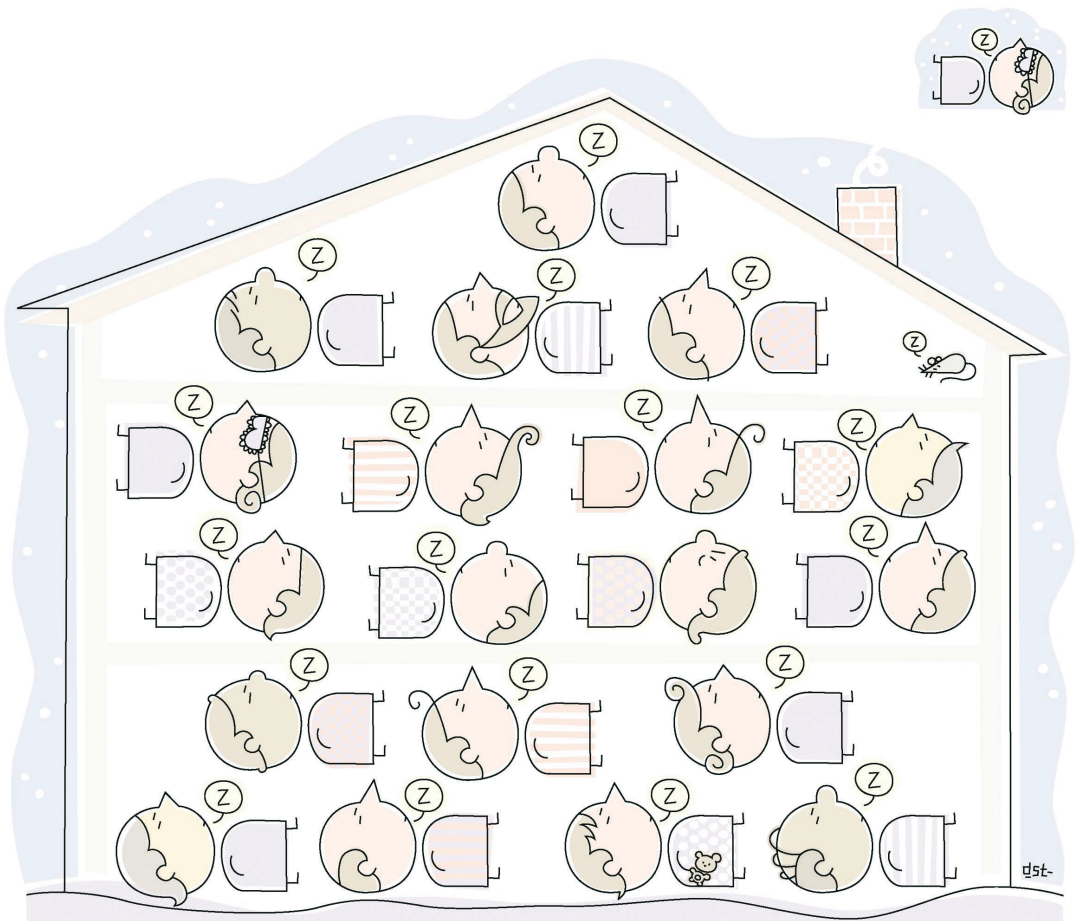




WHEN WELCOMING guests from out of town, for a successful visit both host and visitors need to be sensitive to the other's needs. (TNS)



When family and friends come to visit

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For many of us, having left family behind when we moved to Israel, a visit from family and friends is met with great anticipation. We love the opportunity to give our guests a taste of our day-to-day life, show them around the country, and catch up with those with whom we've shared years of connectedness.

Some visitors fit easily into our life and lifestyle, and are a joy to entertain. They love to help out, have fun, are there for us in every way, and we anticipate their arrival with great joy.

Others make our lives miserable and leave us feeling sad and depleted, often even before they arrive, and sadly, we anxiously await their departure. Somehow, it is work from the minute they announce their impending trip, and their visit is anticipated with dread. While family members may just want to check on us and make sure that we are okay, let's face it, our life here can be very different from theirs, and this, too, may make it more difficult for them (and us) when they are here.

How well the visit will go, however, is in large part determined by the personality characteristics of both host and guest and the relationship issues that already existed long before we moved away, but were easier to ignore when interactions were typically of shorter duration. Issues already inherent in the relationship may now be exacerbated by both distance and intense periods of time together.

Ideally, conversations during the year can help lay the groundwork for a good visit, in spite of any differences. Grandparents and their children and grandchildren can use Skype or FaceTime, for example, and stay in close contact should they choose.

So while some visitors are full of positive energy when they visit, other visitors may see our lifestyle through disapproving eyes and say little or nothing, or may feel compelled to criticize and comment on everything from where and how we raise our children, to our choice of friends or community, and

even how we choose to live our lives.

In essence, while some visitors fit right in, others are disruptive and intrusive when they visit, and still others barely make time for us, even when they do visit.

Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying that "guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days." As much as you may love having family visit, your day-to-day routine changes; and for just about anyone, living together in tight quarters can bring about its own challenges and create more stress for everyone. We have all had guests that drive us crazy after a day (if not before) and others who we wish would move in for months.

Whether you anticipate or dread an upcoming visit, what does it take to be a good host, or a good guest, and what can you do to make the visit easier? Here are a few suggestions.

As the host:

1. Be aware of both your own limitations and those of your visitors. Discuss potential issues in advance. Ensure that the timing of the visit works for you and state beforehand other commitments you may have so that expectations are clear. If you enjoy the company but can only handle a few days, let your visitors know when you will or won't be available. If your visitors expect you to be free to show them the country and you have a work assignment due that week, someone will be unhappy.

2. Prepare for your visitors before their arrival. Get organized, freeze meals, have your children participate in some of the planning; and if you will be traveling with your guests, ask ahead of time what sites they might enjoy.

3. Be warm and inviting. Speak in the same language as your guests so they feel welcome. Ask them what their objectives and goals are for their trip so you can anticipate their needs, whenever possible.

4. Simplify your life. Don't sweat the small stuff. Consider exchanging a five-course meal on your finest china for a BBQ on disposable plates so that you can actually enjoy your limited time together.

5. Let your guests know what you need. Don't be afraid to accept any and all offers of help.

6. Be mindful of your own needs and those of your immediate family. Find time for a quiet walk and a break from company. Choose activities that your children will also enjoy. If you are having a good time, your guests will also.

7. Give your guests as much respect, privacy and space as you can afford, while making them feel at home.

For guests:

1. Be generous with your time and value theirs. Offer to help out with housework, homework or meal preparation. Don't expect to be waited on or entertained.

2. Be a good guest. This often involves a healthy combination of being both helpful and invisible. Know when to stay out of the way and when to step in and give support.

3. Clean up after yourself, keep your showers short, make your bed, and clear the table. Keep shared space clean.

4. Recognize that apartments are small and food is costly. Even when told to make yourself at home, be respectful and accommodating to your hosts. Invite them out, offer to pay for groceries and value their time.

5. Be aware that your host family has another life. Respect their privacy and look for ways to help out. Don't be critical of that life but rather look for ways to embrace and support their choices.

At the end of the day, both host and guest should have fun, feel good about the visit and look forward to future time spent together with loved ones.

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