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## Relocation Guide to Tampa, FL

[www.iorworld.com](http://www.iorworld.com)

*IOR makes every effort to ensure the information contained in this guide is as current as possible. If you notice errors, or information which is no longer accurate, please contact us immediately so we may correct the issue.*

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## WELCOME AND OVERVIEW



Photo courtesy of [Wikipedia](#)

Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon first arrived in the Tampa Bay area in 1513, but the Spaniards focused their attention on settling eastern Florida and left the western areas alone. In 1824, only two months after the arrival of the first American settler, four companies of the U.S. Army established Fort Brooke to protect the strategic harbor at Tampa Bay.

Development of the Tampa Bay region began after the territory became part of the United States in 1845. In spite of the blockade and Federal occupation during the Civil War, the area grew steadily. Henry B. Plant's 1884 railroad extension to the Hillsborough River provided access to new areas, and he built lavish hotels along his rail line to attract visitors.

Tampa owes its commercial success to Tampa Bay and the Hillsborough River. When phosphates were discovered nearby in the late 1880s, the resulting mining and shipping industries prompted a boom of growth and wealth that lasted through the 1890s. Tampa's port is now the seventh largest in the nation; today phosphate shipping is supplemented by trade in shrimp.

The military has also had an ongoing role in Tampa's development. The city was the primary outfitting and embarkation port for U.S. troops bound for Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Today the U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command are headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base.

The main Tampa downtown business district has grown phenomenally since the 1960s. Major banks and an increasing number of other corporations occupy large glass, steel and concrete buildings that tower high above the bay. The Tampa Convention Center, overlooking the Hillsborough River, offers meeting facilities and features access to the River Walk.

Modern day Tampa is commonly referred to as the "Tampa Bay Area", consisting of Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater. The four-county area is composed of roughly 2.9 million residents, making it the second largest in the state behind Miami.

In short, Tampa has evolved into a multi-cultural, diverse business center with sustainable communities for its citizens. People of all ages arrive here to escape the worries and winters of wherever they came from, and an increasing number of them stay here due to the wonders of the city.

## City of Tampa Overview

- [Official Website of the City of Tampa](#)
- [Mayor of the City Tampa](#)
- Population: 347,645
- Land Area: 170.6 mi<sup>2</sup> (441.9 km<sup>2</sup>)

## History of Tampa

- [Time line of Tampa history](#)
- [Jimmie B. Keel Regional Library](#)
- [Tampa Bay History Center](#)

## Recommended Reading (in print)

- [Insiders' Guide® to the Greater Tampa Bay Area](#)
- [Day Trips from Tampa Bay](#)
- [Tampa, FL: Cool Stuff Every Kid Should Know \(Arcadia Kids\)](#)

## What to See, Sightseeing Tours, Value Packages and Passes, Tourist Information

- Best of Tampa- [TripAdvisor](#)
- [VisitTampa](#)
- [Official visitor's guide](#)
- [City Pass Tampa](#) – save on Tampa Attractions

## Where to Find Arts & Entertainment

- [Official Tampa Calendar of Events](#)
- [Tampa Tourist Calendar of Events](#)
- [Theatre Productions in Tampa](#)
- [Movie Theatres in Tampa](#)

## Where to Eat

- [List of Restaurants – Organized by OpenTable \(easy reservations\)](#)
- [Tampa Chocolate Festival](#)
- [Tampa's best restaurants \(blog\) –the Tampa Tribune](#)

## Tipping & Sales Tax

When you eat in a restaurant in America, you are expected to leave your server a tip, as it is not included. In a bar, café, or modest restaurant, 15% of the total bill is acceptable. However, in an upscale restaurant (fine dining), a tip calculated on 20% of the total bill is now the norm in Florida.

In addition, you will be paying the 7.00% sales tax in Tampa.

Map of Florida/Tampa



Source: [worldguides.com](http://worldguides.com)

**EMERGENCY**

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY  
DIAL 911  
FOR FIRE, POLICE & AMBULANCE**

Language line: If the person calling 911 is unable to speak English, they can tell the operator what language they speak. The 911 Operator will have an interpreter on the line within one minute to assist with the translation.

They will ask for the following information so keep this page close to your phone:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

**If you accidentally call 911, please do not hang up.** The police will automatically be dispatched to your home to make sure there are no problems. Explain to the Operator the call was an accident.

- [POISON CONTROL](#) (800) 222-1222
- [ANIMAL POISON CONTROL](#) (888) 426-4435

Other Important Numbers:

CLOSEST CONSULATE OFFICE \_\_\_\_\_  
PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN \_\_\_\_\_  
WORK PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

- Code Enforcement (weekends 7 a.m.- 6 p.m.) 813-690-4631
- Electric Power Outage or Safety Concern (TECO 24 hrs) 1-877-588-1010
- Hurricane Information Desk (during an emergency) 813-274-7700
- Emergency Information (prior to an emergency being declared) 813-282-7827
- Public Works Emergency After Hours (24 hours) 813-274-3101
- Stormwater Emergency Drainage/Flooding (24 hours) 813-274-3101
- Tree Hotline/Emergency
  - Illegal Tree Removal (24 hours) 813-258-8733
  - Fallen Tree (business hours) 813-274-8615
  - Fallen Tree (after hours) 813-931-2168
- Wastewater Emergency Repair/Sewer Backup (24 hours) 813-259-1693
- Water Department Emergency Services (24 hours) 813-274-7400

## **Hurricane Preparedness Tips**

It is imperative that you have necessary preparations in place to be prepared for Hurricane season (June 1<sup>st</sup> – November 30<sup>th</sup>). By preparing in advance you'll invest a little time up front, but you will have things in order and can devote time to last minute, less important items should you find yourself under a Hurricane Watch or Warning.

One good way to ease this stress is to have some plans laid in advance. Just think how you will feel having the peace of mind of knowing you are prepared while everyone else in the hot zone is scurrying about trying to buy supplies that are dwindling or non-existent.

Ideally, everyone should have shutters and a secure way to lock down your home. But you can at least make sure you are prepared in every other way.

1. Make sure to inventory your valuables. Make lists and videotape. Then keep this list in a safety deposit box. This includes property deeds, marriage / birth certificates, social security cards, stocks and bonds and other portfolio information, passports, wills medical records and insurance policies.
2. Make a reference list of everything you would absolutely want to take with you should you have to evacuate your home. Include photo albums, important documents, files, jewelry and other precious mementos. You will surely forget something if you had to get out quickly.
3. Compile a list of supports including family and friends that you want to stay in touch with throughout the storm. Decide on who will take what roles, and where and when to meet should phone service be out. Many people will use an out of town contact that may be easier to reach than a local one.
4. If your area is placed under a Hurricane Watch, make sure you wash all dishes and run the dishwasher. Also make sure all the laundry is washed and clean sheets and towels are being used. You don't know when power may be restored and this will avoid you running out of clean clothes too soon.
5. Be sure to have cash on you. You may not be able to find an operating ATM after the storm.
6. Fill up your car with gas. Purchase a portable tank to bring extra gas. Evacuation traffic is slow.
7. Make sure you have adequate supplies such as food and water (1 gallon per day, per person) for everyone in your household. Don't forget the manual can opener! A good rule of thumb is to have enough supplies to last you for seven days.
8. Be sure you have plenty of supplies for baby including formula (powdered) diapers clean bottles and wipes and baby food.
9. Don't forget to have all medications you use or may use filled and readily available.
10. Battery powered radio or television and flashlights. Don't forget batteries for each.
11. Purchase a car charger for your phone
12. Don't forget to make arrangements for your pets and to have adequate supplies for them as well.
13. Also, take adequate measures to account for climate changes.

The summer is a perfect time to tackle any impending projects you have been putting off. Because the world seems to slow down around us, many people are vacationing and school is out, it is a great time to delve into these matters.

### **Safety and Security**

While Tampa is relatively safe, it is still a major city. Like every major metropolitan area in the USA, there is some crime.

