



Student Handbook

Introduction

Congratulations on enrolling in an Xperitas program and investing in your intercultural and linguistic development! Total language and cultural immersion will provide numerous opportunities for you to step out of your comfort zone, become more self-aware and independent, and begin the journey to global citizenship. On an Xperitas program, students are more than just tourists.

To support you in the travel preparation process, Xperitas provides educational activities and articles, as well as logistical preparation materials in this handbook. Logistical preparation will help you be a smart and educated traveler but preparing for the cultural immersion aspect is essential to having a successful experience! With preparedness and an open mind, you will be able to adapt to any situation new situations and have the most educational and enriching experience possible.

Please read through this handbook and let your teacher or the Xperitas staff know if you have questions or concerns at any point in the process. In addition to this handbook, you will also receive The Navigator, our monthly e-newsletter. To ensure that you receive our email correspondence, we recommend whitelisting these two email addresses:

- registration@xperitas.org
- info@xperitas.org

We look forward to supporting you on your journey abroad!!

Bon Voyage! ¡Buen Viaje! Buon viaggio! Gute Reise!

The Xperitas Team

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PREDEPARTURE RESOURCES

Pack and Prep for a Successful Program

When it comes to packing, less is more. Confident travelers know that carrying heavy bags full of clothes, toiletries and accessories that won't all be used is a waste of time and energy, and quickly becomes the bane of any traveler's journey. Our advice? Lighten up!

If you don't believe us, try this exercise: pack the planned-upon suitcase with a 50 lb. bag of kitty litter, dog food or books; whatever you can find to hit the 50 lb. mark. Now, walk around with it. Haul it up and down the stairs (elevators will not be available everywhere abroad!). Take the bag in and out of the car a few times. Go for a stroll with it. Now is the time to reconsider your packing list! Always pack less than you think you will need. An experienced traveler always travels light. Don't worry about wearing the same clothes several times. Only your travel companions will know, and they will be doing the same thing. Items like valuable jewelry should always be left at home!

Xperitas participants are permitted one suitcase and one carry-on in order to accommodate group travel on trains and in chartered motor coaches; luggage racks on trains and luggage compartments in buses are very limited in size.

Airline websites provide the most current luggage weight and size limits; oversize and overweight luggage creates extra cost that must be paid by the passenger at the time of check-in. Please visit the Travel Security Administration website www.tsa.gov to review current limitations for items allowed in your carry-on. Your carry-on must fit under the plane seat. Both bags must be marked inside and outside with your name and home address - including "USA."

Before you leave for the airport fill out and attach your Xperitas colored luggage tags securely to your bags.

Tips for Packing

- ❑ Roll your clothes instead of folding them, it saves space and helps prevent wrinkles
- ❑ Put the items you will use regularly on top in your luggage, so they are easier to find
- ❑ Pack electronics in your carry-on. Checked luggage gets tossed around, so don't pack anything fragile in there
- ❑ Do leave extra room in your luggage for gifts/souvenirs that you may purchase abroad
- ❑ Dress in layers to be best prepared for possible extremes in weather (bring gloves and hats if needed). Spring and even summer can be very damp and cool in Europe. Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and Peru's daytime temperatures may be warm, but many areas cool down quite a bit in the evening
- ❑ For detailed packing recommendations tailored to your destination, please refer to our country-specific handbooks and packing lists. These resources provide valuable insights into the climate, terrain, and essential items you'll need for your trip
- ❑ Don't wear short shorts, clothing with rips or holes and tank tops

Other Handy Items

- ❑ Plastic bag for dirty clothes
- ❑ Small first aid kit with band-aids, antacids, tissue, Ibuprofen, Tylenol, Pepto-Bismol, Emergen-C, etc.
- ❑ A watch
- ❑ Ear plugs and eye mask for possibly loud or bright hotel rooms
- ❑ List of addresses and emergency contacts for correspondence
- ❑ A copy of your birth certificate, extra passport photos and a copy of the 2 inside pages of your passport that show your picture, date and place of issue. (This information can be very helpful in the case of a lost or stolen passport)

Voltage/Electrical Appliances

- ❑ **Europe & South America:** The electrical current is 220-230V and will quickly burn out any 110-120V appliance. Bring a voltage converter and adaptor for your phone/camera or other electronics
- ❑ **Costa Rica & Puerto Rico:** The electrical current is 110-120V – the same as in the U.S.

Best to Leave at Home

- ❑ Jewelry
- ❑ Uncomfortable shoes or high heeled shoes
- ❑ Laptop or other expensive devices
- ❑ Hair dryers, curlers and straighteners:
They are heavy and only work with a heavy converter

Aside from determining the contents of one's suitcase, it's also important to think about these important steps to get you ready to travel. Here's a checklist to get ready to travel successfully!

Travel Prep Timeline

One Week Before Departure

- ❑ Contact your bank to advise of your travel plans to not run into issues with your debit/credit card usage abroad.
- ❑ Contact your phone carrier regarding any international fees and capabilities if you want to have international phone service during travel.
- ❑ Review the security rules for the departure airport on the airport website.
- ❑ You are allowed one checked bag; verify what the airline's weight limits are for baggage. Typically, suitcases may be no larger than 62" linear (linear size is the sum of the height, width and length). Weight limits for international flights range from 44 lbs. – 50 lbs. per checked piece of luggage. To avoid extra fees, weigh bags at home to ensure they're not overweight. Excessive weight or size may result in additional fees which you pay at check-in.
- ❑ You are allowed one carry-on and it must fit under the seat in front of you or in the overhead bin. A backpack is a better choice than a rolling carry-on because your hands will be free to handle your luggage; a backpack can also be used every day while traveling. (Size: 44" – 46" linear; weight limit ranges 22-26 lbs.; see airline website for more details). If your carry-on luggage exceeds the size limit you may be asked to send the bag as checked luggage.
- ❑ Make sure you have all your travel documentation in one, easy-to-access place (purse, carry-on, money belt, neck pouch, fanny pack). Make sure to have the lists of addresses and emergency contacts for correspondence.
- ❑ A copy of your birth certificate, extra passport photos and a copy of the 2 inside pages of your passport that show your picture, date and place of issue. (This information can be very helpful in the case of a lost or stolen passport).
- ❑ Make extra copies of important travel documents, ID/passports/visas, important phone numbers, etc. Place a copy in each piece of luggage and/or take photos and stored them on your smart phone.
- ❑ Be sure to leave a copy of your final itinerary with your parents/guardians. Additionally, you can simply print off a copy for travel or log onto the Xperitas portal to view the itinerary at any time.

