

Average host fees jump 13 percent over last year

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Report on Host Compensation

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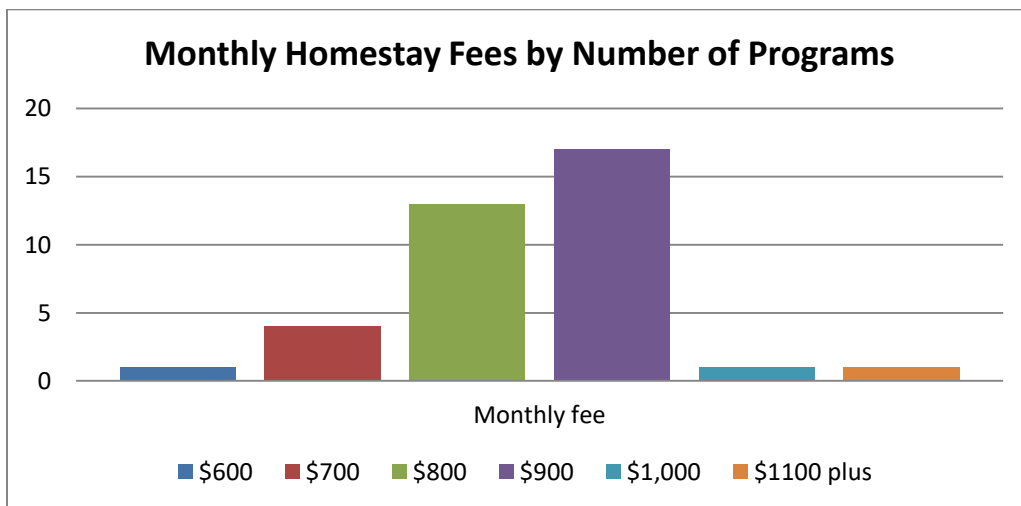
Executive Summary

The dramatic increase in the number of international students coming to Canada has boosted the demand for homestay accommodations. As a result, host payments are on the rise, jumping 13 percent over last year.

In a survey of 42 homestay programs across Canada, the average fee paid to hosts is currently \$845 per month. In last year's survey, the average was \$750. That's an increase of \$95 in just one year.

Whistler, British Columbia, continues to be the location with the most expensive homestay program. Fees there are \$1,200 per month, with the local school board planning to raise it to \$1,500 due to strong demand and a limited supply of host families.

Across Canada, a monthly fee of \$900 was the most common, followed closely by \$800. See chart below.



Compensation Varies Across Canada

The survey demonstrated that fees are widely available across the country. If the fee is intended to reimburse families for the cost of food and household expenses related to having a student, one would expect that it would be roughly the same everywhere.

Fees are lowest in the Atlantic provinces and smaller cities in Canada. In rural areas in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the compensation is \$600 to \$700. This may reflect the fact that there is often only one educational institution, the local school board, in many of these towns. Without any competition to push up fees, the school board can keep fees low.

Toronto and Vancouver are the two most popular destinations for international students. Both cities have a wide range of institutions with homestay programs, including school districts, colleges, universities, private language schools, private high schools and other programs. In the summer, some programs must recruit hundreds of additional host families to meet the seasonal demand. The large number of educational institutions means that competition for hosts is fierce.

Therefore, it's not surprising that programs in Vancouver and Toronto provide higher compensation, ranging from \$800 and up.

Host Recruitment and Fees

Hosting is not supposed to be about money. It is meant to provide families with exposure to different cultures and allow them to share Canadian experiences with their students. Hosts should not expect to get rich from homestay fees, but they do want to ensure that their expenses are covered.

However, programs that operate in cities where there are huge number of students, especially at peak times, often have to accept families that see compensation as a primary reason for hosting. There are simply too many students and not enough potential host families.

In the survey, we asked whether low compensation makes it difficult to recruit new hosts. A whopping 81 percent of respondents said it does. The breakdown was: 33 percent strongly agree, 48 percent somewhat agree, 10 percent neutral and 8 percent somewhat disagree.

Homestay coordinators said recruitment challenges depend on local competition. "If you are near districts that offer higher fees, or colleges and universities, compensation can make a difference," says Kelly Beaman at School District 63 in Saanich, British Columbia, near Victoria.

"Long gone are the days when a host family hosts for the experience," says Rosemary Mooney of Columbia College in BC. "Housing and food is expensive and families host to compensate their living expenses. I had a difficult time adjusting to this new reality although I feel if a host does a great job, and fulfills our expectations; keeping the student safe and well fed then they should be compensated well. I hosted for 18 years and students today are very different than 18 years ago. Most no longer want a lot of interaction with their host."

Host Retention and Fees

When asked to consider the statement that “low compensation makes it hard to retain hosts,” 81 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed somewhat. A further 10 percent were neutral. Just 8 percent disagreed.

Commented Rosemary Mooney at Columbia College in Vancouver: “Unfortunately, a host family’s loyalty lies to the amount they are being paid. I have lost many good families because our rates are too low. Vancouver is extremely expensive and hosts shop around for schools that pay the most.”

Compensation for Special Diets

Very few programs pay hosts extra for special diets. About 85 percent do not offer additional compensation for vegan, Halal or athlete diets. The remaining 15 percent provide hosts with less than \$5 per day.

Here are some of the comments that homestay coordinators made on this topic:

- We do not expect our hosts to provide special meals. However, if a student requests a certain food/diet such as Halal then they would pay the host family directly an amount determined prior to being placed.
- We do not pay extra for special diets but if the student application mentioned a special diet AND if the client is invoiced right from the start, the homestay will receive an additional \$200 a month.
- Our hosts specify if they are able to accommodate special diets.
- Yes, it’s a lump sum for the school year for athletes with special diets.
- Most programs who did pay hosts extra for special diet indicated that it was typically \$100 per month.

Damage deposits and cleaning fees

More than 85 percent of respondents said that they do not collect a damage deposit or charge a room cleaning fee. For those that did the amount and conditions varied widely:

- Hosts collect a \$300 damage deposit and it is returned to the student if there is no damage
- Students pay \$100 refundable damage deposit plus a non-refundable \$50 room preparation fee
- No damage deposit but sometimes students are asked to pay for damages
- Refundable \$675 damage deposit
- We created a “Move Out Form” for hosts and students to complete together. Hosts can charge a cleaning fee if the student doesn’t leave their space clean. This form also indicates if something was damaged and how much the student will be charged to fix or replace the damaged property. They both must sign off on it.

What does the future hold for fees?

Almost half of programs (46 percent) do not plan to raise their fees in the next 12 months, although a number of them stated that they had raised them recently. Of those who were raising fees, many (20 percent) said it would be a modest 1 or 2 percent.

However, some homestay programs are raising their fees substantially - \$100 per month or more.

Fees in the United States

We decided to separate the US survey respondents to avoid confusion with US/Canada exchange rates. There were only 6 US respondents and they came from just two states – Washington and California. The average homestay fee on the survey was US\$750. Of course, statistically this sample size is too small to reliably state what the average cost of homestay is in the United States.

Thank you for participating

Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey. It provides valuable information to colleagues across Canada and the United States. If you have any comments or questions, please email Doug Ronson at douglasronson@yahoo.ca.

A note on the survey

This report is based on 42 survey responses from homestay programs across Canada and 6 in the USA. In the Homestay Times May 2019 newsletter, an open invitation was sent to homestay coordinator subscribers to answer the survey. Therefore, the results do not represent all homestay programs in Canada, but do reflect a good sample.