

Prepare for your move to Houston

Things to do before leaving India

Over the summer

1. **Secure a place to live in Houston.** Check out the Housing in Houston section for more details. Make sure that you know how to get to Rice campus from your apartment, where the closest grocery stores are, etc. If you have decided to live off-campus, you might consider finding another incoming Indian graduate student to be roommates with – you can seek such students on our Facebook group, or via our mailing list.
2. **Learn to drive:** It is very helpful to be able to drive in a big city like Houston. Learning to drive in the US is expensive, so it is better to know how to drive before coming here. Even if you do not plan to buy a car, having a valid driver's license will enable you to rent cars. Take a look at the Zipcar program available to Rice students: <http://www.zipcar.com/rice/> Try to get an International Driving Permit (IDP) prior to leaving India - this will allow you to drive in the USA for six months while you get a US driving license.
3. **Learn to cook:** While there are many dining options on and around Rice campus and in Houston, nothing beats a home-cooked meal! Cooking at home not only saves money, but also helps you have delicious Indian food without having to go to a (possibly expensive) Indian restaurant. If you are vegetarian, you might have trouble finding vegetarian food options and learning to cook is even more important.
4. **Get a complete medical and dental checkup done:** Get prescriptions & medicines for common ailments (the technical name of the medicine along with Indian/US brand names). Get your eyesight checked; get a new prescription for glasses. Buy at least one extra pair of glasses, lenses - glasses are very expensive in the US! If you wear contact lenses, get a few months' supply from India. Make sure to get the required immunizations (especially MMR, meningitis, etc.) as required by Rice University. **Remember to fill up the Health and Immunization record form that has been sent to you with the I-20 packet!**
5. **Decide how you will stay in touch with friends & family:** Most students have fixed times when they talk to friends & family via video-chat, using Skype, GoogleTalk, etc. Your family might need to be shown how to use these applications. One can use Google to make phone-calls to India at a low price from a computer. Of course, one can also stick to old-fashioned phone calls.
6. **Sign up for airport pickup:** Make sure someone is meeting you at the airport. You can fill out the form at www.ruf.rice.edu/~isar to be picked up at the Houston airport by a

volunteer from ISAR. The sooner you do this, the easier it is for us to make arrangements to pick you up!

The week before your flight

1. **Have you started packing yet?**
2. **Call the airline office to confirm your flight:** Cross-check everything the travel agent may have told you (e.g. extra baggage, meal options, transit visa, etc.) If someone is picking you up at the airport, inform them of any changes to your travel plans.
3. **Prepare important documents:** Photocopy your passport, tickets, I-20 form and Rice admission letter. Make sure to keep these copies in addition to contact information for the Rice Office of International Students & Scholars in each piece of luggage, including your cabin baggage. Keep original copies of your CA certificate, bank statements, sponsor's affidavit, passport, admission letter and all other important documents in your cabin baggage. Sometimes, the immigration officials may ask you to present them at the US port of entry.
4. **Contact your apartment complex** to make sure everything is clear about your moving in. **Print out a Rice campus map** if possible. Find out how to get from your apartment complex to the Rice campus.
5. **Rest well; spend time with friends and family:** It's going to be a long journey and it might be many months or years since you see them again! Try to have some of your favorite foods!
6. **Make sure to get to the airport 4-5 hours before the scheduled departure of your flight:** Try to wear loose, cotton clothes and comfortable shoes for your flight. Keep a pen with you.

During your journey

1. **Relax:** Sleep as much as possible. Drink lots of water. If you are vegetarian, make sure you are given the vegetarian food option.
2. Once out of India, be cautious. Don't hesitate to ask questions – most people will be happy to help you out – but be careful. In general, try to ask questions of individuals who work at the airport. Don't hire a taxi (unless it is an emergency) until you reach your destination.
3. As the airplane prepares to land, the local time will be announced – **set your watch to Houston time.** Houston is 10:30 hours behind India from March 11th to November 4th and

11:30 hours behind otherwise.

4. **I-94 card/customs form:**

- a. Before landing, the flight attendant will distribute customs declaration forms and immigration forms.
- b. Fill these out on the plane – you will have to submit these to the appropriate authorities when you land. Do not hesitate to ask the flight attendant for assistance. On the customs form, you can indicate that you have nothing to declare and that the total value of all goods you are carrying is less than \$100.

At the US port of entry

1. Once you are off the airplane **go straight to the immigration counter** - there is usually a really long line, and if you rush you won't have to wait too long. You might be in line for **as long as 1 hour**.
2. **At the immigration officer's desk:**
 - a. Keep your I-20 form, passport, admission & aid letters ready. The officer might ask you a few questions, such as the following: Is this your first time visiting the US? Are you a student on an F1 visa? Which university are you joining? What are you studying?
 - b. After seeing your documents, the immigration officer will indicate length of stay, university, etc. on the I-94 card. The card is then (usually) stapled to your passport. **You must retain this I-94 form until you leave USA!**
3. **Claim your checked baggage:**
 - a. Go to the conveyor belt to collect your luggage.
 - b. Get a cart to carry your suitcases
 - c. Make sure you get the right suitcases! (Many suitcases look alike, which is why you should have some identifying marks on your suitcases)
 - d. If your suitcases are not on the baggage carousel, go to the airline counter, or airline/airport staff to direct you to the Lost Baggage Counter.
4. **Customs:**
 - a. Cart your baggage to the Customs desk.
 - b. Rarely, the customs officer might ask you some questions – these will be much like the questions asked by the immigration officer earlier.
 - c. If asked to open your baggage, do so slowly but do not mess up. Note: In most cases, you will not be asked to open your bags at all and will simply be waved

through.

5. Pickup

- a. If you have signed up to be picked up by an ISAR volunteer, go and wait for him/her at the nearest exit.
- b. Never leave your baggage unattended. Don't leave the airport until somebody comes to receive you. If you have doubt the person who has come to receive you, don't hesitate to ask for his/her identification.
- c. If you have asked a relative or a friend to receive you then please don't request pick up by ISAR. All volunteers have taken time out of their schedule to drive a long way to come and get you.

Once you have reached your new home

The day you arrive

1. **Call home** immediately to inform your parents & family of your safe arrival. If you have been picked up by an ISAR volunteer, feel free to ask them the best way to do so. If you are living at RGA/RVA and you have a computer already, set up the internet connection.
2. Ask the person who picked you up at the airport if they can take you to the grocery store so that you can **pick up some food and any other necessities**.
3. **Get lots of rest.** Sleep can help you get over jetlag!

Within the first week

1. **Check in** with the Office of International Students & Scholars at Lovett Hall. Obtain a **Rice student ID** at the Rice Police Department. Refer to the Rice campus map.
2. **Visit your department at Rice:** Introduce yourself to the department secretary – he/she is often the best source of information about the department. Find your office or lab if you have one and introduce yourself to other incoming graduate students. Make sure you find out if there is a departmental orientation that you are required to attend.
3. **Open a checking account:** Most international students have an account with Chase Bank, which is located close to Rice. There is also a BBVA Compass Bank close to Rice Village Apartments, which you can get to using a Rice shuttle.
4. Make sure you attend the **mandatory OISS International Orientation** and the **Graduate Orientation!**