

AFS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How will I go to school if I don't know the language?

Because AFS participants are thoroughly immersed in a host culture, they learn the language quickly. At first, participants will find that academic classes are very challenging. Some subjects, such as Math and Physical Education, have a quicker adjustment period. It generally takes longer to follow language-heavy subjects such as History, Literature or Political Science. AFS participants are expected to attend classes and to try their best.

For most school-based programs, prior study of the host language is not required. However, this varies and you should check with your AFS office about the countries for which you are applying. Some host countries provide language tapes or CD's before arrival and other provide language lessons during an arrival orientation camp or via classes within your host community.

Language acquisition time varies from person to person, and depending on the amount of study conducted prior to arrival in the host country. Many participants attain conversational ability quickly, while for others the process might be a bit slower. AFS strongly encourages participants to begin studying their host language as soon as their country placement is confirmed.

Will I be able to get academic credit in my high school here for studies that I complete abroad?

Participants must speak to their home school officials to learn whether or not they can receive credit for study in another country. Schools that have more experience with study programs abroad tend to recognize the educational value of the experience in itself, regardless of the actual courses taken, and are more likely to give credit. However, in some countries, it is the Ministry of Education which makes this decision at the national level. Ideally, grades should not be transferred since the grading system in the host country will be different from the home country system, and the grades won't translate accurately.

The academic subjects that you study will depend on the host country. AFS participants will generally choose from among the same elective courses and take the same required courses as participants do in the host country. AFS can provide participants with general information about classes they are likely to take abroad; e.g. physics, geography, foreign languages (see [High School Students Go Abroad](#) and [Adults Go Abroad](#)), but they will not learn exactly which courses they will take until they arrive in their host countries.

Participants with all types of academic background, including those who have been educated at home, can participate in AFS programs.

In most cases, participants cannot receive a transcript or diploma to show their school work done while abroad. Participants can, however, normally get a list of classes attended with an indication

of their performances signed by a school administrator in the host country. Teachers will also often write letters stating that a participant attended and participated in classes.

Who will my host family be? Are host families paid?

FS host families fill out an application and are screened by local AFS volunteers. They are selected for their qualities of stability, flexibility and interest in receiving a foreigner in their home, and they come in many shapes and sizes. For example, some host families have children the same age as the AFS participant, but others have older or younger children, or no children at all. You can include any requests about your host family on your application, but we cannot guarantee that such requests will be fulfilled.

AFS expects host families to provide their hosted participant with his/her own bed, although not necessarily his/her own room. Host families are advised to treat their participants as a member of the family, not a guest, and therefore AFS participants usually are asked to do chores around the house, just like the other children in the host family.

Families who host on AFS live in all kinds of places: in big cities, suburbs, small towns and on farms. Placements vary according to where AFS has volunteer support and host families. You will need to refer to country-specific information to determine whether placements tend to be urban or rural. See [High School Students Go Abroad](#) and [Adults Go Abroad](#) for more information.

AFS host families are not paid. They open their homes to foreign participants in order to share their community and culture, as well as to enrich their own family life.

When do I find out who my host family will be? What if I don't like my host family?

Information about your host family can arrive at any time. AFS volunteers and staff work hard to find a host family for you. If you have special requirements (smoking, non-smoking, no pets, vegetarian), it may take longer to place you, but AFS will find a suitable host family. Because host families go through an application process similar to yours, this process can take time. But as soon as AFS has identified your host family, you will be contacted.

AFS volunteers and staff provide support for the participant and the host family. They will be able to help resolve communication problems or other misunderstandings between the participant and the host family. If necessary, the participant will be moved into a temporary or transitional family while AFS finds a new family for the participant.

Can I pursue my special interests in the foreign country?

It is often possible to pursue special interests, but AFS cannot guarantee it. Music, sports, art and many other activities are available in different forms all over the world. Participants may have an opportunity to continue their interests in the same formats they used at home. They may also have opportunities to translate their interest into local formats. AFS encourages participants to

continue their interests while abroad as this is a good way to connect to another part of your host community.

The way that sports and other special activities are organized varies from country to country. In some places special interest clubs are part of the school and participants can choose from a variety of activities there. In other countries, participants join sports clubs, art institutes and other separate organizations in order to pursue their interests, whether new or something that they have done for years. AFS volunteers in the host country will be able to help participants get involved in athletics and other activities in their host community. Applicants should be sure to include their special interests in their application.

What does the price of the program include?

In most cases the program price covers the following:

- Round-trip international travel with your AFS group
- Travel in the host country to your host family
- Travel from your host family to your international departure point
- AFS's medical plan and supplemental insurance
- Placement with your host family
- Orientation in your home country and your host country
- 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries
- A global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies
- A network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. The only expenses you will need to pay in addition to our fee will be: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses contacts and routine dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food is provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Do [contact AFS in your home country](#) for the specific information for the programs you are interested in.

What if I have special requests for my placement?

Participants with special requests, such a placement that supports a vegetarian diet, should be very flexible in terms of the countries they are willing to go to and must be prepared to have their beliefs challenged, no matter how accepting the family is of this dietary restriction.

As an intercultural exchange program, AFS places participants with families of many different religions and creeds. You can request placement with a host family of a particular religion or to have access to a particular type of church or other religious institution, but AFS cannot guarantee

that such a placement will be available. Keep in mind that placement with a family of a different religion is another opportunity for learning about a different culture.
