

At the end of their AFS exchange in Turkey, 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:

The dependence on the host family was rather difficult for me to get used to. In addition, making friends at school could sometimes be difficult because there was a huge focus on studies and less time for social activities.

Rebecca, Year, 2009

Turkish people are the nicest, most hospitable and generous people I have ever met. Reciprocate their friendliness with a smile and equal effort to make a genuine personal connection.

Sophia, Year, 2009

Be adaptable! Turks do not have the same ideas about structuring time and activities that seem commonplace and natural in American culture. It's important to go along with things and embrace the unexpected because a lot of my best and most memorable experiences in Turkey occurred when I did not know what I was doing or what to expect!

Rebecca, Year, 2009

Be prepared to have a close knit family and the overly polite people and TEA!!! I found the family dynamic difficult to adjust to.

Jovany, Summer, 2008

The way in which people study is extremely different. Everything is geared towards one test that seniors take after they graduate, and many people don't really have any social life outside of studying.

Max, Year, 2008

Nightlife is very big in Turkey and it was hard staying up very late and then waking up early for school.

Mireille, Summer, 2008

You have to learn to be flexible around [Turkish students'] extra tutoring lessons after school and on the weekends. You need to take your social life into your own hands. While your friends are at tutoring, explore on your own, cook with your host mom, or join a dance

class! You can meet many wonderful people outside of your high school as well.

Caitlin, Year, 2008

Be prepared for strict host parents. They care a lot for you and your safety and may say that you have to be home before dark. Take advantage of this situation by hanging out after school until you have to go home; spend the evening connecting with your host family. Also, get hooked on a few TV shows, it will make bonds with your family AND improve your language skills.

Caitlin, Year, 2008

Go!...You will see things you will never see anywhere else in the world. Most everyone you will meet will be kind and open to you. It is an amazing country and you will love the food and adventure of it. Have fun, don't worry, don't speak English!

Max, Year, 2008

Be very open-minded. Istanbul is more liberal, Ankara is more conservative, and Eastern Turkey is even more conservative. Dress, while important, was not a huge factor. People will know you're an outsider unless you speak flawless Turkish and look Eastern. What matters most is that you show respect for the Turks, their culture and history.

Rebecca, Semester, 2008

Expect to eat, kiss, and touch a lot. It may seem strange at first but once you get used to it you will be happy. Turks are also really responsive to body language so smile a lot; be touchable, and keep your body language positive and open. Especially when you first meet people. The openness, touchy-feely atmosphere was hard to adjust to at first but now that I am back I miss it. Engage yourself in the mood and the culture care-freely and they will accept you easily.

Grayce, Year, 2007

