

Rotary Friendship Exchange Participants Practices

For those of you who **have not been on an RFE**, a few things you need to know.

Rotary Friendship Exchange is exactly that – an exchange with another district in order to create new friendships and foster international understanding and good will. Participants are ambassadors for their own club and their country. Friendship Exchange can be an intense social and cultural experience. Rotary Friendship Exchanges are some of the best trips you are likely to take and at a price that cannot be beat compared to traveling as a tourist with transportation, hotels, meals, etc... They are not, however, sterile or fully predictable experiences so you must be prepared for the unexpected and for an occasional unpleasant experience. All part of the adventure!

Participants must be in good health and able to sustain long hours of activity and social interaction.

Friendship Exchange is not a free ride; participants must be prepared to offer to pay admissions to tourist sites, restaurant meals and some restaurant meals for host families and drivers.

There is an expectation that outbound team members and their club members will be prepared to offer hosting to inbound teams.

Exchanges are open to Rotarians and their partners or single Rotarians.

RFEs are organized by volunteers on both ends of the trip. Some volunteers are exceptionally good at the planning and other not so good. This means a flexible and open mind is required as things change and decisions are made on the fly.

You will be primarily **staying with host families**; occasionally a hotel. The homestays are generally considered the best part of the exchanges, BUT it can be a significant challenge and more than a bit uncomfortable at times. 85% are wonderful experiences, 10% not so good and occasionally very challenging and uncomfortable. For example, you may experience extreme heat (90 or more degrees, humid) with no A/C, lizards or insects in your room, substandard toilet facilities, no hot water for bathing, uncomfortable beds, no shower, and food that is unfamiliar and unappetizing. Conversely, you may stay in luxurious accommodations. It is not uncommon to have gastrointestinal upset or diarrhoea.

Food is always an adventure, if you are a picky eater or have food sensitivities, this will be a challenge. You may not always know what you are eating or how it was prepared.

Expenses are another potential wild card. While the team leader will attempt to determine what your total costs are expected to be, there can be surprises for admissions to museums or other venues, shows or meals. Of course you can spend a lot more depending on what you want to buy, but that will be your choice.

So the questions you need to answer when applying for an RFE are:

1. Do the dates work for you? Do you have flexibility if the dates change slightly but well in advance?
2. Are you flexible and can you go with the flow?

3. Do you enjoy being with other people?
4. Do you enjoy travelling with a group?
5. Are you prepared to participate in activities you might not normally choose on your own (e.g. go to museum or gallery or archaeological site or shopping or lots of Rotary meetings)?
6. Are you OK with staying with hosts whom you have not previously met, their pets, kids, unknown sleeping accommodations, and inability to communicate with them easily?
7. Are you pretty flexible with what you eat? If not, this could be a big challenge for you and very difficult for your hosts.
8. Are you flexible with the finances? Can you afford \$100-\$500 in unexpected expenses?
9. Have you travelled internationally before? If this is your first such experience are you willing to deal with the unexpected and unfamiliar?

If you are selected for the Team you should continue with the following steps as soon as you are notified that you are on the Team. You are required to provide the following in order to maintain your place on the team:

Completed an *Outbound Team Member Information / Biography Form* which you will receive from the Team Leader. Include with it a maximum 100 word biography in an electronic format preferably in WORD.

1. **Good quality, colour, head and shoulders photo** of you (with your partner if travelling as a couple) in an electronic format to the Team Leader. This will be used on business cards, the team brochure and possibly thank you cards.
2. Be prepared to submit a **photocopy of your passport** to the Team Leader. They may need it for making reservations and bookings.
3. Fit to Travel letter signed by your doctor. This covers you for Rotary travel insurance and will be needed if you have to make a claim on this insurance

Travel Arrangements Rotarians and travel companions shall be responsible for:

1. Making your own travel arrangements to and from the host district;
2. **Your own travel costs** to and from the host country;
3. One night's hotel expense on the evening immediately before the start of the exchange and possibly one at end
4. Sometimes you may be required to pay for hotel accommodations during the exchange. You would generally know this in advance
5. Purchasing your own trip cancellation insurance and medical insurance;
6. A portion of vehicle rental and driver, bus fare, ferry costs, train fare
7. Entrance fees to sites or expenses for activities. (Example: day trip by private bus along the Great Ocean Road in Australia, Safari in Africa) **If attendance is agreed to by the Team, these fees may be collected by the Team Leader prior to the exchange and may be non-refundable. You might need to prepay some portions of the trip directly (ie, Amazon rainforest ecolodge for 3 days in Peru)**

Team members are encouraged to share information about proposed travel plans as they are being developed with the other team members. If you, as a team member would like to travel with

someone to your destination, please make this desire known to the other team members; hopefully someone else will be willing to be on the same flight as you. Team Members shall submit their travel itinerary to the Team Leader, in order that a Master Travel Itinerary can be created and sent to the receiving host District.

