



# Rotary Youth Exchange Florida

## Outbound Student Research Project and Language Plan

As you have heard several times already, your exchange experience will be a key part of three years of your life. This first year is filled with preparation, the second year is actually being away, and the third year is a time of integration and reflection.

To help you prepare for your year away, you are required to do in-depth research on the part of the world where you will be living next year and to begin (or continue), in earnest, your language study. Both of these activities will enhance and enrich your experience in your host country and ease your transition into a new culture, community and family.

This research project is meant to be a family affair. It may be the only time in your life where it is OK for your parents to be co-authors of a homework assignment! For parents, having in-depth knowledge of the country and the culture where your child will spend the next year will help you to support them better and help you feel more connected to that part of the world while they are away. A once unfamiliar place will begin to feel not so distant and strange.

Enclosed is the outline for the research that you need to do. You are expected and encouraged to use multiple resources: libraries, the Internet, and interviews/conversations with people from or very familiar with your host country. We recommend that you NOT rely on Wikipedia, as the information there is not always reliable. Please list your resources at the end of the paper and note the resources that you found to be the most helpful. Future students may find these resources to be of assistance!

The first step is to look at the outline and ask: "Which of these questions do I not know the answer to about my own country and culture?" That is your starting point. As an ambassador you should be knowledgeable about all of the issues on the outline. You will be asked these questions over and over while on exchange. This will not be part of your paper but you are expected to be able to converse intelligently about all of these issues. If you have gaps in your knowledge about your own country's geography, history, economy, political system, current events, etc., now is the time to get up to speed. You will be asked over and over about your own government's policies on trade, global warming, the war in Iraq, and the presidential elections and new administration, to name just a few topics. You will be expected to share your knowledge and your opinion in a respectful and diplomatic way. You can practice these conversations around the dinner table or in the car.

You already know your destination country, so you can certainly get started on some of the details of the project. In time, when you hear about the actual region, town, and school that you will be going to, you can drill down to the next level with your research.

This paper should be **no less than 12 pages** (excluding your list of resources). You do not need to do formal footnotes unless you are also using this paper for a project at school, which you may be able to do. You may find that, for some of these topics, you would use the same resource to learn about your own country. For example, as you are looking up the demographic data on your host country, that same source may have the demographic information for your home country that you will be asked about on your exchange. Doing parallel research may be a wise use of your time and energy.

By March 15, you should have completed your research for half of the topics listed (not necessarily in the order listed on the Outline). Submit it electronically by that date, to your assigned Country Coordinator and to your sponsor district Youth Exchange Chair and/or counselor. The remainder of your research will be due by June 15. Many of you might not receive information about your host city/town or school until

late spring. If necessary, you can submit an addendum to your paper three weeks after you find out exactly where you are going.

What will happen if you don't turn this paper in? Your commitment to the privilege and responsibility of being an ambassador will be seriously questioned, and your exchange may very well be cancelled. What will happen if you do a half-baked job? The only person you will cheat will be yourself. You probably have never had such a good reason to do research before in your life, not to mention opportunities for real life application!

The second part of your assignment is to develop for yourself a **formal language acquisition plan**. It is up to you to determine what resources to use, and to apply yourself to this critically important task. Students will be expected to demonstrate a beginner's proficiency in the language by mid-March, and be able to have, at minimum, some basic conversations by our June orientation. It is expected that intensive language study will start immediately, and will continue until departure, making your best effort to achieve functional fluency prior to departure.

Much of the fun and learning that you get from travel is from anticipation and preparation. The more you know before you go the richer your experience will be.

Let the adventure begin!

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## Outbound Student Research Project Outline

### 1. Geography:

- Where is your host country?
- What are some of its defining geographical features? How does the natural landscape limit access between different population groups or centers? How does this impact people's daily lives (medical care, education, labor and industry, migration in and out of rural and urban areas)?
- What is the capital city and why is it located where it is?
- What countries border your host country?
- What were your host country's original boundaries? How have they changed over time? For what reasons?
- Is it typical for families to travel between states/regions of the country?
- Do locations popular with tourists impede community development or improve it?

