

# Building Positive Homestay Experiences

Written by Hugh Berkeley Guthrie; Jennifer Walsh;  
with Ankita Ragesh; Sindhu Narayanan  
Report designed by Juliet Y.Y Wong Min



This research has been approved by the Human Research  
Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne – Ethics  
Id. 1852308



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# Overview

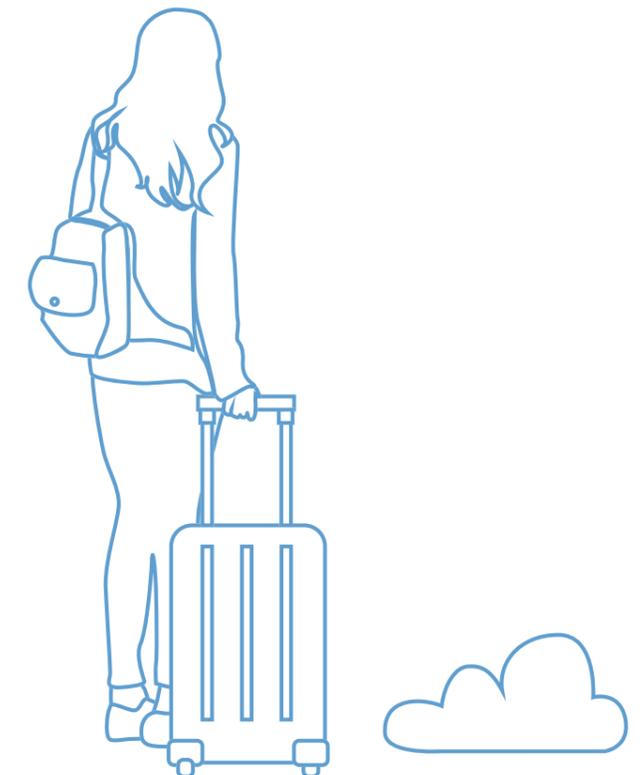
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Other valuable support was provided by the University of Melbourne and ISANA, our partners in the project and by individual members of the project's Reference Group.

Hugh Guthrie and Jen Walsh



Finally, the student volunteer involvement is an aspect of this project which should be highlighted, acknowledged and celebrated. We hoped this project provided an opportunity for student volunteers to be involved through a whole project cycle, and having their names listed on the final report will be invaluable for them.

### Student volunteers

#### Designer

Juliet Yok Yin Wong Min

#### Two Project Assistants

Ankita Ragesh  
Sindhu Narayanan

#### Four marketing student PLS

Tatenda Mzondiwa  
Austar Vannak  
Linh Pham  
Chaitali Bhanushali

#### Six psychology students PLS

Alice Pham  
Saher Nischal  
Aanushka Panwala  
Radhika Sharma  
Jee Inn Tan  
Aaron Chandran

#### Four Reference Group members

Dang Nguyen  
Kirtana Sankarasubramanian  
Param Arputhanathan  
Yohanes Hendratno

#### Six Vignette PLS

Manish Lamichhane  
Joanne Dinh  
Saurav Kattel  
Honglin Chen  
Salvation L Manurung  
Richard Zu

#### Volunteers

Uyen Phan Hong Le  
Dora Chiang  
Feline Fenecia  
Cindy YJ Han  
Steffi Lee  
Nikhar Budhadev  
Kevin (Wun Kwan) Chan

# Executive Summary

This report is one of the final products of a Victorian State Government's International Student Welfare Grant<sup>1</sup>, which aimed to study, document and critically analyse the homestay experiences of international students in the higher education (HE), vocational education and training (VET) and English language sectors. The project sought to address four research questions:

1. What is the nature and scope of homestay amongst international students studying in Victoria?
2. What are the key criteria students are using in selecting the homestay option?
3. What challenges do students, institutions and support agencies face in accessing and providing high-quality homestay experiences?
4. What changes may be required to existing arrangements to improve the nature and quality of homestay in Victoria for all parties concerned?

The Building Positive Homestay Experiences report provides a summary of international students' experience living in a Victorian homestay between 2018 and 2020. The research was both qualitative and quantitative in scope, drawing on literature and documentation, publicly available statistics, survey and critical incident data, interviews with homestay service

providers and forums involving students and institutions utilising homestay.

## Homestay and Duty of Care

Building Positive Homestay Experiences involves a mission to "foster a duty of care". As such, life for an international student living in a homestay in Victoria should involve processes and practices that help students to adopt and maintain coping strategies that will support the cross-cultural communication and conflict management skills they need to build emotional and social functioning. This could potentially assist international students to strive in making friends (both academically and beyond) and for homestay hosts to prepare students for more independent living options later in their studies, especially cooking and shopping. While duty of care is a particular phenomenon for those international students aged under 18, it is likely that this is an artificial age with many of those international students who are aged over 18 still requiring significant levels of support.

## The Extent of Homestay and its Upsides and Downsides

We found that homestay appears not to be a common form of accommodation. Nevertheless, it is still an important one with generally high

<sup>1</sup>

The project is funded through a grant from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) under Category 2 of the International Student Welfare Program (ISWP). The research partners are the Centre for Vocational and Educational Policy (CVEP) at the University of Melbourne and Victorian and Tasmanian Division of ISANA.

levels of student satisfaction. The micro-survey conducted as part of the project (n=168) found that just over three quarters indicated that they probably or definitely had a positive experience, with just over half (56.8%) saying definitely yes. Only 5.5% said that they definitely did not have a positive experience and a further 5% saying they probably did not.

The literature and this present study also confirmed that it is also more likely to be used by students from traditionally non-English speaking countries and as an initial accommodation option before others are explored.

The upsides of using homestay include:

- Enabling students to meet local people
- Being able to settle into their studies quickly
- Learning about Australian culture, customs and way of life
- Improving their English language skills, particularly through interacting with native English speakers (Noting that language gains depend on the quality of homestays, interactions and feedback to aid improvement (Conroy 2018))
- Cost
- Being a real 'home away from home' which provides a "safe and welcoming environment."

**However, its downsides include:**

- Distance and ease of travel to their place of study: a common concern
- Food quality and appropriateness, including meeting those related to dietary and religious needs
- Quality of their room, its furnishing and the tidiness and cleanliness of the accommodation more generally

- Noise levels
- Lack of cultural understanding on the part of their host, which can relate to religious observances and other issues such as clothes washing
- 'Stinginess' on the part of hosts: meanness over quantities of food, use of the bathroom and internet, overcrowding in the home, and unnecessary charging for services and amenities (i.e. charging for materials and services that it was the hosts' responsibility to provide, including internet, cleaning, provision of detergent, handwash, toilet paper and tissues that should be covered by their homestay fee). Also, hosts' attempts to make private financial arrangements with students although this is prohibited by homestay agency guidelines and agreements with hosts
- Concerns about personal freedom and independence, including curfews and the strictness of 'house rules' including showering time
- Communication issues and misunderstandings
- Allegations of sexual harassment or inappropriate touching/physical contact – particularly by males to female students
- The cost of homestay accommodation
- We concluded that 'upsides' are enhanced when hosts are offering homestay for the right reasons when they are well prepared for their role, and well matched to their homestay students. Thus, processes of host selection, training and monitoring are important as are comprehensive and careful approaches to host and student matching pre-arrival. The overwhelming evidence is that the attitude of the host is critical and is one of the most important criteria in host selection. Communication, empathy and caring on the part of the hosts are three key

issues in selecting potential hosts. Finally, and importantly, the homestay agencies should not take on hosts they feel will 'rip students off.'

## Improving Homestay Practice

Students need to be clear about what homestay will involve and well prepared with clear and comprehensive information about living with an Australian family and their host in particular. The keys to improving expectations and having them match reality as much as possible are comprehensive, quality information for students and hosts, and management of expectations.

Generalized but high-quality information via YouTube in students' first language, or suitably sub-titled, could help. These could be used by institutions, homestay agencies and other bodies.

Monitoring of both hosts and students is important to ensure that issues of concern are speedily but carefully and sensitively addressed. This may involve any – or all – of the following: the host, student, study institution and homestay agency, dependent on circumstances.

It is important that Institutions only endorse the safest accommodation options for their students. They should also work closely with one or more preferred agencies and those agencies should use best practice approaches to placing and monitoring their students with hosts'. This also requires comprehensive and meticulous record keeping on their part and a strong relationship with the institutions with which they work.

From the information collected we have written two submissions to government and four guidelines for homestay providers, educational providers, homestay agencies and international students to underpin best practice. Outcomes and findings from this project can be used to assist in developing and supporting possible regulatory reform of homestay providers. The state of Victoria could lead in the duty of care by

registering or licensing Homestay Providers and implementing a mixed face to face and online training program for hosts as well as providing opportunities for just in time training to support hosts to address critical issues in their hosting. This would assist in setting consistent definitions, standards and guidelines leading to best practice.

Addressing the research questions in turn we conclude that:

1. In relation to the nature and scope of homestay amongst international students studying in Victoria, there is no clear notion of its scope, although it is likely that the number of international students who are 18 plus years of age using homestay is small. Better information could be obtained by accessing and using well maintained PRISMS data in an appropriate form.
2. In relation to the key criteria international students use in selecting the homestay option, the accommodation choices are limited for them if they are under 18 and, indeed, we suspect that feedback about homestay by some of our respondents may have been on the basis of their experiences before they turned 18. If they are over 18 choice may be guided by the recommendations of education agents or parental preferences. However, another important criterion is the image that homestay has, positive or negative, from key potential influencers such as other students who are currently or who have studied in Australia.
3. The challenges faced by students, institutions and support agencies in achieving a high-quality homestay experience include suitable homestay accommodation and hosts with the 'right attitudes' close to study institutions, matching the student and the host to get the best possible fit to ensure that both hosts and students find the homestay experience a satisfying one, ensuring that homestays are monitored appropriately by homestay agencies and/or institutions to identify and

resolve any emerging issues and ensuring that students using homestay have opportunities to raise issues they are having with their homestay host as quickly as possible.

4. Changes that may be required to existing arrangements to improve the nature and quality of homestay in Victoria for all parties concerned include avoiding high risk homestay options; especially those not 'auspiced' by a homestay agency; better regulation of homestay, including registration of homestay hosts not working through an agency; developing and implementing a code of ethics and uniform guidelines for homestay in Victoria; requiring periodic re-certification of registered and agency/institutionally managed hosts and implementing a process of spot checks to ensure standards are being maintained; requiring/mandating initial host training using both online and face to face approaches as well as access to just in time best practice resources and helplines to address and help resolve critical issues; emerging issues and needs; developing a series of resources for students, their parents and education agents about study, culture and lifestyle in Australia to ensure that students are well prepared for living and studying in Australia, and Victoria in particular and finally developing and mandating codes of ethics and minimum good practice guidelines, policies and procedures and information management systems.

## Recommendations

Finally, we propose a series of recommendations:

### Recommendation 1:

Whether the student is under or over 18 there should be Victorian guidelines which includes policies and processes that apply to all homestay agencies and hosts. It was suggested that the age of 18 is not magical and does reflect varying levels of maturity to cope with life as an international student in a foreign country. Longer

term support may be needed.

### Recommendation 2:

Homestay hosts have been incentivised by the tax-free income to become a host. Before they apply to a Homestay provider a small investment of registration and a fit and proper person screening with the local council and completion of an online or face to face tutorial should be mandated and seen as the ethical behavior required of a genuine host.

### Recommendation 3:

Spot checks to check on overcrowding, substandard living environment and accountability for unscrupulous homestay operators and hosts are required. These need to be balanced with a periodic inspection, at least annually, but there may be arguments for mandating a shorter period, for example: half yearly.

### Recommendation 4:

As educational providers are accountable for the conduct of the Academic Agents they work with, International students should be encouraged to use this avenue and should only book with a registered high-quality homestay agency. The use of a homestay agency is preferable than a direct relationship between the student and their host as it reduces the chances of the host financially exploiting and intimidating the student.

There are arguments for improving agency practices so that they are all operating to a high standard based on ethical behavior, agreed minimum guidelines, sound policies and practices and high-quality management information systems

### Recommendation 5:

Homestay Providers should be accountable to a consumer protection body.

### Recommendation 6:

A great addition to the industry would be to have a portal to share challenges/issues with

other homestay providers. They could use this as a reference check prior to accepting a host (in addition to the WWC clearance). Sometimes you don't know the true colours of a host are not known until an issue presents.

The above recommendations should lead to positive outcomes for international education in Australia.

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<sup>2</sup>

This is because, while the issues may be the same, or similar, for students aged under 18 these students have significantly more legislative and other protections as they are minors and subject to requirements of child welfare and protection as part of their visa conditions. See the [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 5](#)

<sup>3</sup>

It is seen as a little recorded or researched sector (Burke nd)

# Introduction

## Study Focus

The project is focused on international students who are 18 years of age or older<sup>2</sup>. Why look specifically at this age group, though? From the Victorian government's perspective, the number of international students who are using homestay and are over 18 is unclear. This is because under the current Education Services with Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000, international students over the age of 18 are deemed to be responsible for their own welfare. Homestay for international students over 18 years old is unregulated, existing between a traditional tenancy and purpose-built student accommodation provision.

According to the Savills Market Report for 2018 (Savills 2018), homestay students are subsumed under the heading Renting Privately and Living at Home (n=274,743), making collection of specific homestay data challenging. Most Institutions will list the address of their over 18 international students in their Student Management Systems, perhaps without knowing precisely its nature. For example, is it an Apartment, Share house, Homestay, Student residence or Airbnb? It seems that some institutions are collecting more specific Homestay data, and some are not. It is dependent on how comprehensive their student information is. Thus, it's somewhat 'murky' where and how those international students who are over 18 are actually living.

However, we also wanted to compliment empirical data with insights into the homestay experience from a variety of perspectives. Nevertheless, we have found that research and empirical data on international student accommodation is limited, and this is particularly so for homestay<sup>3</sup>.

The **ESOS** Regulations update came into effect 1 October 2019. The regulations now require all providers to submit student contact details (residential address both in Australia and Overseas, mobile or phone number and email address) in PRISMS when the student becomes an accepted student of that provider- as outlined under section 9(a) of the Regulations. In addition, PRISMS contain information on students' gender, date of birth, country of birth and nationality. **We understand it also has a pull-down set of alternative accommodation sources that can be indicated, including homestay.**

### Key message 1:

Thus, there are, or should be, useful accommodation data on PRISMS. Its utility depends on two things: first, that accommodation options are comprehensive and are then identified by the institutions entering the PRISMS data when the student is accepted and, second, that the PRISMS data are properly maintained as the student changes their accommodation during the course of their studies.

If the changes in accommodation address and

type are maintained, this becomes a potentially valuable data source about accommodation usage for policy makers and others.

