

HIF 2026

Japanese Language and Japanese Culture Program

Homestay –Useful Information & Tips–

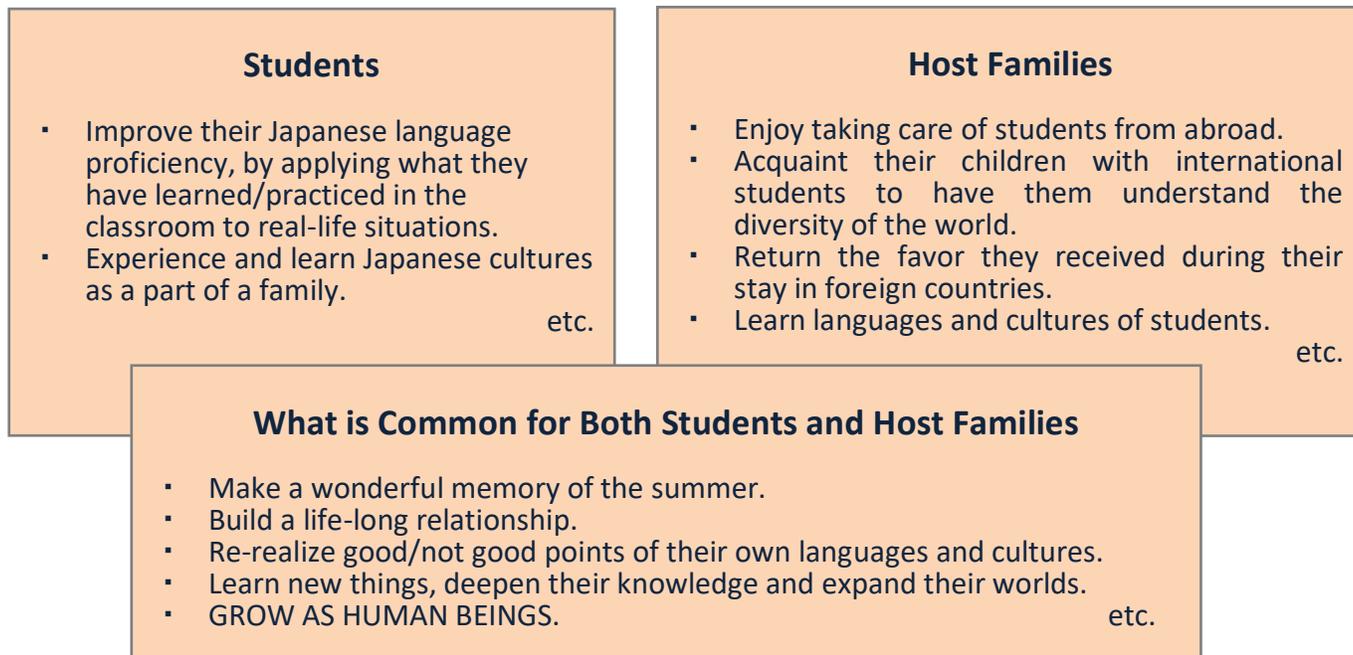
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As of January 10, 2026

It may take time to get used to living and learning in Japan, so we have prepared this booklet for you. It contains information on life in Japan. As you know, each family is different so the situations described here may not apply to your own host family, but we hope that it will give you a confident head start.

1. Purposes & Meanings of Homestay



2. To Make Your Homestay Fruitful & Successful

- Empathy is key. Try to understand perspectives of other than your own.
- Respect others and be open-minded.
- Reserve judgment on cultural differences.
- Make extra efforts to understand the non-verbalized assumptions in the context of the communication.
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes and learn from them.

3. Conditions

a) Homestay Period

Start: Sunday, June 14th, 2026

End: Sunday, August 9th, 2026



-Do not stay at your host family house prior to or after the above mentioned period.

-You may leave Hakodate on August 8th after the closing ceremony and farewell party which finishes around noon.

- You must let your host family know about your itinerary back to your country (i.e., when you leave your host family's house) well in advance. In the case you have to change your itinerary at the last minute, consult with your host family before you actually change it.

