

At the end of their AFS exchange in Chile, 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:

It was difficult to adjust to the relaxed sense of time that Chileans have. Nothing ever seemed to get done on time, but it never seemed to matter, because whatever it was would get done. I am just used to US culture, where the majority is quite prompt. As far as social life, I found it easy because the people are very welcoming and are generally curious about you. I would advise any AFSer in Chile to try as hard as they can to speak the language and learn it and to not be embarrassed about any mistakes...Participate in anything if you get the chance. School anniversaries are great for this because there are a lot of planned activities that your classmates will participate in. These are generally competitions of sorts, and really fun to take part in. I'd also advise any AFSer to just never be embarrassed, no matter what you do, because if you just laugh at yourself, becoming integrated with the Chileans will just be that much easier. And, you should get a cell phone right away, because it'll make it that much easier to get in contact with people. And then when you're invited somewhere, go even if you're extremely tired. It'll be worth it.

Khia, Semester, 2008

Chileans always greet each other individually with a kiss on the cheek or a handshake. It can take a long time if there are many people you know in a room you enter, they'll understand if you forget to do it at first, but if you keep [forgetting] for your whole stay you might offend someone. Don't worry. The people want to help you.

Toby, Semester, 2008

The general social environment was pretty different, and it took me a while to get into it. The family life was very easy; I became one of the group very quickly. Do as much as possible at your school, and get involved in everything, as lame as the stuff might sound. It will get you being with more of your classmates and do well for you. Never turn down an offer to go out. Staying in your room / house sucks.

Adrian, Semester, 2008

1-Try! These three simple words are key for your experience. If you do not try, then you will leave your host country feeling like you have accomplished nothing. Don't be afraid to speak Spanish and definitely do not be afraid to try new things. Even if you feel like you cannot communicate with someone or you are uncertain of something, people will appreciate you more if you attempt to do it. This helped me when I was in Chile. In the end, I returned back home to find that I took advantage of the 7 weeks in a good way. 2- Be outgoing. If you let your guard down, your classmates, host family, and friends will do the same. Do not be afraid to try new foods, speak Spanish, hang out with friends, and attend parties. These things will keep you busy and result in a better experience with your host country.

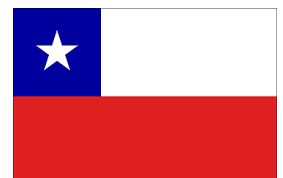
3- Before you depart on your trip, make sure you have some background information on Chile. It's always good to know some history, the language, about the currency, and about social life, in general. Remember, you are representing the United States and if the people around you notice that you have done your research, they will definitely appreciate your interest in their country. It wouldn't be a bad idea to take a book about or a map of Chile.

Eric, Summer, 2009

I'm a really shy person, but the one thing that helped me out was just to completely change my mindset. You're in a new place. Open up, be friendly and attentive, and just enjoy yourself. You'll be glad you did and you'll make friends a lot easier. It's hard at first but you don't want to regret being too shy or nervous to do something that can end up being great.

Kerry, Summer, 2009

I would say the most difficult thing to adjust to is that you are living with a family that you have never met and are living under their rules and although they may be different than your rules



back home, you have to respect them. Communicate with your family that you need some time to get used to the different rules. Take in every second during your exchange experience. You may go back to the country in the future, but it will never be the same and you don't realize how fast it passed until you are home sleeping in your own bed.

Alexandra, Semester, 2009

My family was very strict, and my American family is very open and relaxed. It was hard to adjust to all of their rules. It was also hard to be completely dependent on my family. Because I was living in such a small town, it was hard to adjust to the aspect of everyone knowing everyone. Try to experience as many things and meet as many people as possible. Limit time on the computer, talking to friends and family back home. If you are trying to adapt to your family, but your family is not trying to adapt to you, there is not much you can do, but move on and know what is best for yourself to do. Be open to everything, and don't think about your family back home at all. You are only there for a short time (if you go summer, like i did) and you don't want to waste it thinking about the place that you will for sure return to. The time is precious.

Samantha, Summer, 2009

The greeting in Chile is a kiss on the cheek and that took some getting used to. I also found that Chileans spend a lot less time with their friends out of school. When the information on Chile says that almost no houses are heated, it means it. I was only in two heated buildings the whole time I was there.

Anna, Summer, 2009

I found it very difficult to adjust to the style of teaching there. I go to a very hands-on, project-based school in the US and in Chile school mostly consisted of sitting and taking notes, studying the notes and then taking tests. I also found it a bit difficult to get used to the Chilean habit of commenting on others, esp. their appearances... You will not improve your host language unless you make an effort to use it. Taking a break and speaking/reading English is fine sometimes but you have to immerse yourself in the language. Also, make an effort to connect with people around you. Everyone else will tell you this too, but don't be shy!

