

At the end of their AFS exchange in the Czech Republic, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

Keep your mind open; always smile, even though many won't smile back. Czech people will always ask you why you choose their country, so be prepared. They are interested in our culture and really want to know more of it.

Cindy, Semester, 2010

Ask right at the beginning what they expect from you. Cleaning and chores are a huge part of the student's life in the Czech Republic. The sooner you get a hang of that, the sooner you will fit in with other students. I became closer with the Czechs because I didn't seem like an outsider and they really saw me as one of them.

Erika, Year, 2010

I was surprised at how cold the people are. It takes a while for them to open up to you. At first you will think everyone is mad at you, but they aren't. People don't touch as much either. It's harder than you think to get used to never being hugged.

Caroline, Year, 2009

In the US we have a very open culture. We have a lot of friends and are more comfortable in big groups of people. In the Czech Republic, the culture is based around family. This means families are much closer, spend more time together, and spend less time with their peers. For me this was really difficult to get used to; however, once you become friends with a Czech, you know that they will be your friend for life. Making these kinds of friends also opens up the culture and you will probably get invited into their home and be asked to meet their family. In these situations is where I learned the most about Czechs and their culture, and me and my culture...Students are very serious about their work. Don't take it personally if your classmates are extremely busy. Getting involved with some after school clubs and sports is going to be the best way to meet people. I really wish I had gotten involved with more. Even if you normally don't do something, now is the time to try.

Holly, Year, 2009

I found it somewhat difficult that young Czech people were not used to going to each other's houses. Most of the time people would socialize other places, but it was seen as somewhat of an irregularity to spend too much time at someone else's house. Despite this, it is seen as quite friendly, and Czech families tend to enjoy hearing about the USA from an American.

Malachai, Year, 2007

I think the hardest thing in adapting was being persistent enough to make friends and contacts especially when you are hosted in a small town. The people may seem cold if you don't spend the time and energy to really break their shell.

Thomas, Year, 2007

The best way to really connect with classmates is with sports, or with something you are good at. If they see you doing well at something, they generally respect you more for it, and it is easier to relate. Also, in any of the cities, connecting with the other AFSers is always great, and every single one of them has something interesting to share. It is always great to hear about what people from all over the world think.

Malachai, Year, 2007

