

At the end of their AFS exchange in Ghana, 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 an open mind. Ghanaians will love you right away purely because you're a foreigner so you really have the ability to interact with anybody and everybody that you want to. Take advantage of every single opportunity you have and take up every invitation you get. Don't be afraid to ask questions because the Ghanaians are willing to answer any and all of them. Also, almost everybody will want to talk to you and be your friend. Don't get nervous about opening up to strangers on the street. Ghanaians are very social and will want to know everything about you. And try to learn the local language as much as you can; they'll really appreciate it. Enjoy your time and good luck.

**Sarah, Semester, 2010**

To be yourself and to not be shy because if you show your personality than it will break any tension between you and your family. Take advantage of your time because before you know it, it will be time for you to go home. Ghanaians are really friendly approach people because they love conversing with you and getting to know you. Reach out to people and try to get to know the children at the orphanage because your presence is very precious to them. Don't be shy; this your chance to show people who you are. Take advantage of your trip. Also best gifts are junk food: chips, chocolate, skittles etc.

**Claudia, Summer, 2009**

It was hard for me to know what was happening because my host family discussed things in Twi (their native language) and they did not always follow through with what they said we would do.

**Devon, Summer, 2009**

I had to adjust to their way of disciplining their children. They had no problem disciplining their children in front of me and that made me a bit uncomfortable.

**Sandra, Summer, 2009**

Be open to anything. Be ready to receive lots of attention, which is mostly good, and just try having fun

and a great experience. Ghana is a wonderful place just let yourself into the culture...you won't regret it.

**Gabriella, Summer, 2008**

Be opened minded and flexible. It's a completely different and new culture. Enjoy it and live it to the fullest. Oh be aware of Ghanain time. If someone says be there at 4:00pm it really means 5:30.

**Jasmine, Summer, 2008**

Get used to "Ghanaian time" quickly. Everyone is always late. Always. For example: I went to my host sister's prom. It started at 6pm. We got there at 7:30 [and] people were barely there. We finally ate dinner at 9:30 when most people had shown up. Dancing didn't get going until 10. The dance ended at 11:30...Also, prepare yourself to eat a lot of fried chicken and rice, especially if you are on the community service month program. Being open to trying all new foods is very helpful [and] your family will love you for it. Don't be too uptight or high maintenance. It will make your family much more comfortable with you and feel better that you are fitting in and happy. And most importantly have fun!

**Erin, Summer, 2008**

Getting used to the food in Ghana was difficult. I have a pretty good stomach for food, generally. Not very picky, I withstood the food for two weeks. After that, I began to crave for a change...Some people may not be ready for the lack of personal space in Ghana as well; people are less conservative when conversing. Men (who are friends) will often be seen holding hands, and they are generally much more "touchy feely" They are also more aware and active in conserving trash. They throw very little away.

**Michael, Summer, 2008**

Ghana is a country full of rich traditions and a beautiful culture; still there were some things that were hard to adjust while being



there. I found it hard to open up (at the beginning) with my host family, and other people around me. After a few days I got over the fear I had and finally decided to open up. It made things so much easier.

**Gabriella, Summer, 2008**

Ghana will be the craziest and most ridiculously incredible experience of your life. It seems so different from what you know, but you will be able to adjust and have an awesome time almost immediately. The host families, and the kids at the orphanage are so friendly and welcoming; you'll never want to leave them. I guess the most important things are to go with the flow, get to know a lot of people, and remember everything because you are going to miss Ghana so much once you're gone.

**Erica, Summer, 2008**

I found adjusting to the cultural differences rather difficult, such as beliefs, perspectives on life, timing, and staring. But I came to accept these facts, whether or not I wanted to. It's not right. It's not wrong. It's different. I kept this motto in mind.

**Eviane, Summer, 2008**

I found it most difficult to adjust to the fact that my family didn't really eat together. My family [in the US] always eats dinner together and my [Ghanaian] family never did. My meals [in Ghana] weren't always at the same time either. A few times I had dinner at 10 at night!

**Erin, Summer, 2008**

I just believe that my experience and learning were simply what I made of them. I became close with my host family the first night and did not hold back asking questions, answering theirs...I really was "going to be fine" as AFS said, and Ghana really did change my outlook on life, the world, and certainly my plans for the future.

