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## Relocation Guide to Houston, TX

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

*IOR makes every effort to ensure that 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 that we may correct the issue.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW .....	1
EMERGENCY .....	4
HOUSING .....	8
U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	15
SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA .....	23
BANKING .....	25
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/DRIVING .....	27
LOCAL REGISTRATION.....	30
LIVING AND SHOPPING .....	32
RECREATION.....	34
EXPAT RESOURCES.....	38
U.S. IDIOMS .....	40
PUBLIC HOLIDAYS .....	42

## WELCOME AND OVERVIEW



Photo courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Houston, the fourth-largest city in the United States of America, and the largest city in the state of Texas, is also the seat of Harris County and the economic center of Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown which is the fifth-largest metropolitan area in the United States, with 6.08 million people as of July 1st, 2011. Houston was founded in 1836 on land near the banks of Buffalo Bayou. It was incorporated as a city on June 5, 1837, and named after then-President of the Republic of Texas—former General Sam Houston—who had commanded and won at the Battle of San Jacinto, which took place 25 miles (40 km) east of where the city was established. The burgeoning port and railroad industry, combined with oil discovery in 1901, has induced continual surges in the city's population. In the mid-twentieth century, Houston became the home of the Texas Medical Center—the world's largest concentration of healthcare and research institutions—and NASA's Johnson Space Center, where the Mission Control Center is located.

Rated as a global city, Houston's economy has a broad industrial base in energy, manufacturing, aeronautics, and transportation. It is also leading in health care sectors and building oilfield equipment; only New York City is home to more Fortune 500 headquarters. The Port of Houston ranks first in the United States in international waterborne tonnage handled and second in total cargo tonnage handled. The city has a population from various ethnic and religious backgrounds and a large and growing international community. It is home to many cultural institutions and exhibits, which attract more than 7 million visitors a year to the Museum District. Houston has an active visual and performing arts scene in the Theatre District and offers year-round resident companies in all major performing arts.

## City of Houston Overview

- [Official Website of the City of Houston](#)
- [Mayor of the City of Houston](#)
- Population: 2.1.million
- Land Area: 656.3 square miles (1,700 km<sup>2</sup>)
- Languages Spoken: Over 90
- [Houston Parks and Recreation Department](#)
- [Houston Public Library](#)
- [Harris County Public Library](#)
- [Weather Today in Houston](#)

## History

- [Time line of Houston history](#)
- [The Heritage Society](#)
- [Historical Societies and Organizations Relating to Harris County, Texas](#)

## Recommended Reading (available in print and on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)):

- Editor's choice: *Moon Spotlight and the Texas Gulf Coast* by Andy Rhodes
- *Lonely Planet Texas* (Regional Travel Guide) by Mariella Krause
- *Day Trips from Houston: Getaway Ideas for the Local Traveler* by Laura Nathan-Garner
- *Houston TX: Cool Stuff Every Kid Should Know* (Arcadia Kids) by Kate Boehm Jerome

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

- [Houston Visitors Center](#)
- [Information on attractions](#)
- [Save money on attractions](#)
- [Houston for Free](#)
- [Houston Tours](#)

## Where to Find Arts & Entertainment

- [Houston Chronicle](#)
- [Houston Press](#)
- [Arts Hound](#)
- [City Search](#)
- [Theatre tickets and schedules](#)
- [Museums in Houston](#)
- [Cinema listings and schedules](#)

### Where to Eat

- Locate restaurants by type; see menus; read customer reviews at [Houston Restaurant](#)
- Make online restaurant reservations at [Open Table](#)
- [Houston Restaurant Weeks](#): Benefiting the Houston Food Bank since 2003, for one month in August, dine at exclusive restaurants for special value lunch or dinner.
- [Zagat](#) publishes a respected guide to restaurants with trusted reviews and ratings.

### 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 Houston.

In addition, you will be paying the 8.25 % sales tax (Texas State and Houston combined sales tax).

Find Customer Reviews on Restaurants, Fitness Clubs, Shopping, Services, and Much More

- [City search](#)
- [Yelp](#)

### Houston District Map



Photo provided by [Houston Properties](#)

**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](#)                      1-800-222-1222  
[ANIMAL POISON CONTROL](#)        1-888-426-4435

Other Important Numbers:

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

DIAL 311 to reach any City of Houston agency, or to request a City Service (such as replacing a broken street-lamp or removing an abandoned vehicle).

**Safety and Security**

While Houston 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 Houston](#).

