

International Student Housing Guide

Getting Started

For many international students, living off-campus is a convenient and affordable alternative to on-campus living. However, finding your new home can be intimidating if you are unfamiliar with process of home or apartment rental in the U.S. Before you make any major decisions about living off-campus, you should consider the following:

- What is your monthly price range? (Be sure to consider all costs, such as transportation, utilities, internet, etc. before making a decision).
- What kind of housing do you want? (an apartment or house)
- Can you afford to buy furniture and household goods?
- How far will you commute to campus? (If you plan on walking, biking, or taking the bus, you may want to consider housing closer to campus.)
- How convenient is your housing for daily life – grocery shopping, public transportation, etc.)?
- What amenities do you want? (This could include such things as a washer and dryer, air conditioner, garbage disposal, dishwasher, private bathroom, gym etc.)
- Do you want a roommate? (Roommates can help with costs)



Ten Questions to Ask your Leasing Agent



1. What kinds of housing do you provide and how much do they cost per month (see list on page 2)?
2. What length of lease(s) do you offer?
3. When can I move in?
4. How long does it take to get to campus from your property?
5. How much will I need to pay for a rent deposit when I first move in?
6. What utilities will I have to pay, and what is the average cost of utilities?
7. What amenities does your property have?
8. Do your rooms come with furniture?
9. Is it in a safe neighborhood?
10. Is there anything else I should know about your property?

A Few Different Types of Housing

Furnished or Unfurnished

A fully furnished apartment typically includes basic furniture that is needed to live comfortably, such as a bed, couch and table. Unfurnished apartments are typically less expensive in comparison, but students who opt for unfurnished apartments should consider not only the costs of purchasing furniture, but also how you will transport furniture to your apartment.

Apartments

An apartment is a rented residential unit that is part of one (or several) residential buildings, and may come with amenities such as a gym or pool. There are few different layouts for an apartment, which you will want to acquire about when you speak with a leasing agent. For example, some apartments have “efficiencies” which are small apartments that combine the functionality of multiple rooms into one.



Townhomes, Duplexes, and Houses

Duplexes and houses all have exterior entrances into the dwelling. A duplex has two units attached; whereas houses are not attached. Houses and duplexes usually have a yard or some outdoor space. Renting a house or duplex may require you to provide basic maintenance such as shoveling snow or mowing the lawn. Be sure to be clear on your responsibilities as a renter.

Temporary Housing

Ideally, you will arrive in the U.S. on the day of, or a few days after your initial move-in date. If you will arrive in the US prior to your move-in date, you should plan on staying in temporary housing such as hotel, Airbnb, or with a friend/family.

Finding a Place to Live

Location, commute time to campus, access to grocery and the length of your lease are all factors you should consider when looking for housing. There are a number of ways to find potential places. UT's private off-campus housing website has information about living in private off-campus housing, including resources and roommates: <https://offcampushousing.utk.edu>

You can also find potential places simply by searching “homes or apartments for rent in Knoxville, TN” on Google, and contacting leasing agents to discuss options. You may also find rentals using Facebook Marketplace, but always be cautious about you share any of your personal information and put your safety first.

Remember, you are ultimately responsible for finding adequate housing and determining if the rental meets your needs. The University of Tennessee does not provide assistance with arranging off-campus housing and does not endorse or guarantee the housing options.

Once you've Found your New Home

The Application

Most landlords will require that you fill out an application for the apartment. The application may have a non-refundable fee.

The landlord may also ask for your social security number. Explain to the landlord that you are an international student and are not legally required to have a social security number - they may waive this requirement. They may instead ask you to pay a higher rent deposit as a result or request a recommendation letter from your bank as proof that you can afford to pay the rent. Ultimately, it is up to the landlord whether or not they will accept your application.

The Lease

A lease is a legal document where you agree to pay the landlord for use of the rental. Read the lease carefully because once you sign you are legally obligated to follow the terms of the document.



The lease may require a domestic guarantor or co-signer. If you do not have a friend or relative in the United States willing to co-sign for you, the landlord may suggest an alternative method to ensure rent will be paid on time. This may be paying a higher security deposit, or providing proof of income. Discuss your options with your landlord.

Note that once you sign the lease with a stated cost per month, the landlord may not increase the monthly rent until after the lease is over.

When you sign a lease, you may also be required to pay first month's rent and a 'rent deposit'. Once you move out, the landlord will return the money to you within 31 days. The landlord may keep some of the money from the rent deposit to pay for any damages caused by you or cleaning costs. Make sure you keep a copy of the signed lease and the receipt from paying your deposit and rent.

Set up Utilities

Utilities are companies that provide services to the apartment. Some utilities are included in rent. For example, your landlord may pay for garbage, but you will have to pay for electricity. Talk to your landlord about what utilities you will be responsible to pay before you sign the lease. Different kinds of utilities include:

- Internet (Xfinity or AT&T)
- Electricity
- Gas
- Garbage
- Water



To set up utilities, you typically call the utility company directly and provide your information. If you are living in Knoxville, TN your utility is [Knoxville Utilities Board](#). You can start your utilities by contacting KUB directly at (865) 524-2911. Remember, you will pay the utility company directly. You are responsible for paying the utility on time, not your landlord.

Tips for Moving In

Furniture

If you need to, you can purchase furniture at department stores such as Wal-Mart, Target. If you don't mind used furniture, you can go to "thrift stores" such as KARM or Goodwill. You may also opt for purchasing furniture online via Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, or Amazon.



Finding and moving furniture requires a car. If you do not have a car, you could either have a friend with a car assist with you or rent a car from companies such as Enterprise or U-Haul. You may also opt to order furniture online and have it delivered directly to your house/apartment.

Looking for Pre-existing Damage

Upon moving in, you should go through your new home and look for damage. If you find anything broken, scratched, scuffed etc. you should take note of it and let your landlord know. Additionally, take date-stamped photographs in case there is a dispute about the damage at the end of your lease.

Complaints/Repair Requests

Whenever you make one, confirm it with a written notice and keep a copy of it. Experience has shown that verbal requests are not acted on as promptly as written ones.

Also, be persistent! Sometimes one request isn't enough. Keep a record of how many times to make a complaint or repair request.

Renting Tips

Choosing a place

Before signing an agreement, try to talk with the previous tenant or the neighbors and see what they think of the landlord. Find out about any problems, bugs, mice, abuse of privacy, etc. You can also read Google reviews, or check the ratings of the agency on other websites.

Rental Agreement

Read before signing it. Be clear whether it is a month-to-month or a term lease. Understand that if you commit to a term lease, you're liable for many months' rent if you have to break the lease.

Getting it in Writing

Any assurances that your landlord makes that are important to you should be in writing. Have it added to the rental agreement and initialed by all parties. If the landlord is taking any deposits or fees, ask what they're for. If the written agreement doesn't say what they're for, add an explanation and have it initialed by all parties.

Roommates

Understand that roommates (co-tenants) are jointly liable for things. That means that if one of you flakes out, skips town, or burns the house down, the landlord can sue whichever tenant has the most money for what his or her roommate did. If you vacate during the middle of a lease term, you still owe your roommate your share of the rent until they replace you. They don't have to replace you at all if they can't find a new person with whom they get along.

