

At the end of their AFS exchange in Latvia, 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:

Don't be discouraged if people come off as rude or cold. It takes a while for them to warm up, but it will happen, you just have to be patient. Take as little luggage as you can because there is limited space, and you will have trouble getting your things around in the beginning and the end. Most importantly, DO NOT be afraid to use the language at home and ask for help. Even if you make a fool out of yourself, you'll learn more of it and your family will see that you are really interested in becoming part of their family and their culture. Although it wasn't true of other host families, my family wasn't very close-knit. We never had dinner together, and there wasn't a "dinner time." That was difficult at first, but I ended up getting used to eating whenever I wanted. Also, it is a very different pace of life because people take the time to appreciate what is around them. People in Latvia are much more in touch with nature than we are, so get used to taking walks often, picking berries of the side of the road, swimming in lakes in the city, and spending time in the forest.

Tania, Summer, 2008

Don't be afraid to go out and do things, with your family or even on your own. Latvia is a very safe country, and I never encountered anyone who was rude to me because I was American or because I didn't speak Russian well. But of course, don't be reckless.

Geoffrey, Summer, 2008

Bring flowers! Latvians give them at every occasion. Be prepared for your host mom or Ome to stuff you, and to worry if you don't want seconds.

Rebecca, Year Program, 2007

Make sure you constantly speak the language to family and friends. It will make learning the language much earlier.

Ariel, Summer, 2008

Learn as much of the language as you can at home, always keep a positive attitude, and never stop being friendly and outgoing to people, even if you are having a bad day. Latvians really value first impressions so on your first day of school don't be shy!

Brett, Year, 2008

