



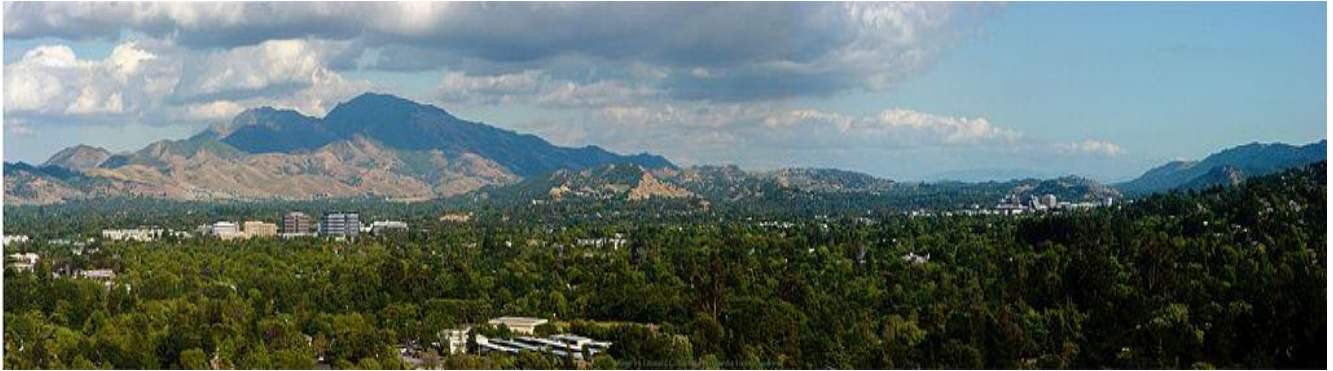
Relocation Guide to Contra Costa County, CA Martinez, San Ramon and Walnut Creek

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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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Martinez

Established in 1876, Martinez is the County seat of Contra Costa County. It is located along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers in the central part of the County. The City's roots can be traced to the late 1840's, when it served as a ferryboat transit point across the Carquinez straits on the way to the gold fields. By the time of its incorporation, Martinez had evolved into one of the area's most significant trading posts and shipping ports. Today, the City covers 12.5 square miles and has approximately 36,700 residents. As one of California's first towns, Martinez retains a strong sense of history and family. The renowned naturalist John Muir made Martinez his home for nearly a quarter of a century and in 1914, the year of Muir's passing, the legendary baseball great Joe DiMaggio was born here. One of the unique aspects of Martinez is its architecture. Many of the downtown shops still retain their early 20th Century look and charm, with some homes dating back more than 125 years.

Respecting its past but with an eye to the future, Martinez has modernized both its infrastructure and its downtown. The City opened an award-winning Intermodal Facility in 2001 that has become a popular stop along the Amtrak line. It also completed a major restoration of Alhambra Creek that beautifies the downtown and controls flooding, and has embarked on a program to make Martinez a cultural-historical attraction as the home of the John Muir Festival Center. An outdoor amphitheater is the first realization of this long-term program.

Martinez citizens of all ages continue to enjoy the outdoors. With 16 city parks and a marina, there are plenty of recreational opportunities available to the public. The waterfront's top-flight bocce ball courts are host to the nation's largest bocce federation. Next door, the recently completed 10,000 square foot Skate Park offers an attraction for the youth of the entire region.

San Ramon

Today San Ramon is a dynamic young city, one of California's outstanding urban villages. It has a variety of homes, parks and stores and a major employment center --- all in a setting of remarkable beauty. It was once home to the Seunen Indians who lived adjacent to the valley creeks. American settlers first came to San Ramon in 1850 when Leo and Mary Jane Norris purchased 4,450 acres of land. In the

nineteenth century, San Ramon was called Brevensville (for blacksmith Eli Breven), Lynchville (for William Lynch) and Limerick (for the many Irish settlers). The first village developed at the intersection of today's Deerwood Road and San Ramon Valley Blvd. In 1873 when a permanent post office was finally established, it was called San Ramon.

