

VICTORIA INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION 2026-2027

Student Handbook



WELCOME TO VICTORIA INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (VIE)

We have designed this handbook to help prepare you for your time in the VIE program. We hope you find this information helpful and informative as you enter the world of cultural exchange. During this immersive experience, know that you are never alone. There is a whole team of caring adults supporting you alongside your family/host family.



Victoria International Education wishes to recognize and acknowledge the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories, we live, we learn and we do our work.

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1. Quick Contacts

9-1-1 	Contact for emergency: medical, police or fire support.	9-1-1
VIE Emergency Line 	Contact for urgent after-hours Program support. This includes if you need help when travelling to Canada.	778-676-3781
VIE Main Office 	Contact for administrative questions (i.e. information about Program excursions, study permits, payments, travel, etc.)	isp_student@sd61.bc.ca 250-592-6871

Homestay Team Contact Information

	School	Homestay Coordinator	Email Contact
	Lambrick Secondary School Gordon Head Middle School	Christina Yee	cyee@sd61.bc.ca
	Mt. Douglas Secondary School Arbutus Middle School	Students Last Name A-R: Subreena Dronzek Students Last Name S-Z: Christina Yee	sdronzek@sd61.bc.ca cyee@sd61.bc.ca
	Oak Bay High School Monterey/Lansdowne Middle	Students Last Name A-R Tricia Sturgeon Students Last Name S-Z Lynne Yarmoshuk	tasturgeon@sd61.bc.ca lyarmoshuk@sd61.bc.ca
	Reynolds Secondary School Cedar Hill Middle School	Nadia Cantera	ncantera@sd61.bc.ca
	Spectrum Community School Glanford & Colquitz Middle Schools	Jenny Stark	jestark@sd61.bc.ca
	Victoria High School Central Middle School	Lynne Yarmoshuk	lyarmoshuk@sd61.bc.ca
	Esquimalt High School Shoreline Middle School	Tiffany Gilbert	tgilbert@sd61.bc.ca

2. What to Bring to Canada

Important Documents

- ✓ Passport and a photo of the passport
- ✓ Visa or Entry Permit
- ✓ Letter of Acceptance
- ✓ Study Permit Acceptance Letter (if applicable) *
- ✓ Custodian Letter
- ✓ Homestay or Accommodation Information
- ✓ Victoria International Education Emergency Line number: 778-676-3781

Students should be able to lift luggage on their own.

** If you have a study permit acceptance letter, your study permit will be issued at the first airport you arrive at in Canada. Please do not leave the arrival area of the airport without it.*



Medication

If you require special medications, bring them with you, along with a copy of the doctor's prescription. Please be sure to:

- a) Bring enough medication to last you during your stay in Canada, OR
- b) Make plans on how you will obtain your medication in Canada

Please ensure that all important medical information has been shared with the program.

Clothing

Students are not required to wear uniforms. Weather in Victoria is generally mild, but it is usually cool with rain in the winter months. It is a good idea to bring a mix of casual clothes for school and suitable clothing to participate in physical education activities; like running shoes, shorts or sweatpants.

Money

While you are able to pay with credit cards almost everywhere, it's a good idea to always carry a little cash with you for the trip. Please do not carry around large sums of cash.

Electronics

Canada's electrical supply and electrical outlets are 120 Volts and 60 Hertz (sockets, wall plugs.) Plug converters can be purchased at the airport or at various local stores.

Cell phones may not be used in many classrooms. If you will need translation support in school, please bring an electronic language translator separate from your cell phone. A laptop will be useful to complete schoolwork at home.



3. Flight and Travel Information

Please book flights all the way through to **Victoria International Airport (YYJ)** and forward the flight itinerary to isp_arrivals@sd61.bc.ca. Host Families will pick students up from the Victoria International Airport (YYJ.)

Discuss your flight details with your host family before you leave your home country and keep them updated as you travel from airport to airport, if possible. Please let your host families know if there are any changes/delays/cancellations to your flight(s).

There is free wifi in major Canadian airports.



Be sure to bring the VIE EMERGENCY Phone number with you: 778-676-3781

Arrival with Natural Parents

If natural parents are accompanying students to Canada, we ask that host families pick students up from the airport, ferry terminal or the hotel where their parents are staying. All visits to host family homes should be coordinated through the Homestay Department. Visits may be scheduled a few days after the student has settled into their new living environment. We find this gives students the best chance to settle in and build those initial homestay relationships.