Take basic precautions: lock your car, lock your doors and windows in your home, be aware of strangers and things that just don't seem right. It is always better to be cautious.

Check [here for a list of crime rates per neighborhood in Tampa](#).

### **Urgent Care Centers**

An Urgent Care Center is different than a Hospital Emergency Room. An Emergency room would be in an absolute emergency. You may visit an Urgent Care Center if, for example, you have a terrible ear ache and need medicine immediately but your Primary Care Physician's office is closed. Many Urgent Care Centers have extended hours and are open early morning until late evening during the week and also some weekend hours. Be sure to refer back to your health insurance company to clarify which urgent care centers and primary care physicians you are allowed to visit using your health insurance. Your insurance card should have a toll-free 1-800 number on the back for you to call and ask questions and clarify which urgent care center would be closest for you. Please always carry your insurance card with you!

### **Hospital & Clinics**

- [Florida Hospital at Tampa](#)
- [Tampa General Hospital](#)
- [Hospitals in Tampa](#)

### **Veterinarians**

Local [list of Veterinarians](#) in Tampa

### **Pharmacies**

There are several major pharmacy chains in Tampa, found on nearly every block on commercial streets. Click on "Store Locator" and enter your zip (postal) code to find the pharmacy near you. Several pharmacies are open 24 hours. Check for hours of operation. Also the main grocery stores like Publix, Target, and Wal-Mart have full service pharmacies.

- [Walgreens](#)
- [CVS](#)
- [Pharmacies](#) in Tampa



A lease is an agreement that outlines the obligations of the owner and the tenants of a house or apartment. It is a legally binding document, so it is important for you to know the exact terms of the lease agreement before you sign it. Please do not sign a lease without reviewing it with your IOR DS Consultant.

### **Types of rental properties**

- **Apartment**

An apartment is rented from a company or individual that owns the property. Apartment buildings are usually multistory with people over, under and beside each other with common hallways or walk ways. Apartments are often rented from a company or individual in the form of an individual lease with no bearing on the other tenants of the building (besides noise complaints, property damage, etc.)

- **Studio Apartments**

A studio apartment is basically a one room apartment with sleeping, dining and kitchen all in one room plus a full bathroom. A “convertible” or “alcove” studio may have a nook or area which can be sectioned off separately for sleeping.

- **Condominium**

A condo is a communally owned estate and the owners share the ownership of the common areas such as grounds and hallways. Condominiums may be apartment style buildings or town house type buildings, but condo owners do not usually own the land. Condo owners are required to pay monthly common maintenance charges; although these might be reflected in your rental rate (it is important to clarify this with your landlord).

- **Townhouse**

A Townhouse is a kind of structure where the individual properties are flush against each other with tiny front and back "yards" and shared walls between them. Almost always they are multistory single family. Usually townhouse owners own the property under their townhouse.

- **Single Family Houses**

Single-family houses are free-standing rental properties that are habited by one person or a family. As you do not share this rental space with any other tenants, single-family homes offer the most amount of privacy. Homes also often come with a parking spot and/or garage space, but may require that you handle certain maintenance items (i.e. your lawn, minor repairs, etc.)

## Rental Agents

In most situations, your IOR DS Consultant will partner with a local realtor to have access to the most current and extensive property listings as well as the realtor's expertise in preparing and negotiating leases. This agent receives a commission for their assistance, in most US locations this commission is paid by the Landlord, not the tenant. Your IOR DS Consultant will discuss this with you.

## Renter's Rights

Tenants who lease or rent property are protected against discrimination by [The Fair Housing Act](#). If you think your rights have been violated, you may write a letter or telephone the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office nearest you. You have one year after the alleged violation to file a complaint with HUD, but you should file as soon as possible.

While you can generally expect the same service from landlords, it's important to know your state's laws. Each state and most major cities have their own tenant rights, laws and protections. Here is [Florida's](#). You can also visit the [HUD website here for a full guide to renters' rights by states](#).

If your rental property ever suffers any defects that make your place uninhabitable, your landlord has a duty to fix it. While some apartments let you make online requests for repairs, as well as provide a phone number for "emergencies," always make sure you document your request in writing. The landlord will then have a certain amount of time to make those repairs.

## Privacy

You have the right to privacy. While the landlord owns the property, they can't access it anytime they want. All states have laws stating renters have a right to privacy while renting. Pretty much the only time the landlord can come into your rental without permission or notice is when they're responding to an emergency that threatens injury or property damage.

Any other time the landlord wants to enter your apartment, they need to have your permission and in most cases give you 24-hours' notice before entering.

## What to expect from the landlord:

In most states, you are legally entitled to:

- Safe structural elements including floors, walls, roofs, and secure doors and windows.
- Privacy as described above.
- All electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems function.
- Working hot and cold water.
- Exterminating infestations of rodents and other insects.
- Access to trash receptacles.
- Landlords cannot discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities.
- Apartment buildings sometimes come with laundry and dryer machines in the basement.
- Water, electricity, and gas bills are up to you to pay. **Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you with this process.**

## Utilities and Appliances

Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you or provide information on connecting your utilities. It is possible some will be included in your rent, but typically most are not.

If you are moving from Europe to North America, you might be surprised at the relatively large size of the kitchen appliances in your accommodation, especially the refrigerator! It may also surprise some expats that properties are rented **with** appliances. In the US it is standard for properties to include a refrigerator, stove, and oven. Properties may also include a dishwasher, microwave, washer and dryer depending on the location, size, and price point.

**\*\*Note that you will need a social security number in order to register and pay for utilities\*\***

## Recycling

The [Recycling Division](#) of the City of Tampa is responsible for implementing, monitoring and administering the Department's comprehensive recycling program. This includes curbside and multi-family recycling, office paper and commercial recycling programs.

## The Lease Process

### Review your housing budget with your IOR DS Consultant

Your IOR DS Consultant can help you understand what kind of property you can afford. You also need to take into account that you may be responsible for some of the utility costs of your rental.

### Know what you want

What are you looking for in a property? Do you want a studio or a single bedroom? Maybe you want to rent a single family home? Do you need the property to come with appliances, including washer and dryer? Do want it to be close to school or your work? Do you want it to be within walking distance of retail, like groceries or coffee shops? Are you looking for a child friendly area?

Keep in mind that outside of the city center in major cities, there is not much public transportation and most locals drive everywhere.

### Identify potential apartments

IOR offers home finding services to aid you with this process. Your consultant may work with a local broker who will help to organize appointments and visit properties. They will also assist in the rental application and the leasing process.

## Common Abbreviations and Acronyms used in rental housing listings

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<b>24-hr mtn</b>	24-hour emergency maintenance
<b>AC or A/C</b>	Air conditioning

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<b>LA</b>	Living area
<b>LR</b>	Living room

<b>Appls</b>	Appliances
<b>Apt</b>	Apartment
<b>BA</b>	Bathroom
<b>BR</b>	Bedroom
<b>Bsmt</b>	Basement
<b>CAC</b>	Central air conditioning
<b>DA</b>	Dining area
<b>Det</b>	Detached
<b>Dk</b>	Deck
<b>DR</b>	Dining room
<b>Dw (D/w)</b>	Dishwasher
<b>Eff</b>	Efficiency
<b>EIK</b>	Eat-in kitchen
<b>Fin bsmt</b>	Finished basement
<b>FDR</b>	Formal dining room
<b>FHA</b>	Fair Housing Act
<b>FMR</b>	Fair market rent
<b>FP</b>	Floorplan
<b>Gar</b>	Garage
<b>H/A</b>	Handicapped accessible
<b>H/W</b>	Hardwood floors
<b>Hi ceil</b>	High ceilings
<b>HVAC</b>	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning

<b>MBR</b>	Master bedroom
<b>MBTH</b>	Master bathroom
<b>Neg</b>	Negotiable
<b>Ofc</b>	Office
<b>OSP</b>	Off-street parking
<b>Pkg</b>	Parking
<b>PM</b>	Property manager (management)
<b>Pvt</b>	Private
<b>Pwdr rm</b>	Powder room (1/2 bath)
<b>RE</b>	Real estate
<b>Renov</b>	Renovated
<b>Rf</b>	Roof
<b>Rm</b>	Room
<b>SF</b>	Single-family
<b>SFA</b>	Single-family attached
<b>SFD</b>	Single-family detached
<b>Sp, Pl (S/p)</b>	Swimming pool
<b>Sq. ft</b>	Square feet
<b>Th (T/H)</b>	Townhouse
<b>Vw (vu)</b>	View
<b>W/A</b>	Wheelchair accessible
<b>W/W</b>	Wall-to-wall carpeting

## **Visit**

Make this process as efficient as possible by visiting as many potential properties as you can in one or two days. Try to go sometime during the week if possible. Your IOR DS consultant will work with you to set an appropriate schedule and to ensure that the properties you visit meet your needs as closely as possible.