All team members **must arrive at the designated place and time** in the host district for the start of the exchange, so that welcoming activities by foreign hosts can be done with the whole team present. If the trip involves a long-haul flight, it is **required** that team members plan a self-paid stay in a hotel on the day and night before the exchange begins. This will ensure that all team members have adequate rest prior to the start of the very busy social schedule of the exchange. If team members know that they require more than one night to adjust to a new time schedule, it is recommended that they book additional time in the country in advance of the exchange. The Team Leader usually obtains a recommendation of a reasonably priced hotel from the host district.

The Team Leader will request team members to **submit their comprehensive travel itinerary and contact information**. This will be included in the team's Master Trip Itinerary consisting of travel information for all of the Team members. This will be distributed to all Team members and sent to the host district's Inbound Coordinator. The Master Trip Itinerary enables the first host club to organize reception services for the team's arrival. It is also an important document for hosts to locate team members should they encounter difficulties while en-route.

The RFE Team Leader will provide each team member with the **name of the Host District's Coordinator, address, phone, email**. This person should be used as the contact name on immigration papers. Team members should carry this information on their person (and not in their checked baggage) when traveling in order to have it available in the event of flight delays, sudden illness etc. and to fill out the immigration papers supplied on the plane. Team members are "tourists" who happen to be visiting Rotarians and should fill out immigration papers as "tourists".

It is **expected that all participants will stay until the end of the exchange** and depart the hosting district at the same time. If you elect to stay longer, you will be responsible for making your own arrangements and for the costs incurred.

Participants may want to **make additional pre or post-exchange tours** to other parts of the country that they are visiting. Any such arrangements are the personal responsibility of the participants. You may wish to share information about some of your proposed tours with other participants, especially if you would like to have company on your journey. Host Districts are usually able to make recommendations about reliable local travel firms, transportation schedules, points of interest etc.

Participation in Activities during the Exchange: All Team Members are expected to take part in all scheduled group activities during the exchange. If a health issue prevents you from participating in some activities, this should be clearly stated in advance of the exchange.

Let your host family know if you would like to see something of **particular interest** or participate in a specific activity or opportunity that is not on the schedule. Most hosts will ask you if there is something in particular you would like to see or do. If they don't ask, use your own judgment about

asking for any special favours. These activities should occur during unscheduled times. Most districts provide some basic information about admission costs to historic sites etc. in advance of the trip.

Smoking: Please respect the rules of the house regarding smoking. It is best not to smoke at all! If you are allergic to smoke or are a non-smoker, please submit this information on your Outbound Team Member Information Form.

Member Profile: Team members will be asked to fill out a personal profile to be shared with the host district coordinator and host families. This profile will provide the host district with pictures and information about each participating Rotarian and their spouse, where applicable. Please make sure that you have identified allergies, non-smoking or smoking status and any particular physical problem that you might have that will require special accommodation from the hosts.

Itinerary and Host Family Designation: If possible, the Team Leader will obtain a program itinerary for each town that you will visit, including host family names, addresses, phone and e-mail from the host district, prior to the RFE Team departure from this district. The development of Friendship Exchange Program varies greatly from district to district. Sometimes detailed program information is not available until a team arrives in a specific town. On rare occasions, there may be no written plan at all.

It is important that upon arrival at each destination, that the names of the participants and their host family be given to the District Team Leader, prior to each Rotarian departing with their host family. When you are flying to your destination, please ensure that you keep your Team's itinerary and the names of the District Chair, and your Team members with you in your hand luggage. In the event of flight delays etc., inform the RFE chair of your circumstances and he/she will contact your hosts and the Team. In the event that you cannot reach the district chair, try to reach your Team Outbound Leader. It is important that someone is able to contact your first hosts or their local coordinator to inform them of any revision to your time of arrival.