In 1970 Western Electric purchased 1,733 acres of the Bishop Ranch and proposed a "new town" complete with a variety of housing, green belts, stores and light industry, placed in the center of San Ramon. Eventually part of the land became new homes and, in 1978, 585 acres became today's Bishop Ranch Business Park, a premier modern office development.

In 1983 San Ramon voters decided overwhelmingly to incorporate as a separate city and took control over development, police, parks and other services. A new library, community center, parks and hospital testify to the energy which the new city displayed. No longer a quiet outskirts of the Bay Area, San Ramon looks to the future and values its past.

Walnut Creek

Just 30 miles east of San Francisco, the city of Walnut Creek is the economic and entertainment hub of Central Contra Costa County, conveniently located at the intersection of Highway 680 (north to Sacramento and south to San Jose) and Highway 24 (west to San Francisco). The city of Walnut Creek has a population of 65,000, and covers approximately 19.50 square miles. With bustling San Francisco to the west and the natural beauty of Mount Diablo State Park to the east, Walnut Creek offers urban flair, suburban grace, and peaceful wilderness.

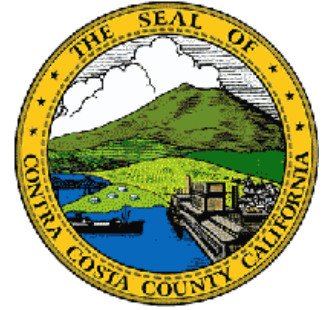
Walnut Creek was first known as "The Corners", where the two roads leading from Pacheco and Lafayette converged after the Mexican-American War. The area's first settler was William Slusher, a squatter who built the first roofed abode on the bank of what was then known as "Nuts Creek" in 1849. In 1855, Milo Hough of Lafayette decided to develop The Corners and built a hotel called the "Walnut Creek House." A year later, Hiram Penniman laid out the first town site and realigned what is now Main Street.

Walnut Creek owns more open space per capita than any other community in the state of California, and in 2012, the city was listed among the 10 best places to retire in the U.S. by CBS Money Watch and U.S. News. Walnut Creek has two BART stations, which provide easy train access to local bay area cities as well as urban San Francisco. The city's close proximity to Mount Diablo promotes many outdoor activities for residents, including hiking and biking trails throughout Walnut Creek. Due to the city's location in the San Ramon and Ygnacio Valleys, Walnut Creek boasts little rain and almost 275 days of sunshine every year.

Contra Costa County Overview

Owing to the high quality of its public schools (due largely to both demographics and added support from prosperous parents), this area has become a magnet for well-off families with children.

- [Official Website](#)
- [Library Locations throughout Contra Costa County](#)
- [Community Events](#)
- [Contra Costa Historical Society](#)
- [Weather Today in Contra Costa County](#)



Cities in Contra Costa: Antioch, Lafayette, Pleasant Hill, Brentwood, Martinez, Richmond, Clayton, Town of Moraga, San Pablo, Concord, Oakley, San Ramon, Town of Danville, Orinda, Walnut Creek, El Cerrito, Pinole, Hercules, and Pittsburg.

Martinez Overview

- [Official Website of the City Martinez](#)
- [Main Street Martinez](#)
- [City Council of Martinez](#)
- [Martinez Recreation Division](#)
- Population: 35,824
- Land Area: 12.13 square miles
- [Martinez Historical Society](#)
- [Martinez Calendar of Events](#)

San Ramon Overview

- [Official Website of San Ramon](#)
- [City Council of San Ramon](#)
- [San Ramon Parks and Recreation Division](#)
- Population: 72,148
- Land Area: 18.63 sq mi (48.24 km²)
- [San Ramon History](#)
- [San Ramon Performing Arts Center](#)
- [City Center Bishop Ranch in San Ramon](#)

