

At the end of their AFS exchange in Portugal, 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:

In Portugal, family is very important and they spend a lot of time with all the extended members. This also means that they will find it amazing that your parents let you leave home. I'm used to my parents wanting me to take every opportunity that arises, so this mindset was very different and strange to me at first.

**Wilson, Year, 2009**

I think the biggest adjustment was school. The school day began at 1:30 and ended at 6:30. By then, my whole day was used on school.

**Kayla, Year, 2009**

When I first arrived in Portugal, I was surprised by the difference between American schools and Portuguese schools. There, school was only about learning--all socializing took place outside of school. The family dynamics were different...My older siblings (24 and 25) would come home every weekend, and often during the week.

**Erika, Year, 2009**

Always try and speak the [host country's] language; never turn down an invitation to go out with your friends, don't sit on the computer the entire time when there are things to be done and stuff to be learned.

**Anne, Semester, 2009**

I think that the trick to being a good foreign exchange student is to go not having any expectations. The biggest disappointment is when expectations aren't met, so why have them?

**Dean, Year, 2010**

I would tell them to be very flexible and try not to have any expectations. That way if things don't go according to plan, it's okay. Portugal has an amazing culture so take advantage of your time there. Try not to have any preconceived notions about people and the culture and just enjoy every minute.

**Helenka, Semester, 2010**

Don't be afraid to talk to new people. The people in Portugal are the friendliest people I have ever met.

**Alyssa, Semester, 2008**

Go out and have a good time, but respect set curfews. Families usually are a bit strict with rules and become annoyed and less willing to let you go out if you break their rules.

**Caroline, Semester, 2008**

I found the culture to be slower, sometimes to the point of laziness. I understood this as culture, however, and it was just surprising that, for example, my host parents would often get up after me in the morning.

**Sarah, Year, 2007**

I had a difficult time with my host family, they were not very forward, so if I did something they didn't like or approve of, they wouldn't say anything.

**Alyssa, Semester, 2008**

Regardless of what your host family (temporary, welcoming, or permanent) says to you, get involved with anything you think you might be interested in. Think as if you are going to live there for the next few years and get involved and get to know people.

**Sarah, Year, 2007**

The groups in school are very well defined and hard to break into. People also take themselves seriously so it can be hard to joke with people sometimes. School also is more for you to take seriously and study on your own, teachers usually don't help with much and the homework is mostly just to study for tests which are a huge part of your grade.

**Caroline, Semester, 2008**