24-hours Before Departure

- Reconfirm the meeting place at the airport for members of your group.
- Check the flight status online to confirm that your flight is on time
- Before leaving home, make sure you have your passport!
- If you are traveling with a carry-on bag, make sure there are no full-sized toiletries inside. All liquids and gels must adhere the 3-1-1 rule and be stored in a clear, plastic quart-sized bag; this must be removed from the carry-on baggage when going through security, so it should be easily accessible.
- Ensure that you are not traveling with any prohibited items.
- Verify that all important travel documents (passport, visas/greencards if applicable) itinerary with important phone numbers, money/debit/credit cards) are ready to go. Make sure to know your 4 digit PIN of your debit/credit cards (leave a copy of it at home in case it gets lost or must be cancelled).

At the Airport

- Once checked in, you should add the baggage claim receipt to your collection of travel documents. If you have connecting flights, especially those on separate carriers, it's especially important to keep your baggage claim tag with you to avoid any delays or glitches.
- Remember to have your passport and/or visa and boarding pass out for the security line.
- You will need to throw away or empty any bottles of water or other liquids outside of checked baggage before going through security.

PREPARATION ACTIVITIES

Understanding Your Comfort Zone

You may be the only one in your family traveling away from home, but your whole family can help you prepare for this cross-cultural experience! Prior to departure, take a good look at your daily routine (your comfort zone) and try to imagine it through the eyes of someone else: What if YOU were the host family, welcoming a student from another culture into your home? What would you do to make them feel comfortable, and what would you want to share with them about your lifestyle?

The objective of this activity is to help you take a look at your own lifestyle from an outside perspective and better understand what it will be like to be hosted by a family that might be very different than yours. We want to empower you to successfully navigate the ups and downs of life outside your comfort zone.



Step 1 Fill out the schedule on the next page and try to paint a detailed picture of what your day-to-day routine is like.

Is your routine pretty consistent, or do you have a lot of freedom to change it frequently?

How much downtime do you usually have each day?

When you have downtime, how do you spend it?

Does your family come together often to share activities? How about to share meals?

Do you think your friends' schedules are very similar to yours? Or very different?

Now swap schedules with one of your classmates. Are you surprised by any similarities or differences?

MORNING

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Wake up Hygiene Routine							
Breakfast							
Classes/ Activities							
Other							

AFTERNOON

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Lunch							
Fun things/ things you have to do							
Classes/ Activities							
Other							

EVENING

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Activities/ Extra- curriculars							
Fun things/ things you have to do							
Dinner							
Hygiene Routine							
Bedtime							
Other							



Step 2 Now pretend you are planning to host an international student and fit them into your schedule.

What about your schedule would you want to share (which downtime/extra-curricular activities)?

What would you have him/her do while you are busy?

Is there anything about your daily lifestyle that you would change to accommodate his/her visit? Why?

What type of meals would you cook during his/her visit?

Where would you want to take him/her?

3

Step 3 Practice other ways you can prepare by putting yourself out of your comfort zone while at home with your own family:

- ❑ Plan a week's worth of **meals that are different** (not better or worse) than what your family would typically eat.
- ❑ **Go to a restaurant or a store** that has traditional foods or products from a different country or culture. If you're from a small town, visit a big city (or vice-versa). Notice the differences and how you feel about them. Can you figure out where the differences lie? Did you enjoy the new food or was it very different from your normal tastes? Would you try it again?
- ❑ **Take quick showers** (or even cold showers if you are going to Latin America) to practice conserving resources.
- ❑ **Write in a journal:** Practice writing about your daily activities and routine, how you feel while doing these things and why they are important to you.
- ❑ **Be curious:** start to notice things around you. How do you already interact with different cultures? You'd be surprised how many opportunities to notice cultural differences exist in your daily life already.
- ❑ Plan a weekend-long **"kid swap"** with another traveler in your group. This will allow you to practice what it's like to spend some time with a family that is different (not better or worse) from yours. This recommendation requires a bit of advanced planning, but it is sure to provide an invaluable experience.

Money Matters

The amount of spending money needed for an Xperitas Language Program participant varies from student to student. Some students are very careful with their money and get by with less, while others spend it quickly and need more. Xperitas recommends about \$40-\$50 a day for meals and incidentals (outside of the family stay). Please keep in mind that if you plan to buy a lot of souvenirs or gifts, eat in the finest restaurants, or spend money on stamps, postcards, snacks, etc., more may be necessary.

Xperitas recommends bringing debit or credit cards for cash access. Please check with your bank or credit card company before you leave regarding possible limits and/or other service charges. Using a debit or credit card will probably offer the best exchange rates, and more flexibility considering many countries' limited banking hours. Make sure you know your 4-digit PIN in numerical form. The ATM machines abroad may not have the alphabet on the keys.

Traveler's checks have become increasingly difficult to cash in the last few years. Xperitas does not recommend utilizing traveler's checks as you may encounter tremendous difficulty in cashing them. You may wonder about the use of prepaid debit cards while traveling. While these seem like a great option and may work abroad, we still highly recommend that you bring a regular debit or credit card as a backup in case the prepaid debit card doesn't work abroad.

Are you ready to manage money while abroad and to use the currency of the destination country? [Do some online research to find the answer to these questions:](#)

What is the currency used in your destination country?

What is the exchange rate between U.S. dollars and the local currency?

Will you be able to use a debit/credit card in your destination country? Do you need a "chip and pin" card?

What will you plan to budget for food, bottled water and other necessities? (Check your itinerary to see which meals are included in the program price. All meals are provided during an Xperitas-arranged family stay.)

What is your planned budget for gifts and souvenirs to bring home?

Here are a couple of additional ideas for you to get a handle on money:

- Plan your budget for the program. Use the Budget Worksheet on the next page to help you discuss your planned and potential unexpected expenses.
- Are there any questions you have after your research? Talk to your teacher, group leader, travel mates, or Xperitas to ask where you might find answers for the questions you still have!