Walnut Creek Overview

- [Official Website of the City of Walnut Creek](#)
- [Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [City Council of Walnut Creek](#)
- [Walnut Creek Recreation Division](#)
- Population: 66,900
- Land Area: 19.77 square miles

- [Walnut Creek Historical Society](#)
- [Walnut Creek Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)
- [Walnut Creek Attractions](#)
- [Walnut Creek Events Calendar](#)

What to See, Sightseeing Tours, Tourist Information in Contra Costa County

- [Martinez Trip Advisor](#)
- [San Ramon Trip Advisor](#)
- [Places to See - Walnut Creek](#)
-

Where to Find Arts and Entertainment

- [Martinez Patch](#)
- [San Ramon Patch](#)
- [Walnut Creek Patch](#)

Where to Eat

- [Make Online Reservations](#) with OpenTable
- [Restaurants in Martinez](#)
- [Restaurants in San Ramon](#)
- [30 Best Walnut Creek Restaurants](#)
- [Yelp Restaurant Reviews for Martinez](#)
- [Yelp Restaurant Reviews for San Ramon](#)
- [Yelp Restaurant Reviews for Walnut Creek](#)

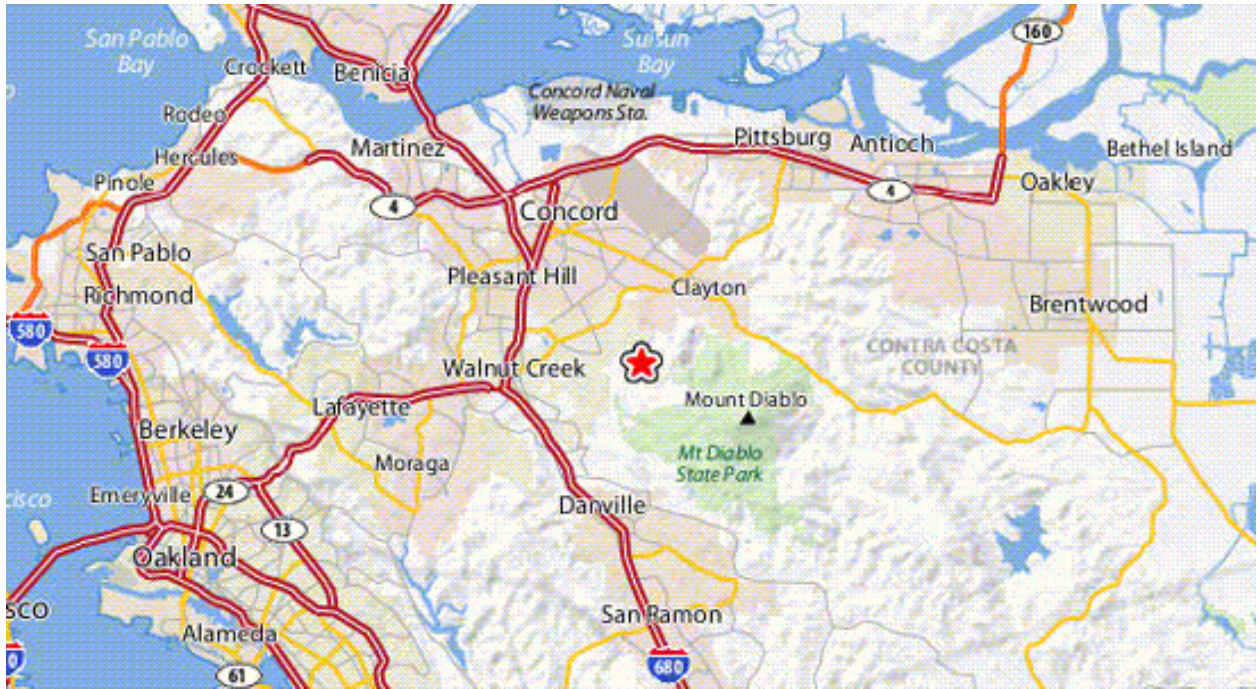
Tipping & Sales Tax

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 the norm.