Cellular voice and data access is essential. International voice and data plans have become moderately reasonable at about \$10 day or you can attempt to buy a local sim card and use that in your phone. That works sometimes, sometimes it doesn't. *It is essential for you to be able to communicate with the team if something happens on the flight, train, or you get separated, please be prepared.*

WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger is are very popular apps used throughout the world for communicating by text and calls as well as sharing pictures via Wi-Fi. The Team Leader will confer with the host country lead and determine which app is most suitable. The teams generally try to create groups within an app to facilitate group communication during the exchange.

Money for the Team Materials If you are selected as one of the Team members you will need to make a team deposit (**Typically \$100 per person but each trip is different**). This money is managed as a cash fund by a selected team member. Group expenses that may be deducted include name badges, team brochure, team thank you cards and any other expense that the team might need.

Expenses for meals at Rotary clubs, coffee breaks or admissions to museums etc. may **be collected** and paid by the Team Leader if the team wishes. This means that only one person has to deal with bill payments, tips, fiddle with foreign exchange etc. The Team Leader or Team Treasurer is responsible for keeping a record of all expenditures.

Sometimes foreign hosts will not allow participants to pay for any activities or local travel. When a return visit is made to the District, participants that were involved in the outgoing group may be asked to pay for some of the hosting expenses. Some foreign districts charge their own outbound team members a significant fee in order to offset the cost of hosting inbound teams. It is the responsibility of the outbound team members to assist with the cost of hosting inbound teams. Such expenses are typically modest and roughly proportional with expenses incurred by the corresponding team members.

Host Gifts: Team members should take an adequate number of gifts to give each host household a gift. The value of the gift should be approximately \$30.00 - \$50.00 per family. Some host families may have children in the household and a small gift for the child is often appreciated. Gifts that are hand-made or are representative of the District are always appreciated.

It is recommended that you provide your host family with one of your **Rotary RFE Team Member Business Cards and perhaps a brochure** about your town. District pins may also be used as a token gratuity. The Team may collectively decide to purchase a small gift or meal for the hosting RFE Chair. It is also nice to have a supply of District pins available to offer as a token of appreciation to drivers, special meal hosts, special event or site hosts or guides.

In the event that a team is purchasing lunch while on an outing, it is always nice to offer to purchase lunch for your host, and any drivers. Some teams choose to take all of their hosts out to a restaurant for a hosted meal. Team members should offer to pay for meals at Rotary meetings; the host club may not agree with this, but at least you will have made the offer. The Team Leader may choose to present a Card expressing Appreciation to each club and the District.

Thank You Cards: It is highly recommended that each host family and the local coordinator be given or sent a thank you card. It is easiest to take such cards with you on the exchange and give them to hosts as you are departing the house or mail them from the next town.

Banner Exchange and/or Club Pins and/or Country Pins: It has been traditional for RFE Team Members to present one of their club banners to each club that they visit. If your club has banners, please make arrangement with your club to have a supply of banners available so that you can take an adequate number with you.

Participants may also choose to present country pins to host club members. Please make arrangements to have a supply of such pins available. There are many Rotary related pins that can be purchased from official Rotary suppliers. Small tokens of appreciation given to drivers or meal hosts are always appreciated.

RFE Team Member Business Cards / Bookmark: The team will arrange for RFE Team Member bookmarks or business cards. These will include your picture, name, phone, address, e-mail and club name.

Dress Code: In some districts, it is recommended that all participants wear a jacket and their RFE Name Badge to all “official functions” or on arrival at each destination. Alternatively, the Team may collectively choose to order District shirts/hats/jackets/vests

The Team Leader will request clarification about the dress code with the host district and will make recommendations. Team Members are expected to wear name badges when in the company of hosts and during activities. Name badges will be ordered by the team and given to you for the exchange.

Luggage: It is requested that each participant take **only one suitcase** (smaller is better!) and one carry-on with them on an exchange. Airline baggage restrictions should not be exceeded. Each bag should be clearly marked with the participant’s name and should have an easily recognizable feature such as a ribbon attached. It is also useful to have your itinerary attached to the inside of the suitcase in case it gets lost and the airline has to forward it to you. As most hosts offer the use of laundry facilities, luggage contents can be kept to a minimum.