BUDGET WORKSHEET

Things to Purchase Beforehand	Budget	Actual	Difference
Suitcase(s)			
Maps or Guidebooks			
Language Guides			
Gifts for Hosts			
Other			

Things to Purchase In-Country	Budget	Actual	Difference
Souvenirs			
Clothes			
Other			

Food & Drink In-Country	Budget	Actual	Difference
Snacks			
Bottled Drinks			
Breakfasts			
Lunches			
Dinners			

Tickets	Budget	Actual	Difference
Public transport (if not covered in program fee)			
Museums (if not covered in program fee)			
Other sites (if not covered in program fee)			
Outings with host sibling			
Total			

Food is Cultural

Do you already know what foods and meals are considered “traditional” in the region of the U.S. where you live? Just because you grew up eating certain foods doesn’t necessarily mean that those foods reflect what is customary for other people in your region to eat. And just because something is considered a regional specialty doesn’t mean that your family eats it! If you have traveled around the United States, you may have sampled specialties from different regions. Now that you are traveling to a new country, you probably want to identify and taste some specialties from that part of the world as well as share some specialties from your own region with your host family!

The objective of this activity is to help you think about culture as it relates to food. By taking a closer look at what your family eats, you can decide if your typical meals are traditional of your region, of your family, or both! This will help you have a cultural discussion about food while staying with your host family. This activity will also help you identify what kinds of regional specialties you might want to try during your program with Xperitas!

1

Step 1 First, make a list of the top 6 meals or dishes that your family eats most often:

2

Step 2 Take a look at the lists below of dishes that could be considered *regional* specialties around the United State

New England: Chowder, baked beans, popovers, pot roast, shellfish, Boston cream pie, lobster rolls, cranberries

Mid-Atlantic: Waldorf salad, strip steak, eggs benedict, cheese steak sandwiches, cheesecake, crab cakes

Midwest: Wild rice, tater tot hot dish, gooey butter cake, fish fry, Kansas City BBQ, morels, lefse, apples

South: Crawfish, cornbread, pecan pie, baby back ribs, biscuits and gravy, sweet potato pie, okra, fried green tomatoes, jambalaya

Northwest: Crab, California mussels, oysters, sourdough bread, Pacific cod/halibut/ Pollock/salmon, cherries

Southwest: Fajitas, quesadillas, enchiladas, cornbread, corn on the cob, potato salad, Cobb salad, clams

Are any of these dishes included in your list above, or do you recognize them?

If so, are they things you eat on special occasions? Or are they stereotypes of your region and not actually eaten regularly by your family or others you know?

Now take a look at this list of *national* specialties and ask yourself the same questions:

U.S.A.: Meatloaf, macaroni and cheese, hamburgers, peanut butter sandwiches, s'mores, chocolate chip cookies, brownies, hot-dogs, Thanksgiving dinner (turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, etc.)

Do you eat these meals at home? Do you recognize them?

Are they stereotypes of "American food" and not actually regularly eaten by your family or others you know?

Can you name a few more dishes that might be categorized as regional or even national specialties?

Do some of your own research and try to explain why these dishes might be described as important to your region:

Are any of these dishes (either the ones listed above or the ones that you listed) dishes that you might be able to cook for your host family? Why or why not?

Can you bring the ingredients with you or buy them in the destination?

*Don't forget that measuring systems might be different!
Check our conversion charts on the last page.*

3

Step 3 Now think about the type of foods you will eat while you are abroad. Have you already studied the regional specialties of the place you will be visiting? What are they?

Find a recipe for a dish that you might eat while abroad and make it for your own family before you go. What kinds of ingredients might be different that those commonly used by your family?

CHEAT SHEET FOR METRIC CONVERSIONS

WEIGHT CONVERSIONS

Imperial System	Metric System
1 oz	28 g
4 oz or 1/4 lb	113 g
1/3 lb	150 g
8 oz or 1/2 lb	230 g
2/3 lb	300 g
12 oz or 3/4 lb	340 g
16 oz or 1 lb	450 g
2 lbs	900 g

TEMPERATURE CONVERSIONS

Imperial System	Metric System
32 °F	0 °C
50 °F	10 °C
59 °F	15 °C
68 °C	20 °C
86 °F	30 °C
104 °F	40 °C
300 °F	149 °C
350 °F	177 °C
400 °F	204 °C
425 °F	218 °C
450 °F	232 °C

VOLUME CONVERSIONS

Imperial System	Metric System
1 tsp	5 mL
1 tbs	15 mL
1/8 cup	30 mL
1/4 cup	60 mL
1/3 cup	80 mL
1/2 cup	120 mL
2/3 cup	160 mL
3/4 cup	180 mL
1 cup	240 mL
1 1/2 cups	350 mL
2 cups	475 mL
3 cups	700 mL
4 cups	950 mL
1 quart	0.95 L
1 gallon	4.5 L

Tips for Journaling

Journaling is one way to record and remember the wonderful things you observe and experience while traveling. It is also a well-known strategy for developing cross-cultural understanding. Journaling allows for self-reflection by observing cultural similarities and/or differences and deciphering how they affect the traveler's emotions, and why. Not only can the act of writing down these experiences and opinions while in the moment result in deeper self-discovery but preserving one's collection of journal entries can also illustrate a personal journey and establish lasting memories.