Daylight Saving Time

Contra Costa County is in the Pacific Time Zone and participates in Daylight Saving Time. Daylight Saving Time begins at 2:00 a.m. local time on the second Sunday in March. On the first Sunday in November areas on Daylight Saving Time return to Standard Time at 2:00 a.m. The names of each time zone change along with Daylight Saving Time. Eastern Standard Time (EST) becomes Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), and so forth. Some areas of the United States not using Daylight Saving Time include, Arizona, parts of Indiana, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa.

Area Map



**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 _____

The Contra Costa Crisis Center manages an extraordinary database of useful resources and information for County residents. You can access social service and health information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by calling the three digit, toll-free number “211” from any phone. Nearly 700 agencies and organizations contribute to provide more than 1,600 services and programs to County residents in need via the 211 database.

Safety and Security

While Contra Costa County 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](#).

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!

Hospitals & Clinics

- [Contra Costa Regional Medical Center](#)
- [John Muir Medical Center](#)
- [Kaiser Permanente](#)
- [San Ramon Regional Medical Center](#)
- [Sequoia Surgery Pavilion](#)
- [UCSF Children's Hospital](#)

[Primary Care Physician](#)

Veterinary Clinics

- [Geary Veterinary Hospital](#)
- [Martinez Animal Hospital](#)
- [Valley Veterinary Hospital](#)
- [Find a Vet](#)
- [Licensing your pet in Contra Costa County](#)

Pharmacies

The major pharmacy chains in the area are found on nearly every block on commercial streets. These pharmacies are also general stores and carry a large selection of cleaning, house care, pet care, and other supplies. Click on "Store Locator" and enter your zip (postal) code to find the pharmacy near you. Many pharmacies are open 24 hours. Check for hours of operation.

- [CVS](#)
- [Rite-Aid](#)
- [Walgreens](#)
- [Area Pharmacies](#)

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 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 are California'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.
- Water, electricity, and gas bills are up to you to pay. **Your IOR consultant will assist you with this process.**
- Apartment buildings sometimes come with laundry and dryer machines in the basement.

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

Contra Costa County offers curbside recycling. More information is [here](#).



The Lease Process

Review your housing budget with your DSC

Your DSC 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>
24-hr mtn	24-hour emergency maintenance
AC or A/C	Air conditioning
Appls	Appliances

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
LA	Living area
LR	Living room
MBR	Master bedroom

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

MBTH	Master bathroom
Neg	Negotiable
Ofc	Office
OSP	Off-street parking
Pkg	Parking
PM	Property manager (management)
Pvt	Private
Pwdr rm	Powder room (1/2 bath)
RE	Real estate
Renov	Renovated
Rf	Roof
Rm	Room
SF	Single-family
SFA	Single-family attached
SFD	Single-family detached
Sp, PI (S/p)	Swimming pool
Sq. ft	Square feet
Th (T/H)	Townhouse
Vw (vu)	View
W/A	Wheelchair accessible
W/W	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 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 the case that 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 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 1st 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 2nd 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 (9th), Sophomore (10th), Junior (11th) and Senior (12th) 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 11th or 12th 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.

SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

California has an open enrollment policy, which means your child can attend any school in the district (called intra-district choice), including charter schools, as long as there is space available. Generally, to register your child for school you will need to have a passport and/or birth certificate, proof of immunizations, any applicable past school records and proof of residency. Please always confirm requirements with the school you are interested in before assuming that your child will be able to attend that school.

Grade level in the public school system is determined by the age of the child. Typically, the child must be 5 years old by September 1st to enter kindergarten. School districts may be very strict about the age requirement, but inquire with the school district you are interested in to determine if there are any exemptions for foreign students who are ahead in grade level. You may also want to ask about any gifted or advanced programs as well as their English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs. Some elementary schools also offer a pre-Kindergarten program for children who miss the September 1st requirement. You may inquire at the school districts for availability.