**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.

## **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**

- [Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital](#)
- [Harris Health System](#)
- [Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital](#)
- [Memorial Hermann - Texas Medical Center](#)
- [Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Houston](#)
- [Shriners Hospitals for Children – Galveston](#)
- [Shriners Hospitals for Children – Houston](#)
- [St. Dominic Village](#)
- [St. Luke's Episcopal Health System](#)
- [Texas Children's Hospital](#)
- [Houston Hospice](#)
- [The Methodist Hospital](#)
- [The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center](#)
- [The University of Texas Medical Branch \(UTMB\)](#)
- [TIRR \(The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research\) Memorial Hermann](#)

The [Texas Medical Center](#) is the largest medical center in the world with one of the highest densities of clinical facilities for patient care, basic science, and translation research. Located in Greater Houston, the center contains 50 medicine-related institutions, including 15 hospitals and two specialty institutions, three medical schools, four nursing schools, and schools of dentistry, public health, pharmacy, and other health-related practices. All 50 institutions are not-for-profit. Exceeding one thousand acres in size, the center is larger than downtown Dallas. Some member institutions are located outside of the city of Houston. The center is where one of the first and largest air ambulance services was created and where one of the first successful inter-institutional transplant programs was developed. More heart surgeries are performed in the center than anywhere else in the world.



### **Veterinary Clinics Greater Houston**

- [VCA Animal Hospitals](#)
- [Animal Emergency Clinic](#)
- [Houston Humane Society](#)

### **Pharmacies**

There are several major pharmacy chains in Houston, 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 HEB, Kroger’s, Randall’s and Wal-Mart have full service pharmacies.

- [Walgreens](#)
- [CVS](#)
- [List of pharmacies in the Houston Area](#)

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 an 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 inhabited 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 cities have their own tenant rights, laws and protections. Here are [Texas'](#).

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. Typically, the only time the landlord may enter 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.
- Functioning electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems.
- 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 your financial responsibility. **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 rental, especially the refrigerator! It may also surprise some expats that properties are rented **with** appliances. In the U.S. 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**

Houston area recycling information [here](#).



## **The Lease Process**

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

Your 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 you 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 real estate agent 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>	<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<b>24-hr mtn</b>	24-hour emergency maintenance	<b>LA</b>	Living area
<b>AC or A/C</b>	Air conditioning	<b>LR</b>	Living room
<b>Appls</b>	Appliances	<b>MBR</b>	Master bedroom
<b>Apt</b>	Apartment	<b>MBTH</b>	Master bathroom
<b>BA</b>	Bathroom	<b>Neg</b>	Negotiable
<b>BR</b>	Bedroom	<b>Ofc</b>	Office
<b>Bsmt</b>	Basement	<b>OSP</b>	Off-street parking
<b>CAC</b>	Central air conditioning	<b>Pkg</b>	Parking
<b>DA</b>	Dining area	<b>PM</b>	Property manager (management)
<b>Det</b>	Detached	<b>Pvt</b>	Private
<b>Dk</b>	Deck	<b>Pwdr rm</b>	Powder room (1/2 bath)
<b>DR</b>	Dining room	<b>RE</b>	Real estate
<b>Dw (D/w)</b>	Dishwasher	<b>Renov</b>	Renovated
<b>Eff</b>	Efficiency	<b>Rf</b>	Roof
<b>EiK</b>	Eat-in kitchen	<b>Rm</b>	Room
<b>Fin bsmt</b>	Finished basement	<b>SF</b>	Single-family
<b>FDR</b>	Formal dining room	<b>SFA</b>	Single-family attached
<b>FHA</b>	Fair Housing Act	<b>SFD</b>	Single-family detached
<b>FMR</b>	Fair market rent	<b>Sp, Pl (S/p)</b>	Swimming pool
<b>FP</b>	Floorplan	<b>Sq. ft</b>	Square feet
<b>Gar</b>	Garage	<b>Th (T/H)</b>	Townhouse
<b>H/A</b>	Handicapped accessible	<b>Vw (vu)</b>	View
<b>H/W</b>	Hardwood floors	<b>W/A</b>	Wheelchair accessible
<b>Hi ceil</b>	High ceilings	<b>W/W</b>	Wall-to-wall carpeting
<b>HVAC</b>	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning		

## **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 parking situation like? Do you pay for a parking spot?
- Does the landlord 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 DS Consultant has reviewed it in full with you, making sure you are comfortable with the terms of the lease. Please note that a lease review is NOT a legal document, rather a checklist identifying main clauses that affect the assignee's responsibilities as a tenant. Further, the IOR lease reviewers are also DSCs.

