



Sacred Heart
Girls' College
HAMILTON

Homestays

A rich, rewarding experience for all

For two Hamilton families, opening their homes to international students has been an experience as rewarding and positive as the experiences of the students themselves. And the friendships formed will be treasured forever.

The Botha and Roche families have each hosted international students for several years. But it's more than just offering them a place to stay – it's about welcoming young people into their homes and families.

Carine Botha, her husband Jan, and their three sons – Ruan, 13; Reuben, 10; and Leon, 4 – have hosted students since 2009.

“The girls become immersed in family life. It's not being a boarder – it's about being part of a family. Our first student, Kate, joined us when Ruan was still a baby, so she even helped to change nappies!” Carine says with a chuckle.

And Coleen and James Roche have the same stance. Together with their children Joshua, 9, and Isabelle, 7, the couple have hosted Lydia since just after the first lockdown in 2020.

“It's like Lydia is our eldest child. She is family. She was quite shy to begin with, but she came out of her shell after a couple of weeks. Now it's like having three of our own children,” Coleen said.

“Joshua and Isabelle will knock on Lydia's door and say ‘Lydia, do you want to play a game with us?’ And like any older sibling, sometimes she doesn't want to play Beyblades every afternoon!” James laughs.

“Lydia goes with us most places. But, like any 18-year-old, sometimes she doesn't want to go to boring family catch-ups where adults are talking for a couple of hours. We regularly do things together as a family. We often talk to Lydia's family in Beijing and she talks to them every day.

Lydia has spent two Christmases and summers with the Roche's. Now in Year 13, she is thinking about staying on in New Zealand to study at university.



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Carine and Jan Botha also take their students on family adventures.

“We went to Bullswool Farm Park [near Paeroa] recently and our last student, Purida, came fishing with us on our boat and caught an awesome fish. She loved that! We go to the beach a lot in summer,” Carine said.

Each family agrees there are lessons to be learned from hosting students from foreign countries.

Carine says it’s taught her sons that everyone is unique.

“We wanted to ensure our boys understand they’re individuals and to be different is also normal.”

They also say it’s important to set family rules and communicate those regularly.

“It’s good to provide responsibilities and boundaries as you would for your family members and check in with the students about those regularly,” Carine said.

James and Coleen said they’ve found it helpful to set expectations, so everyone knows what is required of them.

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“We see it as ‘how would we want our son or daughter to be treated if they were with a homestay family?’ and that’s how you view it,” James said.

And Carine agrees with that:

“One of the big things for us has always been if our child was overseas, we’d want a family to support them and care for and love them like we do. For us that’s a really important reason for getting to know each student and to feel like we’re gifting them a positive experience here. Be prepared to treat them like your own son or daughter.”

The families have been rewarded for their efforts in providing a warm, inviting home for the students they’ve hosted with a steady stream of contact from former students. Each family receives regular video and phone calls, emails, WhatsApp messages, and Christmas gifts.

“It’s wonderful hearing about what they’re up to... some have got married. It’s lovely to hear from them,” Coleen said. ■

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