Contact your IOR Destination Services Consultant for more assistance with schooling questions.

Martinez Public Schools

The [Martinez Unified School District](#) (MUSD) is the area public school district. It currently serves over 4,000 students and operates 4 elementary schools, one middle school and one high school, with two alternative schools.

- Elementary Schools - Ratings from [Greatschools.org](#)
 - John Muir Elementary - Rated 7
 - John Swett Elementary - Rated 8
 - Las Juntas Elementary – Rated 4
 - Morello Park Elementary - Rated 8
- Secondary Schools
 - Martinez Junior High School - Rated 7
 - Alhambra High School - Rated 8
- Alternative and Independent Study Schools
 - Briones School (independent study)
 - Vicente Martinez High School (continuation)

San Ramon Public Schools

The San Ramon Valley area is served by The [San Ramon Valley Unified School District](#) (SRVUSD) covering an 18 square mile area, encompassing the communities of Alamo, Blackhawk, Danville, Diablo, and San Ramon (including the new Dougherty Valley communities in east San Ramon), as well as a small portion of the cities of Walnut Creek and Pleasanton. The District is comprised of 36 schools serving more than 32,000 students in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 12. SRVUSD is one of the top performing districts in California.

- [Monte Vista High School](#) Rating 10 Monte Vista High School is a comprehensive, National Blue Ribbon, fully WASC-accredited 9-12 public school of more than 2000 students.
- [San Ramon Valley High School](#) Rating 9 San Ramon Valley High School is a comprehensive, National Blue Ribbon, fully WASC-accredited 9-12 public school of more than 2000 students.
- [California High School](#) Rating 10 is a comprehensive, National Blue Ribbon, fully WASC-accredited 9-12 public school of more than 2000 students, serving the rapidly growing community of San Ramon. Cal High is undergoing major construction (Measure A) to appropriately serve its rapidly growing student population.
- [Dougherty Valley High School](#) (DVHS) Rating 10 opened in 2007 with grades 9 and 10 and transitioned to a comprehensive, 4-year high school with an enrollment of approximately 2,600.

If you are enrolling a new student, you must complete and submit the on-line enrollment application (see link provided below) prior to your meeting with the school office staff. Be advised that you must be a current resident in the SRVUSD school boundaries and provide proof of residency prior to enrollment approval.

Walnut Creek Public Schools

The public school system in Walnut Creek is managed by multiple public school districts, including the [Walnut Creek School District](#) and the [Mount Diablo Unified School District](#). Public schools in Walnut Creek are based on residency, and your address determines which school your children will attend. Generally, for school registration you will need proof of age such as passport or birth certificate, immunization records, and proof of residency such as a signed lease or purchase contract and deed.

- [Bancroft Elementary School](#)
- [Buena Vista Elementary School](#)
- [Indian Valley Elementary School](#)
- [Murwood Elementary School](#)
- [Parkmead Elementary School](#)
- [Valle Verde Elementary School](#)
- [Walnut Acres Elementary School](#)
- [Walnut Heights Elementary School](#)
- [Foothill Middle School](#)
- [Walnut Creek Intermediate School](#)
- [Las Lomas High School](#)
- [Northgate High School](#)
- [Ygnacio Valley High School](#)

Private Schools in Contra Costa County

There are 35 private schools in Contra Costa County, ranging from early preschool education to high school. In general, many private schools in the U.S. require high application standards and entrance exams, and some may align with a specific religion when devising a curriculum.