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 their input 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.

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

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

- Your employer may require that your lease 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.
- Security Deposit. Landlords will expect you to pay 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 looking for dings in the walls, cracked windows or other irregularities and report them on this form. This documentation 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, perhaps 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.



## SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

In a city as sprawling as Houston, education options are in no short supply. There are 67 school districts in the Greater Houston area, each with a number of public schools, and more than 180 parochial and private schools available. The teaching language of schools in Houston is English, with the exception of those international schools that uphold the teaching language found in their home country. The following are useful information and links on the schools in Houston. Check the links and talk with your local DSC to find the perfect fit for your child!

### **Public Schools in Houston**

Houston claims the largest independent school district in the state (HISD), and the 7th-largest in the US. As a result, expat parents will find that, even though all public schools teach the curriculum mandated by the Texas State Education Agency, the standard of each institution can vary immensely.

Some districts are consistently associated with high standards, while others are not. As students attend schools in Houston based on attendance zones (their physical address), it's important that parents consider the educational landscape of an area before securing accommodation.

To evaluate the standard of educational facilities in a district, parents can use academic excellence indicator (AEIS) reports – where they can look at a school's rating as evaluated by the state's education agency.

### *Biggest Houston and Surrounding Areas Schools Districts*

- [Houston Independent School District](#)
- [Aldine Independent School District](#)
- [Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District](#)
- [Spring Branch Independent School District](#)
- [Katy School District](#)
- [Fort Bend School District](#)

[Academic Excellence Indicator System Report  
Texas Education Agency](#)

### **Private Schools in Houston**

In late September, there is usually an annual “Private School Preview”, a free event where parents can learn more about specific schools, their admission requirements, and their philosophies of education. Otherwise, the best method for finding out about private schools in an area is word of mouth, and by visiting the school in person.

[The Houston Area Independent Schools website](#) has excellent information about the private schools in Houston, from Early Childhood to 12, schools with religious affiliations and schools with special programs.

## International Schools in Houston

- The Awty International School [www.awty.org](http://www.awty.org)
- The British School of Houston [www.britishschoolofhouston.org](http://www.britishschoolofhouston.org)
- The Village School [www.thevillageschool.com](http://www.thevillageschool.com)
- The Trent International School in Sugar Land [www.trentinternationale.com](http://www.trentinternationale.com)
- The Esprit International School in The Woodlands [www.espiritinternationalschool.com](http://www.espiritinternationalschool.com)

## Colleges and Universities

- [University of Houston](#)
- [University of Houston-Downtown](#)
- [Rice University](#)
- [University of St Thomas](#)
- [Texas Southern University](#)
- [Houston Baptist University](#)
- [Houston Community College](#)
- [Lone Star College System](#)
- [The University of Texas Health Science Center](#)
- [South Texas College of Law](#)
- [Baylor College of Medicine](#)
- [Art Institute of Houston](#)



*University of Houston*



*Art Institute of Houston*

## BANKING

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](#)
- [Chase](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [HSBC](#)
- [TD Bank](#)
- [US Bank](#)
- [Wells Fargo](#)
- [Banks in Houston metro area](#)

### **Driving in Houston**

Houston has a number of major highways that make getting around Houston fairly easy. A number of obstacles, however, can make driving in Houston a less than pleasant experience. One is construction, which seems to be ever-present, and the other is traffic. Evening rush hour in Houston begins as early as 4 PM and can last more than 2 hours. Morning rush hour is between 7 and 9 AM. During rush hour, traffic on the highways can come to a halt. The strip of the West Loop near the Galleria, between US-59 and IH-10, is an area you should definitely avoid during rush hour if possible.

- [Houston Traffic Map](#)
- [The outstanding freeways system](#)

Some of the freeways have an H.O.V. (High-Occupancy Vehicle) lane, which are limited-access lanes located in the median strip of the highway. The HOV lanes are operational Monday - Friday in the morning hours (5AM - 11AM) in the inbound direction and in the outbound direction in the afternoon and evening (from 2PM - 8PM). The HOV lanes are restricted to cars with 2 or more passengers, however some HOV lanes require 3 or more passengers during peak travel periods (6:45-8:00AM and 5-6PM, for IH-10 west; 6:45-8AM only for US-290). The HOV lanes are marked with signs bearing a white diamond on a black background. Highways with HOV lanes are: IH-45 North, IH-45 South, US-59 North, US-59 South, IH-10 West (Katy Freeway), and US-290. The Katy Freeway HOV lanes have been expanded into the Katy Toll Road, a 24-hour multi-lane HOV with paid Single-Occupancy Vehicle access cost-adjusted based on HOV usage.