- Staying out overnight is prohibited even at another student's home or at a hotel, except for the semester break. By setting this rule, we strongly believe that you can fully immerse yourself in the homestay experience.

a) Homestay Fee

The 142,000-yen homestay fee is included in your program fee.

This fee includes 1) accommodation (furnished private room) and 2) two meals a day (breakfast and dinner).

*HIF will pay the fee to your host family via bank transfer.

b) Semester Break (July 10th ~ July 13th)

Most participants use this break to travel to Sapporo or other areas in Hokkaido/Japan. If you plan a trip by yourself, you may leave after the final examination and course evaluation which finish around 1pm on July 9th and come back to your host family's house by the night of Monday, July 13th, at a reasonable time so that you won't disturb your host family or others.

Of course, staying in Hakodate is another option.

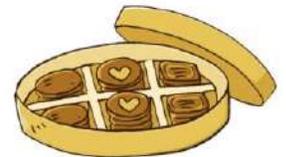
HIF prohibits participants from hitchhiking and sleeping outside except under unavoidable circumstances. In any case, HIF accepts no responsibility or liability for any injury or loss resulting from the above-mentioned behaviors.

c) What to Bring for Your Homestay

Your host family will prepare a room, bedding, desk, and desk light for you. Also they will allow you to use their washing machine, detergent, iron, hair dryer, etc.

Please bring/purchase in Japan for your personal use and necessity such as towels, toothpaste, shampoo and any other consumable items you wish to have.

It is a good idea to bring some omiyage (souvenirs) with you for your host family. Anything is fine, but some popular omiyage are cookies, chocolates, tea, coffee, something that has your university name or mascot on it, etc. It's also recommended that you bring some pictures of your family, friends, hometown, university, etc. to show your host family.



d) Possible Areas for Homestay

Each student will be placed with a family who lives in Hakodate City, Hokuto City or Nanae Town where the public transportation is available to commute to/from HIF. Your host family will show you how to get to HIF using public transportation (bus, tram, or train) on the first few days of your homestay. HIF works hard to find families who live close to HIF, but please note that there is a chance you will live about 1.5 hours away from HIF.

HIF will refund transportation expenses for those who use public transportation to commute between host family's house and HIF, according to the criteria set by HIF. Further information will be given at the beginning of the program.



4. Host Family Placement

HIF matches students with host families according to food and health preferences. These preferences may include cigarette smoke, pets, alcohol and dietary restrictions. However, sometimes students who dislike cigarette smoke are matched with host families that smoke. In these cases, host family members offer to restrict their smoking to designated areas for your convenience.

Some host families accommodate more than one student and they provide each one with an individual room. Also, there is a chance that a student will live with two host families, one for the first half of the program and the other for the second half.

5. Arriving at Your New Home

1) When you meet your host family on the first day at the Hakodate Kokusai Hotel, please bow with the following greeting: はじめまして。お世話になります。

2) When you arrive home, take off your shoes at the Genkan and your host family will let you enter the living room, then you say “お世話になります。よろしくおねがひします。” Please use the terms “okaa-san” (mother) or “otoo-san” (father) with your host parents, or ask them how to call them.

3) Your host family will show you around the house and explain to you about their daily routines and individual schedules and tell where you fit in.

4) Please give them your souvenir in the living room.

5) It is a good idea to show photographs of your family and home to your host family after dinner.

6) Your host family will accompany you to HIF or the nearest bus/tram stop or station on the first weekend to show you how to commute to HIF using public transportation.

★Good manners at the Genkan★

After you take off your shoes at the entrance, put your shoes together with the toes pointing toward the entrance door. If you are instructed, put your shoes in the shoe cabinet.



6. During Your Homestay

Polite Expression

です・ます form is the best way to talk to your host mother and father or any other family members older than you. But, some people prefer casual form to です・ます form, since it makes people feel closer. We recommend you use です・ます form for the first few weeks, and then ask them which form they feel more comfortable to be used.