## Some Preliminary Insights on Homestay Numbers and Experience

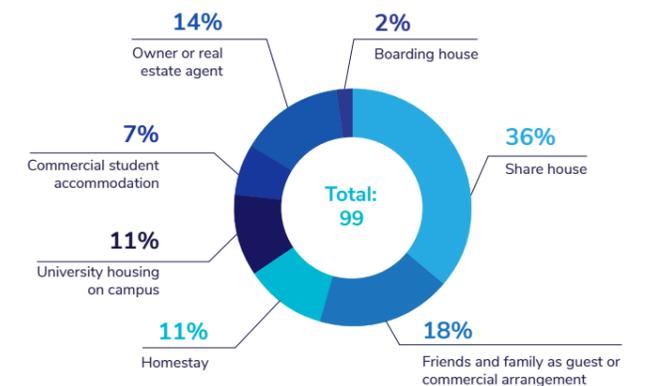
Obeng-Odoom (2012) points out that international students access a number of types of accommodation. These might include family-owned accommodation; rental properties - such as shared houses, flats, units or apartments; on-campus colleges providing accommodation; off-campus purpose-built accommodation, homestay; boarding houses, backpackers' residences or hostels; and rooming accommodation in family houses.

Berg and Farbenblum (2019), in a report entitled 'Living Precariously: Understanding International Students' Housing Experiences in Australia' found that the most common form of first accommodation is a share house (36%). About 1 in 5 (18%) stay with friends and family.

Homestay and on-campus accommodation were both about 1 in 10 (Figure 1). However, they report that:

“Around one in seven (14%) respondents signed a lease directly with an owner or real estate agent in a private rental [our emphasis] in their first accommodation.”

Figure 1: Data on accommodation option and proportions, (Source: Berg and Farbenblum 2019)



Their paper suggests that some of the most problematic accommodation is in share houses.

A report by Australian Education International (Lawson 2013) looked at the satisfaction of international higher education students<sup>4</sup> with accommodation options, including homestay. It found that, overall, 84% of students were satisfied with the quality of their accommodation and felt safe (94%) of the time. Satisfaction with internet access was lower (77%), while only around half (51%) were satisfied with the cost of their accommodation.

The report breaks the data down by accommodation type. What it shows is that:

- Homestay was not a common form of accommodation, making up only 3.7% of the respondents
- It was also more likely to be used by students from traditionally non-English speaking countries

<sup>4</sup> The survey collected data from more than 37,000 students across 36 Australian universities. Students were drawn from China, Malaysia, India, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam and a range of other countries, Chinese students predominated. A little more than half of all respondents were undergraduate students, 28 per cent were postgraduate coursework students

<sup>5</sup> Noting that other relatively high use countries were Vietnam (18%), Hong Kong (15%), Brazil (14%) and Indonesia and Columbia (13% each)

<sup>6</sup> See the bibliography in attachment 1

- It had the highest level of satisfaction of all accommodation alternatives at around 90% (The other highly rated option was living with friends or family at 89%)
- Students using homestay were also the most satisfied with the cost of their accommodation (at 64%) and felt the safest (around 96%), but
- While satisfaction levels were still high overall, homestay was rated slightly lower than most of the other accommodation options in terms of students making Australian friends, or friends from their home country or other countries.

The report (p. 9) also found that:

*Students who were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their accommodation were also more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their learning experience.*

An article by Mather in the Australian Financial Review in 2012 reported a similar finding.

Work in New Zealand (Ward & Masgoret 2004) found that:



*The majority of the students reported that they were very or extremely satisfied with their homestay arrangements, and those in homestays were more satisfied with their accommodation than those in rental property or in student hostels.”*

A more recent report (Berg & Farbenblum 2019) has found that:

- Around one in ten respondents (11%) stayed in a homestay, and it was far more common among students from China (23%) than other nationalities overall (7%)<sup>5</sup> and also for ‘college’ rather than university students

- The major issues with homestay were overcrowding (8%), accommodation that was unsafe or not fit to live in (8%), and intimidation or harassment (7%), and the biggest issues were:

*The accommodation was different to what was described (16%) and I did not get a receipt for money I paid in cash (12%).*

They suggested (p. 45) that:

These problems point to the need for greater government regulation of homestays (including a registration scheme for homestay providers) and stronger oversight mechanisms for commercial student accommodation providers.

Other research has found that homestay hosts and homestay providers were not adequately prepared for the services they are expected to offer and needed training in cross cultural communication, conflict management and basic counselling (Richardson 2003).

A number of organisations have developed screening processes for potential hosts. They have also prepared information booklets and websites as well as guidelines or codes of practice related to homestay for both hosts and students<sup>6</sup>. In addition, methods have been developed to gather information from students about them and their expectations of homestay to guide host matching.

An evaluation of homestay programs (Akbar et al. 2004) found some major concerns arising with homestay accommodation. The report (p. 1) found that these concerns include:

*Regulation of the industry; ethical policies and guidelines; expectations placed on providers and students; guardianship and training requirements.*

### Key message 2:

Homestay is not a particularly common form of accommodation, according to the literature. It is most commonly used by students from non-English speaking countries, particularly China, but also including Hong Kong, Vietnam, Brazil, Columbia and Indonesia.

There are a number of issues with homestay which would perhaps best be addressed through improved oversight or even regulation. This improved regulation could be on homestay agencies or hosts. Of these, the former would be more easily implemented, but this means that those hosts who operate independently are left unregulated. At the very least, information to international students **should strongly** recommend working through an established and reputable homestay agency.

## Report Structure

In this report we aim to:

- Describe the range of methodologies we used to gather information and data
- Define homestay and the homestay experience
- Explore the upsides and downsides of using homestay, as well as student attitudes about it
- Examine evaluations of homestay in the literature, and report on the findings from our other informants (students, institutions and agencies) in relation to pre-arrival and host selection and ‘training’ and the monitoring and management process for the actual homestay experience
- Address each of the research questions outlined above
- Propose a series of recommendations for action, and

- Consider what might be the attributes of a ‘code of practice’ relevant to both international students and homestay hosts.

# What we did:

## The Methodology

The project used a mixed-method approach. This included:

- Gathering literature and documentation from a wide variety of sources on homestay and the homestay experience
- Conducting a small forum with Institutions utilising homestay for their international students
- Holding 10 forums with student groups who had been or are utilising homestay (including four by Zoom following the COVID-19 outbreak). In all, 40 students, plus 15 ISANA volunteers attended these forums and provided information to the project.
- Interviewing four agencies providing homestay services
- Conducting a short web-based survey of students who had been or are in homestay to gauge their satisfaction with it as an accommodation option. In all, 192 responded, with 168 completing the survey.
- Interviewing six individual students to develop individual 'vignettes' describing their homestay experiences, both positive and negative, in greater detail.

All students involved were aged 18 years or older. In addition, 30 international students volunteered and provided support for the project. This support included project co-ordination, assisting the researchers to run the student forums and developing marketing and promotional resources to support the project. All the students involved as volunteers participated in ethics training coordinated by the authors.

The project was supported by a Reference Group (see Attachment 2 for its membership and guidelines). The project also obtained ethics approval from the University of Melbourne. A following section notes some limitations to the project methodology.

In addition to this report, other products from this project include a series of specifically focused summary reports developed for particular audiences.

### Our Informants

With our 40 forum participants, we quantified the results of the forums and the findings are presented later in the report.

Of those that provided vignettes: four were

male and two females. They were from mixture of countries: two Nepalese (both male), two Chinese (both male) and one each from Vietnam and Indonesia: both female. Most were under 18 when they arrived. They had spent a variety of time in homestay ranging from just a few days to around six to seven months. They had a range of experiences, but on the whole only one was extremely negative, two were very positive and the remainder had mixed experiences as they had more than one host and could compare.

The four homestay agencies we interviewed varied in size and reach. Two were large organisations, the other two were smaller. Of the four, three operated in a number of jurisdictions. However, a characteristic of all was that they had local Victorian staff.

### Limitations of Methodology

While we are confident that the report has generated useful findings and that the 'ways forward' proposed are of considerable value, the study had a number of limitations. These included:

- Gaining co-operation and buy-in to the project from students, agencies and institutions. This may have limited the range of perspectives explored.
- A poor response rate to the short online survey by past or present homestay students. In the end, only 168 responses were obtained, despite extensive promotion over a considerable period of time and in a variety of places and media. Sourcing students for the forums and vignettes was also a significant issue.
- Not surveying or interviewing actual homestay hosts. However, the agencies interviewed

could be considered to have provided a good overview of their hosts' views. In addition, one end of the market that was not explored was those homestays sourced by students themselves through Gumtree and other sites rather than working through an education agent, institution or homestay agency, and finally,

- Getting good data on the extent of homestay.

These limitations, and the time taken to gain ethics approval from Melbourne University, also affected the timeline for the project to a significant extent<sup>7</sup>.

7

In addition, the timeline was affected significantly by the time taken to gain approval for the project's Activity Plan.

8

Homeowners include those who own or are purchasing the residence. However, the term 'homeowner' may also apply to those renting the home and who offer homestay as a means of subsidizing rental costs. Such a use of additional accommodation for homestay should also not be in breach of the rental agreement with their landlord.

# Findings

In this section of the report we present the findings based on the literature gathered in the course of the project, data gathered from the student survey and other sources, information gathered through the student forums, institutional incident logs, interviews with homestay agencies and from the vignettes based on the experiences of the eight individual international students.

We define homestay, describe why people want to be homestay hosts and present the upsides and downsides of the homestay experience from the perspective of both the hosts and international students.

## What is Homestay

In its simplest form 'homestay' can be defined as "staying in a spare room of a real home while the homeowner is there." 'Homeowners'<sup>8</sup> might include a family, a couple or a single person. It is one of the many accommodation options used by international students studying in Australia but is most commonly used as one of a limited number of options when the students are under the age of 18. Indeed, many of the students interviewed and who attended forums used homestay when they were under 18 years of age.

Homestay offers a fixed-fee option for international students seeking accommodation when they travel to Victoria to study, as the agreed price per week covers meals, use of

facilities and utilities.

According to Melbourne University's [Student Housing Services](#), homestay can take a number of forms:

- **Full board:** involving a furnished room – including study facilities, meals and covering a range of bills, except, perhaps, the internet and telephone costs
- **Part board**, with a furnished room and access provided to cooking and laundry facilities, or
- **Board in exchange**, with free or low-cost accommodation being provided in exchange for undertaking household duties such as cleaning and/or child minding.

Full board is probably the most common.

## Reasons for Becoming a Homestay Host

Australia's multicultural nature means that there are many reasons that individuals and households choose to become homestay hosts. One reason is "having a cross-cultural interaction." Other reasons include hosts wanting to 'diversify' their children by exposing them to other cultures or retired couples hosting for company because their children have all left home. Other hosts see it as a way of earning additional income or

offsetting their mortgage or rental costs.

These latter reasons for becoming a host may mean that hosts are more concerned with their own personal returns and benefits than the welfare and the quality of the experiences of the international students they host. This may be an issue in relation to the quality of service and support provided by hosts. Such an attitude on the hosts' part can also be detrimental to students' perceptions of homestay hosting and the messages to prospective international students through social media that such less than ideal experiences might provide. In turn, this might lead to negative perceptions of homestay as an accommodation option prior to arrival.

There are other reasons for hosting, too. For example, the Australian Tax Office Interpretative Decision 2001/381 Payments received under a homestay arrangement highlights if an amount received from a homestay student is not a commercial arrangement, then the payments for board are not regarded as assessable income.

In determining whether a particular receipt is income, consideration needs to be given as to whether the intention of providing the accommodation is to make a profit or a genuine commercial relationship exists between the parties. Where these factors exist, it can be argued that such receipts are in the character of assessable income. However, the receipts will not be considered assessable if they merely defray the cost in looking after the students. In such cases, there is generally no gain or benefit to the homeowner. Therefore, it is not reasonably arguable that they had a profit-making intention.

Without the specifics of the hosts ongoing payments and outgoing expenses, the ATO is unable to confirm whether these hosts are considered to be earning assessable income. Reportedly, some hosts have a minimum of three students at a weekly cost of \$355.00 pw each; which is \$1420.00 per student every four weeks, \$4,260.00 tax free income per month.

## The Upsides and Downsides of Using Homestay

An article by Dr. Stephen Howlett (Howlett 2013) from the University of Sydney's Centre for English Teaching in 2013 and entitled *Riding the Dragon: Failing to Manage Risk in Homestay Accommodation* reported that:

*Unlike other accommodation options, Homestay students don't need to pay a bond, sign a lease or search for a property themselves. In return for a weekly fee, students are provided with a furnished room to study and rest in, as well as a supportive family environment and home to live in.*

Most of the major higher education institutions in Victoria having international students offer options for homestay (See attachment 1). Homestay may be accessed and managed through the study institution itself<sup>9</sup>, or by a nominated placement agency, often working in collaboration with the institution itself, education agents, or both.

In addition, students may access a homestay host via the web without using an agency or through their institution using sites such as [Gumtree](#), [Homestay.com](#) and [Airbnb](#).

This is, as we have already noted, possibly the most dangerous approach to accessing a homestay host as it does not offer many of the protections of other homestay options and leaves the student potentially vulnerable to significant exploitation and harassment by the host. **This was pointed out by agencies and institutions alike** and is because the potential hosts may not be subject to the same level of scrutiny and monitoring by either homestay provider agencies, study institutions or both.

However, in looking at some institutional websites we noted that they gave these more potentially hazardous approaches to finding a

<sup>9</sup> For example, [Monash College](#). See its student homestay [Orientation Manual](#) as an example of what is provided to students. Another example of such resources is provided by ???, a homestay agency

homestay on their website, along with others that were potentially far safer.

Many institutions outsource the management of homestays to external agencies, who recruit homestay hosts, inspect properties, and conduct reviews of the homestays on the Institution's behalf. Agencies commonly referred to by universities and training providers include:

- **Australian Homestay Network**
- **Homestay Australia**
- **Homestay Direct Services**
- **Student Accommodation Services**
- **Global Experience Australia**

However, the homestay companies, according to Richardson (2003), are:

*...varying for hosts, as there appears to be insufficient numbers of host families to cater for the number of students requiring accommodation.*

This was the message we got from the agencies we interviewed too. Hosts are in short supply, **and often in most short supply where they were most needed:** in reasonable proximity to the students' places of study.

Homestay hosts may be listed with multiple agencies. Also, disruptive technologies are now an issue of safety and security in the homestay environment with hosts looking at taking international students and posting their other spare room on Airbnb without the Homestay Business knowing. If this is found out, though, we were told this often involves the homestay agency no longer endorsing them and offering them students.

### Key message 3:

It is important that Institutions only endorse the safest accommodation options for their students. They should also work closely with one or more

preferred agencies and those agencies should use best practice approaches to placing and monitoring their homestay hosts. This also requires comprehensive and meticulous record keeping on their part and a strong relationship with the institutions with which they work.

### Upsides of Homestay

Homestay, according to 'Studies in Australia', has a number of potential 'upsides' for international students. These include:

- Enabling students to meet local people
- Being able to settle into their studies quickly
- Learning about Australian culture, customs and way of life
- Improving their English language skills, particularly through interacting with native English speakers (Noting that language gains depend on the quality of homestays, interactions and feedback to aid improvement (Conroy 2018))
- Cost, and
- Being a real 'home away from home' which provides a "safe and welcoming environment."

