

# Rice University International Student Handbook

## Before Leaving your Hometown

These pages should guide you in the few weeks before your departure to your new destination – Rice University. We recommend you to print out these suggestions, and follow them as a check-list. The suggestions are in chronological order.

### Obtaining a Visa

### International Student Information Resources and Orientation Date

### Scheduling Your Flight

### Finding an Apartment

[Rice Graduate Apartments](#)

[Morningside Square Apartments](#)

### Planning Arrival from the Airport

### Apartment check-in

### Hotels around Rice and Airports

### Health Immunization Requirements

### Credit Cards

### Bring Enough Money with you

### Driver License and/or International Driver License

### Baggage Information

### Carry-on Luggage

### Trains and Bus Travel

### Clothing

### International Student Orientation

### **Obtaining a Visa**

Since this is a time-consuming step, you should do this first. As soon as you receive your immigration documents (I-20 for F-1 visa application, DS-2019 for J-1 visa application), visit the website of the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate at <http://usembassy.state.gov/>. Be sure to find out their location, working hours, visa application procedures, and required documents, as each U.S. Consulate and Embassy is different. Follow the procedures carefully to apply for the visa. You should obtain your visa before you continue on with any of the other steps. Check the O-week website for all the required school documents and deadlines for submission at <http://oweeek.rice.edu/>.

### **International Student Orientation**

**The International Graduate Student Orientation begins at 8:30 a.m. on August 20, 2007. The i-PREP (international-Preparation and Regulatory Education Program) for undergraduates begins Friday, August 17 at 9:00am. The J-1 exchange students are included in i-PREP. The MBA Program will have their own international orientation program that begins on August 7, 2007.**

Further information on settling into Houston will be provided to you at the International Student Orientation. Orientation activities continue throughout the O-week before classes begin. It is very important for new international students to attend the OISS orientation program. Topics covered during the international graduate student orientation include: immigration laws and responsibilities, health services and health insurance; opening a bank account; safety, security and personal identification; legal considerations; the academic honor code; social security numbers; student clubs and recreational activities and the cultural adjustment process. These sessions are designed to assist you in successfully adjusting to life at Rice.

### **Scheduling Your Flight**

Please notice the orientation, move-in and student pick-up shuttle dates. Plan for more time in between flights due to new U.S. entry procedures. New requirements of

fingerprinting and digital photo have added to the longer waiting time for customs inspections.

### **Finding an Apartment**

There are two apartments owned by Rice University, which are close by the campus. You can ride bicycles to school from these two apartment complexes. If you have never been to Houston before, we highly recommend them to you. Houston is a big metropolis, and as such, apartments for rent are plenty. However, distances to school (or, for that matter, to the nearest grocery store) are big, implying a need for a car. Research on that matter is fairly easy on line, and OISS can recommend an apartment locator service that may be able to assist you in finding other apartment options once you arrive.

#### Rice Graduate Apartments

The first choice is Rice Graduate Apartments (RGA). You can take Rice shuttles to travel between campus and home. Besides, on the weekend Rice shuttles are also available to take you to grocery stores. However, RGA are for singles only.

The standard move-in date for the graduate apartments is August 18<sup>th</sup>. There might be exceptions for international students (among others) to move in early, but they have to e-mail and request a special date since space is limited and it might affect their apartment assignment.

#### Morningside Square Apartments

If you are married with dependants, spouse and/or children, according to RGA' s policies, you are not eligible to apply to live there. So you might consider Morningside Square Apartments (MSA). It is also close by and suitable for those who are new to this city.

Name	Office Hour	Address	Telephone	Email
RGA	M-F 9:00am-5:00pm	1515 Bissonnet St.	713-348-4723 FAX:713-527-0730	<a href="mailto:gradapts@rice.edu">gradapts@rice.edu</a>

MSA	Monday through Thursday 6pm - 9pm Friday 6pm - 8pm Saturday 12pm - 2pm	2402 Shakespeare #3	713-524-1275	<a href="mailto:msaps@rice.edu">msaps@rice.edu</a>
-----	---	---------------------	--------------	--

### **From the Airport**

#### Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS)

If you are an incoming graduate student and you need a ride upon arriving at the airport, please contact OISS by July 15<sup>th</sup>. We may be able to arrange for a current international student to pick you up. Here is the link for the application: <http://rgs.rice.edu/oiss/hospitality.cfm> (The required access password will be sent to you with your international documents), Tel: (713) 348-6095

#### Shuttle from the Airport

One of the options which you might explore when arriving to Rice or to your lodging place is the airport shuttle service. Check <http://www.airportexpresshouston.com/> for rates and booking.

