

## International-Domestic Student Roommate Guide

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Living with an international roommate can be an amazing experience for both you and your roommate. The benefits of living with an international roommate are countless and include:

- Developing a greater comprehension of world issues.
- Increasing your ability to merge your cultural experiences with those of another culture.
- Improving career skills and opportunities by readying yourself to work in our global society.
- Making a connection and possibly developing a life-long friend.
- Having fun!

### The 4 C's of Living with an International Roommate

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#### **CULTURE**

Learning about a person from a culture different than your own is one of the best parts of living with an international roommate. College provides opportunities to try new things and expand who you are. Having an international roommate is a great way to do that! What better way to expand your knowledge than learn from a native of the culture? You can learn about the country your roommate is from, and how it is similar to or different from here. You could learn about differences in your cultures and challenge stereotypes you may have about that culture. You could even learn a new language, and find many similarities between your cultures. There are endless amounts of information that you can learn from and teach your roommate. You may also end up with a place to stay if you ever decide to travel abroad.

#### **COMMUNICATION**

Develop good communication is the best advice we can provide for a successful roommate experience. Talk to each other. This means not resorting to no texting or e-mailing when there is a problem! Talk to your roommate if you have a question or don't like something they are doing. If you don't say anything, your roommate may not know they are doing something that you don't like. This is twice as important with an international roommate because there could be a language barrier that needs to be navigated.

People from different cultures communicate differently. For example, some cultures show disagreement by not answering questions, while others may view silence to be the same as screaming. Learning how your roommate communicates will be critical to a good living experience. Spend time at the beginning of the year to talk about how you both will communicate disagreements. Talking about these before they happen will make it much easier to work through together than waiting until an issue arises.

#### **COMMUNITY**

Sharing cultures and expanding communities are two great benefits of having an international roommate. In many cases, you can introduce your roommate to your friends and providing them another opportunity to learn about United States culture. The same can be true for you as well, and your international roommate can introduce you their friends. This could broaden your horizon by allowing you an opportunity to interact and communicate with people from different places and backgrounds.

#### **COMRADERY**

Get to know your roommate! Setup time where just the two of you can get to know each other. Go and explore the campus and the city of Corvallis! Talk about things that you both like (ex. music, books,

movies, hobbies). Do the same things you would do with anyone you meet and want to get to know better. You will show your roommate that you care about them and want them to feel welcome and comfortable by spending time with them and getting to know them. Remember, they are coming to a brand new place which could be very far from home. You may be new to college or OSU, but they are also new to the country and living in the United States.

## Roommate Do's

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**Attempt to contact your roommate:** OSU emails are activated before school starts. International students are encouraged to email you before move-in. However, email does have its limitations, and many countries have email firewalls that block email from other countries and some companies. Do not be surprised if your new roommate does not connect with you. It may be that your first contact will have to be after they arrive.

**Get to know your new roommate:** Refer to *Conversation Guide*.

**Keep an open mind and be positive:** Be mindful that we have limited space and you may not be able to switch rooms. With all new roommate situations (domestic or international) it takes time to form a relationship and you should consider this an exciting opportunity. It can be tempting to want to give up early in that relationship process, but those who stick to it learn amazing things and form life-time friendships. Be mindful that we have limited space and you may not be able to switch rooms. When you learn how to form a positive relationship with someone who may be vastly different from you, you will have developed highly marketable life skills that make you competitive in the work force.

**Invest into the roommate relationship:** Set aside time every week to hang out with your roommate. Find things that you are both interested in and have fun! This could include attending OSU sporting events, playing video games, watching movies, hosting tea times, and more.

**Use the roommate agreement and Resident Assistant staff:** The roommate agreement is a great way to setup basic expectations with your roommate and “break the ice”. Use open-ended questions and avoid yes/no questions when completing the roommate agreement. Many cultures have problems answering yes/no questions. For example, it is preferable to ask “what time do you like to go to sleep?” rather than “is 11:00pm okay for us to use as a ‘lights out’ time?”. Use a Resident Assistant when in conflict with your roommate or if you have concerns that cannot be resolved using your roommate agreement.