According to Campbell (2004), in its essence the best of homestay:

*is not just about board and lodging. It is also about providing an environment in which the student is able to enjoy the security, warmth, informal friendships, and support that only a family can offer.*

However, this paper also noted that these expectations were often not met, or only partially met (Campbell 2004).

*Homestay agencies informed us that, often, homestay is used initially by new student arrivals until they 'find their feet' and then they may explore and take up other accommodation options.*

*personal space". "They taught me how to drive" or "They also took me on road trips, like to Canberra and the Blue Mountains" and 'Encouraged [me] to be confident to practice English"*

At its best homestay offers an opportunity for cultural exchange between the international student and their homestay host which builds into a long-term relationship between them even after they leave that homestay.

On the upside, students attending the forums most often liked their host family (23 mentions) and had the strongest relationship with their host 'mum' (18 mentions). Forum participants noted that hosts "were kind", and "really cared about me". "They want to know me and I can feel welcoming." One host: "tried to cook me Chinese food." Another said their host "had a dog" (which they really liked) and yet another had a 'homestay brother' who was the same age.

Others attending said they:

“*Feel a part of the family”, or “we have dinners together with the guests of my host family” and “I feel like [I’m] staying at real homes (e.g. watching TV together & talking to me).”*

“*appreciate we have a lot of differences, but I like, I feel really warm in her house, and I feel like it's like a second home for me, here. I enjoy every day I go back to the house, I see the house was like lit, and she was there, like cooking, and it's just really warm. And I love that.”*

Other hosts: "helped us get a bankcard," or "gave me a lot of privacy and had a lot of

Other upsides noted relatively frequently by students attending forums were food, safety and not being alone.

When asked if they would recommend homestay to others seventeen would recommend it for an Australian experience, but 9 forum participants noted that the recommendation depended on the host.

On the other hand, there can be downsides and challenges, and we examine these in more detail in a following section.

### Downsides and Issues of Homestay

There are downsides and issues for both hosts and students documented in the literature and through the agency interviews, student forums and vignettes. Those highlighted by students include:

- Distance and ease of travel to their place of study
- Food quality and appropriateness, including meeting those related to dietary and religious needs
- Quality of their room and the accommodation more generally

Lack of cultural understanding on the part of their host, which can relate to religious observances and other issues such as clothes washing

- 'Stinginess' on the part of hosts: meanness over quantities of food, use of the bathroom and internet, overcrowding the accommodation

- Concerns about personal freedom and independence, including curfews
- Communication issues and misunderstandings, and
- The cost of homestay accommodation.

When looking at the frequency with which 'negatives' were raised by forum participants, those most frequently mentioned were distance from the study institution, the host family and food quality (9, 8 and 8 mentions respectively), awkwardness and lack of privacy (6 mentions each), limited shower and laundry time (5 mentions) and lack of cleanliness (4 mentions).

We will discuss these in greater detail later drawing on our interview and forum information as well as a small number of de-identified incident logs from institutions and homestay agencies.

Those from the hosts' perspective include:

- Dealing with homesickness and other personal and cultural issues, including mental health and eating disorders
- Communicating and interacting with their international student(s)
- Concerns over the use of facilities and wastefulness: bathrooms, washing machine and laundry, use of toilets, general personal and room cleanliness etc.
- Concern over 'duty of care' and about the safety of their homestay student. As one of the homestay agencies noted: They stay out and don't let the host know where they are or when they will get home.

The series of vignettes we prepared contain both positive and negative homestay stories. Full text of these can be found in attachment 2.

The students participating in the forums identified a number of downside issues too, including: hygiene in the home, distance from their study

institution, clothes washing and dealing with accusations of 'wasting water' plus conversations that the student found confrontational over issues in their home country: China.

Forum participants commented on a range of other issues, including:

“  
*I had a feeling like she was trying to make every single dollar out of me, so she bought the cheapest food, and one, and I really like drinking the milk, and when I was drinking a little too much milk, and she actually told me 'you are drinking too much milk, milk is expensive'*”

“  
*it is a bit restricting and hard to have a social life and you can't invite friends over to your place*”

“  
*have to get home at a reasonable time*”

“  
*the house is very noisy because my room is very near to the living room,*”

and even

“  
*not being able to have my own pet, I really like dogs and can't have one.*”

Akbar et al. (2004) point out that key issues are cultural differences or even clashes, and communication difficulties such as the speed

of talking. They noted a set of cultural issues including:

Differences in attitudes toward family and gender roles, cultural 'do's' and 'taboos' (including table etiquette, politeness, honesty and courtesy, using the toilet and bathroom), behavior moral values and privacy issues in terms of maintaining personal space.

And Akbar et al. (2004) also reported that:

Students found that aspects of family life such as food and family meals, electricity and water usage (in terms of showering, dish and clothes washing), and household rules/chores were most common [negative] issues experienced in homestays

#### Key message 4:

There are upsides and downsides to homestay for both international students and their hosts. The upsides are enhanced when hosts are offering homestay for the right reasons, when they are well prepared for their role, and well matched to their homestay students. Thus, processes of host selection, training and monitoring are important as are comprehensive and careful approaches to host and student matching pre-arrival.

Students need to be clear about what homestay will involve and well prepared with clear and comprehensive information about living with an Australian family and their host in particular.

As already emphasized monitoring of both hosts and students is important to ensure that issues of concern are speedily but carefully and sensitively addressed. This may involve any – or all – of the following: the host, student, study institution and homestay agency, dependent on circumstances.

# Data

## What the Data Tells us about International Education in Victoria

According to data supplied by the Department of Jobs, Regions and Precincts (DJRP) there were nearly 310,000 international students studying in Victoria in 2019. Of these 50.6% were studying in higher education, 27.9% in VET, 14.6% in ELICOS, while the remainder were in either non-award programs (4%) or schools (2.9%).

When breaking this data down by country of origin, the international market is clearly dominated by China and India. In terms of looking at the three major sectors: Higher Education, VET and ELICOS, the 'league table' looks like this (See Table 1).

We know Chinese students are 'big' homestay users, and their activities span all three sectors: HE, VET and ELICOS. What this table also tells us is that other nationalities that are known to be relatively high users of homestay, that is: Vietnam, Hong Kong, Brazil and Indonesia and Colombia were ranked 7th (Vietnam), 17th (Hong Kong), 14th (Brazil), 9th (Indonesia) and 6th (Colombia) respectively in Table 1, below. As reported above (Berg & Farbenblum 2019), all these nationalities are users of 'college' study (VET and/or ELICOS), and that form of study is more the case for students from Colombia, Brazil, and to lesser extent for students from Indonesia and Vietnam.

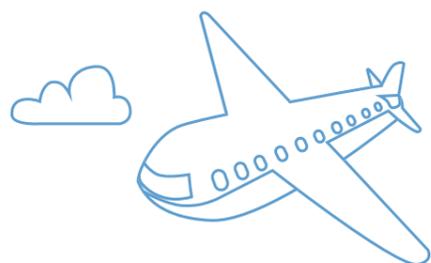


Table 1: The top 20 nationalities in the HE, VET and ELICOS sectors in 2019<sup>10</sup>

| Nationality  | HE (No. of students) | Market of Rank | VET (No. of students) | Market of Rank | ELICOS (No. of students) | Market of Rank | Total Student no. | Overall Rank |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| China        | 54,003               | 1              | 9,356                 | 2              | 15,133                   | 1              | 78,472            | 1            |
| India        | 42,773               | 2              | 21,902                | 1              | 2,963                    | 4              | 67,638            | 2            |
| Sri Lanka    | 7,691                | 3              | 3,377                 | 7              | 395                      | 18             | 11,463            | 5            |
| Vietnam      | 6,901                | 4              | 2,360                 | 12             | 1,723                    | 7              | 10,984            | 7            |
| Nepal        | 5,851                | 5              | 5,254                 | 4              | 698                      | 13             | 11,803            | 4            |
| Malaysia     | 5,637                | 6              | 7,120                 | 3              | 1,033                    | 11             | 13,790            | 3            |
| Indonesia    | 5,110                | 7              | 1,391                 | 15             | 337                      | 19             | 6,838             | 9            |
| Pakistan     | 4,441                | 8              | 2,362                 | 11             | -                        | -              | 6,803             | 10           |
| Singapore    | 2,310                | 9              | -                     | -              | -                        | -              | 2,310             | 18           |
| Hong Kong    | 2,106                | 10             | 969                   | 18             | -                        | -              | 3,075             | 17           |
| Saudi Arabia | 2,106                | 11             | -                     | -              | 1,092                    | 8              | 3,198             | 15           |
| Bangladesh   | 1,429                | 12             | -                     | -              | -                        | -              | 1,429             | 20           |
| Philippines  | 1,370                | 13             | 5,254                 | 5              | -                        | -              | 6,626             | 11           |
| Taiwan       | 1,052                | 14             | 2,582                 | 10             | 1,034                    | 10             | 4,668             | 13           |
| South Korea  | 974                  | 15             | 2,764                 | 9              | 1,058                    | 9              | 4,796             | 12           |
| Thailand     | 969                  | 16             | 2,858                 | 8              | 3,687                    | 3              | 7,514             | 8            |
| Cambodia     | 867                  | 17             | -                     | -              | -                        | -              | 867               | 23           |
| Iran         | 778                  | 18             | -                     | -              | -                        | -              | 778               | 24           |
| Colombia     | 685                  | 19             | 4,555                 | 6              | 5,976                    | 2              | 11,216            | 6            |
| Kenya        | 667                  | 20             | -                     | -              | -                        | -              | 667               | 26           |
| Brazil       | -                    | -              | 2,298                 | 13             | 1,815                    | 6              | 4,113             | 14           |
| Italy        | -                    | -              | 1,567                 | 14             | 467                      | 17             | 2,034             | 19           |
| UK           | -                    | -              | 1,257                 | 16             | -                        | -              | 1,257             | 22           |
| Japan        | -                    | -              | 1,113                 | 17             | 2,081                    | 5              | 3,197             | 16           |
| France       | -                    | -              | 696                   | 19             | -                        | -              | 696               | 25           |
| Chile        | -                    | -              | 604                   | 20             | 801                      | 12             | 1,405             | 21           |
| Turkey       | -                    | -              | -                     | -              | 644                      | 14             | 664               | 27           |
| Myanmar      | -                    | -              | -                     | -              | 630                      | 15             | 630               | 28           |
| Spain        | -                    | -              | -                     | -              | 558                      | 16             | 558               | 29           |
| Mexico       | -                    | -              | -                     | -              | 275                      | 20             | 275               | 30           |

<sup>10</sup> Note that there may be double counting of ELICOS and HE or VET students as they may have completed an ELICOS program and then begun an HE or VET course in 2019. It is also possible that their VET/HE and ELICOS enrolments were concurrent and hence there might be some double counting

## What Data/Surveys Told us about the Extent and Satisfaction with Homestay

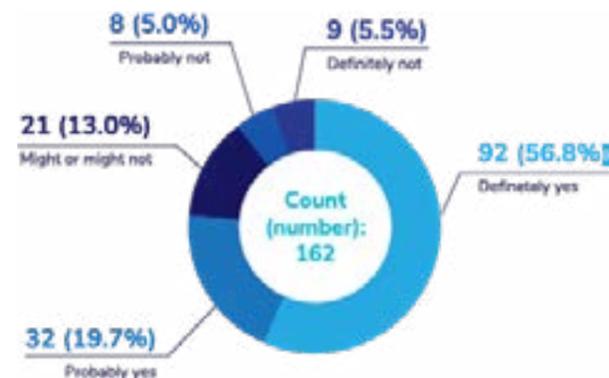
As reported above, Berg & Farbenblum (2019) found that the most common nationalities utilizing homestay were those from non-English speaking countries. Homestay was also slightly female dominated. In addition, their survey found that, overall, education agents found first accommodation for 12% of respondents. Among these, 51% were in placed in homestay. So, this means that agents and their relationship with homestay agencies and providers are potentially significant in the selection and use of homestay.

Data from the 168 respondents<sup>11</sup> to the micro-survey tell us that:

- The majority were female (60.7%), while 36.9% were male and 2.4% preferred not to identify their gender
- Most (65.2%) were from China, with a mix of other nationalities. The most common 'others' were Indian (8.9%), Indonesian (8.2%), Vietnamese (5.2%) and Malaysian (3.7%). Nationalities at or under 3% of respondents included Columbian, Thai, Nepalese and Sri Lankan – with just one respondent.

**Figure 2** shows the results when respondents were asked if they had, or are currently having, a positive homestay experience. Just over three quarters indicated they probably or definitely had a positive experience, with just over half (56.8%) saying definitely yes. Only 5.5% said that they definitely did not have a positive experience and a further 5% saying they probably didn't.

Figure 2: Responses to the question in the micro-survey "Have you had a positive homestay experience?"



On the whole it can be concluded that homestay provides a positive experience for a significant majority of survey respondents.

Survey respondents were offered the opportunity to provide a comment, and many chose to do so. On the whole comments were positive, with about 36 being positive or glowing, while around 18 had a degree of negativity, ranging from relatively minor to significant.

Positive comments focused on good cultural understanding, feeling part of a family that was friendly and welcoming, food quantity and quality, warmth and kindness, cleanliness of the accommodation and proximity to their study institution. Of all of these the first two made up the most numerous comments. Examples include:

“now I'm leaving in a homestay that my host are very kind and nice people, they always show me about new thing in Melbourne that i can do, and also they always bring me to get some short trip in weekends”

“It [was] fantastic, it really help[ed] me a lot for life as well as study.”

“The family I stayed with accepted me as their own. They loved me unconditionally and provided me so much support. I couldn't of had a better family.”

Those that were more negative focused on food quality and personal treatment including meanness and a lack of 'connectedness' with their hosts, a lack of independence, travel distance and food quality. A couple of the negative comments are worth highlighting in full:

“She is very mean and cruel, limits our time to use anything in her house, we can't eat too much, we can't eat early during the weekend, she is a racist in some aspects, sometimes she scolds my roommate, but she is really good at cooking even though she does not let us eat too much which I think is the amount that I should eat.”

And:

“Very bad experience. Even tissue rolls in the toilet are a big deal for the homestay owners to provide. I was extremely dissatisfied with the stay with them. If we wanted something that was nearly finished, we had to wait for so many days. the owners are so rude to talk to and just keep on complaining every time even without any issue they had to [intentionally] create one. We pay so much

and get no facilities, just depression and stress at a very extreme level. No use of staying in the homestay.

### Key message 5:

High quality information about the host and student alike prior to arrival is very important, including information about the hosts themselves and the accommodation to be provided.

The use of a homestay agency is preferable than a direct relationship between the student and their host as it reduces the chances of the host exploiting and intimidating the student. In addition, the homestay agency acts as a 'financial go-between', which is preferable to a direct financial relationship between host and student.

## What our Other Information Sources Told us about Homestay Experience

In this section we explore the issues raised by our key informants: students, institutions, homestay agencies and by the literature. In this section we are looking at the homestay experience from 'go to whoa', but concentrating in two major areas: pre-arrival and then from arrival until the homestay experience finishes. Several perspectives are valid too: the student's, the host's, the homestay agency and that of the study institution.

