

WEEK BEFORE

Soon, you will say farewell to our beloved nation and set off on a new adventure. A smooth transition requires you to KEEP CALM and READ ON! Following is a guideline of what steps you need to complete in the week before you take off.

IMPORTANT THINGS THAT NEED TO GET DONE

- If you have an individual bank account, make arrangements such that either you have access to it in the US or your parents have the authorization to use it, if the need arises. Making it a joint account is an alternative you might opt for.
- Carry the Indian sim card connected to your bank accounts with you to the US if you will be needing to make transactions from an Indian bank account. You can also choose to leave it with your family who can do it on your behalf.
- Arrange to collect/redirect mail from your room/hostel (if applicable).
- Scan all the documents you are planning to bring along and keep them in a protected drive online. Also, make sure you have all major documents saved on your mobile phone and laptop. Also, keep a set of photocopies of all your travel documents ready for travel.

A LIST OF THINGS YOU MIGHT NEED TO PROVIDE YOUR FAMILY WITH

- List of addresses/phone numbers through which information about you can be obtained. It can contain your future roommates or friends.
- A copy of all the relevant and important documents, especially the ones you are carrying with you. If it is a photocopy, you might consider self-attesting it (True Copy - Signature).
- A copy of the relevant parts of your medical history files.

THE LAST THREE DAYS

- Confirm your flight schedule by calling the airlines, or checking online. Find out if there is a possible change of schedule for the flight. Ensure that you have selected seats and chosen your meals for the flight. Online check-in is usually 24 hours before the time of journey.
- Arrange for the conveyance to the airport. You might need to reach a few hours before the time of departure since immigration check usually takes time due to long queues.
- Make a personalized checklist for the last day of travel.
- Carry a sim with an international roaming pack for at least a week. Activate it the day you board your flight (Optional).

ONE LAST REVIEW:

- Keep your ticket, Passport, I-20 and a copy of your admit letter ready, and in your hand luggage.
- It would be better to put all the cash (or any form of money) you are carrying in your hand luggage as well.
- Make sure you have ALL your documents in place.

- Make sure you have completed the health documentation such as the immunization records (if applicable), that you may have to submit when you arrive there.
- Check that you are carrying your [travel insurance](#) papers if you chose to be insured.
- Keep a printout of the confirmation mail of your [Groundshuttle](#) booking, or whichever ground transportation you might have booked to get to College Station.
- Keep a written list of emergency and necessary contact information in your hand luggage.
- All suitcases and boxes are packed well and secure. TSA-approved locks are available in stores, if you insist on locking your suitcase, these are your best bet. You might want to label your luggage. Add your name, contact number, university, and email address on the label. Tie a rope or ribbon of bright color to the bag handle to make it easy to spot.
- Get ready to face the long journey. Have sufficient sleep. Keep the partying to a minimum!
- RELAX!

This is a suggested checklist to help you get everything in place on the day before you leave. Note that while it is comprehensive, it may not necessarily cover everything.

ON THE DAY OF THE FLIGHT

- Since it is going to be a long flight wear something comfortable. Carry a light jacket if the air conditioning makes you feel cold.
- Wear your shoes, (easier to walk around a big airport and saves space in the bag).
- Check all the documents once again and keep them in appropriate places.
- Be at the airport three to four hours before the departure.
- Check in your luggage at the counter. Make sure the label on the bag has the name of your port of entry, like BLR- IAH for a flight from Bengaluru to Houston.
- Collect your boarding passes. If you have a connecting flight, you might get two.
- You will go through an emigration check. Answer the officer any questions they might ask you. Most of the time, they will let you pass after taking a photograph.
- Find your boarding gate.

FAQS:

1. WHAT SHOULD I KEEP IN MIND ON THE DAY I TRAVEL?

- Check all the documents once again and keep them in appropriate places so that it is easy for you to take them.
- Since it is going to be a long flight wear something comfortable (cotton dress + full sleeves shirt). Wear your shoes - in flight, you can remove them (some airlines give in-flight shoes - else relax in socks).
- Be at the airport 3-4 hours before the departure.
- If you were not able to get any dollars, get them at the airport. All international airports have authorized money exchange counters.
- For vegetarians - watch out before you eat - you may get non-veg even if you had asked for Veg. It is always a good idea to state your meal preferences beforehand. You can do so online, on your airline's website, or by calling their customer service center up to 48 hours before your flight. Asian Vegetarian is a safe option to get food closest to what our Indian taste-buds are used to. If you're OK with eating eggs, you can try the Lacto-Ovo Vegetarian option. If, for

some reason, you haven't done this, make sure you mention your meal preference at the check-in counter. If you miss out on that also, you can let the air hostesses know about your meal preferences on the flight and they will try to accommodate you as much as possible. However, it might not always be to the best of your preferences. So your best option is to have your meal preferences set up on the airline's website or by calling in ahead of time.

- Once out of India, be very careful. Don't trust anyone. Keep your eyes on your baggage and documents all the time. Don't hire a taxi (unless emergency) till you reach your destination. If required don't hesitate to spend money.
- If in doubt at any point, ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS to the STAFF.
- Make sure that you are well-rested and sleep during the flight so that you are alert and full of energy during layover and immigration. this will also help minimize jet lag.