- [HOV lane map & schedule](#)
- [Katy Managed Lanes on Harris County Toll Road Authority](#)

### **Public Transportation**

Currently, public transportation in Houston is limited to METRO, which operates bus lines as well as the new and very popular light rail line called [METRORail](#).

Unlike other large cities in the nation such as Chicago, New York, San Francisco, or Los Angeles, Houston doesn't have a local rail rapid transit network in place. METRO Rail is the initial line of what is planned to be a rapid transit system. The line starts at UofH Downtown, through downtown, into Midtown, to Texas Medical Center, and then the Reliant Complex near the south side, for a length of just over seven miles. Houstonians have a tendency to park along the rail line or the south side lot to go into downtown or the medical center as it is easier to get in and out of those areas with the train without the hassle of parking and traffic.

Please be careful when coming near the METRO Rail track, especially at intersections. Follow the signs since the trains move very quickly and run at almost all hours of the day and night. It runs almost silently. At many streets, left turns are not permitted. Also watch the signs and signals, because some

will change as trains approach. Do not drive on the tracks as there are large raised white domes that separate the roadway and the rail line. In some areas signs may indicate driving (or walking) on the tracks is permitted (currently only in the Texas Medical Center) but make sure it is safe to do so. Drive across the tracks only when you are sure it is safe to do so, especially at night as an oncoming train may not be heard by a driver inside a car.

[You can find a map of the Houston Metro System here.](#)

### **Taxis**

Outside of Downtown, don't expect to catch a taxi on the streets, but there are various cab stands located at various parts of downtown proper. Taxis in Houston are generally dispatched by various companies the largest being Yellow Cab.

713-236-1111 or through their [website](#).

### **Limousine**

Traveling via a limousine has become more popular lately. Many Houston limousine companies offer full ground transportation options such as town cars, classic cars, stretch limos and luxury vehicles that can be utilized for special occasions like airport transportation, parties, school dances, business functions and weddings. Consider hiring a limousine service to handle your travel needs.

### **Bicycle**

Houston is so spread out and (most of the time) humid and hot that bicycles are often best used for exercise or to get to somewhere that is close by. On the other hand, if you have a little bit of stamina and perseverance, Downtown, Midtown, Rice, Uptown and the Medical Center/Hermann Park/Museum District area are within a 30 minute ride. Multi-modal transportation is also possible, since most city buses have easy to use racks in the front that can get traveler and bicycle near to a final destination. The city of Houston has 290 miles of marked bike routes, plus another 80 miles of hike and bike trails in city parks, with concrete plans for even more expansion. For more information on the Houston Bikeway program, including a complete map of all marked bike paths, visit [the City of Houston Bikeway Program website](#).

### **Airports**

The Houston Airport System provides a safe and dynamic air services network that fosters economic vitality for the transportation industry and the greater Houston region.

The Houston Airport System mission statement: We exist to connect people, businesses, cultures and economies of the world to Houston.

To bring air service to Houston's area population of more than four million, the [Houston Airport System](#) has three facilities; George Bush Intercontinental Airport, William P. Hobby Airport, and Ellington Airport. The three-airport system served over 49.9 million passengers in 2011, including over seven million international travelers. Together our airports form one of North America's largest public airport

systems and position Houston as the international passenger and cargo gateway to the south central United States and a primary gateway to Latin America.

Houston's three airports, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), William P. Hobby (HOU) and Ellington Airport (EFD) contribute more than \$27 billion to the regional economy.

### **Car Rentals**

Every residential neighborhood has several car rental companies. Rates vary according to demand. If you plan on renting a car on a holiday week or weekend, it is wise to reserve well in advance because there may be no cars available. For better rates, try:

- [Dollar Rent A Car](#) or [Budget Rent A Car](#)
- [Hertz](#) and [Avis](#) are generally more expensive.