### 2. Climate and Environment:

- What is the climate like in your host country?
- What are the regional differences in the climate?
- How is global warming affecting your host country? (industrial/agricultural vs. environmental) What are the "hot" buttons/controversies?
- Are there problems with pollution? Are there pollution controls laws? Are there concerns about de-forestation and habitat?
- Are there protected public lands like National Parks and National Wildlife reserves?
- Is your host country a signatory to the Kyoto Accord? Is your home country a signatory to this accord? If not, why not?

### 3. History:

- What is the early history of your host country?
- Make a time line from the earliest history of your host country to the present. Mark the most important events. During those dates/periods, was anything related happening in your home country?
- What have been the patterns of immigration into your host country in the last 75 years? What influences remain today?
- Have there been any civil wars in your country? Are there lingering effects?
- What was your host country's involvement in any other major world conflicts?
- What new holidays will you celebrate? Who or what is being commemorated?

### 4. Religion:

- What are the major religions in your host country? Is there an official religion?
- To what extent are the major religions adhered to?
- What are the major religious holidays and what are some of the customs associated with these holidays.

## 5. Economy:

- What is the economy based on? What are some of their biggest/most important imports and exports?
- What products are traded between your host country and your home country?
- What products/services is your host region famous for?
- What is the per capita income? The gross national product (GNP)? What is the unemployment rate? When and how do people retire?
- Describe the currency. What is the historical /cultural significance of the symbols on the money?
- What is the current exchange rate?
- What is the currency and the exchange rate in the neighboring countries that you may get to visit?
- Are there distinct economic/social classes in your host country? How easy is it to move from one class to another? Are the different classes made up of different ethnic groups?

## 6. Educational System:

- How is the educational system organized?
- What do you see as the biggest differences between your educational system- especially as relates to high school and college?
- What are the requirements to graduate from high school?
- What are the relationships like between teachers/students/students families? Can you be friends or friendly with your teachers or is it a more formal connection?
- What happens with students who “don’t make it”? What are the options for students whose families cannot afford tuition?
- What percentage of students go on to university?
- Describe the University system. How expensive is it? Which are more prestigious - the private colleges or the public ones?

## 7. Food:

- What are some of the foods that your host country is famous for?
- What are some dishes that are indigenous? What are some foods that reflect non-native influence (e.g., European foods in the Americas)?
- What are some regional differences in food in your host country?
- What does a liter of milk cost? A pound of butter? A dozen eggs? A loaf of bread? How does that compare with the cost of those items in your home city?
- What new fruits and vegetables will you get the opportunity to taste?
- What spices are used in cooking?
- Does your host country have something similar to the US Department of Agriculture Food Pyramid (some official nutritional guidelines)? How does it differ from the one you know?
- Can you drink the water? If the drinking water supply is not generally safe (as luckily it is in N. America), how will you know when and where the water is safe to drink?

## **8. Health:**

- What data can you find about: life expectancy, infant mortality, birth rates, leading causes of death, incidence of smoking, HIV, TB? How does that compare with the data from your home country?
- What do people do when they get sick? What are some common home remedies for things like a cold or sore muscles?
- What immunizations will you need to get prior to departure?
- How do people exercise or keep fit?
- What is the medical care system like? How is its quality? How is it paid for?

## **7. Current Events**

- What are the hot button issues right now in your host country?
- What is the name of the main English language newspaper that you can read on-line?
- What are the names of two influential newspapers or magazines in your host country?
- What is the relationship between your country's government and that of your host country?
- What are the trade or political issues that have been a source of disagreement between your host country and your home country in the last five years?
- In what settings is it appropriate to talk about politics and religion? When? Where? With whom?
- Do people openly discuss attitudes and beliefs that may contradict the government or do these discussions happen privately?
- What is the crime rate? What kinds of things do people visiting your host country have to be mindful of? Pickpockets? Purse thieves? What new behaviors might you have to adopt to keep yourself and your belongings safe?