#### Driving Directions

Rice University is located at 6100 Main Street. The streets and boulevards that surround the campus are Main Street, Greenbriar Street, Rice Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard and University Boulevard. You might find it helpful to check this link:

[http://futureowls.rice.edu/futureowls/Driving\\_Directions.asp](http://futureowls.rice.edu/futureowls/Driving_Directions.asp)

#### Taxi

Another option is to take a taxi. The drive into downtown Houston from Bush Intercontinental Airport takes about 45 minutes, and may cost you \$38-\$50. Here are the telephone numbers for several taxi services:

Yellow Cab: 713-236-1111

Liberty Cab: 713-695-6700

Fiesta Cab: 713-225-2666

**Please check-in at the OISS in the first few days after your arrival to Rice. It is best to schedule an appointment in advance to check-in, the office hours are Monday to Friday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; email Maria at [mariar@rice.edu](mailto:mariar@rice.edu)**

### **Apartment check-in**

Check out your airplane ticket. If you can plan to arrive during your apartment's office hours, then you can check in upon arrival. If your airplane will arrive to Houston at night, you need to contact your apartment in advance, to see if they can arrange check-in for you after their office hours. If they can't make arrangements for check-in after hours, you have to make other overnight plans. Some communities, like Graduate Students Association (<http://gsa.rice.edu/>), may give you some help or check into a hotel nearby (see 1.2). A better case yet would be if you have a friend who can host you one night.

### **Hotels around Rice and Airports**

For information regarding hotels in the Rice University vicinity please refer to <http://explore.rice.edu/explore/Hotel.asp>.

You need to call for reservations ahead of time, if you choose to reside in a hotel.

All prices are subject to change, and 17% tax is added to all hotel rates. If you would like the hotel discount for university students and personnel, please be sure to state this when making a reservation. Most hotels require paid reservations in advance or a major credit card account number. Unpaid reservations are usually lost after 6:00 p.m., unless the hotel is notified in advance of your late arrival plans.

Most hotels have free swimming pools and a 24-hour coffee shop or restaurant. Some have free shuttle bus services to the Rice campus. Some allow children to stay at no extra charge. The term "double" usually means two double beds. A "single"(one double bed) usually is the best price for a couple. (The cost of a "single" and a charge for an extra person may be less than that for the "double").

For hotels in the vicinity of the Houston International Airport (a.k.a. Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH)) and Hobby Airport (a.k.a. Houston William P Hobby Airport (HOU)) a simple search should give results.

### **Health Immunization Requirements**

Obtain all the immunizations and get a recent physical examination by a qualified health professional before coming to Rice (physical exams in the U.S. are very expensive!). The Rice University Health Data Form must be completed and submitted to the Rice University Student Health Service before you can register for classes. This form can be downloaded from <http://www.rice.edu/health/newstudent.htm>. For additional information about immunizations required, please visit [www.rice.edu/health/FaqHdf.html](http://www.rice.edu/health/FaqHdf.html). All students and scholars at Rice University are required to purchase medical insurance. Please refer to the insurance handout sent to you with your immigration documents. All international students and scholars are required to have Medical Evacuation & Repatriation provision as a part of as a part of their insurance plan. Take care of your dental and optical needs before you come. If you can, bring an extra pair of glasses or whatever else just in case. The medical insurance usually does not cover dental or eye glasses.

### **Important Information for Students Needing Ongoing Psychological/Psychiatric Care**

Please note: Students who enter Rice with a mental health concern that needs ongoing care should make arrangements before the start of school to locate Houston psychiatrists and/or therapists to provide that continuity of care. Rice Counseling Center staff can assist you with that process, if you wish. It is the policy of the Counseling Center that the services of the consulting psychiatrist are as an adjunct to the psychotherapy and consultation services provided by the staff of psychologists. Therefore, anyone not receiving counseling at the Center is referred to an off-campus psychiatrist for this service. The Rice Counseling Center can be accessed through <http://rcc.rice.edu>

### **Credit Cards**

We strongly recommend you apply for a credit card in your home country before coming to Houston. In the U.S., you cannot get a credit card unless you have established credit, and many internationals get turned down because of this. Also, many people use credit card/debit card instead of cash. Instead of bringing cash, bring traveler's checks - go to the foreign currency exchange, to convert your currency to US dollars and deposit it at a US bank upon arrival.

### **Bring Enough Money with you**

Though you will receive financial support from your department, do not hesitate to bring as much money as you can, because there will be many unexpected expenses that are not covered by your department.

You should try to have at least \$2,500 in traveler's checks with some in U.S. currency for convenience. (If you will be renting an apartment by yourself, bringing family members, staying at a hotel more than one night, eating at restaurants, or if you plan to lease or purchase a car, you may need additional money). Do not carry large amounts of cash; use traveler's checks instead. Never display a large amount of paper money. You should carry about \$125 cash, including some small bills and coins for tips, phone calls and drink machines. For those of you who will be working at Rice, please understand that it may take 2-4 weeks to receive your first paycheck.

### Fees for university services

Although your tuition is waived, you will have to pay various fees for many campus services such as email access and the Rice shuttle service. These will be charged even if you choose not to use those services.

