Dorms and Host Families – 寝室とホストファミリー

Students generally need to pay attention to many of the same cultural issues whether living in dormitories or with a host family. Try to follow the rules laid out by the dormitory or host family. Students who follow cultural norms and accept whatever reasonable things come their way will generally have a more comfortable time.

Cleanliness is the Japanese norm. Always take off your shoes upon entry to dormitories and houses. Sometimes there are cubbies for shoes near or next to the entry way 玄関 in houses, and there always are in the dormitories. Additionally, there are often places to put umbrellas 傘 in the entry way of any building. In the dorms and, in all likelihood, in host families’ houses as well, food and drink are not allowed in the bedrooms or other non-common areas. Smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol are prohibited inside the dormitories. In host families’ houses, drinking alcohol is usually not a problem, and rules for smoking change from home to home.
The dormitories also have strict rules for visitors. Visitors may only come at certain times of day to certain common areas. If staying with a host family, ask the host parents for rules concerning curfew, visitors, and anything else.

While host families will most likely handle all cooking and cleaning for exchange students staying with them, they might ask students to do some chores. Be amenable and conscientious. Students living in dormitories handle all of their cooking, cleaning, and laundry needs. Dorms provide a large array of kitchen tools including utensils, rice-cookers, carving knives, electric ranges, and refrigerators. As at American dorms, laundry costs money, and can only be paid for in 100-yen coins, which have a deceptively similar shape and color to American quarters.

Most students living in the dorms have a roommate. Floors are typically divided by sex. There are 24-hour computer labs available, but access is by dormitory-issued keycard. If office supplies are needed, the front desk is usually stocked, and students can ask for paper, pencils, a stapler, or scissors. After hours, entrances past the gate and into the building are also by keycard. Outside of the resident assistant, the Japanese couple in charge, and a small handful of Japanese students, everyone living in the dormitories provided at Kansai Gaidai is international. In short, dormitories at Kansai Gaidai are just like dormitories in the United States, except with more rules.
Home stay has its own rules and norms attached. Many families ask or expect students staying with them to teach their children or themselves English. Most Japanese families take daily baths rather than showers, and in order to conserve water, every member of the household uses the same water. Often, host families are conscientious about letting hosted students use the bath water first, but for those students who require this for peace of mind would do well to ask. In general, be polite, courteous, respectful, reasonable, and if problems, inconveniences, or discomforts arise, ask your host family for a solution as soon as possible. If this fails or if the situation is absolutely unbearable, then ask the Center for International Education (CIE) for help. If intolerable problems persist, ask the CIE to provide another host family or allow transfer to a dormitory.

For the overwhelming majority of students, home stay is highly recommended. For those students who are denied a host family, there is a weekend Home Stay program available. Enroll in this or any other similar opportunity to be a part of Japanese society. Having experience living with a host family is a vital part of study abroad in Japan.