Private Schools in Martinez

- [Saint Catherine of Siena School](#) – K through grade 8

San Ramon Private Schools

- [Dorris-Eaton School](#) - K through grade 8
- [San Ramon Montessori School](#)- K through grade 3

Walnut Creek Private Schools

- [Berean Christian High School](#)
- [Contra Costa Christian Schools](#)
- [Dorris Eaton School](#)
- [Northcreek Academy and Preschool](#)
- [Palmer School](#)
- [The Seven Hills School](#)

Additional resources to compare Public and Private schools, view ratings, reviews and test scores

- www.greatschools.org
- www.eschoolprofile.com
- www.schooltree.org

Area Colleges and Universities

- [Diablo Valley College](#)
- [Mills College](#)
- [San Francisco Art Institute](#)
- [San Francisco State University](#)
- [University of California- Berkeley](#)



University of California- Berkeley

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 located in Walnut Creek. 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](#)
- [Bank of the West](#)
- [CHASE](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [US Bank](#)
- [Wells Fargo](#)
- [List of area banks](#)

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/DRIVING

Driving

Contra Costa County is driver friendly, featuring a variety of residential and main streets, and highways. A personal vehicle is the most popular form of transportation.

Public Transportation

County Connection: County Connection provides fixed-route and paratransit bus service throughout the communities of Concord, Pleasant Hill, Martinez, Walnut Creek, Clayton, Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga, Danville, San Ramon, as well as unincorporated communities in Central Contra Costa County. County Connection operates a fleet of 121 fully accessible transit buses. Service is provided from approximately 6 AM to 9 PM on weekdays, and from approximately 9 AM to 7 PM on weekends.

Free Ride (Route 4) Downtown Shuttle: The City of Walnut Creek subsidizes this service in the downtown area. The route runs from the Walnut Creek BART station to Broadway Plaza, stopping every other block at locations along Locust Street, Broadway Plaza, and Main Street. The Free Ride buses run weekdays, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and weekends between 9 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART): The heavy-rail public transit and subway system connects San Francisco with cities in the East Bay.

Map Websites

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

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](#)), and show the following documents IN PERSON at the local social security office.

- Passport
- [I-94](#)
- 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

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

If you are a visitor in California over 18 and have a valid driver license from your home state or country, you may drive in this state without getting a California driver license as long as your home state license remains valid.

If you become a California resident, you must get a California driver license within 10 days. Residency is established by voting in a California election, paying resident tuition, filing for a homeowner's property tax exemption, or any other privilege or benefit not ordinarily extended to nonresidents.

To apply for an original driver license if you are over 18, you will need to do the following:

- Make an appointment before visiting a DMV office (walk-ins are only accepted at our [Driver License Processing Centers](#)).
- Complete application form DL 44 (An original DL 44 form must be submitted. Copies will not be accepted.)
- Give a thumb print
- Have your picture taken

- Provide your social security number. It will be verified with the Social Security Administration while you are in the office.
- Verify your [birth date and legal presence](#)
- [Provide your true full name](#)
- [Pay the application fee](#)
- Pass a vision exam
- Pass a traffic laws and sign test. [Sample Test](#))

Note: To allow you sufficient time for testing DMV will not be administering written or audio exams after 4:30 p.m.

- Steps for applying for a California driver's license [here](#)
- For general information and to find an office near you, see general California [DMV website](#)

For general information and instructions on how to obtain an official state ID card or driver's license, [visit the website of the California DMV](#).

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

TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

The main service providers in Contra Costa County 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](#)
- [DirecTV](#)
- [Dish](#)
- [Time Warner Cable](#)

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](#)
- [Ikea](#)
- [Home Depot](#)
- [Crate and Barrel](#)
- [Pottery Barn](#)
- [Williams-Sonoma](#)
- [The Container Store](#)

Food Shopping

Residents in Contra Costa County go to a wide range of open air farmers markets, large gourmet markets, small specialty shops, and conventional supermarkets. The main conventional supermarkets are listed below. They are located all over town and the surrounding areas:

- [Safeway](#)
- [Sprouts](#)
- [Trader Joe's](#)
- [Whole Foods](#)

