



## Kitakata Sister City Advisory Board Becoming a host family: Frequently asked questions

Thank you for your interest in becoming a host family for a guest from our sister city: Kitakata, Japan. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

### What can you tell me about Kitakata?

Kitakata is located approximately 4 ½ hours northwest of Tokyo, in rural Japan. The climate is warm in the summer and usually receives heavy snowfall in the winter. The population of Kitakata is approximately 46,000 people. Their time zone is 17 hours ahead of Wilsonville during Pacific Standard Time (for example, 6:00 am here would be 11:00 pm the same day in Kitakata). Wilsonville has enjoyed a sister-city relationship with Kitakata since October 1988 “in order to deepen the understanding and friendship between the two cities through programs in such fields as education, culture and economy.” Every other year, Kitakata sends a delegation of middle-school students (or in this case, High School Students) to Wilsonville for approximately 10 days. Local families serve as hosts for one or more Japanese guests during their stay.

### What is our role as host family?

As host family, you provide a way for your guests to learn about American culture and practice English conversation skills. Please welcome them into your home and treat them as one of your family members during their stay. You will provide a place to stay, meals, and transportation to and from a local meeting place for daily activities. Other host families can often help with carpools and other details. Host families may be asked to provide a brown-bag lunch once during the week, but other lunches and weekday activities are provided for the delegation by the sister city board.

### What about the language? How will we communicate with each other?

Your guests will have studied some English but typically have had limited opportunity to listen to and speak English. More than a few words of conversation may be difficult, especially for the first few days. They may read and write English more easily than they speak or be most comfortable practicing their conversation skills with children of any age. At host family info night, you will receive communication tips, common words and phrases in Japanese and English and contact information for people who can help with translation, if needed. Above all, listen with your heart. Much of communication is nonverbal.

### We don't know much about Japanese customs and food. What types of food should we serve?

Remember, your guests are here to experience American culture. As much as possible, maintain a normal routine for your family. Provide a variety of foods, and your guest will find foods they like. A typical Japanese diet emphasizes rice, often with every meal. Seafood, pasta and pizza are also popular. Encourage them to help themselves, if that

### Comments from past host families

- *Our student knew quite a bit of English and it made conversation easy. Our whole family really enjoyed getting to know her and she easily became part of our family for the 10 days.*
- *We realized we all smile in the same language.*
- *Our student seemed very well matched with our family dynamics. We appreciated the great thought that must have gone into the homestay placements.*
- *Thank you! This was a fun experience.*
- *Even though our language and cultures are not the same, we are more alike than different. What a great thing for our children to learn at a young age!*
- *Our family enjoyed getting to know someone new from another country. We had a chance to learn about food and activities that are different from our typical American things.*

is your routine. Your delegate may be a bit reserved, especially at first, and prefer to watch you and your family members to see how to do things.

**What should we do during our free time? Our family's routine is so busy!**

Do whatever you normally do in an evening. Go to school activities, do grocery shopping, run errands, go for a walk, etc. Feel free to call another host family to help with carpooling or to arrange an activity together (meet at store, go for ice cream, etc.). Try games that aren't dependent on language such as video games, puzzles, sports, card games or simple board games. Pull out maps, vacation or family pictures. They may bring pictures of their family to share with you, too. Allow time for rest. Your delegate may experience jet lag, be very tired and appreciate some down time (TV, reading, naps, etc.). On the other hand, they may be eager to participate in every activity and not fall asleep until late!

**What about gifts?**

Gift giving is very common in Japanese culture. The delegates receive welcome packets and a farewell gift from Sister City Board during their stay, and your guest's family will probably send you a gift as a thank you for being a host family. Host families usually also give their guests a small gift during their stay. It doesn't need to be expensive; the significance is in the giving. Hosts often put together something for their guests to take home to their families, such as post cards or photos of their stay, a gift bag with Oregon products, etc.

**We're interested in becoming a host family. What's the process?**

The first step to becoming a host is to complete an application form. City board members review applications, answer questions, conduct interviews and complete background checks for finalists. Host families for the October/November 2023 delegation are selected by the end of the September. If you are selected as a host family, you will receive information about your guests a few weeks before the delegation arrives and attend a host family orientation meeting to get a detailed itinerary, connect with other host families and get any last-minute questions answered. Even if you are unable to host this year, there are plenty of ways to be involved and help provide a warm welcome to our guests. Please let us know if you would like additional information.

*If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact staff liaison for the Sister City Board: Erica Behler at [behler@ci.wilsonville.or.us](mailto:behler@ci.wilsonville.or.us)*