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Le meilleur des séjours linguistiques

NOTRE-DAME

International High School



Homestay Handbook



Some of our international students who attend Notre-Dame International High School live with **host families** during their stay in France, either **full time or during weekends**. This provides them with the opportunity for total immersion into the French culture and language. We believe that this is the best way for students to learn about and experience a new country and way of life.

In this dedicated handbook, you will find answers to the questions you may have about your future homestay experience.



Welcome to France!

FAQs

Nacel France or Notre-Dame International High School program? Who is in charge of the host families?

The Notre-Dame International High School program has been created thanks to the cooperation between the French school *Notre-Dame Les Oiseaux* and the language travel specialist *Nacel France*. While Notre-Dame Les Oiseaux concentrates on the educational aspects, Nacel France is responsible for both the homestay placements and the weekends at the dorms, for those having chosen this alternative option.

How are host families selected?



Nacel France has a Homestay Officer, called Laetitia Le Fur, who works all year long to find the most suitable host families for our students and support student and host families throughout the program.

Host families are recruited primarily through personal contacts from Notre-Dame Les Oiseaux and the local community, as well as community organizations, local newspapers, etc. Once a family expresses an interest in hosting a student, they are visited by Laetitia Le Fur who ensures that the family is capable and prepared to host.

Laetitia's contact details are as follow:

Phone: 06.17.91.43.89 (*to be used by students and host families exclusively, natural parents should contact Nacel France head office: 05.65.77.50.20 or the school, for academic matters*). Please note that Laetitia works during office hours only. In the evening, weekends and bank holidays, if a problem arises, the student should contact our Nacel 24/7 emergency line: 05.65.78.42.16.

Email : laetitia.lefur@nacel.fr or ndihs@nacel.fr (emails are not read outside office hours).

Laetitia Le Fur also determines if the physical conditions of the home meet Nacel standards. All host families submit applications and are subject to police checks. Our host families come from many different backgrounds and have different income levels. We do not discriminate against anyone. The most important attribute is a strong motivation to host a young student coming from abroad!

How are students and families matched up?

Once a potential host family is accepted, information regarding the ages and genders of family members, their interests, pets, and home setting is gathered. Laetitia Le Fur then submits them the student profiles that best match with their interests and family background.

The letter to the host family is one of the most important parts of a student's application. Host families pay particular attention to this letter, as it is the main piece of the application, written by the student, which gives the host family an idea of who the student is. It is important to write a host family letter that openly talks about you, your family and your culture.

You should make an effort to share your true personality and interests in your letter. Think about the ways in which you will be able to contribute to the life of your host family and include that

information as well. Keep in mind that many families are not interested in hosting a student who spends most of his/her time on the computer, playing video games, or going partying with friends. Host families do like to read information about your daily life, family members, country, and interests. For many host families, the letter to the host family is the deciding factor in whether or not they choose to host a particular student.

What is required of a Host Family?

Host families are expected to provide safe and caring environments for their host sons and daughters, treating them as if they were their own children. They are also expected to take an active interest in their students' academics and grades while they are here. Nacel does not require families to plan any special social, cultural, or sports activities for their host student, although many do.

What does living with a host family involve?

You will be a member of the family, sharing in the joys and responsibilities of their day-to-day life. You should want to develop a friendship with your family, exchange ideas, and to give as well as receive. Because the goal of an exchange is to immerse yourself in another culture, it is up to you to adapt to your host family's way of life and not for them to adapt to yours.

This can be challenging, but the more you try to learn about their customs, diet, and habits, the more rewarding the experience will be for you and for your hosts. You should also try to find opportunities to share parts of your culture with your host family, friends, and neighbors, so that they have the opportunity to learn from you too!

Being part of a host family allows you to experience French culture in intimate and personal ways not open to the typical tourist. You will have basically the same privileges and responsibilities as other children in your host family, so you must be ready to live and abide by their rules and help with household chores. It is important for you to integrate yourself into the host family and be willing to participate in their outings and activities, as these are wonderful opportunities to learn more about French culture. It can sometimes be difficult to find a balance between spending time with your host family and your own friends, but it is important to show appreciation for the place your host family has made in their home and heart for you by sharing your time with them.