## **What to do once you're there**

As you look at the rental unit, be sure to ask a lot of questions. While you should keep small concerns to yourself about the unit while looking at it, feel free to ask the landlord or apartment manager any questions you might have that will help in your decision. Here are some possible questions you may consider asking:

- What's the monthly rent?
- Are any utilities included with the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- When is rent due? Do you have auto-pay?
- What's the make-up of the other tenants? Are they mainly younger students? Married couples with families? Older folks?
- What's the parking situation like? Do you pay for a parking spot?
- Do you take care of small maintenance issues or am I responsible for some of the repairs in the property?
- Am I able to re-paint the walls or make other modifications?

Again, be friendly and polite when you ask these questions.

## **The Application**

The next step in the leasing process for an apartment is to submit a rental application for the location you want. The manager or landlord will be able to give you the application as well as anything else that they may need to have filled out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist with this process. For a single family home there will likely be a rental application.

You will need your passport, Social Security number, Visa, and proof of employment. Some landlords may charge you an application fee which could be between \$20 to \$400 dollars, depending on the landlord. This could be a combination of an application fee and move-in fee.

Once you've done this, it can take up to a few days to hear back from the property manager. Once your application has been approved the lease approval process will begin with IOR and likely your employer.

## **Signing the lease**

DO NOT SIGN THE LEASE until your IOR consultant has reviewed it in full and given their approval.

The lease is a binding contract, so it is very important to pay attention as a leasing agent goes over it with you. It is perfectly normal for you to take your time and read all the fine print for yourself. If you

are working with an IOR DS consultant, make sure to talk with them and receive approval before signing. You will also be given a copy of the lease to take with you and keep for your records, but it is very important to know everything included in your lease from the start.

Some things to look for in a lease:

- Term of the lease and any important dates such as when the rent is due.
- Extra fees for parking spaces or storage, garbage collection, and pets.
- Information regarding utility providers and whether you or the landlord is responsible for those bills.
- Notification requirements in case of renewal.
- Requirements/responsibilities of the tenants to do routine repairs such as lawn maintenance, cleaning or notification of repairs.
- Clauses that allow the landlord to change the terms of the lease after it is signed.
- Restrictions that would prevent you from living normally or comfortably in the home.

Sometimes landlords will ask for a security deposit before you sign the lease. This is normal, but you shouldn't pay in cash. Make sure all payments are made out as a check or money order just in case.

### **What to expect from the lease**

Most leases in the United States include the following or a variation thereof:

- Your employer requires that all leases include a Break Clause in case you are transferred for work or personal needs.
- Contracts will often be for periods of a year or more.
- Minimum stay. Typically three fourths of your lease contract time. If you choose to move out before this date, you will lose your security deposit. If you move out afterwards, you are still required to give a specified number of days notice.
- Security Deposit. Landlords will expect you to leave them with a deposit (usually about one to two month's rent) that they will hold for the duration of your lease. You will receive your security deposit back at the end of the lease provided you don't break any specific clauses in your lease, such as moving out without proper notice, not paying rent, causing damages to the property, etc.
- Landlords should not be given unchecked access to your apartment. If there isn't anything in your lease about landlord's rights to enter the leased premises, suggest the following clause:

*Entry by the Landlord: Landlord or his agent will not enter Tenant's home except to deal with an emergency; to make necessary or agreed repairs; to supply necessary or agreed services; or to show the unit to potential purchasers, tenants, or repair persons. Unless there is an emergency, Landlord will give Tenant at least 24 hours' written notice of the date, time, and purpose of the intended entry and will schedule entries during normal business hours, Monday–Friday.*

Most landlords will be hard-pressed to say no to such a reasonable clause. If the landlord refuses, it's a sure sign that he won't be reasonable in other respects, too. Continue on in your housing search.

### **Moving In**

On your selected move-in date, after the lease has been signed, and deposits have been paid...you should be given your keys and more than likely a move-in form to fill out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you with an initial walk through of your apartment. Look for dings in the walls, cracked windows, or other irregularities and report them on this form. This will indicate that these things were there before you moved in and you will not be held responsible for them at the end of the lease term.

### **Get Renter's Insurance**

Renter's insurance covers any loss to your personal property due to robbery or accidents. It also covers any damage you might cause to other tenant's property. For example, let's say your washing machine springs a leak and water seeps through the floor and ruins your neighbor's antique dresser. Renter's insurance would cover that.

Renter's insurance will cost approximately about \$15-125 a month, less if you tack it onto another policy (like auto) you have with an insurance company. A few popular options are [Allstate](#) and [StateFarm](#).

When relocating internationally, your children's education is of great concern. IOR eases this concern by exposing you to the various school options available for your child and helping you to work within the framework of options to find the best solution for your family.

### I. **Overview and Philosophy of the United States Educational System**

In most U.S. locations you will have the choice of sending your children to either a public or private school. A public school must accept your child for enrollment if you live within its designated district. A private school may have a general curriculum similar to that of public schools, but may or may not accept your child depending on availability of space, your child's prior academic history, language ability in English, or the result of entrance exams. Private schools charge a fee, which can be quite high. If you are considering private school, be sure you have a clear understanding of your employer's policy regarding reimbursement. In the U.S. approximately 85% of the children attend public schools for ages 5 to 13, and approximately 93% of the children attend public school at the high school level. Many, though not all, private schools are parochial, or religiously affiliated schools.

A third option called 'charter school' is sometimes available. Charter Schools are similar to public schools in that they are free, non-religious, publicly funded, and are held to state and federal academic standards. Each charter school is governed by its own local school community, which often includes parents and teachers - rather than a district. This freedom allows teachers to be more innovative, and communities to shape their local school. Charter schools can set their own hours and adjust their curriculum to fit their student needs, and give teachers the opportunity to experiment with next-generation teaching models including technology and the virtual classroom. Charter schools typically admit students by random lottery and do not restrict enrollment based on location, academic achievement, or other factors private schools may consider.

Most Americans, regardless of their level of education and income, send their children to public schools. Because each town or community typically has its own school system funded by local municipal taxes and state revenues, residents in an area with a higher tax base can usually be assured of quality public education. IOR is very conscientious about placing assignees and their families in areas with good public school systems.

Private schools do not receive state revenue, although they may be entitled to assistance with transporting students and providing for special needs such as speech therapy and assistance of the learning disabled. Private schools are funded through tuition paid by the student's parents. Typically, there are additional fees for books, uniforms, and school supplies, and the parents are usually solicited for additional charitable donations. There may also be book or activity fees at public schools.



The public education system in the U.S. is administered by local and state government, rather than by the federal government. Each state has a board of education which sets policy for all school districts and standards which all students must achieve. In addition, each local district has a board of education which sets local policy and curriculum within the parameters set forth by the state.

School districts can provide specialized programs and services for children with special needs. The general philosophy of education in the United States is to educate the entire diverse, ethnically mixed population with equal educational opportunity for all, while serving the educational needs of the individual student.

If you choose public education for your child, the particular school your child attends is determined by the school district boundaries containing your residential address. The school may or may not be within walking distance to your home. Generally, if the distance to the school is greater than one mile, the school district provides bus transportation to and from school. For those children who do not live far enough away from the school for bus service but are too far to walk comfortably, parents may have the option of paying for bus transportation, or they may choose to drive their children to and from school. Very often parents form 'car pools', sharing the responsibility of driving groups of children.