Step 1 Keep in mind that journaling is not always easy! Life gets busy, especially while traveling, but making some time in a busy schedule to sit down and document thoughts and feelings is invaluable. Take a look at the list below and mark the examples of good moments to journal that you think you will prefer:

- While commuting
- Before bed
- While waiting for your meal to be served at a restaurant
- While waiting for the rest of your group
- While sightseeing (you might be inspired to write while visiting an inspiring place, such as the gardens of Versailles, Neuschwanstein castle, or Machu Picchu)

List any other places you would like to journal or list a few spots you will be visiting during your itinerary that will be conducive to good journaling:

2

Step 2 Journaling may seem like a tedious task to those who dislike writing or to anyone who might be overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to document every single detailed occurrence of each jam-packed travel day. Keep in mind, however, that there are alternative methods to journaling beside the traditional narrative approach. Take a look at the list below and mark the examples you like best:

- Narrate your day's activities and reflections as they are happening or after they have happened (this is a more traditional style of journaling, but it is appealing to those who like detail and don't want to forget anything!)
- Use bullet points to list the day's activities, the inside jokes you laughed at or the foods you ate. This is a useful method if you like writing but are overwhelmed by narrating every single thing you did.
- Collect pamphlets, postcards and other memorabilia from the sites you visit and make a scrapbook. You can even do this while you travel if you bring scissors and tape! (just remember to pack the scissors in your checked luggage)
- Create a word collage with those same collectables; cut out words, phrases and photos that speak to you and paste them together in an inspiring way. Sometimes you don't need words to show exactly how a place makes you feel.
- Take a day, week or month planner with you and jot down simple notes to help you remember what you did that day, what you learned, or what challenged you.
- Keep an electronic journal; you could type directly into a blog website and publish it, or you could simply keep a running Word doc on a private device. This can be a good alternative for those who type faster than they write!
- Use a voice recorder; there is usually one already loaded into your smartphone. Then upload your voice notes when you get home and string them together to make an audio journal.
- Keep a video journal and talk out your observations. You could even upload your video clips to YouTube under private settings or save them as files on your electronic device.

Which methods do you intend to use? Create a sample entry about your day today and practice using your selected method:

Adjusting to the Family Stay

Congratulations on deciding to do a family stay! You probably already realize that this experience will lead to more profound connections and a higher level of immersion into the target culture. However, what might take you by surprise is that you may experience some discomfort as you encounter differences in daily life during your family stay.

The objective of the following activity is to help you become aware that your host family and their daily lifestyle will feel different while you are staying with them. Your initial reaction to these differences might be negative, but if you are able to suspend that initial judgement and have an open, curious mind, you will be able to deepen your understanding not only about your host culture, but also about yourself.



Step 1 Read the situations below and indicate whether you would feel comfortable, uncomfortable or neutral if you encountered the situation during your family stay.

Situation	Comfortable	Un-comfortable	Neutral
One or more of your host family members smokes a lot.			
You are vegetarian but your host family prepared you a dish with meat in it.			
Your host family does not go to bed before midnight.			
You have to take a shower but there is no hot water coming out of the tap.			
There is hot water in the shower, but you were told your shower should only take 5 minutes.			
Nobody in your host family speaks English.			
Your host family's house has thin walls and you can hear noise from other rooms and the street.			
There is no air conditioning in your host family's home.			
Your host family is very interested in politics and they ask you your thoughts about the U.S. president.			
The girlfriend or boyfriend of your host sibling hangs out with you and your host sibling most of the time during your family stay.			
Your host sibling brings you to parties where people are drinking and smoking.			
Your host family eats a lot of fish.			
Your host siblings are younger than you.			
Your host family doesn't take you to as many places as your friend's host family.			
Your host family is composed of only a host mom.			

2

Step 2 Review your answers from part 1. For the situations that you marked as uncomfortable, try to come up with some solutions or coping strategies that might help you manage the situation. Here are some examples:

- Find a spot in the house that you like (a comfy chair or a patio) where you can journal or read or just reflect
- Read a familiar book or watch a familiar TV show if it's possible
- Do an activity that feels familiar (go running or play piano)

A word of caution: connecting with friends or family in the U.S. may only amplify your discomfort.

In the target language: if you need to communicate with your host family to address the situation, practice how you would say what you need to say to your host family member to convey the message:

3

Step 3 In a small group of other classmates or friends, discuss which situations made you uncomfortable. Were you surprised that any of the situations listed here? Share what you came up with as a coping strategy or solution.

What to bring your host family

It's hard to imagine what your host family will be like and how their daily lifestyle will be different from your own. You are probably excited to meet them, and you want to bring them a gift, but it's hard to think of a gift that will be unique to them and will adequately represent where you come from.

The objective of this activity is to help you brainstorm gifts for your host family that will help you teach them about where you come from; however, we also hope your gift can be a catalyst for interaction and deeper discussion with your host family regarding the differences and similarities between your lifestyles. Remember that you do not have to bring a gift for every single family member.



Step 1 Brainstorm gifts that would be unique and meaningful. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

FOODS

- Are there any packaged foods that are considered specialties from your region (ex: wild rice from Minnesota; dried cherries from Michigan or Washington; barbecue sauce from Kansas City)?
- Now, think of how you would advise your host family on how to use that food. Do you eat it right out of the package? Or are there recipes that include this food that you might be able to cook with them?

Here are some other ideas of foods you could prepare with your host family that are considered typical of the U.S. (and easy to pack if you get them in box form!): Chocolate chip cookies, brownies, pancakes (which go well with the maple syrup that might be typical of your region!), macaroni and cheese, s'mores. Can you think of any others?

PRODUCTS OR BRANDS

- Are there any products that are manufactured in your region (such as OshKosh B'gosh overalls from Wisconsin; John Deere artifacts from Illinois; Burt's Bees products from Georgia)?
- You could also bring a calendar or book about your town or state that has lots of pictures.

CLOTHING OR ACCESSORIES FROM YOUR FAVORITE SPORTS TEAM

Do you support a certain college or professional sports team? If so, which team, and what sport do they play? Could you describe this sport to your host family if they don't know it? Do they have this sport in the place you will be visiting?

2

Step 2 Make a photo album to show your host family what your life is like where you're from. Include photos of your friends and family, your home and neighborhood, pets, favorite pastimes, vacations you have taken, special events you have participated in, etc.

You might even want to include a planner or school schedule to show what your daily lifestyle looks like. Your host family will enjoy hearing about your life and how it differs from theirs.

Write down any key vocabulary words that you will need to explain your personal interests and favorite pastimes:

3

Step 3 Finally, share your list of possible gifts with your classmates and practice showing your photo album and explaining the photos in the target language as you would do with your host family!

Beat Boredom

As you prepare for your program, you're probably learning about the places you'll visit and the sites you'll see. You're also probably ramping up your language skills so you can use them in the destination, and you're probably learning cultural tips and tricks. In this whirlwind of excitement and anticipation, perhaps the last thing on your mind is "What will I do if I'm bored?" However, it's a good idea to prepare for this emotion if it comes up, so that it doesn't catch you off guard.

