

Student Handbook

Welcome to the Nova Scotia International Student Program . . .

Each year many students come to Nova Scotia to learn English and take credit courses. Your decision to leave your home country to participate in the Nova Scotia International Student Program (NSISP) was probably not an easy one, but definitely a great decision. The purpose of the student handbook is to give an overview of the program, the province, and the expectations for both students and the NSISP representatives. Program representatives are available to answer your questions about the handbook and the NSISP.

The Province of Nova Scotia . . .

Nova Scotia is one of ten provinces and three territories in Canada and is situated on the northeast coast of the North American continent. Its estimated population is 937,000.

Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Nova Scotia boasts more than 7,400 kilometres of coastline. It has an area of 55,487 kilometres, is 575 kilometres in length and average width is 130 kilometres. In less than a day you can drive from one end of the province to the other and never be more than 56 kilometres from the ocean.

The Nova Scotia International Student Program . . .

Initiated in 1997, the Nova Scotia International Student Program (NSISP) is a joint venture of the seven regional school boards and the Department of Education. The NSISP provides students from other countries with education programs and the opportunity to learn our language and culture and obtain high school credits.

The Nova Scotia International Student Program is committed to creating global citizens by promoting the growth of intercultural understanding and increased international educational opportunities for Nova Scotian students and students from around the world.

Nova Scotia Schools . . .

All schools in Nova Scotia follow the curriculum set by the provincial government. In Nova Scotia, schools have different grade levels. You may be in a school with grades primary through 12 or in a school with only high school aged students or a school with fewer than 300 students or more than 1,500. All schools in Nova Scotia are friendly places and international students easily make friends when they get involved in student activities.

All schools in Nova Scotia have a wide range of extra curricular activities. These activities usually take place after school and are a good way to meet friends. Students who are involved are happier in school, learn more English, and are more successful academically. This is why it is part of the contract you signed before coming to Nova Scotia. Activities schools offer include music, sports, arts, and clubs.

Things to do in Nova Scotia . . .

Nova Scotia has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. The seasons are winter, spring, summer and fall. In winter temperatures can fall as low as -20 degrees Celsius and in the summer they go as high as 30 degrees Celsius.

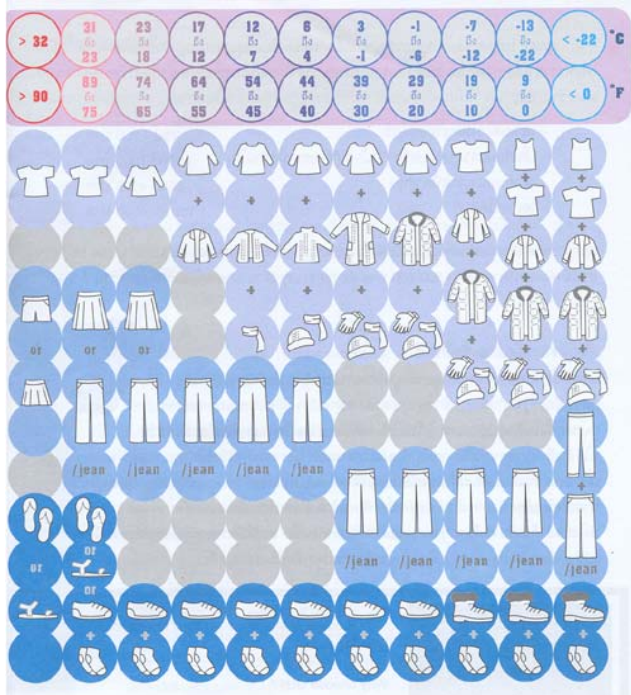


Image courtesy of Away Magazine, Issue 1, October-December 2005

During spring and summer months, students can participate in many outdoor activities. Hiking, canoeing, sailing, river rafting, swimming, and water skiing are some popular outdoor activities. These activities allow students to enjoy the scenic beauty of the province.

During the fall and winter months students can participate in many indoor and outdoor activities. For students who enjoy the outdoors, activities include soccer, skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, hiking, and tobogganing.

Year round students can participate in many indoor activities. Activities include hockey games, basketball, concerts, and theatre productions.