When will I have information about my host family?

We promise that we will make this information available to you as soon as possible. Matching a host family and a student is a complicated process to which we give careful consideration. You may know the details of your placement several weeks before your departure, but it is possible that you may not find out until the eve of your departure. Remain assured that we will make every effort to find you a suitable placement in a timely manner.

Will the host family have children my age?

Not necessarily. Some of our host families do have teenage children, but others have younger /older children or no children at all. We do request, though, that every host family give their student the opportunity to meet people close to his/her own age, either through community activities, schools, nephews/nieces, etc. You may also be placed with another student in the same host family. This will be

a great way for you to learn about another teenager's country and culture and he/she will also learn more about yours.

Are host families paid?

The host families receive a modest stipend to help cover the cost of food and lodging. They do not get paid like a Bed & Breakfast and it is very important for you to keep in mind that **our host families do not host for money. Instead, they are interested in welcoming a student from abroad to share their everyday life**, show him/her their way of life, help him/her with his/her French and, last but not least, open their mind, and that of their children's, to the world around them, to cultural differences, and to foreign languages.

How should I face cultural differences?

Exploring a new culture involves a sense of adventure and a willingness to take risks, learn from your mistakes, and meet people on their terms. You will have to adjust to several new cultures. These new cultures will be composed of new friends, family, teachers, languages, and situations. Apart from learning about the local culture, remember that every social group and organization also has its own unique culture. Keep an open mind! What is the norm in your country may not be the norm in other countries.

Do you know what "culture" is? There are certainly many definitions. You may even have your own. The following definition is from Ralph Linton quoted in *Sociology, Themes and Perspectives* by M. Haralambos and M. Holborn (1990: 3rd Edition) "... the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation... members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence... culture defines accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society. Such definitions vary from society to society..." When people from different cultures meet, the possibility for misunderstanding and conflict is high, unless they are already aware of the impact that culture has on their relationships. Often we don't realize how much of our personality and the way we look at the world is affected by the culture in which we have grown up.

Learning to do this is something that you can take with you and use anywhere in the world will make you a better person. Remember – don't lose your sense of humor and ability to laugh at yourself! There may be times when you will make mistakes, don't worry, this is also a part of your international experience.

What can I do to adapt to my host family?

Here are some tips for you:

- 1) **Communicate!** Please talk about everything and be open with your host family. For example, tell them about your school life, where you are going and at what time you will return. Make a point to discuss host family rules and schedules (such as when you can take a bath) right away.
- 2) **Ask questions.** When in doubt, ask your host family for help. You might not understand everything at first, but your host family wants to help. You might feel less independent in the beginning, but these feelings will go away eventually. Don't hesitate, or feel it is impolite to ask many questions. This is normal and expected.

- 3) **Discuss issues.** Sometimes there will be small problems adjusting to your new life and your host family. It is important to talk about these frustrations even if they seem ridiculous. Always talk to your host family first about any problems. If you become sick, tell your host family right away.
- 4) **Allow adjustment time.** You may form an image of your host family within the first couple of days that isn't accurate. Your host family might take you sightseeing, offer special food, or be extra polite when you first arrive. Little by little, you and your host family will feel more comfortable around each other and begin to interact more naturally.
- 5) **Participate in family life.** Don't hide and isolate yourself in your room. If you are feeling homesick, hiding in your room will only make it worse. Have fun with your host family and share in evening or weekend activities.
- 6) **Keep an open mind.** Look at differences as new and fun experiences. This is your chance to try many new things that you might not be able to do in your home country. Take advantage of the opportunity!
- 7) **Be polite and friendly.** This is important. You might not talk very much with your family in your home country, but if you shut yourself off from your host family they will assume that you are homesick or unhappy. When you like something, be sure you tell them. A "thank you" and a smile can go a long way!
- 8) **Help with housework and chores.** Seriously, you would be surprised at how much an offer to do the dishes will mean to your host family.

Remember, your host family will also be nervous, especially if it is their first time hosting. They worry about whether you like the food or their family. If you are open and friendly, you will help to put them at ease. At the end of your stay, you will probably find that you do not want to leave!

