

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE

to the

FRIENDSHIP PARTNER PROGRAM



sponsored by

International Student Ministries Canada ([ISMC](#))

This booklet has been prepared by the staff of International Student Ministries Canada, solely for the assistance of international students who may wish to have a Canadian Friendship Partner while studying in Canada.

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Dear Student:

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Friendship Partner program of International Student Ministries Canada (ISMC). Many international students have made life-long friendships with Canadians through this program. We trust this will be true for you, too.

The Friendship Partner program has been established to help you adjust to life in Canada. We trust that through this program, especially in the early part of your stay in our country, you will begin to understand what is important to Canadians, learn about Canadian history and culture, and be able to see more of Canada.

This International Student Guide should answer some questions about the program. Please read it carefully so you will be ready when you are contacted about your Friendship Partner.

If you have any other questions, or if there is something in this booklet you do not understand, please contact the ISMC staff member near your campus. In London, your ISMC staff members are Stuart and Mary Smith (226)289-5040 [E-mail: stuart@ismc.ca](mailto:stuart@ismc.ca) or mary@ismc.ca

May you have a rich and profitable experience as you study in Canada, and as your relationship with your Friendship Partner grows and deepens.

Sincerely,

The ISMC administrative staff

INTRODUCTION

Your Friendship Partner

Friendship Partners are Canadians who want to be your friends, and to help you have the best possible experience as you study in Canada. These friends come from a variety of backgrounds, and have differing life-styles.

Your Friendship Partner might be a young couple with small children, an unmarried person, a single parent, or an older couple with grown children and perhaps grandchildren. Your Friendship Partner may be a student, or have a full-time job, or be retired. Your Friendship Partner is prepared to give you genuine friendship, and is hoping that the time spent together will be of real benefit to you in your adjustment to life in Canada.

Building the Friendship

Here are two keys to use in building a rich friendship:

1. **Openness.** As you begin this adventure in learning to know your Friendship Partner, remember that it is important to have an open mind. Being ready to learn new ways of doing things and to explore new ideas and concepts will make your stay in Canada more valuable to you. Take time to think about what you are learning, and be prepared to make some adjustments that will help you to be more comfortable while you are in Canada.
2. **Sensitivity.** If you want your friendship to grow, you will need to be willing to listen, to observe, and to become aware of your Friendship Partner's interests and needs. Does your friend spend a lot of time gardening? Does he/she travel frequently? Is someone in the home interested in handicrafts? You can use knowledge like this to help you express your friendship and interest in the people in the household.

THE FRIENDSHIP PARTNER PROGRAM

Purpose of the Program

The Friendship Partner Program is not intended to replace the services of the International Student Office at the University. Rather, it is designed to help you meet Canadians, to develop friendships with them and to learn about Canada through their eyes. Your Friendship Partner will help you experience directly how Canadians live.

Where Friendship Partners Come From

Friendship Partners are recruited throughout the city, and sometimes in the nearby rural areas. Many people enter the program because their friends are enjoying their participation. Others sign up after hearing a presentation made to a group of interested people.

How Students are Matched with Friendship Partners

On the application to join the program, the Canadian Friendship Partners are asked to list their occupations, children's names and ages, hobbies, and other factors. This will help in the matching process. If they wish, they can also indicate their preference of nationality and gender of the student they will be matched with. Students are also asked to fill out a similar information form.

The people who do the matching read these applications carefully, and consider all the given information and preferences. Another factor is the distance from the student's residence to the Friendship Partner's home. Usually students who are new to Canada are matched before those who have lived here for a while. Each match is for one academic year, and may be extended by request of either party.

The Friendship Partner is informed by phone/E-mail of the intended match, and if it is accepted, information about the new friend is sent by phone/E-mail to the student and the Friendship Partner. You will be contacted by your Friendship Partner, or by the person who has matched you, who will arrange a time and place for all of you to meet. The Friendship Partner receives a booklet similar to this

one. It is intended to help your new friend know how to help you have a good experience of life in Canada, especially if you have recently come to our country.

Responsibility for the Friendship

After the student and the Friendship Partner receive the information, they are expected to develop the friendship with each other. If a successful contact has not been made within two weeks of receiving the material, the student should contact the ISMC staff member who matched you up, or Friendship Partner Co-ordinator.

One of the biggest problems for Friendship Partners is that the student has moved to a new location. Sometimes this happens before the matching is completed, so the Friendship Partner cannot locate the student. At other times, the student moves but forgets to inform the Canadian friend, and so contact is lost.

