

# A Rough Guide to our Outbound Exchanges

Mostly for parents of NZ students  
going on exchange with NZIIU



**NZIIU**

**New Zealand**

**Institute for International Understanding**

225 Great South Road, Greenlane, Auckland 1546  
PO Box 17 416, Greenlane, Auckland, New Zealand 1546

[www.student-exchange.co.nz](http://www.student-exchange.co.nz)

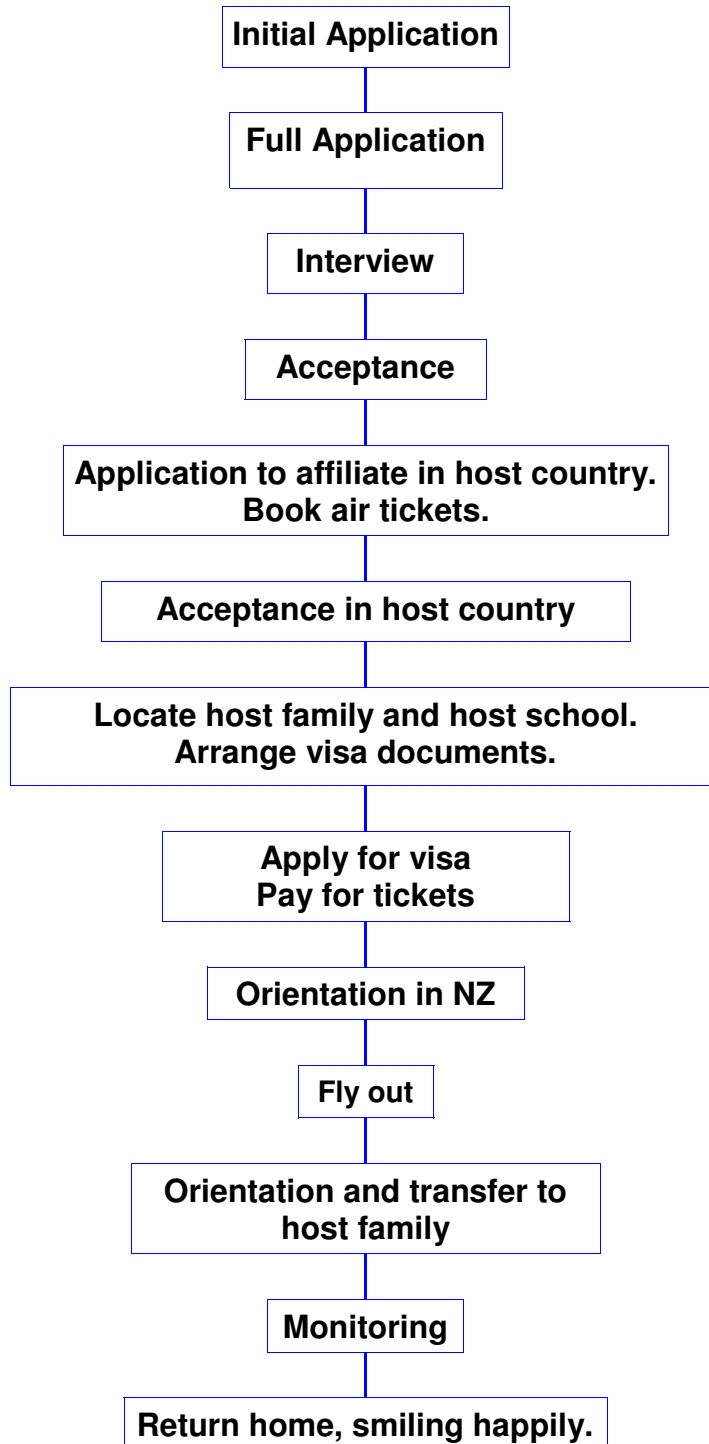
**Phones:** 09 520 6980

0800 924 264

027 433 8576

**e-mail:** [ian@nziiu.co.nz](mailto:ian@nziiu.co.nz)

## The Exchange Process



## **You're smiling and happy on the outside but worried sick on the inside.**

Of course you are. Even if you've had other children who have gone on exchange and even if you've been on exchange yourself, it's hard not to worry. For parents of only-children and for very protective parents it's a particularly stressful time.