### Medical Requirement and Cost

Some students may have been billed for insurance and students fees before leaving for the U.S. If you will be a student and have not already paid for health insurance before leaving your country, you will be billed for student health insurance in the amount of approximately \$750-\$1000 at registration or payment of alternate plan. (Payment on part of the bill insurance and fees may be deferred, but you will still need to pay at least 25% of the fees and health insurance bill at registration).

### Apartment and utilities deposits

Before you check into your apartment, normally you will be charged a room deposit, which ranges from \$100 to \$600. After moving in, in most cases, you have to pay assorted utilities' deposits, like electricity deposit, gas deposit, telephone deposit. These are examples of estimated costs (Updated to Summer 2007)

Room Deposit—Morningside Square Apartment:	\$350
Electronic Key Deposit - Morningside Square Apartment:	\$50
Electricity Deposit—Reliant Energy (estimated)	\$60
Gas Deposit—Center Point (estimated)	\$60
Telephone Deposit—SBC (estimated)	\$60

### **Driver License and/or International Driver License**

If you do not drive in your home country, it is probably a good idea to wait and get a Texas driver's license. Most cars here are automatic and the driving test is easier and much cheaper. There are two parts to the test, one written and one driving. To take the test, find the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles Office (DMV). You must provide you own vehicle for the driving test. For more information of what documents you will need and the process involved in getting a Texas license, see this website: [http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver\\_licensing\\_control/faq/answers\\_dl\\_id.htm](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver_licensing_control/faq/answers_dl_id.htm).

For you who drive in your own country, you may be able to use your home country driver's license. To check if Texas will recognize your license as valid, please check [http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver\\_licensing\\_control/faq/answers\\_dl\\_id.htm#q51](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver_licensing_control/faq/answers_dl_id.htm#q51). Many internationals have to wait for a long time to apply for a driver license here and this may create much inconvenience, as public transportation is not common in Texas.

### **Dependents**

Some dependents choose to apply to a school after arriving in the U.S. If your dependents are interested in applying to a school in the U.S., be sure to bring their official transcripts. Spousal F-2 visa holders may study for incidental learning only. Be sure to inquire with the OISS about the application procedures, before applying to a school.

### **Baggage Information**

Please contact your travel agent or airline company for new restrictions on luggage. All baggage should bear identification tags giving name and address in the U.S. or university address. Be sure you have your important papers with you and not in your baggage. When you check your baggage you will receive a baggage claim check, which is your receipt. Be sure to keep your baggage check in your pocket or purse. You will need this check to claim your baggage when you arrive at your destination. If your baggage is lost or misplaced, leave the phone number of the OISS (713-348-6095) as reference so the airport officials can deliver your baggage to the campus when it is located.

### **Carry-on Luggage**

Check with your airline or travel agency about what is not allowed in your airplane carry-on luggage. This includes things like knives, pointy scissors, razors, and other sharp objects; notice there are constant updates on liquid containers that can be brought into an airplane cabin. If you have any of these items, make sure to put them in your checked baggage.

**Be sure to carry on your I-20 or DS-2019 and immigration documents; do not leave these important documents in your luggage.**

### **Trains and Bus Travel**

Trains are not as convenient in the U.S. as in other countries; they are fewer, and their schedules are not as frequent. Bus travel is cheaper and offers good schedules, but you are advised to take taxi from the depot as soon as you reach your destination. Bus stations are not safe place for you or your luggage.

Coach USA of Houston: 713-671-0991 <http://www.coachusa.com/>

Greyhound: 1-800-229-9424 <http://www.greyhound.com/home.asp>

### **Clothing**

Houston weather is hot and humid in the summer and generally mild in the winter, though we do occasionally have freezing temperatures. The average winter day will be from 45° F to 65° F (7° C to 18° C). Clothing needs range from light summer cottons to medium weight winter coats, jackets, and sweaters. Rain can be expected any time of the year. A light raincoat and umbrella are useful. An all weather coat or jacket is ideal for the winter. Casual clothes (t-shirts, shorts, and jeans) are worn on campus. Dry cleaning is expensive, so it is best to bring everyday clothing that is easily washable and does not require ironing. Both women and men commonly wear jeans on campus. Women sometimes wear skirts or casual dresses, usually with low-heeled shoes. Men wear neckties and suit jackets only for special occasions. You may bring something a little dressy for special occasions, and a “national dress”, if you have one, to wear at cultural events. If you cannot carry all your clothing with you, ship the winter clothing to arrive later. During August and September, the weather will be hot and humid! The average high temperature will be 89° to 94° F. Bring several changes of clothes, especially for the hot summer days. People in the U.S. are very self-conscious about personal hygiene. They wash their clothes, shower often, and customarily use a lot of soap and deodorant daily, especially in Houston due to the heat and humidity.

Remember not to bring electronics that plug-in because of the different power of voltage. It may be cheaper just to buy things in the U.S.