

Apartment hunting for exchange visitors can be stressful with an overwhelming list of things to consider. This section provides general information and links to key resources along with advice regarding housing for participants.

### Introduction

#### Short-Term Housing

Apartment hunting for exchange visitors can be stressful with an overwhelming list of things to consider. This section provides general information and links to key resources along with advice regarding housing for participants.

Part 1 Admin procedures

Part 2 Useful tips

Part 3 Resources

Part 4 Inspection checklist

Part 5 What to note?

NOTE: As a general rule, do not sign any lease until you have actually visited the place and met with the landlord in person. Book a hotel or Airbnb for the first few days to settle down.



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## Part 1 Admin procedures

Participants are recommended to plan ahead and finalize their housing arrangements after being able to inspect the facility and meet with the landlord or property manager in person after their arrival. They should begin searching for housing at least 2-4 weeks prior to their departure to the US.

- Step 1 Start searching 2-4 weeks before flying
- Step 2 Book a hotel/Airbnb\* for the first few days to settle/adjust
- Step 3 Enter tentative housing address for Form DS-160
- Step 4 Right before flying, schedule "in-person" visits
- Step 5 After landing, inspect the premises in person
- Step 6 Check out neighborhood apps for neighbors' comments
- Step 7 Negotiate terms and finalize the lease/details
- Step 8 Take photos/create "move-in report"
- Step 9 Commit/sign, pay deposit/rent, get a receipt, and then move in

\*Age 18 or 21+ and max length of stay (21/30 days) are required by most hotels

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## Part 2 Useful tips

Tips and advice participants should consider when looking for short term housing:

### Protect privacy

- Avoid anything “too good to be true”
- Avoid ads with no/blurry/retouched photos
- Don’t trust photos and reviews in general
- Disregard offers that require any upfront charges
- Do not give out personal information during searching
- Avoid posting ads except in a private/trustworthy group

### General points to consider

- Costs, location, and safety
- Comments from neighbors/past tenants
- Duration (3/6/12+ months)\*
- Public transportation, parking, and accessibility
- Utilities (e.g., WiFi, electricity, water, heating/AC)
- Kitchen and cooking utensils
- Roommates, other tenants
- Landlord or subletter
- Laundry units (available inside premises or a laundromat nearby)

\*Generally, the longer the lease, the cheaper the rent

### Be smart and informed

- Don’t miss out “off-campus housing” web pages of nearby universities
- Rent directly in a unit that requires no credit check with utilities included
- If it’s a sublease, find out whether the owner consents to it
- Renters insurance is available at around USD 15-18 per month, varies by state
- Summer housing is pricier than normal
- Some places (e.g., SF and NYC) have “shelter-in-place” hotels
- Airbnb is not legal in every city, and Craigslist listings can be “hit or miss”

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## Part 3 Resources

Whether you plan to rent an apartment on your own or share a house with roommates, there are plenty of short-term housing rental websites. This section highlights some of them.

### Settle down

- Hotel, e.g., IHG, Marriott Bonvoy, Hyatt, Hilton, etc.
- Short term budget rentals, e.g., Airbnb and Vrbo

### Sublets/homestay

- Sublet apartments, e.g., **Craigslist**, **Sublet**, **Facebook groups**
- Social medial groups for short-term rentals and/or foreign students/expats
- Homestay, e.g., **American Homestay Network** and **Homestay Match**

### Rental websites

- Student specific, e.g., **Boston U**, **Harvard GSD**, **USFCA**, **SFSU**, **USH Student**
- Regional, e.g., **Bay Property**
- All areas, e.g., **Rent**, **MIT off campus**, **Rotatingroom.com**

Check out the City Spotlights section for additional insights of individual cities.

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## Part 4 Inspection checklist

Inspect the premises in person, identify issues, take photos, and ask questions before signing the lease or paying the deposit. Try to inspect the premises during daytime and bring a friend along to check out the area at night.

- Appliances – Available? In working order?
- Bed bugs, feces, pests – Wear gloves to check walls, cracks, beds, etc.
- Connectivity – Wi-Fi, mobile phone reception?
- Deposit – How much? Terms? What if moving out early?
- Entrances – Doors, chain lock, peephole, key/key codes?
- Fire/flooding – Escape signs, ladders, sprinklers?
- Heat, A/C, water – Temperature, turn on schedule, central?
- Identity – How will the landlord safeguard the identification documents?
- Lights – Burnt-out light bulbs, peeling paint, leaky faucets?
- Money – Charges other than rent? How and when to pay?
- Outlets – Try to plug in and test every power outlet, in working order?
- Pest control – Available? How often?
- Repairs – Covered by the landlord? Waiting time?
- Smoke – Smoke detectors? Carbon monoxide detector?
- Theft, disasters, flooding, and/or accidents – Covered by insurance?
- Utilities – Covered? If not, can foreigners get an account?
- Windows – Sturdy? Easy to break in by someone or get out in case of a fire?

NOTE: Create a move-in report and have it signed by the involved parties. The move-in report can be used to determine whether the tenant's deposit will be retained for cleaning or repairs after move-out. Ensure that important points are covered and bring up any concerns you may have before signing.

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## Part 5 What to note?

**1 Program rules.** The distance between the worksite and the participant's residence should be no greater than 25 miles. Hosts are not required to provide housing for their participant(s), but they should provide necessary guidance and support to ensure that they can finalize housing arrangements smoothly and in a timely manner.

**2 Laws.** Landlord tenant laws vary by state. As examples, short term subleasing is prohibited or comes with restrictions in many US cities, live/work lofts in SF are for those who own a business (not for exchange visitors), basements and cellars in residential properties are generally illegal, and good faith (holding) deposit is illegal in some states, e.g., New York and California. The landlord has the right to enter tenant apartments to inspect and make repairs with advance notice and/or consent (rules vary by state).

**3 Sublets.** Subleasing with roommates can be a nightmare if not managed properly. Find out what will happen if one tenant doesn't pay or leaves before the lease expires. Be upfront and discuss any potential conflicts that can occur with your roommates.

**4 Credit checks.** Credit checks are common in the US. This check is usually conducted by a third-party service which asks for personal information such as Social Security Number and a fee. There are also third-party services that have less strict credit check requirements. However, since participants generally have no credit history in the US at all, it isn't easy to pass such checks, and thus it's suggested to consider subleases (becoming a roommate of someone who already has a lease) and rooms rented out directly by the owner (as opposed to management offices or agents), since their requirements may be less demanding.

**5 Security deposit.** Find out the requirements to get a security deposit back and discuss hypothetical situations with the landlord upfront. While rules vary by state, generally, a landlord should return a tenant's security deposit, minus any portion that was rightfully subtracted (e.g., damages, cleanup) within 14-30 days after the tenant moves out. The maximum amount of the security deposit landlords can charge vary by state (e.g., is one month in NY, MA).

**6 Return.** Any disputes are settled in a small claims court, which requires both the landlord and tenant to appear in person. While it may not be convenient to fly back to appear in court, participants are suggested to discuss the procedures, timing, expectations for vacating the apartment, and deposit return arrangements ahead of time. Find out whether special arrangements can be made for you as an exchange visitor. If you return the apartment to your landlord right before your departure from the US, you could be prone to the risk of not being refunded the deposit before you leave.

**7 Know your rights.** Larger management offices and agents generally have systems in place that help safeguard client information. When it comes to more informal landlords, it's important to find out ahead of time how tenant information is safeguarded. Note that a Social Security Number (SSN) should only be required for a credit check. It is illegal for a landlord to deny you a rental on the basis of race, gender, etc.

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