A report prepared for Education New Zealand (Sauer & Robb 2006) examined what was needed to select, prepare, monitor and support homestay hosts.

## Pre-arrival Processes and Information

Akbar et al. (2004) describe the process for accessing and arranging homestay. They did this as part of their evaluation of the program at

<sup>11</sup> We should note that 161 of the survey respondents were over 18, but 7 were not. Nevertheless, we have still included their responses

Queensland University of Technology. Essentially, it is a process which involves:

1. Sending information to students/education agents about accommodation options and the homestay process
2. Students requesting homestay and submitting an appropriate form
3. Homestay agency selecting a host and sending the 'homestay profiles' sent to the host and student and/or their education agent
4. Hosts undertaking training, often online
5. Students advising travel arrangements
6. Airport Reception: students being met and taken to homestay
7. On-going monitoring of homestay placements by agency and/or study institution
8. Hosts, and students using homestay, being surveyed (possibly) to gain their feedback and views as part of the monitoring process by homestay agencies and/or study institutions.

In addition, homestay agencies, and possibly institutions, interview and select prospective hosts from those who put themselves forward. Successful selection depends both on the quality of accommodation they offer and their perceived personal qualities and suitability as a potential host.

Homestay agencies may provide information on hosting and, in some cases, initial host training. According to Akbar et al (2004), this training needs to include:

*issues such as legal responsibility, health and safety, cross cultural communication, food and protocols for emergency situations or risk management.*

However, host training is not mandated, nor is it necessarily comprehensive.

Finally, some agencies said they require periodic re-certification of hosts, usually annually. The process outlined above conforms to descriptions we have received from our informants, particularly homestay agencies.

### Why Students Choose Homestay

As noted earlier, some went into homestay as they were under 18 on arrival and their accommodation options were therefore limited. Indeed, this was the reason that many of our forum participants had used homestay. However, parents may prefer homestay as an accommodation option, particularly when their children first arrive in Australia. For example, one forum participant noted that:

*“my mum/family really want me to choose Homestay to learn about Australian culture and I think it might help me to settle down here”*

Another said that Homestay was not their first option:

*“cause like, I know I don't like to live with people [who] I'm not familiar with, and I like to have my freedom to move around and do what I like, but because my Mum was really insist in this, I just had to.”*

Information from alumni in their home country can assist in making the homestay choice. As has already been pointed out, it can dissuade too.

As noted above, education agents can have close relationships with homestay agencies, and may therefore push it as an option<sup>12</sup>.

The vignette participants taught us that homestay is a very good option for new arrivals to help them orient to Australia, learn something of the culture, improve their English language and conversational skills and get them set up with Myki accounts, phones, bank accounts etc. It also helps them to understand how the public transport system works to access their study institution as easily as possible.

As another of the forum participants pointed out homestay was a:

*“good environment for practicing English, and [to] get connected to local community, and also, it's really convenient with the Homestay can provide foods to you and you don't have to cook.”*

Some forum participants considered a student apartment:

*“but I think Homestay is probably a better choice before city apartment, if there's a first time for you to travel to another country and study there yourself, cause I think living city apartment requires self-control, and also you need to manage your time, take care of yourself, cook for yourself or just go and eat anywhere - you need to balance everything, but in Homestay, you can find someone to sort of take care of you, and there is food and security.”*

The agents can be an issue too, because one

of the agencies believes that they may tell the student and the parents what they want to hear rather than present a real picture. i.e. they will have to travel on a bus, a train or a tram for 30 minutes, but the education agents are keen to sign them up. This can also apply to the marketing people from the institutions. It can be a situation of 'overselling things' and creating expectations cannot be delivered on. Information from alumni in their home country can assist too, and it is important that agents be ethical and truthful in their dealings with the prospective student and their family. At the end it is about matching a good host with a good student, but that is not always possible.

### Student Expectations of Homestay Pre-arrival

In terms of the expectations our forum participants had before they arrived in Australia, seven of the forum participants said they had no expectations, while five expected a bad experience. One said:

*“I didn't expect too much... '[did not] have a good knowledge with what is the whole conception of the Homestay and how it runs in Australia as a commercial industry, so I didn't take higher, like the high expectations”*

And another pointed out:

*“Actually, before I came to Australia even when I was considering coming to study in Australia, I had already heard quite a lot of stories about Homestay, so actually both positive and negative, ... I heard quite a few positive experiences as well, like the student being as part of the family, which I think was my expectation, before I came; but it turns out, it feels like if you get that,*

<sup>12</sup> This may be because they get a 'kickback' from the agency concerned.

*it's kind of like you have won the lottery, yeah, because by that time, we didn't actually get to choose where to stay, we were allocated randomly, so, feels like it was a matter of luck."*

Finally, one student said that homestay not regarded highly in her country and friends who were living in the U.S. told her not to live in homestay. Her parents were also worried about the different cultural background, but:



*Actually, friends and the agent said don't have high expectations of homestay. If you are lucky you can find a good homestay but [she was told] told 'Australian house is not really good'."*

When asked how their expectations related to reality their views were mixed. Most seemed to find it better than they expected, but some others did not for a variety of reasons, often related to the characteristics of their hosts. Fifteen of the forum participants said their expectations were met.

Campbell (2004) highlights the experiences of Chinese students using homestay in New Zealand. The paper reported that expectation could give way to disappointment, with the quality of housing and furnishings not being what they expected of a western country. Aspects of the physical and urban environment were also an issue and a disappointment. There were also reported issues with homesickness, being a stranger in the home, food quantity and the type of food, communication problems and English language skills and a perceived lack of support and an unwillingness to change or adapt to meet the homestay student's needs. There could also be a mutual lack of cultural understanding. In addition:

*they [the students] had not been provided*

*with information about the homestay family, or what it was like to live in a homestay situation before they came.*

These views were supported by students we spoke to and the homestay agencies we interviewed.

The keys to improving expectations and having them match reality as much as possible are comprehensive, quality information for students and hosts, and expectation management.

Generalized but high-quality information via YouTube or in other formats in language, or suitably sub-titled, could help. These could be used by institutions, homestay agencies and other bodies.

### Findings, Selection and Training Hosts

The homestay agencies noted that hosts are free agents and may be registered with more than one agency. On the other hand, and as noted above, the agencies interviewed do not appreciate it if the hosts also listed on sites like Airbnb or Gumtree and, in which case, they would not be used.

Potential hosts most often come to the agencies through word of mouth. Agencies may also advertise in local papers, on radio and TV, through flier drops or using social media. Particular demands for numbers of places and specific study locations generates this activity on the hosting agencies' part.

Agencies suggested that there are not enough hosts, especially in 'wealthy' suburbs or in areas of high demand around particular institutions. In finding a suitable homestay a couple of the agencies suggested that their benchmark for a suggested maximum travel time by public transport of no more than 45 minutes to an hour. Another tries to stay within 10km of institution but needs to consider the ease of travel to it. Thus, hosts are chosen on location and match to

requirements. These are key points influencing student placement. Hosts are also in competition with each other to attain a placement, too.

However, a 'John West Principle' applies to the selection and continued use of hosts by homestay agencies. One agency says it rejects about 30% of those that apply for a variety of reasons. Some of these relate to the quality of the accommodation itself based on a checklist. In other cases, acceptance or rejection relates to the 'vibe' of the prospective host even if the accommodation is deemed satisfactory. As one agency said: We want to know what the people are like themselves.

Notes documenting the agency visit are written up and these go on file, as do photographic records of the accommodation and the hosts themselves. These latter can form part of the information pack sent to prospective students and their families.

In relation to host training: one agency reported that it has a checklist/set of guidelines. They also have an initial training program which is online but, in addition, they require that hosts log in annually and undertake a recertification. The training covers the expectations of being a host/host family, about the culture shock for the student, but they have now included a module on child safety and personal issues such as mental health that may arise. They also provide access to critical incident management where help/support can be provided. The hosts are also advised to keep a lookout for issues with the student. Another agency prefers to hold face to face training sessions involving a number of their prospective hosts. This not only enables host networking, but also allows for outside speakers to be brought in to enhance the training. This, perhaps, is a preferable approach. Indeed, a mixed approach is called for with face to face meetings possible supplemented by access to suitable resources to help hosts 'do their job' most effectively.

In summary, the overwhelming evidence is that

the attitude of the host is critical and is one of the most important criteria in host selection. Communication, empathy and caring on the part of the hosts are three key issues in selecting potential hosts. Finally, and importantly, the agencies do not want to take on hosts they feel will 'rip students off.'

### Matching Hosts and Students

All the agencies interviewed check the student's requirements and match them as best as possible to a host. As noted above, the agency prepared profile goes to agent/student and their family and can be in their language.

Regarding the matching process: one agency said it asks whether the students are happy to have pets in the home (who might be inside or outside pets) and children living at home (they reveal the age of the live-in children). They also ask if the students are happy with other students living in the homestay. They ask about allergies, or are there special requests, e.g. whether they smoke and whether the hosts are happy with smoking in their home. They ask them re food allergies, and they do not generally get issues here.

The matching process can require that they go 'to and fro' with agents and the parents/student to determine whether the placement would be suitable, given what are sometimes the requirements of the homestay students' parents. Determining what the student and/or their family are looking for and what they don't want (e.g. single parent etc.) is important as well.

The hosts need to orient the student: show them how to get to their place of study, get them a Myki card, show them how it works, help them get a telephone or a Sim card, set up a bank account etc.

In terms of matching students, what is important? For students, location is the key issue, and they like to be close. One of the agencies reported that they aim for one form of transport. Two is

the max, and they try to get within 30 minutes of the institution. (NB: note above re travelling distance of up to 45 to 60 minutes as a maximum benchmark).

If given the choice, one agency suggests that 'happiness with the homestay' should take precedence over location. In one case they found that a student would prefer not to move even though the homestay student had changed institutions and the new one was less convenient. However: "Transport is major, and that is where we start."

In short, it is about ensuring that all the parties are as 'happy' as possible.

### Pre-arrival Processes

When the student is about to arrive, one agency reported that it checks their flight details, visas etc. and arranges an airport pickup in a limo with a single company they work with closely. This agency also has a 'welcome pack' with essential information for the student. At least one other agency had such information packs, but one potential issue is whether these packs are just in English or are available in other languages.

## After Arrival

### Greeting

As noted above one of the agencies told us that they ensured the students were met at the airport and taken to the homestay. One agency used a trusted chauffeuring service.

### Meeting Host Responsibilities

The hosts need to take a genuine interest in the student(s) they are hosting and make them 'part of the family' as much as possible, for example by taking them out and including them in family activities. Making and taking the opportunity

for conversations is important for both hosts and students.

In summary, those contributing vignettes revealed that homestay hosts need patience, empathy and cultural sensitivity. They need to be flexible and respect the international student's religious and dietary needs. This accords well with the reasons that homestay agencies may have selected them as a potential host in the first place.

Summarizing feedback from the six vignettes, students really appreciate good, fresh food; a clean homestay environment; ready access to their study institution and being part of a family. Some really appreciate being treated as an additional member of the family, but others can find that an issue. They also do not appreciate feeling that they are being exploited or 'ripped off'. They appreciate generosity on their hosts' part, and do not appreciate those they feel are mean and just appear to be hosting 'for the money'. Homestay hosts can also assist students to prepare for more independent living options later in their studies, especially cooking and shopping.

### Monitoring the Homestay Host and Student Experience

One of the agencies told us that they have a 24/7 advice/contact line that students/parents can access from overseas, with translators, legal and medical advice etc. This agency also told us that students can also call their office during business hours and staff are multi-lingual. Students/families can contact the host prior to arrival if they wish.

In terms of monitoring, at least two of the agencies say they are in touch a fair bit. Agencies send monthly invoices and this process can generate a discussion with the host by phone or email. They also have a newsletter and that provides an opportunity "to read the riot act" if necessary. They like to use the newsletter to give their hosts "the 'good vibe' stories, of which there

are some". "Not too many [hosts] get under the radar"; several of the agencies also noted that institutions would contact them if the student raised issues over the homestay accommodation and then action would be taken. The agencies will also ring if they have a prospective placement and that gives them a chance to see where their hosts are at in terms of placement opportunities.

Two of the agencies reported that issues can emerge when the fortnightly invoices are sent to the student and that may trigger a response from the student that then may need to be acted upon. The invoice can trigger concern about issues, or are there other more personal problems? If so the agencies then approach the host if necessary for their input to see if there really is an issue there in the host's opinion.

Two of the agencies told us they reinspect the host accommodation every six months or yearly as a minimum.

### To Change or Not to Change the Host or Student?

The quality of the two-way relationship and adaptability are paramount and will influence whether or not the homestay works. As one forum participant noted:

————— “ ” —————

*if the matching system allows, better matching, rather than random allocation, say they can be matched based on their expectations, their personal interest, hobbies, et cetera, it would be great to ee ... we hear a lot about people saying what's your expectation of the host family' but I think it's important to realise, to be aware of it's actually a two-way relationship, why are we always expecting the host family to do this, to do A, B, C, the student, him or herself [has] a huge role in how the relationship is going to form"*

### Would the Students we Interviewed Recommend Homestay to Others?

The long and the short of it is that they are equivocal: for them it depends. It also depends on how they value and rate the quality of the information they receive from other sources about using homestay.

As one forum participant pointed out:

————— “ ” —————

*based on my experience, I'd like to recommend my friends in the future that if they want to get to know more knowledge of how the daily life that you might lead in this country, if you want to get on with the local people, to get more information or more knowledges on their lifestyle, I recommend them to do so, but average the case that other participants the unlucky experience I might take a little consideration of the personality of the international student who asked me for the information about the homestay, so that's it."*

# Addressing the Research Questions

The following sections address each of the research questions outlined in the introduction to this report in turn. The responses to these questions provide a useful summary of the project findings and focus on the key issues of:

- The nature and scope of homestay (Question 1)
- The key criteria students use in selecting homestay (Question 2)
- The challenges that key parties: students, homestay agencies and institutions, face in providing good homestay (Question 3), and finally
- What changes will improve the quality of the homestay experience for international students and other key parties? (Question 4).

## Question 1: What is the Nature and Scope of Homestay amongst International Students Studying in Victoria?

In summary, the response to this question is:

- There is no real clear data on the scope, but if national trends followed in Victoria it is a relatively small component of the

accommodation options used by those aged 18+ and, regretfully, this study has not been able to clarify that further

- Having said that the literature tells us that the use of homestay appears to be dominated by particular student demographics, with most being from non-English speaking countries, including China, and with a small majority being female
- Homestay is most commonly a first 'port of call' while international students orient themselves to Australian life and their studies, and improve their English language skills - perhaps beginning when students arrive when they are under 18 and even persisting after they turn 18.

## Question 2: What are the Key Criteria Students are Using in Selecting the Homestay Option?

- It is a choice made for them if they are under 18.

## Question 3: What Challenges do Students, Institutions and Support Agencies Face in Accessing and Providing High-quality Homestay Experiences?

