

Before Arriving to the U.S.

I. WHAT TO BRING

- **Personal Records.** You should bring your immigration documents, passport, birth certificate, translated copies of your marriage certificate and/or children's birth certificates (if applicable).
- **Medical Records.** You should bring immunization (vaccination) records, medical and dental histories, and current vision prescription (if any). If your records are not in English, translated copies are recommended. See [State Vaccination Requirements](#).
- **Driving History.** Bring documentation (in English) to show your driving record. You may need this when applying for car insurance. Coming from abroad, a certificate can be obtained from the proper government agency in your home country. Certificates from insurance companies are not recognized.
- **Passport Copies.** Your dependents may need certified passport copies for tax purposes. A certified copy is a document that the original issuing agency provides to certify that the copy is an exact copy of the original document. It should contain an official stamped seal from the agency.
- **Diploma or Transcript (Postdocs).** You may be required to present a copy of your diploma or proof of PhD to your host institution. Be prepared to provide a translated copy.
- **Documents for Spouses.** If your spouse plans to attend school in the United States, translated and certified transcripts or diplomas are sometimes necessary, depending on the school. Letters of references may be necessary for acceptance into an academic program. Your spouse should look into the examination requirements of the academic program they wish to pursue.
- **Household Items?** Consider leaving your household items and vehicle(s). Shipping costs will likely exceed the value of the items you wish to ship. Vehicles are at risk of being damaged during shipping and the shipping cost would likely exceed the value of the vehicle. If you are planning to move to a place where there is limited public transportation, consider purchasing a used car or live in an area where local transit is available.

II. PLAN YOUR FINANCES

- **Banks and [credit unions](#)** in the United States offer a variety of financial services including checking and savings accounts, debit cards, electronic bill pay, and wire transfers. You can use a debit card to withdraw cash or deposit money at an ATM (Automatic Teller Machine). Consult with your bank in your home country to learn if there are affiliated banks in the United States. It is typically easier to do money wires (money transfers) when there is an affiliation. To open a U.S. bank account, you must provide identification, such as a passport. Some institutions will require an address verification such as a rental agreement or utility bill.
- **Credit History.** Credit history refers to a record of how a person manages their financial responsibilities. In the United States, companies use the credit score to evaluate risk. For example, a bank will give a car loan to someone who has a good credit score and reject a loan application from someone whose credit score is low.
- **Sending Money Abroad.** Banks charge fees when sending money from abroad to U.S. and vice versa. Many foreign scholars recommend using [Transferwise](#).
- [Cost of living in the United States](#)
- [Budgeting & Finance Calculator](#)
- [Keep Track of Your Finances](#)
- [Track Your Credit Score](#)

III. LOOK INTO TAXES

- **U.S. Tax Process.** The U.S. federal government and state governments collect taxes on U.S. income, including wages and scholarships. You should confirm if your sponsor or host institution will automatically deduct taxes from your paycheck as well as the type of tax form you should expect to receive (e.g., W2, 1099, 1042S or 592B). The deadline for filing tax returns in the U.S. is (typically) April 15.
- **Tax Advice.** It is best to consult a tax professional for tax advice ([Find a Certified Public Accountant \(CPA\)](#)). Refer to the list of resources below for additional information.

[U.S. Internal Revenue Service](#)
[State and Local Taxes](#)
[Tax Treaties](#)
[Glossary of Tax Terms](#)

NOTE: Beware of tax scams. Do not fall victim to scammers who call and say they are with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Remember...

ISSNAF Website – International Integration Content

- The IRS will NEVER call and demand immediate payment over the phone.
- The IRS will NEVER try to threaten or intimidate you, demand payment with a prepaid debit card, or ask for your credit card or debit card number over the phone.
- The IRS will NEVER threaten to call the police or immigration agents if you do not pay.

If you get a call like this or if you are concerned that you may be a victim of tax-related identity theft, please do the following:

- Contact your sponsor or host institution
- Report it on IdentityTheft.gov
- Report it to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration by calling 800-366-4484 or visiting www.tigta.gov
- Report it to the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov/complaint.

The National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center's (NCCIC) encourages consumers to review the [FTC Alert](#) and the NCCIC Tip [Preventing and Responding to Identity Theft](#).

IV. ENTERING THE U.S.

- **Apply for a visa.** The first step is scheduling an appointment at your local U.S. Embassy or Consulate once you receive the appropriate immigration documents from your sponsor. Each consular post has a different process for scheduling an appointment. Follow the instructions on the consulate's website, review the list of documents to bring to the interview, and pay attention to the [timeline for visa appointments and issuance](#). If you are applying for an F-1 or J-1 visa, you will need to pay the [I-901 SEVIS Fee](#) before you go to the visa appointment. You will be ready to enter the United States once your visa is placed in your passport. For more information, go to <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html>.
- **Travel to the United States without a visa.** International travelers who seek to enter the United States under the [Visa Waiver Program \(VWP\)](#) as business visitors must apply for authorization and pay the relevant fee through the [Electronic System for Travel Authorization Web Site \(ESTA\)](#) prior to travel to the United States. You must consult your sponsor to confirm if you should be traveling under this status for your visit to the United States.
- **Health insurance.** Ask your sponsor or host institution about health insurance coverage. Some visa types require extra coverage (refer to [J-1 insurance requirements](#)).

NOTE: Please inform your immigration sponsor of any changes to your original intended arrival date.