## **8. Government**

- How legitimate is the government? Was the last election free and fair?
- Who is your host country's top political leader? When was he/she they most recently elected?
- What do people who support him/her like about him/her?
- What do people who don't like him/or her have to say?
- How is the government organized? National vs. regional vs. local roles.
- How close is the military to the seat of power? When in the last 50 years have there been coups, juntas and /or dictators?
- What kinds of social services are available (or not available) for the poor?
- What is the voting age? Is voting required?
- Who is the ambassador from your country to your host country? Who is the ambassador from your host country to your home country? Where are the embassies located in each country? Are there other consular offices in each country?
- How big is the drug trade in your country? What is the relationship between the government and the drug trade?

## **9. Adolescence in your host country:**

- What is the age of majority in your host country? (The age you become a legal adult)
- When can you get a driver's license?
- What is the drinking age in your host country? What are the penalties for using illegal drugs or underage drinking?

- What are family-role expectations of teenagers (school work, family obligations, family functions)
- What are the expectations for teenage family members when visitors stop by? Should you stay and listen? Stay and join in the conversation? Can you or should you leave the room?
- How do teens greet each other? How do they greet adults?
- What are common teenage household/family responsibilities? Part time work? Help with the dishes? Yard or laundry? Run errands?
- Curfews vary by family and often by gender, but what might you expect in your host culture regarding a curfew?
- What are popular leisure activities for teenagers?
- How do teenagers dress in your host country?

## 10. Language:

- If your target language is spoken in different countries, how does the dialect vary? For example, American English vs. British English, or Argentine Spanish vs. Spain Spanish, or Brazilian Portuguese vs. European Portuguese, or Swiss German vs. “High” German, etc.
- What has been the influence of immigrants and indigenous peoples on the language of your host country?
- What percentage of the population speaks a second or third language? What percentage of the population speaks English?
- What are some idiomatic expressions or slang (not vulgar) that are unique to your country. (Example: “G-day, Mate!” in Australia.)
- How might someone describe the accent in your country? In your region?
- What is your plan to become functionally fluent in your host country language *prior* to departure?
- What is your language study plan while you are on exchange? How will you remember and integrate all the new vocabulary that you will encounter every day? How will you become proficient in grammar and writing?
- Learn as many ways as possible to politely say:
  - ❖ Hello
  - ❖ Thank you
  - ❖ I appreciate that
  - ❖ You are so kind
  - ❖ Nice to meet you
  - ❖ I am so glad to know you
  - ❖ Goodbye
  - ❖ I hope to see you again
  - ❖ How can I help?
  - ❖ What would you like me to do?
  - ❖ Can I assist you?
  - ❖ Do you need me to do anything?
  - ❖ I would really like to help.
- Helpful phrases around food:
  - ❖ I am not very fond of liver (or whatever the food is) the way my mother prepares it, but perhaps the way you prepare it I will like it better.
  - ❖ I have not learned to like liver, yet. (Yet is the important word here!)
  - ❖ Learn how to say the word “Unfamiliar”. It is a very diplomatic and non-judgmental response to many questions- especially around food.

## 11. Sports:

- What are the most popular sports in your host country?
- What is the history of soccer in your host country?
- What are the big rivalries?
- Do teenagers play sports as a part of school? If not, how do they get involved in sports?
- What are the opportunities to play sports for girls and women?

## 12. Rotary:

- What is the history of Rotary in your host country
- What are the boundaries of your host district?
- What is the history of your host club? How long have they been involved in Youth Exchange?
- How many members are in your host Rotary Club? How many of them are women?
- Where do they meet? What time of day?
- How many exchange students do they usually host every year?
- Where are the 2007-2008 exchange students hosted by your club from? How might you get in contact with them? Where are your host club's current Outbound students? How might you get in contact with them? (They will be returning home as you arrive!)
- What local projects is your host club involved with? What international projects? Do they have a big fundraiser that you can help with?