**Know and respect time zone differences:** Many international students have family and friends in different time zones. This means that it could be late at night when they want to call home. Set boundaries and expectations early in the relationship and be open-minded when there are family emergencies. Due to the distance between international students and their family, family emergencies can be very challenging. Whereas most domestic students are within a few hour's drive from their families, international students oftentimes have to take a plane which is extremely costly.

**Understand culture shock:** Take a few moments to research what culture shock is. Here is a [blog post](http://matadornetwork.com/bnt/the-4-stages-of-culture-shock-and-how-to-beat-them/) [http://matadornetwork.com/bnt/the-4-stages-of-culture-shock-and-how-to-beat-them/] that can elaborate

on culture shock and how it can be influencing your relationship with your roommate. Knowing culture shock will also provide a framework for understanding how conflicts can arise.

**Homesickness:** Homesickness is a reality for many of OSU's international students. For more information on what this can look like please speak with your Resident Assistant or Hall Director.

**Use general politeness:** Native English speakers often speak more quickly than English language learners. For many of our international students, English is not their primary language. What this means is that when you are speaking to them in English they are actively translating what you are saying and then formulating a response in their native tongue which is then translated to English for a response. This process can be very exhausting, and so please be patient and keep a positive attitude.

In order to bridge possible language barriers, speak slower than usual but not louder. Speaking louder will not compensate for a language barrier. Maintain a calm tone of voice and speak at a slower rate.

## Roommate Don'ts

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**Don't use Facebook or other social media to make first contact:** First, not all countries allow Facebook or other United States social media platforms to be used. Some countries have their own form of social media and limit outside access. Second, Facebook and other social media profiles are not always accurate and can give you (or them) the wrong impression of who the person is.

**Do not bully with your English:** For many students who enter the United States, English may be a foreign language. Many international students on our campus are in the process of learning English. Do not monopolize or dominate conversations simply because your English may be better than your roommate's. Be patient and allow time for your roommate to answer questions. United States English is actually a very challenging language due to all the different slang, colloquialisms and expressions used. This can make it hard for English language learners to know what English speakers may be saying.

**Don't assume anything:** Talk through everything. You must complete a roommate contract for this very reason. Silence is rarely agreement. Always ask open-ended follow-up questions. You can always go to a Resident Assistant for assistance or support.

**Don't sweat the small stuff:** This is true for both domestic and international roommates. Be wise about picking your battles. Not everything is worth having a conversation about. Remember the 24-hour rule. Leave a minor situation alone for 24 hours. If after that time it still really bothers you, take time to talk about it.

**Don't expect to get a room change:** The reality is that space is limited at OSU and room changes cannot always be made right away. Please contact your Resident Assistant if you wish to change rooms.

**Don't be a mom, dad, or guardian:** Remember that international students are adults. Attempting to be a parent figure to an international student is patronizing and insulting.

**Tokenizing relationships:** Do not tokenize your international roommate. They are not something to "show off" to your friends and family. Be careful to share your experiences and activities instead. Each international student has their own personal experience with their culture, and their experience does not

represent the whole of the culture. For example, if you have a roommate from France and they smoke it does not mean that all French people smoke.

**Avoid slang and colloquialisms:** United States English is spoken with a lot of slang words and colloquial expressions, and many of these expressions are regional within the U.S. What is a colloquial expression? An example would be “you hit the nail on the head.” More common examples include: “what’s up?” and “how’s it going?” International students tend to learn textbook English which is more formal. If you do catch yourself using slang, or you sense your roommate is confused, stop and explain the slang term.

**Avoid stereotype usages:** Using stereotypes when referencing other individuals is wrong and offensive. Likewise, it is inappropriate to make broad generalizations about an entire ethnicity based upon the experience you have with your roommate. Using these tips and a positive attitude will help you to get the most from this amazing opportunity and have the best possible experience.

## Questions

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Contact your Resident Assistant and Resident Director if you have any questions about international-domestic student roommate resources.

*Have a great year!*