Generally private schools do not have residential boundaries for their students' families. In most cases, parents rely on car pools to ease the burden of transporting their students to and from school. In selecting your home, consider the driving distance and time to and from the private school.

Ultimately, the school your children attend is determined by your residential address, so it is a good idea to include visits to potential schools and properties in your pre-trip visit. Your pre-trip visit will consist of selected sample houses in a variety of communities, along with information, or perhaps visits, to the appropriate schools. However, there may be a limited selection of homes available within each community. It is possible you may find a school you like, but there may not be any available housing options within that school's enrollment radius. We will show you housing in school districts with proven academic standards, but be aware there are cases when certain schools are unavailable due to housing concerns.

If you are considering a private school, you may wish to visit it as well as a public school to compare. It would be advisable, however, to first determine if the private school has space available for your child. Additionally, you will want to know the amount of tuition and fees for the school, as that may be a factor in your decision.

## II. Academic Standards

### A. Curriculum:

The overriding objective of elementary and secondary education, public or private, is to prepare students for higher learning and future employment. Each school district or private school will have a unique curriculum which meets the above overriding goals.

#### Elementary School:

The elementary years (kindergarten through fifth grade) focus on fundamental academic skills, language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics in addition to introduction to technology, art, music, physical education, and sometimes foreign languages. Students' personal development is energized through emphasizing strong work habits which provide a positive feeling toward learning.

#### Middle School:

Middle School helps children in early adolescence (sixth through eighth grade) transition from elementary to high school and from childhood into young adulthood. The structure of the school day includes contact with several teachers who specialize in their subject matter; students usually move from one classroom to another. Curricular content focuses on expansion of skills in math, science, reading, writing and social studies. Further exploration of foreign languages, practical and fine arts, music, health, physical education and computer literacy are also provided. Middle school students are able to enhance their formal education by participation in school sponsored adult supervised competitive athletics and a variety of clubs and special interest groups.

#### High School:

The premise of elementary and middle schools is to prepare students for the academic, social, and physical challenges of high school. All high schools maintain defined academic requirements for graduation, however great flexibility of classes is usually available within this framework. Most schools provide more challenging academic courses entitled honors or advanced placement which award college credit to successful students. High school extracurricular and athletic activities are more competitive than those found at lower levels and often provide talented students with opportunities continue this activity in college or university.

### B. Grading Systems/Assessment of Child Progress

Schools typically report students' progress to parents with written report cards, which may be either mailed or carried home by the student. Many schools also set one or two days aside each semester for parent/teacher conferences. These conferences are an opportunity for parents to meet with their children's teachers and hear the teacher's evaluations of their student's performance in school. At the elementary school level, where children usually have one primary teacher, a teacher conference may last from fifteen minutes to an hour in length. At the middle school and high school levels, you may meet with your child's teachers for a period of five or ten minutes. If you need additional time with the teacher, you may schedule a follow-up visit

allowing time for a more complete discussion. It is a good idea to participate fully in teacher conferences. Your children's teachers may be able to provide valuable insight regarding your children's academic and social adjustments. Should there be concerns, they may be able to assist you with helpful suggestions of additional resources to contact.

### **C. Standardized Testing**

Challenged to prepare students for higher learning and future employment, all school districts and private schools utilize standardized testing to measure student progress over time and compare themselves to national standards. Such tests are prepared by national groups of parents and educators as well as business and academic leaders. Tests vary from state to state, but typically students in prescribed grade levels (for example, grades 3, 6, 8 and 10) are tested in the areas of reading, mathematics, writing science and social science. Colleges and universities use the ACT and SAT tests to measure incoming student abilities; the results of these tests are nearly as important as high school grades when students apply for entrance into US colleges and universities.

## **III. Definition of School Groupings**

### **A. Pre-School or Nursery School**

In the U.S., 3, 4 and some 5 year olds have the opportunity to attend a pre-school under a private system. These schools can be located in a local school, a church, or an independent free standing building. Pre-school is not publicly funded and is fee-based. Typically children are grouped by age. Most of the schools are play-based, although different philosophies of formal education can be found. Typically, 3 year olds attend 2 half days a week and 4 year olds may attend 3 half days a week. Some preschools also serve as day care centers for families in which both parents work. Typically reading is not taught in pre-school, although a few programs can be found which include reading fundamentals. Concentration of learning is on small and gross motor skills, and basic academic readiness skills. Some pre-schools offer a full-day Kindergarten option for those parents who work. The public school kindergarten programs are typically only half day programs with no before or after school care. If a Kindergarten program is offered it follows the state curriculum guidelines, and teaches pre-reading and math skills.

### **B. Elementary School**

Elementary school provides education for children ages 5 to 11, Kindergarten and Grades 1,2,3,4 &5. While kindergarten at age 5 is not required, most families send their children to kindergarten. Elementary school is the beginning of publicly funded school. In the U.S. children are grouped by age and advanced in school by age. There are usually opportunities within the grade for different levels of learning, with opportunities for advanced learners and remedial learners. The public elementary school is usually neighborhood based and the source of playmates for your child. In the U.S., pre-reading skills are introduced in kindergarten (age 5) along with early math skills. Formal reading begins in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (age 6). Studies have shown that while children learn to read at different ages, the difference between early and late readers is not a predictor of reading skills by about the age of 8 or 9 years old. In addition to reading

and math, elementary school also has a broad base of writing, science, social studies, art, music, computer, personal development and physical education. Only in a few schools will a 2<sup>nd</sup> language be introduced at the elementary level. English as a Second Language (ESL) is offered starting at the elementary level in the public school. Parents are allowed to visit the schools, and there are many opportunities for parents to volunteer their skills, particularly at the elementary school. Parents may approach teachers and administrators with suggestions and concerns with their child. Usually the personnel are willing to consider changes if they feel it would be in the best interests of the child. With a child coming to a new country and sometimes starting a new language, feel free to talk to the school if you think something could be done to ease your child's adjustment. The school day is from approximately 8:30a.m. to 3:00p.m. with recess (playtime break) and a lunch break at the school.

### **C. Middle School**

Middle school provides education for children ages 11 to 14, grades 6, 7 & 8. The children attend school in a different location and in the public school system several elementary schools will combine into the same middle school. A middle school is usually 2-4 times the size of the elementary school. Middle school is considered the transition between elementary school and high school and from childhood to young adulthood. Because of this philosophy, U.S. students at this age level are all introduced to the same academic curriculum. The school day is structured differently with the children changing class rooms and teacher with each subject. There are 6-8 different class periods daily. Within the grades children may be separated by academic ability in classes, particularly math and English. Often an introduction to foreign languages is offered. For those who choose, the student may have the option to complete one year of high school foreign language during middle school. If your home country requires more advanced language development at this age, you may want to consider outside supplemental language instruction. Middle school is a time when extracurricular activities such as theatre, music, sports and clubs become important activities in adolescent life.

### **D. High School**

High school provides education for children ages 14 to 18, grades 9, 10, 11 & 12. It is the final level of education before the university, community college, or trade school. The terms Freshman (9<sup>th</sup>), Sophomore (10<sup>th</sup>), Junior (11<sup>th</sup>) and Senior (12<sup>th</sup>) are also used to identify grade level. At the high school level the student has more specific choices of course work. Each district has a set of minimum graduation requirements, which will include courses in English, math, science, social studies, physical education and a combination of foreign language, fine arts and practical arts. Within this framework the student has various choices from more remedial levels, average levels, and more advanced levels. If a student is prepared for the material, by the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade a student may have the opportunity to take a college level course for advanced credit in the U.S. university system. In high school competitive sports are offered along with theatre, orchestra, instrumental and vocal music and clubs. Your child will have an opportunity to meet more U.S. children by participating in a school extracurricular activity. Each school district has 1 or more high schools with 800-2500 students. A student's high school

performance may determine the type of university or higher education program they pursue upon graduation. During high school national tests are given to determine the student's potential to advance to various higher education levels.

