

USA BERKELEY

Homestay Accommodation



Our homestay families reflect the diversity of life in the United States. They include young, senior and single parent families and couples with and without children. American hosts live in houses, apartment complexes or townhomes and have varying ethnic backgrounds, diverse interests and different lifestyles.



You can purchase toiletries and other personal items locally, but you should plan to bring specific items with you such as prescription medications if you require them (in adequate supply).

Check-in and Check-out

Plan to arrive at your accommodation between 2:00 pm and 10:00 pm on the Saturday or Sunday prior to your course start date. Please make sure your Kaplan Representative and your host family know your arrival details as soon as you book your flights and no later than 2 weeks before your course start date. Host families are not available to pick up students at the airport. Please speak with your Kaplan Representative for information on transfer services. Plan to check-out of your homestay accommodation on Saturday morning.

Your life in a homestay

Living in a homestay will allow you to practice your English in a real-life setting. It is important to remember that you are both part of the family and a guest at the same time. You may have to help with household chores, keep your bedroom tidy and make your bed each morning. Make sure that you always ask for permission to bring friends around and let your family know if you will not be at home for dinner or will be going away for the weekend! We want you to be comfortable with your family, but we cannot promise a family of specific age, gender, or ethnicity. Every family is different and will have their individual lifestyles. Please make sure you understand your house rules upon arrival.

Host family name and address

You will receive your Accommodation Confirmation with your host family profile including name, address, phone number and email address. The Accommodation Confirmation will be sent to you from your Kaplan Representative. Host families are excited to get to know you; don't hesitate to email them to introduce yourself and get to know them before you even arrive.

What to bring

The USA has very diverse climates and weather can range from very hot to very cold. Therefore, please check the weather in the region you plan to visit and pack accordingly. Your host will provide you with bed linen and towels.

Meals

Please tell your host if there are foods you like very much or do not like at all as well as any food allergies you may have. Any special diet requests such as a strictly vegan or halal diet will be the responsibility of the student. Make sure that you ask your host if you can use the fridge or kitchen cabinet to store your personal foods before you purchase your food items. Food in the USA represents a wide variety of cuisines and may reflect the local populations as well as more typical American fare and your host family's ethnicity.

Breakfast: Breakfast is usually a light meal consisting of cereal, toast or fruit, frequently with juice or coffee. Often these foods will be made available to you and you will prepare your own morning meal.

Lunch: You will be responsible for purchasing your own lunch at a nearby restaurant or from a local store. A refrigerator and a microwave may be available for you to use at school.

Dinner: Dinner may be a shared meal in the evening, or occasionally you may prepare your own meal with food supplied by your host. Leftovers, food remaining from a previous meal, are common to have at least once per week. It is polite to ask for a second helping if you are still hungry. If you make other plans for dinner (to eat at a restaurant or a friends' house), please let your host family know. In an American home, dinner is typically between the hours of 5:30 and 7:30pm. If you arrive at your homestay later than this, you may miss the evening meal.

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Internet

Most families have either wireless or DSL Internet in their home. However, you should plan to bring your own laptop and/or other mobile device since most families will not have a computer for you to share. All Kaplan centers are equipped with computer labs with free Internet access; students may use these during business hours.

Telephone use

Be sure to discuss phone usage with your host family on arrival. Some host families have landlines which are available to students for local calls only. Students are asked to limit their calls to no more than 20 minutes. Long distance phone calls are not allowed in host family homes. Due to the increased use of mobile phones, many host families no longer have a home landline. You should be prepared to purchase an international phone calling card or a prepaid phone after arrival as you may need to contact your host regularly by text or phone message.

Laundry facilities

Be sure to discuss this with your host family after you arrive as laundry facilities will depend on your individual homestay. Most host families, while allowing the use of their laundry machine, ask that students launder their own clothes. You may be asked to limit your washing to once a week and provide your own laundry soap. Machines are either in the home itself, located in the common area of the apartment complex, or available at a local laundromat. Shared laundry machines (in an apartment or a laundromat) are usually coin operated and the student will be responsible for paying. The average cost per load of laundry (wash and dry) in an American laundromat is USD \$5.

Electrical current

The electrical current is 100/120 volts and students from some countries may require a transformer and a plug adaptor.

