

## **AFS INTERNATIONAL and AFS RUSSIA rules**

**The Policy of “Travel in Russia” and “Visits by natural family and friends”**

**Agreement of Understanding**





## Dear AFS students!

AFS Russia is responsible for hosting many participants yearly. To ensure the safety and protection of the participant, the host-family, AFS and the natural family AFS sets up the rules which are mandatory for every AFS participant. The intention is not being unfair or inflexible, but to keep your AFS experience safe and happy, **for everyone included**.

All countries-participants in AFS program have **standard rules**, which you are to follow.

Thus, **it is strictly forbidden to:**

### 1) Take drugs (unless medically prescribed)

Violation of this rule is a cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to the home country. It is very important that you remember this rule: if you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used - get away immediately. The best thing you can do is to stay away from those situations.

**Just keep in mind: Neither AFS RUS nor the national government of the students' home country has the power to protect the student from punishment with respect to drugs, thefts and other legal offenses.**

Abuse of alcoholic beverages is also a cause for dismissal from the program.

### 2) Drive a car or any other motorized vehicle

AFS students are not permitted to drive any kind of motorized vehicle (car, motorcycle, moped).

### 3) Hitchhike

If you happened to be away from home and don't know how to get back, you should contact your host family or an AFS volunteer, and they will tell you what to do to get home or a place where you should go. Remember - hitchhiking is strictly forbidden! Do not get into any motor vehicle with a stranger, a younger driver or with someone without a license or with someone who has consumed any alcohol or made use of drugs. It is considered as placing your life in danger.

**According to the international agreement, you are to obey these rules. In case of violation you will be sent home within 24 hours. The obedience of these rules should be considered only as a guarantee of a safety of your stay.**

### 4) Skip school

All AFS students must start and complete the school year/semester/trimester according to the academic and disciplinary system of the respective high school.

All AFS students must attend classes full time even if he/she has completed secondary studies in home country.

AFS students can not abandon the high school before the end of the school year.

In case if any student does not attend classes properly, AFS Russia can decide to send the student home.

### 5) Travel without AFS permission

AFS Russia as all other AFS countries-participants has its **Policy of "Visits by natural parents and friends" and "Travel in Russia"**.



## Visits by family members, other relatives and friends

Basing on many years of experience **AFS DOES NOT encourage** visits of natural parents, relatives or friends to participants while on the program. It can have a negative effect on a participant's adjustment and experience. Such visits distract participants from their new life, impose extra responsibilities on the host family and the local support structure, and may create tension between a student and a host family or just be a bad example to follow for other students.

If natural family members or friends still wish to visit a student in Russia they must fulfill the following requirements:

1. Get official permission from AFS Russia through the AFS office at least **one month before the visit**. The visit has to be authorized prior any travel bookings!
2. The visit **cannot** be in the **first 6 months of the participant's stay**.
3. The time of the visit must be convenient for the host family and host community.
4. AFS compulsory events and school attendance must not be interrupted.
5. The visit of the natural parents/ relatives/ friends to the hosting community must not exceed 7 days.
6. Staying at the home of the host family is permitted if only the host family allows it.
7. The AFS participant is not permitted to stay overnight with the visiting natural family members or friends away from the host family.
8. The AFS participant is not permitted to go on an overnight trip with the visiting natural family (including relatives) or friends.



## Travel in Russia

You are coming to the biggest country in the world and we are sure that one of the reasons to choose Russia for your AFS program was the desire to see it as much as possible. AFS RUS volunteers and staff definitely understand such wish but at the same time we **want to remind you of some rules and standards**.

1. AFS is not a travel agency but an educational organization.
2. You can travel either with adult members of your host family, with your school or with AFS.
3. All trips can take place **only during week-ends, school vacations or national holidays**. It means AFS compulsory events and school attendance must not be interrupted.
4. For safety reasons, **independent trips of AFSers in Russia are strictly forbidden**. Exceptions are made only under serious circumstances and officially regulated by AFS Russia and your sending country in advance (see the explanation below).
5. You may not arrange travel **by requesting hospitality** from AFS close contact, other AFS chapters or a fellow exchange student.



## Permitted travels

### A trip with your host family members

Your host family may invite you to go somewhere for the weekend or holidays. Before accepting this invitation, please, ask your host family if you should pay for your trip. **Mostly you won't**, but sometimes you have to pay for something (train ticket, for example). You or your host family **must inform AFS representatives** in your chapter about the trip.

For these travels the following information is sufficient at least **two weeks before departure**:

- Who of your family members you travel with. **Important!** Your accompanying host family members **must be at least 21 years old or older**.
- The travel dates.
- Name, address of the place of accommodation.

Travelling in Russia is rather expensive. All family trips **are usually local or within Russia**. Trips abroad are very rare and require additional documents signed by natural parents or sometimes impossible because of visa regulations.

- Can a participant travel with someone who is not a host family member?
- Yes, but ...
  1. This must be **adult people** who are **personally known by AFS** (e.g. AFS-volunteers, other host families etc.)
  2. This person must contact AFS RUS and **officially confirm** that he/she is ready to take responsibility of the participant during the trip.
  3. The participant will need a **Travel Waiver** (see the explanation below).

#### Conditions for travel permission

1. AFS compulsory events and school attendance must not be interrupted.
2. The participant's host family and host school must consent.
3. The purpose and timing of the travel, credibility and reliability of the accompanying person(s), safety, source of travel funds, and emergency contact telephone number(s) must all be confirmed in advance.