## A few resources to get you started:

### Books:

*Material World- A Global Family Portrait* by Peter Menzel, et al

*Women in the Material World* by Faith D'Aluisio and Peter Menzel

*Xenophobes Guides*: These are wonderful, humorous and irreverent looks at many cultures written by people not originally from that culture but who know it well as an outsider who has lived there. Even if there is no Xenophobes Guide to the country that you are going to, be sure that you look at the *Guide* to Americans or Canadians. It will give you some insights as to how we are seen by other cultures. To order you can go to [www.xenophobes.com](http://www.xenophobes.com)

### Internet Sites:

**Omniglot** : [www.omniglot.com/language/index.htm](http://www.omniglot.com/language/index.htm)

This website has great information on language and resources for learning languages.

**Newspapers of the World**: [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com)

Pick any country, read the news, discover the arts, learn the language.

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## Tips for Learning the Language of Your Host Country BEFORE You Arrive

Rotary Youth Exchange Florida has made a deliberate choice not to exchange with other English speaking countries. We strongly believe that learning another language is one of the most valuable benefits of living in another country for a year.

You will have at least eight months between country placement and your departure to study the language of your host country. You have ample time to acquire functional fluency in the language of your host country. It would be blatantly disrespectful to arrive in country without a solid grasp of the language of your host country. It reflects poorly on you, your country and culture, and RYE-Florida. Many of our exchange partners are expecting that after three or four months in country, exchange students will be able to speak, read, and write with fluency and will have demonstrated considerable effort to acquire the language. Lack of effort and proficiency is a valid reason for them to send you home.

Some of you will be placed in a country that speaks a language that you can study in your school. Unless you are in special immersion programs, though, your school language studies will not provide you the level of proficiency that you will need before you depart. You will need to do study above and beyond your high school language classes. Our expectation is that you will make time in your busy schedules and make language study a priority. You will be amazed at how much you can learn by setting aside thirty disciplined minutes every day.

We offer the following suggestions to help you to learn the language of your wonderful host culture.

- **Enroll** in a class where you have made an academic or financial investment - nothing like a little commitment or consequences to make you show up and do the work!
- **Listen/watch** radio and TV in your host language. You can do this online if it is not available on cable.
- **Watch** movies in your host language. Watch the first time with subtitles and the second and third time with the subtitles turned off. Netflix (netflix.com) has a HUGE selection of foreign language films. Even if you only subscribe between now and when you go, it will be worth every penny. Movies are a great window into a culture. Get your ears used to the patterns, pace, and rhythms of your host country language.
- **Download** (legally) popular and folk music from your host country. Get the lyrics on line to your favorites and translate them. What are they actually singing about?
- **Check out** an interactive language-learning online community like [www.LiveMocha.com](http://www.LiveMocha.com).
- **Go to the library** and check out children's books in your host country language. They have simple vocabulary and lots of pictures. Children's music and nursery rhymes are helpful too.
- **At the library**, look for periodicals like People and Time in your host language.
- **Get** a self-paced language program like Berlitz, Rosetta Stone, or Pimsleur. Again, the financial commitment here may increase your follow through.
- **If** you already know the language to some extent, use a dictionary in your host country language. You won't believe what a difference that will make in your vocabulary. Be sure you take one with you.
- **Buy** a "501 Verbs" book - learn 3 verbs a day between now and when you leave.
- **Learn** two feeling words a day (happy, confused, irritated, relaxed, hungry, sad, optimistic, excited, etc.) It is when you can talk about what you are feeling that you can begin to deepen your relationships with people.
- **Become a "Grammar Geek"**. You really do sound like a three-year-old when you can only speak in the present tense. Grammar gives language its structure and shape. Grammar is the word for the rules that people follow when they use a language. Clear and nuanced communication is all about knowing the rules. Pay attention to grammar in your own language. What is similar in your new language? What is different? Concentrate on the aspects of grammar that you find most difficult. Focus for a week at a time on that aspect. You will nail it in a week of concentrated effort. Read in your new language. Read out loud. Write in your new language. Your brain absorbs new information differently when you read, write, and speak.
- **Find** some native or fluent speakers in your community that you can converse with - perhaps you can trade language lessons if they are still learning English.