What happens if I have a problem with my host family, if we are not adjusting to each other?

If you have a problem, please try to talk about it with your host family first. Most problems can be avoided if you talk to your host family early, before a small problem turns into a big one. Please share your feelings with them and listen to what they have to say. If you feel uncomfortable discussing an issue with your host family, talk to your Homestay Officer. She is there to support, advise you, and will help you in whatever possible way.

What happens if I am homesick? Is it wise to communicate with my parents on a daily basis while I am abroad?

Homesickness can happen to everyone, even people who have already been abroad without having faced any problem before. To prevent homesickness, keep in touch with your parents, but not too much/too often and follow our preparation tips. If it is your first experience abroad, a short-term program would probably be the best choice for you to make, so that you can "test" yourself. The purpose of most of our programs is immersion in another country's language and culture. During the first days, it is normal if you feel a bit homesick. However, excessive communication with your natural parents could delay your integration into the host country. An occasional phone/skype call is ok, but daily contacts could disrupt your integration in the program and even worse, be the cause of homesickness!

Your new community in France

Your Homestay Officer

Our students as well as their host families receive the assistance of our Homestay Officer throughout the entire duration of their stay in France. The Homestay Officer places students in different locations around the school, both in and around Verneuil-sur-Seine.

The Homestay Officer is in charge of following the progress of a student's experience and tries to make sure that it will be a positive one for both the student and the family. The host family and the student can count on the Homestay Officer whenever they need assistance with any questions or doubts during working hours. They also have access to a 24-hour emergency phone number, available 7 days a week outside of working hours for any emergency situations.

The Homestay Officer has a variety of tasks. On the one hand, she will be available and willing to solve any conflicts or issues that may arise, whatever they are, and, on the other hand, she has to behave as an observer during the process of intercultural interaction, trying to avoid troublesome situations by dispensing appropriate advice.

Responsibilities of the Homestay Officer

- Searching, interviewing, screening, and selecting the host families.
- Giving information and assistance to the host family about the concept of the program, its objectives, expectations, and rules.
- Following the progress of the experience.
- Answering all questions and doubts that may appear during the stay of the student and giving assistance during emergencies.

Your Host Family

The French host family receives and considers you as another member of their family. Their main motivation is to share their culture with you, and learn about your culture in return. The host family receives a stipend to help them cover the additional expenses incurred by the presence of an additional member in the family.

Host parents offer meals and accommodation. In other words, meals like any member of the family, and a place where to sleep and study (which can be private or shared with other members of the family such as brothers or sisters). Any extra expectation or wish that the participant might have (special diets, individual room, etc.) is not to be considered unless specifically requested and within reason (example: vegetarians).

Responsibilities of your host family:

- **Providing you with a caring home** for a school semester or year.
- **Welcoming you as a full family member** and encouraging you to take part in family life and activities.
- **Providing you with a room** or place in their house **(of your own or shared)**.
- **Taking care of your daily meals.**
- **Giving directions and advice** about life in France.

You should also take the following points into consideration:

- Do not expect your host family to plan trips and activities for you.
- Do not expect your host family to cook meals for you other than the ones they are having normally.
- Do not expect your host family to drive you anywhere, except if there is no other option. Try to use public transportation or a bicycle.
- Expect the unexpected!!! This will be a time full of surprises.

Some advice to integrate into your French community

The host family is also looking forward to the foreign student's integration into their family, to his/her learning of the French language, and witnessing their active and eager attitude. The objective of the host family is to offer the young student a home different from his/her own. The family does not have to change its habits to fit the taste and traditions of the new member. On the other hand, it is the student who has to have the will to fit into this new background as soon as possible, showing a positive attitude and avoiding unnecessary problems.

The host family expects you to try to speak French and they will help you with that. Do not be afraid of making mistakes; the only way to learn a language is to practice, practice, and practice!!