Nova Scotia families . . .

An important part of your participation in the NSISP is your home stay experience. The best way to learn English and Canadian culture is by being a member of a Canadian family. This is why students are placed with host families in the community instead of living on their own.

Families in Nova Scotia come in all shapes and sizes. Some host families have two parents with children, some have no children, and others have only one parent. All host families are carefully chosen and screened prior to their participation in the home stay program.

Many families enjoy participating in activities together. In summer they travel, hike, swim, and have social times together. In winter many families ski, skate, watch movies, or attend various concerts and sports events. Be prepared to be part of a Nova Scotia family. Your host family is participating in the program because they want to meet someone from another country. They will welcome you into their home as though you were their own child. Your family will be anxious to show you the sights and introduce you to their family and friends.

Your host family will treat you as a regular family member. You will have the same responsibilities as every other member of the family. This will include contributing to the completion of household chores and respecting the rules of your host family.

Supervision within the host family ...

Prior to undertaking this international program it is imperative that students and their parents understand that the students will be subject to the rules and procedures of their host family. In accordance with the above, student's liberties may vary from that which they are ordinarily accustomed in their own home. This is part of the experience. All reasonable rules must be followed. If there is a discrepancy students are encouraged to contact their home-stay coordinator with questions or concerns about any host family policy. Further, all students have a right to essential privacy in their home-stay; however the host family at their discretion reserves the right to search any room or item found within their home.

Equity in Nova Scotia . . .

Canada is a multi-cultured country. This diversity is found in our schools, homes, and communities. All people, despite their ethnicity, religion, economic background, or gender deserve respect. The NSISP recognizes that different countries have different beliefs, but all international students are to treat all people with respect.

Items to bring to Nova Scotia . . .

Moving far away from home can pose the problem of what to pack. Many students want to bring items that remind them of their home. It is best if you keep personal items to a minimum. Since many airlines have restrictions on how much luggage a person can take on the plane, be sure to check with the airline before packing. The NSISP recommends students have:

warm clothes for winter and fall seasons (students may wish to purchase these clothes once they arrive)

- lighter clothes for spring and summer seasons
- pictures and mementos from home
- a camera
- copies of necessary medical information (for example, prescriptions)
- spare glasses or contact lenses (if applicable)
- cultural items for presentations on your home country

Arriving in Nova Scotia . . .

A representative from the NSISP and/or members of your host family will be at the airport when you arrive. Students arriving at the airport may find it a bit confusing. Lots of people will be waiting for their students at the airport. An NSISP representative will have a sign with your name printed on it and your host family may also be there waiting for your arrival.

After gathering your luggage, it is time to leave the airport and head toward your new home. Upon arrival, other family members may be there to welcome you into their home. Host families will more than likely show you around the house including your bedroom. Host families realize you may be tired after the long trip from your country to Nova Scotia. Your host family should give you time to unpack your luggage and have a rest.

In the first few hours and days, your host family will probably ask you questions about yourself. The questions are usually about your trip, the weather in your home country, and why you decided to come to Nova Scotia to study. These questions are an expression of genuine interest. Your host family is excited to have a new member join their family. However, even with the questions, the first few hours and days may seem a little awkward. This will soon pass however and everyone will feel more comfortable as time passes on.

Learn about your host family and their community . . .

Getting active is the best way to experience new places and new things. Every place in the world is different. The lifestyles some people find normal, other people will find strange. Remember, choosing to come to Nova Scotia is an opportunity to experience something different, so relax and enjoy.

Nova Scotia schools offer many extra curricular activities including sports, arts, and music. The NSISP encourages students to involve themselves in activities. International students have played on local sports teams, were involved in local music groups, and have participated in their high school theatre production, to name a few. It is important that international students meet new people and get involved in activities. It helps to make their time in Nova Scotia more memorable.

Again, this is why taking part in extra-curricular activities is part of the contract you signed when agreeing to participate in the NSISP.

Use of telephone and computer . . .

Host families allow international students the use of their telephone and computer. Clarifying the use and rules of the telephone and computer is the responsibility of the host family.

