

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHILE PURCHASING TICKETS AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE

1. Avoid transit of airline at intermediate airports. A direct flight is the best option. If change of airline can't be avoided, make sure that there is at least 4-6 hours gap/layover between the scheduled arrival of one flight and the scheduled departure of the connecting flight.
2. Baggage is usually safe with a single airline while change of airline sometimes leads to misplaced luggage. Some airlines don't take care about baggage transfer. You may have to personally carry it (check this when you are booking tickets)
3. Many airlines are fussy about the weight of your cabin baggage. It is always better to check with your travel agent regarding this.
4. A couple of days before the flight, call the airlines office to confirm your reservation and to cross-check everything the travel agent may have told you (eg: extra baggage, meal plan, transit visa etc)
5. Indicate whether you want Hindu meal/Asian Vegetarian Meal (AVM), non-smoking section, etc. This can be done at the time of booking the tickets with the travel agent.
6. Some airlines offer Frequent Flier programs (e.g. Continental One Pass, Lufthansa Miles and more, Star Alliance) implying that after a certain number of mileages with that airline you get a free ticket or discounts. Enroll in such programs by creating an online account on relevant websites.
7. Arrive at the airport at least 2-3 hours before the check-in time.
8. Always keep a photocopy of your passport, tickets, I-20, Rice admission letter and contact information of your school in every baggage including your cabin baggage.
9. Always 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 airport.
10. Ideally, a student can bring 20-30% in cash and the remaining 70-80% of the total amount of money in traveler's checks. In case you are not funded by your department, carry with you a personal draft of the amount equal to one semester's expenses. You may check your I-20 to determine this amount.

EMIGRATION CLEARANCE AT THE INDIAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

1. Every person leaving India should have ECNR (Emigration check not required) stamped on one of the rear pages of your passport. For detailed information, it is advisable to contact your travel agent.
2. For questions on whether one needs Income Tax clearance certificate, it is advisable to contact your travel agent.

THINGS TO BE DONE PRIOR TO DEPARTURE

1. Learn driving; try and acquire an International Driving Permit (IDP) prior to leaving India.
2. Learn to cook 😊
3. Make your passport valid for 6 months more than your stay indicated in your I-20. All other changes are best made in the U.S.
4. Get a complete medical checkup done.

5. Get prescriptions & medicines for all common ailments (the technical name of the medicine along with Indian/US brand name) .
6. Get your eye-sight checked; get a new prescription. Buy at least one extra pair of glasses, lenses.
7. Get requisite immunization done (especially MMR, meningitis etc). Fill in the Health and Immunization record form that has been sent to you with the I-20 packet.

PACKING

1. Start your packing at least 2-3 days before departure date.
2. Buy two strong suitcases- they should be able to withstand a lot of mishandling. They should be as large as possible within the size limitations (however most airlines are not very strict about baggage size).
3. Check-in Baggage: As an example the Air India economy class baggage specifications to the USA are given below. Note the specs may be different for other countries/airlines. 2 pieces of baggage and the total linear dimension of each piece should not be over 158cm (62"). The weight of each bag should not exceed 50lb.
4. Carry-on baggage: In addition you can carry a bag with linear dimension not exceeding 115cm (45") onboard which fits on overhead compartments.
5. For most other airlines the baggage specifications are similar. If you are taking a break outside USA/Canada contact your travel agent or airline for details.
6. Put identification marks and labels both inside & outside the boxes (apart from this, the airlines will also provide you with adhesive labels).

THINGS TO BE KEPT IN THE BOXES

Miscellaneous Items

1. Copy of all certificates/documents (originals in hand baggage).
2. Necessary books/notebooks.
3. Medical history file.
4. At least one pair leather chappals, two hawai chappals (with extra straps).
5. Soap (bath), toothbrushes (slightly costlier in the US).
6. You may want to bring audio cassettes, CDs of your favorite music.
7. All Indian groceries, pickles and other food stuff must be sealed completely; else they may be removed by the US customs.

CLOTHES

Usually clothes are machine washed once every two weeks hence two weeks supply of clothes is needed. Get all clothes little loose - clothes may shrink in machine wash or you might probably grow fat.

1. 14-15 sets of undergarments, 6-8 pair of socks, handkerchiefs.
2. Good swimming costume, a few shorts, T-shirts.
3. At least one tie, 1-2 belts.
4. 2 ordinary towels.

5. 2 bed sheets.
6. Jacket, extra woolen sweater.

Note:

- Don't buy multiple sets of sneakers. (Optional) buy a pair leather shoes (other types of shoes are cheap in US).
- Don't worry yourself if you can't bring any of the items listed above most of them are available pretty cheap in the US (made in China). Exceptions are leather goods, formal wear.

COOKING UTENSILS

1. Dosai turner, charani (server with holes), rice ladles & other ladles
2. Big pressure cooker (with spare handle, 3 safety valves, 2 weights, 1 base plate, 3 gaskets).
3. Pair of tongs, small bowls (kinnum), rolling pin (Belan), knife, kadai (optional). 3-4 dishes, spoons, 2 frying pans (tava), 1 chopping board, 2-3 storage vessels (tapeli)

IMPORTANT: LOAN CLOSET FACILITY AT RGA

A lot of household items – utensils, cutlery, furniture, pillows etc – can be obtained at a nominal annual fee (25\$) from the Rice Graduate Apartments Loan Closet.

