

EAT Frequently Asked Questions for Students and Scholars

Thank you for your interest in EAT! EAT is a popular program that not only facilitates cultural exchange and understanding, but also builds community. Many participants have cited EAT as one of the most meaningful experiences that they have had in Nashville.

As you prepare for your EAT event, please review the below frequently asked questions.

Who is my host?

EAT hosts come from many backgrounds. Some are single, some are married. Some have young families, while others are retired. Many hosts have lived or worked abroad, and others are former international students themselves. Some are even Vanderbilt staff or faculty. Hosts participate in EAT on a voluntary basis – they do not receive any compensation or reimbursement from ISSS or from Vanderbilt University. They host because they are sincerely interested in welcoming international students and scholars to their homes.

ISSS seeks hosts who are open-minded and respectful of other cultures. Additionally, they must pass a criminal background check before we will match them with students and scholars.

What am I expected to do as a participant?

As a participant, you will attend EAT on your designated day and time. You do not need to prepare any food or bring anything for your host – just come ready to experience a meal in a local household!

I don't have a car. Can my host give me a ride?

Hosts are not required to provide transportation; they are already putting in much time and effort to prepare a meal for several students and scholars. Some hosts live alone or have young children, so it would be very difficult for them to give rides.

With that said, ISSS recognizes that many students and scholars do not have cars. On the host application, we ask hosts to indicate if they can provide transportation. We try our best to match students and scholars who don't have cars with a host who can provide transportation. However, this may not always be possible.

When you are matched, you will also receive the information of the other students and scholars assigned to the same host. If a host is unable to provide transportation, we try to include at least 1 student or scholar in the group who has a car. Participants can coordinate amongst themselves. Other options may be to meet at a common point (such as somewhere on campus) and share a taxi or Uber/Lyft.

In any case, do not wait until the last minute to coordinate rides.

Will there be other students or scholars at the event?

Yes. ISSS places students and scholars in small groups (2-4 people).

Can I bring a gift for my hosts?

Gifts are neither required nor expected, but certainly are appreciated. In U.S. culture, it is common (but not required) to bring a small, inexpensive gift. Things like candy, flowers, or a small gift from your country would be perfectly acceptable. Offering to bring a side dish or other item for the meal is another idea (but do check with your host first). Check with your hosts before bringing alcohol, as not all families drink. Avoid bringing anything that is expensive, as many Americans feel awkward accepting an expensive gift from someone that they are meeting for the first time.

I don't feel comfortable around pets. Will that be a problem?

Not all hosts have pets. If you prefer not to be matched with a host who has pets, please indicate this on your application. However, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to match you with a host without pets. Most hosts are usually willing to keep their pets in a separate room during the meal, if guests are uncomfortable around pets.

May I bring my family?

You are welcome to bring your family; however, on your application, please indicate the name(s), age(s), and dietary preference(s) of any family members coming with you.

What kind of food should I expect?

Your host will prepare the food. Often, hosts prepare traditional American dishes, or they may ask guests what they prefer. If you have any dietary needs, allergies, or aversions, please indicate this on your application so that ISSS can share this with your host.

The time/date of my EAT does not work for me. Can I ask my host to change it?

No. Please only sign up for dates when you will be available. If you are not sure if you will be available on a certain day, do not select that date.

I am no longer able to go. What should I do?

As mentioned before, you should only sign up for dates on which you will be available. If you sign up for a date and realize later that the date will not work, please let ISSS and your host know as soon as possible. We almost always have a waitlist of students and scholars, so the sooner we know you are not coming, the better, so that we can offer your spot to someone on the waitlist. This is also a courtesy to your host, so that they can plan accordingly.

Communication is important. If ISSS finds out that you did not show up and did not communicate with your host, you will not be matched with hosts in the future.

When will I know if I am placed with a host?

You will receive an email from ISSS confirming your placements at least one week before the designated date. If you have not received information from ISSS by then, you can assume that you have not been matched for that particular date.

Can I sign up for multiple dates?

Yes! However, we probably will not be able to match you on multiple dates.

Can I make special requests (location, profession, etc.)?

You are welcome to make special requests on your application. Nevertheless, though we try our best to accommodate such requests when we can, we may not be able to do so.

How and when should I communicate with my hosts?

Once you receive your hosts' information, you may begin communicating with them. We encourage you to contact them as soon as possible to facilitate planning.

ISSS will provide you with your hosts' contact information (and they will receive yours). It is up to you and your hosts to decide how best to communicate – email, text, WhatsApp, etc. – but we recommend using email as your initial communication.

I have reached out to my hosts, but I have not received any response. What should I do?

Many hosts work full-time, so you may not receive an immediate response. However, if you do not receive a response within 2-3 business days, please contact ISSS.

Can I bring my friend?

Please indicate on your application if you will be bringing a friend or relative with you. We factor that into the group number. If you wish to bring a friend or relative who was not

mentioned on your application, you must ask your host's permission. Hosts are not required to accept additional guests beyond the original placement.

Are there any topics I should avoid during the meal?

One of the most meaningful parts of EAT is the ability to learn about other cultures and perspectives. Hosts may be curious about your country or culture, and they may ask you questions; likewise, you may be curious about them or U.S. culture in general. No topic is "off-limits." However, be respectful of boundaries. Some hosts may not feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics (like religion or politics) with someone that they have only just met. Likewise, ISSS expects hosts to be respectful of your boundaries. It is okay to tell your host that you do not want to talk about a certain topic. If they push you, please inform ISSS.

When you receive your host's information, we will include information they provided about themselves on their application. If you aren't sure of a safe place to start with conversation, you can always use the initial email as a starting point. Maybe they work in your field of study or research. Maybe they have kids who are learning your native language. Maybe they mentioned that they love tennis, and so do you. Food is also a good topic – consider asking them about their favorite foods, or about the dishes they have prepared for you.