**Sara, Summer, 2008**

In Ghana really it's not that hard to feel comfortable, the hardest thing is trying to really live in the culture while continually sticking out as a foreigner.

**Erica, Summer, 2008**

The food was... hard to get used to, to say the least. I missed American food a LOT. The people in Ghana are extremely friendly. When you're walking down the street, it's considered rude not to exchange pleasantries with the people you pass. That took some getting used to! In America, we like to pretend the person on the sidewalk doesn't exist. I really loved that

about Ghana—the hospitality.

**Rebecca, Summer, 2008**

In Ghana time is of no importance, so being late to something was no big deal, and at first it frustrated me so much, but after while, I started noticing how relaxed I was, and the time spent "lolly-gagging" with my host family became some of my most cherished moments.

**Sara, Summer, 2008**

Ghana is a great country to experience Africa. Its capital Accra has its historic tribal background as well as BMW's driving down its crowded and hectic streets. There are vendors selling everything a person would need to survive for embarrassingly low prices and then there are the American-like malls with surprisingly over-priced electronics and perfumes. What one must be ready to encounter in Ghana, which is not linked to its material possessions, is their culture that is centered around the human being for what is on the inside.

**Michael, Summer, 2008**

Find some time to yourself. I found that if I didn't sit down for at least a half hour a day just to think about what I did or whom I talked to or what I wanted to do the next day, my mind would be dead the next day... Talk to your host mother if you're homesick. Also, don't be afraid to talk with your host family. The more you open up to them the more they will open up to you.

**Rachel, Semester, 2005**

Take the time to enjoy the friendliness of everyone and be open to strangers. Remember that you are an exchange student not a tourist, so try to become a part of your community and family; it really helps people move beyond the color of your skin. Enjoy not having to rush all the time, things move at a slower pace. You will definitely get many opportunities to practice your patience. Learn as much Twi as you can; it's great fun to converse with the ladies in the market and even a simple phrase will light up their entire face with a smile. Bring a small photo collection of home, family, and friends. Ghanaians love to look at pictures and are very curious about life in America.

**Natalie, Semester, 2005**

Ghanaians speak their native language much more often than English, even though it is their official language, so you should be prepared to never quite understand everything that is going on. Even if you often do speak English with Ghanaians, be prepared for this because everything in Ghana pretty much has a "go with the flow" attitude. You will get to know what is happening when it happens, which is almost more

fun than knowing ahead of time.

**Jennifer, Year, 2005**

Be prepared to leave your heart in Ghana. Yes, there are many small obstacles that you will overcome, but the hardest part will be leaving. The culture shock is greater coming back to America than it is first arriving in Ghana.

**Andrea, Summer, 2005**

One thing I found difficult to adjust to was the communication style in Ghana. They are very indirect. It was also quite difficult to become used being treated so differently because, as I am white, I was a minority.

**Jennifer, Year, 2005**

Ghanaian culture is very different. Almost everyone is religious and at times [the] religious zeal became overwhelming. Also, being an "Obroni," (foreigner in Twi) I naturally stood out. It is refreshing to receive so much attention in the beginning but towards the end it became slightly irritating. Ghanaian food is also hard to adjust to. The huge portions and the heaviness of the food can be hard on the stomach.

**Annie, Summer, 2005**

I found the language barrier to be extremely difficult to deal with. I went to Ghana under the impression that it was an English speaking country. Although this is true, many people choose to speak their local language most often. In my family, the local language was spoken 90% of the time.

**Anja, Summer, 2004**

Open up to them. They love it most when you are willing to talk and share things...If you talk about things at home and ask lots of questions, they will talk about things there and give lots of answers.

**Meredith, Summer, 2004**

Do not bring traveler's checks! There is only one bank that exchanges them and it's difficult to get to because of traffic. Don't be afraid to walk away from a taxi driver who tries to charge you too much. Another one will come! If you hate bugs, don't be fooled into thinking Ghana isn't for you. I see more bugs in my state of Wisconsin! Bring nice clothes. Ghanaians love to dress up! Speak slowly!

