

Self-Arranged Housing

Do your best to find housing long before your arrival in the U.S. In many cases, your employer may have recommendations for short- or long-term housing near your workplace. If you are beginning the search on your own, use the resources below. Most importantly, don't arrive in the U.S. without any pre-arranged housing.

For the first few nights in the U.S. you may need short-term housing. Hostels, affordable motels, or universities and colleges are good options. It's even better if you can travel and share expenses with other Work & Travel USA students under the same employer. Make reservations ahead of time to make sure you have a bed or room when you arrive.

When planning your long-term housing, consider living with other Work & Travel students -- this is a great way to make new friends and save money. Also consider whether or not the housing is furnished, includes utilities, and whether it is close to work or is close to public transportation, as these can all affect your monthly costs.

Rent, Sublet, or Share?

When you start looking for a place to live, you will find apartments that are available to rent, sublet, or share:

Rent: When you rent an apartment, you will sign a lease, or contract, with a landlord. Pay close attention to the lease agreement, as there may be penalties for breaking the contract. For example, if you lease an apartment for four months but decide to leave after two months, there may be a financial penalty in addition to your rent.

We strongly encourage you to find an apartment where the lease is month-to-month, and avoid long-term leases with firm rules and commitments.

Sublet: A sublet is an apartment or room rented by the owner or leaseholder to another person. Finding a sublet is a good option because it gives you flexibility similar to a month-to-month lease.

Share: If you share an apartment you will pay a portion of the rent and common apartment expenses. This can be easier than looking for a place yourself. If you decide to share an apartment, make sure to meet your possible roommate to get a feel for the situation. Your first instinct is always your best, and you should not accept a situation that you don't feel comfortable with.

Finding Short-Term Housing

For the first few nights in the U.S. you may need short-term housing. Hostels, affordable motels, or universities and colleges are good options.

Hostels: Hostels can be some of the most inexpensive options. They generally provide shared or private rooms and shared bathroom facilities and may have Internet access. The Youth Hostel Association runs an online booking service, so you can pre-book your nights at cities throughout the U.S. Those in large cities

tend to fill up fast, so it is important to make your reservation as soon as possible. Do not hope to get a room the day you arrive!

To research hostels, visit the following sites:

www.hiusa.org : Hostelling International USA has offices throughout the U.S. Due to the popularity of their hostels, reservations are recommended to ensure that your stay is confirmed in advance of your arrival.

www.ymca.int : YMCAs and YWCAs offer affordable temporary lodging. Within this website you can find a list of cities that offer affordable housing.

www.hostelworld.com : This website is available in multiple languages and can help you find a hostel in the U.S. Hostelworld.com provides online bookings for hostels and comprehensive city and country guides.

Hotels: There are many low-cost chains throughout the U.S. These options are good for small groups because you will pay for the room, not per person. Rooms often contain two large beds but you can ask for options. If you have an ISIC card, you will get discounts at budget chains across the U.S. An online search using sites such as www.hotels.com will help you find inexpensive options.

Universities and colleges: Many universities and colleges offer budget accommodation in their student housing. Research whether there is a college or university in the area you are working, and contact the student housing office on campus.

Finding Long-Term Housing

Employers: Ask your employer or future coworkers for suggestions. Many employers either provide housing, are happy to help you arrange housing, or have recommendations.

www.craigslist.org : This website has pages for an increasing number of cities. There is no cost to place an ad on Craigslist, so it is common to find affordable housing here.

www.apartmentlist.com : This website allows you to search by neighborhood, and has lots of options for filtering your search. You can also log in with your Facebook account to access special features.

www.apartments.com : This website lists apartments for rent by state and city. You can also sign up for apartment listings to be emailed to you and they even have an iPhone application.

www.roommates.com : This service, and ones like it, list apartments where people are looking for roommates. A service like this can help you not only find an apartment, but someone to help pay the rent. In this situation it is very likely you'll share an apartment with an American and this will add to the cultural aspect of your Work & Travel USA experience. Be aware that roommate services like this can be free to join, but will generally charge a fee and can take longer.

University Listings and Bulletin Boards: Many campuses have bulletin boards where students post notices looking for roommates. Keep in mind that many students with year-long leases need to sublet their apartments for the summer, and often do so with affordable prices. Most universities also have an Off-Campus Housing Office, with lists of available housing and rental options in the local area.

Questions to Ask!

When looking at options, consider the following questions:

1. What is the lease length?
2. Are utilities included?
3. Is furniture provided?
4. Is it within walking distance of my job?
5. Is it near public transportation?
6. How accessible are stores, banks, entertainment, etc.?
7. What's the average rent for a place this size in the neighborhood?
8. How soon can I move in?
9. How much do I have to pay before I move in (security deposit, first month's rent, etc.)?
10. Is it safe? Do not accept the landlord's word. Be sure you are satisfied with the security of the neighborhood and the apartment/house itself. You can also ask other people for their opinion. Trust your instincts!
11. Does it have laundry facilities?

Signing a Rental Agreement (Lease)

If you rent or sublet, you should make sure you sign a rental agreement. Keep a copy for yourself. A rental agreement may be optional, but you should still insist on signing one. The contract should define the terms you are agreeing to, including rental amount and dates, and protects the tenant and landlord. Before you sign any rental agreement, be sure to read it carefully and get an explanation of any terms that are unclear. Remember that only written information on a rental agreement makes an official legal contract.

Many leases last for one year so look for a lease that will allow you to rent month-to-month or for a shorter term. Do not sign a lease for a period longer than you think you are going to stay in the housing, because you may be charged a fee for breaking the lease if you move out early.

Security Deposits

All states allow landlords to collect a security deposit when a tenant moves in. Security deposits are usually one month's rent. Your security deposit will be returned to you when you leave, as long as there has been no damage to the apartment during your occupancy and you fulfilled the lease agreement. It is a very good idea to inspect your new apartment with your landlord before signing an agreement. Be sure to get a written record of existing damages and a list of all included furnishings and their condition. You can also take photos of the apartment's condition when you first move in to make a visual record.

Budgeting

When looking for an apartment, know how much you can afford to pay for housing. Think about your additional living and entertainment expenses. Be smart with your budget so that you have enough money left for food and other necessities after you pay your rent. Make sure you have enough money to pay the first month's rent and security deposit when you arrive in the U.S.

Being a Good Tenant and Roommate

When you share your housing, you should make sure that everyone understands financial and other responsibilities within the apartment. Request a written agreement about the cost of housing and be sure

to ask any questions that will be important to you. Some suggested questions you might ask are (write these down, and consider if there are other questions to ask before making a decision):

1. How much does each person pay for additional expenses like electricity and Internet?
2. How do you feel about having guests in the apartment?
3. How do you feel about drinking and smoking in the apartment?
4. Are there any things or areas in the apartment that will be private?
5. How should grocery expenses be handled?
6. Are you messy or neat?
7. What should we do about keeping the apartment clean?