The objective of this activity is to help you realize that boredom might come up during your trip, to help you have an open mind about boredom, and to help you turn it into something positive and productive so you can make the most out of your trip.



Step 1 Look at the scenarios below and mark whether or not you would be bored in that situation:

	I would be bored	I wouldn't be bored
If my video screen (in-flight entertainment) on the plane is broken	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to take a long bus ride or train ride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to wait a long time for the next metro	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to walk a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to visit 4+ different museums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to visit 4+ different churches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to listen to lectures on historical facts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have to hike all day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If all the group wants to do is go shopping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If all my host family does is watch TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my host mom spends a lot of time in the kitchen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my host sibling only plays video games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If there are no other families in the area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my host sibling is 3 years younger than I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my host family takes me to a grocery store	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2

Step 2 The first set of “ifs”, listed on the previous page, refer to boredom that arises during transit or wait times. Brainstorm some ideas of how you would pass the time while waiting, such as:

- Reading a book
- Journaling about the differences that you have experienced so far or what you are excited about
- Practicing speaking the target language with a friend or teacher
- Looking around! Where are you? What is different about what you see? How are the other people in the bus or train passing the time? Soak it all in!

Can you think of other ideas?

The second set of “ifs” are the result of traveling as part of a group. You might not always enjoy the activity at hand, but it might be someone else’s favorite activity. Trust that your teachers will provide a variety of activities and think of ways that you could enjoy the ones that aren’t your favorite:

Try to find a way that the activity at hand relates to your interests.

- If you’re at ANOTHER museum, check out the gift shop;
- If you’re on ANOTHER hike, chat with a friend in the target language;
- If you’re at ANOTHER church, try to notice the architecture or the art; how is it different from the other churches you’ve seen?
- If you’re shopping AGAIN, see if there are places of historical or cultural interest nearby. Observe what the other pedestrians are doing.

Can you think of other ideas?

The third set of “ifs” refer to the family stay. After a jam-packed couple of days touring around a new country, your family stay might seem boring simply because the pace is different. Take a breath, enjoy the slower pace and allow yourself to soak in and reflect on the cultural differences.

Remember that Xperitas host families are volunteers and are not required to take you on excursions. That said, all our families have a genuine interest in sharing their daily lifestyle with you and learning about yours!

There are lots of things to do and enjoy and learn, even if most of your time is spent at the house:

- Offer to show your family how to cook a meal that you often eat in the U.S. Bring brownie or pancake mix or boxed macaroni and cheese as part of your gift to the host family.
- Play a board game or card game. Again, you can make these games a part of your gift.
- Have a conversation! Use downtime to really get to know your host family. If you're not sure where to start, come prepared with a list of conversation starters and some useful vocab words.
- Offer to help clean or do other household chores. Notice the differences in how these tasks are done.

If your family watches TV, don't let it be a passive activity. Ask questions! Notice differences!

- What kind of TV shows are popular in this country? Series? Reality? Talk shows? Politics? (What do you think it says about the culture there?)
- What is different about the commercials? The products advertised? The length? When they are played?
- Are there a lot of athletic events being aired? What kind of sports? Are they the same ones that are popular in the U.S.? Are there cheerleaders? Mascots? Team colors?

Can you think of other ways to engage with your host family while at the house?

If you're thinking that playing games on your phone or spending time on social media or texting your friends or family would be a good way to beat the boredom, THINK AGAIN!

Spending time engrossed in your phone is a good way to *disengage* with your environment (the environment that you paid a lot of money to visit). The answer to beating the boredom while in the destination is to engage MORE and discover ways to become interested in your surroundings and the situation at hand, even if it's not your first idea of a fun time.

Guidelines for a Successful Family Stay

Believe it or not, most students say that the Family Stay is the best part of their program! Right now you may be a little nervous about living with a family you don't know and about being in a different culture. We want you to know that the apprehension you feel is perfectly normal. All of the families who agree to host an Xperitas student are not financially motivated but rather have a genuine desire to welcome you into their home and engage in this cross-cultural exchange. Your host family is interested in getting to know you. It is their expectation that you desire to get to know them as well! It truly takes both sides to build a successful experience. To help you to do your part, we offer the following practical suggestions and urge you to observe them.

Remember that it is normal to feel uncomfortable during the first couple days of the family stay. Adjustment occurs gradually and toward the end of their stay, most students wish they could stay longer. If you need to contact your group leader during the family stay, first make sure you have given yourself time to make this adjustment. If you feel threatened or endangered by something, call your leader right away.

Express common courtesies whenever you can; "Good morning," "Good evening," "Please" and "Thank you" in the target language will go a long way in making them feel good about you. Greet your family every morning and always add please and thank you to requests. Wish them a good night before bedtime.

Always maintain a positive attitude. Try new foods, initiate conversation and participate in family activities. **Smile!** Don't spend your time in your room away from others; try your best to communicate with your family members. Not eating or isolating yourself may cause your family to think you are unhappy or ill.

Adapt yourself to their schedule and ways of doing things. Don't expect them to adapt to you! Part of the learning experience of the family stay is becoming acquainted with the differences in other cultures. A good example is different meal times and foods.

Offer to pay your own entrance fees (for example: public transportation, restaurant meals, and movies) if your host family or host sibling takes you places. Your host family has invited you to their home to partake in the family's daily activities including family meals. They have been instructed to follow their regular routine so that you may learn what life is really like in the country you are visiting. They are not expected to be your tour guide.

Please conserve water and energy. Since water and electricity are very costly in Europe and Latin America, limit yourself to one short shower each day and turn off lights and appliances you're not using. Such energy-saving actions are much more common abroad than in the U.S.

Please make your bed each morning and keep your room tidy. Do not leave your clothes or other items on the floor or scattered about the house.

Always ask permission to use the stereo, TV, radio, computer, telephone, etc. If you need to call the U.S., only do so collect or with your own phone to avoid high charges to the host family. Whatsapp is a great way to stay connected with family and friends.

Get dressed before breakfast. No robes or pajamas at the table. Do not go barefoot in the home!