### **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.

### **Map Websites**

- [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)
- [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)
- [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)
- [www.bing.com/maps](http://www.bing.com/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. [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)

## LOCAL REGISTRATION

### Social Security and 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.

**PLEASE NOTE, THE EXPECTED WAIT TIME TO APPLY FOR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER IS 5-10 BUSINESS DAYS FROM ARRIVAL INTO THE US. This amount can vary on your location. Your local Destination Services Consultant can advise based on current wait times they are experiencing.**

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

### 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 U.S. 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) come from the (USCIS). 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.](#)

If the L-2 Spouse does not wish to work in the US but does want to apply for a Social Security number, a spouse must provide:

- Valid Passport/ Visa
- I-94 Arrival Departure Document
- Marriage Certificate from Home Country (If not translated, this could take an additional 6 weeks for processing)

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

## **Obtaining a Driver's License**

In the US, 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.

New Texas residents can legally drive with a valid, unexpired driver license from another U.S. state, U.S. territory, Canadian province, or qualifying country for up to 90 days after moving to Texas.

Prior to the end of the 90 day grace period, a new Texas resident must apply for a Texas license in person at any driver license office to continue to drive legally. When applying for the new Texas license the individual must surrender any unexpired driver license in their possession from another U.S. state, U.S. territory or a Canadian province. Specific information on driver license and reciprocity with other countries [here](#).

- For information on how to obtain a driver's license, see the website of the [Texas State Department of Public Safety](#).
- [General Information about driver's licenses](#)
- [Special information for drivers from other nations](#)

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

### TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

There are five main service providers in Houston for TV cable, landline telephone, and internet. They 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.
- [Fry's Home Electronics](#)  
10241 N. Fwy I45 – Houston  
11565 S.W. Fwy 59 – South Houston  
21300 Gulf Fwy. – Webster
- [Apple Stores](#) retail locations  
379 Memorial City Way – Memorial City  
2000 Willowbrook Drive – Willowbrook  
4012 Westheimer Road – Houston  
5085 Westheimer Road - Galleria
- [TigerDirect](#)

### Housewares and Furniture

- [Bed Bath & Beyond](#) is a national chain where as 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. All you would want to remodel your home can be found here.

- [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.
- [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.

### Food Shopping

Houstonians go to market at a wide range of open air farmers markets, large gourmet markets, small specialty shops, and conventional supermarkets.

The main conventional supermarkets are **HEB, Kroger's and Randall's** and they are located all over town and the surrounding areas.

- [Central Market](#) is a great indoor market with specialty foods, meats, fish and produce and also restaurants and bakery.  
3815 Westheimer Ave.
- [Fiesta Mart](#) provides customers with products unique to their culture and has locations all over town.
- [Whole Foods Market](#) specializes in organic products and has several locations.
- [Farmers Markets](#): For those looking to get their goods directly from the producer, there are a growing number of farmers markets popping up across Houston. From fresh produce to prepared foods, you can find here popular places doing the mobile market concept right.
- **Chinatown**, all of it! The entire neighborhood is replete with fish and produce markets at a fraction of the price of markets in town. While you are there, stop into one of those seedy looking noodle shops with ducks hanging in the window. You'll eat a feast for \$20.
- **Phoenicia Specialty Foods**, is a 55,000-square-foot food market and distribution headquarters in West Houston, with its buying power achieved from the imports of international gourmet foods. Both wholesale and retail operations are conducted in a state-of-the-art facility and people appreciate the down-to-earth gourmet food prices. Phoenicia carries more than 10,000 products from more than 50 countries.  
As the original one-stop YUMMY shop, they offer fresh-baked artisan breads, award-winning European pastries, boutique wines and beers, quality meats and cheeses, fresh seafood and meat, fine catering, tasty prepared foods, exotic produce and house wares. It's not just a grocery...it's an experience!

## RECREATION

### Sightseeing

As the nation's fourth largest city, Houston offers a wide selection of recreational opportunities, ranging from professional football, basketball, and baseball to permanent companies in opera, ballet, theater, and symphony. Houston's retail offerings are world class, with several major shopping malls and urban entertainment centers. With mild annual temperatures, abundant lakes, rivers, and wildlife areas, and more than 400 parks, Houston is also very much an outdoor city.

A principal point of interest is the Johnson Space Center, which offers self-guided public tours every day except Christmas. A unit of the National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA), the center features a museum, tours of the Mission Control Center, and viewing of samples returned from the Moon. Space Center Houston allows visitors to "experience" manned space flight, explore shuttle and skylab facilities, and operate the simulator.



The historically minded may be interested in the San Jacinto Battleground State Historical Park, the world's tallest masonry structure. It houses documents, art, and memorabilia, and is a permanent berth for the battleship *USS Texas*, a veteran of both world wars and the only surviving dreadnought of its class.