For those looking to get their goods directly from the producer, there are a growing number of farmer's markets popping up across the area. From fresh produce to prepared foods, you can find an available market almost every day of the week:

- [Contra Costa Walnut Creek Farmer's Market](#)
- [Diablo Valley Farmer's Market](#)
- [Pacific Coast Farmers' Market](#)
- [Rossmoor Farmer's Market](#)
- [San Ramon Farmer's Market](#)



Local Retail Shopping

- [Broadway Plaza](#)
- [Hacienda Crossings](#)
- [Stoneridge Shopping Center](#)
- [Sun Valley Shopping Center](#)
- [Walnut Creek Shopping Directory](#)
- [Walnut Creek Downtown](#)

Arts and Culture

- [California Symphony](#): The only all-professional orchestra in Contra Costa County, the California Symphony is distinguished for its concert programs that combine classics alongside lesser-known works, for its pioneering Young American Composer-in-Residence program, and for its nationally-recognized education programs.
- [Bedford Gallery](#): Bedford Gallery exhibits the work of historic, modern, and contemporary artists. The Gallery is dedicated to providing the public with opportunities to learn about visual arts through public programs that are varied, accessible, challenging, and educational.
- [Company C Contemporary Ballet](#): Established in 2002, Company C commissions new work and performs historic modern ballet throughout the Bay Area.
- [Festival Opera](#): Festival Opera remains committed to bringing professional opera productions at affordable prices to residents of San Francisco's East Bay communities.
- [Leshner Center for the Arts](#): Three performance spaces (The Knight Stage 3, The Hoffman, and The Margaret Leshner theatres) and the Bedford Gallery are included in this modern building.
- [Martinez Campbell Theater](#): a performing arts theater



The Bedford Gallery

Attractions

- [The Gardens at Heather Farms](#): A Certified Wildlife Habitat and Certified Green Business, the gardens demonstrate sustainable gardening practices such as integrated pest management and water conserving practices.
- [The Ruth Bancroft Garden](#): Just outside the famous Heather Farms, you will find another piece of horticultural art in the Ruth Bancroft Gardens. What began as a private collection of potted plants in 1950 has turned into 2.5 acres of brilliantly landscaped dry-growing plants.
- [Borges Ranch](#): The former ranch of early Walnut Creek pioneer Frank Borges, the ranch complex includes a blacksmith shop, numerous outbuildings, and farm equipment displays. The Borges family home, built in 1901, houses historical displays of the early 1900s.
- [Shadelands Ranch Historical Museum](#): Built by Walnut Creek pioneer Hiram Penniman, the main house on the Shadelands Ranch grounds is a 1903 redwood-framed Colonial Revival structure that now showcases numerous Walnut Creek historical artifacts, including collections of old newspapers, photographs, and government records.

- [Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society](#): The Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society operates the Diablo Valley Lines (DVL) model railroad, one of the most mountainous and one of the largest exclusively HO scale model railroads in the United States.
- [Lindsay Wildlife Museum](#): Featuring education programs and interactive exhibits, the Lindsay Wildlife Rehabilitation Hospital is one of the oldest and largest rehabilitation centers in the United States, treating more than 5,500 injured and orphaned wild animals each year.
- [Martinez Waterfront Amphitheater](#): home of family-friendly events, art and entertainment.