It is very important to inform the ISMC staff member and your Friendship Partner of any change of address, telephone number or E-mail.

GETTING STARTED

The First Contact

Usually, after the Canadian Friendship Partner receives the written information, he/she tries to telephone or E-mail the student within a few days. Sometimes this does not work out very well especially if depending on the phone to make contact. Perhaps the student does not return from the university until very late at night, when Canadian custom says it is no longer appropriate to make a telephone call. Sometimes a message is left with a roommate, who forgets to pass it on, or perhaps loses the paper on which it was written.

Occasionally, something occurs in the Friendship Partner's daily life that causes a delay in contacting the student. This could be a trip out of the city, an illness, or some other unexpected event. Do not be afraid to contact the ISMC [staff member](#) (Friendship Partner Co-ordinator) to find out what has happened.

When your new friend makes the first contact with you, he/she will want to set a day and time to meet, at a time which is suitable for both parties. If the invitation is for a day or time which is difficult or impossible for you, tell this to your friend. Explain why it is not suitable, and suggest a different day and time.

For example, you could say, "I'm very sorry that I can't meet you next Friday. I have an important paper due on Monday. But the week after that would be much better for me. I am free on Wednesday afternoon and all day Saturday."

This tells your new friend that you have a valid reason for not accepting the invitation, and that you really do want to meet as soon as possible. Sometimes, if you do not explain the problem, your Friendship Partner may begin to wonder if you are sincerely interested in the friendship. Canadians appreciate and value honesty and it goes a long way in strengthening friendships.

The First Visit

When you first visit your Canadian Friendship Partner, take pictures of your family and your home district with you. Be ready to explain them to your new friends. Also, try to learn the names of everyone in the Canadian family, and use these names as you visit. If you cannot understand the name, ask the person to spell it for you, and help you learn to say it. Do not be embarrassed if you cannot pronounce all the names correctly when you first hear them. Remember your Canadian friends will also be struggling to pronounce and remember your name as well.

After eating a meal with your friends, it is polite to visit for at least an hour. During the week, your

Friendship Partner will likely be ready to end the visit by 9:30 or 10 p.m. On weekends, you can expect a visit to last until perhaps 11 p.m. If you need to leave for any reason, such as completing an assignment, or preparing for an exam, it is polite to explain this to your hosts early in the evening. Do not wait until it is the time you have to go and then suddenly say you have to leave. When you leave, express your appreciation, and talk about possible future meetings. This will let your friends know you want to continue the relationship. It is fine to accept a ride home if one is offered.

After That?

You should telephone or E-mail your friend from time to time, to visit and tell about yourself and your studies. If you phone them it is best to phone between 8 a.m. and 10 P.M.

You may wish to invite your friend to an event that is special to you, such as a program by your nationality group on the campus, by the campus club for international students, or by the university. You could invite your friend to your apartment for a meal. If you live on campus, you might ask about cooking the meal at your friend's home. This is an excellent way to demonstrate your appreciation for the friendship.

In order to keep your friendship growing, it is good if you and your Friendship Partner can meet at least once a month. However, there are occasions, such as examination time, when that is not possible.

SOME HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

(for establishing and maintaining a good friendship)

A Matter of Time

Customs about time vary from country to country. In most of Canada, you are expected to be ready for your appointment on time. If you realize that you are going to be more than 5 minutes late, it is courteous to inform your host by telephone. If your meeting has been arranged for a restaurant, a theatre, or other public place, it is very important to be there on time.

Changing Plans

If you find that you must cancel an appointment with your Friendship Partners, let them know as soon as possible. At the same time, try to arrange another meeting. Many people in Canada consider it rude to make plans to meet and then not show up; however they understand if you have a good reason and let them know in advance.

Dress

For ordinary visits to your Friendship Partner's home, casual dress is fine. If you are invited to a party, or a holiday dinner, you will probably, feel more comfortable if you dress a little more formally. This also applies to cultural events like symphonies, dramas, concerts and religious programs. If you are uncertain how to dress, it is wise to ask your Friendship Partner what would be appropriate.

Difficulties in Understanding

If you do not understand what is said, or if a word or phrase is new to you, do not hesitate to ask for an explanation. Your Friendship Partner will appreciate your attitude. If you pretend that you understand when you really don't, there will likely be problems in the future.

Gifts

Canadians do not expect you to bring a gift when you visit their homes. However, if you wish to give a gift to your Friendship Partner, then something that represents your country is suitable. Your gift will

remind them of you, so something simple and inexpensive, like postcards, or miniature flags would be acceptable.