Hermann Park includes the Houston Zoological Gardens, Miller Outdoor Theatre, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and the first desegregated public golf course in the nation. Among other parks offering sightseeing opportunities are Memorial Park, featuring an arboretum, herb gardens, and a botanical hall; Sam Houston Park, with seven historical buildings located downtown; and Tranquility Park, in the Houston Civic Center. In the Harris County Park system attractions include Armand Bayou Park and Nature Center, with its wilderness preserve, nature trails, working turn-of-the-century farm, and scenic Armand Bayou boat tours; Mercer Arboretum, featuring gardens, a wilderness preserve, and nature trails; and Bay Area Park, featuring a marsh walkway. Moody Gardens on Galveston Island features a tropical setting with white sand beaches, penguins, and a discovery pyramid.

- [Aquarium at Moody Gardens](#)
- [Aquarium Downtown](#)
- [Armand Bayou Nature Center](#)
- [Bayou Bend](#)
- [Beer Can House](#)
- [Discovery Green Park](#)
- [Galveston Visitor Center](#)
- [George Ranch Historical Park](#)
- [Gulf Greyhound Park](#)
- [Houston Arboretum](#)
- [Houston Zoo](#)
- [Moody Gardens](#)
- [Sam Houston Race Park](#)
- [San Jacinto Museum of History](#)
- [Space Center](#)
- [Tunnel Map](#)

## Arts and Culture

Houston ranks second only to New York City by number of theater seats in a concentrated downtown area. Moreover, it is one of only a handful of cities in the country to feature permanent dance, theater, symphony, and opera companies. The Wortham Theater Center, a \$75 million complex housing the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet, is the centerpiece of Houston's vital cultural community. That community is supported by a one percent hotel tax dedicated to the city's arts, which have become nationally prominent. The city also features Jesse H.



Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, home of the Houston Symphony and Society for the Performing Arts; the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, the home of Theatre Under the Stars and the SFX Broadway Series; and the Alley Theatre, one of the oldest resident professional theater companies in the nation.

Other famed theater groups include Stages Repertory, Main Street Theater, A.D. Players, De Camera of Houston, Theatre LaB Houston, Opera in the Heights, and the Ensemble Theatre, one of the nation's most respected African American theaters.

The Houston Symphony was formed in 1913 and performs more than 200 concerts each year in Jesse H. Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, plus summer concerts in Miller Theatre. Among other musical groups are the acclaimed Houston Grand Opera; the Houston Opera Studio, an international apprenticeship center; the Houston Youth Symphony; and the orchestras of four local universities. The Houston Ballet, a professional company, performs at home and abroad. Other dance companies include the Delia Stewart Dance Company, the Discovery Dance Group, Allegro Dance Group, Chrysalis Dance Company, City Ballet of Houston, Cookie Joe and the Jazz Company, and Several Dancers Core.

With 15 world-class museums, Houston is the fourth largest museum district in the nation. The Houston Museum of Natural Science, located near Hermann Park, features the Burke Baker Planetarium, the Wortham IMAX Theatre, and the Cockrell Butterfly Center, as well as exhibits in space science, geography, oceanography, medical science, and Texas wildlife. The Museum of Fine Arts-Houston is the sixth largest museum in the United States and houses more than 27,000 works from antiquities to the present. It also features the Bayou Bend Collection of American decorative arts, housed in the historic home of local philanthropist Ima Hogg and surrounded by 14 acres of gardens. Houston also boasts the world-famous Menil Collection, 15,000 pieces representing twentieth-century, medieval, and Byzantine art, antiquities, and tribal art. The Contemporary Arts Museum exhibits modern works and is free to the public.

Other facilities include Children's Museum of Houston, Holocaust Museum Houston, Art Car Museum, National Museum of Funeral History, Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, American Cowboy Museum, the Moody Mansion & Museum, Museum of Health & Medical Science, Museum of Printing History, and

the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum, repository for the only intact Byzantine frescoes in the Western Hemisphere. Among the area's galleries are Farish Gallery and Sewall Art Gallery, both on the Rice University campus, and the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, on the University of Houston campus.