#### How to obtain permission

1. Present your travel plan form to your chapter at least **two weeks before** you plan to depart for assessment and approval.
2. Get your natural parents to sign a TW form through the AFS Russia office before the trip.

### What is a **Travel Waiver**?

The **Travel Waiver (TW)** - is an official document signed the participant's natural parents or guardians in which they agree that during the trip, the AFS participant is not the responsibility of AFS and that they will take full responsibility. However, the participant is still bound by the terms and conditions of the AFS Participation Agreement, and will remain under AFS Medical coverage during the trip. But according to AFS Participation Agreement, in case of violating the host country travel policies it may cause an early return to the home country.

### A trip with your school

During the school year your school might organize trips/excursions to some sights of Russia. They are mostly to the places which are not far from the town where you live. If you decide to participate in a school trip you must:

- **Inform AFS representative** in your chapter about your trip at least **two weeks before departure**: The travel dates, the teacher's name, the name, address of the place of stay **and get permission** from him/her.
- Pay for your trip to your teacher or another responsible person. Quite often school can make a present for you and take you to the trip for free. In that case, please, don't forget to say "thank you" for the present.



### AFS organized trip

You can also travel with AFS. But we want to remind you that **all trips are extra activities**. They are not covered by participant fee your parents paid or scholarship you've got at home. If you want to participate in these extra activities you have to pay. The price depends on distance and duration of the trip and covers mostly transportation, accommodation (never luxurious!), food, excursions.

AFS organizes trips/camps every school vacations: at the beginning of November, during Christmas time (January, 1-10) and at the end of March. AFS also organizes some traditional trips, for example, to St. Petersburg in the first part of June.

If AFS invites you to the trip/camp, you will get **an official invitation called "Optional activity form"**. It contains the information about all conditions of the trip (destination, dates, means of transportation, accommodation, food, activities, costs, deadlines etc.) **It will be sent to your personal e-mail and /or to your volunteer**. Your local chapter can organize some short trip as well. If you want to accept this invitation you must:

- Sign the **"Optional activity form"**
- Send it back to a responsible person or hand it out to your local volunteer
- Pay as it is mentioned in the paper.



Other cases when AFS RUS can ask for the TW are **Travels to the places where Additional AFS events** (camps, trips, etc.) **take place**.

Sometimes it is impossible to provide every participant with an accompanying volunteer, esp. if the participant lives far away from the place where the event will take place. It will make the trip too expensive.

**Please take into account** that AFS RUS organizes different trips/camps for different AFS chapters at one and the same time. It's because:

- We have a big number of AFS students in different parts of Russia which can be very far away from each other. It is definitely not worth travelling 4 or 5 days by train just to spend a weekend in another part of the country.
- It's too complicated to arrange suitable transportation from one part of the country to another. And it would be really, really expensive.
- Chapters have their own chapter plan and organize different AFS activities themselves (excursions/short trips/camps/parties/holidays) according to it.
- Not all volunteers are free at the same time.
- **So only students whom a particular activity was offered can participate in it.**

### **What will happen, if the travel rules are not respected?**

A disrespect of the travel rules, especially of the rules for independent travels, can result in serious consequences. Depending on the individual case, these consequences would be usually something between a partial or total prohibition of any further independent trip. A particularly strong or repeated violation of the travel rules may result even in an exclusion of the program and an early return to the home country.



**Please take these rules seriously.**

**We do.**

Further you will find AGREEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING OF AFS RULES, which you and your parents must read attentively, print out and sign.

**You must bring this document to Russia.**

## Agreement of understanding of AFS rules

I, the undersigned, \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ understand and will follow while on AFS program in Russia the following AFS INTERNATIONAL and AFS RUSSIA rules:

### 1) EARLY RETURN

The following will cause **immediate early return** to home-country:

- a. driving a motorized vehicle
- b. hitch-hiking
- c. taking drugs
- d. alcohol abuse

**Also note that failure to adhere to host family or host school rules, persistent non-adjustment and any disregard of AFS rules might be considered as a reason for an early return to your home country!**

### 2) SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

All AFS students must start and complete the school year/semester/trimester according to the academic and disciplinary system of the respective high school.

All AFS students must attend classes full time even if he/she has completed secondary studies in home country.

AFS students can not abandon the high school before the end of the school year.

In case if any student does not attend classes properly, AFS Russia can decide to send the student home.

### 3) TRAVEL PERMISSION

Independent trips for AFSers in Russia are strictly forbidden. AFS students **can travel ONLY with a host-family, a host-school or with AFS during weekends, school vacations and national holidays.**

Participants should contact local AFS representative at least 2 (two) weeks prior to making any travel arrangements with school or host family.

### 4) NATURAL PARENTS/RELATIVES/FRIENDS PERMISSION TO VISIT STUDENTS

Basing on many years experience **AFS DOES NOT encourage** visits of natural parents, relatives or friends to participants while on the program. Any visit should be in advance authorized by AFS National Office of Hosting country.

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Natural parents signature \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_ 201\_\_\_\_

**You must bring this agreement of understanding of AFS rules SIGNED when you arrive in Russia!**

## Make sure!

By now, you should have received the following materials prepared by AFS Russia and sent by AFS of your country.

- 1. The handbook “The Spirit of Discovery”**
- 2. Safety tips for participants to Russia**
- 3. AFS rules and Travel Policy in Russia (the document you are reading at the moment)**

If, by chance, you have not yet received any of them for some reason, please, contact the AFS National Office in your country right away, so that you can read them through prior to your departure. This will, to some extent, reduce your initial anxiety at facing a new language and a new way of life.

We appreciate your cooperation!