Become a member of the family. Offer to help with chores such as setting the table, cooking, shopping, etc. Do not expect to be entertained, waited on or driven around. In short, become part of the family!

Focus on getting to know your host family. Do not call your friends or make plans to meet them; you only have a short time to spend with your host family.

Honor the Xperitas Code of Conduct during the family stay. If anyone should offer you cigarettes or alcoholic beverages such as beer or wine, simply say "No thank you." The Code of Conduct applies to YOU, not to the host family members or others you meet during the family stay.

Take a scrapbook or photo album. These are great tools to "break the ice" at the start of your family stay and provide basic information to your host family about you and your life in the U.S..

Hand out gifts within the first few hours of meeting the family. The small gift(s) you have brought for the host family should be wrapped and presented with thanks. This is an excellent way to get started, showing your appreciation and explaining the gift.

Send your host family a thank-you note upon completion of the program. This is vitally important! A holiday greeting card is also a nice gesture. This type of follow-up on your part will mean a great deal to the host family.

ALWAYS REMEMBER:

The success of your family stay depends as much on YOU as on your hosts. Do your part and you will have a successful family stay!

Family Stay What If...?

GROUP PREPARATION ACTIVITY

During the family stay, students will find themselves in situations that require problem solving, social and cross-cultural communication skills. It's important to go through a few difficult scenarios so that students feel prepared to tackle any situation that may come their way.

The objective of the following activity is to help students practice resolving various categories of problems that may arise while they are staying with their host family. This training will allow them to feel more confident and empowered with actions they can take during this more independent portion of the trip.

1

Have students break into groups and practice the role-plays below. They should decide how they might handle the scenario and how they would communicate their message in the target language.

2

Come together and talk through the role-plays as a group. How did different students respond to the situations? What would you, as the teacher, prefer them to do in the example scenario?

ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS


You have just arrived in your host family's home and they are excited to talk with you and get to know you. The family members are talking very fast and they think you understand everything in the target language. The truth is, you really don't understand very much. How, when and where will you explain this to the family members?

You are about to have your first meal with your host family and they offer you wine or beer with your meal. You don't want to offend your host family, but the rules for the trip prohibit you from drinking alcohol in any setting. What will you do?


It's after dinner and it's late. Your host sibling asks you if you want to go out to a party. You are feeling very tired and although you would like to go if it were earlier, you really need to sleep. How will you explain to your host sibling that maybe another night would be better to go out?

ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS


You just arrived at a party with your host brother or sister. You notice right away that many of the students are drinking and smoking. Do you stay at the party or ask your host sibling to take you home? How would you handle the situation if you stayed? How would you ask your host sibling to leave if you are uncomfortable?




You have been in your family stay for three days and your host sibling doesn't talk to you very much. You feel like you have very different interests and that your host sibling isn't very concerned with getting to know you. You think you would probably get along better with a different host family. How do you respond? How would you communicate this to the family and/or to your teacher?



You really like your host sibling and you like to hang out with them. However, they have a girl/boyfriend that is hanging out with you both almost all the time. You are not comfortable with this and you would prefer to spend more time with your host sibling and their other friends. You plan to speak with your host sibling about the situation and you hope your host sibling agrees with you. What will you say? What if your host sibling does not agree with you?



You remain in contact with two of your U.S. American traveling companions during the family stay. You learn that their host families take them out frequently to visit various sites. You like your host family, but they don't go out at all and haven't taken you anywhere. Your host family likes to talk about politics and they watch a lot of television and read newspapers. You want to change your host family because they are boring. What would you do?



THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-AWARENESS

We all belong to different cultures, and many of our beliefs and personal habits are a result of our cultural backgrounds. In order to become more conscious of why people act the way they do, it is useful to understand that we all make judgements and comparisons on the basis of our own cultural beliefs!

The objective of this activity is to help you become more aware of the traits that make you who you are, to help you understand how these traits may be the result of belonging to a certain culture, and finally, to help you start thinking outside of the box by asking why people from different cultures might have different beliefs, habits or behaviors.

1

On the next page, fill out the diagram with words that describe who you are or words you might use to characterize or identify yourself.

2

Once the diagram is filled out, answer the first four questions underneath the "Discussion Questions" section.

3

Find a partner and share one or two of the traits or identities that are important to you and why. Then, answer why you think your answers might be different than your neighbor's.

4

Look at the illustration on the following page with your group. Listen to what others shared for questions 1-4, then go through the discussion questions underneath the illustration.

5

Think about the connection between personal traits and preferences and how one might be the product of the cultures to which they belong.

At the end of each line, write a word that you feel describes who you are or is a significant part of how you choose to characterize yourself to others.

Examples: Soccer player, female, American

A central light green circle containing the text "ME" is surrounded by ten horizontal green lines for writing. The lines are arranged in three groups: two above the circle, three to the left, and five to the right.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Which three traits are most important to you?

Which of these traits are you most aware of? Least aware of?

Which one trait are you most proud of? Why?

Which one trait that seems less relevant to you? Why?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Which person in the cartoon do you relate to? Discuss the possible causes of the misunderstandings in the photo. If someone wanted to find out more about who you are, how should they approach you? How should they begin? What are the best ways to get to know you?

Now look back at your list of traits; which ones do you think are shaped by values of a culture that you relate to? How do you think these identities frame your view of the world?

The Likert Scale

REFLECTING ON A CONTINUUM

In-country reflection activities are an important part of the immersion experience because they help process the cultural differences you are encountering. However, it can be hard to find the time for reflection when you are constantly on the go! The good news is that you can use the Likert Scale as a reflection activity whenever, wherever, and for any length of time.

The Likert Scale was invented by Rensis Likert, an educator and psychologist, and it uses a continuum related to levels of agreement. The objective of this activity is to ask questions that will spark discussion about cultural difference and how you are experiencing it during the program. This activity should allow a safe space to record your inclinations, without having to vocalize how or why you feel that way (unless you want to). This safe space can also be where you can start to explore what you like or dislike about the culture you are newly experiencing or what you like or dislike about your own culture - there is not necessarily a right or wrong way of doing things!