Sela, Semester, 2009

Be outgoing!! That's the number one piece of advice I could give. If you're not outgoing, you will not have a good experience. Don't be homesick... it's just not worth it. You will be super depressed when you return to your home country, and all you'll want to do is go

back. Be independent... Don't cling on to your host brother/sister all the time; make your own friends as soon as possible. Don't spend too much time talking to friends from home!! Write letters to everyone thanking them... teachers, family, friends; they'll appreciate it so much.

Rebecca, Summer, 2009

There were many small things that differed in US than in Chile. One major one was concern of health. To us, a simple thing as a sneeze or cough is never important. If I sneezed at random once, my host family would be really concerned that I was getting sick. A lot of little things, they would think you would get sick for. That was hard to adjust to.

Emily, Semester, 2009

Chile is a really beautiful country. It is really easy to get around on the buses and exchange students should try to take advantage of that. Also, it's really important to kiss everyone when you greet them (even if they don't take the initiative) because if you don't they will think that you are cold.

Miriam, Semester 2009

I think it was most difficult for me to adjust to some aspects of school, because here in the US I am a very competitive student, and this type of competitive, scholastic attitude was not right for my new school. My school and classmates in Chile focused more on positive human relations and enjoying life than completing a certain assignment on time or things like that. However, in the end, I think this turned out to be one of the most positive aspects of my experience, for I learned that life is bigger than succeeding academically or economically. Share how you feel! I found that the Chileans in my host community really appreciated when I was completely open and sincere with them about my feelings, sometimes to an extent that would be considered too personal here in the US. If you are having a bad day don't think that you would just be a burden if you express how you feel, your new friends would probably love a chance to support you and take care of you.

Jessica, Semester, 2009

I obviously gained a large background in the language, but I never would have guessed how mistaken my expectations could have been. The most important thing I learned about by far was me. I discovered so much about myself and what I need to be happy more than anything. It was also incredible to meet so many of the exchange students. Without them, the experience wouldn't have been half of what it was.

Finally to be able to learn and find out all about a new culture was an experience that I'll never forget. Travel as much as you can in the country. Meet other exchange students at the orientations and get in contact with them. AFS Chile is very nice and even if you don't know someone, they will find you a host family for 3 days or a week if you want. Also, if you're going anywhere in the mid to south region it's going to be cold. There is no central heating in the houses here at all; it's all fireplaces and gas heaters! Also in school there is no heat.

Glen, Semester, 2010

Chile is such a warm, beautiful, loving country. Just open your arms and your mind wide, and prepare for an amazing roller coaster of an experience, because the Chilean people will take you in as one of their own and show you the ropes in a matter of months. After 3 months I felt more Chilean than American, and by the time month 6 rolled around I was bien acostumbrado, yet not ready to leave.

Charles, Semester, 2009

I gained a lot of confidence, and I have a much more independent and anything-is-achievable kind of mindset. I also now have another sister who I'll probably be in touch with for the rest of my life. I had a really hard time not knowing exactly what was going on in school, because I'd always been a slightly lazy, but decent student who didn't really ever need to ask for help. It was frustrating to be trying hard, but still feel confused. If at all possible, I'd recommend going on a tour of the north or south, either through AFS or your school. It's a beautiful and insanely diverse country, so if given the opportunity to see more of it than the area in which you're living, I'd say go for it. It was well worth the cost.

Stephanie, Year, 2009

I learned a lot about who I was as a person, and how people in South America perceive me as a person and the fact that what I will do, will never be perfect or even good enough for everyone I will meet. I also learned to love a family in Chile and call them my own. Even in this moment I still really miss my host mother Soledad. Most importantly I learned to be a more mature person, and to grow from pain and to become a better person from what happens. Chile has a really strong respect system for adults and older individuals. If you falter, waiver or do something remotely a bit bad, you can have people freaking out at you. Also Chile at times can be very unaccepting of different people, with different ways of thinking and attitudes toward ideas and religion in life. Try to have fun and be open for

anything that could happen, let it be good or bad and just roll with it. Also remember tomorrow is a brand new day and try to make the next day better than the last one. If yesterday you had a horrible day or the best day of your life.

Alexander, Year, 2009

I would say I learned really who I am as a person, and what is actually important to me. Also, the friends and family I gained there are life-long. It was difficult to adjust to the rules of the host family being that they were very different from the ones in my natural family. Go into it with an open mind, and with very few expectations. Try everything, and don't hold back!

Rachael, Semester, 2009

Difference in the culture ... wearing shoes indoors. Most valuable thing I gained from this experience, the friends I gained, most of all the other AFSers in my program.

Leila, Semester, 2010

I gained a lot more self-confidence, awareness of my likes and dislikes, intercultural competence, better empathy for immigrants and exchange students, and of course, better Spanish skills. My advice would be everything in moderation.

Madeline, Semester, 2010

Go down to Chile with an open mind and without any ideas of what it might be. It will be completely different. Know that you will be surrounded with friendly, fun people.

Anna, Year, 2009