4. Phone SIM Cards

SIM cards are readily available around town. One option for SIM cards can be found online at www.gophonebox.com.



5. Orientation

During the orientation you will have the opportunity to meet other International Students as well as the International Staff Members that will be supporting you. You will learn useful information for your everyday life in Canada as well as detailed information on school classes and extracurricular activities. You will also get a tour of your new school.

6. Scent-Free Schools & Homestays

The Greater Victoria School District has a “scent sensitive” policy. Please do not wear perfume, cologne or other fragrances at school or in your homestay. Fragrances can cause serious allergic reaction.



7. Important Rules for VIE Students

VIE students must abide by the laws of Canada, the rules of VIE and their school. This includes:

- **Alcohol & Drugs:** all VIE students are strictly prohibited from drinking alcohol or consuming drugs during their stay. This rule is in place to keep you safe. Students unable to follow this rule put themselves and their time in the program at risk.
- **Driving:** VIE students are not permitted to drive a motorized vehicle during their stay
- **School:** Students are required to attend school on a regular basis. All absences must be excused by the adult you live with.
- **Academic Integrity:** cheating and plagiarism are strictly prohibited and are taken very seriously at school.

8. Travel

Students who wish to travel outside of Victoria must apply to the Program Office for permission. Application forms can be found online at the following link:

<https://www.studyinvictoria.com/current-students/travel-forms>

Completed travel forms should be emailed to isp_student@sd61.bc.ca

Please note the following travel guidelines:

- Travel forms must be submitted 5 days in advance for day trips and 7 days in advance for overnight trips
- All overnight travel must have an adult supervisor, aged 25 years or older
- All efforts should be made to avoid travel during school days. If required, students must talk to their teachers as well as receive VIE approval
- If travelling by ferry, students should be on the 7pm ferry home at the latest



9. Trips & Excursions

The Victoria International Education Program organizes a collection of exciting trips to some of the most amazing places in Western Canada. Registration opens at the beginning of September and the beginning of February. Spaces fill up very quickly.

Registration will be available online at:

<https://www.studyinvictoria.com/current-students/trips-excursions>



10. Medical Insurance

VIE arranges medical insurance coverage for each student. The type of medical insurance students have, will depend on the length their program. Students are welcome to purchase additional medical insurance, if interested.

Students Studying for Less Than 6 Months

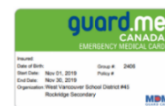
guard.me Medical Insurance Temporary Coverage



- Students enrolled for less than 6 months will be covered by guard.me medical insurance
- They will need to pay up front for services (doctor, bloodwork, etc.)
- In order to be reimbursed for medical payment through Guard.Me, students should:
 - Within 30 days of the first medical expense, log on to www.guard.me
 - Scroll down and click on "Submit A Claim."
 - Complete the steps for reimbursement (*if students will be departing the country within a month of receiving medical services, please contact the main office for help with reimbursement.*)
- Please be aware that if you have a pre-existing condition (any illness, injury or medical condition, for which you've had advice,) that was not stable in the 3 months prior to the start date of your insurance here in Canada, any treatment sought in Canada for this condition will likely not be covered by Guard.Me.
- For information on how to access and use the GuardMe App, please visit the following link: https://news.guard.me/GuardMe_Mobile_App.html

Students Studying for More Than 6 Months

Medical Service Plan (MSP) & GuardMe



- Students enrolled for more than 6 months, will be covered by Guard.me until their MSP coverage starts in the third month after arrival
- Once students have MSP coverage, they can access medical services free of charge
- Long term students on MSP will continue to have extended health benefits through Guard.me

For any questions about medical care, please contact your Homestay Coordinator

or Jo-Anne in the main office: jbettauer@sd61.bc.ca

10. Accessing Health Care in Victoria

***In case of emergency phone 9-1-1**

In Victoria, hospitals are for **emergencies only**. They can be very busy and if you visit the hospital for a non-urgent issue, the wait time will be extremely long. If you have non-emergency health concerns, there are other options:

HealthLink BC (Nurse's Line) 8-1-1

Registered nurses are available 24/7 to provide free health information and advice. You can also connect with a dietitian through this same line by asking to speak to a registered dietitian.