Your teenager was prepubescent only yesterday and now they're close to leaving the nest. It's hard enough when you oversee the process yourself but to entrust their care during a formative phase of their life to an organisation you know little about and to a family you have never met in a country you may never have visited seems, on the face of it, to be a rather foolhardy enterprise.

To balance your fears there is the thrill of seeing your child raise their head to the breeze and take a step towards independence. You can see a strong possibility that your son or daughter is going to grow and mature much faster and with more self-confidence in a foreign country than they could in several years at home.

NZIIU has overseen thousands of exchanges and the number that have proved unsatisfactory is tiny. There are several reasons for our twenty-year record of success including our careful selection and orientation procedures and our excellent partner organisations.

You have far more reason to be confident of a good outcome than you do to be worried about a bad one. Also, the strength of your confidence can be a big factor in a successful exchange.

Here are some details that may help you to build that confidence.

### **NZIIU is:**

- a non-profit, charitable trust
- we have been arranging exchanges for 20 years
- the people who work for NZIIU believe in the value of exchanges

### **An exchange is:**

An idea which has been around for a long time. It began with exchanges between families in different countries but has grown into something broader. The idea has been especially popular after the world wars of the twentieth century and remains relevant today.

Students who go on exchange from NZ do not have to accept an exchange student from anywhere in return, but many do. They are often hosted by families with a family member who has been on exchange.

NZ students are accepted into schools overseas as local students and are accepted into families with little or no money being offered for hosting. Customs vary between countries. The idea is that young people experience culture in depth, acquire new language skills, appreciate the way others live, broaden their outlook and come back with very positive feelings about another country. In time, it is hoped that these good feelings spread so that others who have not had such experiences are also more accepting of

cultural differences. Almost as a by-product, parents report that their children come back far more mature in their attitudes to life and in advance of their peers who have not gone.

## Selecting students

We're looking for socially competent, outgoing students with an interest in language and culture. They don't have to be brilliant, just able to maintain results at an average or better level. They'll have an easier time if they're naturally sociable with a positive attitude to life. We're also looking for supportive parents who can be relied upon to understand what is involved in a student exchange.

Teachers understand the broad range of criteria within which we operate and they encourage and discourage students accordingly. They have no say in the selection process but they can be influential. As a result, most students who have the support of their teachers and their school when they apply, are able to go. Just as important is the support and confidence of their parents.

## Partner organisations

NZIIU works in cooperation with partner organisations in other countries and contract services in the belief that this will provide the most flexibility, the most expertise and the best outcomes. Our partnerships are tried and tested.

Our contractual relationships in each country are strongly similar to each other. In New Zealand we are signatories to the Code of Practice which is quite specific about standards and services that apply to pastoral care. We have found our partners to be reliable, to have similar standards of operation and that is why we deal with them.

The level of documentation in each country varies widely as do their visa requirements. This is one reason why we need partner organisations. They are expert in their own countries and can be relied upon to find good host families and good schools in areas where they can monitor a student's situation.



*"I thought it was really good that we could meet counsellors in our area. CEI did really well...I knew I could contact them if I had any problems. And they organised an amazing three days for us in Paris."*

## Host families



These are chosen by the affiliated organisation after a thorough application, interviewing and vetting process. Ideal families are warm and welcoming. They have an interest in other cultures and languages and can be relied upon to take good care of a foreign student. There is sometimes a lot of difference between host families in



terms of income and lifestyle but they all have important things in common.

Most families are from the educated middle classes and at least one person in the family usually has a professional job. Children may be younger or older or may have left home. Sometimes families enjoy hosting so much that they keep doing it for years even though it is a permanent drain on their finances.

In most countries the families either get no payment for hosting or a token payment. We leave this to our affiliates to decide and do not interfere.

When you think of a host family, think of what it would be like to send your child to another family

in New Zealand. There will be differences in the way the family works which have nothing to do with national culture. Now add a different culture and a different language and you have your child's host family.

Here's what one parent told us:

*“Wow, what a wonderful experience she had! After our initial reservations about her family, they couldn't have been better! Her host parents were superb! .....I just want to say a huge thank you for providing Ruth with this invaluable opportunity she will remember for the rest of her life.”*

Of course not all host families are as attentive and generous as this one was. What happens in the family depends a great deal on the NZ student.

