

As seen in [Transitions Abroad Magazine July/August 2004](#)

Related Topics

0

[Family Travel](#)

More by the Author

[The Middle East with Kids](#)

Visiting International Friends

How to Make Family Stays Work

By *Michael Ungar*



Visiting friends abroad means that children of the host family like Caitlin (left) from Coventry, England get to play tour guide to favorite sites such as Warwick Castle.

Visiting with other families can be a great way to make traveling with children much easier. While staying with people in their own homes can risk straining relationships, many travelers arrange to stay with distant relatives, high school friends, former colleagues, or people they've met during other travels as a way to keep costs down and experience the local flavor of the places they visit. With a little caution, the pitfalls of one family visiting another can be avoided.

- 1. Expect to participate fully in family life.** You may not see all the tourist attractions you want to see, however, you will get to experience how families different than your own live. For children these experiences are often far more important than taking in the sights. In Scotland our children were enchanted by how our hosts' children amused themselves. Feeding rabbits in the hutch behind the house and roaming through the forest that borders the family's country home were fascinating distractions for two children raised in a city.
- 2. Take responsibility.** Traveling with our children has meant making sure that we participate in family life as actively as we would if we were at home. Our children and our host's children as well become the shared responsibility of all the adults in the house.
- 3. Match the host family's rhythm.** Routines like bedtimes and mealtimes are important parts of daily life. If the demands of guests conflict with these routines, hosts can find it challenging to keep their household running smoothly.
- 4. Contribute to the household.** Despite our hosts' frequent insistence that we are their guests and mustn't feel responsible for the household in any way, we always find some way to contribute as a way of saying thanks—like bringing home groceries or cooking a meal that shows off our cuisine and the traditions that go along with it.

Despite these few cautions, expect to be enchanted as you experience what makes your host family, home, and community special. In Athens we visited a high school friend of my wife's who she hadn't seen in 20 years. Patricia made wonderful dinners of traditional Greek cuisine and invited us to meet her friends and in-laws. She also gave us the keys to the family's small cottage on Poros, one of the less touristed Greek isles. She and her children later joined us and showed us the surrounding islands as the locals experience them. There were hidden beaches and quiet monasteries with breathtaking views out over the Mediterranean. Best of all, our children became close friends as they showed us the right way to eat Greek and where to find the biggest starfish on the beach. Two years later it was our pleasure to return the hospitality when their family visited us.

In Quetta, a dusty city on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, we visited a close friend of ours who was living with her parents. We received a firsthand experience of a Muslim family during Ramadan, the holy days of the year during which people fast from sunrise to sunset. It is a complicated ritual that included wonderful evening meals and families drawing close together.

There is nothing quite so lonely as a tourist who walks through cultures without experiencing them from the point of view of those who live their traditions and customs day to day. Far better to park one's self squarely among friends and family and discover what it is like to live in the places we travel.

MICHAEL UNGER frequently writes about family travel. He is an associate professor at the [Maritime School of Social Work at Dalhousie Univ. in Halifax, Nova Scotia](#).

0

Comments:

Echo 0 Items

[Admin](#)

[Home](#) | [Work Abroad](#) | [Study Abroad](#) | [Travel Abroad](#) | [Living Abroad](#) | [Teach English Abroad](#) | [Volunteer Abroad](#)

[About](#) [Write for Us](#) [List Your Program](#) [Advertise](#) [Archive](#) [Disclaimer](#) [Privacy](#) ©Transitions Abroad