Urgent Care Centres "In Person" Appointments

For in person doctor's visits, Urgent Care Centres offer medical appointments 7 days a week. Appointments are made by phoning in the morning. Central phone number connects with multiple centres: **1-833-688-8722**

Downtown Victoria Urgent & Primary Care

1107 Pandora Ave

Open 7 days a week

Phone lines open at 8:30am

Gorge Urgent & Primary Care Centre

7 days a week

Phone lines open at 8:00am

Students with BC Medical Cards will be able to see a doctor at no cost. Students with GuardMe insurance will need to pay upfront, then can go online to submit a claim to be reimbursed at guard.me.

Tia Health - online (for students **with MSP coverage)**

Tiahealth.com



It is sometimes possible to make same day or next day appointments online through Tia Health.

GuardMe Online Doctor (for students **without MSP coverage)**

1. Register your GuardMe account: <https://myaccount.guard.me/login.php>
2. Register for MobileDoctor: <https://guard.me/en/mobile-doctor.html>
3. Download and login to the Maple App
4. You will need to provide the pharmacy that you would like medication sent to



For more information, please see the mobileDoctor information page:

<https://guard.me/en/mobile-doctor.html>

11. Transportation in Victoria

Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from school and activities. Most students use the bus system to travel from place to place.

UMO Card (Bus Pass)

Payment for bus transportation in Victoria is by cash, credit or **by purchasing an UMO card at one of the locations listed in the vendor list:**
<https://www.bctransit.com/victoria/fares/where-to-buy/>.



Most students purchase a 30-day pass to be loaded on the card (\$45.00.) They should ask for a youth rate. For more information on purchasing and using a reloadable UMO card:
<https://www.bctransit.com/umo/>

Students typically use one of the following two apps for bus route information:

Google Maps



BC Transit App



If you ever feel uncomfortable on the bus or don't know where to get on/off, please talk to the bus driver. They will be happy to help.

12. Curfew

Curfew, or the time you need to be home in the evening, is in place to keep you safe and healthy. Curfew remains the same through Summer, Spring/Winter Break and Pro-D Days.

Students are expected to have dinner with their host families a minimum of four nights per week. If they would like to go out after dinner, they must ask their host family and follow the curfews below:

Grade	Weekday Curfew	Weekend Curfew
Grades 6-8	8:30pm	9:30pm
Grades 9	9:30pm	10:00pm
Grades 10-12	9:30pm	11:00pm

All electronic equipment, including computers and cell phones should be turned off by 11:00pm.

13. Homestay Information and Expectations

Victoria International Education Host Families are here to welcome you, as well as provide an environment to keep you safe and healthy during your time in homestay. Canada is a diverse and multicultural country. This diversity is reflected in each unique home. As you join a family that is different from your own, there will be new things to get used to. The process of building a homestay relationship takes time and communication. We hope that the following tips will help you.

Expect things to be different. Prepare for it to be different.

13.1 Communication

Trying to be part of the family is an important responsibility you have while you are here. Your host family will appreciate it when you:

- Engage in conversations. This includes simple greetings (i.e. when you come home, let your host family know you are home, “hello, I am home.”)
- **Participate in family activities and meals whenever possible – dinner is a great time to connect with your host family**
- Be honest – host families are usually very offended if someone does not tell the truth
- You will notice that people say, “please,” and, “thank you,” a lot. For example, even though host parents are expected to make dinner for you, it is appreciated when you thank the cook for the meal
- Notify your host ahead of time if you won’t be home for dinner (i.e. is it okay if I go out for dinner tonight with....?)
- Make sure your host family always knows where you are

13.2 Home

- Many homestays will ask you to take your shoes off at the front door
- Lock the front door when you leave or return home
- For security reasons, do not give house keys/codes to anyone outside the household
- Please avoid burning candles in the home, as they are a fire risk
- If you cause any damage, please let your host family know immediately. You do have insurance coverage to help in these situations. Your homestay coordinator can help.



13.3 Food

- Host families provide 3 meals per day, plus healthy snacks
- Mealtimes, food and expectations will vary from home to home. You may notice the following:
 - **Breakfast:** Students typically prepare their own breakfast. This is often a cold and light meal (i.e. cereal, toast, etc.)
 - **Lunch:** Your host family may pack your lunch or ask you to prepare your lunch. Some common lunch foods include sandwiches, leftovers, granola bars, fruit, etc.
 - **Dinner:** Dinner is the largest meal of the day and is usually served between 5:00-7:00pm. This should be a hot meal. Some common dinner foods include, pastas, rice dishes, pizza, noodles, meat, soups, burgers, etc.
- Be open to trying new foods
- Keep food out of your room (leftover food in rooms can create an environment that invites rodents and insects)
- Cooking is not allowed unless your host family is present



13.4 Heating & Lights

- Families in British Columbia keep their homes quite cool and wear layers of clothing to stay warm. If you are feeling too cold, please talk to your host family
- Some host families will allow students to turn the heat on in their rooms, but they will ask you to turn the heat down when you are not in the room
- If the heat is on, please keep the windows closed, as the heat will escape
- Please turn off the lights and heat when you are not in your room
- Many homes use “baseboard heating.” Please be sure to keep clothing, blankets, towels, etc. away from the heaters to avoid a fire risk.