*I'm sure this experience will remain with Alanna for ever – she speaks very highly of her host family and they were very good to her. She also enjoyed the school she attended very much.*

Sometimes students have the same family for the whole time they are away and sometimes they have more than one. In Japan, students typically change host families every two months.

*I loved all of my host families!* – Jane had four host families in Japan.

## Host schools

International exchanges are well understood in schools in all of our host countries. Some schools are welcoming and enthusiastic and others are less so. This is true in NZ too. Like host families, they treat exchange students as local students and do not charge additional fees. However, the usual school charges for trips, books and stationery apply in most cases. We rarely receive a negative report about a school.



## Visas

Most countries require visas for exchanges lasting more than six weeks. This can be simple or it can be very lengthy and require a lot of documentation. We send documentation to our affiliates, they go through the necessary processes in their countries and then another package of information is sent to us. We then process it and send it to the nearest embassy to obtain a visa. The processing of the visa by the relevant embassy takes anything from one to six weeks. This is one of the reasons that the application process can take a long time.

During this process we usually need to have the student's passport because we don't always know when the documentation will arrive. The passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond the end of the exchange or the student may be refused a visa or, having a visa, may be refused entry. Requirements vary.

## Insurance

Insurance of a particular standard is required not just by NZIIU but also by our affiliates and by the host country. This is bought by NZIIU at the same time as the air tickets.

## Money

Banking practices vary widely and change all the time. The best advice we can give you is for you to consult your bank. Most countries have good access to ATMs but it can be restricted to working hours and particular locations (Japan) or provide limited services (France).

## Orientation

All exchange students receive orientation by NZIIU. Sometimes this is individual and may be brief and at other times may be in a group and take half a day to a day. Parents are welcome to attend at least part of the orientation and to ask questions.

Most sessions come down to two aspects:

- (1) Nuts and bolts about getting there, being there and coming back.
- (2) How to cope. How to settle in well with your host family, things to watch for, coping with school, what if you want to go on a trip, what if something goes wrong, who will provide support, dealing with emotional issues and similar things.

Orientation sessions in the host country for longer exchanges usually take place in or near the host family. One-year exchanges to France can start with a one month language intensive in Paris. Brazilian exchanges provide for 10 hours of intensive language instruction in the first month. Longer Italian exchanges begin with a one week session in the mountains near Lake Como.



## Language study

Reasonable competence in the host country's language is required except for Netherlands, Brazil and Italy. On the other hand it pays to study before travelling to these countries. The more language skills students have on arrival, the sooner they will settle into their schools and families, the more they will understand and the happier they will be.

## What students get from an exchange

Here's what parents say their young adults have got:

- understanding of other cultural perspectives and customs
- ability to adjust and compromise (this is about an only child)
- hugely improved language skills
- a sense of independence and confidence in her ability to fend for herself and look after herself in difficult situations
- the kind of appreciation of one's own country that only comes with distance from it
- new friends
- another family
- friends from different cultures
- a motivation and a dream while living in Japan
- confidence, language skills, enjoyment

Every exchange is highly individual in its benefits.

## What has reassured parents in past exchanges

This is what they say made them feel better:

- the well-organised orientation day
- prompt follow-up to questions that couldn't be answered on the spot
- effective handling of requests while away
- close contact with members of NZIIU
- being able to find out more about the [other] end [of the exchange]
- going with an organisation that has placed many students around the world
- the interviewers experience, the interview and the stories from others who have been before

- regular reports
- speaking to the host family
- NZIIU's systems

### Parents say:

“Everything went well: her host family, her host school, just everything! She has had a great time there and I hope she has left something special after her 10 months.”

“NZIIU was fantastic at staying in touch, following things up and staying informed.”

“Thanks so much for everything you did to make this a success. We appreciate it very much.”

“Thankyou very much NZIIU for an extremely well-organised, prepared and caring exchange. Thankyou for being sincere, honest and approachable.”

### What students say after their exchanges

“Thankyou very much NZIIU for everything. I am still realising new things I learned during my time in France. I had an amazing time and learnt how much I love both France and NZ. Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou.”

“Having been on a previous exchange to Tahiti which wasn't very well organised, this one was brilliant. At the time, filling out all the original application forms was demanding but I can see that you wanted to make sure you selected committed people and that you put us in the environment that was most suitable for each individual.”

