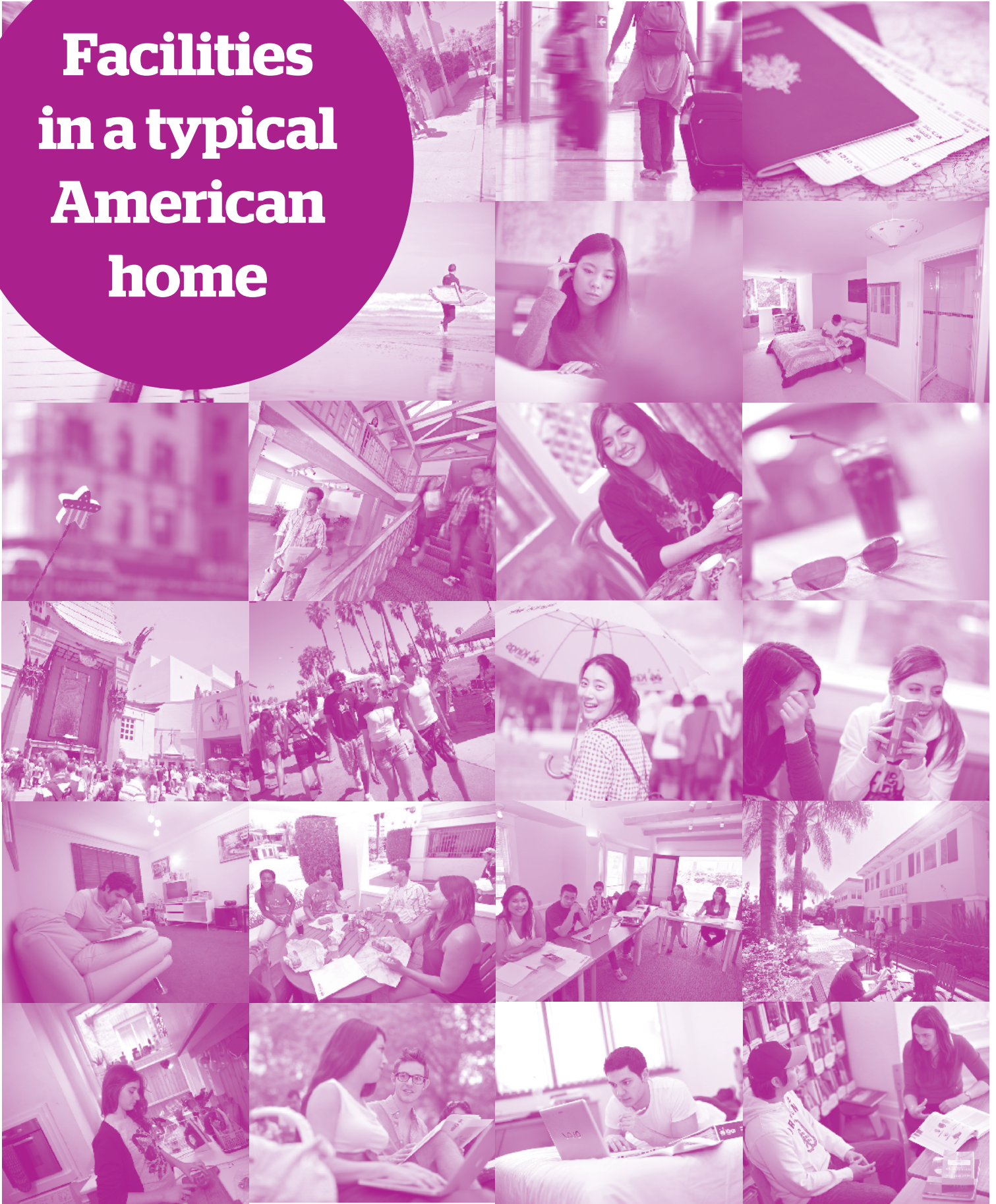


Facilities in a typical American home



5. Facilities in a typical American home

Your room

You will be given a key to the house but you will not normally be given a key to your room, as it is not usual to lock bedroom doors in a private home. You are responsible for keeping your room clean and tidy; this includes making your bed and picking up after yourself. If you wish to move furniture in your room or put pictures on the wall, please ask the host family first. Please do not use drawing pins, glue or sticky tape on walls or furniture and be careful with shoe and nail polish. If you break or damage anything, tell your host family immediately and be prepared to pay for the cost of replacements or repairs. Please ask before using any of your own electrical equipment. You can buy electrical adaptors in many shops, but please note that U.S. voltage is 110V.

It's okay to listen to music in your room, but don't play it too loud. Be careful with furniture and other objects in the room. If anything breaks, tell the host family immediately. Offer to pay if you are responsible.

If you want to bring friends home, ask your host first. If you go to your room, be considerate. Do not make a lot of noise as this may disturb other members of the family.

The Living Room

This is where many families relax, read the newspapers, watch television and entertain their friends. Some people call it the "sitting

room" or "den." Family members may have their favorite armchairs.

Part of the living room may be a dining area. Some houses have a separate dining room. Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen, but use the dining or living room on special occasions. Sometimes people eat while watching television if a favorite program is on at the same time.

- Find out if family members have favorite chairs or armchairs.
- Use the chairs you are offered.
- Don't put your feet up on the furniture.
- Always ask if you want to turn on the television or change the channel.
- If you read books or newspapers, put them away tidily when you have finished.
- If you eat or have a drink in the living room always take the cups, plates and cutlery to the kitchen when you have finished.