**Leanne, Summer, 2004**

Always stay open-minded and realize your intentions for going in the first place. Maybe some things are really difficult but those will really be the most rewarding in the end and you should never just give up.

Also be impeccable with your words and always communicate. Standing out so much was a little overwhelming and sometimes I really just wanted to blend in and not get so much attention. At school it was tough at first because they cane the kids when they are bad and no one said anything about that.

**Joshua, Summer, 2004**

Be flexible!! Make a sincere attempt to eat Ghanaian food (especially the fou fou!!), do African dance, and speak Twi. Ghanaians are extremely friendly, so don't be afraid to talk to strangers or meet new people. Also, if you're with a Christian family, expect to spend a lot of time at Church on Sunday (and sometimes Wednesday too). Ghanaians are very relaxed about time. Punctuality is non-existent. We would show up to social gatherings two hours later than planned and be the first ones there.

**Elizabeth, Summer, 2004**

Don't spend time talking about what's going to happen when you return, simply enjoy, because sooner than you think, the trip will already be over. Don't bring your prejudices along with you, because you will miss out on a lot. Ghanaians are very outgoing. And most important, Ghanaians love honesty, don't ever lie. Get involved! Participate in everything in school. Be friendly. Smile. Be patient. Be tolerant. Think about it, you are representing your country, your race, and your sex. Be open-minded...Communication is the key to a successful relationship. Communicate with your host family. Don't be reclusive. Do everything they do, and do it with an open mind and a positive attitude. School is very different than the USA. Nobody is allowed to wear nail polish or jewelry...They study a ton and work before classes begin each day. Everyone will be watching you; you'll be pretty popular and get a lot of attention and asked a million questions, over and over. As for family, a lot of respect is given to elders; you will always greet your elders, even if you don't know them. They dress very modestly (no skin above the knees showing). Actually none of this was really that difficult to adjust to.

**Sunshine, Semester, 2003**

You will have a lot of free time on your hands, so find things to get involved with early on such as school activities, sports, or church. Be ready to hear about misconceptions of the US and don't be afraid to correct them. Don't lend out money or let people take advantage of you because you're white.

**Kristin, Semester, 2003**

Ghanaians love to eat. Food there is heavy and in big portions as well as very spicy. A lot of people might not have running water and so bucket showers are normal and even if you do have running water, it is usually cold.

**Maricela, Summer, 2003**

Become open-minded, stay focused, be friendly, try to have no expectations; do not compare and contrast, capture and embrace your experience.

**Clarence, Summer, 2003**

Some of the rules may seem very restrictive, but just be on your best behavior, because they often won't really tell you how offended they are. You have to figure it out.

**Tzviah, Summer, 2003**

I was surprised they treated me the same as the Caucasians that came with us. I thought that being African American would automatically form a special bond with them, but they thought I was just as out of place as the other students.

**Britney, Semester, 2003**

I noticed that their lifestyle is very influenced by our [US] culture.

**Maricela, Summer, 2003**

People are extremely polite, and respect is of the utmost importance. It was difficult for me to filter my comments, so that I would not offend anyone, and it is also hard to adjust to using your right hand all the time (Because it is an insult to use your left).

**Elizabeth, Summer, 2003**

They were always saying I wasn't fat enough and fed me so much food! They are extremely religious. They pray aloud a lot and sing and dance in church. They refused to let you help with anything or do anything by yourself, but you have to show them that you're part of the family and can pull your own weight. Patience is definitely a virtue! Be yourself!

**Melissa, Semester, 2002**

One of the things that really bothered me was that even though I was in Africa, people always looked at me weird and that was really upsetting because I am an African American who wants to see where my heritage is from. But other than that, I really enjoyed the differences or difficulties, because it really made me appreciate the little things in life.

**Rhodesia, Summer, 2002**

Ghanaians also have a tendency to be quite blunt. If something about you bothers them they do not have a problem with expressing that. In most cases they aren't used to the clothing and jewelry of the Western culture. Another thing that at first offended me was being called "bruni", which means white person in their native language. There were many times when young children or even adults shout it at you while walking down the street. It is not something that is meant to be offensive at all! But in some cases can be rather annoying.

**Casey, Year, 2002**