If your child anticipates returning to your home country to continue higher education within your university system, you might want to consider the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. This program is recognized internationally for entrance to universities. In contrast to the typical high school college preparatory curriculum, the IB semester consists of fewer subjects, studied in greater depth and with a bilingual proficiency. Developed in Switzerland, the curriculum was intended as a secondary education program which could be utilized and accepted worldwide. Not all US schools will offer an IB curriculum.

#### **E. Post-Secondary Education**

While most families on international assignment do not bring their older children (19 years+) for education in the U.S. we include a brief description of the US university system. Some form of post-secondary education is available to those U.S. students who seek it. Each state offers a public university system which the tuition is partly subsidized by the state for state residents. Residency of at least 1 year is necessary. Some are medium to large institutions (with undergraduate and graduate level programs). Some can be quite competitive for admission while others may not be competitive at all. Student's admission to the university is in part determined by their high school academic performance and course selection and as well as the results of a national standardized test (SAT or ACT). Post-Secondary is the educational level that students in the U.S. study subjects in great depth and select their majors and career choices. Graduate level programs on the master level, professional level, and PhD level are pursued after completing the 4 years of undergraduate studies.

### **IV. Life in Schools**

#### **A. Atmosphere**

It is valuable to visit your child's school to understand the academic and non-academic atmosphere that prevails. Administrators or counselors are happy to serve as tour guides and should always be contacted in advance. Do not be alarmed if your visit takes place during the lunch hour if the children seem a bit rambunctious. Students in American public schools generally enjoy a great deal of personal freedom in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in the halls before and after class. They are supervised by teachers or members of the school staff, but they generally are more relaxed in the lunch room and in the halls. If you are visiting on a rainy day, you may observe "indoor recess" in the gymnasium which could be noisy. Rest assured that when they are in the classroom, students do settle down and work quietly and diligently. Some classrooms are more informally arranged than others. For instance, some teachers prefer to have the children's desks in a circle rather than in rows. Teachers will sometimes assign group projects, where several students work together and are thus not seated at their desks during a part of the classroom period. Teachers are expected, however, to have good control of their classrooms. Private school policy regarding these issues of personal freedom varies. Some

private schools function as the public schools do, while others may have a more closely supervised approach. Again, it is always a good idea to visit the school so that you are comfortable with that particular school's management style.

### **B. Parental Involvement**

In addition to participating in parent/teacher conferences, most American schools encourage parents to become involved in the volunteer activities of the school. Most schools have a "PTA" (Parent Teacher Association) or "PTO" (Parent Teacher Organization). These organizations usually work with the school administration, dealing with issues such as student safety, communication to parents, academic concerns, etc., as well as fundraising and planning special programs to enhance the school experience for the student population.

Getting involved with the PTA or PTO is a great way to become well informed about your child's school. It also provides you with an opportunity to meet and really get to know other parents. There will probably be a choice of committees on which you could work; you do not have to commit to a leadership role. Some volunteer opportunities may involve actually working in the school, volunteering in the school library on day a week or one day a month for example. Be sure to alert the school administration that you would like to get involved, and ask for the name and phone number of the head of the parent volunteer organization at the school. Parent volunteers are usually welcomed and encouraged at all levels at all schools, both public and private.

### **C. Extracurricular Activities**

A well-rounded education requires that students learn their academic subjects as well as develop socialization skills and learn nonacademic skills. Belonging to a group can be a rewarding connection with peers and a good way to develop self-confidence. These are the reasons that schools, public and private, provide numerous extracurricular activities from which their students can choose to participate. At each level of education the opportunities and choices increase. For example at the elementary school level, all students are introduced to art, music, drama and a variety of athletic experiences. At the middle school level, students have required courses in some of the above areas but are provided opportunity to participate in after school activities of their choice. For example, competitive football, soccer, swimming, track, lacrosse, basketball etc. In addition many clubs allow students to pursue other interests, for example, computers, drama, fine arts, forensics, jazz band, photography, yearbook and student council. Almost universally, each activity or club is sponsored by adults, using specialized instruction, who demonstrate a working knowledge of the activity and a desire to teach children. An even greater variety of extracurricular experiences are available at the high school level, many of which help students identify strengths, talents and interests which may direct them to future colleges, vocations or avocations.

#### **D. Facilities**

All schools maintain facilities other than classrooms which enhance or support their educational mission.

##### **Libraries and Media Centers**

Libraries are universally available and are accessible to students throughout the day and often after hours. Libraries often contain a “media center” which maintains and makes available other types of educational materials including computers and software, audio and video tapes, slides, sound sequences, projectors and recorders of various types for use individually or in groups. The wide availability of computers and access to the internet has provided almost unlimited opportunities for students and teachers to obtain information that can enhance and facilitate learning.

##### **Fitness Facilities/Gymnasium**

Fitness facilities, or ‘gyms’ as they are typically referred to, are supplied by almost all schools in the United States. Gyms often consist of a large indoor court with various sports equipment. They are open during lunch hours and for specific hours before and after school for athletes or students who wish to exercise. Many gyms will be accompanied by a weight room and a locker room with a shower. Students are sometimes expected to use these communal showers following Physical Education classes or general use of the gym’s facilities.

## LOCAL SCHOOLS

Expat parents will need to carefully evaluate their priorities, and then choose an institution that can best satisfy their preferences. It's worthwhile considering how much you can afford to pay for your child's schooling, the proximity of the school from home and the workplace, the curriculum you'd like your child to learn, and what kind of teaching style or environment is best for your child.

### Public schools in Tampa

Schools in Florida are graded according to how well students have mastered the Sunshine State Standards. These standards are the skills Florida teachers determined our children must learn at each grade level and are measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) each school year. Schools earn points based on student achievement and are assigned a grade at the completion of each school year.

Pinellas County is situated in the middle of Florida's west coast and is home to more than 150,000 pre-kindergarten through adult public school students. Ranked first in the state, [Pinellas County Schools](#) have a lot to offer in terms of quality education experiences. Enrollment in [Magnet programs](#), charter schools, and special programs is available, including STEM, International Baccalaureate. PCS offers 70 programs focusing on students' interests, talents and abilities.

[The School District of Hillsborough County](#) was ranked as one of "the most outstanding school districts in the United States in the 14th annual Expansion Management Magazine report card of the nation's best public schools. Scoring in the top one-third of the 2,800 districts studied, the School District received a second time designation, and received the top score of all Florida's largest districts. The district's music programs were ranked among the 100 best in the nation for the fourth time in 2005 by the American Music Conference. Enrollment in [Magnet programs](#), charter schools, and special programs is available, including STEM, International Baccalaureate, Fine Arts, and Marine Sciences.

Attendances at [Pasco County Schools](#) are determined by street address, but transfers are allowed for various reasons. Pasco County Schools have been recognized as significant examples of schools that meet and exceed the State's new higher standards for quality. In fact, twelve schools received the Commissioners of Education's Five Star School Award. This is the highest award available to exemplary school in the State of Florida. There are several [Charter and Magnet Schools](#) in Pasco County, including IB and STEM Programs.

**You can find an official ranking of public schools by the Florida Board of Education [here](#).**



### Private Schools

There are over 100 private schools options in the Hillsborough County area. Schools include various religious affiliation, college prep, and Montessori. Please see [PrivateSchoolReview](#), [K12 Niche](#), and [GreatSchools](#) for full lists and rankings.

### Local Universities/Higher Education

- [University of South Florida](#)
- [University of Tampa](#)
- [Everest University](#)
- [Jersey College of Nursing](#)
- [Eckerd College](#)
- [St. Petersburg College](#)



Courtesy of the [Odyssey](#)

Banks and other financial institutions, such as credit unions, offer a variety of services. These services include:

- checking and saving accounts
- credit and debit cards
- online bill pay
- loans
- insurance
- financial planning

Banks in the United States are insured by the Federal Government for deposits up to \$250,000 per depositor per bank. The bank or credit union will display the letters FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) as proof.

