

Conference Travel Guide

Robotics Research Center

Hello! First of all, congratulations on entering this phase. The intent behind writing this document is to share some of our insights from academic travel in the hope that it will be useful to you. But please make sure to update yourself with any changed or updated procedures just to be safe.

Initially, there are two main things to think about when you are attending a conference:

- Getting the grant
- Getting the visa

Getting the grant

First things first- As soon as you've got the acceptance information, look for the travel grant request on the conference website. Since the funds are limited, the sooner you put the request, the better it is. Depending on the type of your conference and area of work, the probability of receiving grants differ. There are two sub-categories here.

- Grants based on conference-ranking
- Grants based on the area of work

Grants based on conference-ranking

Companies like Google, Microsoft, etc., have a list of conferences for which they provide grants. You can check the conferences supported by [Google](#) here. And you can apply to [Microsoft](#) grant here. You can also check for the conferences to which college provides a grant in the research portal. For A* conferences, It is seen that Microsoft provides grants for control and planning related papers as well.

Grants based on Area of Work

For grants related to ML,AI,Vision - You can try [ACM](#) grant. For controls related conference you can start applying to [AICTE](#), CSIR, DST, SERB, etc., The important thing to remember when applying to conferences is that you need to apply **minimum of 2 months before the date of travel**. You can try if there is less time, though- but the chances are less in this case.

Getting the visa

US visa

The best thing is to apply for a VISA appointment as soon as you can. The VISA appointment dates are not easily available. You can start applying [here](#). If it's Hyderabad consular office, it's better to apply at least 2.5 months before the date of travel. In other consular offices, you need to apply at least 1.5-2 months prior for an appointment.

The key documents mostly needed are :

- Passport
- DS-160 form (You will be applying for a B1 Visa)
- Acceptance letter
- Bonafide from IIIT
- IIIT providing a letter that it covers travel expenses
- IIIT granting permission to attend the conference specifying dates (No-objection letter)

You can contact lab-administration staff for these. They mostly look for three questions: Are you a threat to the US? Will you return after the conference? Can you afford the trip? Some times return tickets provide better proof of returning from the place. You can get some information about the type of questions asked in VISA interview [here](#).

Some key instructions are not to mention words like "Robotics", "Artificial Intelligence", "Drones", "Flight based technologies" which might attract unwanted attention. Instead, explain the mathematical part of the paper, which is usually safe. You needn't lie or be afraid of anything as attending the conference is a genuine cause.

Schengen visa

The Schengen visa allows you to travel (short-stay) to all 26 countries members of the Schengen area. The Schengen area covers most of Europe like Germany, France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, but except the UK, Ireland (the two major ones). The Schengen visa has different categories, like Student, Business, Tourist - for conference travel you'll have to apply for the Business Schengen visa. Most of these countries have outsourced their visa processing services to third-party services like VFS, BLS, etc., so you only have to submit your application packet directly to these services and they will forward your packet to the respective embassy. If your application was successfully processed (usually doesn't take more than two weeks), the same guys will door-deliver your visa to you. Typically there is no interview, and the process is also quicker than the US visa process.

You'll be able to find the list of all required documents on the respective website (like VFS, or schengenvisa.info), but here are some of the key documents:

- Passport
- Schengen visa application form
- Acceptance / Invitation letter
- Flight, hostel reservations
- Financial support details
- Travel insurance details
- No-objection letter from IIIT
- Visa-sized photographs (different from passport-sized photographs)

Rejections are usually rare for the Schengen visa, just make sure you fill and submit all the required documents carefully.

Some other general instructions

- Make sure the name entered in DS-160 and Visa appointment forms match.
- They'll cross-check information you've mentioned in DS-160 in the VISA interview. It's better to save a copy of DS-160 with you just to take a look before you attend the interview. It's not compulsory, though.
- AFAIK advance amount for the travel grant can be taken only once from the campus - so it's better to take an advance amount after a big amount gets approved from a source.
- Be quick about AICTE as it accepts applications most of the time and doesn't have any airline constraints.
- Make sure you get proper denominations of the foreign exchange and a travel card to carry your amount. The ideal ratio is to maintain 80% in the card and 20% in cash.
- Arrange an international SIM card as purchasing local SIMs can be expensive some times. Data is important for maps while you commute. 8GB high speed will suffice most of the time.
- Make sure you take a look at the luggage instructions for Airlines. Always ask for your baggage tags during check-in. Don't panic if you are selected for homeland security, which is indicated by "SSSS" on your boarding pass. As long as you don't have anything illegal, you are totally fine.

- Make a program for the conference you are attending. It is available in the paper plaza. It helps you to organize your time at the conference.
- It will be better if you have a card that describes what you do and your contact information just so that you stay in touch with the people you meet at conference.
- People are mostly welcoming, and they are receptive. You can easily start a conversation and get a contact or know about the area of work.
- If you are traveling the US, search online about the neighborhood in which you will be staying. There are some sites like "neighborhood scout" which can give you a better idea about safety. Hostels are safe most of the time, as most of the students will be preferring them.
- Look for flight prices in incognito mode as they might save cookies and might show a rise in prices every time you check. Take flights with max 2 stops just so that you may not be tired after you reach the US.
- Uber in some countries won't accept cash. Make an arrangement to pay online. You can buy gift cards from Walmart, BestBuy, CVS pharmacy (if the US), etc., to add money to your UBER account. Uber is safe if you are traveling late at night.
- Subway trains are efficient, cheap, and well connected. You just need to get a card to use it for your commute.
- If you are vegetarian and have money constraints Halal food trucks, Chipotle, Subway, etc., are helpful. Mention "No meat" instead of vegetarian as the definition might differ in some areas. People are friendly most of the time. Feel free to ask them doubts if you have any.
- You can look for anyone from RRC if they are staying at the place where you are attending for crashing in their rooms

Have a knowledgeable and safe experience! All the best.