Tips

Swiss-Indian Classroom
Tips for Indian host families

As a host family, you are offering a young person a brief insight into culture and daily life in India. It is a unique experience that you, too, will find enriching. This meeting of cultures is an exciting and very worthwhile opportunity to learn. We have put together some tips for you to ensure that the visit is a success for all concerned.

Do your homework

Take time to familiarise yourself with the "Swiss-Indian Classroom" exchange programme and with Swiss culture. Attend the preparatory meetings organised by the school. If you already know who your guest will be, get in touch with them in advance by e-mail or social media (Facebook, etc.), and introduce yourself briefly. Tell your guest about your family, how you live, your surroundings and any pets you have. Ask your guest questions about themselves: their family, hobbies, personal interests and needs (special dietary requirements, allergies, illnesses, etc.).

Prepare a warm welcome for your guest

Give them the feeling that they are welcome in your home, and that you are pleased to have them to stay. Remember that it will not be easy for your guest when they first arrive. Show sympathy and understanding. A smile or chat can help them through the first difficult moments.

Communicate clearly

Tell your guest what the house rules are, and about your daily routine. Encourage them to fit in with the habits of your home. For example, give them a tour of your house or flat, so that they know their way around and feel comfortable right from the start. As you go about your life, always explain to them what you are doing, where you are going, and when you'll be home. If you have visitors, tell your guest who the visitors are, and their relationship to you.

Involve your guest in family life

Your daily routine should not change to accommodate your guest. The idea of the exchange is more that the guest should experience the typical day-to-day activities of a family in their host country. Do not organise any special parties or entertainment for your guest. Instead, involve them in typical family activities, religious customs, shared tasks, etc.

Be conscious of the language barrier

If you find it difficult to communicate with your guest, try speaking particularly slowly and clearly, and avoid using slang. Occasionally, you may need to ask for help from someone who speaks your guest's language.

Be conscious of cultural differences

This visit may well be the first time that your guest has been outside Europe. Introduce them to the differences and particular aspects of your culture. As much as you can, consider and respect their own habits and cultural norms. The following points, in particular, are worth noting:

- In Switzerland it is normal to shake hands when saying hello. However, forms of greeting differ between languages and cantons! In the western, French-speaking part of the country in particular, friends and acquaintances are greeted with three implied ("air") kisses on the cheek: first left, then right, then left again. The Swiss shake hands again when saying goodbye.
- In Switzerland, a shake of the head means "no", and a nod means "yes" – this is a frequent cause of misunderstanding between Swiss and Indians.
- Punctuality is expected in Switzerland. You will make your guest's stay easier if you stick to agreed times.
- Almost half of marriages in Switzerland now end in divorce, and children often grow up alternating between both parents. As a rule, only closest family, i.e. parents and child/children, live together under the same roof. In many cases, even very young children will have their own room. Swiss households do not generally follow a hierarchical structure. With the exception of cleaning ladies or nannies, it is rare to have domestic staff.
- Swiss cuisine almost never uses strong spices. We would therefore advise using chilli or Garam Masala with care, and gently testing out the level of spiciness that your guest can stand. Breakfast in Switzerland is generally "continental" in style.
- Switzerland's drinking water is of a very high quality. Since your guest's stomach will not be used to Indian water quality, it is important that their drinking (and teeth-cleaning) water is boiled, or that you provide bottled water of a reliable commercial standard.
- Although there are people living in poverty even in a rich country like Switzerland, they are rarely publicly visible. Young Swiss are not used to dealing with people begging, or evident bitter poverty, and they may find it a difficult experience.
- Swiss toilets are the western style, and toilet paper is used for cleanliness. Your guest is unlikely to have had any previous experience with Indian toilets, and may find it new and possibly odd to use water for cleansing.

Keep in close contact with those in charge of the exchange project

Ensure that both you and your guest carry the contact details of those in charge at both of the partner schools. Talk to the teacher responsible if you have any concerns or questions about your guest, especially if they are unwell or are having difficulty adjusting.

Stay natural and spontaneous

You do not have to offer luxury to welcome a guest. Your guest will feel just as at home in simple surroundings if you give them a warm welcome and take good care of them. Whatever you do together, you will be making wonderful memories.

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