#### Houston Museums:

- [Blaffer Art Museum](#)
- [Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum](#)
- [Children's Museum of Houston](#)
- [Contemporary Arts Museum Houston](#)
- [Holocaust Museum Houston](#)
- [Houston Center for Contemporary Craft](#)
- [Houston Maritime Museum](#)
- [Houston Police Department Museum](#)
- [John P. McGovern Museum of Health and Medical Science](#)
- [Morris Cultural Arts Center](#)
- [National Museum of Funeral History](#)
- [San Jacinto Museum of History](#)
- [The 1940 Air Terminal Museum](#)
- [The Fire Museum of Houston](#)
- [The Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park](#)
- [The Houston Museum of Natural Science](#)
- [The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston](#)
- [The Printing Museum](#)
- [Watercolor Art Society, Houston](#)

#### Houston Music and Theatre:

- [Alley Theatre](#)
- [Arena Theater Houston](#)
- [Bayou Music Center](#)
- [Broadway Across America](#)
- [Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion](#)
- [Grand 1894 Opera House](#)
- [Houston Ballet](#)
- [Houston Grand Opera](#)
- [Houston Symphony](#)
- [Main Street Theatre](#)
- [Miller Outdoor Theatre](#)
- [Society for the Performing Arts](#)
- [Stages Repertory Theatre](#)
- [The Ensemble Theatre](#)
- [The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts](#)
- [Theatre Under the Stars](#)

#### Festivals and Holidays

Houston celebrates with countless festivals throughout the year. A Grande Parade is held downtown each January in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. The late-winter Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo commands Reliant Stadium and draws a crowd in excess of 1.8 million over three weeks. Spring is welcomed by the Budweiser Original Zydeco Jamm Festival, an outdoor celebration featuring zydeco music and Cajun-Creole cuisine. April brings the Houston International Festival, a multicultural event spanning 20 city blocks and attracting more than one million visitors



across 10 days of performances, art expositions, and open-air markets. The Texas Renaissance Festival is held for eight themed weekends in October and November, while later in November Houston gathers for Washington Mutual's Thanksgiving Day Parade. In December Moody Gardens presents a Festival of

Lights, the Heritage Society holds a Christmas Candlelight Tour, and lighted boats are displayed in the Christmas Boat Parade on Clear Lake.

Ethnic celebrations are held throughout the year. They include the Greek Festival, Bayou City Cajun Festival, Japan Festival, Asian Pacific Heritage Festival, Cinco de Mayo Celebration, Scottish Highland Games & Celtic Festival, Fiestas Patrias, Houston Turkish Festival, Festa Italiana, and the Texas Championship Pow Wow. Texans' love of a variety of cuisines is apparent from Houston's numerous food celebrations, such as the Clear Lake Crawfish Festival, Houston Pod Chili Cook-Off, Bayou Boil, and the Pasadena Strawberry Festival, held 20 minutes southeast of Houston. Celebrations of arts are nearly as frequent. Spring brings the Dance Salad Festival, which presents dancers from the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, followed by the Houston International Film Festival. ArtHouston, Houston International Jazz Festival, Houston Shakespeare Festival, Bluegrass Festival, and Caribbean Luau are held in succession between mid-summer and early autumn.

Some events celebrate the unusual, and others are held just for fun. The Houston Comedy Festival features 20 performances across 8 days in April. Galveston Island hosts the FeatherFest, a birding celebration coinciding with the annual spring migration of nearly 300 species. Each May corporate and community teams race 40-foot dragon boats in the Dragon Boat Festival. Ballunar Festival Liftoff, presented by the Johnson Space Center each August, features a weekend of hot-air ballooning, sky-diving exhibitions, and food and entertainment. The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds and the Navy's Blue Angels thrill spectators with aerial acrobatics each October in the Wings Over Houston Airshow.

- [Art Car Parade](#)
- [Azalea Trail](#)
- [Bayou City Art Festival](#)
- [Buffalo Bayou Regatta](#)
- [Dickens on the Strand](#)
- [Fiesta Italiana](#)
- [Houston Children's Festival](#)
- [International Festival](#)
- [International Quilt Festival](#)
- [Livestock Show & Rodeo](#)
- [Mardi Gras! Galveston](#)
- [Nutcracker Market](#)
- [Orange Show](#)
- [Renaissance Festival](#)
- [Wings Over Houston](#)

### **Sports for the Spectator**

After losing the Oilers to Tennessee in 1996, Houston regained a National Football League (NFL) franchise when the Houston Texans took the field in 2002. Their home is the 69,500-seat Reliant Stadium, featuring the world's first retractable roof in the NFL. Reliant also hosted Super Bowl XXXVII in February 2004, at which the New England Patriots beat the Carolina Panthers. The Houston Astros, a franchise of the National League of Major League Baseball, play home games at Minute Maid Park. This park was christened Enron Field upon its completion in 2000, and then renamed Astros Field when Enron Corp. went bankrupt in 2002, and later that year took its current name in a \$170 million, 28-year naming deal with Minute Maid Co., which has been headquartered in Houston since 1967. The Toyota

Center opened in September 2003, and is home to the Houston Rockets, of the National Basketball Association; and the Houston Aeros of the American Hockey League.