The following is list of simple suggestions that will make everyday life easier for you and those around you:

- If you open it, close it.**
- If you turn it on, turn it off.**
- If you unlock it, lock it up.**
- If you break it, admit it and have it repaired or replaced.**
- If you don't know how to operate it, leave it alone and ask someone who can.**
- If it is broken, don't try to fix it.**
- If you want to borrow it, ask for permission.**
- If you value it, take care of it.**
- If you borrow it, return it.**
- If you make a mess, clean it up.**
- If you move it, put it back.**
- If it will brighten someone's day, say it.**
- If you hurt someone's feelings, be the first to say "I am sorry. Let's talk things out".**
- If someone hurts your feelings, say "Let's talk things out".**

Don't forget to bring along some things which you would like/need to have around:

- **A photo album with pictures of your family, home, friends, schools, etc.**
- **Your favorite music (CD's, pendrive, etc).**
- **Equipment for practicing your favorite sport.**
- **Some books in your native language.**
- **A book from your country (or CD), magazine, etc.**
- **Your teddy bear or its equivalent.**
- **A French-your mother tongue dictionary.**
- **Evidence of vaccination.**
- **Insurance certificate (also all the emergency phone numbers).**
- **An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses if you wear prescription lenses. An extra supply of medicine (if necessary) and a note (it is better if it is in French) from your doctor explaining what medicines you may use, why, and what the medicine consists of.**
- **Receipts and guarantee slips of valuable personal property. (Important for insurance reasons in case of damage or loss).**
- **Some typical recipes of your home country or the area where you live, so you can cook for your Host Family.**
- **Souvenirs and presents for the Host Family.**

The main steps of your homestay experience in France

1 – THE PREPARATION

It starts several weeks before the student arrives in France, when he/she is still in his/her country. The student should start collecting information about France, for example through travel guides and books. The student should carefully read the pre-departure information sent by the Admission Office of the school.

The student should also start to communicate with the host family, try to gather information on how they live, ask questions about the daily organization, etc.

It is important to not make wrong expectations or have prejudices about your host family. Open your mind to a new family, a new environment, and new habits.

2 – THE ARRIVAL

*** Orientation session at school**

- First contact with French and American people, your classmates, your teachers and Nacel - Very stimulating team spirit.
- Transfer to the host family: being apart from the group.

*** Meeting with the host family**

- Excitement - Jetlag - Irritability - Tiredness
- Rest, adapt to local time and habits.

*** Settlement in the family**

- Identify the habits of each family member.
- Identify the main rooms of the house: living room, bathroom, laundry...
- Control your emotions.
- Adapt to the food (be delicate while telling the host family about food or a dish that doesn't suit your taste).

*** The first months**

- First marks/grades.
- Familiarization with the area and the people.
- Do a brief first assessment on what is going well/ what isn't?
- Feelings of loneliness are possible: all family members have gone back to their normal lives and the student is no more the centre of attention.
- Difficulties making friends at school: less tolerance from some students, one cannot go down well with everyone, one cannot like everyone.
- Fight against moments of discouragement by talking/communicating (your host family and Nacel staff are here to support and assist you at any time).
- Enroll in a sports team or any other leisure activity (ask your host family for more information).

*** During the stay**

- Ease.
- Self-confidence.
- Find a happy balance between your host family and your friends: do not spend all your time with friends or on the internet and share as much time as possible with your host family. Don't give the family the impression that they are a hotel/restaurant!
- Involve the family in your activities by inviting them to participate or to talk to them about your activities.

- Christmas and New Year holidays: you may feel depressed, cut off, down. Your host family and Nacel staff are here to help you enjoy this special period of the year.

3 – THE DEPARTURE

- Get ready to go back home.
- Excitement, anxiety, feeling down followed by a lot of contradictory feelings: the desire to go back home and the sadness of leaving new friends and family.

Our Homestay Officer will keep in touch with you and your host family on a regular basis, through phone calls, emails, and in-person visits in your host family. Use those opportunities to discuss your difficulties and concerns, if any. You may also contact your Homestay Officer outside of these meetings to ask questions or discuss a situation.