13.5 Chores

Each homestay is different so different homes will have different expectations. Most homestays will ask students to:

- Make the bed and tidy the bedroom
- Clean up after yourself in the kitchen and public areas
- Dispose of garbage correctly (many homes will separate organic waste, recycling and garbage)
- Some host families will expect students to:
 - Clean the student bathroom
 - Do their own laundry (host families will often ask that you be sure you have a full load of clothes before doing your laundry to conserve water and energy)

13.6 Bathroom

Bathroom spaces and etiquette differ around the world, you can expect that:

- Used toilet paper should go into the toilet
- Please do not flush anything except for toilet paper in the toilet
- The shower curtain should be placed inside the bathtub
- Turn on the bathroom fan when showering
- Many families will ask that you limit your shower time to between 10 and 15 minutes. Often Canadian hot water tanks are not very big and hot water can run out easily.
- Wipe the counter after using the sink and clean up any water that gets on the floor
- Some host families will ask you not to shower late at night when the house is quiet



13.7 Homestay Privacy

- Please do not speak to others about your Homestay Family's personal details. Host families are members of the community and have a right to their personal privacy. If you are having problems in your homestay, please talk to your homestay coordinator.
- Please only film members of your host family when you have their permission.

13.8 Working Through Homestay Challenges

Adjusting to life in a “new” family may take a while. You can expect that both you and your host family will need some time to get used to each other and to establish a relationship. If you are worried that your host family is not a good match for you, please:

1. Don't panic – things will be different and sometimes it takes a little time to settle in. Often, after a little time, students are able to notice that although things are different from what they are used to, they begin to appreciate the good things about their homestay.
2. Talk to your host family – if you are finding something challenging, talk to your host family. Sometimes the host family might not be aware there is an issue. If they don't know, they can't make changes to help you feel better.
3. Contact your homestay coordinator – Your homestay coordinator will talk to you about the steps you have taken to address the issue with your host family or can help you with strategies to talk to your host family. Your homestay coordinator may ask you if they can reach out to your host family to help resolve the issue or may offer to arrange a meeting with you and your host family to work through possible solutions.
4. Potential Change of Host Family – If all efforts to reconcile student/homestay concerns fail, your homestay coordinator may decide a move is required.

Casual requests to change host families without any efforts to improve the situation will not be considered. Students will not be moved immediately and without discussion with the host family, unless there is an emergency, or the student is not safe.

Please be sure to reach out to your homestay coordinator if you have any questions or concerns.

14. Culture Shock

Culture Shock can occur when students are suddenly immersed in a different culture. Students may experience a range of emotions with symptoms including:

- Boredom or withdrawal (spending a lot of time alone)
- Sleeping a lot
- Irritation (being annoyed by things)
- Physical aches and pains

Culture shock is normal and these feelings should go away on their own. Many students have found the following strategies help them move through difficult times:

- Keep going to school (it may feel comfortable to stay home when you are feeling down, but will make things more difficult over time)
- Find somewhere or something that makes you feel comfortable (i.e. sit by the beach, visit a library, etc.)
- Exercise – there are lots of nice places to walk in Victoria or gyms and recreation centers are easily accessible for working out or swimming
- Connect with other students
- Be proud of yourself and the difficult things you have already accomplished

If the unhappy feelings do not go away, please talk to your host family, supportive person at school or your homestay coordinator. There is counselling available, if needed.

15. A Few Last Things

As you prepare to leave your home country, please remember the following:

- Students come to Canada with all different levels of English. Your English will improve the more you talk. It's okay to make mistakes.
- Communicate with your host family before you leave and keep them updated if you have any changes to your travel plans.
- If you have not already, please send your flight information to isp_arrivals@sd61.bc.ca
- **Please carry the emergency phone number with you when you travel in case you need help from our program: +1 778-676-3781**
- We are looking forward to having you here in Canada!



Wishing you safe and happy travels!



VICTORIA