1

Visualize or create a line on the ground of your meeting area. One end of the continuum signifies "I don't agree at all," on the other end is "I completely agree," and in the middle is "I feel neutral about this" (or "I kind of agree and kind of disagree").

2

Your leader will introduce a few reflective questions or comments and ask you to physically move to the place on the scale that best reflects how you are thinking or feeling, like the ones below:

- This experience is exactly what I expected when registered for the trip
- I'm having a lot of fun here. I feel totally comfortable in this setting.
- I am learning a lot about myself.
- I am learning a lot about the people here.
- The people here are so much like the people I know at home.
- I think that people here have a lot of control over their own destiny.
- I think it would have been fun to live in the castle that we just visited (even though it might mean my every move would be watched)
- Visiting this place changed my point of view of a certain subject (ex.: visiting the DDay beaches changed my view of WWII history or of the subject of war in general)
- My host sibling was not someone I would usually be friends with.
- I am putting myself outside of my comfort zone.
- I'm surprised at how much of the language I understand.
- I feel like I could be practicing the language more.
- I liked the big city better than the smaller town we visited.

Guidelines for A Respectful Stay

Respectful Technology Use

- Try not to connect with your family and friends back home during the day (via phone or social media). If needed, you can connect with them at night, after dinner. Instead, connect with your host family during the day and give them your full attention.
- Don't be surprised/disappointed if your host family does not have Wi-Fi. If they do have it, practice respectful Wi-Fi use – no streaming, and preferably only use it after dinner or during other times when the family is not spending quality time together.

Respecting the Home

- Practice respectful water usage. Take short showers and turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth.
- In Latin America, make sure you throw your toilet paper in the trash instead of flushing it, to accommodate their sensitive plumbing (unless you are directed otherwise).
- In Latin America, do not be surprised if your showers are colder than you are used to.
- If you would like to wash your clothes, you can politely ask your host family to do laundry and then offer to help.
- AC and heat are not as commonly used abroad as the U.S. Dress in layers and bring small travel fan if it will be hot in the destination when you travel!

Food and Respect

- Try whatever foods are put in front of you.
- Practice explaining which foods you can't eat (allergies) and practice how to politely decline or not eat as much of a food you don't like.

General Respect

- Always say please and thank you.

Ways to engage with host family members if you spend a lot of time at home:

- Offer to help with cooking or cleaning.
- Show them photos and describe your life at home; ask them about photos or other art or objects that are displayed around their home.
- Make a list of questions/topics that you can bring up to ignite conversation.
- Play cards or a board game.
- Cook a recipe from home for your host family.

Call vs Don't Call

Preparing for the family stay experience can be challenging! Use this activity to help better understand expectations during the family stay. It is important that you have someone to contact in case of an emergency while also being able to understand and respond to your own emotions.

Have fun with this and remember that your leader is there to support and encourage you to have a great family stay.

1

Remember that you have successfully endured short periods of stress and discomfort in your life, and that regardless of what happens you WILL be able to handle it.

Examples: 5 days of "roughing it" while camping, stress during finals, having the flu, staying at an annoying relative's home, etc

2

Think of this experience as a great leap into your soon-to-be adult freedom. Prove that you can be strong individuals...to teachers, parents and yourself!

3

Your leader will set boundaries and expectations for teacher-student during the family stay. They will be nearby and regularly checking messages, and in the event of an emergency, will get to you as soon as possible. It's important that everyone is on the same page as to the definition of a "crisis" or "emergency."

4

Ask yourself: Is this something I can handle by expressing my concern with my family without my teacher's help? Can I tell them that I don't like avocado or that I would love to watch soccer, or I'm really interested in going for a walk in the town center? Can I ask them to pick up some Sprite for my upset stomach at the store? Remember that when you pick up the phone to call a leader, it will be because the situation is emergent, severe, and requires immediate action.

CALL

If a small child from your family keeps sneaking into bed with you at night.

If you are in your bedroom and your host parents are having a loud argument and you are concerned for your safety.

If you vomit all day.

If you are bleeding and there is no way it will stop with a bandage or two.

If you are left home alone all day.

If you wake up and someone in your family is wearing your clothes.

If your host dad is walking around the house in boxers and it makes you uncomfortable.

You see blood in your stool or vomit.

DON'T CALL

If your family only serves cookies and coffee for breakfast.

If you are frightened because you've seen a big spider in the bathroom.

If you hate tomatoes and your family serves them at every meal.

If you miss your family.

If you vomit once or twice.

If you are bleeding and a Band-Aid takes care of it.

If you miss Facebook, TV, your cell phone, or your boyfriend/girlfriend.

If you are bored.

A little stomachache or diarrhea.

If there is only cold water in the shower.

If you don't "like" your family.

CONNECTING DURING THE FAMILY STAY

A Guide for Parents

Thanks to smartphones and widespread WiFi, your teen can virtually take all their friends and family along on their immersion program! There's only one problem: sharing constant selfies and recounting every detail via social media or messaging can actually inhibit the opportunities for true immersion and growth. There is no doubt that cell phones can be a useful tool while traveling, and many parents like the sense of security and the reassurance of connection that they offer, but when do you encourage your student to disconnect?

As teachers prepare their students for their upcoming trip abroad, many of them will be talking about guidelines regarding cell phones. Mauri Deer, a French teacher from Minnesota, has traveled with students for more than ten years. She prepares students for the challenge of disconnecting simply by reminding them that this trip is an investment: "You could look at France through your cell phone, or you could put a down payment on a car and look at our trip photos on the internet." Or, she argues, they can disconnect. Disconnecting and truly being present for the experience will allow them to notice more about their surroundings and be more intentional in their observations.