Children

If your Friendship Partner has children still living at home, you have an excellent opportunity to make additional friends. The parents will appreciate your interest in their children, and will enjoy watching you play or talk with them. The children will benefit from learning about you, your family, and your country.

Table Manners

It is normal for a Canadian family to carry on a conversation at meal times. Be prepared to answer their questions about your studies, your family, and your adjustment to Canada. It is quite acceptable to use the table silverware as you usually do, even if the family uses them differently. You may use your fingers to pick up sandwiches, fried chicken, hamburgers, raw fruit, and vegetables like carrot sticks. If there are any kinds of food you cannot eat, and if you have mentioned them on your application form, then your Canadian Friendship partner will have this information. However, if you have any questions about the food, do not be afraid to ask your hosts about it.

Should the meal contain foods which you do not wish to eat for any reason, you may pass them by without comment. This is especially true if the meal is being served "family style" (serving bowls are passed around the table and you help yourself as you wish).

Helping Around the House

On your first visit to your friend's home, you will not be expected to help prepare the table, or clear it after the meal. Observe what the members of the family do to help the hostess. Then, on a later visit, you will know what their customs are. It is usually appreciated if you carry your dishes to the kitchen, but some hostesses prefer to do this themselves. If the family does not have a mechanical dishwasher, it is appropriate to offer help with washing the dishes after the meal, unless it is obvious that the hostess intends to take care of them later.

Smoking

If you smoke, you should ask permission of your host/hostess before smoking inside the home. Many people today do not smoke, and often do not allow smoking in the house. Sometimes this is because a family member is allergic to smoke. If your host does not want smoking in the house, you can ask if you may step outside for a few minutes to smoke.

Topics of Conversation

A visit with your Friendship Partner is an excellent opportunity for a discussion and exchange of opinions. Your friend will want to learn about your country, and share about Canada. Many topics could be discussed, such as educational standards, employment opportunities, social customs, immigration, and recreation. Matters of politics and religion should be approached politely and cautiously. In general, Canadians do not discuss their income, age, weight or health, the cost of their home and possessions, or if/when they plan to have a baby.

Remember to listen, and to be open to new ideas. Do not try to change the thinking of your Friendship Partner, but feel free to express your opinion based on your own experience and background.

Your studies

You have come to Canada to continue your education. Your Friendship Partner understands that your first commitment is to your studies, and will respect any time limitations you experience, especially when papers are due, and at examination time.

Overnight Visits

Your Friendship Partner might invite you for an overnight, or weekend, visit. If you accept the invitation, there are some matters to remember:

- your hostess provides towels, and will prepare your bed before you arrive
- before you prepare for the night, ask what time you should be ready to join the family for breakfast; then, if necessary, you may request that you be awakened
- if you are visiting for more than one night, it is courtesy to make up your bed each morning, and leave the room tidy for the day
- do not enter any bedrooms other than your own without a specific invitation
- when you leave the bathroom, leave the door partly open. In Canada, a closed bathroom door indicates that the room is in use. Hang up your wet towels, and leave the bathroom tidy and ready for someone else
- it is not polite to open drawers, closets, cupboards, or the fridge unless you have been asked to do so, or have been told "help yourself"

It is usually not wise to accept an overnight invitation for a time when there will be only one adult present in the home, especially if that person is the opposite sex to you.

Religion

If your Friendship Partner is active in a church, you might be invited to attend a service (a formal church meeting) at some time. Your friend will not be offended if you decide not to accept this invitation. If you choose to go, remember that attending a church does not obligate you in any way to that religion. You are there as a visitor, an observer, and you do not need to participate in any part of the service unless you wish to do so. This can be a worthwhile learning experience for you.

Your Friendship Partner has been instructed not to put any religious pressure on you, but if you have any problems in this area, feel free to discuss this with the ISMC staff member who helped you establish the friendship.

If you, the international student, are a Christian, you may attend the church of your choice in the city, or ask your Friendship Partner if you may attend his church with him. To locate churches near your residence, look at "Churches" in the Yellow Pages of the telephone book.

On most campuses where ISMC has staff, ISMC sponsors a university recognized student club known as **FOCUS** (Friendship for Overseas College and University Students). Besides planning outdoor activities such as day trips, camp-outs and barbecues, FOCUS also offers [Bible studies](#) and leadership training for Christian students, as well as investigative Bible studies for those who wish to learn about Christianity. You may ask the ISMC staff member on your campus for more information about this if you are interested.