Keep Your Room Neat

Japanese homes are normally built with natural materials such as wood, or tatami (natural straw mat). The climate is humid and easily causes mold to form, so cleanliness is an important part of maintenance.

- **Vacuum your room at least once a week.**
- **Do your laundry at least once a week because it takes days to dry up when it is humid. Few families have a dryer at home.**
- If you use Japanese style futon, you should fold it up every morning and take it out every evening.
- If your room is a tatami room, do not place anything wet or damp on the tatami mats which can cause mold, and do not enter with your slippers on. The friction damages tatami.

Help with Household Chores as Needed

Help with the dishes and setting the table, at very least clean up your own dishes. Few families have a dishwasher at home.



Daily Greetings

The following expressions are essential in daily life. Greetings with a smile will make them more effective.

おはようございます (Good morning.) いただきます (Thank you for the meal we are about to eat.)
 ごちそうさまでした (Thank you for the meal we just ate.) 行ってきます (I am leaving the house now.)
 ただいま (I am back.) おやすみなさい (Good night.)



ありがとう (Thank you.) & すみません (Excuse me/ Sorry.) are especially helpful in communication with your host family. If you have any request, have misunderstanding, or bothered someone, it is best to simply say すみません at the outset of conversation. Without saying すみません, and then making an excuse for the situation will just end up giving a negative impression to your host family. ありがとう&すみません work miracles.

Questions about Grammar

Please save your questions about grammar for your sensei. Your host family is not familiar with your Japanese textbook and Japanese teaching methods. It is sensei's job.

Your Native Language(s)

Your host family knows you are here to study Japanese and HIF asks them to communicate in Japanese with you even if they can speak other languages. But some hosts occasionally may enjoy hearing your native language(s). You are not expected to speak native language(s) every day, but it may be courteous to reserve a little time once a week to share your language(s) with your host family if they wish, especially if their children are studying a foreign language.

Energy Conservation Conscious

Electricity, hot water (gas, oil consuming) usage is related to energy conservation. The followings are highly welcomed for your consideration:

- Do not keep the hot water running when taking a shower.
- Refrain from taking a shower longer than 20 minutes.
- Turn off the light or other electronic devices in your room when you do not need them.



Air Conditioning

Having air conditioning in a house is not very common in Hakodate. Many households survive the hot summer with fans.



Garbage Disposal

In Japan, garbage is divided into several items, and plastic, metal and glasses are recycled. How to divide garbage varies according to cities and towns. Please follow the rules of the area your host family lives.

Please take out your trash including empty plastic bottles regularly. Try not to keep them in your room for more than a week.

Meals (Gohan)

Try all food offered to you! Please enjoy Japanese meals with various foodstuff and recipes.

HIF will inform your food restriction (if you have one) written in your Homestay Preparation Form to your host family in advance. However, if you find any other foods you cannot eat that is offered to you, please decline **politely**. e.g. すみませんが、これはちょっと……。

Please let your host family know in advance when you plan to be late for dinner, or if you plan to eat out so that they can plan their meals accordingly. If you are late for dinner without informing your host family beforehand, they will not leave dinner out for you.

The legal minimum drinking age in Japan is 20.

Your host family might enjoy if you cook some food you usually cook back in your own country and share it with them.

★Good manners when eating out with your host family★

You must pay for your lunch, because the homestay fee does not cover it. If it is dinner or breakfast, your host family will pay for your food. In this case, please say *again* ごちそうさまでした when you and your host family leave the restaurant.



When You Use Host Family's Facilities

• Home telephone

Please note that international, long-distance, and LOCAL calls are charged in Japan. Please make your incoming calls brief (about 5 minutes) as well. Except for emergencies, you better avoid using their home telephone.

• Internet

Whether the Internet access is available or not at home differs with each family. Do not use your host family's internet service without their permission.

Online video/telephone calls

Be considerate not to annoy your host family by talking loudly or too long, especially early in the morning and late in the evening.

Internet shopping

Please have all things sent to HIF to avoid host family's address being recorded and their receiving of direct mail from online shops after you leave.