Most host families do not mind their student making long distance phone calls. However, if students charge long distance calls to their host family, they are responsible for paying the bill upon its arrival.

The NSISP encourages students to invest in prepaid telephone calling cards. Many local stores sell the prepaid international and national telephone cards. The benefit for the student is they don't owe their host family money on phone bills because they have prepaid calls.

Some students bring their own laptops and others use family computers. It is important students understand that host families have the right and responsibility to monitor and restrict all computer use. Families who enforce time limits for their own children can also enforce time limits for their international students.

Spending money . . .

The NSISP recommends students open a local bank account. A local account allows students to have quick access to their money.

Host parents are not responsible for their student's money matters. They are not to hold the students' money in their bank account, and are not to lend money to their student. Keep bank accounts well organized and if a money problem arises, students should contact their parents in their home country.

Student transportation . . .

Students can travel to and from school by school bus. There is no charge for the school bus. If students live in an area where public transportation is provided and they choose to use this method for travel to and from school, it is at the cost of the student.

Host families are encouraged to, whenever possible, provide transportation to the school or other local sites to facilitate their participation in extra-curricular activities.

Student travel while in Nova Scotia . . .

Many international students like to travel to other places in Canada or the United States while they are living in Nova Scotia. The NSISP encourages students to travel and see as much of the country as possible.

Students traveling within Nova Scotia and with their host family do not need permission from the NSISP. This also applies if the student is traveling with a student group or other family approved by their host family.

Students traveling outside the Maritime provinces and/or traveling without adult accompaniment require approval from the NSISP and written permission from their family. The NSISP requires a letter, in English, from the student's parents giving permission for their child to travel without an adult.

Medical insurance for students . . .

Students receive medical coverage through Ingle Insurance. Students pay for their medical coverage through their program fees. They will receive a card showing they have coverage through Ingle Insurance. If they have any procedure done at the hospital, Ingle Insurance – in some cases - receives a direct bill from the hospital. However sometimes a student will be required to pay for a service upfront but will be reimbursed after Ingle Insurance receives their receipt and claim form.

Ingle Insurance does not cover regular trips to the dentist. However, the insurance will cover the cost of the dentist if the visit is the result of an accident.

Culture shock and international students . . .

Culture shock happens to all international students in varying degrees. At orientation NSISP representatives discuss culture shock and methods of dealing with the problem. Four phases to be aware of:

- 1. The Honeymoon**—students are excited about their new experiences and surroundings. Students will begin to associate Canada with their home country. They will also look for similarities between the two, and this helps them feel more comfortable.
- 2. Shock**—students start to feel a little disorientated. They will start to notice the differences between Canadian living and home. At this point the student may feel the most homesick. Most students do not display strong symptoms however some may get sleepier or need more time alone away from the host family. Keep the lines of communication open during this time as the student may want to talk about their feelings.
- 3. Recovery**—students feel more comfortable, relaxed and secure within their surroundings.
- 4. Home free**—students are now members of the family. Students will begin to enjoy the differences of their new life. They will also display more confidence and feel at home with their host family.

Family visits from home . . .

The NSISP encourages students' parents to visit them in Nova Scotia. It's a wonderful way for them to see their child's new home, meet their host parents, and their Canadian friends.

Sometimes, a visit from family creates some stress on both the student and their parents. The NSISP strongly recommends families wait a few months for their child to settle in before they visit. Some parents feel their child is overly close to their host family, and some children feel lonely after their family has left. However, visits are usually a very positive experience for everyone involved.

The NSISP recommends families do not stay with their student's host families or visit during exam time. They must make their own travel arrangements. Host families are not responsible for accommodations or meals for their student's families visiting Nova Scotia. Families should check with the NSISP before committing to any travel arrangements.

Extending your stay . . .

All student Visas have an expiry date. If a student wants to extend their Visa, an NSISP representative has the necessary application package from the Canadian Immigration Department. Students may need a full physical examination for the approval of their extension. The examination may cost approximately \$200 Cdn. Students should send their application for extension at least six weeks before the expiry date of the Visa.

Rules of the NSISP . . .