Perhaps the hardest obstacle in disconnecting comes during the family stay, when students are feeling a higher intensity of culture shock and homesickness. Homesick travelers are often tempted to stay plugged in to the world they know at home rather than embracing the experiences during their family stay abroad, but this can sabotage a student's opportunity to meet new friends or connect with host family members. Homesickness can be overwhelming, and it's all too easy to pick up that phone and message home to vent or despair. As a parent, it's impossible to disregard your child's concerns, but how can you tell the difference between discomfort and a serious problem? Mauri Deer asserts that the best way to prevent this dilemma is to establish a level of trust between the student and the group leaders before the trip so that the trip participants feel empowered to call their teacher if there is a true problem. Before departure, she meets with students to prepare them for discomfort but also to help them recognize what is discomfort versus what should elicit a call, for example:

- *If you are frightened because you've seen a large spider in the bathroom... DON'T CALL*
- *If you hate tomatoes and your family serves them at every meal... DON'T CALL.*
- *If you are left home alone all day...CALL!*
- *If you are bored...DON'T CALL.*

Taken from Xperitas' [Call vs. Don't Call](#) activity

Deer also empowers students to figure out how to be proactive in a challenging situation:

Is this something I can handle by expressing my concern with my family without my teacher's help? Can I tell them that I don't like avocado, or that I would love to watch soccer, or that I'm really interested in going for a walk in the town center?

If you're wondering how you as a parent can help with this process, consider these guidelines:

- Talk to your child's world language teachers and ask what their standards are for cell phone and social media use and how they are helping prepare students for this challenge.
- Have a conversation with your child about the [Call/Don't Call](#) activity and see how they feel as they anticipate the family stay.
- Empower your child to disconnect but reassure them that their teachers are the most capable people to help during their trip.
- Encourage them to complain to their journal when they are frustrated; their feelings are real and they can learn from them and grow.
- If you do plan to talk to your child while he or she is on the program, limit communication to only a few minutes and don't expect a daily check in. Don't pressure students to contact you at certain intervals or times, but rather allow them to determine if and when they want to reach out.
- Students should only use the host family's technology if they have permission.
- It is normal to feel homesick. Being with new people in a new home can be uncomfortable, and reaching out to talk with host family members is the best way to work through nervousness and misunderstandings. Encourage your student to give communication in the family stay a try. Don't let them give up and miss out on an opportunity to grow, learn and make lasting relationships!

The family stay is the best opportunity for students on brief travel abroad programs to have authentic experiences that help to develop both language and cross-cultural communication skills. Courage, open-mindedness, and a sense of adventure will open doors to new lifelong relationships. You and your child will have stories to share and probably some new friends abroad if the relationship is nurtured during the family stay. And remember, the real learning won't happen until they are ready to push beyond their comfort zone!

BEYOND THE EXPERIENCE

Welcome Home!

As a returned participant, we thank you for sharing your skills, talents, resources, humor, insight, and humanity as part of Xperitas. We hope that your cultural immersion experience was valuable and will continue to have a meaningful impact in your life moving forward.

Coming home can be one of the most surprising parts of any program and is an aspect of a voyage that is often not given much attention. Everyone's return is different. For some it may be wonderful to reunite with family and friends and to enjoy the comforts known and trusted. Others may find that home is not quite the same place they left.

Keep in mind that many of the feelings you may have stem from changes you experienced during your Xperitas program and the ambiguity of how the new "you" fits into your old life. Remember, change can be positive! You have new ideas and a better sense of who you are and what you can do. You have grown and developed as a person. You've discovered your strengths, learned new interpersonal skills, and shared incredible experiences.

We believe it is important to tell your story, extend your experience and make a difference in the world around you. Tell it in as many ways as you wish. We have compiled this resource to give you a few ideas on how you can get started expressing your recent global experience. We hope that it will fuel your creativity and confidence.

You're home - now what?

Don't...

- Expect life to be exactly how you left it
- Forget what you learned as you assimilated into a new culture
- Make impulsive or drastic life changes for at least a few months after your return
- Worry if things move too fast at home

Do...

- Apply the knowledge gained through your experience to your life
- Take time to relax, enjoy yourself and settle in
- Realize that the re-entry process is different for everyone and that it takes time and patience
- channel your excitement into action at home
- Stay connected with Xperitas; who better to understand your experience than those who've been on a similar journey themselves?

Reflect

As you reflect upon your experience, try using these lists as a starting point to identify skills and qualities you may have developed through your Xperitas program. You may find this reflection useful in sharing your experience or communicating your growth to others.

Which skills have you developed?

- Appreciating cultural differences and similarities
- Adjusting to new environments
- Establishing relationships more quickly
- Learning by observing, listening and doing
- Operating with a high level of ambiguity
- Functioning outside your comfort zone
- Communicating despite obstacles
- Making balanced judgments

Which qualities have you developed?

- Curiosity
- Appreciation of diversity
- Patience
- Self-knowledge
- Perseverance
- Enthusiasm
- Flexibility
- Open-mindedness
- Self-confidence
- Independence
- Sense of humor
- Empathy
- Resourcefulness
- Sense of global responsibility

Share

Submit Your Story

One of the easiest ways to readjust from a moving experience is to share your stories with others. Spend some time thinking about the print media that reaches your community: local neighborhood newspapers and newsletters, as well as newsletters from any organization with which you are associated.

Start a Blog

Blogging is a creative way to share your experiences, photos, and links with an audience online. Getting started is easy; try [blogspot.com](https://www.blogspot.com) or [tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com) and start spreading the word. Don't forget to submit your writing to info@xperitas.org for a chance to be a featured guest blogger!

Post Photos & Videos

We'd love to see your trip photos and videos! Email info@xperitas.org for a Dropbox link to send your photos or submit them to our Photo Contest on the Photo Contest tab of our Facebook page or by using the hashtag #Xperitas on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter.

Act

Continue Your Language Learning

- Practice online at [busuu.com](https://www.busuu.com), [livemocha.com](https://www.livemocha.com) or the Duolingo app
- Find a language conversation group near you on [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

Connect with Peers

- Participate in Global Youth Service Day (April) or Youth Service America's Get Ur Good On
- Apply to represent the U.S. at the UNESCO Youth Forum
- Join or start a student group to connect with globally minded peers
- Volunteer in your school's international student services or study abroad office
- Write about your experience and submit to Xperitas as well as magazines like Transitions Abroad, Abroad View, Glimpse and Verge Magazine, which accept student work

Watch for Global Festivals and Entertainment in Your Area

- International film festivals
- Restaurants that serve traditional food from your host community (or try cooking your own!)
- Annual events like Festival of Nations, Día de Los Muertos, Kwanzaa, World Refugee Day
- Dance and music venues
- Art or cultural exhibits