Dealing with Religious Cults

On some university campuses, cults are causing serious problems to the emotional, academic and financial well-being of the students. A cult is a religious group, which uses coercive techniques to recruit and teach its members. Intelligent, intellectually curious, and idealistic students are often targets of cult members, eager to gain their complete allegiance to the cult, often forcing a friendship on a

potential recruit. International students, polite to strangers and curious about western ways, are prime targets of cult members.

A cult is usually manipulative, demanding more and more of the person's time and money, seeking to separate the recruit from parents, friends, and school authorities. A cult may offer a student free accommodation in exchange for willingness to study what the group believes.

Most cults use specific techniques in an attempt to totally control the life of the members. Some of these techniques are:

- peer group pressure, exploiting the need to belong
- denouncing or ridiculing old values and beliefs
- encouraging blind acceptance of the teaching and rejection of logical thought, through complex lectures on confusing topics
- forcing financial dependence on the group by requiring donation of some, or all, financial assets
- creating disorientation and vulnerability by withholding adequate sleep and rest through a tightly scheduled life-style, eliminating opportunity for private thought about the situation
- stressing automatic acceptance of the teachings by discouraging any questions from the recruit, saying, "You'll understand later."

If a cult member is putting pressure on you, you should report this person to the International Student Office on your campus as soon as possible. You may also request help and support from trustworthy non cult groups on the campus, such as ISMC, Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, Navigators.

Finding An Apartment

If you decide to rent an apartment, your first step is to ask the International Student Office on campus for rental guidelines. Read this carefully, and be sure you understand it, before you begin your search. It might be possible for your Friendship Partner to help you as you look for a place.

When you find an apartment you like, check it well, with someone who knows what to look for. Then read the written lease very carefully, and if you have any questions, ask for advice at the International student office. Do not sign the lease until you are certain of what it means, and that you can do what you are promising. Details of the lease will differ from city to city, but you will have to pay a "damage deposit" (money your landlord will keep until you move out, to pay for any repairs needed at that time) along with the first month's rent before you move in. You must also give written notice to the landlord that you plan to move out at least one full month in advance of your move. Do not return the keys until you have moved all your belongings and carefully cleaned up the apartment. This must be done before the notice period ends. After you have moved, and all needed repairs have been made, the balance of the damage deposit should be returned to you.

HOW YOUR FRIEND CAN HELP YOU

Your relationship with your Friendship Partner is an excellent way to learn about Canadian customs and life-styles -- how Canadians interact, what they believe, and how they live and work. You can improve your English vocabulary and comprehension; try new foods, visit historic and cultural sites, and learn about Canadian history and traditions. Your Friendship Partner may be able to help you obtain low-cost or free furniture and kitchen equipment, open a bank account, learn to use the city transit system, and adjust to other aspects of life in Canada.

WHEN YOUR FRIEND SHOULD NOT HELP

You should not ask your Friendship Partner to help you with

- immigration matters including your student visa
- any legal questions you have
- financial matters, such as utilities deposits or obtaining a personal loan

The International Student Office at your university has staff who are trained to help you with these problems, and matters that occur during your time in Canada. As soon as you are aware of a problem, make an appointment with the International Students Office to discuss what should be done. Do not solve these problems by yourself, or by following suggestions of your fellow-students unless they have had the same problems and have been helped by an authority.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR FRIEND

There are many ways you can return the hospitality of your Friendship Partner. Some of these have already been mentioned in this booklet. This relationship is your chance to share your culture and heritage with people in Canada.

Preparing some of your favorite foods for your friends, or taking them to a cultural event in the city, are obvious ways to help them learn about your homeland. Other possibilities include:

- sharing pictures of your home, your family, your country
- giving a book about your country, and taking time to talk about it
- going shopping together in stores that sell items from your country
- giving postcards from your homeland, or a map of your country
- explaining your national holidays and inviting your friends to help you celebrate
- coming for a special event dressed in your national dress, or bringing music from your country
- introduce your friends to other students from your country
- discussing current events in your country

The Friendship Partner relationship should be two-way. It is a special opportunity for you to give as well as to receive. If you enter into this friendship with enthusiasm and a willingness to share, you should have enjoyable, long-lasting memories of your time in Canada.

Friendship Partners are pleased when the students take the initiative in making contact, visiting the home, sharing suggestions about personal interests and places to visit, and generally being good friends.

We wish you the very best in your studies and in your friendships.