The signed NSISP contract contains the rules of the program. Rules include, but are not limited to:

- While in Canada, I am always under the jurisdiction of the national, provincial, and local laws. I will obey all laws. If I break the law (shoplifting, stealing, working, etc.) it will result in my termination from the program.
- I will not consume alcohol or use illegal drugs while enrolled in the Nova Scotia International Student Program (NSISP). Use of these products will result in my termination from the program.
- I will obey the rules of my home stay. This includes any curfews, chores and other rules they have established.
- I will obey the rules of the school I attend. These rules include, but are not limited to, attendance and actively participating in classroom work. I agree to take part in extra-curricular activities.
- I will make every effort to speak English at all times.
- I will not drive motorized vehicles except within the context of a formal driver's training program. Driver's training may be taken only with the written permission of my parents and I will allow the NSISP to hold my driver's license until I return to my home country.
- **Travel within Nova Scotia**—I understand that with the permission of my host family, I can travel throughout the province with them, a student group or other family.
- **Travel outside of Nova Scotia**—I understand I require approval from the NSISP to travel outside the province with a group or my host family. All travel of this kind must be chaperoned by a responsible adult and requires written approval, in English, from my family. I will also advise the NSISP at least two weeks prior to my departure of my plans to travel.
- I will make every effort to adjust to, and become a member of, the host family and community.
- I understand that my program fees cover my monthly charges for room, board, medical and tuition. Some schools charge all of their students an additional fee for such items as lockers, school agendas, etc. It is my responsibility to pay these fees which should cost between \$30–\$50.

- I understand visits by my family or friends from my home country are permitted no sooner than six weeks after my arrival in Nova Scotia. If my family or friends visit, they are responsible to make arrangements for their lodging outside the home of my host family.
- I understand as a student in the NSISP any report about my participation (marks, behaviour etc.) can be sent to my parents and/or agent (if applicable).

Breaking the NSISP rules . . .

The NSISP hopes that no student breaks the rules while they are participating in the program. However, if a rule is broken, the NSISP has various ways of dealing with the problem.

If you break a rule, your first step is to see the Director of the NSISP for a disciplinary meeting. At this meeting, you and the Director will discuss the issues relating to your behaviour. Following the discussion the Director makes a ruling on your punishment. You will get only a verbal reprimand or, depending on severity of what you've done, you may sign a behaviour contract. By signing the contract, you are agreeing not to break the rules of the NSISP again. If you do, the NSISP will send you home.

This procedure is the preferred way of dealing with students who break the rules. However, if the NSISP believes the misbehaviour is severe, the student gets sent directly home.

The NSISP has a three-stage process for managing behavioral discipline issues:

- **Stage One** (Minor infraction) – verbal warning and written report to agent in home country to be forwarded to parents in home country.
- **Stage Two** (Major infraction or 2nd minor infraction) – Written Behaviour Contract and meeting with Program Director and school principal. Behavior Contract sample enclosed.
- **Stage Three** (2nd major infraction or illegal activity) – Student returned to home country.

Problems with school or home stay . . .

If students have problems with their school or host family, they should talk about it with their Homestay Coordinator. The Coordinator takes any major problems to the NSISP Director for help in finding a resolution.

Guidelines for a successful international student experience . . .

- Remember your host family may be nervous upon your arrival. Accept your host family as part of your experience in Nova Scotia. Show compassion, sensitivity, and try to include them in your activities.
- Make sure passport, documents, and airplane tickets are in a safe place so they can be easily accessed at the program end.
- Talk to your host family regularly. Include them in your school projects, activities, or hobbies.
- Spend recreational time with your family. On occasion the NSISP will take students to places of local interest or to sightseeing attractions.
- Make friends at school and in the neighbourhood. School and community activities are an important part of your experience in Nova Scotia.
- Maintain communication with the home stay coordinator. Try to resolve problems through regular communication and understanding.
- Successful students also give their families time, attention and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Final Message . . .

We are pleased you have chosen the Nova Scotia International Student Program and we hope you will have a successful year. We want you take every opportunity to improve your English, experience the culture and hospitality of Nova Scotia, and make memories to last a lifetime.