### Checking and Savings Accounts

To open a checking or savings account you will need the following information:

- Two forms of picture identification including but not limited to your passport, driver's license, or work ID.
- Social security number. If you have not yet received your social security number, the bank can open an account with a W8 Temporary Tax ID form (available at the bank). You will need to call the bank with your social security number once it arrives in the mail.
- Local mailing address. You may use your office address as your mailing address, but be prepared to call your bank branch as soon as you have your permanent address.
- Letter of Employment
- Cash for the initial deposit can range from \$25-\$150 dollars.

### Checks

More businesses and banks are offering online or automatic bill paying options. However, you may still need to pay some bills by mail. **NEVER SEND CASH!** You will want to order at least the minimum quantity of checks. This will cost a set fee that the bank will charge you. The checks will be pre-printed with your name, address, telephone number and account number and will be mailed to your home.

### ATM or Debit Card

The most popular way of obtaining cash is by using an ATM (Automated Teller Machine) card, also referred to as a debit card. ATM's are located in most banks, malls, airports, grocery stores, and in many other public places. You will be given a PIN (Personal Identification Number) for using your card. It is important that you memorize this number and not keep written record of it with your card in order to protect your account. Most ATM's will take all cards, but many banks will charge a service fee for using another bank's ATM. Through the ATM you may deposit, transfer, and withdraw funds. There will usually be a limit to the amount of money you can withdraw in any 24-hour period.

## **Credit Cards**

For many international transferees, the lack of a US credit history can be a challenge. In most cases, you will not be approved for a US credit card initially. One suggestion to assist in building your US credit history is to open a **secured credit card**. With approval from the bank, you can put a certain amount of money in a savings account that will remain in the account. The secured credit card would have a credit limit equal to the amount deposited in the savings account. You will need to use your secured credit card and make the minimum monthly payments; you may also pay in full the amount due. After 9 months or so, if the bank sees that you have a good payment record, they may approve you for a regular credit card.

## **Security**

Always pay attention to the other people around you at an ATM. Do not use the machine if you are suspicious of someone's behavior. It is safer to find another ATM or to come back later. Do not put your PIN number in with anyone close enough to see it.

Credit card theft is another increasing problem. In order to protect your card from being abused, never give your credit card or credit card number to a service provider you have not called. Another precaution is to destroy or shred copies of receipts and bills. Criminals will not hesitate to dig through the trash to find a copy of your credit card number.

## **Major US Banks**

Below is a list of links to some of the larger US banks. Not every bank is represented in all US locations; in some cases you may find that the local bank is a better option for you than some of the larger banks. Your IOR DS Consultant can help you in selecting a bank by sharing the various options available locally, as well as the products they offer to support expatriates.

- [Bank of America](#)
- [TD Bank](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [Chase](#)
- [Wells Fargo](#)
- [HSBC](#)
- [List of banks in the Tampa area](#)

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/DRIVING

### By Car

Cars can be the most convenient for transportation. Just be careful as traffic is especially bad during the rush hours: from about 7:30 to 9:30 AM and 3:30PM to 7:30PM. During these times, try to avoid I-275, especially between I-4 and SR 60 (by the airport) as this section runs by downtown and is currently being rebuilt.



Source: [accessmaps.com](http://accessmaps.com)

### By Bus

[Hillsborough Area Regional Transit \(HART\)](#) provides extensive bus service throughout Hillsborough County. There are three types of routes offered: "local", "Commuter Express", and Trolleys (see below). Local routes have many stops in a small region. Commuter Express lines are long-distance lines providing service from suburbs into downtown Tampa. Bus transportation in the Tampa area is not popular and one can expect plenty of room in busses.

### By Streetcar

Tampa also has [the TECO Line Streetcar](#) that runs from Whiting and Franklin Streets downtown to Centennial Park in Ybor City with 9 stops along the way (11 total stops). The line is useful for tourists and convention goers. The line runs by many local shops, restaurants, and attractions including the convention center/ Embassy Suites, the Tampa Bay Times Forum, Channel side, the Florida Aquarium, and through Ybor City.

There are 3 types of streetcars in operation: 9 "Birney Safety" replicas, one "Breezer" open-air replica, and one original "Birney" car which operated in Tampa from 1923-1946 and went through 10,000 man-

hours of restoration. Even if you're not using it for transportation, the streetcars are a fun way to see some of the city's historic and cultural sights.

Ticket vending machines are located at all stops, and do give change.

### **By Trolley**

Tampa also has a rubber-wheel trolley system serving the Central Business District. Unlike the streetcars, which are electric and run on a fixed track, the trollies are simply small, diesel buses styled to look like a streetcar. The In-Town Trolley runs north-south from I-275, through downtown to the northern end of Harbor Island. It has service every 10 minutes at 17 stops.

### **Rail**

The historic Tampa Union Station is a hub for [Amtrak's Silver Service](#) and [Amtrak Thruway](#).

### **Area Airports**

- [Tampa International Airport TPA](#)
- [St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport PIE](#)
- [Sarasota-Bradenton Airport SRQ](#)

### **Transportation “App” Options**

Several web based phone applications to secure a driver are available throughout the area. The driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS. Payment is automatic through the app and fares may be cheaper than a taxi.

- [Uber](#)
- [Lyft](#)

### **Map Websites**

- [Google Maps](#)
- [Expedia](#)
- [MapQuest](#)
- [MapBlast](#)

### **AAA Travel Protection**

[AAA](#) is a membership organization that offers benefits such as roadside service and towing, discounts on car products and services, maps, reference materials, etc.

Call 1-800-352-5382 for additional information and cost.

## LOCAL REGISTRATION

### Social Security Procedures

[United States Social Security Administration](#)

1-800-772-1213

Upon arrival in the United States, employees holding work visas will be required to apply, in person, for a Social Security number. The Application for a Social Security Card (SS-5) can be used by anyone who has never been issued a card, needs a replacement card or has changed his or her name. Your IOR Destination Services Consultant will assist you with this process and can answer any questions you might have.

### **THIS SERVICE IS FREE.**

To get an original number and card, you'll need to complete an Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5) <http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf> , and show the following documents IN PERSON at the local social security office.

- Passport
- I-94 obtained from [www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94) web site
- Work Visa
- Any other documents received by US Immigration

If all of your information is confirmed, your Social Security card will arrive in the mail in approximately 2-4 weeks. Several days after you have successfully completed the application process, you may be able to take your identification with your receipt, back to the Social Security office to inquire about your Social Security number before you receive your card. Your IOR Destination Services Consultant will assist you with this process.

### **L-2 Visa Employment Opportunity Law Changes**

The L-2 visa allows the dependent spouse and minor, unmarried children of qualified L-1 visa holders to enter into the U.S.

Changes took place on July 27, 2006 that apply to spouses of L-1 Visa holders in the US on an L2 Visa. Prior to that date, spouses on L-2 Visas were not permitted to obtain a social security card and were denied the right to be employed in the US. The law change now permits L-2 Visa holders (spouses only, not dependent children) to work on a full-time basis in the U.S. with proper employment authorization from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The L-2 Visa holder must apply for a social security card in addition to applying for an Employment Authorization Document before they can begin employment.

## **Social Security Numbers**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has issued guidelines, which permit E-1, E-2, and L-2 spouses to obtain Social Security Numbers without having to first obtain employment.

Authorization Documents (EADs) from the CIS. They must show proof that their spouse is in E-1, E-2 or L-1 status, and present an original marriage certificate, in the native language. However, before they are authorized to work, they must obtain an EAD. [The new SSA guidelines are online here.](#)

Employment Authorization Document (EAD): L-2 Visa holders can apply for this document utilizing USCIS Form 1-765, Application for Employment Authorization. They must provide the following forms of identification: valid passport, 1-94 Arrival-Departure Document, Marriage Certificate from home country, two identical, and color photographs taken within 30 days of application. Currently, the process from application to EAD issue takes 3 to 4 months. The L2 Visa holder may also engage in full-time study in the US. A dependent child still may not apply for an EAD card except in cases of severe hardship. Local offices are open Monday thru Friday 9am to 4pm.