“My six weeks in France passed incredibly fast and were probably the most challenging, rewarding and stimulating of my life! I had an amazing time and love that I have a French connection! I can hardly wait to return.....”

“Thankyou for the year of my life [in Italy] NZIIU!!!”

“My exchange to Japan has been the best ever! I will never forget it! And thankyou so much NZIIU and JFIE for making it come true!”

“I would like to thank NZIIU for everything [about my year in Spain], keep up the good work.”

“NZIIU is great.”

“I had a great family. I couldn't have been happier with them or the town I was in [during my year in Spain].”



### What goes wrong

Some things, some times. The exchange process is a complex adventure and sometimes there are hiccups which need to be dealt with. The thing that is hardest to predict is how a student will fit into a family. We can have a great student and a great family that seem like they should get on well, but occasionally they don't. When that happens, we try to move the student on quickly. This isn't always easy and some patience may be required.

Sometimes things go wrong in host families as they do in the best-ordered NZ families. We help students to be aware of their role in these situations and if necessary will move them.

## Support

While they are away, students' first support is themselves. Much of the growth in exchanges takes place because students find that they can solve problems without anyone's help. Beyond themselves they have a host family that can clear the way. They also have resource people available in most schools and our affiliates appoint counsellors that students can call. If they are still unable to solve a problem, they can contact Ian at NZIUU and he will become involved.

We encourage students not to rely on their NZ families for support in the first instance. If there is a serious problem it is most likely to be quickly resolved without any initial involvement of NZ parents. The fewer people involved, the clearer the problem will seem. We always contact parents when there is a significant problem and involve them if it is necessary.

## We do get criticisms

Of course. On most exchanges almost everything almost always goes very well indeed. But for some people there are unforeseeable problems which cause them difficulty. Most criticisms are very individual. Some people are very adaptable and others hope for detailed guidance every step of the way. We try to find a middle path when we give advice. Each student has a highly personal experience and to get the most out of the exchange they need to be adventurous, observant, thoughtful, sociable, friendly, patient, persistent and adaptable. Exchange is a cultural adventure inside a family and a school. It is not a tourist experience nor a holiday although occasionally it is both.

## Getting there and back

We try to find a balance among economy, safety, comfort, short stopovers and reputable airlines. Currently we are using Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines quite a lot. Getting to most destinations is reasonably straightforward, sometimes with a choice of routes. But bookings often have to be made well ahead of time to be sure of arriving in particular time frames. Some of our affiliates are quite firm about this as they have orientation sessions on arrival for exchange students from many countries all at the same time.



We arrange and purchase insurance at the same time as the tickets. Insurance is required by us, by our affiliates and by most countries when they issue visas.

Longer exchanges require visas and part of the visa process usually requires return tickets to be presented on arrival. This type of ticket is often a lot more expensive than the kind of specials offered by travel agents. The return date is sometimes flexible or is pencilled-in until a definite return date is decided. There is sometimes room for negotiation but some countries are very firm about visa dates and some of our affiliates are likewise very firm because of their own organisational requirements. It is unwise to assume that a visa can be extended.

We give students lots of tips about travel. Most travel is simple and safe except through the USA where extended security measures mean that everyone is required to go through customs and may be fingerprinted, photographed and have their baggage checked regardless of whether they are entering the country or not.

Baggage limits are higher through the USA but we strongly advise students to carry as little baggage as possible. Experienced travellers pare their luggage down to the bare minimum.

Early check-in makes tolerance of overweight baggage more likely but some airlines are very intolerant on some flights.

Airpoints may be claimed by the student at the time of check-in or aboard the aircraft on most airlines.

## **We discourage visits to your son/daughter while they're away**

Of course we can't stop you from dropping in, but experience has shown us that the experience of seeing anyone from home can be profoundly unsettling for students. Some even find meeting other exchange students quite upsetting. Homesickness can be a problem and we suggest strategies to students for dealing with it. One is to restrict contact of all kinds with anyone in NZ.

That said, visits sometimes can be arranged for special reasons but we need to know about them. It is better for us to be involved. We're not too keen on surprises as we have agreed to be responsible for your offspring. So have our affiliates. Some of them are very unhappy to hear of parental visits. On the other hand, we have no objection when parents join their offspring at the end of their exchange and travel together. We need to know about this well in advance for ticketing reasons.