General Rules of a Homestay Placement

- 1. Students must show respect for their host families and act as a member of the family.**
- 2. Students must abide by all host family and Nacel rules and must voluntarily help with household chores.**
- 3. Students must always be aware of their responsibility and make a determined effort in their school, host family, and host community.**
- 4. Students are not permitted to talk about the family's private affairs with others.**

5. **Students must attend school daily unless sick and under a doctor's care or with special permission from their host parents.**
6. **Students cannot change families at will.**
7. **Students usually return to their home country or travel during school holidays; if they wish to remain in France, they must inform their host family as early as possible and the Homestay Officer at least one month prior to the holidays.**
Homestay is included during school holidays for full time homestay students.
Homestay is not included during school holidays for weekend homestay students but can be arranged for an additional fee. Please enquire.
8. **Students must show respect for the Homestay Officer and obey their instructions.**
9. **Students should not borrow money from their host family and should be ready to cover the expenses that may occur during activities such as going to a restaurant, going to the cinema or theater, going to an entertainment park, etc. even if they are organized by the host family.**
10. **Host families should not contract a long-term agreement with mobile phone companies on behalf of their host student.**

Any continuous failure to abide by the following rules will cause an official warning by Nacel and may result in dismissal from the program.

Other important program guidelines:

- **Students should limit contact with other foreign students or people from their home country during their program in France and make all necessary efforts to have contact with French people.**
- **On special occasions (birthdays, etc.) the student's priority must be to spend this time with the host family.** This is also the case on weekends, especially on Sundays.
- **Students should limit international phone calls to parents or friends** and should promptly pay for all calls.
- **Parents and friends may visit the student** during the program, but the Homestay Officer and the host family must be informed at least 2 weeks in advance and must agree to the visit.
- **No student may enter into any contractual agreement, be it business, marital, or religious, while on the program.**
- **Students may go to Paris on their own on Saturdays or Sundays (if host parents agree and natural parents sign the release form):** we do not encourage underage students to travel on their own to the Paris city center via public transportation or remain on their own in Paris. We feel that a big town like Paris unfortunately presents some dangers for underage, non-French speaking, vulnerable students. Even if we do our best to inform students properly on how to behave and what to be careful of, natural parents should be aware that being in a big city is not free of risks. If they do still wish to be able to travel to Paris, we encourage students to travel in small groups, and never remain alone while in public transportation and within the Paris city center. This is up to the natural parents to decide if they allow their underage child to travel to Paris for unsupervised free time and take the responsibility for any event that could occur during that time. The host parents may also disagree with this authorization if they feel that the child is not mature or independent enough to travel to Paris on his/her own. Please check the release form for independent outings (in the application form).

Homestay students have to make their own journey to and from Paris.

It is your responsibility to know the rules outlined here, which are for your safety and wellbeing. We expect you to cooperate with these rules and we encourage you to ask your Homestay Officer directly to explain the rules if you do not understand them.

If a participant does not comply with the general rules or if a participant breaks the rules of the host family he/she may have a meeting with the Homestay Officer, who will decide upon the situation and, in certain difficult cases, **the student could be sent back home.**

It is important that each student knows the rules in detail and is informed of the consequences in case he/she does not comply with them. If students break one or some of these rules and cause problems, he/she will receive an official warning notice.

The Official warning notice

If a student is caught breaking a rule, or if the host family complains after learning about a wrongdoing, our Homestay Officer would have a meeting with the participant where they will talk about the event and where the student will sign a written warning in which the event will be described in detail. This statement will then be sent and shown to the parents and Nacel.

The purpose of the official warning notice is to:

- **Give formal notice** to the student that the institution does not approve of his/her behaviour and the reasons to explain why.
- **Tell the student that no other wrongdoings will be accepted.**
- **Make sure that the school and the natural parents are informed about his/her behaviour.**
- **Agree on a plan to adopt after the wrongdoing, including a review of the students behaviour after a predetermined period.**
- **During this period, the student will undergo a period of “probation”.** This period is meant to make him/her aware of the serious situation he/she is in, during which any wrongdoing could result in expulsion from the program.

Early termination of the program

If the student continues to break the rules and/or commit a serious wrongdoing, he/she will be expelled from the program. After an official notification, and after informing Nacel and the natural parents, the student will be sent back to their home country **at his/her parent’s own expense.**

Through training and experience, the Homestay Officer is the person to help you in case of an emergency. **Your Homestay Officer is an advisor, a friend and a helper.** When you have a problem or need advice, you should talk to your host family and to your Homestay Officer as they are on location and can help you quickly.