- **Know the Rules for Bringing or Mailing Food from Home.** To keep invasive pests out of the country, the United States has laws that prohibit or restrict the entry of many agricultural products from other countries, including meats, fruits, vegetables, plants, soil, seeds, and some plant-based handicrafts, among other items. Declare all food, live animals and plant or animal products to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer or agriculture specialist when you arrive in the United States. Contact USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to find out whether the items you wish to bring or mail are allowed into the United States.
- **Register on the website “[Dove siamo nel Mondo](#)” so that you can be contacted in case of an emergency.** If you experience an emergency on a public holiday or after business hours (Mon-Fri from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm) please contact the following number:+1 (202) 612-4411

After Arriving to the U.S.

Welcome to the United States!

To learn more about the U.S., please click [here](#). We hope you enjoy your visit.

I. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

If you will receive U.S. sourced income, you will need to apply for a Social Security number (SSN). The SSN is a unique identification number used to keep track of your earnings, to collect social security benefits, and to receive some other government services. Other businesses and credit companies may also require your number. It is very important to keep your SSN and the card safe to prevent identity theft. Once you receive your SSN card, memorize the number and store it safely, along with your other important documents. Do not carry the card in your wallet. Landlords (property managers) and some business (such as cell phone providers) may request your SSN. Be sure you verify why the number is needed and use discretion when giving it out. If you have an SSN from a previous visit to the United States, the number remains valid. If you have lost your card, you can apply for a replacement.

Please consult your immigration advisor/sponsor to make sure they have recorded your arrival in the United States before you apply for an SSN. You may need to wait at least five business days after your immigration advisor/sponsor enters your information to ensure that your record of arrival has reached the Social Security Administration database. It normally takes three to six weeks to process an SSN application.

More information can be found here: <https://www.usa.gov/about-social-security>

II. HOUSING

While it is important to find convenient and [affordable housing](#), it is even more important to live in a safe area. Check [Areavibes](#) to look up prospective neighborhoods before you make a decision. For convenience, also consider checking [Walkscore](#) to see if your selected neighborhoods rated high on walkability.

Additional rental search tools below.

- [Padmapper](#)
- [Hotpads](#)
- [Places4Students](#)
- [SabbaticalHomes](#): Temporary housing resource dedicated to the academic community worldwide. This lists home rentals, home exchanges, home sitting and home sharing opportunities offered by scholars leaving for research, sabbaticals and even vacation to other scholars. Most homes are furnished with offices and are close to campuses.
- [Trulia](#)
- [Zillow](#): Customize by your needs, perimeter, budget, and number of bedrooms. You can also receive daily alerts based on your criteria.

Rentals for one year, one month or less

[Airbnb](#)
[Homeaway](#)
[Hotpads](#)
[SabbaticalHomes](#)
[Suite America](#)
[Synergy Housing](#)
[Vrbo](#)

Sharing accommodation, living with roommates

[Airbnb](#)
[HubHaus](#)
[Vrbo](#) (sublet)

- **Extras to consider.** Rental apartments typically require a deposit along with the first month rent. There is usually an extra deposit and sometimes rent for pets such as cats and dogs. Some rental places may not provide a garage or parking space for its residents. If street parking, make sure to pay close attention to parking restriction signs (e.g., street cleaning and parking permit requirement). Rental units usually include water, electricity, gas, and trash collection. Home

phone (landline) and cable/internet are usually not included. You may need to establish your utility services for your new home. Check with your housing management to confirm. The rental home may also require you to purchase renter's insurance. Refer to [Fair Housing Act](#) to know your rights.

III. CONVERSIONS AND EQUIVALENCES

Measurements. The United States uses the English measurement system in daily life. Use [Math Connect](#) to convert from metric to English measurements.

Temperature. Temperature is in Fahrenheit. To convert Celsius to Fahrenheit, use the [Fahrenheit to Celsius Converter](#).

Money and Currency. A currency calculator is available on [x-rates.com](#).

Clothes and Shoe Sizes. Clothes and shoe are available on [Online Conversion.com](#).

Power. United States uses 110 or 120 volts.

IV. TRANSPORTATION

- **Getting a car.** If you must get a car, consider buying a used one. Car value depreciates very quickly as soon as you drive it off the lot. Be aware that car dealers not only make their money selling cars, but also through selling the car loan/financing, where they can earn a lot of money from high interest rates among other fees. Do your homework and check with the local bank or credit union in your new neighborhood to see how you can get pre-approved for a car loan (if you do not have the cash) before you step foot in a car dealership. Do not to give your social security number to the salesperson—if they require it to test-drive the car, walk away. Leasing a car is another option. Refer to [Pros-and-cons-of-car-leasing](#). Additional cost of car ownership include car registration, insurance, license plates, transfer ownership fee, sales tax, fuel, and car maintenance. It would be good to check the maintenance cost before determining the type of car to purchase. For example, an oil change for a Honda will cost less than an oil change for a Mini Cooper.

See additional resources below.

- Driver's License - [Foreign Nationals Driving in the U.S.](#)

NOTE: [SAVE](#) is a database that verifies your immigration status. If, for any reason you have difficulties applying for a driver's license with the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV), check SAVE. It allows the DMV agencies throughout the United States to verify valid status of driver's license applicants. [Click here](#) for more information.

- Check the value of the car before you buy:
 - <https://www.kbb.com/>

- <https://www.edmunds.com/>
- o Check the history of the used car before you buy
 - [CARFAX](#)

V. EMERGENCIES

- Call 911 for police, fire or ambulance. You do not need to dial an area code.
- If you have a *life-threatening medical emergency*, **call 911** immediately, or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Contact your sponsor/host to inform them of your situation and seek help
- [Emergencies and Security: useful information for Italians living in the U.S.](#)
- [Viaggiare Sicuri](#)
- [Disaster & Emergency Preparedness](#)
- [What the Department of State Can and Can't Do in a Crisis](#)