Outdoors

- [Walnut Creek Open Space](#): With over 3,000 acres of oak woodlands, grassland savannah, and chaparral, this is one of the largest city operated open spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- [Contra Costa Parks and Recreation](#): Contra Costa County is an outdoor enthusiast's delight; it is home to more than 1,200 miles of hiking trails within dozens of parks spread across the county.
- [Iron Horse Corridor Trail](#) stretches 18.5 miles from the Alameda County line northward to Mayette Avenue in Concord. Formerly a Southern Pacific Railroad route, it now features a paved multi-use trail for walking, jogging, and bicycling along with adjacent unpaved in some areas.
- [The Alamo Parks and Recreation](#): Summer Concert Series and Movie Under the Stars features live music and films for the whole family.
- [Heather Farm Park](#): Features swimming at the Clarke Swim Center, tennis, picnic areas, community center, equestrian center, skate park, off-leash dog park, bike paths, tot lots, sand volleyball court, fishing pond, nature pond, six athletic fields, restrooms, and a connection to the [Iron Horse Trail](#).
- [Mount Diablo State Park](#): Many visitors to Mount Diablo head straight for the Summit to enjoy the famous view. It is surrounded by low, rolling hills and broad, flat valleys, and when conditions are best, you can see almost 200 miles.
- [Boundary Oak Golf Course](#): Boundary Oak Golf Course boasts an 18-hole championship golf course, a driving range and practice area with putting and chipping greens, the perfect venue for Golf Tournaments, weddings, banquets, golf lessons, clinics and camps.
- [La Trampas Regional Wilderness](#) offers 5,300 acres of wilderness and an expanded trail system that allows hikers and horseback riders to enjoy.



Mount Diablo State Park

Area Festivals and Events

- [Contra Costa County Community Events Calendar](#): a wide variety of events for the whole family.
- [Art and Wine Festival](#): Attracting over 100,000 visitors yearly, the two-day celebration in beautiful Heather Farm Park features food and drinks, live music, and pieces from local artists. Revelers can sample local restaurants' delicacies paired with regional wine or the micro-brew of their choice.
- [Bay Area Blues Festival](#): the merger of two great Festivals: the Downtown Martinez Italian Street Painting Festival and San Francisco's Polk Street Blues Festival.
- [The Bay Area Craft Beer Festival](#) in downtown Martinez began in 2010 to highlight the art and flavor of craft beer in Martinez and surrounding communities.
- [Martinez Vintage Market](#): One of the largest outdoor antique and collectible shows in northern California.
- [Run for Education](#): a tradition in the San Ramon Valley for over 30 years.
- [San Ramon Art and Wind Festival](#): Major annual event on Memorial Day weekend.
- [Walnut Creek Half Marathon](#): The annual race features multiple distances for all abilities to participate: the half marathon, the half marathon relay, the 5k run/walk, and the kids fun run.
- [Walnut Creek on Ice](#): An outdoor ice skating rink in beautiful downtown Walnut Creek, open November-January.

Dining

Area restaurants feature cuisine from every corner of the world, including American, Indian, Japanese, Mediterranean, Thai, Chinese, Korean, Mexican, Italian, Latin, Vietnamese and more. Find the perfect setting for your meal out at intimate bistros, award winning steakhouses or fan-friendly sports bars.

Below is a selected listing of popular local restaurants:

- [Hubcaps Diner](#): Family owned and operated, this classic American diner serves burgers, salads & all-day breakfast in a car-themed setting.
- [Va de Vi](#): This upscale restaurant features an extensive wine bar and menu, and tapas-style small plates to share.
- [Kacha Thai Bistro](#): A Modern Thai establishment that earns buzz for its' creatively presented classic Thai fare & stylish atmosphere.
- [CREAM](#): Built-to-order ice cream sandwiches are the specialty of this inexpensive dessert shop that also doles out scoops, sundaes, and milkshakes (plus gluten-free and vegan options).
- [Walnut Creek Yacht Club](#): Though this nautically decorated spot is miles from any body of water, the seafood on its ever-changing menu is the best in town.

Local Cinemas

- [Cinemark](#) – Walnut Creek and Danville locations
- [Regal Crow Canyon](#) – San Ramon and Dublin locations

Expat Resource Guide

- 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:

- [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](#)

[California State Holidays](#)

The following are federal holidays in the United States.

- 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.



Contra Costa County. Kennedy Grove Trail overlooking San Pablo Dam