Collegiate teams participate in most major sports by Houston-area academic institutions. Football is particularly notable, with Rice University in the Western Athletic Conference, the University of Houston in Conference USA, Texas Southern University in the Southwest Athletic Conference, and Houston Baptist University in the Trans America Athletic Conference. Horse racing can be enjoyed at Sam Houston Race Park, while dogs race at Gulf Greyhound Park. More than 150 of the world's best golfers vie for a \$5 million purse in the Shell Houston Open Golf Tournament each April.

- [Aeros Schedule](#)
- [Astros Schedule](#)
- [Minute Maid Park Tours](#)
- [Reliant Park](#)
- [Rockets Schedule](#)
- [Texans Schedule](#)
- [Toyota Center](#)

### **Sports for the Participant**

Harris County and the City of Houston's 429 parks embrace 43,700 land acres and 12,200 water-covered acres. They offer such attractions for the recreation-minded as seven 18-hole golf courses (plus dozens of non-municipal public and private courses), 43 swimming pools, 236 tennis courts, 174 baseball/softball fields, 124 football/soccer/rugby fields, 164 basketball courts, 80 hiking and cycling trails, 55 community recreation centers, and Lake Houston. Cullen Park, one of the largest municipal parks in the nation, boasts a velodrome equipped for Olympic cycling events. A driving range is available at Memorial Park, fishing is enjoyed at Eisenhower Park, and a three-story man-made mountain graces Herman Brown Park. Harris County parks include Clear Lake Park, with boating and fishing; Alexander Deussen Park, with boating, fishing, and camping on Lake Houston; Bear Creek Park, with an aviary on Addicks Reservoir lands; Bay Area Park, with canoeing; and Tom Bass Regional Park, offering fishing. Houston lies within an hour of 70 miles of Gulf Coast beaches; deep-sea fishing on the Gulf is available through charter companies.

Annual events invite participants of all athletic levels. In March the Tour de Houston attracts competitors in a 20- or 40-mile bike race. For many, the Tour de Houston is a warm-up for the BP MS 150 Bike Tour. Held each April, it is the largest non-profit sporting event in Texas, drawing 12,000 riders and raising more than \$47 million in the last two decades to combat multiple sclerosis. Also held in April is the Running of the Bulls, a 5K run attracting 2,500 participants. The Hoopla





Streetball Tournament, a weekend of three-on-three basketball games as well as other family attractions, is also held in the spring. The Buffalo Bayou Regatta, Texas' largest canoe and kayak race, is held each October.

### **Shopping and Dining**

The 375 stores and restaurants of The Galleria, the fifth largest shopping center in the nation, are visited by more than 20 million shoppers each year. Katy Mills Mall houses 200 retail outlets in 1.3 million square feet of space. Uptown Park is a European-style shopping center featuring unique wares. Houston Premium Outlets is the newest and biggest outlet in the Houston area. The largest market on the Texas Gulf Coast is Traders Village, a collection of 800 dealers sprawled over 105 acres each weekend. Early 2005 brought the grand opening of Market Square Market, an outdoor marketplace held each Saturday in historic Market Square Park. Antiques and collectibles shoppers seek out Antique World II, Trader Village-Houston, and the Houston Flea Market, while those seeking Western gear head to Stelzig of Texas and The Hat Store.

With more than 6,100 restaurants and 600 bars and nightclubs in the Houston area to choose from, diners can enjoy a great variety of menus and cuisines. Gulf seafood, such as oysters, shrimp, lobster, and fish, is a regional specialty; other regional specialties include Texas beef, barbecue, Southwestern mesquite-grilled food, Tex-Mex and Mexican fare, and traditional Southern dishes like catfish and chicken-fried steak. Ethnic and international establishments in the Houston area offer the cuisine of 35 countries, including France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, and India.

- [The Galleria](#)
- [Houston Pavilions](#)
- [Houston Premium Outlets](#)
- [Katy Mills Shopping Center](#)

### 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](#)

[State of Texas Holidays](#)

The following are federal holidays in the United States and need to be treated as such by employers:

- New Year's Day            January 1\*
- 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.



[Houston Skyline](#)