Passport and Visas and Immunizations

- Each participant must have a passport valid for at least six months from the date of return home.
- Each participant must make their own arrangements to secure the appropriate visas for the time period being spent in a country. The Team Leader will provide you with information about visa requirements and how to obtain them.
- Each participant must have the necessary immunizations and documentation required by the country for the area that you are visiting.
- Each participant should consult with their own physician or travel clinic to determine what immunizations are recommended for the places on your itinerary and for obtaining those immunizations.

A photocopy of necessary documents should be kept separate from the documents and a copy left with a person at home that is available to fax or courier them to you if you lose the original documents. It is a good idea to make electronic copies and email them to yourselves or place in the cloud storage that you can access from any computer.

Rotary Insurance Each Australian participant is covered by Rotary Insurance. Rotarians pay for this as part of their District dues and it covers the Rotarian and partner. The period of cover includes the RFE visit plus 60 days of personal travel either before or after the RFE. You will need to complete a Rotary Insurance Travel Authorisation Form. A Fit to Travel letter from your doctor is required for this cover. Should your personal travel exceed 60 days then you will need to pay for separate travel insurance for the entire trip.

Pre-Trip Meetings The Outbound Leader will arrange group meetings to plan for your RFE visit and hosting the inbound team. These will provide you with an opportunity to meet and get to know your

teammates, ask any questions that you might have about the program or any questions that you would like to pose to the district that will be hosting you.

The meeting will provide the team with an opportunity to:

- a. Discuss a program for presentation at club meetings that they will visit and decide who will do what, how much time each presenter will have etc. The team will develop their own Power point presentation. Usually a 10 minute and 20 minute presentation will be prepared.
- b. Discuss how the team would like to thank their hosts and host clubs.
- c. Appoint someone to write a report about the exchange for submission to the District Chair and for use on the District web-site

Future Hosting and Involvement - The District Committee sincerely hopes that you have a marvellous trip, make lasting friendships and learn more about Rotary around the world.

The District RFE Committee expects Team Members to be prepared to provide reciprocal hosting when the district that you have visited makes their trip back. This might include serving as a local coordinator, planning a local itinerary, providing accommodation and/or meals, transport, or part of the program.

The Committee encourages team members from out-bound exchanges to assist with program promotion by doing a presentation about their exchange at their own club and neighbouring clubs.

THINGS TO TAKE ON A ROTARY FRIENDSHIP EXCHANGE

RFE Card / bookmark and your personal business cards. Please use the Team RFE cards for your new friends and follow up with your personal card if it applies.

Club Banners/Flags to exchange, maybe 4-5 but it depends on how many clubs you are visiting.

Name Badges. Your team will get the RFE Card and Name badges printed.

Rotary Pins and Pins from your country – e.g. Flag pins, small State or District Pins.

Team's brochure – in English and if possible, in host country's language; for host families, drivers etc.

A map of your country or state or at least a map of D9640 – Pictures of your area, house, Etc.

Hostess gifts & gifts for drivers, kids, interpreters etc. Ideas: book on our area, tea towels, pencils with country flag, any Rotary, Rotary District or Club memorabilia that you might have e.g. conference bags, cups, mugs, glasses, hats, key chains, letter openers, business card holders/folders, pens, pins; something you make yourself e.g. hot plate pads, wood items, fabric items

Photo Book or on your phone – pictures of you and your family, your town, house, Rotary projects. Better to hand paper to people than your phone?

Presentation Materials – a few slides, video or at least a few tourist brochures. This will be coordinated by your Team. Put a presentation together and a couple copies on a flash drive, heavy on pictures of home.

Thank you cards – could be the specially made card with a team photo on it and/or a simple card handmade or commercial thank you card. These can be left with the host family or mailed from the next town back to the host family, drivers, tour guides etc.

Phrase Book – if language other than English. Or Download a translator on your phone. Works pretty well!

District Directory – it is amazing what projects can be realized from an exchange and if you have information readily available, it makes life much easier. This can be copied from Club Runner.

Medical - Immodium, bottled water and iodine to treat water for purposes such as brushing teeth, hand wipes or a bottle of hand sanitizer, toilet paper. Consult your physician well in advance of your trip about the need for immunizations or special medications. Your health history stored on your phone or in the cloud could be invaluable!

Photocopy of your passport, birth certificate, Drivers License and any other Emergency Numbers that you are likely to need – Also leave a copy of this information in a safe place at home where someone can get access to it. Scan everything and email it to yourself or in Dropbox, Drive, etc.