can do whatever you are doing, but we've found that they prefer to go into town - typical teenagers!

The language barrier is no real problem - you do manage to communicate fairly well. A pencil and paper can come in handy at times though! Cultural differences are a great learning point for all of us, although we were always mystified when all the girls collapsed into giggles every time we offered them a cup of tea! You are asked to gently correct any language mistakes. Sometimes we have all had a giggle with the students at the little English phrases they have picked up while here. For example:

"How are you today, Gulmarzhan?"

"I'm full of beans!"

- Love it!

office@familyfocus.co.uk

We have gained so much from having our students to stay. I don't just mean financially - we have learned so much about life in Italy, China and Kazakhstan just from having the girls around. They will often bring a little gift from their parents as a thank-you and this is a lovely ice-breaker when you are sharing that first cup of tea and getting to know each other. This is usually a good chance to embarrass my kids by getting out the family photo album!

"When they've gone home, the house is so empty and quiet!"

Gulmarzhan, who came over from Kazakhstan for a month, celebrated her 17th birthday with us last year and I gave her snazzy t-shirt which told everyone in huge writing that her lovely host family had bought it for her. More giggles! 'My girls' as I like to call them, still keep in touch by email and I was able to

wish Grace a Happy Chinese New Year at the end of January. Before I had met her, I didn't know anything at all about Chinese culture! From Anna we learned about the important landmarks in Rome whilst watching a Lizzy McGuire DVD! It's been a good, fun learning experience all round.

I have to admit, there is always a tear in my eye when it's time to take the students back into town for their journey home. You get so incredibly attached to someone who lives as part of your family, even if it is just for two weeks. You go back home and the house seems so empty and quiet - that's when you know you've been hooked by the hosting bug and will be looking forward to the next time that The Lewis School will ring and ask if you'd like another student to stay!

TJC

Families wanted for hosting overseas students

We are looking for families to host both our Junior and Adult overseas students. You must be willing to make these students welcome in your home and live as part of your household.

Families must live within the Southampton city limits with good bus connections to the city centre. We offer competitive rates and you will be fully supported by our welfare staff.

To apply, kindly contact Suzie Brierley, Welfare Officer, Lews School of English, 33 Palmerston Road, Southampton. SO14 1LL

Telephone 80228203. Email: suzie@lewis-school.co.uk

www.familyfocus.co.uk