The evidence gathered from the forums, agency interviews, vignettes and critical incident logs suggest that the major challenges include:

- Finding suitable homestay accommodation close to study institutions
- Finding suitable hosts with the right attitudes and personal attributes
- Matching the student and the host to get the best possible fit to ensure that both hosts and students find the homestay experience a satisfying one
- Ensuring that homestays are monitored appropriately by homestay agencies and/or institutions to identify and resolve any emerging issues
- Ensuring that students using homestay have opportunities to raise issues they are having with their homestay as quickly as possible.

## Question 4: What Changes may be Required to Existing Arrangements to Improve the Nature and Quality of Homestay in Victoria for all Parties Concerned?

On the basis of the information gathered, the following changes are proposed.

- Gathering better data and other homestay options. It could be possible to obtain such data from PRISMS, assuming it was well maintained by institutions and available in

such a form that protected data sources, especially international students. Having the data for deidentified students would enable their use of accommodation options to be monitored over time to advise Victorian policy and practices.

- International students sourcing homestay options that are not monitored by a study institution or agency are, potentially, at 'high risk' of exploitation by unscrupulous hosts. However, eliminating or reducing the impact of such 'high risk' or poorly performing hosts, including those accessed through homestay agencies will avoid unnecessary damage to the Victorian international study brand. This is a worthwhile goal and could be done by:
  - o Collaboration to 'blacklist' unsatisfactory institute and agency managed hosts in the first instance. As hosts may multiply list, such collaboration would be required.
  - o Implementing a registration requirement for sole trader homestay hosts not working through an institution or agency (who could be a registered body working to a uniform code of ethics and guidelines) Civil penalties could be applied if hosts were identified and then prosecuted under appropriate legislation.
- Developing and implementing a code of ethics and uniform guidelines for homestay in Victoria. There are no uniform guidelines for interviewing and assessing potential homestay hosts and, although a variety of interview schedules, host checklists and other documentation is available, these are probably of variable quality. Thus, developing the best possible set of guidelines and ethical standards is desirable. This could be done by a taskforce involving institutions, homestay agencies and bodies representing the interests of international students. Akbar et al. (2004) point to the need for:



*a clearly defined Code of Ethics and Good Practice Guidelines which, it is envisaged, will eventually form a strong foundation on which dilemmas can be identified and worked through by the homestay hosts. Homestay agencies reported that a common set of guidelines would be useful as institutional variation can be administratively problematic for them."*

However, Akbar et al. (2004) have raised the issue of whether uniform guidelines are worthwhile as there needs to be a balance between strict conformance to guidelines and sound personal judgements about who can/should based on experience.

- Requiring periodic re-certification of registered and agency/institutionally managed hosts at least annually, but shorter-term re-certification could be considered, for example 6-monthly.
- Requiring/mandating initial host training using both online and face to face approaches, with the latter potentially having some advantages in terms of the development of networks of hosts. In addition, online resources and support/critical incident lines for hosts need to be available on a just in time basis to help them deal expeditiously with hosting issues as they arise. Again, institutions and agencies might collaborate in the development of best practice resources available to all. An alternative is that government could fund a project to develop such resources.
- Having a good information management system on the part of both the study institution and homestay agency is critical. It needs to contain information about the students and their requirements, hosts, times in homestay and critical incident logs that

can be analysed to see trends and the extent of issues that may need to be dealt with administratively. Agencies need to refine and improve the policies, processes, checklists and information management systems on a continuing basis based on experiences and emerging issues and needs.

- Developing a series of resources for students, their parents and education agents about study, culture and lifestyle in Australia to ensure that students are well prepared for living and studying in Australia, and Victoria in particular. The Victorian government could fund the development of such resources for use by a wide range of organisations, including institutions and homestay agencies. In addition, these general resources could be complimented by those developed by institutions themselves, and other suitable resources already developed could be identified, stored in a resource bank and used appropriately. Resources would need to be made available in a variety of languages, or at least subtitled to encourage the widest possible use.
- Finally, homestay agencies should be operating using a set of well-developed and effective policies and procedures. Nevertheless, some have described homestay agencies as a "cottage industry" (e.g. Howlett 2013). As with most such statements it is dependent on the size and sophistication of agency and true, except in the cases where it's not.

## Summary,

# Conclusions and Recommendations

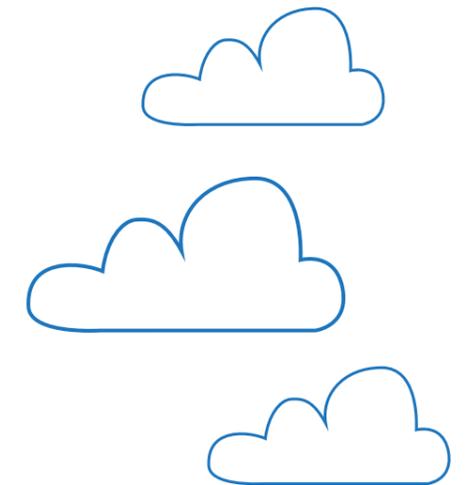
This package represents four guidelines for homestay providers, educational Providers, homestay agencies and international students and their parents about study, culture and lifestyle in Australia to ensure that these students are well prepared for living and studying in Australia, and Victoria in particular.

The Victorian government could fund the development of such homestay resources tailored for use by a wide range of additional organisations, including institutions and homestay agencies as well as for homestay hosts. It might also maintain a resource bank or fund its setting up and maintenance by a third party.

These general homestay resources should be complimented by those developed by institutions themselves. Other suitable resources that have already been developed could be identified, stored in a resource bank and used or adapted appropriately to meet particular needs.

Resources would need to be made available in a variety of languages, or at least subtitled to encourage the widest possible use.

Four example as follows:



# Guidelines for Education Agents

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## Recommendations about Homestay

Education Agents/Counsellors are expected to learn about accommodation options for all Australian institutions in all cities. They receive limited training on accommodation from institutional representatives whose focus is recruitment and promotional activities. Usually agents resort to accessing the institution's website as their main source of information about accommodation. In some education agencies the tasks of education counselling and accommodation planning are undertaken by different staff. Not all of them have frequent contact with Australian accommodation teams based in the institutions they service. For many agents the priority is on securing an enrolment, and accommodation is not prioritised. Most agents are not fully aware of all appropriate accommodation options. They tend to rely on the few familiar accommodation providers they have worked with for years and their commissions.

The accommodation providers include:

- Homestay agencies who will access a suitable host
- Institutional accommodation options, including colleges, halls of residence, apartments
- Staying with family, friends and relatives
- Staying in a parental or family owned house or apartment
- Living in a Purpose - Built Student Accommodation
- Rooming House
- Private rented houses and rooms

Institutions know offshore agent networks play a vital role in determining where an international student will ultimately end up living in Australia. Institutions also know the majority of international students rely on their agent's recommendation when it comes to choosing accommodation. However, from a duty of care perspective, institutions want to ensure that their students are able to access accommodation that is both safe and secure as well as being within suitable travelling distance from the campus.

For young international students, feeling safe, secure, supported and comfortable in the crucial first few months is vital for overall success in their first year at the Institution.

It is important for Institutions to provide training to agents to help them better understand all accommodation options. The training should provide examples on real cases and give opportunities to discuss cases thoroughly with the aim to increase their understanding of the Victorian accommodation market. This can be supported with videos (for each type of accommodation), newsletters, student testimonials as well as the institution's Prospectus.

Homestay placements for international students are recommended to students and their parents because they are relatively easy to place students in this form of accommodation (no lease agreement) and homestay is one of the few accommodation options available to international students aged under 18 years old.

It is also a good option to use initially while the student orients themselves to life away from home to live and study in a new and unfamiliar country and culture.

However, as a key matter of principle, Education Agents should work through a reputable homestay agency as homestay for international students over 18 years old is largely unregulated and discourage international students or their families booking accommodation themselves **unless they are absolutely sure it is REPUTABLE and SAFE.**

As an Agent it is important to give students and parents information on 'what it is really like to live in a homestay'. For example:

- 1  The student application submitted to the homestay agency through you as the academic agent is very important as it enables the homestay provider to make the best match possible between host and student. It is important that you have detailed discussions with the student and their family to get a clear picture of what they want and need in a possible homestay host.
- 2  Ensure that the detailed homestay profile is provided to the student and their parents, including names and the address of the host(s), contact details, a profile of those living in the house, pets if any, photos or videos of the accommodation and particularly the room they will be staying in. The more information they have about their host before arrival the better.
- 3  Homestay hosts will have house rules. Students should know what these are before or soon after they arrive. The students in homestay are part of a new family and need to understand these rules as this will help them fit in as easily as possible.
- 4  Students should be provided with the host's email address and mobile phone number so they can contact the host and do a 'meet and greet' and a virtual tour before they arrive in Australia. This can be facilitated through the homestay provider.
- 5  If the student didn't connect well with the host prior to arrival, or there are other concerns, agents can ask for another host profile from the homestay agent.
- 6  After students arrive, hosts will want to know where students are and will worry if they do not communicate with them, especially if they have cooked a meal for them and they forgot to tell them they will be late home. It is important that students keep in touch by phone with their hosts while they are staying there if their plans change during the day. This is just common courtesy.

- 7  Hosts generally like students to come home for dinner, but if students don't like the food served as meals, they should offer some suggestions of what they do like to eat. They should also inform hosts if they have specific dietary requirements and that should be on the profile provided to the host or homestay agency.
- 8  When some students arrive, they feel nervous and may look at their phone at the dinner table as this is what is 'normal' at home but in Australia this is the time that families chat about their day.
- 9  Many families wash their socks and underwear in the washing machine with all other dirty clothes. Students should feel free to discuss washing arrangements with their host and, in particular, how they would like their personal items laundered.
- 10  Times spent in bathroom and shower may also be an issue for some hosts.
- 11  Being tidy is important, especially in their room. Most hosts will not allow food in the bedrooms.
- 12  Most importantly please ensure that student speaks to their hosts if they are unhappy. They should also feel free to raise issues and concerns with the homestay agency or their study institution.
- 13  Although the environment in their homestay home and culture are different, students should try to participate in the life of their host family. They should engage in conversation, and this will help them to have a more positive homestay experience. If they are having issues, they should let the homestay agency, or their study institution know.

Give students and parents information on:



Homestay rate in AU\$ per week and ensure that they are clear about what that rate includes i.e. use of internet in the home, number of meals etc.



Frequency of payments and who the payment is going to i.e Homestay Provider or direct to the host (NOT preferred).



Who will be responsible for obtaining and keeping a receipt for any homestay money paid?



What the minimum stay is (e.g. two weeks) and if the student leaves early is it refundable?



If a student wishes to vacate the homestay, how much notice/warning in advance must be given?



In certain cases, should the student be away from the homestay for more than one week a vacant rate payment of i.e \$150 per week is payable in advance for the homestay to hold the room. Any arrangements of this kind should be clarified and monitored by you as the agent or with the homestay agency.



The student should know if they are covered by contents insurance, especially for computers, laptops, mobiles, translators and any other personal items.



The State Government advises that water restrictions are in place in Victoria. Although the restrictions have been eased, water usage, especially for showering or bathing, should still be kept to a minimum.

# Guidelines for Educational Provider

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## Recommendations about Homestay

For educational providers who list Homestay as an accommodation option on their website. The following procedure for checking, selecting and monitoring Homestay Agencies. Providers should be checked at least every six months.

## Essential Requirement of Homestay Agencies

All staff and hosts employed by homestay agencies, should have a current Police check or a fit and proper person check as part of a licensing or registration requirement.

Homestay agencies must provide an orientation program for hosts and students to inform them of policies/guidelines, as well as having suitable people in charge who are accessible 24 hours a day.

Homestay Hosts must have appropriate contents insurance.

## Application process for Homestay Agencies

- Homestay Agencies provide their internal policies and procedures as follows:
  - o Helpline emergency contact
  - o Other related policies and procedures.
- Homestay Agencies are required to distribute and explain Institutes Policy and Procedure to 18+ students on arrival relating to their homestay accommodation.
- A site visit to the Homestay Agency is arranged by the Institution Accommodation Office.
- If the Homestay Agency is deemed appropriate for 18+ students, a letter of approval will be sent.
- This letter of approval indicates that there will be a review conducted whenever there are serious concerns or complaints from students.
- If there are legitimate student complaints, or Institution deems the homestay to be unsuitable, the Homestay agency will be asked in writing to resolve the issue/s as soon as possible.
- If issues continue or the Homestay Agency does not resolve the situation in a timely manner, they may be removed from the Institutions website and the Homestay Agency will no longer be approved for future students.
- Where a Homestay Agency is no longer approved for their students the Institution will assist students to transition to alternative accommodation.

## Termination of agreements with homestay agency

The Institution completes a six-monthly/annual checks on Homestay providers as a wellbeing risk audit.

Upon receiving student issues and complaints, the Institution will manage each case by providing appropriate advice and advocacy on the student's behalf (in the absence of a regulatory body and Homestay Host registration) until an outcome is reached.

Where the service does not meet the Institutions standards, the Homestay Agency will be formally notified and informed of the improvements that must be made.

Where Institutes have a signed formal agreement with a homestay agency the terms and conditions of that Agreement will apply to termination.

The process for discontinuation/termination is as follows:

- The homestay agency will be given a maximum of two weeks to make the required changes.
- Institute will undertake another assessment of the homestay agency service.
- If the arrangements still do not meet the standards, Institute may choose to suspend or remove the homestay agency from the list no later than the end of the following business day.
- Institute will be responsible for arranging suitable alternative arrangements for any affected students.

Where Institutes removes a homestay agency from the list, it is under no obligation to disclose the reasons for such a decision.

The following breaches will be considered just cause for discontinuation/termination:



Harassment, bullying and discrimination



Sexual misconduct  
e.g. sexual assault and unwanted sexual attention



Theft



Falsification of records



Misrepresentation of personal information



Poor cleanliness/hygiene



Lack of vermin control



Maintenance and repairs  
not carried out



Cyber bullying



Poor safety and security

# Guidelines for Homestay Providers

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Recommendations about Homestay

## Homestay Summary

Hosting an overseas student can offer your family a valuable and enjoyable cultural experience. For a student, the homestay experience is an excellent way to improve their English language, learn about Australian culture and make the most of their international education experience.

It is critical that your homestay accommodation provides a safe and caring environment.

The homestay rate covers all charges involved with providing food and housing to an overseas student. This will include:

- Providing a single room for each student
- Three meals a day
- Agreed upon facilities

There should never be more than three overseas students staying with a homestay family at any one time.

## Living with an overseas student

For international students arriving in a strange country this can be an overwhelming experience. They will be faced with many changes, including adjusting to a different lifestyle, food, culture and language. For many of these young students, expectations of academic excellence can add to the stress. Each student will have their own cultural and religious observances. It is important that homestay families respect this whilst at the same time introducing students to Australian culture and customs.

It is common that many students feel homesick, lonely, sad and withdrawn at times. Becoming tired and sometimes unwell is normal in the first few weeks.

It is important that a homestay family is supportive and patient during this time as the student adjusts to culture shock and being away from their familiar life.

## Payment

Homestay fees are on average \$355 per week and invoiced 4 weekly at \$1420

Students must be given a receipt on payment of their homestay fees.