***Digital devices like mobile phones and the Internet are very useful tools, but please try to limit time spent to take advantage of the opportunity to spend time with your host family.**

▪ Toilet

In most houses, the bath and toilet are in separate rooms. Most houses will have Western style toilets. Having a Japanese-style toilet at home is becoming more rare. Japanese-style toilets are used in a squatting position, straddling the basin. This position might be awkward for you, but as the body does not touch the bowl, it is considered to be more sanitary. If your house is equipped with a toilet that has many gadgets, please ask your host family for instructions.

Usually there is a pair of slippers in the toilet. These slippers are only for the toilet space. Do not walk around in the house with toilet slippers on.

▪ Bathroom (Ofuro) and shower

Many Japanese people prefer a nice hot bath at night to a quick shower. They use the time to relax and refresh the mind and body. As the tub water is used by other family members too, there are some basic rules:

- ① Wash your body outside the bathtub.
- ② Rinse off all lather from soap and shampoo before you enter the bath. Make sure that no soap gets into the bathing water.
- ③ After leaving the tub, for the sake of next person, be sure to scoop any hair or dirt you have dropped in to the bath water.
- ④ Please remember not to drain the water when you are finished.

- * The bath water is relatively hot (42 ~ 43°C) by Western standards. If it is too hot for you, it is okay to add a little cold water to it as long as it doesn't make the bath water tepid when the next person takes a bath.
- * Sometimes, Japanese families have an order in which family member use the ofuro. When you take a bath, please ask when and how much time you can spend in the bath, as others will be waiting.
- * If you wish to take showers in the morning, please ask your host family beforehand.



▪ Wash basin and mirror (Senmenjo)

Japanese households have a separate senmenjo usually outside of the bath. You can wash your face and hands, brush your teeth, and arrange your hair and makeup there. **Please consider the other family members and try not to occupy the area for long time especially in the morning.**



Going Out

Japan is a relatively safe country, but as your host family feels responsible for you, please let them know where and when you are going, and what time you shall come home. Some families will set a curfew and will expect you to keep it. Do your best to cooperate with your host family.

If your host family does not impose a curfew or if you have already informed them that you will be late, it does not mean you can return home however late you please. Your host family will wait up for you; therefore, your consideration will be much appreciated.

Visiting the Home of Another Japanese Family

It is unusual for Japanese to visit another family's home without an appointment. If you visit another student's host family, inform your plan both to your host family and the family that you are visiting well in advance.

When you would like to invite other students to your home, please discuss this with your host family first because they probably do not wish you to invite your friends, particularly when they are not at home. Please refrain from inviting other people to stay overnight in your host family's home.

Staying Out

Other than during the semester break, staying out overnight is prohibited whether at another student's home or at a hotel except in special circumstances. When your own family members, friends, fiancé(e) or partner visits you during the HIF program, please arrange for them to stay at a hotel.

Leisure Time

You are basically free to use your leisure time as you wish. We hope that you will rest sufficiently, and feel refreshed for the next day's activities.

Mobile Phone Manners

While travelling on public transportation, use a text message or e-mail only. Do not talk on the phone.

Refrain from using a mobile phone while taking meals with your host family, or during conversations with your host family.



Sickness

Please tell your host family when you become sick or suffer any injury. In these situations, they will inform HIF and take you to a hospital if necessary.

If you do not attend class(es) due to sickness or injury, be sure to inform HIF before 9:00am by telephone or LINE.

Damage

If you break or damage anything in the house you must tell your host family and/or HIF. You will have to pay to repair or replace anything you have broken.

Problems

If you have any problems with the homestay during your stay, please speak to a staff member of HIF. It is very important that you tell us if you are unhappy.

Host Family Changes

We work very hard to match students with the most suitable host family, and it is rare that a student is not happy with their placement. However, if this is the case, we will look for another host family for you if there is a valid reason for the homestay change. We listen to all sides in order to solve the problem in the most positive manner possible, and decide whether a host family change is necessary or not.

7. Japanese Manners

Bowing

Bowing (ojigi) is a very important custom in Japan. Japanese people bow to each other instead of shaking hands. It is impolite not to return a bow to whoever bows to you. Bowing has many purposes. First, it is a form of greeting. Second, it expresses feelings of respect, gratitude, and apology.