The dining area

Mealtimes, especially evening meals, are opportunities to talk. Your hosts may be interested in what you have done, seen and learnt. Don't miss this opportunity. Ask them about anything new, unusual or strange that you have seen or heard. This is usually a good time to ask them questions and practice your English.

- It is important to be on time for meals. If you are going to be late, phone and explain. Your hosts will keep a meal for you. Tell your hosts if you will be eating somewhere else that day.

- Don't sit in someone else's favorite chair. Ask which chair you should sit in.
- It is polite to wait until everyone has their food before starting to eat. There is no special word or phrase that everyone says before eating. Your host may say something like 'Please start' or 'Do begin'.
- On the flipside, it is not rude to be the only person eating, so you do not have to stop when everyone else has finished.
- Be considerate. Pass things like salt and pepper, bread and butter, when people need them.
- Use a napkin if you have one. Spread it on your lap. You can use it to wipe your lips and fingers when necessary. Americans don't use a hot towel to wipe their hands at the table.
- When you have finished, place your knife and fork side by side on your plate. Fold the napkin and place it beside the plate.
- You do not have to eat everything on your plate, but it is polite to eat most of it.
- Always offer to help clear the table. Take things into the kitchen area until the table is clear. Men and women, boys and girls help with this in most families.

Language tip

When you don't know people very well, two very useful words when making requests or offers are 'could' and 'would'. Could you pass the butter, please? Could I have some bread? Would you like some orange juice?

Study tips

Notice how people make requests or offers in English. Write down some examples in your notebook.

Can you tell how well these people know each other?

Are some people more direct to each other? Why is this?

What language would you use to make requests or offers to different English speakers you know?

In what ways are table manners different in the U.S.? Observe and make notes. Your host family may not be typical, so observe other people in cafeterias and restaurants. Are there any manners you like or dislike? Write down what they are and why.



The kitchen

Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen. They only eat in the dining or living room on special occasions. There will usually be a washing machine and there might be a dishwasher. In some homes there will be separate areas for cleaning materials and equipment for doing the laundry (washing clothes). These are often called utility rooms. There may be a separate cupboard area or pantry for storing food.

Ask your host what you may or may not do in the kitchen. Usually you will be allowed to make hot drinks and snacks by yourself, but don't take food from the cupboards or fridge without asking first. Keep the kitchen clean and tidy. If you have a drink or a snack, put glasses, cups and plates away when you have finished.

A very important item in most American kitchens is the coffee maker. Most Americans will also have a kettle for boiling water for hot tea.

Offer to wash up or dry the dishes after a meal. Both males and females do this in the U.S. Some families have a dishwasher. Offer to help load or unload the machine when necessary. Put things back in cupboards and drawers in the places where you found them. If you drop or spill anything, clean it up.

Always ask what to use for the cleaning. Don't forget to put things back in the fridge and cupboards when you have finished with them.

The bathroom

Most American homes only have one bathroom so you will share a bathroom with the rest of the family. It is important to know the house rules or customs about using the bathroom. For example, in the mornings, people usually have a routine. That is, they use the bathroom at about the same time every morning before having breakfast and going off to work.

You can have a bath or shower each day. If you do not understand how the equipment works, please ask your host to explain. Remember to leave the bathroom clean and tidy for the next person to use. The host family will give you a towel if you do not have your own but you will be expected to use your own toiletries, i.e. shampoo, toothpaste, etc. You can ask your hosts what times are best for you to use the bathroom for a shower or bath. Again, the most important rules are to be considerate and sensitive to other people's needs at all times.

How do people in the U.S. keep clean?

Some people wash using soap, a washcloth or a scrub brush. They may take a shower, especially if they don't have much time. Other times, they might take a hot bath. This is often used as a method of relaxation. Some people have a quick shower after their bath.

Using the bathroom

Try not to waste water. Some homes have a water meter and families have to pay for the amount of water they use.

Many American bathrooms have mats on the floor to protect the floor from water. Use these in the same way as your hosts. Try to keep the floor dry; don't fill the bath up to the top and remember to keep the shower curtain inside the bathtub.

Only use your own towel in the bathroom and ask your host family where you should put it to dry. Don't leave it on the floor - remember you're not in a hotel!

Rinse out the bath and sink - leave them clean for the next person. Try to leave the floor dry. Ask your host family where to keep your toiletries and be careful not to leave medicines where young children can get them. Remember to lock the bathroom door!



The garden

Many American homes have a lawn or garden. There is often a small lawn at the front of the house and a larger one at the back. Gardening or lawn care is a common leisure time activity for many people.

Pets

Pets are popular in the U.S. - nearly 50% of homes have one. If you don't like pets, tell us in advance so that we can choose a family without pets for you. The most popular pets are fish, cats, dogs, rabbits, birds, hamsters and guinea pigs.

Internet

The vast majority of U.S. families will have Internet access at home. However, they may not allow you to use their Internet connection for long periods or to download material.

Heating and air conditioning

Most homes have central heating and air conditioning. This is often turned off during the night. If you feel cold, please ask your host family for extra blankets or additional heating but never

leave fires or heaters burning overnight. Electricity is expensive in the U.S., so be considerate and switch off the lights when you leave the room.

Laundry

Most host families will have laundry machines in their home or on their apartment premises. If they have machines in their home, you should ask how to use the machines and limit your washing to one load a week.

Friends and visitors

It is polite to ask permission from your host family before inviting friends or visitors to the home. Please do not let your friends (male or female) stay overnight in your bedroom - this is likely to cause offence.

Recycling

Recycling is very popular in the U.S. and you will probably find that your host family has a separate receptacle for plastic, glass and paper waste. Ask your host what can be recycled and where it should go. Plastic, glass and tin containers should always be rinsed or cleaned before going into the recycling container.