Getting to and from school

Your host will help you find your way to and from school on your first day and also show you how to use public transportation. Students should expect to use public transportation (such as bus, train and/or subway) to get to and from school. Journey time will depend on the location of your homestay but students should expect to travel about 45-60 minutes to get to school. Commuting, or regular travel between home and work or school, is very common in the USA.

Smoking

When you book your accommodation, please request a family that allows smoking if you smoke. Most hosts will request smokers to smoke outside. Please make sure you discuss these rules with your host family. In most US cities, it is illegal to smoke inside public places. It is also general courtesy to ask someone for permission to smoke next to them (even if you are outside).

Drinking

The legal drinking age in the USA is 21 years old. Please obey the law and do not drink if you are under-age. It is a courtesy to ask your host family for permission to drink in their home even if you are legally permitted based on your age.



Things to remember

- You are a part of the family as well as a guest
- Expect cultural and personal differences and be tolerant of them
- Be willing to try new foods
- Ask questions and become familiar with American customs. You may have to take part in family chores
- Speak with your host family as much as possible to get the most out of your homestay
- Purchase a phone card or a pre-paid cell phone for international calls
- Ask permission before inviting guests or friends to your homestay
- Notify your family if you are not coming home for the night, will be away for the weekend or will be missing dinner.
- Ask permission to smoke
- Ask permission to drink alcohol at your host family home, even if you are above the legal drinking age of 21 years
- Don't be shy and when invited accompany your host on outings and family activities



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Local Information

Sitting on the sumptuous San Francisco Bay, Berkeley is a thriving small city and a destination for the arts, culture, food and science. With over 200 arts and cultural organizations, Berkeley is one of the most artistically dense cities in the Bay Area. Berkeley residents are fortunate to enjoy expansive bike trails, efficient public transportation and wide open public parks like the stunning Berkeley Rose Garden.

Berkeley, home of prestigious UC Berkeley, is one of the best and most well-known college towns in the country. Berkeley is also ranked as one of the top 10 foodie cities in the US: fresh, seasonal, and locally grown ingredients are bountiful in Berkeley's European-style open air markets and artisan food shops. No matter what your taste, Berkeley is sure to please your palate.

The San Francisco Bay Area is very diverse and you will find yourself among many ethnic groups; there are large Latino, Chinese, African American and Caucasian populations. Kaplan Berkeley students often stay in homestays located in the El Cerrito Hills, Lake Merritt or North Berkeley neighborhoods.

El Cerrito

The neighborhood of El Cerrito Hills is just outside the city of Berkeley and often boasts exceptional panoramic views of San Francisco Bay. The neighborhood is home to many working professionals and families. Students can enjoy shopping at El Cerrito Plaza, bowling and movies on San Paolo Avenue or hiking and picnicking in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.

Lake Merritt

Lake Merritt is the crown jewel of Berkeley's big sister city, Oakland. Stretch your legs for a morning stroll around the lake front or go shopping and noshing in the adjacent Grand-Lakeshore neighborhood. This neighborhood has it all, including free outdoor dance classes every Friday night at the Oakland Museum of California.

North Berkeley

North Berkeley is the preferred neighborhood for many of Berkeley's families, young professionals and students thanks to the array of independent shops and restaurants from Solano Avenue to the Gourmet Ghetto. North Berkeley residents enjoy riding their bikes or walking everywhere while taking in the well-kept gardens and Craftsman-style architecture of many Berkeley homes.

Getting to and from school in the Berkeley area is fairly simple. Kaplan Berkeley is conveniently located in Downtown Berkeley, a large transportation hub for the East Bay area. From your homestay, you may have a short walk to a bus stop or BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) train station.



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**Local Climate**

The San Francisco Bay Area has a very moderate climate. Because of its hilly topography and proximity to the coast, the area has many micro-climates. Neighborhoods on the eastern part of the bay are generally sunnier and have less rainfall. As such, Berkeley is often noticeably warmer and sunnier than San Francisco. The summers are dry and the period of May through October is warm, with average high temperatures of 70-75°F (21-24°C) and lows of 49-52°F (9-11°C). The winters are slightly wetter and cooler. On average, there are 73 rainy days per year with rain occurring mostly in February.