THINGS TO BE KEPT IN HAND BAGGAGE

1. I-20, passport, ticket, financial documents (CA certificate, Bank Statements), admission letter, affidavit of sponsor, all college or school grade sheets and related certificates.
2. First aid medicines. For example, tablets for headache, nausea, fever, loose motion.
3. Novel/magazines/books for in-flight reading, sweater. If you are coming in Fall, the weather will be hot enough, so you can avoid having warm clothes for the flight travel in your cabin bag. Else you must be prepared to face extremely cold temperatures if you are arriving in Spring.
4. Address book/phone book (Indian & US contacts)
5. Copies of your photo (passport size)
6. Things to survive for a week in case luggage gets misplaced (two sets of clothes, valuables like addresses etc)

THINGS TO BE LEFT AT HOME

1. List of addresses/phone numbers where you can be contacted at.
2. One copy of all your important documents.
3. A copy of all relevant parts of Medical History files.
4. Arrange to collect/redirect mail from your room/hostel to your home address.
5. Arrange to apply/collect/mail your transcripts (about 10 in number preferable)

6. Few blank signed papers - so that your parents can be authorized to look after anything on your behalf.

THINGS TO BE DONE IN THE LAST WEEK BEFORE THE FLIGHT

1. Call up & find if there is any delay or change of schedule of the plane (inform the people coming to pick you up of any such change).
2. Rest well - ready to face the long journey/jet lag.

ON THE DAY OF THE FLIGHT, IN-FLIGHT AND LATER

1. As it is going to be a long flight, wear something comfortable - preferably cotton.
2. Be at the airport at least 2-3 hours before check in time (confirm with your airlines one day in advance)
3. Relax during flight, sleep as much as possible.
4. For vegetarians, watch out before you eat for you may get non-vegetarian food even if you had asked for vegetarian. Veg. food is generally bland – fruit juice/soft drinks will be good option.
5. Once out of India, be very careful. Don't trust anyone. Don't hire a taxi (unless emergency) till you reach your destination. If required, don't hesitate to spend money.
6. Don't hesitate to talk to people to ask questions. Usually people will answer all your queries satisfactorily.
7. Drink lot of fluids to get over with the jet lag as soon as possible upon arrival.

PORT OF ENTRY PROCEDURES

1. Sometime before landing, the flight attendant will distribute customs declaration forms & immigration forms as mentioned below. Fill these out on the plane (you will submit them to the appropriate authorities when you land). Do not hesitate to take the flight attendant's help.
2. You can indicate that you have nothing to declare & total value of all goods you are carrying is less than \$100 on the customs form.
3. Fill form I-94 in the plane. After seeing your documents, immigration officer will indicate length of stay, university, etc. This will be attached to your passport. You must retain this I-94 form until you leave USA at a later date.
4. Form I-20 ID copy - all transactions regarding your non-immigrant status will be recorded in this form. This should be retained at all times (not surrendered when you temporarily leave the US). Your admission number will be given - memorize it & note it elsewhere.
5. Just before you land the correct local time will be announced; set your watch. Houston is 10:30 hours behind India from 31st April to 31st October and 11:30 hours behind India for the rest of the year.
6. Once you are out of the plane go straight to the immigration counter rush for them to beat the queue. It might take half an hour to one hour here.
7. Keep your I-20, passport, admission & aid letters ready. They might ask few questions like - is this your first time in the US? -Are you a student on F-1 visa? -Which University are you joining?

8. The immigration officer will attach an I-94 card on one of the pages of your passport usually against the visa page.
9. Be very relaxed and answer all the questions that the officer will ask. Sometimes the officer may ask you to present financial documents/letters from your sponsors. Thus it is advisable to carry these along with you in your cabin baggage.
10. Go to the conveyor belts to fetch your luggage. Pick up a cart to carry the bags. Then pick up your bags as they come out on the conveyer belt (suitable eye-catching labels help here). If you don't get your baggage inform the enquiry section.
11. Cart your baggage to nearby Customs. If asked, tell the officer that you are a student on F-1 visa, school, department and coming to USA for the first time. If asked to open the baggage, do so slowly but do not mess up.

Note: In most cases you will NOT be asked to open your boxes at all & will be simply waived through.

12. Then go & wait at the nearest exit for the volunteers who are supposed to come and receive you. They will always be standing and waiting for you on the exit. Be relaxed, Indian Students Assoc (ISAR) will ALWAYS make an arrangement to receive you. NEVER keep ISAR volunteers as backup. If you have asked a relative or a friend to receive you then DON'T make an attempt to call the ISAR for pick up. All volunteers have to pass through a pain staking one and half hours journey to come to airport for you, thus you must respect their effort.
13. Never leave your baggage unattended. Don't go out of 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 paper.
14. Once you reach your house, call home & inform your parents of your safe arrival.