**\*\*Notice\*\*** Social Security offices are closed on all US Federal holidays.

## **Obtaining a Driver's License/State ID Card**

In the U.S., a driver's license is issued by each individual state and not by the federal government in Washington DC. Since there is no national identity card in the USA and many Americans don't have a passport, a driver's license issued by your state is the only official piece of identification for many citizens. Since 9/11, you will need to show a valid driver's license to enter many big office buildings.

The Division of Driver Licenses, Bureau of Field Operations, has [driver license offices](#) located throughout the state. Appointments are provided at all full service offices. The [Driver License Office Directory](#) has addresses, telephone numbers, days and operating hours. Appointments are recommended. A new resident exchanging a valid out-of-state license for a Florida license will be required to pass the vision and hearing tests only. Requirements listed [here](#). For information on how to obtain a driver's license, see the website of [Florida's DMV](#).

Driver license handbooks, motorcycle handbooks and commercial driver license handbooks are available for your use from your local driver license offices. There is no charge for the handbooks and may be returned for re-use. These handbooks can be viewed [online](#).

## **New Resident**

- United States Citizen [requirements](#).
- Non-United States Citizen [requirements](#).
- Other pertinent [information](#) regarding vehicle registration, tags, and titles.

**Your Destination Services Consultant will assist you with the proper procedure.**

### TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

The main service providers for TV cable, landline telephone and internet all offer combination packages. They are in stiff competition with each other, so special offers change monthly, sometimes even weekly.

- [AT&T](#)
- [Comcast](#)
- [DirectTV](#)
- [Dish](#)

### Mobile Phones

There are four major wireless carriers in the US.

- [AT&T Wireless](#)
- [Verizon Wireless](#)
- [Sprint](#)
- [T-Mobile](#)

### Computers, Electronics, Cameras

- [Best Buy](#) is a national chain: Apart from sales, their [Geek Squad](#) repairs PC computers.
- [Apple Stores](#)

### Housewares and Furniture

- [Bed Bath & Beyond](#) is a national chain whereas the name explains, you can buy necessities for the bedroom and bathroom. From bath towels to comforters.
- [Ikea](#): Swedish-owned furniture shop for all home and home office furniture, soft furnishings, home accessories, flooring, crockery and children's toys.
- [Home Depot](#) is a national chain where anything for renovation or home appliances can be bought. There's paint, tape, hammers and doors.
- [Crate and Barrel](#) is a national chain that sells more modern style furniture compared to Ikea. It is slightly more expensive but has more design.
- [Furniture Envy](#) is a national chain that sells furniture.
- [Pottery Barn](#) is a national chain that sells kitchen supplies, furniture and household items.
- [Williams-Sonoma](#) is a national chain that sells kitchen supplies.
- [Rooms to Go](#) is a national chain that sells furniture.
- [The Container Store](#) is a national chain that sells storage boxes, organizers and the sort.
- [Z-Gallery](#) is a national chain that sells affordable furniture.
- [Pier 1 Imports](#) is a national chain that specializes in imported furniture.
- [Target](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.
- [Kmart](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.
- [Walmart](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.



## Food Shopping

- La Teresita, 3246 W Columbus Dr. (813) 879-4909. Inexpensive Cuban diner with good food and interesting characters. A true Tampa institution.
- Westshore Pizza, 927 S Howard Ave., (813) 251-2020. Numerous other locations throughout Tampa Bay. A local chain with good, cheap eats including pizza and cheesesteaks.
- Saigon Deli, 3858 W Waters Ave., (813) 932-0300. Tampa has quite a few Vietnamese places, but Saigon Deli has gained the most attention.
- Vallarta's Mexican, 9212 Anderson Rd, (813) 901-8027. Fast and inexpensive Mexican food. Good menu and at night local happy hour hangout.
- Mr. Dunderbak's, 14929 Bruce B Downs Blvd., (813) 977-4104. Great German food, also one of the most quintessential Tampa local hangouts. With over 50 taps offering a huge selection of Belgian, import, and local craft brews, Mr. Dunderbak's caters to the interested beer drinker.
- Bahama Breeze, 3045 N. Rocky Point Drive E., Phone: (813) 289-7922.
- CDB Southside, 3671 S Westshore Blvd Tampa, FL 33629, Phone: (813) 805-2327. Near the original Westshore Pizza. Great lunch specials, menu has changed recently but most lunch items \$8-\$10. Large upstairs area, back room, and bar. Great place for casual Italian food.
- Fuego, 1721 West Brandon Blvd, Brandon (Just outside the Tampa city limits; Highway 60/Adamo Blvd becomes Brandon Blvd. at the line) Tel. (813) 413-8382. Brazilian. If you're a meat eater and looking for something a bit different, this is a treat. Waiters bring a wide variety of chicken, beef, pork, and sausages fresh cooked in various ways to your table to sample as much as you wish.
- T. C. Choy's Asian Bistro. 301 S Howard Ave., (813) 251-1191. Sushi and dim sum, along with other traditional Chinese fare.
- Tampa Bay Brewing Company. 1600 E. 8th Avenue, Ybor City section of Tampa. Tel. (813) 247-1422. Brew pub with a good food menu including shepard's pie and huge calzones in addition to more standard fare.
- The NoHo Bistro. 1714 N Armenia Avenue, Tampa 33607, Tel. 813-514-0691. Local independent bistro located in the historic West Tampa district. Lunch and dinner service available. Menus change seasonally and weekly in the case of dinner. Classic European-style bistro fare with an eclectic American flare. Catering and private dining also available.
- Bern's Steak House. 1208 S Howard Av. (813) 251-2421. Considered to be one of the best steakhouses in Florida: it claims to have the largest privately owned wine lists in the world, with over 7000 labels and a million bottles. It is commonplace to have a tour of the kitchen and wine cellar after dinner, but expect to spend at least a few hours.
- The Columbia Restaurant. 2117 East 7th Avenue, Phone: (813) 248-4961. A landmark in the Ybor City neighborhood since 1905.

## RECREATION

### Museums

- [Museum of Science and Industry Tampa](#)
- [Tampa Museum of Art](#)
- [USF Contemporary Art Museum](#)
- Channel District's [SS American Victory Museum Ship](#)
- [Henry B Plant Museum](#)
- [Ybor City Museum State Park](#)



*Science and Industry*

### Tours and Recreation

- Beaches - The city of Tampa operates over 165 parks and beaches. 42 more in surrounding suburbs are maintained by Hillsborough County.
- [Busch Gardens](#) - Africa-themed park featuring many thrilling roller coasters.
- [Lowry Park Zoo](#) - features over 2,000 animals, interactive exhibits, rides, educational shows and more.
- The [Florida Aquarium](#) is located in the Channel District. It hosts over 20,000 species of aquatic plants and animals.
- [Big Cat Rescue](#)- one of the largest accredited sanctuaries in the world dedicated to rescuing lions, tigers, bobcats, cougars and other big cats.
- [Walking tour of Ybor City](#) — Every Saturday at 10:30AM, the Ybor City State Museum offers a 60 minute walking tour of Ybor City highlighting the cigar industry's impact on the area, historic cottages/businesses, and tours of the YC State Museum & YC Cigar Museum. If possible, stop by the 100-year-old Columbia Restaurant at the end of the tour for a tasty Cuban lunch.
- [Gasparilla Pirate Festival](#) is an annual event consisting of several parades, live entertainment, and fireworks. The event is also known as the Mardi Gras of Tampa, and normally takes place on the last two Saturdays in January.
- [Guavaween](#) offers daytime events and nighttime parade on the last Saturday in October in Ybor City.
- [Sant'Yago Knight Parade](#) is an illuminated nighttime parade in February in Ybor City.
- Several film festivals take place at the [Tampa Theatre](#) couple of times a year.
- Surprisingly, ice skating is a popular activity in the Tampa Bay area. [The Tampa Bay Skating Academy](#) in nearby Oldsmar has two NHL-sized ice surfaces. Other well-known rinks include Sunblades Center and the rink in Westfield Countryside Mall, both in Clearwater.
- [Lettuce Lake Park](#) has boardwalks that go through a nearly pristine area with 700 year old cypress trees, alligators, egrets and herons.
- [Dade City's Wild Things](#) - over 190 animals and private guides who facilitate animal encounters.