2. I HAVE A CONNECTING FLIGHT WITH A LAYOVER. WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I GET WHEN WE LAND FOR TRANSIT?

- When you book a flight try to have a layover of a minimum of two hours.
- When your flight reaches your transit, listen carefully to any instructions given by your flight attendants before you disembark. You will hear information about departure time and gate number.
- Proceed to the terminal from where you will depart. All airports have well-marked sign boards and you should be able to find your way. You will only need to worry about your cabin luggage, the check-in will be transferred by the airlines.
- Although you can move around in the airport, be at the designated gate within 1 hour of your flight's departure for the onward journey.
- Do not leave your baggage unattended even for a short while. If you need to visit the restroom, carry your hand baggage with you. Don't watch any bags, etc from any unknown person either.

3. JET LAG: WHAT IS THE REAL DEAL?

- When you're flying from India to the U.S., you will cross nearly ten time zones. This messes up your circadian rhythms, mainly your sleep cycles.
- The suggested way to counter is to sleep throughout or when it is nighttime according to the Central Time Zone.
- Jet lag is different for every individual, ranging from a few days to negligence. You should plan your trip such that when you reach College Station, you have a buffer of a few days to adjust to the cycles here.

4. WHICH FORMS DO I HAVE TO FILL OUT DURING MY FLIGHT TO THE USA?

- In the final part of your trip, just before you land in the US, you will have to fill out a Customs Declaration form.

Customs Declaration: It must be filled out and surrendered to the U.S. Customs inspector at the port of entry into the United States. It is a declaration of the items you are bringing into the country. Fill it out faithfully, there will be instructions displayed on screens nearby when you land or you could ask for help from a flight attendant if you are in flight.

5. I HAVE FINALLY REACHED THE PORT OF ENTRY. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO FIRST?

- The first thing you need to go through at the port-of-entry (international airport where you first land in the U.S.), is the immigration and customs clearance.
- Once you are out of the plane follow the signs for non-residents and head to the immigration desk. Try not to dawdle because the queue is long and it can take from 30 min to three hours.
- Keep your I-20, passport and visa, and admission & aid letters ready. Also, make sure that you have filled out the Customs Declaration Forms.
- The kind of questions you might encounter are: "Is this your first time in the US?", "Where are you going to reside in the U.S?" "Are you a student? Do you have an F1 Visa?"
- Answer concisely and accurately. Do not be scared, you have a valid visa and documentation.
- If your port of entry is not Houston: Even if you have a domestic connecting flight as the last leg of the journey, your port of entry will be an internal airport. If this is far from the university, or in a different state, you might be questioned as to why that is so. If you are planning on meeting relatives or friends elsewhere before heading to college, give the correct reason. You might be asked to tell the address of the place you are planning on visiting. Talk with your relatives or friends, they will help you answer the questions. Have this information handy with you before the flight.

6. I HAVE HEARD ABOUT AN ISSUE WITH SOME STUDENTS NOT GETTING "D/S" WRITTEN ON THEIR PASSPORTS. WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?

- **VERY IMPORTANT:** This is the most important thing to do once the official okays your entry into the country is to see if they have stamped and signed your passport.
- Near your visa, or on some page of the passport, there should be the seal of the Department of Homeland Security, and the words "F-1 D/S".
- If this is not present, go back to your immigration official and tell them.
- **DO NOT** leave the immigration counter if you don't have this written. Many students in the past had to make trips again to Houston because of this small mistake. Be aware!

7. I GOT THE PASSPORT STAMPED. WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

- Once you are done with the immigration, go to the baggage counter to fetch your luggage.
- Use a cart to carry the bags. (At some places the cart is free, at some places you may have to pay).
- Pick up your bags as they come out on the conveyer belt.
- If you don't get your baggage, inform the inquiry section. You may have to wait an hour or so here, it happens in rare cases though.
- Cart your baggage to the nearby customs desk.
- If asked tell them that you are a student on an F-1 visa coming to the US.
- Normally they don't ask students to open their baggage, but if asked to open your baggage do so calmly. If asked about the "powders", give them an appropriate answer. Go through the US Customs page (https://www.cbp.gov/travel/us-citizens/know-before-you-go/prohibited-and-restricted-items?language_content_entity=en) to know what's allowed and what's not allowed.
- **Note:** Based on previous students' experiences, in most cases, you will not be asked to open your boxes at all & you will be simply waved through.

You are officially in the clear to enter the United States! If you have a domestic flight, follow the signs. If you wish to exit the airport, look for signs leading to ground transportation (shuttle) or parking (personal). Cross-check with the people who are coming to pick you up, and specify a terminal and door number.

If nobody turns up, call the contact number given to you. Never leave your baggage unattended. Don't go out of the airport until somebody comes and picks you up.

Once home, rejoice! A new phase of your life has begun.

The questions are answered subjectively, based on the experiences of the members. You might have special circumstances, needs, or issues. Please use this only as a guideline.