There are two payment options:

1. **Direct payment from student or parent to homestay host.**  
Payments must be made fortnightly as agreed with the homestay family.  
A receipt will be provided for each transaction.
2. **Payments during holidays and approved leave**  
Students who return to their home country during term holidays and on RMIT approved breaks are

required to maintain full fees during their absence. The holding fee is approximately \$150 per week

## Giving Notice

Once a homestay family has been allocated, this family will be reserved for a student. It is therefore expected that a student remains in that accommodation for at least four weeks before giving notice, unless exceptional circumstances occur. In such cases, the student can request an alternative homestay be assigned to them. Students will have to give the school and homestay provider at least one weeks' notice if they want to change accommodation.

Similarly, if a homestay provider wishes to terminate the homestay agreement, the student, and the host school must be given at least two weeks' notice and seek the host school's approval before proceeding with the termination. A student needs to provide notice to their homestay family in writing.

## Duty of Care

All students in homestay come under the welfare provision offered by the educational provider.

Students' circumstances and parents' expectations and requests can differ considerably from student to student. We endeavor to match students with homestay families based on information provided in the Homestay application form.

## House Rules



House Rules should be clearly explained to students on their arrival and reinforced during their stay. Homestay providers should be aware that some students will have had servants in their own country and may not be accustomed to doing household chores. Should be advised that Australian families share household chores and that they will be expected to do a share. This includes keeping their own room tidy and leaving the bathroom dry and tidy after use.



Students will need to know how to communicate with homestay providers by email and phone. All family member phone numbers should be shared with the student.



Social outings should be mutually agreed upon with consideration given to the age and maturity of the student. There is no expectation that the Homestay family members will act as a taxi service.



Students should have their own key to the residence. Privacy is very important, and the personal possessions and space of students should be respected.



Members of the Homestay family should not expect to share or use goods that belong to the students. Mail for students is their private property.



Students will be expected to provide their own personal hygiene products- shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, etc.



Some student has been known to remain up very late, often to study, sometimes because that is the norm when they are at home. The family's need and preferences in this area should be made known to the student. For example, it may not be fair on other members of the household to have a student wandering around the house, perhaps making phone calls or watching television at night.



Student should not be expected to act as babysitters.



Snacks between meals should be discussed with students. Some students may wish to purchase some snacks for their own use and store these snacks in refrigerator or kitchen cupboard.



Students should not be permitted to eat meals in their bedrooms.

## Going Out

Students should notify you if they will be home late or if they will not be home for dinner. It is reasonable to expect that they should be home at a specified time for dinner and you will need to establish appropriate times for them to arrive home on weekdays and weeknights.

Please remind students of the following for their own safety:

- It is advisable not to carry too much cash.
- It is best to travel in a group whenever possible.
- When travelling alone, avoid communication with strangers.



It is extremely important to show patience with new students as they adjust to their new life in Melbourne. Remember that when people, particularly young people, arrive in a new country they will bring with them their own personality, cultural background and habits, some of which may differ significantly from Australian customs. Young people may be quite homesick for a number of things- their family, their friends their social activities, and their familiar surroundings. They therefore will at times feel very confused, irritable, nervous and dependent on other people.



Coming to a new country means that these students will be exposed to a variety of new experiences, including the change in the physical environment. They will be exposed in our school to different methods of teaching. Eastern educational methods emphasise teacher centered learning and learning as reproduction, aiming at perfection, using techniques or memorization, imitation, 'knowing facts'. Western learning emphasizes learning as a personal discovery, encourages questioning, exploration and creativity. The classrooms the students will be working in each day will be quite different in many respects from the classrooms to which they have been accustomed. Students will not be accustomed to group work and the emphasis on oral communication and may feel this is not "real" learning.



Discussing these differences in the homestay will help students make the important adjustment of becoming 'responsible for their own learning'.



Associated with these differences in learning styles some social behaviors may be apparent, i.e. these students are often seen as unquestioning, very polite, uncomplaining, conforming, obedient, striving to avoid mistakes, not taking risks therefore avoiding losing face.



Many students will bring with them very high expectations for academic achievements; however, some students will find it difficult to manage the school free time that our Education Systems provides for homework, research and revision. Your assistance in establishing effective home study habits would be appreciated and advice on this matter can be obtained from the International Student Office.



The food they will be expected to eat may be different, the way people look, speak and act will be different. They will be constantly using a language which is not their first language. All these experiences combined with the absence of family and friends will leave the students with a feeling of disorientation and a questioning of whether they have made the right decision to come to Australia. They may want to be alone; they may show a lack of enthusiasm and a lack of concentration for a time. Tiredness and even minor illnesses may be an initial reaction.



To overcome these feelings of cultural dislocation does require a huge effort for some students and the consideration, understanding and support of the family or individual offering accommodation is essential.

## New Student Issues

### Attendance and course progress

If a student is ill and unable to communicate with the education provider, the homestay provider is asked to institute on their behalf. If you have any concerns about student attendance, please share your concern with the education provider immediately.

### Medical Appointments

All students are required to maintain Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) during their stay in Australia. The costs of any medical service provided, but not covered by Health Cover will be the responsibility of the student. Dental, optical and physiotherapy costs are not covered. They will need your assistance initially with making medical and dental appointments and in making Medical Insurance claims.

If the student is ill at night or over the weekend and needs immediate medical attention, your help in these situations is greatly appreciated. We recommend the following service:

Nurse on Call 1300 606 024

Please note that all students have ambulance cover.

In emergency situations, please contact the Homestay Provider.

### Accidental damage and Insurance

- Homestay providers need to be aware that expenses associated with accidental damage to their home and/or contents is their responsibility and not that of the school or student. This includes the cleaning of the student's room once vacated. We strongly advise all homestay providers check that their household insurance covers them for hosting paying guests.
- Additional insurance may need to be considered to cover such situations. Contents insurance to cover home break-in/robbery should also be considered. Homestay agents should be able to provide you with further information on this matter.
- Before and after photos of household damage caused by their student will assist you resolving any costs associated with the repair/replacement of the damage either by the student or through insurance claims.

## Homestay Reminders and Tips



### CONTACT DETAILS AND PERSONAL SAFETY

- Add your homestay phone numbers to your phone and keep the numbers up to date
- Make sure your homestay has your phone number
- Keep your friends phone numbers handy
- Travel with friends and be home before dark



### YOUR ROOM AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

- Keep your room clean, neat and tidy
- Make your bed every morning
- Change sheets every two weeks (minimum)
- No clothes on the floor
- Put all washing in laundry at least once a week
- Shower every day
- Put your rubbish in the bin and empty the bin each week
- No food to be left in your room
- Keep your desk neat and tidy
- Display your calendar and clearly mark important dates: exams, holidays, school dates



### MEALS

- Talk politely to your homestay about food you like and food you don't like
- Be on time for meals

- Tell your homestay in advance if you are not eating at home or if you will be late
  - Call your homestay if you are delayed or will be later than usual
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## COMMUNICATION

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- Read and sign the 'Homestay Responsibility Agreement'. Ask questions if you are unclear on the rules
  - Respect the homestay rules
  - Act responsibly at all times and be willing to learn and respect Australian culture and customs
  - Homestay Profile
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# Guidelines for International Students

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## Recommendations about Homestay

We strongly recommend international students to communicate with service providers such as educational agents, institutions and registered homestay providers and the host before arrival in Victoria. It is important to learn more about the living arrangements to ensure a positive homestay experience with high levels of 'Duty of Care'.

As part of this communication process we recommend a virtual 'meet and greet' with the host and tour of the house i.e an inspection. Don't forget to include a tour of the garden and surrounds.

Part of your conversation could be asking a few key questions:

### Issues/topics to potentially explore



Cultural awareness of your culture by your homestay family/provider



Interaction with your homestay family/provider at meal or other times



Attitude of the homestay family/provider towards them. How were they treated?



Activities your homestay family/provider involved you in



The cleanliness and quality of facilities provided (room and furnishing, personal privacy, bathroom, food (variety, quantity and suitability), internet access etc.)



Was it easy to travel from your homestay to campus?



Were the homestay household rules clear and suitable?

### Homestay Student Responsibilities and Code of Conduct



Ensure the host is aware of your health and wellbeing



To be responsible for your own study pattern



Ensure that you exchange phone numbers with your host



To respect the personal space of the other members of the home



To be responsible for your own personal hygiene and tidiness



To ensure that you become part of the family life and participate in day-to-day activities.



Good manners are expected. Always treat your host family the way you would like to be treated



Try to connect with the host in some way each day



Keep noise to a minimum



We encourage international students to communicate in a respectful way to help develop positive relationships based on trust, if something has gone wrong it is okay to let the host know in a timely manner.



Store your valuables in a safe place e.g. money, passport

### Student Homestay rules



Women and men are treated as equal and very few homes have servants



Although the restrictions have been eased, water usage should still be kept to a minimum



Knock on the door before you enter the bathroom, toilet and bedrooms



You are part of a new family. Please respect their house rules and codes of behavior



Do not enter the bedrooms of other members of the host family nor other students' rooms



If you are going to be home late or going out for dinner, please contact your host



When finished in the bathroom or any other room clean up after yourself



Meals - inform your host of your likes and dislikes.



Provide them with your mobile phone number so that you can be contacted. Inform them if you are coming home late etc.



Students are expected to be home in time for dinner during the week (Mon – Thurs). Your host will advise you what time you should be home each night.



If you are cold in your Homestay, please tell your host



Ask your host for permission if you wish to bring a friend home. Introduce them to your host and if they wish to join you for a meal please check with your host before inviting them



It is not acceptable to use your mobile phone while at the dinner table.



Always ask your host for permission if you wish for a friend to stay overnight



Laundry use - most homestays find it easier to do the washing and the ironing. You may want some other arrangement. Please negotiate with your host.



Always inform your host where you are and how you can be contacted in case of an emergency

## Payment method and holiday payment

You must observe and comply with the homestay agent's payment methods. Do not make or accept a private arrangement with your host as it is a breach of the homestay rules. A vacant rate (reduced fee) is payable when you are on holidays. Check with your homestay agent for the rate.

## Location and travelling

Students will usually need to travel at least 30-45 minutes on public transport from their homestay to College/Uni.

## Change of homestay

A change of homestay after arrival can be requested. Students may need to wait 6 weeks after the course commencement date before an application will be processed (except under exceptional circumstances).

## Flexibility

Students should be made aware of the need to be flexible and not too fussy with their preferences in homestay accommodation. For example, requesting their host is a specific age and culture, no pets, no children or other students will limit the options available to them. The more specific preferences requested by the student, the harder these are to fulfill.

A homestay is only allowed to accept a maximum of three male or female students at any one time. A host may be:

1. a couple – with or without children
2. a single woman – with or without children
3. a single man – with children

## Meals

Board/fee includes three meals per day.

### Breakfast

Breakfast is arranged on a self-serve basis. Foods are provided by the homestay host and students help themselves and prepare their own meal. Usually a choice of cereal, toast, condiments and milk is provided. Some hosts may offer rice or noodles. If assistance is required in preparing breakfast, students should ask their host.

### Lunch

Lunch is arranged on a self-serve basis. Foods are provided by the homestay host and students help themselves and prepare their own meal. Lunch preferences should be discussed with the host. Usually a choice of sandwiches is offered, however some may offer instant noodles, or a container of food to be heated plus piece of fruit. If assistance is required in preparing lunch, students should ask their host.

### Dinner

A cooked meal provided by the host. Dinner preferences should be discussed with the host. The homestay family can provide different styles of food ie Western and Asian. Students should inform their host of the foods they like to eat.

## Laundry

Students over the age of 18 are expected to wash and iron their own clothes. If a student is unsure how to do this, they should ask their host. Some hosts will provide full service. If a student is under 18 the host does the student's washing and ironing, unless the student prefers to do this them self.

## Cleaning

Students are expected to clean their own room and to keep it tidy. For students under 18, the host will vacuum their room but it is the student's responsibility to keep it tidy. When students use areas such as the kitchen, bathroom and toilet, they must be left clean and tidy.

## Telephone

Students pay for all local and mobile calls. International calls MUST be made with a prepaid international phone card.

## Internet

Internet access is available for research, homework and email. The average cost is \$AUD 40 per month. This is an additional charge to the homestay weekly charge. Movie/games should not be downloaded without permission from the host.

## Bathrooms and water usage

Victoria has had serious drought problems for the past 10 years. Because of the water shortage, the Victorian Government set out water restriction regulations (eg four-minute showers, hand-watering the garden). All Victorians must follow the regulations or they risk heavy penalties or a fine.

Although water restrictions have been eased in Victoria, there are permanent water saving rules, therefore please keep water usage to a minimum at your homestay. To assist your homestay host conserve water usage, here are some guidelines:

1. The shower is one of the easiest and most cost effective places to decrease water use.
2. Shorter showers lower water use, decrease wastewater and produce fewer CO2 emissions.
3. An inefficient showerhead can use between 15-20 litres of water every minute.
4. If you shower for six minutes, a water efficient showerhead can save up to 50 litres of water for each shower or up to 20,000 litres of water per person per year.
5. Use a shower timer – choose from a manual 4-minute egg timer or a more sophisticated electronic timer that either attaches to the shower wall or showerhead, or is wired into the wall during construction.

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# Attachments

## Attachment 1: Bibliography of Literature and Resources on Homestay

### Bibliography of Publications on Student Accommodation, Especially Homestay

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### Information about Homestay from Institutional Websites

Note that some of these sites focus specifically on homestay, while others are more general in terms of accommodation options.

- Information from the **University of Melbourne**
- Information from **Latrobe University**
- Information from **Deakin University**
- Information from **RMIT University**
- Information from **Victoria University**
- Information from **Federation University**
- Information from **Swinburne University**
- Information from the **Australian Catholic University**
- Information from **Monash College**
- Information from **Chisholm Institute**

- Information from **Holmsglen Institute**
- Information from Macquarie University
- Information from the **University of Technology Sydney (UTS)**
- Information from **Newcastle University**
- Information from the University of South Australia
- Information from the **University of Tasmania**
- Information from **Griffith University**
- Information from the **Queensland University of Technology**

### Attachment 2: Text from Vignettes

We have completed six vignettes as part of the project.

In overview:

- Four were male and two females
- They were from mixture of countries: two were Nepalese (both male), two Chinese (both male) and one each from Vietnam and Indonesia: both female
- They were identified through contacts with a researcher, our volunteers or by one of the homestay agencies
- They had spent a variety of time in homestay ranging from just a few days to around six to seven months
- In all, three of them had only one host while the remainder had two
- Most were under 18 when they arrived, so this meant that homestay was, probably, the best of a limited range of options for them
- They had a range of experiences, but on the

whole only one was very negative, two were very positive and the remainder had mixed experiences as they had more than one host and could compare. In these cases, one was seen as better than the other

- On the whole they would recommend homestay, but several pointed out that the strength of the recommendation depended on the hosts.
- All but one are now living in other forms of accommodation.