## Sports

- [Tampa Bay Buccaneers](#) are an American football team whose home field is Raymond James Stadium (off Dale Mabry a couple of miles north of I-275). Routinely near the top of the NFC South, they are the 2002 Super Bowl champions and the team which receives the most support in the Tampa Bay region.
- [Tampa Bay Lightning](#) is an NHL (ice hockey) team who won the Stanley Cup in the 2003-2004 season. Their home is in the Tampa Bay Times Forum. Season includes 41 home games and lasts October-June.
- [Tampa Bay Rays](#) are a Major League Baseball team in the American League East, formed in 1995. They play in Tropicana Field in Saint Petersburg, FL, and were the American League Champions in 2008.
- The Tampa Bay Rowdies compete in the North American Soccer League (2nd Division). The Rowdies were crowned NASL champions in 2012.
- [Tampa Bay Storm](#) is an Arena Football League team playing in the Tampa Bay Times Forum. They have won more Arena Bowl titles than any other team in the AFL. Season lasts March-June.
- The New York Yankees train at [George M. Steinbrenner](#) Field during the month of March. However, tickets are usually sold out several weeks before a game.
- [Skatepark of Tampa](#) is a world-famous skateboarding institution. Famously host to the annual "Tampa AM" and "Tampa Pro" contests, which draw professional skateboarders from around the world. Home to an impressive street course and full size competition vertical ramp.



### Expat Resource Guide

- [www.expatechange.com](http://www.expatechange.com)

### Google Translator

- [Translate](#) 90 languages to and from language of choice using iTunes.

### Volunteer Opportunities

- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [United Way](#)

### Parent & Children Resources

- [Mom's Clubs](#) - social groups offering events and outings with mothers and their young children.

### Smart Phone Apps for Travel:

- [Uber](#) : Similar to a taxi service but all web based. Payment also handled online, do not pay or tip driver directly. Uber driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS.
- [Lyft](#) : Wherever you're headed, count on Lyft for rides in minutes. The Lyft app matches you with local drivers at the tap of a button. Just request and go.
- [Google Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Apple Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Map Quest](#) : Map by direction
- [Waze](#) : Community based traffic & navigation with alternate route suggestions
- [CityMaps2Go](#) : The #1 travel app lets you discover exciting new places. Beautiful photos and insider tips at the touch of a button. You will receive stories about places you like and can instantly save and find them on your maps and in your lists.

### Smart Phone Apps for Communication:

- [WhatsApp](#) : Free local & international Real Time messaging
- [Line](#) : Exchange free instant messages with friends whenever and wherever with one-on-one and group chats. LINE is available on all smartphone devices (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, Blackberry, Nokia) and even on your PC.
- [Viber](#) : Free text, calling, photo messages and location-sharing with Viber users. No registration, alias or invitations required. Instantly integrates with your own contact list. Best-quality mobile calls using 3G or Wi-Fi.
- [Skype](#) : Stay in touch with your family and friends for free on Skype. Download Skype today to chat and call on desktop and mobile.

**Smart Phone Apps for Local Information/Reviews:**

- [Angie's List](#) : Referrals for doctor, dentist, child care, maid, mechanic, painter, plumber, etc.
- [Yelp!](#) : Find local businesses, restaurants, bars, clubs, events, etc. with map, lists, and reviews
- [Next Door](#) : Neighbors share community events, items for sale, recommendations for babysitters, doctors and handymen, crime reports, ideas about how to improve their neighborhood and more.
- [Meet Ups](#) : Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something or share something. Cultural groups advertise gatherings here as well.

**Smart Phone Apps for Weather:**

- [WTHR13](#) : Local weather and closings; includes radar and forecast
- [Weather Channel](#) : National and international time, temperature & weather
- [Tornado](#) : Set up tornado alerts & siren

## U.S. IDIOMS

Idioms are words, phrases, or expressions that are not taken literally- they have meaning beyond a literal translation of the words. Idioms are generally used in casual, familiar conversation but can also come up in certain business settings. Here are some examples of commonly used American English idioms:

**better off** - in a more fortunate position

**Big deal!** - So what? That doesn't really matter.

**(to) blow things out of proportion** - to exaggerate; to make more of something than one should

**(to) call it a night** - to stop an activity for the rest of the night

**dime a dozen** - so plentiful as to be nothing special; common

**(to) do the trick** - to achieve the desired results

**(to) give someone the cold shoulder** - to ignore someone on purpose; to snub someone

**(to) get the ball rolling** - to get started

**(to) go back to the drawing board** - to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

**happy camper [slang]** - a happy person; a satisfied participant

**(to) have a heart of gold** - to be very kind and giving

**(to be) head over heels in love** - very much in love

**(to) hit the nail on the head** - to be right

**(to) learn the ropes** - to learn the basics

**(to) lose one's touch** - to no longer be able to do something well

**made of money** - very rich

**needless to say** - obviously

**piece of cake** - very easy

**(to) pitch in** - to help

**(to) pull an all-nighter** - to stay up all night to do work

**rule of thumb** - a useful principle

**(as) sharp as a tack** - very intelligent

**(to) sit tight** - to wait patiently

**(to) stab someone in the back** - to betray someone

**(to) tell someone off** - to scold; to tell someone in strong words what one really thinks

**When pigs fly! [slang]** - never

**(to) twist someone's arm** - to persuade someone; to convince someone

**(to be) up in the air** - not yet determined; uncertain

Many common American idioms come from sports, here are some examples:

**strike out-** to fail or to do poorly at something (*baseball*)

**(to) call the shots-** to make the decisions; to be in charge (*basketball*)

**ballpark-** a guess or an estimate (*baseball*)

**down and out-** lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute (*boxing*)

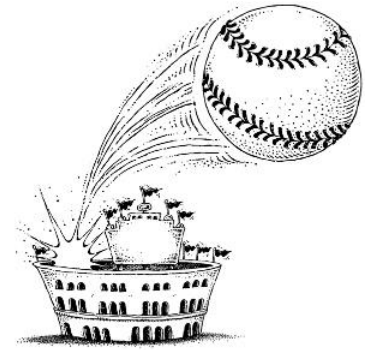
**down to the wire-** to the very end or last minute (*horse racing*)

**drop the ball-** to make an error, to miss an opportunity (*football, baseball, rugby*)

**hands down-** with great ease; unconditionally; often (and originally) in the phrase “to win hands down” (*horse racing*)

**(to) have someone in your corner-** to have the support or help of someone (*boxing*)

**(to) hit it out of the park; home run-** to be wildly successful, to do a great job (*baseball*)



To learn even more idioms, visit the following links:

- [Everyday American English Idioms](#) - with example sentences.
- [Useful Idioms for Lower-Intermediate to Advanced Students \(Teacher's Resource\)](#)
- [Idiom Site A-Z](#)
- [Sports Idioms](#)
- [English Language Learning: American English Idioms](#)

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Holidays can be confusing as there are national (federal) holidays, bank holidays, state holidays. Verify those in your area with Human Resources at your place of business, especially before planning vacations or weekend get-aways!

[Federal Holidays listed through 2020](#)

[Florida Holiday List](#)

The following are legal holidays in Florida and need to be treated as such by employers:

- New Year's Day January 1\*
- Martin Luther King Day Third Monday in January
- Memorial Day Last Monday in May
- Independence Day July 4\*
- Labor Day First Monday in September
- Columbus Day Second Monday in October
- Veterans' Day November 11\*
- Thanksgiving Day Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day December 25\*

\*If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the day following is observed as the legal holiday.