

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 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. All regions of the province participate in the program through their respective school boards.

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 100 students or more than 1,500. All schools in Nova Scotia are friendly and international students have no problems making friends.

Most 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. Activities most 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.

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 probably 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.

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)

Arriving in Nova Scotia . . .

A representative from the NSISP and members of the host family will be at the airport when your flight arrives. 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 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.

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.

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 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. The ISP Director in the student's board can grant approval of the student's travel plans.

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 has happened to some international students during their stay. 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. It is ideal if families wait a few months for their child to settle in before they come 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 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:

- Attend all classes and complete all homework assignments. Teachers and parents are available for help if needed.
- I. Do not drive a car. 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.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages. Also, students cannot use illegal drugs or have them in their possession.
- International students are not eligible to work in Canada. However, if their host family has other children, the international student can babysit for money.
- Follow the rules of the home stay. Treat the host family with respect.
- Obey the laws of Canada. Strictly prohibited is the use and possession of alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Obey school rules. School rules include being absent from class, being late for class and displaying improper conduct.
- Obey rules of travel. Traveling out of the province requires a written letter, in English, from parents permitting their child to travel.

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.

Problems with school or home stay . . .

If students have problems with their school or host family, they should talk about it with their home stay 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.
- 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 proactive communication and understanding.
- Successful students also give their families time, attention and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.