## **Other surprises**

There are other kinds of surprises we find difficult as well.

Part of the application process involves medical certification by a doctor, preferably the family doctor. It is important at this stage that any problems or potential problems are revealed so that they can be properly discussed and assessed. Medical and psychological difficulties do not generally improve on an exchange. The opposite effect is far more common because of the stress involved for some students. Failure to reveal a potential problem at an early stage can cause difficulties if the student has to be brought home before the end of the exchange. We do not usually refund fees in such cases.

It is rare for a student to be removed from NZIIU programmes when they are overseas. This is mostly because we are careful with our screening and orientation processes. It is important that you read our refund and cancellation policy before signing it during the interview.

## **Why choose to send your young adult overseas with NZIIU?**

- We know what we're doing.* We've had 20 years of experience.
- We're home grown.* We're an independent NZ organisation and the way we work reflects NZ culture.
- We look after them well.* We pride ourselves on a high standard of pastoral care and individual attention.
- We always give students their choice of country.*
- We have 14 countries to choose from.*
- Our affiliates are the best.* NZIIU contracts overseas organisations that provide the best care and service for our students. NZIIU maintains regular contact with families in New Zealand.
- They're not a number.* By the time students leave, we know each other well. NZIIU has a genuine concern for their welfare.
- We do it all* We provide a complete package, arranging homestay, visa applications, transport and accommodation arrangements (including transfers), insurance and orientation prior to departure.

## Understanding the Fees

NZIIU is a registered charitable trust. The charitable part of our operation is to support NZ students who want to travel on exchange.

The way we do this is:

- (1) To keep costs low by charging only for out-of pocket expenses and not charging overheads.
- (2) Providing scholarships to help suitable students who need financial assistance.
- (3) Charging for actual airfares separately from the fee.
- (4) Charging the fees in the currency in the country of choice.

This means that every exchange is subsidized by around \$2000 and some by \$6000.

The fee charged by our affiliate and the airfare form the bulk of what we charge for exchanges.

### Airfare

This is a normal airfare and is much more expensive than the kinds of low-season or shoulder-season airfares offered as discounted specials by travel agents. See the “Getting there and back” for details. It is charged separately from the fee.

### Affiliate fee

This covers their charges to find and check-out a host family, arrange a host school, provide visa documents, meet, greet, orient and transfer our students and to support them during their stay. The extent and difficulty of these requirements vary markedly between countries.

### Fee variations

We charge you what it costs us but prices vary significantly because of changing exchange rates, changing airfares and changing fees as our contracts are renewed.

### Refunds and Cancellations

After the interview it seems as though nothing much is happening because students and their families hear very little from us for several weeks. In fact, a great deal of activity occurs within NZIIU and within our affiliated organisation. We need to be sure at the time of interview that students are fully committed as withdrawing after this point means that a lot of effort is wasted by both organisations. For this reason there are charges made for cancellations at various stages of the placement process. The charges are laid out in the Refund and Cancellation Policy document which students and their parents are asked to sign at the time of interview. We will in every case refund what is fair and reasonable and be as understanding as we can. Cancellations are uncommon.

### Payment

We require the whole fee to be paid before departure. We try to make this as painless as possible but we need a reasonable deposit in order to have the confidence to proceed. A fifty dollar deposit is made with the initial application and another \$500 is due upon acceptance. The remainder is usually split into five or six payments spread over the time between acceptance and departure. The first installment is due soon after acceptance as we begin to incur costs and liabilities immediately. If the schedule we provide you with is unsuitable for some reason, we are happy to negotiate one which is mutually convenient.

## **Questions**

If you still have questions, please get in touch using the contact details on the cover of this booklet. Otherwise, the interview is a great time to discuss the details of each exchange.



**NZIU**  
**225 Great South Road, Greenlane, Auckland 1546**  
**PO Box 17 416, Greenlane, Auckland, New Zealand 1546**  
**[www.student-exchange.co.nz](http://www.student-exchange.co.nz)**  
**Phones: 09 520 6980 0800 924 264 027 433 8576**  
**E-mail: [ian@nziiu.co.nz](mailto:ian@nziiu.co.nz) Fax: 09 520 6981**