

Holiday Hosting Information Sheet

International Friendships, Inc.

How do I sign up?

If you are a new volunteer, please complete an application well ahead of the holiday. Sometimes it takes a while to reach your references, and we don't want you to be disappointed! If you are a veteran volunteer, just call and let us know how many students you would like! The deadline for sign-up (for Thanksgiving hosting) is the Tuesday of the week before Thanksgiving. We are getting more students who want to share Christmas with Americans, but most of our requests are for Thanksgiving.

Is there any training?

Yes! Please call the IFI office or check our website for the next available training.

How do the students find out about this opportunity?

Some students will be part of our Friday night Bible study, but we often open this event to the general international student population at OSU. Many students find out about this opportunity through our website. It is possible that you may host a student with whom this is our first contact. Many students see this as an opportunity to both experience American culture and to see an American home and family.

Can I request someone from a specific country?

Yes, when you sign up, you may indicate any preferences you may have. We will do our best to honor your request, but we cannot guarantee that a student will be available from any given country. The vast majority of students here in Columbus are from East Asia.

How will I be matched with a student(s)?

We try to give you your student's name, email, phone number, and address by at least the Monday before Thanksgiving, a few days before Christmas, or a few days before Easter. However, we always have a few students who sign up at the last minute, and we appreciate volunteers who can be flexible! Most likely the information will be emailed or we will call you. It will then be your responsibility to contact the student with an invitation to your celebration and to make arrangements for transportation.

Contacting the student(s)

You may call or email the student. Email is often the most effective way to contact students. However, a phone call is fine. You may need to try calling several times and perhaps at different times of day. Keep in mind that it may be intimidating for an international to return your call. Please do not give up after one try. If, after several tries, you are still unable to contact and / or make arrangements with the student, please contact the IFI office for assistance or for the name of another student.

Transportation and Distance

Most students will not have transportation. In most cases, you will need to come to campus to bring the student to your home and then take him/her back after your celebration. Please communicate the expected pick-up and return times to your student. Also, we have found that students who do have their own cars are not comfortable driving a long distance to their host's home. If you live at a distance, please plan on picking the student up.

What if our celebration is out of town?

If you plan to drive a long distance from campus, please explain your plans to the student and make sure that is acceptable to them. If they need time to study, you might suggest they bring books and then offer a quiet place at some time during the day. In the case that a long drive is not acceptable to your assigned student, please contact the IFI office for another match. If you are planning an overnight stay, please let IFI know ahead of time, and we will do our best to match you with a student who would like to do this. This may not always be possible.

Relating to an international student

Sometimes hosts are nervous about how to relate to an international. Relax and enjoy your time with the student. They will be happy to have someone welcome them and open their home. We suggest that you take the attitude of a learner and seek to gain a deeper understanding of a new culture. Please see our additional resource, "Interacting with Your International Friends."

Are there any dietary restrictions?

When you receive the name of your student, you will also be notified of any dietary restrictions that we are aware of. Usually, if there is a variety of food including vegetarian dishes, there will not be a problem. In general, students from Hindu backgrounds will not eat beef, Muslims will not eat pork (such as ham), and some students are vegetarians. Fortunately, turkey is a safe bet for most. In fact, many international students have never tasted turkey or seen one carved (you will have fun letting them watch and / or participate).

What about sharing my faith?

At this initial stage of meeting the student, please be sensitive to the fact that they may have little or no previous exposure to Christianity. Our hope is that you will have the perspective that you are part of a larger ongoing ministry to the student, as it is more likely that the students who are hosted by our volunteers will come to the IFI Bible Study on Friday nights. Hopefully, over time the student will have the opportunity to build a relationship of trust with you or our other volunteers which would be a more appropriate context for sharing spiritually. We ask that you not force a spiritual discussion but be sensitive to the student and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Do practice your normal family traditions such as praying before the meal or sharing what you are thankful for, etc. You might explain to the student that this is what your family does, and share why.

What about contacting the student(s) in the future?

It is our hope that this will be the beginning of a wonderful and mutual friendship. Although not required, you are encouraged to keep in touch with the student. This can be through calls or emails to let them know you are thinking of them, inviting them to your home again, sending cards for birthdays and holidays, etc.

Thank you for your willingness to serve. We hope you will be blessed as you share your holiday with an international student. Your hospitality opens a door for an international student to be touched by the love of Christ!

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