### Vignette 1: 'Janine'

'Janine' (a pseudonym) is 21-year-old Vietnamese female student who has been living and studying in Australia for 3 years. She studied event management at bachelor level at a non-university higher education provider. She just finished this degree this year and is now exploring further study options to broaden and enhance her skill base and gain work experience. The options she is thinking about at present include Human Resource Management or Multimedia Design, with the latter having particular relevance to events management, its support and marketing. Down the track, she intends to live and work in Australia in the longer term because of the career opportunities and the environment that Australia has offered her.

Her first 6 months in Australia were spent in a homestay in Hawthorn. She and her mother thought this would be the safest initial option for her when moving alone to new country, so they signed a short-term contract.

She and her mum felt homestay would help her develop her English language skills, because she had decided she wanted to study in Australia. She started to develop her language skills, including listening skills, seriously from 2015 while still living in Vietnam, although she says the studies there were oriented more to reading and writing than conversational English. An agent in Vietnam helped her with course and institution selection,

and with accessing a homestay. She was asked about her preferences, which aided the placement process, but she really did not know what to expect when she arrived in Melbourne. All she knew was she wanted to be able to access her study institution easily using public transport and that the homestay was in a safe area. Safety and convenience were the key issues, but:

"I didn't expect much of my homestay host; I really didn't know what to expect," she said.

In fact, she hit 'pay dirt'.

Her hosts were an older couple 'in their 50s or 60s', who had children that did not live with them. They had a lot of experience as homestay hosts, were culturally sensitive and empathetic and they really helped Janine a lot when she first arrived. "It was really lovely."

When she arrived, she found that her room was really well set up and "large enough to store all the stuff I needed." (She also said, "girls also have more stuff than boys!") Her hosts helped her get a mobile, oriented her to the transport options, showed her around the neighbourhood so she knew where things like the local supermarkets were if they were not there to help her, took her to the bank to set up an account, etc. What Janine really appreciated was their patience as she worked to improve her spoken English, by asking simple questions and speaking slowly. She also wanted an Australian cultural experience, which homestay provided. Homestay also helped to prepare her for living independently, for example her hosts helped her to improve her cooking skills, so when it came for her to move on to the shared housing where she now lives, all that helped.

What she really appreciated was that they gave her their full attention (she was the only homestay student living there). "They kept checking that I was OK and took a real interest in me." She also said that:



*Thanks to my homestay host's guidance that I have a better understanding of my strengths and weaknesses, and what I would like to pursue in my future."*

Her hosts owned a local café and this provided her with source of employment which had some relevance to her course of study, helped her with her English and also provided her with some income. Working for them was also one of the things that helped her to gain a casual position at a leading hotel in Melbourne's CBD, assisted also by the institution at which she studied.

She still stays in touch with her hosts, and they have become sort of like a second family for her. As far as homestay goes, this is as good as it gets.

### Vignette 2: 'Robert'

'Robert' (a pseudonym) is a 21-year-old student from China, studying science at Melbourne University. He finished year 11 in China at a Foreign Language High School, where the main foreign language taught was English. It had a tradition of students going to study abroad in the UK or US or other places. "About two thirds at my old school do this and so we are exposed to the idea of foreign study." "The school also had exchange students coming from other countries too." "The English classes were well taught so we had the language skills and some cultural awareness." Robert also felt that the experiences of alumni are important sources of information about studying and living overseas.

He came to Australia in 2016 and enrolled in a Foundation Studies program for 3 semesters starting in August 2016 and completing at the end of 2017. His science studies began in 2018. He has studied a broad range of subjects so far, but has a real interest in animals and is switching to veterinary science in 2020. After he completes

vet science, he is not sure whether he will return to China, stay on here to gain work experience or go elsewhere overseas.

While he first went into homestay he now lives in a residential college, but has also lived in a student apartment. He was in homestay three and a half years ago for only about three weeks before being moved by the accommodation officer at his institution. As he was under 18 when he arrived, he said he really only had two accommodation options: homestay or an approved student apartment. Before coming to Australia Robert saw homestay as a preferred option because "it allows you to be part of a family and hopefully the host will help you settle in to a new country better than if you live in a student apartment." He thinks it can also help improve English language skills, and introduce you to Australian society.

Approved apartments can have their downsides too, because if you have a roommate it depends on how well you can get along with them.

Robert's experience of homestay was very unsatisfactory and short-lived. His host was a single female in her late 50s who worked long and irregular hours as a taxi driver. He did not get along with his host, the "hygiene was not good" and "the apartment was not clean". Because of her work and lifestyle, Robert would be waiting for her to get home so he could have an evening meal. "It was a small one-bedroom apartment, so I got the bedroom and she had her bed in the living room," Robert said. It was in a good suburb, though.

"One of my friends was living with a single lady in a bigger house in [an inner western suburb], but his experience was very different and much better, Robert thought. However, his friend struggled with English, but homestay helped draw him out and improve his language skills, although he would have rather stayed in his room. A number of his friends, mostly Chinese, have had very positive homestay experiences and some have stayed for over a year, despite being over 18 with broader accommodation options.

While living with a family has advantages, if they are a single person and you get along with them, you keep each other company. So, that is a good thing. Also, if they have local friends, there is a chance you can become part of a wider network. But his host didn't do this and only took him out for pizza once. Robert felt that, unfortunately, his host was "in homestay for the money", and this, he feels, is the case for a number of hosts.

She had a pet cat. "I went to see the doctor. They thought it might be chicken pox, but it was actually flea bites, but I didn't know what they were." "That's when I went to see [the accommodation officer] and she moved me out immediately. I had the option of an approved apartment or another homestay. But at that stage there was a shortage of homestays, so I went into an apartment."

Robert feels the quality of homestay is a mutual thing: you need a good host, but a good student too. The student needs to engage and help develop the relationship. If the student just stays in their room it makes it very hard on the host. Location is an issue too and being able to get to campus easily is important, but he thinks it is likely that you won't get too many hosts in wealthier areas. The host's motivation for offering a homestay place is an issue too: do they just want the extra income, or is a cultural exchange and sharing experiences more important?

In the end, when asked if he would recommend homestay his answer was equivocal. If you get a good homestay it may be a matter of luck, he thinks. "We get allocated to a place, so if you get a good one I think you have really won a lottery", but the quality of the homestay needs a good and well-matched student and host. It takes "two to tango". Having a look at the place you will stay and having information about the family, what their interests etc. before you arrive would be really helpful to get a good match. "I would like to meet the host before making a decision. What type of person are they and do I think I can get along with them?" That would really help, he thinks, and it may just need a cup of coffee.

As a footnote, Robert shared that he had a similar experience to homestay by participating in a work exchange program. This program did not cost anything, but he exchanged the home experience for labour at two locations in rural Victoria. This sort of program would be another form of 'homestay' potentially, especially if the host was close to a suitable institution, but in more relevant to tourists such as backpackers or those on a working.

### Vignette 3: 'Yashnav'

'Yashnav' (pseudonym) is an 18-year-old male Nepalese male student who spent about a month in homestay on arriving in Australia. At that stage he was under 18, so this was really his only accommodation option, despite having brothers here that have Permanent Residency status. They could not take him as a sponsor, though. He did not see much of his brothers while he was in homestay.

At present he is studying a Diploma of Info Tech at a dual sector university. This qualification will enable him to transition to a bachelor degree after one year. He moved out of homestay about 5 months ago and now lives in shared accommodation.

He only had one homestay host, an Australian single mum with a young child of Italian background having migrated from Italy. There were also two others living in the homestay with him, both males, one Indian and another who was Thai. He still in contact with them, sees them and they have become real friends.

His homestay experience was excellent. There was nothing he did not like about his experience. He lived near the beach in Melbourne's western suburbs and was close to a train station. It was easy for him to access his study institution by train and walking.

"It was so calm." "The host family was too good; she had the one child, and she treated each person who stayed in the homestay as her own

son, and I liked that the most." "I used to play with her child a lot, and I want to see him again.

He really liked the meals: "She prepared very good food." She prepared different food to Nepalese, but it was good. She would take proper care of his food and take care of him when he was going out as well. He valued proper care and supervision when he was under 18.

Before he came to Australia he expected a homestay that "would have good food and good habits." He had good food and a good place to live, and he was 'part of a family'. She set down rules, but they were OK.

He would recommend homestay to another international student of "if they could get a proper homestay like me. It was the best."

She would help with his English and try to correct him when it was wrong.

In terms of over 18 options, he thinks that if he did not have brothers or sisters living here, he would prefer living in homestay as an alternative to living alone as he "would get guidelines about how to live in Australia" and the Australian life style.

"She took me to the supermarket and other stores. She helped me with shopping and how to get a sim card, as well as how to get on and off the train and how to use apps to assist with travel. "She helped me a lot with Australian culture".

The quality and cleanliness of the home was great; "She even hired a person to clean the house." Internet access was OK too. The homestay students would clean our own rooms, and that was OK too in his view.

### Vignette 4: 'Susana'

Susana (a pseudonym) is a 19-year-old female student from Indonesia who has been studying English language at a dual sector provider to improve her English skills. She will be taking a

Diploma in Business at the same institution this year.

She is presently still living in homestay. She has had two hosts and been in homestay for around four months. Ultimately, she would like to share an apartment with friends but she sees this option as more expensive so she chose Homestay as a better option because it includes her food.

Her first homestay was a single professional woman living in inner western Melbourne. "She was very busy, always back home late and we [didn't] have a long conversation, just for dinner or just in the morning for breakfast, [so I was] lonely." She changed homestay because her host was going on holiday. She liked her, though, and still keeps in touch.

Now she lives with a couple in an inner north-east suburb. Her relationship with her second hosts is very good and she thinks they are nice people. "I always go with her son to ... have some dinner if our parents [are] not [at] home." They also host another girl from Indonesia that she sees as her 'mate'.

She has learnt things about living in Melbourne from her host and "on weekends I do something new ... like a short trip with my host." Her host had friends that came to her house and then they did something.

She sees them as 'parents' and is particularly close to her 'mother' who has helped her learn to cook, even focusing on using Indonesian ingredients. They have helped her culturally too, and insist that she does not use her mobile at mealtimes as she would often do at home in Indonesia or when out with her friends. They also took her to see the fireworks on New Year's Eve and to a seafood festival. The homestay is very clean and they respect her privacy.

Susana is also Christian and when she wanted to go to church, she did not know what tram to take so her host 'mother' went with her on the tram and waited with some of her friends who

live near the church until the service finished and then took her home.

On the downside she doesn't feel free, because to be free means when she wants a friend them to come her homestay she can, "but in my heart I don't feel comfortable with that" even though her host is happy for her to invite friends over. Food is another issue: "the taste is different, totally different but I just take it and eat."

Susana thinks that homestay can be fairly scary in the first instance: a different culture and language, so you need to keep an open mind about everything even though you are out of your 'comfort zone'. Her other issues were that it was the first time living in another country, she was the only child in her family, and it was her first time where she was able to go out and be independent. "But when I arrived the people are very kindly."

Would she recommend homestay? The answer is definitely yes as the first accommodation option when arriving in the country. She thinks it improves your English skill and then enables the students to get to know about Melbourne culture. On the other hand, she says if you just arrive at Melbourne and you choose an apartment for your living that is more difficult and can be isolating.

### Vignette 5: 'Ken'

'Ken' is a 19-year-old male student from China studying biomedicine. He came to Australia in August 2017 and, like 'Robert', enrolled in a Foundation Studies program. Again, like 'Robert', the attended a Foreign Language school in his home city in China. He is now living in a residential college, but when he arrived, aged under 18, he lived in homestay for 6 to 7 months.

Why homestay and why Melbourne? He thought it was probably a bit of a rip off from the Chinese agent. He heard rumours that the agent got a kick back from the homestay agency they used if they recommended homestay. One of the issues was whether he should have taken more

responsibility for looking at the accommodation options and not relying so much on the agent. He didn't know that there was another option, so it was homestay. He had been to Australia, and Melbourne, before and that helped guide his choice of where he would study.

He spent one week in his first homestay as it really was a homestay for girls (they thought he was female, until he knocked on the door!). It was a lovely house in a really good area, so that set his expectations pretty high. His second host was a single mum with two daughters in a large house in Fairfield.

Ken liked his homestay because there was a lot of space, and it had a living space where he could study. There were 3 at this homestay, all Chinese and all males. The host cooked for them, but she also allowed them to cook their own food when they wanted. The flexibility was a positive. If there was a downside it was that "it was a bit far and the transportation wasn't particularly good, so I had to take a bus and then a tram." This wasn't such a problem during the week, but it was during weekends when timetables didn't match up and it would take him about one and a half hours to get to the city.

Another downside was washing, because she wanted to save money and wash our clothes with the rest of the family. As a result, "some of our clothes got ruined and that didn't please my parents when I went back home one time." "I understood that later because when I moved into accommodation, I realised how expensive washing could be", Ken said. The house also wasn't airconditioned, so it was very hot in summer.

His host was pretty nice, he said, and when the academic pressure was less during the Foundation Studies course, they would get home early, have a meal and then they would talk. She would talk about her travels and that was interesting. These conversations helped Ken with his English, because when he first came his English was "pretty American" and so I would

try to pick up the Australian accent and way of speaking. Ken had some social activities with his host too. Around Christmas time she had a really big Christmas party and that was really nice. She had a huge 'get together' of family and friends and a big Christmas dinner, and he was able to meet a lot of people. They also went to the movies.

When Ken was asked if he would recommend homestay to another international student and why, he said it would depend. He has heard of people going to a really good homestay "where they are generous about the meals, generous about the bills". His homestay "was a really nice person, and really helped when you were new to the environment and if you are struggling with English the conversations really helped." Also, it helps with understanding the local traditions, because if you are in accommodation you are all the same and you are on your own and "not really part of a community."

He felt he knew where he could go for help because he knew the accommodation officer at his institution, and "when I had an issue with the time and distance I had to travel I reached out to her and she really helped me."

### Vignette 6: 'Harnoop'

'Harnoop' (pseudonym) is an 18-year-old male student from Nepal. He is studying a Bachelor of Engineering Technology at a TAFE Institute. He turned 18 in November 2019, so spent most of his homestay experience as an under 18-year-old. He arrived in Australia in early July 2019 and stayed in two homestays: the first when he arrived in until late September 2019 and the other until November 2019. So, roughly, he spent around three months in each. He is now living with his sister, who is resident here.

Both his homestays were located close to his study institution, so there were no issues there. He could travel either by bus or train.

The hosts were of different ethnic origins: the

first being a South Asian couple and the second a single Indo-Chinese woman with a young daughter. The second was more positive and the other not so much in Harnoop's view for a variety of reasons. He changed homestay because of changed circumstances with his first host, and that host helped him to transfer to the second homestay.

Both homestays had more than one resident student. The first had another Nepalese student and another from China. The second had Harnoop, an Indian male student staying as well as a Chinese girl.