Table Manners

- ◆ It is the custom to clasp your hands and say "Itadakimasu" before eating and "Gochisoosama deshita" after eating.
- ◆ Contrary to Western manners, noodles can be and should be slurped. Likewise, it is proper and polite to bring small bowls or plates up to the mouth rather than bending one's head toward it.
- ◆ Do not blow your nose or burp at the table.
- ◆ Do not put your elbows on the table.
- ◆ At meal times, it is considered good manners to empty your dish to the last grain of rice. When you cannot eat all the food that has been served, arrange it in the dish in a manner that is not displeasing to the eyes.
- ◆ Different from western meals where courses are served in order, Japanese dishes are all served at once. You are expected to eat little by little from each plate in turn and to finish all food put in front of you if you can.

Chopsticks Manners

- ◆ Don't directly pass food from your chopsticks to somebody else's chopsticks or vice versa. The reason this is taboo is that the bones of the cremated body are passed in that way from person to person in Japanese funerals.
- ◆ Don't stick chopsticks vertically into food, especially into a bowl of rice. (This is done at funerals).
- ◆ Use the clean top ends of your chopsticks when you get food from large serving dishes (if serving chopsticks are not available.)
- ◆ Rest your chopsticks on the chopstick rest before you pick up a dish containing food. (Don't pick up a dish with the hand that is holding your chopsticks.)
- ◆ Don't wave your chopsticks around above food dishes. Don't use your chopsticks to point at somebody.
- ◆ Do not clean your chopsticks with your lips.
- ◆ Do not move around plates or bowls with chopsticks.

* Your host family will give you some instruction in Japanese table manners.

Sitting Manner

If your host family uses a Japanese style low table, the formal way of sitting is kneeling. The casual style is cross-legged or with one's legs folded sideways.



Do not say!!!

「わかった、わかった」

When you don't understand what someone is saying to you, "wakatta, wakatta" is the equivalent of "shut up".

「だいじょうぶ、だいじょうぶ」

It is regarded as "I do not need your help. Do not be concerned about me and about the issue anymore".

「でも・・・、でも・・・」

"But" may be a convenient conjunction in English, but it will be regarded as disagreement and sounds defiant in Japanese, please do not overuse でも.

“Direct expressions *about negative contents*”

e.g. direct impression indirect impression (preferable)
「これはおいしくありません」 → 「これはちょっと・・・」
「行きたくありません」 → 「すみませんが、ちょっと予定があって・・・」

Inoffensive and indirect expressions are regarded as considerate and thoughtful.

Sample questions to ask your host family

What should I call you?

どう お呼びしたら いいですか。

What time will breakfast/dinner be served?

あさごはん／晩ごはんは 何時ですか。

How may I help you?

お手伝いしましょうか。

What kind of things should I help out with around the house?

家のことで、なにか お手伝いできることは ありませんか。

When is a good time for me to use the bath/shower?

お風呂／シャワーは、何時に 使えば いいでしょうか。

Is there any rule when taking a bath?

お風呂に入る時に、ルールが ありますか。

Where may I keep my toiletries?

洗面道具は、どこに おけば いいでしょうか。

Where should I put this trash?

このゴミは、どこに すてれば いいでしょうか。

May I use the washing machine ?

洗濯機を 使っても いいですか。

8. When Leaving

Your moving-out day is August 9th, 2026.

Let your host family know your flight or train schedule to leave Hakodate well in advance so that your host family can arrange their schedule to see you off.

-Return what you borrow, clean your room, and do not leave behind any trash.

-Give your host family a small gift or letter to express your gratitude.

★Good manners!★

-After you return to your home country, please remember to e-mail or write a letter to your host family to express your gratitude again.

世話になりました。
ありがとうございました。



Please feel free to contact the HIF office at any time, especially if you have any situations or problems which you feel are beyond your understanding or control. We can offer advice or mediate if necessary.

We hope that this program will bring you many wonderful experiences.

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