Harnoop said his first homestay host had been doing homestay for a long time – 16 years. They asked Harnoop to call them 'mum and dad', which he did not feel was appropriate in that it denoted a more respectful relationship than he wished to have with them. He would also felt that he would have to obey them more if he called them that. In addition, he found the food, though sometimes OK, was of far lower quality than the second homestay. He said that they liked 'fishy food', which was not really to his taste. Their food was also never fresh, unlike that of his second host. In addition, he had to ask for extra food if he was hungry. it was not easily available – unlike his second host

They set down house rules (which he did not see as a major problem, but they gave those staying there the wifi password and they asked the students to pay \$12.50 each week for access. He did not pay this, and it was also contrary to the guidelines of the homestay agency that co-ordinated his homestay. Their expectation was that internet access was part of the weekly fee, not an addition). The hosts were also concerned with the time he spent in the bathroom, but he did not see he was wasting water, but spent time using the soap before turning the water on.

In terms of washing clothes, his first homestay host did the washing every Friday and they would do that for the students. Harnoop found this an issue because their hosts were washing

garments, he felt were private (like undies and socks), so he would have preferred to do that himself, but this was not allowed. He would have also preferred to wash things more often, like twice a week because he did not have enough clothes to last a whole week between washes.

In summary, he felt the first hosts seemed to be more concerned with maximising their income from the homestays and minimising costs.

The first hosts also did not help him set up a bank account, get a Myki card and orient him to the neighbourhood (including how to get to his study institution); they asked the other Nepalese student staying there to do that.

There was a religious issue too. Harnoop is Hindu and therefore cannot eat beef. He was concerned that sometimes he was served this, but told it was something else. "They were a little bit tricky". Another of the students staying there was also Nepalese, but Harnoop thought maybe Muslim, so he could eat beef. The host told Harnoop his meal served at the same time was chicken, but he thought they looked exactly the same, and suspected he was being fed beef. That "broke his heart". He would have hoped that the homestay experience would be better. He also did not share mealtimes with the hosts: "They would not eat with us. I don't know the reason". In contrast with the other homestay they all had dinner at the same time.

His final cultural concern was that during his time in this first homestay a close relative died and so that he had to go into mourning for two weeks. This meant that he had to be totally vegetarian. He wanted to stay with his sister for that time, but that was not possible. He thought he found fish in what was supposed to be an 'only vegetarian' meal of potato fries, so he found that this was very disturbing for him.

The second homestay was far more positive. The food was good. She would put out a range of food options to choose for breakfast. We could also have breakfast when we wanted to, even

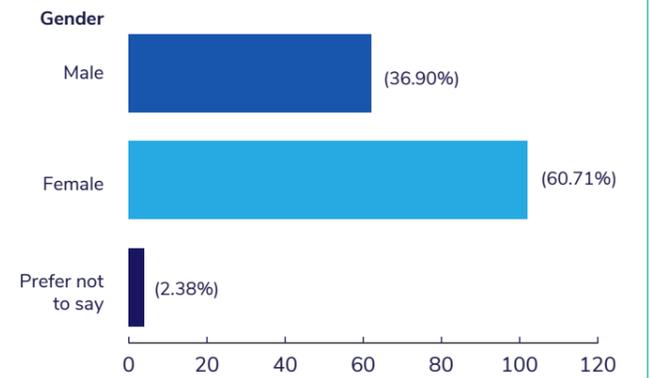
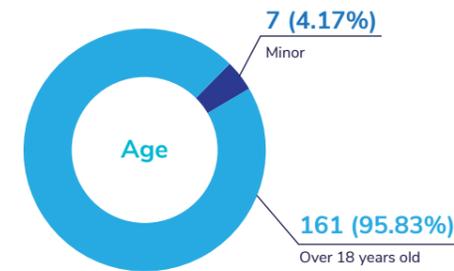
early in the morning. They prepared fresh meals every day, and there was also always extra food available. She also respected his dietary needs, he felt, serving chicken, pork and lamb, but when it was lamb, she told him so. She would also clean the bathrooms all the time. And she also made sure that the temperature in the house was comfortable.

On the whole, he would recommend homestay to others. Even though he had to rely on another Nepalese student to help orient him to Australia, the South Asian family had done that for this student, so Harnoop got what he needed in terms of orientation. In summary, he had a good, but not so good, experience in his two homestays.

## Building positive homestay experiences short survey

### Survey participants demographic

**168** international students participated in this survey



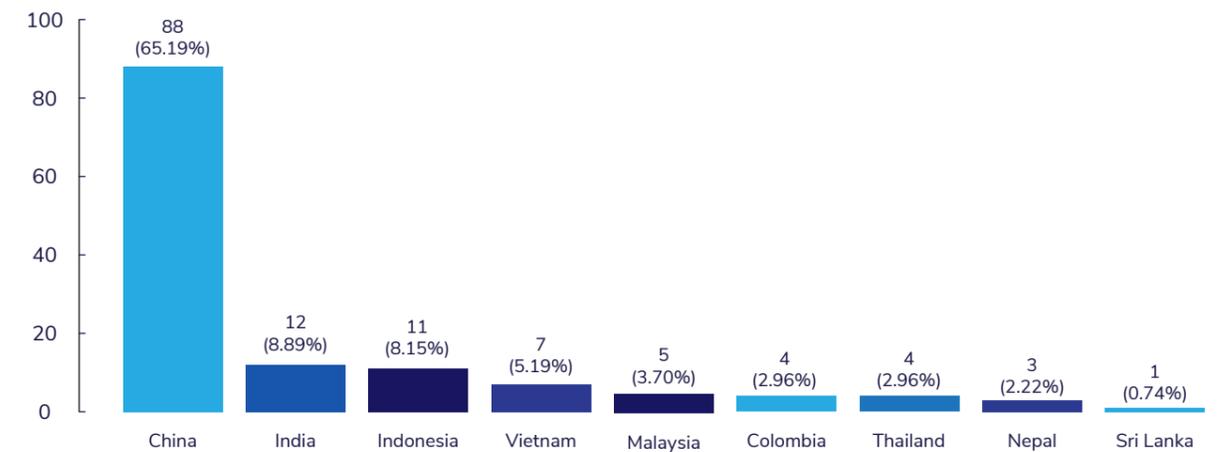
Q. If you have used homestay in the past, or are using it now - Have you had a positive homestay experience?

(No. of responses: 162)



Q. From which country or territory did you apply for your homestay?

Total no. responses: 135



# Building positive homestay experiences short survey

## Some of the comments participants wish about their homestay experience



I hope that I could get to know the Australian culture more with the involvement of different activities with my homestay, however, my homestay hosts are busy working, so it is understandable that they may not have time to show us around.



The homestay experience enables me to have better understanding of the cultural diversity and local traditions



I wished the expectations were set straight rather than branding all positive sides of the whole experience. Maybe the homestay itself isn't extraordinarily bad but the mismatch was just very hard to accept, especially as a young and naive teen.



It was a wonderful experience! I would like to repeat it!



I wish I could be more independent



# Homestay Provider Accommodation Survey 2019



All four respondents have been operating in the Homestay sector for **more than 15 years**

## Working with education agents



**No respondent** worked directly with education agents

3 of the respondents say that education agents are predominantly offshore and 1 says that they are predominantly onshore

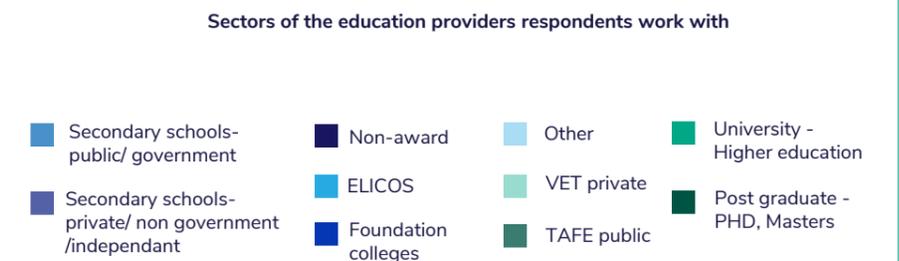
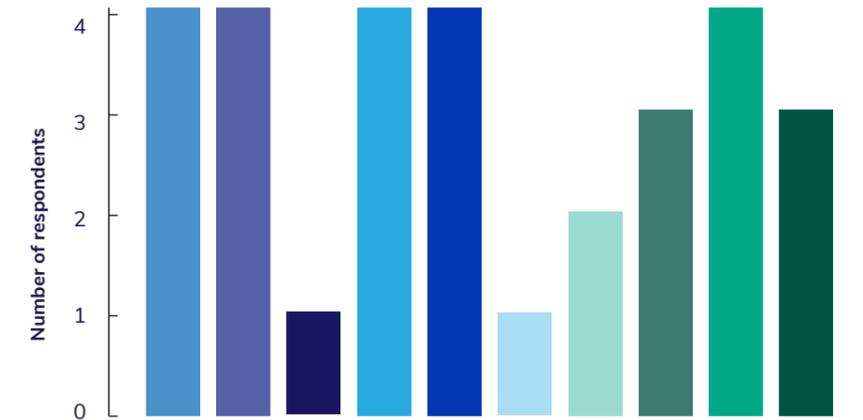
Q. Do you pay agents (IDP etc.) a commission when they recommend an accommodation option to students? If so, how much?

- Respondent 1: "No"
- Respondent 2: "Yes. \$100/successful referral"
- Respondent 3: "Yes, 20%"
- Respondent 4: "Varies depending upon the Agent - \$80.00 to \$200 per placement"

## Working with education providers



3 out of 4 typically worked directly with education providers

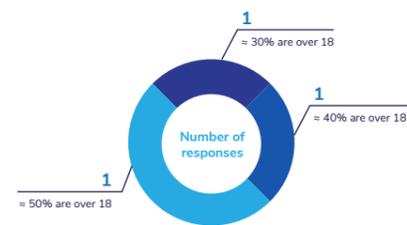


# Homestay Provider

## Accommodation Survey 2019

### Clients (students) overview

Proportion of students over 18 years old



**1 respondent expects** this proportion (students over 18 years old) to change over the next 5 years and **2 respondents** says 'maybe'

#### Occupancy rate of under 18 versus 18+? (percentage for 18 and 18+):

- Respondent 1: "50%"
- Respondent 2: "60%"
- Respondent 3: "90% Under 18, Over 18 50%"
- Respondent 4: -

#### Occupancy rate of males versus females:

- Respondent 1: "Roughly 50%"
- Respondent 2: "60/40"
- Respondent 3: "50/50"
- Respondent 4: "Males 100% Females 70%"

**Q. In the last five years have occupancy rates of these Homestay, increased, stayed the same, declined (so for instance, 70% homestay in Melbourne were occupied in 2015) on an annual basis? Please give an estimate on over 18 international students.**

- Respondent 1: "for over 18 student the rate has probably declined by about 20%"
- Respondent 2: "Depend on the economic - very volatile"
- Respondent 3: "stayed the same"
- Respondent 4: "-"

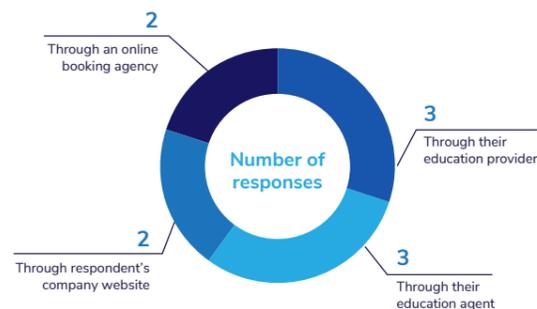
**Q. Is there currently unmet demand for homestay? Please give an estimated percentage?**

- Respondent 1, 3: "No - no unmet demand"
- Respondent 2: "Yes, minor students (less than 10 years of age) - 3%"
- Respondent 4: "If you refer to location under 10ks Melb CBD then : 80%"



**3 answered** students book homestay accommodation **prior to arrival** and **1 answered 'Anytime after first 6 months'**

How students book accommodation with their organisation



**1 respondent** provides priority accommodation to any specific cohort/s of students (e.g. Study Tours i.e. Muslim group)



**3 respondents** said that the distribution of length of stay is **0-3 months. 1 respondent** said there was **no change in distribution of length of stay**

### Comments respondents wish about the homestay industry



Homestay will always provide a more personnel service than a commercial Hostel. If you provide a Homestay in the same location at the same price then you can be competitive.

# Homestay Provider

## Accommodation Survey 2019

### Emergency accommodation



**All respondents** provide emergency accommodation

#### Eligibility for emergency accommodation (quotes):

- If a student is in danger for any reason or a host is ill and taken to hospital and student is left on their own and feels uncomfortable
- Circumstances/relocations
- reviewed case by case depending on the situation from host/student breakdown to temporarily transfers
- Students who land in Australia with their accommodation: not booked; cancelled without their knowledge: change in circumstances by friends or family who were to accommodate them

### Insights about the market



**3 respondents** said that over the past 5 years, they have seen a growth in the use of homestay accommodation by international students in Victoria.

**1 respondent** answered that the market has grown by about 20%p.a

**2 respondents** answered that the market has grown by about 15%p.a



**50% of respondents** have seen a change in the types of students who seek homestay in the past 5 years.

**The changes are countries of origin, age groups, an increase number of students with different dietary requirements and health needs.**

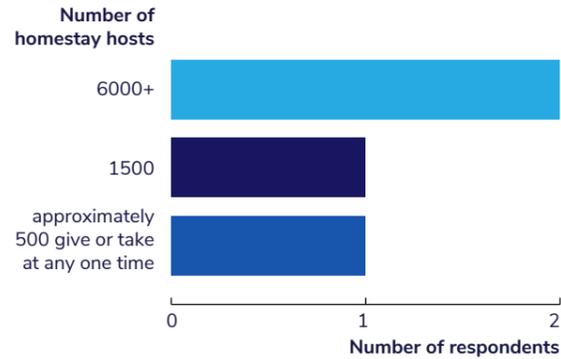
**3 respondents expect** that over the next 5 years there will be specific changes in the demand for homestay accommodation.

Changes include: younger age bracket (especially for Chinese market), more students from other parts of the world outside of China, location requirements and homestay no longer being price sensitive.

# Homestay Provider

## Accommodation Survey 2019

### Number of homestay hosts respondents work with



#### Number of host families there might be in total in Victoria according to respondents:

- Respondent 1: "No Idea. We have around 1500/2000 host families in total on our books but are selective in who is used."
- Respondent 2: "200"
- Respondent 3: "1500"
- Respondent 4: "6000 approx"



MELBOURNE

#### Number of host families there might be in total in Melbourne according to respondents:

- Respondent 1: "No Idea"
- Respondent 2: "200"
- Respondent 3: "1300"
- Respondent 4: "4000 approx"



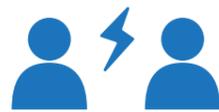
#### Estimated growth rate of host families over the last 10 years (from 2008 if available)

- Respondent 1: "No Idea"
- Respondent 2: "50%"
- Respondent 3: "30%"
- Respondent 4: "4% approx"



**All respondents** provide training to your homestay hosts regarding cultural diversity and cultural needs of students.

One of them added: "Host training provided during registration and re certification annually. Resources and FAQ available website."



**All respondents** provide training to your homestay hosts regarding managing conflict



**2 respondents** said that the **vacancy rates** for homestay accommodation are **usually 50-75% full** and **1** said that rates are usually **75-100% full**

